

LANDSCAPE, RAW MATERIAL, AND PREHISTORIC SETTLEMENT PATTERNS IN THE AREA OF LA PAZ, BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR

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The area of La Paz in the southern part of the peninsula of Baja California is one of the most important areas from the prehistoric period of approximately 9,400 years ago. The archaeological evidence indicates a high density of sites near the coastal zone, composed principally of campsites and rhyolite quarry-workshops, while in the granitic mountain area of the Sierra de las Cacachilas and El Novillo, various pictograph sites were recorded.

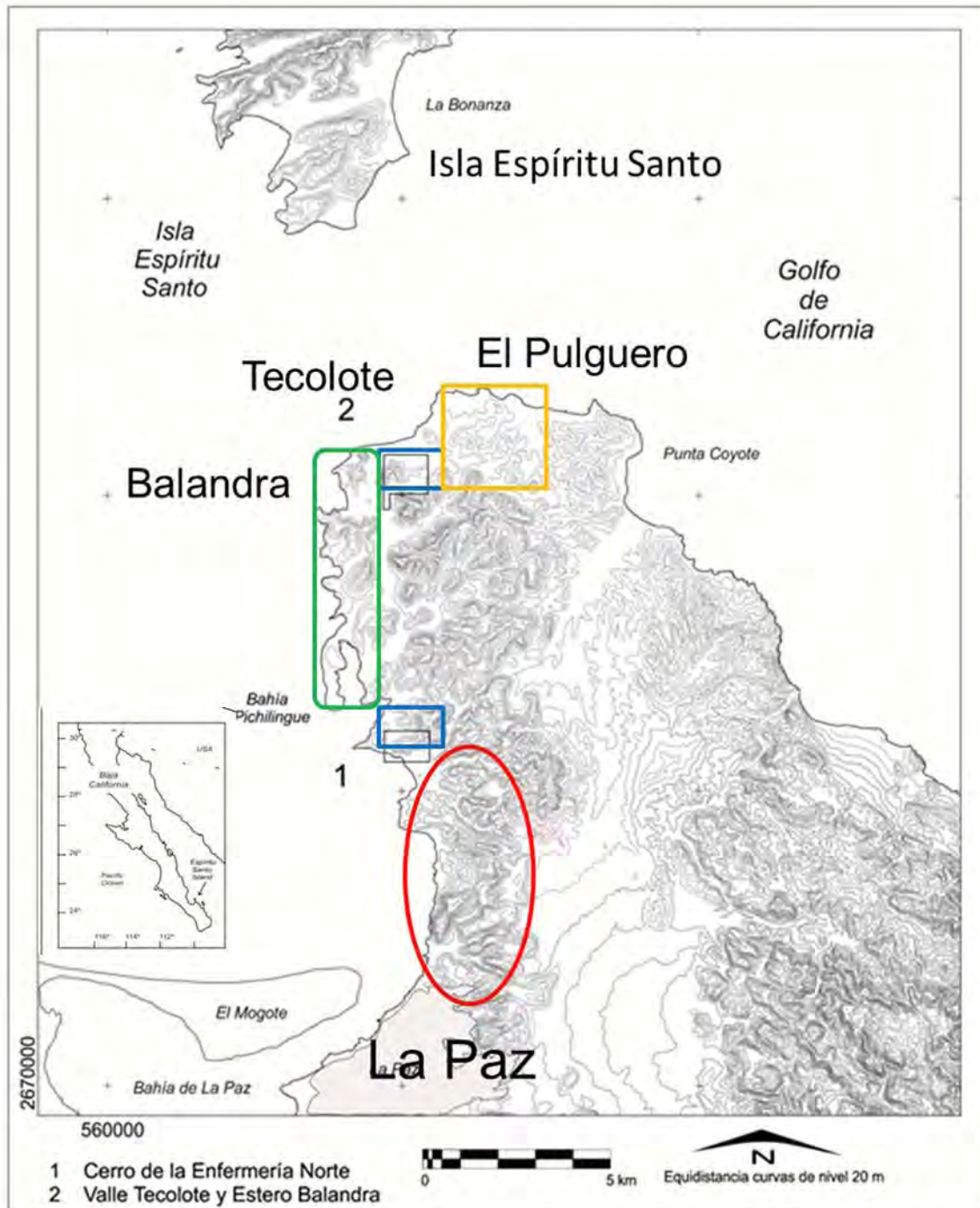
LANDSCAPE

The area of La Paz, Baja California Sur, was one of the most important and attractive areas for early human occupation in the prehistory of the Baja California peninsula (Figure 1). La Paz Bay, in the Gulf of California, is an extensive and calm bay that has a variety of marine species. The ancient population took advantage of the marine food resources, in addition to terrestrial resources, as is manifested in recorded archaeological sites. Approximately 8,500 years ago, the archipelago of Espíritu Santo Island was connected to the peninsula, so La Paz Bay was much more extensive (Fujita and Melgar 2014).

The Sierra de las Cacachilas, which is composed of Cerro del Puerto, Cerro de la Cienaga, and other hills, consists of whitish granitic hills with a maximum elevation of 1,260 m at Cerro del Puerto (Figure 2). This makes it stand out from other areas in the city of La Paz and its outskirts. This mountain is located between La Paz and La Ventana Bay, so it may have served as a landmark for the ancient inhabitants.

In addition, it is probable that this mountain was considered a sacred symbol, such as happens not only in other parts of Mexico but throughout the world. A Japanese archaeologist, Masato Anzai (2010), has stated that the landscape does not only mean the geomorphology, but is the image of the earth conceived by the people, with diverse social spaces created to meet the needs of the individual, the group, and society as a whole. In short, a landscape is the vision of nature that is shared among people through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. In other words, a landscape is socialized nature. Through daily activities, the cult, and cosmovision, society transforms a physical space to a significant place.

