AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE SURVEY OF THE HARNEY VIEW COMMONS (45SJ229), ORCAS ISLAND, SAN JUAN COUNTY, WASHINGTON

by

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a Report Prepared for

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Archaeological site survey activities at the Harney View Commons Project Area on the southern end of Orcas Island confirm that at least two portions of a shallow and disturbed prehistoric shell midden site (45SJ229) are present. Intact deposits are present in at least one of these areas. Of note, however, no evidence of any potentially significant cultural deposits were observed in the areas where several minor road improvements have been proposed. This conclusion is based upon a surface examination and the investigation of nine shovel test pits. Given a site which is "spotty" and discontinuous in its distribution, it must nevertheless be acknowledged that it is possible that cultural deposits could be present in any of the areas between the test pits.

While I believe that the portion(s) of 45SJ229 which remain intact are significant, the issue here is whether the proposed road improvements are likely to adversely impact the site or its potential. The testing conducted by the present study suggests that they probably will not. Nevertheless, I believe that the project should proceed with caution. The appropriate cultural resource management strategy is monitoring. I recommend that the proposed improvements be allowed to proceed, but that all ground-disturbing activities associated with them be monitored by a qualified archaeologist. Should indications of potential significant cultural deposits be exposed during this process, the disturbance must cease immediately and the discovery must be evaluated before any further decisions about continuing with the disturbance can be made. This approach will allow the proposed improvements to proceed while ensuring that potential significant archaeological deposits, if present, will be protected.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Harney View Park & Road Association proposes to make minor improvements to an existing road on the Harney View Commons, on the southern shoreline of Orcas Island, Washington. Due to the presence of a recorded prehistoric archaeological site (45SJ229), the Board of Directors of the Harney View Park & Road Association has requested an archaeological assessment of the proposed improvements. To this end, the Board arranged with Wessen & Associates to conduct the study. The field work portion of the study was undertaken by Gary Wessen, Ph.D., on December 16, 1993.

