



# ARCHAEO MAYA

The Newsletter of Maya Exploration Center

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

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## MEC High School Course - The Bentley School

MEC's first ever high school level course was attended by eleven students from the Bentley School, a private high school in Lafayette, California. Chaperoned by Bentley teachers Emily Repp and Daniel Roose, the group of eager students showed up to the Villahermosa airport on the evening of February 28. MEC's Director Ed Barnhart was there to meet them and escort them to the Hotel Cencali.



*Bentley School's Lisa Curtis Communes with an Olmec Sculpture*

Over the next two days, they were in the capable hands of Christopher Powell, who brought them to La Venta Park and Palenque. In the evenings at El Panchan's new restaurant, Powell and Barnhart worked together providing slide show presentations about ancient Maya history and calendars. Staying in El Panchan was ideal for this young group, and many of them could be found writing in their journals while enjoying dinner and live music at Restaurant Don Mucho.

The third day was another first for MEC, a community service project. Led now by Alonso Mendez, the students visited a rubber tree plantation. After learning about the trees, their uses, and the ways in which their latex is extracted, they spent the afternoon collecting over 100 saplings to reforest other, more de-

nuded parts of Palenque. Those trees are now in a nursery, waiting to be planted at the onset of the rainy season.

On March 4<sup>th</sup>, Mendez introduced them to the beauty of the Chiapan rainforest. Long jungle hikes, climbing waterfalls, and learning about the area's flora and fauna were clearly some of the student's favorite activities.

Their last day in Palenque began again with another community service project. Led this time by Anita Smart of The Pathways Project ([www.thepathwaysproject.org](http://www.thepathwaysproject.org)), they cleared an area in the yard for a special needs school of a future play park. That evening saw a third new event for MEC, the first ever "Maya Quiz Bowl." Powell and Mendez teamed up to run it and the students had fun testing the knowledge they gained over the week. The winning team was awarded MEC t-shirts.

At 5am the next morning, the group were loading up in their van to the airport, some sleepy, some smiling, and few with tears in their eyes, not wanting to leave El Panchan just yet. Since their adventure, the students have all sent heartfelt letters of appreciation and the Bentley School has expressed interest in making the course an annual offering. For MEC it was a wonderful opportunity to touch the lives of younger students, and one we hope to repeat in the future.



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## Letter from the Director

As the slower pace of winter melted away, the spring breathed new life into MEC's education programs. I was especially pleased to extend our offerings to high school level students for the first time. In late February I was invited to present at the American School of London. In March, MEC ran a travel course for the Bentley School. Then, on Cinco de Mayo I spoke at Sioux City's West and North High Schools. All were rewarding opportunities to touch the hearts and minds of younger audiences.

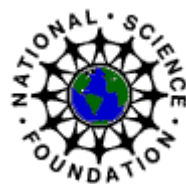


In March, MEC Associates attended the Texas Maya Meetings in force. Carol Karasik, Christopher Powell, Alonso Mendez, and myself were all in attendance. This year's topic was Palenque, in which we were of course keenly interested. Alonso Mendez represented our team well with a masterful presentation of our soon to be published archaeoastronomy discoveries in Palenque. Just days later for the Spring Equinox, I found myself invited to participate in a Japanese Public Television documentary at Chichen Itza. Standing atop El Observatorio, explaining its viewing windows as the equinox sun set, I was acutely aware how lucky I am to be MEC's Director.

In this edition of ArchaeoMaya, you'll read about some of the highlights of our work this spring. With every passing edition, it gets harder to impart the fullness of our activities within the confines of a single newsletter. This time, we've chosen to highlight our spring travel courses, our latest research, and the new content of our website. We also take a moment to introduce our newest Board Member, Dr. Don Hart. As always, we let you know about our upcoming tours and what you can do to support MEC.

I'm now braced for a busy summer, with two more MEC travel courses, another public tour, and three new NSF Chautauqua courses. However, no matter how busy MEC becomes, we will always be happy to take a moment to share our progress reports with those who support us through their interest, program participation, and donations. So, to all of you who read this newsletter, I wish you a wonderful summer and send my heartfelt thanks for your ongoing support.

