

BRUCE F. THOMPSON

Little Landing Survey

Inscribed on an historical marker at the entrance to Lewisfield Plantation is the following excerpt:

LEWISFIELD PLANTATION

This land, part of Fairlawn Barony and known as Little Landing, was bought in 1767 by Sedgewick Lewis. His Daughter Sarah married Keating Simons. They acquired the land in 1774 and are presumed to have built the present plantation house. Tradition has it that during the revolution, Col. Wade Hampton took seventy-eight British prisoners and burned two boats with supplies and plunder at the nearby river landing.

"Little Landing," a 1,000 acre section of the "Fairlawn" Barony on the west branch of the Cooper River in South Carolina, was the name of a proprietary land package sold to Sedgewick Lewis in 1767. Both legend and history have combined to cause sport divers and archaeologists alike to focus their attention on a patch of water just off Little Landing plantation. In 1985 sport divers Bob Snowden, Steve Thornhill, and Don Ard, led to these waters by an account of a Revolutionary War encounter between British soldiers and American patriots, discovered the remains of what looked to be a burned Revolutionary War Period shipwreck.

Next to the vessel's remains Snowden discovered an iron cannon overlying a swivel gun. Excavated from the bore of this

British 3-pounder were a paper envelope of powder, rope wadding, a canvas shrapnel bag containing eight pieces of scrap iron, a cast iron shot, a second rope wadding, and a tompon at the muzzle (Figure 1). An identical canvas shrapnel bag was recovered from the *Defence* which sank in Stockton Harbour in 1779.

Found beneath the 3-pounder, the swivel gun also was loaded when recovered (Figure 2). This gun is effective at close range and on shipboard was used to clear enemy's decks, hence the name "murderer." A similar example was recovered from the gondola *Philadelphia*, sunk in 1776 in Lake Champlain. Probably a 1/2 pounder, this artifact contained five iron shot (2.5 cm diameter) and scraps of wadding rope. No markings were discernible anywhere on the gun itself; however, decorative 'hatching' was noted on the yoke ring.

Snowden and his dive partners reported their discoveries to the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology (SCIAA) and a team was put together to investigate the shipwreck. They worked throughout November and December of 1986 in an effort to record the vessel. During that same period two SCIAA staff members, Joe Beatty and David Brewer, discovered a second shipwreck several hundred meters down-river from the original wreck.

In 1988 a third cannon was recovered from the LL1 wrecksite and was promptly handed over to the Institute by Steve Thornhill. According to Thornhill, the cannon was originally located approximately 3.5 m northeast of LL1's midships. Like the other two cannon, this one was loaded and also like the others it dates to the Revolutionary period. A crown is engraved or chiseled on the top of the tube just before the first reinforcing ring (Figure 3). Beneath it is the letter "P" which indicates that the gun was proofed. Just above the vent astragel the pre-proof

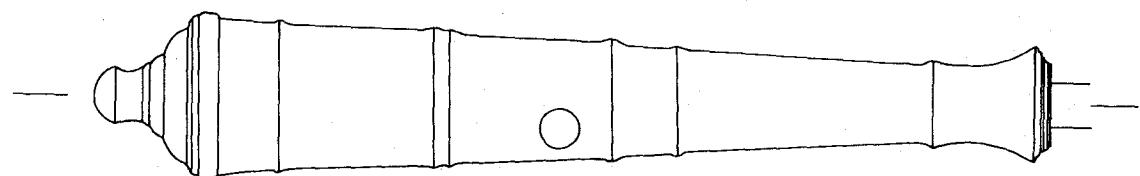
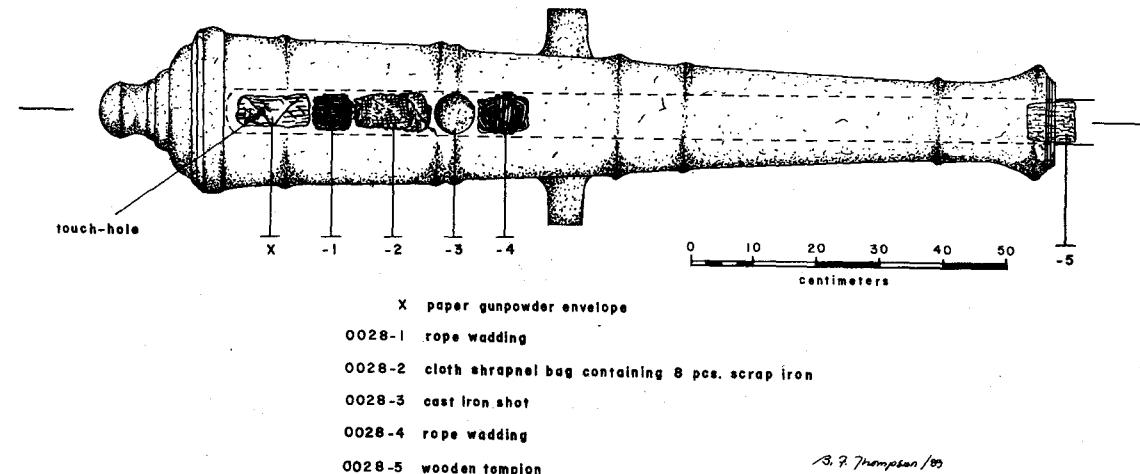


