

How Did Lucayans Utilize Light House Point?

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Background Information

The Bahamas were first inhabited by the Lucayan Taíno, who originated in South America and migrated to The Bahamas by 650 CE. They usually settled on leeward beaches with high dune ridges that had a swale behind them.

Lucayans were horticulturists; they hunted iguana and crab, fished the shallow waters offshore, and farmed the land. Queen conch's durability makes it one of the most commonly found ecofacts. Hole-punched conch does not guarantee Lucayan presence as modern fishermen can imitate the same method, but it is very uncommon to do so. The only way to definitively identify a site as Lucayan is through Palmetto ware, a type of pottery specific to the Lucayans. It was crafted from a red clay and tempered with shell bits. The technology cannot be replicated today.

The focus of the archaeology project at The Island School is to survey south Eleuthera for prehistoric materials, specifically Lucayan. Our semester focused on searching for evidence of Lucayan presence on Lighthouse Point. Lighthouse Point and the surrounding beaches fit the criteria for a Lucayan site. The project area also has caves and cays which may have been used ceremoniously by Lucayans. The site is also scheduled for development, adding to the area's high priority. **As such, the purpose of our research was to survey Lighthouse Point and determine its usage.**



Figure 1. Satellite image of Lighthouse Point.

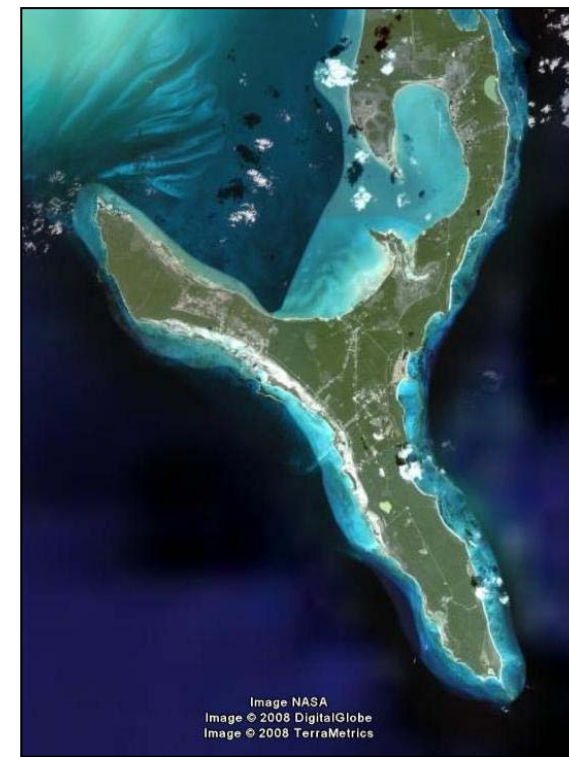


Figure 4. Satellite image of South Eleuthera.



Figure 5. Sources of significant disturbance.

