

February 17, 2016 • Maya Ceremonial Era Long Count: 0.0.3.3.13 • 13 Ben 1 K'ayab • G1

I would like to talk about my continuing research as a codirector – with Dr. Gabriel Wrobel and Dr. Christopher Andres – of the Central Belize Archaeological Survey (CBAS) project into the development of an ancient Maya polity in the foothills of the Maya Mountains, Belize. Specifically, I'd like to emphasize that, regardless of explicitly stated motivations, there is an implicit purpose to public ritual; that is, to solidify the socio-political order. Moreover, I wish to introduce a pattern of regional cave activity, heretofore little discussed, that may have served ably in this purpose.

Tipan Chen Uitz and the Central Belize Archaeological Survey

by Shawn Gregory Morton, PhD,
University of Calgary, Michigan State University

The Maya civic-ceremonial centre of Tipan Chen Uitz is located in a rugged karstic upland, known as the Roaring Creek Works. Our research has demonstrated tangible links to immediately neighboring centers, either directly through shared infrastructure, or indirectly through a distinctive, shared architectural program and economic network that together indicate that by the Late Classic period, an identifiable Tipan-centric polity may have dominated much of the region between the Caves Branch and Roaring Creek drainages (see **Fig. 1**, page 3).

While the deeper history of Tipan and the broader CBAS study area is slowly revealing itself, at its peak in the Late Classic, the monumental site center of Tipan extended over 12.8 acres (5.2 hectares) and comprised 63 major structures, including an acropole administrative/residential complex interpreted as a palace and measuring more than 65.6 feet (20 meters) in height. Using Thiessen polygons, we have suggested that Tipan may have once exercised direct control over an area of at least 59.8 square miles (155 km²) (Andres et al. 2014). Carved monuments suggest that in this period Tipan was an active player in the dynamic inter-regional politics of the broader Maya area, engaging with prominent centers such as Calakmul and Naranjo.

The Stabilizing Power of Ritual Cave Use

From the Archaic to the Postclassic, and across the geographical region in question, the use



Jim Reed,
Editor

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Shawn hanging on... short rope, long fall... outside a cave in the Maya Mountains, Central Belize.

of caves as important ritual loci has been a constant, however, it is the changes of the Classic period on which I'd like to focus (see **Fig. 2**, page 3).

Eric Thompson (2005 [1975]) famously compiled a diverse list of the possible motivations/contexts in which people engaged with the cave context. While several of these uses may

February 17, 8 pm
IMS Presentation:



The Hidden Dead: Discerning the Nature of Classic Period Mortuary Cave Ritual in Central Belize with

Dr. Gabriel Wrobel
of Michigan State University

be more-or-less readily identified, the majority have proven difficult to disentangle.

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2016 IMS Community Education:
*A Year's Worth of Public Presentations by
 Maya Scholars and Experts in Their Fields of Study:*



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February 17:	March 16:
Dr. Gabriel Wrobel Michigan State University Mortuary Cave Rituals	C. Manuel Torres Florida International University Visionary Plants and Iconography of Prehistoric South America
April 20:	May 18:
Dr. Gabrielle Vail Florida Institute for Hieroglyphic Research Maya Textiles as Cultural Texts Through Time	Dr. Marc Zender Tulane University Maya Coronation Ceremonies
June 15:	July 20:
Mark Brenner University of Florida Environments of the Maya Lowlands Present and Past	Drs. Harvey and Victoria Bricker Tulane University / University of Florida Precolumbian Lunar Calenders
August 17:	September 21:
Dr. Andrew Hemmings The Old Vero Ice Age Sites Project	Dr. George Bey Millsaps College The Biocultural Reserve of Kaxil Kiuc, Yucatan
October 19:	November 16:
Dr. Francisco Estrada-Belli Tulane University Ritual and Power Before the Classic Period	Keith Merwin Independent Researcher Holmul Update

**The 2016 Tulane Maya Symposium is right
 around the corner! Join us in New Orleans, March 3-6**

This year's symposium, titled "**Ixiktaak: Ancient Maya Women**," will focus on the significance of women in ancient Maya society. Recent research in the Maya area has dramatically enhanced our understanding of gender roles in the ancient Maya world. The invited scholars have explored this topic from different disciplinary perspectives, including archaeology, iconography, physical anthropology, and epigraphy to illuminate the names, roles, lives, accomplishments, and practices of women in ancient Maya society.

