

# Artifact of the Month

Tribal Historic Preservation Office

June 2017

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Alligator Mandible



When showcasing the THPO's collections to visitors, we frequently highlight man-made objects that range in age from thousands of years old to just a few decades old. While these objects may be valuable and fascinating parts of our collection, by no means do they represent the majority of the objects that we hold. June's Artifact of the Month is an alligator mandible that is representative of the thousands of faunal bone fragments stored at the THPO. It is from the Hollywood Reservation and while it is difficult to determine its exact age, it is likely no more than a few hundred years old.

Alligators are an important fixture in Seminole history and tradition, as they historically provided both a food source and a hide that could be traded. In more recent history, Seminole techniques for hunting and capturing alligators—dubbed “alligator wrestling”—have captured the public's imagination and helped to attract visitors to tribal lands.

Was this alligator in particular a participant in Seminole hunting tradition? It is unclear, but possible! With few stone tools found in South Florida due to the lack of rock in the area, archaeologists instead search for indirect evidence of human presence in the form of animal bones. While scattered bone fragments may come from natural animal activity, areas with burned bone, carved bone, or large concentrations of animal bone may provide evidence of human occupation and hunting. Unfortunately, situations with strong evidence suggesting what might have happened are not as common as archaeologists would like. In the absence of strong evidence, as is the case with this alligator mandible, archaeologists must become detectives and scrutinize what little evidence is available to draw their own conclusions.