FIGURE 1. Loaded British 3-pounder, LL1/0028.

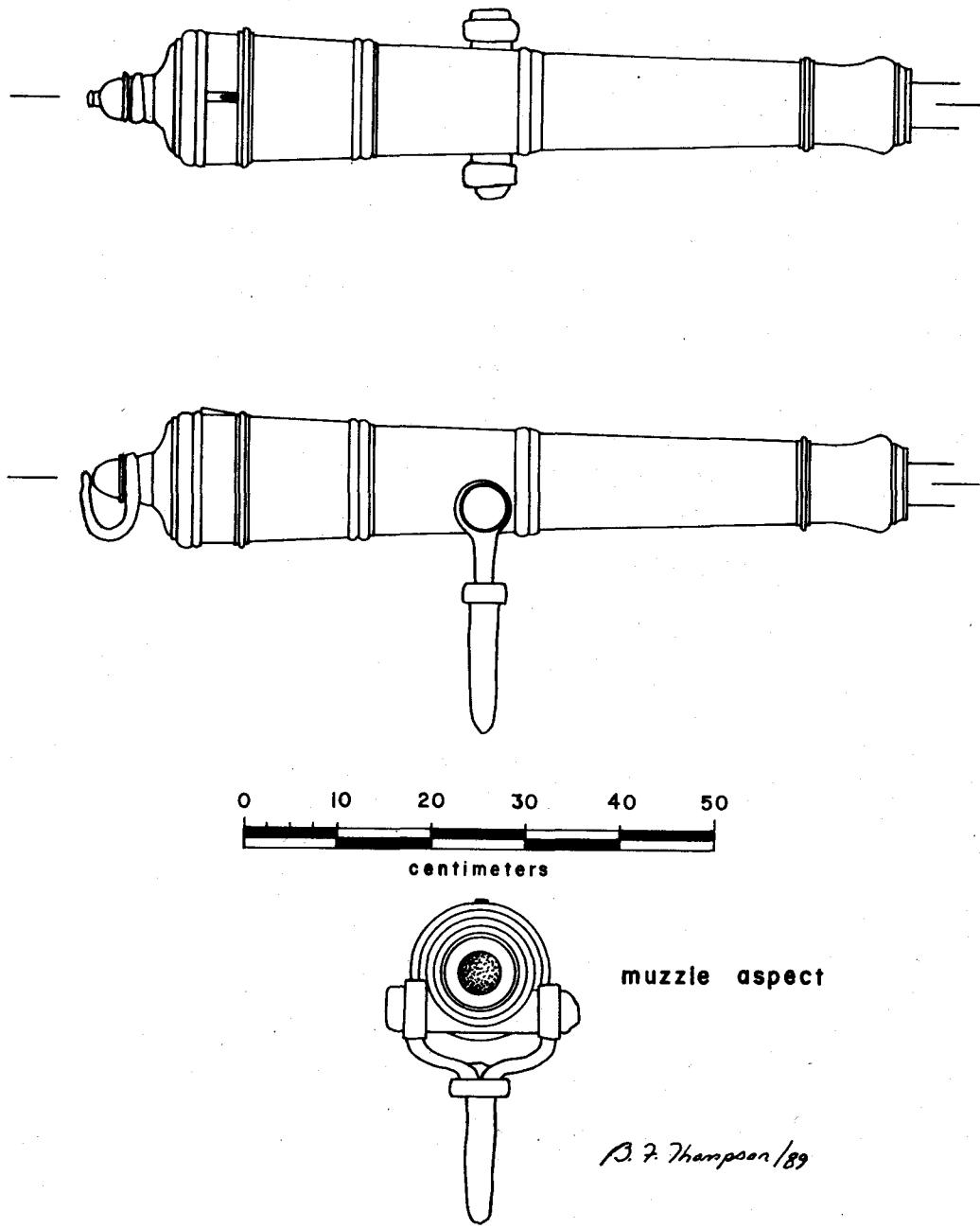


FIGURE 2. Swivel gun, LL1/0029.

weight is engraved "5-2-11" (627 lb). The post proof weight is engraved into the top of the base ring "5 2 10" (626 lb) only one pound different from the first weight. This class of gun dates to ca. 1770.

LL1 shipwreck lies at a 25-33-ft. depth some 8 m off Lewisfield Plantation's shoreline. In situ timbers recorded dur-

ing the 1989 excavation consisted of an intact post, five lengths of outer planking, 19 floor timbers, 14 in situ futtocks, 10 sections of ceiling planking, and a complete