

DID YOU KNOW?

Boquete's Valley Held Chiefdoms 1,500 Years Before the First Coffee Tree Was Planted

Long before the word “Boquete” existed, the slopes of **Volcán Barú** were home to a sophisticated society archaeologists call the **Barriles culture**, part of the wider Gran Chiriquí world that stretched into what is now Costa Rica. At the Sitio Barriles site, a few kilometers from present-day Volcán, excavators uncovered a row of **14 carved stone statues**—ten depicting solitary figures and four showing one person riding on the shoulders of another, a detail scholars read as evidence of a stratified society with ruling elites. Radiocarbon dating places the site's peak between **A.D. 500 and 800**, and recent excavations suggest it was a real village of 500 to 1,000 residents, not just a ceremonial ground.

Human presence in the Boquete area goes back further still. Petroglyphs carved into rock in **Caldera**, today a corregimiento of Boquete district, point to habitation as early as **600 B.C.**, and researchers studying sediment cores from Laguna Boquete have traced signs of human interaction with the landscape back roughly **7,000 years**.

When Spanish colonizers pushed into Panama's interior, the rugged highlands around the volcano became something else entirely: a refuge. The **Ngäbe** people retreated into the mountains and cloud forest to avoid subjugation, and their descendants—organized today as the **Ngäbe-Buglé** comarca—remain part of the region's population centuries later, long after the mountain pass that gave the valley its Spanish name became a coffee capital instead of a hideout.

Sources:

- Wikipedia, “Barriles”
- Wikipedia, “Boquete District”
- Wikipedia (Spanish), “Distrito de Boquete”
- Boquete Papers, “Historia del Distrito de Boquete”