

**An Archaeological Survey of the
Lowe's Tract at Potranco Road and Loop
1604, Bexar County, Texas**

by

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Abstract

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted a Phase I archaeological survey of the Lowe's location, at Potranco Road and Loop 1604, northern Bexar County, Texas for PSI of San Antonio. The property is situated on a divide between Caracol and Medio Creeks, the latter of which is a tributary of the Medina River. Work performed included a pedestrian survey of the approximately 12 acres. This Phase I investigation was designed to detect and record any archaeological or historical component that may be present in the project area. No cultural resources were observed on the property, and no further archaeological work is recommended.

Introduction and Background

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC), conducted a Phase I archaeological survey of the Lowe tract, at Potranco Road and Loop 1604, northern Bexar County, Texas for PSI of San Antonio. The location is between Caracol and Medio creeks and was regarded as having a moderate potential for archaeological sites. Work performed included a pedestrian survey of the approximately 12 acres (Figs. 1 and 2). The work was carried out to insure that no archaeological or historical resources eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places are damaged or destroyed due to the planned construction. This Phase I investigation was designed to detect and record any archaeological or historical component that may be present in the project area.

. Setting

The project area is on the periphery of the Balcones Canyonlands northwest of San Antonio. The tract on which the Lowe's store will be built lies just above the confluence of Caracol Creek with the larger tributary, Medio Creek, a drainage that runs south to the Medina River. Most of the Caracol drainage has been eliminated by FM1604 and adjacent development. Tarrant Association soils are found on the surveyed tract. It is typified by "gently undulating" plateau-prairie topography (Taylor et al. 1991:30). Soils are dark, shallow, and contain limestone and chert (flint) gravels. The chert, as exposed on the surface of the Lowe's tract, is often referred to as the Uvalde Gravels, often the source of raw material for stone tool manufacture in prehistoric times. The soils formed atop the Austin chalk formation of Cretaceous age (Arnold 1959:15-16).

Archaeological Background

Regional Culture History

There are over 1800 recorded sites in Bexar County. These reflect a cultural chronology spanning 11,000 years of prehistory, as well as an historic era that left many important structures. Archaeologists have divided this broad range of time into four general periods: Paleoindian, Archaic, Late Prehistoric, and Historic (Hester 2004).

The Paleoindian period, 9,200-6,800 B.C., has distinctive chipped stone spear points used in hunting mammoth and other late Ice Age mammals early in the period. Other spear types appear with a shift to bison, deer and other game after the Ice Age ended around 8000 B.C. Known site types in Bexar County are *campsites* with diagnostic projectile points flint-chipping debris from stone-tool making and repair.

Sites of the following Archaic period are common across Bexar County. These peoples were hunters and gatherers as in the earlier Paleoindian period, but lived in an environment very similar to those of modern times. Projectile points used to tip spears (often erroneously called “arrowheads”) change in shape through time, from 6,800 B.C. to 500 A.D. Archaeologists use these forms to recognize more specific time frames within the Archaic (e.g., Early, Middle and Late Archaic). In northern Bexar County, the most distinctive Archaic site is the *burned rock midden* (large accumulations of fire-cracked limestone result from the use of earth-oven cooking starting around 3,000 B.C.; see Black et al.1997, Nickels et al. 2000). But in southern Bexar County, *open campsites* are found along creek and river terraces with large amounts of flint debris from tool-making; sometimes, animal bone (dietary refuse) and charcoal that can be used for radiocarbon dating. Other Archaic site types include *lithic procurement areas* (often called “quarries) in northern Bexar County, where flint cobbles eroded out of the Edwards limestone and were processed, and in southern Bexar County, exposures of hilltop Uvalde Gravels), *lithic scatters* (lightly-used areas probably representing short-term hunting and gathering activities), *cemeteries* and rarely, *sinkhole burials* (Archaic peoples often disposed of their dead by placing them in sinkholes and caverns; Bement 1994).

By 700 A.D., there began to be some changes in the long hunter-gatherer lifeway. The Late Prehistoric is first seen with the introduction of the bow and arrow. The stone arrow points are very small (mistakenly called “bird points”), but could be used in hunting game of any size. By 1300 A.D., the economy emphasized buffalo-hunting. Most sites of this era include *campsites*, often in areas previously used by Archaic peoples, *lithic scatters* of this age; and the *lithic procurement areas* of earlier times continued to be used.

