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ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING OF SITE 41WM461
WILLIAMSON COUNTY, TEXAS

By
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Texas
State Department of Highways and Public Transportation
Highway Design Division
April 1984

ABSTRACT

Testing of Site 41WM461 on County Road 375, Williamson County, 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 February, 1984. The site lies on a high clay terrace of Brushy Creek and contains sparse lithic debris. Evidence recovered demonstrates that insufficient material exists within the proposed right-of-way to support a determination of eligibility for inclusion within the National Register.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeological Site 41WM461 was recorded at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory of the Balcones Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, in September, 1983, 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. A research design for preliminary testing of the site was submitted to the office of the State Historic Preservation Officer in January of 1984. During the period of January 31 to February 6, 1984, testing operations were conducted by Joe T. Denton of the SDHPT professional cultural resources staff with field support personnel provided by the SDHPT District 14 Bastrop Residency Office. Testing was performed under the auspices of Procedures for the Protection of Historic and Cultural Properties (36 CFR, Part 800), procedures prescribed and endorsed by the Federal Highway Administration. The object of the test was to determine eligibility for inclusion of the site within the National Register of Historic Places as prescribed by Federal regulation and to determine the nature of the deposits and the cultural context of the site.

The highway construction project affecting the site is a bridge replacement at the Brushy Creek crossing on County Road 375

(Fig. 1). This is an off-system, federal bridge rehabilitation and replacement project and entails the construction of a new bridge on a new location with new approaches, requiring a maximum right-of-way of 125 ft. at the site (Fig. 2). The bridge to be replaced consists of a pony truss span 100 ft. in length with a smaller pony truss 52 ft. in length supported by concrete foundations. In addition, there are two 18-ft. approach spans with timber decks, bents, and columns and ten 15-ft. timber spans with steel bents and treated timber posts. The bridge was constructed in 1922 and has been determined not to meet the criteria for inclusion within the National Register of Historic Places. Similar structures exist in fifteen other localities in Williamson County.

The site, 41WM461, is located to the east of existing County Road 375, on the north high terrace of Brushy Creek. The area is currently rural farmland with improved pastures in the uplands and woodlands along the streams. Portions of the site have been under intensive cultivation and have been subject to clearing. In areas both within and outside the proposed right-of-way, topsoil has been removed by previous clearing operations. As much as 1 ft. of the original topsoil has been removed in some areas.

Surface evidence of cultural materials was most abundant proximal to the existing bridge and roadway. This area of

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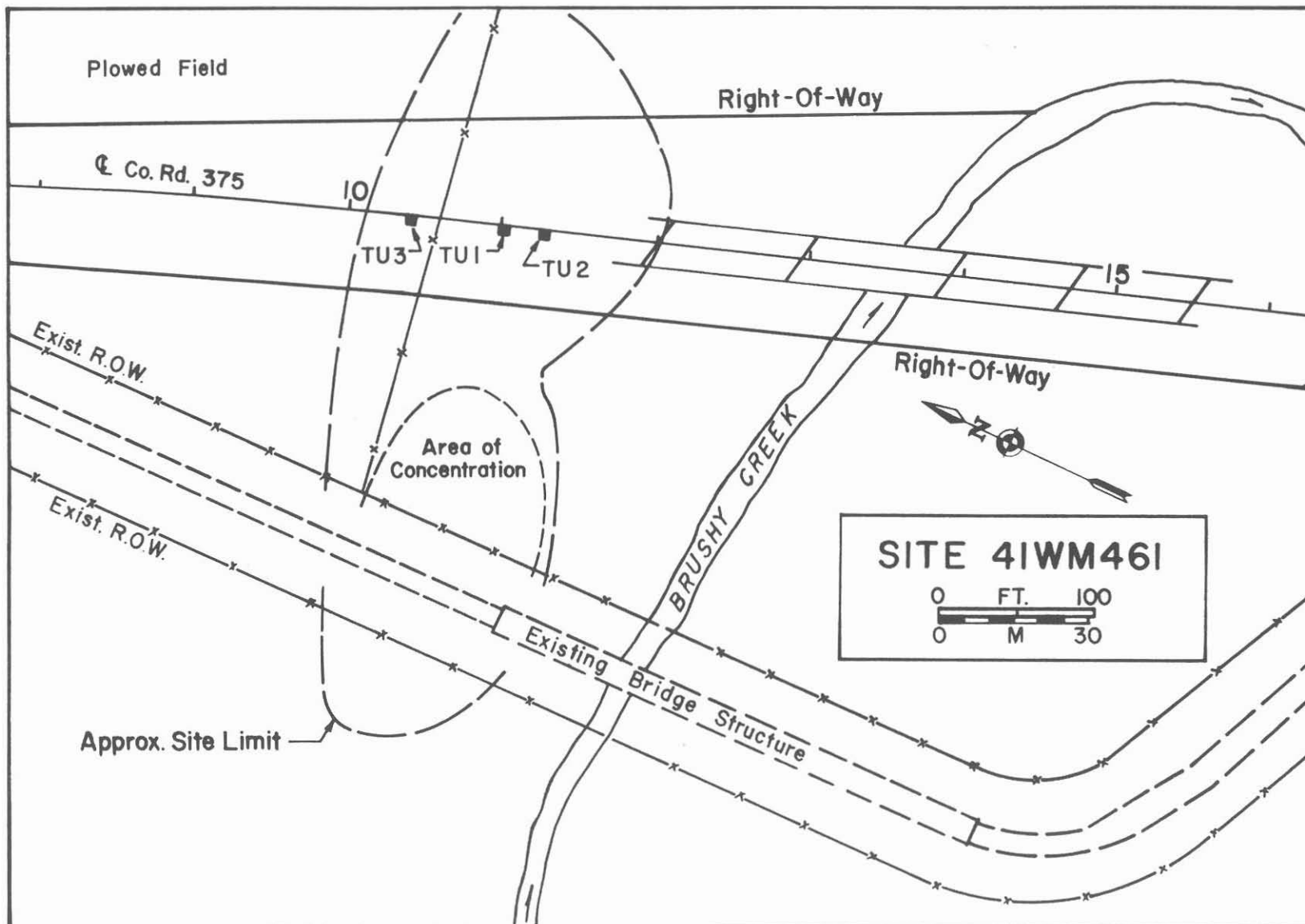


