ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS FOR SOUTHSIDE LIONS PARK, SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR COUNTY, TEXAS

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San Antonio, Texas

by

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ABSTRACT

In December 2009, Prewitt and Associates, Inc., conducted an archeological survey for proposed improvements at Southside Lions Park in the City of San Antonio, Texas. The proposed improvements consist of the construction of a ca. 1,400 m^2 basketball court, one new restroom facility, four ca. 330 m^2 parking areas adjacent to existing roadways, ca. 130 m of new roadway, ca. 1,830 m of pedestrian walking trails, and the resurfacing of ca. 1,880 m of existing park roads. The depth of impacts associated with these improvements will be less than 1 m. The archeological survey examined the footprints of the proposed facilities and improvements. The work was performed for Adams Environmental, Inc., of San Antonio and the City of San Antonio. The results of the survey indicate that much of the park is disturbed by multiple episodes of construction and landscape modifications. One site (41BX1857), a lithic procurement and lithic scatter site, was recorded during the survey. The site is thin and exposed on an upland surface, and like most of the park, is very disturbed. It is recommended that 41BX1857 be judged ineligible for designation as a State Archeological Landmark and that the park improvement project proceed as planned.

CURATION

No artifacts needing curation were collected during the survey. Project records and photographs will be kept on file at Prewitt and Associates, Inc.

