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AN ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF
AN AREA OF FORT JOHNSON

by

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AN ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF
AN AREA OF FORT JOHNSON

The Marine Resources Division of the South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Department is planning a large building to be located to the south of the present Laboratory Building on the site of historic Fort Johnson. In order to determine whether any historical values will be affected by the construction an archeological project was undertaken to explore the site of the proposed building. Stanley South, Archeologist with the Institute of Archeology and Anthropology at the University of South Carolina was in charge of the expedition, assisted by three members of the Institute staff, David Miller, David Mullis, and Travis Bianchi. The crew consisted of eight students from The College of Charleston, Charleston Baptist College, and the University of South Carolina, James Bigalow, Foster Folsom, Alan DeLoach, Leonard Henry, Leroy Humpheries, Alan Hinnant, Joe Jay and Belton Zeigler.

Valuable Logistic and research assistance was provided by Mr. W. J. Keith of the Wildlife and Marine Resources Department, and cooperative assistance in setting up camp was provided by Mr. Otis Martin of the Wildlife Department. The project began on May 21, and was completed on June 1, 1973, and was carried out (with the same personnel) in conjunction with a similar project on the College of Charleston property adjoining the property of the Wildlife and Marine Resources Department.

The historic documents, maps, etc., dealing with this particular area of the Fort Johnson site did not reveal any structures other than a tabby wall to the west of the area under consideration. This wall fragment is seen on several maps, and is surviving today as a tabby

wall with a sloping face, that appears to have been capped at a later time than construction with additional tabby containing a high percentage of brick fragments. This tabby wall is thought to be the remains of an eighteenth century fort, probably the 1759 Fort Johnson. There was a chance, therefore, that to the south of this wall there would be located some structure not shown on the various maps, and for this reason it was thought advisable to cut exploratory trenches in the area to explore for possible undocumented ruins. Another factor here was a watercolor drawing made in 1865, that reveals that this area was a low marshy area at that time. This fact gave rise to the suspicion that the same situation may well have prevailed in the eighteenth century, making this area an extremely unlikely one for occupation during the various periods of use of the Fort Johnson Site.

The approach to the examination of the site was to begin a trench in line with the southeast side of the Wildlife Laboratory building, and a distance of fifty feet from it, extending fifty feet toward the southwest. The three foot wide trench was then crossed at a right angle by a five foot wide trench 110 feet long, with 47 feet extending toward the northwest, and 60 feet toward the southeast. This cross trench revealed recent ditch disturbances in the northwest end, and an old road bed crossing the southeast end at almost a right angle. The three foot wide, generally north-south trench was excavated to a two foot depth, as was the east end of the east-west trench for fifteen feet from the north-south trench. This deeper level revealed three ditches running generally parallel with the east-west trench. The profiles of this trench revealed a dark humus

layer (III), overlying a darker humus filled layer (IIIa), both representing an old marshy area, and containing organic matter to the extent that there was a disagreeable odor from the gases produced by the decay of organic matter. This old marsh area was apparently that shown on the 1865 watercolor of the area.

The ditches could represent drainage ditches toward the low ground of the marsh to the west, or possibly may have been palisade ditches. This latter interpretation was somewhat unlikely since no sign of individual postmolds or posts were remaining in the ditch, which would likely have been the case in such a wet area had posts been present originally. However, to check this possibility a backhoe was used to cut three trenches to the east of the north-south trench in an attempt to locate the ditches here. Only the closest backhoe cut revealed what appeared to be the bottom of one of the ditches, while the others showed no sign of the ditches intruding into compact sandy subsoil beneath the humus layer. This tended to support the interpretation that these ditches were of relatively short length, and that they were likely cut to afford drainage of the higher ground into the head of the low marshy ground represented by layer IIIa. In one of the backhoe cuts two fragments of an eighteenth century white salt-glazed stoneware mug were found, as well as a fragment of mid-nineteenth century transfer printed ware.

Further toward the south from the area of the cross-trench a five by fifty-seven foot trench was cut (CH69-3), revealing ditches from a septic tank drain field in the north half. A ten foot section at the south end of this trench revealed the same sequence of layers in the

profile as seen in the area of the cross-trench. Fifty feet further toward the south, in the open area leading to the Marshland House (?) a 5 by 10 foot trench was cut to a depth of 3½ feet, but extensive disturbance had been caused here by the removal of trees when the Marshland House was moved from a barge to its present location.

With this extensive testing of this area carried out it appeared that there was no evidence that would indicate any extensive occupation had occurred in this section of the site, and that construction of a building here would not damage archeological ruins.

Across the access road toward the east from this site, to the west of the water tank tower, a series of individual dwelling units are planned for construction. Exploratory trenches were cut here in the grassy field using both hand labor and the backhoe, but no evidence of ruins or extensive occupation was found. At a depth of two feet the water table was seen to flood into the excavation trenches. The Civil War period earthworks near the house at the water tower appears to be the primary historic ruin of concern here, and even this is not very well defined at this point. Even if construction is carried out on the elevation that was once an earthen fortification, this should pose no major damage to the configuration of the works unless considerable bulldozing was carried out in the process. It appears, therefore, from an examination of the site, the documents, and the ground that there should be no major historic ruin damaged by the construction of the individual dwelling units in this area.

Near the entrance gate to the property, on the south side of the road, the Wildlife and Marine Resources Department is planning a Food

and Technology Building. A visit was made to this site and the area was probed to determine if any possible historical values might be damaged by the construction of this building. From this survey there appeared to be no reason why construction could not proceed on this site.