

**ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF FRIESENHAHN PARK,
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR COUNTY, TEXAS**

by

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ABSTRACT

On November 14–15, 2018, personnel from Prewitt and Associates, Inc., conducted an intensive archeological survey of 54 acres of land in Friesenhahn Park, in northeastern San Antonio, for the City of San Antonio under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 8634. The field investigations consisted of pedestrian transect survey and the excavation of 22 shovel tests. The survey did not identify any new historic sites or prehistoric Native American archeological sites. However, previously recorded prehistoric site 41BX933 was revisited to assess its present condition and extent within the park. The site is a surface and near-surface scatter of lithic artifacts that likely mark intermittent camps situated on the upland edge overlooking the small stream that bisects the park. The site does not have the capacity to contribute important information and thus is considered ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or designation as a State Antiquities Landmark. As no sites were found elsewhere in the park, it is concluded that the proposed park development will not impact significant archeological resources, and it is recommended that development can proceed without additional archeological investigations.

The archeological survey did not recover any artifacts. Notes on the artifacts observed on the surface and found in shovel tests were recorded by the project archeologists in the field. As such, this project does not require artifact curation. Project records currently housed at the offices of Prewitt and Associates, Inc., will be transferred to the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory at The University of Texas at Austin.

INTRODUCTION

On November 14–15, 2018, personnel from Prewitt and Associates, Inc., conducted an intensive archeological survey of Friesenhahn Park, in northeastern San Antonio, for the City of San Antonio under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 8634. The park location is south of Loop 1604 between Interstate Highway 35 and U.S. Highway 281, just southwest of McClain Park and northwest of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks (Figure 1). All of the survey work done complies with the requirements of the Antiquities Code of Texas (Texas Natural Resource Code of 1977, Title 9, Chapter 191, VTCS 6145-9) and the City of San Antonio’s Historic Preservation and Design Section of the Unified Development Code (Article 6 35-360-634).

The September 2018 Concept Plan for park development includes an 8-ft-wide concrete trail extending westward across the park from existing trails and other development at the northeast end of the park. The new development will mostly be on the south side of a small unnamed intermittent stream that flows southwest through the middle of the park and is presently marked at its eastern head by a water tank and dam. A single box culvert would cross this stream at the west end of the trail. In addition, there are three areas along the trail where benches and trash and recycle bins may be installed, and one area where exercise stations may be installed. The horizontal area of potential effects for the project is 54 acres, while the vertical area of potential effects will be less than 1 ft in most places.

As detailed below, the Texas Historical Commission’s Archeological Sites Atlas shows eight documented archeological sites within 1.1 km of the project area. All of these sites, but one, are historic and include four limestone buildings, four cisterns, a root cellar, and two cemeteries, all of which date to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. The only prehistoric site, 41BX933, is within the survey boundary at the northwest corner of the park. The Atlas shows the site as being in a residential subdivision that is adjacent to the park, but the site form indicates that it is within the high-voltage transmission line corridor that forms the northern edge of the park. The site was revisited by this survey and found to be in that corridor.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The Friesenhahn Park project area is near the edge of the Balcones Escarpment in north-central Bexar County along the boundary between the Blackland Prairie to the southeast and the Edwards Plateau to the northwest (Arbingast et al. 1973:6; Griffith et al. 2004; McMahan et al. 1984:Figure 1). This portion of the Blackland Prairie is characterized by rolling to nearly level tall-grass plains underlain by soft interbedded marls, chalks, limestones, and shales. The scarp along the edge of the Edwards Plateau is a rugged dissected landscape of limestone hills and canyons created by extensive stream downcutting and headward erosion. According to the Geologic Atlas of Texas (Bureau of Economic Geology 1983), the project area is mapped as Upper Cretaceous Pecan Gap Chalk; no Holocene alluvium is mapped in or near the project area. Soils are mapped mostly as Trinity clay, Austin

