Island hunting: a field guide

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ISLAND HUNTING: A FIELD GUIDE

A Thesis,

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

by

Kit French
B.F.A., Virginia Commonwealth University, 2008
A.A., The Art Institute of Washington, 2002
August 2011
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you. That sentiment does not seem to even begin to describe my gratitude towards those people, who pushed, pulled, agitated and championed my desire to be an artist. To the family I am eternally grateful to be a part of; you have indelibly shaped who I am and remnants of each of you can be found in my work. To my teachers, please know your words and character, your time and discipline have been and will continue to be inspirational.
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ABSTRACT

The Island Hunter Association and this field guide are elaborate constructions that assist you in looking at familiar places in a new way. Following the methods and procedures I’ve outlined in this field guide you will become an expert in tracking the many incarnations of Islands. Fact and fiction, real and psychological, Islands are all around.
MISSION STATEMENT

The Island Hunter Association is dedicated to documenting sudden Island occurrences in the immediate surroundings. We could hunt for many things, but we hunt Islands. As Island Hunters we become experts in tracking their many incarnations, believing that Islands are not just fixed by geographic location but have the ability to vacillate from past to present and fact to fiction. Through the immediacy of experience we reacquaint ourselves with familiar landscapes and trace the transient, indefinable, exhilarating nature of becoming explorers in our own environments.
HOW TO USE THIS FIELD GUIDE

As an Island Hunter in Baton Rouge, Louisiana I have written this Field Guide to assist new Hunters in the objectives and methods of Island Hunting. The first section will describe the history and circumstances that contributed to forming the Island Hunter Association. The second section will outline how to become an Island Hunter reviewing the proper uniform and fieldwork methods. Finally the third section, will document a number of recent discoveries made in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

It is my hope that you will use this Field Guide as a constant reference in your journey to becoming an Island Hunter. As new techniques, terrain and Islands are discovered and explored your input as a member of the I.H.A. community is greatly appreciated.

Figure 2– Frank S. French the first Island Hunter.
CHAPTER ONE: HOW I BECAME AND ISLAND HUNTER

Introduction

For most part of my life I’ve lived in land locked suburbs or city centers where the only sight of “paradise” was achieved though daily Google searches. The standard wallpaper on my desktop PC was what I believed to be a beautiful island paradise. I was situated under the protective shade of the palm tree while looking out to the crystal blue waters of some unknown place. This was the perfect go-to image of an Island: white sand, palm trees, coconuts. I was lost in this image of escape, while simultaneously fascinated and absorbed by Island tales. Stories like the mutiny on the HMS Bounty and subsequent settling of Pitcairn Island, to the parable of Atlantis; in each the Island becomes the embodiment of an ideal place. Fact or fiction, these stories established a longing in me; a longing to play the part of adventurer, discover far off places and excavate the artifacts of alternative histories. However, I realized I lacked the resources to get to or the training to survive this mysterious and magical place I would discover. I was not deterred by this realization. I then decided I needed to rediscover the place I live in, Baton Rouge, Louisiana and imbue it with the fabulous fiction that was afforded to the story of Pitcairn Island and Atlantis.

My First Find

My first expedition appeared most unexpected by way of a conversation about University and City Park Lakes with a local Baton Rougian. We were joking about the Lakes less than perfect water quality, the probability in the appearance of three eyed catfish and how I noticed people normally jog around the lake but rarely dare venture into the interior. This comment sparked her recollection of an island in the lake where kids used to party. This statement perplexed me, because I live in the State Street neighborhood that borders the lakes to the East and had never seen an island. However, that didn’t mean it couldn’t be found or didn’t exist.

