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**La Costa Escondida: An Archaeological Investigation of the Ancient
Maya Port of Vista Alegre, Quintana Roo, México**

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Research Year: 2004

Culture: Maya

Chronology: Terminal Classic to Early Postclassic

Location: Quintana Roo, México

Site: Vista Alegre

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Abstract

The site of Vista Alegre is located on an inner-coastal island in the Laguna Yalahau of northern Quintana Roo, México. Our 2005 archaeological investigation provides new insights into the relationship between this ancient maritime port and its supporting polities as well as its role in circum-peninsular trade during the Terminal Classic to Early Postclassic Periods. On-going research efforts in northern Quintana Roo allow for the integration of Vista Alegre into broader studies concerning regional economic and political organization. The unique and strategic location of the port relative to both coastal and inland waterways likely resulted in its affiliation with powerful inter-regional systems.

Resumen

El sitio de Vista Alegre se encuentra en una isla escondida en la Laguna Yalahau, en el norte de Quintana Roo, México. Nuestra investigación en enero de 2005 proporciona nuevas ideas sobre las relaciones entre este puerto marítimo antiguo y sus sitios asociados, así como su papel en el comercio alrededor de la península durante los períodos Clásico Terminal a Postclásico Tardío. Los esfuerzos en curso en el norte de Quintana Roo permiten la integración de Vista Alegre a estudios más amplios sobre la organización económica y política en la región. La ubicación única y estratégica del puerto en relación con las rutas costeras y los canales naturales vinculó probablemente al sitio con los sistemas poderosos a nivel inter-regional.

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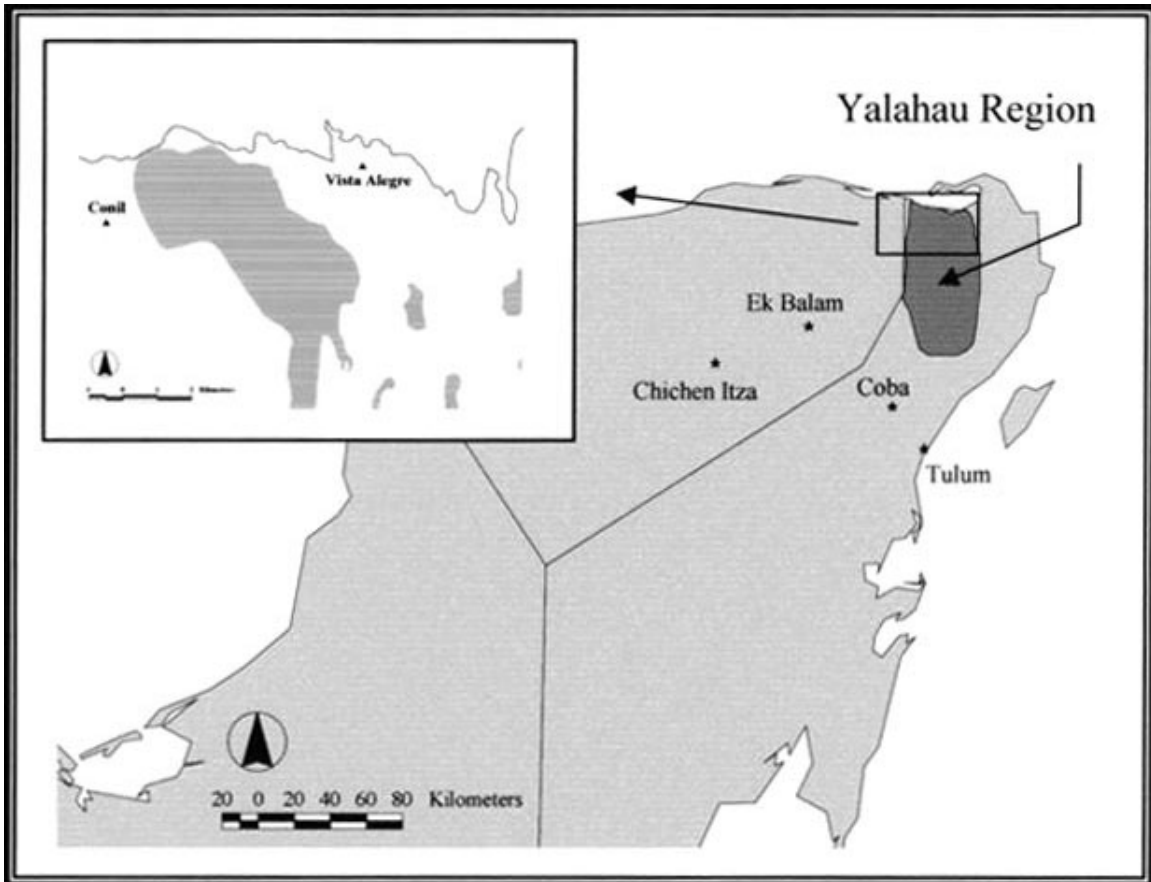


Figure 1. Map of the Yalahau region and the sites of Vista Alegre and Conil (with Sabana Zanja between the two sites).

Introduction

The site of Vista Alegre is located on a small mangrove-shrouded island, which is recessed from the main body of the Laguna Yalahau and lies along the northern coast of the Yalahau region of Quintana Roo, México ([Figure 1](#), shown above; [Figure 2](#) and [Figure 3](#), shown below). Dominated by extensive freshwater wetlands (known locally as *sabanas*), the Yalahau region represents a unique physiographic landscape, which stands in sharp contrast with the dry karstic plain that characterizes the majority of the northern Yucatán Peninsula. In comparison to most of the Maya Lowlands, little archaeological research has been conducted in the region. The site of Vista Alegre has long been part of the archaeological literature, but never the center of a problem-oriented archaeological research project focusing on regional and interregional trade.



Figure 2. Landsat V image of the northern Yalahau region.

Vista Alegre was first visited by William Sanders in 1954 (1955, 1960). During his short visit he conducted surface collections and excavated one test pit. The site was later visited by Jack Eaton during his survey of the Yucatán coast, who commented that "the overgrowth was too dense to appreciate its features" (Eaton 1978:45). Susana Gurrola and Eugenia Romero returned to Vista Alegre during their investigation of the Laguna Yalahau area and recorded the site in greater detail (Attolini Lecón *et al.* 1992; Gurrola Briones 1988; Romero 1991; Romero and Gurrola Briones 1991, 1995).



Figure 3. Landsat V image (false-color), indicating nearby sites.

We were led to the island site of Vista Alegre in 2002 during a canoe-based reconnaissance of the adjacent wetland known as Sabana Zanja (or Río Turbio). The brief survey of the site and wetland was part of the broader Yalahau Regional Settlement Pattern Survey, directed by Jeffrey Glover (Amador and Glover 2003, 2005; Glover 2005; Glover and Amador 2006). During our visit, we recorded a carved serpent head monument located at the base of the major pyramidal structure at the site (Glover and Rissolo 2004) ([Figure 4](#) and [Figure 5](#), shown below).



Figure 4. Serpent head.

The carved monument, most likely the head of a balustrade, brought many interesting questions to the surface regarding Vista Alegre's position within the Terminal Classic and Postclassic world. By specifically focusing on Vista Alegre, our January 2005 field season hoped to not only shed light on one link in the chain of Maya coastal sites, but also position the site within its larger regional context and allow us to evaluate its role in Terminal Classic to Postclassic circum-peninsular coastal trade networks as discussed by Andrews, Romero, and Gurrola (Andrews 1990; Romero 1991; Romero and Gurrola Briones 1991, 1995).

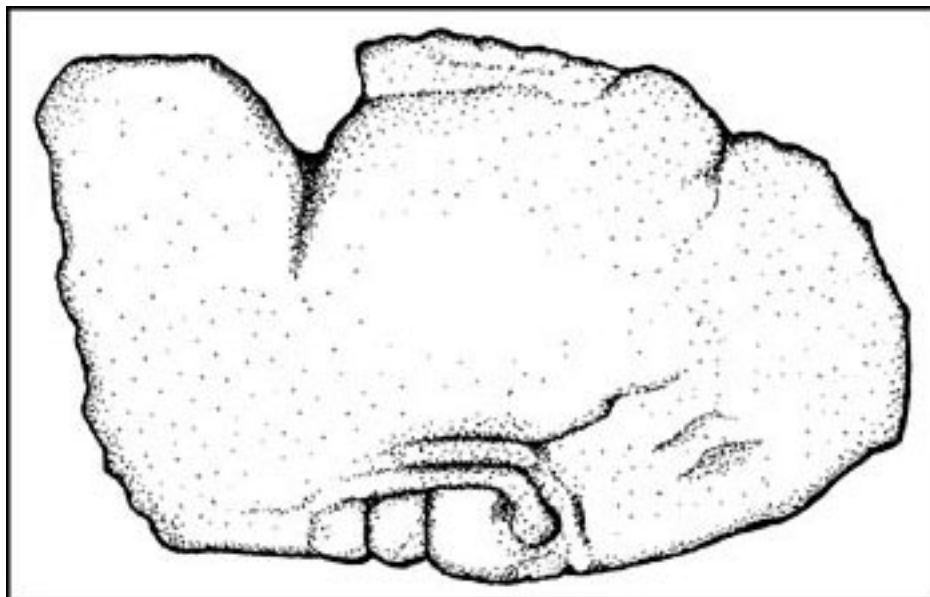


Figure 5. Drawing of the eroded side of the serpent head (by D. Rissolo).

