"HELMER MYRE: A MINNEOSTA STATE PARK DEVELOPMENT PROJECT RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY"

BY

JAN E. STREIFF

Prepared for the

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Division of State Parks

Principal Investigator

Elden Johnson

June 1981

Abstract

An archaeological reconnaissance survey was undertaken in December 1979 on two alternate road and contact station locations at the entrance to Helmer Myre State Park, Freeborn County. Four of the thirteen tests excavated produced prehistoric lithic and historic metal artifacts. An intensive survey was recommended to determine the extent and affiliation of the site before plans continue. The intensive survey was carried out in July, 1980. While additional cultural material was found, it was determined that the site was thin and extremely disturbed. No further work was recommended.

Helmer Myre State Park

The 1979 development projects for Helmer Myre were listed in the Scope of Work as "New Contact Station/Office" and "New Road Construction". They are actually all part of one project: the development of a new entrance area on the north side of the park.

Background

NH Winchell, in his 1889 survey recorded burial mounds in the Albert Lea Lake area. Although locals often looted the sites, no professional archaeologist visted the area until 1945 when Lloyd Wilford of the University of Minnesota arrived to recheck the Winchell site descriptions. He field checked several sites around Albert Lea Lake and made corrections in the earlier legal descriptions. He planned several times to conduct research in the area, but was never able to obtain the necessary permission from the local land owners.

In 1964 C. Thomas Shay of the University was sent by State Archaeologist Elden Johnson to salvage a mound site (21 FE 1) after a bulldozer from a new housing project uncovered several skeletons. Publicity had been extensive and by the time Shay reached the site, only a couple days after being notified, the area had been overrun with local collectors who destroyed the entire site with unauthorized digging. Little of scientific value remained.

The following fall the crew quietly returned to the area to see if anything could be salvaged. They found that while all the mounds had been demolished by pothunters, there were five isolated burials which were salvagable. (Norquist)

In 1971 the University of Minnesota Archaeology Laboratory sent a survey team to Helmer Myre as part of a general State Park survey project to gather initial information on the probablity of archaeological sites within State Parks. The team rechecked several areas within the park reported to have archaeological sites. Surface checks and shovel tests were all negative in these areas (see maps 1). The only

Helmer Myre State Park

site reported was a burial mound site (21 FE 11) located in the picnic ground on the northside of the Big Island. (Roney) The site was mapped and testing between the mounds indicated that there was little habitation material in the immediate vicinity.

In the early to mid 1970's, several reports of artifact finds were filed with the University of Minnesota Archaeology Lab/ State Archaeologist Office by Jerry Oouthoudt, an archaeologist at the Minnesota Historical Society whose home is in Albert Lea. Some were new site areas outside the park;others were areas within the park which over the years had producted material.

In the late 1970's Richard Strachan, Mankato State University, began working in Helmer Myre. His crew has returned to Helmer Myre every summer to continue an extensive survey of the park. Several prehistoric sites have been found, but exact locations are not available at this writing.

The 1979 Survey

The 1979 survey was conducted on 3-4 December 1979 by field director Jan E. Streiff. Department of Natural Resources had provided two alternate routes for the proposed entrance road. (see Map 2)

Location

The survey was located in the W 1/2 SW 1/4 NW 1/4 Section 13 Twp 102N R 21 W (Freeborn County). The area lies east of the current entrance road (county road 38) and extends for 1/4 mile south from the north park boundary to a ravine just north of the Service area. The proposed road route is approximately 100m (350') wide and runs entirely through open fields, across two knolls and a low, wet marsh. The area previously cultivated, is now overgrown in tall grasses. There is no other vegetation in the immediate area although across the road to the west is a stand of oak and to the south in the ravine is a mixed oak and shrub stand.

Helmer Myre State Park

The Methodology

The methodology followed Council for Minnesota Archaeology Standards where tests were placed every fifteen metres along the proposed route unless conditions prevented (i.e. marsh). The shovel tests (50cm x 50cm) were excavated to a depth of 50cm at 5cm levels. All material was screened through 1/4 inch mesh screen. (see profiles for details).

