

# ARCHAEO MAYA

THE NEWSLETTER OF MAYA EXPLORATION CENTER



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## Friendship Bridge Helps Guatemalan Women

The San Antonio Circle of the Friendship Bridge is kicking off their new donation initiative at the Institute of Texan Cultures on September 29<sup>th</sup>. It's their Educational Speakers Program and the first speaker will be MEC's Dr. Edwin Barnhart presenting a talk entitled "Lightning

Blood: The Ancient Maya Calendar Lives." The talk

will focus on the highlands of Guatemala and how the ancient Maya sacred calendar is still central to the lives of modern Maya. It's an apt subject for Friendship Bridge's goal - to assist impoverished women in Guatemala through providing microloans.



*Microloan recipients at the Friendship Bridge office*

Colorado-based Friendship Bridge is a non-profit dedicated to empowering impoverished women. Their work began in Vietnam, providing medical education and supplies to impoverished communities. Then in 1994 they shifted their focus to providing microloans to Vietnamese women. In 1998 they expanded their programs to Guatemala and the response was tremendous. By 2003 they were assisting over 3000 women and that number has steadily increased. Today, over 22,000 "unfundable" women are receiving microloans thanks to Friendship Bridge. The wider impact of their work is noted in their mission statement; "To empower impoverished Guatemalan women to create a better future for themselves, their children, and their communities through microfinance and education."

MEC is in full support of Friendship Bridge's efforts. The San Antonio Circle, one of ten across the United States, will kick off their new supporter-seeking speaker series at the Institute of Texan Cultures on September 29<sup>th</sup> at 6:00pm. If you are in the local area we encourage you to attend. Even if you aren't, please consider donating to this worthy cause. To learn more and purchase tickets to the event, visit <http://www.friendshipbridge.org/get-involved/friendship-circles/san-antonio-circle/>



## Letter from the Director

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Maya Exploration Center

Happy  
Autumnal  
Equinox!  
And welcome  
to the new  
format of our  
newsletter.



It's much the  
same as our  
old format, just now created  
using Apple instead of Microsoft  
software. Yes, MEC has gone  
Mac.

In this edition of  
ArchaeoMaya we report on our  
summer courses, recent  
archaeological finds, and a new  
book by MEC scholars Chip  
Morris and Carol Karasik. As our  
lead article I choose to highlight  
one of our newest partners -  
Friendship Bridge. They're a  
wonderful association of  
generous Americans making a  
real difference in the lives of  
thousands of impoverished  
Guatemalan women. They're the  
kind of people that make the  
world a better place and I hope  
you'll join MEC in supporting  
their efforts.

The main article of this  
ArchaeoMaya is a report on the  
two Chautauqua courses I led  
this summer, one to Ireland and  
the other to Bolivia. Both were  
great learning adventures and  
attended at full capacity. Sadly,  
after twelve years, they were also  
the last Chautauqua courses to be  
offered through the University of  
Texas at Austin. The program  
retired along with its amazing  
creator, Dr. James Barufaldi. His  
leadership will be sorely missed  
but I intend to continue the  
Chautauqua program through

MEC and my newly created  
company Ancient Explorations,  
LLC. I hope those of you who  
have participated in my summer  
courses over the years will  
continue to do so under their  
new roof.

MEC has a new research  
associate and we're proud to  
introduce her in this edition. Dr.  
Heather Teague and I are old  
friends; in fact she was my  
student way back in Belize  
during the 1997 Programme for  
Belize field season. She was  
among the small group who  
found the city of Ma'ax Na with  
me. Since then she's done a lot of  
amazing things and MEC is  
lucky to have caught her now,  
before she moves on to what no  
doubt will be an amazing new  
career as a Ph.D. For now, she's  
part of MEC and plans to lead  
some exciting trips for us in 2016.

As the leaves begin to  
turn and we head into the  
holiday season, I'm reminded of  
all the things we have to be  
grateful for - first and foremost  
our wonderful MEC community.  
Twelve years ago we started as a  
half-dozen archaeologists with a  
dream. Today, this newsletter  
has almost 3000 subscribers.  
With your continued support,  
we'll enter our good luck 13<sup>th</sup>  
year with a strong sense of  
purpose and a renewed  
commitment to recover what's  
been lost in the tides of time.

With Sincere Thanks,

## Old Evidence and New Mysteries at Cahokia

At 1200 AD, Cahokia (just outside of modern St. Louis) was the largest city in North America. Its 40,000 people participated in the construction of many massive earthen pyramids, called less glamorously “mounds” in archaeological literature, and some of those pyramids contained burials. Mound 72, excavated in the 1960’s, had over 270 bodies interred within, mostly young women carefully laid on their backs, shoulder to shoulder in long rows. None of the women had indications of a violent death, but another group of 39 bodies within Mound 72 did. The men and women of that group had broken limbs, projectile points lodged in bones, and a few were decapitated. Back in the 1960’s these burials were explained as enemy groups and sacrificial tributes collected from foreign territories, but new studies are telling a different story.



