2017

Rock, Mosquito and Hummingbird: A Prehistory of Governors Island

Continuous profile core extractions from three historic sites on Governors Island, NYC; situated in the subterranean magazine of Fort Jay atop a customized scaffold system that follows the flight paths of an Asian Tiger Mosquito and a Ruby-throated Hummingbird through the vaulted architecture that once housed military ordnances.

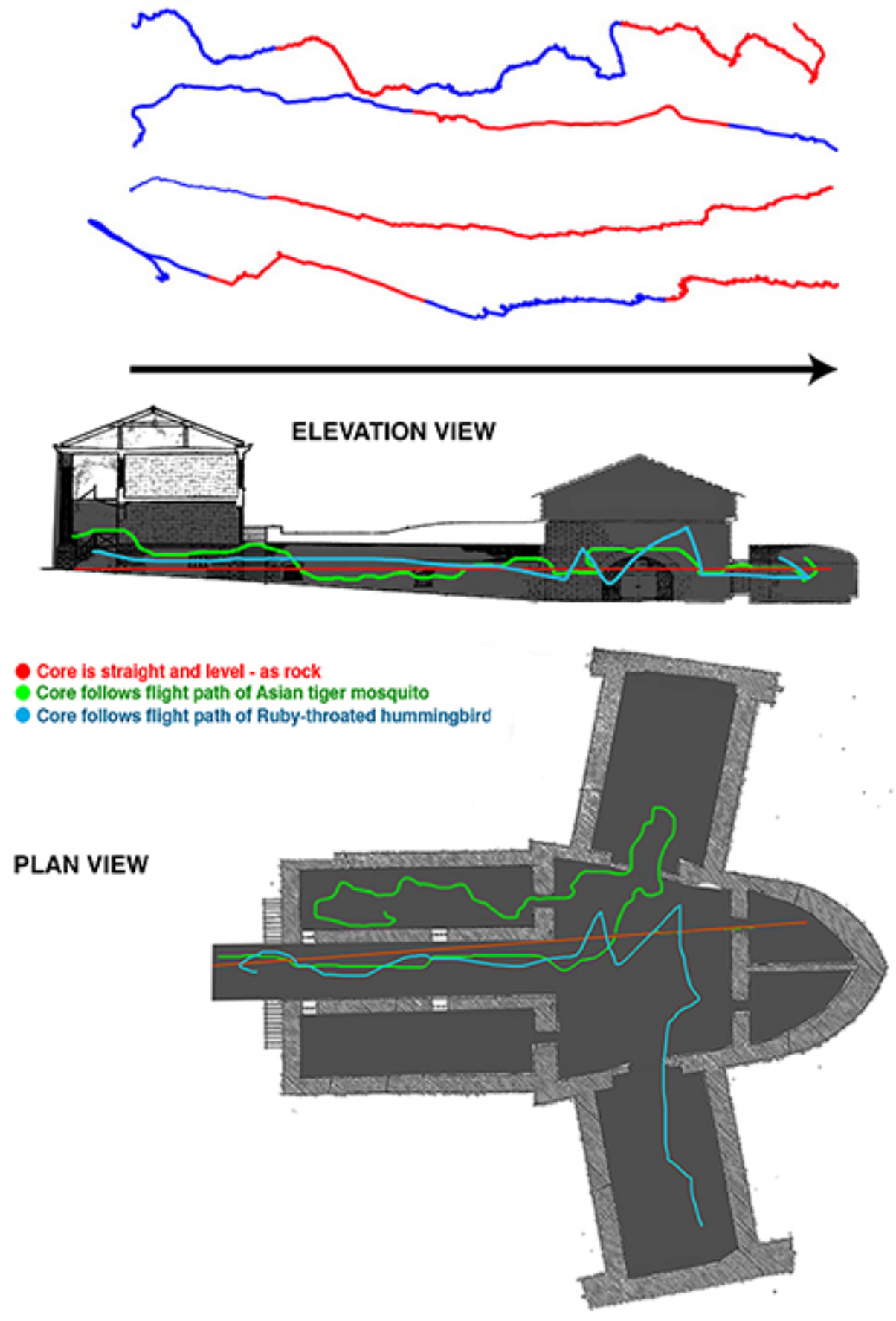
Dimensions variable.

Commissioned by the Trust For Governors Island

CW from top left: Plan for Enlargement and Reconstruction of Governor's Island Military Post, ca. 1907; Island's original 1813 footprint – red circles indicate 2017 core drilling sites; Fort Jay in 1982, courtesy the National Park Service

CW from top: Rotosonic drill near historic hospital extracting continuous core down to 125ft. – through glacial till, original 19th c. seawall, to bedrock; First section of Manhattan Schist extracted; Our first coring in July, 2017.

Bronze monument permanently installed atop the first drill site's 90-foot boring at Evans Road. Each of the three sites is indicated by a bronze monument and narrative plaque commemorating the location, depth and date of the borings.



Top: mosquito flight paths based on heat maps done in the lab. Bottom: plan and elevation views of the cores' layout in Fort Jay's subterranean vaulted magazine that once housed military ordnances.

