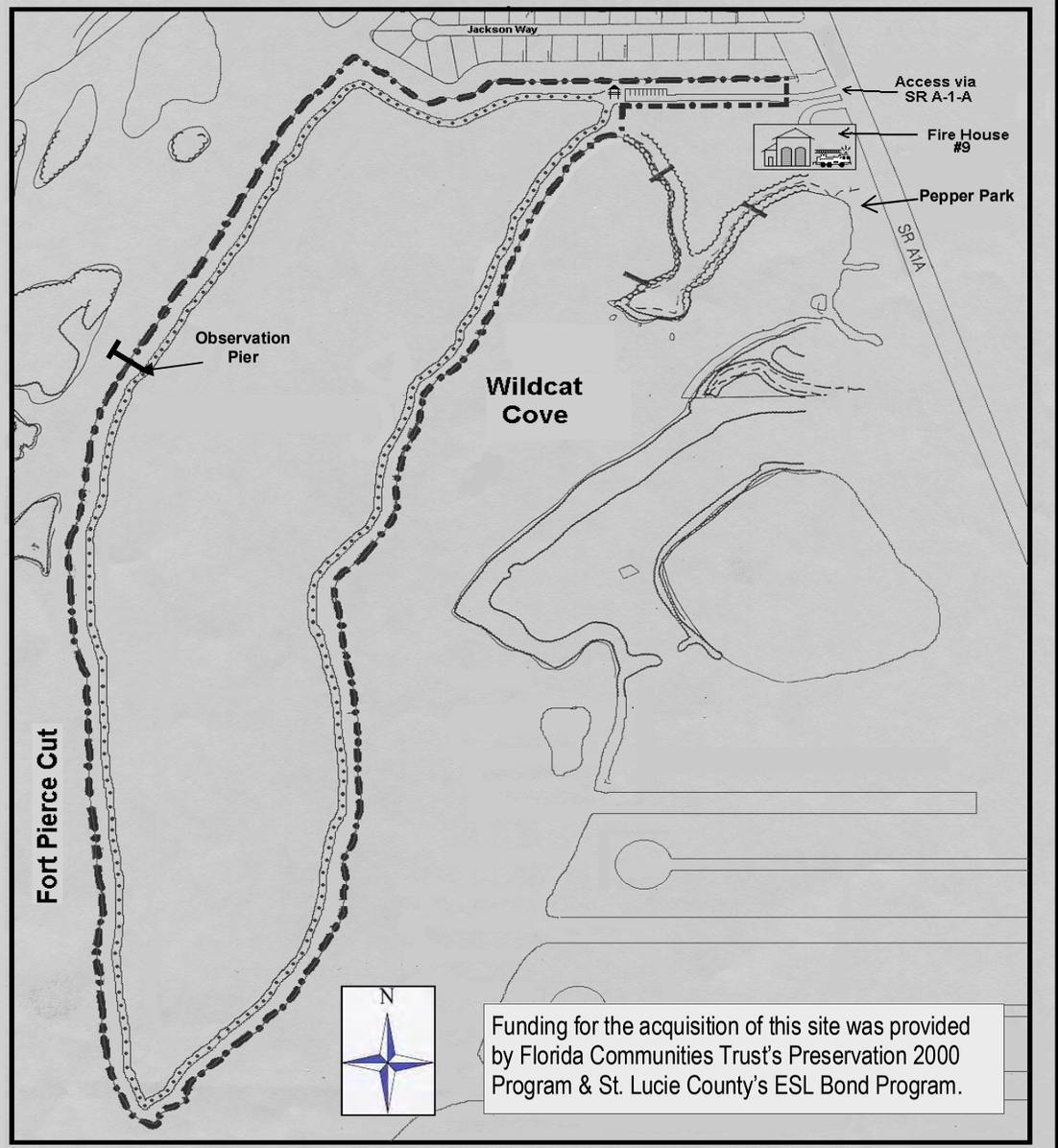
Wildcat Cove Natural Area



Funding for the acquisition of this site was provided by Florida Communities Trust's Preservation 2000 Program & St. Lucie County's ESL Bond Program.

