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POTOMAC RIVER ARCHEOLOGY SURVEY

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Black Rock Mill Area

PRELIMINARY ARCHEOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE OF SLUDGE TRENCHING SITE 57,
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

W.S.S.C. Contract No. 78MM3422A, Task VIII

Report submitted to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission

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Abstract: No known prehistoric sites will be impacted by the proposed sludge trenching operations. One possibly historical site, known locally as a "slave cemetery", lies adjacent to the excavation area of Site 57 but should not be impacted by sludge trenching operations as presently planned.

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INTRODUCTION

The study area consists of a tract of land located along Black Rock Road, immediately north of Seneca Creek in Montgomery County, Maryland. It may be located on the Germantown USGS 7.5' quadrangle map (Figure 1). Approximately 100 acres of the tract, which belongs to the State of Maryland Department of Natural Resources, would be disturbed by the proposed sludge trenching operations (Figure 2).

The study area is located in the eastern Piedmont physiographic province in Maryland which is characterized by gently undulating uplands deeply dissected by stream and creek valleys. Soils in the area are classified as Manor channery silt loam and are underlain by the Wissahickon formation, which includes schists, phyllites, sandstones, and quartz (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1961; Cloos and Clarke 1953). Great Seneca Creek and its tributaries lie in the Seneca watershed and empty into the Potomac River about five miles south of the study area. The creek, its tributaries, and associated springs (several are located near Black Rock Mill) would have provided good sources of fresh water for prehistoric and historic settlers in the region. The creek also furnished water power for mills. Stream gravels and cobbles of quartz and quartzite were a source of lithic raw materials for tools and implements, as were outcroppings of steatite and vein quartz in the vicinity.

The original tree cover in Montgomery County was, in general, a dense forest of hardwoods, dominated by oaks, poplars, and hickories. These deciduous forests and their understory provided a variety of plant foods, including nuts and berries. Deer were the dominant fauna, along with wild turkey and small mammals. The area was probably widely used for hunting and gathering by prehistoric peoples from larger, more permanent settlements on the Potomac River shores or perhaps even on a periodic basis by hunting parties crossing the Fall Line from the Coastal Plain (Strachey 1953). At present the study area is mostly used for farmland.

The study area is known to have good historic potential because of adjacent existing historic structures, including a nineteenth century mill complex and a log cabin along Black Rock Road. Prehistoric potential would be expected to be particularly high on the terrace above Great Seneca Creek (McNamara 1977:45), since upland bluffs or knolls overlooking stream valleys were favored for location of prehistoric campsites. In general, any prehistoric sites could be expected to be small campsites/workshops for purposes of exploiting the available fresh water, food, and raw materials (quartz and quartzite stream cobbles and perhaps local steatites) in the region.

PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS

No prehistoric sites are listed for the immediate study area in the files of the Maryland Archeological Site Survey, the D.C. Consortium of Universities Potomac Valley Archeological Survey 1969-1972 (DCC), or the Maryland Historical Trust. In his report on the archeological resources in Seneca State Park, McNamara (1977:45) notes that no aboriginal

sites have been recorded for this middle section of the Seneca area but adds that no systematic archeological survey has ever been conducted there.

P.L. Wilbur, Assistant Superintendent of Seneca Creek State Park, reports that artifacts have been found occasionally along the ridge above Seneca Creek in the study area and that a former park ranger, who used to live in the Button residence on Site 57 but is no longer in the area, had picked up several projectile points from the fields on the property (personal communication). Wilbur has walked the freshly plowed fields on the terrace above the creek but has found no concentrations of artifacts. He described a small, crudely made, saw-toothed object of local schistose rock which was found on the ridge above the creek and which he feels was man-made. It is on display in the Park Office on Clopper Road; its antiquity and function are questionable. Present tenants of the house on Site 57 knew of no artifacts recovered from the property.

The nearest registered prehistoric archeological sites are 18M070 and 18M071, located about one and one-half miles from the study area where Route 28 crosses Seneca Creek (Figure 1). These sites were recorded in 1973-74 by William Barse and are located in fields on terraces above the creek. Artifacts included a quartz projectile point tip, a battered hammerstone, and rhyolite, quartz, and quartzite flakes.

