Traces to the past,
the rock art manifestation of our ancestors

By: Luisa María Echeverry Barrera / luisa.echeverry@upb.edu.co
Translation:Jean Paul Mejía Holguín / Photos: Research Group

The conservation and protection of archaeological evidence in the Colombian state of Santander is strengthened, from the Bucaramanga sectional of the UPB, based on research on rock art.

Chronicles written in colonial times, ethnographic and historical studies about the communities that once inhabited it, conversations among friends after a rewarding tourist experience are known about the Chicamocha Canyon. The narratives allude to indigenous wealth of a geographic accident that conserves, in the middle of its rock formations, part of our heritage.

It was the Guane indigenous community that inhabited some specific areas of the Canyon, one of them, the municipality of Los Santos, a place that, according to Spanish accounts, it was a province of exceptional wealth. Moreover, in its mountainous roads, still rests a significant number of rock art panel.

Researchers identified rocky layers in which red pictograms are found on the roof and walls of the stratum.

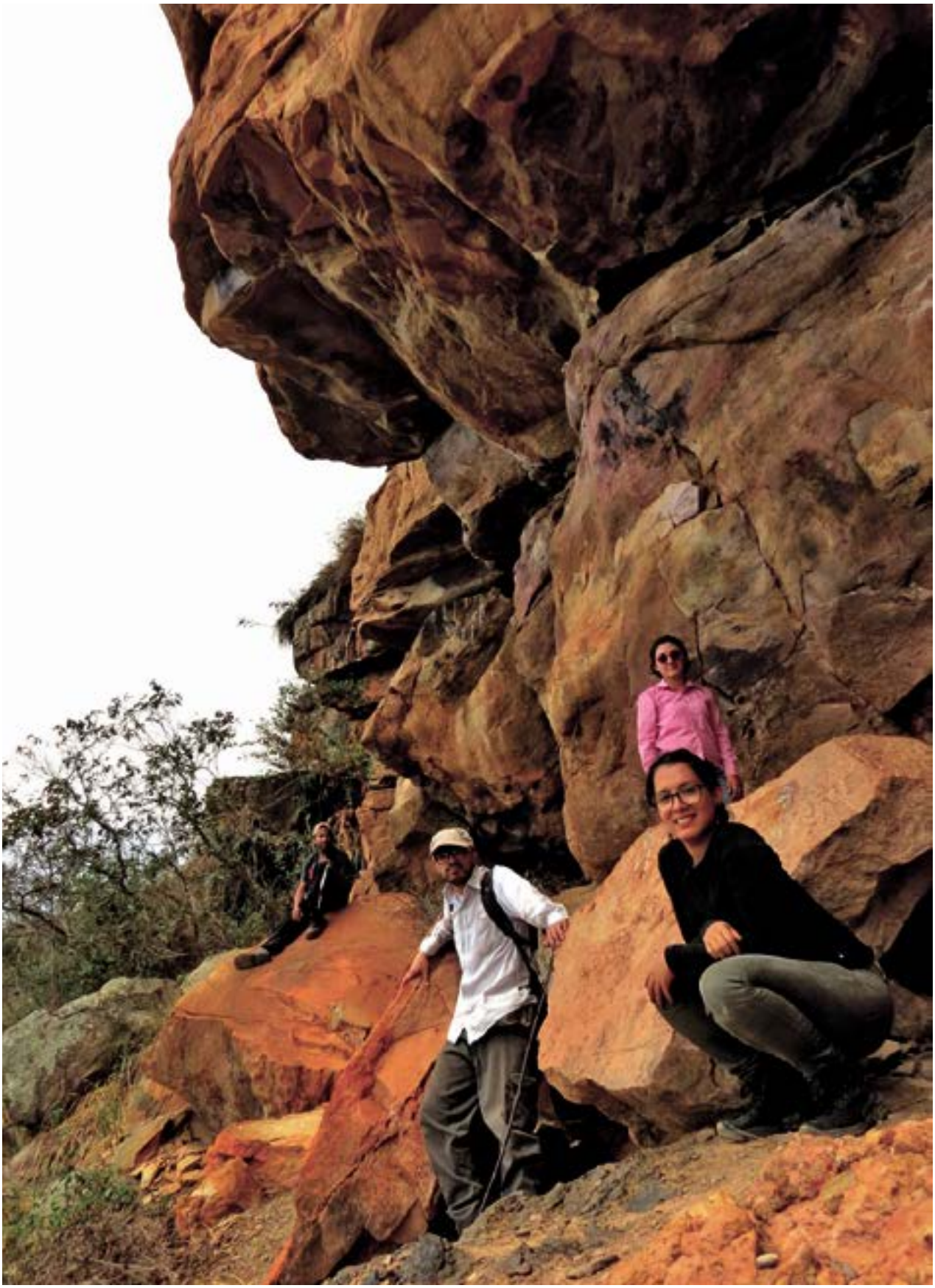
Los Santos was the municipality elected, in 2014, for the development of a research program, with the object of an archaeological exploration in the settlements, habitability, forms of organization and management of the natural resources by the original settlers. The Group of Interdisciplinary Studies on Culture, Human Rights and Death (GECDHM), associated with Humanist Formation Department, of the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Bucaramanga Sectional has chosen this area for the research. An investigation that ended its first stage with the georeferencing of 147 sites of archaeological interest and, among them, 57 rock art sites.

