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19-Archaeological Survey of the I-75NB Welcome Center, Moran Township, Mackinac County, Michigan

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DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

TECHNICAL REPORT NO. 19

1986

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE I-75NB WELCOME CENTER,
MORAN TOWNSHIP, MACKINAC COUNTY, MICHIGAN

A Report of Phase I Archaeological Site Location Survey
Conducted for the Michigan Department of Transportation
and the Michigan Department of State under Contract # 85-
1115 (MDOS ER # 9262) by Western Michigan University,
with Dr. William M. Cremin as the Principal Investigator.

William M. Cremin

ABSTRACT

With the execution of a Cultural Resource Investigation work authorization (#4-86/87) under contract #85-1115 (MDOS ER #9262) between the MDOT, the MDOS, and WMU, authorizing a Phase I archaeological survey of the I-75NB Welcome Center in Moran Township, Mackinac County, Michigan, archaeologists undertook a systematic and intensive site location survey of the project area on 12-13 Oct 86.

Employing reconnaissance and shovel testing procedures, the survey team relocated and confirmed the existence of a site(s) in the eastern portion of the project and extending into the adjoining property of the Straits State Park. Although lithic debris and pieces of FRC were recovered, nothing is diagnostic; cultural affiliation and temporal placement of this site cannot be determined.

Elsewhere in the project area, surveyors observed considerable prior disturbance resulting from the construction of the parking lot. Immediately to the north of this lot, some chunky limestone and chert shatter were recovered from muck soils flanking a cedar swamp. Careful examination of these pieces revealed no evidence of purposeful modification; the surveyors concluding that the chert, like the limestone material, was derived as colluvium from the nearby bluffs. Inasmuch as the Welcome Center will be constructed in the area north of the parking lot, we are confident that no archaeological resources will be impacted by the proposed activity.

With respect to the eastern portion of the project, we believe that the three previously recorded sites are actually a single site (20MK136), and that additional (Phase II) evaluation of this site should be undertaken prior to any proposed construction activity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
Project Personnel	1
Description of the Project Area	2
Previous Research in and near the Project Area	4
Phase I Survey Methodology	7
Results and Recommendations derived from the Phase I Study	9
References Cited	10

TABLES

Page

Table 1: Lithic Specimens Recovered from
I-75NB Welcome Center Project 11

FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Location of the Project in Moran Township, Mackinac County, MI	3
Figure 2: MDOT I-75NB Project, Showing the Extend of Coverage and Findings	5

INTRODUCTION:

With the execution of a Cultural Resource Investigation work authorization (#4-86/87) under Contract #85-1115 (MDOS ER #9262) on 10 Oct 86 between the Michigan Department of Transportation, the Michigan Department of State, and Western Michigan University (WMU), authorizing a Phase I archaeological survey of the I-75NB Welcome Center in Moran Township, Mackinac County, Michigan, archaeologists initiated a literature, documents, and site file search and surveyed the project area on 12-13 Oct 86 in order to determine if construction of the proposed facilities would have an adverse impact on archaeological resources. There follows a report of the research carried out by WMU personnel, together with recommendations based upon our findings.

It should be understood that the opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Michigan Department of State, or Bureaus thereof, or the Michigan Department of Transportation or the Michigan State Transportation Commission and the United States Department of Transportation or agencies thereof.

PROJECT PERSONNEL:

The following individuals comprise the WMU research team:

Principal Investigator - Dr. William M. Cremin, Associate Professor
of Anthropology, Western Michigan University

