



March 2023 Newsletter

Saving Angola: Community-based Archaeology as Grassroots Activism

By Uzi Baram

This article is Part I of a two-part feature about community activism and the archaeology of Manatee Mineral Spring. This article originally appeared in the 2021 issue of the magazine *Adventures in Florida Archaeology* published by the Florida Historical Society Archaeological Institute ([link](#)).

Read the full article below >>>

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Indigenous
Northeastern Florida

Florida Panhandle
Shipwreck Trail

Tomoka
Archaeology Project

2021 ADVENTURES IN FLORIDA ARCHAEOLOGY

Saving Angola
Community-based
Archaeology as
Grassroots Activism

FLORIDA HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE



EDITORS' NOTE



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As with everything in the past year, the covid pandemic upended archaeological research. Field schools were cancelled or postponed; contract firms worked on fewer infrastructure projects; and research-related travel came to a halt. However, while archaeologists worldwide groused about the pandemic's effects, the pause in field studies actually allowed folks to catch up on lab work, think about new ways to interpret data, and delve further into the link between history and archaeology.

In the fifty-plus years since Ivor Noël Hume proposed that "Archaeology is the handmaiden of history"—subsequently a much-debated concept within both disciplines, we have come to realize that archaeology and history go hand in hand. Archaeology makes history more tangible and reveals that literary and popular notions of historic events can be misleading. As Uzi Baram notes in his article about the Angola site, "History is written by the winners." Archaeology can support or refute historic documents. Even if the records are accurate, we only get the big picture, not the details. Archaeology supplies the context and the details.

Keith Ashley used Laudonnière's words to design a strategy to locate and interpret the Mocama town of Sarabay. He notes that, "Combining archaeology and historiography allows for a more nuanced reframing of conventional historical narratives based mostly on uncritical readings of biased and static descriptions and observations of Native peoples written by European chroniclers." Melissa Price reminds us that maritime heritage trails in Florida inspire modern explorers to learn about and protect our precious history—a lesson that also applies to terrestrial sites. The Gulf Coast

Digital History Project highlighted by KC Smith is a wonderful resource for researchers.

Fred Gaske's article illustrates how a seemingly unimportant artifact can tell a rich story and add new interpretation to a site. It also illustrates the importance of context within history and archaeology. The stencil plate's significance would have been lost had it been found on a roadside. Through context, Jon Endonino used excavated artifacts and ecofacts to propose a St. Johns River Valley origin for the Tomoka mound builders more than 50 km away.

Endonino also notes the changing environments that pre-contact and protohistoric populations experienced as sea level rise altered food resources and required inhabitants to adapt. The effect of sea level rise and other natural forces on archaeological remains also is shown at Clint's Scallop Hole, a 3,000-year-old site that is four miles offshore. The work there by Morgan Smith and Shawn Joy reconfirms that the state's submerged cultural heritage must be documented and protected. Nancy White's research on St. Vincent Island on Paleo to late prehistoric sites—which also reflect sea-level change—additionally reminds us that offhand historical comments, as were made when Narváez and crew stopped to "steal Indian canoes and food," enhance our archaeological interpretations.

We thank the researchers who contributed to this issue and everyone who protects, curates, and interprets our state's irreplaceable cultural heritage. We hope you enjoy this issue of the magazine.

SHARE YOUR RESEARCH AND PROJECTS IN *Adventures in Florida Archaeology*

We welcome feature articles and regional news that focus on academic research, CRM projects, new technologies, artifacts, historic sites and museums, and other aspects of archaeological study. Abstracts for proposed articles are due by November 15; finished articles and images are due by January 15. For information and submission details, contact coeditors **Dr. Anne Stokes**, anne@searchinc.com, or **KC Smith**, kcsmith614@hotmail.com.

