

Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective

Volume 5

Number 1 *Archaeological Encounters with Georgia's Spanish Period, 1526-1700: New Findings and Perspectives*

Article 2

June 2011

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Recommended Citation

Blanton, Dennis B. and Snow, Frankie (2011) "New Evidence of Early Spanish Activity on the Lower Ocmulgee River," *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective*: Vol. 5 : No. 1 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/jgi/vol5/iss1/2>

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New Evidence of Early Spanish Activity on the Lower Ocmulgee River

Dennis B. Blanton and Frankie Snow

In 2006, Fernbank Museum of Natural History launched an archaeological project along the lower Ocmulgee River of southeastern Georgia. The ongoing effort began with a straightforward objective: recover and interpret archaeological evidence of an early seventeenth-century mission named Santa Isabel de Utinahica. Interpretations of historical accounts put the mission in or near The Forks, a reference to the junction of the Oconee and Ocmulgee Rivers that creates the Altamaha River (Braley 1995; Snow 1990; Worth 1993, 1994, 1995a). Previous tantalizing discoveries of Spanish artifacts in the area offered solid targets for investigation and the project design was simply to investigate as many candidate mission sites as possible.

Spanish artifacts have since been recovered from each of the four sites we have investigated but obvious evidence of Santa Isabel's location still eludes us. We have confirmed instead a Spanish presence both pre-dating and post-dating the mission. From one site there are robust indications of much earlier Spanish contact during the sixteenth century, very possibly associated with the *entrada* of Hernando De Soto. From another site there is equally compelling evidence of Indian refugees who abandoned coastal mission communities in the late 1600s. And from others there is Spanish material we cannot yet precisely date.

Update of Evidence for a Spanish Presence in the Ocmulgee Big Bend Region

In this section we review the updated archaeological record of Spanish activity along the lower Ocmulgee. Our new treatment refines earlier summaries of evidence generated by Snow's (1977, 1990) independent survey of the Ocmulgee Big Bend region.

Lamar Period Settlement in the Big Bend Region

An appropriate beginning for the update is acknowledgment of the concentration of late prehistoric Native population in the area of The Forks. Our recent work supports Snow's (1977, 1990) assertion that a discrete population inhabited the lower Ocmulgee and the adjoining area to the south, and that it represents one of many other distinct

Lamar polities in Georgia on the eve of European contact. Five radiocarbon dates for Big Bend Lamar sites establish a period of occupation from AD 1390-1600 (Blanton et al. 2008, Stephenson and Snow 2004). The locations of these sites, ranging from upland to floodplain settings, are suggestive of the dispersed community pattern so well documented for Lamar polities elsewhere (Hally and Rudolph 1986, Smith and Kowalewski 1979). Artifact densities and feature types at representative sites are indicative of modest-scale but intensive occupation, probably over at least one or a few generations. Our findings have narrowed an earlier estimation of the time frame for this late prehistoric contact period population. With recent recovery of diagnostic Spanish artifacts on the sites, we believe the so-called Square Ground components mainly fall within the period AD 1450-1650.

Glass Site (9TF145)

Investigation of the Glass Site (9TF145), situated on a low sandy ridge fronting a relict Ocmulgee River channel, has revealed details of a Native settlement where specialized, non-domestic activities occurred, as did very early contact with exploring Spanish. In the course of three seasons we have opened a large block of contiguous units, measuring almost 18 x 12 meters in size, and four aspects of the findings merit description.

First, there is evidence of a small artificial mound on the site. Tree planting operations have obscured the most obvious traces of the feature but close-interval surface mapping and stratigraphic documentation confirm its existence. Presently we estimate the original size of the mound at twelve meters in diameter and not more than 60 cm in height. Similar lines of evidence indicate that the mound was constructed in no more than two stages.

