

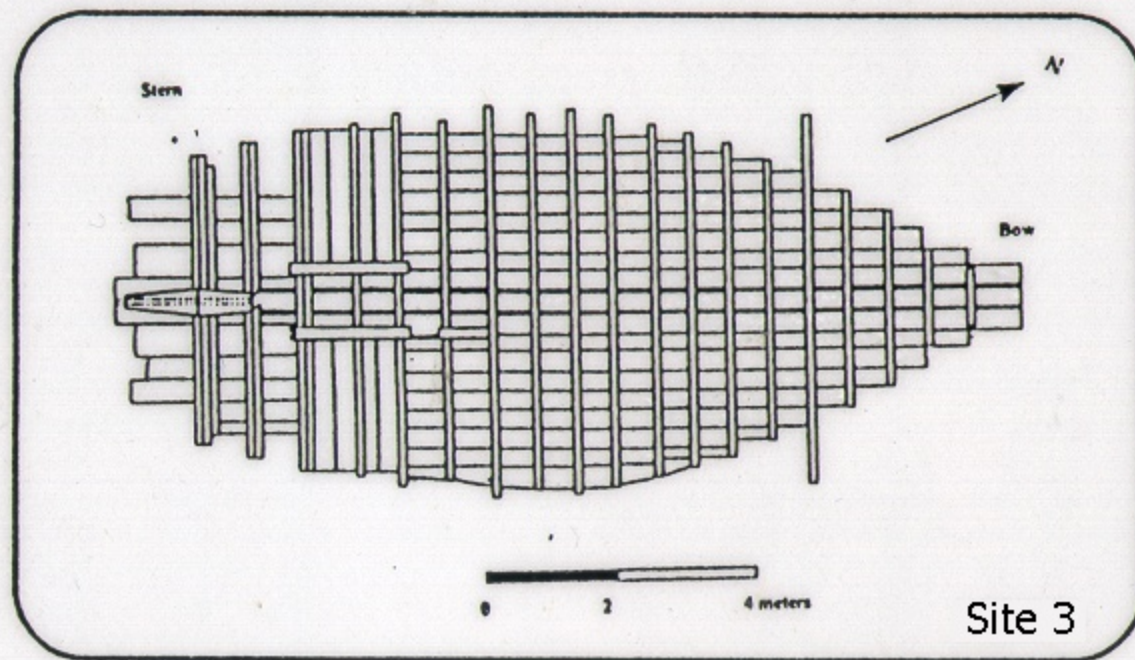
Paddling THE ASHLEY RIVER

South Carolina Heritage Corridor -
Maritime Archaeological Site Canoe Trail



History:

In 1774 an English traveler described Dorchester as "a pretty good sized town, upon Ashley River about 20 miles above Charles Town, and navigable all the way up to it...for vessels of 100 tons burthen." Bacons Bridge represented the "head of sloop navigation" and steamboats travelled up to and beyond Cedar Grove which was situated opposite Middleton Place and slightly upriver. The navigable waters of the Ashley River allowed watercraft to travel inland to conduct trade, to visit plantations, to reach the town of Fort Dorchester, and to mine phosphate. The historical sites situated along the banks of the Ashley River are an important part of the archaeological evidence relating South Carolina's settlement patterning and transportation network.



The Wrecks:

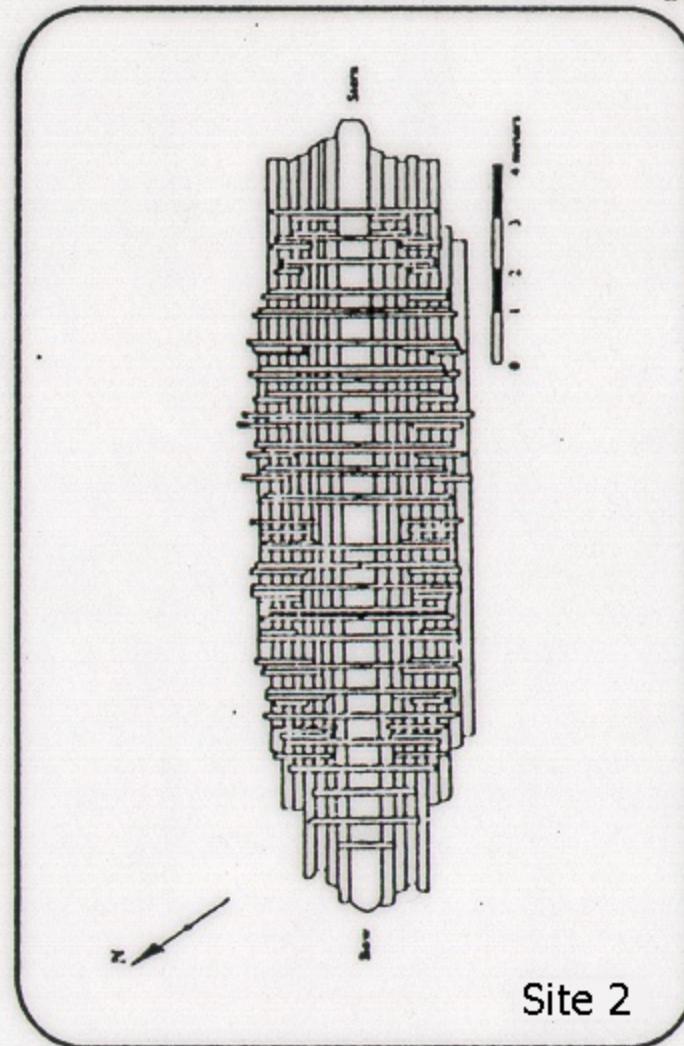
There are a number of possible reasons for the demise of the vessels littering these riverbanks. The upper reaches of the river was probably a convenient location to scuttle boats that were unservicable. Reported historical usage of this river for "hurricane holing" might also account for a high number of damaged and abandoned boats. Another possibility is the gradual abandonment of vessels that were no longer useful due to changing economic conditions along the Ashley River. For example, the failing economic viability of Dorchester town, decreasing agricultural potential of lands adjacent to the river, and finally the slump of the phosphate industry.

