

MONITORING OF EXCAVATIONS
AT THE COMMANDING OFFICER'S QUARTERS,
FORT STANTON, LINCOLN COUNTY,
NEW MEXICO

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Office of Archaeological Studies



Museum of New Mexico

AN 420
2010

MUSEUM OF NEW MEXICO

OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES

**Monitoring of Excavations at the Commanding Officer's
Quarters, Fort Stanton, Lincoln County, New Mexico**

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ARCHAEOLOGY NOTES 420

SANTA FE 2010 NEW MEXICO

Administrative Summary

The Property Control Division, New Mexico General Services Department, proposed stabilization work at the commanding officer's quarters (Building 1) at Fort Stanton State Monument, New Mexico. The visible surface manifestation of Fort Stanton (LA 8744) is listed in the *National Register of Historic Places* (No. 60) and the *State Register of Cultural Properties* (SR 60).

Because of the potential for subsurface deposits within the stabilization area of the commanding officer's quarters, monitoring of subsurface excavations was conducted to determine if subsurface deposits were present and, if so, to investigate their nature and extent. Monitoring consisted of observing hand-excavated trenches prior to the installation of supporting helical

piers. Monitoring was conducted by the Office of Archaeological Studies on June 22 and 23, 2009.

No cultural features were observed during monitoring. Excavation ceased after the discovery of pieces of cut-sandstone blocks below the corner of the building. Future monitoring is recommended depending on the new strategy for the stabilization of the commanding officer's quarters.

MNM Project No. 41.496 (Fort Stanton)
State of New Mexico General Permit No. NM-09-027-M
NMCRIS Activity No. 11504

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Introduction

The Property Control Division, New Mexico General Services Department, proposed stabilization work at the commanding officer's quarters (Building 1) at Fort Stanton State Monument, New Mexico (Figs. 1 and 2, and Appendix 1). The visible surface manifestation of Fort Stanton (LA 8744) is listed in the *National Register of Historic Places* (No. 60) and the *State Register of Cultural Properties* (No. 60). The commanding officer's quarters is listed as LA 8744 in the New Mexico Cultural Resources Information System (NMCRIS) files, Archaeological Records Management Section, New Mexico Historic Preservation Division.

Because of the possibility that subsurface deposits associated with Fort Stanton were within the excavation area (Fig. 2), the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division required

monitoring of subsurface deposits during the hand-excavation of trenches prior to the installation of support helical piers.

Fort Stanton lies south of the Rio Bonito. It is surrounded by the Lincoln National Forest, which is north of the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation. The Capitan Mountains lie to the north and east, and the Sacramento Mountains to the west and south. Farther south is the Sierra Blanca.

The project area is on unplatted land within Lincoln County; UTM Zone 13, E450000, N3706400 (NAD 27); USGS 7.5' Fort Stanton Quadrangle. The commanding officer's quarters, known as Building 1, is located along the north central perimeter of the fort's parade grounds. The land is owned by the State of New Mexico.

