

**An Archaeological Survey
of
Tracts 5 and 8 at the Reserve at Sonoma
Verde Development**

By

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Abstract

During March 2008, Abasolo Archaeological Consultants carried out an archaeological survey of two tracts at the Sonoma Verde development in northern Bexar County. Tract 5 consisted of just over 118 acres and Tract 8, just less than 62 acres. Because of the rugged topography and dense vegetation cover, the focus of the survey was on those locales that might have had a “high probability” for the presence of cultural remains. However, transects were made into all parts of the property. As a result of the fieldwork, no archaeological sites were found. No further archaeological research is necessary at either Tract 5 or Tract 8.

Introduction

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC), conducted Phase I archaeological investigations in the high probability areas for archaeological sites at the Sonoma Verde Tracts 5 and 8 development, northern Bexar County, Texas. This project was carried out for PSI of San Antonio and included a pedestrian survey of the 118.31 acres of Tract 5 and the 61.81 acres of Tract 8 (Fig. 1). The work was carried out in accordance with the "Archeological Survey Standards for Texas" 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.

The archaeological survey of Tract 8 was carried out on March 12, 2008 by the authors, and the Tract 5 survey was carried out on March 24, 2008 by Shafer, assisted by Chris Wilson. The survey conditions were good in Unit 5 in that the property has not been seriously disturbed at this stage of development. The first clearance of the vegetation to create roads occurred along two contours in the property (Fig. 2) and these openings provided pedestrian access to much of the property despite the often dense stands of ashe juniper. Unit 8 tract was mostly cleared of juniper and overall visibility was good. The terrain on both tracts has a marked topographic slope and is very rocky (Figs 3-7). In some areas, there are vast expanses of exposed bedrock (Fig. 7). In portions of both tracts, earlier ashe juniper (cedar) clearing had left a "mulch" that often obscured the ground surface (Fig. 6). A "dividing line" of sorts between the two tracts is marked by Camp Bullis Road, with a huge volume of rock deposited presumably as fill for future development of this road.

The senior author walked the Cedar Creek Golf Course to assess the margins of the Tract 5 property that borders the course. This inspection also was carried out to determine if archaeological sites occurred along Lee Creek and its spring-fed tributaries. One previously unreported archaeological site was confirmed in the 10th hole fairway below a spring and evidence of prehistoric activity in the form of fire-cracked rock and chipped stone was observed at several locations within the golf course. This reconnaissance was done to obtain a more complete picture of the archaeological landscape and to determine where archaeological site occur around the hills incorporated into the Sonoma Verde development. The findings concluded that the high probability landscape along the spring-fed creeks do indeed contain cultural resources (in contrast to the report by Hafernik 1988; see below) but that the steep slopes and tops of the surrounding hills are proven to have a lower potential for archaeological sites although they do often contain cultural features such as prehistoric hearths and artifacts, and historic rock fences.

The Setting

Tracts 5 and 8 at the Sonoma Verde development lie within the Balcones Canyonlands, a region of often extreme topographic relief created by the eroded edge of the Balcones Escarpment northwest of San Antonio. The property is situated north of Loop 1604 and east of Kyle Seale Parkway. The geology is characterized by exposed Lower Cretaceous Glen Rose limestone overlain by exposures of Comanche Peak limestone and Edwards limestone capping the high elevations (Arnow 1959; Sellards et al. 1966:315). The soils are shallow and rocky, with areas of exposed bedrock and belong to the "Tarrant association, hilly" (TaD; Taylor et al. 1962). Blair (1950) places the Balcones Canyonlands in the Balconian biotic province. The native vegetation of both tracts consisting of oaks, mountain laurel, ashe juniper, persimmon, prickly pear cactus and sotol, reflect this biotic community.

Archaeological Background

Regional Culture History

The broad outline of the archaeology of northern Bexar County is reviewed here. Major time periods and site types are briefly noted.

