

"LAKE BRONSON: A MINNESOTA STATE PARK DEVELOPMENT  
PROJECT RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY"

BY

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## Abstract

An archaeological reconnaissance survey was undertaken in May of 1980 on a proposed trail in Lake Bronson State Park. The trail is to run from the bridge over the South Branch of Two Rivers along the upper terrace on the south side of Lake Bronson, Kittson County. The only cultural resource of concern found was an abandoned farmstead, through which the trail was to run. Due to the nature of some of the features at the homestead, it was recommended that the trail avoid this area.

## LAKE BRONSON

The 1980 development project for Lake Bronson State Park was listed in the Scope of Work as "Trails." The trail is to run along the south side of Lake Bronson from the new trail bridge on the east side of the park west to the Scout Camp on the south side of the lake. It will then continue west on existing roads to connect with county road 28 south of the Lake Bronson Dam.

### Background

In 1936 A. H. Jenks and Lloyd Wilford of the University of Minnesota excavated two of nine burial mounds on the south edge of the newly formed Lake Bronson. The site (21 KT 1) was established as being part of the Arvilla Complex, "a prehistoric burial pattern consisting of flexed and disarticulated primary and bundle burials in subsoil pits underlying circular and linear earth mounds." (Johnson, 1973). These sites, which occur from northwestern Wisconsin, diagonally across central Minnesota and into the Red River Valley of Minnesota and North Dakota, date to 600-900 A.D.

Professor Wilford revisited the Lake Bronson site in 1939 and reported that there were still three mounds visible south of the two he excavated in 1939, although one mound had been tampered with.

In 1948 Dr. Wilford returned to KT 1, but found that the entire mound site was under cultivation. On a 1952 visit, he reported that the continued cultivation had obliterated all but the mound nearest mound to the 1939 excavation. He also reported the road route had been changed with the site no longer on the highway.

By 1974 the area of KT 1 was once again outside of the park boundaries and there were local plans to plat and build houses on the site. An improved county road was needed for access to the development and the county highway department was investigating the possibility of upgrading highway 10.

Elden Johnson, State Archaeologist at the University of Minnesota, along with Department of Natural Resources Park personnel Krona, Ludwig and Head, examined the area and determined that if the highway change was to be made, additional archaeological work was necessary.

During the 1975 field season, Tom Neumann, graduate student at the University conducted a survey within the road route and determined that the highway expansion would indeed impact the archaeological site. Later that season, when it was determined that federal matching money would be available for the road project, the State Historic Preservation Office sent its County Highway Archaeologist out to do additional testing at the site. The highway archaeologist recommended that mitigation be undertaken before construction began.

During the 1976 field season, Michael Michlovic of Moorhead State University, together with his field school undertook the salvage of the site. After seven weeks of field work, Michlovic summarized the site as follows: "The site is a multi-component, multi-use site occupied intermittently from Middle Woodland to Late Woodland times by people associated with the Laurel, Arvilla, St. Croix and Blackduck complexes."

#### The 1980 Survey

The survey was conducted on 26 May 1980 by field director Jan E. Streiff after consultation with park manager Forest Hudson. Much of the trail route had been flagged with the remainder being pointed out by Manager Hudson.

#### Location

The survey covers Twp 161N R 46W, beginning in the NW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 34 and looping into the NE $\frac{1}{4}$  SE $\frac{1}{4}$  and the SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 34, continuing west through the south half of Section 33 where it terminates at the Group Camp. The trail connects to County Road 28, but follows the existing driveways and roads from the Group Camp to the dam.

The trail begins on the east side of the park where a new trail bridge spans the bottoms of the South Branch of Two Rivers. The bridge will connect the proposed trail with already existing trails on the north side of the river. The river flood plain is flat here with grasses underlying hardwoods along the river banks.

The trail climbs out of the flood plain onto a flat terrace 20' above the river. The trail passes through a narrow stand of oaks on the terrace edge and out on to an open, grassy field. The trail turns south and alternately passes through scrub oak stands, open fields, and hazelbush until it arrives at an old homestead in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$  of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 34.

The trail leaves the open farmstead yards and continues southwest along the terrace above the river through oaks and hazel until it breaks out into open fields which lead up to the Group Camp in Section 33.

The soil is very sandy in both the flood plain and on the terrace above the river.

#### The Methodology

Due to the nature of the soil and the excellent exposure, a surface examination was deemed all that was necessary. No shovel tests were needed along the trail route, but over 200 animal burrows were examined for cultural material. None was observed.

#### Results

The entire proposed trail was walked and examined twice. Two hundred plus animal burrows (gopher mounds, mammal dens, etc.) were trowelled and the soil screened through  $\frac{1}{4}$ " screen. No cultural material was observed anywhere along the route.

The only area of culture concern is in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$  SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 34 at the abandoned homestead. The farm sits on what is now a peninsula jutting north into the east end of Lake Bronson. It is on the 975' contour, open and grassy with a ring of hardwoods along the terrace edge overlooking the lake.

The surface remains include three large depressions, two of which are 3-4 meters long, 2-3 meters wide and 1-1 $\frac{1}{2}$  meters deep. The third depression is a stone lined root cellar, 2+ meters deep, with an accompanying backfill pile. These three depressions are obviously part of the historic homestead. But of additional interest are seven smaller, scattered depressions within the farm yard. These are circular and each is approximately 2m across and 40-50 cm deep. One has a noticeable lip around it.