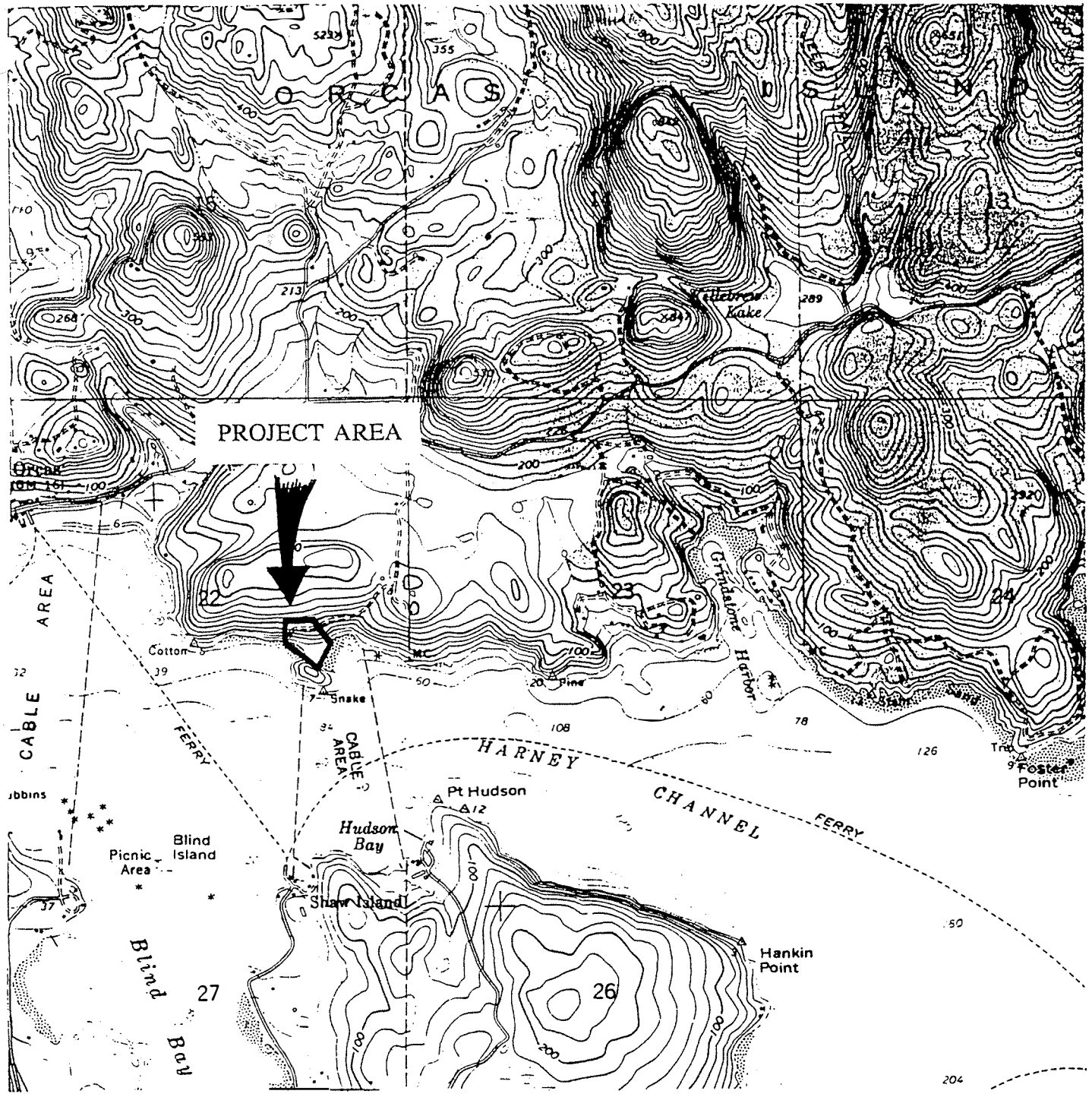
2 BACKGROUND

The background for this study includes consideration of the project area, its environmental setting, cultural setting, and archaeological setting.

