

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND ASSESSMENT OF TWO MICROWAVE
TOWER LOCATIONS IN ALAMANCE AND GUILFORD COUNTIES,
NORTH CAROLINA

By

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Management Summary

An archaeological survey and cultural resource assessment were carried out at two microwave tower sites in Alamance and Guilford counties, North Carolina (No Clearinghouse numbers were available). The Cane Creek Microwave Tower site covers approximately one acre and is located atop Cane Creek Mountain just north of Snow Camp. The Groometown Microwave Tower site is just over one acre and is located less than a half mile east of the Groometown exit on I-85 south of Greensboro. Assessment of the two tower sites included both pedestrian survey and shovel testing. Because no evidence of archaeological remains were found, clearance is recommended for both project sites.

Introduction

On August 2-3, 1984, the authors conducted an archaeological survey of two microwave tower sites in Alamance and Guilford counties, North Carolina. The surveys were done at the request of the Eastern Regional Office of MCI Telecommunications Corporation, Douglasville, Georgia.

The Cane Creek Microwave Tower site is located in southern Alamance County, about 3.6 mi due north of Snow Camp and along the western crest of Cane Creek Mountain (Lat 35°56'45"; Long 79°21'11"; Elev 955 ft) (Figure 1). The project site consists of a triangular tract approximately one acre in extent, situated immediately south of an existing radio tower and abandoned lookout tower, and east of an existing dirt road. The area is covered by relatively mature oaks and other hardwoods, as well as a numerous large granite boulders. The project site is on a 12-15 percent slope; impact to the site will consist of erecting a microwave tower and construction of one or more small buildings.

The Groometown Microwave Tower site is located in southern Guilford County, six miles south of Greensboro and 0.5 mi east of Interstate-85 at the Groometown exit (Lat 35°59'28"; Long 79°51'34"; Elev 826 ft) (Figure 2). The project site is situated on a gradually sloping upland surface (7-8 percent slope) adjacent to a small tributary of Hickory Creek and consists of a 209 x 209 ft (1 acre) tract connected to NCSR 1116 by a 285 x 30 ft access road easement. Proposed facilities, which consist of a microwave tower and one or more small buildings, will be located with a 60 x 100 ft area surrounded by a chain-link fence.

