

CHAPTER 15

The PACH Laboratory, 2004 Season: Construction, Organization and Methodology

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Construction

At the time of initiating the second field season, we faced the need to design an adequate space that would function as a Laboratory of Archaeological Materials. The mission was to furnish PACH with a permanent space fit to be used as a laboratory. After studying the feasibility of renting a house for that particular purpose, or investing in remodeling a Victorian house known as “the hotel”, used as residence and operation headquarters by the PACH team, we opted for the second option.

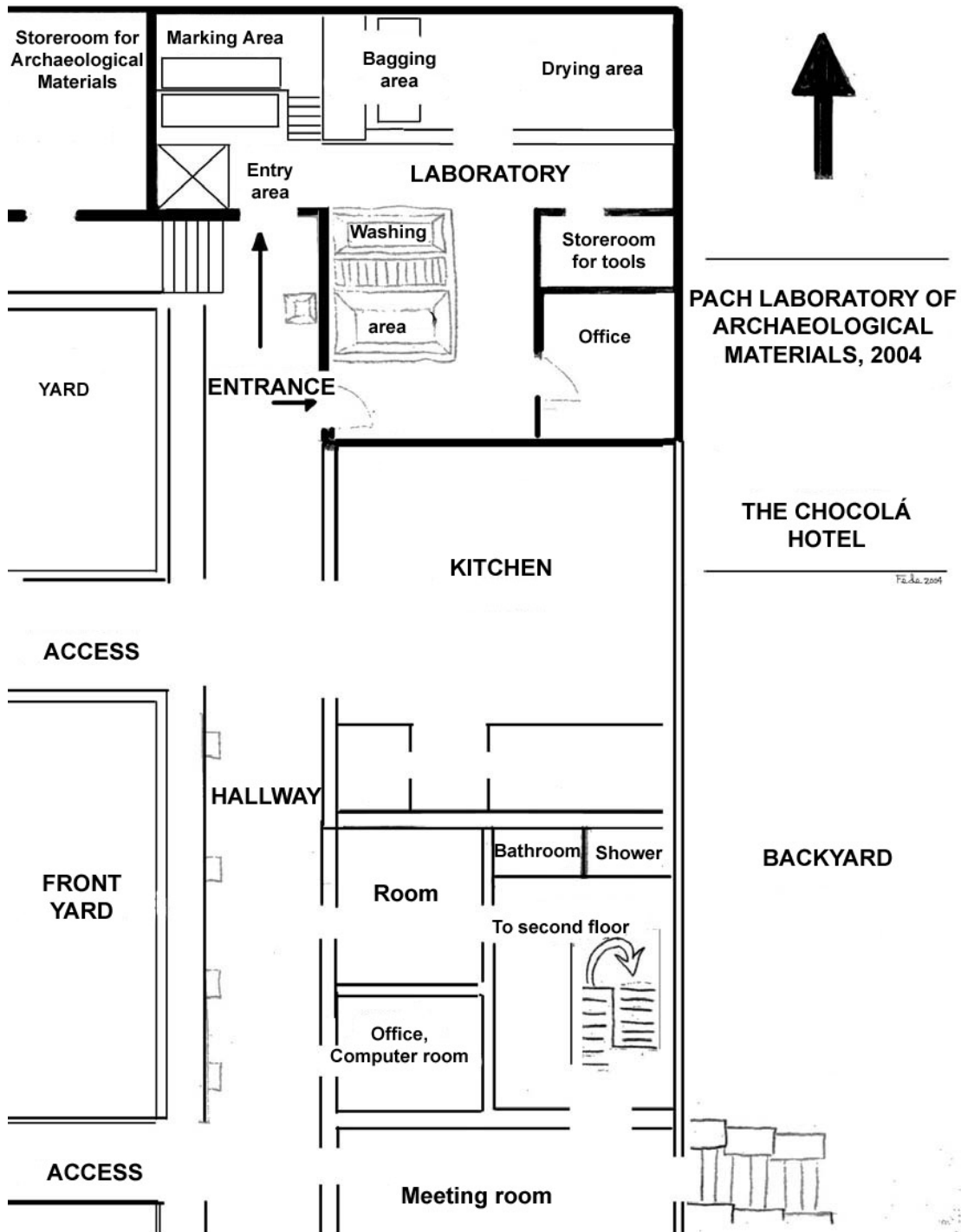
The design and remodeling of the physical space was to consider three major factors: 1) security, 2) sufficient space for the internal circulation of materials and individuals, 3) respect for the original design of the building. The first objective was achieved thanks to the short distance that mediated between the laboratory and our place of residence and daily activity. The second was achieved because the space in question used to be an area previously occupied by troughs and storerooms, with two tiled-roofed rooms adjacent to the area where the present dining room is located. The utilization of this previously open space was achieved by building two perpendicular walls in a ninety-degree angle on the north end of the outer hallway of the “hotel’s” façade. The third objective was certainly the most difficult one to achieve, as we were altering an original design and modifying the function of the older space. Anyway, we preserved the line of design by using ancient doors we found in one of the storerooms, and by respecting the lintel ornamentation. The entire construction was made of wooden planks for lining with board rules made of hard wood trees.

