

BRASS/El Pilar Conservation in the Maya Forest

Abandoned for centuries, the ancient Maya center of El Pilar has experienced a rebirth since the BRASS team arrived only three short years ago.

1995 has been a momentous year. Formal excavation of key structures began in February and the survey, determining the boundaries of the EL PILAR ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESERVE FOR MAYA FLORA AND FAUNA, was accepted by the Belize Ministry of Natural Resources in May. This established El Pilar as the first conservation effort of its kind in Belize to combine archaeological research with the conservation of important natural and cultural resources.



The Location of the El Pilar Archaeological Reserve

With interest in El Pilar crossing over disciplines and political borders, the BRASS/El Pilar Program has blossomed into a dynamic undertaking dedicated to resource management, environmental stewardship, cultural history, and education in the Maya forest. BRASS/El Pilar has joined forces with the Government of Belize, the Belize tourism industry, and the local, regional, and international community to establish El Pilar as a Mundo Maya destination and research center for sustainability.

The international conservation community has its eye on the El Pilar Program for the

progress being made in engaging the local community in resource management in the tropics. A major regional center, El Pilar is playing a pivotal role in understanding the economic landscape of the ancient Maya civilization.

The field team continues to focus research at El Pilar to discover how the center's ancient inhabitants lived on the landscape and how they organized the distribution of resources locally and regionally. With her long tenure in Central America, Program Director ANABEL FORD is well positioned to decipher the ancient secrets of El Pilar.

Translating ideas into action is the main goal of the BRASS/El Pilar Program. We are not simply trying to save the rainforest or expose yet another Maya temple. Focusing upon the enduring relationship between humans and the environment, the El Pilar Program contributes to develop long-term solutions for a sustainable use of the land today.

BRASS/El Pilar 1995

The field season commenced routinely with the field team reconnoitering on schedule at the Santa Familia Monastery in Cayo at the beginning of February. A staff orientation at Rum Point Resort, compliments of GEORGE & COROL BEVIER, helped the team to consolidate project goals. The dedication of *Teo's Way to Amigos de El Pilar* on March 4 at the Maya mound in Bullet Tree Falls was the indisputable highlight of the early weeks.

Lovingly transcribed in Creole from conversations with El Pilar's master storyteller Teo Williams and brimming with anecdotes, personal stories and bush folklore, *Teo's Way* is the first BRASS/El Pilar publication. Proceeds from the book, which was published by the Belize Ministry of Tourism and the Environment, will go to support the continuing efforts of *Amigos*.

Increasing stewardship responsibilities at El Pilar for local villagers is a goal of the locally-based *Amigos*. Making El Pilar an unforgettable experience in the rich natural and cultural heritage of Belize will increase tourism and the economic opportunities it generates. Village

Council Chairman VICTOR POTT spoke at the ceremony and endorsed plans for a Natural History and Visitors' Center in Bullet Tree at the gateway mound to El Pilar.

Fiesta 95

A tradition has been born with the blockbuster follow-up to last year's inaugural Fiesta El Pilar. This year, Belize's All Star Steel Band and the Pacific Symphony Quartet from Costa Mesa, California, added a national and international touch to local entertainment—the ever-colorful and charismatic Bullet Tree Falls Traditional Dancers. Their performance of the Maya Hog's Head and Mestizada dances preserves the region's Maya heritage and brings the spirit of festival to El Pilar's ancient plazas every year.



Trail Head with Fred Prost's Signs at El Pilar

FRED PROST of Parrots Nest in Bullet Tree Falls updated and added to the El Pilar trail signs which made a big difference for fiesta visitors. Now all trail heads have a major entrance and all plazas are named with the important Belizean forest protector that they represent. The effect is elegant and we look forward to the new developments for the upcoming season.

Guests this year came from all over Belize. The word is spreading about El Pilar and the unbeatable local hospitality, good food, and stellar entertainment of the Fiesta made possible by the generous contributions of no fewer than 31 Belize businesses.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and the

Cayo Land Offices approval of the boundary survey for the EL PILAR ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESERVE FOR MAYA FLORA AND FAUNA was celebrated by all. Belize Tourism Industry Association President GODSMAN ELLIS thanked Anabel Ford and the BRASS/El Pilar team for working cooperatively with the Government of Belize and the local community to bring the Reserve into being. Ellis called the potential Bi-National Peace Park as well as the opportunity to focus upon a shared cultural heritage with neighboring Guatemala, "El Pilar's great mission."

