

Flag #80 Report

Robert J. Atwater LF'05, Flag Expedition Leader

Yucatan Cave Exploration & Archaeological Recovery Expedition 2011

An Explorers Club Flag Expedition to Colonia, Yucatan, Mexico, January 13 through January 25, 2011



(Expedition members with Explorers Club Flag #80 left to right, Jitka Hyniova, Josh Bernstein FR'04, Jeff Toorish, Bob Atwater LF'05, Jon Bojar, Brendan Nappier, and kneeling Curt Bowen FN'11 and Walter Pickel)





(Human skull and pottery located in San Manuel Cenote)

21° 97' 19" N 87° 40' 31" W

From January 13th through January 25th, 2011 a team of eight explorers with a support group of local guides and Government of Yucatan and Mexico representatives along with financial support from the ADM Exploration Foundation conducted an exploration and underwater surveys of cenotes and dry caves around the area of Colonia, Yucatan, Mexico. The expedition was conducted under the direction of Curt Bowen FN'11, Publisher of Advanced Diver Magazine. The expedition is multi-faceted and very complex. Curt planned the logistics of the expedition allowing the team to focus on the very challenging but routine of obtaining the necessary permits, team provisions, locating the SCUBA/Cave Diving equipment to have at the ready, and sufficient living quarters. Colonia, Yucatan was developed in the 1950s as a logging community with a veneer factory. Colonia would be our expedition base camp for operations. We hung our hammocks, charged our numerous batteries for cameras and lights, and took our cold showers at a bunk house provided by one of the locals. Many of our meals were prepared by a local family who provided some of the most elegant foods available that was native to the area. Several evenings throughout our time in the Colonia area were spent with local families discussing customs and culture. This along with entertainment



from a professional local singer and guitar player made our off time very special and educational.

After unpacking the numerous crates of gear, performing shake down dives, verifying that the known artifacts were still intact at the same locations, going through the various prep dives along with testing the rappelling and climbing gear specific to the teams unique system of exploration, we hit the jungle cenotes to take measurements and photographs during our exploration of the systems. Many of the artifacts including skeletal remains were photographed with video and still footage at various depths and angles to create an accurate history of the team's work.

One major objective was to reveal and provide proof of the existence of a unique piece of pottery that was located during a similar expedition by the ADM Exploration Foundation in 2010, and thought to predate the beginning of the Mayan civilization. Preparations for retrieval of the pottery were in place if the INAH gave the approval. Simultaneously we conducted a production of a video segment for the NBC's "Today Show" that revealed cave diving exploration in its multifaceted details. The intent was also to discover new cenotes through official permits received from the Departamento de Conservacion y Manejo de Sistemas Karstico of the Yucatan government. The surveys resulted in the location and identification of several ancient Mayan artifacts including the following.

At the Village of San Manuel: two human skulls with various skeletal bones and three Mayan pots of various shape and sizes. (see photos marked San Manuel Cenote).

Additionally, we spent many days surveying, measuring and photographing over 50 never before explored cenotes. These surveys were conducted in co-operation with the governments of Mexico and the Yucatan.

As mentioned before, the objectives of the expedition were to discover the existence of very unique artifacts from the Mayans; mostly pottery remains both fully intact and existing pieces that were not destroyed by time and erosion. Several human remains were discovered, including skulls that were most likely sacrifice victims. During a past expedition a Mayan Pot of extreme significance was discovered at Cenote San Manuel. The dive teams, including a cave diving qualified archaeologist representative from INAH who are responsible for ancient antiquities accompanied the expedition divers to expertly identify the pottery and ensure the preservation of the artifacts. That one



spectacular piece was identified as an 1800 year old piece of Mayan Pottery used for pouring chocolate. The Mayans used chocolate for both human consumption and sacrificial purposes. They mixed a very dark version of chocolate with honey as a sweetener. Due to the nature of the retrieval process by professional archaeologists, the process was delayed until the correct preservation facilities are prepared in the field for another expedition set for that purpose. The archaeologist expressed great excitement over this particular piece of pottery do to its age and use by the Mayans. The lead archaeologist, Helena B. Meineke who dove the cave system, stated this particular style of pottery was extremely rare. She mentioned the piece could be identified due to the type of twist of the style of handle on the pot.

