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ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING OF 41BZ87

BRAZOS COUNTY, TEXAS

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ABSTRACT

Site 41BZ87 is a prehistoric site situated on a low knoll above Thompson Creek in western Brazos County. It is within the approximately 600 ft. wide right-of-way of the future alignment of S.H. 47. Phase II archaeological testing was begun by the author in August, 1992, to determine the site's eligibility for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (in accordance with 36 CFR, Part 800) and assess its potential for State Landmark status. The site contains an unknown prehistoric cultural zone of undetermined age or affiliation. The occupation is exposed on the surface and extends to some 40 cm deep in the sandy soil and gravel. No diagnostic material were recovered, no features were noted, and only 2 flakes and 6 chips was found during testing. Further testing will not add to the overall regional database for prehistoric sites. Site 41BZ87 is extremely minimal as a site and it does not meet the criteria for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places nor should it be designated as a State Archaeological Landmark.

INTRODUCTION

This report describes archaeological testing conducted at site 41BZ87 in August of 1992. The prehistoric site is located on a low knoll on the west side of Thompson Creek, approximately 500 ft. southeast of Silver Hills Road in Brazos County (Fig. 1). The site will be impacted by construction of the Stotzer Freeway (SH 47). Site 41BZ87 was recorded in 1987 by archaeologists with the Texas Department of Highways and Public Transportation as part of a cultural assessment of SH 47.

Significance testing was undertaken prior to the TxDOT road construction project which will require up to 600 feet of new right-of-way in the area of prehistoric site 41BZ87. Archaeological testing, totaling 46 person hours, was conducted in August of 1992 by the author, with the assistance of personnel from District 17 in Bryan. Testing at site 41BZ87 was conducted by hand and with machine to determine the site's possible eligibility for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places and to assess the sites possible State Archaeological Landmark status.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Prehistoric site 41BZ87 is found in the Brazos River valley of east central Texas and falls within the Blackland Prairie Region of the Texan Biotic Province as described by Blair (1950). The area is characterized by mesic forests of oaks, hackberries, and pecans supported by alluvial soils of sandy and clayey loams, with intermittent sections of rolling grasslands, and by a moist subhumid climate with rainfall barely in excess of need. Elevation of the site area is between 240 and 260 above sea level.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Very little has been accomplished on the prehistory of Brazos County. Of the sites listed in Brazos County none have been excavated and published at the time of this investigation (Biesart and Spotts 1985). Archaeological investigations in the region containing 41BZ87 include a survey of the proposed Bryan Industrial Park (DeMarcey 1985), a survey of the proposed Bryan Athletic Complex (Drollinger 1986), and a survey of the proposed Wolf Pen Creek Park (Carlson et al. 1990). No prehistoric material was reported in any of the above surveys.

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SITE DESCRIPTION

Site 41BZ87 is located near the west bank of Thompson Creek in western Brazos County (Fig. 2). The site area and adjacent lands are used primarily as pasture for raising cattle. The entire site appears to extend to an area approximately 125 meters northeast to southeast along the creek bank and is about 100 meters in width.

Site 41BZ87 is partially buried from the surface to approximately 40 cm. A few small chipping flakes are exposed in dirt refuse piles near the tops of rodent burrows. The landowner states that the pasture in which the site is located was used to cultivate oats up to about 10 years ago and was annually plowed to a depth of about 6 in.

SOILS

Thompson Creek cuts through Eocene deposits of the Cook Mountain Formation in the project vicinity (Bureau of Economic Geology 1974: Austin Sheet). The site lies within an overlay of alluvial floodplain deposits of light colored sand with Gowan-Ochlockonee associations. The general soil profile for the 41BZ87 area may be characterized as consisting of reddish-yellow to reddish-brown sandy loam overlying a red clay matrix (Fig. 3). Iron-manganese mottling is present immediately above the red clay layer. Cultural material was present in the upper sandy loam levels and absent in the lower red clayey loam levels.

PROCEDURES

Survey of the project area was undertaken by SDHPT (now TxDOT) archaeologists in December of 1987. The location of 41BZ87 in relation to the proposed alignment of SH 47 was noted and testing of the prehistoric site was recommended. Testing was initiated by TxDOT in August of 1992.

