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ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING OF SITE 41WM443
WILLIAMSON COUNTY, TEXAS

By

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Texas
State Department of Highways and Public Transportation
Highway Design Division
May 1985

ABSTRACT

Testing of Site **41WM443** along **FM 1431** in Williamson County, Texas, to determine eligibility for inclusion within the National Register of Historic Places and to determine site depth, cultural context, and archaeological significance was undertaken in April **1985**. The site is located along a ridge line containing an outcrop of good quality Georgetown flint. Almost **all** the area within the right-of-way consisted of exposed bedrock ledges. One small incipient burned rock midden was present within the right-of-way. The midden measured **5** meters in diameter, but about half of **it** had been destroyed by relic hunters. Results of the survey and testing indicate that portions of **41WM443** within the right-of-way contain a prehistoric component of unknown age and that the major activities were concerned with the procurement of flint and lithic reduction. No features, diagnostic artifacts, or organic remains were recovered although the testing procedures removed most of the burned rock midden. Evidence recovered does not support a determination of eligibility for inclusion within the National Register of Historic Places for the portions of the site within the right-of-way.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeological Site 41WM443 was recorded at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory of the Balcones Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, in September 1972 by a member of the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation (SDHPT) professional cultural resources staff. Following initial evaluation, further investigation and testing were recommended. During the period of April 10–16, 1985, testing operations were conducted by Wayne C. Young of the SDHPT cultural resources staff, with field support personnel provided by the SDHPT District 14 Burnet residency office.

Testing of Site 41WM443 was performed under the Memorandum of Understanding between the SDHPT and the Texas Antiquities Committee. The object of the test was to determine eligibility for inclusion of the site within the National Register of Historic Places and to determine the nature of the deposits and the cultural context of the site.

The highway construction project affecting Site 41WM443 provides for the construction of a four-lane highway from the Chandler Road overpass on IH 35 to FM 1431 at US 183 in Cedar Park, Texas. This is a new construction project involving a 200 ft.-wide right-of-way along the 8.76 mile route.

Site 41WM443 is located about 4500 ft. west of the Chandler Road overpass on IH 35 (Fig. 1). The site consists of a lithic procurement area and associated burned rock middens along a ridge line that contains an outcrop of good quality Georgetown or Edwards flint. The site limit was not determined but the site appears to extend for at least a mile along the ridge paralleling the highway. Most of the site consists of exposed limestone bedrock with numerous flint nodules and flakes lying on bedrock or in small catchment basins in the rock. There is a small incipient burned rock midden within the right-of-way, a large burned rock midden 30 meters north of the right-of-way, and two large middens about 100 meters south of the right-of-way. The observed middens are on the eastern slope

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of the ridge line. Interestingly, there is no current water source along the ridge but there may be springs in the area which were not located during the examination of the site.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Site **41WM443** is located about **4500** ft. west of the Chandler Road overpass on IH **35**. The site consists of a lithic procurement area extending for at least a mile along a limestone ridge line containing good quality Georgetown flint. Scattered flint nodules, cores, and flakes are common along the exposed bedrock of the ridge line and suggest that a large amount of lithic reduction was performed at the site. There are also a minimum of four burned rock middens associated with the lithic procurement site although only one is located within the right-of-way of **RM 1431**.

The midden within the right-of-way is the smallest such feature observed at the site. It appears to have been an incipient burned rock midden and is about 5 meters in diameter with a maximum thickness of **45 cm**. Testing indicated that it was built in a bedrock depression. Bedrock occurs on all sides of the midden as a series of steps or benches. There is a small amount of topsoil with flint flakes around these steps but the material is thought to have washed into these catchment basins and does not represent intact cultural deposits.

Relic hunters have destroyed roughly half of this burned rock midden since the discovery of the site in **1972**. The eastern or lower half of the midden has been looted extensively, leaving only the western **3** meters for testing.

