

Kenyon College

Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange

Four Valleys Archive

Anthropology

1995

PVN OP 029 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 029 Excavation Report" (1995). *Four Valleys Archive*. Paper 10666.
<https://digital.kenyon.edu/honduras/10666>

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.

Kenyon College

Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange

Four Valleys Archive

Anthropology

1995

PVN OP 29 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 29 Excavation Report" (1995). *Four Valleys Archive*. Paper 10666.
<http://digital.kenyon.edu/honduras/10666>

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.

Operation 29

Operation 29 encompasses 8 monumental structures that define an extensive plaza in the eastern portion of the La Sierra site core. These edifices and their immediate environs cover ca. 9,200m² and occupy relatively level terrain. Unlike the western site core plaza, where the component structures are closely spaced, the distances between buildings on the east are greater, providing numerous points of access to the plaza. Structures 1A-45 and -48 were excavated by members of the Naco Valley Archaeological Project; Str. 1A-45 in 1988 and Str. 1A-48 in 1995. Fully 143m² were cleared in the course of this work.

Structure 1A-45

Structure 1A-45 is located in the center of the line of sizable platforms that delimit the east side of the eastern site core plaza. Structure 1A-44 is ca. 8m to the north whereas Str. 1A-49 lies 21m to the south; Str. 2A-3 is situated 20m to the southeast. Excavations here were largely restricted to a trench that cut east-west across the building's approximate center (Subop. 29A and B); clearing was limited to exposing several construction units encountered on the summit (Subop. 29C and D). Fully 33m² was uncovered here, digging being pursued to maximum depths of 2.5m and 1.54m below modern ground surface outside and within architecture, respectively. One construction phase was recorded in the course of this work pursued for a month in 1988 under the direction of Lavinia True, Patricia Reed, and Patricia Whooley.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.3-10, 12	-	LCL I, II?
2	Str. 1A-45-Sub1 Str. 1A-45-Sub2	U.1 U.2	-	-	LCL II/III?
3	-	-	S.10	-	LCL II/III?
4	Str. 1A-45-1st	U.3-18	-	-	LCL III
5	Str. 1A-45-1st	-	-	F.2, 3	LCL III
6	-	-	S.1-3, 10, 11	F.1	

Time Span 1

This interval witnessed the sequential deposition of eight soil layers that are unassociated with any recovered architecture. Strata 3-9 were exposed in a deep probe sunk off Str. 1A-45-1st's east flank while S.10 was recorded only on the building's west side. The first of these

strata to be deposited, S.9, is a coarse-textured, loosely consolidated, dark brown to gray sand with small mica inclusions. Stratum 9 was revealed to a maximum thickness of 0.19m and runs flat over the 0.9m it was exposed (the layer's base was not encountered). Overlying S.9 by 0.29m is a moderately coarse-textured, loosely compacted, tan sand with mica inclusions (S.8). Stratum 8, in turn, is blanketed by 0.15-0.18m of S.7, a fine-textured, soft-compacted, micaceous, tan sand. Stratum 6 covers S.7 by 0.35-0.39m and consists of a moderately coarse-textured, loosely consolidated, tan sand with mica inclusions. Covering S.6 by 0.18-0.22m is a layer of extremely fine-textured, loosely compacted, tan soil with numerous included mica fragments (S.5). Stratum 4, overlying S.5 by 0.1-0.12m, is a fine-textured, soft-compacted, tan, micaceous sand. Strata 4-9 all run relatively flat over the 0.9m they were exposed.

Approximately 0.3m of S.3, a fine-textured, loosely consolidated, light tan soil, accumulated atop S.4 near the end of TS.1. This is the amount of S.3 that underlies TS.2 architecture and must have been laid down prior to that construction episode; the remainder of S.3 was deposited after Str. 1A-45-1st's abandonment. On the west, at least 0.48m of an undescribed soil (S.12) covers the lowest 0.04m of U.3, Str. 1A-45-1st's western basal wall, and continues for, minimally, 0.44m below that construction. Capping S.12 is 0.26-0.33m of S.10, a fine-textured, hard-compacted, light tan soil. Stratum 10 accumulated to a depth of 0.26m against U.3; the S.10 soil may have been deposited after Str. 1A-45-1st was raised or, more likely, the western basal facing was set within the pre-existing earth to stabilize the foundation. Stratum 10 also envelopes U.1 and 2 of Strs. 1A-45-Sub1 and 1A-45-Sub2, respectively, suggesting that the deposition of this earth layer was interrupted by building during TS.2.

