





**PALO HINCADO SITE**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

Historic: **Domestic  
Religion**

Sub: **village site  
ceremonial site**

Current: **Agriculture**

Sub: **agricultural field**



**7. DESCRIPTION**

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: **N/A**

MATERIALS:  
Foundation:  
Walls:  
Roof:  
Other:

**PALO HINCADO SITE**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form **Page 4****Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**

[REDACTED]

plaza area (see Figure 1). Ceramic analysis has identified both Santa Elena and Capá style sherds, indicating the site dates from Rouse's Period IVb (ca. AD 1250 to 1500) (Alegria 1983:101-104)

**Environmental Setting:** According to the site description for the Palo Hincado Site in Ricardo Alegria's *Ball Courts and Ceremonial Plazas in the West Indies*,

[REDACTED]

**Previous Archeological Investigations:** Alegria notes the Palo Hincado Site "was known to collectors, and many petroglyphs (on stones around the plaza and ball court) had been removed from it" (1983:101). Additionally, the site had been visited by Samuel K. Lothrop (n.d.), Froelich Rainey (1940), and de Hostos (Alegria 1983:101).

However, the most accurate description of the site was accomplished by Irving Rouse, of Yale University, in 1936. According to Alegria the main plaza (see Figure 1),

. . . measures 72 by 52 m, is rectangular, and its long axis extends from east to west, parallel to the crosswise contours of the ridge. Rouse thinks that the plaza has been lowered, apparently by excavation, on the northern side and the eastern end, and in addition, a broad terrace or bench 6 to 12 m wide, had been cut into the high ground on those two sides. The earth removed had probably been heaped up to form embankments 1.5 m high at the ends of the enclosure and along the western half of the northern side, where the land is low. On the southern side Rouse (1952:485) found no earthworks except for a low mound near the western end.

He [Rouse] believes that originally all sides of the plaza were lined with stone slabs. At the time of his visit (1936) most of these had disappeared, but enough remained to suggest their original location and arrangement. On the northern side and the eastern end of the plaza he thinks there may have been two rows of stones, one upright and the other lying horizontally on the edge of each bench, as in some of the ball courts

**PALO HINCADO SITE****Page 5**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

at Capá [Caguana Site]. The remaining two sides were lined with only a single row of upright slabs. Rouse explains that the row across the western end of the plaza was not directly against the embankment, as is usual in these structures; instead, what was left of it was some 17 m inside the enclosure, at the end of the bench along the northern side of the plaza. He was unable to find petroglyphs on the remaining stones [Alegría 1983:101, 103].

Northwest of the central plaza Rouse found a stone lined ball court, that was aligned along a northwest-southeast axis (see Figure 1). As described by Alegría,

Forty-five meters [northwest] from the [main] plaza he [Rouse] found a ball court, also on the ridge, but 5 m higher up the mountainside. The court is rectangular and extends across the ridge, having a length of 33 m and a width of 15. On its upper side it has been excavated 60 cm [to level off the surface of the ball court]. There was an embankment of the same height on the lower side. A similar embankment extends along the western end, but the eastern end is open. A few upright stone slabs, without petroglyphs, were still lining the embankment [in 1936] [Alegría 1983:103].

The three causeways, or roads as called by Rouse (see Figure 1), according to Alegría,

. . . radiate from the [main] plaza. Road 1 extends northeast from the main stream to the southwestern corner of the ball court; it is straight, although it becomes narrower as it climbs the ridge. Its maximum width is 15 m near the stream and only 6 m at the plaza. On either side it was lined with an [earthen] embankment 173 m long and 1.2 to 1.5 m high. The present surface of the road is described as U-shaped rather than flat. The second road runs from the eastern end of the plaza to one of the tributary streams. It was built in two section - the lower part, which is perpendicular to the stream, measured 37 by 5 m and was lined with [earthen] embankments 60 cm high on the left and twice that height [1.2 m] on the right.

At the time of Rouse's visit [1936] only the upper half of the left embankment remained, and part of it curved around to the right, blocking the middle of the road. Rouse explains that it was not possible to determine whether this curve was original. The upper section of the road was formed by two straight walls of earth 82 m long, 1.2 to 1.5 m high, and 12 m apart. The third road begins on the northern side of the [main] plaza and extends up the ridge to the mountainside. Its [earthen] embankments are well preserved and vary in height from 30 cm to 3 m and enclose a roadbed 10 m wide. This road had a length of 1,133 m, more than three-quarters of a mile. According

**PALO HINCADO SITE**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**Page 6**

to Rouse, the preservation of these roads is due to the fact that the ridge has never been plowed. No [stone] slabs were found in any of the roads, in the form of either walls or pavements. Rouse thinks that these roads could have been linked with the worship of streams and mountains [Alegría 1983:103].

