While trying to understand the Formative-Initial/Early Horizon phase in the south-central Andes, we are especially interested in the early evidence for increasing political scale and agricultural systems. We are trying to uncover evidence of the domestic areas and activities. We also realize that the Formative world included ritual as central and thus are integrating the ritual evidence into our views of Chiripa. We have excavated in two areas, above and below the mound, looking for domestic houses and middens. In both areas of the site, Llusco and Santiago, we have instead found large (approx. 13 by 13 m) semi-subterranean cobble stone-walled enclosures. At this stage in our research we believe these to be ceremonial (gathering) areas rather than habitation. The Llusco enclosure dates to the early Late Chiripa phase, we believe dating to about 800-600 B.C. The area of Santiago to the east of the enclosure directly overlooks the lakeshore. This zone is a complex of use and rebuilding layers throughout all of the Formative times and into the Tiwanaku phases. While there are surfaces, the later ones seem to be fairly clean and in some cases plastered with yellow or white, with burials throughout. The earlier surface use is not clear. Although the rubbish suggests daily life tasks were performed, there is no evidence for houses as we understand them in the Andes. At some point the walls were collapsed and a mound of rubble was formed running north-south in this area. What these different surfaces mean is still very hard to determine. This area of the site is extremely important yet still quite mysterious as to the types of activities that occurred there. More analysis must be done there to explain this sector.

To the west of these surfaces and cuts, at the end of the 1996 season, we discovered a 14 by 14 m stone-walled enclosure that we think is another of these semi-subterranean enclosures. This one could date as early as 1300 B.C. Because we only outlined this structure in the last few days of excavation, we do not know the details of its construction, but we do know that its east wall had a small stone niche that had nothing visible in it. This could be what we see in later Tiwanaku and even Inkaic enclosures; niches that held important sacred objects.
The research on the mound provides us with a much better view of its history. We now know that there were a series of house and floor rebuildings during the Formative times, as well as several reorientations of the structures. The painstaking work on the profiles has led to a map of the actual measurements as well as an understanding of what is left of the Formative site. Sadly, no structure remains untouched, although some are in quite good shape.

The Llusco and Santiago enclosures are the earliest in this region. Previously investigated structures such as these have dates in the 400-200 B.C. range. This evidence suggests that Chiripa had some of the earliest ceremonial sectors in the region. Its importance is further seen in the systematic surface collections that were completed this year. The Formative site now seems to be about 7 ha. in size. Given that the ceremonial areas, Llusco, Monticulo, and Santiago only make up less than 1 ha. in area, there seems to have been substantial residence surrounding this central precinct, much larger than other Formative sites found in the nearby regional surveys. This larger area will be studied in the next field season.

Chiripa has opened up the view of early settled life in the Titicaca Basin, allowing us to begin to see how people lived in a world that was simultaneously ritualized while being routine.