



# **Caribbean Archaeology**

At the Florida Museum of Natural History



## **PARADISE PARK, 2002**



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**Curator of Caribbean Archaeology Florida Museum of Natural History**

**February 12-26 and March 5-19, 2002**

**9 Paradise Park, Westmoreland, Jamaica**

**Earthwatch Volunteers:**

**Robert Furlong, Ruan Pohlman, Tommasso Vitali, and Eleanor Hynes.**

**Assistants:**

**Jean Borchardt, Sylvia Chappell, Robert Gezon, Caroline Keegan, Dennis Kendrick, Ralph Pax, Mary Lou Pax; Ricardo Tyndall and Leslie-Gail Atkinson (Jamaica National Heritage Trust).**

**Other Participants:**

**Jamaica National Heritage Trust: Dorrick Gray (Acting Technical Director of Archaeology), Joan Sharp (Executive Board Member), and Andrea Richards.**

**University of the West Indies: Professor Philip Allsworth-Jones, Nicole Murphy, and Kerry-Ann Coombs.**

**Tourist Product Development Corporation: Arlene Mckenzie, Sandra Bellinfantie, Suzette Hines, Sheryll Lewis, Winston Reid, Geri Roy, Lola Ricketts, and Robert Kerr.**

**Archaeology Society of Jamaica: Donna Miller, Damien Shaw, Jasmine Lewis, and Moya Bailey.**

**Others:**

**Errol Henry of the St. Mary Archaeological Society, Keril Wright and Herbert McKinnis (The Gleaner), Dr. Geoff Conrad and Jay Vanderhoff (Indiana University); Roger Portell, George Hecht, and**

Reed Toomey (Florida Museum of Natural History); Josh Fletcher, Richard Henry, Camal and Noel and Randy and Roy Fulford.



Location of Paradise Park.

## Highlights

This was the most eclectic Earthwatch project I have ever run. We had two volunteers during each of the two weeks who worked with four staff members, a representative of the JNHT, and myself. This small core group lived, worked, ate, and played together in close company. During the project we were visited by an enormous number of people who have a local interest and stake in Jamaica's heritage. These four weeks did more to promote heritage management in Jamaica than any previous project on the island.



Thomas Vitali working at the Ostionan site

Although I may see education and collaborative efforts as a highlight, I know that the volunteers appreciate finding interesting artifacts. We accomplished this as well. By returning to Paradise Park in the dry season we were able to extend our excavation units much deeper than we had in previous years. In the Paradise site (Ostionan, 9th century) we encountered a very dense deposit of refuse ("midden") that provided a very clear indication of food remains, shell and stone tools, and the typical pottery for this time period. Although the artifacts were not "spectacular" in an aesthetic sense, they have helped prove that when people first arrive on an island they tend focus on those resources that provide a high rate of return in terms of calories, protein, or similar currencies. It has always amazed me that anthropologists are unwilling to accept the fact that people in traditional societies were "careful consumers" in that they selected those resources that had the highest rate of economic return. Thanks to Earthwatch, we now have evidence that the first inhabitants of Grand Turk and Jamaica selected the best resources and ignored the rest.

A second highlight for me is the confirmation that food-getting behavior in the 9th century was very different than that practiced in the 15th century. While the former focused on sea turtles and mollusks from a sea grass environment, the latter has no sea turtle remains and mollusks were obtained from a mangrove environment. Clearly, there were major changes in foraging practices that may reflect cultural differences and/or changes in the marine environments closest to the sites.

Continuing this theme of differences between the two sites, it is now clear that the Ostionan (9th century AD) and Meillacan (15th century AD) sites have completely different material remains. In addition to the differences noted in diet, the stone selected for tools is completely different as is the pottery pastes and styles. These data suggest that we need to reevaluate the cultural affiliations of the people who colonized Jamaica, and focus more on the possibility of distinct and separate colonizations and less on the evolution of a single propagule. Again, the evidence from Paradise Park suggests the need for a complete rethinking of Caribbean Archaeology for the western Greater Antilles.

We also found some very cool artifacts. The most amazing is a small stone pendant that represents the Taino spirit (cemi) Opiyel Guobiran. Opiyel is one of the guardians of the world of the dead (Stevens-Arroyo 1988). He is the dog spirit who brings the souls of the dead to the afterlife (Coaybay). This small stone carving shows strong affiliations with Hispaniola and Puerto Rico and suggests that the mythology of these areas is connected strongly. In the Meillacan site we found a broken fishhook made from West Indian top shell. The fishhook is similar to those found in Guadeloupe and is the first reported for the Greater Antilles. Pottery in the site continues to be mostly plain, but the decorated sherds are in the Montego Bay style. Finally, there were very interesting animal remains including crocodile and dog teeth and hutia (a small rodent) bones.

## 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 1503-1504. 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.



Dennis Kendrick and Sylvia Chappell laying out new units at the Meillacan site. (Photo © Bob Gezon)

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, Acting Executive Director of 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  $\pm$  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  $\pm$  60. The two sites are in a good state of preservation and contain evidence for 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 material remains. What are the reasons for these differences? Do these reflect cultural preferences? Ethnicity? Resource depletion? Changes in the local



environment? Other factors? The goal of the 2002 research was to collect sufficient data to develop a more complete picture of the pre-Columbian peoples of Jamaica.

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.



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Ruan Pohlman keeps cool under a palm frond fan.

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.