We are excited to announce that in addition to the K-16 Educator Workshop organized by the Stone Center for Latin American Studies, we are also offering an **Introduction to Maya Glyphs** workshop on Friday, March 4, at the New Orleans Museum of Art.

Register today! The full symposium program is now available at:
<http://mari.tulane.edu/TSM/program.html>.

See you in New Orleans!



Tipan Chen Uitz and the Central Belize Archaeological Survey

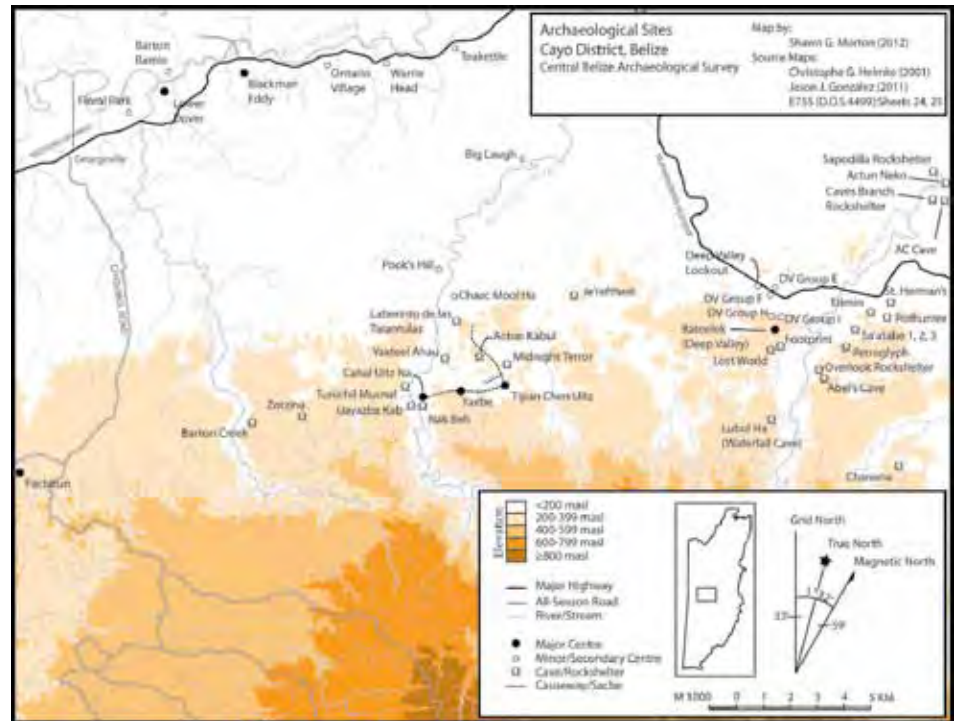
by Shawn Gregory Morton,
University of Calgary, Michigan State University
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In particular, identifying specific motivations behind frustratingly generalized ritual deposits has proven problematic.

In a recent article focused on cave deposits from western Belize, Holly Moyes and colleagues (2009) convincingly suggested that the intensification of cave ritual during the Late Classic was related to the acts of a prolific drought cult. They not only showed that such rites are among the most frequently noted ethnographically, but that the requisite symbolic connections between the cave context and such concerns extend far back into the Formative period. More importantly, they demonstrated a strong correlation between climatic data indicating drought conditions and increasing frequency of cave use.

A more general explanation for the intensification of cave use may be suggested based on Robert Sharer's (1985) observations that a lack of stability in the socio-political order may foster "atypical" or heightened expressions of authority such as the construction of monuments, revitalization of seats of power, or an increasing frequency of public ritual display.

Certainly, endemic drought is likely to cause such instability. The transformation of a region such as that of our study area, from a relatively underdeveloped hinterland or frontier zone into a burgeoning seat of power in its own right may have elicited similar ritual reactions. Given the generalized functional relationship between rite and society, such rites may have incorporated a wide variety of specific ritual goals that nonetheless served the unified purpose of consolidating the socio-political order. It is worth suggesting that this may similarly have been the driving force behind increased ritual activity in western Belize, as the



▲ **Fig. 1:** Map of central Belize indicating sites studied by the CBAS project. MAP by Shawn G. Morton.

