



1979

39-Archaeological Evaluation of The Right-Of-Way Along US-31 Connector-Walton Road from Winn Road to Existing US-31 (Alternate 4), Niles Township, Berrien County, Michigan

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William M. Cremin

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF THE RIGHT-OF-WAY ALONG US-31
CONNECTOR-WALTON ROAD FROM MINN ROAD TO EXISTING US-31 (ALTERNATE 4),
NILES TOWNSHIP, BERRIEN COUNTY, MICHIGAN

1979

REPORT OF INVESTIGATIONS NO. 39

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION:

Pursuant to a letter from the office of Mr. John P.

Woodford, Director, Michigan Department of Transportation, authorizing an archaeological survey of the Walton Road

right-of-way designated Alternate 4, a team of archaeologists from Western Michigan University undertook on-site assessment of the project in order to determine whether or not road

improvement activities would impact cultural resources. There follows a report of fieldwork conducted between 6-8 Aug 79,

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 Department of State,

Michigan History Division or the Michigan Department of

Transportation.

PROJECT PERSONNEL:

Principal Investigator - Dr. William M. Cremin, Assistant

Professor of Anthropology, WMU

Field Supervisor - R. David Hoxie, M.A. Candidate in

Anthropology, WMU

Field Assistants - John Nass, Jr., M.A. Candidate in

Anthropology, WMU

- Jean Marek, M.A. Candidate in Anthro-

pology, WMU

- William Ruter, M.A. Candidate in

Anthropology, WMU

- James Wojtala, Senior Major in

Anthropology, WMU

All project participants have received formal training

in archaeological field methods, and most have served as supervisory personnel in various aspects of WMU's field research

program. In addition, all have acquired considerable exper-

ience in CRM projects of this nature. Conservatively speaking,

this team of archaeologists has amassed more than 300 weeks of

archaeological field experience. This fact speaks well for

the team's qualifications to conduct this project for MDOT.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TRACT EVALUATED:

The project area of this study consists of a linear tract

of land almost one kilometer in length and varying in width

from 45 m to 72 m. In addition, relocated Walton Road exists

from the Alternate 4 alignment and extends in a southerly di-

rection for a distance of 285 m (see Map No. 1, Exhibit No. 8,

Recommended Alignment, Alternate 4).

The Alternate 4 alignment commences on the west at the

intersection of Walton and Winn roads in the NE 1/4, NW 1/4

of Section 16 and extends in a northeasterly direction across

the SE 1/4, SW 1/4 and W 1/2, SE 1/4 of Section 9, Niles Town-

ship, intersecting US-31 at a point approximately 540 m north

of the present junction of Walton Road with US-31 (Map No. 3).