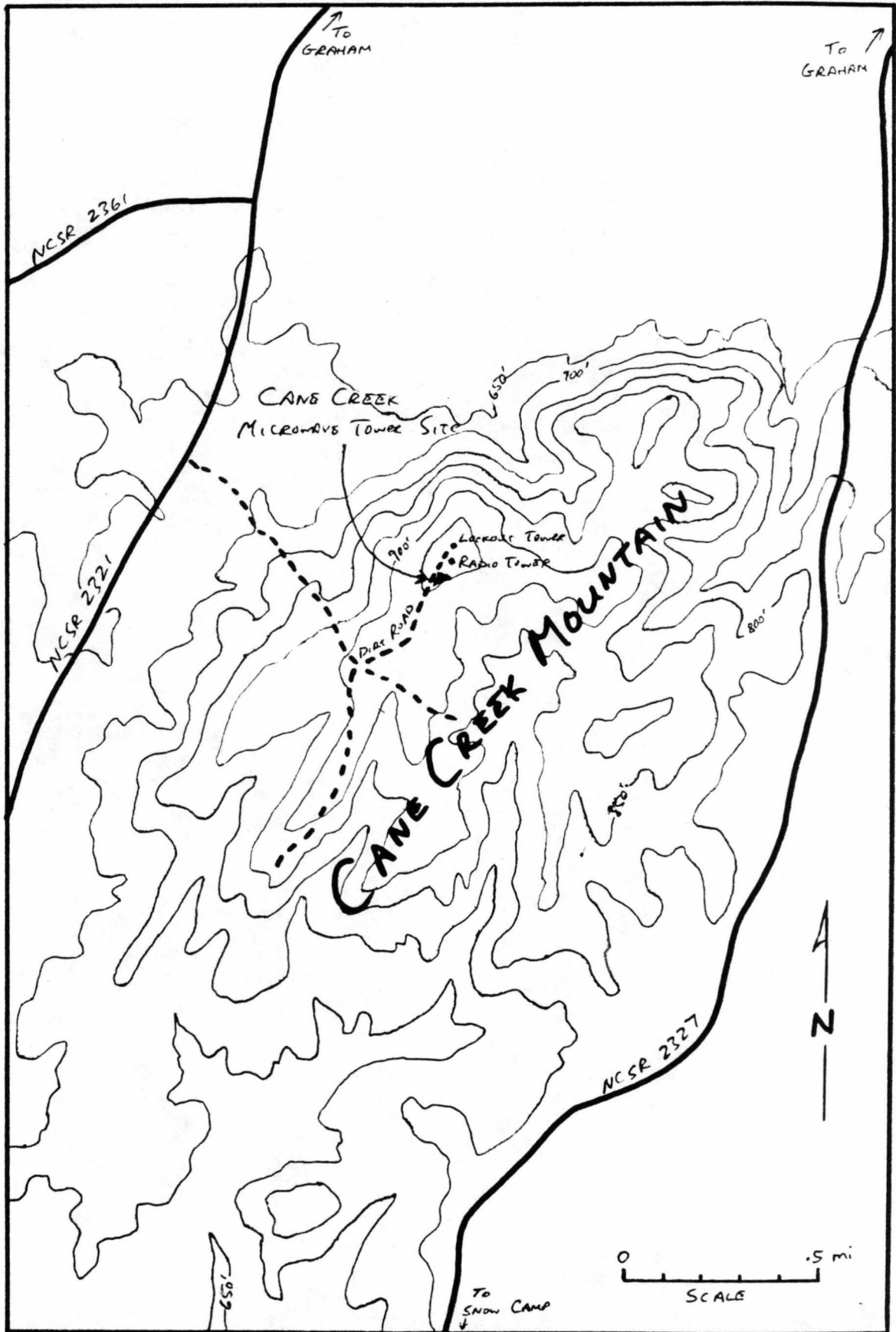


Figure 1. Map locating the proposed construction area for the Cane Creek Microwave Tower.

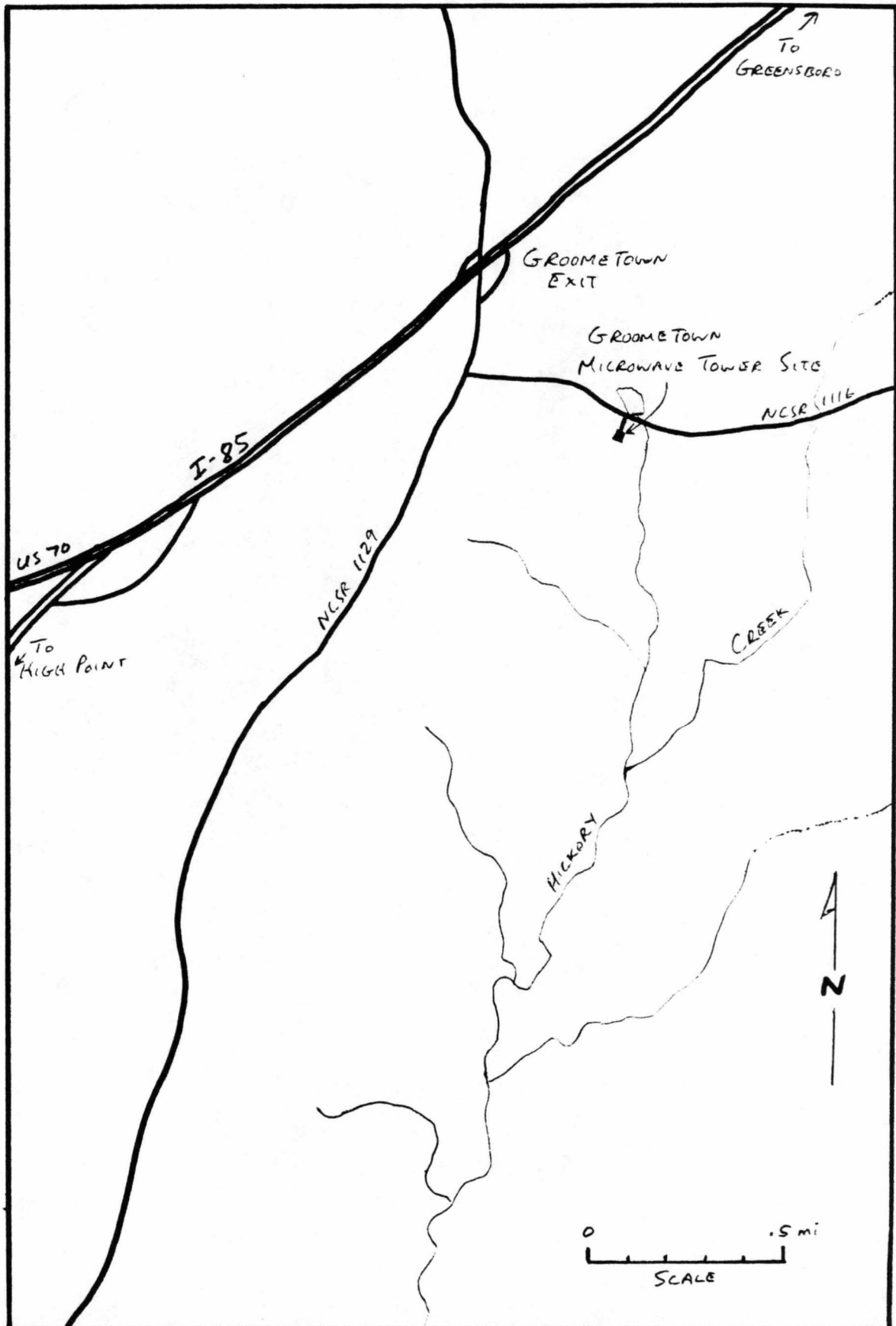


Figure 2. Map locating the proposed construction area for the Groometown Microwave Tower.