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. (Hester 1986). Known site types in northern Bexar County are *campsites* with flint-chipping debris from stone-tool making and repair. One site of Clovis age (9,200 B.C.) was excavated near FM1604 and Leon Creek (Collins et al. 2003). A later site, dating around 7,500 B.C., was investigated on the grounds of St. Mary's Hall on Salado Creek (Hester 1986).

Sites of the following **Archaic** period are common in northern 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. (Turner and Hester 1993). 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*. These large accumulations of fire-cracked limestone result from the use of earth-oven cooking starting around 3,000 B.C. (Black et al. 1997 ; Nickels et al. 2000) Such features were part of *larger campsites*, with large amounts of flint debris from tool-making; sometimes, animal bone (dietary remains) and charcoal that can be used for radiocarbon dating. Other Archaic site types include *lithic procurement* areas (where flint cobbles eroded out of the Edwards limestone and were processed), *lithic scatters* (lightly-used areas probably representing short-term hunting and gathering activities), 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 life way. 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, the best known archaeological remains are *ranch and farm houses of cut stone*, dating from the 1840s through the 1880s. Stacked- stone fences also occur (Knott 2004). Such sites, including those without surviving structures, are recognized from 19th century pottery fragments, artifacts of glass and metal, etc. Later Historic houses and farmsteads, through the early 1900s, are also found.

Archaeological Sites in the Vicinity

This area of the Balcones Canyonlands in which both Tracts 5 and 8 are located is considered to be high probability areas for burned rock middens, given the presence of sotol (Fig. 4), the bulbs of which were used as food and cooked in earth ovens, limestone used as thermal components for the ovens, and water sources, such as branches of creek or isolated springs. Due to the shallow rock soils, steep slopes, and lack of alluvial or colluvial terracing, any archaeological site found within the boundaries of Tracts 5 and 8 would not have buried components. Thus, the only accumulations with any depth that would be expected are burned rock middens.

Recorded archaeological sites in the area of Tracts 5 and 8 at Sonoma Verde are very few. The authors conducted archaeological surveys of Sonoma Verde Tracts 1 and 6 recently and recorded one destroyed burned rock midden in Tract 6 (Shafer and Hester 2007a). Running through the Sonoma Verde development, and at the north edge of Tract 5, is the Cedar Creek Municipal Golf Course, lying along Lee Creek. An archaeological survey was carried out for the City of San Antonio in 1988. Hafernik (1988) reports that 180 acres were examined and that no archaeological sites or other cultural resources were found. Shafer’s recent reconnaissance, noted earlier in this report, finds that there is indeed archaeological evidence within the boundaries of the golf course.

A little more than a mile north of the Sonoma Verde tracts, Shafer and Hester (2007b) recorded sites 41BX1723 and 1724 at the Terra Mont development. The first site is a lithic scatter, while the second is a burned rock midden or tightly clustered hearths.

To the northwest of the project area, sites 41BX1631 and 41BX1734 have been recorded by Joseph W. Beavin of the Southern Texas Archaeological Association. BX1631 is a burned rock midden, with diagnostics of Early Archaic times. Site BX1734 is a historic, stone-built lime kiln related to the La Quinta historical landmark of the 1850s (Texas Archeological Site Atlas, Texas Historical Commission). Another site of relevance in the Sonoma Verde vicinity is located a couple of miles to the southeast. This is site

41BX985, the Loftin site, a vertical cave shaft with fill containing an undetermined number of prehistoric Native American burials.

Four to five miles north of Tracts 5 and 8 at Sonoma Verde, Shafer and Hester (2007c, 2007d) have surveyed developments at River Rock and at Sundance Ranch. The River Rock locale had a small burned rock midden, while at Sundance Ranch; all of the recorded cultural resources were Historic 19th and 20th century in date.

