Juan Ponce de León first made landfall on the east coast of Florida in 1513, though the exact location remains a debated topic. No firsthand narrative of the expedition exists and the latitude and other information regarding the location of that first landfall—derived from a second-hand account of Ponce’s voyage published nearly a century later—have been differently interpreted by researchers spanning several generations. Almost everyone who has delved into the controversy, including myself, agrees that the recorded latitudes for both the Bahamas, through which Ponce sailed on the way to Florida from Puerto Rico, and those of his Florida exploration are erroneous and have to be “corrected” to interpret the voyage and landfall.

Comparing the latitudes for specific islands in the Bahamas and the Florida Keys with those recorded in the account of Ponce’s voyage indicates that the correction factor is about one and a half degree of latitude south. For instance, the latitude given for La Yaguna Island in the Bahamas (modern Mariguana Island) is 24° N latitude, while the true latitude is 22° 24´ N latitude; the latitude given for Guanahani Island (modern Watling Island, later called San Salvador) is 25° 40´ N latitude, while the true latitude is 24° N latitude. In other words, the latitudes we have for the voyage are all about one and a half degrees too far north, a distance of about 90 miles.

---

1 A longer version of this paper will appear in a collection of essays tentatively entitled “500 Years of Florida at the Edge: 1513-2013,” edited by Viviana Díaz-Balsera, Gary Mormino, and Rachel Ray. I am grateful to those forthcoming volume’s editors for allowing me to post this paper.

2 Milanich is Curator Emeritus in Archaeology, Florida Museum of Natural History. He can be reached at: jtm@flmnh.ufl.edu.


4 As noted below, the latitudes from Ponce’s 1513 voyage are recorded in Antonio de Herrera’s narrative. The identification and correlation of the Ponce era islands with modern islands can be found in Scisco, "The Track of Ponce de León in 1513," 723-725. Scisco was among the first researchers, if not the first, to document the erroneous latitudes.
Most researchers concur that after landfall and spending about six days at anchor on the Florida Atlantic coast, Ponce’s small fleet sailed northward for a day, then reversed course. Over several weeks Ponce’s ships slowly made their way southward down the Florida coast encountering contrary currents along the way. After rounding southeastern-most Florida, Ponce’s expedition took a southwesterly heading along the Florida Keys. Probably just west of modern Key West, Ponce’s ships turned north into the Gulf of Mexico. Presumably the intent was to continue to explore what was thought to be a large island, one that Ponce had christened *La Florida*. 5

Their northerly route brought the Spaniards to the southwest coast of Florida. There they would encounter the Calusa Indians, native Americans whose ancestors had inhabited that coastal region for at least several thousand years and who would continue to live in their traditional lands into the early eighteenth century.

The Calusa Indians are the only identifiable American Indians who played a documented role in Ponce’s 1513 reconnaissance of what is now the mainland of the United States. Information from the secondhand account of that voyage and archival materials from the sixteenth century allow us to pinpoint the location of the Calusa Indian town near where Ponce’s ships anchored. Further, that location can be correlated with an archaeological site, an actual place.

Ponce and Early Sixteenth-Century Florida in Documents

The standard source of information regarding Juan Ponce’s 1513 voyage to La Florida is the account assembled by Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas and contained in his multi-volume opus: *Historia general de los hechos de los Castillanos en las islas y tierra firme del Mar Oceano* (General History of the Deeds of the Castilians in the Islands and Mainland of the Ocean Sea), first published in 1601-1615 in Madrid. 6 Herrera, appointed by Philip II of Spain to write a history of the Spanish conquest of the Indies, presumably had access to original materials pertinent to Ponce’s Florida voyage. The present-day whereabouts of those documents is unknown, and historians and popular writers are forced to rely heavily on the sometimes vague Herrera account to try and map Ponce’s route along the coasts of peninsular Florida. It is, of course, the latitudes in the Herrera account that are off by a degree and a half.

---

5 Florida, as opposed to *La Florida*, refers to the modern state. *La Florida*, the name Ponce gave to what he thought was an island, eventually was used by the Spaniards to refer to all the lands north and east of New Spain, a huge area that encompassed modern Florida. Within only a handful of years following Ponce 1513 voyage other Spaniards sailing the Gulf and Atlantic coasts of Florida and adjacent regions had determined that Florida was not an island, but a part of a larger land mass.

