

Alabama Archaeological Society

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STONES & BONES NEWSLETTER

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I apologize for the lateness of the January STONES & BONES: we are experiencing the inevitable delays and glitches involved in the transition to a new editor. With the February issue we will be back on schedule.

I would like to thank Amos J. Wright for his fine direction of the newsletter since 1977; he led us from manual typewriter and Mimeograph machine to electronic equipment and a professional printer. We use more photographs in the newsletter now, and plan to use even more in the future. Amos kept us on schedule over the years; the STONES & BONES is one of very few monthly newsletters of its type. (The accent there is on "monthly": most organizations now publish quarterly or only twice a year.)

Many thanks too to Bart Henson for his ideas (such as last year's series on Alabama museums) and support over the years. It was Bart who mastered the addressing equipment, from an early Ditto-like process through a machine using cards, to today's computerized labels printed on his own PC. Bart, with his interest in technology, did his best to improve the appearance of the newsletter and the efficiency of its publication, eliminating many hours of work for the newsletter staff in the process.

Last but certainly not least, thanks to Bettye Henson. Bettye's name is not on the masthead, but - to coin a cliché - we couldn't have done it without her. Bettye has spent innumerable hours working on the mailing list, compiling membership information and typing it. She has helped out with the collating, stapling, folding and sorting by Zip Codes. She has allowed her family room to be invaded and her routine disrupted by the "work parties" every month for 13 years, and has even plied us with goodies while we worked. Bettye and Bart have computerized the A.A.S. membership records and mailing lists, which entailed considerable outlay of their time and funds.

The Alabama Archaeological Society owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to Amos Wright, Bettye and Bart Henson. They will be a tough act to follow!

January 1991

As incoming editor of the STONES & BONES, I look forward to working with our members - both professional and avocational archaeologists. I want to hear from you.

Professional archaeologists: What projects are you working on? Do you have a field school coming up? What do you see as the role of amateurs in archaeology?

Chapters: Who are your officers? When and where do you meet? Do you go on field trips or take on special projects?

Individuals: Have you done any interesting research? Travelled to some place our members would be interested in? (See Jim Farrior's letter in this month's issue.) Read a book we should know about?

The STONES & BONES is your forum. We want to focus on the archaeology of Alabama and surrounding states, with mention of items of interest in archaeology in general.

Please send your input to the address on the top right-hand corner of the front page; my home phone number is 205/880-2825. The deadline for articles, chapter news, etc., will continue to be the 15th of each month, for inclusion in the next month's issue. If you know you can't meet the deadline, but have something that must make the next issue (such as program information), call me and I can hold off on publication for a couple of days.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Dorothy Prince Luke

NEW ADDRESS FOR DUES

1991 membership dues are payable now. See the back cover of this issue for membership categories and amounts due. Also please note that - because we have a new Treasurer, Janice Gilliland - we have a new address to which to mail your dues.

Please mail your dues and changes of address to:

Treasurer, A.A.S.
Division of Archaeology
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Moundville, AL 35474

SEARCH FOR ARCHAIC SANDSTONE BOWL QUARRY IN SOUTH MADISON COUNTY, AL

Bill Friday
Roy Blair Jr.

26 November 1990

In the late 1960's or early 1970's, Tom Cornell of Huntsville, AL, heard from a local farmer that there was a sandstone formation at the foot of the mountain near the Tennessee River which had crude quarrying features carved into the surface. The description sounded like it could possibly be an Archaic Indian sandstone bowl quarry, similar to others found in Lamar (sandstone) and Covington (steatite) Counties [1]. The presence of such bowls in the archaeological excavations near Whitesburg bridge makes it likely that such a quarry did exist, and the farmer's sketchy description fit the characteristics and location envisioned for such a place. Tom did not get an accurate location, not even which mountain, Green or Wallace, just that it was on the north side of the river and near the valley floor at the south end of the Huntsville mountain chain. The identity of the farmer was then lost so that no efficient follow-up was possible. Tom died in 1981 without ever having an opportunity to find the quarry.

