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ORIGINAL PAPER

The Flintlock Site (8JA1763): An Unusual Underwater Deposit in the Apalachicola River, Florida

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Abstract In the fall of 2001, staff of the Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research were led by river divers to an underwater site in the Apalachicola River containing a large concentration of prehistoric and historic artifacts lying on the riverbed. Subsequent inspection of the submerged river bank and scoured limestone river channel revealed a myriad of objects, which included iron fasteners, metal tools and implements, broken glass bottles, stone projectile points, scattered bricks and stone blocks, and other materials. Discovery of two large fragments of a wooden watercraft, a bayonet, a copper arrowhead, and flintlock gun barrels initially prompted researchers to hypothesize that the site might represent the remains of a U.S. Army boat that was attacked in 1817 by Seminole Indians while en route upriver. The episode, which caused the deaths of more than 30 soldiers and several women who were aboard the boat, led to the First Seminole War and the U.S. Army invasion of Florida. To investigate this hypothesis, a systematic survey of the riverbed was undertaken in the spring of 2002 to record underwater features and recover additional diagnostic artifacts. These activities employed side-scan sonar as well as diver visual investigations. This paper presents a case study of the value and broader significance of

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aggregate data where interpretation was underpinned by artefactual, historical and environmental analysis.

Keywords Florida · Seminole Indians · Apalachicola River · Muskets · Prehistoric · Historic · Material culture · Site formation processes

Introduction

In September 2001, geologists Harley Means and Ryan Means, who are active explorers of north Florida's rivers, reported to James Dunbar of the Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research (BAR) that while collecting prehistoric artifacts in the Apalachicola River they had encountered a concentration of historic materials on the riverbed. The Means brothers described a portion of river where they had seen deposits of iron tools and fasteners, bricks, and bottle glass that they judged to be an underwater archaeological site rather than a random scatter of artifacts. They offered to bring to BAR's Conservation Laboratory a small collection of historic objects they had collected while diving at the site. The Means brothers also expressed concern that other river divers had been seen collecting artifacts at the same location.

Artifacts delivered to the laboratory by the Means included various utensils (a razor, toothbrush handle, pewter spoon, clothes iron, and doorknob), tools (an auger, file, hammer and axe heads, and logging hook), and portions of glass bottles (diagnostic of nineteenth-century styles), a military bayonet, and a rolled copper Seminole Kaskaskia projectile point. The utilitarian nature of these materials, together with the bayonet and Native American metal arrowhead, led BAR staff to concur with the Means brothers that they may have located an underwater site of historical importance. As a result of this determination, Dunbar contacted Dr. Joe Knetsch of the Division of State Lands (Bureau of Survey & Mapping)—whose intimate knowledge of Florida history is the result of years of archival research—to inquire about nineteenth-century activities along this portion of the Apalachicola River. Knetsch immediately mentioned an episode that occurred during the First Seminole War (1817–1818) just south of the confluence of the Flint, Chattahoochee, and Apalachicola Rivers involving a Native American attack on a U.S. Army boat in 1817 (Fig. 1).

As Dr. Knetsch began assembling relevant historical documents, BAR underwater archaeologists visited the site, which they dubbed the Flintlock Site (8JA1763) after several musket barrels were observed lying on the river bottom. A curious collection of prehistoric and historic artifacts, together with the presence of structural elements of a watercraft partially buried in soft sediments near the river bank, prompted BAR to conduct a month-long survey of the area. The project attempted to answer two basic research questions: (1) Was the Flintlock Site associated with the 1817 Native American attack on a U.S. Army boat, and (2) if not associated with the 1817 attack, what did the artifact accumulation represent?

Environment and Geology

The site is situated in a wide bend of the Apalachicola River approximately 1.6 km (1 mile) below Woodruff Dam (Fig. 2). The dam is located at the confluence of the

Fig. 1 Image depicting the massacre of Lt. R.W. Scott's party (Knetsch 2003, p. 13)

Chattahoochee, Flint, and Apalachicola Rivers near the Florida/Georgia border. Along the western bank of the river adjacent to the site is a high bluff that has been subjected to periodic flooding events and wind erosion. A small sandy beach with limited vegetation slopes into the river, where an exposed limestone ledge marking a previous water level emerges from river sediments. A barren and eroded karst river bottom stretches to the central channel of the river.