Field Supervisor - Mr. David G. De Fant, M.A., WMU

Field Assistant - Mr. Dale W. Quattrin, Graduate Student in
Anthropology, WMU

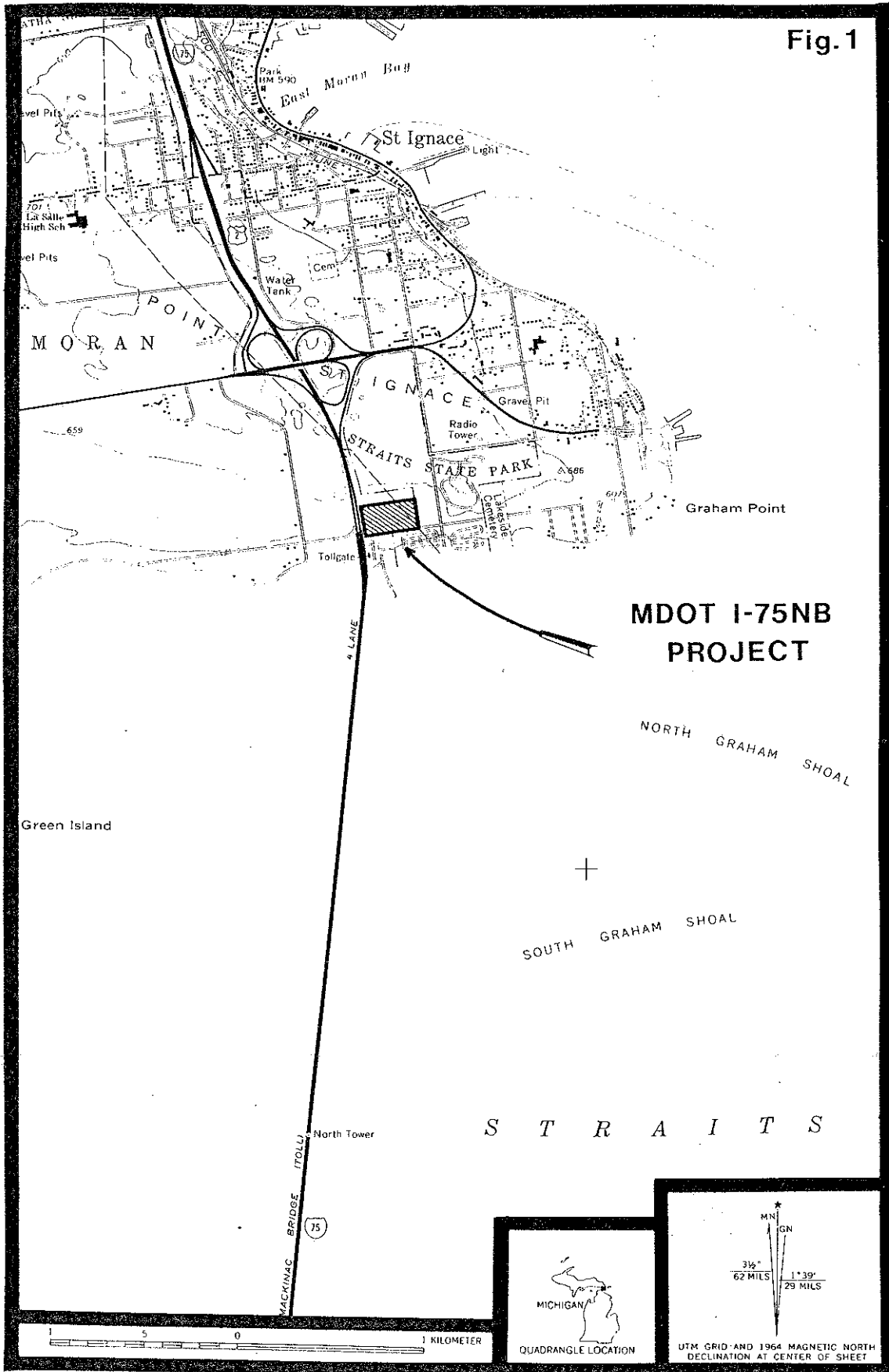
DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT AREA:

The project area of this study lies in Moran Township (T40N R4-3W), Mackinac County, Michigan near the northern or Upper Peninsula end of the bridge across the Straits of Mackinac. It is bordered on the west by I-75NB, on the north and east by the Straits State Park, and on the south by a street that separates the property owned by the MDOT from that of the Bridge Authority (Fig. 1).

This parcel of land, aggregating 3.0 ha (7.5 acres), lies at an elevation of about 180 m (600 ft) above sea level and occupies an area of old lake sediments between the present Lake Huron shoreline and a steep bluff of St. Ignace dolomite and Point Aux Chenes shale with a collapse filling or mass of "Mackinac Breccia" that marks a former high shoreline(s) of the lake. This prominent bluff is part of the larger formation known as the Niagaran Escarpment; a cuesta formed by erosion of resistant limestones and dolomites that comprise the dominant landform across much of the eastern portion of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan (Dorr and Eschman 1977: 104-105, 160).