Tour Guide Training

What started as an informal gathering of interested local tour guides in 1994 turned into formal training in 1995. The newly formed Belize Tour Guides Association (BTGA) asked the El Pilar Program to help them understand the Maya of El Pilar to be better guides in support of the program. Several sessions were held involving an overview of Maya culture history, a lecture on the research to the general meeting, and an extensive annotated on-site tour of El Pilar. The outcome was an enthusiastic response from the BTGA members lending vital support for the Fiesta El Pilar and a glamorous new tour booklet for El Pilar (to be published in 1996). We hope to do even more in 1996 with the BTGA's cooperation!



Tour Guides Discuss Stairs on EP 10, Plaza Copal

PROGRESS in the FIELD

The Preliminaries – The field season began auspiciously with a flight from Placencia over the highest point in Belize (yes Anabel, I think the pilot knows there's a mountain ahead..) and circled the Caana at Caracol to BRASS Base with Anabel, CLARK WERNECKE, computer guru GIL ARBANEL, and BRASS chronicler BYRON (Byronious Monk) REMPEL.

We assembled an extraordinary crew for 1995. TIHA VON GYHZY came down to fill a new position, project administrator, to attempt to keep our lives in some (especially financial) order and his wife, BETTINA, joined the ranks of our photographers. Another new addition, BETH BITTER, joined as lab manager and all-around miracle worker (We all appreciated the candy bars in the lunches, Beth!). MIGUEL ORREGO, celebrated Guatemalan archaeologist and Coke drinker, joined as joint Project Director to add his expertise in subterranean excavation.

The Main Event – We got off to a very early start, February 20th, for what would prove to be a fantastically productive season. From the beginning life was made easier by the addition of some advanced archaeology students - RYAN "what rings" GRAY, VANESSA "Kiwi" BUNTON, MELISSA "Mel" GRZYBOWSKI and KRISTA "Brecha Queen" LEWIS.

Unpacking was accomplished in record time and we began our annual maintenance of the site. Caretakers Teo Williams and Gustavo Manzanero had kept much of the ever-encroaching tropical forest at bay but still a lot of clearing and repair was necessary.

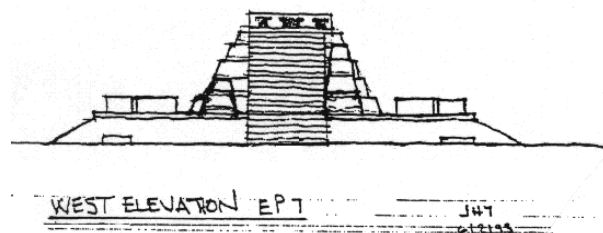
The field work concentrated on several important areas. We wanted to answer some of our questions regarding the links between structures and plazas we had begun excavating in 1993 and '94. We decided to begin when the first group of able volunteers arrived. First to arrive was the intrepid BOB HIBSCHMAN and the father and son team of VERN and VAUGHN HEIPLER followed shortly by JANICE GOWER and Clark's brother-in-law, JOE MARLIN. With their help we managed to leave the passage between plazas Faisan and Gumbolimbo open for future visitors. These volunteers had a nasty habit of turning all the lovely monumental stairways on our plans into ramps (apparently El Pilar was

completely wheelchair accessible!)

A moment must be taken to immortalize an event this season that happily turned out okay. We were visited by project friends, DAVE SOWLE and MARCIA BURTT. Marcia shared her wonderful artistic talents with us while Dave came equipped with his own airplane for aerial reconnaissance of El Pilar. Our heroic crew (Anabel, Joe, and Bob) went flying with Dave one morning (by way of Ambergris Cay) but, when landing for fuel, launched the El Pilar underwater survey by exploring the canal at the end of the municipal airport runway. No one was hurt and they eventually came home with lots of stories. Miguel summed it up, "Anabel in plane, no?" Clark said "No."

Speaking of Miguel – he, Mel, and the Belize Tunnel Rats (or Gibnuts) began the year tunneling structure EP7, or Xikna. This resulted in a 28 meter long view back 3000 years of prehistory down through at least 7 major floors and buildings to bedrock. The light at the end of the tunnel was made possible by the electrical wizardry of DAVID BRENNAN (follow the generator checklist!) and the unflagging enthusiasm of the great (but short) tunnel crew.

