

Native Stone

The mill ruins here are made of *coquina*—Spanish for “tiny shell.” Quarried locally (and elsewhere in the Southeast), it contains mollusk shell fragments and quartz sand, bound together by calcium carbonate. Centuries after the Spanish first used *coquina* in Florida, frontier Americans chose this building stone for their sugar factory.

Durable as it looks, cut *coquina* is porous and surprisingly delicate. Today’s earthtone blocks are attractive, but in the 1830s this mill had protective coatings of white lime plaster. Its roof sheltered valuable machinery from the West Point Foundry of New York—a pioneering industrial manufacturer in the United States.

Following the Seminoles’ 1835 raid, these ruins faced years of rugged weather, destructive vegetation, climbing visitors, and misguided masonry patching. Finally, in 2007, preservation specialists properly repaired and stabilized the old *coquina* walls. Even so, the site remains sensitive to human disturbance.

For your safety and the sugar mill’s survival as a public place, please stay on the walkway and never climb on these ruins. Future visitors will thank you.



Left:
A coquina quarry in Florida.

Detail from a print in
Picturesque America, 1872.

coquina up close



Feel free to touch this piece of cut *coquina*, and notice the shells that form it. **Nearby are two other samples of modern *coquina* work—a quarried chunk of natural *coquina* and a lime-plastered *coquina* wall.**

What happened to the sugar factory’s own white coating? Fires set by the Seminoles probably caused that plaster to fall off—though artist John Rogers Vinton still found some light areas to show in his early painting of the ruins.

These samples (and the historic site’s overall *coquina* repairs) are the work of Professional Restoration, Jacksonville, Florida. Special thanks to Brian H. Rand and John Gongaware.