

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND ASSESSMENT OF TWO
MICROWAVE TOWER LOCATIONS IN ROCKINGHAM
COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

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May 1984

Management Summary

An archaeological survey and cultural resource assessment were carried out at two microwave tower sites in Rockingham County, North Carolina. (No Clearinghouse numbers were available.) The Troublesome Creek Microwave Tower site is a little over an acre in extent and is located on the east side of NC 68, north of Stokesdale. The Price Microwave Tower site is located east of the junction of SR 1504 and SR 1501 and comprises 1.4 acres. In both cases, surface visibility was sufficient to permit a pedestrian survey. Because no evidence of archaeological remains were found, clearance is recommended for both project sites.

Introduction

On May 1, the authors conducted an archaeological survey of two microwave tower sites in Rockingham County. The surveys were done at the request of the Eastern Regional Office of MCI Communications Cooperation, Douglasville, Georgia.

The Troublesome Creek Microwave Tower site is located in southern Rockingham County, on the east side of NC 68, approximately 3.2 mi north of Stokesdale and 1.1 mi south of US 220 junction (Lat: 36°16'14.4"; Long: 79°56'41.9"; Elev: 930') (Figure 1). The proposed project includes a 200 x 200 ft tower site connected to NC 68 by a 300 x 30 ft access road easement. Together, the tower site and access easement encompass about 1.1 acres. Major construction, however, will be restricted to the 60 x 60 ft tower site, where the following facilities will be built: (1) a microwave tower, (2) an 11 x 18 ft shelter, (3) an 8 x 10 ft generator building, and (4) a 1000 gal LP gas tank. These facilities will be enclosed by a chainlink fence.

The Price Microwave Tower site is located in northern Rockingham County, approximately 1.5 mi southeast of the town of Price on SR 1501, immediately east of its junction with SR 1504 (Lat: 36°31'36"; Long: 79°53'34"; Elev: 1043 ft) (Figure 2). The project site comprises approximately 1.4 acres and includes a 200 x 200 ft tower site connected to SR 1501 by a 650 x 30 ft access road easement. Major construction will be restricted to a 60 x 100 ft area. Constructed facilities will

