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Phase I Archaeological Survey of the Tanners Ridge Resort area, Sodus Township, Michigan

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I. Project Inception

The Tanner's Ridge archaeological survey was carried out at the request of Mr. Warren Burke, following a series of telephone conversations and correspondence with the Bureau of History, Michigan Department of State, during the summer and fall of 1987. The author's prior archaeological work (Garland 1984) in the immediate vicinity of the planned resort area suggested the high probability of prehistoric sites at this locale, particularly at elevations above the 100 year flood line.

Following a reconnaissance on December 4 to ascertain visibility and plan the survey, the field work was carried out on December 13 and 14, 1987 by Elizabeth B. Garland (Ph.D.) and Lawrence G. Dorothy (M.A.), Department of Anthropology, Western Michigan University.

II. Location and Potential Archaeological Significance of the Project Area

The proposed Tanner's Ridge Resort development is located on some 88 acres of the St. Joseph River flood plain in Sections 34 and 35, T5S, R18W, (Figure 1). The Stover Site (20BE307) is situated on the bluff above the survey area, while the Rock Hearth site (20BE306) is located on the flood plain on the opposite (south) side of the St. Joseph, a short distance upstream.

The stratified, multi-component Rock Hearth site occupies a low, rounded knoll at ~602-603 feet A.S.L., 2 or 3 feet above the 100 year flood line, which is 601.5 feet at this location. (Garland 1984, Garland

and Mangold 1980:89). The Wymer site knolls (20BE132) are some 6 feet higher and are located at a greater distance from the existing river channel. The USGS topographic map of the Tanners Ridge project area indicates that the south end of the planned development is above 600 feet and that several "knolls" situated further to the north likewise rise above 600 feet. These elevations were deemed to be particularly site-sensitive and, as shown at Rock Hearth, the potential exists for stratigraphic separation of components in such a flood plain context. This potential for stratigraphy, as well as the sheer density of known sites in the project vicinity (Figure 1) combined to make the Tanners Ridge survey one of unusual interest.

III. Surface Survey Procedures

Topography varies within the 88 acre Tanners Ridge survey area, all of which is under cultivation. For reference purposes the survey universe was divided into 5 units, designated Areas 1-5 (Figure 2). There is an overall drop in elevation of about 2.5 feet from south to north. Area 1 is just above 600 feet and a recently surveyed elevation of 597.5 is designated near the river in Area 2-A. The terrain also slopes generally downward from west to east, i.e. from the river toward the bluff, with the lowest elevations occurring just below the bluff where a spring fed stream flows northward and is drained back to the river via a ditch which marks the north end of the project area. Woods occupy the low eastern margin of the flood plain nearest the bluff.

Area 5 is extremely level, lacking any discernable relief. The terrain in Area 4 begins to undulate in long east-west swells or ridges several feet in height, with the highest points just below 600 feet,

according to recent transit survey work by a private firm and the developers themselves. (Surface elevations in Figure 2 were provided by the developers). This uneven topography continues into Area 3 where the ridges are closer together and their orientation is more varied, but having general east-west trend. North of Area 3 the topography again levels out with no discernable relief other than a gradual downward slope toward the bluff.

Area 1 and 3 were fallow in 1987 but had been turned this fall. Surface visibility averaged 15-20% in these two areas. Visibility in the corn fields, Areas 2, 4, and 5, was generally obscured by chopped corn stalks. However, in certain rows up to 50% of the surface could be observed. We routinely shifted a row or two in order to maintain optimum visibility on a given traverse. Overall surface visibility was fair to moderately good when evaluated in comparison to typical pedestrian survey conditions in this region.

It was possible to survey at normal walking speed, since the great uniformity of soil texture and color over the entire project area insured that any variation would be readily apparent. The soil association is Landes Variant Silt Loam (66A), dark brown in color. White gastropod shell fragments were readily visible on the surface, and it is quite certain that the local medium to light gray cherts would have been equally easy to detect. The most significant negative finding of this survey is that not one flake of chert was observed.

