

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY FOR THE SCOTT NUMBER 3 WELL IN BRAZORIA COUNTY TEXAS

Antiquities Permit 5407



By
William E. Moore , Phillip C. Bishop,
and Edward P. Baxter

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY FOR THE SCOTT NUMBER 3
WELL IN BRAZORIA COUNTY, TEXAS

Antiquities Permit 5407

BVRA Project Number 09-28

Principal Investigator

William E. Moore

Prepared for

Slawson Exploration Company, Inc.
4801 Woodway Drive, Suite 345 W
Houston Texas 77056

Prepared by

Brazos Valley Research Associates
813 Beck Street
Bryan, Texas 77803

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ABSTRACT

An archaeological survey of a proposed well site on the Retrieve Unit of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice in central Brazoria County, Texas was performed by Brazos Valley Research Associates (BVRA) on October 6, 2009 under antiquities permit 5407. The area investigated consisted of 2.07 acres. No archaeological sites were found, and no artifacts were collected. Copies of the report are on file at the Texas Historical Commission (THC), Archeological Division, Texas Archeological Research Laboratory (TARL), Slawson Exploration Company, Inc., and BVRA.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors are grateful to those who made the successful completion of this project possible. Michael King of Slawson Exploration Company, Inc. was our primary contact for this project. He provided the project maps and information regarding the proposed construction. David King, also of Slawson Exploration Company, Inc., visited the project area during the archaeological survey to make sure that the proper area was being examined. Michael Corley, who is Program Specialist I at the Retrieve Unit, also provided assistance and signed the permit application. The field survey was performed by Phillip C. Bishop. The figures that appear in this report were prepared by Edward P. Baxter and Lili G. Lyddon. The records check for previously recorded sites was conducted by Jean Hughes, Records Conservator at TARL. Lyddon of LL Technical Services edited the report.

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INTRODUCTION

Slawson Exploration Company, Inc. plans to construct a well site on the Retrieve Unit owned by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice in Brazoria County, Texas (Figure 1). The well site is 300 feet x 300 feet (2.07 acres). Within the footprint of the well site will be a water pit and a reserve pit. The water pit will be 20 feet by 40 feet and will be dug to a depth of six feet. The footprint of the reserve pit will be 131 feet by 150 feet and will be dug to a depth of five feet. Except for the borehole near the center of the well site and the two pits, the remainder of the 2.07 acres will not be disturbed below the surface. All construction in this area will consist of placing gravel on top of the existing surface. The project area is in close proximity to Club Lake, a body of water believed to be a former channel of Oyster Creek. This tract is viewed as a medium to high probability area for the presence of a significant prehistoric site. Therefore, an archaeological survey was recommended by the THC. Significant archaeological sites have been recorded along this stream and oxbow lakes associated with Oyster Creek. The project area is depicted on the Lake Jackson topographic quadrangle (2995-122) (Figure 2).

