

## The Naranjo Rescue Project: New Data from the Preclassic Guatemala



**Research Year:** 2006  
**Culture:** Maya  
**Chronology:** Preclassic  
**Location:** Guatemalan Highlands, Guatemala  
**Site:** Naranjo

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### Abstract

The *Proyecto de Rescate Naranjo* started as a rescue work required by the *Instituto de Antropología e Historia* in Guatemala due to the construction of an urban development in the area. An emergency grant was provided by FAMSI to do more fieldwork and support archaeological analysis. Fieldwork began at the end of July 2005 and finished in March 2006. Naranjo is located in the central Guatemalan highlands and has proven to have a Middle Preclassic occupation with a scant Late Classic re-use. The site was completely abandoned by the Late Preclassic, suggesting that it fell under Kaminaljuyú's centralized authority. Its large size, strategic location and large presence of plain monuments, suggest that it may have been one of the earliest ceremonial centers in the region. The settlement pattern study has shown a high population density, suggesting a complex organization of the Middle Preclassic highland society.

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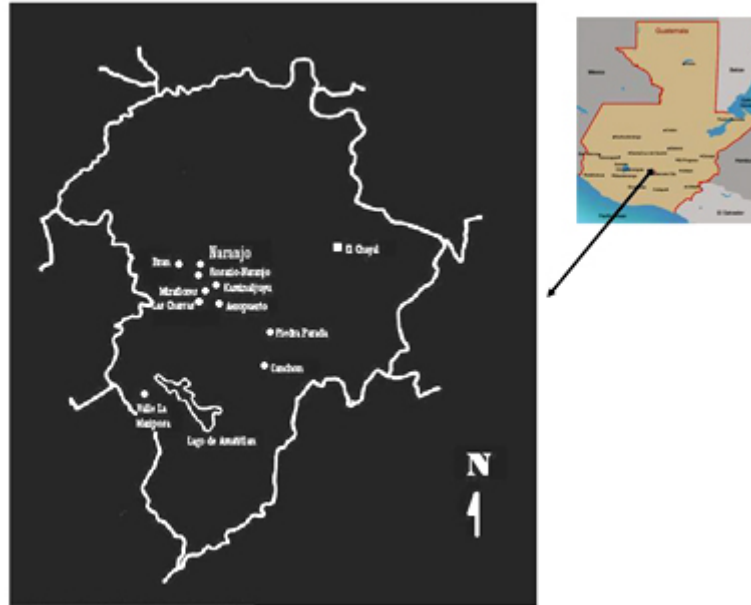


Figure 1. Map showing the location of Naranjo.

## Introduction

The Naranjo rescue project took place at the site of Naranjo, in the valley of Guatemala, located 3 kms north from the major center of Kaminaljuyú (Figure 1, shown above). Following, data on background research will be presented on research at the site and surroundings. Results from field research will be presented as well as a discussion of the site's importance in the understanding of the Highland prehistory.

## Background

The site of Naranjo was first reported by Williamson (1877) who was a United States Minister from Central America and amateur archaeologist. He visited the Hacienda Naranjo, owned by Pedro de Aycinena in 1876, carrying out several excavations at the site. On his publication, he mentions "the results were too unsatisfactory to induce me to make any excavation of No. 2". Williamson's description includes stone monuments placed in three lines, some of which have been removed to other parts of the hacienda. He made a sketch map that was used as initial reference for our project (Figure 2, shown below). The photographic file of the Carnegie Institution on the Peabody online archive, there are two photos of carved monuments that were located at the hacienda house. This suggests that they may have come from Naranjo.