A cache of eight rhyolite blades found on the west bank of Seneca Creek near Dawsonville was reported by H.A. MacCord in 1941 (S8 in DCC files; Figure 1).

R.E. McDaniel, who has surveyed the Lower Seneca region and has spot-checked portions of the Upper and Middle Seneca regions, has

knowledge of occasional quartz projectile points and flakage finds near Lake Seneca by local amateur collectors (personal communication).

Artifact finds (quartz points, steatite "grinding stone(?)") have been reported from the ridge between Great Seneca Creek and Long Draught Branch several miles east of the study area (Evans 1979:3).

No historic sites are listed with the Maryland Historical Trust or Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission's Index of Historic Sites in Montgomery County (1976) for the immediate study area, nor are any residences indicated on the Hopkins (1879) or Martenet and Bond (1865) maps. However, several historic sites in the vicinity of Site 57 are described here because of their bearing on the local history of the study area:

Log House/Black Rock Road (MHT 18/33) (Figure 1): This nineteenth century structure is located across Black Rock Road from the study area. Although the logs, covered with weatherboarding, are hidden at present beneath asbestos siding, the external stone chimney bases (with more recent brick stacks) on either end of the two-story structure are visible. Apparently, original access to the house was from old Germantown Road (present Route 118), since the original front of the house faced east rather than towards Black Rock Road. It was perhaps a tenant house to a farm closer to the main road. (References: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission 1974, 1976)

Black Rock Mill and Miller's House (MHT 24/5, 24/6) (Figure 1): Black Rock Mill was for many years one of the most important and efficient grist mills in the county. It is also one of the best preserved: the walls and foundations, of fitted stone mortar typical of construction materials and techniques used in the period between the Revolutionary

and Civil Wars, are still standing, as is the adjacent miller's house. Plans for restoration of the mill complex to full operation were the subject of a recent study by Vosbeck, Vosbeck, Kendrick and Redinger (1973). The mill and miller's house are owned at present by the State of Maryland. Built in 1815 by Thomas Hilleary (the date stone on the east wall of the mill reads "Black Rock Mill T.H. 1815"), the three and one-half story mill was used for grinding wheat, rye, and corn into flour and for sawing lumber, serving the farming communities of Germantown, Darnestown, and Dawsonville up until the 1920's. It was apparently a most productive and profitable operation and a focal point and meeting place for families in the area. The mill changed hands numerous times; owners included the Offutt family (shown as owners on the Martenet and Bond (1865) and Hopkins (1879) maps) and Americus Biggs and his son-in-law, C. Wallace Hughes, who operated it into the 1920's, when it became inoperative. (References: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission 1974, 1976; Schmitt 1975; Cobb 1968; Vosbeck, Vosbeck, Kendrick and Recinger 1973; Washington Star 1971)

Possible "Slave Cemetery": The Germantown USGS quadrangle map in the Maryland Archeological Survey files records "stone alignments (cemetery?)" on the southern ridge of the study area tract overlooking Seneca Creek. This feature was reported and described in a letter of June 6, 1973, to the State Archeologist, Tyler Bastian, from P.L. Wilbur, Seneca State Park Assistant Superintendent. According to local legends, slaves were present on the Site 57 property at some point in the past, and this was their graveyard, although other old tales mention Indian, Revolutionary War and Civil War burials (Wilbur, personal communication). A previous owner of the property, Mr. Button, had county records searched as far back

as 1700 with no success as to the identification of possible "cemetery" occupants (Wilbur 1973). Limited test excavations by Bastian (1973) and later by Wilbur at the site revealed no evidence of soil disturbance or discoloration. A map provided by WSSC indicates the alignments to be located about 300 feet east of proposed Pond III, just inside the existing treeline. Because of the proximity of these alignments to the proposed sludge trenching operations, the survey team was asked to locate them and investigate their present condition.

