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## 63-An Archaeological Survey of the Yacht Harbor Development Project in South Haven, Michigan

William M. Cremin  
*Western Michigan University*

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DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF INVESTIGATIONS NO. 63  
1984

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE YACHT HARBOR  
DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN SOUTH HAVEN, MICHIGAN

William M. Cremin

Prepared for:

YACHT HARBOR DEVELOPMENT COMPANY  
317 CENTER STREET, P.O. BOX 406  
SOUTH HAVEN, MICHIGAN 49090

## INTRODUCTION:

Pursuant to the receipt of a signed and dated (9 Oct 84) contract from Mr. Douglas F. Schroeder, Managing Partner, Yacht Harbor Development Company, South Haven, Michigan, authorizing Phase I archaeological study of the project area, a survey team from the Department of Anthropology, Western Michigan University undertook on-site evaluation in order to determine if a planned complex of marina with boatyard facilities, condominium units, and a hotel and restaurant would have an impact on potentially significant cultural resources. There follows a report of fieldwork conducted on 11 Oct 84, together with appropriate background information and recommendations based upon the findings of the researchers.

## PROJECT PERSONNEL:

Principal Investigator - William M. Cremin, Ph.D., Associate  
Professor of Anthropology, WMU

Field Assistants - James Cogswell, M.A. Candidate in  
Anthropology, WMU  
- Conrad Kaufman, Senior majoring in  
Anthropology, WMU  
- Chris Williams, M.A. Candidate in  
Anthropology, WMU

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT AREA:

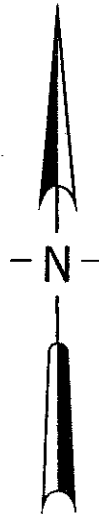
The Yacht Harbor project comprises about 74 acres ( 30 ha)

within the limits of the City of South Haven, Michigan and includes the NE 1/4 of the SE 1/4 and portions of the NW 1/4, SE 1/4; SE 1/4, SE 1/4; SW 1/4, SE 1/4; and SE 1/4, NE 1/4 of Section 3, South Haven Township, T1S R17W, Van Buren County, Michigan (Map 1). The general site occupies a portion of the valley floor of the Black River. The low wetland is flanked by the river on the north and west, and on the south and east there occurs a rim of high ground occupied by many residential properties overlooking a marsh with standing water. This area is traversed from NE to SW by an abandoned railroad grade along which are situated both presently occupied and recently abandoned commercial properties. A report prepared by Warzyn Engineering, Inc. of Madison, Wisconsin contains the results of soil studies indicating that most of the land lying between the railroad grade and the river has been filled, often to a depth of three meters or more. Our visual examination of this area confirmed that the streets and structures occurring here lie on top of sand, gravel, cinder and rubble fill.

That portion of the general site lying to the east of the abandoned railroad grade features depressional topography occupied by wet marshland partially ringed by a rising upland rim supporting brush and second growth on the slope and usually well maintained lawn with domestic structures on the bluff top. The center of this depression is occupied by a 2.6 ha body of water called Celery Pond. The elevation of this pond is 174.2 m ASL, or 0.2 m above Black River. A much smaller pond to the SW of Celery Pond stands at 174.3 m ASL. The water level of both ponds fluctuates from year to year with the level of nearby Lake