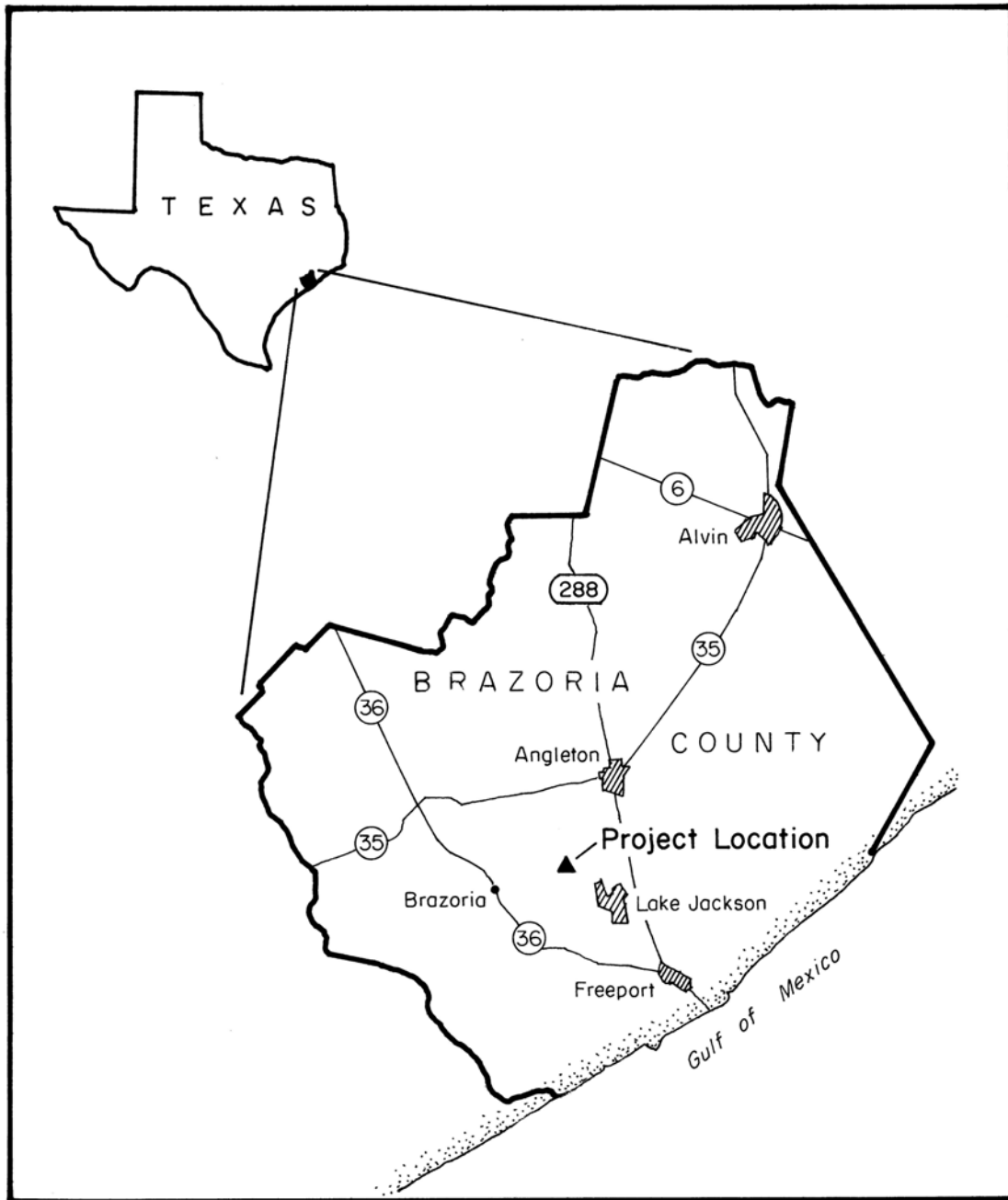


Figure 1.General Location

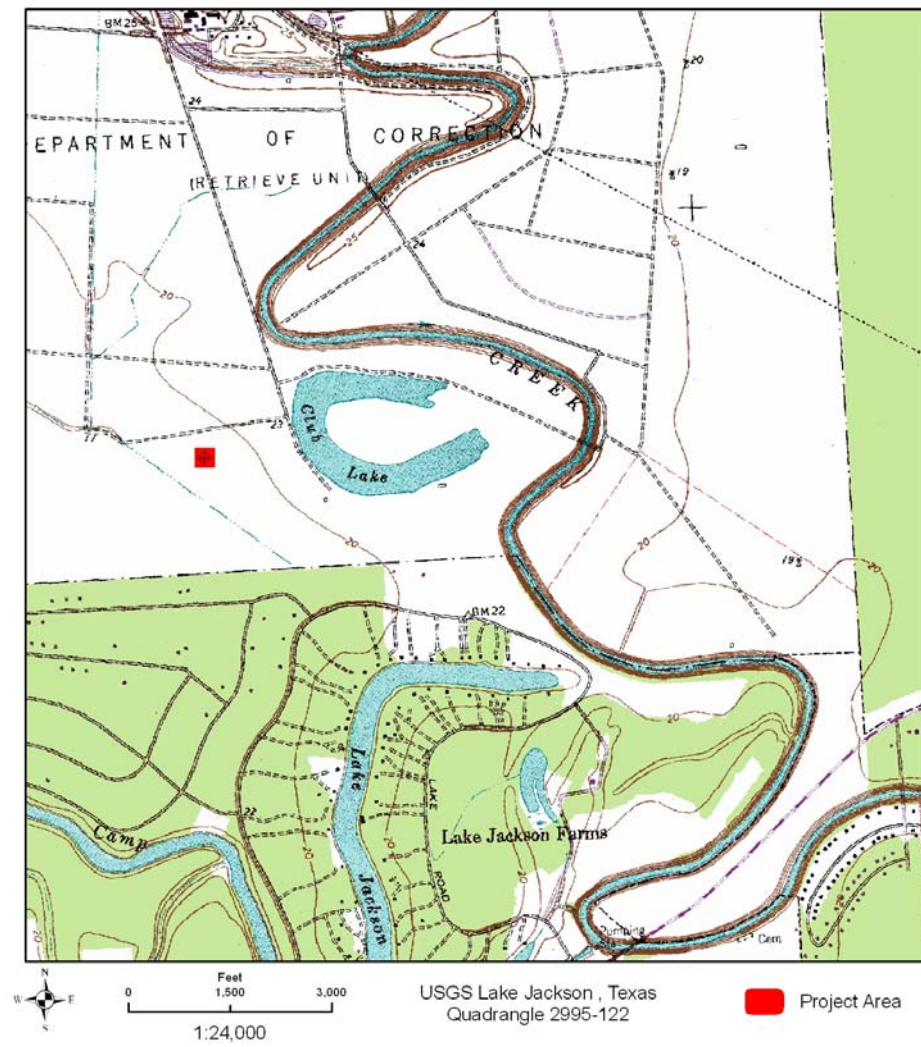


Figure 2. Project Area on Topographic Quadrangle

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

General

Brazoria County is located in the southeastern part of Texas along the Gulf of Mexico. Much of the area is defined as Gulf Coast Prairie. It is bordered by Fort Bend, Harris, Galveston, and Matagorda counties. It covers an area of 1407 square miles. The land surface of the county is classified as broad and nearly level, and the highest elevation in the county is Damon Mound that rises to 146 feet above mean sea level. There are a few sloping areas that occur mainly adjacent to major drainages such as the Brazos River, San Bernard River, and Oyster Creek. Most drainages flow to the southeast through the major streams. Other streams empty directly into the Gulf of Mexico or into the bays adjacent to the Gulf. According to the soils book for Brazoria County (Crenwelge et al. 1981:1), the inland portion of the county belongs to the Gulf Coast Prairies Major Land Resource Area.

Project Area

The project area is located 365 meters west of Club Lake, a body of water believed to be a former channel of Oyster Creek. The current project area is flat and generally featureless. At the time of this survey, the area was in fallow pasture with grasses and weeds. (Figure 3). According to the published soil survey for Brazoria County (Crenwelge et al. 1981:33-34, Sheet 85), the project area is located within the soil type described as Pledger clay (36), a nearly level, non-saline soil with slopes of about 0.1 percent. Typically, this soil has a surface layer of mildly alkaline black clay about 26 inches thick. The subsoil, to a depth of 50 inches, is moderately alkaline, calcareous, reddish-brown silty clay. This soil is somewhat poorly drained, surface runoff is slow, and permeability is very slow. Pledger clay soils have a perched water table above a depth of about two feet in winter. This soil is mainly used for pasture, although grain sorghum, soybeans, corn, and cotton are grown.



