

# Kenyon College

## Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange

---

Four Valleys Archive

Anthropology

---

1988

## PVN OP 026 Excavation Report

Edward M. Schortman  
*Kenyon College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.kenyon.edu/honduras>



Part of the [Archaeological Anthropology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Schortman, Edward M., "PVN OP 026 Excavation Report" (1988). *Four Valleys Archive*. Paper 9879.  
<https://digital.kenyon.edu/honduras/9879>

This Excavation Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthropology at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Four Valleys Archive by an authorized administrator of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact [noltj@kenyon.edu](mailto:noltj@kenyon.edu).

# Kenyon College

## Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange

---

Four Valleys Archive

Anthropology

---

1988

## PVN OP 26 Excavation Report

Edward M. Schortman

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digital.kenyon.edu/honduras>



Part of the [Archaeological Anthropology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Schortman, Edward M., "PVN OP 26 Excavation Report" (1988). *Four Valleys Archive*. Paper 9879.  
<http://digital.kenyon.edu/honduras/9879>

This Excavation Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthropology at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Four Valleys Archive by an authorized administrator of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact [noltj@kenyon.edu](mailto:noltj@kenyon.edu).

## Operation 26

Operation 26 includes four closely spaced monumental platforms (Strs. 1A-8/11) running in an east-west line on the northern border of La Sierra's western site core. Only one of these edifices, Str. 1A-10, was investigated. Digging here in 1988 uncovered 44m<sup>2</sup> and was overseen by Patricia Reed and Patricia Whooley.

### Structure 1A-10

Structure 1A-10, along with Strs. 1A-8 and 9 to the west and Str. 1A-11 to the east, forms part of a line of monumental platforms that closes off the western plaza of the site core on the north. Structure 1A-17, the northern member of the dyad excavated in Op. 37, is 6m to the south while Str. 1A-11 is about 2m to the east. A tall saddle, or raised construction, links Str. 1A-10 with its western neighbor, Str. 1A-9. The ground on which Str. 1A-10 was raised ascends 0.92m over ca. 11m north-to-south. Excavations on and around Str. 1A-10 took the form of a 19.58m-long by 1m-wide trench that cut across the approximate center of the building running north-south (Subop. 26A). Subsequently, constructions encountered in the axial trench were pursued laterally to the extent time allowed, especially on the platform's south face and summit (Subop. 26B). A total of 44m<sup>2</sup> was cleared in the course of roughly one month in 1988. Digging was pursued to maximum depths of 2.1m and 3.37m below modern ground surface outside and within architecture, respectively. One major construction phase was identified in the course of this work which was directed by Patricia Whooley and Patricia Reed.

### Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.4, 6, 7	-	LCL I
2	Str. 1A-10-1st	U.1-22	-	-	LCL II
3	Str. 1A-10-1st	-	S.3	F.3-6	LCL II/III
4	Str. 1A-10-1st	-	S.8	F.2	LCL III/II
5	-	-	S.1, 2	F.1	-

### Time Span 1

The earliest activity attested to in the Op. 26 excavations was the deposition of S.7, a loosely compacted, dark brown soil that accumulated to a thickness of at least 0.21m (its base was not encountered). Stratum 7 was identified in a deep probe sunk into Str. 1A-10-1st's summit. Overlying this soil layer is 0.22-0.23m of hard-compacted, tan clay (S.6). Both S.6 and 7 run flat over the 1x1m they were exposed.

Stratum 4, a hard-compacted, dark gray clay was uncovered to a maximum thickness of

0.31m where it underlay, and ran north of, Str. 1A-10-1st construction. Like S.7, the base of S.4 was not encountered and it too runs flat, showing no variation in its elevation over the 1.96m it was exposed running north-south. Stratum 4 is at roughly the same level as S.6, ca. 2.8m to the south, and yet these layers are quite distinctive. How they relate, and what this relationship has to say about the nature of the terrain over which Str. 1A-10-1st was erected, are unknown.

## Time Span 2

Structure 1A-10-1st is a substantial stone-faced platform which assumed its basic form during this interval. The south, plaza-facing side of the edifice is fronted by a 0.05m-thick, well-consolidated, hard, white plaster floor (U.1). Unit 1 was traced for 3.15m south from Str. 1A-10-1st's south basal facing (U.3) but its south margin was not encountered. On the north the building rises above a 0.03m-thick white plaster floor (U.8) that runs 0.34m to the north where it abuts U.18. The latter is a stone surface that measures 0.91m north-south by, minimally, 1m east-west.