# YACHT HARBOR PROJECT

**SOUTH HAVEN, MICH.**



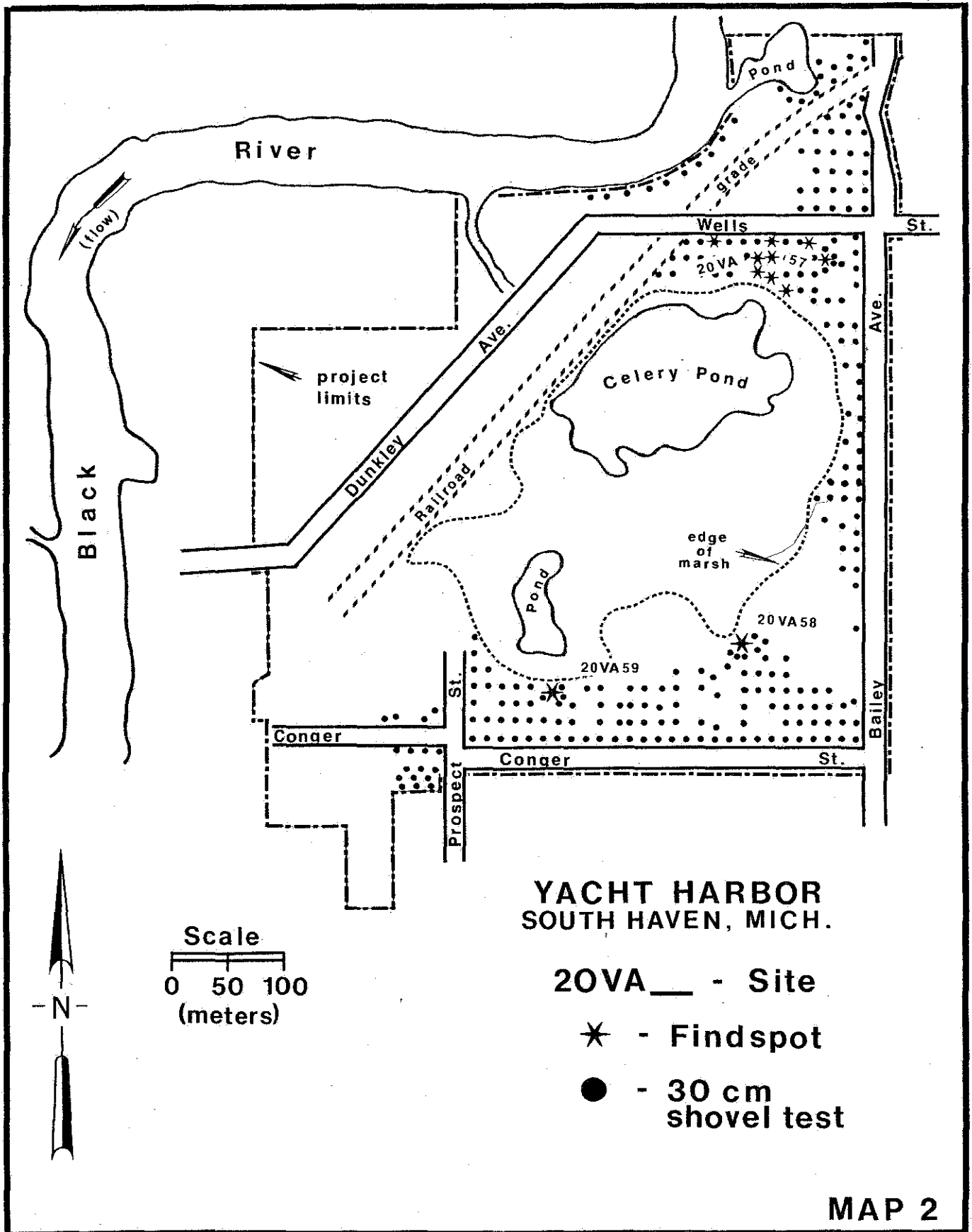
Michigan. The wet marsh flanking the two ponds appears to conform to the 175.5 m contour as it passes through the eastern one-half of the general site (see Map 2).

While wetland vegetation including marsh grasses, reeds, and sedges predominate in the central portion of the Yacht Harbor project, much as they did in the past, the upland rim overlooking the marsh is dominated by lawn, shrubs, and ornamental trees in well maintained properties and by brush, scrub second growth, and noxious weeds elsewhere within the project boundaries. According to Brewer (1979), at the time of the original Government Land Office survey of South Haven Township the marsh-filled Black River Valley was flanked by uplands supporting markedly beech-maple forest with inclusions of hemlock and white pine.

