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105-Phase I Archaeological Assessment of the Coldbrook ADA Upgrade, Coldbrook Park, Kalamazoo County, Michigan (ER-940188)

William M. Cremin
Western Michigan University

Arthur Desjardins
Western Michigan University

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF INVESTIGATIONS NO. 105

1994

PHASE I ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE COLDBROOK ADA UPGRADE, COLDBROOK PARK, KALAMAZOO COUNTY, MICHIGAN (ER-940188)

WILLIAM M. CREMIN

ARTHUR DES JARDINS

A Report of Research
Conducted on Behalf of:

Department of Parks and Recreation
County of Kalamazoo
2900 Lake Street
Kalamazoo, MI 49001

INTRODUCTION:

On 16 Jul 94, authorization (P.O. #35356) was received from the Office of County Controller for a Phase I archaeological survey of the proposed ADA upgrade at Coldbrook Park in Section 34 of Charleston Township (T2S R9W), Kalamazoo County, Michigan. A literature and site file search was initiated, and on 18 Jul on-site evaluation of the project area was undertaken in order to determine whether the proposed construction activity would adversely impact potentially significant archaeological resources.

Inasmuch as a grant application to fund the proposed construction activity was pending, and the results of our research were entirely negative, our recommendation in support of upgrading access to camping, picnic, playground, and fishing facilities for all visitors to the park was forwarded by letter dated 20 Jul to Dr. John Halsey, State Archaeologist, Bureau of Michigan History (with a copy to the County of Kalamazoo). There follows a report of our program of research providing the basis for that recommendation, together with a restatement of our professional opinion that the proposed upgrade of facilities at the park **will not** have an adverse impact on archaeological resources of any sort.

PROJECT PERSONNEL:

Principal Investigator	-	Dr. William M. Cremin, Professor of Anthropology, WMU and Owner, W.M. Cremin Consulting of Kalamazoo, MI
Field Supervisor	-	Mr. Arthur Des Jardins, Graduate Student in Anthropology, WMU
Field Assistant	-	Mr. John Weaver, Senior major in Anthropology, WMU

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT AREA:

The research area of this study occupies 3-4 acres of 275 acre Coldbrook Park located in the NW 1/4 and W 1/4 of the NE 1/4 of Section 34 and extending very slightly into the SE 1/4, SE 1/4 of the SW 1/4 of Section 27, Charleston Township (T2S R9W), Kalamazoo County, Michigan (Figure 1). It is surrounded by water on three sides; namely, Portage, Long, and Blue lakes. These interconnected bodies of water aggregate 160 acres of the park and, together with a smaller unnamed lake lying to the south and entirely outside park boundaries, give rise to Portage River, a tributary of the St.