Water depth along the western riverbank is shallow but drops quickly towards the central channel. The eastern river bank has a much lower elevation, sloping gently into the water, where a natural eddy causes sediments to continuously accrete, creating sand bars and shallow water. The center of the river averages 6 m (20 feet) in depth with a strong current and, until 2002, was routinely dredged. The jagged karst riverbed contains many small solution pockets that collect coarse-grained sediments, small river pebbles, fresh water mussels and clams, and artifacts. Along the main channel of the river bottom are several deep linear scars, a result of past dredging activities. Like the natural solution pockets, these man-made indentations also collect artifacts and river debris.

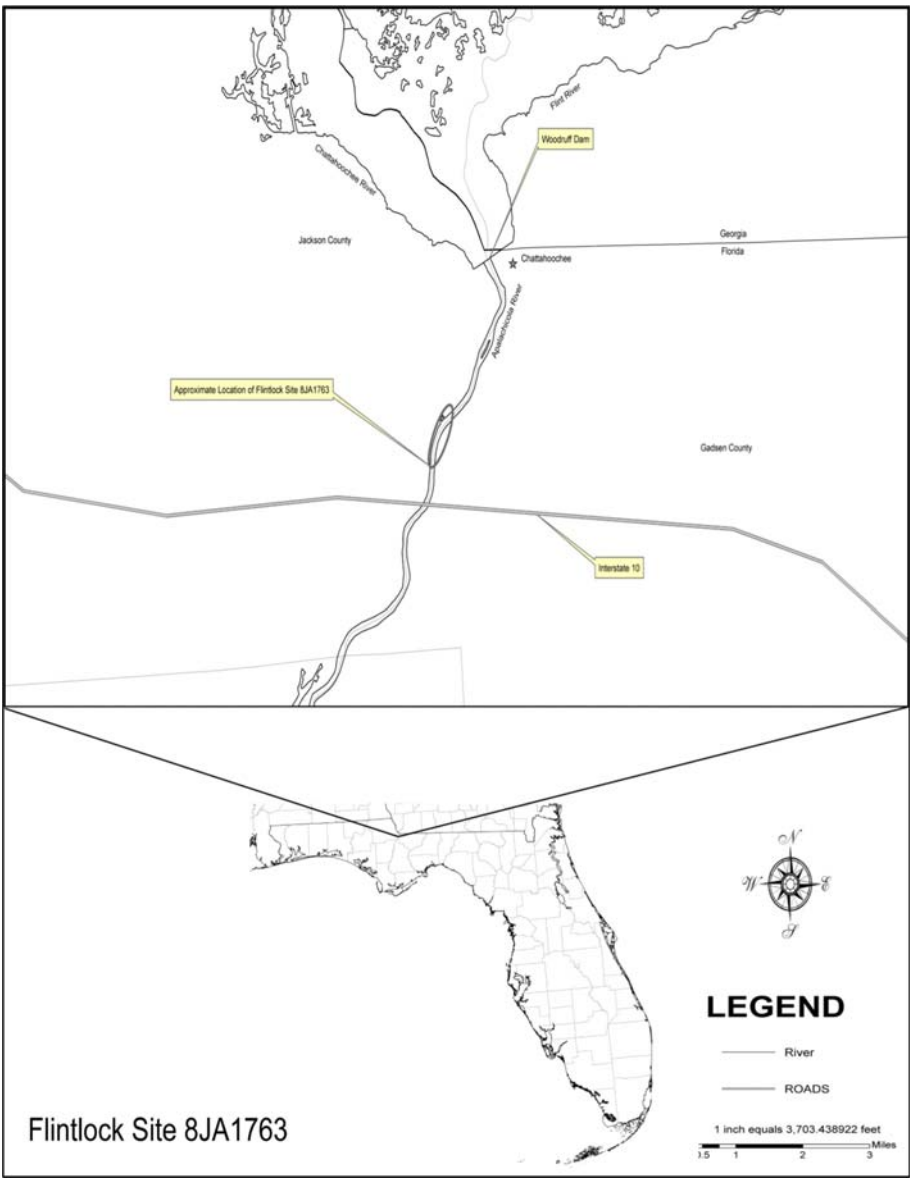

Fig. 2 Site location

The northern (upstream) portion of the site is characterized by several immense drowned trees and logs that are situated behind an eddy in the river current created by the discharge canal of the nearby Scholtz Power Plant. The river bottom in this area is covered with an accumulation of thick, soft sediments containing partially buried portions of a planked watercraft, logging poles, aboriginal pots, bricks, cut granite blocks, and other materials. Sediments are less than 50 cm (19.7 inches) deep, and appear to be relatively stable in this area of reduced water flow. Accumulation of sediments appears to have

resulted from a combination of river bank erosion and a lack of strong water currents in this immediate area.

The southern (downstream) portion of the site is dominated by an exposed limestone ledge that runs parallel to the river bank, marking a previous water level when the river was generally lower. The ledge drops abruptly to a sloping and scoured bottom that stretches into the central channel of the river. In solution cavities and behind small rock pinnacles are collections of iron fasteners, tools, gun parts, bricks, ceramics, and glass. In some areas concentrations of artifacts are quite dense, but cultural material becomes less frequent toward the center of the river, which has been repeatedly dredged. Despite the effects of dredging, erosion, and corrosion, preservation of both natural and cultural materials on the site is quite good.

Biology