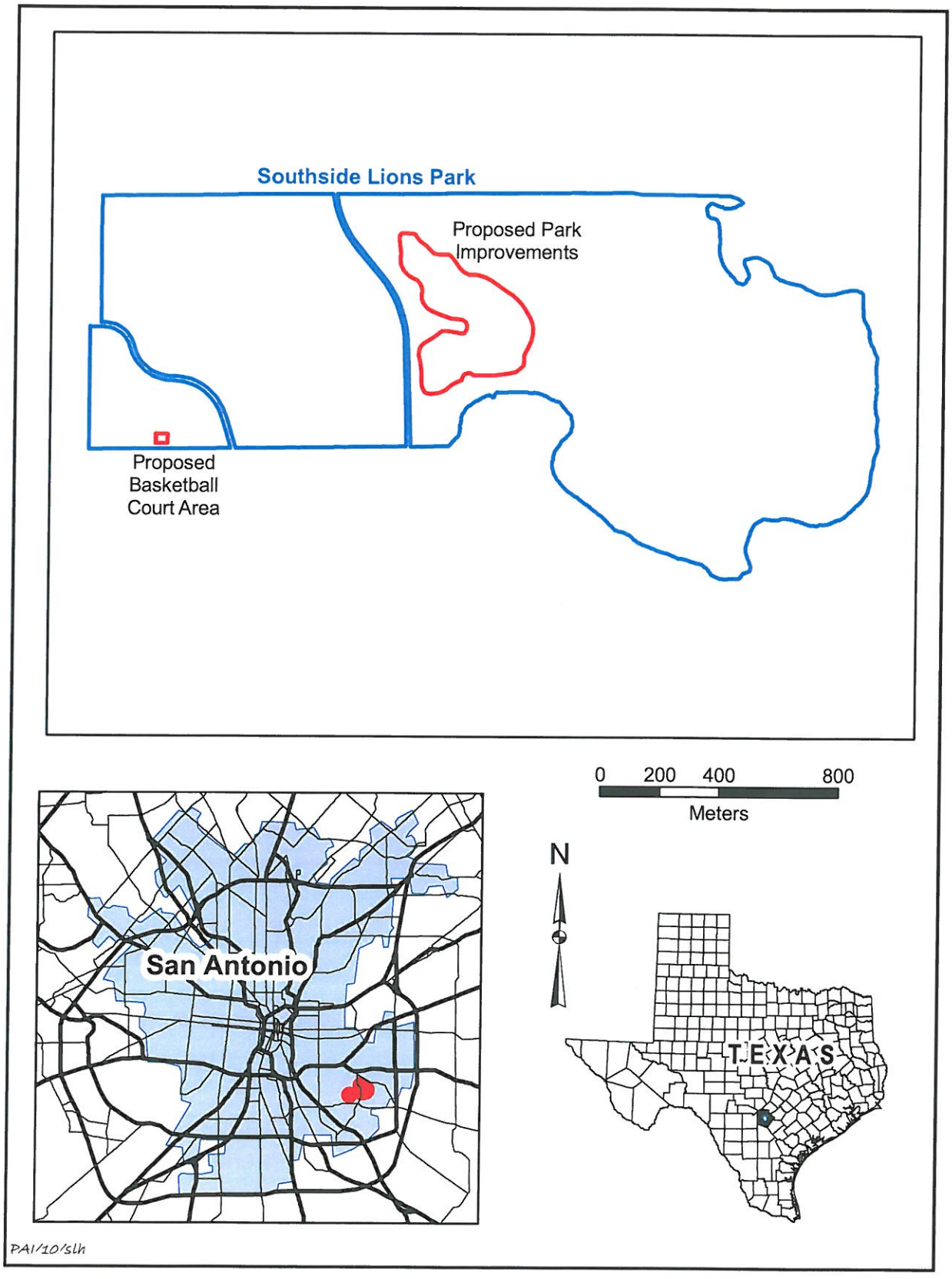
INTRODUCTION

In December 2009, Prewitt and Associates, Inc., conducted an archeological survey of the portions of Southside Lions Park subject to proposed improvements (Figure 1). The park is in southeast San Antonio, Texas. The survey was authorized by the State of Texas Antiquities Code (Texas Natural Resource Code of 1977, Title 9, Chapter 191, VTCS 6145-9) and conducted under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 5487. The work was also conducted under the City of San Antonio Historic Preservation and Section of the Unified Development Code (Article 6 35-630 to 35-634, Office of Historic Preservation). The proposed improvements consist of the construction of a ca. 1,400 m^2 basketball court, one new restroom facility, four ca. 330 m^2 parking areas adjacent to existing roadways, ca. 130 m of new roadway, ca. 1,830 m of pedestrian walking trails, and the resurfacing of ca. 1,880 m of existing park roads. The proposed basketball court is spatially separate from the other proposed park improvements. The depth of impacts associated with these improvements will be less than 1 m.

Figure 1. Project area map.

Southside Lions Park is in southeast San Antonio, inside Loop 410 and east of Interstate 35. The land has served as a city park for many years and contains an asphalt-paved road that loops around an artificial lake, three pavilions (estimated to be over 20 years old), and a large earthen dam that forms Pecan Valley Lake, formerly a tributary of Salado Creek immediately west of its confluence with Salado Creek. The 600 acres of land was purchased from the George W. Brackenridge Estate in 1944 and 1964 and was originally slated for a landfill, but local residents and the Highland Parks

Figure 1


Southside Lions Park
Proposed Park Improvements
Proposed Basketball Court Area
San Antonio
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Lions Club petitioned to have the land used for a park and a school (City of San Antonio 2009). In 1956 the area was cleared for a picnic area and sports center, and 400 trees were planted in 1957. Although it is not stated, the land that that encompasses the lake may have been purchased in 1964, since that was the year the dam and the 10-acre lake were built.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Bexar County is in south-central Texas and straddles the Balcones Fault Zone, which separates the Edwards Plateau from the Blackland Prairie of the Gulf Coastal Plain to the southeast (Arbingast et al. 1973:6; Bureau of Economic Geology 1983). The Edwards Plateau margin has been heavily dissected by stream downcutting and headward erosion, resulting in a rugged landscape of limestone hills and canyons, whereas the Blackland Prairie is typically rolling tall grasslands underlain by soft limestones, marls, and chalks.

The climate of the Blackland Prairie region can be classified as modified humid subtropical with Gulf-influenced hot summers and continental-influenced mild winters, while the Edwards Plateau region is subtropical steppe with low summer humidity (Natural Fibers Information Center 1987:10–12). Summer temperatures can exceed 100°F, although such extremes are more frequent to the west on the Edwards Plateau. Freezing temperatures can occur during the winter months but also are more common on the Edwards Plateau. The mean annual precipitation for Bexar County is 29.1 inches (739 mm). Rain falls throughout the year with slight peaks in the late spring and early fall months (Natural Fibers Information Center 1987:49).

Like the landscape and climate, the biota of Bexar County differs from east to

west, although there is geographical overlap of some species. The flora and fauna of the Edwards Plateau are defined as Balconian, while those of the Blackland Prairie are characterized as Texan (Blair 1950).

