

In 1999, I stumbled upon a small group of professionals dedicated to the study of a specialized type of warfare—fortifications, and specifically, for the most part, field fortifications constructed during the Civil War, 1861-65. Surprisingly, many of these fortifications, mostly devised from stone, dirt, and sand, still survive—if you know where to look. Unfortunately, many of these fortifications, which one might deem sacred ground, are being bulldozed to make way for condominiums and shopping centers.

I was fortunate enough that they allowed me, a mere enthusiast, to stumble along with them on some of their annual “meetings,” three or four days of intense Civil War study and hiking to some of the most esoteric places in the South. I managed to make four such trips (Middle Tennessee; Dalton, Marietta, and Savannah, Ga.) and take some interesting photographs. I went to places that I didn’t even know existed, and learned more in three days than I had managed in three years. For a brief moment in time, I ran with a bunch of rogues known as ...

THE TRENCH NERDS





It's a 1,000-foot climb up to Rocky Face Ridge in northwestern Georgia, where the Confederates built stone fortifications for defensive purposes against Sherman's advance in 1864. At some points, the dirt trail atop the ridge was about six feet wide. Quite a view of Interstate 75 from atop this ridge. On our hike down, we stumbled across the wreckage of a light airplane.





Many times the group would hike to locations above even the cell towers and transmission lines. Here I pose along the stone fortifications along the top of the ridge. I wore short pants that day. Bad decision. That evening, I discovered my legs bloody from a multitude of scratches and lacerations.



The nerds explored the railroad tunnel at Tunnel Hill, before it was opened to the public. The stone and brick 1,447-foot-long tunnel was built in 1850, before the Civil War.

Here, we document the spot where General John Bell Hood's amputated leg was buried after the battle at Chickamauga. That's our story and we're sticking with it.





At Allatoona Pass, we compare the historic Civil War scenic photographs of George Barnard with the modern landscape.

Walking through the former railroad bed at Allatoona Pass, where Federal forces embedded in two small forts held off a determined Confederate assault in 1864. The small gorge is 65 feet deep.



