
Amigos de Honduras

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SECRETARY/TREASURER'S REPORT

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Slow but sure, Amigos, the business of incorrect due dates gets corrected. I'm still working with NPCA on a couple of people. As always, check your due date on the address label. Our bank account stays very healthy despite using it for some grants above and beyond the Grant Fund itself. We currently have \$5735.17 in the bank.

And speaking of grants, the Committee's current members are **Loren Hintz, Judith Whitney-Terry and myself**. We could certainly use a couple more of you. It's an easy task! Just email me if you wish to help. Please contact the committee if you can think of a potential project to fund.

AMIGOS DE HONDURAS DONATION 2015

BRENDA CRUMPACKER

RON REAFS

ARIETTA WEIDMANN

KATE RAFFERTY

MIL GRACIAS AND THANKS TOO!

Just a reminder: your Amigos Secretary is working with Fred Corvi to complete the list of Honduran RPCVs. Fred tells me he is coming down the wire and hopes to finish the list by the end of summer. He sends the list to each person who is "found" and they are asked to see if they have information on any of the people still missing.

There are many of you who enjoy receiving the Newsletter in the mail. That will certainly continue, but please remember if you wish your Newsletter electronically, let me know and I'll get your email to Brant Miller.

Don't forget the next Reunion in February 2016 in New Orleans. Terry Salus is the brave soul riding honcho on that Gathering. She will be contributing articles on the Reunion for the next Newsletters and sending out emails.

For each mailing I still get back two or three Newsletters for the members who have forgotten to notify me of an address change and the postal forwarding has run out. If possible, keep me updated on your correct address.

Not only are the Washington State Incorporation dues (\$10.00) for **Amigos de Honduras** paid for another year but we are also once again paid members of **NPCA (NATIONAL PEACE CORPS**

ASSOCIATION). At almost 200 members, **Amigos de Honduras** is considered a medium sized affiliate group and our yearly dues are \$100.00.

What does that get us? Loren and I are in constant touch with Washington DC Headquarters and are kept updated on all NPCA doings. It is also our tie to the other "Friends of ____" groups.

Many of our Amigos members have been with us since the start of **Amigos de Honduras** 25 years ago. Thank you for hanging in there with us through our growing pains and helping us to become the incorporated association we are! A special note of thanks to **Marilyn Watts and Phyllis Bloch Shelton** who did all the initial hard work and got us off to such a good start! You two ladies are THE BEST!

EDITOR'S CORNER

Loren Hintz (Olancho 1980-82)
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Since my trip to Honduras in January I've had the chance to talk to recent RPCVs who worked in Santa Barbara National Park. I hope you will enjoy reading what they shared. Also in March many people were excited by an on line National Geographic article by Douglas Preston titled "Lost City Discovered in the Honduran Rain Forest".

Check it out at <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/03/150302-honduras-lost-city-monkey-god-maya-ancient-archaeology/> It struck a nerve with some RPCVs from Honduras. Please take a moment to read their articles.

Don't forget to donate to the Amigos Grant Fund. It is tax deductible and a great way to keep contributing to Honduras

UPDATE: PALISAL

Dale Schmitz Yamaranguila, Intibuca 1967-69



In April Frances and I returned from two months in Honduras. This is information and pictures about the \$1,000 donated by Amigos de Honduras to Tools for Opportunity to train and equip carpenters in Honduras. The photo is from the 7 days I spent with 2 woodworkers from our group who came for a week. We trained and provided tools to 12 young, new, young carpenters at the Colosuca Training Center in Gracias, Lempira; and to 5 beginning carpenters at PALISAL, a lumber cooperative in Yamaranguila, Intibucá. It was our second year at Colosuca and our first at PALISAL.

These men will earn their tools after one year during which they will have mentored another person in carpentry, planted 5 trees and donated 40 hours in a project for

their town, a school, a park, or other non-profit group/entity.

We will visit and interview everyone next year to check their compliance, and to gather information about their increased earnings because of the training and donated tools. The carpenters at the cooperative lumber mill PALISAL in Yamaranguila, Intibuca built the new workshop before we arrived to use to build products and to store tools.