Biology at the site is consistent with that found along the length of the Apalachicola River and the surrounding forests. Upland vegetation includes hard and soft woods, such as pine, oak, cedar, tupelo, and various types of brushwoods. Submerged waterlogged tree trunks, branches, logs, and leaves are well preserved underwater. Wildlife along the shore includes deer, raccoon, and several kinds of birds. Encountered in the river were alligator, bream, bass, gar, freshwater flounder, turtles, several types of freshwater mussels, and numerous examples of the small non-native Asiatic clam *Corbicula fluminea.*

Historical Background

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Great Britain was involved in containing Napoleon's forces in Europe. Ensuing disruption of trade and commerce weakened the already tenuous relationship between Great Britain and the United States and, by 1812, the two nations were again at war. Britain had been allied with the Spanish during the Napoleonic War and when the War of 1812 erupted Spain allowed Great Britain to utilize Florida's natural bays and inlets to land troops and supplies to penetrate the United States. In June of 1812, the British frigate HMS *Orpheus* brought troops, arms, ammunition, and supplies to St. George Island, located on the coast of northwest Florida near the present-day town of Apalachicola. Men and materials were transported up the Apalachicola River to a spot owned by the Forbes and Company trading concern. On this parcel of land the British constructed an octagonal fort to protect vessels on the river as well as to maintain trade with the Creek and Choctaw Nations (Boyd 1937, pp. 68–72). In late 1814, the United States was able to push the British out of Pensacola, the capitol of West Florida. British troops, refugee Creek Indians, and former slaves retreated to the new fort and desperately tried to maintain control of the region as evidenced by the ship *Orpheus* and the schooner *Shelbourne* having deposited a "large quantity of arms and ammunition in the area under the auspices of Brevet Major Woodbine" (American Weekly Messenger, 13 August 1814, p. 329).

On 24 December 1814, the Treaty of Ghent was signed and the War of 1812 came to an end. Before evacuating the fort, British Colonel Edward Nicholls ordered weapons, cannons, ammunition, and other supplies to be distributed to the slaves and Indians who remained behind. When the British abandoned the fortifications they left a former slave named Garçon and a Choctaw chief to command the facilities. This act generated anxiety

for the encroaching Americans who now referred to the fort as the "Negro Fort" (Boyd 1937, p. 72; Colburn and Landers 1995).