The January 2005 field season at Vista Alegre, which was funded exclusively by FAMSI, essentially involved an intensive ten-day survey, mapping, and recording effort. Technical and logistical assistance in the field was provided Carrie Furman, Samuel S. Meacham, and Roberto Echeverría, and conducted under a permit issued by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). The results of the field season, presented herein, offer the most substantive data on the site to date and create a foundation upon which more detailed future investigations can be based.

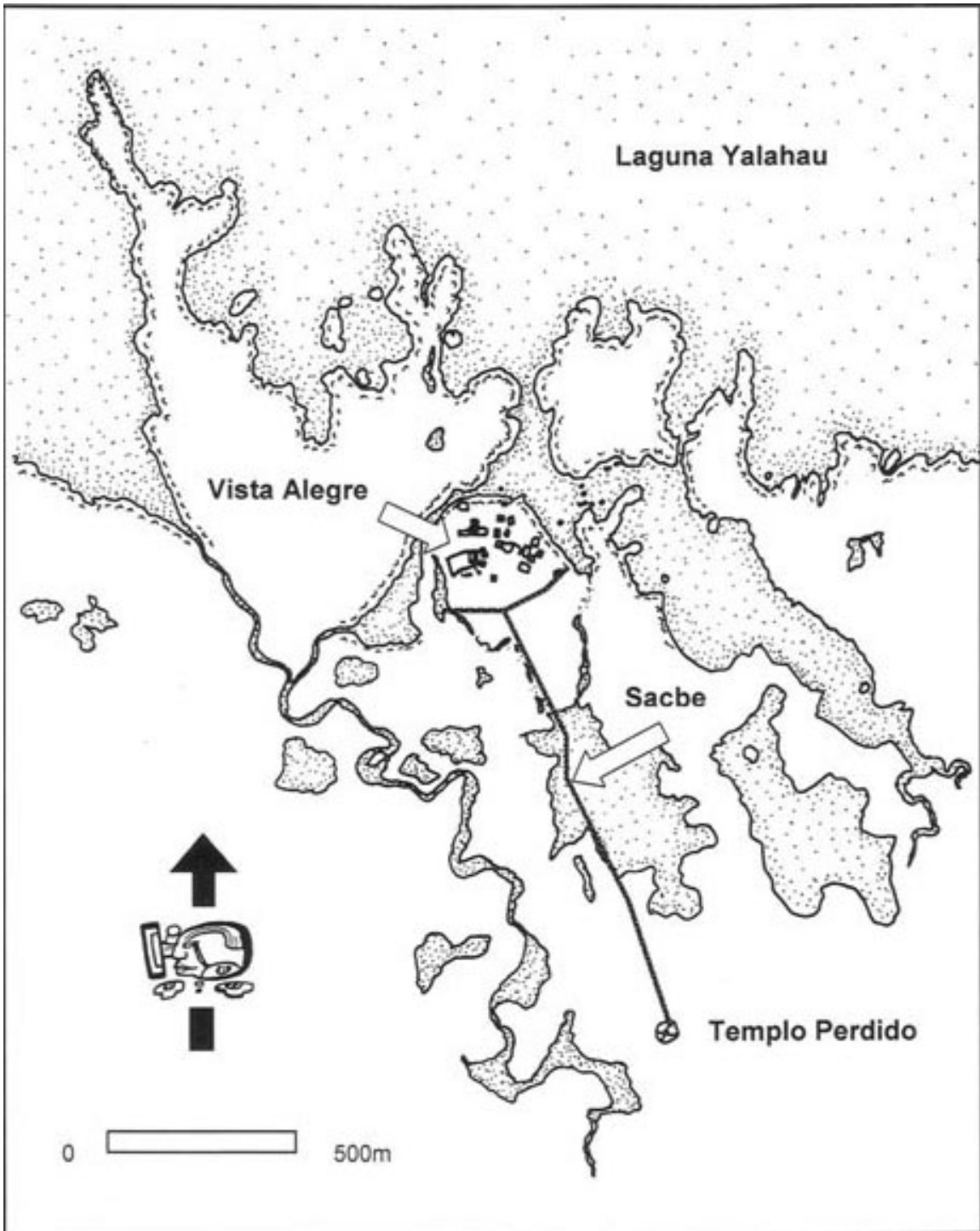


Figure 6. Map of Vista Alegre and the andador (walkway) to Templo Perdido.

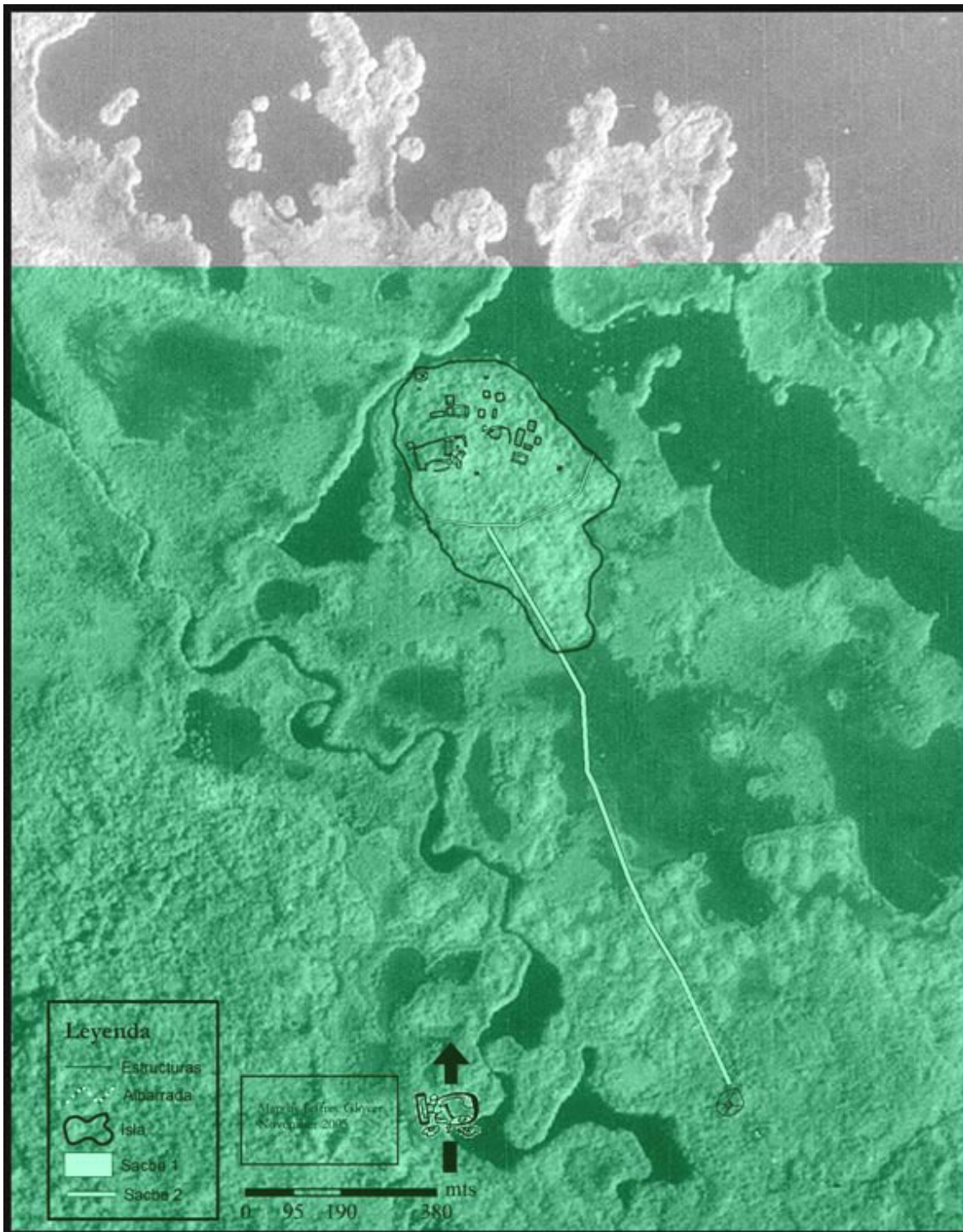


Figure 7. Aerial photograph with the superimposed map of Vista Alegre and the andador to Templo Perdido (aerial photograph: INEGI, Feb. 85, 1:75000, D.F.-88.14, L-271 F16-8).

