



ARCHAEO MAYA

The Newsletter of Maya Exploration Center

www.mayaexploration.org

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London Students Meet the Maya in Chiapas

This year's cultural exchange program between students from the American School of London and Maya students at Yaxalum was the best yet. Teenagers boarding at Yaxalum come from remote hamlets to attend high school in the busy town of Yajalon, and in many ways the distance is as far as London. Yet with kids so open and irrepressibly enthusiastic, genuine rapport is possible.

In past years, the program emphasized service work. Londoners helped build efficient wood-burning stoves and composting latrines and lent their sweat to organic community gardens. This year, in response to Yaxalum's request, ASL brought nine laptops, along with software and a wireless modem to serve 50 machines. After setting up the computers, students exchanged Facebook addresses so they can stay in touch during the year. Computers usually put a damper on conversation, but that depends on how you define conversation. ASL students who hadn't mastered Spanish simply used Google Translator!

Still, there's nothing like up close and personal communication for establishing long-term friendships - the real aim of the program. This year, ASL students were able to visit when school was in session, which meant they could attend classes with their Maya peers. At the local vocational school, the Londoners observed the dissection of a sheep, which, oddly enough, turned out to be fascinating. During English classes, students split into small conversational groups and everyone had a chance to dialogue and ask questions. Excitement peeked when Maya students crowded into the auditorium to attend Alonso Mendez's multi-

media presentation on Maya astronomy. Maya civilization is not taught in the schools.

All the Yaxalum students living in the dorms work on the institute's organic ranch. Saturday's tour of the coffee plantation inspired great interest in local environmental methods. Afterwards, ASL had a chance to see the beautiful embroidery produced by the girls. There was a buying frenzy. Sales were more than enough to support one Yaxalum student for a year!

The afternoon ended with a rousing game of soccer. For the first time ever, Maya boys played against girls, and the ASL girls put up a terrific show. The competitive spirit continued during the party games that night, but then a warm camaraderie set in. ASL students juggled, performed comic skits, and taught the Macarena. With music and dancing as well as superb snacks, the evening was a great success.

On Sunday, ASL students traveled to a small village where they enjoyed a home-cooked meal with Maya families. Although communication was sometimes awkward, the students appreciated the chance to visit traditional homes.

During this year's trip, ASL students explored the jungle, toured the great ruins of Palenque and Bonampak, and spent time in a mountain town where they connected with living Maya people. Despite personal and cultural barriers, they proved that some things in human nature are universal. Thanks to Carol Karasik, Alonso Mendez, and Christopher Powell, coordinators Anita Smart and Sarah Daggett, ASL chaperones Nils Anderson and Joy Marchese, and the great staff at Yaxalum, this program broadens our hopes for the future.

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Letter from the Director



Ah, summer solstice. The longest day of the year. For the ancients, it was the day on which the Sun ended his journey north and held his ground against the night as long as he authority ever allows. Over the years I've stood at dawn watching summer solstice sunrise everywhere from Chaco Canyon, to Palenque, to behind the Sacred Rock on the Island of the Sun in Lake Titicaca. This year I was happy to just be home in Austin, Texas watching the sunrise with my family. Where ever you were, I hope you took a moment to appreciate the sun today.

In this edition of ArchaeoMaya you'll read about some of our latest education program and advances in the field of archaeological research. In particular, I'm proud to relate the wonderful connection between the American School of London and Yaxalum that MEC has been facilitating. That story made our front page news this time. Dr. Powell and I have both been on the

road this spring, he with a big group from the Mathematical Association of America in Guatemala and I forging new MEC territory in the deserts and mountains of Southern Peru.

Another big focus of this edition is to inform you of our plans for 2012. Obviously a big year in the Mundo Maya, we have planned a number of exciting (and still educational) tours for the general public. See the list on page 5. This edition also includes a heartbreaking two obituary pieces from the Maya studies community. MEC personal friends Merle Green Robertson and David Kelley have passed away. On the heels of Bruce Dahlin's passing, coupled with this week's most recent news of the deaths of Virginia Fields and Juan Antonio Valdez, this year has been one of great loss for the Maya studies community. Each of these individuals made giant contributions to our understanding of and appreciation for the ancient Maya. We at MEC aim to honor their memories, both as scholars and as the wonderful people they were, by carrying the torches they lit into the next generation.