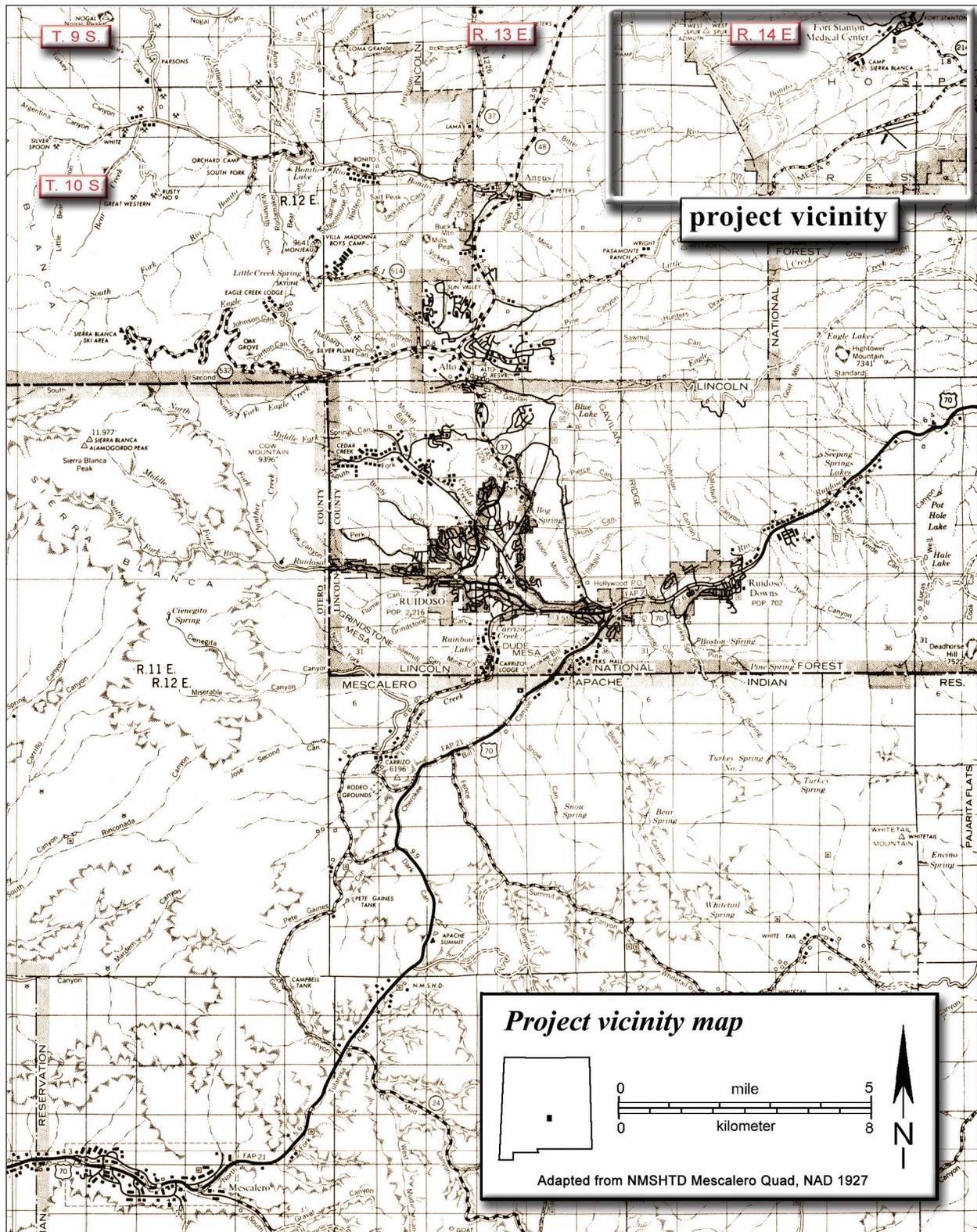


Figure 1. Project vicinity map.