TESTING OPERATIONS

Archaeological testing of Site ~~41WM443~~ consisted of surface observations and excavations of test units by hand (Fig. 2). The testing operations were concentrated in and around the burned rock midden and this was the only area with any soil deposition. The remainder of the site was exposed bedrock. Three 2 meter squares were dug into the deposits and vertical control was in arbitrary 10 cm levels unless bedrock was encountered before that depth. Shovels, picks, and trowels were used to remove the soil and burned rock; and all matrix was passed through 0.25 in. mesh hardware cloth screens. All material recovered was bagged and labeled by test unit and level coordinates and was removed from the site for analysis and temporary storage at the SDHPT Laboratory for Archaeological Studies.

Excavation unit placement was limited by the lack of soil within the right-of-way and by concern with the burned rock midden. Test Units 1 and 3 were dug into the intact portions of the midden while Test Unit 2 was placed along the eastern edge. Test Unit 1 was placed in the northwest quadrant of the midden and excavated to bedrock. This unit contained two large limestone slabs along the south wall which were thought possibly to represent a feature atop solid bedrock.

Test Unit 3 was excavated adjacent to Test Unit 1 to expose a larger area and to see if the rocks represented a feature. The floor of this unit was largely covered with large slabs lying on bedrock. The lack of burning on these slabs and the unpatterned nature suggest that these were natural and did not represent a cultural event.

Test Unit 2 was excavated into a large bedrock catchment basin along the eastern edge of the midden. Bedrock was encountered at less than 10 cm across this unit, with most of it being less than 5cm beneath the present ground surface.

