More Than a Fort

FORT HAWKINS, MACON, GEORGIA

Archaeologists study military sites in an effort to learn more about the people involved in past conflicts. Artifacts provide the archaeologist with unbiased evidence that provides a more complete picture of history. It is through the combined use of artifacts and historical documents that archaeologists are able to reconstruct the past.

Georgian citizens were active from 1733-1833 in a variety of major battles, skirmishes and atrocities towards each other. These involved a variety of nationalities as they fought to gain control of the Georgian homeland. Some of the key European players included Spain, France, and Britain. Native American groups included: Creek, Cherokee, Yamasssee, Yuchi, and Seminole. African-Americans were also present. Military sites such as Fort Hawkins give us an opportunity to better understand the complexity of this period.

Introduction to Fort Hawkins

Fort Hawkins is located near the Ocmulgee River and served as an important center for the frontier of Georgia from 1806-1819. It was named after Benjamin Hawkins, a white man appointed by President Washington to be an Indian Agent. Hawkins determined the fort’s location and served the nation as a liaison between the U.S. government and the Creek Nation. Hawkins was given the title Principal Temporary Agent for Indian Affairs South of the Ohio River. His 21-year career was spent monitoring and working to maintain peace. Tensions between the Creeks and the settlers increased, as settlers continued to arrive illegally on Indian land. Fruinations soon boiled over to the event known as the Red Stick War. These events ultimately led to the signing of the Treaty of Washington in which the Creek Nation was forced to cede its remaining lands in Georgia. By 1827 the Creek no longer lived in Georgia.

Construction began on Fort Hawkins in 1806. It was built on a ridge top northeast of the Ocmulgee River in what is now Macon, Georgia. This site was home to different groups of people including the Yuchi and Creek Indians. Fort Hawkins served as a primary post for the United States military. As the Creek trading factory from 1808-1816, the fort held stockpiles of goods such as guns, ammunition, metal tools, beads, and blankets, to be exchanged for deer pelts. Fort Hawkins also served as Georgia’s militia headquarters. Due to the frequent traffic in the area, the fort was a starting point for the Federal Road in 1810. This road was a main thoroughfare connecting Washington to New Orleans. The location of the fort served its occupants well as it was strategically placed upon a hill that served as an advantage for oncoming pedestrian traffic.

Reading the Dirt

Aside from artifacts, archaeologists have to examine other examples of evidence so they may understand the complete picture of the past. Soil can be evidence and is often moved by people using a site. The earth can be moved for a variety of reasons including: construction, farming, cooking, heating, and others. To learn more about Fort Hawkins, archaeologists examined the soil to locate where the outer walls/barricades of the fort once stood. Archaeologists read soil by looking for changes in its color. Fires also can change the color of soil and leave charcoal behind.

Thanks to technology, scientists are able to use Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) to learn about what lies beneath the ground. GPR does not disturb the soil or the clues in it. This technology can show unusual areas (anomalies) that may be part of the archaeological site. GPR uses high frequency radio waves transmitted...
from an antenna into the ground. When the waves hit a change in the earth, a piece of the wave is reflected back to the machine. Ground Penetrating Radar can be used over many types of ground surfaces and can “read” 10 feet into the ground.

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Life at the Fort

Before the War of 1812, 300 to 500 people lived at Fort Hawkins. During the war, however, over 3,000 soldiers lived there. Archaeologists at Fort Hawkins have uncovered several clues about the everyday life of soldiers, Native Americans, and Africans. Families were often stationed together at the fort. Archaeologists also learned about people usually left out of history. At Fort Hawkins these people were African slaves and washerwomen who worked for the officers stationed at the fort. Other people using the site included Moravian missionaries living by the Flint River near the Creek Indian Agency. Moravians were pacifists who visited the fort to pick up supplies. Moravians were originally from Eastern Europe and many lived in Pennsylvania and North Carolina, and missionaries were sent to Georgia.

Archaeologists found a variety of artifacts at Fort Hawkins. These represent the diversity of its use and its residents. The types of items they used were very similar to things we use today, such as dishes, jewelry, doorknobs, shoe and belt buckles, and bricks.

