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20-Archaeological Survey of the US-23 Weigh Stations Project in Whiteford Township, Monroe County, Michigan

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DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

TECHNICAL REPORT NO. 20

1986

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE US-23 WEIGH STATIONS
PROJECT IN WHITEFORD TOWNSHIP, MONROE 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 #4573) by Western Michigan University, with
Dr. William M. Cremin as the Project Principal Investigator.

William M. Cremin

ABSTRACT

With the execution of a Cultural Resource Investigation work authorization (#6-86/87) under contract #85-1115 (MDOS ER #4573), as amended, on 10 Oct 86 between the Michigan Department of Transportation, the Michigan Department of State, and Western Michigan University, authorizing Phase I assessment of the US-23 Weigh Stations project in Whiteford Township, Monroe County, Michigan, archaeologists undertook a systematic and intensive on-site survey of the project on 20-21 Oct 86.

Employing reconnaissance and shovel testing procedures, the survey team thoroughly examined an area of 25.9 ha (64 acres), making not a single observation of potential significance with respect to the presence in the study area of archaeological resources. Furthermore, interviews of local landowners, coupled with a literature, documents, and state site file search, also failed to produce information having a bearing on local archaeological resources.

In the final analysis, all the information presently available to us strongly suggests that the proposed construction of new weigh station facilities along US-23 will not have an adverse effect on archaeological sites.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
Project Personnel	1
Description of the Project Area	2
Previous Research in and near the MDOT Project	6
Phase I Survey Methodology	7
Results and Recommendations derived from the Phase I Study	9
References Cited	10

FIGURES

Page

Figure 1: Location of the MDOT US-23 Project in
Whiteford Township, Monroe County, MI 3

Figure 2: MDOT US-23 Project, Showing the
Extent of Coverage and Findings 5

INTRODUCTION:

Pursuant to the execution of a Cultural Resource Investigation work authorization (#6-86/87) under contract #85-1115 (MDOS ER #4573), as amended, on 10 Oct 86 between the Michigan Department of Transportation, the Michigan Department of State, and Western Michigan University, calling for a Phase I archaeological survey of two proposed weigh stations along US-23 in Whiteford Township, Monroe County, Michigan, a team of archaeologists from the Department of Anthropology began a literature, documents, and site file search and conducted on-site examination of the project area on 20-21 Oct 86 in order to determine whether proposed construction activities would have an adverse impact on potentially significant archaeological resources. There follows a report of research undertaken on this occasion, together with recommendations based upon our findings.

It is to be understood that the opinions, findings, and conclusions presented in this publication are those of the author, Dr. Cremin, 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 team responsible for the research program reported herein:

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

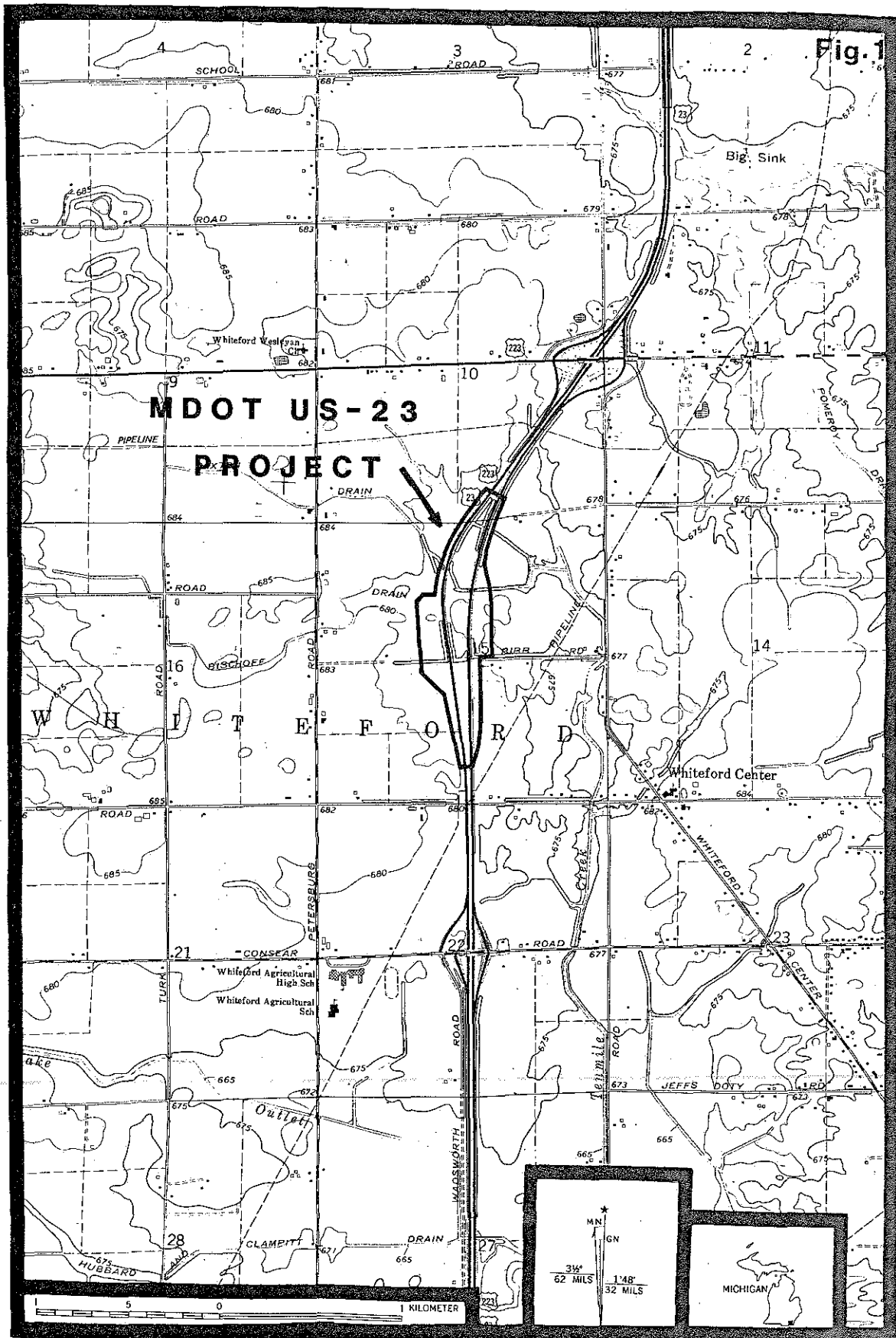
Field Supervisor - Mr. David G. De Fant, M.A., WMU
Field Assistant - Mr. Dale W. Quattrin, Graduate Student
in Anthropology, WMU

