

Winter Solstice Sunset Ceremonial Serpent Mound Marco Island, FL Caloosa Indian Culture (Calusa)

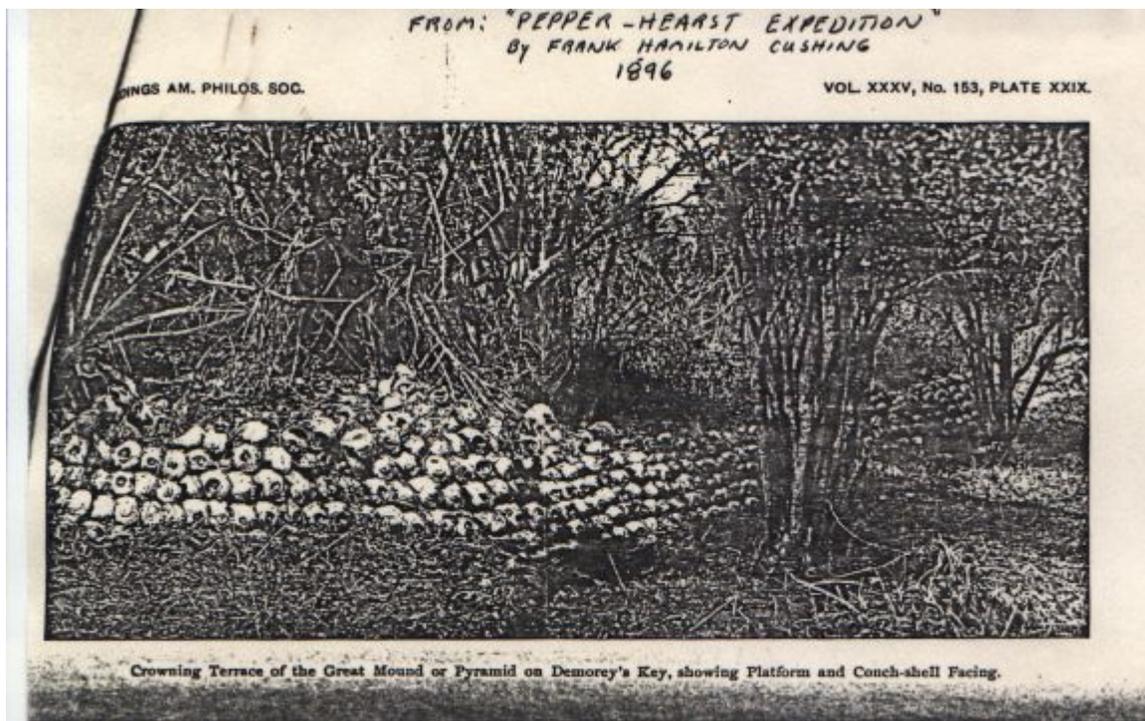
By: Ray Urbaniak

The Caloosa Indians(Calusa) occupied and ruled primarily the SW region of present day Florida. They lived there for thousands of years until their eventual extinction after the arrival of the Spanish. The Caloosa became famous in 1895-1896 when Frank Hamilton Cushing discovered a hoard of beautifully carved and decorated wooden artifacts preserved in the muck of Key Marco, Marco Island, Florida.

When I lived in Florida 30 years ago I did a lot of research on the Caloosa(the present spelling commonly used is Calusa). A friend of mine, Kathy Herring told me about and took me to a shell mound on Marco Island that had Whelk shell terraces. The story was that a settler by the name of Ernest Otter had built the whelk shell terraces during the 1940's-1960's. The house he built on this Caloosa habitation site eventually burnt down. I was convinced at that time that the terraces were actually built by the Caloosa Indians, since they were identical to those found on Demory Key off of Pine Island, Florida on Cushing's expedition.

Photo below from Cushing's expedition

(Cushing called them Conch shells when they were actually Whelk shells.)



At that time, I wrote to state officials to preserve the site, but I don't know if my pleas had any impact.

I visited the property a few times over the years, and at one time the property came up for sale, and was close to being destroyed when the Conservation Collier Program purchased the property and turned it into a small park.

During the first part of April, 2013, I was visiting Naples , Florida and volunteered a few hours to help sift shell rubble for artifacts. The shell rubble had been recorded by location and collected when a new pipeline was installed.

At that time I met Joe Mankowski who was the archaeologist in charge of the project. I told him of my theory and he agreed that it warranted further research. We agreed that it was most likely that after clearing the land that Mr. Otter actually rebuilt the walls, verses building them from scratch.

