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## More Survey For Lucas Vázquez De Ayllón's Lost Capitana

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Thank you for your generous support of the Archaeological Research Trust (ART) Endowment Fund and the printing of *Legacy*. These donations have made it possible for new research at SCIAA and to continue publishing *Legacy* twice a year. We continue to seek donations from the readership to continue the publication of *Legacy* and to build the ART Endowment. Thank you for your past donations. Please send the enclosed envelope to me indicating whether you want to continue receiving *Legacy*. Contributions will be appreciated. Please visit our website at: [www.sc.edu/sciaa](http://www.sc.edu/sciaa). Nena Rice, Editor, ([nrice@sc.edu](mailto:nrice@sc.edu))

*New logo above: Blue-painted bird called a parlatot on Santo Domingo Blue on White bowl, excavated at Santa Elena.*

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# Legacy

South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology

## More Survey For Lucas Vázquez De Ayllón's Lost Capitana

By Christopher Amer

Flying at 400 feet over North and South Islands and the approaches to Winyah Bay and the North Santee River it is not much of a stretch to visualize the area as the early explorers would have seen it (Fig. 1). Four hundred years ago, the sea would have been some four-feet lower exposing more land, some barrier islands may have been shorter or smaller, and a few of the submerged sandbars guarding the entrance to the Bay displaced from their present locations. But otherwise, not that different. As Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón and nearly 600 would-be settlers drew near to the North Santee River (River Jordan) and Winyah Bay, they would have been faced by low land punctuated by the relatively higher sand dunes of North Island, then known as Cabo San Roman.



Fig. 1: Aerial view of North Island with the entrance to Winyah Bay and South Island in the background. (SCIAA photo)

The disastrous loss of their main supply ship to the shoals on August 9, 1526 was made only worse by the realization that the settlement they had dreamed of building near the River Jordan would have to be erected on more fertile ground. However, the location they eventually chose for the settlement, some 45 leagues (approximately 166 miles) southwest of Jordan, also was not to support their dreams as it became too late in the year

See CAPITANA, Page 4

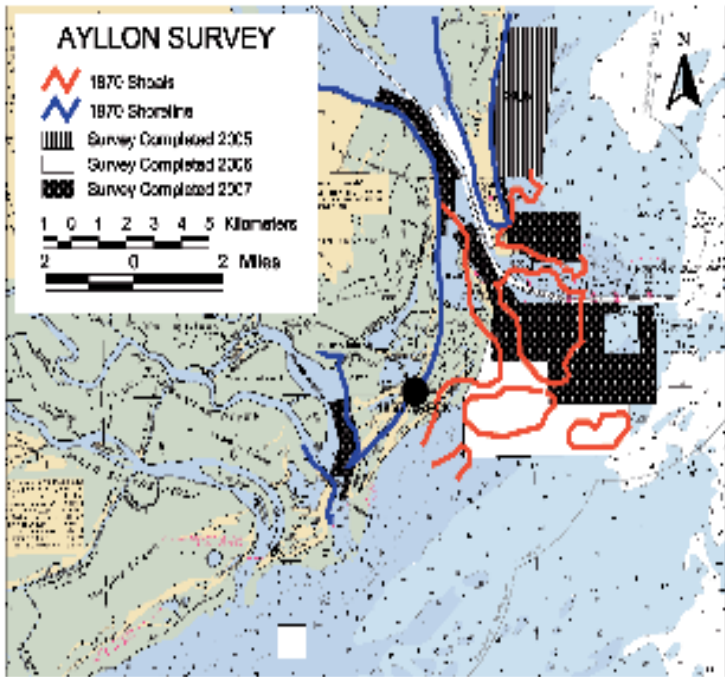


Fig. 2: Project Map showing areas surveyed since 2005. (SCIAA photo)

to plant crops and their numbers were diminishing at an alarming rate from disease and Indian attacks. When de Ayllón himself succumbed to disease on the feast day of St. Luke (October 18, 1526) anarchy reigned, led by two “discontented rebels” named Gines Doncel and Peter of Bacan. De Ayllón’s mortal remains were unceremoniously dumped in the sea by the rebels and the tattered remnants of the expedition quit their would-be settlement and returned to Hispaniola. This was to be the final attempt of settlement in North America by Spain until she virtually was forced to do so to protect the treasure-laden fleets returning to Spain from the Gulf of Mexico.