Figure 3. View of Project Area (looking north)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Brazoria County is located in the Southeast Texas Cultural-Geographical Region of Texas (Figure 4) as defined by the THC in a statistical overview published in 1985 (Biesaat et al. 1985:76). At that time, Brazoria County was fifth in the state in terms of numbers of sites recorded (1630) and percentage of sites recorded (8.06%). Within the region, Brazoria County was sixth with 89 sites (44% of the state and 5.46% of the region). According to Biesaat et al. (1981:114), all major periods of Texas prehistory were documented in Brazoria County in 1985. At that time, 89 sites had been recorded at TARL. Of this number, 43 sites were classified by temporal period as follows: Paleo-Indian (2 sites), General Archaic (11 sites), Middle Archaic (2 sites), Late Archaic (2 sites), and Late Prehistoric (26 sites). Information for the county in 1985 came primarily from surface collections (79 sites). Twenty-three sites were tested by hand in 1985, 12 were excavated, and 1 tested by machine. The archaeological potential of Brazoria County is reflected in part by the increasing number of recorded sites found as a result of cultural resource management studies. As a result of these investigations, the number of recorded sites now stands at 229 sites (TARL site records). According to a published planning document for the Eastern Planning Region of Texas (Kenmotsu and Perttula 1993:Figure 1.1.2), Brazoria County is situated within the Southeast Texas archeological study region. According to their research, site density within the region is low at 0.001 – 0.1 sites per square mile. Threats to sites in the area consist of mainly of urban sprawl, agriculture, and destruction by relic collectors. Most of the archaeological surveys in the county consist of small area surveys, many of which did not locate cultural resources. State and Federal agencies such as the United States Army Corps of Engineers, Galveston District; Texas Water Development Board, and Texas Department of Transportation have been active in the county and surrounding area. The remaining studies have been conducted by universities, private contractors, and amateur archaeologists. Most of these projects can be found by checking the Abstracts in Texas Contract Archeology series published by the THC (Moore 1990, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1993, and 1994), a bibliography of Southeast Texas (Moore 1989), the site records at TARL, and the Texas Archeological Sites Atlas (hereafter referred to as the Atlas) on the Internet.

The importance of Oyster Creek in prehistoric times is demonstrated by a survey conducted by Moore Archeological Consulting in 1991 (Moore and Moore 1991). This study examined 750 acres adjacent to Oyster Creek and several oxbow lakes formed when the creek (formerly the Brazos River) changed course. In all, ten prehistoric sites were recorded. Three of these sites contained historic components. This project was north of the current project area and adjacent to the Texas Central Prison Farm. Of the ten prehistoric sites, three (41FB199, 41FB200, and 41FB202) were tested (Moore 1996). Later, in advance of park construction, data recovery was conducted at sites 41FB199 and 41FB200.