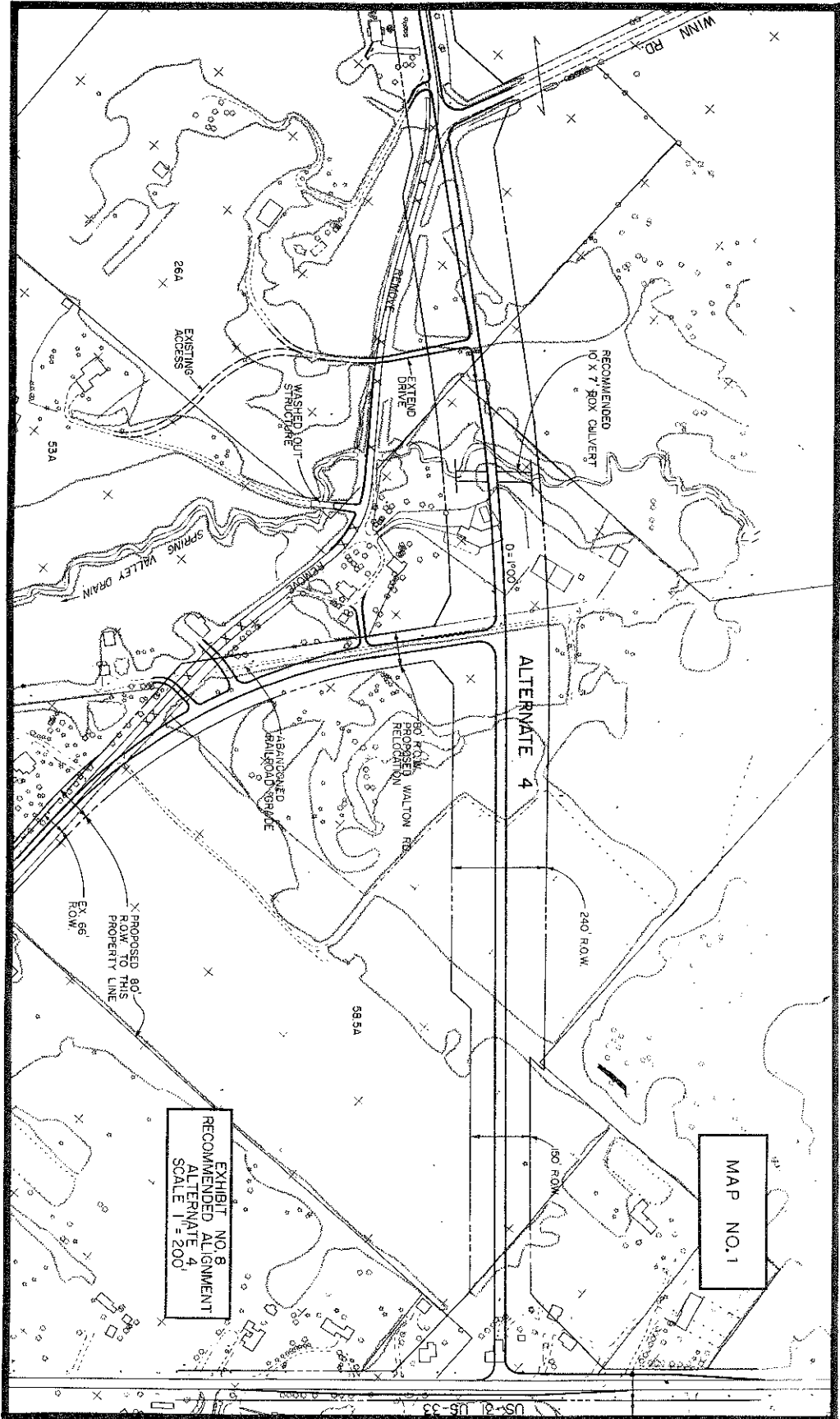
Examination of relevant topographic, geologic and soils

maps indicates that the tract lies in a plateau-like upland

which occupies most of the southeastern and eastern portions

of Berrien County. Elevation along the alignment ranges from

201 m to 228 m above sea level. The gently rolling topography



is broken only by an abandoned railroad grade and the deeply entrenched channel of Spring Valley Creek, a small permanent stream which originates to the north of the project near the western end of the alignment and flows across it in a southerly direction to join the St. Joseph River about 0.8 km away. Modern land-use practices have resulted in a mosaic of fields (both fallow and presently cultivated) and dense hedge rows along the route surveyed. This pattern is broken only by the old railroad grade and by the presence of several homes (together with associated out-buildings and other sorts of facilities) lying within the proposed right-of-way. The soils which comprise the project area consist of fertile, well-drained loams and sandy loams which could have been easily cultivated by people possessing a primitive hoe-digging stick technology. Thus, it is quite likely that this area may have been attractive to prehistoric groups engaged in maize agriculture. Examination of the pre-settlement plant associations as presented on maps derived from the original land survey fieldnotes and plats (Brewer 1979; Kenoyer 1934) indicates that this tract was formerly occupied by climax Beech-Maple Forest. And, importantly, a major lobe of Oak-Hickory Forest penetrating Lower Michigan from the south and west occurred at a distance of only a few kilometers to the east of the project at the time of the surveys. These data strongly suggest that the general area of the project presented the human residents with something of an environmental mosaic. And current archaeological research would suggest that situations such as this might reasonably be expected to have been attractive to groups pursuing a mixed economic strategy based

