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The Search for Francis Marion's Snow's Island Camp

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From around December of 1780 to April 1781, Revolutionary War hero Francis Marion used Snow's Island in Florence County as a base camp for his partisan band fighting for independence. Surrounded by rivers and swamp, this camp afforded his troops a safe haven to organize raids against British troops occupying South Carolina. In March of 1781, a detachment of British soldiers was able to find and destroy the camp while Marion was successfully checking the advance of another British detachment. Though Snow's Island has been recognized as an important historic place, the exact location of Marion's camp (or camps) has since been lost. This October, the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology initiated a systematic archaeological survey in search of Francis Marion's Snow's Island camps.

This project was led by Steven D. Smith of the Institute with the field work directed by James B. Legg. The methodology for the work consisted of archival and map research to narrow down the search areas on the island which were then surveyed using metal detectors. High ground on the island was searched, especially around the Lynches River area where Marion had addressed several letters to General Nathaniel Green during the period in question. Marion wrote at the top of his letters to Green the following locations: Lynches River, Mouth of Lynches River, Snow's Island, and Goddard's plantation. William Goddard owned and farmed Snow's Island during the war. Unfortunately, the most logical locations for camps did not prove fruitful, so additional survey was conducted in lower swampy areas of the island, and in areas where local informants reported finding artifacts or had placed the "traditional location" of the camp. According to contemporary newspaper accounts, Marion's stores were thrown into the Lynches River during the British raid. An underwater team, led by Chris Amer, searched the shallow, tree-infested Lynches River and Clark's Creek in search of evidence of Marion's army's presence. Still, Marion eluded the searchers.

Once the accessible and most obvious places had been checked on the Snow's Island side of Lynches River, the land survey continued along the north bank, opposite Snow's Island, on Georgia-Pacific property. There, archaeologists located an isolated colonial site, which looks upon preliminary analysis to be contemporaneous with Marion's occupation of the region. Perhaps, and hopefully, this site is part of Goddard's plantation, although additional research is needed to confirm this hypothesis. As this report was written, artifact analysis and additional archival research is continuing on the findings.

The project was funded by Sonoco Products Company, the Marion County Historical Society, and numerous private interested individuals. Additional funding and assistance came from the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology and the Three Rivers Historical Society, and Georgia-Pacific graciously allowed us to search their property and conduct some preliminary excavations at the colonial site. A report will be written about the project and be available through the Institute upon completion of analysis. Art: SCIAA: [Simms: Life of Marion: 1844]