

# Preliminary Report

## Summer 2004 Archaeology Field School, San Patricio, Texas

*Director*  
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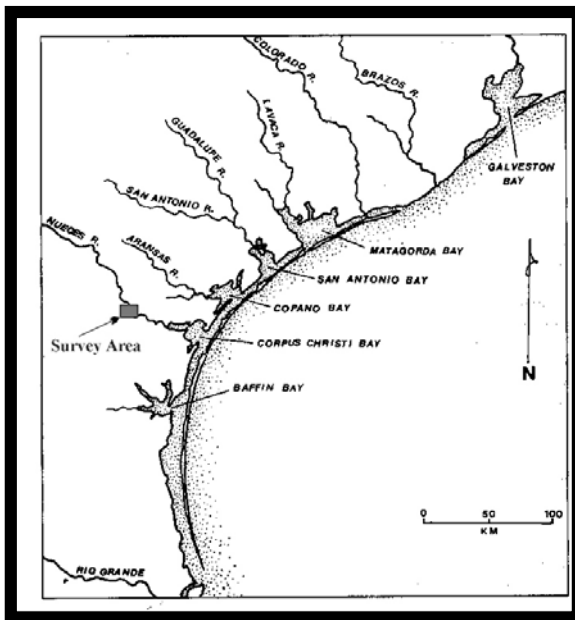
### Introduction

The Summer Archaeology Field School sponsored by Texas A&M-Kingsville and Corpus Christi Museum has successfully completed its fifth season in the Lower Nueces River Valley, South Texas. As in previous years, the program provides academic training for university students in archaeological field methods and educational opportunities for public interested in prehistory and history of the region. This year new archaeological sites were recorded and hundreds of artifacts, soil samples, animal bone remains, pottery fragments, and carbonized remains from



*Quadrant Survey 2004*

site excavations were recovered, catalogued, and analyzed. The findings from survey and excavations further our knowledge of prehistoric settlements in the Nueces River Valley.



*Summer 2004 Archaeological Field School Study Area,  
Lower Nueces River*

### Project Focus and Participants

One of the goals in the 2004 field school was to continue archaeological survey and locate new sites in the Nueces River Valley. Four 1 km<sup>2</sup> blocks along the western margin of the Nueces River, northwest of Bluntzer, were selected for intensive reconnaissance. The area contains ranchlands, residential areas, low floodplain, and extensive undeveloped terraces supporting thick mesquite forest. Survey crews located six new archaeological sites. Each was mapped, surface collections were made,

and testing was completed to evaluate the cultural deposits.



*Mapping Operations, Site RF-1, 2004*

Students and volunteers also conducted a complete intensive surface survey and continued excavations at Site MD-1, a Late Prehistoric (AD 1000-1700) base-camp located north of San Patricio. Initial study of this site began in 2002 (DeLoney 2003; Drolet 2003a, 2003b). The goal was to expand the investigation to better date the site occupation, identify habitation features, and obtain more complete artifact collections for analysis.

The 2004 Field School participants included students from Texas A&M University-College Station, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, University of North Texas, Wooster College (Ohio), and University of New Mexico. Specialists included Dr. Linda Perry, an archaeobotanist from Southern Illinois

University and Adam Watson, a faunal animal bone specialist from the Smithsonian Institution. Marguerite DeLoney from Brown University was field supervisor. Volunteers from middle schools, high schools, and universities joined the field team along with interested adults and local residents.

Museum staff, Texas A&M University-Kingsville (TAMU-K) faculty, and other specialists visited the field operations. These included: Jeff Brown, Dr. Patricia Drolet, Geraldine McGloin, Angela Snider, and Rick Stryker from the Corpus Christi Museum; Dr. Cecilia Rhoades and Dr. Kuravilla John from TAMU-K; Dr. Gerald Betty from Texas A&M University-College Station; John Lloyd-Reilley from USDA-NRCS Kingsville, and Bill Havelka from San Patricio. The Field School also hosted a group of 15 secondary school teachers from South Texas taking part in a special workshop entitled *European Conquest of Native American Lands*. The group was led by Sandra Linderman, Educational Specialist from the Corpus Christi Museum and sponsored by the Education Service Center, Region 2.

In addition, eight members of the Texas Archeological Society (TAS) participated in field operations at Site MD-1 in June and July as part of their 2004 TAS Academic Academy training program. They included Pam Wheat (TAS Executive Director), Sandra Blandford, Donald Carr, Dan Hudson, Christina Younger, Maria Younger and Jack Younger. The TAS members assisted in excavations, screening, and laboratory work, each spending an 8-hour period with the field team.