The presence of this fort caused a great deal of consternation to the United States for two reasons. First, it was a supply depot for openly hostile Native Americans and runaway slaves within the territory. Second, it provided a strategic vantage point from which to attack U.S. vessels attempting to supply Fort Scott, constructed in 1816 along the river near the border between Georgia and Florida (Gannon 1996, p. 191). After several open attacks on boats and settlers, as well as intensified hostilities towards American troops, Major General Andrew Jackson ordered the fortification eliminated. On 27 July 1816, Jackson's forces approached the Negro Fort with the aid of two gunboats. The gunboats fired on the fortress and managed to land a single round of hot shot in the powder magazine. The explosion destroyed most of the fort and killed almost 300 people; only 33 people survived the blast (Boyd 1937, pp. 80–81; Memory et al. 1998, p. 12).

With the destruction of the Negro Fort, a short hiatus of hostilities existed within the region. Shortly after the fort's destruction British soldiers and merchants met to develop a plan for seizing Spanish-controlled Florida. George Woodbine, a former British army officer, drew on the support of Seminole and Choctaw Indians to carry out these designs. Woodbine sent agitator Robert Ambrister to muster further support. Ambrister, together with a group of disbanded British troops, Indians, and former slaves, conducted slave raids in the vicinity of St. Augustine on Florida's east coast; other individuals soon joined including the entrepreneur Alexander Arbuthnot. Both Ambrister and Arbuthnot were instrumental in instigating renewed hostilities, as well as in planning and completing several successful raiding sorties into Georgia. These activities angered the United States government, causing the War Department to send General Jackson to deal with the insurrections (Boyd 1937, p. 83). On 21 November 1817, United States forces invaded a Miccosukee village across the river from Fort Scott, killing several Native Americans and burning the village (Gannon 1996, p. 191).

On 30 November 1817, just days after the attack on the Miccosukee village, a supply boat commanded by Lieutenant Richard W. Scott of the 7th Infantry was ambushed by a force of approximately 500 Seminoles while en route to Fort Scott. According to a letter written 2 December 1817 by Major General Edward P. Gaines, Commander of Fort Scott, to the Secretary of War:

> A large party of Seminole Indians, on the 30th ultimo, formed in ambuscade, upon the Appalachicola river, a mile below the junction of the Flint and Chatahoochee, attacked one of our boats, ascending the river near the shore, and killed, wounded, and took, the greater part of the detachment, consisting of forty men… There were also on board, killed or taken, seven women, the wives of the soldiers. Six men of the detachment only escaped, four of whom were wounded (Gaines 1818a).

Soldiers who escaped the ambush reported the river current was so strong at that location the boat had to be taken near the shore to make headway. The Seminoles were not discovered until they had fired the first volley, which killed Lt. Scott and his "most valuable" men (Boyd 1937, p. 87). This incident, along with additional hostile actions, caused the Secretary of War to order Andrew Jackson to Fort Scott in order to subdue the Seminoles. Jackson marched into Florida with a force of nearly 5,000 soldiers "and Indian allies" and destroyed Native American and Spanish settlements (Gannon 1996, p. 192; Knetsch 2003).

Jackson's drive into the Apalachicola River Valley touched off the First Seminole Indian War. While Jackson was in the Apalachicola River Valley, he constructed a new

fort, called Fort Gadsden, on the site of the decimated Negro Fort. Eventually, Jackson was able to thwart the Seminoles and push them into central and southern Florida. Jackson's actions during the war, however, upset the Spanish government and caused lasting political difficulties for the United States.

Methodology

Initial visits to the Flintlock Site in October 2001 consisted of visual reconnaissance of the riverbed with the assistance of the Means brothers, their father Bruce Means, and Dale Frierson to become familiar with the area and to establish the nature and extent of artifact distribution. Accumulation of cultural materials was greater than anticipated and their geographical dispersion extended over a larger area of the riverbed than previously had been recognized. After additional artifacts were collected during these visits, it was decided that controlled mapping of objects in relation to the riverbed could best determine the scope, origin, and formation of these deposits. In addition, adjacent sections of the river, both upstream and downstream, were investigated to search for additional components of the site or similar features that might be associated with it.

