An Archaeological Survey of Rising Moon, Northern Bexar County, Texas

SUBMITTED TO

FROST GEOSCIENCES
Helotes, Texas

By

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Abstract

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC) conducted Phase I archaeological survey in the high probability areas for archaeological sites of the 313 acres Rising Moon property (formally the Lazy M Ranch), northern Bexar County, Texas. Field work was performed between October 17 and October 27, 2008. Four sites of archaeological interests were recorded, two historic stacked rock fence sites (RM-1 and RM-4), a two-room stack rock structure (RM-3), and a small rockshelter with potential use during the prehistoric period (RM-2). In addition, two additional features of interest were recorded that include an abandoned Boy or Girl Scout camp used within the past two decades and a possible stone cairn. The poor preservation of the latter prevented positive identification. None of the sites are eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places although the small rockshelter should be protected if possible. No further archaeological work is recommended for the Rising Moon property.

Introduction and Background

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC), conducted Phase I archaeological investigations that included a pedestrian survey in the high probability areas for archaeological sites of the 313 acres Rising Moon property (formally the Lazy M Ranch), northern Bexar County, Texas. Field work was performed by Harry Shafer between October 17 and October 27, 2008 accompanied by Patrick Buster and T. G. Bey of Frost GeoSciences. The work was carried out in accordance with the "Archeological Survey Standards for Texas" 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 is designed to detect and record any archaeological or historical component that may be present in the project area.

Figure 1. View of the Rising Moon property and surrounding Balcones Canyonlands.

Rising Moon lies within the Balcones Canyonlands north San Antonio (Figs. 1 and 2). The property is situated west of Scenic Loop Drive and drains into Leon Creek and the headwaters of Helotes Creek (Fig. 2). Archaeologically 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.

