

# DESIGNATION REPORT

## OLETA RIVER MOUND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ZONE



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Office of Historic Preservation  
Regulatory and Economic Resources  
Miami-Dade County

April 2018



## CONTENTS

I.	General Information	Page 2
II.	Physical Description/Setting	Page 3
III.	Archaeological Significance	Page 4
IV.	Current Condition and Preservation Quality	Page 7
V.	Criteria for Designation	Page 8
VI.	Proposed Improvements/Development	Page 9
VII.	Standards for Certificate to Dig	Page 9
VIII.	Staff Evaluation	Page 10
IX.	References Cited	Page 10

## I. GENERAL INFORMATION

**NAME:** Oleta River Mound (8DA24) Archaeological Zone

**LOCATION:** North Miami, Florida  
Township: 52 South  
Range: 42 East  
Section: 16

**PROPERTY OWNER:** Miami-Dade County Water and Sewer Department

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** A parcel of land lying in the SE ¼ of the of Section 16, Township 52 South, Range 42 East in Miami-Dade County, Florida being more precisely described as follows: Commence at the SE corner of Section 16-52-42; thence run North, as a basis for bearings, on the East line of Section 16 for a distance of 1920.00 feet; thence West, 20. feet to the Point of Beginning; thence west, 200. feet; thence North, 200. feet; thence East, 200. feet; thence South, 200. feet to the Point of Beginning, containing .92 Acres, more or less.

**TAX FOLIO NUMBER:** 06-2216-000-0040

**SIGNIFICANCE:** The Oleta River Mound (DA 24) is associated with the Tequesta Tribe and the Glades Culture. It is significant since the appearance of constructed mounds may be associated with an important shift in sociopolitical organization during the Glades II (A.D.750-A.D.1200). The Oleta River mound is one of the few remaining coastal mounds in Miami-Dade County and South Florida, and is likely to provide information on burial practices, the health and mortality of prehistoric populations, as well as social rank and status.

