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50-An Archaeological Survey of the Proposed Oakview Estates Site in New Buffalo, Michigan

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DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF INVESTIGATIONS NO. 50
1982

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE PROPOSED
OAKVIEW ESTATES SITE IN NEW BUFFALO, MICHIGAN

William M. Cremin

Prepared for:

Donlon-Lofgren-Maenhout and Associates,
Architects, Inc., Mishawaka, Indiana

INTRODUCTION:

With receipt of a signed and dated (26 Aug 82) contract from Mr. Steven M. Davenport of Donlon-Lofgren-Maenhout and Associates, Architects, Inc., Mishawaka, Indiana, authorizing Phase I archaeological evaluation of the proposed Oakview Estates site in New Buffalo, Michigan, a research team from Western Michigan University undertook on-site investigation of the property in order to determine whether planned work relating to the construction of a residential complex would impact cultural resources. There follows a report of field-work conducted on 29 Aug 82, together with appropriate background information and recommendations derived from the team's research.

PROJECT PERSONNEL:

Principal Investigator - William M. Cremin, Ph.D., Associate
Professor of Anthropology, WMU

Field Assistant - R. David Hoxie, M.A., WMU (now on
the Staff of American Resources Group,
Carbondale, Illinois)

DESCRIPTION OF THE PARCEL EVALUATED:

The research area of this study comprises one hectare (2.475 acres) in the extreme SE corner of Section 3, New Buffalo Township, T8S R21W, Berrien County, Michigan (Map 1). The parcel fronts on US-12 just east of the community of

New Buffalo and overlooks the Galien River Valley to the north and west. The landform on which the site is located has a maximum elevation above sea level of 196.2 m, and it is approximately 16 m above the river floodplain commencing less than 300 m away (Map 2).

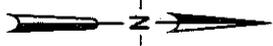
This parcel has experienced considerable disturbance in recent years. Impacts are especially evident in the central portion where there is located an abandoned asphalt and concrete racetrack complex presumably used by "go-carts" or some other small engine-powered vehicles. Elsewhere in the parcel there exists evidence of land leveling and filling and some harvesting of marketable timber. All of these activities have left their mark on the landscape.

While grasses and weedy annuals dominate the area about the track and access path, the northern and western portions of the property still support some mature trees and very dense undergrowth. The present canopy bears little similarity to the oak-hickory forest cover that formerly dominated the uplands flanking the Lower Galien. Climax vegetation is now represented by only a scattering of hickories and scrub oaks. Rather, a mixture of small hardwoods, together with stems of sassafras, locust and sumac, prevails. And a hedge-row consisting of gnarled stems densely matted with grapevines crosses the parcel just before the surface rather abruptly drops off toward the floodplain below the site.

Soils of a sandy consistency predominate throughout. Where machine scraping has not exposed the sandy subsoil, a thin veneer of silt loam ranging in depth from 13-24 cm overlies the thick deposits of sand. In one small area

