



U. S. COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY.

J. M. Thorn, Superintendent.

State: *Louisiana.*

DESCRIPTIVE REPORT.

Topographic Sheet No. 1822
+ part of No. 1823.

LOCALITY:

Atchafalaya River.

1888.

CHIEF OF PARTY:

C. H. Sinclair.

Give here full address to which reply should be sent:

S.W. Cor. Fourteenth and P. Sts. N.W.
P. O. Station D.

U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey,

Washington, D. C.

May 10th, 1888.

Descriptive Report for lower topogr. Sheet
(Sheet No. 1) of the "Atchafalaya River", from "At-
chafalaya Bay" to "Sweet Bay Lake".

The general character of the shores of the "Atchafalaya River", one of the great delta branches of the "Mississippi", is flat and of a uniform broadness from "Sweet Bay Lake" down to its mouth, a distance of ten miles (statute). The alluvial lands embraced by this section are of a boggy and marshy character, of a dark colour and being covered with a thick growth of wild cane or reeds, attaining a height of 12 to 30 feet, they bar the traversing of these lowlands, even where the ground is sufficiently hard to permit walking over. These wild cane fields are frequently burnt down to a great extent by hunters in the fall of each year, which procedure not only facilitates

the, traveling across these plains, but as such wet sections are covered with a luxurious growth of vegetation in the following spring, these areas afford good grazing for cattle and fine fields for the browsing of the southern deer and other game. Notwithstanding the general unproductiveness of these vast lowlands, the rich alluvium soil of the Atchafalaya marshes could be, by proper drainage, turned into exuberantly fertile fields, as they are intersected by a close network of sloughs or "Bayous", most of which have a good depth for navigating purposes and all being connected with the "Atchafalaya River" they form the natural means of communication.

After once piercing through the layer of roots and stratum of vegetable matter ("floating turf") which covers this rich soil, ^{this} it can be traversed to any depth without offering much resistance. Some few exceptions from this general soft character are found in the area referred to in this report, forming so called "Islands", which isolated spots, however, cover but relatively small areas and as they can be

cultivated without taking recourse to draining they are without exception utilized by settlers. "Deer"- and "Shell Islands" are the most prominent ones of these exceptionally hard bottomed localities, their verdant trees and orange groves forming a pleasing contrast to the far extended marshes, covered with the yellow coloured wild cane, they owe their existence to an aggregation of clam shells with very little or no sand admixed. At "Shell Island" this bed of white shells appears on the surface, conditioning the white colour of the beach on the N side of "Shell Island Inlet" and here also we find quite a little knoll, some twenty feet high (above low water) composed solely of this calcareous material. This huge pile is of quite an age, judging from the presence of two considerable old mosscovered live oak trees, standing upon the same. It is generally believed, that these masses of shells, surrounded by marshes are the remains of often repeated meetings of Indian tribes at these places during their fishing expeditions to

the lower "Atchafalaya". There are many reasons leading to doubts, that nature should have intended a hand towards making these calcareous deposits at the places in question and the supposition that living Indian fishermen were instrumental in depositing these shells is strongly supported by the frequent findings of fragments of Indian pottery among the shells of the "Shell Island Inlet" beach. The little knoll (under the northernmost building) mentioned above is supposed to be a place of burial of Indians, as some well preserved human bones (Femur, Fibula and Tibia bones) are found among the shells on the N.W. slope of this pile, which does not appear to have ever been opened for a closer investigation in this respect.

At "Deer Island" the shells are visible on the surface in a few places only, the rest being covered ^{and intermixed} with a dark coloured earth similar to that found in the adjoining marshes, this circumstance is probably due to a more thorough and prolonged cultivation.

At "Shell Island" the once large and well yielding grove of orange trees has been destroyed by frost in the past decade (at which time nearly all the groves in this section of Louisiana suffered severely by the unprecedented cold weather), still there are some fruit bearing guinea and peach trees there at the present time, while a new grove of orange trees, quite recently planted, seems to promise well for the future. The trees skirting the shores of the "Atchafalaya" (indicated on the chart) are willows, live oak, honey locust and ash trees, the first tree dominating on the lower part of the river. Sand is rarely seen along the shores of this part of the river and found only in a small quantity at a place opposite "Sword Point" (f. W. of "Double") indicated on the W. side of the "Atchafalaya" on the chart.

"Deer" and "Shell Islands" are inhabited by fishermen, the next dwelling above these places is at "Ratcliffe", these people descend on "Morgan City" to dispose of their

fish catchings.

"Shell Island" is provided with a Tower or lookout, built by the "Morgan Steam Ship Co." and it is connected with this company's telegraph office at "Brashear" or "Morgan City" by a single wire, the main direction of which telegraph line is indicated by some poles (mostly iron on account of the prairie fires) located on Shell No 1. Up to the early Spring of this year there was a telegraph operator stationed at "Shell Island", whose duty it was to announce the arrival of every Ste., belonging to the Morgan S. S. Co., communicating to Morgan City the character and amount of their cargo in order to have a gang of "stow-aways" in readiness for un- and re-loading the vessel at her arrival in Morgan City.

The shoreline given on the chart is the mean low water line and the wet marsh indicated outside of this, consists of a growth of "cattail", sufficiently dense to make it difficult for a small boat to be

forced through the passage up to the shore. The "snags" shown on Sheet No. 1 are visible at low water and when seen in numbers they give a general idea of the extent of mudbanks. The numerous "wrecks" located on the chart are remains of coal barges, which in the course of time have been carried down stream from the upper River, (by freshets and other causes) where numbers of them are tied up annually, after their contents have been disposed of, and where they are held for sale, having a value only as old lumber.

Whenever the shore presents a very ragged and jagged contour it is a sign of it's being gradually eaten away by the constant and unrestrained influence of waves and ebb tide, the shore being generally so low at such places as to be partly submerged by flood tide, especially when aided by a favorable direction of the wind.

The three lower "bush stakes" in midstream (W. of "Cut off Bayou") are on the E. side

but very near the edge of the main channel. The lower two of the next three above these (near and S.W. of "Sword Pt.") indicate the W. edge of the channel, while the upper one of these three is S. of the entrance channel to "Bayou Shaffer" and E. of the main-river channel. These stakes are characterized by a tuft of palmetto leaves fastened on their tops and they are counterparts to those used by the Morgan L. S. Co. to stake out their ship channel through the "Atchafalaya Bay."

Most of the other "stakes" located on the chart have been erected by fishermen at various times, and some few have been placed by loggers as a warning of shallow places.

Wherever palmetto growths are indicated, they are a criterion of a hard and more elevated riverbank, than the general river, the shores of the lower Atchafalaya, still this hard character does not extend inland, but only forms a narrow skirt along the river bank at such places. Altogether it is a well

observed fact that these wild cane marshes
grow softer and more humid with the in-
creasing distance from the shoreline.

J. N. Flemer,
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