Environmental Factors

The topography of Alamance and Guilford counties is typical of the central Piedmont. Both are plateaus that have been dissected by a dendritic network of streams and valleys. Land surfaces vary from gently rolling to steep and broken. The more gently sloping terrain lies between the major drainage system, whereas the steep, broken topography is adjacent to and at the headwaters of major tributaries such as the Haw River, Cane Creek, and Big and Little Alamance creeks.

Alamance and Guilford counties comprise a patchwork of cultivated fields, pastures, and mixed hardwood forests. Tobacco and corn dominate the agricultural scene, along with large pastures where numerous dairy herds graze. The mature forests are primarily made up of stands of oak, hickory, gum, and poplar. A sere of pine and cedar occupies the more recently abandoned fields and clearings.

At the Guilford County site, the major soil type is Enon Fine Sandy Loam, 6-10 percent slope. This soil has a surface layer that typically consists of a dark grayish brown fine sandy loam. The subsoil is a light brown clay loam that grades into a yellowish-brown clay (Stephens 1977:13). The Alamance County site is covered by Herndon Stony Loam which is a brown loam 6 inches thick. The subsoil is a red to yellow clay. This soil, which developed from the granite and schist residuum comprising Cane Creek Mountain, contains numerous unaltered rock fragments (Coffey and Hearn 1908:306).

Prehistoric and Historic Background

Approximately 350 archaeological sites have been recorded in Guilford and Alamance counties. Most represent small, disturbed camp sites that produce varying amounts of nondiagnostic lithic debris. When temporally diagnostic specimens are found, they usually date to the Middle (4000-2000 BC) or Late (2000-1000 BC) Archaic periods with Guilford and Savannah River lithic assemblages predominating (Woodall et al. 1977; Coe and Wilson 1975). After ca. AD 1000, small farming villages began to develop on the alluvial floodplains paralleling the major rivers and creeks. Sites such as 31Gf19 and 31Am76 have produced pottery dating to the late prehistoric period, whereas, European trade materials have been found at UNC-Aml43 (Site Files, Research Laboratories of Anthropology).

John Lawson, in 1701, was one of the first Europeans to visit the area and described the land as ". . . extraordinary Rich, no Man that will be content within the Bounds of Reason, can have any grounds to dislike it" (Lefler 1967:60). By the middle of the eighteenth century, Alamance and Guilford counties, like other Piedmont counties, were receiving a flood of Scotch-Irish, German, and English Quaker settlers, primarily from Pennsylvania. In Guilford County, the Quakers settled in the western part of the county, the Scotch-Irish the central, and the Germans in the eastern section. In Alamance County, The Scotch-Irish and Germans settled the northern and eastern parts of the county, while

the Quakers settled along Cane Creek. Today, the descendents of these sturdy pioneers continue to plow and cultivate the soil and run small shops, as well as provide the labor and talent to operate complex factories associated with the textile industry (Jurney 1923; Coffey and Hearn 1908).

Survey Methods and Results

Assessment of the cultural resource potential of the Cane Creek site involved surface inspection of the adjacent dirt road and inspection of spoil dirt piles from seven subsurface test pits previously excavated by MCI engineers. These test pits measured approximately 2 x 2 x 2 ft and were dispersed about 30 ft apart across the project area. Surface visibility along the dirt road was excellent (100 percent visibility) and provided an extensive exposure for detecting archaeological remains. Despite generally favorable survey conditions, no prehistoric or historic archaeological remains were discovered at the Cane Creek project site. Given its upland setting and consequent low potential for buried archaeological remains, no further assessment is recommended.

Assessment at the Groometown tower site consisted of a pedestrian survey and shovel testing. Survey conditions were moderately poor, as the site was covered with honeysuckle bushes and a stand of ca. 10 yr. old pines. Six shovel test pits were excavated in the area of proposed tower construction. These revealed a tan/light brown sandy loam soil

(8 inches thick) underlain by sticky clay. No prehistoric or historic archaeological remains were observed. The undulating character of the ground surface, coupled with the type of vegetation present, suggest moderate recent disturbance. Two low, linear ridges of earth that cut diagonally across the site appear to represent recent fire breaks. In addition to examining the project site, an area immediately west of the site was also carefully inspected. This area recently had been partially panned, exposing a half-acre surface. This area was also devoid of cultural material. Given these results, no further archaeological assessment is recommended.

Conclusions

Archaeological survey and assessment at the Cane Creek and Groometown Microwave Tower sites failed to identify any significant prehistoric or historic archaeological remains. It is, therefore, concluded that these projects will have no effect upon significant cultural resources. Archaeological clearance without further assessment is recommended for both projects.

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