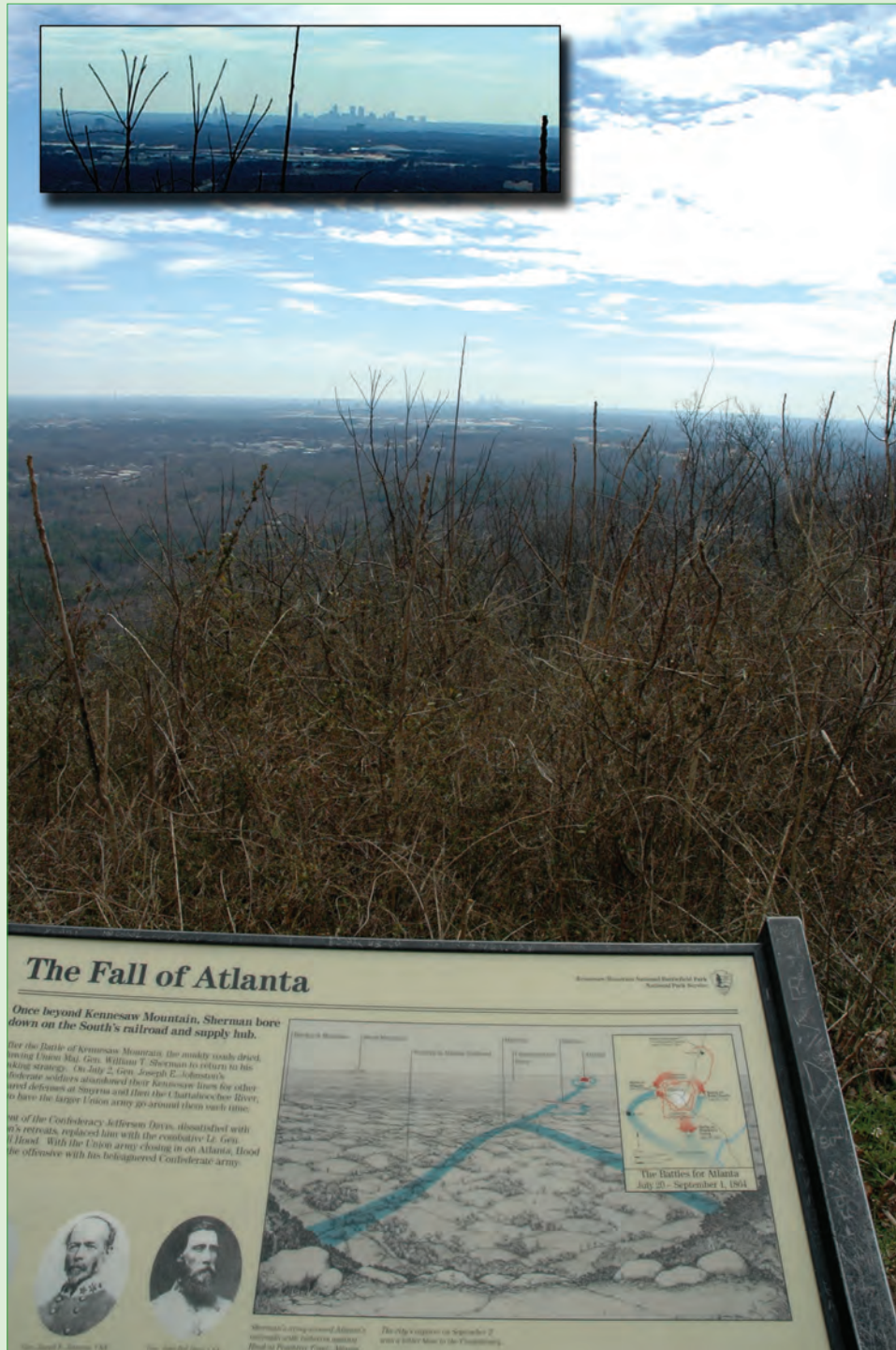


Moccasin Bend and Chattanooga from atop Lookout Mountain, almost 2,400 feet high. The entrance to the 10-acre Point Park reservation atop the mountain. The Chattanooga area was well fortified during the war.





An artillery position atop Kennesaw Mountain, near Marietta, Georgia.



The skyline of Atlanta is barely visible on the horizon in this view from Kennesaw Mountain, site of Sherman's worst defeat during his advance upon the city.



We're not lost. We just don't know where we are. Both modern road and topo maps and historic battle maps are consulted before we explore the vicinity of Snake Creek Gap. At times, we tromp on private property, but always after obtaining the landowner's permission.

Not all mounds are Civil War fortifications. Here, we examine the prehistoric Native-American mounds at Etowah, Georgia.





“Hey, guys, I’ll be right back.” Famous last words, right? Keeping trench nerds organized is like herding cats. There’s always an interesting spot that needs to be explored. Seriously, no trench nerd has even been lost on an excursion, although several went missing for awhile.



Some very well delineated earthworks. Normally, earthworks are extremely difficult to photograph. Usually, you need a lot of contrast and a person in the picture to add scale. Earthworks are very fragile and should not be walked upon, as the warning sign denotes.





The terrain in South Carolina is much different than that in Georgia, as seen here at the Battle of Rivers Bridge site.



An historic structure in the swamps near Savannah, Georgia. No, it was not functional.



A big gun at Fort James Jackson along the Savannah River, a brick fort built around 1810 to protect the city of Savannah. In addition to many fascinating exhibits and sights, Fort Jackson is home to millions of mosquitoes.





Here we board carts very early in the morning at the historic Savannah Golf Club (1794) and round a large sand trap in order to explore the historic site of an artillery battery not far from the river.

The Savannah Golf Club and golf course we know today was incorporated on Dec. 29, 1899 in Chatham County. At the time, there existed a complete line of Confederate fortifications, which extended across the entire property. To celebrate the Civil War and Georgia history it was decided that the course should be laid out to utilize these fortifications and although changes and alterations have been made to the golf course over the years, these fortifications are still present today and play an integral part in the design of the course.

—Savannah Golf Club website





The South Carolina landscape can sometimes appear foreboding.
Trips are usually made in February or March when trees are bare and ground clutter is at a minimum.



NOBLE JONES' "WORMSLOW" 1736 - 1775

This 1-1/2 mile oak avenue leads to the tabby ruins of Noble Jones' colonial fortified plantation. Jones and his family were original settlers in Georgia, arriving in Savannah with founder James E. Oglethorpe on February 1, 1733. As a middle-class carpenter from England, Jones would perform a variety of roles in the new colony of Georgia including: constable, physician, surveyor, Indian agent, soldier, member of the royal council, treasurer, and senior justice of the province. In 1736, Jones leased 500 acres from the Trustees of Georgia and in 1745, finished construction of the fortified home he named "Wormslow". From this outpost, Jones commanded a company of marines charged with patrolling the inland water route and alerting Savannah of any Spanish attack. Wormslow was also well known for its horticultural efforts. Indigo, rice and silk were all cultivated here by Jones, his indentured servants, and later slaves. Following generations of the Jones family lived at Wormsloe for over two centuries, building on their ancestor's prominent role in Georgia history. The tabby ruins of the original "Wormslow" home survive as the last architectural remnant of Savannah from the Oglethorpe era (1733 - 1743).

