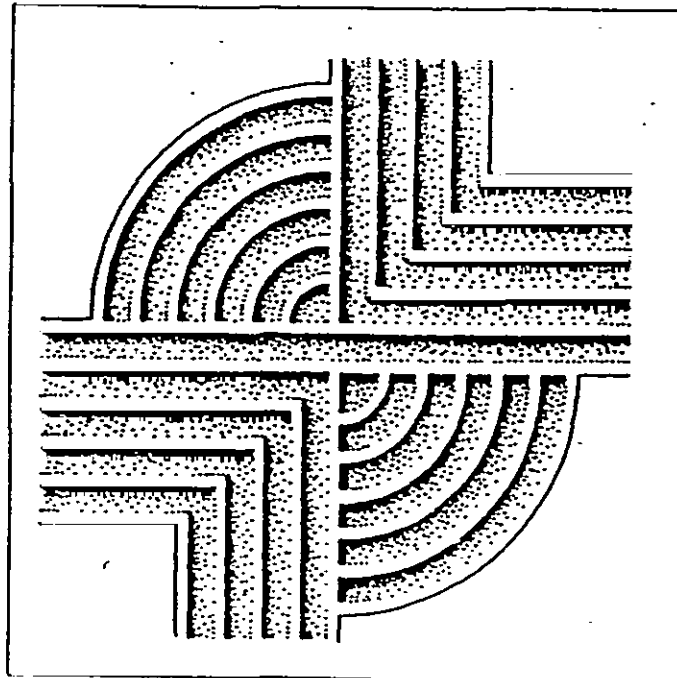


**MANAGEMENT SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL
TESTING CONDUCTED AT 38BU832, BETHEA TRACT,
HILTON HEAD ISLAND, [BEAUFORT COUNTY],
SOUTH CAROLINA**



RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION 23

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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING
CONDUCTED AT 38BU832, BETHEA TRACT,
HILTON HEAD ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA

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Chicora Research Contribution 23

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Introduction

This investigation was directed by Dr. Michael Trinkley of Chicora Foundation, Inc. for the Town of Hilton Head Island as part of a National Park Service Historic Preservation Grant administered by the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. While the work conducted by Chicora involves archaeological testing at six sites, this management summary deals with findings at only one site, known as the Bethea Tract or 38BU832. The 2.25 acre tract is situated immediately north of the intersection of Skull Creek and Santa Maria Drives on Hilton Head Plantation (Figure 1). The site was originally identified during Chicora's 1986 reconnaissance survey of the Skull Creek drainage for the Town (Trinkley 1987).

Site 38BU832 is situated about 350 feet north of Santa Maria Drive at the edge of the Skull Creek marsh, and at the time of the 1986 survey, appeared to represent a Middle Woodland shellmidden, although only one sherd (tentatively identified as Wilmington Cord Marked) was recovered from the surface. Based on the presence of surface shell exposure, the site was estimated to measure about 225 feet along the marsh (roughly east-west) and about 80 feet inland (north-south). A retaining wall had been build along the marsh edge, so there was no exposure of the midden to determine depth or provide additional information on extent. The midden was noted to extend west, across a small slough, into a Black cemetery (recorded as 38BU35).

Based on this original survey the site was recommended as potentially eligible for the National Register and it was noted that "the site evidences abundant shell and is in a wooded area, so site integrity is expected to be high" (Trinkley 1986:67). The work conducted in 1986 was oriented to obtaining sufficient information to document eligibility at the site.

The research design was essentially explorative, that is, it was directed toward answering certain fundamental questions such as does the site possess integrity, what is the range of artifacts present, and what can an archaeological study reveal concerning the site's inhabitants? While portions of this research are guided by the need to determine site eligibility, other aspects are oriented toward obtaining additional information on what appeared to be a small, discreet Middle Woodland shell midden. Little previous research has been conducted on these types of sites in the Beaufort area (see Trinkley 1981).