The centerline for the future S.H. 47 project was used as a baseline for reference and the making of a site map and formation of a testing grid. One 1x1 m (TU 1) and four .5x.5 m test units were hand-excavated by 10 cm increments into sterile levels. All matrix was screened through 1/4 in. hardware cloth. Testing was concentrated on the site within the right-of-way. The actual excavation was carried out with trowels, flat and spade shovels, with the use of trowels and brushes to clean level floors and examine possible features. In addition to the hand-dug units, two machine dug units were excavated in the site area using a backhoe to test for possible deeply buried cultural deposits.

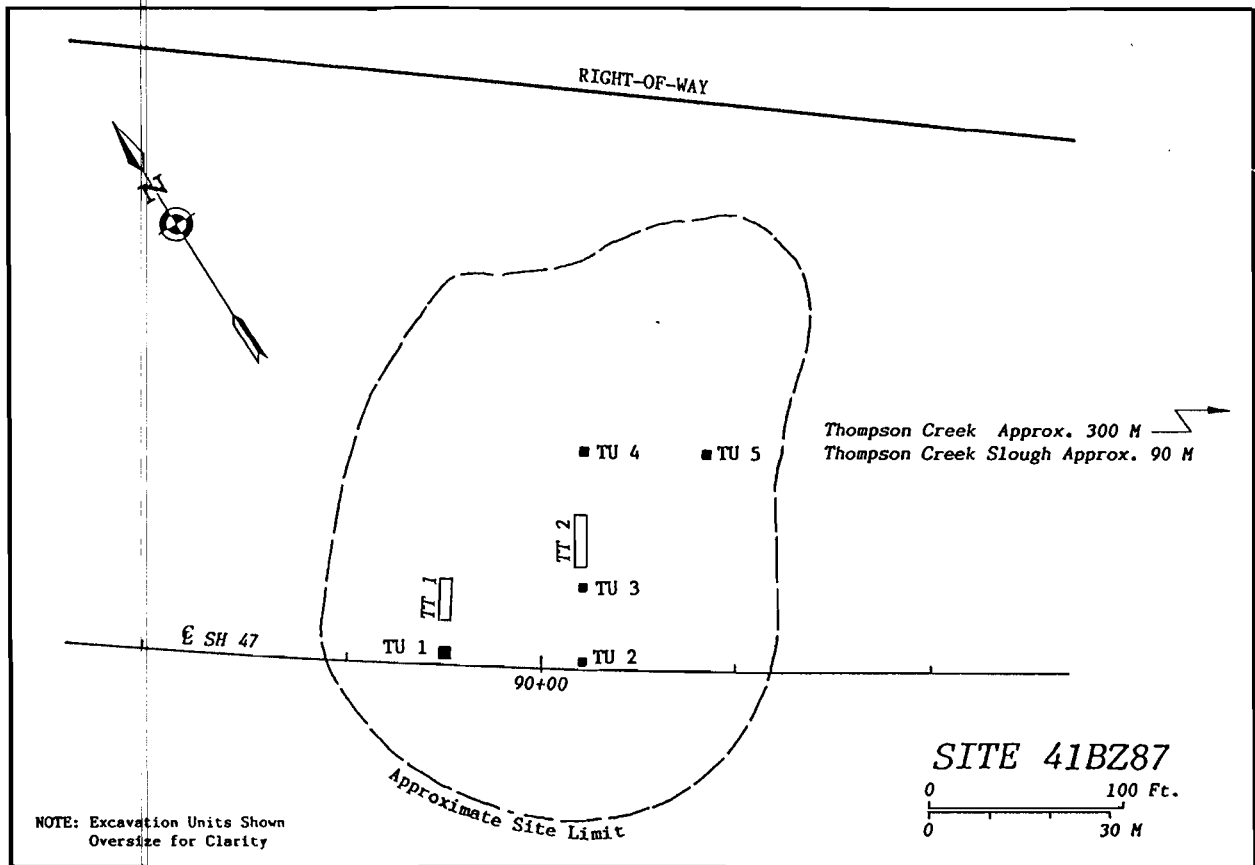


FIGURE 2. Location of Site 41BZ87 within the right-of-way of SH 47 and excavation units.