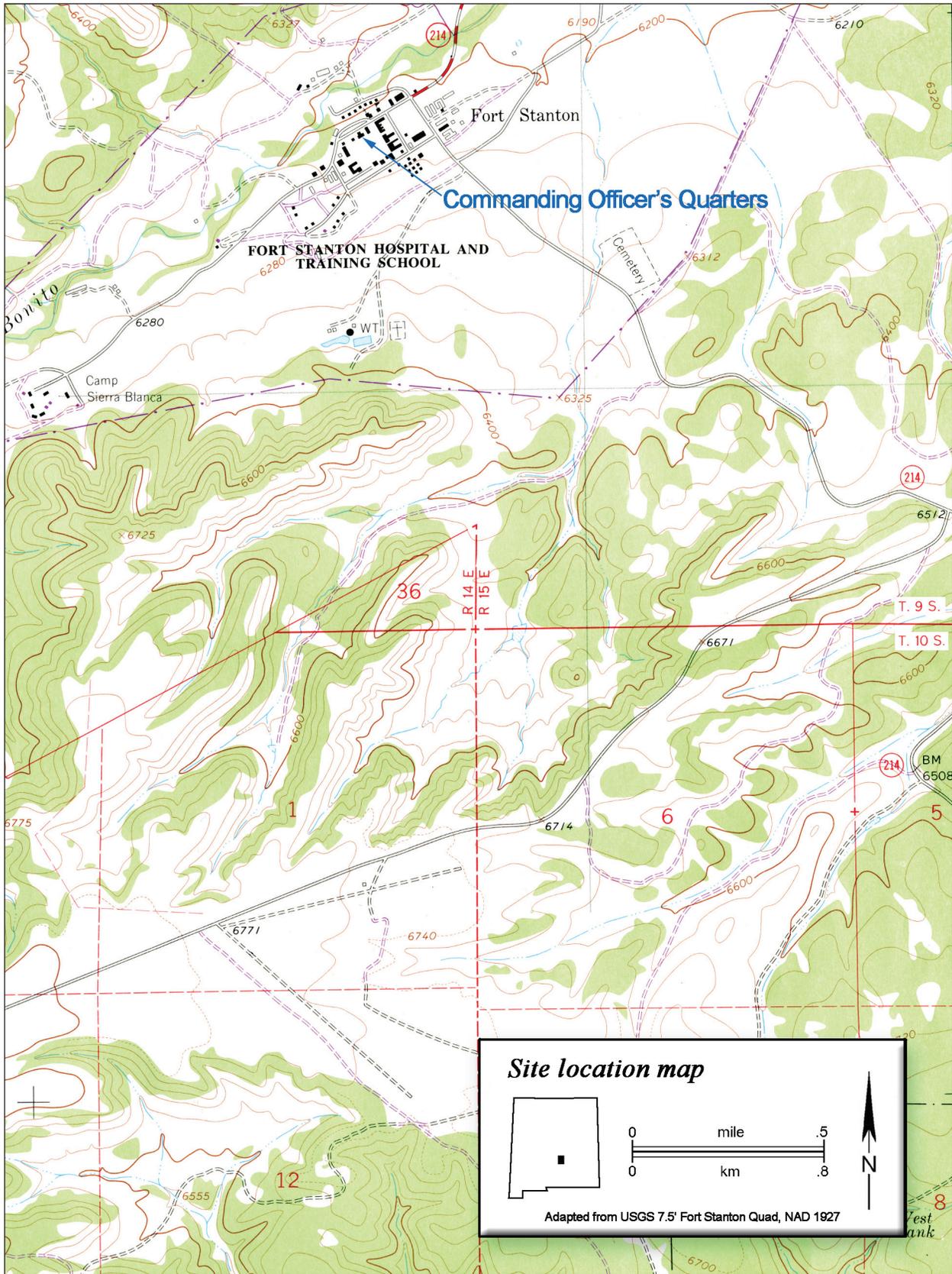


Figure 2. Site location map.

Culture History

The history of Fort Stanton and the commanding officer's quarters is detailed in the nomination documents and files of the *National Register of Historic Places* and the *State Register of Cultural Properties*. The following background is summarized from Sze's (1996) *National Register* nomination.

A frontier military post in Territorial New Mexico from 1855 to 1896, Fort Stanton experienced almost 141 years of continuous use until its closing in 1995. It is the only intact New Mexico fort built before the Civil War and is one of the best preserved forts in the Southwest from this period.

The fort was originally established to house military forces charged with subjugation of the Mescalero Apaches, which was considered crucial to the settlement of the area by settlers of European origin. It was central to frontier development and associated with major upheavals over a broad region during the Territorial period. Fort Stanton forces were involved in the Apache Wars, the Civil War in New Mexico, and the Lincoln County Wars. It was burned and abandoned by Union forces to keep it from being occupied by an invading Confederate army. At the end of the Civil War, the fort was reestablished under the command of Colonel Christopher "Kit" Carson, who played a major part in the subjugation of central and southern New Mexico's Native American populations and their restriction to reservations.

Major players in the Lincoln County Wars got their start in business by serving the needs of Fort Stanton during the late 1860s and 1870s. Soldiers from the fort were sent to Lincoln to quell the violence in 1877 and 1878. The legality of using

the military to police civil conflict was questioned and resulted in the trial of Lieutenant Colonel N. A. M. Dudley, who was subsequently cleared of the charges. With the surrender of Geronimo in 1886 and the end of the "Indian Campaigns," Fort Stanton's military role was diminished. In 1895 the garrison was retired and the post temporarily abandoned.

In 1899 Fort Stanton was transferred by President William McKinley from the Interior Department to the US Marine Hospital Service, creating a facility dedicated to the care of tubercular merchant seamen. Fort Stanton served as a place of healing, learning, rehabilitation, and community until 1953, when the US Congress failed to appropriate funds for its operation. From 1955 to 1966, the facility was operated by the New Mexico Department of Public Welfare. Until 1995 the state operated the facility as a branch of the Los Lunas Hospital and Training School for developmentally disabled clients. It became a New Mexico State Monument on August 11, 2007.

Building 1, the commanding officer's quarters, is one of eleven structures that surrounds the centrally situated parade ground. The existing quarters were built in 1876, replacing the original commanding officer's quarters, which were built in 1866. The present commanding officer's quarters is a one-story building of dressed stone with a T-shaped building plan. The front porch has been replaced with an enclosure of the same size. In 1876 it was the only building on the north side of the parade ground (Fig. 3). By 1886 two flanking structures had been added, a configuration that remains in place today, with some modification to the flanking structures.

