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PVN-Op 043-Excavation Report

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Operation 43

Operation 43 consists of, minimally, 11 surface-visible buildings and two rock concentrations dispersed over a narrow strip of elevated terrace summit in southwestern La Sierra. The land slopes up towards the area occupied by Op.43 from all sides save the south, in which direction it runs flat for a considerable distance. Immediately east of Op. 43 is the high, steep descent to the Chamelecon floodplain while on the west is the somewhat less precipitous drop to the Quebrada Danta channel. Northward, Op. 43 overlooks the heavily built-up slope down towards the La Sierra Main Group. Three basin-shaped depressions, up to 1.5m deep and covering 7x13m, 32x42m, and 25x38m, form a rough arc on the northern margin of the operation, beginning on the northwest and trending round to the southeast. The behavioral significance of these locally distinctive features was unknown prior to excavation, though we suspected that they were ancient borrow pits from which construction fill and/or clay for pottery production might have been secured.

Patterns underlying the arrangement of buildings in Op. 43 are difficult to discern. The five largest edifices in the area (Strs. 1C-1, 1C-2, 1C-4, AK, and AJ) define a patio immediately south of the central, and largest, depression. Structure AL and rock concentration (RC.) AM may be outliers of this aggregate. Otherwise, buildings are scattered without apparent patio foci between the northwestern and central declivity and east of the southeastern depression. Distinguishing structures from slight undulations in the terrace surface proved difficult when Op. 43 was mapped. We tended, therefore, to take a conservative approach, designating as structures only those surface-visible features that were characterized by relatively clear wall lines. Excavations conducted in 1995 and 1996 amply revealed the error of our ways, uncovering edifices that had been missed during the initial survey. Despite these additions to the architectural corpus, the perceived distribution remains the same; i.e., a patio-focused structure group in the south composed of relatively substantial buildings contrasted with a scattering of much smaller constructions concentrated on the margins of the depressions.

Investigations within Op. 43 concentrated on the two largest depressions (the central and southeastern examples) and their immediate environs. Work conducted in 1995 (Subops. 43A/G, directed by C. Wells) focused on the central declivity and its western margins. Four buildings (Str. 1C-1 and three edifices not mapped as distinct structures) on the western and southern edges of the depression were excavated along with 35, 1x1m, test pits sunk into the declivity. Work resumed in Op.43 during 1996, this time centered on the southeastern depression (Subops. 43I-M, supervised by B. Shade). Two previously unrecognized buildings, located within the extensive rock concentration on the declivity's eastern border, were revealed at the same time that 33 test pits, each measuring 1x1m, were dug cross-cutting the depression. A total of 235.5m² were cleared as a result of the 1995 and 1996 investigations. C. Wells provides a detailed account of his 1995 research in the environs of the Central depression (1996). The interpretations that follow differ slightly from the views expressed in that report, but do not challenge his essential findings.

Structure AO

Structure AO appeared on the surface as a slightly denser concentrations of stones within an extensive, diffuse distribution of rocks on the eastern margin of the southeastern depression. The building is situated well upslope within the declivity, near the latter's eastern lip. Structure

AN is 7.1m to the north, also on the declivity's eastern edge. Fully 8.5m² was cleared in revealing the entirety of Str. AO (Subop. 43L), excavations being pursued to a maximum depth of 0.68m below modern ground surface outside construction. A single building phase was recognized in the course of this work which was directed by B. Shade.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1	-	LCII, I, MPrecl
2	Str. AO-1st	U.1-6	-	-	LCLIII
3	-	-	S.1	-	HIST

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a dark grayish-brown (10YR-4/2), moderately hard-compacted clay, is the only soil level identified in Subop. 43L. This earth layer underlies construction by at least 0.6m; its base is outside excavation limits. Recovery of significant quantities of artifacts, especially sherds, from those portions of S.1 below architecture implies a substantial human presence in the immediate area predating Str.AO-1st's erection.

Time Span 2

Structure AO-1st is a surface-level edifice the perimeters of which were originally defined by U.1-4, walls composed of a mixture of unmodified stones and cut tuff blocks set on end. Unit 1, the western perimeter construction, is fashioned exclusively of tuff blocks, U.3, on the south, of tuff cobbles, U.2, on the north, from a mixture of blocks and cobbles, while U.4, on the east, seems to have been made exclusively of cobbles. When uncovered, the U.1-4 stones were in various stages of falling outwards, giving the building a splayed appearance. Contained within these bounds is a cobble pavement (U.5). Unit 5 would have rested roughly 0.2m below the tops of the upright U.1-4 stones and covered an area roughly 0.8m on a side. This version of Str. AO-1st measures 1.1x1.2m and is aligned approximately 16 degrees.

Subsequently, the building was expanded eastward through the construction of U.6 and the extension of U.2 and 3. The addition's perimeter walls are built exclusively of cobbles set on end, while the flooring of river-worn stones noted above continues eastward within these walls. Unit 4 may have remained standing at this time, effectively creating two side-by-side diminutive enclosures within Str. AO-1st; the new "room" covers ca. 0.35x0.8m. The building now measures 1.2x1.5m and retains the previous orientation.

By the end of its occupation Structure AO-1st was a surface-level building that measured 1.2x1.5m, contained two stone-paved rooms set in an east-west line and measuring 0.64m² and 0.1m², and was aligned roughly 16 degrees. All stones in Str. AO-1st construction are set in a

brown mud mortar. The four measured cut-blocks have the following dimensions: 0.2x0.4x0.48m, 0.15x0.36x0.37m, 0.14x0.28x0.37m, and 0.18x0.31x0.4m. Cobbles average 0.2x0.25m in size. Only one fragment of obsidian was found within Str. AO-1st, artifacts being more commonly encountered around the building's perimeter.

Time Span 3

Following abandonment, deposition of S.1 resumed, eventually burying all but the uppermost portions of U.1-4 and 6. Very few rocks fallen from final-phase architecture were identified in Str. AO-1st's vicinity, suggesting that U.1-4 and 6 never stood much taller than they did when uncovered in Subop. 43L. A ceramic roof tile found near the base of the building's northwest corner (ca. 0.11m below modern ground surface) hints at relatively recent human activity in the area. No other signs of Historic period construction and/or occupation were recognized near Str. AO-1st and there is no reason to believe that this building is anything but prehistoric in date.

Structure AN

Structure AN is situated within an extensive distribution of scattered rocks located on the eastern margin of the southeastern depression. Like its nearest neighbor, Str.AO, 7.1m to the south, Str. AN was not identified as a prehistoric construction during initial mapping. Excavations were initiated here (as part of Subops. 43K and 43M) because a slight rise and somewhat greater concentration of rocks within the dispersed stone scatter hinted at the presence of subsurface architecture. Unlike its southern neighbor, the majority of Str. AN is situated outside the depression, on relatively level terrain back from the declivity's edge. A total of 26m² was cleared in the course of investigating Str. AN, digging being pursued to maximum depths of 0.66m below modern ground surface outside construction and 0.81m below ground level into architectural fill. Despite relatively poor architectural preservation, two building phases were tentatively identified in the course of this work. All of these excavations were overseen by B. Shade.

Time Spans

<u>Time Spans</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1	-	LCLII,I
2	Str. AN-2nd	U.1-4, 7, 9	-	-	LCLIII?
3	Str. AN-1st	U.5-6, 8, 10-12	-	-	LCLIII
4	-	-	S.2,3	F.1	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1 is a dark grayish brown (10YR-4/2 and-5/3), fine-textured, soft-compacted ashy soil containing large quantities of artifacts, especially pottery sherds. The level was exposed to maximum thicknesses of 0.17m and 0.23m southwest and northeast of construction, its base lying beyond excavation limits (digging was not pursued to sufficient depths under Str. AN to reveal S.1). Stratum 1 descends 0.32m over 8.84m from northeast to southwest into the depression, based on its appearance in two discontinuous exposures on either side of Str. AN. In fact, S.1 is probably the upslope manifestation of S.9 which is exposed 2.4m horizontal distance and 0.88m vertical distance downslope. Stratum 1 underlies Str. AN architecture, suggesting a very substantial human occupation in the immediate area preceding that building's erection in TS.2. The inclusion of so much ash in S.1 hints at considerable burning somewhere nearby during this interval.

Time Span 2

Structure AN-2nd seems to have been a surface-level edifice the interior of which is demarcated by low cobble foundations on the southwest, northeast, and southeast (U.1, 3, and 7, respectively) and subdivided by the U.2 footing. The northeast and southwest perimeter walls are fairly insubstantial, rising 0.17-0.22m high and measuring 0.2-0.45m across. The southwestern foundation is much taller and wider, (0.45m high by 0.82m across), U.1's greater size possibly being an adaptation to its location on the depression's edge where downslope erosion would have threatened structural stability. Unit 2, the possible room-divider, rises up to 0.28m above a floor composed of earth and cobbles; U.2's width was not determined. A 0.4m-wide gap between U.2 and U.1's northeast (interior) side may be a doorway between enclosures within Str. AN-2nd. Unit 2 abuts U.3 on the northeast. The room defined by U.1-3 and 7 encompasses ca. 1.25x2.9m, the whole building covering roughly 4m northeast-southwest and oriented approximately 333 degrees.