Because the western portion of the Yacht Harbor project evidenced considerable land filling activity in the recent past and much of the eastern portion was occupied by wet marshland overlying perhaps as much as 7.5 m of very soft to soft soils (according to the engineering report consisting of peat underlain by organic silt and silty clay), the fieldwork reported herein concentrated on the uplands flanking the marsh on the north, east, and south, from the channel connecting Celery Pond and the Black River on the northwest to the commercial properties fronting Conger Street just west of the intersection of Conger and Prospect streets on the southwest (Map 2).

#### PREVIOUS RESEARCH:

A literature, documents, and state site file search revealed that no archaeological sites were reported to occur in the





general vicinity of the Yacht Harbor project. In fact, no sites are recorded for the Lower Black River (Ms. Barbara Mead, Michigan History Division, personal communication). This state of affairs in all probability reflects not on the potential for sites to exist here, but rather on the total lack of interest thus far shown by archaeologists for undertaking field research in this area.

Of the historical documents examined, only Ellis' (1880) History of Berrien and Van Buren Counties, Michigan presented information suggesting the presence of Native Americans on the Black River at the time of Euro-American settlement. And, here, the implication is that Indian occupation was intense only during the season of maple sugaring. It is also possibly noteworthy that an early resident (Daniel Pierce) in 1838 noted that small patches of corn were planted following conclusion of maple sugaring, after which the Indians apparently left the Black River until their planned return in the fall (1880: 534).

In light of the failure of the professional archaeological community to investigate the Lower Black River and the fact that the location of the Yacht Harbor project overlooking the Black River and its adjacent marshland just a short distance above its mouth is absolutely "prime" in terms of site potential, the Principal Investigator undertook this survey realizing that an excellent opportunity existed to record potentially valuable information about the prehistory (and early history) of the South Haven area.

#### FIELD PROCEDURES:

Inasmuch as ground surface visibility across that portion

of the project requiring on-site evaluation was almost nil, the survey team relied on shovel testing procedures to conduct the study. Target parcels lying within the project limits were systematically traversed along transects usually spaced 15 m apart, but on occasion placed even more closely together. Our individual shovel tests were spaced along each transect at distances of 10-15 m apart. Additionally, multiple shovel tests were clustered around initial findspots (\*) of cultural material in an attempt to maximize recovery of items useful in assessing the potential importance of a discovery. In aggregate, 267 shovel tests, ranging in depth from 30-70 cm, were placed in parcels requiring evaluation. Their approximate locations are shown on Map 2. These shovel tests, together with careful examination of all bare spots, erosional cuts, and tracks created by the passage of people and/or vehicles, provided ample opportunity to examine the project area for the presence of potentially significant cultural material.

#### RESULTS OF THE SURVEY:

Surface and subsurface finds of prehistoric lithics and/or fragments of fire-cracked rock, and in one instance the report of a current landowner, Mr. John VanWynen, that formerly a sand ridge overlooking Celery Pond to the south had yielded to area collectors many "arrow heads" over the years, indicate that there exist no fewer than three archaeological sites in the project area. In the case of 20VA57 (Yacht Harbor site), an area of perhaps 4500 m<sup>2</sup> (1.2 acres), bordered on the north by Wells Street, on the east by Bailey Avenue, on the west by the abandoned railroad grade, and on the south by Celery Pond and

its adjacent marsh, nine separate occurrences of worked lithic material, lithic debris, and fire-cracked rock were recorded (Map 2). This area features some very sandy soil and minimal disturbance of natural contours along the edge of the marsh. All observations of prehistoric material were made either on the surface or within 10-12 cm of the ground surface. Nothing from this site is diagnostic with respect to the cultural affiliation and/or temporal placement of 20VA57.

