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## The 2013 Black River Project

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# The 2013 Black River Project

By Ashley M. Deming

For the first two weeks in August of 2013, the Maritime Research Division (MRD) and a number of volunteers conducted an archaeological survey of Black Mingo Creek and two potential ferryboats at Brown's Ferry Landing in Georgetown and Williamsburg Counties. The project sought to answer some questions regarding known and unknown historical sites in Black Mingo Creek and to record the two known vessels at a historic ferry landing. Our research included hobby diver reports, both oral and written, SCIAA staff recollections of past visitations and assessments as well as field notes, South Carolina State Site Files, and oral histories of local inhabitants in the area. We conducted this survey through remote sensing and diving operations using the help of many wonderful volunteers from the academic and sport diving community.

Week 1 focused solely on a stretch of Black Mingo Creek. This area ran from the mouth at the Black River up to where it became impossible to go any farther (roughly 13 miles upriver). We were lucky enough to be put up by two amazing hobby divers, Caroline and



Figure 2: Week 1 volunteers Bruce Orr and Cody James review the side scan sonar data on Black Mingo Creek. (SCIAA photo)

Bobby Woodward, who also shared their extensive knowledge and collections of artifacts and sites in the creek. Our other volunteers that week were hobby divers, Bruce Orr and Gus Dunlap, University of West Florida underwater archaeology

student Cody James, and Dr. Scott Harris and two students from the College of Charleston.

We used side scan sonar to try to locate known and unknown sites, but our equipment acted up, so we got straight onto the diving. We used location information from a variety of sources to choose our dive spots. Divers made recoveries of a small sample set of artifacts from each site to study, as well as to be used for museum exhibits and educational purposes. We found a variety of artifacts that speak to many different periods of occupation and use along and on Black Mingo Creek. These artifacts are consistent with our research of the extensive use of the creek throughout time.

We discovered several new sites, including two shipwreck sites and what we believe is a historic landing site that was used from at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Black Mingo Creek has a wealth of information, and we hope to conduct more survey there in the future.

Week 2 was spent at Brown's Ferry Landing locating and recording two

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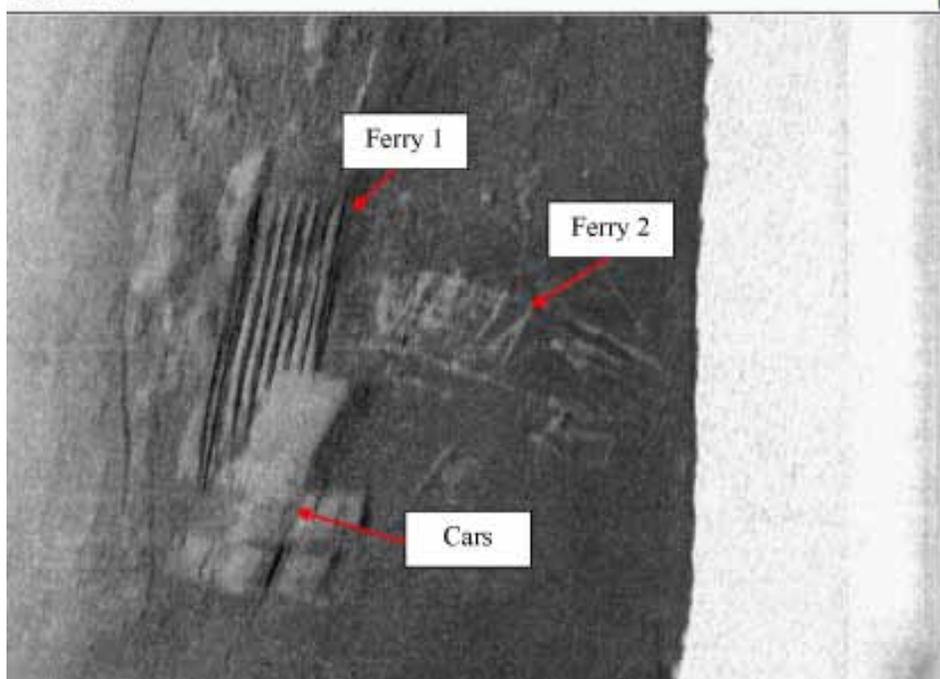


Figure 1: Side scan sonar image of the ferry site. (SCIAA map)