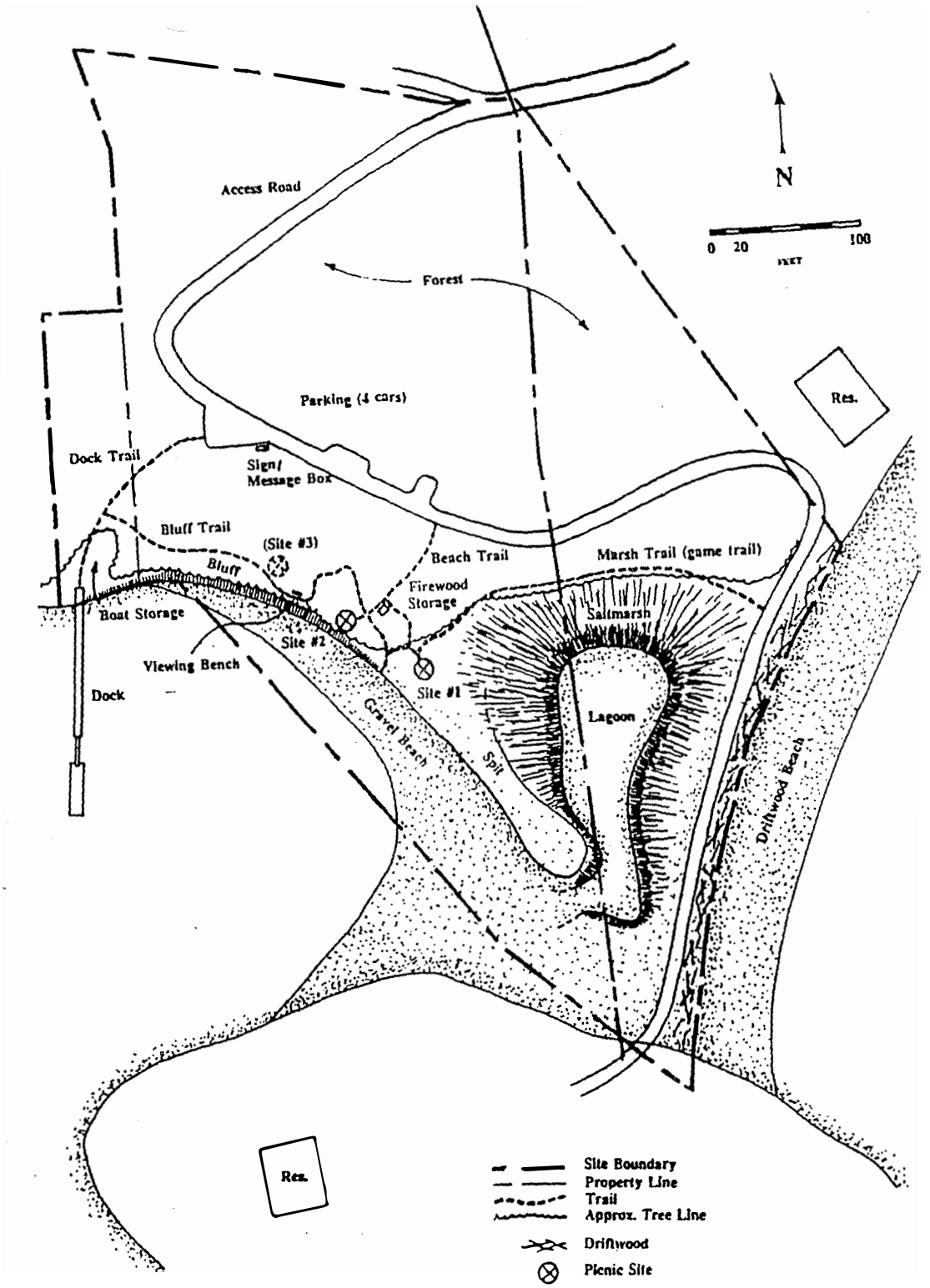
2.1 Project Area

The project area for this study is a ca. 5 acre parcel located at near Harney Island on the southern shore of Orcas Island (see Map 1). Specifically, it is located in the southeast quarter of Section 22, Township 36 North, Range 2 West. The project area is a sub-rectangular in shape with its long axis oriented close to north-south. It includes ca. 700 feet of waterfront facing onto a small lagoon, the tombolo linking Harney Island to Orcas Island, the island itself, and Harney Channel beyond.

At the time of this study, the Harney View Commons Project Area includes few developed features (see Map 2). The most dominant feature is an unpaved road. The road enters from the sideslope above the property, switchbacks downslope, briefly crosses onto the adjoining lot (the Transelli Property) to the east, and then passes over the tombolo to Harney Island. In addition, there are also a few footpaths, fire pits, and a buried utility cable. Finally, it is noted that the project area is mantled by a second growth forest and that the area behind the beach contains at least one old logging road, hummocks and berms which suggest significant ground disturbance, and a conspicuous absence of old growth tree stumps.



Map 1 The Location of the Harney View Common Project Area, Orcas Island, Washington.



Harney View Commons
Recreation / Preservation Plan

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. Final location and construction details should be determined on the ground.

OSPREY Environmental Services (1/89)

Map 2 The Harney View Common Project Area, Orcas Island, Washington.

2.2 Environmental Setting

The Harney View Commons Property Project Area consists of a relatively steep sideslope fronted by a relatively narrow backshore area, and then there is the small lagoon and tombolo noted earlier. Precise elevation data was not available, but the highest portion of the project area is probably on the order of 80 to 100 feet above sea level. The seaward western margin of the project area is mostly a low bank/no bank beach; small vertical exposures are, however, available on its western end. There are no surface freshwater resources in the project area and the closest source is more than .25 mile away.

With the exception of the beach, the entire Harney View Common Project Area is represented by a Roche-Rock Outcrop Complex soil (Schlots et al. 1962). This is a complex mosaic of Roche Series soils and rock outcrops common in the San Juan Islands. Roche soils are moderately well drained, coarse textured, deposits developed on glacial till. Clasts in the gravel to boulder size range are common.

