



Charleston County

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Inland Rice Fields Project website: <http://inlandrice.ccroadwise.org/>

County Project Teaches Significance of Historic Dikes Located in Palmetto Commerce Parkway Area

The citizens of Charleston County got a much needed, new road when [Palmetto Commerce Parkway](#) was constructed using funds from the [Transportation Sales Tax](#). And because the road crosses the site of former inland rice fields, where remnants of dikes are still visible more than 100 years later, citizens now also have the opportunity to learn about history through [Charleston County Government's Inland Rice Fields Project](#).

"As part of the construction of the Palmetto Commerce Parkway, we undertook an extensive project to document and preserve the history of inland rice fields in the Lowcountry," said [Kurt Taylor, Charleston County Administrator](#). "We have developed a website, a resource guide and a 'traveling trunk' of materials and curriculum that are already being used in our schools and branch libraries."

The County project is registered with the [State Historic Preservation Office](#), which is a part of the [South Carolina Department of Archives and History](#). In addition, the [S.C. Association of Counties](#) [recognized](#) the project with an honorable mention for the [J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award](#) during the association's [annual conference](#) last week.

"Our preservation project has become a model for how such historical features are documented," Taylor said. "The Inland Rice Fields Project has allowed Charleston County Government to demonstrate our commitment to preserve the heritage of the county and state."

The water dikes in the Palmetto Commerce Parkway area were once part of a large inland rice plantation that has not been used for well over a century. Archeologists studying the area concluded that the dikes on the project site were constructed in order to grow rice. When it rained, the dikes would keep water from rising creeks contained in the rice fields. When there was no rain, the enslaved people carried water from the surrounding creeks to water the fields.

The archeologists also indicated that the slaves who constructed the dikes were likely from Northern Africa, near Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone was used by slave traders as a point of departure for enslaved people being sent to many places around the world. The enslaved people sent to South Carolina were skilled in growing and harvesting rice.

The construction workers who were building Phase Two of the Palmetto Commerce Parkway were required to protect the rice dikes as much as possible. At the end of the project, a historical plaque was put in place. The dikes are on private property, so the County worked with the adjacent landowners to complete the study.

The County's project allows residents to learn how rice, grown with the knowledge and labor of thousands of enslaved Africans, created the Carolina Colony, how the technology for growing rice evolved, how rice influenced the culture and traditions of the Lowcountry, and how Charleston County works to protect and preserve important archaeological and historic resources in our community.

Background

- To protect our nation's heritage, Congress passed laws and regulations that require all cultural resources on federal lands such as national parks, national forests and military installations be protected and managed. Projects that use federal funds or require federal permits, such as highway construction, also must abide by these laws.
- Cultural resources are archaeological sites, historic buildings, cemeteries, battlefields, landscapes, historic structures, traditional cultural places and objects. They are the threads that tie the present to the past to create a national fabric that represents who we are as individuals, as a state and as a nation. In the South Carolina Lowcountry, cultural resources are also protected by the [Coastal Zone Management Act](#).

For additional information on the Inland Rice Plantation project, which includes archaeological findings near the Palmetto Commerce Parkway, visit <http://inlandrice.ccroadwise.org>.

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