

The Florida Isolated Finds Policy – Opportunity and Responsibility for River Divers

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Introduction

The Florida Isolated Finds Policy (IFP) was initiated in June 1996 to allow for the legal collection and reporting of prehistoric and historic artifacts from Florida's submerged lands and transfer of title to those artifacts to their finders (Knight 1997; 1998). The success of this policy relies totally on the voluntary sharing of information about river finds collected by amateur archaeologists with the Bureau of Archaeological Research (BAR). After 8 years it is time to evaluate how well this experiment is working and time to take proactive steps to improve those aspects of the program found to be deficient.

This article provides an overview of the history of artifact collecting in Florida's rivers, the scope of the IFP, and an analysis of the data collected by the IFP as of June 20, 2003. This article also describes the concerns that both professional and amateur archaeologists have about the Florida IFP and provides recommendations for improving the program and continuing the benefits of amateur-professional cooperation.

Brief History of Artifact Collecting in Florida Rivers

Serious collecting of artifacts from Florida river bottoms was first documented in the 1940s by Clarence Simpson of High Springs and Marianna (Simpson, 1948), in the 1950s by Dr. John Goggin of the University of Florida, and in the 1960s through 1980s by legendary divers and amateur archaeologists such as, Ben Waller of Ocala (Waller, 1969; 1970), Hub Chason of Marianna (Chason, 1987), and Don Serbousek of Ormond Beach (Serbousek, 1983). Collections of thousands of stone and bone artifacts were amassed by the first divers that methodically searched Florida's rivers such as the Santa Fe, Ichetucknee, Aucilla, and Suwannee. Those divers who came first had the truly unusual good fortune to be the artifact collecting pioneers in Florida's rivers.



Translucent coral Marion point found in the Santa Fe River and reported to the IFP.

The early cooperative spirit between amateurs and professionals was exemplified by the divers listed above and many others, and resulted in a relatively early understanding of the conditions of archaeological resources in Florida's rivers, and the distributions of certain types of specific cultural markers. For example, the cooperative efforts between James Dunbar of BAR and Ben Waller led to support of the "water hole" hypothesis (Neill, 1964) concerning the distribution of Paleoindian cultures with respect to karstic limestone areas, sinkholes, and eroded river beds in paleo Florida (Waller and Dunbar, 1977; Dunbar and Waller, 1983). Subsequent information sharing between Florida's amateurs and professionals has led to catalogs of Paleoindian fluted points (Faught et al., 1994), refinements to distributions of late-Paleo/early-Archaic artifact assemblages (Dunbar et al. 1990; Dunbar, 1991), and general distribution surveys of other diagnostic artifacts useful as cultural markers.

The Aucilla River project was perhaps the most successful and longest cooperative endeavor by professional and amateur underwater archaeologists and paleontologists in Florida. Discussion of a possible project at Half Mile Rise in the Aucilla River started in the early 1980s when Don Serbousek and other divers reported finds of fossilized bones of extinct Paleofauna in association with diagnostic artifacts from the Paleoindian cultural tradition as well as worked ivory artifacts thought to be made in direct association between early humans and these extinct megafauna (Serbousek, 1983). Expeditions to the Aucilla River continued several times each year from 1983 to 1999 under the leadership of Dr. S. David Webb of the University of Florida, Jim Dunbar, and a long list of graduate students and volunteers (Dunbar et al., 1988). Many of the most active river divers in Florida and the southeastern U.S. worked on the Aucilla River Project and learned the importance of quantitative data and careful record keeping for documenting their archaeological finds. This project has had a lasting effect on the good relationship between many of the State's professionals and amateurs with common archaeological interests.

Florida's Isolated Finds Program

Changes to the Florida Historical Resources Act in 1993 led to an examination of the widening communication gap between river divers and professional archaeologists in Florida and a number of interested individuals came together to discuss the negative aspects of the situation and opportunities to reestablish a more cooperative relationship in the state. State archaeologist Dr. James Miller, the first Chief of BAR from 1983 to 2003 was assisted by Jim Dunbar, underwater archaeologist, in a review of amateur archaeology programs in other states. This review of the legal and technical aspects of these programs led Dr. Miller to formulate the Florida IFP with review and comment by interested amateur underwater archaeologists.

Knight (1998) summarized the findings of the IFP for the first year of reporting. At that time there were 141 reports from a total of 29 individuals. These reports described artifacts from 17 rivers and included a total of 1,014 prehistoric artifacts. This updated analysis of the IFP database examined Isolated Finds reports from May 1996 through June 2003, for a total of 8 years. After eliminating redundant reports and reports from uplands and other uncertain locations there were a total of 660 reports in the database. A total of 86 individual collectors have reported 4,939 prehistoric and 103 historic artifacts.

Artifacts have been reported from 27 rivers/creeks, 3 lakes, one beach, and one sinkhole. The highest numbers of reported artifacts from a single river are 1,601 from the Santa Fe, 1,207 from the Suwannee, 657 from the Apalachicola, 457 from the Wacissa, 330 from the Aucilla, 173 from the Steinhatchee, and 131 from the St. Johns. Of the prehistoric artifacts reported, 3,441 are stone tools, 554 are ceramics, 823 are bone tools, and 120 are worked bone.