The project area is already considerably developed, featuring a paved parking lot and temporary visitors' center and restroom facilities which are accessible from I-75NB. Immediately to the north of the parking lot, where the proposed Welcome Center is to be constructed, much disturbance related to the original grading of the parking lot is in evidence. Beyond the trees bordering the construction site on the north there occurs a cedar swamp. Here, visual examination of the surface and a series of shovel tests revealed a deep deposit of muck soils containing many chunks of

Fig. 1



weathered limestone and pieces of chert shatter probably derived as colluvium from the bluffs located a short distance to the north of the MDOT project (Fig.2).

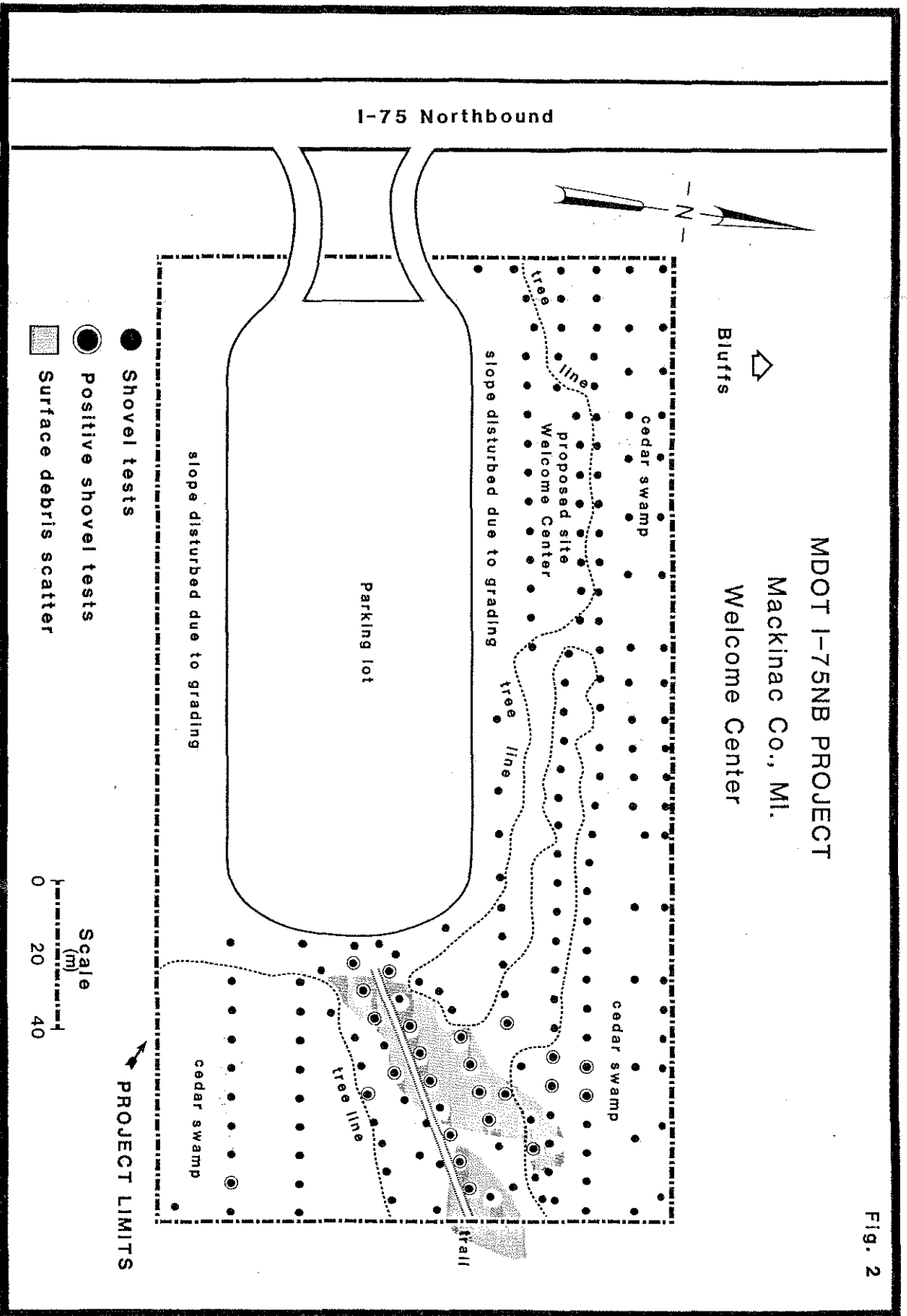
The eastern portion of the study area also features several small cedar swamps, with an intervening area of well drained sandy soils extending into the project from the east. Here, probing with a soil sampler revealed that the sandy beach deposits reach to a depth of at least 1.5 m below the present ground surface. The sandy soils support a cover of grass fringed by mixed evergreen and hardwood species along the margins of the swampy areas located to either side (Fig. 2).

