Corozal Project

1973 Interim Report, edited by Norman Hammond

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Specialist reports on the human and animal bones, mollusca and plant remains from the 1973 excavations have been held over for the final report.
The objectives of the 1973 survey were two-fold: an area survey of the Orange Walk and Corozal Districts to discover the overall distribution of ancient sites, and the detailed recording of specific sites within this area. However, the system finally adopted meant that the full power of the survey team was directed to the latter objective, whilst the area survey, after an intensive period in early April, evolved into a series of short explorations intended to verify the existence of possible sites first noticed on air photographs (generously made available by Belize Sugar Industries Ltd.).

Each of the major site surveys was initiated for a different reason, and each demanded a different approach.

Of these sites, San Estevan was chosen so that the work of Bullard in 1965 could be amplified and the true extent of the ceremonial centre established. This objective was then enlarged to include the spread of settlement around the centre, and then further enlarged to encompass the minor ceremonial centre of Chowacol, and the mound clusters dubbed the Martinez group and the Hipolito group; this will be continued as an area settlement survey covering the region between the New River and Long Swamp.

Nohmul was chosen because it was certainly the largest and probably the most important site in the area, Santa Rita because it was so destroyed by quarrying and farming that some record was vital before the last traces of many structures were removed altogether, and Colha because it proved to be a major industrial centre, of which few have been identified so far in the Maya area.

Many sites are in danger of partial or total destruction; some are being actively destroyed at present and desperately need a thorough record of remaining structures and their relationship to topography. Such sites include: Kate's Lagoon (Kichpanha), Santa Elena, Caledonia and San Victor. Other sites - e.g. Aventura, Progresso and Honey Camp - are being destroyed rather more slowly by agriculture, but their recording will soon become urgent. For all these sites a topographical survey with dumpy level or theodolite should be considered essential. There follows a description of the survey methods used for each of the four major sites mapped in 1973.

San Estevan (Figs. 7-13)

Work began with the recording of Plaza D to the south of Bullard's Plaza A. Plaza D was gridded in ten metre squares from an axis which was laid out due north-south. Levels were then taken at each ten-metre point, and a contour plan constructed. At the same time the shape of each structure was recorded by measuring the width and length of top and base from a conjectural centre point. With the contour plan as a base, reconstructions could then be attempted. This procedure became standard for all sites surveyed.

Selected grid lines were then extended to north, west and south. To the north, two lines were cut through heavy bush to join Bullard's Plaza A, which could then be accurately related to
SURVEYING

RICHARD M. BRYANT

San Estevan
Plaza D. To the west a grid line was cut across a field of young cane into Plaza E where a second ten metre grid was generated. This grid was further extended into Plazas F and G which were cleared of bush and also fully gridded. Later the grid was extended again to cover a large platform group (58) to the north of Plaza F.

To the south, a grid line was surveyed into the middle of a group of mounds and chultuns. From grid points on this line these features were plotted in by triangulation.

To the east of Bullard's group (Plazas A, B and C) lay broad fields of sugar cane, and as they were cut they revealed a spread of platform groups and house mounds covering most of the ground between the ceremonial centre and the Long Swamp. Ranging rods were placed as fixed points within each of the visible groups and these points were related to the central survey area by triangulation from the tops of Bullard's structures 3 and 15. The groups themselves could then be recorded by tape and compass from the fixed points. This proved to be a highly satisfactory method, and it was extended as new groups or house mounds emerged from the cane.

Within the San Estevan survey, three other surveys, of Chowacol, the Martinez group, and the Hipolito group, must be included because these sites must have formed part of the overall settlement pattern for which San Estevan provides the focal centre.

Chowacol (Fig. 20) is a minor ceremonial centre about three kilometres to the south of the San Estevan central group. It consists of two Plazas, (A and C), separated by a lower area (Plaza B) which may be a third plaza or just an access area. Plaza A is an enclosed ceremonial plaza with a nine-metre high pyramid at its southern end, while Plaza C appears to be a dual-purpose, broad, open plaza with a palace structure across its southern end, a pyramid in its north-eastern corner, and a scatter of smaller structures. Beyond this pyramid (Str. 9) a lower plaza extends northwards. On all sides of the central complex a limited portion of the settlement pattern was recorded in the dense bush.