The significance of U.4 and 9, located southwest of U.1, remains uncertain. The former is a cobble wall, 0.72m high by 1.02m wide, that did not continue across the 1m width of the Subop. 43K northeast-southwest axial trench; it was exposed solely in the northwest trench wall. Unit 4 is backed over the 0.7m separating it from U.1 on the northeast by a fill composed of densely packed, flat-laid medium to small cobbles set in a dark brown clay matrix (U.9). Unit 9 covers U.1, extending from the latter's top to an undetermined point below that wall's base (continuing at least 0.15m below the bottom of U.1). Construction of U.4 and 9, therefore, predates the raising of U.1. It may well be that these entities are parts of a ca. 1.7m-wide terrace intended to bolster Str. AN-2nd's downsloping side and to create an elevated living/working space perched above the depression's upper ascents. Unit 1, the building's southwestern footing, would then have been set on to U.9 fill, retained by U.4. Working within this interpretive framework, we would attribute U.4's spotty preservation to post-abandonment disruptive processes, e.g., erosion and/or stone-robbing.

In general, Str. AN-2nd is a surface-level building that measures 4m northeast-southwest, is aligned ca. 333 degrees, and contains at least two compartments set in a northwest-southeast line. The putative northwest room was not uncovered while its southeastern counterpart is surfaced with a mix of earth and stone and covers 3.6m². Passage between these chambers may have been through a 0.4m-wide door in the southeast room's west corner. The narrowness of this passage, however, may have made it more suitable for the movement of air than people. All

Str. AN-2nd architectural components are fashioned of unmodified river cobbles bound together with a brown mud mortar. No horizontal courses were noted and only U.2 possessed rocks that were generally placed with their naturally flatter aspects oriented outwards (to the southeast in this case). Overall, Str. AN-2nd conveys an impression of casual construction. Rock sizes average between 0.15x0.2m to 0.22x0.24m.

Time Span 3

Str. AN-2nd was converted to a platform during this interval, U.1, 3, and 7 transformed from footings to basal facings when the room(s) they contained was filled with a mixture of earth and cobbles (U.8). Unit 2, the putative room-divider within Str. AN-2nd, was probably completely buried at this time. Unit 3 was also apparently covered by the addition of U.5, the new northeastern facing. The latter assumes a radically different alignment from its predecessor (oriented 358-8 degrees). The considerable variation in U.5's azimuths reflects its wandering course over approximately 7.2m northward from its junction with Str. AN-2nd's east corner. This distance is covered in three increments, 1.9m, 3.2m, and 2.1m long from south to north, each terminated by 0.3m step-outs to the east. The southernmost U.5 component is a single riser faced with large cobbles (averaging 0.3x0.4m). Further north, construction shifts, two low, narrow terraces replacing the single ascent. The lower riser consists of, primarily, faced tuff blocks mixed with a few cobbles while the second ascending step is fashioned from a more even mix of masonry and river-worn stones. On the north, U.5 junctions with U.11, a poorly preserved remnant of an east-west running wall that probably defines the northern limit of the newly enlarged Str. AN-1st. Unit 11 seems to have been built using a mix of cut blocks and cobbles. All U.5 and 11 stones are set in a brown mud mortar. Rock sizes average 0.3x0.4m to 0.37x0.45m.

The changes in construction and orientation noted in U.5, coupled with its relation to U.3, suggests that the former construction was added late in Str. AN's occupation sequence, linking it to possibly three previously distinct buildings to the north (each corresponding to a shift in U.5's construction and alignment). The presence of the steps/terraces on the north implies that the entire structure was a platform by this point. The absence of any comparable modifications on the southwest and southeast directly linked to Str. AN-1st suggests that the builders were concerned with creating a united front for their new edifice on the side not facing the declivity. The sporadic use of cut blocks in U.5 supports the notion that Str. AN-1st's eastern flank was intended to be its formal, "public," facade.

Units 10 and 6 are the southwestern and southeastern elements of a casually constructed terrace built further into the depression from Str. AN-1st, probably to slow erosion on the downsloping side where the building was most vulnerable to this process. Units 6 and 10 are each ca. 0.5m wide by 0.2m high. Unit 10 is backed on the northeast by a fill composed of cobbles set in a dark brown earth matrix (U.12); U.6 and its immediate environs were insufficiently cleared to determine the nature of the fill intervening between this construction and U.7, ca. 2.5m to the northwest. Unit 4 would have still risen a reconstructed 0.43m above the U.10/12 terrace. Unit 6 and 10's full lengths were not revealed. Unit 10 may well have continued northwest, fronting and preserving the downsloping flanks of the newly united Str. AN-1st, the northeast face of which is fronted by U.5. Units 6 and 10 are built of medium-size river cobbles (averaging 0.18x0.25m), set in a brown mud mortar, and positioned without attention to horizontal courses or the placement of their naturally flatter aspects. The latter is

oriented roughly 341 degrees, the former being aligned 77 degrees.

Structure AN-1st, therefore, rises 0.31m and 0.63m high on the northeast and southwest, respectively, measures approximately 6.2x7.2m (excluding U.6 and 10), and is variably aligned from 333 to 8 degrees. Access to the summit was formalized over the northern part of the eastern flank by the addition of two low risers constructed from a mix of cut blocks and cobbles. We do not know the nature of summit architecture, though it seems likely that it consisted of perishable, probably bajareque, walls raised above an earthen floor.

Time Span 4

Stratum 2, a dark brown, moderately coarse-textured, moderately hard-compacted clay, was deposited atop S.1 following Str. AN-1st's abandonment. Stratum 2 is 0.18-0.34m thick and is surmounted by 0.1-0.13m of S.3, a dark brown to black, moderately coarse, moderately fine-textured, root-rich clay. Strata 2 and 3 likely represent different elements of the same layer distinguished by increasing organic content as modern ground surface is approached. These earth levels bury all but the uppermost portions of Str. AN-1st and contain moderate to very dense concentrations of stones fallen from final-phase architecture (F.1). Feature 1 extends for at least 1.38m southwest of U.10 and 0.6m northeast of U.5.

The Southeast Depression

The Southeast Depression covers ca. 25x38m and ranges in depth from 1.1-1.35m. This basin-shaped declivity is irregularly shaped and bounded by slopes that ascend gradually to the terrace summit. Two perpendicular trenches were laid out to bisect the depression across its approximate center; Subop. 43I extends 42m from the terrace summit on the north to roughly 4m north of the declivity's southern edge (oriented 10 degrees); Subop. 43J intersects Subop. 43I, extending 33m from the west to east margins of the depression (oriented 280 degrees). Blocks measuring 1x1m were excavated at intervals within these trenches, spacing determined by the nature of encountered deposits and our desire to reconstruct the depression's original profile. Most commonly, two adjacent blocks were dug simultaneously to get a better sense of the stratigraphy and facilitate excavation at increasing depths. A total of 15 blocks were dug to depths of as much as 1.58m below modern ground surface in Subop. 43I, 13 blocks being dug to a maximum depth of 1.51m below ground level in Subop. 43J. In addition to these excavations, five 1x1m blocks were excavated in Subop. 43K, 4.4m southwest of Str. AN, in the quadrant defined by the northern and eastern arms of Subops. 43I and J. These contiguous tests were sunk to maximum depths of 1.9m below modern ground surface to evaluate the unusual stratigraphic relations and dense artifact deposits encountered on the depression's northeast margin. In all, these investigations were intended to: 1.) establish when this portion of the terrace summit had been excavated; 2.) reconstruct the shape and dimensions of the original depression; 3.) and, provide data from which inferences concerning the declivity's function might be made.

Time Spans

<u>Time</u> <u>Span</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Date</u>
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1	Soil Deposition	S.1, 5	MPrecl?
2	Excavating the Depression	S.1	LCLI,II?
3	Deposition of Cultural Material in and near the Southeast Depression	S.6-7, 8-9	LCLII
4	Initial Natural In-filling of the Depression	S.2-4, 10	LCLII,III?
5	Continued Natural Infilling of the Depression	S.10	LCLIII

Time Span 1

Stratum 1 is a yellowish-brown (10YR-5/3) clay containing variable quantities of sand and, occasionally, sand and gravel lenses. This earth level was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.76m in block B5 (Subop, 43I) near the declivity's center and was encountered at the base of every excavation carried to sufficient depth within the depression (S.1's base, however, lies outside excavation limits). Though not culturally sterile, artifact frequencies within this entity are considerably lower than those characteristic of overlying soil layers. Some of these items almost certainly percolated downwards through the permeable barrier separating S.1 from the soils covering it. Recovery of Middle Preclassic ceramic diagnostics from S.1, predating by at least a millennium the earliest material unearthed elsewhere in the Southeast Depression, suggests that there was an extensive human presence in the immediate area when this layer was deposited. Most Middle Preclassic ceramics derive from the western and northeastern margins of the depression outside the deepest portion of the ancient excavation. This distribution may reflect the localized nature of early habitation and/or the loss of portions of the settlement when the depression was originally dug.