The first year's analysis of the IFP database found that of the "diagnostic" points recognized by Bullen (1976) about 19% were stemmed Archaic, 18% Bolen, and 12% Paleoindian (Suwannee, Clovis, and Simpson). Detailed breakdowns of the distribution of point types from individual rivers could be extracted from the updated database with additional work but has not been done for this article. Of the 86 people reporting, 80 are from Florida and 6 are from other states. A relatively small number of individual collectors have reported the majority of the artifacts in the database. Seventeen individuals have submitted at least 10 reports and the top 10 participants (12% of the individuals who have submitted reports) have submitted 394 reports (about 58% of all reports). These top 10 participants have reported 4,443 artifacts or about 82% of the total number of reported finds.

Is the Isolated Finds Policy a Success or a Failure?

Depending upon your perspective, the IFP may be considered to be a failure or a success. It is likely that the reported artifacts from Florida rivers represent a small fraction of those actually found and removed during and before this 8 year period. For example, there are dozens of old time collections that number in the thousands of artifacts that have not been reported.

On the other hand approximately 5,000 artifacts have been reported to BAR that otherwise might never have come to its attention. The mass of technical data in the IFP database is already sufficient to occupy one or more

graduate students or interested researchers full time for at least a year in mapping the distribution of diagnostic stone, bone, and ceramic artifacts in several of Florida's rivers. These data could also be used to plot the find locations for hundreds of isolated artifacts in Florida's rivers and to serve as the groundwork for a detailed inventory of pre-historic cultural resources in those rivers. The underwater archaeological survey conducted by Jim Dunbar on the Santa Fe River (Smith et al., 1997) is an example of highly successful research conducted almost completely based on information reported in the IFP and with the help of amateur archaeologists. The reality is that most of the artifacts that occur in rivers are not associated in their original context, a large majority of the original artifact inventory has already been removed by divers, and the remaining artifacts are so



A variety of lithic artifacts collected in the Santa Fe River and reported to the IFP.

dispersed in river environments that professional archaeologists are not likely to ever have the resources necessary to recover even a very small fraction of the potential finds that are still present.

So what is the correct perspective concerning the success or failure of the IFP? While different people have varied perspectives, the answer is clearly that the program is neither a total success nor a total failure, it is somewhere between the two extremes. The IFP has been successful at lowering the wall of suspicion and distrust that developed a decade ago between the two groups of people most interested in preservation of Florida's archaeological heritage, namely amateur and professional archaeologists. The IFP has resulted in the reporting of some data where virtually zero data flow was present before its existence. On the other hand it is likely that there are many more artifacts being collected from submerged lands each year than the number reported to the IFP. Information about those artifacts, their type, their provenience, their metrics, and all other evidence they even existed at one time in a river is lost to the citizens of the state of Florida. While the physical artifacts cannot be owned by everyone or even enjoyed by very many people, the technical information about them can theoretically be shared by all if it is reported to the IFP.

Thoughts on Improving the Isolated Finds Policy

There are some extreme views on both sides of the IFP issue. These opinions range from those either for or against the collection of artifacts from state-owned submerged lands by private individuals, and those who want to improve the success of the IFP or to see it fail. On one hand some divers want the IFP to go away, to be able to collect artifacts in any river without the need for permission from the state, and to not have any responsibility for reporting the artifacts they find. There are others who do not want any amateur to have the right to collect artifacts on state-owned land without the expressed permission of a permitted researcher and with no opportunity to take ownership of those artifacts after they are collected. Neither of these groups is likely to be supportive of the IFP.

However, it is the conclusion of the authors that those who wish to have all or none on either side of this issue are in the minority. To help the IFP succeed, the majority of serious amateur and professional archaeologists need to find ways to improve the policy so it is more successful in the future. Two possible paths to reach this goal, include the following:

- Create a permit program to allow better enforcement and to collect funds to support the IFP
- Increase education and outreach to collectors to enlist their voluntary compliance with the existing IFP

The idea of a permit may be the most attractive option if the existing IFP continues to be marginally successful. However, the difficulty of enacting new legislation to set up a permit program is potentially so great that if this were the only option then the Department of State may decide that the IFP is not worth the effort and decide that all artifact collecting in rivers should be categorically prohibited. While this outcome is pessimistic it should provide an incentive to find another solution such as the one offered below.

It is our opinion that the success of the IFP can be measurably improved through a greater education and outreach program by both amateur and professional archaeologists with an interest in artifacts found in submerged lands. There is an opportunity for true collaboration between these two groups since both groups have shared interests and goals related to antiquities. The existing IFP opens the door for full cooperation without incrimination.

One difficulty of improving public/private cooperation in the past was the fear that providing information to the State about artifacts collected in rivers would result in their confiscation. For the past three years the authors of this paper and in a few cases representatives of BAR's Underwater Archaeology Program have attended artifact shows and displayed a broad array of significant artifacts reported to the IFP. At each of these shows it has been observed to hobby divers that BAR has been presented with numerous opportunities to request unique artifacts reported to the IFP and has not asked for a single one. As a result of these presentations by fellow divers, most collectors no longer harbor the fear of confiscation.