Time Span 2

Lying immediately west of Str. 1A-45-1st are two, discontinuous stone surfaces, U.1 and 2. The former is 0.12m thick and covers an exposed 0.96m east-west by at least 0.55m north-south; its southern limit was exposed but its north margin lies beyond our excavations. Unit 2, 0.1m to the east, is a similar pavement at the same elevation and measures 1.34m east-west by, minimally, 1m north-south (its northern and southern limits were not revealed). Both U.1 and 2 consist of flat-laid cobbles set in an earth matrix. The 0.1m separating U.1 and 2 is filled with S.10 earth as is the case for the 0.85m intervening between U.2 and Str. 1A-45-1st's west basal facing (U.3). Given the distances separating these constructions, U.1 and 2 may be parts of two distinct surface-level buildings (Strs. 1A-45-Sub1 and 1A-45-Sub2, respectively). The chronological placement of U.1 and 2 prior to the erection of Str. 1A-45-1st is based on their stratigraphic position, suspended within S.10. *If* S.10 was laid down during TS.1, as suggested above, then the building of Strs. 1A-45-Sub1 and 1A-45-Sub2 must have at least briefly interrupted that deposition and predated the construction of Str. 1A-45-1st.

Time Span 3

Between 0.03-0.16m of S.10 covers U.1 and 2. Whether this tan earth was introduced by natural means, implying a hiatus in the use of the area, or was purposefully deposited in preparation for raising Str. 1A-45-1st is unknown.

Time Span 4

Structure 1A-45-1st is a stone-faced platform that rises above seemingly unprepared earthen surfaces on the east and west. The building is faced, on the west by three broad terraces (U.3-5) leading up to the stone-faced step-up to the summit (U.6). Unit 3, the basal riser, ascends 0.34m above the reconstructed level of ancient ground surface and is 2.14m wide. Unit 4, in turn, rises 0.8m above U.5 and encompasses 3.08m east-west. Unit 5, the next ascending terrace, stands 0.89m tall and measures 1.56m across. The step-up to the summit, U.6, is 0.43m high and runs back 0.94m to the east to the summit bench's (U.7's) west facing. On the east, there are four terraces (U.8-11) rising to the summit step-up (U.12). The lowest in the sequence, U.8, is 0.24m high by 1.81m wide. Its successor, U.9, rises 0.52m and encompasses 2.64m east-west. Unit 9, in turn, gives way to U.10, a riser standing an estimated 1m tall and running back 0.6m to the west. Unit 11, the final member of the sequence, has a basal sloping zone that tilts back to the west. This portion of the riser slopes back 0.22m over its height of 0.33m and is surmounted by a vertical ascent of 0.33m. Unit 12, the summit step up, is 0.66m west of U.11's east face and rises 0.12m above that terrace's tread.

The summit seems to be dominated by one large, earth-and-stone-floored room that measures 4.53m east-west by at least 6.4m north-south. Its east and west sides are bounded by stone-faced ascents that are 0.12m and 0.43m high, respectively, while U.13, the northern step-up, is 0.28m tall. Though the generally poor preservation of final-phase construction makes ascertaining superstructure form difficult, it appears that the western summit floor was 0.2m higher than its eastern counterpart. The superstructure is dominated by a large stone-faced bench (U.7) which takes up most of the summit's center. Unit 7 stands 0.39m and 0.59m tall on the west and east, respectively, and measures 2.6m east-west by an estimated 3.85m north-south. An extension of this construction (U.18) projects 0.95m west of U.7's northwest corner. Unit 18 is about the same height as U.7 and measures approximately 1m north-south across its center; its south facing was not clearly identified, however, in our limited summit probes. No obvious foundations delimiting the borders of the superstructure were recorded; it may be that U.5, 12, and 13 served as footings for perishable upper constructions as well as steps to the summit.