The Results

Thirteen tests were excavated in the development area. Nine of the tests were negative(Tests2,5,7,8,9,10,11,12,13). These were the northern most tests. Four tests were positive (Tests 1,3,4,6) These tests were on the southern end of the route, generally on the south facing slope overlook the ravine. All material was found in the plow zone so no stratigraphy was discernible. The material was a mix of lithic artifacts and modern historic goods. (See Appendix A for accession list). None of the prehistoric material was diagnostic so no cultural affiliation or time period can be assigned to the site at this time.

It will be necessary to return to the site for an intensive testing program if the proposed road route is to be placed in this area. Additional work is necessary to determine the extent of the site and it affiliation.

The preliminary field report was submitted to DNR, the State Archaeologist and the SHPO on 10 December 1979. The State Archaeologist approved the report and agreed with the recommendation for an intensive survey on. The SHPO responded on 8 January 1980 and also informed DNR that an approval for the project would not be forthcoming until an intensive survey was completed.

Jan E. Streiff

Archaeology Laboratory
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
11 March 1980

Helmer Myre State Park

The Intensive Survey

Location

Between December 1979 when the reconnaissance survey was completed and July 1980 when the intensive survey was begun, Department of Natural Resources and Freeborn County officials chose a third alternate for the entrance road (see map 3).

The new plan pulled the road west, closer to the existing road and placed the contact station (and accompanying parking areas) on the west side of County Road 38, on the oak covered knoll.

Methodology

Unlike the reconnaissance survey which placed tests every 15 metres along the proposed route, the intensive testing concentrated on areas which previously had produced material. Additional tests, especially on the west side of highway 38 were scattered to cover as much development area as possible since it had not been included in the earlier plans for development and had not had the reconnaissance survey. All tests were dug in 5cm levels to within subsoil. All soil was screened through 1/4 inch mesh hardware cloth.

Results of the Intensive Survey

Thirteen additional tests were excavated at the proposed alternate 3 entrance road/contact station. Of the thirteen, four were positive (see Map 3). Tests 20 and 24 were placed near Test #6, all of which are north of the current nature trail and east of County Road 38. Test 6 had yielded two hide scrapers and a lithic flake during the fall survey. Tests 20 and 24 produced only one flake each.

The third test on the east side of the road was dug south of the trail along the base line and north of Test 1 (in which had been found a lithic knife during the December survey). The summer test, labeled F-2, had a mixture of lithic flakes and modern glass/ceramics.

Helmer Myre State Park

Like all tests on the east side of County Road 38, the above three were in the very disturbed plowzone. The humus is thin (maximum 30cm) in this former field with all cultural material mixed. No features were visible in the clay subsoil in any of the tests.

Since the cultural material was thin and obviously there was no original stratigraphy, it was believed that if a preceramic site existed in this area, it had long been destroyed by farming activities. It is also possible that the material was dragged by the plow to the locations in which they were found during the excavations. It seemed unnecessary to ask for additional salvage time.

Test 15 was the only positive test of the five placed on the oak knoll on the west side of highway 38. While the area looked relatively undisturbed, the three lithic flakes recovered from test 15 were mixed with modern coal cinders. No additional work was requested for the area of the proposed contract station/parking lot.

Jan E. Streiff

Archaeology Laboratory
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
May, 1981

