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PVN Op 441 Excavation Report

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1Site 441

Site 441 lies at the base of a 40m-high spur extending south from the western valley slopes, on the north bank of a seasonal affluent of the Quebrada Danta (also called the Quebrada Puente Quemada). Said stream course is 60m to the south whereas Site 444 and La Sierra are 300m and 3.35km to the west and southeast, respectively. The site occupies the summit of a low knoll, ground rising towards this spot very gradually from all sides. This eminence barely stands out from the general south-to-north ascent towards the aforementioned promontory. The two surface-visible buildings that make up Site 441 occupy the north and northwest flank of a patio that is open (as one might surmise) on the remaining sides. Both of these edifices were completely cleared in the course of excavating 136m² from April 4 through May 12, 1995. All field investigations were directed by J. Wendt whose detailed report of the research forms the basis for this summary.

Structure 441-1

Structure 441-1 occupies the northern margin of the Site 441 patio, lying 7.9m east/northeast of Str. 441-2. The terrain drops gradually from south to north around the building before ascending towards the hill spur on the north. Approximately 92m² was cleared in the course of exposing all of this edifice along with evidence of surface-level constructions situated off the platform's southern and northern flanks (conducted within Subops. 441B, G, and H). Digging was carried down to maximum depths of 0.98m and 0.45m beneath modern ground surface outside architecture and within construction fill, respectively. A single building phase was recognized in the course of this work.

Time Spans

Time Span	Construction Phase	Units	Strata	Features	Date
1	-	-	S.1	-	LCLI, II
2	Str. 441-1-1st	U.1-14	-	-	LCLII/III, III, EPC, LPC
3	-	-	S. 1,2	F.1	-

Time Span 1

At least 0.66m of S.1, a fine-textured, hard-compacted, light-brown soil, underlies TS. 2 architecture (S.1's base was not encountered during excavation). The bottom-most 0.09m of S.1 contained no artifacts, cultural material being retrieved from the remainder of the level. These findings point to a human presence in the immediate area prior to Str. 441-1-1st's construction.

Time Span 2

Structure 441-1-1st's core is a platform bordered by basal walls (U.1-4), measuring 0.35-0.64m across, that rise in single ascents of 0.37-0.43m to the summit. The bases of these walls drop 0.05-0.13m from south to north and 0.23-0.29m west-to-east. This patterning tentatively suggests that Str. 441-1-1st was built over a gentle rise that dropped off in all directions from a high point beneath the edifice's southwest corner. A fine-textured, hard-compacted light brown earth containing very few small rocks comprises the fill (U.13) bounded by U.1-4. An extensive stone construction (U.5) covers roughly 32% (6.5m²) of the platform's summit (ca. 20.5m² total summit area). Unit 5 rests on U.13, may have stood 0.13m high, and completely fills, and extends beyond, the summit's southwest quadrant. The eastern face of U.5 is irregular, projecting 0.8m east from the main body of the element 0.85m north of its junction with U.1 on the south before stepping back 1.4m, in two distinct stages, to the west. The architectural significance of U.5 and its eastern extension are unclear. With its maximum east-west and north-south dimensions of 2.2m and 2.3m, respectively (excluding the projection), U.5 may have been a low stone-faced and -surfaced bench. The eastern protrusion might have been added on, together with U.6, 0.5m to the east, to define a room on Str. 441-1-1st's northwestern summit. Unit 6 is a 0.14m-high by 0.2-0.32m-wide L-shaped stone wall the longer element of which runs 1.4m north-south, the shorter leg extending 0.3m west from the former's southern terminus. Together, U.5 and 6, along with the tops of U.3 and 4, define an L-shaped enclosure (Room 1) whose main axis runs east-west and measures 4.3m by 0.9-1.3m. Variation in the north-south dimension results from U.3, the northern basal facing, stepping 0.4m to the north roughly 2.7m east of the compartment's northwest interior summit corner. The southward extension of the room's "L" protrudes 0.75m from the longer element's eastern end and covers 1.55-2.1m across east-west (the aforementioned irregularities in U.5's eastern face account for differences in width measurements). A second L-shaped compartment (Room 2) lies east and south of U.6. This enclosure's north-south running component covers 1.1m by 3.6m, its 1.45m-wide extension protruding 1.85m west from the former's south end. Two, ca. 0.2m-high, stone-faced and -surfaced shelves protrude 0.4m (U.7) and 0.2m (U.14) west and north into Room 2, respectively. Unit 7 is 1.1m long north-south and is located 0.9m north of Room 2's southeast corner; U.14 covers 0.85m east-west and lies 0.65m west of that same corner. Both Rooms 1 and 2 have earth floors and are bordered by U.5. Movement between the enclosures was through 0.65m- and 0.5m-wide doors set in the eastern and southern ends of Room 1.