Structure 1A-45-1st's hearting (U.17) consists primarily of earth with very few included stones. The fill underlying terraces (U.15 beneath U.3, U.14 below U.4) and the U.5 step-up (U.16) consists of a moderately dense concentration of small to medium-size cobbles set in brown soil. The fill for the U.7 bench (included in U.7) is much the same as the hearting described for U.3-5.

By the end of TS.4, Str. 1A-45-1st rose 2.6m above earthen surfaces on the east and west, measured 17.28m east-west, and was aligned roughly 358 degrees. Three and four stone-faced terraces ascend the west and east sides of the platform, respectively, leading in each case to a stone step-up to the summit. The western terraces and the two lowest eastern risers are the widest recorded on the building (1.56-3.08m across) while the uppermost eastern terraces are relatively narrow (0.6-0.66m across). No steps were recorded in our excavations and there is at least one terrace on the east and west sides whose height probably precluded easily ascending that flank (U.5 at 0.89m on the west and U.10 at 1m on the east). Most likely the staircase(s) lies somewhere beyond our restricted excavations. The summit is defined by low stone-faced ascents on all exposed sides (east, north, and west) and seems to have supported one large room that covers at least 29m². The western floor of this enclosure may have been 0.2m higher than its eastern counterpart. Much of this space is taken up by a 0.39-0.59m tall stone-faced and -surfaced bench that occupies the room's approximate center and measures 2.6x3.85m (10m²). A stone-faced construction projects 0.95m west from the bench's northwest corner and measures

roughly 1m wide north-south. This architectural element is approximately the same height as the bench and may have given the latter an “L” shape. All wall facings and pavements are made using unmodified river cobbles while the terrace treads were surfaced with a mixture of stones and earth. The platform’s fill consists primarily of earth though cobbles are mixed with soil beneath terraces and summit step-ups.

Time Span 5

During this interval there may have been some changes made to Str. 1A-45-1st’s east flank. Evidence for these putative modifications is ambiguous but suggestive. Based on the patterned distribution of stones overlying the second and third terraces on this side (U.9 and 10), it appears that two casually fashioned terraces were added at this time (F.2 and 3). Feature 2, the lower member of the dyad, rests on U.9’s tread, 0.48m west of the latter’s east face, and rises 0.62m above that surface. Feature 2 is 1.66m wide and is succeeded by F.3. The latter is 0.6m tall by 1.25m wide, ending at U.11. Approximately 0.44m of U.11 would have still projected above the F.3 terrace tread, including the upper 0.1m of U.11’s lower sloping zone. Unit 10, however, was completely covered by these additions as was all but 0.48m of U.9’s tread. If F.2 and 3 are the remains of actual construction, then their erection would have created five terraces on Str. 1A-45-1st’s east flank. By covering the 1m-tall U.10, these putative risers would have made it possible to reach the summit from this side, no terrace on the east now exceeding 0.62m high. No other changes were noted on the building dating to TS.3.

Time Span 6

Following abandonment, 0.26-0.41m of S.3 was laid down over S.10 on the west and the deposition of S.3 on the east resumed. This earth layer eventually covered basal construction on both sides (U.8 on the east and U.3 on the west). Stratum 2, a moderately fine-textured, hard-compacted, brown soil with numerous small white inclusions, covers S.3 on the east and west by as much as 0.28m. On the west, S.2 gives way 2.44m east of the western excavation limits to a fine-textured, loosely consolidated, dark gray ash (S.11). Stratum 11 is 0.1-0.37m thick and covers U.3 and 4, ending at the latter terrace facing. Stratum 11 overlies S.3 in this area. Blanketing S.2 and 11 on both of the exposed flanks is S.1, a moderately fine-textured, hard-compacted, root-rich, dark brown soil that varies from 0.16-1.01m thick. Embedded in S.1, 2, 11, and upper S.3 and 10 is a moderately dense concentration of stones fallen from final-phase architecture (F.1). The F.1 rocks are densest where they overlie construction, thinning out over a distance of 0.39m east and 2.4m west of the basal platform.