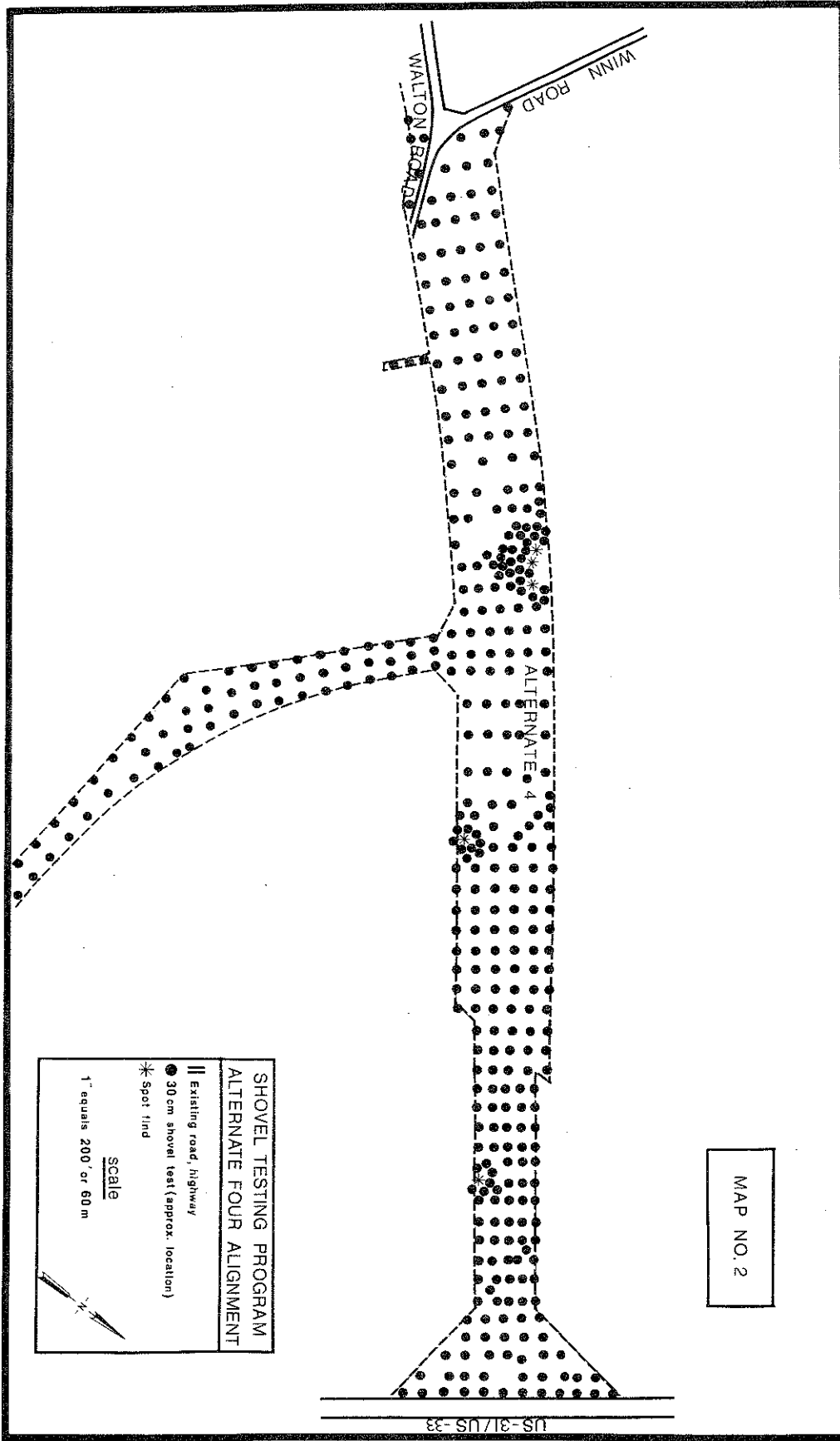
upon the growing of maize in conjunction with seasonal exploitation of native plant and animal resources of the St. Joseph Basin.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH:

