

**An Archaeological Survey  
of the  
Villas del Sol Development,  
Southern Bexar County, Texas**

**by**

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**SUBMITTED TO**

**Real Fortune, LTD, Laredo, Texas**

**by**

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### **Abstract**

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted an archeological survey of the 188-acre Villas del Sol development for Real Fortune, LTD, Laredo, Texas. The survey was conducted at the request of the Historic Preservation Office of the City of San Antonio. The Villas del Sol is located on the prairies north of the Medina River in south San Antonio near Highway 281 inside Loop 1604. The survey was carried out to locate and record any archaeological or historical resources on the property and to assess the significance of the cultural resources regarding consideration for nomination to National Register of Historic Places. The assessment consisted of a surface inspection of the entire property. One prehistoric archaeological site, a lithic scatter, was recorded. Other signs of cultural resources include outcrops of Uvalde gravels observed in several locations which were utilized in prehistory as a source for lithic resources, and a 20<sup>th</sup> century trash scatter. None of these cultural resources --the archaeological site, the traces of lithic procurement activities, and the historic trash deposit--meet the criteria for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. No further archaeological work is merited for the Villas del Sol property.

## Introduction

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted an archeological survey of 188 acres slated for the Villas del Sol development. The study was carried out for Real Fortune, Ltd, of Laredo, Texas, at the request of the Historic Preservation Office for the City of San Antonio. The Villas del Sol is located in the prairies south of San Antonio, near Highway 281 and inside Loop 1604. The survey was carried out by a two-person team headed by Harry J. Shafer on November 16 and 17, 2006 to locate and record any archaeological or historical resources on the property and to assess the significance of the cultural resources regarding consideration for nomination to National Register of Historic Places.

Part of the Villas del Sol property is located on the prairies north of the Medina River and the southern part of the property includes terraces of the Medina River system. An abandoned 20<sup>th</sup> century ranch house, with a large swimming pool, remained on the property at the time of the survey (Fig. 3). The house had been stripped of usable materials and illegal dumping is on-going around and behind the house.

The property is also drained by an intermittent stream (see Fig. 1). A small dam associated with an aqueduct constructed of cement blocks is associated with other efforts to manage the run-off water on the farm (Fig 4).

The ground surface in the fallow fields and pastures was extensively disturbed by feral hogs. Their rooting and foraging pattern is ongoing. Soils in the northwest portion of the property west of the creek are Crockett fine sandy loam and in the southwest portion as the where the prairie drops off to the upper Medina River terrace the soils are Houston black clay 0-1% slope. East of the creek the soils are notably different, and consists of Venus clay 0-1% slope and 1-3% slope. The “panhandle” portion of the property in the extreme southeast section where the creek cuts through Medina River terraces is deeply entrenched and is described as “gullied land” (Taylor et al., 1991).

Uvalde gravels are associated with both the Crockett and Venus soils, but not with Houston Black Clay in this section of the property. Prehistoric exploitation of the flint (chert) found in the Uvalde gravels was apparent in several localities and this activity is described in more detail below.

Deep vertical exposures in the “gullied land” portion of the creek bottom provided good opportunities to inspect for buried archaeological deposits in this section of the property. The deep soil profiles did not yield such evidence, but it did reveal possible soil horizons that could correlate with those described for the Richard Beene site. The buried soil horizon marked a layer of calcium carbonate nodules shown in Figure 4 may correlate with the Leon Creek paleosol described by Mandel et al. (2005) at that locality. This paleosol dates to the Middle Holocene or about 4100-4500 BP. One cannot be absolutely sure of this is in fact the Leon Creek paleosol, however, but the circumstances suggest a possible correlation.

## Research Design

The research design called for a 100% pedestrian survey of the property to document any archaeological and historical resources that might encountered. If such resources were encountered, they were to be documented and assessed with regards to their eligibility for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. A no-collecting policy was observed, and artifacts noted were digitally photographed in the field. Locations of any diagnostic artifacts and archaeological sites were to be recorded on appropriate maps. UTM coordinates were to be noted for any archaeological site recorded. The research design also called for four copies of a formal report to be delivered to Real Fortune, LTD, Laredo, Texas, and one copy to the City of San Antonio Historic Preservation Office.

