South Carolina State Parks

ARCHNEWS

SOUTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS ARCHAEOLOGY NEWSLETTER

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Charles Towne Landing Archaeology Update

Inside this issue:

Upcoming Events

- **Archaeology Day**, Charles Towne Landing, October 10, 2009, 10.00 am-5.00 pm.
- **American Indian Expo**, Charles Towne Landing, November 7, 2009, 9.00 am-4.00 pm.

In November 2008, we closed and backfilled our primary research site on the Albemarle point. Our research and lab results have led us to believe that we have located a crop garden dating back to 1670s.

Earliest signs of this crop garden revealed themselves as multiple rows of circular stains in the soil (Fig. 1). Soil samples taken from these circular features were full of sugar cane residue (for a detailed discussion of soil sampling techniques, see page 7). Careful excavation and analysis of the lab results showed that these stains were indeed the remnants of sugar cane plantings.

Perpendicular to these plantings, our archaeologists found three parallel trenches. The alluvial layering of the sediments inside these trenches suggested that they were exposed to water. Soil samples from the same deposits showed abundance of plants and weeds which would thrive in wet conditions with constant water flow. It is possible that the colonists dug these trenches as drainage ditches in order to prepare the land for agriculture.

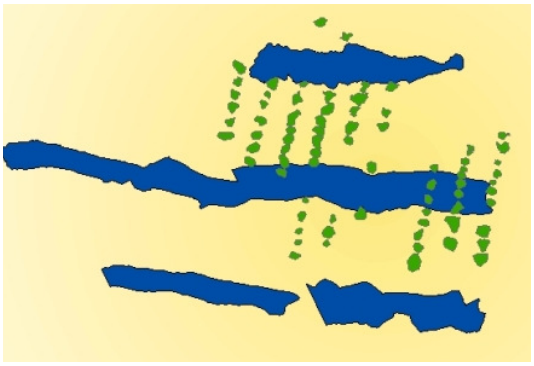


Fig. 1. Drainage ditches (in blue) and sugar cane plantings (in green).

Another noteworthy area to the southeast of our site showed similarities to a very thin midden. Sugar cane phytoliths were found in abundance in this feature. In addition, infrared analysis on the soil showed traces of cow or bison blood. Could this have been a food processing area?

We know from the ship's supply list that the settlers brought sugar cane with them to South Carolina. What surprised us was the identification of several different varieties of sugarcane in our soil samples. This may be the area where the settlers first planted an experimental crop of sugar cane while they tried to pick a cash crop for the new colony. It is possible that they were trying to determine which variety was better suited for the climate and the soils. ■

Colonial Dorchester Archaeology Update

Our primary objective at Colonial Dorchester State Historic Site is to rediscover the town of Dorchester, which thrived on the upper Ashley River from 1697 through the Revolutionary War nearly a century later.

Year-round digging and surveying is giving archaeologists a better understanding of the archaeological record by finding artifact concentrations and site boundaries of the town, all of which help provide us with a "window" into the past.

With more than 3,000 shovel tests to complete, these 50 cm wide tests are helping archeologists interpret the history and importance of this site (Fig. 1). The precise grid system used at the park allows us to record the exact location of each artifact found.

Once catalogued, these artifacts will be entered into a data base and used to generate a map highlighting areas that are "hot spots" with higher levels of artifact concentration (Fig. 2).

These shovel test units are large enough to allow archaeologists to see features and stains that may represent post holes, builder's trenches, privies and even trash middens. Each stain noted will have to be studied and analyzed as we continue to interpret the site.

Fig. 1. A shovel test at Colonial Dorchester.

The public is welcome to observe the archaeologist at work at Colonial Dorchester State Historic Site on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The park is located at 300 State Park Road on the Ashley River in Summerville. The e-mail address is colonialdorchester@scprt.com. The phone number is 843-873-7475. On the Web, the park is at www.SouthCarolinaParks.com. ■

Fig. 2. Map showing artifact concentrations at Colonial Dorchester.

Meet an Archaeologist

David Jones

"What would you like to have with you on a stranded island?" we asked David Jones. "A unit to excavate," he replied promptly, impressing us with his dedication to his job. David started his journey down the dirty path of archaeology twenty-five years ago and has worked with the South Carolina State Park Service for almost nine years.

While he now conducts a wide variety of differing archaeological projects, David's focus prior to joining State Parks was cemetery excavations and biological anthropology. He earned his Master's degree from the University of Tennessee, home to the Forensic Anthropology Center known as the "Body Farm" where anthropologists observe the decomposition of human bodies in different settings. By recreating various environmental conditions in which human bodies may be found, scientists hope to learn more about the process of decomposition. The bodies at the Forensic Anthropology Center are provided through a unique body donation program.

