

**An Archaeological Survey of the
Terra Mont Tract, Northern Bexar County, Texas**

by
Harry J. Shafer and Thomas R. Hester

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Abstract

An archaeological survey has been conducted of about 30 acres within the Terra Mont Tract in northern Bexar County. Requested by the City of San Antonio Historic Preservation office, the fieldwork was conducted by Abasolo Archaeological Consultants, in collaboration with Frost Geosciences. The area had been extensively cleared prior to the survey. However, two archaeological sites were recorded. One is a lithic scatter, 41BX1723, that requires no additional research. The other, 41BX1724 appears mostly to be situated in a City of San Antonio Natural Area at a canyon mouth close to Babcock Road. This site will not be disturbed and no further work is needed.

Introduction

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC) conducted an archaeological survey of the approximately 30 acres of high probability area for archaeological sites within the Terra Mont Tract adjacent to Babcock Road in north San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. The survey was carried out for Frost Geosciences at the request of the City of San Antonio. The fieldwork was done by the authors (AAC) and Brian Culver of Frost GeoSciences. The survey was carried in order to assess the significance of any site recorded in regard to potential eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. The assessment consisted of a 100% surface inspection of the area below the 1250 ft contour as defined on the USGS topographic map (USGS Helotes). Evidence of prehistoric occupation was observed within the survey area. Two light occupation areas were defined as archaeological sites and four isolated finds and features were recorded.

Background

The Terra Mont Tract is located on northern Bexar County in the steep canyons along the southeast edge of the Balcones Escarpment (Fig. 1). The canyons drain into a tributary of Leon Creek. The two short canyons surveyed on the property are steep walled with little soil left from their extensively eroded slopes (Figs 2-4). Prior to the survey much of the ashe juniper had been removed and mulching was in progress at the time of the survey. Consequently, the surface throughout the survey area has badly disturbed, and it was doubtful that any intact archaeological site remained within the survey tract. Nevertheless, one objective of the survey was to record the presence of archaeological evidence, disturbed or not.

The surface geology in the survey area is composed of Lower Cretaceous limestone belonging to the Washita group of the Comanche series (Fig. 5). This limestone is exposed throughout the survey portion and underlies shallow soils of the Brackett-Tarrant association described by Hailey et al. (1991:12-13) (Fig. 6). These are non-arable soils on the tops and sides of ridges (with 8-30% slopes; see Fig 3) and where they survive erosion they support native grasses, prickly pear cactus, ashe juniper, oaks, and underbrush.

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 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, 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. 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

There are no recorded archaeological sites in the area in or around the Terra Mont Tract (Texas Archeological Site Atlas, Texas Historical Commission). Indeed, the closest site is about .6 miles (1 km) to the southwest. It is 41BX71, a lithic scatter (along with a few projectile points) recorded by William Fawcett and Paul McGuff in 1971. To the west about 1.25 miles (2 km). along Helotes Creek, are several sites recorded by students from The University of Texas at San Antonio. Two are historic Anglo-European sites (41BX488: stage stop?; 41BX490, cemetery) and other is a scatter of fire-cracked rock (41BX491). Just north of these sites is 41BX902, recorded by avocational archaeologist

H. Ray Smith. Also on Helotes Creek, it had been damaged by construction associated with Scenic Loop Road.

Survey Results

Two archaeological sites and four isolated finds were recorded during the survey. Surface visibility was excellent given the fact that ashe juniper removal had disturbed the patches of shallow soils capping bare limestone. With these conditions the survey party did not expect to find intact archaeological sites, and indeed our findings showed this to be the case.

Earlier landowners had created a retention dam across the larger of the two drainages for a stock tank (Fig. 1). It is apparent that wet weather springs flow into the drainage at an outcrop of hard limestone stratum creating a *tinaja* effect in potholes at the upper end of this drainage (Fig. 4 top). Springs feed the pond and continue flowing below the dam. The slopes on both sides of the drainage are steep, and do not provide optimal setting for a prehistoric campsite. Nevertheless, we observe scattered fire cracked limestone along the slope north of the pond, a biface tip and other artifacts (Fig. 10A-C) along with burned chert and two flakes. This area is designed as site TM #1 and was given the trinomial number 41BX1723.

