

**Hill Cumorah Expedition Team, Inc**  
**2017 Spring Expedition Report**  
**May 20 thru May 31, 2017**  
By David B. Brown



## Saturday May 20, 2017

It was an early morning for sure. Up at 2:30 and gathering folks by 3:30 in order to be at the airport by 4:30, through the ordeal of security checks by 5:30 and pushing back from the gate at 6 AM. It was a smooth transition at Chicago O'Hare and then off to Cancun. We landed safely just before noon.

The Cancun airport was a simple process with a very efficient system and porters that helped Neil and Trudy through immigration and customs. While inside we met up with Edd DeTray and our party of six (Mike Brown, Neil Steede, Trudy Steede, Terry Scott, Joanie Glandon and David Brown) expanded by one.



We were soon outside the terminal waiting for our car rental service when we realized we forgot to claim the wheelchair we checked at the gate in Kansas City. Romel was sent back into the terminal and in about 20 minutes he arrived with the wheelchair. Then off to the car rental.

It was nearly 3 PM before we made our way onto the highway and heading south on the road from Cancun toward Belize. There was a lot to discuss on the way. The latest archaeological finds and the newest changes in anthropology that are shifting the science toward intelligent design as opposed to chaotic evolution.

Eventually we made our way to the border between Mexico and Belize. Here we surrendered our Mexican immigration papers and went through customs once again. This time we had another individual walk us through the process and this went very quickly considering how these border crossings usually happen. We then drove the 10 miles or so to Corozal.

It took some time, but finally we found a hotel and moved our luggage into the rooms. Then off to a restaurant to get some well-deserved food. But, even that seemed to take quite a while. Two ladies working both waitressing and the kitchen. The food finally came and it was good.



Tomorrow we begin the day at 8 AM. We will be having devotions by the vehicle before we drive up the road to a local church mission being

sponsored by Centerplace churches. After our worship, we head south toward to visit a ruin, probably Altun Ha where we heard they discovered a cache of buried weapons—we need to see what this is about. Then tomorrow evening at Belmopan.

### **Sunday May 21, 2017**

The morning began with confusion on timing. Apparently, some were using their cell phones for their alarm while others were using the time of their watches. Unknown to us, Belize doesn't switch to daylight savings time. Some of us were up an hour early! After yesterday's long day of travel, we could have used the extra hour sleep. But, nothing was lost. Those who rose early found a local restaurant for breakfast while the others got ready.

Now being all together and armed with directions for getting to the church, we began looking for College Street. It is difficult when your cell phone map won't fill in the street names and the posted road signs are few and far between. Eventually, we stopped at the town square and began asking where it was located. One very nice man on a bicycle offered to guide us the two blocks over to the road we needed. From there we followed the directions we were given from our Independence connection.



We pulled up to the church and it was unlocked. We were met by the Pastor Guillermo. We introduced ourselves and then he welcomed us in. Guillermo is a Spanish speaker, as are most of the adults at the congregation. Neil began talking with him about why we were at his church this morning and testimonies began to be shared on both sides concerning new understandings that are about to come forth regarding the Book of Mormon.

Soon the members of the congregation were gathering and we were introduced to them. After one of their members received laying on of hands for healing (administration), Neil also we administered to for his legs and feet as they were causing him some problems. Before the service was over, another young lady received administration by the Elders. We all shared a beautiful service with Guillermo speaking on the power of repentance, some of us sharing testimonies and messages and then Guillermo sharing his own personal testimony of a dream he was given concerning the message of the Book of Mormon speaking from the dust and going forth to the

peoples of the Earth. When the service concluded, we all met at a local restaurant (El Mirador) in town where we spent the next two hours in conversation sharing with and getting to know one another.

It was a wonderful time where the Holy Spirit was knitting together hearts in a unity that can be found by no other means. These wonderful people are now a part of our lives and our interaction is recalled with tenderness. It was just after 2 PM when we found ourselves leaving Corozal heading south on the Northern Highway. We spent much of the next three hours discussing the experience we just left and trying



to assimilate all of the information we just received through the testimonies of dreams and from the impress of the Holy Spirit which each of us felt. There is no doubt we will have much to share at our testimony service that we will be holding when we return to the States.

It was about 5 PM when we reached Belmopan, and in no time, we were pulling into the Yim Soon Hotel where we had stayed during a previous trip. We found our rooms, took an hour and a half rest, then gathered again to get some dinner. We found a nice restaurant called the Blue Moon where we enjoyed a clean atmosphere with good food. We headed back to the hotel and held our devotions. It was opportunity for all of us to share what we had experienced earlier in the day. This was a beautiful and incredible way to start our trip. We can tell that God is moving in these latter days to prepare people for the important events that we will be experiencing soon. That was evident in the testimonies shared this morning.

Tomorrow we plan to cross the border into Guatemala. Once that is accomplished we plan to visit the archaeological site of Naranjo before traveling on to Santa Eleana (Lago Flores) which is located in the center of the Petén of Guatemala.

### **Monday May 22, 2017**

Our morning began with less confusion for most, though one of us set the watch the other way and was now two hours off. But, we gathered at the van at 8 AM this morning. The local hotel restaurant was closed, so we headed out the west end of town and discovered that our favorite restaurant in Belmopan (Cabo) was open for breakfast—we found them as they were just

opening the doors and unloading food for the kitchen. We then had a wonderful breakfast with some very good coffee. With our bellies now ready to meet the day we headed out the West Highway toward the Guatemala border.

The road took us through many twists and turns as we passed through the towns of Ignacio and Santa Elena. We noticed that we were definitely gaining altitude as we moved farther west into a slightly mountainous area. We also noticed that the homes built on the large tracts of land were looking much more affluent and much like structures you might find in any town in Northern Texas. We made the comment that it felt like we were passing through Little Texas. It seemed to be complete with the sultry heat you would find in Texas as well.

