

## THE FIRST AVOCATIONAL UNDERWATER PROJECT IN GEORGIA

By Charles Kelly

Lynn Harris, representing the SCIAA Underwater Archaeology Division, assisted the Historic Preservation Office of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources in the first combined avocational/professional underwater archeology project in the state during November 2002. Ronnie Rogers and David Crass (State Archaeologist) initiated this project in conjunction with Paul Barans and Charles Kelly of the LaGrange Dive Center.

After classroom and open water training sessions, volunteer divers began mapping a mile long site (9TP973) beneath the Chattahoochee River near West Point, Georgia. This diverse site contains a vast profile of the area history dating back almost 165 years. A variety of features at the site include everything from Civil War era artifacts to 1940s automobiles.

The earliest feature currently being studied is the bridge support and remains of a covered bridge built by noted builder Horace King in 1838. King was born into slavery in 1807, was later freed, and went on to become a master covered bridge builder. He built numerous bridges and other structures throughout Georgia and Alabama before his death in 1885. This bridge along with the railroad trestle were burned on April 17, 1865 by Union Troops as they departed the town on the day following the Battle of West Point. The 5 X 15 meter middle log support is almost perfectly preserved below the waterline. The bridge was replaced in 1866 by another covered bridge, one block north, which stood until 1885, when it was destroyed by a flood. The 1866 covered bridge was replaced by an iron bridge another block north, which was destroyed by a flood in 1919. Evidence of all bridges, as well as items which fell off of them, still remain in the river.

Also on the site are the remains of a steamboat believed to be the *C. W. Jones*. The stern paddle wheel boat broke loose from the wharf in a storm in 1888, drifted into the wagon bridge, and sank. This boat, along with at least two others, were used to transport



*Figure 1: Georgia divers leaving the water (Photo courtesy of Charles King).*



*Figure 2: Lynn Harris briefs divers on their assignments (Photo courtesy of Charles King).*

employees and cargo back and forth to the textile mills down river during the 1880s. Other boat remains on the site include a 1930s era racing boat.

For more information about this project, contact Paul Barnes or Charles Kelly at (706) 812-9011 or [barnesserv@mindspring.com](mailto:barnesserv@mindspring.com).



*Figure 3: Class practices offset mapping techniques (Photo courtesy of Charles King).*



*Figure 4: Underwater image of 1838 bridge pier (Photo courtesy of Charles King).*