On the basis of the information obtained from Tom Cornell, the authors have made a survey during November 1990 to determine where likely sites might be in the target area, leading hopefully to finding the quarry itself.

The Hartselle Sandstone (HSS), found in the area at a sufficiently low elevation, was chosen as the best candidate host formation. The HSS is described in two documents [2, 3] as forming a local lens in north Alabama between the Monteagle and Bangor Limestones (ML & BL), with its eastern edge pinching out along the Madison and Marshall/Jackson County lines. It is as thick as 150 feet beneath Winston County, AL. An outcrop five feet thick is described in the west face of Monte Sano mountain at the Highway 431 roadcut (T4/R1E/5/NW/NW; Mad1)¹, occurring at 1060' elevation above mean sea level (msl). There is an isolated massive outcrop of HSS at Candlestand on the west face of Keel mountain (800' msl) in eastern Madison County (T4/R2E/34/NW/NW; Mad2), described as 26 feet thick. All occurrences are postulated as having formed in shallow coastal water where the sand settled into local low places washed out by currents and rivers. Ripple marks and strong inter-layering with limestones and shales are evident in the SS. Plant fossils, along with marine brachiopod, bryozoan, crinoid and blastoid fossils, are present.

All of the major mountains in northeast Alabama are capped by the Pennington Sandstone (PSS), which slopes gently down toward the southwest. Monte Sano above site Mad1 has a cap elevation of 1580' msl, while the southern end of Green Mountain has a cap elevation of 1350' msl. Assuming that all buried strata slope with the same gradient as the cap, we calculated that the HSS should be exposed at 830' msl at site Mad3. The authors made a field survey to an obvious flat which lies at 840' msl near a power line right of way, expecting to find it capped with the HSS. This candidate site, located below Russell Point, is designated in this document as Mad3, (T5/R1E/28/NE/NE). Our findings are summarized below.

¹ The notation here is Township (T4)/ Range (R1E)/ Section (4) / Corner of Section (NW)/ Corner of Corner of Section (NW); Site (Mad1). These are taken from the National Geological Survey 7.5 minute topographic maps for Huntsville, Moontown, and Farley respectively for Mad1, Mad2, and Mad3.

On the hike up a power line right of way which led toward our target shelf, we found three areas where sandstone slabs were lying on the road: one at the valley floor, around 615'; one about 700', and one at around 800' msl. No sandstone was found at the shelf at 840' (and no search was made at higher elevation on this trip). None of the sandstone was observed within the bedrock as an exposed stratum, so that it is possible that all of the SS seen had survived after having weathered out of bedrock at the postulated 830' msl and then migrated down the slope. One specimen from 800' was a lens shaped boulder 12" across and 3" thick in the middle, tapering to a sharp edge all around, as if formed in a matching depression. There were many 1-3" thick slabs in this layer at two lateral positions 200 yards apart, indicating that this is likely most closely associated with the HSS. The layer at 700' had three 2-3' diameter by 1" thick slabs, lying adjacent as if undisturbed, plus many other loose stones. The lowest level, 615' msl, was distributed across a 10' high by 100 yard diameter swell on the valley floor. It contained numerous 3" thick slabs, one of which contained a 5" long by 1" wide plant fossil. The only boulder was found here, being 12" thick by 15" wide by 3' long. Specimens were collected at each level for closer analysis of grain compaction and appearance. All were moderately dense with no friable grains attached, but sand grain boundaries could be discerned in broken faces of the stone.

Two miles southeast, around the foot of Wallace Mountain, a quick stop revealed a sandstone faced building foundation, made of the same type material observed at Mad3, with no massive material in evidence.