*Rows of female burials in Mound 72  
(Photo: St. Louis Community College)*

In a new study to be published in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* in October, archaeologists from the Illinois State Archaeological Survey report their findings after conducting a strontium study of the teeth of Mound 72’s skeletons. Strontium occurs naturally in ground water and finds its way into what people eat and drink. Each region has its own particular concentrations of strontium and as it leeches into tooth enamel it provides a way of tracking an individual’s geographic history. In the case of the people interred in Cahokia’s Mound 72, the analysis revealed that the vast majority were citizens, not foreigners.



*Hypothetical sacrifice rituals at Cahokia  
(Drawing by Herb Roe)*

This, of course, turned the theories from the 1960’s on their heads. These were not foreign enemies or tributes to the powerful Cahokia state, but native Cahokians. The women were found in discrete sets, indicating that dozens of local women were ritually sacrificed and buried on multiple occasions. The mutilated group of 39 individuals were also locals, though they held in common some different physical traits from the other bodies. Why were they killed in such a brutal manner when the other burials in Mound 72 were not? Project team member Dr. Phil Slater suggest that the 39 may have been some local sub-population that ran afoul of Cahokia’s aristocracy. Slater also concedes that their discoveries may well

have produced more new questions than answers. Regardless, it’s exciting to see modern technology applied to old evidence to produce new data. The project is a great example of how much can be learned from archaeological materials already collected, without the need for costly and destructive new excavations.

## The Chautauqua Report – Summer 2015

### Ancient Ireland – Megaliths and Neolithic Tombs

Less than a week after the spring semester in the US had ended, Dr. Barnhart and his wife Cassandra met twenty course participants in Dublin, Ireland. That first night they met for his kick off lecture explaining the amazingly old megalithic architecture of Ireland and noting the hundreds of Irish sites that predate the pyramids of Egypt by centuries. Day two stayed in Dublin to attend a private tour of Ireland's National Museum's archaeological exhibits. That evening, participants had free time to enjoy the pubs and music of Fleet Street.

Departing comfortable Dublin, the course's first archaeological stop was the beautiful Boyne Valley. Ireland's most famous Neolithic site, the New Grange Passage Tomb, was built there. The group was led deep inside and shown a demonstration of how the winter solstice sunlight would strike the innermost chamber. At its sister-site Knowth, they walked around the exterior admiring the dozens of elaborately carved megalithic "curbstones." Participants pulled their coats tightly around themselves to guard against the biting wind as their guide assured them they had arrived on a wonderful Irish summer day.

The passage tombs of the Boyne Valley were old, but the next day brought them to an even older site – Loughcrew. At 3500 BC, Loughcrew's tombs pre-date the Pyramids of Giza by a full 1000 years. The site is on a mountaintop and the narrow, winding road was a challenge for their bus driver Peter. At one point he became so nervous that he stopped and knocked on the front door of a cottage. A kindly woman in a housecoat listened to him and then volunteered her husband to guide them the rest of the way. The view from the top was amazing and the local caretaker's explanation of the site's astronomical alignments was fantastic.

Later that day they stopped into a virtually unexplored Neolithic site – Rathcroghan. After a tour of the newly remodeled visit center, the center's director Daniel brought them out to another passage tomb. Though still buried under a sheep pasture, the now experienced travelers could see from its shape and depressions that it was like the structures in the Boyne Valley. Imagine, a site more than 5000 years old just sitting there in an open field! Most people

drive right by without ever even suspecting.

For the next few days their home base was the picturesque port city of Sligo. From there they visited the very special site of Ceide Fields. Director Gretta Bryne herself guided the group across the site's vast expanse, explaining how a peat bog had preserved a 5500-year-old village. There were stone houses, field plots and animal pens. Some of the younger members of the group were the first to note how similar they looked to some of the modern villages they had traveled through. Director Bryne replied with a laugh, "It's true, many things around here haven't changed in a long time!"



June 9<sup>th</sup> was the cornerstone of the week. The group traveled north along the coast for two hours to the tiny village of Glencolmille to participate in an age-old pilgrimage.