According to various myths and legends of the southern part of the peninsula, there was a cult of mountains, associated with the creation god known as Niparaja, who arrived at a high mountain from the universe, specifically from the stars of Orion's belt (Reyes Silva 2005:27-30). This god created the spiny vegetation, animals, and the first man and woman of this region. Other legends narrate the celebration to receive the god from the sky to the mountain. The inhabitants had to gather fruits and seeds, such as pitahaya (*Stenocereus thurberi*) and medesa (*Cercidium microphyllum*) for offerings beforehand and deposit them in a hut. Since this god brought rain, it was important to celebrate this event every year. Myth and legend show us that the indigenous people of the peninsula had a cult of mountains.



- Survey conducted in 2000 (Fujita 2003)
- Survey conducted in 2012 (Fujita and Bulhusen 2013)
- Survey conducted in 1982 (Fujita 1985)
- Survey conducted in 1982, 1997, and 2007 (Fujita 1985, 1998; Fujita et al. 2008)

Figure 1. Surveys of coastal areas north of La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico.

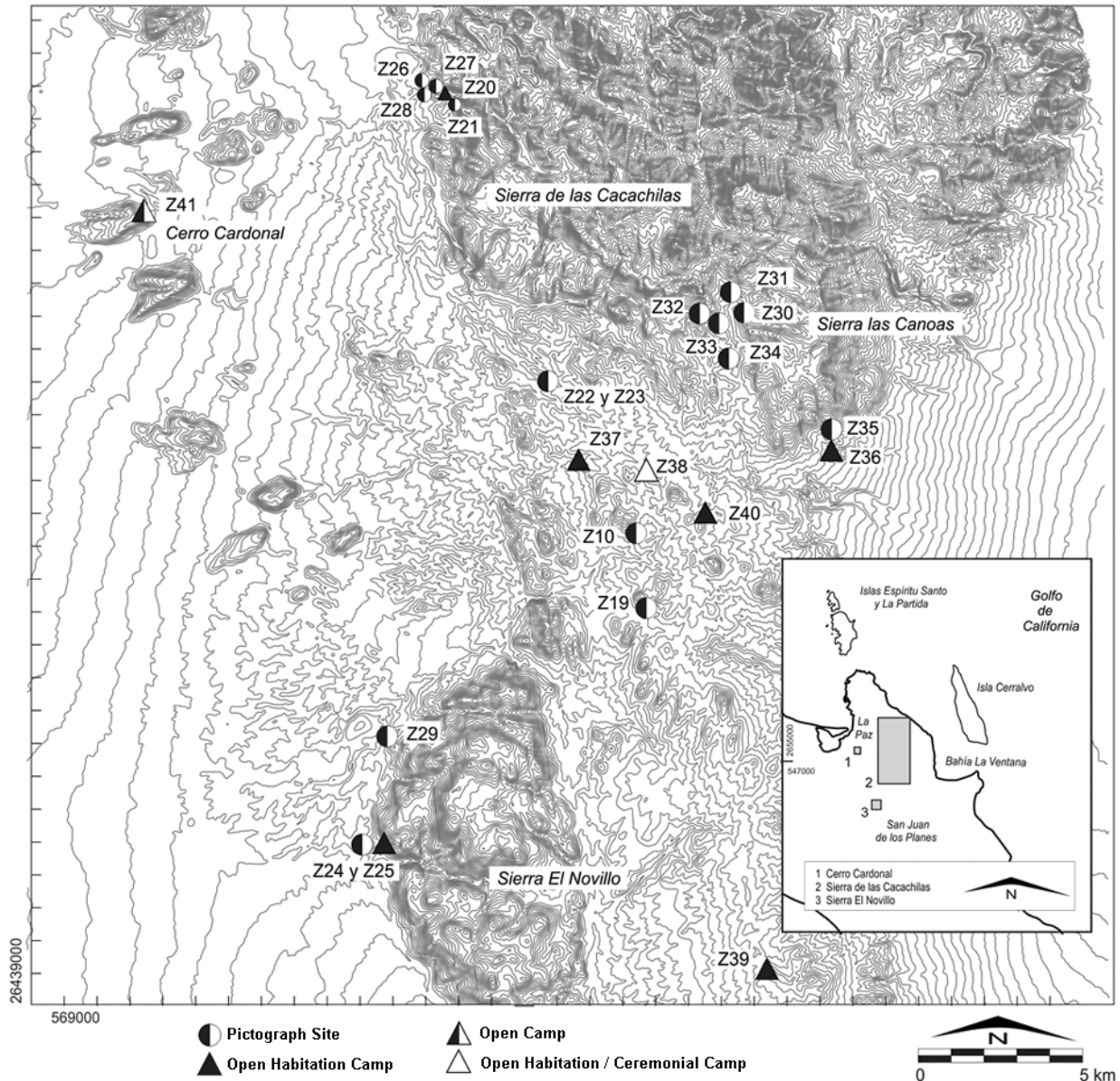


Figure 2. Site distribution in the Sierra de las Cacachilas and the Sierra de El Novillo.

RAW MATERIAL

The eastern part of La Paz Bay is characterized by a volcanic rock formation composed of rhyolite and basalt (Hammond 1954), considered to be the best raw material to manufacture tools in the Cape Region (Figures 3a and 3b).