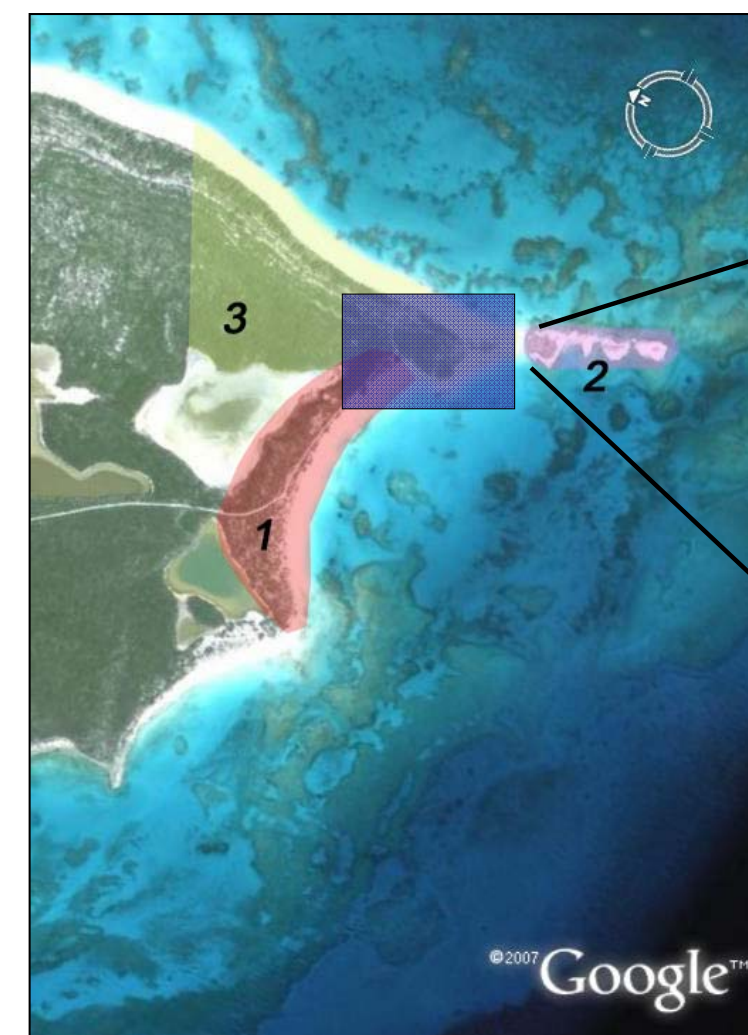


Figure 6. Close up of project area and survey priority areas.

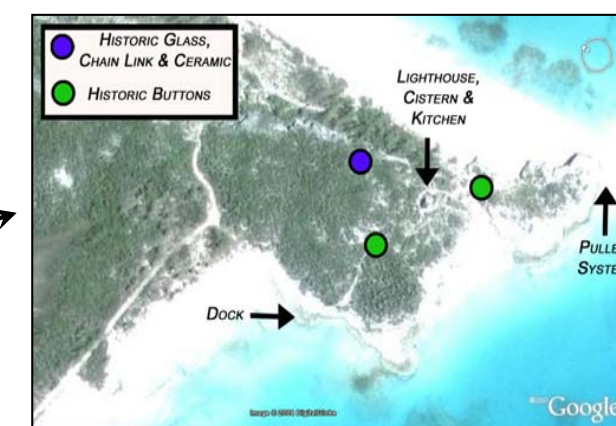


Figure 7. Historic materials documented.

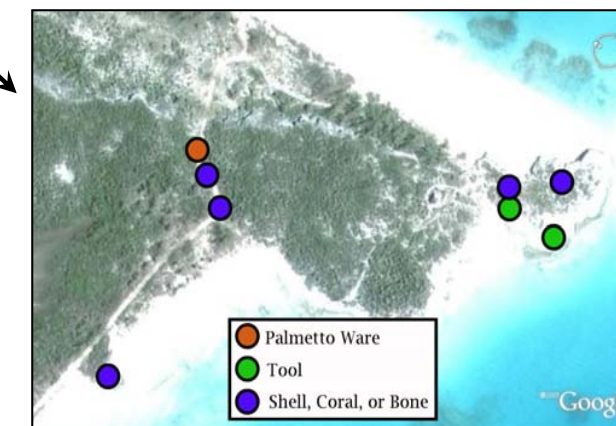


Figure 8. Prehistoric materials documented.

Methods

This project employed standard phase I survey, or pedestrian walkover, techniques, during which individuals scour the ground in a meandering transect. It involves a group of individuals positioned five meters apart and arranged in a straight line perpendicular to the shoreline. The team then walks parallel to each other, meandering about their transect line to avoid obstacles and ensure coverage of exposed areas. This method was developed specifically for The Bahamas because of the thick coppice and rugged terrain. When an ecofact, artifact, or feature was found, it was recorded into a field notebook with the geospatial data, other findings nearby, a description of the sediment and possible disturbances all documented. With the exception of rare or significant materials, no artifacts were collected during these investigations.