Field School collections are being curated at the Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History where they are undergoing further analysis. Dissemination of the archaeological findings will be presented at professional meetings, in the *TAS Newsletter*, and at public/university forums in South Texas.



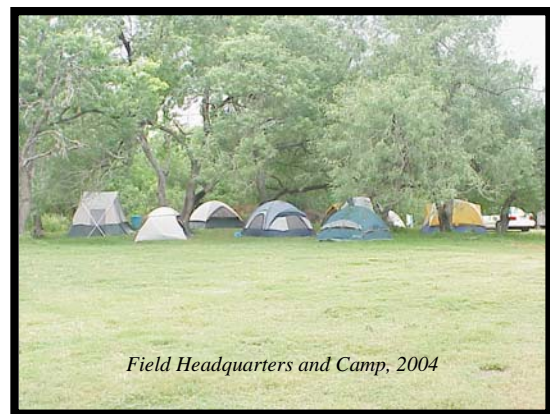
*Student Excavation Team, Site MD-1, 2004*

### **Sponsorship and Assistance**

The Archaeology Field School benefited from institutional assistance, foundation grants, and public support. The Friends of the Corpus Christi Museum provided equipment, supplies, and consultant fees. Dr. James Puckett (Chair, Psychology and Sociology) and Dr. Cecilia Rhoades (Assistant Professor) from Texas A&M University-Kingsville provided valuable institutional assistance. Financial grants were received from the Behmann Brothers Foundation and the Daughters of the American Revolution. The Texas Archaeological Society contributed

operating funds through their Academic Academy program that was sponsored in part by Humanities Texas and the Texas Preservation Trust Fund of THC. Two students received educational grants from the Behmann Brothers Foundation. A third received a scholarship from the Independent Studies Program at Wooster College.

Public support for this educational program was as enthusiastic as in previous years. St. Patrick's Catholic Church provided its Parish Hall as an evening meeting place for dinner and discussion. The project field headquarters was located near San Patricio on the ranch of Dr. Robert Bluntzer, who graciously granted the use of his property and ranch house during the 8-week period. Local ranch owners, including Steve Blunt, the Dorch and Dunn families, Tim Funter, Micky Handy, Dr. David Murphy, and Lonnie Glasscock, offered access to their land for archaeological study. Other local residents assisted in field and program efforts; these include Charles Bluntzer, Joan Bluntzer, Dr. David Murphy, Bill Havelka, Geraldine McGloin, and Reverend Francis Sebastian.



*Field Headquarters and Camp, 2004*

### **2004 Field Operations**

Field operations included survey, excavations, and processing of artifact collections. The project headquarters was the base where the field team camped, collections were processed, and site and artifact information was recorded. The team was divided into two groups: one to survey and the other to excavate Site MD-1. During the 8-week period, people shifted between groups in order to gain training in different types of data recovery techniques. Evenings were dedicated to washing and sorting artifacts, completing lab and field forms, preparing site map drawings and profiles, and entering tabular information on the computer data base.



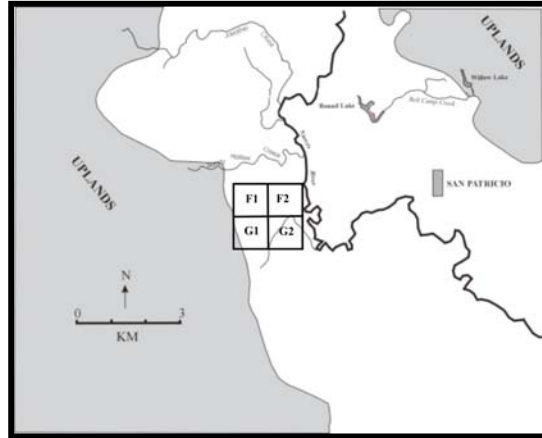
*Artifact Processing, Field Lab, 2004*

At the end of the course, students submitted research reports and prepared a slide presentation for the public at St. Patrick's Catholic Church Parish Hall in San Patricio.

#### *Systematic Survey*

Systematic survey was conducted within four contiguous 1-km<sup>2</sup> quadrants (F1, F2, G1, G2) located on the western margin of the Nueces River. A hand-held GPS unit was used to locate each of the quadrants and pinpoint internal features, such as archaeological sites,

roads, geographical points, and landmarks. USGS topographical maps guided the survey teams through the quads. Compasses were used to follow transect lines, and survey members made continuous parallel sweeps positioned 30 m apart. Before survey was initiated, access to property was obtained from private landowners.