► **Fig. 2:** Investigating the contents of a ritual platform in Lost World cave.



emergence of Minanha as a semi-independent state with the disintegration of external and overarching power relationships, and the establishment of what is perhaps a royal court (Lannone 2009) would provide similar pressure. In this case, the drought conditions may have been an important, but perhaps not the only, driver in the expansion of cave ritual.

Other rites may have functioned similarly. The construction of a platform that would have fostered observation of some activities in Actun Lubul Ha (while others were obscured), and the presence of hearth features that may have served primarily in illumination, may be taken together to infer that some aspects of ritual cave use in Actun Lubul Ha were geared toward public observation (**Fig. 3**, page 5).

One is reminded of elite ritual practice within monumental centers, that are thought to combine ritual elements that are open to public observation – carried out in procession from location to location,

upon the stairs of pyramidal platforms, or before the temple structures that rest atop – and those that are closed to public scrutiny – carried out within temple structures (Freidel et al. 1993:158).

James Brady has suggested a very similar division at Midnight Terror Cave, where a large platform built within the cave entrance would have fostered observation of some portions of ritual activity, while the use of niches and boulders within the cave would have shielded others from general observation (Brady 2009). Such division appears to be an important element of Maya ritual activity, patterns of inclusion and exclusion working in concert fostering the creation of both *communitas* and *polis*; those moments that take place on the stage stand in complementary opposition to those behind the scenes.

continued on page 5





A: Bent rails in Gualán. **B:** Collapse of the Hotel Terminal in Guatemala City, caused by the failure of reinforced concrete columns in its third story. Both images are photos from the U.S. Department of the Interior U.S. Geological Survey professional paper 1002, published in 1976. Public domain.

Remembering the Great Guatemalan Earthquake of February 4, 1976

by Jim Reed

The devastating earthquake in Guatemala was something rather personal for me. In 1975, I had been living in Belize for a year-and-a-half and when our project in the western Cayo District reached its end, my friends drove back to South Florida, and I headed out on my own, into Guatemala on a three-month hitch-hiking and bus-riding return trip.

My first night in Guatemala City, I met some really nice people and they invited me to stay at their place. I enjoyed myself for three weeks, and one day they challenged me to climb the Pacaya volcano at night. The volcano was active and we were able to get above the caldera.

Every 12 minutes or so, we felt intense tremors beneath our feet. The shaking caused lava to explode up before us, creating colorful clouds and lightning. It was a magical night and more natural energy than I had ever experienced, although all the explosive activity was perhaps a harbinger of things to come.

On my way north, when the bus stopped along the Pacific Coast Highway in Retalhuleu, I remember meeting a young American couple who said they had just sold their land and were heading back to the U.S. – because they had witnessed a very strong “vertical” seismic shift that really scared them. That was six months before the big quake.

On the morning of the quake, I was awakened by my radio alarm to a live helicopter report by a pilot flying over the scene. He said that whole mountainsides were



D: Patzicía destroyed. Typical street view in Patzicía, showing adobe block rubble which is all that remains of the houses that formerly lined this street. Collapse of the heavy adobe walls, roof tiles and beams caused most of the casualties. Many of the adobe blocks are still intact but the mortar between the blocks failed during the seismic shaking. Slide 43, U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 77-165, 1976. Public domain.



E, F, G: Three photos by an anonymous photographer of the destruction in Antigua, Guatemala; posted to the Editor's Facebook page more than a year ago.

on fire! Ironically, the report was later revised as authorities realized that the “smoke” was not from fires, but that the shaking was so severe near the epicenter, that the mountains, trees and some villages had totally been reduced to clouds of dust. Twenty-three thousand people lost their lives on that fateful day.

Six years later, I returned to live in Guatemala. I credit learning Spanish to some of the shoe-shiners living in the city parks – all survivors – their parents had died in the quake.

C: Earthquake damage, Guatemala, 1976. Image courtesy of: <http://worldrenew.net>.



