

PROJECT NAME: Belize

LOCATION: Cahal Pech, Belize

Next summer will mark the eleventh consecutive season that AFAR will team up with the highly reputable Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance project to work at the ancient Maya site of Cahal Pech. This two-week archaeological field school will allow students to obtain hands-on training from leading archaeologists while excavating in a very special space once occupied by the citizens of ancient Cahal Pech. Over the course of the field school, students will take part in virtually every step of the archaeological field process and will work to master steps such as excavation, mapping, illustration, artifact processing, and scientific journaling. Students who choose, will even have the opportunity to co-author professional reports and present their findings at academic conferences.

CAHAL PECH History

Cahal Pech is located on the southern outskirts of San Ignacio Town, in the upper Belize Valley region of western Belize. The site core sits on the crest of a steep hill on the west bank of the Macal River, two kilometers upstream from the latter's confluence with the Mopan, and some 200 river kilometers from the Caribbean coast. The central acropolis is approximately 270 meters above sea level and provides a commanding view of the Maya Mountains to the south, and the interfluvial bottomlands between the Macal and Mopan Rivers to the north (Awe 1992).

Settlement survey and investigations at Cahal Pech indicate that during the Classic period the site and its sustaining area may have encompassed a realm of approximately 16 square kilometers. At the nucleus of this territory was the central precinct or site core. This area consists of some 34 large structures which are densely compacted on an imposing acropolis slightly larger than one hectare in size. The architecture of the central precinct includes several tall non-domestic structures, a number of large range-type buildings, two ballcourts, and possibly a sweathouse (Awe and Campbell 1988, 1989).

Most of the structures in the site core are located around seven plazas. The largest of these is Plaza B, or what Satterthwaite (1951:22) previously referred to as the Central Plaza. The principal Classic period courtyard, however, is Plaza A. Together with Plazas D and E, it is located on the western half of the acropolis. All of the structures bordering Plazas A, D and E are tightly clustered, they completely enclose their courtyards, and they provide limited access to and from the other plazas within the central precinct. The other courtyards (Plazas B,C,F, and G) are relatively more open and mounds are less clustered, but the structures are located in a position that would have provided limited access to the site core in general. There are, in fact, only two areas which provide access into the site core. These are located to the north and south of the juncture between Plazas B and C. This configuration,

plus the acropoline nature of the central precinct, suggests that during the Classic period the site core may have served for defense in times of conflict, or for limiting public access into areas that had been exclusively set aside by and for the elite (Awe, Campbell and Conlon 1991).

Cahal Pech, Baking Pot Lower Dover, and Xunantunich are among the largest prehistoric Maya sites in the upper Belize River Valley and served as the capitals to small kingdoms in the Classic period (c. AD 250-900). BVAR excavations at Cahal Pech have revealed that this site is the location of some of the earliest Maya settlements in the Maya lowlands. First settled around 1200 B.C., the site was continuously occupied until the 10th century A.D.

Archaeological Focus for 2018

The investigations at Cahal Pech will focus on two objectives: continued investigations of the monumental architecture of the site core, and on settlement pattern studies in the sustaining area of the site. The investigations in the site core aim to further elucidate the status and complexity of this important center, from its establishment at the end of the Early Preclassic period (1200-900 B.C.) to its subsequent abandonment in the Terminal Classic period (~ AD 800-900). Specifically, we will continue exposing the terminal architecture of the site core's western ball court. Our settlement research will involve mapping of unrecorded mounds in the northern and eastern periphery of the site, and test excavations of these settlements.

Key Information

DATES:

One Session – July 22 – August 5

Civilization: Maya

Eligibility:

This project will be available for up to 18 students currently enrolled in 9th to 12th grade who are in good standing at their school.

Fees:

Total fees for this project are \$3200.

Fees Include:

- Full Room and Board
- Fieldwork training
- Seminars and workshops

- Excursions and other activities
- Medical Insurance
- Transportation to and from airport
- Application fee
- Administrative, site preservation, and artifact analysis costs

Fees DO NOT include

- Airfare
- Airport meals
- Any spending on snacks or souvenirs

Expectations Schedule Registration

To reserve a space, students must pay a \$100 application fee. (Included in the price of the program). Upon acceptance into the program, one half of the program fees will be required to be paid. The remainder of the fees will be due (minus the application fee) by May 15. Application fees will not be refunded if the applicant is not selected.