## Archaeological Background

Over the past couple of decades, large-scale archaeological projects as well as smaller-scale surveys have documented dozens of historic and prehistoric sites in south-central Bexar County. This work has been

done along the Medina River drainage, and most work was focused in the Applewhite area to the west of the proposed project area. The area of Villas del Sol property has been farmed for several generations. Other sites, found mostly through cultural resource surveys, are to the southwest and northeast, again recording prehistoric and historic resources (Boyd and Freeman 1990; Shafer and Hester 2004a, 2006b).

Historic Indian groups were often reported along the lower Medina River, some of them later associated with the missions. These include the Payaya documented by Campbell (1975) in the Medina River valley. They appear to have been a population that was native to the region, while some of the other Historic Indian groups, such as the Pampopas, the Pastia, and the Sijame, came to the locality from homelands in Coahuila, having been displaced by Spanish expansion (Hindes 1995). There was also extensive Spanish Colonial ranching activity in this part of the county, known best from the Toyota plant and Applewhite reservoir areas. Nearer the project area, Fox et al. (1978: Fig. 4) have outlined the 18<sup>th</sup> century Juan Montes de Oca land grant east of the San Antonio River. This and other Spanish lands in southern Bexar County were broken up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when German and Anglo-American settlers established farms and ranches in the area.

The archaeological record of southern Bexar County can be tied into the regional cultural framework extending back at least 11,200 years (e.g., Hester 2004). The first occupations occurred in the Paleoindian period during the last part of the Pleistocene, indicated by the occurrence of scattered Clovis and Folsom spear points. Groups were likely small and highly mobile. Clovis peoples (9200 B.C.) hunted Ice Age mammals, such as mammoth, and the later Folsom bands (8800 B.C.) emphasized large, extinct species of bison (buffalo). As modern environments began to emerge around 10,000 years ago, Paleo-Indian peoples were more numerous, and there is widespread evidence of occupation throughout the region. The hunting and gathering patterns of this early time frame, involving modern species of animals and plants, began to be intensified by 8,000 B.C., leading to the development of Archaic cultures. This way of life lasted for thousands of years, reflected by regional specialization and locally distinctive types of projectile points, scrapers, and other stone tools. It was not until about 500 A.D. that changes in this long-lived tradition began to change. The introduction of the bow and arrow marked the beginning of the Late Prehistoric period. For over 10,000 years, the ancient hunters had used the spear and spear thrower as their main weapon, and this began to be replaced by the bow and arrow around 2000 years ago. The most distinctive archaeological indicator is the presence of tiny arrow points, and later, around A.D. 1300, the intensified hunting of buffalo. With the arrival of the Spanish in the region in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the native and displaced Native American peoples of the Historic period began to go into the missions. The raids of invading Lipan Apache bands spurred this transition.

In the immediate vicinity of the Villas del Sol property, relatively few archaeological sites have been documented. Most of the data are derived from cultural resource surveys for various state and federal agencies. Notable examples include the San Antonio 201 Wastewater Treatment Project of the late 1970s (Fox 1977). There have also been surveys in the Braunig Lake area near the present project area. A transmission line survey for City Public Service was done by Galan (1998) near the V. H. Braunig Power Plant and extending west/southwest toward Blue Wing Lake. Seven prehistoric sites were reported, although several of these had been recorded by earlier surveys in the area, in a study funded by City Public Service (e.g., EH&A 1985). A good example is site 41BX686 (41=Texas, BX=Bexar County, 686= unique number of the site) was originally found in 1985. It is described as a "lithic scatter" in the uplands and may have been used as a "quarry" for stone procurement by ancient tool-makers.

Just over a mile downstream from the project area, several sites have been documented on the north side of the Medina River (e.g., 41BX796-800), but no data (other than map plottings) are available from the State Archeological Atlas (Texas Historical Commission).

The most significant archaeological studies along the Medina River have focused on the area proposed for the Applewhite dam and reservoir. This research began with surveys of the region, identifying prehistoric and historic sites (McGraw and Hindes 1987). Subsequently, Texas A&M University archaeologists continued this work, documenting more sites and carrying out excavations. The most important of these is the Richard Beene Site (41BX831) located at the proposed Applewhite reservoir dam site (Thoms and Rolfe 2005). This site yielded a deeply stratified cultural deposits buried in the Medina River terraces

dating from ca. 8800-8600 BP in the deepest component to 1200-500 BP in the latest component. Not only was the stratification of cultural deposits significant, but the stratigraphic study also yielded excellent series of radiocarbon dates correlated with the valley's geomorphology. Ancient soil horizons were identified, data that may be used for future reference for archaeologists working in the Medina River Valley.