Passing through this grassy area from the parking lot on the west to the property line on the east is the path or trail in which were revealed the archaeological materials that initially resulted in the recognition and reporting of three sites (20MK136, 137, and 138) to the Bureau of History by a discerning visitor several years ago (Barbara Mead, personal communication).

Finally, the narrow strip of land separating the parking lot from the street delimiting the project area on the south also evidences considerable prior disturbance that can be attributed to grading preparatory to establishment of the paved parking lot.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH IN AND NEAR THE MDOT PROJECT:

An extensive and thorough review of the literature, documents, and state site files prior to the initiation of the Phase I survey fieldwork revealed that with the exception of the three sites noted above, each being observed as a surface find, there is no record of archaeological activity or archaeological resources having been previously reported for the project area (Fitting 1974; Stone 1975).



MDOT I-75NB PROJECT

Mackinac Co., MI.

Welcome Center

Fig. 2

Be that as it may, the general area of Point St. Ignace, on which the MDOT property is located, is not without recognized cultural resources that may, perhaps, have a bearing on the research potential of this study area. For example, the historic community of St. Ignace is located about one kilometer to the north. It was here, in 1671, that Father James Marquette established the Mission of St. Ignatius at the site of the old town of Michilimackinac among the Hurons. Eight years later, La Salle arrived at St. Ignace, staying at the chapel and house of the Jesuits and visiting nearby Indian villages while establishing a fortified trading post--the first military establishment in the region. By 1683, the growing number of French traders and Indians residing in the neighborhood of the mission and "fort" necessitated that three priests be stationed here to provide for their needs. Residing in three separate or distinct communities, the Indians are reported by Cadillac to have numbered between six and seven thousand in 1695; and he further noted that all lands for three leagues around had been cleared and cultivated to support them (Sawyer 1911: 119-134).

From another historical source (Wood 1918: 24), it has been noted that between 1671-1705 there existed the following Indian establishments in the vicinity: (1) an Ottawa village and cemetery on West Moran Bay; (2) an Ottawa fort and a Huron fort near the French mission and its associated French settlement; and (3) a substantial Algonquin village a short distance to the north along East Moran Bay. Aside from the attraction afforded by the French, the Indians were drawn to the Straits region by the abundant fish and also the availability of excellent soil for planting corn.

One final reference gleaned from the documents relates to that extension of Point St. Ignace formerly known as Point Iroquois and

now Graham Point (Fig. 2). Located 1.4 km due east of the MDOT project, it is said to have received the name Point Iroquois because

traders, in 1794, noticed skulls, etc., on this point unburied. Some 200 Iroquois Indians, about the year 1680, were making their hostile incursion into the southern borders of Lake Superior. The Gibways (Chippewas) unexpectedly attacked them at night while they were asleep and very few of the party escaped to tell the tale of their defeat. Tradition says only one was spared and permitted to return, first having his ears and the tip of his nose cut off (Wood 1918: 633-634).

Today, the intensity of aboriginal occupation and French interest in the St. Ignace vicinity reported in the historical documents is further attested to by Middle Historic Period (A.D. 1670-1760) sites such as the Richardson and Lasanen ossuaries in St. Ignace, Gros Cap Cemetery on West Moran Bay several kilometers down the shoreline from the MDOT project, and the Huron-Ottawa village or fort currently being excavated by Michigan State University in St. Ignace.

PHASE I SURVEY METHODOLOGY:

On-site evaluation of the project area was undertaken by Mr. David De Fant and Mr. Dale Quattrin, both experienced surveyors, on 12-13 Oct 86, with the Principal Investigator, Dr. Cremin, being available to join them in the event that any problems or difficulties were encountered during the survey. The data recovery procedures employed were those outlined in the proposal and project application submitted to the MDOT prior to the awarding of the contract to WMU.

Evaluation commenced with surface reconnaissance in the area of the trail running east-west across the eastern portion of the project where previously three archaeological sites had been found.

Surface debris scatters, consisting of chippage together with FCR, were observed intermittently along this trail and extending beyond the fence separating the project from the Straits State Park on the east. Following examination of the trail, surveyors spread out to both the north and south, visually studying the grass covered area where surface visibility permitted. Cultural material conforming to the patterns illustrated in Fig. 2 was noted; albeit in modest quantities.

