

Archaeological Survey of the West Salado Creek Lift Station Project, San Antonio, Texas

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Abstract

During October of 1999, archaeologists from the Center for Archaeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio conducted a pedestrian survey, shovel testing, and backhoe trenching along a portion of Salado Creek in southeastern San Antonio, Texas in order to identify cultural resources that may be impacted by a proposed sewer line. The project encompassed three areas (Phase I, II, and III) where the proposed route of a sewer line was to cross Salado Creek. Phase I and the east side of the Phase II crossing were surveyed. Results from shovel tests and backhoe trenches indicated that the proposed sewer line would not impact cultural resources in Phase I and the eastern portion of Phase II. The survey was not conducted on the west side of Salado Creek in Phase II and all of Phase III due to changes in city planning. This work will need to be completed if, or when, the sewer project is reinstated.

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Introduction

On October 14 and 15, 1999, an archaeological survey was conducted by the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR), The University of Texas at San Antonio along a portion of Salado Creek in southeastern San Antonio, Texas. The project was undertaken as a direct result of plans developed by San Antonio Water Services to place a sewer line route near Salado Creek. The work was to be conducted in compliance with the Texas Antiquities Code under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 2259. Antonia Figueroa and Owen Ford of CAR carried out the field investigations under the supervision of Cynthia Tennis.

The archaeological survey was to consist of three areas where the proposed sewer line route was to cross Salado Creek. Phase I, east of Artesia Road and south of Wheatley Avenue, consisted of a 900-ft (275-m) section of trench and three creek crossings (Figure 1). The Phase II area consisted of a 400-ft (122-m) section of trench parallel to Roland Avenue and included one creek crossing. The Phase III area consisted of an approximately 1500-ft (457-m) long section that would run beneath Salado Creek just east of Vallevista Drive and Corfu Street.

Archaeological Background

Two archaeological sites have previously been recorded within the project boundaries. One of these sites (41BX64) contains both historic and prehistoric components, while the other (41BX785) is a prehistoric occupation site.

Site 41BX64, located at the eastern end of J Street, is within the Phase I survey area. This site, referred to as the J Street Park Site, contains both historic and prehistoric components. J Street Park was acquired and developed by the city of San Antonio in 1971. It is located approximately 10 miles down Salado Creek from the Northeast Preserve, on an elevated peninsula at the confluence of a drainage channel and the creek. In 1971, the city of San Antonio requested that all city parks be surveyed to determine archaeological significance. Investigations conducted by Fox and

Fawcett consisted of one day of surface survey (Fox 1973). Artifacts collected included ceramic sherds, glass fragments, tile fragments, and chert flakes and fragments. Fox and Fawcett concluded that the historic artifacts may have resulted from dumping at the site during the mid-1900s. The lithic debris collected did not contain much diagnostic information, only allowing for a general dating to the Archaic period, approximately 8000 B.C. to A.D. 1000 (Fox 1973).

Site 41BX785 is located within the Phase III area boundaries, just east of Vallevista Drive. Two phases of investigation were conducted at 41BX785 in advance of a planned sewer project similar to the current project. During August of 1988, Phase I, consisting of a pedestrian survey and limited shovel testing, was conducted along the 10,000-foot right-of-way of the West Salado Creek Outfall pipeline easement. Site 41BX785 was identified during this survey. Subsequent testing at 41BX785 was conducted to assess the importance of the site, including the intensity of occupation, the period or periods of occupation, and the activities occurring during occupation. This work consisted of excavation of six 1-x-1-m units and three 50-x-50-cm units confined to an area 17 by 100 m along the length of the pipeline easement. The artifacts recovered from this site consisted mainly of chert debitage, utilized flakes, bifacially worked chert fragments, and burned limestone fragments (Burkett 1989; Burkett and Huebner 1989). No datable diagnostic artifacts were recovered, which did not allow for the cultural/chronological placement of the prehistoric occupation. Investigations concluded that site 41BX785 was a prehistoric site of undetermined age and of uncertain total area (Burkett 1989). It is believed that the site may have been a campsite and workshop as indicated by the types of artifacts recovered, but the lack of diagnostics created a problem determining the actual utilization of the site (Burkett 1989).

For further information concerning the cultural/chronological sequence of this region, refer to Hester (1980) and Prewitt (1981). Other information concerning sites along Salado Creek can be found in reports by Brown et al. (1977), Fox (1977), Fox et al. (1978), Gibson et al. (1982), Hester (1974), McGraw and Valdez (1978), and Snavely et al. (1984).



Figure 1. Location of the Salado Creek Pipeline Project.

