

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE PROPOSED
DAYTON CITY PARK AREA IN LIBERTY COUNTY TEXAS**

Texas Antiquities Permit 722

By

William E. Moore, Jean La Delle Epperson, and David S. Pettus

Brazos Valley Research Associates

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Project Conducted for the
City of Dayton, Texas

by

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ABSTRACT

An archaeological survey was conducted by Brazos Valley Research Associates on September 2, 1988 at a 25 acre tract just north of the Dayton Corporate boundary in Liberty County, Texas. This survey was funded to search for prehistoric and/or historic sites in the area set aside for the proposed Dayton City Park. A pedestrian survey, accompanied by shovel testing and limited auger probing, failed to locate evidence of cultural materials. Due to a virtual absence of sandy soil in the project area, it was concluded that this is a low probability area in terms of prehistoric habitation.

The project area is located on land granted to Beasley Prewitt by the Mexican Government in 1831. Until it was sold to Champion Paper and Fiber Company in 1947, it's main use was probably farming or ranching. Since 1947, use of this tract has been primarily restricted to logging activities which have severely disturbed the ground surface throughout the project area.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am appreciative of the help I received during this project. Roger G. Moore and David S. Pettus assisted during the field reconnaissance. Jean La Delle Epperson prepared the historic background of the project area and authored that section of the report. Mr. Pettus researched and wrote the section on the geology and geomorphology of the project area.

Sam Barrington (City Manager of Dayton, Texas) and Boyd Arnold (Sponsor Representative) were very cooperative. They provided maps of the area and assistance throughout the duration of the project.

Mark Denton of the Texas Antiquities Committee helped with the research design for this project and the paperwork necessary for acquiring a Texas Antiquities Permit. The cooperation of the staff at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory is also appreciated.

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INTRODUCTION

The City of Dayton plans to construct a city park on a 25 acre tract of land on the north side of FM 1008, approximately 2.75 miles north of the center of town and adjacent to the French Cemetery. The general location of the project area in Liberty County is depicted in Figure 1, and its plotting on the USGS Liberty quadrangle is shown in Figure 2. Although the proposed site is located outside the city limits, Dayton plans to annex this area upon approval of the project.

The site is situated in the uplands between French Creek and Bowie Creek with a topography ranging from approximately 75 feet above sea level at the western edge to 45 feet above sea level at the eastern edge. The eastern 500 feet contains a relatively constant six percent slope while the western portion is flat. Virtually the entire tract is heavily wooded with few clearings and trails. A roadbed constructed by Champion Paper and Fiber Company to facilitate management of the property bisects the project area from northwest to southeast.

Due to the position of this site in the uplands between two creeks, it was considered a likely area for a prehistoric site. The proximity of the historic French Cemetery and the possibility of finding remains of the Beasley Prewitt (also spelled Pruitt and Pruett) homestead provided additional importance to this tract. Because of these reasons and the fact that part of the funds for this project will be provided by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, an archaeological survey of the proposed park area and a permit from the Texas Antiquities Committee are required.