While there, I arranged and took a trip with them to the Honduran National Forestry Institute and University in Siguatepeque to view several models of solar kilns.

They plan to build a solar kiln, which will dry the wood with about a week down to a moisture level of about 15%. This will allow them to sell dry wood at a higher price and for carpenters to make better products that will not warp.



Thanks to Amigos de Honduras and those who contributed for the donation to Tools for Opportunity. More information and pictures are available on Facebook or Tools for Opportunity's website. (FYI: I'm the one in the blue T-shirt in the photo with the sign for Amigos de Honduras.)

BUITI UGANU: "GOOD NEWS"

**Joan M. Larimore for
Fernando and Alison Sabio**

I receive the Newsletter published by our honorary members, Fernando and Alison Sabio, who have been faithfully working with the Garifuna community in Honduras to preserve their language and culture.

They report that thanks to donations, they now have a truck capable of traversing the roads to the outlying areas of the community. All you hardy Honduran RPCVs will well remember the Honduran roads! Fernando and Alison will be building a home in one of the more remote areas and moving there soon.

Just before COSing in 1988, Guy Branch my PC Program Manager, sent me to the coast to work with the Garifuna on building clay stoves. It was one of the highlights of my PC service. From San Pedro Sula we made several weekend jaunts to a Garifuna village. The final transportation to the village was across the water in a classic dugout log canoe! The people were warm, friendly and welcoming which made it a delightful time.

2016 PEACE CORPS HONDURAS REUNION IN NEW ORLEANS

Terri Salus 1978-80 Tegucigalpa

Feb.12 to 15, 2016. Please use my special PC Honduras email TerriSalus@gmail.com to contact me. I will need folks to contribute \$50/person (made out to "Therese Salus," and sent to 8501 Aragon Lane, Chevy Chase,

MD 20815; include your name(s), contact information (mobile phone/text/email, home phone, snail mail address, and site/years of service) so that we can start a registration list. See www.PeaceCorpsHondurasReunion2013.com for reunion details!

PARQUE NACIONAL SANTA BARBARA

Loren Hintz Olanchito 1980-82

Despite the pull out of Peace Corps from Honduras in early 2012, many projects begun by volunteers are still working. **Alicia Ward and Alex Osteen** were two volunteers who worked in small villages near Santa Barbara National Park. They overlapped in their PC service there and since they left an Australian, **Robert Lambeck**, arrived and is helping the community.

Alicia Ward was one of the last group of volunteers what was able to COS before Peace Corps pulled out. From 2009 to 2011 she was in the Protected Areas Management Sector in the small village of El Dorado. She now works for an environmental consulting firm in Seattle, Washington.

Like most volunteers she had many projects. One effort was the development of a local ecotourism project to help generate income for the local communities near the national park. About 100 visitors a year passed through the area. Her village of El Dorado had 801 residents and was next to the larger San Luis Planes where Alex worked. Right next to the park was a very poor village called El Sauce. Each town has lots of local mistrust and jealousy with each other and much of Alicia's time was spent moderating

meetings. Folks developed a network of trails to access the park and hoped to develop a visitor center. One ongoing fear was that some foreigner would build a fancy hotel and take advantage of their own work. They wanted to obtain a co-management agreement with the park service but were unable to do that. Instead someone from the other side of the National Park was able to obtain one. His focus is far away, so the El Dorado, San Luis Planes and El Sauce continue their own ecotourism project.



Alicia was able to do an inventory of the amphibians and reptiles of the park which helped her with her M.S. research. She coordinated efforts with the Honduran National University and a botanist from there was able to inventory the unique flora of the mountain. She learned about the native stingless bee and helped with developing its honey production. (Its clear, white honey is believed to have medicinal properties by locals.) She was also successful in helping her community create a library and community center. She managed to get the mayor of the municipality to donate half of the cost and used the Peace Corps Partnerships fund raising opportunity. Unfortunately as coffee prices fell, the community was unable to put more resources into. Even though the library is within the

school grounds the teachers seem unwilling to help open the library and there is very limited access to it.

