



In 1991, Larry Lane documents war damage in Kuwait, including the burning oil wells set ablaze by Iraqi forces. Photo courtesy of Larry Lane.

From the Army into ARCHAEOLOGY

Written by Larry Lane, SCDNR Archaeologist
and NPWE Program Participant

I began work with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) Archaeology team at Parker Annex Archaeology Center (Parker Annex) in 2018 as a volunteer, processing artifacts in the lab and helping on field excavations. Archaeological job opportunities are limited in the Columbia area, but one way to gain hands-on experience and to learn more about the state's archaeological sites is to volunteer with local archaeological offices. Through my volunteer work I have helped in the excavation of both historic and prehistoric sites, from early settlements of the indigenous people of South Carolina to sites related to the American Revolutionary War and the Civil War.

For the last nine months, I have worked as a full-time lab and field technician as part of the SCDNR Archaeology team under the Veterans Affairs (VA) Non-Paid Work Experience (NPWE) program. Under this program designed for disabled veterans, I work alongside professional archaeologists as I learn new skills and gain more experience that will help build my resume

as an archaeologist. Under the NPWE program, I am a free employee to SCDNR and the VA pays me a monthly stipend. The additional money is one incentive for veterans to take advantage of the program, but the experience is much more valuable to me. This job placement is only open for positions with state and federal government agencies, which may seem limiting in some ways, but it is also a possible foot in the door for people interested in future government work.

Prior to joining the SCDNR Archaeology team, the wealth of my archaeological experience was gained through field schools with the University of South Carolina (UofSC) as I pursued my BA in Anthropology. One field school was at the site of Fort Congaree, an early 18th century colonial fort and trading post located in Cayce, S.C. just outside of Columbia. Another field school focused on Camp Asylum, a former Union soldier Prisoner of War (POW) camp located on the South Carolina State Hospital property in Columbia. The site of this former POW camp is partially below where Parker



Larry Lane photographs flight deck operations while deployed with Joint Task Force Liberia in 2003. Photo courtesy of Larry Lane.



Larry Lane looks for artifacts in a screen during the May 2019 archaeological field season at the Pockoy Island Shell Ring Complex. Image courtesy of SCDNR archaeologist Meg Gaillard.

Annex was constructed in 1910. I also worked on archaeological projects in Ireland and Italy with the University of Notre Dame.

My first interest in archaeology developed while I served as a journalist and public affairs specialist in the Army. In my 23 years of service, I traveled to several countries where I learned how war destroys the culture material of a people, from the Iraqi forces looting of Kuwaiti Museums to the Taliban destruction of Buddhist statues along the Silk Road in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. In many cases, the loss of material culture during a conflict cannot be recovered. Our current work at Parker Annex is satisfying to me in that we recover and preserve the cultural materials

that have been lost over time. Whether we excavate a 4,300-year-old shell ring site created by the people who once lived on Pockoy Island (Edisto Island, S.C.), or uncover the foundations of homes once occupied by enslaved African-Americans near Fort Frederick in Beaufort, S.C., we continue to add to the greater understanding of the people who lived in this state.

One of the greatest joys of working on the SCDNR Archaeology team, and something that I miss from my time as a soldier, is working on projects as a team to achieve an objective, whether we are in the field or back in the lab. In many ways, working on a archaeological field site is similar to working through a short-term military

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Larry Lane talks with young visitors during the May 2019 archaeological field season at the Pockoy Island Shell Ring Complex. Image courtesy of SCDNR archaeologist Meg Gaillard.

deployment. Our sites are often empty fields in remote environments, so there is a great deal of what I used to call mission preparation with planning for many contingencies. At the same time, whether in the lab or in the field, there is always an opportunity to learn some new skill so that I can become a greater asset to the team.

While archaeology is much more than individual artifacts, I especially like working with prehistoric pottery we recover at the Pockoy Island Shell Ring Complex. I also hold an Art History MA from UofSC where I studied both historic and prehistoric art forms. Prehistoric pottery always shows what we call the “hand of the artist” or the craftsmanship of the artist. Individual pottery sherds show the choices made by the artist, from the clay used, the shaping of the vessel or the distinctive surface design.

There are some sherds that make me stop and

think that 4,000 plus years ago on the coast of South Carolina, someone sat down beside a fire and formed a pot from clay, and then used a shell to add this design. The pot was then baked over an open fire and possibly used to contain food or water. While the pottery may show great craftsmanship in its production, there are also some interesting aesthetic choices made by each craftsman, showing a higher form of thinking. I am always in awe of the work they accomplished, and I am happy to be part of a team that is helping recover and preserve some of that past.

My current commitment with the NPWE program ends this August, but until then I continue to improve my archaeological skill set so that I may contribute to the greater mission of preserving South Carolina’s history through its archaeology. Parker Annex continues to be a great learning resource for me as I prepare for whatever comes next.