U. S. COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY.

A. M. Thorne, Superintendent.

State: Louisiana.

DESCRIPTIVE REPORT.

Topographic Sheet No. 1822-1823.

Locality: Atchafalaya River.

1858.

Descriptive Report for lower topographical sheet (Sheet No. 1) of the "Atchafalaya River," from "Atchafalaya Bay" to "Sweat 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 "Sweat 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 color 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
west 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 unsymmetrical,
tunes of these vast lowlands, the rich alluvial
vines foil of the Atchafalaya marshes could be,
by proper drainage, turned into excel lent,
artificial 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 dratation of vegetable matter ("floating top")
which covers this rich soil, it can be traversed
to any depth without offering much resi
rance. Some few exceptions from the general
soft character are found in the area referred
to in this report, forming so called "Islands,
which isolated peats, however, cover not re-
latively small areas and as they can be
cultivated without taking recourse to drift, since they are without exception utilized by setlers. "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 colored 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 ancient age, judging from the presence of two venerable old moss-covered live oak trees, standing upon the same. It is generally believed that these masses of shells, which constitute the remains of often repeated meetings of Indian tribes at this place during their fishing expeditions to
the tower "Aachajalaya." There are many reasons leading to doubts that nature alone
have tended a hand towards making
these calcareous deposits at the places in
question and the supposition that bea-
curing Indian fishermen were instrumen-
tal in depositing these shells is strongly sup-
ported by the frequent findings of fragmen-
tal Indian pottery among the shells of
the Shell Island Inlet beaches. The little
Knoll (under the northernmost building) men-
tioned above is supposed to be a place of
burial of Indians, as some well prese-
vred human bones (Femur, Tibial, and Fibula
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 in-
vestigation in this respect.

At Deer Island the shells are visible
on the surface in a few places only, the rest
and ultimate
being covered with a dark colored earth
similar to that found in its adjoining
marshes. This circumstance is probably due
to a more thorough and prolonged cultiva-

At "Hull 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 quince 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 flanking the shores of the "Atchafalaya" (indicated on the chart) are willows, live oak, honey locust and ash trees, the first predominate 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 "Ardor Point" (f.w. of "Double") indicated on the W. side of the "Atchafalaya" on the chart.

"Deer" and "Hull Island" are inhabited by fishermen, the next dwelling above these places is at "Ratcliffe"; these people depend 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 the Company's telegraph office at "Brasher's" or Morgan's City by a single wire, the main division of which telegraph line is indicated by some poles (mostly iron on account of the prairie fires) located on the 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 steamer belonging to the Morgan S. S. Co., communicating to Morgan's City the character and amount of their cargo in order to have a gang of "swab-away" in readiness for use and re-loading the vessel at her arrival in Morgan's City.

The shoreline given on the chart is the mean low water line and the wet meadow 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 same up to the shore. The 'brage' shown on that Plate are visible at low water and when near ice runners they give a general idea of the extent of mudbanks. The numerous 'bucks' noted on the chart are remains of coal-bogs, gyre, which in the course of time have been carried down stream from the upper river, (by freshets and other causes) where numbers of these 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.

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

The three lower "bird staks" in question (W. of "Out of 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 Sward Pt.) indicate the
W. edge of the channel, while the upper one
of these three is S. of the entrance channel
to 'Bayou Steerre' and S. of the main-size
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 S.S. Co. to stake out
their ship channel through the 'Athopa-
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.

Whenever palmetto growth is indicated,
they are a criterion of a hard and more
elevated riverbank, than the general river
shy places of the lower Athopa river. Still this
hard character does not extend inland, but
only forms a narrow plain along the river
banks at floodplaces. Otherwise it is a pile
observed fact that these wild cane marshes grow softer and more humid with the ice, creating distance from the shoreline.

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