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# Archaeological Testing and Monitoring for a Proposed Drainage Channel at Mission San Juan Capistrano, San Antonio, Texas

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# Archaeological Testing and Monitoring for a Proposed Drainage Channel at Mission San Juan Capistrano, San Antonio, Texas

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**Archaeological Testing and Monitoring for a  
Proposed Drainage Channel at Mission San  
Juan Capistrano, San Antonio, Texas**

**Kevin J. Gross**

**Robert J. Hard  
Principal Investigator**

Texas Antiquities Permit No. 1748

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## **Abstract**

In October 1996 the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) of The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) completed preliminary archaeological investigations south of Mission San Juan Capistrano in areas specified for a proposed 800-ft drainage channel. Shovel tests, excavated at five-meter intervals along this route, revealed this area contains a very limited amount of Colonial period and modern artifacts in a mixed context.

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## Introduction

In October 1996, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) of The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) completed archaeological investigations south of Mission San Juan Capistrano, one of the chain of Spanish colonial missions that make up the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park (Figure 1). Shovel tests were excavated at 5-m intervals in areas specified for a proposed 800-ft drainage channel to direct rain water away from the mission (Figure 2). The investigations revealed this area contains a limited amount of Colonial period and modern artifacts in a mixed context.

The project was conducted under Texas Antiquities permit number 1748. Robert J. Hard and C. Britt Bousman were co-principal investigators, with Kevin Gross as project archaeologist. Artifacts and field notes from this project are curated at CAR.

## Project Area Background

### Mission History

Only a general overview of the historical development of Mission San Juan is presented here. Habig (1968), Ivey et al. (1990), Procter (1965), and Schuetz (1980) should be consulted for more complete descriptions of the historical and architectural histories of the mission.

Mission San Juan de Capistrano was established at its present location in San Antonio on March 5, 1731 (Habig 1968:158–160). Campbell and Campbell (1985) suggest that members from at least 20 Native American groups lived at the mission at various times during the Colonial period. As with the other missions in San Antonio, the population at Mission San Juan fluctuated over time. The population was relatively large and stable in the early years of the mission except for a brief period in ca. 1739–1740 when smallpox and measles epidemics killed or forced many of the Indians to flee the mission. The known resident Indian neophyte population climaxed at 265 in 1756, then gradually and continuously declined until secularization. The last census taken at the mission

in 1815 recorded only 15 Indian residents (Habig 1968: 270).

Fox (1993:1) suggests that the first church at San Juan was probably a *jacal*, located on the line of the southern wall. A 1756 inspection of the mission noted

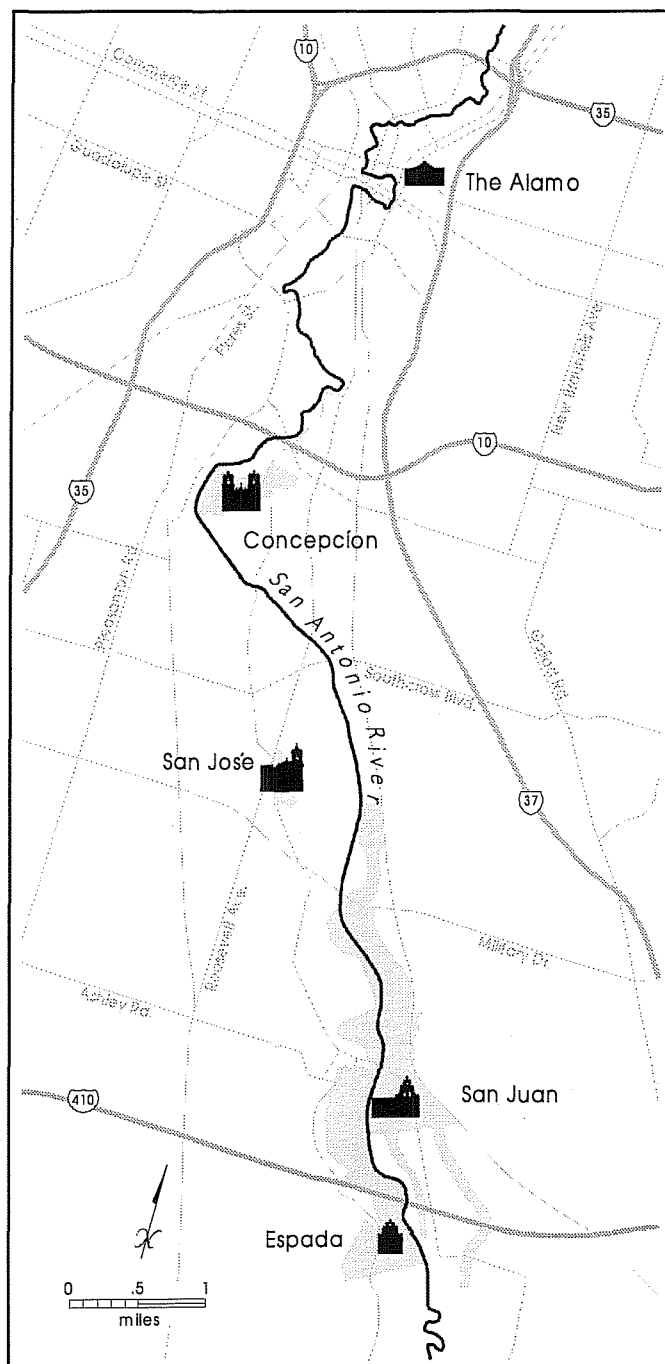


Figure 1. *San Antonio's five missions.* Shaded areas indicate the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park