To the east and southeast of La Paz, there are the high hills of the Sierra de las Cacachilas and El Novillo. The geological formation changes, and granite and granodiorite predominate. The ancient inhabitants took advantage of the slabs and blocks for milling stones and mortars, and the cobbles for hand stones. It is probable that some of those may have been transported to the coastal area. In these mountains, various streams are born, and natural water tanks exist even in the dry season (Figure 4a). Some large rhyolite bifaces were found on surface of this region by ranchers and are part of their collections. The length of these artifacts is more than 12 cm, and some exceed 20 cm. The width of these

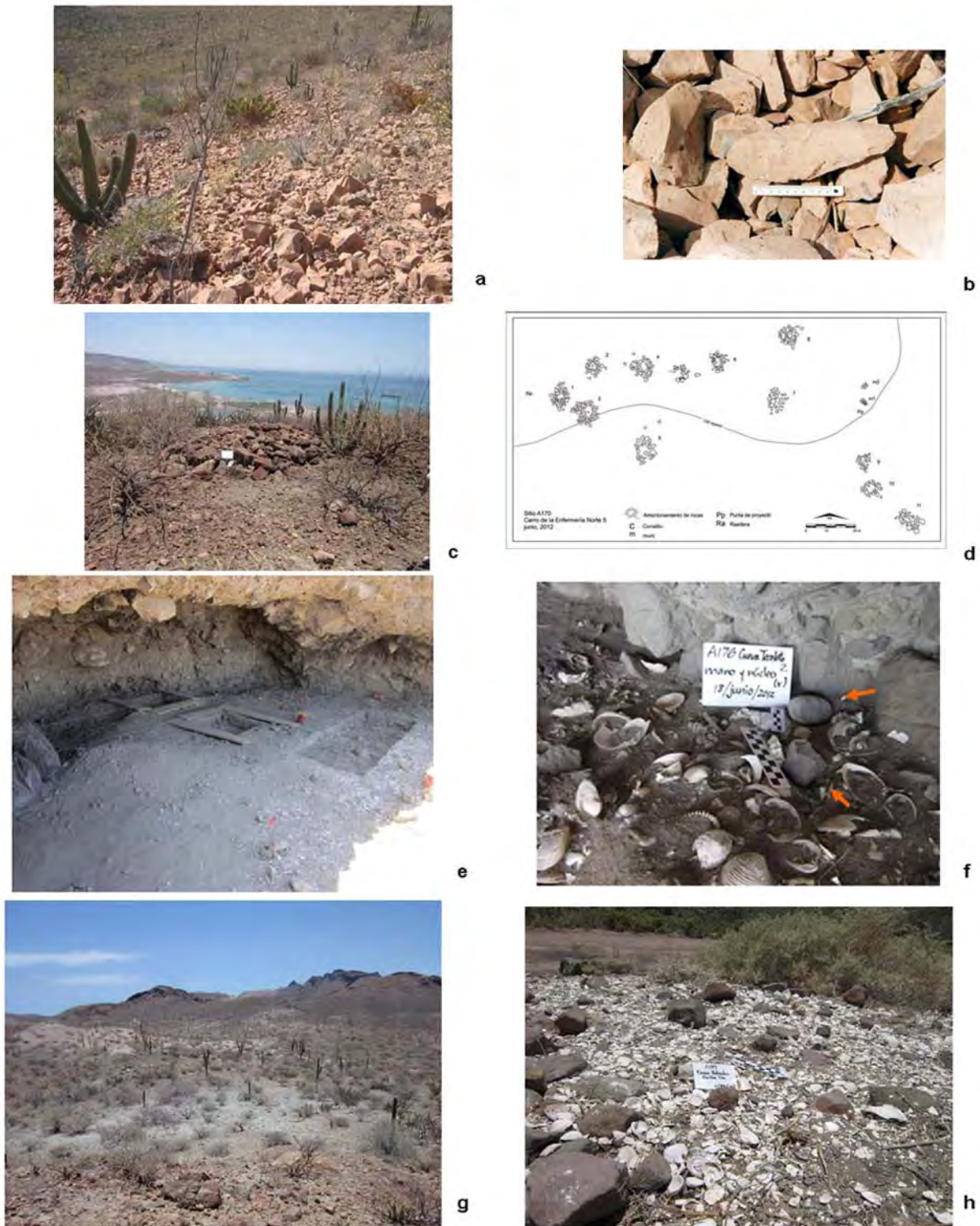


Figure 3. Coastal area of La Paz – a: rhyolite quarry and workshops at site A-104 Loma El Barril; b: rhyolite knife at site A-104 Loma El Barril; c: rock accumulation at site A-170 Cerro de la Enfermería Norte #5; d: distribution of rock formations at site A-170; e: excavation at site A-176 Cueva Tecolote #2; f: shellfish remains and lithics at site A-176; g: general view of open campsite A-183 Loma Tecolote #4; h: shellfish remains at shell midden A-189 Estero Balandra.



Figure 4. Hills at east of La Paz – a: Sierra de las Cacachilas; b: seasonal stream at pictograph site Z-11 Tamales #1; c: coral bean tree (*Erythrina flabelliformis*) in the Sierra de las Cacachilas.

bifaces is more than 7 cm. There are two types: one is leaf-shaped, with the extremes rounded or pointed, and the other type is the La Paz projectile point (Figures 5a-d). These large bifaces may have been used during diverse festivities or considered as symbols of power in the late period, which corresponds to the period between A.D. 1000 and 1700 (Carmean 1994). The vegetation in the coastal area is composed of sarcocaulis bushes such as torote (*Bursera microphylla*), lomboy (*Jatropha cinerea*), palo blanco (*Lysiloma candidum*), and various species of cactus, such as cardon (*Pachycereus pringlei*), cholla and nopal (various species of *Opuntia*), pitahaya dulce (*Stenocereus thurberi*), and pitahaya agria (*Stenocereus gummosus*) (González-Abraham et al. 2010). In the Sierra de las Cacachilas, there is a greater variety of plants, including coral bean tree (*Erythrina flabelliformis*) (Figure 4c) and oak (*Quercus idonea*), and animals (deer, rabbit and hare, fox, squirrel, coyote, lizard, rattlesnake, ringtail, etc.) than observed in the coastal area.

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

Survey during various field seasons in the area between La Paz and El Pulguero, as well as in the Sierra de las Cacachilas and El Novillo, revealed a contrast between the two areas (Fujita 1985, 1998, 2003; Fujita and Bulhusen 2013a, 2013b; Fujita and Poyatos de Paz 2007; Fujita et al. 2008). In the coastal area, there is a high density of open habitation camps, caves, and rock shelters, as well as quarries and workshops. Only one funeral cave from the late period between 1,000 and 300 years ago was recorded. The antiquity of the La Paz Bay coastal zone started at least 9,400 years ago (Fujita 2008; Fujita and Bulhusen 2013b).

