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SCOPE OF WORK
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE LEVEL FIELD TESTING
CONFERENCE HOUSE PARK, STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK
NYC PARKS/PRE-CEQR R

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BACKGROUND

The proposed reconnaissance level archaeological testing will be conducted as part of an ongoing project to prepare an historic landscape report and master plan for Conference House Park. The current phase of this project involves several tasks, including topic intensive documentary research on the history and prehistory of the land now included within the Park and limited archaeological subsurface testing. In June 1996, an interim report was submitted to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (South Street Design Co. et al.) which included a summary of the documentary research results and a preliminary plan for subsurface testing. Upon review of the interim report, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission requested additional data concerning this project (Santucci 1997). In response to LPC's comments a separate report is being submitted detailing the results of the topic intensive documentary research (Pickman 1997). The present document provides a scope-of-work for the field testing. It represents a modification of the previously submitted testing plan which takes into account the LPC comments. The proposed field work meets the specifications for reconnaissance level archaeological surveys as set forth in the New York Landmarks Commission's Guidelines for Archaeology, the New York City Environmental Review Technical Manual, and the United States Department of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines as set forth in the Federal Register at 36 CFR Part 66.

An archaeological sensitivity model was prepared for Conference House Park (Pickman and Yamin 1988) in conjunction with the preparation of the 1989 master plan. The model divided the Park into four sensitivity zones. The most sensitive (zone 1) includes the portion of the Park designated as the Wards Point Conservation Zone, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This National Register district extends from the Burial Ridge area on the south to Billop's Ridge on the north (see Florance 1982; Jacobson 1980), and includes the Conference House property. A portion of this larger district has been separately nominated for inclusion on the Register as a National Historic Landmark (Jacobson and Grumet 1992). Prehistoric and Contact period Native American burials as well as other significant archaeological deposits have been recovered from the Wards Point Conservation Zone National Register District.

Indications of possibly significant prehistoric and historic period archaeological remains have been noted in other portions of zone I during previously conducted limited shovel testing and pedestrian reconnaissance. Other portions of the Park, designated as sensitivity zones II and IIIa, are also considered to have potential for containing possibly significant archaeological deposits. The portions of the Park designated as zones IIIb and IV are considered to have a low probability of containing such deposits.

The objective of the proposed limited shovel testing is to

determine whether or not possibly National Register eligible archaeological deposits are located within the portions of the Park designated as zones I, II and IIIa in the 1988 model. These data will be used to modify the master plan and/or to plan for additional intensive level archaeological investigations and/or data recovery excavations which may be required prior to construction. In accordance with this objective, testing will not be conducted within the portion of zone I which falls within the National Register District, since the archaeological sensitivity of this portion of the Park has been firmly established. Following the suggestion of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission after its review of the 1989 master plan (Beckelman 1990), the interim report recommended that this portion of the park be considered as an archaeological preservation zone, and that no construction activities be conducted within this zone.

As presented in the interim report the archaeological testing plan excepted the Conference House property from the approach noted above. Since the proposed park improvements would necessarily include work within the boundaries of the Conference House property, limited shovel testing was planned for this area even though it was included within the National Register District. However, because of the limited objectives of the present testing program, as well as the need to minimize possible impacts to prehistoric burials, it is no longer proposed to conduct testing on the Conference House property during the present stage of investigations. Alternatives for future testing of the Conference House property will be noted briefly below and will be discussed in greater detail in the final report.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The proposed limited archaeological testing is a reconnaissance level study as specified in 36 CFR Part 66. The primary research question to be answered at this level of investigation is the presence or absence in the tested area of archaeological deposits potentially eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

However, it should be noted that the documentary research results indicate that archaeological deposits which may be present in the area to be tested are likely to be useful in addressing a number of broader research questions in prehistoric and/or historical archaeology.

While the reported archaeological deposits within the Ward's Point Conservation Zone represent the most important remaining prehistoric archaeological site within the region, relatively little is actually known about the culture history or lifeways of the prehistoric occupants of this site. Furthermore, the extent and nature of the deposits which remain on this site are uncertain. While the testing plan has been structured to eliminate further disturbance within the National Register

work for this project. Determinations of further procedures will be made after consultations with such groups, which could include the American Indian Community House and/or representatives of the Lenni Lenape tribal group.

