



# ARCHAEO MAYA

The Newsletter of Maya Exploration Center

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

## In This Issue:

- Mayan Calendar Website
- Midland Attends Day of the Dead
- The Sheridan School in Chiapas
- FOMMA
- An Interview with Dr. Peter Mathews
- Public Tours in 2009
- News from the Field

## On The Horizon:

- Three Public Tours in January and February
- A 2012 Lecture Series
- More Peru courses for 2009
- New Travel Courses in Central Mexico
- The Maya Meetings at University of Texas
- A MEC Membership Program for 2009
- The 2009 MEC Longhorn Award

## Mayan Calendar Website and Wall Calendar

An earlier version of Mayan Calendar had been in print for 20 years. For one katun, the calendar's creator, Jeff Chouinard, produced the rich color photos and text and built up a loyal consumer base. When Chouinard decided to retire, he asked MEC to continue the enterprise. We were delighted, not only to take over the service but also to add to it. In addition to offering a precise correlation between the Maya and Western calendars, the new 2009 edition of the Maya wall calendar presents some exciting changes. The format is bigger, thus providing more space for such items as factoids about Maya history and a countdown to the 13<sup>th</sup> bak'tun.

MEC has also expanded the content of the calendar's associated website, which now includes abundant information about Maya calendar systems, an online Maya date converter, and discussions related to the 2012 debate. And there are detailed sections on the 260-day sacred calendar and how it is used by traditional Maya timekeepers to identify personality traits as well as human destiny.

As curiosity about the calendar grows, there is an equal swell of misinformed predictions, ranging from spiritual transformation to prophecies of doom. Hollywood director Michael Bay, whose last blockbuster was "Transformers," is now filming "2012," an apocalyptic movie to be released next summer. The academic community of Mayanists, put off by the tide of sensationalism, has generally dismissed the media hype. But the rumors and prophecies and air of anticipation just keep growing! MEC's 2009 calendar bridges the gap between scholars and Maya enthusiasts by simply presenting expert information. To learn more about the 2009 wall calendars and access the information, log on to [www.mayan-calendar.com](http://www.mayan-calendar.com).

The ancient Maya are swiftly becoming a hot news item. This ripening fascination is not so much about the advanced arts and sciences of Maya civilization. Rather, the main obsession of all the recent books, articles, and websites is with the Maya calendar, specifically the "end" of the great Calendar Round, in 2012. Depending on whom you read, the general buzz is that the world will either grind to a catastrophic halt or – looking on the bright side – human beings will turn into creatures of light and achieve higher consciousness. Of course, both disembodied scenarios are based on the belief that the wheels of Maya time will stop turning. Scholars familiar with the intricate workings of the calendar, and the spirit of renewal that is at the heart of Maya time-keeping, are stymied by all the fuss. MEC has decided to go one step further and put accurate calendrical information into the hands of the general public.



### MEC Board

#### *Chairman*

Edwin L. Barnhart

#### *Secretary*

Charles C. Williams

#### *Treasurer*

Blair Duncan

#### *Officers*

Fred Barnhart

LeAndra Luecke

Donald Hart

Harold Green

### Research Associates

Mark Child

James Eckhardt

Kirk French

Michael Grofe

Carol Karasik

Alonso Mendez

Alfonso Morales

Walter F. Morris

Christopher Powell

Kirk Straight

### MEC Staff

#### *Director*

Edwin L. Barnhart

### Editors

Edwin L. Barnhart

Carol Karasik

### Contact MEC

#### United States

7301 RR 620 N

Suite 155 #284

Austin, Texas 78726

Phone: 512-350-3321

#### Mexico

El Panchan

Apartado Postal 142

Palenque, Chiapas 29960, Mexico

### On the Web

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

#### Email

[info@mayaexploration.org](mailto:info@mayaexploration.org)

Contents of this newsletter © 2008 Maya Exploration Center, Inc.  
All rights reserved.

## Letter from the Director



As we prepare for a busy 2009, we look back proudly on this year's achievements.