In the mountain area, a high frequency of pictograph sites was observed. In those pictograph sites, almost no evidence of tools from daily life was present, so they cannot be considered to be habitation sites. In this mountain area, there is a low density of camps, quarries, and workshops.

We think that the ancient inhabitants executed paintings on rocks as part of a ceremony, either to celebrate the initiations of boys and girls, to ask for an abundance of game in hunting and fishing as well as abundant plants for collecting, or to commemorate the gods and their ancestors. The painted figures in the panel reflect the world in which they lived and their cosmovision.

In the cases of pictograph sites consisting of only one figure, we think that they may be landmarks on a trail to reach a certain place, with some symbolic meaning such as desiring a safe journey for the people who passed.

Although radiocarbon dating of the majority of the sites in the mountain area has not been done, it is important to mention that a shell sample from a habitation camp was dated to approximately 9,000 years ago.

The abundance of the pictograph sites in the Sierra de las Cacachilas and El Novillo coincides with the myths and legends of the indigenous people of the central and south parts of the Baja California peninsula, so we consider that the majority of these places were sacred spaces, ceremonial sites, or landmarks.

RECORDED SITES

In the coastal area between La Paz and Tecolote, some sites were recorded by Massey (1955), García and Santamaría (1989), and García and Mora (1980, 1981). More recently, 172 sites were recorded in various field projects (Fujita 1985, 1998, 2003; Fujita and Bulhusen 2013a; Fujita et al. 2008). These sites consist of 94 open campsites, 33 habitation caves and rock shelters, 29 shell middens, 13 quarries and workshops, two rock formation sites, and one funeral cave (Figure 3). In the mountain area in the Sierra de las Cacachilas and El Novillo, 25 pictograph sites, six open campsites, one petroglyph site, one site with evidence of lithic workshop activity and hunting, and one site with numerous milling stones and mortars were recorded (Figure 2) (Fujita 2008; Fujita and Bulhusen 2013b). Discussed below are some sites recorded in 2012 in both areas, starting with the coastal area and continuing with the mountain area.



a



b



c



d

Figure 5. Large bifaces from the Sierra de las Cacachilas – a and b: La Paz type rhyolite projectile points; c : leaf-shaped chalcidony knife; d: leaf-shaped rhyolite knife.

Site A-173 Cerro de la Enfermería Norte #8

This site extends from the northern slope to the higher part of the hill of La Enfermería Norte. The presence of large, high-quality rhyolite blocks permitted the material's exploitation. At this site, flakes were extracted to manufacture numerous tools, principally preforms of large bifaces (Figures 6b and 6e). Some of the bifaces are similar to those found in the site A-16 El Pulguero Suroeste with respect to their manufacture, shape, and size (Fujita 2009; Fujita and Poyatos 2007). Some other lithics were also found, including a chopping tool, some long primary flakes, and some end and side scrapers) (Figures 6a, 6c, and 6d).

Site A-170 Cerro de la Enfermería Norte #5

On the east summit of Cerro de la Enfermería Norte, at an altitude of 100 m, we recorded 11 rock accumulations with circular and semicircular bases between 4.5 and 6.5 m long, between 3 and 6 m wide, and between 0.5 and 1 m high. (Figures 3c and 3d). The area of the site is 4,600 m². This site does not have enough evidence to establish it as a habitation camp. There are several possibilities: it may have been used as a ceremonial site, as a space with astronomical implications (Bowen 2009), or as a trap to capture deer (Ritter 1977), although this type of trap was usually installed on a slope or in a canyon rather than on a summit.

Site A-176 Cueva Tecolote #2

This site is a habitation cave in a conglomerate formation, located in front of Tecolote beach, close to another rock shelter with a shell sample on the surface dated to 9426 ±77 B.P. (INAH-3091). This cave is 9 m long and 5.5 m wide, and the altitude is 36 m. The area of the site is 46 m². This cave contains a deposit of sediment extending to more than 50 cm, judging from a looting hole. The surface of the site has been disturbed by continuing visitors who have excavated and disturbed the sediment and materials (Figure 3f). The most abundant archaeological material is shellfish remains for food and for artifacts made from pearl oyster (*Pinctada mazatlanica*), as well as a *Fusinus dupettithouarsi* punch (Figure 6i). Also recovered were flaked lithics of rhyolite, such as end and side scrapers, and a projectile point preform, as well as a core, hammer stones, an abrader, and hand stones of basalt (Figures 6g and 6h). At the foot of the hill of the adjacent rock shelter A-175, a side-notched projectile point was recovered (Figure 6f). In 2013, an excavation was made, which recovered a large quantity and diversity of archaeological materials (Figure 3e).

Site A-183 Loma Tecolote #4

This open campsite is located at the lower part of a hill in Tecolote plain (Figure 3g). There are two sections, and both have clear areas. The area of the site is 4,576 m². The most abundant materials are milling stones and hand stones, as well as shellfish remains. The abundant species intended for consumption are *Chione californiensis*, *C. undatella*, *Strombus gracilior*, and *Persististrombus granulatus*. Among the flaked artifacts, a fragment of an elongated, square bifacial knife, a fragment of a bifacial knife with round extremities denominated the "Cerro de la Calavera" type, a tip of a drill, and side and end scrapers (Figures 7a, 7c, and 7g) were recorded, in addition to cores and flakes. A shell sample (*Spondylus crassisquama*) from Section A was dated to 8683 ±79 B.P. (INAH-3099), and a shell sample (*Chama frondosa*) from Section B was dated to 2440 ±73 B.P. (INAH-3098).