Recent acquisition of properties in the Applewhite area in preparation for the Toyota automotive facility led to further field work and historical research by the Center for Archaeological Research at The University of Texas at San Antonio (cf. Greaves et al. 2004). Additionally, one of the sites found south of the Medina River by the Texas A&M University Applewhite surveys was tested by Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (Shafer and Hester 2005). Other Medina River valley sites were excavated by the Southern Texas Archaeological Association, based in San Antonio, during an archaeological field school at a prehistoric site (41BX528) and a Historic ranch site (41BX527) in 1994 (Thoms and Ahr 1995).

## Survey Findings

One archaeological site was recorded during the survey and was temporarily designated as VDS#1 (Figs. 6 and 7). The site is located in the west-central portion of the property at the 512 msl contour line (Fig. 1). The UTM coordinates taken from the western margin of the site next to Highway 281 is: Zone 14, 5515337E, 3236512N; the eastern end of the site is at coordinates 551591E and 3236517N. The archaeological evidence consists of a very thin scatter of artifacts including fire-cracked rock, flakes, a core, a proximal end of an adze-like tool, a Potranco biface (Fig. 8; Shafer and Hester 2006b), and two fragments of grinding stones (Fig. 8). The material was not concentrated and merits a site designation only because of the presence of the several artifacts and apparent campsite activity represented by the fire-cracked rock. There are no Uvalde gravels at this location, and therefore all chipped stone material was brought to the site where it was reduced or discarded. There is no way to estimate the age or ages of the occupation. Hog activity was extensive which provided ample opportunities to view what lies beneath the surface. Soils on the site are Houston black clay and the transition to Crockett fine sandy loam occurs just north of the site. No further archaeological attention is merited for this site.

Traces of prehistoric cultural activity were also found in several areas of the property but in no case were these concentrated to the extent of yielding more than one artifact per five meter square. The most apparent evidence of such activity was the infrequent quarrying of Uvalde gravel exposures (see Figs. 1 and 9) noted on the west side of the creek along the northern property line, and along the east side of the creek where Uvalde gravels are exposed along the prairie slopes. The evidence consisted of an occasional cortex or partial cortex flake removed by hard-hammer percussion and cores (Fig. 10) from which such flakes were removed. No diagnostic artifacts other than a single sequent flake (Fig. 10) were observed in any of the Uvalde outcrops. The quarry activity was not frequent enough to justify archaeological site designation.

A thin scatter of 20<sup>th</sup> century historic trash consisting of stoneware potsherds, glass shards, and pieces of tin cans were noted on the prairie slope in the northeast part of the survey area (Fig 1). The USGS map identifies a house near the location of the trash (UTM 14 552089E, 3236934N), but no structural evidence such as old cisterns, foundations, or other evidence of an old farmstead was present. Cattle pens, stock tank, and posts from a barn that has since been removed were located nearby along the northeastern property line.

In addition, a single stoneware transfer print rim sherd identified as Davenport 1794-1887 (Pollan et al., 1996: 41) was recovered east of the house in an fallow field badly churned by feral hogs. Further inspection of the lone find failed to yield any additional ceramics or indication of early 19<sup>th</sup> century occupation

## Summary and Recommendations

The archaeological survey of the Villas del Sol property yielded traces of prehistoric landscape use and one archaeological site. The property was once a farm-ranch complex with a now-abandoned large 20<sup>th</sup> century ranch house with a swimming pool. The prehistoric archaeological site, given the temporary designation of VDS#1, is a very light lithic scatter consisting of fragments of burned rock, an occasional flake and artifact, including two chipped stone tools (a Potranco biface and the proximal end of a small adze-like tool), and two ground stone artifacts. None of the cultural resources merit consideration of the recorded site for nomination to the National Register of Historic places, and no further archaeological work is recommended.

