

Alabama Archaeological Society

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STONES & BONES NEWSLETTER

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JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE LABORATORY

1989 Summary Project Report

In the spring of 1989 the Jacksonville State University Archaeological Resource Laboratory personnel were contacted concerning the impending construction of a sports complex to be constructed by the City of Anniston, Calhoun County, Alabama. This property contained several natural resources that - based on previous archaeological survey within Northeast Alabama - tended to yield significant archaeological sites. Cane Creek, Cave Creek, the Blue Hole Spring and a broad fertile flood plain would have undoubtedly attracted prehistoric and early historic aboriginal populations to this area. After an initial visit and surface inspection of the Sports Complex site, it was decided the 1989 spring and summer archaeological field schools would be conducted on the property.

An area upon the property was selected for investigation, and it was initially termed the Blue Hole West Site (1Ca421). The Blue Hole West Site (1Ca421), was excavated for two and one half months in the spring and summer of 1989. This work was jointly sponsored by the Archaeological Resource Laboratory of Jacksonville State University, Anniston Museum of Natural History, and the City of Anniston. Dr. Harry O. Holstein, Jacksonville State University, served as the principal investigator for the project. This project was made possible with the aid of Jacksonville State students, who were enrolled in two Jacksonville State Field Archaeology courses and a one-week Elderhostel program, in which students 60 years and older participated in the dig. In addition, numerous volunteers also contributed their time and energy to make this project a success.

The City of Anniston Sports Complex property is located less than one mile north of the city limits of Anniston, near the Fort McClellan Military Installation. In this area, the Blue Hole West Site (1Ca421) lies approximately 91 meters (300 feet) west of the large natural sinkhole spring (Blue Hole). This area was selected for excavation because of the presence of abundant archaeological surface material, and there was serious evidence of non-professional digging (pot hunting) in this location.

December 1989

A total of 53 subsurface excavation units were excavated. As a result of the excavation, 38 aboriginal features (i.e., hearths, storage pits) and 129 post molds were located, confirming the presence of a substantial aboriginal occupation. The features confirmed the presence of storage pits and hearths, and the post molds strongly suggested the presence of circular aboriginal houses. Preliminary analysis seems to suggest the Woodland aboriginal populations were constructing substantial (approximately 33 feet diameter) round structures with oval storage pits situated against the interior back walls.

In excavation units along the western edge of the site, researchers discovered upon a slightly raised area several prepared clay and sand floors capped by scattered fist-sized cobbles. In this same locale an interesting raised rectangular clay basin hearth and charcoal were uncovered. This area may represent the base of a former mound structure which had reportedly been located upon the site.

The 1989 archaeological investigations at the Blue Hole West Site (1CA421) have demonstrated the presence of a substantial Woodland Villages (Yanceys Bend and Coker Ford phase) and has located several other areas upon the property that appear to contain potentially significant archaeological resources. In addition, the excavations have provided a valuable educational experience for over 100 students and 500 visitors who visited this excavation. The 1989 Blue Hole West, 1CA421, project has been a successful and informative venture between Jacksonville State University, the Anniston Museum of Natural History, and the City of Anniston. The archaeological data obtained thus far is but the first of a series of archaeological information that can be gained from this property concerning Anniston's and Calhoun County's rich and varied prehistoric past.

In another project, Jacksonville State's Archaeological Resource Laboratory has been actively involved in an intensive archaeological survey of five surrounding counties (Calhoun, Cherokee, Etowah, St. Clair, Talladega) as part of a survey grant funded through the Alabama Historical Commission and U.S. Department of the Interior. As a result of this survey, 100 new archaeological sites were recorded. These archaeological resources include Creek and Cherokee Indian sites, prehistoric villages, and fish weirs. The final report is presently being compiled, and it will be submitted to the Alabama Historical Commission in December of 1989.