6 Herrera’s book is often referred to as *Las Décadas*, the Decades, because of the chronological way it is organized. The account of Ponce’s 1513 voyage is contained in the first volume, Decade I, Book IX, Chapters X and XI, with some information on *La Florida* in the beginning of XII; those portions of the three chapters dealing with *La Florida* begin on page 311 and run to page 316 (but pages 312-319 are mis-numbered as 302-309; the correct pagination resumes on page 320).
Another primary document important to charting Juan Ponce’s *La Florida* voyage is a world map drawn by the Italian cartographer Count Ottomanno Freducci, who was active from 1497 to 1539. The map seems to have been made shortly after Ponce’s voyage, perhaps even the following year. Often referred to as the Freducci map, the chart portrays a portion of peninsula Florida as well as the adjacent Florida Keys, both in their correct geographical location north of Cuba and westerly of the Bahamas. On the map the Florida peninsula is labeled an island; some of the Florida place names are the same or very similar to ones in Hererra’s Ponce narrative.

The assumption is that in drawing the map Freducci had access to navigation information recorded by Ponce’s expedition, though that information seems to have been somewhat different from that used by Herrera. Unfortunately, the latitudes derived from the map as interpolated for Florida are erroneous and do nothing to solve the problem of the latitudes in Hererra.

In addition to Hererra and the Freducci map there are other sources of information that are pertinent to interpreting the route of Ponce’s ships around Florida, especially the encounter between the Calusa Indians and the Spaniards. Below in this chapter I will mention a few.

My goal in this paper is to draw a new generation of scholars to Ponce’s voyage, especially to stimulate more archival research to find new sources of information. Questions yet to be answered are: (1) where did Ponce land on the east coast of Florida; and, (2) did Ponce’s 1513 encounter with the Florida Indians have an impact on them, or, was the voyage simply the key that opened the Pandora’s box of future colonization that so devastated the Florida Indians? In the case of the Calusa, it appears at first glance that Ponce’s 1513 voyage had little or no lasting impact.

**Interpreting Herrera and Freducci: Landfall, the Atlantic Coast, and the Straits of Florida**

Ponce, the former governor of the Spanish colony of San Juan (modern Puerto Rico) received a royal contract in 1512. That contract, awarded by Ferdinand II, gave Ponce three years

---

7 The Freducci map has not escaped the notice of historians and geographers. An early study of the map, apparently authored only several years after the map came to light in a Florence, Italy archive, is Eugenio Casanova, *La carta nautica di Conte di Ottomanno Freducci d’Ancona conservata nel R. Archivio di stato Firenze illustrata da Eugenio Sasanova* (Firenze: Tip. Di G. Carnesecchi e figli, 1894). The map also was used in Scisco, “The Track of Ponce de León in 1513.” More than a half century ago the Florida significance of the map was further noted in two articles by David O. True: “The Freducci Map of 1514-1515, What it Discloses of Early Florida History,” *Tequesta* 4 (November 1944), 50-55; and, "Some Early Maps Relating to Florida," *Imago Mundi* XI (1955), 79-80. In the *Tequesta* article (p. 50) True notes that the map was reproduced in Italian, German, and French sources as early as 1892. A more recent study of the Florida portion of the map as it pertains to Juan Ponce’s 1413 voyage is Jerald T. Milanich and Nara B. Milanich, "Revisiting the Freducci Map: A Depiction of Juan Ponce de Leon's 1513 Florida Voyage?" *Florida Historical Quarterly* 74 (1996), 319-328. In conjunction with the Columbian Quincentenary an image of the Freducci map was published in the elephant-size volume by Osvaldo Baldacci, *Atlante Colombiano della Grande Scoperta* (Rome, 1992), 123-126.