Finally, about 11 AM we made it to the border crossing. We paid our \$40 Belizean exit fee, walked through the exit lanes, got back into the van, drove 150 feet through an oversized vehicle bay, then parked long enough to have the van tires “fumigated.” This cost us another fee, then into the Guatemalan side of the border to get stamped that we had entered. Mike then walked through the office to have the rental van registered for entry. Here is where our day turned very different. The notarized document we received from the rental company that was supposed to get us easy access into Guatemala did not have the right VIN number or the right license number. The rental company gave us the paperwork for another vehicle and we could not gain entry into Guatemala until this was resolved. So.... we sat....and waited...and sweat. and waited.

Mike called the rental company. After two hours, they emailed a signed document that corrected the original document based on the rental contract. But, (wait for it) it was not notarized. The Guatemalan official could only allow passage with a notarized document. So, another phone call to the rental company and another two plus hours. We sweat....and waited...and sweat some more.



Finally, at 4 PM, over five hours after we began this process, the notarized document came through and we were allowed our sticker for authorization into Guatemala. We crossed the Mopan River that divides Belize and Guatemala, but they weren't done collecting money yet—we had to pay a 20 Quetzales toll for crossing the bridge.

Finally, we were on the road heading west into Guatemala, but it was far too late for a visit to



Naranjo. We will have to do this on the way back through when we return. The road was twisting and turning, though it was overall smoother than the roads in Belize. We finally made it into Santa Elena (Flores) in the center of the Guatemala Petén about 5:30 PM. We found a hotel we stayed at four years ago and got the rooms we needed for the evening. Once unloaded, we spent no time heading to the restaurant for some limonadas to quench the thirst we developed waiting in the hot sun.



With dinner complete, we headed back to the rooms and had our evening devotion. This evening's scripture referred to staying out of the way of God's Kingdom development. That we need to make sure we are working in harmony WITH Him and not against Him. Well, we decided, we are now on God's schedule and He is directing the timing of what we need to accomplish from here on out. We plan to leave for Sayaxche tomorrow, and literally—God willing—we will try to take in one site before we find a hotel there for the evening. From that location, we hope to visit four different sites before we turn back north and start recounting our steps to an eventual exit through Cancun. But, after today, we are more keenly aware of letting God lead in what we do while we are here.

## **Tuesday May 23, 2017**

It was a beautiful morning. The sun was shining as we made our way to the breakfast table. We enjoyed a very good breakfast. Terry actually ate some fruit, which he assured us doesn't usually happen. We packed our bags, paid our bill and headed down the road before 9 AM. The road south out of Flores was without incident and before long we found ourselves on the riverbank waiting for a ferry over the Pasion River to take us into our destination of Sayaxche.

Once across the river, we found the hotel we wanted in no time, checked in for the day, made contact with a guide and were on the road to the archaeological site of Ceibal before noon. The road was typical large gravel with many soft areas and deep puddles that seemed concerning at times



because you never know how deep and how soft the mud in the puddles might be. But, we made it to the site without incident.

It was a hot steamy day, and we managed to offload at the heat of the day. The terrain was rough and we tried to get Neil's wheelchair to navigate over the ground but we really needed a mini four-wheel drive. His wheelchair just couldn't take it as one of the front wheels began to fold in the ruts on the path. He had to give up and stay back with the groundskeepers while the rest of us went ahead with the guides.

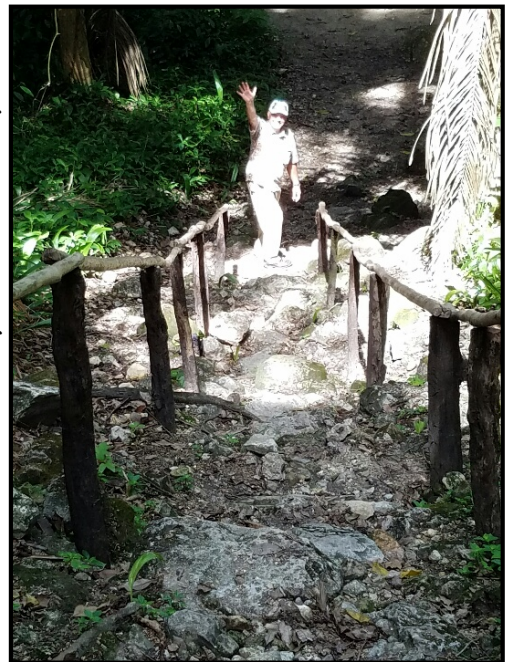
With a pail of smoking palm nuts providing a hazy barrier against the mosquitoes, we ventured into the grounds to view the architecture of the structures and the artwork of the stelae.

The structures were unique with corners very straight and square. The stones were squared and larger than what we usually find in the northern areas of the Petén and the areas of Chiapas in Mexico. This appears to be a utilitarian area that was used for defense and for product



development such as refining rough jade into jewelry trinkets. The low-profile temples, altars and structures when compared to the size of temples in other locations indicate that they spent their energy on other things.

There were many stelae found here, many of which had Quetzalcoatl priests with serpent scepters similar to those found in Naranjo and painted on the tomb of Temple XX at Palenque. Of particular interest was the large 100-meter long wall that was built along the riverfront side of the site which is said to have been a defensive wall. One stela was erected next to this wall of the plaza side which had the face of a monkey and the body of a man. He held a copal-bag in his right hand and a cane/stick in their left. We know that Red Monkey was one of the Maya monikers used for Captain Moroni (Captain Kan' Tok), and the fact that this stela is mounted next to the wall is perhaps a clue that this is





indeed Captain Moroni who built this wall as a defense against the time when Amalickiah (who commanded the Lamanite Army in the Highlands of Guatemala) would come against the Nephites.

