



# ARCHAEO MAYA

The Newsletter of Maya Exploration Center

[www.mayaexploration.org](http://www.mayaexploration.org)

## In This Issue:

- MEC's partnership with AIA
- New howler monkey research in Tabasco
- Teotihuacan's ties with Tikal affirmed
- Albright College in Chiapas and Peten
- New fashions in Maya weaving
- Three day seminar on Maya Mathematics
- A big change at Chichen Itza
- Summer tours

## On The Horizon:

- MEC travels to the American Southwest and Angkor Wat
- Community service work in Peru
- Thanksgiving tour to Palenque and Tikal
- Fall Lecture Series - Misunderstanding 2012
- New discoveries about Maya geometry

## MEC Partners with AIA for Site Preservation

On April 28, the Archaeological Institute of America held a gala dinner in New York City on behalf of its Site Preservation Program. The evening featured a grand Peruvian feast and live auction in support of preservation efforts around the world. MEC donated a trip for two to the auction and Dr. Kirk French represented MEC as an honored guest of Archaeology, AIA's superb popular magazine.

AIA is the oldest and largest archaeological organization in North America, with over 200,000 members in the United States, Canada, and overseas who are devoted to archaeology and to fostering a deeper public understanding of ancient cultures and civilizations around the world. Through its international research centers, the non-profit organization supports archaeological studies and promotes sound archaeological practices in the field.

AIA is a leading advocate for the protection and preservation of the world's archaeological heritage. In every nation, archaeological sites are besieged by looting, vandalism, increased tourism, and environmental change. Maya ruins are no exception. Wholesale looting and vandalism of unprotected sites in the rainforest pose a chronic threat to artifacts and monuments, and a genuine danger to archaeologists working in remote areas of the jungle. Nature is another force to be reckoned with. Palenque's exquisite stuccos and murals were devastated by the



MEC's Kirk French and Laurel Pearson at the AIA Charity Gala in NYC

eruption of Chichonal in 1986, and since then, the stones are eroding under the steady fall of acid rain. Yaxchilan and Piedras Negras are threatened by a proposed hydroelectric dam, which will flood these and dozens of "lost cities" along the Usumacinta River. Other Maya sites suffer the perils of tourist hype. Chichen Itza, declared one of the new "Seven Wonders of the World", receives thousands of visitors a day, far too many for authorities to handle. The potential damage, huge under normal circumstances, is aggravated by crowds attending rock concerts bathed by the psychedelic lights illuminating the great El Castillo pyramid.

Bringing in Elton John and Paul McCartney is a good example of what not to do. AIA provides funds for innovative projects that not only preserve archaeological sites, but also educate the local community and the public at large about the site's significance for humanity.

...continued on page 3



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## Letter from the Director



When the world finds itself in tough economic times, the role of non-profit organizations like Maya Exploration Center becomes ever more vital. Despite our own financial challenges, MEC continues to support research, education, and cultural preservation. On behalf of Maya high school students, we are sending 10 laptops to the Yashalum dormitories in Yajalon, Chiapas. As you'll read in this edition's lead article, we have made a donation to *Archaeology* magazine's program for historic site preservation. In early May, Christopher Powell will lead Simpson College students to the remote Quechua communities of Huancarani and Piscohuata, to feed people cut off by mudslides in the Sacred Valley. The food program is being organized in conjunction with San Jose Hogar de Niños Transitorios in Cuzco. Simpson students will also be serving in the Hogar soup kitchen, which feeds over 450 homeless children every day.

This year MEC provided a travel grant for Carl Calloway's investigation into the origins of the Maya calendar and supplied video equipment for Kirk French's documentary, "Land and Water Revisited." Our research, though

diverse, is a team effort, and we strive to give aid in proportion to the support we receive.

This edition of ArchaeoMaya reports on important new discoveries at Teotihuacan. You'll also learn the latest on MEC board member LeAndra Luecke's investigation of howler monkeys in the wetlands of Tabasco. Our chief editor Carol Karasik presents a new view on Maya textiles, inspired by her work with Chip Morris on his forthcoming book, *A Guide to Maya Textiles of the Chiapas Highlands*. A review of *Travelers to the Other World* tells the incredible story of two Zinacantec Maya men who traveled through the United States in the 1960s. As always, you'll read about our most recent study abroad program and the great experiences had by our latest batch of student explorers.

