

**An Archaeological Survey of the Tuscan Development
Northern Bexar County, Texas**

by

Harry J. Shafer and Thomas R. Hester

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Abstract

On January 4, 2006, Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted a 100% pedestrian archaeological survey of the 4.3 acres in the Tuscany Development. The work was done for Frost Geosciences, of Boerne, Texas, at the request of the City of San Antonio Historic Preservation Office. The project is located along an upland tributary of Lawrence Creek. A significant Edwards chert outcrop was observed on the property and the surface was littered with chert nodules and debris. Evidence for a minor amount of prehistoric resource procurement was observed in the form of tested nodules, cores, and primary flakes. No prolonged quarrying or other prehistoric site activity was observed on the property. It is our assessment that no significant archaeological or historical resources occur within the Tuscany Development project.

Introduction and Background

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted a 100% pedestrian archaeological survey of the 4.3 acres in the Tuscany Development on January 4, 2006. The survey was conducted for Frost Geosciences (Boerne, Texas), at the request of the City of San Antonio Historic Preservation Office. The assessment was carried out in accordance with the "Archaeological Survey Standards for Texas" (Texas Historical Commission) in order to assess the significance of any cultural resources that might be present on the property. Such resources, if found, were to be evaluated as to potential eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places.

The Tuscany property consists of a mixed oak-juniper parkland on the north slope of small tributary of Lawrence Creek (Figs. 1 and 2). The shallow Crawford-Bexar cherty soils (Taylor et al. 1991) contain Edwards limestone outcrops and boulders. A thick seam of Edwards chert outcrops across the property resulting in a surface littered with chert nodules, some up to 30 cm or more across (Fig. 3). Surface visibility varied from good to fair owing to the dry grass cover. Certainly enough surface exposure was sufficient to assess the extent and degree of prehistoric cultural activity.

The survey area lies in an upland landscape at a headwater branch of Lawrence Creek east of Panther Springs creek in northern Bexar County. The major streams of northern Bexar County are spring fed and significant prehistoric archaeological sites occur along each one. For example, the Panther Springs Creek site on Panther Springs creek (41BX228; Black and McGraw 1985), Granberg site on Salado Creek (Schuetz 1966), Pavo Real (41BX52; Collins et al. 2003) on Leon Creek, and 41BX126 (Nickles et al. 1998) and the Chandler Site (41BX708) (McKenzie and Moses 2005) both on Culebra Creek, are major investigated sites along major streams in the northern part of the county. It has also been long known that there are significant outcrops of Edwards chert from the Edwards limestone formation along the fringes of the Edwards Plateau north of FM 1604 (cf. Gerstle et al. 1978:187 ff; Katz 1987:29-30). These provided an abundance of high quality chert (flint) for the production of stone tools. The landscape between major drainages and around headwater streams is often littered in places with chert. These natural outcrops were often utilized to varying degrees as lithic quarries or resource procurement areas throughout the human prehistoric past. Several chert quarries and areas of intensive lithic procurement are located close to the Tuscany Development. These include sites 41BX68 (McGraw and Valdez 1978) and 41BX901 (Potter et al. 1992), both about 4-5 km to the east, along FM 1604. Additionally, sites 41BX299 and 41BX301 are about 1500 meters further east, on Elm Waterhole Creek, and are both documented examples of the quarrying of chert (Katz 1987).

Archaeological Background

Chronological Overview

While there has been little research in the area of the Tuscany Development, more than 1600 archaeological sites have been recorded in Bexar County, including many in north-

central Bexar County. These span 13,000 years of human occupation of the region, from the late Ice Age into the Historic era. The archaeological record has been divided into four major time periods: Paleoindian, Archaic, Late Prehistoric and Historic.