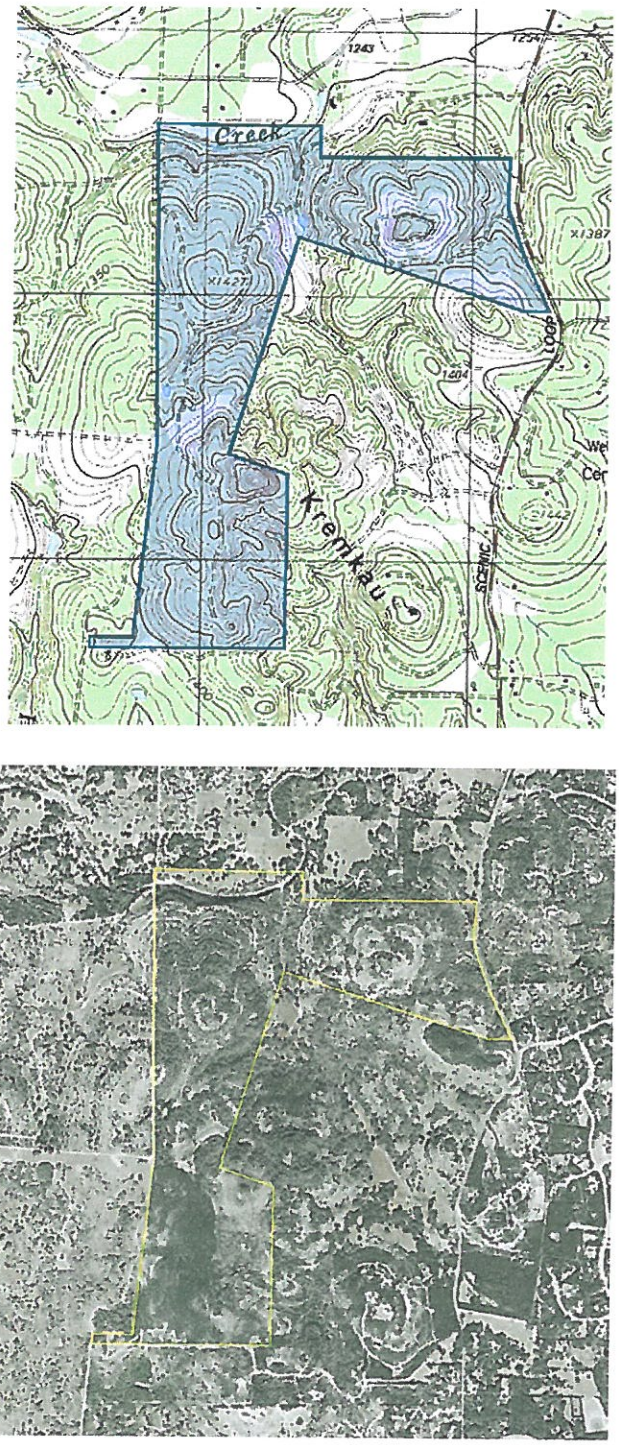

Figure 2. Top: Topographic map of the Rising Moon property. Bottom: Aerial view of the property. Images provided by Frost GeoSciences.

The Rising Moon development is in the Balcones Canyonlands, a rough landscape formed by the eroded front edge of the Edwards Plateau (Figs. 1 and 2). The dominant geological formation on the Rising Moon property is the Cretaceous age Glen Rose formation (Fig. 3). This geological formation lies stratigraphically below the Edwards and Devil's River Formations. This is significant archaeologically for two reasons; first, the Glen Rose has no chert formations in the area of the property, and the boundary between the Edwards and Glen Rose is the source of many springs in the Balcones Canyonlands. The absence of chert and water make the Rising Moon area a low probability for major prehistoric archaeological sites because both of these resources, chert and water, were essential to sustaining presence in this locality.

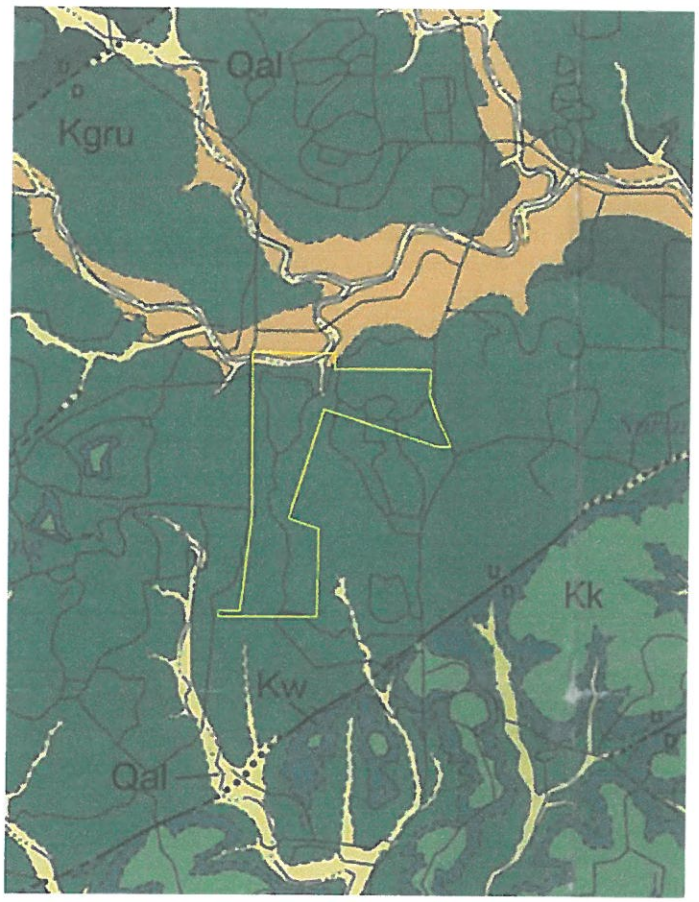

Figure 3. Geological map showing the dominant Glen Rose formation across the Rising Moon property.

The topography is hilly formed by the erosion of the Glen Rose that created the creek valley. Most of the steep slopes are exposed limestone, but where soils do occur they are classified as Bracket soils (BrE 12 to 30% slope). A narrow section of property on the north side of Leon Creek contains shallow Patrick series soils (PaB 1 to 3 % slope).