Fort Capron

Fort Capron, built in 1849 to replace the abandoned and burned down Fort Pierce, was established in response to the killing of a local trader/merchant, John Barker by the Seminole Indians. Mr. Barker had been trading unfairly with Indians by selling defective gunpowder and watered-down whiskey. The federal government, acting upon the pleas of the Florida Legislature, dispatched Lt. Johnathan Ripley along with the First Artillery made up of Irish and German immigrants. They established a fort on the west bank of the Indian River named after Captain Erastus Capron, a brave First Artillery officer who fought during the Second Seminole War.

A stone monument is all that remains of the fort today, however, the surrounding residential area that remains is in the St. Lucie Village vicinity.

To Preserve Wildcat Cove Natural Area:

- Observe all state fish and game regulations
- Minimize disturbance of wildlife in the surrounding habitat.

For Your Own Safety:

- Carry adequate supplies of drinking water. There is no potable water on site.
- In case of lightning, seek a low area away from trees, fence lines, and tall objects.
- In case of emergency, call 911. Site entrance is adjacent to the north of Fire House #9 on North Hutchinson Island.
- **USE THIS SITE AT YOUR OWN RISK**

Wildcat Cove

St. Lucie Board of County Commissioners

St. Lucie County Environmental Resources Department

2300 Virginia Avenue
Ft. Pierce, FL 34982
772-462-2525
www.co.st-lucie.fl.us/erd

The Historic Indian River

Wildcat Cove and the surrounding area is part of an unique historical location on Florida's East Coast. This 114 acre natural site obtains its name from Wildcat Cove, a body of water, located along its southern boundary line. In all probability, the cove was named after Chief Wildcat of the Seminole Indians or due to the presence of the numerous wildcats, including panther and bobcats found in the area. The western boundary now called Fort Pierce Cut, was once part of the Fort Pierce Channel.

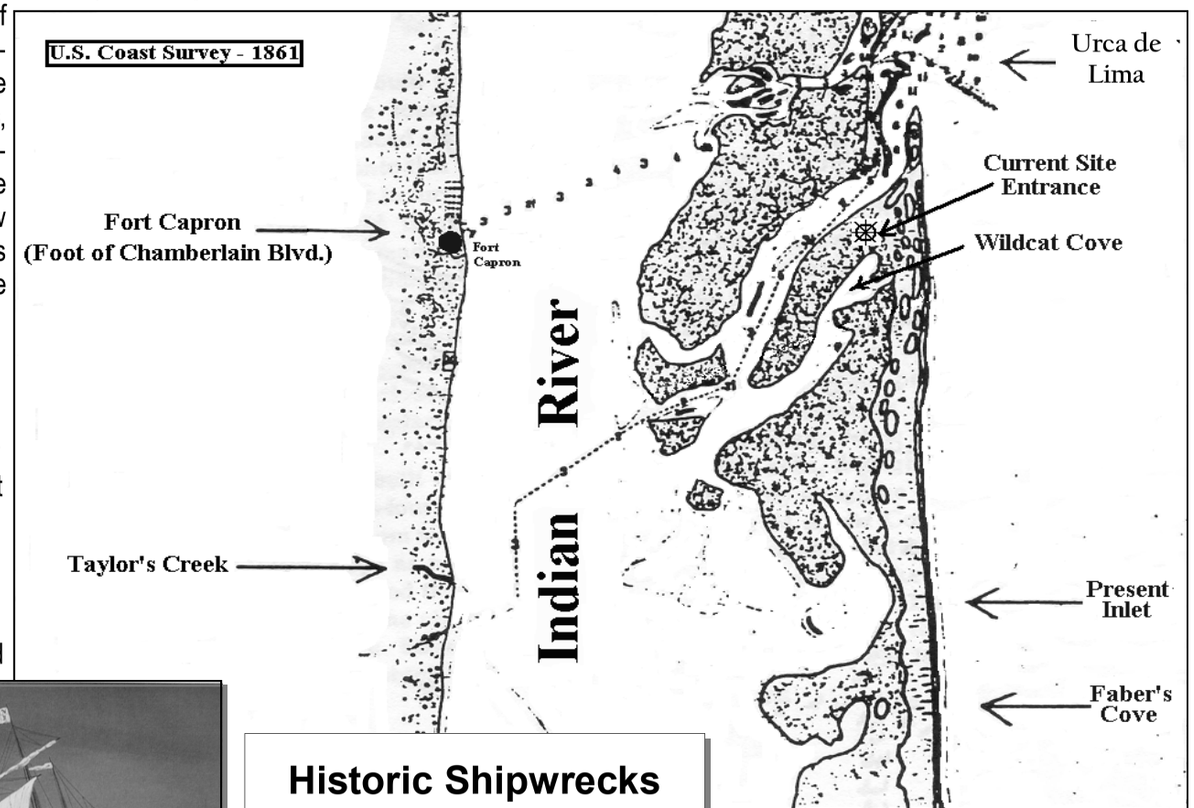
This tidal channel provided access to the Old Indian River Inlet. At one time it represented the only waterway navigable by boat to and from the ocean from Mosquito Inlet (now Ponce de Leon) on the north, to Jupiter Inlet on the south, covering 165 miles. The old inlet was a natural opening blocked by tidal sands during the winter of 1911. The ocean end of the old inlet is now covered by SR A1A and condominiums.

