

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND ASSESSMENT OF TWO
MICROWAVE TOWER SITES IN ROWAN AND MECKLENBURG COUNTIES,
NORTH CAROLINA

By

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July, 1984

Management Summary

An archaeological survey and cultural resource assessment were carried out at two microwave tower sites in Rowan and Mecklenburg counties, North Carolina (No Clearinghouse numbers were available). The Shupings Mill Microwave Tower site is just over one acre in extent and is located south of Shupings Mill in southern Rowan County. The Huntersville Microwave Tower site is 1.6 acres in extent and is located approximately 2.5 mi east of Cowans Ford Dam in northern Mecklenburg County. Both sites were assessed by pedestrian survey. Shovel testing was also conducted at Shupings Mill due to low surface visibility. Although no cultural resources were identified at Shupings Mill, two prehistoric archaeological sites were recorded at the Huntersville Microwave Tower site. Neither of these archaeological sites meets the minimum standards to be considered significant by National Register criteria. Consequently, no further archaeological assessment is recommended.

Introduction

On May 15, 1984, archaeological surveys were conducted at the Shupings Mill and Huntersville Microwave Tower sites by R. P. Stephen Davis, Jr. and Daniel L. Simpkins. The project was initiated at the request of the Eastern Regional Office of MCI Telecommunications Corporation, Douglasville, Georgia.

The proposed Shupings Mill Microwave Tower site (Figure 1) is located in southern Rowan County, approximately 1.4 mi south of Shupings Mill on the north side of NCSR 2564 (Lat: 35°32'18.5"; Long: 80°28'46.2"; Elev: 795 ft). The proposed project includes a 209 x 209 ft tower site connected to an existing gravel road by a 200 x 30 ft access road easement. The total project area encompasses less than 1.2 acres. Construction at the tower site itself will be limited to a repeater tower and a chain-link fence enclosing a 60 x 60 ft area (including the tower).

The proposed Huntersville Microwave Tower site (Figure 2) is located approximately 1.0 mi south of Hicks Crossroads on the east side of NCSR 2128, near the southern shore of Lake Norman (approx. Lat: 35°25'00"; approx. Long: 80°55'00"; Elev: 800 ft). The project site comprises approximately 1.6 acres and includes a 0.55 acre tower facility connected to NCSR 2128 by a 1550 x 30 ft access road easement. Major construction at the tower facility will include: (1) a microwave tower, (2) a 30 x 50 ft structure (DREI Station), (3) a 9 x 12 ft generator building, and (4) a 2000 gal LP gas tank. These facilities will be enclosed by a chain-link fence.

