



ARCHAEO MAYA

The Newsletter of Maya Exploration Center

www.mayaexploration.org

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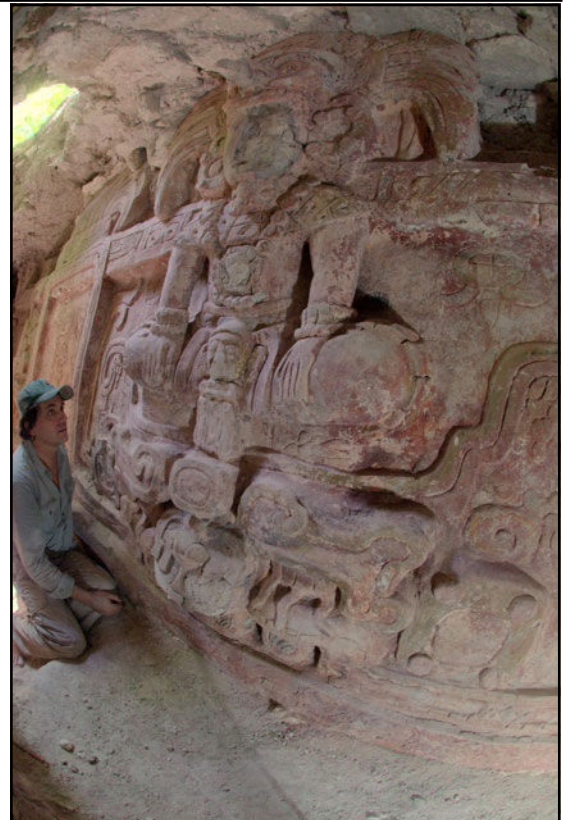
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Important Discoveries at Holmul

Another massive Maya stucco frieze was found this summer – this time at the site of Holmul in the jungles of Guatemala's Peten rainforest. Encountered by a team led by archaeologist Francisco Estrada-Belli, it's one of the most pristine and elaborate ever found in the Peten. An outer phase of the structure was carefully built over the frieze, preserving it rather than destroying it as was often the practice when the Maya built over an earlier temple. The reason behind its preservation may be the importance of its message. The central element of the frieze is a seated Holmul lord. The text along the base explains that the lord's ascension was overseen by the neighboring city of Naranjo's ruler, Ajwosaj. Contemporary texts at Naranjo state that Ajwosaj was a vassal of the powerful kingdom of Calakmul.

The inscription places the commemorative work of art at about 590 AD, which is a time just after Calakmul defeated Tikal and exerted their dominance over the entire Peten. Holmul was a small city, probably about 10,000 people at its peak, but its position along trade routes was important. For Tikal, it was in the route towards the coast and its many marine resources. For Calakmul to the north, it was along the route to the jade and obsidian resources of the Guatemalan highlands. The discovery of this incredibly ornate



Estrada-Belli at the corner of Holmul's stucco frieze

piece of public art indicates not only that Calakmul controlled the route, but that their support for Holmul was allowing the city to flourish. The more intrepid archaeologists like Estrada-Belli hunt the dense Peten rainforest for these Classic Period cities, the more Calakmul's golden age comes into focus.

To learn more about Holmul and Estrada-Belli's non-profit Maya Archaeology Initiative, log on to the project's website at:

www.mayaarchaeology.org

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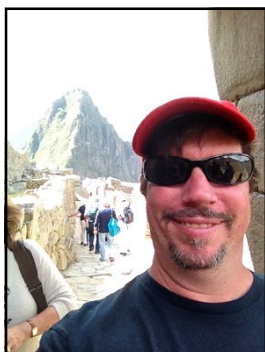
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Letter from the Director



Normally we try to get this fall newsletter out right on the autumnal equinox, but this year our director (me) was driving across the desert to the Nazca plains that day. So, please excuse our lateness. It's that time of year again, when MEC's field work is slow and planning is in high gear. I'm happily buried in new itineraries, travel courses and lecture series ideas. Many of the new plans for 2014 are featured in this edition of ArchaeoMaya. We have three private travel courses planned before spring and two publicly accessible adventures - a January travel course with Dr. Michael Grofe to the incredible temples of Angkor in Cambodia and a trip from Palenque all the way to Copan in February led by MEC's newest addition, Dr. David Hixson. Dr. Hixson is also leading a program of his own in January - a community service oriented experience in the Yucatan. I encourage reading all about it on page 3 and joining him in supporting modern Maya people.