Lenses 0.05-0.16m thick of dark brown (10YR-4/3) clay flecked with white inclusions are incorporated in S.1 near the depression's northern edge (S.5; recorded in blocks B8/9, Subop. 43I). These layers are exposed for no more than 0.42m long and appear most commonly as isolated deposits embedded in S.1. Their significance is uncertain.

Time Span 2

Stratum 1 descends over an irregular slope towards the center from all excavated sides. The drop is 2.15m over 17m east-to-west, 2m over 13m west-to-east, and (minimally) 2.25m over 25m north-to-south and 1.25m over 17.75m south-to-north (the deepest point in the depression was not exposed along the north-south line of Subop. 43I). A particularly precipitous decline is noted in the approximate center of the declivity, S.1 dropping a reconstructed 1.07m over 1.25m south-to-north and not regaining its original height until approximately 8.75m further north (seen in Blocks A5/4, B1/2, 4/5, Subop. 43I). No natural processes operating in the area today, nor inferable for the past, are likely to have created such a concave feature with these outlines. Instead, we argue that S.1 was dug into by La Sierra's ancient inhabitants. Stratum 1 clays may have been mined for use in pottery manufacture (see Str. 43-2-1st) and/or inclusion in structure fill. Whatever the case, a considerable amount of material was removed from the

immediate area, leaving in its wake a declivity that encompasses roughly 28m in diameter and is 1.25-2.25m deep.

Time Span 3

Soon after the aforementioned excavations had ceased, the northeast portion of the depression became a dumping spot for large quantities of cultural material, especially artifacts and ash. Stratum 8, a dark gray-brown to brown (10YR-4/2 and 5/3) clay incorporating significant amounts of ash, sherds, and dispersed carbon flecks, overlies S.1 in this area by 0.26-0.72m, its thickness generally increasing with distance away from (southwest of) the depression's northeast edge. Stratum 1 descends 0.25m over ca. 4.9m northeast-to-southwest while S.8's top initially drops 0.16m over 2m in the same direction. The top of S.8 then rises on the southwest to 0.03m above its highest northeastern-most point. Stratum 8 grades into S.9, a grayish-brown (10YR-4/2 and 5/2) ashy soil incorporating large numbers of artifacts, especially ceramic sherds. This earth level is 0.14-0.98m thick, S.9 growing thinner with increasing distance southwest from the declivity's edge. Both S.8 and 9 seem to be parts of the same midden, piled up to a total depth of 0.93-1.07m on top of S.1. A northeastward continuation of S.9 seems to underlie Str. AN-2nd, ca. 2.4m upslope atop the depression's lip (designated S.1 in those excavations).

No comparable deposits were recorded elsewhere within the Southeast Depression, though S.6 and 7, exposed in block B20 of Subop. 43I, represent another artifact-rich trash deposit located approximately 11m north of the declivity's northern edge. Stratum 6, a grayish brown to dark brown (10YR-5/2 and 4/2) ashy soil covers S.1 by 0.29-0.32m and, in turn, grades into S.7, a dark gray (10YR-4/1) ash that blankets S.6 by 0.67-0.8m. No soil level intervenes between S.7 and current ground surface. Strata 6 and 7 appear to be remnants of a trash deposit that sealed S.1 by at least 0.96-1.08m (see Subop. 43G).

Strata 6-7, on the one hand, and S.8-9, on the other, are exposed in two areas separated by ca. 23m of unexcavated terrain. Inclusion of both sets of soil levels in the same time span is based, therefore, on their similar stratigraphic relations to S.1, directly overlying this soil, and the predominance of ceramics diagnostic of the same time period in these widely separated middens (LCLII).

Time Span 4

Stratum 1, in most excavated portions of the Southeast Depression, is sealed by S.10, a black (10YR-3/2) clay containing an abundance of artifacts. The principal exception to this pattern is noted immediately north of the declivity's center (Blocks B1 and 4/5 in Subop. 43I) where a sequence of thin (generally 0.04-0.18m thick) lenses intervene between S.1 and 10 (S.2-4). Stratum 2 is a brown (10YR-5/2 and 5/3) clay mottled with slightly lighter and darker elements of underlying S.1 and overlying S.10, respectively. This level apparently seals S.1 and, in blocks B4/5, is succeeded by S.3, a 0.04m-thick lens of brown clay (10YR-5/3 and 6/4) distinguished by the quantities of small white stone fragments it contains. Stratum 2, in turn, buries S.3 by as much as 0.5m. In block B1, S.2 alternates with S.4, a very similar clay that is slightly darker (tending towards 10YR-4/2, "dark grayish-brown"). Artifacts are found in S.2-4 and the lower segments of S.10 where it rests directly on S.1, but quantities tend to be small.

These slight soil variations are not recorded elsewhere in the Southeast Depression

excavations, hinting at a localized soil formation processes operating near the declivity's center. It may be that the deposition of S.2-4 coincides with the trash accumulation represented by S.6-9. There is insufficient stratigraphic data to confirm or deny the contemporaneity of these processes. The two episodes are placed in different time spans because it was convenient to distinguish between what seem to be two different processes, i.e., purposeful trash deposition and the incidental inclusion of cultural material in soils gradually washing into the Southeast Depression. Whether this potentially significant behavioral distinction also has temporal meaning remains uncertain.

Time Span 5

Continued deposition of S.10 is the primary activity that occurred within the Southeast Depression from TS.4 onwards. This black clay eventually reaches total thicknesses of between 0.44-1.55m (minimal) in areas exposed in Subops. 43I and 43J, 0.42-0.6m in Subop. 43K (blocks D1-5). Artifacts are plentiful throughout S.10, indicating that cultural material derived from surrounding deposits washed into, and was incorporated within, S.10 throughout its formation. No clear signs of stone architecture, including tumbled building debris, were embedded in S.10, hinting at a paucity of substantial constructions in the declivity's immediate environs throughout TS.5. That LCL III materials predominate in S.10's upper reaches indicates that the depression was no longer being mined at this time.

Structure 43-1

Structure 43-1 occupies land that ascends gradually from east to west on the upper slopes of the Central Depression's western flank. Structures 43-2 and 43-3 are in a similar topographic position ca. 3m and 11.5m to the northeast, respectively. None of these buildings was originally mapped as a distinct edifice, all of them appearing as scatterings of stone that barely protruded above ground surface. Excavation of Str. 43-1, therefore, was initiated to see what, if any, architecture might be the source of these rocks, part of a general study designed to date the creation of the Central Depression and determine the activities pursued here. Investigation of Str. 43-1, directed by C. Wells, was carried out as part of Subop. 43A, 34m² being cleared in the course of this work. Digging was carried down to depths of 0.62m below modern ground surface outside construction and 0.71m beneath ground level into and through architectural fill, revealing two building phases.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1,2	-	MPrecl, LCLI,II
2	Strs. 43-Sub1,2	U.1,19	-	-	LCLII?
3	Str. 43-1-2nd	U.2-4, 6-7,	-	-	LCLIII

			10, 14, 17-18		
4	Str.43-1-1st	U.5, 8-9, 11- 13, 15-16, 20-21	-	F.1	LCLIII, EPC?
5	-	-	S.2,3	F.2	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1 is a fine-textured, moderately soft-compacted, light gray (10YR-7/1) ashy soil that underlies construction and yielded a considerable quantity of artifacts. Numerous sherds, in particular, were found lying flat near the S.1 and 2 boundary, these fragments being especially notable downslope (east of) Str. 43-1-1st's eastern facing (U.2). Stratum 1 ascends 0.31m over 2.58m east-to-west before leveling off, rising only an additional 0.22m over the remaining 7.43m east-west that it was exposed in Subop. 43A. This earth level was revealed to a maximum thickness of 0.18m, its base lying outside excavation limits. The lower ca. 0.14m of S. 2, a very dark gray (10YR-3/N), moderately hard-compacted clay, also underlies construction and debris fallen from final-phase architecture (F.2), suggesting that this soil's deposition is earlier than, at least, TS.3. This segment of S.2, especially east (downslope) of U.2 is also rich in artifacts, primarily pottery sherds.

