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Archaeological Investigations at Promontory Pointe at Stone Oak II, Bexar County, Texas

Owen A. Ford
Center for Archaeological Research

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Archaeological Investigations at
Promontory Pointe at Stone Oak II,
Bexar County, Texas

Owen A. Ford

Robert J. Hard
Principal Investigator

Texas Antiquities Committee Permit No. 1746

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Abstract

The Center for Archaeological Research of The University of Texas at San Antonio conducted a pedestrian survey and subsurface testing for cultural resources at the proposed Promontory Pointe at Stone Oak II planned unit development, in northern Bexar County. The project was conducted under contract with Great America Companies on October 23 and 25, 1996. Upon completion of the survey and 11 subsurface tests, CAR determined that a light scatter of chipped stone debris was present, but no cultural resources would be impacted along the easements planned for trenching for sewer pipe installation.

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Introduction

Great America Companies, Inc., contracted the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) of The University of Texas at San Antonio to identify and record cultural materials which might be affected by the trenching for sewer line installation at the Promontory Pointe at Stone Oak II planned unit development off Blanco Road in northern Bexar County. The proposed easements for the sewer lines crossed into the property of the San Antonio River Authority, therefore requiring archaeological investigations by CAR. The close proximity of sites 41BX447 and 41BX448 reinforced the necessity of archaeological investigation. Pedestrian surveys and shovel tests along the three proposed easements were conducted by CAR staff archaeologists John Arm and Owen Ford on October 23 and 25, 1996.

Project Area Description

The project area is located approximately 900 m east of Blanco Road, on a hill scheduled for development (Figure 1). Three easements were laid out along the escarpment of the hill for proposed sewage lines by Great America Companies. These were designated the northern, western, and southern easement areas by CAR staff investigators (Figure 2). The western and southern easements follow, for the most part, a natural limestone outcropping forming a shelf along the side of the hill. The western half, off the hill, is skirted at the base by an unnamed stream bed flowing into Panther Springs Creek.

