# Reconstruction of a Prehistoric Environment and its Useful Plants: Warm Mineral Springs (8So-19), Florida

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The archaeological site (8So-19) at Warm Mineral Springs is a collapsed cave fed by hot mineral water. Remains of several human burials have been recovered by underwater archaeologists, under the direction of Wilburn Cockrell, from a ledge 45 feet below the surface of the spring which have been radio-carbon dated at 8,200 B.C. Presence of stalactites and stalagmites inside the cave indicate that the water in the sinkhole was 60-90 feet below its present level at that time. Analysis of the artifacts has aroused great interest among archaeologists (Clausen et al. 1975, Royal and Clark 1960) primarily because these are the earliest undisturbed burials in the southeastern United States.

The following work is part of an on-going project to characterize the past and present environments in south Sarasota County and has been generously supported by the Florida Division of Archives, History, and Records.

Besides its archaeological importance, Warm Mineral Springs (8So-19) is also of considerable botanical importance. Instead of the charred fragments usually associated with archaeological sites, sediments on the 45 foot ledge contain whole leaves, twigs, large pieces of wood, and seeds; this unusual state of preservation has resulted from infusion of the sediments by mineral water containing only tiny amounts of oxygen. Identification of these remains in conjunction with fieldwork will result in a floral reconstruction for the Pleistocene-Holocene interface and may further elucidate effects of glaciation on southeastern United States vegetation.

South Sarasota County bedrock consists of deposits of Key Largo limestone, Caloosahatchee marl, and terrace sands. The prevailing soil is fine, sand loam usually containing sufficient organic matter to give it a dark color. Analysis of soil from Punta Gorda (14 miles southeast of Warm Mineral Springs)