"Dead people generally tend not to bother you. And they're never in a hurry."

"Dead people generally tend not to bother you. And they're never in a hurry," says Jones as he contemplates the things that led him into the field. "I had a biology background, and really like being off the beaten path with people that know how to have fun doing serious work. The anthropology of death seemed like a natural fit. It has been interesting charting the evolution of burial practices. This includes prehistoric burials along the North Carolina coast as well as African and European burials in what we today call America."

For example, Jones says that today Christians are buried on their backs with the head pointed toward the west. "This is so we can see Jesus when he returns from the east to render judgment." He also says that Christians bury a husband and wife so that they are side by side in the same position they were in when standing at the altar on their wedding day, that is, with the wife to the left of the husband.

After graduation, David worked for several different Cultural Resource Management projects including cemetery surveys. Although not much of his current work corresponds with his prior interests in burial practices, Jones works as enthusiastically as ever in his field. His current position enables him to travel across the state, coordinate digs at state parks, and be the voice of archaeology in the resource management department. Thanks to his efforts, archaeology is still an important part of historic preservation at South Carolina state parks. ■

Site Spotlight

Slave Quarter Excavations at Redcliffe Plantation

by Andrew Agha

Excavations at Redcliffe State Historic Site were conducted during fall 2003 through early spring 2004. The purpose of this dig was to positively locate the corners of the two slave cabins that no longer remain out of the four that once housed the enslaved at Redcliffe (Fig. 1). These cabins were originally built in the late 1850s, and were housed by enslaved African descendents for only a few years before Emancipation. James Henry Hammond established Redcliffe as a "model plantation," and he grew experimental vegetables few planters were growing at the time. The cabins were situated in a U-shape, so that they enclosed a central workyard between them and the manor house. The two cabins standing today are completely different from each other due to changes from the twentieth century. One of the cabins was converted during John Shaw Billings' tenure into a garage. In doing so, the central chimney and dividing wall of the duplex were torn out, and a new, smaller room was added inside to house the driver. The other cabin remained almost true to form, as its chimney was rebuilt, along with the brick piers it sat on. This cabin was renovated for Billings' house servants, in which they lived until the 1950s.

Since we had an original cabin to base our hunt for the corners from, along with detailed drawings by Hammond's son from the 1870s, our search for the corners of the past cabins should have been relatively easy. We quickly learned this was not the case, as all brick piers of the former buildings were removed during the twentieth century. Only obscure soil stains remained to mark their past positions. The house closest to the house that we attempted to find was converted into a kitchen

Fig. 1: David Jones and Andrew Agha, looking for the missing cabins

before 1900. This cabin produced a large amount of artifacts related mostly to the kitchen, although some of the artifacts may relate to the enslaved. Because artifacts related to both kitchens and slave cabins were the same (ceramics, glass, nails, window glass, buttons, utensils, etc.), we had to look at other kinds of artifacts that might relate more to life in the home, versus activity in the kitchen. We recovered intact features at this cabin/kitchen, including a trash pit and a posthole stain (Fig. 2). I interpreted this post to be the original corner of the slave cabin, as it fell within a few inches of being the exact distance from the corner of the garage/cabin, as seen on the sketch plan made by Hammond's son. This raised the question: If the whitewashed cabin standing today is on brick piers, were these cabins on brick piers in the 1850s? This question alone raises the need to conduct more excavations not only at this kitchen, but at the other lost cabin.

The other cabin had been used for farm storage until it collapsed in the early 1930s. We found

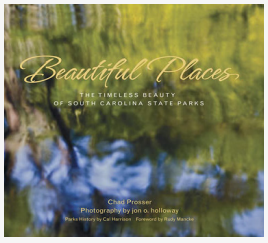
artifacts related to the early twentieth century, and this period of storage. We did not identify the kinds of features uncovered at the kitchen/cabin, but instead found very faint soil stains where the brick piers once sat. It appeared that when Billings cleaned this structure up and removed it, he had

Fig. 2: Original posthole stain from the kitchen/cabin.

the chimney and piers removed also. More excavations here would still be important , because this cabin was only used as a house up to the end of the nineteenth century. Denoting what artifacts related to the daily lives of the inhabitants of this house would be easier than at the kitchen/cabin. Therefore, more excavations are needed not only to uncover more of the house, but to recover more material culture of the past slaves and tenants.