Site TM #1 (41BX 1723)

An area on the slope north of the retention dam is given a site designation because of the light scatter of fire-cracked limestone, chert flakes, and a chipped stone artifact (Figs 1, 7). The GPS location is Zone 14 0533574E/3277110N. It was a lightly used campsite that measures about 75 meters east-west and 50 meters north-south. The Brackett-Tarrant soils are very shallow and have been disturbed down to bedrock limestone by the clearing of ashe juniper. No further work is recommended.

Site TM#2 (41BX 1724)

Another more dense concentration of fire-cracked rock at the mouth of the canyon and mostly on COSA Natural Area property is TM#2, located at GPS 14 0533810E/3277314N. This concentration of fire-cracked rock is eroding from the slope of a narrow terrace along the south side of the creek (Figs 1, 8). The deposits are shallow, not more than 30-40 cm at most, and the recent topsoil eroded from the hillside covers the rocks. The site area also is small, measuring no more than 30 meters north-south and 50 meters east-west. The site size is limited by the narrow terrace which is framed by the creek and the steep hillside. The site may be a small single-layer burned rock midden, but more likely it is a small hearth field consisting of several rock-lined hearths. The cracked stones are large and may be the result of single use features. Most of the site, and the better preserved portion, lies on COSA property and is not affected by the Terra Monte development. No further work is recommended.

Isolated Finds

In addition to these two sites, single hearths disturbed by the clearing activity were recorded along the north side of the creek at GPS 14 0533185E/3277136N upstream from the pond, and at ca. GPS14 053390E/3277120N on the south side of the creek below the pond (Fig. 9). On the north side of the larger drainage near the east property line is an area of scattered hearthstones from the displacement of one or more hearths. This was noted at just below where a large temporary office structure is being anchored. No chert was found in association, and the fire-cracked rock scatter, and the scatter was not given a formal site number although the GPS location for this concentration is Zone 14 0533700E/3277360N.

A lone untyped projectile point was found just west of Babcock Road along the south slope or bank of the smaller northern drainage on the property (Figs. 1, 10E). The GPS location is Zone 14 0533490E/327780N. A few widely scattered fire-cracked rocks were also noted along the north side as well, but no defined hearths or concentrations occurred here.

A final observation is in order. We noted that beginning at the upper end of the larger drainage that widely scattered fire-cracked rock occurred on the slopes along both sides, but that the density became greater as we progressed downstream. It was not until we got to the flatter part of the valley that the densest concentration was encountered at site TM#2. Future developments downstream from Terra Mont will likely encounter more concentrated archaeological sites because spring flow from various small steep canyons such as those surveyed on Terra Monte.

Summary and Recommendations

A pedestrian survey of 100% of the high probability area within the Terra Mont Tract in northern Bexar County resulted in the recording of two archaeological sites and four isolated finds. The archaeological sites are both lightly used campsites marked by light scatters of fire-cracked limestone and chipped stone artifacts. Site TM#1 (41 BX1723) is highly disturbed by the removal of juniper, and site TM#2 (41BX1724) is mostly on City of San Antonio Natural Area property. No further work is recommended for either site.

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Figures

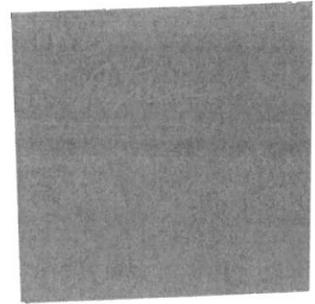
**IMAGE RESTRICTED**

Figure 1. Topographic map showing the locations of sites 41BX1723 and 41BX1724 and isolated finds 1(displaced hearth), 2 (displaced hearth), 3 (displaced hearth), and 4 (projectile point). Base map provided by Frost GeoSciences.



Figure 2. View of creek valley from Terra Monte.



Figure 3. Sloping landscape within Terra Monte tract after juniper removal.