Sincerely,

Zenith Passage at Ancient Angkor, Cambodia

August 12-20, 2011*A Summer Travel Course from the UT Chautauqua Program*

This Chautauqua course did not enroll the minimum ten people needed to run, so I'm doing it anyway! I've found that people who are committed to travel always find a way to do it and those that aren't never do. I'm one of the people who make it happen. Are you? If so, join me in Cambodia and be part of my team re-discovering ancient Khmer astronomy. — *Ed Barnhart*

See the full itinerary and sign up at: www.ahautravel.com.

Pre-Clovis – Earliest People in the Americas

Some 15,500 years ago, bands of hunter-gatherers camped beside a spring-fed creek, in central Texas, where they fashioned the local chert into thousands of blades, scrapers, and choppers. These tools were manufactured two millennia before the next great wave of Ice Age hunters – the Clovis people – appeared on the scene. Until archaeologists began digging near Buttermilk Creek, northwest of Austin, it was widely believed that the makers of Clovis spear points were the first to populate the Americas. Stone artifacts excavated at the Debra L. Friedkin site, the largest and oldest pre-Clovis camp yet found in the Americas, prove that an earlier culture was thriving south of the ice sheets by 13,500 BC.

The peopling of the New World has been a fascinating and controversial question for over a century. With the discovery of Folsom spear points, and even older Clovis points, human occupation was firmly fixed at 11,200 BC. The fine fluted points, used as ritual objects as well as hunting tools, showed surprising technical skill. The points also revealed the social practices and incredible geographic breadth of Paleolithic culture.

The quest for older sites continued, yet the finds were not thoroughly convincing. The well-documented discovery at Buttermilk Creek changes the picture completely. Starting in 2006, the archaeological team, led by Michael Waters of Texas A&M, uncovered a sequence of cultural horizons, dating from Late Prehistoric to Folsom, Clovis, and finally pre-Clovis. Without organic material to radiocarbon-date the layers, the team relied on optically stimulated luminescence (OSL), a technique that measures and dates the amount of sunlight trapped in quartz and feldspar grains found in clay deposits.

As far as Dr. Waters is concerned, Clovis hunters were latecomers whose artifacts were influenced by the origi-

nal settlers. The resemblance between ancient pre-Clovis cutting blades and the later Clovis toolkit suggests a continuous technological evolution over time.

The history of the Americas needs to be rewritten, the portrait of archaic life redrawn. The estimated time of arrival of the first Asian hunter-gatherers pre-dates the supposed existence of an ice-free corridor leading down from the Bering Strait. That idea, according to geologists, no longer holds water. Instead of following big game, the first Americans probably voyaged along the Alaskan and Canadian coasts by boat, perhaps as long as 16,000 years ago. And then some seafaring fishermen moved inland, toward Texas and beyond. There are numerous scenarios, involving different peoples, including a few from the other side of the Atlantic. But now that the old story is being revamped, archaeologists, geologists, and geneticists are freer to investigate where and when the first pilgrims came from, who they were, and how they survived and spread across the vast American landscape.

The Houston Chronicle has a photo:

<http://www.chron.com/dispatch/story.mpl/metropolitan/7489500.html>



Clovis Point (photo: UNC)



Upcoming Public Tours from MEC

Pillars of the Classic Maya, Palenque to Tikal

November 19-27, 2011

Celebrate Thanksgiving with Maya Jungle Turkey!

Learn the details and sign up at

<http://mayaexploration.org/tours/palenque-tikal-nov11.php>

A MEC Adventure in Southern Peru

Once again this spring, Midland College Professor Margaret Wade challenged MEC to create an adventure we had never led before. This time it was Southern Peru and we were more than happy to oblige.



Dune buggies at the Huacachina Oasis

Starting in Lima, a six hour drive south brought Dr. Barnhart and the Midland group into one of the planet's driest deserts. Parts of southern Peru's coastline have never seen a drop of rain in recorded history. The first stop was the magical Huacachina Oasis, from which they explored the mountains of desert sand by dune buggy. The next day it was off to the Paracas coast where the Humboldt Current flowing around the Ballustras Islands provided an amazing site - penguins and sea lions in the desert!

Travelling yet deeper into the desert, the next stop was Nazca. In groups of 3-4, they flew in small private planes over the famous Nazca Lines, thus joining the ranks of the few people who have seen them with their own eyes. MEC's plan had been to spend the night in Nazca, but word on the street warned of a miners' strike set to close all the coastal highways

starting at midnight. So, Plan B was quickly set in motion and a long but beautiful drive following the cliffs along the coastline brought the group by night fall to Arequipa one day early. Arequipa was to be their launching point into the remote region of Colca Canyon. Reaching the canyon required driving through hours of natural preserve in the high Andes where the group passed by herds of wild vicuñas (Peru's smallest camelid species) and another rare sight - pink flamingos at 10,000 feet! It was hard to believe, but there they were quietly standing in the treeless marshes of the Andes.