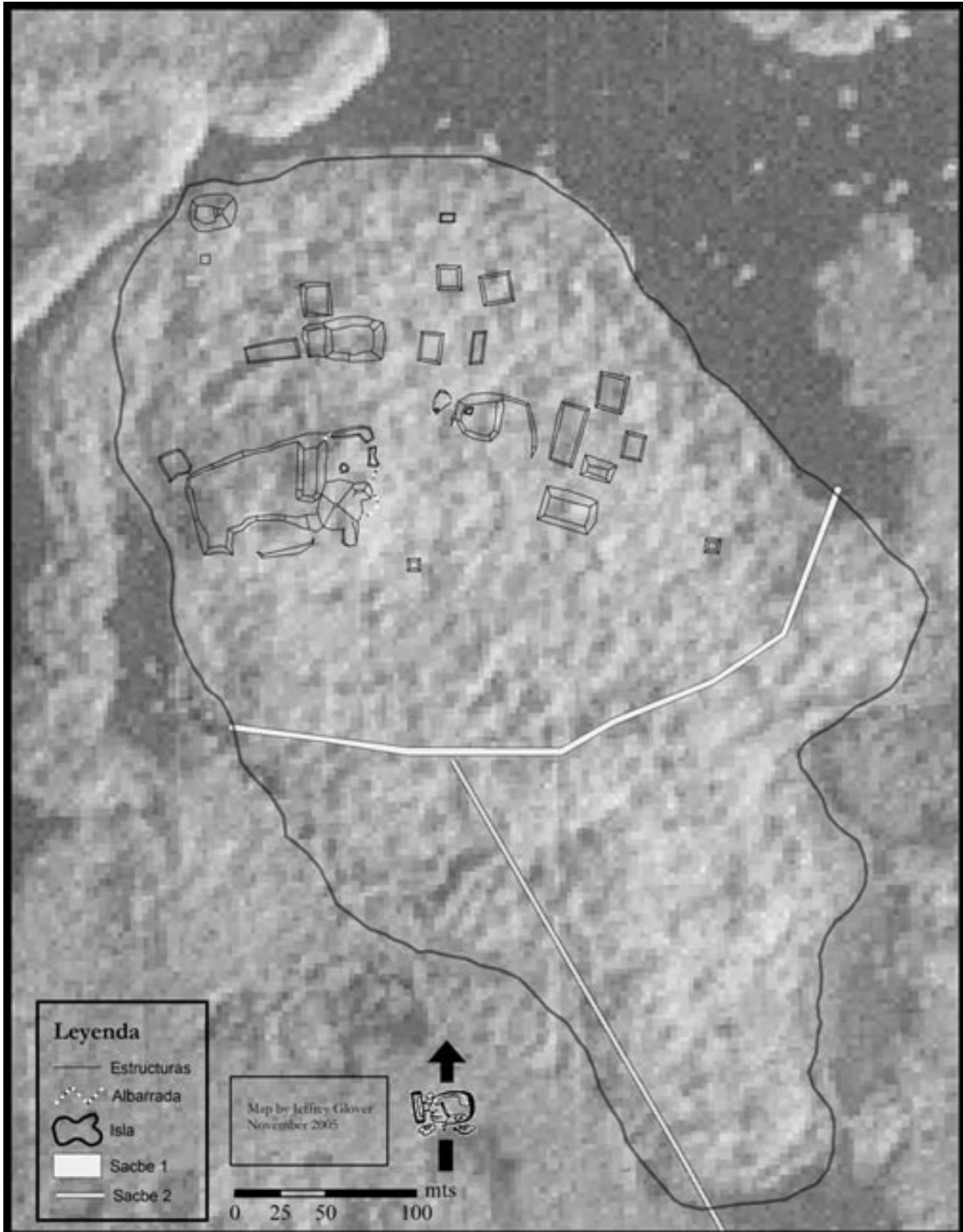


Figure 8. Aerial photograph with the superimposed map of Vista Alegre (aerial photograph: INEGI, Feb. 85, 1:75000, D.F.-88.14, L-271 F16-8).

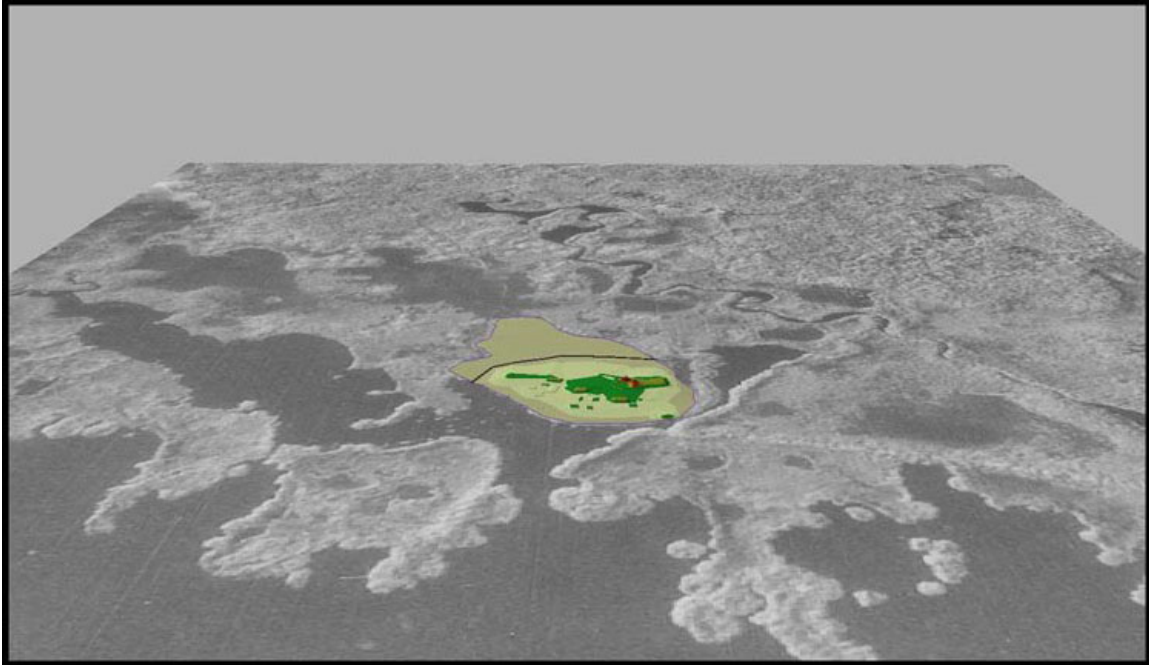


Figure 9. Aerial photograph with superimposed ArcGIS TIN projection, looking south (aerial photograph: INEGI, Feb. 85, 1:75000, D.F.-88.14, L-271 F16-8).



Figure 10. Vista Alegre, ArcGIS TIN projection, looking south.

Site Description

The boundaries of Vista Alegre are essentially defined by its geographic setting. Lagoon and estuary encircle the majority of the island. However, the southern portion of the site is characterized by mangrove, tinal, and tidal flats, with expansive wetlands to the east and west. The site itself occupies a forested area of relatively high topographic relief. The overall physiographic setting of Vista Alegre is ideal for that of a sheltered coastal port site.

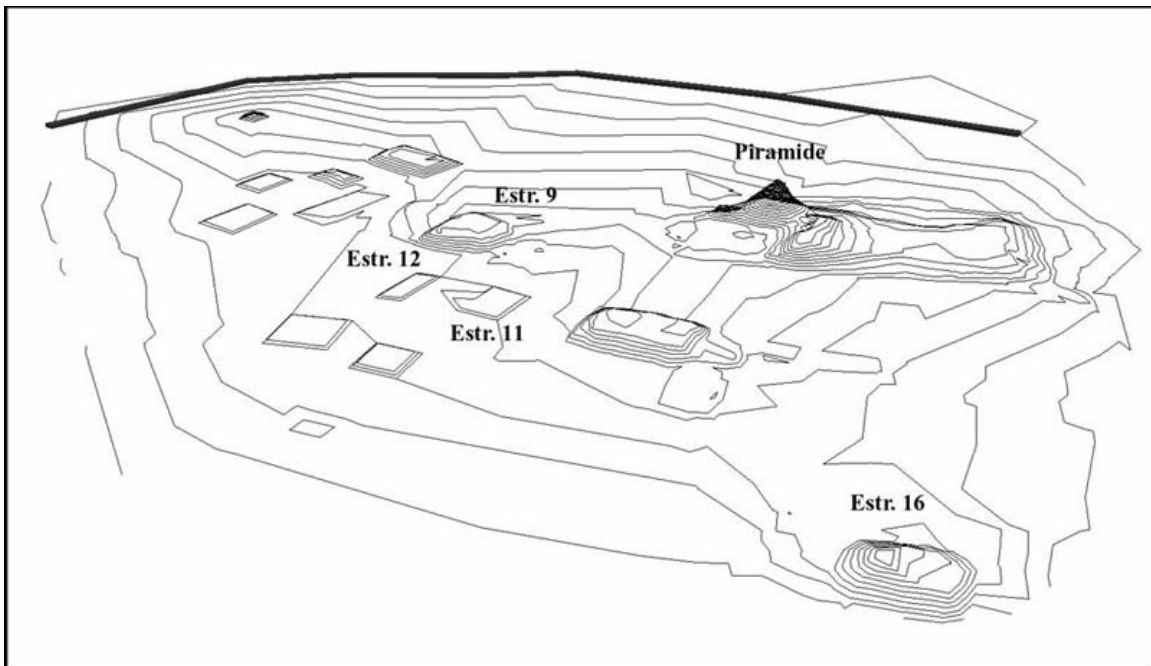


Figure 11. Topographic map of Vista Alegre, looking south.