Glencolmille is remembered as the place where St. Columba drove the demons out of Ireland. The pilgrimage goes through ancient cairns in the valley, perhaps representing the demons of old pagan ways. At each cairn pilgrims circle and say prayers. Liam Ó Cuinneagáin of the Oideas Gael Irish language school was kind enough to lead them. Liam said the traditional route went through the valley floor, but it might be "a bit water logged" and that they should probably skip that part. The group objected, half wanting to try it anyway. So Liam led some around by the road as others followed a local woman named Wendy down into the fields of the valley floor. He was right and the Chautauqua pilgrims were quickly up to their knees in cold bog water. Undaunted, they continued on. Soon onlookers were watching from their fence lines, wondering who those crazy foreigners were. Liam was waiting when they emerged on the other side, half apologetic and half angry. He explained that after they had separated he heard that it was worse than ever this year and that no community members were going to attempt it. As Dr. Barnhart and the soaking wet pilgrims assured him that they enjoyed it, his mood quickly lightened. They completed the pilgrimage back at the community church and thanked him for inviting strangers into their local tradition. One can only

imagine how long the locals will tell the tale of the crazy Americans who waded through the bog!

Back in Dublin the group enjoyed a final dinner together, sharing stories and bragging about how they had seen parts of Ireland that tourists never see. When Dr. Barnhart inquired who was up for part two in Scotland for summer 2016, almost every hand at the table was raised.

## Ancient Culture and Modern Ecology in Bolivia

This summer's Chautauqua course in Bolivia was broken up into two parts. The first half was archaeological and cultural. The second half was about ecology and natural wonders. After gathering in La Paz and trying to adapt to the 12,000 ft asl elevation, the group was off to the enigmatic ruins of Tiwanaku. As Dr. Barnhart guided the group through its megalithic monuments, he explained the city's strange similarities to Chavin de Huantar, 1000 miles to the north. From the top of the Akapana Pyramid they could see the entire treeless valley and the remnants of a raised field agricultural system thought once to have fed a population of 40,000 people.

The timing of their visit was planned so that the group could participate in the Aymara Inti Raymi celebration, set to occur at dawn on the following day. From their windows in the town's only hotel, the group watched thousands of Aymara people filter into the town all night, partying, dancing, and lighting fires in the street to ward off the bitter cold. Just before dawn they joined the procession of indigenous people as they walked to the ruins and stood waiting in the Kalasasaya Plaza. A group of Aymara shamans burned offerings on a central altar, recited prayers to the Sun, and apologized to the crowd for not being able to afford the black llama



traditionally sacrificed on this day. As the Sun finally peeked over the valley's edge, thousands of hands went up in the air, treasuring its warmth. Few foreigners have ever

participated in this ceremony and the Chautauqua group was humbled by how graciously they were accepted by the locals.

The next destination was Lake Titicaca. After a night on its shores in Copacabana and a visit to its

famous Shrine of the Black Virgin, an early morning boat brought them to the Island of the Sun. Landing on its north end, the group took a tiny trail that Dr. Barnhart had discovered years ago as a short cut up to the Sacred Rock. Just as Inca mythology says Viracocha did at the start of time, the group saw the winter solstice sunrise hanging over that mystical outcrop. From there, a pleasant walk along prepared trails brought them down to the village of Challapampa where they caught their boat back to Copacabana.



Part two of the course began with a four-hour bus ride to Oruro and then a nine-hour train into the very middle of Bolivia. Stepping off the train in Uyuni about 10pm, that evening they were on the edge of one of the world's most remote and bizarre landscapes - The Salt Flats of Uyuni. The next morning the group loaded into seven Land Cruisers and caravanned into the Salar (salt flats). Once they were about an hour in, it was like another planet - hundreds of square miles of flat, a perfectly flat and white surface stretching to the horizon in every direction. Lunch that day was on an island of petrified cacti. To their surprise, a viscacha hopped by. Life finds a way, even in the barren Salar!

On their second day in the Salar they drove all the way across to the base of Volcano Thunupa. A man from the tiny village there led the group up a winding trail to a cave he referred to as a huaca, which means ancestral shrine. Bringing them inside with a flashlight, the group was astonished to be standing amongst a family of mummies! There were men, women, children and even a baby stretched out on slabs with their clothing and hair still intact. Even Dr. Barnhart had never seen a huaca in such a pristine and undisturbed state.

Back in Uyuni that night at the wonderful Toñito Hotel, hotel owners Sussy and Chris made the group gourmet pizzas in their brick oven and offered bottles of Champaign for the course closing ceremonies. Considering our journey to the southern hemisphere for the solstice, clever course participant Brent Williamson offered this closing thought - "I left home in the spring and arrived in the fall. I've stayed until winter and tomorrow I'll return to summer".