Later I made contact with a lawyer named Craig Woodward, who is also interested in archaeology, had also seen the photo of the whelk shell terraces in Cushing's report, and shared my belief that the terraces were originally constructed by the Caloosa Indians. The three of us teamed up to try and prove the origin of the terraces by proposing to dig a few small trenches up to the walls and determine if the whelk shells all sat on top of the shell refuse or extended down into the shell rubble. This along with sampling and testing of a few of the bottom shells for age would help prove our shared belief.

After Craig sent me a more detailed map of the terraces I immediately noticed that at least one of the walls aligned to the Winter Solstice Sunset.

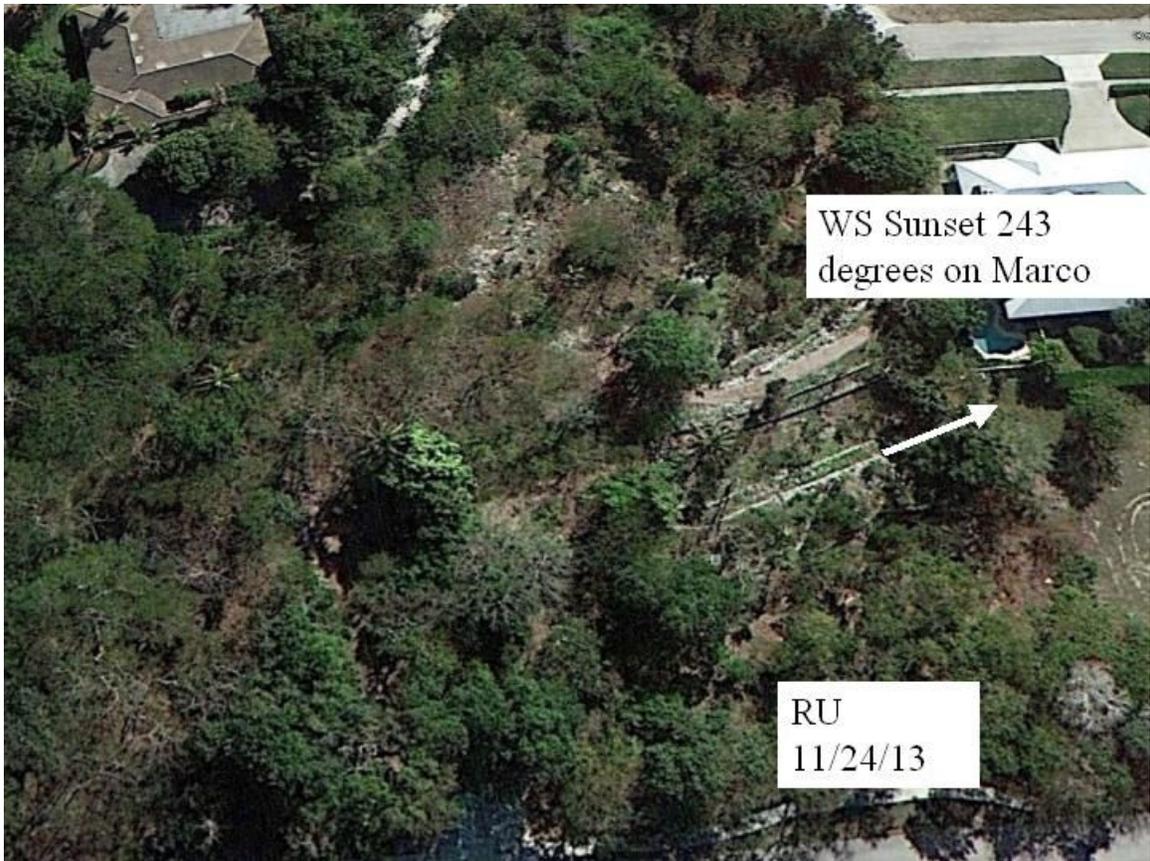
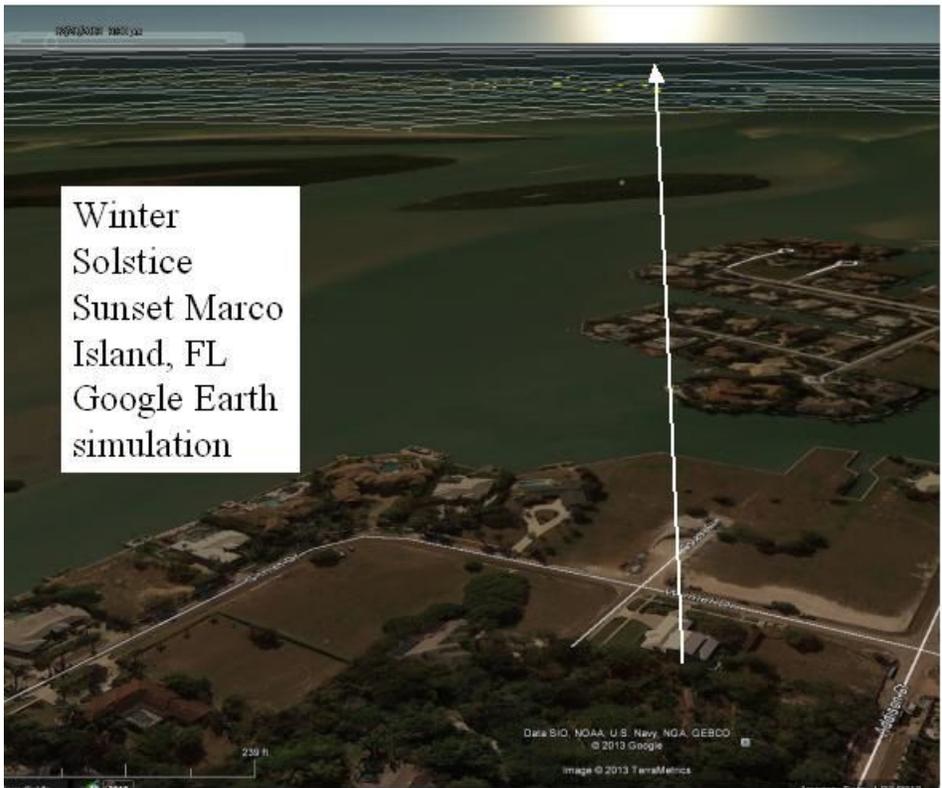
I had in fact surveyed the land through the thick brush 30 years ago and made a crude map from which a friend, Jesus Gonzalez made me an isometric sketch of the terraces to send to the authorities in hope of preserving the site.