An extensive literature/documents search and examination of the Berrien County site files maintained by the Michigan History Division and the Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan suggest that the project area has not received prior archaeological attention. However, it is important that we note that the portion of the St. Joseph Valley extending from about 3 km north of the City of Buchanan to the Indiana-Michigan line is rich in reported prehistoric and historic sites. One previously recorded site, the historic Potawatomi village of Chief Weesaw's band, is located less than 2 km from the project, being situated on the opposite or south side of the river near that point where Sections 15, 16, 21 and 22 meet (Map No. 3). Given the proximity of the project area to the river and to this historic site in particular, we reasoned that the probability of this project area having a site(s) was reasonably good.

FIELD PROCEDURES:

Inasmuch as ground surface visibility was quite low throughout most of the project area, surveyors relied on systematic transect procedures employing subsurface shovel testing at designated intervals to achieve the desired coverage. Map No. 2 illustrates the manner in which our shovel testing program was adapted to the Alternate 4 alignment and the coverage we achieved



during three days of fieldwork.

The standard spacing of shovel tests was achieved by having surveyors space themselves at intervals of 15 m, with subsurface tests being placed at intervals of 15 m along each transect. On several occasions, these intervals were adjusted to take into account the presence of obstructions (e.g. houses, outbuildings) and variables of topographic relief, local drainage and vegetative cover. However, as the information provided on Map No. 2 indicates, the spacing of transects and shovel tests was really adjusted on only two occasions. First, in the center of the project, we encountered a slope of approximately 30-35 degrees as we neared the abandoned railroad grade. This decline, coupled with the fact that undergrowth was exceedingly dense, made shovel testing extremely difficult. Given the fact that a slope of this magnitude would hardly have been conducive for occupation and the establishment of a site, our intervals were here adjusted to 18 m and shovel tests were placed every 25 m along the lines of survey.

The only other adjustment of testing intervals occurred in the western portion of the project, in the area located between Spring Valley Creek and the intersection of Walton and Winn roads. This area was under cultivation at the time of the survey and, hence, surface visibility was relatively better here than had been encountered previously. More effort was expended in examining the surface of the ground between corn rows for indications of prehistoric activity, in hopes that frequent plowing of this field might afford us with some insight into what might lie beneath the surface. While in the field, surveyors employed a 15 m interval, but placed shovel tests at

18 m along each transect. Regardless of the precise context of our shovel tests, all probes were conducted to a depth of 40 cm or more below the modern surface. Shovel tests were terminated only upon encountering sterile subsoil. Finally, in addition to surface reconnaissance and shovel testing, surveyors carefully examined all exposures and erosional features on the landscape in search of evidence of human presence.

RESULTS OF RESEARCH:

Three occurrences of cultural material were noted during the testing program. These are shown as asterisks (*) amidst clusters of shovel tests on Map No. 2. There follows a brief description of the material recovered from these sites, together with appropriate locational information.

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A single flake was observed on the surface of a ridge on the property of Mr. Richard J. Moore in the NE 1/4, SW 1/4, SE 1/4 of Section 9, Niles Township, T7S R17W, Berrien County, Michigan. This location, about 90 m west of Moore's east property line, was carefully examined for any additional evidence, but surface reconnaissance and cluster testing about this locus failed to produce any additional material. This findspot has been recorded with the Michigan History Division, Michigan Department of State.

20 BE 352

At a point about 240 m west of the aforementioned site and along the same ridge in the SE 1/4, NW 1/4, SE 1/4 of Section 9, Niles Township, T7S R17W,

20 BE 350

Berrien County, Michigan, a second flake was recovered from the surface. Again, intensification of recovery procedures failed to produce any additional evidence in the area about this findspot. The site has been recorded with the Michigan History Division, Michigan Department of State.

