AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY FOR THE CITY OF PANORAMA VILLAGE FEMA PROJECT IN CENTRAL MONTGOMERY COUNTY, TEXAS

By
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BVRA Project Number 03-24

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ABSTRACT

An archaeological evaluation of a pond impoundment site in central Montgomery County, Texas was performed by Brazos Valley Research Associates (BVRA) in August 2003 with William E. Moore the Principal Investigator. This is a federal project that will be largely funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). No archaeological sites were found during the archaeological survey in an area viewed by BVRA as a very unlikely setting for a prehistoric site. Therefore, it is recommended that the City of Panorama Village be allowed to proceed with construction as planned with no further archaeological investigations. Copies of this report are on file at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory (TARL); Texas Historical Commission, Archeology Division; and Brazos Valley Research Associates.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Brazos Valley Research Associates is appreciative of the assistance provided by the following. Brian Rodel, EIT of Bleyl and Associates of Conroe, Texas provided maps and other logistical support. The Honorable Howard Kravetz was the representative for the City of Panorama Village for this project. Jean Hughes, Records File Search Assistant at TARL, performed the file search for previously recorded sites. The field survey was conducted by Edward P. Baxter, Project Archaeologist. Tiffany T. Terneny, Staff Archaeologist at the United States Army Corps of Engineers, Galveston District, was the lead reviewer for this project. The figures in this report were prepared by Edward P. Baxter and Lili G. Lyddon.

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INTRODUCTION

Brazos Valley Research Associates was retained by the City of Panorama Village through the engineering firm Bleyl & Associates of Conroe, Texas to conduct an archaeological investigation along the banks line of the East Fork of White Oak Creek in central Montgomery County, Texas (Figure 1). The client proposes the construction of a small pond by lining the stream channel with rip-rap and installing a weir across the creek. No removal of topsoil along the creek bank will occur. The resulting pond will be approximately 1/2 acre in size. It is important to mention that the project area is located within the footprint of an earlier pond, the dam having been destroyed through a recent storm. The area examined is depicted on the USGS 7.5' topographic map Conroe dated 1958 [photorevised 1976] (map number 3095-132). It is depicted on Figure 2. The project area is located at the southern boundary of the city limits of Conroe, Texas on the west side of Interstate Highway 45 (Figure 3). This is a federally funded project with 75% of the money being provided by FEMA and 25% being provided by the City of Panorama Village. The land is owned by a private corporation, the Panorama Country Club.

Montgomery County is located in Southeast Texas, an area known to contain significant archaeological sites. A summary of previous work by professional archaeologists in the county is summarized in the *Previous Investigations* section below. Because of the archaeological potential of the project area, a cultural resource study by a professional archaeologist was required by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (COE), Galveston District in accordance with 33 CFR Part 325, Appendix C. The COE permit application number for this project is 23113. The project number assigned by BVRA is 03-24. The field survey was conducted on August 22, 2003 by Edward P. Baxter with William E. Moore assuming the duties and responsibilities of Principal Investigator.

