

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY FOR THE CONQUISTA PROJECT OF THE
NIESCHWIETZ-BODDEN PROPERTIES,
KARNES COUNTY, TEXAS

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INTRODUCTION

In December 1979 the Conquista Project of Conoco, Inc. contracted with the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR), The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) to conduct an archaeological survey of 437 acres in Karnes County, Texas. Approximately 2 miles south of Falls City (Fig. 1), this survey involved the Bodden (134 acres) and Nieschwietz (303 acres) properties. The planned uranium operations would create disturbance to any archaeological sites. A preliminary assessment was needed for the location and description of all archaeological resources, with recommendations for their future protection or mitigation.

Thomas C. Kelly and Erwin Roemer of the CAR-UTSA staff, working with Conquista representatives Morris Merritt and Gary Guy, conducted the field survey under the overall supervision of Thomas R. Hester, Director, and Jack D. Eaton, Associate Director, of the Center for Archaeological Research. Field work was substantially completed in two person days, although Roemer later revisited the area.

Procedures standard to small surveys of this nature were followed. The area was first considered through map study and an examination of previous research in this region. Next, an on-location inspection was made by vehicle, and boundaries were determined. Final surface examination took place by walking over the properties in an informal transect manner, which involved zigzag patterns across cultivated fields or along minor drainages. The area was intensively examined, and general area and site photographs were taken. Favorable visibility, due partially to sparse winter ground cover, substantially aided examination.

ENVIRONMENTAL BACKGROUND

Several recent archaeological projects have been conducted near the Nieschwietz-Bodden properties. Most of these have been performed by the Center for Archaeological Research, and it is from these surveys that most of the following information has been drawn.

Karnes County is situated in the region of Texas referred to as the Rio Grande Plain and is generally flat with some moderate topographic relief. The San Antonio River is the major drainage in the immediate area, supplemented by numerous creeks, particularly the Cibolo. Land practices in the last hundred years have probably diminished the reliability of smaller streams (cf. Hester 1976; Kelly and Highley 1979:1).

The present climate is classified as semi-arid and megathermal (Thorntwaite 1948), but is noted for extremes. Average annual precipitation is often not more than 20 inches. The "rainy seasons" usually appear in late spring and early autumn. Sustained droughts have occurred, as well as flooding such as hurricanes produce.