The earliest sites are Paleoindian, beginning around 13,000 years ago. This begins in the late Pleistocene (Ice Age) with the Clovis and Folsom cultures hunting animals that are now largely extinct (mammoth, ground sloth, camel, native horse, large buffalo, etc.). They used distinctive fluted spear tips (Turner and Hester 1993) that can be used to date sites of this era. By 10,000 years ago the climates and landscapes approached those of modern times. The best example of the Paleoindian archaeology is the Pavo Real site (41BX52; Collins et al. 2003), located just south of FM 1604, about 10-11 km west of the survey area.

By 8500 years ago, the Edwards Plateau area had seen a considerable expansion of population, with increasing dependence on plant-food gathering and processing. This period is known as the Archaic and encompasses a broad range of hunter-gatherer cultural patterns that lasted until about 1500 years ago. A major Archaic campsite, 41BX228, has been published by Black and McGraw (1985). It is located on the west site of Panther Springs Creek, roughly 5-6 km south-southwest of the Tuscan Development.

Also seen in the materials from 41BX229 is evidence of the Late Prehistoric, beginning around A.D. 700. This era was marked by the introduction of the bow and arrow. The tiny flint arrow points are easily distinguished from the Archaic spear points of earlier times. With the advent of 17th century Spanish expeditions, and the subsequent establishment of the Spanish missions in San Antonio. Historic sites near the survey area include the Walker Ranch ruins (41BX180; Fox 1979), 5-6 km to the south-southwest, thought to be the remnants of a mission rancho during the 18th century, though there is also evidence of occupation at the site well into the 19th century.

Archaeology in the Survey Area

The Tuscan property lies within the Stone Oak area north of FM1604 and between Blanco Road (on the west) and US 281 (on the east). Several small surveys have been done in this vast area, most of them much later than the extensive clearing, land modification, and development of the 1980s.

Based on data from the Texas Archeological Site Atlas, **no** archaeological sites have been recorded in the Stone Oak area – though certainly there were numerous locales with prehistoric and historic cultural materials prior to development. Thus, the nearest recorded sites are 41BX777, a occupation site along Highway 281 about 2 km to the northeast, 41BX364, a burned rock scatter on Panther Springs Creek, 2 km to the southwest, and in the same area, 41BX363, two small rockshelters (Texas Archeological Site Atlas).

Survey Results

The field survey was conducted by Hester and Shafer of Abasolo Archaeological Consultants and Steve Frost and Marc Haga of Frost GeoSciences. Virtually the entire surface of the project area was littered with chert nodules and debris. The soil mantle was shallow and Edwards limestone outcropped in places as well. No burned rock or burned rock concentrations were observed on the property. Specific attention was focused on the Edwards chert and the extent to which it may have been exploited prehistorically. Traces of utilization were noted in the form of tested nodules and an occasional cortex and secondary cortex flakes (Fig. 4). No concentrations of flakes and cores were observed, however, to suggest a revisited chert quarry. The only chipped stone artifact observed aside from the few flakes and cores was the medial section of a thinned biface, probably a point fragment.

Given the lack of the recording of archaeological resources of any type in the Stone Oak area, and with the opportunity to document an example of chipped stone procurement, we will be submitting data to the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory to record the locale as an archaeological site. The site can be best characterized as a “resource procurement zone” given the fact that the landscape is littered with Edwards chert, and the chert was intermittently exploited in the past as a lithic resource. Because of the limited use of the exposed chert nodules (Fig. 3) and the highly scattered nature of flakes (Fig. 4) and other processed materials, there is little more that can be done to interpret the ancient human activities that took place there. The site is much smaller, and less intensively used, than the quarry sites to the east (e.g., 41BX68, 299, 301 and 901) and it is clearly not of National Register status.

It is our assessment that no significant archaeological or historical resources occur within the Tuscan Development project. No further archaeological work is required.