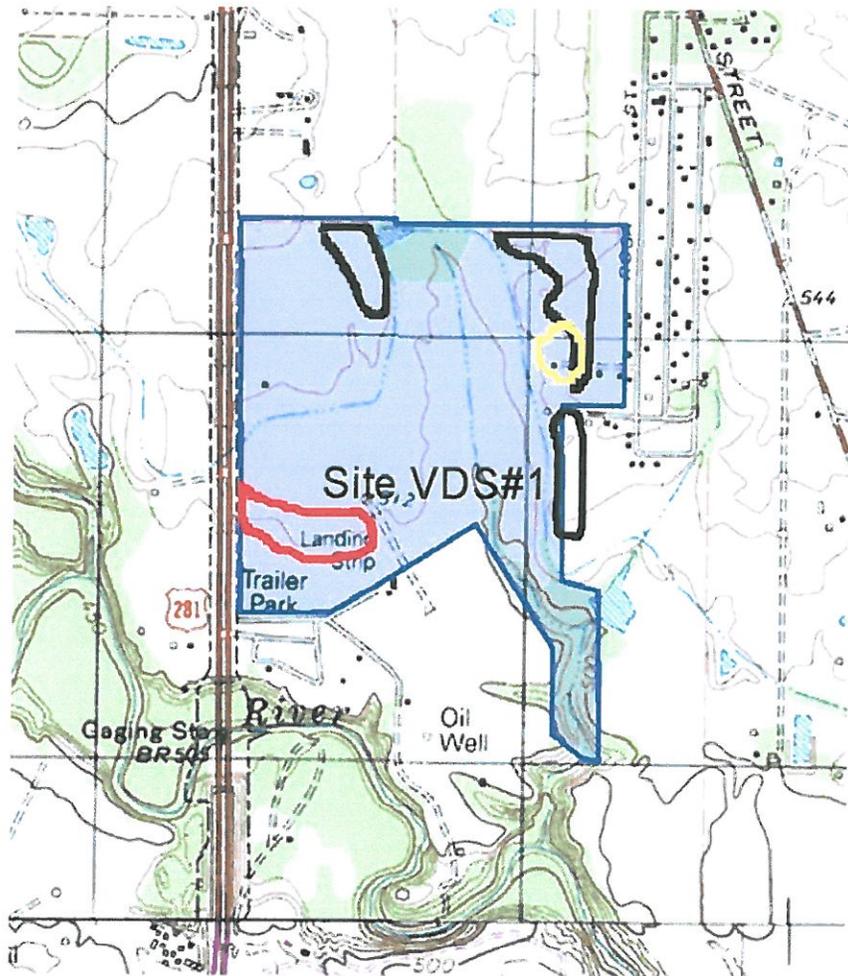
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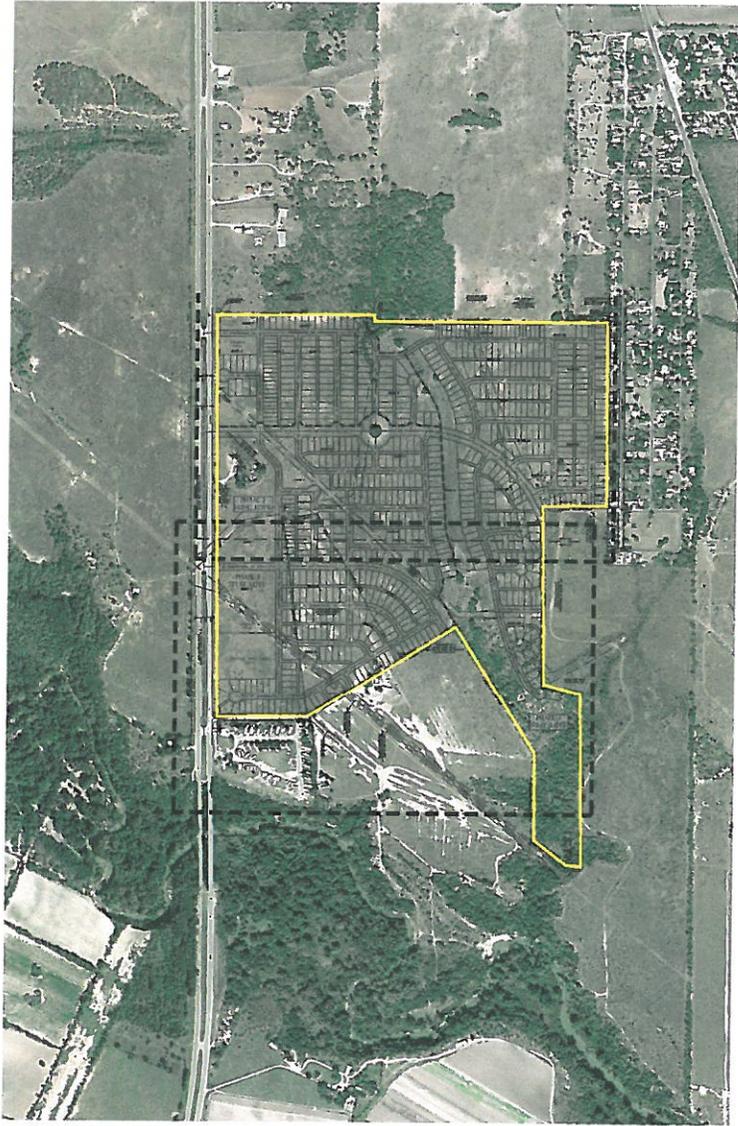
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## Figures