As in San Estevan Plaza B, a ten metre grid was laid cut along a north-south axis in Plazas A, B and C, and levels were taken at every ten metre point. The information was again used to compile a contour plan, and, with additional information, to attempt a reconstruction. In order to tie into the survey the house mounds of the settlement, triangulation as described above was of limited value, site lines being obscured by dense bush. Only those mounds which stood to the east of the ceremonial centre were recorded in this way; elsewhere grid lines had to be extended into the bush and used as base lines from which structures on either side could be recorded.

The Martinez Group (Fig. 84) was either a very small ceremonial sub-centre or a very large double-plaza residential group. It lay by the San Estevan road about 1 km south of the quarried Platform 71 group. The relative positions of the mounds in this group were defined by triangulation, and the mounds themselves were surveyed with tape and compass.
The Hipolito Group (Fig. 83) was a small group of house mounds 3.75 km from the San Estevan complex. It was surveyed by tape and compass, and together with Chowacol and the Martinez Group was related to the San Estevan ceremonial centre by means of the aerial survey.

Future priorities for San Estevan

1. The settlement area around the ceremonial centre and between it and the Long Swamp should be topographically surveyed along site lines one hundred metres apart, so that surveyed structures can be related to topography.

2. The observed, but unsurveyed, platform groups and house mounds 500 metres to the south of Plaza D should be related to the main group along levelled site lines and then surveyed by tape and compass.

3. The presence or absence of settlements between San Estevan and Chowacol should be determined and if necessary surveyed.

4. The house mounds near San Estevan village should be recorded by tape and compass.

5. The settlement observed but not surveyed, beside the access road into Chowacol, should be surveyed and related to the main Chowacol complex.

6. The continuous spread of structures to the west of the San Estevan road should be recorded.

7. Ultimately, the entire San Estevan ridge should be divided into one kilometre squares and systematically surveyed to reveal the settlement pattern and topography of the ridge form the New River to the Long Swamp. This has never been done in Belize, and for a full knowledge of the population, hierarchy and distribution of a settlement and its relationship to the surrounding country, at least one such detailed survey should be carried out.

Santa Rita (Figs. 71-3)

In some ways Santa Rita was the saddest site the survey team visited. Destruction has been so savage that even the large concrete triangulation marker left by the D.O.S. survey, which once crowned the pyramid, had been ripped out of the ground and thrown down. The contour plan shows some of this disturbance, but detailed observation finally distinguished structural mounds from spoil heaps and quarry tips. Thus at least the central plaza and some of the site settlement pattern has been preserved. The survey was almost entirely carried out by Rob and Terry Thallon, and to produce the contour map the whole plaza area around the pyramid was gridded at ten metre intervals and levelled with a theodolite. The pyramid itself was tacheometrically levelled from points on this grid. The settlement pattern was recorded by tape and compass and tied to the overall survey either by extensions of the grid lines or by triangulation.

Future priorities for Santa Rita

1. The house mound group to the east of the Corozal–Santa Helena road should be recorded by tape and compass.
1973 Operation Numbers

Each site investigated was given an Operation number in the series 1 → infinity; surface collections from each site were designated "A", followed by a bag number in the series 1 → infinity; each excavation at the site was lettered in the series B → Z, and each bag numbered 1 → infinity. A typical designation for a sherd lot from excavations at Nohmul would therefore be 3 C 17, while a surface collection for San Estevan would be 1 A 23. Site designations given in 1973 and the work done were:

1 San Estevan - reconnaissance, mapping, surface collection, excavation, soil survey, ethnographic agriculture survey
2 Chowacol - reconnaissance, mapping, surface collection, excavation, soil survey
3 Nohmul - reconnaissance, mapping, surface collection, excavation, soil survey
4 Colha - reconnaissance, mapping, surface collection, excavation, soil survey
5 Louisville - reconnaissance
6 Cuello - reconnaissance, surface collection
7 Aventura - reconnaissance, surface collection
8 Santa Rita - reconnaissance, mapping, surface collection, excavation
9 San Victor - reconnaissance
10 Progresso - reconnaissance
11 Kichpanha - reconnaissance, surface collection
12 Santa Elena - reconnaissance, surface collection
13 Buena Vista - reconnaissance, surface collection
14 Caledonia - reconnaissance, surface collection, stratigraphic sampling, exposed section drawing
15 Hipolito gp - reconnaissance, mapping, surface collection
16 Martinez gp - reconnaissance, mapping
17 San Antonio - reconnaissance
18 Benque Viejo - reconnaissance, surface collection (Santa Cruz)
Gann excavated three mounds at San Estevan in 1908-9 (Gann, 1911, 86-7), which he describes as being 25, 12 and 8 feet high; he found nothing except sherds, mainly unslipped. The site presently known by this name is a medium-sized ceremonial centre, which was partly mapped and excavated by Bullard in 1962 (Bullard, 1965); it lies 200 m east of the Orange Walk – San Estevan road on the crest of the low ridge between the New River and Long Swamp. Bullard mapped three plazas, designated A–C; A, the southernmost, was slightly raised and surrounded by two smallish and one large pyramids; B was open and bordered by relatively low range structures; C had a ball court in the middle, the largest pyramid, Str. 15, 15 m high, on the west, and ranges on the other sides, with an enclosed court beyond to the north. Bullard noted the existence of other structures in the bush but did not investigate them. His excavations were confined to Plaza A, where he exposed three successive buildings in Str. 1, all of Early Classic date, and two in Str. 2. His deepest excavations yielded Preclassic material which he designated the Vasquez complex; he noted Mamom-like characteristics but preferred to interpret it as an archaic Late Preclassic. The total occupation span of the site he gave as 300 B.C. – c.A.D. 750, since he had found very little Late Classic material.

Since it was the only site in our research area to have received any stratigraphic excavation, we decided that our first step in constructing a regional ceramic sequence would be to confirm and possibly extend Bullard's sequence by further excavation at San Estevan; the destruction of Str. 2 for road fill in early 1973 also convinced us that all locatable structures around Bullard's site should be mapped. A brief reconnaissance showed that two additional plazas, F and G, ran west from B, and that F had two pyramids on its western and southern sides, the north side being occupied by a long range structure than ran across Plaza G also. To the south of the pyramids was a long depression designated Plaza E. During the course of survey it became clear that it was basically either a natural depression in the limestone or a massive quarry, bordered by a low scarp and with no coherent arrangement of structures around it. A number of similar scarps were found in the vicinity, the ridges utilised for structures but again with no coherent pattern, and to the east of Plaza C the presence of a large quarry was confirmed. Beyond a depression south of Plaza A was a group of mounds around a small plaza, designated D, with a small pyramid at the north end and range structures on the other sides. This, together with Plazas F and G and the compound Str. 19 north of Plaza C seem to have been residential, while further élite residence was provided by large plazuela groups nearby (e.g. the Pl. 58 group, Fig. 11). Plazas A and C each contained one large pyramid, A two smaller and F two of similar size to them; Plaza B would seem to have been the main ceremonial plaza, as a large open space, while Plaza C contained the ball court.

The area surveyed in 1973 was 1.104 km by 0.833 km at its greatest extent and about 0.7 km² overall, bounded on the west by the road and on the east by a sharp decline in size and density of structures towards Long Swamp. Apart from the T-shaped area of the ceremonial centre itself this area contained two large and seven smaller plazuela groups, 15 single mounds around the 'Plaza E'
depression, 6 others east of Plaza A on another rock shelf, and a dozen or so single mounds towards the limits of the survey, beyond which other occurred. None of the mounds surveyed had apparent standing architecture, although its existence in Strs. 1 and 2 was shown by Bullard's excavations.

The 1973 excavations were carried out mainly in the newly-discovered Plaza D, and were intended to establish its period of occupation and comparability with Plaza A. Ops. 1C and 1D were two test pits, 1C in the plaza floor, 1D through the small pyramid (Str. 21) at the northern end. 1C yielded Early Classic material, and a series of poorly preserved plaster floors the lowest of which covered Preclassic refuse deposits. Examination of sherds from the lowest level by T. Patrick Culbert suggested that they were Mamom in date and close to the Tzec complex of Tikal in type. Op. 1D showed that the pyramid had been built over the latest plaster floor and had been built up of large rubble, then smaller rubble with lenses of plaster. Excavation reports on these pits by Richard Wilk and Elizabeth Graham are appended. Op. 1B consisted of the examination of deposits inside a chultun in the hope of finding undisturbed burials, refuse or other stratified pottery; the chultun was close to a mound, and much sherd material was found, but all had apparently fallen into the open chultun. Op. 1E was a small test square behind Str. 62 in the Pl. 58 plazuela group to see whether domestic refuse had been dumped down the back of the mound or if it was more likely to be in the large adjacent chultun, which was full of earth. Little refuse was found, and the excavation of the chultun therefore seems promising.