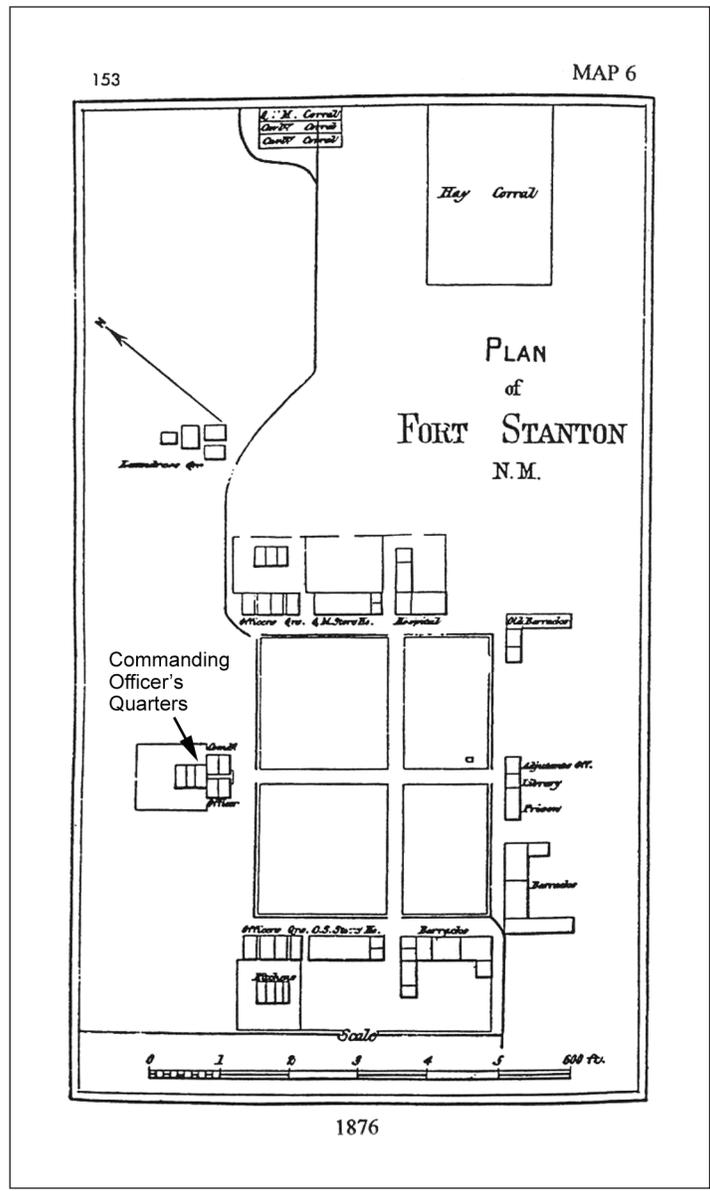


Figure 3. Map of Fort Stanton in 1876, showing commanding officer's quarters and parade ground.

Monitoring Methods and Results

MONITORING METHODS

Archaeological monitoring was conducted in accordance with the provisions outlined in "Standards for Monitoring," Cultural Properties Act 4.10.17. A monitoring plan was submitted to New Mexico Preservation Division for review. It was approved prior to the construction and archaeological monitoring activities at Fort Stanton.

Monitoring consisted of observing the hand-excavation of a 60 cm wide by 90 cm trench on the north corner of the building (Fig. 4). This trench was 0.8 m long along the northwest wall and 1.50 m long along the northeast wall. As the trench was excavated, the fill was examined for cultural deposits, and artifacts were collected. Notes were taken describing the fill and contents of the trench as it was being excavated. When excavations were complete, profiles and a plan view were drawn to document the trench. Photos were also taken of the trench before, during, and after excavation. Once it was determined that excavations were not going to continue any further, the trench was backfilled by the contractors.

MONITORING RESULTS

Initial observations of the wall showed that the northeast and northwest sides had a crack 1 cm wide running vertically from the base to near the top of the wall (Fig. 5). The crack in this wall had prompted the placement of helical piers at this location.

Excavations revealed two distinct strata. The upper stratum (Stratum 1) was 24–28 cm thick and consisted of a consolidated, dark brown (Munsell

10yr 3/3), silty clayish sand with inclusions of 1 percent pea gravel and roots. Artifacts and other cultural inclusions consisted of a mix of concrete and sandstone pieces, glass, metal, a peach pit, a modern key, plastic, foil, paint pieces, two Native ceramic sherds, one lithic artifact, animal bone, and very sparse charcoal flecks. Five cm beneath the surface, a loose concrete slab (56 cm wide by 80 cm long by 10 cm thick) was removed; it did not appear to be related to the construction of the building, and may have been a discarded piece from the slab in the nearby portal. The lower stratum (Stratum 2) was 68–72 cm thick and had the same consistency and content as Stratum 1, except that modern refuse was absent. Artifacts and other cultural inclusions consisted of a few pieces of glass, metal, animal bone, and very sparse charcoal flecks (Fig. 6).