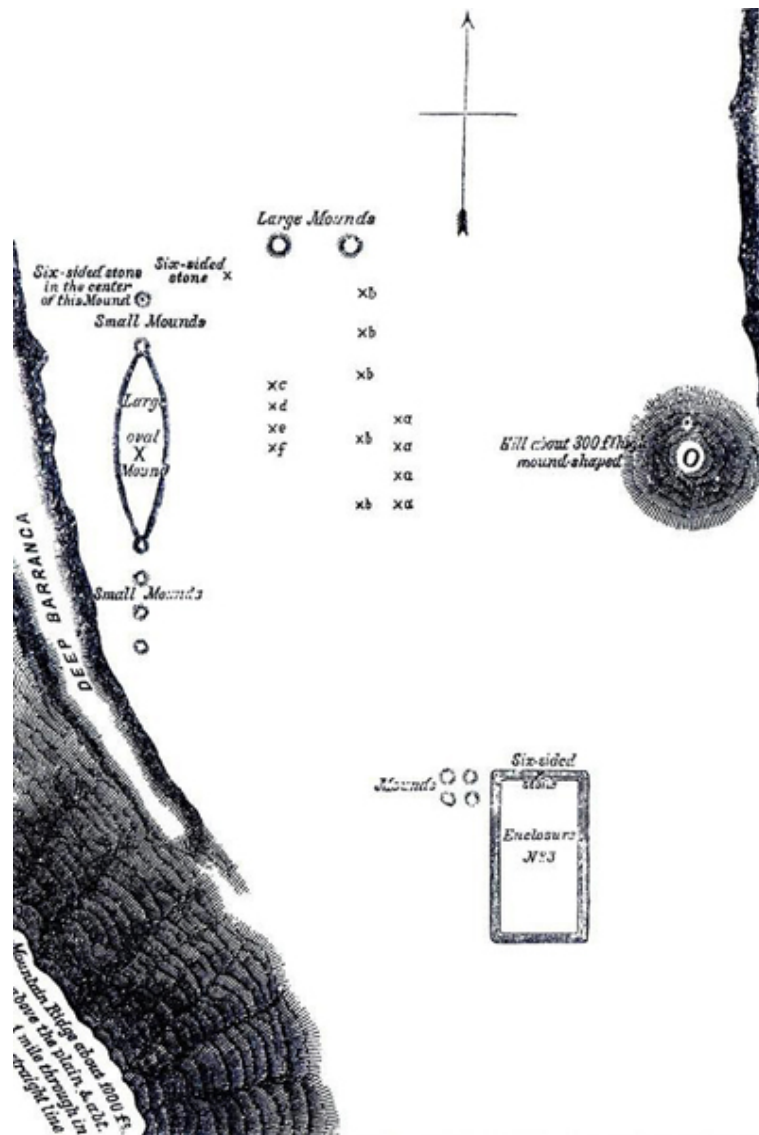


Figure 2. Williamson's sketch map (From Williamson 1887).

Williamson mentions that several monuments had been taken out of the site prior to his visit. However, despite this, he saw "three rows of stones still standing in the ground" (Williamson 1877:419). He then, continues with an ample description of the monuments and its location. This was extremely useful for our project as two of the monument lines were not visible on the surface.

In addition to Williamson's report, the photographer E. Muybridge, visited the site and photographed Monument 1 in 1875 (Figure 3, shown below) (Burns 1986). Unfortunately, there is no other reference to the site on his photo archive. Later, Villacorta (1927) published a brief report on the site, based on Williamson's observations and a visit to the hacienda that included photographs of some of the plain monuments (Figure 4, shown below).

Edwin M. Shook visited the site on various occasions between 1940 and 1950. These visits took place as part of his job at the Carnegie Institution and the Kaminaljuyú project. Shook made a sketch map (Figure 5, below) and contacted various residents from the surrounding area. They showed him a collection of clay figurines that Shook dated to the Middle Preclassic.



Figure 3. Photo by Muybridge of Monument 1 at Naranjo (From Burns 1986).



Figure 4. Monument 28 photographed by Villacorta (1927).

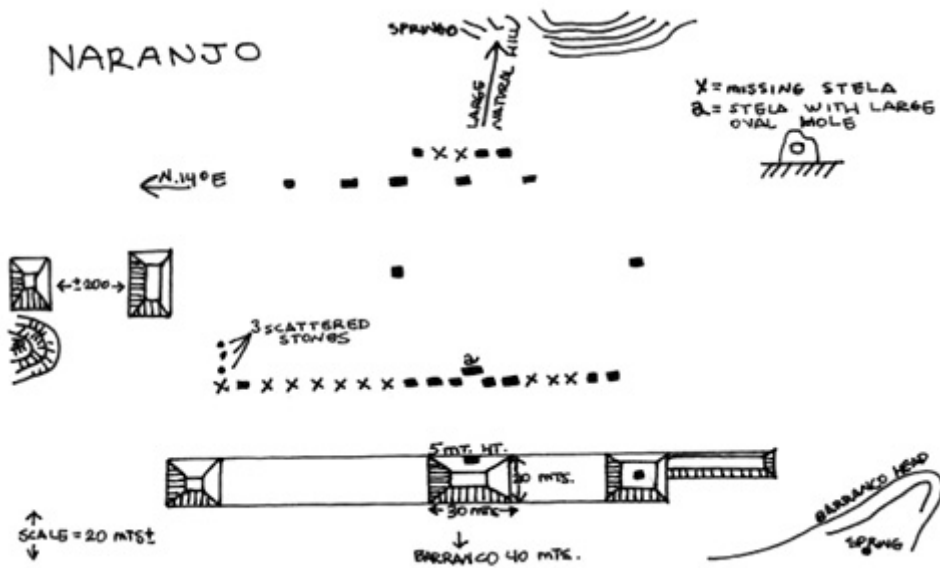


Figure 5. Edwin M. Shook's sketch map of Naranjo (From Universidad del Valle Shook archive).

After Shook's last visit, no more work was done at the site. Currently, the area around Naranjo is undergoing an urbanistic development that will impact the site, and on that context, our rescue research took place.

A rescue research pretends to obtain the largest amount of information before that this one will be lost due to the building or modern activity at a site. The main objective of these projects is to handle the archaeological record adequately to obtain cultural information that could be relevant in determining the cultural value of the site and which sites or part of the site should be protected or excavated through salvage operations.

The opportunity to carry out a rescue research project has allowed for the documentation of important data on the Middle Preclassic on the Guatemalan highlands. To be able to investigate the site as a unit has been very productive. Most rescue projects that have been done around the Guatemalan highlands, particularly, around Kaminaljuyú, focus on a mound or small group of mounds. Having the opportunity to focus on a site, contemporary with the first occupation of Kaminaljuyú, has been extremely useful. In addition, we were able to carry out survey and test excavations in the surrounding area of the main center. This has allowed understanding the settlement pattern of the site. This data will be presented by Karen Pereira on a report that will be submitted to FAMSI soon.

## **Rescue Projects and the Middle Preclassic**

The moment Guatemala City settled in the Ermita valley, the pre-Columbian site of Kaminaljuyú was condemned to disappear. Many projects have been done in various places in the valley. Unfortunately, there is no legislation that is specific for rescue archaeology. Because of this, a diverse amount of information is processed by different archaeologists in many ways. Some rescue projects have contributed with important information, however, most have produced only scant reports that are hard to find and contain little information. This is a tragedy as whatever a rescue project does, is the last information (and sometimes the only one) available on a specific site. The work done here could be invaluable in reconstructing the prehistory of the valley. Shook reported a series of sites nearby Naranjo, including Cruz to the east, Bran and Guacamaya to the west, Betania to the south, and Aycinena, Rodeo, Cruz de Cotiío and Ross to the southeast ([Figure 1](#), Shook 1952). Most of these sites have long disappeared under modern buildings and little is known of their settlement.

