



**RESCUE
ARCHEOLOGY**

**NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN HISTORIANS**

Rescue Archeology ✓✓

Papers from the ✓
First New World Conference
on Rescue Archeology

National Trust for Historic Preservation
Organization of American States

Rex L. Wilson and Gloria Loyola, Editors

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Preface

New World peoples share a uniquely American cultural legacy that began thousands of years ago with the appearance of Asian hunters and, quite possibly, trans-Pacific mariners. Most of the details of the prehistory of the Western Hemisphere are still lying undiscovered and undisturbed beneath the ground surface, out of sight and out of mind. For the past 20,000 to 30,000 years, successive migrations of people have been arriving in the Americas, and all have contributed something of value. Today, North, Central and South America represent several rich, loosely related and highly dynamic cultures. And because this heritage is shared to some degree by all Americans, preserving it is our common responsibility.

Most archeological sites fall victim to construction activities related to large public works projects such as dams and reservoirs, highways, airports, housing developments, land leveling for irrigation farming and urban renewal programs. Increasingly, these sites are being destroyed in the massive search for energy resources. Still others are vandalized or looted by treasure hunters who spread historic and prehistoric treasures on the illicit antiquities market. Every day countless sites, all representing unrecorded human activity, are destroyed without study. We will never know what they could have told us because they have vanished as though they had never existed.

Although mechanisms for protecting historic and prehistoric sites exist in all nations of the New World, most are only partially effective, and all are unevenly applied. The result is the continuing indiscriminate but often avoidable destruction of unstudied human history. General agreement is urgently needed on basic principles and procedures that will prevent such losses in the future. There may still be time to deal properly with endangered archeological treasures in most of the Western Hemisphere nations if we can agree that all Americans share the responsibility for protecting them.

From the beginning, the cosponsors and organizers of the First New World Conference on Rescue Archeology firmly believed that the conference could have a positive influence on national and international attitudes toward and policies affecting the world's archeological

resources. We believed that a well-conceived rescue archeology program is especially important to nations of the New World that are just beginning to develop industrially and economically. And we believed that we should be able to place the foremost archeological issues, those shared by all New World nations, in their proper perspective.

Most rescue archeology is related to large public works projects. Much of it is occasioned by land clearing and leveling required for development of massive agricultural operations or to enhance grazing land for livestock. Because these kinds of activities are carried out in the public interest and because the public and government policy makers generally believe that archeology should have a lower national priority than water storage, flood control, transportation networks, housing developments and food production, the scientific community usually has no alternative than to use rescue, or salvage, archeology in such projects; otherwise, historic and prehistoric remains and the information they contain are damaged or destroyed and important data are compromised or lost forever. We do not have the option of doing nothing; we do have the option of doing better work with less time, less money and a greater payoff for our people.

A second consideration is that public funds, often the only source of support for rescue archeology, are, at best, finite and, at worst, insufficient to cover the costs of scientifically adequate data recovery. Time, like money, is also finite. A state-supported project undertaken in the public interest simply cannot or will not be delayed beyond reasonable limits that are usually defined at the outset. When a definite period has been allotted for the rescue of threatened cultural remains, archeologists must complete their work within that time. If they cannot, they must accept less than adequate data recovery. In many instances, for lack of time, funding support or both, they must reconcile themselves to the destruction of archeological resources with no study at all.

A third but equally crucial issue concerns the ultimate disposition of the archeological specimens themselves. It is imperative that we reach agreement on the universal realities of the looting of archeological sites by treasure hunters, the attendant loss of scientific data and the illicit national and international traffic in antiquities to satisfy a rapidly expanding and lucrative world market.

These were the major issues addressed in Quito, Ecuador, in May 1981. More than 170 archeologists representing 16 New and Old World nations attended the conference and participated in symposia and workshops dealing with a variety of concerns. The conference ended with the unanimous adoption of a set of resolutions and recommendations (see the appendix).

We believe it especially fitting that the First New World Conference on Rescue Archeology was held in Quito, and we gratefully acknowl-

edge the government of Ecuador as a cosponsor of the conference. We are pleased to credit Rodrigo Pillares, Fileteo Samaniego, Hernán Crespo Toral, Ximena de Terán, María Molestina and Presley Norton; their extraordinary effort and remarkable enthusiasm ensured the conference's success. Announcements, programs and other published materials were paid for by a grant from the Bankers Trust Company of New York. We are grateful for its support and for the keen interest of Stephen Kerner, whose help was invaluable in planning the conference.