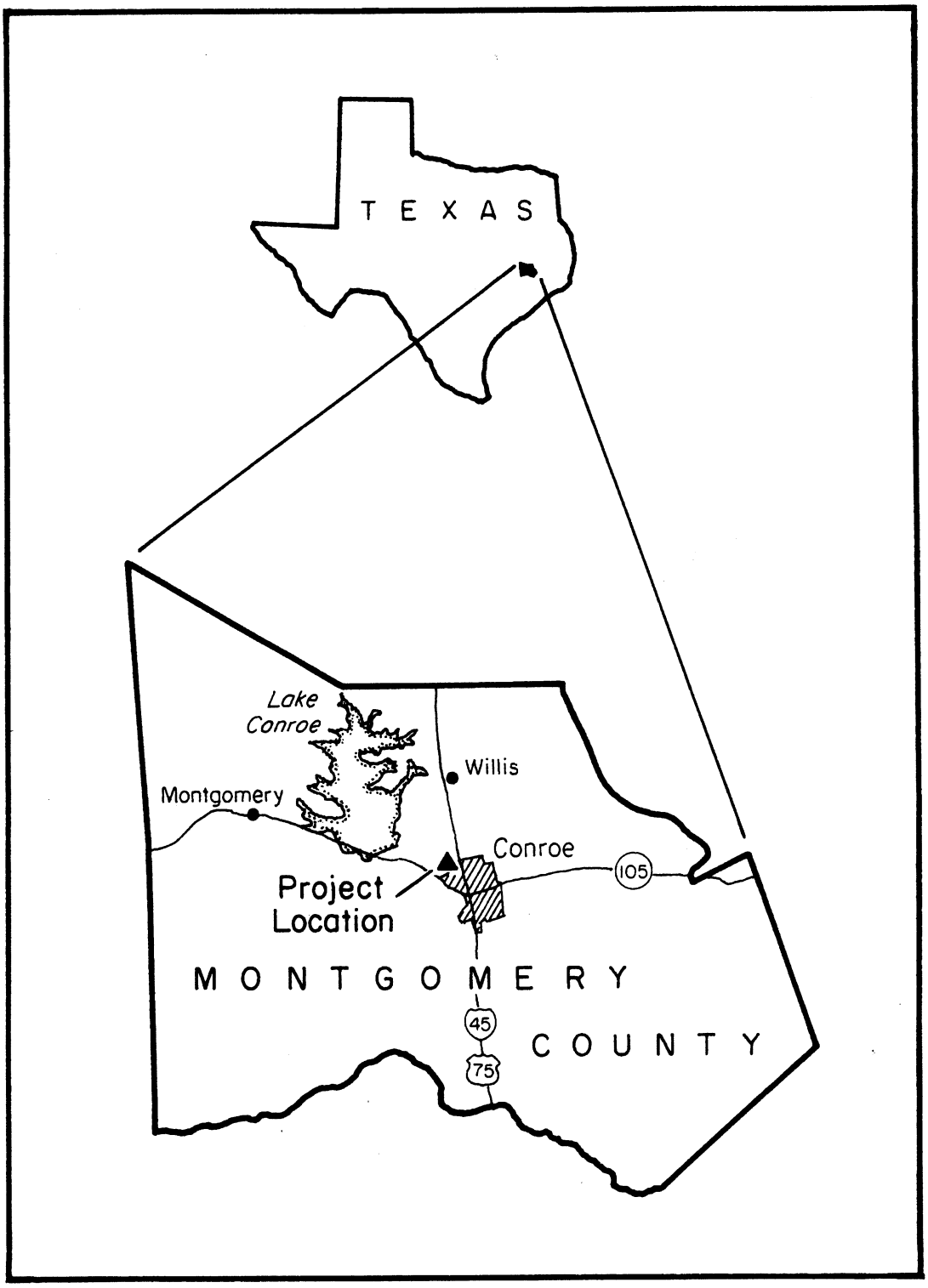

Figure 1. General Location Map.