The excavations confirmed Bullard's general Preclassic-Early Classic dating, although sherds of Tepeu 1 basal-ridged plate from the eroded fill of the ball court suggest that construction at the site may have continued into Late Classic times. Bullard's sequence was based on Plaza A, and this may have remained unaltered during the latter part of the site's history. The Mamom-type pottery from Ops. 1C and 1D suggests that Bullard's Vasquez complex may contain mixed Mamom-Chicanel material, and that the site may be several centuries older than he envisaged. The presence of Mamom material in mixed deposits at Altun Ha (Pendergast, personal communication) and its identification at Louisville (Haberland, 1958) and Becan (Ball, personal communication) suggest that this is a reasonable possibility, with the Mamom Ceramic Sphere extending much further north and east than envisaged.

**Operation 1B**

**Location:** Chultun I, S. of Plaza D. San Estevan


**Summary:** The entrance of a double-chambered chultun was cleared, and a trench dug in one of the chambers in the hope of locating a primary midden deposit. This enterprise proved fruitless, as the contents of the chultun were largely fallen earth and bat droppings.

**Illustrations:** Fig. 18.

**Section and Plan:** R. Wilk, Field Notes 1973.
PL. 58 GROUP
SAN ESTEVAN BELIZE

RECONSTRUCTION MAP REF. CR3905
SURVEYED APRIL 1973 R.M.B, B.A
DRAWN R.M.B COROZAL PROJECT
PLATFORM GROUPS 68, 71
SAN ESTEVAN BELIZE
RECONSTRUCTION 1973
DRAWN: RLT
NOTE: STRUCTURES ON SURVEY PLT. 71 DESTROYED BEFORE SURVEY; RECONSTRUCTED FROM 1954 AERIAL SURVEY.
3A and 3B: Soils on flinty limestone

8: Soil on old river terrace

Other soil sets and conventions as on Fig. 24.
Stratigraphy: 1: 75 cm of roots, charcoal, decayed vegetable matter and bat guano were removed from the entrance shaft of the chultun. At this level (1.55 m below surface) the cover-slab of the shaft was encountered where it had fallen or been thrown to the bottom of the shaft. About 25 cm below this stone the floor of the entry shaft was found. A 10 cm deep trench was then dug across the floor of the North chamber of the chultun through an identical deposit. This soil contained large amounts of badly eroded sherds and a few flints. They have probably eroded from the structure immediately adjacent to the chultun.

2: When the trench reached an average depth of 10 cm in the north chamber, a one meter square was excavated in the center of the trench with the intention of locating the floor. The trench continued through 30 cm of identical deposit before striking a 2-3 cm deep layer of sterile decomposed limestone over the limestone floor. As in 1, badly eroded sherds, burned material probably from recent milpa firing, shells, small rodent bones, and bat droppings were contained in the deposit.

Conclusions: The chultun was not used for burial or rubbish disposal; no evidence of its original function was found. The deposit encountered is almost certainly an erosion feature accumulated after abandonment, the chultun having been left empty. A hole has recently been made by the landowner into an adjoining single-chambered chultun, the shaft of which still has the cover-slab in place. The deposit there is more likely to contain undisturbed material but only a thin layer of deposit was present and no excavation was made.

Operations 1C and 1D (Figs. 16, 17, 19)

