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## 91-Phase I Archaeological Survey of Three Boat Launching Sites at Omena, Prairie River, and Proud Lakes in Southern Lower Michigan for the Department of Natural Resources

William M. Cremin

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GREGORY R. WALZ  
WILLIAM M. CREMIN

PHASE I ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THREE BOAT LAUNCHING  
SITES AT OMENA, PRAIRIE RIVER, AND PROUD LAKES IN SOUTHERN  
LOWER MICHIGAN FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

1990  
REPORT OF INVESTIGATIONS NO. 91

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

A Report of Research  
Undertaken for:

Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
Recreation Division  
P.O. Box 30028  
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Attention:

Mr. Bruce Walker

**INTRODUCTION:**

Upon receipt of authorization from Mr. Robert Deadman,

Procurement Section, Michigan Department of Natural Resources,

dated 8 Mar 90, archaeologists in the Department of Anthropology,

Western Michigan University initiated a literature and site file

search and on 4 Apr and 27 Apr traveled to the Omena and Prairie

River Lake study areas and the Proud Lake Recreation Area, respect-

ively, to conduct on-site evaluation in order to determine whether

the construction of boat launching and related facilities would

impact potentially significant archaeological resources. There

follows a report of our program of research, together with the

findings and recommendations based upon the Phase I study under-

taken for the MDNR on this occasion.

**PROJECT PERSONNEL:**

Principal Investigator - Dr. William M. Cremin, Professor of

Anthropology, Western Michigan

University

Field Supervisor

- Mr. Gregory R. Walz, M.A. Candidate,

Department of Anthropology, WMU

Field Assistants

- Mr. Daniel Goatley, Graduate Student

in Anthropology, WMU

- Mr. Timothy Knapp, Graduate Student

in Anthropology, WMU

- Mr. Lewis Wisser, M.A. Candidate,

Department of Anthropology, WMU

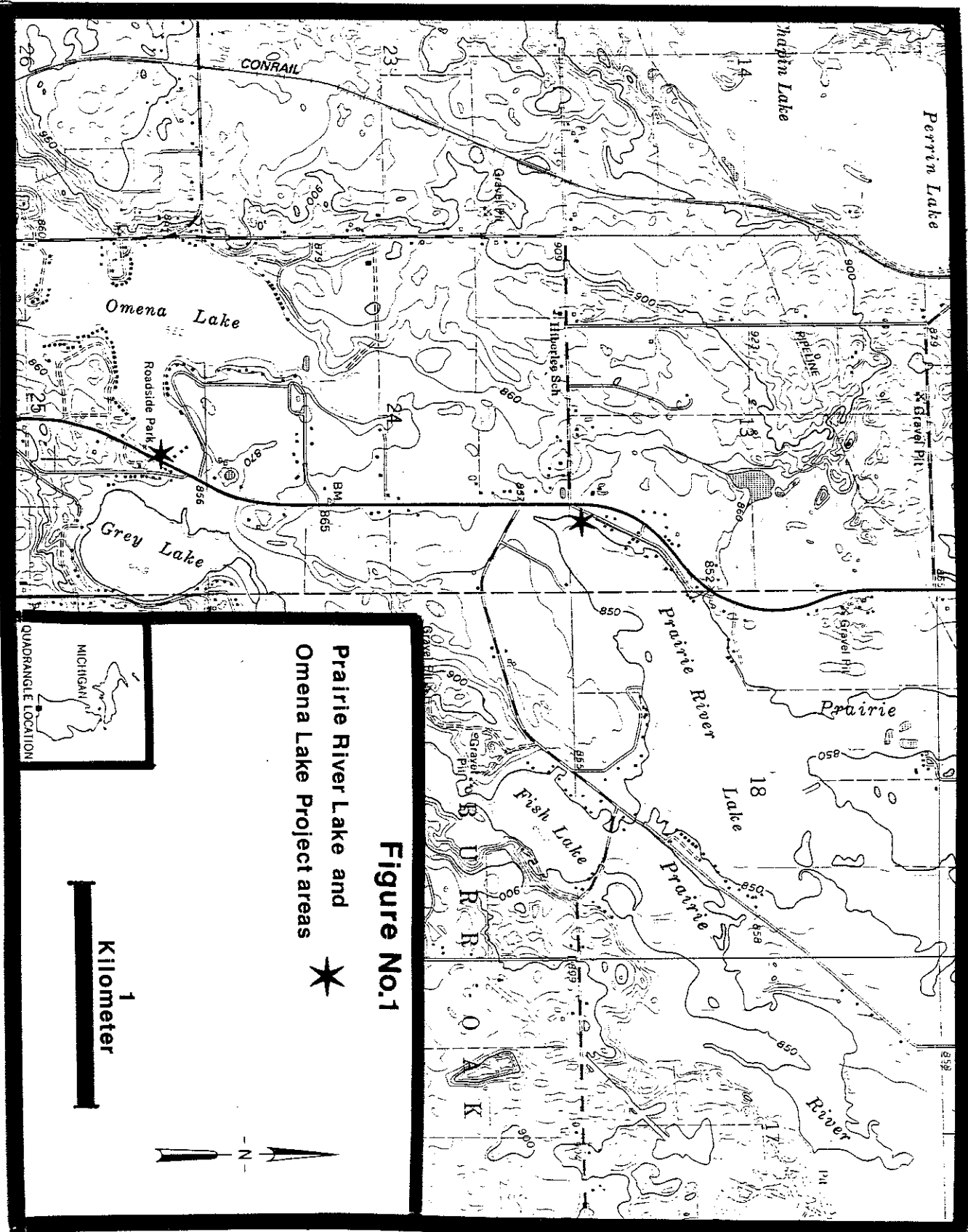
## DESCRIPTION OF THE THREE STUDY AREAS:

The study areas all represent small irregularly shaped parcels conforming to lake contours where the MDNR proposes to establish or upgrade boat launching sites and certain other facilities. The

Prairie River Lake access site encompasses about 1.5 ha in the SW 1/4, SE 1/4, SE 1/4 of Section 13, Sherman Township (T7S R10W), St. Joseph County, Michigan. It fronts on M-66 near the intersection of M-66 and Featherstone Road, and a gravel road leading from the highway provides access to the property as well as forms the western limits of the study area. The lake shoreline forms the eastern boundary of this parcel of land. Today the lake stands at an elevation of 258 m ASL (Figs. 1 and 2).

At the time of fieldwork, it was determined that the parcel had long been used as a boat launching site, with a portion of the area consisting of gravel and fill roadway and parking space. Surveyors found the southern boundary to be delineated by surveyor stakes and roughly paralleling a drainage ditch running from the highway to the lake. Vegetation over much of the area consisted of small second growth species that included elm, dogwood, weeping willow and pussy willow stems. Along the aforementioned gravel road there are a few white oaks of 24 inch diameter or greater, and one large hickory tree. The northern survey boundary of the parcel conformed to a property line marked by a transition from the above noted "scrub" vegetation to a well manicured lawn. It is further noteworthy that most of the parcel lies little more than one meter above lake level (Fig. 2).

The Omena Lake study area (Figs. 1 and 3) lies less than two kilometers to the south of the Prairie River Lake access site in the



