

An Intensive Archaeological Investigation of the Dunn-Meaney Property in Corpus Christi, Nueces County, Texas



by
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REDACTED

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Prepared for:
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Prepared by:
Center for Archaeological Research
The University of Texas at San Antonio
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San Antonio, Texas 78249
Archaeological Report, No. 454

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Abstract:

In January 2017, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) conducted an archaeological survey of approximately one acre (66-x-60 [m] meters) of private property owned by Father Patrick Meaney. The survey was requested by Father Meaney in order to investigate potential archaeological resources in the area prior to sale.

A pedestrian survey with shovel testing was conducted to identify potential archaeological resources within the project area. Fifteen shovel tests in total were excavated, five of which were positive for cultural material. No cultural features or temporally diagnostic artifacts were recorded. CAR staff documented one prehistoric site on the property, 41NU381.

Records generated during this project were prepared for curation according to Texas Historical Commission (THC) guidelines and are permanently curated at the CAR at UTSA. All artifacts collected will be returned to Father Patrick Meaney.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Project Summary

The Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) was contacted by Father Patrick Meaney with a request to investigate a one-acre piece of property, which had been reported to contain archaeological resources (Figure 1-1). The property is owned by Father Patrick Meaney and in the process of being sold for possible future development. The CAR completed a 100 percent pedestrian survey with shovel testing in order to identify and record archaeological resources in the area that may be impacted by future development. Dr. Paul Shawn Marceaux served as Principal Investigator, and Jason Perez and Sarah Wigley served as Project Archaeologists.

Two Isolated Finds (IFs) were observed on the ground surface. Isolated Find 1 was a single piece of marine shell, and IF 2 was an aqua glass bottleneck. Fifteen shovel tests were excavated in order to explore potential subsurface deposits. A small amount of prehistoric material was recovered from five positive shovel tests.

This report presents the results of these investigations. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 provides an overview of the environmental setting and reviews the previous archaeological investigations in the area. Chapter 3 outlines the field and laboratory methods used by the CAR archaeologists during the completion of this project. Chapter 4 provides the results of field investigations. Chapter 5 summarizes the project and offers recommendations based on the results.



Figure 1-1. Project area on USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle map Corpus Christi.

Chapter 2: Project Setting

Environmental Setting

The project area is located in northeastern Nueces County and encompasses approximately one acre (66-x-60 m). The area is currently undeveloped but has been subject to plowing in the past. The property is known as the Dunn Ranch or Dunn-Meaney property and has been owned by Father Patrick Meaney's family for generations (Father Patrick Meaney, personal communication 2017). The project area is bounded by Dunn-Meaney Road to the west, and surrounded by privately owned property to the south, east, and north (Figure 2-1). Much of the surrounding area along Up River Road and I-37 has been developed for industry.

