

Intensive Survey (Shovel Testing) Associated with the Anticipated Construction of a Bus Shelter at Travis Park, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

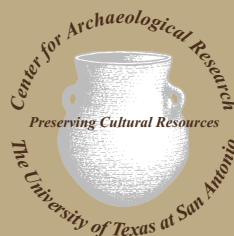
by
Preston Beecher and Antonia Figueroa

Principal Investigator
Steve A. Tomka



Texas Antiquities Permit No. 6781

Prepared for:
VIA Metropolitan Transit
1720 North Flores Street
San Antonio, Texas 78212



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Technical Report, No. 56

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Abstract:

In February 2014, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) conducted a pedestrian survey and shovel tests in anticipation of proposed improvements to Travis Park by VIA Metropolitan Transit Authority. This project is partially funded by the Federal Transit Administration through the Department of Transportation, and, therefore, it falls under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act as revised in 1999/2000 and codified in 36 CFR 800. The City of San Antonio acquired Travis Park in the early 1870s, and the project falls under Chapter 35 of the City of San Antonio's Unified Development Code, prohibiting subsurface disturbances within historically significant properties. This archaeological work was conducted under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 6781, with Dr. Steve Tomka serving as the Principal Investigator.

These improvements to Travis Park include the construction of a new bus shelter on the north side of the park. The construction will affect an area measuring roughly 12 meters by 4.5 meters. Pedestrian survey and shovel testing were conducted to test for cultural deposits that could potentially be impacted by the proposed improvements. The surface was examined, and five shovel tests were excavated to determine if cultural deposits existed beneath the surface. No historic or prehistoric items were seen on the surface. Shovel testing revealed that the deposits were disturbed down to depths below 60 cm. As the VIA bus stop construction is not to surpass 60 cm below the surface, the construction will impact only disturbed deposits that have little or no research value. Consequently, no additional archaeological investigation is recommended within the project area.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In February of 2014, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) conducted a pedestrian survey and shovel test excavations at Travis Park, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. This archaeological work was conducted under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 6781 with Dr. Steve Tomka serving as Principal Investigator. The project area is shown on the San Antonio East USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle map (Figure 1-1). The project Area of Potential Effect (APE) consisted of a small tract of land measuring approximately 10 meters by 20 meters in the northwest section of Travis Park near the corner of Pecan and Navarro Streets. The location is shown in Figure 1-2, identified by the red outline. The project APE is positioned just south of the original location of the San Antonio River, before channelization. The San Antonio River would have provided abundant resources for prehistoric peoples to exploit, including flint for tool making, water for irrigation, and wood for building fires and structures. These two elements suggest that the project APE is within a high probability zone for historic and prehistoric cultural deposits. Pedestrian survey and shovel tests were conducted to test for cultural deposits that could potentially be impacted by the proposed improvements.

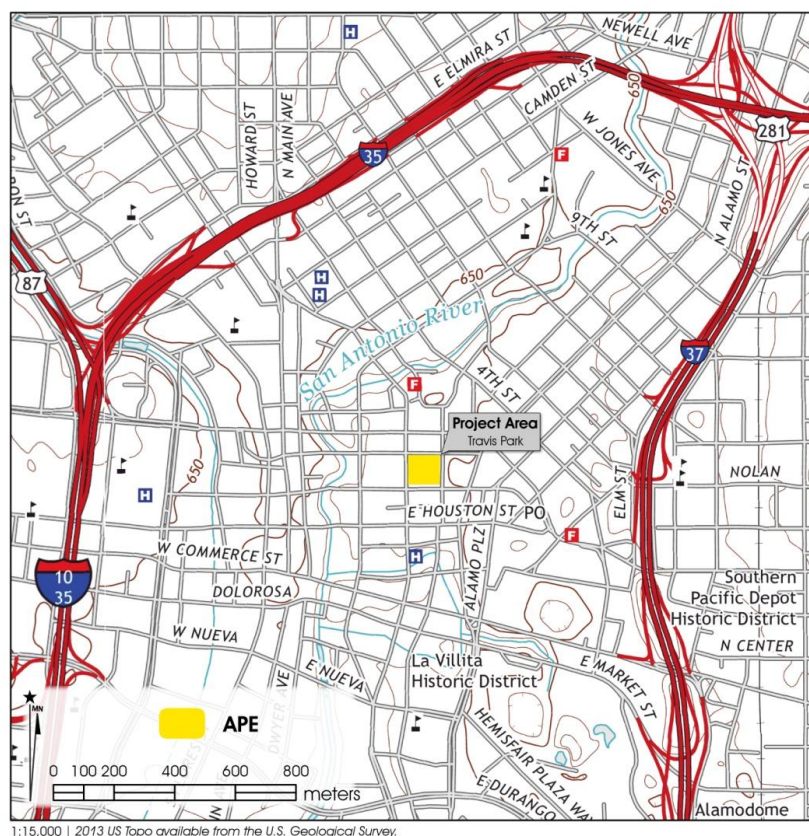


Figure 1-1. Travis Park on the San Antonio East USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle map.