So, here we are at the close of another field season searching for the elusive Capitana lost during Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón’s 1526 voyage to the New World. Where the remains of the ill-fated vessel lie and where the abandoned fledgling settlement of San Miguel de Gualdapé was located have been the grist for debate and speculation for over half a century. In 1982, 43 scholars assembled in Georgetown for a colloquium dedicated to discussing the matter. After three days of presentations and examinations of available historical and environmental data, as well as taking into account possible errors in latitude determination

during the 16<sup>th</sup>-century, the issue was never resolved. Some scholars believed that the wreck could be near the Cape Fear estuary (the northern interpretation), while others favored a more southerly location near Winyah Bay (the southern interpretation) as the site for the disaster. The remains of the ill-

could therefore reside

near Edisto/St. Helena Sound area or in the vicinity of Sapelo Sound respectively. The best evidence for the ship’s loss comes from a combination of contemporary historical sources, including chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedó, the 1526 Vespucci map (shown in *Legacy*, Vol. 10, No. 3. Pg. 11), and a series of rutters published in 1526 and 1609. These sources point to the shipwreck’s location being

near Winyah Bay. Notwithstanding, archaeological surveys by Jim Michie in the 1980s on Waccamaw Neck and along the foreshore of Winyah Bay and North and South Islands uncovered archaeological evidence for neither the settlement nor the shipwreck.

In spite of this body of evidence, and with the assistance of geologists Scott Harris of the College of Charleston and Eric Wright of Coastal Carolina University, after three field seasons, the elusive shipwreck has retained its anonymity.

### 2007 Field Season Results

Between May 28 and July 10, 2007, staff of the Maritime Research Division (MRD), with financial support from the Archaeological Research Trust (ART), surveyed another 20.75 square-kilometers (7.92 square miles) of sea floor in the historic southern approach to Winyah Bay, within the bay proper, and at the mouth of the North Santee River. This brings the total area surveyed since 2005 up to 47.75 square kilometers (18.42 square miles) (Fig. 2), or almost 60% of the projected high-probability submerged search area. If we have to venture onto terra firma and conduct a survey for the shipwreck beneath the sands of North and South



Fig. 3: High wing Piper Cub airplane used for the aerial reconnaissance with pilot “Lep” Boyd. (SCIAA photo)



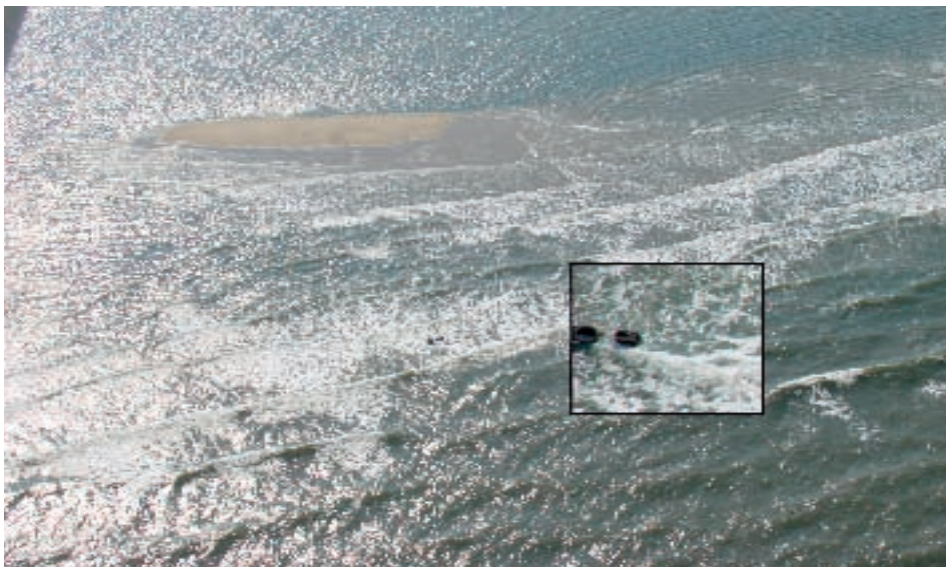


Fig. 4: Remains of a shipwreck in the surf-riddled approach to North Inlet. Exposed iron structures are more visible in the enlarged image inset. (SCIAA photo)