025-100

GEORGIA HISTORIC MARKER

1892



SOUTH

CAROLINA

BATTLE OF HONEY HILL

On Nov. 30, 1864, Union troops under Brig. Gen. John P. Hatch were marching to Grahamville to cut the nearby Charleston-to-Savannah rail line when they met Col. Charles J. Colcock's smaller Confederate force posted in a redoubt located about 1 mi. N. of here. In the ensuing battle, Union troops were repelled, owing to their lack of ammunition and strong Confederate positions.

ERECTED BY
JASPER COUNTY BICENTENNIAL COMMITTEE
1976



The moat at Fort Pulaski at the mouth of the Savannah River.



The artillery casements in the interior of Fort Pulaski.



Heavy rifled Federal guns pounded Fort Pulaski from across the river during the Civil War and nearly reduced it to rubble, thereby discrediting the functionality of fixed stonework or brick fortifications.





Old graveyards, cemeteries, and churches are part of the picturesque scenery of the Low Country. At left is a children's tomb at a private graveyard. Below are the remains of Old Sheldon Church (1745-53), the first conscious attempt in America to replicate a Greek temple. Below left is a monument among the moss-covered trees of Bonaventure Cemetery in Savannah.





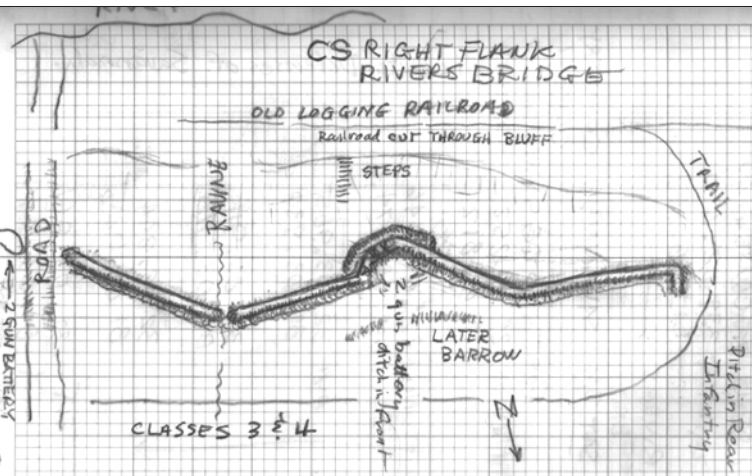
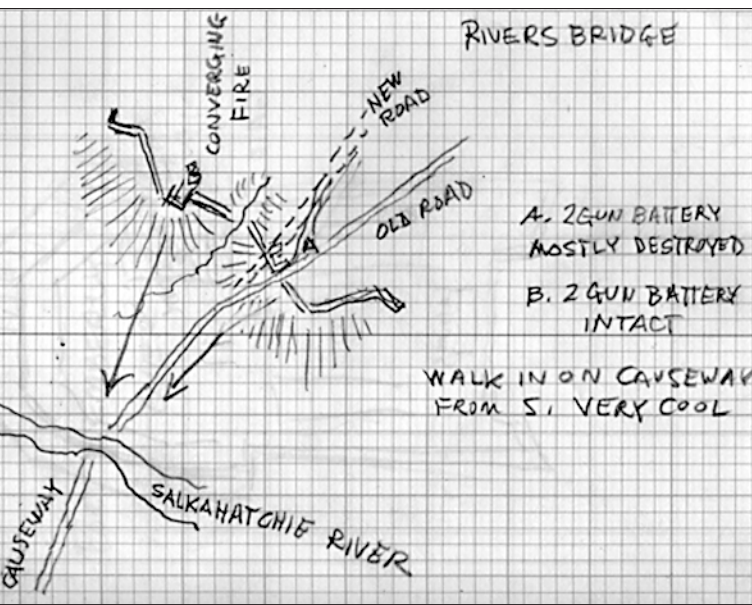
The fortifications at Fort McAllister, south of Savannah, were built of sand rather than brick or stone. Federal gunboats would shell the fort by day, and by the next day the Confederates had been able to rebuild the “sandworks.” The fort eventually fell to a land attack by the Federals.



An old South Carolina plantation road lined with very old live oak trees.



Trench nerd David Lowe of the National Park Service sketches one of his many pencil drawings during a visit to field fortifications. A variety of his drawings are displayed on the expanded next page.