As mentioned, for the historical record the expedition was both filmed via still photography and video. The video portions will be used for the ADM Exploration Foundation archives and WEB site along with portions that were eventually shown on NBC television's "Today Show" with explorer Josh Bernstein represent the exploration team. To produce the scenes for NBC television the segment would include new exploratory dives and the dives conducted with the INAH archaeologists. This would afford the television viewer with a true to life feel of actual cave diving exploration. Josh Bernstein FR'04 who acted as host, producer, photographer, videographer and director had little rest during his time on expedition. Most of the underwater scenes were shot by Curt and Jeff typically with two models along with two divers acting as the lighting crew. Curt, on one occasion hung fifty feet in the air to film several team members climbing and rappelling into a cenote to obtain sufficient film footage. All of the team members used what is called a frog climbing system during which climbing gear is hung under the Armadillo Side Mount Harness systems used by the explorers. The Armadillo was developed by Curt for this type of cave diving. All team members took turns rolling the video cameras and throwing ropes for retrieval of equipment after subsequent dives.

The team worked hard for two weeks conducting solo and team dives on fifty-six new cenotes. As a result of the co-operative effort with the scientists representing the Governments of the Yucatan and Mexico, the team was invited to return to conduct professional cave dives on ten selected cenotes with discovered artifacts and to assist in the recovery of those most important relics. Many of the cenotes dives were extremely deep dives. One cave system was recorded at one hundred and sixty-five feet in depth.



After twelve days in the jungle, three flat tires on the vans, several hundred tick bites, and stings from Africanized bees, the expedition was a very successful event. The surveys conducted showed breathtaking underwater cave systems that are littered with exceptional and spectacular geological formations and ancient artifacts along with human remains. Some were used as aquatic graveyards that provide for the unlocking of the ancient past of the Yucatan.

(Jon Bojar with EC Flag #80 preparing for a cenote dive)





(Explorers Club Flag #80 with a pot located in San Manuel Cenote identified for use in pouring chocolate by the Mayans during the 3rd century AD)





Explorers Josh Bernstein FR'04 and Jon Bojar getting ready to dive one of the 50 plus cenotes that were explored and surveyed during the expedition.



Various scenes from the many diving locations



The Yucatan Cave Exploration & Archaeological Recovery Expedition 2011

Team Members are in alphabetical order:

Robert J. Atwater LF'05, – Explorers Club Flag #80 Expedition Leader, Explorer, Assistant Photographer/soundman, and EC Flag Report Writer.

Josh Bernstein FR'04 – Explorer, Photo Journalist, Photographer and TV Host

Jon Bojar – Explorer and Photographer

Curt Bowen FN'11 – Expedition Director, Explorer, Photographer, Publisher – Advanced Diver Magazine, Photographer, and Report Writer

Jitka Hyniova-Explorer and Photographer

Brendan Nappier – Explorer and Photographer

Walter Pickel – Explorer, Photographer, and Note Taker



Jeff Toorish – Explorer, Photo Journalist, Soundman, and ADM Foundation President

The Instituto Nacional De Antropologia E Historia (INAH) of the Gobierno Federal (English Translation: National Institute of Anthropology and History of the Mexican Federal Government)



Curt Bowen with Archaeologist Helena B. Meinecke

The INAH provided professional underwater **archaeologist “Helena Barba Meinecke”** and a coworker to support the cenote diving expedition at San Manuel Cenote where identification of the human skull and other bones along with the ancient Mayan Pottery the expedition team located was conducted. The pottery was estimated to be as old as between 200 and 300AD. As a result of this co-operative dive, the INAH gave permission for ten future cenote dives to identify and recover archaeological artifacts including those located at Cenote San Manuel.