Structure 1A-48

Structure 1A-48 lies near the center of the eastern plaza of the site core, ca. 57m west of Str. 1A-45 and 6m east of Str. 1A-41. A low saddle links Strs. 1A-41 and 1A-48. Digging in and around Str. 1A-48 was conducted in Subop. 29E-L, fully 110m² having been cleared in the course of this work. Excavations were pursued to maximum depths of 1.33m and 0.88m below modern ground surface within and beyond architecture, respectively, resulting in the identification of two major building phases. The investigation of Str. 1A-48 spanned one-and-a-half months in 1995 and was directed by Peter Agelasto.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.4-13	-	LCL I ?
2	Str. 1A-48-Sub1	U.29-32, 35	-	-	LCL II?
3	-	-	S.2, 3	-	LCLII/III?
4	Str. 1A-48-2nd	U.1, 3-7, 10, 12, 13, 16	-	-	LCL III/II?
5	Str. 1A-48-1st	U.1-28, 36, 37	-	-	LCL III
	Str. 1A-48-Sub2	U.33, 35	-	-	LCL III
	Str. 1A-48-Sub3	U.34	-	-	LCL III
6	Str. 1A-48-1st	-	-	F.2	LCL III/EPC
7	-	-	S.1-2	F.1	

Time Span 1

Strata 4-10, revealed in a deep probe sunk off Str. 1A-48-1st's north flank, were laid down during this interval. The lowest of these layers, S.9, is a coarse-textured, soft-compacted, tan sand that did not yield any artifacts and was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.14m (its base was not located). A lens of moderately fine-textured, loosely compacted, tan sand (S.10) was embedded in S.9. Stratum 10 pinches out on the north and reaches its maximum observed thickness of 0.08m as it exits our excavations on the south. Overlying S.9 is 0.09-0.19m of very fine-textured, hard-compacted, brown clay (S.8) that thickens from south to north over the 1.06m it was exposed in this direction. Blanketing S.8 is 0.11-0.24m of S.7, a fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted, brown soil that thickens from north to south. This layer, in turn, is covered by 0.06-0.07m of S.6, a fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted, brown to black soil. Stratum 6 may be the remains of an organic-rich outwash layer associated with activities dating to the period predating the erection of known buildings in the area. A lens of fine-textured, hard-compacted, greasy dark brown clay (S.5), covers the southernmost exposed 0.74m of S.6 and is 0.01-0.04m thick; S.5 does not extend the full north-south extent of the probe. Covering S.5 and the still-exposed northern portion of S.6 is 0.04-0.14m of S.4, a moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted, tan soil mottled with orange flecks that may be the remnants of

decayed *bajareque*. Stratum 4 slopes down slightly, 0.04m over 1.06m, from north to south.

South of Str. 1A-48 a sequence of four levels, S.10-13 were revealed underlying construction integral to Str. 1A-48-Sub1. Stratum 13, a very fine-textured, hard-compacted, micaceous, brown soil, was encountered at the base of excavation. Overlying S.13 is 0.05-0.06m of coarse-textured, loosely compacted, tan sand (S.10) that is, in turn, blanketed by 0.02-0.03m of very fine-textured, loosely compacted, highly micaceous brown soil (S.12). Another 0.07-0.09m of S.10 covers S.12; S.10, 12, and 13 run more-or-less level over the 1.2m they were exposed running north-south. Stratum 11, a fine-textured, hard-compacted, red-brown clay, covers S.10 by about 0.34m and is the surface above which Str. 1A-48-Sub1 was raised.

It is difficult to relate the strata located north and south of Str. 1A-48 as these portions of the excavations were not linked. Strata 9 and 10 on the north are roughly equivalent to the top of S.11 on the south. They are very different soils, however, the northern examples being tan sands of varying textures while their southern counterpart is a red-brown clay. This suggests the operation of different depositional regimes separated by 11.8m, though whether these distinctions resulted from natural processes or human intervention is unclear. On a more general level, deposition in both areas did occur under varying conditions over the course of TS.1, with sand succeeded by clay in both sequences. There are at least a few signs of cultural activities during this presumably long interval (e.g., based on artifacts recovered from S.4-6).

