AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY FOR THE FALLS-ON-THE-BRAZOS PARK IN FALLS COUNTY TEXAS

Antiquities Permit 4287

By
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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY FOR THE FALLS-ON-THE-BRAZOS PARK IN FALLS COUNTY, TEXAS

BVRA Project Number 06-20

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ABSTRACT

An archaeological survey at the site of Falls-on-the-Brazos Park was performed by Brazos Valley Research Associates (BVRA) on October 24, 2006. This investigation examined the site of a proposed observation tower and an area where outdoor cooking pits will be installed. The subsurface in both areas was examined with a backhoe to the depth of the Area of Potential Effect (APE). In all, 11.85 acres were examined. No evidence of a prehistoric or historic site was found. This project was performed under Antiquities Permit 4287 issued by the Texas Historical Commission (THC), Archeology Division. No artifacts were collected. Copies of the report are on file at the THC, Texas Archeological Research Laboratory (TARL), BVRA, and Falls County.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to those who made the successful completion of this project possible. Linda Kendall of Kerbow and Associates and Doyle Sebesta of Sebesta and Associates provided the project area maps used in this report. Jack Hogg and Roy Erwin of the Falls County Road and Bridge Department accompanied the field survey crew during this investigation, and they were very helpful. The Honorable Tom Sehon, Falls County Judge, was the sponsor for this project. The field crew consisted of James E. Warren (Project Archaeologist) Bobby Jemison and Art Romine. Jean Hughes, Records Conservator at TARL, performed the records check for previously recorded sites in the project area and vicinity. The figures were prepared by Lili G. Lyddon of LL Technical Services, and the cover was prepared by Edward P. Baxter. Technical support was provided by Jennifer McMillan, and Nora Rogers served as editor and proofreader.

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INTRODUCTION

Falls County plans to construct an observation tower on a high bluff overlooking the Brazos River and install a series of outdoor cooking pits within the boundaries of Falls-on-the-Brazos Park in central Falls County (Figure 1). The footprint of the observation tower will be 10 feet by 10 feet. It will be supported by metal pilings which will be anchored into the subsurface at a depth of six feet and surrounded by concrete. The tower will protrude over the bank of the river and serve as a platform for bird watchers interested in observing the Bald eagle. In addition, 15 outdoor cooking pits will be installed along the southern boundary of the park in conjunction with proposed primitive camping sites. These pits will be placed in holes two feet in depth. A pedestrian bridge is planned to span the slough that bisects the park in an east-west direction. No subsurface disturbance is planned for this improvement which is outside the current project area. Instead, three eight-foot by forty-foot culverts will be brought in and covered with used concrete. A trail from the entrance of the park will be constructed through the primitive camping area and end at the observation tower. This trail will not affect the subsurface. Except for the pedestrian bridge, there are no planned improvements for the remainder of the 22-acre park at this time. Funding for this project is being provided by a grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). A map of the park depicting the areas surveyed, and the approximate location of the seven backhoe trenches appears as Figure 2. The current project area is depicted on the USGS 7.5' topographic quadrangle Cedar Springs (3196-223) (Figure 3).

The tract where the observation tower is to be placed was viewed by BVRA as a medium to high probability area for a prehistoric site as it is on a high bluff with deep sandy soils overlooking the confluence of McCullough Slough and the Brazos River. The THC shares this opinion. In a letter from the THC dated September 16, 2006 to Jeff Hauff at the Grants-in-Aid Program at TPWD, the Falls-on-the-Brazos Park was recommended for archaeological survey. In order to satisfy this requirement, Falls County contracted with BVRA to perform this service.

