

## ARTICLE 7:

## TEST EXCAVATIONS AT NEBLINA AND LAS PIEDRAS

MARK L. CHENAULT

### ABSTRACT

*Two sites with large, enigmatic stone features found in the area of the large cemetery site (G-150) are described. Cultural materials found at the sites are briefly discussed, and possible functional interpretations are presented.*

*Department of Anthropology  
University of Colorado*

### INTRODUCTION

Two archaeological sites, Neblina (G-151) and Las Piedras (G-152), were found during the 1984 field season of the Proyecto Prehistórico Arenal. Neblina is located 5 km east of Tilarán, and 4.5 km south of Lake Arenal. Las Piedras is 5.5 km east of Tilarán and 5 km south of Lake Arenal. Only about 500 meters separate the two sites, and both are very near the large cemetery, the Silencio Site (Article 6). Las Piedras is located 250 meters northwest of site G-150 on the slope leading up to the cemetery. Neblina is approximately 750 meters from the Silencio Site (G-150), on the next ridge to the northwest. Both sites are dominated by large stone features. Neblina was discovered during fence building by workers on the Finca El Silencio, where both sites are situated. The boundaries of the aptly-named Las Piedras site were found by project personnel testing for buried features with a metal probe.

### NEBLINA (G-151)

Test excavation at Neblina revealed a large concentration of *laja*, approximately 5.4 meters long (east-west) and 1.8 meters wide (north-south). The average size of the *laja* is approximately 40 cm by 30 cm. The stones appear to have been intentionally piled, and in places are stacked in as many as three courses. The stone feature is roughly rectangular in plan view (Fig. 1). The northern extent of the feature was not determined through excavation; probing indicated that it did not continue more than 30 to 40 cm. The areas to the east, west, and south were also probed, with no subsurface stone being found. Test excavation units placed several meters to the east and to the west of the stone feature, along the edge of the ridge top, also failed to expose any subsurface stone.

A 1 x 1 meter excavation operation was placed at the top of the ridge at the site and taken down to the Aguacate Formation. The stratigraphy revealed by this excavation is described by Mueller (Appendix A of Article 3). The profile of the rock feature shows the relationship of the feature to the site stratigraphy (Figs. 2 and 3). It appears that the *laja* were piled upon the Unit 50 deposit and were exposed when the Unit 41 tephra

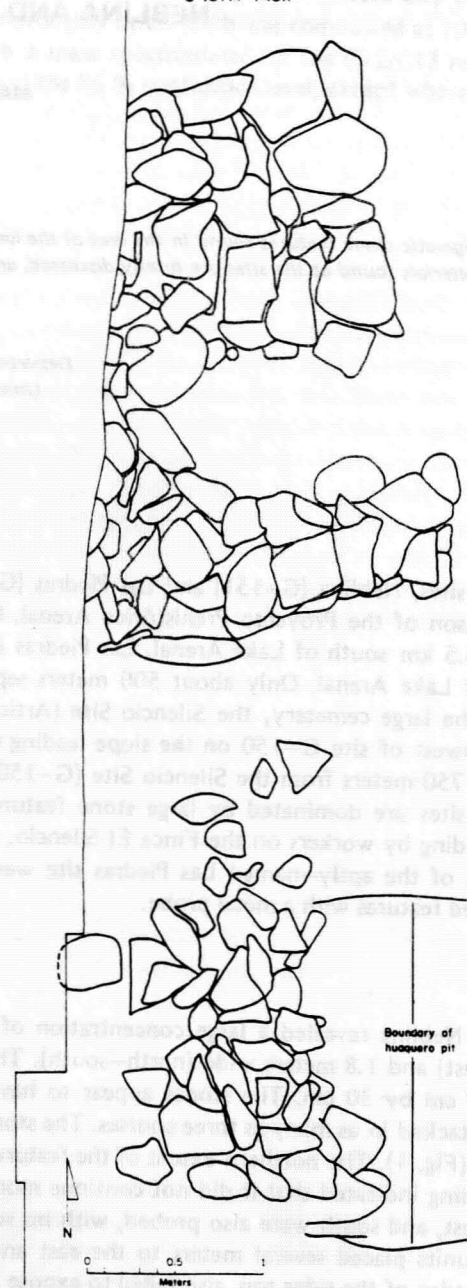


Figure 1. Plan view of test excavation at site G-151, Neblina. Note the roughly rectangular shape of the stone feature.

