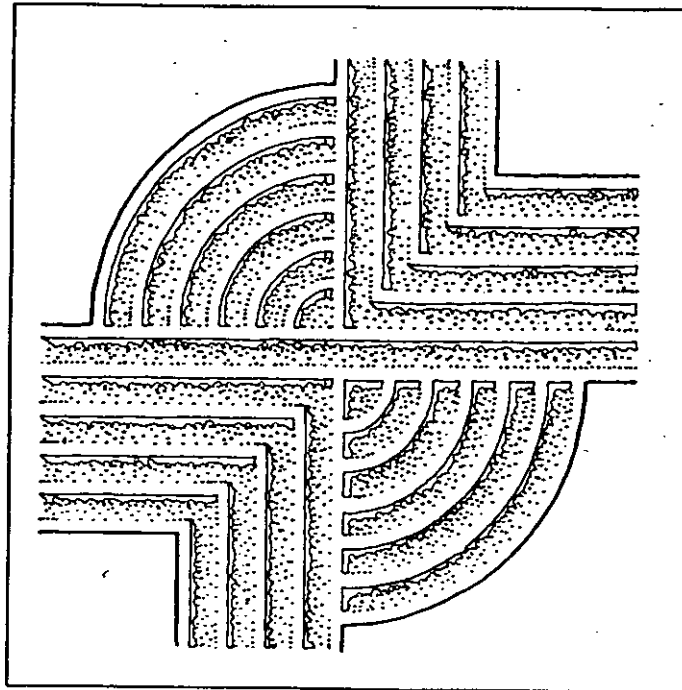


MANAGEMENT SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
DATA RECOVERY, 38BU833, HILTON HEAD  
PLANTATION, HILTON HEAD ISLAND, BEAUFORT  
COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA



**RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION 77**

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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA RECOVERY,  
38BU833, HILTON HEAD PLANTATION,  
HILTON HEAD ISLAND, BEAUFORT COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA

Prepared For:

Mr. Jack Best  
The Melrose Company  
P.O. Drawer 21307  
Hilton Head Island, S.C. 29925

Prepared By:

Michael Trinkley

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Chicora Foundation, Inc.  
P.O. Box 8664 □ 861 Arbutus Drive  
Columbia, South Carolina 29202  
803/787-6910

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## Introduction

Hilton Head is a Sea Island situated in Beaufort County, about 15 miles south-southwest of the City of Beaufort. The island is located between Port Royal Sound to the north and Daufuskie Island to the south and is separated from Daufuskie by Callibogue Sound. A narrow band of marsh and Skull Creek separate Hilton Head Island from the mainland to the north and northwest (Figure 1).

The 19,500 acre (highland) island measures about 11.5 miles in length and a maximum of 6.8 miles in width. Hilton Head has a Pleistocene core, with a Holocene beach ridge fringe (Mathews et al. 1980:155). Prior to development the area was in maritime forest modified by fairly intensive agricultural activity (scattered across the island, but including lands bordering Skull Creek, in the vicinity of archaeological site 38BU833). Elevations on the island range from sea level to 25 feet above mean sea level (MSL). The soils are typical of the area and consist of primarily nine soil series. Three, the Bertie, Seabrook, and Wando series, are excessively to moderately well drained sands found on nearly level to gently sloping topography (Stuck 1980). About 68% of the soils bordering the major drainages on the island, Skull, Jarvis, Old Town, and Broad creeks, are either Seabrook or Wando.

Four series, Coosaw, Ridgeland, Seewee, and Yemassee, are somewhat poorly drained sands which occur on fairly level topography. Finally, two soil series, the Rosedhu and Williman, are poorly to very poorly drained and have water tables within the upper foot of the soil.

Large portions of the island have been developed as residential resort communities. As a result of an intensive archaeological survey conducted by Chicora Foundation on Tracts 4 and 9 of an undeveloped portion of Hilton Head Plantation, two archaeological sites were identified (Adams 1991). The study tract is bounded to the west by Skull Creek, to the north by development property, to the east Seabrook Drive, and to the south by Parcel 10.