Ceramics are often found on archaeological sites and Fort Hawkins was no exception. You would expect to find lead shot, gunflints, and weapons parts at a fort. Archaeologists also discovered everyday items used by residents. They found types of dishes known as creamware and pearlware. Pearlware was found most often at Fort Hawkins and was most popular from about 1790 to the 1830s. Archaeologists do more than identify the type of dishes used. They try to decide things like “How easy was it to get these kinds of dishes on the frontier of Georgia?” or “Did many people want these kinds of dishes?” and “How much did they cost?” Archaeologists found few porcelain dishes at Fort Hawkins even though porcelain is usually found on military sites.

Archaeologists also discovered clothing artifacts, including a uniform collar tab, buttons, and a brass pin. They identified the soldiers who lived at Fort Hawkins by identifying the uniform buttons found. Some buttons, for instance, were molded with the words, “4th Infantry.” From the types of buttons recovered, we learn that these belonged to both civilian and military persons. Historical
documents also mention the 4th Infantry at Fort Hawkins, in addition to other infantries and regiments. Archaeologists found more evidence of a soldier’s life. They found containers that held boot blacking which the soldiers used to polish the leather on their uniforms. Excavation also uncovered embossed metal pieces of some of the soldiers’ hats, called “shakos.”

Militia records show Fort Hawkins was a warehouse for ammunition and weapons. Old documents recorded the shipment of these items. Examples included cannon, grapeshot (a kind of metal ball), muskets, rifles and gunflints (shaped rocks needed at that time to shoot guns). Some old documents tell us more about what soldiers came to Fort Hawkins. The Creek Brigade, made up of the Creek and Yuchi people, volunteered to fight in two wars on the frontier, and went to Fort Hawkins to pick up their pay.

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**Fort Hawkins Architecture**

What did Fort Hawkins look like? Archaeologists are helping to describe it by finding architectural artifacts. They found the floors of six buildings. They also found stains in the soil that tell about the architecture of the fort. Evidence of seven lines of palisades was discovered during excavation. Palisades were walls surrounding the fort made of wooden logs with sharpened points. The logs were stuck in a deep ditch to keep them upright. Palisades were needed to protect forts throughout Georgia. At Fort Hawkins three different walled enclosures were uncovered. Archaeologists discovered that two forts were built on this site. Storing guns and ammunition required a magazine and a Quartermaster Warehouse. The large size of these buildings shows that the fort stocked and dispensed many trade goods. It is obvious that Fort Hawkins was more than a fort. It functioned as its own small town, with a military government, barracks, a kitchen, and a store.

**Activity**

1. Locate a topographic map through the website http://mapper.acme.com or http://www.topozone.com. After a brief explanation inform the students how to read/understand the contour lines on the map. Ask the students to explain why Fort Hawkins was considered an ideal location for a defensive center. Why would this be important to the formation of Georgia? What would be some of the criteria for determining the location of a fort? Using a topographic map decide where you would place a fort.

2. You are the Chairman of The Fort Hawkins Commission and have been given the challenge to reconstruct this site. What challenges will you face? How will you decide which architectural features and phases of the fort should be focused on? Who should make this decision? What other issues should be considered, for example where will you get the money?

**Discussion**

1. How is Ground Penetrating Radar helpful to archaeologists? In your opinion is GPR a successful tool? Research other uses of GPR in archaeological research. Support your argument. If you were an archaeologist what site would you like to study using GPR?

GPR is helpful to archaeologists because it allows them to get a preview of the soil before they dig.

This is a successful tool when researching a large area of land.

2. Learn about the people. How do archaeologists use artifacts and historical records to understand the lives of people?

Archaeologists use historical records to learn more about the daily lives of people. Several types of records that may be available in-
clude deeds (showing who owned the land), population census, industrial and manufacturing census, maps, diaries, recorded histories, and more. Artifacts are materials that have been made by humans. Archaeologists sort artifacts into groups (Kitchen, Architecture, Tobacco, Arms, Clothing and Miscellaneous) based on how the artifact was used. While archaeology can provide new information about the past it is a destructive science. Archaeologists take a cautious approach to leave parts of the site available for future study as technology continues to develop.

3. Who was Fort Hawkins named after and when was it built?

Benjamin Hawkins and 1806

4. What were palisades?

Palisades were walls made of long squared wooden logs that formed Fort Hawkins’s stockade.

