Maya Archaeology Field School in Belize
Summer 2027

Program Overview
During this unique program, you will spend three and a half weeks living and working in a professional archaeological camp in northwestern Belize. This is an intense program, during which you will work 6 days a week excavating and participating in related activities at the ancient Maya city of La Milpa.

The program is an experience you will remember for years as it provides not only a tremendous learning experience but also an opportunity for personal growth and exposure to the cultures of the Latin American and the Caribbean area.

The 2026 crew at the REW Adams Research Station.

Program Dates
May 20th-June 13th, 2027

Courses Offered
ANTH 497, 6 credits

Education
Through hands on training, you will learn the general aspects of field archaeology: excavation, survey, mapping, artifact processing, and artifact analysis. Field and lab training will be supplemented by occasional lectures. All project participants will have the opportunity to participate in various aspects of archaeological fieldwork.

The Program Setting
This field school is part of the Tzaman Acropolis Research Project (TARP) at La Milpa, directed by David M. Hyde, of Western Colorado University. The project is located within the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area (RBCMA), a 250,000-acre nature reserve in northwestern Belize, owned and operated by the Programme for Belize.

TARP shares a camp with many other archaeological projects conducting research on the RBCMA, collectively known as the Programme for Belize Archaeological Project (PfBAP). Dr. Rissa Trachman, of Elon University, is the permit holder for the larger umbrella organization PfBAP, which issued by the Institute of Archaeology, National Institute of Culture and History, Belize.

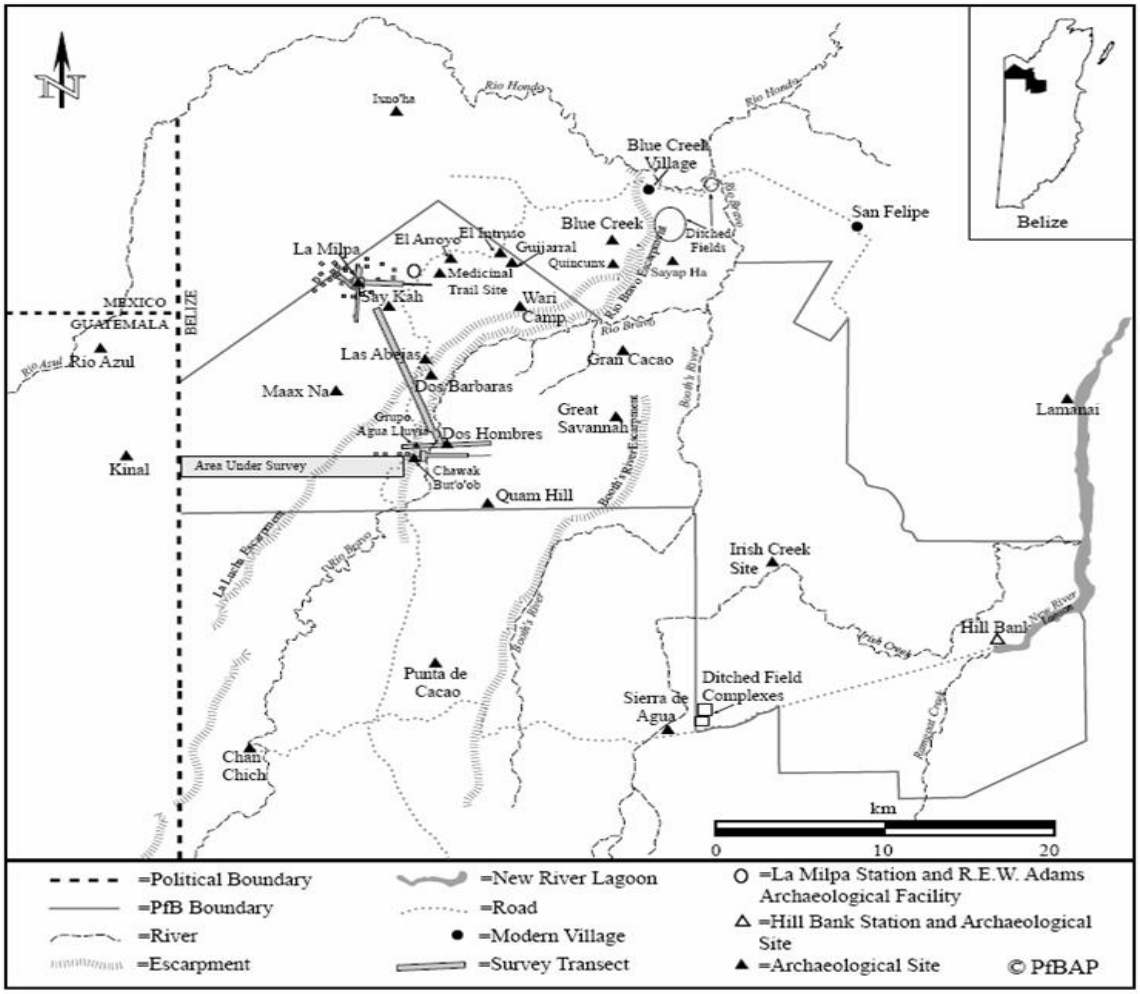
The research area is home to over 60 known ancient Maya sites, many rare birds, two species of monkeys, jaguars, and other fauna and flora of the tropics. It is a fascinating place to do research!