As noted, most of the project area is mantled by a ca. 30 to 50 year old second growth forest. It is an Open Transitional Forest community, essentially as described by Atkinson and Sharpe (1985:42-43). It is dominated by Douglas fir (Pseudostuga menziesii) and Pacific madrona (Arbutus menziesii); a few western red cedar (Thuja plicata) are also present. Oceanspray (Holodiscus discolor), Nootka rose (Rosa nutkana), and snowberry (Symphoriacarpus albus) are all common in the understory here. The upper beach areas are marked by a variety of beach grasses.

No wildlife observations were made during the survey field work, but it is assumed that the area hosts, or formerly hosted, most animals common to nearshore areas in San Juan County.

2.3 Cultural Setting

The early historic and probable late prehistoric Native American occupants of the San Juan Islands are members of a broad grouping of peoples referred to as the Coast Salish. Coast Salish peoples are wide-spread in Western Washington and southwestern British Columbia and are divisible into a number of smaller regional groups. The people of the San Juan and north-western Skagit and Whatcom County areas are considered to be members of the Central Coast Salish (Suttles 1990). They are distinguished from their neighbors by the language they speak, Lkungen, as opposed to Lushootseed spoken by other local Salish groups. They also differ in their pursuit of a distinctive subsistence and settlement system which traditionally placed a heavy emphasis upon exploiting the marine resources, particularly the reef-netting of sockeye salmon, within their territorial territory.

The Central Coast Salish people have often been divided into a number of tribal groups, but it is worthwhile to note that such tribal groups may be historic phenomena and the term "tribe" may

not be directly applicable to the pre-contact inhabitants of the area. Most types of economic, political and social affiliation appear to have focused on local lineal groups (families). Family control of resource collection localities and ownership of the rights to ceremonial properties such as dances, songs, titles, and masks was the rule. The historic tribal groups most frequently mentioned in the San Juan Islands include the Lummi, Samish, Saanich, and Songish Indians.

The Harney View Project Area is situated within what is generally considered to be the traditional territory of the Lummi Indians (Suttles 1951). Historic settlements of these people were widely distributed along marine shorelines in both San Juan County and in Skagit County on the main land to the east. Data reported by Suttles (1951:34) indicates that the nearest Lummi settlements were located at West Sound on Orcas Island (ca. 3 miles to the northwest) and at Low Point on Lopez Island (ca. 3 miles to the south). There are no ethnographic accounts of a Lummi settlement in the immediate vicinity of the project area.

There is impressively little information regarding the earliest Euro-American history of the vicinity of the Harney View Commons Project Area. There does not appear to have been any early historic Euro-American settlement either within, or immediately adjacent to, the project area. The closest early settlement was apparently that of Paul K. Hubbs who established a small store in Grindstone Harbor (ca. 1.25 miles to the east) in 1868 (Richardson 1971:179-180). The store only operated a few years and was gone before 1875 (Keith 1978:16). Shortly afterward, Joseph Sweeney opened a store at what later became known as Orcas Village (ca. 1 mile to the west). Joe Sweeny moved to San Juan Island to open yet another store in 1876, but his younger brother Stephen kept up the business on Orcas and the location would grow to become one of the principal commercial centers on the southern shore of the island. The initiation of ferry service to Orcas Island through this point in the early 1920's only bolstered the development.

2.4 Archaeological Setting

The Harney View Commons Project Area contains a recorded prehistoric archaeological site (45SJ229), and appreciation of prior study of it is an important aspect of the background of the present effort.

The archaeological site 45SJ229 was recorded by Keith Thomson in 1951. Thomson described it as a shallow shell midden deposit. He provided no estimate of its length or width and noted evidence of both historic disturbance and erosion. With respect to its potential for further study, he reported "Not worth excavation" (Thomson 1951).

