





**Randy Lathrop, of Brevard County, said he found this dugout canoe after Hurricane Irma rolled through the area. (Courtesy photo)**

Making waves after Hurricane Irma passed through Florida was the discovery of a canoe found near the Indian River in Brevard County. Original [reports](#) speculated the canoe was a piece of Seminole history, but after multiple tests conducted by the Bureau of Archaeological Research and Florida Department of State, the speculation has proved false.

Randy Lathrop said he found the 15-foot wooden dugout canoe while he was riding his bike along the Indian River in Brevard County after Hurricane Irma passed the area in September. As soon as he found the item, he claims he “knew exactly what it was.” He and a friend contacted archaeologists in the Florida Department of State to report the artifact and check its authenticity.

“I was shocked,” Lathrop said. “It looked like somebody had picked it up and placed it perfectly on the side of the road. It was the oddest thing I’ve ever seen.”

The state conducted radiocarbon dating on the canoe to determine its age and found three possible date ranges for the canoe. According to Sarah Revell from the Department of State, there is a 50 percent probability the wood used for the canoe is from years 1640-1680; a 37.2 percent chance it is from 1760-1818, and an 8.6 percent chance it is from 1930 or later. She explained these probabilities are based on when the wood used for the canoe died or was cut down and that other features of the discovery, such as paint and wire nails, indicates the canoe may be from the 19th or 20th centuries.

Revell summed up the findings into three explanations in an email to The Seminole Tribune: The canoe was made in the 19th or 20th century from an old log; the canoe was made in the 17th or 18th century and was modified over time, explaining the paint and nails; or, though unlikely, the canoe was built in the 20th century.

Originally, reports and Lathrop thought the canoe might be of Seminole origin because of its dated appearance; however, researchers have yet to announce any official confirmation or denial of this and are not leaning toward this idea. While the canoe’s origins and affiliations are still a mystery, many who heard of the find were not convinced of Seminole roots, including [Pedro Zepeda](#), a village crafter at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum in Big Cypress and expert in Seminole dugout canoes and their history.

“It doesn’t match any Seminole canoes at all,” Zepeda explained, citing the shape, size and type of

tree used to construct the canoe. "The tree used had large knots in it, but Seminole canoes usually use 'clean' pieces of wood with no knots."

While Lathrop considers himself a "history buff," as he has embarked on numerous educational history adventures, including historical shipwreck salvages, he maintains that he is not an expert.

"I think a lot of people gravitated toward [the idea that it was a Seminole canoe] because why wouldn't that be a possibility? With their strong history here and the time period, it very well could have been," he said. "There was still a lot of Seminole in this area in the late 1800s and early 1900s."

The Bureau of Archaeological Research is conducting further tests on the artifact's paint and other features to learn as much as possible about the item. Once the Department of State's conservation lab in Tallahassee stabilizes and preserves the canoe, the state will put it on display in Brevard County.

The University of South Florida created a 3D model of the canoe, which is available at [sketchfab.com/models](https://sketchfab.com/models). Search for "wooden canoe" and look for the submission from USF.

"I'm thrilled we were able to save the canoe for everybody. It is a part of our history here," Lathrop said. "I'm anxious to learn more."

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