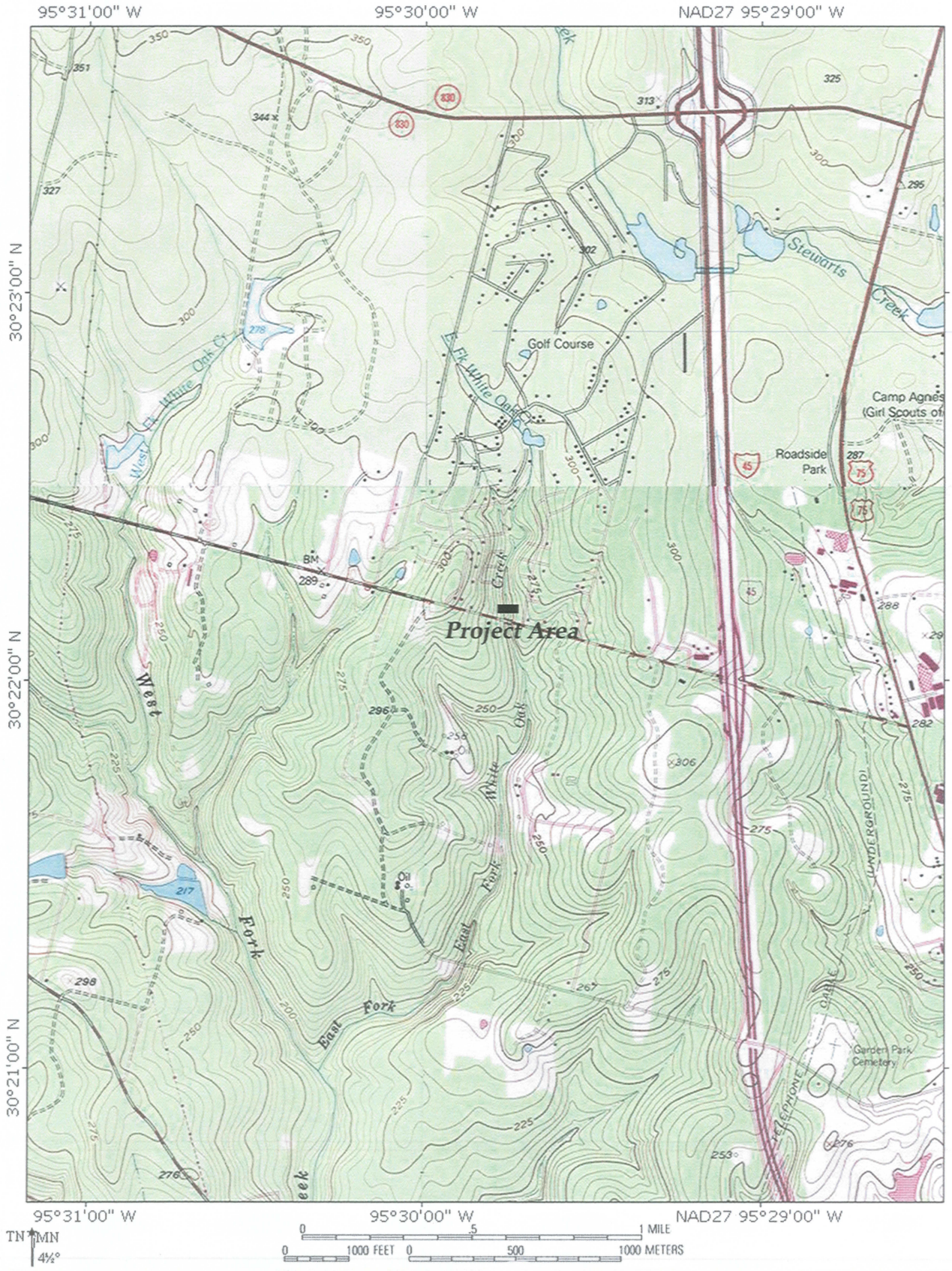

Figure 2. Project Area on USGS Conroe, Texas Topographic Map

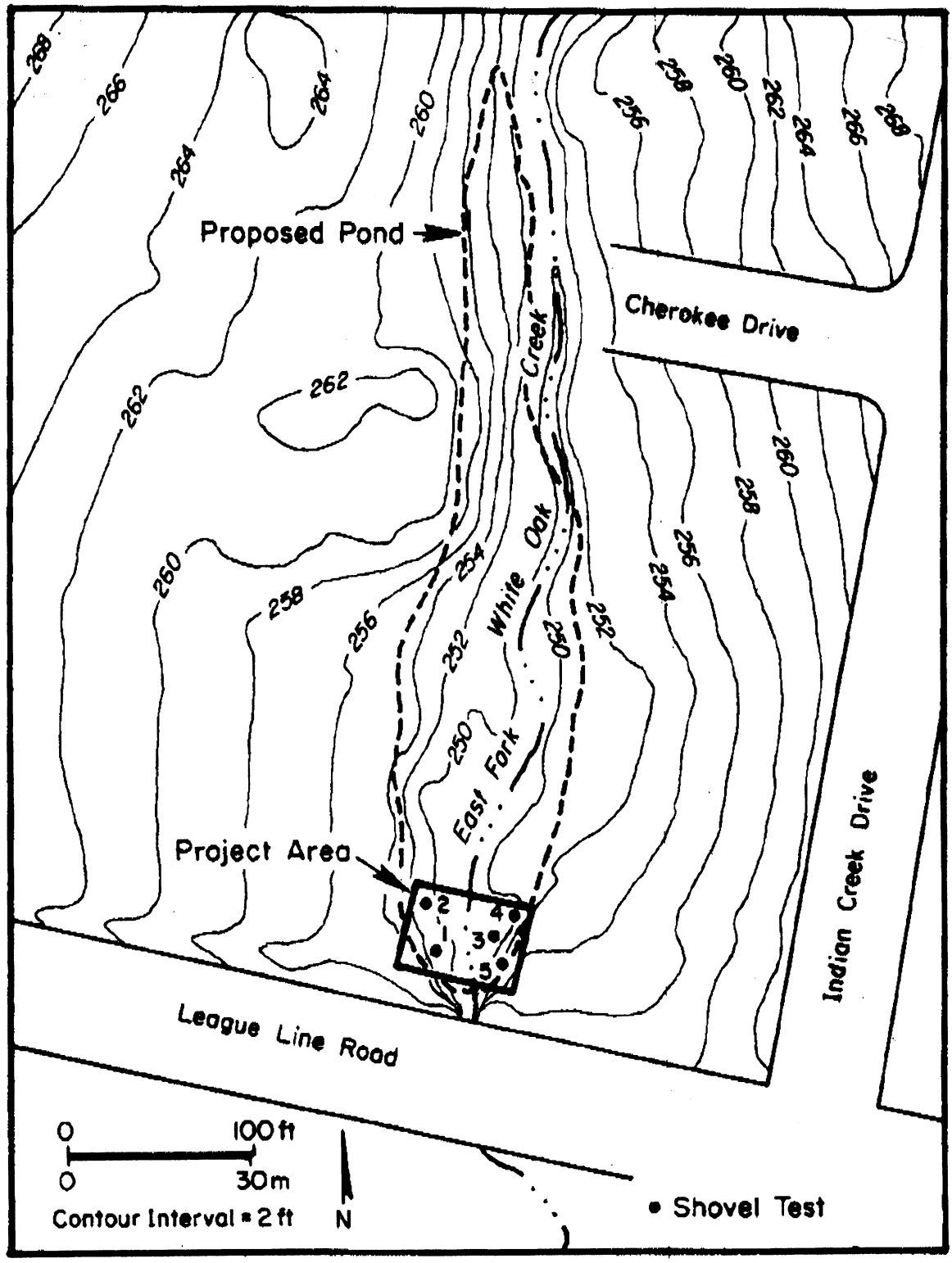

Figure 3. Project Area Map

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The following statements was summarized from the *Handbook of Texas* (Webb 1952) and the *Soil Survey of Montgomery County* (McClintock et al. 1972:1). Montgomery County, in the East Texas Timberlands Region, is bounded on the north by Walker and San Jacinto counties, on the east by Liberty County, on the south by Harris County, and on the west by Waller and Grimes counties. Montgomery County covers 1047 square miles of flat to gently rolling terrain. Vegetation is typical of the Piney Woods area with thick stands of longleaf, shortleaf, and loblolly pines and hickory, maple, sweet gum and black gum, oak, and magnolia trees. Grasses include Virginia Wildrye, blackseed needle grass, and purpletop. Wildlife in the county includes eastern gray and fox squirrels, various species of bats and skunks, and small herbivores such as gophers, mice, rabbits, and armadillos, as well as racoons, white-tailed deer, opossum, bobcat, coyote, and red and gray fox. Alligators, frogs, toads, and numerous species of snake, including the poisonous copperhead, cottonmouth, coral snake, and rattlesnake, are found in abundance. A wide variety of birds such as mockingbirds, cardinals, doves, quail, bluejays, and roadrunners, to name a few are also native to the area. The county's principal water source is the San Jacinto River basin drainage system, which includes Peach, Caney, Spring, and Bushy creeks.