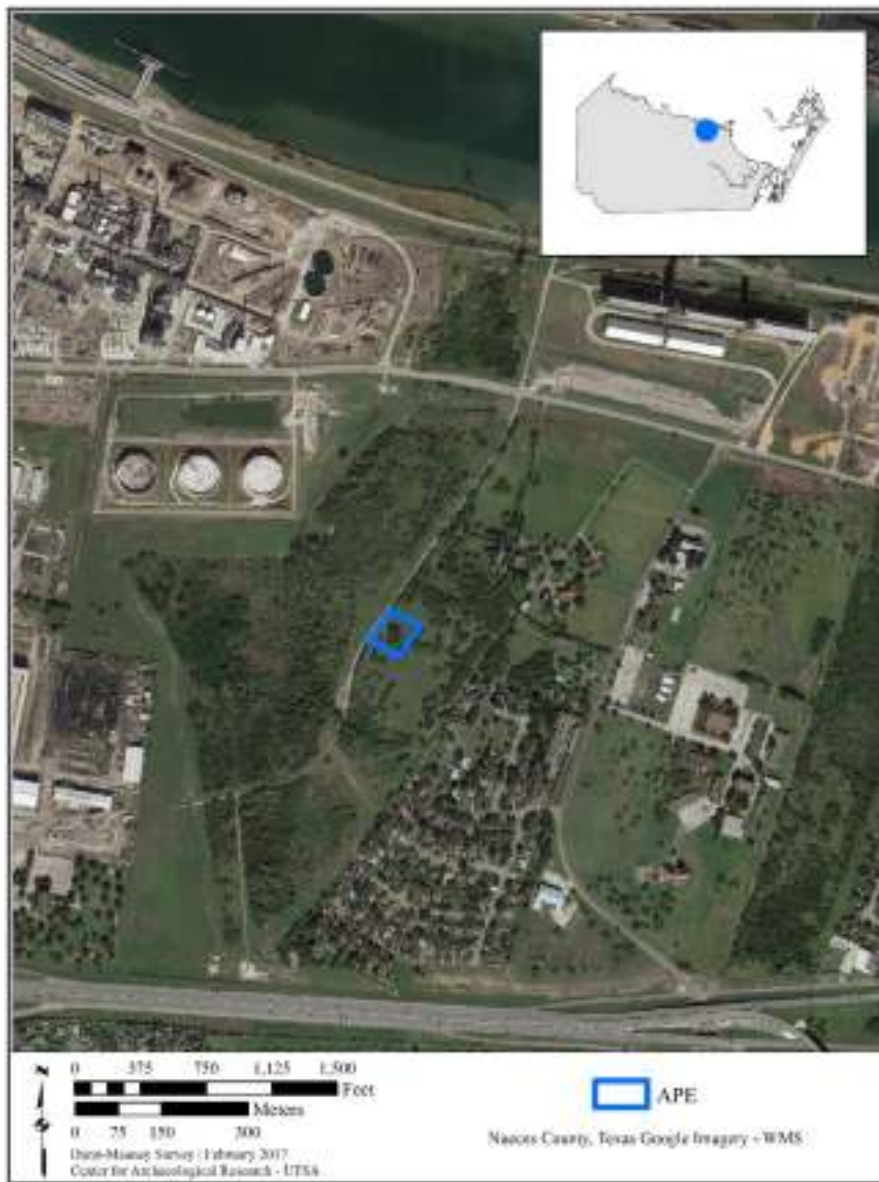


Figure 2-1. Project APE (outlined in blue) on satellite imagery.

The nearest extant bodies of water are the Tula Lake Channel, about a kilometer to the north, and Nueces Bay, about two kilometers to the north. The area has an elevation of 60-121 m (200-400 ft.) above sea level. The local climate has a mean annual precipitation 63-86 cm (25-34 in.), a mean temperature of 21-23°C (70-73°F), and 275-300 frost-free days a year (Natural Resources Conservation Survey [NRCS] 2017a).

Soils in the area are Miguel fine sandy loam, with slopes of 3-5 percent. These soils are well drained and reach depths of more than 203 cm (80 in.). The historical climax plant community for the area is the Midgrass plant community. This community is characterized by less than 5 percent woody plant cover and dominant grasses reaching 0.6-1.2 m (2-4 ft.) in height. Little bluestem, Rhodesgrass, and Arizona cottontop are prevalent. Woody species include mesquite, snakewood, and spiny hackberry. These sites are prone to fire, which keeps woody plant cover low to the ground (NRCS 2017b). The project area was previously plowed, and it now consists mostly of open grass (Figure 2-2). However, the area described by the Sponsor as a Native American campsite is reported to have remained unplowed and has greater brushy growth (Figure 2-3).



Figure 2-2. Vegetation within the project area.



Figure 2-3. Vegetation within the area described as a mound.