During the Historic period, Native Americans peoples from southern Texas and northeastern Mexico lived in and around the missions on the San Antonio River. Intrusive peoples such as Comanche and Lipan Apache are well documented by the 1700s, but they left few archaeological traces. The best known archaeological remains are *ranch and farm houses of cut stone*, dating from the 1840s through the 1880s. Such sites, including those without surviving structures, are recognized from 19th century pottery fragments, artifacts of glass and metal, etc. Later Historic houses (often of board and batten construction) and farmsteads, through the early 1900s, are also found. .

Nearby Archaeological Sites

Very little archaeological research has been done in the general area of of the Lowe’s property. In 1987, archaeologists from Espy Huston and Associates (Austin) carried out an archaeological survey of the West Creek development, to the south along Caracol Creek. They recorded several sites, most classified as “lithic scatters” (41BX761, 767, 768) and none of which could be dated. They also documented a ranch complex that began in the 1920s (41BX769) and a nearby dilapidated house (41BX 766).

Avocational archaeologist David L. Calame, Sr. has documented two sites in the vicinity of the Lowe's tract. One site is an Archaic burned rock midden disturbed during the development of the Del Webb property (41BX1688). A lithic procurement (quarry) site was also recorded nearby by Calame (41BX1613). On nearby Culebra Creek, archaeologists from the Center for Archaeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio, recorded a domed burned rock midden site (41BX1422) and nearby burned rock scatter.

Just downstream from 41BX1422 is a major prehistoric site, 41BX126, located near the intersection of FM1604 and Culebra Creek. The Center for Archaeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio, carried out significant excavations at BX126 in 1997. Analysis provided important new data on the Archaic use of earth ovens in terms of burned rock midden formation processes (Nickels et al. 2001).

To the west, in the Potranco Creek drainage, Abasolo Archaeological Consultants carried out a survey of 2000 acres of Redbird Ranch in western Bexar and eastern Medina counties (Shafer and Hester 2006a). Four historic sites (41BX1659, 1660, 1661, and 1662) and four prehistoric sites (41BX1658, 41BX1668, 41ME154, and 41ME155) were recorded during the survey. The historic sites included three late 19th century homestead and a cemetery. The prehistoric sites all were surface lithic scatters and hearth fields indicative of short-term campsites. Numerous isolated hearth areas, artifacts, and vertical shaft caves were plotted to note possible prehistoric landscape use patterns.

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants also have surveyed several properties within three miles of the Lowe's tract. The Wissman development (now Sundance Ridge) is 2.25 miles to the west, along Potranco Road. No sites were found (Shafer and Hester 2006b). Located 1.80 miles to the north is the Metzger Tract, fronting on FM1604 and in the Caracol Creek drainage. Survey there recorded three prehistoric sites (Shafer and Hester 2007). Three miles to the south-southwest, a survey of the Tres Laurels property, adjacent to Potranco Creek, did not find any archaeological sites (Shafer and Hester 2008). However, the terrain and the extent of exposed Uvalde Gravels makes that area somewhat similar to the Lowe's tract.

Research Design

To inspect the area, a 100% pedestrian survey was to be conducted over the entire 12 acres. Any archeological material encountered was to be located using hand-held GPS units and plotted on the project map. Diagnostic artifacts encountered during the course of the survey, if found, were to be digitally photographed but not collected.

Following the field work, the information recovered from the pedestrian survey was to be compiled and evaluated.

Field Work

The pedestrian survey was carried out by Harry Shafer and Thomas Hester on June 25, 2008. The survey covered 100% of the area. The property is relatively flat high ground

that serves as a divide between Caracol and Medio creeks. Ground visibility for the most part was poor due to thick grass and weeds cover (Fig.), but sufficient open areas did occur and were closely inspected for any evidence of historic or prehistoric archaeological evidence. The shallow soils and exposures precluded the need for shovel testing. Large cobbles of chert and conglomerate were exposed on the surface but there was no indication of extensive use of these resources in the form of chipped stone residue of extensive prehistoric use of the chert resources other than a rare chert core. No fire-cracked rock, another indicator of prehistoric archaeological sites in the area, was observed. Some illegal dumping of construction debris was noted along the old access road into the property.

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants have recorded several archaeological sites along similar higher elevation divides between upland creeks in western Bexar County (Shafer and Hester 2007). None of these sites have any stratigraphic integrity and none were recommended for further work. We expected a similar situation at the Lowe's tract, and a trace of prehistoric quarry activity was noted, but not extensive enough even to warrant a formal site number.

Since no prehistoric or historic archaeological sites were observed on the property, no further archaeological work is recommended.