The climate is subtropical humid with warm summers and mild winters. The average annual relative humidity is 73 percent, and the average rainfall is 47.44 inches. The average annual temperature is 68 degrees Fahrenheit. Temperatures in January range from an average low of 39 degrees to an average high of 61 degrees and in July range from 72 degrees to 95 degrees. The growing season averages 270 days per year with the last freeze in early March and the first freeze in late November (Webb 1952).

The following statements were taken from the *Soil Survey of Montgomery County, Texas* (McClintock et al. 1972:1). Montgomery County is in the southeastern part of Texas in the land resource area of the East Texas Timberlands, Blackland Prairie, and the Gulf Coast Prairies. The northern and western parts of the county are undulating; the south and southeastern parts are level to gently sloping. Elevation varies between 79 feet in the southern part of the county to 330 feet in the northwestern part.

The project area is very small and is confined to the stream channel and immediate banks. Therefore, no attempt was made to identify the soil types from the soil survey.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Montgomery County is located in the Southeast Texas Archeological Study Region of the Eastern Planning Region as defined by the Department of Antiquities Protection in *Archeology in the Eastern Planning Region, Texas: A Planning Document* (Kenmotsu and Perttula 1993). It is located in the Southeast Texas cultural-geographical region (Region 6) as defined by Biesaart et al. (1985:88-90) in a statistical overview. At the time the overview was published, Montgomery County was 14th in the region with 62 recorded archeological sites. The 62 sites comprised 3.81% of the region and .31% of the state. As of March 12, 2003, there were 187 recorded prehistoric and historic sites in Montgomery County (TARL site files).

The Archeological Bibliography for the Southeastern Region of Texas (Moore 1989) cites 87 references for the county. Although many of these investigations have been small area surveys, often resulting in no sites being recorded, several projects involving larger areas have been conducted. The following is a discussion of previous work in Montgomery County.

The first site to be recorded in the county is a Late Prehistoric site (41MQ1) on the West Fork of the San Jacinto River documented by E. Mott Davis of the Anthropology Department, The University of Texas at Austin, during a field trip to Montgomery County in 1956. Following this visit by E. Mott Davis, the county remained virtually unexplored until 1965 when archaeologists working for the Texas Archeological Salvage Project (TASP) surveyed an area to be affected by the proposed Conroe Reservoir (Shafer 1966). As a result of this survey 32 sites (41MQ4-41MQ36) were recorded, and three were recommended for testing. In the spring of 1967, three sites (41MQ4 - 41MQ6) recorded during the Lake Conroe survey were tested by TASP (Shafer 1968). These excavations provided the first substantial body of data for Montgomery County and made it possible for the first time to discuss the archaeology of the area based on artifacts excavated under controlled conditions.

In 1975, eight years after the Lake Conroe excavations, an archaeological survey was conducted in the Sam Houston National Forest adjacent to Lake Conroe (Shafer and Baxter 1975). Three sites (41MQ41 - 41MQ43) were recorded in Montgomery County, and two sites (41WA81 - 41WA82) were recorded in Walker County. During the summer of 1975, site 41MQ41 was tested by archaeologists from Texas A&M University (Shafer and Stearns 1975). This site is located in the area to be affected by construction of the Scott's Ridge Recreational Area. This effort was very significant at the time as it provided an opportunity for archaeologists to test and confirm the hypothesis that "prehistoric sites having considerable antiquity do occur on older landforms in the area" (Shafer and Stearns 1975:37). The work conducted at Lake Conroe only sampled sites on recent geomorphic features. The Scott's Ridge site, however, represents the first site investigated in the area that could be "tentatively placed in the Early and Middle Lithic Periods" (Shafer and Stearns 1975:37).