First of all, after five years of educational

activities, MEC has received official 501(c) 3 non-profit status. A number of universities now book annual travel courses; it is evident that we are creating a broad community of academics who are interested in Maya culture. Along with the Maya, this year marked the flowering of our courses in Peru. MEC has also continued to support Mesoamerican scholarship through its Longhorn Award to promising graduate students.

This fall, our primary initiative has been the production and sale of our 2009 Mayan Calendar. The response to our wall calendar and our spin-off

website has been strong. Amid a flood of books, movies, and websites on the 2012 Maya end date, we represent a solid source of information on the calendar round.

In this issue of ArchaeoMaya, you'll read about our most recent travel courses, the new public educational tours we have planned for 2009, and the outreach programs we're involved in.

As we move into the holiday season, I want to thank all of you who have supported MEC through your donations, program participation, and general interest. And please don't forget that entering Amazon.com through the links on our website is a simple way to donate to MEC as you purchase your holiday gifts.

Happy Holidays,

### Dr. Barnhart's 2009 Chautauqua Courses Have Been Announced!



Inca Mathematics and Culture in Peru: Cuzco, Machu Picchu, and the Sacred Valley - May 30 - June 6, 2009



Ancient Astronomy and Mathematics in Angkor, Cambodia and the 2009 Solar Eclipse in China - July 12-24, 2009



Ancient Maya Astronomy and Mathematics in the Maya Ruins of Chiapas, Mexico: Palenque, Bonampak, and Yaxchilan - August 1-8, 2009

The Chautauqua Program is run through the University of Texas at Austin and designed as continuing education courses for college professors of sciences. High school teachers and those in teaching related occupations are also welcome to apply.

To learn more about Dr. Barnhart's courses and how to apply, log on to [www.ahautravel.com](http://www.ahautravel.com)

## Day of the Dead in Guatemala - Midland College

The Day of the Dead, Latin America's version of Halloween, celebrates the departed souls who return to earth for a brief reunion with their living relatives. The festival is a stoic acknowledgment of death, as well as the pleasures of life, as families greet the spirits of their loved ones with feasts of foods and drink. In late October, Dr. Margaret Wade of Midland College brought a dozen students down to the Guatemalan Highlands to witness this ancient ritual. Led by MEC archaeologists Ed Barnhart and Jim Eckhardt, the trip turned out to be a profound educational experience.



*The trail leading to the shrine of Pascual Abaj*

After visiting the National Anthropology Museum and the mountaintop ruins of Iximche, students hiked to the Maya shrine of Pascual Abaj, where a Quiche shaman implored the spirits of the earth for assistance. This powerful shrine is the locus of rites associated with the sacred 260-day Maya calendar. In accordance with the ancient system, Maya shamans interpret the omens associated with each day in order to predict their clients' fortunes in life. Usually these solemn consultations occur daily, but when the group arrived, most of the townsfolk were at the cemetery, repainting tombs and crosses in preparation for the return of their ancestors.

Lake Atitlan's towering volcanoes provided an incredible dreamscape for the celebration of Halloween. Midland students had brought candies for the children living in the village of Santiago Atitlan, and the word spread quickly. In no time, an entourage of excited "trick or treaters" accompanied the visitors through the cobble-

stoned streets to the chapel of Maximon, where worshippers were making offerings of candles, scarves, cigarettes, and liquor.

Students observed Day of the Dead in the beautiful colonial town of Antigua. During the early morning hours, they walked among the white mausoleums as families placed flowers on the graves. Dozens of kites flew overhead, a tradition the Maya say draws the ancestral spirits down to earth.

On the last day of the trip, students experienced a thrilling outdoor adventure - a journey to the top of Guatemala's most active volcano, Pacaya. First they traveled by horseback and then by foot across the hardened lava flows. When they reached the edge of the flowing molten lava, they toasted marshmallows over the magma!



*Hiking up to the lava flows from Volcano Pacaya*

Back in Antigua, local residents were lining the downtown streets with carpets of flowers and multicolored sawdust. As the sun set on All Saint's Day, thousands of spectators watched as a brass band and huge processional float marched over the floral carpets. The creation of the intricate designs, and their subsequent obliteration, are meaningful customs performed in honor of the deceased. The final dinner at the historic Hotel Convento de Santa Catalina was filled with deep emotions. The Texas students vowed to return for Midland's next learning adventure - Peru in April 2009.



