4.2. ACTUN TACBI HA

The first archaeological investigation of Actun Tacbi Ha involved a brief visit by Scott Fedick and Karl Taube in 1990. INAH archaeologist Luis Leira Guillermo officially reported the cave that same year. During the 1993 field season of the Yalahau project, I made a trip to the cave with Kevin Hovey and José Estrada Faisal. We produced a provisional map as well as a cursory collection of surface ceramics. Shortly thereafter, the cave was given the name Tacbi Ha (“hidden water”) by Karl Taube. The results of the 1993 investigation were later published (Rissolo 1995) and Actun Tacbi Ha contains five additional pools. Four of these are essentially pits or solution features that reach the water table. A rather large pool is located along the eastern edge of the cave. Like the main pool at the base of the stairway, this pool was the focus of considerable attention and was marked by pottery. Evidence of mining is also present in Actun Tacbi Ha. This practice was confined to a travertine mound located in the eastern portion of the cave. The relatively thin “crust” of flowstone was removed to reveal a sascab-like powder (figure 4.2.5). This material has not been analyzed, and may or may not resemble (chemically) the dolomitic material extracted from Actun Toh. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that the materials mined from these two caves were functionally related. As in Actun Toh, it is difficult to determine the antiquity of this practice. The exposed (and obviously excavated) material in Actun Tacbi Ha are incorporated into this chapter.

Description

The cave, located 1 km east of the community of Naranjal, is essentially a large, single-chambered collapse dome (see figures 4.2.1 and 4.2.2). Its circumference is roughly ovoid and measures approximately 40 m at its widest point. A prominent mound is located 14 m beneath the narrow entrance shaft. This mound appears to consist entirely of collapse debris, which accumulated during the formation of the entrance above. Its borders are clearly delineated (perhaps artificially) and the mound measures a maximum of 10.5 m in diameter and 2.5 m in height. Though the mound has not been terraced (like in Actun Toh), it has nevertheless been significantly modified.

A carefully constructed and well-preserved stairway leads from the top of the mound to a pool below (figures 4.2.3 and 4.2.4). This stairway consists of eleven steps. The risers of eight of these steps were created by horizontally placed speleothems (mostly stalactites), which were apparently broken-off from the cave floor and lower portions of the ceiling. The pool (which marks the water table) is 5 m wide and approximately 1 m deep. The only other masonry feature in the cave is a crude step or low wall, which spans a narrow slot to the east of the pool.

Figure 4.2.1. Map of Actun Tacbi Ha.

Figure 4.2.2. Profile of Actun Tacbi Ha.