Probably the largest area to be investigated in the county was the site of the proposed Woodlands Development, a tract of 23,000 acres in the southern part of the county along Spring Creek. The project was initiated by the Coastal Zone Resources Division of Ocean Data Systems, Inc. under subcontract with Greiner Engineering Sciences, Inc. (1980) of Tampa, Florida in 1979. In all, this project recorded 12 prehistoric sites (41MQ63 - 41MQ74). Six of the sites are associated with the Neo-American or Late Prehistoric (corresponds to the Ceramic Period as defined by Shafer and Stearns); 2 sites contained both Neo-American (Ceramic Period) and Archaic (Lithic Period) components, and 4 sites were classified by the authors as "undifferentiated" prehistoric. No historic sites or standing structures were encountered. Not one of the 12 sites was eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Except for sites 41MQ70 and 41MQ73, no further work was recommended. The majority of sites are described as "small and unproductive, possibly short-term or transitory habitation localities." In 1981, sites 41MQ70 and 41MQ73 were tested by Greiner Engineering Sciences, Inc. (1981) in order to determine their eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. Site 41MQ70 was found to be not eligible, and site 41MQ73 was found to be potentially eligible.

In 2002, an archaeological survey of approximately 262 acres in central Montgomery County was conducted by Moore Archeological Consulting (Schubert et al. 2002). The entire development consists of approximately 11,000 acres; however, the Corps of Engineers only required that a smaller sample be examined. A two-stage investigation was conducted; Stage 1 consisted of shovel testing, site delineation, and excavation of test units, while Stage 2 completed site testing and conducted backhoe trenching. The investigation was limited to areas along Fish Creek, one of its tributaries, and the location of two smaller water control structures. Five prehistoric sites (41MQ175 - 41MQ179) were recorded during the Stage I survey, all of them along Fish Creek. Each of the five sites were in settings with deep sandy soil. The sites were not recommended for further work.

The most recent investigation in the area was an archaeological survey of 17 acres for the Conroe Independent School District approximately three miles to the south of the current project area (Moore 2003). No archaeological sites were found.

METHODS

Prior to entering the field, a records check for previously recorded sites in or near the project area was conducted by Jean Hughes at TARL. The Project Archaeologist and the Principal Investigator visited the project area on August 22, 2003. Except for an area where fill had been brought to the site, surface visibility was zero percent, making a surface inspection impossible. Therefore, the investigation relied on shovel testing. In all, five tests were excavated, all dug to clay. A shovel test log was kept and is part of the field notes. The approximate location of the five tests is shown on Figure 3. All earth excavated through shovel testing was screened using 1/4" hardware cloth. A digital camera was used to document the field conditions present during the survey.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A check of site records at TARL revealed there are no previously recorded sites within 1/2 kilometer of the project area. The area was examined through shovel testing, and no previously unrecorded sites were found. Shovel testing revealed a shallow sandy mantle overlying a firm clay on both sides of the East Fork of White Oak Creek. The depth of clay in the tests ranged from 10 to 20 cm. A layer of fill brought in from another site covered a portion of the southwestern bank of the creek. The creek bank was covered with dense vegetation consisting of thick woods (pines and hardwoods) and various understory plants such as briars. The western edge adjacent to the wastewater treatment plant was in a mowed lawn, while the southern end was in a heavily disturbed area, covered in part by fill brought in from another location. Disturbance factors include construction associated with the previous dam and pond area, construction of League Line Road, a drainage pipe, and the fill material. Several pieces of lithic material were found on the surface of the fill; however, they are viewed as not cultural and not associated with the project area prior to disturbance.

The area investigated had served as a pond in the past; however, the dam was destroyed during a recent storm. This is a very low probability area for an archaeological site. Although the creek bank may have been utilized for the exploitation of fish and plants any more permanent site would be found on the high ground to the east or west. It is, therefore, recommended that the City of Panorama Village be allowed to proceed with construction as planned with no additional archaeological investigations.

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