This core construction is bounded on the north by an extensive (4.37x6.49m) element (U.8) consisting of tightly packed schist slabs that, when exposed, were consistently tilting out at ca. 45 degree angles to the north. Unit 8 completely buries most of the platform's northern facing (U.3), stopping 0.5m shy of the latter's northeast corner. There is a 0.65m-wide (north-south) by 1.1m-deep indentation in U.8's eastern flank, 1.45m north of its junction with U.3. On the west, U.8 steps in (east) 0.3m, 2.25m north from its intersection with the northwest platform corner; thereafter, U.8's western facing runs southwest-northeast to its northwest corner. These irregularities may reflect differential preservation of the unit's perimeter or could be parts of the original construction.

Units 11 and 12 are 0.21m-high by 0.3-0.37m-wide foundations that together form an L-shaped wall 0.2m southeast of the platform's southeastern corner. Unit 11 runs 1.1m northwest-southeast to where it corners with U.12 on the southeast; the latter extends at least 0.4m southwest where it left our excavations. Most likely, U.11 and 12 mark the northeast and southeast perimeters of a surface-level room(s) built against Str. 441-1-1st's southern flank.

Units 9 and 10 are parts of another surface-level construction lying 0.2m south of the platform's southwest corner. Unit 9 is a 0.27-0.32m-high stone block measuring 1.09m east-west by 1.5m north-south. A 0.2m-high wall (U.10) intersects U.9's southeast corner and runs for a total of 2.7m to the northeast. Unit 10 is 0.2-0.65m wide and traces an irregular course, jogging 0.6m north, 0.9m northeast of its junction with U.9, and then extending northeast for the remainder of its length. The upshot of these changes in direction is that the space enclosed by U.9, 10, and the platform's southern basal wall (U.1) narrows from 1.15m north-south on the west to a scant 0.2m on the east. Together, these constructions may delimit a small earthen-floored cubicle or be parts of an earth-filled bench the northeast end of which is not preserved.

Structure 441-1-1st is a 0.37-0.43m-high stone-faced, earth-filled platform that covers 4.45x7m, and is aligned roughly 273 degrees, 30 minutes. This platform was apparently raised atop a gradual northeast-to-southwest rise, the ground sloping up 0.41m across 8.2m in that direction. The earthen-floored summit is divided into two L-shaped rooms bordered on the south and west by a 0.13m-high stone-faced and -surfaced bench that covers 2.2x2.3m. The northern-most of these enclosures (Room 1) measures 6.1m², its long axis running east-west along the summit's northern perimeter. Room 2 is east and south of the former compartment and encompasses 6.6m². The long axis of this enclosure extends north-south along the summit's eastern margin. Room 2 contains two shelves that are 0.2m high, one each built into its eastern (0.4x1.1m) and southern walls (0.2x0.85m). Passage between Rooms 1 and 2 was through 0.65m- and 0.5m-wide doors in the former's eastern and southern ends, respectively. A block of tightly packed schist slabs set on end abuts Str. 441-1-1st's platform on the north. This construction is set on ground surface, measures 4.37x6.49m, and covers all but the eastern-most 0.5m of the platform's northern facing. Remains of what may have been an earthen-floored room built on ancient ground surface lie 0.2m southeast of Str. 441-1-1st. This enclosure is bounded by 0.21m-high by 0.3-0.37m-wide foundations that define a cubicle measuring at least 0.4x1.1m. An enigmatic surface-level construction was found 0.2m south of the platform's southwest corner. Walls standing 0.2-0.32m high in this area may define an earthen-floored compartment encompassing ca. 1.6m² or a stone-faced, earth-filled bench, 2.7m long by 0.6-1.5m wide, set against the platform's southern flank.