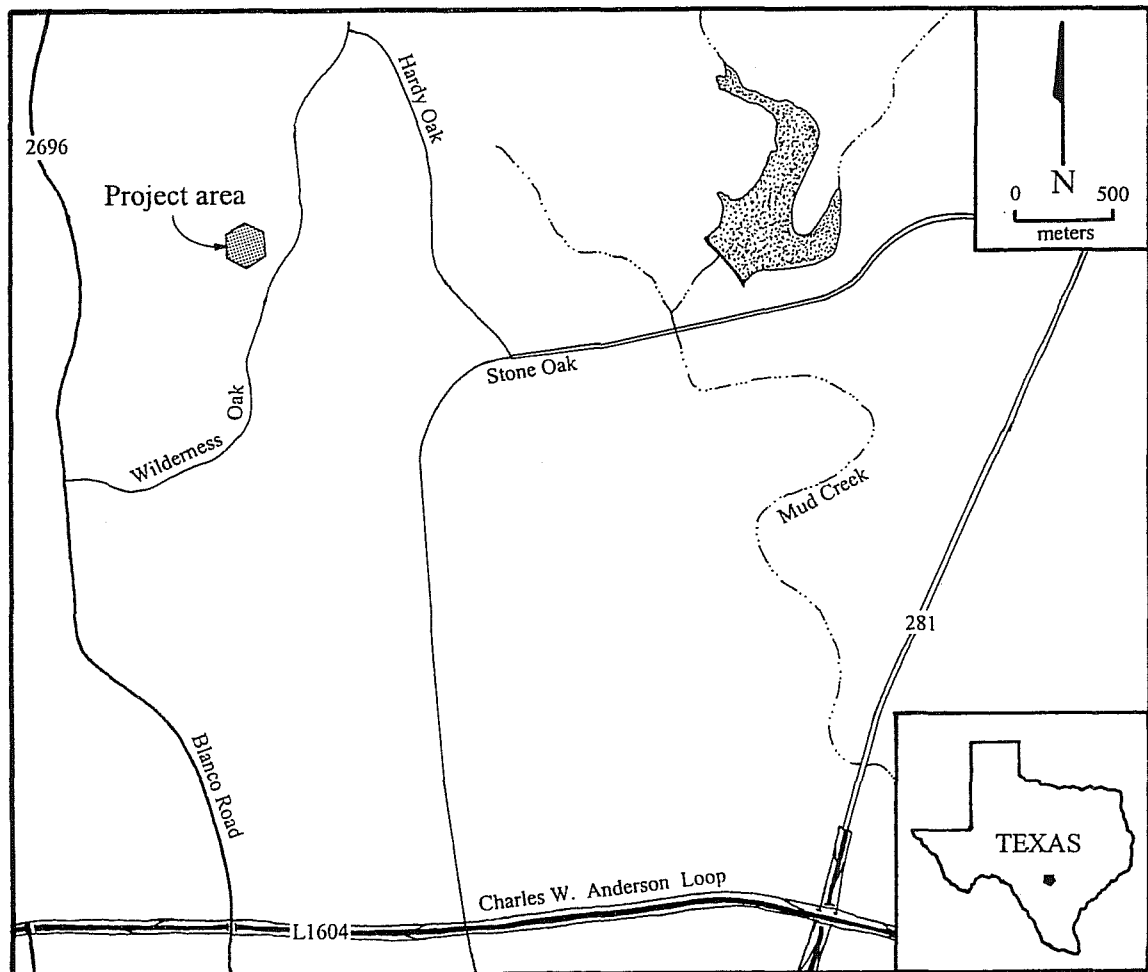


Figure 1. Location of Promontory Pointe at Stone Oak II.

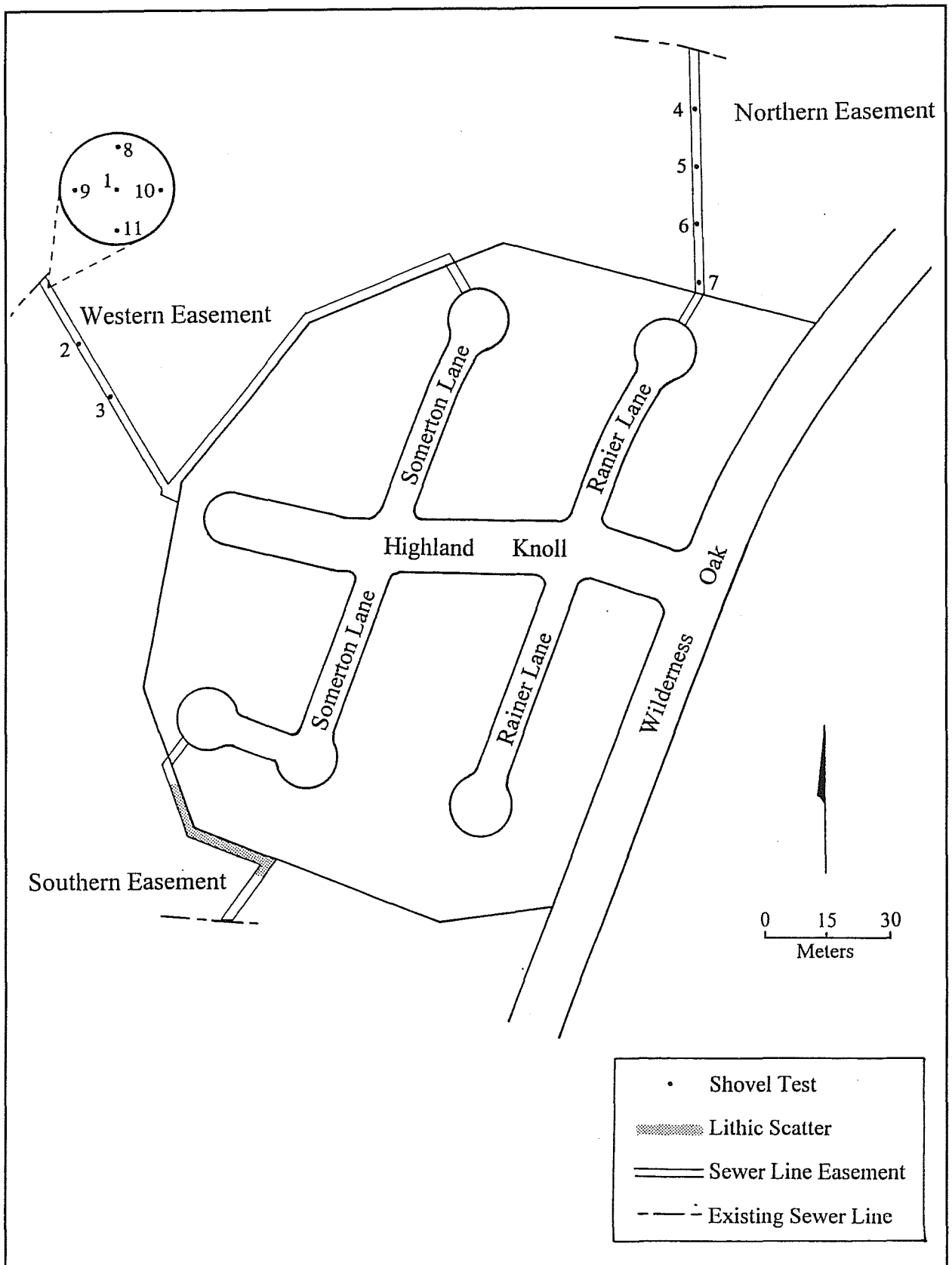


Figure 2. Project survey area and shovel tests.

