

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

For

**CRESTA BELLA
UNITS 3, 4, 4A, 5, & 6A
IH-10 WEST
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS**

Prepared for

**POST OAK DEVELOPMENT, ET AL
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SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS 78205**

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**An Archaeological Survey of
Units 3, 4, 4A, 5, and 6A at the Cresta Bella
Development Northern Bexar County, Texas**

by

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Abstract

In April 2008, Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted a Phase I archaeological survey at Units 3, 4, 4A, 5, and 6A within the Cresta Bella development in northern Bexar County. The terrain is typified by heavily vegetated limestone ridges and hills, portions of which had been disturbed prior to the survey. Transects through the uplands and examination of high probability areas at the base of the uplands provided no archaeological evidence of prehistoric or historic cultural resources.

Introduction

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC) has conducted Phase I archaeological investigations at Cresta Bella Units 3, 4, 4A, 5, and 6A in northern Bexar County, Texas for PSI of San Antonio (Fig. 1). The field work was carried out in April, 2008 by the authors and included a pedestrian survey of the approximate 81 acres. The work was carried out 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. This Phase I investigation was designed to detect and record any archaeological or historical component that may be present in the project area.

The Cresta Bella development is within the Balcones Canyonlands northwest of San Antonio (Fig. 2). This physiographic region is known for its high density of prehistoric archaeological sites that includes mounded accumulations of fire-cracked rock (called burned rock middens) resulting from the repeated activities of constructing and dismantling earth ovens, large campsites located along creek terraces near springs or along spring-fed streams, upland scatters of chipped stone and burned rock from hearths probably the result of short-term hunting or collecting camps, and vertical shaft cave cemeteries. Sites of each of these categories have been previously recorded in the vicinity of Cresta Bella development.

Research Design

After consultation with the City of San Antonio Historic Preservation Office, our research design called for a surface inspection of each unit but with a focus on those areas that are considered high probability areas for archaeological sites. The upland and slopes were to be inspected by walking transects in order to inspect terrain in all elevations. Any archeological material encountered would be located using hand-held GPS units and plotted on the project map. Diagnostic artifacts encountered during the course of the survey or testing were to be digitally photographed but not collected. Following the field work, the information recovered from the pedestrian survey was compiled and evaluated.

The Setting

The Cresta Bella development is 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 west of I-10 and north of Camp Bullis road (Fig. 2). Geologically, the area in and around Cresta Bella is mapped as Glen Rose limestone of the Cretaceous period (Arnow 1959). The soils in the units surveyed in the present project fall within the Brackett-Tarrant soils ("hilly;" 8-30% slopes) (Figs. 3 and 4). The Tarrant soils are on the upper part of the ridges, with Brackett soils just

below (Taylor et al. 1962). The native vegetation of this part of Cresta Bella consists of oaks, mountain laurel, ashe juniper, persimmon, prickly pear cactus and sotol (Fig. 5).

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 usually part of *larger campsites*, with large amounts of chert [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 chert [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 middle 1900s, are also found.

Archaeological Sites in the Vicinity

In terms of the site types described above, earlier archaeological work by professionals and avocational archaeologists have documented, in the area around Cresta Bella, burned rock middens, lithic scatters, and sinkhole burials. These sites are briefly reviewed here.

Given the presence of abundant limestone, extensive stands of sotol (*Dasyilirion texanum*) and access to water, in prehistoric northern Bexar County, there is a high probability that burned rock middens will be present. Limestone slabs were used in heating and cooking within an earth oven in which the bulbs of sotol were cooked. Along the stream courses, these are often buried in alluvial deposits, as documented, near Cresta Bella, at sites 41BX962 (see Shafer and Hester 2008) and 41BX1631 (Texas Archeological Site Atlas, Texas Historical Commission).

In the hills and uplands away from the stream valleys, burned rock middens will often be found near springs or ephemeral stream tributaries. In such terrain, with thin soils and limestone outcrops, these middens are usually much smaller and hard to place in terms of chronology. An example of such a site was recorded by Shafer and Hester (2007) at the River Rock project to the north, situated on a tributary of Leon Creek. A similar site is just to the north, within the Terra Mont development (41BX1724).

