

ANNUAL REPORT: ECUADOR – BUEN SUCESO 2019 FIELD SCHOOL

Directors: Sarah M. Rowe and Guy S. Duke



Student excavating in the center of the Buen Suceso plaza.

Excavations at Buen Suceso in 2019 sought to address two persistent questions about ancient life at the site: 1) how were domestic spaces organized and distributed around the site? And 2) how did communal use of the site change over time? To address these questions we opened units adjacent to previous excavations that revealed likely house floors, as well as on the top of a small rise that had revealed intriguing artifactual evidence for early ceremonial use. Lastly, excavations in the middle of the site were conducted to clarify the use of the plaza area, in the center of the circular midden ring.

Students worked in smaller teams on excavation units and learned how to identify soil changes based on soil color and texture, how to excavate features, and how to map units in plan and profile. Students learned how to use a Total Station to establish a local map and to record excavation areas and features. Students were part of the ongoing process of interpreting

excavation findings to understand the occupation history of the site. Current interpretations include the following:

- 1) The earliest occupation of the site appears to have been focused on the north side of the site, with later dates found in the central and southern portions
- 2) There may have been a shift from a ceremonial emphasis atop the rise in the northwest portion of the site during the Early Valdivia period to one in the central portions of the site during the Middle Valdivia.
- 3) Expansion of the two potential floor surfaces encountered in 2017 confirmed one, on the south arm of the midden, to be a prepared surface of some sort, though it is unclear if it was a house structure at this point. The other, on the north arm, may not have been a floor at all but a level of chalky soil deposited on the midden.
- 4) Excavations in the central part of the site confirmed previous research at this and other sites that the central plaza areas of Valdivia ring villages were kept remarkably clean of debris as little material associated with the Valdivia period was recovered from these units.

Students went on a weekend trip to the Santa Elena Peninsula. While there they toured the Los Amantes de Sumpa museum to learn about the ancient Las Vegas culture as well as historic and contemporary traditions of the Peninsula. They also visited Real Alto, where they were given a site and museum tour by none other than Dr. Jorge Marcos, who shared his extensive experience studying the Valdivia culture. Some students also took advantage of an opportunity to participate in a ceramic workshop to replicate ancient techniques, led by master potter Esteben Orrala (*Comuna Valdivia*) and ethnoarchaeologist Kathleen Klump. This workshop was held in Salango at the compound of the Florida Atlantic University field school, so students were also able to meet other field school students and learn about their research.

The co-directors of the research will be presenting the results of this research at conferences including the American Anthropological Association and the Society for American Archaeology meetings. They will also submit a formal report to the Instituto Nacional de Patrimonio Cultural (National Institute of Cultural Patrimony) in Ecuador, and this work will be featured in forthcoming journal articles.