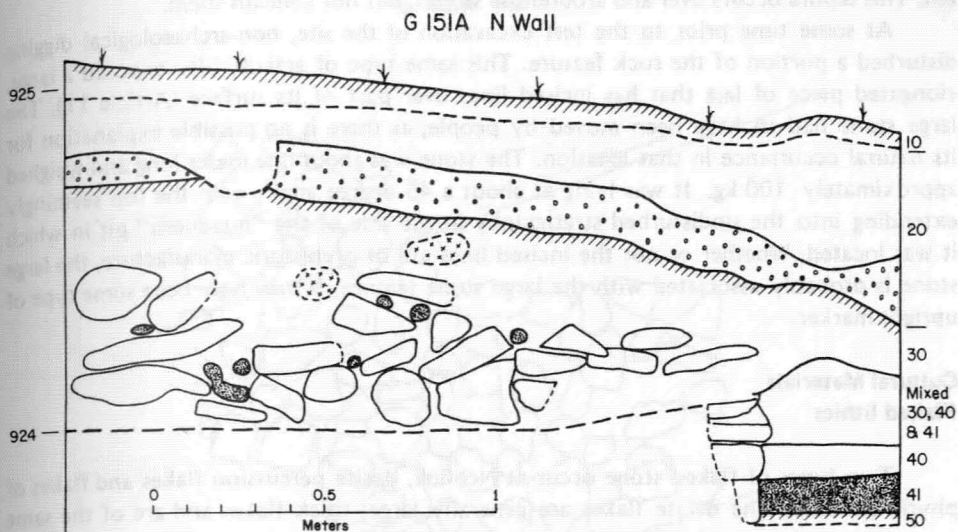


Figure 2. This profile of G-151A shows the relationship of the stone feature to stratigraphy. The *laja* were apparently exposed at the time of the Unit 41 ashfall.



Figure 3. Stone feature at site G-151. The *laja* apparently were intentionally stacked, forming a roughly rectangular feature.

fell. This tephra occurs over and around the stones, but not beneath them.

At some time prior to the test excavation of the site, non-archaeological digging disturbed a portion of the rock feature. This same type of activity also exposed a large, elongated piece of *laja* that has incised lines over part of its surface (Article 11). The large stone had to have been moved by people, as there is no possible explanation for its natural occurrence in that location. The stone was about one meter long and weighed approximately 100 kg. It was lying at about a 45 degree angle, with the top seemingly extending into the undisturbed stratigraphy in the side of the "huaquero" pit in which it was located. Whether or not the incised lines are of prehistoric manufacture, the large stone is probably associated with the large stone feature. It may have been some type of upright marker.

### **Cultural Materials**

#### **Flaked lithics**

Two types of flaked stone occur at Neblina, dacite percussion flakes and flakes of phyrlic andesite. The dacite flakes are generally large, thick flakes and are of the same type of material as a flaked stone celt found at Site G-152. Flaked lithic analysis (Article 10) indicates a full production sequence for the manufacture of flaked stone celts at the site. No groundstone artifacts were recovered at Neblina. The phyrlic andesite occurs in smaller flakes; some are probably the result of inadvertant *laja* damage and others from testing of raw material and shaping of *laja*. No boiling stones were found in the excavated portion of the site, suggesting that no cooking activities using stones took place at the site.

#### **Ceramics**

Only six ceramic sherds were found at Neblina, four in the operation excavated to the Aguacate Formation and two in the stone feature. All diagnostic sherds are from the Arenal Phase (500 B.C. to A.D. 500) of the Cuenca de Arenal phase sequence. These were excavated from lots below Unit 50, and thus precede the placement of the stones.

### **LAS PIEDRAS (G-152)**

Another large stone feature, amorphous in plan, occurs at Site G-152 (Fig. 4). The feature is approximately 4 meters long (north-south) and 3.75 meters wide (east-west). This stone concentration also consists of *laja* with an average size similar to that of the *laja* at Neblina. The stones at Las Piedras also occur on top of Unit 50 with the Unit 41 ash deposits around them (Fig. 5). None of the tephra occurs beneath the stones. All of the *laja* were lying horizontally except for a few upright stones at the southwestern corner of the feature. The stones were stacked three deep in parts of the feature.

### **Cultural Materials**

#### **Lithics**

The flaked lithic collection from Las Piedras is more diversified than that from Neblina. The flaked lithics from Las Piedras include one chipped stone celt, one scraper, two