Devastation in Antigua, Guatemala. Photo by Joe Guerriero. Source: ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America, at: <http://revista.drclas.harvard.edu>. 🌋



Tipan Chen Uitz and the Central Belize Archaeological Survey



by Shawn Gregory
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Concluding Thoughts

Such dialogues between public and private, inclusive and exclusive, observer and performer, appear to have framed much ritual cave activity in the CBAS study region and are represented by the single most commonly observable pattern of deposition within this area: that is, the fragmentation and distribution of objects between several distinct loci.

Regardless of the specific motivation behind the rites in question, connecting multiple locales across the landscape affords an opportunity for more-or-less formal and inherently observable/public ritual procession in combination with secluded/private acts within caves themselves (Fig. 4). Importantly, the pattern is ubiquitous, observable in every single cave investigated by the CBAS project and explicitly referenced in many academic accounts of ritual activity in this region. Further, this pattern appears



Fig. 4: Heavily fragmented ceramic vessels in Tipan Chen Uitz s.08.

relatively common across the Maya area, though its full extents are difficult to gauge from the published literature and it is rarely actively discussed (cf. Lucero 2008).

Methodologically, the most important implication of this may be that we have been remiss in treating cave contexts in isolation. Even large elaborate and heavily utilized caves seem to have served as simple nodes within broad ritual landscapes and should be treated as such. The scale of cave-related studies within the Maya area needs to change, from those focussed on individual caves to broad analyses on the landscape scale (as in settlement studies). Moreover, these studies must explicitly seek out variability within this corpus as it is clear that even small sites may have served as important nodes within larger circuits (Overlook Rockshelter, for instance, contained thousands of isolated sherds).

While there is little space available to delve deeper into the subject, it may suffice at present to make a prediction: The future of cave studies in the Maya area will and must focus not only on the wide variety of acts occurring within the cave itself, but on the significance of cave rites in the wider context above ground, the extent of which we are only just beginning to fathom.

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Fig. 3: Contemplating the dark in Actun Kabul.

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Shawn G. Morton recently completed his PhD in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Calgary, and is a Research Associate in the Department of Anthropology at Michigan State University. 🏠

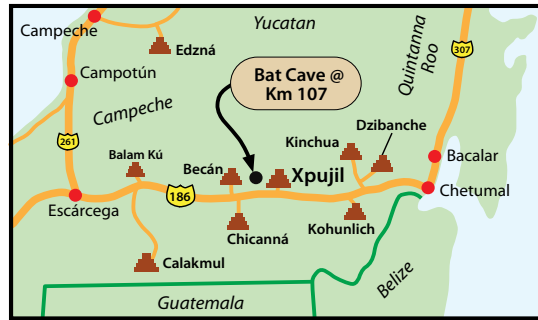
A Batty Trek in the Yucatan Bush by Marta Barber

It was past 5:30 in the afternoon, and our group was traveling west on Mexico's Road 186 from Chetumal on our way to Puerta Calakmul, a new bungalow-style hotel recently opened right at the entrance to the Calakmul Biosphere and the magnificent ruins of that great city. We were still about 30 minutes away from the hotel and were aiming to get there before nightfall.

"Maybe we'll see the bats coming out of the cave," said our driver, as we went by Xpujil. "As they leave the cave at dusk, they create a funnel formed by millions of them."

As we stopped by a non-distinct place on the road, with nothing but the typical Yucatan bush, bats began to seemingly come out of the core of the earth. A couple of hawks loomed in the still blue sky, as focused as we were. "There's a path to the cave," our driver said.

Armed with flashlights, those of us with enough dare



L) Bat Cave is near Km 107, slightly west of Xpujil. Map by Jim Reed. R) The Bat tornado, by Eric Slazyk. Check out a short Bat Cave YouTube video by Greg Muelrath at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ph-qk3006GA

started climbing a rugged path, teeming with exposed tree roots, more difficult to manage in the darkness of the dense vegetation. We walked for about 5 minutes until someone stopped by a cliff, spotted a big opening in the earth down about 20 feet and facing us. It was hard to see anything but rock and vegetation. Then we noticed that out of the creases of the limestone thousands of flitting black wings kept emerging.

