

Caribbean Archaeology

At the Florida Museum of Natural History



PARADISE PARK, 2001



William F. Keegan, PI

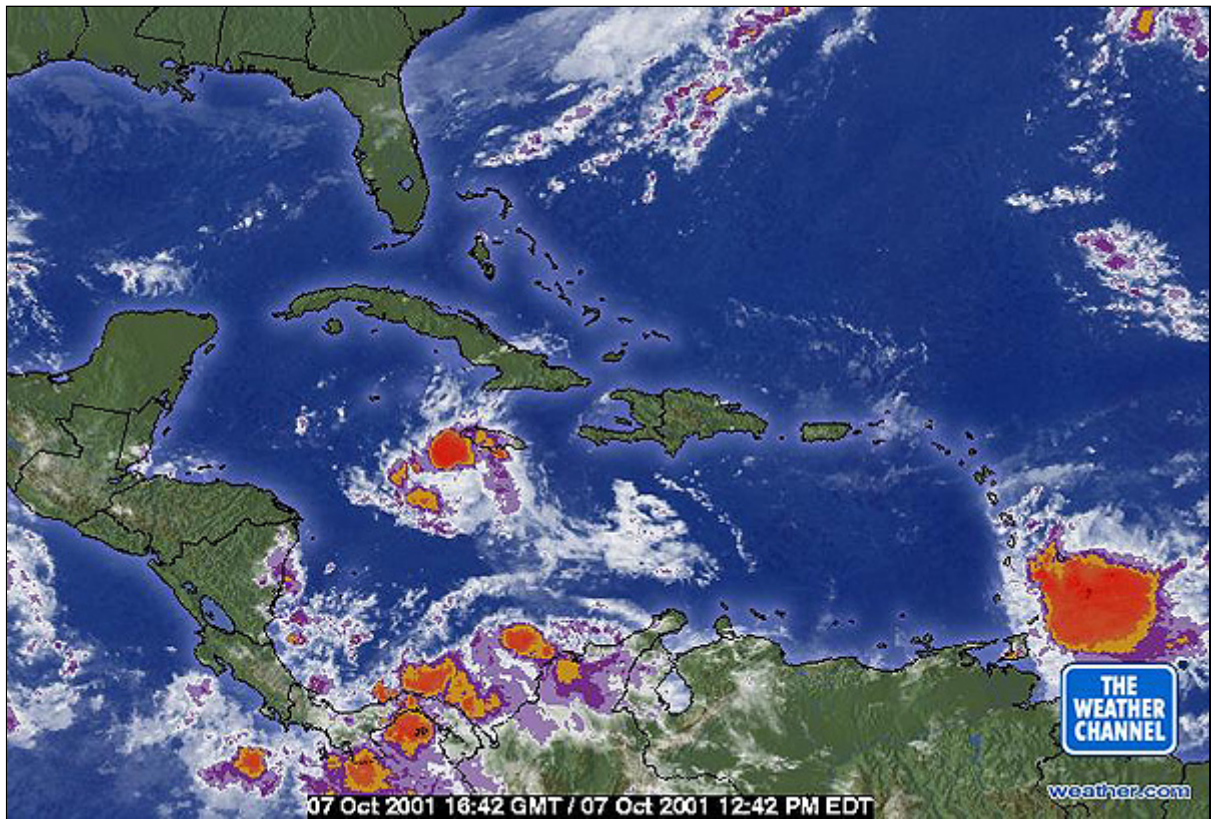
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October 1-21, 2001 Paradise Park, Westmoreland, Jamaica

9 Earthwatch Volunteers (Cindy Ames, Dave Denton, Laura Donehue, Matthew Hay, Eleanor Hynes, Ellyn Landreth, Richard Mason, Dennis Stern, and Warren Strotreon)

Assistants: Micah Mones (graduate assistant), Jean Borchardt, Sylvia Chappell, Michael Dion, and Robert Gezon, and Ricardo Tyndale (Jamaica National Heritage Trust)

Other Participants: Roderick Ebanks (Technical Director of Archaeology, JNHT), Rebecca Tortello, Rosemary Palmer and Trevor Beckford (Savanna-la-Mar Sustainable Development Group), Dr. Phillip Allsworth-Jones (University of the West Indies) and 3 students from UWI.



Hurricane Iris passed just to the south on the first day of Team 2.

Highlights



Area 400, Units K, L, M, underwater!