## An Interview with Dr. Peter Mathews



*Peter Mathews and Ed Barnhart talking in Palenque*

*MEC Director Ed Barnhart caught up with Dr. Mathews Peter at Merle Green Robertson's birthday celebration in Palenque. Here are a few excerpts from the interview he gave on July 12, 2008.*

EB: I believe you were the youngest scholar at the first Palenque Round Table. Was that a challenge? Was that intimidating?

PM: I wouldn't say I was a scholar at that stage.

EB: The tale I heard is that you were by far the most organized, that you showed up with a briefcase...

PM: I showed up with a *suitcase* full of blue folders of all the stuff Dave and I were working on. Dave decided to concentrate on Thompson's catalogue of Maya hieroglyphs, and I basically looked through it all, did my own translations of Thompson's, and then showed them to Dave. That was the methodology in those days. We could read so few of the glyphs then. When my translations differed from Thompson's, Dave and I would talk about it, and of course Dave would say, "No you're all wrong, can't you see that little squiggle up there?" And occasionally he'd make my day by saying, "You're right and Thompson's wrong."

What I got out of that was a very good visual sense of the glyphs. I couldn't read them but I could recognize them. I do think that if you don't have a good visual memory you're lost. Today, when epigraphers get together and talk, they say *pa ta wa ni* or whatever. They have the inscriptions in their heads. When Linda Schele and I talked, we used Thompson's categories - T this or T that. I was positively stuck on Thompson's categories.

Linda thought I was positively anal on that. By the third semester I got the prize for being Mr. T number. In those days I could draw T781 or whatever. I remembered them all then. Now I can't.

EB: Your mentor, David Kelley, is a very colorful character. Could you share one of your favorite stories about him?

PM: Where do I start! Maybe the first meeting. The one thing I regret is that I spent my entire first undergraduate year not in contact with Dave. In the Australian system the professors are so far above you, you can't even talk to them for the first few years. But there was one young professor at Calgary who said, "If you're interested in Maya studies, you should talk to Dave Kelley." So I frantically screwed up my courage and thought of an excuse. Dave was going to teach a class for third year students, and I knocked on the door and said, "Hi, I'm interested in the Maya," and Dave placed his hand on his forehead and said, "Well, you've got to come home for supper tonight." This was absolutely so foreign to me I felt like an anthropologist with massive culture shock. When I got to the house, two or three graduate students were there, Dave's wife, Jane, was wonderful, and I remember thinking, in a fleeting moment of paranoia, that they were setting me up for a grilling. Dave and I chatted and chatted until four in the morning. And that's pretty much how we spent the next year. We were both night owls. Dave and Jane eventually became second parents to me.

People like Dave and Jane, Floyd Lounsbury and Mike Coe when I got to Yale, shared their lives and their knowledge. I like to think people in universities can still do that. Of course, that was in the days when classes were smaller and you could talk to individual students in a way you can't today. I would have almost thought I owed a debt, except that I think it's the natural way one should behave as a teacher. They treated us as colleagues rather than students. This made a huge impression on Linda Schele, because she hadn't studied anthropology and didn't have a doctorate yet. She didn't need to feel out of place but she did. She was always made welcome, and that's the way it should be. I went through it, too. I thought, "My God, Dave is one of the great scholars and he is spending so much time with me." It was heaven.

*To read the full interview with Peter Mathews and another on his incident at El Cayo, log on to:*  
[www.mayaexploration.org/resources\\_interviews.php](http://www.mayaexploration.org/resources_interviews.php)

## Sheridan School in Chiapas - Elementary Schools

An estimated one million Maya are now living in the United States, and many are of school age. Among the problems these children face are teachers and fellow students who don't understand the rich traditions that Maya youngsters inherit. The elementary teachers who visited Chiapas in early August were determined to learn, and with the guidance of MEC researchers, they succeeded in gathering enough material on ancient and modern Maya culture to develop a new school curriculum.