This summer offers exciting new ways that you can benefit from MEC's work - new educational tours, a Maya seminar on the campus of University of Texas at Austin, and new ePublications for the fast-growing world of digital reading devices. Whether you join one of our learning adventures, support our research through donations, or broaden your horizons by reading our publications, each and every one of you who reads this newsletter is a vital part of our growing community. Thanks for your support!

### The 2010 Chautauqua Program

Come on a learning adventure with Dr. Edwin Barnhart and be part of MEC's on-going research on ancient sciences.

This summer's new destinations are:

**Chaco Canyon • Copan • Angkor, Cambodia**

To learn more just click on this link or visit

[www.mayaexploration.org/tours.php](http://www.mayaexploration.org/tours.php)

## Albright's Adventure in the Mundo Maya

It was the first time any of the students at Albright ever visited Mexico and Guatemala, and they were really up for all kinds of new adventures. They saw the giant Olmec heads at La Venta ("Wow!") and then headed for the jungle and the mysterious land of the Maya. ("Did you see that gecko? Did you see that giant spider?") They traveled to Palenque, Bonampak, and the huge site of Tikal, then cruised down the Usumacinta River to the ruins of Yaxchilan.

Every night, Christopher Powell gave another lecture: Maya history, Maya geometry, Maya mathematics, Maya astronomy. "He knows a lot of cool stuff. He'd sit down and talk and answer everyone's questions."

And then everyone was standing under the stars, and Chris was pointing out the Maya constellations, and there was Venus and there was Orion, and the bugs out there were wicked, but nobody seemed to mind, because everyone was sort of on another wave length, thinking or dreaming and definitely floating off through time and space, and it was just like being a Maya in ancient times. That part was awesome!

*"Chris was the best guide we could have had. He was knowledgeable, helpful, and patient, and everyone connected with him. Chris was a huge contribution to making our trip fun and full of information and adventure. We could not have asked for a better guide. I appreciated the time he took by sitting down and talking and answering my questions after our lectures."*

**Tara Haney**  
Student  
Albright College



*The crew from Albright in Villahermosa, Mexico*

*"I can't say enough about the wonderful time all of us had on the trip. The students have been talking animatedly about it ever since our return. Their encounter with Southern Mexico and Guatemala made a huge impact, not just on their knowledge of ancient Maya culture, but on their broader perspectives on life.*

*Christopher's insights, enthusiasm, and intelligence impressed everyone. I have seen students and professors intellectually sparked by an animated speaker or an interesting idea. But I have rarely seen a group of people emotionally moved by such an encounter. I believe it is in part due to Christopher's passion and depth of knowledge about the Maya, past and present."*

**Elizabeth W. Kiddy, Ph.D.**  
Director of Latin American and Caribbean Studies  
Associate Professor of History  
Albright College

## MEC Partners with AIA...(continued from page 1)

For AIA, educating people about the importance of archaeological discovery is the key to human enrichment. It does so through tours, talks, and special programs, such as the lecture series designed for army troops being deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, birthplace of our earliest civilizations.

But AIA's main avenue for educating large audiences is through its award-winning publication, *Archaeology*, which enjoys a readership of 750,000 worldwide. The magazine has extended special recognition to MEC for our efforts to educate students and the public through study abroad courses, intensive educational tours, lectures, and media presentations; our non-invasive research studies in Maya astronomy, mathematics, and hydrology; and our detailed mapping surveys of architectural remains. Practically speaking, this nod from our peers gives a boost to our image. In the long run, it verifies and strengthens our goals.

## Join the MEC Research Member Program

Have you ever wanted to get more involved in archaeology, but felt like you didn't know where to start? Or perhaps you have ideas about ancient mysteries you'd like to share with the world. If so, consider joining Maya Exploration Center as a Research Member.

Most membership systems are about financially supporting the work of an institution, be that a museum, a charity, or a team of scholars. While the MEC membership program appreciates and values that kind of support, we invite (though not require) our members to actively participate in the process of discovery. How? By giving you access to powerful research resources and the guidance of a panel of experts in the field of Mesoamerican studies. When you become a Research Member of MEC, you receive:



### **1. Access to JSTOR**

JSTOR is a revolutionary online resource which has digitalized tens of thousands of journal articles from every imaginable academic discipline and linked them to a searchable database. As a MEC Research Member, you will have access to JSTOR's collections that focus on anthropology, archaeology and related fields - 247 journals with every single article in full.

