AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE FOUR SEASONS TRACT, NORTHERN BEXAR COUNTY, TEXAS

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ABSTRACT

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted a Phase I archaeological survey of the high probability areas for archaeological sites at the Four Seasons tract in northern Bexar County, Texas. The survey was to insure that no archaeological or historical resources eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places are damaged or destroyed due to the planned construction. No prehistoric or historic archaeological sites were discovered. The only notable material culture concentrations were both 20th century scatters, one that dates probably 1930s and the other post 1962. No further archaeological work is recommended.

INTRODUCTION

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC) conducted a Phase I pedestrian archaeological survey in the high probability areas for archaeological sites at the 202 acre Four Seasons tract in northern Bexar County, Texas. This property is designated to become a residential development (Fig. 1). The archaeological pedestrian survey was performed by the authors in late May 2009. The field work was carried out to insure that no archaeological or historical resources eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places are damaged or destroyed due to planned development This Phase I investigation was designed to detect and record any archaeological or historical component that may be present in the project area.

Setting

The Four Seasons tract is a ranch located in the Balcones Canyonlands and is drained by Pecan Creek, a tributary of Leon Creek (Figs. 2-5). The property is about 60% open pasture and fields, and about 40% oak/ashe juniper parkland (Fig. 2). Ground visibility was excellent. The dominant geological formation is the Cretaceous Glen Rose formation. Topography is hilly formed by the erosion of the Glen Rose that created the creek valley (Fig. 4). Valley soils are Krum complex along the small channels that join to form Peach Creek. The fields at the front of the tract are partly in the Krum soils, but the limestone uplands on the western and northern fringe fall within the Tarrant-Brackett soils, sloping as much as 12% and developed over limestone bedrock. The soils on the slope of Round Hill are Brackett-Tarrent series, sloping up to 30%, with shallow soils over limestone that is sometimes "stair-stepped" in appearance (soils data are from Taylor et al. 1991).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Regional Culture History

The broad outline of the archaeology of northern Bexar County is described here. Major time periods and site types are briefly noted.

The **Paleoindian** period, 9,200-6,800 B.C., has distinctive chipped stone spear points used in hunting mammoth and other late Ice Age mammals early in the period. Other spear types appear with a shift to bison, deer and other game after the Ice Age ended around 8000 B.C. (Hester 1986). Known site types in northern Bexar County are *campsites* with flint-chipping debris from stone-tool making and repair. One site of Clovis age (9,200 B.C.) was excavated near FM1604 and Leon Creek (Collins et al.2003). A later site, dating around 7,500 B.C., was investigated on the grounds of St. Mary's Hall on Salado Creek (Hester 1986).

Sites of the following **Archaic** period are common in northern Bexar County. These peoples were hunters and gatherers as in the earlier Paleoindian period, but lived in an environment very similar to those of modern times. Projectile points used to tip spears (often erroneously called "arrowheads") change in shape through time, from 6,800 B.C. to 500 A.D. (Turner and Hester 1993). Archaeologists use these forms to recognize

more specific time frames within the Archaic (e.g., Early, Middle and Late Archaic). In northern Bexar County, the most distinctive Archaic site is the *burned rock midden.* These large accumulations of fire-cracked limestone result from the use of earth-oven cooking starting around 3,000 B.C. (Black et al. 1997; Nickels et al. 2000) Such features were part of *larger campsites*, with large amounts of flint debris from tool-making; sometimes, animal bone (dietary remains) and charcoal that can be used for radiocarbon dating. Other Archaic site types include *lithic procurement* areas (where flint cobbles eroded out of the Edwards limestone and were processed), *lithic scatters* (lightly-used areas probably representing short-term hunting and gathering activities), and rarely, *sinkhole burials* (Archaic peoples often disposed of their dead by placing them in sinkholes and caverns; Bement 1994).

