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## The Trouvadore Project: The Legacy of a Sunken Slave Ship

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## **September 2007 Newsletter**

### **The *Trovadore* Project: The Legacy of a Sunken Slave Ship**

By Nigel Sadler\*

#### **Introduction**

Often in the past archaeologists have worked in isolation from other disciplines, carrying out research and publishing to meet the demands of peer pressure. This usually meant their work only appeared in limited academic publications and had little relevance to the community in which the archaeological project was carried out.

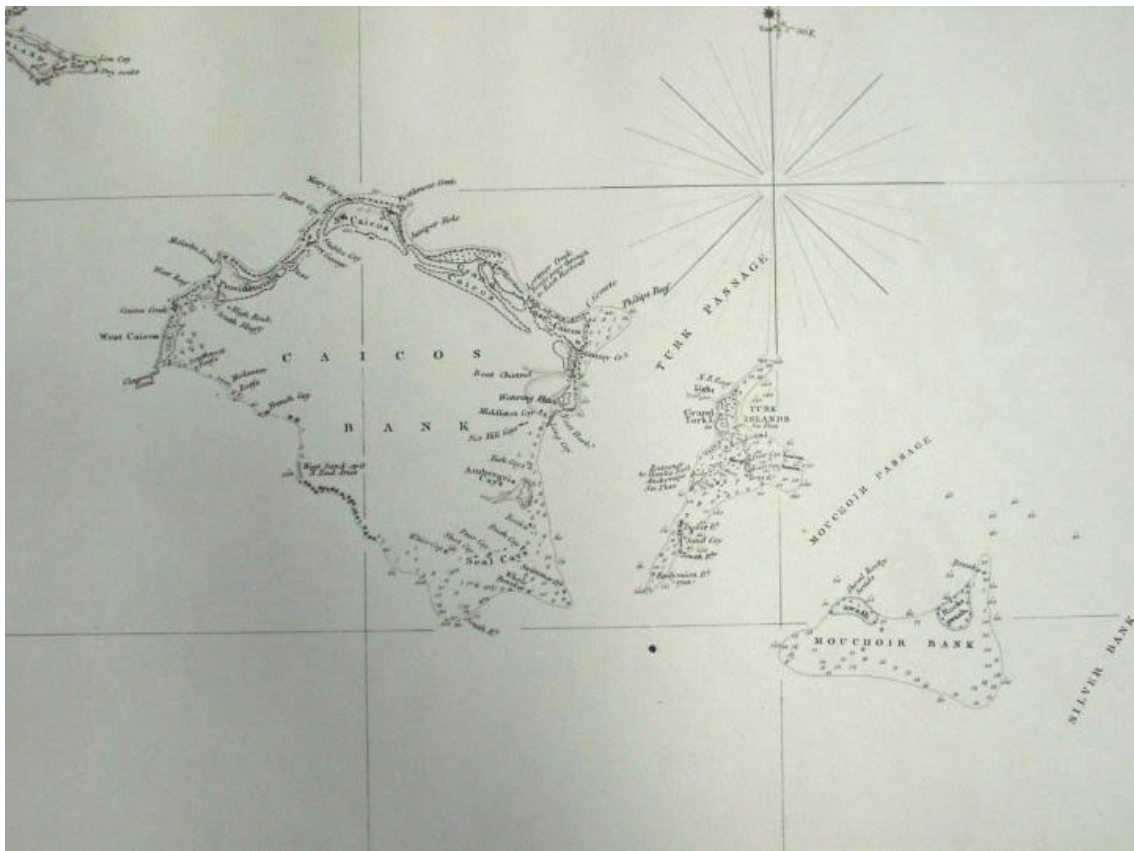
However, what is the purpose of archaeological work if it does not inform, educate, and interest the local community? It is for this reason that community or public archaeology is growing and the involvement of the local community in a project is now being deemed an essential component of any work. Archaeology should also be seen as an integral part of a wider project involving associated disciplines, such as archival and historical research, as well as partnering with local organisations such as museums, heritage organisations, and government agencies.

In the Turks and Caicos Islands, just south east of the Bahamas, the *Trovadore* Project is a good example of this inter-disciplinary and community approach (Figure 1).

#### **Historical Background**

In 1807, the British Government passed legislation outlawing the trade of enslaved people from Africa. It was not until 1834 that slavery was fully outlawed in British territories, but the 1807 act was the start towards the end of British slavery. However, other European

countries, especially Portugal and Spain, delayed the prohibition of the transatlantic slave trade and when they did pass laws those provisions were not so vigorously enforced. Starting in 1811,



**Figure 1. Map of the Turks and Caicos Islands: Owen’s maps made in 1830 during a survey voyage of the *Blossom* provide a contemporaneous view of the islands.**

the British Royal Navy set up an anti-slavery squadron to chase down all ships carrying enslaved Africans and when a slaver was caught the Africans on board were freed and the ship was seized and condemned. Between 1811 and the 1880s, during this little known period in the story of slavery, the anti-slavery squadron captured around 1,600 ships and freed over 150,000 Africans.