### **2. Publish Your Own Research**

As a MEC Research Member, you will have the opportunity to share your research with the world by publishing your work in the research section of our website. Currently, MEC's website gets over 1.2 million hits per year and the research section is the most visited section.

### **3. Support for Grant Applications**

While MEC does not have the resources to fund independent research, we can help our members find it. There are many grant sources for which individuals are not eligible. As a MEC Research Member, you will be part of a non-profit research institution. Any awards you win can be run through MEC and distributed directly to you as the Principle Investigator. Universities typically charge 40-50% overhead to projects applying under their name; MEC's overhead is only 10%.

### **4. 10% Off Any MEC Educational Travel Course or Tour**

MEC Research Members will receive 10% off the costs of any MEC tour or study abroad course they choose to join. Participating in just one program a year at 10% off more than pays for the entire annual membership fee!

### **5. An Annual Mayan Calendar wall calendar**

Each MEC Research Member will receive a free annual Mayan Calendar wall calendar every January. To see this year's calendar - [www.mayan-calendar.com](http://www.mayan-calendar.com).

### **6. Recognition as a Supporter of MEC**

MEC Research Members can take pride in knowing that they support research and education programs related to Mesoamerican civilization. MEC's quarterly newsletter keeps you informed about what your membership supports.

**Annual Research Membership in MEC is only \$150.00**

To fill out an application form and join our team in recovering the past, log on to

[www.mayaexploration.org/membership.php](http://www.mayaexploration.org/membership.php)

## Of Monkeys and Men

LeAndra Luecke counts monkeys, dozens of them, in the Pantános de Centla Biosphere Reserve of northern Tabasco. Encompassing the Usamacinta and Grijalva river basins – one of the largest watersheds in the world – the vast marshes and wetlands are home to abundant aquatic vegetation, birds, fish, and reptiles; endangered manatees, jaguars, and howler monkeys; and about 15,000 human inhabitants. Despite its hidden riches, only a handful of scientists have faced the challenges of this exceptional environment. LeAndra is part of that rare breed. A doctoral candidate in physical anthropology at Washington University, in St. Louis, and a member of the MEC board, LeAndra chose the delta for her research on the interface between humans and primates. After her first months of grueling fieldwork, she questioned the wisdom of her decision. Yet over time the area has yielded vital information on the primates, plants, and people of the mangroves.



*LeAndra Luecke in the field*

Life in this remote area remains a hardship. The settlement where she lives is populated by several hundred souls scattered along the river. There are a few churches, a few tiendas, and no entertainment to speak of. People subsist on corn, rice, beans, and fish. It is a wilderness of water, and the only way to get around is by boat.

At dawn, LeAndra sets off to work under the steaming sun, paddling up estuaries so dense and narrow she has to duck under low-hanging branches. She may see a crocodile as she makes her way towards the monkey troops she is observing. Black howler monkeys move through the forest canopy, pausing occasionally to chew on leaves and fruits. Once a week, LeAndra takes her plant samples to the herbarium in Villahermosa. Later she will analyze the nutritional (and toxic) properties of the monkey diet, particularly the numerous species of lianas.

In her spare time she also collects the plants used by people for medicine, cooking, construction, and firewood. Slowly she is assessing the human impact on

the environment and learning about the local way of life.

The Chontal Maya who inhabit the mangroves are descendants of seagoing merchants who controlled the ancient trade routes along the Gulf of Mexico. The prosperous cities they built among the lagoons are largely unexplored. Surrounded by groves of cacao, the site of Comalcalco, outside present-day Villahermosa, once vied with Palenque for commercial power. The Chontal fishermen now living in the reserve are unaware of their noble past. In exchange for their knowledge and skills, LeAndra has been telling villagers about their remarkable history.

The reserve, as it turns out, is a fruitful place for ethnographic study. Too often, people living in wildlife reserves are overlooked in favor of flora and fauna. “If we want to achieve balance, we need to understand all three,” she says. “The Chontal Maya have plenty to teach us about the natural world, and about how the ancient Maya survived in this environment. An integrated view is what contem-



*A howler monkey swinging through the trees of Pantanos*

porary anthropology is all about.”

The ultimate goal of the study is conservation. Pantános is plagued by cattle ranching, oil drilling, and poaching. Through her educational program, LeAndra hopes to teach youth and adults how to monitor and protect the land and animals of the reserve.

When LeAndra completes her doctoral dissertation, she plans to conduct two-week courses for US college students interested in the wildlife and people of this rare habitat.