Sincerely,



## CHAUTAUQUA SHORT COURSES FOR COLLEGE TEACHERS

2006 FACULTY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

To see the National Science Foundation Chautauqua courses

offered by Dr. Ed Barnhart visit [www.ahautravel.com](http://www.ahautravel.com)

To register for a course, visit [www.chautauqua.pitt.edu](http://www.chautauqua.pitt.edu)

## U Pitt at Bradford March 2006 Travel Course in The Peten

On 5am March 4<sup>th</sup>, Ed Barnhart and Kirk French began their journey by van and boat from Palenque to the island of Flores, Guatemala. As the Sun set that evening, they arrived to the Hotel Santana, where they met the earlier comers for the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford travel course, "Science and Culture in the Maya Ruins of The Peten, Guatemala." For the third year in a row, Professor Isabelle Champlin organized a group of students, colleagues, and alumni to attend the course. Alumni course participant Brian Calhoun generously offered two student scholarships. Brian himself, unfortunately, missed his connecting flight in Cancun. Undaunted, he took 15 hours of buses, through Belize, to arrive the next afternoon!

The course had in total sixteen participants, and began with introductory lectures and by exploring Flores and Lake Peten. On the island, the group learned about its former identity as Noj Peten, the capital city of the Peten Itza, King Kan Ek's 20,000+ Maya empire until Spanish forces conquered it in 1697. The next day was spent exploring Lake Peten by boat, visiting the ruins of Tayasal, a tiny island museum, Petencito Zoo, and the village of San Jose where some of the last descendants of the Itza Maya reside. In a tragic case of linguistic endangerment, there are said to be only seven people left who can fluently speak Itza Maya. The group was lucky enough to invite one of those remaining seven to lunch, a man in his late 70's named Rosa Bitzil. Rosa spoke in his language for the students, and told them stories of how for decades of his youth speaking Maya was an offense punishable by public flogging. As he accompanied them to the boat, he pointed out the homes of the other six Itza speakers. Of one, he said, "He knows Itza, but now he's deaf and can't hear what people ask him." From conversations on the boat back to Flores, it was clear that witnessing a language so near extinction had a powerful effect on the group.

After one more night in Flores and a visit to the remote ruins of Siebal, the course headed north into Tikal National Park. At the park's entrance, the group stopped in for an exciting zip-line canopy tour. Barnhart was bit hesitant, but gung-ho Professor Champlin would not be denied the challenge. The first few zip line runs made some students nervous, but by the end everyone was having a ball and zipping along like pros. From there it was on to Tikal, and an hour beyond to the ruins of Uaxactun, famous for its astronomically oriented E-Group. After a home cooked lunch at the El



*University of Pittsburgh course participants in the ruins of Uaxactun*

Chiclero campsite and a visit to their incredible ceramic museum, a crowd of village children led the students into the ruins. There they discussed how the E-Group observatory functioned and stumbled upon a new archaeological discovery. Upon measuring the top of the E Group's viewing platform, they found its proportions to be a perfect square root of five!

The last full day of the course was spent in the vast ruins of Tikal guided by Ricardo Ortiz, son of the man who cut Tikal's first airstrip in the 1950's. Having grown up amongst the ruins, Ricardo's knowledge of the various theories, as well as the local flora and fauna, was incredible. But that wasn't quite the end of their adventure. Waking the next day at 5am, a ruins guard met the group and led them by flashlight through the darkness to Tikal's tallest Temple (Temple IV, 64 meters in height). Sitting atop the temple, they watched the dawn as Barnhart explained how the site lines from temple to temple could be used to track the cycles of the heavens. As the Sun began to rise, the roars of three different howler monkey troupes echoed through the forest with a haunting beauty. French explained that they do that every morning to establish their territories.

After a quick breakfast back at the Tikal Inn, everyone packed up and headed towards the Flores airport. There they said their goodbyes and promised to meet again for next year's adventure, scheduled for the Yucatan. Barnhart and French then got back in their van to start the long bumpy road back to Palenque, where they were to meet a group from the World Monument Fund the very next day.