Miguel brought us several surprises this year in the form of graduate students from the University of San Carlos in Guatemala. Many of us had the privilege of working with CHRISTA LAVARREDA, one of Miguel's students on the "Well of Despair," the great shaft dug 6 meters down through the south platform of EP7. Keeping her company were a large cast of characters working on the unit that wouldn't die - EP7SPLAT. KERRY "Gigante" TAMPAS and KEVIN THOMPSON tried their best to reach the great jade monkey idol but came up with "the shaft" (and a Maya domino).



Xikna (our EP 7)
The Subject of Tunnels and Pits

as drawn by John Yust

We seemed to have a lot of large scale units this year and **LAYLA LYNE-WINKLER**, **WILL BREITBACH**, and returnee **DINA RACHAL** got caught up in another one on structure EP3. The structure of this important building is now a lot clearer because of the work done on the EP3-EP4 contact and the axial stairway. Even Clark got to dig for a change!

Major excavation also took place on the other large structure in central Plaza Copal - EP10. Another returnee, **NICK "Yourg" RAB**, brought his growing expertise and penchant for bizarre tropical diseases back to the project and, after a short apprenticeship with "the Master" Miguel, headed up another axial trenching project. Nick's excavations turned up some beautiful (but large) stairs and a host of questions about what was going on in Plaza Copal. Dina also pitched in with a HUGE trench from top to bottom of EP10. What we had thought would be a simple look at the stairway preservation turned into a puzzle as the stairway narrowed and widened alternately.

Another puzzle was uncovered by Ryan "what rings?" Gray at the corner of structure EP9. It was supposed to be a simple shaft to bedrock but uncovered a perfectly preserved Preclassic round platform jutting from beneath the pyramid. **IAN DAVIDSON** took turns with Ryan on the voluminous paperwork generated there and uncovered what looked like a Maya cafeteria plate dispenser - upside down, stacked plates!

These excavations allowed us to begin construction of an architectural sequence for Plaza Copal. To the structures around the plaza we added a series of soundings down to bedrock. At the end of the season all you could usually see of **SEAN LEDDY** was the top of his head as he took CCTR1 down and down through many mysterious strata.

It was a good year for excavation - 27 units and a great deal of knowledge (as well as mysteries) about the south complex - Nohol Pilar - was added to our growing data!

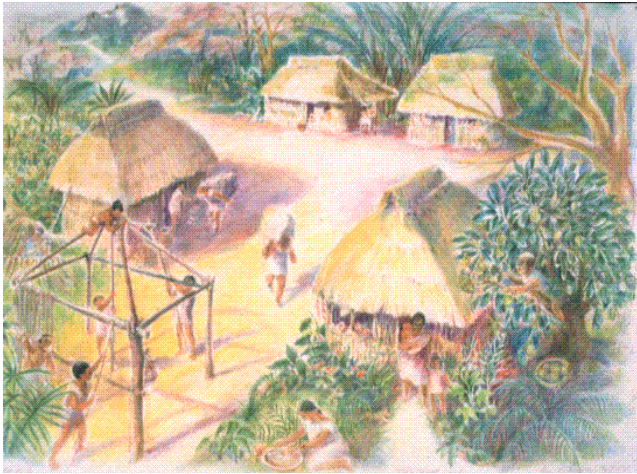
This was a year to shine in the Media! Following the *Science* (December 94) article on El Pilar last year, a string of newspaper items on the project have appeared everywhere from obscure, small town newspapers throughout California to our first-ever acknowledgment in *Archaeology* (May/June '95). An excellent article on ecotourism and archaeology at El Pilar appeared in the prestigious *Santa Barbara Magazine* (Spring 95) and earned its writer, **FRANCIA GAUNT**, an invite to El Pilar where she served as a project photographer and documentarian.

Anabel's round-up of trained writers, artists, and photographers for the '95 field season also brought positive results. Byron took charge of our media image in Belize, placing local articles on the Reserve and creating engaging text for the 4 by 8 foot poster presentation, composed and donated by **HEARST ADVERTISING** and displayed at the Society of American Archaeologists (SAA) national meetings in Minneapolis in mid-April.

Canadian photographer, **MARIE DERUAZ**, snapped some excellent portraits of Anabel as well as plenty of project photographs. Field Director Clark may have captured the only good shot of a pollen-covered, native porcupine who streaked through the excavation site one day last May pursued by angry bees.