keelson (Figure 4). Normally, a shipwreck's artifact distribution will describe much of a ship's story at the time of wrecking, i.e., destination, use, nationality, etc. In this case we have several complications concerning

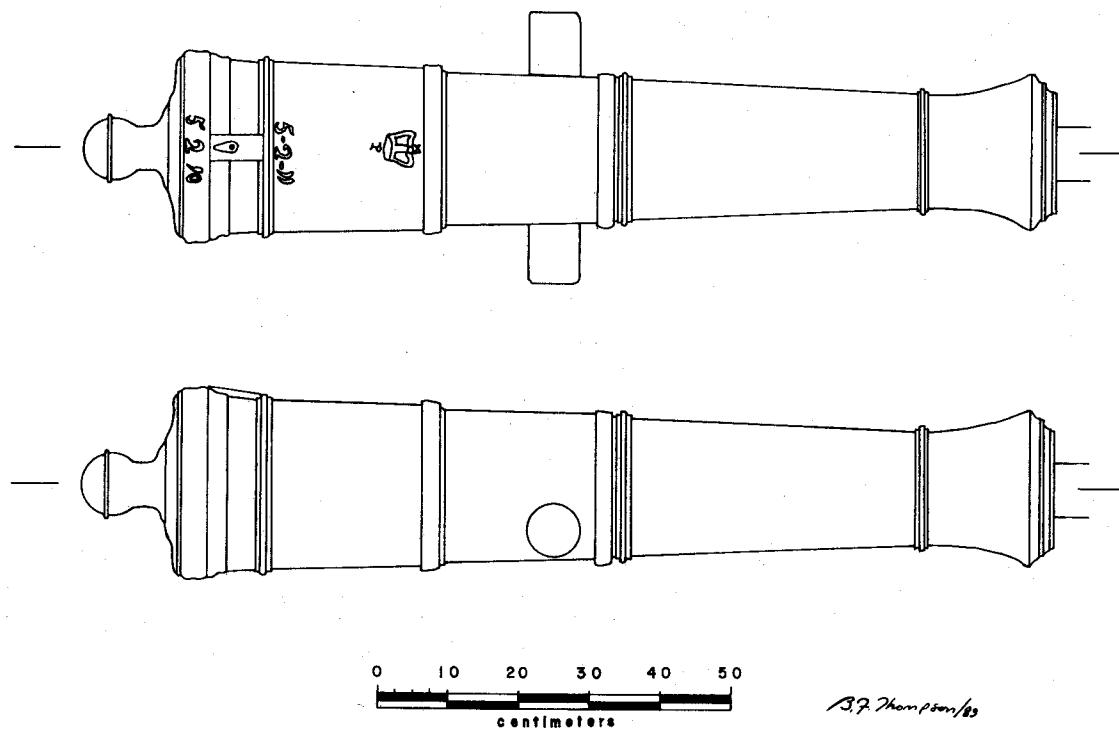


FIGURE 3. Marked cannon, LL1/0030.

provenienced artifact distribution, for instance: 1) salvage activity over the site has been done without regard for artifact locations, 2) archaeological activity in 1986 produced a vast number of artifacts but with only relative proveniencing, and 3) only two artifacts have been mapped in situ within the hull.