The RBCMA from the air. The clearing is where our camp is located.

2027 Maya Archaeology Field School in Belize

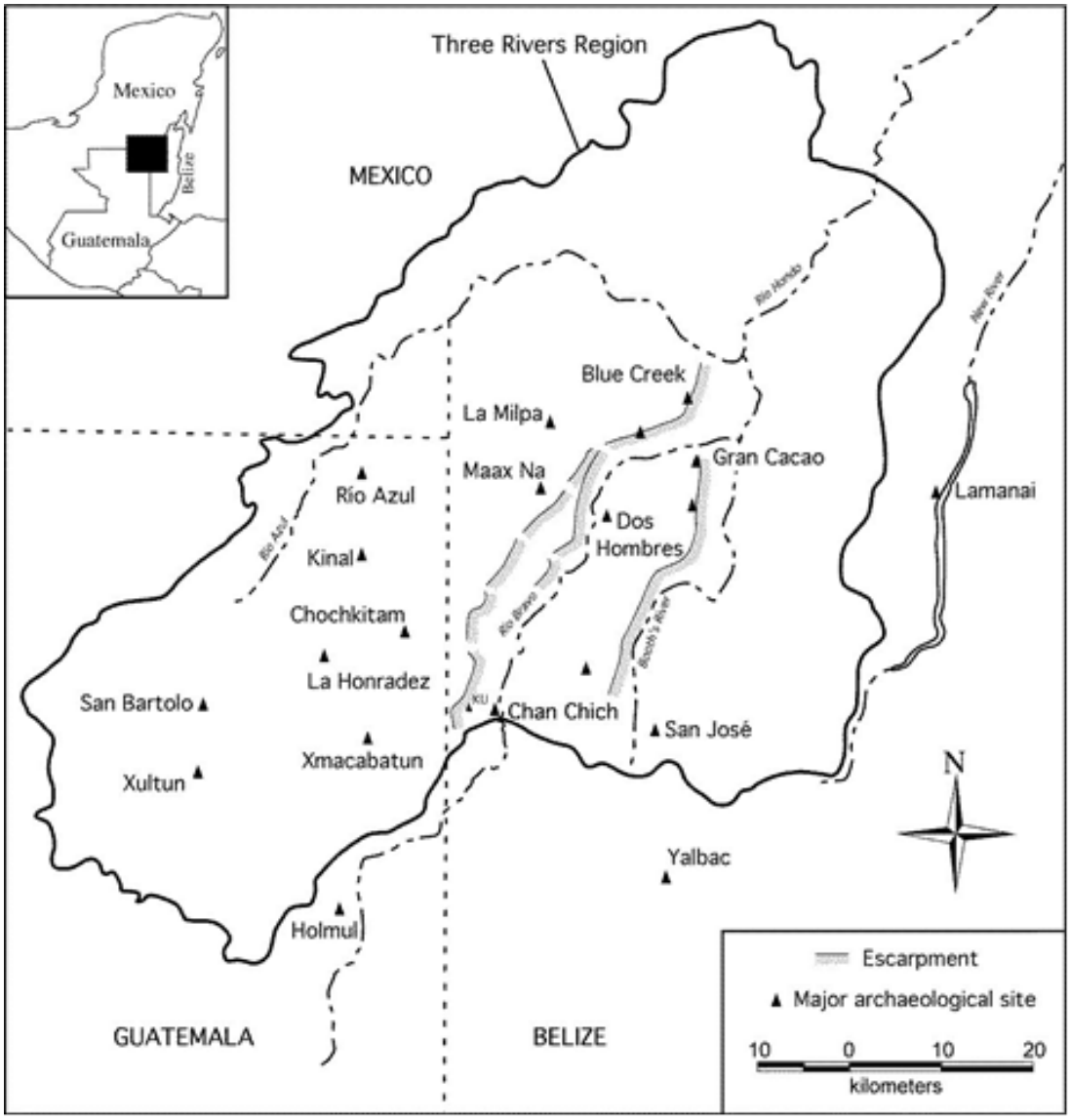
The WCU Field School has been in operation since 2012 and is an outgrowth of previous programs Dr. Hyde has directed or operated to varying degrees. Dr. Hyde previously directed a similar field school through The University of Texas at San Antonio (2009 & 2010), and prior to that was field director of The University of Texas at Austin field school (2004-2008). In that time, the field school(s) has trained hundreds of students.