Very close to Naranjo, to the southeast is the site of Rosario-Naranjo (also known as Tulam Tzu) one that has had several rescue projects (Fonca 1989, Jacobo and Grignon 1991; Jacobo 1992; Escobar and Alvarado 2004). It is believed that this was a larger site than Naranjo with Middle Preclassic occupation, including five original mounds and various plain monuments.

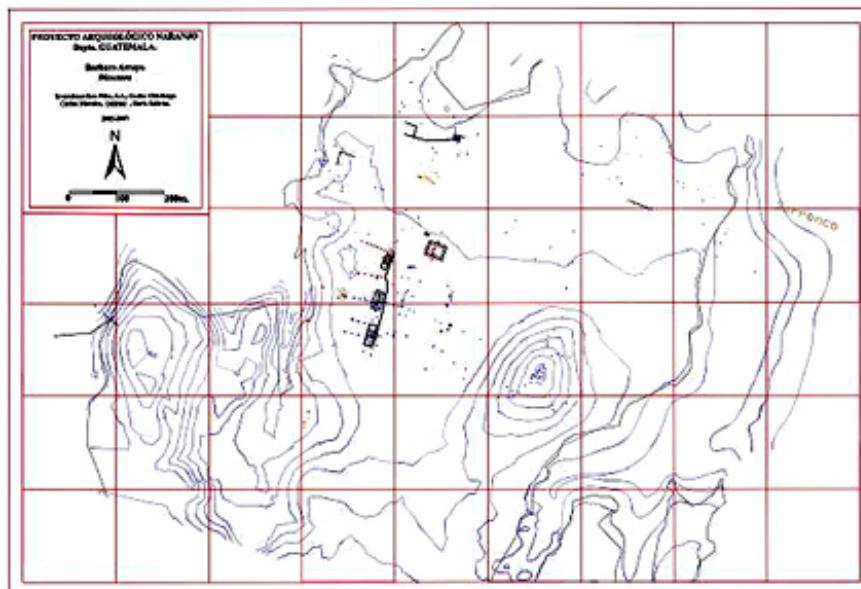
The Carnegie Institution carried out excavations in various locations of the valley and mostly in the epicenter of Kaminaljuyú, documenting the first evidences of occupation in the region. Later, Pennsylvania State University also conducted excavations and settlement pattern studies that have documented important data on Kaminaljuyú and the surrounding area. These projects allowed for the recording of the Arevalo (Early Preclassic) and Las Charcas (Middle Preclassic) phases. Shook identified Arevalo and Las Charcas remains on Mound C-III-10 during 1951 and 1952 (Shook and Hatch 1999). Prior to this, Middle Preclassic findings had been reported in section A-IV from Kaminaljuyú (Kidder, Jennings, and Shook 1946).

The last two years, a series of rescue operations have taken place in various Middle Preclassic sectors of Kaminaljuyú. Among them is Las Conchas in zone 14 (Valle 2005) and Gran Via in zone 11 (Flores 2005).

Away from the city, several reports of Las Charcas occupations have been documented. Piedra Parada, San José Pinula, and Canchón, near Fraijanes, to the east of the city, have been referred by Shook as having a dense Middle Preclassic occupation (Shook 1952). Some of these places have had rescue projects (De León and Valdés 2002), documenting significant population, in addition to complex social organization. The presence of plain monuments at

various locations from Middle Preclassic contexts is just one of the features that are shared by these places showing a complex organization.

These settlement pattern data reflect a relevant site density for that time period, something that has not been widely discussed. This reflects the importance of the Middle Preclassic in the explanation of sociopolitical complexity of the time.



**Figure 6. Naranjo topographic map.**

## Research at Naranjo

The rescue project was designed to investigate the main structures at the site and spatially limit them (which was a request from the *Instituto de Antropología e Historia de Guatemala*) including a topographic map of the site ([Figure 6](#), shown above). In addition, we carried out a settlement pattern study outside the main center, as well as test excavations in the surrounding area. This allowed for a perspective on the chronology and settlement density of the site.

Fieldwork started at the end of July 2005 and finished at the end of March 2006. Research was sponsored by *Inversiones Las Pilas*, the local development company, New World Archaeological Foundation, FAMSI and the Reinhart Foundation. The following students participated on the project for fieldwork credit: Adriana Linares, Ivannoe Fajardo, Julio Cañas, Iyaxel Cojtí, Diego Vásquez, Carlos Enrique Fernández, Andrea Tovar.

The site's arrangement includes a spatial organization oriented north-south, a feature typical of the Preclassic sites from the area. The site itself is surrounded by ravines and various water springs where small streams flow. Water was readily available, and probably the reason why this location was selected in Preclassic times. To the east of the main structure, Mound 1, there is a natural hill. The space between Mound 1 and the natural hill had a leveled surface with three parallel lines of stone monuments aligned north-south.

The site center consists of Mound 1 and 2, and the Northern and Southern platforms. Mound 1 and the platforms are lined north-south. The Southern Platform was a natural elevation modified to hold the prehispanic activities that took place in the area during Las Charcas phase. Mound 1 was built during Las Charcas phase but modified during Providencia times. Mound 2 and the Northern Platform were built during the latter part of the Middle Preclassic, during Providencia times. Mound 3, on the northernmost limit of the site, dates to Providencia and continues the same building pattern from the Northern Platform and Mound 2.