8 A translation of the royal contract awarded Ponce, the original of which is in the Archivo de Indias, is contained in Davis, “History of Juan Ponce de Leon’s Voyages to Florida,” 9-14.
Figure 1. A portion of the Freducci world map showing Florida (at top left), the Florida Keys, the Bahamas, Cuba, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and a portion of the Caribbean coasts of Central and South America.
to explore in search of Bimini, a land or island that was thought to lie somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean, north of the Bahamas. At the time of Ponce's voyage the Bahamas were known to Spanish interests and it is possible that one or more unsanctioned (meaning without a contract from the Spanish crown) Spanish voyagers might have reached the coast of what is now the southeastern United States before 1513. By that date knowledge of eastern Canada, and, perhaps, the Atlantic coast farther south, had been recorded by John Cabot, who had captained voyages to North America in 1497 and 1498-1500. Cabot's voyages and rumors from Spanish sources about lands northwest and west of the Bahamas may have been provided impetus for Ponce's voyage.

After leaving the harbor of San Germán on the southwest coast of Puerto Rico the first week of March 1513 Juan Ponce's three ships sailed first to the town of Aguada on the northwest Puerto Rican coast. From there they took a northwest heading along the eastern side of the islands of the Bahamas. They sailed past by the Caicos Islands, then La Yaguna (modern Mayaguana Island?), Amaguayo (Plana Cays?), Manegua (Samana?), and then Guanahani, where Christopher Columbus made landfall in 1492 and which he named San Salvador. In his article “The Track of Ponce de Leon,” Louis D. Cisco uses early sixteenth-century cartographic sources to equate the various islands of the Lucayos recorded in Herrera with modern place-names.

At the north end of those islands Ponce’s ships sailed past Great Abaco Island and that portion of the Little Bahama Bank to the north and west. If the ships continued on their same northwest heading they would have soon sighted the Atlantic coast of Florida well north of Cape Canaveral. But the expedition is said instead to have taken a west-northwest track, which would have led to a landfall on the central Florida coast. But where? It is this initial landing that remains a bone of contention among researchers, and, again, and a large part of the dispute revolves around interpreting the latitude of Ponce’s landfall recorded in Herrera’s account as 30° 8´ N.

If one subtracts a degree and a half from that 30° 8´ N datum, we arrive at a latitude of 28° 38´ N, very close to the latitude of the large Indian shell mound known as Turtle Mound, which is in Canaveral National Seashore just north of Cape Canaveral. In 1513 the imposing shell mound would have been the tallest feature on the Atlantic coast of Florida. During the colonial period and later it was a landmark for sailors, one visible from ships at sea. Did Ponce make landfall near Turtle Mound? Maybe, or maybe not.

Wherever landfall was made, Ponce’s first sighting of the Florida coastline on April 2nd, was,
of course, at the time of Easter Holy Week, the Feast of Flowers (Pascua Florida). According to Herrera, the religious holiday and the natural beauty of the land led Juan Ponce to name the land he saw La Florida.

Herrera’s account is not totally clear, but it appears that about April 8th, Ponce’s ships continued north along the coast for a day before reversing course and sailing just east of south down the coastline. They continued on that same course until April 20th (nearly two weeks). There is no information on what may have transpired between April 2 and April 8 while they were anchored; perhaps they explored the land and took their horse ashore to relieve them from the sea journey. Likewise, Herrera’s account provides no information about what transpired from April 9th to April 20th while they were sailing south.

On the 20th, however, the Spaniards saw Indian houses and anchored, though there was a strong current. Ponce and some of his men went ashore. A skirmish took place between the Spaniards and Indians, with people wounded on both sides. The next day the Spaniards went back ashore to collect firewood and water and again a minor skirmish occurred and an Indian was taken to serve as a guide. Ponce left a stone cross at the place and named the stream La Cruz. It is likely the Indian village where Ponce’s men went ashore and the place where they sought firewood and water were at a coastal inlet, rather than on the beach itself.