**Figure No.1**

**Prairie River Lake and  
Omena Lake Project areas**



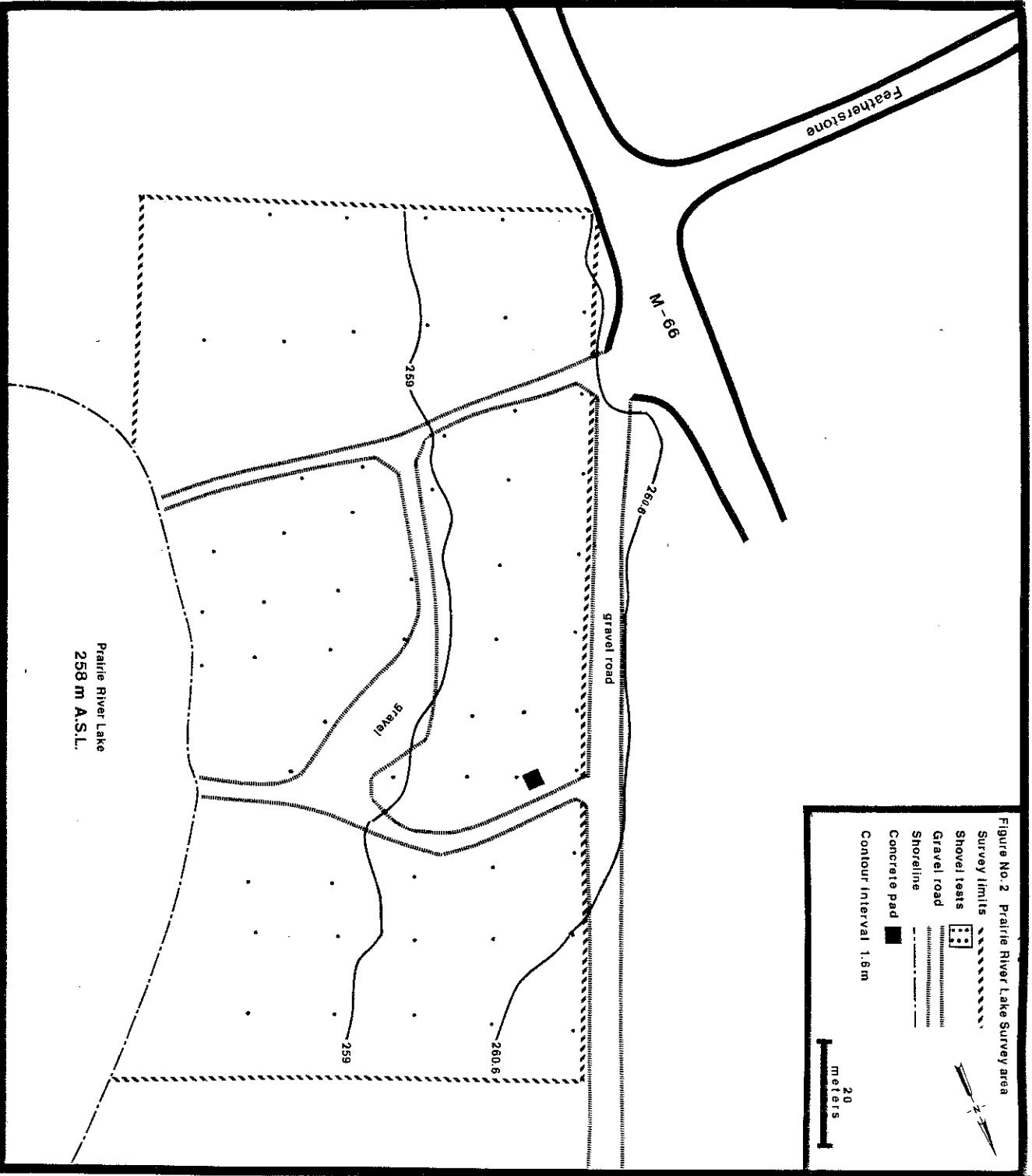
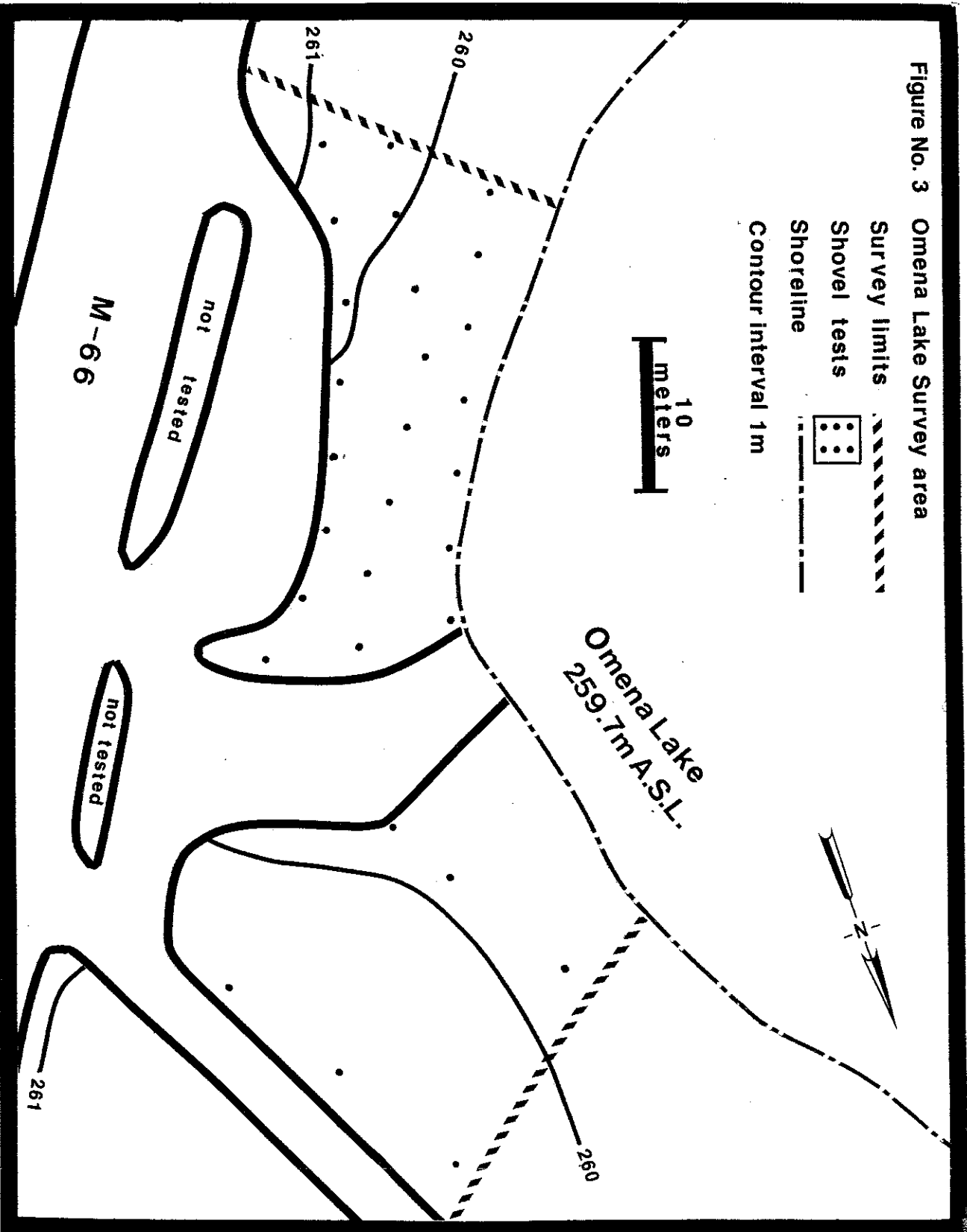


