7-1-1997

Flotsam and Jetsam - July 1997

South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology--University of South Carolina

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An archaeology canoe and kayaking trail has been established on the Ashley River from Bacon's Bridge downstream to Middleton Place. This approximately six-mile tidal float trip affords captivating views of historic shipwrecks, wharves, old river houses, and modern waterside homes. Wildlife is abundant, especially wading and shorebirds like egrets, herons, and wood ducks.

Bacon's Bridge, originally built by the colonial residents of Dorchester village is located at one end of the trail, and Charleston's famous Middleton Place is at the other end. The river is narrow and twisting with many overhangs. The tidal range is as much as four feet. Most of the wrecks are only visible at low tide. Paddling has to be planned around tides.

This section of the river played a significant role in Charleston's early history. In 1774, an English traveler described Dorchester as "a pretty good sized town, upon the Ashley River about 20 miles above Charles Town, and navigable all the way up to it...for vessels of 100 tons burthen." Bacon's Bridge represented the "head of sloop navigation," and steamboats traveled up to and beyond Cedar Grove which was situated opposite Middleton Place and slightly upriver. The navigable waters of the Ashley River allowed reaches of the river were probably a convenient location to scuttle boats that were unserviceable. Reported historical usage of this river for "hurricane holing" might also account for a high number of damaged and abandoned boats. Another possibility is the gradual abandonment of vessels that were no longer useful due to changing economic conditions along the Ashley River. For example, change occurred due to the failing economic viability of Dorchester town, decreasing agricultural potential of lands adjacent to the river, and finally the slump of the phosphate industry.

The architecture of the riverbank sites suggests that these shallow-draft, beamy boats were more practically utilized in an inland tidal context rather than offshore. It is possible that the tug was also used in the harbors, estuaries, and sounds of South Carolina. Sailing vessels and other tidecraft were probably towed by steamtugs. Archaeological evidence indicates that the majority of these wooden vessels date to the mid-19th century or onwards into the early 20th.
century. As this part of the Ashley River was a rich phosphate field during this time period, it is very likely that the vessels in the upper reaches had some association with this industry.

The Archaeological Canoe Trail also forms part of the South Carolina Heritage Corridor. The trail was created with the idea of integrating research with site management and public education. The maritime research, documentation of the wrecks, and design of the trail map was undertaken and funded by our SCIAA office with the volunteer help of Summerville residents, College of Charleston internship students, and a GIS specialist from the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. All the sites lie on the riverbanks or in the marsh and represent an integral part of waterway history of the area that is a frequently neglected part of the educational message.

The intent of the trail is to combine recreational opportunities with heritage tourism, and thereby boost the economy of the surrounding areas. It will represent a partnership between the state, private enterprise, and the local community. We envisage the trail as an opportunity to attract visitors primarily to the Summerville area. Old Dorchester State Park, many of the historic plantations on the Ashley River, and local canoe companies have expressed an interest in using this trail. We also anticipate including it as part of our state public education program during our annual South Carolina Archaeology Week in September and hope it will have similar utility for various Summerville cultural events.

Tour guides, who will include local outfitters and SCIAA and State Parks staff, will talk about the shipwrecks, their context within the maritime history of the state, and the abundant wildlife on the river. The inaugural paddle will be offered on the morning of July 26, 1997, leaving from Old Dorchester State Park at 8:30 AM. Please call Poll Knowland, weekday mornings between 11:00 to 12:00 AM, or leave a message at (803) 873-1740, for registration or more information.

The South Carolina Hunley Commission has announced that it is moving ahead with plans to raise the submarine H. L. Hunley. Fundraising efforts officially kicked off at the first “Raise The Hunley” gala, held at Charleston Place Hotel last April. The black tie event was well attended and included Mary Wood Beasley, Honorary Chairperson, and Cliff Robertson, who acted as Master of Ceremonies, as well as Commission members, reenactors, and the interested public. Bruce Rippeteau, Jonathan Leader, and myself represented the SCIAA and USC.
Underwater Archaeology On The Dry Side
By Dee Boehme

I have always loved archaeology. I was fortunate enough to grow up in a household of readers and to have a father who was a member of several book clubs. This meant that we had lots of books around, including many large, beautifully-illustrated volumes on archaeology. What child wouldn’t be fascinated with pictures of delicate jewelry from Troy, gold masks from Greece, vine-draped temples in Asia, large-eyed statues from Mesopotamia, and a fragile wreath of flowers laid on a boy king’s coffin in Egypt? It seemed to me that being an archaeologist and traveling all over the world would be wonderful. If the books were not enough to give that impression, there was always National Geographic, and like most families in the 1950s and 1960s, we gathered around the TV to watch specials on Jerusalem, Abu Simbel, and Knossos. My mother never missed Jacques Cousteau telling us about our rich heritage found on seafloors throughout the world.

