

OVER HILL AND DALE: CARACOL 1994

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The tenth season of the Caracol Archaeological Project took place from the end of January through the end of May 1994. The primary objective of the 1994 season — the first of two sponsored by the National Science Foundation (Grant No. SBR9311773) — was settlement pattern study. Approximately 70 people participated in the research undertaken this season and slightly over 3,000 tourists visited the site during the course of the 1994 field season.

1994 work focused on survey and excavation in the northeastern sector of the site, an area that is particularly "hilly." While some areas could be accessed by road, many others required daily treks of up to 12 kilometers to get from camp to excavation locales and back. In spite of the time expended in these "long distance" commutes, the 1994 field season proved to be extremely successful.

To look for evidence of Maya occupation, an area of four and a half square kilometers was gridded with survey transects cut into the jungle. Wherever no settlement was found, agricultural terraces were plentiful. During the course of the season, over 1,500 structures were mapped; mapping of the field systems was also begun in this area. As was the case in the southeastern sector of the site, the terraces in the northeastern area formed systems much too large to have been created by individual family groupings; this, when combined with the overall (non-clustered) settlement layout, suggests that the field systems and housing were most likely the result of centrally planned developments. Another important aspect of this season's work was the search for the limits of Caracol's occupation; the settlement drop-off could be determined

within 6 kilometers of the site epicenter in the areas surveyed. Previous population estimates that placed Caracol's population at well over 100,000 people in A.D. 650 are substantiated by the data collected this season.

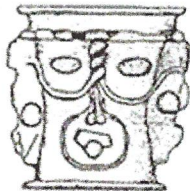
During 1994, excavations were conducted in 15 residential groups within the northeastern survey area and consisted of 38 test pits, 9 opportunistic tests, and 4 intensive excavations. These excavations produced numerous in-situ refuse deposits, 6 tombs, 10 other burials, 16 caches, data on 5 chaltuns, and abundant architectural details. While most of the archaeological materials date to the Late Classic Period, excavations also uncovered substantial Terminal Classic refuse deposits throughout the core area. Additionally, Late Classic contexts from this part of the site indicate that the burial and cache patterns found in other sectors of Caracol — consisting of "face caches," "finger bowls," and burials associated with eastern buildings — are also common in this sector and occur at least 5 kilometers distant from the epic center.

In addition to settlement research, work was also undertaken on monumental architecture in Caracol's epicenter. On the summit of Caana, excavation was continued in Structure B19. A combination of trenching and tunneling revealed stairs and floors from a series of earlier constructions as well as a cache of *spondylous* shells and eccentric obsidian. Excavations were also undertaken in Group C in buildings on the west side of this group. Investigations in Structure B64, the palace complex on the west side of the group, exposed fallen pieces of a stucco hieroglyphic text that tell of the birth of a previously unknown bacab of Caracol, possibly a "post-monument" ruler during the Terminal Classic Period. Substantial quantities of late refuse were recovered on the floor in front of this same building and two burials and a cache were found in the fill of the plaza east of Structure B64.

Two Caracol buildings were the focus of stabilization efforts during the 1994 season. The south easternmost palace, Structure B63, of the Barrio group was stabilized during the first half of the season. During the

second half of the season, consolidation efforts focused on the front stair of Structure B20. New techniques for stabilization were introduced and are evident in the repaired stairway to the temple.

The current program of investigation at Caracol focusing on the outlying settlement will be continued during the 1995 field season. The data collected during these two seasons will be used to examine the relationships between Caracol's epigraphic and settlement histories, especially with reference to the site's recorded warfare events of the 6th through 9th centuries. Of particular interest to the current project is a definition of what happened at Caracol — both in the epicenter and in the outlying settlement — following the cessation of monument erection during the Terminal Classic era; the data collected as a result of the current program of investigation at Caracol should result in new insights about this enigmatic time.



Ceramic vessel from a tomb at Caracol, Belize

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