

ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

December 2023

Have you ever gone looking for shark teeth on the beach? They are very common near the ocean, especially the coast of Florida; so much so that the town of Venice, located on the west coast of Florida, is the self-branded shark teeth capital of the world ([Kranking 2024](#)). All of this is good fun on a vacation, but what happens when you find a shark tooth that isn't close to the ocean or rivers? For our Tribal Archaeology Section, that is not too uncommon.

This broken lemon shark tooth was found on the Big Cypress Reservation (Figure 1). You might think that makes sense considering there are so many swampy areas in this part of Florida, but sharks do not usually swim in swamps ([americanoceans.org](#)). This means there was a significant amount of travel through other means, possibly trade, before it reached its destination. It was found with deer, opossum, and rabbit bones; this suggests that the tooth was not naturally deposited, but was actually the result of food processing. Another clue to this effect is that this shark tooth is not fossilized. Many, although not all, naturally placed shark teeth are fossilized due to their density and mineral composition ([paleosoc.org](#)). See the picture to the right for an example of a fossilized lemon shark tooth (Figure 2).

There can be other reasons for the presence of shark teeth aside from being food refuse. There have been many shark teeth, including lemon shark teeth, found by archeologists that have been altered in some way. These modified shark teeth were sometimes used as tools or adornments. However, that was not the case for this tooth, as it is unmodified. Visit <https://stofthpo.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/2014-Artifact-of-the-Month.pdf> to see our artifact of the month about a drilled shark tooth.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Are there sharks in swamps?. American Oceans. (2024).

<https://www.americanocceans.org/facts/are-there-sharks-in-swamps/#:~:text=Swamps%20are%20complex%20habitats%20where%20the%20freshwater%20of,is%20a%20phenomenon%20that%20occurs%20when%20conditio ns%20allow.>

Kranking, C. (2024b, September 17). *Four places to find fossilized shark teeth in the United States*. smithsonianmag.com. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/four-places-to-find-fossilized-shark-teeth-in-the-united-states-180985086/#:~:text=The%20region%E2%80%99s%20acclaimed%20sites%20for%20fossil%20hunting%20include,as%20the%20%E2%80%9CShark%20Tooth%20Capital%20of%20the%20World.%E2%80%9D>

The Paleontological Society. (n.d.). *Fossil Shark Teeth*. paleosoc.org. https://www.paleosoc.org/assets/docs/Fossil_Shark_Teeth.pdf