New York-based writer/illustrator **ANN GRIFALCONI** visited El Pilar in April to videotape and interview Anabel for an educational volume and CD-ROM on the ancient Maya. She and landscape painter **MARCIA BURTT** both lent their artistic expertise to the Program while in Belize. Ann's beautiful color illustration depicting an ancient Maya household debuted at Stanford University last September where Anabel lectured at a forum on the Global Human Environment. Marcia's acrylic-on-paper renderings captured the subtle range of color of the rainforest of El Pilar.

Media Coverage and Public Relations



The Maya Forest Garden by Ann Grifalconi

The Action Archaeology poster presentation at the SAA meetings in Minneapolis would not have been the success it was without DAVID BRENNAN. He helped keep things running smoothly, and treated Anabel, Clark, and friends to a celebratory, post-presentation Italian feast. Program biographer CAROL MILLER was there and took great pictures of the display, and local architect JOHN YUST threw a party for Anabel and Clark.

International Component

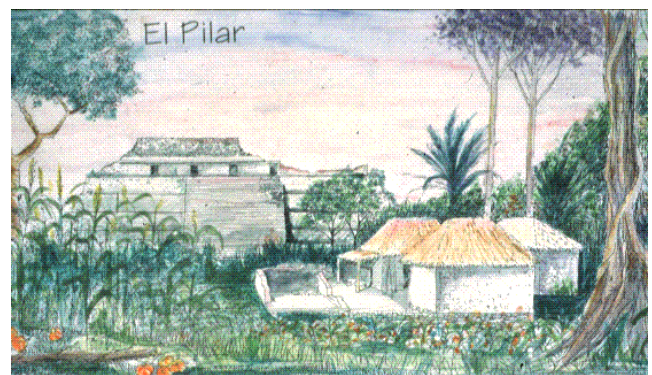
International volunteer groups made greatly-appreciated contributions to the BRASS/El Pilar Program including youth volunteers from Raleigh International and Global Roots. Raleigh International helped build two nature trails at El Pilar that add a new dimension to the park experience. Global Roots worked with *Amigos* to construct a small cement-floor *tienda* at the Bullet Tree Falls Maya mound. The *tienda* will be managed by members of *Amigos* as a craft store and tourist information center.

Thanks to U.S. Agency for International Development funds awarded to the Belize Tourism Industry Association, the Caretakers' House was completed last July at the entrance to the Reserve, adjacent to the area designated for the future Visitor Center. Reports have it that EP caretakers, TEO WILLIAMS, GUS MANZANERO, and CARMEN CRUZ are ensconced in their new digs.

Special thanks go to local resort owners

KEN & JUDY DUPLOOY for contributing time and organizational skill for these end-of-the-season building projects. Ken helped choose the local building sub-contractor, MENNO LOWEN, to build the Caretakers' House designed by architect PAUL BAILLY, and Judy served as the Program liaison for Global Roots which completed the *Amigos* Tienda in July.

The MacArthur Foundation has come on board, providing start-up funds for the international conservation effort at El Pilar and in support of the proposed international Peace Park. The Ford Foundation promises seed funds for the example Maya household forest-garden. Other proposals are also in the works.



Envisioning El Pilar by Paul Bailly

The Mayistas in Chetumal

The '95 season went on and on, rounding it up, closing it down, finishing seemed impossible, but we had the target mid-July date of the 3r Congreso de Mayistas. We presented a fine symposium on Arqueologia de Accion with an international and interdisciplinary group of presentations about tourism (BTIA President Godsman Ellis), nature (Mesoamerican Program director for Wildlife Conservation Society CHUCK CARR), people (ADOLFO AGUIRRE), regional relations (Mexican Ambassador to Belize VICTOR SOLANO), and a public overview (Carol Miller). These illustrious folks joined the BRASS/El Pilar field staff—Clark, Mel, and Anabel—for a well rounded presentation that got incredible press coverage in the local Mexican paper as well as by the famous culture writer Maria Elena Matadamas. She gave El Pilar and Anabel high billing in El Universal, one of Mexico's oldest papers.

Stewardship Starts With People

Success of the El Pilar Program hinges upon local support. With this in mind, the community based organization *Amigos*, was founded in 1994. Its objectives were to encourage local involvement in the stewardship of El Pilar, to create new forums for local artistic and cultural traditions, and to foster enterprises that would increase the community's stakehold in the Reserve. Organization and education are two critical components in achieving these goals.