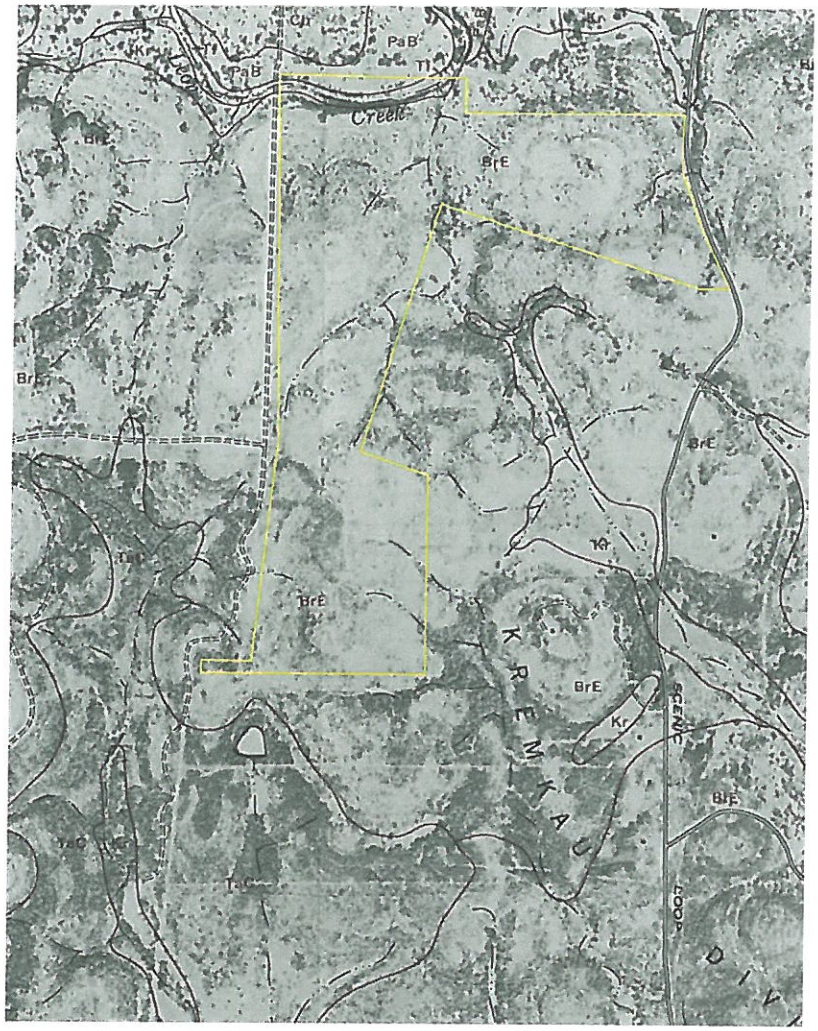

Figure 4. Soil map of the Rising Moon property. Image provided by Frost GeoSciences.

Rising Moon lies within the Balconian biotic province (Blair 1950). The vegetation is typical of the Balcones Canyonlands and consists mostly of a oak-juniper parkland mixed with shrubby vegetation in the canyons and on certain slopes. Prominent stands of sotol, prickly pear cactus, and an occasional yucca plant also occur on the hilly slopes (Fig. 5 right) of the property. Most of the property is drains into Leon Creek which is dry during most of the year due to the absence of springs Fig. 5 left).

Figure 5. Landscape view of Rising Moon property: Left: Dry falls along the Leon Creek in Unit 5. Right: View of sotol stand and other vegetation on the slopes in Unit 6.

Research Design

To fully inspect the area, a pedestrian survey was conducted over the entire 313 acres with more intensive coverage along Leon Creek and its tributaries. The steep slopes of the hills were mostly barren limestone with some shallow soils along the topographic benches on the slopes. No shovel tests to explore for buried deposits were not necessary due to the shallow soils and exposed limestone. The slopes were considered a very low probability area for prehistoric sites and features but historic features such as stacked rock fences that date the last half of the19th century and early 20th century were not unexpected. All archeological material encountered was located using hand-held GPS units and plotted on the project maps. No prehistoric artifacts other than two chert flakes were encountered during the course of the survey, and only historic glass associated with RM-3 was digitally photographed.

Archaeological Background

Cultural History

The Rising Moon development is also in the Balcones Canyonlands archaeological region. The broad outline of the archaeology of northern Bexar County can be discerned. Major time periods and site types are briefly noted here.

