

**Archaeological Survey of the Carmona Hills
Development,
Bexar County, Texas**

By

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Abstract

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted an archeological survey of the 100 acres in the Carmona Hills Development for Frost Geosciences at the request of the City of San Antonio. The assessment consisted of a 100% surface inspection. Much of the property had been badly disturbed by oil field operations, a commercial cattle pens, auction house, and barns. The soils contained dense admixtures of cherty Uvalde gravels. and intermittent prehistoric exploitation of the chert resource was observed in less disturbed pastures in the form of occasional tested cobbles, cores, and primary flaking debitage. Resource exploitation was sufficient to justify the recording of a quarry site to document one aspect of prehistoric landscape use. No significant historic or prehistoric cultural resources will be impacted by the Carmona Hills Development. No further archaeological work is recommended.

Introduction and Background

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted an archeological survey of the 100 acres in the Carmona Hills Development, also known as the Southern Farms Subdivision, for Frost Geosciences at the request of the City of San Antonio. Fieldwork was conducted on March 7, 2006 by Drs. Harry Shafer and Thomas Hester and accompanied by Steve Frost of Frost GeoSciences. The survey covered 100% of the project area. The assessment was carried out in accordance with the "Archeological Survey Standards for Texas" in order to assess the eligibility of any possible cultural resources for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

No subsurface testing was deemed necessary due exposures of local stratigraphy provided by erosion features and recent disturbances. The soils contained dense admixtures of cherty Uvalde gravels and intermittent prehistoric exploitation of the chert resource was observed in the form of occasional tested cobbles, cores, and primary flaking debitage. Resource exploitation was sufficient to justify the recording of a quarry site to document one aspect of prehistoric landscape use.

The property is located west of Loop 410 and north of Pearsall Road (FM 2536) in San Antonio (Fig. 1). The land has had a history of 20th century commercial use. It is part of an abandoned oil field with capped oil wells and old pipelines that transect the property at various places. The property was divided into the several open pastures, a commercial cattle operation (Fig. 2), and woodland pasture strip along the north side. Surface disturbances were extensive in the cattle operation section and in the pasture immediately to the west (Fig. 3). Surface exposure overall was generally excellent with the exception of the woodland strip along the northern part of the property; here the land sloped northward and was densely covered in trees and underbrush. Recent bladed roads through the wooded area provided clear indication of the archaeological situation, however.

The soils are Houston Black gravelly clay with subsets defined primarily by slope (HuB, 5-8% slope; HuC, 3 to 5 % slope, and HsB, 1 to 3 % slope; Taylor et al., 1991). Of interest here is the gravel (Fig. 4). It is Uvalde Gravel heavily laden with chert and chalcedony. Intermittent use of the chert outcrop for stone tool production was apparent across the property, but was most frequent along the western prairie slope overlooking the Medio Creek bottom.

Archaeological Setting

There are more than 1,600 recorded sites in Bexar County. These reflect a cultural chronology spanning 11,000 years of prehistory and a 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. Comprehensive statements on the archaeology and historic archaeology of the Applewhite area to the south provide additional details (McGraw and Hindes 1987).

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 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. A later site, dating around 7,500 B.C., was investigated on the grounds of St. Mary's Hall on Salado Creek. Most recently, the Chandler site on Culebra Creek has been partially excavated, yielding artifacts between 7,500-6,800 B.C. (McKenzie and Moses 2005). To the south of the present project locale, Thoms (1992) has studied an Angostura occupation (6800 B.C.) in the Applewhite Reservoir basin.

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.). 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 remains) and charcoal that can be used for radiocarbon dating. Other Archaic site types include *lithic procurement areas* (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* (41BX1 in the Olmos Basin is the best example; Lukowski 1988) and rarely, *sinkhole burials* (Archaic peoples often disposed of their dead by placing them in sinkholes and caverns).

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 (see McGraw and Hindes 1987; they also recorded Spanish Colonial structures in the Medina River drainage to the

south). 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.

The Carmona Hills project area overlooks the Medio Creek valley to the west. A fair amount of archaeological work has been done along this drainage, including a survey by McGraw (1977) that recorded 15 sites upstream, in an area north of Highway 90. On the Medina Base Annex across from the project area, surveys have been done by the Center for Archaeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio (CAR). One of the sites they recorded, 41BX1130, is on the west side of Medio Creek, near the Carmona Hills area. It is basically a Historic period dump (early 1900s) although a handful of prehistoric stone artifacts (non-diagnostic) were also collected (Texas Archeological Site Atlas).