Finally, as a result of a grant funded by the Alabama DeSoto Commission, the Archaeological Resource Laboratory will begin the investigation of 1Ce309 on Terrapin Creek in Cherokee County, Alabama. This site is believed by some researchers to be the location of the 16th century Spanish Contact Indian town of Coosa. Researchers will attempt to locate possible mounds, and document the presence of Late Mississippian Indian and/or 16th century Spanish materials upon the site. This investigation is tentatively planned to begin in late November and continue into early December. At present Saturday excavations of 1Ce309 seem likely, and volunteers will be welcomed.

For more information please contact Dr. Harry O. Holstein at Jacksonville State University.

Dr. Harry O. Holstein
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CHAPTER NEWS

Cullman Chapter

Thanks to Van King for his excellent slide presentation at the October meeting. If you missed it, then you missed out on a lot of archaeological information. We also had some very nice artifacts on display.

Howard King

Huntsville Chapter

The November Huntsville Chapter meeting consisted of a presentation by members of a Civil War enactment unit. Civil War uniforms and equipment - some original and some authentic reproductions - were displayed and their use explained.

The Huntsville Chapter will not meet in December. The next chapter meeting will be Monday, January 29, at 7 p.m. in the Auditorium of the Public Library. This is not the usual chapter meeting night; the Library had a scheduling conflict and asked us to move our meeting to the 29th.

Dorothy Luke

CALL FOR PAPERS - ALABAMA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

The Alabama Academy of Science will meet March 7-10, 1990, at Mobile College in Mobile, Alabama. Papers are invited. Contact Tim Mistovich; 1 Mound State Monument; Moundville, AL 35474.

NEW LIFE MEMBER

The Society welcomes its newest life member:

Wendell P. Garton
711 Mira Vista Drive, S.E.
Huntsville, Alabama 35802

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

THE SOUTHEASTERN CEREMONIAL COMPLEX - Artifacts and Analysis -
edited by Patricia Galloway.

These essays represent the latest thinking about the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex - the appearance of certain similar motifs in mid-13th century artifacts from the Atlantic and Gulf coasts to eastern Oklahoma and the lower Ohio Valley. Written by the participants in a 1984 conference held at the Cottonlandia Museum in Greenwood, Mississippi, the essays focus on nine specific regions and sites as well as offer interpretations of Mississippian Symbolism, the Bird-Man theme, Mississippian monsters, and parallels between Meosamerican and Mississippian cultures.

1989. xvii, 389 pages, 283 b&w illustrations. CIP.LC 88-12223.
ISBN 0-8032-2131-2. \$50.00.

THE CHEROKEES - A Population History - by Russell Thornton.

Fall 1990. 215 pages, maps, illustrations. CIP.ISBN 0-8032-4416-9.
Price to be announced.

POWHATAN'S MANTLE - Indians in the Colonial Southeast - edited by
Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley.

Combining ethnohistory, archaeology, anthropology, cartography, and demography, POWHATAN'S MANTLE provides a provocative introduction to the diverse Indians who dominated much of the Southeast in the colonial era. In addition to essays on Indian communication networks, regional population changes, interior migration, and Indian-drawn maps, the work includes essays on specific areas, such as Florida, Louisiana, and Virginia, and specific nations, including the Choctaw, Catawba and Cherokee.

1989. xviii, 355 pages, 13 maps, 14 b&w illustrations. CIP.LC 88-20630.
ISBN 0-8032-4745-1. \$50.00.

CREEKS AND SEMINOLES - The Destruction and Regeneration of the
Muscogulge People - by J. Leitch Wright, Jr.

"Wright's work effectively explains how ethnic diversities among the Muscogulges in the pre-Columbian period contributed to later schisms and struggles among 18th and 19th century Creeks and ultimately led to the emergence of the Seminoles as a separate people in the Florida peninsula. The author's 'ethnicity' argument provides an interesting alternative analysis of the course of Creek and Seminole history. Well stated and supported, it should excite students and scholars of southeastern Indian culture." - Robert L. Gold, "American Historical Review".