The summaries of these test pit excavations were not available when this report was prepared; they will appear in the final report. Both were in Plaza D, Op. 1C being in the north part of the plaza and Op. 1D in Str. 21 on its north side. The lower part of the excavation profile of Op. 1D was very similar to that of Op. 1C, showing that the sequence of plaster floors overlying an earth fill of redeposited occupation material was the same in both locations. The occupation material was Preclassic in date, with sherds similar to the late Middle Preclassic Tzec Complex at Tikal (T. P. Culbert, personal communication) and also Late Preclassic material. All these features had been assigned by Buliraró (1965) to his Late Preclassic Vasquez Complex, but a Middle Preclassic occupation of San Estevan now seems more likely. The upper levels of Op. 1D showed that Str. 21 was built over the final plaster floor of Plaza D, and that this was the last of a series of superimposed floors with no accumulation of occupation material between them. Floor I, in Op. 1C would seem to be the earliest of this series, the later floors having been destroyed by natural agency since the site's abandonment, with the unclear Floor IV in Op. 1C linking up with the ?Floor IV in Op. 1D. Str. 21 itself was built up with a mixture of small and massive limestone rubble fill,
with levels of stucco containing voids in the upper part below a smooth hard plaster surface, layer 2, which seems to represent the top of the structure. Sherds from the fill of Str. 21 suggest that it is of Early Classic date.

Operation 1E

This was a 1 m² test pit behind Str. 62 in the Pl. 58 Group, dug to see whether occupation debris had been thrown down behind the house; results were negative. No formal summary has been prepared, although the findings will be noted in the final report.


The existence of the site dubbed Chowacol - 'long milpa', its local name, was brought to our attention during the work at San Esteban by Julio Patt of San Esteban. The site was under bush, and had not previously been reported; nor had it been looted. Reconnaissance showed that there were two plazas set upon a large basal platform, with a lower area between them but still raised above the surrounding land surface; the southern plaza had a small pyramid some 8 m high on its southern side, a very small pyramidal structure on the northeast and low range structures on the north and west, while the northern plaza was dominated by a very long range structure on its southern side with a large projecting stair. This structure, Str. 5, is 35 m long and was dubbed the 'palace', since it seemed likely to be an elite residence or administrative building of some kind. This plaza had another small pyramid 3.5 m high at its northeast corner, beyond which was a semi-enclosed area off the edge of the basal platform. A number of isolated mounds and one large plazuela group were recorded to the east of the main group and two mounds to the west; the survey did not extend further.

The plan of Chowacol, which from its possession of a single substantial pyramid could be dubbed a 'minor ceremonial centre', might be said to be the epitome of such a site, with one plaza devoted to religious activity and the other to elite residence, the religious and secular aspects of social control.

A test pit in Plaza A in front of Str. 2, supervised by Richard Wilk, showed 9 superimposed plaster floors, up to 45 cm thick in the case of floor VI, overlying 1 m of refuse deposit with many articulated sherds and including halfway down the low wall of a platform subsequently covered by midden. A sample of sherds examined by T. Patrick Culbert proved to be Late Preclassic in date, but analysis of the complete collection from the pit by Duncan Pring has shown that apparently Early Classic material exists in even the lowest levels. It may be that the 'Preclassic Midden' indicated on Fig. 21 should in fact be attributed to an Early Classic redeposition, without too much churning, of Preclassic deposits, but even if this is so the Preclassic foundation of Chowacol is not in doubt. Presumably one of the 9 plaster floors formed the surface of the depressed area B between the raised platforms of Plazas A and C, so that the division into two plazas with separate functions came relatively
late in the history of construction. The date of abandonment of Chowacol is not yet known, but there is firm evidence of its reuse in the Late Postclassic when a small platform edged with vertical slabs was built on top of Str. 2 and a large quantity of effigy incensario fragments deposited in front of it. These were also found on top of and in front of the pyramid, Str. 1, and Postclassic pottery was found on the surface of Str. 5.

Chowacol thus shows the familiar pattern of sites in this area, a Preclassic foundation followed by Early Classic construction, abandonment and Late Postclassic reuse, but Chowacol is also one of the few sites in the region, with Nohmul, Santa Rita and a mound at Progresso 1, where actual Postclassic structures have been found, as opposed to merely incensario deposition. In plan it seems slightly more organised and differentiated into functional areas than the Martinez Group, to be a definite ceremonial site rather than a borderline elite residence group, and in the regional site hierarchy we have made it the type site for the next level of complexity above that of the Martinez Group, the 'minor ceremonial centre'.

Operation 2B Location: 7 metres West of Grid Point N11, Plaza A: Chowacol


Summary: A one metre square test pit was dug into the floor of Plaza D to ascertain the construction sequence and depth of bedrock. A succession of nine plaster floors over six levels of midden deposit incorporating a low wall was observed.

Illustrations: Figs. 21, 23.

Section and Plans: S. Section, Fig. 21.
W. Section, R. Wilk, Field Notes 1, 1973.

