

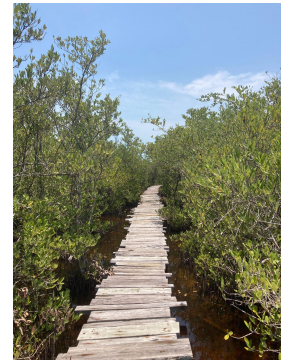
## Marco Gonzalez Archaeological Project

Aubree Marshall

I originally applied to the Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarship to go on the Marco Gonzalez Archaeological Project (MGAP) during the summer of 2021. However, due to the global pandemic, field schools with undergraduates were not permitted to run in Belize. With that said, we were finally able to go to Marco Gonzalez during the summer of 2023. This scholarship allowed me to buy a plane ticket and a portion of my room.

As a graduate student, I was assigned to be a staff member for the project. This meant that I arrived about a week earlier than the undergraduate students to get familiar with the site, set up a lab space, and get acquainted with the area where we were living. Most of the staff stayed at Feathers Guesthouse, which was about a five-minute golf cart ride from the Royal Caribbean Resort, where the undergraduates were staying. Golf carts were the primary form of transportation on the island. Staff would leave Feathers and go to Royal

Caribbean to corral students, then we would drive about ten to fifteen minutes to the trailhead of the site. From here, we would walk about fifteen minutes across a boardwalk over the mangroves (image of the boardwalk depicted on the right).



During the first week, a graduate student supervised by Dr. Elizabeth Graham, one of the co-directors, was excavating an area where burials had previously been excavated in hopes to conduct some analyses on the soil in the area (image of staff digging on the top left). Quickly, we came upon an intact vessel close to the surface (image on the bottom left). We found the remains of an infant around this area and the hand of an adult - we continued to excavate this area before the students arrived.



The students arrived on a Friday. We had a welcome dinner, then took them to the site on Saturday so that they could see where they were going to be working for the next four weeks (map of

Marco Gonzalez from Simmons and Graham (2016) to the right). We had nineteen students overall, sixteen from the United States and three from Belize. This archaeological project aims to give a space for



undergraduate students to learn vital skills that they will need on the job market or for graduate school. In addition to excavations, several archaeologists who work in Belize visited our site and gave lectures ranging from lithics to ceramics in the Maya region. Students had a well-rounded experience between excavations, lab experience, and lectures.

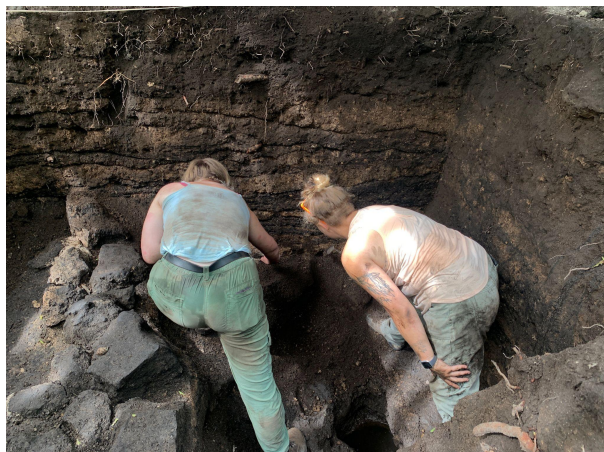
We promptly began excavations on that following Monday. Excavations ran from about 7:30 to 12, with lab work following. Excavations focused on two buildings: Structure 14 and Structure 18. Marco Gonzalez is an interesting site because the community there successfully navigated the Maya Collapse. It's location on the island allowed it to grow as a trade port. Artifacts from across Mesoamerica has been found at this site, both before and after the Maya Collapse, a period of social, political, and environmental changes. This makes Marco Gonzalez an ideal site to study the biocultural adaptations that occurred between the pre- and post-Collapse populations.

Structure 14 had two units focusing on the architecture and two focusing on the platform where previous burials were discovered. Structure 18 focused on a looter's trench and extended beyond those boundaries.

Five burials were excavated from the eastern half of structure 14, along with various artifacts and architectural features. The first architectural unit was located on the eastern portion of the northern wall and aimed to uncover facing stones, which was successful. The second architectural unit was on the western portion of the southern wall, and aimed to find the foundation of the structure. This was also successful. Both architectural structures had various artifacts, including sherds of ceramic vessels and lithics.

As mentioned, structure 18 focused in the area where a looter's trench was. There were three burials found in this unit, as well as an intact ceramic vessel and other artifacts that were found both in situ around the looter's trench and in the backfill.

The unit that I supervised was located on the western half of Structure 14 (my group and I are pictured on the right). Since the eastern portion of the structure had almost forty burials found in previous years, the research design had a focus on the western portion of the structure with the idea that



we could find more skeletal remains. However, this unit did not produce any burials, which was odd considering the eastern side had so many. We did make it to and beyond the salt processing layers in the building (pictured left).



On the northern portion of the unit, we found a cache that was originally thought to be a part of a burial. However, even after extending the unit in each direction, it was determined to be a cache. It included an ocarina, different-styled shell beads, herbivore teeth (potentially tapir), a carved piece of bone, a bone fan handle, a piece of jadeite, ear spools, a piece of melted rubber with a fabric imprint on it, and a carnivore jaw (potentially canine). Cinnabar covered the entire area (unwashed artifacts pictured to the right).

Preliminary osteological analyses of the individuals excavated this season found that both osteological males and females were present, many of which seemed to be young to middle-aged adults. There was the one infant present as well. Dental and cranial modifications were found, including two individuals who had evidence of inlays (one still had inlays present). Some dental pathology was identified, including enamel hypoplasias and caries.



While in Belize, another staff member and I also conducted preliminary osteological analysis on the legacy collections. We brought the legacy collection and this season's skeletal remains to the Institute of Archaeology in Belize to begin the paperwork for export to Michigan State University. More detailed osteological analysis will be conducted at Michigan State in the fall.

We are currently outlining various publications that will be coming from this field season. Additionally, we are beginning to apply to more grants and plan for next year's field season with MGAP. Now that we are able to run the field school again, the plan is to hold the field school every summer. We will continue to bring undergraduate students from both the United States and Belize. I am very appreciative of the Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarship as it allowed me to begin my archaeological work in Belize. I was able to network with various Maya archaeologists and gain crucial excavation experience and supervising skills.

## References

Simmons, Scott E. and Elizabeth Graham (2016). Maya Coastal Adaptations in Classic and Postclassic Times on Ambergris Caye, Belize. In *Trading Spaces: The Archaeology of Interaction, Migration and Exchange. Proceedings of the 46th Annual Chacmool Archaeology Conference* (pp. 167-180). University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, CA: Chacmool Archaeology Association.