

# The Archaeological Exploration of Ft. George Cay, October-November 2009

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## **Preface**

The following is an interim report offering a broad overview of (1) the fieldwork strategy employed during the archaeological exploration of Ft. George and its results, (2) observations on the nature and rates of erosion and deterioration on the cay, and (3) recommendations for future action. Because the most immediate concerns of the Ft. George stakeholders are the recommendations and options evolving out of the field work (and the reasons for them), rather than the minutiae of artifact identifications and distributions, this interim report is being circulated with *a request for feedback, particularly with regard to the recommendations and options offered herein.*

## **Introduction**

With a license from the DECR, the blessings of the National Trust, support of the National Museum, funding from private donors, and leadership by Ships of Discovery, the archaeological exploration of Ft. George Cay began on October 23 and ended two weeks later on November 6, 2009. The exploration team was composed of seven individuals with local knowledge and expertise in archaeology, architecture, metal detecting, and photography (see Acknowledgments). Exploration of the ruins known to exist on Grouper Cay, which may once have been connected to Ft. George Cay, is postponed until early 2010 in order to coordinate with a guide who knows their locations (Figure 1).

Impetus for this project began in 2008 with the realization that after decades of casual artifact collecting, limited historical research, and mapping, there were still no answers to even simple questions such as: How big is the site? Is it confined to Ft. George or are the surrounding cays also involved? Which military units occupied the fort? How much of the site has been lost to the sea? Were British soldiers buried on the cay? The archaeological exploration of Ft. George Cay described in this interim report is an effort to answer some of these questions, but it is only one part of a larger effort that includes, or will include, ongoing archival research, artifact conservation and analysis, museum exhibit preparation, public relations, and management planning designed to make Ft. George accessible to the public without destroying its natural beauty in the process.

Work is continuing on the final report which cannot be finished until the artifacts now at the Turks and Caicos National Museum have been cleaned and analyzed. *The final report, to be issued in March, will integrate input on recommendations and options received from all stakeholders who respond to this interim report.*



Figure 1: Gridded aerial photo of Ft. George and Grouper Cays, which may have been connected in the past. Ft. George Harbor is to west. Grid interval is 50 m.

## On-Going Archival Research

Although this interim report is about the archaeology of Ft. George, it recognizes that archival research is the fount from which the true story of Ft. George will emerge. Efforts to determine when and by whom Ft. George was built, which military and militia units manned it, and when it was abandoned have begun to bear fruit. Field work at Ft. George may be more dramatic and photogenic than archival research, but in this case archaeology is definitely the “handmaiden of history.” Everything we know—or think we know—about the fort comes from the written record—old letters, sailing directories, Colonial Office files, army muster rolls, War Office lists, and the like. If it were not for these sources the foundations and artifact scatterings on Ft. George Cay by themselves would be an enigma.

The archival research element of the Ft. George Project began with the intent of verifying the scattered references to it in *Turks Islands Landfall* (Sadler 1997), which was up to that point the only written source of information. While some of Sadler’s contentions remain unsubstantiated, *e.g.* that the military detachment numbered some 200 men and that 30 of them were lost “through sickness or death,” his book did provide a starting point for the current effort. Surprisingly, historical research appears to have taken two separate but parallel and complementary directions, both of which seek to answer the questions of who built the fort and manned it. From Sadler’s account it was assumed that Ft. George was hastily built in 1798 to guard the

harbor and manned briefly by British military units until 1800 when it was abruptly abandoned. Thanks to research spearheaded by Mr. Terry Smith we now know much more about the history of the fort, including that it existed in some form in 1795 and that it was occupied by British troops at least until 1802.

Historian Charlene Kozy developed a separate line of research, perhaps even more evocative and certainly of potentially greater relevance to the local population. Kozy’s evidence suggests that Caicos planter Thomas Brown, formerly a Lt. Colonel in the Kings Rangers (a Loyalist militia), may have selected the site, started construction, supplied the first artillery pieces, and even manned the fort with “armed, clothed, and disciplined” slaves until turning the fort over to the military (Kozy 2009a, 2009b).

This suggests a much different relationship between “slave” and “master” than usually portrayed, particularly because the reason for a British military presence at Ft. George was to defend the colony against a perceived threat of invasion from Haiti, still much in turmoil following the slave uprising of 1791. In any case it is clear that Ft. George was not created and manned exclusively by “outsiders,” but also by the ancestors of the people who occupy the Caicos Islands to this day.

Given how much new information is emerging from the on-going archival research, it may be best to address the history of Ft. George in a separate report.

