



ARCHAEO MAYA

The Newsletter of Maya Exploration Center

www.mayaexploration.org

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Happy Birthday, Merle



Merle awarding Kent Reilly a quesadilla during her party (photo by Elaine Schele)

Merle Greene Robertson's birthday bash, set in Palenque in steamy July, was a five-day toast to the Maya, and the cycles of life. Merle prefers not to reveal her age, but her memories of riding the western range go back to the 1920s. Later she ran a summer camp in the Pacific Cascades and a private high school in California. In between, she studied painting and became an artist. Then, as Merle says, one little thing changed everything. She went to Tikal and fell in love with the Maya. In no time she was paddling down the Usumacinta River, recording the art she found at remote jungle ruins.

When Merle first came to Palenque, in the 1960s, she slept in the Temple of the Sun. During the next three decades, she explored every tunnel, tomb, and roof-comb, making drawings, photographs, and ink rubbings of every sculpture at

the site. As co-founder of the Palenque Mesa Redonda and the Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute, she presided over the most remarkable breakthroughs in the Maya field.

The scholars who used to gather on Merle's back porch are now leading lights, older, yes, but still bitten by the bug and inspired by Merle's feisty courage. Together, this elite crew

cracked the hieroglyphic code, sweated in the trenches searching for the buried truth. Forget Indiana Jones! Merle is the fearless model, an ageless, irrepressible, five-katun queen.

The days before the royal banquet were steeped in weighty conversations that soon dissolved into reminiscence. The formal talks presented at the mini-symposium mixed memories and ideas. Peter Matthews's lists of the birthdates, reigns, and deaths of Maya rulers summoned the ancestors. Alfonso Morales's discovery of Akhal Mo Nahb III's complex seemed destined by his childhood growing up in Palenque and becoming part of Merle's extended family. Arlen Chase, a former high school student of Merle's, went on to excavate the great city of Caracol. David Stuart, who first met Merle when he was 11, took up the theme of youth and the

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Letter from the Director



This has been a great summer for MEC. Our three courses in South America expanded our educational repertoire, while in Mexico our programs continued to flourish. The two newest members of our team, Michael Grofe and Kirk Straight did fantastic jobs co-leading courses in Yucatan and Peru. Back at our home base in Chiapas, Alonso Mendez expertly conducted our first Maya science course for the University of Cincinnati. As this newsletter goes to press, Alonso, Chip Morris, and Carol Karasik are conducting another MEC first – a course through the highlands and lowlands of Chiapas designed specifically for elementary school teachers.

In this issue of ArchaeoMaya you'll read about Merle Green Robertson's birthday in Palenque, an event that MEC's Susan Mendez Prins helped organize and run. The rest of the newsletter captures the flavor of the

many courses we conducted this summer. Again, we have so much to share that I felt compelled to increase our newsletter's length!

As we move into the slower pace of autumn we are focused on one primary goal – publications. Carol Karasik's latest editorial effort, *Every Woman is a World*, is now available on Amazon.com. Among her many writing projects, she is continuing her semi-fictional saga about life in El Panchan, Palenque. She and Alonso Mendez are hard at work on a new paper concerning zenith and nadir passages. Christopher Powell is in the final stages of writing his seminal dissertation on ancient Maya geometry. As for me, I'm working on a book about ancient Palenque, and creating the new website for our 2009 Mayan Calendar. All of these writing projects are inspired by the interest you have shown in our research. Thanks for supporting our work and have a great end to your summer.

Sincerely,

Happy Birthday, Merle – continued from page 1

ritual dances performed by heirs to the royal throne. Nature in Maya art was the subject of Elizabeth Benson's talk, specifically the armadillo, whose anomalous charms she likened to Merle. Mary Miller discussed the fruit trees depicted on Pakal's sarcophagus lid as metaphors for rebirth. Karen Bassie, who has been exploring the sacred mountains, rivers, and caves mentioned in the *Popol Vuh*, showed that Maya myth is rooted in the landscape. Her early photos of Merle and many guests in the audience reminded everyone that scholarship grows out of personal bonds.