We continued along a path to many other structures that were overgrown. We saw several howler monkeys along the way, many trails of cutter-ants, a beautiful red-breasted bird, and all the while we were given information about the local nut trees and other flora that is unique to the wetlands of the Petén. Eventually, we made our way back to where we started. Once there we learned that Trudy (who had returned earlier to sit with Neil) had seen a Quetzal bird flying through the area and she was so impressed by the long tail feathers that streamed behind it as it flew—almost giving a melodic or musical appearance as the tail feathers flowed up and down with the flap of the wings. We figured this was God's little gesture to be sure that she wasn't missing out as she stayed back with Neil.

It was close to 3:30 as we made our way back down the rocky, bumpy, slip-sliding road toward Sayaxche. But, this time we weren't so fortunate as we dropped into a particularly large puddle and lost traction. The van wasn't moving forward no matter how hard Mike pushed on the gas. Out of the van came several of us as we assessed the situation. Thank the Lord the van wasn't sinking any further. We pushed, Mike gunned forward, we pushed back, Mike gunned backward and got some space to build momentum, then we pushed again as Mike gunned forward and the van was moving out of the mudhole. Whew!!! God is good!

It was a little after 4 PM when we made it back to the hotel. Hot, sweaty, tired, but at least with some new information concerning the particulars of the Maya in the southern region of the Petén. It was good to finally be gathering archaeological information on this trip. We rested a little while and then met again about 5 PM to have some good food.

While trying to find the Carbonera restaurant that was recommended to us, we stopped to ask someone alongside the road. We were close...the man pointed that we needed to travel another two blocks down the road. And by the way, the owner of the Carbonera restaurant was his daughter. Another God-incidence. We found the restaurant, had some very savory meat and vegetables—all of which were cooked on a grill. Once done, we traveled back to the hotel and settled in for the night.

We had devotions this evening and spent some time contemplating the implications of the scriptures. While the saving grace of Jesus Christ provides the avenue for life after death, the

revelation of greater knowledge, as given to the Brother of Jared, requires continued effort on our part—effort to improve our character, long for a more intimate relationship with our Creator and to let Him provide the means for our spiritual and physical improvement. We never acquire Heaven because we deserve it, but we do acquire jewels for our crown by demonstrating our commitment to His service.



Tomorrow we will be eating breakfast early then traveling south with our guide in tow to visit the site of Cancuén. This appears to be the southernmost major Nephite/Mulekite city. We know that there are interesting archaeological finds here that we feel will help answer some questions we have concerning the death of King Anti-Nephi-Lehi and the attempted murder of King Lamoni which resulted in the death of 1,005 dedicated Ammonites who refused to use their weapons even in defense. While we are certain that none of these events mentioned occurred at Cancuén, it appears that perhaps something did happen that is related to this same series of events. More to come later.

Thank you again for your prayers of protection and guidance. Events occurred throughout the day today that we feel were definitely guided by unseen hands. The choice of our hotel in Sayaxche, the young man who was and will be our guide, the chance-meeting on the street when finding our restaurant, and many others, some of which I am certain we aren't even aware of yet. We know that we are being protected and guided. Thank you for your prayers.

### **Wednesday May 24, 2017**

The rooster woke most of us up at 3:30 AM. We went back to sleep until about 6, but that rooster continued to crow off and on during the early morning hours and he was very loud. By 7 AM we were meeting with our guide at the van to load and move down the road. We stopped at

the Maya Café here in town, got a nice breakfast with good coffee (yes!), then off we went by 8:30 AM.

The road south was fairly smooth, but there were a few places where the road base was washed out on one side of the road and all traffic had to share a single lane for a few hundred feet. Past topes and coconut groves, we made our way across the flat plains of the lower Petén until we got close



to the mountains that seem to jut up out of nowhere. This was the town of Raxruha. They were having a festival here with carnival rides and so many vendors cluttering the streets. It was slow going for several blocks, but eventually we cleared the edge of town and found ourselves on an incredibly rough rock road that went on for 22 kilometers. While this is only about 15 miles, it seemed an eternity when you are going 20 miles an hour and feeling every single bump in the road.



Traveling behind heavy rock trucks and pulling over for truck taxis with people in the back, we finally made our way to the pasture where we were to park our vehicle. This seemed a little odd. I was looking for a parking lot, but our guide took us through cow pastures with a 10-year old guide walking in front to be sure we weren't driving into a hole or over a large stump covered by tall grass. Finally, we stopped, loaded up with water and snacks, left Trudy and Neil at the van because it was obvious that the terrain was too rugged. We started trekking through the pasture about 10 or 12 minutes until we found ourselves looking down on the Pasion River from a high east side bank.



Our guide whistled for his companion across the river who then got into a boat and rowed to

our shore. We loaded and were then ferried to the east side of the river. Up the tall bank and to the gate of the site. Our ferryman was also the groundkeeper. He then took us through the site.

Here is what we learned. There were 31 members of a royal family that were dressed in their regalia, murdered by blows to the head, then laid in a cistern and covered with dirt. These 31 members were men, women and children. The archaeologists claim that the ones killed were probably killed by a family member who wanted to remove all claims to a throne, but who cared enough about these dead to lay them carefully in the cistern as if there was some form of concern for their care in death. This cistern was actually the cleansing bath located in the front of the temple.

This temple is designed with almost the exact same symbolic concepts at the Caana temple at Caracol. Five large steps to begin the journey upward with a combined total of about 24 steps to the first level which contained mural rooms where the new initiate is instructed in the primary aspects of the belief system. Then across a courtyard to the north is a Hieroglyphic Stairway with three large steps (perhaps one for each glory) and then a series of other steps that lead to another upper plaza that has two temples on the third level and then a stairway that ascends to one higher temple. Could this allude to the afterlife ascension from this world (courtyard of instruction) to the higher plane of the afterlife (upper level with a total of three pyramids) where two are on relatively the same level (telestial and terrestrial glories) and the third glory (celestial) is clearly delineated by another ascension to yet a higher plane—the highest on the site. This temple at Cancuén and the Caana temple at Caracol have these features in common.