To establish survey control, a 100-m (328 feet) measuring tape was attached to the mooring block of a channel buoy at the north (upstream) end of the site and unreeled downstream along the riverbed to serve as a baseline for underwater investigations. The baseline was situated parallel to shore at a distance of 30 m (98.4 feet) into the river and through the center of the site. Beginning at the downstream end of the baseline, a two-diver team equipped with 50-m (164 feet) tapes and gridded mylar slates swam 30-m-long transects perpendicular to the baseline at 5-m (16.4 feet) intervals toward the shore. Another team swam similar 30-m-long transects from the baseline toward the middle of the river. The goal of this methodology was to systematically record the locations of cultural materials to produce a general site map of a rectangular area measuring 100 m in length and 60 m in breadth, or 6,000 square meters (nearly 20,000 square feet). Objects encountered on the riverbed were noted on the gridded mylar and their relative positions were recorded from marked intervals along the baseline. Data from field mylars were transposed to a master site plan to provide a generally accurate picture of the locations and distribution of features and artifacts at the site.

The underwater archaeology team soon recognized that additional divers and more time would be required to complete mapping of the site. Students from Florida State University's Program in Underwater Archaeology, under the direction of Dr. Cheryl Ward, joined the team to continue mapping and recording during the month of June 2002. Assistance afforded by student participation enabled a second 100×60 m area to be surveyed. Another 100-m baseline was attached to the downstream end of the existing baseline and 30-m transects were surveyed on both sides at 5-m increments. In this manner, a total of 12,000 square meters (nearly 40,000 square feet) of the riverbed at the Flintlock Site were explored and mapped.

The investigation was expanded with the use of side-scan sonar to search for objects standing proud of the riverbed that might produce acoustical reflections. A Marine Sonics sonar unit with integrated DGPS locational control, on loan from Florida State University, was employed to survey the bottom of the river from just below Woodruff Dam to a point 5.6 km (3.5 miles) below the site. Digital sound images were acquired through a 600 kHz tow fish suspended just below the bow of the survey vessel. Sonar and DGPS data were merged into an onboard computer that recorded acoustical reflections of objects on the

riverbed with a level of accuracy that would not have been possible utilizing standard diver survey techniques. During post-processing of the side-scan data, several interesting targets were selected for visual inspection by divers. Each proved to be a natural feature along the river bottom, such as a rock outcropping, limestone ledge, sunken tree, or log. No additional cultural features that could be associated with the Flintlock Site were encountered, and the sonar survey produced no discernible evidence of other archaeological sites in the vicinity.

Site Formation Processes

Several natural and cultural activities are, and have been, at work at the Flintlock Site. These processes, while at times minimal, play a key role in interpreting the site. Natural processes include major and minor flooding events caused by occasional hurricanes, seasonal storms, and periods of heavy rainfall. These phenomena change the velocity of the river's flow, affecting sediment transport and deposition as well as rates of shoreline and riverbed erosion. They also contribute to gradual migrations of the river's currents over time as riverbanks alternately erode or accrete. Trees, stones, and sediments, loosened from their upland matrix, fall into the river and are carried to new locations. Artifacts and other archaeological materials contained in the upland matrix or at the river's edge also are dislodged and become part of the aquatic circulation.

Cultural formation processes—human modification of the surrounding environment—also influenced the manner in which the Flintlock Site has been shaped and reshaped over time. For example, a major human alteration of the river occurred when Woodruff Dam was constructed in the 1930s at the lower confluence of the Chattahoochee, Flint, and Apalachicola Rivers. Prior to the construction of the dam the river may have been deeper, thereby protecting cultural materials on the river bottom. As the flow of the river was regulated, changes in the speed of the current occurred. As a result, cultural materials began to move horizontally and vertically throughout the site. Artifacts that may once have been buried now are found in solution cavities in the limestone bottom. In addition, the increased speed of the current contributed to erosion of material remains buried within the riverbanks.

Additional landscape modification directly influenced the distribution of sediments across the surface of the Flintlock Site and was instrumental in determining how artifacts and features were displaced from upland sites adjacent to the river. Construction of the Scholtz Power Plant in the early 1950s required dredging of both an intake and outflow channel in order for the power plant to operate. These dredged areas are immediately upstream of the site and undoubtedly contained subsurface cultural materials that became displaced and were swept downstream by the river current. Artifacts that originated in upland contexts now comprise portions of the artifact assemblage seen on the river bottom today at the Flintlock Site. Certainly, the power plant's outflow channel, which deflects the main river currents around the upstream portion of the site, has facilitated the accretion of sediments.