Strata 1 and 2 appear to be redeposited or disturbed fill. Stratum 1 appears to be more recent, judging from the modern refuse, and may have been introduced to level the area. Stratum 2 could be as early as the building; it may be redeposited fill used to fill in the trench foundation for the building.

About 24 cm below the ground surface, large pieces of cut-sandstone blocks (ranging in diameter from 16 to 40 cm) were encountered below the corner of the building, protruding into the trench (Figs. 7–10). These sandstone blocks continued to 60 cm below the base of the wall. It appears that these sandstone blocks were placed beneath the corner of the building during construction to support the corner. Excavation for the helical piers could not continue because of their location, and it was determined that an alternate plan would have to be made at a later date.

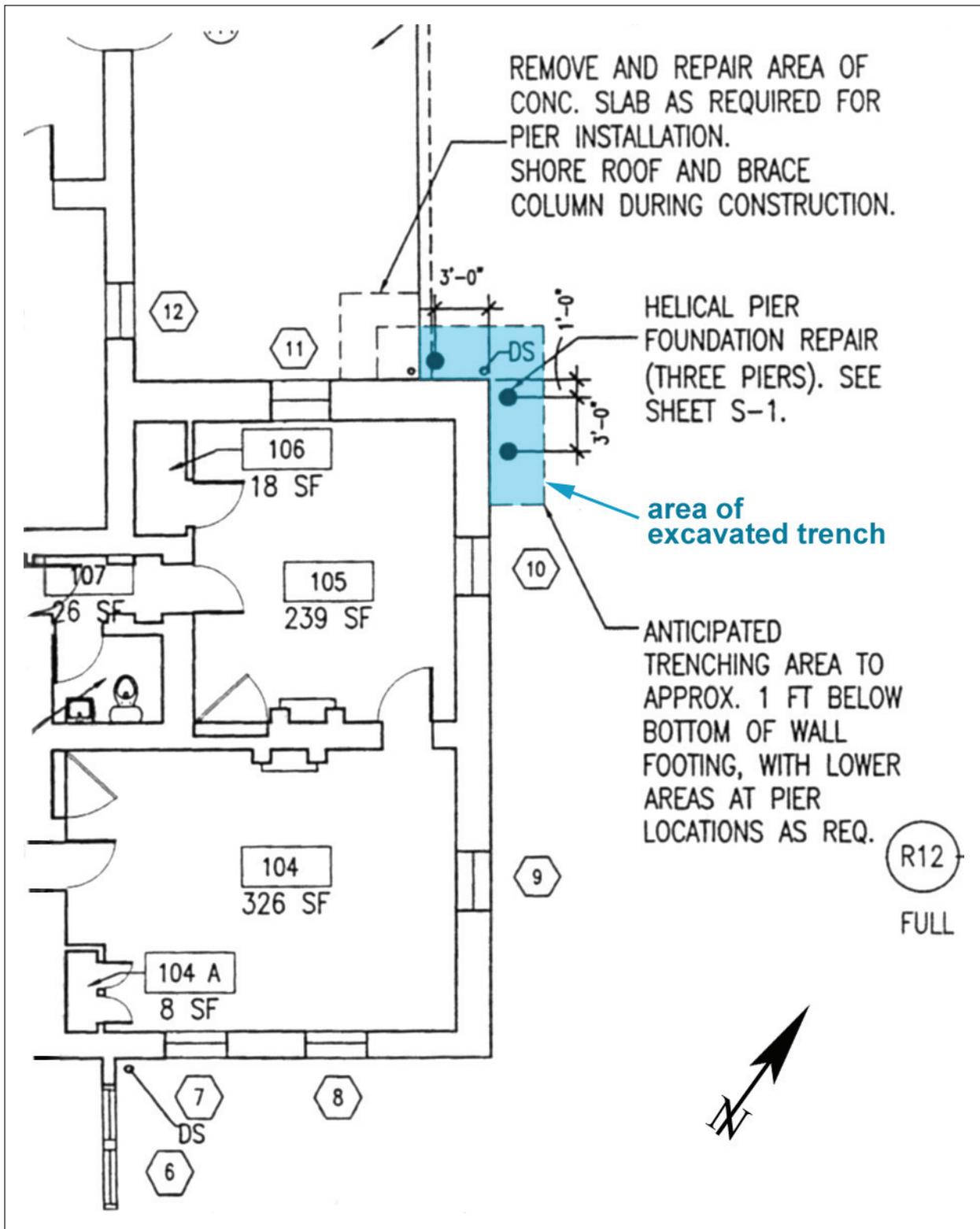


Figure 4. Schematic drawing of helical pier and excavated area.