Three shovel tests placed near the south margin of the tennis court behind the home of Richard Moore in the SE 1/4, SE 1/4, SW 1/4 of Section 9, Niles Township, T7S R17W, Berrien County, Michigan, yielded a scatter consisting of three flakes and two pieces of fire-cracked rock. Twenty-five shovel tests subsequently placed in the general vicinity failed to disclose any additional debris, but did serve to confirm the very disturbed nature of the soil here. A conversation with the landowner revealed that heavy equipment had been used to level a ridge along the east bank of Spring Valley Creek prior to the construction of the elaborate home and associated recreational complex now occupying this location. Based upon our observations and this information provided by the Moore Family, it is clear that the cultural material observed in our initial shovel tests had, in all probability, been transported to this location during land-clearing activities.

Examination of the nearby ridge remnant and also the extant ridge immediately across the creek from

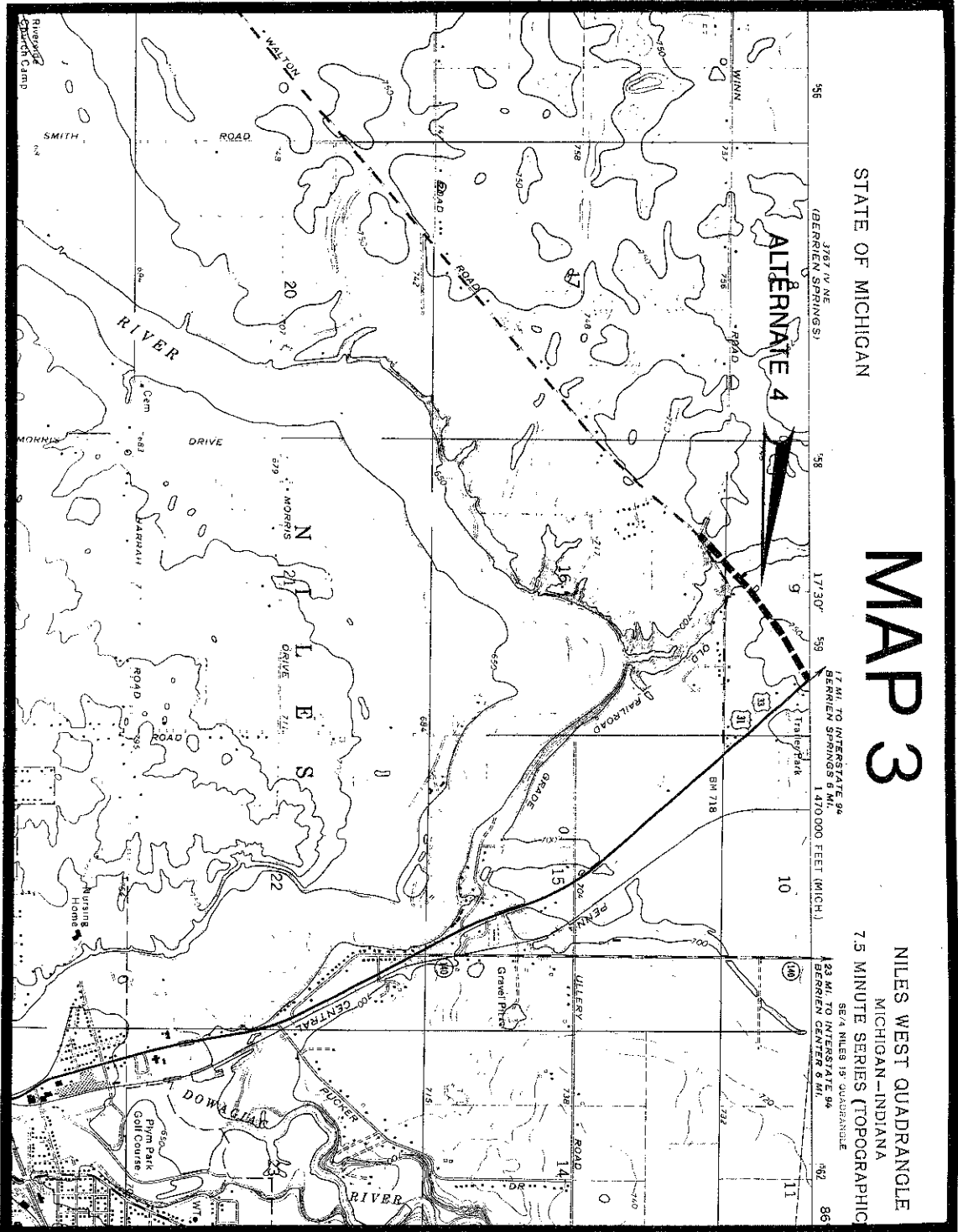
the Moore property did not produce any evidence which would have assisted us in delineating the former site. In aggregate, we have but five bits of evidence for the presence of an archaeological site where the Moore home is now situated, and the context is thoroughly disturbed as a result of the current land-use. Be that as it may, this site, identified as a lithic scatter, is recorded with the Michigan History Division, Michigan Department of State.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Prior to concluding this report of our activities and offering recommendations based upon our findings, several points warrant comment. First, with respect to our having failed to find more information than that which is briefly summarized above, it must be restated that in our opinion both the environmental context of this portion of the St. Joseph River Valley and site locational data available to us prior to the initiation of fieldwork strongly suggested that our research would in fact produce a prehistoric site(s), and perhaps an important one, along the Alternate 4 alignment. We cannot find fault with the testing program implemented on this occasion or with the abilities of surveyors to recognize indications of prehistoric activity had they been encountered in the area examined.