I was so enthralled by this unexpectedly magnificent act of nature that I had not noticed that I was completely surrounded by bats, moving around me as if I was not there. I stood there, by then in complete darkness, "listening"

to the silence surrounding me as the bats went up, down and all around me, inches away from my body without ever giving me the slightest touch. They are fast. They are accurate.

The cave is known as the Bat Cave, which scientists calculate is home to approximately 16 million bats and about a dozen species.

Thanks to our "flying" companions, there wasn't one mosquito in the bushes. What a sight. What a feeling!

IMS members have also visited the caves of Balankanche, Loltún, and Actun Usil in the Yucatan, and Actun Ha, Actun Tunichil Muknal (ATM), and Actun Chapat in Belize (see below).



L) Sacred water deep inside Balankanche. Photo by George Fery. C & R) Interesting formations within Actun Chapat, Belize. Photos by Janice Van Cleve.



L, C & R) Actun Usil. Glyphs, imprints in red and red hands are visible on the ceiling in Actun Usil, near Oxkintok, Yucatan. Photos by Eric Slazyk.

February 10, 2016 • IMS Explorer Session: An Intro to the Maya



IMS adventurers visit El Mirador. Photo by ETS.

Jungle Builders: Learning the Basics of Maya Architecture

with IMS President **Eric T. Slazyk (ETS)**,
AIA, NCARB, LEED AP BD+C



IMS adventurers visit Nakbe. Photo by ETS.

Though settlements and small cities found in Mesoamerica date to about 1,500 BCE, around 600 BCE, an incredible city rose from the deep jungles in the northwest area of Guatemala that, to this date, is considered the first of many

to come. El Mirador, with pyramids between 20-30 meters high, has been called the “cradle of Maya civilization”. For the next 2300 years, as cities bloomed all over Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras, Belize and El Salvador, each area and time period developed their own building style, using the materials accessible to each. The Puuc, Peten, Río Bec, and Chenes styles, among others, are now symbolic of buildings and cities that, though in ruins, continue to impress for their beauty and grandeur.

February 17: IMS Feature Presentation

The Hidden Dead: Discerning the Nature of Classic Period Maya Mortuary Cave Ritual in Central Belize

with **Dr. Gabriel Wrobel**, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Michigan State University and currently Codirector of Central Belize Archaeological Survey Project

Mortuary practices among ancient Maya groups from Central Belize during the Classic period appear to have been largely focused on the abundant caves and rock shelters dotting the karstic landscape. While use of subterranean spaces to house the dead is documented throughout Mesoamerica and beyond, the river valleys of central Belize appear to have an unusually high concentration and wide variety of mortuary caves. However, despite a recent explosion of cave archaeology in the Maya region, there is currently no consensus about the meaning of mortuary cave ritual. Indeed, ethnohistoric documents describe a multitude of mortuary rituals associated with caves, and the variety and complexity of these contexts further complicates interpretation.



This talk will highlight current approaches used in the study of ancient Maya mortuary cave use, providing examples from ongoing research in the greater Roaring Creek area conducted by the Central Belize Archaeological Survey (CBAS) Project. In addition to presenting results of direct analyses of human remains found in caves, I will discuss the ways in which archaeological data from a variety of recently discovered cave, rock shelter, and civic-ceremonial sites in the surrounding area all provide context for interpreting ancient mortuary practices.

Gabriel Wrobel is an associate professor of Anthropology at Michigan State University, specializing in bioarchaeology. He received his bachelor's degree in Anthropology from Emory University in 1993 and his PhD from Indiana University in 2004. He currently directs the Central Belize Archaeological Survey Project, on which he and his students investigate mortuary contexts in caves and rock shelters.

Photo from his page on the Michigan State website, at: <http://anthropology.msu.edu/blog/people/wrobel>

All meetings begin at 8 pm • Institute of Maya Studies • www.instituteofmayastudies.org

The IMS is a Community Partner with Miami Dade College – Kendall Campus, Miami, FL

Both programs will take place in K-413 (in Building K-4, Room 13)

Check out their website at: www.mdc.edu for directions and campus map.