Of the two identified sites, one, 38BU833, was determined by the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Officer (SC SHPO) as eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. A Memorandum of Agreement between the SC SHPO and The Melrose Company (dated January 15, 1992), requires that this eligible site receive data recovery excavations.

Chicora Foundation was requested by the developer's representatives, Mr. Jack Best and Mr. Marty Colleran, to prepare

a technical and budget proposal for review and approval by the S.C. SHPO. A proposal for those investigations was submitted by Chicora on December 20, 1991 and the work was approved by the developer on December 31, 1991 and was approved by the SC SHPO on January 7, 1992 (memo from Mr. Lee Tippet to Dr. Michael Trinkley).

This management summary has been prepared immediately upon completion of the fieldwork at 38BU833 and does not contain detailed information on artifact or subsistence analyses, or any detailed midden evaluations. It is intended solely to provide a brief descriptive statement of the work conducted by Chicora and to allow the SC SHPO to verify that the proposed work has actually been accomplished. The management summary is minimally necessary for The Melrose Company to continue with the development of the land encompassing 38BU833. This construction will destroy portions of the site and, of course, created the need for archaeological mitigation activities initially.

Archaeological investigations were begun at 38BU833 by a crew of four (including the principal investigator) on January 23, 1992 and continued through January 31, 1992. A total of 244 person hours were spent in the field and an additional 24 person hours were spent on laboratory analysis and field processing. As a result of this work 900 square feet of site area were opened. This resulted in the excavation of over 785 cubic feet of soil, all either dry screened through 1/4 or 1/8-inch mesh, or waterscreened through 1/8-inch mesh (depending on the provenience).

The proposed investigations at 38BU833 were to include the excavation of approximately 900 square feet, representing a 4.5% sample of the total site area within the survey tract (Parcels 4 and 9, the site extends north, off the survey tract for perhaps 600 additional feet). The work conducted by Chicora at 38BU833 meet the proposed data recovery requirements.

#### Previous Investigations

Site 38BU833 was originally reported by Chicora Foundation, based on a reconnaissance level survey conducted for the Town of Hilton Head Island (Trinkley 1987). The site was recommended as potentially eligible, but insufficient information was generated by the study to document significance.

An additional survey was conducted by Chicora Foundation at the request of The Melrose Company. 38BU833 was found situated along the bank of Skull Creek in the northwestern portion of the survey area. Thirty-two shovel tests were placed at 25 foot intervals in the site area. Fifteen (46.9%) evidenced moderate to heavy shell midden or artifacts, while 10 (31.3%) contained light shell. The remaining 21.8% of the shovel tests were negative. Shell was also found eroding from the creek bank. While the structure and parking lot on Parcel 4 destroyed portions of the

