

Cerro de Trincheras



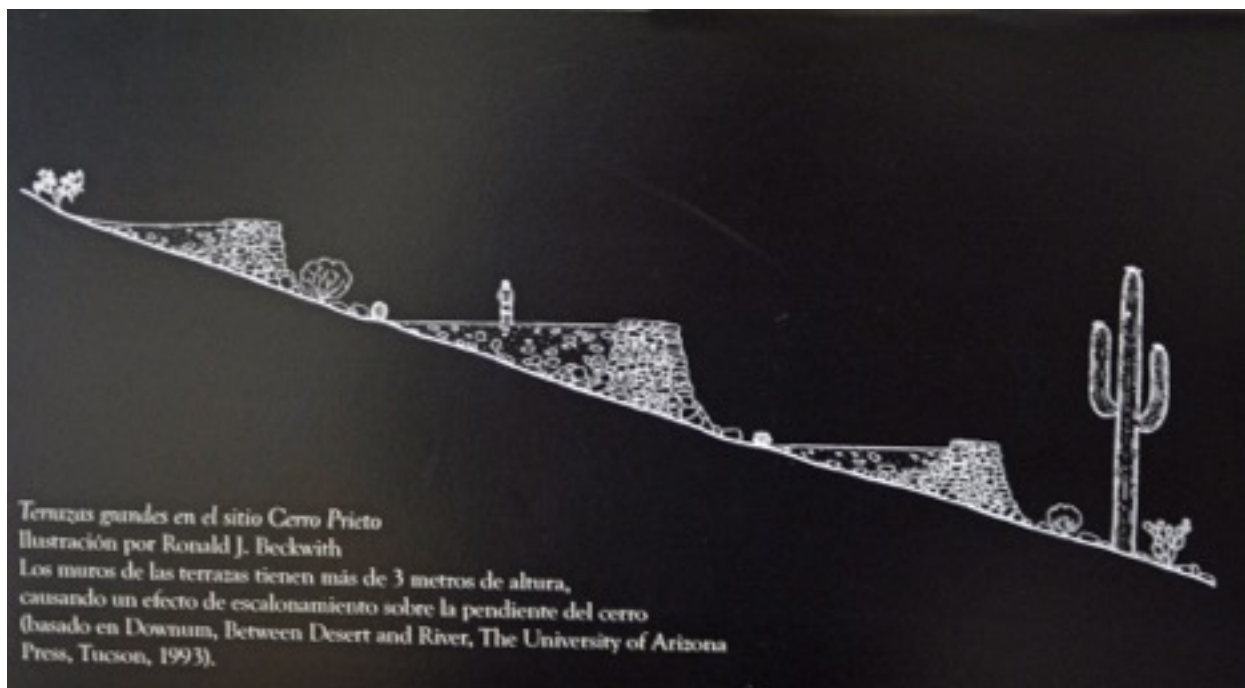
In March 2016 I stopped in Green Valley, AZ, to visit with a long-time friend, Sue Durling. When she suggested we take a day trip to Cerro de Trincheras, an archaeological site in Sonora (Mexico). I readily agreed.

We left early in the morning in order to spend as long as possible at the site and still return to Arizona before dark. In the event, we were only able to climb to the foot of the hill before time ran out. The director of Cerro de Trincheras, Sergio Adrián López Dávila, met us and showed us around, struggling mightily with our (particularly my) lack of Spanish. —Allan Brockway



The terraces are the most obvious features of this prehistoric town. Archaeologists Randall McGuire and Elisa Vallalpando have documented more than 900 terraces and have classified them depending on the form of the walls, their dimensions, and possible use.

The terraces were made of large-rock retaining walls, which range from about three feet to ten feet in height and from 50 feet to more than 300 feet in length. Behind the walls, the fill was smaller stones, rubble, and dirt. Houses, ramadas, workshops, and all the other elements of a town were located on the terraces.