SHOVEL TESTING PLAN

The limited archaeological testing to be conducted will involve the excavation of up to 100 shovel tests, as specified in the DPR scope-of-work for this project. Each shovel test will cover approximately 1 - 1.5 square feet of surface area and be excavated to a depth at which culturally sterile subsoil is encountered. All soil removed will be screened through 1/4 inch mesh to detect the presence of cultural material. Such material will be placed in bags labelled to indicate the excavated context.

The planned test locations reflect the results of the documentary research and the location of proposed improvements as indicated on the 1989 master plan for the Park. Test locations will be modified and additional tests conducted as necessary depending on the results of the initial tests.

The proposed test locations are shown on the maps submitted with the interim report. However, as noted above, the tests on the Conference House property which are indicated on these maps will not be conducted.

It should be noted that final design of the proposed Park improvements has not been completed, and the exact locations of disturbance cannot be determined at the present time. In addition, disturbance will most likely occur at locations which are not indicated on the master plan. For example, the adaptive reuse of existing structures (e.g. the Biddle, Rutan/Felch and Wood/Leven houses) will most likely involve the installation of new utilities and/or other structural modifications which may involve sub-surface disturbance. In addition, demolition of structures, plantings and landscaping may involve the use of heavy equipment which could result in additional sub-surface disturbance.

The limited scope of shovel testing to be conducted during this project indicates that results can only be suggestive of the relative sensitivity of various portions of the Park. Recommendations to be made after completion of testing will be based on both the documentary research and the results of the shovel testing. Areas considered to be sensitive based on the results of this phase of the project may require further archaeological testing and/or excavation prior to construction if avoidance of such areas is not feasible or if changes in the master plan result in disturbance of untested portions of the areas noted below.

A brief description of the areas to be tested follows. The

history and prehistory of these areas, including the results of pedestrian reconnaissance and previous subsurface testing is discussed in detail in the documentary research report and summarized in the interim report.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SENSITIVITY ZONE I (OUTSIDE OF NATIONAL REGISTER DISTRICT)

Biddle Property

The 1989 master plan shows the construction of a parking area, plantings of trees and shrubs, and construction of a stairway to the beach on the Biddle property. All of these activities would result in sub-surface disturbance. Prehistoric artifacts were encountered in the area adjacent to Satterlee Street during the 1984 Oakwood Beach project shovel testing (see Pickman and Yamin 1984).

The focus of shovel testing on this property will be in the location of the planned parking area and on either side of the driveway where plantings are indicated on the plan. Several tests may also be placed on the slope west of the house where the stairs are to be constructed to determine if any midden accumulations are present. An estimated total of 10-15 tests will be conducted on the Biddle property.

Rutan/Felch and Rutan Shipyard Properties

The 1989 master plan includes the installation of rest room facilities in the Rutan/Felch garage structure and a stairway to the beach. Shovel tests will be conducted to determine the extent of historic period midden deposits noted in this area and whether they would be affected by the proposed construction. Tests will also be conducted on other portions of the Rutan/Felch property to determine if other prehistoric or historic period deposits are present. The 1989 plan does not call for construction in other portions of the property and these areas will not be shovel tested. A total of 7-10 shovel tests will be conducted on these properties.

Wood/Leven Property and Adjacent Areas

Disturbance in this area as shown on the 1989 plan would be primarily associated with construction of a parking area. Disturbance may also be associated with the demolition of two domestic structures and several smaller outbuildings.

The southern portion of the Wood/Leven property is separated from the National Register District by a swale area. However, a possible historic period midden deposit has been noted on higher ground along the bluff immediately south of the Wood/Leven tract. Shovel tests will be placed in this location and other portions of the Wood/Leven property. A total of 7-10 shovel tests are planned for these areas.

