
Case Study 3.2: Caguana, Puerto Rico

Angel Rodriguez

Presentation and analysis of the site

Geographical position: Barrio Caguana, Utuado, Puerto Rico

Location: Latitude 18°17'41"N, longitude 66°46'52"W. Elevation 310m above mean sea level.

General description: The Caguana Ceremonial Ball Courts Site is considered one of the most important archeological sites in the West Indies.

Inventory of the remains: Approximately 13 ball courts (*bateyes*) have been identified. Monoliths and petroglyphs carved by the Taínos can be seen among the rocks and stones. Some of the monoliths weigh over a tonne, and were most likely brought from the Tanama River located adjacent to the site.

History of the site: Studies estimate that the site is over 700 years old, built by the Taíno in around 1270 AD.

Cultural and symbolic dimension: The plan of the site indicates that the plazas were aligned according to specific astronomical events. The site evidently functioned as a place to observe or predict astronomical events. There are symbolic representations of astronomical objects as rock engravings on rock slabs. The cultural landscape surrounding the site (and particularly its topography of mountains and rivers) represents the cosmovision of the builders.

Authenticity and integrity: The site was found *in situ* with all the plazas in their original context. Furthermore, a plan of the site was made to help in the reconstruction.

Documentation and archives: The archaeoastronomical documentation of the site is mainly related to (i) the social use of astronomy—ritual and ceremonies during astronomical events; and (ii) art and decoration represented on the rock engravings.

Present site management

Present use: The site is open to visitors as an interpretative park.

Protection: The National Park Service has placed the Caguana site on the National Register of Historic Places, and designated it as a National Historic Landmark. This means it is a monument protected under law.

State of conservation: Many of the ball courts have been restored to their original state.

Context and environment: The site is located near to the Cemí Mountain (Montaña Cemí) which was believed by the Taínos to be the home of the gods. This is the reason they built the ball courts in this area.

Archaeological/historical/heritage research: Current research related to astronomy at the site focuses on: (i) its use for astronomical observations; (ii) symbolic representations (rock art).

Management: The Institute of Puerto Rican Culture manages and maintains the site as a park called the Caguana Indigenous Ceremonial Center (Centro Ceremonial Indígena de Caguana). The park includes a small museum containing Taíno artifacts, archaeological exhibits and a botanical garden featuring the plants the Taínos harvested for food, such as sweet potatoes, cassava, corn, and yautía. Many of the trees used by the Taínos to construct their homes (*bohíos*), such as mahogany and ceiba can be seen throughout the park.

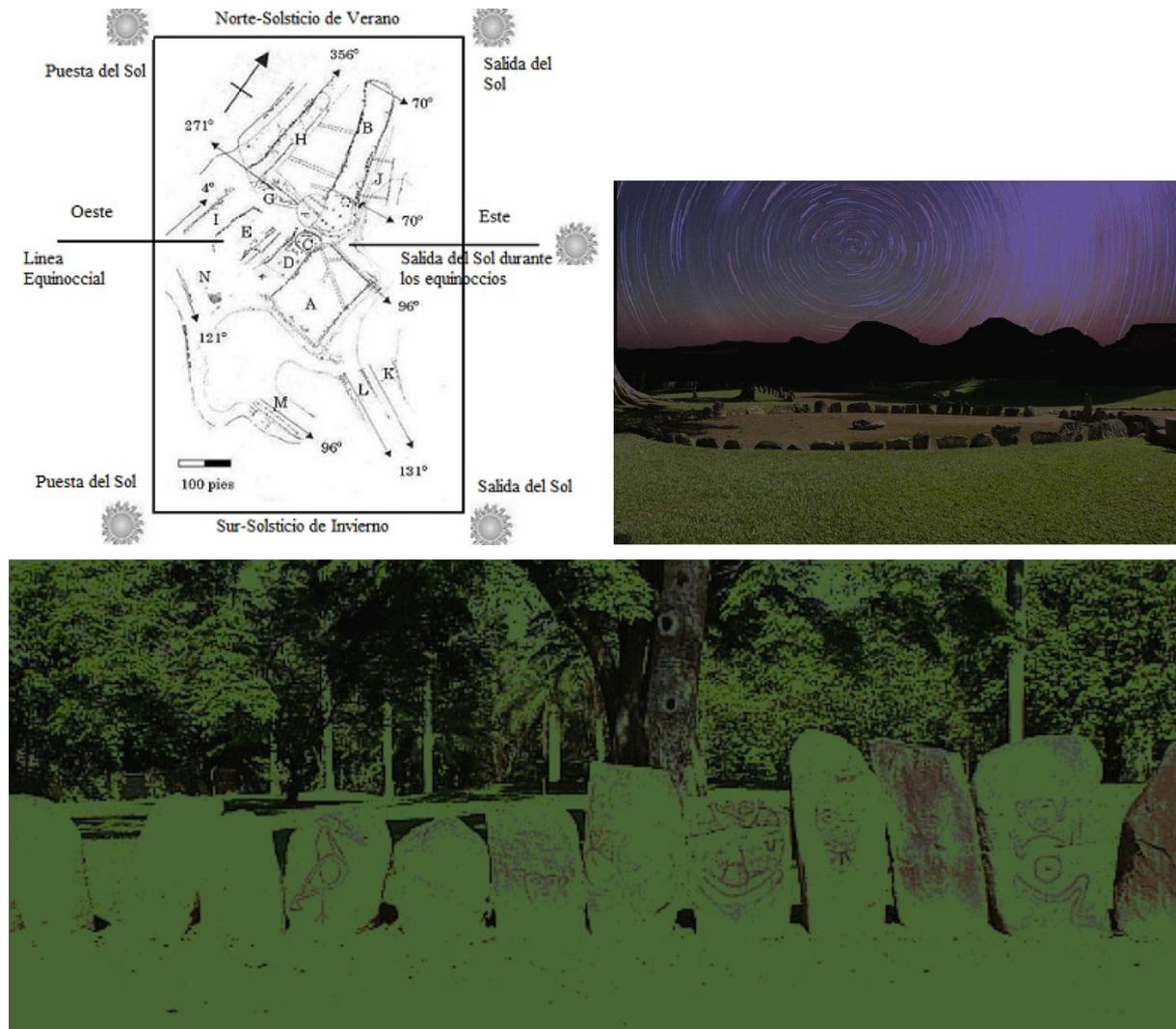


Fig. 3.2.1. Top left: General plan of Caguana. **Top right:** The view from Plaza C towards Polaris. **Bottom:** A row of stones aligned upon the equinoxes with reliefs displaying human figures. All figures © Ángel Rodríguez