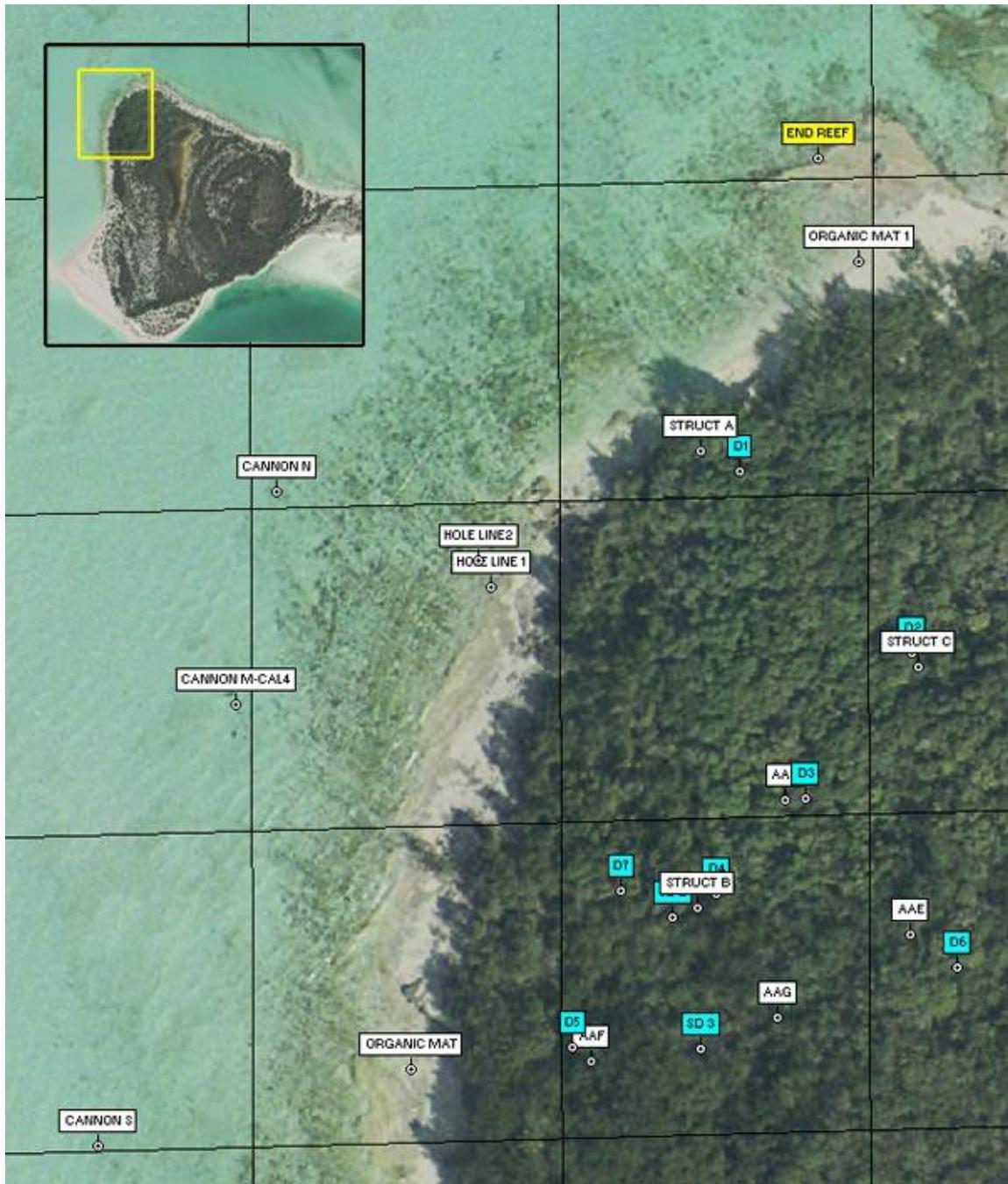


Figure 2: Locations of cannons, structures and activity areas on northwestern side of Ft. George.



Figure 3: Locations of datum points (blue boxes), sites (white boxes), corridors (white lines), and exploratory trails (yellow lines).

## Fieldwork Strategy and Results

### *Explorations on Land*

We started the terrestrial part of our survey at the most prominent feature of the fort: the ruin on the bluff (“Struct A” on Figure 2). We established a base camp just inland of the ruins, equipped it with chairs, storage lockers, and a stand-up work table, and covered it with a tarp for protection from rain and sun (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Morning briefing at the base camp.

We then used the “Brewer-McWilliams Map,” drawn in 1999 (Figure 5), to locate other foundations in the interior. In order to allow the movement of people and equipment between Structures A, B and C it was necessary to clear corridors through the dense bush. We then pushed outward from the three structures to look for other signs of occupation (Figure 3).

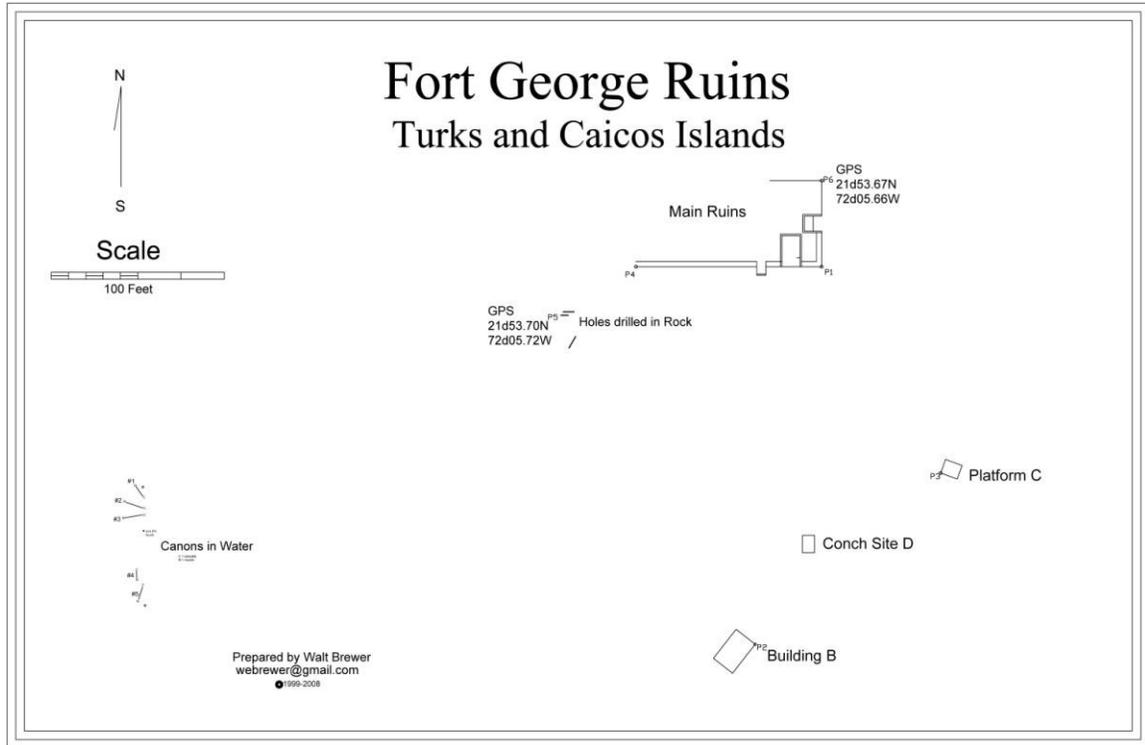
Our most useful tools for locating “activity areas” were metal detectors, which could find objects lying just below

the thick layer of organic litter covering the soil. Scattered artifact finds were made almost everywhere, but when concentrations were found they were recorded as “activity areas” and trails were cut linking them to the main corridors. This was a time-consuming process due to the havoc wrought by hurricane Ike. Many small trees, poorly rooted in the thin soil, blew over to form horizontal deadfalls. Others recovered, even though their trunks were horizontal, and began sprouting vertical trunks, creating impenetrable organic barriers.