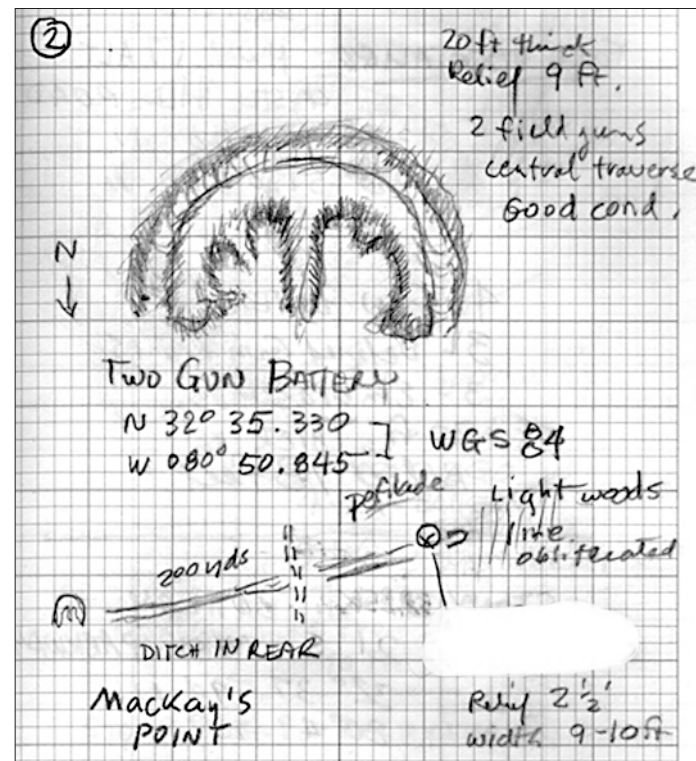
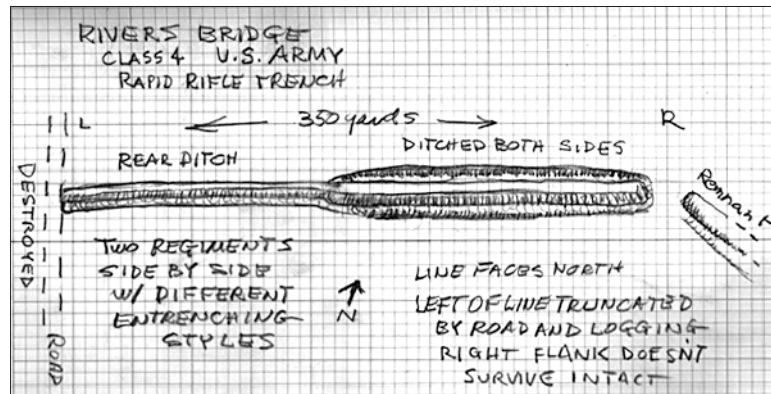


◀ RIVERS BRIDGE ▶▼

Confederate River Line. The Confederate earthworks at Rivers Bridge were well designed but fairly rapidly constructed, so I would classify these as Class Three and Four. The line consisted of two two-gun batteries connected by two rear-ditched infantry faces about 75 yards long and slightly inclined to form a re-entrant angle. (There's a technical term for this that escapes me at the moment.) Average relief 2.5-3 feet. The right flank also consists of two inclined faces with a short section refused. As the battle played out, this section was not refused enough! The left flank of the line followed the brow of the bluff and provided protection for that flank. The present day road goes right through the left-hand battery and destroyed most of it. The historic road passed just to the left of the battery and its trace may still be seen. This battery was sited to fire directly down the road to the river. The right-hand battery, front-ditched and in decent condition, was sited along the causeway which takes a jog toward the east beyond the river. Evidently both batteries were embrasured. The left-hand battery, two smooth-bores for anti-personnel work. The right-hand battery, rifled guns for longer range fire. The field of fire in front of this line was recontoured for an old logging railroad so there was likely less defilade in front than as it currently appears.