Research Design

The research designed called for a pedestrian survey of the entire acreage of the two tracts, but with a concentrated effort in those areas that we considered high probability areas for archaeological sites. This higher probability terrain occurs along the ase of the hills adjacent and creek valley. The upland and slopes were inspected by walking transects in order to inspect terrain in all elevations. Any archeological material encountered was to be located using hand-held GPS units and plotted on the project map. However, no archaeological sites or features were found in the survey. Artifacts diagnostic or reflective of ancient activities encountered during the course of the survey were digitally photographed but not collected

Following the field work, the information recovered from the pedestrian survey was compiled and evaluated. This report describes the survey findings and fulfills the goals of the research design.

Survey Results and Recommendations

The pedestrian surveys of Tracts 5 and 8 at Sonoma Verde revealed a landscape that is partly disturbed by previous clearing and vegetation removal (Fig. 6). The surface conditions were adequate, however, to identify any cultural resources that might be present. Within Tract 8, no archaeological sites or features were identified during the survey, and only one chipped stone artifact was found. It is the distal end of a chipped stone biface perhaps used as an axe or adze. **No further archaeological work is recommended for Tract 8.**

Tract 5 incorporates a large hill and a small header canyon that was much less disturbed than Tract 8. A large utility line crosses the property and the easement has been cleared of vegetation. In addition, two road tracts have been bulldozed in preparation for road construction that follow contours on the property. Atop high ridges, there is evidence of much earlier bulldozer clearance; especially noticeable are large rocks pushed into piles. All of the open areas were inspected and transects were made off of these open areas to inspect the remainder of the property. Attention was directed at the small header canyon and the lower slopes that border Cedar Creek Golf Course and the creek below. No archaeological sites or features were found on the property. An occasional flake of Edwards chert and one biface core-tool was observed (Fig. 8). **No further archaeological investigations are recommended for Tract 5.**