Time Span 2

Structure 1A-48-Sub1 was erected during this span. The building is characterized by massive walls measuring 1.4-1.6m across by 0.92m tall that define an earthen-floored open space on the west (U.29), south (U.30), and east (U.31); the building continues under Str. 1A-48 to the north and its limit in this direction was not uncovered. The exposed perimeter of Str. 1A-48-Sub1 covers 6.75m by 16.3m while the area it encloses measures 3.8x14.75m. No clear floor was recorded in this space and it seems likely that the building was a platform whose core was filled with a moderately fine-textured, dark brown soil (U.35). A circular stone construction (U.32), 0.7m in diameter, was found atop, and near the center-line, of U.30 immediately east of its junction with U.29. Investigation of the summit was very limited, most of our efforts being devoted to defining Str. 1A-48-Sub1's perimeter. We did not locate any cross-walls or built-in furniture in the course of this work, though we cannot be certain that they do not exist. Units 29-31 are built exclusively of cobbles, the larger of which are set in five to six clear horizontal courses that are packed round with river-rounded chinking stones. The rocks are set in a red-brown clay that is indistinguishable from S.11 which underlies the building.

Structure 1A-48-Sub1 is a 0.92m-high stone-faced, earth-filled platform that measures 6.75m by, at least, 16.3m, and is aligned roughly 3 degrees. Its summit encompasses minimally 56m² though if and how it might have been subdivided are uncertain.

Time Span 3

Following Str. 1A-48-Sub1's abandonment S.3, a moderately fine-textured, hard-compacted, tan clay was deposited over U.29-32 and 35. Roughly 0.15m of this earth likely accumulated between this abandonment and the raising of Str. 1A-48-2nd in TS.4. The same soil was recorded on the north where 0.25-0.33m of S.3 overlies S.4. About 0.1m of S.2, a

moderately fine-textured, hard-compacted, brown soil, blankets S.3 on the south and serves as the base for construction dating to the next time span. No portions of S.2 can be assigned to TS.3 on the north.

Time Span 4

Structure 1A-48-2nd is a low, stone-faced platform with a moderately large central room. The building is fronted on the north by one stone-faced step-up (U.1), 0.4m high, that leads directly onto the summit. On the south, two stone-faced and -surfaced risers (U.10, 11) ascend to the summit step-up (U.5). Unit 10, the basal risers, is 0.38m tall and runs back (north) 0.7m to U.11. Unit 11, in turn, is 0.22m high, 0.59m wide, and gives way to the summit step-up, U.12, which ascends a scant 0.05m on the south. The platform's east and west flanks are defined by single ascents to the summit that are roughly 0.3m high (U.12 and 13).

The superstructure consists of one earthen-floored space that measures 3.5x4.9m and is delimited by low (0.25-0.35m tall), broad walls (0.9-1.7m across; U.3-6). The southern perimeter wall (U.5) also bounds the summit on this side, the upper 0.05m of its south face serving as the ascent to the summit here. On the remaining flanks the superstructure's foundations are set 1-2m back from the summit's edge. The space intervening between U.3, 4, and 6 and the platform edge was apparently flat and may have been sheltered under the eaves of the superstructure's roof. A 0.28m-high stone-faced and -surfaced construction (U.7) runs east-west across the superstructure's approximate center. Unit 7 is at least 0.91m wide north-south and divided the superstructure's interior into two spaces measuring 1.25x4.9m on the south and an estimated 1x4.9m on the north (the north edge of U.7 lies under later construction [U.14] and was not uncovered). The unusually great widths of U.3-7 suggests that they might have doubled as footings for perishable upper walls and as benches.

The platform's fill consists of a moderately fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted, tan soil (U.16). It is the upper surface of this deposit that serves as the superstructure's floor.

Structure 1A-48-2nd is a 0.33m-high (from the base of construction to the superstructure's floor), stone-faced, earth-filled platform that measures 9.2x10m, and is oriented approximately 4 degrees. All flanks save the south are defined by a single ascent to the summit while two terraces mount the south side. None of the facings is tall enough to have posed an obstacle to reaching the summit. The presence of two terraces on the south, however, tentatively implies that they constituted a formal entryway to the superstructure. The latter is bounded by four low (0.25-0.35m high) but wide (0.9-1.7m across) stone foundations that may have doubled as wall supports and benches. Another comparable construction divides the 17.2m² of the earthen space thus enclosed into two compartments set in a north-south line. The northern enclosure covers 4.9m² while its southern analogue encompasses 6.1m². Bounding the superstructure on the east, north, and west are spaces 1-2m wide leading out to the platform's summit facings. These areas may have provided work and living spaces outside the central compartment but sheltered under the eaves of its roof. On the south the steps/terraces lead directly to the summit room. Construction is generally of unmodified river cobbles except in the case of the basal southern terrace which was made using cut blocks. The concentration of masonry in this riser reinforces the notion that it was part of a formal entrance to Str. 1A-48-2nd's superstructure.