The generous support of the Tinker Foundation, Incorporated, has made possible the publication, in both English and Spanish, of the papers presented at the conference. The papers were translated by Victor Carbone, Sonia Guillén, Gloria Loyola and the OAS staff in Washington, D.C.

Our special thanks go to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, particularly Michael Ainslie, president, Russell Keune, senior vice president for preservation programs, James Biddle, former president, and Douglas Wheeler, former executive vice president, for their generous and unfaltering support of the conference and their commitment to historic preservation throughout the Western Hemisphere.

There would have been no conference without the enthusiastic support and positive influence of the Organization of American States. We are proud to acknowledge the help of Jorge Luis Zelaya, former executive secretary for education, science and culture, and Eduardo Gonzalez Reyes, former executive secretary; Roberto Etchepareborda, director, department of cultural affairs; and Jorge Arellano, former deputy director.

Finally, we extend our thanks and sincere appreciation to the many others who helped with this conference and to all those who perpetuate the idea that the New World nations can and should work more closely with one another in the interest of preserving as much as possible of our common cultural heritage.

Rex L. Wilson
Gloria Loyola

Archeological Parks: Guayabo de Turrialba and El Caño

Carlos Aguilar Piedra

The creation of archeological parks in the intermediate area of Central America, although not a novel idea, involves some unusual challenges and problems. My comments are based on my experiences with the Guayabo de Turrialba Archeological Park in Costa Rica and the El Caño Archeological Park in Coclé Province, Panama.

A principal problem is inadequate financial support, but another problem, particularly in the smaller countries of the region, is the absence of tradition in establishing and administering a national park system, especially parks set aside for their archeological significance. The creation of an archeological park should be based on criteria directly relevant to the different cultural aspects of the local community.

The primary aim of an archeological park is to protect and interpret a defined archeological context, and the selection of that context is determined by the presence of visible features such as architectural remains. The general public tends to consider only the great ruins of the Mesoamerican and Andean areas as archeological monuments. But in Costa Rica and Panama the presence of massive above-ground archeological features is unusual. In these countries prehistoric architectural features usually consist of rock or ashlar stones, principally forming architectural structures in which the stones (usually river cobbles or sections fissured by the natural elements) are placed on top of one another or side by side without mortar to hold them securely in place. Nevertheless, the layout and great quantity of rock used, especially at Guayabo, indicate a high population density and a great concentration of power shaped by cultural factors of a specific nature.

Because the ultimate extent of a park cannot usually be determined initially, it is necessary at the beginning to establish temporary boundaries and to institute a means of protecting the archeological resources for which the site is nationally significant. It is also important to give special consideration to archeological sites that do not exhibit important archeological features. Although some sites may appear to lack significance, they may actually possess substantial cultural value. Even if such sites are not held to be nationally significant and cannot be

considered as parks, their potential for yielding important information should be recognized and their protection should be ensured. A case in point is the establishment of archeological reservations, the custody of which could be the responsibility of individual landowners.

The difference between an archeological park and an archeological reservation is that the former, because of its visible and uniquely significant features, becomes a special center of human activity in a place where visitors can admire the creative works of those who once lived there, reflect on the site's position in time and space and gain a deeper appreciation of their own cultural legacy.

The development of a national archeological park usually involves the restoration of environmental conditions in the archeological zone to those thought to have obtained during the site's occupation. Thoughtful attention to accurate landscape restoration will enhance the park story and will ensure a meaningful experience for park visitors.

Because the development of an accurate park story is critical, the research must focus on explaining the site's cultural significance and its place in space and time and depicting the ecological environment in which the culture developed. Most research will be designed and conducted by museums and universities that can usually be expected to provide professionally trained technical personnel, laboratory and storage facilities and field equipment. In Costa Rica and Panama, the universities and museums are the only resident organizations able to carry out archeological research work in the national parks. These institutions will always be able to identify willing and able students of different disciplines who can perform their field work in the parks under faculty supervision. Because national parks are protected reserves, they present ideal opportunities for students to learn archeological field techniques. Guayabo Turrialba and El Caño can be thought of as ecological preserves invested with rich archeological resources that are readily available for systematic investigation.

All research results should be available in the park for use of the park staff and visiting scholars. The excavations themselves and the material recovered should be considered as a kind of open-air museum where visitors and students at all educational levels can enrich their knowledge.