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT AREA:

The research area of this study lies for the most part in Section 15 with a short extension into Section 10 of Whiteford Township, T8S R6E, Monroe County, Michigan. It includes 8.1 ha (20 acre) parcels on either side of US-23 and a 9.7 ha (24 acre) median strip separating north- from southbound lanes. In total, the area encompassed by project boundaries and requiring systematic and intensive evaluation aggregates 25.9 ha (64 acres). The configuration of the MDOT US-23 project is illustrated in Figure 1.

Lying at an elevation of about 204 m (680 ft) above sea level, this remarkably level area represents former clay lake beds that at the time of American settlement largely supported swamp forest. The dominant plant cover consisted of American elm and black ash, but with red maple, silver maple, and pin oak being common throughout. Occasionally, this community was interrupted by stands of beech-sugar maple where better drained sites occurred on the old lake beds, and in localized situations associated with sandy ridges there occurred mixed stands of oak, hickory, basswood, and black walnut. Wild grape and poison ivy were everywhere conspicuous in the native understory.

Interestingly, while most of the project is today under cultivation, according to several of the local landowners interviewed by the survey team, as recently as 40 years ago the land was still too poorly drained to permit agricultural activity. It was only with the establishment of a number of new drainageways, several of



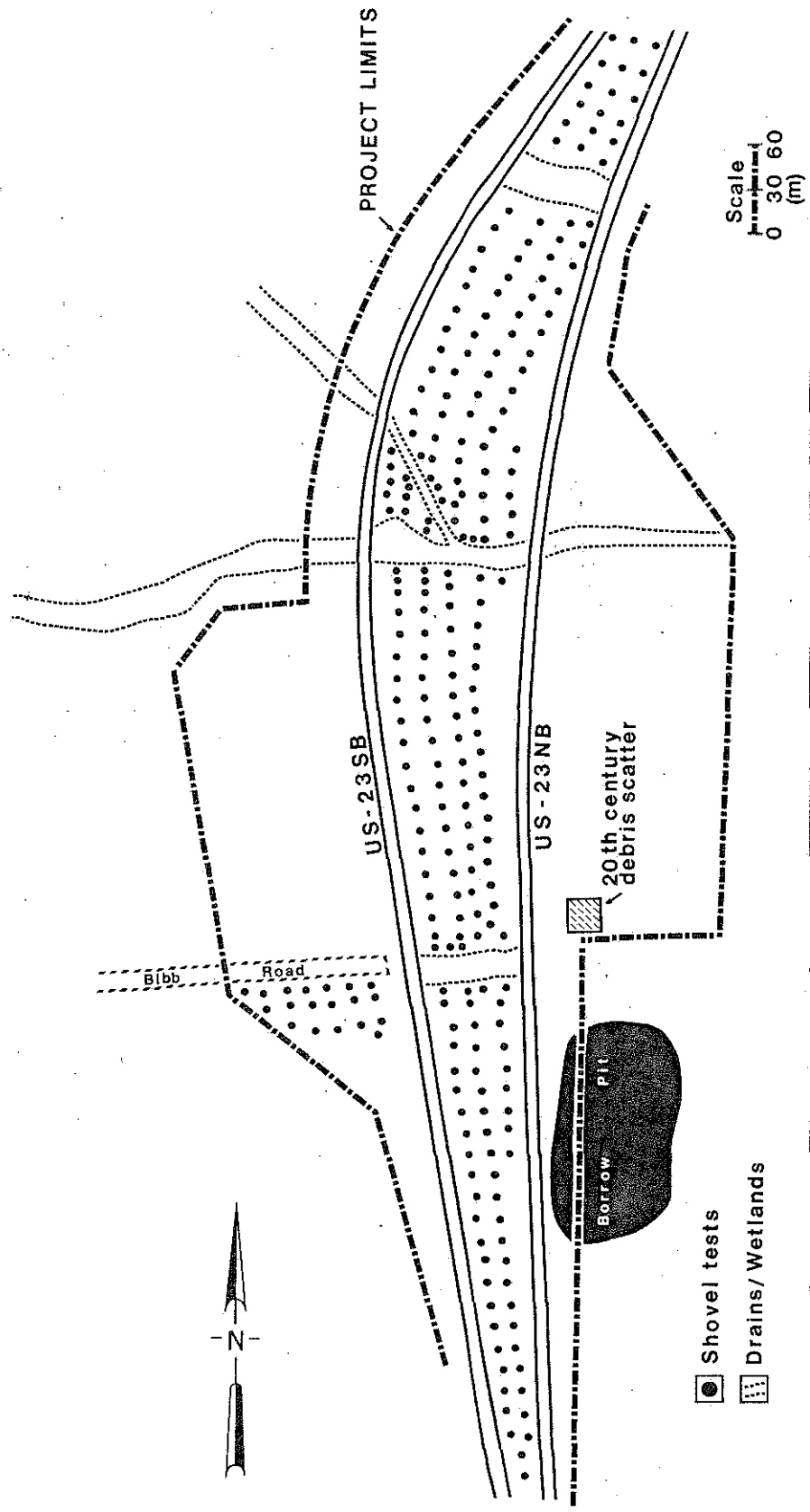
which are shown crossing the project area in Figures 1 and 2, that it proved possible for area farmers to put land that was formerly "nothin' but marsh" into production. Thus, for the most part, the survey team found the land lying outside the existing MDOT right-of-way to be in cultivation; either in row crops such as corn and soybeans or a cover crop like wheat.

