



INDEX OF TEXAS ARCHAEOLOGY

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Volume 1981


Article 18

1981

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Young, Wayne C. (1981) "Archaeological Testing of Sites 41MK28 and 41MK29 McCulloch County, Texas," *Index of Texas Archaeology: Open Access Gray Literature from the Lone Star State*: Vol. 1981, Article 18. <https://doi.org/10.21112/ita.1981.1.18>

ISSN: 2475-9333

Available at: <https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ita/vol1981/iss1/18>

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Archaeological Testing of Sites 41MK28 and 41MK29

McCulloch County, Texas

By

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Texas

State Department of Highways and Public Transportation
Highway Design Division

August 1981

ABSTRACT

Two sites in McCulloch County, Texas, Sites 41MK28 and 41MK29, were tested in August, 1981, and were found to have very shallow or surface deposits. Site 41MK28 proved to be a badly eroded surface site. That portion of Site 41MK29 which lay in the proposed right-of-way was found to be already destroyed by previous root plowing and fire lane construction activities. Further excavation is not recommended at either site because of the disturbed nature of the sites and the lack of depth to the deposits.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeological testing of prehistoric sites 41MK28 and 41MK29 in northwestern McCulloch County, Texas, by the archaeology section of the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation was conducted during the week of August 3-7, 1981, in accordance with the Department's Memorandum of Understanding with the Texas Antiquities Committee.

Both sites are located along the present route of U.S. Highway 283 between Brady and Santa Anna, Texas (Fig. 1), and will be effected by proposed bridge improvements along the Colorado River and Cow Creek. Site 41MK28 is located along the south bank of the Colorado River and will be effected by widening the approaches to the bridge within a new 100 ft. wide right-of-way, and Site 41MK29 will be adversely effected by a 75 ft. widening of the right-of-way along the Cow Creek bridge.

Testing results indicated that both sites have very shallow or surface deposits and that Site 41MK29 already has been destroyed by root plowing and fire lane construction activities. Further testing is not warranted at either site, and neither appears to be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

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SITE 41MK28

Site Description and Testing Strategy

Archaeological Site 41MK28 is a very large site covering a minimum of 40 acres along the south bank of the Colorado River and is just within the limits of McCulloch County (Fig. 2). The site covers a high ridge line overlooking the river and is heavily eroded, especially near the river. A number of deep gullies are present in this area and reveal that the soils at the site consist of a reddish clay loam overlying a thick caliche deposit. The upper soil zone appears to reach a maximum thickness of 40 to 60 cm in a few locations, with the average depth being about 20 cm.

Vegetation on the site consists primarily of small mesquites, with some prickly pear and yucca present. Most of the site has a covering of heavily overgrazed native grasses. The flora at the site relates more readily to an upland plant community than to a floodplain or riverine environment.

Prehistoric cultural debitage was found to be very thinly scattered over an immense area and consisted mostly of primary lithic reduction debris found in close association with thin gravel deposits outcropping at the higher elevations of the site. Several small areas of burned sandstone were observed outside the proposed right-of-way and have been interpreted as disturbed hearths. At least one of these features had mussel shell fragments and flakes in association.

Figure 3 indicates that the proposed right-of-way across the site will consist of an additional 100 ft. wide strip along the west side of the present highway. Although much more of the site occurs on the east side of U.S. 283, that area is more heavily disturbed than the west side. The figure shows the placement of a 6-in. pipeline along the east side of the road but fails to show a 10 to 20 cm deep fire lane between the pipeline and the present highway. The bottom of this fire lane was carefully examined and failed to show any signs of prehistoric occupations at this depth.