The archaeological record of northern Bexar County fits into the regional cultural framework extending back at least 11,200 years (e.g., Hester 2004). The first occupations occurred in the Paleoindian period during the last part of the Pleistocene, indicated by the one major archaeological site located along Leon Creek (41BX52 or Pavo Real; Collins et al., 2003) and the occurrence of scattered diagnostic projectile point types and other

artifacts of the Clovis and Folsom periods. Groups were likely small and highly mobile. Clovis peoples (9200 B.C.) hunted Ice Age mammals, such as mammoth and large extinct species of bison, and the later Folsom bands (8800 B.C.) emphasized bison (buffalo) and smaller game.

As modern environments began to emerge around 10,000 years ago, Paleo-Indian populations were more numerous, and there is widespread evidence of occupation throughout the region. The hunting and gathering patterns of this early time frame, involving modern species of animals and plants, began to be intensified by 8,000 B.C., leading to the development of Archaic cultures. This way of life lasted for thousands of years, reflected by regional specialization and locally distinctive types of projectile points, knives, and other stone tools. It was not until about 500 A.D. that this long-lived tradition began to change. The introduction of the bow and arrow marked the beginning of the Late Prehistoric period. For over 10,000 years, the ancient hunters had used the spear and spear thrower as their main weapon, and this began to be replaced by the bow and arrow around 1000 years ago. The most distinctive archaeological indicator is the presence of tiny arrow points, and later, around A.D. 1300, and intensified hunting of buffalo. With the arrival of the Spanish in the region in the late 17th century, the native peoples of the Historic period began to go into the missions. The raids of invading Lipan Apache bands spurred this transition. One group who occupied the surrounding area that followed this pattern was the Payaya, a hunting and gathering band indigenous to the area (Campbell 1988). Armed with the bow and arrow, Payaya hunters preyed on deer and bison (American buffalo). Their settlements were concentrated along the pecan-rich environments of the Medina and San Antonio rivers, and pecans were a major fall food source for these people. Their hunting territories extended into the Canyonlands in what is not northern Bexar County.

During the Historic period, the best known archaeological remains are ranch and farm houses of cut stone, dating from the 1840s through the 1880s (Shafer and Hester 2006). Stacked- stone fences also occur and usually date prior to the introduction of the barbed wire about 1885 (Shafer and Hester 2006). 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 in rural areas of Bexar County.

Nearby Sites

The upper portion of the Leon Creek Valley is poorly known archaeologically. Indeed the northwest corner of Bexar Country, around the Rising Moon development, has had little archaeological work other than Phase I surveys of residential developments. To the north two historic sites, the Obert House (41BX497) and Obert Cemetery (41BX498) are located to the northwest of the project area, within the Maverick-Altgelt Ranch National Register District. To the south are sites 41BX84 and 41BX85, recorded by the Leon Creek survey carried out in the early 1970s by Paul McGuff and William Fawcett (Texas Archeological Site Atlas, Texas Historical Commission). 41BX84 is at the confluence of Pecan Creek and Leon Creek. Perdiz (?) and Fairland points were found at this bluff-top

site. Nearby is 41BX85, an open campsite also on a Leon Creek bluff downstream from Rising Moon.

Recent Phase I surveys of residential developments by AAC have recorded a few archaeological sites, include prehistoric as well as historic. For example, site 41BX1761 is a stacked rock fence recorded in the Hills of Boerne Stage development (Shafer and Hester 2008). Site 41BX962 is a major prehistoric campsite and burned rock midden located at a spring next to the Hills of Boerne Stage development (Shafer and Hester 2008). This large site is typical of the prehistoric sites found around upland springs in the Balcones Canyonlands. AAC recorded three historic sites at the Sundance Development east of Rising Moon. One (Sundance #1 was the historic mid 19th century Hausmann homestead site which had been destroyed, but was associated with an impressive network of stacked rock fences. The other sites were Sundance #2, another historic homestead all but destroyed save the stone chimney and also associated with an elaborate stacked rock fence. Sundance #3 was a small one-lane stone bridge with arches that resembles the Mission Espada aqueduct (Shafer and Hester 2007a). A small burned rock midden (41BX1723) was recorded on the River Rock property by AAC (Shafer and Hester 2007b); this property is also in the upper Leon Creek watershed and is similar to that encountered at Rising Moon. Another AAC survey was conducted at Terra Mont development where traces of prehistoric occupation were recorded (Shafer and Hester 2007c).