In this area of the coast, four terrestrial habitats are noted to have been available to human inhabitants prehistorically; Beach and Beach-Proximate, Beach Fluvial, Prairie Riverine, and Prairie habitat. The Prairie habitat occupies the largest area and has the least biological diversity. It is noted that as proximity to the coast increases, biological diversity also increases, though individual habitats may cover smaller areas (Tomka and Mauldin 2009:18).

Culture History of the Texas Coastal Region

This discussion of the culture history of the Texas Coastal Region generally follows Ricklis (2004) and Thompson (2009). Ricklis (2004) more specifically identifies the area as the Central Texas Coast (2004:156), in order to distinguish it from the Lower Texas Coast, which is described as less well-studied and ecologically different, lacking the bays and estuaries found in the Central Texas Coast. The Central Texas Coast as defined by Ricklis stretches from the Colorado River to Baffin Bay and includes the barrier islands, shoreline zone, and the coastal plain stretching 40-50 kilometers inland. Both Ricklis (2004:157) and Thompson (2009:20) note that human occupation of the area was strongly impacted by ecological changes caused by shifting sea levels during the Holocene. Occupation of sites in the area is often argued

to be seasonal, particularly for fishing purposes (Ricklis 1996:55). The most common type of site in the region is described as a lens of shell containing few other artifacts (Campbell 1960, Ricklis 2004, Thompson 2009).

Paleoindian (11,500-8000 BP)

Both Ricklis (2004:156) and Thompson (2009:19) decline to include the Paleoindian period in their discussions, noting that ocean levels were so low during this time period that inhabitants of the area could not be described as coastal in nature. However, Hester (2015) notes that Clovis, Folsom, Midland, Golondrina, and Angostura projectile points are found on the surface throughout the region, and that mammoth, Pleistocene bison, and horse have been excavated at the La Paloma site, although radiocarbon dates (7600-6100 BC) returned from the excavations are described as “unacceptably late” (2015:12). Paleoindian populations appear to have been present but practicing more terrestrially based Paleoindian lifeways, rather than coastal subsistence practices found in later occupations.

Archaic (7500-950 BP)

The Archaic period begins around 8,000 BP, and lasts until the appearance of bow and arrow technology and the increased use of ceramics around 950 BP (Ricklis 2009:171). This period is most often divided into three subperiods: Early, Middle, and Late.

Early Archaic (7500-4200 BP)

Ricklis (2004:161-162) and Thompson (2009:19) note two primary periods of occupation of the Texas Coast during the Early Archaic: from 7500-6800 BP and from 5800-4200 BP. Ricklis describes sites from the first period as found primarily in proximity to Nueces Bay and characterized by dense shell lenses containing few lithic artifacts. Site 41NU266, located on a bluff above the Nueces Bay, has been radiocarbon dated within various shell strata to 7381-6737 BP. Faunal remains and fish otoliths are noted to be lacking from these sites, although it is unclear whether this is due to a subsistence emphasis on oyster rather than fish or terrestrial mammals, or a lack of preservation of these types of remains. Sites from the late Early Archaic are described as more numerous and more stratified in comparison to earlier sites within the area. The McKinzie site (41NU221), radiocarbon dated to 5919-5336 BP (Ricklis 2004) is noted to have comprised a dense shell layer containing lithic debitage, dart points, a lithic scraper, and a shell tool. This site is also noted to have a significant number of fish otoliths present (Ricklis 2004), indicating some fishing practice. A structure, identified by a semicircular series of post molds, is reported to have been found at the Means site (41NU184; Thompson 2009). Diagnostic projectile points recovered from the Texas Coast, which date to the Early Archaic, include Gower, Andice, and Early Triangular; shell tools have also been found.

