



## Cerro Sechín

*Casma, Ancash, Peru*

Cerro Sechín is one of the most ancient coastal Andean civilizations in Peru. Located at the foothills of the Sechín River in the Casma Valley, 168 miles north of Lima, the ceremonial center was discovered in 1937 by renowned Peruvian archaeologist Julio C. Tello. Early excavations at the ceremonial site uncovered 97 engraved stone slabs along the outer wall of one building. The carvings, dated to 1770–1510 B.C., depicted combat rituals and human sacrifice. Further studies determined that the five stone temples were part of a secondary structure that enveloped earlier mud buildings. Polychrome murals dated between 2290 and 2020 B.C. have been found in the mud surface of the mud buildings depicting stylized felines, an animal revered in the Formative Period. To date, over 300 carved monoliths have been uncovered, making Cerro Sechín one of the earliest ornamented sites in the Americas. Some of its iconography is used in the decoration of the main public buildings and plazas of Casma city.

Cerro Sechín is part of an archipelago of archaeological centers in the Casma valley that include Sechín Alto, Sechín Bajo, Manchan, Chankillo, and others located in close proximity to the Pan-American Highway. Decades of archaeological explorations culminated with the opening of a site museum in 1984. Despite receiving over 17,000 visitors each year, the stone monument at Cerro Sechín has not been treated since its excavation and restoration for public use in the 1970s. There is an urgent need for conservation work to prevent the accelerating decay of its carved monoliths. These unique sculptures are suffering cracking and erosion from exposure to the elements and seismic activity. The museum exhibit, now almost 30 years old, is outdated. It is hoped that the inclusion on the Watch will serve as an important catalyst for timely action for the conservation and management of the site.