

Mound House Outdoor Nature & Education Events: February 2022

By Gary Mooney

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During 2021's final three months, the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau fielded over 61,000 visitor inquiries, with the iconic Mound House on Fort Myers Beach ranking as the third-highest Southwest Florida attraction on that prestigious list! One of our region's most-beloved historic attractions, the Mound House traces its roots to the ancient Calusa of over 2,000 years ago. It is open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., enforces Social Distancing guidelines and requests that all unvaccinated visitors wear masks.

New this month is the 2nd installment of the Mound House's 2022 Lecture Series as Austin Bell presents "The Nine Lives of Florida's Famous Key Marco Cat" on Tuesday, February 8, from 6 to 7 p.m. Bell explores the nine periods of the six-inch-high wooden carving, beginning with its sculpting from shell and shark-tooth tools, and whether it represented a human / panther god to the Calusa. Preserved in muck for centuries on Marco Island and unearthed in pristine condition, the Cat journeyed over 12,000 miles while being viewed by millions of people. Due to COVID-19, this will be a virtual lecture, so register in advance at 239-765-0865; \$5-per-person & Mound House members free.

As the oldest standing structure on Estero Island, the Town of Fort Myers Beach operates the Mound House as a museum complex and cultural and environmental learning center that offers numerous monthly educational programs, including for kids. It is at 451 Connecticut Street with overflow parking at 216 Connecticut. Admission is \$10 for ages 13 & up, \$8 for students with IDs, \$5 ages 6 to 12, and 5 & under free, with Fort Myers Beach residents receiving a 50% museum admission discount. For information, reservations, and a monthly program schedule, call 239-765-0865 or see www.moundhouse.org.

Shell Mound Tour

For all ages every February Tuesday through Saturday at 11 a.m. & 1 p.m.

If you dig archaeology, the Mound House's signature program is for you! Tour the one-of-a-kind underground 2,000-year-old Calusa Indian Shell Mound led by the interpretive staff as you explore the site's archaeology to unearth clues about this ancient society. \$5-per-person that does not include Mound House admission; Mound House members free, with Social Distancing guidelines in place.

FREE: Newton Beach Park Guided Beach Walk

For all ages every Tuesday and Thursday weather permitting at 9 a.m.

This twice-weekly free outdoor nature program is different every single time, as the "Guided Beach Walks" have a simple premise – walk roughly a half-mile down the

beach and back, discussing whatever you find that morning. Meet at the thatched hut closest to the beach, with Social Distancing in place. Bring sunscreen, shoes to get wet, sunglasses, and hat. No reservations necessary; while free, parking is \$5-per-hour, with one hour generally enough. Newton Beach Park is mid-island at 4650 Estero Boulevard.

Garden Tour

For all ages every February Tuesday & Friday at 2 p.m.

Stroll through the Mound House gardens to discover how its unique plants conserve water and protect wildlife, while learning how the Calusa and other Native Americans used them in their daily lives. \$5-per-person that does not include Mound House admission; Mound House members free, with Social Distancing guidelines in place.

Latino History Tour

For all ages every February Wednesday as well as Saturday, February 19, all at 2 p.m.

Perfect for Florida history buffs! Learn about the Latino fishing village known as a “Rancho” that existed on the shell mound between the ancient Calusa and Anglo-Pioneer eras. Explore the site’s archaeology and history through unearthed clues about this multicultural society. \$5-per-person that does not include Mound House admission, with Social Distancing guidelines in place.

Mangroves by Kayak Tour

For ages 12 & up every February Wednesday through Saturday at 9 a.m.

Explore the winding mangrove creeks and hidden waters of the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve as only a kayaker can on this Environmental Educator-guided tour of the ancient realm of the Calusa! Witness birds, fish, manatee and dolphins as you paddle through the natural beauty of Estero and Hell Peckney Bays in a tandem kayak. All paddling & safety equipment provided; \$45-per-person with Mound House members \$15 that includes Mound House admission. Advance reservations necessary at www.moundhouse.org with Social Distancing guidelines in place on land.