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Figures

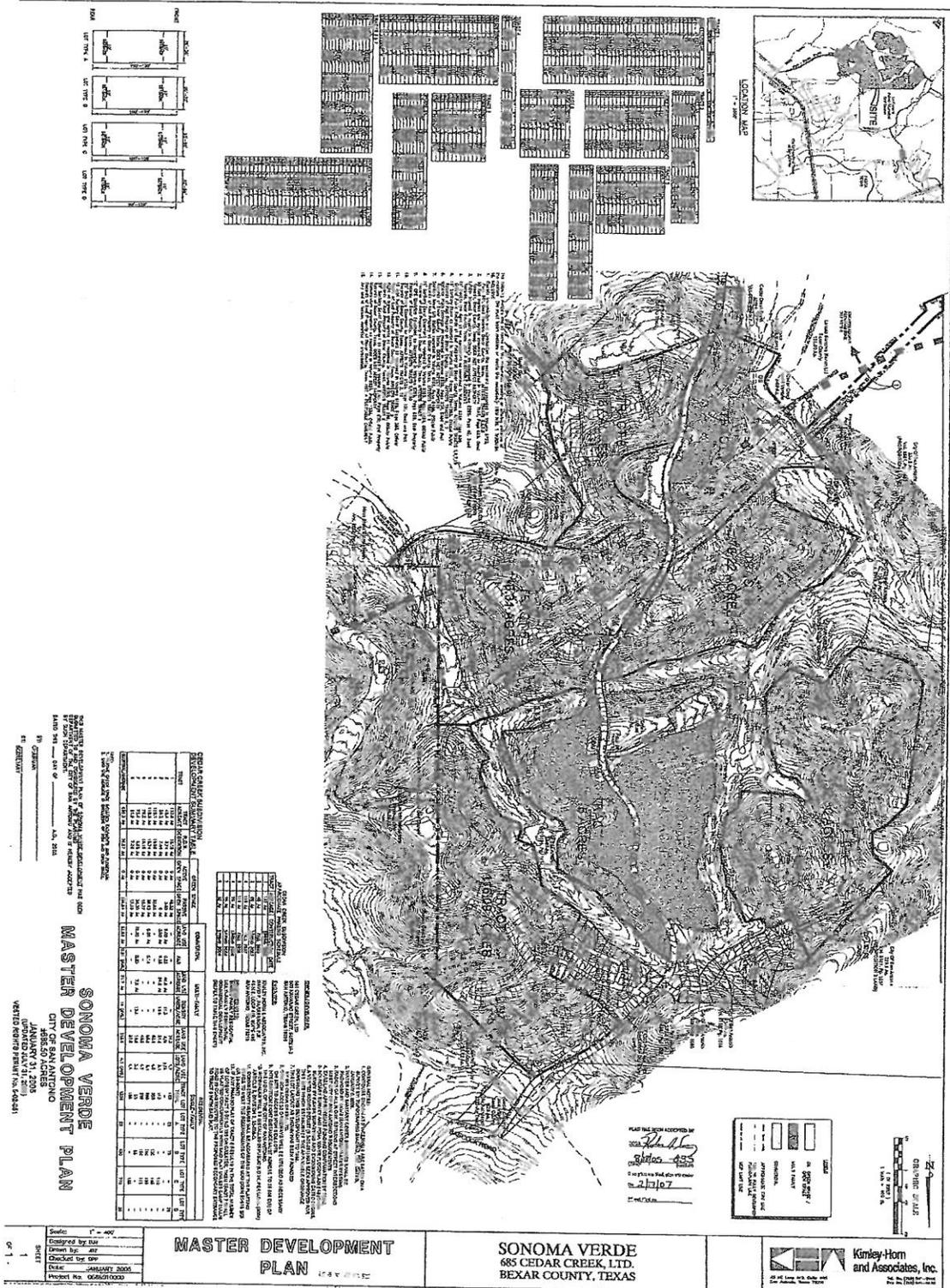


Figure 1. Master plan map of the Sonoma Verde development showing the marked topographic relief and the locations of Tracts 5 and 8.

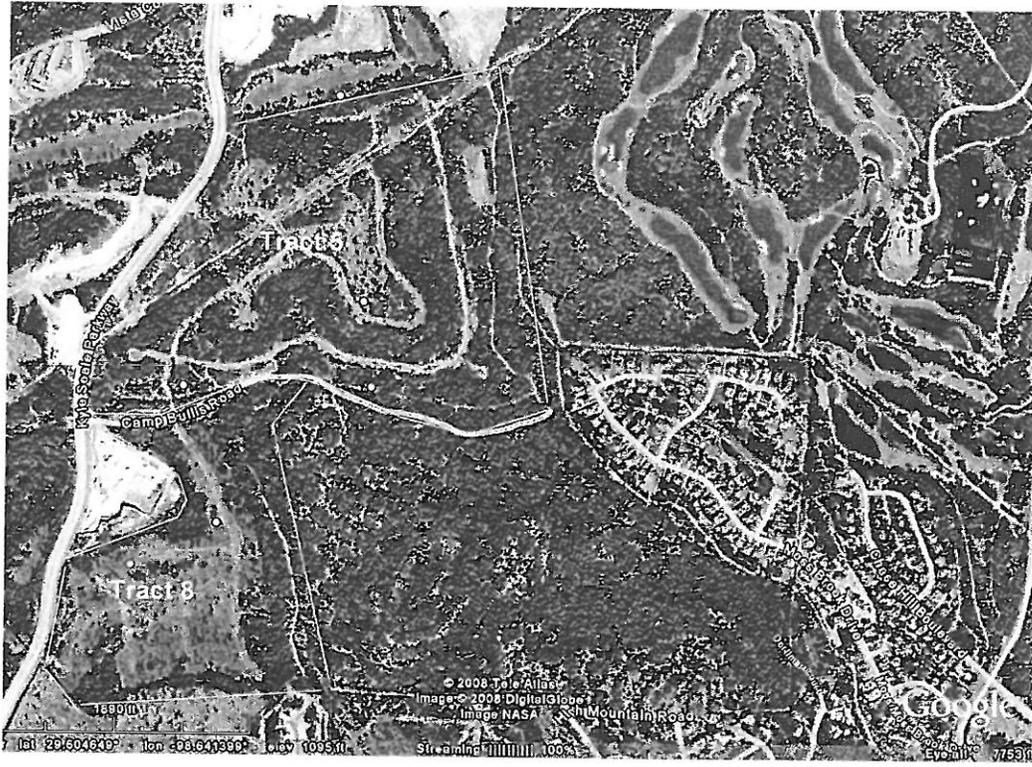


Figure 2. Google image of the area of Tracts 5 and 8 with approximate boundaries shown. Dots indicated chipped stone artifacts; blue denote the locations of biface tools and yellow dots denote chipped stone flakes.