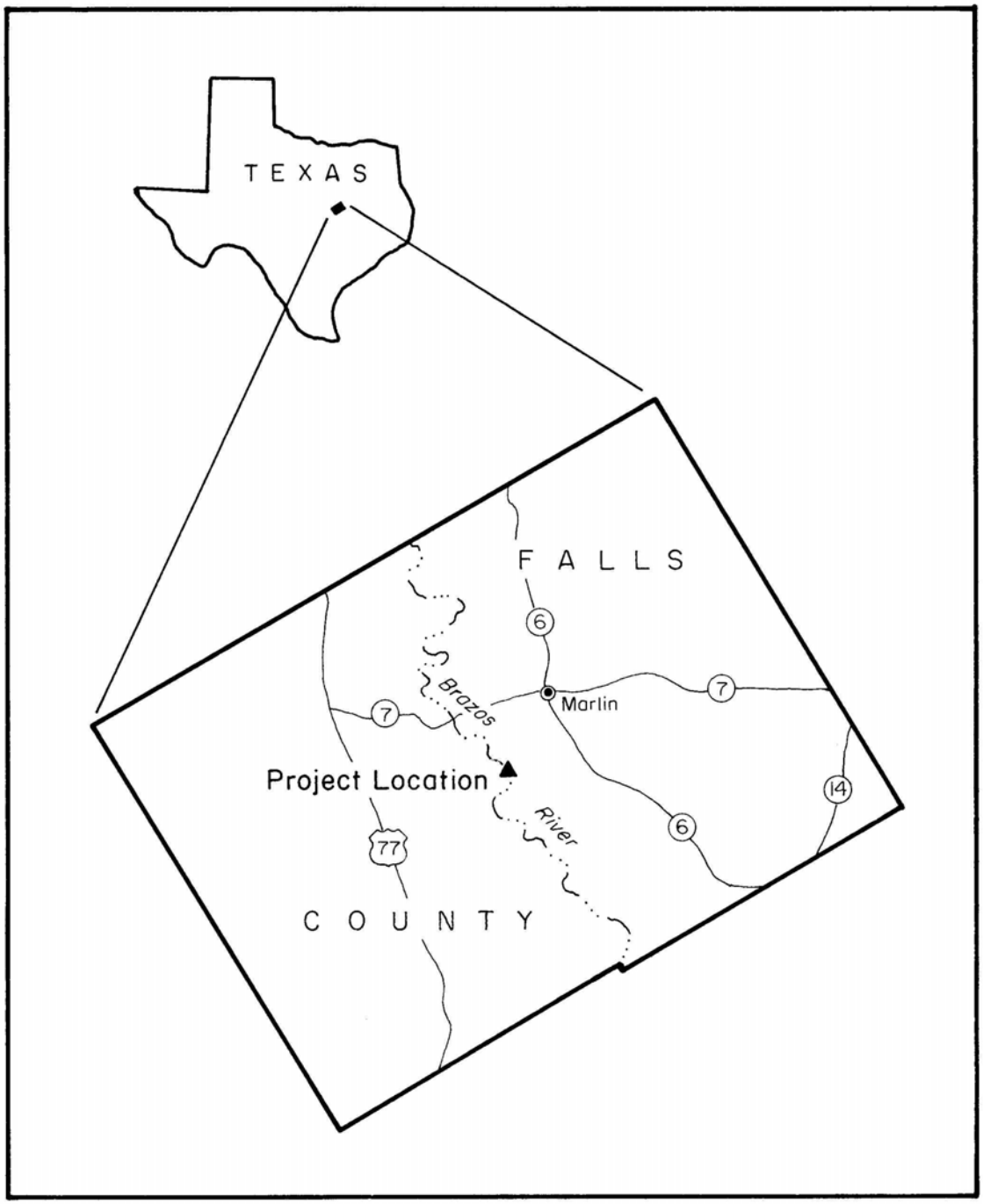

Figure 1.General Location

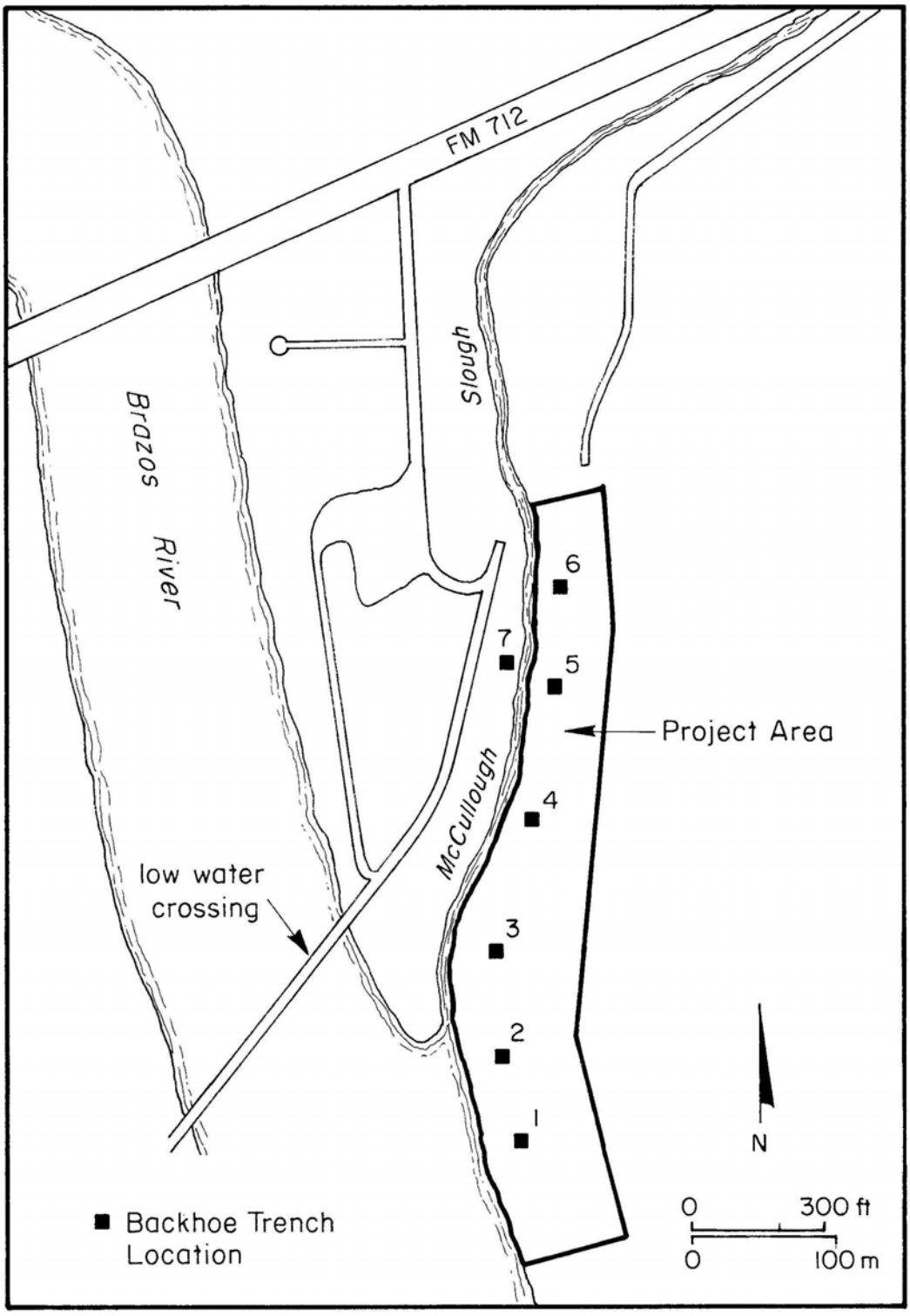

Figure 2. Plan View of Falls-on-the-Brazos Park

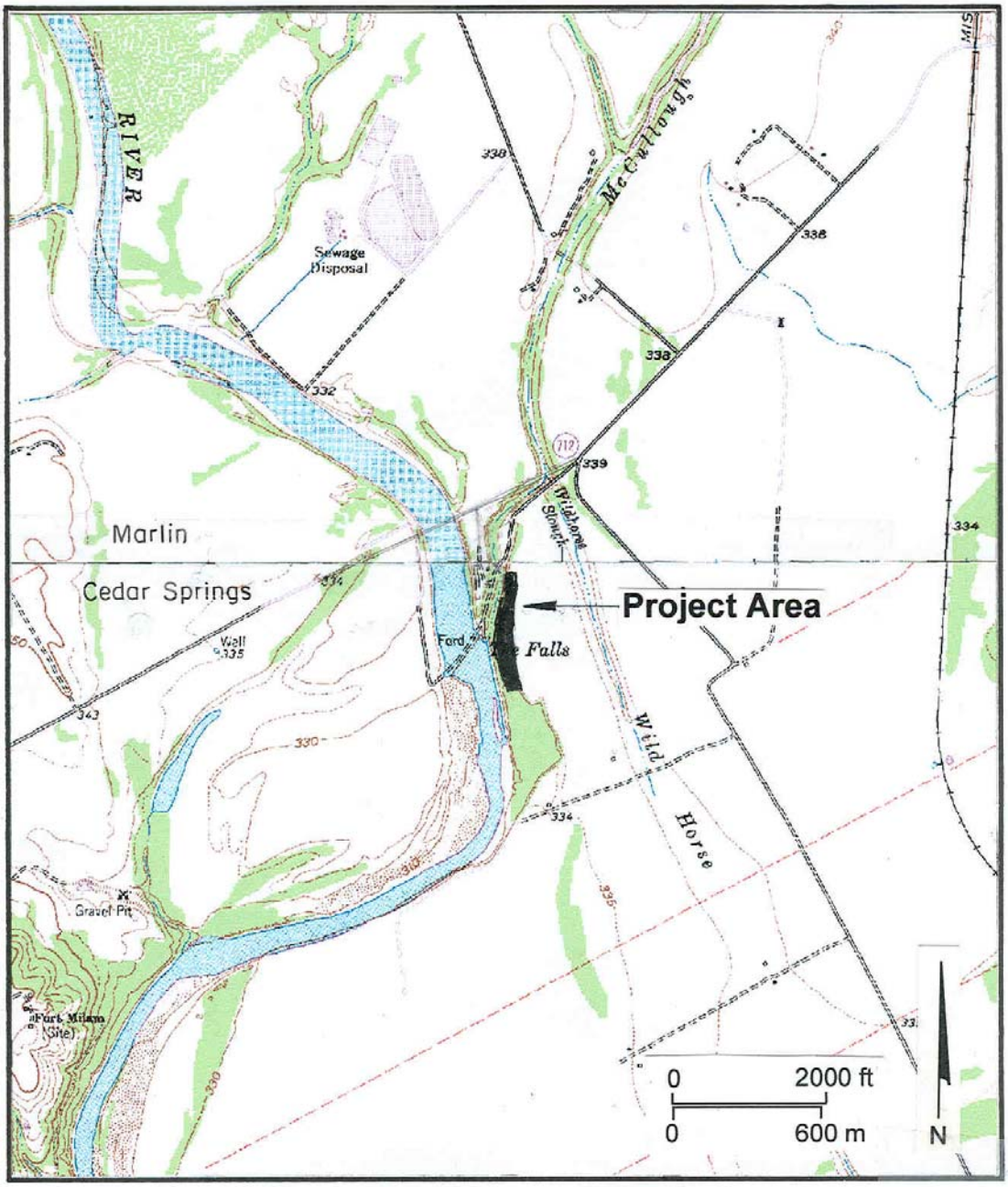

Figure 3. Project Area on Topographic Map Cedar Springs

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Falls County is located in the east-central part of the state. In general, the relief is undulating to rolling with some broad flatlands. The major drainage in the county is the Brazos River and its tributaries. This river passes through the center of the county in a shallow valley two to three miles wide. The other major streams are the Little Brazos River and Big Creek. The floodplains along these streams are ¼ mile to 1 mile in width. The county slopes generally to the southeast. Elevations vary throughout the county from 300 feet to 500 feet above sea level. There is one elevation, however, in the northwest corner of the county that is about 700 feet. In winter, the average temperature is 49.8 degrees Fahrenheit, and the average daily minimum temperature is 39.2 degrees Fahrenheit. In summer, the average temperature is 82.4 degrees Fahrenheit, and the average daily maximum temperature is 93.2 degrees. The total annual