From the palace, we went to the ball court which contained three ball court markers all depicting ball players and a ball. The reader might respond—duh, it is a ball court. However, the Maya imagery of a ball being set in motion by kings is a depiction of how the actions of kings result in their people moving from one location to another. Such is the result of the deaths of these royals at the cistern. This information we gathered today further develops that theory we are fleshing out concerning how the decapitated king at San Bartolo outside of Tikal was actually King Anti-Nephi-Lehi who was beheaded by his older brother from Dos Pilas who felt that he should be king because he was the eldest. This oldest brother then removed all other possible heirs who might make claim to the throne by killing his siblings and relatives such as we find at Cancuén. This heinous act probably resulted in the movement of this people from Cancuén to a more guarded location in the Belize area, but we will have to further research this aspect as well.

We were again soaked with the 100-degree heat saturating our clothing. We finalized our journey through the park and made our way back to the boat ramp and across the river. We said our goodbyes to Jose for his gracious reception and help, and then trekked back through the pasture to find our friends almost as melted as we were. Into the van, across the cow pasture, down the bumpy road, back through Raxruha, and then north on the highway to Sayaxche.

We found our hotel, made plans for tomorrow with our guide and then off to refresh in our rooms. Tonight we found the Carbonera Restaurant with issue and enjoyed another wonderful meal. The scripture for devotion this evening was on the loss of hope that Mormon had for his people because they no longer leaned upon God for guidance, but they leaned upon their own understanding. But, we felt that Mormon at least held the hope that the words he penned for us would make a difference to a people who read them, and that his life efforts would not be in vain. We too take comfort in that aspect.

Off to bed this evening with the prayer that we will sleep well, get good rest and move to even greater understandings as we visit the site of Dos Pilas tomorrow.

#### **Thursday May 25, 2017**

We had a rain storm last evening and we went to bed with the sound of rain on the tin roof over the courtyard of our hotel. That made the rest we had a very good one. This morning began like yesterday. By 7 AM we were meeting with our guide at the van then breakfast at the Maya Café and down the road by 8:30 AM. Because the day ahead included a lot of walking, Neil and Trudy stayed back at the hotel while the rest of us traveled on.

We proceeded south again out of Sayaxche as we contemplated the scripture of the morning. Alma 15:52 *“Oh, that I were an angel and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth and cry repentance unto every people; [53] Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption--that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might be no more sorrow upon all the face of the earth. [54] But behold, I am a man and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me.”*

We mentioned that this seemed to be a moment when Alma was under the influence of the Spirit and was feeling the love that God felt for all of humanity—oh, that he (Alma) could be a



part of this work on such a grand scale. But, in this moment he also sensed how small he was. Perhaps little did Alma know that God granted his wish by the inclusion of his words in this work that is the Book of Mormon. Edd DeTray then gave the prayer and while praying I started hearing music coming from somewhere. It was the phone in my pocket. It was the song “Born of God” from the Mormon production of “From Cumorah’s Hill.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqT3aTpA8Hw>

I was stunned. How did this start playing on the phone in my pocket at this particular moment? I don’t listen to this album at night, and while it was on my phone, how did the music program get loaded to this cut of the album? And at this particular moment? This was a God message concerning the words of Alma, God’s love for us, and His call for us to be born of Him.

After about 45 minutes on the highway, it was time to turn onto the gravel road and head west and south for about another 45 minutes as we traveled 15 kilometers through small villages and fields in various stages of development from forests to pastures. The road today wasn’t nearly as bumpy as yesterday so we made better time.

We received permission to park our vehicle in the yard of a local farmer, prepared ourselves for jungle travel and began our way down the trail toward Dos Pilas. The trail moved into an open field that had been deforested. There were many huge trees that were fallen and being cut into plank lumber to build the small homes in nearby villages. We met several local Ka Chi’ natives who were carrying jugs along the trail. Every now and then we traveled into a grove of trees until finally it was the jungled area for the last 15 minutes or so of our walk. Here we encountered howler monkey and spider monkeys, cutter ants, and exotic birds.

We arrived at the site. Here we found only the Principle Plaza excavated which exposed the hieroglyphic stairways, several large stelae and altars, a ball court with two stelae positioned on either side of mid-court, and a natural spring-fed well. This well sprung out of the ground about 30 years ago. Anciently, there were two wells here, thus the name Dos Pilas, but they have since gone dry. Now it became obvious why the natives were on the trail with jugs—this was their water source for drinking water—fresh out of the ground.

The site was not marked to tell us what each item was, and there was no guide other than the one we brought with us and the one on site to take us on the trails from location to location. There was no knowledge source as there was yesterday at Cancuén. But, we did find a couple of stelae that were most impressive.

One is of a Quetzalcoatl priest bringing with him a converted people that are now captive to the sacred bond they have made to no longer use arms, even in self-defense. The stela right next to it is of another Quetzalcoatl priest who holds a serpent scepter and is receiving the kneeling subject before him. Both Priests are carrying shields because they are preparing to defend someone. We interpret this to be Ammon bringing the converted Lamanites and Alma receiving them and giving permission for them to move to Jershon. Once we discovered these two stelae, then the ones in the center of the Principle Plaza made sense. One of those stela in the plaza is of a warrior who holds a sword and a copal bag (his sacredness) in his right hand, while his left hand holds a shield and a spear. We believe this is Captain Moroni who took on the task of providing an army of protection for the converted Lamanites.



This visit took about 3 hours and a lot of walking. In the heat of this 100-degree day, it took a lot out of us. We spent some time resting before we began our venture out of the jungle and back into the fields toward the van. This took another 45 minutes with many stops in the shade, our water supply was exhausted and all of us were feeling the effects of approaching dehydration.

