



**WMS/LSS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER**

**Vol. 35, No. 4 September/October 2024**

*A 501(c)3 Corporation and Chapter of the Florida Anthropological Society*

The Warm Mineral Springs/Little Salt Spring Archaeological Society meets the second Tuesday of the month (except this October, when we will meet Wednesday, October 9, due to a scheduling conflict at the new meeting place)

The next two meeting dates are Tuesday, September 10, 2024, and Wednesday, October 9, 2024

**New time and new meeting place: North Port Public Library at 6:30 PM (Veranda Room).**

Join us for dinner at 4:30 PM at the Tarpon Point Grill & Marina, on the Myakka River, prior to the meeting. The Zoom links:

September meeting link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87591169750?pwd=hilFHc42hY3N6EhXs4KS0rP2jnVJal.1>

September ID: 875 9116 9750 Passcode: 049553; October Meeting ID: 858 5491 2085 Passcode: 488075

October meeting link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85854912085?pwd=VAQTbzYFRAAOqfK6kNKIKNNamde3la.1>

**Note: The September and October meetings will be in-person and via Zoom**

**ANCIENT HIGHWAYS: TRAILS AND WATERWAYS, TOPIC OF SEPTEMBER 10 MEETING BY STEVE KOSKI**

Evidence of Indigenous transportation methods and means will be the topic of discussion at the September 10 meeting by archaeologist Steve Koski.

When Europeans “discovered” the “New World,” it was not new at all to the Indigenous inhabitants of North and South America, who are believed to have entered the continent from Asia, ca. 14,000 to 20,000 years ago, or more. Over those many millennia, Indigenous Peoples developed overland transportation trails to far-flung locations and plying navigation routes along the coast, bays and estuaries, slough ways and creeks, and rivers and lakes by various types of watercraft. In Florida, the primary mode of travel was the dugout canoe. Transportation routes extended over hundreds of kilometers within the state, and thousands of kilometers throughout the southeast and north to Canada, in an interconnected network covering multiple states and provinces.



Steve Koski at the Sarasota County History Center in 2022

**EVIDENCE OF THE 1492 LANDING OF COLUMBUS IN THE AMERICAS, TOPIC OF OCTOBER 9 MEETING BY KATHY GERACE**

We are pleased to welcome back WMSLSSAS president Kathy Gerace, co-founder of the Gerace Research Center with her late husband, Donald Gerace, for a topic most appropriate for October, the landing place of Columbus. She kindly presented this topic at the October 2017 meeting and has some additional information to share.

For nearly 500 years, there was controversy among scholars and lay people over the exact location of Columbus' first landfall on his maiden voyage in 1492. A review of historic documents, maps, and descriptive photos show why there were numerous theories, but by the 500th anniversary of the landing, in 1992, some undeniable evidence came to light through archaeological research and excavation.

During the 1980's, under the direction of Dr. Charles Hoffman of Northern Arizona State University, excavations of a



October Speaker, Kathy Gerace

Lucayan Indian site on the western side of San Salvador Island, Bahamas, unearthed numerous European artifacts. Analysis of these artifacts revealed they were of Spanish origin and dated from the very late 1400's. The significance of these finds cannot be overstated, as it provides further proof that the island of San Salvador was the location of Columbus' first landfall in the New World.

Kathy Gerace holds a M.S. degree in anthropology/archaeology from Michigan State University. In 1971, she was teaching at Elmira College, in Elmira, NY, when she was asked to teach a four-week field course in Historic Archaeology on the island of San Salvador in The Bahamas. Meeting the Executive Director of the field station, Dr. Donald Gerace, led to their marriage, and Kathy became the Assistant Director of the field station.

Over the years, the field station grew to provide a venue for scientific studies and research for over 100 colleges and universities from the U.S., Canada, and Europe. In 1988, the Geraces formed a Bahamian, non-profit corporation named the Bahamian Field Station (BFS). The Geraces gave the BFS to the College of The Bahamas (COB) in 2003, and it was renamed the Gerace Research Centre (GRC). When the COB became the University of The Bahamas (UB), the GRC became one of their campuses, and it continues to provide accommodations, lab and field equipment, and all types of logistical support for professors, students, and scientific researchers in the disciplines of archaeology, biology, geology, and the marine sciences.

