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An Archaeological Survey of Power Line Distribution Routes Near Uvalde and Blewett For Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, Inc., Uvalde and Kinney Counties, Texas

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY
OF POWER LINE DISTRIBUTION ROUTES NEAR UVALDE AND BLEWETT
FOR RIO GRANDE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.,
UVALDE AND KINNEY COUNTIES, TEXAS

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Center for Archaeological Research
The University of Texas at San Antonio®
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ABSTRACT

An archaeological survey was conducted of power line routes near Uvalde and Blewett in Uvalde and Kinney Counties, Texas, for the Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, Inc. Four prehistoric sites were found; however, only two sites (41 KY 22 and 41 KY 24) are recommended for testing to determine eligibility for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The survey was conducted during January 1983, in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and Executive Order 11593.

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INTRODUCTION

During January 1983, a preliminary archaeological survey was conducted along portions of the Uvalde and Blewett 30, 24.9 KV power lines in Uvalde and Kinney Counties. The purpose of the survey, undertaken for the Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, Inc., was to make a preliminary assessment of the archaeological potential in areas affected by distribution tie line constructions. The survey was done under contract between the Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, Inc., through Alexander Utility Engineering, Inc., Consulting Engineers, and the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR), The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). Approval for the survey project was initiated by a letter dated December 1, 1982, by Mr. Henry Fuentes of the Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, Inc., to Mr. Wilbur Pressler of Alexander Utility Engineering, Inc.

The field survey was conducted by A. Joachim McGraw and Paul Lukowski, Research Associates of the CAR. Dr. Thomas R. Hester, Director of the Center for Archaeological Research, and Jack D. Eaton, Associate Director, were the Principal and Co-Principal Investigators, respectively. The purpose of the field work was to make a 100% surface survey and assessment of the power line easements. Any archaeological sites found would be briefly described and recommendations made for any further work. Any recommended testing would be aimed at establishing the cultural resource potential and possible qualifications for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and Executive Order 11593.

THE SURVEY AND METHODOLOGY

Two separate power line routes were investigated: (1) the proposed route of the Uvalde tie line just west of the City of Uvalde; and (2) the Blewett-Conoco tie line near the borders of Kinney and Uvalde Counties in the vicinity of the Whites Asphalt Mine (see Figs. 1 and 2). Both of these localities were identified on furnished copies of project maps. While the actual impacted corridor of the routes often measured less than 75 m in width, an area of about 200-300 m along the power lines was surveyed. A knowledge of the topography within the immediate vicinity of the power line route helped the field researchers to locate potential patterns of site distributions.

Research methodology followed the guidelines suggested in the "Council of Texas Archeologists Performance Guidelines" (CTA 1981) as well as in Hester, Heizer, and Graham's (1975) *Field Methods in Archaeology*. Field operations consisted of a series of transects across the selected areas with a primary emphasis on the identification of surface areas as well as the collection of diagnostic or otherwise significant materials. Elevations and distances from water sources and other natural resources were also important considerations. Information on newly recorded sites were transferred to standard site survey forms as used by the CAR-UTSA. All collected materials were placed in plastic or paper bags and numbered as to type of collection, temporary site number, date, and name of collector. Field notes and other pertinent data are on file at the laboratory of the CAR-UTSA.