We made it to the van about 4 PM. We couldn't get the engine started fast enough to get the air-conditioning flowing in order to curtail the advancement of heat exhaustion. After about 15 minutes with the AC running, we spent a little time with the friends who provided security for our van. We then headed back to Sayaxche.

It was after 5 PM when we hit town. We then went to our favorite Carbonera restaurant where we caught up Neil with the finds of the day. After this we headed back to our hotel, shared time for our devotions and then headed to bed.



In reflection of the day, I find it amazing how God places His mark on our efforts and provides confirmation in advance of what we might find. Tim chose the scripture for today long in advance of this trip, the trip to Dos Pilas was supposed to take place before today, but today the words of Alma were the subject of our devotion, the song playing on my phone was “Born of God” and today we discovered the stelae that depict how those Lamanites who were Born of God were given permission by Alma to enter into Nephite protection. God completely orchestrated this day and gave us affirmation of what we found. All Praise and Honor be to Him.



Tomorrow we head up river by boat to visit Altar de Sacrificios. I sense another find is on its way.

### **Friday May 26, 2017**

We had another rain storm last evening with lots of rain through the night, but when the morning arrived the rain had stopped and we enjoyed cloud cover to keep the heat of the sun from overtaking us. This morning began like yesterday and the day before. By 7 AM we were meeting with our guide at the van then breakfast at the Maya Café. This time we returned to the hotel to drop off Neil and Trudy, held our devotions and then five of us walked one block to the riverfront to meet with our water taxi who was waiting to take us to Altar de Sacrificios.



It was a two hour and forty-five-minute river ride to Altar de Sacrificios. There was lots of waterfowl, turtles, fisherman, families doing laundry, and a scarce crocodile as we got closer to the site. The overcast of the clouds saved us from exposure to the direct sun and that was a real blessing.

We departed the boat and climbed the make shift clay steps that had been carved out of the bank with a shovel. As we got to the top, our guide whistled and called for a caretaker, but got no answer. We began to check out the plaza—the only plaza that was at this site. Everything was overgrown and not well kept. Moss had taken over much of the items on the ground as the disuse of the site had allowed the tree canopy to redevelop.

Stumbling over the mossy, wet clay, we climbed the only large stone structure at the site. At the top was a large altar, but there were no placards informing us what we were observing.



We took many pictures and then made our way down to the plaza level again. We took a few minutes to investigate the stone architecture and determined that this stone structure (again, the only one on site) was actually a construction of the Bountiful Historical Society (Palenque Stela Cult) who has a particular signature as to how their corners are formed. They are squared stone with a slight upward slant. We have found these on certain buildings in Yaxchilan and Chinkultic.

Terry made his way down a large swath path into the jungle area attempting to find other stelae, which he did. But, he also came upon a young man named Andres. Andres is working with a archaeological group in Guatemala, assisting in establishing a technology to adapt LiDAR to drones as opposed to aircraft. They intend to return to Altar de Sacrificios at a later date with the LiDAR to create a digital image of the topography in order to relocate several of the stelae that Ian Graham had originally uncovered and then recovered without mapping where these stelae are located. We also later discovered that Andres has worked and continues to work with Sergio Gomez at Teotihuacan. Wow, what are the chances of meeting a common acquaintance in the jungle heat of Guatemala?

Andres quickly took us to see a dig that was going on at the site. It was a burial mound that was being excavated. We met the Guatemalan Dig Director Lorena Paiz. She shared a lot of information with us concerning the Classic and Late Classic remains they were excavating today. After we talked about archaeological specifics she then confirmed her suspicions by asking if we were tourists. We stated that no, we were more in the area of research as we were looking for a



particular river crossing along the Pasion or Usumacinta Rivers for which we had a specific description. She confided that she was working with someone who was also looking for a river crossing more along the line of the one at Yaxchilan. She stated that there was local legend about this particular crossing, but they hadn't found it yet. We exchanged contact information in case one or the other comes across such information.



We also were given further information concerning the site of Altar de Sacrificios. She stated that the site was much, much larger than the official land reserve. There were some very large mounds located about a kilometer south, and there were even some stela found across the Usumacinta on the Mexico side of the border. None of them were set up for visits. Lorena said it was good to see someone showing up at the site—that it had been probably a year since anyone had been here to visit. They were very glad to share their mosquitoes with us. We bid our acquaintances good-bye, thanked them greatly for their hosting and made our way back to the canopy-covered plaza in preparation for leaving.

Back in boat, our guide took us another three or four minutes down the river to the confluence of the Pasion with the Usumacinta. There we were able to view the Country of Mexico on the west shore of the rivers. The Usumacinta IS the border between Mexico and Guatemala. Guatemala on the East; Mexico on the West.

Having taken our photos and reset our bearing, we turned around and began heading up river for a final destination of Sayaxché. Along the way, we were taken up a channel that was spring fed.

It was a very large channel, with very clear, cool water. At places we could see the bottom 8 feet below, with lily pads growing and the flower blossoms opened under water. I never knew that the lily pad flower would blossom underwater. This was amazing.

Finally, we pulled in at Sayaxché at about 5 PM.





We made arrangements for one more water taxi ride tomorrow morning to visit the site of Aquateca. This was recommended by Lorena Paiz who said it was her favorite site. We like taking the advice of archaeologists as it usually pans out that we find information very pertinent to our search.

This evening we again visited our Carbonera restaurant. We



enjoyed fish, pork ribs and chicken; each of us having something a little different and all of it grilled with savory seasoning. We then retired to the hotel, had our devotions with Josue in attendance, and then retired for the evening.

Today we kept our eyes open for a location that would fit the description given in the Book of Mormon concerning the first battle involving Captain Moroni. Specific topographical clues are given and we were able to identify a couple of places that might fit that description. We will have to do some research on these areas to see if something comes up. However, I have a feeling that the scriptural description will be unmistakable when we see. Time will tell.