Communication at her site was always an issue. Some villagers have an antenna which lets them phone, others climb up the mountain until they have phone reception. During the rainy season the bus could not make it to her site and she would have to stay over at Pena Blanca or Cerro Azul. Sometimes she felt unsafe but if you follow your training for well-educated travelling there should be no problem. For example it is foolish if you are a female to ride the bus wearing shorts and or look at laptop while travelling. Dress appropriately, carry cell phone with emergency numbers entered, don't bring valuables and travel light.

She has been able to visit once in Feb. 2014. For her community it was as if she had never left and friends wanted to share their problems and get advice.

Alex Osteen was in the PC Business Development Program but had an unusual situation because his site was a very rural area. His primary job was with a Coffee Cooperative at San Luis Planes. Santa Barbara produces some of the best coffee in Central America. Each year someone in the area wins Taza de Excelencia rating. Besides working with the coffee industry he helped with the local health clinic committee and is pleased that three years after he left, the committee is still organized and holding local fund raisers for the health clinic. He also began working with Alicia Ward whose site was at El Dorado with folks near the National Park developing an ecotourism project.

Alex was very disappointed when he learned that Peace Corps was pulling out because of safety concerns in the country. First volunteers were told to “stand fast” and told to stay at their sites and not travel. Finally they were told that the decision was made for Peace Corps Volunteers to be sent home. PCVs had the opportunity to spend the Christmas holidays in site, pack and say good bye. Before leaving the country, they were put up in a Tegucigalpa Hotel, the Maya, for three or four days. It was nice being able to talk and visit with other volunteers but a very bittersweet moment. He wished he could have stayed around longer. (After the pull out he even managed to complete his health clinic project while in the US.) They had already lined up next set of Honduran PVCs to continue their local projects up until 2016.

I asked Alex about problems of violence and drugs. He felt safest in the campo. His village people would keep an eye out. He was not concerned about drug nor security issues in his area. Drugs/gang violence was definitely a problem in the big cities. There was also highway banditry on the highways for example roads to Olancho. Random violence in smaller cities was also a possibility.

Alex felt he lived at the best site in the Honduras. He wished he could have stayed longer. It was on the border of a national park. Santa Barbara is second tallest mountain in the nation. It has old growth cloud forest with Quetzals. An endemic salamander is found there. Its natural beauty is not matched anywhere else. He loved staring at the mountain in the mornings before work, as the clouds rolled in. It produces some of

the best coffee in Central America and he enjoyed drinking it and learning about it.

After Peace Corps Alex went to Duke for grad school and now lives in Portland Oregon working on energy efficiency. Alex has managed to get back once a year to visit. To get to site a bit difficult. You need to leave early from San Pedro Sula or Santa Barbara towards Lago Yojoa because only one local bus to village and it leaves at 11:30. Some locals have trucks are willing to shuttle you. \$50 for the trip. There is no cell phone coverage in the mountain so communication is difficult.

He encourages RPCVs to visit there. Going there would be a special vacation and meet special people.



MONTAÑA SANTA BARBARA - LA FUENTE DE VIDA!

Robert Lambeck

Montaña Santa Barbara and the
Lago Yojoa Basin

Rising majestically above the beautiful Lake Yojoa in central Honduras is one of the country's more impressive mountain ranges - Montaña Santa Barbara. Here, the combination of volcanic and limestone landscapes surrounding the lake supports a rich diversity of habitat types and a corresponding diversity of plants and animals. Nestled into the mountains are small friendly communities that

make their living from growing coffee and from subsistence agriculture.

On first appearances this seems like an idyllic landscape but unfortunately, as is the case throughout much of the world, there is pressure to clear more forest to make way for agriculture in order to support a growing population.

What is different about this region however is that three communities on the northern side of the mountain are working together **to try to protect the cloud-forests of the National Park as well as better manage the buffer zone in which they live.**

Unfortunately, these communities are currently almost entirely reliant on the coffee industry for their livelihood and the vagaries of the coffee market drives them to continue to clear forest in order to derive more income.