The Oleta River Mound fulfills Criterion Sec. 16A-10(1)(a)(d),

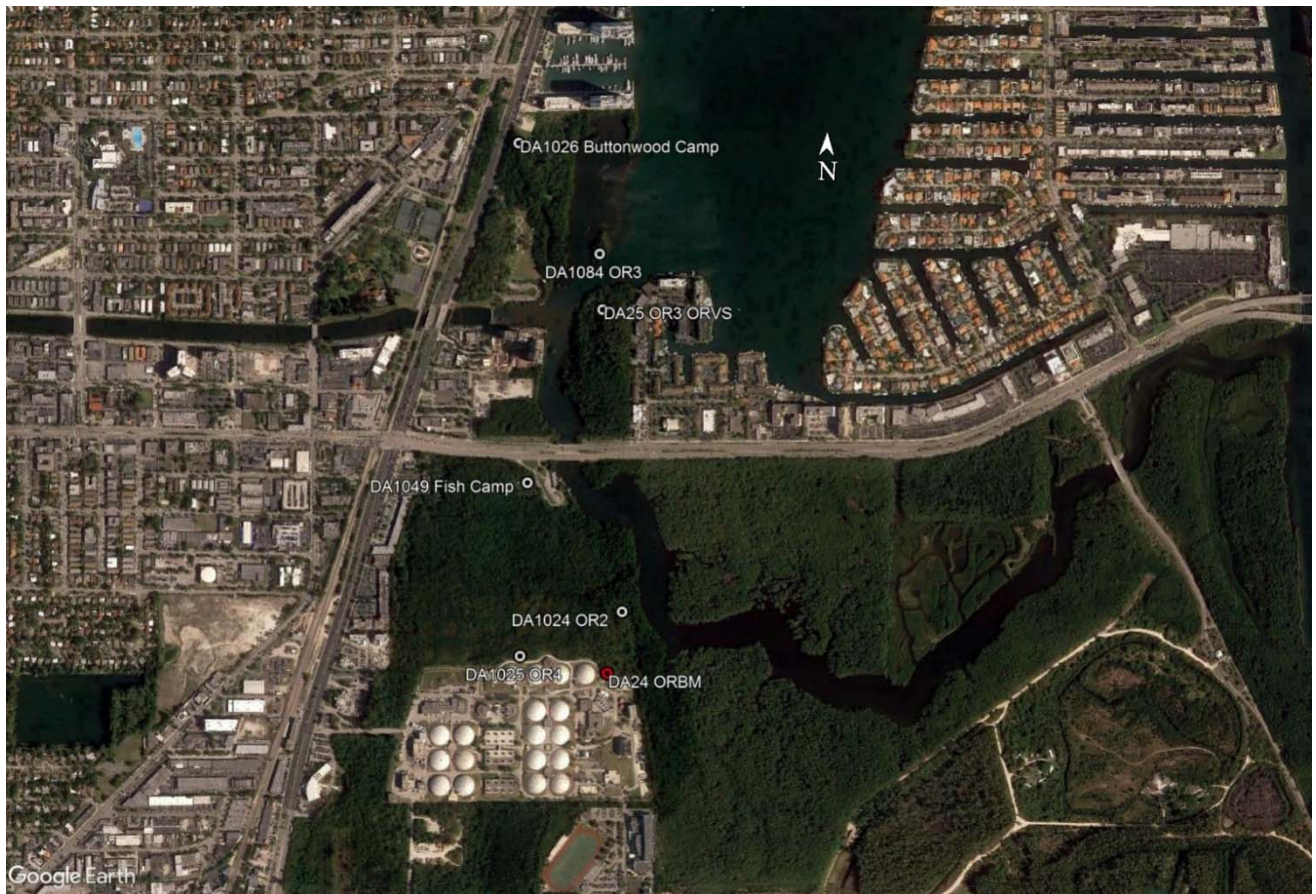
(a) *Associated with distinctive elements of the cultural, social, political, economic, scientific, religious, prehistoric, paleontological and architectural history that have contributed to the pattern of history in the community, Miami-Dade County, south Florida, the State or the nation.*

(d) *Have yielded, or are likely to yield information in history or prehistory*

**IMPACTS:** Any ground disturbing activities within the designated 200 square foot fenced area require approval by the Miami-Dade County Office of Historic Preservation. Most approvals are handled in-house directly by the staff of the Office of Historic Preservation. Major construction/improvements require approval by the County Historic Preservation Board. These would be concurrent with, or in addition to, cultural resource protection requirements currently imposed by the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, Bureau of Archaeological Research.

## II. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION / SETTING

The Oleta River Mound is located approximately 150 feet west of the Oleta River State Park and 200 feet west of the Oleta River directly north and adjoining the North District Wastewater Plant. The site is characterized as an oval white sand mound covered with a heavy canopy of oak (*Quercus virginiana*), saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), and Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthefolius*). The mound measures approximately 75 feet (N-S) by 78 feet (E-W) with a maximum height of 8 feet. Since 1976 the mound has been enclosed within a 200-foot square chain link perimeter fence for protection. Generally speaking, the site is located within a hardwood hammock surrounded to the east by mangrove swamp and brackish tidal waters of the Oleta River. The area retains much of the original natural character that attracted prehistoric populations.



Contemporary aerial showing location of Oleta River Mound (red) and nearby archaeological sites (white).