Because our main objective was to determine the area covered by the site, we did not concentrate on recovering artifacts. Our policy was to collect only objects that might contribute to our understanding. Many of the artifacts we discovered were identified, then reburied *in situ*. In some cases the locations of metal detector “hits” were noted but not excavated.

A datum point was established for each of the seven structures and activity areas, and permanently marked with a 0.60 m length of 1-inch PVC pipe driven as far into the soil as possible. Each pipe was engraved with a “D” for “datum” followed by a number for its specific location (Figure 2).

Because the dense vegetation hampered mapping, we recorded the location of one corner of each of the three structures using a hand-held GPS receiver mounted on the end of a stadia rod extended to a height of 5 m to get clear of the forest’s signal-blocking upper story. A tall tripod stabilized the stadia rod (Figure 6). The receiver was set to record using the “positioning averaging” feature and left



**Figure 5: The Brewer-McWilliams survey map of features and structures on Ft. George Cay made in 1998, irrefutable documentation of the effects of erosion (see also Figure 7)**

until its position was refined to a radius of  $\pm 0.70$  m, which was sufficient accuracy for our purposes. All survey data were recorded using the UTM coordinate system, which makes mapping much easier than the lat/long system. Whenever possible a tape measure was used to verify the GPS-determined distances between datum points. The locations of all individual artifacts were related to the nearest datum point.

Considerable time and effort was spent exploring Structures A, B, and C. The exact function of each is still not known, but an analysis of the types of artifacts found around them may eventually lead to positive identification.

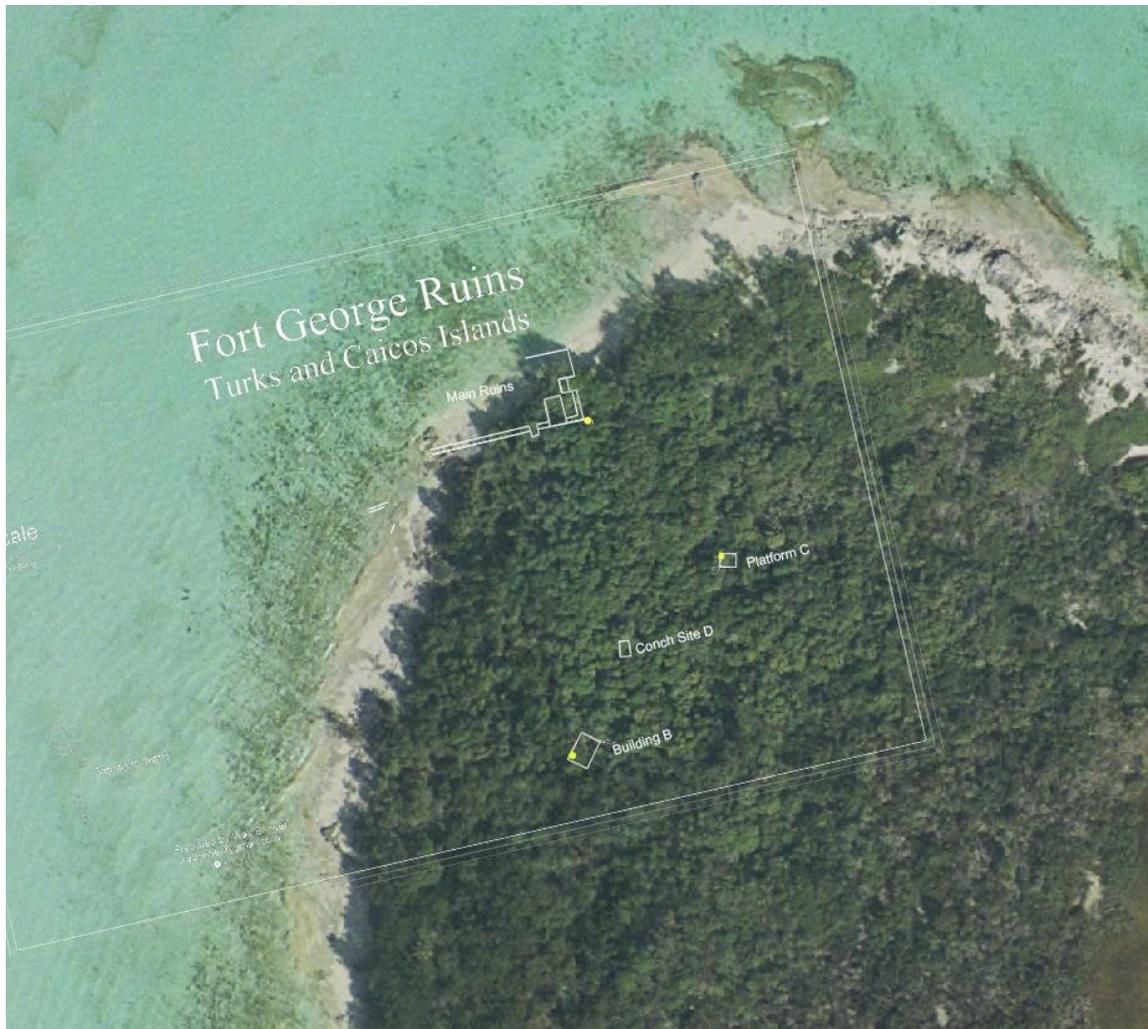
**Structure A**, once the largest ruin on the cay, has been reduced by erosion to a tiny fraction of its former size. The extent of



**Figure 6: GPS receiver mounted on a 5 m stadia rod for better reception.**

damage is graphically demonstrated by laying the Brewer-McWilliams map over a digital aerial survey image and adjusting for scale differences (Figure 7). It is difficult to determine Structure A's original function; however, finds from in, around, and offshore suggest that it

threshold indicating the presence of a door on its northwest side (Figure 2). The area around the structure contained a concentration of artifacts, including a high proportion of musket furniture (Keith 2009c). A 1 x 1 m excavation unit positioned to straddle the foundation wall



**Figure 7: The Brewer-McWilliams map, when laid over the aerial photo of Ft. George Cay taken in 2007 shows how much of Structure A has been lost.**

provided living quarters. A total of 17 artifacts were collected from within and around Structure A (its "Activity Area"). Another 11 objects were found in the water below.