In addition to his measuring of the features at Palo Hincado, Rouse also excavated a pit west of the central plaza (see Figure 1). From a ceramic analysis of the artifacts recovered Rouse found

The sherds are representative of the Santa Elena and Capá styles. Santa Elena pottery is represented by 3 sherds of open bowls, 3 fragments of constructed bowls, 2 unidentifiable sherds, and 1 stone pestle. The Capá pottery includes 29 sherds from open bowls, 90 pieces of constricted bowls, 19 unidentifiable sherds, and 3 fragments of griddles. The few stone artifacts include 2 stone balls and pieces of another. Rouse also found some historical pieces: bricks, fragments of glass, and Spanish pottery; he thinks the historical material was deposited during Period IVb and the site may have been the village of chief Orocovix, the cacique of Jatibonico [(Rouse 1952:488) in Alegría 1983:103-104].

On October 14, 1996, Dr. Mark R. Barnes, Senior Archeologist, of the National Register Programs Division, with the National Park Service's Southeast Regional Office in conjunction with Mr. Miguel Bonini, Puerto Rican State Archeologist, accompanied by Geraldine Toste, and Grisel Rosa, staff archeologists with the Puerto Rican State Historic Preservation Office visited the Palo Hincado Site in Barranquitas Municipality, to evaluate the site for National Register eligibility. Overall, there has been a good deal of surface disturbance. Yucca and banana have been cultivated for a number of years in the area.

It was found that the stone lined central plaza was easily discernible with 11 stones on the north side and 14 stones on the south side in same area noted by Rouse in 1936 (see Photos 1-2). The stones had been displaced by agricultural activity, but the general dimensions of the central plaza was still evident and numerous scattered prehistoric artifacts were noted in the central plaza area of the site (see Photo 3).

The stone alignments of the smaller ball court to the northeast of the central plaza could not be detected. This area is now under banana cultivation. However, a grouping of 8 larger stones, apparently from this ball court were noted to the west of the area Rouse found the ball court. It is probable that the stones were moved to this location during the planting of the bananas.

The three roadways are still evident [REDACTED] the earthen embankments lining the three roadways have been eliminated by agricultural

**PALO HINCADO SITE**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**Page 7**

activity at this site.

**Site Integrity:** The site has been impacted by agricultural activity. While the central plaza is still discernible from the arrangement of remaining stones, the location of the ball court to the northeast of the central plaza as noted by Rouse in 1936 cannot be verified as it appears the stones from the ball court have been displaced from their original settings. While the three roads are evident, the embankments which once lined the roads are now gone.

Overall, the site is in fair condition. Surface artifacts of a prehistoric nature were noted throughout the site during the October 1996 site visit indicating the probability of intact deposits for future investigations.

**PALO HINCADO SITE**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**Page 8****8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally:\_\_\_ Statewide: X Locally:\_\_\_

Applicable National Register Criteria: A\_\_\_ B\_\_\_ C\_\_\_ D X

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A\_\_\_ B\_\_\_ C\_\_\_ D\_\_\_ E\_\_\_ F\_\_\_ G\_\_\_

Areas of Significance: **Archeology - Prehistoric**

Period(s) of Significance: **Santa Elena and Capá, or Period IVb (AD 1250 to 1500)**

Significant Dates: **N/A**

Significant Person(s): **N/A**

Cultural Affiliation: **Taino**

Architect/Builder: **N/A**

**PALO HINCADO SITE**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**Page 9****State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**

**Summary Statement of Significance:** *Batey*, or Ball Court Sites in the American possessions in the Caribbean are significant prehistoric ceremonial resources. They first appear in the Early Ostiones or pre-Taino Period (AD 600 to 1200), with the majority of them dating from the Late Ostiones or Taino Period (AD 1200 to 1500). Early sixteenth-century Spanish descriptions of ball courts and the ball game, both called *batey*, indicate these were the central feature of the larger Taino villages. From these descriptions it is clear the intent of the ball game was for settlement of disputes between Taino chiefs, and had a ceremonial oracular function, in addition to recreation. The ball courts also represented not only a certain degree of technological competence in their construction, but also a political and organizational ability to oversee their execution, probably at the level of a chiefdom.