All walls, facings, and surfaces are built primarily of schist slabs the outward-facing ends of which appear to have been modified to create vertical faces. The rocks in the taller constructions (especially U.1-4, the platform facings) are set in relatively clear vertical stacks. There is a tendency to place the larger stones at the bottom of walls. A few unshaped quartz rocks are intermixed with the schist (they are especially prevalent in U.6) and a single shaped tuff block was revealed at the platform's southeast corner (junction of U.1 and 2). A brown mud mortar is used as a binding agent throughout.

Time Span 3

Natural deposition of S.1 resumed after Str. 441-1-1st's abandonment. This level is, in turn, covered by 0.08-0.16m of S.2, a fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted, root-rich brown soil. Most likely, S.1 and 2 are parts of the same level, the latter's slightly darker hue resulting from its greater enrichment with organic matter near current ground surface. Together, S.1 and 2 cover all but the highest portions of extant architecture. A moderately dense concentration of stones tumbled from final-phase construction (F.1) was found in upper S.1 and S.2, extending for at least 2.39m south and 0.78m north of Str. 441-1-1st.

Structure 441-2

Structure 441-2 occupies the northwest side of the patio, 7.9m west-southwest of Str. 441-1. The ground here is fairly level, ascending 0.02m over 7m northwest-to-southeast. Excavations conducted within Subops. 441C, D, E, and F cleared approximately 44m² in the course of completely exposing Str. 441-2-1st. Digging was pursued to maximum depths of 0.81m and 0.45m beneath modern ground surface outside architecture and into construction fill, respectively. A single building phase was identified in the course of this work.

Time Spans

Time Span	Construction Phase	Units	Strata	Features	Date
1	-	-	S.1	-	Mprecl, LCLI, II
2	Str. 441-2-1st	U.1-7	-	F.1	LCLII/III, III, EPC
3	-	-	S.2,3	F.2	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a very fine-textured dark yellowish-brown soil (10YR 4/4), accumulated to a depth of at least 0.38m prior to erection of Str. 441-2-1st (S.1's base was not encountered). Following from the stratigraphic position of the steps giving access to the platform's summit, it is likely that an additional 0.24m of S.1 was deposited before TS. 2, Str. 441-2-1st's basal walls intruding 0.19m-0.24m into that layer. Recovery of artifacts from S.1 points to a human presence in the vicinity during this level's deposition.

Time Span 2

Structure 441-2-1st is a platform bounded by facings (U.1-4) that stand 0.22-0.23m high (above S.1) and measure 0.45-0.6m across. The fill (U.5) contained by U.1-4 is a very fine-textured dark yellowish brown to yellowish brown earth (10YR 4/4-5/4) that is indistinguishable from S.1 and 2. Two steps (U.6 and 7), appended to the building's southeastern flank, provided access to the earthen-floored summit. Unit 6 is a 0.1m high construction set against the platform's eastern corner. Built entirely of schist slabs, U.6 is 0.65m wide northeast-southwest and projects 1.05m southeast from the southeastern basal facing (U.1). Unit 7, which abuts U.1 ca. 3.3m southwest of U.6, extends 1.24m southeast of U.1 and measures 1.35m across. The basal (southeastern-most) riser is 0.11m high and gives way after 0.3m to a second, equally diminutive step-up of 0.12m. The tread of the first stair is stone whereas the 0.94m separating the second riser from U.1 was probably earth. Unit 7 is bordered on the northeast by a low stone wall; no comparable construction was located marking the stair's southwestern margin. The

latter may have been ripped out in antiquity or the steps possibly remained incomplete when the platform was abandoned. Presumably, the finished version of U.7 would have had (or did have) an earth fill. The summit supports a large (3.35x5.55m) featureless room.