Time Span 5

During this span Str. 1A-48 retained its overall orientation. The summit was raised, however, and some modifications were made to the north and south flanks. The saddle connecting Str. 1A-48 with Str. 1A-41 to the west may also have been built now; it was certainly exposed throughout TS.5.

Roughly 0.3m of U.17, a coarse-textured, loosely compacted, tan sand, was laid atop U.16 within the space defined by U.3-6. Covering U.17 by 0.19m in the northern half of this space (north of U.14) is a fill deposit composed of moderately fine-textured, hard-compacted, tan soil mottled with white flecks (U.37). Unit 37's counterpart south of U.14 is U.36 which is nearly identical to U.37 save for its darker brown hue. Whereas U.17 was contained by U.3-6, U.36 and 37 override these earlier constructions and extend to the summit's margins. Units 36 and 37 are retained by an addition made to U.13, the platform's west basal wall. To the east, U.12 was raised to a height of 0.8m, functioning as both a fill-retaining wall and the eastern foundation of the expanded superstructure. To the north, a new construction, U.2, was added atop U.1, 0.76m south of that northern basal facing. Unit 2 is 1.03m wide and may have served as a broad foundation for the northern superstructure wall and as a bench. Also added on the north is a 0.15m-high step made of two courses of masonry blocks (U.18). Unit 18 projects 0.74m north of the platform's basal facing (U.1); its east-west dimensions were not determined. Twenty-five centimeters of U.1 still projected above U.18. At some point late in the sequence, another step (U.19), also 0.15m high and fashioned of cut blocks, was appended to U.18's north side. Unit 19 measures 0.58m across and completely covers U.18. The northern step is now 1.32m wide north-south though we still remain in doubt about its east-west length. On the south, two new terraces were added (U.8 and 9), partially burying U.10. These constructions are 0.18m and 0.1m high, respectively, and are made of cut blocks. Unit 8's tread is 0.25m wide while that of U.9 measures 0.57m across and leads to U.10, 0.1m of which still protruded above these additions. Unit 5, the summit step-up, was raised 0.17m above its earlier height to retain the newly added U.36 fill. This shift converted the summit step-up from a dainty 0.05m to a more imposing 0.22m.

The earthen-floored summit enclosure now measured 4.9m across north-south by 7.9m east-west and was bounded by U.2 on the north, U.12 on the east, U.5 on the south, and U.15 on the west. The latter is a new construction standing 0.4m high and measuring 0.6m across. Unit 15 is 0.5m east of the platform's western basal facing (U.13), creating a narrow open span on the superstructure's west side. In the other three directions the superstructure extends to the summit's margins. Dividing the interior into two spaces set in a north-south line is U.14. Unit 14 rises 0.49m above the summit floor and is 0.75m wide. The northern compartment covers 2.35x7.9m, its southern neighbor measuring 1.8x7.9m. No free-standing built-in furniture, such as benches, were encountered in either enclosure though U.2 and 5 on the north and south, respectively, are sufficiently broad (measuring 1.03m and 1.14m across) to have served as benches as well as wall foundations.

The summit could now be reached using steps or terraces on the north and south sides. The relatively low heights of U.2 and 5, the wide northern and southern foundations, further suggests that there was no serious obstacle to reaching the superstructure's interior from these directions.

The western saddle is a low, stone-faced construction that apparently linked Str. 1A-48-1st with Str. 1A-41 to the west; we did not clear enough of the putative linking construction to test that notion. Unit 20, a ca. 0.15m-high wall of cobbles capped with cut blocks, defines the