ON THE COVER

A barrel well was among the important features uncovered during excavation of the Angola site in Bradenton. Once cleared of soil, water seeped into the well as it had in the past, reflecting the image of a modern archaeologist. *Courtesy of Sherry Robinson Svekis*

BACK COVER

NOAA archaeologists record two shipwreck sites in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. *Courtesy of Brenda Altmeier (top) and Matt Lawrence (bottom)*

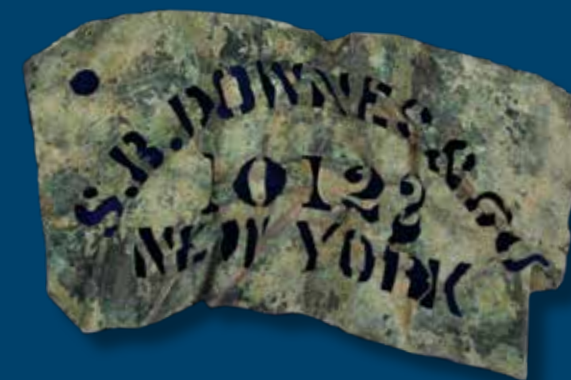


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SAVING ANGOLA

Community-based Archaeology as Grassroots Activism

This article is Part I of a two-part feature about community activism and the archaeology of Manatee Mineral Spring. Part II will appear in Adventures in Florida Archaeology in spring 2022.

It was cause for celebration when, in February 2019, the City of Bradenton announced that a small park in northeast Bradenton would become the eastern terminus for Riverwalk, a successful recreational and entertainment district along the Manatee River. The park already was a historic site, with cultural landscapes that began in pre-Columbian times and moved forward to embrace an early nineteenth-century maroon community and an 1840s pioneer settlement that became the Village of Manatee and, eventually, the City of Bradenton. Plans included signage about the history of the site, which is located near Manatee Mineral Spring, a natural feature used by countless people over time before it was capped in the 1980s. The Riverwalk expansion meant that more residents and visitors would learn the history and heritage of the region while enjoying views of the Manatee River. In addition, Reflections of Manatee Inc., a small but determined, nonprofit historic preservation organization, likely would increase visitation to its three historic houses with exhibits.

For more than two decades, Reflections of Manatee volunteers have organized public heritage events on the property, and in 2013, the organization installed twelve interpretative signs about the varied histories by the spring. Nonetheless, while the new gazebo was pretty, the nearby sugar cane field was interesting, and the Black Bead-Cats Claw Tree was a National Champion Native Tree, few people had reason to come to the



LEFT: Funding from the City of Bradenton facilitated extensive excavation at Manatee Mineral Spring in January 2020. Courtesy of Kimley-Horn

park. The proposed landscape plan showed Manatee Mineral Spring flowing into a pond and streaming into the Manatee River, with lagoons to address rising sea levels. It was a beautiful vision for a renewed park—an image of spring waters being released, decades after the spring had been capped.

However, as the archaeologist who announced that traces of the early nineteenth-century maroon community of Angola rested underground near the spring, I was concerned. Would the archaeological record be destroyed by the transformation of the park landscape?

Luckily, the material record has been recovered and saved, through excavations funded by the City of Bradenton. More than a decade of public education programs contributed to grassroots support for archaeological excavations that led to saving Angola. Some activities brought large crowds to the park, and others attracted only a handful. Some received broad media coverage, and others were enjoyed only by those who attended. The point is, partners offered grassroots support for archaeological excavation and analysis that led to the study and saving of Angola.

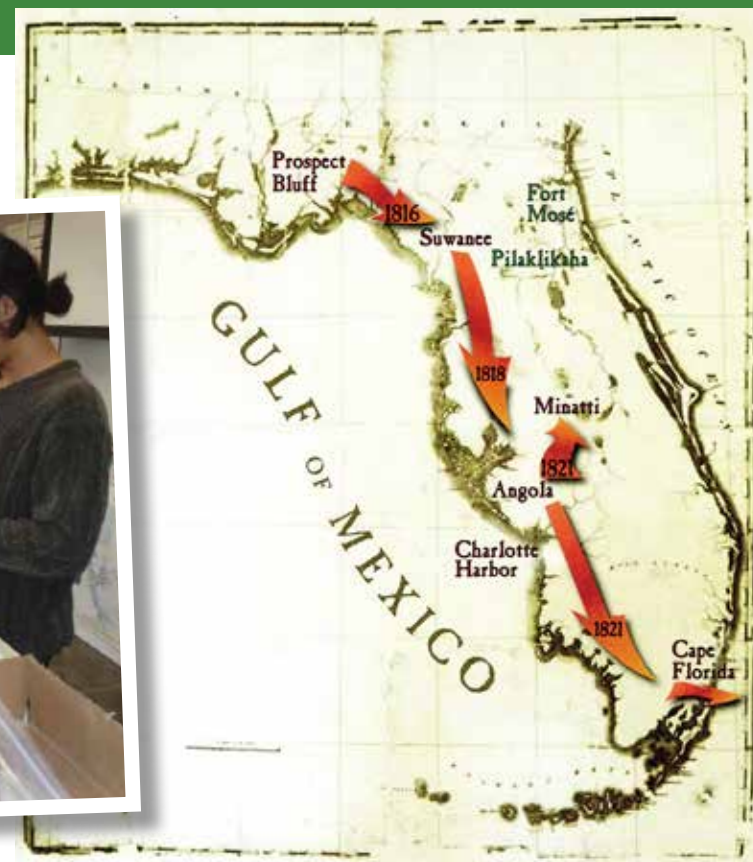
Community-based archaeology: radical openness

