



Ciudad Perdida, Central Platform, Feasting and Ceremonial Terraces. © Global Heritage Fund.

# Ciudad Perdida, Colombia

## A “Lost City” of Unique Architectural Form

### Site Significance

The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, a UNESCO-designated Biosphere Reserve, is a triangle-shaped mountainous massif comprising 12,000 square miles that rises from the Colombian coastline to an altitude of approximately 19,000 feet within 30 miles of the Caribbean, making it one of the highest and most ecologically diverse coastal mountain ranges in the world. From A.D. 200 until A.D. 1600-1650, the northern portion of the massif was inhabited by a number of autonomous polities of varying size and political power known collectively as the Tayrona. Archaeological research since the early 1920s has shown that during this time period, the Tayrona built over 250 stone masonry towns spread out through a 2000-square-mile area.

Ciudad Perdida, which means “Lost City”, was discovered in 1975 and includes more than 200 structures in an area of approximately 30 hectares (80 acres). The structures include dwellings of various sizes, terraces, stone-lined paths and staircases, plazas, ceremonial

and feasting areas, canals and storehouses. In comparison to the other 26 settlements found in the upper section of the Buritaca river basin, it appears to be the largest of the Tayrona sites in the Sierra Nevada and is believed to have been the center of Tayrona political, social and economic power.

### Preservation by Design®

#### Project Goals

GHF is implementing a 5-6 year project in the upper Buritaca River Basin in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia, focusing on the conservation of sites from the Tayrona civilization. The Tayrona Conservation Project focuses on planning, conservation, community development and strategic partnerships for the sustainable preservation of Ciudad Perdida National Archaeological Park and other surrounding Tayrona civilization sites, and the protection of the rich cultural heritage of the indigenous communities of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.



#### Threats

- Climate
- Vegetation
- Neglect
- Looting
- Unsustainable Tourism

#### Start Date

2009

## Planning

GHF and partners will focus on the development of a Buritaca Management Plan, including a tourism plan and carrying capacity assessment. Planning efforts will also include biological and environment assessments of the Buritaca Valley and community development needs assessment for the indigenous and local communities.

## Project Partnerships

- Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History (ICANH)
- Organization Gonawindua Tayrona (OGT)
- Colombian Ministry of Culture

## Conservation Science

Scientific conservation will include mapping of indigenous sacred sites, Ciudad Perdida and other major Tayrona sites of the Upper Buritaca.

Conservation activities will be focused at the site of Ciudad Perdida and 2-3 other major Tayrona sites in the area.

## Community

GHF community development efforts will focus on trail maintenance to Ciudad Perdida and the development of indigenous owned eco-tourism lodges in the Buritaca River Basin, training, capacity building, basic infrastructure improvements and basic health and education improvements for both indigenous- and local communities. Other activities will include revival of traditional handicrafts, environmental and cultural protection curriculum development for local schools, and microcredit and business skills training for indigenous- and local women.



(Top) Vegetation overgrowth on a ring platform. (Bottom) Local community member (left) and archaeologist Santiago Giraldo (right) discuss Ciudad Perdida. © Global Heritage Fund.



The trail leading from the river to the central platforms of Ciudad Perdida is made up of 1,200 stone steps. © Global Heritage Fund.

**The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, a UNESCO-designated Biosphere Reserve, is one of the most ecologically diverse coastal mountains in the world.**



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