As I grew older I became busy with school, and although I never lost interest in archaeology, it was not encouraged as a “practical” career consideration. Marriage and raising a daughter and assorted pets took priority, and so it went until something momentous happened—my husband took diving lessons!

Suddenly there were bottles, whole and broken, competing with books for shelf space. There were bits and pieces of pottery and ceramics everywhere I looked. The bathroom became a conservation lab, and then there were the buckets. Buckets full of soaking artifacts on the front porch, on the back patio, in the garage, and even in the living room! My husband began to get a look of crazed lust every time he spotted a boat and proceeded to assess each as a potential dive boat. My daughter and I were clearly in a situation of catch the wave or be sucked under with the undertow. So we volunteered.

It was gradual at first—things like “mind the boat while we go diving,” or “bring lunch to the landing while we work this project,” or “help me put in a display at the library.” I expected to have very little real involvement because after all this was underwater archaeology, and I don’t dive. But it turns out that there is a great deal of “underwater” archaeology that can be done by the non-diver. You can even take the same field school training that the divers do.

When SCIAA works on underwater sites, there are many things that can be done, such as prepare slates and equipment, mark and bag artifacts, record information, and man the camera. It is important to recognize that for every hour spent diving, there are many more hours spent cataloging, recording, researching, and reporting information. All of these activities need volunteer help. There are also
opportunities to get your hands dirty on sites that are exposed at low tide, such as some of the wrecks on the Ashley River or on sites like Pritchard’s Shipyard that are on the shore. You can measure timbers, sift for artifacts with screens, map and draw sites, and generally put whatever talents you have to good use and maybe even discover a few that you never knew you had.

The following are some of the types of volunteer jobs in which my daughter and I have taken part. It doesn’t include everything, but it will serve to give you an idea of the variety of things that volunteers can accomplish.

1. File paperwork at the SCIAA field office.
2. Take slides and photos at project sites and workshops.
3. Sort artifacts collected by a diver by type and number.
5. Prepare underwater slates for use in the CSS Hunley project.
6. Assist in field school training sessions.
7. Carry equipment and help set it up.
8. Take measurements on Ashley River wrecks and record them in the field notebook.
9. Convert measurements taken on the Ashley River wrecks from field notes to scale drawings and then ink them in on mylar.
10. Sort and organize maps at the field office.
11. Sift, bag, and label artifacts recovered at Pritchard’s Shipyard site in Mt. Pleasant.
12. Sort and wash artifacts found at the Pritchard site.
13. Organize and staple handouts for workshops.
14. Assist in shovel tests at the Pritchard site.
15. Help lay out desktop publications at SCIAA office.
16. Photograph or draw artifacts.
17. Help take transit readings.
18. Assist SCIAA staff at Archaeology Field Day and at other events where SCIAA presents a display.
19. Put up exhibits at libraries and museums.
20. Prepare food for conference banquets.

While attending an underwater archaeology conference, I picked up a newsletter with an article inviting volunteers to contact the State Parks archaeologist, saying that although I may have only traveled counties instead of countries away from home in the pursuit of archaeology, I still think it’s every bit the wonderful job that I imagined it to be as a child. So whether you like your archaeology on the wet side or on the dry side, I would highly recommend that you volunteer. You can get in touch with Lynn Harris or Carl Naylor at the SCIAA Field Office at 762-6105 for more information.

Let me conclude by Legacy, Vol. 2, No. 2, July 1997
North Carolina Maritime Conference

By Carl Naylor

Several SCIAA Underwater Archaeology Division staff members traveled to the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort, North Carolina, in April to give talks at the 1997 North Carolina Underwater Maritime Conference. The staff members were Jim Spirek, Lynn Harris, and Carl Naylor. Accompanying the staff members were Doug and Dee Boehme of Summerville, who also gave talks at the conference.

Jim Spirek, an underwater archaeologist with the Underwater Archaeology Division, told the group about his upcoming project in the Port Royal Sound. The project will include a remote sensing survey of the sound. Anomalies discovered during survey will be inspected and recorded by divers. In addition, visual inspections of maritime shoreline features will be conducted. See future issues of Legacy, for more on this exciting project.

