
26 **ANCIENT MAYA ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MOUNTAIN PINE RIDGE FOREST RESERVE**

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The Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve is renowned for its natural beauty, but few ancient Maya archaeological sites have ever been recorded there. The paucity of known monumental centers has resulted in it receiving little archaeological attention and an overall view that it is largely devoid of cultural heritage. Yet, the region has long been regarded as the primary source of vital raw materials for the ancient Maya, such as granitic rock for grinding stones. Contrary to the commonly held view that the reserve is a vacant archaeological landscape, recent research by the Rio Frio Regional Archaeological Project is revealing the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve is a region rich with a variety of types of archaeological sites, many unique to it. Here we report on the newly documented monumental center of Nohoch Batsó, and the Buffalo Hill Quarries, an industrial-scale multicomponent granitic rock quarry and ground stone implement workshop, the first of its kind ever recorded in the Maya Lowlands.

Introduction



Figure 1. Satellite image of central and southern Belize showing locations of known centers, including those mentioned in the text. The orange polygon indicates the RiFRAP permit concession area.

The Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve is celebrated in Belize for its unique natural beauty—stunning waterfalls, relaxing pools, and easy to access caves—but it is considered a region with limited cultural heritage. In fact, when reviewing maps of known archaeological sites in central Belize, it appears largely vacant except for one unstudied site, a few caves and a possible shrine, seeming to affirm a minimal ancient Maya presence (Figure 1). Yet, it has long been regarded by archaeologists as a primary source of vital resources for ancient Maya life including pine trees, game animals, and an array of mineral

resources, particularly slate, shale, and granitic rock for making *manos*, *metates*, and other ground stone implements (Graham 1987; Healy et al. 1995; Lentz et al. 2005; Morehart 2011; Parker and Spenard 2020). Recent research by our Rio Frio Regional Archaeological Project (RiFRAP) reveal that the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve was far from a culturally barren landscape; instead, it is a distinct archaeological region rich with a wide array of site types, many unique to it. In this paper, we describe for the first time two previously unrecorded ancient Maya sites in the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve. One is Nohoch Batsó, a Classic period center. The other is the Buffalo Hill Quarries, an extensive, industrial-scale, multicomponent ancient Maya granitic rock quarry and ground stone implement workshop site, a type of site heretofore previously undocumented anywhere in the ancient Maya world.

Environmental and Cultural Overview

A description of the surface geology of the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve is necessary for understanding the variety of types of archaeological sites found there. The following geological description is summarized from Bateson and Hall (1977), Martens and colleagues (2010), Shipley and Graham (1987), and Weyl (1980), and personal observation.

There are three distinct surface geological regions in the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve. At the center is its namesake, the Mountain Pine Ridge, one of three granite-bearing regions in the Maya Mountains. Those sources are the only granitic rocks known in the

Maya Lowlands. As a point of clarity, we use the abbreviation “MPR” to refer specifically to that geographic region, whereas “reserve” refers to the designated lands managed today by the Forest Department. Along the western boundary of the reserve, the granites are overlain with residual cave-filled limestone hills that have been separated from their parent Vaca Plateau by the Macal River. The north, south, and east sides of the reserve are defined by the Santa Rosa Group, a geological conglomerate of hard sandstone, quartz, phyllite, and other contact-metamorphic sediments. We have yet to conduct any research in the Santa Rosa Group areas, and for that reason, we continue only with a discussion of the former two regions.

The geology of the two regions under investigation create distinct biomes leading to their differential use by the ancient Maya. The limestone areas are covered in nutrient rich soil from which broad-leaf forests grow. Such areas are good for agriculture, and it is in them that most ancient Maya settlements were founded throughout the lowlands (Fedick 1995). Before we located Nohoch Batsó, Mahogany was the only recorded ancient settlement in the limestone areas of the reserve, but it remains unmapped and unstudied (Moyes et al. 2017). Other nearby Classic period centers outside of the reserve include Caledonia (Awe 1985; Healy et al. 1998), Minanha (Iannone 2001, 2005), Pacbitun (Healy 1990; Powis et al. 2017), and Ramonal (Awe et al. 2005). Caledonia and Ramonal are situated directly adjacent to the Macal River to the south of the reserve, but on the opposite bank. The extensive Caracol road network also extends to near the southern banks of the Macal River suggesting economic interest in the resources of the reserve from that site (Chase et al. 2014). Minanha and Pacbitun are the nearest major population centers to the west and north respectively. Several Maya ritual cave sites have also been recorded in the limestone hills, and ceramic styles suggest that most ceremonial activity took place in them during the Late Classic period (Mason 1928; Mirro and Spenard 2018; Moyes et al. 2017; Pendergast 1970; Spenard and Mirro 2020).

