



**An Archaeological Survey of
Phases I and 6 at the Reserve at Sonoma Verde
Development, Bexar County, Texas**

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Abstract

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted a Phase I archaeological survey of Tracts 1 and 6 of the Reserve at Sonoma Verde development in northern Bexar County Texas in December, 2007. Both tracts are adjacent to Lee Creek and the Cedar Creek Municipal Golf Course. A pedestrian survey was carried out over the 132.8 acres of Tract 1 and 76.22 acres of Tract 6. Approximately 50% of Tract 1 and 80% of Tract 6 had been previously modified by landscaping. The survey of Tract 1 yielded several isolated finds but no archaeological site; isolated finds and traces of a destroyed burned rock midden were noted in Tract 6. The destroyed midden and isolated artifacts indicated prehistoric utilization of the landscape in both tracts. **No cultural resources were found that merit National Register nomination. No further archaeological work is warranted in Tracts 1 and 6.**

Introduction and Background

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC) was contacted by representatives of PSI, San Antonio office, on December 18, 2007 to request a Phase I archaeological survey of Tracts 1 and 6 of Sonoma Verde for Post Oak Development in northern Bexar County Texas (Fig. 1). Both tracts are adjacent to Lee Creek and the Cedar Creek Municipal Golf Course. An agreement was reached to begin the survey on December 20, 2007 and the survey was conducted immediately thereafter on December 21 and 28 by the authors. The proposal called for a pedestrian survey of the 132.8 acres of Tract 1 and 76.22 acres of Tract 6. The work was carried out with the intention of assuring 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 archaeological investigation was designed to detect and record any archaeological or historical component that may be present in the project area.

The Reserve at Sonoma Verde 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 north of Loop 1604 and west of Kyle Seale Parkway. The geology is characterized by exposed Lower Cretaceous Glen Rose limestone overlain by exposures of Comanche Peak limestone and Edwards limestone capping the high elevations (Arnou 1959; Sellards et al. 1966:315). The soils are shallow and rocky, with areas of exposed bedrock and belong to the "Tarrant association, hilly" (TaD; Taylor et al. 1962). Blair (1950) places the Balcones Canyonlands in the Balconian biotic province. The native vegetation of both tracts consisting of oaks, mountain laurel, ashe juniper, persimmon, prickly pear cactus and sotol, reflect this biotic community.

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 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 early 1900s, are also found.

Archaeological Sites in the Vicinity

Both Tracts 1 and 6 were considered to be high probability areas for burned rock middens, given the presence of sotol (bulbs used in earth oven baking), limestone (used as thermal components for the ovens), and water sources, such as branches of creek or isolated springs. Due to the shallow rock soils and lack of alluvial or colluvial terracing, any archaeological site would not have buried components. Thus, the only accumulations with any depth that would be expected are burned rock middens. While it does appear that a deposit of fire-cracked rock was present, in some form, in Tract 6, it is no longer intact.

Recorded archaeological sites in the area of the Reserve at Sonoma Verde are very few. Shafer and Hester (2007) recorded sites 41BX1723 and 1724 at the Terra Mont development a little more than a mile to the north of Sonoma Verde Tract 1. The first site is a lithic scatter, while the second is a burned rock midden or tightly clustered hearths.

An archaeological survey of the Cedar Creek Municipal Golf Course, lying along Lee Creek between Tracts 1 and 6 was carried out in 1988. Hafernik (1988) reports that 180

acres were examined and that no archaeological sites or other cultural resources were found.

To the northwest of the project area, sites 41BX1631 and 41BX1734 have been recorded by Joseph W. Beavin of the Southern Texas Archaeological Association. BX1631 is a burned rock midden, with diagnostics of Early Archaic times. 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). Another site of relevance in the area of the Reserve at Sonoma Verde 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.

Four to five miles north of the Reserve at Sonoma Verde, Shafer and Hester (2007a, 2007b) have surveyed developments at River Rock and at Sundance Ranch. The River Rock locale had a small burned rock midden, while at Sundance Ranch; all of the recorded cultural resources were Historic 19th and 20th century in date.