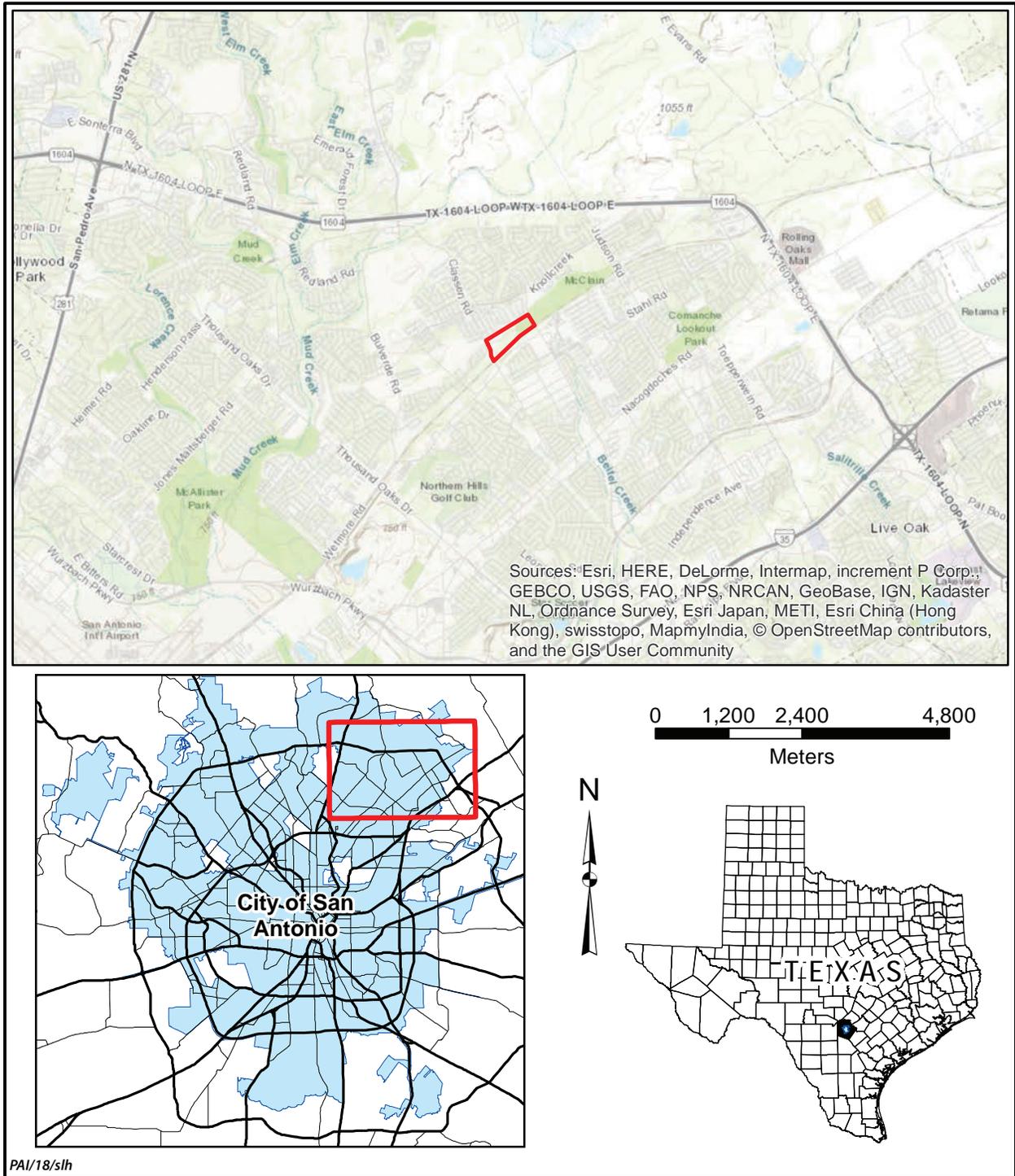


Figure 1. Location map of Friesenhahn Park.

silty clay, Lewisville silty clay, and Trinity and Frio soils, frequently flooded (Taylor et al. 1991). Austin soils occur in uplands, while the others are alluvial soils that occur on terraces and floodplains. These alluvial soils reflect the fact that a small unnamed stream flows from northwest to southeast through the project area on its way to Salado Creek 6.5 km to the south-southwest. Vegetation in the park ranges from a mowed lawn with scattered oak, mesquite, and huisache trees in the developed northeastern end to dense second-growth woodland with oak, mesquite, hackberry, and huisache trees and a moderate to thick understory of privet, greenbrier, and grasses along both north and south sides of the unnamed stream (Figure 2). Tall grasses mark the course of the stream and its wet and marshy floodplain.

RESULTS OF FILE SEARCH

Review of the Texas Historical Commission's Archeological Sites Atlas in October 2018 revealed two previous archeological investigations and seven documented archeological sites within 1 km of the project area, with one additional site just a bit farther away. The Atlas shows that the southmost corner of the current project area was surveyed in 2012 for Bexar County in connection with a drainage improvement project that extended 0.9 km southwest of the project area. No sites were found (Dayton 2013). The other previous investigation was a survey of a residential subdivision 0.4–1.4 km west of the current project area. It was done in 1984 by the Center for Archaeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio (Cox 1984). Two sites (41BX623 and 41BX624) were recorded.