The MPR granites erode into acidic, nutrient-leached soils from which grows an open, pine-scrub-savanna that stands in stark contrast to

the closed canopy broad-leaf forest of the limestone regions. Ancient Maya settlements have yet to be recorded in the MPR, likely due to the very poor quality of the soils, but Bullard (1963) documented a possible shrine site associated with a granite outcrop near the Rio On. Although the site was not excavated, ancient Maya ceramics and an obsidian blade fragment were collected from it, revealing its antiquity. Wright and colleagues (1959:113) note rectangular pits in granitic rock in the MPR that they propose may be where the ancient Maya quarried slabs of stone to make metates. Unfortunately, the locations of the pits are not given, and they have never been investigated archaeologically.

Several sourcing studies on ground stone objects from Maya centers throughout Belize and Guatemala reveal the MPR granites were the preferred raw material source over the other two outcrops (Abramiuk and Meurer 2006; Brouwer Burg et al. 2021; Halperin et al. 2020; Shipley and Graham 1987; Tibbits 2016, 2020; Tibbits et al. 2022). In Belize, MPR granites dominate assemblages from all the sites that have been tested, except for Alabama in the Stann Creek District. There the local granite was preferred, but some material from the MPR was also identified. As far north as La Milpa and Dos Hombres, MPR-sourced materials account for the entire collection of granitic objects, although locally available rock was preferred overall for making ground stone implements. In Guatemala, ground stone implements made from MPR granites have been reported from Seibal, Tikal, Uaxactun, and Ucanal (Halperin et al. 2020; Moholy-Nagy 2003; Shipley and Graham 1987). As with the northern Belize sites, the artifacts from the Guatemalan centers were made from a variety of materials overall, but when made from granitic rock, the MPR source was preferred over the other two. Although no testing has been done on granitic objects from Maya sites in Mexico, the presence of MPR-sourced material at La Milpa and Dos Hombres in far north west Belize near the international border suggests future sourcing studies are likely to identify it in Campeche and Quintana Roo.

The overall pattern revealed from the sourcing studies is that the MPR granites were clearly preferred over the other two sources, but