South of the project area, on the east side of Medio Creek and the near intersection of Loop 410 and IH 35, archaeologists from the Fort Worth District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, recorded site 41BX1131 (Texas Archeological Site Atlas). It is worthy of special note since it is in the same type of upland setting as Carmona Hills, and the site is adjacent to the creek. The site was described as a prehistoric occupation, of unknown age, with stone tool debris and fire-cracked rocks.

Archaeological Findings

Traces of prehistoric landscape use were observed in the form of lithic resource procurement. The dense concentration of Uvalde Gravels would be attractive to any flintknapper, prehistoric or modern. The quality of chert varies from tough coarse texture to very fine, semi-translucent banded and fine opaque. Colors vary from tan, brown, mottled brown, gray, and mottled gray. Some nodules, as noted previously, are banded. Prehistoric flintknappers, like the behavior of modern ones, would simply walk along testing various cobbles for high quality material. The judgment of quality cannot be made by looking at the cortex alone. Flintknappers test the quality by removing one or more primary flakes to assess the quality of the chert. A primary flake here and there, tested cobbles, partly reduced cores, and several early stage bifaces were observed across the property, indicating exploitation of the chert resource in prehistoric times (Fig. 5).

The most concentrated area was in a west pasture on a high terrace overlooking the Medio Creek bottom to the west. Erosion had concentrated the Uvalde gravels on the surface creating an ideal situation for resource exploration (Fig. 4). The survey party also noted more quarrying in this area of the property, and for that reason designated it as an archaeological site.

Artifacts observed during the course of the survey in addition to the flakes and cores mentioned above included tested cobbles (Fig. 6 A), partially reduced blanks (Fig. 6B), a biface fragment (Fig. 6B), a core (Fig. 6C), and an early stage biface (Fig. 6 D). Additionally, three thin bifaces were noted, including the medial fragment of a thin biface

(Fig. 7A), a large dart point preform (Fig. 7B), and the proximal end of a large dart point, possibly a Late Archaic type Marcos (Fig. 7C)(Turner and Hester 1993).

Summary and Recommendations

An archaeological survey of the Carmona Hills property failed to yield evidence of significant archaeological or historical resources. Evidence of prehistoric landscape use was observed in the form of chert resource exploitation of the dense Uvalde gravel deposits, especially along the western portion of the property. In order to document this landscape use, the area along the high terrace fronting the Medio Creek bottoms was designated as an archaeological site. No further archaeological investigation are deemed necessary due to the fact that there is no way of determining the age or ages when the resources were exploited.