Site 41BX623, 0.6 km northwest of the project area, is a nineteenth-century limestone house and associated artifact scatter consisting of ceramics, cut nails, and glass; archival research indicated it was built in the 1870s. Site 41BX624, 0.9 km west of the project area, is a partially collapsed limestone building believed to date to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Site 41BX908, 0.4 km north of the project area, is a historic limestone house and two stone-lined cisterns recorded in 1990. Site 41BX910, 0.7 km southwest of the project area, is a historic cistern recorded in 1990. Site 41BX912, 0.5 km west of the project area, is a historic cemetery; when recorded in 1990, 11 marked graves dating to 1895–1946 were present. Site 41BX933 was recorded in 1990 as a sparse lithic scatter consisting of flakes, bifaces, Guadalupe gouges, and unidentified dart points; the Atlas shows it as being in a residential subdivision immediately northwest of Friesenhahn Park, but the site form indicates that it is within the high-voltage transmission line corridor that forms the north edge of the park. Site 41BX935, 1.1 km north of the project area, is a historic cemetery (Tampke Cemetery) that reportedly dates as early as 1877. Site 41BX951, 0.9 km north of the project area, consists of the remains of a historic stone house and associated cistern and root cellar that was recorded in 1991.

In addition to review of the Archeological Sites Atlas, the potential for historic archeological sites was assessed using maps obtained from the Texas Department of Transportation's Texas Historic Overlay and historic aerial photographs. None of the maps and aeriels reviewed (1953 USGS map; 1938 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers map; and 1952 and 1963 aeriels) depict improvements within the immediate project area, although the 1938 map does show a now-defunct road passing through it.



a



b

Figure 2. Photographs showing vegetation in the survey area. (a) Northwest view of the mowed lawn with an erosional exposure of bedrock (foreground) in the developed northeastern end of the park; (b) north view across the intermittent stream in the west-central undeveloped part of the park.

METHODS OF FIELD INVESTIGATION

The archeological survey consisted of 100 percent pedestrian coverage of the 54-acre project area by a team of two archeologists. As per the Texas Historical Commission's minimum survey standards, the team walked the project area on transects spaced no more than 30 m apart examining surface exposures such as erosional rills, dirt tracks, and pathways for evidence of prehistoric and historic artifacts and features. The transects were placed on the upland edge north and south of the stream channel and its wet marshy floodplain. A total of 22 shovel tests were excavated where the ground surface was obscured by vegetation and in settings with the potential for buried archeological deposits (Figure 3). This is 5 tests short of the Texas Historical Commission's standard of 1 test per 2 acres for project areas of this size, with the shortfall due to the facts that the already developed northeast part of the park is clearly disturbed and thus does not warrant testing and a central swath along the small unnamed stream is too wet and marshy for testing. Five of the tests helped determine the extent and depth of revisited site 41BX933. Shovel tests were 30 cm in diameter and typically shallow, ranging in depth from 10 to 55 cm with an average of 20 cm, due to the rocky and clayey nature of the sediments. Sediments removed from the tests were carefully sorted with a trowel, as they were too clayey and wet to screen. A shovel test record form was used to record brief sediment descriptions and notes about artifact recovery for each test. All shovel test locations were recorded with handheld GPS units.

Information concerning the condition and location of revisited site 41BX933 was recorded on a temporary site form so that it could be entered into a site update form on the TexSite database. In addition, photographs were taken of survey conditions across the project area and disturbances to 41BX933. A photograph log and a daily journal of project activities, discoveries, and observations were also kept by the project archeologists.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The archeological survey of the 54-acre Friesenhahn Park project area identified no previously unknown sites and revisited one previously record site. The revisited site, 41BX933, is in the northwest corner of the park in a high-voltage transmission line corridor that forms the northern edge of the park. The Archeological Sites Atlas shows the site as being in a residential subdivision that is adjacent to the park and the transmission line corridor, but the site form states that it was found within the corridor. This survey found that the site form is correct; the site is in the transmission line corridor. It is bounded on the north by the housing development and on the south by the drop-off to the head of the stream that bisects the park. On the east, it is bounded by the park parking lot off of O'Conner Road. On the west, it is bounded by a wide drainage ditch the runs from the housing development to a water tank also at the head of the stream. In a few areas along the ditch, it is evident that sediment removed from the ditch was spread on either side effectively burying the original ground surface. So bounded, the site dimensions are 60 m north-south by 200 m east-west. The site was found by this survey because of an oval ATV track that provides 100 percent surface visibility within an otherwise grass-covered