## Grand Anniversary of the Birth of the Progenitor Deity of Palenque

*MEC Associate Alonso Mendez noticed an incredible synchronicity currently being played out in the Maya Calendar. The following piece is his written explanation.*

On April 19, 2006, only a few days after the Holy Week celebrations, an anniversary of mythic proportions passed by without much fanfare. The date, written as the initial series of the Tablet of the Cross 12.19.13.4.0. 8 Ahau 18 Tzek, was the birthdate of the progenitor deity of Palenque, named Muan Mat by the epigraphers. This date,



*The hieroglyphic name of the Progenitor Deity*

which occurred 6.79 years before the famous date of creation, 13.0.0.0.0. 4 Ahau 8 Cumku, stands as one of the oldest events mentioned in the tablets of Palenque. In the famous passages of the Tablet of the Cross, the progenitor deity's "arrival" or birth is one of the principal events that is recorded.

Today, 6.79 years from the 21st of December 2012, when the Long Count reaches its completion once again, we are experiencing the same dates that preceded the end of a grand cycle and the beginning of a new era. April 19, 2006, according to the Long Count, corresponds to the date 12.19.13.4.0. 8 Ahau 13 Pop, and we are 6 tuns (or years of 360 days) and 16 winals (or months of 20 days) away from 13.0.0.0.0. 4 Ahau 3 Kankin, December 21, 2012, the end of this creation. And if that were not enough, 8 Ahau 13 Pop also coincides with the anniversary of K'inich Janab' Pakal's birth date! This could be interpreted as a fortuitous coincidence had it not been that earlier observations made by Lounsbury, showed that the 1,359,540 days interval between the birth dates of Muan Mat and Pakal is an integral multiple of seven different important periods which include the synodic period of Mars (Coe 1993). It is this deep interrelationship between mythological dates and historical dates that

make Palenque's tablets a unique and an endless well of information.

But what relevance does a mythical Maya date have for our era? As it happened, the mythology of Palenque was the primary theme of a prestigious gathering of Mayanists and epigraphers that occurred in March. The annual Maya Meetings are held every year at the University of Texas at Austin. Founded 30 years ago by Linda Schele, the forum has inspired some of the most important discoveries and advances in the field of Maya studies. Palenque still holds its place as the cradle of Maya epigraphy and the place where some of the first texts were translated. Palenque's hieroglyphic texts contain the most detailed descriptions of mythological events. However, the metaphorical and esoteric character of these texts also makes them the most difficult to translate. Thirty years of study have brought us back to the same tablets, which were a central part of the first Maya Meetings and still resist decipherment.

During the last three years, new archaeological discoveries have compelled scholars to reconsider the mythology of the Classic period. One was the discovery at San Bartolo, Guatemala. The magnificent murals, beautifully preserved for over 2000 years, depict mythical scenes involving a deity identified as the Corn God. San Bartolo demonstrates that this deity was well established by the early Classic period, whose dates have been pushed back to about 300 B.C. (see National Geographic, January 2006. [ngm.com/0601](http://ngm.com/0601)). Characteristics of the Corn God may also be present in the tablets of the Cross Group. David Stuart, epigrapher at the Mesoamerican Center of the University of Texas at Austin, sees a link between the Corn God of San Bartolo and the progenitor deity of Palenque and has proposed a translation of the prefix of her name as *Ixim* or Corn. There is sharp disagreement, however, about the gender of this primordial deity. David Stuart proposes that Palenque's progenitor deity, like the Corn God at San Bartolo, is male. Stuart's theory contradicts Linda Schele's original identification of the deity as a mother goddess, based on the translation of the prefix as *Na*, "mother," or *Ix*, "woman." Perhaps this deity contains both genders, representing the dual Mother-Father creators or a single deity that recreates itself and the

## Progenitor Deity Cont.

next generation of gods. Michael Grofe from the University of California Davis, sees a treelike element in her name, and thus may exemplify the Mesoamerican concept of the arrival of the gods through an opening in the primordial tree. Examples of these "births" may be seen in the Dresden Codex as well as the Mexican and Mixtec codices.