According to Herrera, Ponce’s fleet then continued farther down the coast. The expedition continued to sail at a slow pace, still battling the current. On May 8th, a Sunday, more than a month after landfall, the ships finally passed what Herrera calls the cabo de la Florida. Herrera records that the Spaniards also named the location the Cabo de Corriente (“Cape of Currents”), because the northward-flowing currents were very strong at that point. Possibly the cape was about at Rivera Beach. Herrera notes that from the Punta de Arracifes (“Point of Reefs”), which was to the north but south of the landfall, to the Cape of Currents the coast ran south-southeast. Presumably, the shoreline changed direction south of the Cape of Currents. Herrera also records that the Cape of Currents was at 28° 15´ N (Riviera Beach is at 26° 46´ N, almost exactly 1 ½° degrees south of Herrera’s latitude). Because of the strong currents Ponce anchored his ships behind or south of the cape near an Indian village called Abacoa. Presumably the currents Herrera describes are those of the Florida Current, a part of the Gulf Stream system.10

The Freducci map shows both a p. de arçifes and a place named abacoa. On the map the ponta de arçifes is next to a point on the peninsula coast off of which are markings that may indicate reefs or shoals. Abacoa is well to the south (but north of the place on the map labeled chequiche, certainly the Indian town of Tequesta known to be located at the mouth of the Miami River).

I believe that Herrera’s Punta de Arracifes, located south of Ponce’s landfall, is Cape Canaveral. Later mariners were well aware of shoals off Cape Canaveral. The 1913 edition of the United States Coast Pilot for the Atlantic Coast, describes those shoals as dangerous and extending off the coast for 13 miles to the north and northeast with depths of as little as 11 feet on the outer

---

10 See http://oceancurrents.rsmas.miami.edu/atlantic/florida.html.
From the Cabo de Corrientes (Riviera Beach?) the expedition sailed farther south, finding two islands, one of which was christened Santa Maria and where they found water (Herrera says they were at 27° N latitude; Sand Key at the northern end of the Florida Keys is at 25° 30´ N). After several days (on Friday May 13th) they again set sail, running along sandbars and low islands. Across the shallows and islands there was open water and then the mainland. Certainly they were sailing off the Upper Florida Keys with either Biscayne Bay and/or Florida Bay in the distance. They named one of the keys Pola. For the next two days they sailed along the Keys, which they named Los Martires (“The Martyrs”) because from a distance the islands looked like suffering men (men waking hunched over?). Herrera says the Keys were at 26° 15´ (Marathon, in the central Keys, is at 24° 42´ N; the degree and one half error seems pretty consistent). Reaching the west end of the keys (Key West) Ponce then sailed north and northeast, reaching the Florida Gulf coast on May 23rd. Most likely the expedition was off coastal Lee County near Sanibel Island. They had entered the domain of the Calusa Indians.

The journey from the Cabo de Corrientes down the coast to the Upper Keys, along the Lower Keys to Key West, and north to southwest Florida took only about two weeks, from May 8 to May 23. Unhindered by the Florida Current, the ships apparently were able to sail much faster than they had down the Atlantic coast, a journey that had taken about four weeks (from April 9 to May 8).

Before we focus on Ponce and the Calusa Indians let’s take another look at the voyage down the Atlantic coast, trying to correlate the Herrera account and the Freducci map with coastal

---

In the U.S. Coast Pilot pamphlet Section D, Cape Henry to Key West (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), issued by the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, the Canaveral shoals are the only ones on Florida’s Atlantic Coast (my clarifications are in brackets):

Between Winyah Bay [South Carolina] and St. Johns River the shore is very broken, the harbors, inlets, and sounds being in many cases but little over 10 miles apart. This part of the coast has shoals which extend off from 3 to 8 miles. Cape Hatteras, Cape Lookout, Cape Fear, Cape Romain, and Cape Canaveral are distinguished for the distance to which dangerous shoals extend seaward from them. These shoals are generally sand, shifting to some extent with every heavy gale; with the strong currents which are found at times, they form the greatest danger for the navigator while passing along this coast. (p. 19)