To the south of Celery Pond in the lawns of the property at 721 Conger Street and 815 Conger Street the survey team recorded the findspots of isolated chert flakes. Cluster testing about the loci of the specimens from 20VA58 and 20VA59 resulted in no additional material being recovered. Moreover, the residents of these properties could provide us with no information useful in tracking down collections and/or fully assessing the potential of the finds. The recommendations pertaining to these sites therefore reflect the observations made in the field by surveyors, only.

Briefly, the inventory of cultural material, by location plotted on Map 2, is as follows:

20VA57 (Yacht Harbor site)

This site, located in the N 1/2, NE 1/4, NE 1/4, NE 1/4, SE 1/4 of Section 3, yielded 22 pieces of lithic material and fire-cracked rock.

1. Two pieces of unidentified chert, one of which evidences use-wear, and four fragments of FCR were observed in the VanWynen garden about 10 m south of Wells Street.

2. Three pieces of unidentified chert, one of which may be unifacially worked to produce a perforating tool, were recovered from a series of shovel tests in the lawn next to the VanWynen House and about 22 m south of Wells Street.
3. A utilized flake of Burlington chert was recovered from a shovel test along Wells Street about mid way between the VanWynen House at the intersection of Wells and Bailey and the old railroad grade.
4. A bifacial thinning flake of Bayport chert and a resharpening flake of an unidentified dark gray chert were found in a shovel test about 15 m south of the above find.
5. A resharpening flake of heat-treated Burlington chert was found in a shovel test located 15 m south of the last findspot.
6. A bifacial thinning flake of Bayport chert and a resharpening flake of Deer Lick Creek chert were recovered from a shovel test 15 m west of findspot #4.
7. One bifacial thinning flake of an unidentified chert and a flake of a dark gray chert were found in a shovel test 15 m south of the above findspot.
8. This findspot, located next to Wells Street and about 35 m east of the abandoned railroad grade, yielded one biface midsection fragment of Bayport chert, two flakes of what appears to be Burlington chert, one of which shows some use-wear, and two unidentified thinning flakes.
9. This, the southernmost findspot, represents the discovery of four lithic specimens and a piece of FCR in a small flower bed only a few meters above the edge of the marsh. All of

the items represent bifacial thinning flakes. One is of Bayport chert; a second flake is Burlington chert; the third is identified as Deer Lick Creek chert; and the last specimen cannot be identified as to source.

20VA58 (Conger Street I site; 815 Conger Street)

This findspot, located in the NE 1/4, NW 1/4, NE 1/4, SE 1/4, SE 1/4 of Section 3, produced a single flake of chert that cannot be identified as to source. The specimen is a bifacial thinning flake and occurs without any potentially meaningful cultural association.

20VA59 (Conger Street II site; 721 Conger Street)

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ERRATUM

On page 10 it should be noted that the legal description of 20VA59 includes:

a findspot in the NW 1/4,  
NE 1/4, NW 1/4, SE 1/4,  
SE 1/4 of Section 3

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Cluster testing

about the loci of the finds did not yield associational information. Therefore, in the case of sites 20VA58 and 20VA59, it is suggested that no additional work will be necessary in that portion of the project where these sites were recorded.

However, with respect to the Yacht Harbor site (20VA57), the

Principal Investigator is impressed with the quantity of cultural material recovered from seven shovel tests and two surface finds in this area of the project. Moreover, soil conditions observed here suggest that much (if not most) of the site area has been but minimally disturbed as a result of recent land use, strongly suggesting that additional examination may well reveal archaeological context. Finally, although the PI has not been able to follow up on comments provided by the current landowner, there is information to the effect that over the years this sand hill overlooking Celery Pond to the south has yielded artifacts to collectors. Therefore, it can be recommended that test excavations be conducted on this site prior to the commencement of construction activity.

#### REFERENCES CITED:

Brewer, R., compiler

- 1979 Vegetation of southwestern Michigan at the time of settlement. Department of Biology, Western Michigan University. Kalamazoo.

Ellis, F.

- 1880 History of Berrien and Van Buren Counties, Michigan. Ensign, Philadelphia.