precipitation is 33.85 inches. The growing season occurs from April through September. It is during this time that rainfall is the greatest. July is generally the driest month of the year. The average date of the last occurrence of freezing temperatures in spring is March 9th, and the first occurrence of freezing temperatures in the fall occurs on November 24th.

According to the soil survey for Falls County (Wyrick 1978:Sheet 35), the soils in the project area belong to the Westwood series and the Yahola series. Westwood series soils consist of reddish-brown soils that formed in the stratified, calcareous, loamy alluvial sediment. These soils are found on high bottom land and on the leveled edges and in bottoms of natural, secondary drainageways in bottom land. Slopes range from 0 to 8 percent. The specific soil type in the project area belonging to this series is Westwood complex, 0 to 8 percent slopes (62). These soils rarely flood. The surface layer of this soil is a moderately alkaline silty clay loam about nine inches thick. From nine to eighteen inches, is a moderately alkaline silty clay loam. The underlying layer, to a depth of sixty inches, is reddish-brown, moderately alkaline silty clay loam that is stratified with reddish-brown fine sandy loam and reddish-brown silty clay.

Yahola series soils consist of reddish-brown soils that formed in slightly altered loamy, calcareous alluvium on long narrow flood plains paralleling the river. The specific soil type in the project area is Yahola fine sandy loam, occasionally flooded. This soil type consists of deep, well-drained, nearly level soils on flood plains of the Brazos River. It floods only once in every four to ten years. Slopes are 0 to 1 percent and plane. Some areas are smooth, while others are channeled by shallow drainageways. This soil has a surface layer of reddish-brown, moderately alkaline fine sandy loam about ten inches thick. Below the surface layer, to a depth of thirty-seven inches, the soil is reddish-yellow, moderately alkaline fine sandy loam. Between thirty-seven and fifty-eight inches the soil is a reddish-brown, moderately alkaline loam. Underlying these strata, to a depth of eighty inches, is a yellowish-red, moderately alkaline fine sandy loam and thin strata of loamy fine sand and clay loam. Permeabilty is moderately rapid, and the available water capacity is medium. The root zone is deep and easily penetrated by roots. Runoff is slow, and the hazard of water erosion is slight.