Driven by the prospect of discovering this Island I began conducting research in the Louisiana Archives Photo Database. I came across a series of photographs that documented the creation of the lakes in 1942 by the Works Progress Administration learning that a cypress swamp once inhabited that portion of land. Being that I live and drive by the lakes everyday some photographs seemed familiar. Flipping through, I paused on the image of two women canoeing. (Figure 2)
At first I mostly looked at the two women, but quickly noticed a small island in the middle right corner. “Could it be true?” “Could I have possibly missed it for the past three years?” It was no longer a passing story. I now had photographic evidence that the island possibly existed. The anticipation of embarking on my first real adventure was almost overwhelming. My destination was right outside my door, in a man-made lake only six feet deep; not exactly the high seas but that was a matter of perception. I enlisted the help of documentarian Skye Erie, and canoe in tow, we started hunting for this lost Island. After days of hunting we had still hadn’t found the island, concluding it had been lost to time or to some epic party that resulted in it’s sinking. During this expedition I took water and satin samples and collected artifacts in an attempt to record empirical data about the lake. The artifacts collected appeared dark green from exposure to lake water. A crankshaft, Dr. Pepper soda can circa 1995, plastic bag, a short length of plastic tubing and a crusty piece of rope all painted the picture of forgotten stewardship.

This experience confirmed my need to reintroduce myself to Baton Rouge. I wanted to continue hunting. I knew now that I could step out side my door and see things I had never noticed. I wanted to go further. I posed a question to myself. “Could I discover other Island occurrences in my own familiar geography?” “Did my routine allow me to look for these places or had I fallen for the ease of habitude?”
It was then I established The Island Hunter Association (I.H.A) for the purpose of housing research and findings. I envisioned members as hunters reconnecting back to a primal source, one associated with fervency and extreme focus. I defined the procedures and methods by co-opting methodology from Geography, Archeology, Anthropology, cartography and hunting with the determination that members become specialist of their own environments. The resulting collection, display and analysis of data lend credence to the fictional or fictitious realities of sites under investigation.

Finding an Island paradise like the one from my desktop computer was impossible, but being an Island Hunter is about momentarily suspending held beliefs about a place. As Yi-Fu Tuan professor emeritus of Geography at University of Wisconsin-Madison states, “realism may be necessary to survival, but unless people are also touched by fantasy, they risk imprisonment in their own narrow world.” (pg. 435) The abandonment of established assumptions allows Hunters to approach their landscape with a new set of eyes. Therefore, many types of Islands can be found in the immediate surroundings, you only have to hunt for them.

Welcome to the world of Island Hunting.
CHAPTER TWO: HOW TO BECOME AN ISLAND HUNTER

For millions of years we survived as hunters. In the few short millennia since our divorce from that necessity, there has been no time for significant biological change—anatomical, physiological or behavioral. Today, we have small hope of comprehending ourselves and our world unless we understand that man still, in his innermost being, is a hunter.

- Robert Ardrey
What Constitutes an Island?

The dictionary definition of an island is, “a tract of land completely surrounded by water.” (http://www.dictionary.com) However, figuratively it can resemble places of solitude, independence, myth, liberation and disillusionment, more precisely it is a matter of perception. Allowing many different interpretations to be included in your field research contributes to an understanding that Islands appear as a variety of physical and psychological manifestations.

Figure 5–Matt and Kit on an Island.
The Art of Wandering

It can be hard to see any newness in a familiar landscape. As a daily routine is established it is easy to become apathetic towards your surroundings and as Tuan states, “we no more notice the things that we habitually use than we do our own hands and feet when they are functioning” (463). Sights and sounds become normalized and are pushed to the periphery.

The first strategy employed in the reintroduction of an environment is a technique called dérive or drift. First developed by cultural theorist Guy Debord of the Situationist International (S.I). The S.I. was a loose collective of artists, writers and cultural agitators in 1960’s France that used interventionist tactics to redefine notions of landscape and culture. Debord’s “Theory of the Dérive” described it as:

“…one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.”