Curt Bowen along with Helena B. Meinecke





Jon Bejar



Brendan Nappier

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Bob Atwater LF'05, Curt Bowen FN'11, and Jon Bejar assisting with the video and sound systems expedition recordings along with various other expedition photos



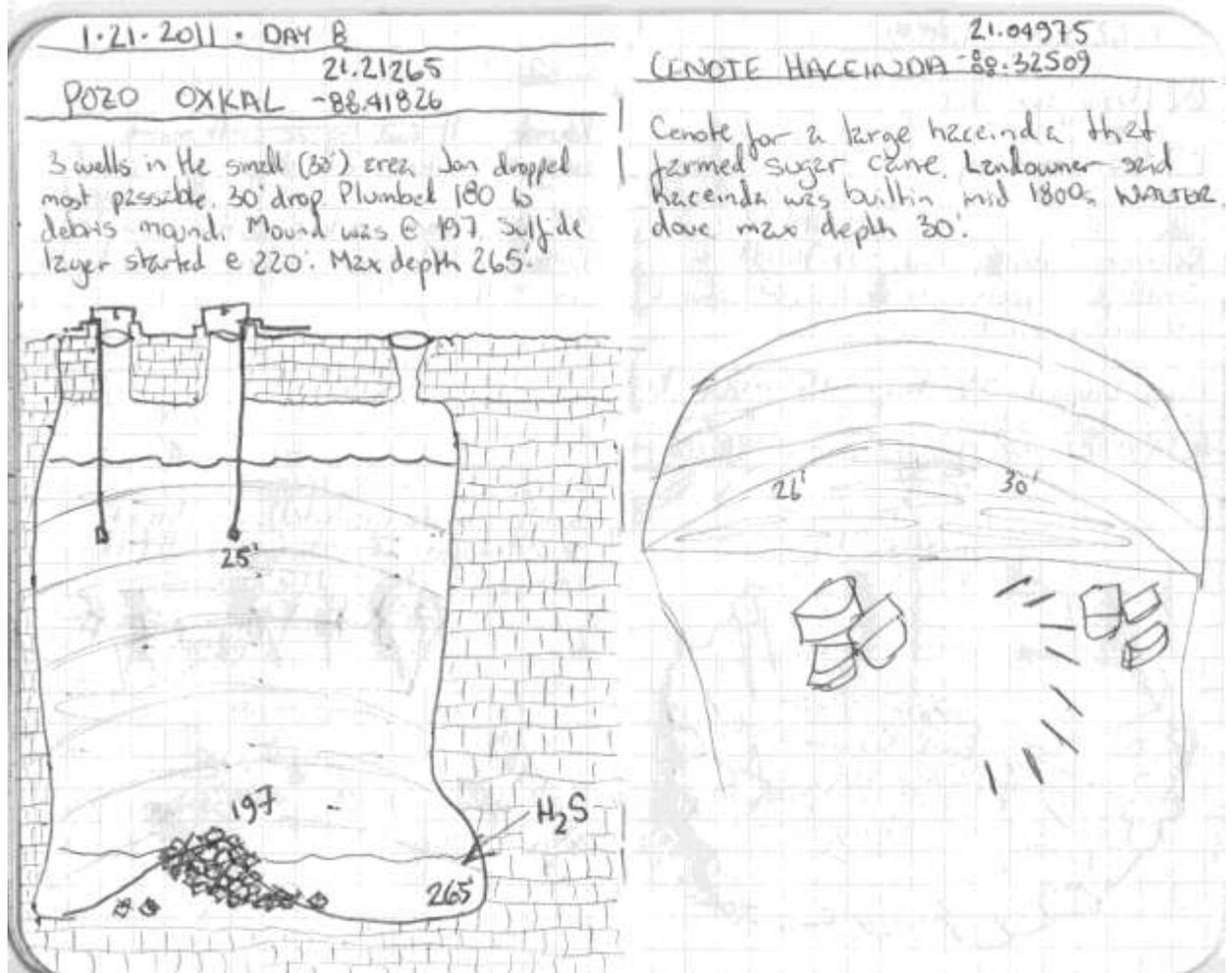
Bob Atwater LF'05, Josh Bernstein FR'04 and Curt Bowen FN'11, filming for the ADM



Foundation and NBC's "Today Show"



Expedition notes explaining the cenote surveys and measurements provided by team member Walter Pickel



21.15827/
 CENOTE SAN JOSE UNO - 87.66947

• Square cow ranch cenote. Large Banyan trees surrounding the entrance

• 25' drop - Sounded to 30'. DVR: WALTER

top of debris mound is the old ceiling. Stalagmites are reversed

70'

100'

80'

1-19-2011. DAY 6

SUUC ILHA
 21.15510/ -87.31157
 CENOTE SUCILA

• Town cenote 2 blocks from church

• Fenced off

• 20' drop

DVR: BRENDON

Water was clear to debris mound 20-30 for the remainder

150'

