Introduction
At the beginning of the second half of the 1999 field season, work was begun in the northern portion of grid C/D. Visible architectural remains in the eastern 'saddle' and on the artificially steep and high slopes which define the 'saddle' were the principal focus of our investigation in the area. Excavation in this area had two main goals. First, we were interested to secure stratified deposits in order to date the standing architectural remains. Second, we needed to put some exploratory trenches into the Tel away from the main area of interest in the south to ascertain where the post-Hellenistic occupation of the Tel (implied in the middle to late Roman temple and mausolea) may have been. Faced with an enormous area of interest and a three-week digging season, we chose to maximize our efficiency and flexibility by working in 2 x 2 m trenches, rather than the 'standard' 5 x 5. In the end, we were able to excavate four 2 x 2 m trenches in a rough line across the 'saddle': three on the opposite slopes and one in the middle. Our original hope, that these architectural remains were associated with a monumental entrance to the top of the Tel, was unfulfilled. Nevertheless, the information gathered during this exploratory work will be significant for directing future work in the area of the 'saddle'.

C/D 5.8
In Grid C/D 5.8, at the peak of the artificial slope south of the eastern 'saddle', we began work in a 2 x 2 m probe which was located 5 m north and 1 m east of the southwest corner of the grid. This probe was placed to catch the north face of the visible east/west wall. Two loci were discerned in the course of excavation. Locus 58000 (topsoil) was full of modern debris and was an average depth of 75 cm. Below topsoil was a thick and dense deposit of collapsed architectural remains (58001) which consisted primarily of large worked-stone and formed-plaster blocks. Very little ceramic material was included in the collapse levels. At a depth of about 65 cm we discovered a modern utility pole buried in the collapse, with a machined iron rod secured to it. According to Martin (the excavator from Malikiya), this must have been a telephone pole which connected the modern Arab village to the British base at Yehuda Junction, since the village was not wired for electricity. The architectural collapse must then be contemporary with or post-date the forced abandonment of the village in 1948. We were not able to date the wall itself through excavation of this particular probe.

Having missed the wall in the first probe in C/D 5.8, we opened a second probe located 3 m north and 2 m east of the southwest corner of the grid, directly over a visible stretch of the east/west wall. Topsoil (58000) was consistent with the first probe, as was the architectural collapse (58001), although we were able to excavate through the collapse at a depth of about 90 cm. The east/west wall (58002) was built in a style which is similar to standing walls on the north portion of the Tel: large flat stones (probably reused) as orthoquats on the outside face of the wall with cobbles in courses for the inner face. The wall was preserved to a height of 1.04 m and a width of 0.62 m, with a 2.27 m stretch of wall visible in the probe. No foundation trench was identified in the excavation of this probe. Wall 58002 was founded on locus 58003, a dark-brown silty soil for which the latest datable material was Mamluk. As typical for a 2 x 2, work was stopped when we ran out of room to move in the bottom of the trench.
C/D 8.7

A probe was also opened in grid C/D 8.7, 4 m east and 1 m north of the southwest corner of the grid, on the slope north of the 'saddle', in an area adjacent to preserved architecture suggestive of a bastion. While no architecture was discovered in this probe, the soils and ceramic assemblages are very interesting for the later (post-Hellenistic) history of the site. Topsoil (78000) was approximately 25 cm thick and consisted of a thick and dense layer of architectural collapse and tumble. This collapse layer (87001) was over half a meter in depth, and consisted primarily of large worked-stone and plaster inclusions with little ceramic material. Below the collapse was a compacted fill/debris layer (87002) which was the surface onto which the architectural elements collapsed. This was the first locus with a significant amount of ceramic material, and the latest datable material for 87002 was early Islamic. Below this compacted layer was a level of loose dark brown soil (87003) with quite a bit of ceramics, the majority of which belonged to two discrete vessels: an Arab cook-pot and a Mamluk (?) basin. We are interpreting this locus as a dump associated with a domestic structure in the vicinity, probably on the top of the slope. The last locus to be excavated in this probe was a semi-compact grey-brown fill (87004) with a tight assemblage of Byzantine and early Islamic ceramics. This would have been the surface onto which 87003 was dumped. Excavation in C/D 8.7 was stopped due to safety factors.

C/D 7.8

The probe in C/D 7.8 was the final probe to be opened as part of this small project. It was located in the middle of the lowest portion of the 'saddle', in the hope that erosional factors associated with the southern and northern slopes would not be as significant in its depositional history. Within the grid, the probe was placed 1 m north and 1 m west of the southeast corner. Topsoil (78000) was relatively thin, about 15 cm. Below topsoil was a thick layer of architectural collapse and debris (78001) similar to 58001 and 87001. The density of the collapse and the size of some of the stones prohibited its complete excavation. On a positive note, this probe caught a section of an east-west wall (78002) in its southwest corner at a depth of 25 cm. This wall, for which we were unable to secure a foundation date, is in a different architectural style than 58002. Two rows and two courses of well-cut stone blocks were visible at shut-down. The maximum preserved height of 78002 is 0.62 m, with a width of 0.60 m and a length of 0.72 m. Very little ceramic material came out of any of the units in C/D 7.8.

Conclusions and Suggestions

While these four probes in grid C/D were not entirely successful (no trace of Hellenistic monumental architecture was found), they are beneficial both in terms of defining the use-history of different areas on the Tel and for assisting in future excavation strategy. As distinct from the trenches in the southernmost portion of the Tel, the loci from these four probes were rich in material culture of the Byzantine and later periods, although we are still lacking the elusive middle and late Roman material which would be contemporary with the construction of the temple. Finds dating to the Mamluk period, notable wall 58003 and the basins from C/D 8.7, are particularly interesting, as that is a use-phase which was more or less unexpected on the site. As to excavation strategy for future seasons, it is clear that a trench will have to excavate quite deep to reach pre-Arab
levels. Across these three grids and in three different topographic areas (peak, mid-slope, and 'saddle') were found a relatively thin topsoil and a thick and dense locus of architectural debris which was difficult to move without machinery and hindered excavation in the probes. The size of a trench which would be large enough to make sense of any architectural remains and yet small enough to work efficiently through the debris locus will have to be considered carefully.