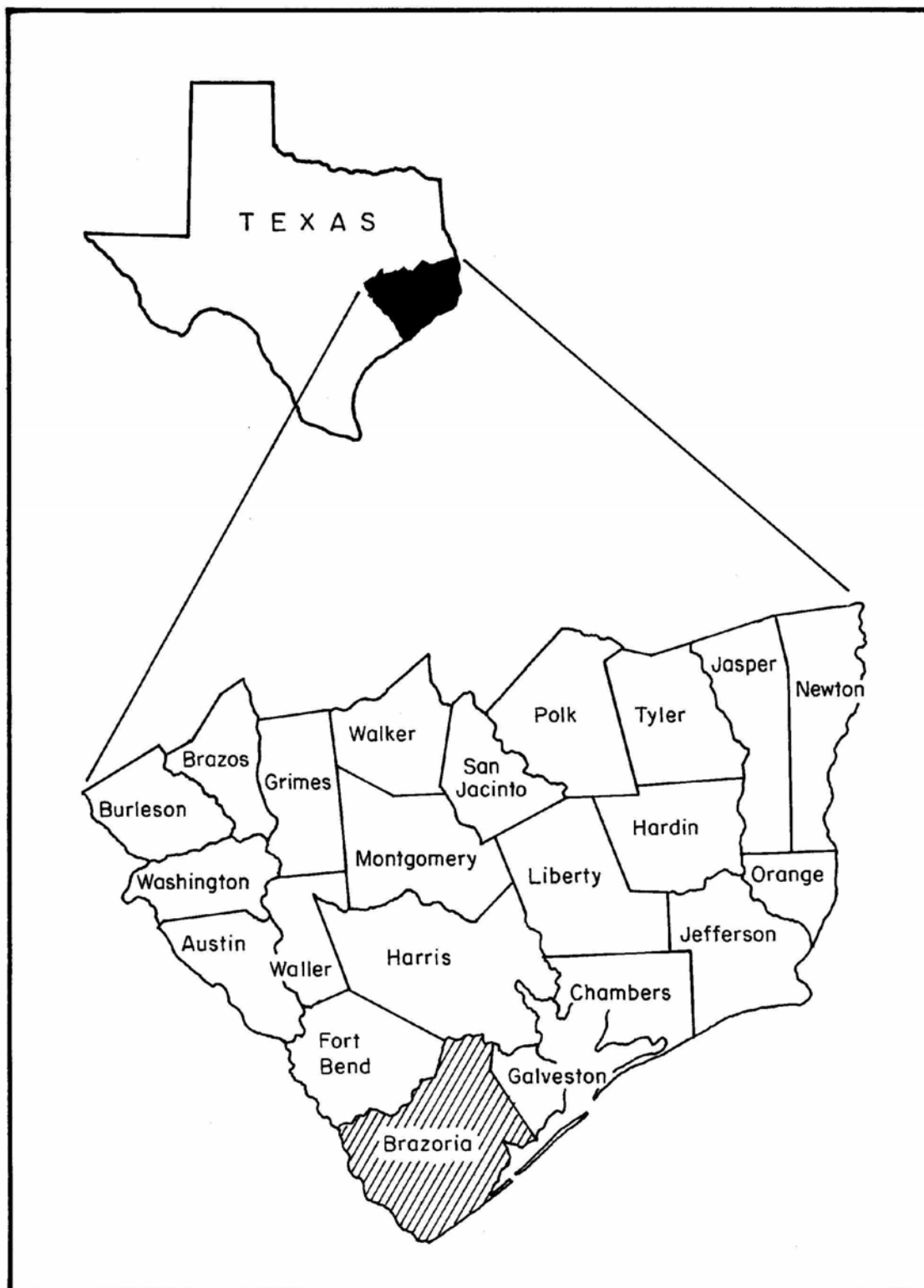


Figure 4. Southeast Texas Cultural-Geographical Region
(after Moore 1989)

Both sites date to the Late Prehistoric period and have received the designation of State Archeological Landmark. Site 41FB200 produced numerous stone artifacts and ceramics. Bone preservation was excellent, and large quantities of fish and animal bone were found as well as plant materials recovered through flotation.

Brazoria County is one of the original Texas counties, being created and organized in 1836. Activity in the area began in 1528 when the Spanish explorer *Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca* passed through what is now Brazoria County, probably crossing Oyster Creek, Old Caney Creek, and the Brazos and San Bernard rivers. Other Spanish adventurers were in the region in 1689 (*Alonso De Leon*) and 1727 (*Joaquin de Orobio y Basterra*). The first Anglos to settle the area were immigrants to Stephen F. Austin's colony in the 1820s. The population grew, largely due to the importance of the Brazos River as a transportation artery. Between 1849 and 1859, the area supported a plantation economy based on cotton and sugar cane, and Brazoria County became the wealthiest county in Texas.

