

Digging Deeper in Starr County

Archeology Fact Sheet - Pharr District

Project Details: State Loop 195

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Pharr District is dedicated to enhancing regional mobility and traffic movement. The proposed State Loop (SL) 195 project would construct a rural four-lane divided highway with a grass median through the southern part of Starr County. TxDOT is currently documenting the existing social, economic and environmental conditions, and assessing the proposed project's impact to natural and cultural resources while identifying potential mitigation.



Excavations at *The Cornelio Alvarez Sr. Site*

PROPOSED SL 195 PROJECT

This proposed project is a new roadway extending from Farm-to-Market (FM) 755 to the intersection of U.S. Highway 83 and Loma Blanca Road in Starr County. After several studies, TxDOT concludes that this project will reduce congestion and improve safety, mobility and connectivity between Rio Grande City and the City of Roma. The total project is 17.21 miles in length and covers approximately 824.5 acres. Construction will be divided into three phases.

ARCHEOLOGICAL STUDIES

There are 23 recorded archeological sites in the project area based on TxDOT archeological surveys and prior surveys for projects overlapping the proposed SL 195 project area. In addition, prior excavations at two locations provided radiocarbon ages that range from 3,200 years before present (BP) and 1,500-500 years BP to the mid-twentieth century.

Many of the archeological sites have sparse materials, extensive land disturbances, or both. After further evaluation, however, TxDOT determined that three sites in the project area are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). These three sites are unusual for being relatively undisturbed, having preserved plant and animal remains, and abundant evidence that speaks to the use of the local landscape. Excavations will provide new information about why people came to this upland landscape in the past. Since the project will impact the sites, TxDOT will excavate and study the information in order to preserve it, adding to the prehistory of Texas. These excavations have begun at two of the sites.

As a courtesy to the landowners of these two sites for their cooperation, assistance and interest in the projects, the sites are named after the current landowner's father, *Cornelio Alvarez Sr.* and *The Herrera/Travino Ranch Site* is named for the family that has owned the ranch for many years.

Read more about other TxDOT archeology projects. Visit www.txdot.gov, Keyword: "Archeology."

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Stone artifacts recovered from *The Cornelio Alvarez Sr. Site*

DETAILS AND NEXT STEPS

Much of the dating evidence for the *Hererra/Travino Ranch Site* is based on certain styles of projectile points. The presence of Catan, Matamoros, and Starr points suggest that the site was occupied in the Late Archaic period through the Late Prehistoric period. TxDOT found debris from stone tool making near clusters of burned rock. This suggests that people replaced stone tools while sitting around cooking fires.

TxDOT evaluated multiple burned wood samples using special mathematical models at the *Cornelio Alvarez St. Site*, which indicated intermittent occupation between 3,550 and 2,050 years ago. Given the unusual preservation of plant and animal remains at this site, TxDOT hopes to learn more about the kinds of resources that attracted groups to this setting. The site also contained abundant evidence for stone tool making. While people were hunting and gathering, they also collected stone cobbles for making and restocking their stone tools.

Data recovery excavations are planned for February and March 2020.

TxDOT consulted with Federally recognized tribes on developing a museum exhibit and educational activities as part of its larger Beyond The Road outreach campaign in order to supplement mitigation for this project.