Middle Archaic (4200-3100 BP)

Ricklis (2004:165) and Thompson (2009) describe the Middle Archaic as representing another gap in occupation of the Texas Coastal region, noting not only a lack of sites dating to this time period in the region, but the fact that zones of occupation at stratified Texas Coastal sites frequently date before and after this time period (Ricklis 2004:165; Thompson 2009:20). It is argued that this due to changes in water level affecting the availability of aquatic resources (Thompson 2009:20). However, Hester (2015) argues that occupation did occur during this subperiod, albeit of a brief, limited nature, based on recovery of projectile points diagnostic of the Middle Archaic such as Gower and Pedernales from coastal sites, including 41NU266 and 41NU46 (2015:14). Bulverde projectile points also date to this time period (Turner et al. 2011). Due to this limited data evidence on specific subsistence practices or material culture, shifts dating to this time period is lacking.

Late Archaic (3100-950 BP)

Ricklis (2004:165) and Thompson (2009:20) describe the beginning of the Late Archaic as corresponding with the stabilization of shorelines at their modern locations, and the subsequent development of barrier islands. It is noted that shellfish gathering became a less significant part of subsistence, while hunting and fishing increased; this is based on an increase in recovery of faunal bone, including white-tailed deer, and fish otoliths. However, massive shell middens are still documented at sites such as 41AS3 (Kent-Crane), 41CL3 (Mustang Lake), 41SP43, and 41SP120, and shell tools are still common. Ricklis argues that the abundance of fish in the area increased dramatically after 2000 BP due the development of the modern estuarine environment (2004). Diagnostic projectile points from the Late Archaic on the Texas Coast include Kent, Ellis, Marcos, Godley, Ensor, Catan, and Matamoros. Other diagnostic lithic tools such as Olmos bifaces are also present, and shell tools are noted to have increased in diversity. Evidence of basketry in the form of impressions on burned clay and asphaltum has been recovered from a number of sites as well. In addition, cemeteries appear in the area during this time period. Site 41NU2 (Cayo del Oso) is an example from this period of a cemetery site that continued to be used through the Late Prehistoric (Ricklis 2004; Thompson 2009). It is noted that skeletal analyses at these sites often find similar features to the Karankawa, a group known to inhabit the area in the Historic Period; these features include unusually tall stature (Ricklis 1996:10).

Late Prehistoric (950-250 BP/AD 1000-1700)

The beginning of the Late Prehistoric on the Texas Coast is marked by the introduction of bow and arrow technology and the widespread use of pottery (Ricklis 2004:171; Thompson 2009:20), although Ricklis argues that pottery may have seen limited use in the Terminal Late Archaic (Ricklis 2004:171).

Undecorated ceramics found in this region are considered to date to the earlier phase of the Late Prehistoric, as well as Scallorn arrow points. The terminal Late Prehistoric, known in this region as the Rockport phase, begins around 1250 AD and includes distinctive pottery decorated with asphaltum, Perdiz arrow points, bone tools such as awls, and shell tools such as scrapers and adzes. Fishing appears to have continued to be a significant part of subsistence, as fish otoliths remain common at Late Prehistoric sites; however, large, dense shell middens become less common (Ricklis 2004; Thompson 2009). In fact, Ricklis notes that fish otoliths reached a peak in density during the Late Prehistoric at 41SP120 (Ricklis 2004:174). Bison remains become more common, being found at sites such as 41RF41 and 41NU221 (Ricklis 2004:174; Thompson 2009:21). The Rockport phase is parallel in some ways with the Toyah phase material that is found further inland (Thompson 2009:21).