TARP takes place at the ancient Maya city of La Milpa, located in northwestern Belize, in the La Lucha Uplands (Figure 2). The property on which the site is located, designated as the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area (RBCMA), is owned and operated by the Programme for Belize (PFB), a locally run non-profit organization, which has adopted the role of conserving the rich natural and cultural heritages of RBCMA.



Map of the Three Rivers Region, with the location of La Milpa indicated.

TARP and the other projects of the PfBAP have their roots in the Rio Azul Archaeological Project of the 1980s, directed by REW Adams, in northeastern Guatemala, and its successor, the Ixcanrio Regional Project. In 1992, the Guatemala project(s) was shut down and moved across the border to the RBCMA in northwestern Belize. The Guatemala and the Belize projects collectively are part of the larger Three Rivers Region, an arbitrarily defined archaeological and geographic area that encompasses nearly 2000 km² of northeastern Guatemala, northwestern Belize, and the southeastern corner of the Mexican state of Campeche



Map of the Three Rivers Region

La Milpa: Description

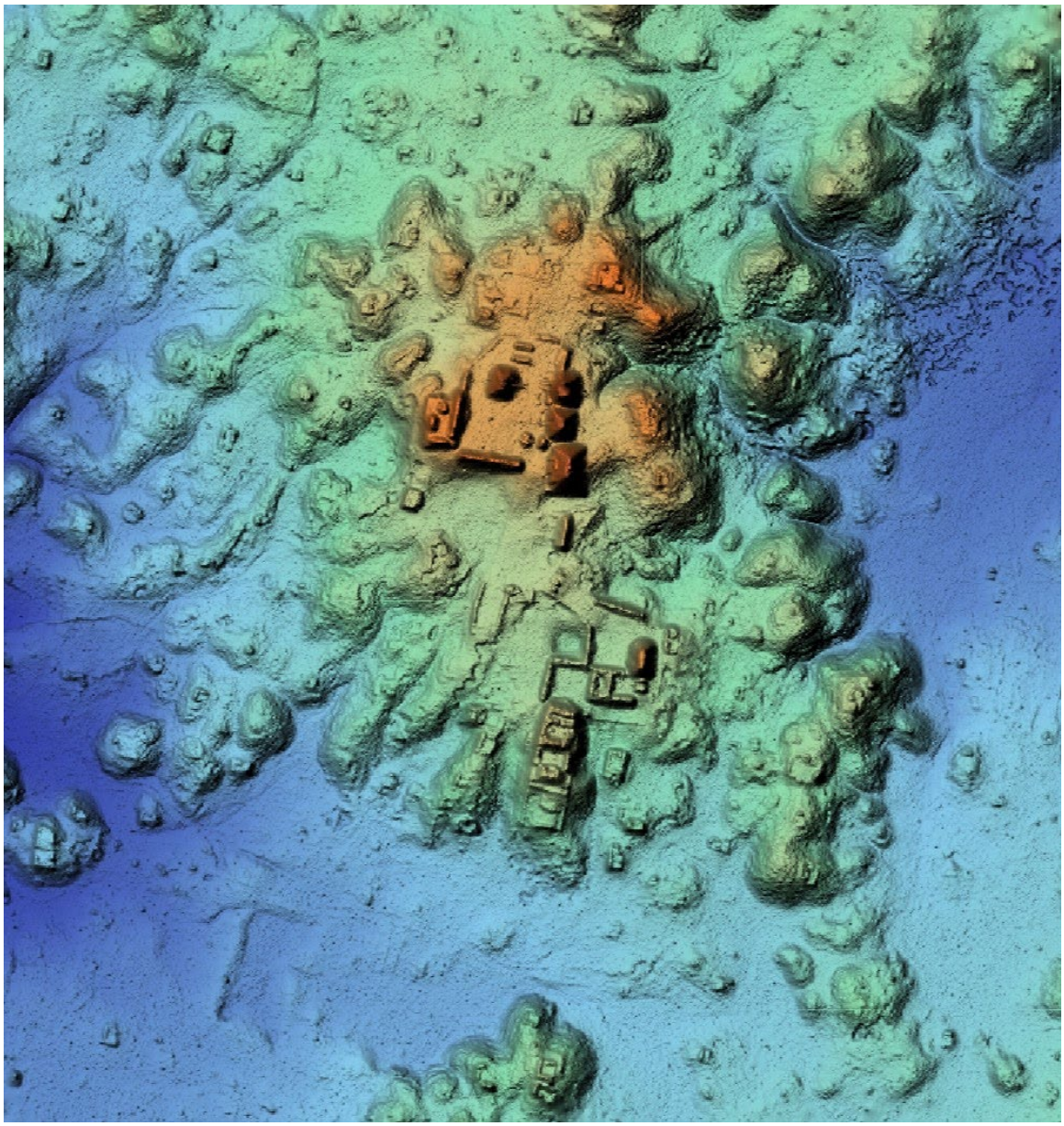
La Milpa is located in the La Lucha Uplands of Northwestern Belize, in the Central Maya Lowlands, in the western portion of the Rio Bravo Conservation Management Area, which is part of the larger Three Rivers Region. It is the third largest Maya site in Belize, built on the highest hills in the region and surrounded by rough terrain. Plaza A, of La Milpa, also known as the Great Plaza and the Main Plaza, is the highest point in this region. The site center sits at an elevation of 180 m/asl and was constructed atop a more or less north-south running ridge. It is not located near any major rivers or waterways and instead relied on two large modified natural *aguadas*, dubbed Reservoir A and Reservoir B, both located to the south of Plaza A.

La Milpa began as a village in the Late Preclassic period, and experienced substantial growth during the Early Classic. One excavated tomb had a Teotihuacán style cylinder vase and was thought to be the tomb of a La Milpa king. The growth of La Milpa really took off