Tomorrow we head down river and over to another channel by boat to visit Aquateca, then we plan to return to the hotel about noon, check out and be on our way back north toward Flores.

### **Saturday May 27, 2017**

We were up early this morning and meeting Julio (our river boat guide) at 7 PM. Josue met us there as well to send us off. He could not come with us today because of other obligations he had for his college programs.

So, we were off down another tributary of the Pasion River that is called the Petexbatun River and leads to the Petexbatun Lagoon. The river was busy



at first with morning washing being done by local residents. Again, the riverway was full of cormorants, herons, king-fishers, and other colorful birds. However, because the river was so low, what was supposed to be an hour trip up river became a two-hour trip with our boat driver having to pull the motor up and paddle in several places.

Finally, we reached the site only to be met with a hundred-yard trek over marshy land, and then with at least 150 steps up the side of a steep hill. At least these were wooden steps, although many of them were starting to rot away so we had to be very careful where we stepped. At the top, we were met with a “*bienvenidos*” and were shown the way to the site. Oh yeah, it was another 60 steps up to the site. Oh my, talk about getting our stair-climber workout!

Here we found a set of buildings all oriented to 30-degrees off of cardinal directions. It appeared to be a series of teaching buildings similar to those we found at Bonampak, Xunantunich and Caracol. These were converted Highland Maya who were being taught the gospel of the religion of twelve tribes—it was the heritage that they never knew about. These mural rooms taught them of their heritage and brought them into covenant with their God. Up the hill we found communal buildings and then we came to a plaza which had a sunken plaza. From that sunken plaza was a set of five steps that rose up to a large building on the southeast. It was seven doorways centered and overlooking

the plaza and the three-door building located on the Northwest side of the plaza. But, when we got inside the seven-door building we soon discovered that it was a ten-door building with the last three doors not included in the centering on the plaza and one level down from the other seven doors. This is the designation telling us there were a total of ten Lamanite vassal



states and seven of them were converted, while three of them were not. Therefore, seven doors were centered over the plaza and on a higher-plane than the other three doors. Looking across the plaza, these seven doors faced a three-door building that was reached by ascending 12 steps (the religion of the twelve tribes). And, this three-door building was divided in a manner to teach the glory levels of the afterlife. A telestial (stars), terrestrial (moon) and celestial (sun) levels

(15<sup>th</sup> Chapter of I Corinthians).

We then ventured up yet more steps to cross over a chasm that was nearly 90 feet deep in some places and ran about 200 feet long. Once over the chasm, we were in another main plaza of very large structures. Several stelae here told of people being held captive in their land. These are the converted Lamanites who took the oath that they will never pick up their weapons again, even in defense of their lives—that is how repentant they were for the type of lives they lived prior to their conversion. But, that made them easy prey for those who were not happy with their conversion. It was then necessary for the people of the church to step in and protect these converts who were trapped (captive) by their sacred oaths and under the persecution of their ruling class. These stelae conveyed these very images. Aquateca is a sister city to Dos Pilas. Both shared the emblem glyph of Tikal. Both had defensive walls built around the inner structures because they were persecuted in their own land. Both had to relocate to other places in the Belize region in order to escape certain death.



Our time was running out. We had taken an hour longer than planned to reach the site which means it was another extra hour to return and we were already running behind time for a 2 PM check-out. So quickly down the many (many) stairs, across the mushy grass and into the boat. Back down the river with the wind of the boat ride cooling us in our sweaty clothes. We finally reached the hotel at about 2:30 PM. Our gracious hostess



at the hotel was very accommodating. We quickly loaded the van, took a photo with our hostess Mariella, loaded up and headed over the restaurant where we ate in the evenings.

Our friend Anna wanted to show us how to make the dessert dish she had fixed the night



before, so we watched her (Joanie filmed her) making the dish and she graciously sent us off with the product in hand.

Onto the ferry and across the Pasion River we went after which we spent the next hour and half driving back to Flores and our hotel where we stayed before.

Going to Sayaxché was an unknown venture for none had ever stayed in the area before. We met wonderful people and made very good friends. It was an experience to remember with relationships that will be remembered with tenderness.

We had McDonald's this evening. It was a very upscale franchise with touchscreen ordering and electronic payment—in either Spanish or English. Neil had a chance to speak with one of the attendants here and this young lady was very engaged in what he was sharing about the Christianity that was present in the Maya culture even prior to the advent of Christ. Neil and Trudy have encountered many such conversations with locals while we were out sweating and getting beat up by the elements, but so-be-it. We are all doing our part to prepare a world for a new understanding of how Jesus Christ is for all of humanity and has been thus engaged for all of human history.

We finished our evening with a good devotion recapping how this promise God has made for all of the children of Jacob will be fulfilled, and how much of what we are doing is contributing to that effort of bringing the history of the Book of Mormon to life. Tomorrow we will be visiting the site of Naranjo which has immediate ties with Dos Pilas and Aquateca.

Again, your prayers are helping to keep us shielded from harm and guided to His purposes for our endeavors. Thank you for your prayers.

### **Sunday May 28, 2017**

We planned on a very aggressive schedule today so we were up and packing the van at 7 AM this morning. We headed down the road and took advantage of being near a McDonalds—McMuffins and coffee were a welcome change in Guatemala. We drove east down the road to the turn off for Yaxha, Nakum, and Naranjo. Eleven kilometers north on a gravel road, we found the entrance where we registered and paid our entrance fee (the first time we paid to enter a site in Guatemala). We visited the museum site, took lots of photos, then talked with a park employee who said that the road to Naranjo was very bad. Now, on a scale of roads in Guatemala, even the three-and-a-half-hour trek to San Bartolo with off-roading vehicles was

determined by the driver to be “not a good road.” But, he didn’t say it was a “bad road.” If the local was saying it was a bad road, then we weren’t about to even try it.