Site A-188 Valle Balandra #3

This site is a habitation camp on both sides of an intermittent stream, divided into three distinct areas. The area of the site is 12,096 m². A great quantity and variety of archaeological material was recorded, including flaked stone artifacts (cores, flakes, blades, knives, chopping tools, scrapers, and a projectile point), 64 milling stones, and 15 hand stones (Figures 7b, 7d, and 7h). Shellfish remains are seen throughout the entire area; the most abundant species are *Chione californiensis* and *Strombus*



Figure 6. Lithics and shell artifact from the coastal sites located along the eastern portion of La Paz Bay – a: elongated flakes from site A-173 Cerro de la Enfermería #7; b: large rhyolite bipointed biface from site A-173; c: rhyolite scraper from site A-173; d: chopping tool from site A-173; e: biface preform from site A-173; f: side-notched projectile point from site A-175 Abrigo Tecolote #1; g: basalt core from site A-176 Cueva Tecolote #2; h: rhyolite scraper from site A-176; i: Fusinus punch or drill from site A-176.



Figure 7. Lithics and shell artifact from the Tecolote area, north of La Paz – a: fragment of a rectangular bifacial rhyolite knife from site A-183 Loma de Tecolote #4; b: fragment of a rectangular bifacial rhyolite knife from site A-188 Valle Balandra #3; c: fragment of a bifacial knife with round extremity termed “Cerro de la Calavera” type, from site A-183; d: basalt core from site A-188; e: rhyolite side scraper from site A-189 Estero Balandra; f: tip fragment of a drill from site A-183; g: milling stone from site A-183 Loma Tecolote #4; h: basalt pitted stone from site A-188b; i: retouched *Dosinia ponderosa* shell from site A-189a.

gracilior. Some shells (*Dosinia ponderosa*, *Fusinus dupettithouarsi*, and *Triplofusus princeps*) were worked and converted into tools such as scrapers and drills. Three radiocarbon dates were obtained from the three sections of the site: 6028 ±74 B.P. (INAH-3104), 2906 ±73 B.P. (INAH-3103), and 799 ±73 B.P. (INAH-3102).

Site A-189 Estero Balandra

This shell midden extends from the Estero Balandra beach to the slope of a hill. One-third of the site was affected by the construction of a paved road. The most abundant shellfish species are *Strombus gracilior*, *Persististrombus granulatus*, and *Glycymeris gigantea* (Figure 3h). Milling stones, hand stones, flaked stones (blades, a side scraper, and a retouched flake), abraders, hammer stones, and modified shell tools were recovered. Two shell samples were dated to 1581 ±74 B.P. (INAH-3105) and to 7002 ±80 B.P. (INAH-3107).

Sites in the Sierra de las Cacachilas and El Novillo

The pictograph sites in the Sierra de las Cacachilas and El Novillo are composed of zoomorphic and/or geometric representations executed in various shades of red. We have not identified any clear anthropomorphic figures in these mountains. The most frequent painted animals are deer and fish, followed by rabbit or hare, turtle, lizard, and wildcat. The animals are generally painted in profile, except the lizard. With respect to fish, some are painted solid, and in other cases lines are used. There are several shapes, suggesting different species.

At site Z-10 Los Tepetates, five groups of geometric and zoomorphic figures are painted: fish (using lines), quadrupeds, probably a bird, and parallel vertical lines (Figures 8a and 8b).

Site Z-19 Los Guayabitos is a large boulder with various rocks in the vicinity that have mortars and milling areas. There is only one area with paintings of two figures. One is a motif of a fish, and the other one cannot be identified (Figures 9a-e). This is a unique site, with numerous rocks containing mortars and milling areas.

The other site with numerous rocks having mortars and milling areas is Z-38 Rancho Tamales. However, this is not a pictograph site.

At site Z-21 Palmerito 2, a fish motif was painted, using lines (Figures 8c and 8d). This site was first recorded by Léon Diguët (1895).

At site Z-23 La Huerta 2, three groups of abstract motifs composed of parallel lines were painted (Figures 10a and 10b).

At site Z-26 El Cajoncito #1, five groups of geometric and zoomorphic figures were painted: deer, a fish, parallel lines, and other unidentified figures.

At site Z-27 El Cajoncito #2, a figure of a corpulent deer with antlers was painted (Figures 8e and 8f). The preservation is good in general.

At site Z-28 El Cajoncito #3, a deer was painted, although most of the head has been destroyed.

At site Z-30 Palmilla Cuata, a fish, an arrow, a quadruped (possibly a turtle), and another quadruped were painted.

At site Z-31 El Agua de Arriba, a quadruped, probably a deer, was painted.

At site Z-32 La Cieneguita 1, two groups of geometric and zoomorphic figures were painted, including a hare with a curved back in profile and a quadruped, probably a turtle (Figures 10c and 10d).

At site Z-33 La Cieneguita 2, five figures are painted: a zoomorphic representation, probably a fish, parallel vertical lines, and unidentified figures.

At site Z-34 Pozo Nuevo, one zoomorphic motif was painted.