At this time the main demand for newly enslaved Africans came from Brazil and Cuba. If a ship was captured near Africa the Africans were freed at Sierra Leone, a British Colony in West Africa. However, if a ship made it across the Atlantic the Africans were freed either in the Bahamas, if the ship was trading to Cuba, or in Trinidad if the ship was trading to Brazil. This of course put pressure on these two countries. Between 1811 and 1860 approximately 6,000

Africans from 26 captured or wrecked vessels entered the Bahamas (Johnson 1991, p. 31). At the same time business interests in those two countries could not ignore the potential of these liberated Africans as a source of cheap labour for the Caribbean, which could offer an alternative to the slave economy.

The Africans freed in this manner were known as “liberated Africans.” Initially to aid the costs incurred by the Bahamas or Trinidad, liberated Africans undertook a 14 year apprenticeship, being taught a trade, the English language, and Christianity. It was the responsibility of the person who took them on as apprentices to fund them. Unfortunately many were treated little better than enslaved labour and eventually the apprenticeship period was reduced to only 6 months so that the essential training could be undertaken (Johnson 1991, pp. 42-44). In the Bahamas special towns were developed to house these liberated Africans and to separate them from the enslaved communities. This period created a strange demographic mix between African descendants still in slavery with few rights, freed slaves with more rights, and those Africans freed from slave ships who were being given rights and land to survive in a new homeland.

In addition to those ships captured by the British Navy, many vessels also suffered the vagaries of the sea and sank, often due to taking risks to avoid navy patrols or being sighted by British officials. One of these ships was the *Trouvadore* in 1841. *Trouvadore* is the name that appears in the official British records and the related archaeological project takes this name. However, it is likely that the ship was really named *Troubadour*, which is a Spanish word for a wandering minstrel.

## **Project Background**

In 1991 the Turks and Caicos National Museum opened to the public. Prior to this time there had been no formal collecting policy to preserve the artefacts that told the story of the

country's past. This had unfortunately meant that many important items had been lost or sold to museums and private collections outside of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

In 1993, Museum founder Grethe Seim along with Dr. Donald Keith contacted museums in the USA to find out what they held. The Smithsonian informed them that they had in their possession a 'letter book' from George Judson Gibbs from the Turks and Caicos Islands which detailed his collection that he was trying to sell in the 1870s. The majority of this collection consisted of pre-Columbian material from the Lucayans, but surprisingly the entry dated 14th June 1878 also listed:

Two African idols, found on board the last Spanish slaver, of wood with glass eyes [schr "Esperenza"] wrecked in the year 1841 at Breezy Point on the Caicos Islands. The slaves from this vessel were taken possession of by the Government and brought to the Grand Turk Island. -- The captain of the slaver, escaped the penalty, (by being a Spaniard), of being hung according to the British laws. The slaves were apprenticed for the space of one year and they and their descendants form at the present time, viz the year 1878 the pith of our present labouring population. (Gibbs 1878, p. 216)

The idols are in fact from Easter Island and are displayed in the Pacific galleries in the Natural History Museum, New York. The discovery of these letters and of the idols sparked an interest that would shed light on a story long forgotten.

### **Sunken Slave Ships in the Turks and Caicos Islands**

Turks and Caicos Islands' folklore ties some of the local population to ancestors who were aboard slave ships that wrecked in the waters surrounding the country. Little research had been carried out on these oral traditions and many believed that there was little truth in these accounts.

The first real historian to publish material related to sunken slave ships for the Turks and Caicos Islands was Herbert E. Sadler, who quoted President Forth's dispatch to London in October 1849 that stated "It may be within the recollection of the Colonial Office that these islands owe most of their labourers to the shipwreck on the Caicos Islands of two vessels on their

passage to Cuba, one in 1837, another in 1841” (H. E. Sadler, 1997). Sadler believed the first ship had wrecked near North Caicos in 1837 and the second ship, *Esperenza*, had wrecked at Breezy Point in March 1841. The research work undertaken by the Turks and Caicos National Museum has now uncovered the stories of these two shipwrecks, *Esperenza* and *Trouvadore*.

### **The *Trouvadore* Story**

In 1994 David Hebb, a researcher, was commissioned by the Turks and Caicos National Museum to review original papers held at the Public Record Office, London, for any reference to the ship mentioned in the Gibbs letters. It transpired that *Trouvadore* and not *Esperenza* had wrecked in 1841. Further research identified *Esperenza* as a Portuguese slaver wrecked off Middle Caicos in 1837 with 220 Africans coming ashore, along with the crew, but 18 died before all the survivors were taken to Nassau (Dalleo 1984). It is possible some returned amongst the 189 liberated Africans sent from Nassau to the Turks and Caicos Islands between 1836 and 1840.