Helmer Myre State Park

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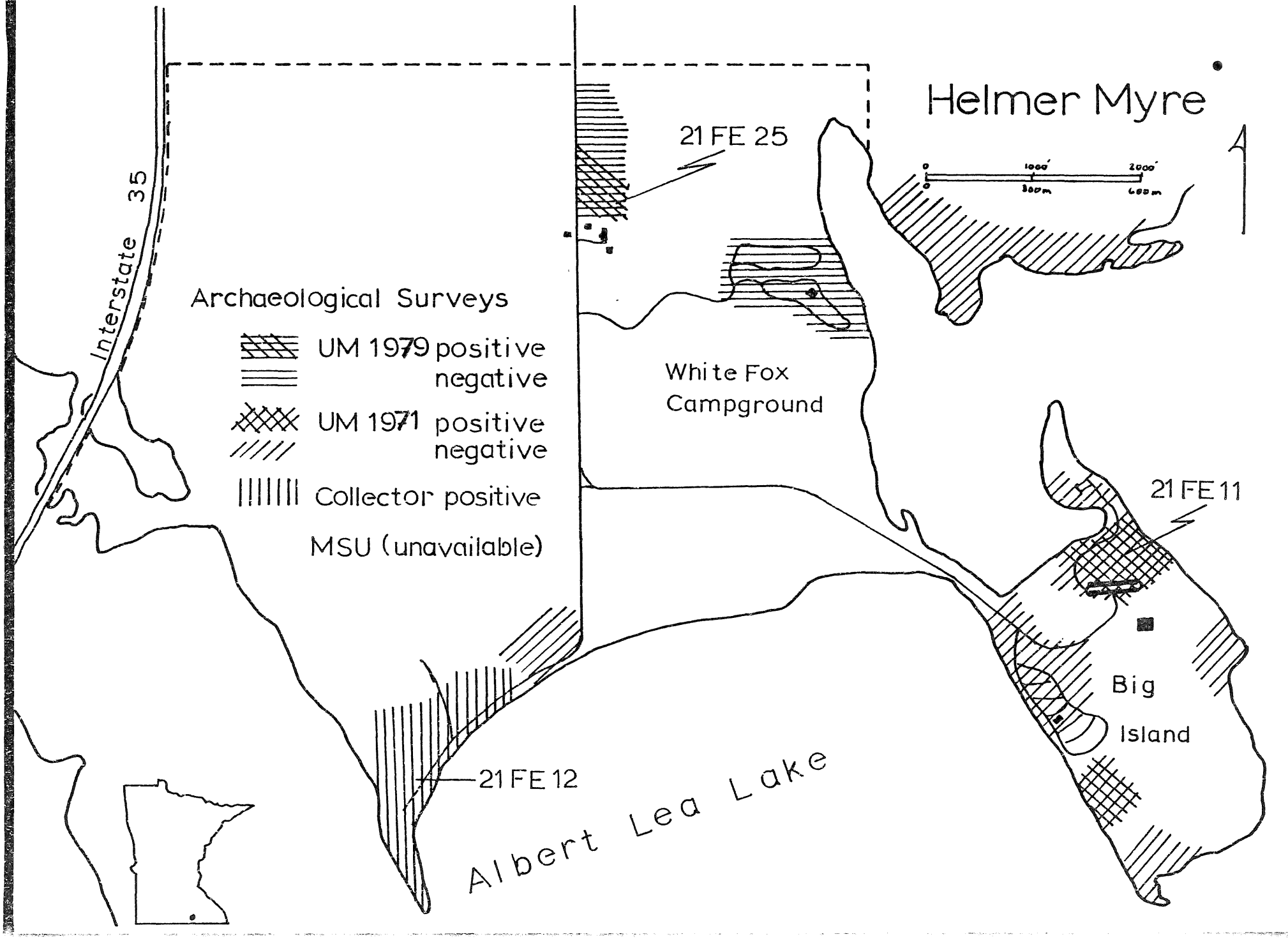