And,

Broken ground and shoals extend 13 miles northward and northeastward from Cape Canaveral, terminating in Hetzel and Ohio Shoals, which have depths of 11 and 19 feet, respectively.... The least depths found on the inner shoals range from 9 to 16 feet, the shoals are subject to some change in position and depth, and only small, light-draft craft can easily pass inside the outer shoals. In a heavy sea the shoals are marked by breakers, but with a smooth sea there is nothing to indicate them except the buoys marking Hetzel and Ohio Shoals and Cape Canaveral lighthouse. (p. 114)
Figure 2. Florida as depicted on the Freducci map. From north to south on the Atlantic coast the place names are: i. florda, Río de canoa, chantio, ponta de arçifes, c. de setos, abacoa, Río salada, and chequiche. On the Gulf coast are stababa and guchí. At the eastern end of the Keys, which are labeled los matires, are canbeia and el nirda; off the western end of the Keys (partially cut-off) is Iglías de tortugas, while north of the Keys is yglías de marança. Four places in the Bahamas are depicted just east and south of Florida: east are y. de la vieja and c. lucbaita; south are abacoa and beimini.
geography. The northernmost place name on the Freducci map is *insula* florida, or "Island of Florida." Moving down (south) the Atlantic coast the next place name is *Rio de canoa* ("River of Canoes"), which is not mentioned in Herrera. Farther south is *chantio*, probably the same name as Cautio, contained in the Herrera account. Just south of *chantio* is the *ponta de arçifes*, the same Ponta de Arraefjs noted in Herrera, which I have suggested could be Cape Canaveral. If that is correct, we might believe that the River of Canoes is Mosquito Lagoon, an inland waterway easily accessible to Indians in dugout canoes who lived along the lagoon. Today the Mosquito Lagoon is within the Canaveral National Seashore. Could *chantio* be the imposing Turtle Mound archaeological site or an Indian name for that locality?

On the Freducci map well south of the *ponta de arçifes* there is a large inlet emptying into the Atlantic with three entering rivers. It may be St. Lucie Inlet, where the Indian River and the North and South Forks of the St. Lucie River intersect and flow into the Indian River. That location may be where Ponce erected the cross.

South of the inlet on the Freducci map is the *cabo de setos*. In medieval Spanish *setos* meant "poles, fence, or enclosure," suggesting "Cabo de Setos" may be "Cape of Fish Weirs." South of that cape is the place named *abacoa*, the native village Herrera calls *Abaioa*, near where the expedition anchored in the lee of the cape, perhaps near Riviera Beach as suggested above. Is there a place on the coast north of Riviera Beach where the Indians may have build fish weirs? One candidate is at Jupiter Inlet; another is the north end of the Lake Worth lagoon which is just north of Riviera Beach. That 21-mile long lagoon would have been a good place for weirs intended to trap fish when the tide went out.

Southward from the Cabo de Setos the Freducci map shows two places on the southeast Florida coast. The first is *Rio salado*, literally “Salt River.” That place may be the North Bay portion of Biscayne Bay, the inland waterway north of the mouth of the Miami River. The second place is *Chequiche* (Tequesta), known from other accounts to be a native village at the mouth of the Miami River. Calling the same place *Chequescha*, Herrera intimates that Juan Ponce’s expedition reached that town on its return voyage (to Puerto Rico) after leaving southwest Florida and the Calusa Indians. The dates in the Herrera account suggest Ponce’s small fleet spent two weeks traveling between the Upper Keys and the Bahamas on the return voyage. Some of that time could have been at Tequesta.

The mouth of the Miami River once was marked by extensive shell middens, ample evidence of centuries of Indian towns and it was a place well-known to other Spaniards in the sixteenth century (and later). The geographer Juan López de Velasco described that setting in his 1575 *Geographía y Descripción Universal de las Indias*:

> At the very point of Tequesta there enters into the sea a freshwater river, which comes from the interior, and to all appearances runs from west to east. There are many fish and eels in it. Alongside it on the north side is the Indian settlement that is called Tequesta, from which the point takes its name.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^\text{12}\) In John H. Hann, *Missions to the Calusa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1991), 314. This quote is from a much longer, informative description of the coasts of Florida and other information written by López
de Velasco, a translation of which can be found in Missions to the Calusa, 308-315.
Figure 3. Modern locations mentioned in the text.
Tequesta is the only place on the Atlantic coast of Florida that was visited by Ponce in 1513 that can be definitely correlated with a specific location.

The Freducci map, like the Herrera account, also depicts the Florida Keys—*los martires*—and provides the names of two of the islands: *canbeia* (the southernmost) and *el nirda*. *Canbeia* is certainly the *Achecambei* of Herrera’s account, an island in the Florida Keys where he says Ponce’s fleet stopped on the expedition’s return to Puerto Rico and which was west of the islands of *Pola* (called *Santa Pola* by Herrera in one place) and *Santa Maria*.