METHODS

Pre-Field Tasks

Prior to entering the field, the site records at TARL were checked for the presence of previously recorded archaeological sites in the project area and vicinity. Relevant archaeological reports documenting work in Falls County were reviewed in order to become familiar with the types of prehistoric and historic sites found in the area.

Field Survey

William E. Moore was the Principal Investigator, and James E. Warren was the Project Archaeologist. A survey of the site of the proposed observation tower and the primitive campground where the outdoor cooking pits will be installed was conducted on October 24, 2006. At the time of this study, the ground cover was obscured by grass that is regularly mowed by inmates of the local prison. Oaks and mixed hardwoods along with various understory plants were scattered across the area, especially adjacent to the slough. The site of the proposed observation tower was investigated using a backhoe. A single trench was dug to the approximate depth of the APE. This trench was 4 meters long, 1.4 meters wide, and 1.96 meters deep. Figure 4 depicts the excavation of this trench in its early stages. The Project Archaeologist, using a Munsell Soil Chart, profiled the north wall of Trench 1. This profile, and the profiles of the other trenches, is depicted in Appendix I to this report. Five additional backhoe trenches were dug in the primitive campground area to the depth of the APE (two feet) or greater. Each of these trenches was 4 meters long and 1.4 meters wide. The depth, however, varied from 1.14 meters (Trench 4) to 1.42 meters (Trench 2). Clay or bedrock was not encountered in any of the six backhoe trenches in the area to be funded by the TPWD. A seventh trench was excavated at the site of the proposed pedestrian bridge. It was terminated at 79 centimeters when the backhoe broke a water line. This project was documented by field notes and digital photography. In the area of the proposed observation tower, a vertical cut bank was examined for signs of an *in situ* archaeological site. No such evidence was observed. The location of the seven trenches is depicted in Figure 2 above.

Figure 4. Backhoe Trench 1

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

General

According to a published planning document for the Eastern Planning Region of Texas (Kenmotsu and Perttula 1993:Figure 1.1.2), Falls County is situated within the Prairie Savannah archeological study region. According to the planning document, the prehistory of this region has not received as much attention as many other regions of Texas. According to a statistical overview published by the THC (Biesaart et al. 1985:Figure 15), Falls County is located in the North Central Texas Cultural-geographical region. In 1985, Falls County contained 16 recorded sites (Biesaart et al. 1985:114) - .60 percent of the region and .08 percent of the state. Only six counties in the region had fewer recorded sites. In 1985, 0 sites in the county had been excavated, 0 had been tested by hand, and 10 had been surface collected. One recorded prehistoric site in the county was listed as Paleoindian, 2 were listed as Early Archaic, 2 were listed as Middle Archaic, 1 was listed as Late Archaic, 8 were listed as General Archaic, and 8 were listed as Late Prehistoric (Biesaart et al. 1985:133). Currently, there are 71 recorded sites in Falls County.

Historic Indian groups known to have inhabited parts of Falls County are the Cherokee, Tawakoni, and Waco (Kenmotsu and Perttula 1993:Figure 2.6.11). In 1845, there was a Cherokee village near the confluence of the Bosque River and the Brazos River. Circa 1809, the Tawakoni had three towns on the Brazos River about 80 miles north of the Camino Real crossing of the Brazos. The Waco may have been derived as a group from the Tawakoni. Circa 1829, they lived on the Brazos River south of the confluence of the Brazos and Bosque rivers. By 1841, they had moved up the Brazos River along with other Wichita-speaking groups and lived near the Tawakoni a few miles below the Clear Fork of the Brazos before moving to the Brazos Indian reservation (Watt 1969).

In 1843, the Torrey brothers created the Torrey Trading Post on the Brazos south of the current project area. The site of the trading post was on the line separating the Indian and white settlements. Here, the Indians signed treaties and received presents until 1854 when they were settled on reservations on the upper Brazos River. According to Dr. Ferdinand Roemer, a German scientist who traveled throughout Texas from 1845 through 1847, the trading post was on a hill covered with oak trees two miles from the Brazos River above Tohawacony Creek (Roemer 1983:191-192).

The nearest recorded site, according to the Historic Sites Atlas, is 41FA2. It is described on the site card as a campsite. There is no site form, and it appears that it may be incorrectly plotted. On the atlas it is shown to be in the river. According to the site card, it may be in another location at or near the site of 41FA4, which is several kilometers south of the current project area. The nearest recorded site for which there is good data is 41FA7. This is a prehistoric site in a gravel pit 2.6 kilometers south of the current project area.