in the Late Classic. The only Long Count date identified at the site is on a stela that was erected in the Late Classic for a building renovation. Evidence of abandoned buildings and architecture indicates that the royal family started to lose a considerable amount of power by the end of the Late Classic. A major depopulation of the city occurred at the time of the Classic collapse. At this point many of the rooms were cleaned out, and it appears the inhabitants migrated elsewhere. The abandonment was not sudden however, as previously believed. The LMCP identified 10th century construction in Courtyard 100, and, an assemblage of artifacts such as "broken ceramics, lithics, figurine fragments, and even human bones" were deposited at the courtyard. In Plaza A, offerings and artifacts were left by pilgrims from the Late Postclassic to Historic periods. At its height, the site core had 23 stelae, two ballcourts, major pyramids, administrative structures, and a series of large, connected plazas. There are two main groups of architecture on a north-south axis and linked by a sacbe.

The northern group contains Plaza A, which is a nearly 20,000 m^2 public space. There are three large temple-pyramids running along the eastern side of the plaza; these are, running north to south, Structures 1, 2, and 3. At the southwest corner of Structure 1 is the smaller temple Structure 5. Across from Structure 1, is Structure 10, which sort of occupies the northwest corner of the plaza, but also appears to be in the center of the plaza. The southern and western sides of the plaza contain large range structures, Structures 8 and 9. To the west of, and contiguous with, Structure 9, is Courtyard 88, also known as the Los Pisos Courtyard, was investigated by Maria Martinez. Courtyard 88 is a small acropolis that sits 4 m above the Main Plaza (Martinez 2008), and consists of Structures 9, 13, 14, and 15. Plaza A contains two ball courts, one in the southeast corner of the courtyard with its alley running north-south, made up of Structures 6 and 7. The other is at the north end of the plaza, consisting of Structures 11 and 12, with an alley running east-west. Of the 23 known La Milpa stela, 17 are in Plaza A, found mostly along the eastern side of the plaza in front of Structures 1, 2, and 3.