Historic

The Historic period begins on the Texas Coast with the arrival of Cabeza de Vaca in 1528 according to Thompson (Thompson 2009:21), while Ricklis follows the general terminal date of the Late Prehistoric period used by Texas archaeologists (Pertulla 2004:8) when the French and Spanish arrived in Texas and started to document the local inhabitants. The inhabitants of the Texas Coast were referred to collectively as the Karankawa, which derives from a term that ethnohistoric accounts describe as referring to several groups inhabiting the area. More extensive contact between Texas Coastal peoples and Europeans began with the arrival of French explorer Robert Sieur La Salle in 1685. Initial friendly relations quickly deteriorated when some of La Salle's men attempted to steal several Karankawa dugout canoes, prompting violent retaliation by the Karankawa (Ricklis 1996:1). Relations between the Karankawa and European colonists remained hostile through the end of the eighteenth century (Ricklis 1996:2, 143; Thompson 2009:21). Initial attempts at building missions in the area, the first of which was the Nuestra Senora del Espiritu Santo established in 1721, were relocated or abandoned due to limited success at converting local Karankawa, who had little interest in remaining in the missions and lacked the pressures of the threat of invading Apache and Comanche that impacted groups further inland. The most successful of the mission attempts was the Nuestra Senora del Refugio in the early 1790s; the Karankawa spent significant time here, fluctuating seasonally, and showed willingness to be baptized and baptize their children (Ricklis 1996:157-168). During this period, relations between the Karankawa and Europeans became more peaceful. However, epidemics of disease introduced by Europeans resulted in high mortality rates throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and by the 1850s the Karankawas had disappeared from historical record (Ricklis 1996:127-137).

Previous Archaeology

A search of the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) Historic Sites Atlas did not identify any recorded systematic archaeological surveys in proximity to the project area. The search listed one site, 41NU176, within a kilometer of the project area (Figure 2-4). Malcolm Johnson recorded the site in 1978. The site is described as a surface scatter of prehistoric artifacts, including a shell midden, a whelk gouge, and projectile points. The site is noted to be "known from collecting activities in the 1950s" (THC 2017).

There are also two historical markers within one kilometer of the project area. One marks the location of the John Dunn Jr. Homesite, noted to be built in 1889 by the son of a local Irish immigrant. The other marks the Corpus Christi College Academy, a Catholic boys' school built in 1927 by Benedictine monks on property donated to them by John Dunn (THC 2017).



Figure 2-4. Aerial image depicting previously recorded archaeological sites within 1 km of the APE.

History of the Project Area

Interviews with Father Patrick Meaney concerning the project area took place prior to conducting fieldwork. Father Meaney (personal communication, 2017) noted that the area had been protected by his family since the 1850s, when family historical records indicated that an elevated area on the landscape, described as a mound within the project area had been used as a Native American campsite. While the surrounding area had been plowed, the family had avoided plowing the mound area out of respect for its previous inhabitants. Father Meaney also noted that the area was prone to flooding but that the mound generally remained dry during these episodes. This setting indicated a possible reason for its desirability as a campsite. CAR archaeologists examined a collection of eight dart points that had been found in the surrounding area (Figure 2-5). According to Father Meaney, one dart point (Figure 2-6) had been recovered from the mound within the current project area.



Figure 2-5. Selection of points found in the general area.



Figure 2-6. Bulverde projectile point specified by Father Meaney to have been found within the mound space within the project area.

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Chapter 3: Field and Laboratory Methods

Field Methods

CAR staff walked the entire project area in 15-m transects to observe and record surface artifacts. Initially, shovel test locations (n=5) were evenly distributed within the project area; further shovel tests were placed in order to delineate potential cultural deposits. Shovel tests were 30 cm in diameter and, when possible, extended to a depth of 60 cm below the surface (cmbs). In certain areas, shovel tests extended to a depth of 80 cmbs in an attempt to explore the possibility of deeper deposits. Each shovel test was excavated in 10-cm increments, and all soil from each level was screened through ¼-inch hardware cloth. Only potentially diagnostic artifacts were collected; all other material was documented on shovel test forms and photographed. A shovel test form was completed for every excavated shovel test. Data collected from each shovel test included the final excavation depth, a tally of all materials recovered from each 10-cm level, and a brief soil description (texture, consistency, Munsell color, inclusions). The location of every shovel test was recorded with Juno 3B GPS units. The locations were sketched onto topographic maps or aerial photographs as a backup to GPS provenience information. Any additional observations considered pertinent were included as comments on the shovel test excavation form.