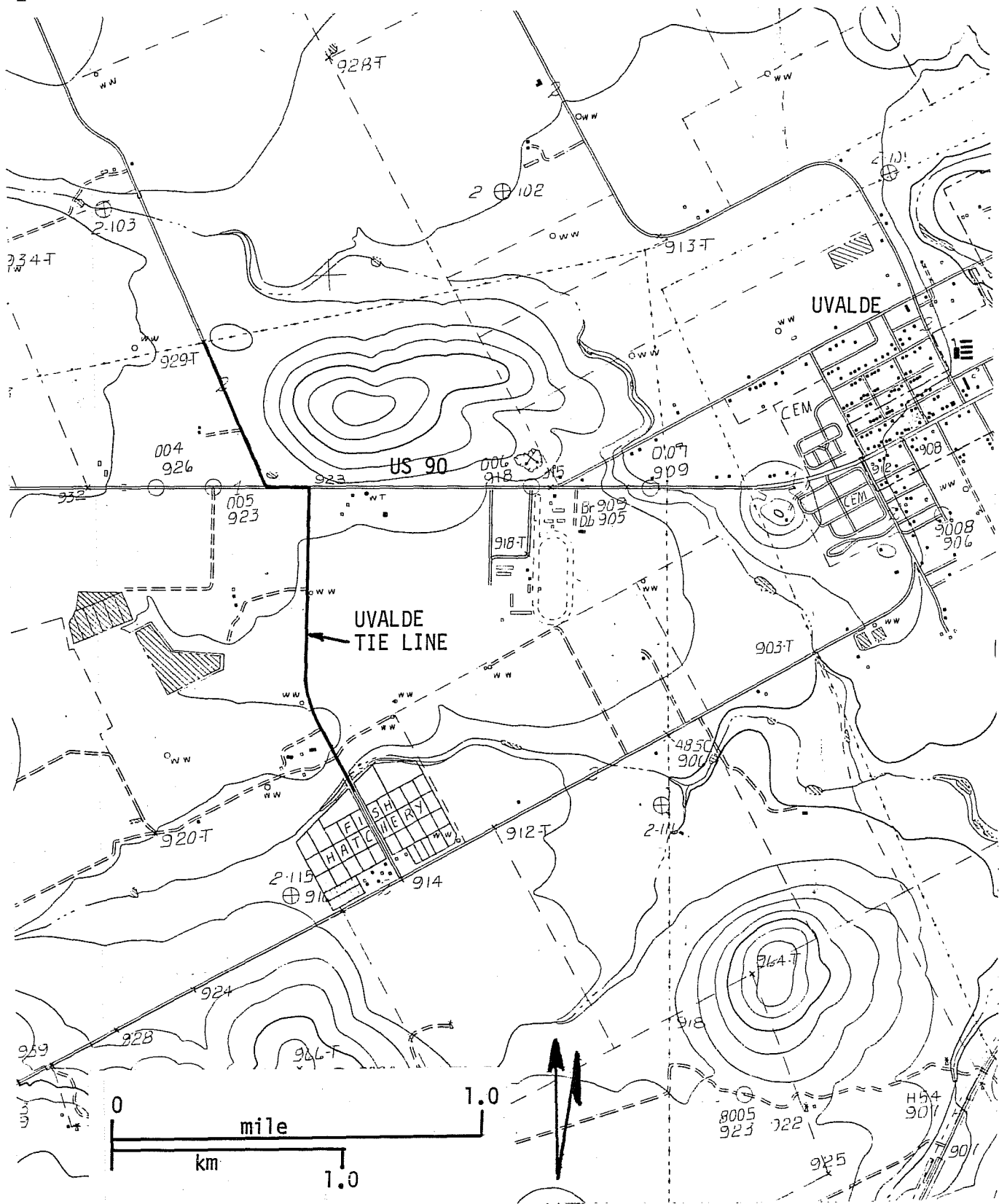


Figure 1. Location of the Uvalde Tie Line and Survey Area.