Another prehistoric site (41FA6) is located downstream from the current project area. This site is near the location of Fort Milam, which was established in 1834 to protect the colonists from Indian attacks. It was originally named for the village of Sarahville de Viesca, the capitol of Sterling C. Robertson's colony. The name was changed to Fort Milam in 1835. It is located four miles southwest of Marlin in western Falls County. No site number has been assigned to the fort. (Webb 1952:630)

According to the Texas Historic Sites Atlas, there has been only one survey in the vicinity of the project area. In 1975, the Texas Highway Department (now Texas Department of Transportation) examined a portion of County Road 712. No sites were found. There is no report documenting this investigation on file at TARL.

According to the site records at TARL, there has been only one major survey conducted in Falls County. This study was conducted by J. Parker Nunley in 1978 and involved twelve proposed floodwater-retarding structures to be constructed in the Big Creek Watershed (Nunley 1978). In all, 19 prehistoric sites and one historic site were recorded. The site numbers are 41FA43 – 41FA62 Most of the prehistoric sites only contained a few lithics on the surface and were not considered significant. He refers to these sites as open campsites or lithic scatters. Three sites (41FA50, 41FA55, and 41FA58) were recommended for testing. Site 41FA58 is described on the site form as "possibly the most significant site of any visited in the course of the present study." He observed numerous bifaces and biface fragments, four manos and several fragmented manos, hammerstones, burned rock concentrations, and numerous flakes and chips in a newly reclaimed field. Projectile point types *Darl* (n=2) and *Gary* (n=1) were found at this site. Most of the sites in his project area lacked diagnostic artifacts and features. Only six sites (including 41FA58) contained datable projectile points such as *Carrollton, Darl, Fresno, Gary*, and *Perdiz.* The single historic site (41FA60) was identified as the Tacker family cemetery that dates to the middle of the 19th century.

For additional information regarding past work in Falls County, the interested reader is advised to consult the planning document by Kenmotsu and Perttula (1993), the statistical overview by Biesaart, et al. (1985), and the *Abstracts in Texas Contract Archeology* series compiled for the THC by William E. Moore. This series provides abstracts for the years 1987 – 1992.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Examination of the files at TARL in Austin, Texas revealed no sites have been recorded in the project area, and a professional archaeologist had not previously examined the park. Archaeological surveys have been conducted in the general area, and these are discussed above in the *Archaeological Background* section of this report above.

The field survey excavated six backhoe trenches to the depth of the APE or greater in all areas except in the vicinity of the proposed pedestrian bridge due to a broken water line. These trenches were dug through loamy clay, sandy loam, and clay loam. As stated above, no firm clay or bedrock was encountered. No evidence of a prehistoric or historic site was found in the exposed cut bank near the proposed observation tower, on the surface in either area, or in any of the seven backhoe trenches. Local informants reported a major prehistoric site about five miles south of the park in an upland setting above the Brazos River. A conversation with Jack Hogg of the Falls County Road and Bridge Department revealed that no prehistoric artifacts have been found in the park area or on the higher landform located on prison property just south of the park. Flooding can be a problem in park if the slough is not able to contain the rising water, and BVRA believes that prehistoric groups selected higher landforms for their camps. The project area could have been visited by bands of Indians utilizing the river for fishing or collecting mussels, but no evidence of this activity was observed during this study.

The previous survey by Nunley (1978) revealed that significant prehistoric sites are present in Falls County; however, it also demonstrated that a large percentage of prehistoric sites in the area appear to be limited activity areas where some form of stone tool manufacture or refurbishing was the major task being conducted. The presence of manos suggest processing of plants, and the burned rock is an indicator of possible hearths. Although the data on the site forms are often sketchy, it appears that the vast majority of prehistoric sites are near a permanent water source. In another part of the county, 41FA7 is located in a multiple resource area being situated at a gravel quarry and at the confluence of a creek and the Brazos River. The finding of a small family cemetery (41FA60) demonstrated that isolated historic sites may appear anywhere on the landscape.

This survey was conducted in accordance with the Minimum Survey Standards as outlined by the Texas Historical Commission, Archeology Division.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No archaeological sites were found within the footprint of the proposed observation tower or in the areas where the outdoor cooking pits will be installed. It is, therefore, recommended that construction be allowed to proceed as planned Should evidence of a prehistoric or historic site be encountered during the construction phase, all work should cease until the situation can be assessed by the Texas Historical Commission, Archeology Division. Prehistoric campsites are typically recognized by the presence of burned rock (evidence of hearths), stone tools (arrowheads), and waste material (flakes). If Falls County decides to change its construction plans to include areas not examined during this survey, additional investigation by a professional archaeologist may be necessary.