Applications will be accepted until all spaces are filled. Participants will be notified of their acceptance within two weeks of the submission of their application and will receive an information packet shortly thereafter with further details.

Cancellation and Refund Policy:

- Before May 15: All payments, except for the \$100 application fee, are refundable.
- After May 15: All payments are non-refundable unless your application is rejected by the program director.

Right of Refusal:

AFAR reserves the right to refuse an applicant's selection. This is a rare occurrence and is most likely due to a person's inability to meet health requirements or in the interest of group compatibility. Once in the field, the program directors and AFAR reserve the right to send a student away from the program should that person's behavior compromise the safety, research objectives and general performance of the group, or violate Greek laws, regulations or customs.

Expectations of Students

Working on an archaeological site is hard work. Students need to be in good health and capable of using picks, shovels, trowels, and detailed instruments to excavate in

a hot environment. Students are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner, be eager to learn, and capable of taking direction.

Daily Work Schedule

6:30 – 7:30 Breakfast buffet served

7:30 – Students depart for Cahal Pech site and pickup equipment along the way

8:00 – Work begins on site

12:00 – 12:30 – Lunch Break

12:30 – 2:30 – Return to work

2:30 – Complete daily documentation, gather artifacts & equipment and depart site.

3:00 – 6:30 Afternoon Programming (varies)

6:30 – Dinner with free time afterwards

10:00 - Bedtime

ITINERARY & ACCOMODATIONS

The group will be staying the Cahal Pech Village Resort in San Ignacio. Students will be sharing rooms, each with en- suite bathrooms and air conditioning. The resort has a laundry service, which costs \$7 per load. The turn around for laundry is 24 hours. Towels are provided. The hotel includes a general room with a television and a dining area where meals will be served. Wifi is also available.

Meals will be eaten at the hotel, and an arrangement will be made to provide us with a mid- workday snack. All of the meals served will be comparable to those found at home. Please let us know if you are a vegetarian or if you require a special diet so that we may discuss the best way to accommodate your needs.

For this program, the students will generally be at the archaeological site during the weekdays and on excursions during the weekend. On occasion, we may choose to deviate from the schedule in reaction to unforeseen circumstances and unique opportunities.

July 22 – Fly to Belize City and drive to San Ignacio. Stop to eat on the way. Evening briefing on safety and logistics

July 23 – Cahal Pech site tour in the morning. Field methods and mapping. Lab intro & Unit setup.

July 24 – Full day of excavations. Afternoon lecture on taking field notes.

July 25 – Full day of excavations. Artifact diagnosis workshop following excavations. Evening dinner in town.

July 26 – Full day of excavations.

July 27 – Excavations through the day. Optional trip to the Iguana Farm in the afternoon. \$10
July 28 – Students will visit the ancient Maya capital of Caracol, then visit Rio Frio Cave and Big Rock Falls.
July 29 – Students will tour Actun Tunichil Muknal cave during the day.
July 30 – Full day of excavations
July 31 – Excavations through the day. Ghost stories atop temple in the evening.
August 1 – Excavations through the day. Dinner in town.
August 2 – Excavations through the day. Lecture and movie night following dinner.
August 3 – Closing Excavations. Following excavations, the team will break down site, process and store final artifacts, finish mapping, and do inventory on equipment. After workday, team will shower and travel to Placencia for weekend stay.
August 4 – Snorkeling off of Placencia and island barbecue. Overnight at Placencia.
August 5 – Fly home

Students will visit, Caracol, Big Rock Falls, Placencia, Actun Tunichil Muknal Cave, and the optional Iguana Farm for their excursions.

Workshops & Excursions

Classroom sessions will take place on certain nights.

Topics include the following:

- Stratigraphy and Artifact Collection
- History of Belize Maya
- History of Excavations at Cahal Pech
- Maya Ballgame
- Archaeological Recording
- Keeping an Archaeological Journal
- Ceramic Illustration

Historical Excursions

An archaeologist's work is not finished unless he or she can sit back and reflect on the day's excavation. Therefore, the group will make time to experience Belize away from the shovels and wheelbarrows, either by relaxing at a café or by visiting several nearby Maya sites.

We believe that visiting the region's historical sites is essential to understanding the context of the archaeological work at Cahal Pech. Excursions may change depending on the excavation schedule and unforeseen events. Probably excursions include the following:

- Placencia

- Actun Tunichil Muknal Cave
- Big Rock Falls
- Caracol
- Iguana Farm (optional)