**Among the Calusa Indians**

According to Herrera’s account, Ponce’s ships arrived on the coast of Southwest Florida on May 23rd. Though not altogether clear, it may be that Ponce’s ships were near Sanibel Island. Needing firewood and water and also to carry out repairs on one ship the Spaniards sailed southward and then closer to shore to islands they could see. It is doubtful that they would have sailed into San Carlos Bay which was too shallow for the ships. Perhaps at that point they were off Fort Myers Beach.

The Spaniards spent more than three weeks in the area. During that time minor skirmishes with the Indians took place; at one point the Calusa attacked with bows and arrows from canoes, some tied together as catamarans. The Spaniards retaliated, taking women and men as prisoners and damaging canoes on shore. Fatalities were suffered on both sides.

Despite the fighting, both the Spaniards and Calusa seem to have been interested in trading and learning more about one another. One native man understood some Spanish words, and it was believed that he had come from Hispaniola or another island colonized by Spaniards. The Calusa told the Spaniards their chief had gold and that he was coming to trade, but this was apparently a ruse. Herrera says the chief’s name was Carlos, a name also used by later Spaniards.

During the three weeks Ponce was within Calusa Indian territory there was sufficient time for one or more of his ships to explore the Gulf coast north of the present-day Lee County area. That such a voyage took place is suggested by a notation on the 1519 map of the Gulf of Mexico coast (from Florida around to Yucatan) drawn as a result of the Alvarez de Pineda-led expedition. Written on the map at about modern Apalachee Bay is, "Juan Ponce discovered to this point."13

Deciding that it was time to return to San Juan, Ponce and his men set sail for the Caribbean. Apparently they were told by captive Indians about an island to the south and they stopped at that place for water. A fierce fight with the local Indians took place. Because many (?) Indians were killed, the Spaniards, according to Herrera, named the island *Matança*. That island

---

13 Robert S. Weddle, *Spanish Sea, the Gulf of Mexico in North American Discovery, 1500-1685* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985), 95-108. Also see, Paul E. Hoffman, *A New Andalucia and a Way to the Orient: The American Southeast during the Sixteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 88. But was Pineda using a faulty latitude taken from Ponce? The point might have been 90 miles south.
might have been Marco Island, where there was a freshwater source near the southern end that was known to later sailors. On the Freducci map the name of the island is recorded as *yglias de marança*.

Taking leave of the Florida coast, Ponce’s ships next sailed southwest and reached the Dry Tortugas, which they named *Las Tortugas* because of the large number of sea turtles they took for food; that place is also on the Freducci map (*Iglias de tortugas*). Next the fleet took a southern heading, which brought the Spaniards to a landfall on the north coast of western Cuba on June 29. Two days later, on July 1, the ships turned north, reaching the Florida Keys, a journey that took two days.

Moving east and then north, the expedition, according to Herrera, passed by Tequesta at the mouth of the Miami River, then sailed back to the Bahamas, reaching them on July 14. The Spaniards must have been exploring the Keys and southeast Florida coast along the way. Perhaps they spent time at Tequesta. They also explored the Bahamas on the voyage back to San Juan.

Let’s take a second look at Ponce and the Calusa Indians. The Freducci map has two place names recorded in southwest Florida north of the island of *Matança*. The northernmost is *guchi*; the other is *stahaba*. Both are Calusa names and both are known from other, post-Ponce Spanish sources, though neither is mentioned in Herrera.

*Guchi* (Also *Juchi*) was a Calusa town in the general San Carlos Bay/Pine Island Sound area. There is no shortage of possible archaeological sites on islands in that locality—some are quite large and all are characterized by extensive shell middens and mounds constructed of shell. We might guess that *guchi* was south of Charlotte Harbor and west of the mouth of the Caloosahatchee River, because neither the river nor the harbor are mentioned in Herrera or depicted on the Freducci map.

The name *Juchi* appears in the writings of Hernando d’Escalante Fontaneda, who was shipwrecked in south Florida about 1545 when he was ten years old and lived among the Calusa Indians for more than twenty years before being rescued by Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, the founder of St. Augustine. Fontaneda wrote a memoir and other notes about south Florida and the native residents. In his writings, Fontaneda listed *Juchi* as one of the many Calusa towns that was subject to Carlos, the Calusa chief.