We talked with him at greater length and discovered that it was accessible through another approach from the east instead of the park road from the west. The attendant knew a local guide who could take us. He called his friend Orlando and set up the place and time to meet and make our approach to Naranjo from another direction.



We met Orlando at the main east-west highway and he said the site was about an hour and fifteen minutes once we exited the highway. So, we spent about fifteen minutes getting to our turn off and headed north and west on this very, very rough road. Very few locals lived on this road. It was mainly access for cattle ranchers and loggers; big trucks with very low gears and high axles. But, we pushed forward and about an hour and forty-five minutes later we were pulling into the site. We signed in with the attendant and began our tour of the site.

There is presently some renovation going on at this site. Three of the pyramids were undergoing restoration. The tallest pyramid of the site was topped with a set of three small temples. The tallest in the middle and facing east. Again, this seemed to indicate a “three-glory” concept. We were hoping to find some form of Dos Pilas/Aguateca architectural connection, but all of the pyramids we saw here were



more of the Mulekite influence with rounded corners. We did not find squared corners such as we found in Dos Pilas and Aguateca. But, there were dozens of very large pyramids spread over many, many sites that were still covered. So, there may yet be something found. It is sad that the stelae left at this site were so eroded. And, years ago the site was left unattended so there was extensive looting that took place. It seems that finally it is getting the attention it deserves.

The threat of rain was pushing us to complete our visit, so we pushed on through the buildings as quickly as possible. One thing that did seem interesting is how this site seemed to



have the same flavor of buildings that we find in Lamanai and Xunantunich in Belize. Naranjo has a Temple of the Masks with large masks capping a centrally positioned tall pyramid; the same type of stucco masks found in Lamanai. And, there was one pyramid that seemed to be constructed with an allusion to an Earth Monster figure similar to one of the Lamanai temples as well. It is a conglomeration of Mulekite and Lamanite influence.

With the threat of rain coming, we decided to get moving back to the main highway before we got caught trying to navigate a slick clay-based road that was rain covered—not a good scenario. We got back to the van to



discover that Neil was at work again. An archaeologist had arrived at the park with a group of students who are preparing to spend a few weeks working during the summer months in helping the restoration. We found that this archaeologist had also worked at San Bartolo during the years of 2002 to 2008 when Neil and David Kelley were working on the epigraphy of the murals. Neil got his contact information and we also got directed to a couple of website for more current information on Naranjo.

With everyone back on board, we headed out of the park making it out in the one hour fifteen-minute time frame we were originally quoted. Orlando needed to be returned to his home, so we turned back west toward Flores to the place where we had first met him, said our goodbyes and then turned to travel back east on the same highway to cross the border about 6 PM this evening.

We arrived at our hotel at 8 PM. Mike arranged our rooms while we entered into the restaurant as we hadn't had a true meal since 7:30 this morning. Dinner was served up in good time by 9 PM we had devotions. Trudy led this evening's devotion with a humble thanks for all that we have been shown on this trip. For how God has been with us, guided and protected us, how He has been present in the formation of new friendships and with the furthering of this work. We all whole-heartedly agreed.

The plans for tomorrow are to sleep in after such an aggressive schedule. We will then drive over to the archaeological building to inquire about new finds in Belize, request updated reports in digital form and probably spend another night here in Belmopan. Time to finally go to bed.

### **Monday May 29, 2017**

It was a wonderful opportunity we had this morning to sleep in. Many slept until at least 8 AM since we weren't meeting at the van for a breakfast run until 9. We then went to the Cabo restaurant on the edge of Belmopan. While at breakfast we made plans to do our business at the archaeological institute here and then head north to cross the Belize/Mexico border today with the plan of visiting Tulum tomorrow. With that decision made, we returned to the hotel, checked out, loaded the van and were on our way to the Institute.

We pulled into the parking lot at the institute at 11:30 AM. We were introduced to Antonio and were then taken to their work office where we inquired about updates that have been done in the last four years, especially of any weapons caches that may have been found at Altun Ha or Lamanai. They were not aware of any, especially since there were no new excavations at these sites in the last several years. They did, however have new work going on at Ka'Kabish about 15 kilometers from Lamanai. We got the information on that and also about the Belize Archaeology Symposium coming up in late June. With all this information, we exited and returned to the van and headed east out of town.

The day was warm and the skies had some clouds. We passed through a little bit of rain on the north highway just before we entered into Orange Walk. We then continued through Corozal and to the Belize border where the check-out of Belize went without incident and the check into the Mexican border went very smoothly as soon as we got to the right building—the one for the vehicles as opposed to the foot traffic.

We were now in Mexico and back on Daylight Savings Time so we lost an hour when we crossed the border. Up the highway toward Bacalar. We went through another bit of nice rain at this point, but it only lasted about five minutes. When we arrived at Bacalar, we discovered that the hotel we hoped to stay in was full. So, we checked a few others, but decided to drive on to Tulum and then we would be right by the site in the morning. Two hours later we were driving through the metropolis of Tulum and checked several hotels—all of which were booked. It was now 9 PM. We decided to drive on to Playa del Carmen. We called ahead to a Wyndham Garden

Inn and let them know we were coming. But, Google Maps took us to an apartment complex several miles away from the hotel. This wasn't going to work. I called the hotel to let them know we were coming. They then said to plug in Holiday Inn Express for the Google Map location because that is what they used to be. That didn't work either—it wanted to send us to the same apartment complex. Ugh!!

We were hungry and found a McDonalds in Playa and pulled into the parking lot just ten minutes before they closed. Then while driving down the road to get back on the highway members in our van spied the Wyndham sign and finally we arrived at about 10:25 PM. Whew! WE unloaded into our rooms, had devotions and then made plans for tomorrow at Tulum. We plan to have our Tulum trip completed by 1 PM and then head to Cancun to check into a hotel, turn in the rental van and prepare everything for our departure on Wednesday.