In order to change their practices, they recognise that they need to develop other sources of income. The scenic beauty, combined with the natural and cultural richness of this region makes tourism an obvious option. However, the community is clear that it does not want a tourist enterprise that adversely impacts their way of life. Hence, this project aims to develop new sources of income based on ethical and sustainable tourism that, hopefully, will enable them to improve their livelihood while protecting the environment and maintaining their cultural values.

Members of the three communities, El Sauce, San Luis Planes and El Dorado, have come together to form a project they have named “Montaña Santa Barbara – La Fuente de Vida.” This project aims

to build the capacity of local communities to create and manage the ecotourism opportunities and develop and implement conservation and social programs on their own terms, rather than being overwhelmed by external commercial interests.

The project is in its infancy but by supporting this program you will have the chance to be part of an inspiring conservation effort in a spectacular landscape, learn about the friendly people of the local villages, and gain a better appreciation of why this is such an important area to protect.



OUR VISION “Prosperous communities committed to the protection of the environment with better education, health and infrastructure supported by additional income derived from sustainable and ethical tourism.”

A key feature of this vision is that it encompasses the three pillars of sustainability - the environment, society and the economy. Our belief is that we don't have to trade these off against each other - we aim to make positive gains on all three!

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES: The aim of this project is to protect the natural environment of Santa Barbara National Park and its surrounds while enhancing the livelihoods and culture of local communities.

Specific objectives include: To protect the flora and fauna in the core protected area of PN Santa

Barbara; To sustainably manage the buffer zone surrounding the National Park; To develop a sustainable and ethical ecotourism enterprise that creates new employment opportunities and decreases the communities' dependence on the coffee economy; To build the capacity of local communities to manage emerging tourism opportunities to ensure that the benefits remain within the community; To develop other social projects that benefit other members of the community that are not directly involved in the tourist enterprise.

ETHICAL TOURISM

Our ethical tourism principles aim to ensure that our visitors tread lightly on the ground, interact sensitively with local people and contribute tangible benefits to the communities that they visit. We strive to ensure that the tourism experience does not damage the very values that they come to see - the unfortunate legacy of much tourism throughout the world. By supporting our local economies through using local guides and buying local food, all of their contribution goes to developing our communities and protecting our environment in an emerging new tourism destination.

OUR TOURS!

CLOUD-FOREST HIKES:

Explore the majestic cloud forests with local guides who will show you the mysteries that lie within. Witness the incredible diversity of plants including those that have provided food and medicine to local people for hundreds of years and see some of the special birds that call the mountain home.

LA PEÑA LOOKOUT: Ride a horse or hike through idyllic rural landscapes before scrambling up the short but steep trail to Mirador La Peña for spectacular views of Lago

Yojoa, Santa Barbara Mountain and the local communities of El Dorado.

CUEVA EL ENCANTO:

Montaña Santa Barbara is an enormous limestone massif riddled with caves and sinkholes. This trip, on foot or by horseback takes you to a small but enchanting (as the name suggests) cave with fascinating formations and a small subterranean pool.

BIRD WATCHING TOURS

the Quetzal trail: Montaña Santa Barbara supports a remarkable diversity of birds, many of which are difficult to find elsewhere in Honduras or, in some cases, elsewhere in Central America. The mountain is home to Resplendent Quetzals, Wine-throated Hummingbirds, Buffy-Crested Wood-partridges, and Pheasant Cuckoos as well as a diverse mix of toucans, trogons, motmots and more! Our local bird-guide started off as a hunter but now is a passionate and knowledgeable observer of the birds and their habits.

LOCAL CULTURE, AGRICULTURE AND

COFFEE-CULTURE: On all of our tours we provide an overview of the lifestyles of our local communities, but if you want a more in-depth experience of life in rural Honduras, this is the tour for you. Gain an insight into the challenges and rewards of agrarian life. Sample local produce - after you have helped to harvest and prepare it! Learn about the dynamics of local communities - the challenges of education, health and employment.

Security - the big challenge for Honduras - whether real or perceived. We have been working with the community to ensure that there is general support for the

project but more importantly our groups are always accompanied by local community members which hopefully reduces risk from local people.

