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Excavations at Site 41BX773: Cultural Resource Investigations along Huebner Road, in San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

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Excavations at Site 41BX773: Cultural Resource Investigations along Huebner Road, in San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

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EXCAVATIONS AT SITE 41BX773:
CULTURAL RESOURCE INVESTIGATIONS
ALONG HUEBNER ROAD, IN SAN ANTONIO
BEXAR COUNTY, TEXAS

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ABSTRACT

Test excavations were conducted at Site 41BX773 by Alan J. Wormser of the cultural resources staff at the Texas State Department of Highways and Public Transportation (SDHPT) between September 23, and September 25, 1987. The site was a workshop/quarry site where chert nodules eroding out of the limestone bedrock were being tested, broken up, and carried away to outlying campsites. A lack of diagnostic artifacts prevents assigning the site to any particular set of time periods. The portion of the site south of Huebner Road has been destroyed by construction of an apartment complex. The deposits on the north side were very shallow and no features were encountered during testing. Site 41BX773 is not considered to be eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places and does not warrant designation as a State Historic Landmark.

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INTRODUCTION

In September of 1987, test excavations were conducted at 41BX773, a lithic procurement site in northern Bexar County. Figure 1 shows the location of 41BX773 on a portion of the Castle Hills 7.5' Series USGS quadrangle (#2998-311). Testing was performed by Alan J. Wormser, of the Texas State Department of Highways and Public Transportation(SDHPT) cultural resources staff. The SDHPT District Office in San Antonio supplied a 2-member excavation crew. All testing was within the new right-of-way on the northeast side of Huebner Road, and was conducted under the Procedures for the Protection of Historic and Cultural Properties(36 CFR, Part 800). Fieldwork required a total of 6 man-days.

Site 41BX773 is in an upland area about 750 meters southwest of Olmos Creek. The site was recorded by Wormser during an on-site survey in June 1987. Problems regarding site function, and the integrity, nature, depth, and horizontal extent of the cultural deposits were addressed in order to determine eligibility for inclusion within the National Register of Historic Places.

During testing, four 1 X 1 meter test units and two shovel tests were excavated. The test units were excavated in arbitrary 10 cm levels. A total of 144 pieces of chipped lithic debris, 1 core, 3 tested cobbles, 14 small pieces of burned rock, and 5 modified flakes were recovered. No diagnostic prehistoric artifacts were found. Other material included 8 pieces of glass, and 1 crockery sherd, 1 shotgun shell, and 1 ground-wire clamp.

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ENVIRONMENTAL BACKGROUND

Bexar County is in the transition zone between the South Texas Plains, Blackland Prairies, and Edwards Plateau (Gould 1969, Taylor et al. 1962:119). The northern portion of Bexar County, which is the setting of Site 41BX773, is on the southern edge of the Edwards Plateau vegetational area. The climate is subtropical with mild winters and hot summers (Taylor et al 1962:119). Mean annual rainfall for the period 1931-1960 was 27.89 inches (Taylor et al. 1962:120-121), and typical humidity varies from 80 to 50 percent through the day. Snow occurs only once every 3 or 4 years. Blair (1950:113-114) refers to the Edwards Plateau as the Balconian Biotic Province, and mentions that it has a dry, subhumid climate. Within Bexar County, the Edwards Plateau can be characterized as drier than other portions of the county.

In describing the Edwards Plateau, Gould (1969:12) states that "the rough, rocky areas typically support a tall or mid-grass understory and a brush overstory complex made up of live oak, shinnery oak, junipers, and mesquite." Gould's description fits the habitat surrounding 41BX773 exactly. Deer are plentiful within the area (Gould 1969:12). The area including 41BX773 may have been attractive to prehistoric people due to the proximity of several different environmental zones and the various resources associated with these zones.

Major Rivers in Bexar County include the San Antonio River and its tributary, the Medina River. The northern portion of the county includes Cibolo Creek, Balcones Creek, Salado Creek, and Olmos Creek. Although the area immediately

surrounding the site is dry, water resources in the form of springs and creeks are plentiful within a one-half hour walk of the site.

Chert nodules eroding from the limestone were available over the site. Artifacts uollected from the surface indicated that the major activity was procurement and initial reduction of chert. This assertion was verified during the testing phase.

The site is on soils of the Tarrant Association (Taylor et al 1962:30-31). The soil is classified as a Lithic Calciustoll. A typical vertical section of Tarrant soils has very dark grayish-brown clay loam to a depth of about 10 inches. From 10 to 18 inches there is broken limestone mixed with very dark grayish-brown clay loam. The fractured limestone typically continues to a depth of about 24 inches, beneath which is limestone bedrock (Taylor et al. 1962:115). The soil horizons at 41BX773, while generally following this description, are even more shallow.