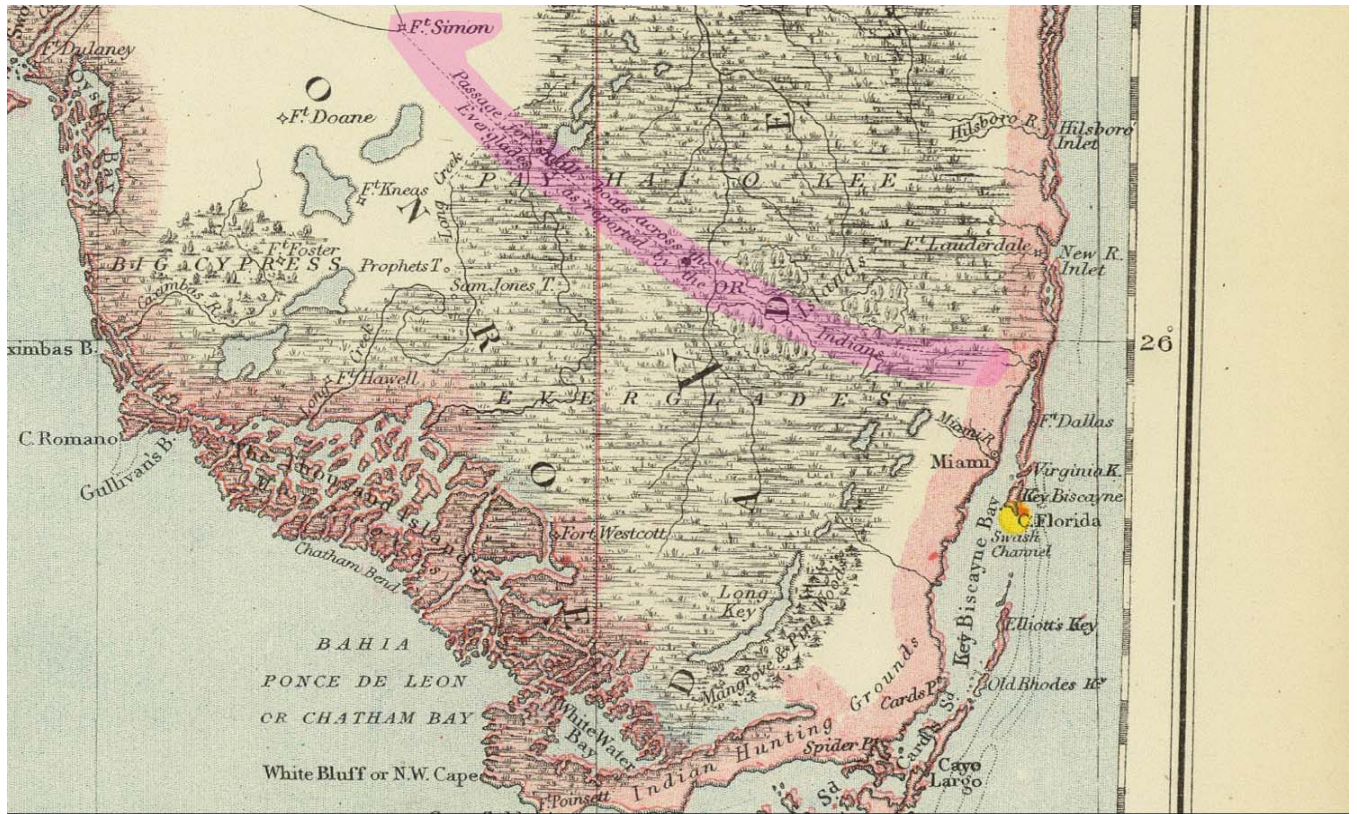
### III. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Surveyor Karl Squires gave the earliest reports of the mound in 1946, notifying University of Florida Archaeologist, John Goggin, of the find. Goggin assessed the site in 1955, providing the first scientific description of the mound. In 1974, the site was visited by Thomas Hemmings of the Florida State Museum in Gainesville and in 1979 by former Miami-Dade County Archaeologist, Robert Carr. There are no field notes or records from these early assessments beyond the Florida Master Site File forms and to this author's knowledge, the site has never been subjected to a comprehensive archaeological investigation.