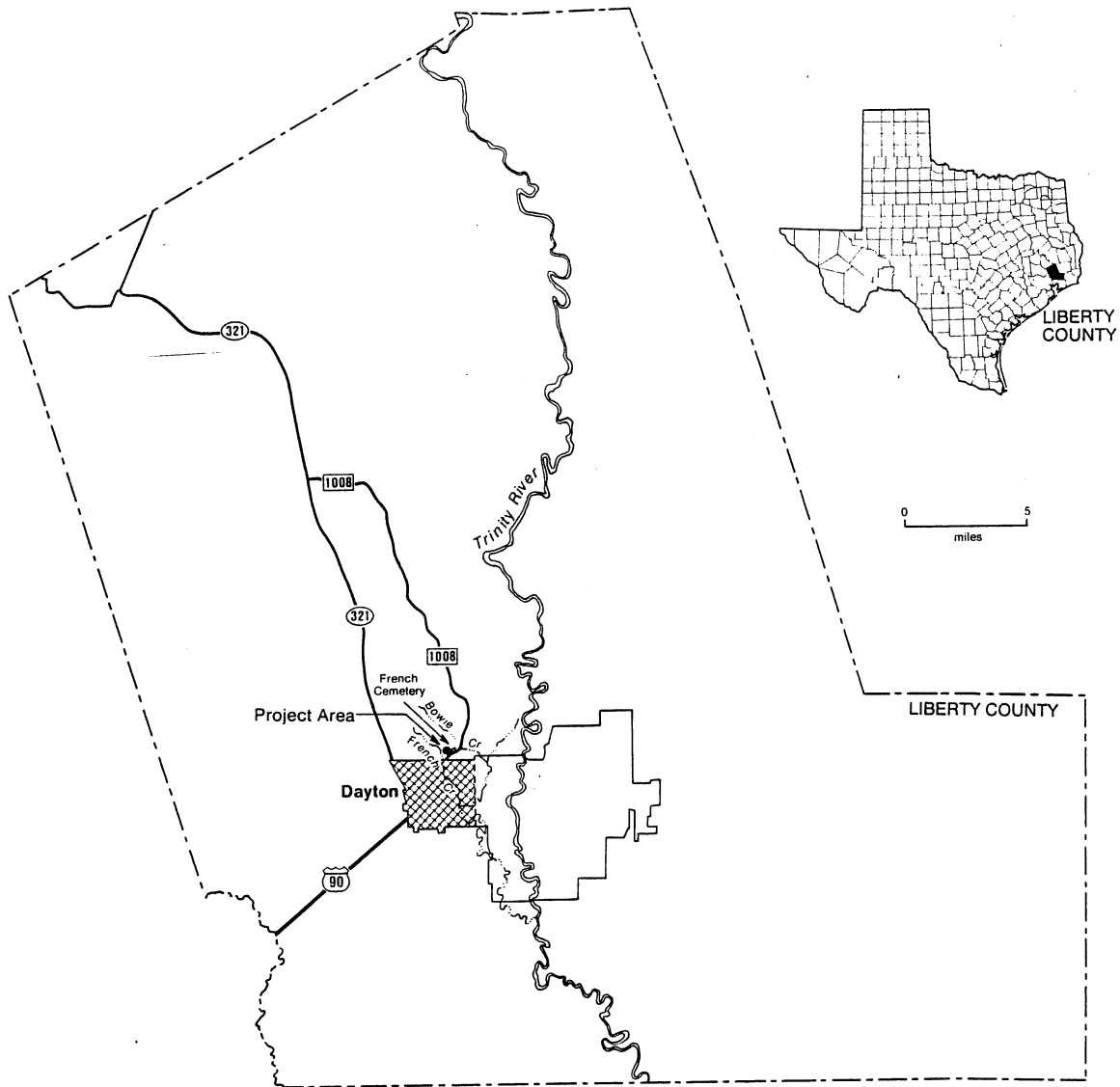


Figure 1. Location of proposed Dayton City Park in Liberty County, Texas.