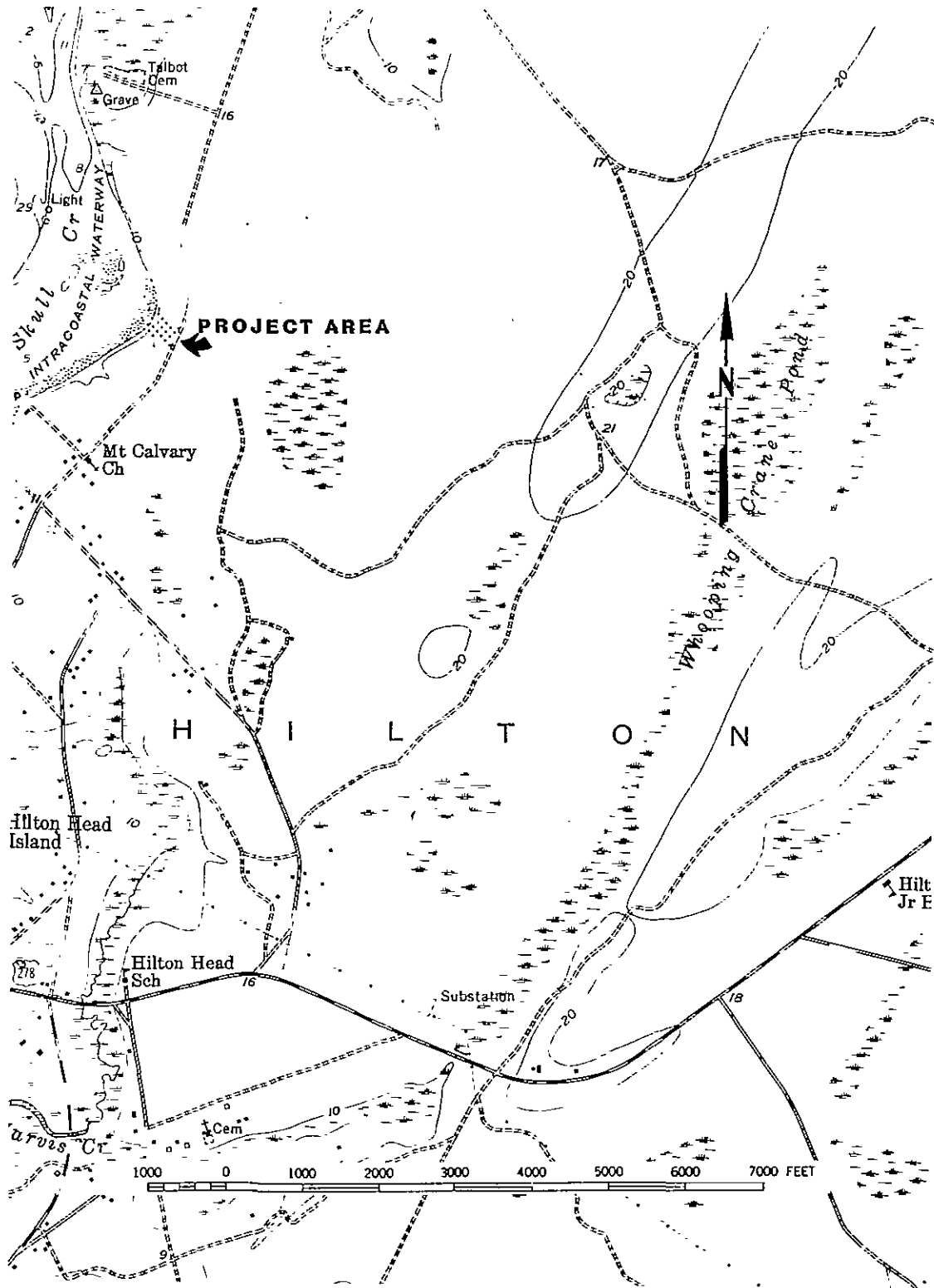


Figure 1. Location of project area, Hilton Head Island Quadrangle.

site, the area between the creek and the building, as well as the area east of the parking lot near the large live oaks evidenced buried intact shell middens. The site was found to continue at least 300 feet inland, east of the creek edge. The central UTM coordinates were established as E524140 N3566850 and the soils are classified as excessively drained Wando fine sands. Soil profiles indicated that the top horizon was generally 0.5 feet in depth (Munsell Color 10YR4/3), the second zone was generally 0.4 feet thick consisting of shell midden and the same brown sands. Subsoil exhibited a Munsell Color of 10YR6/4. Areas immediately around the structure were disturbed. Recovered artifacts consist of two thin curved clear glass fragments, three unidentifiable prehistoric sherds, and one Caraway coastal plain chert projectile point.

The site was recommended eligible for inclusion on the National Register based on the presence of intact midden and probable features. Research questions centered on the continued exploration of Middle and Late Woodland settlement and subsistence systems in the South Carolina low country.