**Structure B**, situated about 40 m from the

shore, is now only a low foundation with a demonstrated that the builders excavated to bedrock, only about 0.30 m below the surface. The structure's function is unknown, but screening the excavated material yielded a particularly rich selection of artifacts including pipe stems, bone fragments, a button, many ceramic and glass

shards and a badly worn coin (Fig 8). “Activity Area B” produced 78 artifacts and detector hits—the highest concentration encountered during our survey.



**Figure 8: Unidentified copper coin, probably Spanish, recovered from Structure B.**



**Figure 9: Structure B under test excavation.**

**Structure C**, originally thought to be a furnace for heating cannon shot, does not appear to possess the features or dimensions that such a facility should have (Figure 10). The furnace identification probably stems from one of the early references to Ft. George: “*The furnace for heating shot is still standing,*

*the chimney of which can be seen a few miles round . . .*” That this could be a misidentification on the part of the author is made less likely by an entry in the 1833 edition of the *Columbian Navigator*: “*there are the remains of a fort, a magazine, and a furnace for heating shot . . .*” This structure is the most massive and impressive discovered so far, but if it were ever a furnace with a tall chimney, most of it is now missing. Only 2 artifacts (both shot) were recovered from “Activity Area C.”



**Figure 10: Structure C, seen from the northeast.**

**Activity Area D**, which corresponds to “Conch Site D” on the Brewer-McWilliams map (Figures 5 and 7), does not show any evidence of a permanent structure. It does contain a high concentration of artifacts, mainly brick and tile fragments and glass shards. Artifacts in this area were mapped by taking offsets from a tape baseline pulled between Structures B and C. Twenty-seven artifacts were discovered in this area.

**Activity Area E**, located about halfway between the shore and the inland lake, contains a high concentration of the usual artifacts such as ceramic and glass shards, buttons, pipe stems, and brick and tile fragments. Unusual among the 44 finds from this area were fragments of a large, heavy cast iron object, possibly a stove, a

number of heavy iron fasteners, a piece of what may be a chamber pot, and numerous large conch shells (Fig 11). Working in this area required caution due to the presence of poisonwood trees.



**Figure 11: Activity Area E, a possible impermanent habitation site.**

**Activity Area F**, with only 19 finds, was not as artifact-rich as the other activity areas. It consisted of two shallow pits and a curious arrangement of large, undressed stones. After clearing around the stones it was apparent that although they did not represent a foundation, they did seem to have been intentionally arranged. Screening the fill from a small excavation unit placed in the middle of the stone feature produced a large amount of charcoal (Fig 12), suggesting that the feature could have been a charcoal kiln or a kiln for producing mortar from crushed conch shell. Adjacent to the pit and stone feature is an area where earlier explorers found many artifacts concentrated in a small area that they dubbed “the dump.”

**Activity Area G**, discovered only a day before the end of the field work, is located in a dense stand of trees with low-lying branches, and consequently was difficult to test. Thirteen artifacts, including iron fasteners, a unique iron tool handle (as for an auger or drill), a roofing slate fragment (one of only two found), an intact tile, a

fragment of a fire brick, and 3 brass buckles were found within the very small area that was accessible. This area deserves further exploration in the future.



**Figure 12: Activity Area F. Note charcoal piles in foreground.**

In addition to the above-mentioned structures and activity areas we also found artifacts elsewhere, but not in sufficient concentration to qualify as activity areas. Responding to a tip from an earlier explorer that objects had been seen on the beach and ironshore along the northeastern shore, we cut a trail from Structure C to the shore to gain access to the northern end of the interior lake. Finds there were sparse, but intriguing: a fragment of a large glass container, a curious lead bushing, a fragment of a thin iron strap, and a musket shot (Fig. 13). We also metal-detected the margin of the lake using two kayaks supplied by the ever-resourceful Mr. Kriebel, finding only one lead musket shot.

Along a trail cut from Structure C toward the ridge top to the east, we encountered a pipe stem fragment, a ballast stone, brick

and tile fragments, a lead musket shot and a small iron shot.



**Figure 13: Metal detecting around the northern end of the interior lake.**

The trails from Datum 6 to the margin of the lake and from Structure C to the north shore were sterile. Exploration of the interior of the cay east and south of the lake were limited to walking the rocky, clear tops of the curving ridges clearly visible as light-colored patches and arcs in the aerial photos (Figure 1). No discoveries were made.

### ***Explorations Underwater***

Our previous magnetometer survey alerted us of the presence of small and large magnetic anomalies in the shallow water just offshore (SEARCH 2009). Although we were not equipped with SCUBA or the special tools of underwater archaeology, and underwater explorations were not a field work priority, we did spend time investigating the central cluster of five cannons and verifying the presence of two other cannons, one 34 m to the north and another 73 m to the south (Figures. 14, and 2). Using the thrust of a diver propulsion vehicle to create a gentle

current, we cleared sand away from a cannon in the main cluster, exposing iron fasteners, shot, and even a well-preserved Royal Artillery button! It is clear that there are many small, loose artifacts buried in the sand around the cannons.



**Figure 14: Three of the cannons in the central cluster.**

Despite rough water and poor visibility we snorkeled the water close to shore underneath the bluff. Although the land they came from is now gone, iron shot, glass, ceramics, copper-alloy hardware and slate artifacts were still present, albeit without their original provenience. Excluding the cannons themselves, a total of 17 artifacts were recovered from the various underwater areas.

Just to the north of the bluff we encountered a feature that defies description, let alone explanation (Figure 15). It is a dense, thick, submerged organic mat overlying a bed of straight wooden poles or sticks, several layers deep, running parallel to each other (Figure 16). The association of numerous artifacts with the mat—iron hardware, ceramic shards, copper sheathing, and even a large wooden wheel—could be due to natural agencies, but the regularity of the poles layer would seem to belie a natural origin. A similar organic layer lies just under the sand on the shore near Activity Area F (Figure 2).