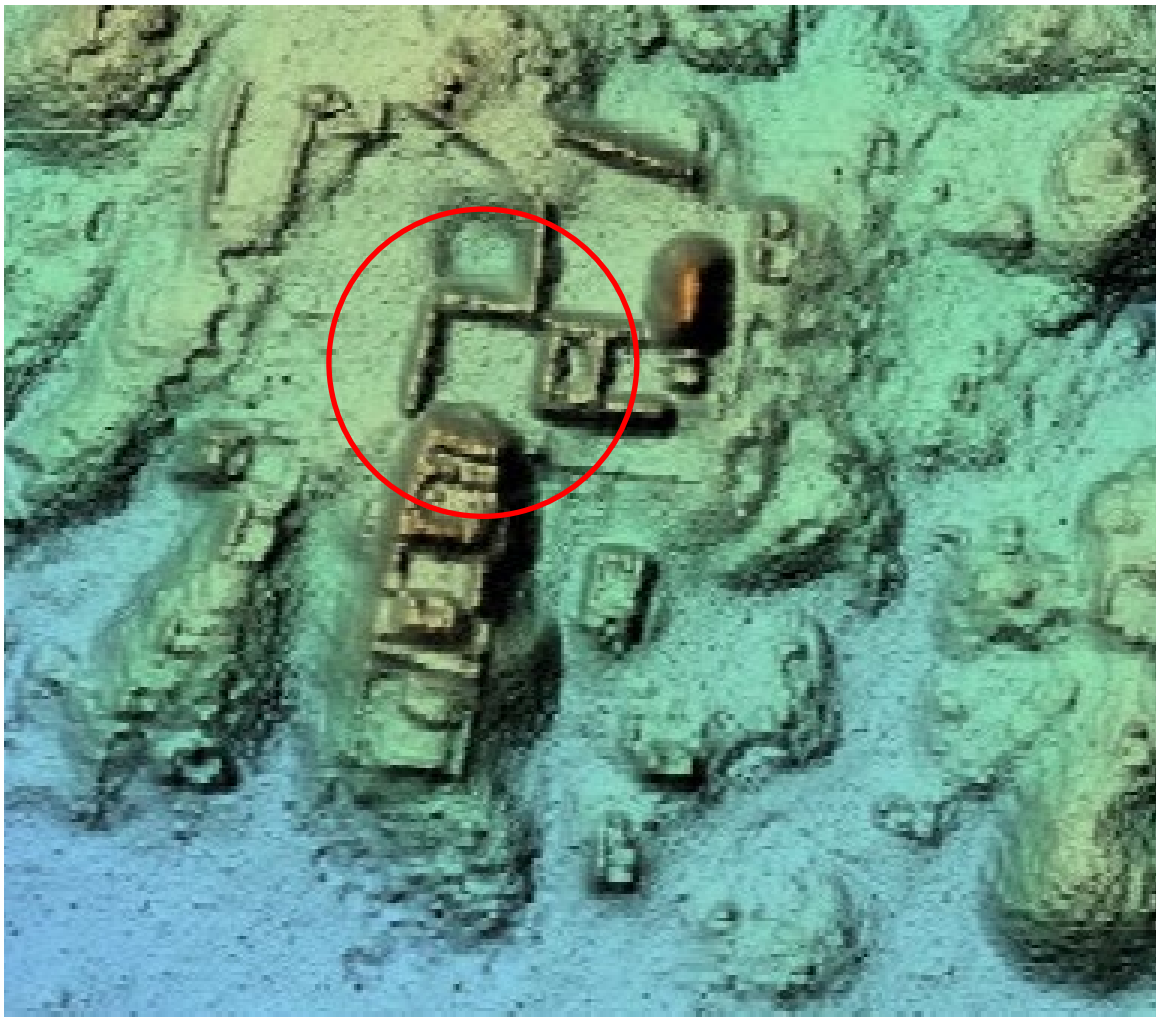
Plaza C and the Alleyway are part of the southern group of architecture. Together with Plazas B and D, and the Southern Acropolis, among other features, the southern group forms "a contiguous and complex arrangement of architecture related to the Late Classic florescence of the site" (Houk 2010:3). Plaza C, which had not yet been investigated, is the third largest plaza at the site and is located north of and contiguous with the Southern Acropolis. It measures 53 m north-south by 55 m east-west (Houk 2010), and on the west, north and east sides are Structures 29, 30 and 31, all large range structures. The southern border of the plaza is made from Structure 32 which is also the entrance to the acropolis. Entrance to Plaza C is restricted to an alleyway running along Courtyard D and the Kotanil Courtyard, south of Structures 26 and 28, entering the plaza at its southeast corner.