Natural Setting and Environment

The project area is located in the southeastern fringe of the Edwards Plateau in northern Bexar County. The biotic region is known as the Balconian and the landscape generally supports a Juniper-Oak-Mesquite Savannah (Black 1989a:7, 10, 12). The soils are classified as the Tarrant soils, hilly, with 15 to 30 percent slopes. This soil type is occasionally associated with limestone outcrops which form escarpments (Taylor et al. 1991:31).

This semiarid area is located within the Salado Creek watershed. The Tarrant soils in this section of the system are very shallow and consist of thin layers of very dark brown or black blocky clay directly on top of limestone bedrock. Sediments in the stream beds usually consist of 5 to 10 cm of sandy brown alluvium directly above very dark brown and black blocky clays. The sediment depth rarely exceeded 20 cm within the project area.

Prehistoric Background

Nonhabitation open sites are very common in central Texas, primarily in upland areas. Black (1989b:19-20) describes these as containing only debris from stone chipping activities. These sites range from lithic workshops to cobble procurement areas. Two open sites, 41BX447 and 41BX448, were identified in 1974 (Fox and Chadderdon, notes on file at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, The University of Texas at Austin). Both of these sites are just under a kilometer southwest of Promontory Pointe at Stone Oak II, along the same drainage. These sites are located on top of a stream terrace and contained a medium density of lithic debris with shallow deposition. Investigation of both sites involved a pedestrian survey and collection of chert artifacts.

41BX447 and 41BX448 are included in 29 sites identified within the Salado Creek watershed region (Hester 1974:9). Another of the 29 sites is the Panther Springs Creek site, a large multi-component site located in the upper regions of the Salado Creek watershed (Black and McGraw 1985).

This section of Bexar County has been extensively surveyed due to substantial construction—primarily residential—in the region over the last 25 years. These surveys have verified the presence of prehistoric cultural activity in the region and the close proximity of two of these activity areas, 41BX447 and 41BX448, is one of the reasons for investigations at the Promontory Pointe proposed easements.

Field Methodology

The three proposed sewer easements, each averaging six meters in width, were clearly delineated with stakes (Figure 2). Pedestrian surveys were conducted along each of the easements to locate any surface artifacts. After the pedestrian surveys, investigators initiated subsurface testing in the northern and western easements. Shovel tests, excavated in 10-cm levels, were used to detect any subsurface deposits.

The pedestrian survey was conducted for approximately 120 m along the northern easement (Figure 2). Four subsurface tests were excavated in the northern easement at 30-m intervals.

The pedestrian survey for the western easement extended approximately 330 m; however, portions of this area were disturbed by heavy machine tracks. A 100-m area had adequate sediment deposits to conduct three subsurface tests at 30-m intervals along this easement.

The southern easement pedestrian survey was approximately 120 m in length and primarily located along a limestone outcropping. The latter feature did not allow for subsurface testing.

Results

Surface collection at the northern and western easements was not required, as no cultural remains were identified during the pedestrian surveys. Portions of the western easement contained surface disturbances from heavy machine tracks located

along a limestone outcropping. The subsurface shovel tests of the northern easement revealed no cultural material.

Three subsurface tests were initially planned and laid out at 30-m intervals along the western easement. Shovel Test 1 (ST-1) revealed a biface fragment between 10 and 20 cm below the surface. Consequently, four additional shovel tests were excavated within the easement, at two meters from ST-1 in each of the cardinal directions. These tests produced only one additional artifact, a platform flake. Beginning at approximately 20 cm below surface, directly below the level where the two artifacts were found, decomposing bedrock occurs, indicating little depth to the deposits. It is possible that the artifacts were displaced by turbation processes.

The pedestrian survey along the southern easement identified a light lithic scatter of chert which was collected for analysis. The scatter was located along approximately 90 m of the easement and continued past the easement along the limestone outcropping for at least another 40 m. The light lithic scatter contained two platform flakes, four nonplatform flakes, and two cores. No temporally diagnostic tools were identified during testing. The two cores were located on the southernmost edge of the easement. One of the cores could possibly be classified as a biface, but the large reduction flakes present are more typical of core production. Other chert fragments were collected, but cultural derivation could not be determined. All the collected chert was of fine-grained material with abundant inclusions. The characteristics of the scatter classify the area as a nonhabitation open site. This site type is common for the region. No other cultural remains were observed within the three proposed easements.

Summary and Recommendations

The results of the survey and subsurface tests suggest that planned construction activities along the projected easements should have no impact upon cultural remains. Therefore, no additional archaeological work should be necessary. However, if cultural remains are encountered during construction activities, additional archaeological assessment would be required.

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