FIGURE 2. Project area showing limit of Site 4IWM461 and location of test units.

greatest concentration lies outside of the proposed right-of-way and new alignment. No evidence of cultural material other than an occasional flake was noted along the stream terrace embankment. The site, as evidenced by an infrequent occurrence of lithic debris on the surface, appears to extend approximately 500 ft. along the terrace from the existing roadway, with a maximum width of approximately 100 ft. Some cultural debitage is observable in the plowed fields.

The soils consist of clays and loamy clays, principally of the Branyon Series. These soils are characterized as deep calcareous clays on gentle slopes formed in clayey alluvium and marine clays and shales. The region can best be described as flat to gently sloping. The soils in the region are well known for their extreme shrink/swell coefficient which results in excessive cracking when dry. Cracks with depths of 5 ft. are not uncommon in this soil.

PROCEDURES

Archaeological testing of Site 41WM461 consisted of surface observations and test units excavated by hand (Fig. 2). Three 1 by 1 meter units were excavated in 10 cm levels to a depth of 80 cm. Two units, (TU 1 and TU 2), were placed in the wooded area along the terrace edges in a location believed to be relatively undisturbed. An additional test unit, TU 3, was placed in the plowed field. All test units were located along the centerline established for the new facility. All matrix was passed through 0.25 in. hardware cloth screens, and recovered material was removed from the site for analysis and temporary storage at the SDHPT Laboratory for Archaeological Studies.

OBSERVATIONS

A total of 128 flakes was recovered with little real vertical variation observed. The majority of flakes was recovered from TU 1. The flake frequency increased at or near the contact between two clay types at a depth of approximately 40-50 cm. The upper clay was a dark gray clay and the lower was a yellow-tan mottled clay. Virtually nothing was recovered below a depth of 50 cm. The only artifact, a possible Pedernales dart point base, was found on the ground surface near the old bridge. Also recovered were 3 square nails and occasional glass fragments. Historic materials were recovered to a depth of 40 cm. No features were encountered.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the material recovered from testing operations at Site 41WM461, **it** is believed that the portion of the site lying within the proposed right-of-way does not meet the criteria for inclusion within the National Register of Historic Places. The site exhibits a general paucity of cultural material, a lack of adequate stratification, and an apparent lack of intact features: factors which suggest that **it** does not contain significant information worthy of further study. Previous clearing and cultivation activities, as well as the extreme shrink/swell coefficient characteristic of the Branyon Soil Series which produces excessive cracking during dry periods, have resulted in mixing of modern and prehistoric materials. That portion of the site within the right-of-way subject to testing appears relatively shallow and highly disturbed. No further investigation appears warranted.