We then traveled to Candlestand, site Mad2, which was easily observed from over a mile away when approaching. The outcrop is 200' above the valley floor, with the 10' thick persistent sandstone cap most visible. It has no overlayer of limestone for 100' away from the cliff edge. Below, the thinly bedded limestone/shale/sandstone layers had eroded a cavern reaching 50' back under the point. A 3" by 5" plant fossil was clearly visible in the massive overhang underface. Underneath was thinly layered (.2 - 1" thick) limestone and shale layers. A boulder 10' thick by 20' by 20', supported on a much smaller 10' by 10' by 5' high pedestal of limestone, was standing separated from the cliff, (probably the source of the name "Candlestand"). It would not likely survive any perceptible earthquake. This cliff extended east into a Keel Mountain valley for ~400 yards, but then was not visible anywhere else. It is truly an isolated pocket of HSS, located on what is elsewhere the eastern terminus of this stratum.

Our conclusion from this surveying trip is that there is no place at the south end of Green Mountain where the HSS makes a massive outcrop of the general type seen at Mad1 extending through the mountain. Most places the SS is too thin to serve as a source for sandstone bowls. It is probable that other such isolated outcrops as Candlestand exist, and such an outcrop could have served as a quarry. It will likely be 200' above the valley floor and should be observable in winter from a distance, or by a rugged hike following the shale flats along this contour.

REFERENCES

[1] Conversation with Amos J. Wright of Huntsville, AL, author of two papers describing the quarries mentioned. His descriptions of the known quarries were valuable in our decisions as to how to proceed with our search.

[2] "Geologic Survey of Alabama", Eugene A. Smith, Geological Survey of Alabama, Special Report #14, University of Alabama, 1926.

[3] "Mississippian Stratigraphy of Alabama", William A. Thomas, Geological Survey of Alabama, Monograph #12, University of Alabama Press, 1972.

22 December 1990

Dear Amos,

This year, I dug at Kinal, located in the remote jungles of northeastern Guatemala, about 12 km. S.E., as the jaguar runs, from Rio Azul, where I had dug for three seasons. This was the first year of the "Maya Lowlands Regional Archaeological Project", which is an expansion of the Rio Azul Project. As previously, the project is under the direction of Dr. Richard E. W. Adams of the University of Texas at San Antonio. The purpose is to expand the investigations to cover a number of sites in that area and to study the relationship of these sites to each other and to other large Maya centers, such as Tikal.

Kinal is a large (about 20 courtyards) Maya site. I first visited the site in 1985, after a long trek, on foot, through the jungle. At that time, some surface finds were collected, but it was not until this year, 1990, that the first excavations were made. It has been determined that Kinal was first occupied during the Late Preclassic period, ca. 250 B.C. to 250 A.D. However, the present evidence indicates that the extensive, visible architecture at Kinal was constructed during a relatively brief 60 year span, ca. 771-830 A.D., which is part of the Late Classic period.

The project encountered many difficulties this year. Due to political changes, it was even more difficult than usual to get the necessary governmental approvals. Guerrilla activities in the Peten had created a critical gasoline shortage, and through the action of an unfriendly government official, now fortunately out of office, the buildings at our base camp near Rio Azul had been destroyed. To make matters worse, the dry season never arrived. It rained almost continuously, which made it next to impossible to commute through the jungle to the excavation site. In spite of all of that, we carried out some important and interesting excavations in several parts of Kinal.

The worst thing that happened occurred late one afternoon when one of the workmen was bitten on the leg by a huge, deadly fer-de-lance, known locally as a barba amarilla. Within minutes the man was bleeding at the mouth, and it was clear that he would not survive without prompt medical help. This seemed impossible due to the remote location and the terrible condition of the jungle road.

As previously, I had brought with me a small Morse code amateur radio transceiver, which was operated as W4FOK/TG under a Guatemalan license. Within an hour following the bite, contact was established with Marty Morrison (NS5H), an amateur in San Antonio, Texas, with whom we had a daily schedule. Working through her, our embassy in Guatemala City was contacted, but their efforts to get the Guatemalan military to send a helicopter failed, as they would not risk a night landing on our primitive jungle pad. Luckily, the normally unreliable phone service from the U.S. to northern Guatemala was working. Through Marty, contact was made with the fire chief at San Benito, a small town near the edge of the jungle, and he agreed to send medics into the jungle to meet our convoy coming out with the patient. Amazingly, this worked as planned, and the medics met our vehicles about half way out of the jungle and began treatment.