The land-use of area surrounding the site is quickly becoming residential and commercial, Modern apartment complexes have destroyed the site on the south-east side of Huebner Road. Nearby, and to the south and east, there are a public school and modern single-family housing additions. To the west, commercial development is occurring due to the proximity of IH-10. The northwest side of Huebner Road is heavily wooded, with vegetation typical of the southern Edwards Plateau uplands. However, the trend toward residential and commercial development in the area will probably continue at an accelerated pace over the next several years.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Previous research

The archaeology of Bexar County has been summarized by Woolford (1935), and Fawcett (1972). The Olmos Creek drainage has been examined several miles south of 41BX773 near Olmos Dam. Woolford (1935) presented a summary of prehistoric sites including 41BX1, a site first tested in the 1920's. Site 41BX1 yielded material from the Paleo-Indian period (Orchard and Campbell 1954) and later material, possibly including Southwestern and local styles of pottery (Orchard and Campbell 1960). The site and general vicinity have been restudied frequently within the last 15 years or so (Fawcett 1972, Luke 1974, Fox 1975, Brown 1977, Assad 1978, 1979).

A quarry site in northern Bexar County is described by McGraw and Valdez (1978b) and a brief report has recently been published on archaeological resources within Eisenhower Park (McGraw 1986).

Archaeological research projects have also been conducted along the Salado Creek. The survey and subsequent excavations in the Salado drainage have been quite extensive (Hester et al 1974, McGraw and Valdez 1978a, Black and McGraw 1985, Katz 1987). Hill (1974) examined St. Mary's Hall, and the Walker Ranch Historical District has also been studied intensively (Hudson, Lynn, and Scurlock 1974, Potter 1980, Fox 1979).

Cibolo Creek has been studied by Jaquier (1976). The Fort Sam Houston Project (Gerstle, Kelly, and Assad 1978) examined a large area which included both the Salado and Cibolo Creek watersheds. Previous to these studies, relatively

little was known about the archaeology of the Cibolo River in Bexar County, although Patterson and Adams (1977) had described a complex of prehistoric quarry sites in neighboring Kendall County.

Chronology

Evidence of human occupation extends beyond 10,000 B.C. in Central Texas. Weir (1976) has divided prehistoric sites from the region into several different time periods (which Weir calls "phases"). These have been modified and elaborated by Prewitt (1981), but Prewitt's use of the archaeological concept of "phase" has recently come under criticism (Johnson 1986). Weir's chronology is the more conservative of the two, and will therefore be used for purposes of this report:

Late Prehistoric:	1500 - 400 B.P.
Archaic:	
Twin Sisters Phase	2000 - 700 B.P.
San Marcos Phase	2800 - 1800 B.P.
Round Rock Phase	4200 - 2600 B.P.
Clear Fork Phase	5000 - 4000 B.P.
San Geronimo Phase	8000 - 4500 B.P.
Paleo-Indian:	Before 7000 B.P.

SITE DESCRIPTION/INVESTIGATION

Methods

The site was covered with a thick brush of oak, cedar and mesquite. Portions of this were cleared along the north side of Huebner Road using a backhoe. In order to not disturb the surface of the site, the backhoe bucket was used to remove small trees and shrubs at about 6 inches to 1 foot above the ground surface. The remainder of the brush and other vegetation was then removed by hand. Five locations were cleared in this way, leaving a clearing 5 meters in diameter at each location. The test units and shovel tests were excavated within these five cleared areas.

Four test units (TU) were excavated (Figure 2). Each was 1 by 1 meter horizontally. Two test units (TU-3 and TU-4) were adjacent to one another creating the equivalent of a 1 by 2 meter test unit. In the cases of TU-1 and TU-2, the soil was less than 10 cm deep. Each of these two test units consisted of a single excavation level. TU-3 and TU-4 were excavated in 10 cm levels. In all cases, test units were excavated to the soil-limestone contact. In addition, two shovel tests were made southwest of the test units. They were approximately 50 by 50 cm in size.

The test excavations were usually conducted with shovel and trowel. A pick was used in TU-3, Levels 3 and 4, to get through the fragmented limestone and expose a clean profile along the walls of the test unit. All excavated fill was screened using 114-inch hardware cloth.