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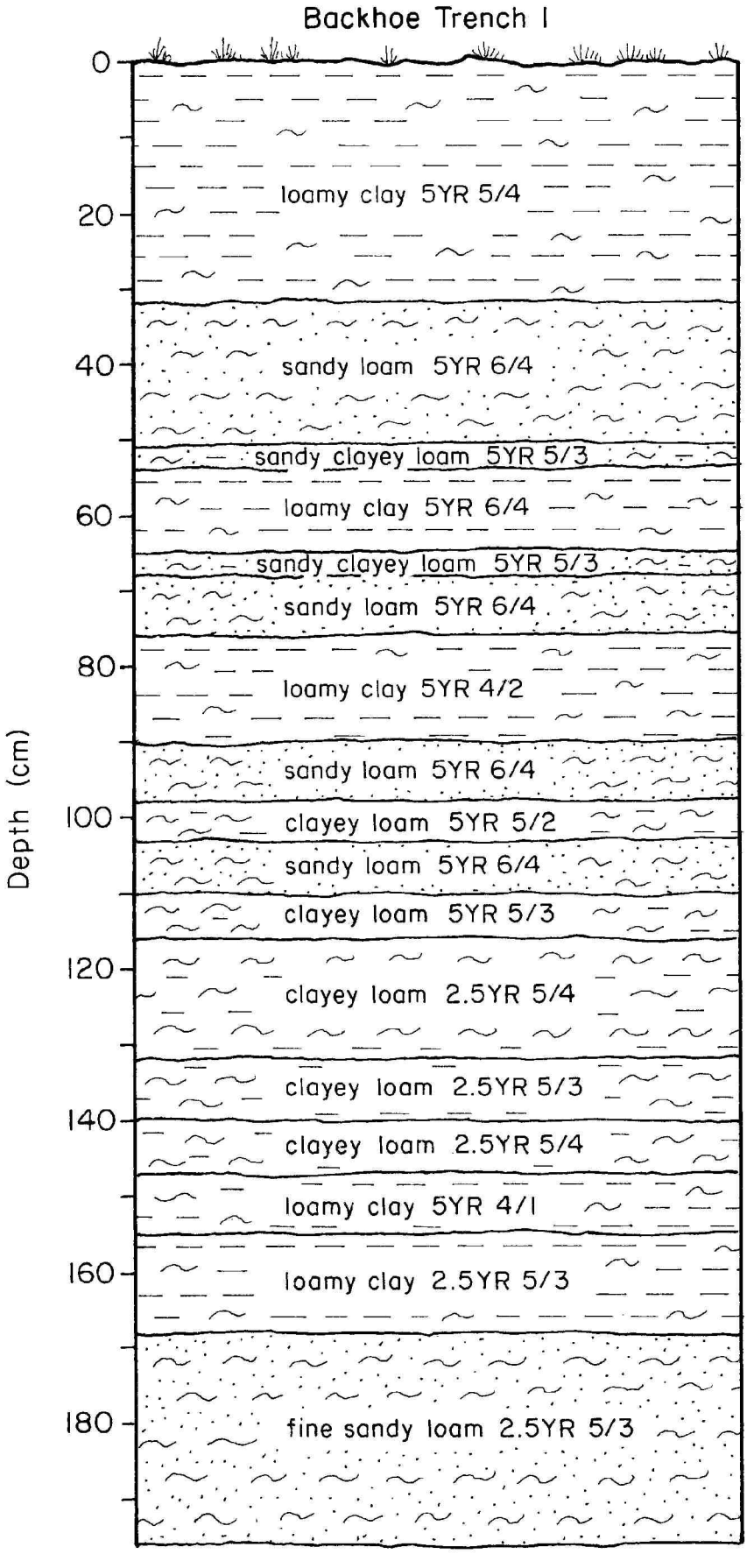
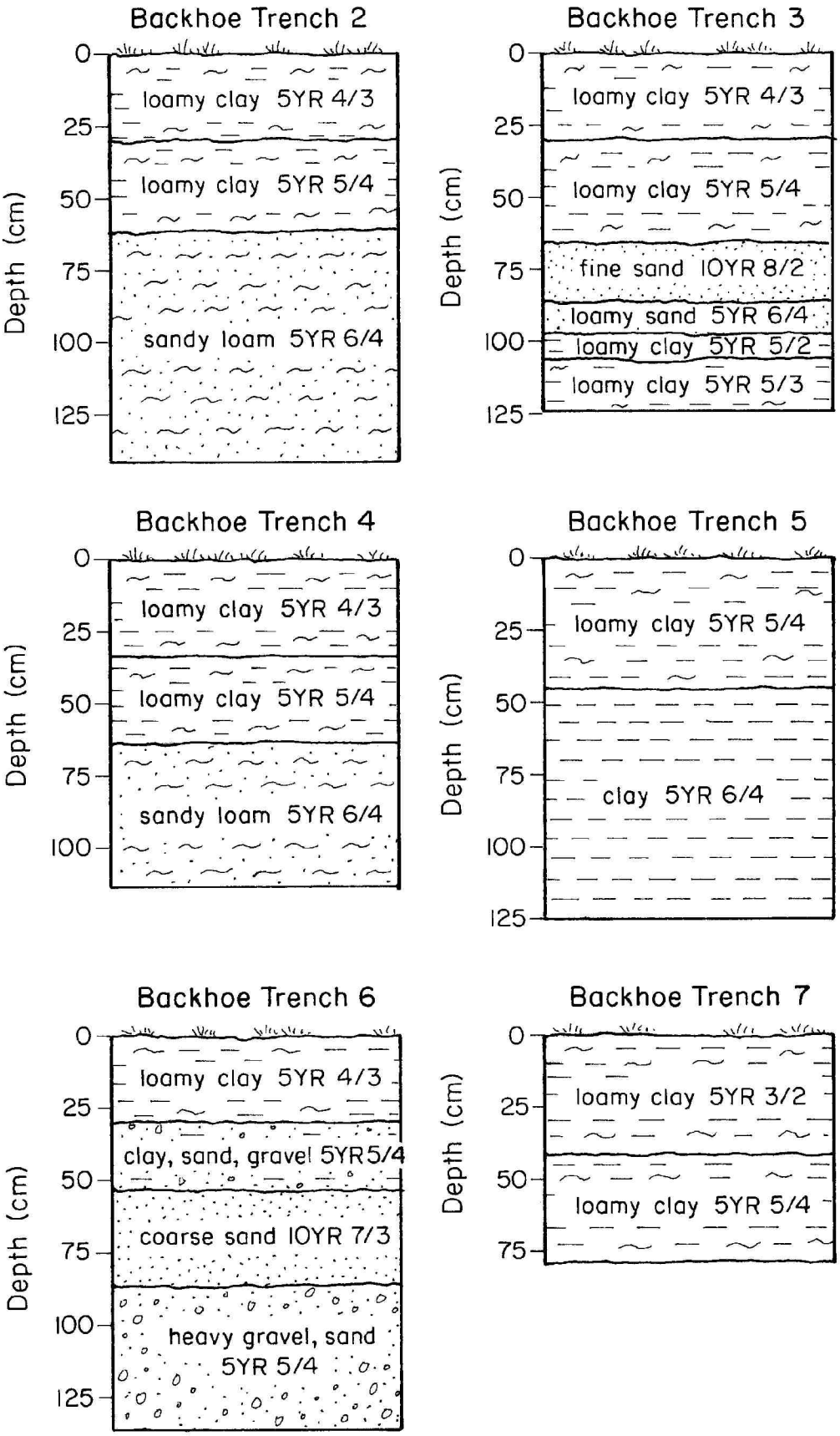
APPENDIX I

