



# ARCHAEO MAYA

The Newsletter of Maya Exploration Center

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

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## Paving Over Paradise

Once there was a green pasture. Cattle grazed there. Tired mares ran the six-furlong length of it, from the edge of the abandoned real estate development to the gates of El Panchan Hotel. INAH owned the land, and it was rumored that one day they would close the congested parking lot outside the ruins of Palenque, blanket this grassy field with asphalt, and create a public space that would accommodate

hundreds of idling tour buses and parked cars. In this far-sighted scheme, tourists would browse the souvenir stalls while waiting for the electric trains that would convey them to the archaeological site.

Five years went by and nothing happened. Then one windy February day the bulldozers arrived en masse. Half the field was reduced to muck. Then came the endless brigades of dump trucks hauling gravel and blowing dust. The sheer immensity of the INAH project - the two-meter depth of the gravel bed, the incalculable tonnage - rivals the great building programs of the ancient Maya kings. Except in this case, the public work is deliberately flat and artless. When the long-range project is completed, the national forest will be free of cars and free of the cows, chickens, and



*The future location of INAH's parking lot for the Palenque archaeological zone*

people who now live inside it. Nature will take its course.

Work ceased during the flu scare, but rumor has it that the paving will start "soon." Meanwhile, the gleaming parking lot acts as a giant reflector bouncing solar rays back into outer space. In the noonday sun it seems as if this were its intended purpose all along.

Nothing has stopped the total renovation of the main street in downtown Palenque. Three long blocks have been torn up for months while workers bury electric lines and broaden the pedestrian walkway. Someday soon, tourist cafes will line the boulevard, shops will resemble thatched huts, and residents will gossip behind the shrubbery. In the interim, traffic is hopelessly snarled and businesses on main street have closed their doors. It's a small price to pay for becoming part of the new *Pueblo Magico*.



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## Letter from the Director



Between global recession, claims that Mexico is a war zone, and pandemic swine flu, it's been a challenging year for an organization that offers educational travel programs in Mesoamerica. Nevertheless, most schools we work with have been undaunted by the news media hype, and our study abroad courses have run as scheduled. In this issue of ArchaeoMaya you'll read about the continuing adventures of ASL, Midland College, and our newest educational partner, Math for America. We at MEC want to thank them for their loyalty and intrepid spirits.

This issue of ArchaeoMaya also discusses MEC's ongoing commitment to the sensitive portrayal of Native American cultures. At the *Cosmic Serpent* conference, held for museum educators in Santa Fe, Alonso Mendez shared his current research on Maya astronomy and served as an instructor. Most recently, MEC and Dr. Gerardo Aldana of UC Santa Barbara co-hosted *KalpulliCe Akatl*, a week-long workshop designed to give students a chance to recreate ancient Maya mathematics, ceramics, and architectural plans.

Looking into the future, fall promises to be busier than usual. In addition

to planning the study abroad courses for 2010, I will be on the road lecturing on the end of the Maya Long Count in 2012. Wish me luck in absolving the Maya from all the apocalyptic mania! MEC will also host our first fundraiser this fall. The goal is to provide computers and internet service for Yashalum, a non-profit institution that offers dormitory space and scholarships for rural Maya youth living near Yajalon, Chiapas. The event will be held in Austin sometime in October. Details will go out by email to all newsletter recipients.

Finally, I'm very pleased to announce that our membership system is ready to launch! Read about what it offers and how to register in the pages of this issue. Unlike other membership systems, MEC invites you to participate in our research and gives you the resources to do so! We hope that some of you will take the important step from supporter of our research to active participant.

As the summer draws to a close and the holiday season appears on the horizon, I'm confident that our readership will continue to support our work through program participation, donations, and by simply spreading the word about who we are and what we do.

Sincerely,



## Mayan Calendar

Visit our sister website, [www.mayan-calendar.com](http://www.mayan-calendar.com), for information about Maya calendar systems, a Maya date conversation calculator, links to various web resources, and much more.



## ASL: Holy Week in Chiapas

This rainy April, ten high school students from the American School of London chose to spend Easter vacation in sunny Chiapas, soaking up Maya culture, practicing Spanish with newfound friends, and working on two environmental projects. As this remarkable educational program has evolved over the past three years, the students and itinerary have changed but the goals remain the same: cultural enrichment and service work. Along the way, ASL and MEC have strengthened their ties with Yashalum, a Maya institution dedicated to education and economic sustainability in the mountains of Yajalon.