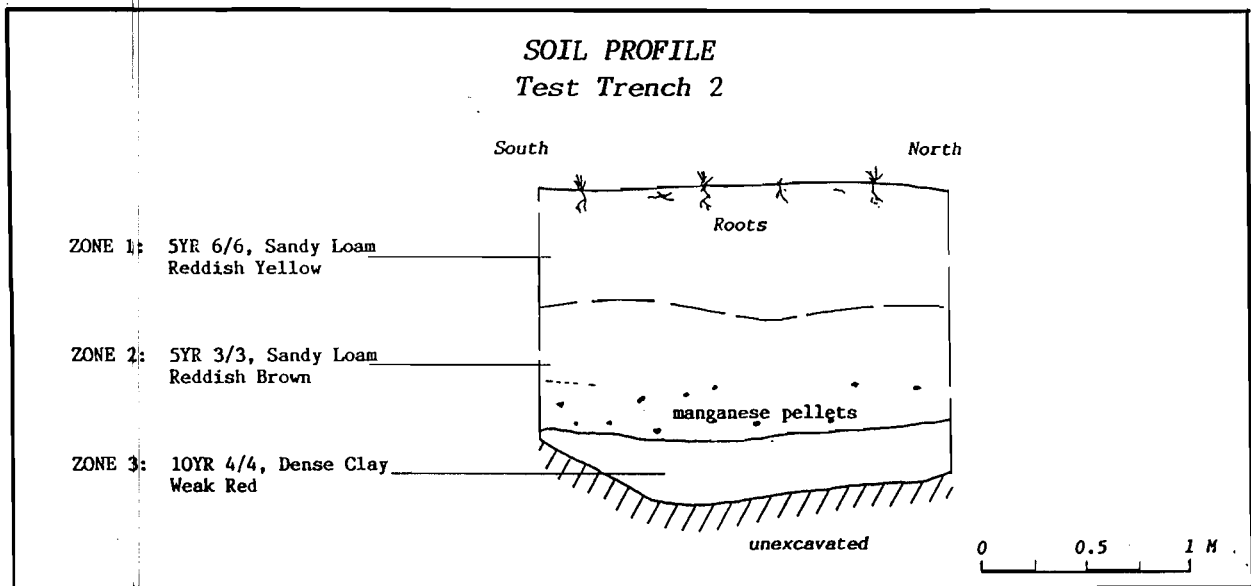


FIGURE 3. General soil profile, Test Trench 2, at Site 41BZ87.

MATERIAL RECOVERED

Extremely little cultural material was recovered from 41BZ87. Only 2 flakes and 6 chips of local chert were found in the five test units. Nothing was found or noted in the backhoe trenches. The flakes consist of one interior flake 1.0 cm in diameter and one primary flake 2.0 cm in diameter. The chips are from interior flakes and range in size from .3 cm to 1.5 cm and average .97 cm in diameter. In addition to the chert lithics found in the test units was a tiny piece of charcoal measuring .2x.3 cm, 2 small burned rock fragments, and a sherd of clear bottle glass measuring 2.7 cm in length.

		ARTIFACTS FROM 41BZ87			
		FLAKES	CHIPS	GLASS	CHARCOAL
TU 1:	1				
	2				
	3				
	4				
TU 2:	1		1		
	2		2		
	3				
	4				
	5		1		
TU 3:	1				
	2		1		
	3				
	4				
	5				
TU 4:	1	1			1
	2				
	3				
	4				
TU 5:	1	1	1	1	
	2				
	3				
	4				
	5				
TOTAL		2	6	1	1

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Five test units were excavated by hand and two trenches by machine at site 41BZ87 in order to determine the nature of the prehistoric cultural deposits at the site and to decide if further data recovery operations would be necessary. Tests indicate that site 41BZ87 consists basically of a sparse lithic scatter on a low rise above the west bank of Thompson Creek. No cultural features were located in the area tested and no diagnostic artifacts were found during testing, nor are any reported from 41BZ87 making temporal placement of the occupation impossible at this time.

Additional excavation within the right-of-way will probably not add significantly to the data already recovered or to the prehistory of the region. Site 41BZ87 is not considered worthy of designation as a State Archaeological Landmark nor should it be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

No further work is recommended.

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