Thereafter, the survey team initiated shovel testing procedures along the trail in order to ascertain whether the discontinuous nature of surface debris scatters reflected the presence of more than one or, alternatively, only a single site, and, secondly, to examine subsurface deposits to determine if there existed any site context. Shovel tests were routinely excavated to depths of 40-60 cm, with a soil probe being employed to examine the depositional history of local soils to a depth of 1.5 m below the surface. This approach resulted in the recognition of a profile in the sandy grass covered area of the project featuring a black organic lens extending to a depth of 10-15 cm, below which there commenced a horizon of gray sand with a recorded depth of 15-20 cm. The final layer observed through use of the soil sampler consisted of a wet and extremely compacted organic sand. All cultural material collected from shovel tests placed in the grass covered area flanking the trail came from either the humus layer or the upper 10 cm of the gray sand lens (i.e. within 25 cm of the ground surface).

Having completed their examination of the area where the previously recorded sites had been reported, surveyors began their systematic and intensive shovel testing of the remainder of the

project area, walking transects 10-20 m apart with shovel tests being spaced along each line of survey at intervals of 10-20 m. To the north of the parking lot and beyond that point where soil disturbance associated with previous grading prior to paving the lot was in evidence, soils were observed to be very mucky. In those areas where standing water did not prohibit evaluation, shovel tests revealed chunks of limestone together with particles of chert shatter. Every chert specimen was carefully examined, but none was felt by the surveyors to exhibit features or attributes suggestive of deliberate or purposeful modification by man. Rather, the chert, and the weathered limestone with which it was commonly associated, is most probably derived as colluvium from the bluffs located a short distance to the north of the project.

With respect to the southern portion of the project, specifically the narrow strip of land lying between the parking lot and the street forming the project boundary to the south, surveyors noted good evidence of disturbance due to grading for purposes of establishing the paved parking lot. Therefore, shovel testing on the south was confined to the area about the cedar swamp in the southeast corner, where two transects and 21 shovel tests produced only one thinning flake of chert.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS DERIVED FROM THE PHASE I STUDY:

In summary, thorough evaluation of the I-75NB Welcome Center project by means of surface reconnaissance and the excavation of 199 shovel tests (the approximate locations of which are shown in Fig. 2) has resulted in confirmation of the presence of archaeological resources in the eastern portion of the study area where a trail passes through a grass covered area of sandy soils. And

based upon our brief visual examination of the area lying across the property line, it is also apparent that the cultural material extends for some distance into the Straits State Park on the east. The lithic data recovered both from the surface and from 24 (12%) shovel tests (and summarized in Table 1), together with a goodly number of pieces of fire-cracked rock, argue for a moderately dense scatter of cultural debris. On the basis of our observations, we are reasonably confident that: (1) the archaeological material encompasses about 1200 m² and is confined to the area of sandy soils lying to the east of the parking lot and quite far from the proposed site of the Welcome Center; (2) the three previously recorded sites are in all probability a single site (20MK136); and (3) the area to be impacted by the proposed MDOT construction activity is absolutely free of archaeological resources.

Inasmuch as the site designated for establishment of the Welcome Center facilities lacks archaeological materials, it can be recommended that the project proposed by the MDOT be permitted to proceed. However, while no diagnostic cultural items have been recovered from 20MK136 in the eastern portion of the project area, the debris density observed during our program of research is such that should the MDOT propose landscape altering activity in this area of the property in the future, it is also recommended that additional (Phase II) investigation be undertaken prior to any proposed impact to this site.

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TABLE 1

Lithic specimens recovered from the I-75NB Welcome Center project.

Surface Collection (43 pieces)

- 1-utilized flake of an unidentified chert
- 1-bipolar core of Onondaga chert from Ontario Province
- 2-decortication flakes of Bois Blanc chert
- 3-pieces of blocky fracture debitage of Bois Blanc chert
- 36-bifacial thinning and retouch flakes, 17 of which are of Bois Blanc chert

Shovel Tests (31 pieces)

- 1-core remnant of Bois Blanc chert
- 2-decortication flakes of an unidentified chert
- 11-blocky fracture flakes, four of which are of Bois Blanc chert
- 17-bifacial thinning and retouch flakes, seven of which are of Bois Blanc chert

Total Number of Specimens in the Lithic Assemblage - 74

Note:

The above identifications have been provided by the project Field Supervisor, David G. De Fant.