Obviously, an archeological park must have a museum. It should consist of exhibits in which the park's important features, material and scientific knowledge are presented. Here people, their culture and their environment merit equal attention. The design and orientation of the museum, of course, will depend on factors appropriate for the area in which the park is located.

One of the most important aspects in the creation of a national archeological park is the acquisition of the land on which the significant archeological remains are located. Park land is typically acquired through donation, transfer from the state or purchase or through confiscation, condemnation or expropriation by the national government.

Once sufficient land is acquired, the next step is to determine which government agency will be responsible for its administration. In the case of an archeological park, one might immediately assume that it should be managed by a state institution or government agency that is responsible for the protection of the nation's historic patrimony. This relationship is quite obvious when the archeological aspects of the park predominate. But in Costa Rica, archeological parks as well as biological parks are administered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. Of primary importance is that the direct management of an archeological park should be assigned to a professionally qualified archeologist.

Although research within an archeological park may have several highly significant facets, the determinant aspects of environment should be studied first because these factors may have greatly influenced the cultural processes that occurred through time and they can be observed in the excavations and laboratory analysis of materials and data recovered. Knowledge of the ground, such as soil composition, contours and, hence, its hydrography is extremely important in relation to the architectural features and is a determining part of the policy for the investigation and preservation of archeological sites. Likewise, knowledge of the flora and fauna is of vital importance to the reconstruction or enhancement of the ecological conditions of the park.

As indicated, archeological research is obligatory in any archeological park. All research must be part of a well-planned project, with clearly defined objectives, which must consider the evaluation of the archeological potential of the park, the location of the site within the geographic area and its cultural sequence throughout time.

An archeological park must not be thought of as an island; its existence must be integrated with the community or neighboring communities. It is therefore necessary to conduct a socioeconomic survey of those communities to ensure that they derive reasonable social and economic benefits from the park. These benefits could be immediate, such as improvement in channels of communication and in recreational and educational aspects. The parks might also become intermediaries in the formation of supporting organizations dedicated to the sale of local agricultural products or the manufacture and sale of regional handicrafts.

Clearly, the excavation of a site generates changes in its archeological context. These changes become more pronounced after the stratum covering the architectural features is removed. Modifications can be significant, depending on the climatic conditions prevailing at the site area. Accordingly, all excavation activities must be followed immediately by stabilization of exposed features or by backfilling.

Guayabo de Turrialba, Costa Rica

The park known as Guayabo de Turrialba corresponds to the archeological site of the same name, cataloged at the University of Costa Rica. At present the park embraces a tract of 65 hectares and is situated approximately 19 kilometers from the city of Turrialba, Province of Cartago, following the highway leading to the Atlantic Ocean on the northern side of the Río Reventazón. The archeological complex lies within the Turrialba volcano, whose steep sides are marked by rivers that cut deep gullies and leave stretches of land inclined and somewhat flattened, similar to that in the park.

This region is not characterized by a well-defined dry season; rainfall averages 3 meters annually, with abundant clouds, fog and frequent drizzling rains. The region is tropical and has been described as a premountainous pluvial forest with rich wooded vegetation.

The archeological complex consists of architectural structures formed by stones of various shapes. Most are river cobbles, some wedge-shaped, that are laid to form pathways, steps, retaining walls, foundations (some with intermittent levels), aqueducts, reservoirs and bridges. Distribution of the structures suggests that they were built to conform to ground contours and that no symmetrical plan was followed.

So far, we have found no evidence at the Guayabo site of the various archeological periods of the central intermountainous area and of the Atlantic Coast. The specific date of the site has not been determined; it dates from between 500 B.C. and 1300 A.D.

The first mention of the Guayabo site was by Don Anastasio Alfaro, a director of the National Museum who, at the end of the century, excavated at the site to obtain Costa Rican archeological pieces for exhibit at the American Historical Exposition in Madrid, held on the fourth centennial of the discovery of America. Even before Alfaro's arrival at the site, the Guayabo remains had been excavated by the owners of the property. Their valuable collection was subsequently donated to the National Museum. Although a later owner prohibited excavation at the site, it had already been extensively pillaged, and only one or two sections remained undisturbed.