#### Excavations at 38BU833

The site grid at the site was laid out to incorporate the area between the existing building and Skull Creek, as well as that portion of the site north of the structure. Grid north is oriented N20°E and has been tied into the existing structure. In addition, two iron rods were used to temporarily mark the east-west baseline. Units were established using the modified Chicago 10-foot grid, with each square designated by its southeast corner, from a 0R0 point at the southwest corner of the site. Thus, the southeast corner of square 10R20 would be located north 10 feet and right (or east) 20 feet from the 0R0 point. Vertical control was maintained through the use of a nearby temporary benchmark (a nail in the base of a pine tree situated at 40R55) with a mean sea level (MSL) elevation of 20.00 feet.

The excavations throughout the site used gross natural stratigraphic zones. Zone 1 consisted of brown to dark brown humic sand varying in depth from about 0.6 to 1.0 foot. Zone 2 was used to designate shell midden deposits underlying Zone 1 soils, regardless of their cultural affiliation. Zone 2 varied from 0.4 to 1.0 feet in depth. Underlying Zone 2 is a yellow-tan sand which is sterile within the upper 0.5 foot.

Zone 1 soil from the various units was dry screened through ¼-inch mesh using mechanical sifters. Zone 2 soil was subjected to a variety of screening processes, including ¼-inch dry screening, ⅜-inch dry screening, and ⅜-inch waterscreening, to examine the different recovery rates. Shell was routinely separated out and weighed prior to being discarded in the field (hand picked samples, however, were collected, and a column sample of shell was retained from each area where Zone 2 was present as an in situ deposit).

Units were usually troweled at the base of Zone 2 (or Zone 1, if no Zone 2 was present), photographed in b/w and color slides, and plotted.

Field notes were prepared on pH neutral, alkaline buffered paper and photographic materials are being processed to archival standards. All original field notes, with archival copies, will be curated at the Environmental and Historical Museum of Hilton Head Island as Accession Number 1992.3 (ARCH 3263 through ARCH 3284). All specimens will be evaluated for conservation needs and will be treated prior to curation, although the prehistoric specimens (including bone and shell items) appear to be stable.

A total of nine 10-foot units were excavated by Chicora at the site (Figure 2). Units 70-80R30 were placed to examine the suspected dense midden adjacent to Skull Creek, while units 55R55 and 75R55 were excavated to examine the area immediately inland from the middens. Two 10 by 20 foot blocks, 100R70-80 and 100R110-120 were excavated to the north of the structure to examine further inland areas and unit 70R280 was excavated in the live oak grove to determine the nature of the midden previously identified in that area.

As originally suspected, units 70-80R30 were found to contain relatively intact, dense midden adjacent to the Skull Creek bluff edge. Two 2.2-foot square column samples were removed from the southwest corners of these units. The soil:shell ratio varies from 1:1.3 in 70R30 to 1:0.4 in 80R30, reflecting the heterogeneous nature of the midden. Shellfish is dominated by oyster, which comprises 99+% of the midden by individuals. Other shellfish observed include hardshell clam, stout tagelus, and knobbed whelk.

Faunal remains were found to be exceedingly rare. A comparison of the various screen recovery rates is not useful because of the heterogeneity of the midden. For example, 1/8-inch waterscreening of midden soils in 55R55 produced a small, but noticeable quantity of fish bone (the only faunal material present in the unit), whereas similar screening of midden soils in 100R70 and 70R30 yielded virtually no faunal remains of any description.

Ethnobotanical remains are equally as scarce. Flotation of the soil from the two column samples produced almost no charcoal (and what was recovered is wood charcoal). Waterscreening of the various midden samples yielded only two fragments of hickory nutshell and very small quantities of wood charcoal.