Middle Preclassic diagnostic ceramics comprise a very minor component of materials assigned to TS.1. These sherds, dating to the earliest known valley occupation, most likely washed in from deposits predating S.1 and 2. Items indicative of Late Classic II and, to a lesser extent, Late Classic I occupation are more common in S.1 and the lowest portions of S.2.

Time Span 2

Two apparently unrelated segments of stone construction underlie Str. 43-1-1st architecture. Unit 1 (part of Str. 43-Sub1) is a ca. 0.3m-high by 0.45m-wide cobble wall that was uncovered over a length of 1.5m beneath Str. 43-1-1st's approximate center. This element articulates with no known construction, certainly not its presumed contemporary, U.19, situated 3.9m to the northwest (part of Str. 43-Sub2). The latter stands a preserved 0.12m high, is 0.2m wide, and was revealed over 1m of its total length. Units 1 and 19 have very different alignments, the former being oriented due north, the latter ca. 315 degrees. Inclusion of both entities TS.2 is based on their nearly identical depths and stratigraphic position beneath Str. 43-1-1st architecture. Though only small glimpses of these constructions are provided in Subop. 43A, they are probably parts of footings from two surface-level edifices.

Time Span 3

Structure 43-1's construction history is as complex as its final form. It may well be that Str. 43-1 began its use-life in TS.3 as a surface-level edifice that was transformed into a platform near the end of that interval. Evidence tentatively suggesting this interpretation includes: a cobble pavement (U.17) measuring 1.6x2.23m contained by U.4 and 6 but located ca. 0.3m

below the tops of these units; the way in which U.14 (the northern perimeter wall) steps in 0.4m south to link the bulk of this construction with U.3 on the east; and, the relative shallowness of U.15 and 16 vis a vis other Str. 43-1-1st architectural elements (the bases of U.15 and 16 are 0.15-0.31m above those of all other Str. 43-1-1st components). Unit 17's stratigraphic position, equivalent to the bases of U.4 and 6 but well below their preserved tops, implies that this pavement covered part of an early, surface-level room. The inset portion of U.14, abutting U.3 on the east, looks like it was tacked on to fill in the 0.8m separating U.3 and the main body of U.14 to the west. The distance spanned by the putative addition (0.8m) is commensurate with other doorways noted on Str. 43-1-1st and elsewhere at Late and Terminal Classic La Sierra. It may well be, therefore, that U.14 was originally breached by an entryway in its northeast corner, that passage being sealed by an addition to U.14 prior to filling the enclosure with earth (U.12, see below). The base of U.18, a stone-faced and -surfaced shelf located in the enclosure to which the inferred door provided access, rests at about the same depth as the bases of the surrounding room walls, implying that both the shelf and the foundations were initially raised above the same earthen floor. Unit 18 may have continued to protrude slightly above the newly elevated summit after the enclosure in which it is found was filled in, but the depth of its foundation implies that it was not set on this elevated surface. Finally, U.15 and 16 are positioned well up in the platform's fill (U.12), indicating that they were added relatively late in the building sequence after all other elements were in place. Their stratigraphic positions, above inferred ancient ground level, imply that these footings were built to subdivide the summit of an existing platform.

Structure 43-1-2nd, therefore, would have been a surface-level building the rooms of which are defined by cobble footings (U.2-4, 6-7, 10, and 14) 0.15-0.41m high and 0.24-0.56m wide (U.4, the southern foundation, was not fully exposed). This edifice would have contained three relatively large enclosures whose floors are generally surfaced with earth. The eastern room is bounded by U.2-4 and 6, covers approximately 8.7m², and, contrary to the norm, is partially paved with cobbles (in its southwest corner, U.17). Immediately to the west, two enclosures are located in a north-south line, the northernmost covering ca.3m² and containing a ca. 0.26m high shelf (U.18) in its southwest corner that measures 1.4m long by 0.5m wide. The southern room encompasses at least 4m², its southern flank lying beyond excavation limits. Movement among rooms was virtually unimpeded and at least one capacious (0.8m wide) doorway located in the building's north wall provided access to the interior. Structure 43-1-2nd measures a reconstructed 5x6m and is oriented ca. 273 degrees, 30 minutes.

Time Span 4

Structure 43-1-1st was created when the northern entryway was sealed, the earlier foundations were converted into basal facings, and what had been room interiors filled with a dark gray (10YR-3/N; U.12) clay identical to S.2. Unit 12's upper surface probably served as the unpaved summit floor. The structure now stood 0.2-0.4m high, tops of footings that previously divided the interior into distinct enclosures fulfilling the same role on the platform's summit. The addition of U.15 and 16 at this time served to further subdivide summit space, creating a warren of four interconnected cubicles (Rooms I-IV) separated by cobble footings, 0.18-0.36m high by 0.24-0.4m wide, that likely supported bajareque upper walls (U.5-7, 15, and 16). The easternmost room (Room I) runs the full-north-south width of the building, measuring 0.8x4.3m, and was entered through a 1.35m-wide gap between U.4 and 15 in its southwest corner. Said

doorway provides direct access to Room II, an L-shaped cubicle that covers approximately 2.3m² (the U.17 floor lies buried beneath Room II). The offset lines of U. 5 and 6 frame a 0.4m-wide passage in Room II's north wall. This narrow breach links Rooms II and III, the latter being a more commodious L-shaped room containing ca. 5.5m². The U.18 shelf may have continued to rise 0.05-0.1m above the summit in Room III's southwest corner. Room IV, directly west and south of Room III, was entered through a 0.6m-wide passage between U.6 and 16 that linked these two cubicles. The southern side of Room IV was not clearly defined, the enclosure covering 1.25m east-west by (minimally) 2m north-south. Time restrictions limited investigation of the building's southern flank, and the manner in which U.4 articulates with U.10, the western facing, remains uncertain.

Built against the platform's west flank are two surface-level cubicles (Rooms V and VI) that use U.10 to delimit their eastern side. The cobble foundations outlining Rooms V and VI (U. 8/9 and U.11/13, respectively) are fairly substantial, measuring 0.2-0.38m high by 0.3-0.55m wide. Room V, the northern of the two adjoining enclosures, covers ca. 1.2m², its north wall breached by a 0.4m-wide gap. Room VI, its southern neighbor, was entered through a 0.55m-wide door in its northwest corner and encompasses 0.6m². The relatively late temporal placement of Rooms V and VI within the construction sequence is based on the tenuous argument that, if they had been contemporary with the Str. 43-1-1st's surface-level version, they would have been connected to the latter's interior through doors set into U.10. The orientation of known passageways leading outward weakly implies that the adjacent building's interior was already filled in by the time Rooms V and VI were constructed.

In addition to these more-or-less clear construction elements, there are subtle indications that Room III's southern arm (between U. 15 and 16) once contained a shallow pit (F.1). Feature 1 is identified by a localized concentration of stones that diverge from surrounding tumbled architectural debris in being consistently tilted down west-to-east and resting 0.18m below the reconstructed summit surface. No other signs of a pit outline were noted nor is the soil contained within F.1 distinct from the surrounding fill, nor is it distinguishable from S.2 which covers it. Consequently, F.1 is only tentatively identified as a concavity measuring 0.34m across and 0.18m deep. The density of stone found within the putative depression's bounds, coupled with their consistent orientation, suggests that the rocks in question played some role in whatever purpose F.1 might have served. What that function was, and whether the feature is contemporary with Str. 43-1-1st's principal use period or postdates it, remain unknown.

Structure 43-1-1st stands 0.2-0.4m high, retains its earlier orientation and measures, by the conclusion of TS.3, 6x6.2m (including Rooms V and VI). The summit supports four rooms covering 2.3m², 2.5m² (minimum), 3.4m², and 5.5m², the only built-in furniture being a low stone shelf located in the northern enclosure (Room III). The two surface-level rooms raised against the platform's western flank encompass 1.2m² and 0.6m²; both lack built-in furniture.

Located 0.2m north of Str. 43-1-1st's northeast corner is a partially uncovered complex consisting of a circular feature and low cobble wall (U. 21 and 20, respectively). Unit 21 is a curved cobble wall ca. 0.1m high and 0.2m wide that defines the southern half of what is probably a circle with an interior diameter of 0.85m. The circle's interior is surfaced with earth. Extending 1m south from the arc's east side is U.20, a comparably tall cobble wall measuring ca. 0.35m across. Units 20 and 21 are not linked to Str. 43-1-1st, though their elevations suggest that the two entities are contemporary. The U.20/21 complex seems to have been part of a surface-level construction the form and dimensions of which are unknown.