We acknowledge the devastating effects inflicted on the Indigenous peoples on the Lucayan Archipelago (Bahamas), Caribbean Islands and all of North and South America as a result of European contact, and value and respect their feelings regarding this October federal holiday, also federally recognized as Indigenous Peoples Day, to honor and commemorate Indigenous cultures and people.

### ANCIENT HIGHWAYS (cont. from page 1)

Where were these transportation routes? What evidence do we have of their locations? What happened to them? Do any still remain? These are some of the questions that will be addressed at the September 10 meeting.



"Indian Trail to Kissimmee Creek" depicted on this 1838 Second Seminole War Period map, from "Seat of War Map" (SC History Center).

Steven H. Koski recently retired after nine years as County Archaeologist for the Sarasota County Division of Historical Resources. There, he served as an administrator of the County's Historic Preservation ordinance, Chapter 66. He reviewed all development applications in unincorporated Sarasota County to identify and determine potential adverse effects on historic resources and archaeological sites to ensure the protection of those which have been determined to be significant under national and local criteria. Prior to his county position, Koski served as a research associate and resident underwater archaeologist at the University of Miami-owned Little Salt Spring Research Facility, working with the late Dr. John A. Gifford between 2004 and 2013. Koski had participated in research there since 1992. He has a B.A. in Anthropology with a certificate in prehistoric archaeology from the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and completed his coursework and exams in an M.A. program at Arizona State University.

### NEW MEETING LOCATION AND TIME ANNOUNCED!

**Please Note:** Beginning this September 10, our new meeting location will be the Veranda Room at the North Port Public Library (back room off children's section). The new time will be 6:30 PM (see front page for Zoom links). Due to a scheduling conflict, the October meeting will be held on **Wednesday, October 9**.

### NATALIE DE LA TORRE SALAS SPOKE AT OUR MAY 14, 2024 MEETING ON 'WEEDS AND SEEDS: A HISTORY OF DINING IN SOUTHERN FLORIDA'

Florida is a natural wonder, filled with a dazzling array of Native plants which have sustained the needs of people living here for thousands of years. Natalie's presentation discussed how pine and cypress provided the raw material for canoes, while other plants were used for sustenance and for medical purposes. Food plants, like sea grape, persimmon, coontie, smilax, beautyberry, red mulberry, wild grape, betony, chickasaw plum, and cabbage palm, helped sustain Native Peoples in Florida as a supplement to hunting and fishing practices.

According to the UF website, De Soto observed the Muskogee eating dried mulberries while on expedition in the mid-1500s. Due to the wide range of this plant (from FL to Canada) and the delicious taste of the fruit, it was utilized by Native Peoples across eastern North America. Coontie was used by the Calusa of Charlotte Harbor, and Timucua of Tampa Bay and other Florida Native groups throughout southern Georgia, Florida, the Caribbean, and South America. The tannins first need to be leached out of the plant to create a starchy cooking flour.

Tannins reduce the ability of one's gut to absorb nutrients, causing serious digestive issues and promoting cell mutation, serious liver damage, and cancers. Natalie explained that the Seminoles would leave behind improperly processed flour for the soldiers who were searching for them to find, often with devastating results for those who ate the resulting, tainted bread. Similarly, smilax or greenbrier tubers and acorns were gathered, and their tannins leached to make a nutritious flour.

The tender tips of smilax are safe to consume without any preparation.

While there is no evidence for maize farming in south Florida, at several archaeological sites, botanical testing has revealed the presence of squash and gourds, indicating that Native Peoples in south Florida had likely intentionally grown these plants for not only food, but as a means to transport goods as well. Medicinal plants like passion flower, mint, and yaupon holly provided relief from various ailments, and in the case of the holly, a ceremonial emetic. We thank Natalie for her great and informative presentation!

