

Cypress Creek Archeological Site

How was the archeological site found?

The Harris County Flood Control District began a two-phase maintenance project in 2006 to stabilize, re-shape and re-grade the bed and banks of Cypress Creek near Elizabeth Kaiser Meyer Park in northwest Harris County, Texas. The project spanned more than 1/2-mile of Cypress Creek upstream of Stuebner-Airline Road. In advance of the project's first phase, the Flood Control District conducted environmental reviews, including a cultural resources investigation. During this investigation, artifacts were discovered at a site along Cypress Creek in the project area.

The site was designated by the State of Texas as archeological site 41HR991. State and federal laws require that public areas containing cultural resources deemed worthy of research and valuable contributions to history must be investigated if they cannot be avoided by a project. When it was determined that the first phase of the maintenance project would not affect the archeological site, the Flood Control District proceeded with the first phase while the archeological investigation continued. The first phase of the maintenance project was completed in 2006.



Excavation work at archeological site 41HR991

Archeologists conducted excavations at the site in 2009 to make way for the second phase of the maintenance project. After excavation work was completed, the Flood Control District started the second phase of the maintenance project, which was completed in 2013.

What artifacts were found at the archeological site and what do they tell us about the people that lived there?

In late 2009, archeologists excavated portions of a Native American campsite and recovered more than 2,000 artifacts, mostly stone tools and broken pieces of pottery.

"It's a rare opportunity that we've been presented with when we are able to do work that ends up contributing to the knowledge base of prehistoric peoples in this part of Texas," said Glenn Laird, director of the Flood Control District's Environmental Services Division. "Every time one of these

sites is properly excavated, we learn a little more about how these people lived, the foods they ate, the kind of tools they used and how all that changed over time."

The artifacts found at this site indicate that the various groups of nomadic prehistoric people returned every year (or every few years) on a seasonal basis to take advantage of the area's plentiful hunting



Piece of ceramic pottery excavated from archeological site41HR991



and fishing opportunities and the agreeable climate. Artifacts indicate that people first came here for a limited period around 8,000 to 10,000 years ago (Paleoindian Period, 8000 to 6000 B.C.), and then camped here repeatedly over a period of approximately 1,500 years, from A.D. 100 until the arrival of Europeans (Early Ceramic Period, A.D. 100 to 800, to Late Ceramic Period, A.D. 800 to 1750). When tested, a piece of burned wood found in a cooking hearth was dated to A.D. 1020 to 1200.

During the 1700s to 1800s, native people living in this part of southeast Texas belonged to an ethnic group known as the *Akokisa*. The territory of the Akokisa appears to have stretched from the mouth of the Neches River to the midpoint between the Trinity and Brazos rivers and would have included the Meyer Park area. However, due to the degree of large-scale migrations and depopulation that resulted from European contact, it is difficult to know if the people that created the archeological deposits at this site represent the historic Akokisa.

Why did they live here?

The occupants of this site were nomadic foragers who lived by hunting game and gathering wild plants. Foragers moved from campsite to campsite based on seasonal variations in the weather and the availability of different types of food. The southeast Texas environment provided a wealth of food resources, including deer and bison; a wide variety of small mammals such as rabbits, opossums and squirrels; various land and water birds; reptiles, including snakes and land turtles; a wide range of aquatic species such as alligators, turtles, frogs and shellfish; and many types of fish. Plant foods tend to be less visible in archeological contexts due to poor preservation, but would have consisted of nuts, fruit and berries, and a variety of wild plants, including gourds, squashes and beans.

Where are the artifacts now?

The discovered artifacts were washed, analyzed, labeled, catalogued and bagged. The items are curated at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory at the University of Texas in Austin, and, though not available for public viewing, are used for research purposes.

By the Numbers

- Total archeological site size – 6.8 acres
- Total area excavated by hand – 28 square meters (1 meter roughly equals 1 yard)
- Number backhoe trenches – 11
- Total number of recovered artifacts – 2,457
 - Stone tools – 42
(including several arrow and spear points)
 - Debris from stone tool manufacturing – 1,797
- Pottery fragments – 462
- Animal bone fragments – 43
- Burned clay nodules (used for cooking) – 100
- Fragments of bivalve shells – 12
- Fragment of imported sandstone – 1
- Fire pits – 4



Arrowheads recovered from archeological site 41HR991



Further Reading

For more information about the native people of southeast Texas, see *Indians of the Upper Texas Coast* by Lawrence E. Aten, published by the Academic Press in 1983; *The Archeology of Southeast Texas* by Leland W. Patterson, published in the Bulletin of the Texas Archeological Society in 1995; and, *The Indians of Texas: From Prehistoric to Modern Times* by W. W. Newcomb, Jr., published by The University of Texas Press in 1961.

**IT IS A CRIME TO REMOVE, DIG OR DISTURB ANY ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE LOCATED ON
PUBLIC LANDS.**