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Office of the State Archaeologist

The Bridge To Nowhere: History Detectives and the Office of the State Archaeologist Team Up to Solve a Mystery

By Jonathan Leader

One of the truly enjoyable parts of working with the PBS series *History Detectives* is the collaboration. The questions they are asked to solve are never easy and always tie in many allied colleagues and experts.

Enter the History Detectives and their collaborative format. Elyse Luray assembled a team to review David's work, add to it from sources he was unable to access, and then truth it on the ground.

Confederate Relic Museum, was enlisted for his knowledge of the times. Tracy Power and Patrick McCawley at the Department of Archives and History, were essential for the documents and maps. The sticking point was the third part, proving the solution on the ground.

Fortunately, Elyse and *History Detectives* had a similar situation come up in 2006 when they were trying to authenticate the 71st Highlander cartridge bag cartouche found in North Augusta, SC. They turned to the Institute's archaeological expertise to prove the object's authenticity. I used my skills in archaeometallurgy to show that the artifact was from the time period in question and had come from an environment guaranteed to ensure its survival until being found by the licensed sport diver. It was therefore natural that Elyse would turn to me again to provide the archaeology and final proof to the question.

Using the maps and documents assembled from Elyse and the team, I



Assembling the equipment with Elyse. (SCIAA photo)

The *Bridge to Nowhere* was a fine example of this reality.

David Brinkman, a local avocational historian, had been researching the ruined bridge abutment remains in his yard for some time. Back in 2006, we took an in-depth look at the remains in the hopes of dating them. David was thinking that they might be the remnant of the bridge destroyed by Confederate forces in the face of Sherman's advance in 1865. Alas, the analysis did not support this conclusion. Undeterred, David continued his research.

Three years later David had a much more solid foundation built upon historic maps he had researched at the USC Caroliniana Library, the Collections of the Department of Archives and History and online. The focus had shifted upriver in the vicinity of the current Broad River Road Bridge. He knew that he was close, but how to prove it to a scientific certainty?

The first and second part ran through familiar territory. Joe Long, curator at the



Graduate students Dwight Jones (Left) and Ben Johnson (Right) move the gradiometer over the flood to the pontoon area as a nervous Jon Leader looks on. (SCIAA photo)



Jon Leader running the gradiometer in the woods. (SCIAA photo)

decided to use geophysics to answer the question. The probable areas for the bridge burned by the Confederates and the pontoon bridge built by the Union forces to cross the Broad River were grossly identified. The bridge was burned and subjected to artillery barrage and the pontoon bridge saw up to 30,000 men, horses, and wagons cross in a very short period of time. In both instances the massive assault sustained by the areas should be discernible by specialized, sensitive equipment. In this case, the choice was to use a Bartington gradient magnetometer and a Mala ground penetrating radar.

Quickly assembling a group of volunteer field workers from both the community and the Anthropology Department's students, the team tackled the areas. Almost immediately, a remnant of the original road leading to the 1860s bridge was found. This was followed by the exact position of the bridge as shown by the surviving wagon ruts leading to the edge where the span once stood. The miracle was that the work that built the current bridge and road way access for fisherman had come very close to obliterating any sign of the 1860s bridge.

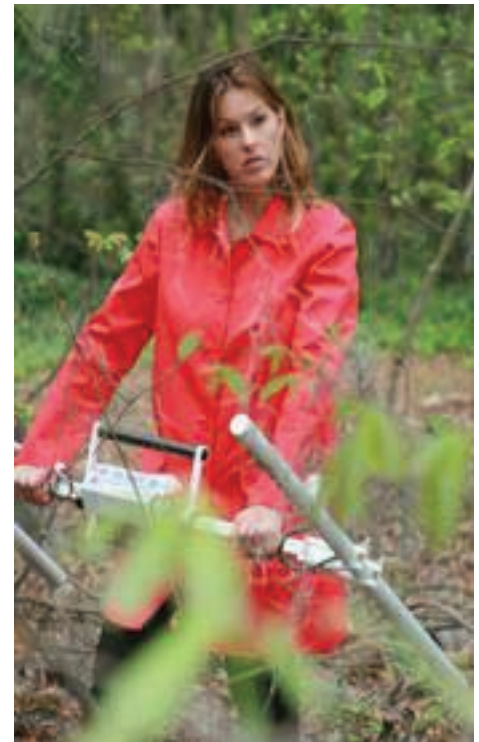
The team then went to work on the pontoon bridge location. Remarkably, not

only was the original access road found, but also the staging area for the Union wagons as they waited their turn to cross the pontoon bridge was recovered. In the course of these discoveries, I gave Elise a quick course in the use of the equipment. This was a personal first for her and for History Detectives.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Mala Equipment for donating the use of ground penetrating radar for the project. Grateful appreciation is extended to the volunteers: Matthew Allgrim, Carmen Beard, Ben

Johnson, Dwight Jones, James Legg, and Stephanie Sapp without whom this project could not have been accomplished as quickly or as well.

The Bridge to Nowhere is the season finale and will air on September 7 twice. Please check the "History Detectives" web site at <http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/> for more information.



Setting up the shot for the Bridge to Nowhere on site. (SCIAA photo)



Fig 10: Setting up the shot for the Bridge to Nowhere on site. (SCIAA photo)