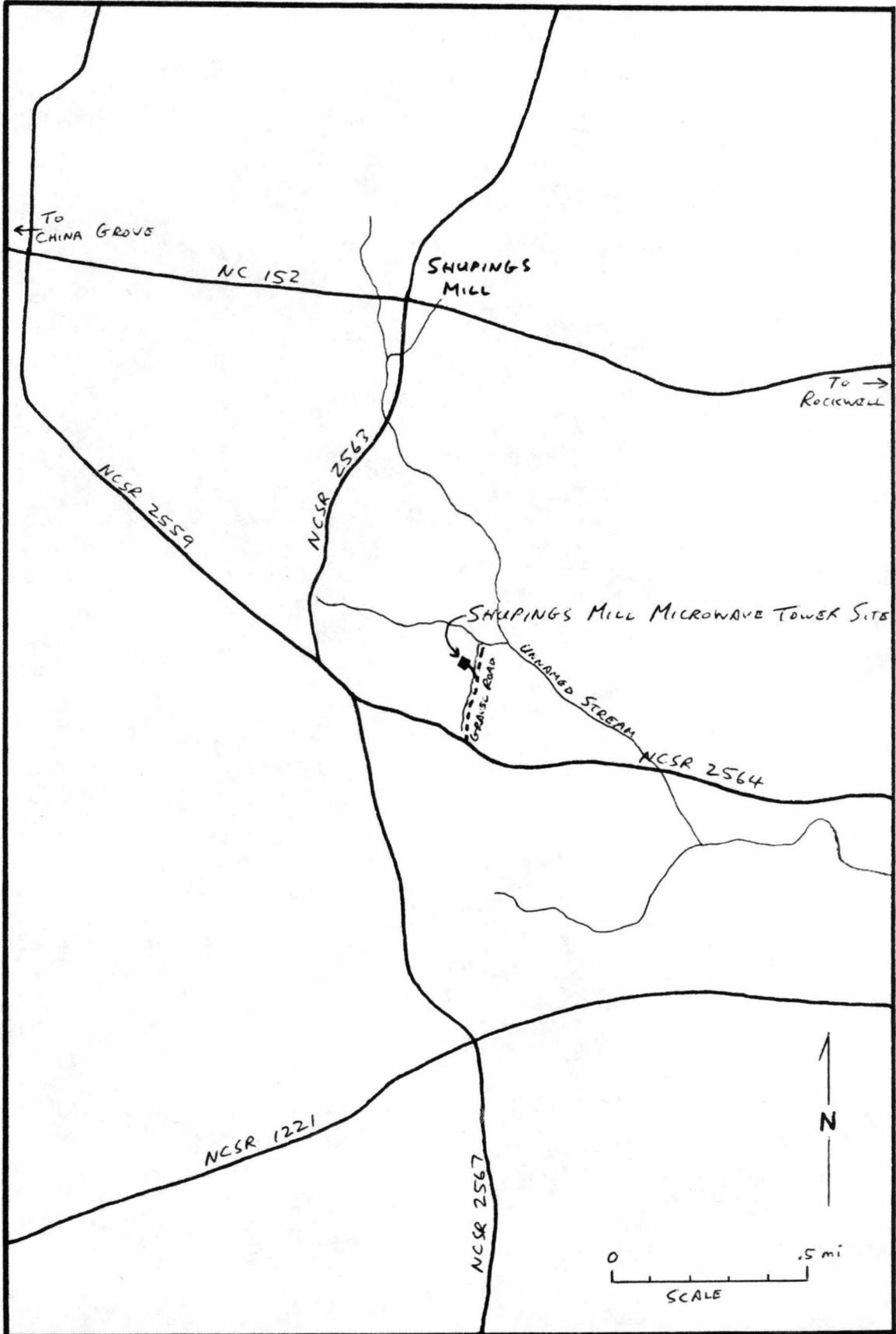


Figure 1. Map Locating Shupings Mill Microwave Tower Site.