**Figure 15:** The “organic mat” lying between the shore and a rocky outcrop.

The Organic Mat’s proximity to the ruins on the bluff lends further support to the theory that it is man-made. Perhaps it was a ramp on which to haul out small craft or even a “bridge” for foot traffic over a low, marshy area lying between the bluff and a part of the island that has since eroded into the sea, leaving only the rocky outcrop today visible just above the waves.



**Figure 16:** The organic mat, composed of a peat-like material, may be seen here in the upper left, overlying the bed of poles.

We were able to confirm that another peculiar shore feature plainly visible in 1999, three lines of holes drilled into the



**Figure 17:** Parallel rows of holes drilled into the ironshore were visible in 1998, but have since disappeared.

ironshore below the high water mark, have disappeared (Figures 17 and 2)). Two of the lines were parallel to each other while the third was 5 m away running at an oblique angle to the parallel lines.

## Erosion Issues

It is clear that Ft. George Cay is eroding dramatically, but until this survey there was no way to measure the rate of erosion. Our survey provided an opportunity to quantify erosion rates over three different time intervals: the short-term (1-year) erosion rate between 2008 and 2009; the 7-year erosion rate revealed by the digital aerial surveys of 2000 and 2007; and the longer-term (20-year) rate documented by comparing the results of our survey with the detailed Brewer-McWilliams map and a rough sketch made at the same time.

### ***2008-2009***

Neal Hitch, Robert Kriebel, and I visited Ft. George Cay in July 2008. The visit was brief, but we spent time examining, sketching, and photographing Structure A. Fourteen months later, at the beginning of this project it was apparent that dramatic changes had taken place. Two or three meters of the bluff on which Structure A sits had crumbled into the sea, probably during hurricane Ike.

### ***2000-2007***

The high-resolution digital aerial surveys of 2000 and 2007, loaned to us by the TCI Department of Lands and Surveys, make it possible to see the rates of erosion in different places on Ft. George Cay. To obtain actual measurements from the photos we arbitrarily picked eight points along the coast that seemed to represent the border between land and sea on the 2007 image (Point 1 is an interior reference point and Point 10 is one of the cannons in the cannon cluster). Admittedly, this could not be precise in most instances because the western side of

the cay was in shadow when the photos were taken so the land/sea border is not clearly delineated (Figure 18a).

When the 10 positions were transferred to the image made seven years earlier in 2000 (Figure 18b), it was easy to see where and by how much the coastline had receded. Erosion was worse along the portion of the coast between Points 2 and 6. At Point 2 at least 15 m of land has been lost; 10 m at Point 3. Between Points 4 and 6 the bluff north of Structure A has receded on the order of 10 m.

Erosion was detectable, but less severe on the northeastern side of the cay. Other striking differences can be seen when the photos from 2000 and 2007 are compared. The shallow water to the north and west of the cay shows more submerged features in the 2000 photo, possibly indicating less sand on the bottom. The semi-submerged rocky outcrop at the northern tip of the cay is noticeably smaller in the 2007 photo.

### ***1998-2009***

The most revealing evidence for the effects of erosion on the archaeological remains of Ft. George is a comparison of the Brewer-McWilliams sketch map of Structure A, made in 1998, with our findings (Figure 19) in 2009. Only about 20% of what was recorded in 1998 was still present in 2009. The bluff on which Structure A sits—the highest and most massive part of Ft. George Cay—receded on the order of 10 m between 1998 and 2009—an average of about a meter per year!

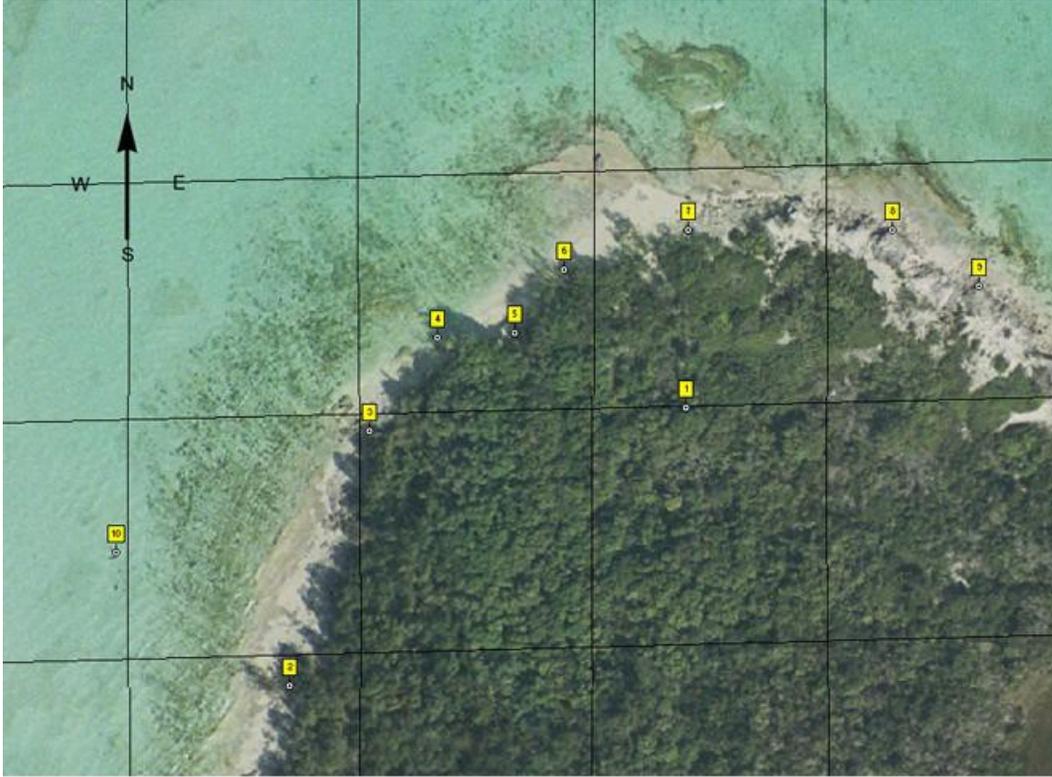


Figure 18a: Photo taken in the 2007 aerial survey shows eight points arrayed along the land/sea border of Ft. George. Grid line interval is 50 m.