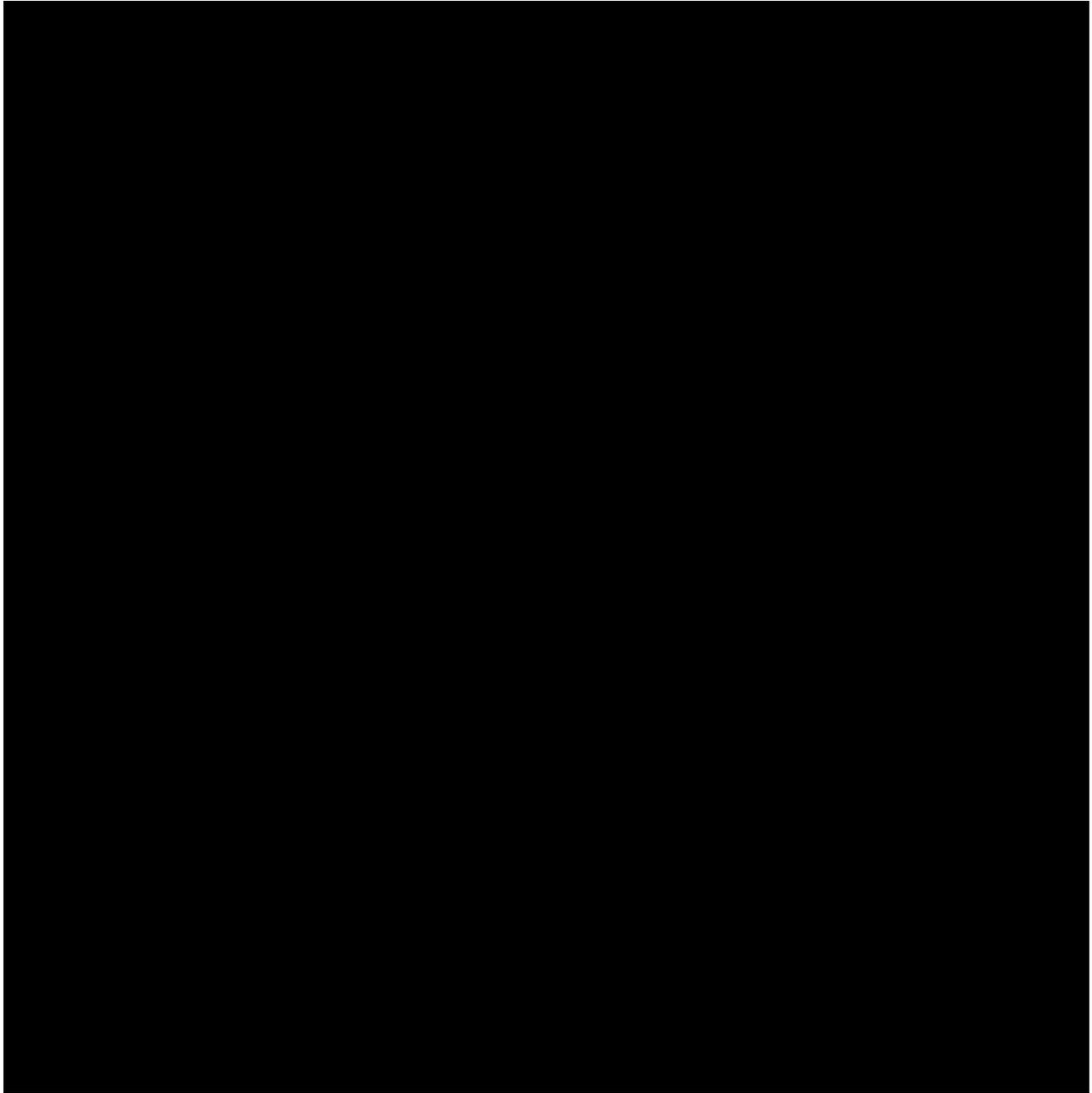


Figure 3. Aerial photograph of the survey area showing shovel test locations.

corridor (Figure 4a). Scattered primary and secondary lithic reduction flakes were observed across the surface of the track, but no concentrations of material that could be considered features were noted. Five shovel tests were placed in the grass around the edges of the track, and only one test (ARN11) produced two lithic flakes in Level 1 (0–20 cm). This test was excavated to 45 cm below the surface in a dark grayish brown loamy clay and was stopped when gravel was encountered. Based on these observations, the site can be considered a surface or near-surface scatter of

lithic artifacts that may mark the remains of small intermittent camps. Temporally diagnostic artifacts recovered or observed during the initial site recordation were noted as dart points and Guadalupe gouges. These tools suggests that the site dates to the Archaic period of Texas prehistory.