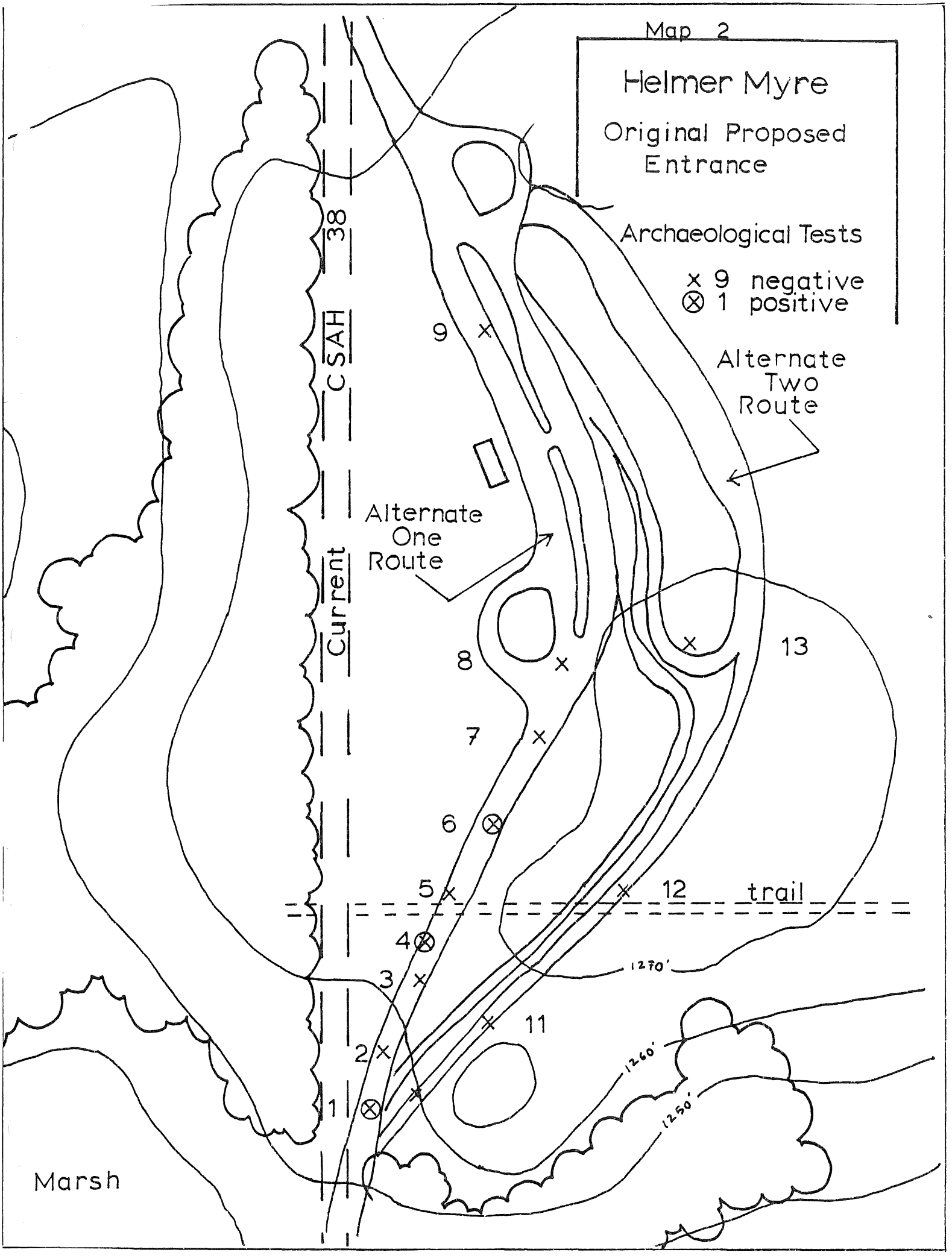
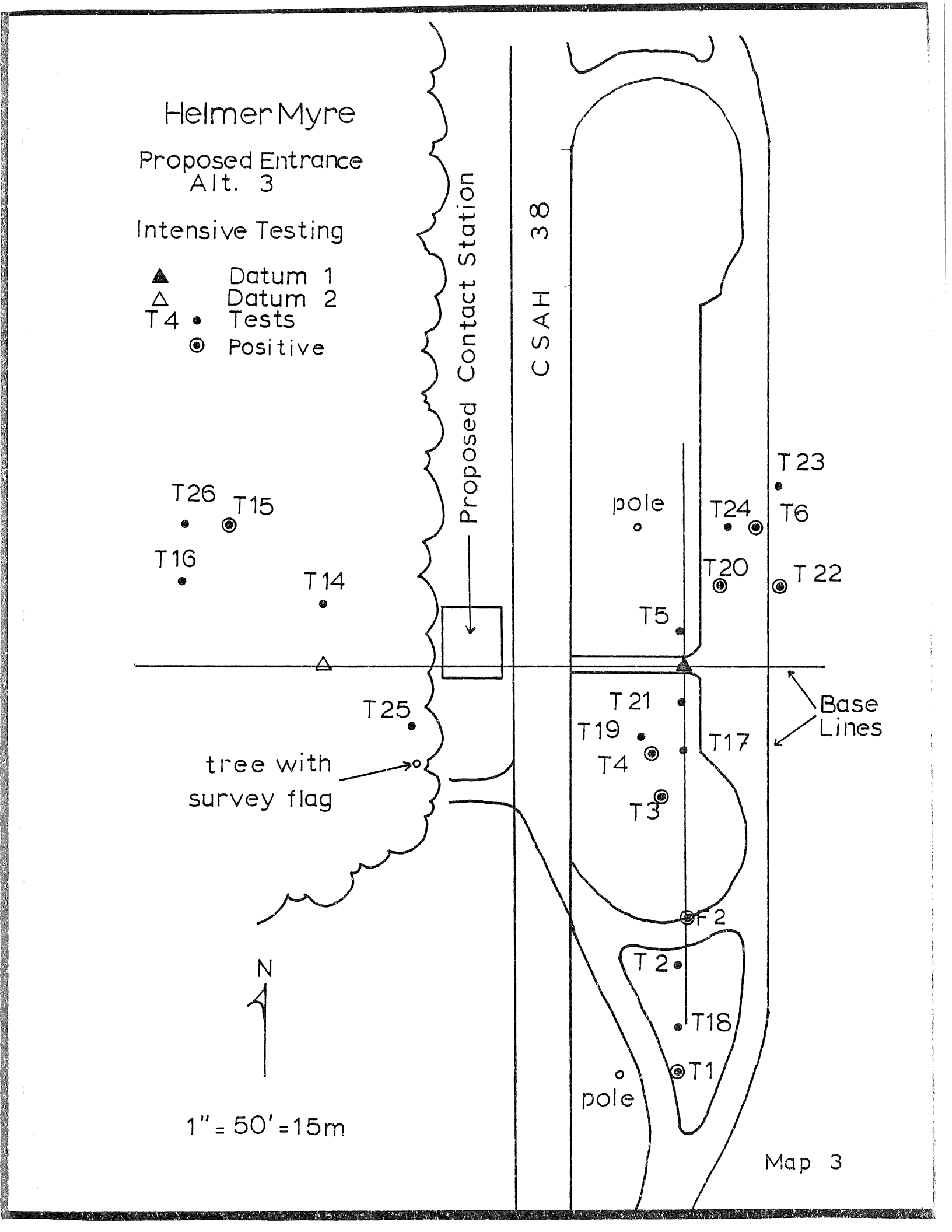