By 700 A.D., there began to be some changes in the long hunter-gatherer life way. The **Late Prehistoric** is first seen with the introduction of the bow and arrow. The stone arrow points are very small (mistakenly called "bird points"), but could be used in hunting game of any size. By 1300 A.D., the economy emphasized buffalo-hunting. Most sites of this era include *campsites,* often in areas previously used by Archaic peoples, *lithic scatters* of this age; and the *lithic procurement areas* of earlier times continued to be used.

During the **Historic** period, the best known archaeological remains are *ranch and farm houses of cut stone*, dating from the 1840s through the 1880s. Stacked- stone fences also occur. Such sites, including those without surviving structures, are recognized from 19th century pottery fragments, artifacts of glass and metal, etc. Later Historic houses and farmsteads, through the early 1900s, are also found.

Nearby Sites

The upper portion of the Leon Creek Valley is poorly known archaeologically. Indeed the northwest corner of Bexar Country, around the Four Seasons tract, has had practically no archaeological work until recently. AAC conducted an archaeological survey of the Sundance Ranch development (Shafer and Hester 2007a), a portion of which borders the Four Seasons tract on the east and immediately to the south across Toutant Beauregard Road. Three archaeological sites were recorded on the Sundance property, all historic in age. Two were 19th century ranch houses, and one was a historic rock bridge over Pecan Creek. In addition, a complex of 19th century rock fences were also recorded.

Two miles to the west of the Four Season Tract, Shafer and Hester (2007b) surveyed upland and creek side locales along Leon Creek. A small burned rock midden and a scatter of chipped stone debris was found on an upland slope overlooking the drainage. The site was recorded as 41BX1721.

To the south of Sundance is the Rising Moon tract, also surveyed by AAC (Shafer 2008). Three archaeological sites were recorded on this property, a small rockshelter, a 19th century rock fence complex, and a two-room stacked rock structure.

To the north two historic sites, the Obert House (41BX497) and Obert Cemetery (41BX498) are located to the northwest of the project area, within the Maverick-Altgelt Ranch National Register District. To the south are sites 41BX84 and 41BX85, recorded by the Leon Creek survey carried out in the early 1970s by Paul McGuff and William Fawcett (Texas Archeological Site Atlas, Texas Historical Commission). 41BX84 is at the confluence of Pecan Creek and Leon Creek. Perdiz (?) and Fairland points were found at this bluff-top site. Nearby is 41BX85, an open campsite also on a Leon Creek bluff. It probably dates to the Middle Archaic and Late Archaic.

SURVEY RESULTS

The survey failed to identify any significant cultural resources on the property. The setting and environment are conducive to finding prehistoric sites, particularly burned rock middens and burned rock scatters usually associated with the outskirts of the middens. However, we did not find any such features or identify any prehistoric remains. Parts of the property have been heavily used for hunting and for ranching, particularly cattle and horse-raising activities. Two historic trash scatters were recorded, however, designated as SC-1 and SC-2 (Fig. 6). One trash scatter consisted of potsherds and pieces of glass that may date to the 1930s, perhaps a deer hunter's camp. This trash deposit consisted of a light scatter of glass, bottle fragments, and stoneware ceramics scattered over an area of about 100 square meters (Fig. 7). A much larger trash disposal area (SC-2 in Figure 6) was observed on and below a ledge west of the foreman's (?) house and above Peach Creek. It was characterized by rusted cans (including beer cans), construction materials, soda bottles, wine bottles, bailing wire and a 1962 Texas license plate (Fig. 8). This latter item appears to us to be a good time indicator as to when this debris accumulated.