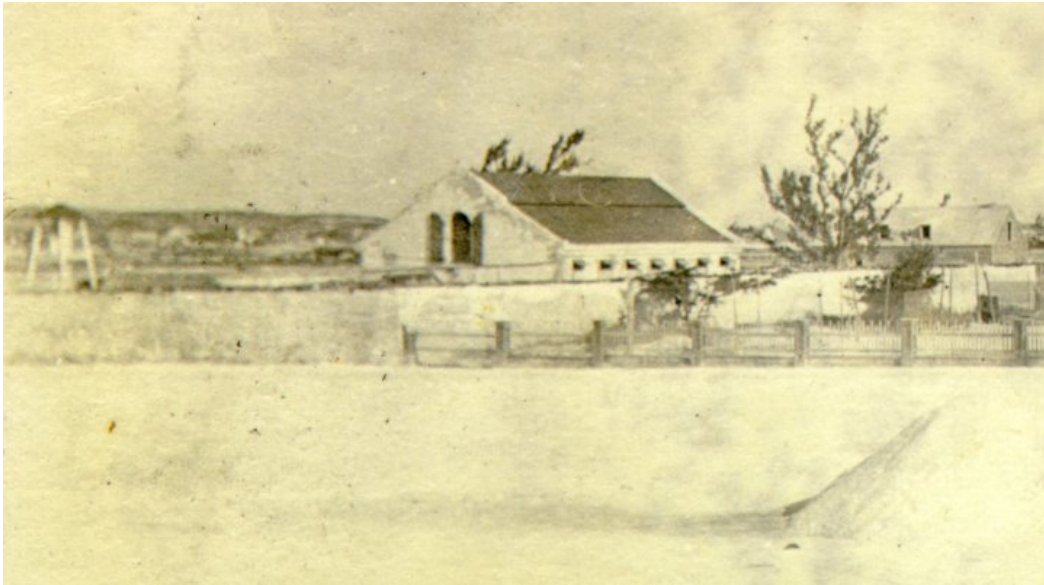
*Trouvadore* was a brigantine sailing under Spanish papers from Santiago, Cuba. The crew were Spanish but during the crossing to Africa some died and were replaced by Portuguese sailors picked up on São Tomē. Research has provided some suggestions as to where the enslaved Africans were loaded; however, at this time it is still not confirmed where or how many were loaded. As the ship docked at São Tomē it is likely that some would have been collected there or nearby on the West Coast of Africa: the vessel would not have lingered and risked capture by the British Navy. However, a recently uncovered article in the *Pittsfield Sun* (Massachusetts), dated April 29, 1841, suggests that 289 slaves were loaded at the Portuguese colony of Bissau (now in modern day Guinea Bissau) and that the ship belonged to Rosaline Kitan, which maybe a misspelling of Rosaline Canot, the wife of the infamous slave trader Theodore Canot who was operating in the area. More research is needed on this newspaper article to find out the accuracies contained within it.

The final destination for the *Trouvadore* was the illegal slave markets in Santiago, Cuba, but after a month at sea the ship wrecked off the deserted island of East Caicos. The area around East Caicos is treacherous, and a graveyard of many ships, most of which were trading with the Turks and Caicos. *Trouvadore* was not trading locally, so why was it here? Had it run low on supplies and sought new provisions? Had it been forced onto the reef by a storm? Had the captain made a mistake in his navigation? Was it trying to hide from a British Navy ship? These questions will likely remain unanswered.

As all aboard survived, it suggests that the wrecking was not severe, and probably the ship had ridden over the reef and settled in the shallow water between the reef and shoreline. The ship was carrying 20 crew and 193 enslaved Africans when it sank. Soon after landing, one African was shot dead, probably as a member of a group of slaves who fled into the bush, of which 15 managed to escape. Locals from nearby Middle Caicos came to help the ship. The Captain, De Bonita Velasea, offered a local, Mr. Stevenson, \$3,000 to obtain a vessel to take the crew and slaves on to Cuba. Mr. Stevenson deliberately delayed Velasea, and the latter failed to secure a boat before the local government representatives were informed and dispatched two sloops and Lieutenant Fitzgerald with a detachment of 17 soldiers to pick up the survivors and bring them back to Grand Turk, the country's capital. Mr. Stevenson, who had also helped in the rescue of captive Africans from *Esperenza* in 1837, had already disarmed the ship's crew so when Lieutenant Fitzgerald arrived there was no confrontation (CO 23/109 p. 337).

Once collected, the survivors were taken to Grand Turk where the ship's crew were imprisoned in the upper room of the old court house and the Africans were placed inside the walls of the crowded prison (CO 23/109 pp. 338-339) (Figure 2). The local authorities knew the Bahamas had too many liberated Africans and decided to keep most in the Turks and Caicos Islands. To gain the support of local salt proprietors, 168 of the 192 Africans were distributed amongst salt pond owners on Salt Cay and Grand Turk on a one-year contract. Salt raking was

carried out by the men (Figure 3), whilst both sexes worked together moving the salt to the dock and women bagged the salt (Figure 4). Working conditions had improved since emancipation but it was still a hard, unrewarding job. For this reason the salt proprietors were eager to take in the Africans as cheap labour.