1979 RECONNAISSANCE: SURVEY METHODOLOGY

On January 23 a crew composed of June Evans, Paul Cissna, Bette Mehalko, Paul Inashima, and James Sorensen began a preliminary archeological reconnaissance of the study area. Because surface visibility was limited occasionally by patches of snow cover and frozen vegetation and since the ground surface in parts of the site was too frozen for adequate shovel testing*, the survey team restricted its reconnaissance to an assessment of areas which it felt could be sufficiently tested and to a determination (by total coverage of the site on foot) of those portions of the site which should be further examined when better field conditions prevailed. Areas A and B (Figure 2) were fields in corn stubble and some low weeds; Area C consisted partly of a field in corn stubble and partly of grass and low shrubs. Crews traversed all areas, walking transects approximately 100 feet apart, shovel-testing every 30-40 paces where possible and when ground surface was obscured. Areas A and B were felt to have been adequately enough surveyed not to justify further examination, since some shovel-testing was possible there and ground surface visibility was fair to good in most places. For Area C, however,

*shovel test: approximate width and depth of shovel

it was determined that additional investigation should be undertaken when surface visibility was improved and adequate shovel-testing could be carried out, particularly because of this area's better archeological potential (proximity to Seneca Creek and its feeder stream).

On March 7 June Evans and Paul Cissna returned to the study area to complete the reconnaissance of Area C, including the location and recording of the adjacent proposed "slave cemetery". Transects approximately 50 feet apart with shovel-testing every 50 feet where necessary were walked on the creek side of Area C bordering the woods. The ground surface visibility was good in most places and shovel-testing easily carried out in the thawed ground. In the area around Pond III testing was extended into the wooded area bordering the field, and stream banks and gully (quite steep here) were examined. On the portion of Area C which is in grass, shovel-testing was carried out, again in transects 50 feet apart.

The stone alignments referred to in Wilbur's 1973 letter were located, within the woods about 15-20 feet from the edge of the field and about 300 feet east of Pond III. They were mapped, drawn, and described (Figures 2, 3, and 4).

1979 RECONNAISSANCE: RESULTS OF SURVEY AND CONCLUSIONS

No prehistoric sites were located on Site 57 during the reconnaissance. Although scattered artifacts might be expected to be found on the terrace above Seneca Creek, given other similar finds on higher elevations elsewhere along the creek (for example, 18MO70, 18MO71), none were in evidence during the present survey. Under ideal field conditions (freshly plowed and rained-upon fields), which were unfortunately not

the case during the survey, such cultural data might be more easily identified.

The only structure of possible historic significance located on Site 57 is the set of stones aligned in rows, with similarities to a cemetery patterning and referred to locally as a "slave cemetery". There are approximately twenty stones of local Wissahickon lithic material within an area of about fifty feet by thirty feet, apparently arranged in several rows (Figure 4). Others may be hidden by undergrowth and timber debris. Of these stones fifteen are embedded on end in the ground, some very deeply, and the others are lying flat, as though disturbed from their original alignments by frost heaving or vandalism. They vary in size, thickness, and shape, although many are flat and thin. Two appear to have crude markings on them (see a and b in Figure 4). Debris from test excavations of Bastian and Wilbur were evident in the southern part of the area. Large trees growing on the site and immediately adjacent to some of the stones could indicate considerable age for the alignment.

It is not possible to add any new information about the nature or significance of this alignment without further archeological and historical investigations, which are not warranted at this point unless the Department of Natural Resources wishes them done or the sludge trenching operations will extend into the wooded area (not planned at present). In our opinion, the stones, while set in a definitely non-random pattern and one which does show similarities spacing-wise to a cemetery, are somewhat questionable as grave markers, given their crudeness and the negative results of earlier limited test excavations. However, a recent conversation with Jane Sween, Montgomery County Historical Society,

indicates that at least one other such "slave cemetery" may exist in the Dawsonville area and it also contains very crude stone markers. Therefore, should the alignments on Site 57 be endangered, further archeological and historical investigations are strongly recommended.

ASSESSMENT OF POSSIBLE IMPACT

No known prehistoric or historic structures will be impacted by the proposed sludge trenching operations.

One possibly historic structure, a set of stone alignments known as the "slave cemetery", although located immediately adjacent to Area C, will not be impacted unless trenching operations are expanded within the existing treeline.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that sludge trenching operations be kept well away from the possibly historical stone alignments, which at present are protected within the existing treeline bordering Area C. Should it become necessary to expand trenching into the wooded area here, additional historical and intensive archeological investigations would be desirable to determine the significance of the alignments.