Additional information on the environmental setting of

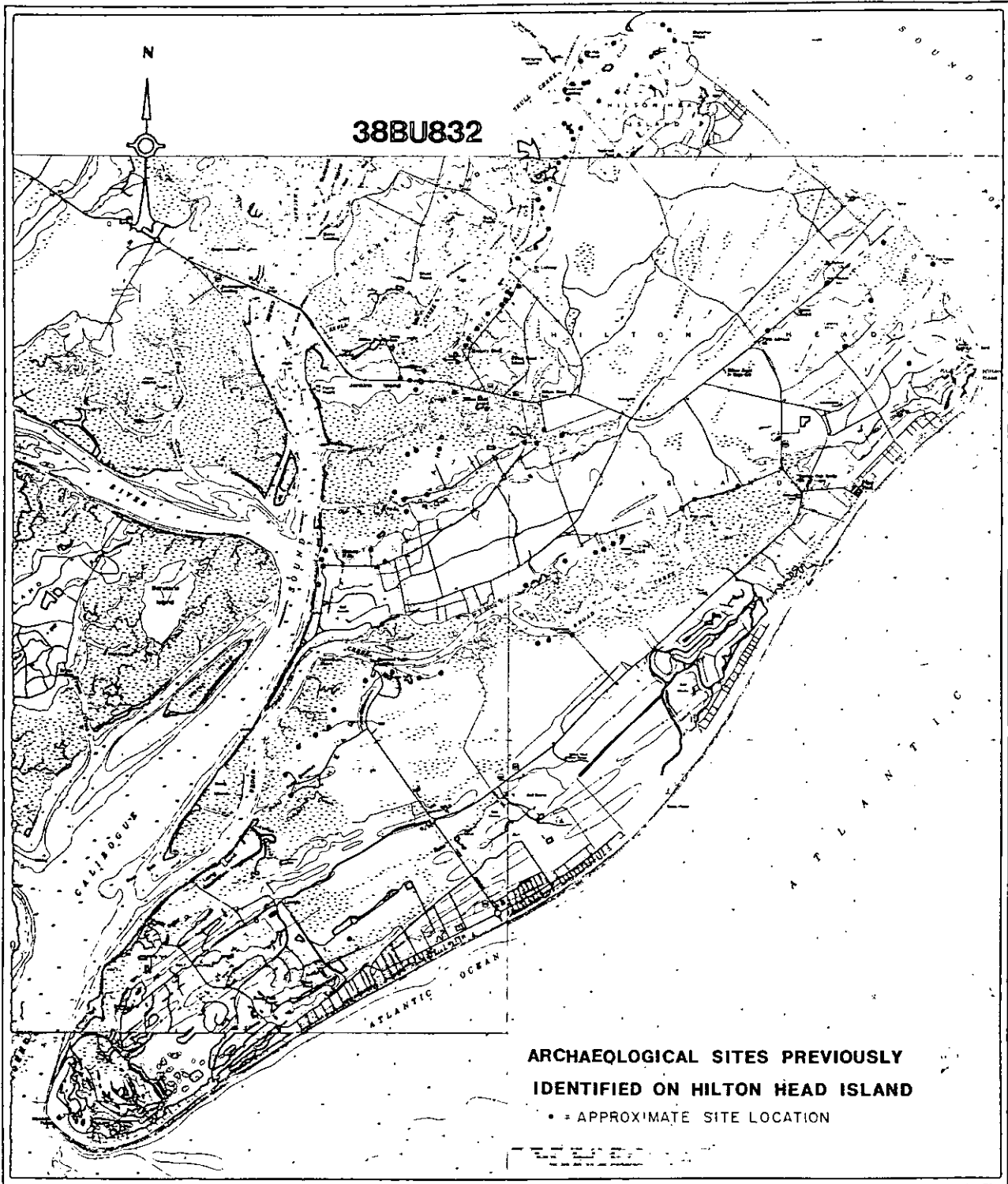


Figure 1. A portion of the Hilton Head Island 7.5' USGS topographic map, showing the location of 38BU832.

Hilton Head Island, previous archaeological research, and the historical setting may be obtained from several previous archaeological studies, including the 1986 survey report (Trinkley 1987) and the Fish Haul archaeological study (Trinkley 1986).

Field Methods

Because 38BU832 was only one of six sites tested by Chicora in less than two weeks of field work, a program of auger testing was developed to maximize data while minimizing time spent at any one site. Although additional time could have allowed additional information to be collected, I believe that the tests are sufficient to place the site in a firm temporal framework, establish site boundaries, determine site integrity, and begin to reveal pertinent research questions.

The site was examined on January 8-10, 1988 by a crew of two (including the author). A total of 10 person hours were required for this work.

A grid, oriented N5 W, was established at the site with a 1/2-inch rebar datum placed at the west edge of the site against the concrete retaining wall. Auger test points were begun 50 feet east of this datum and were laid out at 50 foot intervals east-west for a distance of 200 feet and at 25 foot intervals north-south for a distance of 100 feet. The resulting rectangle, measuring 200 by 100 feet, contained 25 auger test points and was oriented to the marsh edge where there was abundant shell. Although the midden was thought to continue west, into the cemetery, no testing was conducted in that area. Although the cemetery will be preserved from any development activity, it is likely that its use has damaged the integrity of the prehistoric remains.

A mechanical auger with a 10-inch bit 3-feet in length was used to obtain a sample from each established point. All soil was screened through 1/4-inch mesh and all cultural material was collected (including shell debris). Information was collected from each unit on soil stratigraphy and soil colors were collected from representative tests. All auger tests were backfilled.