LL1 appears to be single-masted and double-ended with flat broad lines amidships which might indicate a vessel built for its cargo space rather than its speed and agility. The vessel would have been able to support lightweight guns on her gunwales. Artifacts and hull construction point to this vessel being of late 18th-century origin; however, due to the lack of primary artifactual proof (a barshot and cartridge box are the only artifacts actually triangulated to the hull remains), we can only surmise that she could have been British; she was probably military and she likely belongs to the Revolutionary period.

Exposed during low tide, LL2 was discovered some 750 m downriver from the LL1 wreck remains. Due to LL2's shallow deposit, disturbance by man has been far more detrimental than at the LL1 site. A 20th-century pilon cuts through the wreck on the starboard side and close to the maststep. Any artifactual evidence has long since been removed from the interior of the hull and replaced by river vegetation which, when removed, exposes only wooden hull timbers. Small pieces of burned glass were found near some of the frames, but none of these pieces is large enough to provide bottle shape or type.

The effects of nature further expose the wreck to constant battering by tidal change and current forces. It is likely that datable artifactual remains lie beneath the hull or in the sediments surrounding the site. Analysis of 14 wood samples, taken from a range of hull timbers, reveals that the boat was constructed of

southern pine and live oak. The predominant use of these two wood types in the construction of wreck 2 suggests the hull was constructed locally of readily available raw materials.

As a necessary step in the re-recording of the two Little Landing shipwrecks, a four day survey was accomplished by SCIAA staff archaeologists between 14 November and 18 November 1988. The goals of the survey were to observe physical features immediately surrounding both wreck sites, to record river characteristics, to map the relationship between the two wrecks, to chart the bottom contour of the Little Landing cove, and to complete a visual search of the area surrounding LL1 and LL2.

The entire survey was tied to a primary datum, established onshore and directly in front of the LL1 shipwreck. Additional subdatums n1 and s1 were placed 55 m and 50 m respectively inline with the primary datum (Figure 5). Range pins were then laid at 5-m intervals in a line between n1 and s1. A second line of range pins were established 5 m behind and parallel to the datum line.

With this system we were able to extend our controlled survey area out and over the bay. By running 22 lengths of 50-m-long polypropylene rope, line-of-site with each pair of range markers, we established a 110 m x 50 m survey area within which we could conduct the underwater survey. This part of our study took the form of paired divers swimming each of the 22 lanes. Vegetation close to shore prevented anything more than tactile observation in that area. The results of the visual survey produced neither additional shipwrecks nor diagnostic artifacts.

All 22 ranges were run from 100 m offshore toward on shore range-poles using a LOWRANCE X-16 computer sonar with