Union Line

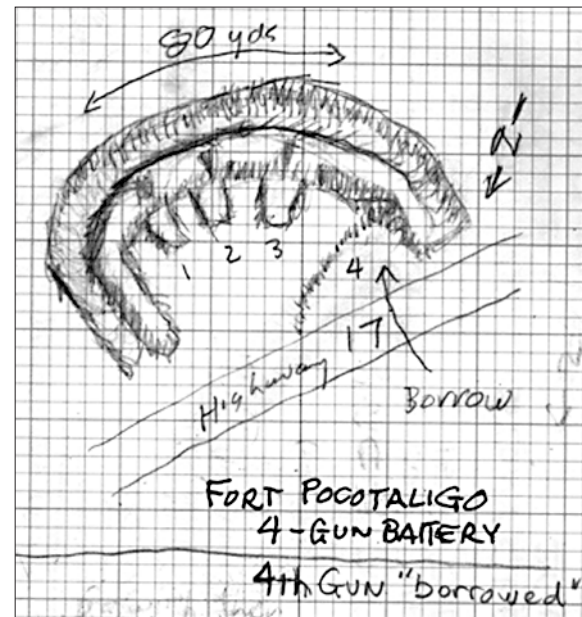
A Class Four rapid infantry trench about 300 yards long, facing north. The right half of the line is double ditched, parapet about 15 feet thick with 3-4 feet relief. This joins directly into the left half which is rear-ditched, parapet about 12 feet thick, relief about 2 feet. The line is abruptly truncated at a logging road on the left and beyond there is the typical Craters of the Moon landscape left by mechanical logging. A shame. We rarely find an intact flank, where deployments tend to get interesting, as at Snake Creek Gap. What we have here are two regiments dug in side by side with entirely different entrenching styles, perhaps from different brigades? A shallow remnant continues for a ways from the right flank, disappears beneath a lawn, and does not reappear in the woods beyond the house.



MACKEYS POINT EARTHWORKS ▲

Class One Two-Gun Battery

Parapet 20 ft. thick, 9 ft. relief, good condition. Two gun platforms and ramps separated by a central traverse. The infantry line (Class Four) extended northeast and southwest of this battery, relief 2-3 feet. We followed the line toward the southwest 300 yards or so until it truncated in a marshy woodland after which we thrashed around in vain.



FORT POCOTALIGO ▲

Class One: Four-Gun Battery, about 80 yards end to end. Basically a lunette trace, front-ditch, parapet 20+ feet thick, relief 15-18 feet. Three intact gun platforms with ramps, embrasures. Fourth gun ramp and platform destroyed due to borrowing of earth. Infantry parapet extends for a distance from the work's left flank. This was part of a complex that extended from the Pocotaligo River to the northeast. The Smith map (3.1) show other fragments of the line surviving. Location: East side of Castle Hill Road (21/17A), N. of Pocotaligo, Beau-fort County, SC.

CWFSG Earthworks Classification System

Class One: Prepared Artillery Fortifications

Forts, redoubts, bastions, lunettes, redans, batteries, blockhouses

Class Two: Prepared Infantry Fortifications

Seigeworks, main lines, parallels, connecting curtains, blockhouses

Class Three: Rapid Artillery Fortifications

Breastworks, minor artillery lunettes or demi-lunes

Class Four: Rapid Infantry Fortifications

Breastworks, rifle trenches

Class Five: Communication and Supply

Communication trenches, covered ways, entrenched military roads

Class Six: Internal Works

Magazines, bombproofs, bunkers, traverses, associated with enclosed or semi-enclosed artillery fortifications

Class Seven: Personal Field Shelter

Discrete fox holes, picket or skirmish holes, command holes, slit trenches, rifle pits

Class Eight: Defenses of Convenience

Stone walls, piled stone breastworks, sunken roads, railroad cuts/fills, often enhanced by digging

HARDEE CEMETERY

The enclosed earthwork that contains the neglected Hardee Cemetery is very large (est. about 10 acres), wooded, and very overgrown. It was built adjacent to the road and would have commanded it fully. Ditched front and rear with a relief of about ten feet (or more?). Width? Ditch (mysteriously) is deeper inside in places than outside as though these folks were more concerned with keeping something inside rather than keeping attackers out. Sally port formed in southern face by overlapping parapets. Too overgrown to explore for interior features. While constructed on the scale of a Class One artillery fortification, this may be an unprecedented Class Five Communication and Supply. It is located at the head of the Union Causeway, the principal northern land route out of Savannah. Speculation was that it may have served as a command/control/logistical base for the far-flung picket posts north of the Savannah River. Other hypotheses welcomed. The historic map (OR Atlas) shows this work and appears to show the Hardee House on the opposite side of the road rather than inside the redoubt as I was trying to imagine it. Brick cemetery wall in disrepair and numerous tombstones, many overthrown, some dating from 1830.

DELTA PLANTATION

The earthwork on Delta Plantation is a Class Two prepared infantry parapet with a relief of 6-7 feet? It is a simple straight parapet perhaps 100-120 meters? in length. Ditch presumably in front if assumed northerly facing is correct. Forest cover. Good condition. This parapet may have covered a camp, though there is little evidence to go on.