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Santa Elena Project Report

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Stanley South and Chester DePratter are currently involved in writing reports based on fieldwork conducted in the past few years at Santa Elena. A report on the 1994 shovel testing project to find the limits of the town of Santa Elena is available for purchase from SCIAA (see sales ad elsewhere on page 7 in this volume). This report describes shovel testing over a 35-acre tract within which 1,383 shovel tests were excavated at 30-foot intervals. Analysis of the resulting artifact distributions indicates that the town of Santa Elena covers about 15 acres (not counting the shoreline strip containing the two known forts). This work, in conjunction with past excavations, allowed DePratter and South to identify individual lots for the first time, and they have begun to formulate a more complete model of the layout of the town including possible locations for the plaza, another fort, and perhaps the church.

A second report on a large block unit excavated in 1993 is currently being reviewed by Marine Corps staff at Parris Island; that report should be available by early next year. The 1993 block unit was located in the backyard of a structure excavated in 1991-1992. This structure is now known to be a high status dwelling based on its size and construction materials as well as the size of the lot that it occupies. The backyard of this lot contained two wells and numerous construction-related pits filled with refuse. Analysis of these features and their contents has allowed DePratter to identify a storm event (possibly a hurricane) that damaged the building on the lot and necessitated rebuilding.

South and DePratter have begun writing a report on the Spanish pottery kiln that they discovered in 1993, and the finished product will be in print by late 1996. The pottery kiln, a small updraft Moorish style kiln, contained about four broken pots identified as micaceous red ware by the excavators. This utilitarian ware was made to supplement the imported wares which must have been difficult to obtain at Santa Elena. Analysis of the kiln and its contents will represent a major contribution to the study of the potting industry in Spain and the Spanish colonial empire.

Jim Legg has a contract with the Marine Corps through the Department of Defense Legacy Program to cross-mend Spanish ceramics fragments from all excavated parts of Santa Elena. This effort should provide an important research collection consisting of reconstructable vessel forms for each of the ceramic types used by the Spanish settlers at Santa Elena. His work will continue through Spring, 1996.

South and DePratter expect to return to Santa Elena in April, 1996, to conduct two weeks of shovel testing in the area surrounding the pottery kiln in order to determine whether there is a waster pile nearby. Preliminary planning is also underway for a Fall 1996, expedition to complete excavation of the large town lot that they have been excavating since 1991. Contact Chester if you want to participate!