Lynn Harris, head of the Sport Diver Archaeological Management Program (SDAMP), discussed the public education and research aspect of the program. Since 1990, SDAMP has offered underwater archaeology field training courses and continuing education workshops to divers and non-divers. Harris reviewed the various aspects of these courses and workshops and how well they were succeeding in meeting the program’s research and management goals.

As an archaeological assistant with SDAMP, I discussed the program’s Hobby Diver License Program. In 1973, South Carolina began issuing licenses to sport divers for the recovery of artifacts and fossils from the state’s waters. Since then more than 3,500 licenses have been issued. I discussed how this program has benefited the state as well as the licensed divers.

Doug Boehme, a sport diver and Research Affiliate at SCIAA, gave a presentation on the Helen B. project. In July 1996, Doug discovered a large wooden vessel embedded in the bank of the Wando River, several miles upstream from Charleston Harbor. Doug, along with a group of dedicated sport divers, is currently conducting an investigation of the wreck under the guidance of SCIAA. Doug told the group about the methods being used to excavate the vessel, the history of the immediate area, and speculated on the identity and use of the vessel.

Dee Boehme, a non-diving volunteer on many of SCIAA’s underwater projects, gave a talk on the many opportunities for non-diver involvement in underwater archaeology. She described how non-diving volunteers work on shipwrecks that are on riverbanks or exposed at low tide, assist on the terrestrial components of underwater sites, and get involved in the documentation process through drawing, research, and photography.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Legacy, Vol. 2, No. 1, March 1997, had three photographs mislabeled on page 21. These are the correct captions.

Figure 4: Baked clay objects. (Photo by Doug Boehme)

Figure 5: Full-grooved axe. (Photo by Doug Boehme)

Figure 6: Southern Notched Ovate bannerstone. (Photo by Doug Boehme)
Schedule of Events for Sport Divers
By Lynn Harris and Carl Naylor

“Sight on This” Workshop at Old Dorchester State Park in Summerville (Saturday, July 19)

Learn how to use a transit, lay survey lines, dig test pits, and excavate archaeological units. This workshop will require active participation. The integral historical link between the land and the water will be a significant theme. The importance of combining terrestrial and underwater fieldwork and survey methodologies will be explained in the context of Fort Dorchester’s location on the Ashley River. Cost is $10. Send a $5 deposit to SCIAA at P.O. Box 12448, Charleston, SC 29422. The remainder of the fee should be paid to the State Park on arrival. Contact Monica Beck at (803) 873-1740 or 873-7475, for further information.

Ashley River Canoeing and Kayaking Shipwreck Trail (Saturday, July 26)

Paddle the Ashley River and learn about the maritime history of the area represented by shipwrecks embedded in the riverbanks. Tour guides will discuss a variety of diverse topics such as the vernacular boat construction techniques, shipwreck disposal patterns, trade, industry and settlements along the river. Total cost to be determined based upon availability of canoes. Send a $5 deposit to SCIAA at P.O. Box 12448, Charleston, SC 29422. For more information, contact Lynn Harris or Carl Naylor at (803) 762-6105.

South Carolina Archaeology Week (September 27 to October 4)

Archaeology events will be held state-wide. Contact Nena Powell Rice for further information and a Calendar of Events at (803) 777-8170. (See page 32 in this issue of Legacy.)

“Going all the Way, the Right Way: Official Methods for Reporting a New Shipwreck Site,” Workshop in Charleston (Saturday, October 11)

Spend a few hours in the morning discussing the procedures and requirements for reporting a shipwreck site to the SCIAA Information Management Division. This will be followed by a boat trip out to some old wrecks lying on the beach at Snake Island on the Stono River to practice these methods. Divers and non-divers are welcome. Cost is $10. Send a $5 deposit to SCIAA at P.O. Box 12448, Charleston, SC 29422. For more information, contact Lynn Harris or Carl Naylor at (803) 762-6105.

Conference in Underwater Archaeology in Atlanta (January 7-10, 1998)

This annual conference will feature presentations and workshops offered by underwater archaeologists from all around the US and many other nations. We are considering a session on public participation in underwater archaeology and would like a few advanced FTC (Field Training Course) students to consider giving 10-minute papers. For more information, contact Lynn Harris or Carl Naylor at (803) 762-6105.

Lynn Harris standing behind a shipwreck on the Ashley River Archaeological Canoe Trail. (SCIAA photo)