Figure No. 3 Omena Lake Survey area





center of the NW 1/4, NE 1/4 of Section 25, Sherman Township (T7S R10W), St. Joseph County, Michigan. Also fronting on M-66, this access site encompasses only 0.25 ha of lake shoreline. Surveyors noted that a significant amount of recent disturbance characterized this locale, reflecting its current use as a roadside park with both a paved parking area and a gravel access road to water's edge near the northern end of the study area. The highway passing along the eastern edge of the parcel is at a higher elevation than the parking area, resulting in a graded bank between the two that was deemed unworthy of testing by surveyors. The elevation of Omena Lake is 259.7 m ASL, with almost the entire study area lying within one meter of lake level.

The final parcel studied during this project lies in the Proud Lake State Recreation Area of Commerce Township, Oakland County, Michigan. Specifically, the Proud Lake access site occurs in the NE 1/4, SE 1/4, NE 1/4 of Section 20, T2N R8E, and it encompasses about 0.25 ha of land area on the south end of the lake (Figs. 4 and 5).

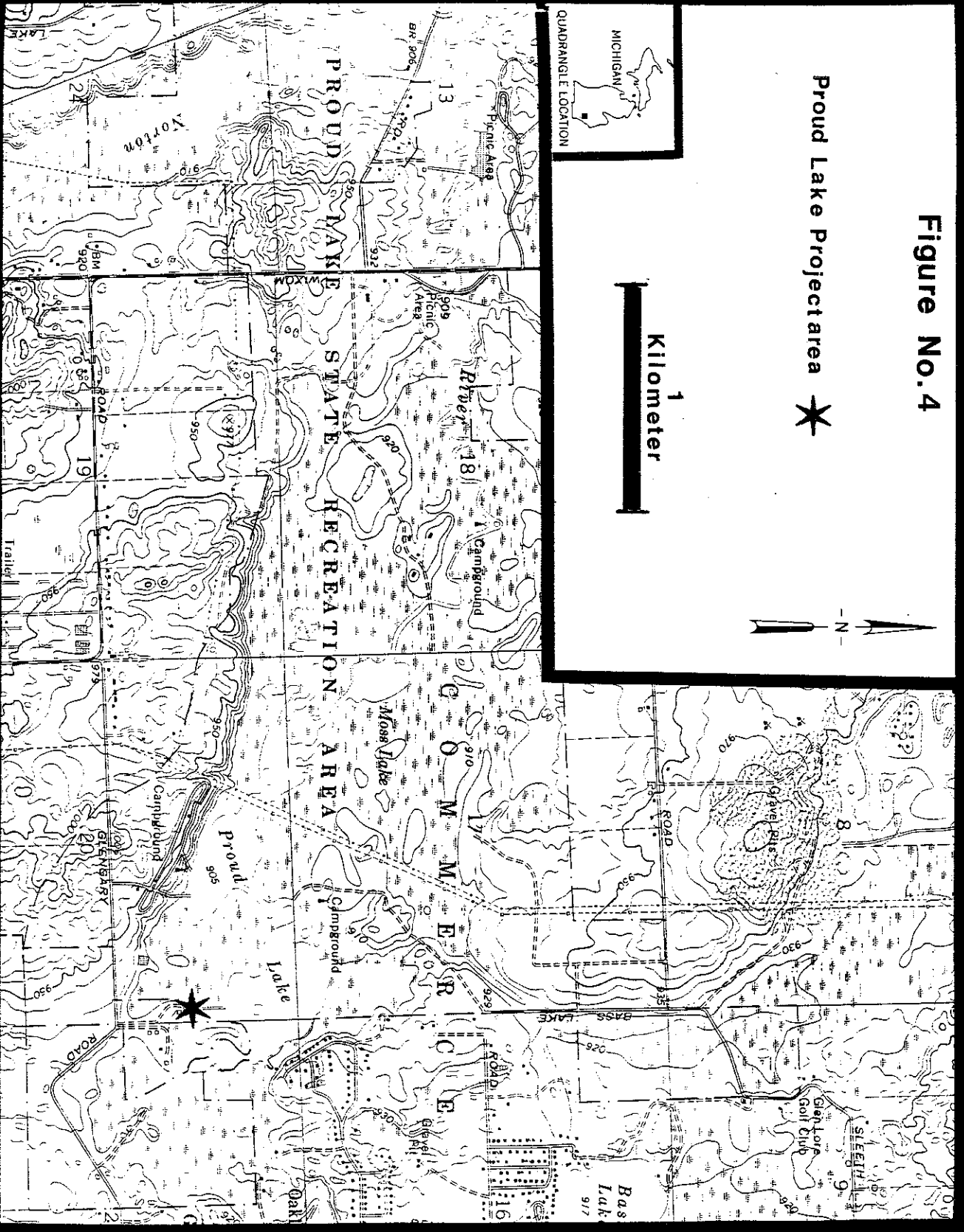
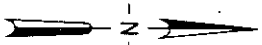
This locale was found by the survey team to consist largely of wetlands bordering the lake and a narrow channel that extends in a southerly direction from this body of water toward the area of proposed development of boat launching facilities. Vegetation consisted of sedges, dogwood stems, and marsh marigolds. The portion of the study area that could be effectively surveyed lies along a gravel road and turn-around providing access to the channel. The road ends on a sandy knoll that provides a site dry enough to support several large white oak trees. While the size of these trees suggests that the knoll is a natural feature, the nearby channel appears to have

