Current Archaeological Investigations at Brimstone Hill

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The Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park Society has generously supported University of Tennessee archaeological studies at the site since 1996. University funding and a grant from the National Geographic Society helped support the work in 2005. Ten students from the University of Tennessee and five from the University of Montana as well as five Kittitian students, hired by the Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park Society, Dr. Gerald F. of Tennessee, investigations. Dr. Todd University of students study the site. Dr. Todd University of responsible for and digital site Ms. Greta Gomez role in artifact Elizabeth DiGangi has helped supervise the excavations and analyzed the human skeletal remains recovered at the site. (A list of papers and reports based on this work appears as an insert with this issue.)

The primary objective of the Brimstone Hill Fortress Archaeological Project is to document the enslaved Africans who built, maintained, and defended the fortress throughout much of its history. To locate places occupied or utilized by enslaved Africans we have relied on a 1791 military engineer's map of the fort. Copies of this map are located in the St. Kitts Archives and in the Public Record Office, London. In 1996 excavations were made in the vicinity of the limekiln at the base of the hill and work was started on two buildings located along the curtain wall connecting the Orillon and Magazine bastions. These investigations continued through 1999 and were completed in 2004.

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Additional studies made in 2004 included a small excavation where communications towers were built at the salient of the Orillon Bastion, and initiation of excavations in the complex of buildings occupied by the Royal Engineers located down slope from the Prince of Wales Bastion. Further work was conducted here in 2005 and is planned for 2006.

Archaeological studies of the Royal Engineers building complex is important because: (1) these buildings record how the engineers conceptualized and arranged their living space; (2) one associated building was occupied by enslaved Africans; (3) engineers organized and directed the work of enslaved Africans; and (4) most historical maps, architectural drawings, and landscape illustrations of Brimstone Hill almost certainly were produced in the buildings at the Engineers headquarters, and these documents are a direct linkage between the

engineer’s office building, a structure occupied by enslaved Africans, and several smaller unidentified structures. These features are situated on three terraces cut into the slope of the hill, defined by retaining walls or revetments and connected by stairs. The engineer’s residence, on the upper-most and broadest terrace is characterized by an elaborate entrance at the east end including a brick walkway that ran from the doorway to the present road that ascends to the parade ground area. Archaeological work revealed a second brick walk running between the building and the high revetment behind it. Excavations suggest that shrubs were planted along both sides of the walk. The walk opens to a paved patio that covered the area from the rear of the residence between the kitchen, storage structure, and cistern. The kitchen had a cut sandstone floor and a large oven, as well as a sink and drain that were connected to the cistern.

From the patio three separate sets of steps provide access to the bath tub, the office building, and to the
terrace below. After descending one set of steps, a narrow walk along the length of the cistern between it and the wall of the office building lead to the bath tub. Entry to the tub was accomplished by several steps up to the rim and another set of steps descending along one side of the tub's interior. Use of the tub would have afforded officers a magnificent view of Sandy Point, Statia, and Saba. Associated with the tub are several additional drains and an overflow tank incorporated into the west side of the office building. These features carried excess water away from the kitchen, cistern, and patio.

A second set of steps provides access to the office building. This building was two stories. The upper floor, constructed of wood and now completely gone, was devoted to the preparation of engineering proposals, plans, and related documents while the bottom floor, which was paved with cut stone, served as storage area. About halfway down the third set of stairs from the upper terrace and residence area was a doorway into the lower floor of the office building. On the other side of the steps and opposite the doorway is a second small terrace where no buildings apparently stood. The stairway continued to the lowest terrace where a structure, housing enslaved Africans, who apparently served the needs of the Royal Engineering officers was situated. Unlike most buildings recorded at Brimstone Hill, this structure was earth fast or post-in-ground construction where wall frames consist of vertical posts between which earthen material is plastered. The building has a partial mortar floor. About half this structure was excavated in 2005.

Artifacts recovered from the excavations were identified in St. Kitts, and are currently being entered into the computer data base made for all the artifacts excavated at Brimstone Hill. Preliminary observations indicate that the areas around the engineer’s residence were kept clean. Large numbers of nails from the residence attest to the wood construction of the building, and fragments of bottles and dishes reflect the kinds and quality of food service the officers enjoyed. Very importantly large numbers of animal bones were recovered from the kitchen. Preliminary identification of some of these remains by Dr. Walter Klippel indicates that officers were consuming fresh fish, rabbits, chickens, and a variety of doves or pigeons. The rabbits were surely raised at Brimstone Hill for consumption, while the doves or pigeons might have been hunted locally or kept in hutches. In general these species are absent or poorly represented in other areas investigated at Brimstone. Good bone preservation also occurs in the vicinity of the slave structure. This is important because there is little disturbance by occupation

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attributable to other groups who lived at the fort and thus the recovered animal bones represent an unambiguous representation of food consumed by enslaved Africans. Comparison of these food remains with those from the kitchen area should reveal the contrast between the diet of enslaved Africans and British Army officers.

Further excavations are planned for Brimstone Hill in July of 2006. The complete excavation of the structure occupied by enslaved Africans is an important priority, as is smaller excavations to determine the specific relationship of the patio area, engineer's residence, and the brick walk, and investigations to recover debris discarded from the kitchen, particularly through the kitchen drain and down slope from the building. In order to obtain archaeological evidence pertaining to British enlisted men stationed at the fort, it is also planned to begin excavations in the area of the Enlisted Men's Barracks located to the northeast of the parade ground.