The Land of Lampedocia

_LAMAR Institute Publication Series_

_Report Number 148_

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The LAMAR Institute, Inc.

Savannah, Georgia

2010
Introduction

One of the LAMAR Institute’s research initiatives, entitled, “Skeletons in the Closet”, casts a wide net. Its mission is to explore little known or under explored past archaeology of southeastern North America and to bring it to the microscope of modern scholarship. This task has yielded many diverse research products, from mound to reservoir research, from compiling biographies of antiquarians long deceased to cleaning up the mess left behind by neglectful archaeologists whose corporal beings are yet warm. Recent search capabilities via the internet have allowed the discovery (or rediscovery) of many obscure archaeological sites, archaeological exploits, and important archaeologists (or proto-archaeologists). This short monograph explores one of these recent discoveries in the land of Lampedocia in Camden County, Georgia.

Figure 1. Location of Site 9CM200, Lampedosia.
Historical Discovery

The story begins with an online search of early newspaper archives searching for keywords involving Georgia and Indians. A newspaper article from the *Dedham Gazette*, November 21, 1817, contained the following information on its page 1:

From the Savannah Republican:

Ancient Indian Fortification,

‘Lampedocia, Little Satilla Neck, (Ga.)

October 1, 1817.

‘In submitting for publication the underwritten true description of an ancient Indian fortification, I am warranted in the opinion of asserting, that it will be read with pleasure by many patrons of your widely circulated paper.

‘On the river Dover, a branch of the Great Satilla in this county, (Camden,) there is a remarkable fine bluff on the right bank, on which is situated a very ancient Indian fortification—I have viewed it particularly myself, as well as many of the most respectable gentlemen on this neck and vicinity, all of whom agree that it is one of the most ancient fortifications that was ever discovered in the United States. It has undoubtedly stood for centuries, from the decayed situation which it is now in—but, from the regularity and strength of the works, it is obvious that there must have been by far a more ingenious race of Aborigines than the present tribes, or those that were found at the first settlement of this country.

Each side of the fortification is about three hundred feet in length, and they are almost parallel with each other, and the walls, which are made of oyster shell and a kind of hard mould, are now more than ten feet high; but, no doubt, when first constructed were considerably higher: the top of which is now very even and broad, sufficiently so to admit of heavy cannon being placed thereon. The site on which it is built is remarkably exemplary of Indian ingenuity, being placed beside a beautiful spring rivulet, and notwithstanding which it has a very commanding position. At the northeast corner of the fort there is a small round outwork, the walls of which are as strong as any part, which admits of a narrow passage into the main fortification; and it also appears, that on this bluff was situated one of the largest towns of this ancient people, there being several large mounds of earth, thrown up on large masses of the dead, who are laid off in regular strata, one above the other; and there are also large pieces of earthen pots and other implements for domestic use’ (Dedham Gazette 1817:1).

This newspaper story, which was also reprinted in other northern newspapers, including the *Alexandria Gazette* (October 28, 1817) and the *Columbian Register* (December 16, 1817), represents one of the earliest descriptions of archaeological sites in coastal Georgia. The discovery of this newspaper article was followed by a “Google-search” of Lampedocia and several variants spellings.

The search continued and a letter, archived in the Telemon Cuyler collection at the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Georgia, provided additional clues about this potential aboriginal site. The letter, dated December
18, 1819, was written from “Lampedocia” by Thomas E. Hardee to Georgia Governor John Clarke, in which, the author described recent hostilities with the Indians in Appling and Irwin counties, Georgia. It may be inferred tentatively from this letter that Lampedocia was Hardee’s plantation, although this awaits confirmation by historical research.

As a historical sideline, Lampedusa is a small island in the Mediterranean Sea southwest of Sicily. It is part of a small chain of isolated islands, known as the Pelagie Islands. It was used by the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans and Arabs. Around 1759, this island was inhabited by a colony of Islamists who lived a self-sufficient lifestyle when it was visited and briefly described by John Harriott (Mackenzie 1829:57). The island was probably named for a prominent Amazonian general, Lampedo, who was instrumental in the founding of Ephesus around 1,500 B.C. (Clayton 1870:11). Brewer (1880:18) noted that Lampedo of Lacedaemon held the royal distinction of being a daughter, wife, sister and mother of a king. The close association with Greek and Roman place names and southern plantations is a commonly recognized theme.

These historical data suggest that Lampedocia was a well-established plantation on the Dover River in Camden County, Georgia in the period 1817-1819. At this time no in-depth historical research was conducted on this plantation. That work should be the subject of future study. The illumination of these early historical references to substantial archaeological remains at a remote place in coastal Georgia called Lampedocia was exciting. It was immediately followed by the question, where is this place today?
Archaeological Evidence

A quick review of current maps of Camden County, Georgia revealed a Lampedoshia Road in the study vicinity. The 1962 Camden County Highway Map identifies the Lampo Dosha Wildlife Management Area, which covered a large area north of the Dover River. Even more promising, however, was the Dover Bluff, GA. 7.5 minute U.S.G.S. quadrangle, which identifies “Indian Mounds” in the general suspected location of Lampedocia. Once the approximate geographical location of Lampedocia on the modern landscape was determined the next pressing question was, has any modern-day archaeology been done there?