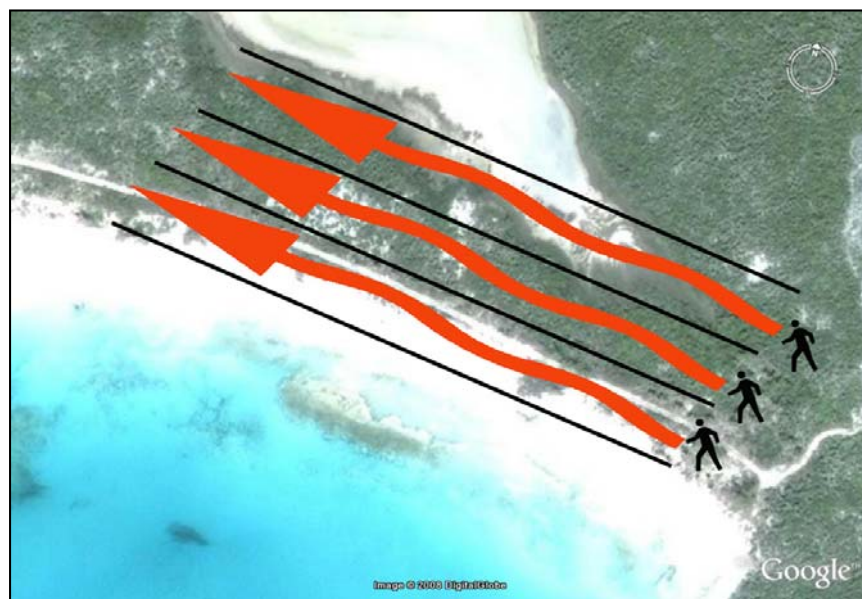


Figure 2. Illustration of the meandering transect (not to scale).



Figure 3. Meandering transect in action.



Figure 9. Prehistoric *C. pica* receptacles.

Results

The location of the prehistoric artifacts were in high erosion areas. For example, the piece of Palmetto ware was found only a few feet away from some more *C. pica* and a parrotfish jawbone, could have been a spot where food was prepared. The Palmetto ware suggests that the fish may have even been cooked there. Conch could have been prepared there as well. Only a few hundred yards from that spot a hole-punched Queen conch was found, and although it cannot be concluded for certain that the conch was Lucayan, it could indicate that the Lucayans harvested conch at that site.

Prehistoric Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Palmetto Ware • Parrotfish Jawbone • Nerites • Welks (<i>C. pica</i>) • Hole punched conch • Bits of coral • Bits of conch • Fuzzy chiton
Historic Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lighthouse • Cistern • Kitchen • Dock
Historic Artifacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buttons • Chain



Figure 10. Prehistoric shell assemblage.



Figure 11. Historic lighthouse and kitchen.

Discussion

The broken coral pieces and *C. pica* shells found on the southern-most point hint at a ceremonial use of the point at Lighthouse. On the other side of the point, where the piece of Palmetto ware was found only a few feet away from some more *C. pica* and a parrotfish jawbone, could have been a spot where food was prepared. The Palmetto ware suggests that the fish may have even been cooked there. Conch could have been prepared there as well. Only a few hundred yards from that spot a hole-punched Queen conch was found, and although it cannot be concluded for certain that the conch was Lucayan, it could indicate that the Lucayans harvested conch at that site.

The hole-punched conch, fish jawbone, and palmetto ware suggest that this Lucayan site was used for fishing and food gathering. There was a high dune ridge, a sandy beach, and wind protection, all of which the Lucayans looked for when choosing a place to settle. But not enough artifacts were found to call this site a Lucayan settlement. It can be said, however, that Lighthouse was a heavily used historic site. The lighthouse itself, along with the cistern and kitchen, means that somebody was living at the site for an extended period of time. The dock also means that ships may have been coming in and out of the site with frequency. Not only does this mean that there is a high level of anthropogenic disturbances, but also that this site was important to a variety of different people.

In the future, it is suggested that archaeologists try test pitting. It is believed that there are more artifacts buried beneath the heavy sediment that has blown around the lighthouse areas. Many of the modern artifacts around the Lighthouse area are already buried, meaning that the prehistoric artifacts must be far beneath the surface. Test pitting would be an easy way to check for more artifacts.

Literature Cited

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