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George P. Wood

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Archaeological Testing near Site 41DN345, Denton County, Texas

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING NEAR SITE 41DN345

DENTON COUNTY, TEXAS

By

Gregory P. Wood

Texas
Department of Transportation
Division of Highway Design

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ABSTRACT

Site 41DN345 is a buried prehistoric site on the north terrace above the Elm branch of the Trinity River, adjacent to IH-35E, in southern Denton County. Archaeological testing was undertaken at 41DN345 by the author in order to determine horizontal and vertical boundaries of the site, cultural context, and possible eligibility for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (in accordance with 36 CFR, Part 800) and State Landmark status. The site contains at least one prehistoric cultural zone. No diagnostic material was recovered during testing. No features were identified during testing operations. Additional right-of-way will be acquired in the site area for the Frankford Road Project (CSJ 0196-02-079). Results of testing indicate that 41DN345 will not be impacted by highway construction, and that further investigations will not add significantly to the overall database.

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INTRODUCTION

Site 41DN345 is located adjacent to IH-35E, in the city of Carrollton in south Denton County (Fig. 1). The prehistoric site was discovered in 1985 in the eroding walls of an abandoned gravel pit or quarry. A Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) project, which will construct a bridge across IH-35 at Frankford Road and will require new right-of-way in the area of 41DN345, necessitated action by the Division of Highway Design's archaeological staff. Testing in the area of 41DN345 was conducted to determine the nature of the deposits, the cultural context, and site boundaries; to assess the site's possible eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places; and to investigate the site's possible State Landmark Status, if indeed site 41DN345 is found within the proposed right-of-way.

Testing, totaling 90 work-hours, was conducted in September of 1991 by the author, with the assistance of personnel from the District 18, Denton Residency. Based on the reported depth of the cultural material at 41DN345, a Gradall trench digging machine was used for most of the testing in order to determine if the Frankford Road project would impact site 41DN345.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Many of the recorded prehistoric sites in Denton County are centered around the Lewisville Lake area (Lake Dallas) in south central Denton County, approximately 10 mi. north of site 41DN345. Previous research on prehistoric sites in the 41DN345 vicinity includes P. Lorrain's (1963) report on six sites in the Elm Fork-Denton/Dallas County line area and his report on a cache of Archaic blades (site 41DL239) found near Carrollton (Lorrain 1978). A review of other sites in the Denton and Dallas County line area is available in Smith (1969), and in Slaughter et al. (1962).

SITE DESCRIPTION

Site 41DN345 is located in the north outskirts of the city of Carrollton in south Denton County. A planned extension of Frankford Road will include a bridge with piers near the 41DN345 site area. The site was recorded in 1985 by R. Ferring and D. Prikryl. The site then consisted of a few pieces of chipping debris, mussel shell, and bone buried 1.8 to 2.5 m below ground surface in an abandoned gravel quarry. The cultural material was visible in the walls of the quarry, which today is filled with water. The entire site, as recorded, appears to extend to an estimated area approximately 300 m by 150 m, or roughly the size of the gravel pit in which the site was located.

Adjacent lands are open and bordered by the Elm Fork of the Trinity River. Railroad tracks and power lines run near and across the site. Residential and commercial neighborhoods are located nearby. The site has been impacted by the gravel pit operations and possibly by power line and railroad construction in the recent past.

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The site is buried under a clayey deposit of soil that varies in thickness (Fig. 2). A more detailed study describing land forms and soil zones established for 41DN345, including soil profiles, is available in a geomorphological report on the site area by C. Caran (1991) in an appendix at the back of this report.

PROCEDURES

Testing consisted of digging 15 trenches with a Gradall machine (Fig. 3). The trenches were 1.5 m wide and 3.5 m long. All trenches were monitored by the investigator and excavated in 10-cm increments to check for exposed artifacts, bone, or features. The trench walls (north and/or west) were troweled by hand to obtain a clear view of the trench profiles.

Two 1-by-1-m test units were hand-excavated in 10-cm levels to disturbed levels. All matrix was screened through 1/4-in. hardware cloth. The actual excavation was carried out with flat and spade shovels, with trowels and brushes used to clean floor levels and examine possible features. Both hand-dug units were located in the proposed right-of-way and found to be in a disturbed context.

Intensive survey of the gravel pit walls revealed some bone and bone fragments outside of the proposed right-of-way. No bone or artifacts were found in the proposed right-of-way. Within the proposed right-of-way, most of the area near the gravel pit was composed of recent fill—possibly imported for power line tower stabilization.

ARTIFACTS RECOVERED

Very few artifacts were recovered in the testing operations. A few pieces of lithic débitage in the form of small, secondary flakes, were recovered from 41DN345. Three large bovine-like bones were recovered from test trench 8, along with some small bone fragments and a charcoal sample. All artifacts were located while attempting to define the boundaries of 41DN345¹. No skeletal material or artifacts were found in the area designated as the project right-of-way. No stone tools were located. No historic artifacts, other than modern trash, were found in the testing operations within the project right-of-way. All artifacts will be curated at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, Austin, Texas.