The intense variety and pacing of the trip proved ideal for energetic teenagers eager to experience the Maya world. As they explored the magnificent temples of Palenque, Carol Karasik traced the history and beliefs of the Maya people. Soon the students were traveling through the sacred landscape to Yashalum and their first encounter with living Maya culture. Meanwhile, Maya students from Yashalum were touring the ruins of Tonina with Alonso Mendez. The next day, ASL and Yashalum students were knee deep in the organic compost heap that nourishes the community's coffee plantation.



*ASL Students working in San Cristobal*

Arriving in the high pine forests of San Cristóbal, ASL students immediately teamed up with teenage members of Ecos de la Tierra and El Club Na Bolom and began the backbreaking work of clearing land for an urban botanical garden. The project, organized by Anita Smart, resulted in three level terraces as well as increased environmental awareness in the surrounding neighborhood. A hike through the Huitepec cloud forest reserve and a visit



*ASL students show off their hard work badges*

to Cisco Dietz's spectacular orchid collection exemplified current efforts to preserve the rare plant species of Chiapas.

Most of Holy Week was devoted to an in-depth view of traditional Maya culture. With Chip Morris as their guide, students traveled to three Maya villages where they visited the private chapels of religious officials, witnessed ritual dances and curing ceremonies, and observed the reenactment of the crucifixion on Good Friday. Amid the heady scent of pine needles and incense, Maya customs blended with medieval church practices preserved since the Conquest.

Back in San Cristóbal, solemn religious processions vied with the celebration of the city's spring festival as saints were carried through the streets to the sounds of drumbeats, rock bands, and fireworks. In the midst of the cacophony, students explored the local craft shops and took in a performance of "Palenque Rojo," a lavish costume drama set in ancient Maya times.

Returning to the environmental theme, a visit to a rural 18<sup>th</sup> century church and wheat mill introduced students to the colonial flavor of the San Cristóbal valley, and to a long-range development project that will help sustain local communities as well as the environmental integrity of the highlands. Environmental and cultural preservation go hand in hand. This year's ASL visit, combining culture and ecological work, touched the spirit and is sure to reap future rewards.

## Announcing 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. For journals like *American Antiquity*, that's over 100 years worth of publications. MEC has specific permission to access the Arts and Sciences Collections, volumes I and II. Click here to see all the journal titles these two volumes contain -

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With this resource you have a research archive that rivals a major university, downloaded right into your personal computer. Articles may be directly printed, emailed, or saved as pdf files.

### **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. In order to have your research published on our website, members must comply with these procedures:

A. Write up your research following the standard rules of academic publication, including figures, citations, and a bibliography. For guidelines, see the Society for American Archaeology Style Guide:

<http://saa.org/AbouttheSociety/Publications/StyleGuide/tabid/984/Default.aspx>

.B. Submit your paper electronically (limit 20 pages) to MEC at [members@mayaexploration.org](mailto:members@mayaexploration.org)

C. MEC's panel of experts will then conduct a peer review and return comments within six weeks.

D. The author addresses the comments of peer review and resubmits the paper.

E. Steps C and D continue until MEC approves, or finally denies, the paper.

MEC supports freedom of opinion. However, we retain the right to deny any research paper that does not meet our standards of scholarship.

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

Do you have a research project for which you would like to seek funding? 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. Research Members are invited to submit their research plans for peer review and commentary. MEC will evaluate the research

plan and advise you on how to make it the best it can be. Upon approval of your research plan and proposal, MEC will provide letters of support to accompany your grant application. 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 every January (retail price \$15.99). 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 celebrate the unveiling of our new membership system, those who sign up before September 1<sup>st</sup> will receive all of 2010 at the regular cost of \$150, plus membership privileges for the last four months of 2009, including JSTOR and the wall calendar, at no additional cost!

To receive an application form and join our team in recovering the past, email us at [members@mayaexploration.org](mailto:members@mayaexploration.org)

## Kalpulli Ce Akatl



According to Aztec prophecies, the day Ce Akatl ("One Reed" in Nahuatl) would see the return of Quetzalcoatl, the great Mesoamerican god and culture hero who taught the arts and sciences to humanity. Although Quetzalcoatl's return remains imminent, the Kalpulli Ce Akatl workshops were designed to honor and revive Mesoamerican arts and sciences. Held at University of California Santa Barbara, from July 12-18, and hosted by UCSB's Dr. Gerardo Aldana, in partnership with MEC, the workshops attracted enthusiastic local students, teachers, and community members.