I teach at a residential liberal arts college, where faculty members write narrative evaluations for undergraduates in their courses, and undergraduates are offered research opportunities. Because this spirit of intellectual adventure opens possibilities, I was able to create and direct the New College Public Archaeology Lab (NCPAL) as a place of “radical openness.” I took that expression from bell hooks, the black feminist intellectual who used it for a 1989 essay about space and location. In practice, this meant that NCPAL projects across Sarasota and Manatee counties would confront and expose racism and inequities in all aspects of the archaeological process—from background research and collaborative approaches to creating a research design to encouraging public observation and participation in excavations and laboratory work, as well as partnerships and creativity for representing insights and findings. The concept of radical openness shifts research to a future tense, encouraging participants to find ways to contribute to removing silences and preserving heritage, so archaeology can offer possible, productive futures for all. “Looking for Angola” became the hallmark project for this approach at NCPAL.



FAR LEFT: In 2013, Reflections of Manatee installed interpretative signs at the park, including one titled “Angola: A Haven of Freedom” that described the maroon community. Courtesy of Uzi Baram

LEFT: Members of the public enjoyed a tour of the site as part of the public education program. Courtesy of Karen Willey



Angola on the Manatee River: The Search and Recognition

The cliché about history is that it has been written by the winners. The courageous, determined people who resisted enslavement by escape and uprising rarely are found in the archival record, especially in their own voice. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Spanish *La Florida* offered a haven for self-emancipated people of African heritage and their allies who fought the United States and its slave regime. The history of Fort Mose is pieced together by archival and archaeological evidence. The US military and congressional accounts are the main sources for the July 1816 destruction of the maroon stronghold on the Apalachicola River at Prospect Bluff. US army records for the 1818 Battle of Suwannee document the maroon hamlets associated with the Seminole settlement Bowlegs Town. However, for the haven at the Manatee River, there are only scraps of archival evidence of the community destroyed in an unauthorized slave raid in summer 1821. Historian Canter Brown Jr. and anthropologist Rosalyn Howard were able to analyze those archives and learned that some maroons had escaped the destruction, eventually finding liberty in the British Bahamas. Dr. Brown published his findings in a 1990 *Tampa Bay History* article and Dr. Howard in 2013 in *Florida Historical Quarterly*.

Meanwhile, journalist and community activist Vickie Oldham wanted the history to be better known and created an interdisciplinary research team to find the location of the maroon community; hence, the Looking for Angola project was born. The team included Dr.

Brown; Professor Terrance Weik, with his experience on maroon sites; Dr. Howard, who performed participant-observation research with Black Seminoles in the Bahamas; Louis Robinson of the Manatee County Schools; and me.