### **Objectives**

The main objectives of our work at the both the Paradise site (Wes-15A) and Sweetwater site (Wes-15B) were to collect additional samples from midden deposits, and to look for evidence of structures and other activity areas. Such very general objectives often characterize the first research done in a region. We still know very little about the first inhabitants of Jamaica, although our work there over the past few years has added substantially to our knowledge.

### **Volunteer Assignments and Accomplishments**



Robert Furlong checks out an interesting find.

From February 12-26 and March 5-19, 2002, excavations were conducted at two sites at Paradise Park, Westmoreland. A total of 41 square meters were excavated in the Sweetwater site (Wes-15B), and 14 square meters were excavated in the Paradise site (Wes-15A). The excavations at the Paradise site were focused on collecting samples from a previously exposed midden deposit. Of



major significance was the high frequency of flaked stone, which is being studied at the Florida Museum of Natural History by Micah Mones (UF graduate student). Excavations in the Sweetwater site provided the first decorated ceramics from this locale. The design motifs are in the Montego Bay style as identified by Robert Howard (1965). These investigations clearly demonstrated for the first time that the cultures of the two sites are completely different.

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 ¼" inch mesh sieves. In sum, everyone had the opportunity to participate in all aspects of the project.



Terry Hines and Thomas Vitali take a break on the Black River Swamp Safari.

Yet work at Paradise Park was not all work. At the Greathouse the volunteers had videos, a swimming pool, and a huge snooker table to assist with their relaxation. On their days off trips were arranged to Negril (team 1) and a Black River Safari (team 2). Horseback riding trips were arranged, sea kayaks were available, and the group enjoyed puzzles, dominoes, Uno, and other diversions in their off time.

## Results

Excavations at the Paradise site (Wes-15A) focused on a midden area that was discovered in 2000 and partially excavated in 2001. A total of 8, 1-meter squares were excavated during 2, two-week

sessions. Efforts were directed toward collecting additional materials from units that were flooded in October 2001. The archaeological deposit is about 60-cm thick and we were able to reach levels that previously were below the water table. We also expanded our area of investigation to the east of our primary trench. The midden deposit 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, 2000, and 2001, which revealed a focus on resources that provided a high rate of return in terms of food value (especially large sea turtles). Excavations to the west of Unit A (which is the unit in which a possible center post was discovered), failed to reveal evidence for a hoped for structure wall.

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 to confirm that there was a structure in this area.



Sylvia Chappell and Ruan Pohlman cleaning pottery.

Two 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 brought to the surface by crabs burrowing in the area. Area 800 (a 4 by 4 m square unit and a 5 by 2 m trench extending to the south) was opened to the east of the area excavated in 2001. The 4x4 meter unit near the road had very few artifacts and a very shallow stratum of sandy loam above sterile beach sand. The absence of artifacts may indicate that a plaza or house floor was located in this area. Of interest is the discovery of



a greenstone axe in this area despite the absence of significant shell or pottery accumulations. The trench to the south of the 4x4 produced substantial quantities of shell, pottery, and flaked-stone tools. Because this area is located on the edge of the morass, it is possible that this represents a dumping area off the main habitation area of the site. Archaeological materials in this area were recovered to a depth of one meter. Furthermore, a 1x1 meter square test unit to the north of the road contained substantially more materials than did the 4X4, which suggests that dumping activities occurred to the north and the south of the relatively sterile unit. In other words, there is evidence for specific activities in the area, although it is too early to tell what they reflect with regard to the plan of the village.

The excavations produced very little decorated pottery, but that which was found has decorations in the Montego Bay style identified by Howard (1965). 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.



Ostionan chert



Meillacan chert

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.

The animal remains indicate that small fish, birds, crocodile, and hutia. We also recovered a dog tooth, and the first fishhook provides evidence for a previously suspected, but unconfirmed, fishing technique. Again, the molluscan remains are predominantly clams and mud conchs (*Melongena melongena*), in contrast to the large number of conchs (*Strombus* spp.) at the earlier site. The results of the excavations in this area must await further analysis of the pottery and animal bones. Finally, this year's excavations yielded far more flaked stone tools and debitage than were recovered during previous seasons. Moreover, it became clear that the chert selected for tools was very different than the chert used at the Paradise site, even though the source of both types of chert was river cobbles. 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. The excavations at both 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). 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 Fall of 2002. The results of our investigations to date are included in a book chapter "Prehistoric Resource Depletion in the Northern West Indies" for the edited book **The Archaeology of Insularity: Examining the Past in Island Environments** (S. M. Fitzpatrick, ed., Praeger Publishing). An excellent newspaper article by Keril Wright appeared on the front page of the national newspaper the day before we left the island.

## **Other Accomplishments and Results**

The project had several important subsidiary results. First, we provided the first archaeological field experience for two archaeology students from the University of the West Indies. This kind of short-term field experience is extremely important for



Terry Hines

students who are deciding what career they wish to pursue and contributes to the knowledge base of Jamaicans in general. In this regard we also hosted for one day each members of the Archaeological Society of Jamaica and the Tourist Product Development Corporation. The TPDCO visit was especially important because they have promised to work with us on creating a Taino Heritage Trail at Paradise Park. My colleagues and I

have long held the view that archaeology and history will not be valued and appreciated until the general populace has a knowledge of their past. Thus, it is important to expose not only future archaeologists, but also business people and the general population to the value of preserving their cultural patrimony.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Yvonne Gordon



Daisy Graham

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