Other human influences on the manner in which the site has changed over time include the use of watercraft along the river. For the past 200 years, the Apalachicola River has been an avenue for moving goods and people between the interior of the Southeastern United States and the Gulf of Mexico. Large, slow-moving steamboats, tugboats, and barges that plied the river also produced wakes that cut into banks and bluffs causing erosion. Modern propeller-driven boats continue this process. No doubt centuries of

waterborne traffic have contributed to the formation of the Flintlock Site, causing displacement of upland materials, but also adding discarded artifacts in its wake.

Periodic dredging and snag removal activities to keep the river open for modern navigation likely also contributed to artifact movement on the river bottom. Dredging operations can physically remove artifacts from intact sites either upstream or downstream and redeposit them in other locations. Deep dredge scars penetrate the soft karst river bottom at the Flintlock Site, creating additional solution pockets and cavities that, just as the natural ones, also collect artifacts, sediments, and other debris.

Artifact Analysis

The wide variety of artifacts encountered at the Flintlock Site, and the broad chronological range of their manufacture and usage (where these can be determined), demonstrate that the site does not represent a discrete episode of deposition, but rather is a collection of cultural materials reflecting a succession of human activities that took place along the Apalachicola River over time.

The largest features are two submerged remnants of wooden watercraft (Fig. 3) (Features 1 and 2). These sections of edge-joined planking appear to have been upperworks, since the planking was not closely joined or caulked to make it watertight. Construction details are otherwise not diagnostic for date or function; however, the size of the planks and their method of fastening are quite similar to those observed on the remains of two modern abandoned wooden barges eroding from the riverbank nearby. Features 1 and 2 likely are also the remains of modern barges or other types of simple watercraft (Fig. 4).

Native American artifacts included two prehistoric ceramic pots that are older than other artifacts at the Flintlock Site. They are of the Fort Walton style, dated between 1100 and 1500 CE, and probably are associated with a known prehistoric site (Castle Root Site, 8JA413) immediately upland on the bluff overlooking the river. The Castle Root Site was investigated in 1984 by University of South Florida archaeologists. Their surface collection produced Fort Walton Period (Deptford or Weeden Island) ceramics; at that time the site appeared to be moderately disturbed and archaeologists recognized it was threatened by erosion (Figs. 5, 6).

Two other Native American artifacts, a sherd of Chattahoochee Brushed pottery and a rolled copper Kaskaskia projectile point, are typical of Seminole Indian material culture. A single silver "ball-and-cone" earring, recovered from a solution pocket in the river bottom, also dates from the Seminole Period and was manufactured in England specifically for Indian trade (Figs. 7, 8).

Several fragments of glass objects were recovered for analysis. All examples date after 1818 and several date between 1825 and 1875. Another example is a modern Gallagher & Burton whiskey bottle from the first half of the twentieth century, which could have been discarded by a fisherman.

A variety of tools were collected from the site, including an auger, hook, hammer, machete, axes, and hatchets. Although difficult to date, all are consistent in function with late nineteenth and early twentieth-century logging activities along the river. At least one of the hatchets may date from an earlier period (late eighteenth or early nineteenth century), but its form and function are identical to modern counterparts. Similarly, a Pringle tree sap collection cup, which is associated with the naval stores industry at the turn of the twentieth century, was patented in 1910. Other tools observed on the site but not collected