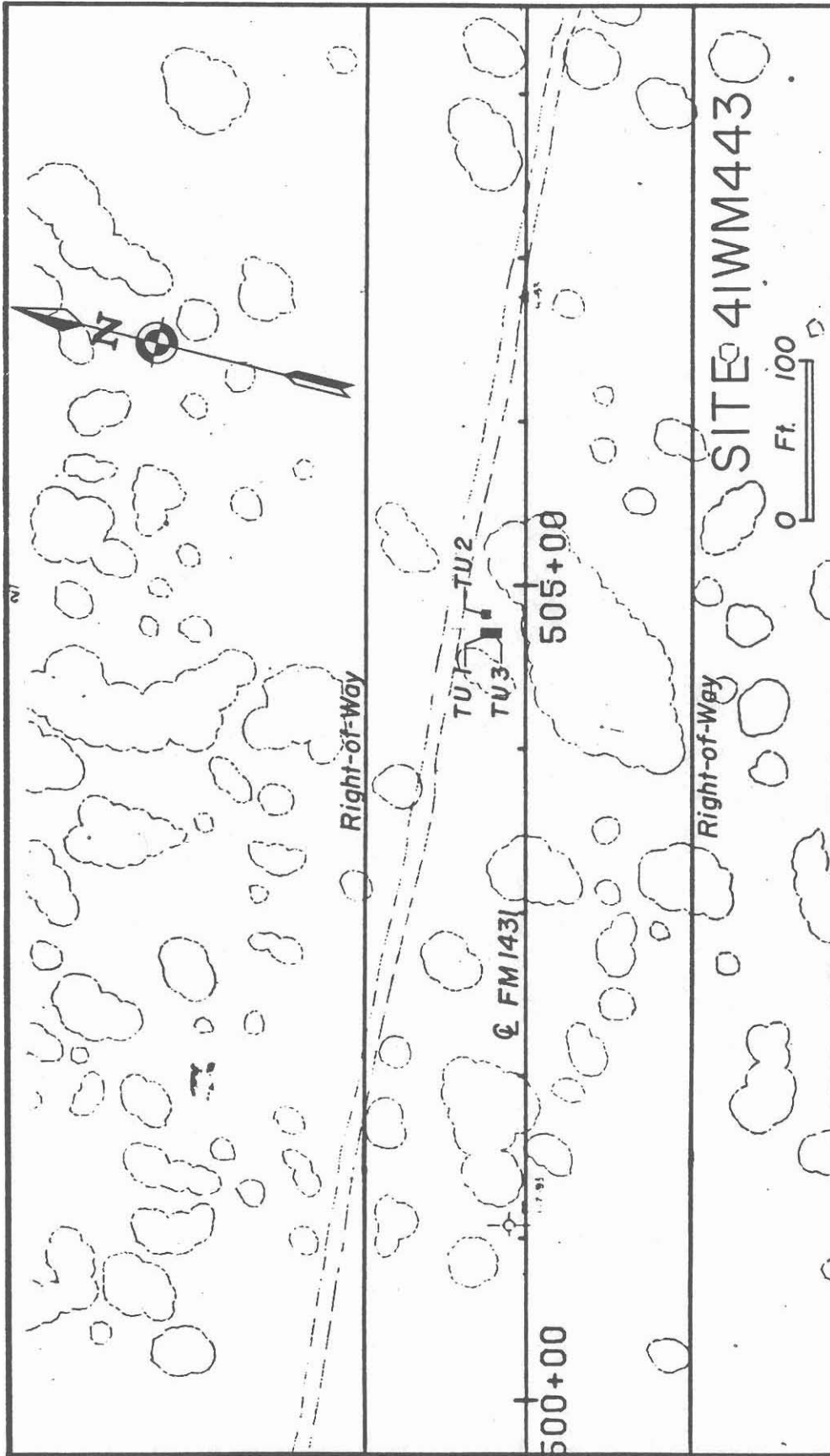


FIGURE 2. Topographic map of Site 41WM443 showing test units.

TESTING RESULTS

Artifact recovery from the testing of 4IWM443 included a quantity of lithic debitage and aborted bifaces but no bone, snails, mussels, features, or temporally diagnostic artifacts. The lithic sample is related to the early stages of lithic reduction, as might be expected with the midden located on a lithic procurement area.

Level 1 of Test Unit 1 contained 1 core, 18 chunks of flint, 100 interior flakes, and 61 cortex flakes. Level 2 contained 1 thin triangular biface, 2 core fragments, 1 side scraper fragment, 19 flint chunks, 153 interior flakes, and 89 cortex flakes.

Test Unit 3, adjacent to Test Unit 1, contained 3 cores, 10 flint chunks, 38 interior flakes, and 42 cortex flakes in Level 1. Level 2 held 3 cores, 2 biface fragments, 3 scrapers, 36 chunks, 179 interior flakes, and 73 cortex flakes.

Test Unit 2 contained 2 cores, 1 modified flake, 1 side and end scraper, 58 flint chunks, 168 interior flakes, and 114 cortex flakes.

The testing operations also provided a midden profile which is shown in Figure 3. This profile spans most of the burned rock midden and indicates that this cultural feature was constructed in a natural bedrock depression which had a number of large, loose limestone slabs lying on bedrock. These slabs were not removed prior to the midden construction and their lack of burning suggests that they were not used for cultural activities within the burned rock midden.

