

4-2013

Recording the Beginnings of South Carolina River Diving

Drew Ruddy

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/sciaa_staffpub



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

Publication Info

Published in *Quarterly Reporter*, Volume 4, Issue 1, 2013, pages 6-7.

<http://www.cas.sc.edu/sciaa/>

© 2013 by The South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology

This Article is brought to you by the Archaeology and Anthropology, South Carolina Institute of at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty & Staff Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.

Recording the Beginnings of South Carolina River Diving

By Drew Ruddy, SCIAA Research Associate, Hobby Diver #0246

The sudden starting of a Navy diving compressor disrupted the serenity along the rural banks of the Ashley River. Nine divers on a 50-foot vessel were members of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit 2 stationed at the Charleston Naval Mine Force Command. It was April 1960 and the State of South Carolina had recently acquired the lands on which sat the 18th century Fort Dorchester and the site of the colonial town established there in the late 1690s. The divers stretched a line across the river and ran a search pattern in the tannic stained waters. They hoped to find pilings from the 18th century bridge as well as cannon which had been reportedly jettisoned during the American Revolution.

Dr. Lawrence Lee, history professor at the Citadel, supervised a work

force on the banks comprised of inmates from the South Carolina State Penitentiary. They worked on clearing land and performing some excavation work as directed by Dr. Lee. The State had aspirations of establishing a new state park.

Reports of the outcome of the two-week diving expedition are sketchy but newspaper articles suggest that no cannon were discovered but a wheel, which may have come from a gun carriage, was salvaged. A possible cannon ramrod is reported.

By the mid-sixties, Dorchester was a newly established state park and SCUBA diving was becoming an endeavor embraced by a bold few. The earliest report of any divers searching for submerged antiquities was at Dorchester. An article in the Charleston newspaper



Pewter tankard recovered by Jim Batey



18th century onion bottle recovered by Drew Ruddy

dated September 1966, describes the recoveries of 18th century artifacts by the Amberjacks, a ten-member SCUBA club. Perhaps the most significant find of the era was made by Jim Batey of the Charleston Aqua Raiders SCUBA club when he recovered an intact 18th century pewter tankard. It had a hole in the side that naturally sparked imaginations to create a tale of a drunken tavern patron shooting the tankard with a flintlock pistol. The tankard was restored by Colonial Williamsburg where it is on display.

My lifelong diving partner, Steve Howard, and I met in our SCUBA certification course at the Charleston YMCA in 1967. We spent many hours of our earliest artifact hunting expeditions scouring the bottom of the Ashley River at Dorchester. Still one of my most exciting finds was the recovery of my first early 18th century onion bottle at this site about a year after my certification.

In 1973, the first SC

State underwater archaeologist, Alan Albright, came onboard and it was decided that the Dorchester waterfront should be closed to diving until an assessment could be made of the site's archaeological potential. In 1976, SCIAA conducted an underwater survey under the direction of Alan Albright and Ralph Wilbanks. It was decided that although a great deal of archaeological potential probably lay buried in the sediments of the Ashley, the site could be reopened to diving by the hobby diver.

Over the ensuing 45 years of friendship and diving, Steve Howard and I have recognized that hobby divers have made important discoveries that deserve to be recorded for the sake of future archaeologists, researchers and persons interested in the preservation of South Carolina heritage. For several years we have been

(Continued on page 7)

Recording the Beginnings (Continued from page 6)

working on the South Carolina Artifact Documentation Project. To date we have photographed about 30 collections of divers' recoveries ranging from fossils, Native American and historic materials.

In the past year, the South Carolina Artifact Documentation Project has worked with Dorchester State Historic Site archaeologist Larry James to try to recover information about the early diving and finds of this site where South Carolina artifact diving began. Having learned of a collection of 12 boxes of artifacts donated to the Charleston Museum by 1960's diver John Berg, we enlisted the help of SCIAA archaeologist Ashley Deming and archaeological

technician Carl Naylor. With the oversight of Charleston Museum archaeologist, Martha Zierden, we photographed and typed the artifact collection.

Steve and I also recognize that the personalities and stories of the divers themselves are an important part of South Carolina heritage. We have been conducting video interviews as an oral history documentation project. In the past months, archaeologist Larry James has interviewed Steve and me as early Dorchester divers. Ralph Wilbanks and Jim Reed were interviewed discussing the 1976 SCIAA underwater project. Larry also did an interview on the river with Billy Judd regarding the construction and usage of the crib docks

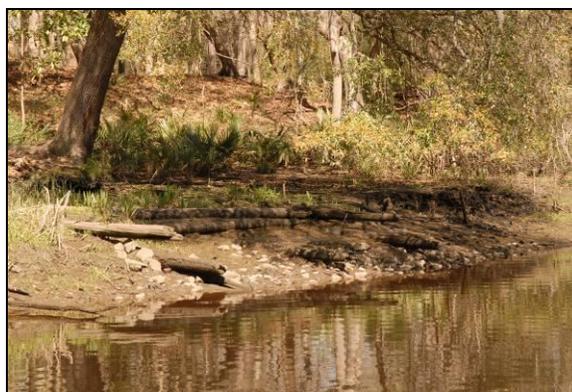
of colonial Dorchester.

The South Carolina Artifact Documentation Project wishes to assist the archaeologists in preserving the underwater heritage of the Dorchester Colonial Historic Site and in doing so, preserve stories of South Carolina's first artifact divers.

The South Carolina Artifact Documentation Project welcomes the

opportunity to photograph artifact collections and to conduct video interviews to record the stories of South Carolina heritage diving. If you are interested in participating in this project, please contact us.

Drew Ruddy
drewruddy@aol.com
 Steve Howard
sh7seas@aol.com ■



Colonial dock at Fort Dorchester

Wyboo Chert and Its Fossil Content: A Preliminary Note

By Robert C. Costello, USC Sumter, Hobby Diver #4563

It has become increasingly apparent over the past several years that a previously unrecognized, indigenous variety of chert was being utilized by ancient peoples of the Lake Marion area of SC. An initial report on this material was presented by

the author and Ken Steffy in 2011, who named the material Wyboo chert based upon a concentration and possible source (Cooke, 1936) in the Wyboo Creek area of Clarendon County, SC. This chert differs in several aspects from Black Mingo chert.

Black Mingo chert is briefly described as a highly silicified shell hash that was formed in "a mosaic of restricted shallow water fluvio-deltaic environments" (Nystrom & Willoughby, 1992) of the Late Paleocene Lang Syne Formation. Its quality varies from a silicified coquina to gem quality agate. A nearby source on Lake Marion is Sparkleberry Quarry (South Carolina State Site 38SU42) in Sumter County.

Wyboo chert also varies markedly in quality from a highly-eroded, low-density material to gem quality agate. Wyboo chert is

distinguished by the presence of a variety of marine deep-water Bryozoan fossils. It often has a mottled appearance due to regions of lesser-consolidated ground mass interspersed within the chert. Figure 1 shows two flakes and a denticulated core scraper of Wyboo chert collected near Hickory Top Landing on Lake Marion. Most currently documented Wyboo chert artifacts are of Middle Archaic age.

Efforts to classify and date Wyboo chert included a search for

(Continued on page 8)



Figure 1
Two flakes and a denticulated core scraper of Wyboo chert