A section of the sketch is shown below.



Joe and Craig visited the site on the Winter Solstice and visually confirmed the alignment.

I also confirmed it on Google Earth(which is a great tool for such work).



On January 4th, I flew to Naples Florida and met with Joe and Craig on January 6th to determine where we should suggest digging in our proposal. I made an additional 3 trips to the site to refine my observations. On my third trip I read one of the signs for the first time.



The sign in the photo above, referring to Ernest Otter, said.. ***"He accentuated the contours of the existing Calusa mounds, ridges and canals..."***

This meant that they were indeed Caloosa walls aligned to the Winter Solstice Sunset. This in my mind confirmed that this would have been a major Winter Solstice Sunset Ceremonial site to keep their world in balance by assuring that the Sun didn't move any further south. This is a ceremony that was widely practiced by many Native Cultures.

I was a bit obsessed with this project so I even made a model of the terraces at the beach.



Actual Terraces



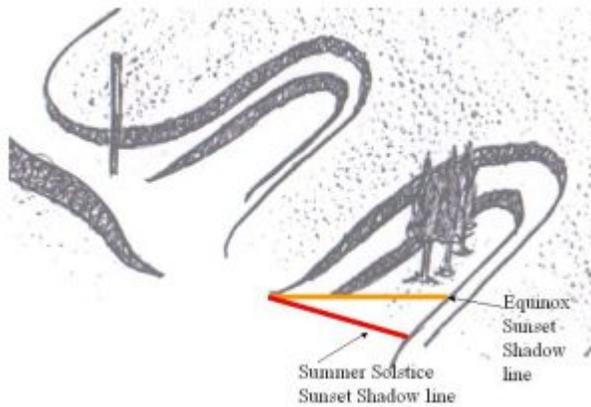
Simulated Caloosa view of Sunset on Winter Solstice(unfortunately, there is now a house obstructing the view, and other houses in the distance on filled land that wasn't there during the Caloosa period.)