Islands we must add an additional 22 square kilometers (8.5 square miles) to the total.

The methodology used on the 2007 survey mirrored that of previous years with one significant difference. With the kind support of G. G. "Lep" Boyd, Jr. from Georgetown, South Carolina and using one of his company's Piper Cub aircraft, piloted by Lep himself (Fig. 3), I was able to conduct an aerial reconnaissance of the entire survey area in a matter of a couple of hours. The aerial survey amassed over 350 images and videos that documented the natural and built environment of the survey area and even identified the remains of a shipwreck amid the shoals guarding the entrance to North Inlet (Fig. 4).

The balance of the survey, while conducted at a much, much slower pace and certainly not as exciting as the plane ride, was nevertheless very productive. We identified numerous magnetic and acoustic targets during the four-week survey. After post-processing the survey data, 15 targets proved worthy of further investigation. During two weeks in August, MRD staff, along with Scott Harris and Emily Jateff, who volunteered for one week each, ground truthed five targets within the turbid and dynamic waters of Winyah Bay and ten targets outside the confines of the Bay (Fig. 5). Targets within the murky Bay turned out to be, to the one,

of modern provenance, and included an A-frame-like structure possibly associated with a shrimp boat. Likewise, most of the offshore hits were of modern origin, including lengths of two-inch pipe at two sites, metal, concrete, and copper fasteners, components of a boat trailer, and a modern boat anchor and chain, the latter recovered from within the entrance of the North Santee River (Fig. 6). However, three sites in the approaches to the Bay proved to be of particular interest. 2PRISW1-1, located just north of the North Jetty, is an oval iron box-like structure with pipes protruding from it. The curious object is three meters (10 feet) long by two meters

(six feet, eight inches) wide by one meter (three feet) high. A significantly intense magnetic anomaly, of some 511 gammas, was encountered approximately one mile south of South Jetty at a wreck marked on the NOAA nautical chart. Denoted in the South Carolina State Sites Files as 38GE66, this site, which contains much shipwreck debris, features a three-meter (10-foot)-long by 2.4-meter (eight-foot)-diameter iron boiler and some three meters (10 feet) of propeller shaft ending in a 1.8-meter (six-foot)-diameter iron propeller. The wreck is believed to be that of the Confederate blockade runner *Sir Robert Peel*, which was set afire and burned by its crew in April, 1862, after being chased by a Union vessel.

By far the most exciting find of the season was a very large iron construct lying within five meters of South Jetty. Sitting in seven meters (23 feet) of water, the main component of the site rises to within four meters (13 feet) of the surface of the water and is approximately 11 meters (36 feet) long by six meters (20 feet) wide. Other components of the site lie scattered over a wide area parallel to the line of jetty rocks extending the overall length of the site to over 24 meters (78.7 feet) (Fig. 7). While visibility on the site remained less than one foot on top of the object, the dark, murky water reduced exploration of the lower parts of the site to



Fig. 5: Emily Jateff handles the hand-held magnetometer at the surface before diving to investigate a target. (SCIAA photo)





Fig. 6: Jim Spirek (left) holds a modern anchor, one of the magnetic targets located by the hand-held magnetometer, held aloft in triumph by Scott Harris. (SCIAA photo)

a tactile procedure. Further investigation of the site was severely hampered by its close proximity to the jetty, ocean waves, and an intense water flow across the submerged rocks, which reversed direction with the tides. Several round openings along the length of the object could be portholes suggesting that the iron object may be the remains of a vessel lost against the jagged rocks of South Jetty. The size and construction of the remains and its close proximity to the jetty suggest a fairly recent origin for the site, which certainly postdates the construction of the jetty in the 1890s.