Figure 1-2. Travis Park, showing the project area (red square, upper left).

These improvements include the construction of a new bus shelter on the north side of the park. The construction will affect an area measuring roughly 12 meters by 4.5 meters. Impacts are anticipated to be no deeper than 60 cm below the surface (cmbs). This project is partially funded by the Federal Transit Administration through the Department of Transportation. Because of this funding, the project falls under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act as revised in 1999/2000 and codified in 36 CFR 800. Additionally, the project also falls under Chapter 35 of the City of San Antonio's Unified Development Code, prohibiting subsurface disturbances within historically significant properties.

The impacts associated with the planned VIA improvements will center on the construction of a new covered bus stop facility, and the removal of two existing shelter facilities, and their replacement with the new shelter designs to foster uniformity of design and appearance. The planned facility is to be erected along Pecan Street, while both shelters that will be demolished and replaced are located on Navarro Street. The new construction will require the removal of some of the existing blocks of stone that form the boundaries of the park and their replacement with stones of a slightly different, but complementary and compatible, design.

Chapter 2: Background

Prior to the fieldwork background research was conducted using the Texas Historical Commission (THC) Sites Atlas Database, Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, and the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) previous project database. For a background review on Travis Park see Figueroa and Beecher 2014. During the Spanish Colonial Period, the property that later became the park was part of Mission San Antonio de Valero's lands, but after the full secularization of the mission, the lands were divided among the resident neophytes (de la Teja 1999). Eventually, the land was purchased by Samuel Maverick who deeded the tract to the City in 1870, and shortly thereafter, Travis Park, one of the oldest municipal parks in the country, was established (City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation [COSAOHP] 2013). Numerous historically significant properties are present in the neighborhoods surrounding the park. They include St. Mark's Episcopal Church north of the park, the St. Anthony Hotel to the south, and the Burr Building and Scottish Rite Cathedral east of the park. In addition, the San Antonio National Register District is found southwest of the park, and the Alamo Plaza Historic District occupies a large area just southeast of the park. During this research two historic properties were noted within the vicinity of the APE that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The two properties listed on the NRHP are summarized in the following paragraphs.

The St. Anthony Hotel is located on Travis Street on the south side of Travis Park. The construction of this ten-story, masonry and steel-frame structure began in 1909 with the building of Tower One (THC 2014). During the Depression in the 1930s, Ralph W. Morrison purchased the building and began a million dollar renovation on the hotel. This renovation work was finished in 1935, and a fourth and final tower was subsequently added in 1941, completing the complex. The St. Anthony Hotel is reported to be the first fully air-conditioned hotel in the world (COSAOHP 2013).

St. Mark's Episcopal Church is located on Pecan Street on the north side of Travis Park. The construction of this church began in December of 1859, but it was put on hold due to the Civil War (THC 2014). The final construction work of the church began in 1873 and was finished in 1875. The architect, Richard Upjohn, was a nationally known architect, who also worked on the Trinity Church in New York City. This structure is significant not only because of its age and its architect, but also because it is a great example of the style (Gothic Revival) and period (THC 2014).

Chapter 3: Field and Laboratory Methods

The CAR hand-excavated five shovel tests within the area that will be disturbed by the installation of the new bus shelter along Pecan Street. The APE measures roughly 10 meters by 20 meters in maximum dimension. The goal of these units were to determine whether buried cultural deposits are present within the upper 60-80 cm of matrix.

The shovel tests were 30 cm in diameter and were excavated in 10-cm levels to depths ranging from 20 cmbs to 100 cmbs. In four of the five shovel tests, the excavations were terminated when electrical lines or roots were encountered. Shovel test 5 was excavated to a terminal depth of 100 cmbs. All matrix removed from each level of each unit was screened through ¼-inch hardware cloth, and all artifacts were retained by their appropriate provenience in plastic bags with appropriate temporary tags. A standardized shovel test form was completed for each excavated unit. The properly completed form retained information related to the terminal depth of the shovel test, types of artifacts recovered in each level, and the characteristics of the strata that were excavated. Photographs were taken of representative shovel tests for documentation and reporting purposes.