Figure 7. Photograph of different building episodes from Mound 1.

### Mound 1

Mound 1 is located at the center of the site. It was oriented towards the natural hill to the east, and aligned with the Northern and Southern Platforms (Figure 7, shown above). The material used for the construction of Mound 1 was clay and fill of different types of clay and talpetate (Figure 7, above). One of the last construction episodes has 15 steps on the eastern and western sides (Figure 8, shown below). The main access to the site was through the eastern side. On this side, six different construction episodes were documented having started with two separate low clay platforms. On top of these, clay fill was placed to raise the height of the mound, adding to six different construction episodes. The first three building episodes of these platforms were built during Las Charcas times; a radiocarbon date of 770-400 BC confirms such dating (Figure 8, below). Three other episodes took place during the Providencia phase.

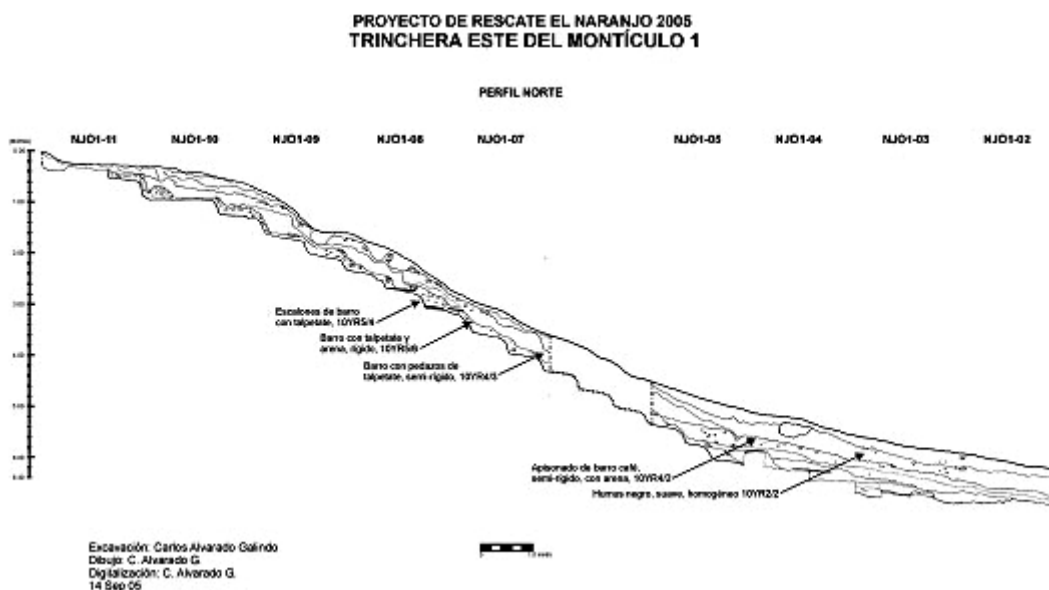


Figure 8. Illustration showing North profile from Mound 1.

Mound 1 served a ceremonial purpose. The layout of the mound, oriented 91 degrees towards the Natural Hill to the east, and limiting the sector of the first line of plain monuments, supports this idea.