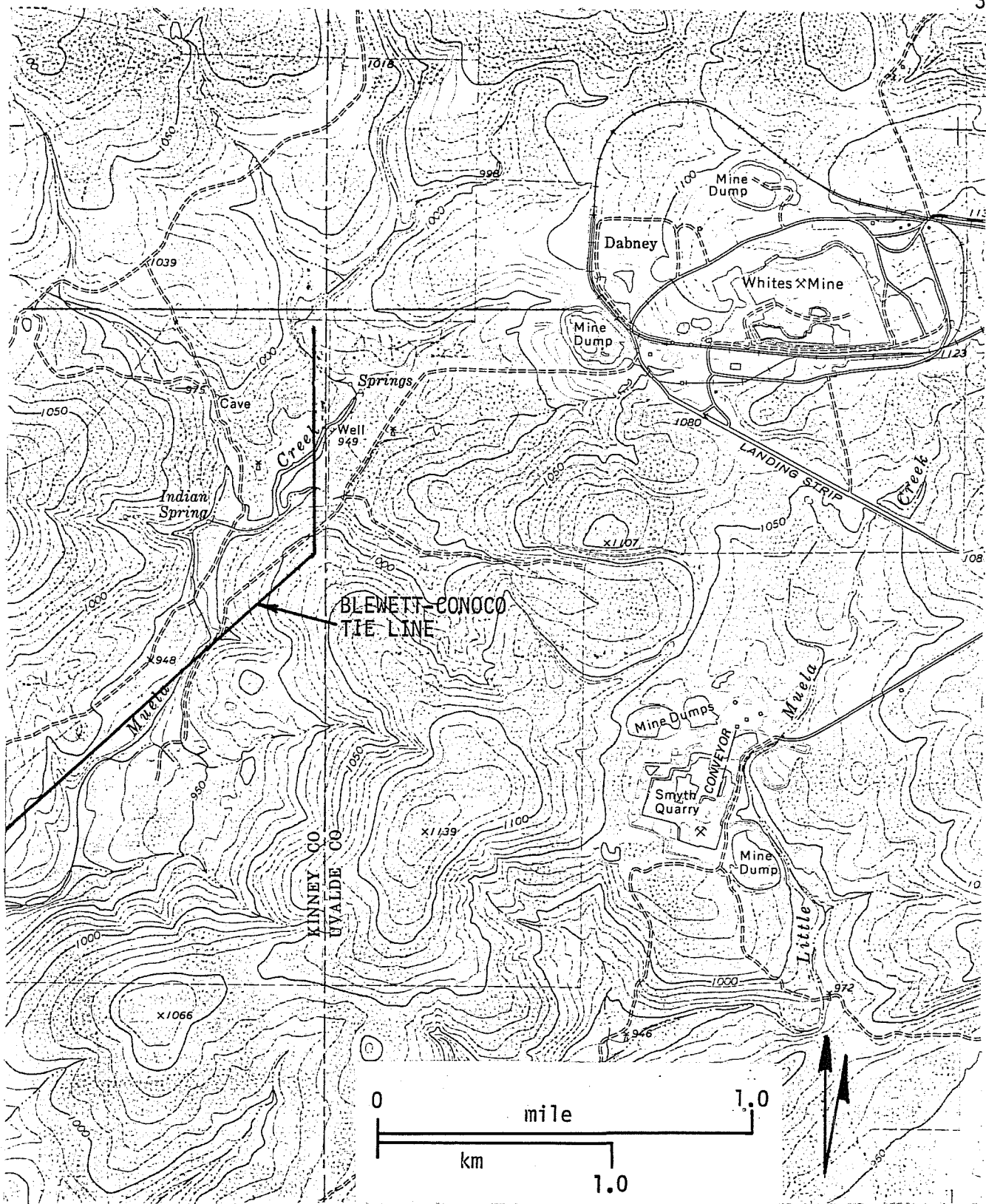


Figure 2. Location of Northern Section of the Blewett-Conoco Tie Line and Survey Area.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA

The geological setting for portions of Uvalde, northern Zavala, northeastern Maverick, and southeastern Kinney Counties is characterized by exposures of Upper Cretaceous to Quaternary deposits. The study area is located in a broad transition zone between the western margins of the Edwards Plateau/Balcones Fault Zone and the expansive Gulf Coastal Plain just southward. Flora and fauna are a mixture of the Tamaulipan Biotic Province described by Blair (1950) as well as elements of neighboring biotic communities. The major hydrological system affecting all tributary drainages within this area is the nearby Nueces River. Major mainstream tributaries in the vicinity of the study area include both the Turkey and Chaparrosa Creek drainages. The major geological feature within the survey location is the striking Anacacho Mountains just to the north. Cut by steep ravines and dissected by extensive erosion, the mountains border the asphalt mines of western Uvalde County.