Candidates for the shipwreck sites located during the 2005 through 2007 surveys include the following vessels:

Shipwreck spotted by plane at North Inlet

- *Liverpool*, a schooner-rigged blockade runner out of Nassau that ran aground off North Inlet on 10 April, 1862 after being pursued by USS *Keystone State*. South Carolina State Site Files have this site designated as

38GE64.

- *Prince of Wales*, a blockade runner out of Nassau, laden with salt that fell afoul of the shoals off

North Inlet on 24 December, 1861, after being chased and fired on by a union blockade ship.

### Shipwrecks off South Island

- *Sir Robert Peel*, noted above.
- Quartermaster's steamer *Union*, and the steamers *Osceola* and *Peerless*, all of which were lost in the area at the beginning of November, 1861.
- *Arethusa* and *National*, both of which appear on an 1899 US Coast and Geodetic Survey chart of Winyah Bay.

While many interesting shipwreck and non-shipwreck sites have come to light during the survey, nothing of 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish origin has as yet made an appearance. We still have 40% of the projected high-probability area left to survey before turning to terrestrial possibilities for the final resting place of the vessel that dashed the hopes of so many would-be settlers and the Spanish Crown to colonize this area of the Southeastern Atlantic seaboard.

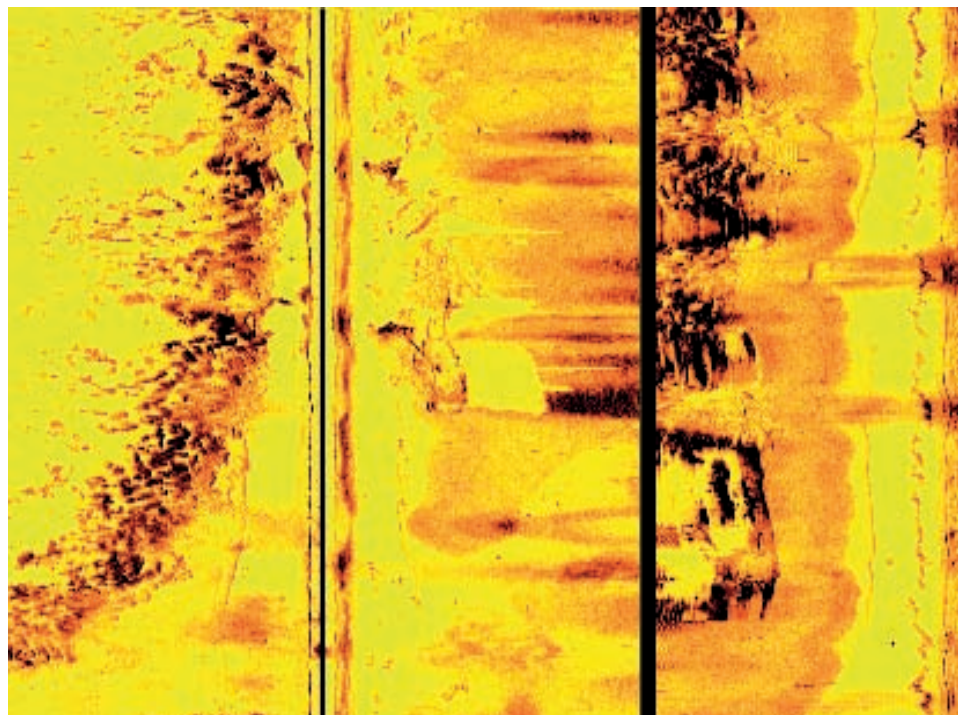


Fig. 7: Side-scan images of large iron wreck near the seaward side of South Jetty. Image to left and center shows jetty (left) and shipwreck (center). Image to right shows shipwreck from sonar towed in the opposite direction. (SCIAA photo)