The week began with Dr. Aldana's lively critique of current Hollywood films about the Maya. Taking a serious look at *Apocalypto*, *Indiana Jones* and the *Crystal Skull*, and the upcoming 2012, he asked, "Are these blockbuster films just movies?" Aldana pointed out that, in the absence of any other frame of reference, these films shape the general public's perception of Mesoamerican people, both ancient and modern, often portraying them in a bad light. Aldana is committed to the responsible representation of Mesoamerican culture in his outstanding work on Maya mathematics and science, and he calls upon others, be

they professors or movie producers, to do the same.

The best way to gain an appreciation of ancient Maya achievements is to visit the Maya sites. Short of that, students can try to duplicate Maya art and architecture through hands-on experience. During the workshops, some made ceramics, others did calculations using Maya mathematics, and still others designed buildings using Maya geometric principles. Mid-week, participants took a break to enjoy a lecture and documentary film on cacao presented by MEC research associate Dr. Michael Grofe, an expert on cacao symbolism – and an excellent chocolatier.

In the late afternoons, a small group of scholars met for a special seminar on the Venus Pages of the Dresden Codex. The goal was to examine the translation problems that still exist after 100 years of intense scholarship. During an exciting exchange of ideas, participants developed a new, workable hypothesis: the probability of a Maya "Venus Zodiac." The concept is still being tested, and if successful, the results will be written up over the next few months.

The week ended with a superb dance performance at UCSB's Alumni Center. Students proudly displayed the objects they created in the workshops, excited by how much they had learned. When Dr. Aldana announced another workshop for the summer of 2010, everyone pledged to help spread the word.



## Math for America Does Math in Mexico

When Math for America's Melanie Smith first contacted MEC, she was wondering if there was enough ancient Maya math content to fill a full week's travel course. Now, after leading her first group of young New York mathematicians through the Yucatan, she wonders how we fit so much in!

Because of misleading media coverage regarding travel in Mexico, the planning phase of the course was fraught with an unusually high level of security concerns. MEC met those concerns by arranging private security, mapping out all the hospitals along the route, and developing evacuation plans. Thankfully, none of those precautions proved necessary. From day one in Merida, course participants realized they were among warm, friendly, family-loving Maya folks.

The week was spent with Christopher Powell, visiting

ruins by day and attending Maya math lectures in the evenings. As a special treat, they were invited to the home of Sid Hollander, famous for creating the world's first Maya calendar conversion software, "Bars and Dots." As Sid's wife catered a delicious Yucatec lunch, Sid presented his perspective on Maya calendrical cycles and taught the students how to calculate their birthdays in the Maya calendar.

By the time the week ended, Christopher had given the group of young mathematicians an unparalleled understanding of how ancient Maya people used math to build their world, record their histories, and understand the movements of the heavens. Another successful program completed, and Maya mathematical traditions are on their way to the public schools of New York City.

## Texans in Peru



Midland in Machu Picchu

For their sixth travel course with MEC, Midland College decided to study the ancient Inca of Peru. The April course began with a trial, namely a terrible storm that closed the Houston airport. The group was trapped. Accustomed to meeting the unexpected, Dr. Wade changed the flights in Houston as Dr. Barnhart changed the transport and hotel reservations from Lima. A day later, the sleepy participants arrived in Lima at 2:30 am.

The course officially began in Cuzco, once known as *Cosco*, meaning "the navel" of *Tawantinsuyu*, "the land of four quarters," as the Inca called their empire. In the ancient capital, students toured museums and churches and walked the ancient streets, still lined with Inca stones. At Sascahuaman they marveled at fortress walls built with massive boulders, each perfectly dressed and weighing over 100 tons.

On the third day, the Midlanders were traveling by train through the mountains towards Machu Picchu, sipping coca tea, and trying to stay warm. When they descended into Machu Picchu's tropical valley, the

sparkling sun created an ideal day for visiting the ruins. Rain blew in the following morning, but those who braved the storm witnessed the magical temples as they slipped in and out of the mist.

The trip through the Sacred Valley was blessed with glowing weather. Students hiked the Inca terraces of Ollantaytambo, dined at Hacienda Tunupa along the Urubamba River, and shopped in the indigenous market of Pisac. As the sun set and their private bus climbed over the last ridge, the lights of Cuzco, shining in the valley below, melded with the stars.