The findings also indicate that a structure had been constructed exactly where the mound was created. A pattern of postholes defines parts of three of the enclosing walls of a very large, square building generally oriented to the cardinal directions. The structure measures almost exactly ten meters across, making it considerably larger than the average Lamar dwelling of the period. At the center of the building is a large hearth, near which two of four large, central support posts have been exposed. Daub is concentrated over the central part of the floor, mainly within three meters of the hearth. Below the layer of debris created when the building burned, and corresponding closely with the structural footprint, is a thin midden-like stratum believed to be a floor deposit.

Skirting the three sides of the structure that have been revealed is a large artificial ditch measuring 2-2.5 meters wide. The estimated maximum depth of the original feature is 70 cm. Because we have exposed only portions of the ditch we cannot be sure of its full extent or purpose. However, we suggest that it served initially as a borrow pit for construction of the low mound, or perhaps for sandy fill embanked against the walls of the building. We are also entertaining the possibility that the ditch was purposely created as a symbolic barrier.

Finally, a discrete, artifact-rich midden was identified immediately northeast of the mound and structure within the ditch. Well-preserved animal bone was abundant and several other categories of artifacts were concentrated in the midden. All of the marine shell objects from the site were found there (three beads and one columella

ear pin), as were unusual numbers of box turtle shells and incised ceramics. Also concentrated in the deposit are obvious lenses of ash and some of the early European artifacts. This kind of material leads us to ask whether we have isolated a dump resulting from an annual busk (i.e., Green Corn) or similar ritual (see article by Windham in this volume).

Native Indian artifacts associated with the structure are characteristic of a late Lamar occupation (AD 1450-1600). They share attributes akin to Lamar ceramics described from the interior Coastal Plain and Piedmont (Braley 1995, Hally 1994). Ceramic vessel forms are mainly complicated stamped jars with folded and pinched rims, or carinated bowls with incised panels above complicated stamped bodies. The stamped quadrilinear "square ground" motif described by Snow (1990) occurs commonly, as do several other motifs ranging from simple curvilinear to more complex. Incising is characteristically well executed and plain surfaces are rare. Other vessel forms are less common but among them shallow brimmed bowls are dominant. The brimmed bowls are usually stamped on the exterior surface but have incised decoration on the upper brim; a few brimmed bowls bear traces of red film paint.

Elaborate ceramic smoking pipes typical of late Lamar occupations throughout the region have been recovered at the Glass Site in large numbers. Two styles are especially common. One has a large trumpet-shaped bowl that is often embellished with a raised grid pattern and two prominent beak-like projections. The other has a smaller bowl that features one or two narrow bands of dentilated decoration.

During each of the five episodes of fieldwork at the Glass Site, Spanish artifacts have been recovered together with the Lamar material. The assemblage of early European artifacts presently consists of 17 objects (Table 2.1). All of the objects are datable to the first half of the sixteenth century (Deagan 1987, Mitchem 1991, Smith and Good 1982, Smith 1987). Compared with other early sixteenth-century assemblages in the Southeast, especially those outside of Florida, the collection from the Glass Site is unusually large and diverse. We are not aware of another collection remotely like it from the interior Coastal Plain or Piedmont of Georgia or the Carolinas. Equally unique is the tightly-controlled recovery of the material within an area measuring 10 x 12 meters. All but one of the metal items has been recovered *in situ* in undisturbed deposits, as has one of the chevron beads. None of the artifacts are from burial context but instead occur in deposits associated with the large structure.

While the evidence revealed at the Glass Site shares characteristics with other Lamar sites we have examined, there are features of it that imply something other than ordinary activity. The structure we have begun to document is far larger than the typical domestic dwelling. The low mound and associated midden are not entirely unique but the associated ditch feature could be. The occurrence of marine shell artifacts and large numbers of elaborate smoking pipe fragments also appear to be out of the ordinary. Considered together these must be taken as possible indications of some level of specialized activity tied to elite ritual centered around a large public building.

Table 2.1. Early sixteenth-century European artifacts from the Glass Site (9TF145).