The Guayabo site recently passed into public ownership when the Institute of Lands and Colonization purchased the property as the site of an agricultural colony. Through negotiations on behalf of the University of Costa Rica, the Institute was persuaded to set aside several hectares for an archeological park. Later the park was expanded by 65 hectares as a result of the acquisition of adjoining parcels of land, including the adjacent wooded area of the Guayabo River canyon. However, the fact that the park has been established does not mean that all the site is incorporated within the park's boundaries. Because the settlement is much greater, the park area will be increased in time through purchase or donation or, possibly, through the expropriation of the remainder of the archeological site and appropriate easements.

Although the Guayabo de Turrialba site has already been declared a national park, activities are under way to convert it into a monument of world interest. At present the park is administered by the National Parks Service, a bureau of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. Guayabo is being managed by an archeologist director, who is supported by a staff trained in park administration and maintenance.

Consistent with the preservation policies of the National Park Service, excavation within the park is prohibited; however, the same cannot be said of the areas surrounding the park, which include parts of extensions of the Guayabo site, where pillaging reflects what has happened—and continues to happen—in the remainder of the country. Existing Law 14, enacted in 1923 and amended in 1938, has proved to be totally inoperative. This law and its amendment responded to the times in which they were approved. The law corresponds to the historical descriptive period, in which fully trained archeologists, in effect, did not exist and archeological materials were, generally, valued mainly for their aesthetic qualities; it was also the period in which the collectors' influence was decisive. Furthermore, the law provides a maximum penalty for infringement of only 50 to 100 *colones*, an insignificant sum in a million-dollar business.

A bill to enact a law more in keeping with current archeology has been introduced in the national legislative assembly; the law focuses mainly on the archeological context. Great consideration is also given to the traffic and exportation of historic and prehistoric objects, two factors that encourage illicit archeological exploitation. On the other hand, the bill provides for severe penalties, including several years' imprisonment, as well as for a commission to ensure enforcement of the law. Naturally, this proposed new law has many powerful opponents, among them the pot hunters, antiquities dealers and, especially, the prominent collectors. Unfortunately, the bill does not consider properties that ought to be preserved as archeological reservations, areas in

which custodial responsibility must be assigned to the owners of estates on which archeological remains are located.

A major concern in the creation of the Guayabo Park was ecological protection, the preservation of the vegetation mantle. It was possible to prevent the removal of thousands of trees that populate the river canyon, almost all of which remain green throughout the entire year because of constant and abundant rainfall. In addition to vegetation preservation, preservation of the native fauna must be considered. In this zone, for example, one can commonly see squirrels, quetzals and ocelots. Ecologists are also quite aware that some rodents and other species that build underground galleries, such as the armadillo, cause serious problems for the archeologists because they disturb or displace archeological materials.

Scientific excavations were carried out at Guayabo during 1968 and 1978–79. The main objectives of the 1968 explorations were to determine the approximate area of the archeological deposit, to become familiar with the architectural characteristics of the site, to establish ceramic sequences and to develop a chronology applicable to the entire area. We conducted a cleanup of one of the principal mounds, exposed several meters of stone floorings and aqueducts and made several stratigraphic tests. The thousands of potsherds recovered permitted us to establish a fairly complete ceramic sequence as well as a tentative chronology, despite the fact that we recovered only one charcoal sample. Our ceramic sequence and chronology have served as a basis for studies of the central mountain region of Costa Rica. After the discovery of architectural features, we discontinued our investigations because of the ruinous effects of water erosion of those fragile structures when left exposed.

The immediate objectives of the 1978–79 archeological explorations were to complete a general survey of the Guayabo site and to refine the general plan prepared during the first season. In the course of the second season a new plan for Guayabo was drawn up showing additional architectural features, especially a pathway more than one kilometer in length.

Reports by several archeologists since the end of the last century indicate that additional sites similar to Guayabo exist—or existed—in other parts of Costa Rica, particularly on the Atlantic slope, including Las Mercedes (Hartman 1901), Costa Rica Farm and Anita Grande (Skinner 1926) and La Cabaña (Snarskis 1978). Unfortunately, none of these sites has received or is the beneficiary of any protection whatsoever; in many cases, they have been looted out of existence. On the other hand, our comparative studies have enabled us to recognize a certain similarity between Guayabo and settlements situated in the

Sierra Nevada of Colombia, particularly with Pueblito (Fonseca 1979), a site reported on by Reichel-Dolmatoff (1954).