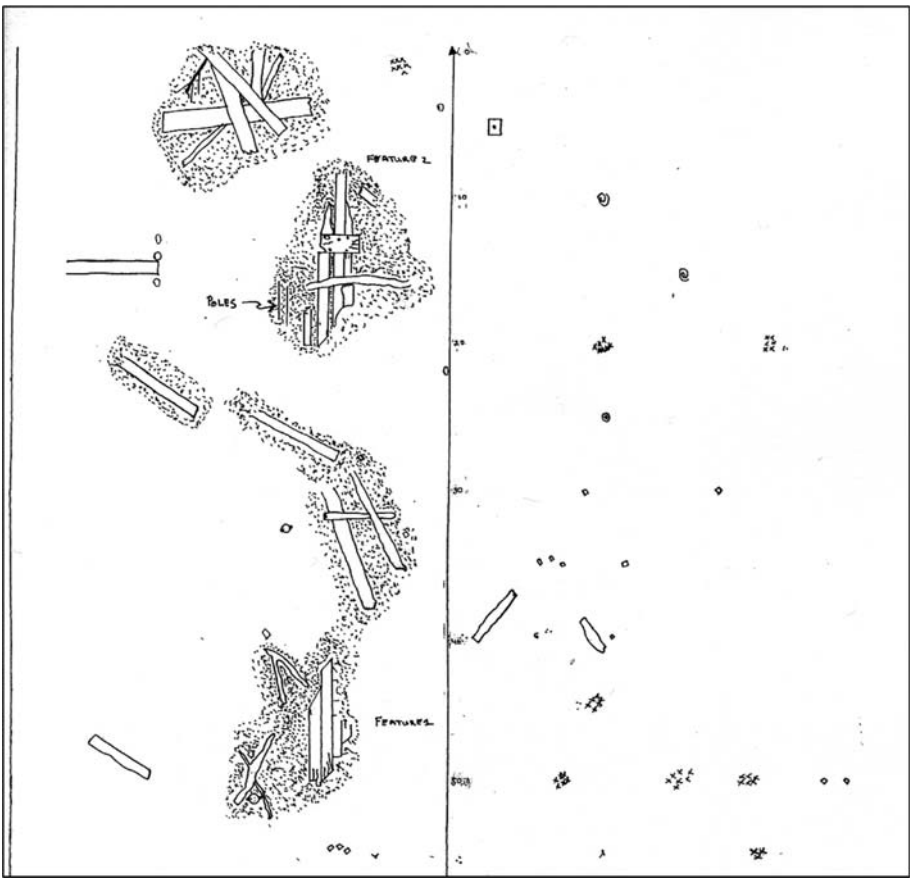

Fig. 3 Portion of the site map depicting the location of disarticulated elements of a wooden barge

include a pry bar, bolt cutters, shackles, and chain, all of which are not inconsistent with logging activities.

Utensils and personal items recovered from the site also are difficult to date, but most appear to fit within a nineteenth-century context. For example, one pewter spoon has a maker's mark that could be associated with a New York pewterer who was in business between 1833 and 1840. A knife handle with pewter inlays appears to date to the first half of the nineteenth century, and a folding straight razor with a horn handle is of an early type, most likely made in England between 1790 and 1810. A complete tailor's iron appears to date to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century; similar irons can be found in turn-of-the-century catalogs.

Among the most numerous artifacts encountered, and the artifact that inspired the naming of the Flintlock Site, are gun barrels and other parts. The gun barrels and locks present an interesting challenge, since only two of the weapons could have been functional at the time they were deposited in the archaeological record. One of the firearms is a Richard Wilson Type G Indian trade gun. The remains of this weapon had a portion of the stock and the lock still attached when found. A second gun recovered from the site had the forward portion of the lock mechanism remaining, along with evidence of a full-length