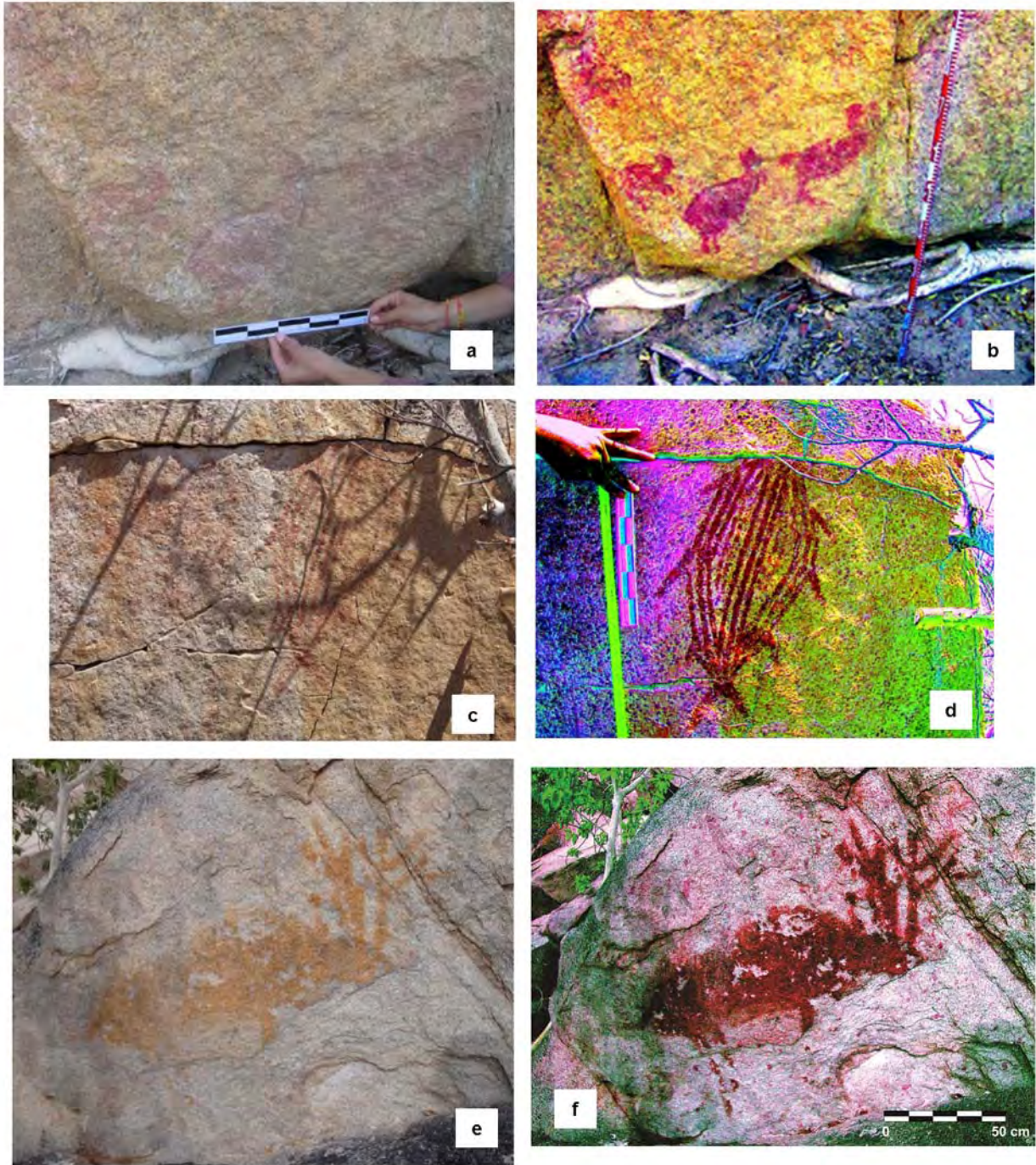


Figure 8. Zoomorphic representations in Sierra de las Cacachilas – a: quadrupeds or birds at site Z-10 Los Tepetates; b: the same panel in DStretch; c: fish at site Z-21 Palmerito #2; d: the same panel in DStretch; e: a male deer at site Z-27 Cajoncito #2; f: the same panel in DStretch.