Figure No.4

Proud Lake Project area 



  
1  
Kilometer



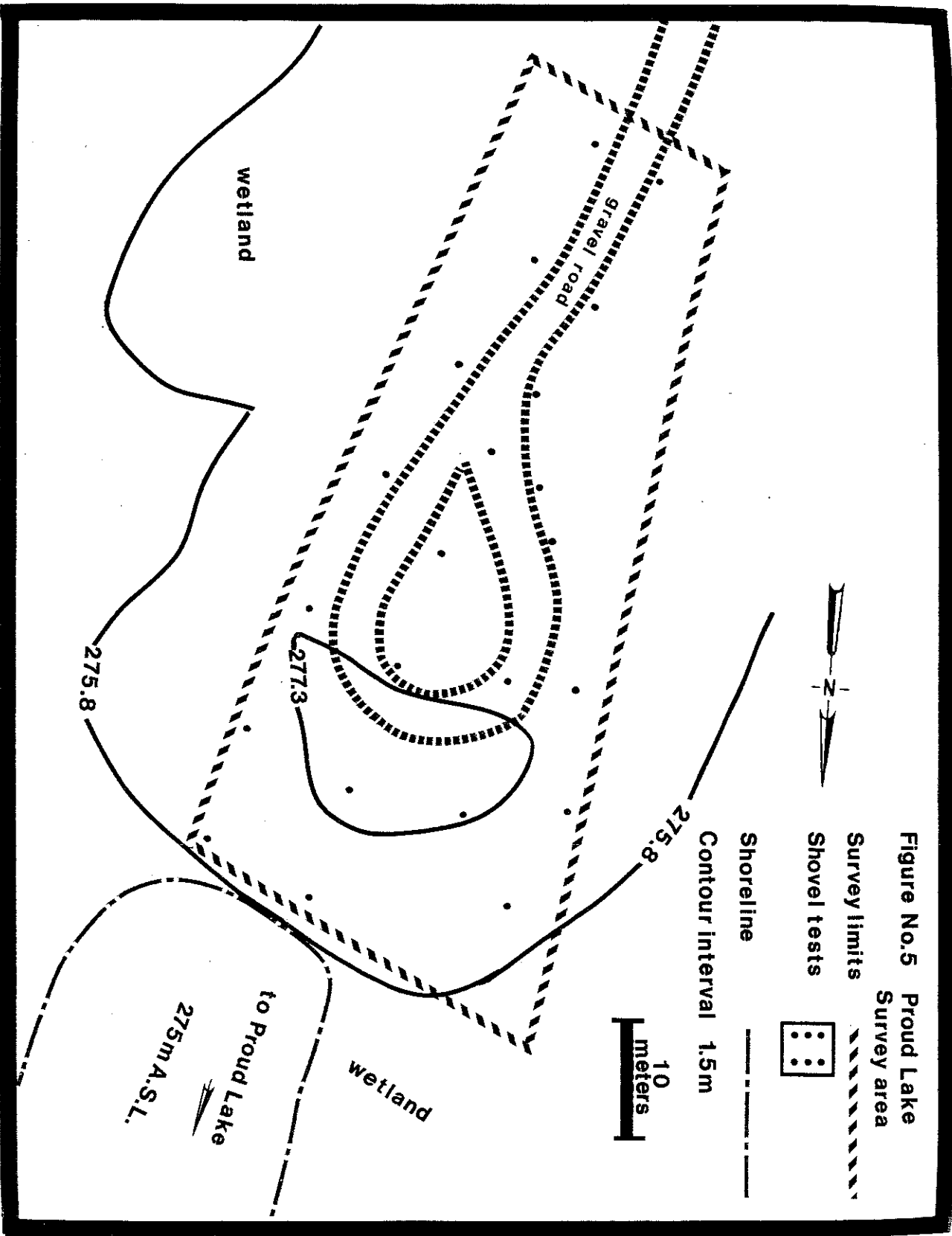


Figure No.5 Proud Lake  
Survey area

Survey limits  
Shovel tests



Shoreline

Contour interval 1.5m



been excavated from the lake, possibly to provide access to a cabin that formerly occupied a concrete foundation pad located just outside the survey boundary on the east. Once again, the site selected for boat launching facilities is for the most part less than one meter above the 275 m ASL elevation of the channel and lake. Only the sandy knoll, reaching an elevation of 277.3 m ASL, is at an elevation significantly higher than that noted for Proud Lake. PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE AREA OF THESE PROJECTS: The state site files indicate that no archaeological sites have been recorded for the three parcels under investigation (Barbara Mead, Bureau of History, personal communication). In fact, with respect to the Omaha Lake and Prairie River Lake study areas, it is noteworthy that only a single site, 205J4, a Hinsdale listing identified as a prehistoric fort located in the SW 1/4, SW 1/4 of Section 31, has been recorded for Sherman Township. Moreover, only one site, 205J53, identified as a Woodland Period earthwork in the center of the W 1/2, SW 1/4 of Section 12, is presently reported for adjacent Burr Oak Township. No archaeological surveys have been conducted in either township, however. The senior author and his associates at WMU have undertaken both systematic survey and several programs of test excavation in the nearby townships of Colon and Leonidas to the northeast of these two MDNR study areas (Cremien and Quattrin 1987; Cremien and Quattrin 1988). Having recorded almost 100 new archaeological sites for 15 km<sup>2</sup> surveyed in 1986 in the general area suggests to us that future systematic study in Burr Oak and Sherman, with their many lakes and streams, would most probably be rewarded with many additions to the site files.