1987. xvi, 383 pages, 3 maps, 19 b&w illustrations. CIP.LC 86-11281. ISBN 0-8032-4738-9. \$35.00.

The four publications listed here are available from University of Nebraska Press; 901 North 17th Street; Lincoln, NE 68588-0520. Include postage: 1-4 books \$2; 5-14, \$3; 15+ \$4.

THE WORLD'S OLDEST ROAD

One day in 1970 a peat cutter named Raymond Sweet was busy at his typical winter occupation: clearing weeds from drainage ditches that vein the broad peat bogs of the Somerset Levels, flatlands in southwestern England. As he dug, his spade hit a hard object. Peat is dead plant matter and is soft, and so resistance meant that some substance other than peat, such as a root, was present. This particular object was not a root, but a plank of hard wood.

Sweet suspected that the wood was old, for it was buried near the bottom of what once had been many meters of peat, laid down over thousands of years. He delivered a fragment to the peat company, the Eclipse Peat Works, which in turn sent it to me at the University of Cambridge. I had been doing archaeological work in the Levels for several years, and my interest in old wood was well known among the peat cutters.

A prompt visit to the site, about 250 miles from Cambridge, confirmed that the plank was indeed old: it had been worked by sharp tools of stone and wood, raising the exciting possibility that it was a relic of a Neolithic (late Stone Age) community. Studies I began the following summer with a team of students soon revealed that the plank was but one piece among many thousands forming an 1,800-meter-long road through a swamp. Radiocarbon analyses indicated that the wood was extraordinarily old: it dated from some 6,000 years ago, early in the Neolithic period. Sweet had found the oldest road ever discovered.

In about 4000 B.C., the first farmers of Britain began arriving from the European mainland, seeking lands to clear and cultivate. No better place could have been found than the Levels.

Why was the track constructed, and what has been learned from it? The evidence indicates that the Sweet Track builders had a settlement on the gentle slopes of the Polden Hills and built the road to serve as a footpath linking two islands on which the settlers were also active.

To construct the road, the workers selected about a dozen species of wood from the forests both north and south of the planned track. They felled the larger trees (mainly oaks, ashes, elms and limes, or lindens), some of which were a meter in diameter, to make long planks for the surface.

The trees were debarked, cut and split in the forest. Roundwood (branches and young trees) of many species - such as hazel, ash, alder and elm - was collected for the road's underlying support structure, which consisted of rails (long, fairly thick pieces of roundwood) and pegs (thinner pieces that were sharpened at one end).

Once the wood had been brought to the northern and southern terminals, construction began. First, single rails were set out end to end on the surface of the swamp. Next, pairs of pegs were hammered (points down) into the peat so that they formed a tall X whose vertex rested on a rail. The X's were spaced a meter or so apart, and their upper arms formed a V-shaped scaffold into which a plank could be set. Planks were laid end to end and parallel to the rails (perhaps after being notched for a better fit with the pegs), forming a narrow walkway elevated about 40 centimeters above the rails. (The rails were critical because without them the weight of the planks could have caused the track to subside gradually into the peat. The rails served to spread the load and thereby prevent or delay such sinking.)

Our tree-ring analyses have demonstrated that almost every piece of oak and ash (which account for most of the planks) came from trees felled in the same year - at the same point, that is, in a sequence of matching rings. Hazels and other trees cut for pegs had similarly been felled in a single year, presumably at the same time as the planks were cut.

The absence of later repairs suggests that repeated flooding, the relentless growth of reeds, the accumulation of peat beneath and around the track and the consequent rising of the water level eventually doomed it.

In order to fashion oak planks, the builders felled trees that would yield strong, straight timbers, free of knots and side branches. Then, exploiting the tendency of oak logs to crack radially, they split the larger felled trunks into planks by hammering wedges into the rays.

The sharpened ends of the pegs further testify to the builders' skills. The workers possessed stone axes of high quality, resharpened them frequently and knew the differing properties of various roundwoods. For example, hazel and alder were chopped with short strokes, whereas willow and poplar, which are difficult to cut in that way, were shaved into long points.