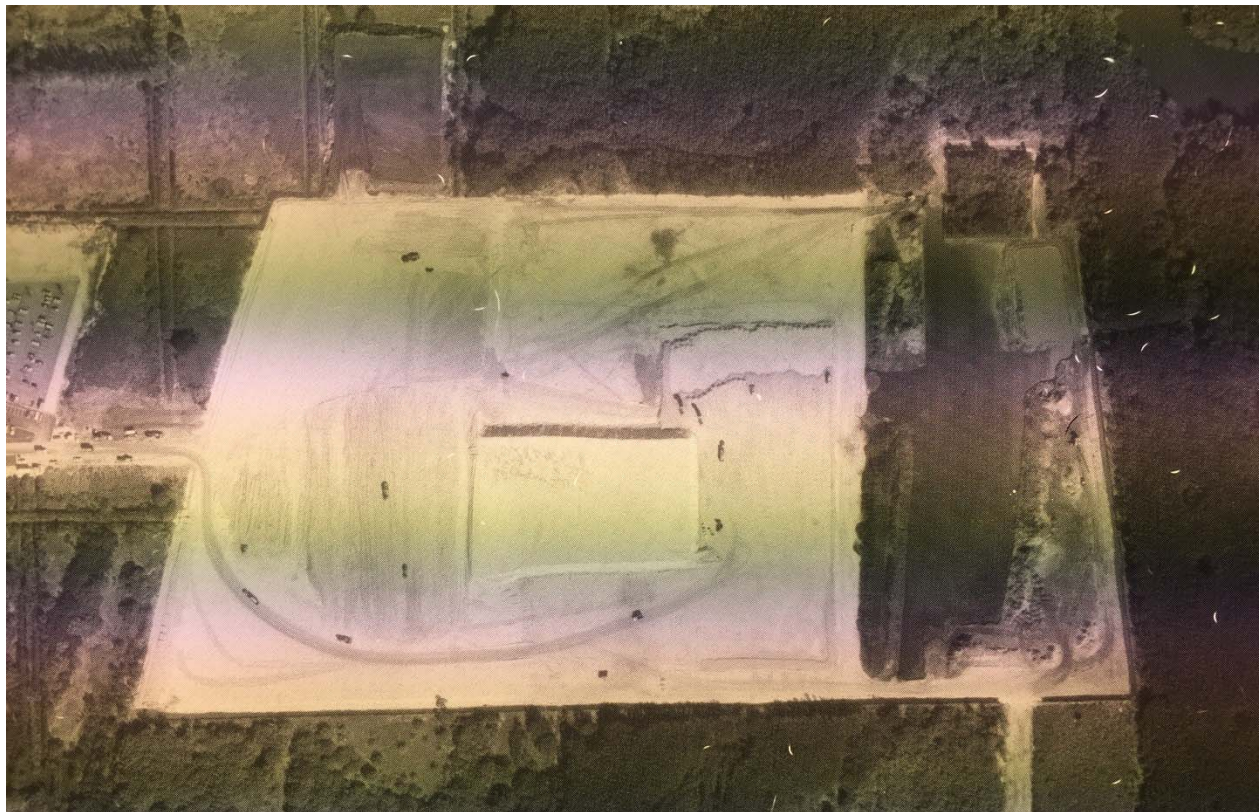
The Oleta River Mound (DA 24) is associated with the Tequesta Tribe and the Glades Culture. It is significant since the appearance of constructed mounds may be associated with an important shift in sociopolitical organization during the Glades II (A.D.750-A.D.1200). The Oleta River mound is one of the few remaining coastal mounds in Miami-Dade County and South Florida, and is likely to provide information on burial practices, the health and mortality of prehistoric populations, as well as social rank and status. Burial mound sites are also significant since they appear to be rare in South Florida and may be related to broader patterns of earthwork building in the Southeast and Midwest (Wheeler 2004). In Miami-Dade County, only three mounds remain, Oleta River Mound, Cutler Mound, and El Portal Mound.

The Oleta River represented one of the principal waterways in southeast Florida during pre-drainage times, even more significant than the Miami River. It provided year round entry into the Everglades for Native Americans. During most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the river was known as the Snake Creek, presumably because of the Snake Warrior, Chitto Tustenuggee. The Seminole Indian War Chief had his village at the headwaters of the Snake Creek in the Everglades. Early surveys and records make clear that Snake Creek was the "Principal Passage to the Everglades."