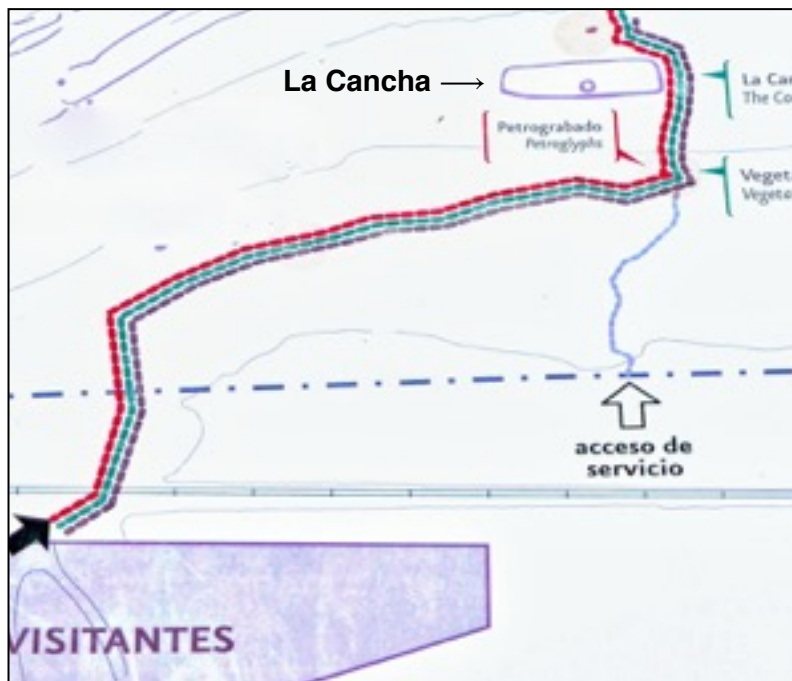
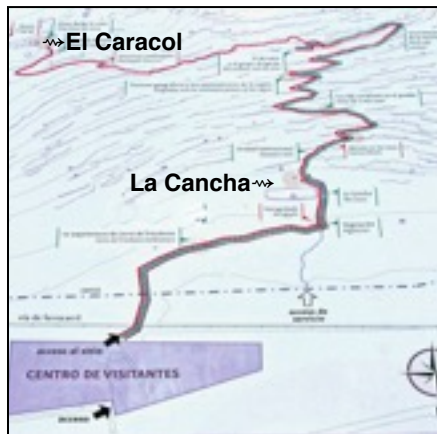
Covering, primarily, the entire north side of the hill, this village had residential areas for ordinary people and others for their leaders. A few privileged families lived in the higher elevated areas of the hillside that permitted a view of all the other terraces.

Cerro de Trincheras had more than 1000 inhabitants during the 150 years of its existence in the 14th and 15th centuries. Though not as impressive as Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon, the amount of effort expended on its construction may have been comparable.

Since early in the 20th century, the reasons proposed for the terraces have included:

- defense
- display
- agriculture
- all of these—and more

We were short on time and weren't able to make it to the top. So we only walked to the Court, *La Cancha*.



La Cancha, which is at the base of the north side of the hill, is a rectangular patio marked by rocks piled on its edges, measuring 167 by 43 ft. It was not a ball court in the Aztec or Maya style; the circular structure at its center would have hindered play. But that it is some kind of arena for ceremonies is without doubt—it is visible from all the terraces



Another ceremonial building is *El Caracol* "The Snail"—here pictured in an artist's depiction. At the eastern end of the hilltop, it appears from above to be a snail's shell cut in half. It measures 41 X 25 ft and its walls still stand to a height of 5 feet.



Museum at Cerro de Trincheras

Marine shells from the Gulf of California were transformed into personal ornaments (rings, earrings, bracelets, and pendants) and musical instruments (shell ticklers). It is possible that the Trincheras community exchanged shell for polychrome pottery with the regional center of Paquimé located at its east, on the other side of the Sierra Madre, in Chihuahua.

This olla was recovered in pieces from the fill of one of the terraces excavated in 1996. It was found in a domestic context and was restored in the Sonora workshops of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH).



The presence of these funerary painted vessels suggests a relationship with the Casas Grandes community in Chihuahua. These bowls might have come with food or perishable products or may have been used exclusively as funerary urns to store ashes and bone fragments.

Trincheras
Purple-on-red
sherds.