Time Span 5

Deposition of S.2 continued after Str. 43-1-1st's abandonment, this soil level eventually reaching thicknesses of 0.22-0.32m. Stratum 3, a black (10YR-2.5/N), moderately hard-compacted clay, covers S.2 by 0.07-0.14m, S.2 and 3 together covering almost all final-phase architecture. Stones dislodged from construction are found overlying and extending out from all sides of Str. 43-1-1st (F.2). Feature 2 is particularly extensive and dense on the east (downsloping) side of Str. 43-1-1st, extending at least 2.54m in this direction away from U.2. Many fewer rocks tumbled out of place on the west, F.2 here consisting of a light scatter of cobbles found up to 0.45m distant from construction (U.8).

Structure 43-2

Structure 43-2 was erected over a gentle east-to-west ascent on the Central Depression's western edge (the land in the building's immediate vicinity currently rises 0.71m over 8.02m east-west). Structures 43-1 and 43-3 are 3m southwest and 3m north/northeast of Str. 43-2's principal construction, respectively. Excavation conducted here as part of Subop. 43B cleared 34m² of prehistoric deposits and achieved depths of as much as 0.74m below modern ground surface outside construction and 0.59m below ground level within Str. 43-2's confines. This work, directed by C.Wells, revealed a single building phase.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1,2	F.1	LCLI,II
2	Str. 43-2-1st	U.1-10 -	-		LCLIII
3	-	-	S.2,3	F.2,3	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a light gray (10YR-7/1), soft-compacted, fine-textured ashy soil rich in artifacts, underlies all exposed construction. This earth level ascends 0.68m over 6.9m east-to-west, the steepest slope occurring over the easternmost 3.9m where S.1 rises 0.55m. Stratum 1 was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.32m, its base lying beyond excavation limits. Approximately 0.15m of S.2, a very dark gray (10YR-3/N), moderately hard-compacted, moderately fine-textured clay, was laid down on top of S.1 prior to Str. 43-2-1st's construction (this amount of S.2 runs under components of that edifice). A dense concentration of ceramic and bajareque fragments is embedded in the lower portion of S.2 just off Str. 43-2's east (downslope) flank (F.1). Feature 1 extends at least 1m east of U.4 and may be part of a trash deposit that accumulated along with S.2 immediately prior to the raising of Str. 43-2-1st.

Time Span 2

Structure 43-2-1st is a roughly circular surface-level building to which is attached a low platform and around which cluster the remnants of other constructions raised on ancient ground surface. The circular portion of the edifice (U.1) has a more-or-less regular perimeter defined by 0.15-0.3m-high cobble walls that probably served, primarily, as foundations for bajareque upper constructions. The principal unconformity along U.1's margin is a ca. 1m-wide by 0.2-0.9m deep indentation seemingly excised from the building's western flank. The thickness of U.1's walls is highly variable, ranging from 0.2m on the narrow east and west sides to 2m on the south. These discrepancies result, in large measure, from U.1's irregularly shaped earthen-floored interior. This seemingly "open" area (i.e., lacking clear signs of stone construction) assumes a shape that approximates, albeit very roughly, a trapezoid. A 0.7m-deep salient cut into the interior of U.1's southern face (the indent measuring 1.1m across at its widest point) lines up with the U.3 floor (see below). Units 2 and 3 consist of cobble floors set within and slightly below the top of U.1's south wall. The latter covers roughly 0.6x0.9m (measured across the center) while the former is 0.4m wide on its southern edge, extends northward 0.35m at which point it measures only 0.25m across. Both U.2 and 3's southern margins are coterminous with U.1's external edge, the floors projecting northward into the hearting of the circular perimeter wall. Unit 4, a 0.4m-wide, by, maximally, 0.2m-high cobble wall, projects 0.6-0.8m eastward from U.1's eastern flank.

Unit 1, therefore, has a diameter of roughly 5m and was raised over a gradual ascent of ca. 0.36m over 4.2m from east to west (indicated by differences in the basal elevations of U.1's eastern and western foundations). The construction is delimited by relatively narrow (0.2-0.75m across) footings on all sides save the south. The, maximally, 2m wide southern portion of U.1 may have served as more than a simple foundation for perishable upper walls, possibly as a shelf. Access to the interior may have been achieved by traversing U.3 and/or stepping over and across the particularly low and narrow eastern and western U.1 wall segments. Unit 1's earthen-floored interior contains large quantities of artifacts, especially pottery sherds, and encompasses roughly 6m². This space may have been dug down below ground surface in antiquity. This interpretation is suggested by the distribution of tumbled stone architectural debris within the area (F.2). Feature 2 rocks tilt down from U.1's margins towards the interior, many of them coming to rest at levels below the flanking walls (especially notable on the west). Many of the F.2 cobbles were even found sitting atop S.1. There is no evidence of post-abandonment processes that might have produced the observed distribution of F.2 stones. We tentatively surmise, therefore, that the floor of U.1's earthen interior was roughly 0.12m below ancient ground level. The putative floor, like the rest of the building, retained the east-to-west ascent of the surrounding terrain, rising a reconstructed 0.25m over a horizontal distance of 3.54m. The general incline noted in U.1's construction approximates the ascent attested to in underlying S.1, implying that the slope over which that ash deposit was laid down remained relatively unchanged between TS.1 and 2.

Units 5-7 define the south, east, and north flanks of a ca. 0.1m-high, cobble-faced platform that projects approximately 2.2m east from U.1's northeast edge. This construction vaguely resembles a right triangle, its southern and eastern facings (U.5 and 6) meeting to form a nearly 90 degree angle while the northern flank (U.7) slopes in from the northeast corner westward to its junction with U.1. The low, earthen-floored platform thus formed is wider (1.3m

across) on the east than where it joins U.1 on the west (narrowing to 0.6m across). Unit 5 is aligned 96 degrees while U.7 is oriented 76 degrees.

Units 8-10 are three cobble walls that come as close as 0.2m north of U.1 and 0.4m north of U.7. Unit 8 is 0.9m long, 0.2m wide, and is aligned 338 degrees. Units 9 and 10 are two parallel constructions 0.2m east of U.8, consisting of cobble walls less than 0.2m apart. Unit 9, the northern of the two entities, is 1.85m long by 0.65m wide, its southern neighbor measuring 2.1m long by 0.2m wide. Both U.9 and 10 are oriented 76 degrees, paralleling U.7, which is 0.4m to the south. All three units are 0.08-0.15m high. Units 8-10 are probably components of a complex of surface-level constructions filling in the seemingly open space between Strs. 43-2-1st and 43-3-1st. The forms of these edifices, and whether the uncovered elements are parts of the same or distinct construction, remain unknown.

Structure 43-2-1st, therefore, is a circular building measuring ca. 5m across, defined by low cobble footings, and containing a 2m-wide (maximally) cobble shelf on the south. The earthen-floored interior of this entity may have been sunk 0.12m below ancient ground surface, this space being accessed across a stone floor recessed into the southern foundation/shelf and/or by stepping over the particularly narrow eastern and western portions of the encircling walls. Two constructions extend eastward from the circle's eastern limits; a ca. 0.1m-high, 0.6-1.3m-wide, by 2.2m-long platform and a cobble wall, located 1.6m south of the platform. The latter is 0.4m wide, 0.2m high, and 0.6-0.8m long. Lying immediately north of this complex are the remnants of one or more surface-level constructions. All architecture uncovered in Subop. 43B consists primarily of medium-size cobbles set in a brown mud mortar and with their naturally flatter aspects oriented outwards (the U.1 stones have flat face looking both towards the exterior and earthen-floored interior). Cut blocks are scattered throughout U.1; the southern flank of the indent on U.1's west side is faced with masonry blocks.

Time Span 3

Deposition of S.2 resumed after Str. 43-2-1st's abandonment, eventually becoming as much as 0.3m thick. Stratum 3, a black (10YR-2.5/N), moderately fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted clay, overlies S.2 by 0.08-0.15m and comprises the humus horizon. Stones dislodged from final-phase architecture (F.2 and 3) are embedded in S.3 and S.2's upper segment. Feature 2 consists of those rocks found in some numbers throughout the interior of U.1 while F.3 refers to stones located beyond the confines of Str. 43-2-1st. The latter generally consists of a light scattering of cobbles, somewhat denser off the downslope (east) flank, that extend for at least 1m away from TS.2 architecture. Though artifacts are plentiful everywhere, and at every depth, in and around Str. 43-2-1st, particularly dense concentrations of cultural debris were associated with F.3 off U.1's east flank between U.4 and 5 and off the south side near U.3.

