

Caribbean Archaeology

At the Florida Museum of Natural History

INDIAN CAVE, MIDDLE CAICOS

Located just west of the village of Conch Bar, Indian Head Cave is a large cavern with multiple large skylights through the ceiling. For the week of May 11th, 1998, Bill Keegan (archaeologist), David Steadman (ornithologist), Dick Franz (herpetologist)



Dale Witt inside Indian Head Cave (Photo © Mike Witt).

excavated in the cave with the assistance of Reed and Barbara Toomey, Brian Riggs, and Anne Stokes. Our goal was to determine if people had occupied the cave in the past and to obtain a record of the animals that lived in the area in the past.



Screening material from Unit 1. (Photo © Mike Witt).

Caves are excellent locations to search for animal bones. Caves provide shelter for a wide variety of animals, such as iguanas and tortoises who use the cave to escape the heat of the day. Some of these animals happen to die in the cave,

while the carcasses of others are brought by a carnivorous birds who roost in the cave. Large owls are excellent at sampling the local fauna, especially small birds and reptiles. In addition, the dry, limestone soils help to preserve the bones of dead animals.

Our excavations were conducted in two areas. The first was two adjacent one-meter squares which were excavated near the cavern entrance. The deepest of these was excavated in 10 cm levels (4 inches) to a depth of 230 cm (over 8 feet). There were no human objects recovered in this area. Near the surface there was a lot of charcoal which probably entered the cave as a result of fires set by people in the area. A wide variety of birds and reptiles were recovered during the excavation. Bird bones from locally extinct and extirpated owls, hawk, parrot, quaildove, and a flightless rail were also recovered. The reptiles were represented by small lizards as well as the extinct Turks and Caicos tortoise and a giant iguana. The tortoise and iguana bones were found all the way to the bottom of the deposit which suggests that they reached the island without the assistance of people. Surprisingly, the only mammals in the deposit were bats, and there were also no frogs.



Fossil bones from Unit 1. (Photo © Mike Witt).



Dave Steadman at 2 meters excavating Unit 1. (Photo © Mike Witt).

The other excavation area was along the eastern wall of the cave. In this area we recovered lots of tortoise bones, some of which were unfossilized. The preservation of these as bone indicates that the tortoise was living on Middle Caicos within the last few centuries. Eight pieces of very black pottery were recovered near the surface. Ann Cordell, ceramic technologist at the Florida Museum of Natural History, identified the paste as typical of that found in Meillacan pottery (A.D. 850-1300) from Hispaniola. In addition to the pottery there was also a brass thimble, which indicates that the cave was used until historic times.



Barbara Toomey washing bones and matrix. (Photo © Reed Toomey).



Dick Franz excavating area 2. (Photo © Reed Toomey).

All of the material excavated from the cave is now under analysis at the Florida Museum of Natural History. Upon completion of the analysis a representative sample of the material will be used in interpretive displays at the cave.



"Whale Watch House" our base of operations. (Photo © Mike Witt).

We are grateful to Mike, Micky, and Dale Witt of Blue Horizon Resort (649-946-6141).