The track tells of the extraordinary woodmanship and carpentry of the builders, who had only fire, stone axe and wedge to handle great trees. Presumably, these were not the only people at the time who had such skills.

(From an article by John M. Coles in "Scientific American", November 1989)

NEW LAWS PROTECT INDIAN RELICS

Nothing is more painful to Native Americans than the treatment of ancestral remains and relics - which anthropologists study and looters sell. Now help is on the way in many states.

Last spring North Dakota, Kansas and Nebraska joined 19 other states in passing laws protecting unmarked burial sites. Montana, New Mexico, Texas and Hawaii are expected to follow soon. Burial legislation is different in each state but typically prohibits intentional disturbance and mandates re-burial after a reasonable period for scientific study. Although legislation includes unmarked graves of Anglo and Spanish pioneers, the impetus for legislation came from Native Americans. Kansas and Nebraska offer two different responses - and results.

In Kansas the state historic preservation officer worked closely with seven tribes, the Native American Rights Fund and the State Historical Society to ban unregulated displays of human remains and to protect unmarked graves from unnecessary disturbance.

In Nebraska, where state officials were initially reluctant to address Indian concerns, lawmakers enacted a stronger, precedent-setting act that requires state-sponsored museums to return tribally identifiable skeletal remains and associated burial goods. The act also establishes criminal penalties for trafficking in the contents of graves.

(From an article in "Historic Preservation" - November/December 1989)

PINSON MOUNDS READIED FOR INDIAN REMAINS

Pinson Mounds State Historic Area, 10 miles south of Jackson, Tenn., has been readied and waiting to receive remains of American Indians dug up to make way for development in the state. But it looks like that day is still not close. The state has continued to stockpile bones - from more than 5,000 bodies so far - at the University of Tennessee, where they are sent for research. At first the reason given for the delay in reburial was that Pinson Mounds was being readied.

Now there is a question as to whether the Native American Indian Association and other concerned American Indians want them buried there. "We may be entering a whole new era in the application of the law", said State Archaeologist Nick Fielder.

Presently, it costs a developer or property owner less than \$200 to have each grave removed that is found in a construction site. A typical cost to the state to have research conducted on each is about \$500. The reburial site in the future is likely to be decided on a case-by-case basis in court. Anytime American Indian graves are discovered in a location where they might be disturbed, a request must be filed with the courts to unearth them for reburial. Only recently has the association begun to be notified when the requests are going to court. The problem has been that "nobody adheres to the law", said Nick Mejia, a member of the Native American Indian Association. While the law says the bones must be reburied, usually they have not been in the past. "They feel like 'What do we care? We're going to keep them at UT'. Nobody has ever confronted them before. They've had a free hand to do what they want to do.... Pinson Mounds would be better than no place at all. It would be better than a lab at UT".

(From an article in "The Tennessean" - Saturday, November 11, 1989)

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

Available issues of <i>Journal of Alabama Archaeology</i> Vol. 20-29 each issue	(\$2.50 to Members) \$5.00 pp
<i>Stanfield-Worley Bluff Shelter Excavations</i> (<i>Journal of Alabama Archaeology</i>) Vol. VIII Nos. 1 & 2 - Reprint, each issue	\$5.00 pp
Special Publication 1 — Fort Mitchell	\$2.00 pp
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<i>Handbook of Alabama Archaeology Part 1, Point Types</i>	\$10.00 pp
Lively, Long, Josselyn - <i>Pebble Tool Paper</i>	\$3.00 pp
<i>Investigations in Russell Cave</i> , published by the National Park Service	\$7.50 pp
<i>Exploring Prehistoric Alabama through Archaeology</i> (Juvenile)	\$7.00 pp

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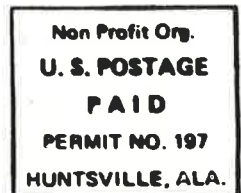
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