

Archaic bones unearthed

By VALARIE
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She was found in a fetal position, hands placed at her breast, face looking towards the east on Easter Sunday weekend. She still has the hairpin or ear ornament she was buried with.

The people who found her final resting place are calling her "Bunny."

Bunny is a 4,500 to 6,000 year-old female discovered by General Development Corporation. Her final resting place lies not within a large Indian "cemetery" in an area near Little Salt Spring where thousands of her brethren lie, but in an area outside the usual burial place.

Her discovery is both a puzzle — and an exciting discovery for local archaeological research.

"Little Salt Spring is possibly the biggest in

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Florida for what it is," Carl Clausen, geo-archaeologist specialist and research associate professor affiliated with the University of Miami.

Little Salt Spring was donated to the university by GDC for the protection and preservation of the ecological and archaeological discoveries contained there.

According to Clausen "what it is" is one of the largest Archaic to Pre-Columbian burial sites in Florida.

During the time when Indians visited Little Salt Spring and buried their dead in an area on the site, they shared their world with large mammals; deer, wolves and perhaps bison. They were a transient people but, due to the abundance of natural foods in the area, large and well proportioned. They chose an area for burial and most of the centuries-old human remains rest there. While not a civilization, the people were a culture and therein lies part of the mystery.

Why "Bunny," whose exact age has not been ascertained as yet by radion-carbon testing, was buried outside of the area is a puzzle but, according to Clausen, the reason could either be cultural or environmental.

"This person may have been with but not belonging to the group buried in the slough (the cemetery)," Clausen said. She may not have been a pre-Columbian."

According to Clausen, the Indians at the time may have kept slaves and Bunny may have been captured and hence, may not have qualified for burial with the others.

A second theory in the cultural vein, is the individual may have committed some "wrong" against the culture and so was buried outside.

Clausen also raised two environmental reasons as to why the burial took place outside of the slough.

The area underwent some environmental changes. The environment became, according to Clausen, markedly drier.

"If this person died toward the end of the first period and so closer to the present, it may have been impossible to bury her in the slough," Clausen said. "She was buried close but not in. A storm may have made it temporarily impossible to bury her in the slough."

Whatever the reason for Bunny's burial outside the cemetery area, her final resting place presented something of a problem.

General Development Corporation, obligated to build a road over the area where Bunny rested faced a dilemma.

"We have an obligation to put in the road if it is feasible," GDC Operations Manager Alan Mitchell said. "But the company does not want to destroy our past."

What GDC did was to request Clausen make a study and an evaluation of the proposed road site and the surrounding area for the possible discovery and preservation of additional burials.

Bunny was the first human burial discovered after ten years of exploration on the site.

According to Mitchell, part of the proposed roadway has been essentially ruled out as a possible site for any other burials. The southern end, according to Clausen, may contain other burials.

Bunny was not moved by GDC until the city and state were consulted for input. Her remains were painstakingly excavated and removed by Clausen.

According to Mitchell, it was a cooperative effort on the part of the city and GDC. Both, according to Mitchell, have essentially the same goal in mind: preservation of the past. Just how that preservation will be accomplished is still being discussed.

"There are two things we are trying to balance," Mitchell said. "Care and preservation of our past and the needs of the present. Both have rights and there needs to be a careful balance."



Carl Clausen unearthing 'Bunny' at the site. Photo courtesy Charles Mitchell