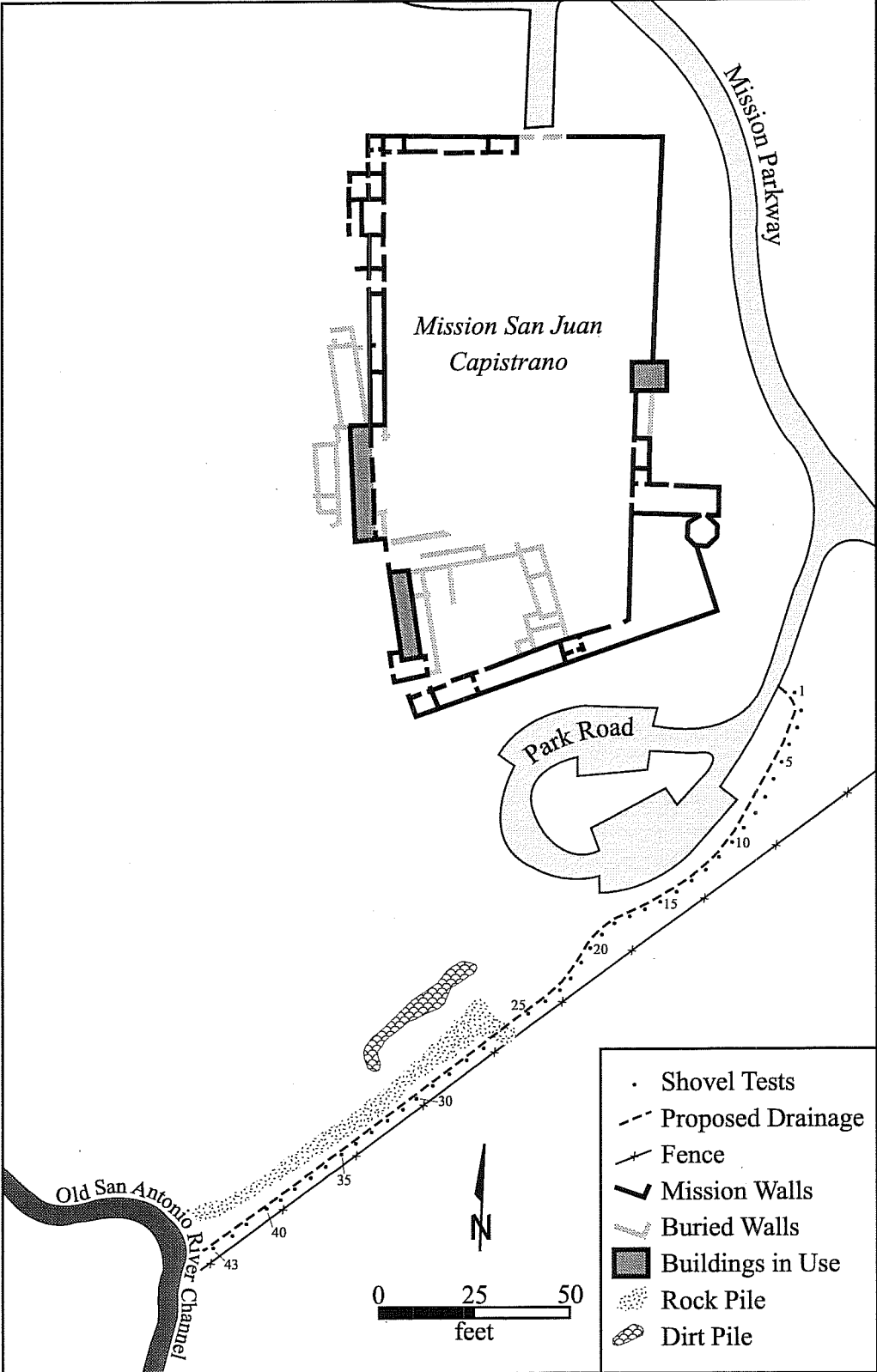


Figure 2. Plan view of Mission San Juan Capistrano.

that a stone church, the *convento*, a kitchen, and a number of miscellaneous rooms had all been completed along the west wall. There was an enclosed convento in the southwest corner of the compound by the early 1760s. By 1772, 15 stone Indians' quarters were being constructed at the north end of the compound (Fox 1993:1; Schuetz 1980). The same report also noted that a granary, measuring 40 x 6 *varas* (approximately 111 x 17 ft), of *jacal* construction with a tile roof, had been built, possibly along the south wall of the main plaza of the mission (Ivey et al. 1990:178). Fox (1993:1) suggests that construction of a new church and granary, that were never completed, was initiated on the east side of the compound after about 1772.