Structure 43-3

Structure 43-3 is built over land that currently rises gradually 0.56m over 8.06m from east to west on the Central Depression's western margin. Its nearest neighbor is Str. 43-2, ca. 3m to the south/southwest. As noted in the description of the latter building, however, the seemingly empty space separating the two edifices was probably filled in with prehistoric constructions that are not visible on present ground surface. Excavations on and around Str. 43-3, carried out

within Subop. 43C, cleared 35m² and were pursued to maximum depths of 0.97m below current ground level outside construction and 0.82m below ground surface within and below architecture. Two building phases were identified in the course of this work which was overseen by C. Wells.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1,2	-	LCLI,II?
2	Str. 43-3-2nd	U.1-7	-	F.1	LCLI,II
3	Str. 43-3-1st	U.8-15	S.2	-	LCLIII
4	-	-	S.2,3	F.2	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a light gray (10YR-7/1), fine-textured, soft-compacted ashy clay, was found underlying all construction. This earth level was revealed to a maximum thickness of 0.29m (its base was not encountered) and ascends 0.84m over 5.36m east-to-west. Despite exposure of S.1 in only two, segments separated by 3.96m, it appears that the layer's rise does not describe a continuous, gentle slope. Instead, S.1 seems to have been truncated immediately west of U.4. The lower 0.1-0.2m of S.2, a very dark gray (10YR-3/N), moderately fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted clay, overlies S.1 and runs beneath exposed architecture. Recovery of at least a few artifacts from both layers points to a human presence in the area when these strata were being deposited.

Time Span 2

Structure 43-3-2nd is a complex of surface-level constructions partially obscured by later architecture (Str. 43-3-1st). Units 1-3 and 7 define a small room open to the east and with a stone-lined and -floored arc built into the west wall. The footings delimiting the room (U.1-3) are 0.22-0.42m wide by 0.07-0.2m high and enclose an earthen-floored space measuring approximately 1.3x1.8m and oriented 81-88 degrees. There is no eastern foundation, the 1.1m-wide gap between U.1 and 3 on the north and south creating an ample passageway to the cubicle's interior. The northwest room corner is taken up with an arc defined by a cobble wall ca. 0.2m wide by 0.1m high (U.7). This curved space encompasses 0.62x0.84m (interior dimensions) and is covered with a cobble pavement (all included in U.7). The stone surface seems to be at roughly the same level as the room's earthen floor to the east, the rocks comprising U.7's arc resting directly on the pavement. Similar arc/pavement combinations were recorded ca. 0.25m north of the U. 1 and 2 junction and 0.75m north of U.1 near the latter's east end (U.5 and 6, respectively). Both U.5 and 6 are nearly identical to U.7; i.e., cobble walls 0.18-

0.36m wide by 0.1-0.25m high defining arcs whose interior dimensions range from 0.66x0.76m (U.5) to 1.4m deep by, very roughly, 1.6m across (U.6, this element's southwest flank is missing, possibly dislocated by later construction). The area contained within each arc is paved with cobbles set even with ancient ground surface. Unlike U.7, however, U.5 and 6 are not incorporated into surviving walls but seem to be isolated and face different directions; U.5 open to the south/southeast, U.6 open more to the east. Feature 1 may be the remnants of a comparable, albeit larger, stone arc open to the east and located 0.54m west of U.7 and possibly abutting U.6. Unfortunately, F.1 was so thoroughly obscured, and possibly damaged, by later construction that we cannot determine its dimensions or be certain how it was floored.

Units 5, 6, and the room all cluster around enigmatic U.4. Unit 4, occupying the narrow space between U.1 and 5, consists of two adjoining cut stone blocks, slanting down at ca. 45 degree angles from east to west and north to south, converging on their downslope margins. The larger of the two rocks (0.1x0.4x0.42m) is on the east, the smaller (0.09x0.23x0.29m) on the north. A large (0.25x0.41m), flat-laid cobble rests on U.4's eastern margin. Unit 4's base is 0.16-0.41m below, its top 0.04-0.34m above, the bases of neighboring TS.2 constructions. These discrepancies imply that U.4 extends down into a depression around which U.1, 5, and 6 were built. The absence of S.1 at appropriate depths in the putative pit defined by U.4 on the east suggests that this ashy soil level was partially removed during U.4's construction. Unit 4 is subsequently filled with S.2, architectural debris fallen from Str. 43-3-1st (F.2) coming to rest at depths no lower than 0.18m below U.4's top (equivalent to the uppermost points of the two masonry blocks). Though far from clear, U.4's reconstructed depth is 0.28m and it may have measured as much as 1m across east-west by 0.8m north-south.

Structure 43-3-2nd is more a collection of (probably) related but not architecturally integrated small surface- and subsurface-level constructions clustered within an area measuring at least 4x5m. The components were raised over a gradual east-to-west ascent, no effort apparently having been made to level ground surface prior to erecting U.1-7 and F.1 (Feature 1's base, the westernmost TS.2 construction, is 0.53m above that of U.1 on the east). The most distinctive feature of the complex consists of the three (possibly as many as four) stone arcs resting on and containing cobble pavements. Though the three best preserved examples are similarly built and have comparable dimensions (0.66x0.76m, 0.62x0.84m, and 1.4x1.6m), they vary in which way they face and whether or not they are integrated within a larger construction. An earthen-floored room (covering 1.3x1.8m on its interior), delimited by low cobble foundations, incorporates one of the arcs into its western foundation; the other semi-circular entities are scattered to the west and north. All of these elements, in turn, surround what seems to have been an earthen pit defined by three rocks two of which are cut stone blocks that slant down into the depression from the east and north. No distinctive soils or other rocks mark the declivity's boundaries, the depression's dimensions of 0.8x1m across and 0.28m deep are inferred from its few surviving stone components and the position of contemporary architecture and later construction debris.

All TS.2 stone architecture was built using medium to large cobbles (0.14x0.21m to 0.4x0.52m), bound together with a brown mud mortar, and set in a single course. Two cut blocks are incorporated into U.4 and a single masonry fragment was recorded at the U.2/3 junction. In general, some effort was devoted to orienting the naturally flatter aspects of river-worn stones towards the interior of the southern room and the arcs.

Time Span 3

It is not certain how much, if any, of the Str. 43-3-2nd complex remained exposed during this interval. Units 6, 7, and F.1 were at least partially buried by TS.3 architecture, though the U.1-3 room, U.5 arc, and U.4 pit were not obscured by Str. 43-3-1st's construction. Nevertheless, The tops of these five entities usually fall out below the bases of Str. 43-3-1st's easternmost (furthest downslope) components (U.12 and 13; sometimes as much as 0.25m of S.2 intervenes between these building elements), implying that even portions of TS.2 architecture that were not built over had ceased to be used prior to Str. 43-3-1st's erection. Unit 13's base does extend 0.21m below U.4's top but rests 0.25m above the reconstructed base of that pit. Such a stratigraphic relation implies that U.13 was built after U.4 had begun to fill in, again suggesting a temporal gap separating Strs. 43-3-2nd and 43-3-1st. How long this interval may have been is presently unknown, though it was of sufficient duration to allow approximately 0.25m of S.2 to accumulate.

Structure 43-3-1st is a surface-level room that overlaps, and is built slightly west (upslope) from, Str. 43-3-2nd. The former apparently began as a single compartment demarcated by cobble foundations that are 0.25-0.4m wide by 0.1-0.2m high (U.8-11). All perimeter walls, save the southern, conform to a common alignment (359/89 degrees; the southern foundation (U.10) is oriented 113 degrees). The enclosure's earthen-floored interior could be attained by passing through a 0.6m-wide gap in the eastern footing (U.11). The room itself covers 1.6x3m (measured across the center) and may have contained a bench/shelf built against its south wall. Evidence for the latter construction consists solely of a 0.12m-high cobble wall (U.14) that currently describes a sinuous course as it runs between the western and eastern foundations (U.9 and 11). There is no sign of a stone paving backing U.14 on the south and identification of this entity as a bench/shelf facing is admittedly tentative. *If* it did serve this function, the construction would have been 1.6m long by 0.6-1.4m wide.

Subsequently, Str. 43-3-1st was expanded downslope (eastward) through the addition of U.12 and 13. The latter is a casually built footing that describes a winding course from its corner with U.12 on the north to its junction with U.11 ca. 0.35m north of the latter's southeast corner. Units 11 and 12 are 0.2-0.25m wide by 0.07-0.32m high and enclose an irregularly shaped room that is 3m north-south (measured along U.11) by 0.5-1.2m east-west. A portion of U.6's stone floor may have been incorporated into the enclosure's interior, though this is far from certain. No built-in furniture or other architectural elements were noted in this eastern extension nor is it clear how the building was entered now that the doorway in U.11 no longer faced the exterior. The U.12/13 addition diverges in orientation from the original structure's alignment; the former is sighted 280/188 degrees (not including U.13's sinuous southern portion).

Unit 15 is a wall fragment (uncovered over only 0.8m northwest-southeast) that measures approximately 0.55m across and stands a preserved 0.08m high. Located ca. 0.3m southwest of Str. 43-3-1st's southwest corner and aligned 313 degrees, U.15 is probably part of a foundation for a surface-level construction the remainder of which extends beyond excavation limits.

