

Progress Report No. 1

Exploration of Huluga Sites, Tagwanao Region, Cagayan de Oro, Mis. Or.

I. Introduction:

This progress report covers the present archaeological investigation of the Huluga sites in the Barrio of Tagwanao undertaken between January and May 1975. The fieldwork was under the auspices of the Dept. of Philippine Studies and with the assistance of the Archaeological Society of Xavier University.

Previous investigations had been done in this region. In 1970, the National Museum personnel explored the area wherein a complex of caves were discovered and excavated thereafter. Material culture such as pottery, beads, stone tools, human physical remains were recovered. Then in 1972 again, the National Museum made a partial investigation of the open site in which several trenches and pits were opened. Material culture were collected from the surface which consisted of obsidian flakes and chips, chert flakes, potsherds, and some porcelain sherds. No detailed report has been filed with Xavier U. except for some scanty notes and a brief summary of the fieldwork. No analysis of the materials has been done.

After 1972 no further work has been made until this year 1975, when Fr. Francisco Demetrio, Chairman of the Dept. of Philippine Studies (formerly Folklore Dept.) invited the writer to train some students in archaeological field methods in January and February. A series of lectures was delivered to the students who were members of the Archaeological Society, after which they were brought to the site to be initiated in their first fieldwork. In January we explored the areas around Huluga specifically the open sites, and surveyed the upper region of the Tagwanao plateau on the eastern banks of the Cagayan River including Tagwanao caves. These were all devoid of materials. Caves have been reported in Gisok which is 2 kilometers south of Huluga. Of the three caves, only one contained a few materials (potsherds) and skeletal remains. According to an informant, the cave was disturbed by Guano collectors. Within the Huluga area, a small rock hole used as burial was also found by a resident of the area. This was surveyed and excavated. A much detailed report on this site will be delved on separately.

We concentrated on the intensive exploration of the open site which had been suspected to have been a pre-hispanic settlement of the early inhabitants of Cagayan de Oro. Due to the frequent inclement weather--- excavation was hampered and sometimes had to be postponed. There is much to be done here for the place is significant historically and archaeologically speaking. The work accomplished so far is a mere iota of a ~~could~~ bigger project and should be pursued when weatherp' permits and funds are available.

The results of the investigation might clear up some historical queries on the early settlers of Cagayan de Oro. It is positively an archaeological site, but as to its chronological standing, it is still vague since we have not discovered any dateable organic remains; hence it is yet premature to pose any assumption.

II. Area of Explored Sites

Huluga lies on the eastern side of the Cagayan River which is part of a limestone promontory rising above the river 200 ft. high. Accumulation of silt and sediments through inundation and alluvial deposits formed a narrow stretch of flood plain below. To the eastern portion are rolling hills which gradually rise to higher plateaus. Vegetation on the lower areas are lushier and more wooded while the terraces are covered with tall cogon grass and intermittent cluster of smaller trees.

The Huluga area is part of the Sitio of Tagwanao which is 8 kilometers south of Cagayan de Oro City and 2 kilometers east of Barrio Balulang. The cave sites discovered by the National Museum, ~~burial holes or crypts,~~ and the open site lie on the eastern side of the Cagayan river just at the tip of Puntod island—a river island with a settlement and plantation. The area is part of the geological complex of Eastern Misamis and Bukidnon which is a rolling plateau region formed by flat lying to gently dipping enter-bedded pyroclastic, basalt fluviatile conglomerate sandstone. Limestone also overlies the volcanics but in more isolated patches.

The nearest water source is the river where the people use for daily chores like washing and bathing. There are some springs and creeks that people use for drinking and washing also.

III. The Sites and Methods of Exploration

This report will only touch on the sites that are currently investigated and had been investigated this year.

A. Huluga Open Site: The site is about more than 80 ft. high above the ground and one can overlook the river and the surrounding areas; from below it looks like a natural fortress. The site has an area of 50 meters north to south and 40 meters from the western edge of the precipice to the eastern slope. Cogon grass covers much of the area with ~~big~~ shade trees (balete) on both the northern and southern flanks; tree saplings are sparsely distributed throughout the site.

The soil is compact clay loam silt of dark brown color which becomes very hard when sun-baked and soft and muddy when wet. Pebbles and cobbles of limestone and other conglomerate stones are distributed throughout the area. Towards the eastern slopes, there are some limestone outcroppings, exposed by erosion.

Inspite of the earlier work done here, there are still numerous artifacts found--obsidian flakes, chert flakes (mostly wastes), potsherds, and porcelain sherds. These were collected as samples.

Rechecking the bearings of the earlier excavation made by the National Museum in 1972, we can determine the exact location of the former pits and trenches. Using the same point of reference, we have laid out 2 exploratory trenches in T form in the middle of the site. Trench A which is laid in the east-west direction is 5 meters long and 1 meter wide; Trench B in north-south direction is 4 meters long and 1 meter wide. Using arbitrary level of 20 centimeters intervals, trench A was dug first. Excavation was always interrupted by rain and was quite muddy to work and screen the dirt. When the soil is sun-baked it was difficult to excavate. Since we were only exploring on week-ends, the progress of work was slow.

During the summer, the weather was likewise erratic and with the students on vacation, very few willing hands assisted; so far we have gone down only to 25 centimeters.

Nevertheless, we were able to recover more obsidian flakes (some were worked), potsherds, one glass bead, and chert flakes. It is rather difficult to discern any stratigraphic sequence up to this point. But as we might continue to work here after the rainy season, we hope to accomplish more.

ADDENDUM: More recently, a farmer-tenant who has been squatting in this area since 1947, tilled the soil and planted corn. The land is privately owned by the Neri family of Cagayan de Oro. Thus the site is eventually disturbed--no work can be done as long as the land is in use.

B. Gisok Caves: Gisok is about 2 kilometers southeast of Huluga. Caves are part of the same geological structure of the Cagayan formation. They are lower than the Huluga caves and located along the river and in low cliffs. Vegetation is lush and baete trees grow close to the cave entrances. The area has a complex of caves--three in number of which 2 are devoid of material culture. Guano miners had claimed these 2 caves. During the war an informant related that the guerrillas used these for shelter and hideout. The other smaller cave is a rock shelter but littered with pieces of skeletal remains associated with potsherds. The cave had been greatly disturbed by guano miners and treasure seekers.

We made a small test pit in 2 areas but nothing was found. This cave was apparently used as a burial place perhaps by the early natives--ie. Bukidnons or Higa-aynons.

The analysis and interpretation of the sites and their material culture and skeletal remains will be included in the final report of this fieldwork. Nevertheless, I strongly suggest that there should be a continuous exploration of the Huluga area and that area towards the western side of the river. If caves have been found to have been used as burials by the early inhabitants, then there should have been early settlements near above or below the places of internment.

Huluga open site was a settlement--were they responsible for the cave burials? If so, who were they and when did they live? Up to this point, there are more numerous problems posed for us to analyze and seek answers. The chronological history of Cagayan de Oro and Misamis Oriental as a whole is not really well-understood unless we could place the cultural sequences in perspective.

Report by:

Linda Burton
Resident Archaeologist
Xavier University