The day was spent reading and discussing various aspects of the sites we visited and it is becoming evident that while we are not bringing home rich information from every site, the experience we received at every site will begin to clarify theories as the knowledge we gained continues to stew.

Neil wanted to be sure that we included this communication—there are about 15 critical pieces of information we have obtained on this trip, any one of which would have made the entire trip worthwhile. He will be expounding on these in the months ahead.

It is off to bed and ready to start an early day in the morning.

## **Tuesday May 30, 2017**

We met for breakfast this morning at 7:15 AM. We then placed the bags for two rooms into the last room that Mike stayed in since he was staying back to catch up on work he has been missing. The rest of us piled into the van at 8:15 and headed south to Tulum. We arrived at the site at 9 AM and parked. Already the day was getting warm and we couldn't wait to make our way to the sea shore for a cooler breeze.

Once at the site we began touring the various buildings. The grounds of the site were covered with iguanas that seems to pose for cameras at every opportunity. As we drew closer to the cliffs over the sea, the vegetation was covered with butterflies. It was a beautiful site.



The notable aspects of the buildings here is that it is late Classic construction with rooftop facades similar to those at Uxmal and Chichen Itza. And, most of the walls of the structures had an offset where the upper portion of the wall extends about three inches over the lower portion of the wall. This is a Mulekite construction feature. In addition, nearly all of the structures on the upper slope leading toward the sea have openings on the east with two round pillars.



I sense that there is an allusion to the King Solomon Temple two-pillar porch, and that these pillars being on the east overlooking the sea is a clue that the two-pillar porches are looking to the land of their heritage accessed through the Mediterranean ports of Sidon and Joppa.

The lighthouse is the major structure on the site and it sits on the high point of the cliff against the sea. It is said that there were lights on a 24/7 basis coming from the four windows that overlooked the sea. It appears that these four window lights were used to guide ships past the reef by taking them through the deepest water channel. Of great interest is that the front of the building has the image of a descending god. The guides referred the building as being dedicated to



Quetzalcoatl. So, the building dedicated to Quetzalcoatl is the lighthouse that guides ships past the rugged seas and safely into port. I can't describe Jesus Christ any better than that.

The descending god theme is found all the way throughout the site which is centered around a building called the Temple of the Frescos. This is a two-level building whose first level has stucco friezes of three descending gods (Three Nephites?) above the doorways and then the second level has one descending god above the doorways (Jesus Christ?).



What is of interest is if you go to Google Earth and draw a line from the single temple on the north of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl to the center of the large circle at Chaco Canyon, the line goes through the Temple of the Descending God at Coba and it goes over the platform of three



stela of the important figures at Ek Balam. This is not accident. They are telling is that there is some connection to these structures.

The morning was getting very warm and there were thousands of visitors at the site today. It was about 11:30 AM when we started for the exit to the shops and on site. At 12:15 we exited the parking lot at Tulum and headed back north to Playa del Carmen. We got to the hotel about 1 PM, picked up Mike and our luggage, checked out of the hotel, grabbed some dinner at Burger King, refueled and headed north to Cancun.

In Cancun at 3:15, we checked into the Comfort Inn by the airport. Once in our rooms, Mike and I took the van back to the car rental, placed our complaint and will be hearing about our refund in the days ahead. We got a shuttle back to the hotel, settled in for a rest this afternoon.

We met for dinner about 6:30, enjoyed some time together then met for devotions right after. This evening's devotion was a consideration of the people who are "worker's in the vineyard." Certainly, we have to include the countless archaeologists and epigraphers who are devoted to providing a voice to the people of the ancient cultures they spend their lives studying. As a matter of fact, the Restoration movement and Central American archaeology began within the same decade; The Restoration Church in 1830 and the Yucatan exploration by Stevens and Catherwood later that same decade. Since that date these two movements have been advancing their purposes and are now poised to experience a convergence. Get ready world, something strange and marvelous is about to take place.



We closed our evening early as all of us did our final re-packing in preparation for tomorrow's air travel. We plan to be in the air by 11:10 AM, flying to Dallas and then on to Kansas City. We hope to be there by about 6:30 PM.

Thank you for your continued prayers. Your daily concern for us has helped to carry us through without issue thus far. We are truly thankful for each prayer you have offered.

**Wednesday May 31, 2017**



We were up to meet for breakfast at 7:00 AM this morning. We held devotions at 8 AM, closed out our trip with a prayer of thanks for God's watch care and guidance. Our shuttle picked us up at 8:30 as we enjoyed the cool breeze on this cloudy morning in Cancun. We were at the airport in no time. By 9:25 we had all the bags checked, the passports stamped and passed thru security. We had a little time to purchase some gifts and wait for our gate to be announced.



We loaded onto the plane and we were in the air on time at 11:10 AM. The flight into Dallas was smooth and we landed about 15 minutes ahead of time. Then came the passing through immigration and customs on the American side. A couple of us had to stop and be interviewed (they said it was random), but we were all at our gate well in advance for the Kansas City flight. It gave some time for us to grab a bite to eat and then talk about the development of theories. There are many things that are beginning to become clearer about the divisions between the dissident Nephites, the Kings-men, the Lamanites and the Nephites. All of these groups are becoming identifiable through archaeological characteristics such as architecture, name titles, geography and so on. There will be more coming out on this in the months to come. The Book of Mormon gives us the Nephite perspective of the Mayan culture. We are now filling in the Mesoamerican record from the three other perspectives. The commercial/industrial riches of the region played a large factor in the political/social powers and we are now starting to see who were the power brokers in the creating regional intrigue that led to the death of so many Lamanite royalty.

It was sunny and hot in Dallas, so the 30-minute delay waiting for mechanical issues was a little uncomfortable, but in time we were in the air and heading to KC.

We landed about 7 PM, gathered our things, gave hugs and goodbyes with another very successful trip under our belt. Thank you again for all of the support you have provided. We were protected and arrived home safely. God bless until we meet again next year