

Utilizing Archival Information to Re-Locate or “Stumble Upon” Lost Archeological Sites

Waldo Troell, Archeologist,
Texas Department of Transportation

The Long Road to Locating Lost Sites

TxDOT archeologists must consider a transportation project’s impact on cultural resources, such as archeological sites, before construction. Identifying and evaluating sites are part of a process prescribed by the National Historic Preservation Act.

More than 10 years ago, TxDOT began the arduous process of identifying sites along a 14 mile project for US Hwy 175 in Anderson County in northeast Texas.



Modern day US 175

Finding sites is usually the hard part. In some cases, previously recorded sites can help identify and evaluate the sites early in the development process, potentially allowing TxDOT to avoid high-risk areas, such as cemeteries and sacred burials. When TxDOT cannot avoid a site, it mitigates through data recovery.

For this project, a TxDOT consultant suggested several 1930s sites around the US 175 project area had been lost, providing few clues as to the area’s archeological resources. Any

information from sites recorded in the ‘30s and ‘40s was slim, forcing TxDOT archeologists to dig deeper. Since the first survey more than a decade ago, it has been a long road to the re-discovery of five significant archeological sites, adding to the rich prehistory of northeast Texas.

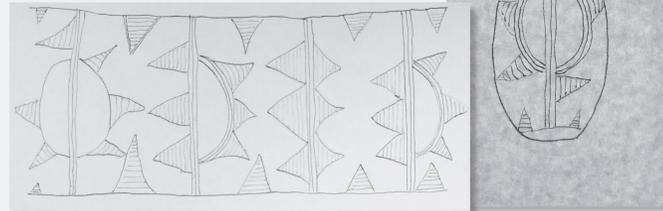


1956 Tobin aerial photo of Anderson County

The author wishes to thank Jim Abbott, Jay Tullos, and Christine Crosby who accompanied the author to these lost sites and helped identify them.

The Lost A.S. Mann Site (41HE7/41AN201)

University of Texas archeologists J.E. Pearce and A. M. Woolsey originally recorded the A.S. Mann Site in 1935 looking for complete ceramic vessels artifacts for the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition. The Caddo site was defined as a small prehistoric cemetery and included an unexplored domestic area with a nearby spring about 200 yards away. But the exact location of the site was unknown.



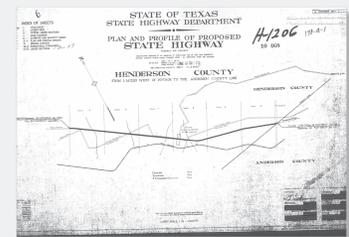
Drawing of Caddo Water bottle and its engraved pattern depicted in 1935 excavation report by J. E. Pearce and A. M. Woolsey

Step 1: During the background survey for US 175, TxDOT discovered that the 1932 Plans for the Proposed State Highway (later US 175) identified a parcel of land as the A.S. Mann property in Anderson County. TxDOT knew of another listing on the Atlas for a site in neighboring Henderson County (41HE7) with the same name.



1935 Cover page of A.S. Mann Site Report discovered at TARL

Step 2: TxDOT discovered there was only one A.S. Mann parcel of land adjacent to the highway and it was in



1932 Plan and Profile of Proposed State Highway

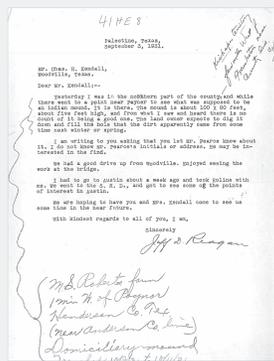
Anderson County. After shovel testing this parcel and turning up a high density of artifacts, TxDOT wondered if this could be the Caddo village discovered in 1935. However, site records for 41HE7 described its location as north of the original Highway 40, which itself was well north of the current highway US 175.

M.S. Roberts Mound Site (41HE8)

This lost Caddo mound, believed to be near the US 175, had been recorded in 1931, by archeologist Alvin T. Jackson working for James E. Pearce from the University of Texas. The site was described as a domiciliary mound 80 feet by 65 feet at the base and 5 ½ feet tall, with a nearby borrow or sand pit (presumably to build the mound) and surrounding village. Jackson collected a number of ceramic sherds from the village area, noted a burned feature at the bottom of the mound excavation trench and a nearby spring 200 yards away. The exact site location was not depicted on the Texas Archeological Site Atlas.