The third MDNR study area in the Proud Lake State Recreation Area of Commerce Township in Oakland County has received some prior, albeit unsystematic, survey attention. According to the state site files, Stamps and Zurel (1980) included Section 20, where the parcel we examined occurs, in their county-wide study of archaeological resources. However, no archaeological sites were reported. They did record 200K84, an Archaic site characterized by an argillite biface found amidst an FCR scatter, in the NE 1/4, SE 1/4, NW 1/4 of Section 33 in Commerce Township at a distance of about three kilometers SSE of the Proud Lake access site. And the site files also contain a reference to a prehistoric debris scatter (200K302) in the SW 1/4, NE 1/4, SE 1/4, NE 1/4 of Section 16 in this same township near Bear Lake less than two kilometers NE of the MDNR study area.

Although the application of survey procedures varied somewhat from parcel to parcel, in all instances both reconnaissance and shovel testing were employed to achieve coverage that was systematic and intensive. At Prairie River Lake, shovel tests were placed at 15 m intervals along transect spaced 15 m apart from north to south across the parcel. A total of 57 shovel tests were located wherever recent disturbance in the form of filling was not in evidence (Fig. 2). None produced evidence of prehistoric presence on this property, quite probably reflecting the lowlying character of the study area. For example, as surveyors approached to within 15-20 m of the lake shoreline, soils were noted to be saturated with water and highly organic in content. In the water saturated areas, the A horizon was a dark brownish black underlain

#### SURVEY METHODS AND RESULTS:

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by a medium tan soil that had a high clayey content and was noted to be "waterlogged". Drier portions of the parcel featured an A horizon that was medium brown in color, but again the underlying horizon consisted of a medium tan clayey subsoil.

Given the very low relief across the entire study area and the existence of wetland soil associations along its margins, it is most doubtful that this parcel would have afforded an attractive location for intensive occupation by the prehistoric residents of the area.

The Omena Lake study area evidenced even greater modern disturbance in the form of a roadside park with both a paved parking area and a gravel access road leading to water's edge. Due to the small size of this parcel, transects were spaced at 5 m intervals and shovel tests were located at 8-15 m along each line of survey. Twenty-nine tests, located in Fig. 3, were excavated to ground water, with no recovery of cultural material. While it is possible that recent disturbance has obscured whatever trace of prior occupation might have existed, it is more reasonable to postulate that the low elevation of this parcel above the lake dissuaded the area's prehistoric residents from camping here.

Surface reconnaissance and systematic placement of 22 shovel tests at the Proud Lake access site also yielded negative results (Fig. 5). Those shovel tests placed along the road margin and within the turn-around revealed that fill material had been used to raise the level of the road above the adjacent wetlands. This fill included chunks of asphalt, brick, and coal, together with gravel and sand. It is interesting that the sandy knoll supported such large oak trees, as if this natural landform was formerly isolated from land of comparable elevation until the road was constructed

across the wetlands to reach it. The low elevation of the project area in relation to the surrounding wetlands once again argues against prehistoric settlement of this location, albeit may have been frequented for seasonal exploitation of certain aquatic and riparian plant and animal resources.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

In each instance, these three lakeside parcels were thoroughly evaluated employing recovery procedures that provided surveyor coverage that was both systematic and intensive. Yet nowhere did the surveyors record observations suggestive of prehistoric occupation of the MDNR boat launching sites. Our negative results may reflect to some extent prior disturbance of the sites; however, we are inclined toward an interpretation which emphasizes the lowlying character of each parcel. And this interpretation is not out of line given the presence of wetlands in close proximity to each site today!! While these locations may have been visited for seasonal resource exploitation in the past, it is most doubtful that they provided a situation "dry" enough to encourage establishment of even a temporary camp. Camp sites, should they exist, will most likely be found at higher elevations back from the lake shoreline. In light of our findings, it is very doubtful that proposed construction of boat launching facilities at the three sites in question will impact potentially significant archaeological sites. Therefore, we recommend that the proposed construction activity be permitted to proceed as planned.

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