Figure 5. The northwest wall before excavation.

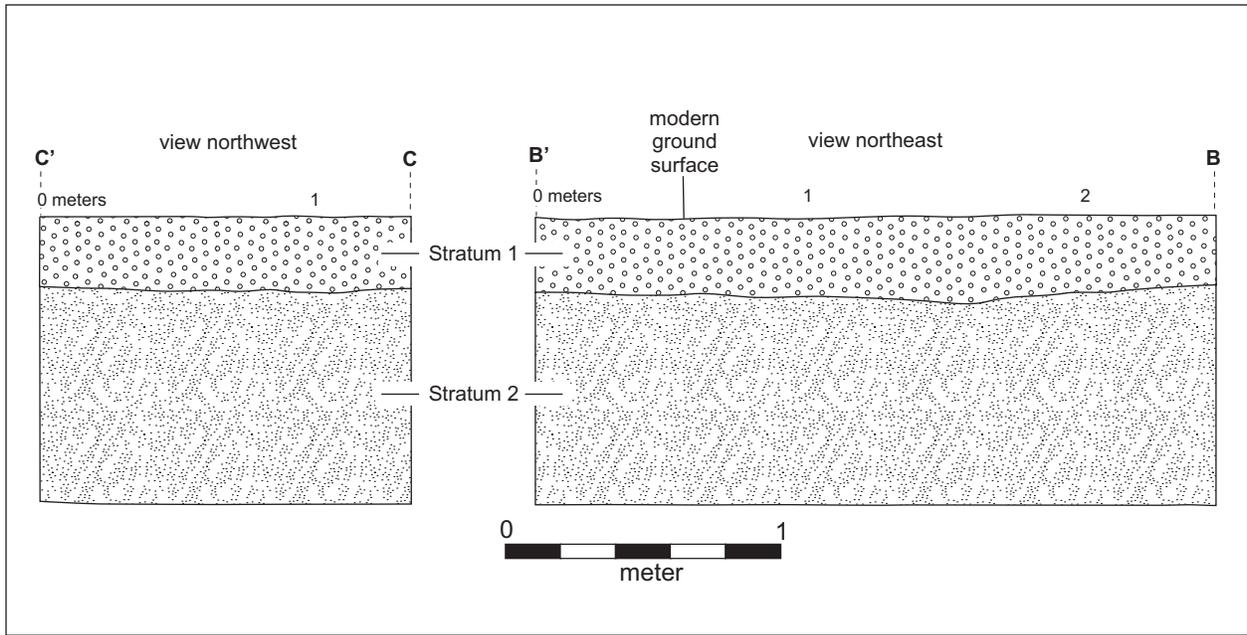


Figure 6. Profiles of northwest and northeast trench walls.

