



Project Director Dr. Richard Hansen shows the newly discovered stucco at El Mirador. Photo by © FARES

Mirador, Guatemala

Saving the Heart of the Maya Biosphere

Site Significance

The Mirador Cultural and Natural System a proposed 810,000-acre protected area located in the heart of the Maya Biosphere in northern Guatemala, is home to the earliest and largest Preclassic Maya archaeological sites in Mesoamerica, including the largest pyramid by volume in the world - La Danta. Indeed, Mirador's priceless ancient cities and monuments of the Preclassic Maya period are the most spectacular and unique in Central America, and as such it is Guatemala's leading nomination for UNESCO World Heritage designation.

Project Goals

Mirador's ancient Maya cities form the basis for a sustainable future based on a roadless Archaeological and Wildlife Preserve which has the potential to stop the destruction of the forests at its borders and to provide an alternative to the status quo of burning, logging, looting and poaching. GHF's goal is to implement world-class conservation and

master planning while achieving economic sustainability in revenues and costs within ten years by supporting key areas of conservation, park infrastructure, training and planning in consultation with the government of Guatemala, other NGOs and the local communities.

Preservation by Design®

Planning

A major goal of this project is to prepare a Management Plan for submission to and approval by the government of Guatemala. Such a document provides guidelines for a holistic and integrated approach to site preservation with the support and backing of the government - crucial components to ensuring long-term sustainability.



Threats

- Deforestation
- Fires
- Major Logging
- Poaching
- Looting
- Narcotics trafficking

Start Date

2003

Project Partnerships

- Foundation for Anthropological Research and Environmental Studies (FARES)
- The Government of Guatemala Instituto de Antropología e Historia de Guatemala (IDAEH)
- Instituto Guatemalteco de Turismo (INGUAT)
- Fundación Patrimonio Cultural y Natural Maya (PACUNAM)
- The Department of the Interior (DOI)

Conservation Science

Conservation efforts are aimed at stabilizing and preserving some of the most significant monuments within the archaeological site of El Mirador, with the complex of La Danta, the pyramid of El Tigre and the building known as Structure 34 (“Jaguar Paw Temple”) receiving particular attention with oversight and guidance provided by leaders in the field of conservation science.



Stabilization and consolidation of El Tigre. Photo by Richard Hansen

Community

GHF is dedicated to ensuring that Mirador tourism is responsible and sustainable and that local communities benefit directly. As part of this initiative, the Guatemalan government has agreed to improve the road to the villages surrounding Mirador, provide increased security measures for tourists and supply electricity for rural villages surrounding the basin for the first time, making the gateway village of Carmelita a “model community,” while a newly opened visitor’s center will serve as the hub for park management, visitor education and guide services in the Mirador Basin. GHF-sponsored conservation and training employs over 220 Guatemalans each year, providing meaningful employment and an alternative to logging, poaching, looting and other illegal activities.

Recent Accomplishments

- El Mirador – Tintal Causeway: Clearing of all underbrush for 40 kilometers, test pit excavations, load and structural stability analysis.
- Structure 34, (Temple of Jaguar Claw) - Consolidation of tunnel and masks, environmental monitoring.
- La Danta Pyramid Summit: excavation, consolidation, and stabilization of the main walls of the building, repairing and stabilizing the wood staircase to access city.
- Consolidation and stabilization of El Tigre’s main platform.
- Detailed exploration and mapping of 35 ancient sites in the Mirador Basin.
- 72 computers delivered to public schools in local towns and villages to support education programs.
- In 2008 the project provided employment to 318 workers, 40 specialists, and 22 Guatemalan and American students, while continuing with programs of tourism infrastructure, health, potable water systems, computer systems for schools in communities, schools for Tourism Guides including the first graduating class of 28 students from the first school of community guides, and the literacy and education programs for workers.
- During the 2008 field season extraordinarily well preserved reliefs, with detailed iconography, were discovered during the excavations efforts of the Great Central Acropolis structure. The iconography of these reliefs are a clear representations of the ideological and economic complexity of Late Preclassic society in the Mirador Basin.
- Using camera traps where movement fires photo image, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) found that in the area of the La Gloria Concession/Lechugal area in the southern part of the Mirador Basin, a relatively low density of jaguars was revealed with a concentration of 1.5 +/- .85 jaguars per 100 km². However in the greater Mirador Basin region a high density of jaguars was detected, about 11.28 per 100 km².

Described as the Cradle of Maya Civilization, the Mirador Basin is the last tract of virgin rainforest remaining in Central America.



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