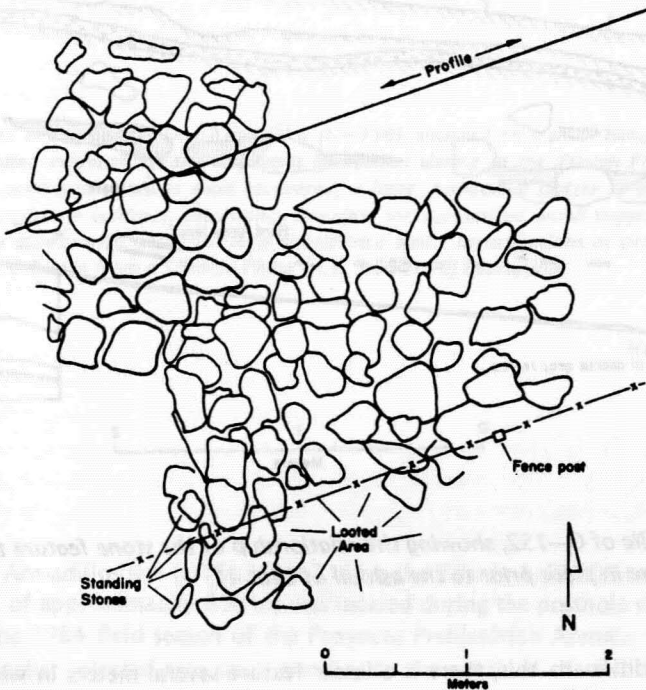


Figure 4. Plan view of amorphous stone feature at site G-152, Las Piedras.

hammerstones, two flaket cores, and one percussion blade. Analysis of flaket lithic (Article 10) indicates that flaket celt production also occurred at this site. There were no ground or polished stone items found at Las Piedras. Twenty-eight pieces of thermally fractured debitage recovered during work at the site suggest that cooking activities were performed by the prehistoric inhabitants.

#### Ceramics

All diagnostic ceramics found at Las Piedras are from the Silencio Phase of the Cuenca de Arenal Sequence.

#### INTERPRETATIONS

As has been stated, both Neblina and Las Piedras are located near the large cemetery site (G-150). Ceramics from Las Piedras indicate that the site was contemporary with the Silencio site. The ceramics from Neblina, however, suggest an earlier date for that site. However, this could be a bias caused by the small sample size. Another site (G-153) (Article 8) dominated by Silencio ceramics is located between Neblina and Las

G 152A N Wall

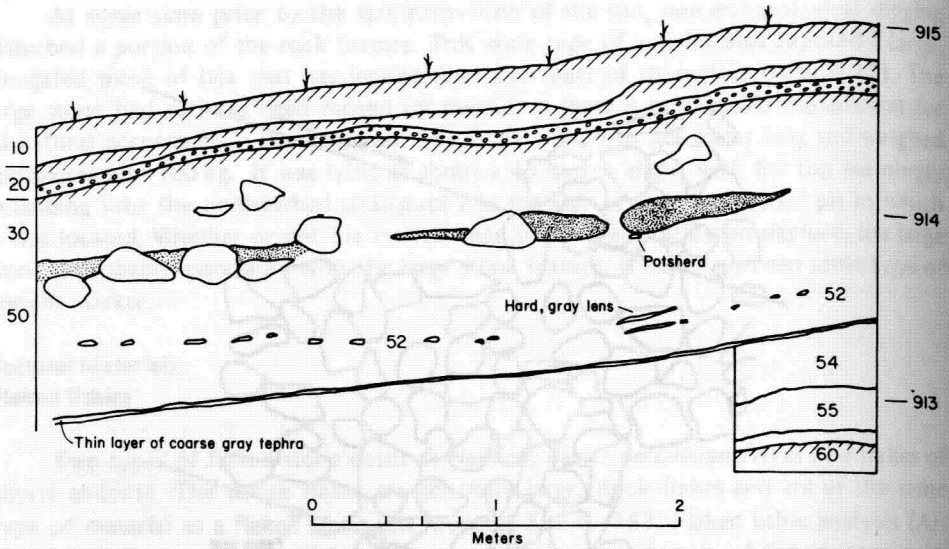


Figure 5. Profile of G-152, showing the relationship of the stone feature to stratigraphy. The stones were in place prior to the ashfall of Unit 41.

Piedras. In addition to this, there is a linear feature several meters in width which runs from just below Neblina to G-153, across a drainage, up to Las Piedras, and then possibly up to Site G-150. A test excavation revealed that the depression pre-dates the tephra falls of Units 40 and 41. It is possible that the linear depression is a trail connecting the four sites. This suggests that the sites were contemporary.

Several possible functions might be suggested for the stone features at Neblina and Las Piedras. They could be the base of walls or they could be paved trails. However, testing indicates that they do not continue in any direction, as one would expect with either walls or trails. A third and more likely interpretation is that they are caches of *laja* to have been used at the large cemetery. The evidence for cooking and other activities at Las Piedras probably means that the site was a work area for maintenance activities at the cemetery. The production of flaked lithic celts is an example of activities related to maintenance. According to Sheets (personal communication) flaked lithic celts were easier and faster to manufacture than the more durable polished stone celts. They were probably used for cutting and clearing vegetation at the cemetery when groundstone celts were broken or unavailable for use, or for removing smaller, more easily cut underbrush where a heavy, thick groundstone celt was undesirable.