## News from the Field

### [Aztec Skull Rack Discovered](#)

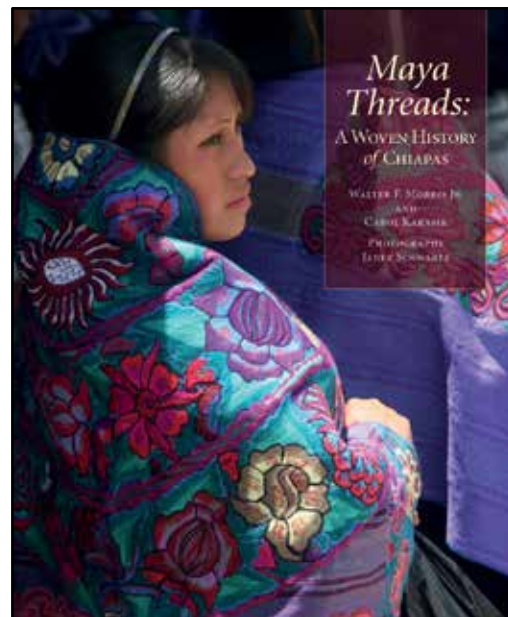
While many features of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan have been discovered under Mexico City, its gruesome main skull rack, or tzompantli, had never been found – until now that is. The rack was accidentally uncovered during the renovation of a three-story colonial era house. Its location, just west of the Templo Mayor, is exactly where chronicles said it would be. Excavations validated another chronicle assertion – that the rack’s platform was built of skulls. Archaeologists found rows of skulls mortared together roughly in a circle, around a seemingly empty space in the middle. Excavations will continue into 2016, but its identity as the city’s skull rack is already confirmed and along with it Cortez’s report of this massive, heinous piece of ancient public infrastructure.

### [Caffeinated Ancients](#)

A recent study has concluded that caffeinated drinks were being consumed in plenty across the American Southwest. Inspired by the discovery of chocolate in Chaco Canyon, University of New Mexico anthropologist Dr. Patricia Crown analyzed 177 pots from 18 different sites and found that over 20% tested positive for caffeine. Dr. Crown was searching for cacao, but instead found that most of her residues were actually “Black Drink”, a yaupon holly extract six times more potent than coffee. Black Drink had been found previously in ancient Cahokia, but this was a surprise. Since neither yaupon holly nor cacao can grow in the Southwest, its abundant presence there is yet another indicator of the vast trade network that existed in ancient North America.

## A New Book on Maya Textiles

*Maya Threads: A Woven History of Chiapas* explores the beautiful and intricate Mayan textiles of Chiapas, Mexico. When Walter F. Morris, Jr. (“Chip”) relocated to Chiapas, Mexico, in the early ‘70s, he was not just an outside observer looking in; rather, he quickly became an active participant in the Mayan daily life. As he established his life in Mexico’s southernmost State, he learned how deeply interwoven the symbolism and colorways of the area’s indigenous dress, household fabrics, and ceremonial pieces are with the culture and history of the people.



His new book, *Maya Threads: A Woven History of Chiapas* (Thrums Books, March 2015), coauthored with Carol Karasik and Janet Schwartz, is the essential guide to the history, meaning, and evolution of these textiles – from pre-Columbian royal raiment to the latest manifestations of ancient symbols and styles. Morris notes, “This book isn’t about fashion per se but how a culture preserves traditions, adopts new ideas, and adapts to changing times. Throughout their turbulent history, the Maya have clung to tradition while riding the waves of change. This remarkable resilience has guaranteed their survival, and nowhere is their success clearer than in their beautiful and diverse costumes.”

With more than 250 stunning photos, illustrations, and maps, *Maya Threads* explores a full range of textiles and offers an in-depth look at the region’s people. It vibrantly showcases an exuberant, private people whose textiles are constantly evolving on their own terms.

*Maya Threads* is the ultimate sourcebook for anyone interested in the culture and history of Chiapas. Perfect for an armchair traveler, fashion student, textile artisan, curious observer, or world traveler, this book offers a fascinating historical journey through fabric.

Available on Amazon at:

[http://www.amazon.com/Maya-Threads-Woven-History-Chiapas/dp/0983886067/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1443033123&sr=1-1&keywords=maya+threads](http://www.amazon.com/Maya-Threads-Woven-History-Chiapas/dp/0983886067/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1443033123&sr=1-1&keywords=maya+threads)

## MEC's New Team Member

**Dr. Heather Teague** has joined the MEC team. Heather received her Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin in December of 2014 with a focus on human rights in Latin America. Her expertise in modern indigenous politics and international law make her a great addition to the MEC team. In addition to her work in modern politics, Heather has a background in Maya archaeology stretching back to 1997 when she was with Dr. Barnhart in Programme for Belize. Her extensive travels in Latin America and teaching experiences are going to make her an ideal instructor for MEC travel courses and we couldn't be more pleased to welcome her into the MEC community.



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*Thanks to everyone who donated to MEC this summer*

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