Results

Investigations in the Phase I area consisted of 11 shovel tests and five backhoe trenches (Figure 2). Backhoe Trench (BHT) III was located on the south side of J Street Park near the northern edge of the small tributary and approximately 40 meters west of the confluence with Salado Creek. Backhoe Trench IV was located along the southeast edge of J Street Park on the west bank of Salado Creek, approximately 30 meters north of the confluence with the small tributary. These trenches exhibited similar qualities. The soils within the first 50 cm below the surface consisted of a dark brown clay loam with golf ball-sized chert cobbles scattered throughout. From 50 cm below the surface to approximately 200 cm the soil was also a dark brown clay loam, but exhibited a dense mix of 10–20 cm chert cobbles that were mainly angular, although a few which appeared stream rolled were present. In BHT III, below 200 cm, the soils consisted of a light-gray clay with chert gravel. In BHT IV, below 110 cm, the soil consisted of a yellow-tan clay matrix with angular chert pieces approximately 10 to 20 cm in size.

Backhoe Trench V was located along the south side of Salado Creek. In this trench, the upper 50 cm was composed of a light brown clay matrix with 2 to 3 cm (diameter) chert gravel. Between 50 and 200 cm the soil was a brown clay that contained no gravel. Below 200 cm the soil was a dark gray clay located in the water table.

Backhoe Trench VI was located along the east bank of Salado Creek on a terrace directly across from Trench IV in J Street Park. The soils throughout this trench consisted of a medium brown clay loam. The soil was uniform in consistency throughout this trench. No cultural material was observed in any of these trench profiles.

Trench VII was located on a terrace on the north side of Salado Creek across from Trench V. The soil was uniformly a medium brown clay loam with no rock inclusions. Beer bottle glass and asbestos siding were located at 2.5 meters below the surface. The uniform soil content and presence of modern trash indicate that at least the upper three meters of the terrace is man made.

A total of 11 shovel tests were excavated within the Phase I project area. Shovel Tests 1 through 6 were located on the west side of Salado Creek within J Street Park. Shovel Test (ST) 1 uncovered a possible roadbed at 18 cm below the surface and was terminated at this level. Shovel Tests 2 through 6 had very similar soil matrices, a blocky clay loam with small pebble inclusions. These tests were excavated 40–50 cm below the surface, depending on the compact nature of the soil. ST 3 contained modern glass and metal fragments in Levels 3 (20–30 cm) through 5 (40–50 cm). ST 4 contained tin can and plastic fragments in Level 1 (0–10 cm). ST 6 contained modern glass fragments in Level 2 (10–20 cm). No intact historic or prehistoric deposits were revealed in these shovel tests.

Tests 7 through 11 were located on the east side of Salado Creek along the east sewer easement, southeast of J Street Park. These tests also had very similar attributes including a soil matrix of blocky clay loam with small pebble inclusions. Most of these tests were terminated between 40 and 50 cm below the surface, although ST 9 was stopped at Level 3 (30–40 cm) due to a large root, and ST 10 revealed asphalt fill within the first 10 cm. A ceramic sherd was collected from ST 7, Level 3 (20–30 cm).

Investigations in the Phase II area consisted of a total of five shovel tests along the proposed sewer line route and two backhoe trenches (Figure 3). The shovel tests were 30 centimeters in diameter and excavated to approximately 50 centimeters below the surface in 10 centimeter levels.

The soil in the Phase II shovel tests was a dark grayish-brown blocky clay loam, like that of the Phase I area. ST 1 contained one wire and one forged nail, which were collected, within the first level. Subsequent level inclusions consisted of small pebbles and snail shells. ST 2 also contained cultural material in Level 1 (0–10 cm) which consisted of asphalt. A flake was found in the first level of ST 3. ST 4 appears to be devoid of cultural material. ST 5 contained cultural material, such as modern glass and metal, within the first three levels. The artifacts recovered from the top layers of the shovel tests may indicate disturbance in the area caused by past plowing activities.

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Summary and Recommendations

The areas surveyed during the Salado Creek Pipeline Project failed to locate any significant archaeological deposits that would be adversely impacted by this project. Site 41BX64, located within the Phase I area survey boundaries, was initially believed to be impacted by the proposed route. The pipeline route was marked prior to shovel testing to determine the extent of the impact. After the testing was complete, investigators concluded that the pipeline route would not impact the J Street Park Site. No sites had been previously recorded within the Phase II area limited survey, and no sites were uncovered during the course of the project. Therefore, it has been determined that the pipeline route through the Phase II area shall have no impact on any archaeological sites. Testing was not conducted in the area of 41BX785, but will need to be performed in the future if the pipeline project's scope is to extended into this region.

No further investigations have been recommended for the areas surveyed before construction begins. We do urge, though, that further investigations should be conducted if the areas which were not surveyed in Phase II and Phase III are to be included in the future route of the pipeline.

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