Amigos' President **MARCOS GARCIA** and Vice President **ABEL MANZANERO** devoted their efforts to help redefine the organization's role within the larger community of Cayo and in respect to El Pilar. Returning from a mobile workshop on ecotourism sponsored by The Nature Conservancy in June, Marcos stated, "the trees are worth more to us left standing!" Marcos' carvings of rainforest fauna, a craft passed on to him by his father **FERMIN GARCIA**, also a member of *Amigos*, were featured at the Bullet Tree Falls Agricultural Fair in May. The *Amigos* booth, crowded with an assortment of handmade crafts, including corn husk dolls and laminated native wood picture frames, was an undisputed show-stopper. **AMBER BEAMAN**, of UCSC's Community Development program, was a big help for *Amigos*.



Amigos and the El Pilar Program Join Forces at the Bullet Tree Falls Fair

Program-sponsored workshops were held

this year, including our tour guide training. Program collaborator **ROSITA ARVIGO** of Ix Chel Tropical Research Center gave several native plant workshops to interested Bullet Tree Falls villagers, stressing plant identification, use, and folk history. In this open forum, people from the surrounding villages also contributed their local knowledge about plants.

Early in the field season, **JON CLARK** of the Santa Barbara-based Community Environmental Council visited El Pilar, as did representatives of the international conservation group Earthkind. These visits not only help spread the El Pilar story, but bring new ideas for meeting the Program goals. Collaborating with local, national, and international agencies in resource conservation planning for the Maya forest is a chief goal of the **BRASS/El Pilar Program**. You can play a part in this too.

EL PILAR Sustainability

In cooperation with the Belize Department of Agriculture, the EP Program has "seeded" an experimental agricultural project. We are inviting participants from the University College of Belize and the Universidad de Quintana Roo Mexico, to collaborate with us in this endeavor working to develop more sustainable farming practices. **DALITSO SULAMAYO**, an intern recommended by Program supporter **BRUCE STRATTON**, helped to forge our relationship with the Department of Agriculture and we look forward to moving the project forward in '96. He also planted legume cover crops with seed provided by Central Farm.

Using the knowledge of the past for the benefit of present-day peoples is what we call **ACTION ARCHAEOLOGY**. **BILL ROLEY** of the Permaculture Institute of Southern California plans to help us in formalizing polycultural farming methods as an alternative to the current practice of monoculture and accelerated cycles of slash-and-burn. Our small successes are destined to make steps toward sustainability.

The 1996 Season and Beyond

We are now on the brink of our departure

for Belize; for the season starts March 4. We have all kinds of ideas to bring to fruition this year. Survey work begins around the major monuments of El Pilar to fill out our map of the city and give us a feeling for the texture of the Maya landscape. This will mean work around Pilar Poniente as well.

Toward the goals of understanding the urban landscape, we will begin excavations at the example Maya house on the Lakin Trail and start our development of the adjacent forest-garden with the help of agriculturalists and economic botanists. We also plan to continue our work at EP7 and conduct rescue work at the "cute little temple" on Plaza Lec.

We will, of course, continue our work with the community through *Amigos*, Belize tourism, and Guatemala. Also, Mexico's Institute for Anthropology and History is interested in collaborating with the archaeology at El Pilar. So we have a lot of other avenues we want to develop, and with your help, we can.



View of Pilar Poniente on the Horizon
and El Pilar in the Foreground

Be a True Friend



To become a Friend of BRASS/El Pilar (and to continue to receive this stimulating newsletter), send us a tax-deductible contribution of \$40 to the Regents of the University of California and fill out the enclosed form! We will send you a media packet on the El Pilar Program over time.

New BRASS/El Pilar items may be of interest to you. There is, of course, the guide book *Maya Sites of Belize* by Anabel Ford (12.50 + 1.50 post) — a must for archaeological travel in Belize. *Teo's Way*, for \$10 including postage

from Belize, is a great way to learn Creole. We also have a very nice (and short) video called *Fiesta El Pilar '95* which gives you a great view of the fun you can have at El Pilar available for \$15. T-Shirts are also available.

You can join the '96 team for an adventurous 2-weeks as an aficionado with a contribution of \$2,000 and see **YOUR** name in the next newsletter. Write for details.