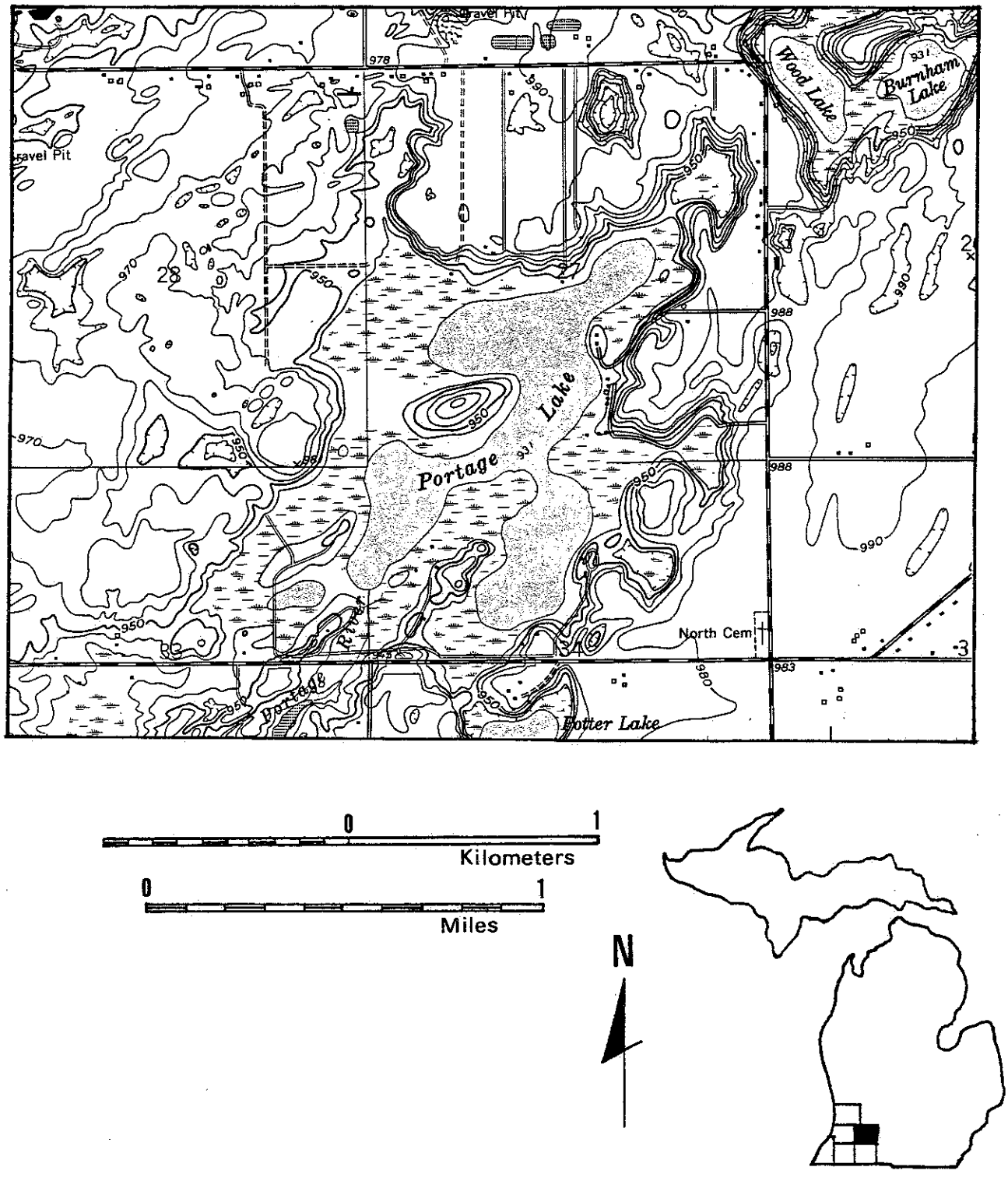

Figure 1: The general area about Coldbrook Park in Charleston Township, Kalamazoo County, Michigan.

Joseph River.

The park exhibits considerable topographic variability and is for the most part characterized by well drained sandy loams occupying 6-18% slopes. Prominent vegetation includes cattails in wetland areas flanking lakes, various herbacious and shrubby plants tolerant of a seasonally fluctuating water table on lower slopes, and mature native hardwoods (oak, hickory, maple, black cherry) and introduced conifers at higher elevations. Of course, much of the area is today given over to grasses and mowed (Austin 1979; Cosby 1994).

The relevant U.S.G.S. quadrangle sheet shows the area of immediate concern to occupy wetlands flanking Portage Lake at an elevation of between 931-950 ft ASL (Figures 1 & 2). Evidence of landfilling in the area was noted by the survey team during shovel testing, and this observation was later confirmed in conversation with park maintenance personnel who acknowledged that some raising and leveling had been undertaken to facilitate lawn care, especially in the spring when the water table in the study area is higher.

PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE GENERAL AREA:

No archaeological sites have ever been reported for the study area. Furthermore, no information has been found which indicates that Coldbrook Park has even been the subject of an archaeological study of any sort! Be that as it may, the headwaters area of the Portage River (including the lakes comprising much of this park) certainly deserve attention given the number of sites recorded by WMU survey teams downstream of the headwaters in recent years (Cremin et al. 1982; 1984).

Our review of the literature and state site files has revealed that unconfirmed burial mounds, earthworks, and garden beds have been reported for Sections 27 & 29 in Charleston Township and Sections 1, 2 & 3 in nearby Climax Township (see Cremin and DeFant 1987 for a thorough review of these historical references).