Only a small amount of material was recovered from the shovel tests. This material and all project related records generated during this project were prepared in accordance with 36 CFR part 79 and THC requirements for State Held-in-Trust collections. Additionally, the materials were curated in accordance with current guidelines of CAR. Artifacts were stored in archival-quality bags with acid-free labels documenting a provenience and corresponding lot number. All artifacts were stored in acid-free boxes. Digital photographs were printed on acid-free paper, labeled with archivally appropriate materials, and placed in archival-quality sleeves. All field forms were completed with pencil. Field notes, forms, photographs, and drawings were printed on acid-free paper, placed in archival folders, and stored in acid-free boxes. A copy of this letter report and all computer media pertaining to the investigation were stored in an archival box and curated with the field notes and documents.

Subsequent to proper analyses and quantification, artifacts associated with this project possessing little scientific value will be discarded pursuant to Chapter 26.27(g)(2) of the Antiquities Code of Texas. On the current project, modern material, along with all soil samples, were discarded. This material was documented and counts included in curation documentation. Discarded materials were disposed of using suitable procedures. Upon completion of the project, all remaining materials and records were submitted to the CAR for permanent storage.

Chapter 4: Survey Results

In February 2014 the CAR conducted an archaeological survey along with shovel testing at Travis Park, located in downtown San Antonio. The surface of the APE was examined for artifacts prior to shovel testing. Although modern trash and debris were present on the surface, no artifacts were discovered. Photos were taken to document the buildings surrounding the park, and a standing structure survey is planned to address the Section 106 requirements of the project.

Following the surface inspection, five shovel tests (STs) were excavated within the APE. Figure 4-1 shows the location of these excavations, and Table 4-1 summarizes the results for shovel tests. As discussed subsequently, STs 1 and 2 were abandoned soon after they were begun as electrical lines were encountered. A small quantity of soil was removed from each level and was analyzed in the CAR laboratory. Figure 4-2 shows examples of STs 1, 2, 3, and 4.

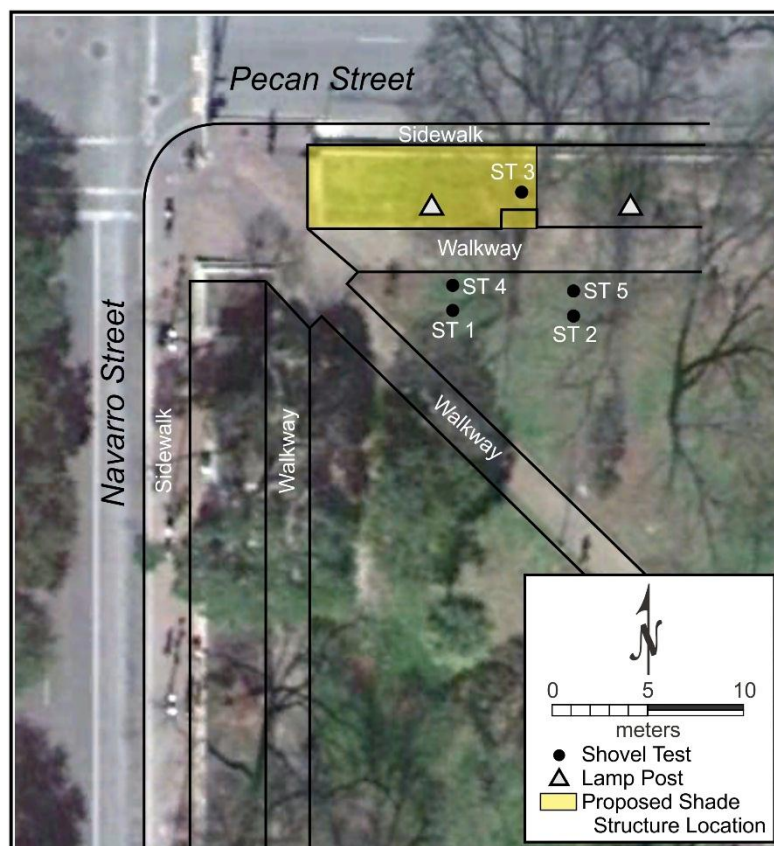


Figure 4-1. APE, with shovel tests.