Their luck at Colca Canyon the next morning was amazing. As their naturalist guide informed them at 6am along the two hour journey to the Canyon's deepest section (over 10,000 deep), the season to see the condors was coming to an end and the chances of seeing one were not great. However, the moment the bus stopped not just one, but three of the majestic birds flew by. The whirled, dove, and soared around the group for another ten minutes and then disappeared over the mountain tops. The guide explained they had gone out to hunt and would not return until nightfall.



Vicuñas on the way to Colca Canyon



A partially ruined burial tower at Sullistani

The final destination for the course was Lake Titicaca. With Puno as a base, a slightly rusty but sea worthy boat brought them out to the floating islands of the Uros people. Warm and friendly folks, they cheerfully provided demonstrations of how they made their islands, houses, boats, fish traps, and even shoes out of the lake's native *titora* reeds. Later that afternoon the group travelled inland to the Sullistani Burial Towers. As they walked between the ruined stubs of the once stately towers Dr. Barnhart had his compass out verifying the alignments of their tiny doors. Though virtually all were oriented East as he had read, one at a corner was 25 degrees north of east. This, Dr. Barnhart explained, was the direction of the Summer Solstice sun rise and its existence illustrates that there may be more to learn about these pre-Incan constructions.

Flying back to Lima, the Midlander's spent their last day in luxury, exploring the upscale Larco Mar shopping complex. After a final dinner of fine Peruvian cuisine and memory sharing, they returned to Lima's airport for midnight flights out back to Texas and their normal lives.

2012 Tours with Maya Exploration Center

MEC recognizes that many people will want to know more about the ancient Maya, their astronomical prowess, and their calendar during the pivotal year of 2012. In response, we have created the following travel opportunities to learn about the ruins and the modern Maya descendants of the amazing culture who built them. Come join us!



January 19-26, 2012

The Fiestas of San Sebastian in the Highlands of Chiapas

Led by Chip Morris and Carol Karasik

Among the most lively and important of festivals of Chiapas, the fiesta of San Sebastian celebrates the momentous encounter between the Pre-Columbian and Spanish worlds.



February 16-23, 2012

Carnival in the Highlands of Chiapas

Led by Chip Morris and Carol Karasik

In Chiapas, Carnival is a combination of the days leading up to Christianity's lent and the Maya five "lost" days of the Wayeb, the annual end of the Maya Haab calendar.



March 16-25, 2012

Spring Equinox in the Yucatan - Ancient Calendars and Astronomy

Led by Dr. Michael Grofe

Bike through Coba, see the equinox sunrise through the doors of Dzibilchaltun's Temple of the Seven Dolls, and watch the shadow snake descend the Castillo at Chichen Itza.



June 18-28, 2012

Summer Solstice in Chiapas and the Highlands of Guatemala

Led by Dr. Christopher Powell

Discover the connections between the ancient and modern Maya as you travel through the ruins and attend Chamula's biggest festival of the year.



August 5-15, 2012

Surfing the Zenith in the Maya World – Guatemala and Honduras

Led by Dr. Ed Barnhart

The tropics has a solar event that doesn't occur in the western world—zenith passage. Each latitude has its own zenith passage date and we will chase it southward in August.



November 17-25, 2012

Pillars of the Classic Maya - Palenque to Tikal

Led by Dr. Christopher Powell

Palenque and Tikal were two of the most influential and powerful cities in ancient Meso-america. Travel from one to the other during the 2012 Thanksgiving holiday.

In Memoriam - People We Will Miss Dearly

This spring, the field of Maya studies lost two of its most renowned scholars, Merle Greene Robertson and David Kelley. Merle's adventurous career as an art historian, artist, and photographer helped preserve the artistic achievements of Maya civilization. David Kelley, a bold Renaissance thinker, advanced our understanding of Maya writing and cosmology.



Merle Greene Robertson 1913-2011

Born in 1913, Merle grew up in the wilds of Montana and Oregon, where she developed her passion for nature and for Native American cultures. While studying art in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, she traveled to Tikal and fell in love with the jungle and with an art style that "seemed to be growing right out of the environment." Immediately she joined the University of Pennsylvania Museum project and spent three summers making architectural drawings and ink rubbings of the monuments.

