

Oyster Shell Knife?

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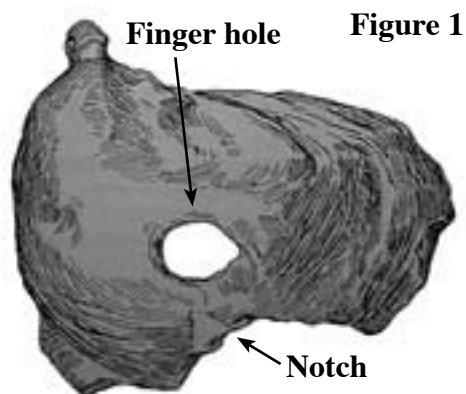


Figure 1

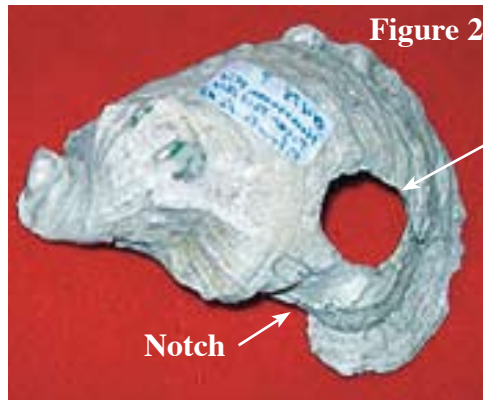


Figure 2

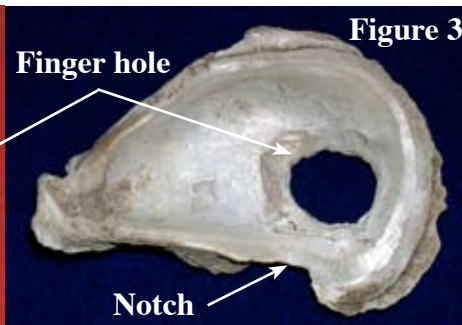
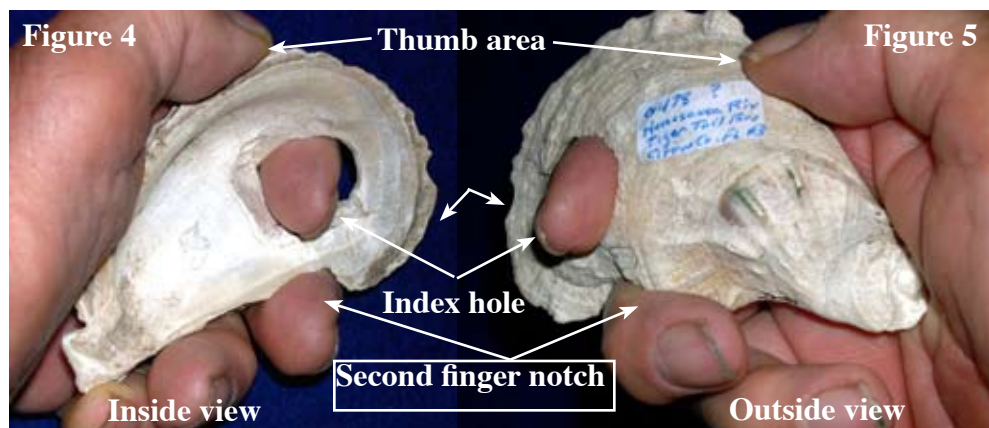


Figure 3

Left - Moore example. Middle - Hoff example outside view. Right - Hoff example inside view.

Moore (1905) spoke of a novel object from Chokoloskee Key, Lee County, Florida (Figure 1). This was an oyster shell (*Crassostrea virginica*) having a central hole in addition to a groove at one end. He speculated that a handle passed through the hole which was lashed to the shell at the groove (notch) to form a tool. He felt parts of the shell broken from the edge back lends support to this supposition.

However, a similar oyster shell (Figures 2 & 3) was reported by Hoff (2007) which was a surface find on a shell mound along the Homossassa River in Citrus County, Florida. It also has a grooved notch close to the hole and chips of shell removed along the edge. Neither the described artifact by Moore or the one found in Citrus County were made from exceptionally large, heavy oyster shell which is readily available. This indicates they were not a heavy-duty, but a very delicate tool. Moore did not elaborate on what he felt the tool might actually be. Knowing the natural extreme sharpness of edges on smaller oyster shells we are going to classify these samples as knives used for special applications like surgery. The Hoff example does not show signs of hafting and the hole is not jagged but relatively smooth inside. While handling the Hoff shell we found that it fits very comfortably (Figures 4 & 5) into the right hand with the index finger inserted into the hole and second finger into the notch. This handling arrangement allows for very good control needed for delicate cutting. The hole in his sample is oval 1.4 x 1.2 cm whereas our sample is 2.1 x 1.7 cm. Differences in hole size might be the difference in diameter of an index finger between a male and female. However, perhaps only the index finger needs only to nestle in the hole or indentation for control?



This type of knife was probably disposable after use since it could not be easily sharpened.

Our interpretation is only speculative yet, this example certainly has all the aspects for use as a knife. This piece is certainly open for discussion since we have only had the opportunity to hold one.

References:

Hoff, Frank & Nancy 2007. Shell Aritifacts, Emphasis on Southeastern Collections. Published by Pasttime Artifacts, Dade City, Florida ISBN 0-9662960-5-2

Moore, Clarence B. 1905. Miscellaneous Investigations in Florida. Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia 13:298-325. Also see The West Central Florida Expeditions of Clarence Bloomfield Moore University of Alabama Press, ISBN 0-9662960-5-2