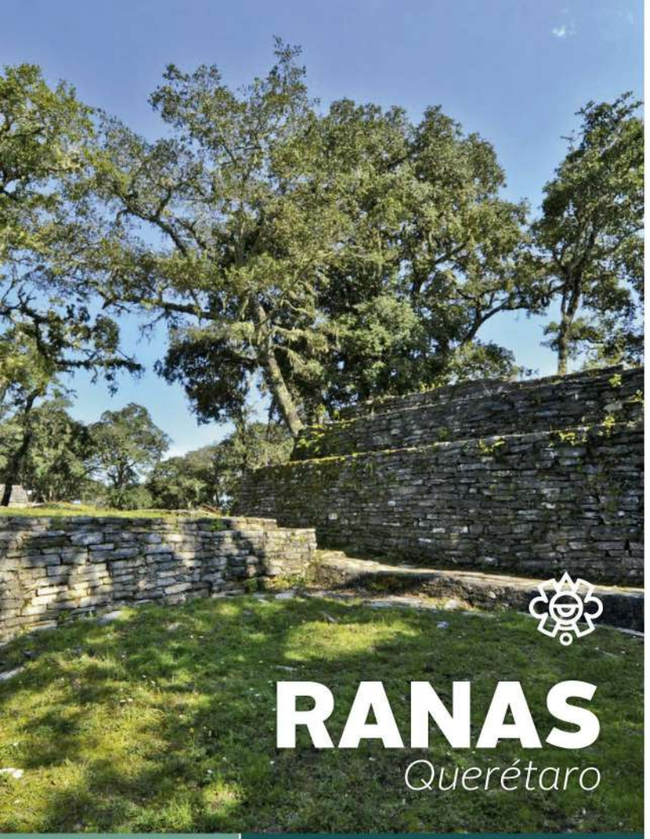


RANAS
Querétaro

PLACE NAME	In the nineteenth century this settlement was known by the local community as "The City." The name of this zone was given by mining engineer Bartolomé Ballesteros in 1872 in remembrance of the foundation of the Spanish mission of the nearest town, "San Nicolás Tolentino at the place of Ranas," today known as San Joaquín, the seat of the municipality.
CULTURE	Serrano (Mountain).
PERIODO	Classic period to time of Spanish contact.
DATES	AD 300 to sixteenth-century Spanish contact.

The settlement of Ranas occupied portions of two hills and the layout of the settlement was planned in at least four sectors:

I. The religious sector, including ritual ballcourts.
II. The Acropolis, intended for political and administrative functions and activities.
III. The entrance to the site, the location of the only natural pass to the hills, where groups of platforms have been found and interpreted as elite residences with production spaces for cinnabar processing and management.
IV. The plateau to the north, where residential units and platforms were established.

From the architectural standpoint, they are structures built with well-worked limestone slabs. Most constructions are rectangular in shape and have pyramidal platforms. The site has two well-differentiated spaces open to the public: one aimed at religious activities where three ballcourts stand on the upper part of the plateau, which served as an axis for planning and distribution for this portion of the site. The second section resembles an acropolis that includes a series of groups of buildings that shape the hill's topography, with the main platform at the peak, offering a clear view of the group of sites that dominate the region: Toluquilla and San Joaquín.

In the Ranas II sector visitors will find buildings with benches in the front, flanked by semicircular stairs. It is a unique architectural element, copied in other regions in the north of the Sierra Gorda at sites such as San Rafael, Concá, La Campana, and as far away as Guadalcázar, San Luis Potosí, which was also an ancient red pigment mining center.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Archaeologist Margarita Velasco named this unique cultural development in Mexico the Serrano (Mountain) culture to set it apart from neighboring cultural centers. However, through time, it adopted cultural features and styles from other ancient societies that it was in contact with, producing the distinctive identity that distinguishes it today. On a regional level, this development was composed of three major settlements: Toluquilla, San Joaquín—today lost—and Ranas, which controlled the geography and mining production in the southern Sierra Gorda. Its historical importance resides in the fact that to date it is the only society identified with a specialized economy exploiting underground red mercury sulfide or cinnabar mining, from 300 BC to the present.

The country's principal cinnabar sources were located in the southern Sierra Gorda. It was one of the points where cinnabar was extracted and processed, becoming a sign of wealth and power and extensively used in burials of rulers and high-status individuals in ancient Mexico.