Although we technically know the exact positions of the two missing cabins, further excavations at Redcliffe are needed now more than ever. Focusing on the post-Emancipation African American past is extremely important to furthering our understanding of culture, society, and life. At Redcliffe, the Historical Archaeologist has the opportunity to investigate how Reconstruction, the tenant/sharecropper period, the Jim Crow era, and the Great Depression influenced the lives of the African Americans that lived on as laborers, house servants, cooks, and groundskeepers. These are situations in American history that are rarely investigated through archaeology, especially on sites once inhabited by African Americans. This research is needed, and would be a worthy contribution to our understanding of early twentieth century South Carolina.

Also needed is a critical investigation of the changing landscape of Redcliffe. Since landscapes are constructs of physical and cognitive elements, the historical archaeologist working at Redcliffe will have the opportunity to see the changes made at Redcliffe since the 1850s, and then interpret the reasons behind these changes. Today, the changes made to the plantation from the 1930s-1950s could be seen as detractions from the plantation's original context and vision. However, those same changes are parts of how Redcliffe changed as a landscape, with the people living there making the place fit for themselves. So, archaeological investigations into the alterations and additions across the Redcliffe landscape will provide a clear picture of not just how the plantation changed through time physically, but why the past residents chose to do what they did. All of this new research will provide an expanded and more enriching picture of Redcliffe Plantation through all decades of its existence. ■



NOW AVAILABLE!

Beautiful Places: The Timeless Beauty of South Carolina State Parks

by Chad Prosser, photography by Jon O. Holloway

As featured in Southern Living Magazine, this stunning photography book showcases all 47 state parks and includes a brief history on the South Carolina State Park Service. Proceeds from the book go directly back to park improvements.

For more information, and to buy the book, please visit

http://www.beautifulplacesalliance.org/

Featured Article

Hollywood Archaeology

by Cicek Beeby

It can be stated, with certain confidence, that archaeologists have a love-hate relationship with movies that deal with archaeology. Time and time again, my husband, who is also an archaeologist, and I find ourselves watching some tacky sci-fi movie featuring archaeologists, artifacts, and dusty landscapes. Many of these movies have a similar story line. Scenario A: The main girl and the main guy (one of whom is an archaeologist) go after an invaluable artifact while fighting bad guys. Scenario B: The main girl and the main guy excavate a site and inadvertently unleash an evil curse. Scenario C: The main girl and the main guy dig each other while some archaeology happens in the background.

Although I usually end up screaming in frustration and disbelief, it is hard for me to pass up an archaeology movie. My interest in "Hollywood Archaeology" is partly a curiosity about how the producers and writers will portray archaeologists *this time*. Needless to say, professional archaeologists worry about their image in popular culture. We are not equipped with bullwhips, and our female crew members do not tie their khaki shirts above their waist. Every now and then, we are asked if we find gold. The answer is no. As a matter of fact, I did work at a site where a gold coin was found (when I wasn't there, of course), but I imagine this is as close as I will ever get to gold. It seems like it is easy to romanticize the pursuits of archaeologists, imagine them dodging darts, diving for lost cities, or hanging from vines. In reality, most of our time is spent in labs, washing artifacts or writing reports. Our most exciting find can be a 2-inch piece of a broken pot. I suppose *Tomb Raider* wouldn't be the stellar movie that it is, if Lara Croft paused to fill out paperwork every once in a while.

Even though archaeology and ancient cultures were a Hollywood favorite since the 1930s –starting with the 1932 film *The Mummy*-, it wasn't until the arrival of Indiana Jones in 1981 that the stereotypical image of an archaeologist was firmly established in popular culture. This rugged adventurer who travels the world in search of treasure, battles evil Nazis, and saves people from being sacrificed to ancient gods became an instant icon. It is now an unspoken expectation that archaeologists dress in the fashion of Indy, at least sport a stylish hat, if not a fedora. Indy's iconic leather jacket and fedora are on display at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. In a 2008 survey by 20th Century Fox, Indiana Jones' bullwhip finished third on the "Top 10 Favorite Movie Weapons" list, just behind the Jedi lightsaber and Dirty Harry's Magnum. Equipment and accessories aside, the most crucial weapon Indiana Jones possesses is his infinite knowledge of everything ancient. While small-time archaeologists like me are bound by the limitations of "expertise", Dr. Jones can identify any artifact from any period and culture. He knows every ancient city on the face of the planet, he can draw obsolete artifacts from memory, and he is fluent in hieroglyphs, Latin, Chinese, and Hindi as well as Quechua. If only he also spoke Hovitos...

It is clear that the moviegoers love the Indiana Jones series, but what do the real archaeologists think about them? There seems to be two fronts on this issue. On one hand, we have a generation who was inspired by these movies and rushed to the anthropology or archaeology department of the nearest college. Even though they figured out what archaeology *really* is along the way, they remember Indy as a "childhood hero". On the other hand, there is a group of professionals who were outraged by the reckless methods of Dr. Jones. He focuses on the "treasure" with little or no regard to the less valuable art or architecture surrounding it, snatches artifacts out of their contexts, usually destroys everything

within the 1-mile radius in the process, and, needless to say, has a tendency to carry off the treasures to the country of his choosing. Some think that idolizing such a character encourages looting and improper excavation techniques.