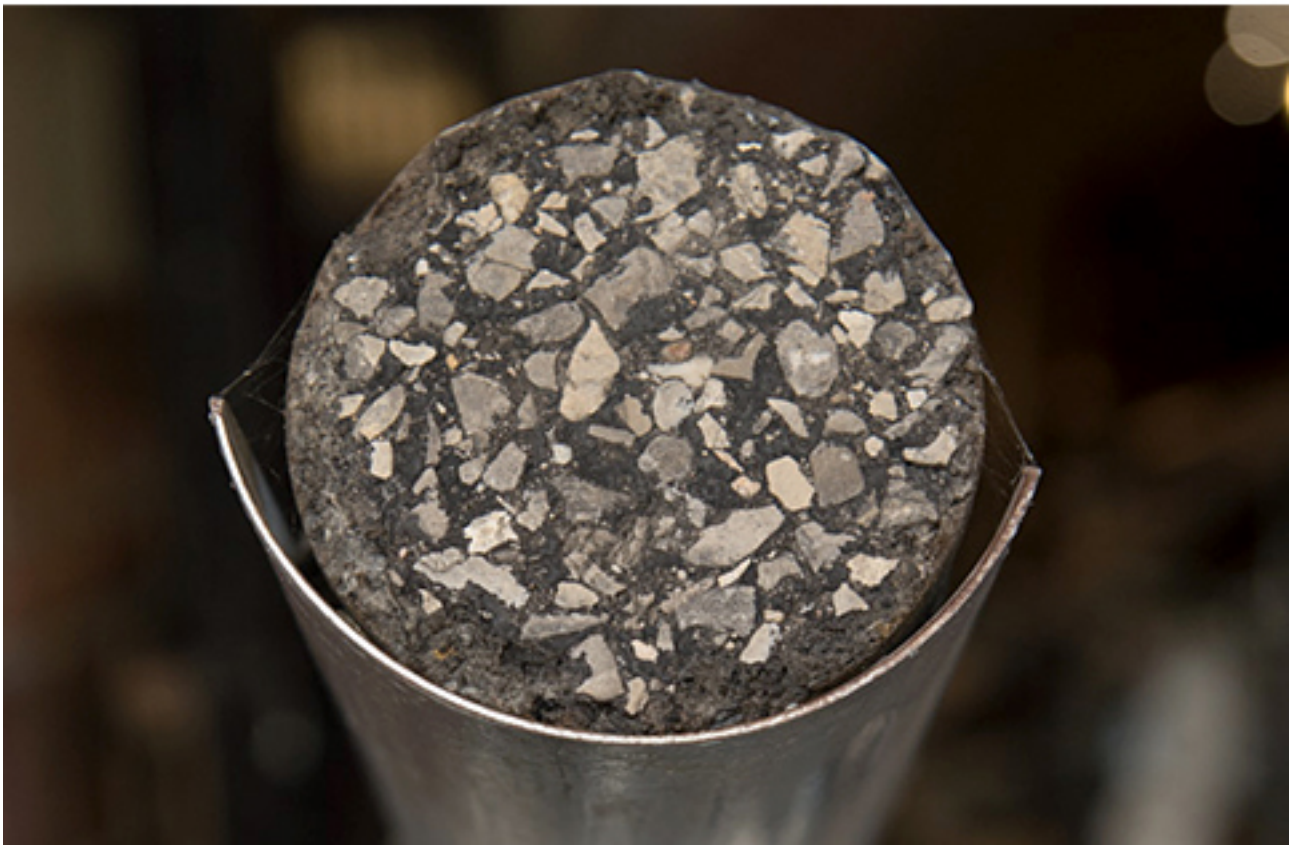
Rock, Mosquito, and Hummingbird digs down to the core of the place we now call Governors Island, to expose the strata of history of this floating rock at the entrance of NY Harbor—layers stretching down to a foundation of Manhattan Schist that predates complex life on earth.

Probing three sites on the northern side of the original footprint of the island, Brooks bored through the ground surface to a range of 90 to 125 feet in depth, telling a story of this ancient place in cobbles, soil, silt, shells, clay and bedrock. This excavated narrative leads visitors beyond the dominant military and colonial history of the site to imagine a landmass that for millions of years played a part in a larger strategic operation—the origin of land and life itself.

Situated in the subterranean magazine of historic Fort Jay, Brooks' winding sculptural intervention of three long continuous core samples are assembled in contrasting trajectories referencing fast time (the flight of a mosquito and hummingbird) and slow time (the creation of bedrock).

—Excerpted from the exhibition's press release

Entrance to the subterranean magazine with the beginning of each of the three core samples visible: the top concrete surface of Evans Road, The Hospital sidewalk, and Pershing Hall lot.



Top: detail of the top concrete surface of Evans Road.
Bottom: detail of the top asphalt surface of the Pershing Hall lot.

Vaulted tunnel with visible original 19th C. seawall; Magazine Court with glacial till installed atop three pathways – the straight line emblematic of geological time, mosquito and hummingbird flight paths emblematic of rapid time.

Bottom: bedrock core sample of Manhattan schist.

Top: Asian Tiger Mosquito flight path entering and exiting the West Powder Magazine. Bottom: Geologic core path entering the North Powder Magazine with sections of Manhattan schist and fossilized marine organisms visible.

Top: Ruby-throated hummingbird flight path terminating at East Powder Magazine. Bottom: Each path terminates with a bronze plaque (consistent with designs throughout the island) narrating the unique characteristics of its trajectory.

Terminating section of the Asian Tiger Mosquito flight path in the Southwest Powder Magazine (with sections of a feldspar-rich igneous rock visible, not known to exist on the island prior to this boring).