Three stone-faced terraces (U.3-5) ascend the platform's south flank, the last of which, U.5, provides a step-up to the earth-floored summit. Unit 3 stands a preserved 0.65m high above U.1 and it runs back 1.3m to the north where it is succeeded by U.6. The latter is 0.17m high by 0.92m wide and leads to U.5, the 0.81m-high riser giving way to the summit.

Extending 1.2m south of U.3 is a 3.1m-wide (east-west) outset (U.21). Unit 21 continues down below the level of the U.1 floor and is composed of three interdigitated components. The lowest of these is 0.11m tall and extends 0.87m back to the north where it is succeeded by a 0.73m-high wall the bottom-most 0.08m of which projects 0.6m out to the south. The lowest segment is covered by the U.1 plaster. Unit 21 contains a cobble fill (U.2).

The north flank of the building is defined by a 1.42m-high by 0.76m-wide stone facing (U.6). Unit 6 retains fill composed at least 0.16m of hard-compacted, dark gray clay (U.17) surmounted by 0.34m of loosely compacted, dark brown sand in which were found small pebbles (U.16). Unit 17, whose base was not found, is identical to S.4 which likely served as the source of this fill. A moderately dense concentration of medium-size cobbles is embedded in U.16 and 17. Fully 1.78m south of U.6's north face is a sheer ascent to the summit marked by U.7. This wall looms 1.47m over U.6's earthen tread though excavations on U.7's south side revealed that it stood to a total height of 3.1m. Unit 7 is sunk 0.2m into S.6 and most likely constitutes the southern wall of Str. 1A-10-1st's core onto which U.6 was appended. The fill backing U.7 on the south is, from bottom to top: a 0.68-0.72m thick deposit of loosely compacted, reddish-brown soil (U.14); a 0.04-0.15m thick lens of powdery, fine-textured, loosely compacted, dark gray ash (U.13) that becomes thinner from the north, where it intersects U.7, to south over the 1m it was uncovered; a 0.43-0.47m thick layer of moderately hard-compacted, dark brown soil (U.12); 0.62-0.7m of loosely compacted, fine-textured, brown soil with numerous *bajareque* inclusions (U.11); 0.16-0.25m of powdery, fine-textured, soft-compacted, tan soil (U.10); and 0.11-0.25m of hard-compacted, light orange soil within which are embedded charcoal flecks (U.9). Very few stones were noted in this fill.

Structure 1A-10-1st's summit measures 6.35m north-south and was surfaced with earth. Portions of the western (U.19) and southern (U.20) foundations of a room within the superstructure were revealed. Units 19 and 20 are 0.13-0.45m high by 0.4-0.55m wide and likely supported perishable upper walls. Unit 19 stops after running 1.5m north from its intersection with U.20; no other wall was recorded continuing the line of U.19 northward. The

room enclosed by these two footings encompasses at least 1x1.5m though its limits were not revealed.

All facings and foundations, save for U.21, were built using unmodified river cobbles. The tallest of these constructions, such as U.6 and 7 in the north, exhibit careful coursing of the facing stones, levels of larger rocks interspersed with smaller chinking pebbles. One cut block was recorded in U.6. Unit 21, however, was fashioned almost exclusively of cut blocks.

By the end of TS.2, Structure 1A-10-1st was a 1.46m and 2.38m tall (on the south and north, respectively), stone-faced, earth-filled platform that measured 10.56m across north-south, and was aligned roughly 77 degrees. The building rises above an extensive plaster floor on the south and a prepared surface of stones and plaster on the north. Three stone-faced terraces ascend the south, patio-facing side of the edifice while two tall, steep risers mount the north flank. Terrace heights on the south fall between 0.17-0.81m while the two northern facings each rise 1.42-1.47m. No stairs providing access to the summit were recorded in our limited investigations. A projection fashioned exclusively of masonry blocks was found, however, extending 1.2m south from the approximate center of the platform's south basal wall. This construction measures 3.1m wide east-west and is the only exposed construction on Str.1A-10-1st that consists primarily of faced blocks. The summit supported at least one earthen-floored room bound by low stone foundations. This enclosure covers at least 1.5m<sup>2</sup>, though its northern and eastern limits were not identified.