The course was almost over, but fortunately there was still one full day left for exploring. Flying back to Lima, the students set off on a historical tour of the city. The first stop was the Larco Hoyle Museum to see the world's most extensive collection of pottery from the pre-Inca Moche culture, justly celebrated for its ceramic portraiture. Next, the City Cathedral, for a blood-chilling tour of the catacombs. While watching the sun set over the presidential palace in the Plaza Mayor, students learned about Lima's tempestuous political history.

There was just enough time to cross the city and dine at Rosa Nautica, a famed international restaurant overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The happy group ate, drank, and reminisced about all they had learned during the week. Where to next for the adventurous students of Midland College? The rain forests of Tabasco and Chiapas in October!

## Chiapas: Shelter in the Storm



*Allen Ginsburg Ponders the Ruins of Palenque, 1954*

When American poet Hart Crane reached the end of his tether, he wailed that Mexico was the land of death. Perhaps he was referring to the sugared skulls sold in the markets, the ghostly figures walking arm in arm along the sundrenched strand. *Ni modo*. For a generation of melancholy, suicidal writers, Crane's final words were read, not as a warning but an invitation. At one time or another, the giants of 20<sup>th</sup> century letters – D.H. Lawrence, Malcolm Lowry, Robert Lowell, Tennessee Williams – journeyed south of the border in search of redemption. That's how it was before exploring Mexican ruins became as fashionable as breathing the vapors at Delphi. Adventurous souls merely dipped their toes in the wine-dark waters of creative turmoil. Their postcards home spoke of color, art, tradition, beauty. Alas, high culture is not everyone's cup of tea. The mil-

lions of tourists who began flocking to Mexico were more interested in middle-class beach resorts than in spiritual illumination. By then, the worst that could happen was a dose of culture shock or a bad case of Montezuma's revenge. So the trend continued until this year's media blitz made Hart Crane's words prophetic: See Mexico and die.

As we all know, death is everywhere, so why should Mexico be singled out for this dubious honor? The reasons have to do with politics and the declining quality of prose. For example, the drug wars (or the war on drugs) being fought on the US-Mexican border are a lamentable by-product of Hollywood stereotypes and metaphors as mindless as poverty, addiction, and revenge. Without commenting on news battles and sinking journalistic standards, let us just say that the chances of getting caught in gangster crossfire are statistically slim, especially when the zone of criminal conflict is two thousand miles away from Chiapas.

In a state where, according to local raconteur Moises Morales, there are more second-rate poets per square meter than anywhere else in the world, peace reigns supreme. The economic crisis hasn't hit yet, and the American dollar still buys a double espresso. The magic so eagerly sought by serious travelers flows like manna from underworld springs.

But wait. The month of May rang out a new alarm: swine flu. With 150 reported deaths in Mexico, the schools were closed and for the first time in history, all archaeological sites and museums were locked tight. Although only five cases were reported in Tabasco, cautious citizens were wearing blue surgical masks. The few who donned red bandanas reminded us of the days when the Zapatista rebellion kept tourists away. Those who live here either shrug their shoulders philosophically or insist the whole thing smells of a conspiracy designed to ruin the people who pick apples and tomatoes for American tables. Everyone is feeling the pinch. And yet this latest epidemic, bolstered by the media, has proved far less dangerous than the average winter flu.

When Allen Ginsburg visited the eternal site of Palenque in 1954, he had a vision of a vast unfathomable god. For him, the jungle and the ruins made the written word seem like a candle in the wood. *Written by Carol Karasik*



### Upcoming Public Tours

**Pillars of the Classic Maya, Palenque to Tikal,**  
November 21-29, 2009

**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

### Early Structures Found at Chichen

Classic Period platforms have been discovered under the Post-classic main plaza of Chichen Itza. The earliest texts at Chichen Itza date to A.D. 859, although none of the city's previously known buildings date from that century. Now it appears that the newly found structures are the missing link.

Early in 2009, INAH's Dr. Rafael Cobos took over as chief archaeologist at Chichen Itza and almost immediately began digging test pits in the main plaza, between the Castillo and the Temple of the Warriors. Encountering walls at depths of two to four meters below the surface, Cobos's team opened wide trenches to expose the architecture. Well constructed terraces, some two meters in height, were uncovered, and ceramic evidence points to an 8<sup>th</sup> century construction date. This is one of the most significant archaeological discoveries made at Chichen Itza in decades. As excavations continue, Cobos and his team should be able to shed more light on Chichen Itza's Classic, pre-Toltec history.