It had rained heavily for several days. When we returned to the redware site after a day off we found that several of our deeper excavation units looked like swimming pools. While excavating the deposits that were still

above the water line we soon found that the clay/sand would not pass through our screens. We decided to use the water to water screen. Holding a bucket high above her head Laura Donehue proceeded to pour 10 liters of water through the screen and down my pants leg! She had collected the muddy water from the nearby "swimming pool" and was helping to dissolve the other mud that clung to the objects from her unit. As the water passed through the screen there appeared before our eyes shells, pottery, and flaked

stone tools that had before looked only like strange clumps of soil. And while my leg was soaked with water and clumped with mud, Laura looked like someone beaten in a paintball game where brown was the color of the opposition. Splattered with mud, she nevertheless continued to smile and work on through the muddy conditions. This is dedication!

Our work at the sites provided a number of new and important revelations. I suspect that at time you all got tired of hearing me say "that's not supposed to be here." But as I have discovered repeatedly, the more data you have the less you know. We are on the verge of significant breakthroughs in our understanding of stone tools and their manufacture thanks to the work of Micah Mones. The patterns of marine shell use continued as expected, and we recovered echinoids (sea urchins, sea biscuits) in the meillacan site for the first time. We recovered the first decorated pottery from the meillacan site and it is in the Montego Bay style. No one expected pottery with Montego Bay style decorations from the south coast. Hopefully all of the volunteers had their moment of excitement as tools, decorated pottery, a greenstone/jadeite axe, beads, pendants, and shell inlay were removed from the ground. The work is difficult and sometimes tedious, but the quality of the excavation data is outstanding! Much remains to be done in terms of analysis.

Introduction

When Christopher Columbus visited Jamaica during his second voyage to the Americas he encountered a thriving native population that numbered perhaps 100,000 people. These natives befriended Columbus and helped to sustain him while he was shipwrecked off the north coast in 1504. Within another generation, virtually all of the natives, who we today call Tainos, were gone. The victims of forced labor, warfare, and introduced diseases. We know almost nothing about these people. A few archaeology projects have been conducted in Jamaica, but most have been by avocational archaeologists who sought primarily to document the locations of sites. Recently, salvage operations have been initiated to recover archaeological remains from sites that are threatened by development, but long-term, problem-oriented research remains the exception in Jamaica.

The present project is based on a tropical dairy in southwestern Jamaica 60 km south of Montego Bay. The sites were first identified in 1990 by Mr. Roderick Ebanks, Director of Archaeology for the Jamaica National Heritage Trust. The boundaries of the site were later defined during fieldwork directed by Keegan in 1998 (1998 Paradise Park Report). The sites are located on a coastal dune between the Deans Valley River and Bluefields Bay. Our focus was on the Meillacan site (Wes-15B), which is radiocarbon dated to AD 1430 +/- 60. A second site (WES15A), located 240 meters to the east, contains only Ostionan pottery (called redware in Jamaica) and is radiocarbon dated to AD 850 +/- 60. The two sites are in a good state of preservation and contain evidence for



Team 2 at the Meillacan site working with Mr. Roderick Ebanks, Technical Director of Archaeology, JNHT, his wife, and Rebecca Tortello (Photo © Bob Gezon)

the two known cultures that occupied Jamaica prior to the arrival of Europeans. What is fascinating about these sites is that they contain very different animal remains. While the earlier site has mostly conch shell and turtle bones, the latter has mostly clam shells and reef fish bones. What are the reasons for this difference? Do these reflect cultural preferences? Ethnicity?

Resource depletion? Changes in the local environment? Other factors? The goal of the 2001 research was to collect sufficient data to develop a more complete picture of the pre-Columbian peoples of Jamaica, and to address the broader issues of environmental change and cultural identity.

Despite its large size and substantial pre-Columbian population, Jamaica has remained on the periphery of archaeological studies in the West Indies. As is the case throughout the islands, there was an early interest in antiquities and the collection of objects from caves and archaeological sites. These collections were made haphazardly and contain little documentation (see de Booy 1913; Sherlock 1939). In the 1940s, Robert Howard, a student from Yale University, examined the collections at the Institute of Jamaica and undertook limited excavations as part of his Ph.D. research (Howard 1950, 1956, 1965). Howard showed that of the three pottery styles in Jamaica, two matched those from Hispaniola and Cuba. The earlier style, known in Jamaica as redware because of its bright red color, is part of the more general Ostionan Ostionoid subseries (AD 650-1000). The second style, called White Marl for the archaeological site at which it was first described, fits within the regional Meillacan Ostionoid subseries (AD 950-1550). The third style, from around Montego Bay, shows clear affinities to the Meillacan subseries, but is a local variation with decorations that are found nowhere else.