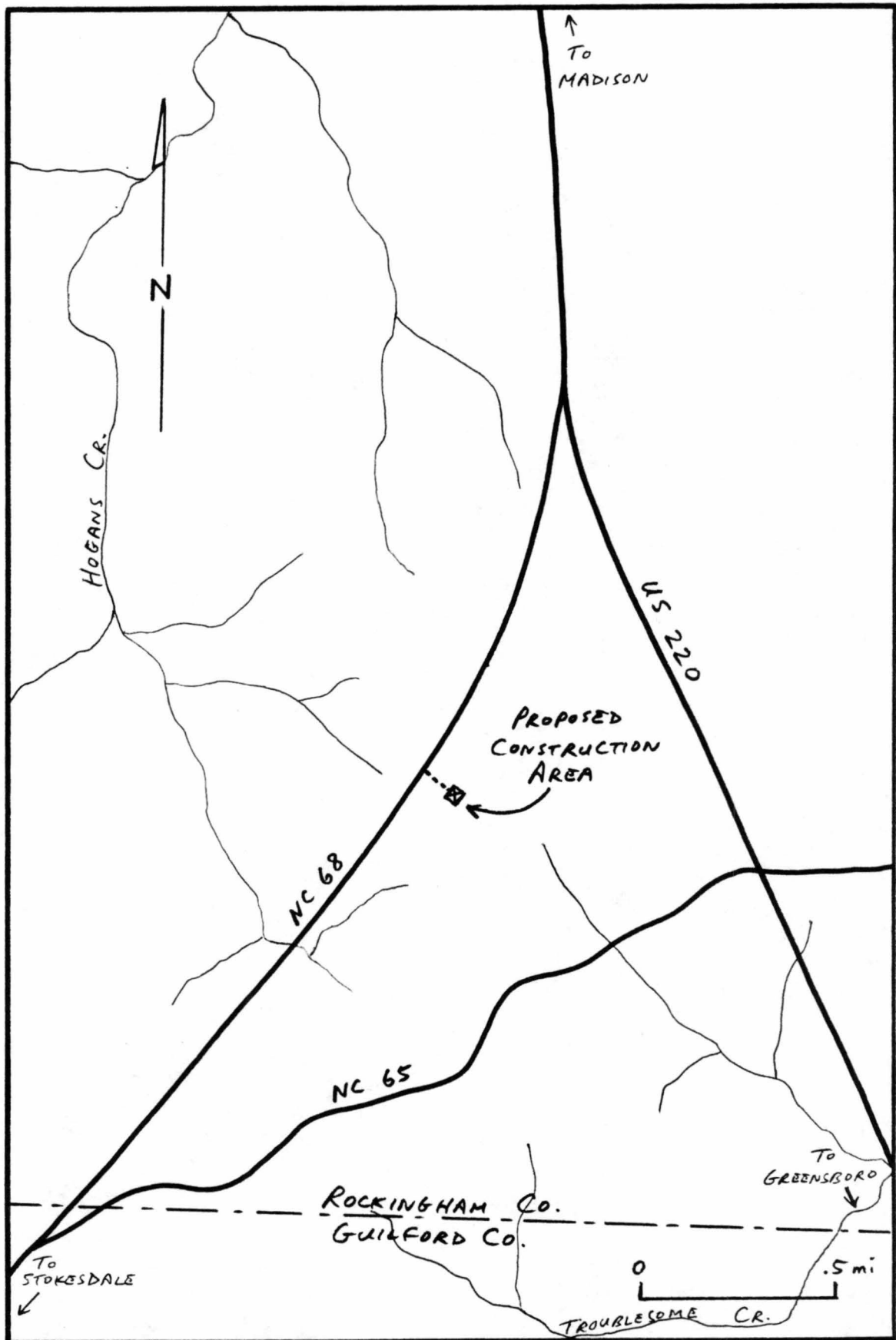


Figure 1. Map locating the proposed construction area for the Troublesome Creek Microwave Tower.

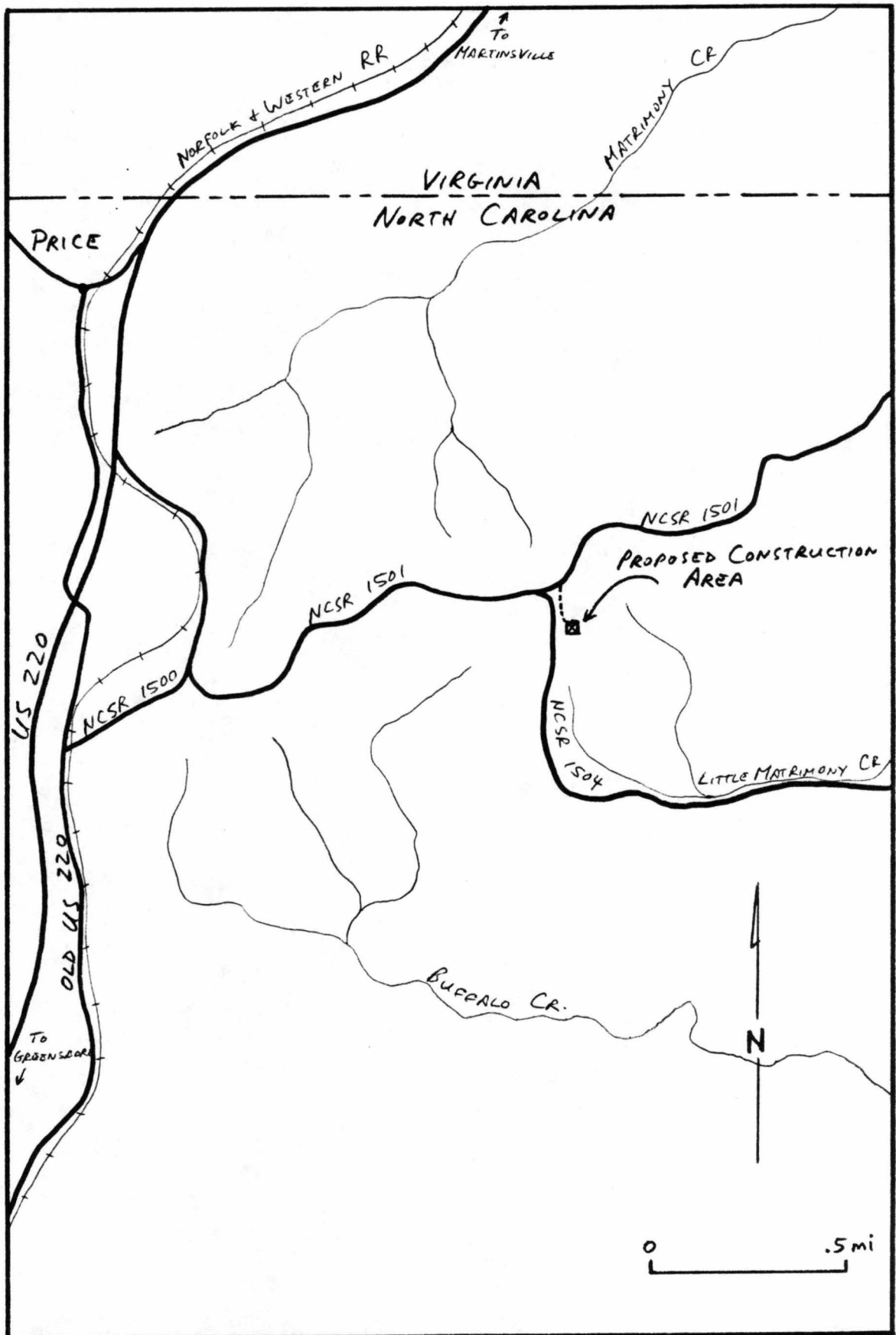


Figure 2. Map locating the proposed construction area for the Price Microwave Tower.

include a microwave tower, an 11 x 18 ft shelter, an 8 x 10 ft generator building, and a 1000 gal LP gas tank. These facilities will be enclosed by a chainlink fence.