For the purposes of this survey, CAR defined an archaeological site as containing cultural materials or features that are at least 50 years old with (1) five or more surface artifacts within a 15-m radius (ca. 706.9 m²); (2) a single cultural feature, such as a hearth, observed on surface or exposed in shovel testing; (3) a positive shovel test containing at least three artifacts within a given 10-cm level; (4) a positive shovel test containing at least five total artifacts; or (5) two positive shovel tests located within 30 m of each other.

Laboratory Methods

All cultural materials and records obtained and/or generated during the project were prepared in accordance with 36 CFR part 79, and THC requirements for State Held-in-Trust collections. Artifacts processed in the CAR laboratory were washed, air-dried, and stored in 4-mil zip locking archival-quality bags. Acid-free labels were placed in all artifact bags. Each label contains provenience information and a corresponding lot number written in archival ink, pencil, or produced by a laser printer. Artifacts were separated by class and stored in acid-free boxes. Digital photographs were printed on acid-free paper, labeled with archivally appropriate materials, and placed in archival-quality sleeves. All field forms were completed with pencil. All records obtained and/or generated during the project are permanently housed at the CAR; any artifacts collected will be returned to the Sponsor.

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Chapter 4: Results

In January 2017, an intensive pedestrian survey was conducted at the Dunn-Meaney property in Corpus Christi, Texas. A complete pedestrian walkover and 15 shovel tests were excavated within the one-acre project area. One small, low-density, prehistoric site was recorded. This chapter discusses the results of these investigations.

Surface Material

Four transects, 15 m apart, were walked over the project area. Visibility of the ground surface was about 20 percent due to thick grasses and an area of dense brush surrounding the mound area in the center of the project area. The ground surface in the northern portion of the project area showed considerable evidence of insect activity, including a large number of anthills (Figure 4-1). Two surface finds were recorded within the project area. Isolated Find (IF) 1 was an unmodified fragment of marine shell (Figure 4-2), and IF 2 was an aqua glass bottleneck. A concentration of burned marine shell (Figure 4-3) was recorded just beyond and to the west of the southwest corner of the project area boundary near Dunn-Meaney Road. However, this may have served as road base rather than a prehistoric feature.



Figure 4-1. Bioturbation from insect activity.



Figure 4-2. Isolated Find 1: Unmodified marine shell.



Figure 4-3. Shell concentration east of Dunn-Meaney Road.

Shovel Testing

As noted, 15 shovel tests were excavated within the project area to identify and document any below ground archaeological deposits (Figure 4-4). All shovel tests reached the target depth of 60 cmbs; however, five shovel tests (STs 9, 10, 12, 13, and 14) extended below this depth in an attempt to explore the potential for deeper deposits. Five initial shovel tests (STs 1-5) were distributed throughout the project. Shovel Test 1 contained modern glass, and ST 4 was positive for burned rock and marine shell in Level 4 (30-40 cmbs). Five additional shovel tests (STs 6-10) were positioned in order to further investigate the mound area identified by the Sponsor. ST 9 was excavated in an area of deflated soil in an attempt to explore possible disturbances below or deeper deposits; however, it was negative for cultural material. ST 10 was positive for lithic debitage, burned clay, faunal bone, and marine shell. Four more shovel tests (STs 11-14) were placed to investigate the extent of this material. Shovel Test 11 contained only modern clear glass, and ST 12 contained debitage, white earthenware, and historic glass. Shovel Tests 13 and 14 were positive for marine shell. Shovel Test 15 was placed in order to investigate the extent of cultural material between ST 4 and IF 1, but this shovel test was negative. The results of shovel testing are summarized in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1. Shovel Tests Summary

