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Archaeological Survey of the Highland Oaks Subdivision, Bexar County, Texas

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Archaeological Survey of the Highland Oaks Subdivision, Bexar County, Texas

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Archaeological Survey of the Highland Oaks Subdivision, Bexar County, Texas

by
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Principal Investigator
Paul Shawn Marceaux

Texas Antiquities Permit No. 8032

Prepared for:
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Technological Report, No. 71

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Abstract:

On May 24 and 25, 2017, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) conducted an archaeological pedestrian survey of the Highland Oaks subdivision in southern Bexar County, Texas. Adams Environmental, Inc. contracted CAR to conduct the work in association with future road improvements by Bexar County in the Highland Oaks subdivision. The current roads are unimproved, and 3,700 meters (m) of the residential subdivision are planned to be improved by Bexar County. As improvements will be within the public right of way (ROW) and funded by Bexar County, the project falls under the Texas Antiquities Code. The archaeological work was performed under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 8032. Dr. Paul Shawn Marceaux served as Principal Investigator, and Antonia Figueroa served as the Project Archaeologist.

The fieldwork consisted of a pedestrian survey and the excavation of 36 shovel tests in the existing ROW. Much of the project area has been subjected to vehicular traffic and has been impacted by residential activities. No new archaeological sites were documented during the archaeological survey and shovel testing, and only modern material was observed. CAR recommends no further archaeological work and that improvements proceed as planned. Records generated during this project were prepared for curation according to Texas Historical Commission guidelines and are permanently curated at the CAR at UTSA.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Project Area

At the request of Adams Environmental, Inc. (AEI), the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) conducted an archaeological survey of approximately 3,700 m of unimproved roads in the Highland Oaks subdivision. The survey was in advance of road improvements that will be conducted by Bexar County. Bexar County is owner of the roads and is funding the improvements; therefore, the project required a Texas Antiquities Permit. The archaeological work was performed under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 8032. Dr. Paul Shawn Marceaux served as Principal Investigator, and Antonia Figueroa served as the Project Archaeologist.

The goal of the archaeological investigations was to survey the project area and document any archaeological finds along the 3,700-m stretch of unimproved roads. The archaeological survey consisted of a pedestrian survey and the excavation of 36 shovel tests. No archaeological sites were identified during the survey.

The Area of Potential Effect

The Area of Potential Effect (APE) is defined by the unimproved roads in the Highland Oak subdivision in southern Bexar County, east of US Hwy 281, north of Hickory Pass, and south of Memorial Lane (Figures 1-1 and 1-2). CAR conducted shovel testing within the existing ROW, along the unimproved roads. Background research indicated no archaeological sites were previously documented within the APE. Currently, the APE is part of a residential subdivision adjacent to plots of land occupied primarily by mobile homes. Although the northern portion of Deer Run Drive is parceled, it has not been cleared for occupation, and it is heavily vegetated.

Report Overview

This report documents the archaeological pedestrian survey and shovel testing for the proposed road improvements to the Highland Oak subdivision. It consists of four chapters, including this introductory chapter. The second chapter provides an overview of the environment of the area and a review of previous archaeological investigations near the APE. Chapter 3 presents the field and laboratory methods used by the CAR to conduct this project. The final chapter presents the results of the fieldwork and a summary of the project.



Figure 1-2. The APE depicted on an aerial map of the area (unimproved roads highlighted in white).

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Chapter 2: Project Area Environment and Previous Archaeology

This chapter presents a brief description of the project area's physical environment, including soils, climate, and vegetation. It also provides a brief description of previous archaeological investigations conducted within 1 km of the APE.

