November 19, 2016 - John Ehrenhard, former director of the National Park Service Southeast Archaeological Center

Archaeology Goes to the Opera

A sliver of land formed sometime in the late Pleistocene in the Atlantic Coastal Plain physiographic province, now known as Cumberland Island, exists in a semi wild state, somewhat protected by its status as a national seashore. Human occupation over the centuries has left the imprint of a checkerboard social history filled with much adventure, misfortune, and sorrow. One story of love, trust, and betrayal is the account of a young woman of mixed ancestry named Elizabeth Bernardey. The account is based in archaeological and historical research conducted by the Southeast Archeological Center, National Park Service, related to stabilization evaluations of a slave quarters complex supporting the early 19th century Stafford Plantation. A most unanticipated series of events resulting from this research led to an even more improbable production of a full-length dramatic opera entitled “ZABETTE” related to historic events in the life and times of Elizabeth Bernardey. Now retired, John Ehrenhard will give an anecdotal account of events which led up to the production of the opera “ZABETTE.”

October 15, 2016 - International Archaeology Day – Charles R. Cobb, Florida Museum of Natural History

Native American Travels and Travails in the Colonial Southeast

Between the pull of trade with towns like Charleston and St. Augustine and the push of slavery and European land encroachments, Native Americans in the Colonial Southeast moved frequently over long distances. As a result, many localities became home to plural communities as diverse Native American groups banded together for defense and mutual support. This process, often referred to by archaeologists as “coalescence,” led to completely new political and economic arrangements between Native Americans in the Southeast, and between Native Americans and Colonial powers. This presentation will compare patterns of coalescence on the frontiers of Spanish Florida and of English Carolina, focusing on recent archaeological research in both of the regions.

September 17, 2016 – Dr. Florin Curta, Professor of Medieval History and Archaeology at the University of Florida

Clay Pans and Pita Bread in Early Medieval Europe (6th to 7th century), from Spain to Eastern Europe

A number of 6th- to 7th-century sites recently excavated in southern and central Spain have produced evidence of an intriguing ceramic category—hand-made, circular clay pans. They appear both on urban (Cartagena) and on rural sites (Gózquez). Such pans are also known from sites in southern and southwestern England, as well as Central and especially Eastern Europe. A great number of them were associated with stone ovens, inside which the pans served to bake bread with a cooked crust (unleavened bread), as suggested by ethnographic analogies. Other sites show that clay pans were associated with communal ceremonies that may have involved the consumption of special foods, such as pita bread. The clay pan phenomenon coincided with, or immediately followed, a number of cultural changes, the most important of which is reflected in the adoption of closed ceramic forms most appropriate for the cooking of beef or pork. Such culinary changes, as well as the accompanying clay pans appear occasionally on military sites in the northern Balkans, or even in cities, such as Carin Grad (Serbia). In both Spain and East Central Europe, clay pans became an important component of ceramic assemblages shortly before or after AD 600. The paper offers some possible answers to the questions raised by that parallel.

May 21, 2016 - Dr. Gabrielle Vail

Painted Capstone and Codical Texts from the Northern Maya Lowlands: Agricultural vs. Elite Rituals in Late Classic to Post Classic Yucatán

The northern Maya lowlands provide a rich corpus of painted texts associated with the interior and exterior walls of buildings; capstones serving to seal off vaulted chambers, which sometimes contain burials; and painted scrollfold books, or codices. In a number of cases, these texts and their associated pictorial component were painted to commemorate—or provide the template for—important rituals. Many of these rituals can be identified based on ethnohistoric sources, including Diego de Landa’s Relación de las cosas de Yucatán, which highlights the “festivals” associated with each twenty-day month of the year, many of which are agricultural in nature. This information, in combination with that from hieroglyphic and iconographic sources, provides important clues for determining context and audience.

This presentation examined the underlying meaning of capstone and codical texts and explored what the different media, time periods (the former date to the Late Terminal Classic periods and the latter to the Late Postclassic period), and hieroglyphic captions tells us about elite versus agricultural rituals, and what they reveal about a group’s social memory.

April 16, 2016 – Dr. Robert S. Neyland, Head of the Underwater Archaeology Branch of the Naval History & Heritage Command

Archaeology of the Confederate Submarine H.L. Hunley

One hundred and forty six years after its historic naval engagement with the Union sloop-of-war USS Housatonic in 1864, the Confederate Civil War submarine H.L. Hunley was successfully raised from the Atlantic Ocean in August 2000. In 2001, a multi-disciplinary team composed of archaeologists, conservators and forensic anthropologists excavated the crew compartment and uncovered the remains of the ill-fated crew along with numerous artifacts and revealed the inner workings of the submarine and its machinery. This presentation discussed the archaeology of Hunley from its discovery through the recovery, excavation, identification and reburial of the eight crew members. It concluded with the current theories of why Hunley was lost and the current status of the conservation and archaeological analysis.

March 19, 2016 – Dr. James S. Dunbar

The Paleoindian Survivalist: Enduring the Demise of Keystone Species, Fire, and Surface Water Oscillations and Iceberg Armadas off the Southeast Coast

The late Pleistocene Southeast was a warm thermal refuge protected from the ice age cooling and containing a greater number and diversity of animal species than the rest of North America. However, by the beginning of the Holocene, the extinction of species was greatest in the Coastal Plain of the Southeast U.S. Many researchers have theorized that late Pleistocene wild fire regimes increased due to human causes, but there is another, more subtle explanation. Perhaps it was the failing populations of two keystone species affected by humans, rather than humans themselves, that caused the change. At the same time many Florida river systems were transforming from Pleistocene channel-fill to Holocene channel-cutting systems. Dr. Dunbar, formerly with the Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research, addressed the questions: What happened? What climate alterations, if any, took place when iceberg armadas grounded off the Charleston, South Carolina coast?

February 20, 2016 – Dr. Nell Walls of the Florida Museum of Natural History

The Traveling Art and Artisans of Ancient Florida, AD 200 to 800

Florida’s most ornate pottery traditions were developed almost 1800 years ago in the northern part of the state. Beyond technical skill and sheer aesthetic beauty, the pottery of the Middle to Late Woodland periods (ca. AD 200 to 800) also reflects patterns of vessel production and distribution that yield unexpected insights into pre-Columbian social organization. Dr. Walls presented his latest research that revealed evidence of ancient social networks stretching hundreds of miles within an integrated sociopolitical landscape tied together by mortuary rituals and other ceremonial elements.

Jan. 23, 2016 – Dr. Steven and Kathleen Holen

Early Humans in the Americas: When Did They Arrive and Where Did They Come From?

Dr. Steven and Kathleen Holen presented unexpected insights into pre-Columbian social organization. Dr. Wallis presented his latest research that revealed evidence of ancient social networks stretching hundreds of miles within an integrated sociopolitical landscape tied together by mortuary rituals and other ceremonial elements.

National Archaeological Institute of America lecturers discussed the controversy surrounding the topic of the first humans in the Americas and offered new evidence from their research that suggests humans arrived earlier than previously thought. His work with museums and as State Archaeologist and Tribal Liaison with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in South Dakota has formed the foundation for his theories and publications.