Helmer Myre
21 FE 25
Interstate 35
Archaeological Surveys
UM 1979 positive
negative
UM 1971 positive
negative
Collector positive
MSU (unavailable)
White Fox
Campground
21 FE 11
Big
Island
21 FE 12
Albert Lea Lake


Map 2
Helmer Myre
Original Proposed Entrance
Archaeological Tests
x 9 negative
⊗ 1 positive
38
CSAH
Current
9
Alternate Two Route
Alternate One Route
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
13
12
trail
11
1270'
1260'
1250'
Marsh


Helmer Myre
Proposed Entrance
Alt. 3
Intensive Testing
Datum 1
Datum 2
T4 Tests
Positive
Proposed Contact Station
CSAH 38
T26
T15
T16
T14
T25
tree with
survey flag
pole
T24
T6
T23
T20
T22
T5
T21
T19
T17
T4
T3
F2
T2
T18
T1
pole
Base
Lines
N
1" = 50' = 15m
Map 3

HELMER MYRE STATE PARK

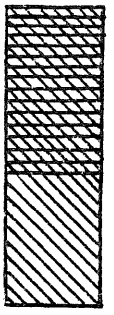
TEST UNIT SOIL PROFILE

TEST 1

humus with cultural material

gravelly sticky clay

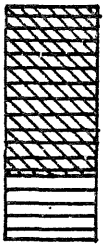
TEST 2



humus and sticky clay with many lenses

humus

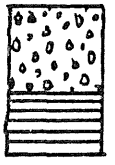
TEST 3



humus and sticky clay with many lenses

gravelly sticky clay

TEST 4



plow zone (grinding stone)