**Figure 9. Northern Platform photo.**

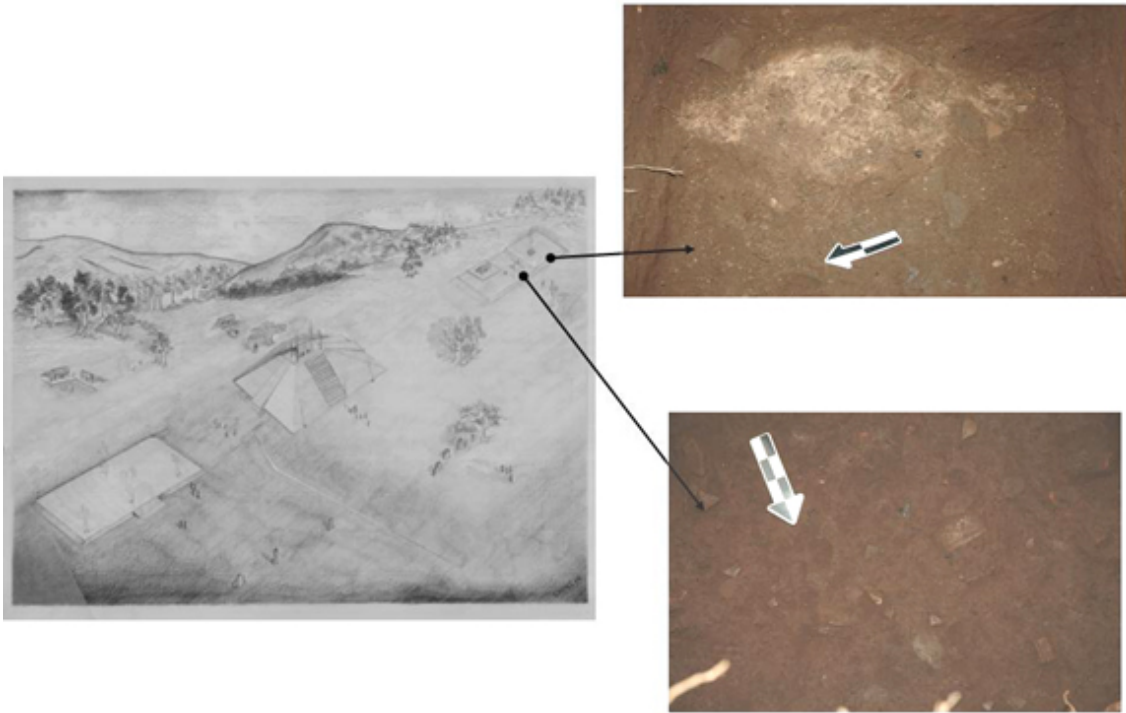
### ***Northern Platform***

This is an elongated structure located to the north of Mound 1 ([Figure 9](#), shown above). This was built during the Providencia phase. A dedicatory event was uncovered containing abundant sherds, ash, burnt clay, and animal bones ([Figure 10](#), shown below). The dedicatory event was probably a banquet that ended up on the building dedication. The ash and burnt clay remains suggest the celebration of various fires that took place with this event.

After the dedication, various clay boxes were built, a building technique common during this time period. Various fill episodes were placed inside the clay boxes to heighten the surface some 90 cms. On top of the boxes, the surface was leveled and a clay floor was documented dating to the Middle Preclassic.

In association with this surface various significant features were recovered. To the north of the platform, a hearth was documented. This large hearth had pieces of basalt monuments that had been burnt together with smaller stones ([Figure 11](#), shown below). A short distance away, to the south, there was an alignment of 13 stones running from west to east. In the middle of the alignment, a plain columnar basalt stela was erected (Monument 21). A few meters to the south, Monument 16 was uncovered ([Figure 12](#), shown below). This was a columnar basalt that had been re-worked and was oriented directly with Monument 21. All these features were placed during Middle Preclassic times, however were re-visited and re-used during the Late Classic. In association to these features, 18 Amatlé phase vessels were recovered together with a cross shaped feature and 13 pebbles that included 7 quartz ([Figure 13](#), shown below). These features were placed as offerings related to the Late Classic re-visit.





**Figure 10. Dedicatory deposit on the Northern Platform showing sherds and ash.**



**Figure 11. Hearth uncovered at the Northern Platform.**



**Figure 12. Overall view of 13 stones located in the Northern Platform.**



**Figure 13. Overall view of offerings found in the Northern Platform.**

If the plain monuments were erected due to a calendrical event, the northern sector may have had such connotation. The placement of 13 stones could relate to the 13 months of the Tzolkin. The re-use in Classic times could be interpreted as the remembrance of the place and its importance in the calendar of the time. An alternative interpretation could be that the Northern Platform was identified with a place in the North, a location associated to the sky, with the 13 stones, representing the 13 levels of such place.

To the east of the Northern Platform, the base of a sweat bath was recovered ([Figure 14](#), shown below). This consisted of a stone circular shaped feature which incorporated various plain monument broken fragments. Inside this feature, fire cracked small stones were recovered. This supports the hypothesis of a sweat bath as the stones would have been heated and water could have been poured over to produce vapor that would extend inside this space. The dating of this feature is Late Classic, and would be related to the later use of the Northern Platform.



**Figure 14. Excavation of sweatbath near the Northern Platform.**

### ***Southern Platform***

The southern platform was a natural elevation accommodated for prehispanic uses directly to the south of Mound 1 ([Figure 15](#), shown below). In contrast with most of the main structures, this one was only minimally modified and used almost exclusively during the first part of the Middle Formative, in what has been referred as Las Charcas phase. No formal building was identified, something that contrasts with the Northern Platform and the larger mounds at the site's center. The surface of this natural elevation was used for ceremonial purposes. A few flat clay surfaces in some sections of the platform were uncovered without any postholes or hearths ([Figure 16](#), shown below). However, the southwest and northwest corners had dense ceramic and obsidian deposits inside small holes carved inside sterile soil ([Figure 17](#), shown below). These holes are similar to other “*botellones*” reported at many Middle Formative sites.



**Figure 15. View of the Southern Platform.**



**Figure 16. Surface on the Southern Platform.**



**Figure 17. Deposits on the Southern Platform, carved inside sterile soil.**

Among the remains recovered, there are coarse orange plates that are burnt in exterior, suggesting its use for cooking purposes ([Figure 18](#), shown below). However, there are examples of these plates with burning spots inside, probably used to burn incense. Multiple incense fragments were recovered, including three prone incense burners, suggesting a ritual use of this sector. The absence of post holes and midden deposits also supports the ritual use.

At the base of the eastern platform axis there was a concentration of stone fragments including broken metates that could be interpreted as a dedication to the platform ([Figure 19](#), shown below). Stone concentrations in specific locations seem to have been used as offerings at the site. No burials or other offerings of whole vessels were recovered in this sector.

As with the Northern Platform, sections of the Southern Platform had Late Classic re-use. A section on the southern sector was particularly used during Late Classic times, maybe as a residence.



**Figure 18. Orange Coarse dish from Las Charcas phase.**



**Figure 19. Stone alignment at the eastern base of the Southern Platform.**

The primary use of the Southern Platform was during Las Charcas phase. Many sherds identified by Shook and Hatch (1999) as being from the Early Formative Arevalo phase were recovered. However, no stratigraphic deposit was found with this material underneath the Middle Formative Las Charcas, in order to confirm the chronological sequence. The findings at Naranjo, and other contemporaneous locations, suggests that the Arevalo phase ceramics could have been an early facet of Las Charcas phase.

A calibrated radiocarbon sample dated a Charcas phase deposit between 790-420 BC. This date is somewhat later than the original chronological placements for the Charcas phase, but we are still awaiting results to learn more about the chronology of the site.