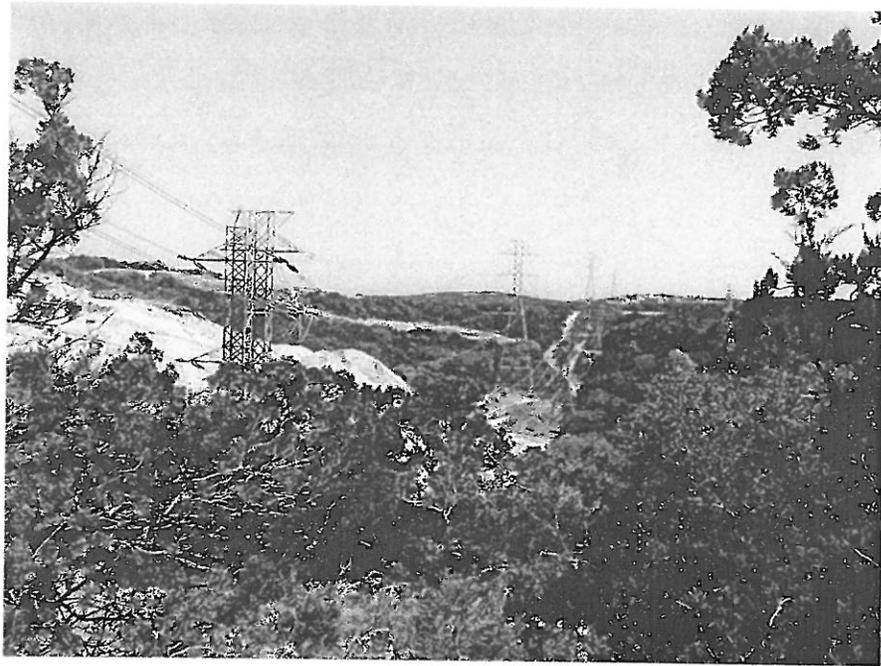


Figure 3. View of Tract 5 from Tract 8.

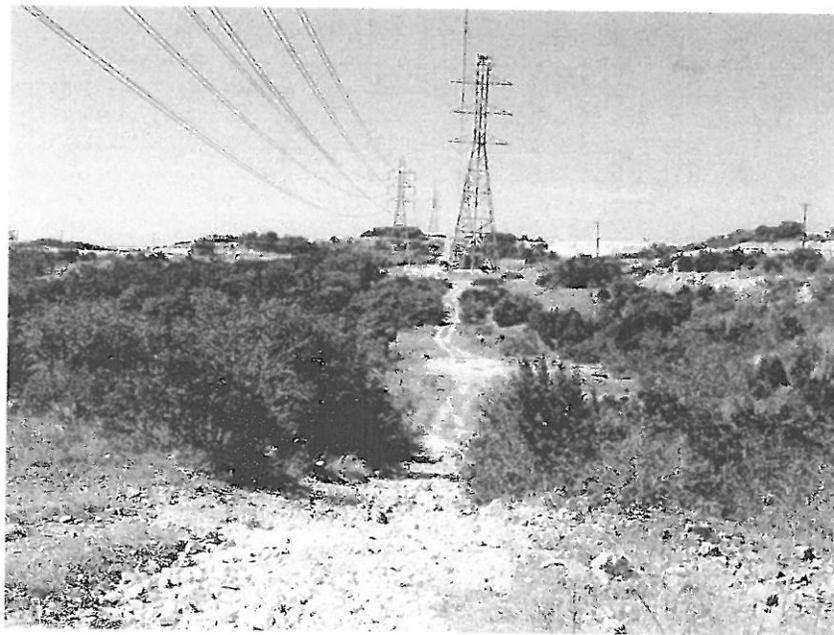


Figure 4. View of Tract 5 showing the transmission line easement and rocky terrain.