Figure 18b: This photo from the 2000 aerial survey shows the same points 7 years earlier.

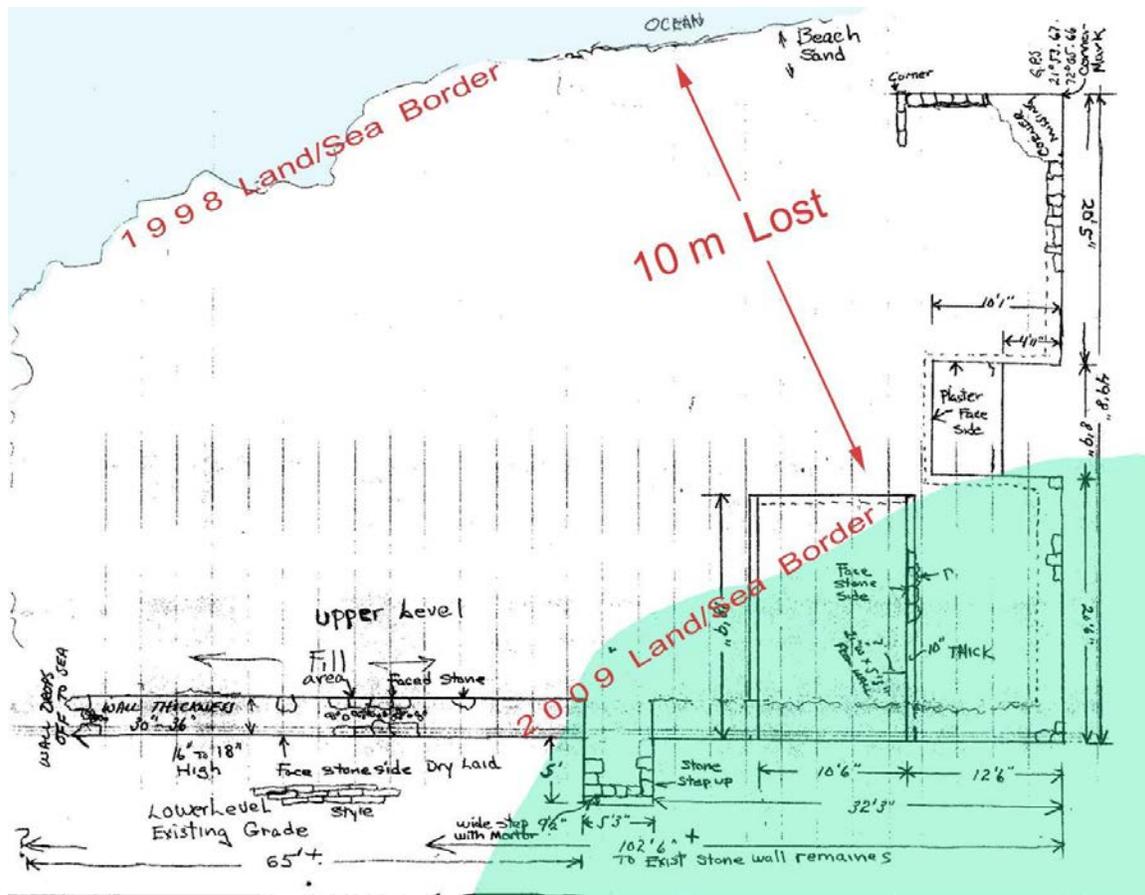


Figure 19: Sketch map of Structure A from the Brewer-McWilliams survey shows more detail than the final product (see Figure 5). The blue area in the upper left represents the land/sea margin in 1998 when the map was made. The green area in the lower right is all that remained of Structure A in 2009.

The entire northwest lobe of Ft. George Cay is actively eroding. The loss of most of Structure A on the bluff is now well-documented, as is the disappearance of layers of beach rock and massive rock features clearly visible in photographs taken in 1999.

The fact that seven cannons lie in shallow water on the west side of the cay as much as 60 m from shore suggests that at least that much land has been lost since the cannons were set in position over 200 years ago (Figure 2). Other explanations for the cannons' locations, *e.g.*, that they are all that is left of a shipwreck or that they were moved there in preparation for transportation to another location, are not

particularly convincing. The rows of holes drilled into the ironshore, now eradicated, are further evidence that the cay's shore once extended much further to the west.

It is unlikely that there is any cost-effective means of curtailing or substantially reducing this natural process. Several observers have suggested that the rate of erosion has accelerated since a channel was dredged through the fringing reef to North Caicos, but this has not been substantiated. In any case it is clear that Ft. George Cay will continue to erode and any archaeological features close to shore will eventually be taken by the sea.

## Stakeholder Issues

The impetus for this project was the TCI Government's Cabinet approval of a concept to build a "Sea World-style aquarium" on the cay. Many people immediately perceived that such a plan would be undesirable, inappropriate, and destructive of one of the most important historic sites in the TCI, which was already designated a National Park. Fortunately, public outrage at the scheme, followed closely by the global economic downturn, killed the proposal along with other such grandiose, impractical schemes. But proponents of heritage preservation were put on notice: Ft. George Cay was in danger (Keith 2008).

Perceiving a need to "do something" with Ft. George Cay in counterpoint to commercial development, stakeholders began to suggest various action plans to demonstrate a new-found appreciation for the cays historical importance and unsullied natural state. What type of action would be appropriate for Ft. George? Who will do it? Who will pay for it? Who will assume both responsibility and the commensurate authority for protecting and maintaining Ft. George Cay?

All the answers to these questions lie with the stakeholders, each of whom has a different mandate and perspective. Considered in no particular order, they are:

- **The DECR**, which is mandated to protect and promote economic prosperity through "a sustainable fishing industry and a protected areas system."
- **The National Trust**, which is mandated to "safeguard the natural,

historical and cultural heritage of the Turks & Caicos Islands for present and future generations and for the enjoyment of all."