Organization

The mission of a field laboratory is to provide the necessary treatment and order to the material brought in day by day. The different artifacts come from surface collections and systematic excavations conducted by the PACH team. The other materials entered are donations from members of the community. Each one of these three entry categories has a particular protocol that needs to be followed.

The organization of the physical space of the laboratory is arranged in function of the most voluminous and uninterrupted activity: the treatment of excavated materials (see graphic). They must be deposited on a board at the entrance of the laboratory, and a card must be filled whose details will be presented in the next section. The materials come straight from the field, in plastic bags with labels that indicate their origin. Once they are formally admitted into the laboratory, they are taken to the washing area where they are washed in the laboratory troughs. Then, they are taken to a drying section in frames made of wood and a metal mesh, where they are displayed and exposed to the sun. Once they are dry, the person in charge of

rotating the materials picks them up and packs them again in cloth bags manufactured at Chicolá by local artisans. These bags have a paper label in the outer part, with a detail of their contents. The next step is marking. Only ceramics and major lithics artifacts are marked with the provenience number. Only the ceramics with a diameter larger than a token of 25 cents are marked. All minor fragments are counted and recorded in the card, and will not be discarded until they are properly observed by the ceramist. Obsidian is packed separately, with the corresponding place of origin label. Charcoal samples, with their correct labels, are left intact in plastic flasks that contain the sample wrapped up in aluminum foil. The material is marked with a line of white ink on which the word PACH is written, followed by the number of Operation, Sub-operation and Lot, in black India ink. Once this is dry, transparent enamel is applied to seal and protect the code. Following this procedure and placing the correct identification of the material on labels outside and inside the cloth bags, the process of sample circulation inside the laboratory is done. Then the bags are taken out of the laboratory to a contiguous room that serves as storage space for field materials.



Methodology

The laboratory works as a link between theory and practice, as the reliability of the data regarding the place of origin of all PACH materials depends on its adequate performance.

In this section it is suitable to explain the nomenclature used to mark the place of origin of artifacts, and in what way that information is transferred to the corresponding cards.

Materials originated in controlled excavations

Operation	It identifies a structure or a plaza.
Sub-operation	It identifies the excavation unit (pit, trench, or record).
Lot	It identifies the stratigraphic level in each excavation.

If the tag reads **PACH 4-2-1**, it means that the material in that bag comes from: the Chocolá Archaeological Project, **Operation 4** (mound 15), **Sub-operation 2** (pit 2), **lot 1** (at a level of 0-0.20 m).

The Operations conducted in the 2004 season were as follows:

Mound 15 = Operation 4

Mound 5 = Operation 14

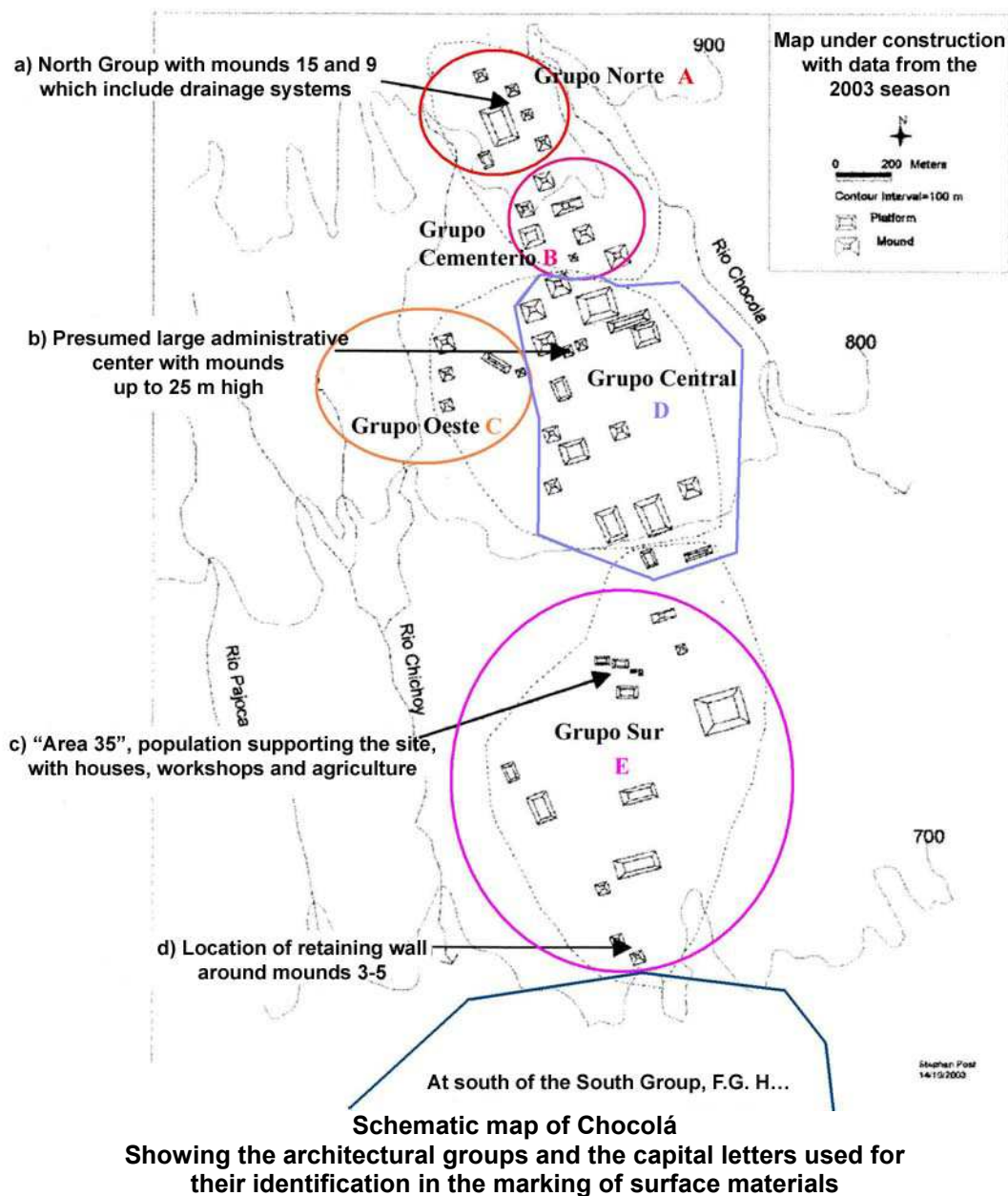
Salvage of vessels found in the street = Operation 15

