

A Summary of Archaeological Sites to be Affected by the
Proposed New Grissom High School Off of Weatherly Road in
Huntsville, Madison County, Alabama



**A SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES TO BE AFFECTED BY THE PROPOSED NEW
GRISSOM HIGH SCHOOL OFF OF WEATHERLY ROAD IN HUNTSVILLE,
MADISON COUNTY, ALABAMA**

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INTRODUCTION

At least five recorded archaeological sites (1MA189, 1MA527, 1MA528, 1MA529, and 1MA1401) will be impacted by the proposed construction and development of approximately 60 acres adjacent to Weatherly Road as an alternative location for the new Grissom High School. During previous surveys of these sites, four were deemed potentially National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligible, at least when initially recorded. In particular, 1MA189 is well known by both local archaeologists and collectors. Some of the sites have been visited on at least two occasions by the University of Alabama Office of Archaeological Research. In the summer of 2005, 1MA189 was impacted by heavy machinery. From that time, there are several accounts of observations of numerous cultural features, some of which reportedly included human burials. Based on current plans for the development of the Weatherly Road parcel, the road will be extended westward impacting portions 1MA527, 1MA528, and 1MA529. In addition, a proposed city park will also impact a portion of 1MA529. The proposed location of the new Grissom High School will directly impact 1MA189 and 1MA1401.

The group of sites to be impacted by the proposed construction overlook Byrd Springs, which provided a unique ecosystem with numerous natural resources such as raw material for stone stool manufacture, numerous fresh water springs, and abundant localized food resources to American Indians. The types of artifacts reported from the site indicate sporadic occupation spanning 12,000 years of prehistory. Notable within collections are the following artifact classes: Paleoindian stone tools, non-local groundstone steatite, sandstone, and greenstone, and thousands of chipped-stone tools. The chipped-stone tools indicate long term use of the site occurring during the Late Archaic through Late Gulf Formational periods. This was a time when human burial practices consisted primarily of flexed and cremated interments. Flexed burials are typically contained within shallow basin-shaped pits or a deeper cylindrical hole.

Photographs of cultural features from 1MA189 indicate that it should be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Further impacts could disturb American Indian human remains. It is clear that this site is significant on both local and regional levels. Currently, the preservation status of 1MA189 is unknown as it has been capped by a large amount of fill dirt. Tennessee Valley Archaeological Research recommends that all the sites within the proposed development be evaluated by a qualified archaeologist in regard to site preservation and NRHP status prior to any further disturbances. Such an evaluation would lessen the likelihood of an inadvertent discovery and disturbances of American Indian human remains. Otherwise, a historic resource potentially significant to improving our understanding of American history and prehistory could be irretrievably lost during the course of construction activities on the site.

SITE DESCRIPTIONS

SITE 1MA189

Site 1Ma189 is a large multicomponent American Indian site located on a terrace above Byrd Spring. Very little written information exists about the site; however, it is well known within the local archaeological community. Several accounts of the site identified cultural features that were visible on the surface when the site was cultivated. Numerous artifacts exist from the site in private collections. These artifacts indicate that the site was utilized by American Indians from approximately 12,500 years before present (B.P) through A.D. 1500. Utilization of the site likely varied over thousands of years from short term hunting excursions to longer term intensive use of the site.

Local informants detail visual accounts of major impacts to the site around 2005 when the site was heavily disturbed by large earth pans repeatedly scraping down the site, after which approximately 10 ft of earthen fill was placed over the site. These accounts are confirmed by historic satellite imagery of the site. During leveling of the site, several local accounts describe large cultural features being exposed. Pottery and stone bowls were observed in some of the features. In addition, bone fragments were scattered across the site during the leveling.

Site 1Ma189 was initially recorded by Blaine Ensor of the University of Alabama in 1979 (Alabama State Site Files-ASSF). At that time the site was described as being on a low terrace overlooking Byrd Spring swamp to the west. The description documented a heavy scatter of lithic (stone) tool manufacturing debris approximately 100 m in diameter. Ensor documented the possibility of intact features at the site. The ASSF also indicates that New World Research visited the site during a survey of Redstone Arsenal and adjacent land (Thomas 1980).

The site was again visited by the University of Alabama during an archaeological survey associated with a proposed southern bypass around Huntsville (Patterson 1991). The site summary describes 1MA189 as a heavy surface scatter of lithic material. The dimensions of the site are listed as 50 m x 100 m, but this appears to be only the portion of the site to be impacted by the proposed road. The site is depicted in the report on the project location map as approximately 500 m north to south and 200 m east to west. These are the dimensions currently reflected in the ASSF. No specific component data was provided for the site in the report. The description of the site recommends avoidance or testing because of the likelihood of intact cultural deposits. While not specifically stated in the report, the site was considered potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

SITE 1MA527

Site 1MA527 was recorded by the University of Alabama during a cultural resource survey associated with a proposed southern bypass around Huntsville (Meyer 1994). During the initial recordation of the site, it was described as a large lithic reduction site with an abundant amount of chert debitage (stone-tool manufacturing debris) scattered over its surface. Several stone tool fragments were collected from the surface during the survey. Recommendations for the site at that time suggested that subsurface cultural features could be present at the site and avoidance or

additional testing was recommended. These observations would at least warrant a potentially NRHP eligible recommendation for the site

This site was again revisited by the University of Alabama in December 2003 (Watkins 2004). During the revisit, site conditions were described as recently plowed with the main part of the site situated on the crest of a rise. The site was described as being approximately 305 meters by 150 meters in size. Several shovel tests at the site identified mixed soils and evidence of sheet erosion. The revisit findings did not concur with the earlier assessment that the site was potentially NRHP eligible, and no additional investigations were recommended.

SITE 1MA528

Site 1MA528 was recorded by the University of Alabama in 1994. The site was described as a medium sized, approximately 160 meters by 84 meters, lithic reduction site with a considerable amount of chert debitage spread across the entire site. The recorders felt that the density of lithic debris at the site indicated that stone tool manufacturing took place at the site. While the site has been subjected to years of agriculture, the recorders still indicated a potential for intact cultural deposits at the site and recommended avoidance or further testing. No chronologically diagnostics artifacts were collected during this site visit (Meyer 1994).

This site was again revisited by the University of Alabama in December 2003 (Watkins 2004). During the revisit, site conditions were described as recently plowed with excellent surface visibility. A couple of shovel tests at the site did not result in the recovery of artifacts. The revisit findings did not concur with the earlier assessment that the site was potentially NRHP eligible, and no additional investigations were recommended.

SITE 1MA529

Site 1MA529 was recorded and revisited the University of Alabama in 1994 (Meyer 1994). The site was described as an approximately 90 meters by 53 meters lithic reduction site with a heavy concentration of chert debitage. No temporally diagnostic artifacts were recovered during the survey. A single shovel test within the site boundaries revealed 30 cm of topsoil. Given depth of topsoil coupled with a high density of artifacts, the recorder felt that the site had a high potential for intact cultural deposits and therefore considered 1MA529 to be potentially NRHP eligible.

SITE 1MA1401

Site 1MA1401 was recorded by Bart Henson of Huntsville, Alabama. The site is located south of a large spring that locals called the "blue hole," south of Byrd Spring. Mr. Henson collected numerous artifacts from the site, which included Clovis, Big Sandy, Kirk, and Benton stone tools. Mr. Henson estimated that the site was 200 meters by 100 meters. The NRHP eligibility of this site is unknown.

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