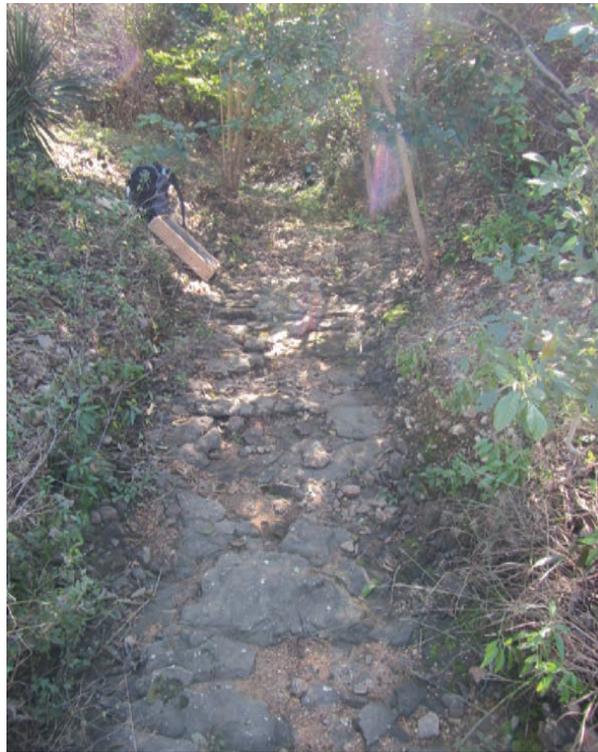
Survey across the remainder of the park, on either side of the central intermittent stream with its marshy floodplain, noted dark gray clay loam rocky soils and moderately dense vegetation broken by pathways, erosional features, and other disturbances that provided 25 percent surface visibility or better, even within some of the grass-covered areas. On the north side, limestone rock push-piles are present along the slope to the stream. The dam for the water tank at the head of the stream is the largest of these disturbances. Several drainage channels, in addition to the one that bounds the west end of 41BX933, were cut from the housing development across the highline corridor toward the stream. Some of these channels are cut to bedrock, which is not more the 30–50 cm below the surface (Figure 4b). The maintenance road for the highline also provided good surface exposure along the northwest section of the park. Railroad tracks and a drainage ditch that follows the length of the railroad mark the southern edge of the park. Sediment removed from the ditch has been spread into the park forming a wide low berm along it. Erosional rills cutting downslope from the berm toward the stream and marshy floodplain also provided surface exposures, as did animal and human tracks through this part of the park. Modern trash was noted in these exposures, but no historic or prehistoric materials were observed. In addition, shovel tests in the more-vegetated areas failed to produce any cultural materials.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Archeological survey of Friesenhahn Park found no new historic or prehistoric sites within its boundaries. One previously recorded site was re-located at its northwest corner. The site, 41BX933, is a prehistoric surface and near-surface scatter of primary and secondary flakes that may mark intermittent camps situated on the upland edge overlooking the small stream that bisects the park. Temporally diagnostic artifacts recovered or observed during the initial site recordation suggest that the site dates to the Archaic period. The site does not have the capacity to contribute important information and thus is considered ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or designation as a State Antiquities Landmark. This assessment is based on the following: (1) it is restricted to surface and near-surface sediments atop a very old landform and thus has no potential for isolable components; (2) no cultural features were observed in the extensive surface exposure afforded by the ATV track, suggesting only occasional nonintensive use by Native Americans; and (3) it has been disturbed by transmission line construction, excavation of drainage ditches, and ATV use. As no sites were found elsewhere in the park, it is concluded that the proposed park development will not impact significant archeological resources, and it is recommended that development can proceed without additional archeological investigations.



a



b

Figure 4. Photographs of the survey area. (a) View to the east across 41BX933 toward O’Conner Road showing transmission line towers and ATV track; (b) view south along a drainage ditch cut to bedrock on the north side of the park.

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