San Juan was partially secularized on July 14, 1794, and made a sub-mission of Mission Espada. On February 29, 1824, the mission was fully secularized and the administration of San Juan was turned over to the local diocese (Habig 1968:180). Apparently the mission continued to be occupied throughout most of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (Fox 1993:2–3).

Ivey et al. (1990:8–9) document a number of repairs to the chapel between 1907 and 1910 and then again in ca. 1915. A partial restoration of the walls was completed in the 1950s. The restoration of the convento, chapel, friary, and the caretaker's house, was completed in the late 1960s.

### Previous Archaeological Investigations

Schuetz (1968, 1969) investigated the northwest and southwest corners of the mission and identified the foundations of the incomplete church on the east wall of the compound during the reconstruction of Mission San Juan.

In 1971 Schuetz (1974) tested beneath the floor of the present church in preparation for restoration work. Scurlock (1976) completed excavations west of the current church in 1975. In 1983, the post-Colonial Tufa House was investigated by Escobedo (1984). Finally, Fox (1993) tested along the east wall and southeast corner in advance of a drainage project.

## Field Methodology

Forty-three shovel tests (STs) were excavated at five-meter intervals along the route of the drainage channel (Figure 2). STs 26 and 27 were not excavated because of a large amount of gravel and caliche stockpiled on the surface of this portion of the route. The tests were excavated in 15-cm levels to a maximum depth of 60 cm below the surface. Soils were screened through ¼-inch wire mesh. Shovel-test locations were plotted on a site map generated from the engineering plan provided by NPS.

## Results

Cultural material was recovered from 21 of the 43 excavated tests. Eighty-eight highly fragmented Spanish-colonial and post-colonial artifacts were collected (Table 1). Tests containing cultural material were, in general, limited to the west and northern portions of the proposed channel (e.g., STs 11 through 25). The majority of the artifacts (61 percent) were recovered from Level 1, 0–15 centimeters beneath the surface.

The Colonial artifacts comprise 18 percent of the assemblage from this project (n=16). They include three sherds of Goliad ware, an unrefined earthenware manufactured locally by Native Americans throughout the Colonial period; and one lead-glazed sherd of a type often imported to Texas from Mexico during the Colonial period. The proximal portion of a Guerrero projectile point, commonly found in mission-period collections, and ten pieces of lithic debitage were also recovered.

The 72 post-Colonial artifacts (82 percent of the assemblage) include, but are not limited to, two refined earthenware sherds, nine unidentifiable metal fragments, and one piece of plastic. Bottle glass (n=32) and animal bone (n=19) fragments make up 70 percent of the collection. The limited number of Spanish colonial artifacts recovered all came from mixed contexts; no unmixed Spanish colonial levels were identified.

Table 1. San Juan Drainage Artifacts

ST #	Level	Depth	Goliad	Lead Glaze	Chert	Shell	Undec. WW	Spongeware	Glass	Bone (ct)	Nails	Wire	Metal	Brick	Asphalt Tile	Plastic	Arms
1	1	0-15			1												
	2	15-30							1				1		1		
	3	30-45				1				2							
	4	45-60							1								
2	2	15-30									1						
4	1	0-15					1										
	2	15-30							1								
5	2	15-30						1									
6	1	0-15												1			
7	1	0-15							2								1
8	1	0-15							1				2				
9	1	0-15							7					1			
	2	15-30			1				1								
10	1	0-15		1					1	1	1		5				
12	1	0-15	2														
12	2	15-30							1	3							
15	1	0-15			1								1				
	2	15-30			1					1							
16	1	0-15			1				1	4							
	2	15-30								2							
17	1	0-15			1				1		1	1				1	
	2	15-30	1						2	3							
18	2	15-30			1				5								
19	1	0-15							2								
	2	15-30							1								
22	1	0-15			1					3							
27	1	0-15			3				1								
28	1	0-15							1								
29	2	15-30									1						
41	1	0-15							2								
Total			3	1	11	1	1	1	32	19	4	1	9	2	1	1	1
Percent of Total			3.41	1.14	12.50	1.14	1.14	1.14	36.36	21.59	4.55	1.14	10.23	2.27	1.14	1.14	1.14

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of the shovel testing suggests that no intact Spanish-colonial period deposits will be impacted within the proposed route of the drainage channel. However, it is recommended that the channel excavation be monitored by archaeologists to detect possible deeper deposits not encountered in the shovel testing.

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