**Figure 2. The Old Prison on Grand Turk, 1926. © Turks and Caicos National Museum.**



**Figure 3. Salt rakers circa 1900. This is the type of work that liberated Africans were often apprenticed into. This photo may show some of the descendants of the *Trouvadore* survivors. © Turks and Caicos National Museum.**



**Figure 4. Women bagging salt, 1930s. This process would have changed little since the *Trouvadore* wrecking. © Turks and Caicos National Museum.**

The 89 men, 26 women, 39 boys, 11 girls, and 3 infants were given clothing, food, accommodation and medical care in return for their labour. The children were only allowed to work as indentured domestic servants under a deed of guardianship. The local authorities were to teach the Africans to speak English and to learn Christian ways. It was the responsibility of the established Anglican Church, under Rev. Charles Neale, to meet these needs. All of the liberated Africans were christened and were made to attend regular services whilst children were also expected to go to Sunday school (CO 23/109 p. 339).

The undistributed Africans, including 20 men and 4 women, were taken to Nassau along with the slave vessel's crew. To prevent the prisoners from trying to take the ship, or the ship being captured and the Africans being taken on to a slave market, an armed militia of 10 men under the command of Lieutenant Fitzgerald accompanied them. After arriving in Nassau the *Trouvadore* captain, De Bonita Velasea, and his crew were released into the custody of the Spanish Consul, Sr. Mauro who departed with them for Cuba on 17th April 1841 for trial (Cust.

34/228 No 26). Research has yet to show what happened to these 24 liberated Africans taken to Nassau.

### **The Turks and Caicos at the Time of the Wreck**

The country was undergoing a major period of readjustment and change. In 1834 slavery had been abolished in the British colony. The former slave owners were afraid that emancipation would bring economic equality. The headright system gave all British citizens an equal share of the salt ponds and worked well for the salt proprietors when the slave's shares went to their owners, but now the former enslaved workers were on equal footing. The wealthier white population, who saw their privileged way of life under threat, lobbied for headright to be replaced by a leasehold system. The influx of Africans from *Trouvadore* would have weakened the former slave owners' rights even further: they would have fewer shares of the ponds.

The *Trouvadore* survivors were not the only liberated Africans in the country. They joined other liberated Africans who had been transferred from Nassau between 1836 and 1840. Mr. Spedding, a Whitehall official, wrote on 30th March, 1841:

At Turks Island and Caicos, out of 189 that have been received since 1836 there are now 151. Of the remaining 38, 4 are known to have died by shipwreck; 1 on the voyage; 29 from disease (*chiefly sea-scurvy*). 2 returned to Nassau. 2 only are missing -- and they are supposed to be at the Caicos under other names. (CO 23/109 p. 54)

The salt proprietors accepted the Africans as a source of cheap labour. However, at the end of their year-long apprenticeship the Africans could have been entitled to a share in the salt ponds. This would have been unacceptable to the white population who would have seen sending them to the less populated Caicos Islands as the best solution. The former slave owners were also concerned about the ratio of black to white citizens. As the black population increased and gained positions in the community, the accepted social order of pre-1834 was undermined.

The country is made up of two banks of islands. The majority of the population lived on the Turks banks where there were limits on fresh water and the amount of food that could be

produced. On the other hand the Caicos bank had a lot more islands, were greener and more fertile and therefore able to sustain a population willing to lead a subsistence way of life.

Research at present suggests two islands that the liberated Africans from the *Trouvadore* could have been moved to: Middle Caicos and South Caicos.

There is no written evidence of any settlements being set up in the Turks and Caicos Islands for liberated Africans. Stipendiary Magistrate, Francis Eve in his 1842 report of the Turks Islands mentions that there were 3 principal settlements in the Caicos Islands, but he does not name them (CO 23/113 p. 203). One would have been the newly formed East Harbour, in South Caicos. Could the other two settlements have been for liberated Africans? H. E. Sadler (1997 p. 91) recorded that Bambarra, Middle Caicos was “established in 1842 by the survivors of the shipwreck *Gambia*, a Spanish slaver bound for Mexico, the slaves originally coming from the shores of the River Niger.” Eve also recorded that only 168 liberated Africans had settled in the Turks and Caicos Islands in the previous three years, the number from *Trouvadore*. There is no evidence of Africans from another ship in this period, nor any records for a slaver called *Gambia* being captured or wrecked in the Bahamian archipelago for the years 1807 to 1860 (Dalleo 1984). Perhaps Eve was confused or misinformed about the ship’s name and the origins of those Africans.

Bambarra is the only settlement in the Turks and Caicos with an African name (Thomas 1999, p. 226; Curtin 1999). The fact that this name was chosen for the settlement would suggest strong links with first generation Africans, making a good case to linking it to liberated Africans, possibly from *Trouvadore*. However, firm proof is still sought. Local residents in Bambarra have two stories about who founded it. The first is that slaves from the Forbes’ plantations settled here, accounting for why the surname Forbes is common in the settlement (H. E. Sadler 1997, p. 135). The second was that they are the descendants of a slave ship that sank off the Caicos Islands. There were freed slaves from the Loyalist plantations and as any liberated

African from a slave ship had to be baptised they would have taken a Christian name and surname. It is likely that both stories have some truth.