If any Maya ghosts showed up at the birthday banquet, they wouldn't have gotten a word in. Oh, the snake stories flew! And after the tamales and mariachis, Merle doled out more gifts: chocolates, ink rubbings, champagne, a stuffed toy pig for e-pig-rapher Peter Matthews and for Moises Morales, a t-shirt signed by everybody in the room. Pakal's court was probably no richer in achievement, graciousness, and joy. Thank you, Merle.

Millikin University in Peru

In June, twelve students from Millikin University joined MEC for an educational adventure in Peru. Their focus was astrophotography, and the Andes provided an ideal location. Equipped with high-tech cameras and motorized telescopes, they landed in Lima, where Dr. Michael Grofe, MEC's newest instructor, showed them the Larco Herrera Museum and other outstanding sights. Then they flew to the ancient city of Cuzco. Wasting no time, they tested their equipment in the mountains above the city, capturing spectacular time-lapse photos of the Milky Way.

Early the next morning, Dr. Barnhart arrived, delivering lectures on the Inca *kipu* and ancient Andean astronomy. After a day visiting the great Inca sites around Cuzco, they struck out for Machu Picchu before dawn the next day, reaching the ancient city's sacred precinct in time to watch the sun emerge over the mountains, bathing the temples in light.

That evening, in Aguas Calientes, a small village at the foot of Machu Picchu, Millikin students spontaneously decided to share their telescopes with the community. While they set up two telescopes in the local soccer field, Dr. Barnhart told a policeman and one small boy of their intentions. A half hour later, 300 people were crowded around the telescopes. Fifty more surrounded Dr. Grofe as he aimed his green laser pointer at the stars and disclosed his vast knowledge of the constellations. Meanwhile, the line for telescope viewing stretched across the field and into the local streets. Over 1000 people had a chance to see the stars. For a town of 5000 people, it was a great showing!



Millikin University sharing their telescopes with the community of Aguas Calientes

Waving goodbye to many new friends from the train, the students set off for the Sacred Valley. An overnight stay in the Quechua town of Pisac provided the best astrophotographic opportunity. With clear skies and minimal light pollution, many students stayed out past 2am. One student achieved an incredible 30-minute exposure of the Milky Way's Dark Rift. Dr. Dan Miller, lead professor on the course, was confident this photo would be accepted by a major astronomy journal.

Back in Cuzco, exhausted but happy, the group shared a final dinner. Receiving their course certificates, many vowed to return. Indeed, plans are already in the works for more astrophotography in 2009 and a full-blown astronomy fair for the community of Aguas Calientes.



Upcoming Public Tours

Ancient Zapotec Culture and Cuisine in Oaxaca, Mexico

October 11-18, 2008

Learn the details and sign up at
www.mayaexploration.org/tours.php

2008 Chautauqua Courses – Peru, Bolivia and Yucatan

Once again, MEC's Director Ed Barnhart led three summer travel courses for the National Science Foundation's Chautauqua Program, which is designed to expand the intellectual horizons of college science professors. This summer's destinations were Peru, Bolivia, and Yucatan.

Inca Mathematics in Peru, June 7-14

Dr. Barnhart based his Andean course in Cuzco, the spiritual heart of the ancient Inca Empire. The immediate challenge facing participants was the 11,500 ft. altitude. Forced to take it easy, they spent the first few days absorbed in lectures on Inca culture, astronomy, and mathematics. Then they tackled the mysteries of the *quipu*, the complex system of knotted strings the Inca devised to keep their records. After a lot of mental twists and turns, they took to the narrow streets and explored the Coricancha, an imposing Inca temple once covered in gold. At the giant fortress of Sacsahuaman, looming on the mountainside above Cuzco, everyone marveled at the immense gray walls built of perfectly fitted 100-ton boulders.



Chautauqua Peru course visiting Machu Picchu

At dawn, participants boarded the train for the legendary ruins of Machu Picchu. Descending from the barren *altiplano* to the lush landscape of the Sacred Valley, they passed ancient Inca catacombs, *huacas*, carved in the granite cliffs. Then they arrived at Machu Picchu, and it started to rain. It rained and rained, and by evening, the storm had knocked out the power. Undaunted, the group ate dinner by candle light, serenaded by Andean flutes. By morning the mountains were wrapped in mist and the temples were drifting through clouds. It was magical. The brave ones who hiked to Wayna Picchu were rewarded with a rainbow arching over the ethereal city below.