Most of the archaeological sites along the Oleta River are the remnants of camp and village areas of the ancient Tequesta, who used the creek as a principal route to traverse between the everglades and Biscayne Bay . Tequesta activity along the creek has been dated to as early as 500 B.C. More recent sites include those of the Seminoles, who arrived on the Oleta River in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Snake Creek towns were the largest Seminole settlements in present day Dade County after the Civil War. Villages under Chief Tigertail and Alex were prominent on area maps. With the arrival of white settlers in the 1890s, the Snake Creek settlements were abandoned and the Seminole were forced deeper into the everglades.



Historic Letts, Son & Co. Map of Florida in 1883. Note highlighted "Passage for small boats across the Everglades as reported by the Indians."



Circa 1976 aerial view of the Wastewater Treatment Plant during construction. Note square preservation area in northeast corner (top right) of the plant.



Close-up circa 1976 aerial view of the Wastewater Treatment Plant square preservation area.

#### **IV. CURRENT CONDITION AND PRESERVATION QUALITY**

The Oleta River Mound is (DA24) is currently in a good state of preservation.

In 1979 Robert Carr best described the site as “one of the few sand burial mounds that still are preserved within Dade County. Every effort should be made to protect and preserve this significant resource from vandalism and development.”

The preservation quality and significance of the site make it eligible for local designation and nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

#### **V. CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION**

The Oleta River Mound is significant under the following criteria, as set forth in Section 16A-10 of the Miami-Dade Historic Preservation Ordinance:

- (a) **Criteria Sec. 16A-10(1)(c)**, Is associated with distinctive elements of the cultural, social, political, economic, scientific, religious, prehistoric, paleontological and architectural history that have contributed to the pattern of history in the community, Miami-Dade County, south Florida, the State or the nation.

**(d) Criteria Sec. 16A-10(1)(d)**, Have yielded, or are likely to yield information in history or prehistory.

The Oleta River Mound meets the requirements of criteria “a” and “d” of Section 16A-10 of the Miami-Dade County Historic Preservation Code and is also eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

## **VI. PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS/DEVELOPMENT**

As required Section 16A-10(4) designations shall address proposed development plans. There are no projected, proposed, or existing public improvements and developmental or renewal plans; any private plans for development or redevelopment of the property or area under consideration, including any new architecture or features proposed for the same location; any applicable neighborhood or community revitalization goals, plans, or objectives, including any existing policies in the local government's comprehensive plan or other planning initiatives pertaining to, among other things, economic development, transportation, and housing; any impacts on the availability of affordable or workforce housing in the community due to historic designation or proposed redevelopment of the property or area under consideration; and the possible adaptive use of the property after designation, based on applicable local government zoning regulations and other building code requirements.

## **VII. STANDARDS FOR CERTIFICATE TO DIG**

The Oleta River Mound Archaeological Zone would be subject to preservation requirements as determined by the Miami-Dade County Office of Historic Preservation, if the zone is ever subjected to any ground disturbing activities. These would be concurrent with, or in addition to, cultural resource protection requirements currently imposed by the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources. Archaeological monitoring by an approved professional archaeologist will be required during all ground-disturbing activities.

Due to the high probability for locating unmarked prehistoric human burials in the zone, *Florida Statute Section 872.05* (Florida’s Unmarked Human Burial Act) and *Florida Administrative Code Chapter 1A-44* (Procedures for Reporting and Determining Jurisdiction over Unmarked Human Burials) shall apply.

## **VIII. STAFF EVALUATION**

Staff has performed several site visits to document the Oleta River Mound and assessed the archaeological significance of the site. Staff has determined that the Oleta River Mound Archaeological Zone meets the objective criteria for designation.

## **IX. REFERENCES CITED**

Carr, Robert

1974 Site No. DA24, Oleta River Mound. Site form prepared September 1974. On file at the Florida Master Site File, Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources.

Goggin, John

1955 Oleta River Mound (DA24). Site form prepared September 3, 1955. On file at the Florida Master Site File, Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources.

Wheeler, Ryan

2004 *South Florida Sites Associated with the Tequesta and Their Ancestors*. National Historic Landmark/National Register of Historic Places Theme Study.