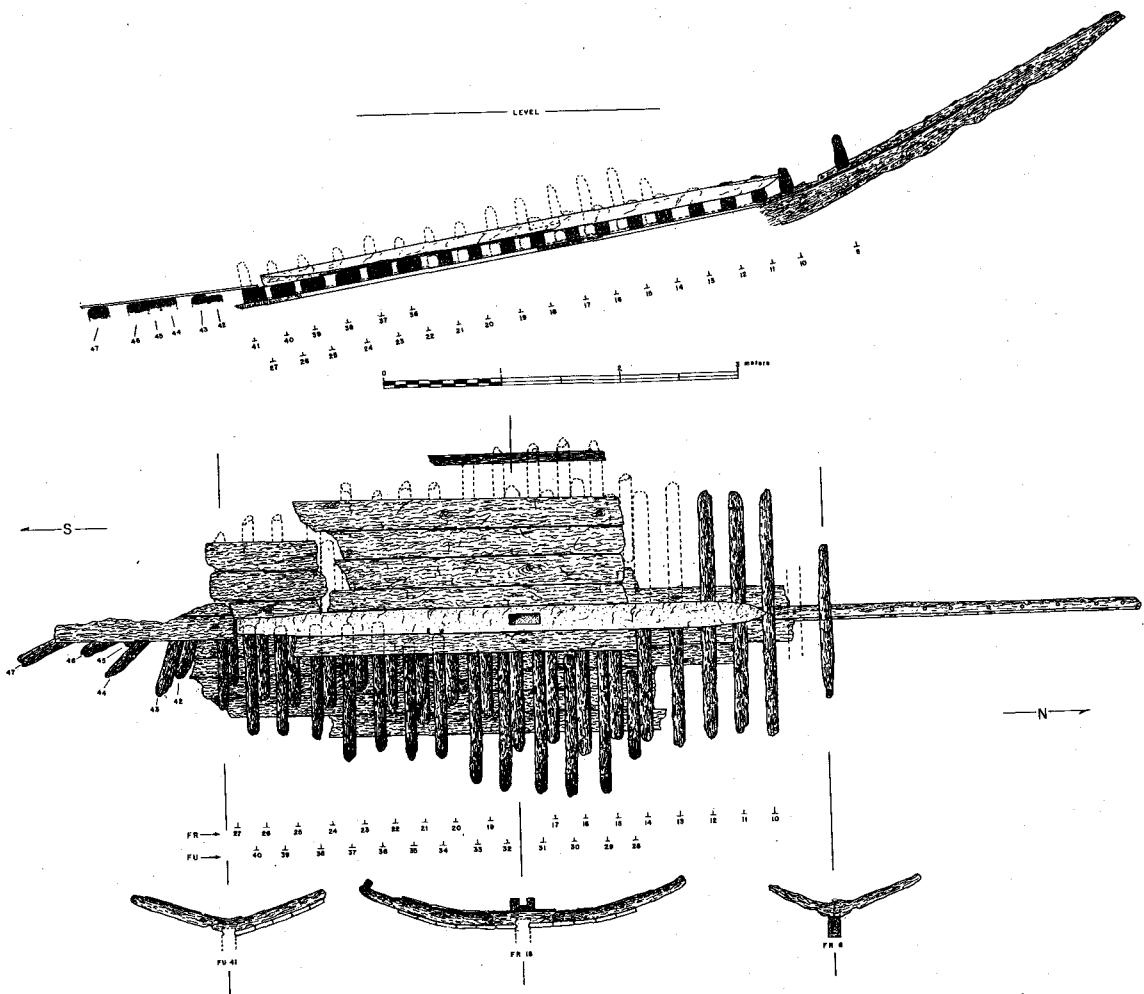


FIGURE 4. Preliminary wreck plan of LL1 hull remains.

chart graph-recorder (Figure 6). Although inshore shallows prevented recording of the immediate fifteen meters offshore, we were able to cover an area approximately 115 m x 90 m surrounding the LL1 shipwreck. Activities in the river during World War II affected the LL1 wrecksite bottom. The Corps of Engineers dredged the channel of the river to facilitate Liberty ships awaiting loading in Charleston. The dredge spoil from those activities accounts for some of the anomalous changes in the bottom contour.

The results of the survey gave us the background information we needed to prepare for an excavation season on LL1. Since most of the divers had little formal training on an actual shipwreck excavation, it was necessary to train all participants. The first step in training involved pool dives on an aluminum mock-up of a simplified wreck. Fabricated by University of South Carolina's physical plant welders, this form was overlain with a 1 m x 2 m grid from which measurements of the "wreck" were taken. The system proved to be an excellent test of the team's power of observation when it was discovered that the overlying 1 m x 2 m grid had been made with the use of forestry scale rules rather than metric rules.

Our excavation dive plan allowed us to train one diver per shift, using the LL2 shipwreck remains as a "classroom," without seriously affecting the safety and progress of ongoing work at wreck 1. Within three days all divers had participated in ballast removal from LL1, had been on LL2 at least twice, and had the chance to learn the recording techniques which were to be used on the deeper site. A second benefit to the plan was that we were able to record the LL2 wreck remains without detrimentally affecting excavation time on wreck 1.

Several loose frames had been removed from the LL1 site in 1986 and stored at SCIAA facilities. These timbers were returned to the field in 1989, recorded at 1:10 scale on the expedition boat deck, and served as further training aids in the field. Divers were teamed on deck, and each diver participated in the recording process. Morning and evening briefings were held during both the survey and excavation stages of our work. This practice not only allowed for teaching new ideas, but it also gave each participant the opportunity to relate information or offer suggestions concerning the day's effort.