Area South of the National Register District

Although this area was included within sensitivity zone IIIa in the 1988 model, the presence of reported shell midden deposits suggests that it area should be initially considered as having greater sensitivity than the other "zone IIIa" areas. Shovel testing will provide data on the extent and characteristics of the reported shell midden and other deposits which may be present. A total of 15-20 shovel tests are planned for this area.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SENSITIVITY ZONE II

Zone II includes three properties occupied during the 19th century and is considered to be sensitive for the possible presence of artifact deposits associated with these occupations. Since this area contains land which is at a higher elevation than most of the Park shoreline, it could also contain prehistoric deposits.

As currently mapped, the Park boundaries include the southernmost portions of these properties, which contain three standing structures. The 1989 master plan called for the demolition of the western most structure. Disturbance could occur in association with the renovation of the other buildings. An estimated total of 7-10 shovel tests are planned for this area.

The northern portions of these properties are owned by the City and will eventually become a part of the Park. These areas are also considered to be archaeologically sensitive, and additional archaeological testing should be conducted here prior to any construction activities. However, testing of the portions of these properties outside of the present Park boundaries is not within the present DPR scope-of-work.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SENSITIVITY ZONE IIIa

Parking Area

A proposed parking area would be located between Satterlee Street and Massachusetts Avenue and between Hylan Boulevard and the northern boundary of the archaeological preservation zone. This area could also serve as a site for a visitor's center (should a new building be constructed to serve this purpose) or an American Indian memorial. Approximately 10-15 shovel tests will be excavated.

Other Portions of Zone IIIa

The 1989 master plan indicates that no development will occur within the remaining portion of Zone IIIa, which lies outside the boundaries of the proposed archaeological preservation zone. Tests in this area will be concentrated along the border of the

National Register District (i.e. the Archaeological Preservation Zone). Limited testing will also be conducted in other portions of this area. A major objective is to assess the area's actual archaeological sensitivity in case of future development. It may be advisable, for example, to re-route planned pathways through this open woodland area, in order to avoid the need to clear vegetation within the National Register District. An estimated total of 15-20 shovel tests will be conducted.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SENSITIVITY ZONE IIib

Reconnaissance and previous shovel testing along Carteret Street indicates that much of this area has undergone prior disturbance, and no indications of prehistoric activity have been noted. It is our understanding that much of this zone consists of designated wetlands areas and no development will occur in this portion of the Park. Thus no shovel tests are planned for this area.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SENSITIVITY ZONE IV

According to the 1988 model, zone IV is not considered to be archaeologically sensitive. According to the master plan, the most extensive subsurface disturbance within this zone would be associated with the construction of a gazebo (at Yetman Avenue) and a scenic overlook (at Swinnerton Street) along the Raritan bay shoreline. At least one shovel test will be placed in the vicinity of each of these improvements. One or more tests may also be conducted in the eastern portion of the "meadows" area located east of Page Avenue.

A parking area shown on the master plan immediately east of Page Avenue would be located on the "Butler Shop/Raritan Bay Hotel" site immediately east of Page Avenue. This area appears to have undergone a considerable amount of disturbance and any sheet midden refuse deposits are likely to have been removed. Since detection of any remaining archaeological features is likely to require the use of power equipment, this site is not included in the shovel testing plan. Construction of the planned parking area probably would not result in disturbance to a depth below that which already exists.

LABORATORY ANALYSIS

All cultural materials recovered from the shovel tests will be returned to the laboratory where they will be cleaned and identified. Culturally diagnostic artifacts will be described and identified according to professionally recognized cultural/temporal categories. The cleaned artifacts will be placed in plastic receptacles labelled to indicate the excavated contexts. Diagnostic artifacts will be directly labelled.

District itself, prehistoric deposits which may be encountered in the areas to be tested would most likely represent camp sites or other occupations associated with the Ward's Point sites. Analysis of such deposits could provide data on the settlement systems operative in the Ward's Point area at particular portions of the prehistoric period.

Historic period deposits could also be used to address broader research questions. The documentary research has provided much information pertaining to the occupants of the various Conference House Park tracts and the landscape configurations at various times during the historic period. However, there are still significant gaps in these data and archaeological inference based on material recovered could be used to help fill in these gaps. Other research questions which may be addressed by analysis of such deposits concern the material culture correlates of historic period occupations. Such data is for the most part conspicuously absent from the written record. Such questions could concern procurement patterns of the Tottenville residents as well as data on dietary and material culture preferences of residents with different ethnic backgrounds.