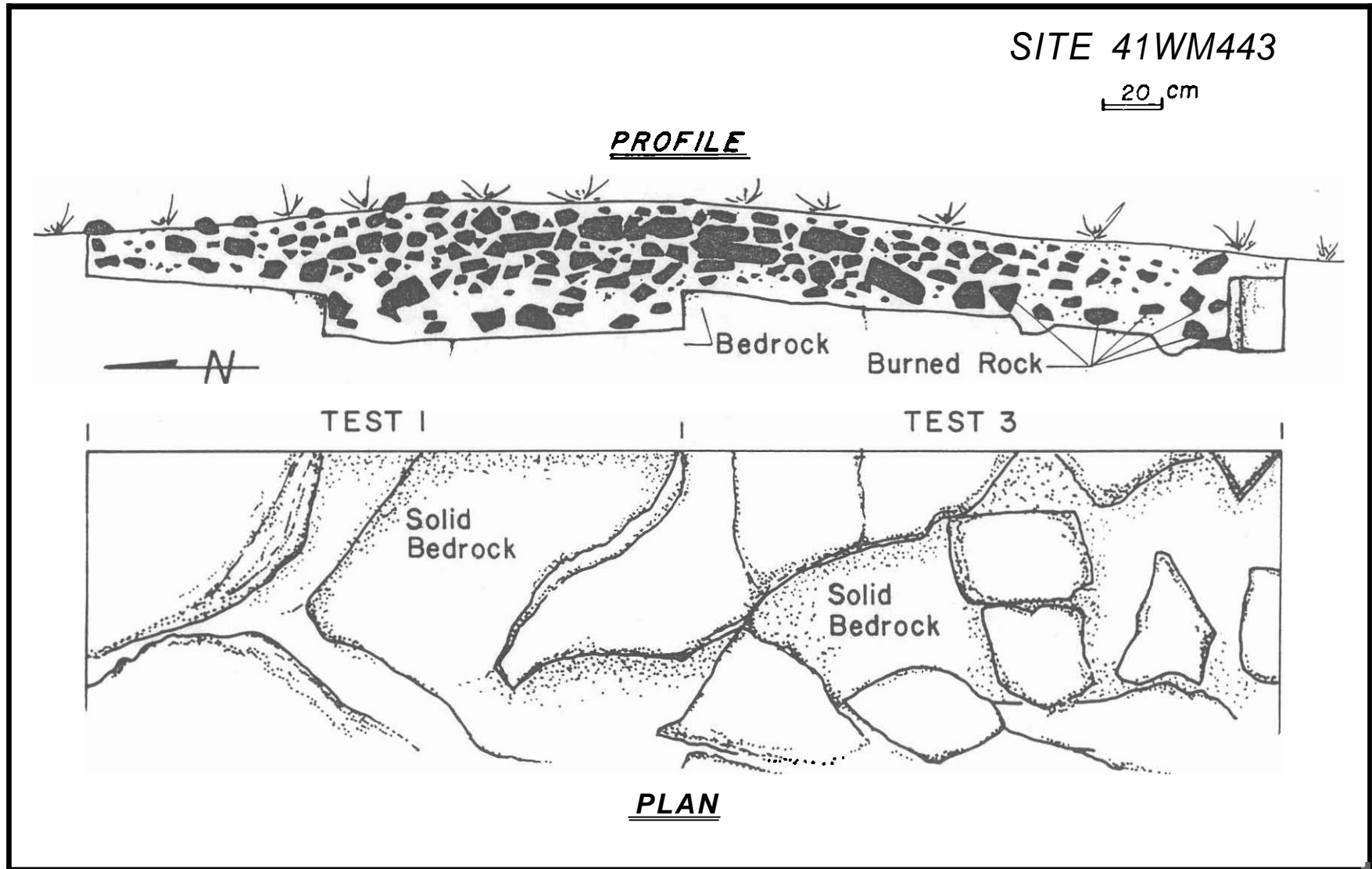


FIGURE 3. Profile of midden and plan view of test units with burned rocks removed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Further research is not warranted on the portions of **41WM443** within the right-of-way for **FM 1431**. Testing procedures have provided a sample of materials from within the burned rock midden and have largely eliminated all areas with intact cultural deposits. The site is thought to represent primarily a lithic procurement and early reduction center and was used secondarily **as** a habitation site, most likely over a span of several thousand years. Unfortunately, the temporal parameters are unknown and cannot be controlled. **The** portions of **41WM443** within the **SDHPT** right-of-way do not warrant inclusion within the National Register of Historic Places. Parts of the site outside the right-of-way may meet the criteria for inclusion, but these areas are beyond the jurisdiction of the **SDHPT**.