Survey Findings

The survey party located only four sites of archaeological and historic interest. Two are stacked rock fences, one is a stacked rock two-room structure, and one is a small rockshelter with a good probability for prehistoric use. Each of these sites is described below. The locations of the sites and features are shown in Figure 6.

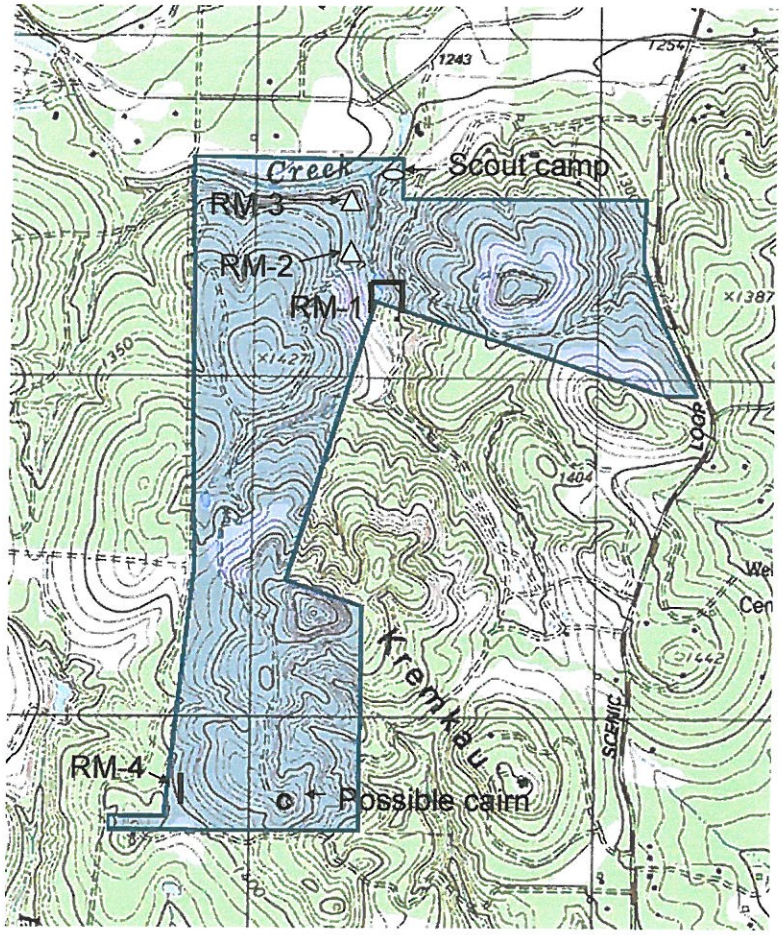

Figure 6. Topographic map showing the location of recorded sites and features on the Rising Moon property.

RM-1

The remnants of a stacked rock fence designated as RM-1. This feature is in Units 4 and 5. In Unit 4 it extends from the creek upslope eastward for about 50 meters where it turns south and extends for about 80 meters to the property line and beyond. It is partly preserved only on the lower slopes near the creek where it is about 70 cm high (Fig. 7, left) but appears very well preserved on the adjacent property. In the poorly preserved sections the rocks appear to have been salvaged. A GPS reading was taken and portions of the fence photographed, and a formal site number will be given to this feature. The GPS reading on the section shown in Figure 7, left is 14R 053099E/3281315N. The reading at the northeast corner is 0530427E/3281284N property line where the fence continues southward is 0530427E/3281205N. The fence continues westward across the creek in Unit 5 for about 30 meters and turns south across the property line. The GPS at this corner where the fence is about 80 cm high is 0530304E/3281289N (Fig. 7, right). There is not enough of the fence left to preserve; no further work is recommend.