As usual, this fall edition presents my choices for the locations of the summer 2014 courses I will lead for the University of Texas at Austin's Chautauqua program. This year I've picked the pyramids lining the coast of northern Peru and Easter Island. The courses will occur back to back so participants who want to attend both can combine

airfares to South America. Read more about those courses on page 5 and come join me.

This summer was a busy and exciting time for Latin American archaeology. Our lead article relates to the discovery of a massive stucco frieze found in Holmul and our "News From the Field" section explains some significant finds deep in the jungles of Mexico and Bolivia. Though not exactly a new find, this edition also features the newly opened site of Atzompa in Oaxaca and why it's changing the way the public sees the ancient Zapotec capital of Monte Alban.

Last but not least, this edition includes the first notice of our 2014 Mayan Calendar. Did you think we would stop making it now that 2012 has passed? No way! In our opinion the Maya calendar continues passed the 13th Bak'tun and thus so will our annual publication. Our predecessor Jeff Chouinard published the Mayan Calendar for a complete katun (20 years) and we intend to carry the torch for at least another if not longer.

As always, I want to end this with thanks to all of you who read this newsletter and support MEC through your program participation, donations and general interest in our work. We wouldn't exist without you!

Happy Fall,

A Letter from MEC Associate Dr. David R. Hixson

Dear friends of MEC,

I began my life among the Maya by volunteering with a wonderful group called "*Intercambio Cultural Maya*" ("Maya Cultural Exchange"). I was only a teenager at the time, but it changed my life. I would not be who I am now without the experience of living in a rural Maya village during my early college years. And I am not alone. One of my great friends, Dr. Christian Wells, also began his career with a trip we took together, volunteering for a Guatemalan refugee center in Campeche through *Intercambio Cultural Maya*.

I have continued to volunteer with this organization on-and-off for the past 20+ years. I was fortunate enough to bring *Intercambio Cultural Maya* to my dissertation project community of Chunchucmil in 2002, where we built a structure that eventually became the community children's library and the town's only connection to the internet.



Intercambio volunteers working in a Maya community



A free dental clinic hosted by the Intercambio Cultural Maya

As a professional anthropologist / archaeologist, I continue to believe that *Intercambio* is not only one of the best volunteer experiences for the novice sojourner into the Maya area, but also a wonderful way to "give back" for those of us who have spent a lifetime studying this wonderfully enriching culture.

Intercambio Cultural Maya is essentially an "alternative winter break". This year, volunteers can offer their time just after Christmas to travel to a small village in the north of the Yucatan peninsula, San Angel, Quintana Roo. There, volunteers will be paired up with a Maya host family for one week while performing services for the community.

There are various projects that meet the skill sets of everyone who wishes to contribute, from college students to experienced senior citizens, and everyone in between. Specific projects slated for this winter's trip to San Angel include:

Construction: Building a new room for the local school (no skills necessary, just a desire to work hard).

Dental: A free dental clinic for the entire community, providing a much-needed service that is not readily available to rural Maya communities.

Optical: A free optical clinic to provide prescription eyeglasses at no cost to anyone who needs them.

Translation: Helping fellow volunteers (construction, dental, or optical project members) communicate with the people of the village.

[Spanish - English; or Spanish - English - Maya]. All levels of translators may apply.

All of these projects have been specifically requested by the local *ejido* (native communal government) of San Angel. This is a volunteer cultural exchange group, not a "mission" trip (no religious proselytizing is allowed by members of *Intercambio*). In fact, you will find that you gain more from this experience than you can possibly give. You will gain a life-long relationship with a host family, and a perspective on living in a rural Maya village during the

Letter from Dr. David R. Hixson

holiday season that will last you a lifetime.

If any of you have ever hosted foreign exchange students, you know how this experience can affect both the student and the host. In this case... *you* will be the student, living and learning among the Maya, while you help their community with improving their school and their healthcare.

The home-stays and the projects are brief. *Intercambio* spends only a week in the village, but this week is just after Christmas, and covers New Year's Eve. It is a magical time to live within a Maya village -- a time that most modern anthropologists never see (our research grants usually cover summer months, since few institutions can cover winter sabbaticals).