This site area was examined again by Stephen Kenady in 1981. Kenady's report provides few additional descriptive details and has created some confusion because he incorrectly refers to the site as "45SJ299" rather than "45SJ229". He only reports

material on the Transelli Property and indicates that "Most of site 45SJ299 [sic] appears to have been buried or destroyed by the recent construc-tion of an access road"; he describes it as "thin (surface to 10 cms.) and spotty". An unspecified number of shovel tests were dug and Kenady reports a very limited range of cultural materials including "no burnt bones, no tools, and a very narrow range of fauna [sic] species". No fauna are identified however. On the basis of these findings, Kenady offered the following recommendations:

1. The construction of roads, trails, and firepits should be prohibited.

2. Excavation of any kind should be prohibited unless the archaeological material is salvaged by a qualified archaeologist.

Finally, the 45SJ229 site area was briefly examined a third time by Gary Wessen in 1985. At that time, Wessen examined the available exposures, but undertook no subsurface testing. He (1986b) reported that the site area was disturbed and that only limited intact cultural deposits were observed.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The activities described in this report represent a limited program of site survey designed to determine whether potentially significant archaeological resources are likely to be impacted by the improvements proposed for the Harney View Commons Project Area. The research design of the project included both a clear statement of goals and an identified set of appropriate methods.

3.1 Research Goals

The goals of this effort were to identify any archaeological resources which might be present within the proposed impact area, to document them, and to offer an assessment and recommendations regarding measures to protect them. Such resources might include any portions of 45SJ229 and/or any other archaeological materials which might be present. The effort was therefore descriptive and documentary in nature. As such, the articulation of study findings within any particular proposed regional cultural framework was not a high priority. Similarly, the study results cannot be considered to be a test of any particular model of prehistoric settlement and subsistence patterns or other cultural process dynamics.

3.2 Research Methods

The work plan for studies relied upon standardized archaeological techniques. The effort consisted of background research and field activities including both a ground surface inspection and a limited program of investigating subsurface exposures.

Background research for the study included the review of relevant documents on file with the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation and the Washington State Library in Olympia.

The surface survey include a general inspection of the entire project area in order to identify exposures of 45SJ229 and a more intensive inspection of the locations of specifically proposed improvements (i.e., impacts). Given the extensive ground cover and the lack of wide-spread disturbance, ground surface visibility was expected to be no better than fair to poor. However, stratigraphic exposures are available along the western portion of the beach and this area was known to contain important information about the occurrence and distribution of cultural deposits.

Following the surface inspection, the work plan called for the investigation of subsurface conditions in those areas where specifically proposed improvements (i.e., impacts) will occur. All subsurface testing was conducted with small shovel test pits. As all proposed impacts are anticipated to be ca. 6 inches deep or less (C. Ledgerwood, Pers. Comm.), no shovel test pits were dug deeper than ca. 12 inches. All recovered sediments were screened through 1/4 inch hardware mesh in order to ensure the recognition of any cultural materials which might be present. The represented depositional structure at each shovel test pit was recorded, but no samples of any kind were collected.

4 FIELD ACTIVITIES AND FINDINGS

The field activities undertaken at the Harney View Commons Project Area were conducted during a one day field effort. This effort included both the ground surface inspection and the investigation of subsurface deposits described above. The effort investigated a number of locations both within, and immediately adjacent to, the project area. As two separate - - albeit closely related - - issues were involved, the following discussion will divide the two for the sake of clarity.

4.1 45SJ229

The initial field activities were associated with locating any available exposures of 45SJ229. Two discrete portions of the site were identified. Descriptions of the surface conditions in both areas were made, but no subsurface probing was conducted. Thus, the interior extent of neither area is known with certainty. Similarly, no samples were collected in either area.

A limited, yet relatively intact, stratum of shell midden deposits is present in the wave cut bank on the western end of the beach. This deposit is ca. 10 to 15 feet long and is located in the vicinity of Picnic Site No. 2 (see Map 2). It ranges between 2 and 6 inches in thickness and contains a variable density of highly fragmented shell, fire-cracked rocks, charcoal, and ash. The deposit contains no obvious internal stratification and no in situ features are evident. A few fire-cracked rocks and a single retouched cobble spall were observed on the beach in front of this area.