When drifting there is no set plan. However, it is a conscience act and serves as the primary means of mapping the environment. At this point in your training you are not yet hunting Islands but simply reacquainting yourself with your surroundings. It can be helpful to ask yourself simple questions like: Is there a sidewalk? Does this dictate where you are allowed to walk or are you walking in the street? Do fences keep you in, or out of certain places? Can you find the locations where people have made their own shortcuts, defying the attempts of urban planning? Each time you drift it will be different; each time go a bit further. Open fields, strip malls, crowded cities and repetitious suburbs can all be considered training sites.

Zone of Discovery

Once you have completed the drift training and successfully mapped your environment it is I.H.A procedure to establish the Zone of Discovery (Z.D). You will determine the size (2 feet, 1 mile, 10 miles etc.) of the Z.D. but it must radiate from a central point. The location of the central point is determined by your familiarity with the location. Selecting a central point and demarcating a Zone of Discovery will give consistency, thoroughness and focus to your expeditions.

Here is an example of the Z.D. used when I conducted expeditions in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The Island Hunter Headquarters on Ivanhoe Street was used as the central point, with a Z.D. circumference of one mile.
Uniform

Island Hunters are required to wear uniforms. They act as a visual certificate of legitimacy separating you from the general public and into a collective identity. A uniform is a simple device that calls attention to you, your actions and location.

Equally important is that Hunters be prepared for a variety of environmental conditions when conducting fieldwork. Here in South Louisiana weather can turn on a dime and before you know it you could be up to your knees in swamp water. Given that the highest point in Baton Rouge are the Indian Mounds (64 feet) on the LSU campus water can rise fast, even in this land-locked locality. If you find yourself in unpredictable rising water conditions it can be helpful to move to higher ground by: stepping onto the curb, standing your tippy-toes, asking for piggy-back ride to destination or fashioning a raft from plastic bottles.

Figure 7–I.H.A Uniform.
Figure 8–I.H.A Uniform breakdown.

1 Red I.H.A. insignia shirt
Made from breathable cotton, this shirt feature a collar and two mid length sleeves.

2 Camouflage hat with Panther Vision
This Panther Vision equip hat is made from sturdy triple weave camo-cotton. Laser sharp Panther Vision illuminates object 5-10 feet away. Does not attract Cougars.

3 Black Cotton Pant
Made from indestructible cotton/poly/silk blend, this pant features fifth pocket, button clasp and zipper fly.

5 Rain Boots
Made from 100% plastic. These boots keep out and in moisture, protecting feet from soggy terrain. Packaged in pairs.

6 Gear Bag and Flag
Made in the U.S.A. This gear bag can accommodate all types of I.H.A equipment with special holders for Finding Finger, and Toothbrush. Comes in Yellow and Bright Yellow.
Tools of the Trade

The following section will outline the proper equipment necessary for conducting fieldwork. Tools used by Island Hunters such as: shovels, grid markers, containment vessels, maps, and sediment sifters closely resemble those used by Archaeologist. However, Island Hunters also incorporate some Shamanistic art practices into fieldwork such as Smudging, which is the burning of sage as a cleansing ritual to release latent negative energy withheld by collected artifacts. Typher a contributing writer on allnatural.com and expert in the use and art of smudging states:

“Matter attracts energy. Whether it is electromagnetic, ionic, or emotional energy it will effect [sic], negatively or positively, whatever it is “clinging” to. Smudge and other form of incense are used to cleanse matter of negative energy fields as well as create and buildup positive ones.” (http://www.allnatural.com)

We must remember that every place has a history; the residue of past events permeates the artifacts we find. It is advised that a cleansing sage ritual be performed before each expedition and on collected artifacts. In addition, it is also logical to enlist the assistances of local psychics and conspiracy theorist when collecting research or mounting an expedition. Unlike the plausible reliability of the visible world, what we can’t see or have the ability to detect can lead us to finding synchronistic associations between seemingly disparate developments.

Below is an abbreviated list of tools used by Island Hunters.

Figure 9–I.H.A Tools.
List of Tools

**Atomizer** – *(pictured)* Shoots short puffs of air to move fine debris.

**Funnel** – Conical shape with short cylinder at bottom to shuttle aqueous or dry materials into containment receptacles.