Table 4-1. Results from Shovel Testing

ST	Terminal Depth	Cultural Material	Depth of Cultural Material	Reason for Termination
1	20 cmbs	none	none	electrical line
2	20 cmbs	none	none	electrical line
3	35 cmbs	none	none	root
4	55 cmbs	glass (n=1), metal (5.8g)	40-50 cmbs; 50-60 cmbs	root
5	100 cmbs	bone (1.5g), metal (0.5g), debitage (n=1)	60-70 cmbs; 80-90 cmbs	end of shovel test



Figure 4-2. Shovel Tests 1, 2, 3, and 4 at termination.

Shovel tests 1 and 2 were located just south of the walkway within the APE (Figure 4-1). Both STs were excavated to a depth of about 20 cmbs. The initial 20 cm was highly disturbed, with mottled soils present. Electrical wires were discovered in both tests at roughly 20 cmbs. The excavation did not damage the wire, and these shovel tests were abandoned (Figure 4-2, top row). Two new shovel tests (STs 4 and 5) were initiated roughly 50 cm to the north, though still on the south side of the walkway. CAR excavated the third test (ST 3) on the north side of the walkway. Each of these deeper shovel tests is described below (see Table 4-1).

Shovel Test 3

This shovel test was excavated to a terminal depth of 35 cmbs. Disturbance found near the surface of STs 1 and 2 were present in this unit. Levels 1-3 (0-30 cmbs) contain modern trash, but no historic or pre-historic materials were present. In Level 4 (30-40 cmbs), the soil changes to a dark brown clay loam with about five percent degraded carbonates. This stratigraphy remains consistent in STs 4 and 5. The shovel test was terminated at 35 cmbs due to a large root (Figure 4-2, bottom left).

Shovel Test 4

This shovel test was excavated to a terminal depth of 55 cmbs. The construction of the nearby footpath had disturbed the matrix to a depth of about 38 cmbs. Within this zone were multiple layers of construction fill, including sand and gravel, capped by a layer of soil used for modern landscaping. At about 30 cmbs, a modern PVC pipe was discovered in this sand and gravel matrix (Figure 4-2, lower right). Below 38 cmbs the soil changes to a dark brown clay loam. A piece of yellow glass was found in Level 5 (40-50 cmbs), and an unidentified piece of metal was found in Level 6 (50-55 cmbs). Though the soil in Levels 5 and 6 did not appear disturbed, presence of these modern artifacts confirms that construction impacts reached the terminal depth of the shovel tests. A large root was encountered at 55 cmbs, and the shovel test was terminated.

Shovel Test 5

This shovel test was excavated to a terminal depth of 100 cmbs. The excavation revealed a high degree of disturbance to a depth of about 40 cmbs. The disturbance consisted of sand and gravel, as well as modern trash. At approximately 40 cmbs, the soil changed to a dark brown clay loam with about five percent degraded carbonates. This soil remained homogenous until about 80 cmbs, when a mottled (tan and dark brown) soil appeared (see Table 4-1). In Level 7 (60-70 cmbs), a small amount of animal bone was recovered (total weight of 1.4 g). Due to the small size and degraded condition of the bone, the species could not be identified. In Level 9 (80-90 cmbs), a small piece of debitage and a small unidentifiable

piece of metal were recovered. The presence of historic metal and pre-historic debitage in the same provenience and in combination with mottled soils indicate that the deposits are disturbed.

Chapter 5: Summary and Recommendations

In February of 2014, the CAR conducted a pedestrian survey along with shovel testing at Travis Park. Proposed improvements include the construction of a new bus shelter on the north side of the park. The construction will affect an area measuring roughly 12 meters by 4.5 meters. Impacts are anticipated to be down to no deeper than 60 cmbs. The five shovel tests excavated for the project revealed extensive disturbances caused by multiple construction projects within the park. These disturbances, which reach to a minimum depth of 100 cmbs, have likely impacted the area's archaeological potential. Following a review of the data obtained during the shovel testing and based on the fact that the VIA bus stop construction is not to surpass 60 cm below the current surface, the construction will impact only disturbed deposits with little or no research value. Because of this, no additional archaeological investigation is recommended within the APE. As mentioned earlier, however, the standing structure survey will be carried out to assess the visual impact of the proposed construction on nearby properties.

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