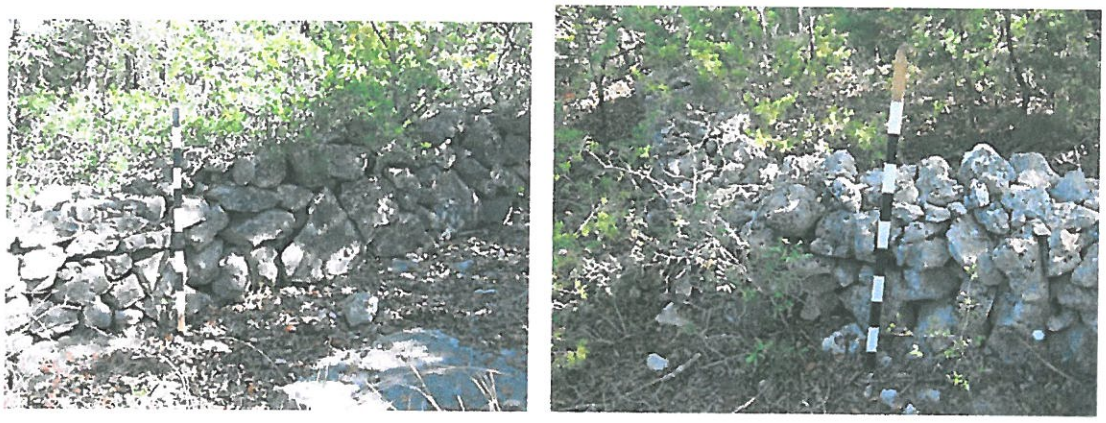

Figure 7. Stacked rock fence designated as site RM-1. A section in Unit 4 is shown on the left, and a portion in Unit 5 is shown on the right.

RM-2

This site is a small rockshelter at the head of a small side canyon to the unnamed creek draining into Leon Creek from the south in Unit 5. The unnamed creek is the boundary between Units 4 and 5. The GPS coordinates are: 0530304E/3281320N The shelter faces east and measures 2.7 m deep and about 9 meters north-south. The ceiling varies from 60 cm to 90 cm high. The interior is dry but the south end is wet and the north end may catch some runoff. No soot was observed on the ceiling but this could be due to weathering of the soft limestone. No fire-cracked rock or chert flakes were observed in front of the shelter either. Regardless of the lack of visible evidence of prehistoric occupation, the shelter definitely has the potential of containing some archaeology, possibly even human burials. This shelter should be protected if possible.

Figure 8. Views of RM-2, a small rockshelter. Left: View from the southeast; Right: close-up view looking north.

RM-3

On the point overlooking the confluence of Leon Creek with an unnamed tributary draining from the south in Unit 5 is a two-room stacked stone structure designated as RM-3. The GPS readings for the structure are: 14R 0530302E/3281554N. Shards of patinated glass, one piece of unidentified metal, and two chipped stone flakes were found while examining the surface around the structure. This structure measures about 7 meters north-south and varies in width from 2.2 to 3.0 wide, depending on the wall measured. The wall heights vary from 40 cm to 1 meter high. The structure is actually pretty well preserved considering it is dry-laid and stacked. There is a niche or door space between the two rooms that is about 1 meter wide.

All glass shards were either from the body or near the bases; consequently, no diagnostic traits were left to identify the type or age of the bottles. Most appeared to be from glass beer bottles as they were amber in color, but clear glass was present as well. Strangely, no stoneware or other refuse that would indicate any long-term occupation was present.

Given the location and vantage point on the bluff overlooking Leon Creek and the tributary, the structure may have been a hunting blind used in the early part of the 20th century. This does not explain the two room structure and connecting passageway, however, and the absence of a dense artifact scatter rules out an occupied structure.

The structure, while interesting and somewhat mysterious, does not merit National Register Designation mainly because it lacks the kinds of architecture and artifact scatter that would suggest historic significance. It has been documented and digitally imaged, and therefore, has been recorded for archival and future reference. No further work is recommended.

Figure 9. Two views of RM-3; left, viewed from the west. Right: viewed from the north.

Figure 10. Views of RM-3. Left: Niche or door between rooms 1 and 2 as seen from the north. Right: view of room 2 from the northwest.