Count	Category	Description
6	Glass beads	7-layer, small, faceted chevron
1	Glass bead	3-layer, short, faceted Nueva Cadiz
1	Glass bead	Olive-shaped, white core, blue-white spiraling stripes
1	Glass bead	Spherical, small, opaque white
1	Iron tool	Tanged awl/punch with embossed decoration
1	Iron tool	Celt blade or thin chisel/wedge
1	Iron tool	Heavy wedge or adze (broken)
1	Sheet brass	Unidentified object
1	Silver pendant	Oval-shaped, perforated at one end
1	Lead shot	.31 caliber round ball
1	Clear glass	Possible amulet, traces of copper allow wire
1	Molten iron	Unidentified scrap
1	Nail fragment	Small nail

Coffee Bluff Site (9TF115)

Twenty years before our recent examination of the Lamar occupation at Coffee Bluff (9TF115), Snow was able to plot evidence of its spatial arrangement. Tree planting operations had laid the surface bare, and next to a low floodplain ridge five small midden deposits were observed to be arranged in an arc. At one end of the midden arc was a possible low, house mound. We believe the middens represent dumping areas associated with household structures and our systematic shovel tests and test units have potentially identified two of the structure locations. One is on the low mound and one is near the center of the space created by the arc of middens. Other concentrations of Lamar artifacts on separate, nearby ridges may indicate that each of these occurrences represents a small household enclave within a larger dispersed community.

We devoted two seasons to evaluation of the potential house mound where in 1984 a single sherd of Spanish-made Columbia Plain *majolica* pottery was found on the surface. Excavation of a large block exposure on the upper surface of the mounded feature, which measures about 12 meters in diameter, demonstrates that it was the locus of relatively intensive Native activity. Obvious architectural features have been elusive but some are present that are suggestive of a structure. One such feature is a thick deposit of daub close to the center of the mound. This concentration is not unlike the one recorded above the central area of the building at the Glass Site. In the lower deposits of the mound a number of probable postholes were also identified. Other formal features have not been encountered but several lenses of midden-like soil occur in the mound fill that may be refuse dumps or remnants of a floor deposit.

Despite our intensive evaluation, no additional Spanish artifacts have been recovered from Coffee Bluff. The sole indication of Spanish contact is the single sherd of *majolica* collected from the surface. Lamar Period artifacts are similar to those from the Glass Site and Site 9CF46, as well as many others identified elsewhere in the area by Snow (Snow 1977, 1990).

Site 9CF46

Site 9CF46 is located at the upland margin of the river floodplain in Coffee County opposite where the Glass and Coffee Bluff sites are located. Our limited evaluation of 9CF46 documents a settlement organization very much like that described at Coffee Bluff. Three concentrations of Lamar Period artifacts are arranged in a gentle arc. Artifact density is relatively low and our initial sense is that the occupation, while generally permanent, occurred in a compressed span of time. Ceramics on the site indicate that its period of use was contemporary with those at Coffee Bluff and the Glass Site, but there is as yet no indication of house mound construction or high-density midden dumps.

Notably, a single fragment of probable Spanish-period iron was found with Lamar ceramics in undisturbed context in one of our test units. The small piece of flat iron measured only 2 x 1.5 cm in size and was quite fragile. We have not been able to specifically identify it but suggest that it is a section of a knife blade or some other thin object.

Sand Ridge Site (9CF17)

The Sand Ridge Site was discovered by Frankie Snow in 1970 after it was cleared for tree planting and, soon thereafter, he conducted a small excavation where post-contact Native material had been exposed (Snow 1977, 1990). Snow's initial work on the site established that European artifacts were present together with "Altamaha-like" complicated stamped ceramics. Altamaha pottery is anomalous on Ocmulgee Big Bend sites but is characteristic of mission-period settlements in the coastal zone (Braley 1990, 1995; Saunders 2009; Thomas 2009). Attributes of the ceramics and the associated European artifacts indicated that the occupation probably dated late in the seventeenth century. Taking into account available historical records and the lack of comparable assemblages in the area, Snow (1990:93) observed that, "in 1686 a group of Yamassee from South Carolina made a raid on north Florida Mission Indians and stopped on their return at Tama to celebrate their success (Lawson 1987). Site 9CF17 would have been a likely spot for this celebration."