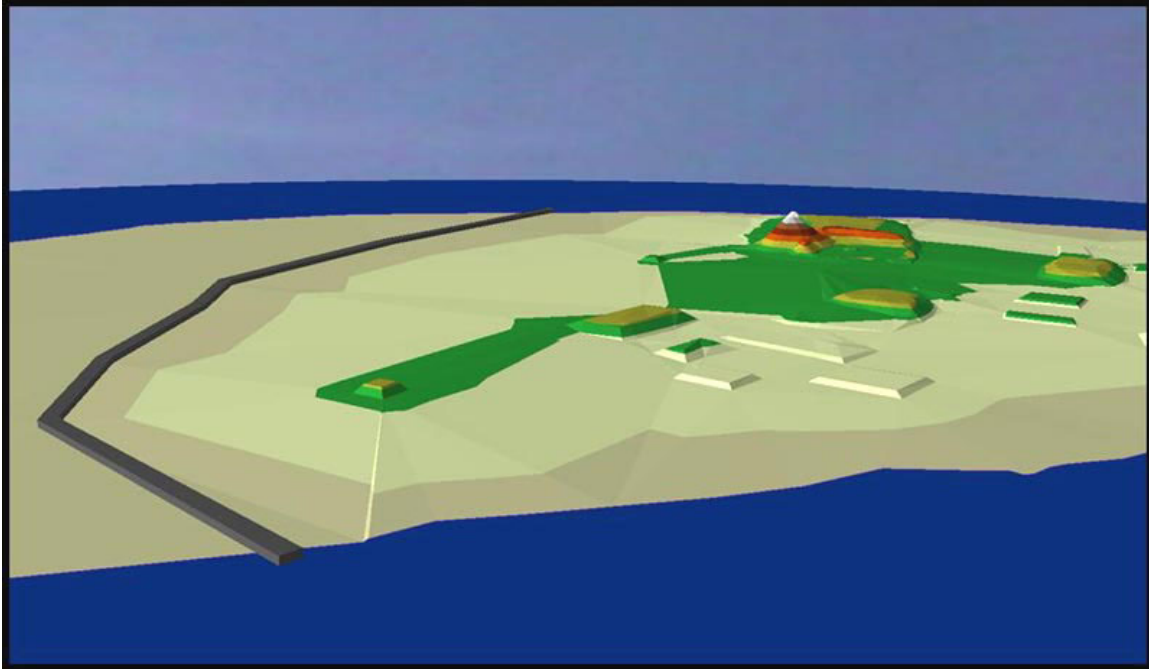


Figure 12. Vista Alegre, ArcGIS TIN projection, looking southeast.

The island measures approximately 383 m by 630 m and covers an area of approximately 16 ha. The fundamental objective of the project was to create a detailed map of Vista Alegre, including all of the structures of the site ([Figure 6](#); [Figure 7](#); [Figure 8](#); [Figure 9](#); [Figure 10](#), shown above; [Figure 11](#); [Figure 12](#), shown above; and [Figure 13](#)). With the use of a total station, we mapped 27 structures ([Figure 13](#) and [Figure 14](#)) as well as surveyed the island's margins and periphery. Structures ranged from small mounds to basal platforms to a steep pyramid, the latter of which dominates the central plaza. In addition to mapping the site, we conducted a canoe-based survey of the coastline and adjacent lagoons using a GPS receiver. All mapping and survey data were compiled into a regional geographic information system (ArcGIS 9).

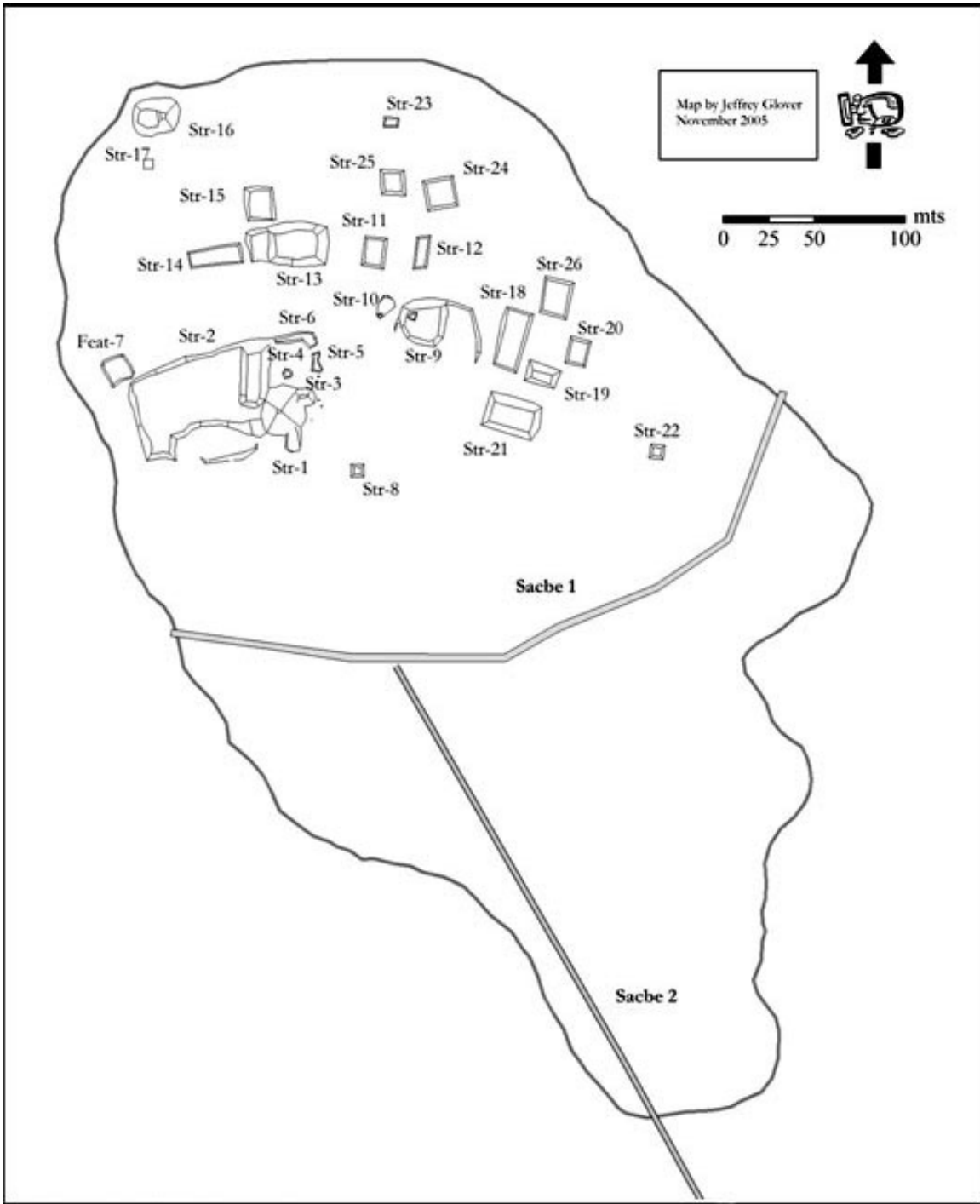


Figure 13. Vista Alegre site map.