<https://gardeningsoflife.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/edibles/floridas-edible-native-plants/>

### **THE 2025 77th ANNUAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE OF THE FLORIDA ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY MEETING TO BE HELD IN GAINESVILLE IN MAY 2025.**

The Florida Archaeological Council has volunteered to host the 2025 FAS Annual Meeting in Gainesville. Weekend dates and schedule will be announced in an upcoming newsletter and at [www.fasweb.org](http://www.fasweb.org). As an FAS Chapter, we encourage members and friends to attend. The general venue will include a Friday evening reception, a full day of research presentations on Saturday, with an evening banquet, FAS awards ceremony, and a keynote speaker. On Sunday, several site tours and museum visits will be offered.

### **WHY IS THE SABER CAT THE LOGO OF THE WMS/LSSAS?**

by Steve Koski and Michelle Calhoun

Why is the saber cat the logo of the WMS/LSSAS? We have to go back to the early history of the organization to find out why. The WMS/LSSAS was initially founded as the Warm Mineral Springs Archaeological Society (WMSAS) by the late Wilburn "Sonny" Cockrell in 1990. At that time, Sonny was the principal investigator at the Florida State University-administered Warm Mineral Springs Archaeological Research Project. The project was funded through an annual Florida legislative appropriation, sponsored by the late Senator Bob Johnson beginning in 1985 (1985-1990).

Sonny started the organization because he wanted to expand his educational public outreach efforts on the international significance of Warm Mineral Springs, provide monthly history and archaeology presentations to the local general public, as well as provide volunteer opportunities for members with the Warm Mineral Springs Archaeological Project. At their first meeting, held at the Glenallen Elementary School in North Port in early 1990, over 300 people attended and over 200 joined; a testimony to the popularity of the archaeological discoveries at Warm Mineral Springs!

In late 1992, Cockrell moved to Tallahassee after funding for the project ended, and FSU did not have funds to continue the project. He asked Steve Koski to take over as the second president of the WMSAS. He did, and a few years later, with Koski's association as assistant to Dr. John Gifford, University of Miami's principal investigator at Little Salt Spring, he proposed that the WMSAS board add Little Salt Spring to the name of the organization. With that, we became the WMS/LSSAS in 1994.

As the second state underwater archaeologist, Sonny came to Warm Mineral Springs at the invitation of the Sarasota County History Center manager, Dottie Davis, in 1973, to investigate the findings of the late Colonel William "Bill" Royal, who began diving WMS in 1959. At that time, Royal began exploring both Warm Mineral Springs and Little Salt Spring. At WMS, he found artifacts and human remains on the 45-foot ledge. He postulated that if the artifacts and remains were on the 45-foot ledge, and stalactites overhung the ceiling of the ledge when sea levels were lower, the remains must have been deposited at least 10,000 years ago when levels were lower and the cavern was an open-air environment. If he was correct, the remains would be the oldest human remains yet to be found at the time in the Western Hemisphere.

The discovery was surrounded by controversy and skepticism, as no substantiated evidence of human antiquity had been previously found in Florida, nor had human remains of that age been found in North America. It was confirmed, however, by radiocarbon dating, that the remains did indeed date to the end of the last glacial period of the late Pleistocene, more than 10,000 years ago. In those early years of exploration and research, extinct Pleistocene megafauna were also found, such as a giant ground sloth (*Megalonyx jeffersonii*), and a saber cat, (*Smilodon fatalis*) in similar stratigraphic context as the human remains, demonstrating for the first time in the southeastern United States that people were in Florida when extinct Pleistocene mammals had roamed the Florida peninsula; a tremendous discovery at that time! With those spectacular finds, Sonny thought it appropriate that the saber cat should become the logo for the newly-formed organization.

*Smilodon*, often referred to as saber cat and saber-toothed tiger, is not actually closely related to the tiger (or any other modern cats). It belongs to Machairodontinae, an extinct subfamily, which diverged from the ancestor of modern cats around 20 million years ago (mya). These large predators roamed throughout the Americas during the Pleistocene (2.5 mya to 10,000 years ago).