*Nueces Valley Survey Quadrants, 2004*

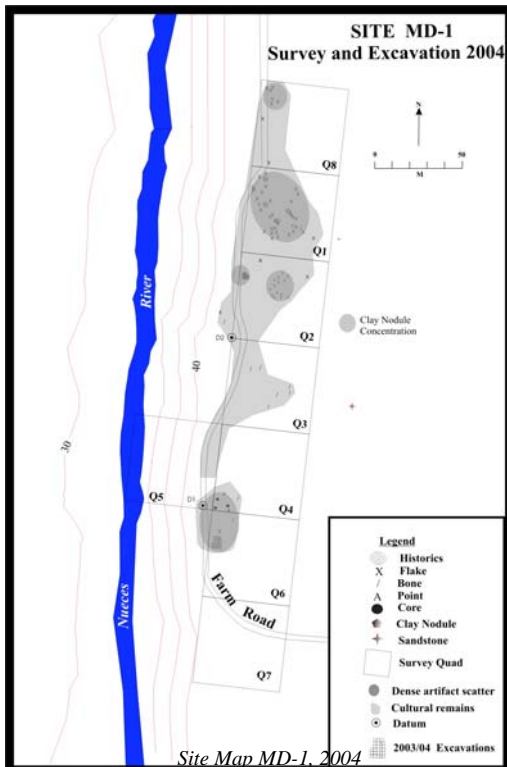
Surveys were conducted on the river terraces within each quad. The eastern sections of survey blocks F2 and G2 consisted of low floodplain adjacent to the Nueces River. Only minimal survey was conducted due to flooding and dense grass cover. The northern and southern sections of F1 and G1 blocks were residential subdivisions and heavily modified terrain. These areas were spot checked but not systematically surveyed. Attention focused on surveying elevated terraces measuring 50-75 ft high which extend from the northwest (F1) to the central (F1, F2) and southwest (G1) portions of the survey squares. Large ranches with mixed pasture and undeveloped mesquite forest dominate this area.

Six prehistoric sites were identified along the edge of the high terraces

(Frech and Buitron 2004). The sites range from  $\frac{1}{2}$  hectare ( $6075 \text{ m}^2$  or 1.5 acre) to less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a hectare ( $1700 \text{ m}^2$  or .1 acre). All contain relatively shallow deposits (30-50 cm deep) with sparsely scattered chert flakes on the surface and an occasional projectile point, core, or bifacial artifact fragment. Test excavations were conducted on 5 of the 6 sites and no evidence of subsurface features or stratigraphy was identified. The sites appear to represent small seasonal hunting camps occupied during Late Archaic (1150 BC – AD 1000) or Late Prehistoric (AD 1000-1700) times. These small temporary hunting camps are common in the Nueces River Valley ((Drolet and Davis 2001; Drolet and Gilmore 2002; Drolet 2003b).

#### *Investigations at Site MD-1*

Site MD-1 is located along the margin of the Nueces River and extends over a hectare in size. It contains a single, Late Prehistoric component. The site was



discovered during survey in 2002 and initial excavations began in 2003. Radiocarbon dates obtained in 2003 indicate the site was occupied over a 300 year period, from approximately A.D. 1460-1760 (Drolet 2003a, 2003b). The 2003 excavations were limited to the southern area where habitation features, lithic tools, faunal remains, ceramics, shell, and preserved botanical remains were recovered (DeLoney 2003, Gilmore and Wack 2003; Johnson 2003; Perry 2003). Preliminary findings indicated that MD-1 was a base camp settlement with scattered midden concentration areas associated with tool making, food preparation, and other household activities.

#### Survey

Intensive survey of Site MD-1 provided further information about its size and internal configuration. The entire river terrace was gridded off into eight  $50 \text{ m}^2$  survey quadrants (George 2004). All cultural materials within the quadrants were plotted and mapped. A refined site map emerged, indicating the settlement was 275 m long by 45 m wide, extending north-south along the terrace margin. Five circular midden or artifact concentrations, 10-50 m apart and ranging from 10 to 30 m in diameter were identified. Another surface feature included a clay nodule concentration situated along the eastern site border. The midden concentrations contained dense lithic flake scatters and animal bone. In or near these localities were chert cores, knives, bifaces, projectile points, hammer stones, and Toyah/Rockport Phase pottery sherds. The scattered concentrations indicate localities of habitation and diverse



An unusual artifact concentration was found adjacent to Feature 3. A high density of Rockport/Toyah ware sherds were recovered within a 1 m<sup>2</sup> area. Over 90 bowl and jar fragments representing several vessels were found in this location (Franco 2004). Their occurrence between Features 2 and 3 may indicate a locality associated with ceramic manufacture and/or a storage area associated with vessel use.