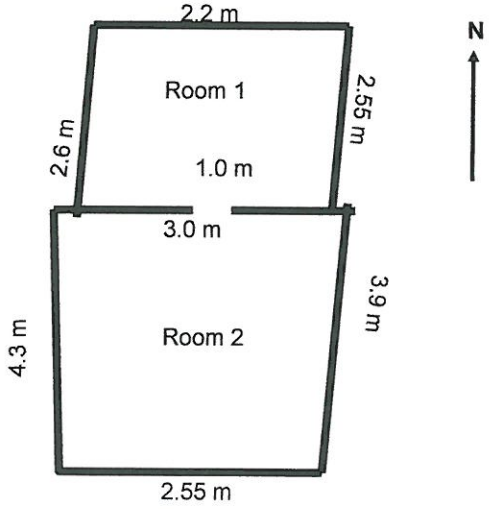

Figure 11. Floor plan and dimensions of the two-room structure at RM-3.

RM-4

This site is a remnant section of a stacked stone fence located near the southwest corner of Unit 6. The fence is oriented approximately north-south for about 50 meters. The best preserved section (Fig. 12) measures 80 cm high. No other features were associated with the fence, and like RM-1, the builder took advantage and incorporated a natural bench or shelf into the fence.

Figure 12. Views of RM-4, the remnants of a stacked stone fence.

Other Features

The survey party encountered other features that do not merit site designation but are worthy of mentioning. One is an abandoned camp, possibly a Boy or Girl Scout camp in Unit 4 (Figs. 13). The features within the camp include two to three stone hearths, a central stone hearth surrounded by a bench, abandoned bar-b-que cookers, and a nearby flag pole. This camp probably dates within the past two decades judging from the condition of the cookers. This recent site does not merit further archaeological attention or designation.

Figure 13. Left, one of several hearth features at the abandoned scout camp. Right: hearth and campfire circle at the abandoned scout camp.

Another feature of possible significance is a possible stone cairn on top of the second highest hill in Unit 6 (Fig. 14). The feature consists of several flat slabs placed together on a surface that otherwise does not have these kinds of stones. The construction of a recent nearby hearth, possibly associated with the abandoned scout camp, may have borrowed additional stones that were originally associated with this feature. Since it cannot be confirmed that this feature is indeed a prehistoric stone cairn, no further attention is warranted.

Figure 14. Possible remnants of a stone cairn on top of a hill in Unit 6.

Summary and Recommendations

Four cultural resource sites were recorded during the archaeological survey of the 313 acres of the Rising Moon property. Two sites, one in Units 4 and 5 (RM-1) and one in Unit 6 (RM-4), were remnants of stacked stone fences. These stone fences are characteristics of early ranching in the Edwards Plateau and Canyonlands and may date to the mid 19th century to the early 20th century. Stone and wood fences predate the introduction of barbed wire which came into the area about 1885 and were replaced by wire fences. These two stone fences have been formally documented but since both are poorly preserved on the Rising Moon property, they do not merit preservation or further attention.

Such stone fences were once common across the Texas Hill Country prior to the introduction of wire fencing. Laura Lynne Knott (2004 a,b; 2005) suggests that rock fences in the Hill Country were built primary by settlers who had come into Texas from the South (Tennessee, Kentucky, northern Alabama, northern Georgia), bringing a fencing technology that was primarily of British origin. It is likely that almost all rock fences in northern Bexar County were built in the mid-19th century, with the practice ending upon the introduction of barbed wire in Bexar County after 1878 (McCallum and Owens (1996:377-378).

Site RM-2 is a small rockshelter in Unit 5 that does have some potential of containing information of archaeological significance. While unequivocal evidence of prehistoric use was not observed in our survey, that the shelter is relatively deep and has a well protected dry area beneath the overhang, the possibility that it contained light occupation and even human burials exists. This site should be protected if possible.

Site SM-3 in Unit 5 is intriguing in that it is a two-room stacked stone structure without any evidence of occupation other than a very light scatter of glass shards, mostly from bottles. It does not appear to have historic significance and may have served as a hunting blind given its vantage point on a bluff overlooking Leon Creek. The fact that it is structure's construction consisting of stacked stone walls is not dissimilar to the construction of stacked stone fences, the structure may date to the beginning of the 20th century, plus or minus 20 years or so. Since no unequivocal evidence of antiquity or historic significance could be determined, no further archaeological work is recommended.

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