The entire trip (**December 28th to January 9th**) also includes visits to the ancient Maya ruins of Ek Balam and the North Coast of the Yucatan Peninsula. We are also trying to arrange a visit to unreconstructed ruins nearby the village of San Angel, organized by a local Maya co-op, thus supporting local Maya eco-tourism. Applications will be accepted through **October 15th, 2013**.

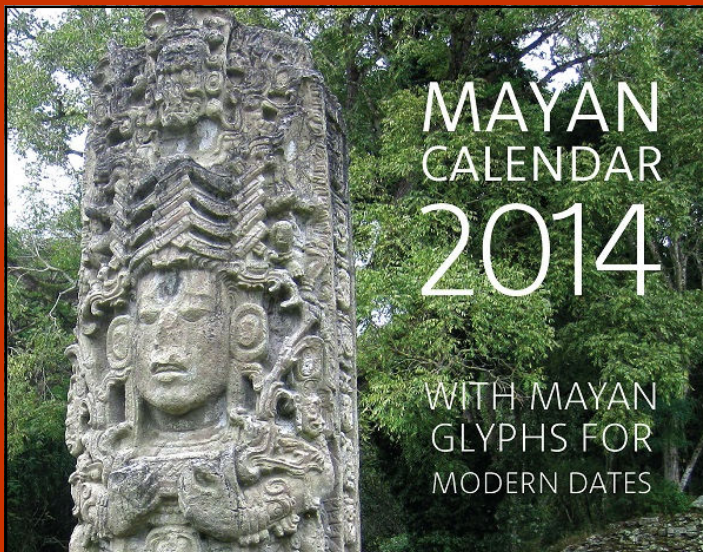
Limited assistance grants are available for students to cover some costs. Please contact "*Intercambio Cultural Maya*" at the URL below for more info:

<http://www.intercambio-maya.org/current.html>

Dr. David R. Hixson
Maya Archaeologist & MEC Associate
Shepherd University
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A Maya family in the village of San Angel, Yucatan



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The 2014 Mayan Calendar is available for pre-orders now! Shipments begin the first week of November.

We are printing a limited quantity this year, so get yours before they're gone.

To order, log on to:

www.mayan-calendar.com

The 2014 Chautauqua Courses - Easter Island and Peru

The Chautauqua Program is a continuing education program offered by the University of Texas at Austin Center for STEM Education. The program was originally created as a faculty development program, but since 2010 it has been open to the general public as well. For the last ten years Dr. Barnhart has led summer travel courses for the Chautauqua Program. Here are the two courses he'll be leading in the summer of 2014. If you're interested, please contact Dr. Barnhart or visit www.ahautravel.com for more details.

Mysteries of the Moai and the Demise of Rapa Nui

Easter Island - June 25 - 30, 2014

Travel to one of the most remote archaeological sites in the world – Easter Island – for a first hand investigation of its incredible statues, called Moai. Books depict but a few of the over 900 Moai on the island.



The Ancient Pyramids of Peru's Northern Coast

Peru - July 1 - 7, 2014

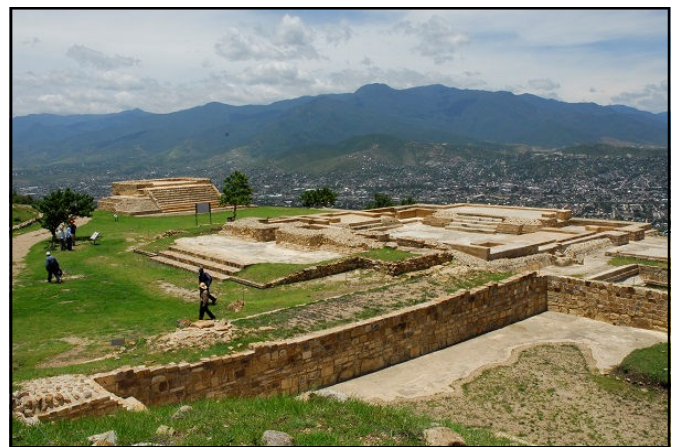
Did you know that along Peru's north coast stand pyramids older than the ones in Egypt? This course will travel through those lands, learning about the Chimú, the Moche and the many unnamed cultures that came before them.

Atzompa - Monte Alban's Sister City

For decades the astute visitor to the Zapotec ruins of Monte Alban in Oaxaca would ask their guide "what's that on the ridge over there?" The guide would reply that it was an unexcavated area of large temples. Now finally, just opened for tourism last fall, the ruins of Atzompa have been revealed and they're changing the way we see Monte Alban.

