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Hobcaw Barony Waterfront Cultural Continuum Project - Results from the Field

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Maritime Research Division

Hobcaw Barony Waterfront Cultural Continuum Project - Results from the Field

By James D. Spirek

Working in partnership with Dr. Karen Y. Smith, Director of the Applied Research Division (ARD), the Maritime Research Division (MRD) at SCIAA embarked on an underwater archaeological prospecting venture along the Winyah Bay waterfront of Hobcaw Barony near Georgetown (Figure 1). Our effort is one component of a larger collaborative endeavor by SCIAA, SCETV, and USC professor emeritus Leland Ferguson, under the auspices of the Belle W. Baruch Foundation, to document archaeological sites on the 16,000 acre preserve on the southern end of the Waccamaw Neck. Our underwater project objectives included locating prehistoric or historic sites eroding along the shoreline, a ferry landing, shipwrecks, and abandoned watercraft. As the Hobcaw landscape has historically been the site of intensive rice agricultural activities, we also expected to encounter associated infrastructure consisting of canals, rice fields, and vernacular watercraft, e.g., barges, pole boats, and dugout canoes (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Karen Smith manning the data acquisition station. (SCIAA photo)

Figure 2: Portion of 1821 Mill's Atlas of Georgetown District showing a number of plantations focused on rice agriculture along the Hobcaw Barony waterfront. (SCIAA graphic)

From 7-10 July, the MRD launched remote sensing operations consisting of a cesium magnetometer and side scan sonar towed along the adjacent waters of the Hobcaw Barony to locate sites, structures, and objects of historical or archaeological significance. The instruments detected a shipwreck and a number of magnetic and acoustic anomalies (Figure 3). The shipwreck measured approximately 120 feet (36.5 meters) in length and 26 feet (8 meters) in breadth with varying heights of structural relief off the bottom. The weak magnetic anomaly associated with the shipwreck suggested the remains of a wooden watercraft. We also visited a ruined rice mill next to a canal in which a rice barge was reportedly abandoned (Figure 4). Unfortunately, the barge was not visible, as it was buried under several feet of mud and reeds. Returning to the office, we post-processed the acquired electronic

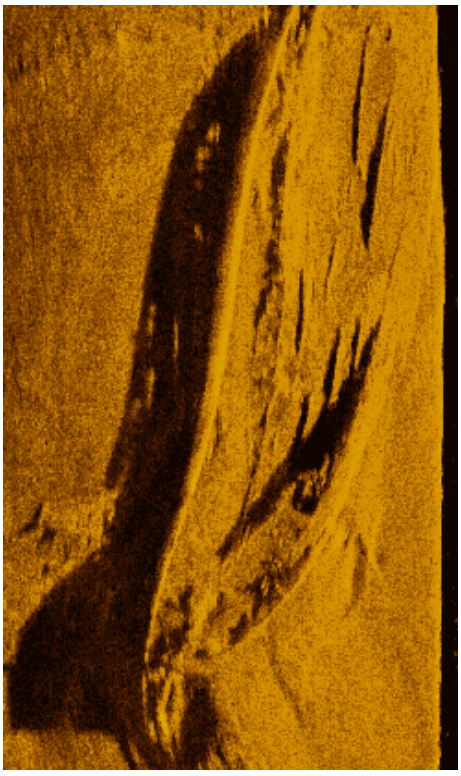

Figure 3: Sonogram of a shipwreck adjacent to Hobcaw Barony. (SCIAA graphic)

Figure 5: Iron fasteners protruding about 6-7 inches from the side of the wreck. (SCIAA photo)

Figure 4: Joseph Beatty, Karen Smith, and Keith Stephenson investigate ruins of a rice mill. (SCIAA photo)

data and then prioritized several magnetic and acoustic anomalies to identify their sources during the next phase of the project.

The MRD returned to the Hobcaw Barony waterfront from 11-15 August to ground-truth the shipwreck, prioritized anomalies, and to prospect along the shoreline for eroding terrestrial sites. For this phase of the project, volunteer divers Ted Churchill, Jimmy Armstrong, and Catherine Sawyer joined us. Our first two dives centered on investigating the presumed shipwreck lying off the Barony. In extremely turbid water, we groped our way around the wreck and found several sections of iron-fastened edge joined planks (Figure 5). Some of these sections lay collapsed on the bay floor, while others remained upright. Based on the joinery of the planks and absence of frames or deck beams, we tentatively identified the watercraft as a barge, empty of any cargo. At this time we are uncertain of the vessel's historical context, but certainly the site dates to no earlier than the late 19th century and most likely is of a later vintage. Diving along the shoreline at two sites, a reported ferry landing and an eroding prehistoric site, revealed a plethora of Native American ceramics, along with some historic pottery, including a quantity of bricks and cobblestones that suggested proximity to the landing (Figure 6). We also ground-truthed a number of magnetic and acoustic anomalies that were identified as remnants of tree trunks - masquerading as structures in the sonograms, or modern iron debris, including a cache of iron bolts and a large nut, and some one-inch diameter iron pipe (Figure 7).

Overall, our Hobcaw Barony work resulted in a solid archaeological prospecting venture that succeeded in locating several items of historical and archaeological interest. We intend to incorporate our findings into the overall archaeological record at Hobcaw Barony. During the project, we were joined and ably assisted by fellow SCIAA archaeologists Drs. Karen Smith and Keith Stephenson, Director of the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program, as well as freelance videographer and filmmaker Patrick Hayes, who was working in partnership with SCETV. Patrick and SCETV are creating an interactive website, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, that will feature video snippets of our work along with the efforts of other archaeologists and groups that are exploring the history and culture of Hobcaw Barony. We also want to thank Hampton Shuping, who had worked with former SCIAA and Coastal Carolina University archaeologist Jim Michie in the 1980s, and provided us with re-collections of diving in this area in support of Michie's search for remnants of the Spanish colonization effort led by Lucas Vasquez de Ayllon in 1526. The underwater archaeological project was generously supported and funded by a SCIAA Archaeological Research Trust Fund grant. We also want to extend a special acknowledgement to Bob Mimms, ART board member and proprietor of the Leitchfield Beach Fish House, who provided us with a nice dinner and a catered lunch. (***Please see pages 10-11 for further discussion on archaeology at Hobcaw***)

Figure 6: Ashley Deming, Keith Stephenson, and volunteer Cat Sawyer discuss ceramics found during a dive. Volunteer Jimmy Armstrong looks on in the background. (SCIAA photo)

Figure 7: Iron bolts and a nut found to be the source of one of the magnetic anomalies along the shoreline with Cat in the background. (SCIAA photo)