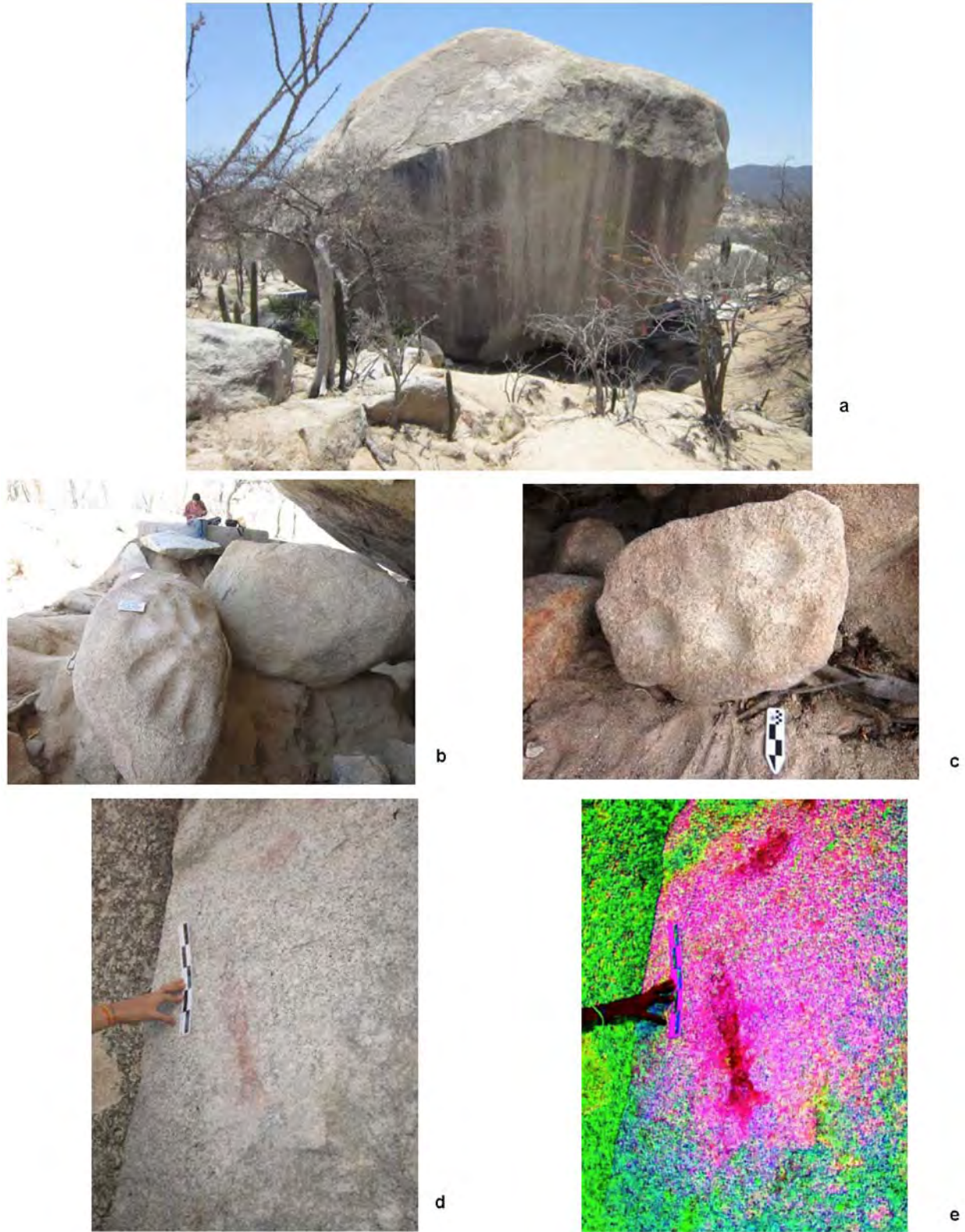


Figure 9. Site Z-19 Los Guayabitos – a: general view; b and c: mortars on rocks; d: representation of a fish and an unidentified figure; e: the same panel in DStretch.

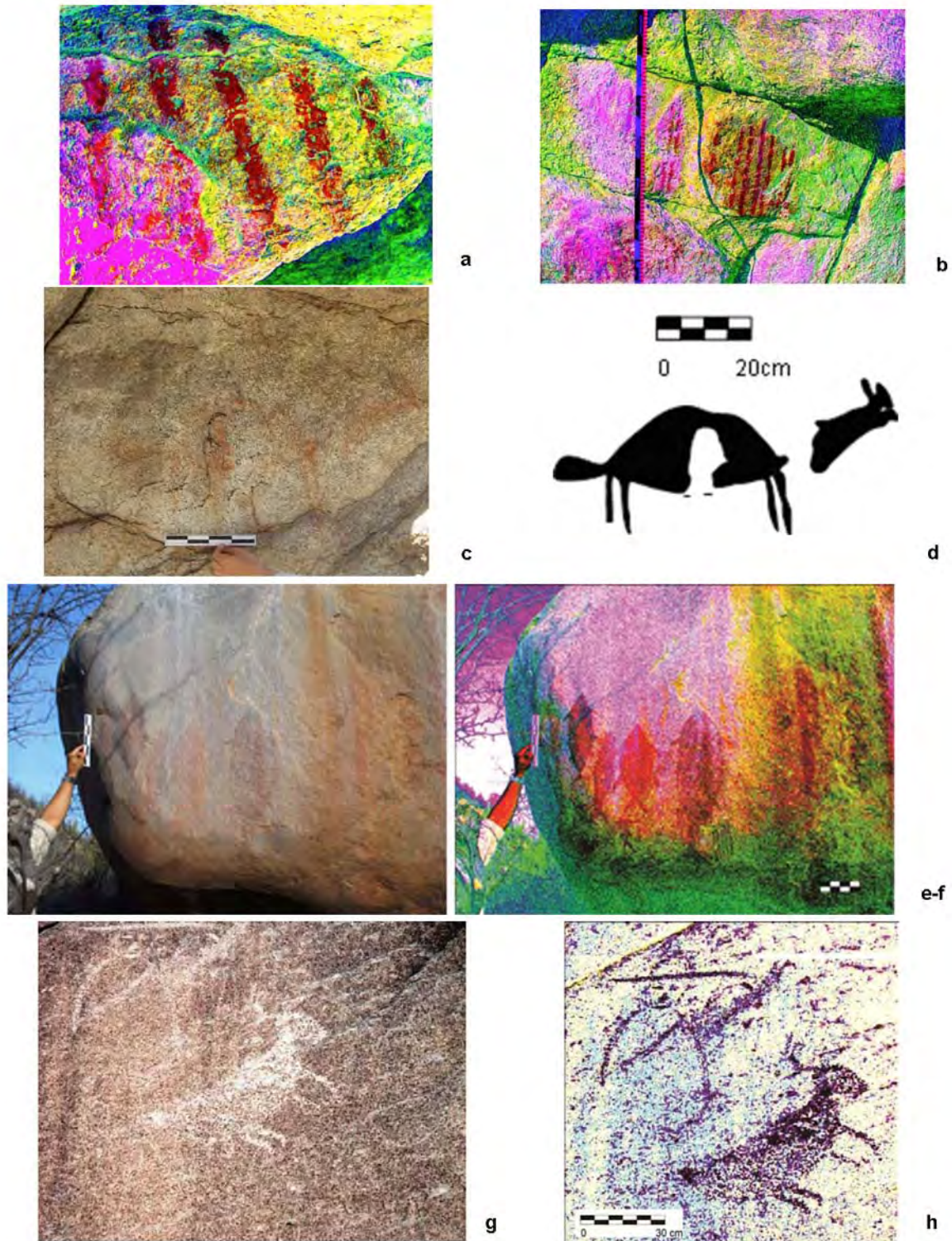


Figure 10. Geomorphic and zoomorphic representations – a: vertical lines at site Z-23 La Huerta #2 in DStretch; b: vertical lines at site Z-23 La Huerta #2 in DStretch; c: a turtle and the upper part of the body of a deer at site Z-32 La Cieneguita #1; d: drawing of the same panel; e: four fish at site Z-24 El Novillo #1; f: the same panel in DStretch, g: petrograph of a deer at site Z-29 Rancho La Palma, h: the same panel in DStretch.

At site Z-35 El Ranchito 1, the motifs are geometric and zoomorphic, such as fish, a lizard, and a wildcat (Figures 11a-e). The representations of the lizard and wildcat are unique in the Cape Region.

Site Z-36 El Ranchito 2 is a habitation camp, located on a promontory to the south of the preceding pictograph site. We recorded milling stones, hand stones, a few flaked stones of rhyolite, and shellfish remains. A shell sample from the surface was dated to 8955 ±84 B.P. (INAH-3108), which is much earlier than we have expected.