The second part of the name is composed of the fierce head of the mythical *Muan* bird, which is the main reason why Schele called the goddess "Lady Beastie." This mythical bird, which carries in its beak the feathers and foot of another bird, has been identified by some as a type of eagle. The cormorant, an aquatic species, is a more likely possibility. It swims underwater as well as flies through the air, thereby mastering two natural elements. Its unique beak, lined with vestigial teeth, make it a rare link between birds and reptiles; fossils of cormorants confirm its existence 30 million years ago. Perhaps it is the bird's teeth that related the cormorant to the caiman, a creature that also plays an important role in the creation myth.

We are living at a moment of remarkable discoveries, with the next six years promising profound breakthroughs in the study of Maya hieroglyphs. What new revelations will they provide to guide us toward the end of this creation? We can be sure of one thing, that Palenque will continue to be the focus of new insights. Meanwhile, in a modest and quiet celebration, preparations for the next great cycle began this 19<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2006.

## MEC Establishes CEM

After over a year of learning, planning, meetings, and paperwork, MEC's sister company in Mexico has finally been established. **Centro de Exploraciones Mayas, S.C.** was signed into being May 12, 2006 at Notaria Publico #34 in Villahermosa, Tabasco. Alejandra Merino Trujillo de Powell, CEM's Tesorero (treasurer) did the tireless work of keeping the incorporation process on track from beginning to finish. Through CEM, MEC can provide its services directly to Mexican residents, pay Mexican salaries, sell merchandise, and even own land. CEM represents an important step in MEC's commitment to providing services to people of all nations.

## UPCOMING TOURS

### *Education Through Exploration*

*Maya Ruins and Culture in Chiapas and Tabasco, Mexico*

July 28 - August 2, 2006

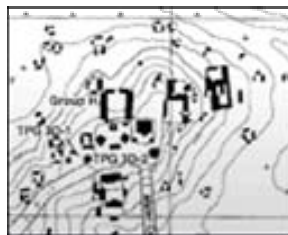
*Day of the Dead in the Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico*

October 27 - November 4, 2006

Learn more and sign up at:

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

## MEC Tech Report



MEC is proud to present our newest online resource, *Maya Maps*. Ruins maps of individual sites and regional maps can now be found and searched through at:

[www.mayaexploration.org/maps.php](http://www.mayaexploration.org/maps.php). Starting modestly with about 30 maps, MEC hopes to expand this list to 100's, adding a few new maps every month. The goal of *Maya Maps* is to give students, scholars, and enthusiasts alike access to site maps that are otherwise buried in archaeological reports and obscure publications. The maps of individual ruins are in pdf format and arranged in alphabetical order, with their references in a side tab. MEC is looking for more maps and help with tracking down their original authors, so if you have contributions or comments, please send them to: [mayamaps@mayaexploration.org](mailto:mayamaps@mayaexploration.org).

Also new this Spring, check out the newly posted research papers by Ed Barnhart and Christopher Powell in MEC's Research Section:

[www.mayaexploration.org/research\\_pubs.php](http://www.mayaexploration.org/research_pubs.php)

## News from Palenque

*Settlers at Yaxchilan* Over the last 18 months, a community of settlers has been growing on the opposite side of the river from Yaxchilan. Starting with just one thatch roofed structure and a small milpa, there are now over a dozen homes. Clear cutting for farming has revealed the presence of multiple large temples, assumably part of ancient Yaxchilan. Where did these settlers come from? Another new community of over 150 families lying just a few kilometers off the river. MEC's brief contacts with the riverside community found them friendly and hopeful to find ways to participate in Yaxchilan's tourism. However, being located on the Guatemala side of the river could create problems between them and the service providers on the Mexican side. Accusations of looting and tourist harassment have already been thrown about, though nothing substantiated. One thing is certain – the riverside community will continue to grow. If these people are excluded from the Usumacinta economy, it will lead to resentment and possibly hostility. MEC will keep an eye out and continue to provide updates.