Examination of the 70-80R30 profiles reveal only a single episode of midden deposition. Further, the profiles suggest that the bulk of the midden has eroded into Skull Creek. Intermixed in both middens are small quantities of St. Catherines and Savannah wares. Elsewhere in the vicinity of the marsh edge there is a mixture of earlier Deptford pottery with the later Late Woodland

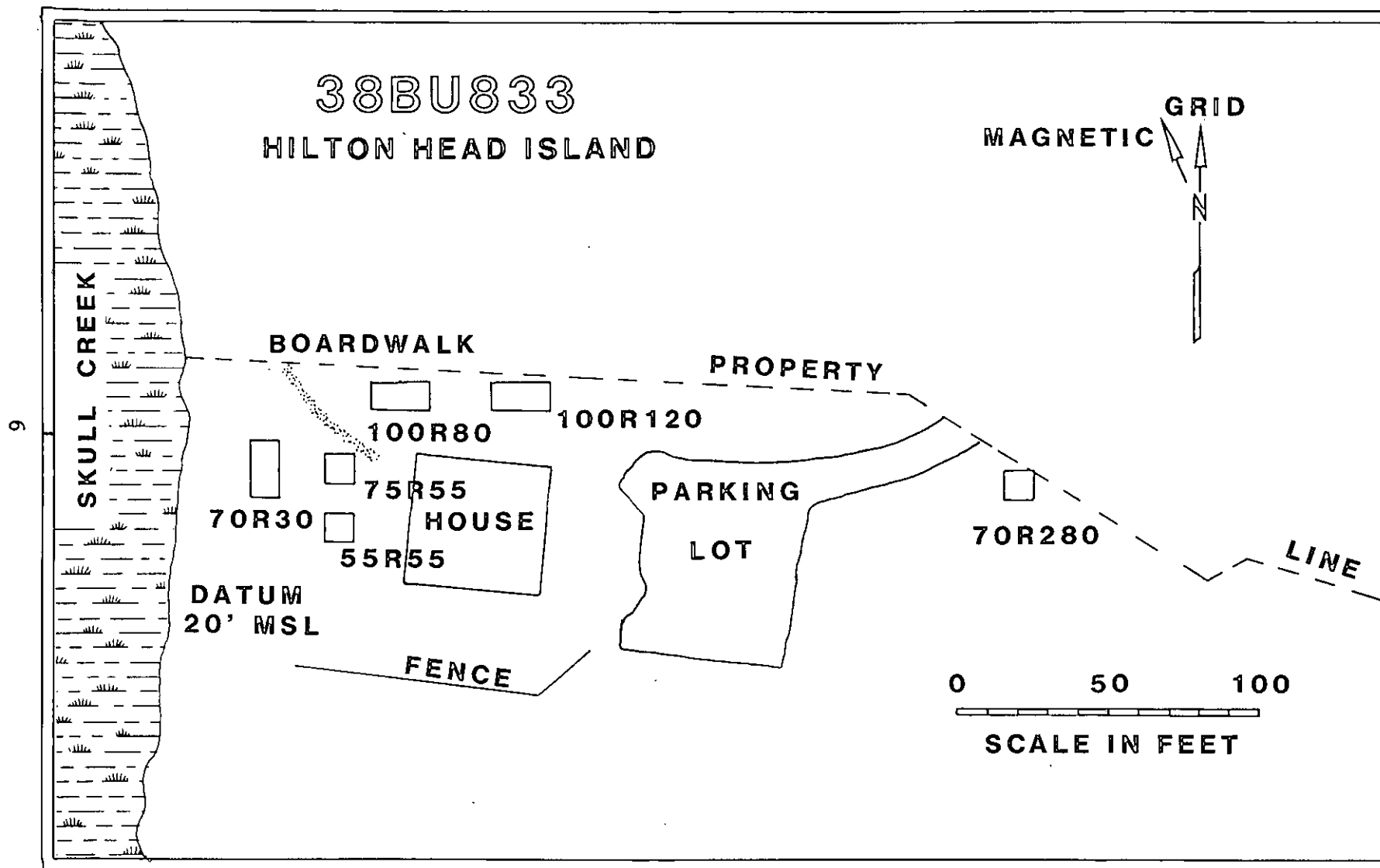


Figure 2. Excavations at 38BU833, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.



wares. Also present over the site area adjacent to the water is a thin veneer of eighteenth century ceramics -- delft, white salt-glazed stoneware, and slipware. Also present was an occasional glass fragment or hand wrought nail.