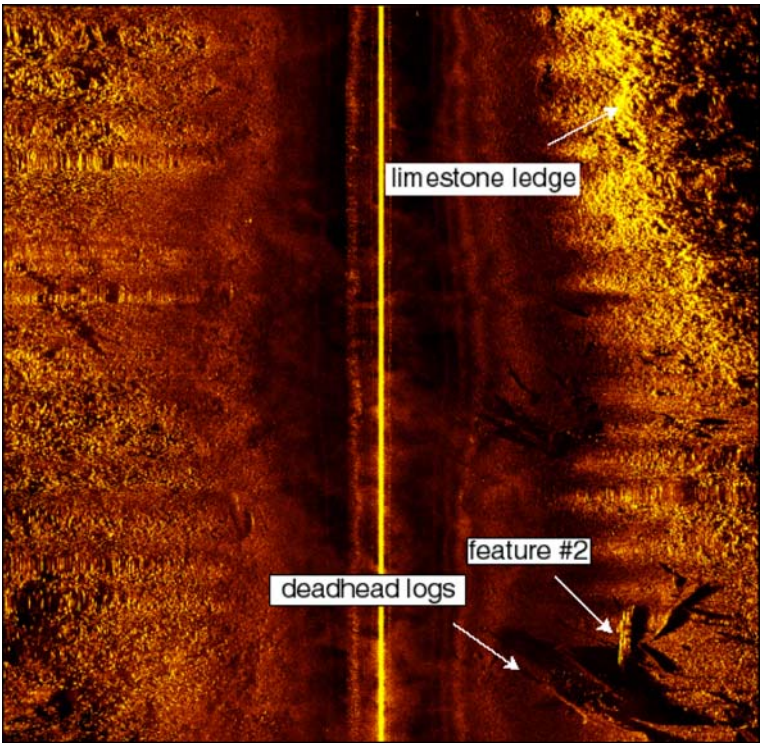

Fig. 4 Sonar image of a portion of the Flintlock Site 8JA763 (note feature #2 represents disarticulated elements of a wooden barge)

Fig. 5 A complete Fort Walton bowl recovered during the project

Fig. 6 Portion of a Fort Walton bowl recovered during the project

Fig. 7 Rolled copper Kakaskia Point

stock. Of nine guns recovered during these investigations, seven have been intentionally damaged and deformed. The deformities may have been caused to make the guns inoperable, or they may represent use of the gun barrels as pins, canoe tie-downs, fishing poles, pony pickets, etc. Alternatively, the weapons may have been ritually "killed" by pinching the barrels shut or removing the breech plugs and hammering shut the breech, much like pots were "killed" by punching holes in the bottoms (Sears 1954, p. 342) (Figs. 9, 10).

All of the guns and locks were manufactured between 1750 and 1780. Although none were standard U.S. military issue, examples of Brown Bess type muskets may have been used by the U.S. Army. Fragments of this type of weapon in archaeological contexts were found at the Negro Fort (Fort Gadsden). Alternatively, military operations occurring within the area may be responsible for the disabling of these weapons or for throwing them into

Fig. 8 Ball and cone earring typical of Seminole Indian material culture

Fig. 9 Type G Wilson English trade guns were recovered during the project

Fig. 10 A French (TVLL) flintlock mechanism with gunspall recovered during the project

the river to prevent further use. The most significant conclusion derived from the study of these weapons is that they were too old to have been used in the 1817 Scott ambush incident.

Conclusions

Analysis of artifacts recovered from the Flintlock Site and of those left in situ on the riverbed produced no archaeological evidence that could be linked conclusively to the 1817 army boat ambush episode. No artifacts were encountered that could positively be identified as belonging to the U.S. Army. Instead, the Flintlock Site collection appears to represent material remnants of cultural activities that took place along the river from the time of prehistoric occupation to the late Colonial and Seminole Period trade and conflict, the development of ante- and post-bellum plantation traffic, turn-of-the-century timber industries, and into modern commercial and recreational river use.

Accumulation of artifacts in this particular area can be explained by a combination of natural and human activities. Riverbank erosion and construction of the power plant caused objects from upland sites, such as the Castle Root Site, to be redeposited in the river, where they were protected from further erosion and displacement by deflection of the main river current below the plant's discharge canal. Gradual accumulation of sediments in this area also included entrapment of waterborne debris including not only trees, branches, and logs, but also cultural materials that became trapped in a trough of reduced hydrodynamic flow along the limestone ledge below the river bank. Other objects that found their way to the site undoubtedly were accidentally or intentionally deposited during riverine activities related to transportation, construction, resource extraction, recreation, dredging, and navigational maintenance.

Analysis of the site's artifact typology and chronology provides material reflections of the various cultural activities that took place along the Apalachicola River over time, rather than a record of one discrete event or activity. Despite a careful and thorough investigation,

no archaeological evidence that could be linked conclusively to the 1817 Scott ambush was found. Instead, an underwater museum containing relics of the river's past was discovered. As such, the Flintlock Site represents a cultural cache of hidden clues to the history of one of Florida's most important waterways.

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