ST	Cultural Material Present	Termination Depth (cmbs)
1	Clear container glass, Level 1 (0-10 cmbs); Brown bottle glass, level 4 (30-40 cmbs)	60
2	No	60
3	No	60
4	Burned rock and marine shell, Level 4 (30-40 cmbs)	60
5	No	60
6	No	60
7	No	60
8	16 gauge shotgun shell, Level 3 (20-30 cmbs)	60
9	No	87
10	Lithic debitage , Level 5 (40-50 cmbs); Marine shell, Level 6 (50-60 cmbs); Burned clay, Level 8 (70-80 cmbs)	80
11	Clear glass, Level 1 (0-10 cmbs); Clear glass, Level 2 (10-20 cmbs)	60
12	Lithic debitage, Level 4 (30-40); Aqua container glass, Level 7 (60-70 cmbs); Brown container glass, Level 8 (70-80); White earthenware, wallfall	80
13	Marine shell, Level 4 (30-40 cmbs); Marine shell, Level 5 (40-50 cmbs)	68
14	Marine shell, Level 5 (40-50 cmbs)	75
15	No	60

Shovel test sediments consisted of sandy deposits reaching depths of 30-60 cmbs, below which compact clay deposits were found. The upper sandy deposits were brown (10YR 5/3) in color throughout most of the project area. The sandy deposits within the mound area were darker (10YR 3/3), and according to Father Meaney, the soils in this area had not been cleared or plowed. The lower clay deposits showed some variation in color. These deposits were mottled brown (10YR 5/3) and very dark gray (10YR 3/1) in some areas, while in other areas deeper soils were a light yellowish brown (10YR 6/4). Soils in the project area showed evidence of disturbance through plowing (a carrot was found growing in ST 3), bioturbation (specifically, numerous large ant mounds), and the presence of modern materials such as modern glass and a shotgun shell. Snail and small specimens of faunal bone were also present throughout the project area.