In 1842, a Grand Turk salt merchant named St. George Tucker leased land on South Caicos for salt production (CO 23/113 p. 13). This development occurred at the right time to provide potential employment to the liberated Africans from *Trouvadore*. Further expansion on South Caicos occurred after the Turks and Caicos Islands gained political independence from the Bahamas in 1848. As salt production developed on South Caicos it would have attracted workers and would have suited the liberated Africans from *Trouvadore*; they had experience working in the salt ponds, and could have been the earliest people to seek work in the newly developed salt ponds in South Caicos, especially the single men with no family commitments.

The official population statistics of 1843 show the population was 2,495 (Table 1) and if all of the 168 Africans from *Trouvadore* had survived they would have made up nearly 7% of the population. As many were of childbearing age it is more likely that their population grew in this two-year period. Also, for Grand Turk and Salt Cay there are roughly equal numbers of men and women, whilst in the Caicos Islands there was quite a large difference between the male and female population. Was this due to single men without commitments travelling to the Caicos

	White		Coloured		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
<b>Grand Cay (Grand Turk)</b>	160	176	552	574	1462
<b>Salt Cay</b>	36	42	298	300	676
<b>Caicos</b>	16	19	183	139	357
				<b>Total</b>	<b>2495</b>

**Table 1. The first official Population Statistics for the Turks and Caicos Islands, 1843 (H. E. Sadler, 1997)**

Islands in search of work, or was it because the Africans from *Trouvadore* had moved to the Caicos Islands and had taken their unequal numbers with them?

### **Folklore and the Remnants of African Society -- The Cultural Legacy**

The distribution of Africans played a significant role in the development of African culture in the Caribbean. In Africa, elders played important roles in maintaining customs and beliefs, but as the young were disproportionately targeted by the slave trade this link to the elements of a home culture became attenuated. In the Caribbean, young Africans continued on with their traditions as best they could, but those beliefs and practices became modified over time (Craton 1995, p. 174). Liberated Africans were the final influx of Africans and as they were never enslaved they retained their “homogeneity and Africanisms” longest (Craton 1995, p. 176). They mainly came from Yoruba (now south western Nigeria) or “Congoes” out of Portuguese Loango and Cabinda (Craton 1995, p. 176; Stark, 1891).

H. E. Sadler (1997, p. 91) recorded that “the accent of many present day Caicos natives still carries a trace from their [African] ancestors.” What evidence is there to tie the Africans from *Trouvadore* to today’s population? They entered a community that was divided between former enslaved workers and slave owners. The former slaves were also divided between those owned by the Loyalists, by the salt rakers, and those born in the country. The arrival of a large group of first generation Africans would have seen their customs and beliefs reinforcing the African legacy that had evolved in the country through the enslaved labourers working for the Loyalist cotton producers and the Bermudan salt raking operations.

This created a web of cultural influences and it is this rich tapestry that forms the basis of modern day customs of the “Belongers,” the name for the locals. Traditional storytelling not only allowed messages of right and wrong to be told, but also allowed history to be passed orally from generation to generation. It is through this source that families and individuals can be tied to their ancestors who could have been survivors from *Trouvadore*. The Museum has been working very

closely with David Bowen, Director of the Department of Culture, whose own family oral history suggests his grandmother's great-great-grandmother came from a wrecked slave ship and had lived at Bambarra.

Local crafts and arts also indicate the cultural background of people. Maybe it is just a coincidence, but the remaining basket makers and straw workers are based in Middle and North Caicos (Figure 5). It is likely that as development has not overrun these islands these skills and crafts with their origins in African societies, have survived. The fact that modern day Caicos Island residents are more closely related to first generation Africans may also be a reason for such continuing traditions and skills. Straw work would have been carried out from the earliest days of slavery as the salt and cotton workers needed hats to protect their heads whilst working and would have needed baskets for storage. Further study is required on the different styles



**Figure 5. Basket Maker in Middle Caicos, 2001.**  
© Turks and Caicos National Museum.

that could be linked back to African societies, and maybe even to particular culture groups within West or West Central Africa. This line of research is further encouraged by examples such as an 1891 observation by James Stark in the Bahamas that “some of the Africans rescued from slave ships brought with them from Africa the secret of making the genuine African thatch for roofing houses” (Stark 1891, p. 189), different to the styles already in use. As they did not share their knowledge, this thatch style only appeared in areas where liberated Africans settled.

Another important aspect of any culture is music and celebration. The local music in the Turks and Caicos is called ripsaw, and originally used everyday items for instruments, such as a saw, screwdriver, and upturned bucket (Figure 6). The beat is clearly African influenced, and it is likely that it evolved from the enslaved population. A typical celebration here is Junkanoo



**Figure 6. Ripsaw player in the local Grand Turk band, High Tide, 2006. The guitarist in the back ground, Mitch Rollings, is one of the boat captains for the *Trouvadore* Project.**

(Figure 7), and like the music there are documentary records of this ceremony that pre-date the arrival of *Trouvadore* (Peggs 1960, p. 36), but did the Africans add anything to these forms of music and celebration? Like particular traditions of basket working, ripsaw and Junkanoo are strongest in the Caicos Islands. Could this be because these societies are more closely related to first generation African ancestors, or because outside influences have taken longer to impact on the communities?