saddle's east side. It runs 3.55m south from its juncture with U.8's west end cornering on the south with U.21, the saddle's south basal facing. Units 20 and 8 seems to have been built at the same time, based on the manner of their intersection; U.8 and 20 join but do not continue past each other. Backing U.20, 0.4m to the west is another low riser (U.22) leading up to the saddle's summit. Unit 22 runs approximately 1.8m south from its intersection with U.9 on Str. 1A-48-1st and may turn a corner with U.24. Unit 27, the saddle's eastern summit wall, rises behind (west of) U.22. The southern basal facing, U.21, is 0.38m tall and is also made of cobbles topped by masonry blocks. A cobble surface (U.25) extends 1.7m south from U.21. Unit 25 was only exposed in a 1m-wide trench and its east-west dimensions are unknown. Backing U.21 to the north is a 0.12m-high step-up to the summit (U.24). Unit 24 is 2.05m north of U.21 and is made of horizontally laid masonry blocks. Stretching for an estimated 9m north of U.24 is a white plaster floor (U.23) that may have surfaced the entirety of the saddle's summit. Unit 23 is bordered on the east by U.27 and on the north by U.26. The latter is ca. 0.4m high and intersects U.13, Str. 1A-48-1st's western basal wall, 1.8m south of the platform's northwest corner. Unit 26 runs for about 1.7m west from this point before turning south for ca. 0.5m and resuming its westward course. Unfortunately, this wall is poorly preserved, making it impossible to be certain about its final form. A low stone step up (U.28) runs 0.7m from U.27, the saddle's eastern summit wall, to U.13, Str. 1A-48-1st's western basal facing. Unit 28 rises above the saddle's second ascending eastern terrace (U.22) and may define the south side of a raised walkway linking Str. 1A-48-1st and the saddle. The northern margin of this putative passage was not encountered.

Most of the walls comprising these two linked buildings are fashioned from river cobbles. The principal exceptions are the two southern basal terraces and northern step on Str. 1A-48-1st and the eastern and southern basal risers of the saddle where cut blocks predominate. The second ascending southern terrace on the saddle is also fashioned using masonry blocks. Scattered cut blocks were also recorded in U.14 and 15, though they make up a minority of the rocks used in both walls and show no clear patterning.

By the conclusion of TS. 5, Str. 1A-48-1st was a stone-faced, earth-filled platform that stood 0.82m high, measured 10m on a side, and was oriented ca. 4 degrees. Four terraces now mounted towards the earthen-floored summit on the south, plaza-facing side while the building's east and west flanks were each delimited by a single ascent. Steps and/or terraces fashioned using cut blocks fronted the building on the north and south, strongly suggesting that passage to the superstructure was channeled up both of these sides. The low heights of the superstructure's northern and southern foundations support the argument that the building could have been entered from either direction; the eastern and western flanks of the summit construction, however, were sealed by more substantial walls. The superstructure contains two rooms set in a north-south line and bounded by stone foundations. The northern compartment encompasses 18.6m² while its southern neighbor covers 14.2m². A 0.4m-wide gap between the medial summit wall and the western foundation may have provided passage or, more likely, ventilation between the two rooms. Though no free-standing built-in furniture was found in either compartment, the northern and southern foundations are both sufficiently broad (1.03m and 1.14m across) to have served as benches. A 0.5m-wide area intervenes between the superstructure and the platform's western basal facing provided a limited area of living space outside the walls but, possibly, under the edifice's eaves.

The saddle leading westward to Str. 1A-41 was raised at this time. It projects 3.55m south from Str. 1A-48-1st's southwest corner before turning west. Its basal east and south risers

are made using cut blocks and are succeeded by one, on the south, and two, on the east, terraces leading to the summit. The north side is bounded by one basal facing. The summit is surfaced with white plaster and covers 9m north-south. No evidence of superstructure construction was unearthed, though our excavations were limited to a narrow portion of the construction's eastern summit. A raised walkway may have connected the summits of Str. 1A-48-1st and the saddle. Overall, the saddle measures 11.2m north-south, is 0.4-0.5m high, and is oriented approximately 2 degrees.

Test pits dug south of Str. 1A-48-1st revealed small portions of two buildings not discernible from ground surface (Strs. 1A-48-Sub2 and 1A-48-Sub3). The stratigraphic positions of these edifices suggests that they are roughly contemporary with Str. 1A-48-1st and the western saddle.