Structure 43-3-1st, by TS.3's conclusion, is a surface-level edifice defined by low cobble foundations that delimit two long, relatively narrow earthen-floored rooms. The western enclosures encompasses ca. 1.6x3m and may have contained a 0.12m-high bench/shelf raised against its southern wall. The eastern cubicle is irregularly shaped, due in large part to the curving portions of its eastern footing, and measures 3m long by 0.5-1.2m wide. Structure 43-3-1st, altogether, covers (maximally) 3.8x4m and is aligned 359 (western component) and 188 degrees (eastern component). Like its predecessor, Str. 43-3-1st was raised over an east-to-west

ascent; U.13's base on the east is 0.41m lower than that of the western-most building element (U.9). Remnants of at least one more surface-level construction were revealed within 0.3m of Str. 43-3-1st's southwest corner.

Time Span 3 architecture closely resembles constructions dated to TS.2; i.e., foundations and facings (U.14) composed of single to, at most, two rough courses of medium to large cobbles (0.1x0.16m to 0.4x0.45m) set in a brown mud mortar. Some effort was made to place the naturally flatter aspects of stones looking outwards and into room interiors, though this tendency is more strongly attested to in Str. 43-3-1st's original western room than it is in the eastern addition.

Time Span 4

Deposition of S.2 resumed after Str. 43-3-1st's abandonment, this earth level eventually achieving total thicknesses of as much as 0.56m. Stratum 3, a black (10YR-2.5/N), moderately fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted clay, overlies S.2 by 0.12-0.14m, the two earth levels together burying all but the uppermost stones in Str. 43-3-1st. Feature 2, a variably dense concentration of stones fallen from final-phase architecture, blankets the building and extends for 0.54m east and 0.6m west of construction. Tumbled rocks are densely packed where F.2 overlies architecture (especially between U.4 on the east and U.9 on the west), thinning out away from the edifice.

Structure 1C-1

Structure 1C-1 is just south of the Central Depression, ca. 17m southeast of Str. 43-1 and 4m east of Str. 43-5. This building is not part of the Strs. 43-1/3 aggregate. Instead, Str. 1C-1 is integrated within the irregularly organized patio-group composed of Strs. 1C-1, 1C-2, 1C-4, AK, and AJ. The land over which Str. 1C-1 was erected currently ascends 0.32m over 11.12m east-west. Approximately 30m² were cleared on and around Str. 1C-1 as part of Subop. 43D, digging being carried down to maximum depths of 0.57m below modern ground surface outside construction and 0.69m below ground level within and through architectural fill. A single building phase was identified in the course of this work which was overseen by C. Wells.

Time Span

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1,2	-	LCLII?
2	Str. 1C-1-1st	U.1-5	-	-	LCLIII, EPC
3	-	-	S.2,3	F.1	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a light gray (10YR-7/1), fine-textured, soft-compacted ashy soil, was revealed

sloping up 0.32m over 2.16m east-to-west beneath U.5. This earth level was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.35m, its base lying beyond excavation limits. An undetermined amount of S.2, a very dark gray (10YR-3/N), fine-textured, hard-compacted clay, was subsequently deposited on top of S.1. Most of Str. 1C-1-1st is set into S.2, though U.3 and 4 on the platform's summit seem to rest on S.1. Recovery of artifacts from both layers, and the high ash content of S.1, imply a significant human occupation in the immediate area while S.1-2 were being deposited. Stratum 1, in particular, may largely be the result of intensive trash disposal on the future site of Str. 1C-1-1st.

Time Span 2

Structure 1C-1-1st is a low platform defined on the east and west by substantial cobble facings (U.1 and 2). Unit 1, the eastern retaining wall, is particularly large, rising a preserved 0.58m and measuring 2.25m across east-west. Near U.1's approximate center, the facing projects a total of 0.6m eastward in two segments; the first covers 0.35m east-west and runs 0.95m southward before stepping out the remaining 0.25m to the east. This last portion then runs 0.65m south before turning west to rejoin the main north-south U.1 line. Unit 1's width seems out of proportion to Str. 1C-1-1st's size; possibly, this construction served both as a fill retaining wall and a stone-faced and -surfaced work area raised ca. 0.16m above the reconstructed summit floor. The aforementioned projection may have provided additional workspace off the edifice's east flank. Unit 2, the western facing, rises a preserved 0.35m and is much narrower than its eastern counterpart (covering roughly 0.82m east-west). A 0.4m-wide (east-west) projection partially uncovered at the northern excavation limits may have been a step appended to U.2's western flank (included in U.2).

Units 1 and 2 are backed by a fill composed of medium to small river cobbles set in a very dark gray clay matrix indistinguishable from S.2 (U.5). Only ca. 0.1m of U.5 was exposed behind (east) of U.2; the deeper probe into U.5 west of U.1 revealed that this fill directly overlies S.1 here. As noted earlier (TS.1), S.1 slopes up east-to-west under the platform and it looks like Str. 1C-1-1st's builders took advantage of this rise to reduce the labor required to raise the edifice. At least some superstructure architecture (U.3 and 4) was erected on S.1's level top while U.5 was packed in only where it was needed over the eastern ascent to level the summit.

Unit 3 is a 2.43m-long, 0.6m-wide, by 0.43m-high (above U.5's inferred top) stone wall that runs approximately east-west near the center of Str. 1C-1-1st's summit. Abutting this wall on the north is a much smaller, more casually built entity that is 0.3m wide by 0.18m high (U.4). Unit 4 was only traced for 0.65m north of U.3 before excavations ceased. These two elements probably represent a bench (U.3) to which a wall foundation was later added (U.4) to subdivide whatever room(s) may have lain north of U.3.

Structure 1C-1-1st, therefore, is a 0.35-0.48m-high stone-faced, earth-and-stone-filled platform built over an east-to-west rise in underlying S.1. The building encompasses 8.79m east-west (exclusive of the projections) and is aligned 6-12 degrees. The earthen-floored summit encompasses 5.63m east-west and may have contained a 0.43m-high bench along with a raised work area on the east. The bench appears to have been backed on the north by at least two rooms divided by a low cobble foundation. No comparable enclosures were noted on the south. Limited summit clearing, restricted largely to a 1m-wide (north-south) trench cut along the platform's approximate east-west axis, revealed very little of superstructure form, however.

All standing architecture, save for U.4, is built, primarily, of unmodified cobbles, set in a

brown mud mortar. Some effort was made to orient the naturally flatter faces of these rocks outward. One masonry block was incorporated into U.3's south facing and schist slabs were occasional noted in U.2. Rock sizes range from 0.14x0.2m to 0.35x0.4m, the single cut block measuring 0.1x0.35x0.44m. Unit 4 is built with smaller cobbles (0.05x0.11m to 0.11x0.2m) that were not chosen for their naturally flat faces.

Time Span 3

Deposition of S.2 resumed after Str. 1C-1-1st's abandonment, eventually creating a layer that is at least 0.34m thick (the S.1 and 2 interface was not revealed). Stratum 3, a black (10YR-2/N), moderately fine-textured, hard-compacted, root-rich clay covers S.2 by 0.1-0.18m. A dense concentration of stones dislodged from final-phase architecture is embedded in S.3 and the upper portion of S.2, extending at least 1.14m east and west of construction (F.1). Feature 1 is also found above Str. 1C-1-1st's summit, denser on the west between U.2 and 3 than on the east between U.1 and 3.

The Central Depression

A series of 30 test pits, each measuring 1x1m, were dug along the summit of the depression's southeast side (Subop. 43E) and extending from that flank to the declivity's approximate center (Subop. 43F; 15 probes in each suboperation). Suboperations 43E and 43F are oriented 40 degrees, more-or-less parallel to the depression's southeast flank, and 130 degrees, respectively. Each suboperation measures 2m across and is composed of two adjoining, parallel rows 1m wide and 15m long. A 1m gap was left between each excavated pit in these rows, two 1m² tests in adjoining rows never being dug. Instead, the excavated pits alternate by row. The probes were carried down to maximum depths of 1.49m and 1.3m below modern ground surface in the declivity's center and on the southeast margin, respectively. The purpose of this work, overseen by C. Wells, was to determine whether the Central Depression was the result of human action in antiquity. If so, the excavations were designed to date that creation and to ascertain something of the declivity's original form.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	Deposition of underlying soil	S.1	MPrecl?
2	Digging into S.1	S.1	LCLII?
3	Filling in of the Central Depression	S.2	LCLII
4	Possible excavation of a pit in the depression's center and continued in-filling	S.3	LCLIII and later

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a light beige, fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted clay with numerous small micaceous inclusions, was revealed only in the depression's center at 0.57-1.3m below current ground surface (Subop. 43F, Block 15). This earth level is at least 0.9m thick, its base lying beyond excavation limits, and appears to be culturally sterile. A similar layer was revealed at the base of excavations in the Southeast Depression (Subop. 43I, 43J, and 43K, S.1), though the latter stratum did contain some artifacts. A very few sherds diagnostic of the Middle Preclassic were recovered from later deposits within the Central Depression. They hint at an early occupation somewhere in the vicinity and *may have* derived from S.1, all other soils yielding much later materials. There is no direct confirmation of this association, however.