Vote with your feet - Come and visit. The most tangible way that you can support this project is by experiencing it yourself. This is the experience of a lifetime. There are very few opportunities to get off the tourist trail and experience real rural life in Honduras, and our network of tour operators that share our ethical principles will ensure that you have an amazing and safe experience.

Volunteer: If you have the skills and time to contribute to this project, come and stay with a local family and help to build the capacities of these extraordinarily welcoming communities. Teach English, train in trades, develop computing skills, and support local schools and medical clinics. There are many opportunities for those who want to roll up their sleeves and directly make a difference.

For more information please contact Robert Lambeck at rjlambeck@gmail.com



Life in Honduras after Peace Corps (Part I)

Robert J. Gallardo Olancho and La Mosquitia 1993-96

I arrived in Honduras in 1993 as a Natural Resources PCV and stayed for three years with Jorge Betancourt acting as my APCD. I had worked for nearly 2 years with Francisco Urbina (a former COHDEFOR employee) completing small projects with Sierra de Agalta N.P. in Olancho. I then did a site transfer and extension all at once to Raista, Gracias a Dios (La Mosquitia) where I worked with Eddy Bodden and MOPAWI on establishing the country's first butterfly farm. Both projects, both sites, and both counterparts had proved to make my PC experience rewarding and worthwhile.

I then quickly fell into the "NRPCV" category (Never Returned PCV) as I only returned home to cash my check and sell my old VW Beetle that was sitting on blocks. I continued to work with butterfly houses for some time, trying to get into the market of selling pupae for export. I made butterfly shadow boxes and even light construction just to get by. I had married a Honduran and we were together for nearly 11 years before going our separate ways. It was a pivotal moment in my life as at that point I was starting to get into bird watching and was even starting to work as a freelance guide. I would have left the country if I had not previously met John Sill (a professional bird illustrator) at a bird fair in late 2011.

Little by little I was getting more experience as a guide and identifying the birds by sight and sound. I had purchased some Sony recording equipment and eventually produced a CD, "Bird Sounds of Honduras". I had travelled extensively across the

country and by July 2012 would be the first person in history to have seen 700 species. I had also amassed a whopping 40 country bird records. Eventually this would convert into a self-sustaining and prosperous business and I led tours for numerous overseas companies.

But, I had another more important mission to accomplish. I wanted to a complete country bird guide before someone else came along who would not have known the country's birds like I did. Not long after meeting John and relocating to Lake Yojoa I met Olivia, the love of my life. I took a year off from guiding and began writing the first draft of the species accounts; the bulk of the text. I was also starting to look for support to publish it and had most doors shut in my face. A rep from the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt publishers told me in my face, "That's too small of a project". Ouch.

I ended up garnering enough support from the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation, private donations, the selling of most original plates, and using my own finances to pull it off. A totally self-published, self-financed, modern day bird guide; complete with 73 color plates, 11 color pages of ecosystems, over 500 pages of text, and a large pull-out map. How about that? To be continued.....



LOST CIVILIZATIONS?

Maggie McQuaid (Perespire 1976-78)

Many of us have been fascinated by recent accounts of an allegedly newly-discovered archaeological site in the Mosquitia, the vast department in far eastern Honduras. There's a great deal of controversy about what was actually found, and about the science and ethics surrounding the newest study. Until more is known about this particular issue, I won't comment about the methods or findings.

But the very nature of what was described, and *how* it was described bear some scrutiny. Accounts released by the people making the study used phrases like "lost civilizations". Claims were made of their being the first to set foot in the area for hundreds of years. A carved stone figure was described as shamanic, as a "were-jaguar". And it was noted that the wild animals the party encountered seemed tame, and seemed to show no fear of humans.

A were-jaguar? Where do I start?

The descriptions noted above could be right out of Saturday matinee serials of the 1950's, or out of old cartoon strips. Because that's where ideas like "lost cities" or "vanished civilizations", of fearless wildlife or "we were first" belong. It's easy to dismiss these descriptions as being like bad pulp fiction, but we need to be aware of the bad history and practices involved. We need to be aware of the racism and colonialism of these tropes, and of the danger they do.