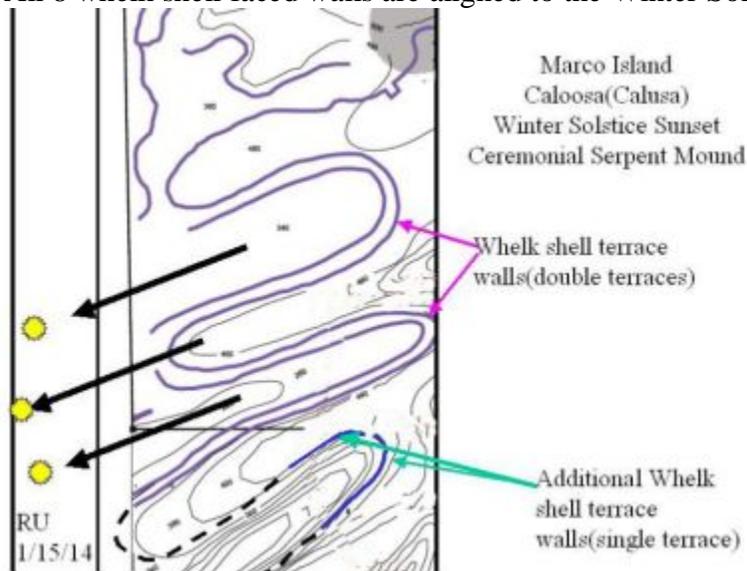
The 2 female shaped sets of terraces point to the Winter Solstice Sunset as well as the male shaped terrace in the middle. It is possible that the Shaman stood on the terrace in the middle while select tribal members were in the recessed terraces. The patrons would have watched the sun sink into the middle of the recessed terraces.



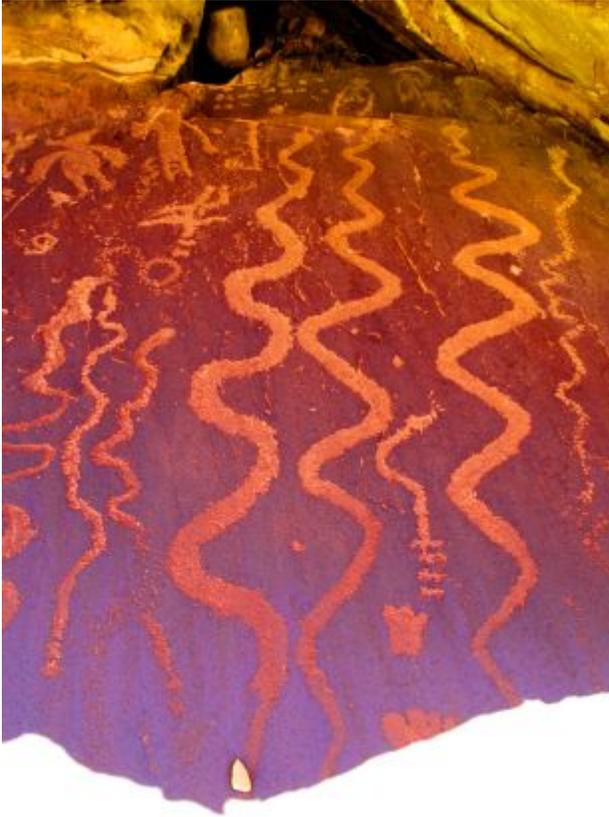
Around the Winter Solstice Sunset the Sun would not cast any shadows from the walls. During the rest of the year the walls would cast shadows at sunset and could have been used to mark the seasons.



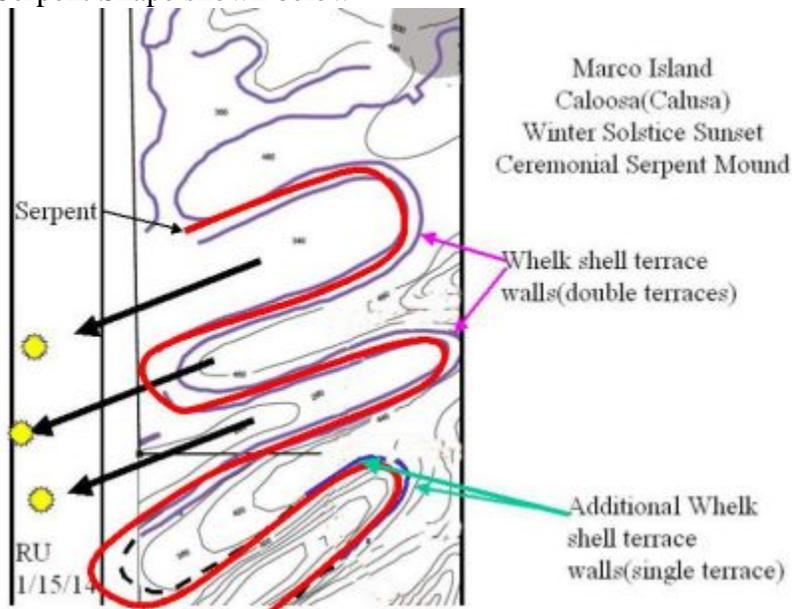
All 8 whelk shell faced walls are aligned to the Winter Solstice Sunset position.