On this sector, many figurine fragments were recovered as well as some vessel fragments that depict themes related to the cosmology of Naranjo ancient inhabitants. Figurines represent mostly feminine individuals with a few animal representations. There are some male samples, some of which are bearded samples. These figurines are chronological markers for the Middle Formative and, diagnostics of the Charcas phase ([Figure 20](#), shown below).



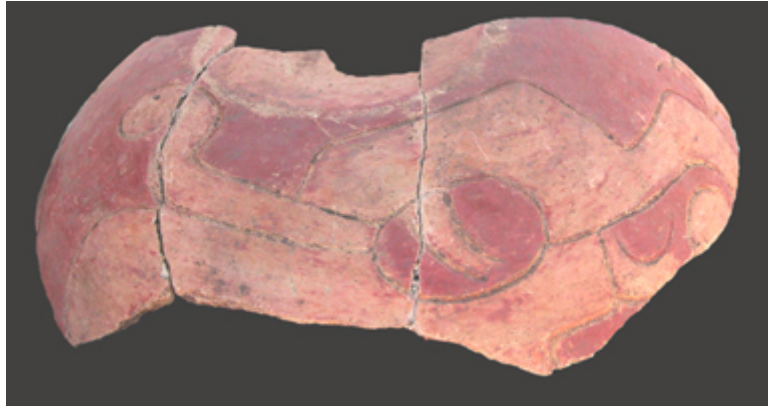
**Figure 20. Ceramic figurines recovered at the Southern Platform.**

Among the sherd deposits recovered from the platform corners various fragments reflect important world conceptions of prehispanic Naranjo. A dish fragment with the representation of an early deity depicts what David Stuart has identified as G1 from Palenque (personal communication 2005) (Figure 21, shown below). G1 is one of the Palenque Triad Gods. Schele mentioned that G1, G2 and G3 are not only Palenque gods (Schele and Freidel 1990). She noted that G1 and G3 are gods represented on ancient public images created by the Late Preclassic Maya. The portrait of G1 on a Middle Formative sherd from Naranjo indicates that the Maya Highlands was part of a very ample interaction sphere from very ancient times.



**Figure 21. Red on Buff ceramic fragment with early representation of G1.**

In addition to the G1 representation, there is also a bowl fragment with an Olmec dragon (Figure 22, shown below). This reflects that Naranjo was within the greater Mesoamerican interaction sphere typical of the Middle Preclassic. The Olmec dragon representation on a vessel of the red on buff type is important. This ceramic type contains a series of special designs, suggesting a particular function for these vessels. There are many examples of this type at Naranjo when most of the other contemporaneous sites in the vicinity have only a few sherds. It could be that through the bowls and dishes of this type, a message was being communicated. We are still analyzing the material and continue to study details of this subject.



**Figure 22. Red on Buff ceramic fragment with representation of Olmec dragon.**

### ***Mound 2***

This mound is located on the northeast limit of the site center ([Figure 23](#), shown below). It was built towards the end of the Middle Preclassic on what has been referred to as the Providencia phase, being contemporary to the Northern Platform and Mound 3. Mound 2 also had a dedicatory event prior to its building. Four different building episodes were identified, all dating between 700 and 400 BC. Contrasting with Mound 1, no steps were uncovered here, so the access to the structure must have been through a ramp. We can also suggest that the building system followed the typical building pattern of clay boxes, seen on the Northern Platform and other sites of the valley. One of the fill episodes contained a rim of a dish with an Olmec profile. This confirms that Naranjo was within the larger interaction sphere during the Middle Formative.



**Figure 23. View of Mound 2.**

### ***Mound 3***

This mound is located 243 m north of Mound 2, and on the edge of the ravine. This may have been the northern entrance to the site. The excavations documented three building episodes, with a dedicatory deposit similar to that of the Northern Platform and Mound 2. The dating is also contemporaneous with those structures, being the Providencia phase, at the end of the Middle Formative.



## ***The Naranjo Monuments***

Naranjo is the Central Highland site with the most plain monuments reported up to date (Pereira *et al.* 2007). So far, 27 monuments have been recovered. These include plain stelae and altars. Some of these monuments were originally placed between Mound 1 and the natural hill limiting the site to the east. They were placed in three parallel lines running north-south and oriented 21 degrees east of north. This placement was observed by Williamson (1877), Shook (1952) and Villacorta (1927). Unfortunately, when we visited the site, the second and third lines had been dumped in modern times and its context, disturbed.



**Figure 24. Hector Neff surveying with GPR and magnetometer.**

Using Williamson's description to locate the second and third line of monuments, one of our test pits uncovered some monuments. The remaining ones were identified by Hector Neff and colleagues from the University of California at Long Beach (Neff *et al.* 2007). They carried out a magnetometer survey to locate the missing monuments. This technique proved to be very productive as he was able to uncover most of the monuments on the second and third lines (Figure 24, shown above). Only four monuments were discovered on the second line. One of them remains missing, as our testing program nor the magnetometer found it. The third and last line of monuments originally consisted of four columnar basalt plain stelae (Figure 25, shown below). We were able to recover many fragments that were placed back together, forming two very large monuments and one additional fragment. One of the plain columnar stelae that was glued back together measures 3.5 m in height.