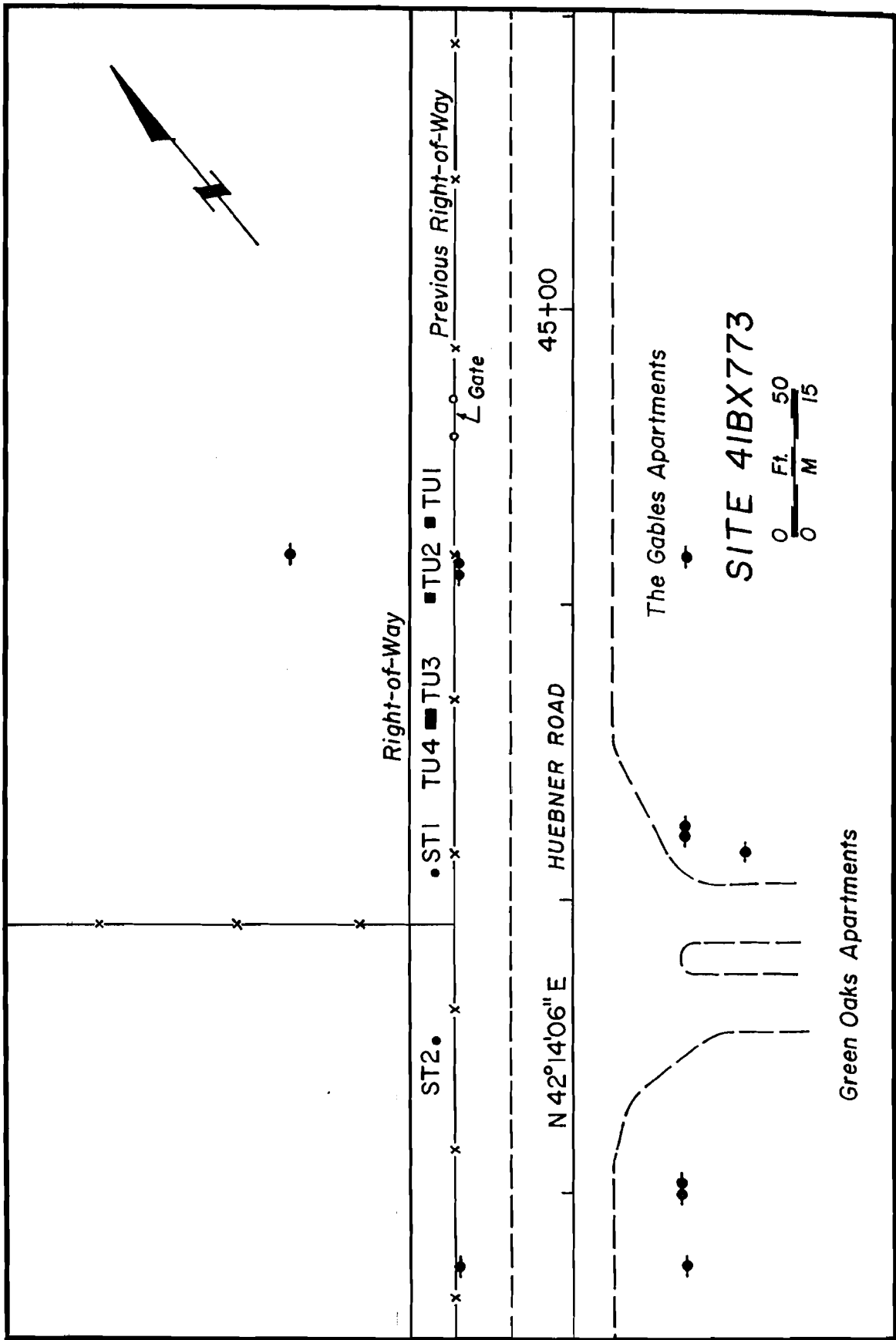


Figure 2. Map of Site 41BX773 showing location of test units.

Test Units

A summary of all the material found at 41BX773 appears in Tables 1 and 2. Little cultural material was found. Most of the artifacts recovered were primary and secondary flakes. A few pieces of burned rock were recovered, but most of these were pebble-size fragments, and may have been the result of attempts at heat treating. No features and no temporally diagnostic artifacts were found during the testing of 41BX773.

Uncontrolled surface collections were made prior to excavation. Most of the material collected came from the road cut and drainage ditch on the north side of Huebner Road. Of the cultural material observed, only selected items were retained in the surface collection. The material which was observed on the surface, but not collected, consisted of primary and secondary waste flakes. The scatter of material on the surface indicated that the site extends only about 30 meters along Huebner Road. The collection included the only core recovered at the site and one of the three tested cobbles. The modified flakes are both secondary hard-hammer flakes with unifacial use-wear along the distal portions of one lateral edge. They were probably makeshift tools used for scraping moderate to hard material such as wood or bone.