"Discovery". It's a term modern archaeologists and historians are loathe to use. It is a term fraught with error. Cristobal Colombo didn't discover America. Walter Raleigh and his band of English pirates didn't discover Virginia, although they used the idea of virgin land and friendly animals to promote their business venture back home. The idea of an area or a continent as being unexplored, untouched, *virgin*, is racist, sexist, and wrong.

Civilizations don't get lost. Much was made of Hiram Brigham of Yale, discovering the "lost city" of Machu Pichu in Peru. Little was made of the Peruvian farmers and herders who were living there when the boys from Yale turned up. Lloyd Stephens didn't discover Copan, but bought it from a local rancher and his family who had a pretty good idea of where the pyramids and stelae were, and who made them. Stone walls, towers, ceremonial areas – they deteriorate, but they don't get lost. They stay put, and generally, so do the people who built them.

When our northwestern European forefathers came here and saw the effigy mounds and raised platform cities of the Cahokia and Mississippian cultures, did it occur to them that the people who still lived in and around these areas might have something to do with the people who build them? Nope. It was obviously the work of Vikings or Phoenicians or ancient Egyptians or one of the lost tribes of Israel.

Here in Arizona, the agricultural, ceremonial, and residential sites along our central Verde Valley weren't explored until the last 19th and early 20th centuries, by people

who had some knowledge of pre-contact civilizations. But did they imagine that the local Yavapai, Hopi, and Apache people or their forebears might have been involved in their founding. No. Which is why the two most explored sites are now called Montezuma's Well and Montezuma's Castle.

We might like to think that human nature and knowledge has advanced since then. But, the casual use of terms like "fabled lost cities" in the jungles of eastern Honduras show that not much has changed.

These so-called discoveries also belie and mock the realities of what's happening right now out in the Mosquitia. Between illegal logging, incursions of farmers still slashing and burning, and the conversion of remote tracts of land into landing strips for drug shipments, very little of the territory is unclaimed or untouched. A biologist friend estimates that there are no tracts of the country which are not 20 km away from roads, landing strips, or settlements. 20 km isn't much; about what a macaw flies in a day. The wildlife out there, the jaguars and giant anteaters, are at risk of being hunted into extinction. The Pech and Miskito people who have lived there for generations are also threatened.

Many of us grew up dreaming of swashbuckling exploration, of alien planets or of lost temples in faraway jungles. But those blank spaces on the map never really existed. The people who actually live in the blank spaces, the wildlife, and the resources are all imperiled. They deserve our respect, understanding, and our efforts to protect them as they are

now, not as something we want or imagine them to be. The Ciudad Blanca is a myth, and these days, a dangerous one.



WHY THE CIUDAD BLANCA IS A FIGMENT OF OUR IMAGINATIONS

Mark Bonta, Juticalpa, Natural Resources, 1991-1993

I remember very clearly being a star struck trainee in 1991 and eating up what the late George Hasemann, archaeologist at the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia, had to tell our group about the definitive existence of the White City. Reflecting upon the continued discovery of the ruins of sizeable communities in the Río Plátano region characterized by massive stone construction and elaborate carvings, he told us that all these smaller towns, of necessity, would have been governed by a central place – a city much like Copán, though belonging to a completely distinct culture. It was only a matter of time, he averred, until legend and reality would coalesce in the inevitable discovery of the ruins of the Ciudad Blanca. What made this search particularly difficult, though--unlike the discovery of Maya cities in the flat Petén—was that in aerial photos it was impossible to distinguish ruined temple from hillside in the rugged landscape of the *Biosfera*.

Though I was later assigned as a Natural Resources volunteer to work with protected areas across Olancho, including the Biosfera, I focused on other discoveries that were more tangible. I had my hands full without becoming yet another casualty of this legend--the gift that, sadly, keeps on giving. There are very large Pre-Columbian ruin sites throughout Olancho, such as Tayaco, all but ignored by outsiders and by the government that should be protecting them while instead it chases after phantoms. And in the natural realm, there are hundreds of undescribed species lurking in the cloud forests, and thousands more described species in dire need of protection. Nevertheless, an “Indiana Jones complex” lures both self-styled explorers on a shoestring (such as one who, in a footnote, claimed to have found the White City as if it were no big thing) and others who, on little academic authority but with millions in backing, roll out the latest in laser technology, find more of those sizeable communities that have emerged from every expedition in the last century, and claim that the Legendary Capital of the ‘unnamed civilization’ has been found. (Don’t even get me started on the whole ‘Monkey God’ thing.)

