

Take Nothing But Pictures,
Leave Nothing But Bubbles

WELCOME TO CAHUITA NATIONAL PARK!

Do Not Touch The Wildlife

Cahuita National Park contains one of the only well-developed coral reefs on the Atlantic Coast of Costa Rica. Local Cahuitans make their livelihoods fishing on these reefs, and students and tourists alike travel great distances to see and study this reef. Unfortunately, due to high silt levels from land-based activities, many of the corals in Cahuita National Park are suffering, leading to reduced fish populations and therefore a reduction in earnings for local fishermen who depend on those sources of income.

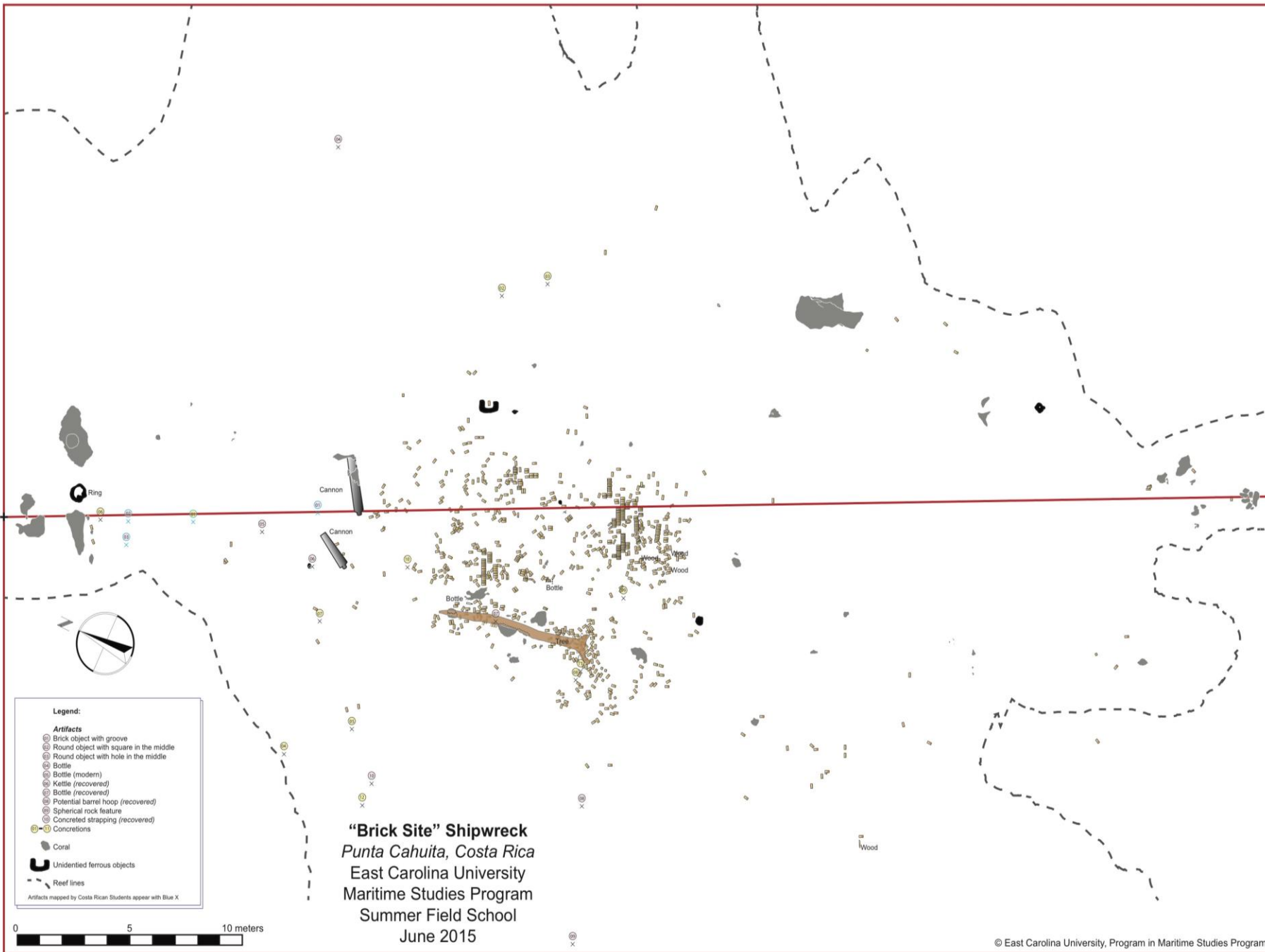
The heavy sedimentation in the waters of Cahuita National Park has been damaging to the coral reefs there, and has led to a less diverse reef composition. The corals that have been successful, and are thus the most prolific, tend to be those corals that require less light and are resistant to sediment; in other words, their shapes are such that sediment does not land and accumulate on them (elkhorn coral, staghorn coral, and other highly vertical coral species).

During periods of especially heavy sedimentation, the growth rates of the corals is reduced, and many corals die, resulting in less reef. The general substrate is quite sandy, which is an unsuitable place for coral polyps to land and colonize, leading to less regeneration and coral spreading.

The wreck sites in Cahuita National Park have been extremely beneficial to the reef as a whole. The increased surface area to which polyps can adhere has led to greater reef generation and growth on wreck sites, and has improved species diversity. The process of corals adhering to man-made objects is called an “artificial reef”.

In many places around the world, large objects such as boats and cars are intentionally sunk in order to provide a habitat for corals and reef growth. Despite the un-intentional nature of a shipwreck, such as those which created the Canon and Brick Sites, these two sites may be one of the oldest artificial reefs in Costa Rica.

As such, it is important to be careful to avoid damaging both the natural reef and the artificial reef by leaving garbage at the site. Additionally, it is important to refrain from taking artifacts off of the site, as these artifacts provide important information to scientists who may want to study the site at a later date and need to know where the artifact was located.



Cannon Site Map: Numbered Cannons
Costa Rica Field School 2015