75'

176'



21.10566 / -87.66415
CHUVN PICH - AAKTUW HIA

Collapsed dry/wet. Joff dove.
Max depth to 30'. Undercut on
all sides, bottomed to mud

Pozo Montecristo 21.06757 / -87.67702

Hand dug well to water. UNX

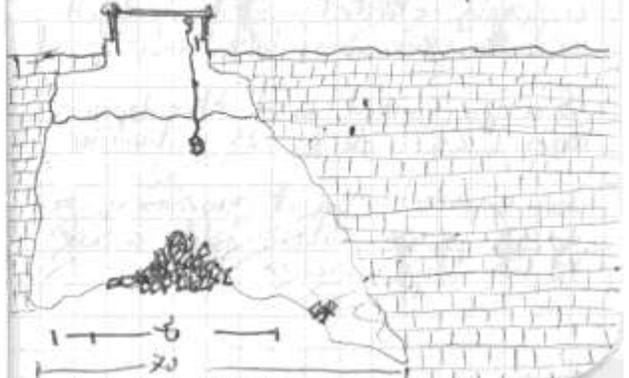
Pozo Dos Ojos 21.06738 / -87.67616

WALTER dove. Fissure cracks (2 eyes)
30' drop Sanded to 33'
Water was very clear. Max depth
30.



Montecristo 3

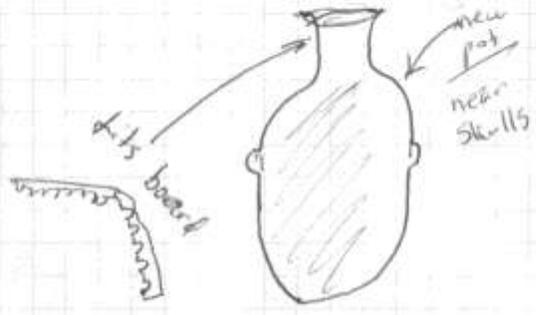
Jon dove. 50' max depth 70' diameter
on bottom, 30' on top. 30' drop



1.16.2011 • DAY 3 • MONDAY

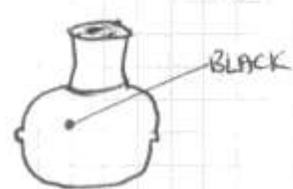
CHAN CENOTE (POZO)

- Road filming
- In cave filming



- Found whole water pot, only necks last year (2010). 10' away from skulls
- The neck of the tanks fit in the board

✓ Vasijas



DAY 4 • 1-17-2011

SAN MANUEL (POZO)

EC Flay dive. Photographed new pot

CUEVA JEANUS de Jon

Small dry cave 10' ceilings, 80' long ends in moon pool
Very decorated.



Clear blue water



Various expedition scenes, most at Cenote San Manuel



The Yucatan Cave Diving and Archaeology Recovery Expedition Team 2011



Conclusion:

The expedition was very successful in discovering and identifying new human remains and Mayan artifacts, in developing a professional relationship with the Mayan people and culture, and with the Governments of the Yucatan and Mexico, and developed further interest in future cooperative archaeological discovery and recovery efforts to preserve the Mayan record of history in the Yucatan of Mexico. As a result of the reports from the INAH and the recent work with the ADM Exploration Foundation team's expertise and procedures for exploring these dangerous cenotes, permission was received in approving the retrieval of archaeological artifacts, filming the future expeditions through both still and video



photography of future selected sites. The team will be the only explorers who have the exclusive privilege to act on behalf of the governments of Mexico and the Yucatan. Truly an honor rarely obtained.

(Josh Bernstein FR'04 & Bob Atwater LF'05 with Explorers Club Flag #80)



Credits:

Explorers Club Flag # 80 report prepared by Robert Atwater LF'05 and Shellie Howard AN'11.

Photos courtesy of Robert Atwater LF'05, Josh Bernstein FR'04, Curt Bowen FN'11, Jeff Toorish and Jitka Hyniova.

Note drawings and flag report materials courtesy of Walter Pickel

Expedition sponsors: ADM Exploration Foundation and all expedition team members.

Explorers Club Flag #80, The Explorers Club, NYC.