### Time Span 3

During this interval 0.62-0.7m of S.3, a loosely consolidated, dark brown sand incorporating some pebbles, was laid down over the U.8/18 floor off Str. 1A-10-1st's north side. It is unclear whether this earth was purposefully introduced or accumulated by natural means. Capping most of S.3 in this area is F.3, a 0.02-0.04m-thick lens of dark black soil. Feature 3 extends for 1.6m north-south, stopping 0.33m shy of U.6, the north basal facing. Directly underlying the southernmost 0.7m of F.3 is a 0.02m-thick level of red soil (Feature 4). Features 3 and 4 seem to be the remains of cultural activities carried out on and around Str. 1A-10-1st during TS.3; F.3 looks to be organic rich debris washing out and settling onto S.3 whereas F.4 appears to be the melted remains of clay used in *bajareque* construction. Features 5 and 6 are identical earth lenses found in the same stratigraphic position, this time overlying U.16, the fill backing U.6. Feature 5, the level of dark black soil, is 0.57m long by, maximally, 0.03m thick while the red soil of underlying F.6 measures 0.02m thick by 0.54m north-south. Feature 5 stops 0.31m north of U.7, the steep ascent to the summit, whereas F.6 ends 0.42m shy of that wall. Most likely F.5 and 6 have the same behavioral significance as F.3 and 4 to the north.

The major changes to Str. 1A-10-1st wrought during TS. 3, therefore, consist of the reduction of the platform's height on the north to 1.68m. The northern basal facing, U.6, was still visible but reduced in height to 0.72m. The remains of activities that occurred on and around Str. 1A-10-1st during this interval were not removed prior to the initiation of the next phase.

### Time Span 4

This interval is characterized by the blanketing of portions of Str.1A-10-1st by what seem to be fill deposits that do not support any surviving architecture. On the north, F.2, a dense

concentration of small to large cobbles set in a dark brown soil matrix, covers the portion of U.6 still projecting above S.3 and all but the uppermost 0.49m of U.7. Feature 2 extends from U.7 to a point 1.8m north of U.6. A very similar fill deposit (included in F.2) was laid atop U.4 and against U.5, the second and third terraces on the south. Roughly 0.38m of U.5, the third ascending terrace and step-up to the summit, might still have been visible after F.2 was introduced here. The summit floor was blanketed by 0.48m of F.2.

Prior to the deposition of F.2, an 0.08-0.2m-thick deposit of hard-compacted, light brown soil (S.8) was laid down atop S.3 off Str. 1A-10-1st's north side. As F.2 in this area covers S.8, it appears that a period of unknown duration intervened between the accumulation of S.3 in TS. 3 and the introduction of F.2.

The architectural significance of F.2 is unclear. It may represent fill introduced in preparation for renovating Str. 1A-10-1st, a project that was never completed. Alternatively, these stones might be part of an effort to cover at least parts of the platform, especially its high, northern terraces, possibly to terminate formally the building's use. In either case, the effect was to obscure those features of the platform that marked it as a human creation (specifically the terraces) and round its contours into something approximating a hill. As vegetation inevitably encroached, on the edifice it would have been ever harder to distinguish it as an artificial eminence.

### Time Span 5

Following Str. 1A-10-1st's abandonment the building was gradually covered by the deposition of S.1 and 2. The latter is a hard-compacted, fine-textured, light brown soil that accumulated to as much as 0.31m above U.1 (the southern extramural plaster floor) and against U.3 and 21 (the platform's southern basal facing and outset). Stratum 1 overlies S.2 on the south and S.8 on the north. It is a hard-compacted, fine-textured, root-rich, dark brown soil that is up to 0.9m thick (deepest on the north). Embedded in S.1 and 2 is a moderately dense concentration of stones fallen from final-phase architecture (F.1). Feature 1 is difficult to distinguish from F.2 where the former overlies construction, but was traced for 2.66m south and 1.02m north of last-phase architecture.

### Chronological Summary

The earliest period of occupation attested to in and around Str. 1A-10-1st dates to Late Classic I. Diagnostics of this interval, though never plentiful, are more common here than in most other portions of the site core, suggesting that the Op. 26 area may have been one node of Late Classic I settlement at La Sierra. Still, no construction is linked to this span and the number of people involved was likely fairly small.

Structure 1A-10-1st was erected during Late Classic II, signifying a substantial increase in the intensity of occupation in this zone. The building remained in use into the Late Classic II/III transition, though the accumulation of S.3 and several debris lenses (F.3-6) off the platform's north side may hint at reduced efforts to maintain Str. 1A-10-1st near the end of its occupation. By the beginning of Late Classic III portions of the edifice were covered with a fill composed of stones set in an earth matrix. As indicated earlier, such construction may have been part of an effort to terminate Str. 1A-10-1st's use or represent an episode of refurbishment that was never completed. In either case, Str. 1A-10-1st seems to have been largely abandoned

by the start of Late Classic III. No material datable to later periods was unearthed in the course of our excavations in Op. 26.