In high spirits, the group went on to explore Ollantaytambo, whose elaborate terracing and monumental architecture remain an incredible engineering feat. A visit to the Inca town of Pisac rounded out the journey back to Cuzco.

On their last day, participants learned to knot their own *quipus*, encoding a university grade sheet into the cords. Groans of exasperation filled the room, but everyone proudly showed their work at the final dinner.

A successful Chautauqua course offers exciting learning experiences for everyone, including the instructor. The next morning, Dr. Barnhart hopped a train headed south through the Andes, to lead his first course in Bolivia.

Astronomy and Culture on Lake Titicaca, June 16-23

When course members arrived in La Paz, the streets were ominously quiet. The day before, the Bolivian soccer team had lost to Chile on its own field, the highest soccer stadium in the world. At 12,500 ft., the professors had their own loss to contend with – oxygen. But after two relaxed days of lectures and museum visits, they were ready for adventure.

Before dawn, they set off for the mysterious city of Tiwanaku, center of the earliest Andean civilization. Amid the monolithic stones, they shivered in the freezing air, waiting expectantly for the winter solstice sunrise. It was easy to understand why Tiwanaku's ancient inhabitants worshipped the sun. Then, just as dusty archaeological tomes had predicted, they saw the solstice sun rising directly in line with the outer corner of the Kalasasaya platform.

By late afternoon, the group reached the busy port of Puno, in Peru, and the next morning they were sailing across Lake Titicaca. The first stops were the Uros Islands, which are not islands at all but floating man-made constructions built of layers of totora reeds. The Uros people generously invited the group into their homes for a tasty snack of guinea pig roasted on a stick. Farther across the lake, the group stopped at Taquille, a real island, where the Quechua people maintain ancient traditions and weaving practices. Lunch atop the island's promontory afforded breathtaking views of the vast blue waters. When the group arrived at the colorful Bolivian town of Copacabana, families were paddling happily on the lake and the cheerful priests from the Cathedral of the Virgin were blessing a multitude of American cars.

The next morning was the highlight of the week – solstice sunrise on the Island of the Sun. Boarding a launch

in the pre-dawn dark, participants traveled silently through the fog, until a flurry of fireworks burst from the island. For the Aymara who live there, winter solstice is New Years Day! After rounding the island's northern tip and hiking up a steep trail, the group arrived at the Sacred Rock, where the creator deity Viracocha summoned the sun on the day of creation. They



A journey around the Uros Island in a totora reed boat

stood in the spot where Viracocha is said to have stood, and they watched the first rays of sunlight strike the cleft in the stone.

Back in La Paz, the final dinner was held on the 16th floor of the Plaza Hotel, which offers panoramic views of the setting sun glinting off the ice caps of Mount Illimani. It was a fitting end to an unforgettable week that participants can share with classes across the USA.

Ancient Maya Astronomy in the Yucatan, July 16-23

Dr. Barnhart's last Chautauqua course of the summer took place in the Yucatan, timed to coincide with Mesoamerica's most distinctive solar event - zenith passage. Beginning in Merida, participants escaped the 100-degree heat by attending lectures and visiting the Regional Anthropology Museum. The first ancient city they visited was Dzibilchaltun, led by renowned archaeoastronomer Felipe Chan Chi. At the Temple of the Seven Dolls, Chan Chi explained his 20 years of observations and how they proved the temple was once a complex astronomical observatory. At noon the group witnessed zenith passage at the causeway stela. With the sun standing directly overhead, in the center of the sky, the 10-foot-tall stone monument cast no shadow. Everyone was duly amazed.

That afternoon was spent at the home of Sid Hollander, the mathematician who created "Bars and Dots," the first software program that correlated the Maya and Gregorian calendars. With the patience he

developed during his years as a high school math teacher, Sid helped the class calculate their birthdays in the Maya calendar.