**Figure 1. Topographic map of the Villas del Sol property and locations for Site VDS#1 (red), Uvalde gravel outcrops (black), and 20<sup>th</sup> century trash scatter (yellow). Base map provided by Steve Frost of Frost GeoSciences.**



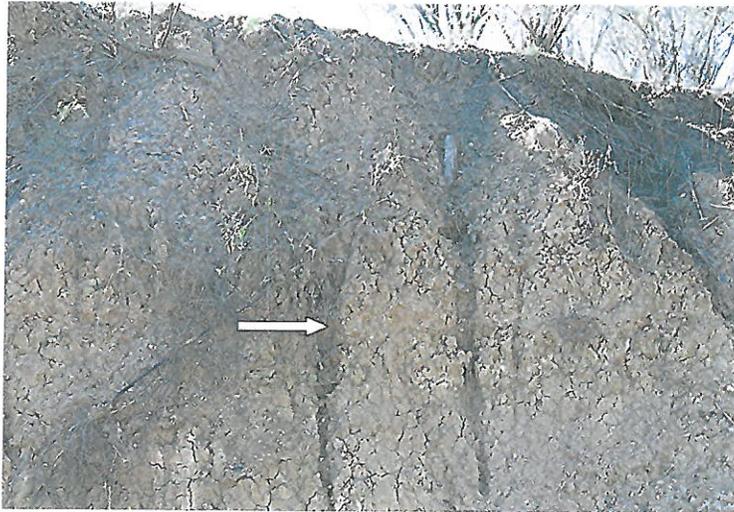
**Figure 2. Aerial map with Villas del Sol plat superimposed.  
Graphic provided by Frost GeoSciences.**



**Figure 3. Twentieth century ranch house on the Villas del Sol property.**



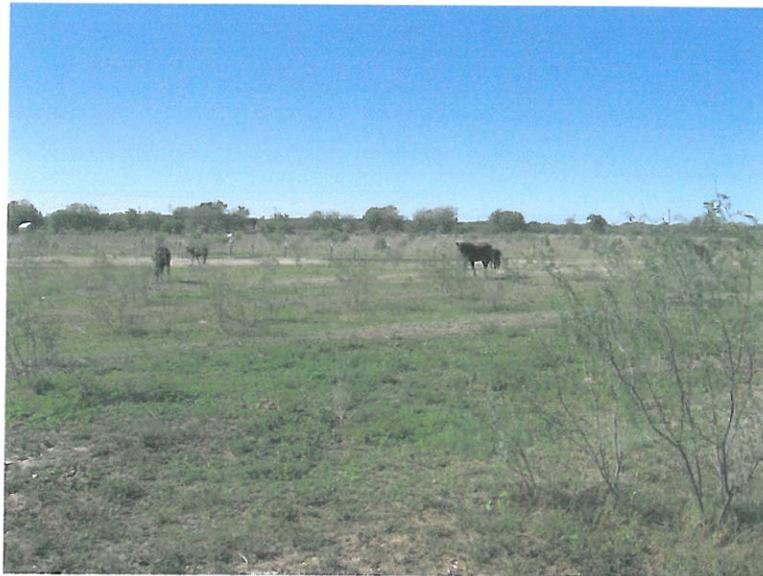
**Figure 4. Concrete block aqueduct associated with a catchment dam and other water management features on the north side of Villas del Sol property.**



**Figure 5. Deep soil exposure in the southern portion of survey area reveals a soil horizon (arrow) that possibly correlates with the Leon Creek paleosol at the Richard Beene locality.**



**Figure 6. Surface view of Site VDS#1 looking north. The Crockett sandy loam -Houston black clay soil transition occurs on the site.**



**Figure 7. View looking west across Site VDS#1.**



**Figure 8. Potranco biface (left) and fragment of sandstone grinding slab (right) from Site VDS#1.**



**Figure 9. Eroded sandy loam exposing Uvalde gravels in northwestern portion of the Villas del Sol property. Chert flakes and cores attest to prehistoric uses of this outcrop.**



**Figure 10. Core (left) and sequent flake (right) were observed associated with limited prehistoric quarry activity in the Uvalde gravel outcrops.**