Our goal was to cover the high probability areas along Pecan Creek with pedestrian survey and to inspect the uplands. This property was converted into an upscale horse ranch with a huge horse barn and stalls, two houses near the barn complex (all overlooking the valley to the southwest) (Figs. 9-11), and an expensive home built on top of Round Hill. This development left a highly modified landscape on the east side of Pecan Creek and on the hill slope above the creek. The field east of Pecan Creek and south of the house has been graded and badly disturbed to create some terracing and a fishing pond. Water from this pond was diverted from Pecan Creek via a large pipe from a low water dam built across the creek. The upland area leading to the house on top of Round Hill is typical of the hill slopes and hillsides on this part of the Balcones Canyonlands. Exposed Glen Rose limestone with intermittent stands of juniper, sotol, and the usual brush characterized the landscape. Juniper growths occur on the various benches from the top of Round Hill southwest toward Pecan Creek. We saw nothing here that would indicate anything of archaeological interest such as rock fences (which were common on Sundance across the road to the south). Therefore, no significant archaeology was in the upland portion of the property.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Why are prehistoric archaeological sites not present in the Pecan Creek valley? Our guess is for two reasons: first, a lack of water; Pecan Creek does not have any springs or deep holes along this section to attract prehistoric campers; second, the geology is Glen Rose limestone which lacks chert. Other than passing hunting or gathering parties which undoubtedly crossed into the area and left isolated artifacts, there were not natural resources such as water or chert to attract ancient hunters and gatherers. A good campsite may be nearby, however, and one cannot dismiss these properties as being archaeologically sterile.

The negative findings indicate that no significant historic properties exist on Four Seasons. The two house structures and barn complex plus the luxurious house on Round Hill are all mid-late 20th century or later, and are of no historic significance. **Therefore, no further archaeological attention is recommended.**

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Figures

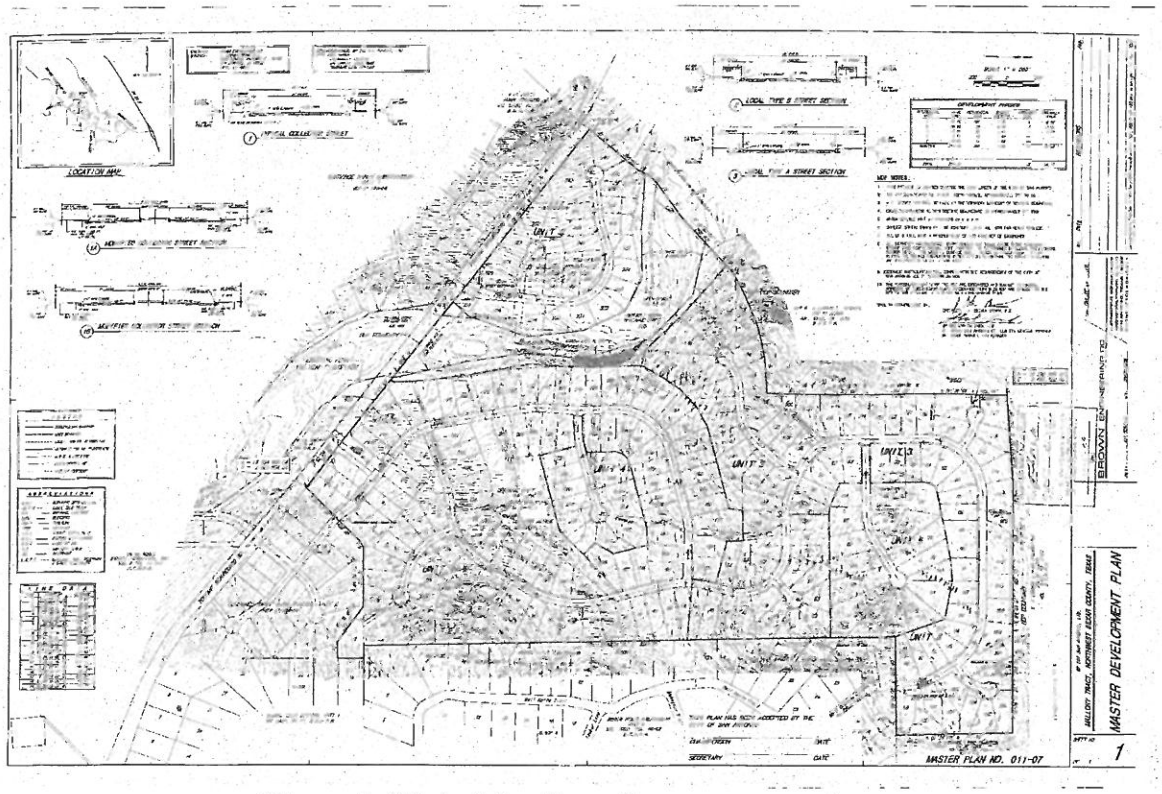

Figure 1. Plat of the Four Seasons property.