The archaeology of western Uvalde, Kinney, Maverick, and Zavala Counties has been studied only recently. Prehistoric sites in the Uvalde area have been described since 1947 (Krieger 1947). T. R. Hester (n.d. and 1978) and T. C. Hill (n.d.), of Zavala County, have been responsible for much of the documentation of sites in this locality since the 1970s. The Chaparrosa Ranch vicinity in Zavala County has received much of this attention, and Montgomery (1978) has added to this data through testing and excavations at the Mariposa site, 41 ZV 83. More recently, G. Nelson (1981) has described extensive investigations at the historic site of Ft. Inge on the Leona River in Uvalde County; Kelly *et al.* (1983) surveyed over 20,000 acres in southern Uvalde and northern Zavala Counties; and McGraw and Knepper (1984) have reviewed the distribution of sites in Uvalde and Zavala Counties.

The prehistoric chronological sequence of the area is known to extend at least to 11,000 B.P. and probably older. *Folsom*-aged projectile points, identified by their deep fluting and fine craftsmanship, have been recovered from the Kincaid rockshelter in Uvalde County as well as site 41 ZV 285 in Zavala County. Interestingly, most recovered specimens are unusually large examples of the defined type in Texas.

McGraw and Knepper (1984) noted that Paleo-Indian, Early, Middle, and Late Archaic, and Late Prehistoric cultures are represented in the general area with Archaic-aged materials predominate. In addition, there were a proliferation of the *Dimmit* scraper tool type in certain localities and the occurrence of unusual, incised limestone cobbles. To summarize the findings of McGraw and Knepper's (1984) report:

1. The Paleo-Indian pattern, which centers upon upland resources or exploitation of upland resources, was poorly represented in the area.
2. The Late Paleo-Indian/Early Archaic site distribution indicates a diversification of exploited resource areas as well as an increase in intensive exploitation of local ecosystems.
3. The middle Late Archaic period was characterized by a shift to a broad-based resource exploitation.

4. The transitional Archaic/early Late Prehistoric period placed an emphasis on specific areal exploitations.

5. The Late Prehistoric period had a shift to a broader based resource-gathering strategy.

RESULTS OF CURRENT SURVEY INVESTIGATIONS

Four prehistoric archaeological sites were identified in the power line right-of-way (easements) during the course of the survey. This report will provide a brief description of the site locations and offer recommendations for future studies where applicable. The site locations discussed below will be described as per each surveyed area, e.g., the Blewett-Conoco or Uvalde tie line routes.

Results of the Survey of the Uvalde Tie Line

The planned Uvalde tie line, to be located west of the City of Uvalde, will extend for ca. 1.9 miles (3.04 km) along FM 2369 and cross U.S. Highway 90.

One small archaeological site (41 UV 125) was identified at the south end of the tie line. Chert debitage was scattered lightly over an area of about 100 m in diameter. No features or burned rock were observed in this area. With the exception of an unidentified projectile point preform (Fig. 3,a), no diagnostic materials were noted or collected. Several chert core fragments and a number of secondary and tertiary flakes were also observed. The present site location has been extensively damaged in the past by land clearing and building constructions. Coupled with the shallow soils and erosional effects, little is apparently left intact at this site. Preliminary interpretations suggest a temporary flint or chert working location once used by Indian knappers who took advantage of large nodular cobbles exposed in eroding terrace areas. No further work is recommended at this site.

Results of the Survey Along the Blewett-Conoco Tie Line

The Blewett-Conoco tie line, which was already installed at the time of the survey, is located southwest of Blewett in Kinney County and is approximately five miles (eight kilometers) in length. The entire length of the line travels cross-country, but fortunately a construction road provides access across its length. The line passes across a small tributary known as Muela Creek. This area was carefully investigated. Three prehistoric sites (41 KY 22, 41 KY 23, and 41 KY 24) were identified along and adjacent to the power line right-of-way.

