A Preliminary Archaeological Assessment
of State Route 8, from State Route 27 to Palisades Drive,
Hamilton County; Archaeological Input for a TDOT
Advance Planning Report

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Introduction

In response to a request for proposal from Chester IDE Associates, an infrastructure design and engineering firm based in Nashville, Tennessee, a preliminary archaeological assessment has been prepared for a Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) advance planning report (APR) on proposed improvements to State Route 8 from its intersection with State Route 27, (or Suck Creek Road), to the intersection with Palisades Drive in the township of Signal Mountain, Hamilton County, Tennessee. The length of the study corridor is 3.06 miles, and this portion of S.R. 8 is a two to three lane thoroughfare. Locally, State Route 8 is known as Signal Mountain Boulevard and serves as the principal access route to Chattanooga and environs for the northwestern incorporated areas of Chattanooga and most of the population of Signal Mountain.

The scope of work for the Archaeological Input report for the APR was described as follows:

Review site survey files at the Division of Archaeology, report any recorded sites on a quadrangle map, field review project, and identify high probability areas. Prepare brief report (one to two pages), describe terrain and type of land use along project, and highlight sensitive areas. Include topographic maps.

This report does not constitute a Phase I level archaeological survey.

In addition to examining data on previously-recorded archaeological sites, several field inspections of the project area were made, the first being in the company of planners from Chester IDE Associates and personnel from the Tennessee Department of Transportation. In the course of this first field review on 22 October 1993, a meeting was held with the city manager of Signal Mountain, Tennessee, outlining various issues to be addressed in the APR.

Archaeological Background

The purpose of Archaeological Input for an Advance Planning Report is to provide a preliminary assessment of projected or possible negative impacts on buried cultural resources in the project area. In this instance, the probable impact area would fall, for the most part, within a linear corridor adjoining and subsuming the existing right-of-way of State Route 8.

The project area begins within the physiographic division of the Valley and Ridge Province bordered on the east by the Unaka Mountain Range and on the west by the Cumberland Plateau. As a region, the province is characterized by numerous parallel ridge lines running northeast to southwest around the principal drainage system of the Tennessee River. Known as the Great Valley of East Tennessee, the region possesses well-watered, fertile valleys. Most of the relevant portion of S.R. 8, however, traverses the sloping margins of the Cumberland Plateau, a high, flat plain standing some 1200 feet above the valley floors in the Valley and Ridge Province.

The study corridor begins in a meadow on the fringes of Mountain Creek valley at the intersection of State Route 8 with State Route 27 or Suck Creek Road, a two-lane highway running along the foot of the Cumberland Plateau. A few hundred feet northwest of this intersection, S.R. 8 makes an abrupt turn to the west and begins a relatively steep ascent of the face of the Cumberland Escarpment (see Figure 1). Running northwest along the debris talus of the plateau, the highway makes one serpentine turn on a relatively flat terrace before climbing the near vertical walls of the sedimentary formations comprising the geological body of the plateau. This stretch of highway below James Point enjoys a commanding view of the scenic Tennessee River Gorge to the south and west. State Route
8 tops the plateau having ascended through the gulley or gulf cut by Shoal Creek. Once atop the plateau in the corporate limits of Signal Mountain, the two to three lane mountain road widens to four lanes. The project area ends at the first major intersection on the top of the plateau, at Palisades Drive.

The absence of even narrow road shoulders on much of the highway, and the continuous stream of traffic along the thoroughfare, makes detailed inspection of the right-of-way difficult. Consequently, field inspection was from an automobile. Except for commercial development near the start of the study corridor, most of the frontage of the highway is undeveloped except for scattered residences located in the general vicinity of the geological terrace at the serpentine curve or switch-back. In most cases, the relief of the terrain is quite high, making habitation impractical.

At the Jeffrey L. Brown Institute of Archaeology, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, duplicates of the state archaeological site file forms are maintained, and this site file was examined in detail for background information on the general project area. The Institute's site file was updated by the state site file curator on 19 October 1993. An additional inspection of the master site file at the Division of Archaeology, Edmondson Pike, Nashville, was made by a member of Chester IDE Associates on 22 December 1993, confirming that the site lists discussed below were complete and accurate as of that date. The state site file curator also directly confirmed to the author on 4 January 1993 that the sites shown on Figure 1 and listed in Table 1 were all the recorded sites in that portion of the quadrangle. These examinations of the site files revealed only one recorded archaeological site immediately adjacent to the relevant portion of State Route 8. However, this review of recorded sites revealed a high density of archaeological sites in the valley in which this project area begins. These sites are discussed in detail in another APR report.

<table>
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<th>Site Number</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>40HA283</td>
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<td>private cemetery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40HA356</td>
<td>Historic, non-Indian</td>
<td>house, cemetery</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The one recorded site adjacent to the project area is located a few hundred feet to the north of the S.R. 27 intersection, namely, 40HA356, an historic site at the Glendale Drive turn. The site definition encompasses a cemetery and the remains of historic houses apparently associated with the construction of C. E. James' electric trolley line, the Chattanooga Traction Company. This trolley line, completed in October 1913, opened access to a resort hotel constructed near Signal Point on top of the Cumberland Plateau. In addition to the railbed and electric utility line, the trolley right-of-way included a 25-foot roadbed for motor vehicles. The trolley line from Glendale to the resort was abandoned in 1934 (Steinberg 1975: 73-74). Much of S.R. 8 in the study corridor rests on the original 1913 trolley and roadbed right-of-way.
Figure 1. Recorded archaeological sites in proximity to State Route 8, from State Route 27 to Palisades Drive. Sites on Williams Island and the left bank of the Tennessee River are not shown. U.S.G.S./T.V.A. Chattanooga Quadrangle, 105-SE, 1969 edition, photorevised 1976.