They then proceed to ignore all criticisms of their inflated claims, while making yet more unfounded claims, and (like all the rest) sweeping in like White Knights to ‘protect the Rio Platano.’ Tell that to the Pech, who ARE the unnamed civilization. They are habitually ignored, now, but in the 1500s, when this civilization was still a force to be reckoned with, their ancestors, whom the Spaniards called ‘Taycones,’ were still living in sizeable towns built of stone, from the Aguan Valley to the Patuca. Like in the rest of America, their societies were decimated by disease, and their remnants were later known as the

largely innocuous ‘Paya’ during the Franciscan mission period, which began in the 1660s and lasted until Independence.

Other than a misinterpreted statement by Hernán Cortés, the main serious ethno historical claim to the existence of the White City is that the Pech themselves are said to talk about their own origins as being in some sort of place that outsiders have typically conflated with all the rubbish invented by 20th-century explorers or cooked up on the basis of finding elaborate grinding stones and similar artifacts. The explorers will never stop looking until all the forest is gone, because the White City itself, as a fable, *is always said to be located within the forest that hasn’t yet been cut*. Jesus Aguilar Paz, the famous Honduran geographer who made the first detailed map of the country, himself related that it was thought to exist in the vicinity of Catacamas in the 1940s (typically, the ‘white’ part refers simply to white limestone cliffs, such as those above Talgua

In the real world of unsensational claims and tedious scholarship, archaeologists and geographers, with very few exceptions, have long understood that the societies created by the ancestors of the Pech and other groups in eastern Honduras would not have needed a central place to govern them. Judging by the descriptions of the Spanish themselves, they were what the French anthropologist Pierre Clastres famously called ‘societies against the State’ that labored actively to resist outside dominance. Temporary alliances between chiefdoms were formed, to be certain, but no imperial power, not the Empire ruled by the Mexica and not the Spanish Catholic Empire, were tolerated as overlords—until, that is, the most terrible genocide the world has ever see had run its course.

And, even then (by the end of the 1500s), only a few thousand original inhabitants remained under Spanish control as tribute payers, the rest of the living having fled to the inaccessible places of the 'Taguzgalpa and Tologalpa' (what we call "the Mosquitia" today).

There never was a White City because not all societies tolerate being governed from afar—the *comarca*, the *cacicazgo*, whatever you wish to call it, most likely did not extend into the next *valle*, as each was well armed, and trade relations already existed that provided what was needed without the necessity of onerous tributes and other taxes on local people that 'glorious' kingdoms and empires have tended to levy in order to make their central places ever more glamorous and take their wars of conquest to ever more distant locations. In the case of Honduras, there is absolutely no reason for a White City to have existed, and nothing in the historical literature prior to the Banana Company era to suggest that anyone thought so.

The millions spent on glorification-via-Hollywood would better be spent on empowering the very indigenous and Ladino communities of the Biosphere Reserve who are supposed to be its stewards. One good way to start would be with the indigenous education program at the Universidad Nacional Agraria in Catacamas (formerly the ENA). The Pech, in particular, deserve to be credited with the ownership of what their ancestors built, and this pretense of 'mysterious lost civilization' needs to be dropped once and for all. Once upon a time, before governments gave up on protected areas and outsourced their management to weak NGOs and entrepreneurs, it was understood that the Río Plátano was not only

world heritage but also "herencia de nuestro pasado." It was thought that communities themselves should be empowered, together with the central government, to protect the reserve. What is wrong with that idea? Tens of millions of dollars were spent, true, but without effective community-based rules enforcement.

Sustainable development is great, no quarrel there, but a park in any country exists because park management includes law enforcement as well as community outreach. The Biosphere Reserve, and all the highly-endangered paper parks of eastern Honduras, were set up behind active colonization fronts, and no amount of sustainable development activities on the planet, alone, could have stopped what is happening.