Structure 1A-48-Sub2, 10.7m south of the saddle's southeast corner, is bounded on the west by a low (ca. 0.2m high) cobble wall (U.35) that was exposed for 1.5m running at an azimuth of roughly 3 degrees (we did not reveal U.35's northern or southern limits). A white plaster surface (U.33) borders U.35 on the west. Unit 33 was exposed in five discontinuous segments in as many test pits, extending 5m west and 8m south of U.35. We did not encounter a definitive edge to this surface though it was no longer present in the area of Str. 1A-48-Sub3 11.3m south of U.35. Structure 1A-48-Sub3 is represented by another low stone wall (U.34) that was followed for 0.45m at an angle of, very approximately, 69 degrees. It is unclear whether Str. 1A-48-Sub2 and -Sub3 were low platforms or surface-level buildings. In either case, it appears that the plaza south of Str. 1A-48-1st contained at least a few, relatively insubstantial constructions.

Time Span 6

During this span about 0.55m of densely packed stones set in a brown soil matrix (F.2) covered U.1, 2, and 18 on Str. 1A-48-1st's north flank. As many of the rocks making up this entity were found lying flat it seems likely that they were purposefully introduced and are not among the stones fallen from final-phase architecture (F.1, see below). Feature 2's deposition would have made it difficult to reach the superstructure from the north, possibly sealing this flank and redirecting traffic to the south side. It is also possible that F.2 comprises fill intended to support construction, such as new terraces, that was never completed. In either case, access to the summit from the north was blocked near the end of Str. 1A-48-1st's occupation.

Time Span 7

Following abandonment, Str. 1A-48-1st and the saddle were covered by S.1 and 2. The latter may have begun to accumulate during TS.3, as indicated by stratigraphic relations between it and TS. 5 construction on the platform's south flank. In any event, this moderately fine-textured, hard-compacted, brown clay mottled with numerous small white inclusions resumed deposition now and covered all but the uppermost portions of construction. Succeeding it is S.1, a moderately coarse-textured, moderately hard-compacted, root-rich, dark brown soil that collected to as much as 0.31m over S.2. Embedded in S.1 and 2 is a moderately light concentration of rocks tumbled from final-phase architecture (F.1). Feature 1 is nowhere particularly dense but was traced for 1-3.6m beyond saddle and platform architecture.

Chronological Summary

A very few Late Classic I diagnostics were found mixed with later material in the environs of Strs. 1A-45 and 1A-48. In no case were these items recovered from sealed contexts. It seems likely, therefore, that their presence signals at least some occupation of the area around these two buildings prior to their erection, though the extent and intensity of that settlement is hard to gauge. The paucity of the relevant finds, however, hints at light or sporadic use of this zone during Late Classic I.

Evidence for Late Classic II occupation in Op. 29 is more substantial than that available for its predecessor, pointing to increased use of the area. Though associated materials were slight, the stratigraphic position of Str. 1A-48-Sub1 suggests that it may have been raised at this time. The behavioral significance of this extensive but enigmatic building remains uncertain, though it was clearly buried out of sight by the time Strs. 1A-48-1st, 1A-48-2nd, 1A-48-Sub2, and 1A-48-Sub3 were erected. Structure 1A-48-2nd may have been raised, along with Strs. 1A-45-Sub1 and 1A-45-Sub2, at the transition between Late Classic II and III. Very few artifacts associated with these constructions were found, however. Dating of Strs. 1A-48-2nd, 1A-45-Sub1, and 1A-45-Sub2, therefore, is based on their stratigraphic positions; in the case of the first edifice in the sequence its Late Classic III/II date is founded on its intermediate position between Str. 1A-48-Sub1 and Str. 1A-48-1st.

Both Strs. 1A-45-1st and 1A-48-1st reached their final forms during Late Classic III. The vast majority of the diagnostic artifacts associated with both buildings are assigned to this interval and were found in terminal debris contexts. Structures 1A-48-Sub2 and 1A-48-Sub3, both fairly insubstantial constructions, were also apparently raised about this time. A few Early Postclassic sherds were mixed with much larger numbers of Late Classic III materials on and around Str. 1A-48-1st. Apparently, occupation of this building continued relatively late, postdating the use of most La Sierra edifices. The paucity of Early Postclassic markers implies that the use of Str. 1A-48-1st involved relatively few people over a fairly short period. While no construction is clearly associated with the Early Postclassic it may be that Str. 1A-48-1st's north side was covered by a fill of stone and earth now. This activity, however, may fall near the end of the Late Classic III interval.