During the 1970s Merle documented the exquisite bas-reliefs of Palenque. Her investigations included a thorough study of the stucco techniques employed by Palenque artists, the paints they used, and the sources for their pigments. For her substantial contribution to Mexico's heritage, she received the Order of the Aztec Eagle.

Along with creating a remarkable record of Maya art and architecture, Merle organized the Palenque Round Table conferences (1973-1993), which resulted in some of the greatest breakthroughs in Maya studies. Later she founded the Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute, supporting major research in Maya art and epigraphy, excavations of the Cross Group, and the mapping of Palenque.

Merle's enormous legacy of drawings, photographs, and rubbings are an enduring resource. Her keen eye provided lasting insights into the meaning of Maya iconography. For everyone who knew her, Merle's fearless spirit was an inspiration.

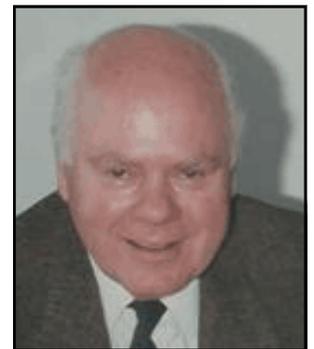
David Kelley was an explorer of another sort, an intellectual who extended the frontiers of knowledge. Although he did fieldwork in Mesoamerica, Peru, and Uruguay, his true terrain was the classroom and library. A pioneer in the phonetic decipherment of Maya hieroglyphic writing, Kelley was also an expert in astronomy, calendars, ethnohistory, European and Mesoamerican genealogy, linguistics, and world mythology.

Born in Albany, New York, in 1924, he became interested in Maya archaeology during his teens, and after World War II, entered Harvard to study anthropology. His dissertation topic, Mexican influences on Polynesian culture, marked the beginning of his life-long research on cultural diffusion and trans-oceanic contact.

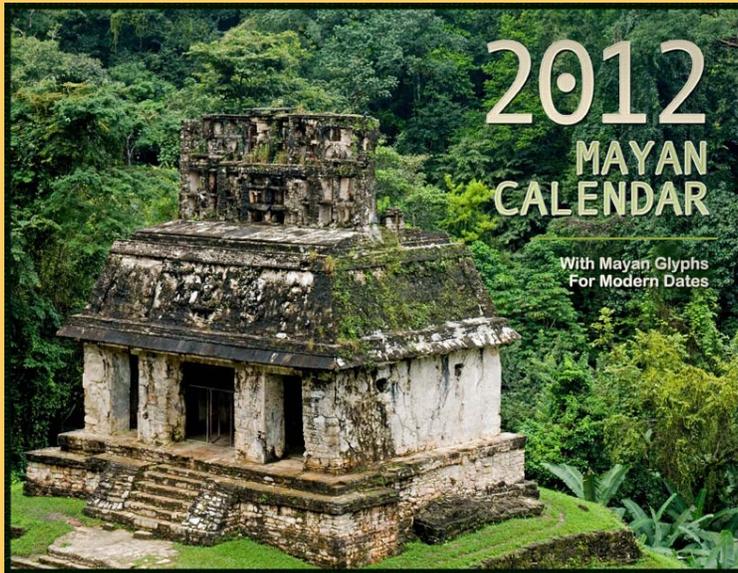
Kelley argued for a number of unpopular ideas. Going against the leading scholar of the time, J. Eric S. Thompson, Kelley's decipherment of hieroglyphic panels at Quirigua verified that Maya texts were essentially historical documents. His analysis of the Maya script proved that the writing system was phonetic, as Russian epigrapher Yuri Knorozov first proposed.

Kelley also refuted Thompson's correlation between the Maya and European calendars. Here he failed to win adherents, though he brought his formidable knowledge of astronomy and calendrical systems to bear on the subject. His astronomical research culminated in the encyclopedic volume, *Exploring Ancient Skies*, co-authored with Eugene Milone.

A legendary teacher at the University of Calgary, David Kelley was a rigorous scholar whose research ranged across the cultures of the Old World and New. In the words of one of his devoted students, "the world will not see his like again."



David Kelley 1924-2011



Coming this fall – the 2012 Mayan Calendar

The wall calendar providing the Maya glyphic dates for every day of 2012 – up to and beyond December 21st.

www.mayan-calendar.com

amazon.com

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