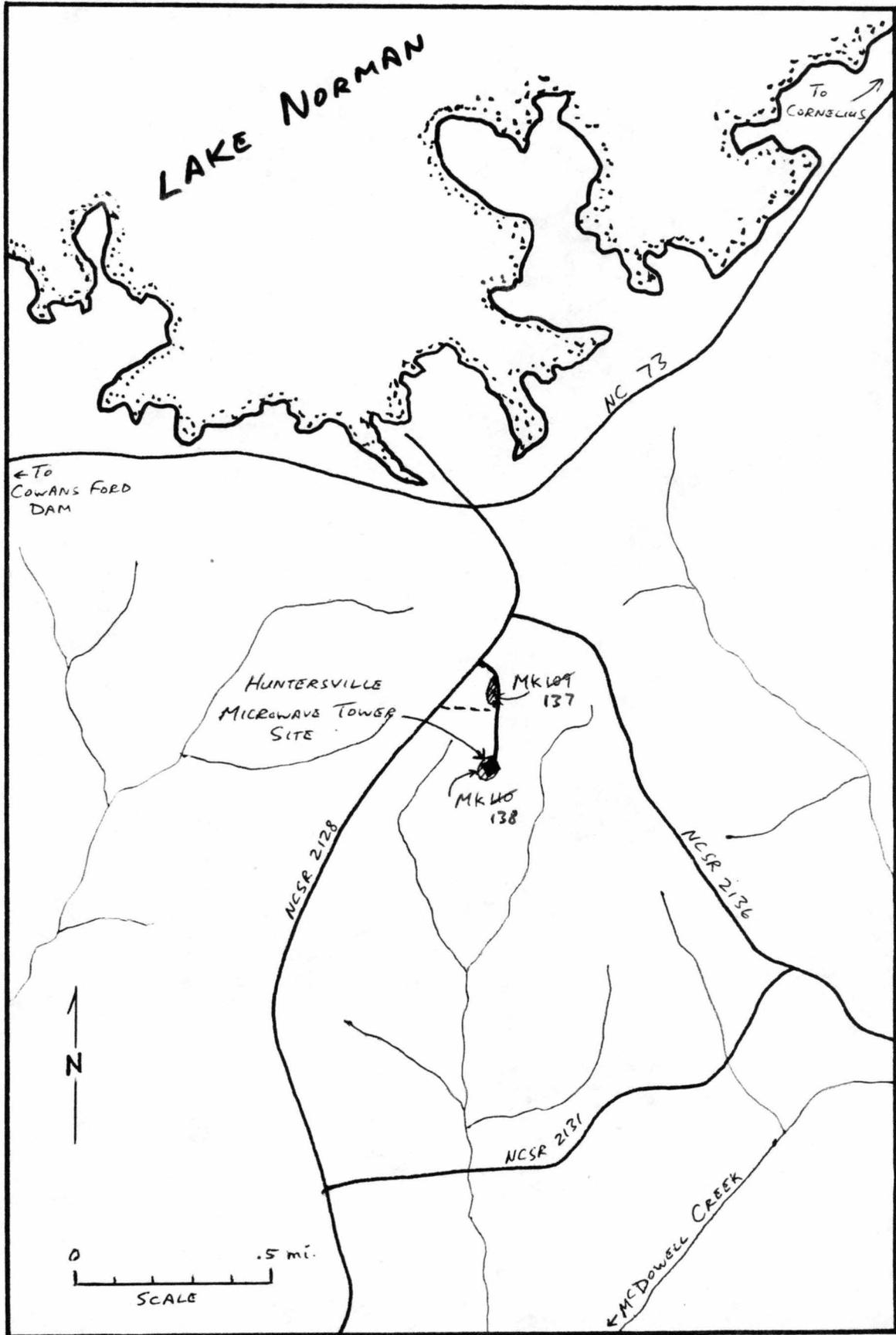


Figure 2. Map Locating Huntersville Microwave Tower Site and Associated Archaeological Sites.

Environmental Factors

Rowan County topography ranges from rolling to hilly, with steep slopes occurring along the larger streams. Major drainage is provided by the South Fork of the Yadkin and Yadkin rivers (Hardison and Journey 1915:6). Appling gravelly loam is the primary soil in the Rowan County survey area. This soil is restricted to the south-central section of the county. The surface soil is a yellowish-grey sandy to silty loam with 20-60 percent of its matrix comprised of small, angular quartz gravel. The subsoil is a yellowish-red friable clay that also contains a large percentage of small gravel. Outcrops of granite boulders occur frequently, and quartz fragments are found in small areas on the surface (Hardison and Journey 1915:27-28).

Topographically, Mecklenburg County is a plateau dissected and eroded by numerous streams. The terrain is gently rolling, but becomes more broken and hilly along the larger streams. Major drainage systems are formed by the Catawba River along the western border and the Rocky River in the northeast section of the county (Hearn and Brinkley 1912:5-6). The soil in the Mecklenburg survey area is Cecil clay loam which is known locally as "red land". The surface soil is a brown, red, or reddish-brown clay loam which contains small quantities of gravel and quartz. The subsoil is comprised of a bright red clay that is tough and hard when dry and sticky when wet. Cecil clay loam is the most widespread and agriculturally important soil in Mecklenburg County (Hearn and Brinkley 1912:24-25).

Prehistoric and Historic Background

Over 50 archaeological sites have been found in Rowan County. All time periods are represented; however, the majority of the sites date to the Middle (4500-2000 B.C.) and Late Archaic (2000-500 B.C.) periods (Cooper and Joyce 1976:12). Unfortunately, many of the sites recorded in Rowan County were flooded by the impoundment of High Rock Lake (Site Files, Research Laboratories of Anthropology). One of these sites, 31Rw14, is located on the west bank of the Yadkin River, near Trading Ford. During periods when the lake level was low, the site was "excavated" by a Catawba College crew. The materials and records from the excavation were dispersed among the various individuals involved. However, Joffre Coe was able to examine some of the specimens and assigned them to the Uwharrie Culture, dating between 1300 and 1500 A.D. (Howell and Dearborn 1953).

Rowan County was formed from part of Anson County. In 1753, its boundaries included most of the western Piedmont. The present borders were established in 1836. In 1670, John Lederer visited a village of Sara Indians at Trading Ford on the Yadkin River. Children in the village took delight in using Lederer's horse for target practice. When he tried to intervene, Lederer himself almost became their target (Cumming 1958). In 1701, John Lawson spent several days in a Saponi village located at Trading Ford and noted that "These Indians live in a cleared Field about a Mile square" (Lefler 1967:52).

When white settlement began in Rowan County, it began with a flood of Scotch-Irish pouring down the Great Wagon road from Pennsylvania. The earliest settlers were clustered in three areas: the Bryan settlement at Shallow Ford on the Yadkin, an Irish settlement near present-day China Grove, and the Davidson settlement near present-day Mooresville (Brawley 1977:4). Fort Dobbs was established in 1759 to protect the settlers from hostile Indians allied with the French during the French and Indian War. Gold was discovered at Gold Hill in 1843, and for a time this settlement rivaled Salisbury, the County seat. After the Civil War, cotton, tobacco, and textiles dominated the local economy. During this period, Salisbury became the "wettest and wickedest town in the state". It had at least a dozen saloons, a half dozen distilleries, and two wholesale whiskey warehouses, and was "supported by the whiskey business" (Brawley 1977:117). Today farming and textiles are of primary economic importance in Rowan County.

Over 100 archaeological sites have been recorded in Mecklenburg County. Over half of these were discovered during the course of surveys carried out in 1941 and 1960-61. Many of these sites are located along the Catawba River and were inundated by the Lake Norman impoundment (Site Files, Research Laboratories of Anthropology). Most of the sites recorded in the county represent temporary camps that contain no diagnostic artifacts. When temporally sensitive tools are present, they usually date to the Middle (4500-2000 B.C.) or Late (2000-500 B.C.) Archaic periods, although Paleo-Indian and Woodland sites have also been found (Fisher 1978:3). Recently, a Historic period site, the Bell Farm site (31Mk85), has been described by Wilson who views it as a village of the Catawba Indians (Wilson 1983:377).