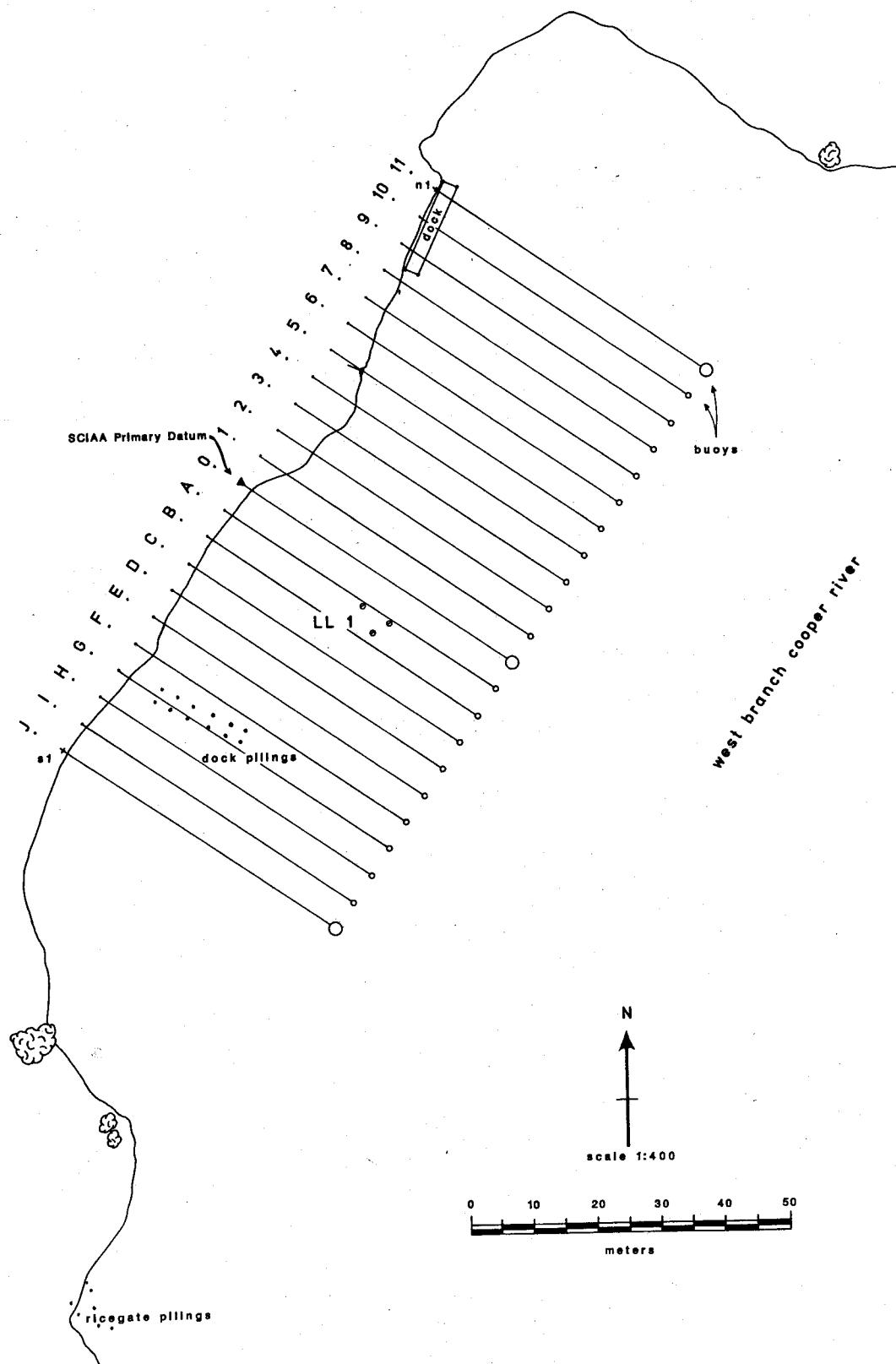


FIGURE 5. LL1 survey area, 1989.