The magnificent temples of Palenque, Tonina, and Comalcalco opened their eyes to the grandeur of Maya art. Alonso Mendez's lectures helped unlock the mysteries of Maya history, religion, astronomy, and the calendar. As for the natural world of the rainforest, there was a trip to a rubber plantation, where real latex from real trees went into making rubber balls. On a long walk through the jungle, Alonso shared his knowledge of medicinal plants. The trip to a cacao plantation outside Villahermosa provided one of life's great pleasures – chocolate.

In the Chiapas highlands, the teachers encountered modern Maya culture head on. Led by Chip Morris and Carol Karasik, they saw Maya weavers and potters at work and witnessed a curing ceremony in the Chamula church. The continuity between past and present was visible during the fiesta of St. Lawrence in Zinacantán. As the church swelled with music and worshippers, the noonday sun shone directly above. The fiesta coincided with zenith passage.

Another fortunate coincidence occurred when Chip suggested a simple classroom activity: making impressions of woven textures on clay. He just happened to be studying some examples. Lying on his kitchen table were rare pottery sherds from the Ocos culture, some three thousand years old. The archaeologist John Hodgson treated the group to a brief lecture on the Ocos, the first ceramicists in Mesoamerica.

Inevitably, the vitality of artistic and spiritual traditions came up against darker social realities. As the teachers strolled through traditional villages and vis-



*The Sheridan Group at the Misol Ha Waterfalls*

ited the colonial sites of San Cristóbal, they were struck by the stark independence of Maya children: girls carrying baby brothers and sisters on their backs, managing market stalls, and working in the fields. Didn't they ever go to school?

At the end of the week, English teacher Lucia Mendez led tours of two local schools. The first, run by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, had a well stocked library, computer room, and indoor gym. By contrast, the rural school was the size of a used postage stamp, with battered classrooms and no space for play. Five dedicated men teach 160 students here, when and if the students show up. Many of the boys have to work. The government provides staple foods for the parents, but there is no money for desks, materials, or books. Things were bad in the States, too, the visiting teachers confessed, but nothing this grim, and few teachers willing to work under these conditions.

It's amazing how much you can see in a week, with sensitive guides, clear visions, and open hearts.



### Upcoming Public Tours

**Pillars of the Classic Maya, Palenque to Tikal, Jan 31 - Feb 8, 2009**

Learn the details and sign up at [www.mayaexploration.org/tours.php](http://www.mayaexploration.org/tours.php)



## News From the Field

### Casa Herrera in Antigua

On November 13th, the University of Texas Mesoamerica Center, a division of the Department of Art and Art History officially opened and inaugurated Casa Herrera in Antigua, Guatemala. Two blocks from the central square, the property is owned by the Fundación Pantaleón. Built in the late 1600s, the structure has a central courtyard and original woodwork, ironwork, and structures. This center's setting in Antigua provides an ideal venue in which scholars and students can pursue, explore, and appreciate both the rich Pre-Columbian heritage of Guatemala as well as its modern cultural milieu. The Casa Herrera will function as a flexible, interdisciplinary site where scholars can build and host workshops, symposia, meetings, exhibitions, and lectures. In addition to maintaining a library, technology lab, and hosting resident national and international scholars, this vision encompasses the ability to someday facilitate student-based academic programs. The Casa Herrera will live within the programmatic scope of the Mesoamerica Center; its mission will always serve to promote and engage the larger aims of the Mesoamerica Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

### New Reports from Chichen Itza

Recent investigations at Chichen Itza have revealed there are close to 100 "White Roads" or Sabeob leading out of Chichen Itza says INAH archaeologist Peter Schmidt. Building on the research of archaeologist Rafael Cobos, more than 90 roads have so far been detected. The Sabeob network proves strong political control emanating from Chichen Itza. The roads also adopted routes that would control water sources and civil works were constructed of channels that crossed the roads with drainage to avoid water stagnation.

## FOMMA – Maya Theater

A new Maya theater, the first of its kind, opened its doors in San Cristobal on August 28. Housed in an imposing earth-toned building, the pastel-colored space, with its cantilevered glass ceiling and unique tri-level stage, is more than a beautifully designed theater. It is a meeting place for indigenous artists and activists from North and South America, as well as a school, workshop, and community center for local Maya women.