To a large degree, all that we know of the archaeology of Jamaica is these pottery styles. Most of the archaeology since Howard was done by members of the amateur Jamaican Archaeological Society. Although their work is of the highest quality, it has focused on finding new archaeological sites and on preparing an inventory of these sites. Occasionally they would excavate sites that were threatened with destruction. There are very few radiocarbon dates for the sites, and we are currently working within a very broad chronological framework. In the past five years, the Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT) has been extremely active in documenting archaeological sites threatened by development. This work, directed by Roderick Ebanks and Dorrick Gray has added substantially to our understanding of Jamaican prehistory.

Caribbean archaeologists, following the work of Irving Rouse (1992), have tended to assume that the Ostionan potters were replaced by Meillacan potters. How or why this came about is presently unknown, but recent research conducted in Haiti has shown that the relationship between these groups was far more complicated than previously assumed (Keegan 1999, 2000). Paradise Park offers a unique opportunity to examine the lifeways of the Ostionan and Meillacan peoples. Separate archaeological sites from each group occur in the same general location, separated by only 240 meters. By comparing and contrasting the materials from these sites we will improve our understanding of these two groups. In addition, we hope to gain insights into their possible interaction, although one site may have been abandoned before the other was settled.

Objectives

The main objectives of our work at the Paradise site (Wes-15A) were to seek evidence for a structure wall and to collect additional samples from the midden. Our goals at the Sweetwater site (Wes-15B) were less specific because only one small 1 by 2 meter unit had been excavated there in addition to the 50 square centimeter shovel tests. Our main goal was to collect a larger sample from the site and to look for evidence of structures and other activity areas. The Park site (no number), near the landscaped park, had not been tested previously, so we sought to characterize the cultural affiliation of these deposits and evaluate their integrity.

Volunteer Assignments and Accomplishments

From October 1-21, 2001, excavations were conducted at two sites at Paradise Park, Westmoreland. A total of 35 square meters were excavated in the Sweetwater site (Wes-15B), and 13 square meters were excavated in the Paradise site (Wes-15A). The excavations at the Paradise site were focused on delimiting a possible house structure. Although we failed to identify the western walls of the house, we did encounter an extensive midden deposit just north of our 2000 excavation units. Of major significance was the high frequency of flaked stone, which is being studied by Micah Mones (UF graduate student). Excavations in the Sweetwater site provided the first decorated ceramics from this locale. The design



Micah Mones (UF graduate student) and Ricardo Tyndale (JNHT) wet screening a bulk sample.

motifs are in the Montego Bay style as identified by Robert Howard (1950).

Volunteers shared equally in all aspects of the project. Everyone was given ample opportunity to excavate using pointing

trowels and finer tools. At some point everyone worked on the screens where all of the soil was sieved to recover the smaller artifacts. In the lab everyone participated in washing the stone, shell and pottery that we recovered, and had the opportunity to observe the manner in which these objects were analyzed and recorded. Several people helped with the fine-mesh water screening of bulk samples that were collected to ensure that we obtained a sample of objects that would pass through $\frac{1}{4}$ " inch mesh sieves. In sum, everyone had the opportunity to participate in all aspects of the project.



Laura Donahue leads the crew on horseback.

Yet work at Paradise Park was not all work. At the Hotel Comingle the volunteers had television, a swimming pool, and a pool table to assist with their relaxation. On their days off trips were arranged to the spectacular YS waterfalls and Negril. Horseback riding trips

were arranged, sea kayaks were available, two late night expeditions to capture land crabs were undertaken, there was an enormous snooker table in the clubhouse, and the group enjoyed puzzles, dominoes, Uno, and other diversions in their off time. The motto "work hard, play hard" seems to apply. We also learned that crab hunting expeditions aren't for everyone. Sometimes the crabs win!

Results

Excavations at the Paradise site (Wes-15A) focused on searching for evidence of a house (structure) wall to the west of the apparent center post that was discovered in 2000 at Area 400. A total of 8, 1-meter squares were excavated during a one-week session in October.

Efforts were directed toward collecting additional materials from the midden deposit, which was identified in Units G and H in 2000. Five 1-m square units (M, N, P, Q, R) to the north of Unit H showed that dense deposits continued for another 4 meters. The midden deposits included substantial quantities of sea turtle bones, fish bones, and mollusk shells (especially conchs). Of special note was the high frequency of flaked stone tools and debitage. The deposits are consistent with those reported for excavations in 1998 and 2000, which revealed a focus on resources that provided a high rate of return in terms of food value.



Area 400 midden deposit with chert core, conch tools, and turtle bone exposed.