Staying overnight at Chichen Itza, the group had a jumpstart over thousands of tourists, being among the first to test the ballcourt's acoustics, admire the sacred cenote, and peacefully stroll the main plaza. They and the sun had traveled a half-degree south of Merida, and now, one day later, they once again witnessed the noonday zenith passage. Walking around the base of El Castillo pyramid, they saw no trace of shadows.

At Uxmal, Dr. Barnhart arranged a special event. His friend and colleague Dr. Mark Van Stone presented his latest research on why the year 2012 may not be the end point of the Maya calendar. Comparing Aztec ethnography, little known glyphic texts, and the Popol Vuh (Maya Story of Creation), he made the case that the ancient considered this current epic the final, perfect, and never-ending creation.

That night, hurricane Dolly swept across the Yucatan, preventing a view of Uxmal's zenith passage on the following day. Nevertheless, the rain held back long enough for a tour of the city's masterful art and urban design, as well as a discussion of the palace's orientation



The Yucatan course at Dzibilchaltun for zenith passage

to the planet Venus. By the time the storm descended, the group was safely in the Maya village of Muna, attending a pottery painting demonstration by master artist Patricia Martín.

On July 23rd, as the zenith passage marched south, participants flew north to the USA with a new appreciation for the achievements of the ancient Maya.

Saint Joseph's College of New York in the Yucatan

Though the Saint Joseph's group was a small one, the impression they made in Quintana Roo was large. The theme of Maya mathematics and the calendar was the catalyst for bringing together Elana Epstein's class and math students attending the Universidad Tecnológico de Valladolid. Thanks to the invaluable contact work of Professor Raymundo Osorio, both groups of young mathematicians had a rare opportunity to meet and exchange ideas. The director of the Tecnológico, accompanied by several professors and hundreds of students, gave the US group a gracious welcome and led them on a special tour of the campus. Afterwards, everyone attended PowerPoint presentations on Maya calendrical and counting systems. Prepared by local students, the sophisticated content and animated images surpassed all expectations. A question-and-answer session segued into a talk by Alonso Mendez on the significance of zenith passage for the ancient Maya. The timing could not have been better. As the students were bidding their final farewells, the noonday sun reached the center of the sky, and everyone present had a chance to ponder in silence the complete absence of shadows. This lasted about five minutes before the students agreed that it would be best to find shade and cold drinks.



The adventures of the Saint Joseph's students also included visits to two of the more important sites in the Yucatan, Chichen Itza and Ek Balam. These visits gave students the chance to put the mathematical concepts they had learned into context. And they gave MEC's new instructor, archaeologist Kirk Straight, an opportunity to discuss his experiences in the field. Still, everyone agreed that swimming in cenotes and the Caribbean sea was also time well spent after braving the sites and the sun all day.

Millersville University in Quintana Roo



For the third year in a row, Millersville University Mathematics Professor Ximena Catepillan brought a group of her students to MEC in Quintana Roo. Picked up at the Cancun airport by our friend and colleague Raymundo Osorio, the group made their way excitedly

to Playa del Carmen. The Maya mathematics theme and travel route was the same as years past – a first full day in Playa del Carmen followed by visits to Coba, Chichen Itza, and Ek Balam. Lectures on Maya calendars, astronomy, and mathematics were attended during the evenings. A few new elements, such as Christopher Powell's impromptu cliff diving lesson at Cenote Ik'il, kept the students on their toes. Perhaps the best received new course component was the star show expertly delivered by Dr. Michael Grofe, wielding a green laser pointer he projected skyward from the beach at Playa del Carmen. At the closing ceremonies in Restaurant Yax Che, the students recited the twenty Maya day names with ease and showed off their now scribe-like understanding of ancient math. Long after dinner and into the night, Grofe and the students continued deep conversations about the many Maya mysteries that still remain to be solved. Less than a week after the course's end, Professor Catepillan had already reserved her dates for May 2009.