A portion of Area 1 (approximately 4-6 acres) had been previously surveyed under excellent visibility conditions by the author during the US-31 project. No evidence of cultural activity was noted at that time. Accordingly, we elected to start this survey at the north end of the universe.

We commenced the survey walking 5 rows apart, about a 4m interval, and maintained this distance over Area 1 and Area 2B. Nothing of cultural origin was observed in these areas. We then doubled the interval to 8 m over Area 2-A, which included the downward gradient toward the bluff comprising the less likely area for prehistoric site location.

Area 3, characterized by a series of ridges and swales, was surveyed judgmentally rather than by transect intervals. We examined ridge tops and slopes and gave less attention to the swales.

In Area 4, which contained fewer and more regular ridges and swales, we returned to systematic survey intervals of 8 meters (10 rows apart).

Surface survey of Areas 4 and 5 was carried out on the second day, during and after excavation of the backhoe trenches. With a winter storm impending in the late afternoon of that day, and with survey evidence non-significant up to that point we gave relatively cursory attention to Area 5. We walked east to west from bluff to river at 40 row (32 meter) intervals completing 4 transects over the southern portion of Area 1. The remaining one-third of Area 1 nearest the access road was not surveyed, except for the roadway itself. In view of the author's prior examination of Area 5 mentioned above, threatening weather conditions, and the totally negative evidence from the south portion of the area, curtailment of survey at this juncture was deemed appropriate.

IV. Cultural Evidence (see Figure 2 for locations)

A total of four culturally modified objects were recovered in the course of survey as listed below:

Area 1	none
Area 2A	none
Area 2B	1 fire-cracked rock
Area 3	1 fire-cracked rock 1 battered cobble 1 mano
Area 4	none
Area 5	none

The FCR in Area 2B was an isolated find; a careful surface search revealed nothing else in the vicinity. The north end of Trench 5 intersected the find spot; no cultural disturbance was observed in the profile of this trench.

Two of the artifacts in Area 3 were found in relatively close association. We flagged a battered cobble (an undoubted artifact) and an FCR spall about 14 meters apart. Despite careful search, nothing further was located in the vicinity. Trench 3 was emplaced connecting the two find spots, again with negative results.

A mano with a single well-smoothed surface was an isolated find in Area 3 some 100 meters south of Trench 3.

V. Trenches

It was recognized at the outset of the survey that backhoe trenching would be necessary, the number and placement of trenches to be determined

by surface evidence and topography. At the end of the first day of survey we designated 6 trench locations. These were excavated with a backhoe the following day as surface survey continued. Additional trenches could have been dug, but nothing developed during the second day of survey which warranted further excavation.

The trenches are located on Figure 2. Trenches 1-3 were about 14 meters in length; Trenches 4-7 were about 8 meters long. All were dug to a depth of 1 meter below surface except the south end of Trench 1, which was excavated to 1.5 meters.

Trench profiles were so similar that only one is illustrated here (Figure 3). The humus-plow zone layer was thicker (up to 30 cm) in the more northerly trenches and there was some evidence of recent surface deposition in Trench 6, perhaps from deepening the natural depression at this location designated by the developers as the "first channel".

Trench 1 was placed in the flat terrain at the south (higher) end of the project area. Trench 2 intersected the south slope and top of a large east-west ridge. Trench 3 was located in a flat area connecting two artifact find spots. Trench 4 transected a prominent ridge in Area 3. Trenches 5 and 6 were emplaced on either side of a natural depression. As noted above the specific location of Trench 6 intersects an FCR find-spot.

Emplaced using the criteria of topography and surface cultural evidence, none of these trenches revealed any evidence of aboriginal occupation.

