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Archaeological Survey of Proposed Portage Park, Portage, Michigan

Personnel:

Principal Investigator: Robert G. Kingsley, M.A., Research Associate

Introduction:

On July 8, 1977, an archaeological survey was conducted at the request of Mr. Patrick L. Loeprich of the City of Portage, Michigan. The survey involved inspection of an area where the proposed Portage Park will be located; attention focused on the locating of historic or prehistoric sites in the area to be impacted.

Previous Research:

Three Public Archaeology surveys have been conducted in the immediate project area by Western Michigan University. Two surveys within the confines of the Kalamazoo Municipal Airport have been done by Mr. Marvin Keller, then Research Associate, Department of Anthropology, WMU. The areas surveyed lie 1-2 mi east of the present project area. Keller also conducted a survey about 1/2 mi south of the area. Neither of these surveys yielded sites of historic or prehistoric significance. Keller's reports on these projects are on file at the Michigan History Division in Lansing and at the Department of Anthropology, WMU.

Two known archaeological sites are located within 2-3 mi of the present project area. The first lies 1/2 mi north of the area. This site is known as 20 KZ 30, and occupies the NE 1/4, Sec. 3, Portage Twp. The site is of unknown cultural affiliation. The second site lies in or near the Kalamazoo Municipal Airport property, Sec. 1 and 2, Portage Twp. This site, known as Indian Fields, is reputed to be an historic Pottawatamie village and burial ground; the site is enigmatic in that Keller's airport survey failed to locate it, though historical records inspected by Keller indicated that at least the burial area of the site was located on airport property. The village area may lie somewhat further to the east. At any rate, for purposes of this project Indian Fields, although as yet not accurately located, lies east of the project area, and not in it. It should also be pointed out that the USGS Portage Quadrangle map indicates a location for the Indian Fields cemetery west of the airport and east of the present project area. This location seems to be erroneous.

Procedures:

Prior to fieldwork, the archaeological site files at the Department of Anthropology, WMU, were inspected to determine the location of any known sites in the immediate area. These two sites are discussed above. The Reports, field notes and historical data compiled by Keller in the course of his 3 surveys were also examined.

Actual fieldwork was conducted on July 8 and consisted of systemic transect survey. In addition to surface reconnaissance, subsurface test probes were placed in the proposed impact area at about 10-20 yd intervals. Probes were dug down to glacial till and/or clay.

Description of Survey Area:

The parcel surveyed, consisting of 8-10 acres, is located in the NW 1/4, NE 1/4, Sec. 10, Portage Twp., Kalamazoo Co., Michigan. Railroad tracks border the parcel on the west and Portage Creek borders it on the east. The eastern approximate 1/2, that nearest the creek, was quite wet; transects were run west-east, and no transect ever made it to the creek due to swamp. Much of this area was not presently inundated and was dry, but the presence of rushes and cattails indicates that this area floods each spring. Generally, all land lower than 845' MSL appears to be annually inundated.

The western 1/2 of the area does not flood each spring. This area, however, showed evidence of much previous disturbance. There was absolutely no topsoil in this area; glacial sand, till, and gravels were exposed. Much recent debris was observed here, e.g. assorted metal fragments, poured cement slabs, piled and in situ asphalt, and general grading, plowing, and displacement of large trees. It is evident that a large structure once occupied this site and has been destroyed. A dirt road follows the railroad line at the western edge of the parcel, and it appears that this building once was located next to this road. The asphalt may have been a parking lot. The building itself seems to have been quite large, as the presence of large concrete foundations was noted.

Sites Recorded:

No historic or prehistoric sites of any significance were discovered by this survey. The undisturbed area of this parcel seems to be swampy and inundated annually. The dry part of the area has been highly disturbed by what appears to have been the construction and subsequent destruction of a large building. It seems unlikely that this building would be of historical significance, since it appears to be of modern origin.

Recommendations:

The area surveyed, as pointed out to me by Mr. Patrick L. Loeprich of the City of Portage, does not contain prehistoric or historic archaeological sites of such significance as to warrant mitigation. Thus, I can recommend that the Portage Park project proceed as planned.

Prepared and submitted by:

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RGK:jw