Excavations suggest there were separate areas for tool manufacturing, butchering, cooking, and ceramic use associated with one or more household units. Unfortunately, no direct evidence for structures, house floors, or hearths has been recovered in this locality.

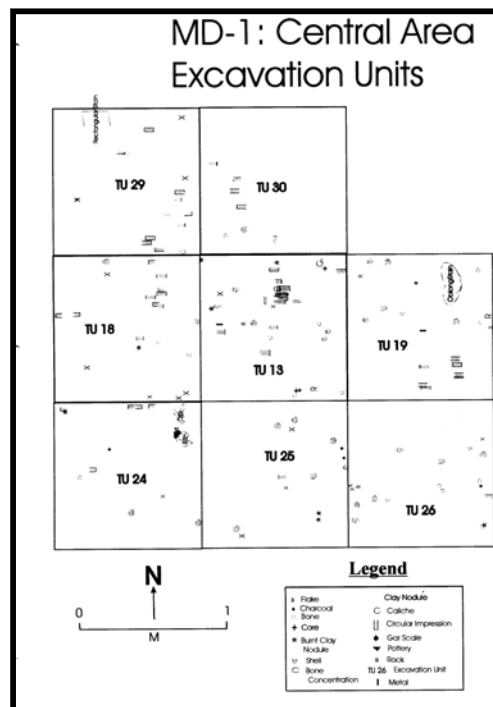


Excavations, Site MD-1, 2004

#### *Central Area Site Units*

Eight continuous 1x1 m units were excavated in the central area to a depth of 60-90 cm. The subsurface layers contained sparse midden materials except for freshwater shell remains recovered in all excavated units (Franco 2004). In 2003, a bead made of this same shell material was found in the southern area of the site (Johnson 2004). The higher density of mussel shell in the central site portion may be associated with special artifact manufacture.

Multiple, small circular stains were identified in the excavation units at 20-90 cmbs (Thomas 2004). Some were angular in profile while others were generally straight. The stains were approximately 4-6 cm in diameter. The angular impressions appear to represent disturbances by gophers, ants, and tree roots. The straight or slightly angular profiles may represent pole impressions associated with domestic structures, such as shelters, food drying racks, or even markers. A circular pattern of impressions spread across four excavation units (TU29, TU30, TU16, TU15). The oval pattern of post-like impressions measured 1.1 m long by 1 m wide, possibly outlining the perimeter of a single circular structure. If this can be confirmed, the feature would be the first domestic structure identified at the site.



The possible house floor finding demonstrates the difficulty of identifying

domestic structures and determining their shape, size, and spatial distribution within the site. Nevertheless, the habitation areas marked by midden concentrations at Site MD-1 clearly suggest multiple households were present. Given the circular pole-like pattern identified, the Site MD-1 households were probably similar to the small, circular pole frame structures covered with mats or hides used by the Karankawa in historic times (Newcomb 1983; Ricklis 1996:4)

#### *Northern Area Site Unit*

The single excavation unit placed in the northern area of the site confirmed a habitation locality. The Late Prehistoric midden layer, extending approximately 90 cmbs in depth, contains concentrated cultural materials. No special features were recorded.

#### **Final Comments**

Valuable information about prehistoric settlement in the Nueces River Valley is being generated by the Field School operations. Each year a better understanding of how early human groups adapted to the inland area is recorded. More than 30% of the valley has been surveyed and more than 35 sites have been identified. The work has confirmed that the area was occupied over three long cultural periods spanning approximately 10,000 years. Site MD-1, where investigations centered this year, has been particularly significant in providing detailed evidence about the size and internal complexity of a major settlement during the Late Prehistoric period. Further research promises to contribute additional archaeological information on prehistoric settlements.

Student training and public education are a significant part of the field school program. University students learn methods and techniques of archaeological field research. The course is intensive and all students benefit academically from developing new skills, learning data recovery procedures, and participating in artifact analysis and interpretation. This year, as in years past, the course has provided new opportunities for students to continue their academic growth.



Public participation in the field school is a rewarding aspect of the program. This summer there was a diversity of volunteers and public participants who joined the field team. Some stayed for only one day, while others camped with us for 5-6 weeks. Everyone who visited had the opportunity to see and understand how scientific work is conducted and what an enjoyable experience it can be.

Archaeology Field School Participants and Staff, 2004

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