Environment

The project area is located in southern Bexar County, south of the unincorporated community of Loysoa. The nearest body of water to the APE is the Medina River, over 6 km to the north. The San Antonio River is 9 km to the northeast of the APE. Elevations in the APE range from 550–600 ft. amsl, according to the USGS topographic map (see Figure 1-1). The San Antonio region is described as a moderate subtropical humid climate with cool winters and hot summers (Norwine 1995; Taylor et al. 1991). Generally, temperature extremes are moderated by morning clouds and gulf breezes throughout the year. The warmest months are July and August while the coolest are December and January. Rainfall averages approximately 79 cm a year. Temperatures range from an average January low of 39° F to an average July high of 96° F (NRCS 2016).

Soils in the APE are Aluf (Euc) series and consist of sandsheets (NRCS 2016). Soils in this series are characterized by fine sand that ranges in depth from 106.68 cm to 203.2 cm in depth. Soil colors in the APE ranged from a brown (10YR 5/3) fine sand to a compacted yellowish brown (10YR 6/4) sand with the presence of calcium carbonates. The APE is made up of two vegetation communities, the Post Oak-Yaupon Woodland Community and the Oak Scrub-Shrubland Community (NRCS 2016). The Post-Oak Yaupon Woodland Community is dominated by a variety of oaks (*Quercus incana*, *Quercus marilandica*, and *Quercus stellate*) with Yaupon (*Ilex* spp.) as the dominant shrub. (The Oak Scrub plant community is transitional between savannah, pastureland, or cropland to oak-yaupon woodland that is a result of fire or brush management (NRCS 2016). Along with the dominant oak species, other plant species include persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*) and red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*).

Previous Archaeological Investigations

CAR staff completed an archaeological background study of the Highland Oaks subdivision area by using the Texas Historic Commission Archaeological Sites Atlas to search for any previously recorded archaeological surveys and sites within 1 km of the project area. No archaeological sites have been recorded within 1 km of the project area. However, there have been two linear archaeological surveys conducted within 1 km of the Highland Oaks subdivision.

The first survey, immediately east of the project area along Campbellton Road, was conducted by Frontera Archaeology in 1998 under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 1955. No other information was included on the THC website about the project (THC 2017). The second survey was performed in association with the Water Resource Integration Pipeline project. SWCA Inc. conducted the pedestrian survey in 2011, north of the project area along Losoya Drive (THC 2017). The nearest site (41BX1701) recorded during that survey is over 6 km to the northwest of the project area. It was described as a lithic scatter that only produced material on the surface, and no material was observed subsurface in shovel tests (THC 2017).

Chapter 3: Field and Laboratory Methods

The CAR conducted a 100 percent pedestrian survey and shovel testing within the project APE. During archaeological investigations, 36 shovel tests were excavated. According to the THC guidelines, this project was conducted as a linear survey for a corridor less than 30-m wide. The current ROW of the unimproved roads was the focus of shovel testing. This chapter outlines the field and laboratory methods followed during the archaeological investigations.

Field Methods

To complete the project, the Project Archaeologist and two field technicians worked two 8-hour days. The pedestrian survey consisted of a walkover survey and shovel test excavations at a rate of one shovel test every 100 m, unless prevented by landscaping features or other disturbances. Shovel tests were approximately 30 cm in diameter and excavated to a depth of 60 cm below the ground surface, terminating before that depth if excavators encountered bedrock, disturbances, sterile sub-soil, or other obstructions. Shovel tests were excavated in 10-cm arbitrary levels, and all soil matrixes were screened through one-quarter-inch hardware cloth. At the conclusion of each shovel test, archaeologists recorded natural stratigraphic levels when possible and refilled the hole with the screened soil.

A shovel test form was completed for every excavated shovel test. Data collected from each shovel test included the final excavation depth, a tally of all materials recovered from each 10-cm level, and a brief soil description (texture, consistency, Munsell color, inclusions). Soil samples were collected from some shovel tests to confirm the soil color and texture in a laboratory setting. The location of every shovel test was recorded with Trimble Geo XT GPS unit. Shovel test locations were sketched onto aerial photographs as a backup to GPS provenience information. Any additional observations considered pertinent were included as comments on the standard shovel test excavation form.