Such data could be approached from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. For example, it could be expected that prior to the railroad, items were procured mainly from New Jersey, while after the railroad was opened New York served as the primary market for the residents of Staten Island. It would be interesting to determine whether such inferences are substantiated by the archaeological record.

HUMAN REMAINS

The testing plan has been designed to minimize the possibility of disturbance to human remains. The known interments within Conference House Park are located within the defined National Register District, which includes the Conference House property. Since the latter tract has been removed from the present testing plan, no human remains have been reported from the portion of the Park to be tested. In addition, the area to be affected by each shovel test is very small. Therefore, the possibility of encountering such remains is remote. However, there is always a possibility that human interments would be encountered. In the unlikely event that the morphology of any osteological remains recovered from the shovel testing suggests human origin no further testing in the immediate vicinity of such finds will be conducted. The recovered remains will be examined by a qualified physical anthropologist or archaeologist specializing in the analysis of such remains. If this examination indicates human origin, notification will be made to representatives of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and the New York City Landmarks Commission. Representatives of such agencies will then consult with representatives of groups representing the relevant descendant populations. The consultants will participate in meetings with such groups in accordance with the DPR scope-of-

REPORT

Subsequent to the completion of the field work and laboratory analysis a written report will be prepared for submission to DPR and LPC detailing the results of the survey. The report will include a complete inventory of the shovel test stratigraphy and artifacts recovered, as well as a map indicating the actual location of all shovel tests conducted. The report will also include recommendations for any future archaeological work considered to be necessary. The nature of such work would depend on the results of the reconnaissance level survey and the final determination of specific locations to be disturbed by construction. Future archaeological work could include intensive level surveys to further evaluate the nature of deposits detected during the reconnaissance level survey or data recovery excavations to mitigate construction impacts on deposits determined to be of significance based on the results of the reconnaissance survey and documentary research.

In addition, the report will include a discussion of procedures for any future testing and excavation within the National Register District, which will not be subject to testing during the reconnaissance level survey. As noted previously, it has been recommended that most of the area be considered as an archaeological preservation zone, and that no construction take place in these areas. Because of the reported recovery of human remains it is considered that any planned subsurface disturbance in the National Register District, including the Conference House Property, would necessitate prior intensive level archaeological investigations using techniques which would insure that human remains are not disturbed. These concerns are reflected in the 1997 LPC comments on the interim report (Santucci 1997). As suggested in the LPC comments it is possible that "non-invasive" (i.e. remote sensing) techniques could be used to determine whether burials are in fact present within areas which could actually be affected by construction. Use of such techniques is beyond the scope-of-work for the present survey, but could be applied in portions of the Park in future projects. However, the difficulty of practical application of such techniques (e.g. ground penetrating radar) within much of the National Register District as well as other portions of the Park is increased due to the presence of dense undergrowth. It may be feasible, however, to use such techniques within the Conference House property, much of which consists of open ground. Application of remote sensing in future levels of investigation will be discussed in the final report.

CURATION OF ARTIFACTS

Subsequent to the submission of the final report the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, in consultation with the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, will arrange for the disposition of recovered archaeological materials and field and laboratory records as specified in the Department

of the Interior's requirements for "Curation of Federally Owned and Administered Archeological Collections" as set forth in 36 CFR Part 79. The consultant will provide advice as requested concerning repositories which have appropriate facilities for the curation of these materials.

INVOLVEMENT OF INTERESTED PARTIES

Representatives of the Department of Parks and Recreation will arrange to meet with members of community groups as appropriate to discuss the results of the project. The consultants will participate in such meetings in accordance with the DPR scope-of-work for this project.

DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS

Any significant results of the limited field testing to be conducted under this project should be disseminated to the public. Possible means for doing this could include publication of versions of the documentary and field testing reports, edited for popular reading, and/or creation of an exhibit in a Park building as referenced in the LPC review letter (Santucci 1997). However, production of such written materials or exhibits is not included within the present DPR scope-of-work.

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