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Archaeological Survey and Testing: Castroville's County Village, Unit One, Medina County, Texas

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND TESTING:
CASTROVILLE'S COUNTRY VILLAGE, UNIT ONE,
MEDINA COUNTY, TEXAS

Ralph Snavelly

Center for Archaeological Research
The University of Texas at San Antonio
Archaeological Survey Report, No. 145

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ABSTRACT

During October 24-26, 1984, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR), The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), conducted a survey of approximately 30 acres of a housing development site on the northeast edge of Castroville in Medina County, Texas. The survey was required as part of Veterans Administration grant application. One area within the development zone was found to have a light surface scatter of cultural materials. This lithic scatter was recorded and assigned a permanent state site designation (41 ME 31). Shovel tests throughout the site area failed to produce any subsurface cultural material, and we recommend that no further work is needed. The cultural resource found within the survey area was determined not to be significant, and therefore not eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

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INTRODUCTION

During October 24-26, 1984, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR), The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), conducted a pedestrian survey of a 30-acre housing development tract, Unit One of Castroville's Country Village, located one kilometer northeast of the intersection of State Highway 90 and the Medina River. Castroville is in the eastern part of Medina County, Texas (Fig. 1).

The survey was done under contract between the CAR-UTSA and Genny Tschirhart Realty (letter dated October 23, 1984). The survey was requested as part of the requirements for Veterans Administration grant application and is in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and Executive Order 11593.

The field work was conducted by Ralph Snavelly, CAR staff archaeologist, under the supervision of Thomas R. Hester, CAR Director, and Jack D. Eaton, Associate Director.

The main objectives of the survey were: (1) to determine by surface examination and shovel tests if archaeological cultural resources are present within the study area; and (2) to form recommendations for any further work needed in order to determine site(s) eligibility for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

AREA ENVIRONMENT

Drainage systems associated with the survey area are the Medina River to the west and Flat Creek to the east. Less than five feet of topographic relief occurs within the study area; this may be the result of clearing, plowing, and other land modifying agricultural practices.

The entire survey area has recently been under cultivation. The flora of the immediate study area is not necessarily indicative of the naturally occurring flora. In its natural state, the study area would fit into the Tamaulipan Biotic Province, where the predominant vegetation is thorny brush. This thorny brush vegetation consists of mesquite, acacia, mimosa, whitebrush, and prickly pear (Blair 1950). Dense vegetation including cypress, oak, and native pecan trees occur most often in the riparian zones. Along the Medina River bank, one kilometer west of the survey area, an excellent example of a riparian environment exists.

Fauna present in the survey area is typical of the South Texas Coastal Plains region. A complete listing of fauna and flora relevant to Medina County can be found by consulting Dittmar et al. (1977).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Thirty-one archaeological sites have been recorded in Medina County, but none of these were located within the survey area. The scarcity of recorded sites

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in this area may be due to agriculturally related land modifications obscuring or destroying intact cultural remains.

Scorpius Cave (41 ME 7), approximately 15 miles north of the survey area, has been extensively investigated. Cultural remains indicated an occupational span from the Middle Archaic to the Late Prehistoric period (Highley et al. 1980; Highley and Graves 1978).

Patterson (1973) studied the blade technology at quarry site 41 ME 3 and recorded nine sites (41 ME 9, 41 ME 10, 41 ME 11, 41 ME 12, 41 ME 13, 41 ME 14, 41 ME 15, 41 ME 16, 41 ME 17) in north-central Medina County (Patterson 1975). In 1976, the CAR investigated four sites (41 ME 18, 41 ME 19, 41 ME 20, 41 ME 21) on the Medina River near Natalia in southeast Medina County (Hester and Kelly 1976). In 1975, the Texas Historical Commission conducted historic site excavations at the Landmark Inn (41 ME 6) in Castroville (Texas Archeological Research Laboratory [TARL] files).

SURVEY AND TESTING

The field survey consisted of a series of transects across the entire area of study. The survey area is divided into lots and covers approximately 30 acres (Fig. 2). Each lot was actually transected several times. Observations were recorded on the occurrence, density, and location of prehistoric remains. A USGS topographic map (La Coste quadrant) was consulted to establish the general outlay of the terrain.

Only diagnostic or otherwise significant artifacts were collected for analysis. The collection was necessary because the area is currently under development. The locations of prehistoric remains, mostly lithic debitage, were plotted on a map of the development area.

The study area limits were clearly defined by the roads and other bulldozed land cuts appearing on the survey area map provided by the land developers. The existing profiles of exposed utility trenches and road cuts were inspected for the occurrence of subsurface cultural remains. In addition, shovel tests were made in the area suspected of containing subsurface cultural deposits.

After the entire study area had been surveyed, one area was suspected of being a prehistoric site. Lots 8, 9, and 10 of Block 6 (Fig. 2) located in the northeast corner of the survey area were found to have prehistoric lithic debris scattered on the ground surface. Further inspection of the area resulted in the collection of one Montell dart point and one core. The dart point is dated to the Late Archaic time period (from the late centuries B.C. to the early centuries A.D.) (Hester 1980). The core is a good quality chert cobble, commonly found in Uvalde Gravels. A natural deposit of these chert bearing gravels occurs in the northeast corner of the survey area.

The surface lithic scatter consists of mostly primary flakes with a few secondary flakes present. This thin lithic scatter may represent a prehistoric chert acquisition area, as raw Uvalde Gravels are available at the site.

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A series of nine shovel tests was excavated randomly across the three lot areas. Each test was approximately 25 cm² and ranged in depth from 18 to 30 cm. The soil from each shovel test was passed through a 1/4-inch screen. No cultural materials were recovered from these shovel tests.

This site was recorded, and a permanent state archaeological site designation has been assigned (41 ME 31) by the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory (TARL) in Austin. Field notes and the two collected artifacts are curated at the CAR-UTSA.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the survey, all of Unit One in Castroville Country Village development was carefully examined. One location with small amounts of cultural materials on the ground surface was recorded as site 41 ME 31. A series of shovel tests failed to produce any subsurface cultural material. Therefore, no further work is recommended at site 41 ME 31. However, should development of the land north or east of this site take place, further testing should be required in those areas.

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