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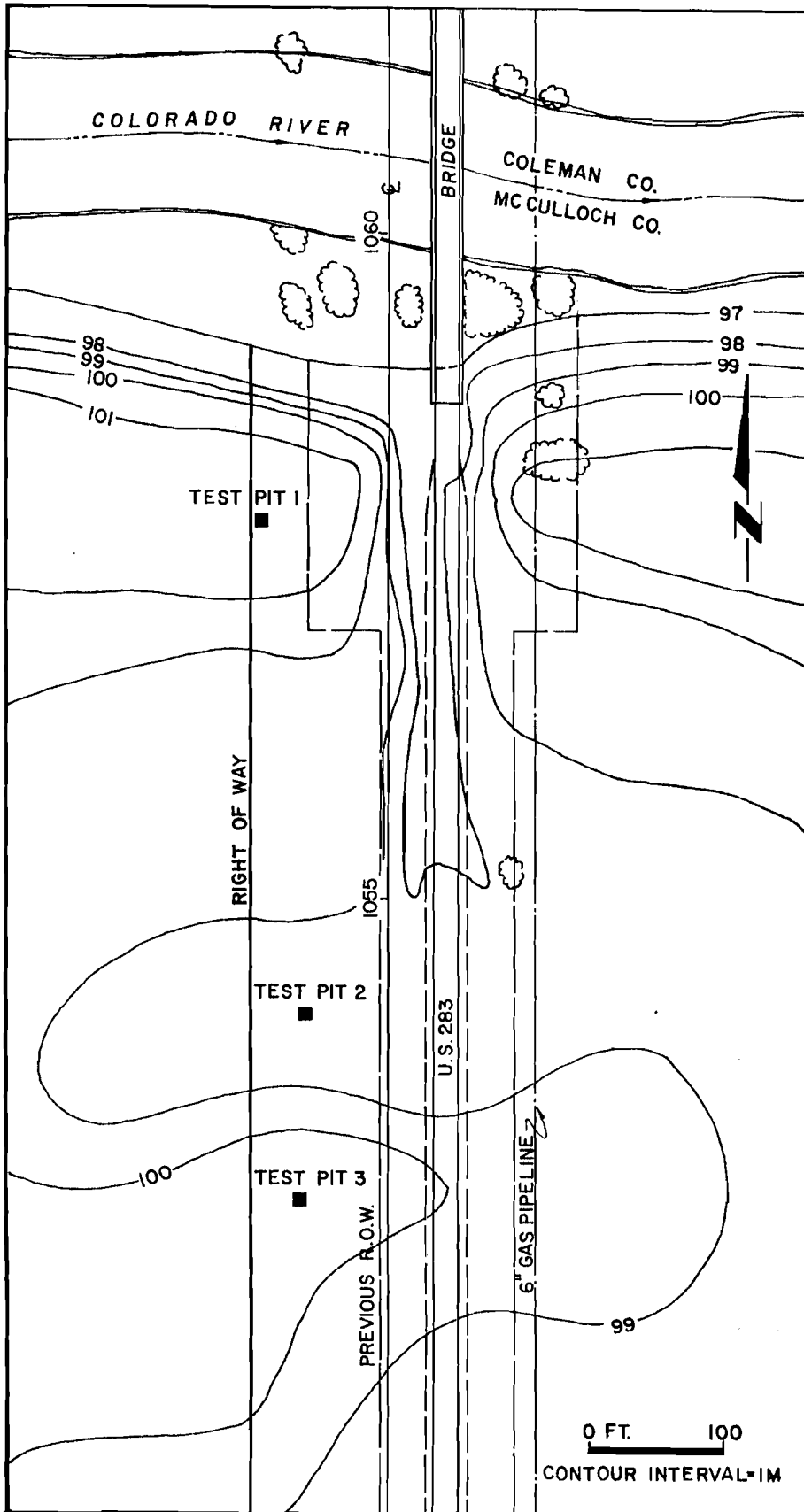


Figure 3. Map of Site 41MK28 showing test excavation units.

The new right-of-way is also far from being in a pristine condition. This area is heavily eroded, with cultural materials appearing only on the highest erosional remnants. An old roadbed also appears to cross the site in this area and has wallowed out a considerable portion of the right-of-way.

Prehistoric cultural debris within the right-of-way occurs in a swath beginning about 100 meters south of the river bank and extending 300 meters farther south to the crest of a small hill. Testing was conducted within this area.

Test Unit 1 was located along an erosional remnant on the northern perimeter of the site near a disturbed hearth located outside the right-of-way. A 1 meter square was gridded off approximately 4 meters from the hearth and excavated in arbitrary 10 cm levels to a depth of 40 cm. The ground surface within the unit was picked clean of flakes before excavations began, and this material was bagged as surface material. Level 1 yielded only 8 flakes, compared to 29 flakes from the surface. Level 2 was in the same red clay loam as Level 1 but contained only 1 flake. Levels 3 and 4 were into caliche and were culturally sterile.

Test Unit 2 was situated 100 meters south of Test Unit 1 in an area lacking surface debris. This 1 meter unit was located about 20 meters east of a small gravel knoll with an abundance of flakes in an area which did not appear to have been heavily eroded. The unit was excavated to determine if all of the cultural debris at the site was related to surface gravels. The test appears to confirm our suspicions that there was indeed a high correlation between surface exposures of gravel and prehistoric cultural debris.