While these smaller depressions are probably also associated with the historic farmstead, they do resemble prehistoric features and might possibly be earlier than the farm.

At the time of the survey, it was not yet certain if the trail was to be used strictly by hikers and skiers or if snowmobilers would be allowed on it. The use of such a trail through the homestead by hikers and skiers would probably do

no damage to the depressions. However, snowmobiles could do considerable damage to the edges of the features if driven into or through them.

It was thus recommended to Manager Hudson that the trail at this point be moved south of the homestead to avoid putting the features in danger until future archaeological work can be undertaken to determine their nature.

The preliminary field report was submitted to DNR, The State Archaeologist and the SHPO on 9 June 1980.

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12 January 1981

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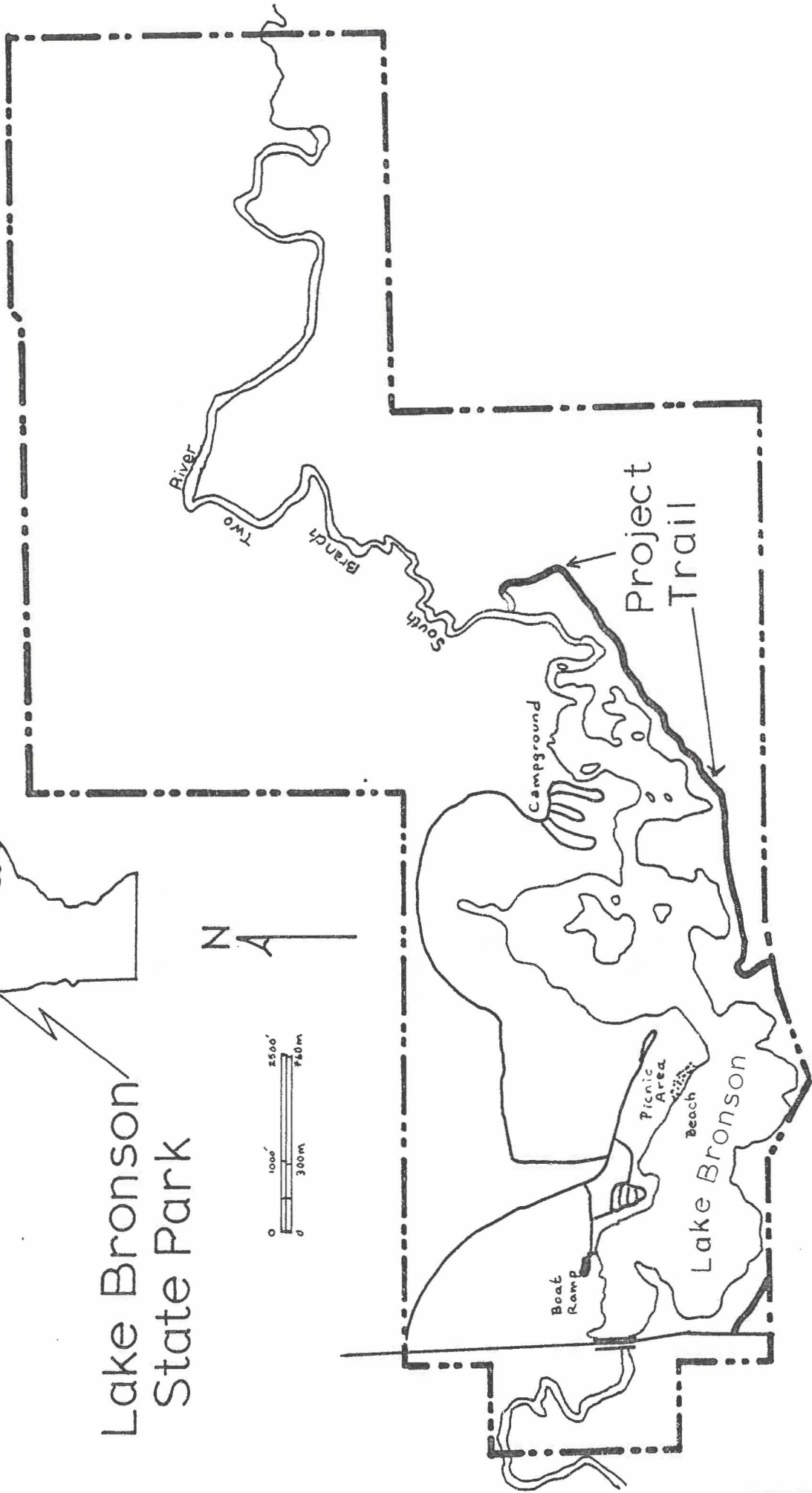
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# Lake Bronson State Park





## APPENDIX A

### Material from Lake Bronson State Park

Technically, there are no artifacts from within the park boundaries, since the one recorded site, 21 KT 1, is currently outside the park. However, since this site has had a history of being in and out of the park, it will be listed here, in the hope that some day, the Lake Bronson Site will once again be within park jurisdiction and available for park interpretation.

<u>Year collected</u>	<u>Archaeologist</u>	<u>Accession #</u>	<u>Site #</u>
1936	A. E. Jenks, University of Minnesota	148	21 KT 1
1975	Thomas Neumann, Univer- sity of Minnesota	779	21 KT 1
1976	Michael Michlovic, Moorhead Material accessioned at MHS and curated at Kittson Co. Historical Society	410	21 KT 1