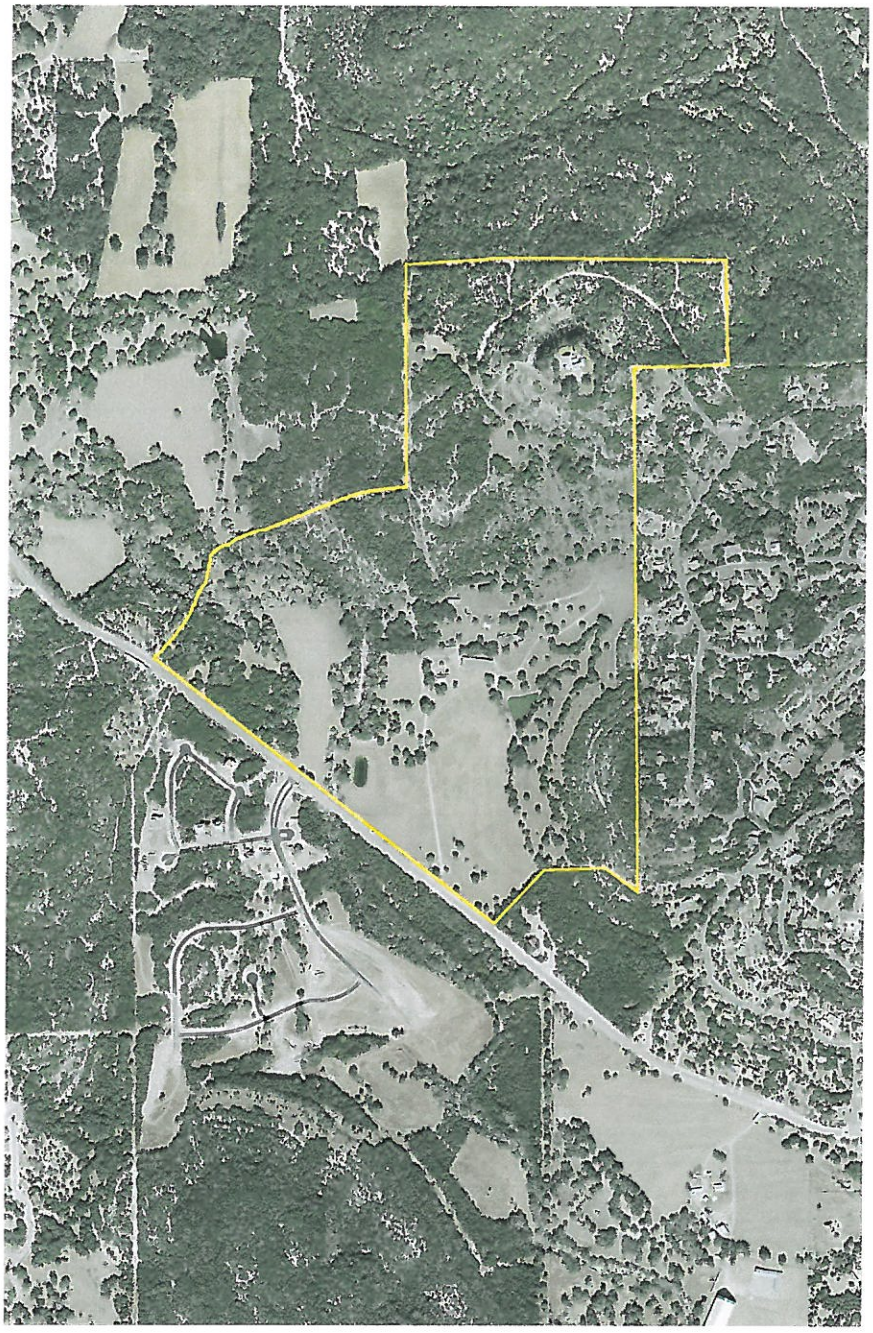

Figure 2. Aerial perspective of the Four Seasons tract showing the mostly open landscape.