While it is certainly possible that a findspot or lithic scatter of debris might have eluded us, that we have recorded three very modest sites is good indication that our testing procedures were adequate to the task of recovering evidence in the form of

concentrations of cultural debris which are usually indicative of a campsite or village (i.e. a component) had such concentrations of cultural material existed in the project area. In seeking alternative explanations for the absence of what can be termed "significant" prehistoric sites in the project area, we might wish to consider the following: First, that the project is located at a distance of some 800 m from the river, and that between the river and the Alternate 4 alignment the terrain is heavily dissected (see Map No. 3). Relevant topographic data indicate the presence of broad expanse of level uplands in even closer proximity to the river at a point but a short distance downstream from the project area in the SW 1/4 of Section 16. Alternatively, we should also consider the possibility that habitation sites just don't occur in upland areas bordering this segment of the river valley. Rather, main habitation areas in this portion of the valley may have been confined to nearby areas of the valley floor (e.g. across the river from the project), with only brief forays by hunters and small parties of collectors into upland areas, resulting in the deposition of little "hard" evidence by which the archaeologist might identify a prehistoric presence. A final point which must be addressed has to do with those domiciles and associated outbuildings that lie in the alignment and will ultimately be destroyed should this route be approved and road improvement activities initiated. All three houses lying in the alignment date to the 20th century, with the possibility being that the Smith house located at the proposed intersection of Walton Road and US-31 was constructed just prior to the turn of the century. Although we are not architectural



STATE OF MICHIGAN

MAP 3

NILES WEST QUADRANGLE
 MICHIGAN-INDIANA
 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

3767 1/4 NE (BERRIEN SPRINGS) 17 30' 59" 1.7 MI. TO INTERSTATE 94 BERRIEN SPRINGS 6 MI. 1 470 000 FEET (MICH.) 1 23 MI. TO INTERSTATE 94 BERRIEN CENTER 8 MI. 40' 36"

historians, in our judgement none of the structures is, in terms of mode of construction or style, a significant building. We were given the opportunity to examine the external features of each structure, and based upon our observations at the time we did not even elect to photograph them. Be that as it may, it is recommended that these existing structures should not be ignored. Perhaps it would be appropriate for an architectural historian to make an on-site evaluation of the houses.

In the final analysis, it is concluded on the basis of a thorough and systematic survey of the Alternate 4 alignment, together with a search of the literature/documents and an examination of the Berrien County site files, that this project will not have an adverse impact on cultural resources and should be permitted to proceed.

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