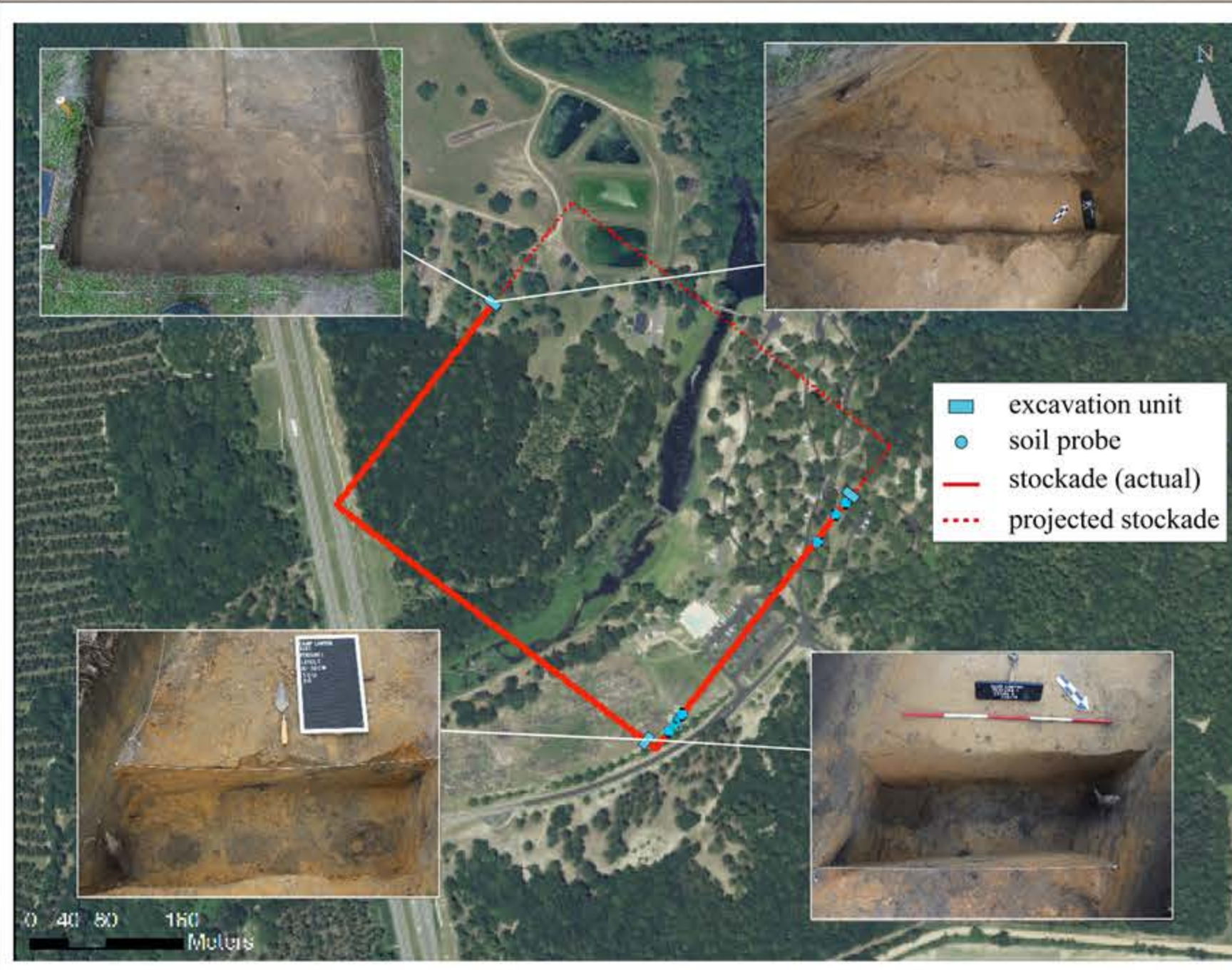


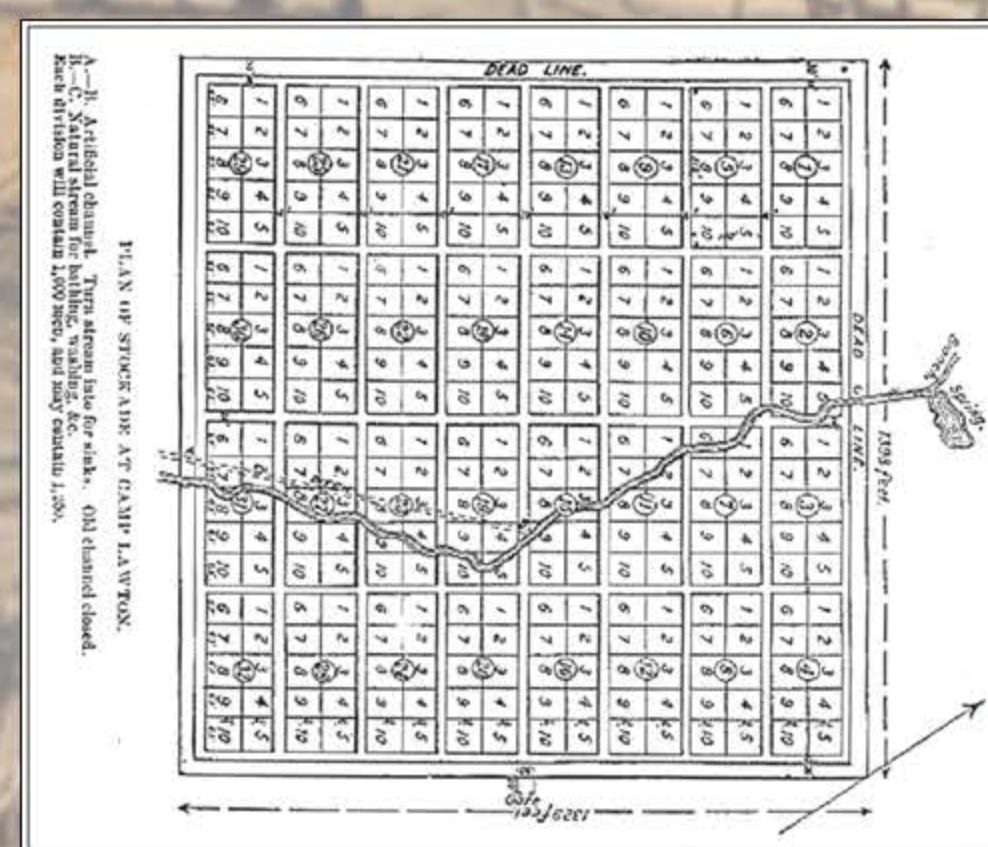
Stockade Construction at the Confederate POW site of Camp Lawton in central Georgia

Background

The prison experience of the Civil War can be characterized as one of hardship and atrocity. Even today it is difficult to understand the cause of this, but it may be rooted in poor planning and lack of supplies. In nearly all prisons of the Confederacy overcrowding was an issue that promulgated disease and starvation. Andersonville, at its peak, held 33,000 prisoners. To relieve this overcrowding, the Andersonville stockade was extended from 16 to 26 acres. However, this was insufficient. To accommodate increasing numbers of prisoners, a new prison, Camp Lawton, was planned near Millen Georgia approximately 51 miles south of Augusta, Georgia. Construction began in the summer of 1864 and Lawton's stockade wall encompassed 42 acres. This made Camp Lawton the largest prison in the world at the time. While this was quite a feat in Civil War engineering, the people who actually constructed the stockade are rarely discussed. Oral testimonies, recorded in the early 20th century, suggest that roughly 500 slaves and 300 prisoners worked on the project.¹



Aerial photo showing boundary of stockade trench at Camp Lawton And locations of excavated sections.