**Figure 7. Junkanoo on South Caicos, 1960s. © Turks and Caicos National Museum.**

### **Archaeological Work**

The Turks and Caicos National Museum and maritime archaeologists are using the *Trouvadore* Project as an example of why the nation must protect its shipwrecks from unscrupulous treasure hunters. Museum officials and archaeologists advocate requirements for the issuance of licences for underwater salvage operations with the proviso that the goal must be the retrieval of information and presentation of that information to national, regional, and international audiences, rather than salvaging solely for the financial rewards of selling the finds.

Laws are in place but it is the interpretation of the regulations, the monitoring of licences and the understanding that the benefit to the country is above that of the individuals involved that need to be clarified. Without such policies, wrecks like *Trouvadore* are open to plundering before the full importance of the ship and its story can be uncovered. The country can only win from this approach as there will be a greater understanding of the history of the country, and maybe the origins of its people and the life of past generations.

Following the uncovering of the *Trouvadore* story in the archives the next step was to look for the remains of *Trouvadore*. Even here the historical and archival records provided assistance. To help identify a slave ship the archaeologists will be using the ‘Equipment Clause.’ This 19th century clause enabled the British Navy to capture ships and condemn them as slavers, even if enslaved Africans were not found on board. It identified equipment, such as excessive water barrels or large cooking pots, and ship layout including latticed covers to the holds to provide air into for the captive Africans, which suggested that a ship was fitted out to carry a human cargo.

As only two slavers are recorded as wrecking in the country (*Esperanza* and *Trouvadore*) it is certain that if the remains of a slave ship are found off East Caicos they will be from the *Trouvadore*. Also, between the 1680s and 1834 enslaved workers did not arrive in the Turks and Caicos Islands on slave ships but on general cargo vessels, just as one element of the cargo required to sustain life in these distant Islands. This is illustrated by the accounts of the enslaved labourer Mary Prince (Ferguson 1993) who recorded her journey from Bermuda to Grand Turk in about 1802.

The archaeological team had to consider what would be left of the ship. Archives show extensive salvage was undertaken at the time of the wreck, hardly surprising as the locals had grown up as “wreckers.” The Spanish consul for the Bahamas requested that the salvaged items, including sails, rigging and chain cables, be turned over to him, as the ship was Spanish (Cust.

34/228, p. 340). However, the British authorities felt the Spanish had no legal claim on the wreck and sold the items for £71.3.5 sterling (Cust. 34/228 No.56). This value compares with the sale of the Brigantine *Vigilante*, a slave ship captured in 1836 carrying 231 slaves, for £58.8.6 sterling, which did not include the boiler and slave irons which were handed over to “Her Majesty’s Service” (CO 23/101 p. 64). This suggests that much of *Trouvadore* was recovered. This reduction in the on-site remains of the vessel would be further exacerbated by the wreck being underwater for over 160 years and the likelihood that little of its timber frame would be left and that storms would have scattered and buried much of the remains.

### **2002 Aerial Reconnaissance**

In 2002 the Turks and Caicos National Museum received the loan of a helicopter (N. Sadler, Summer 2003). A small team flew over the potential area of the *Trouvadore* wreck (Figure 8). It was clear that from the air a wooden shipwreck would not be seen. However, the



**Figure 8. Breezy Point on East Caicos, taken during aerial reconnaissance, 2002. This is the location where records suggests the liberated Africans came ashore. © Turks and Caicos National Museum.**

reconnaissance was intended to examine the area to see if any wrecks could be spotted, and it was not long before several metal wrecks were located.

The reconnaissance gave a better indication of the contours of the reef, the lagoon, and the drop off to the 'wall' where the edge of the Caicos Bank fell several thousand feet in a very short distance. There had always been a concern that the ship could have dropped over this wall, but after the reconnaissance, and the research pointing to a less dramatic wrecking, the team gained increasing confidence that something of *Trouvadore* would be left in the shallow waters.

### **2004 Season -- Survey for *Trouvadore***

The wreck needed to be located to give a tangible link to the intangible material and heritage collected so far. Unfortunately the first attempts to raise funds for fieldwork from traditional sources failed. This led to an innovative approach to fundraising. The Museum used funds already held in its 'Friends' bank account which had been raised to aid the Museum to meet its mission. However this only covered 50% of the total costs of a recovery project for *Trouvadore*. The wreck site/survey area was off East Caicos, a very large deserted island. Yet the rest of the funding came through donations from the Turks and Caicos Tourist Board and Hotel and Tourism Association as well as several individual hotels. In fact the largest single donation came from the owner of the Sands and Palms hotels. So what was their interest? As Stan Hartling the owner of The Sands and The Palms Hotels and main individual backer stated, he was concerned by his staff's lack of knowledge of their heritage. They were unable to answer simple questions posed by hotel guests and he felt the project would enable his staff to become inspired and informed.