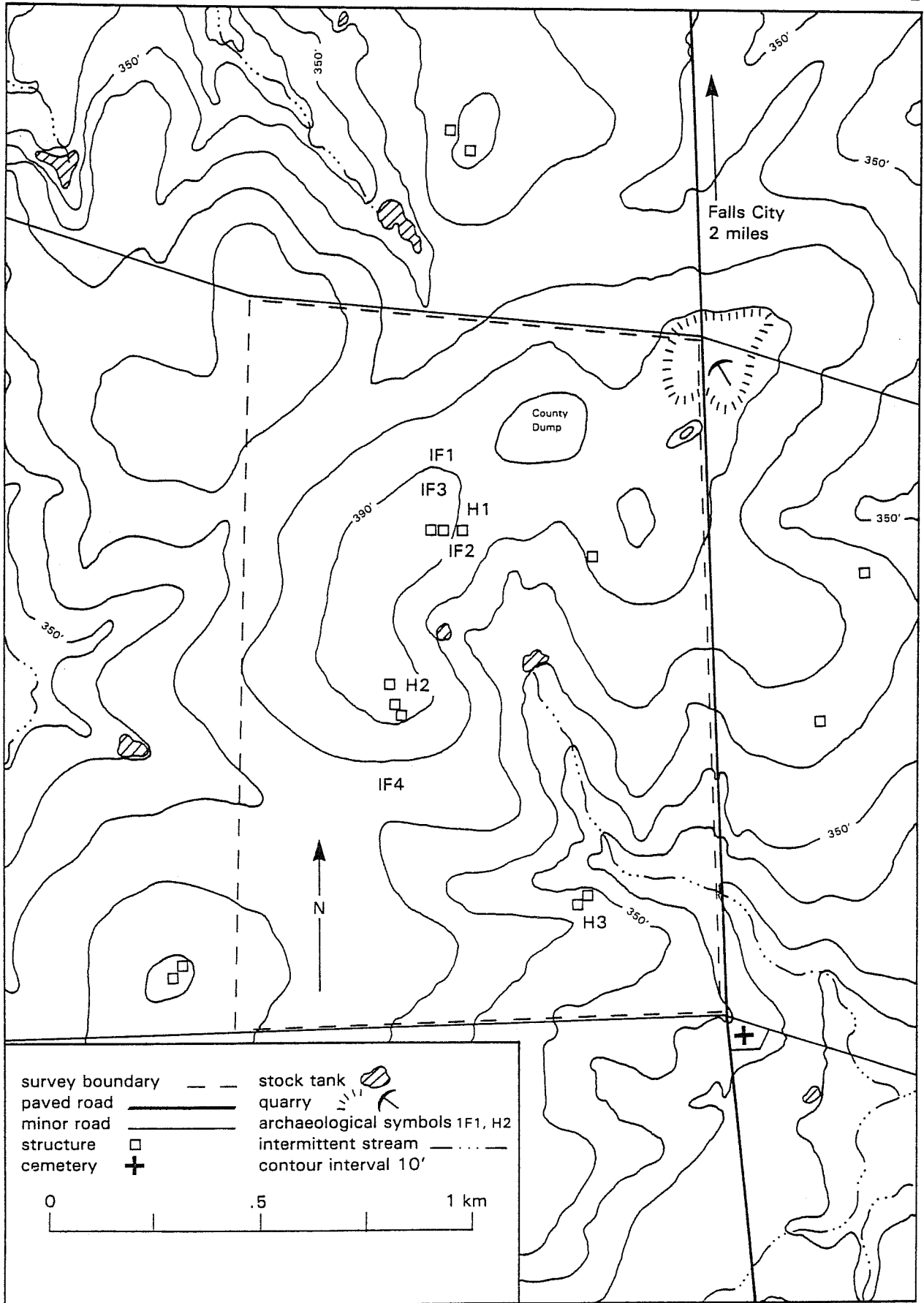


Figure 1. Map of Nieschwietz-Bodden Survey Area. Shown are the locations of Anglo-European sites ("H" numbers) and isolated finds ("IF" numbers).

Blair (1950) defined this area as the Tamaulipan Biotic Province, characterized by savannah with desert grasses, mesquite, other thorny brush, and cacti growing in the uplands, and hardwoods such as oak, ash, elm, hackberry, and pecan on the floodplains of rivers and their tributaries. Typical native animals include whitetail deer, javelina, turkey, quail, hawks, doves, fox, squirrel, rabbits, raccoon, opossum, skunk, ringtailed cat, rodents, turtles, snakes, fish, and lizards. Other larger mammals, such as antelope, bear, bison, and puma, have recently become extinct.

Human activity has had a large effect upon the local land. Ranching practices have encouraged thorn brush (through fencing and overgrazing), while farming has increased erosion and silting. Archaeological resources have usually suffered from modern activities.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Southern Texas archaeology has only recently accelerated to the extent that a cohesive group of data is available. Among the various projects that have contributed information about the area are: Lynn, Fox and O'Malley (1977); Fox, Mallouf, O'Malley, and Sorrow (1974); Shafer and Baxter (1975); Montgomery (1978); Hester (1976); Fox, Black and James (1979); and Creel *et al.* (1979).

Kelly and Highley (1979) provide a recent synthesis for the local archaeology; the reader is referred to this publication for more detailed information and numerous references. McGraw (1979b) recently surveyed 540 acres under an earlier Conquista contract. An explicit chronological or cultural outline has not yet been constructed for Karnes County prehistory, due largely to a lack of major excavation at any site. A generalized outline for southern Texas does exist, including Paleo-Indian, Archaic, and Late Prehistoric occupations (cf. McGraw 1979a:4,7).

Early Spanish activity included a fort near the Cibolo and San Antonio Rivers. The historic period of Karnes County is discussed by Kelly and Highley (1979: 5-6), including information from the 1880 census (*ibid.*: Table 2).

THE STUDY AREA

The 437-acre Nieschwietz-Bodden study area is located south of Falls City (Fig. 1), approximately 50 miles southeast of San Antonio on U.S. Highway 181. The area presently is in about two-thirds active cultivation, as indicated by plowed, terraced fields in the Nieschwietz property's northern area, along the cemetery road, and over most of the Bodden land. Geologic characteristics revealed sandy-clay soils of medium to light gray color, interspersed with soft, white tuffaceous stone, and more resistant, bedded sandstone (also gray) in other areas. A mixture of the Miocene and Eocene formations appears to exist, pertinent to the Catahoula and Jackson Group designations (Geologic Atlas of Texas), with the former over most of the area's surface but revealing in places the older stratum. In addition to the tuffaceous stone and sandstone, a scatter of fossil wood was noted, especially in the cultivated northern Nieschwietz area, which is also the more elevated portion of the study area at