Fifteen years ago, the information on Angola—a name found in the Spanish Land Claims records for the area by the Manatee River, then known as the Oyster River—offered only hints of what the community was like. Historical archaeology provided a pathway that united the documentary record, archaeological investigations, historical geography, and collaboration with descendants, all of which suggested traces of Angola by Manatee Mineral Spring in east Bradenton, on the south side of the Manatee River. The model for the marronage has its origins starting in the 1770s as a small interior settlement partnered with Cuban fishing ranchos on the Gulf coast. With the destruction of the Prospect Bluff fort in 1816, British ships brought some survivors to safety at Angola while others escaped south to Bowlegs Town. After the 1818 clash with US military forces at Suwannee, even more survivors came, and the community, spread across the south side of the Manatee River and down to Sarasota Bay, may have numbered more than 700 occupants. These maroons regarded themselves as British subjects, as promised at the Prospect Bluff fort. The material evidence around Manatee Mineral Spring consisted of late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century British mass-produced goods. With the destruction of the Prospect Bluff community, some of the inhabitants were taken into captivity; others escaped to the interior, later contributing to the uprising

FAR LEFT: The New College Public Archaeology Lab serves as the processing lab for the excavated materials.

LEFT: Map showing the movement of freedom-seeking people across Florida.

RIGHT: Many of the ceramic and glass fragments found around Manatee Mineral Spring were of British origin.

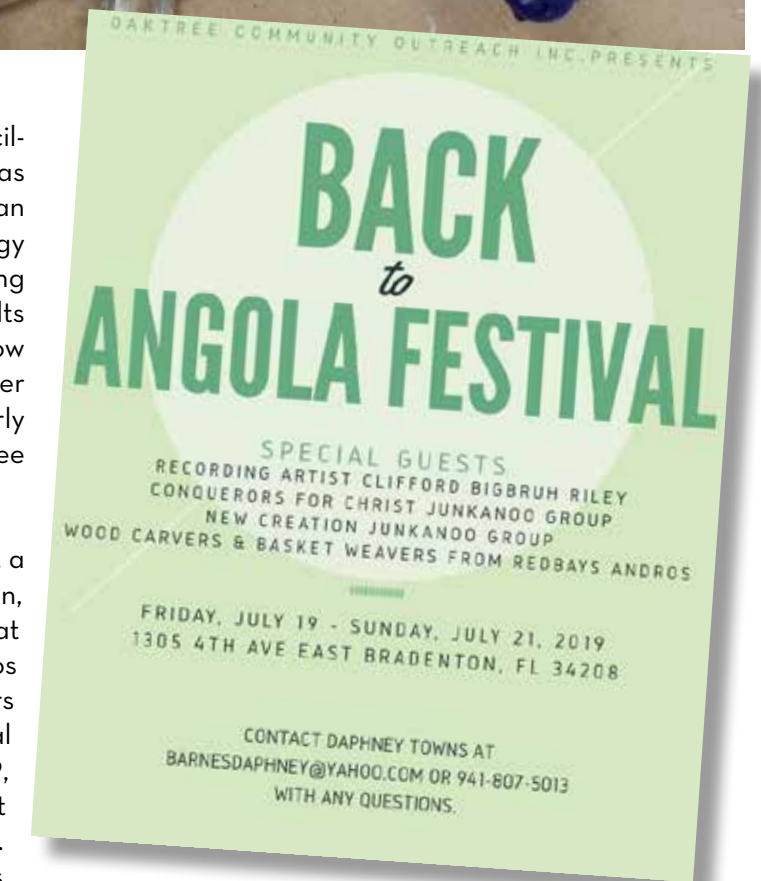
BOTTOM, RIGHT: The Back to Angola festival helped to energize community interest in the site.

Images courtesy of Uzi Baram

known as the Second Seminole War (1835–42); and others reached the British Bahamas, where their descendants have lived in freedom on Andros Island.

Looking for Angola ensured that public outreach centered all of the research. The program began with a public presentation in 2005, during which project scholars asked the 200 people attending the Florida Humanities Council-funded event what they prioritized. The answer was educating the children. That feedback sustained an array of programs. Initially, a shovel test pit strategy was employed, but I decided to use remote sensing and strategically chosen excavation units. The results came together in 2014, with a research report—now on file with the Florida Department of State Master Site File—that demonstrated the presence of the early nineteenth-century maroon community by the Manatee Mineral Spring in east Bradenton.

