



Frequently Asked Questions

1. What was discovered?

The discovery was of the previously unknown location of a burial ground, believed to be a Kingsley era slave cemetery with six confirmed early 19th century human burials.

2. How was it discovered?

Dr. James Davidson, an archaeologist with the University of Florida, and his students were looking for the cemetery as part of the research he was doing in partnership with the Timucuan Preserve. The research was approved under an archaeological permit granted by the National Park Service.

3. When were the burials first discovered? Why wasn't the announcement made right away?

The burials were discovered in May 2010. The discovery was significant to the National Park Service and the Kingsley descendant community. It also had potentially significant implications for management of the site. For these reasons, Park Superintendent Barbara Goodman decided that more than a verbal notice was required. She needed to wait until the interim report was prepared in order to review and obtain solid confirmation of the findings. The interim report by Dr. James Davidson, University of Florida, on the Kingsley Plantation archaeological findings was submitted in October 2011. We immediately made plans for the announcement.

4. What kind of verification was done when the remains were discovered? Were the remains dated?

Historical documents indicated that the plantation had a slave cemetery. Anomalies on 1853 and 1855 coastal survey maps were also possible indications of the cemetery's location. The burials were dated based on the buttons and other objects found associated with them. Based on these artifacts we believe the burials are from between the 1820s and 1850s, which suggests at least five of the burials are probably related to the Kingsley era.

5. How many people are buried in this area? Have the boundaries been determined?

We have located six burials to date. At this time, the number of total burials is unknown. We have no historical documents that tell us how many people are buried in the cemetery or how much space the cemetery occupies.

6. Have the remains been identified?

We determined the sex and relative age of five of the people interred. There is one adult male approximately 40 years old, one adult female approximately 60 years old or older, and three children ranging in age from toddler to elementary school. The field school ended before the sixth burial could be fully investigated, so the sex and approximate age are not known.

7. Are there any burial records or documentation? Are you looking for any?

There is little historical documentation about the enslaved people who worked on Kingsley Plantation. No slave rolls have been found for any of the families who owned the plantation. Additionally, there are no known records of when the cemetery was first established, how large an area it encompasses, how many people are buried there, or when they were buried. Without such documentation, identifying those interred and their relationship to living persons will be virtually impossible.

8. Are the descendants known? Have they been notified?

We have a close relationship with the descendant community of Kingsley Plantation. We believe that in the case of five of the burials, they are likely related to the Kingsley family. However, we have no specifics as to lineage. The known descendants of the Kingsley family have been notified.

9. What is known about the slave burials? Were they in coffins? Arranged in any identifiable way? Were there markers or artifacts?

Currently we have been able to determine the sex and relative age of the individuals, their probable family lineage and how they were buried. They were buried in coffins of various shapes. The coffins were laid to rest with the heads facing east. Several large conch shells and a sad iron were recovered along with the burials. We believe these items would have been grave markers. At this time, no other markers are known.

10. What are the plans now that the site has been identified?

There are currently no plans to continue the archaeological excavations at the burial site. We will consult with the descendant community to determine the most appropriate way to memorialize the cemetery. We anticipate ongoing community engagement as we explore the future development and interpretation of Kingsley Plantation.

11. Will the burials be marked?

Memorialization of the cemetery will be determined in consultation with the descendant community.

12. Will there be further archaeological explorations?

Any future decisions about further exploration will result from consultation with the descendant community.

13. Why is this discovery significant?

The discovery is significant for the knowledge it provides. While we do not know the specific lineage, we now know the actual place of burial for those ancestors who endured enslavement and who lived and died in a foreign land to create the landscape that is now Kingsley Plantation. To know a bit about these anonymous men, women, and children, and garner some insight into their lives through a respectful viewing of their final resting place, is an opportunity rarely seen.

14. What is a witness tree?

A “witness” tree can be any tree of considerable age overlooking a particular historic area and events surrounding it. In the case of Kingsley Plantation, it is the large live oak due west of the cemetery. It is approximately 300-years old and has been “witness” to all the events that have happened at Kingsley Plantation.

15. What is a field school?

A field school is primarily for the training of undergraduate or graduate students. For approximately six weeks in the summer, a small group of students is taken into the field to learn the basics of archaeological field work. The students get credit and training to start them off in a career in archaeology. Almost every archaeology or anthropology department with a concentration in archaeology in the world conducts archaeological field research such as the summer field schools conducted in TIMU.

16. Who can be contacted for more detailed information?

John Whitehurst, TIMU Cultural Resource Specialist, can be contacted for more information at 904-221-7567 x128 or via email at john_whitehurst@nps.gov