My wife Enilse, noticed that the terraces resembled a serpent. The serpent is a symbol for the Sun in my Anasazi area of the SW. Here is a serpent panel, from the Arizona strip, that should be fully in Sunlight at the high point of the Sun on the Winter Solstice.

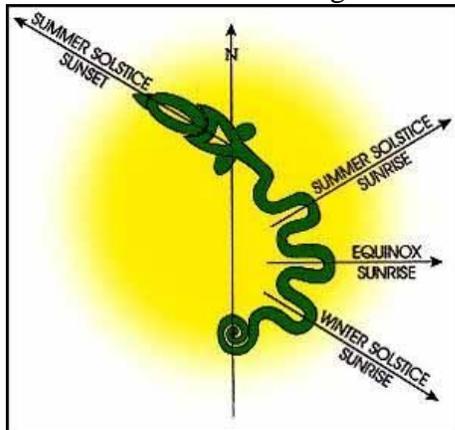


Serpent Shape shown below



According to the archaeologist, Joe Mankowski ..” regardless of whether or not the shells in the walls are found to be applied by the Calusa or Mr. Otter, the mound site is still eligible for listing to the National Register of Historic Places because it represents a significant prehistoric Indian village and with midden deposits that are unique to the area.”

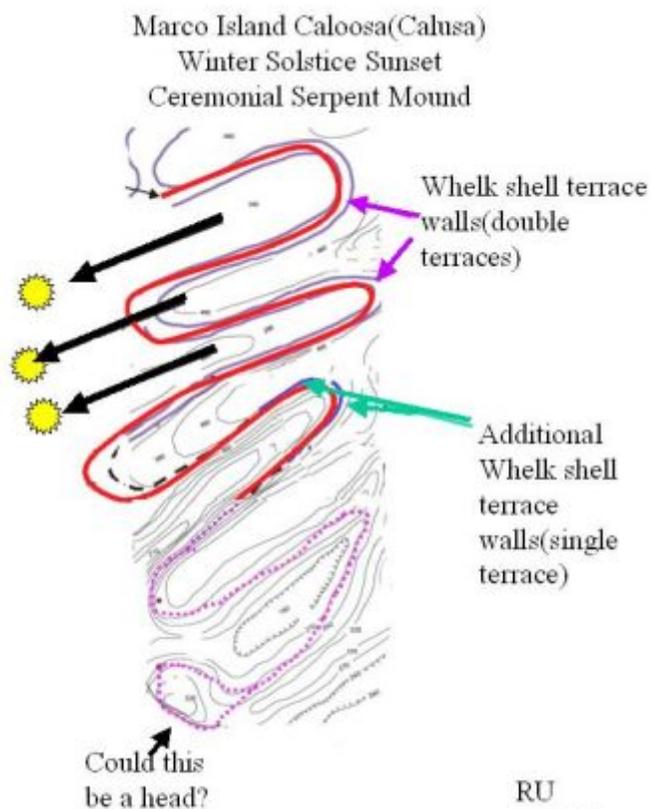
After I finished the above article, I sent a draft to a friend, Tom Rachunas, who did some research and discovered that the famous Serpent Mound in Ohio is also a seasonal marker. This is something I was unaware of.



Tom apparently found this at <http://jordynsummers.blogspot.com/2011/02/rr6.html>

I had suspected that the Marco Island Serpent could have a head, so after Tom sent me this I looked for a larger scale topographical view of the shell midden and found a view that went farther south.

I outlined the serpent including what most likely is, or was at one time, the head of the serpent.



This connection to the Ohio Serpent Mound is very possible since there was definitely trade to the Gulf of Mexico area as proven by Lightning Whelk shells found in the Hopewell Mounds in Ohio (Lightning Whelk shells are the same shells used in the terraces).

<http://museum.nps.gov/ParkObjdet.aspx?rID=HOCU%20%20%20%204209%26db%3Dobjects%26dir%3DCR%20HOCU%26page%3D2>

Areas of trade for Hopewell people http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hopewell_culture