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Figures

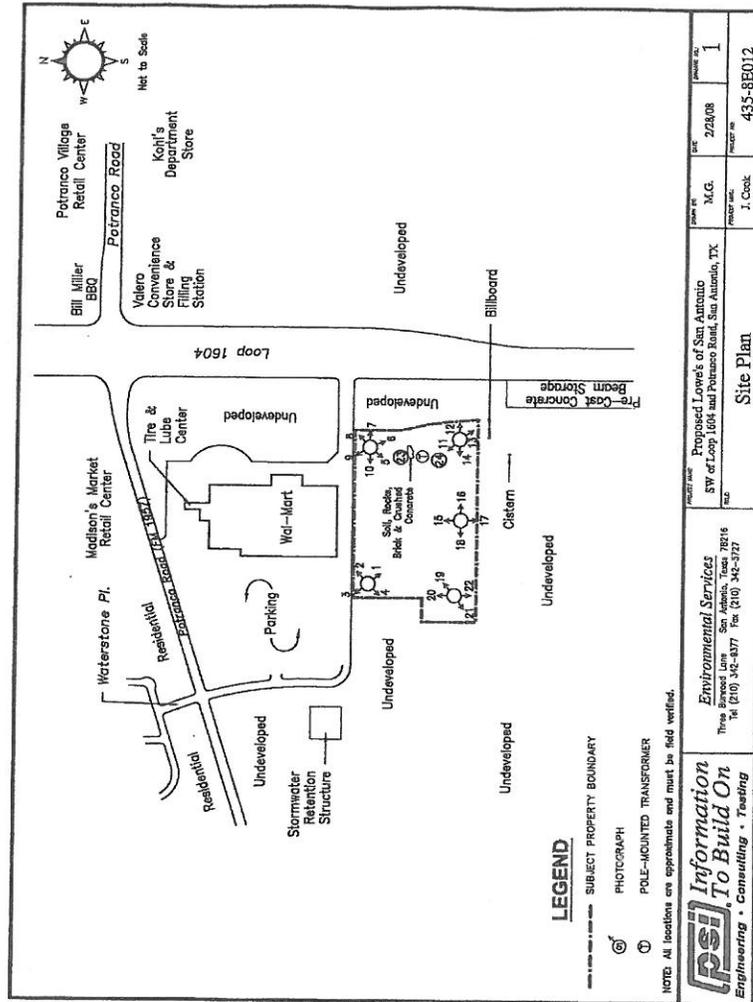


Figure 1. Site plan for the location of the Lowe's tract at Potranco Road at Loop 1604, San Antonio, Texas.



Figure 2. Google Earth image showing area of survey

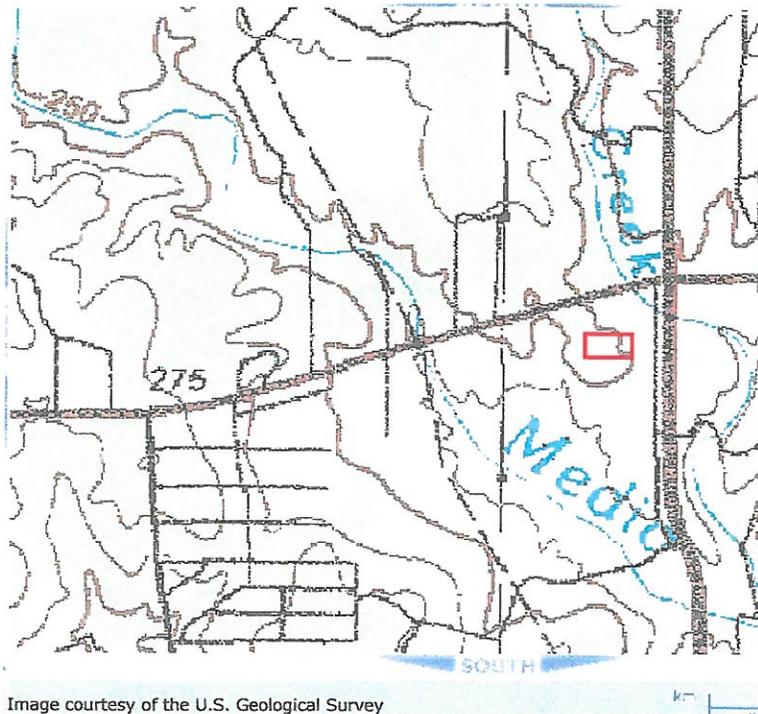


Figure 3. Topographic map showing the location of the survey area between Caracol and Medio Creeks.



Figure 4. Views of the property at the Lowe's tract at Potranco Road showing the vegetation cover.