Research Design

The stated research design was as follows: To inspect the area, a pedestrian survey will be conducted over the entire acreage of the two tracts, but concentrating on those areas that we consider high probability areas for archaeological sites. Any archaeological material encountered will be located using hand-held GPS units and plotted on the project map. Diagnostic artifacts encountered during the course of the survey or testing will be collected, digitally photographed, and diagnostic artifacts will be curated at a certified archaeological curation facility (either the Center for Archaeological Research at The University of Texas at San Antonio, or the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory at The University of Texas at Austin).

Following the field work, the information recovered from the pedestrian survey will be compiled and evaluated. A formal report will be prepared for PSI Environmental Services and copies will be provided to the City of San Antonio.

Field Investigations

At the time of the field investigations both tracts had undergone extensive landscape modification. Approximately 50% of Tract 1 and 80% of Tract 6 had been modified to the extent that the undisturbed landscape remained, and much of the undisturbed landscape occurred mostly on the steep slopes bordering the creeks. Most of the undisturbed landscape consists of steep rocky slopes heavily wooded with oak, juniper, and underbrush. These steep slopes are low probability areas for archaeological sites and the only types of sites we would expect in this situation would be lithic scatters on rocky benches or burned rock middens. Burned rock midden formation began with the excavation of a pit, something not likely to have occurred on the steep rocky slopes. Once these conditions were recognized, the focus of the survey was no longer locating sites that might meet National Historic Landmark status, given the fact that burned rock

middens would not qualify, but rather emphasis was placed on searching for traces of where sites may have been or where remnants of sites might exist. There is a very good likelihood that burned rock middens were destroyed by the previous modification as such evidence was observed in Tract 6 (see below).

Tract 1

As noted above, a portion of Tract 1 had been modified prior to the archaeological survey (Figs. 2, 4 and 5). The unmodified portion was the steep rocky slopes along the perimeter bordering the creek and Cedar Creek Golf Course (Fig. 5). The perimeter area was heavily wooded with oaks, ashe juniper, and underbrush, but the rocky terrain made ground visibility good but walking difficult (Fig. 6). The only evidence of prehistoric activity were a single biface tool (Fig. 7A) isolated flakes and chipped stone cores (Fig. 7B) from the locally outcropping ledge of poor quality chert (Fig. 7C) and an occasional fire-cracked rock, the latter possibly the remains of a disturbed prehistoric hearth. No definable hearths or other features were observed on the perimeter slope. The top of the hill was extensively modified (Fig. 4C) and investigations there found no evidence of prehistoric activity. Many lost golf balls, however, were observed along the lower portions of the hills adjacent to the golf course.

Tract 6

Tract 6 was modified by the time of the survey (Figs 8, 10). One of the initial disturbances was the placement of a City Public Service transmission line through the middle of the tract. The patches of undisturbed landscape that remained were investigated. Native vegetation such as sotol (Fig. 11) suggested that evidence of prehistoric utilization such as a burned rock hearth feature, burned rock midden, or discarded expedient tools might be found. Only the trace of one cultural feature in Tract 6, a destroyed burned rock midden, was observed. This evidence consisted of about three dozen fragments of fire-cracked rock, the tell-tale sign of a burned rock midden, intermixed with recently deposited crushed limestone on limestone bench above Lee Creek at GPS location 14 053326E/327469N (see Fig. 8). The burned rock scatter indicated that a burned rock midden was once nearby but its precise position could not be determined due to the landscape modification. The survey party also observed outcrops of thin ledge of poor quality chert in the Edwards limestone near the crest of the hill. One such scatter near a stand of sotol in Tract 6 (Fig. 11) had been expediently exploited prehistorically, and two chert cores found along the slopes of Lee Creek (Fig. 12) also indicated expedient exploitation of the chert. Like Tract 1, many lost golf balls were noted in the woods adjacent to the golf course.