## ***Plain Monuments at the Center***

The monuments located on Line 1 consist of Mound 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9 (Figure 26, shown below). Monuments 3 and 4 had plain altars associated to the west of them. Monument 8 had an altar to the east. The other monuments did not have stone altars. Monument 3 consists of a columnar basalt stela. Both the stela and altar (Figure 27, shown below) were associated to a clay surface with a calibrated date of 800-750 BC (Beta 214075). This dating places the practice of stelae/altar back to the Middle Preclassic, a cultural manifestation that was thought to be Late Preclassic (Lowe, Lee and Martinez 1982, Guernsey 2006). Monument 4 and its large altar also dates to the Middle Preclassic according to the ceramics associated to them. It

is possible that other central highland sites had altar associated to the plain monuments but because the altars were deeply buried, were never recovered.



**Figure 25. Excavating the third line of monuments.**

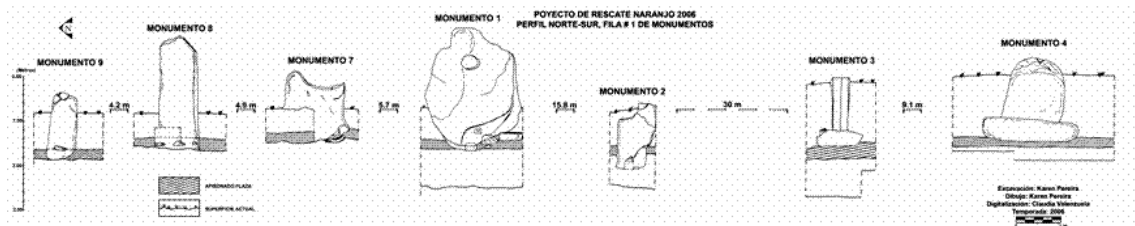


**Figure 26. View of the first line of monuments.**



**Figure 27. Monument 3 and Altar 1.**

The stela/altar concept appearing in Middle Preclassic time may suggest a different meaning of this cultural manifestation from that interpreted for later periods. It is possible that these monument complexes were used for calendrical purpose, rather than honoring or related to lineages. Because of this, only certain monuments had altars at Naranjo. All monuments on line 1 had a thin clay floor associated, corresponding to the same surface for all of them, indicating a contemporaneous use ([Figure 28](#), shown below).



**Figure 28. Illustration of monuments and floor associated to them.**

The second line of monuments at Naranjo consisted of Monuments 22, 27, 28, and 29. All but Monument 27, are huge basalt plain boulders that had one side smoothed. Monument 27 is different as it shows some subtle carving on its facing surface ([Figure 29](#), shown below). So far, this is the only monument that has traces of carvings. It also shows some carvings on one of its sides. This is a recent finding and we are in the process of working with night lights to determine the carving on its worked surface. At the same time, Travis Doering and Lori Collins have scanned the monument as part of their [Kaminaljuyú Sculpture Project](#) and we will soon have results. As with the first line of monuments, all of these had a clay floor associated, related to the one in line 1.



**Figure 29. Photograph of Monument 27 showing carving.**

Although the four monuments identified on Line 2 had been dumped, undisturbed primary deposits of the stones used for originally holding the monuments up straight were uncovered. A carbon sample was recovered from this context and yielded a calibrated date of 790-500 BC. This date overlaps with that on line 1, suggesting a Middle Preclassic placement of the monuments.

The third line of monuments consisted of plain columnar basalt stelae. These were broken when dumped in modern times. We have been able to identify four of them, the same number noted by Williamson (1877) and Shook (1952). As with the other monuments, they also had a clay floor associated to them ([Figure 28](#), above).

We could only securely take the orientation of the first line which was *in situ* by the time of our rescue project. The orientation consisted of 20 degrees east of north, while the other two lines, could not be oriented as their primary context had been disturbed.

The clay floor associated to the monuments ends a few meters to the east of the third line of monuments, and does not get all the way to the base of the natural hill, limiting the site on the eastern side. This suggests that the floor was used for the activities associated to the monuments.

The three lines of monuments set up in north-south parallel alignments may represent the commemoration of a specific calendrical or cyclical event.

### ***The Naranjo Settlement Pattern***

The opportunity to accompany an archaeological rescue with a survey around the site was unique. Most of the rescue projects only focus on a few structures without working on the outskirts of sites. We did a reconnaissance around the main center and were able to find various locations for the domestic sectors.

From our reconnaissance and test pitting program, we were able to determine that most of the houses were located in the northern sector of the site, and to the southwest. The domestic areas are characterized by being located in open flat areas surrounded by small hills. Karen Pereira's report to FAMSI includes more data on the settlement pattern study.

### ***The Northern Sector***

A total of 71 test pits were excavated in this section of the site. Cultural deposits were very shallow ([Figure 30](#), shown below). They were identified between 40 and 60 cms from the surface in what seemed to be "invisible structures". These areas consisted of clay floors, some of which had midden deposits associated as well as small hearth areas. Sometimes, very low platforms were identified, measuring around 50 cms in height. No extensive excavations were carried out due to the nature of the work, but at least, we could confirm that there was an extensive occupation in the surrounding area of the site center.

Most of these residential sectors are located close to ravines that hold springs on the edges and various sectors. Obviously the ancient residential area had easy access to water sources.

Most of the occupation corresponded to the Middle Preclassic, but some Late Classic was also uncovered. In contrast with the site center, the ceramics recovered here were clearly cruder, suggesting a utilitarian function. Interestingly enough, the obsidian recovered from the excavations in the northern sector, corresponded to flakes and a few blades. No debitage was recovered, indicating that the workshops were not in this area. Most of the obsidian examples correspond to the El Chayal source. The obsidian analysis is still ongoing and we hope to have a final report shortly.