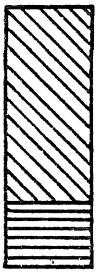
clay

scale in centimeters

HELMER MYRE STATE PARK

TEST UNIT SOIL PROFILE

TEST 5



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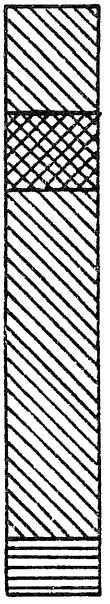

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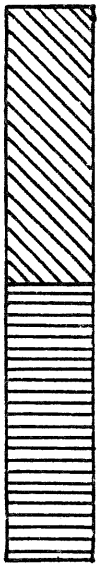

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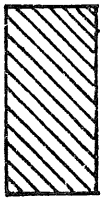

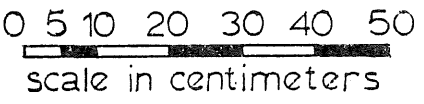

HELMER MYRE STATE PARK

TEST UNIT SOIL PROFILE

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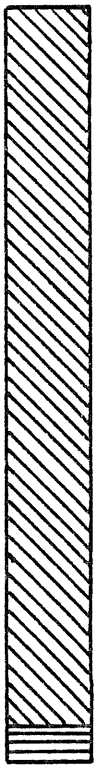

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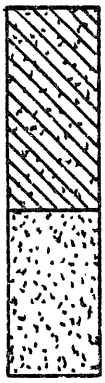

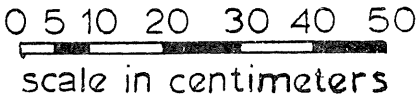

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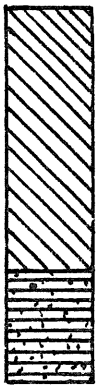

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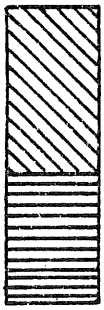
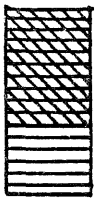


HELMER MYRE STATE PARK

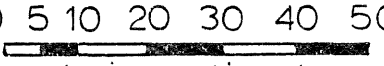
TEST UNIT SOIL PROFILE

TEST 13



humus mixed with clay subsoil

clay

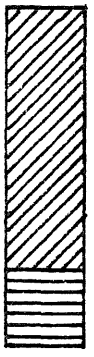


scale in centimeters

HELMER MYRE STATE PARK

TEST UNIT SOIL PROFILE

TEST 14



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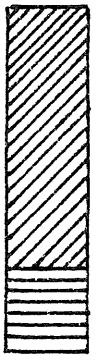

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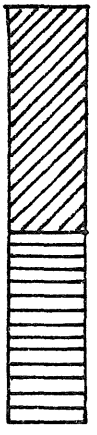

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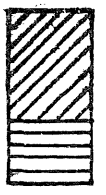


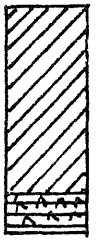
0 5 10 20 30 40 50

scale in centimeters

HELMER MYRE STATE PARK

TEST UNIT SOIL PROFILE

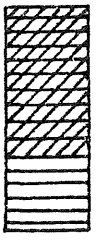
TEST 18



humus
plow zone

clay/gravel

TEST 19



clay-rich
humus

clay

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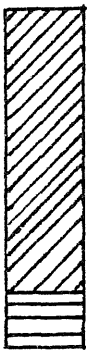
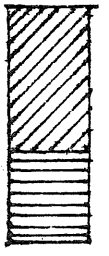


humus
no plow zone
flakes to 30 cm.