*Texas Maya Meetings* Palenque was the topic of the 2006 Texas Maya Meetings this March. Under the leadership of Dr. David Stuart, the meetings welcomed changes to its schedule, location, and content for the first time since the 1990's. In addition to the traditional long workshops, the first-ever Spanish language workgroup was established. A new evening event featured an informal conversation between National Geographic legends George Stuart and Ken Garrett, who shared lively and entertaining accounts of their stories from the field. David Stuart (George's son) presented compelling new theories on the identities of Palenque's mythological founders and brilliantly organized the weekend symposium. Mexican epigraphers Erik Valequez and Ignacio Bernal were invited to present and clearly demonstrated that Mexico's new generation of epigraphers are the finest in their country's history. In an informal session of lectures, Alonso Mendez presented MEC's exciting new archaeoastronomy discoveries from the Temple of the Sun. Overall, the meetings were well attended and the mood was one of renewed enthusiasm. Next year's meeting, planned for the first time to occur before Spring Break, promises to be even bigger and better.

## The Palenque Hydro-Archaeology Project

The Palenque Hydro-Archaeology Project is moving forward in its search for a better understanding of the site's hydrology. MEC Associate and PhD candidate, Kirk French, and his professor from Pennsylvania State University, Dr. Christopher Duffy, arrived at Palenque in early May. Their goals were to: 1) explore Palenque's watershed; 2) scout locations for the installation of more stream sensors; 3) update the software and hardware on the meteorological station at the site; and 4) test the viability of using a new flow meter on Palenque's many waterways.

Christopher Duffy is a hydrologist in the Civil Engineering Department at Penn State. He has ongoing projects in the southwestern U.S. and on the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. At Palenque, Duffy is interested in testing his model for human impacts on hydrological processes. He believes the Maya of Palenque modified their landscape to such a degree that it might have altered the areas hydrological cycle.



*Duffy and French Measure the Stream Flow of the Picota with a Rickly Flow Tracker*

French and Duffy accomplished their goals and have since returned to State College, Pennsylvania where they have begun to analyze the data gathered from the streams and weather station. French will return to Palenque in July in hopes of installing more stream sensors and better survey the watershed.



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[www.mayaexploration.org/resources\\_books.php](http://www.mayaexploration.org/resources_books.php)

## MEC Board Welcomes Don Hart



*Don Hart at Chichen Itza*

MEC is proud to welcome our newest addition to the Board of Directors, Dr. Donald M Hart. Don first ventured into the Maya world some 37 years ago under the wing of Merle Greene Robertson. At 17 years of age, he was one of "Merle's Boys" from the Stevenson School who explored Guatemala, Honduras, & Mexico. His early activities lead him to projects in Naranja, Tamrandito, Dos Pilas, Uaxactun, Tikal, and Palenque, to mention a few. Don went on in his college years to obtain degrees in Anthropology, Education, and Law. A perennial supporter of Merle's incredible (and continuing) career, he served for almost 25 years as a director of her Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute. Most recently, Don has been involved in research projects in Palenque, Tikal, Chichen Itza, and San Bartolo. His years of experience as an administrator, researcher, and mentor to students will surely be of great value as MEC continues to develop our research and education programs. It is our honor to present him to our community of supporters. Don presently resides in Quintana Roo, Mexico.

## Why Donate to MEC ?

If you're interested in the search for the lost knowledge of the ancients, you should support Maya Exploration Center. MEC is at the forefront of research that is making a real difference in our understanding of the ancient Maya. In addition, our education programs encourage students to step away from classrooms and into to the ruins to see for themselves.

Our education programs are enriched by current research and, in turn, ongoing research is supported through the funds raised through our education programs. Support MEC's non-profit organization today and help us carve new paths between the ancient Maya and modern public awareness.

*Thanks to Everyone Who Has Donated to MEC This Spring*

**Ricardo Oria • Alliance Bernstein • Joan Powell • Richard Diehl • Gordon Faison • Thomas Pyle • M.M. Lamar • Joseph Puentes**

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