Based on those suggestions we elected to evaluate Sand Ridge again as a candidate mission site or mission-related settlement. Our 2008 work involved a program of shovel tests across the general area examined by Snow, followed by excavation of seven separate units where late-dating material was concentrated. We did not encounter discrete features or midden deposits that would allow a more refined analysis, but the results serve to reinforce Snow's general sense of the occupation.

Artifacts remain the primary source of information about the site. The Native ceramics, as noted, are of a type completely unknown elsewhere along the lower Ocmulgee and are best described as Altamaha stamped (DePratter 2009, Saunders 2009, Thomas 2009). They feature a distinctive simple stamped or line-block pattern and wide, pseudo-pinched folded rims created with large jabbed punctuations. Other unique characteristics of the pottery are a relatively high proportion of plain surfaces and a low incidence of incising.

European artifacts at Sand Ridge are entirely different from those described from the Glass Site (Table 2.2). Snow (1977:53-54) recovered the first such material during his 1970s investigations, including four glass beads, one sheet-copper fragment, and a dark green wine bottle fragment. The glass beads include one white and one blue "seed"

beads and two larger, spherical amber-colored beads. Perhaps most intriguing of all is a fragment of the stem of a ceramic smoking pipe very similar, if not identical to, the stems of so-called Chesapeake pipes better known from Tidewater Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina (Mouer 1993:124-146).

Very small, glass “seed” beads were the most common items of European manufacture recovered by the 2008 evaluation. Ten of them are white glass, two of them are turquoise blue, and one is cobalt blue. In addition, three scraps of metal were found in the deposit, consisting of two small pieces of flat copper or copper alloy and a small piece of iron. Considered together, and judged by comparable material elsewhere in the region, it is reasonably clear that, in the aggregate, the assemblage dates from 1650-1710. We believe that the site represents a brief but intensive settlement of Native people displaced from the coastal zone during a volatile period late in the seventeenth century.

Table 2.2. Late seventeenth-century European artifacts from the Sand Ridge Site (9CF17)

Count	Category	Description
11	Glass beads	Seed beads, opaque white
2	Glass beads	Seed beads, turquoise blue
3	Glass beads	Seed beads, dark blue
2	Glass beads	Spherical, amber
3	Sheet copper or brass	Unidentified scraps
1	Iron	Unidentified scrap flat metal
1	Bottle glass	Dark green
1	Pipe stem	Red clay, Chesapeake-style

An Interim Assessment of the Spanish Evidence on the Lower Ocmulgee

After four years, our research project, initially aimed at locating the site of the early seventeenth-century mission known as Santa Isabel de Utinahica, has succeeded in documenting a much longer record of Spanish activity on the lower Ocmulgee. Clues suggestive of the mission have turned up, but we do not yet know its location. Much clearer is archaeological evidence of Spanish exploration nearly a hundred years prior to Santa Isabel’s establishment and later dating evidence from the tumultuous closing decades of the Spanish period in *La Florida*. Thus, a richer story of a Spanish presence in south-central Georgia is beginning to emerge, and here we will outline our working sense of what the evidence has to say.

First of all, it was not our intention to enter the fray over questions of who traveled where during the Spanish period of exploration in the Southeast. But in the face of the findings just described, we must now try to explain early sixteenth century artifacts where no one, or at least very few people, expected to see them. While we do not know precisely how to account for the findings, two leading possibilities emerge for consideration.