Univ. of Cincinnati in Chiapas Palenque's Direction

Students who came down from the University of Cincinnati received a scientific tour of the lowland Maya ruins of Chiapas. Of course they appreciated the art of Bonampak and Yaxchilan, the experience of driving through the Lacandon rainforest and swimming in the Usumacinta River at dusk. But the crowning glory of the course was being at Palenque for the summer solstice sunrise. During the previous semester, many of these students had worked intensively on architectural renderings and 3-D models of various temples at the site. They already had a deeper understanding than the average visitor, and a weeklong course that focused on the scientific achievements of the Classic Maya simply refined their budding knowledge. And so, what better way to reward their dedication than to offer them a chance to see firsthand some of the great alignments of the site.



With great anticipation, students waited for the solar events they had been reading about to unfold. Observations began in the Temple of the Inscriptions, where K'an Bahlam's heir presentation ceremony is commemorated, and concluded in the Temple of the Sun, where K'an Bahlam's accession is celebrated in the lunar and solar alignments of the temple. The cloudy sky that had threatened to make observations impossible miraculously opened for the key moments, and students were able to watch the diagonal ray of solstice light enter the Temple of the Sun and illuminate the far chamber. Morning observations ended with the dramatic descent of fog, which gave the group an indelible vision of Palenque's magical character. The students gave thanks to the triad gods for a most special day.

Just before the nation took off last Easter vacation, Elizabeth Flores stepped down from her post as director of Palenque. A week later, INAH named Juan Antonio Ferrer as the interim director of this great World Heritage site. A proven field archaeologist, he now bears responsibility for maintaining Palenque, Bonampak, and Yaxchilan and for supervising any archaeological work that may take place at these sites. The job is not without its headaches. On a limited budget, he is expected to protect three major Maya ruins threatened by rain, jungle growth, looting, and growing tourism. With one million tourists visiting Palenque last year, the previous administration simply decided to close Pakal's tomb and the sanctuaries in the Cross Group. To placate visitors' disappointment, a replica of the tomb was installed in the site museum.

Ironically, Elizabeth Flores is now director of Chichen Itza, a site that attracts ten thousand visitors a day. The problems of managing a site under siege became so overwhelming that administrators had to cordon off most of the major structures. Tourism issues aside, it is expected that Juan Antonio Ferrer will bring to the post the knowledge and sensibilities that will improve conservation and increase archaeological investigations at Palenque.



Upcoming Public Tours

**Pillars of the Classic Maya, Palenque to Tikal,
November 22-30, 2008**

Spend Thanksgiving in the Mundo Maya

Learn the details and sign up at www.mayaexploration.org/tours.php

News From the Field

Olmec Discoveries

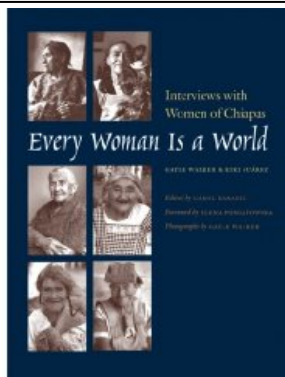
In 1988, excavations at the Olmec site of El Manati encountered a variety of organic artifacts in an astounding state of preservation. This summer the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) has released new reports on those objects. Among the most important were a collection of anthropomorphic statues carved in wood, eleven rubber balls, and a vessel containing cacao residue. Carbon 14 dating revealed these objects to be 3500 years old. Although the antiquity of rubber production has been known for some time, the identification of cacao residue from El Manati pre-dates available evidence from Belize and Honduras by 500 years.

Teotihuacán Tunnel Reopened

Thirty years since its initial discovery, the tunnel underneath Teotihuacán's Temple of the Sun is once again the subject of archaeological investigation. Project Director Alejandro Sarabia and Assistant P.I. Saburo Sugiyama have re-entered to conduct test pitting and analyze samples of the mud walls built by the Teotihuacáanos to block off sections. Approximately 300 feet long and terminating into four short tunnel chambers, the conduit has long been considered a naturally formed lava tube with minor human amplification. Initial investigations in the 1970's noted the four chambers, concluding that they had been looted during Aztec times. Anthony Aveni later suggested that the cave's entrance was oriented directly towards a Pleiades-Sun alignment along the western horizon.