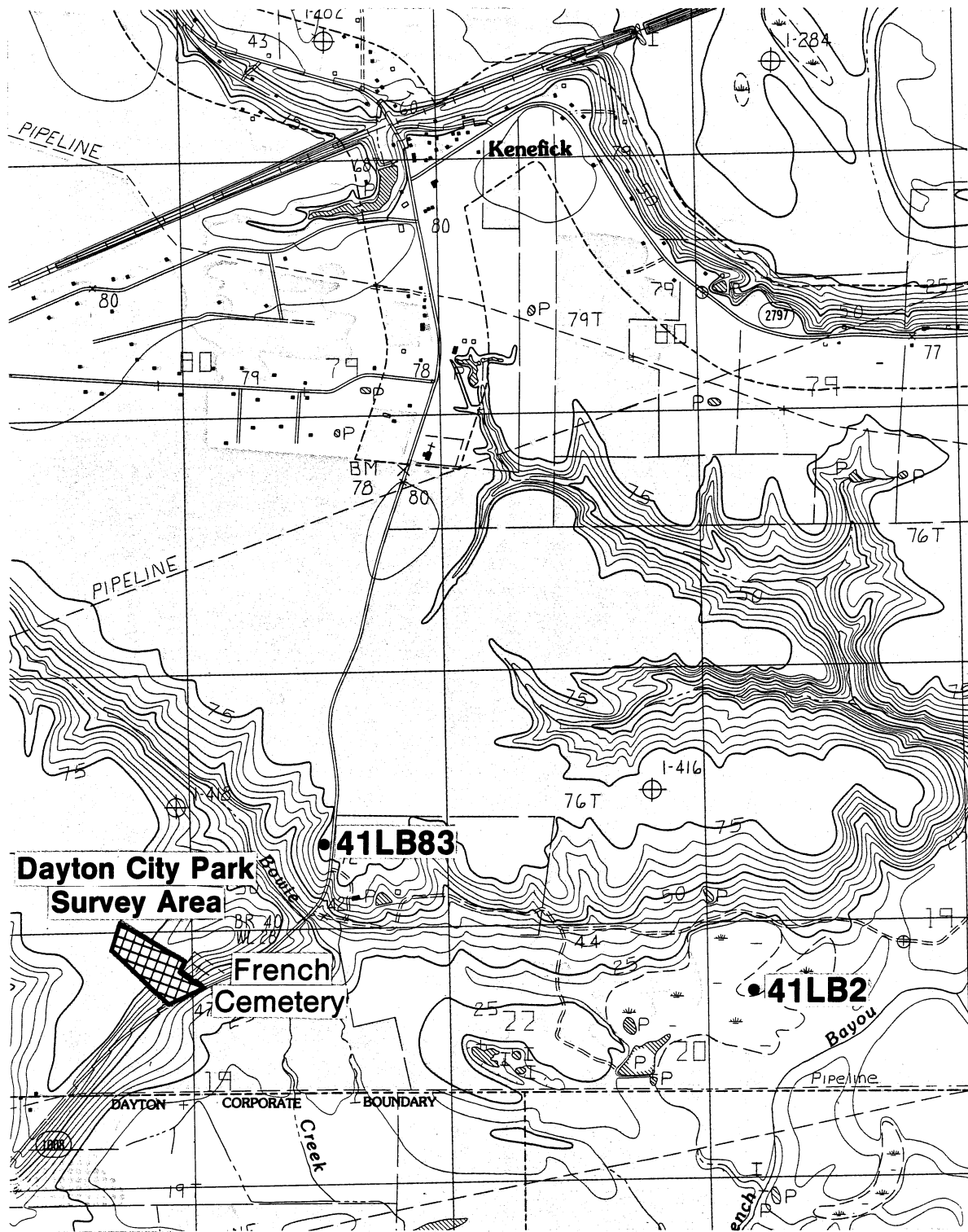


Figure 2. Location of Project Area and sites 41LB2 and 41LB83 on USGS Liberty Quadrangle.

In order to fulfill this obligation, the City of Dayton contracted with Brazos Valley Research Associates of Bryan, Texas to conduct the fieldwork and prepare a report documenting the results of the survey to be presented to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Antiquities Committee. This work was conducted under Antiquities Permit 722.

Improvements planned for the Dayton City Park include a swimming pool with bathhouse, baseball and softball fields, walking and jogging trails, picnic grounds with pavilion, playground, restroom, roads, and parking areas. Future plans call for a tennis court, soccer field, and Civic Center building.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design for the Dayton City Park survey conforms to guidelines outlined by the Texas Antiquities Committee (TITLE 13, Part IV, Chapter 41.3).

As mentioned above, the location of the project area on an upland ridge between two creeks was considered a likely area for prehistoric occupation. In order to find out the kinds of prehistoric sites known in the area and where they are likely to occur, site records at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory in Austin, Texas will be checked.

In the field, surface inspection, shovel testing, and auger probing will be utilized to examine subsurface deposits. Because of the dense vegetation and heavy ground cover, it is anticipated that shovel testing and auger probing will be the most productive. A geomorphologist will accompany the crew and prepare a statement concerning his observations of the project area.

Since the City of Dayton plans construction of a swimming pool, Civic Center, and other improvements requiring excavation of considerable depth, attention will be given to determining the possibility of deeply buried deposits in the project area. In upland areas, soil depth can usually be ascertained by shovel testing, auger probing, and/or fortuitous exposures resulting from erosion. If it is apparent that deeply buried deposits are present, mechanical testing with a backhoe (monitored by an archaeologist) may be required to make a final determination.

The close proximity of the French Cemetery to the project area poses additional problems. There is always the possibility of unmarked graves existing outside the fenced area of the cemetery. Unmarked graves are virtually impossible to locate, especially in areas of dense vegetation.

According to local tradition, the cemetery is named after a group of French settlers who were killed and buried near the site in the eighteenth century. Since the exact location of these graves is not known, it is possible they are present somewhere in the project area.

Also, Mr. Prewitt is supposedly buried somewhere on his land grant in an unmarked grave. He was a large landowner with nine slaves. Historically, slaves were buried in unmarked graves which adds to the number of unmarked graves that may be present in the project area.

In the mid-1800s, the French Cemetery was referred to as the Prewitt Family Cemetery. Since it was not uncommon for family cemeteries to be located near house sites and the exact location of the Prewitt residence has never been determined, the possibility of remains of the Prewitt homestead in the project area must be considered. Unless cultural materials are uncovered by shovel testing or features such as chimney rubble or a well are observed, evidence of a homestead, if present, may be difficult to find.