One plausible source is the *entrada* of Hernando De Soto. De Soto made his first pass through present day Georgia in the spring of 1540, trekking northeastward from today’s Tallahassee, directly across the heart of Georgia, en route to Cofitachequi in central South Carolina (Hudson 1997, Hudson et al. 1984). No archaeological evidence

has been previously confirmed of De Soto's passage across the 375 km swath of the state that he traversed that March and April. This vacuum of clues stands in contrast to the relatively ample evidence for his summer season trek in far northern Georgia (Hudson et al. 1984; Smith 1987).

For over twenty years now the favored path of the De Soto army, advanced by Charles Hudson and his colleagues, puts its crossing of the Ocmulgee River at Macon, 140 km upstream from our project area (Hudson 1997, Hudson et al. 1984). Other interpretations of De Soto's path through Georgia have been advanced, and some of them have his crossing of the Ocmulgee River much closer to our project area. For example, the 1939 federal De Soto commission estimated the crossing near Abbeville about 45 km upstream of our location (Swanton 1985). Lesser known estimations bring the crossing even closer, to within 20 km of our area, close to the confluence of the Ocmulgee and Oconee rivers (Eubanks 1991a:81-92, 1991b:149-191; Lawson 1991:28-38).

These alternative interpretations of the explorer's route open the possibility of direct encounters with Native communities along the lower Ocmulgee. Indeed, the non-burial contexts of our discoveries can be likened to the pattern common to residential sites of exploring Spanish parties, like Governor Martin at Tallahassee (Ewen and Hann 1998) and the later Berry Site (Joara) in North Carolina (Moore et al. 2008). On these two sites, early Spanish artifacts routinely occur in the general site matrix or in non-burial features, like pits and on structure floors, just as they do at the Glass Site. Moreover, and to reiterate an earlier point, there are no comparable sites in interior Georgia that have produced similar numbers of diagnostic early Spanish artifacts.

Our new findings have naturally led us to an independent evaluation of the De Soto chronicles, along with the body of relevant archaeological evidence that has accumulated over the last twenty years. This exercise is initiated to account for our results and, in the process, bring some refinement to a segment of several competing route proposals. In our view, available documentary and archaeological information can be marshaled to support an argument that puts De Soto's crossing of the Ocmulgee River very close to the Glass Site near Jacksonville, Georgia. An exhaustive presentation of the argument is beyond the scope of this paper but the main points are as follows:

- *Thriving Native American communities, that were probably elements of independent provinces, were situated on the Flint and Ocmulgee rivers at locations not previously recognizable by scholars seeking to establish De Soto's route through Georgia.* Particularly significant is evidence of a substantial Lamar site complex on the Flint River in Lee and Worth counties at the crossing point of important Indian trails (Bubba Hopkins, Sam Lawson, and Frankie Snow, personal communications, 2008, 2009) and confirmation of "square ground" Lamar communities on the lower Ocmulgee, also proximate to known Indian trails. Recognition of archaeologically-documented late prehistoric communities is always a fundamental step in evaluations of early exploratory routes (Hudson 1997:464-465; Hudson et al. 1984:65).
- *The network of Indian trails utilized by De Soto included paths that connected the lower reaches of the Flint River drainage with the lower Ocmulgee River.* The apparent late Lamar site complex on the Flint in Lee and Worth counties coincides with the

crossing point of the Ten-Mile Trail. This point on the river cannot be dismissed as the second Flint River crossing of the De Soto party using the same rate of travel estimates and geographic cues cited by others. The trail tracks eastward, directly to the Big Bend section of the Ocmulgee, where it intersects with other documented paths not more than 10 km from the Glass Site, within the square ground Lamar province. This Flint River location potentially squares well with the initial crossing point at Toa that Hudson's once team favored but decided to abandon for another location upstream (Hudson 1997:480).