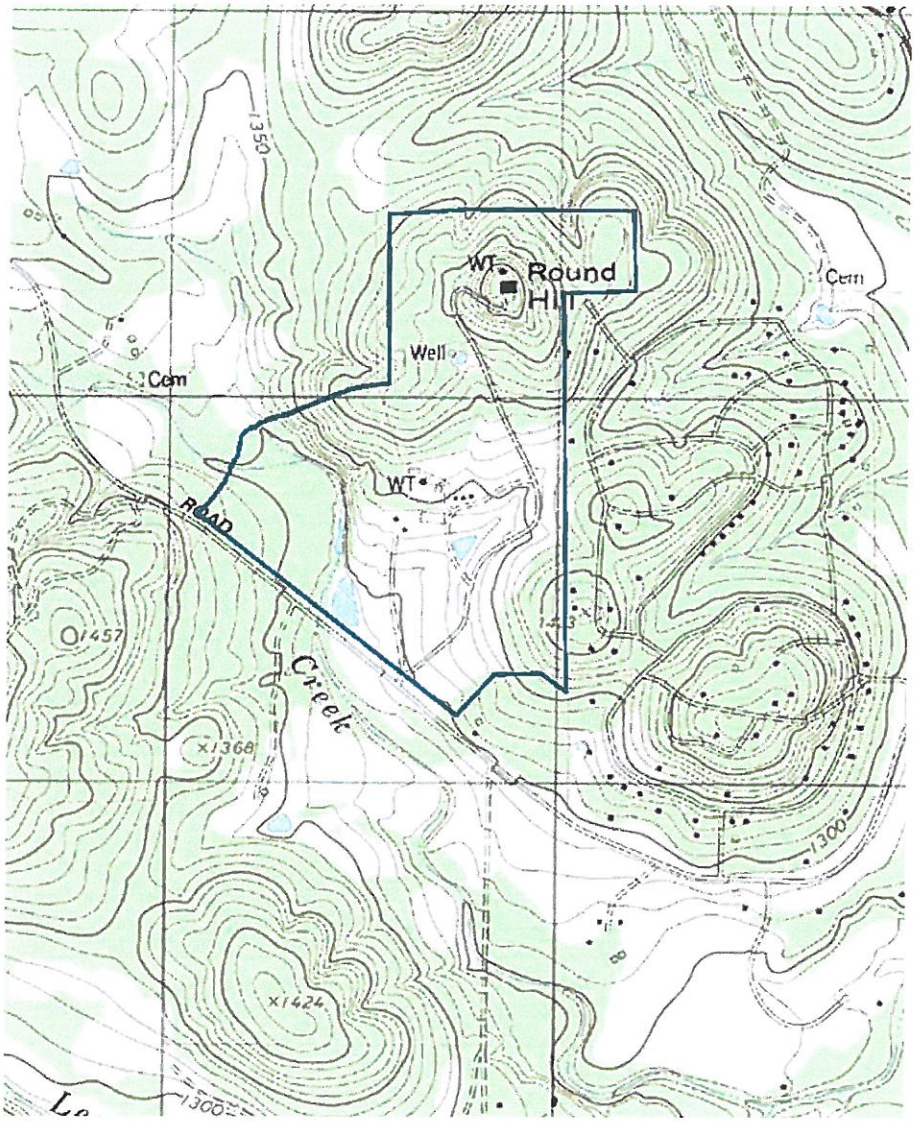

Figure 3. Topographic map showing the location of the Four Seasons tract along the Pecan Creek valley.