BACKHOE TRENCH PROFILES


Backhoe Trench I
Depth (cm)
0
20
40
60
80
100
120
140
160
180
loamy clay 5YR 5/4
sandy loam 5YR 6/4
sandy clayey loam 5YR 5/3
loamy clay 5YR 6/4
sandy clayey loam 5YR 5/3
sandy loam 5YR 6/4
loamy clay 5YR 4/2
sandy loam 5YR 6/4
clayey loam 5YR 5/2
sandy loam 5YR 6/4
clayey loam 5YR 5/3
clayey loam 2.5YR 5/4
clayey loam 2.5YR 5/3
clayey loam 2.5YR 5/4
loamy clay 5YR 4/1
loamy clay 2.5YR 5/3
fine sandy loam 2.5YR 5/3


Backhoe Trench 2
Depth (cm)
0
25
50
75
100
125
loamy clay 5YR 4/3
loamy clay 5YR 5/4
sandy loam 5YR 6/4
Backhoe Trench 3
loamy clay 5YR 4/3
loamy clay 5YR 5/4
fine sand 10YR 8/2
loamy sand 5YR 6/4
loamy clay 5YR 5/2
loamy clay 5YR 5/3
Backhoe Trench 4
loamy clay 5YR 4/3
loamy clay 5YR 5/4
sandy loam 5YR 6/4
Backhoe Trench 5
loamy clay 5YR 5/4
clay 5YR 6/4
Backhoe Trench 6
loamy clay 5YR 4/3
clay, sand, gravel 5YR5/4
coarse sand 10YR 7/3
heavy gravel, sand 5YR 5/4
Backhoe Trench 7
loamy clay 5YR 3/2
loamy clay 5YR 5/4