While we (**Honduran Conservation Coalition**) will continue to work in community-based conservation in the region and not make grand pronouncements, we do wish the current hyperbolists well—may your efforts to "save the Río Plátano" prove us wrong. Next time you go through Dulce Nombre de Culmí, though, with your soldiers and ex-mercenaries, why not stop to chat with local people—heck, even bring a few Pech leaders along on your voyages of "discovery"? As leading expert Dr. Christopher Begley says, they will likely have already known about what you so brashly "discovered." Maybe you could even acknowledge this in your many tweets and in your meetings with the political elite.



BETA CACERES WINS 2015 GOLDMAN ENVIRONMENTAL PRIZE

Beta Cáceres in 1993 cofounded The National Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) to address the growing threats posed to Lenca communities by illegal logging, fight for their territorial rights and improve their livelihoods. In 2006, community members from Rio Blanco came to COPINH asking for help. With mandates from local community members at every step of the way, Cáceres began mounting a campaign against the Agua Zarca Dam. Honduras' violent climate is well known to many, but few understand that environmental and human rights activists are often its victims. Tomas Garcia, a community leader from Rio Blanco, was shot and killed during a peaceful protest at the dam office.

Against these odds, Cáceres and the Lenca community's efforts successfully kept construction equipment out of the proposed dam site. In late 2013, Sinohydro terminated its contract with DESA, publicly citing ongoing community resistance and outrage following Tomas' death. **To date, construction on the project has effectively come to a halt.**

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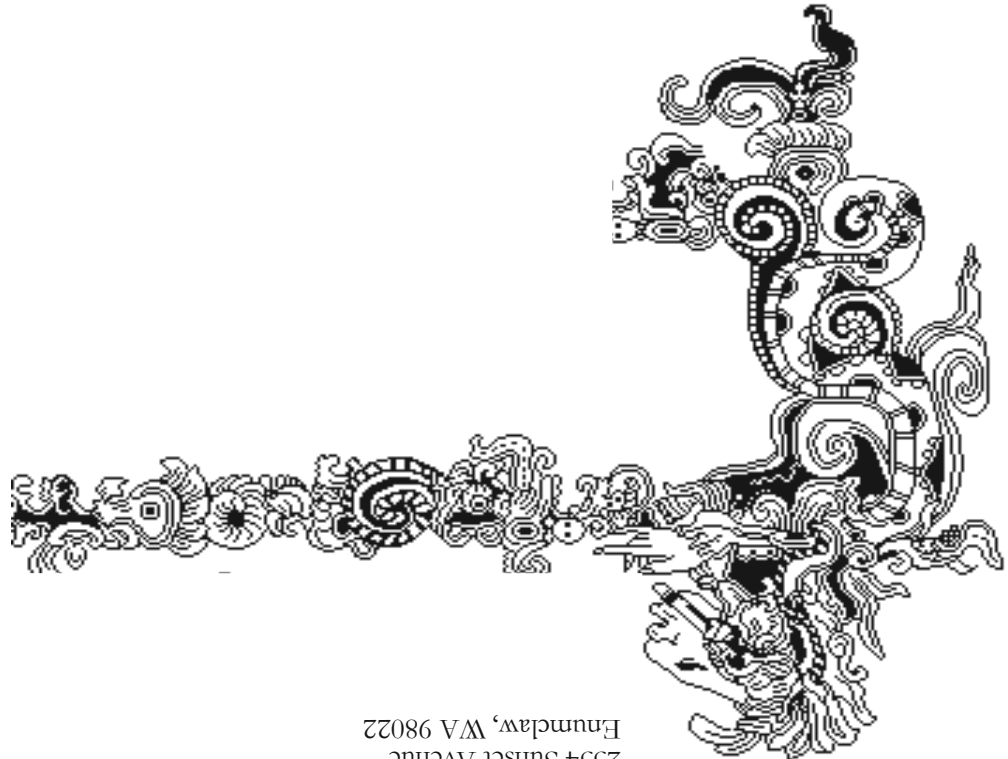
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