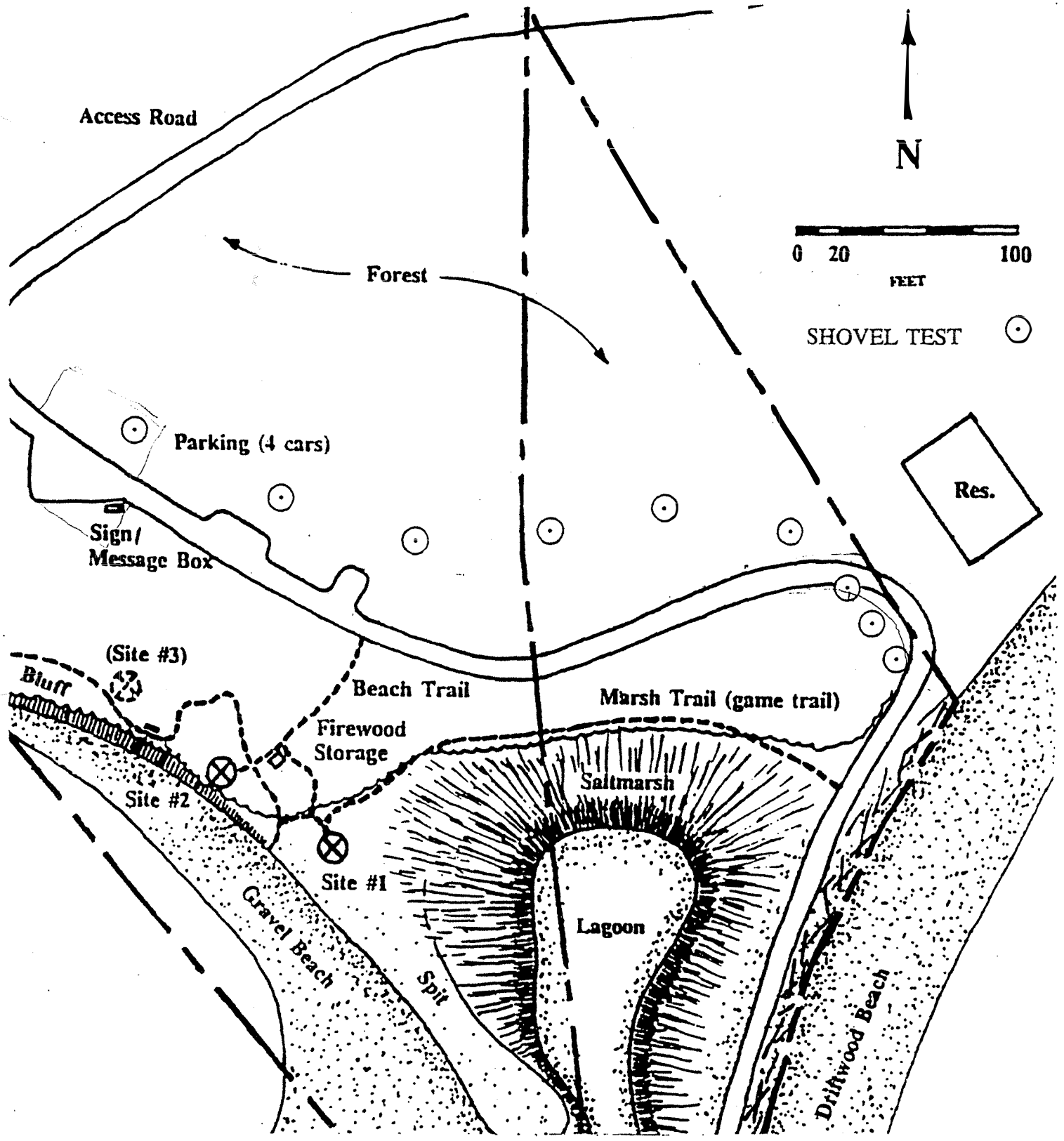
A second small area of shell midden deposits which should probably be considered a portion of 45SJ229 is evident on the Transelli Property immediately to the east of the Harney View Commons Project Area. This is a ca. 15 to 20 foot area along the bank edge on the southeast side of the Transelli residence (see Map 2). No obviously intact deposits are evident and it appears that this area may have been disturbed by landscaping associated with the Transelli residence.

