

ANNUAL REPORT: NICARAGUA 2016 FIELD SCHOOL

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PAGN 2016 Baseball Team

The 2016 IFR field school in Nicaragua featured excavations at two sites: Ticuantepe and El Rayo. We were invited to work at Ticuantepe by the Nicaraguan Institute of Culture (INC) to participate in a rescue project at the site of an elite burial that was discovered in the course of a civic construction project. Close ties with the INC over the past 15+ years have often involved collaboration on rescue projects as a way of providing logistical support to the under-funded, under-staffed institute. At Ticuantepe, grad students from our team and one IFR student helped excavate and remove human skeletal materials. Other field school students excavated adjacent areas to provide archaeological context to the burials; one group identified and exposed a pre-Columbian structure wall, and both groups learned excavation techniques in the process of recovering material culture. This was not part of the planned IFR program, but was an outstanding opportunity for the students to participate in one of the most important discoveries in recent years. The project received extensive television coverage, and one of the Spanish-speaking IFR students was interviewed about the field school for an educational video about the project.

Upon completion of the Ticuantepe rescue project, IFR field school students began work at the El Rayo site near modern Granada. Nine field school students worked alongside graduate students from the University of Calgary and Leiden University, Nicaraguan archaeologists from Mi Museo, and members of the landowner's family. Training included site lay-out, excavation techniques, artifact recognition and classification, and field recording. Excavations were distributed among four different loci, providing students with diverse experiential opportunities. One group worked with co-director Sharisse McCafferty to explore a stone burial crypt and

associated architecture; another group worked with grad assistant Shaelyn Rice to follow a large architectural feature relating to a civic-ceremonial structure; and a third group worked with a Leiden University graduate student at a shallow architectural feature. A final locus was a domestic area that was investigated at the end of the field season. Students had the opportunity to move between loci to gain varied experiences.

Lab work was conducted at Mi Museo in Granada, with supervision from U of Calgary graduate student Jessica Manion. Students washed and labelled artifacts in the afternoons, worked with museum collections, and helped process artifacts from the excavation. The museum experience included an introduction to museology, and students used the museum collections to develop illustrated posters which are being adapted for exhibition.

In addition to the archaeological component, the El Rayo field school also introduced IFR students to the history, culture, and ecology of Pacific Nicaragua. Students toured the colonial city of Granada with architectural historian Donald Carr, including a carriage ride around the city to visit points of historical interest. We also visited the Masaya volcano and interpretive center, with a side trip to an artisan market for shopping. On another weekend, we travelled by boat to Zapatera Island to visit the archaeological site of Sonzapote where we conducted excavations in 2013. The final weekend featured a trip to San Juan del Sur, a popular beach town where the students went on a surfing excursion. During their free weekend, many of the students went 'volcano surfing' with a tour group. Another activity for the IFR students was two baseball games played against a local Little League team, followed by pizza and ice cream; designing their personalized team jerseys was a popular activity. These diverse experiences provided an abundant opportunity for the IFR students to gain insights into Nicaraguan culture.

The archaeological research was a great success. The discoveries at Ticuantepe are truly some of the most important in recent years. I recently presented a paper at a conference in Denver based on one of the ceramic fragments discovered in the IFR students' excavation, which featured painted decoration resembling Mixtec calendrical glyphs. That paper is currently generating considerable discussion on Academia.edu, and I hope to submit it for publication. Conference papers are also planned for the annual Chacmool conference in Calgary and the meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in Vancouver. These papers will be co-authored by the project directors and supporting graduate students. One field school student, Emilie LeBrell, is co-authoring a paper for the SAA conference based in part on the summer's discoveries, and she is also attending the Chacmool conference as a prelude to applying for the Master's program in Calgary. Exhibitions of discoveries from both Ticuantepe and El Rayo are being prepared for the Mi Museo museum in Granada as a form of public outreach to local stakeholders; public presentations were also made in both English and Spanish. Next summer the results will be collated with those from previous research for a more comprehensive monograph.