Site 41 KY 22

This site is located at the north end of the Blewett-Conoco tie line (see Fig. 2). The site, which is about 200 x 400 m in size, is more or less bisected by the established easement. A possible burned rock accumulation was

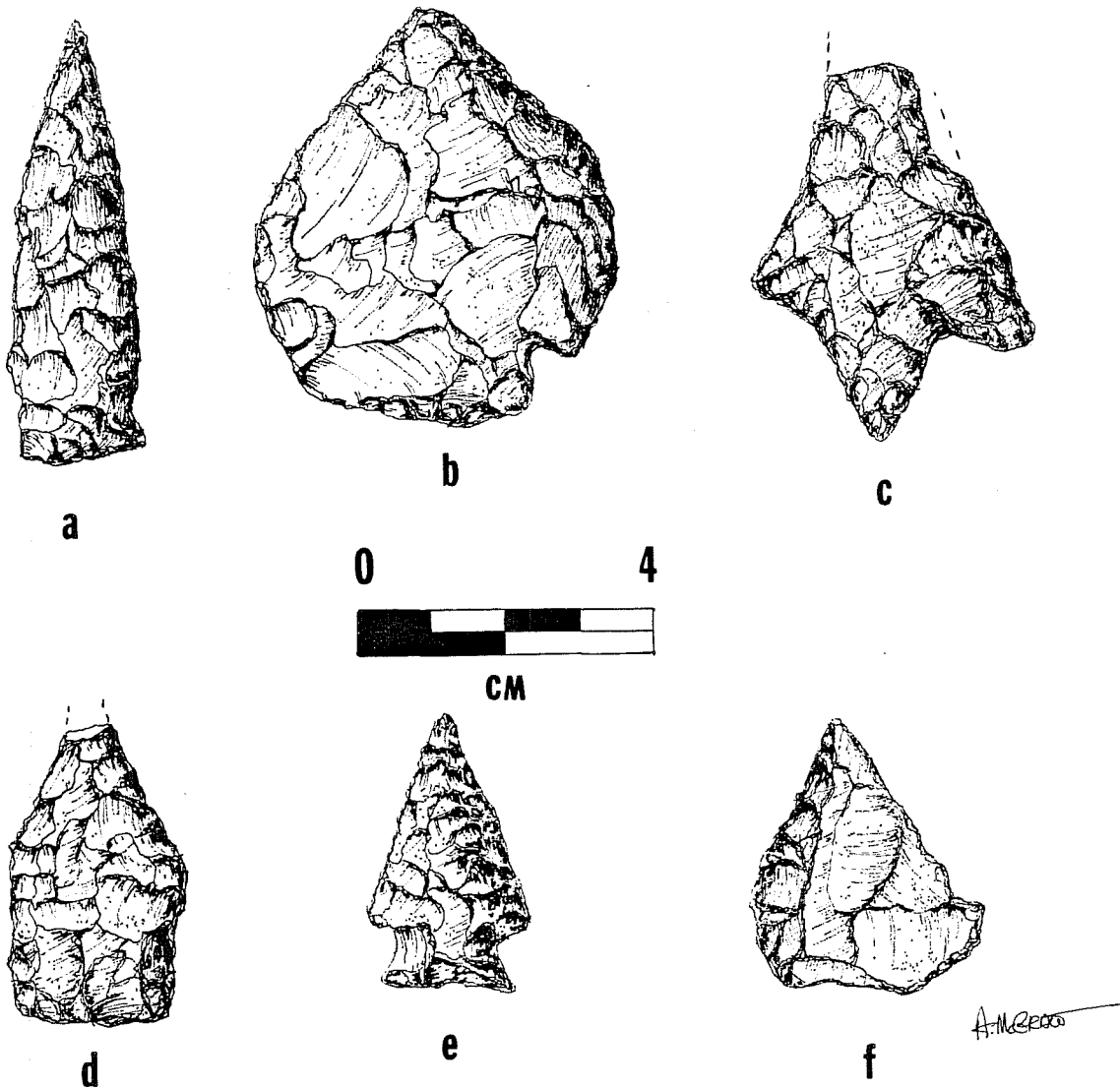


Figure 3. *Artifacts Collected from the Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, Inc., Survey.* a, 41 UV 125, unidentified projectile point; b, 41 KY 22, bifacial preform; c-f, 41 KY 24; c, reworked *Langtry* projectile point; d, *Nolan* projectile point; e, transitional Late Archaic dart point; f, point fragment.