A search of Georgia Archaeological Site Files (GASF) and the NAHRGIS database for known archaeological sites and previous archaeological investigations in the study vicinity provides some background. An official archaeological site form, based solely on this cartographic evidence, was recorded in 1980 by laboratory technician Terry Smith. The site was designated 9CM200. The site form contains little information beyond a UTM location (Zone 17, E443500, N343100) along with the disclaimer, “known only from USGS 7.5’ map—not exact enough for UTM’s”. The site was plotted as an oval dotted-line polygon in the same location as the “Indian Mounds” indicated on the Dover U.S.G.S. quad. Consequently, the 9CME200 location is not included in the NAHRGIS searchable database of officially recorded archaeological sites. The review of previous archaeological studies indicates that the Lampedocia site has been recorded as an archaeological site, although it was recorded solely on cartographic evidence shown on the U.S.G.S. topographic quadrangle and no field examination was conducted. The plotted location of this suspected site (9CM200—UTM, Zone 17, 443500E, 3431000N, NAD27) is not directly on the Dover River, as the 1817 newspaper reference places it, but is just northwest of the headwaters of the Dover River and north of Sparkman Creek.

Figure 3. Site 9CM200 Location, as Shown on Site Form (Smith 1980; U.S.G.S. 1961).

No professional survey been conducted in the immediate vicinity of the suspected site, although two recent archaeological studies were conducted on what may be portions of the former Lamedocia plantation. One is a 2006 survey by the CRM firm of Bland &
Associates, Inc. (Bland 2006). Their team surveyed 150 acres of the Marsh Landing property for cultural resources. One previously recorded, archaeological site (9CM204) was further defined. Site 9CM204 is located south of the study area on Crooked River and not in the vicinity of the aboriginal fortifications described in 1817.

The second study was by Carolyn Rock and Fred Cook, who recorded Site 9CM370 at the Dover Creek bluff in 2006 as part of the Camden County Archaeological Survey project (Rock and Cook 2006; Rock and Elliott 2006). Site 9CM370 consisted of a surface scatter of historic artifacts and Indian pottery in an area along both sides of River Marsh Boulevard measuring 200 meters east-west by 100 m north-south. The NRHP status was listed as unknown. The site was described as less than 50 percent disturbed but no excavation was attempted.
Summary Interpretations

Site 9CM200 is an important aboriginal site in Camden County, Georgia that awaits formal archaeological exploration (Figure 4). This unverified site may be the same as an “ancient fortification”, first described in 1817 by an anonymous source. This site is located on a large plantation, known as Lampedocia. Through the years the spelling of the placename “Lampedocia” became corrupted and the collective memory of this important archaeological site faded. In 1980, University of Georgia Department of Anthropology employee, Terri Smith, resurrected the site and recorded in the Georgia Archaeological Site File in 1980. She based her decision on the words, “Indian Mounds” that were printed on the Dover U.S.G.S. quadrangle. Smith, who was not an archaeologist, made no archaeological visit at that time, so this site remains unconfirmed by archaeologists. In 2010, through the miracle of the Internet and Google Books, the site was “rediscovered” by the author and the evidence for its existence and significance was presented herein.

Figure 4. Site 9CM200 and Potential Lampedocia Location (Courtesy Google Earth 2010).

The 1817 information describes a site, consisting of a nearly square enclosure, measuring approximately 300 feet by 300 feet, which has a circular outer work on its northeast corner. The walls of the inclosure were 10 feet high and wide enough on its flattened top to support a cannon (or at least 6 feet wide at its summit). This inclosure was situated on a bluff, near a spring. Other earthen mounds were located on the same bluff beyond the enclosure, although their specific numbers and locations were not provided by the anonymous author. If this description is valid, then the site measures several hundred meters in extent and it contains many significant aboriginal constructions. The site likely contains (or
contained) human burials within the mounds. The age and function of the “aboriginal fortification” remains unknown. It could range anywhere from a Late Archaic shell ring to a Spanish-era fortification.

Presently, we do not know if the 1817 earthworks are the same as the “Indian Mounds” shown on the U.S.G.S. map, although the clues suggest that this is so. Archaeologists examined the recent aerial photographs and concluded that, if this site is in the vicinity plotted as 9CM200, then portions of the site are likely intact. The land in this area has been disturbed by silviculture. The 10 foot high “ancient fortification” may have been leveled, or greatly reduced, in the 192 years since the site was first described. Shell middens also were used for road paving material in the 19th and 20th centuries, and this site may have been reduced by use as road fill. Our shared archaeological experiences with major mound sites in Georgia, however, tells us that these sites are difficult to completely erase from the landscape and with diligent exploration, important vestiges of these earthworks may be discerned. A field visit to the site is the next task at hand. Additional historical research also should be conducted on the Lampedosia plantation and its former owners.
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