The Palo Hincado Site has the most complex prehistoric features of any late prehistoric ball court site in Puerto Rico, with the exception of the Caguana Site (designated an NHL in 1993). The combination of a large central plaza, ball court, and causeways or roads is indicative of a major Taino chiefdom of the late prehistoric period. In addition, the finding of historic early Spanish colonial period material culture may, as proposed by Irving Rouse, indicate that this was the village site of Orocovix, a cacique that controlled the Jatibonico province of central Puerto Rico (1952:488). This raises the potential of future research providing information on the early contact period for the Caribbean.

Current research on ball court sites includes topics such as: settlement patterns; identification of the area of origin for the introduction of the ball game and ball court into the Caribbean; clarification of dating of ball court sites; and ethnohistorical study of the role of the ball game in the sociopolitical context of Taino culture. The following research topics might be addressed in future investigations at the Palo Hincado Site.

a. Settlement Patterns - Additional archeological surveys to locate ball courts sites are needed to determine if the present distribution of these resources are correct. The majority of known ball courts in the Caribbean are found in the mountainous areas of Puerto Rico. This distribution pattern may be skewed by historic agricultural activities in the coastal areas of Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands that have been subjected to land modification which has masked the occurrence of ball court sites.

Extensive field research and radiocarbon dating of archeological sites containing ball courts still is required before reliable diachronic patterns of settlement in the early Ostionoid and Taino Periods can be determined. Considering the length of time archeological investigations have been conducted on prehistoric sites in Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands little

**PALO HINCADO SITE**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form **Page 10**

is known about large, coastal village/ball court sites, possibly due to destruction of such sites by colonial and post-colonial agricultural activity. Additionally, little is known about the nature of sites that occur in interior mountainous or upland areas. Investigation of these would contribute much to an understanding of site function and intra- and inter-regional relationships.

- Are there differing patterns of the distribution of ball court sites typical of coastal and inland areas?
- Do settlement patterns of ball court sites change through time? Are these affected by long-term climatic change and/or sea level fluctuations?
- Do interior sites concentrate along major streams as indicated by Alegría or is this a product of our unsystematic site records?
- Were some ball court sites occupied seasonally, or year-round, or during periods of ceremonial activities?
- How do the village sites associated with ball courts vary through time? For example, how far back in time do ball courts and associated village sites extend? Is there a time difference between coastal and inland sites?
- What is the specific nature of public architecture (e.g., ball courts, houses for the chiefs and religious structures (caney), petroglyphs, alignment of stones, plazas, etc.) at these sites and how do they change through time?

b. Chronology - Alegría (1983) has provided the most comprehensive work for the occurrence of ball courts in the Caribbean to date. He shows that ball courts began to show up in the archeological record ca. AD 600, with the beginning of the early Ostionoid Period and continue and expand in the Taino Period (ca. AD 1200). This dating is based on ceramic chronology and a few radiocarbon dates gathered from past archeological investigations.

Considering the ongoing nature of the refinement of chronology and dating of sites and artifacts in the Caribbean it is assumed that the traditional view of ceramics and settlement patterns will be enhanced by the construction of local scale environmental chronologies. For example, recent geological advances allow the construction of localized sea level and rainfall curves for the Holocene Epoch. Fluctuations in sea level or rainfall translate into significant changes in the coastal and mountain/upland environments and resources available to prehistoric peoples in Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands.

- How should paleoenvironmental continuity and change over time be investigated?

**PALO HINCADO SITE****Page 11**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

- How do the paleoclimatic and paleoecologic records relate to patterns of settlement, subsistence, and ultimately political organization?
- How can ceramic, bone, shell, and stone artifact types be refined to permit their use in chronological studies?
- What is the nature of the earliest occurrence of ball courts and ball game paraphernalia in Puerto Rico, and what is the place of origin for this activity?

c. Social and Political Organization - Little archeological information exists to complement the ethnohistoric documents of the early sixteenth-century Spanish colonial accounts of ball courts and the ball game. Alegría (1983) and Stevens-Arroyo (1988) offer testable models of cultural development. There is a need for large-scale excavation to generate significant data sets before such issues can be resolved.