**TomTom** – Global Positioning System.

**Cup Ruler** – Specialized for Daiquiri Island equip to measure small/medium and large cups.

**Drawing Template** – Made for expediting the logging process

**Yellow Rubber Excavation Gloves** – *(pictured)* Protects hands from environmental toxins when conducting field research.

**Yellow Artifact Handling Gloves** – Protects artifacts from damaging oils from hands.

**Brushes** – Large and small removes fine debris from delicate surfaces.

**Red Scope** – Detected infra red signatures from objects with thermo radiation.

**Ionic Column Artifact Markers** – *(pictured)* Marks the location of artifacts.

**Hand Shovel** – *(pictured)* Removes small debris from delicate surfaces and can reduce artifact contamination.

**Weather Radio** – Only picks up weather station.

**Grid Markers** – Used to set up 1’x1’ grid for excavations.

**Sunglasses** – Protects eyes from harmful UV rays and keeps you looking cool
Artifact Dowsing Rod or Finding Finger (*pictured*) – Handles are molded to fit the user. The tip of the finger contains gold from Howard Carter’s discovery of the Valley of the Kings. To correctly read the Finger Finder hold parallel to ground as the Finder picks up on energy from artifacts it begins to make a counter clockwise circular rotation. The rotation becomes greater the closer the fingertip comes to the artifact. Finger Finder can penetrate rock, ice, clouds, nuclear waste, frozen ground and water up to 3 meters deep.

Sunglasses (*pictured*) – Protects eyes from harmful UV rays and keeps you looking cool.

Fieldwork Logbook – Weather resistant logbook for recording field observations.

Compass – Essential to any expedition and hunting excursions.

Knife – Kept on person for defense and protection when in the field, also helpful when eating lunch.

Septuple Tone Wind Detector (S.T.W.D.) – an audible wind detection system. The S.T.W.D. should be set up at each site for proper wind detection.

Talismans (*pictured*) – This bundle of talismans features many different materials for warding off negative energies. Moon stone, Peridot, Amethyst, Evil Eye, Physic rabbit, Mystic Donut, and Skeleton Key.

Purifying Sage (*pictured*) – Bundle of purifying sage.

Contaminant Receptive Fabric for Stain Samples – This specially made cloth is used in collecting stains samples bodies of water. Samples are used to determine contamination of water sources.

Standard 12inch ruler – measures object up to twelve inches

Cup Ruler Specialized for Daiquiri Island equip to measure small/medium and large cups
**Drawing Template** – Made for expediting the logging process and encourages precision.

**Magnifying Glass** – 5X magnification for finding fine detail.

**String** – for map making and embroidery

**Wave gauge (pictured)** – To be used in logging the environmental conditions during shallow and deep-water excavations – a. small waves b. medium wave c. large (Hokusai waves).

---

**HOW TO USE I.H.A WAVE GAUGE**

![Wave Gauge Diagram]

**Figure 16–How to use Wave Gauge.**
Collecting Artifacts

I learned the correct way of conducting archaeological fieldwork while participating in a dig at Garfield Farm in LaFox Illinois. Built in the 1880’s Garfield Farm continued today as a working farm and interpretive historical site. As a member of the dig team I would help sift through buckets of raw earth in an attempt to find remnants of previous inhabitants. I quickly developed the haptic familiarity in discerning the differences between a natural rock and mortar from a building. Shards of glass, pieces clay pipe and pottery were seen as true finds, but when an obvious 70’s era RC Cola Can was sifted from the bucket it was immediately discarded as trash. It was then apparent to me that finding trash of a more foreign past was the Archaeologist only concern. Personally, I thought the juxtaposition of clay pipe and RC Cola Can was a description of the stratum of time possessing the ability to chart the progression culture.

