

## Archaeological Survey to Cerro Negro de Tejada, Salta Province, Argentina

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### ABSTRACT

*From our work as archaeologists we believe that one of the fundamental tasks is to link with the territory. This imply not only to do field work to record environmental and human aspects in the study area but, and maybe more important to approach to those who live daily the territory. Our work may contribute to articulate between Institutions such as Museums or Universities and local communities. Scientific knowledge may contribute to community development programs reevaluating local patrimony. This linkage and articulation tasks implies constant action and negotiation and therefore are long term processes.*

*Within this frame we carried on an archaeological survey at Cerro Negro de Tejada (Salta province in Argentina), area that has few previous research. The tasks we performed were part of a long term process that we are carrying on with the Zerpa family group, whom are developing communitary tourism in the area. Our team collaborated in the diagram of tour circuits with archaeological information.*

**Keywords:** Archaeological survey, Argentina, Salta province, work with community

### INTRODUCTION

Within the archaeological research project Study of Technological Variability and Social Interaction Networks in Northwester Argentina through Lithic Strategies Analysis in Formative Period (Mercuri 2012) we explore and study Cerro Negro de Tejada area, in the province of Salta, Argentina.

Cerro Negro de Tejada is located in a transitional zone in between valley and puna environments. These are the rather narrow strip that run along Calchaqui River between structural units of Puna and the Oriental Mountain Range, and the high altitude deserts respectively. This information is relevant when investigating social interactions as it connects different geographical and ecological zones through ravines and pathways used most likely from prehispanic moments until today.

Geologically Cerro Negro area is conformed mostly by rocks of very low to low degree of metamorphism (Vergani and Starck 1989). Weather is semidesertic with scarce rainfalls and frequent frosts and strong winds (Caro 2005). Rivers and creeks are temporary due they originate by defrosting of high peaks.

Nowadays, to the scarce local flora subsistence cultigens are added (Osinaga 2012).

In spite of the few previous archaeological research on the area, towards 1970s and 1980s Pío Díaz performed exploratory surveys in which he recorded both archaeological sites and territory characteristics, although none of these information is published (cf. Mercuri 2016).

As part of the investigation project, we work along with Archaeological Museum of Cachi as this population is near the study area. The Museum carries on different community linkage activities promoting access and participation of Calchaquí valley people's cultural life allowing to reflect and negotiate on the how, why, and what for of history.

Diego Zerpa and his family live at Cerro Negro de Tejada, but they usually go to Cachi (about 30 Km) to buy groceries and do other errands. As part of long term linkage tasks we were in touch with him when he decided to start a horse riding tourism entrepreneurship along with his family group. Therefore, being interested in the history and knowing the archaeological richness of the territory, he contacted with us. What follows is the result of our first survey to the area.

## SURVEY AT CERRO NEGRO DE TEJADA

Field work looked for combine the need of Zerpa family entrepreneurship and the archaeological research aims, due, in this stage of the investigation we put the focus in the identification and characterization of archaeological sites in the touristic circuit.

Exploration encompassed two main sectors to the interior of Cerro Negro area. One known as Quebrada El Ciénego Grande which are a system of creeks and sheds that flow at right margin of Las Capillas river. The other one, about 7 km from Ciénego Grande, is known as Quebrada de Los Potrerillos and is located towards east of Cerro Negro, conforming part of the river system, of which also is Quebrada El Junchal, that flow at left margin of Las Capillas river. The tour was guided by Diego Zerpa who as developer of horse riding circuits of tourism was interested in the history of his territory. We only took geological hand size samples of rocks to pursuit a determination in laboratory there for all material was analysed on field. We could record ten archaeological sites:

- Archaeological road (inca) in Ciénego Grande. Short section of road built with smooth face rocks.
- Ciénego Grande site. Located west of Zerpa family house, right margin of El Ciénego ravine. It is a double wall rock structure of 10 metres in diameter with internal divisions. On surface there are abundant dark red and black on white pottery, gray sandstone flakes, side scrapers and sharpened edged lithic instruments. Also some transparent obsidian flakes (likely to be from Quirón source in puna of Salta) were found.
- Zerpa family house. Located east from Diego Zerpa family house. Three double wall linked rock structures. We recorded fine sandstone artifacts, flakes and cores. Bicolour and dark red pottery and a black on white vase neck. The conservation of this site is regular due to domestic animals such as goats and sheep.
- Quebrada Las Peritas. On right margin of Las Peritas ravine, about 800 meters south from Zerpa house. Double wall rectangular structure. Material on surface is represented

mostly by black ceramics and no decoration red pottery. We also recognized scarce lithic materials among which stands out a green sandstone side scraper.