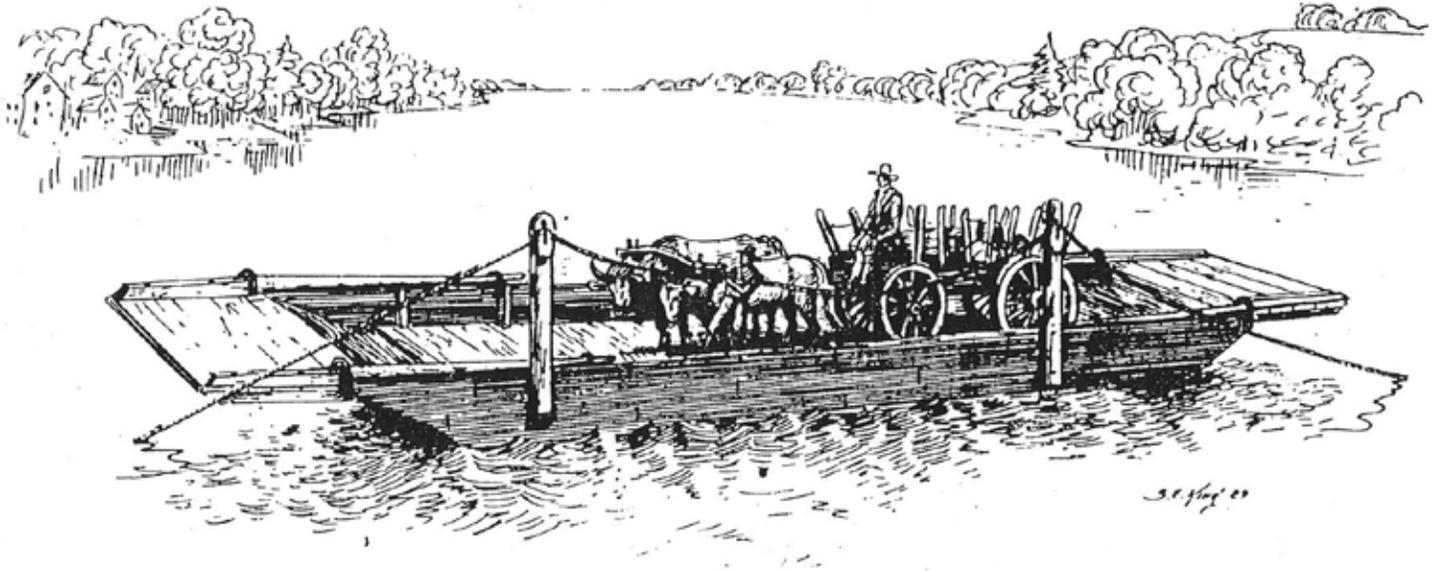


Figure 3: Illustration of an historic rope ferry.

vessels that are believed to be ferryboats. These vessels were noted by SCIAA staff when the Brown's Ferry Vessel (now in the Georgetown Rice Museum) was excavated and again in the 1980s and 1990s on brief surveys of the area. Besides knowing of the existence of these vessels, little had been done to study the vessels or the historic ferry landing.

The Week 2 team included MRD staff Jim Spirek, Ashley Deming, Carl Naylor, and Joe Beatty, as well as volunteers Nate Fulmer, Bruce Orr, Rick Presnell, Catherine Sawyer, and Jimmy Armstrong. We conducted side scan sonar to define the area and came up with an excellent picture of the site (Figure 1). The image shows both ferryboats, as well as what turned out to be three cars (one upside-down Buick, one Camero, and a truck).

The site was extremely disorienting, as the water was very dark with lots of particulates and a quick current. We spent at least one day becoming familiar with the sites before we began to record each one. Once we felt comfortable with our orientation, we laid a baseline on Ferry 2 to begin recording. In addition to the use of dive slates and measuring tapes, we also took many underwater photos and video to record the site.

We discovered that Ferry 2 had two disarticulated (unattached) stanchions with pulley wheels. This definitively made it a ferryboat. It seemed it was likely

a rope ferry based on the construction, which makes it one of the older style ferries at the location. More research on the construction will need to be pursued to define a time period for the vessel. While Ferry 1 is probably a ferry, we are still not certain. This vessel is missing many attributes that would indicate, for certain, it is a ferry. It does exhibit two stanchions, but there are no pulley assemblages remaining, if they existed at all. Both vessels are approximately 40 feet long and 15 feet wide.

This project was a huge success from the volunteer and community involvement to the research conducted. We hope to pursue future research in this area, as there is still much to learn about maritime heritage in the region. The new Georgetown County Museum in Georgetown will be host to many of the artifacts from this project once it officially opens. Many thanks to all of our volunteers and to the Archaeological Research Trust Board for awarding us the grant and making the project possible.



Figure 4: Week 2 Black River Project team: (left to right): Nate Fulmer, Joe Beatty, Catherine Sawyer, Carl Naylor, Jimmy Armstrong, and Jim Spirek. Not pictured: Ashley Deming, Bruce Orr, and Rick Presnell. (SCIAA photo)