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So-called Indian Ridge linked to Lost Colony by local researcher

By Jeff Hampton
Staff writer

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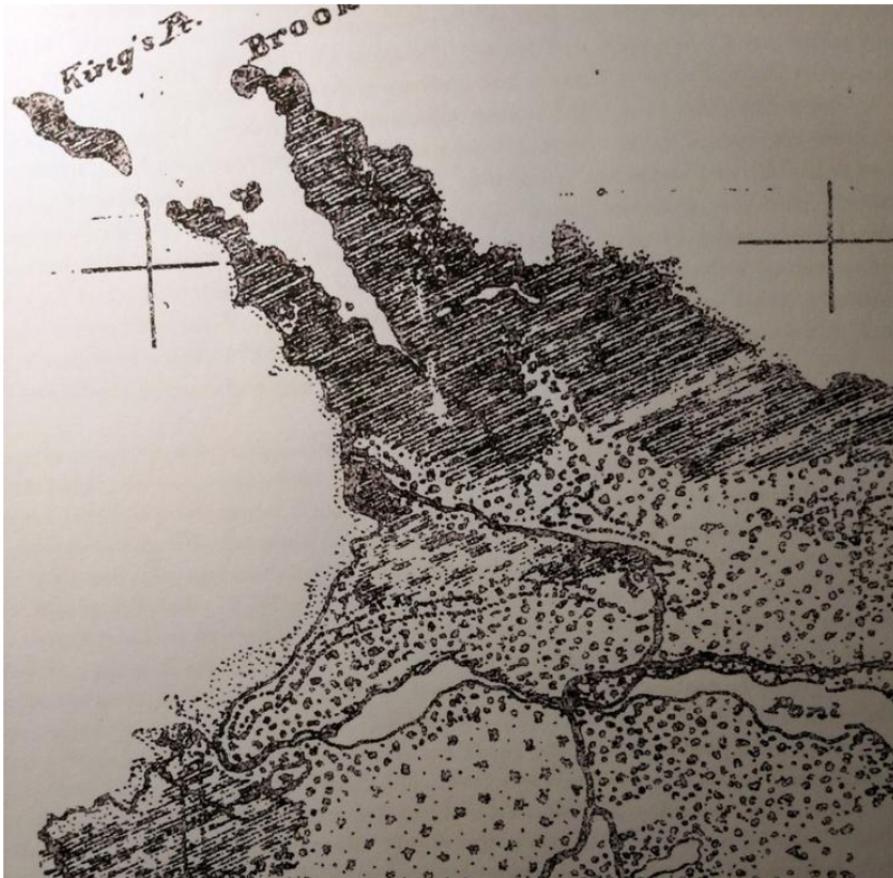


Image courtesy of Mel Covey

Old map of a portion of Frisco where researcher says great Croatoan village once was.

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FRISCO, N.C.

A tree-covered ridge just off N.C. 12 here could be the site of a large Croatoan town where the Lost Colony settled and blended with natives.

Old timers still call it Indian Ridge.

Hatteras native and businessman Mel Covey spent two years poring through old deeds, wills, colonial records and maps, finding among them a 1759 land grant of 200 acres to "William Elks and the rest of the Hatteras Indians."

The grant boundary description begins at a "forked live oak stump" at the east end.

The stump is long gone, but Covey connected newer deeds back to the grant and compared descriptions more than 200 years old to the modern lay of the land. He researched documents signed by the oldest Outer Banks families such as O'Neal, Mann, Farrow and Howard. This undeveloped triangle of land bordered by housing developments is where John White's 1587 colony went after leaving Roanoke Island, he said.

White returned in 1590 to Roanoke Island in search of the settlers he left behind, including his daughter Eleanor Dare and granddaughter, Virginia. Instead, he found only the letters CROATOAN carved in a post and CRO carved on a tree. He believed it was a sign they followed friendly natives south to the area near Cape Hatteras.

"I've located where CRO and CROATOAN are," Covey said. "We're never going to learn about this story if we're not looking in the right place."

Covey has written an account of his findings in a 64-page manuscript which includes a detailed description of his work, maps, surveys and drawings. He has posted it online at www.melcovey.org and placed hard copies in the Outer Banks History Center, the Museum of the Albemarle and regional libraries.

"He corroborates what the old timers have been saying all along," said local historian Danny Couch. "They called it Indian Ridge."

Also called Indian Town, the settlement was lost over time as land was bought and sold.



Researchers with the Croatoan Archaeological Society have found hundreds of English artifacts from the late 1500s mingled with arrowheads and native stone tools on a site in Buxton, not far from Frisco. The site is part of the same ancient ridge that extends about four miles east to west from the Buxton dig to Indian Town described by Covey, Couch said.

The natives would have camped along that ridge possibly for centuries, but the main town was on the west side in modern day Frisco, Couch said.

Manteo befriended the Lost Colony settlers, traveled to England, returned and was baptized a Christian on Roanoke Island. It is believed the settlers sought refuge with Croatoan leader Manteo at his home village on Hatteras Island.

Oral tradition says Manteo's mother permitted the English to live with them, Couch said. The Algonquin society was matriarchal.

"Women called the shots," Couch said.

Explorer John Lawson landed on the Hatteras shoreline in 1701 and wrote how the natives wore English clothes, had gray eyes and knew the name of Walter Raleigh.

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Evidence indicates some colonists also went inland. The First Colony Foundation has discovered evidence of English and natives living together at Site X in Bertie County. It recently became a state natural area of 1,000 acres in part because of its unique history.

But no archaeologists have dug at the Frisco site known as Indian Ridge. Discoveries there could rival the importance and international recognition of Jamestown, Covey said. A massive layer of shells indicates centuries of life there. And that the people feasted on the coastal bounty.

"These guys were not the skinny natives you see in the movies," Couch said.

Several people own parts of what would be the original grant, Covey said. He hopes land owners would permit archaeologists to dig there. He proposes starting with ground penetrating radar taken from an aircraft or drone to locate the highest concentration of life such as wells, work stations, living quarters and burial sites.

"This site is about more than the Lost Colony," he said.

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Tags **Lost Colony** **Frisco** **Buxton** **Hatteras** **John White** **Virginia Dare** **Manteo**

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