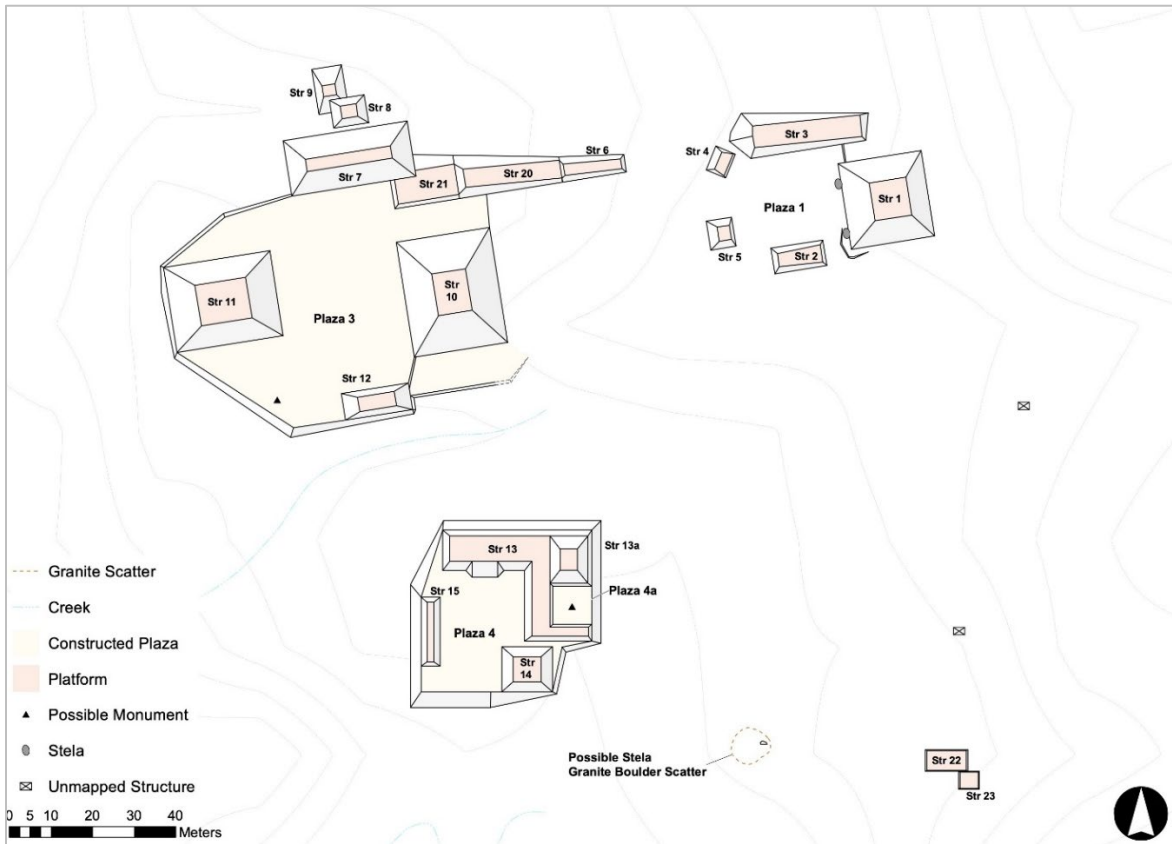


Figure 2. Plan map of the core zone of Nohoch Batsó site indicating structure and plaza numbers and locations of monuments.

questions about raw material acquisition remain largely unanswered (Brouwer Burg et al. 2021). Archaeologists have speculated that cobbles may have been collected opportunistically from the streams and creeks that drain the MPR, while others have suggested it was collected through extractive enterprises, perhaps controlled by sites such as Caledonia and Caracol (Awe 1985; Brouwer Burg et al. 2021; Chase et al. 2014). Moreover, until the recent discovery of a ground stone workshop at Pacbitun where MPR granites were shaped into *manos* and *metates*, the ancient manufacturing process was unknown (Skaggs et al. 2020; Tibbits 2020; Ward 2013). Although the Pacbitun data help understand the manufacturing process, the roll the site played in overall MPR granitic rock economy of the Maya Lowlands remains unclear. Our discovery of the Buffalo Hill Quarries, described below, helps resolve some of these questions, and reveals a complex industry that we are only beginning to understand.

Summary of Research

We initiated the RiFRAP in 2018 with the intention of it being the first long-term investigation of the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve's ritual landscape. Our focus was the known caves in the limestone region (Mason 1928; Pendergast 1970) and the possible shrine identified by Bullard (1963) in the MPR. Our first two field seasons were dedicated to relocating and studying the caverns that have been previously improved for tourism by the Forest Department (Spenard and Mirro 2020). When time or circumstances permitted, we have also conduct pedestrian survey of the MPR to relocate the possible shrine and to document any other traces of ancient Maya activity there. These activities led to the discoveries of Nohoch Batsó and the Buffalo Hill Quarries. Though studying cave ritual remains a core focus of the RiFRAP, the newly documented sites have broadened the project's scope to understanding ancient Maya habitation in the reserve and the granitic rock implement economy of the Lowlands.

As they have been recently discovered, our work at both sites is limited. We located Nohoch Batsó at the end of the 2019 field season while reconnoitering the Rio Frio valley to relocate Rio Frio Cave E (Pendergast 1970) and document any other cave sites there. Investigations of Nohoch Batsó began in 2022 with a focus on mapping the site, cleaning, and backfilling looter trenches, and conducting test excavations to establish the site chronology. Laboratory analysis remains underway, but ceramic styles suggest the site dates from at least the Early Classic period through possibly the early Postclassic, although most material dates to the Late/Terminal Classic. The ceramic dates align with those collected from the nearby Rio Frio caves suggesting the inhabitants of Nohoch Batsó were the ones using the caverns.

The Buffalo Hill Quarries are located on an elevated ridge immediately south of Pinol Sands. They were noted several years ago by co-author Mai who brought them to the attention of the project in 2022 when we were surveying nearby. Time and other research commitments did not permit a full exploration of the site during that field season. Nevertheless, we mapped an area approximately 16 ha, but the site continued beyond what we were able to survey. Surface collections of select diagnostic or representative samples of ceramics, production waste, quarrying and manufacturing tools, as well as discarded and unfinished ground stone products were made. Unfortunately, the ceramics are too eroded for classification or stylistic identifications, but their presence confirms the antiquity of the site.

Site Descriptions

Nohoch Batsó

Nohoch Batsó is a medium-sized Maya center located above a floodplain on a valley terrace between two tributary creeks of the Rio Frio between Rio Frio caves C and E (Mason 1928; Pendergast 1970). The site core has a primary east-west alignment and consists of approximately 30 structures arranged around three or four plazas, labeled Plaza 1 through 4 (Figure 2). Structures were numbered in the order they were located and recorded. Overall, the site core is relatively intact with fewer than five looter excavations encountered. A range structure complex and additional plaza, Plaza 5,

(unmapped) lie to the south and north ends of the valley respectively (Figure 3). Although we have yet to conduct systematic survey of the hinterlands, we have identified several low, isolated mounds on the valley floor, as well as agricultural terracing and a hilltop rural settlement cluster to the east.