### Excavations Begin at Ichkabal

This summer saw the first major excavations at the ruins of Ichkabal, a massive ancient city located in southern Quintana Roo. Just ten kilometers from Dzibanche, Ichkabal may prove to be another extension of the Kaan Kingdom, perhaps even the origin place of Calakmul's powerful "Snake" dynasty. Mapping of the city's ceremonial center reveals that the main temple measures 46 meters high, surpassing the Nohoch Mul at Coba and thus registering as the tallest pyramid in the Yucatan. INAH Archaeologist Enrique Nalda, who is directing excavations at the site, estimates that Ichkabal will be open to tourism in 2011.

## On the Trail of the Cosmic Serpent



*An Eagle Dancer at sunrise in Chaco Canyon*

On March 15, over 70 scientists, educators, and museum personnel met in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to confront one of the major impediments to science education and advancement among Native Americans: the fundamental "cultural disconnect" between western and indigenous world-views. Resolving the issue is no easy matter, but *Cosmic Serpent*, a professional development conference funded by the National Science Foundation and organized by the Indigenous Education Institute (IEI) and the U.C. Berkeley Space Sciences Laboratory (UCB), represents a first step toward bridging the cultural gap between western and indigenous scientific knowledge.

The cosmic serpent, a universal symbol of the celestial realm, united the diverse traditional cultures represented at the conference. Finding common ground enabled conference members to identify teaching methods that lacked a pluralistic scope and to develop strategies for creating broader and more sensitive programs in science centers, cultural museums, and other informal educational settings.

MEC's Alonso Mendez played a major role as advisor, presenter, and instructor at the conference. Having participated in previous NASA, U.C. Berkeley, and INAH educational projects and having collaborated with Carol Karasik on the full dome production of "Maya Skies," Mendez recognized the problems of presenting indigenous knowledge to western audiences but went on to offer some important suggestions. Following the premier of "Navajo Astronomy," at Albuquerque's Lodestar Planetarium, indigenous astronomy, including Maya archaeoastronomy, became the leading topic.

The timing was perfect. On March 17, equinox observations were made in the main court of the American Indian Art Institute's new campus, which was built in accordance with the solar alignments of the Great Kiva at Chaco Canyon. Alonso and Ron Stutcliffe, a cultural astronomer who has dedicated his life to southwestern archaeoastronomy, used forked sighting sticks and string to measure the setting sun.

On March 21, key participants made a pilgrimage to Chaco Canyon. Under a cold, pre-dawn sky they waited for the sun to appear at Casa Rinconada. As the rising sun pierced the aligned doorways of the Great Kiva, two young dancers from Laguna Pueblo began a haunting performance of the eagle dance. Past and present came together as the drum and song of the eagle dancers summoned the cosmic serpent.

For more information on the Cosmic Serpent Project:

<http://www.indigenouseducation.org> or contact

Dr. Nancy Maryboy, Principal Investigator, [ncm@indigenouseducation.org](mailto:ncm@indigenouseducation.org);

Dr. David Begay, Co-Principal Investigator, [dbegay@gmail.com](mailto:dbegay@gmail.com); or

Dr. Isabel Hawkins, <http://cse.ssl.berkeley.edu> or [isabelh@ssl.berkeley.edu](mailto:isabelh@ssl.berkeley.edu).



# 2010 Mayan Calendar



MEC is pleased to announce that the 2010 Mayan Calendar will be available starting this September.

As always, this year's calendar will feature beautiful photos of ancient art and architecture while providing the Maya date for each day of the year. Each month's page includes

the glyphs for the calendar round date, important anniversaries in Maya history, and a countdown to the 13<sup>th</sup> Bak'tun in 2012.

Log onto [www.mayan-calendar.com](http://www.mayan-calendar.com) for purchase instructions plus a host of free information and resources on the Maya calendar. Proceeds support Maya Exploration Center.

\$15.99 per calendar, 4 for \$52, and 10 for \$120

*(Shipping and handling charges apply)*



*iMaya* for iPhone or iPod touch devices gives you the Maya calendar date for today or any date in history - past, present and future. Convert dates back and forth between the Maya and Gregorian calendars, learn about various Maya cycles of time, and find out what the Maya really said about December 21, 2012.

An additional function allows you to calculate your birthday in the Maya 260-day calendar. Learn what your day sign says about your personality traits and destiny.

To download *iMaya* to your device, search the Apple App Store or [www.mayan-calendar.com](http://www.mayan-calendar.com)

*Thanks to Everyone Who Donated to MEC This Spring and Summer*

**No Donations**

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