- Potrero del Ciénego Largo. At about 600 meters east from Diego Zerpa's house. We observed five rock structures with a perimeter wall. The archaeological material on surface is scarce; we only recorded coarse pottery sherds. Here we could detect a daily use of the archaeological structures in the storage of a plastic poncho in one of the structures.
- 6-Petroglyph and lithic workshops in Quebrada El Sunchal. At approximately 2 Kilometres north-eastern of Zerpa's family house. On right margin of Quebrada El Sunchal there are three concentrations of petroglyphs in association with lithic workshops (in which predominates green sandstone). Petroglyphs are performed by chopped and scratched on non prepared rocks located at the same altitudinal elevation and distant to each other about 200 meters. They represent zoomorphic, anthropomorphic and abstract motives. Regarding lithic material we could record cores, flakes and finished artifacts (mostly a diversity of projectile points).
- Parapet. Climbing some 200 metres up the hill, there is another engraving concentration in a rock hill. They represent anthropomorphs typical of those registered in other sites dated on 2000 BP although in association with these we found a biface of archaic characteristics (about 8000 years, Martínez et al. 2011). Going up further we detected a parapet: simple wall semicircle of about 1 metre diameter oriented to the ravine bottom as well as the downhill engravings (site 6). On its surface we recorded sandstone flakes.
- Campo la Torre. Petroglyphs and archaeological structures. We detected at least three engraving panels on natural rock, which is a soft yellowish sandstone rock very degraded due mostly to the wind. Therefore all engravings are in a very bad conservation status. Nevertheless we could observe zoomorphic, anthropomorphic and abstract

shapes of big dimensions (stands out anthropomorphic figure with head band and unku). We also recorded a recent intervention in these rocks in which the writing A+M appears. Archaeological structures are dispersed in the riverbed and this location provokes its constant deterioration when the river grows.

- Quebrada El Junchal. Near to Enrique Zerpa house. Located on a plateau surrounded by river bed of El Junchal river, occupies a 3Ha area. It presents a series of linked circular and sub-circular simple and double wall structures between 5 and 10 metres diameter and plazas. On surface we detected black and gray ceramics and grinding stones and lithic artifacts and flakes. Such characteristics lead us to hypothesize that this site may be of Formative Period (about 2000 BP, cf. Tarragó 1992).
- Quebrada Los Potrerillos. Located on left margin of Quebrada de Los Potrerillos at about 1 Kilometre from Enrique Zerpa's house. Is a small concentration of simple wall circular structures very eroded, and therefore its conservation status is very bad. On surface we detected black smooth pottery and lithic artifacts associated to grinding activities.

### DISCUSSION

In this first stage of survey at Cerro Negro de Tejada area, in Salta province, Argentina we could detect ten archaeological sites among which stands out lithic workshops, petroglyphs and assemblages of structures. These rock structures vary from site to site in shape, size and quantity. Some of them may be corrals and some residential structures. It is important to remark Quebrada El Junchal site as it corresponds with a large conglomerate of circular and sub-circular structures in association with ceramics that reassemble those of Formative Period in North Calchaquí Valley (Rivolta y Cabral Ortiz 2017). Regarding lithic materials, we could observe that most of them have low energy investment in its production and are expediently or non-formal artifacts. The only formal piece is a biface whose shape and manufacture is similar to those in hunting-gatherers contexts with datings of about 8000BP in Argentina's puna (Martínez et al. 2011). We

also recorded small projectile points with morphologies of around 1000BP (Martínez et al. 2011). The other lithic artifacts have scarcely one edge sharpened that may be for cutting, scrape, regularize surfaces or killing, displaying the diversity of activities, both extractive and processing, carried along.

During the survey we also took notes on lithic resources availability in the area. As mentioned before, green sandstones are abundant, accessible and largely available (which at some places may be an anthropic feature). It has a good quality for knapping which may explain its choice for the manufacture of lithic sharpened instruments.

Considering these small random sample of archaeological materials that we could observe in the field we may hypothesize different uses of space in the territory surveyed, a variety of activities carried along in the area and a long term use of this territory.

As we mentioned above, an important part of our work is to combine archaeological knowledge with development of local entrepreneurship. In our study case, archaeological information is nowadays being used in the layout of logistics of horse riding tour circuits that Zerpa family offers. So departing from the above list it was possible to determine which sites could be visited according to the difficulties of access to each site and following the recommendation measures to mitigate the anthropic impact considering that it is low intensity tourism that is practiced in the area: visits by small groups of people once a month.

Combination of people, communities, institutions and territory inspire us to think about and negotiate new hows to, whys, and what for allowing new readings of history and histories, and scientific knowledge may contribute to community development programs revaluing local patrimony.

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