The controversy was rekindled when Harrison Ford was elected to the Board of Directors of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) on the eve of the premiere of the new Indiana Jones movie. The AIA is a respected 130-year-old academic institution whose members include almost every archaeology professor in North America. In addition to his new position on the board, the AIA recently honored Ford with the Bandelier Award for "raising public awareness of archaeology through his on-screen work in the Indiana Jones film series". These events sparked protests form several archaeologists, including Dr. Oscar Muscarella, a former curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who said "…the AIA President has made a serious and very unfortunate blunder. He has publicly proclaimed that he has no idea what archaeology is." The AIA president, Dr. Brian Rose, happens to be a prominent figure in Mediterranean archaeology and a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Muscarella's *alma mater*.

Can a fictional character really cause so much harm to an academic discipline, or can some good come out of this publicity? Public interest in archaeology is always a factor in funding, especially for institutions like museums and historic sites where budgets are driven by visitation. Archaeology is usually put on the back burner and deemed "uncritical" and "not self-sustaining". If the public expresses an interest in the future of archaeological research and support their local institutions, it could mean a lot for many archaeology departments. A celebrity spokesperson like Harrison Ford could make a difference if he took the time to appear in fundraisers, invite the public to support archaeological research, and educate people about the damage caused by illegal excavations. Hopefully he will live up to these expectations. ■

Tools of the Trade

Soil Sampling and Phytoliths

Archaeology has come a long way since the antiquarians of the 19th century. Today, soil analysis can be considered one of the new frontiers of scientific archaeology. When archaeological features generate more questions than answers, soil samples can point the excavators in the right direction.

Extracting samples from a dig site is meticulous and painstaking work. To avoid contamination from outside elements, archaeologists wear gloves, use sterile tools, and wait for calm and dry weather. The samples are later analyzed in labs for traces of pollen and phytoliths.

Sugar cane planting feature, uncovered at Charles Towne Landing State Historic Site.

Phytolith literally means "plant stone" in Ancient Greek. It is a type of plant cell containing silica or calcium. These rigid cells are preserved in the soil long after the plant itself has completely decomposed. Thanks to their rigidity, they provide structure and support to the plant. Some give plants a grainy or prickly texture, thereby providing some protection against predators. Just like fingerprints, the phytoliths of a plant are unique and can help specialists identify the plant.

Phytoliths can provide evidence plants that point to environmental conditions at a given time on a site. With the help of science, historic landscapes can now be reconstructed with more accuracy. ■

Digs Around the World

Nefertiti was the wife of the powerful Egyptian pharaoh, Akhenaten.

- Remains of a previously unknown 4,300-year-old pyramid were discovered in the Egyptian desert under 23 feet of sand. It is believed that the pyramid once belonged to Queen Sesheshet of the 6th dynasty. Archaeologists believe that the pyramid was looted in the past.

  http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2008/11/081111-new-pyramid-egypt.html

- Archaeologists in Port Angeles, WA are planning to employ canine units to find buried human remains older than 100 years. These specially trained dogs sit at the spot where they can smell old graves.

  http://www.peninsuladailynews.com/article/20090712/news/307129989

- A Florida couple shipped back some artifacts they "borrowed" from an archaeological site in Israel. An attached letter had directions to where they found the pieces. Officials stated that they will not press charges.

  http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/132460

- Is the famous Nefertiti bust a fake? Swiss art historian Henri Stierlin's recent study claims that the famous likeness is just a copy dating from 1912. Egyptian authorities are claiming that the allegations are unfounded.

  http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/arts_and_culture/8038097.stm

Archaeology Facts

Restored Native American pottery from Charles Towne Landing

In this section we will try to answer some frequently asked questions about archaeology.

Q: Do you ever find complete pots?

A: Recovering a complete pot from an archaeological site is actually a rare occurrence. In most cases, we find them in fragments. Once a pot is broken, it is extremely easy for the fragments to scatter around and be forever lost to archaeologists. This is especially the case in occupation levels or domestic quarters. Pottery sherds from burial sites, such as the Native American ceremonial center at Charles Towne Landing, stand a better chance of staying close to each other. If we are lucky, some of these pottery sherds can be mended to form a partial, or even a complete pot. Archaeologists and conservators use special techniques and glues to restore pottery while keeping in mind that all the restorations should be reversible. ■