While the land included within the project limits but lying outside the existing MDOT ROW was found generally to be in cultivation, the median strip separating the north- and southbound lanes of US-23 stood, for the most part, in tall grass interspersed with occasional trees. Here and there, surveyors observed thin patches of plant cover, affording them modest surface visibility. But in marked contrast to the fields flanking the highway, where surface visibility was generally most adequate for implementation of surface reconnaissance procedures, the median could only be effectively surveyed employing shovel testing measures. The application of Phase I survey procedures during the fieldwork will be presented more fully in a subsequent section of this report.

While having previously noted the local problems of drainage, reflecting the absence of natural waterways within the limits of the MDOT project, as well as in areas immediately adjacent to it (which is to say that all drains are here artificial or man-made), the general area lies within the drainage of North Branch Tenmile Creek (or, as known on some maps, North Branch Ottawa River). The available maps show this stream originating about 700 m east of the project area, taking its form from several intermittent tributaries as well as those drains which flow across the project from west to east. From its headwaters this stream flows in a southerly

Fig. 2

MDOT US-23 PROJECT MONROE CO., MI WEIGH STATIONS



direction toward its confluence with the Maumee River at Toledo, Ohio.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH IN AND NEAR THE MDOT PROJECT:

No systematic archaeological research has been reported for the general area of the MDOT project. According to Brose and Essenpreis (1973), research conducted in Monroe County prior to their 1966 survey of archaeological resources consisted mainly of inquiries by Hinsdale during the period of preparation of his Archaeological Atlas of Michigan (1931), the survey and testing of 11 sites by Greenman in an attempt to confirm some of Hinsdale's information, and very limited work by both amateur archaeologists and crews from the University of Michigan during the decades of the 1940s and 1960s (1973: 1).