Unit 70R280, the most interior square investigated, produced almost exclusively Deptford pottery. While considerable shell was present in this unit (656 pounds), all but perhaps the lowest 0.2 foot appeared to be thoroughly crushed, probably from plowing.

The excavations revealed two features in 70R100 and one post hole in 70R280. Feature 1 consisted of a portion of a shallow shell pit in the southwest quadrant of 70R100, bisected by the R90 and N70 walls. Feature 2, situated in the northwest quadrant of the same unit, was bisected by the R90 wall and also represented a shallow steaming pit. Fill from both features amounted to less than 5 gallons (volume) and was therefore waterscreened through ¼-inch mesh. Neither pit produced pottery, and only Feature 2 yielded a small quantity of fish bone. Charcoal, while present, was very fragmented. The single post hole in 70R280 was 0.8 foot in diameter and 0.5 foot in depth. No associated post holes were encountered and the fill produced no pottery.

#### Interpretations

These investigations have explored a relatively small percentage of site 38BU833, since most of the site is situated outside the survey tract. The excavations undertaken, however, appear to have yielded material and information representative of that portion of the site contained within the project area of The Melrose Company. The work suggests that portions of undisturbed site **can** be identified even in areas of previous development. Consequently, future work should be contemplated for that portion of the site within the Village at Skull Creek development.

The excavations at 38BU833 reveal an earlier Deptford occupation, primarily situated approximately 250 to 300 feet inland from the bluff edge, and a later St. Catherines and Savannah occupation, primarily found adjacent to the bluff. Finally, there is also evidence of some type of mid-eighteenth century historic plantation occupation in the immediate vicinity.

The Deptford and eighteenth century historic occupations are the least thoroughly investigated -- the Deptford midden has been thoroughly disturbed, reducing its potential to yield significant subsistence information and no structural remains could be found associated with the historic occupation during either the shovel testing or data recovery phases.

Regardless, both components have yielded some additional information. The Deptford occupation appears to be generally similar to that of the later St. Catherines/Savannah phase. The

historic occupation is suggestive of a moderately low status occupation, perhaps similar to the isolated structures identified on Spring Island (see Trinkley 1991) and Daufuskie.

The St. Catherines and Savannah occupation is perhaps the most interesting, if not significant, aspect of the work and is comparable to the research conducted by Chicora Foundation on nearby Callawassie Island (Trinkley 1991). Site 38BU833 has yielded evidence of a very focal subsistence based, almost exclusively oriented toward the collection and processing of oysters. The collection of other shellfish, fish, and mammals appears to be opportunistic. Floral materials, excluding perhaps wood used to fuel the fires steaming the oysters, are exceedingly rare.

Ceramics, while present, are uncommon, as are other types of cultural remains. In fact, the survey and excavations produced only a few flakes (all suggestive of resharpening existing tools) and a single projectile point. No bone or shell tools were found. Daub is equally rare and may represent the accidental firing of clay naturally found in the soil, rather than structural remains.

The co-occurrence of St. Catherines and Savannah ceramics is certainly expected based on the Pinckney Island research, which yielded radiocarbon dates for St. Catherines pottery as late as A.D. 1385 (Trinkley 1981). In several cases there seems to be a blending, or mixing, of traditionally Savannah characteristics with those usually thought of as St. Catherines. This, of course, opens several possibilities, including that both wares were used by the same cultural group or that the wares were freely traded and exchanged between several contemporaneous groups.

The investigations at 38BU833, then, offer tantalizing evidence of early historic occupation on Hilton Head Island -- a period about which, unfortunately, little is known. The site also provides some of the first evidence of Late Woodland occupation on the island, revealing some parallels with research elsewhere in the County.

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