The control of cinnabar enabled these people to establish ties with highly diverse groups in time and space. Ranas has yielded materials from the Pacific coast, the Gulf of Mexico, the Huastec region, Río Verde, as well as Toltec and Teotihuacan cultures, attesting to its long-distance interaction. Therefore, this non-local contact introduced them to models from different societies, leading them to incorporate what suited them and to generate their own style.

An important aspect of Ranas is its strategic location, allowing it to establish regional visual control. It stood at the apex of natural communication routes of three different sectors of the Sierra Gorda: the first leads from the central portion of the sierra to a semi-desert zone and the main deposits of mercury sulfide are found in that canyon. The second is Agua de León canyon—which leads to the inter-mountain lake valley of San Joaquín, the site of another settlement, which according to sources was where the king had a power center. The third path of access joins with the Sierra de Canoas, the setting of Toluquilla, the largest settlement—with more than 200 monuments—which is the best-preserved site in the region.

Toluquilla, San Joaquín, and Ranas controlled a vast territory, where more than 100 ancient mine entries and a group of 80 towns and lesser hamlets have been found to date. Their purpose was to control the territory, exploiting cinnabar deposits, obtaining products for subsistence through gathering, hunting, and to a lesser extent, through agriculture.

HOW TO GET THERE

To get to the site of Ranas, go to the town of San Joaquín, in the Municipality of the same name. From Mexico City, take the México-Querétaro Highway (No. 57) to the city of San Juan del Río, then take the turnoff to Tequisquiapan, Cadereyta (Federal Highway No. 120) and passing through the town of Vizarrón de Montes about 7 km to the north, there is a paved turnoff at Km 32, to San Joaquín. The archaeological zone is 3 km further north of this point.

ADMISSION

According to the Federal Fees Act, admission is free for students, teachers, and seniors with a valid ID; children under 13 and people with a disability.

Sundays: Free admission for Mexican citizens and foreign residents.

PHOTOGRAPHY

For the use of any device to make videos, visitors must pay the stipulated fee. Non-professional photography, without the use of tripods, is free of charge, and must be done without a flash.

HOURS

Monday to Sunday
9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

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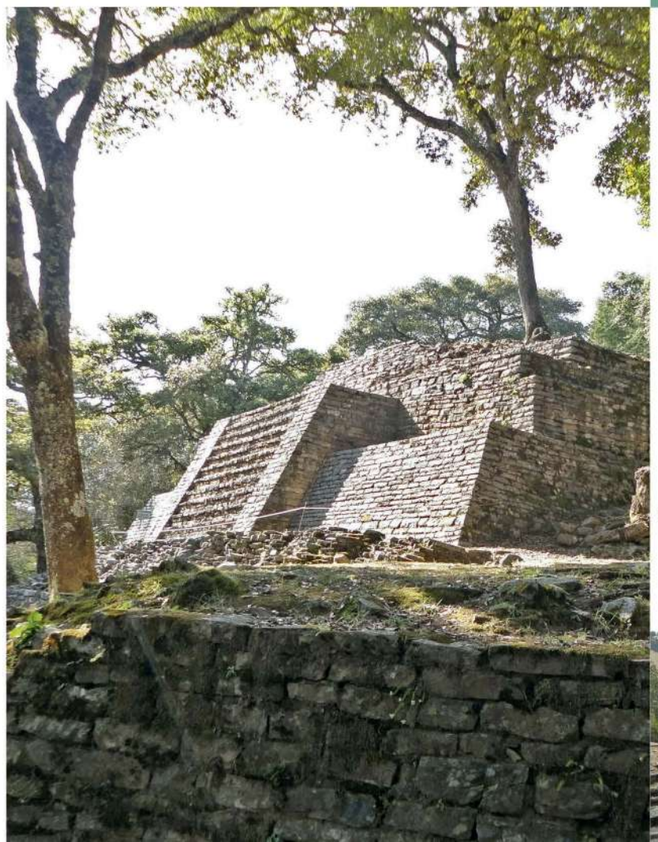
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MAIN ATTRACTION

The Main Platform or Structure 16

Standing at the summit of the Ranas II sector, it is a platform that is 20 m by 12 m wide. It is a temple with at least three construction stages. It is interesting to note that in the remodeling process fine stone was used solely on the facades, leaving a rustic appearance on the sides. The back part of this platform always had a projection on its lower tier, a landing between twenty and thirty centimeters and a second tier with a vertical rise, topped by a projecting cornice. A temple stood on the latter and had a band with three well-carved sloping slabs on its base and a wall with a straight profile, unfortunately lost from the looting of stone from the site in earlier periods.