Summary and Recommendations

The phase I archaeological survey of Phase 1 and 6 at Sonoma Verde development in northern Bexar County did not find any intact cultural resources. Most of the undisturbed landscape consisted of steep rocky slopes along the base perimeter of the hills. Pedestrian inspection of these areas did not locate any intact archaeological sites. Over

11,000 years of prehistoric occupation and landscape utilization occurred in the Balcones Canyonlands, and this long history of human use resulted in an artifact scatter across its surface. Concentrations of artifacts and accumulated cultural deposits are regarded as archaeological sites. The integrity of the cultural deposits with regards to stratigraphy, context, and temporal period are among the criteria for designating a particular site for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places or as Texas Archeological Landmarks.

Traces of a destroyed burned rock midden were found in Tract 6 indicating that such sites probably did exist within one or both tracts. The survey investigations did confirm that the landscape was utilized prehistorically primarily as a zone of resource exploitation as expected, but no sustained activity areas were observed during the two-day investigations that would even merit an archaeological site designation. **Since no intact cultural resources were found, no further archaeological work is recommended.**

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Figures

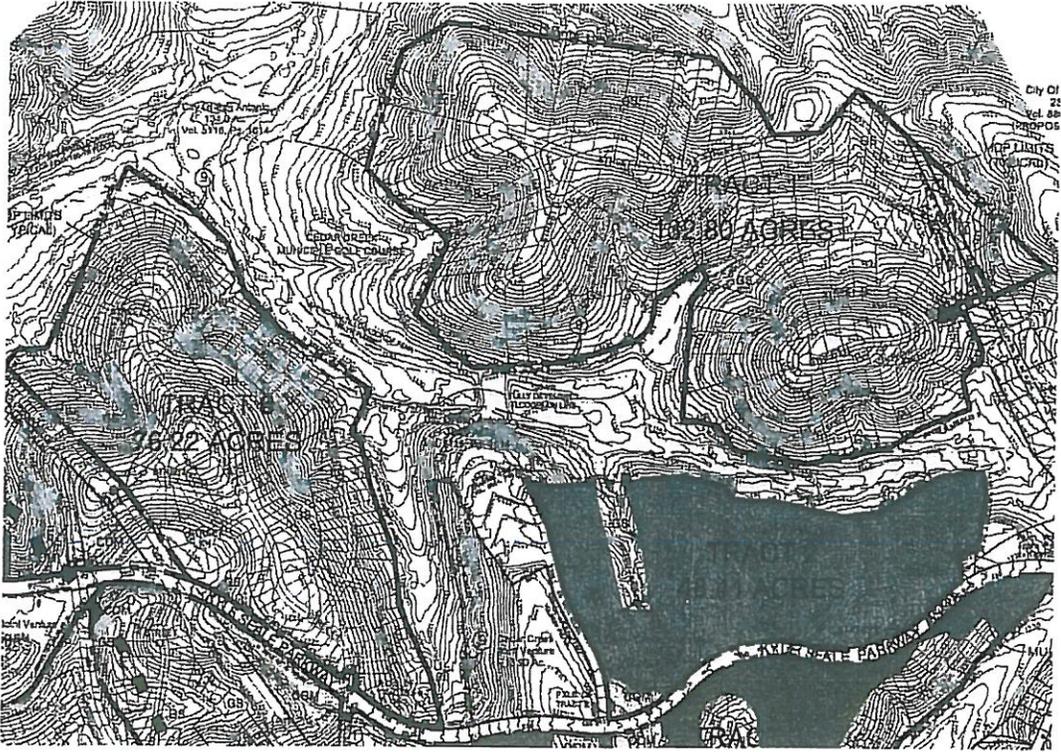


Figure 1. Topographic map of Tracts 1 and 6 at the Reserve at Sonoma Verde, north Bexar County, Texas.



Figure 2. Aerial view of Sonoma Verde Tract 1. Note the extent to which the promontory has been modified. Cedar Creek Golf Course is shown the east side of the property.