One of the early plantations was the Retrieve Plantation on Oyster Creek four miles north of Lake Jackson. The plantation was established in 1839 by Abner Jackson. In the beginning, Jackson's plantation contained a two-story mansion, slave cabins, a sugarhouse, and an oven. All of the structures were constructed of brick. About 1842, he sold half of his interest in the plantation to James Hamilton. During the 1850s, the plantation produced several sugar crops, and it became one of the largest sugar producers in Texas. Merchandise was transported by steamboat along Oyster Creek to a point on Retrieve known as Steamboat Landing and carried goods to and from the plantation and Lake Jackson before the Civil War. In 1911, the land was leased and worked by hired laborers from the prison system. The State of Texas purchased the 7424-acre plantation in 1918 and continued to use the property as a prison farm. The Retrieve Unit has been one of the most productive farms in the Texas prison system. The above information regarding Brazoria County and the Retrieve Plantation was taken from *The Handbook of Texas Online*. Today, the population of the county is 257,256, and the economy is based on the petroleum and chemical industry, fishing, tourism, and agriculture.

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

Pre-Field Tasks

Prior to entering the field, the site records at TARL and the Atlas were checked for the presence of previously recorded archaeological sites in the project area and vicinity. Relevant archaeological reports documenting work in Brazoria County were reviewed in order to become familiar with the types of prehistoric and historic sites found in the area. In order to comply with the law, a One Dig was performed to make sure that no buried utilities would be affected by the backhoe trenching.

Field Survey

The Principal Investigator for this project was William E. Moore, and the Project Archaeologist was Phillip C. Bishop. The project area was investigated by a 100% Pedestrian Survey, shovel testing, and backhoe trenching. Two backhoe trenches and four shovel tests were excavated within the footprint of the proposed well site (Figure 5). Following a surface inspection, four shovel tests were excavated to depths of 20, 40, and 50 centimeters. All tests were dug through black clay, and Shovel Test 4 was terminated when standing water was encountered. Backhoe Trench 1 was excavated at the location of the proposed reserve pit and was 50 feet long, 36 inches wide, 3.5 feet deep, and orientated in a northwest-southeast direction. The soil in this area was black gumbo clay over orange clay that dates to the Pleistocene epoch. Backhoe Trench 2 (Figure 6) was excavated at the location of the proposed water pit and was 20 feet long, 36 inches wide, 3.5 feet deep, and oriented in a northwest-southeast direction. The soil in this area was black gumbo clay over orange clay that dates to the Pleistocene epoch. Photographs of the project area were taken with a digital camera, and a hand-held GPS was used to create waypoints to help locate the shovel tests and backhoe trenches.