TU-1 was located at the northeast end of the site. The dark clay loam was very shallow, with fractured limestone bedrock underlying the soil. The soil-limestone boundary varied between 8 and 10 cm below the surface. All the fill from this test unit was dug as a single level. Historical material recovered during testing came from this test unit, and was mixed with the prehistoric remains. There was a gate and dirt access road just east of the test unit, so historic material might be expected to be concentrated at this

location. All of the historical material appears to be recent. The ground-wire clamp probably came from the overhead electrical power lines.

TU-2 was Located to the southwest of TU-1 and also had a very shallow soil over fractured limestone bedrock. The soil varied in depth from 2 cm in the northern aorner of the square to 10 cm in the southern corner. All the fill from this test unit was dug as a single level.

TU-3 was excavated in 4 levels to a depth of 40 cm. The soil was about 20 cm deep in this test unit, before the mixed layer of fractured limestone and clay loam was encountered. Excavation continued through the fractured limestone to the more massive limestone bedrock below. The massive bedrock was at a depth of 32 to 40 cm. The deeper soil in TU-3 may be due to the presence of a shrub in the test unit. Many roots from this shrub were present in the center of the test unit; where the soil was deepest. Artifact yields were low over all of the site, but were highest in TU-3, Level 1.

Two modified flakes were recovered from Level 1 of TU-3. The first specimen is a large secondary flake, while the other specimen is a primary flake. Both exhibit unifacial use-wear on the dorsal face of their distal end. The used edges are concave in outline and appear to have been used to scrape moderate to hard material such as wood or bone. The concave outline and use-wear scarring indicate that the modified flakes represent "spokeshave" tools typically used in fashioning wooden implements.

TU-4 is adjacent and northeast of TU-3. The soil of TU-4 was shallow with fractured limestone bedrock appearing at the bottom of level 2 (20 cm). The

test unit was excavated in 2 levels. A modified flake found in Level 1 of this unit is a hard-hammer secondary flake with unifacial use-wear on the proximal portion of the right lateral edge. The use-wear is fine and regular, and the flake was probably used to scrape a relatively soft material. The northwest wall profile of TU-3 and TU-4 appear in Figure 3.

Shovel Tests

Two shovel tests were placed southwest of TU-3. The purpose of the shovel tests were to further determine the horizontal extent of the site, and to reveal the nature of the soils at the southwestern end of the site. Material from the tests was screened through 1/4-inch hardware cloth. No artifacts were found in the shovel tests. The soil at both locations was a very dark grayish-brown clay loam to a depth of about 10 to 15 cm. Below the soil was fractured limestone typical of the test units elsewhere on the site. The shovel tests confirmed observations made during examination of surface material that the linear extent of the site along Huebner Road is limited to about 30 meters. Since the new right-of-way along Huebner Road is only 15 feet wide, it was impossible to estimate site size beyond the linear distance along the road project.