Plaza 3 is the largest in the core and it, along with Plaza 1 defines the site's east-west orientation. The plaza is flanked on the east by Structure 10, an 8-10 m tall pyramidal structure with a staircase on its west side. Structure 11 is a 5 m tall mound on the opposite (west) edge of Plaza 3 from Structure 10. It is flanked to the south by an ancillary, abutting mound (unmapped) that collectively resembles an E-group (Aimers and Rice 2006), or Eastern Triadic Assemblage-(Awe et al. 2017) architectural arrangement. Structure 7, is a steep, 5-6 m tall range structure that bounds the north side of the plaza. The south side of the plaza is partially enclosed by the low-lying Structure 12.

Plaza 1 sits at a slightly higher elevation than Plaza 3. A series of abutting range structures stretching from Structure 7 indicate the two plazas comprise a single architectural unit. Structure 1 at the east side of the plaza is the largest structure in Plaza 1. It is a 4 m tall range structure facing west with an outset staircase leading to its summit from the partially enclosed plaza floor. A snapped phyllite stela (Stela 1) and butt at the northern stair-side outset was noted when we first documented the site (Spenard and Mirro 2020) (Figure 4). To view a digital 3D model of the monument, navigate to <https://skfb.ly/6YFzu>. A companion monument of the same material (Stela 2) was unintentionally uncovered when setting up a sifting screen in the southern stair-side outset during our investigations (Figure 5). To view a digital 3D model of that stela, navigate to <https://skfb.ly/oCnRX>. We inspected both monuments for carving, but none was noted. The presence of the two stela flanking the central staircase suggests at least a third and possibly other monument are present in front of the structure along its primary axis. A large looter's trench was dug into the east (back) side of the structure revealing three construction phases.

We focused our initial excavations of Nohoch Batsó on Plaza 1 due to the presence of