**Figure 30. House floors located on the northern sector of Naranjo.**

Recent modern work done by the developers removed the surface from the immediate northeastern sector of the site center, corresponding to ancient residential areas. This situation allowed us to collect many examples of obsidian, indicating that the workshops were here.

Settlement pattern data indicates that the population was nucleated in sectors and concentrated in the flat areas, some of which were surrounded by small natural elevations. They were all close to water sources. There are certainly more domestic sectors and we plan to continue the survey before the whole area is built with modern houses.

## **Preliminary Interpretations**

The site of Naranjo has an occupation that may start around 1000 BC. The oldest pottery at the site corresponds to what has been defined as the Arevalo and Las Charcas phases (Shook and Hatch 1999). Some of the early ceramic modes identified at Naranjo have an intimate relationship with modes from the Pacific Coast. Among these, there are large hollow tripod supports that resemble the traditional Ocos tecomates from the Early Formative on the coast.

The presence of red slips on the interior jar rims is a mode similar to the red bands on the Locona and Ocos ceramics on the coast. Another ceramic mode is the zoned punctuated decoration in some of the jars. A significant number of globular shaped tecomates have also been recovered, some of which have a band of red slip on the exterior.

The Providencia phase ceramics has many similarities with the Conchas phase manifestations at La Blanca and the Sis and Guatolon phases on the Escuintla coast of Guatemala. Without a doubt, and considering the antecedents of the South Coast development, the relationship between Naranjo and the Guatemala Highlands was very relevant in prehispanic times.

The representation of an early version of G1 at Naranjo, also refers the South Coast importance in the highlands. Being G1 a deity related to the ocean, its appearance in Naranjo, could be argued as a coastal ancestry for it. The implications are relevant in that it represents a very ancient representation (securely dated to 800 BC), of a deity that lasts many centuries and into geographical areas far away from here.

Naranjo must have played an important role in the valley of Guatemala between 1000 and 400 BC. After this, the site was abandoned and not re-visited until the Late Classic (sometime around 700 AD). The sudden abandonment of the site around 400 BC, suggests that Kaminaljuyú took over Naranjo, moving its population 3 kms to the north, where centralized power was concentrated during the Late Preclassic.

An intriguing question is why Kaminaljuyú did not take advantage of the strategic location of Naranjo. It is believed, based on the obsidian evidence, that the site played a relevant role on the exchange network of this product during the Middle Preclassic. It is possible that Naranjo had a role in the control and exchange of the obsidian source of El Chayal during the Middle Preclassic, something that was later accomplished by Kaminaljuyú a few years later. The total abandonment of Naranjo may be explained in terms of control by Kaminaljuyú.

The presence of stelae and other monuments at the site, as well as an early stela/altar cult present as early as 800 BC, suggests that the Guatemalan highlands had an important role in the development of the social and ideological complexity of the region. The role of the monuments is still unknown; it could be that they are an early representation of kinship and rulership, but they could also represent the commemoration of a calendrical event incorporated into the landscape. The three lines of monuments north-south across the main plaza, suggest that they served a special purpose related to the sun, and maybe represent a completion of a calendrical cycle.

This rescue project was able to run a series of radiocarbon dates ([Figure 31](#), shown below). This has provided with a clear idea of the ceramic sequence of the Middle Preclassic. Currently we have ten radiocarbon dates, and we are running a few more in the near future. They are contributing to the better understanding of the Guatemala highland chronology.

PROCEDENCIA	FECHA BP	FECHA CALIBRADA	No. MUESTRA LAB	CONTEXTO
OP2-C45-12	2500 +- 40	790-420 AC (CAL AP 2740-2370)	215853	Plataforma sur
OP32-5A-04	2550 +- 40	800-750 AC (CAL AP 2760-2700) Y 700-540 AC (CAL AP 2850-2490)	215854	Sector Norte
OP21-03-01	2510 +- 40	790-500 AC (CAL AP 2740-2450) Y 480-430 AC (CAL AP 2410-2380)	215855	Monumento 22
OP8-04-04	4800 +- 40	3500-340 AC (CAL 5450-5390) Y 3380-3340 AC (CAL AP 5330-5290)	214073	Monumento 7
OP5-03-08	2550 +- 40	800-750 AC (CAL 2760-2700) Y 700-540 AC (CAL 2850-2490)	214075	Mon. 3 y Altar 2
NJO38-01-08	2240 +- 40	400-340 AC (CAL AP 2350-2290) 320-210 AC (CAL AP 2270-2160)		abajo piso sector SW
NJO4-27-03	550 +- 50	1300-1440 DC (CAL AP 850-510) 830-750 AC (CAL AP 2780-2700) Y 700-540 AC (CAL PB 2850-2490)	217152	dentro fogón
NJO4-08	2590 +- 60	770 - 400 AC (CAL AP 2720 to 2350)	209872	plataforma norte sobre estéril
NJO 1-28-12	2470+- 40		220576	Mont 1
NJO32-17-6	1250 +/- 60 BP	880 to 900 DC	220578	Sector Norte
NJO2-14-5	1250+- 80BP	880 to 900 DC	220577	Deposito Ctardio Plataforma Sur
NJO2-M10W-2	579 +- 40BP	380-180 AC	220579	Plataforma Sur

**Figure 31. Radiocarbon dates chart from Naranjo.**

A rescue project is the last work that is done at a site prior to modern activities that will take place on it. The nature of these archaeology works have to be carried out in a scientific manner, documenting the most of the ancient history of a site. It is urgent that authorities and archaeologists take rescue archaeology a step forward than the mere description of ancient buildings. This will be the only way to obtain an ample and deep knowledge of the ancient Guatemalans.

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