In 2004, the Museum gained a survey licence and a fleet of vessels left Grand Turk for the shores of East Caicos (Mulligan 2004; Ecott 2004; Ecott 2005). The main vessel was *Turks and Caicos Explorer*, a live-a-board dive boat hired to provide accommodation and support gear,

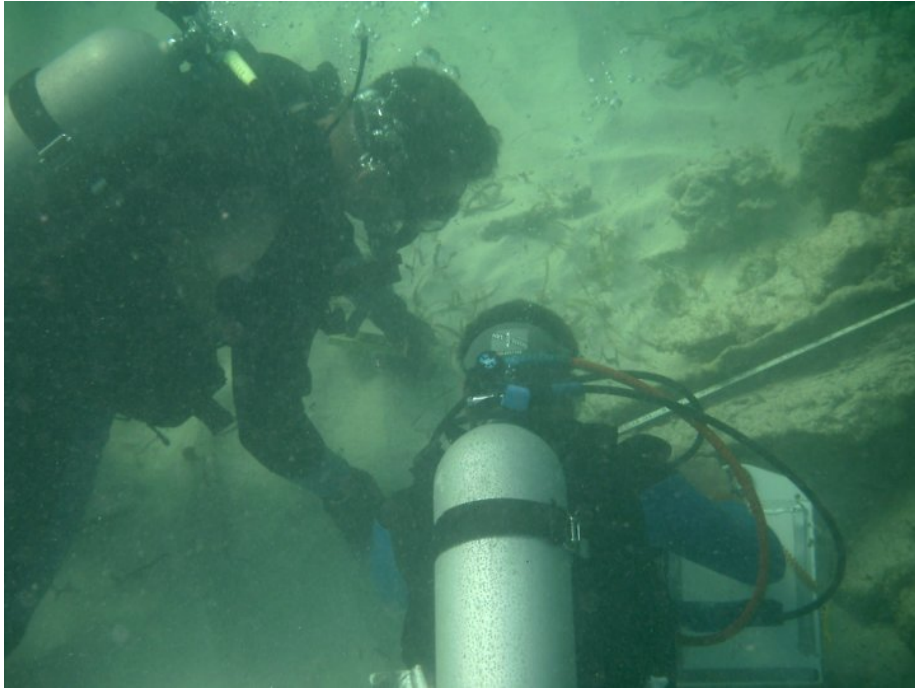
and the ship's crew were willing to become volunteer 'towboarders.' Along with the *Explorer* were three smaller vessels which were the 'work horses' for the project.

East Caicos is a renowned graveyard for ships and the reef and sea could potentially play havoc with the survey team and vessels. The country is blessed with crystal clear waters for most of the year as well as good weather. Unfortunately, as the *Trouvadore* Project departed Grand Turk Hurricane Frances was heading towards the Turks and Caicos Islands. After only one day, the team was recalled to Grand Turk as the hurricane was predicted to hit within 48 hours.

After sheltering through a category 1 hurricane the team returned to the now murky and choppy waters. Even after missing 6 days the project was a success. Survey work was carried out by team members being towed behind small boats. Anything seen by these towboarders was recorded and then archaeologists returned to areas of interest and dived on the site to record the area in more detail. A range of manufactured items were recorded along with two historic wrecks. One was a metal sailing vessel, clearly not *Trouvadore*, but the second wreck, a wooden hulled vessel was more promising. No diagnostic material was visible to date it but the wreck's location was promising.

The written records suggested *Trouvadore* sank near to Breezy Point. The fact that all aboard had survived suggested that the ship did not sink rapidly or that the survivors had to swim over the reef. This would mean the ship had ridden over the reef and come to rest in the lagoon. The discovered wreck was a mile away from Breezy Point, resting next to a coral head. It is possible the ship wrecked closer to Breezy point and was later pushed by the waves to the west until it was stopped by the coral head.

The wooden wreck sits in waters only 15ft deep (Figure 9). The visible ballast mound is small and the contiguous centreline extended for 60ft and a row of iron bolts which would have passed through the keel and keelson protrude from the sand, suggesting a keel length of 90ft. Near to one large post a bronze number "3" (Figure 10), a waterline indicator, as found.



**Figure 9. Archaeologists recording the wooden wreck during the 2004 season. © Trouvadore Project/Turks and Caicos National Museum.**



**Figure 10. The number '3' discovered on the wooden wreck during the 2004 season. © Trouvadore Project/Turks and Caicos National Museum.**

Unfortunately, the site had been tampered with recently. Buoys can be seen on photographs taken during the aerial reconnaissance suggesting the site had been marked as early as 2002 and on the site there is clear evidence of sand being moved by a propwash diverter (Keith 2005). The lack of recent concretion on the uncovered material suggested the site had recently been uncovered, probably by the team of ‘treasure hunters’ who had been given a licence to survey the area in 2002-2003 but no permission to excavate. The Museum had objected to their presence for numerous reasons but had been unable to prevent their project from being undertaken. It is unclear what was taken from the site or how compromised the wreck has become.