The archaeological success inspired Daphney Towns, a Bahamian from Andros Island who lives in Bradenton, to create a Back to Angola festival in July 2018 that brought her kin and friends from Red Bays, Andros Island in the Bahamas, to celebrate their ancestors on the land where they found liberty. That first festival led to a second Back to Angola Festival in July 2019, for what seemed like a promising annual event, but the COVID-19 pandemic canceled plans for 2020. However, media attention for Back to Angola festivals





ABOVE & LEFT: Realizing that excavation at Manatee Mineral Spring would yield evidence of Angola and other historical settlements, Bradenton city officials agreed to sponsor the excavation. *Photos courtesy of Uzi Baram*

animated a successful application to the Network to Freedom, the National Park Service Underground Railroad commemoration, for Manatee Mineral Spring. In addition, community support and funding allowed Reflections of Manatee Inc., to open a visitors' center. Its inaugural exhibit focused on the early nineteenth-century, freedom-seeking people on the Manatee River. The combination of the festivals, visitors' center, and Network to Freedom designation took the community-based program to a lively, empowering level, with local residents and descendants coming together to honor the history of this group of maroons. The public archaeology program had met its goal of breaking the silence over the history of maroons on the Manatee River.

In February 2019, local officials announced that Riverwalk, a 1.5-mile-long park on the south side of the Manatee River, operated by the City of Bradenton and the nonprofit Realize Bradenton, would be expanded

to Manatee Mineral Spring. Open since 2012, Riverwalk is a popular strolling and gathering place, and its expansion was widely welcomed. The plans included uncapping the spring and allowing its waters to flow into a pond and then to the river along with other water features. However, the good news spawned a big question: What would become of the adjacent archaeological record, with its potential insights into the Angola community?

Meeting the Challenge: The Groundwork with Reflections of Manatee Inc.

After hearing about the potential transformation of the landscape by Manatee Mineral Spring, I turned to statewide colleagues for advice and support. With the park owned by the city, would there be any excavation? In 2016, a contract archaeology firm conducted a Phase I survey right next to the park and concluded that there were no significant remains.

Founded in 1997, Reflections of Manatee Inc., had purchased the land by Manatee Mineral Spring to protect against its potential development. By organizing an assortment of festivals, historic demonstrations,



LEFT: Among the features recovered was a relatively intact barrel well.

BELOW: This unusual G-shaped belonging may have been placed ritually in a small pit under the floor of a structure.

Photos courtesy of Uzi Baram

archaeological training, and tours, Reflections combined research and public outreach to encourage interest—initially, in the 1840s Village of Manatee, the Seminole War era-Branch Fort, and the 1860s Curry family households. With the Looking for Angola program, the organization added the maroon history in its outreach and also expanded interest in the pre-Columbian Native American heritage on the land.

My small-scale excavations with New College of Florida students and the Time Sifters Archaeology Society, the regional chapter of the Florida Anthropological Society, were met with gracious hospitality, including lemonade and peanut butter sandwiches. Each excavation welcomed community members to ask questions and the local media to document the work, with a surprisingly large number of newspaper and television stories for our excavations in 2008, 2009, and 2013. I made sure to share results with community members and the media, which I know today was a wise move. At the onset of our work, I was making transparent the process of asking research questions; trying to understand why we were recovering early nineteenth-century, British mass-produced goods; and weighing competing interpretations. New College students came into the New College Public Archaeology Lab, opened in 2010, and contributed to the process of making sense of the geographic, archival, and excavation evidence. If I was wrong about the finds indicating maroons closely aligned with the British military, many would know.

A productive consequence of radical openness became the

teamwork among community members and organizations to locate a solution. Constructive conversations during spring 2019 convinced the city manager and the city commissioners that the potential for recovering material remains of Angola as well as the other settlements by the spring was worthwhile. An agreement between Reflections of Manatee Inc. and the City of Bradenton, along with the community interest and media stories, led to the city funding excavations to recover the history by Manatee Mineral Spring. Even after the local newspaper reported the cost, public responses were only positive. That productive spirit led to support from landscape architects that included survey information and drone footage.