LiDAR Map of La Milpa

2027 Excavations

All work will take place at Plaza C of La Milpa, which consists of range structures on the west and north sides (Structures 31 & 30), and a long, tall structure on the east side that is part of the Kotanil Courtyard (Structure 29). This plaza has very restricted access, limited to the southeast corner of the plaza. The goal for the 2027 season will be to continue to expose more of the facades of Structures 29, 30, and 31, and ultimately excavate inside the structure rooms to uncover artifacts and features that may provide insight into the functions of the buildings and the plaza. Additional excavations will take place in the center of the plaza.



Camp Facilities

The R. E. W. Adams Research Facility consists of numerous buildings including:

- a large dorm/bunkhouse building and lab
- several roofed tent areas
- a kitchen and dining hall
- showers (water is not heated – one shower/person/day)
- latrines

Lodging will be assigned upon arrival. Generally, you may expect to share a bunkhouse room (4 bunks) with up to three others, or a tent with one other person. Mattresses or foam sleeping pads will be provided.

Laundry service is once per week and is included in your fees – it may take 1-2 days to get your clothes back so plan accordingly.

A 10,000-Watt diesel generator provides us with part-time electricity. We do not yet have 24-hour electricity, but it is generally on in the mornings and evenings until 9:00pm.

Potable water comes from a well and is pumped through filtering system and is available in camp 24 hours per day 7 days per week.

View of the REW Adams Research Facility where we will live.

Typical Field Day

Below is an outline of a typical fieldwork day (Sunday through Friday). This is an approximate daily schedule and may change.

5:30 a.m. Some rise early to prepare for their day and perform camp chores
6:00 a.m. Breakfast
6:30 a.m. Pack lunch and prepare for the field day
7:00 a.m. Depart camp for field work locations
12:00 noon Lunch in the field
3:30 p.m. Leave the field for camp
4:00 p.m. Arrive at camp from the field
4:30-6:00 p.m. Shower and relax until dinner
6:00 p.m. Dinner
7:00 p.m. Lectures and presentations may be scheduled, or free time
8:30 p.m. "Quiet Time": conversations must be at a whisper or taken out of camp
9:00 p.m. Lights out. The generator is turned off

Typical Field Week
Sundays through Fridays: Typically, we will be working at the archaeological site and in the field lab 6 days per week.

Saturdays: We will visit nearby archaeological sites for part of the day, and make a trip to "Linda Vista", a general store in the neighboring Mennonite community. At Linda Vista, you are able to make phone calls and buy snacks.

Students examining one of the many stelae from La Milpa.

Camp Chores
All project members and students participate in the day-to-day operation of camp. Typical duties include, but are not limited to, the following and are assigned on a rotating basis:

- Dorm/Lab - sweep the common areas daily
- Trash - biodegradable trash is taken to a local dump each evening
- Kitchen - clean tables before breakfast and dinner
- Vehicles – supervised inspection of the vehicles (oil, water, tire pressure, etc.)
- Camp - pick up litter/trash around camp
- Dishes - wash the dishes after dinner

Food & Drink
Local cooks are hired to prepare Belizean-style food for breakfast and dinners. Students will make their own lunch from food that will be provided. Most special dietary needs can be accommodated, so please let me know as soon as possible if you have any so we can determine of it will an issue.

Breakfast: beans, eggs, oatmeal, boiled plantains, cheese, buns, tortillas, fruit.

Lunch: Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, canned tuna, canned meat (Vienna sausages), breakfast leftovers, fruit, tortillas, buns are some possibilities. You will prepare your own lunch from provided food.

