

Figure 9.15 Ciruelas phase ceramics: Reconstructed Guinea Incised vessel with ring base and exterior incised design.

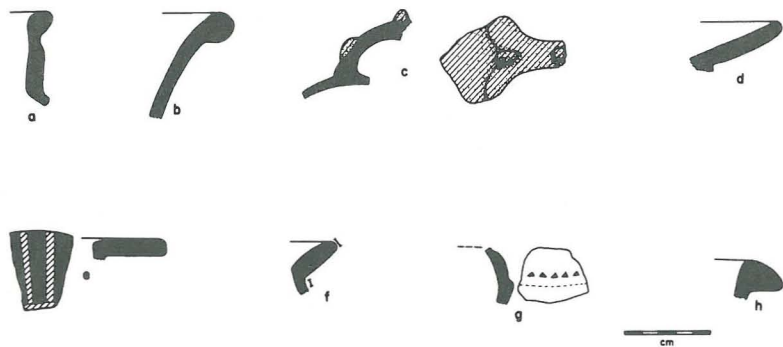


Figure 9.16 Foothills and cloud forest survey ceramics. c applique handle; f marked areas indicate bands of black; g shoulder punctates. Hatched areas are red.

10.

PRELIMINARY RECONNAISSANCE OF THE CUENCA DE ARENAL
(1981-1982)

by

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RESUMEN

Una prospección intensiva fue realizada en la zona de la Laguna Arenal, encontrando un total de 60 sitios, con un fechoado posible desde el período arcaico (y también Paleolítico fuera de contexto original) hasta los finales del período Policromo Medio (según la secuencia de la Gran Nicoya). Había muy poca evidencia de ocupación durante el período tardío. La mayoría de los sitios estuvieron ubicados alrededor la orilla de la nueva laguna construida para el proyecto eléctrico Arenal.

A 25 May-8 June 1981 trip to Costa Rica determined the feasibility of initiating multidisciplinary research in the Arenal region of northwestern Costa Rica (see Figure 1). A region had been sought where active volcanism had affected prehistoric settlement, and the region surrounding Volcán Arenal was chosen for this preliminary reconnaissance. Dr. William Melson (volcanologist, Smithsonian Institution) had conducted stratigraphic and geochemical research in the area following the explosive eruption of 1968, and has worked out a sequence of 9 large explosive eruptions during the past 3000 years. His presence in the field from 27 May through 30 May 1981 was invaluable. His research has focused on the northern side of the volcano, close to the active vent, and future volcanological work will be conducted in this area as well as broadened to include areas on the north (farther from the volcano) and eventually on the La Fortuna side to the east.

Despite the brevity of the visit and the thick vegetative cover, a total of nine artifactual samples was recovered, demonstrating the feasibility of a larger scale multidisciplinary research program in the area. The samples were divided into two series, A and IF. The A series were five collections of artifacts where stratigraphic relationships with one or more tephra layers were evident. The IF series consisted of four isolated finds where artifacts were not encountered *in situ*, and further research would be necessary to establish stratigraphic relationships. Most of the artifacts date to the first few centuries A.D. (Abel-Vidor; Lange; and Snarskis; personal communications). Los Hermanos Beige, Tola Trichrome, Galo Polychrome, and an

unidentified Red/Orange ceramic were most frequent in the surface and profile collections.

A second brief visit to Costa Rica during the last week of May and the first week of June, 1982 was specifically directed toward obtaining additional basic data on ancient human occupation of the volcanically active area west of Volcán Arenal in order to improve a proposal to be submitted to the U.S. National Science Foundation.

The following objectives were accomplished, in ascending order of importance:

(1) The excavations cut for dam fill described to me by the Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad (I.C.E.) officials were inspected for stratigraphic or artifactual information. The stratigraphic sequences were "short", as only the topmost tephra layers and soils were exposed by these relatively shallow cuts. No new archeological sites were encountered. The cuts were concentrated in the area 1-2km south of the dam. I.C.E. officials also mentioned some recent road cuts on the southeast side of the lake, between Quebrada Flor de Lis and Quebrada Guayabos. The results were the same as above.

(2) Sites previously discovered in the area were revisited to check for accuracy of site location, stratigraphy and chronology. Sherds were examined in the field. No excavations were conducted, and no artifacts were collected. A few photographs were taken.

(3) A new site was discovered near Tronadora, in the roadcut at 396 x 751 (Lambert conformal projection grid) on the 1:50,000 Tilarán topographic map. Approximately 25 sherds were examined in the field, and they appeared to be similar to sherds at sites A4 and A5 nearby, hence they probably would date to the later middle portion of Period IV, or about the time of Christ (Lange and Stone 1984). Their roughly lower-middle stratigraphic concentration in the roadcut, presumably in the Volcán Arenal tephra sequences, would appear to substantiate that assessment. This site, along with A4 and A5, needs to be tested.

(4) Following a lead supplied by Andrea Borgia, we visited the finca El Silencio, of Clara Corneli, and Luis and Gabriella Jiménez, located about 3km south of Tronadora. The hospitality of the Jiménez family is here gratefully acknowledged, as well as their willingness to have scientific, archeological and geological investigations conducted on their property. Unfortunately, looters were gradually destroying the site; I estimate perhaps one-half of the site remains intact. The Silencio archeological site consists of three localities, as far as is presently known. Locality 1 is a cemetery and possible habitation zone perched on the continental divide, at 960-980m. It is approximately 100m x 300m in extent. The stratigraphy is consistent, being capped by a c. 30cm thick contemporary humic soil horizon that has developed out of a coarse beige tephra layer (now c. 20cm thick). That tephra caps and

postdates the cultural features, which consist of sherds, *lajas* (stone slabs) and other stone walls, stone-lined tombs, and some tombs without stone construction. Distance from the present ground surface to the pre-Arenal "Aguacate" horizon is 2-3m. This area is the most looted of the three.

The second locus at the Silencio site consists of rock-lined tomb structures buried by two major eruption layers, the above-mentioned coarse beige unit and a low fine gray ash and associated paleosol. Thus, it is chronologically earlier than Locality 1. Locality 3 consists of a similar construction, but its stratigraphic and chronological positions remain yet unknown.

In sum, these loci of funerary activities are sufficiently buried by airfall volcanic ash to preserve activity areas frozen in time, thus the activities are reconstructable in potentially great detail. Habitation remains should be found near these localities, and these may yield ample information on house construction, material culture, activity areas, and subsistence. A geophysical survey of Locality 1, using resistivity and magnetometry, is being planned for 1984 and will be supported by grants from the National Science Foundation and from the National Geographic Society.

NOTES

The National Science Foundation proposal was successful, as was the National Geographic Society proposal. Fieldwork was begun in January, 1984, in the Silencio area near Tilarán. The results of the first season have been published (Sheets 1984a).

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I feel the second reconnaissance was successful, and I would like to thank some people and institutions for their assistance. Robert Drolet, Audrey Korelstein, and Andrea Borgia (Geología, University of Costa Rica) generously volunteered their time in the field. Funding for the visit, from NSF via Gilbert White at the Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado, is most gratefully acknowledged. Michael Snarksis, as usual, provided assistance in numerous ways. Oscar Fonseca, Lorena San Román de Gallegos, the Comisión, and the Museo Nacional were helpful in providing the permission as well as suggestions and encouragement.