Historic and environmental research will also be conducted. It is hoped that these studies will not only provide insight into the project area in a holistic sense, but will help explain the presence or absence of sites.

In addition to the Principal Investigator, the crew will consist of a historical archaeologist (Roger G. Moore) and a geomorphologist (David S. Pettus). Historian Jean La Delle Epperson will conduct the historical research for this project.

The project will be documented by photographs and field notes. All artifacts, forms, notes, and photographs will be turned in to the Texas Antiquities Committee and the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory for permanent curation.

METHODS

The project was divided into three phases - background and archival research, field reconnaissance, and report writing. Prior to commencement of the field survey, the files at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory were checked for previously recorded sites in the project area and vicinity. Historical documentation of the project area and surrounding region was conducted by Jean La Delle Epperson of Texana Heritage Services, and data concerning the geology and geomorphology of the project area were researched and written by David S. Pettus of Southwest Geoservices.

The field crew consisted of William E. Moore (Principal Investigator), Roger G. Moore (historical archaeologist), and David S. Pettus (geomorphologist). A pedestrian survey of the 25 acre tract, accompanied by shovel testing and limited auger probing, was conducted. Because of dense vegetation and thick ground cover, regular transects were not practical. Therefore, the area was walked in a zig-zag pattern utilizing clearings and trails when available. A roadbed traversing the long axis of the project area and providing an approximate centerline was used as a control point during the survey. This was especially critical since the boundaries of the project area were not flagged prior to the survey. Although we believe the project area was adequately covered during the survey, we can only be certain of those boundaries adjacent to the French Cemetery and FM 1008.

During the survey we relied on the project map supplied by the City of Dayton, aerial photography, and a USGS Topographic

Sheet (Liberty Quadrangle) for locational data. Because of dense vegetation, lack of prominent features, unflagged boundaries, small scale maps, inability to walk normal transects, and outdated aerial photography (1964), no attempt was made to locate shovel tests or transects on a map for the report.

Twenty-one shovel tests and one auger probe were excavated. Ten shovel tests and the auger probe were placed on the north side of the roadbed and eleven shovel tests were placed on the south side of the roadbed. All shovel tests were dug in natural levels. Due to the virtual lack of sandy loams, use of the auger was discontinued after one probe. Nineteen of the shovel tests were placed on the top of the landform away from the slope. This was done as this is the area most likely for a site. Also, due to plans for construction of a swimming pool at this park, it was necessary to determine if deeply buried deposits could exist on this landform. All soil was screened through 1/4" hardware cloth. Shovel tests were terminated when clay was reached.

Because of the absence of sites or features, only two photographs were taken. The two photographs taken document the dense vegetation in the project area and the roadbed that bissects it.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The project area is located within the boundaries of a Mexican land grant given to Beasley Prewitt, Sr., one of the original Atascosito District land holders, in 1831. Prewitt arrived in the area with his family in 1824 and settled on the west bank of the Trinity river just below the river crossing on the Atascosito road (Liberty County Deed Records 1902, Vol. 4, pp. 141-145; Williams and White 1984). Early records document the family surname as Prewitt, while the family today uses the Pruett spelling.

When Prewitt arrived in Texas he was 84 years old. The 1826 Atascosito census lists his family as consisting of Lucy Sims (second wife) age 40; Jesse (son by first marriage) age 33 and his family; and Beasley's three children by Lucy Sims. They were, Cynthia Riley (13), Beasley Jr. (10), and Edmond (7). The family had fifteen slaves at this time (Osburn 1963:17).

Early settlement in the area consisted primarily of unauthorized squatters. Settlers in the Atascosito District had petitioned unsuccessfully to be included in Stephen F. Austin's Colony. In 1831, Jose Francisco Madero, the Mexican Land Commissioner, gave titles to a few land grants and the town of Liberty (Villa de la Santissima Trinidad de la Libertad) was established (Webb 1952:54).

Sawmills, gristmills, and cattle shipping docks comprised the earliest industries in the area (Webb 1952:54). In Prewitt's (1831) will he stated that he raised cattle, operated a grist mill for corn, and owned nine slaves.

French Cemetery, adjacent to the project area, is known to have been the family cemetery of the Prewitts and it is believed that Beasley Prewitt, Sr. is buried there (Jamison 1985). It is also likely that the Prewitt home was close to the family cemetery. According to Wright (1978:179), family cemeteries usually existed within 300 yards of the homestead. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the home may have been located in the project area on high ground north of the cemetery. Bowie Creek is near by and would have provided a water supply.