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

The extremely sparse surface evidence for prehistoric activity of any kind; the total absence of chippage or sherds which would signal occupation, however short term; and the negative results of trenching combine to support the conclusion that the flood plain at the Tanners Ridge locale was never the scene of prehistoric activity of any duration or intensity.

The area may have witnessed episodic hunting. It would have been unsurprising to find a projectile point, although we did not. Prehistoric use of this area seems to have been for limited extractive tasks the nature of which is indeterminate from the evidence recovered.

In my view, the primary reason for the absence of sites in the project area is its low elevation. The highest elevations along this entire stretch of flood plain are at or just marginally above or below the gradient of the 100 year flood line. There are no rounded knolls which rise 2 feet or more feet above the flood line, such as occur on the opposite side of the river at the Rock Hearth site and vicinity. The highest elevations are either flat areas with no visible relief such as Area 5, or linear ridges which in the northern part of Area 3 are rather narrow and steep-sided, not land forms for which a practiced eye would predict occupation.

The highest probability ^{for sites} would have been the broad undulating swale and ridge topography in the vicinity of Trenches 2 and 3, and indeed 3 items of our meager surface evidence came from this general vicinity. However the negative results of trenching and the complete absence of chippage or sherds on the surface support the conclusion that the Tanners Ridge survey area does not contain significant archaeological remains. It is recommended that the development project should proceed as planned.

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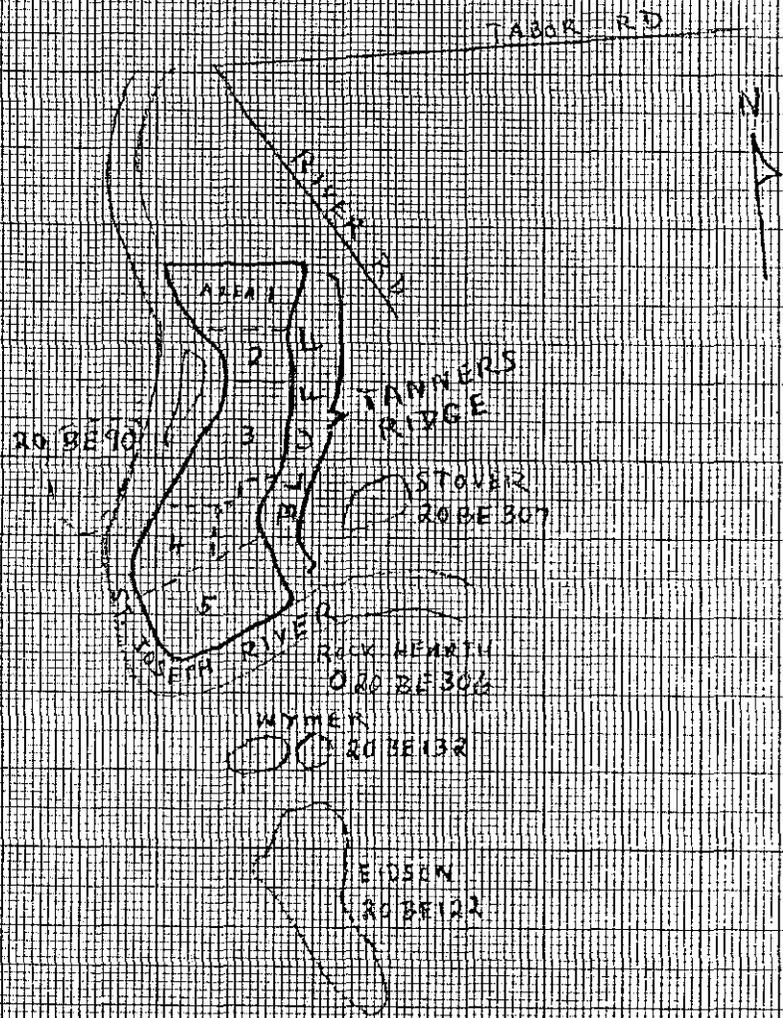


