

# Developers try to save historic 67-foot tree

By **RON WENZELL**  
State Staff Writer

## BEAUFORT

Developers of Dataw, a remote barrier island some six miles east of Beaufort, are fighting to save an historic, but diseased, oak tree.

Possibly more than 400 years old, the 67-foot tree grows in the center of the Sams' family plot and is known as the "Sams Cemetery Live Oak."

William Sams, grandson of the founder of the city of Beaufort, bought the 870-acre island in 1774 and lived there with his family until his death 24 years later. He was the first to be buried under the spreading oak that now bears his name.

In his history of the family's involvement with the island, Sams' grandson, the Rev. James Julius Sams, wrote: "Our family burying ground was shaded all over by the spread of the largest live oak tree I ever saw."

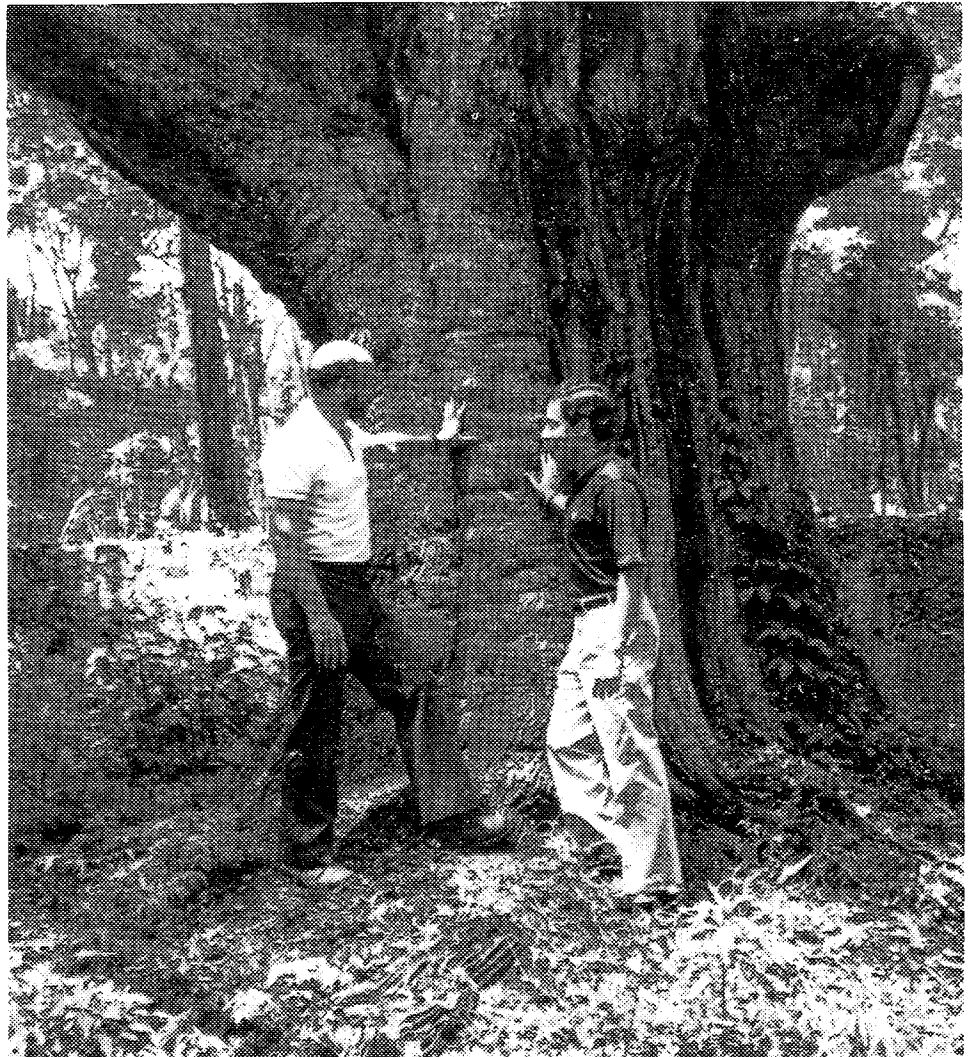
Alcoa South Carolina Inc., a subsidiary of Aluminum Co. of America, purchased the island in 1983 to build a retirement community and has spent an estimated \$6,000 trying to keep the gnarled giant oak alive.

**KENNETH A. KNOX**, a consulting arborist from Hendersonville, N.C., has been treating the tree since March, and although he's taken it off the critical list, it's still receiving a lot of tender loving care from Knox and Dataw's landscape supervisor, Jack Queener.

Knox's initial examination showed the Sams Oak to be "in a very weak condition due to neglect, abuse by nature and abuse by man." His prescribed treatment included removing neighboring water oaks and palmettos competing for survival, injecting nutrients, trimming dead branches, controlling ants and borers, and installing a lightning system. The tree had been struck by lightning at least three times.

The lightning system consists of a braided copper cable running from the top branches. Lightning strikes the copper and travels along the cable to the ground, where it's dispersed in a ground rod.

**KNOX, WHO HAS** done consulting work for the Governor's Mansion in Columbia, the Greenbrier Hotel in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va., and the Augusta (Ga.) National Golf Course, said that barring some unforeseen calamity, there is a good possibility the Sams Oak can be kept alive at least 40 or 50 years.



Ron Wenzell/The State

## Sams Live Oak Tree on Dataw Island

Arborist Kenneth Knox, Alcoa marketing services supervisor Arthur Levin

William F. Cochrane, president of Alcoa South Carolina Inc., said the money and time expended on the tree is in keeping with the company's policy to preserve as much of the island's natural beauty as possible. "The Sams Oak has great significance in Dataw's history, and we are going to do everything we can to save it."

Collin Brooker, an architectural preservationist of Beaufort, and Larry Lepionka, a local archaeologist, have been retained to uncover Dataw's past and come up with a plan to preserve and showcase it. The Sams' plantation house and dairy are some of the most extensive tabby ruins in the state.

Alcoa's Beaufort office is filled with bits of Indian pottery and other artifacts from Dataw. It's believed the island was inhabited by Indians as early as 2500 B.C. Caleb Westbrook, a Scottish trader, held the first recorded deed to the island in 1698.

**FRONTING THE MORGAN** River on the

north and Jenkins Creek on the other three sides, Dataw has an abundance of wildlife including large herds of white-tailed deer.

The Sams Oak, which is almost 7 feet in diameter, is the backdrop on the par 3 No. 11 hole on the golf course now under construction.

The golf course (there eventually will be two 18-hole courses), a 16,000-square-foot clubhouse, granular tennis courts, AAU regulation-size swimming pool, roads, security system, and six model homes are scheduled for completion by March of next year before any lots are offered for sale.

"We want the amenities to be in place when the first 400 lots go on the market so prospects can see exactly what they are buying," said Arthur F. Levin, Dataw's marketing services manager.

Alcoa has a 10-year plan to build 1,500 housing units — 50 percent patio type, 25 percent full-size, and 25 percent multi and cluster housing.