exposed in the detritus from a utility pole excavation, and intact, recently eroded burned rock clusters, roughly one to two meters in diameter, were observed in several locations. A moderate scatter of chipped stone, several biface fragments, and a corner-notched, heat-treated projectile point preform was observed at the site (see Fig. 3,b). Preliminary survey interpretations suggest that the site encompasses the margins of two small knolls separated by a small drainage. Although somewhat eroded and damaged by modern land alterations, much of the site appears intact and buried. The occurrence of diagnostic artifacts and activity features such as burned rock clusters indicated possibly significant buried cultural deposits. Further work is recommended to more clearly define the overall site significance and its potential eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places. (See Summary and Recommendations section for an elaboration of recommended testing procedures.)

Site 41 KY 23

Site 41 KY 23 was identified as a light occupation or multifunctional site along the western slopes above Muela Creek, ca. 130 m in diameter. A scatter of fire-reddened debitage: chips, flakes, and burned rock, was noted among the thorn brush adjacent to the construction road and utility line route. No diagnostic materials nor features were observed. Because of these factors and the extensive amount of natural slope erosion throughout, no further work is recommended at this location.

Site 41 KY 24

This extensive occupation site is located near the southern end of the Blewett-Conoco tie line as it crosses Muela Creek (Fig. 4). The site is situated along the eastern terrace and extends at least 200 m away from the drainage. The length of the site is estimated to be in excess of 250-300 m. Small, eroding burned rock clusters between one and two meters in diameter were observed in several areas. In some areas a moderate to extensive distribution of chipped stone and burned rock was scattered across the site. Several biface and projectile point fragments were collected across the site. Diagnostic artifacts included a Middle Archaic *Pedernales* (not illustrated), a *Nolan* (Fig. 3,d) projectile point, a reworked *Langtry* projectile point (Fig. 3,c), a small transitional Late Archaic dart point (Fig. 3,e), and an unidentified point fragment (Fig. 3,f). Although some portions of the site have suffered the effects of natural erosion, especially along the creek margins and throughout the construction roadway, the major portion of the site appears intact, and extensive subsurface deposits may exist along the eastern terrace. Although the power line has already been installed in this area, limited testing is recommended to more accurately define the horizontal and vertical extent of the site as well as its potential cultural significance.