The man survived, but lost his leg when the small hospital was not able to manage the complications that occurred. The high hospital costs made it necessary to terminate the season at Easter, about a month earlier than planned.

The season ended on a pleasant note, however, when my wife Peggy, and our youngest daughter, Janis Nall, came to Guatemala to spend Easter week. We especially enjoyed the spectacular religious processions in Antigua.

Please extend my best regards to my many friends at the A.A.S.

Sincerely,

Jim Farrior
James S. Farrior

Mr. Amos J. Wright, Editor, Stones & Bones
2602 Green Mountain Road
Huntsville, AL 35803

CHAPTER NEWS

HUNTSVILLE CHAPTER

The Huntsville Chapter did not hold a regular meeting in December, but rather took part in a Christmas party at the home of Beth and Donald Justice.

The next chapter meeting will be January 22; Lawrence Alexander is scheduled to speak on a late Mississippian site in Tennessee.

Elections will be held for 1991 chapter officers at the January meeting. The slate is as follows:

President: Dee Hubbert
1st V.P./Programs: Van King
2nd V.P./Membership: George Thurlow
Secretary/Treasurer: Beth Justice
Librarian: Georgia Dunn

The Huntsville Chapter meets the fourth Tuesday of each month in the Auditorium of the Public Library on St. Clair Avenue. The public is welcome.

MUSCLE SHOALS CHAPTER

The Muscle Shoals Chapter held its November meeting on the 12th at the Indian Mound Museum in Florence. Dr. Orvis Engelstad of Florence presented an interesting slide narration on Indians and Eskimos in the Northwestern U.S., Alaska and Canada. He and Mrs. Engelstad visited in that area for three months this summer. Thirty-five members and visitors attended this meeting.

The chapter's December meeting was held on the 10th at the Indian Mound Museum. We had an all-time record number of 52 members and guests attending. Our meeting room normally holds 35, but we took out the back row of chairs to make standing room. Four people had to stand outside the meeting room door in order to enjoy the program!

In analyzing this turnout, we decided that several factors contributed to this great attendance.

1. The local newspaper carried the meeting notice in their calendar of events for about a week before this meeting.

2. They gave us a headlined notice on Page 1, Section B on the day before the meeting.

3. An outstanding, well known, and highly respected person was bringing us the program.

4. We had good member participation in bringing cookies, cakes, pies, punch, coffee, etc., as this was our Christmas party meeting.

5. The weather was clear and cool - or a good night for getting out.

We fortunately can control Factors 1 through 4. Perhaps all of us who strive to increase chapter attendance can consider working or continuing to work on these possibilities.

Boyce Driskell brought us an excellent talk and slide presentation about the Dust Cave excavation that took place near Florence last summer. The public as well as many of Boyce's crew, and members from past excavations were very interested in hearing this fine update on Dust Cave. An early carbon date has been reported so far, and hopefully an earlier date from a deeper level will soon be received from the lab. Boyce was accompanied by his son Nathan, who operated the projector.

The next chapter meeting will be held January 14 at 7:15 p.m.

Charles Moore

OLD MOBILE PROJECT

Project Director Dr. Gregory Waselkov, in a brief interview told your Editor [of the "Friends of Old Mobile Newsletter"], just before press time, that the excavation of the blacksmith's shop is now completed. While soil conditions have not preserved any broken nails, horseshoes, and the like, slag heaps and scrap iron have firmly established the nature of the site. At this moment a house and smaller structure have yielded up evidence of a probable tavern: the larger structure revealed a French wine glass. Dr. Waselkov will present a more complete report; it is expected next month.

(From the "Friends of Old Mobile Newsletter", Fall 1990).

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