IMS Hotline: 305-279-8110



Excavation of Ancient City in Honduras Yields New Finds

A Maya site in Honduras is under excavation in the jungle of La Mosquitia by a joint American/Honduran team. Surveys and a minor excavation began last year. This year's field season kicked off on January 12, 2016, with Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández personally removing the first stone sculpture from the ground.

The artifact is one of dozens from a cache found in February of last year. The artifacts were left untouched under military protection at the undisclosed location since then.

In just the first few days of excavation last month, the team, led by archaeologist Chris Fisher of Colorado State University at Fort Collins, has found a dozen more objects, bringing the total

to sixty-four. The artifacts are mostly stone jars and "metates." Many of the objects are decorated with animal heads and geometric patterns.

President Hernández also removed a metate with a "were-jaguar" head, well known following the initial media reports of the discovery last year. The sculpture is believed to depict a shaman in a transformed spiritual state, part animal and part human. This artifact has given the valley site a new name. Previously referred to by the mundane name of "T1," short for Target One, it has now been officially renamed the "Valley of the Jaguar."

James Nealon, the American ambassador to Honduras who accompanied the president to the



Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, in white, confers with archeologist Chris Fisher, right, as they extract artifacts at the site. Photo by Dave Yoder; courtesy of National Geographic.

site, felt it was a "great day for Honduras and a wonderful example of Hondurans and Americans cooperating on a project of importance to both countries and the world." 🏛️

Source: From an online NatGeo article by Douglas Preston, released 1/13/2016 at: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com>. Submitted by Mike Ruggeri.

Upcoming Events at the IMS:

All IMS events for February and March will take place in Room K-413 at Miami Dade College Kendall Campus. That's Building K-4, Room 13. See www.mdc.edu

February 10 • 8 pm: *An Intro to the Maya Jungle Builders: Learning the Basics of Maya Architecture* – with IMS President **Eric Slazyk**.

February 17 • 8 pm: *IMS Feature Presentation The Hidden Dead: Discerning the Nature of Classic Period Maya Mortuary Cave Ritual in Central Belize* – with **Dr. Gabriel Wrobel** – of Michigan State, and currently codirector of the Central Belize Archaeological Survey project.

March 9 • 8 pm: *An Intro to the Maya Food Staples of the Ancient Maya* – with IMS Treasurer **Ray Stewart**.

March 16 • 8 pm: *IMS Feature Presentation Visionary Plants and Iconography of Prehistoric South America* – with **C. Manuel Torres** – Professor Emeritus of Florida International University.

Upcoming Events and Announcements:

February 19: *Symposium The Ancient Maya: Dance, Writing, Art* – Lectures will address dance in the ancient Maya world and the Maya Hieroglyphic Database Project, headquartered at the University of California, Davis. An informal gallery discussion will consider Maya objects in the Denver Art Museum collection. Cocktails follow the lectures. At the Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO. Details at: <http://mayercenter.denverartmuseum.org/symposia.htm>

March 3-6, 2016: *Tulane Maya Symposium Ixiktaak: Ancient Maya Women* – The invited scholars will focus on the significance of women in ancient Maya society. This year's Keynote, hosted at the New Orleans Museum of Art, will be given by Dr. Mary Ellen Miller of Yale University. The symposium will take place at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA. Get more at: <http://mari.tulane.edu/TMS/index.html>

March 11-12: *2016 Conference Midwest Conference on Mesoamerican Archaeology and Ethnohistory* – Dr. Elizabeth Pope of the Art Institute of Chicago will be the keynote speaker. Dr. Pope will speak on Friday, March 11. The symposium will follow on Saturday, March 12. At the College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, IL. Info at: www.cod.edu

April 28–May 1: *M@L Conference Maya at the Lago* – The Maya at the Lago Conference (M@L) is a four-day "Everything Maya" event that's comprised of lectures, workshops, and exciting social activities. M@L brings some of the world's top Mesoamerican archaeologists together to share their experiences and current research with colleagues, students, and the general public. At Davidson Day School in Davidson, NC. Get additional info at: <http://www.mayaatthelago.com/>



IMS EXPLORER

Join the **Explorer-ation!** Scholar or not, we welcome submissions from IMS members and other Maya enthusiasts. Share what interests you with others. All articles and news items for the **IMS Explorer** should be forwarded to the newsletter editor at: mayaman@bellsouth.net