Lithic scatters include site 41BX1723 at Terra Mont (Shafer and Hester 2007c), along with a number of sites along Leon Creek to the north and within Friedrich Park to the south (Texas Archeological Site Atlas, Texas Historical Commission).

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). In nearby Leon Springs, 41BX557, a stagecoach inn constructed in 1856 has been documented. There are also historic sites of the mid-20th century. Site 41BX1590 is on Leon Creek to the northwest of Cresta Bella. It is a 1940s-1950s homestead, with abundant glass and metal artifacts of the period. However, it was in poor condition and did not have any historical significance (Texas Archeological Site Atlas, Texas Historical Commission).

Another site of relevance in the area of the Cresta Bella development 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 Indian burials.

Survey Results

The pedestrian survey of the Cresta Bella units did not find any traces of prehistoric or historic sites. Most of the terrain left undeveloped or unmodified consisted of steep slopes

covered with juniper, oak, and mountain laurel. Perspectives of the survey areas are shown in Figures 6-9. The valley where most of the archaeological sites would most likely occur was outside the survey area, and has been thoroughly modified by the construction of a dam and roads. Roads were being cut to the upper elevations at the time of the survey (Fig. 8).

The only possible sign of prehistoric utilization found despite the fact that dense stands of sotol, a staple plant harvested by prehistoric groups, was an occasional fire-cracked limestone rock and two chert flakes. The fire-cracked rock could date to prehistoric utilization of the landscape or quite possible to brush fires or brush clearing activities. No unequivocal archaeological features were found on any of the units. Part of the explanation for this lack of archaeology is due to two factors: first, the landscape surveyed consisted of marked topographic relief being on the slopes and hilltops of side canyons to Leon Creek and is a low probability area. Secondly, there were no active springs in the canyon that would be a magnet for attracting prehistoric groups to camp or carry out special function activities. There may have been one or more burned rock middens within the canyon itself, but if so, the traces have been removed by construction.

Summary and Recommendations

No archaeological or historic resources were found in any of the Cresta Bella units examined during this survey. **Therefore, no further archaeological work is recommended.**

