



Archaeology & The People of Mobile Bay

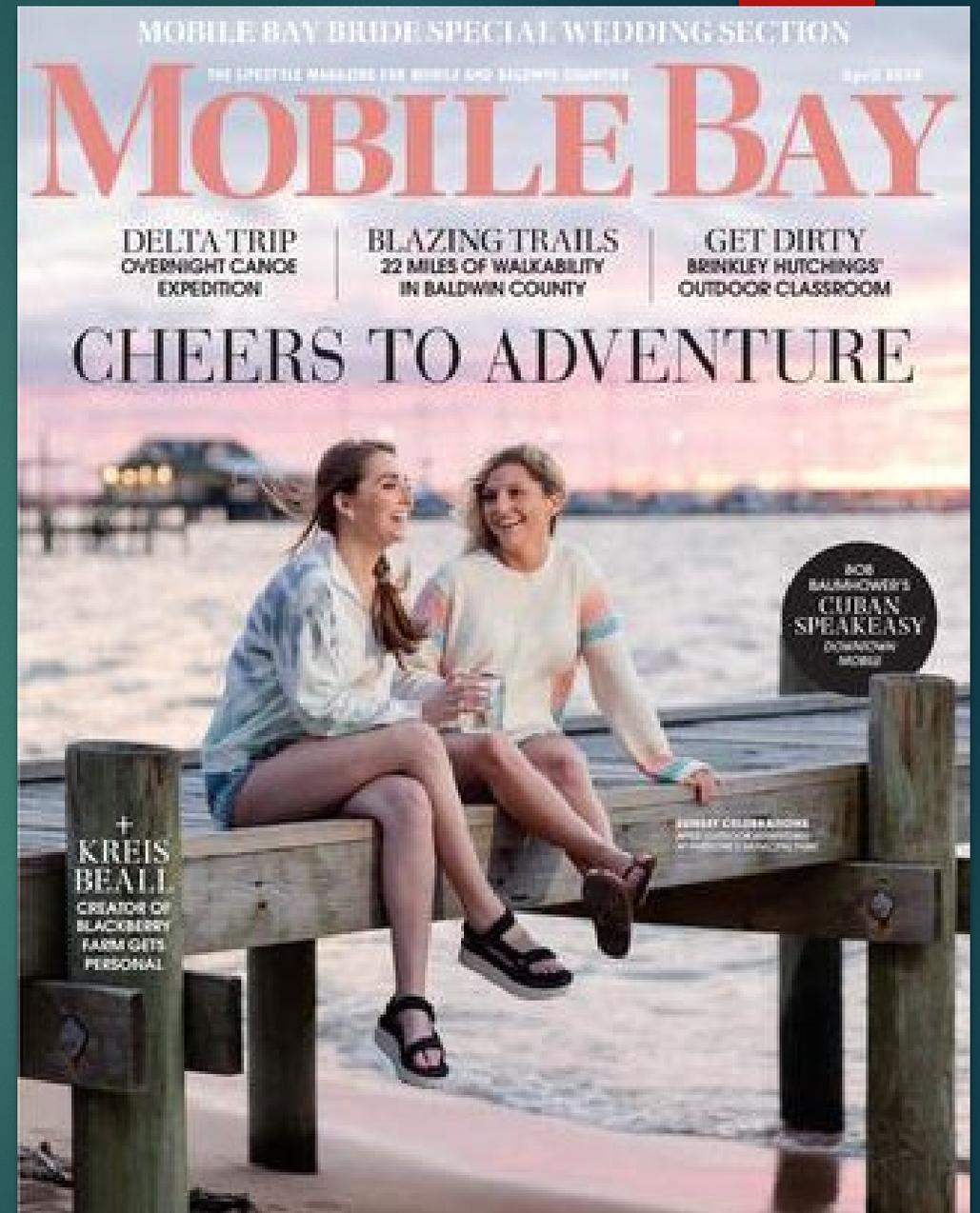
THE I-10 MOBILE RIVER BRIDGE PROJECT
INVESTIGATES THE PAST BEFORE BUILDING FOR
THE FUTURE

The vast expanse of Mobile Bay connects to the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta, the second largest in the United States. These geographic features are important today and have drawn people to live here for thousands of years. We refer to them as the People of Mobile Bay.