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PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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- P.L. Wilbur.....Assistant Superintendent, Seneca State
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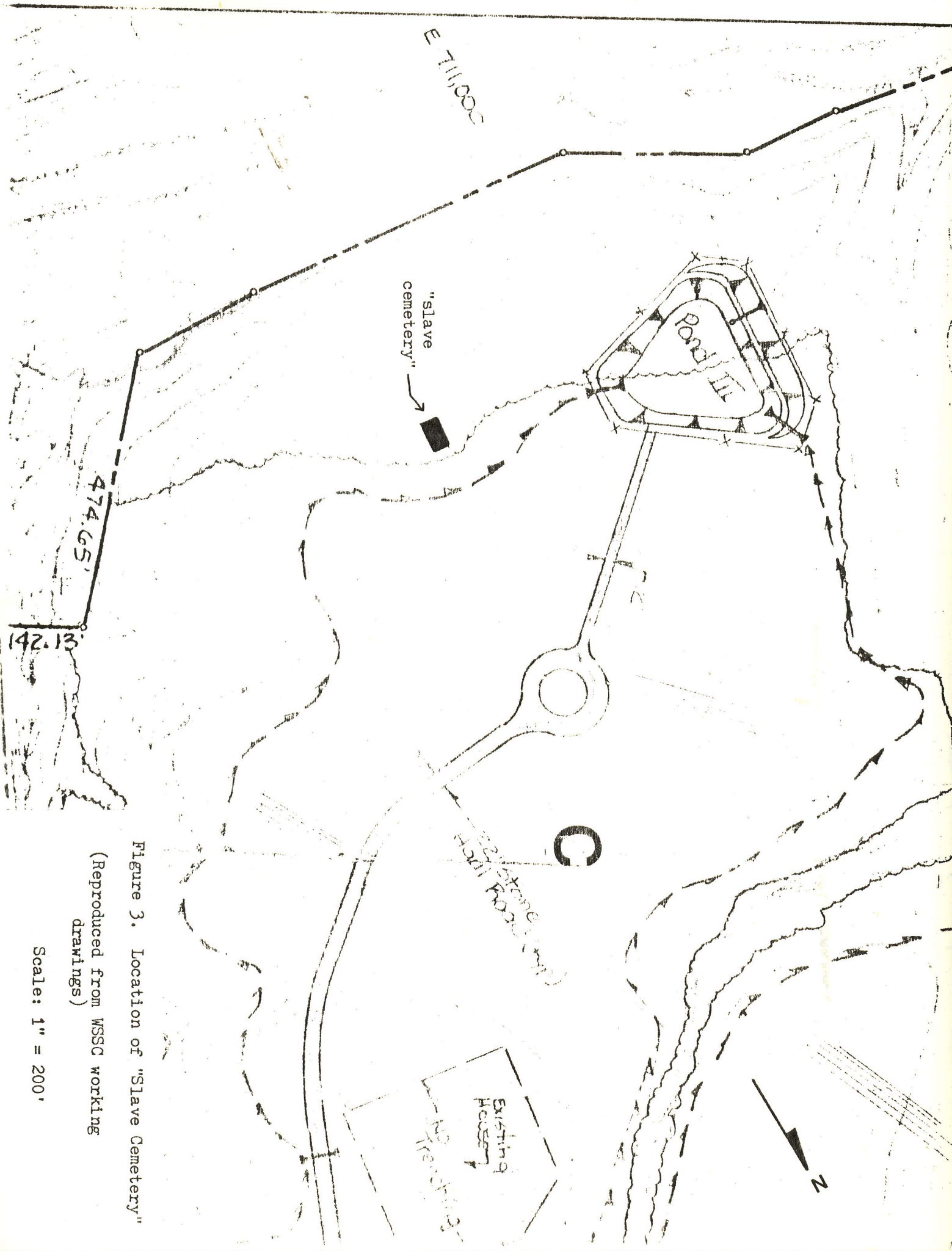
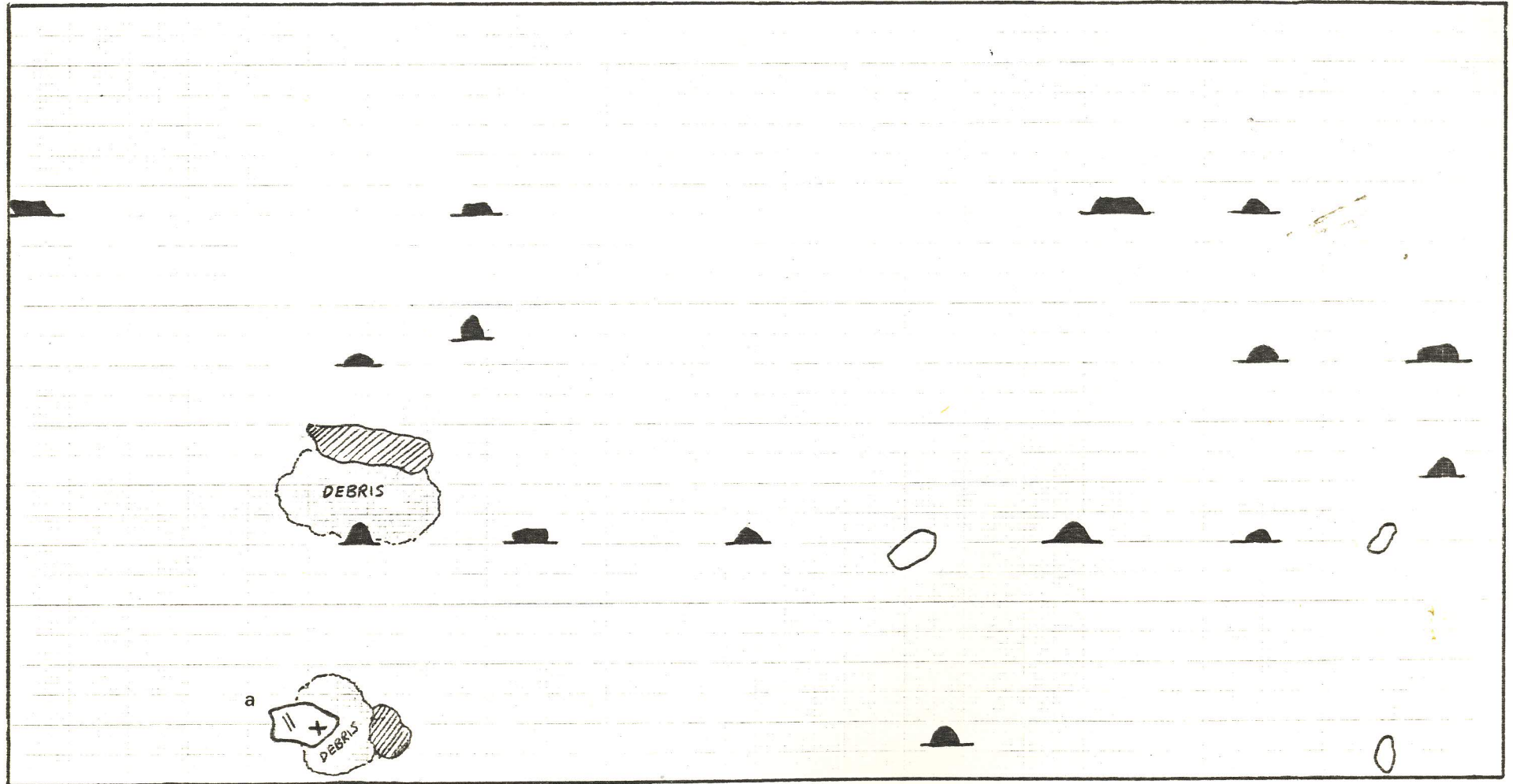


