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Monitoring of Construction at Site 41BX1199, Government Canyon State Natural Area, Bexar County, Texas

by
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Texas Antiquities Committee Permit No. 2582

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Abstract:

In February 2002, archaeologists from the Center for Archaeological Research at The University of Texas at San Antonio monitored the construction of roads and parking lots and the clearing of land on site 41BX1199 in Government Canyon State Natural Area. These roads and parking lots were being built to provide/facilitate access to picnic and tent camping areas planned for when the state natural area becomes a state park. Archaeological monitoring identified no significant archaeological deposits and confirmed the original assessment of the site as having no research potential. The construction activities did not impact any significant intact cultural deposits on site 41BX1199.

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Introduction

In February of 2002, archaeologists from the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) at The University of Texas at San Antonio monitored the clearing of brush and the cutting of a roadbed into the soils of site 41BX1199 in Government Canyon State Natural Area in northwest Bexar County (Figure 1). This work was done for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 2582.

Project Area and Previous Research

Site 41BX1199, approximately 68 acres in size, was originally documented and shovel tested by TPWD archaeologists in 1996 (McNatt et al. 2000). Plans to open Government Canyon State Natural Area to public access necessitated the improvement of existing trail systems and the construction of new support facilities. Two facilities are currently under construction on the relatively flat southern portion of the natural area that encompasses 41BX1199.

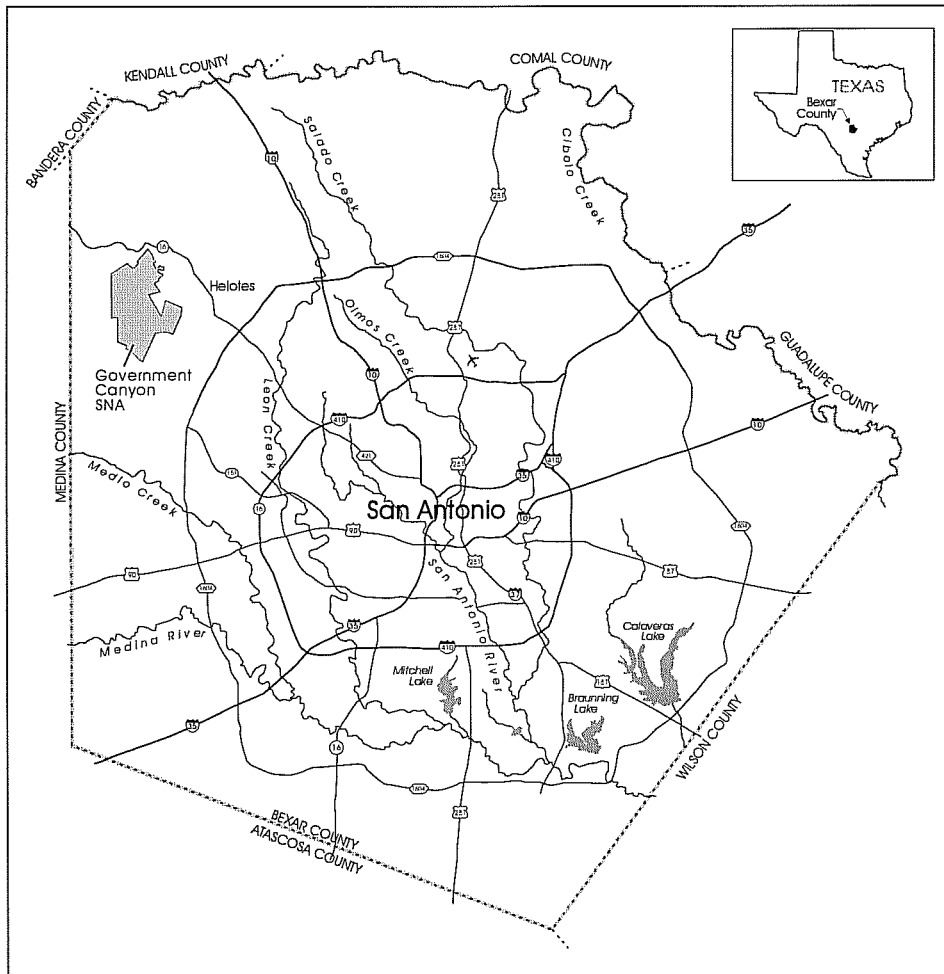


Figure 1. Location of the project area .

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Methodology

The heavy vegetation of oak, juniper, whitebrush, prickly pear cactus and a variety of other thorny plants was cleared using a bulldozer, backhoe, and bobcat. The primary earthmover for setting the roadbed and parking lots was a scraper. An archaeologist from CAR monitored this activity from in front of and to the side of the machinery where the disturbance of the soils could be seen and any artifacts or features present could be spotted. A hard hat and safety vest were worn at all times.

Results

In Area 1, the picnic area, work involved monitoring of the construction of a road into the site, parking lot construction, and brush clearing for the picnic area and restrooms. In Area 2, the camping area, work involved the monitoring of construction of small parking spaces, restrooms, and the clearing of land for tent sites, as well as the creation of a road to that area (Figure 2). Monitoring at both areas revealed only prehistoric cultural materials. The amount of cultural material seen during monitoring was very small. The artifacts only observed consisted of six scattered, unmodified lithic debitage, one early stage biface, and a sparse scatter of burned rock. No artifacts were collected. Considering the size of the affected area, this demonstrates an extremely low artifact density. No diagnostic artifacts were found and no features were noted.

During the clearing and scraping for the large parking lot in Area 1, several rock concentrations were noted. These piles of unmodified limestone were carefully inspected under the suspicion that they were potential burial cairns. No burials were present and close examination of the structure of the concentrations indicated that the rock piles were the result of previous bulldozer work, possibly from earlier ranch road maintenance or field clearing prior to plowing.

Conclusions

Monitoring of construction work at 41BX1199 noted six pieces of unmodified debitage, a single unfinished biface, and minor amounts of burned rock. These finds come from Areas 1 and 2 and the roads connecting them. This low density of recovery is consistent with the findings of the testing performed at the site (see Weston 2001:12–13). No significant archaeological deposits or culturally/temporally diagnostic artifacts were noted during monitoring. None of the cultural materials noted during monitoring change the assessment that the site has a very low research potential. The rock concentrations, while man-made, were not graves and have no archaeological interest. The results of the present monitoring efforts do not alter the recommendations made in the testing report (Weston 2001:13). As stated in the testing report, the long-term equestrian trail traffic and pedestrian traffic on paths to the campsites will occasionally expose artifacts. It is recommended that these areas be periodically examined for exposed artifacts. The few formal artifacts that may come to light as a result of this impact may be collected, assigned to general surface provenience on site, and used in park-related exhibits and public outreach presentations offered to park visitors. Such exhibits are optional and at the discretion of the TPWD staff at Government Canyon State Natural Area.

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