Stratigraphy: 1: 0-15 cm. Root disturbed and humus layer containing a few badly eroded sherds and a stone mano.

2: 15-25 cm. A second humus layer, slightly harder and lighter than 1, containing large amounts of broken limestone.

3: Floor I, 25-46 cm. A badly eroded and root-disturbed plaster floor underlain by a layer of medium (10-15 cm) limestone fragments extending to about 36 cm. At this level a limestone and grey-soil fill was encountered, which, like the floor itself, was largely sterile.

4: Floor II, 46-56 cm. An uneven but well-preserved plaster floor of an off-white colour, found to overlay Floor III without any intervening deposit.

Floor III, 56-75 cm. A well constructed and very thick off-white plaster floor, which was much softer in its lower portions. Underlain by grey soil and limestone fill, identical with that beneath Floor I, to a depth of 81 cm. This fill was totally sterile, and the floors above it were largely so except for several large badly-weathered sherds.
5: **Floor IV**, 81-87 cm. A hard, grey plaster surface, almost completely lacking in cultural debris. Probably a re-surfacing of **Floor V**.

**Floor V**, 87-96 cm. Very light and hard white plaster, separated by a very thin dark line from the overlying **Floor IV**. At the very base of this floor a layer of angular dark limestone fragments was found incorporated in the plaster; sterile.

**Floor VI**, 96-146 cm. A very deep and complex layer, quite definitely a floor on its upper surface, but grading into an inconsistent mixture of hard white bits of plaster, fragments of black earth, and pockets of powdery grey clay at a lower level. The fine white plaster floor surface extends to a depth of about 1.11 m, when the jumbled deposit, probably composing the fill of the floor, begins. All deposits were almost entirely sterile. The bottom 3 cm of this layer was composed of sterile black soil.

6: **Floor VII**, 1.46-1.62 m. An extremely hard and flat plaster surface resembling limestone in strength and texture. Found to consist of two layers; the top 3 cm being very hard, grainy yellow plaster, and the bottom 12 cm being of equally hard lumpy white plaster or breccia containing small (1-3 cm) bits of limestone. There was, however, no distinct cleavage or dividing layer between the two layers.

**Floor VIII**, 1.62-1.72 m. Another extremely hard and well made plaster floor, immediately underlying **Floor VII**. It was constructed of sterile cream-coloured plaster, and was not discoloured at all on its upper surface.

7: **Floor IX**, 1.72-2.02 m. A floor quite similar to VIII on its upper surface, though much thicker and blending in with limestone fragments and bits of dark earth at about the 1.94 m level. Two fragments of pottery were recovered at the 2.00 level, though it is quite likely that these belong to the underlying midden.

8: **Midden layer I**, 2.02-2.14 m. The top surface of this layer was as hard and flat as the overlying floors, suggesting that it had been tramped down at some time. The dark brown earth was mixed with charcoal, painted stucco, animal bones, shell, flint, quartz, and many sherds. Most sherds had sharply broken and uneroded edges suggesting that this is a primary midden layer. On its lower border, this deposit begins to grade into that below.

9: **Midden layer II**, 2.14-2.38 m. A much harder and lighter layer than I, containing much less cultural debris, though large amounts of charcoal. Chunks of limestone, plaster and soft marl were jumbled together without any clear layering. In the lower levels, as the deposit became mixed with 10 and 11, more and more sherds, stone and bone were recovered, including a small bone punch or awl.
Chowacol

Midden Deposits
10: Pottery Concentration, 2.34-2.38 m. Almost in the centre of the pit at this level, as a lens in 9, a collection of large unarticulated sherds, flakes, bones and charcoal were discovered.

11: Midden layer III, 2.38-2.44 m. A similar concentration was also found in the North West corner of the trench. In this deposit several lumps of dark grey clay were found, as well as many articulated pieces of friable black pottery lying on a horizontal plane. Upon further excavation this layer was found to extend inconsistently over much of the trench. Sherds were very dense in this layer, one concentration of 14 being labelled as 2B11a and photographed in situ.

12: Midden layer IV, 2.44-2.70 m. This layer consisted of a homogeneous mixture of light grey clay-like soil and white marl. Two low walls were completely covered by this largely sterile deposit. At a depth of 2.47 metres half of a large laurel-leaf blade of honey-coloured flint was uncovered (2B12B). Carbon samples, and a large sample of the deposit itself, were removed for analysis.