Figure 3. Location of "Slave Cemetery"
 (Reproduced from WSSC working
 drawings)

Scale: 1" = 200'



b



a

Scale: 0 2 4 feet




-  - embedded
-  - flat
-  - excavation

Figure 4. Diagram of "Slave Cemetery"

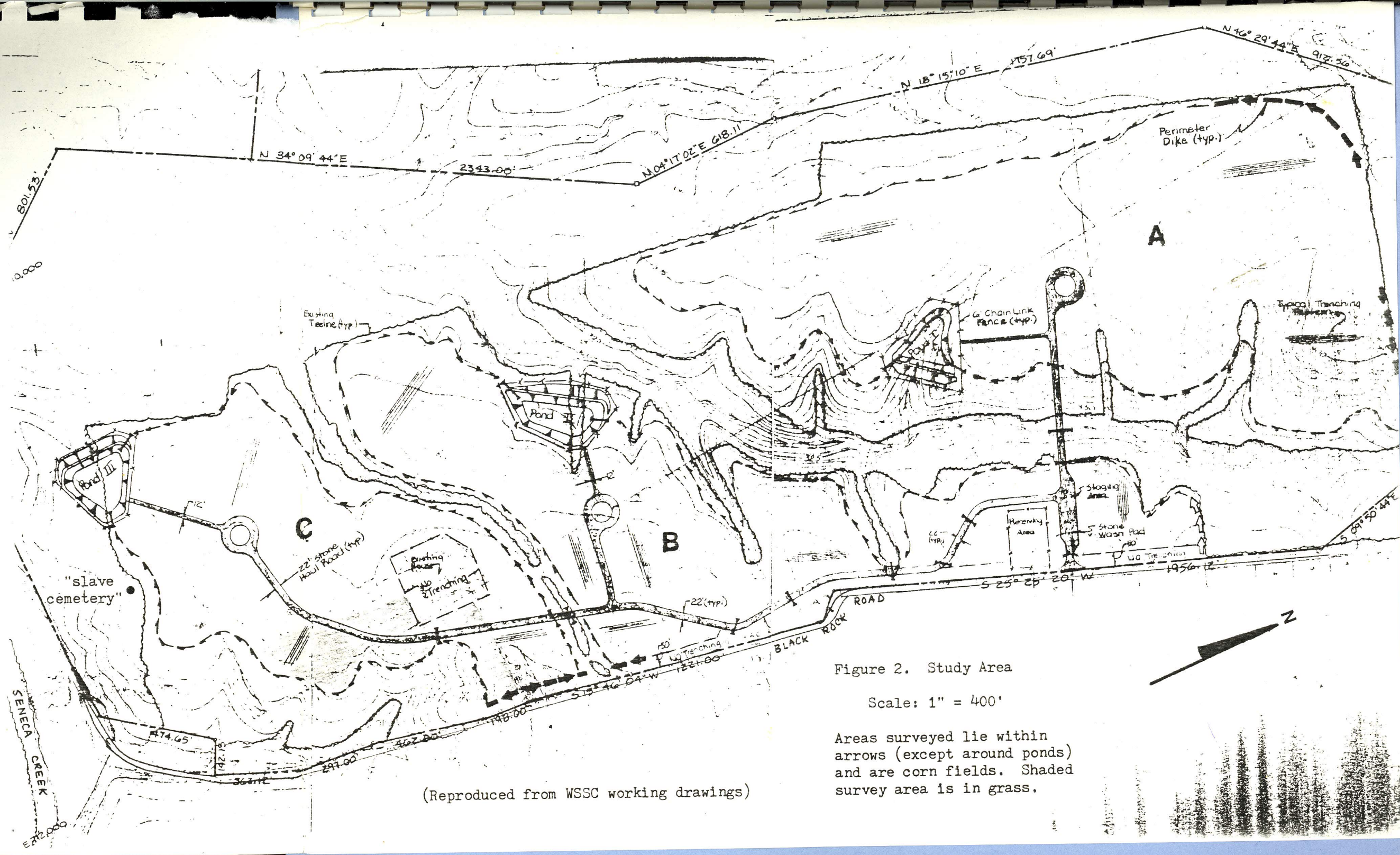


Figure 2. Study Area

Scale: 1" = 400'

Areas surveyed lie within arrows (except around ponds) and are corn fields. Shaded survey area is in grass.

(Reproduced from WSSC working drawings)