Test Unit 2 was dug to a depth of 18 cm where solid caliche was encountered. Only 1 flake was recovered from the surface, and 1 from Level 1. Level 2 failed to yield any cultural materials.

Test Unit 3 was dug into the top of a small hill along the southern edge of the site. A small lens of gravel was showing in the area and appeared

to be covered with some depth of soil. Testing indicated that the gravels were only 8 cm beneath the present surface and that they formed a thin lens on top of caliche at 18 cm. Only 2 flakes were found on the surface of this unit. Both excavated levels were sterile.

Materials Recovered

UNMODIFIED FLAKES

Number of Specimens: 41

Description: The 41 flakes recovered represent the total inventory found in the 3 test units at the site. None of the sample shows any obvious signs of human modification or utilization. Quality of the flint exploited appears to have been poor.

Provenience:

<u>Level</u>	<u>Test Unit 1</u>	<u>Test Unit 2</u>	<u>Test Unit 3</u>
Surface	29	1	2
0-10 cm	8	1	-
10-20 cm	2	-	-
20-30 cm	-		
30-40 cm	-		

SIDE SCRAPER

Number of Specimens: 1 (Fig. 4A)

Description: This surface artifact is a thick patinated decortication flake with a scraping edge worked onto a lateral side. Other modifications are not evident. This tool has an area of cortex remaining on a steep edge opposite the worked edge.