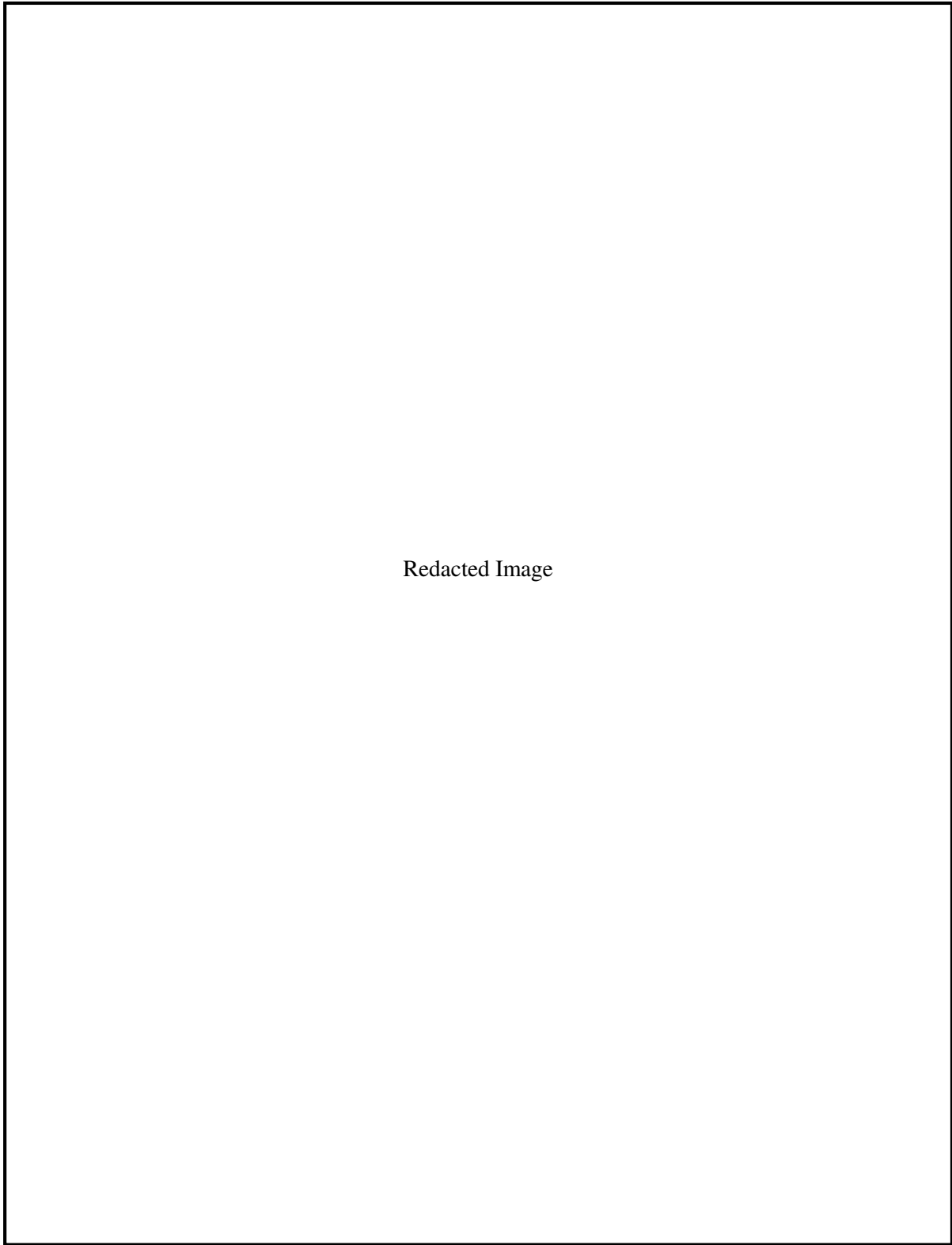


Figure 4-4. Aerial image depicting shovel test distribution within the APE.

Field Site 1 (41NU381)

Field site 1 is located in an area contains dense vegetation and shows some evidence of water drainage (Figure 4-5). The small prehistoric site was defined by the presence of two specimens of debitage (Level 4, 30-40 cmbs, and Level 5, 40-50 cmbs), one piece of burned clay (Level 8, 70-80 cmbs), and a scatter of marine shell (Levels 4-6, 30-60 cmbs). It is noted by Ricklis (2004:169) that many areas of the Texas Coast are chert-poor, and shell is often used instead for tool making. Prehistoric sites in the region often include shell lenses as well (Thompson 2009:19-20). Historic material including white earthenware and container glass was also recovered from ST 12 in Levels 5 (40-50 cmbs), 7 (60-70 cmbs), and 8 (70-80 cmbs). Fragments of charcoal were noted in all levels. No temporally diagnostic artifacts were recovered during the course of the survey; however, if Father Meaney's attribution of the provenience of the Bulverde projectile point to the site area is correct, it would suggest a Middle Archaic component (Turner et al. 2011).

Chapter 5: Summary and Recommendations

In January 2017, CAR archaeologists conducted an intensive pedestrian survey and shovel testing of a one-acre project area. The project was conducted in response to a request by the Sponsor, Father Patrick Meaney, in order to investigate historical reports of a Native American campsite in the area and to assess the impact of future development to any sites that were identified.

Fifteen shovel tests were excavated. CAR archaeologists recorded one previously unknown archaeological site (41NU381). The site contained buried deposits including lithic debitage (n=2), burned rock (n=1), a scatter of marine shell, and some historic material that included white earthenware (n=1) and historic container glass. No temporally diagnostic artifacts or cultural features were identified in the project area. If the Bulverde projectile point did come from the site as described, it indicates a possible Middle Archaic (1500-2000 BC) component (Turner et al. 2011); however, the exact provenience of the point is uncertain. The presence of historic material below prehistoric material in ST 12, as well as the evidence of water drainage through the area, signifies that the deposits may be of mixed integrity, and the low density of cultural material indicates low potential for future research. Therefore, the CAR recommends that the site be listed as ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places and that no further testing is necessary. The CAR further recommends that development of the property proceed as planned.

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