Figure 4. Small side canyon on Terra Monte tract with spring flow and very low sheltered spaces. The shelters are too small for human occupation.

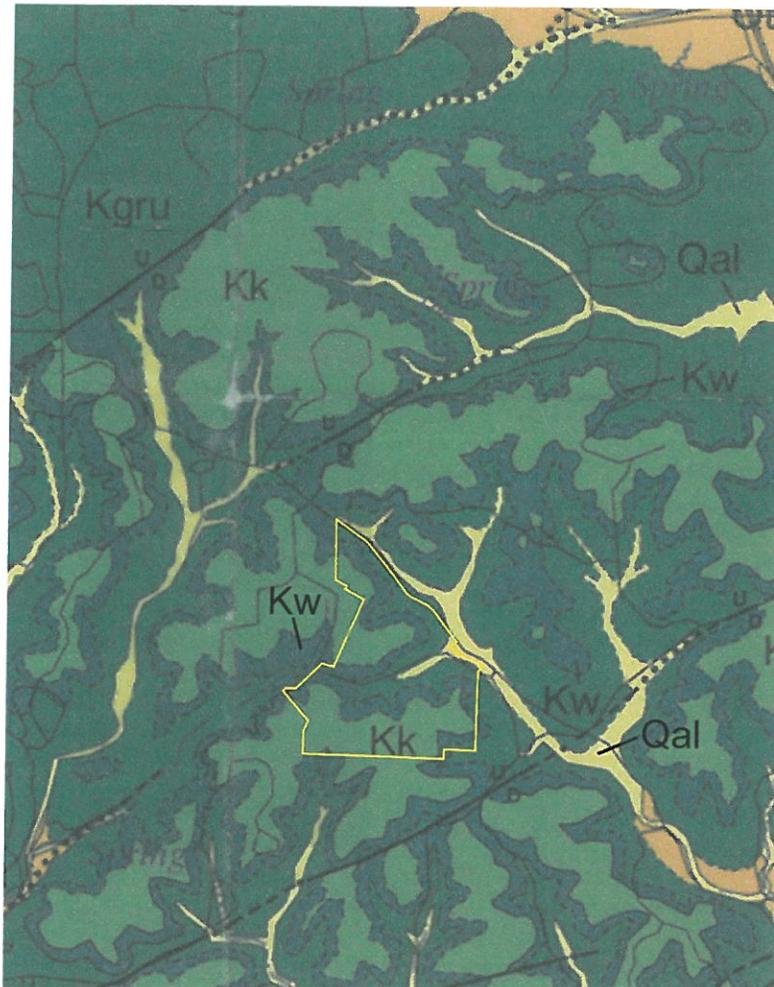


Figure 5. Geology map of the Terra Monte property. Image provided by Frost GeoSciences.