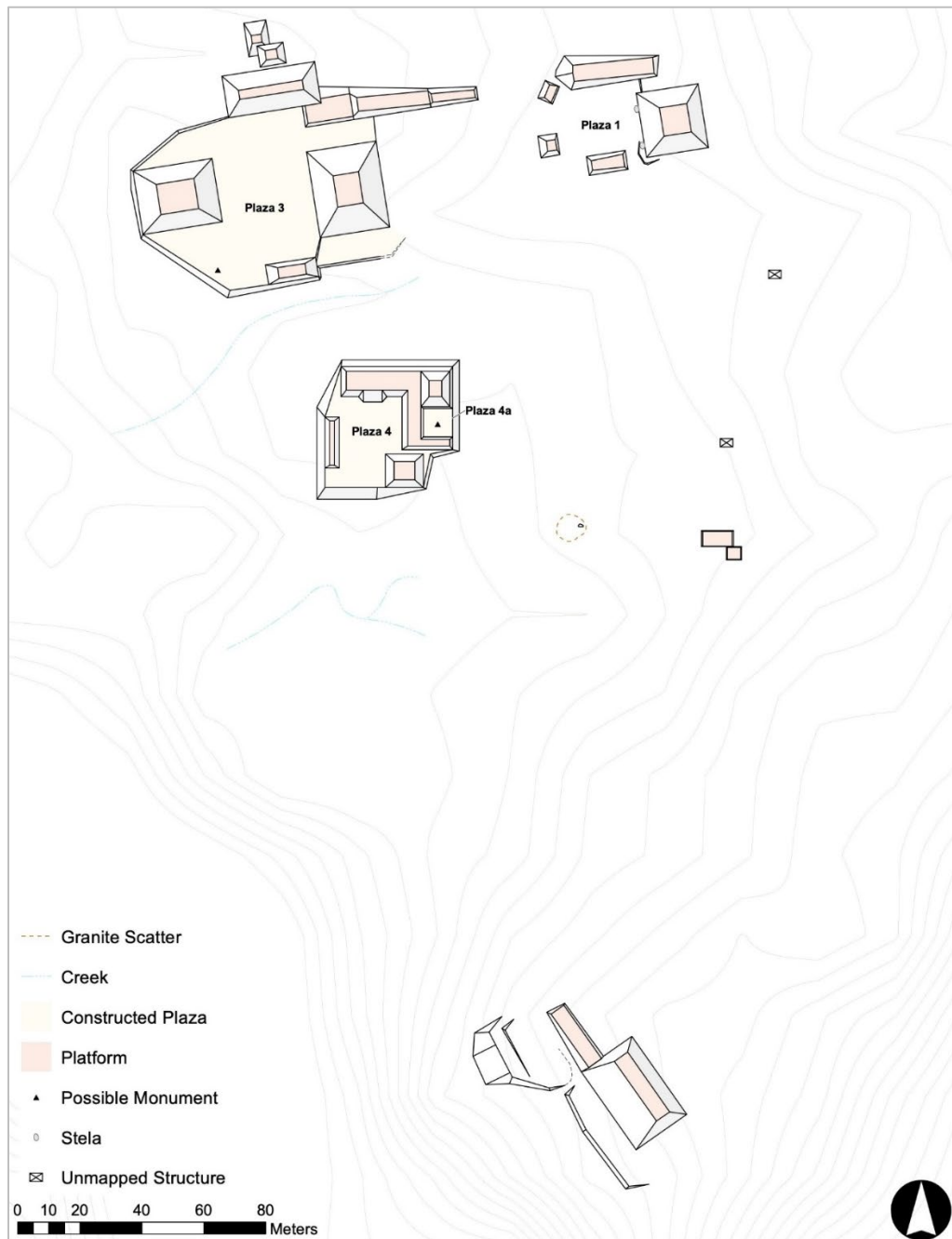


Figure 3. Settlement map of Nohoch Batsó site core and confirmed mounds and architectural groups in the site periphery.

Stela 1 and the exposed architecture revealed in the looter’s trench. Our goals were to establish a preliminary site chronology by recovering the cache at the base of the monument and artifacts discarded by looting activities. We also aimed to gain a clearer understanding of the structure’s construction sequence by clearing and then backfilling the trench. Our excavations of Stela

1 are ongoing, and we have yet to locate its cache. Nevertheless, we identified three plaza surfaces the earliest of which retains a partially intact plaster surface. That sequence matches the one revealed in the looters trench on the opposite side of the structure. Several fragments from spiked and appliqué censers, resembling the “face caches” from Caracol (Chase and Chase 1998)



Figure 4. Screen capture of 3D digital model of Nohoch Batsó Stela 1.



Figure 5. Screen capture of 3D digital model of Nohoch Batsó Stela 2



Figure 6. Spiked censer lid (Candelario Applique) recovered from side of topped Stela 1 (photograph by J. Spenard).

were recovered in both contexts suggesting a ritual function for the complex and Late to Terminal Classic period use.

Stela 1 is pointed and tapered, while its companion monument has parallel sides and a square top. They would have both stood 2 m above the terminal plaza surface although excavations in front of the butt of Stela 1 reveal it was erected at least two construction phases earlier. The monuments were toppled in antiquity revealed by snap fractures at their bases. Iannone (2005) recorded similar treatment of the stelae from Minanha, which he attributed to purposeful termination associated with the abandonment of the site at the beginning of the Terminal Classic period. His dating of the stela toppling events at Minanha provide a baseline for those we recorded at Nohoch Batsó, suggesting a Terminal Classic period abandonment for the site. Interestingly, our Stela 1 excavations uncovered a spiked censer lid (Candelario Applique) that was placed aside the toppled monument on the terminal plaza floor, indicating some local population remained connected with the site even after it was abandoned (Figure 6).

Plaza 2 (unlabeled on the map) sits between Plazas 1 and 3, but it unconfirmed because it lacks an enclosing structure to the south. A possible plaza edge was noted but thick vegetation covers that area of the site. Forest Department regulations require approval for vegetation removal, which we did not have at the time of study. Future excavations that would have permission to clear the area of vegetation are necessary to confirm the nature of the space. Plaza 4 is on an elevated platform, 5 m above the valley floor, and 40 m south of Plaza 3. It is partially enclosed, giving it the appearance of a palace-like structure.

Plaza 5 is 200 m northwest of Plaza 3. It has a slight, but obvious different orientation than the other plazas of the site. Preliminary lidar data of the area indicate the plaza is partially closed, but on the valley floor or low platform. The northern and southern edges are flanked with range structures, and the eastern and western edges are flanked by series of smaller mounds.