I then began establishing a more democratic value system for the collecting artifacts ensuring a broad range available for assessment. Collect everything: Soil, grass, bark, clouds, cigarette butts, scribbled notes, rain, plastic, hubcaps, barrettes, glass, sunshine, beer caps, feathers, pinecones, air, red reflectors, soda cans, plastic bags, Cicada wings, rope and Styrofoam. When manufactured, fabricated, and natural artifacts are placed in the same context they have the capacity to deepen our understanding about the site of investigation. As a result these once disparate objects evoke new conversations about the intersections of humans and nature while simultaneously establishing an ethnographic picture of a surrounding community.

![Figure 17–Median Island Artifacts.](image-url)
How to Collect Artifacts

Artifacts should be collected with care and not physically harm the site.

**Step One:** Mark location of artifact with *Ionic Column Markers* (numbered 1-4) and noting orientation and describing its physical characteristics in your logbook.

Figure 18—Kit finds an artifact.
Step Two: Set up a grid system using the *Grid Markers* so that surrounding sediment or artifact(s) are not mistakenly collected.

Figure 19–Matt and Kit collecting artifacts.

Step Three: Using the *Yellow Artifact Handling Gloves* place artifact in I.H.A regulation zip-loc bag or glass containment vessel.

Figure 20–Collecting Median Island artifacts.
Artifact Classification

Your investigation site will dictate what types of artifacts you find and should be categorized using one or more taxonomies below:

**Taxonomy I Color:** Following the ROY G BIV color system placed left to right or warm to cool

**Taxonomy II Form:** Categorized according to shape and or size

**Taxonomy III Material Properties:** Wood, Metal, Polymers/Plastics, Living/once living, Ephemeral

Figure 21–Taxonomy.
CONCLUSION

Island Hunting is a serious pursuit that allows you to become an expert in your own surroundings. Through its lens: roads, medians, pictures, trash, lakes, and people can be transformed into site of inquiry and investigation. However, not all discoveries happen in a straight line. Expeditions can form like constellations; each disparate piece of research suspended in air until another joins and an image starts to develop. Once you start hunting you will find that more and more Islands are discoverable above and beyond the dictionary definition. With your discoveries a new landscape of potential appears, one where the sidewalks, fence lines, neighborhoods, distance suburbs and best friends all become collaborators in its making.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Crew Members:
Hunter #1 Captain – Kit French
Hunter #2 Documentarian – Skye Erie

History:
After talking with a local resident about University and City Park Lake I learned about the existence of an Island. Started looking for photographic evidence in the Louisiana Photo Archive Database. Found evidence after exhaustive search. Requested and obtained copyright for a series of photos that documented the creation of Lakes by the W.P.A in 1942. Found 2 clear photos of an Island. Started hunting.

Report:
We never found that Island. What we did find painted a picture of forgotten stewardship. Large steel cables protruded 2-3 feet above the surface of the lake. A large garden hose floated beneath the highway. The depth of the lake certain points were only 4 feet deep and the bottom is covered with the cypress stumps and a deep sludge.

Artifacts Recovered:
Crank Shaft, Dr. Pepper can circa 1995, Plastic Bag, Crusty piece of rope, Plastic Tubing, Stain Sample, Water Sample,
Figure 22–Map for Lost Island in the Archive Expedition.
Figure 23– Island in background, 1942. State Library of Louisiana.

Figure 24– Island in far right corner of picture, 1942. State Library of Louisiana.
Figure 25–Video Stills from expedition. Skye and Kit find artifacts from lake.

Figure 26–Artifacts collected from lake.
APPENDIX 2
MISSION TWO: DAIQUIRI ISLAND

Crew Members
Hunter #1 Captain – Kit French

History:
Daiquiri Island is a compressed amalgamation of buoyant waste products. Created by consumption much a kin to The Great Garbage Patch floating in the Pacific Ocean where plastic and other buoyant debris that is carried by ocean currents to a central point where currents converge. Because of the opposing currents debris is unable to break free therefore collecting in a large mass. In Baton Rouge The Corporation Canal on the end of Carlotta Street is a convergence point for debris from LSU and neighborhoods north of Campus. Small formations began to accumulate after tailgating during the Fall LSU football season. Trash left over by tailgaters was scattered throughout the parade ground and Carlotta Street areas and subsequently collected in mass quantities in Corporation Canal. Various weather systems pushed the formation or Island-like mass into University Lake where it currently sits.

