

Popular Archaeology Magazine sends group to newly discovered ancient sites in Peru

For the first time, several approximate, newly discovered monumental archaeological sites in northern Peru may see their first exposure to an organized expeditionary tour group consisting of members of the public, bloggers, photographers, and freelance writers for a first-hand look.

The area, where archaeologists first began full-scale excavations in 2014 and where ongoing additional surveys and excavations will continue to explore several monumental sites in close proximity in the Upper Nepeña Valley of Peru, has thus far yielded finds that suggest human occupation as far back as at least 3,000 years.

Led by project director Kimberly Munro, an Andean archaeologist and PhD student at Louisiana State University, along with Lic. Jeisen Navarro, a professional Peruvian archaeologist and co-director of the new project, and Dr. David Chicoine, also of Louisiana State University, a research team is in the first stages of unearthing the ancient sites that, together, bespeak a possible associated complex of structures with beginnings at least as long ago as ancient Peru's "Early Horizon" period (900 – 1 BCE). What has been investigated thus far includes a mound about 250 meters long and 70 meters wide and featuring an underground gallery and truncated top; a smaller mound featuring signs of exposed architecture at its top; and a hilltop fortress-like structure. Collectively, they are known as the archaeological site of Cosma, named after the nearby small village.

“Cosma is located in an ecological region which has largely been ignored by researchers,” Munro says.* And because of their location in the upper reaches of the coastal river valley, says Munro, they could offer a glimpse into ancient inter-regional interactions that many other sites could not afford.

Shown above: Two of the Cosma sites, located in the scenic upper coastal Nepeña River Valley. The sites have been relatively unexplored until now. Karecoto is the large mound. Ashipucoto is the smaller mound. Courtesy Kimberly Munro and the Cosma Archaeological Project

The 2014 excavations uncovered a set of stairs leading into the underground gallery within the main mound (Karecoto) at the Cosma archaeological site. Courtesy Kimberly Munro and the Cosma Archaeological Project

The 2014 excavations also revealed evidence of a possible circular room structure within the smaller mound (Ashipucoto). Courtesy Kimberly Munro and the Cosma Archaeological Project

Excavations are scheduled to continue during the summer of 2015. But concurrent with that, Popular Archaeology Magazine plans to lead a group to visit the sites, affording any interested members of the public, writers, and photographers the chance to see the sites and the ongoing excavations first-hand.

“The proposed tour expedition will permit the participants to see the exposed architecture and artifacts in person and give them the opportunity to ask questions of the project staff and take photographs at a working excavation within an exceptionally scenic and remote area,” says Popular Archaeology Magazine Editor-in-Chief Dan McLerran, who will be co-leading the group along with tour operator and local guide Juan Cardenas. The expeditionary tour will be conducted in collaboration with Far Horizons Archaeological and Cultural Trips, Inc.

“But more than this,” he continues, “we also plan to see a significant number of ancient sites in Peru during the tour, including such sites as Caral, the oldest known monumental city of the Americas, dating back to 2700 BCE, and even some iconic Inca sites such as Machu Picchu for those who want to stay a little longer.”

McLerran hopes that the tour expedition will play its small part in supporting the archaeological research while also helping to draw attention to the area, contributing eventually to the economy of the nearby rural villages.

“Part of the proceeds from the tour will be donated to the Cosma archaeological project, which hopefully in time will have a positive income affect on the families of the rural villages in the area and bring more tourists and travelers to the sites,” says McLerran.

McLerran points to the fact that the services and the tourist industry play an important role in developing nations like Peru, where cultural resources are a significant resource that, when developed, can bring new jobs and income to the people of the country.

“A lot of people think that, when they go on a tour to a developing country, they’re just spending a lot of money on a vacation get-away and enriching their own lives—and while that

is true, they may not be thinking about the fact that they're also contributing to the economies of those countries and the people who live there by infusing their dollars into services and products. This is especially true for countries and communities where their cultural and historical resources, such as archaeological sites, are among their greatest assets."

Aerial view of Caral, the New World's oldest ancient monumental complex. Villa de Omas, Wikimedia Commons

The Inca mountaintop site of Machu Picchu, Peru's most iconic archaeological site. Wikimedia Commons

"In a small but important way," continues McLerran, "I like to think that the pioneering group of visitors we're trying to assemble for this trip will not only be enriching their own life experiences, but will also be the start of something good for the villagers and researchers in a remote corner of the world, a place that time seems to have forgotten—but no longer."

More information about the expeditionary tour can be obtained at the [website](#).