General Winder map of Camp Lawton Stockade, 1864.³



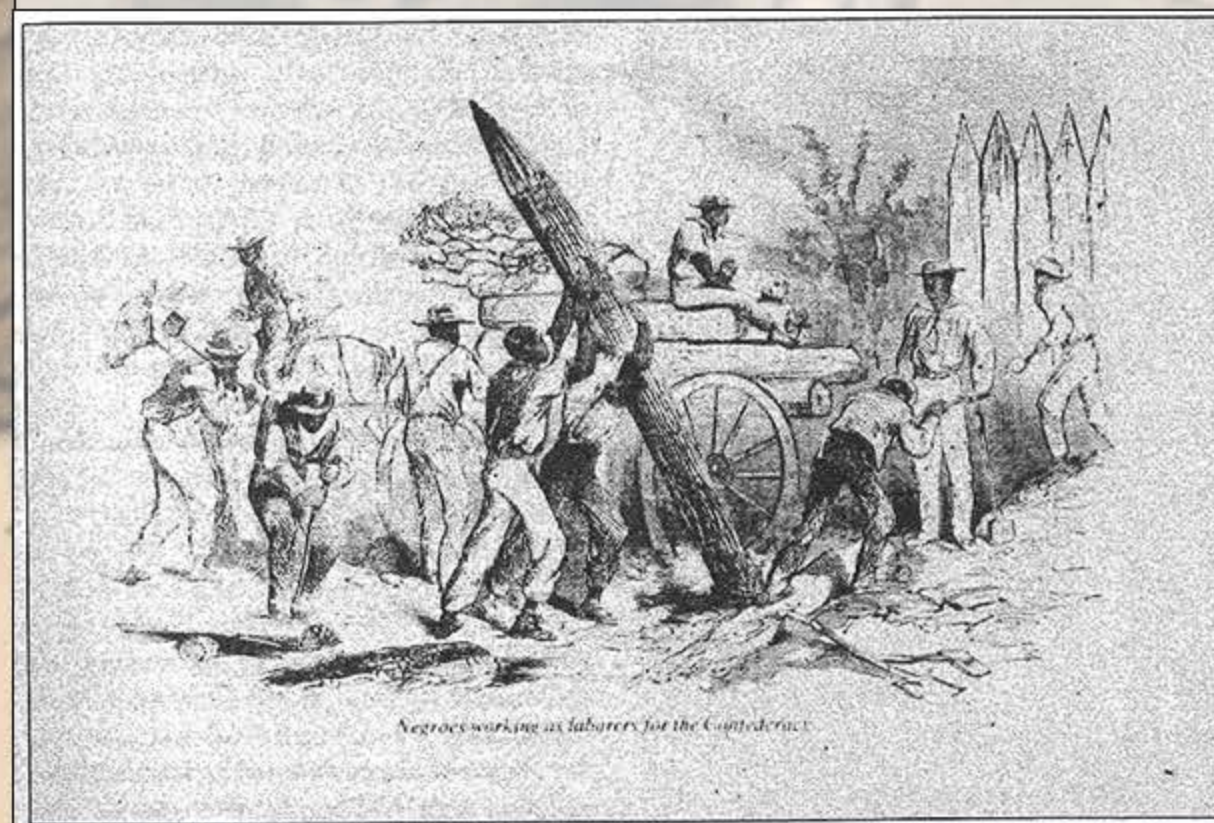
Robert Sneden drawing of Camp Lawton stockade.⁴

Hypothesis

I hypothesize that excavated sections of the stockade trenches at Camp Lawton can serve as archaeological correlates of differing modes of labor in the Civil War-era South. Excavators of the stockade trench at Andersonville noted differences between prisoner and slave labor, concluding that slaves had a more methodical approach to construction, utilizing a banding feature.⁵ Similar results have been observed at Camp Ford, a Confederate POW camp in Tyler, Texas. The 10-acre stockade was built exclusively by slaves and many methodical adaptations to soil composition were employed.⁶ Excavations of the stockade trench at Camp Lawton have yielded similar results, including evidence that clay was carted to sandier portions of the site to stabilize stockade posts.

African American Slave Laborers

The focus of this research is enslaved African Americans. Archaeologically, slaves are commonly studied within the context of the plantation. However, the narrative of slavery concerning Civil War sites is often neglected, with the exception of "Colored" troops. In fact, black laborers were an important part of the war effort for both sides. They were heavily utilized by the military in both the South and the North for digging entrenchments and constructing roads, stockades, barracks, and other structures or features involving military fortifications.²



Enslaved African Americans constructing stockade.

Findings

In the southern section of the site, subsoils are comprised of sandy clay, and are generally only 1-1.5m in depth. In these locations, the stockade trench was 3-4 feet wide and roughly 6 feet deep. The upper soil zones, made up of coarse sand, were dumped in piles along with the deeper, more clayey soils. The walls of the trench were vertical. During erection of the stockade the pine posts were placed along the outer wall of the trench, and the subsoil acted to stabilize these posts. The soils were then shoveled back into the interior of the trench, and different soil zones were backfilled in layers, creating a banding effect in the cross section.

In the northern more elevated section of the site, soils are comprised of coarse sand, with a very low clay content to a depth of more than two meters. To compensate for this, the exterior wall of the trench was sloped inward and clay was carted from another portion of the site. The posts were positioned vertically and the gap created by the slope was filled with the clay. This would stabilize the stockade by creating a solid clay support.

Conclusions

Overall, this is still a work in progress and much more evidence needs to be unearthed to solidify these claims. However, initial results of the archaeological analysis show that these three civil war prisons seem to exhibit similar patterns with regards to slave labor and stockade construction. More Civil War sites should be excavated with an eye toward investigating African American laborers to create a more holistic interpretation.

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