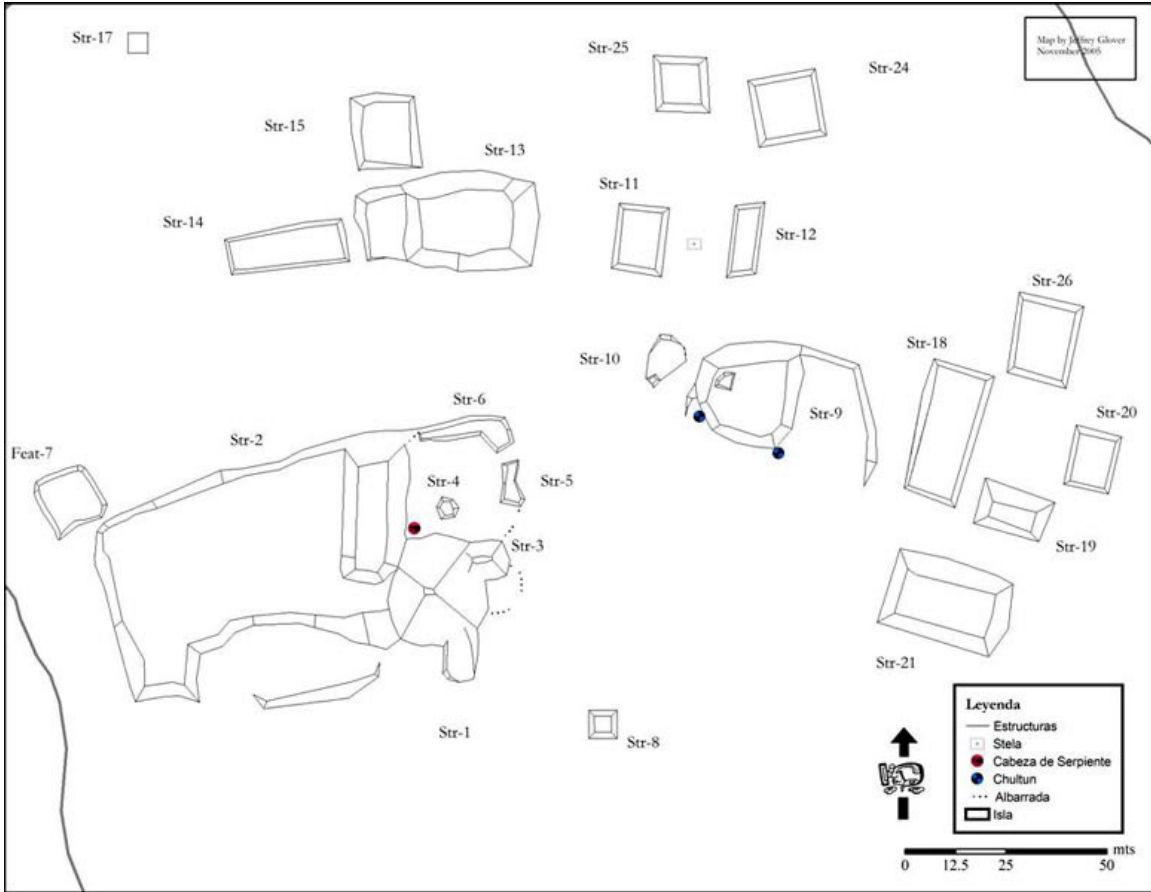


Figure 14. Detailed site map of Vista Alegre.

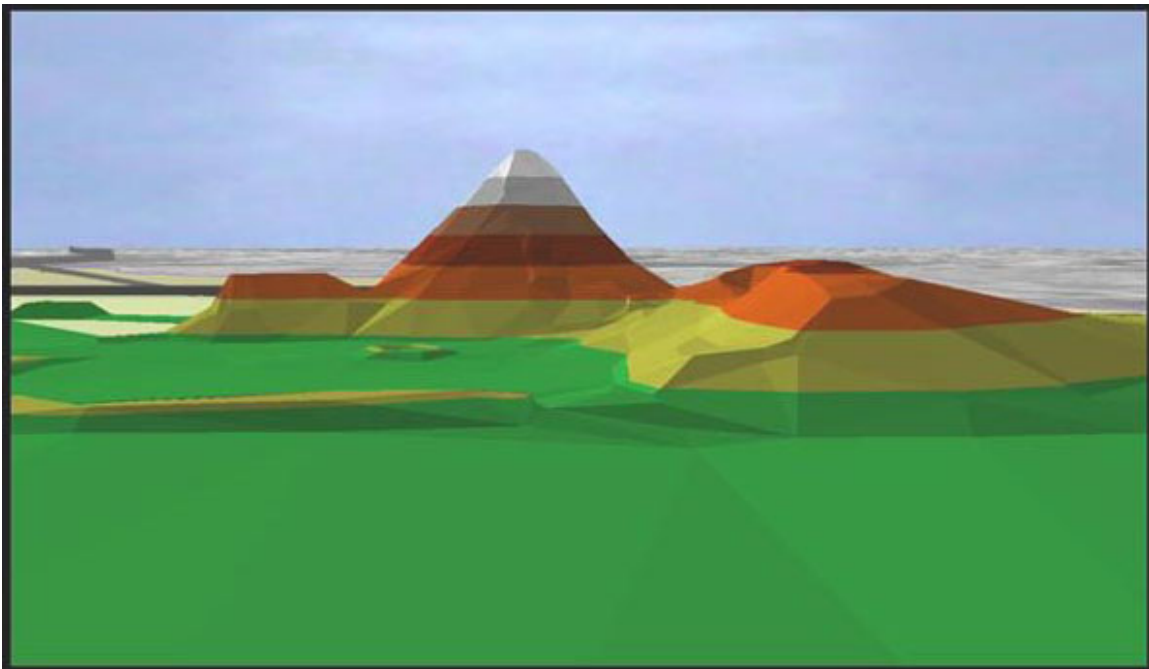


Figure 15. Structure 1 (the Pyramid), ArcGIS TIN projection, looking south.

The Pyramid and Structures of the Main Plaza

The main plaza at Vista Alegre is anchored by a steep pyramid (Structure 1), which measures 10.7 m in height ([Figure 14](#); and [Figure 15](#), shown above). This steep-sided structure appears to have been heavily damaged by both looters and hurricanes, and was originally constructed in a manner that at once ensured its integrity during use and hastened its collapse after abandonment. Essentially, the fill of the structure consists of concrete ([Figure 16](#), shown below). This technique enabled the site's inhabitants to construct a pyramid that was both high and steep with a minimal volume of building material; it is a structure that most likely shared the function of *mirador*. From the summit of the pyramid, it would have been easy to view both the coast and the sabanas, as well as closely monitor the approaching and departing canoes of maritime traders.



Figure 16. Structure 1, portion of concrete fill.

This specialized construction technique, including the use of concrete, was well adapted to coastal conditions and would have ensured the structure's stability when subjected to frequent and powerful storms. At the same time, and somewhat ironically, this technique also contributed to the destruction of the pyramid, post-abandonment. The roots of large

trees, blown down during hurricanes, have removed large sections of fill. Many of the subsequent openings have since been expanded by both looters and erosive forces. The serpent head sculpture is associated with the pyramid's collapsed stairway; however, its exact location and position appear to be the result of recent site disturbance ([Figure 17](#), shown below).