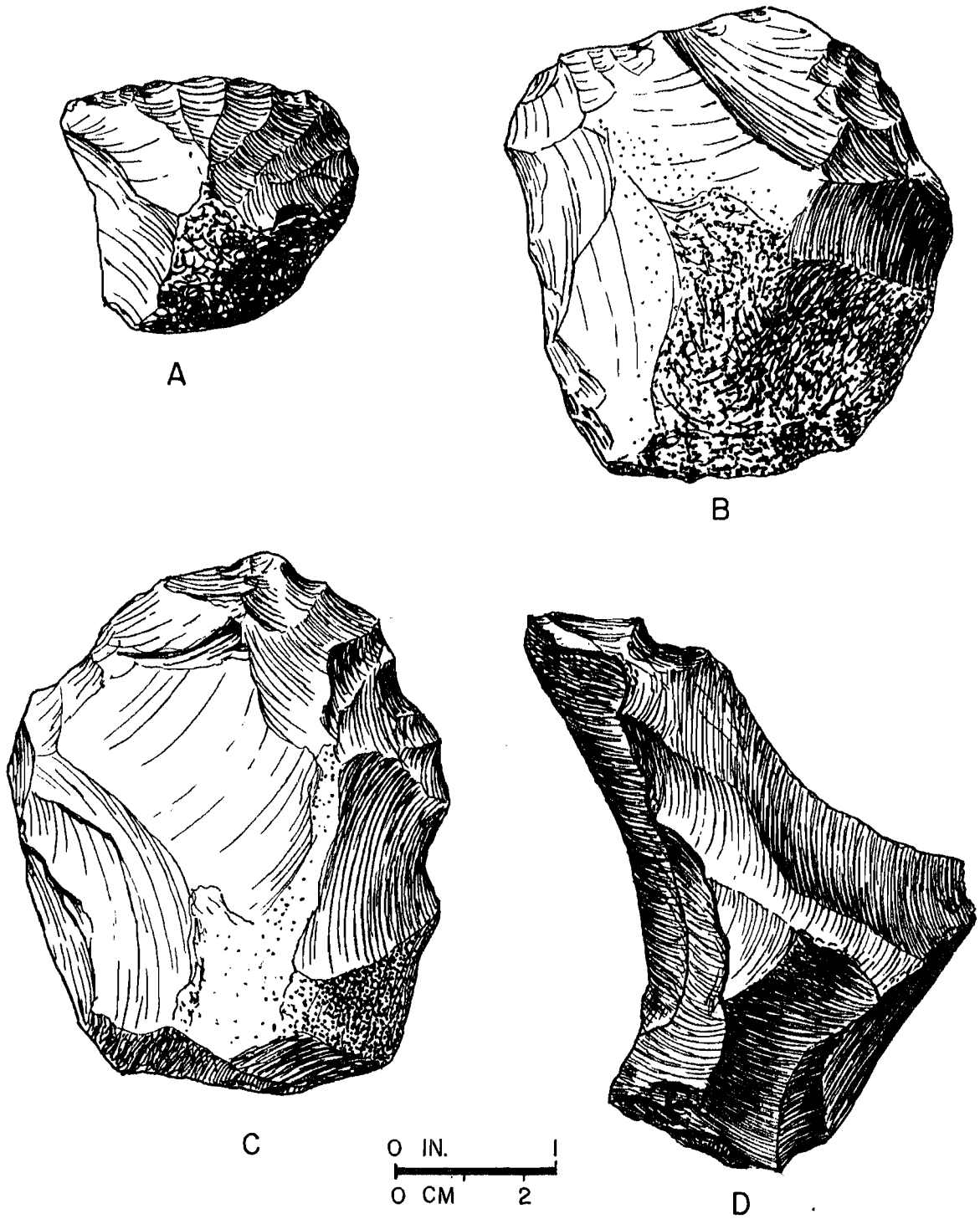


Figure 4. Artifacts from Site 41MK28. A, side scraper; B,C, thick bifaces; D, core.

THICK BIFACES

Number of Specimens: 4 (Fig. 4B,C)

Description: These artifacts are thick bifaces which have not been shaped. They appear to have been abandoned early in the lithic reduction sequence. Flake scars are deep, and hinges are numerous on both surfaces of all four artifacts. The flint chosen for these specimens is poor quality and seems chalky. All of the specimens have areas of cortex remaining on one surface.

CORES

Number of Specimens: 2 (Fig. 4D)

Description: Both of these artifacts are unidirectional cores in that all of the flake scars originated from one surface. Both specimens appear to have been irregular pieces of flint which have had a series of blade-like flakes removed.

Summary and Conclusions

Testing of Site 41MK28 has indicated that the occupations at the site are limited to the present ground surface and are in association with gravel deposits occurring on the higher elevations of the site. Materials recovered from the site appear to indicate that, the site functioned primarily as a lithic procurement and lithic reduction center, although the flint observed seemed to be of very poor quality.

Further research at the site does not appear warranted due to the lack of depth of the deposits and the eroded nature of the right-of-way. The site appears to represent a badly eroded surface site and appears to be subject to sheet erosion which may have moved materials from their original context.

SITE 41MK29

Archaeological Site 41MK29 is located along both sides of Cow Creek at its intersection with U.S. Highway 283. The site appears to cover about 3 acres along the creek on a small terrace system of the intermittent stream (Fig. 5). Unlike Site 41MK28, this site appears to have served as a habitation site as attested by three burned rock middens east of the highway.

Vegetation on the site varies greatly from the east to the west side of the highway. The eastern side of U.S. 283 has a thin scattering of small mesquites, yucca, and prickly pear along with overgrazed native grasses. This portion of the site has been root-plowed with such obvious evidence as brush piles and heavily churned ground surfaces.

The western side of the highway contains a jungle along the south side of the creek. Mesquites are much larger here, and the landscape is dominated by bee brush which has formed a virtually impenetrable thicket. Yucca and prickly pear share several small openings with native grasses and live oak trees.

The portion of the site north of the creek on the western limits of the highway consists of a plowed field bordering the heavy thicket. Except for the field, this area resembles an upland environmental zone with only a few willows and elms bordering the creek channel.

The proposed right-of-way crossing the site consists of a 25 ft. wide strip along the eastern side of the road and a 50 ft. wide strip on the west side (Fig. 6). The eastern side is heavily disturbed by the previously mentioned root plowing and by a fire lane excavated to a depth of 10 to 20 cm which has removed almost all of the cultural deposits in the right-of-way. An examination of the floor of the fire lane indicated that it had cut through the deposits of the site.