---

14 Early maps show an *aguada* (watering place) on Marco Island in the Caxambas Ridge near the southern end of the island. Local people and archaeologists who have worked on Marco Island have told me there is still a perched, freshwater pond there. That may be the *aguada* listed in the Chaves *Espejo* at “25 2/3 grados” (Castañeda, Cuesta, and Hernández, “Espejo de Navegantes, 367). Roberts Bay on the south end of Marco Island west of a portion of the ridge is at 25° 55’ N. *Matança* can be translated as “carnage” or “slaughter.”

15 Hann, *Missions to the Calusa*, 301. The information is contained in a letter from Pedro Menéndez de Avilés to the King dated October 20, 1566. Also see, Eugene Lyon, *The Enterprise of Florida* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1976), 147-150.

16 Fontaneda’s account is found in David O. True, ed., *Memoir of D. d’Escalante Fontaneda respecting Florida, Written in Spain, about the Year 1575* (Coral Gables, Florida: Glade House, 1945), 30, 51; also see, John E. Worth, “Fontaneda Revisited: Five Descriptions of Sixteenth-Century Florida,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*
The second name on the Freducci map—*stababa*—was the Calusa name for the major Calusa town located on a small island in Estero Bay. That town is the same Calusa town sometimes called Calos by the Spaniards, that served as the capital of the Calusa Indians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (and, likely, earlier as well). Ponce’s ships must have anchored somewhere near *stababa*, probably off Fort Myers Beach. Mound Key, with its shell middens and mounds and other shell works (and canals) today is a marvelous archaeological site. The entire key is covered with remains left by the Calusa Indians. In 1513 Stababa must have been a town to behold.

In his writings Fontaneda refers to the town as *Estantapaca*.17 In 1575 López de Velasco described the place, calling it *Escampaba*.18

The Bay of Carlos, which is called Escampaba in the language of the Indians, for a cacique of that name, who later called himself Carlos out of a devotion for the Emperor, appears to be the same one that is named by Juan Ponce, because he landed in it during the year of [1513]..., and where he lost his people and where the Indians gave him wounds from which he died. It is at 26½ plus degrees (*esta en 26 grados y ½ largos*) [it actually is at 26° 24’ minutes N latitude; the Ponce-era errors in latitude had been corrected]. Its entrance [Big Carlos Pass] is very narrow and full of shoals as a consequence of which only boats (*barcos*) [small boats] are able to enter. Within it is spacious, about four or five leagues in circumference, although all subject to flooding. There is a little island [Mound Key] in the middle that has a circumference of about half league, with other islets around it. On this (island) Cacique Carlos had his headquarters and presently his successors have it there (as well).

Father Juan Rogel, a Jesuit missionary who lived among the Calusa, wrote a letter in 1568 in which he used the same name, *Escampaba*, to refer to the “kingdom of Carlos.” 19 There is no doubt that the *stababa* of the Freducci map refers to the Calusa Indian capital town near where Juan Ponce’s expedition anchored in 1513.

Mound Key, site of that town, is only one of a number of extraordinary Calusa Indian-related shell work archaeological sites along the coast of modern Lee County and extending northward into the Charlotte Harbor vicinity and southward into Collier County. The size, number, and nature of those archaeological sites, nearly all of which feature large shellworks, did not escape the

---

17 Worth, "Fontaneda Revisited,” 342, 348.

18 Hann, *Missions to the Calusa*, 311-312. In the translated quote Hann’s comments are in parentheses; mine are in brackets.

19 Father Juan Rogel in Hann, *Missions to the Calusa*, 237.
Spaniards who traveled to that coast in the early sixteenth century. In a navigation guide (Espéjo) compiled in the early sixteenth century by the Spanish cosmographer, Alonso de Chaves, the region is referred to as the Costa de Caracoles, literally "coast of shells." One wonders if that name, Costa de Caracoles, might not be the basis for the name of La Costa Island on which there are major shell mounds.