PROJECT FIELD PROCEDURES:

The experienced two-person survey crew quickly surmised that walkover procedures would not prove useful in examining the area of proposed impact and opted instead for intensive and systematic shovel testing along transects to achieve the desired coverage. Using an old well casing near the extant restroom as datum, a 10m grid was projected over the area. As surveyors traversed the project area along north-south transects spaced 10m apart, 30cm shovel tests were excavated at intervals of 20m along each line of survey. The intervals between tests were deliberately offset by 10m along adjacent survey transects, resulting in the staggered

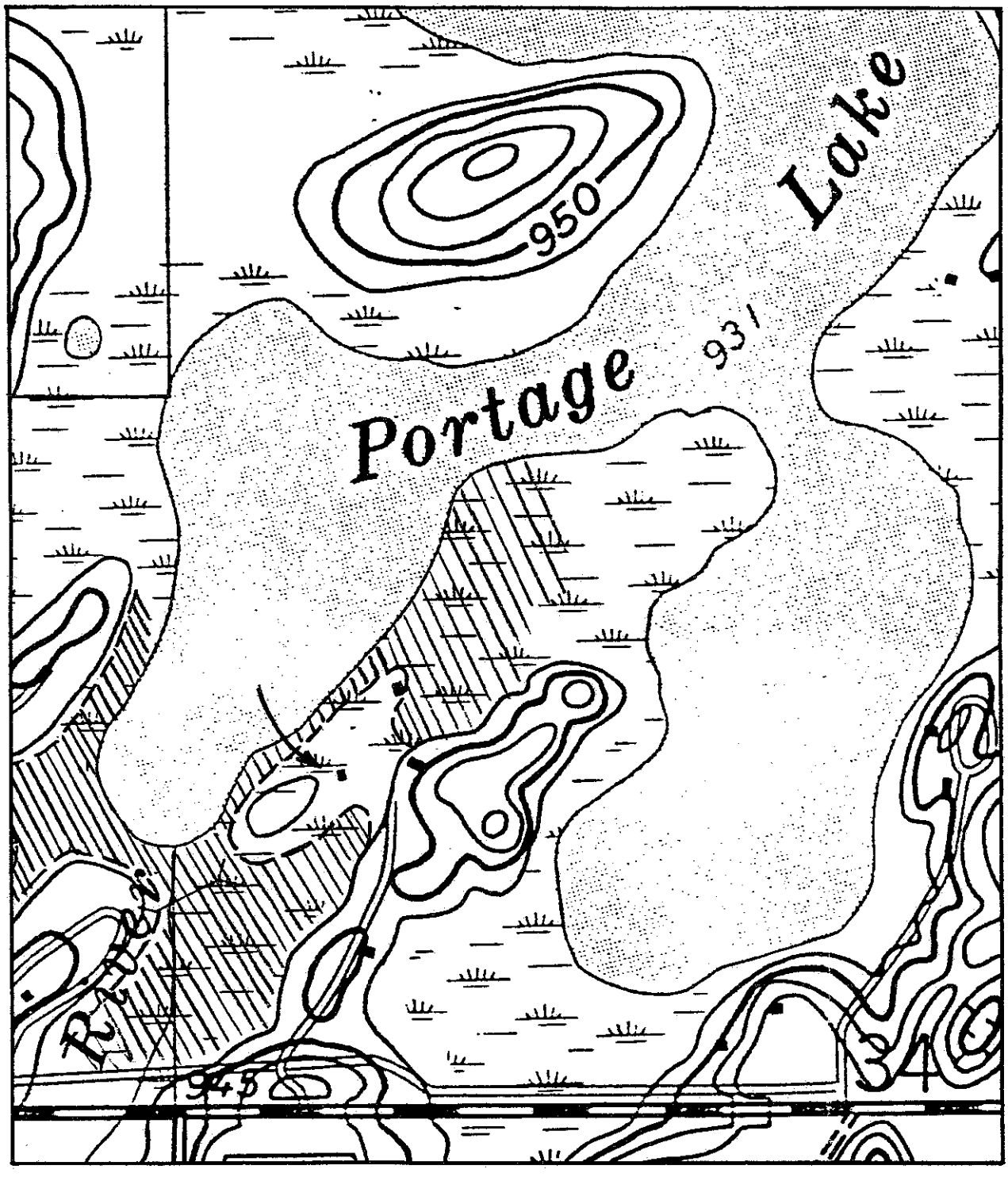

Figure 2: The ADA Upgrade project in Coldbrook Park.

coverage illustrated in Figure 3.