The southern complex is made up of two abutting range structures aligned northwest-southeast on an elevated natural terrace on the same hill that Rio Frio Cave C penetrates. It is 180 m southeast of Plaza 3, and a series of terraces constructed on the hillside below it would have given the complex a stepped-

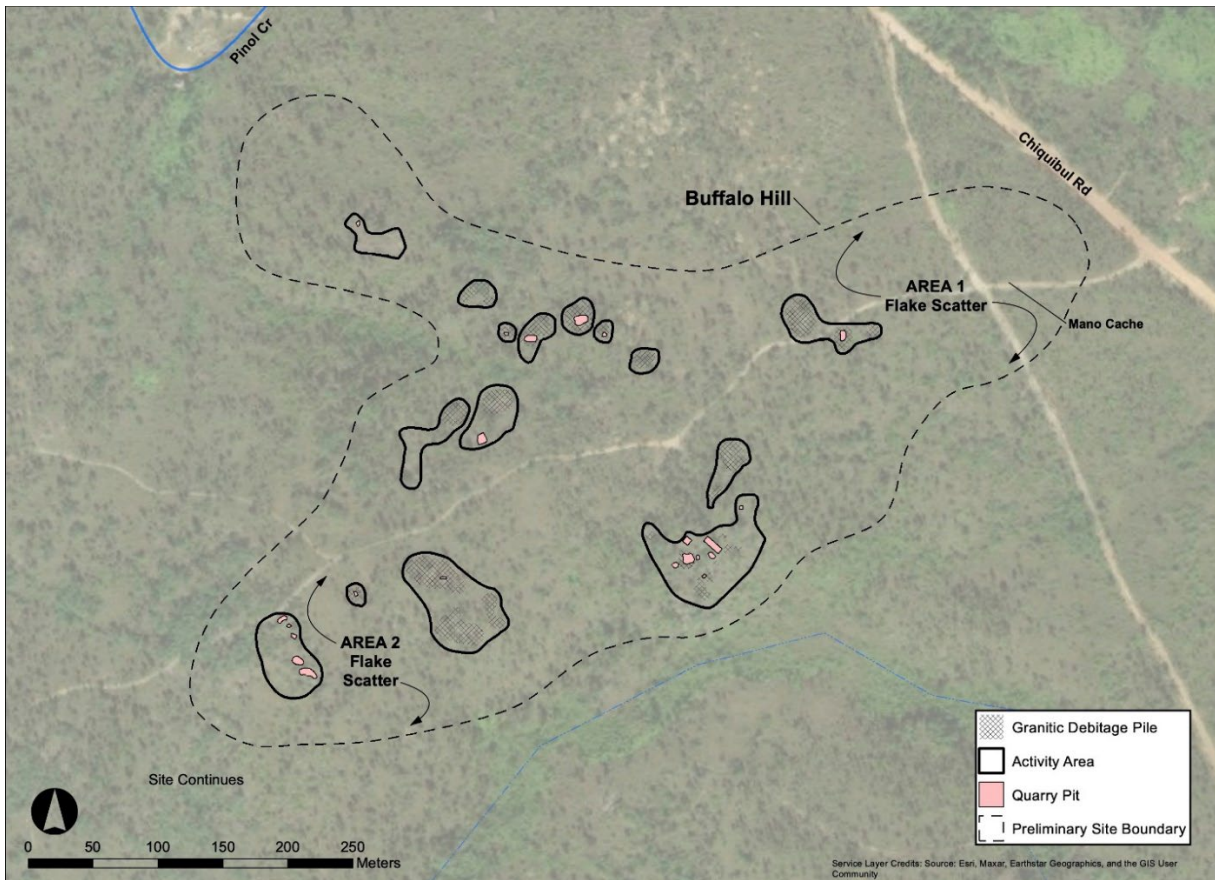


Figure 7. Plan map of Buffalo Hill Quarries site indicating the survey boundary, activity areas, quarry pits, and piles of granitic rock debitage.



Figure 8. Photograph of granitic rock debitage pile in the Buffalo Hill Quarries site from which some of the waste material was collected for gravel (photograph by J. Spenard).

pyramid-like appearance, suggesting a possible ritual function for it.

Buffalo Hill Quarries (MPR-2022-02)

The Buffalo Hill Quarries is a multicomponent, industrial-scale site consisting of granitic rock extraction loci and ground stone implement workshops on the west side of Chiquibul Road on a low flat-topped granitic ridge south of Pinol Creek in the northern half of the MPR (Figure 7). The full extent of the site has not yet been defined, and it may continue farther north and southwest along the ridgeline. As mapped, the site is spread over an area of about 16 hectares and measures 775 meters east-west and 550 meters north-south. Fifteen activity areas were recorded where granitic boulders and outcrops were quarried. Two associated areas with a low density of chert flakes are also present. Modern disturbance is minimal overall, although one area of the site was recently quarried for gravel, and some of the debitage piles were incorporated into military training exercises (Figure 8).