Environmental Factors and Survey Methods

Rockingham County is characteristic of the northern Piedmont counties. From east to west the terrain shifts from gently to sharply rolling and, if not cleared, is blanketed by stands of old field pine or mixed hardwoods. Most of the cleared land lies in the stream valleys and is usually cultivated for corn or tobacco. The Dan River, flowing diagonally across the heart of the county, is the major drainage artery. The headwaters of the Haw River--Big and Little Troublesome creeks--are found in southern Rockingham County, whereas the Smith and Mayo river watersheds are located in the northern section of the county.

The Troublesome Creek project site is situated on a gradually sloping upland surface, flanked to the west by Hogans Creek and to the southeast by Big Troublesome Creek. The nearest stream is 1000 ft to the west. Archaeological assessment consisted of a pedestrian survey of the entire project area. The tower site is located in an old soybean field, and surface collecting conditions were excellent (80-100 percent visibility). Careful inspection of the surface failed to yield any prehistoric or historic archaeological remains. Soils at the site consist of clay loam underlain by clay, with no potential for buried

archaeological deposits. The access road easement is presently forested, and surface visibility is poor. However, given the absence of artifacts within cultivated fields adjacent to the access road, subsurface testing was not considered necessary.

The Price project site is situated in a pasture atop a prominent knoll at the headwaters of Little Matrimony Creek. The nearest stream is 1000 ft to the south (100 ft drop in elevation). Soils consist of a thin humus zone, underlain by red clay. Soil erosion at the project site has been moderate to severe, particularly at the south edge of the tower site. As a consequence, patches of bare soil are scattered across the pasture. Archaeological assessment consisted of a pedestrian survey of the entire project area. Eroded areas were sufficiently numerous to permit surface collecting without additional subsurface testing.

Prehistoric and Historic Background

Approximately 65 archaeological sites have been recorded in Rockingham County. Most represent small camp sites dating from the Archaic (8000-1000 B.C.) to the Early Middle Woodland (1000 B.C.-AD 1000) periods. Most of the Archaic sites chronologically belong to the Middle (4000-2000 BC) or Late (2000-1000 BC) periods with Guilford and Savannah River lithic assemblages predominating. After ca. AD 1000, small to medium-sized farming villages began to dot the fertile bottoms of the Dan, Smith, and Mayo rivers. Sites such as 31Rk1, 6, 7, 8, and 12

represent fairly permanent palisaded settlements, with circular houses accompanied by storage and garbage disposal facilities. Burials are found scattered throughout the villages, and, after European contact, sometimes in cemetery compounds (cf. Gravely 1969; Ward 1983).

One of the first whitemen to visit Rockingham County was William Byrd II while surveying his "Land of Eden" in 1673. Byrd was much impressed with the land, and after looking over the old fields on the Dan River that had been abandoned by the Sara Indians, wrote:

we were surprised with an opening of
large extent where the Sauro Indians
once lived, who had been a considerable
nation (Byrd 1966:398).

Byrd had hoped his "Land of Eden" would attract large numbers of settlers, but it was not until the middle of the eighteenth century, when most of the Piedmont counties were settled, that rapid growth took place in the Rockingham County area.

During this period hordes of English, Scotch-Irish, and German settlers poured down the Great Wagon Road from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Maryland. The ones that came to Rockingham County were of Scotch-Irish descent, and the earliest settlement took place in the Troublesome Creek valley. These earliest settlers were subsistence farmers, and the only industry was milling (Butler 1982: 9-11).

The Dan River coalfield was discovered in 1824 and mined extensively during the Civil War. The major activity took place just upstream from Leaksville, and coal pits are still visible in the vicinity today. Once mined, the coal was shipped downstream by

bateaux to the railhead at Danville. However, after the war the vein proved too sparse for commercial exploitation (Butler 1982:4).

Iron and mica have also been mined in Rockingham County. Iron ore occurs in the Haw River basin, and an ironworks was established on Big Troublesome Creek around 1770. The latter was in operation until the end of the nineteenth century. In 1791 George Washington "Breakfasted at troublesome Iron works (called 15, but which is at least) 17 miles from Guilford . . . (Washington; quoted in Hatch 1970:35). Around 1890 commercial mines were opened in the Price community. At one time or another, over a dozen mines were in operation. Production peaked during World War II (Butler 1982:4).

Survey Results and Recommendations

Although survey conditions were generally favorable, no archaeological sites, historic or prehistoric, were found at the two microwave site locations. Based on these negative findings, it is concluded that no significant cultural resources will be impacted by the projects. As a consequence, archaeological clearance is recommended for both project sites.

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