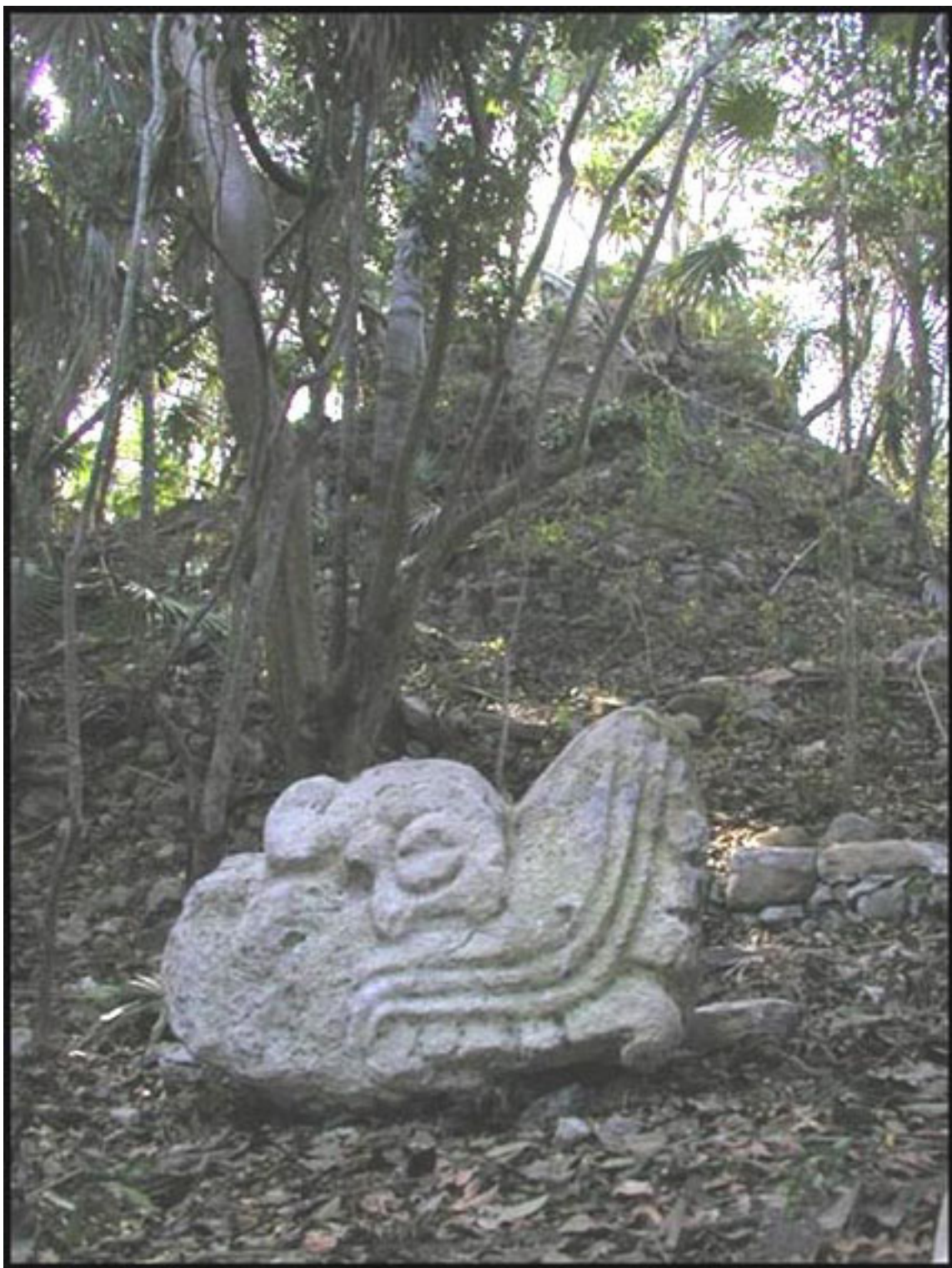


Figure 17. Structure 1, the serpent head in front of the Pyramid.

The concrete fill technique used in several buildings at the site of Vista Alegre is suggestive of a Terminal Classic construction phase. Joseph Ball has observed similar

techniques employed in the construction of Terminal Classic structures at Cobá (personal communication 2005). With respect to the form or morphology of the main pyramid at Vista Alegre, it is remarkably similar to the Xaibe structure at Cobá (see Folan *et al.* 1983:75, figure 5.8). This pyramid, from the Nohoch Mul group, is also referred to as the "Cono" because of its steep sides and rounded form. The Xaibe also is situated at the crossing of four sacbes. Folan *et al.* (1983:75) have suggested that the pyramid may have been the site of rituals related to trade due to its unique location.



Figure 18. Structure 1, wall segment (note beveled facing stones).

Also of interest is the nature of the beveled facing stones set into the concrete-core walls and terraces of some of the site's larger platforms and buildings ([Figure 18](#), shown above). With respect to the facing stones, Ball (personal communication 2005) noted similarities between the structures at Vista Alegre and certain Terminal Classic buildings at Dzibilchultún. The presence of cylindrical column fragments on two platforms at Vista Alegre suggests a later construction phase at the site.

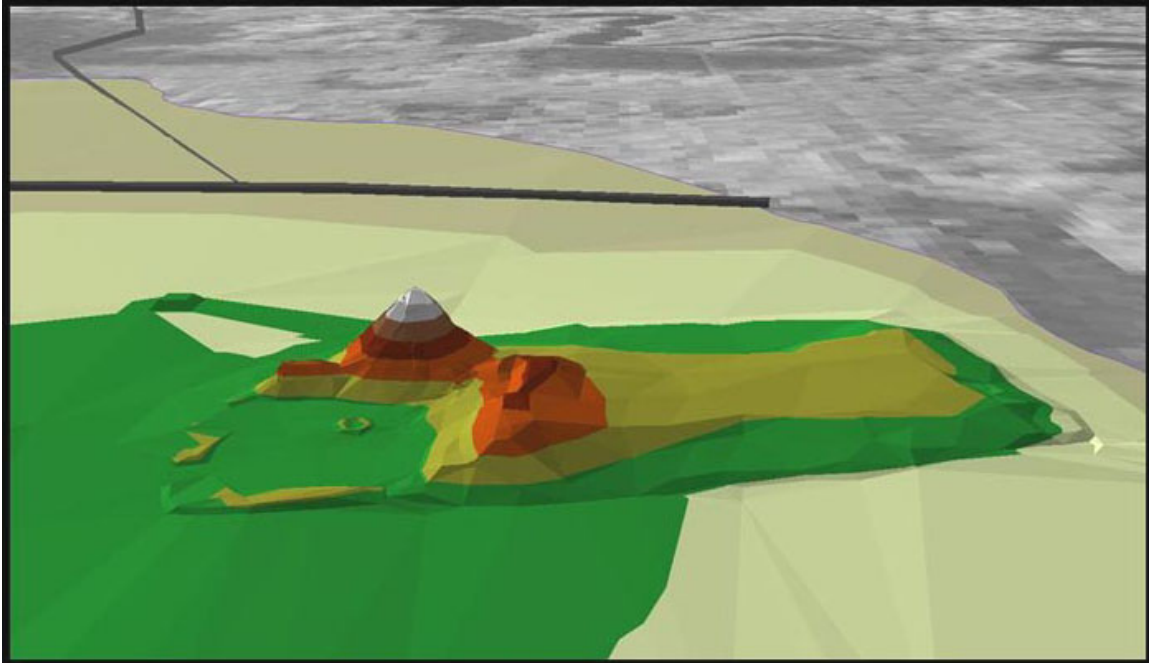


Figure 19. Structure 2 and its expansive platform (extending east from the main plaza), ArcGIS TIN projection, looking south.

Structure 2 is the most expansive platform at the site, measuring 77 m east-west by 40 m north-south ([Figure 19](#), shown above; see also [Figure 14](#)). The west side of the platform terminates at the edge of the mangroves that encircle the majority of the island (and on the other side of the mangroves is open lagoon). A 4 m-high range structure (Structure 2a) occupies the east side of the platform and faces the main plaza. The eastern slope of Structure 2a has been heavily damaged by looting activities, exposing evidence of two stucco floors near the surface of the structure ([Figure 20](#), shown below).



Figure 20. Structure 2, portion of stucco floor.

Structure 3 is connected to the east side of the pyramid and is badly damaged. The structure is approximately 3 m high and 8 m square at its base. Romero and Gurrola Briones (1995:463) suggest that Structure 3 was originally a vaulted building (based on the peculiar nature of the two remaining sections of intact fill located along the sides of the structure). However, no vault stones are present in either the collapse debris or the sections of intact fill ([Figure 21](#) and [Figure 22](#), shown below). Rather than a vaulted building, Structure 3 appears to have been a steep un-terraced structure with a flat summit. The concrete fill and the technique of construction used are similar to that of Structure 1.



Figure 21. Structure 3, intact concrete fill (west side).



Figure 22. Structure 3, intact concrete fill (east side).

Structure 4 is situated in the center of the main plaza. This structure is less than 1 m high and measures 5.4 by 5.2 m. The size and location of the structure are suggestive of a platform for a shrine or altar. Structure 5 delineates the east side of the main plaza and is characterized by a single course of well-dressed stones. The L-shaped Structure 6 encloses the northern side of the plaza.



Figure 23. Structure 9, Chultun 1.

Structure 9 and the Eastern Portion of the Site

Interestingly, we discovered two *chultuns* in front of Structure 9 ([Figure 23](#), shown above; [Figure 24](#), shown below; see also [Figure 14](#)). Both were constructed in the fill of an elevated plaza, rather than dug into the bedrock. Since there are no catchment basins associated with the *chultuns*, it is likely that they were used for food storage rather than for the collection of rain water.



Figure 24. Structure 9, Chultun 2.

East of Structure 9 are four low platforms (of which Structure 19 is the highest) that together create a small plaza (see [Figure 14](#)). In the center of this plaza we found a greenstone bead, possibly jade ([Figure 25](#), shown below). The 3 m-high Structure 21, which is located south of the plaza group, is among the most massive platforms at the site.



Figure 25. Greenstone bead.

Between Structures 11 and 12 we observed what appears to be a stela measuring 1.67 m high, .84 m wide, and .30 m thick ([Figure 26](#), shown below). The stela bears no visible relief or traces of stucco or paint (on either side), as weathering may very well have removed any such embellishment.



Figure 26. Stela.



Figure 27. Segment of east/west sacbe.

The East-West Sacbe

During our survey of the southern portion of the site, we encountered and recorded a sacbe that traverses the island (see [Figure 13](#)). In sections, the *sacbe* reaches up to 5 m in height and is approximately 2 m wide ([Figure 27](#), shown above). The east and west termini of the sacbe extend into the water of the lagoon and possibly functioned as docks. These docks would have facilitated inner-coastal and inland trade from the east, west, and south, while Structure 16, located at the site's northern tip, would have received maritime traffic from the Laguna Yalahau ([Figure 28](#), shown below).