There was variability between activity areas with some exhibiting much more cultural activity and complexity than others. Minimally each area contained granitic debitage and rock outcrops or boulders exhibiting modification. At most areas hammerstones of quartzite, a very hard durable chert from the Santa Rosa Formation, or granitic rock were observed. The following is a list of features and cultural materials observed throughout the site.

Quarry pits: these varied in size and depth across the site ranging from 1 to 2 meters in diameter and 20 to 30 cm deep to over 20 meters in length, 5 meters wide, and over a meter deep. Pit bases were often clear of debitage with piles found around the feature margins. This distribution pattern resembles the work areas documented at Pacbitun's ground stone tool workshop (Skaggs et al. 2020). Cut faces where slabs were removed, sometimes exhibited flake scars. They were often observed on the margins of pits.

Isolated cut faces: are modified granitic boulders from which slabs of material was removed from the rock face. They were often smaller in scale than quarry pits and were not excavated below the surface.



Figure 9. A bedrock milling feature/possible mano refining site from the Buffalo Hill Quarries site (photograph by J. Spenard).

Bedrock milling features/mano reshaping station: these features consist of shallow ovoid to circular basins cut into bedrock outcrops exhibiting lightly polished grinding surfaces (Figure 9). Features measure between 25 to 32 cm in diameter or length and between 3 and 8 cm deep. A total of 10 were documented throughout the site. They are likely the result of mano refining. In his ethnoarchaeological study of a traditional *metatero* from the Guatemalan highlands, Hayden (1987:Figure 2.21) included a photograph that depicts the process of mano refining. Although not elaborated in the text, the photo shows the tip of the mano being supported in a cup-like basin of dirt that resembles the milling features we identified at the Buffalo Hill Quarries.

Cairns: two cairns and a possible dispersed cairn were recorded. They consist of 20 to 30 stones between 20 and 40 cm in size stacked three to four courses high within a 1 meter area. Their purpose remains unclear.

Ritual structure: a possible shrine was identified on the eastern side of a quarry pit backfilled with local sediments. It sits vertically



Figure 10. Photograph of possible shrine in the Buffalo Hill Quarries site (photograph courtesy of K. Martinez).



Figure 11. Photograph of large conchoidal fractured granitic flake from the Buffalo Hill Quarries site (photograph by J. Spenard).

erected, resembling an altar. Only one was recorded (Figure 10).

Granitic debitage: this reduction waste product was found near modified boulders and bedrock and quarry pits as low mounds and berms up to 1.5 m high to low density scatters near lesser worked faces. Debitage include flakes of granitic rock, which often exhibited bulbs of percussion and other common anatomical features of conchoidal fractured rock (Figure 11). The flakes range in size from 2 to 40 cm in length.

Hammerstones: hammerstones were found throughout the site often mixed into the

debitage, on the ground surface near the margins of the activity areas, and in the quarry pits. In a few instances, hammerstones were found in clusters of three or four. Hayden (1987) reports that the *metateros* of highland Guatemala will often cache their quarrying and shaping tools near their worksites to avoid transporting them. They also hide them away to prevent others who visit the site from taking them. The clustering of hammerstones noted in the Buffalo Hill quarries may represent a similar purpose.

We recorded 69 hammerstones. They were either spherical or disc shaped and ranged in size from 12 to 20 cm in diameter, although the largest was found to exceed 30 cm. Weights were not collected. Many had been broken into in flakes and possibly repurposed for tasks such as abrading (Hayden 1987). A variety of materials was used but quartzite was predominant in the recorded assemblage. That material was imported to the site; however, it is readily available nearby in the Santa Rosa Formation to the north and east.

Mano preforms: approximately 54 mano preforms were plotted, but that number likely under represents the total number present. Preforms in the earliest stages of reduction were often difficult to discern from debitage making a full count difficult. Moreover, some “preforms” may have been used as pics and other types of reduction tools making this class of artifact difficult to discern overall. Much more study will need to be made of them to differentiate between discarded and incomplete products from production tools. Several types of preforms and stages of reduction were observed.

Metate preforms: Ten metate preforms were recorded although many more were likely present (Figure 12). Only slabs of stones that exhibited pecking scars and evidence of shaping were tabulated. Several slabs of stone that lacked those traits were regularly observed, some likely representing earlier stages of production; however, they were not tabulated. The items varied in shape and size, although most were ovular with diameters between 35-40 cm.

Monument preform: a single possible monument preform was observed within a quarry pit. It measured approximately 65 cm long and tapered from 20 cm wide to 10 cm longitudinally.



Figure 12. Photograph of a broken metate preform from the Buffalo Hill Quarries site (photograph courtesy of F. Quiros).

The lateral margins showed evidence of pecking and shaping.