Working in conjunction with the project, a team of UNAM geologists have now determined that it is not a cave, but rather an entirely man-made tunnel. Though the age of the tunnel has yet to be determined, this important discovery dispels the commonly published theory that the Temple of the Sun's location was chosen because of the natural cave formation.

Every Woman is a World



The elder women living in the mountain towns and jungle hamlets of Chiapas have witnessed tumultuous changes during their lifetimes. Through long and hard experiences, they have gained unique perspectives on the transformations that modernity has brought to their traditional culture. Inspired by this rich store of wisdom, San Cristóbal artists Gayle Walker and Kiki Suárez began interviewing and photographing women between the ages of 60 and 108. The resulting book, *Every Woman Is A World*, presents the life stories of 27 women - nuns, weavers, ranchers, midwives, merchants, cooks - who speak for the silent members of a divided society: well-to-do urban Ladinas, low-income Mestizas, and indigenous Maya from the highlands and Lacandon rainforest. Adding to their intimate testimonies is an interview with one outstanding American

woman who represents the significant contributions made by foreigners to Mexican and Maya culture: Merle Green Robertson.

As the women tell their stories, they weave together personal dramas and major historical events. For some, the Mexican Revolution is still painfully vivid. Others focus on recent social upheavals, such as the 1994 Zapatista Uprising. Women whose families had more resources fondly recall their high school courtships, while poorer women tell tragic stories of deprivation, hunger, and family violence. Particularly striking are their clear-eyed views on marriage, work, religion, and their own mortality. Growing up in a world of limited opportunities, where love was the exception, they carved amazing lives out of nothing. Neglected by society (and ignored by anthropologists), the women of Chiapas finally have their say. In this landmark work, edited by Carol Karasik and published by the University of Texas Press, they reveal their scars, as well as remarkable courage and humor.

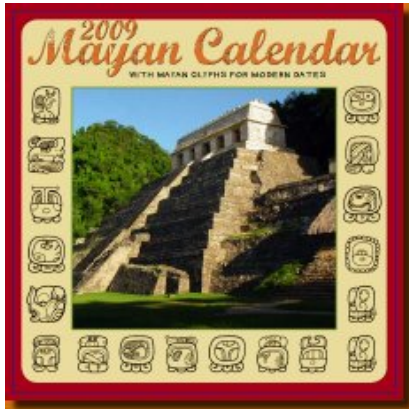
Every Woman Is A World: Interviews with Women of Chiapas contains 30 photographs by Gayle Walker, a foreword by Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska, and complete endnotes describing the people, culture, and historical events mentioned in the text. It is available through amazon.com.

New Research on Palenque House E Inscriptions

MEC is excited to host Carl Callaway's new paper about the Palenque House E Painted inscription. The text is located on the rear wall of the western corridor of House E and sits directly above the Oval Tablet. Today the exquisite calligraphy (painted circa 721 AD) is barely visible. Time and erosion have taken their toll until only small patches of glyph blocks remain. Yet with some previously unpublished photographs taken by Alfred P. Maudslay in 1891 and by Linda Schele in 1973, it has been possible to reconstruct the majority of the text into a new photo composite. We are now able to view the text as Maudslay must have seen it over one hundred years ago. You can read the full article on the MEC website at:

http://www.mayaexploration.org/pdf/HouseEPaintedText_Callaway2008.pdf

2009 Mayan Calendar



MEC is pleased to announce that our 2009 Mayan Calendar will be available this September. After a *k'atun* of publication by Mayan Calendar's creator, Jeff Chouinard, MEC's Director Ed Barnhart is honored to assume the responsibility. As always, this year's calendar will feature beautiful photos of ancient architecture and

provide the Maya date for each day of the year. In addition, you can expect new features, including bi-lingual English-Spanish text, important anniversaries in Maya history, a countdown to the 13th Bak'tun in 2012 - and a lower price of \$15.99 per calendar. An associated website where the 2009 Mayan Calendar can be ordered will be launched at the start of September. Until then, you may pre-order the calendar by contacting us through MEC's website - www.mayaexploration.org/contact.php

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

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James Sievers • Daniel Maddux • Merle Green Robertson • Margaret and Burgess Wade

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