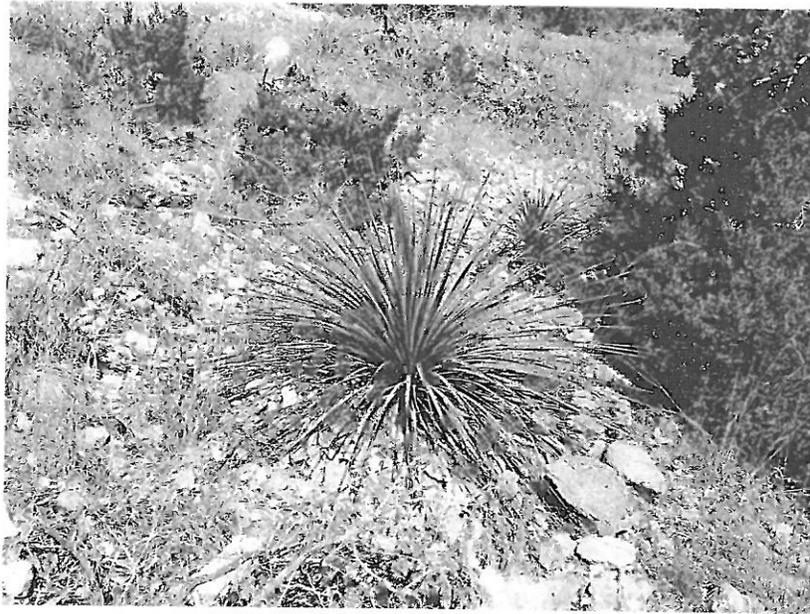


Figure 5. Sotol and exposed Edwards limestone along cleared contour in Tract 5.

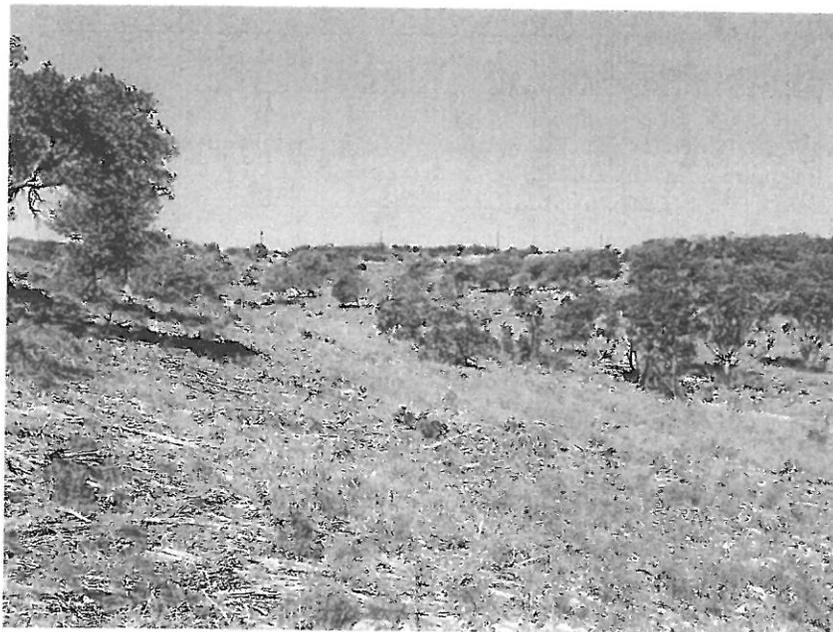


Figure 6. Tract 8 showing mostly cleared vegetation and survey conditions.



Figure 7. Bedrock exposed in Tract 8; this type of surface was found in both tracts.



Figure 8. Biface core-tool observed in Tract 8 (see Figure 2 for location).