Stratigraphy varies considerably throughout the site area, primarily as a result of grading probably associated with the construction of the concrete retaining wall adjacent to the Skull Creek marsh. In areas of intact, well preserved midden, such as are found at the northwest edge of the site, there dense shell midden from the current ground surface to a depth of 0.9 foot. This midden is composed almost entirely of oyster shells with small quantities of clam. The soil matrix is dark black (Munsell 7.5YR2.5). Underlying the midden a transition zone of mixed

oyster shell and brown soil (Munsell 7.5YR5/6) which gradually grades into a yellow sand (Munsell 10YR7/8). This profile is thought to represent the site prior to disturbance. The undisturbed site area extends from Auger Test 25 southeast to Auger Test 14 and incorporates approximately one-quarter of the site area (Figure 2).

The tests revealed considerable disturbance in the northeast quarter of the site, where there is evidence that the midden has been completely stripped away leaving a tan soil (Munsell 7.5YR5/6) overlying the yellow B horizon sands. There is also evidence of extensive filling in the southwest corner of the site, with up to 0.4 foot of fill overlying either shell midden or tan sand.

Shell weights in the dense midden area, range from 39 pounds in Auger Test 14 to 9 pounds in Auger Test 24. Elsewhere on the site the shell midden is less dense, with shell weights ranging from 0 to 6 pounds. Density falls quickly to the south; it seems likely that the auger test grid as established defines the original site area (excluding the cemetery portion) of 200 feet east-west by 100 feet north-south.

Laboratory Methods

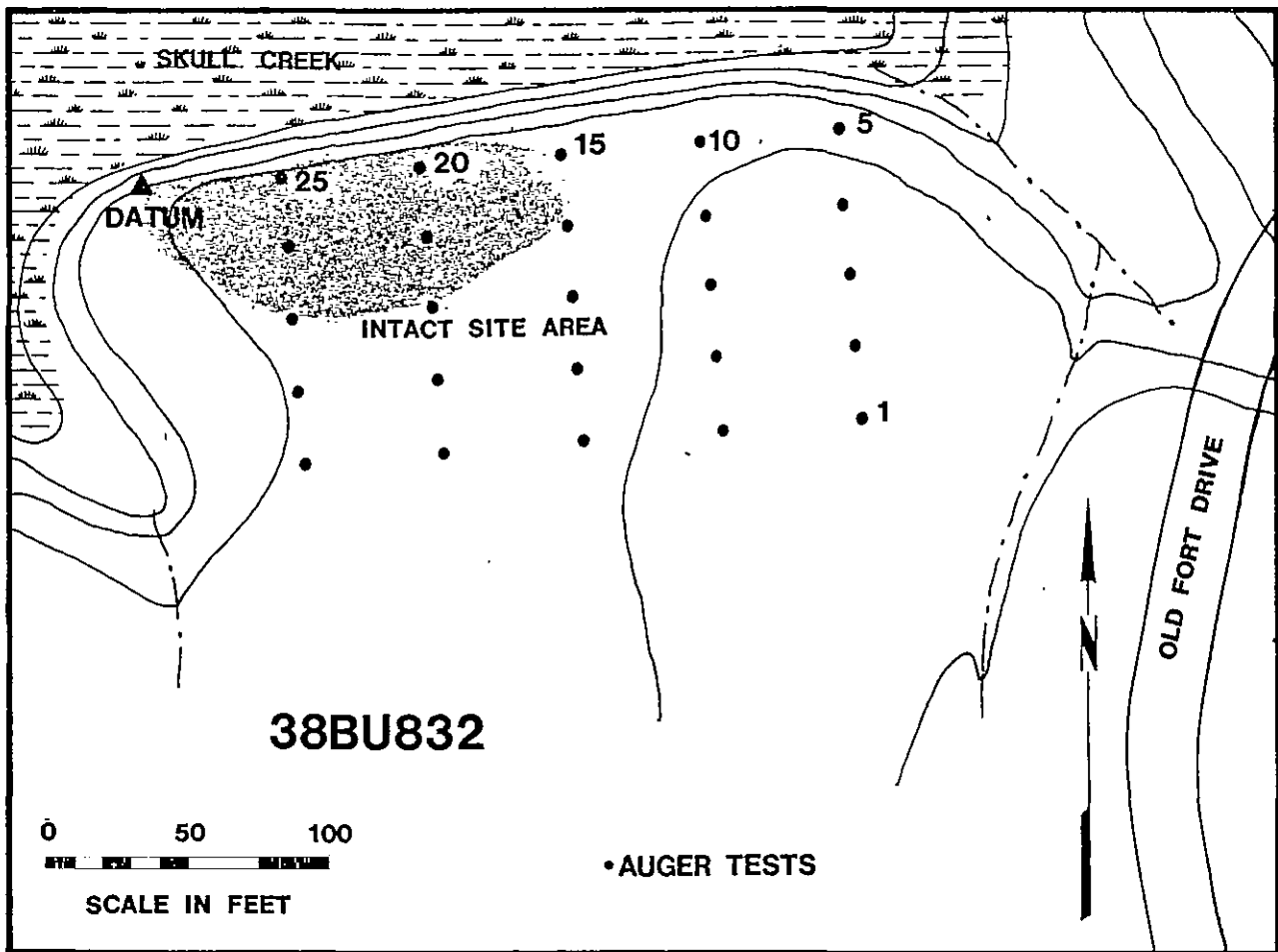
The cleaning of artifacts was conducted in Columbia on January 20, 1988. Cataloging uses the system established by The Environmental and Historical Museum of Hilton Head Island, where the collections will be permanently curated under Accession Number 1988.3. No conservation of the collection was required.