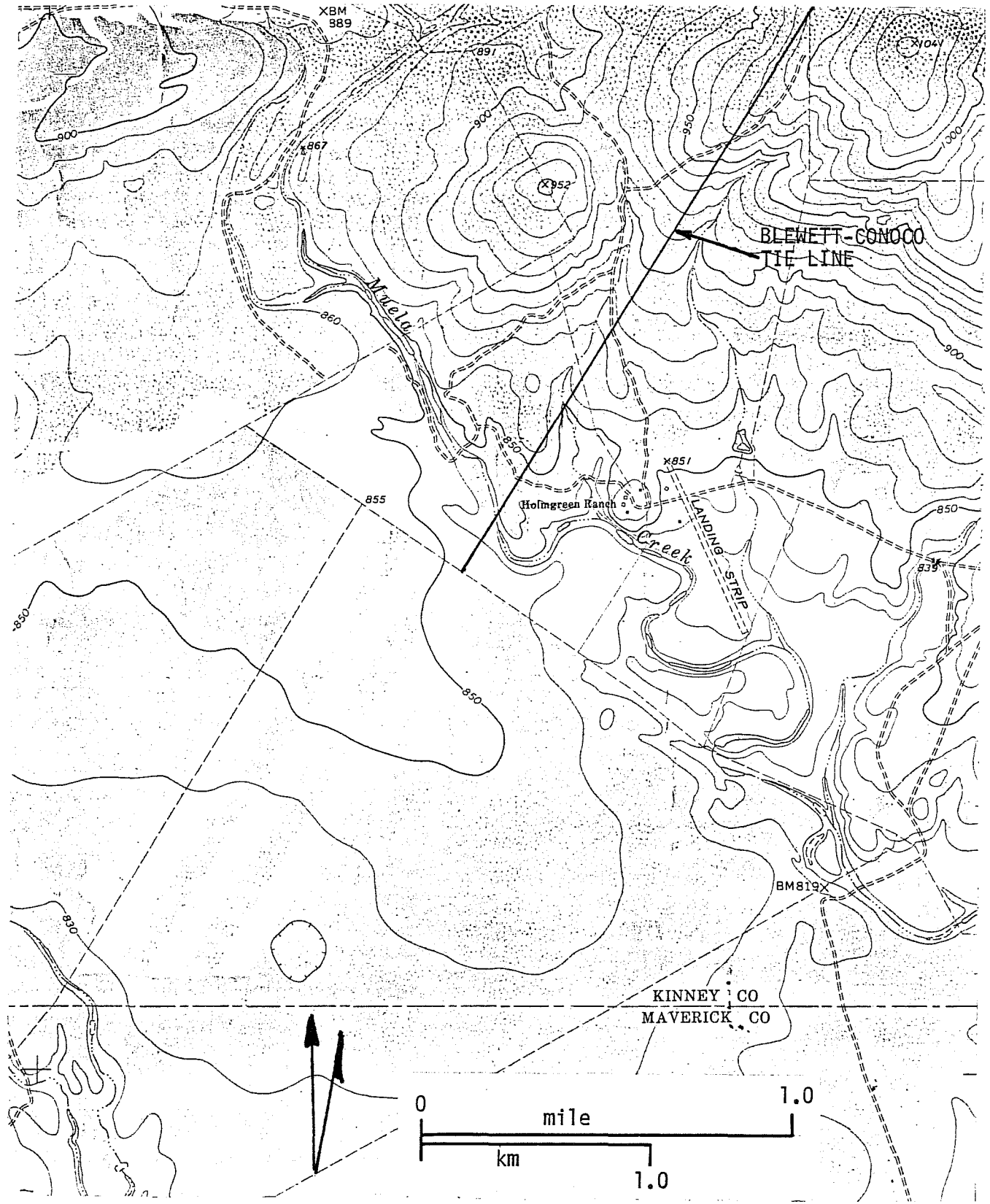


Figure 4. Location of the Southern Section of the Blewett-Conoco Tie Line and Survey Area.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the surveys of the Uvalde and Blewett-Conoco power tie line routes, four archaeological sites were identified. At the Uvalde tie line route a light scatter of lithic debris indicating prehistoric activity (41 UV 125) was noted. However, no features or diagnostic materials were recovered from the site area. Therefore, no further work is recommended at this location.

Three prehistoric sites (41 KY 22, 41 KY 23, and 41 KY 24) were located within the power line route corridor and adjacent to it along the five-mile stretch of the Blewett-Conoco line. Only two of these sites (41 KY 22 and 41 KY 24) appear to be potentially significant cultural resources.

Although the Blewett-Conoco tie line was installed sometime prior to the archaeological survey, and no further disturbance along this line is currently planned, we recommend that the two sites (41 KY 22 and 41 KY 24) be tested to determine cultural significance and potential eligibility for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. This would be done in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended in 1976) and Executive Order 11593.

The testing of the two sites would include systematic subsurface excavations in the form of 50-cm² shovel tests and one or two 1-m² test units excavated by hand tools. This testing should be done under existing Federal and State requirements and well in advance of any future planned developments in the area.

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