The other open habitation camps Z-20 Palmerito #1 and Z-37 Tamales #3 contained flaked stone artifacts such as projectile points made of quartz and rhyolite, a fragment of a knife, a chopping tool, side and end scrapers, a fragment of a blade, milling stones, and hand stones.

In the case of the site Z-39 Piedra Larga, there is an extensive open area (100 m²) with one milling stone and one basalt flake.

As for site Z-40 Cerro Copaloso, four granite hand stones, one rhyolite core, one chalcedony core, and some rhyolite flakes were found.

Three sites were recorded at Sierra de El Novillo: one pictograph site, one open campsite, and one petroglyph site. At site Z-24 El Novillo 1, zoomorphic and geometric motifs were painted. The four fish seem to be tuna (Figures 10e and 10f). At site Z-29 Rancho La Palma, there were some scratched figures on a wall. Most of them seem to be modern graffiti. Only one motif, which is a deer, has similarity with the motifs at the painted sites in these mountains (Figures 10g and 10h). This is the only petroglyph found in these mountains. At site Z-25 El Novillo #2, the number of portable milling stones and hand stones is the highest among these open mountain campsites, with 25 milling stones and eight hand stones.

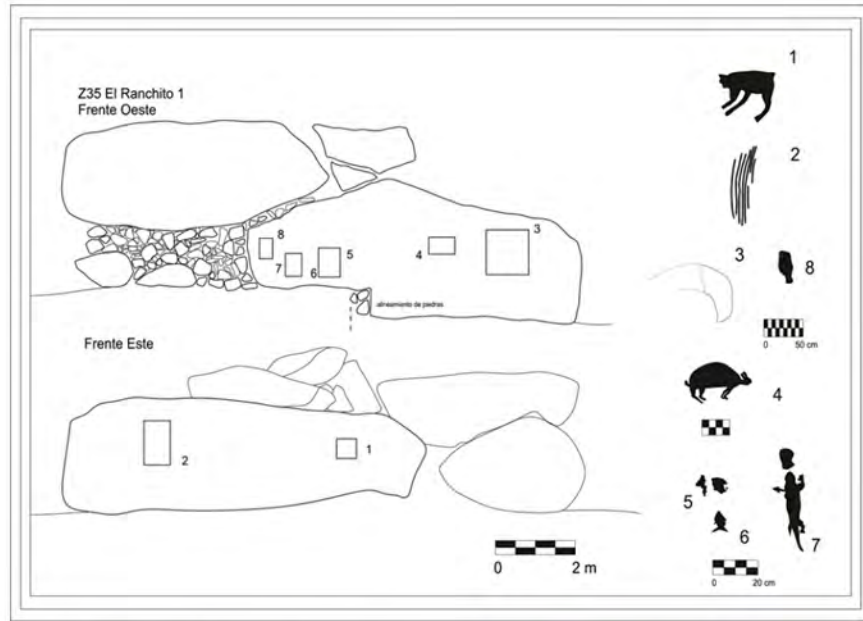
Although we have not done a systematic survey in these mountain areas, the low frequency of habitation campsites and archaeological materials suggests that the prehistoric people did not stay in one place for a long time, suggesting a nomadic life style, except at site Z-25 El Novillo #2, which shows a semisedentary lifestyle. The pictograph sites seem to have been used on certain occasions, since most of them do not show evidence of long stays.

These results in the mountain area contrast with the coastal area near the eastern part of La Paz Bay, where evidence of daily activity is abundant, suggesting a more semisedentary lifestyle. However, we need to determine the settlement patterns in different periods, from the Early Holocene forward.

CONCLUSION

The coastal area between La Paz and Tecolote-El Pulguero was the most attractive area in the Cape Region for the prehistoric inhabitants, used from the Early Holocene on to exploit terrestrial and marine resources, as well as rhyolite and basalt, the principal raw materials for the manufacture of flaked tools and the creation of milling stones and hand stones. This area is considered a self-sufficient unit, from the acquisition of food and raw materials to their consumption and use.

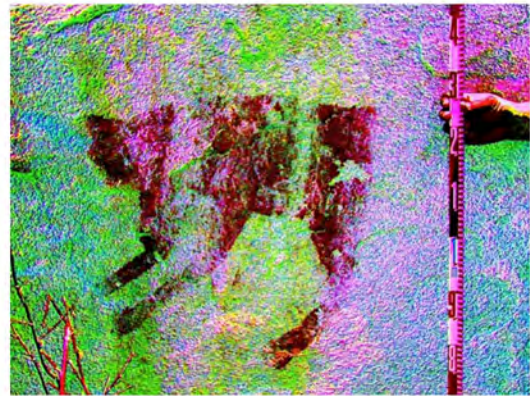
The prehistoric coastal groups near La Paz Bay may have gone into the Sierra de las Cacachilas and El Novillo to obtain certain materials, such as wood, diverse fruit and animals, and granite hand stones, as well as to engage in various festivities. The numerous ceremonial sites represented by the pictograph sites indicate that these mountains were considered as sacred places, and as reference points in the landscape. The presence of representations of marine fauna suggests high mobility between the coast and the mountain areas. It appears that, through daily activities, the prehistoric society may have transformed the physical space to a significant place. The landscape and its raw materials, in addition to the availability of food resources, fresh water, and security, were important factors in determining prehistoric settlement patterns.



a



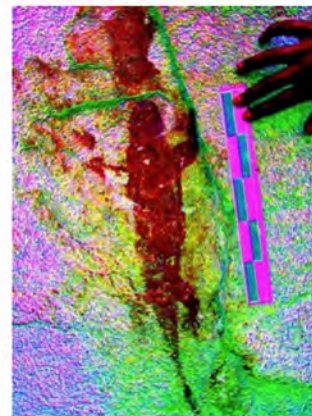
b



c



d



e

Figure 11. Zoomorphic representations at site Z-35 Ranchito #1 – a: drawings of the panels, b: panel with a wildcat; c: the wildcat in DStretch; d: panel with a lizard; e: the lizard in DStretch.

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