The traditional view of Monte Alban was that it was the "disembedded capital" of the entire Valley of Oaxaca from about 200 BC through 800 AD, standing alone on a mountaintop above the valley's many smaller cities and villages. Now Atzompa, built on a mountaintop just two kilometers away, divides that lone capital city into two distinct locations. MEC's director Ed Barnhart led a group of professors to Atzompa in July and was astounded at the size and complexity of the site.

Like Monte Alban, Atzompa has finely built elite residential compounds, wide open plazas and massive pyr-



An Atzompa elite residential compound (photo by Carol Ventura)

amids. It also has a large ball court built identical to Monte Alban's, but five meters longer. Surprisingly, it also has two other ball courts. Finding a Mesoamerican city with more than one ball court is rare and the two smaller versions at Atzompa have been theorized to be

News From the Field

10,000 year old finds in the Amazon?

The earthen mounds and causeways covering Bolivia's Amazon basin have been known for some time now, but thus far the occupation evidence has all been in the AD time frame. Now Swiss archaeologist Umberto Lomardo says he has dated fragments of old hearths deep within the fill a mound back to 10,500 BP. If he's correct, this human occupation evidence closely matches the dates Ann Roosevelt found in Brazilian caves a few years back. Archaeologists believe that the mounds were created by piling up human refuse for generations, but this would push the practice much farther back than anyone suspected. For the moment the evidence is still meager and needs more outside verification, but the potential for how we view Amazonian pre-history is exciting.

A Gruesome Discovery at Uxul

The bodies of 24 decapitated and dismembered individuals were found in a sealed chultun (a manmade cave designed to store water) at the site of Uxul in Campeche this summer. The find would not have been possible had the Maya not sealed the cave with gravel and mud at 1400 years ago. The victims were all adults, both men and women, all with clear hatchet marks on the cervical vertebrae. Some of the teeth recovered had jade inlays, indicating they were elites. While unsure if they were locals from Uxul or captured enemies, Dr. Nikolai Grube of the University of Bonn remarked, "The discovery of the mass grave proves that the dismemberment of war prisoners and opponents often represented in Maya art was in fact practiced."

Atzompa (cont.)

"training courts". Another exciting find at Atzompa was a section of ceramic kilns, evidence rarely encountered and an indicator that craft production was an elite activity.

Ceramics and carbon 14 dates from Atzompa indicate the city was built late in Monte Alban's long history, between 650 and 800 AD. The rest of the valley experienced a population surge about 600 AD, so perhaps Atzompa was a response to a need for more living, ceremonial, and commercial space. On the other hand, it might have been a response to the fragmenting of political authority that we also know to have occurred at the end of the Classic Period. Whatever its inspiration, the site of Atzompa is now open to the public and has dispelled the long standing idea that Monte Alban was a lone capital on a single mountaintop.

Exploring Angkor, Cambodia

January 4-11, 2014



Led by Dr. Michael Grofe, this travel course will explore the ruins of Angkor and teach about the illustrious history of the Khmer Empire.

<http://www.mayaexploration.org/study.php>

Pillars of the Classic Maya: Palenque to Copan

February 21 - March 2, 2014

Led by Dr. David Hixson, this tour will begin in Palenque and go by land, river and rainforests all the way to Copan in Honduras.



<http://www.mayaexploration.org/tours.php>

Angkor Zenith Passage Research

After four years of travel, study, thinking and writing, we have finally posted our research paper on the temples of Angkor, Cambodia. The paper presents the photos we took during 2010 and 2011 and our theories about how and why Angkor's temples were meant to function as zenith tubes. In conclusion, it suggests that zenith passage may have been more important in ancient Hindu India than commonly understood and links the Hindu concept of "the center of the universe" to the location of zenith passage in the sky. This paper has been a long time coming in part because we wanted to give the Cambodian authorities the respect of reading it first before we shared it with a wider audience. They have now done so, and while still somewhat skeptical of our ideas, they have acknowledged the merit of our theories. The paper is now posted for all to read on the MEC website at:



www.mayaexploration.org/pdf/angkorzenithpassage.pdf

Just click on the link below and bookmark it to always use our portal to do your Amazon .com shopping:

www.mayaexploration.org/amazon

Thanks to Everyone Who Donated to MEC This Summer

Colleen Christensen • Betty DeGroh • Scott Baker • C.H. Drake

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