4.2 The Proposed Improvements

All of the proposed improvements at issue at this time are associated with the existing access road. These include: (1) a slight restructuring of the route such that it does not extend onto the adjoining Transelli Property, (2) a possible loop in the road just upslope and to the west of the restructuring just noted, and (3) the possible construction of a few more parking spots along the existing road route.

The restructuring of the route such that it does not extend onto the adjoining Transelli Property will involve a very limited disturbance. It consists of moving the existing road bed on the Transelli Property ca. 15 feet to the southwest (see Map 2). This area is near the shoreline and approximately 60 to 80 feet west of that portion of 45SJ229 which is near the Transelli residence. The relocated route will be ca. 40 feet in length and three shovel test pits were dug along it (see Map 3). No indications of the shell midden, or potentially significant cultural materials, were observed in this area. Moreover, there are clear indications that this area was disturbed during construction of the existing access road. Much of the area has been bladed and a crushed rock fill material has been deposited here.

The other proposed improvements have been less specifically located, although they are planned for the area just upslope from the existing road. The proposed road loop will be just to the northwest of the re-route just described. A few additional parking spaces may be developed still further to the west, across from an existing four car parking lot. Because the locations of these features have not been finalized, the latter section was investigated by digging six shovel test pits across the area (see Map 3). No indications of the shell midden, or potentially significant cultural materials, were observed in this area



Map 3 Shovel Test Pit Locations on the Harney View Commons Project Area, Orcas Island, Washington.

either. Testing here suggests that this is a complex mosaic of apparently disturbed and relatively intact deposits. In some places, a relatively intact soil profile is present; elsewhere, an 'A' Horizon is almost wholly absent and the subsoil shows clear indications of re-working.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Archaeological site survey activities at the Harney View Commons Project Area on the southern end of Orcas Island confirm that at least two portions of a shallow and disturbed prehistoric shell midden site (45SJ229) are present, but no evidence of any potentially significant cultural deposits have been observed in those areas where several minor road improvements have been proposed. This conclusion, however, is based upon a surface examination and the investigation of nine shovel test pits. Given a site which is "spotty" and discontinuous in its distribution, it must be acknowledged that it is yet possible that cultural deposits could be present in any of the areas between the test pits.

I believe that the Harney View Commons Project Area should be considered sensitive, but at the same time I believe that Kenady's 1981 recommendations are unnecessarily restrictive. Recall that Thomson's original (1951) assessment was that the site was not worth excavation. In 1981, Kenady reported that most of the site was either "buried or destroyed". In 1985, Wessen found that the site was "disturbed, with only limited intact deposits". On the basis of the present survey, no proposed impact is located less than 50 to 60 feet away from an area where cultural deposits can be shown to be present.

Despite Thomson's original assessment, I would not discount the potential of the portion(s) of 45SJ229 which remain intact. The issue here, however, is whether the proposed road improvements are likely to adversely impact the site or its potential. The testing conducted by the present study suggests that they probably will not. Nevertheless, I believe that the project should proceed with caution. The appropriate cultural resource management strategy is monitoring. I recommend that work on the proposed improvements be allowed to proceed, but that all ground-disturbing activities associated with them be monitored by a qualified archaeologist. Should indications of potentially significant cultural deposits be exposed during this process, the disturbance must cease immediately and the discovery must be evaluated before any further decisions about continuing with the disturbance can be made. This approach will allow the proposed improvements to proceed while ensuring that potential significant archaeological deposits, if present, will be protected.

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