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Figures

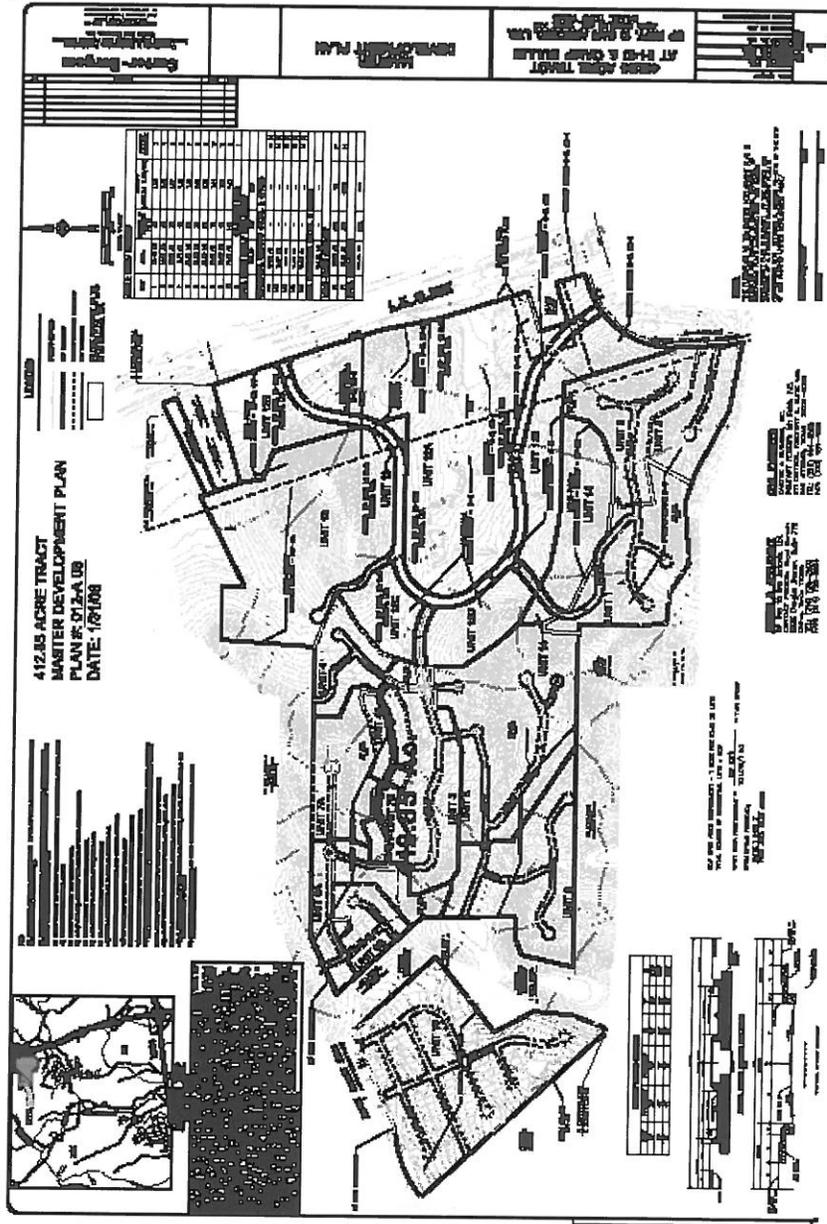


Figure 1. Master Development Plan for Cresta Bella showing the location of Units 3, 4, 4A, 5, and 6A.



Figure 2. Virtual Earth image showing approximate boundaries for the Cresta Bella development bordering WI-10, Camp Bullis Road, and Huermann Road.

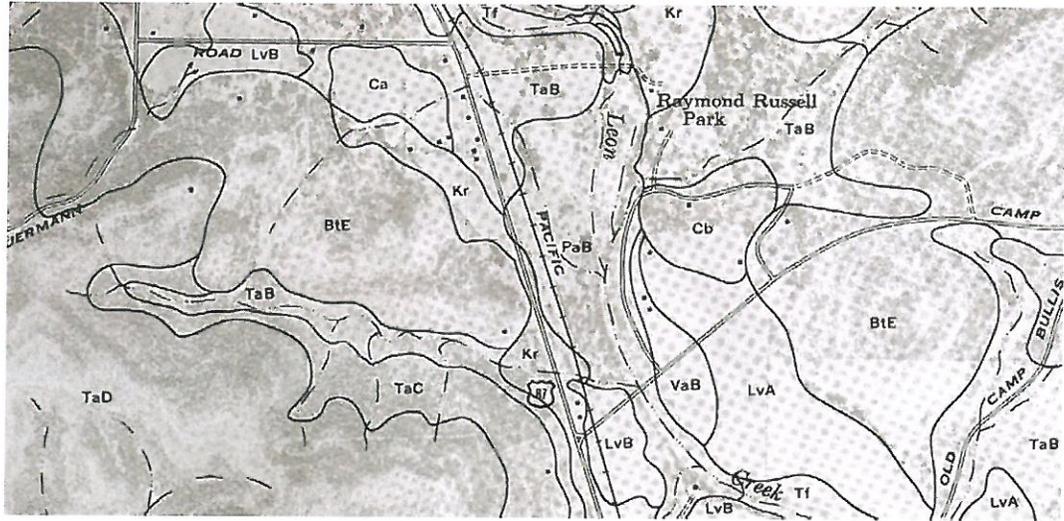


Figure 3. Soils map of the Cresta Bella development.



Figure 4. Portion of Unit 5 showing the rocky slopes and Tarrant-Brackett soils.



Figure 5. One of several stands of sotol observed on the Cresta Bella tracts.



Figure 6. View looking south from Unit 7A toward Unit 6A.



Figure 7. Cleared juniper and road construction bordering Unit 3 at Cresta Bella.



Figure 8. View looking northeast toward Dominion from the crest of Unit 5 at Cresta Bella



Figure 9. Road construction in progress in Units 3, 6B, and 6A at Cresta Bella.