

In the summer of 2012 I attended field school at the Chan Chich Archaeological Project under the direction of Dr. Brett Houk, Texas Tech University. For thirty days, twenty one other field students and I worked on two sites on the Gallon Jug estate, in northwestern Belize. The primary site was situated in the upper plaza of a Maya settlement, dated to 770 B.C., where excavations ten years earlier had uncovered an tomb free from pillage. The other site, Kaxil Unic, was located 1.5 miles away from Chan Chich and constituted a much smaller settlement and included artifacts and signs of activity dating to 850 A.D.

For the first week of field school, I was assigned to Kaxil Unic. The initial foci were an altar and a stele, both located at the base of a large structure. The hope was to find a cache, and therefore we began to excavate around the objects. I mostly worked on the stele, which was broken in half with part still erect in the ground and part collapsed on the ground (Fig 1). Despite the discovery of pottery, lithics, and two devotional incensarios, there was no cache to be found. After several days of work, we proceeded to move the altar and the stele in order to excavate underneath (Fig 2 and 3). At this point, I was transferred to the Upper Plaza.

Our work in the Upper Plaza had a greater architectural focus than the work being done at Kaxil Unic. The primary goal was to analyze the many layers of plaza floors and its surrounding structures. I spent two weeks on this site, mostly working on one sub operation located a few meters from the main structure of the plaza (Fig 4). Another student and I brought this sub open down through over seven floors, a midden, and finally down to bedrock. Once again, we found pottery and lithics, as well as plenty of carbon material that was used for dating. In the midden, I found a jade bead and several animal bones. After reaching bedrock, I was transferred to open

another sub op, this time on the side of the main structure. The hope was to gain a greater understanding of the architectural components of the surrounding buildings. Due to the massive amount of debris and earth that had formed on top of this structure, we overestimated its size and failed to come across any architectural elements besides a well preserved floor (Fig 5). This area will continue to be excavated next year.

The remainder of my time at field school was spent backfilling and in the lab, where I logged and cleaned objects (Fig 6). At Chan Chich, I learned many archaeological procedures and techniques. Most importantly, I learned to profile map, record data, open and close a sub op, handle delicate objects, and identify architectural components such as floors and walls (Fig 7 and 8). My time in Belize has further cultivated my interest in anthropology, and as a result I am currently applying to graduate programs in cultural anthropology. I hope to specialize in cultural property and neocolonialism in Latin America, and Belize in particular. The connections that I made in Belize will make establishing my future research in the country much easier and fruitful. Without the Waldbaum Scholarship, which greatly helped to defray the cost of airfare and field school attendance (\$3,000), this experience would not have been possible. I would like to thank the AIA, Jane Waldbaum, Brett Houk, and all of the individuals I met during field school for making a truly unforgettable experience (Fig 9).



Fig 1: Opening a new lot at Kaxil Unic



Fig 2: Moving the altar



Fig 3: Stele can be seen on the side of the sub op.



Fig 4: As you can see, Sub Op C was over a meter and a half in depth. After reaching a meter down, we had to bring in the perimeter because the exterior walls became unstable.



Fig 5: Ashley, Dr. Houk, and I standing on the beautiful floor we found leading towards the structure in the background. Unfortunately, no architectural elements were located.



Fig 6: I am cleaning large pieces of travertine that were found at Kaxil Unic. There is no natural supply in the area, so these objects must have been brought to serve some function.



Fig 7: Sifting through excavated dirt at Kaxil Unic.



Fig 8: Profile mapping at Kaxil Unic. This trench stretched down the face of a structure there and unearthed a wall towards the top (can be seen behind me).



Fig 9: The Crew