The project area is situated on the floodplain, terraces, and adjacent uplands along the western side of the Salado Creek valley. The valley incises Pleistocene-age fluviatile terrace deposits, whereas the uplands are mapped as Tertiary Uvalde gravels (Bureau of Economic Geology 1983). This stretch of the valley probably contains limited amounts of Holocene alluvium, but not enough to be mapped as a discrete unit on the 1:250,000-scale *Geologic Atlas of Texas – San Antonio Sheet*. Hence, the potential for intact or deeply buried archeological remains is low and any potential remains are likely disturbed due to channel modifications and maintenance over the years. Soils of the Frio series are mapped on the floodplain of Salado Creek, whereas Venus series soils are mapped on the terraces (Taylor et al. 1991). Houston Black soils are mapped on the adjacent upland margins, while hilly gravelly lands are mapped on the upland surfaces.

PREFIELD INVESTIGATIONS

Prefield investigations included a search for previously recorded archeological sites in or near the project area. The Texas Historical Commission's Archeological Sites Atlas shows that several linear archeological surveys have been conducted near the project area: one to the east, one to the south along Pecan Valley Drive, and one to the north along Salado Creek. Three previously recorded sites are within 2.0 km of the project area. Site 41BX64 is a prehistoric open campsite. Site 41BX595 consists of a lithic scatter and historic house structure, and 41BX1756 is a historic farmstead that

also contains a prehistoric component.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The proposed improvements for the park are located in two areas. The basketball court is in the far southwest corner of the Southside Lions Park, in the vicinity of the existing baseball fields. The other planned improvements are in the central portion of the park around Pecan Valley Lake. Field investigations consisted of a 100 percent pedestrian survey and surface examination of these areas.

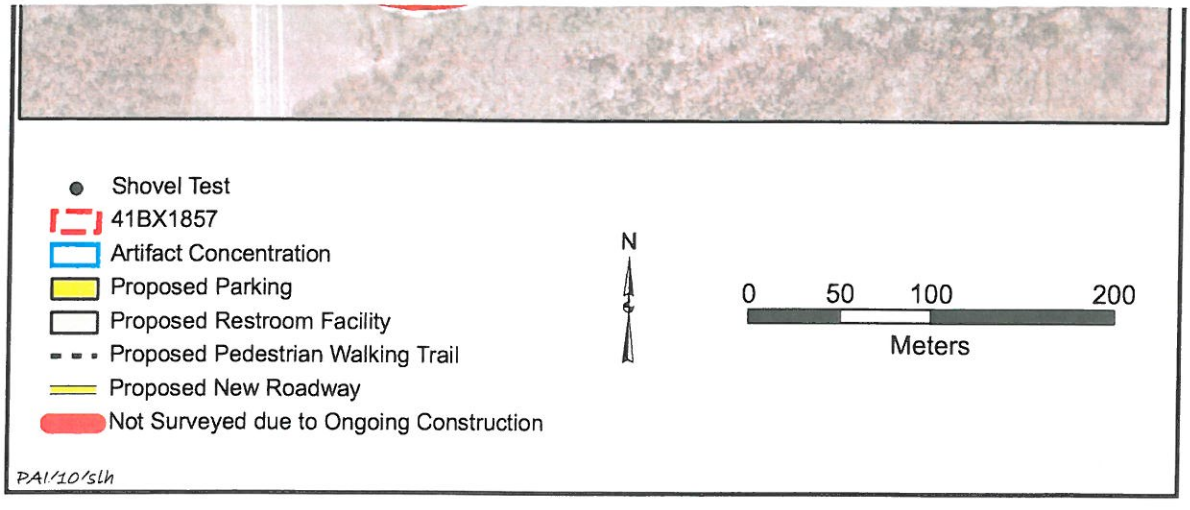
The area of the proposed basketball court was inspected first. Plans call for the construction of a ca. 1,400 m^2 basketball court just east of a gravel parking lot. Several trees are visible on a 2009 aerial photo, some of which have already been removed. The surface visibility of this upland setting was relatively good due to dormant grasses as well as deep tire ruts observed primarily at the western end of the proposed court near the parking area. The degree of surface visibility and geomorphic setting precluded the need for shovel tests in this area. No cultural materials were observed.