GET READY TO EXPLORE

There are at least five points of interest: the highlights of the visit are the two ballcourts in the Ranas I sector; in the Ranas II section, the shape and distribution of different groups of monuments on different levels, where Structure 3 stands out for its location and volume in two sloping tiers, with a central stairway framed by balustrades evoking a majestic visual, as a manmade structure added to the topography; the sunken patio composed of four platforms and two monumental stairways made of finely worked and assembled limestone blocks. This group acts as a centralizing point of circulation to the summit, where the main platform stands, a two-tiered temple with a rectangular plan, measuring 20 m on the front side by 12 m on the side and 8.5 m tall, with a central stairway framed by balustrades.

The site's date is still being studied, although it is clear that the settlement of Ranas already had a planned layout since AD 300. This urban plan underwent minor modifications through time in the density of the structures in its sections. However, the settlement as a whole maintained the layout of its original plan, which suggests this center was not conquered by other groups from outside the Sierra Gorda.

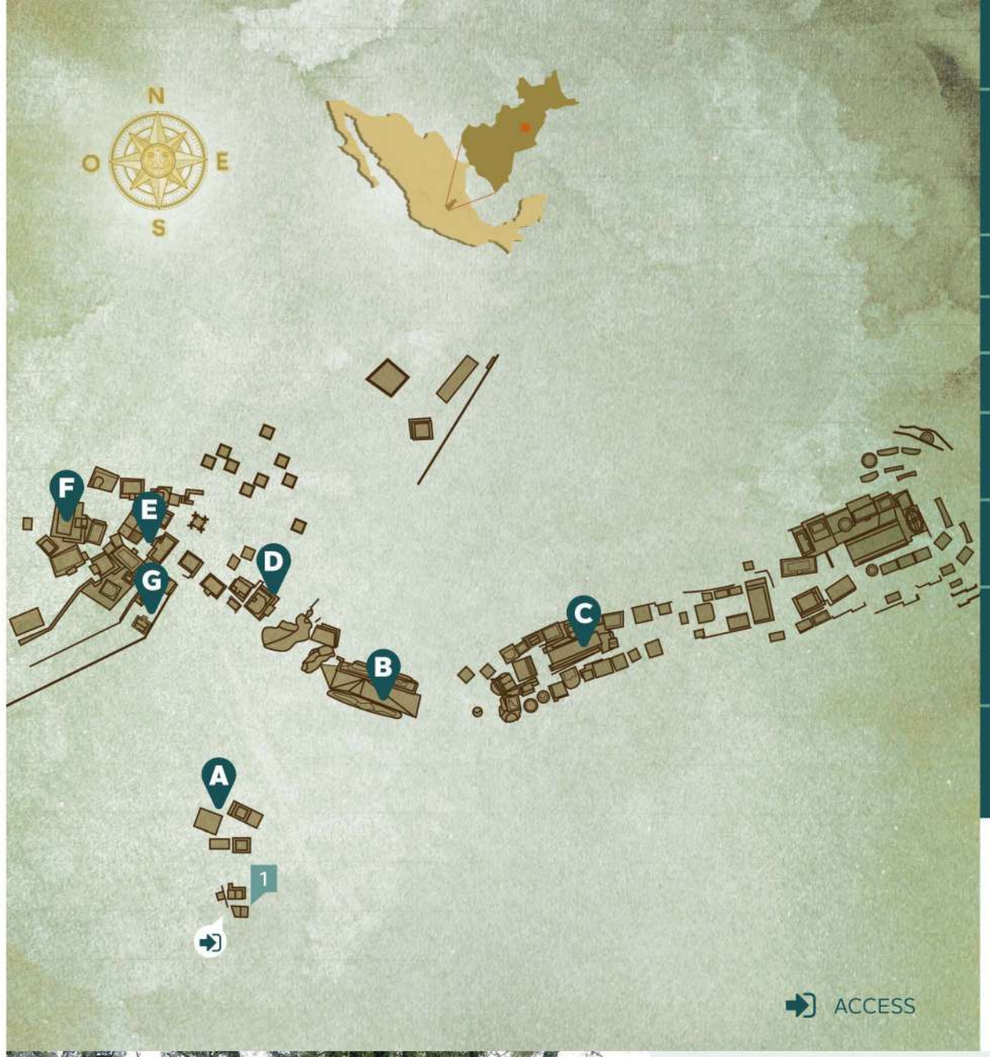
Ranas I Sector

The visit begins in the south sector of Ranas I, which stands to the east of the site's entrance. It is a long plateau of about 360 m in length by 70 m in average width. In this east sector, three ballcourts stand on the central axis of the plateau, defining the layout for construction in this part of the city, surrounded by more than 68 structures and platforms. The ballcourts are type I, lacking markers, and their orientation is determined by the shape of the hill.

Ranas II Sector

In Ranas II or the north sector, the hill has an irregular shape, with an elongation, like a peninsula, at its northeast end (Ranas IV). The settlement covers the upper part and east and south sides of the hill. The structures are arranged taking advantage of the slope, which stands at a level 45 m from Ranas I.

The archaeological site of Ranas, the first to be opened to the public in the state of Querétaro, was declared a zone of monuments in 2000 by the Mexican government.





Ranas III Sector

The Ranas III sector is at the southwest of the settlement. Its location seems peripheral to the site and probably served to control passage to the city. Compared to the other two sectors, it has a lower density of construction, with modest monuments. However, as the entryway to the ceremonial center, it has different construction elements, such as long, stepped contention walls, stairs set into the wall, double-chamber rooms, and so forth. Ranas III was affected by the construction of the access road that destroyed several of its monuments.