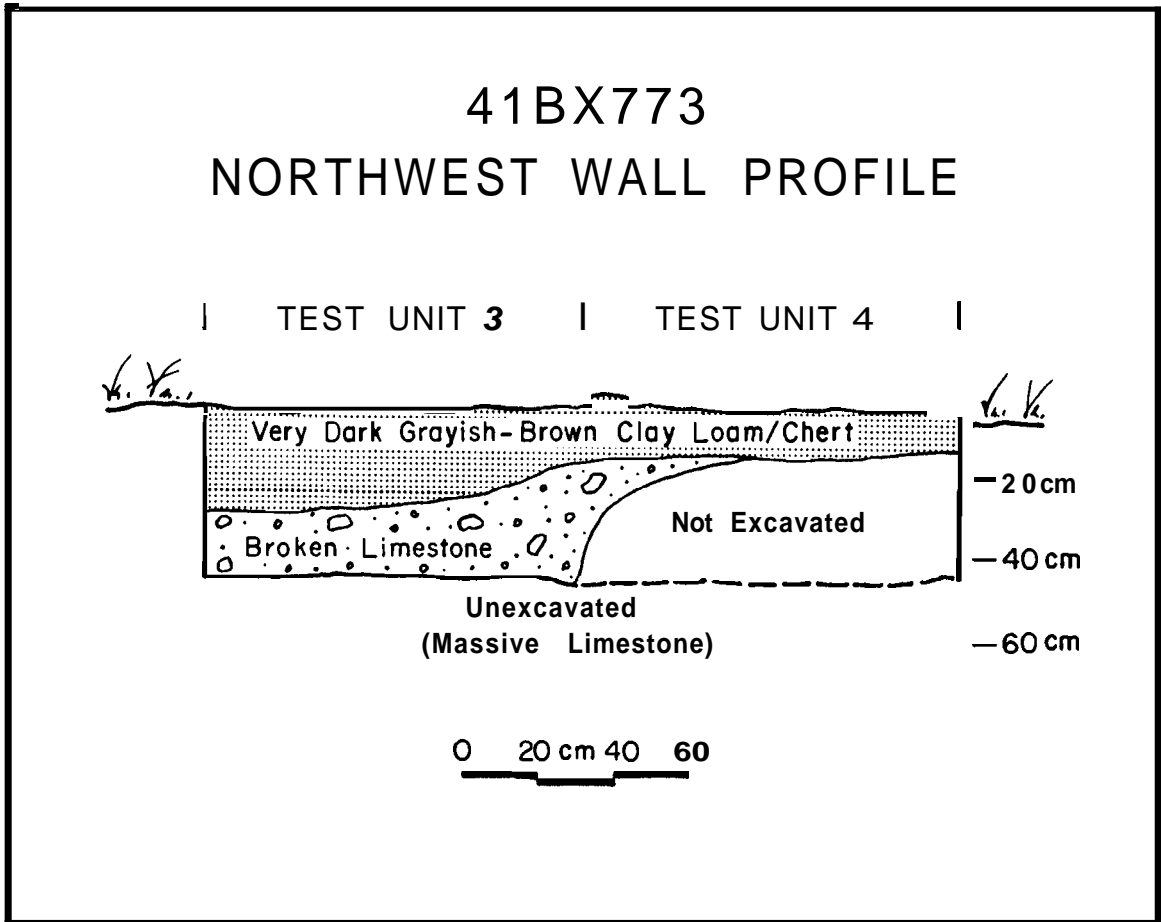


Figure 3. Northwest wall profile, Test Units 3 and 4.

TABLE 1. Lithic debris recovered from 41BX773

TEST UNIT	LEVEL	PRIMARY FLAKES	SECONDARY FLAKES	INTERIOR FLAKES	SHATTER	BURNED ROCK
Surface	---	6	---	3	1	3
TU-1	1	4	4	2	---	2
TU-2	1	8	9	6	9	---
TU-3	1	10	15	10	2	5
	2	2	4	1	3	
	3	3	6	3	3	
	4		1	1		
TU-4	1	6	4	9	3	2
	2	4	2			2

TABLE 2. Other artifacts from 41BX773.

TEST UNIT	LEVEL	CORES	TESTED COBBLES	MODIFIED FLAKES	CLEAR GLASS	HISTORIC CROCKERY	GUN SHELL	WIRE CLAMP
Surface	---	1	1	2	---	---	---	---
TU-1	1	---	---	---	7	1	1	1
TU-2	1	---	---	---	1	---	---	---
TU-3	1	---	2	2	---	---	---	---
TU-4	1	---	---	1	---	---	---	---

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Cultural material was originally observed in the road cut and drainage ditch on the northwest side of Huebner Road. The southeast side of the road has been badly disturbed by the construction of an apartment complex and maintenance of the drainage ditch on that side of the road. Examination of the surface indicated a scatter of flaked chert for a linear distance of about 30 meters.

Selected areas along the northwest side of Huebner Road were cleared of vegetation in such a manner that the shallow soils were not disturbed. Four 1 by 1 meter test units were excavated and 2 shovel tests were dug. These revealed a low artifact density, very shallow soils, and some mixing of recent historic debris with the prehistoric material. The disturbance caused by root activity in such a shallow soil was evident in TU-3.

The site appears to have been used as a source of chert in the form of naturally occurring nodules. The large proportion of primary and secondary flakes, and the lack of burned rock, indicates that the site was primarily a lithic workshop/quarry. The distance to water may have made this a less attractive location for a campsite.

The only implements found were makeshift flake tools, which were probably only used for a short time before they were discarded. No diagnostic artifacts or other finished tools were found. No features were discovered during excavation.

In conclusion, the site appears to be shallow and disturbed. Cultural material is unstratified. The portion of the site to be affected by the road project is quite small, although concomitant residential/commercial development along Huebner Road will further impact the site outside the highway right-of-way. The artifact yields were very low, and no diagnostic artifacts or features were discovered during testing. Site 41BX773 is not considered eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. It is recommended that no further research be done within the highway right-of-way at 41BX773 and that the highway project may proceed as planned.

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