\* What is the form of prehistoric political organization? For example, is the historic Taino complex political organization of *caciques* employing the use of *batey* games and divination using *zemis*, a prehistoric feature as well?

- How does political organization change through time?
- What are the archeological correlates of complex sociopolitical organization?
- Can social status be detected through dietary and dress preferences?
- How early and at what frequency do large construction projects, such as ball courts, appear in the archeological record?
- What is the extent and nature of Taino political alliances? How far back in time do these alliances extend?
- Is there a prehistoric trade network that links the political organizations on Puerto Rico?
- How do the nature and boundaries of prehistoric networks shift through time?
- What roles do the mountain and coastal ball courts sites play in the trade/exchange networks?

**PALO HINCADO SITE**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**Page 13****9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES****Alegría, Ricardo E.**

1983 *Ball Courts and Ceremonial Plazas in the West Indies*. Yale University Publications in Anthropology No. 79. Department of Anthropology, Yale University, New Haven.

**Fernández de Navarrete, Martín**

1825 *Relación de Diego Méndez sobre los acontecimientos de último Viaje de Colón*. Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos, Vol. 1. Imprenta Nacional, Madrid.

**Fewkes, J. W.**

1907 *The Aborigines of Puerto Rico and Neighboring Islands*. Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Washington.

**Las Casas, Bartolomé de**

1909 *Apologética Historia de las Indies*. Nueva Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, No. 13. Madrid.

**Lothrop, Samuel K.**

n.d. *Archaeological Sites in Puerto Rico*. Manuscript on file at the Yale University Department of Anthropology, New Haven.

**Mason, J. Alden**

1917 *Excavation on a New Archaeological Site in Puerto Rico*. In *Proceedings of the Nineteenth International Congress of Americanists*. Washington.

1941 *A Large Archaeological Site at Capá, Utuado, with Notes on Other Porto Rican Sites Visited in 1914-1915*. Scientific Survey of Porto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Vol. 18, Pt 2. New York Academy of Sciences, New York.

**Oviedo, Gonzalo Fernandez de**

1851 *Historia general y natural de las Indies*. 4 Vols. Madrid.

**Picó, Rafael**

1974 *The Geography of Puerto Rico*. Aldine Press, Chicago.

**Rainey, Froelich G.**

1940 *Porto Rico Archaeology*. In *Scientific Survey of Porto Rico and the Virgin Islands*, Volume 18, Part 1. New York Academy of Sciences, New York.

**Rodríguez, Miguel**

1995 *Los Bateyes de Trujillo Alto: Un Nuevo Centro Ceremonial Indígena en Puerto Rico*. In *Proceedings of the XV International Congress for Caribbean Archaeology*, pp. 27-44. Published by the Center for the Advanced Study of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

**Rouse, Irving**

1952 *Porto Rican Prehistory*. Scientific Survey of Porto Rico and

**PALO HINCADO SITE****Page 14**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

the Virgin Islands, Vol. 18, Pts 3-4. New York Academy of Sciences, New York.

1992 *The Tainos, Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus.* Yale University Press, New Haven.

**Stahl, Agustín**

1889 *Los Indios Borinqueños: Estudios Ethnográficos.* Puerto Rico.

**Stevens-Arroyo, Antonio M.**

1988 *Cave of the Jagua, The Mythological World of the Tainos.* University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register.
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # \_\_\_\_\_
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office **Puerto Rico**
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository):

**PALO HINCADO SITE**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**Page 17**

■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

Name/Title: **Mark R. Barnes, Ph.D.**

Org.: **National Register Programs Division  
Southeast Regional Office, NPS  
1924 Building**

Street/#: **100 Alabama Street, S.W.**

City/Town: **Atlanta**

State: **Georgia**

ZIP: **30303**

Telephone: **(404) 562-3173  
(404) 562-3244 - FAX  
email Mark\_Barnes@nps.gov**

Date: **June 24, 1997**

Additional assistance in the preparation of this nomination provided by:

**Mr. Miquel Bonini  
State Archeologist  
La Fortaleza  
P.O. Box 82  
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00901**

**(787) 721-3737  
(787) 723-0957 - FAX**

**Ms. Geraldine Toste  
Staff Archeologist  
La Fortaleza  
P.O. Box 82  
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00901**

**(787) 721-3737  
(787) 723-0957 - FAX**