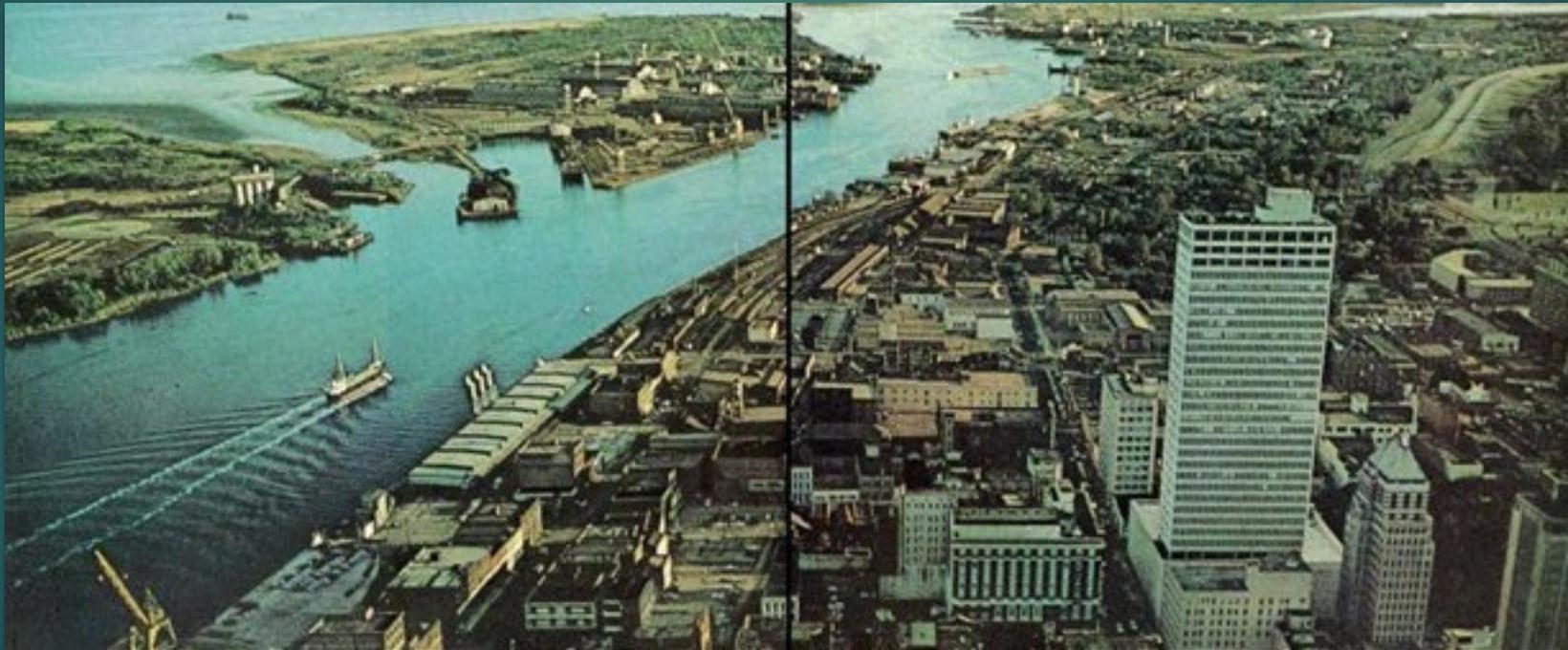


<https://www.worldatlas.com/bays/mobile-bay.html>

Today, the People of Mobile Bay number more than 200,000. The majority of inhabitants live and work in the city of Mobile for which the Bay provides jobs at the Port of Alabama, as well as in shipbuilding and related industries. The City of Mobile and the Eastern Shore are united by Mobile Bay as evidenced by the industries in and around it, as well as more figuratively by the publication of *Mobile Bay Magazine*. Published now for 50 years, this “lifestyle” magazine for Mobile and Baldwin counties includes articles and advertisements ranging from food to homes, and healthcare to local history.