FIGURE 1. LOCATION OF TANNERS RIDGE SURVEY
 SODUS TOWNSHIP, BERRIEN CO., MICHIGAN
 (USGS BASE MAP)

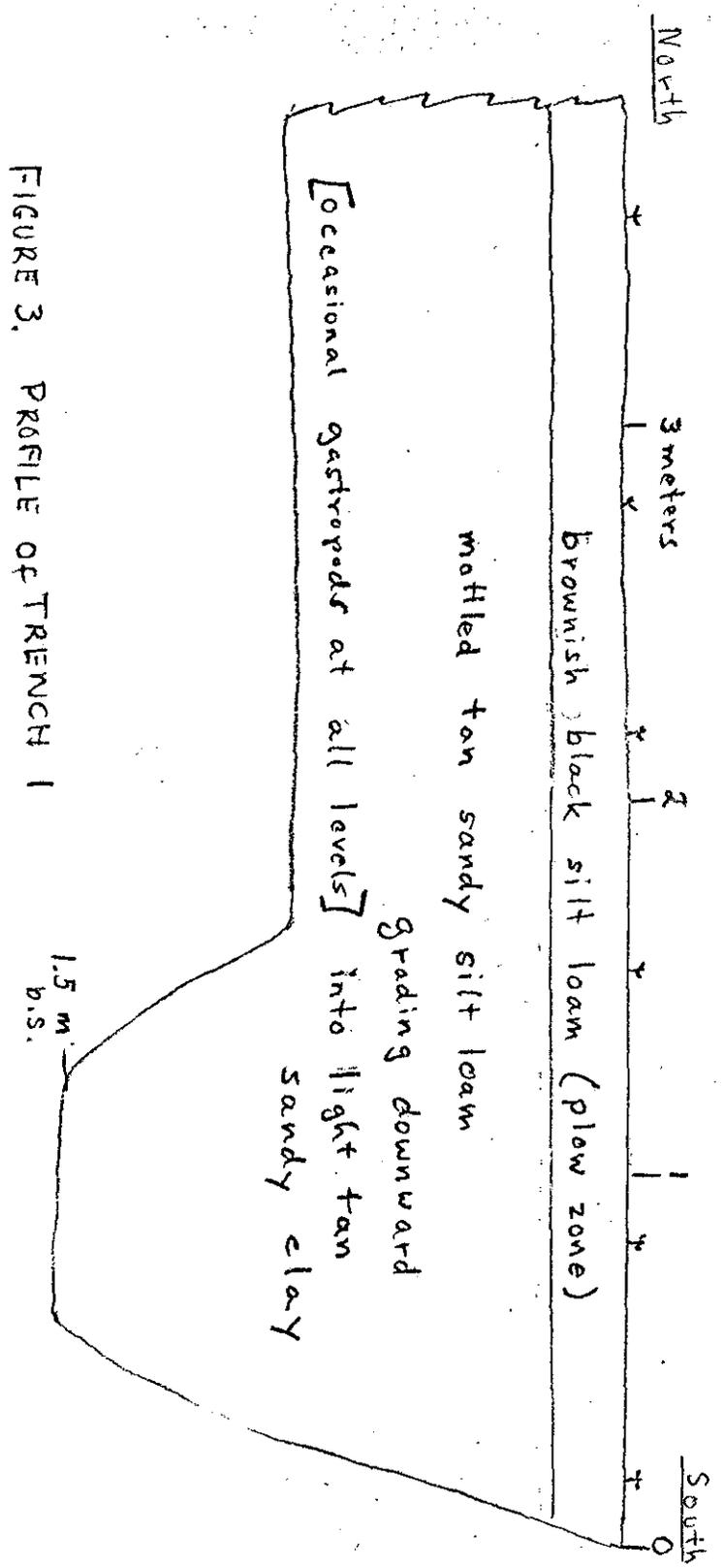


FIGURE 3. PROFILE OF TRENCH 1