The mainly informant-based survey undertaken by Brose and Essenpreis in this county during 1966 recorded two prehistoric sites in rather close proximity to the study area. These are: (1) Eyre Farm (20MR60), a Late Archaic and Late Woodland site that yielded a bannerstone, several drills and projectile points, lithic debris, and one potsherd from an area of plowed out sand ridges along a tributary of Tenmile Creek in the NE 1/4 of Section 16. Analysis of the material in the collection of a Mr. George Schnittiker resulted in this site being identified by Brose and Essenpreis as a hunting camp/fishing village/workshop between ca. 2000-1500 B.C. and a temporary special purpose encampment in Late Woodland times; and (2) Tenmile Creek (20MR61), a probable Paleo-Indian site located on a slight rise overlooking the junction of this stream and one of its tributaries in the NE 1/4 of Section 15. Also reported to the authors by Mr. Schnittiker, this site has

yielded several examples of the Hi-Lo point. However, field confirmation of 20MR61 in the location provided by the informant eluded the survey team in 1966.

PHASE I SURVEY METHODOLOGY:

On-site evaluation of the project area was undertaken by David De Fant and Dale Quattrin, both very experienced surveyors, on 20-21 Oct 86, with the Principal Investigator, Dr. Cremin, being prepared to join them in the field in the event that any problems or difficulties were encountered during fieldwork. 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 in the median strip, where surface visibility was so restricted as to require the systematic and intensive application of shovel testing procedures throughout. This portion of the project was traversed from south to north along lines of survey (i.e. transects) that were initially spaced 20 m apart, with this interval being reduced by half as the survey team approached to within about 50 m of the drainageways crossing the project. Shovel tests were initially located at intervals of about 20 m along each transect, with the distance between probes again being halved as surveyors approached the drains. The strategy of intensifying the shovel testing program as the survey team neared drainageways was subsequently abandoned, once it had been determined that these features on the landscape were artificial rather than natural.

The only area lying outside the median strip where it was felt appropriate to employ shovel testing procedures was a small fallow

parcel adjacent to Bibb Road near the southern end of the project. In aggregate, surveyors placed 251 shovel tests in those portions of the project where surface visibility was restricted by vegetative cover. Figure 2 shows the approximate locations of all shovel tests excavated by surveyors. These were routinely excavated so as to expose the soil profile to a depth of 40-60 cm below the surface, or to a depth that surveyors determined to be consistent with the post-Pleistocene depositional history of local soils. A small number of deeper shovel tests (and probing with a Stam soil coring device), extending to a depth of 100 cm or more, were strategically located across the project area in order to confirm the adequacy of routinely terminating shovel tests at a shallower depth. The results of the shovel testing program were less than satisfying--not a single cultural item was observed/recovered from the 251 shovel tests excavated on this occasion!

Elsewhere in the project, surface visibility was deemed to be most adequate for the application of surface reconnaissance procedures. Farmers had not yet begun their fall harvesting, and surveyors found the visibility between the rows of corn and beans to be quite good. Spacing themselves at intervals of 3-5 m apart, they slowly walked each field with the rows of plants, carefully scanning the surface of the ground for telltale signs of the presence of an archaeological site. Not a single observation of fire-cracked rock or lithic debris was made in any of the fields so evaluated! However, a light scatter of historic material, including particles of brick, metal, wood, plastic, and modern ceramics, was noted to cover an area of some 500 m² just north of the large borrow pit flanking northbound US-23 (Fig. 2). According to the present

landowner, who happened to be working in the field nearby when surveyors encountered this historic debris scatter, this was the former location of his grandfather's house. The small frame structure had been erected about the turn of the century and was occupied until about 20 years ago when, following the death of his kinsman, the old house was torn down and the land leveled prior to putting it into production.

Prior to terminating the field phase of the project, the survey team briefly revisited each of the landowners who had permitted them access to the land for purposes of conducting the study. On this occasion, each was questioned in more detail about possible observations of artifacts made during preparation of their fields for planting over the years. Only one elderly man had any recollection of having found "arrowheads" on his land, and he could not precisely place the location of discovery in that portion of his current holdings that lies within or even near the MDOT project. Moreover, the few objects that he had collected many years ago were no longer in his possession, but had been given to "the kids". Aside from this individual's recollections, we came up empty-handed during the conduct of this research program on behalf of the MDOT.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS DERIVED FROM THE PHASE I STUDY:

In summary, thorough examination of the literature, documents, and state site files pertaining to this area of Monroe County and on-site evaluation of the MDOT project area by means of surface reconnaissance and shovel testing procedures has resulted in the recovery of no data (or informational leads) that would suggest the presence of potentially significant archaeological resources.

In fact, on this occasion we have only negative information to report! Therefore, in light of the findings of our systematic and intensive study of the US-23 Weigh Stations project in the Township of Whiteford, it can be recommended that the proposed construction activity be permitted to proceed as planned.

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