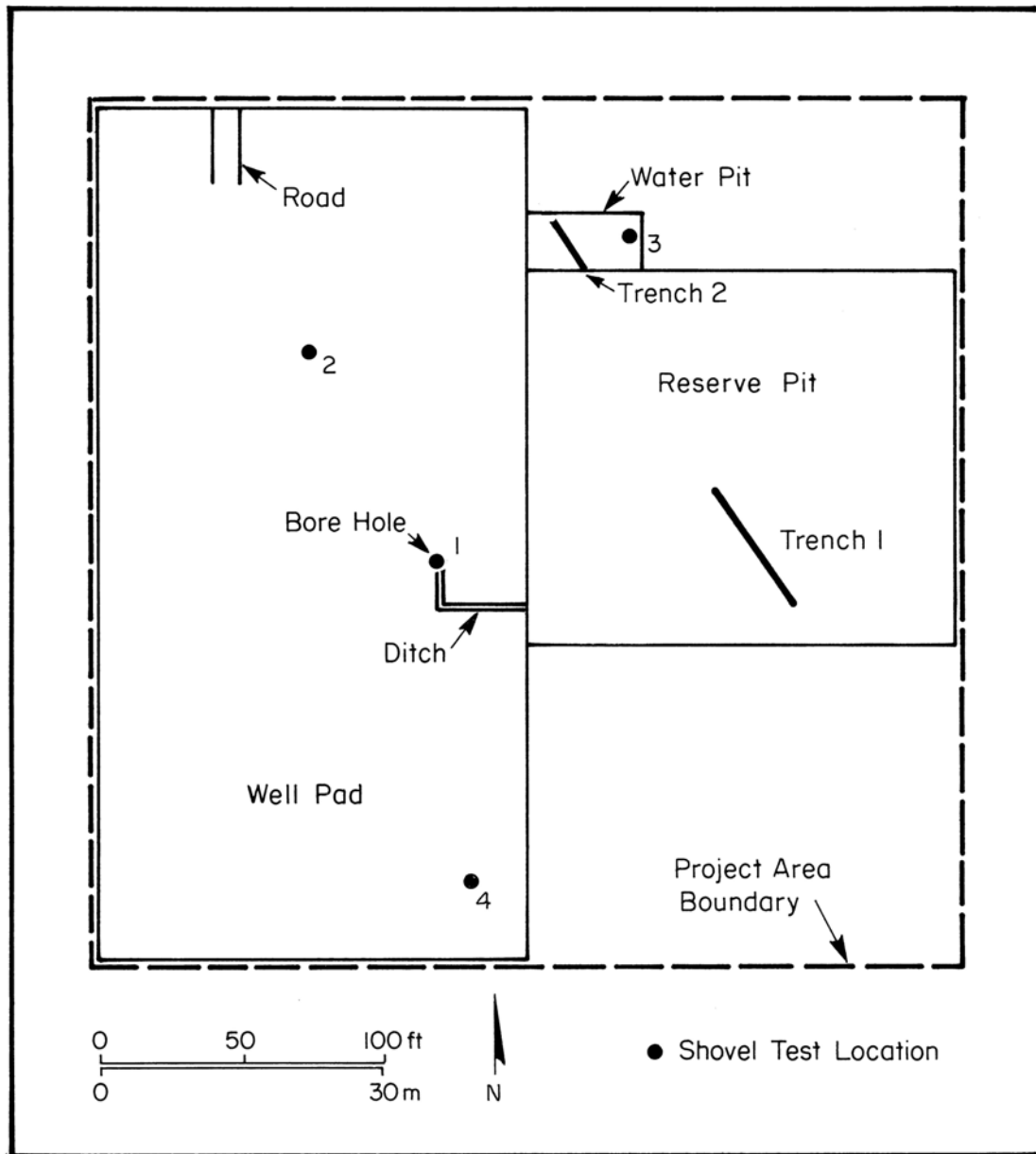


Figure 5. Location of Backhoe Trenches and Shovel Tests



Figure 6. Backhoe Trench 2 (looking northwest)

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Examination of the files at TARL in Austin, Texas and the Atlas revealed no sites have been recorded in the project area, and a professional archaeologist had not previously examined the tract. No archaeological sites were found during the course of this survey. The project area is located in a fallow field that was used in the past to grow cotton. It was covered with grasses and weeds. The landform was broad and flat and approximately 365 meters west of Club Lake, a body of water believed to be an oxbow lake and former channel of Oyster Creek. Even though sites have been found adjacent to oxbow lakes, the project area is not likely to contain an archaeological site because of its distance to this body of water. The soils in the area are black gumbo clay to a depth of 40 to 60 centimeters. Beneath this soil is an orange clay that dates to the Pleistocene epoch. Access to the project area is by two-track roads maintained by the prison. This survey was conducted in accordance with the Minimum Survey Standards as outlined by the THC. Additional archaeological work is not considered necessary. Therefore, it is recommended that the client be allowed to proceed with construction as planned. Should evidence of an archaeological site be encountered during the excavation associated with the water pit or the reserve pit, all work must stop until the THC can evaluate the situation.

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