Mobile Bay both connects the City of Mobile and the Eastern Shore as well as separates them. Over 50 years ago, *National Geographic* published an article entitled “Mobile: A City in Motion.” The author, William Graves states, “Dominating Mobile’s skyline, the new 33-story First National Bank Building lends a metropolitan look. A freighter gliding down the Mobile River passes some of the 33 cargo berths on the 2 1/2 –mile-long waterfront. The ship churns above the Bankhead Tunnel, which carries automobile traffic between downtown Mobile and the eastern bay shore. This year construction begins on two additional river tubes to serve future Interstate Highway 10, the broad unpaved swath cutting through the city...” (Graves 1968). Arguably, Mobile is no longer a “city in motion” with the traffic jams that regularly occur on the I-10 Bayway and Wallace Tunnel.



Graves, William, et al. "Mobile, Alabama's City in Motion." *National Geographic Magazine*, Mar. 1968, p. [368] +. National Geographic Virtual Library.

How did this all come about? What do we know about the lives of the people of Mobile Bay 50 years ago, 100 years ago, 1000 years ago, and beyond? Historic documents and oral histories only go back so far and only provide certain information. The materials made and used by the People of Mobile Bay in the past that remain today are called artifacts by archaeologists. These artifacts add to our knowledge and give us new insights into what life was like in the past.



The start of excavations at archaeological site.

The acquisition of land to build a new I-10 Mobile River Bridge, solve the current traffic jams, and make Mobile once again a “city in motion,” provides the opportunity to conduct archaeological research that will add to our knowledge of the people of Mobile Bay. Investigating the ancient past along the shores of Mobile Bay to the more recent past of the “Down the Bay” neighborhood, archaeologists will work to identify artifacts in context that provide the data for describing what life was like in the past. An artifact out of context is interesting but does not provide such data so the search is for undisturbed areas for detailed excavation. The archaeological investigations will cover a vast amount of time and diverse peoples, from ancient Native American sites to those at the time of contact with Europeans, and from colonial settlement through the mid-twentieth century.



Careful excavation of a brick feature.

New oral history studies and examination of historic documents will complement the archaeological fieldwork. Integrating three sources of information – archaeological, historical, and oral historical - using contemporary perspectives will allow fresh insights into the past. Look for opportunities to share your knowledge of Mobile's past through events and public outreach. Clearly, the people of Mobile do celebrate their history as evidenced by a recent web page stating “There is no question something joyful is occurring in Mobile. Fun, funky, and festive. Historic, hip, and happening. Or colorful, cool, and cultured. You can call this coastal town a lot of things when you have a vibrant 300 year old history...” We will be working to explore that history and honor the People of Mobile Bay.



From left to right, Paul Sledge and Delmas McCryndle are interviewed by Dr. Kern Jackson and USA student Ruby Staten.
<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/publicrelations/pressreleases/100421nehgrant.html>

Archaeological investigations for the I-10 Mobile River Bridge Project are being conducted by the Center for Archaeological Studies at the University of South Alabama (USA). Partnering with two private cultural resource management firms, Cedars Consulting and Wiregrass Archaeological Consultants, the work on 15 archaeological sites will take place over the coming months. The project will draw upon the expertise of a number of USA faculty members, including archaeologists, geographers, geologists, historians, and oral historians. This type of partnership and bringing together this range of expertise is a first of its kind in the state. The work is sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration and the Alabama Department of Transportation. The project will be reviewed by the Alabama Historical Commission.



Archaeological feature excavation and recording of findings.



As the work progresses, look for updates and public outreach to share the new findings of this exciting project investigating the People of Mobile Bay!

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