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Figures

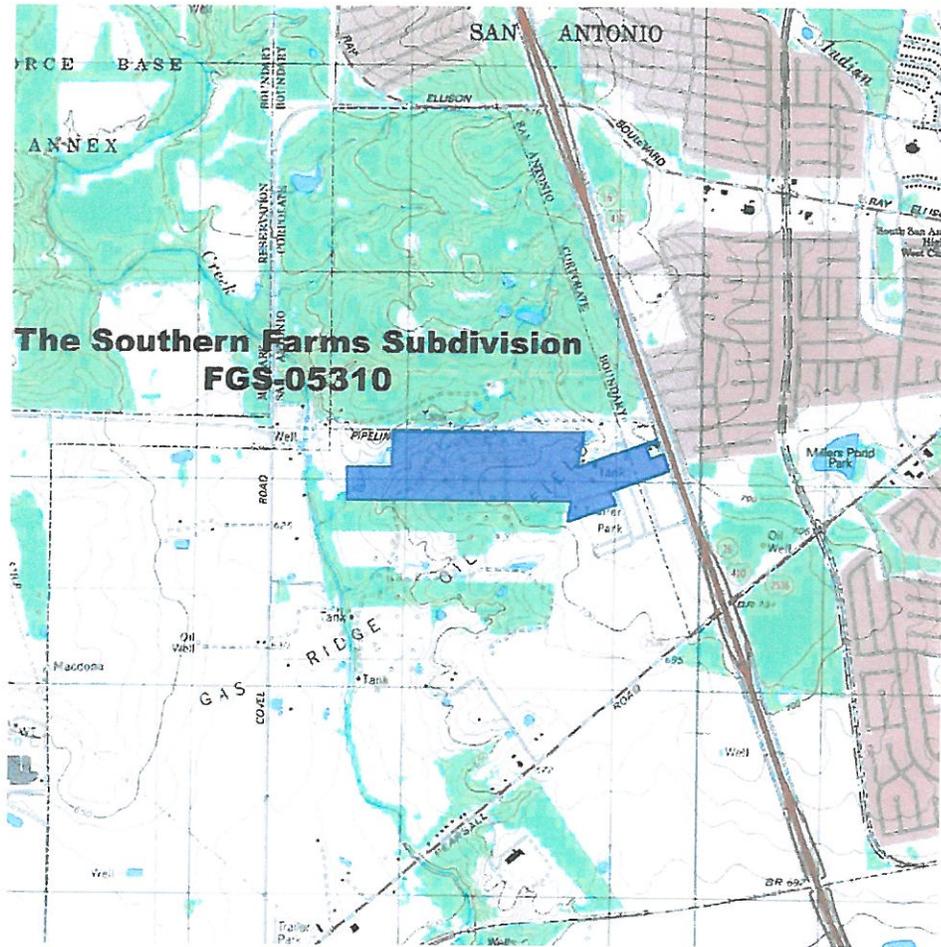


Figure 1. Topographic map showing the location of the Southern Farms Subdivision Carmona Hills Development. Image provided by Frost GeoSciences.



Figure 2. Remains of commercial cattle operation constructed on the Carmona Hills property. Buildings and pens are being removed to make way for development.



Figure 3. Disturbed surface conditions in a pasture west of the commercial cattle operation at the Carmona Hills Development.



Figure 4. Uvalde gravels exposed on the surface in the western portion of the Carmona Hills property.



Figure 5. Cortex flake among cobbles of Uvalde gravels at the Carmona Hills Development. Pocket knife was used as a scale in the photograph.



A



B



C



D

Figure 6. Artifacts. A, tested cobble; B, biface blank; C, flake core; D, early stage biface.

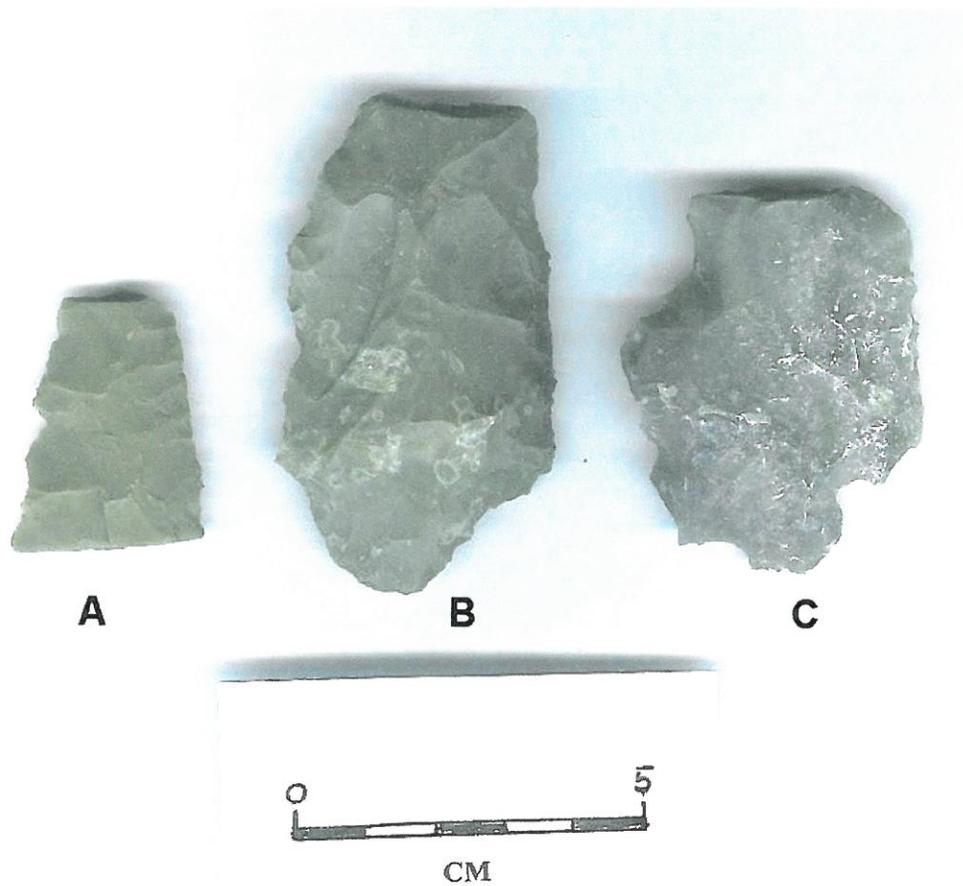


Figure 7. Artifacts. A, thin biface fragment; B, large dart point preform; C, large dart point, possibly Marcos type.