5. Why is learning about the past so important?

The study of the past teaches us about those who lived before us. It is important to learn about all groups of people and understand their relationships and events in history. Protecting the past for today and the future allows scientists to study these sites and make careful and important analyses about the data they collect.

6. Use the back of the Archaeology Month poster to initiate further discussion. What other military sites have been studied in Georgia and what did archaeologists learn about them?

Resources

Society for Georgia Archaeology (SGA):
www.thesga.org

Interested in learning more about Georgia archaeology and how you can preserve threatened archaeological sites? Visit the website to learn more about upcoming events and resources. Several local chapters exist throughout the state. Find information about where your local chapter meets and attend a meeting to learn about what archaeology is being done in your neighborhood.

Frontiers in the Soil
This book is a must have for any educator interested in teaching about archaeology. Learn about the time periods of history here in Georgia, how an archaeological excavation takes place and activities you can try. It can be purchased at http://www.cviog.uga.edu/store/item.php?item=9 for $16.95 or check it out at your local library.

Fort Hawkins Project:
http://lamarinstitute.org/fort-hawkins-project.htm
Visit this website to learn more details about the ongoing work at Fort Hawkins. Check the website periodically for updates.

National Park Service: American Battlefield Protection Program
www.cr.nps.gov/hps/abpp/abpp_p.htm
Learn how you can protect historic battlefields from erosion, vandalism, and development.

Teaching With Historic Places:
www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/
This website features lesson plans for educators organized by state. Search under Georgia to find:

Andersonville: Prisoner of War Camp (11)
Examine conditions of the Civil War’s most notorious prison, and learn how inmates were able to cope. (National Park)

Frederica: An 18th-Century Planned Community (31)
Discover why this British settlement was built and how it functioned as Great Britain and Spain each struggled to control land from Charleston to St. Augustine. (National Park)

Savannah, Georgia: The Lasting Legacy of Colonial City Planning (83)
Learn about James Oglethorpe and his enduring city plan from the colonial era. (National Historic Landmark)

The Trail of Tears and the Forced Relocation of the Cherokee Nation (118)
Understand the factors that contributed both to the forced removal of the Cherokees off their homelands and to painful divisions within the tribe. (The Trail of Tears is a National Historic Trail. The Major Ridge House and John Ross House are National Historic Landmarks.)

Society for American Archaeology:
www.saa.org
Features new webpage for Archaeology for the Public at www.saa.org/public

Forgotten Invasion
Visit the little known battle of Point Peter, one of the last known battles of the War of 1812, at www.forgotteninvasion.com . This site was designed by The History Workshop and includes video, a web game and lesson plans (War of 1812, Colonial Marines, Patriot War, Cumberland Island and Archaeology).
Wormsloe State Historic Site:
www.wormsloe.org/content/georgia/parks/wormsloe/
Look under Educational Resources for an Archaeology Guide for educators.

Fort King George:
http://gastateparks.org/info/ftkinggeorge/
From 1721 until 1736, Fort King George was the southern outpost of the British Empire in North America. It is part of Georgia State Parks and is an ideal stop for any visitor learning more about early Georgia history.

University of Georgia Hargrett Library Rare Map Collection
http://www.libs.uga.edu/darchive/hargrett/maps/maps.html
Use this website to make history come alive in your classroom. This amazing collection covers 500 years of history.

Further Reading:

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Coulter, E. M.
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Elliott, D.T.


Elliott, D.T., and R.F. Elliott

Ethridge, R.

Foster, H.T., Jr.

Ivers, L.

Johnson, J.M.

Kennedy, W.B.

Lawrence, A.A.
Storm Over Savannah. (1951) University of Georgia Press, Athens.

McDaniel, M.F.K.
Mason, C. I.
*The Archaeology of Ocmulgee Old Fields, Macon, Georgia.*

Toner, M.

This is one of a series of educational packets produced annually by The Society for Georgia Archaeology during Spring Archaeology Month activities. The series reflects new themes annually and is distributed free of charge along with an associated poster and Events calendar to all middle/junior high public schools in the state, to regional libraries, state parks and historic sites, and other entities. With the exception of the Events calendar, the materials are timeless. Librarians at schools and regional public libraries are encouraged to catalog these materials so that they may be used in the future. The 2007 lesson plan is the 10th in the series.

This packet was created by Catherine Long, with major contributions by Daniel Elliott. Images courtesy of LAMAR Institute.
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