Feature 1, located off Str. 441-2-1st's southwest face (U.4), is a deposit of burnt earth, 0.15-0.39m wide by as much as 0.12m high, that appears to have been part of the foundation for a surface-level edifice. This element extends 0.35m southwest from its intersection with U.4, 0.4m southeast of the platform's western corner. From that point, F.1 generally trends southeast for 2.55m; F.1 is 0.55m southwest of U.4 at its southeastern terminus. No other components of the putative surface-level building were located. Feature 1's stratigraphic position, resting at the same level as U.4, indicates that whatever it may have been part of is contemporary with Str. 441-2-1st.

Structure 441-2-1st is a 0.22-0.23m-high stone-faced and earth-filled platform that measures 4.32x6.6m and is aligned roughly 32 degrees. A single, 0.1m-high stone step built against Str. 441-2-1st's eastern corner, and measuring 0.65x1.05m, provided access to the earthen-floored summit. A second, more formal, staircase composed of two risers, 0.11 and 0.12m high, was set against the southeastern basal wall slightly southwest of the building's centerline. This element is 1.35m wide northeast-southwest, projects 1.24m southeast of the platform, and has treads measuring 0.3m and 0.94m across, in ascending order (the former is stone, the latter mostly earth). The absence of a retaining wall on the staircase's southwestern flank leaves open the possibility that the element may not have been completed. The featureless summit room covers approximately 18.6m². Remnants of what may have been a perishable surface-level building were unearthed lying immediately southwest of the platform. All that is left of this construction is a line of burned earth ca. 0.12m high and 0.15-0.39m wide.

A mix of schist slabs and quartz boulders, some as large as 0.6x0.7m, were used to fashion Str. 441-2-1st's basal walls. The U.6 and 7 steps are built almost entirely of schist slabs. No rocks were found underlying F.1, an intriguing divergence from the common prehistoric Naco valley pattern of raising the perishable walls of surface-level buildings on stone foundations. The schist slabs may have been modified to create their outward-oriented flat faces. No such shaping was recorded for their quartz counterparts. A brown mud mortar was used as a binding agent in all facings and steps.

Time Span 3

Structure 441-1-1st was blanketed, after abandonment, by S.2 and 3. These very fine-textured soils are distinguished by overlying S.3's slightly darker color (brown, 10YR 5/3, as opposed to yellowish brown, 10YR 5/4, for S.2), harder compaction, and greater concentration of small roots. Together, S.2 and 3 collected to depths of 0.23-0.24m over S.1 and buried all but the highest portions of surviving architecture. A very light scattering of stone fallen from TS. 2 architecture (F.2) was found across Str. 441-2-1st's summit and off its flanks.

Chronological Summary

Settlement in the environs of Site 441 was apparently initiated during the Middle Preclassic. The very few ceramic fragments diagnostic of this period found in levels predating Str. 441-2-1st's construction suggest that this early occupation was small and ephemeral or the scant items we uncovered washed into Site 441 from a more substantial nearby settlement. Following the Middle Preclassic, use of Site 441 is next attested to during Late Classic I and II.

Material pertaining to this span is not associated with architecture. Nevertheless, its ubiquity, being unearthed around Strs. 441-1-1st and 441-2-1st, and greater frequency compared with Middle Preclassic remains, suggest a significant increase in population and activity levels at the site over those seen in the earlier period. The investigated edifices were built sometime during the Late Classic II/III transition or early in Late Classic III. Occupation at the site persisted strongly into the Early Postclassic when both platforms were still in use. It is unclear what, if any architecture, might date to this span. Structure 441-2-1st's southeastern staircase (U.7), if left unfinished, is a good candidate for construction raised during the Early Postclassic. As noted earlier, however (Str. 441-2-1st, TS. 2), this element could just as easily have been dismantled as left undone and so cannot be confidently placed in the Early Postclassic. The surface-level buildings raised off Str. 441-1-1st's southern flank are other possible Early Postclassic constructions cannot be unambiguously assigned to this span. The most that we can say at this stage is that Site 441 was occupied into the Early Postclassic, its two constituent buildings probably undergoing some renovations during this interval. The very scant evidence of a Late Postclassic presence, derived from Str. 441-1-1st, may well signify no more than temporary reuse of the site after its abandonment. No signs of Historic occupation were recorded at Site 441.