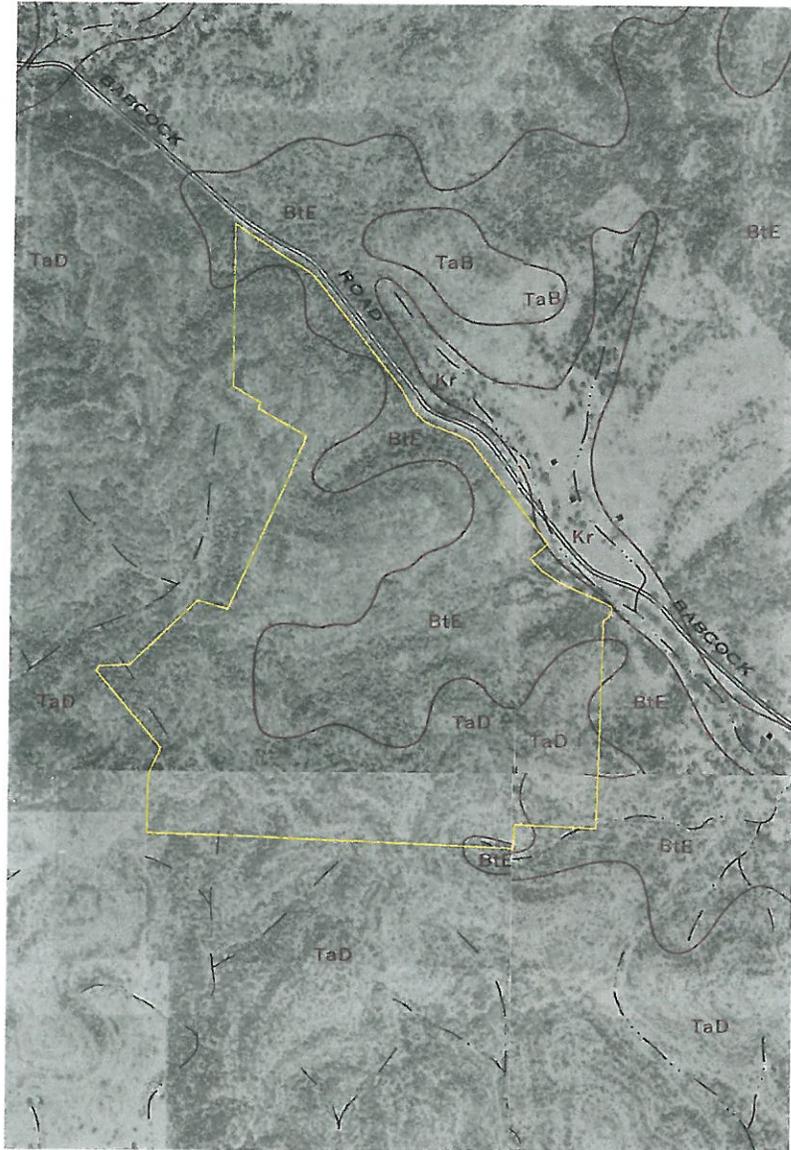


Figure 6. Soils map of the Terra Monte property provided by Frost GeoSciences.



Figure 7. Site conditions at 41BX1723.



Figure 8. Hearthstones eroding from creek bank at 41BX1724.



Figure 9. Disturbed hearth designated as isolated find No. 1.

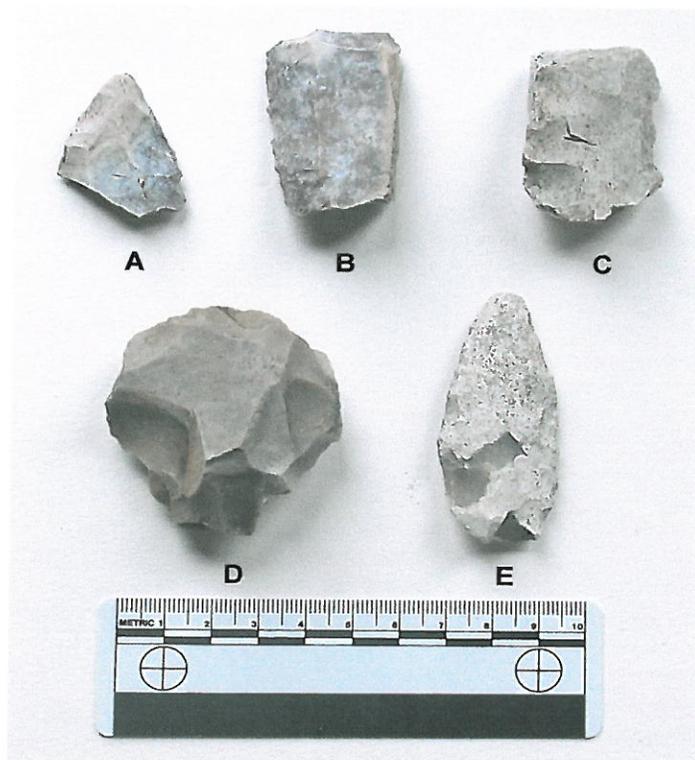


Figure 10. Artifacts. A-C 41BX1723: A, biface tip; B, blade fragment, C, small core. D, 41BX1724: Possible chipped celt; E, Isolated Find No. 4, Untyped projectile point.