The initial phase focused on the photographic record of the deposits with rock paintings, specifically of pictograms: graphic representations drawn with mineral pigments in the stones.

Among the main findings there are, for example, paintings with chromatic variety - ochres, blacks, reds, oranges, greens and whites - geometric lines, abstractions, types of suns and, above all, reiterations in anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures (especially reptiles).

The objective was to gather the greatest amount of social, archaeological, geological and environmental information regarding the rupestrian works and the rocky layer in which they are found. It was a characterization of the places to establish their state of deterioration.

After the exercise in the field and with the documentation found, the researcher, Mónica Giedelmann Reyes, leader of the project, considers hasty some assertions on the matter; however, her experience indicates that these symbolic manifestations "have a



Nelson Ramírez Guevara, Raúl David Pérez García, Clara Natalia León Montenegro and María Alejandra Padilla Arias.

Researchers: Román Sarmiento Gómez and Johan Javier Quintero Duarte

relation with the positioning in the landscape. We find a tendency that pictograms are usually associated with the sighting of bodies of water, there are many in the direction of the river. It is possible that there were areas of advantage of the interesting resources". These are hypotheses that, according to the archaeologist, they hope to solve in the following years, when they complement, for example, the environmental record. At this moment, they only recognize, in geological terms, what formations the ancient communities sought.

The research program - as the group calls it - is projected to 10 years, a period in which three essential moments are contemplated. First, the registration and the digital reconstruction with a high fidelity of the pictograms, by a hardware

The research involves teachers and students of the University at different levels of training and from various disciplines. Thus, the team consisted of ten people who contributed knowledge from Archeology, Geology, Social Communication; Environmental, Mechanical, Electronic and Civil Engineering.

The work in the field involved, in methodological terms, dialogues with the inhabitants of the municipality of Los Santos, direct observation of rocks, differentiation of the alterations according to the coloration and a photographic record for the analysis and future divulgation of the results.

and software designed - as part of the academic exercise - by the professor of the Faculty of Electronic Engineering, César Augusto Aceros Moreno, and The master's student in Electronic Engineering, Román Sarmiento Gómez. The second, the classification of the rock art sites according to the level of risks for the visit and access to them. Moreover, the third, the dissemination as a strategy for the preservation of this archaeological cultural heritage.

Currently, the experts, in addition to the technical analysis, identified problems of social matters related to tourism. It is fair; one of the attractions of the municipality of Los Santos is the considerable number of rupestrian art in the area. This implies, according to Clara León Montenegro, a geologist from the National University of Colombia and participant of the project during this research stage, that the anthropic damages (caused by man) overcome the deteriorations and alterations of the rupestrian art that are produced by weathering (decomposition of minerals in contact with the atmosphere).

This idea is the basis for the construction, in the following months of 2017, of the Special Plan for the Management of rock art sites in the municipality; a document resulting from this investigative phase and that, by legislation, should form part of the Territorial Planning Plan (POT) for the protection of the cultural heritage of our Nation.

The research progress made possible to establish goals for the next two years regarding the need to establish responsible tourist routes, most important, experiences with historical-scientific contents. The group looks for, in this matter, to be involved in the governmental dynamics and to participate in the conception of public policies that engage the archaeological conservation and benefit the present inhabitants.

Enriching perceptions and imaginaries around the Canyon, both researchers and non-experts but interested in the subject,

Researchers: (from left to right) Silvia Paola Sánchez González, Claudia Santoyo Muñoz and Indira Yajaira Solano Rueda.

A significant number of rock art motifs are found in areas of difficult access and in rocky places with less environmental exposure. Experts suspect that indigenous people selected deliberately the location to favor the permanence in the time.

is a significant contribution to what is a goal for this project. Johan Quintero Duarte, a student of the seventh semester of Mechanical Engineering, he was linked in 2015 and since then he has visited the Chicamocha Canyon with the certainty that the readings of this environment are enriched thanks to scientific confirmation.

Archaeological research invites us to recognize the ethnic value present in the mountains of our country. The investigative experience of the UPB Bucaramanga Sectional is a significant example of the impact and contribution of the University in culture and communities.

Data sheet

Project Name: Archaeological exploration in the municipality of Los Santos: appraise of the archaeological heritage.
Keywords: Rock art; Pictogram; Geological formation; Anthropology; Indigenous people
Research Group: G. of Interdisciplinary Studies on Culture, Human Rights and Death (GECDHM).
School: Social and Human Sciences
Sectional: Bucaramanga
Project leader: Mónica Johanna Giedelmann Reyes
Email: monica.giedelmann@upb.edu.co