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Preliminary Assessment of the Site of the Southeastern Utilization Research Center and the Waste Treatment Plant at Fort Johnson, South Carolina, Charleston County

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PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE SITE OF THE
SOUTHEASTERN UTILIZATION RESEARCH CENTER AND THE
WASTE TREATMENT PLANT AT FORT JOHNSON, SOUTH
CAROLINA, CHARLESTON COUNTY

by

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Prepared by the
INSTITUTE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
October, 1975
On September 30, 1975, I visited the proposed site of the South-eastern Utilization Research Center and Waste Treatment Plant on property owned by the South Carolina Marine Resources Division of the South Carolina Department of Wildlife and Marine Resources. I was accompanied by Willis J. Keith of the Marine Resources Division. The purpose of the visit was to examine the proposed site of these facilities as a preliminary step to eventually lead to an Environmental Impact Statement.

Environmental Impact Statements contain an archeological evaluation section consisting of three basic stages: The Preliminary Assessment, The Field Study, and the Mitigation. Each of these stages emerge from the previous one, and all three must be completed before any disturbance of the ground preliminary to construction is undertaken. The present preliminary assessment involved walking over the sites in question and examining the ground to find clues to past occupation. Such clues as pottery sherds, glass fragments, oyster shell midden, etc. are used in such a search. In addition to the visual inspection two test pits were excavated to determine the depth of oyster shell midden deposits on these sites. The comments made here in this Preliminary Assessment are in relation to a necessary field study, and mitigation of any values that may be destroyed by construction of these facilities.

THE WASTE TREATMENT PLANT

The Site of Fort Johnson is historically important because of its many historic fortifications and earthworks. The remaining earthworks are among the few visible remains surviving and among these is a Civil
War embankment containing a sally port in the immediate vicinity of the proposed location of the waste treatment plant. This proposed location for the waste treatment plant is directly in front of, and but 20 feet from, the sally port of this Civil War earthworks. It is directly upon the spot where Federal forces attacked the fort.

A waste treatment plant in this location would irreparably damage the historic values of the Civil War defenses here and would be a serious violation of the historic integrity of the site. No amount of archeological excavation or other conservation measures could mitigate the adverse effect on the site that would be caused by this construction. The only mitigation that could preserve this integrity is to change the location of the waste treatment plant.

There are many locations where this facility could be placed so as not to have an adverse impact on the historic values of the site. I would suggest a location much nearer the proposed Southeastern Utilization Research Center. For example it could be placed along the sewer line on either side of the road to the Maintenance Building with little or no adverse effect upon historic values.

It might be suggested that the presently proposed location in front of the sally port might better be used for small, park-like picnic area for employees to enjoy and have a spot to eat lunch. This would provide a scenic and attractive use for this historic area. It would be one of the few remaining spots of natural beauty and would be an asset to the total complex.

The recommendation for this facility, therefore, is not for a Field Study, since this location would have irreparable adverse impact on the
historic values. The recommendation is for mitigation by a change in
the location of the planned facility to a less intrusive spot on the site.

THE SITE OF THE SOUTHEASTERN UTILIZATION RESEARCH CENTER

This facility will occupy about five acres of land, lying across
two high ridges. These ridges contain a number of brick piles above and
below ground, that are very likely the remains of the Confederate encamp­
ment on the site when the artillery emplacements just outside this
planned area were being used during the Civil War. This area contains
ceramics and other objects, such as a friction primer from firing of
one of the artillery pieces, remaining from the Confederate occupation
of these high ridges during the Civil War. A field study phase is
certainly warranted because of these Confederate ruins on the site.

However, evidence of a major occupation of this site in prehistoric
times occurs on both ridges of high ground. This is the oyster and
clam shell midden remaining from Indian occupation. Two fragments of
Cape Fear Period pottery were recovered from the surface of this oyster
shell midden. This pottery dates from the time of Christ to about
1000 A.D. (South 1973). A small test hole was dug on the westernmost
ridge, and the oyster shell midden was found to be one foot thick. At
the bottom of this discolored soil, lying on the subsoil layer, was a
sherd of Thom's Creek pottery, dating from about 2000 B.C. In this
pit also was a number of oyster and clam shells from Indian midden, and
a deer bone fragment. These are merely clues that were found in a
single one foot wide hole, indicating that much more such material of
archeological interest may well be found if a field study were undertaken
to obtain a further evaluation of the archeological values of this site. A testing-sampling field study should by all means be undertaken on this site so that a proper evaluation of the resources can be made. From such a study recommendations can then be made as to the mitigation phase of evaluating the impact of this facility. Mitigation may involve careful stripping of broad areas under the archeologist's supervision in order to reveal features for examination. It may, however, involve further sampling and trenching. In any case, however, there is a definite need for a field study on the site of the research center.

It is recommended that the entire area of the proposed site be sampled by means of five foot squares randomly selected so that an evaluation of the unknown from this controlled sample can be made. A minimum of two weeks with a crew of six, or one week with a crew of twelve would be required to sample the site and collect enough data to properly evaluate the results. Analysis time, computer time, writing time, and report preparation would take at least four weeks for every week in the field.

The report from such a study may well recommend machine stripping as a means of mitigation of the values found to be present as a result of the study. The recommendations may also be to discontinue the field study phase if the study revealed that the values present were minimal.

PROPOSAL FOR A BROAD STUDY OF THE FORT JOHNSON SITE

As continued construction takes place through the years to come the site at Fort Johnson will need to be evaluated as each building is built. This results in many environmental impact assessments. If a
thorough topographical, and archeological, and historical survey were made of the entire point, planning could work around such a master plan rather than one site at a time as is now the case. This long range plan would allow lead time for any mitigation that might be needed as development of the site continues. It is hoped that such a long range plan can be undertaken by the Marine Resources Division to provide a more adequate planning base relative to the cultural resources on the site.