Dinner: beans, rice, vegetables, and chicken/pork/beef. A variety of local dishes will be prepared as well as more familiar fair such as spaghetti. In the past meat was served every other evening only although it is possible that might be switched to every night. Realize though for every meal there is a vegetarian option.

Drinks: soft drinks are available for purchase (Coca-Cola products), drinking water is available 24 hours/day (free of charge). "Kool-Aid", or something similar is usually available (included in fees). Water and “Kool-Aid” are not served cold. We try to keep the Cokes cold, but there are no guarantees.

Snacks: Snacks are not provided. You may wish to bring snacks with you, but most items are available at the Linda Vista store. Keep in mind that you will have to store all snacks in your room and many things melt in the heat, do not keep well, and can attract insects.

Climate and Weather
You can expect the weather to be hot and humid with some rain. Rain is unpredictable, there may be a lot, and there may be none. Neither accommodation nor transportation are air-conditioned – be prepared!

Immigration
US citizens require a valid passport to enter Belize (and Guatemala if you decide to go on the optional trip). A visa is not required. You will be issued a 30 day visitor’s permit (it is a stamp in your passport) when you arrive at the airport in Belize City. You will be issued a visitor’s permit when you cross the border into Guatemala. If you are not a US citizen you must determine well in advance if a visa or other documentation will be required for you to enter Belize and Guatemala.

Health Issues
Consult with your physician or a travel medicine specialist for advice on immunizations. Make sure you tell your health care provider the nature of your trip. Some health care providers may suggest a tetanus booster, Hepatitis vaccinations, anti-malarial medication, or others measures. It is up to you, in consultation with your preferred medical care provider, to decide what medical course of action is best for you. If you decide to take malaria preventatives, start taking them before leaving for Belize to ensure there are no adverse side effects (and you will have time to switch to a different anti-malarial).

Travel to and from Belize
You will be responsible for booking your own flight to Belize. However – **DO NOT** book travel until you receive written notification that you have been accepted into the program. You will be met at the international airport in Belize City (airport code is BZE).

There is one international airport, it is relatively small and has a single pedestrian exit from the terminal. Students will arrive throughout the day on May 21st – the time of your flight arrival does not matter. Not everyone will likely be flying out of Gunnison or Denver so this gives you more flexibility in finding the cheapest flight.

International flights to Belize all land at the Philip Goldson International Airport (BZE)

Optional Tikal and Caye Caulker Trip
After the field school, you can spend four days on an **optional** trip to Guatemala and Caye Caulker on the reef off the coast of Belize. Chartered buses will be hired for you to help facilitate the logistics.

The cost of the chartered buses and the trip is **NOT INCLUDED** in your fees or tuition.

You would spend the first two nights on the island of Flores, Petén, Guatemala. Flores is a beautiful town with great food and shopping options. You would spend one full day at Tikal, the largest Maya site known. Archaeological work has been conducted at Tikal for at least 100 years, and there are numerous large monumental structures that you will have an opportunity to climb and explore.

The next two days of the trip would be spent on Caye Caulker, on the reef off the coast of Belize. The Belizean reef is the second longest in the world after the Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Here you can relax, swim, go fishing, snorkeling, diving, or any number of activities. The timing of this trip usually corresponds to the start of lobster season.

Costs

Program fee is $2650.00. The program is very reasonably priced for an opportunity of this kind. Some programs may charge lower fees, but may require you to bring your own camping equipment, and force you to get a hotel room and pay for meals at your own expense every weekend. Some other programs also require you to spend a significant amount of money on your own tools and excavation equipment – use of these items is included in this program. If it is not listed here it is not included.

<u>The $2650 Includes</u>:

- Room and board while in camp
- International Health Insurance
- Project-related ground transportation: to camp, to the dig site, transportation to airport at the end of the program
- Laundry service once per week (wash, dry, fold)
- Use of necessary field equipment and supplies
- Operational and administrative costs and fees
- Weekend field trips to archaeological sites and admission fees

<u>The $2650 DOES NOT Include</u>:
The program involves additional costs for participants. Some significant items are not included in the program fee, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Round trip airfare to Belize
- Passport and associated expenses
- Medicine, prescriptions, immunizations
- Personal spending (personal items, telephone calls, extraneous beverages, souvenirs, etc.)
- Textbook
- Air travel insurance

TUITION COST: $1080 for 6 Credits!