FREE: Calusa Carvers

For all ages on Tuesdays, February 1 & 15, from 9 a.m. to Noon

Learn more about woodcarving firsthand from a local group of woodcarvers who made some of the Calusa replica artifacts for Mound House exhibits and programs. The Calusa Carvers appear for free on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month through season from 9 a.m. to Noon.

Cool Calusa Tools

For families with children ages 6 & older on Tuesday, February 1; Thursday, February 3; Saturday, February 5; Tuesday, February 8; Thursday, February 10; Saturday, February 12; Tuesday, February 15; Thursday, February 17; & Tuesday, February 22, all at 10 a.m.; and Thursday, February 24, at 2 p.m.

Learn to hunt, fish, and make masks and pottery, just like the Calusa! The Mound House interpretive staff leads this exciting hands-on tour of the Mound House grounds where they demonstrate Calusa tools and artifacts, then help you make Calusa-inspired artwork where your imagination runs wild! \$2-per-person that does not include Mound House admission, with Social Distancing guidelines in place.

Archaeology: Can You Dig It?

For all ages on Wednesday, February 2 and every February Friday at 10 a.m.

Learn what it takes to be an archaeologist! Handle real artifacts and discover how archaeologists study past cultures in a program perfect for families. \$5-per-person that does not include Mound House admission, with Mound House members free.

Untold Stories Tour

For adults on Thursday, February 3 & Saturday, February 5, at 2 p.m.; Wednesday, February 9, at 10 a.m.; Thursdays, February 10 & 17, at 2 p.m.; and Thursday, February 24, at 10 a.m.

The Mound House is the oldest standing structure on Fort Myers Beach, with an intriguing cast of characters who called it home, ranging from farmers to casino owners; scientists to developers! Learn about their individual stories along with a good dose of island history on this guided tour through the Mound House Museum, native gardens, and majestic grounds. Adults \$15; Mound House members free.

Sunset Kayak Tour

Ages 12 & up weather permitting on Friday, February 4 and Saturday, February 12, both at 4:15 p.m.

People travel from all over the nation and world to marvel at Fort Myers Beach sunsets, but not many get to do so by kayak! In addition to catching a breathtaking sunset, explore the tidal creeks and winding mangrove tunnels that extend into the hidden backwaters of Estero Bay while experiencing the estuary's abundant wildlife in the quiet of twilight. The Mound House provides all paddling and safety equipment, with Social Distancing in place on land. \$45-per-person; Mound House members \$15, with advance registrations necessary at www.moundhouse.org.

Mound House Lecture: “The Nine Lives of Florida’s Famous Key Marco Cat”

For adults virtually on Tuesday, February 8, from 6 to 7 p.m.

Austin Bell explores “The Nine Lives of Florida’s Famous Key Marco Cat” through the nine periods of the six-inch-high wood carving. Bell begins with the cat’s sculpting from shell and shark-tooth tools to whether it represented a human / panther god to the Calusa. Preserved in muck for centuries on Marco Island and unearthed in pristine condition, the cat journeyed over 12,000 miles while being viewed by millions of people. Due to COVID-19, this will be a virtual lecture, so register in advance at 239-765-0865; \$5-per-person with Mound House members free.

Full Moon Kayak Tour

For ages 12 & up on Wednesday, February 16, at 4:45 p.m.

This unique tour offers kayakers the rare opportunity to experience the backwaters of the Estero Bay in the quiet of twilight by the light of the full moon! Participants explore the estuary’s tidal creeks, winding mangroves, and abundant wildlife illuminated by the full moon. Weather permitting and reservations required at www.moundhouse.org; \$45-per-person with Mound House members \$15. The Mound House provides all paddling equipment, with Social Distancing in place on land.