## Maya Calendars, Mathematics, and the 2012 Craze

3 Day Seminar ♦ July 19-21, 2010

On the UT at Austin Campus

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## The Arrival of Strangers in Tikal

A dozen years ago, epigraphers working on Stela 31 at Tikal deciphered the hieroglyph for "arrive." That simple verb heralded a momentous event in Maya history. Who arrived? A noble by the name of Siyaj K'ak' ("Fire Born"), who reached Tikal, in A.D. 378. And what was the nature of his visit? As it happened, the very day he arrived the reigning king died suddenly and his monuments were soon destroyed. Shortly thereafter, Siyaj K'ak' assigned power to a man called Atlatl Cauac, "Spearthrower Owl," who placed his son, Yax Nuun Ayiin I, on the throne of Tikal. At his coronation the young king wore the headdress and goggle-eyed mask of Tlaloc, the rain god of Central Mexico. The emblem of his royal lineage displayed the image of an owl and shield, another symbol of Tlaloc. Putting the pieces of the puzzle together, scholars were certain that the foreign usurpers had arrived from the great city of Teotihuacan. Now there is absolute confirmation. INAH researcher, Dr. Raul Garcia Chavez, has identified the royal emblem, the owl and shield, in the murals at Teotihuacan.

Still debated is the precise relationship between Teotihuacan and such Maya cities as Tikal, El Peru, Uaxactun, and Palenque. Prior to the *Entrada* of 378, Tikal was importing green obsidian and other trade items from Teotihuacan and had adopted Teotihuacano architectural features. Imports swelled after the arrival: new styles of ceramics as well as new types of weapons. Evidently Teotihuacan was not simply advancing its com-



*Spearthrower Owl's name found at Teotihuacan*

mercial empire; it was engaging in violent political takeovers. According to one recent scenario, Siyaj K'ak' may have been a great general who led thousands of warriors to Guatemala on a mission of military conquest. Whether or not Teotihuacan could have supported a huge mobile army is debatable. But be that as it may, the strangers engineered a swift defeat, and Spearthrower Owl became the political figurehead of what was to be a long-term occupation.

Thirty years later, Teotihuacan's strategy changed. Instead of wearing the symbols of Teotihuacan, Tikal's rulers adorned themselves in archaic Maya styles. Oddly enough, with the resurgence of Tikal as a major power in A.D. 682, we see references once more to the glorious days when Teotihuacan was at its height.

In addition to political alliances, the extent of Teotihuacan's cultural influence is hotly debated. Did Teotihuacan, armed with new myths, symbols, and gods, redirect the course of Maya thought and religion? Or was it the other way around? Perhaps Maya artists and scribes living at Teotihuacan introduced new ideas to its ruling elite. Or perhaps traveling Teotihuacanos were smitten by certain Maya motifs; for example, the feathered serpent, found in Pre-Classic Maya art, was later displayed profusely in monuments at Teotihuacan. In the end it may be wiser to think in terms of a shared culture, with scientific and philosophical concepts exchanged over vast distances and trade occasionally interrupted by battles and invasions, a world much like our own but with greater mutual respect.

## *Travelers to the Otherworld: A Maya View of America*



*Romin and Antzelmo, Maya travelers to America in the 1960's*

Most travel books deal with the "Other." This book presents a unique perspective on US culture. *Travelers to the Other World* was written by Romin Teratol and Antzelmo Péres, two Zinacantec Maya men who journeyed from Chiapas to the Southwest, in 1963, and to the eastern United States, in 1967, to work as ethnographic consultants. Once they crossed the border they turned the tables and became full-fledged anthropologists.

When Romin and Antzelmo set off for the States with anthropologist Dr. Robert M. Laughlin, their society was governed by tradition and ours was plagued by social change and war. Whether visiting Indian reservations or riding through the "Underworld" on the New York subway, the authors never ceased to be amazed, and frightened, by American customs and behavior. In New Mex-

ico, they see snow, observe Native American dances, get trapped in a gay bar. The first time they watched television they saw the assassination of President Kennedy. They were shocked that a perfect stranger would kill a man. In Washington, D.C., they discovered pizza, skyscrapers, pollution, racism, and warships heading for Vietnam. Dressed in Zinacantec costume, they marched on the Pentagon. Alternately brooding and philosophical, they try to make sense of the social upheaval around them.

