Results of Preliminary Investigation of Sitio Pedregal
Area de Conservacion Guanacaste

June 4, 1993 - August 12, 1993

Proyecto Arqueologico Volcan Orosi (PAVO) investigated the prehispanic rock art site of Sitio Pedregal (G-540 Pd) located on the west side of Orosi Volcano, Guanacaste Nacional Park, Area de Conservación Guanacaste (ACG). The first field season began with a crew composed of Director and Co-Principal Investigator Ellen Hardy, Ph.D.; Co-Principal Investigator Master Ricardo Vazquez, Lic.; four archaeology students from University of California, Santa Cruz, Elizabeth Wolf, Geoffrey King, Anita Hall and Nathan Craig; two Costa Rican archaeology students, Tatiana Hidalgo and Sr. Eloy; and an accomplished volunteer, Dejon Dillon.

Emphasizing site survey and glyph registration in the large savannah area of Sitio Pedregal, arbitrary boundaries were set bounded by tropical dry forest and two streams running down from Orosi, Quebrada Yequitas to the south and Rio Sabalo to the north. Over the course of the survey more than 600 petroglyphs were located, flagged, numbered and briefly described. A number of them exhibit alterations (re-incisings) completed in the recent past. Glyphs were examined following a petroglyph record sheet developed for PAVO (Figure 6). A petroglyph data base was established, and thirty five lifesize renderings were completed.

The mapping and photographic documentation projects were initiated. A site datum was set and one E-W and two N-S baselines established. Thirtyfive mm. black & white, color, and video recording of the petroglyphs was begun. Traditional methods of recording the glyphs were utilized including photography, tracings and sketches, and a more advanced method of documentation using video recording was begun.

Site Survey

In two groups of two investigators the site was surveyed. Each day, as determined by the physical makeup of the site, an area was chosen to be investigated; the survey thus traversed a ridge or valley, contiguous to an area previously surveyed. Project director followed the general course of the teams, observing their work and taking Polaroids of the glyphs.

Examination of any glyph was somewhat cursory as site coverage was emphasized. Once a rock had been flagged and registered, the team moved on to the next rock. In this way the entire area was crossed several times. However, due to particular natural conditions encountered at Sitio Pedregal,
glyph sighting is difficult and irregular.

The site is extremely difficult to survey. Not all glyphs are visible at any given time. Rain, and the amount of it, also affect visibility. After a drenching, previously unobserved glyphs seemingly appear yet, at the same time, rain obscures visibility of known glyphs and they are almost invisible. One person can survey an area say at 11:00 a.m. and spot relatively few glyphs. They appear faint, very hard to determine what is being viewed. A few hours later, another surveyor finds many more and is struck at their clarity, the lines etched by a different angle of the sun. The chances of being at any particular glyph at the "right" time are slim, hit or miss. Ubiquitous nativa savannah grass (cola caballo) blankets the area, often completely covering or obscuring glyphs. Based on grass growth, glyph wear and algae growth patterns, the grasses erosive capability and destruction is obvious - Designs are sanded away by the passing blades.

It is hot, humid, wind blows almost constantly, at times approaching gale-force strength, forceful rain and occasional lightening strikes - this in an area where a person is usually the tallest object around. Terrain is uneven. Falling, turning ankles are common occurrences. Scorpions, ticks and over 30 snakes, some known to be poisonous, were observed during the course of the exploration. Investigators use leather gators, spat type leg protectors that cover the leg from foot to knee.

Of interest is an area thought to be a cemetery. There are 11 looter pits in this open circular area surrounded by rocks. They appear to be tombs but not one sherd or cultural artifact was encountered while cleaning the sidewalls. It is possible that this is a natural formation. This is significant for a number of similar open circular areas found throughout the site. Their character, natural vs. cultural, is vital in ascertaining Sitio Pedregal site function. Without additional mortuary evidence the likelihood that this is a cemetery is in doubt. At this time it is best to say that, although we have evidence of looting activities, we have no idea what was encountered, let alone what evidence prompted the looters to place their holes in the first place.

Overall glyphs are more complicated and sophisticated than previously thought. Investigation of this unique symbolic imagery should continue until 100% of petroglyph assemblage is documented. Area with looter holes should be excavated to ascertain its nature and perhaps shed light on temporal and cultural affiliations.
Figure 3: Two views of Sitio Pedregal: Above, Orosí Volcano. Below, looking west towards Pacific Ocean and Santa Elena Peninsula, extinct volcano El Hacha to the right.
Figure 4: Sophisticated and complicated petroglyphs. Above: Petroglyph 366, possible alter-ego figure wearing jaguar skin. Below: petroglyph 425.