A cemetery is contiguous to the housesites recorded as 40HA356, but the areal definition of the site - 45' by 275' - would appear to include only the housesites and not the cemetery which is located to the west. This cemetery is unmarked. The site forms indicate that the site is disturbed to an unknown degree. A 1941 edition quadrangle map shows five houses on the west side of S.R. 8 between the Glendale turn and Suck Creek Road, and two structures on the north side of the highway west of the turn. The cemetery and
housesites south and west of the Glendale curve are included within Portland Park, a park maintained by the Hamilton County Parks and Recreation Department.

In the field review meeting of 22 October 1993 with TDOT personnel it was noted that Martha Carver of the TDOT Environmental Planning Office had determined that portions of Signal Mountain Boulevard may be potentially eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places due to the highway's correspondence with the Chattanooga Traction Company right-of-way. It was also noted in the meeting of 22 October that the Glendale Tourist Court opposite the Suck Creek Road turnout may also be register-eligible. This early motel consists of a complex of brick room units and a roadside office. Excluding the brick structures associated with the Glendale Tourist Court complex, the standing structures at the Glendale turn are modern commercial improvements.

Other standing structures along State Route 8 may be in excess of 50 years of age, having been built after the 1913 completion of the Chattanooga Traction Company line. Perhaps a half dozen of the structures along the S.R. 8 study corridor that appear on the 1941 quadrangle map still appeared on the 1969 edition and its 1976 photorevision. Many of the presumably residential structures appearing on the frontage of the highway in the 1941 quadrangle map have subsequently been removed, and the housesites may retain archaeological research potential.

A brick structure situated on the north side of S.R. 8 a little over one-tenth of a mile north of Sunset Drive may be the surviving shell of an electrical substation serving the trolley; the architecture is distinctive and utilitarian in appearance, and the structure is at the approximate location of a trolley substation shown on a map of the trolley stops in 1913 (see map, Steinberg 1975: 75). At the Shoal Creek Road cutoff, in the gulf near the top of the plateau, the existing highway departs from the historic trolley line right-of-way. At this point, the trolley apparently followed the creek gorge about two tenths of a mile to the east before crossing that stream and turning back west to an intersection with S.R. 8 at Palisades Drive (ibid.).

Prehistoric archaeological sites are possible only in a few restricted areas along the 3.06 mile corridor of S.R. 8. The project area of S.R. 8 begins in a sensitive archaeological zone, namely the valley drained by Mountain Creek, and at least one recorded historic site (40HA356) is present within the existing right-of-way. In the meadow between Suck Creek Road and the Glendale cutoff/turn, prehistoric components may also be present. Much of the highway is cut into steeply-sloping terrain or clings to the near-vertical walls of the escarpment, (such as that below James Point), and such terrain is highly unlikely to contain prehistoric archaeological sites, with some exceptions. Prehistoric rock shelter sites and/or petroglyph sites are possible in several localities through which the 3.06 mile stretch of highway passes, namely, on the level terrace at the serpentine curve or switch-back at Balmoral Drive, and in the gorge of Shoal Creek. No likely rock shelters are visible near the switch-back, however, and construction of the 1913 trolley and roadbed right-of-way and the more modern paved highway may well have disturbed rock shelter sites in the Shoal Creek gorge, particularly north of the Shoal Creek Road cutoff. Lithic quarries may also be present at points along the highway, but a thorough pedestrian survey would be required to evaluate this possibility.

Recommendations

Major widening or realignments of State Route 8 from State Route 27 (Suck Creek Road) to Palisades Drive may require additional cultural resource input, particularly in assessing the significance of standing architecture along the highway and in determining the archaeological research potential of historic housesites along the route. In addition, some classes of prehistoric sites might be present in potential impact areas.
Areas where Phase I field reconnaissance might be productive are limited in extent. The meadow adjacent to Suck Creek Road intersection may require survey if that interchange is significantly redesigned. Portland Park, on the north side of Suck Creek Road, contains site 40HA356, and in addition to historic components may contain prehistoric components. Prehistoric lithic quarries have been located on the slopes of the ridgeline of which the Glendale area is part [40HA271, 272]. Further up S.R. 8 on the slopes of the Cumberland Plateau, the terrace at Balmoral Drive and the gorge of Shoal Creek may also need close field inspection for rockshelter, petroglyph or lithic quarry sites. The above identification of properties amenable to field reconnaissance is not a statement that significant sites exist on these lands, and the scope of any projected survey will be dictated by the nature of proposed highway improvements.

Should a major construction effort be undertaken on Signal Mountain Boulevard, planners may want to consider potential cultural resource impacts on nearby undeveloped properties used as construction staging areas. Archaeological surveys of borrow pits are, of course, already required.

References Cited

Steinberg, David H.
1975 And To Think It Only Cost A Nickel: The Development of Public Transportation in the Chattanooga Area. Chattanooga, Tennessee: Published by the Author.

Acknowledgments

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