Excavations to the west of Unit A, which is the unit in which a possible center post was discovered), failed to reveal additional evidence for structure walls. Units S and T were located immediately west of Unit A, and like Unit A, they contained few artifacts. This absence of artifacts would be expected if the units were located inside a structure because the Tainos reportedly kept their house floors swept clean. Units V, W, and X were

located 3-6 meters west of Unit A, and also contained few artifacts. Based on the excavations to the west of Unit A, I expected to find some evidence for a house wall in this area. No post stains were encountered. It could be that the house was oval and that we did not excavate far enough to the west to encounter evidence for a wall, or it is also possible that the large stain in Unit A was something other than a post stain. Additional work in this area is needed.

The archaeological deposit is about 50-cm thick, but it also extends below the water table. Due to heavy rains we were unable

to reach the bottom of the deposit in the northern units. Future excavations at the site are scheduled for the dry season. During the dry season it should be possible to reach the bottom of the deposit. There was no evidence for differences in the strata during our excavations.

In sum, the site continues to reflect a single component, redware (Ostionan) occupation that is dated to the 9th century A.D. The animal resources and the high frequency of flaked stone distinguish this site from the nearby Meillacan site. It is possible that our excavations are in the vicinity of a house or other structure, although additional evidence for house walls is needed.



Conch shell celt.

Two of the three weeks were spent excavating the Sweetwater site (Wes-15B). Our efforts were focused near the 85-foot tall silk cotton tree because there is a substantial surface scatter of artifacts around the base of the tree. These artifacts were brought to the surface by crab burrowing in the area. Area 600 (a 5 by 5 m square unit and a 2 by 2 m square unit) was opened on the south side near the tree.

No excavations were undertaken beneath the tree due to crab disturbance. The excavations produced the first decorated pottery from this site. The style of decoration fits the Montego Bay style identified by Howard (19&&). This is a significant discovery because only one Montego Bay style site was excavated previously (on the north coast near Montego Bay), and this style was previously unknown from the south coast. In addition, a greenstone or jadeite wedge and a Strombus shell axe were recovered. The animal remains indicate that small fish, birds, and hutia. There is also evidence for recent disturbances including butchered cow foot, rat bones, and manure balls, which may have nettered the deposits through crab burrows.. Again, the molluscan remains are predominantly bivalves, in contrast to the large number of conchs at the earlier site. The results of the excavations in this area must await further analysis of the pottery and animal bones. Finally, this site contains far fewer flaked stone tools and debitage than does the Paradise site. Here we have clear evidence for a shift in resource use over time, and a change in the tool kit used to exploit the local environment.

Discussion

The excavations at all three sites were extremely productive. When our analyses are finished we will have a clearer understanding of life in Jamaica from the 9th through the 15th centuries. To date, our investigations have only begun to scratch the surface. Future research is planned to improve our understanding of the organization and activities carried out at these sites.

Publications

Previous work on the invertebrate remains at these sites will be published in the Proceedings of the 19th International Congress for Caribbean Archaeology (Aruba 2001), and the work conducted this year will be incorporated into that publication which has a final submission deadline of December 2001. I am currently working on a monograph on the research conducted at Paradise Park during the past several years, which should be submitted for publication in the summer of 2002. An article written by Rebecca Tortello has been sent to a wide variety of Jamaican publications. In addition, the Jamaica Information Service filmed our excavations and plans to broadcast their film on local television.



Other

Ricardo Tyndale and Sylvia Chappell screening.

Accomplishments and Results

The project had several important subsidiary results. First, we provided the first archaeological field experience for three archaeology students from the University of the West Indies. This kind of short-term field experience is extremely important for students who are deciding what career they wish to pursue and contributes to the knowledge base of Jamaicans in general. My colleagues and I have long held the view that archaeology and history will not be valued and appreciated until the general populace holds this view. Thus it is important to expose not only future archaeologists, but also business people and the general population. We also had visits from representatives of a sustainable development group in Savanna-la-Mar and two other Jamaicans with an interest in learning more about archaeology and Jamaica's cultural heritage. Although we reached a relatively small audience during this project, this is better than no audience at all. We hope to increase our outreach during future projects, and plan to work with the Jamaica Tourist Development Corporation to establish a Taino Heritage Trail on the Paradise park property.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to Tony and Busha Clarke for all of their assistance during our stay at Paradise Park. My work here would not be possible without their assistance. Evon Gordon was a wonderful cook, and Daisy provided exemplary housekeeping assistance. We also appreciate the attention of the people at the Hotel Comingle, Savanna-la-Mar. Finally, the assistance of the Jamaica National Heritage Trust needs to be acknowledged. The Trust is the caretaker for cultural heritage in Jamaica and their assistance with the project is greatly appreciated.



Matt "Calvin" Hay.

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