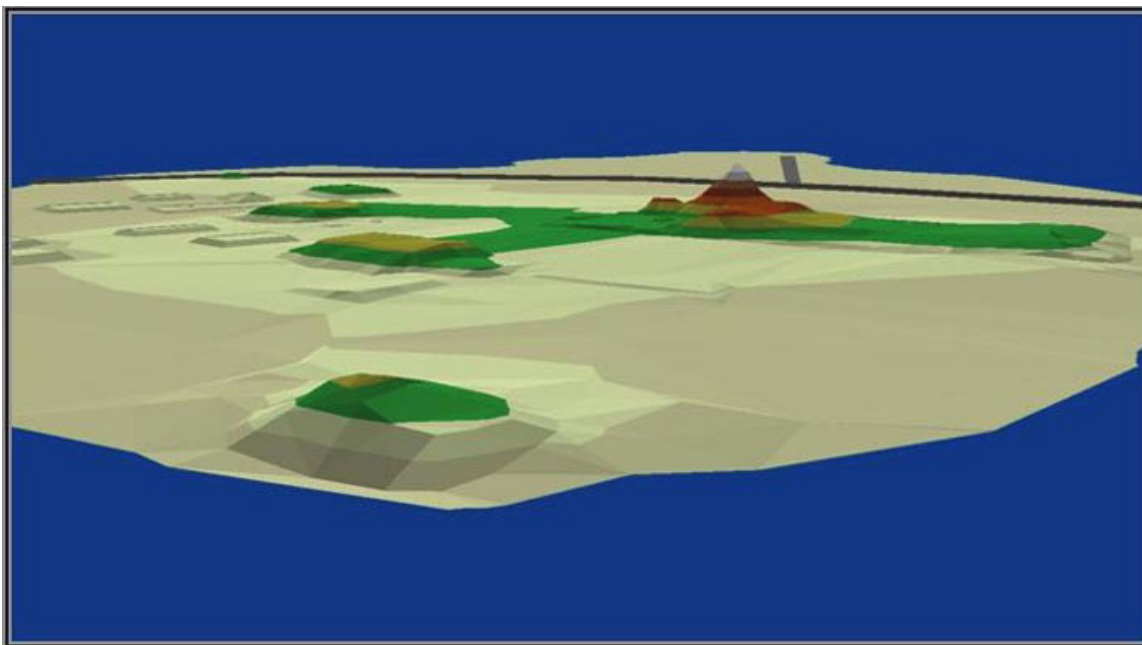


Figure 28. Structure 16, ArcGIS TIN projection, looking southeast.



Figure 29. The andador to Templo Perdido, looking north.

Templo Perdido

During our canoe-based survey, we discovered an andador (raised walkway) or sacbe that connects Vista Alegre to a structure 1.4 km to the south, named Templo Perdido ([Figure 29](#), shown above; [Figure 30](#), shown below; see also [Figure 6](#)). The walkway begins at a small temple built along the east-west sacbe of Vista Alegre and extends southeast across tinal and mangroves and across the open water of the lagoon before it enters higher forest to the south. The collapsed temple sits atop a broad platform and shares the use of cylindrical columns with the sacbe temple at Vista Alegre, suggesting that they were both constructed during the Postclassic Period. The sloping platform atop which the temple is constructed is approximately 5 m high and roughly 52 m in diameter.



Figure 30. The andador to Templo Perdido, looking south.

In addition to its religious functions, it is possible that the walkway also facilitated the delivery of drinking water and supplementary agricultural products to Vista Alegre. The presence of a small modern *milpa* just south of Templo Perdido attests to the suitability (albeit limited) of the soils. This area is also closer to fresh water periodically flushed into the brackish lagoons after heavy rains inundate the *sabanas*. As noted by Andrews

(2002), sources of fresh water are relatively rare along the coast, and include the *ojo de agua* at Rancho Yalahau and the outflow of Río Turbio (or Sabana Zanja).

With respect to subsistence at Vista Alegre, it is evident that such a small coastal site could not have existed without the support of other regional centers. *Milpa* agriculture would not have been possible in the *sabanas* and *tintales* surrounding the site. Deeper, well-drained soils are present on the island, but there would have only been room for home gardens. It is possible that the residents of Vista Alegre received agricultural products as well as ceramics and cotton from sites in the interior – like Monte Bravo, San Ramón, and San Ángel – in exchange for maritime products such as salt and dried fish, as well as trade items and commodities such as grinding stone, obsidian, or sumptuary goods.

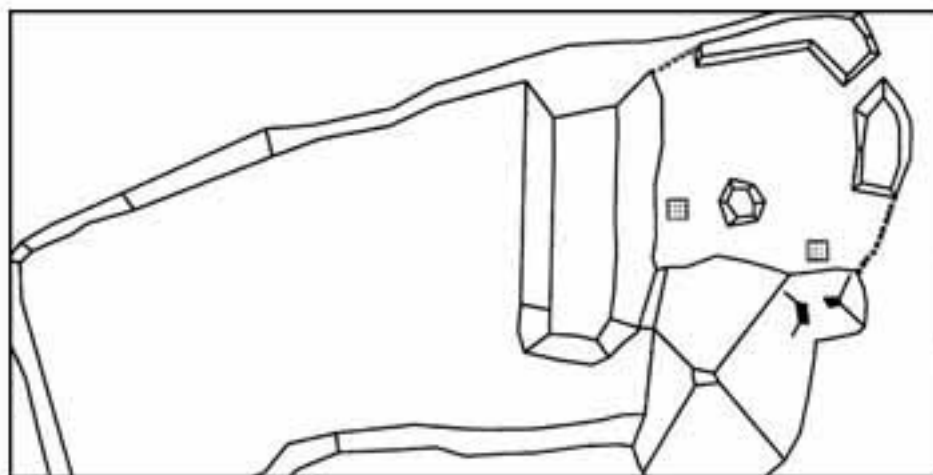


Figure 31. Location test excavation unit 1.

Test Excavation

As stated above, our brief investigation of the site of Vista Alegre focused primarily on mapping and recording. Nevertheless, we excavated a 1 m x 1 m test excavation unit in the main plaza in hopes of uncovering a plaza floor and recovering sub-floor ceramics ([Figure 31](#), shown above; [Figure 32](#); [Figure 33](#), shown below). The unit was excavated in arbitrary 10 cm levels, which revealed three distinct natural levels: 0-30 cm, a loose loamy soil; 30 cm, fragments of a stucco floor; 30-60 cm plaza construction fill. A total of only 45 sherds were recovered from the excavation unit, of which 39 sherds were too eroded to be confidently typed (see [Table 1](#), below). This extremely poor sample yielded an extremely shaky *terminus post quem* date for the plaza floor, which is based on a single Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic Vista Alegre Striated sherd.

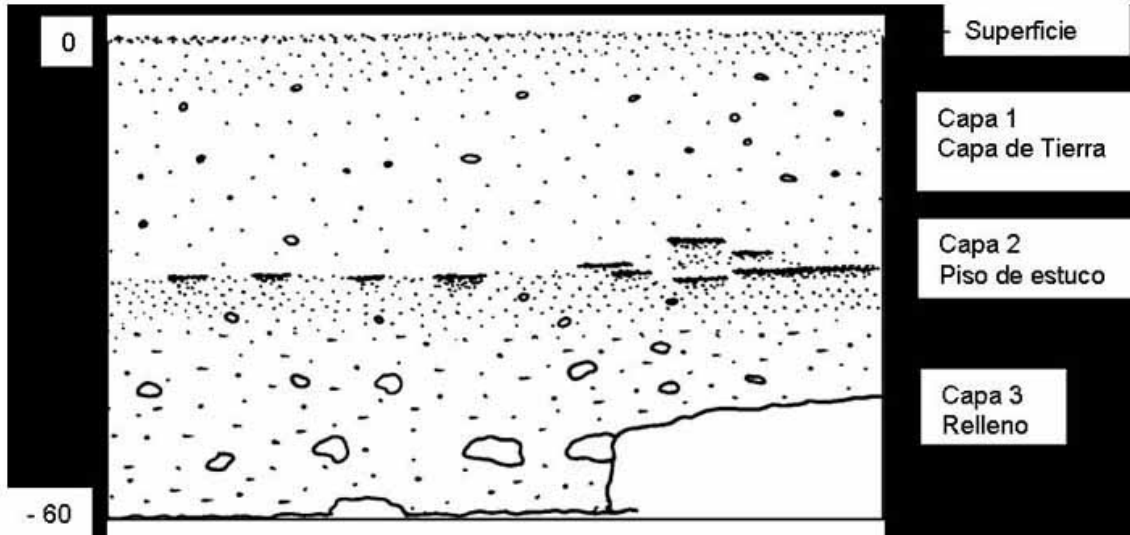


Figure 32. Unit 1 (1m x 1m), profile (northeast).



Figure 33. Unit 1. Stucco plaza floor; level 2 (-30 cm).

Ceramics

Our cursory sample of ceramics from Vista Alegre is admittedly paltry and does not offer a fair characterization of the types present at the site. Once again, our efforts (during the 2005 field season) focused on recording the site's structures and features and no effort was made to conduct a systematic or more thorough collection of surface ceramics. The greatest density of sherds is found along the margins of the island (a logical place to dispose of rubbish). Unfortunately, these deposits, which also contain an abundance of marine shells, are relatively shallow and are subject to severe erosion given their constant exposure to seawater.