One of the most significant aspects of the study of Guayabo de Turrialba was the contribution made by volunteers enrolled in the University of Costa Rica's Community Program. They have provided excellent reports covering the environment, geography, geology, land use and so forth; their practical contributions to archeology were notably outstanding.

The most difficult problems at Guayabo are the stabilization and maintenance of architectural features. During prehistoric occupation, wood and straw huts built on the foundations prevented the erosive action of heavy rainfall. We presume, therefore, that the inhabitants provided constant maintenance, especially of drainage facilities. During the archeological work it was discovered that the indigenous builders lodged small pebbles between the cobbles to reduce erosion, principally in the sidewalks. This method is being used with satisfying results in the ruins stabilization currently under way.

The Guayabo Archeological Park is a significant site for gaining an insight into the prehistory of Costa Rica. Because of the perpetual preservation of the site and its continuing maintenance, archeologists from the University of Costa Rica have been able to formulate long-range projects that will extend beyond our knowledge of the site's architectural values. Their essential objective is to learn more about human behavior at the site throughout its long existence.

El Caño, Coclé Province, Panama

The El Caño Archeological Park is under the administration of the Management of the Historic Patrimony of Panama. It is situated approximately five kilometers from the city of Natá and can be reached via the Interamerican Highway and an improved dirt road that passes through the village of El Caño. The site lies approximately one kilometer east of the Río Grande.

The land here is formed by alluvial soils deposited by the Río Grande during frequent floods. Because the land is very flat and the difference between the river level and the site is minimal, more than 1.5 meters of water may cover the ground during periods of heavy rainfall. The region of El Caño is classified as tropical lowlands in which the rainy and dry seasons are pronounced. Wooded vegetation in this area occurs only along river banks. The remainder of the land is part of a thriving sugar plantation and consists of plains planted with sugar cane. Park land was donated by the plantation owners to the Management of the Historic Patrimony of Panama.

El Caño Archeological Park is situated in a region that has prehistoric and historic antecedents. When Spanish colonists arrived in the El Caño region, native peoples in the area were centered in several towns such as Natá, whose chieftains were renowned warriors. Much of the land suitable for agriculture was already cultivated, and crops were plentiful.

Pre-Columbian cultural wealth is apparent from the numerous archeological discoveries made along the banks of the Río Grande, among which is the well-known Conte site (Lothrop 1942). The first report directly pertinent to the El Caño site was prepared by Hyatt Verrill, who conducted an intensive season of excavations in 1925 (Verrill 1927). According to Verrill, the most significant architectural characteristic of El Caño is a large structure formed by many columns of smooth or ashlar stones placed on end in several rows and with a central determining element of the group.

Rescue archeology at the site began with tests conducted by Richard Cooke in one of three small mounds within the park. The mound had been disturbed earlier by the construction of an aqueduct (Cooke 1976). Later, massive excavations were carried out in the three mounds that appear to have been built for both burial and residential purposes.

During the past three years our investigations at El Caño have concentrated on locating and repositioning some of the columns. By now many have been restored and aligned in accordance with archeological evidence.

Reforestation to recreate the prehistoric environment in the El Caño Park requires special care to ensure historical accuracy. The most difficult problem so far is that because the broad and deep pits excavated in the mounds were never backfilled, they collect water during the rainy season. The Management of the Historic Patrimony has solved this problem by erecting thatched roofs or huts over the exposed excavations. These shelters, built using aboriginal techniques and native materials, now serve as outdoor museums and as pleasant refuges for visitors during the hot summer months.

By the end of 1980 the park was able to offer the minimal amenities required for visitor comfort and enjoyment. The road leading to the park from the village of El Caño has been improved, and a small museum has been built that encompasses exhibits, offices and storage space. A custodian who provides information and protection is on duty during visiting hours.

Despite the intense agricultural disturbance that has taken place at the site, El Caño seems to have lost only a part of its archeological value and research potential. Future investigations will likely produce evidence of occupation dating before the Christian era to the time of the

Spanish conquest in the 16th century. With further park development, archeological investigations will be undertaken to acquire more in-depth knowledge of the history and prehistory of the central provinces of Panama.

Without a doubt the archeological parks in Central America are one of the most significant means of protecting archeological sites. Among the parks' most outstanding features is the permanent protection that is provided for archeological values. Thus, research work, principally archeological, can be planned as long-term projects that can result in notable contributions to the history and prehistory of a country as well as to the understanding and interpretation of the park itself. National parks also can become centers of great importance for the communities or regions in which they are located.

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