



Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



DE SOTO FIRST VISITOR TO BICKEL MOUND

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TERRA CEIA ISLAND --- The site of an ancient Indian village provides a quiet isolated retreat for visitors who turn off busy U.S. 19 south of the spectacular Sunshine Skyway. The first "visitor" to this interesting Indian mound was the explorer Hernando DeSoto who some experts say landed near Bradenton in the year 1539.

The State-owned property is called Madira Nickel Mound, named for Mrs. Karl A. Bickel, who joined her husband, the late Karl A. Bickel, long-time president of United Press International, in donating the property. It was the first archeological site in Florida to become a State historic memorial. In 1970 it also was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

The mound itself, 100 by 170 feet in base dimensions and 20 feet high, is the most outstanding feature of the area, which was the site of extensive Indian habitation from near the beginning of the Christian era until after the time of Columbus.

Some historians claim this site was the village of Ocita or Ucita, mentioned in the accounts of the DeSoto expedition as the initial camp of the Spaniards, but no concrete evidence has been found to substantiate this theory. A local historian, Mrs. Mary Ethyl Clyatt, told the St. Petersburg Times that "DeSoto took the wooden structures from on top of the mound and made houses for his men."

The interesting mound is a mixture of shells, black dirt, animal bones and pottery, and apparently was constructed as a substructure for a building, perhaps the chief's resident or a temple.