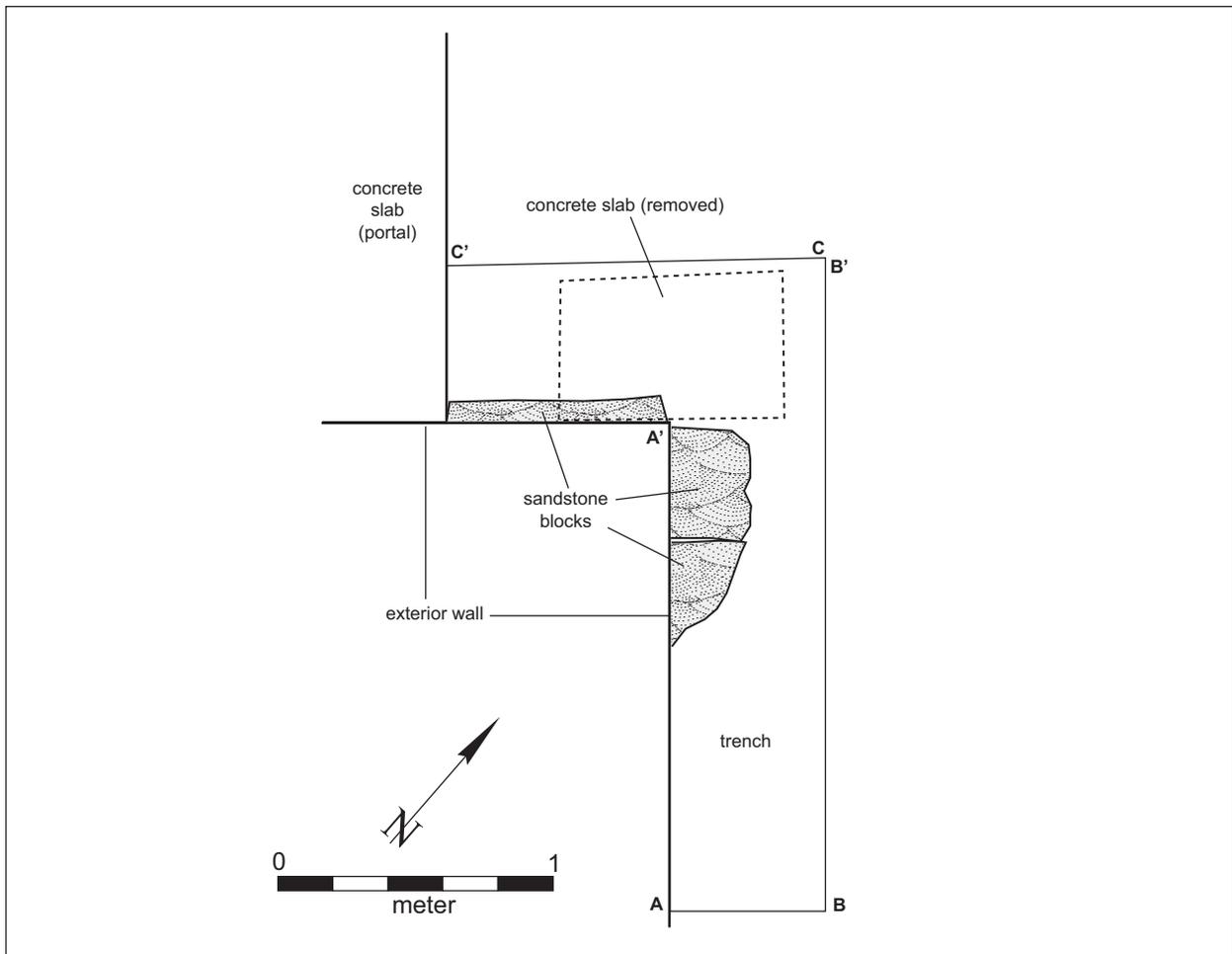


Figure 7. Plan of north corner.