There were three species of *Smilodon*; *S. fatalis*, *S. gracilis*, and *S. populator*. Only *S. fatalis* and *S. gracilis* have been found in Florida, and their finds are not common. According to the Florida Museum, *S. fatalis* ranged between 350 to 600 lbs (similar in size to Siberian tiger). *S. gracilis* weighed between 120 and 220 lbs (similar in size to jaguar). Recent research has revealed much about these large cats. For instance, a population study involving cats from the La Brea Tar Pits showed that a young saber cat had both baby and adult canine teeth.



Photo showing baby teeth buttressing adult canine teeth (from popsci)

The baby teeth acted as buttresses, providing stability to the much-longer and more flexible adult teeth, which did not begin to erupt until around 10 months of age. In Ecuador, a mother cat was found with her two two-year-old cubs, an age at which modern large cats would have already struck out on their own. It is believed that this morphological adaptation might be the reason for an extended maternal period for these cats, as they needed to practice using these unwieldy canines before leaving their mother's care.

**Interesting Links for More Info on Saber Cats:**

- Saber-toothed Cats May Have Co-Existed with Modern Humans  
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/saber-toothed-cats-may-have-co-existed-modern-humans-180965349/>
- Evolutionary History of Saber-Toothed Cats Based on Ancient Mitogenomics  
[https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822\(17\)31198-3](https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(17)31198-3)
- Smilodon fatalis* siblings reveal life history in a saber-toothed cat  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2589004220311135>
- Florida Vertebrate Fossils: *Smilodon fatalis*  
<https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/florida-vertebrate-fossils/species/smilodon-fatalis/>
- Saber-tooth surprise: Fossils redraw picture of the fearsome big cat  
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/saber-tooth-cats-surprise-fossils-redraw-picture-of-big-cat>
- How saber-toothed cats' baby teeth kept their adult fangs from breaking  
<https://www.popsci.com/science/saber-toothed-cats-baby-fangs/>

**SILENT AUCTION FUNDRAISER COMING UP THIS WINTER!**

We are in the planning stage of an exciting event this winter, with details to be announced in the Nov/Dec NL; a silent auction dinner, keynote speaker! There will be ceramic and lithic reproductions, posters, framed art, a reproduction pipe, color prints of Little Salt Spring and the *Sacoila* orchids, and more! We will also have a chili dinner for all in attendance. We hope you'll join us. Thank you to Deb Lang for donating her amazing ceramics for our auction!

Selected items which will be available at the silent auction



**WMS/LSSAS 2024/2025 MEMBERSHIP SUPPORT**

Thank you to all who responded to our membership drive! Membership is critical to operations. While our meetings and events are free and open to the public (unless fees apply to the destination), it is our loyal members that provide the financing to the speakers, for newsletter, and for events. Let's keep the momentum going! A membership form will be included with the November/December WMS/LSSAS NL and we are still hoping to get on-line membership renewal capabilities available on our website very soon.

**LSS CHICKEE THATCH FUNDRAISING UPDATE**

We are still going! More than \$1900 raised for the Seminole-style Chickee thatching at Little Salt Spring. Interested in helping? The WMS/LSSAS is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation. If you would like to assist with this endeavor, please send a tax-deductible donation to the WMS/LSSAS to P.O. Box 7797, North Port, FL 34290, and reference "LSS Tiki Hut Thatching." To those who have already donated, thank you so much for your kind support! We are most grateful and look forward to seeing this effort come to fruition!

**2024/2025 WMS/LSSAS OFFICERS**

- PRESIDENT .....Kathy Gerace, [dtgerace@gmail.com](mailto:dtgerace@gmail.com)
- VICE PRESIDENT ...Michelle Calhoun, [mcalhoun35@gmail.com](mailto:mcalhoun35@gmail.com)
- SECRETARY .....Lisa Shavers, [Lshavers2000@gmail.com](mailto:Lshavers2000@gmail.com)
- TREASURER .....Dennis Backens, [kidweller@gmail.com](mailto:kidweller@gmail.com)

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- Assistant Editor: Steve Koski, [skoski1044@aol.com](mailto:skoski1044@aol.com)
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- Librarian: Kathy Gerace, [dtgerace@gmail.com](mailto:dtgerace@gmail.com)

Warm Mineral Springs / Little Salt Spring Archaeological Society  
P. O. Box 7797, North Port, Florida 34290

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