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Figures

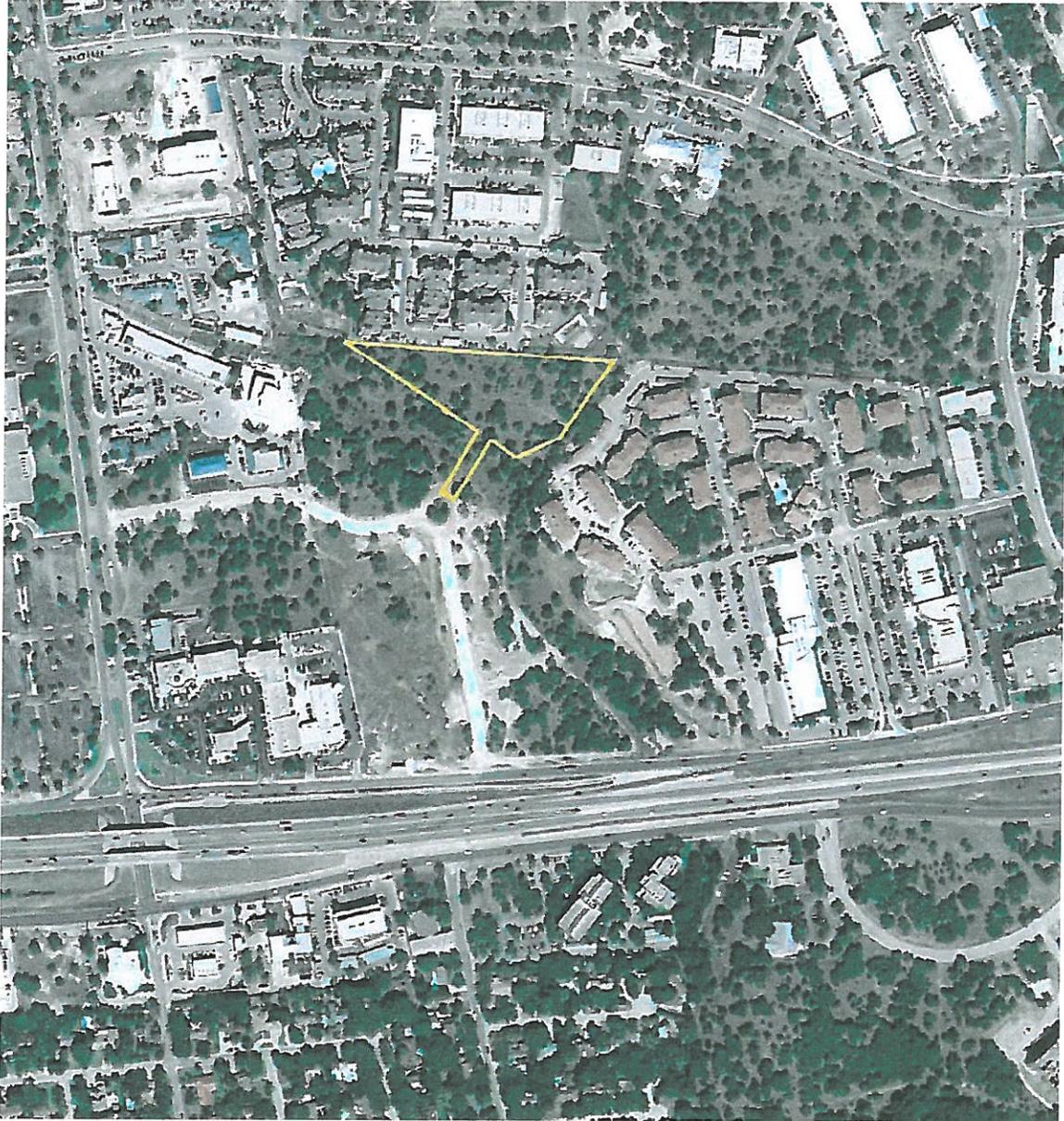


Figure 1. Aerial view of the Tuscany Development project (image provided by Frost GeoSciences).