Step 1: TxDOT saw that the Atlas site form included a 1970 survey from SMU that mentioned the site, but not the mound. According to the report, TARL had mapped multiple locations for the Caddo site.

Step 2: Conducting targeted archival research at TARL, TxDOT discovered Jackson’s 1931 report, photographs of the mound as well as a profile of the constructed stratigraphy and mileage from a nearby town.



1931 letter by avocational archeologist about the discovery of M.S. Roberts Mound Site

Step 3: The 1932 State of Texas Highway Dept. County maps for Anderson and Henderson counties revealed that the road from Athens to Jacksonville was called Highway 40, and before 1933 it consisted of a winding road that followed property boundaries north of the current highway U.S. 175. A new linear Highway 40 was constructed south of the old Highway 40 between 1932 and 1933. The old highway 40 was converted into a series of county roads. By 1936, the county maps s new Highway 40 was renamed US 175.



1933 Tobin aerial photo overlaid on 2014 Google Earth photo of the site area

Lastly, the original report by J. E. Pearce and A. M. Woolsey (1935) and the site maps indicated three important points about the site location:

1. Pearce and Woolsey believed (correctly) that the A.S. Mann Farm was in Anderson County.
2. The field work and report were done in 1935, which meant that Woolsey was referring to the new Highway 40 that later became U.S. 175.
3. Woolsey did not take precise measurements but guessed at the distance of landmarks and features. A number of the measurements were changed several times after returning from the field, then rounded up for the report.

Conclusion: The highway location and name changes coupled with the imprecise site location measurements caused the site to be later incorrectly plotted in Henderson County. TxDOT had rediscovered the A.S. Mann Site in Anderson County and began intensive archeological investigations and data recovery for the project.



Assorted recently found artifacts from A. S. Mann Site

Step 3: TxDOT measured the distance from the original highway (now a county road) to determine the location of the site.

Step 4: While performing a field investigation in the area, TxDOT stopped at the proposed site location and discovered a small mound surrounded by open pasture.



1931 excavation of M. S. Roberts Mound

Conclusion: Furthermore, the TARL records show a SMU map of the site that depicts a depression and the word mound written on the map, with shovel test or test units depicted around the mound. It appears the site was not lost once, but twice. By locating this site, TxDOT was confident that it would not be affected by the proposed project.

W. J. Robinson Farm Site (41AN4)

The site was described by Alvin T. Jackson in 1931 as a Late Caddo Frankston Phase cemetery and domestic site. He made a surface collection of ceramic sherds from the domestic area for the University of Texas. The approximant area that is supposed to be the location of site 41AN4 has had a number of surveys performed, but no artifacts have been found to date. In an attempt to predict the actual location of site, TxDOT noted that the site was recorded in 1931, which meant that the site was being measured from a road that would not exist for another two years from when it was recorded. When measuring from the original highway, the site location falls in an area of high potential as compared to the current upland setting depicted on the Site Atlas and may be related to the A. S. Mann site due to its proximity. The site appears to be safely outside the proposed project area and will be avoided.

Arthur Holsumback Site (41AN10)

This site is not depicted in the Atlas but the site file describes it as prehistoric cemetery and domestic site. The limited information shows the site appears to only have been reported by locals and not visited. There is no mention in the file who recorded the information or a date other than information taken from 1930s field notebook. However, the file mentions the old Poynor highway, so if the original highway is used to calculate the location, the resulting location is found in what appears to be a high potential area for a prehistoric site. The site appears to be safely outside the proposed project area and will be avoided.

Worley Mound Site (41AN60)

During background studies for US 84 in Anderson County, the Atlas revealed a mound site most likely related to the Caddo Indians, unexpectedly placed on the slope of a large hill side. Originally recorded in 1948 by Robert L. Stephenson for the Smithsonian Institution River Basin Surveys, it is described as a flat topped mound 200 feet by 300 feet at the base with two different elevations - 3 feet and 11 feet - in a large cultivated field. Stephenson collected seven ceramic sherds from the site. A field visit visually identified the mound site’s correct location over a kilometer away that fit the description in Stephenson’s report. A 20th century house has been built on top of the mound, protecting the base of the mound from collecting activities. With the correct location identified, TxDOT was able to determine the proposed project would not affect the archeological site.



1948 photo of Worley Mound