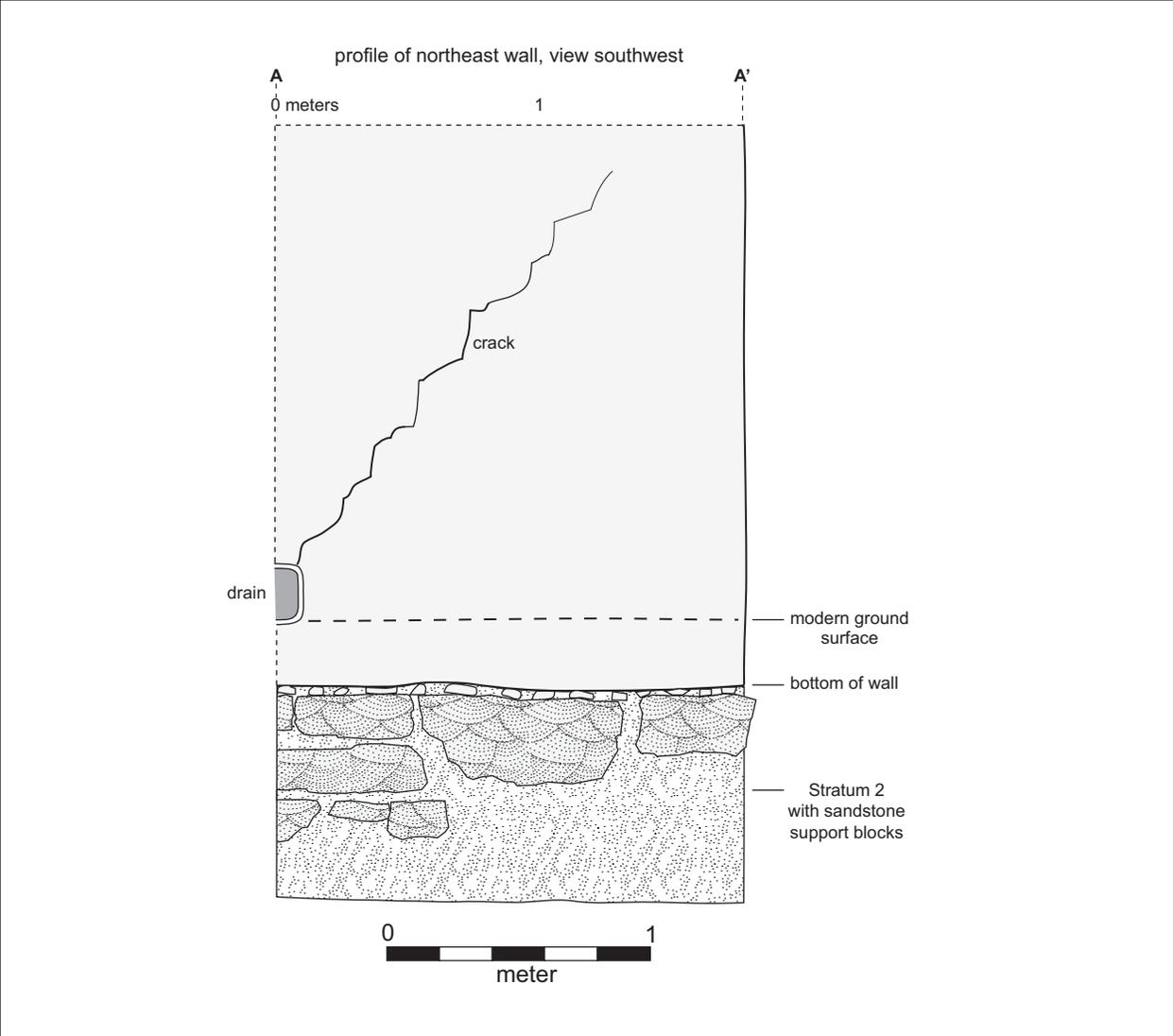


Figure 8. Profile of northeast wall.



Figure 9. The north corner after excavation.



Figure 10. The northwest wall after excavation.

Artifact Descriptions

A mix of historic and prehistoric artifacts were collected during monitoring from Strata 1 and 2. Stratum 1 contained glass, two sherds, one lithic artifact, and bone. Stratum 2 contained glass, a nail, and a bone.

CERAMIC ARTIFACTS

Two sherds were recovered from excavations: a Chupadero Black-on-white sherd and a locally produced indented corrugated ware. The Chupadero Black-on-white sherd contained a dark igneous and sherd temper; the indented corrugated sherd had a sand temper. Chupadero Black-on-white was dated to AD 1050–1550 (Mera 1931). Since these sherds were in the upper 10 cm of fill, they were probably transported from another location and redeposited.

LITHIC ARTIFACT

One lithic artifact was recovered from excavations in Stratum 1. This gray rhyolite, medial flake with 80 percent dorsal cortex and was waterworn. Its dimensions were 4 by 3 by 1.2 cm.

ANIMAL BONE

Two rib fragments from a large mammal were found. They were probably transported from another location and redeposited.

EUROAMERICAN ARTIFACTS

A total of 25 Euroamerican artifacts were recovered from the excavation. They included the shank of an iron machine-cut square nail (1830+; Nelson 1968:8), six pieces of cylinder-produced window glass (1830+; Roenke 1978), and eight pieces of bottle glass. The bottle glass represents a minimum of two different vessels. One is a cylindrical one-quart beer bottle. The bottle was manufactured using a two-piece mold (1840–1920; Lorrain 1968:39-40). The other is a clear glass bottle that may date after 1880, when the demand for clear glass rose sharply due to increased awareness of product quality. While none of these artifacts are particularly diagnostic, and sample size is very small, the assemblage probably dates to the later half of the nineteenth century. This would correlate well with use of the site during or shortly after the Red River War (1874). However, the assemblage tells us little about activities occurring at the military installation except to indicate that alcohol was being consumed on the premises.

Recommendations

As anticipated, no cultural features were encountered during monitoring. Soils were disturbed and contained a mixed context. They were probably introduced during construction. Because the original plan of placing galvanized steel angle plates below the foundation was compromised by sandstone blocks, excavations were halted. A new strategy for supporting the northeast wall will have to be developed. Future archaeological monitoring will depend on what new strategy is devised. If the new strategy requires excavation in areas that were not excavated previously, additional archaeological monitoring is recommended. Future monitoring is also recommended because the depth and age of the soils are still unknown.

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