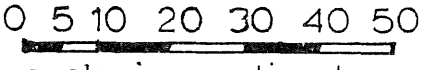
clay

TEST 21



humus

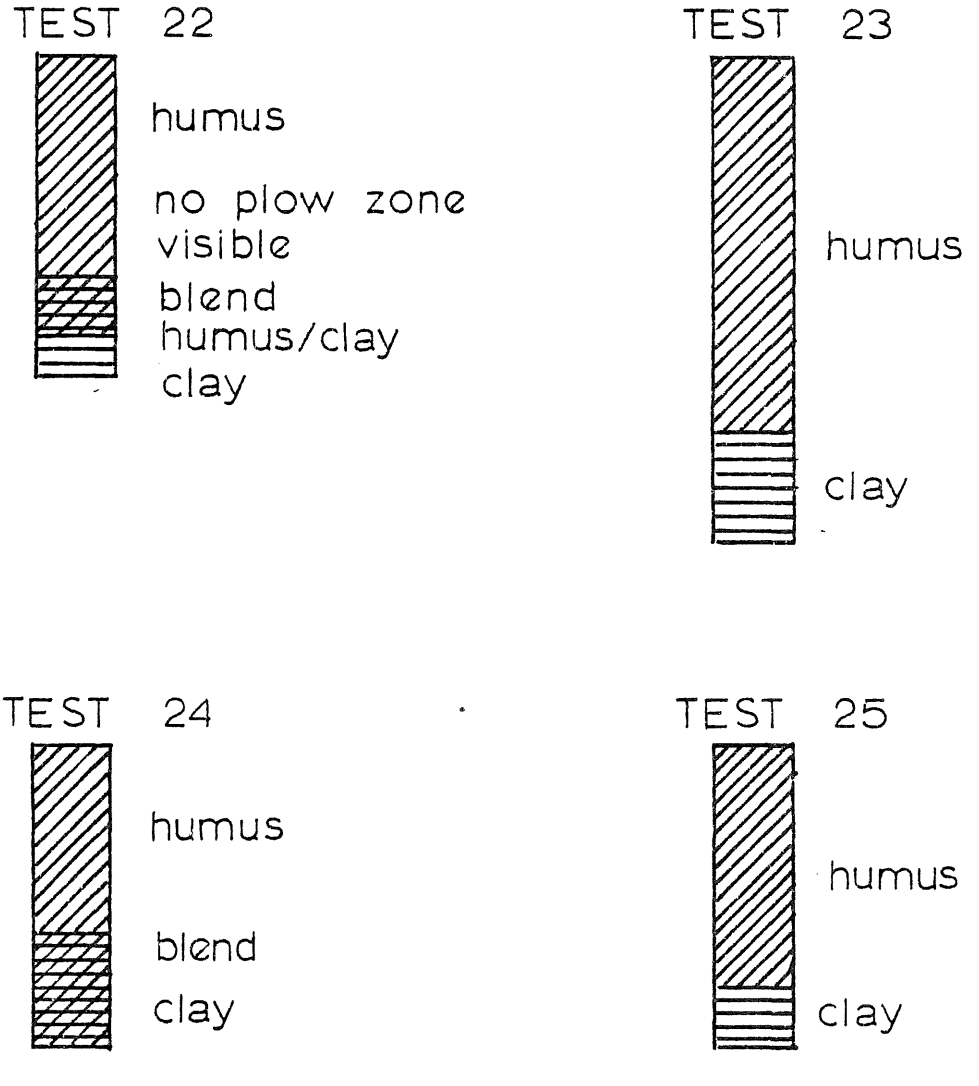
clay



scale in centimeters

HELMER MYRE STATE PARK

TEST UNIT SOIL PROFILE

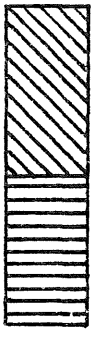


HELMER MYRE STATE PARK

TEST UNIT SOIL PROFILE

TEST 26

TEST 27



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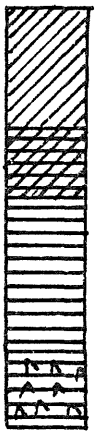
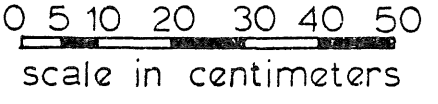
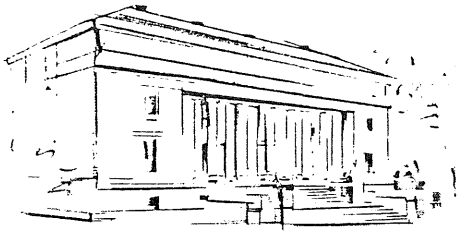






MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
690 Cedar Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101 • 612-296-2747

January 8, 1980

Mr. John Winter
Department of Natural Resources
Parks and Recreation
Box 39
Centennial Building

RE: Review of the archaeological survey work conducted at Helmer Myre State Park - Entrance Road and Contact Station, Freeborn County, Minnesota.

MHS Referral File Number: J 907

This letter is to inform you that archaeological material was discovered during the course of the above-referenced project. We concur with the archaeologist's opinion, which states that a phase two intensive survey should be undertaken along the proposed roadway to determine the exact extent and nature of the site. When we are in receipt of the results from this additional work, our office will issue a final statement.

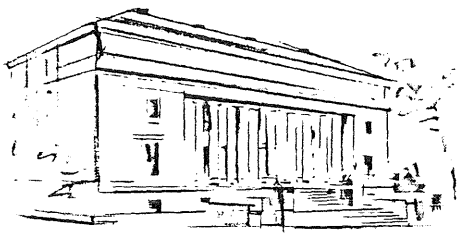
Thank you for your support in preserving Minnesota's cultural resources.

Respectfully,

Russell W. Fridley
State Historic Preservation Officer

RWF:bh

cc: Jan Streiff



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

690 Cedar Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101 • 612-296-2747

February 3, 1981

Mr. John Winter
Department of Natural Resources
Parks and Recreation
Box 39
Centennial Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Mr. Winter:

RE: HELMER MYRE STATE PARK
Contact Station
Freeborn County

MHS Referral File Number: M 269

This letter is to inform you that our office has received a statement regarding the above referenced project. Additional archaeological testing was conducted at the proposed contact station site, which is in the vicinity of prehistoric site 21 FE 11. The results of this testing revealed that the area was completely disturbed. We concur with the archaeologist's opinion that the proposed work will have no effect on the archaeological site. Consequently, there are no sites of historic, architectural, cultural, or archaeological significance listed on the National Register or eligible for inclusion on the National Register which will be affected by your proposal.

Thank you for your participation in this important effort to identify and preserve Minnesota's cultural resources.

Sincerely,

Russell W. Fridley
State Historic Preservation Officer

RWF/sl

cc: Jan Streiff
Dept. of Anthropology
University of Minnesota

APPENDIX A

Archaeological Material from Helmer Myre State Park

Year Collected	Archaeologist/Institution	Accession #	Site #
1889	T.H. Lewis	?	21-FE-4
1964	Shay/University of Minnesota	542	21-FE-1
197?	Strachan/Mankato	?	?
1979	Streiff/University of Minnesota	822	21-FE-25

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

(1) FIELD SPECIMEN SHEET OR
(2) PHOTOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET

SITE & DATE	NO.	(1) DESCRIPTION AND ASSOCIATION (2) SUBJECT AND DESCRIPTION	LOCATION	DEPTH	(1) FIELD (2) NEG. FILE
Helmer Myre 12/3/79	822-1	lithic (granite) knife	Test # 1	0-18cm	humus zone
	822-2	modern iron bolt	Test # 3	0-23cm	humus zone
	822-3	grinding stone	Test # 4	5-18cm	base of humus
	822-4	2 lithic scrapers 1 flake	Test # 6	15-25cm	humus zone
7/9/80	822-5	2 greywacke flakes 1 white chert flake 1 light brown chalcedony flake 1 clear galss fragment 1 white ceramic fragment	F-2	0-20cm	humus zone
	822-6	2 tan chert flakes 1 white chert flake worked	Test # 15	to 30cm	humuszone
	822-7	1 dark brown chert flake	Test # 20	30cm	
	822-8	1 worked grey chert flake	Test # 22	20cm	