Materials originated in surface collections

All artifacts originating in a surface collection bear the PACH I code; "I" stands for surface collection, and a letter is added to it, to identify the area of origin. If there is a reference of a mound number, this is added after the letter. Thus, a sherd collected at the cemetery group will be labeled **PACH I – B**. And a sherd from the surface of mound 15 in the north group will be labeled: **PACH – I – A-15**. We shall now present a preliminary map of Chocolá showing the architectural groups identified since the first season, with the associated letters, as follows:

North Group (A)
Cemetery Group (B)
West Group (C)
Central Group (D)
South Group (E)

Groups at the south of the South Group (inclusion in the map, pending) (F, G, and H)



Laboratory cards

Two different cards are used to record the place of origin of the laboratory materials: the Materials Count card and the Field Samples card.

The first is aimed at controlling the materials entered into the laboratory, and counting the different artifacts per lot. This card is filled-in by the excavator when the materials are entered into the laboratory. The second is aimed at facilitating the entry of the information into a database (under construction). The different artifacts originated in a lot have a similar FS, or field sample number. This number is obtained following an order of arrival to the laboratory, and it is universal and correlative. The FS number is used in the information card of materials count, and in the labels of the bags with materials, for a quick identification. The FS numbers are particularly useful for example at the time of working with charcoal samples, abbreviating the

nomenclature (see the report on Analysis of the pertinence of charcoal samples, 2004 season, by Paredes Umaña and Belches Luín).

Laboratory Card Materials Count

Instructions:

Once the lot is dry, bagged once again, and relabeled, you will be able to complete this card with the amount of materials per lot. Do not leave incomplete the **FS (field sample)** field.

Operation:	Sub-operation:	Lot: / MC:	Excavator:
Ceramic:	Mica:	Carved stone:	Metal:
Obsidian:	Jade:	Glass:	Others:

Example of headline and format of the card used for material counts at the laboratory.

PACH 2004 FIELD SAMPLE CARD

Date	Field Sample	PP Number	Trait	Structure	Room	Operator	Unit or Sub-operation	Stratum	Lot	Initial Elevation	Final Elevation	Responsible	Comments
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Example of headline and format of the card used for field samples at the PACH field laboratory, 2004.

The Laboratory in figures

The remodeling of the space and the construction of the laboratory amounted to Q. 10,000.00, including the salaries of four workers for two weeks, the timber, the electrical installation, the metal sheets, and other building materials.

The approximate total of recovered artifacts amounts to 35,000 single objects duly marked at the end of this season. Dr. Judith Mitchell, from the La Trobe University, Australia, is working on the initial steps to create a typology of the ceramics of Chocolá. Prof. Edgar Carpio has begun with the analysis of the obsidian artifacts.

Summary of artifacts originated in controlled excavations treated in this season at the field laboratory:

Operation 4	Operation 14	Operation 15
Ceramic: 17325	Ceramic: 12301	Complete vessels: 11
Obsidian: 2699	Obsidian: 826	Ceramic fragments: 41
		Obsidian fragments: 2