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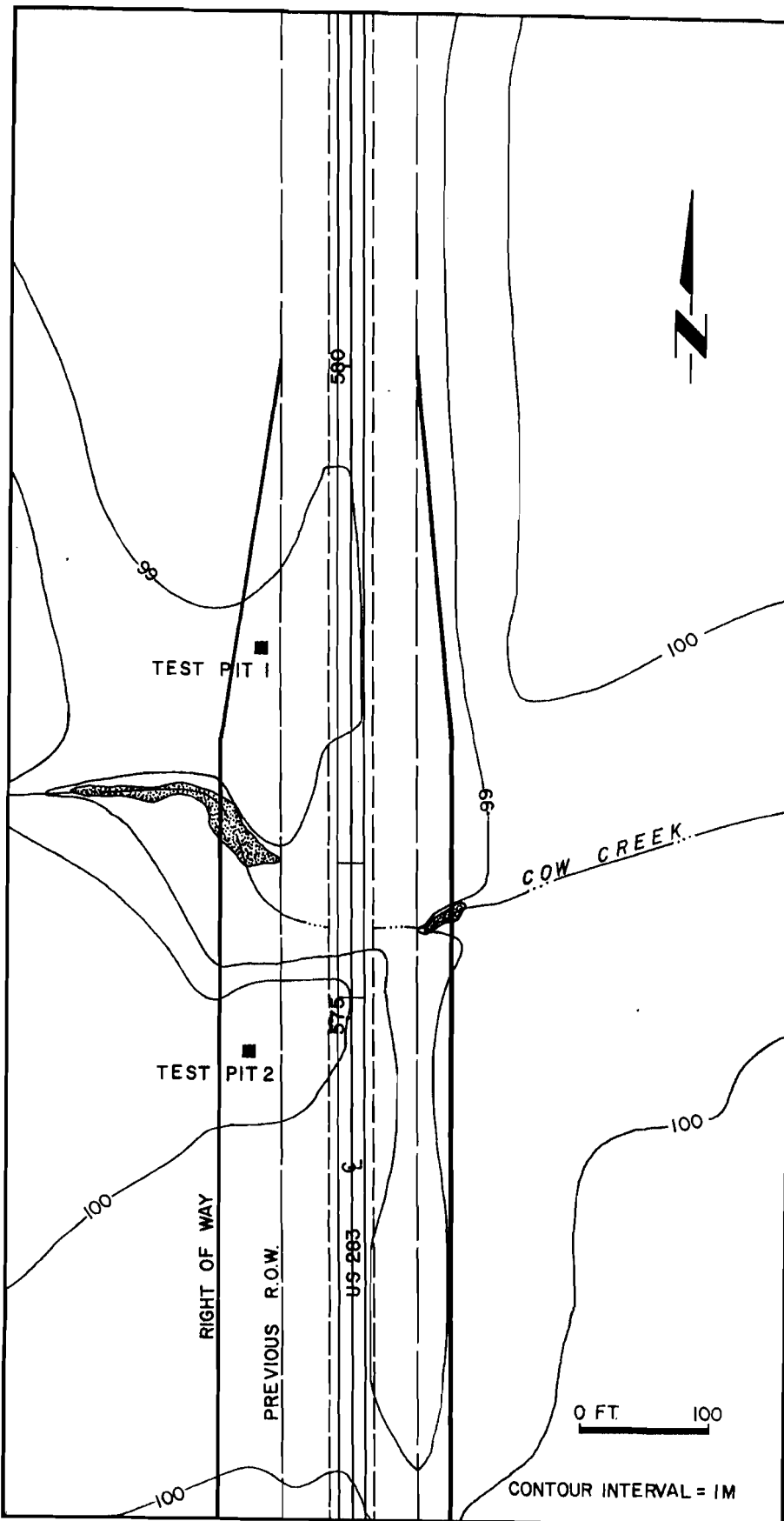


Figure 6. Map of Site 41MK29 showing test excavation units.

The western part of the right-of-way did not appear to be as heavily disturbed as the eastern part, with the plowed field representing the only major disturbance. A survey of this field produced flakes and burned rocks and indicated that the site extended into this area. A 1 meter square was excavated into the corner of the field. Excavations were carried to a depth of 50 cm, and only 1 flake was recovered in Level 1. This single specimen may indicate that the density is very low and that the site is limited to the plow zone.

Test Unit 2 was excavated on the south side of the creek to a depth of 30 cm and failed to produce any cultural material. This test indicates that the site does not extend across the road on the south side of the creek.

A survey was conducted east of the right-of-way in the root-plowed area. Three heavily damaged burned rock middens were observed, with two of these being south of the creek and one along the north side of the creek. A single dart point fragment was observed in association with the middens south of the creek. This fragment was from a wide-bladed specimen with corner notches and may relate to the *Marcos* or *Marshall* type.

Testing of Site 41MK29 indicates that little knowledge can be gained from within the right-of-way. The site does not extend into the undamaged strip south of the creek on the west side of U.S. 283, and the northern part appears to be limited to the plow zone. The eastern part of the site has been heavily damaged within the right-of-way, and all of the cultural deposits appear to have been removed from the fire lane which comprises most of the right-of-way. The site may have some undisturbed areas outside the right-of-way, but these areas are outside the jurisdiction of this department.

Additional research is not warranted at the site due to these disturbances within the right-of-way.