Report:
The formation of Daiquiri Island was discovered in Corporation Canal on the West end of Carlotta Street. Corporation Canal is choked with floating debris that fuses into large floating masses. This toxic environment led to the development of binder-like bacteria capable of fusing polymers together at the molecular level. The continued growth of multiple types of bacteria spawned a unique ecology visible on the Island and smaller formations pulled from the Canal. Due to the long growing seasons and humid climate of South Louisiana an alien ecology has started to form. The barnacle like cup accumulations, small flower-like growths and compression of buoyant waste tells us the formations are about 3 to 4 months old. An Island was spotted in University Lake on April 22, 2011 and is visible from Martha Wamplode Parking lot on Standford Ave.

Artifacts Recovered:
3 formations were collected from corporation canal. Flora and rock samples were taken from the Island.
Figure 27–Map of Daiquiri Island expedition.
Figure 28–Corporation Canal on Carlotta St. Kit spots formations.

Figure 29–Close-up photo of formations.
Figure 30–Kit spots Daiquiri Island in University Lake.

Figure 31- Photo taken on canoe expedition on University Lake.
Figure 32–Close-up photo of Daiquiri Island.

Figure 33–Ecology of Daiquiri Island.
Crew Members:
Hunter #1 Captain – Kit French
Hunter #2 Co-Captain – Matt Indiana

Report:
Median Islands are made as a result of urban planning. Ranging from 2-12 inches above roadways, these Islands define the edges of roads and act as buffers between two-way traffic. Made up of mostly cement, grass and dirt, many of them are shaded with large trees and feature manicured landscaping with trash receptacles, benches and an assortment of flowers. Sometimes these Islands are the only places where natural elements are allowed to grow, confined by cement borders. When traffic is particularly heavy from 2:30pm -6pm people can become stranded on these Islands. Some of the Islands we found inhibit traffic from entering or exiting certain roads, controlling the flow of traffic and movements of cars. Because Median Islands have the ability to attract both nature and humans, both man-made and natural artifacts can be found.

Artifacts Recovered:
Aluminum ball, pinecone, pot-it note, wood paneling, 80–year old branch, safety glass, cigarettes butts, Starbucks lid, banana clip handle, cigarillo package, black plastic, white plastic, silver plastic, glass, red reflector, orange blinker cover, umbrella, shells, Cicada wing, feather, paper, hubcap, rubble, reflector paint chips.
Figure 34–Map of Median Island Expedition.
Figure 35–Examples of Median Islands in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
Figure 36–Kit collecting information on island on East Lakeshore Drive.
Figure 37–Matt and Kit discover artifacts on island next to I-10

Figure 38–Matt and Kit exploring island in Nicholson Drive.
Figure 39–Median Island artifacts.

Figure 40–Odd similarities between natural and man-made artifacts.
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Rebecca L. Hamilton, Assistant Secretary Date ____________________________
Vita

Kit French was born in Arlington, Virginia, and after receiving her Associate of Art in graphic design from The Art Institute of Washington she made her way south to Richmond, Virginia. Being from the north Kit had never experienced how nice people could be and after living for five years and completing her Bachelor of Fine Art from Virginia Commonwealth University, Kit decided to keep on moving in a southern direction. In 2008 she landed in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in hot pursuit of her Master of Fine Art at Louisiana State University. To Kit, Louisiana is a different southern all together, a place where people have whole closets devoted to Mardi Gras costumes and a parade is dedicated to her favorite color, pink. This is defiantly Kit’s kind of place.