Figure 4. Views of the surrounding property from near the top of Round Hill: Top View is to the southwest toward Sundance development; bottom view is toward the east.

Figure 5. Views of the Four Seasons property: Top: Open area west of the Pecan Creek; Bottom: Pond and terrace looking south from the ranch house and toward Toutant Beauregard road.

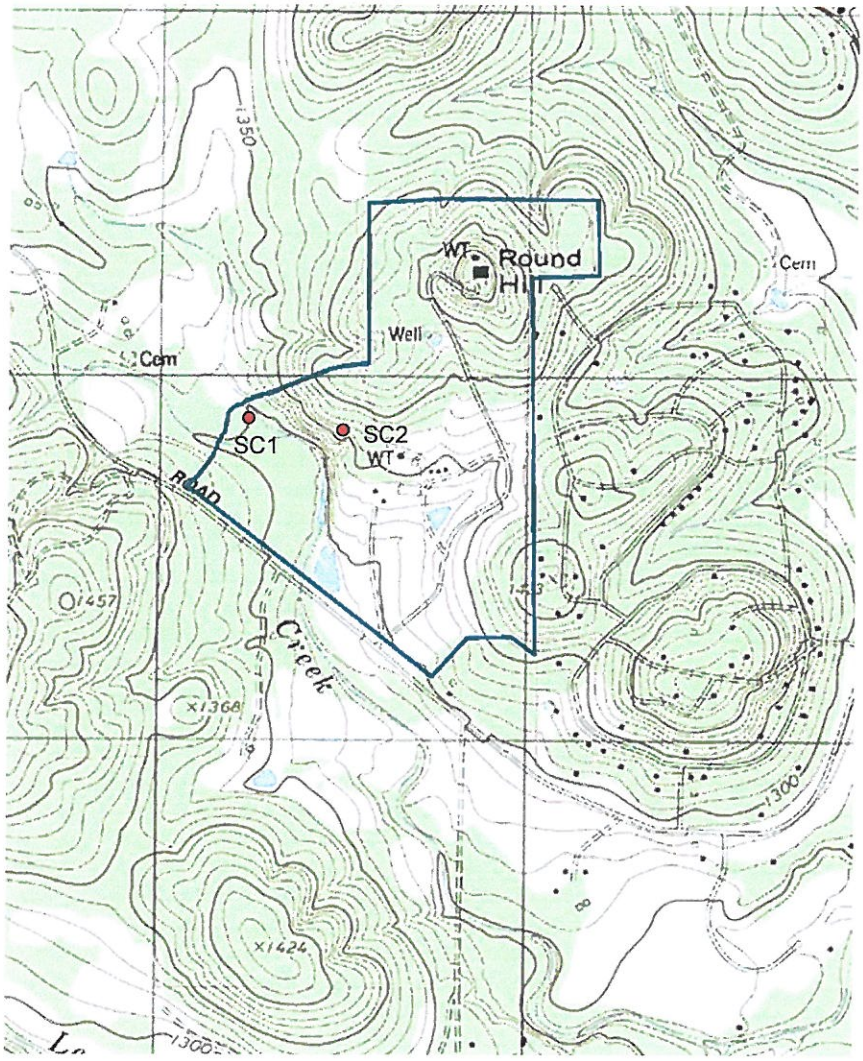

Figure 6. Location of the two historic trash scatters, SC-1 denotes the 1930s era scatter, and SC-2 denotes the 1962+ scatter.

Figure 7. Historic glass and stoneware ceramics from ca. 1930s historic trash scatter.

Figure 8. View of the 1962+ historic trash dump west of the ranch house/barn complex.

Figure 9. Ranch house on the Four Seasons property.

Figure 10. Horse barn and stalls on the Four Seasons property.

Figure 11. View of the water tower and outbuildings at the Four Seasons tract.