Ais Indians

The Indian River provided transportation for the east coast Ais Indians, known to Spanish explorers as Rio de Ais. The old Indian River Inlet was the access point between the Indian River and the ocean on the barrier island, now known as North Hutchinson Island. It dates back more than 2,000 years and is rich in Ais history.

A name used by an archaeologist, Barra de Ais referred to the inlet or land surrounding the inlet, as a barrier, thin, long strip.

El Pueblo Grande of Ais, or the big town, speculated to be the Ais capital is described to be near the Old Indian River Inlet. English and Spanish period maps name places as Ais, Rio de Ais, and Barra de Ais surrounding the Old Indian River Inlet highlighting the considerable significance behind this area in terms of Ais's history.



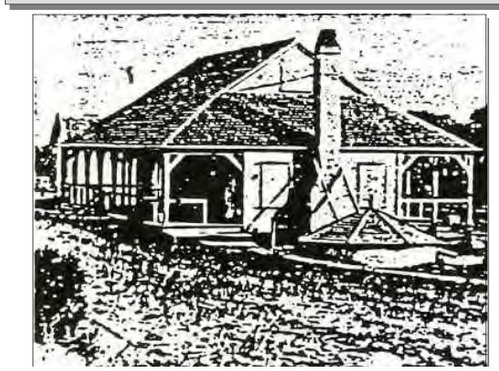
Historic Shipwrecks

Urca de Lima,
a merchant ship traveling with the Spanish Plate Fleet in 1715, wrecked just 200 yards out, and just North from the present day Pepper Park. Blown to shore by a hurricane, this wreck site became Florida's first Underwater Archaeological Preserve in 1987.

For further information sources include:

- A portrait of St. Lucie County, Florida by Lucille Rieley Rights
- Miley's Memos, by Charles S. Miley, News Tribune editor
- Http://www.treasurelore.com/florida.ais.htm
- Http://www.georoots.org/term_full.asp?ID=110

Indian River Inlet House of Refuge



Yet another early landmark of this area, was a life-saving station located just south of the Old Indian River Inlet, in the present day Pepper Park. In addition to the St. Lucie County House of Refuge, two boat houses were constructed nearby to hold rescuing vessels.

Built in 1886, the house of refuge provided support to survivors of shipwrecks and aided in the recovery of ships' cargo.

Thirty-four wrecks were recorded in the refuges log books during its operation. The rescue workers stationed at these houses, located up and down the East Coast of the U.S., were some of the bravest. Battling the same inclement weather that had caused shipwrecks, these rescue teams set out to save lives and recover cargo in long row boats. Their motto was "You must go out, but you don't have to come back".

In 1915, this service was combined with the Revenue Cutter Service to form the Coast Guard. The boat houses are all that remain from the life-saving station, having been restored and relocated to the Inlet State Park on North A1A. An exact duplicate of the main building can be found in Stuart, Martin County and is used as a museum.