Excavations and Lab Analysis

In 2019, the Manatee Mineral Spring park consisted of a historical marker, heritage interpretation signage for the many histories of the property, a round concrete cap over the spring, a gazebo, and a grassy field. But the excavations were urban archaeology, needing to go through the previous twentieth-century urban neighborhood that had grown from the 1840s pioneering Village of Manatee. I led a superb team with Sherry Robinson Svekis as field director; a field crew of Jonathon Barkmeier, Gabriel Castaldi, Jessica Gantzer, Amy Gatenbee, Kelsi Kuehn, Jean Louise Lammie, and Heidi Miller (all from the University of South Florida anthropology program), Mary Maisel, Nicholas Frech (who brought experience with the descendant community), and Jason Brown, an Andros Island descendant, who joined us from his home in Atlanta. Richard West of Wetland Management Services provided expert backhoe work; Robert Bowers was our surveyor, and Jeff Williams provided site security. In addition, Jeff and Trudy Williams of Reflections of





LEFT: An open house during the excavation drew hundreds of visitors.

BELOW: Media coverage was vital to creating public interest and support.

Photos courtesy of Uzi Baram



Manatee Inc. offered local history and information about the specifics of the property; and local residents, including Jeff Moore, provided insights into the material record for the property. For more than a month, we excavated down to the water table, carefully recording the stratigraphy and associated finds and plotting the many features revealed by shovel scraping.

Predictably, the excavations were complicated, with intrusions and the challenges of the rising water table. The stratigraphy is complex, but the layers of cultural landscapes were visible through the central areas of excavation. For archaeologists, the postmolds were obvious evidence of former structures on the property; for the general public, the one major visible feature was a barrel well—once cleared of soil, the waters flowed upward as they had centuries ago. Ongoing analysis might provide a date at the early nineteenth century. The presence of a well so close to the spring is perplexing, but that is one of the joys of archaeology—figuring out the materiality of a cultural landscape.

Most features were postmolds, evidence of wooden structures. On the floor of one potential structure, deep down in the stratigraphy, two separate small pits contained, respectively, a flaked glass half-projectile point and an ornament. We are intrigued by the finds, suggestive of ritual placement. Nearby, a rectangular feature contained a complete skeleton of a dog. Field analysis suggests the presence of many more mammals, including cow, pig, and opossum, as well as marine life.

Most of the findings relate to the Village of Manatee, the successor settlement to the Angola maroon community. Funding from the Florida Division of Historical Resources facilitated lab work by Sherry Robinson

Svekis, Jean Louise Lammie, and Mary Maisel under my supervision at the New College Public Archaeology Lab along with volunteers. The finds include ceramics dating from the eighteenth to twentieth century, clay tobacco pipe fragments—a wide range of buttons, glass bottles and many glass fragments some of which were flaked, and metal items consisting mostly of nails, but also some materials that are still being studied for identification. A complete catalogue is being compiled as part of the report for the Florida Master Site File.

Exhibiting Findings, with Community Partners

During the January 2020 excavations, the project invited media outlets to report on the research process, and we organized events that included a successful Martin Luther King Jr. Day open house. The number of media stories was impressive, disseminating information about the excavations and initial findings. Anticipating lab work at New College Public Archaeology Lab, I had hoped to have an open lab for Time Sifters members as well as students, faculty, and staff at New College of Florida; however, the COVID-19 pandemic restricted access. As the reasonable alternative, videos produced by several community partners and social media shared the process of research, and journalists again reported on the community-based effort.

RIGHT: Thousands of small metal objects were recovered during the excavation.

BELOW: To facilitate access to the lab work, the Florida Public Archaeology Network-West Central Region created a video available online.

Photos courtesy of Uzi Baram



We were lucky that the excavations were completed in the last month of the *annus horribilis* of 2020. The report on the excavations and initial lab analysis is on file with the Florida Master Site File in Tallahassee, and I have given several virtual presentations on what the research team has found out about daily life for the early nineteenth-century, freedom-seeking people on the Manatee River. There is much more the research team and its supporters are doing to disseminate the general history, the heritage, and the specific findings. And the research continues, with scholarly promise of more and expansive insights into the lives of the maroons by Manatee Mineral Spring. The support from descendant and local communities and academics who are mindful of racism, both at universities and beyond, has been crucial to recovering a haven of resistance to slavery and ensuring the saga of freedom from under the streets of Bradenton is widely shared. Radical openness facilitates good research.

Dr. Uzi Baram is professor of anthropology and founding director of the New College Public Archaeology Lab at New College of Florida in Sarasota. Professor Baram focuses research and pedagogy on identity issues involving race and ethnicity, legacies of colonialism, and the intersections of archaeology and heritage tourism.

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