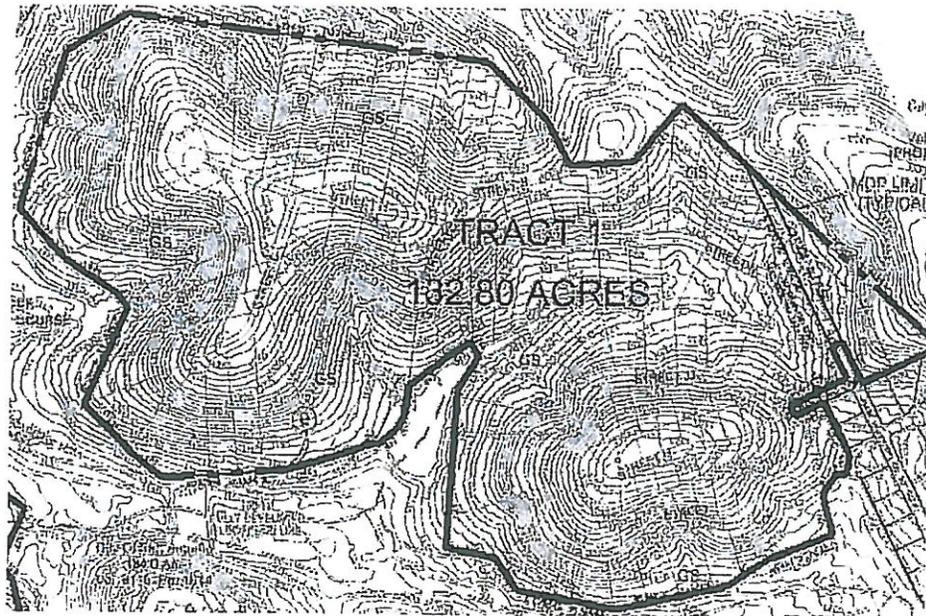


Figure 3. Topographic map of Sonoma Verde Tract 1. Note the degree of topographic relief. North is to the right on the image.



Figure 4. Aerial view of Tract 6 showing the extent to which the land has been modified. Cedar Creek Golf Course borders the property to the north and west. The near location of a burned rock scatter is also shown.

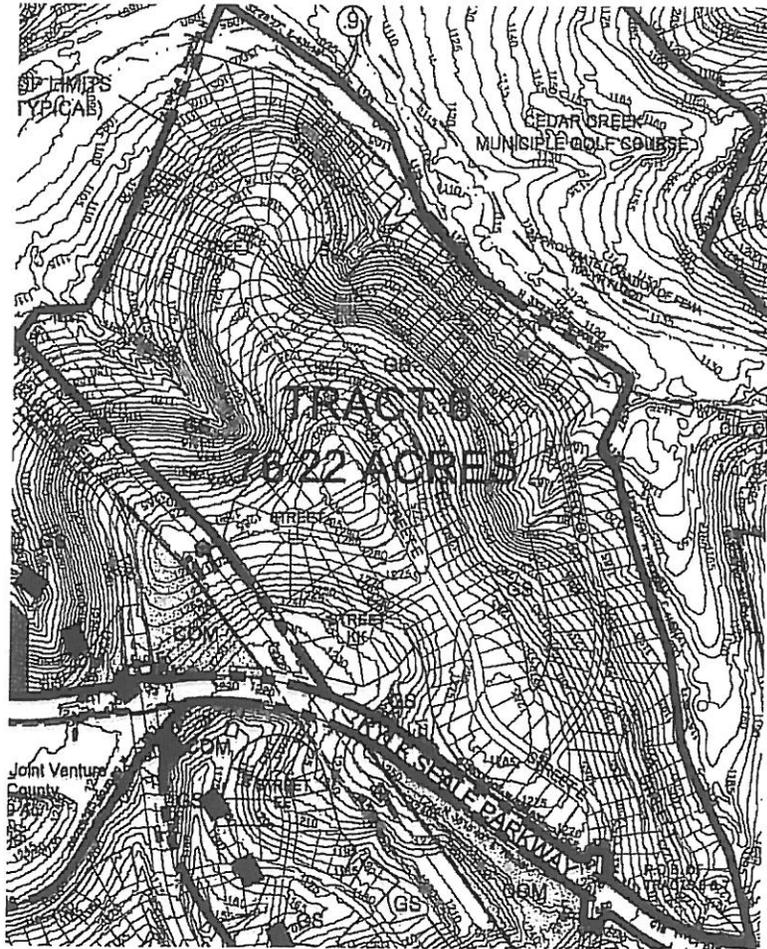
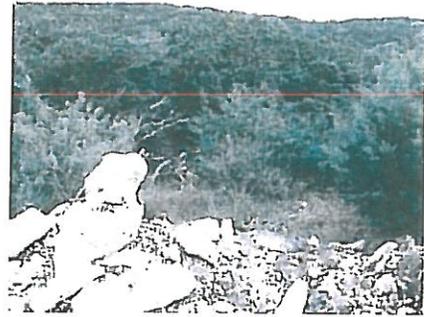