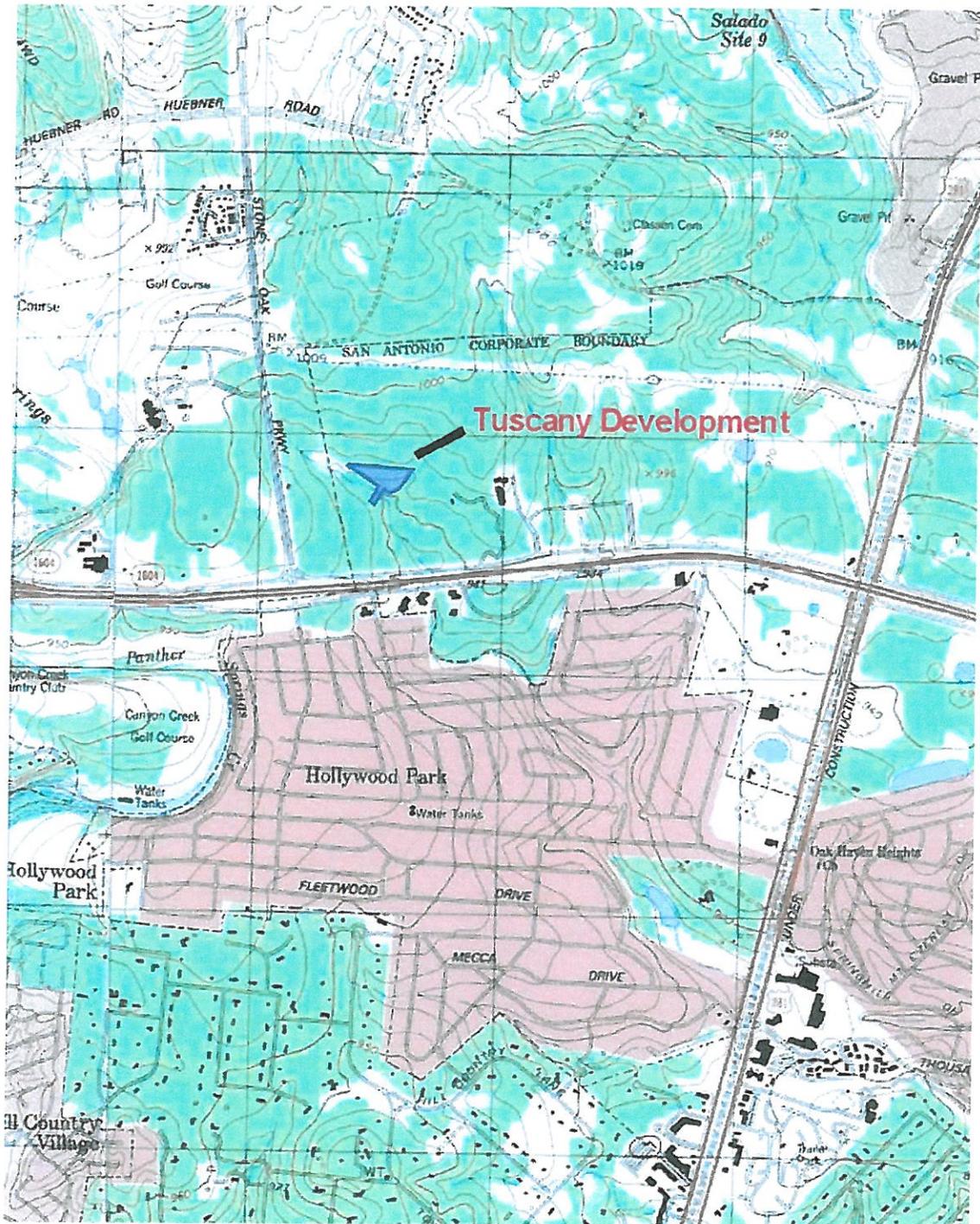


Figure 2. Topographic map showing location of the project (image provided by Frost GeoSciences).



Figure 3. Top: chert and limestone exposures; bottom: large Edwards chert nodules



Figure 4. Core (top) and large primary flake (bottom) provided evidence of prehistoric utilization of the chert outcrop.