Deviations from this basic testing strategy are as follows:

1. Where obstructions precluded placement of a shovel test, the test was excavated as near to the planned location as possible;

2. Where lowlying and/or wet locations for the placement of shovel tests were encountered, these situations were avoided; and

3. Additional shovel tests were frequently located in areas that offered greater potential for recovery of the desired information as a way of intensifying our coverage of the study area.

Individual shovel tests were routinely excavated into the subsoil regardless of soil conditions encountered in any particular shovel test. Almost without exception, surveyors observed an "A" horizon ranging in depth from 7-15cm below the surface. This soil zone consisted of decomposing organic matter mixed with the parent material and also frequently revealed indications of periodic flooding (i.e. the effects of the seasonally fluctuating water table, if not actual inundation). Those excavations in which sediments did not appear to conform to what was anticipated were typically unconsolidated in appearance, suggesting some recent disturbance attributable to landfilling. In this regard, it is noteworthy that one shovel test excavated into disturbed sediments revealed a bottle cap and piece of glass at a depth in excess of 35cm below the surface.

At no point during shovel testing did surveyors note the presence of a plow zone in lieu of the continuous gradation of organic material and percolation of minerals, punctuated by signs of natural bioturbations typical of topsoil. The only contact zones encountered, between topsoil and subsoil, can be attributed to quite recent landfilling activities. In total, 60 shovel tests were excavated, and their locations are shown in Figure 3.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Before addressing the results of our program of shovel testing, it is appropriate that we briefly review information provided by park employees very familiar with the area under study. First, the small area of the park of particular interest to us has experienced landfilling in an attempt to raise and level the ground surface for regular maintenance purposes. At least some of the fill has been "borrowed" from the pit located on the ridge above and immediately to the east of the area investigated.