The Beasley family cemetery was, in later years, called French Cemetery. This name may have been influenced by French Bayou, French Creek, and French Prairie, all partially on the Prewitt league. Legend states that Indians, at the request of the Spanish, killed several French families who had settled there about 1720. The survivors were reported to have buried their dead on the pine clad hill on the western edge of French Prairie (Partlow 1974:223).

Beasley Prewitt died in 1835 and his league of land on the west side of the Trinity was divided between his sons, Beasley Jr. and Edmond. The project area was owned by a number of people until purchased by the Champion Paper and Fiber Company from T. V. Collins and W. J. Moreau on January 1, 1947 (Liberty County Deed Records 1947, Vol. 292, p. 105). A complete list of property owners is presented in the original manuscript prepared by Epperson (1988) which discusses the Prewitt Land Grant.

Floyd Duesler (personal communication, September 16, 1988), of Champion's Land Management Department, stated the land was utilized by the paper company for growing timber. It was not a

plantation but was kept natural. When questioned about the roadbed running from the Dayton Kennefick road, northwest through the property, Mr. Duesler replied it had been constructed to facilitate management of the property and it was not the old tram roadbed which had run from north/south to the west of the Champion property.

GEOLOGIC AND GEOMORPHIC OBSERVATIONS

Geology and Soils

The park site lies in the outcrop of the Beaumont Formation of Pleistocene age (Sellards et al. 1932; Shelby et al. 1968). The Beaumont typically consists of heavy clay and sands of fluvial origin in the vicinity of Dayton.

Soils in the survey area were mapped in 1983 and 1984 by the United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service as part of the revision of the Liberty County soil survey which is in preparation. Two soils are present in the project area. These are the Vaumont series (555B), which form the flat upland portion of the tract, and the Dylan series (855B), which form the sloping southern portion of the tract. Both are very slowly permeable resulting in poor drainage.

Geomorphology

Most of the park site is situated on a wooded upland with the southern and southeastern sides of the tract sloping toward the Trinity River bottomlands and Bowie Creek, respectively. The tract is heavily wooded with second growth pine forest which is cut by several roads and access routes to deer stands.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

An archaeological survey of the proposed Dayton County Park area failed to locate any prehistoric or historic sites in the project area. Twenty-one shovel tests and one auger probe revealed a very thin, almost non-existent, mantle of sandy loam overlying silty clay loam and clay throughout the project area. Only four shovel tests exhibited natural strata containing sandy loam or silty loam and they turned into clay at 5, 10, 15, and 25 centimeters below the surface.

These findings were confirmed by data published by the National Cooperative Soil Survey in 1973. According to this survey, the project area contains soils of the Vamont and Dylan series. These soils are primarily clay, poorly drained, and best suited for forest and limited pasture.

Since prehistoric sites in this part of Texas are typically found in areas with well-drained sandy soils, it is considered unlikely that a prehistoric site exists in the project area.

During the survey, we were told of a nearby prehistoric site which we recorded as 41LB83. Although the elevation of this site at 75 feet is the same as most of the project area, its closer proximity to Bowie Creek and location in an area of sandy soil helps support the negative findings of the survey.

The records check at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory revealed the nearest recorded prehistoric site to be the Jamison site (41LB2). The location of this site is depicted in Figure 2.

The historic documentation research revealed the project area is part of the Beasley Prewitt land grant acquired from the Mexican Government in 1831. This area was used primarily for farming and ranching until acquired by Champion Paper and Fiber Company for timber in 1947. We found no evidence that the Prewitt homestead or any other structures were ever constructed in the project area. No historic artifact scatters or other evidence of historic occupation of any age, other than the roadbed, were located during this survey.

Virtually the entire project area was very disturbed, presumably due to logging operations. Large, deep ruts, apparently caused by heavy trucks, criss-cross the tract. The surface was further disturbed, probably by removal of tree stumps, leaving the ground hummocky. This disturbance, in combination with the extremely shallow soils, suggests that the integrity of any site (if present) will be questionable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the absence of cultural materials observed during the survey of the project area, it is recommended that the City of Dayton be allowed to proceed with construction of their city park. However, should any evidence of a site (prehistoric or historic) or burials associated with the nearby French Cemetery be encountered during construction of this park, the Texas Antiquities Committee must be notified immediately so an archaeologist can further evaluate the situation. It is not considered necessary for an archaeologist to monitor the construction phase of the park.

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