13: Midden layer V, 2.70-2.88 m. At the base of the walls this very dark organic primary midden was uncovered. Carbon fragments were common, and a sample was taken for dating. It was concluded that the walls were built directly upon this layer.

14: Midden and bedrock decomposition layer VI, 2.88-3.44 m. This light grey clay layer had the appearance of primary midden on top, but graded into sterile limestone rubble and then into decomposed bedrock and solid bedrock. Pottery became scarce below the 3.00 m level.

Structures: Two low walls meeting at right-angles were found incorporated in layer 12 and resting upon 13 at a depth of 2.70 m. The platform took the form of a very hard plaster matrix surrounding limestone rubble in the North East corner of the trench, and of a dry-laid limestone block wall running in one course towards the South West across the trench.

Conclusions: This test pit revealed a complex sequence of midden deposits overlain by an extremely deep succession of plaster floors. The presence of Late Preclassic pottery in the midden layers indicates use of the site by that date, but a number of possibly Early Classic sherds in the midden indicate that it may have been redeposited from nearby, with little damage occurring to the material; a Preclassic date for the midden layers with occasional penetration of later material due to animal or root action or an undetected pit seems however more likely. The succession of plaster floors contained little sherd material and thus cannot be firmly dated, although the forms of the structures around the plaza which the floors surface suggest a Classic date; the number of floors, most of them new surfaces rather than repairs, suggests a complex constructional sequence for this part of Chowacol in general. A terminus ante quem for the construction is provided by the slab-edged construction built over the North end of Str. 2,
which is of Postclassic architectural type and apparently associated with a surface deposit of Late Postclassic effigy incensarios. Op. 2B would thus seem to document a period of Preclassic occupation during which midden material was used as fill for a stone-faced low platform, probably for a house, followed by a period mostly or wholly in the Classic of continual floor-construction associated with the development of the minor ceremonial centre.


Nohmul - 'great mound', its local name according to Gann and Gann (1939, 1) - is the largest site so far discovered in northern Belize. It lies on the westernmost of the limestone ridges that form the basic structure of the region, between the Rio Hondo and the belt of swamp that passes by San José and Buena Vista. Most if not all of the site is in the quadrilateral area between the modern villages of Douglas, San Victor, San Pablo and San Luis, but its limits have not yet been determined and it is not certain whether the smaller ceremonial centres at San Victor (Op. 9) to the north and San Luis to the south are part of Nohmul or separate sites.

The first record of the site is as an unnamed 'Signal and lookout mound' (Gann, 1897, 314), and the first excavation that of Gann in 1908-9 into a number of mounds (Gann, 1911, 74-7) including two large structures probably Strs. 66 and 8. Gann excavated another mound in 1911-12 (Gann, 1914-16, 39) on which a sub-surface deposit of Late Postclassic effigy incensario fragments had been found by an Indian. After he had retired from the medical service and married, Gann returned to Nohmul with his wife for two seasons of excavation (Gann and Gann, 1939; Gann, 1938, Gann, 1939, 260-72) during which thirty mounds were opened. In 1944 a road was built north of the site centre from San Pablo to Douglas, partly destroying an isolated pyramid which yielded a number of Proto-classic vessels from two chambers within it (Anderson and Cook, 1944), and more recently Dennis Puleston recovered a burial from the roadbed some 50 m to the east (MS report in Archaeology Department, Belmopan).

The sum result of this work was that Nohmul had a sequence running from probably the Late Preclassic through a strong Proto- and Early Classic, with an unknown date of abandonment and later Late Postclassic reuse of at least one small pyramid for incensario deposition. Gann's plan (Gann and Gann, 1939, 2) suggested a loosely-articulated ceremonial centre with a single plaza and many long 'mounds and banks' enclosing less defined areas.

The 1973 survey showed that both the content and scale of Gann's plan were inaccurate (Figs. 26-6): the 'mounds and banks' were much smaller relative to the main plaza than he had recorded, and much closer, forming a series of plazas to the east, south and west; Gann had missed the eastern range of the ball court and the function of the long construction running west from the main plaza as a saecbe, as well as the group of structures at its western end. Detailed comparison of Figs. 25-6 with Gann and Gann's