- **The National Museum**, which is dedicated to "the encouragement of scientific as well as academic research into the history and heritage of the Turks and Caicos Islands and their people, and the protection and preservation for the benefit of the public of such features of the Turks and Caicos Islands as are of special historical, architectural or educational interest."
- **The Meridian Club of Pine Cay**, which desires to protect and preserve Ft. George and Grouper Cays in their natural state, and to keep them available to public.
- **The charter boat and tour operators** based in Providenciales and elsewhere who regularly take visitors to Ft. George Cay.

Judging from the stated mandates of the DECR, the National Trust, and the Museum, protection and preservation for the benefit of the public are common objectives, along with encouraging the economic prosperity of the TCI. The charter boat and tour operators are more concerned with maintaining access to public lands. There is a growing realization among the various stakeholders that their efforts to protect the cay have not only established the high ground, but common ground as well.

The economic and practical realities of Ft George Cay make it abundantly clear that any plan including a museum building, restaurant, shop, dock, or restroom facility

is doomed to failure. The fundamental unsuitability of the cay for any such plan is obvious. Most of its 0.2 km<sup>2</sup> surface area is only a few meters above sea level, and its only high ground is actively eroding. But there are other types of actions that might be appropriate.

Among the suggestions recently put forward by the DECR, National Museum, and National Trust during our various meetings are some that have the virtues of simplicity, affordability, practicality, and cost-effectiveness. The DECR pointed out that the one stakeholder element so far not represented in any of our discussions—and the only element with a financial incentive to enhance the visitor experience—is the Provo-based tour operation industry that brings most of the visitors to the cay. Among the ideas advanced to encourage stakeholder participation in creating, installing, and/or maintaining enhancements to the visitor experience are:

- erecting a simple free-standing information kiosk on shore in the vicinity of the beach where most tour operators prefer to land their passengers. The kiosk would support and shade graphic and text panels acquainting visitors with the fact that the island is a National Park, caution them not to take anything or leave anything behind, present them with a brief history lesson explaining the origin of the island's name, and perhaps provide them with information on the most common types of shells found on the beach.
- creating an “adopt a cannon” program in which tour operators would install underwater signage near the cannons explaining where they came from and how they came to be underwater. Similar “underwater trail” programs have been installed in the US Virgin Islands, Florida, South Carolina, Australia and elsewhere in the world with considerable success. Two of the seven known cannons are usually buried in sand. Uncovering them and shoring them up so that they will be visible would enhance this program and might be a way to initially engage the local diving community.
- printing a brochure with information similar to that of the kiosk. Made widely available to potential visitors, the brochure would also indicate which operators volunteer to donate a certain amount per visitor carried to a Ft. George preservation and maintenance fund. This is preferable to a government-imposed fee for access to the cay.
- continuing archival research to answer the persistent questions of who built and manned the fort and to fill in the myriad missing details, *e.g.*, re-locating the sketch of Ft. George referred to in a letter from Thomas Brown to John Sullivan dated 1803: “The small island or key in St George’s harbor (*as represented in the sketch*) on which Fort St George etc were constructed . . . .”
- continuing to search for images of Ft. George Cay taken during aerial surveys of the Caicos Islands in the 1960s and 1970s to determine the rate of erosion over the last half-century.

## Recommendations

Ft. George Cay was abandoned early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At some point the structures were robbed of the stones, slate and brick used to build them. After that, it attracted little human attention. There is ample reason for this. While the cay was well-suited as an artillery post to protect the harbor, it was too low, dry, and barren for agriculture, and at only 0.2 km<sup>2</sup> in total area—and getting smaller every year—it was too small and fragile for anything else . . . until now.

The public outrage over proposals to “develop” Ft. George indicates a strong desire to “keep it as it is.” On the face of it, that should be an easy thing to do, but in reality it is not.

Now, more than ever before, different user groups see opportunities on and around the tiny island. Ft. George, or rather its tiny beach, has become a major destination for tour boat operators and visitation is increasing. Developers have pressed politicians for access to Ft. George and Grouper Cays. Collectors are mining the beaches and interior for artifacts. Fishermen harvest its waters with impunity.

In short, Ft. George, and for that matter most of the other designated Historic Sites in the TCI, are classic examples of the social and environmental phenomenon known as “The Tragedy of the Commons.” In this situation, multiple individuals, acting independently, and solely and rationally consulting their own self-interest, will ultimately deplete a shared limited resource even when it is clear that it is not in anyone's long-term interest for this to happen.

To “keep Ft. George as it is” does not mean to continue to neglect it, but quite the opposite. At present, tour operators and visitors landing on Ft. George see only a “desert island” on which they are free to do as they please. Some act responsibly, some do not. They are not aware of any rules governing behavior while on the cay. “Desert islands” don’t have rules—that is a large part of their attraction. The absence of any visible expression of proprietorship or concern to “keep it as it is” invites exploitation. To keep Ft. George as it is, firm action is necessary:

- **Strengthen legislation.** Although Ft. George Cay lies within a National Park and is also designated as a Historic Site, existing legislation could be interpreted to allow some forms of commercial development which would be destructive to such a fragile area. A higher level of protection for this and other such fragile areas is warranted. Ft. George and Grouper Cays might warrant Nature Reserve status. Alternatively, some new level could be created to protect areas like this that could be irreparably damaged by artificial enhancements designed to provide or increase public access.
- **Enforce existing legislation.** Legislation without enforcement makes a travesty of the law. The existing rules governing National Parks and Historic Sites are not being enforced at Ft. George. Often multiple tour boats, some overloaded and with music blaring, land a hundred or more people on the cay at the same time.

Jet ski caravans pull up on the beach. Fires are built, litter accumulates, fish and shellfish are taken at will within park waters. Thus some users are allowed to take liberties with the resource even though it is not in anyone's long-term interest.

- **Inform the public.** Installing signage on Ft. George is not only for the education and benefit of the public, but also a reminder that they are in a National Park, not on a desert island where anything goes. If signage to inform visitors that the cay is a National Park and Historic Site and to acquaint them with the rules for behavior is objectionable, then other ways must be found to ensure every visitor gets this message. Information and even virtual tours on land and underwater can be offered on one of the stakeholders' Web sites. For a good example of this see Florida's Museums in the Sea site at <http://www.museumsinthesea.com/san-pedro/tour.htm> (Figure 20).