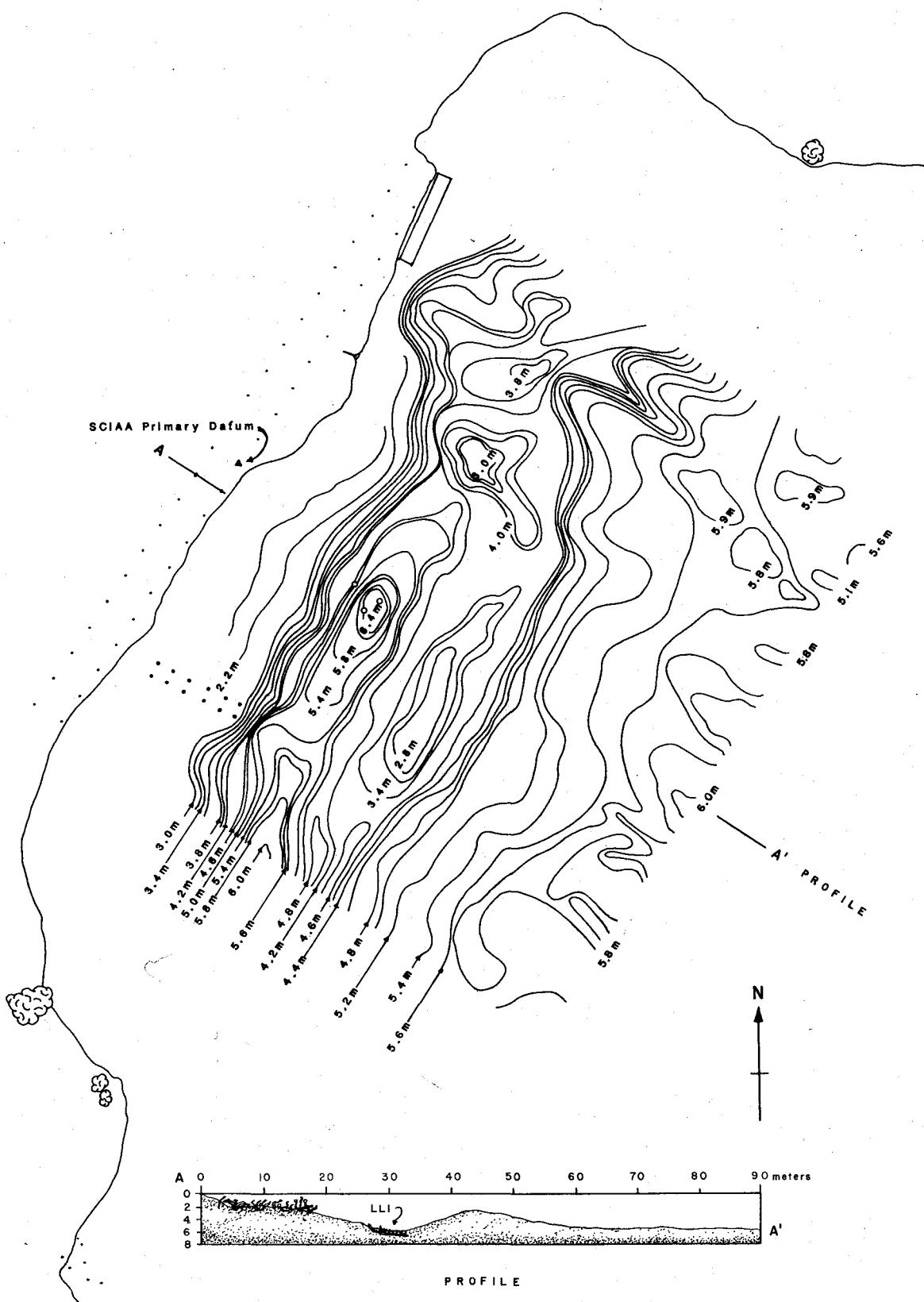


FIGURE 6. Bottom contour of LL1 wreck area.

In the Spring of 1989 we completed 11 days of excavation and recording on both wrecks. A final report on the 1988 survey and the 1989 excavation of LL1 and LL2 is nearing completion at this time.

BRUCE F. THOMPSON
ASSISTANT STATE UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGIST
MARYLAND MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGY PROGRAM
100 COMMUNITY PLACE
CROWNsville, MARYLAND 21032-2023