Analysis of the collections followed professionally accepted standards with a level of intensity suitable to the quantity and quality of the remains. The only materials recovered were prehistoric ceramics, which were classified using common coastal South Carolina and Georgia types (DePratter 1979; Trinkley 1983), and modern wire nails (from the fill zones at the site).

Results

The auger tests yielded only four prehistoric sherds, including two Deptford Plain, one Mount Pleasant Cord Marked, and one St. Catherines Cord Marked. All were recovered from the area of intact midden found at the northwest corner of the site. These remains are indicative of occupation during the period from about 500 B.C. to A.D. 1000. The midden consists almost entirely of oyster shell with no evidence of animal bone and little evidence of other shellfish.

This site appears to represent a Middle Woodland camp, perhaps occupied seasonally. Although there is a tendency to suggest that it was exclusively oriented toward the collection of



shellfish, the data collection techniques and sampling strategy were not developed to provide accurate indicators of subsistence. Nor was the auger testing procedure intended to provide specific information on the presence of subsurface features (which are often difficult to identify in a unit smaller than 5-foot square. The presence of intact midden, however, suggests that subsurface features may be present in the one area of the site.

Somewhat similar sites were investigated in 1980-1981 on Victoria Bluff and Pinckney Island (Trinkley 1981). This previous work provided indications of seasonal settlement and a limited subsistence base. In addition, ceramics were found to be very sparse at these sites; only 3600 sherds were identified from the excavation of about 3700 cubic feet at 38BU67. Since these excavations considerable refinement of collection techniques has occurred. Many researchers (e.g., Reitz 1984; Quitmyer 1985) have suggested that where collection strategies are geared toward the collection of small faunal remains, fish will be found to make a significant contribution to the diet of coastal Indian groups. There has been no recent research on Hilton Head to explore this type of Middle Woodland shell midden site.

Site Significance and Recommendations

It is generally accepted that "the significance of an archaeological site is based on the potential of the site to contribute to the scientific or humanistic understanding of the past" (Bense et al. 1986:60). If a site exhibits integrity it is likely that it may address at least some research questions and contribute information.

The archaeological testing conducted at site 38BU832 revealed the presence of a Middle Woodland shell midden which originally covered an area of about 0.5 acre adjacent to the Skull Creek marsh (and extending westward into a cemetery area). The site, however, has been damaged, probably by the construction of a retaining wall to retard erosion. This damage consists of fill placed on top of midden in several areas, and of greater concern, the removal of shell midden. The tests also revealed that there is a portion of the site, covering an area of at least 100 by 50 feet (or 0.1 acre), which is intact. Midden in this area is very dense and is found to a depth of 0.9 foot. Artifact density is not great, but is comparable to that found at other, similar sites. Like other sites, this occupation spans a considerable period of time

This site has the potential to yield significant information on a variety of research topics, most particularly those topics dealing with subsistence reconstruction and seasonality. Although it may be difficult to distinguish different temporal occupations, previous archaeological studies have suggested that subsistence and settlement from the Deptford Phase through the

St. Catherines Phase was very similar.

Chicora is recommending this site as eligible for inclusion in the National Register in spite of the previous damage. Our recommendations for additional work at the site, however, clearly recognize that the damage has affected both the types of research which can take place at the site and also the level of mitigation required.

We believe that all additional work at the site should be limited to the area of intact midden in the northwest corner of the site. Research should be oriented toward (1) recovery of a representative sample of midden remains suitable for subsistence, dietary, and seasonality studies, (2) identification of potential features through large unit excavations, and (3) examination of several distinct areas of the midden to determine spatial variability. To accomplish these goals excavation of over 800 square feet (representing a 16% sample of the intact site area) should not be necessary. This size excavation can be easily accomplished by a small crew in a maximum of two weeks.

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