In 1762, Mecklenburg County was carved from Anson County and included in what is now Cabarrus, Gaston, Lincoln, and part of Union counties. Scotch, Irish, German, and English settlers immigrated from Pennsylvania, Virginia, South Carolina, and eastern North Carolina. These early settlers were ". . . intelligent, labor-loving, industrious, and patriotic" (Hearn and Brinkley 1921:7). Early in the county's history, cotton was important and large plantations ranging from 2000-5000 acres were the rule. In 1800, gold was discovered, and in 1837, the first branch of the U.S. mint was opened in Charlotte. Gold mining continued to be important until after the Civil War. Today, farming dominates the county's economy, although Charlotte has emerged as a major transportation and distribution center (Public Service and Information Office 1978:3).

Survey Methods and Results

The Shupings Mill site is situated along the valley slope (10% slope) of a small intermittent stream which flows into Second Creek, a tributary of the Yadkin River. Archaeological assessment consisted of a pedestrian survey of the entire project area, as well as inspection of erosional areas along the stream north and south of where it will be intersected by the proposed access road. Because much of the project site was covered with grass and high weeds, 15 shovel tests were excavated across the project area to provide further archaeological assessment. No prehistoric or historic artifacts were recovered in any of the shovel tests or on the ground surface. Soils at the site

are classified as Appling gravelly loam and are underlain at approximately 0.8 ft below surface by clay, with no potential for buried archaeological deposits.

The Huntersville site is situated atop a low upland knoll, flanked 700 ft to the east and west by two intermittent streams which flow into McDowell Creek, a tributary of Catawba River. The proposed access road follows the crest of a low upland ridge. Since the access road parallels an existing dirt road for its entire length, surface visibility was excellent (90-100%) for assessing this portion of the project. In addition, the northern 900 ft of the road crosses an abandoned cornfield which also provided adequate surface visibility (70-90%). Survey of the access road easement produced one site, 31Mk109, which is described and assessed below. Surface collecting conditions at the proposed tower site were also moderately favorable; visibility was 25%. This area is a recently abandoned agricultural field, which at the time of the survey was partly covered in high weeds. Prehistoric archaeological remains, designated site 31Mk110, were observed over the entire tower site area.

MK137
31Mk109

This site is defined by a light scatter of lithic artifacts over a 100 x 400 ft area. The site is located along a level upland surface 1000 ft northeast and 1000 ft northwest of intermittent tributary streams which flow south into McDowell Creek (UTM: 17/3919360/507540; Elev: 790 ft). Soil at the site consists of Cecil clay loam underlain by clay. All visible artifacts were collected and include: 2 probable

Archaic projectile point fragments, 4 used flakes, and 10 unmodified flakes. These artifacts indicate only limited site use during the Archaic period. Given the paucity of artifacts recovered from 31Mk109 and a corresponding low potential for buried archaeological deposits, no further assessment of this site is recommended.

31Mk110

MK138

This site is defined by a light scatter of prehistoric artifacts over a 250 x 200 ft area. The site is situated atop a low upland knoll, flanked to the west and east (700 ft away) by small intermittent streams (UTM: 17/3919050/507520; Elev: 800 ft). Soils at the site, determined by shovel testing, consist of Cecil clay loam underlain by clay. Erosional gullies along the knoll margins attest to the deflated condition of the site. All visible artifacts were collected and include: 2 Guilford projectile points, 1 Morrow Mountain point, 1 small stemmed point, 2 point fragments, 1 biface, 1 core, 1 scraper, 4 used flakes, 69 unmodified flakes, and 1 sand tempered sherd (surface finish indeterminate). These artifacts suggest multiple occupation of the site, probably as a temporary encampment, during the Middle Archaic, Late Archaic and Woodland periods. Although the artifacts are more extensive than those observed at 31Mk109, this site's research potential is severely limited due to excessive soil deflation. Consequently, no additional archaeological assessment is recommended.

Conclusions and Recommendations

At the request of MCI Telecommunications Corporation, an archaeological survey and assessment were conducted at the proposed Shupings Mill and Huntersville microwave tower sites in Rowan and Mecklenburg counties, North Carolina. Although no cultural resources were identified at Shupings Mill, two prehistoric archaeological sites (31Mk109 and 31Mk110) were identified at the Huntersville site. Neither site meets the minimum standards to be considered significant enough for the National Register of Historic Places. As a result of these findings, it is our opinion that proposed construction activities at these two tower sites will have no adverse effect upon significant cultural resources and that no further assessment is warranted.

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