For the most part, the types that we observed are consistent with those identified by Sanders (1960:191-192), and include a greater frequency of Terminal Classic and Postclassic types. The collections of Romero and Gurrola Briones (1995:463) include the groups Saban, Saxche, Muna, Vista Alegre, Silhó, Kukulá, and Mama. Also present in our collection are unidentified bichromes, orange polychromes, slate-wares, and trickle-wares. In addition to the provenienced sherds listed in the tables below ([Table 1](#) and [Table 2](#)), we observed sherds from the Carolina, Navula, and Payil groups scattered about the site.

Type: Variety Lot	P1 0- 10	P1 10- 20	P1 20- 30	P1 30- 40	P1 40- 50	P1 50- 60	Total
Sierra Rojo: Engobe Claro					1		1
Laguna Verde Inciso: Engobe Claro	1						1
Huachinango Bicromo Inciso: Huachinango	1						1
Vista Alegre Estriado: Vista Alegre						1	1
Chen Mul Modelado: Chen Mul	1	1					2
No Identificado	6	20	4	4	1	4	39
Total	9	21	4	4	2	5	45

Type: Variety Lot	Str. 1	Str. 2	Str. 9	Str. 11	Str. 27	Templo Perdido	Total
Tancah Burdo (no especificado)						1	1
Vista Alegre Estriado: Vista Alegre			4	1			5

Pizarra no especificada		1					1
Chen Mul Modelado: Chen Mul	1				2		3
Total	1	1	4	1	2	1	10



Figure 34. Tulip conch (exact species not identified).

Archaeological Mollusks

Scattered across the surface of the northwestern margins of the island (at the water's edge) are a large number of sun-bleached and weathered shells, a cursory sample of which consisted entirely of gastropods. As previously mentioned, this portion of the site is characterized by extensive and apparently dense midden deposits. No attempt was made at a systematic collection of surface (or subsurface) mollusks, though a few general observations merit reporting. As one would expect, mollusks were a routinely exploited source of food for the residents of Vista Alegre. Nearly every gastropod we observed bore the telltale hole punched through the shell for the purpose of cutting or detaching the muscle and extracting the animal through the shell's aperture.



Figure 35. Lightning whelk (*Busycon contrarium*).

Based on our observations, tulip conchs (possibly *Fasciolaria tulipa*) were quite commonly consumed ([Figure 34](#), shown above). Also abundant at the site are lightning whelks (*Busycon contrarium*), easily identified by their sinistral shell ([Figure 35](#), shown above). The enormous Florida horse conch (*Pleuroploca gigantea*) can be found in the waters of the Laguna Yalahau and were readily observed at Vista Alegre ([Figure 36](#), shown below). There are a great number of whelk species at the site that remain to be identified, but turnip whelks and pear whelks appear to be included among them ([Figure 36](#)). Conspicuously absent are queen conchs (*Strombus gigas*), which are ubiquitous at sites along the east coast of the Peninsula. The north coast of Quintana Roo represents a biological transition zone between the Caribbean and the Gulf of México, and we suspect that the queen conch was more common in the waters east of Vista Alegre.



Figure 36. Horse conch (*Pleuroploca gigantea*), third from right, and assorted whelks (exact species not identified).

Discussion

In Anthony P. Andrews' (1990) seminal work on Maya ports, he succinctly proposes a classificatory scheme based on the functional differences between eight types of ports: 1) coastal communities, 2) religious coastal centers, 3) island necropoli, 4) specialized trading ports, 4a) ports of embarkation to offshore islands, 4b) ports-of-trade, 4c) coastal transshipment ports, and 4d) seaports of inland polities. It is important to note that these functional categories are not mutually exclusive, and as Andrews states (1990:162): "it is impossible to assign any given coastal site to an exclusive category. Most fit into several, if not all, categories." The possible functions of Vista Alegre need to be tested archaeologically before we can address specific questions regarding its relationship with other sites. Andrews' (1990) descriptions of the attributes of the various ports will serve as a comparative baseline and provide the material correlates for investigating the possible function(s) of Vista Alegre. Once the functional attributes of Vista Alegre have been identified, the port's connection with other parts of the northern Maya Lowlands can be addressed. There are two different scales of analysis when investigating these relations: the regional scale and the peninsular scale.

Ethnographic and historic data from the early 20th century, as discussed by Andrews (2000), show that at least one of the sabanas, Sabana Zanja (Río Turbio), was used for canoe travel from the Laguna Yalahau to the inland town of San Ángel, which is located

some 18 km to the south. This navigable waterway, which most likely connected ancient inland sites to the coast, is of interest here.

Vista Alegre is positioned near the eastern edge of Sabana Zanja, while the Prehispanic centers of Monte Bravo and San Ángel are located along the sabana margins to the south. Taube and Gallareta (1989) were the first to investigate the site of San Ángel, which is located near the southern terminus of Sabana Zanja. There they encountered intact Postclassic mural paintings in the Tulúm-style as well as two carved serpent head balustrades (Lombardo de Ruiz 1987; Taube and Gallareta Negrón 1989). During a more recent visit, Fedick observed large quantities of conch shell (personal communication 2001). These data have led others to propose that San Ángel was connected to coastal trade networks via the port of Vista Alegre. However, the specific connections between these sites have never been systematically investigated. Was Vista Alegre the coastal port for an inland polity centered at San Ángel or elsewhere in the Yalahau region? What was the nature of its relationship with the larger port of Conil (as discussed by Andrews [2002])? Were these sites under the sway of a larger power such as Chichén Itzá (like the port of Isla Cerritos [see Andrews and Gallareta Negrón 1986])?

If Vista Alegre served as a seaport for an inland polity such as San Ángel or Monte Bravo, then one would expect the sites to share a common ceramic tradition (as well as exhibit architectural similarities). Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic ceramics, such as the ubiquitous Vista Alegre Striated type, have been identified at the 23 inland sites where surface collections and excavations have been conducted by the Yalahau Project. Few slate wares of either the Cehpech or Sotuta spheres have been found. Late Postclassic groups, such as Mama and Navula, however, are common and have been identified at all the sites studied within the region.

Was Vista Alegre a coastal outpost for the Itzá state during the Early Postclassic as Andrews proposes (1990:161)? Was Vista Alegre an important link in the chain of coastal sites that participated in the circum-peninsular trade networks of the Late Postclassic? Or, did the site play an active role in both? At the most basic level, the answers to these questions must come from ceramic data and the temporal information that they will provide. The iconographic data cannot stand alone since the serpent head balustrade tradition (while ubiquitous at Chichén Itzá) continues into the Late Postclassic and can be found at Mayapán, Tulúm, El Meco and San Ángel (Proskouriakoff 1962:45, 51, 53, figs. 3d [mural representation], 6i-k, 7a-e; Taube 1992:fig. 76c; Taube and Gallareta Negrón 1989). Of those four sites, El Meco is the only one with minimal Itzá influence (Andrews 1990:161; Andrews and Castellanos 1986).

Associated with the Itzá hypothesis made by Andrews (1990:161) is the subsequent abandonment of many Itzá-controlled coastal sites after Chichén Itzá's collapse. From Sanders' (1955, 1960) work this abandonment already seems questionable due to the presence of Late Postclassic ceramics, which calls into question the tightness of the relationship between the Itzá capital and Vista Alegre. Once again this question should be easily resolved with sub-surface ceramics from Vista Alegre. If Vista Alegre served

as an Itzá outpost, as proposed by Andrews (1990:161), then Itzá-style Sotuta ceramics should be found in abundance.

The ubiquitous Terminal Classic ceramic type at the site of Vista Alegre is Vista Alegre Striated (of the Eastern Cehpech ceramic sphere) (Ball 1978; Robles Castellanos 1990; Sanders 1960). Vista Alegre Striated was locally produced, and its abundance at the site of Vista Alegre suggests that strong regional ties were maintained in the midst of a possible Itzá control during the Terminal Classic to Early Postclassic. Susan Kepecs (1998:128) reminds us that Vista Alegre Striated is relatively common at the Itzá port of Isla Cerritos (see Andrews *et al.* 1988) as well as at coastal sites in the Chikinchel region. This ceramic situation indicates coastal interaction between Yucatán and Quintana Roo during the Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic. Moreover, as Kepecs (1998:128) insightfully notes, it suggests that connections between the Chikinchel region and northern Quintana Roo during the Classic period did not dissolve after Itzá control was later established.

As we prepare to continue our program of research and exploration along the northeast coast of Yucatán Peninsula, we find ourselves in a unique position to integrate Vista Alegre into larger studies concerning regional economic and political organization. A more detailed understanding of this strategic ancient port will enable us to not only evaluate the linkages between the coastal and inland sites within the region, but also determine the role of Vista Alegre within the context of Postclassic circum-peninsular trade. The data collected and the perspective gained during the 2005 field season at Vista Alegre will go far towards realizing these goals.

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