### **2006 Season -- Survey for *Trovadore***

Following the low tech approach in 2004 using towboarders, the poor conditions, and the limited finds, the 2006 season needed to reassess the 2004 work as well as extend the survey area and carry out test excavations on the wooden shipwreck. This would require greater funding. For the 2006 season funding was easier to find after the success of the 2004 season and the publicity that it had created. Fifty percent of the funding came from the NOAA Ocean Exploration Program, and the remaining funds came from the Turks and Caicos National Museum’s fund raising activities which saw major donations from the Turks and Caicos Conservation Fund and the Turks and Caicos Tourist Board.

A team using a magnetometer resurveyed the 2004 season area to see if anything was missed as well as covering the extended new survey area for the 2006 season which was also being covered by tow boarders. Fortunately, their results showed that towboarders in 2004 and 2006 had missed very little, and what was missed was buried material. At the same time the newly discovered areas of interest generally tied in with the area around the wooden ship wreck found in 2004. No new wooden wrecks were uncovered in 2006 suggesting that surprisingly the

wooden wreck found in 2004 was the only site that offered any potential to be the remains of *Trouvadore*.

The wooden wreck found in 2004 underwent test excavation. This new work identified that the wreck was more substantial than first thought. Buried in the sand below the ballast mound extensive remains of the hull of a ship were uncovered (Figure 11). The vessel was at least 120ft long, not the original 90 ft as estimated after the 2004 season. About 100 meters to the east of the wreck the magnetometer team had located an area of interest and here several test pits uncovered metal fixtures and a decorated cathead (a beam from which an anchor would be supported) (Figure 12). These finds are part of the wooden shipwreck and indicate that the wreck covers a much more extensive area than originally thought.



**Figure 11. Uncovered timbers at the wooden wreck site 2006.  
© Trouvadore Project/Turks and Caicos National Museum.**



**Figure 12. The cathead uncovered during the 2006 season.**  
© Trouvadore Project/Turks and Caicos National Museum.

The small ballast mound suggests the vessel was carrying a cargo, but there is no evidence of a cargo at the wreck implying it had either eroded away, like salt which was the main export crop from the country, it had floated away, it had been salvaged, or had ‘walked off’ the vessel. Unfortunately even after all this work the 2006 season failed to produce any diagnostic material. Only three undecorated body pot sherds were uncovered, and the timber and samples of ballast provided no suggestion of either a place of construction or where the ballast was loaded.

The two field seasons have been inconclusive. Nothing has been found to suggest that the wooden shipwreck is a slave ship, let alone *Trouvadore*. However, on the other hand nothing discovered so far has identified the wreck as anything else either. However, the field seasons have allowed the training of a local government representative in overseeing an archaeological project, it has educated the local population through lectures, TV and radio shows as well as

numerous newspaper and magazine articles. In fact, through these local media the resident population has been kept up to date well before any academic publication and they now have a desire to follow the project and learn more about their history. It must also be stated though that the academic obligation of the team has not been ignored. Team members have given presentations to their peers at numerous conferences, and there are plans for several publications.

## **Conclusion**

Millions of anonymous Africans were shipped to the Americas by hundreds, maybe, thousands of unknown slave ships. At long last archaeologists are now turning their attention to some of these vessels, not only through the archaeological remains but also through archives and record books.

The *Trouvadore* Project shows archaeological work should be a collaborative process, mixing not only professionals and avocational researchers but also a wide range of disciplines. Bringing together professional and avocational researchers with different cultural backgrounds and experiences has allowed the data to be analysed in many ways. This variety of interpretations makes it a living project, not just looking at dusty old books, and has opened up many debates on how the material should be researched and presented.

Archaeology is not only about the finds. The story has to include the legacies of the people that made and used these items, lived in the buildings, or journeyed on the ships. Such research projects also have to be made relevant to descendant communities. The *Trouvadore* Project aims at not only uncovering the historical context of the shipwreck and survivors but also how their legacy exists today.

This project is bringing information to the local population, most of whom will have either a tie by blood or marriage to the survivors from *Trouvadore*. It may not be possible to identify any cultural activity directly to the survivors of the wreck, but the project is raising the

awareness that the Turks and Caicos Islands culture is heavily influenced by its African roots, whether they came here as enslaved workers or were liberated from shipwrecks. These strong African cultural roots should be celebrated and not ignored, or worse still replaced by a homogenised view of Caribbean culture and/or American culture so present on the satellite TV broadcasts in the country. The Museum and other local agencies have a mission to research, interpret, and protect not only the material objects and the buildings, but also the dynamic culture of these Islands.

## Note

\* Nigel Sadler is affiliated with the Trouvadore Project and the Sands of Time Consultancy. Additional information concerning these projects is available at [www.slaveshiptrouvadore.com](http://www.slaveshiptrouvadore.com) and [www.sandsoftimeconsultancy.com](http://www.sandsoftimeconsultancy.com).

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