Aftermath

Following his 1513 voyage to Florida, Juan Ponce did not immediately follow up on his discovery, despite having been granted a second contract in September 1514 by Ferdinand II that gave him permission to colonize Florida and “Beniny.” But in February 1521, perhaps stimulated by the stories of wealth found by Hernán Cortés in New Spain (Mexico) and by the voyages of other Spaniards to the Gulf coast of Florida that threatened his rights to future colonization, Ponce decided to act. He penned a letter to Charles V, then his sovereign, informing him that he planned to return to Florida to explore further and to establish a colony.

20 A transcription of Chaves’ guide has been published in Castañeda, Paulino, Mariano Cuesta, and Pilar Hernández, Transcripción, Estudio y Notas del "Espéjo de Navegantes” de Alonso Chaves (Madrid: Instituto de Historia y Cultura Naval, 1983). Navigational information, including latitudes, for the coasts of Florida are in the Thirteenth Chapter (364-371). The Costa de Caracoles is on p. 366.


22 Cortés initially went to New Spain under the auspices of Diego Velásquez de Cuéllar, the governor of Cuba. In his letter to Charles V, Ponce wrote that he intended to explore the coast of Florida to see if it was an island or if it connected with the land where Diego Velásquez was, i.e., Mexico. By 1521 other Spaniards had established that Florida was a peninsula, not an island. Translations of the royal contract awarded to Ponce in 1514; Ponce’s letter to the crown; short accounts relative to the 1521 expedition taken from Herrera’s Historia general (Decade III, Book I, Chapter XIV, 30-31) and from Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y
Between 1513 and 1521 at least one other Spanish expedition voyaged to the Calusa coast. Francisco Hernández de Cordoba stopped off in Calusa territory to search for water when sailing to Cuba from Yucatan. Significantly, Hernández de Cordoba’s pilot was Anton de Alaminos, who had been Ponce’s chief pilot in 1513. It is possible that the pilot was searching for the *aguada* on or near the island of *Matança* (Marco Island?) where Ponce had been on his voyage in 1513 (mentioned above).23

Ponce’s 1521 voyage began on about February 20 when he departed Puerto Rico with two ships carrying 200 men, priests, 50 horses, and livestock, including cows, sheep, and goats, as well as seed for planting crops. His intent apparently was to return to the Calusa. But the expedition turned out to be a colossal failure. The meager accounts of the 1521 venture agree that a major land battle with native warriors was fought, resulting in large numbers of fatalities on both sides (one second hand account, quoted in Davis, says “not less than eighty” of Ponce’s men were killed; another account says the number of Indians slain was more than twice the number of Spaniards killed). Juan Ponce was himself wounded with an arrow in his thigh. The expedition retreated to Cuba, where Ponce died of his wound.

By the time of Ponce’s second Florida expedition the knowledge he had collected in 1513 had led to other Spanish voyages to the Gulf and Atlantic coasts of the southeastern United States. Spanish conquistadors and sailors also had reached Mexico. The conquest of the Americas had moved from the Greater Antilles to the North American mainland setting in motion profound social and biological changes. Ponce’s 1513 voyage to the Florida had changed the world forever.

---

Valdés, *Historia general y natural de las Indias, islas y tierra-firme del Mar Océano* (Vol. II, Part II, Book XXXVI, Chapter I, 622-623; published in Madrid in 1853); and several other pertinent sources are contained in Davis, “History of Juan Ponce de Leon’s Voyages to Florida,” 51-62.

23 Hann, *Indians of Central and South Florida*, 12.
Below are links to several of the documents and papers cited above.

Casanova’s *La carta nautica di Conte di Ottomanno Freducci*:
http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?view=image;size=100;id=uva.x00134794;page=root;seq=3

Davis’s *Florida Historical Quarterly* article on Ponce’s voyages (click on the July 1935 issue):
http://digitool.fcla.edu/R/IIUEVL9M4XSN79A3HDP7XK997K5TJNBV3QSK5STB516YK6MVN3-02917?func=results-jump-page&set_entry=000041&result_format=002

Herrera’s *Historia general* (the volume with the Ponce account):
http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009349049

Scisco’s “The Track of Ponce de León” http://www.jstor.org/stable/200163
The 1502 Cantino map. Note the eastern coast line of the landmass northwest of Cuba.