A FOMMA play entitled "La Monja Bruja"

The Daughters of the Moon Theater is a testament to the work that the Maya women's group FOMMA (*Fortaleza de la mujer maya*) has been doing for the past 15 years. Since 1994, FOMMA has offered illiterate single mothers basic courses in bilingual education; job training in tailoring, baking, and computers; and free day care services. Theater is the core of the program, a means of providing information about women's issues and serving as a medium of cultural expression.

After years of getting by on small grants and donations, FOMMA attracted the attention of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics. Based at New York University, the institute sponsors the performance arts as vehicles for the creation and transmission of cultural values and identity. The goals of the Hemispheric Institute matched FOMMA's mission, to empower indigenous women by preserving Maya languages, customs, and traditions (at least those traditions that support the dignity of women). The Hemispheric Institute found the funding for the theater, and along the way, decided to make FOMMA's community center its Latin American headquarters. When the project began, women had to wade across FOMMA's dirt patio

during the rainy season. Now there's a glass roof, walls of periwinkle blue, a digital studio, and history in the making.

The grand inauguration brought together Maya actors, poets, painters, videographers, and musicians. But the event was also international and pan-Indian. Native women from Hawaii and the Lakota Sioux reservation performed a blessing ceremony. The Maya theater group Sna Jtz'ibajom presented a play based on a folktale, "When Corn Was Born." A Mapuche actress from Argentina dramatized the loss of her people's traditions. Two Chichimeca-Otomi grandmothers associated with the Coatlque Theater in New York City presented "Water Is My Blood." The final offering, by Jesusa Rodriguez and Liliana Felipe of Mexico City, was a brilliant retelling of a pre-Hispanic myth about corn, and a hymn to genetic and cultural diversity.

Along with these dramatic productions, the two-day event provided a forum for advocates working in women's health care, human rights, and domestic abuse. It is said that art and politics don't mix, but that truism has never been true. In a region faced with the pressures of globalization, the Maya are taking on a global perspective. And women, the backbone of traditional culture, are finally taking center stage.

*Come join MEC scholars Chip Morris and Carol Karasik on these exciting adventures in early 2009!*

**The Festival of San Sebastian in the Highlands of Chiapas  
January 20-27, 2009**

Among the most important and lively indigenous festivals of Chiapas, the fiesta of San Sebastian celebrates the momentous encounter between the Pre-Columbian and Spanish worlds. In the highland community of Zinacantan, the Plumed Serpent, dancing jaguars, bareback riders, and Spanish grandees play their parts in a spectacular three-day pageant rich in myth, mystery, and sheer entertainment-all timed to coincide with the Maya end-of-year ceremonies.



**Carnival in the Highlands of Chiapas  
February 19-26, 2009**

In Chiapas, Carnival is essentially a pre-Columbian fiesta held during the Uayab, the five "lost" days at the end of the Maya calendar when the world is turned upside down. Led by the Mash (monkeys), this raucous religious celebration recapitulates the Maya creation story-with brass bands and clowns thrown in. The Festival of Games, as it is called in Chamula, features mock battles and wild bulls and ends with a dramatic firewalk representing cosmic renewal.



**amazon.com**

**MORE** than just **books**

SHOP ON AMAZON.COM

Support the creation of a library in Palenque by always using [www.mayaexploration.org/amazon](http://www.mayaexploration.org/amazon)

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

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

*Thanks to Everyone Who Donated to MEC This Fall*

**James Jobs • Steve Eckman • Daniel Maddux • Merle Green Robertson**

## Donate to Maya Exploration Center

*Your support is crucial. Please help us to continue our education and research programs. Donate today.*

Amount Donated: \_\_\_\_\_

Method of Payment

Check

Visa

MasterCard

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

\_\_\_\_\_  
Credit Card #

\_\_\_\_\_  
Exp. date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Maya Exploration Center, Inc., is a 501(c)(3), Texas Non-Profit Corporation. Your donations are tax deductible.

Please mail donations to: Maya Exploration Center, 7301 Ranch Road 620 N, Suite 155 #284, Austin, Texas 78726