The other improvements planned for the park are located around Pecan Valley Lake. Here, proposed improvements consist of ca. 130 m of new roadway and adjacent new restroom facility, ca. 1,830 m of pedestrian walking trails, four ca. 330 m^2 parking areas adjacent to existing roadways, and the resurfacing of ca. 1,880 m of existing park roads. Some of this work was already underway when the survey was conducted (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Proposed improvements and site 41BX1857 around Pecan Valley Lake.

Figure 2

IMAGE REDACTED



The survey in this part of the park started with a windshield survey of the extant paved loop or roadway around the lake. A ca. 200-m stretch along the southern portion of this loop, however, was barricaded and closed off due to ongoing construction work. A barricade was set up about 15 m south of the entrance to the park, closing the loop to a point about 125 m past the earthen dam. Several large earthmoving machines and bulldozers were in use in this area of the park. The work was centered on improvements to the dam itself; however, additional improvements observed included the construction of limestone retaining walls around several large trees and roadway resurfacing. Other disturbances from past improvements include spoil piles on the southeast side of the park, water lines in the central portion of the park, a sprinkler system around Pavilion #1, and erosion caused by drainage from culverts and Pecan Valley Drive just west of this portion of the park. The spoil piles are highly eroded and probably date to the 1964 dam construction and creation of Pecan Valley Lake. All of these disturbances suggest that the natural stratigraphy and landscape have been highly impacted over the years and that ongoing improvements are taking place in a portion of the park (specifically, the dam area) that has already been extensively disturbed.

Since the road around the lake was barricaded to the south, the survey of the existing roadway only looked at the western, northern, and eastern segments of the loop. After the loop was driven, the areas of the proposed hiking trail, parking areas, restroom facility, and new roadway segment were inspected on foot. Beginning at the park entrance and working northward along the proposed trail route, numerous disturbances and cultural materials were observed.

Earthmoving and importation of fill and road-base gravels have clearly altered the surface of this portion of the park landscape over the years. Extensive changes have

occurred in two areas in particular. The first area was observed immediately northeast of the park entrance, where a small gully associated with a drainage culvert revealed a mix of imported fill materials, including reddish brown ironstone, limestone, and gray chert gravels. A second area was observed just west of the lake in the central portion of the park. One shovel test was excavated in the footprint of the proposed trail in this area. The shovel test exposed 15 cm of the pale brown sandy sediment and 7 cm of reddish brown sand over a dark brown clay loam. The profile of the shovel test suggests that at least two episodes of sandy material were imported to this area.

Consistently sized gravels ranging from 3 to 6 cm were observed throughout the area around Pecan Valley Lake. These gravels, consisting of quartzites, cherts, and other siliceous rocks, are associated with an outcrop of Tertiary or Uvalde gravels. West, north, and east of the lake, four concentrations of lithic materials, including pieces of debitage, cores, tested cobbles, and fire-cracked limestone were observed. In total, at least 31 flakes, 10 cores, and 6 pieces of fire-cracked rock were observed in these four concentrations. These four areas comprise a lithic procurement and lithic scatter site designated 41BX1857 (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Overview (a) and close up (b) of site 41BX1857 lithic concentration along the northeastern shore of Pecan Valley Lake.

Site 41BX1857 measures 300 m (north-south) by 200 m (east-west) and covers areas west, north, and east of Pecan Valley Lake. All artifacts and other cultural materials observed were in a surficial context and associated with a deposit of Uvalde

Figure 3

a

b

gravels. Landscape modifications and construction related to the park and lake have disturbed much of the site. Given this and the upland setting, only one shallow shovel test was excavated, which confirmed the site's surficial context and disturbed nature. Based on these attributes, it is recommended that 41BX1857 be judged ineligible for designation as a State Archeological Landmark.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Archeological survey conducted for proposed improvements at Southside Lions Park in the City of San Antonio documented extensive disturbances related to park construction and landscape modifications. One archeological site, 41BX1857, was recorded and is associated with an outcrop of Uvalde gravels. The site is a lithic procurement and lithic scatter consisting of four concentrations of flakes, cores, tested cobbles, and fire-cracked rocks in surficial contexts. The site's disturbed and surficial nature suggests that its potential to yield significant information is very limited. Based on this, it is recommended that 41BX1857 be judged ineligible for designation as a State Archeological Landmark. The proposed improvements for Southside Lions Park should proceed as planned without any additional archeological investigations, as the impacts associated with these improvements will have no effect on significant archeological resources.

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