Figure 5. Topographic image of Tract 6 at Sonoma Verde showing the dramatic topographic relief. North is to the right on the image.



A



B



C



D

Figure 6. Views of Sonoma Verde Tract 1 showing patches of natural landscape.



A



B



C



D

Figure 7. Views of Tract 1 showing the extent of landscape modification prior to the archaeological survey. A and B are from the eastern hill portion and C and D are from the western hill portion of the property. C is a view of the summit of the western hill (as seen in the background of A).



A



B



C

Figure 8. Chert nodule and artifacts. A, probably a variant of the Guadalupe type adze blade; B, sequent flake core; C, Edwards chert nodule.

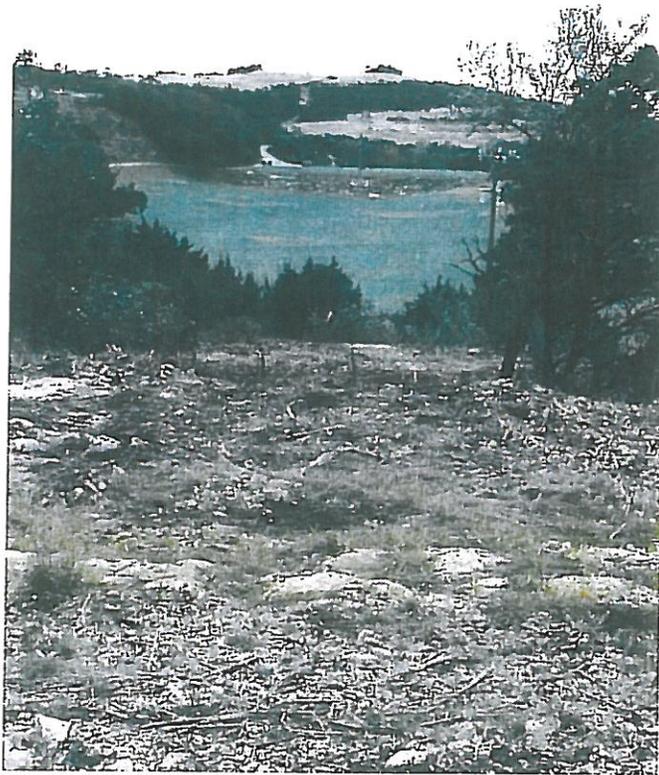
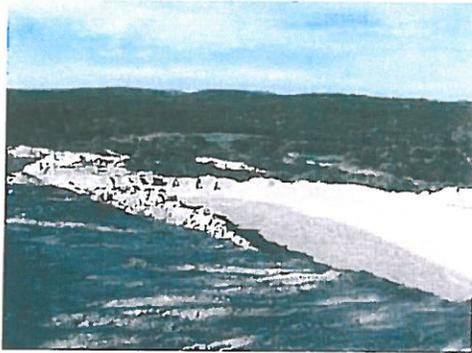


Figure 9. View of Tract 6 from Tract 1; Cedar Creek Golf Course is in the mid-ground. Note shredded juniper in the foreground.



A



B



C



D

Figure 10. Views of Tract 6 showing the extent of landscape modification. A and B are views taken from the hill summit; C, and D are views from the lower perimeter.



Figure 11. Sotal stand in Tract 6; Kyle Seale Parkway is to the right.



Figure 12. Chert artifact found along the perimeter of Tract 6.