*Travelers to the Other World* was recorded before ethnicity and Mexican immigration policies had become explosive issues. Today, one million Maya are working on US farms and in meatpacking plants. The journals dramatize the wonder and confusion awaiting migrants who cannot speak English, cannot abide the food, and cannot fathom this strange land and its people. *Travelers to the Other World* also conveys what it is to be a Zinacantec Maya, with a proud, 2000-year-old history and an unswerving devotion to the gods.

Dr. Robert Laughlin's moving Introduction describes his painful early years as a graduate student in Zinacantán, trying to learn the language and customs of an alien culture under the patient guidance of his friends Romin and Antzelmo. Year later he would become Curator of Anthropology at the Smithsonian Institution and translate his friends' journals. Antzelmo would become the head shaman of Zinacantán. Romin would break all cultural bounds, and his sons would form the influential literary and theatrical group, Sna Jtz'ibajom, performing for migrant workers in Florida. Carol Karasik would edit the journals, and the book would be published by University of New Mexico Press, for the delight of American readers interested in seeing themselves through Maya eyes.



### Upcoming Public Tours

## **Pillars of the Classic Maya, Palenque to Tikal**

November 20-28, 2010

## **Spend Thanksgiving in the Mundo Maya**

Learn the details and sign up at

[www.mayaexploration.org/tours.php](http://www.mayaexploration.org/tours.php)

## News From the Field

[State of Yucatan Buys Chichen Itza](#)

The State of Yucatan has just purchased a 205-acre chunk of Chichen Itza for a reported \$18.4 million. That may sound like a hefty sum, but the property does come with a ball court, temples, monuments, and one big pyramid. For generations, the World Heritage site was in private hands. The former owner, Hans Jurgen Thies Barbachano, is said to be pleased with the "visionary projects" slated for the famed archaeological zone.

Mexican scholars are skeptical. Wary of the government's tourism plans, they suggest that the land be managed by INAH. The great fear is that the state will go ahead with the proposed construction of a Disneyland-style Palace of Maya Civilization. "Already the site has been turned into a theater for musical spectacles that have nothing to do with local history or culture. Will boxing matches be next?" asks archaeologist Jesús Evaristo Sánchez.

Thus far, the state has announced they will "clean up" the site, meaning they will get rid of vendors selling souvenirs inside the zone; a move that often guarantees all-out war between government and small business syndicates. In the longer term, the Department of Culture promises that tourist development will generate untold benefits for nearby residents.

If they wanted to help the people, say local politicians, the government should have expropriated the land and used the money they borrowed from the banks to improve social conditions. The purchase will put the government in deeper debt for 15 years.

"A giant snake has descended from the Castillo," quipped one congressional delegate. "For 230 million pesos, even Kukulcán would come down to receive the money."

## Maya Textiles: A Cultural Renaissance



*Four talented and savvy sisters set fashion trends in Zinacantan*

Positive signs of change are sweeping through Maya communities in Chiapas. And the most vibrant signs of a cultural flowering are today's lavish costumes. In the highlands, traditional brocaded designs grow more elaborate and colorful, and in the burgeoning settlements of the Lacandon rainforest, Maya women are inventing new styles of dress.

This phenomenal spontaneity is the subject of an ongoing study by anthropologist and MEC Research Associate Walter "Chip" Morris. With funding from Na Bolom and the State Department of Tourism and External Affairs, Chip has been traveling to every community in Chiapas in order to document changes in textiles, and changes in Maya culture. His findings will be published in two handsome volumes. The first, now in press, is *A Guide to Maya Textiles of the Chiapas Highlands*. Edited by Carol Karasik and richly illustrated by photographers Janet Schwartz and Alfredo Martínez, the book describes daily and ceremonial wear, the pageantry of religious fiestas, and the creative spirit behind the current cultural revival.

Thirty years ago, Chip conducted a similar study. Most of the textiles he collected then were woven during the early 1970s, with some rare examples from the turn of the last century. Analyzed, documented, and exhibited in Mexico and the United States, the collection became a cultural icon, the standard measure of tradition. As a result, some observers regard the textiles of the 1970s as the "real" tradition and the new fashions as an abandonment of tradition, dazzling omens of imminent decay.

In *Living Maya*, Chip's analysis of textile symbols showed that modern brocaded designs originated over a thousand years ago, in the Classic Maya costumes of Yaxchilan and Bonampak. Considering this extraordinary example of cultural continuity, Chip assumed that Maya textiles would remain the same. But young Maya weavers have proven that the culture is not static. Instead of abandoning tradition, they are weaving and embroidering costumes of increas-