Flaked stone: Approximately 10 flakes, mostly of quartzite were noted throughout. Some appear to be fragments of broken hammerstones that were repurposed while others appeared to be purposefully flaked from a core. Identified tools include one core and one utilized flake.

Area 1 is a sparse scatter of lithic debitage on the eastern margins of the site. The boundaries of the scatter were not defined, and it likely extends farther north and south. Materials include various cherts, imported from regions beyond the MPR, and quartzite, which was likely locally sourced from the Santa Rosa Formation. The scatter included a diverse set of flake types including primary, secondary, tertiary, thinning, and other types, as well as fragments, shatter, and cores. Many have use wear on their margins. A total of 52 flakes were collected, although the actual total may be in the hundreds. Time and field conditions did not permit for a full systematic survey. At the eastern most extent of the area, a cache of a two stacked manos buried

in the ground were observed in the roadbed. The top mano was disc shaped while the bottom was hemispheric.

Area 2 is a low-density lithic scatter of lithic debitage located near the western end of the Buffalo Hill Quarries site between two activity areas. The boundaries of the scatter were not defined and only a few flakes were documented; however, the assemblage is similar to that of Area 1.

Conclusions and directions for future research

The discovery of the two ancient Maya sites described here, Nohoch Batsó and the Buffalo Hill Quarries, has significantly altered the scope of our project's overall research agenda. Our work on them is in its infancy and many studies, and much analysis remain to be done. As such, we conclude this paper with a series of future research goals and questions to be addressed for each of the described sites and the reserve in general.

For Nohoch Batsó, we have strong evidence of a Late to Terminal Classic period occupation in Plaza 1 and a revisit to the site after it was abandoned. Are there older deposits there, and how does its chronology of Plaza 1 compare to other parts of the site? Where did the post-abandonment population live, and what connection did they have with the original inhabitants of the site? Were they early Postclassic visitors returning to their ancestral home, or were they a later group who happened upon it, perhaps related to the inhabitants of Tipu to the north? Given the alignment of Plaza 5 differs from the other plazas at the site and that is a considerable distance from the core, was it occupied at the same time or does it date to an earlier or later occupation? The site occupies a significant portion of the valley and few house mounds have been identified. The surrounding hills are steep and little agricultural terracing has been documented. How big the supporting population and where did they live, and where did they farm?

The Buffalo Hill Quarries are more than 5 km north of Nohoch Batsó, a span than can be generously described as rugged terrain that also includes crossing the deep cut of the Rio On if a direct route was taken. That distance and difficulty of travel makes it unlikely that people

from Nohoch Batsó were working the quarries. The wide demand for MPR granite throughout the eastern Lowlands and sheer size of the site indicates regular industrial scale production and full-time specialists rather than part-time crafters. Considering the above, who was working them? Was it a local permanent population or did *metateros* from sites such as Pacbitun travel there for periods of time when products were in demand? If there was a permanent, local population, was the production and distribution of finished products managed, and if so by what site(s)? Local knowledge suggests other quarry sites are present in the MPR. Were they worked the same way and by the same *metateros* as those using the Buffalo Hill Quarries site? Were the finished products from the quarry sites part of the same supply chain supporting the demand for the eastern Lowlands, or were quarries and quarry workers supporting distinct networks? The possible monument we recorded at the quarries coupled with the shrine recorded by Bullard (1963) suggests ritual was a component of the quarrying and production process. If that is the case, what were the rituals performed for? Many contemporary Maya groups believe in a supernatural being or beings who are the owners of the land and its resources. These “Earth Lords” are commonly petitioned before hunting or planting a field and ritually thanked after the action was successfully completed. Were the ritual sites on the MPR affiliated with the granite quarries used for similar purposes?

On a more regional level, Nohoch Batso’ is closest known center to the Buffalo Hill Quarries. What role, if any, did the inhabitants of that site have in organizing and controlling the quarry work? How is Nohoch Batso’ related to the other rumored quarries in the MPR? Was the site established to control and manage those resources and their distribution? Finally, the ceramics recovered from the site show a strong Caracol influence. What was the relationship between the two sites? What about its relationship other closer neighbors such as Minanah and Pacbitun? The presence of the stelae in Plaza 1 indicate the site was ruled by an *ajaw* (Stuart 1996). What role did the Nohoch Batsó royalty play in local and regional geopolitics?

All of these questions reveal that far from a region devoid of ancient Maya sites, the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve was a Maya cultural landscape rich in archaeological sites unique to it. We have only begun to scratch the surface of understanding the rich cultural heritage there. Questions like those above will guide our research for years to come. As they suggest, much work remains to be done as we continue to define this unique archaeological region.

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