ESSENTIALS:

- A *Ranas III access complex* *(2 rooms, 2 work and temple buildings)*
- B *Ballcourt 3*
- C *Ballcourt 2*
- D *Ranas II Structure 3*
- E *Sunken Patio or vestibule*
- F *Main Platform* *(Ranas Structure 16)*
- G *Ranas III temazcal (steambath) and Building 3*

1 Ticket booth and services

AND DON'T MISS . . .

- In San Joaquín the National Huapango Competition is a major event held more than 45 times, without a fixed calendar, but always near Holy Week. Similarly, the patron saint's celebrations in August see the return of much of the local population that has migrated seeking new opportunities.
- The Herrera Grottoes, a natural grotto with limestone formations, are at the entrance to the municipal capital. The town council added a 400-meter path for visitors.
- Toluquilla, 13 km from San Joaquín, is the largest archaeological site in Querétaro and is remarkable for its state of preservation.
- For adventure tourism, in the summertime you can see waterfalls in the community near Maravillas.

DID YOU KNOW . . .

- *The location of the settlement can only be understood if its surroundings are analyzed. It is a strategic point where communication, mercury deposits, arable land, and year-round access to water coincide.*
- *Given its location, the site of Ranas has access to three ecological niches that maximize diversity and the availability of subsistence and operative resources for the population.*
- *The Ranas Archaeological Zone has a unique setting, because visitors discover the structures as the visit unfolds. In the process of architectural preservation, attempts have been made to respect the natural setting of the mixed netleaf oak forest, a remnant of the forest and refuge zone of small fauna that has already been lost in other parts of the Sierra stemming from the intrusion of human settlements.*
- *Research has uncovered fourteen pre-Hispanic mine entries associated with the site. To date, it is the only settlement in Mexico where its protection polygon includes at least three ancient mine openings for future investigation.*
- *Progress made in cinnabar exchange research has made it possible to identify its chemical footprint, which suggests this mineral was traded with distant regions. Cinnabar extracted at Ranas has been found as far away as Teotihuacan and possibly Monte Albán.*

WHERE TO SEE IT?

The archaeological zone of Ranas occupies the upper part of two hills that are joined to form a sixty degree triangle, surrounded by ravines with a single access on its west side. For its complexity, it was divided into four sections (Ranas I to Ranas IV), by archaeologist Margarita Velasco in 1985. Of these, only three sectors have been explored and their buildings consolidated.