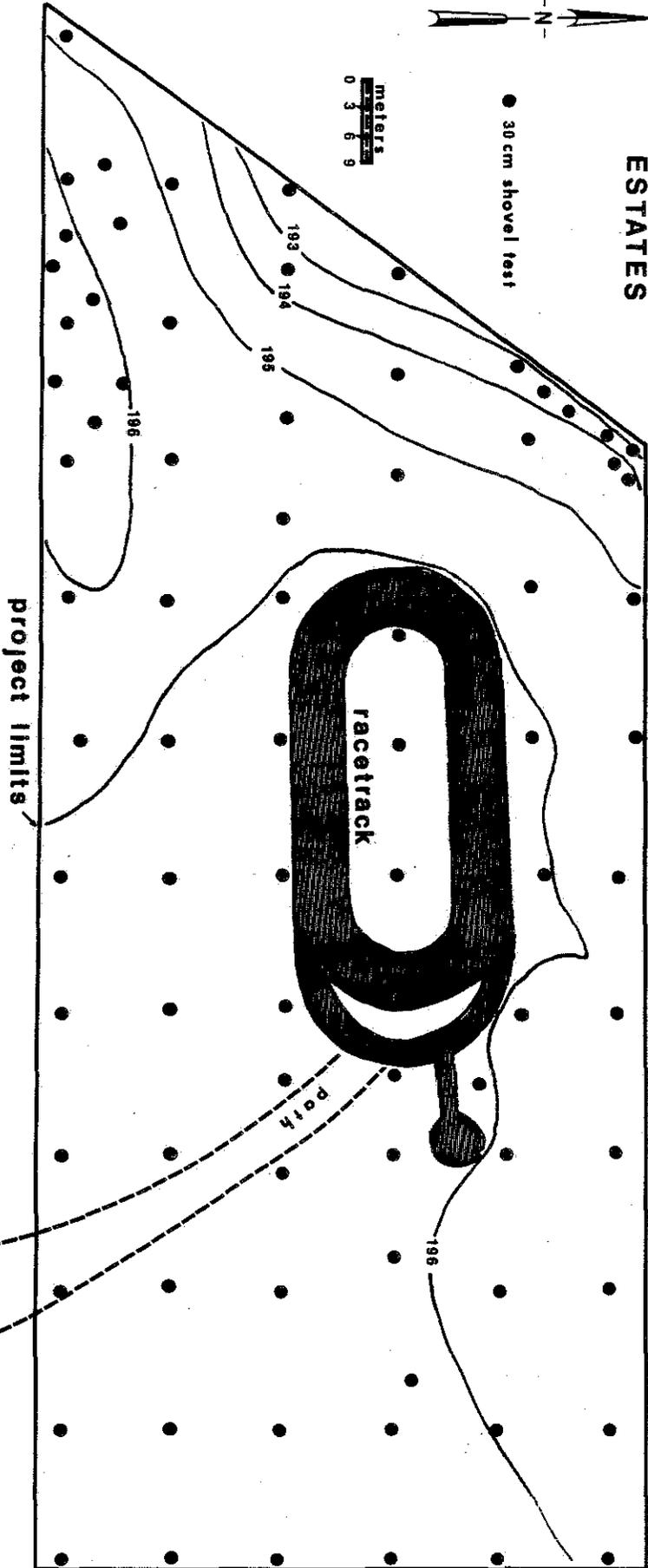
MAP 2

OAKVIEW ESTATES



● 30 cm shovel test

meters
0 3 6 9



Westbound US-12



SE corner of
Section 3

immediately east of the racetrack it would appear that water was formerly ponded. Here, the survey team observed the soil to be quite clayey and compacted. And the remnant vegetation consisted of several herbaceous species common to wetland plant associations.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH:

A literature and documents search and examination of the state site files revealed the presence of three archaeological sites in the vicinity of the project area. These are: 20BE52 - Center of Section 3; 20BE346 - SW 1/4, SW 1/4 of Section 3; and 20BE282 - NW 1/4, NE 1/4 of Section 3.

According to Mangold (1981), who has recently published on his survey and excavation efforts in the Galien River Basin, this is a potentially rich archaeological zone. He briefly summarizes what is known of the mid 19th century excavation of the group of three mounds (20BE52) on the Quantrell Farm and then discusses his own testing of 20BE282 located on the sandy peninsula lying between Lake Michigan and the Galien River. This latter site is but a short distance from the location of the mound group and also evidences Woodland components. He postulates that the occupation of the habitation site is, at least in part, related to the burial component at the Quantrell Mounds (1981: 36).

Importantly, both sites lie NW of and immediately across the valley from Oakview Estates. Formerly, the lower course of the Galien, for a distance of about 3.2 km above its mouth at New Buffalo, was the location of "Lake Pottawattamie". Occupying the intervening floodplain from valley margin to

valley margin, this body of water was observed at the time of initial Euro-American settlement to have supported dense stands of wild rice and teemed with waterfowl (Ellis 1880: 270). If it is reasonable to postulate that the resource potential of this lake was a factor in attracting prehistoric populations to the Lower Galien Valley (and possibly responsible in part for the two aforementioned Woodland sites being located on the lake shoreline), it is certainly feasible to anticipate that the well drained landform on which Oakview Estates is to be situated might yield valuable archaeological information.

FIELD PROCEDURES:

Inasmuch as ground surface visibility across the parcel to be surveyed was almost nil, the team relied on shovel testing procedures to evaluate it. The property was systematically traversed from east to west along six transects spaced 12 m apart, with shovel tests being placed along each line of survey at intervals of 15 m. Additionally, in the NW and SW corners of the parcel where the ground surface suggested only minimal disturbance, a number of more closely spaced shovel tests were established. In aggregate, 81 shovel tests, ranging in depth from 40-100 cm, were placed along the six transects. Their approximate locations are shown on Map 2. These shovel tests, together with careful examination of all bare spots, erosional cuts, and tracks created by the passage of vehicles, provided ample opportunity to examine the parcel for the presence of potentially significant cultural material.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY:

Despite a very systematic and intensive program of subsurface testing, surveyors were unable to detect even the slightest indications of human activity in the form of cultural remains during evaluation of the parcel. Not a single item was recovered from shovel tests, and the only object observed on the surface was a bottle of recent vintage. Recent evidence of human presence consisted entirely of activity related to the racetrack, land leveling and filling operations, and the harvesting of timber.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Given the location of this parcel with respect to potentially resource rich "Lake Pottawattamie" and two previously recorded Woodland period archaeological sites flanking the lake shoreline opposite the Oakview Estates site, it was most reasonable to anticipate that an archaeological site might occupy the pronounced landform where the property in question is located. Be that as it may, our thorough Phase I evaluation of this parcel clearly indicates that potentially significant cultural resources are not present. Therefore, it is recommended that archaeological clearance be given to the proposed Oakview Estates project and construction activity be permitted to proceed as planned.

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