The architecture of the three vessels suggests that these shallow-draft, beamy boats were more practically utilized in an inland tidal context rather than offshore. It is possible that the tug was also used in the harbors, estuaries, and sounds of South Carolina. Sailing vessels and other tidalcraft were probably towed by steamtugs such as this one.

Archaeological evidence indicates that the majority of these wooden vessels date to the mid-19th century or onwards into the early 20th century. As this part of the Ashley River was a rich phosphate field during this time period, it is very likely that the vessels in the upper reaches had some association with this industry.

The Route:

This approximately six-mile tidal float trip affords captivating views of old river houses and modern waterside homes. Wildlife is abundant especially wading and shorebirds like egrets, herons and woodducks. Charleston's famous Middleton Place is located at one end of the trail and Bacon's Bridge, originally built by the colonial residents of Dorchester and now a state park, is at the other. The river is narrow and twisting with many overhangs. The tidal range is as much as four feet. Most



of these wrecks are only visible at low tide. Paddling has to be planned around tides. Launch at Bacon's Bridge or Middleton Place. Stop in at Fort Dorchester State Historical Park, one of the most notable colonial settlements, for a teabreak. Enjoy our maritime heritage!

Map Key (From Bacons Bridge paddling down river)

Left bank:

Site 1 : Vessel timbers protrude from a high tree-covered bank. The site is comprised of a stempost, apron and forward section of the keel and keelson.

Right Bank:

Site 2: The bow faces downstream with the stempost lying flat on the starboard side. This is probably a sailing or an oared vessel. The distinctive framing arrangement on this vessel is comprised of a floor timber and two sets of first futtocks attached laterally to the floor timber on either side with two sets of bolts. The first futtocks are angled squarely at 90 degrees resembling standard knees. During sit stabilization some of the timbers were re-fastened with wire. The archaeological number tags are still on the wreck.

Right bank:

Site 3: Vessel timbers of a motorized flat-bottomed watercraft. The bow is orientated in a downstream direction. The engine and propellor have been removed. Diagnostic timbers include engine mounting beams which straddle the keel and a shaft

log used to support the propellor shaft. The hull of this vessel is heavily planked, with three layers of planking in the aft section. Small chunks of marl in the bilges might indicate that this vessel was used for phosphate mining.

Left bank:

Site 4: Two wharves extending into the river consisting of cribwork filled with soil, rocks and brick rubble. Three rows of cribbing logs run parallel to the earth embankment, each spaced directly over the foundation logs. Filler logs, of a smaller diameter to the cribbing logs, run along the side of the wharf. In 1989 hurricane Hugo did considerable damage to these wharves.

Left Bank:

Site 5: A planked barge projecting from the river bank. The corners of the side planks are notched in two locations to receive the header log. A rod runs through the interlocking portions. At each corner, on the inside, a thick gusset is held in place by an iron rod.

Right Bank:

Site 6: Vessel timbers projecting from the riverbank with a keel, keelson, floor timbers, and outer hull planking. Other disarticulated sections of planking attached to frames are located upstream.

Left Bank: Site 7: Remains of an iron steam boat.

Left Bank:

Site 8 : Steam tug boat of composite construction with an iron hull sheathed with wood and sealed along the interior hull with cement. The boiler and the iron propellor are still extant, but the engines have been removed. Many of the boiler tubes are plugged with cement indicating that the tubes were dysfunctional. The vessel is comprised of six bulkheads. Two large bitts located near the stern were used for towing. An iron propellor is still attached to the hull.