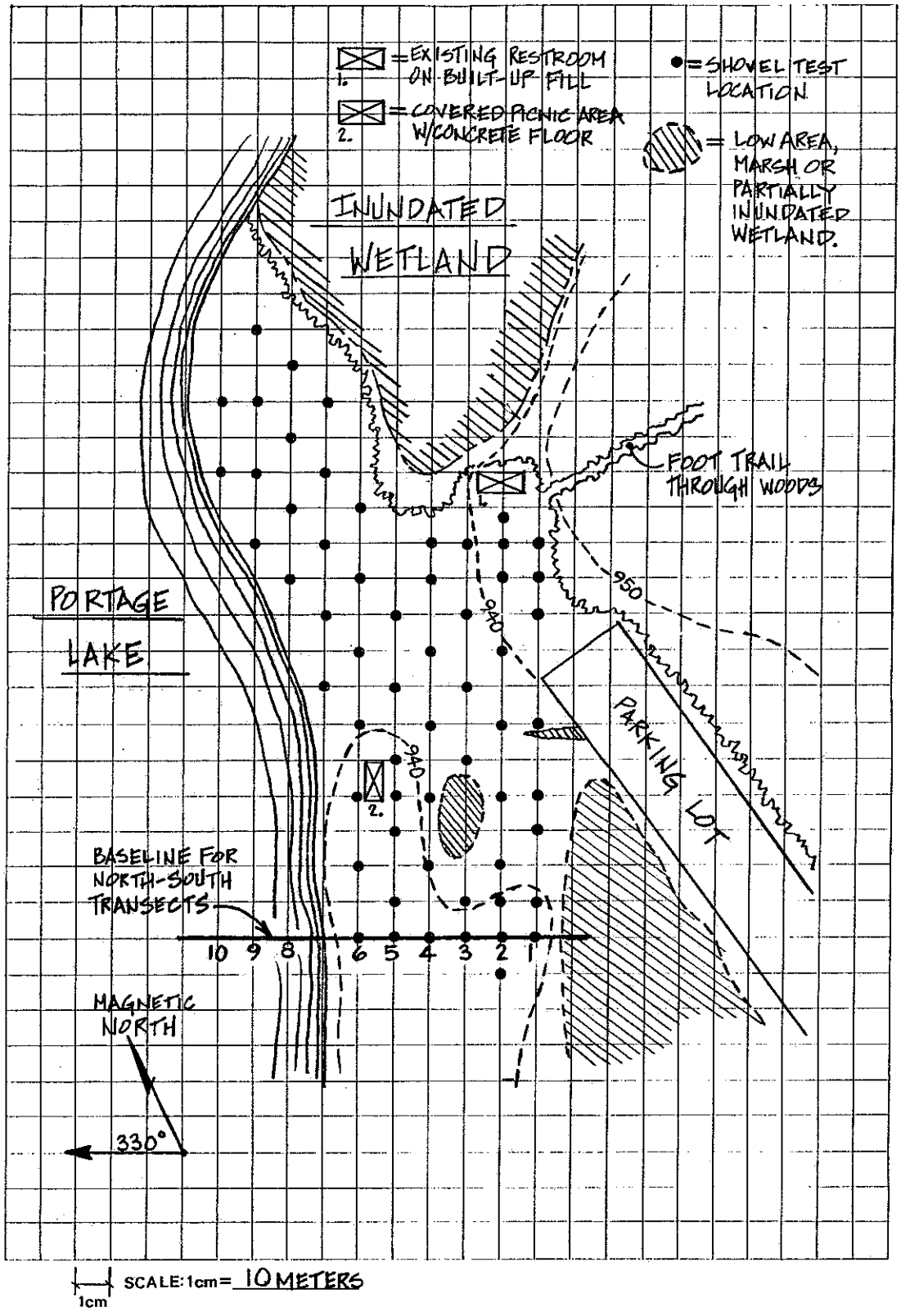

Figure 3: Program of shovel testing in the ADA Upgrade project, Coldbrook Park.

Secondly, no one with whom surveyors spoke had any knowledge of the discovery of either historic or prehistoric cultural items in the study area (or for that matter, Coldbrook Park), albeit an earlier historic occupation might be indicated by the presence of feral apple and cherry trees to the east of the aforementioned ridge and overlooking Blue Lake. In this regard, it would be appropriate to check on a possible overgrown and deteriorated structure that is said to occur near the southeast corner of the park.

Finally, the presence/absence of an occupation site might reflect on significantly fluctuating lake levels over the years. During low water stages, the three lakes are distinctly separate bodies of water. However, this is not the case today. We are told that the present high water level, which interconnects them, can be attributed to a partial constriction in flow resulting from a single outlet serving all three lakes--the Portage River outlet.

Our program of shovel testing resulted in the recovery of 14 specimens of broken/fractured rock exhibiting possible thermal alteration and cracking from six excavations. These pieces of FCR were in all cases retrieved either from the topsoil or the uppermost portion of the underlying subsoil. While they may be byproducts of human activity, in the absence of any associated diagnostic items, and given the current land use as a campground, no significance can be attached to their occurrence in the study area.

The only other observations of possible consequence are the presence of a small piece of pebble chert in a shovel test together with one piece of FCR and the occurrence of a chert flake in association with a large heat fractured cobble in a second excavation. While the second chert specimen has morphological appeal, upon closer inspection, the dorsal surface exhibits an unmodified exterior and there is no striking platform or other characteristic which positively identifies it as a bona fide cultural item.

In the final analysis, we completed a systematic and intensive examination of the proposed ADA upgrade at Coldbrook Park without identifying any preserved archaeological context(s) or having recovered any specimens pointing unquestionably to human presence predating the current land use. Therefore, we can only conclude that proposed construction activities **will not** adversely impact potentially significant archaeological resources, and we recommend that this project be permitted to proceed as planned.

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