390 feet mean sea level (msl) or more. The effective topography lies on a portion of the lower valley wall, with the San Antonio River located less than a mile to the north, flowing distinctively eastward at this point. However, the study area drains east and south because it is predominantly on that side of a slight valley wall protrusion. The properties' sole minor drainage originates in the central area and flows southeast, eventually connecting to the river about five miles eastward via the Cow and Turkey Creek system. The lowest elevations are along this drainage in the southeastern Nieschwietz corner at less than 340 feet msl. The remaining uncultivated third of the area displays native brush cover with grasses and trees. Most of this follows the minor drainage. Common names for observed vegetation include mesquite, prickly pear, live oak, persimmon, agarita, ball moss, black brush, acacia, pepper weed, and long grasses. Other recent activity which has affected the immediate vicinity (besides the dump and quarry) includes a buried pipeline shown on the 1961 Falls City USGS map and three recent Anglo-European sites, designated H-1, H-2, and H-3. Also, Conquista workers had cleared a series of east-west *senderos* (lanes cut through brush) for test cores in the southern study area. This aided ground visibility in the survey area.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The Nieschwietz-Bodden survey identified only a small amount of prehistoric material, with more extensive, recent Anglo-European occupation. Despite moderately abundant fossil wood, very few specimens were seen to be altered in the form of cores, debitage, or tools. Typical fossil wood pieces were 5 to 10 cm in diameter or larger and of various colors, but often dark brown or gray with some translucence and white-streaked cortex. In many cases the grain quality for knapping was quite good (lab tested). Yet despite good visibility, only several knapped flakes and one possible test core were noted throughout the survey area. Two isolated finds (IF) made of fossil wood were located and designated IF-2 (collected) and IF-4 (not collected). The former was located in a driveway rut at a historic site (H-1). It is a crude bifacial "gouge" form common to southern Texas. The other (IF-4) was a small biface fragment in the Bodden cultivated field, of opaque light-colored fossil wood and under one cm in thickness. One isolated "dart point" was discovered in the Nieschwietz field north of Anglo-European site H-1. This artifact (IF-1, collected) is a thin biface of pale brown Uvalde gravel (cf. Creel *et al.* 1979: 4-5), a material basically non-existent in the study area. The distal portion is missing. The crude stem and notching outline give no ready type identification. A fossil wood fragment (IF-3) that apparently is knapping debris was also collected in the proximity, but is probably unrelated.

Three 20th century Anglo-European sites were noted in the study area. Due to the very recent occupation displayed (i.e., age of 50 years or less), these sites were not formally recorded but are briefly described below. Field designations are H-1, H-2, and H-3. All were previously identified by symbols on the 1961 Falls City USGS map.

The northernmost Anglo-European site (H-1) is located in the northern Nieschwietz property. It was considered the most interesting structurally due to the considerable amount of local sandstone utilized. This farm-ranch complex still has

some structures in use, including a corral, buildings, and windmill. At least eight structures are represented, including five standing wood-frame buildings, some of which rest on sandstone foundations. The wooden shingle roof on a sandstone smokehouse is only now collapsing. The main dwelling structure, now removed, was set on a sandstone and concrete slab opposite the smokehouse. A date of 1949 remains in the concrete. Artifactual debris is plentiful and apparently little older than 50 to 60 years. Construction techniques, while recent, display great care taken by the builders. Extensive use of sandstone in "modern" dwellings is infrequent in the area. Quarry sources are varied but not too distant. Sandstone outcrops to the south and a stock tank quarry near H-2 are less than 500 m southward. A much older unrecorded historic sandstone site located 1.2 km northwest of H-1 may have been robbed; a large sandstone quarry exists there. Also at H-1, a sandstone wall averaging 80 cm in height runs east of the main site for at least 200 m. This ends near another USGS structure symbol, probably part of H-1. Only a few scattered foundation stones and a ca. 1949 Pontiac remain today. The sandstone wall has aided in the retention of the cultivated field north of it. P. J. Nieschwietz reports that a family named Rohan once lived at H-1.

The second Anglo-European site, H-2, is on the Bodden property. This farm-ranching complex consists of a wood-frame house and barn. A corral was built on the south side of the barn, and earlier buildings may once have existed to the south. Of interest nearby is a small sandstone quarry which possibly formed a stock tank. This is about 100 m east of the buildings, on the edge of Nieschwietz's land. Sandstone has been stacked about a shallow excavation (ca. 12 m diameter, 1.5 m deep) to form a low retaining wall which opens to the west. Associated debris again pointed to occupation beginning about 50 years ago. A man named Rudy Konig was also named as a former occupant of the site.

The last Anglo-European site, H-3, consisted of a scatter of refuse with little or no evidence of structural remains, although the 1961 USGS map showed house symbols. Many glass bottles, bottle fragments, and metal scraps were scattered over an area of about 400 m². Bottle forms suggested 1920 to 1930s occupation at the earliest. Test core *senderos* have been placed in the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Existing prehistoric evidence is insufficient to warrant further investigations. It is expected that natural erosion and human activities would have revealed any significant site evidence unless it is deeply buried or long since destroyed. If buried deposits are discovered by Conquista workers, an archaeologist should be notified; additional field work is not recommended at this time. The three Anglo-European sites are interesting but recent, with no outstanding traits presently known. Most intensive Conquista activity is planned in the southern survey area, and officials stated that site H-1 will be avoided. No further archaeological action is recommended for these complexes.

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