- **Share the history.** The news features, editorials, magazine articles and even blogs already published provided the public with a preservationist perspective of Ft George not available elsewhere. Another vehicle to deliver the same message to a different audience is the creation of one or more museum exhibits utilizing artifacts and graphic images to tell the story of Ft. George. The Beaches resort expressed to the TCNM an interest in hosting just such an exhibit, but a more public venue would perhaps be more appropriate. The National Museum has been given property and a building on Provo where such an exhibit could be made available to the public, but it will be many months before such a

transformation will be possible.



Figure 20: A bronze plaque placed on the shipwreck San Pedro in the Florida Keys.

## Field Work Recommendations

A question that came up surprisingly often in all of our meetings was “What else needs to be done?” This was in reference to further archaeological and historical research. From an archaeological perspective there is much more to do on land, in the shallows around Ft. George, and even in the harbor between Ft. George and the reef.

The ruins on Grouper Cay and the well on Dellis Cay are scheduled to be visited in February. They will be completely documented in order to determine if they

are historically associated with Ft. George.

Excavation of Structure A and the top of the bluff from the cliff at least as far back as 20 meters would enable us to make a complete record of the architectural vestiges of Structure A, recover all the artifacts before they erode into the sea, and determine if there are other structures or activity areas in the immediate vicinity which have so far escaped our notice. Eventually the sea will claim this area too, but although the actual structures will be

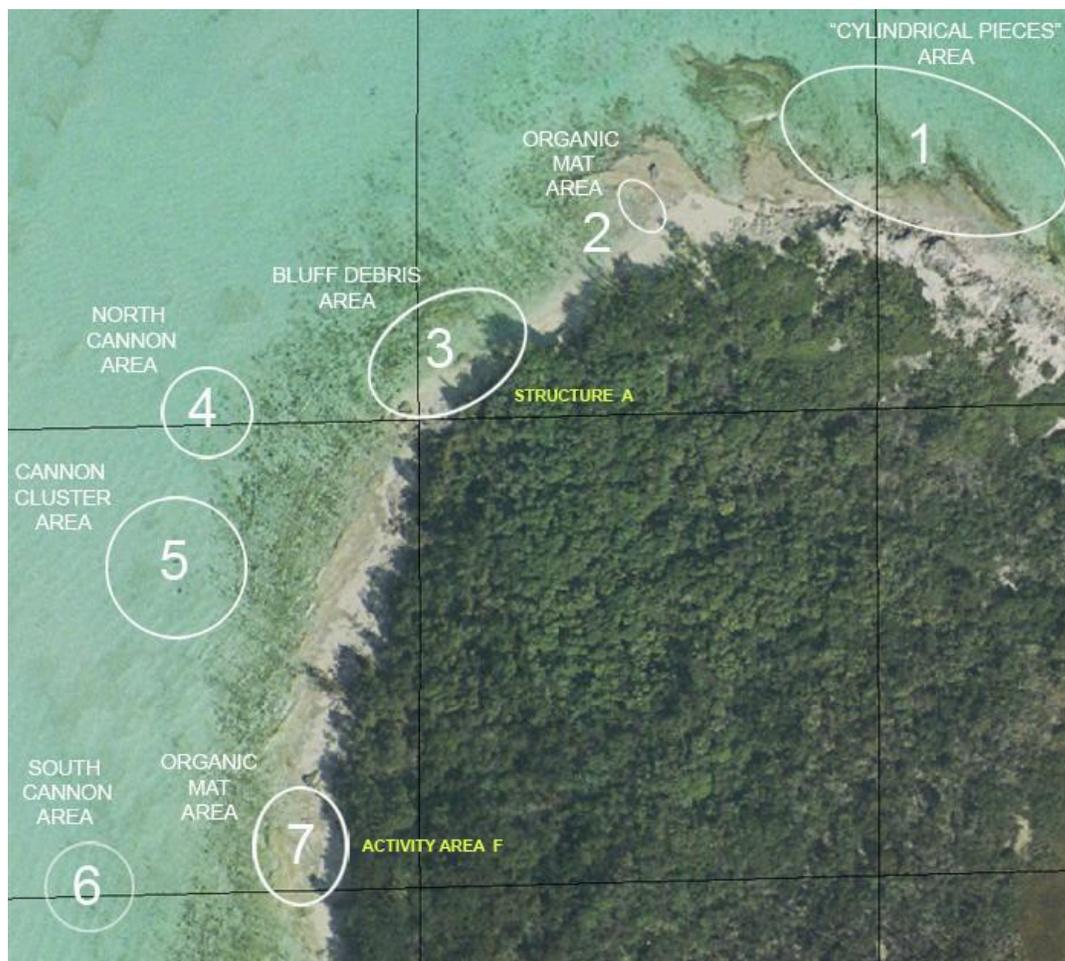


Figure 21: Seven underwater areas deserving further investigation in the future.

lost, the artifacts and archaeological data will be saved.

The underwater part of Ft. George is quite large. Concentrations of artifacts have already been noticed in 7 distinct areas which could be surveyed and/or excavated in stages (Figure 21). Area 1 is the rocky, submerged northern tip of the cay where “cylindrical pieces” (cannon shot) have been found in the past. Area 2 is the location of the large Organic Mat (Figures 15 and 16). Area 3, lying below the bluff and to either side of Structure A, is extremely artifact-rich. Area 4 lies around the North Cannon. Area 5 lies around the Cannon Cluster. Area 6 lies around the South Cannon. Area 7 is the vicinity of the small Organic Mat.

Artifacts that erode into the sea are not lost forever. Survey and excavation of the underwater portions of Ft. George is likely to produce hundreds of finds, but the conservation burden imposed by iron and wooden artifacts must be carefully considered before making any recoveries.

Low-profile, targeted, non-invasive exploration and Museum-supervised field documentation using volunteers could and should continue without necessitating the major expenditures of a full-fledged expedition. On the other hand, if the stakeholders agree it is imperative that the ruins on the bluff, now actively falling into the sea, should be excavated to recover as much information as possible before they are lost; or that the underwater portion of the site around the cannons should be excavated in advance of creating the “adopt a cannon” program mentioned above, organized projects supervised by experienced professionals are more appropriate.

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