Archaeological Laboratory Methods

All records obtained and/or generated during the project were prepared in accordance with federal regulation 36 CFR part 79 and THC requirements for State Held-in-Trust collections. No artifacts were collected during the survey. Digital photographs were printed on acid-free paper, labeled with archivally appropriate materials, and placed in archival-quality sleeves. All field forms were completed with pencil. Field notes, forms, and photographs were printed on acid-free paper and placed in archival folders. The survey report and digital content related to the investigations were stored in an archival box and curated with the field notes and documents. Following laboratory processing and analysis, soil samples were discarded. Upon completion of the project, all records were permanently curated at the CAR facility.

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Chapter 4: Results of the Field Investigations

On May 24 and 25, 2017, the CAR conducted a pedestrian survey of the APE that included the excavation of 36 shovel tests (STs; Figure 4-1). Figures 4-2 and 4-3 demonstrate the current conditions of the APE, which is defined by two-tract sand roads. The pedestrian survey and shovel testing began on May 24, 2017, from Black Willow Street, moving along Little Walnut Drive to Memorial Lane, with field crew excavating shovel tests every 100 m of the ROW. Placement of the shovel tests were not at exact intervals in every case due to obstacles such as vehicles, refuse, and landscaping.

All shovel tests were excavated to a terminal depth of 60 cm below the surface (cmbs) with the exception of ST 5 that contained a utility line at 30 cmbs. No significant findings were encountered during shovel testing on May 24. Notably, modern glass and plastic were recovered from as deep as 30 cmbs. Soil consisted of sandy soils that ranged in color from yellowish brown (10YR 6/4) to brown (10YR 5/3).

The remainder of the fieldwork was completed the following day (May 25, 2017). Shovel testing began at the east end of Tea Rose Lane and continued to Shellnut Drive. Segments of the road along Shellnut Drive contained patches of asphalt from previous paving (Figure 4-4). Shovel testing of the remaining streets continued, with Deer Run Drive being the last road subjected to shovel testing. Soils along this portion of the ROW were the same sandy soil found along Black Willow Street and Little Walnut Drive (Figure 4-5). No significant cultural material was observed during the excavation of these shovel tests, and all were dug to 60 cmbs.

The typical shovel test soil profile revealed a brown sandy soil was present from 0-40 cmbs. When modern material was present, it was in this top soil profile. The second sandy soil typically found was yellowish brown and contained calcium carbonates, and it was found from 40-60 cmbs (the final depth of shovel tests). No material was encountered in this second stratum of sandy soils.



Figure 4-1. The APE with shovel tests in red.



Figure 4-2. Photograph of the APE on Black Willow Street, looking west.



Figure 4-3. Photograph of the APE on Little Walnut Drive, looking north.



Figure 4-4. Photograph of the APE on Shellnut Drive, looking north.



Figure 4-5. Sandy soils encountered during CAR shovel testing.

Chapter 5: Summary and Recommendations

CAR archaeologists performed a pedestrian survey and shovel testing of the Highland Oaks subdivision in advance of proposed road improvements. A total of 36 shovel tests were excavated along the existing ROW on May 24 and May 25, 2017. CAR archaeologists placed shovel tests every 100 m. Archaeologists observed modern material and eroding soils along the ROW. With the exception of modern material, no cultural material was observed during the shovel testing. Moreover, shallowly buried modern utilities were observed along the south side of Black Willow Drive.

A search of the Texas Sites Archaeological Atlas showed no previously recorded sites within 1 km of the project area. The nearest site was documented over 6 km away and was contained to the surface. The surface of the APE has been modified by vehicular traffic, modern dumping activities, and utilities; therefore, any surface archaeology has been disturbed and is no longer present along the ROW investigated by CAR. Based on the lack of findings, CAR recommends no further archaeological investigations and that the proposed road improvements for the Highland Oaks subdivision proceed as planned.

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