

NORTH CAROLINA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

Estelle Randall

The *Estelle Randall* was described as "one of the largest and most magnificent passenger and freight steamers in North Carolina". It made stops at towns along the Albemarle Sound on its run between Elizabeth City and Norfolk, Virginia. During one of these stops at the town of Columbia in Tyrrell County, the *Estelle Randall* burned and sank while tied to the wharf. The ship's cook died, but the remaining fourteen crew members narrowly escaped the late evening fire.

The 112 foot long vessel was built in 1898 at Baltimore by William E. Woodall and Company. Its machinery was furnished by the Campbell and Zell Company. The *Estelle Randall* was originally owned by Captain E.S. Randall, who operated several large passenger steamers on the Potomac River. By 1909 the steamer had been bought by the Farmers' and Merchants' Line of North Carolina and was then overhauled in Norfolk for use in the Albemarle region. Soon after, on January 18, 1910, the *Estelle Randall* was consumed by the fire of unknown origin and was a total loss.

The North Carolina Underwater Unit has been spearheading an effort to record and recover significant portions of the wreck's machinery and artifactual content prior to a waterfront clearing project. The work is a cooperative effort between the Underwater Archaeology Unit and Columbia and Tyrrell counties to conduct research and restoration on the remains of the *Estelle Randall*.

The majority of excavation, which was necessary for the recovery of the machinery, has been conducted by volunteer divers Eddie Congleton, Mitch Moore and Kenneth Bland. During this work they recovered a large variety of shipboard implements, personal effects, and machinery accessories such as steam gauges and grease lubricators. With the help of heavy equipment and operators donated by Waff Contracting, Inc. of Edenton, the machinery from the *Estelle Randall* was recovered in November 1992. The major items retrieved were a vertical, direct-acting, compound steam engine fitted with a surface condenser; a double-acting, vertical air pump; a duplex feed-water pump; an early Westinghouse generator housing and the ship's rudder.

The Unit is in the process of inventorying and stabilizing the many small artifacts. Within the next year restoration will begin on the machinery. A collection of small artifacts is now on display in Columbia and it is hoped that the interest generated will lead to a local museum that deals with the area's maritime history and features the *Estelle Randall*.

Mark Wilde-Ramsing



Estelle Randall Engine - workman next to it

NOTICES

Spring Meeting

We are planning our annual Spring meeting on Saturday, April 24th at Appalachian State University in Boone. More information about the meeting will be mailed in March. Please plan to attend.

Dues

This will be your last newsletter if you have not paid your dues for 1993. To receive the next issue of *Southern Indian Studies* and upcoming newsletters, please send in your renewal card as soon as possible.

Southeastern Archaeological Conference November 3-6, Raleigh Radisson Plaza Hotel

North Carolina will be host to the 50th Meeting of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference (SEAC) in November. SEAC is one of the largest, oldest and most respected regional organizations in the country. In recent years, about 400 archaeologists have attended the meeting. The Office of State Archaeology and the Research Laboratories of Anthropology at UNC-Chapel Hill are hosting the conference. All NCAS members and interested amateurs are invited to attend and hear some of the more than 125 papers dealing with archaeology in the Southeast. Registration for the meeting is \$35.00. For more information or registration forms contact Mark Mathis or Dee Nelms at 919/733-7342.

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Phelps Lake

In September, 1992, a project sponsored by the National Geographic Society under the direction of Claude E. Petrone, the National Geographic Magazine's manager of photographic special projects, and Donald G. Shomette, director of Nautical Archaeological Associates, examined prehistoric dugout canoes in Phelps Lake with a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) unit. Underwater Archaeology Unit (UAU) staff members Richard Lawrence, Mark Wilde-Ramsing, Leslie Bright, and Julep Gillman-Bryan assisted the project by relocating known canoes and helping to determine the cause of significant anomalies recorded during the radar survey.

Located in northeastern North Carolina, Phelps Lake is a shallow, 16,000-acre lake, the second largest in the state. It is characteristic of a group of oval-shaped lakes and pocosins known as "Carolina Bays" distributed along the Middle Atlantic and Southeastern coastal plain. The presence of log canoes in Phelps Lake has been acknowledged by New World prehistorians as singularly important to the study and understanding of occupation and subsistence patterns of prehistoric man in the southeastern United States. To date thirty canoes have been located along the northern and western shores of the lake adjacent to the archaeological sites where they were made, used, and eventually abandoned. Some of the canoes are nothing more than fragments while others are essentially intact, preserved by the acidic water and long burial in the lake bottom sediments. There appear to be a number of end (bow and stern) shape variations and the length of the longest canoe found so far is 37

feet. Nineteen of the canoes have been radiocarbon-dated ranging in age from 2430 B.C. to A.D. 1400, correlating closely with the known age of the other artifacts from the lake.

During the GPR survey two 10,000 square-foot survey areas were marked off adjacent to the lake's shoreline using stakes and string lines. This permitted the survey craft to follow lanes with a precise ten-foot spacing. As anomalies were recorded, string lines were marked and a team examined the bottom sediments with metal probes and, in some cases, an induction dredge to determine the cause of the disturbance on the radar.

The GPR survey met with mixed results. On the one hand, the radar did clearly identify known canoe targets. Unfortunately, the complexity of the sediments of the lake bottom--with several layers of very hard-packed sand alternating with soft pockets of organic muds--provided many false readings. However, the potential of GPR for finding dugout canoes is demonstrated by the fact that it picked up a section of log buried three feet in the sediment below a thick layer of dense sand.

After an analysis of the strip charts from this survey, a better understanding of the readings will emerge. National Geographic personnel and UAU staff members are already planning a follow-up project at Phelps Lake to employ techniques refined from this survey. The aim will be to examine other portions of Phelps Lake, particularly unsurveyed areas along the lake's western shoreline in hopes of locating additional canoes to add to the archaeological record.

Mark Wilde-Ramsing



Phelps Lake - National Geographic Survey (left to right: Leslie Bright, Pete Petrone, Don Shomette, and Richard Lawrence)