- *Ours is the only discovery in Georgia of Spanish artifacts diagnostic of early sixteenth-century contact that has been reported from a Native community on a documented trail in the Piedmont or interior Coastal Plain.* Similar artifacts are not known from any of the sites or areas on the Hudson route between Anhaica (Tallahassee) and the Appalachian mountains. Elsewhere, beads and metal objects like those from the Glass Site are a common currency at places associated with the De Soto *entrada*. They have been recovered not only from the winter encampment site at Anhaica near Tallahassee but also at the Ruth Smith, Thatham, and Weeki Wachee mounds more proximate to the 1539 landing point, at sites associated with the province of Coosa, and even farther west, at locations reasonably close to proposed routes (Ewen and Hann 1998; Hutchinson and Mitchem 1996; Mitchem 1991; Mitchem et al. 1985; Smith 1987, 1992).

Perhaps we are putting the first hard dot on the map of Georgia that anchors De Soto's initial passage across the area. If we apply the logic that has ordinarily been applied to interpretation of early sixteenth-century artifact occurrences, we would be reasonably safe in declaring this to be a new location of direct De Soto contact, or at the very least a place closer to his path than not.

However, there is at least one other source of contact to consider that prevents immediate commitment to De Soto. This competing case means looking to another direction and an even earlier event: the 1526 colonizing attempt of Lucas Vasquez de Ayllon that ended on coastal Georgia (Hoffman 1990, 1994). Oddly enough, one can return to De Soto's chronicles to build an argument for this source of the earliest European artifacts. Told briefly, De Soto and his party were startled to discover glass beads and iron tools among the "treasures" in an elite storehouse near Cofitachequi (Clayton et al. 1993:279). That De Soto's men deduced the artifacts came from Ayllon's failed colony (one of De Soto's party was a veteran of that attempt), even though it was located some 250 km away on the Atlantic coast, is pertinent to our case.

The reasoning of De Soto's chroniclers provides a scenario, other than down-the-line exchange, by which artifacts from the coastal colony could have been deposited in the interior. The firsthand accounts, as well as the works of modern historians (Hoffman 1990), describe a breakdown of order among Ayllon's dwindling and desperate group. These conditions launched exploring parties to the interior and, in the extreme, sparked mutinous factions that took matters of survival in their own hands. Given these accounts, we have no choice but to ask: Were the artifacts at the Glass Site among the possessions of a small Allyn-related band that sought to do business, or actually cast its lot with, the interior Indians?

Few as they are, there are still more De Soto-related sites with which to compare our findings than there are Ayllon-related sites. This is to say that our assemblage is reasonably similar in its makeup to others linked with De Soto, but we literally have no working precedent for what an Ayllon assemblage should look like. In years past, the possibility has been considered that Nueva Cadiz-style beads are the better marker of pre-1540 exploration (Smith 1987:45). Indeed, they are perhaps the most common early bead type in Georgia on the coastal sites that would have been most exposed to the earliest European landfalls (Pearson 1977). Regardless, and especially until clearer diagnostic traces of the earlier colony are recognized, we must keep the Allyon option on our short list of possible origins.

Turning now to the evidence from the closing decades of the Spanish period, the post-Santa Isabel occupation at the Sand Ridge Site represents a true anomaly in the archaeological record of the lower Ocmulgee. The Indian ceramics in particular are alien to the area and, using a geological concept to make the point, they represent an obvious unconformity. In archaeological terms we argue, as Snow (1977, 1990) has before, that the only way to reasonably account for this material is by abrupt relocation of a non-local Native group. This general suggestion begs many questions, and we will offer at least two competing explanations.

The first extends Snow's (1977) original suggestion, quoted earlier, that the material was deposited during a campaign of marauding "Chichimeco" Indians. Worth (1993, 1999), among others (Braley 1995, Green 1992, Green et al. 2002), has explored the documentary records of the late seventeenth century to expose details of the event. With firearms and other enticements, bands of English-allied, northern Indians were deployed from the competing colonies in the Carolinas and Virginia to harass Spanish-allied Indians in Georgia and Florida.