Time Span 2

Stratum 1, as revealed in Subop. 43F, Block 15, appears to have been cut into. The level descends rapidly, dropping as much as 0.73m over 0.9m south-to-north. The basin defined by this descent measures, over 1m across (its northern limits lying beyond our excavations) and is 0.43-0.73m deep (the eastern side may be lower than its western counterpart or we may simply have not dug far enough in the former direction to encounter the eastern margin). Erosion does not seem to have created or significantly affected the southern slope, given that this ascent is both steep and well-defined. In addition, ancient pottery sherds were found lying directly atop the ascent, indicating that the cut had been made in antiquity. It seems reasonable, therefore, to argue that the prehistoric inhabitants of La Sierra dug out at least a portion of S.1, probably to obtain the micaceous clay that makes up this layer. Almost certainly, the pit identified in Subop. 43F, Block 15 was only a particularly deep probe dug near the center of the much larger excavation that created the Central Depression. Unfortunately, time constraints meant that Subops. 43E and 43F were not pursued to sufficient depths elsewhere to encounter S.1 and determine the extent of the original mining operation.

Time Span 3

Following cessation of digging, the Central Depression gradually filled in with soil and artifacts. Stratum 2, a brown (7.5YR-3/3), micaceous, fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted clay with small white inclusions, fills in the ancient pit. This earth level is as much as 1.08m thick where it overlies the lowest point in the basin cut into S.1. Stratum 2 was also exposed on the southeast margins of the Central Depression in Subop. 43E. Here, the level has an irregular upper surface (its base was not revealed), first rising 0.1m over 0.6m southwest-to-northeast, then running more-or-less level for an additional 1.1m in this direction, before dropping 0.17m and then 0.2m in two abrupt descents over the next 5.7m southwest-to northeast. Stratum 2 thereafter maintains a relatively even upper surface for another 6.3m; beyond this point to the northeast, excavation was not pursued to sufficient depths to reveal S.2. Digging in Subop.43F also picked up S.2. Here, the layer ascends 0.28m in an unbroken slope for 4m from the depression's southeast margin towards the center. Stratum 2 abruptly ends at this point, only reappearing 11m further to the northwest in Block 15. The significance of the above-noted undulations is unclear (but see below). Given the clarity of the S.1 pit outlines, it appears that

deposition of S.2 began soon after that excavation was abandoned and before the initial pit's outlines were blurred by erosion.

Artifacts are generally sparse in S.2. The largest collection (46 sherds and 5 bajareque fragments) comes from within the S.1 pit. There are no clear signs that S.2 contained cultural material where it was exposed elsewhere in Subops. 43E and 43F.

Time Span 4

Stratum 3, a black (10YR-3/N), coarse-textured, hard-compacted clay, covers S.2 by 0.33-0.65m and is found in all Subop. 43E and 43F excavations. Artifact densities in S.3 increase away from the declivity's edge towards the center, being especially marked for 4m northwest of the abrupt plunge in S.2 noted above in TS.3 (this descent occurs at the border between Blocks 4 and 5 in Subop. 43F). Artifact densities range from 697 to 902 items per .5m³ within this area. A 0.15-0.3m-thick layer distinguished by particularly large amounts of cultural debris is found embedded in S.3 within Blocks 7 and 8 at depths of 0.15-0.35m below current ground surface. This deposit may represent an ancient sheet midden, though it is difficult to specify its limits within S.3. It may be that S.2 was excavated out near the depression's center during TS.4, subsequently filling in with trash jettisoned from surrounding buildings accompanied by the black clay that is so commonly associated with late construction in southern La Sierra. The frequency of cultural material in S.3 also increases regularly and significantly from southwest to northeast, reaching the greatest densities in Blocks 14 and 15 on Subop. 43E's northeast margin (571 and 469 artifacts per 0.6m³, respectively; Block 12 on the far southwest has 48 artifacts per 0.6m³). There is no sign of an ancient pit in this area, increasing artifact frequencies probably resulting from growing proximity to the massive trash deposit located ca. 20m further northeast of Subop. 43E, Block 15, investigated within Subop. 43G.

The Northeast Trash Deposit

A ca. 0.7m-deep looter's pit dug off the Central Depression's northeast edge revealed a deep deposit of fine gray ash associated with large ceramic fragments. This deposit, seemingly isolated from surrounding prehistoric buildings but located just back from the declivity's lip, was investigated to determine if the materials it contained might shed some light on the activities conducted within and around the Central Depression. Excavations here, conducted as part of Subop. 43G, took the form of two trenches, each 7m long, intersecting at their respective centers, and oriented 30 and 120 degrees. Subop. 43G spans the entire extent of the trash deposit as it was visible on the surface. The trenches were divided into 1m² blocks, five of these being dug (Blocks 1-5), four on the margins of each trench and one at their point of intersection. The four pits on the trench margins were all carried down to 1-1.2m below modern ground surface; the probe conducted in the presumed center of the trash deposit (Block 3) was pursued to 1.77m below ground level. This work, directed by C. Wells, revealed a virtually homogenous ash-and-artifact deposit, time running out before its base was encountered.

Time Spans

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Date</u>
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Time Span 1

No clear soil distinctions were noted within S.1, this level consisting of a “pale yellow” (5Y-7/4), fine-textured, very loosely compacted ash throughout. Slight variations, based primarily on the nature of inclusions, were noted in the deep Block 3 probe into S.1. A 0.12m-thick level marked by more carbon, white ash, and bajareque than noted elsewhere in S.1 was recorded at 1.18m below ground surface. A very similar entity, though with less bajareque, extends up 0.15m from the excavation floor, its base lying beyond Block 3's limits. Approximately 0.3m separates these two components of S.1. Otherwise, there is no evidence for a break in S.1's depositional history nor does the nature of the trash change appreciably. Artifact densities in Subop. 43G blocks are uniformly high in all but the northwestern-most pit (Block 2), ranging from 1,635-3,098 pieces per 1m³ (the Block 2 artifact density is 975 items per 1m³). Block 3 yielded comparable figures of 3,940 pieces per 1.75m³. Though artifact yields declined somewhat with depth, there was no clear sign that the bottom of the deposit lay close by. A total of 831 artifacts were recovered from the lowest 0.25m³ dug in Block 3. There was a tendency, however, to find diagnostics of older periods (in this case, Late Classic II ceramics) underlying those of later periods (Late Classic III) within S.1. This pattern may suggest, along with S.1's great depth, that the trash deposit was in use over a long interval (see also descriptions of S.6 and 7 in Subop. 43I, Block B20 in the section dealing with the Southeast Depression).

Chronological Summary

Occupation in Op. 43 was probably initiated during the Middle Preclassic, evidence for habitation pertaining to this period being found near both the Southeastern and Central Depressions, though especially on the western and northeastern margin of the former. No architecture or other clear features are associated with this interval. The next signs we have of settlement in the area date to Late Classic I and, especially, Late Classic II. Material pertaining to these spans is found underlying construction throughout the investigated portion of Op. 43, usually associated with an ashy, artifact-rich soil. There are hints that certain relatively humble surface-level buildings were raised at this time (most likely in Late Classic II), especially Strs. 43-Sub1, 43-Sub2, and Str. 43-3-2nd. More impressive was the initial excavation of the Central and Southeast Depressions that seems to be attributable to these industrious La Sierrans. Whatever else they may have been involved with, Late Classic I and II occupants of southern La Sierra were engaged in tasks that required considerable amounts of clay and generated large quantities of artifacts (especially pottery sherds) and ash. Late Classic III occupation is widespread throughout the investigated portions of Op. 43 and all excavated buildings, save those noted above, were erected now. Activities dating to this interval also generated their fair share of ash (as seen in Subop. 43G) and artifacts, especially concentrated within and around the Central Depression. Some portions of the latter declivity may have been dug at this time, though the excavations do not seem to have been as deep or as extensive as those carried out in Late Classic I/II. Early Postclassic use of the Op. 43 area is suggested by the recovery of a few ceramics diagnostic of this period intermixed with Late Classic III materials. No free-standing

constructions, or modifications to extant buildings, can be dated to the Early Postclassic. The paucity of such late remains implies that occupation throughout Op. 43 was sparse at this time. Late Postclassic markers are absent from analyzed collections while there is limited evidence indicating Historic occupation in the immediate environs of Str. AO-1st on the eastern margin of the Southeast Depression. No surviving Historic period architecture or other features were noted.