The remaining primary deterrent to better cooperation with the IFP is getting collectors to commit the time necessary to make an accurate report. For many hobby divers there is no satisfaction in filling out forms and recording data. Some who do keep their own logs are not motivated to spend the additional time necessary to record their finds with the IFP. Reporting past finds can be a daunting task just due to their high numbers and the amount of paperwork involved. Many collectors just need help with this final data-reporting step to be able to actively participate in the IFP. A possible alternative to assist with outreach to these divers is establishment and funding of a Florida Artifacts Collection Survey (FACS).

The concept of FACS is relatively simple and is modeled after the highly successful collectors survey conducted in South Carolina (see Charles, 1986 for a detailed description of that program). A representative of the State of Florida, possibly from the Florida Museum of Natural History would contact collectors and request permission to visit them, observe their collections, and record data about artifacts that have firm provenience. In its broadest form FACS would record information about artifacts collected from both uplands and submerged lands. For the purpose of this discussion the initial focus of FACS would be to record isolated finds from submerged lands into the IFP database. Basically the state's representative would carry the main workload for paperwork and data recording with a greatly reduced time commitment by the collector. The collector would benefit by having their artifacts recorded and receiving clear title to them while the State would benefit from a much greater flow of data and more consistent reporting. It is not suggested that the State's representative would visit a collector repeatedly, only once or twice initially to record all of the pre-existing, unreported finds. From that time forward it would be a much easier task for the collectors to fulfill their responsibility and to make their own reports.

Implementation of this idea has already started in a phased approach. The first phase is a "pilot study" of the concept being conducted by the authors. They are attending a number of artifact shows located in north Florida and south Georgia and volunteering their time and services to record and report artifacts to the IFP. This first phase is intended to bring more participants on board and to further convince the majority of collectors that the IFP

is meant to help and not to harm. At the first show attended (Sunshine State Archaeological Society show at Spirit of the Suwannee Campground on September 13, 2003) a total of 21 new collectors reported over 154 artifacts to the IFP. The authors plan to continue this pilot program for at least one year or until funding is found to carry on this cataloging by a dedicated representative of the State of Florida.

The second phase of implementing FACS is grant-writing to fund a full or part-time technician position at the Florida Museum of Natural History in Gainesville to reach out to collectors who wish to report their finds. This person would be under the direction of the Archaeological Collections Manager at the museum (Scott Mitchell). Identification of funding sources and preparation of grant applications to initiate the FACS has already begun. It is just a matter of some time and effort until the pilot efforts of a few amateurs can expand into a funded FACS program that greatly increases knowledge about the archaeological resources hidden within the submerged lands of Florida.

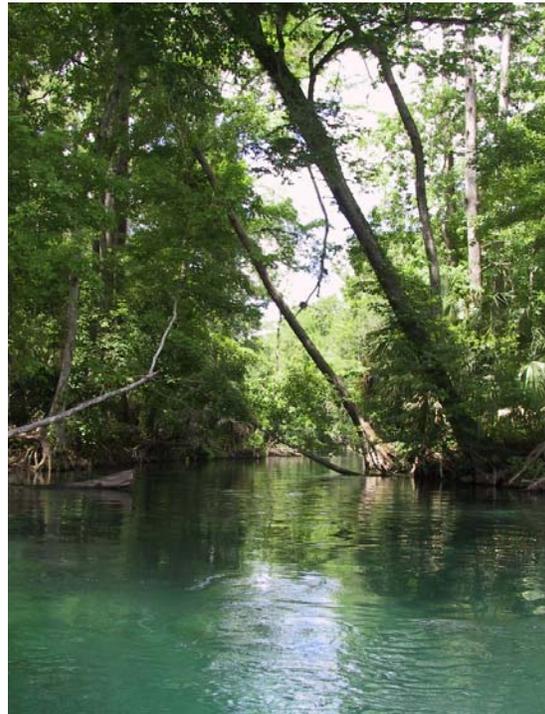
Summary

Florida's IFP is neither a success nor a failure, instead, it is a good alternative to open hostility between avocational and professional archaeologists. Whatever the outcome of the IFP, Florida's laws governing artifacts in submerged lands, and future enforcement of those laws, artifacts in Florida's rivers will continue to be extracted. Those artifacts may be in private collections or in state-owned collections and actually may migrate from the former to the latter sometime in the future.

The real issue is not where the artifacts go or who owns them. The important issue is whether or not the information about those artifacts is ever in public ownership. This is the shared goal and responsibility of most amateurs and professionals in Florida. The IFP either in its current form or in some future improved transformation appears to be the best method for capturing that information and making it widely available. A beefed-up permit program is not likely to solve the reporting problems currently keeping most hobby divers from reporting their finds. The proposed FACS does provide an opportunity to increase the level of reporting about isolated artifact finds in Florida's rivers and ultimately the information gained from these important prehistoric resources.

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Florida's many rivers hold treasures for those who are willing to seek them and who are also able to accept the responsibility of their discovery.

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