Written accounts are very clear about the 1661 incursion to which Snow alluded (Green 1992, Green et al. 2002, Worth 1999). The records tell us that the Chichimeco first began to harass Spanish-allied Indians in 1659, operating from a base somewhere in middle Georgia, but two years later they turned their aggression to Indian settlements on and near the Atlantic coast. Again working from an encampment deep in interior Georgia, the 1661 raiding excursion made its way down the Altamaha River in a flotilla of canoes to launch an attack on mission Santo Domingo de Talaje near present day Darien (Worth 1999). The attack was repulsed, and the party returned to the interior, reportedly somewhere in or near the provinces of Tama and Catufa. It is possible, then, that the Sand Ridge Site represents one of the Chichimeco settlements from which they were launching raids between 1659-1661. The archaeological material is too dense and varied to be explained by a short-lived encampment of raiders in transit.

The second possible explanation, and the one we are inclined to favor at this point, is occupation by a small group of displaced refugees from the coastal zone. Later in the seventeenth century, in the wake of Chichimeco and other English-sponsored depredations, Yamassee Indians living near the coastal mission settlements withdrew to safer locations. Rather than moving *en masse* we know that the communities split between new destinations, one of which was the interior.

Around 1662, the Chichimeco moved their base of operation from central Georgia to the Savannah River and immediately began to prey upon Yamassee Indian settlements of the outer Coastal Plain (Worth 1999). The Yamassee responded by relocating to the

vicinity of Spanish missions on the Georgia coast, occupying several “pagan” towns as opposed to the mission communities themselves. In 1675, the Yamasee are reported to have been living in six such towns. A new era of English-sponsored raids began in 1680 that targeted Spanish mission outposts and the towns of allied Indians. Periodic raids and a pirate attack in 1683 forced the Yamasee to move again. While one contingent returned to southeastern South Carolina, Chief Altamaha led another Yamasee group to “the interior.” Within a year, most if not all of the Yamasee congregated in South Carolina settlements, but it is very possible that the Sand Ridge Site was the location of the interim refuge community.

Concluding Comments

Emerging results from our work on the Ocmulgee cast light on several basic issues. First, the full story of early Spanish exploration in the Southeast is far from told. The prodigious body of scholarship concerned with the Period of Exploration in general, and events surrounding Hernando De Soto’s trek in particular, has already carried us well down the path toward a representative history. At the same time, we recognize that each interpretation of an explorer’s route or a settlement’s location is nothing other than a hypothesis to be tested until a weight of tangible evidence confirms the details.

This brings us to a second issue: archaeology still matters. More to the point, archaeological evidence combined with the historical record is absolutely critical to any study that endeavors to bring clarity to the early colonial picture. Certainly this is not a novel suggestion (Hudson 1997, Hudson et al. 1984), but our recent experience on the lower Ocmulgee refreshes the belief that archaeology is not merely the “handmaiden to history” (Noël Hume 1964). Indeed, until archival sleuths turn up new troves of relevant documents, archaeology finds itself at the vanguard of early colonization studies. So far as the lower Ocmulgee area is concerned, the piney woods still have secrets to share.

Acknowledgments

We wish to recognize the many individuals who have supported this project with information, logistical and material support, and general encouragement. Foremost among them are the landowners who have allowed us to explore sites on their property: Glass Land & Timber, LLC and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Pat and Wilson Thorpe and Dr. David Crass have, in particular, been especially generous with allowing and arranging access. Our field crews since 2006 have done the hard work of getting the information out of the ground and maintaining the records that allow it to speak to us. These include participants in Fernbank’s summer archaeology education program, as well as a field school from Georgia State University under the direction of Dr. Jeffrey Glover. Equally critical support has been given in the Fernbank Museum of Natural History archaeology laboratory where staff, volunteers, and student interns have cataloged and analyzed the artifacts and samples. Some special thanks are extended to Kenny Powell, Brian Floyd, Craig and Ann Hilliard, Chris Trowell, Pennie and Lloyd Moses, Becky and Harold Mobley, Louie Harper, Frank Lee, and Doug Tarver.