One new site was located during survey and testing operations. The new site was recorded off the right-of-way and designated 41DN482. Site 41DN482 was located on the west side of IH-35E and was discovered in test trench 5. Flakes, a burned rock, and some mussel shell were observed. The site is located outside of the proposed right-of-way and will not be impacted by road construction. Similar test trenches (9, 10, and 11) were dug within the proposed right-of-way on the west side of IH-35E, but did not contain any indications of cultural material.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Seventeen test units were dug near site 41DN345, by hand and by machine, in order to determine the nature of the prehistoric cultural deposits and the geographic limitations of the site, and also to decide if further data recovery

¹ Because the right-of-way was not staked at the time of testing, some Gradall trenches were inadvertently excavated outside of the project area.

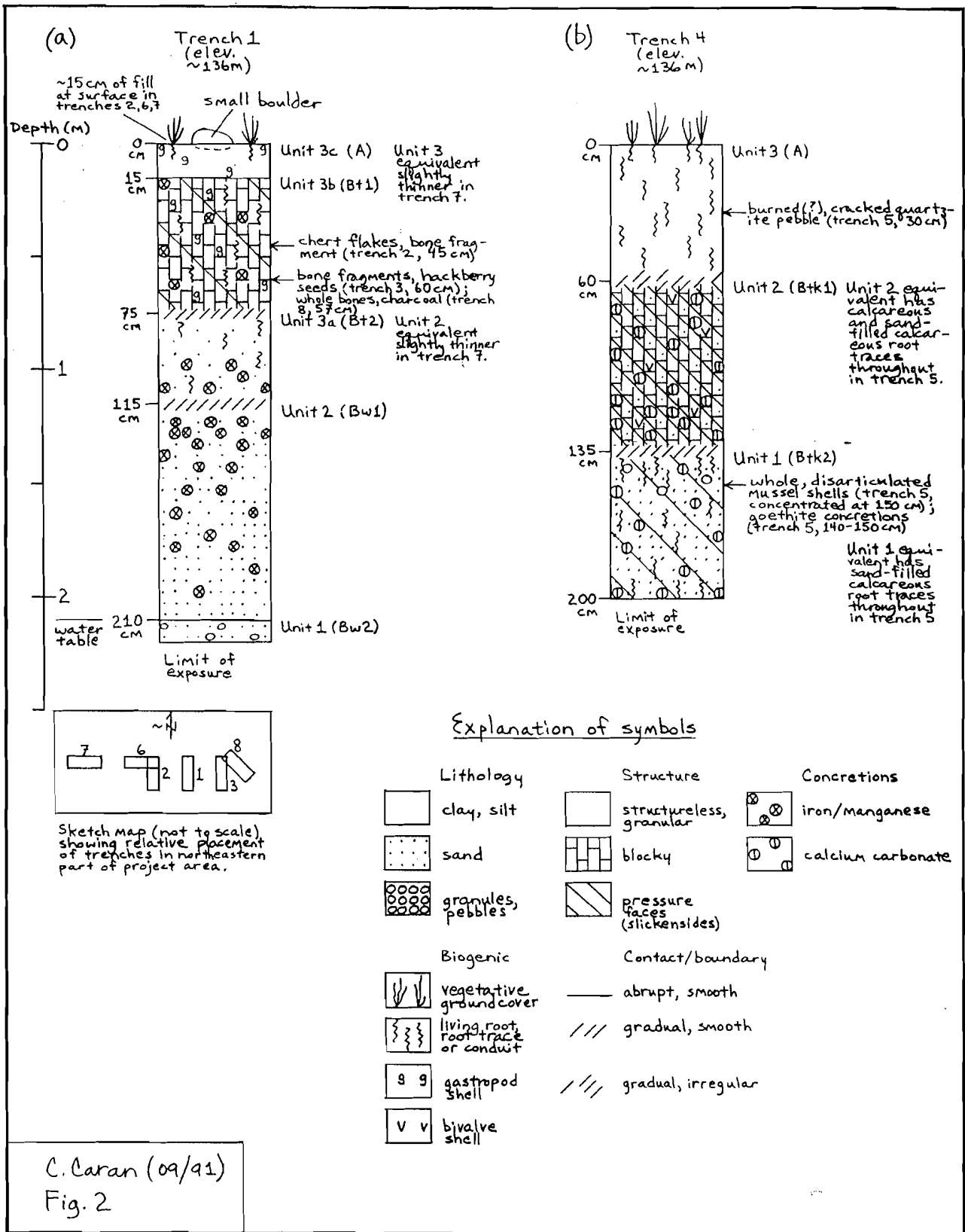


FIGURE 2. Soil profiles of site 41DN345 test trenches, from Caran (1991).

FIGURE 3. Site map of site 41DN345, showing test trench placement.

operations would be necessary. Testing showed that site 41DN345 was not located within the proposed right-of-way of the Frankford Road project.

Conclusions as to Prehistoric lifeways at 41DN345 are difficult to draw, given the overall absence of cultural features and diagnostic artifacts. A larger area than the actual proposed right-of-way was investigated with test trenches to determine the extent of 41DN345 that existed within the project area. One result of the investigation was that the area of the project right-of way thought to have the highest potential to contain cultural material, based on the recorded placement of site 41DN345, was found to be composed of recently laid fill. Dirt fill was possibly brought into the area when the power line towers were built, to stabilize the ground area against erosion. The gravel pit, which once contained most of site 41DN345, lies in a low area and is filled with water.

Since 41DN345 has been found not to exist in the project area of Frankford Road, no statement can be made as to its designation as a State Archaeological Landmark or its eligibility for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

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