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Report of the Uxbenká Archaeological Project (UAP) - 2005 Field Season



Research Year: 2005

Culture: Maya

Chronology: Early Classic

Location: Uxbenká, Toledo District, Belize

Sites: Uxbenká

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Introduction

The following is a report on FAMSI funded archaeological research conducted at Uxbenká, Toledo District, Belize between May 25 and July 24, 2005. The long term goals of the Uxbenká Archaeological Project (UAP) are to understand the role of the monument bearing polity Uxbenká in regional and pan-Maya social and political

systems through a comprehensive archaeological and epigraphic study of the internal development at the site. The 2005 goals of the UAP were to assess the spatial layout and organization of the site core, to begin the process of cataloging the Uxbenká settlement, and to identify new monuments and sculptures. Uxbenká is the earliest known Maya political center in southern Belize, with its origins during the Early Classic (AD 250-500). It is also home to some of the earliest known carved monuments in Belize and the southeastern Petén. For these reasons it offers an ideal laboratory to study the growth of a Maya polity and its role in dynamic regional political developments.

Investigations at Uxbenká are currently addressing three research questions: (1) What were the cultural and historical contexts in which Uxbenká was first settled?; (2) What was the nature of Uxbenká's relationships with neighboring Emblem Glyph-bearing sites in southern Belize and Petén?; (3) Was Uxbenká involved in hierarchical relationships with large polities (like Tikal) in the Petén or elsewhere, and, if so, were these relationships stable or did they change over time? These questions are being addressed through an investigation of the internal developments at the site of Uxbenká. We are committed to the idea that historical data (hieroglyphic writing) from monuments at the site must be substantiated and confirmed by archaeological data from survey and excavations. This project will illuminate both regional political developments in southern Belize and provide data on how larger polities interact with smaller formations in non-industrial societies. By integrating archaeological, epigraphic, and art historical data the UAP will achieve an improved understanding of the processes by which the southern Belize region was settled, grew, and interacted with its neighbors over time.

UAP research in 2005 was conducted under permits issued to Dr. Keith Prufer by the Institute of Archaeology (IA), National Institute of Culture and History, Government of Belize. Project members include co-PIs Dr. Andrew Kindon (West Valley College) and Phillip Wanyerka (Cleveland State University) along with Charles Mustain (ASC Group, Inc.), Jack Sulak (graphic designer and project photographer) and Shoshaunna Parks (Doctoral Candidate, Boston University).

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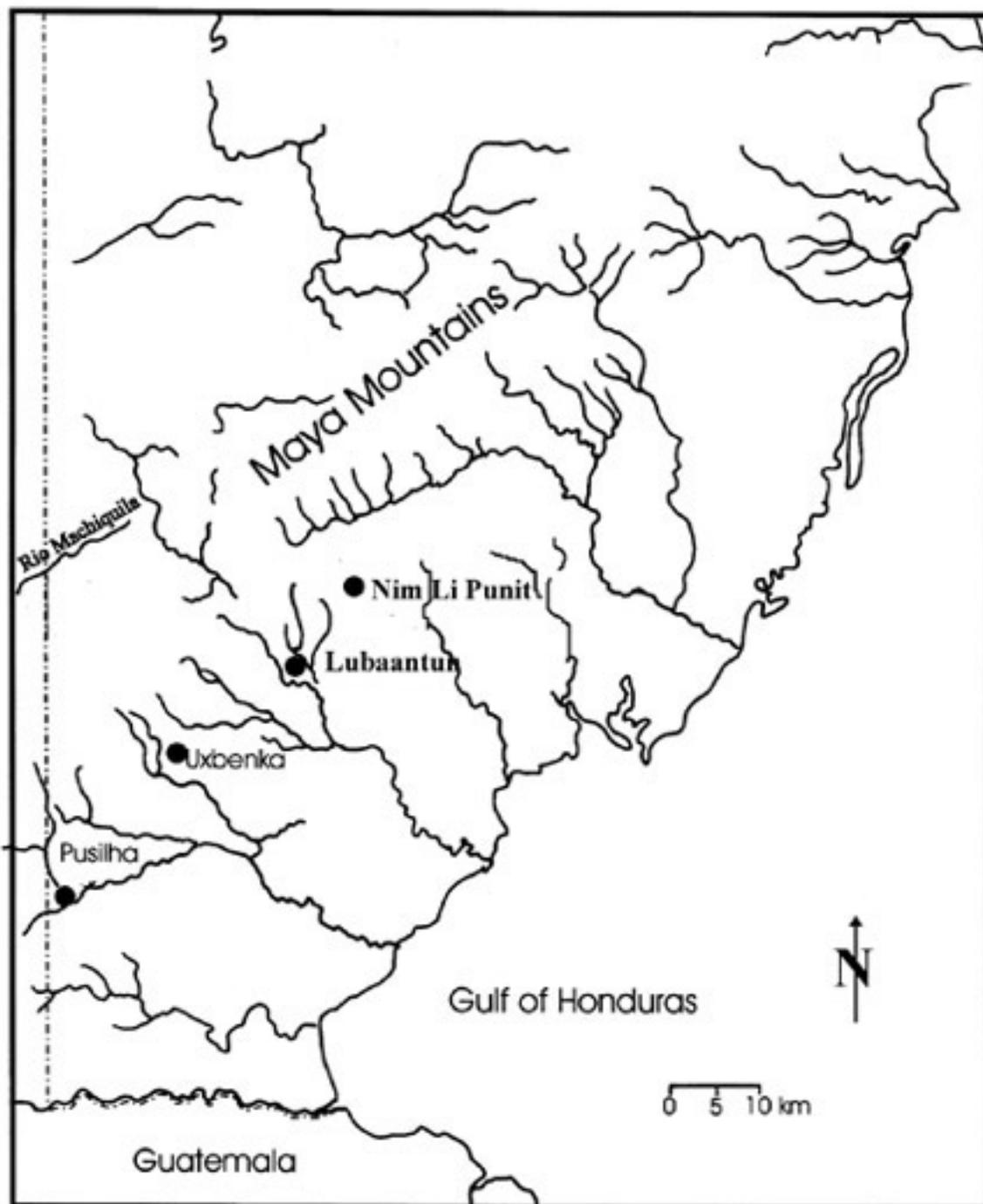


Figure 1. Map of southern Belize showing the location of important archaeological sites in the foothill region. Map by K. Pruffer.

Background to the Project

Uxbenká is located in the Toledo District of southern Belize ([Figure 1](#)), 10 km from the border of Guatemala along the San Antonio-Jalacte Road. The site is located directly adjacent to the roadway, and portions of the site are bisected by the road. Prior to 2005 little archaeological work had been done at Uxbenká. Parts of the site were first documented during Norman Hammond's survey of southern Belize in 1970 (Hammond 1975). In 1989 and 1990 Richard Leventhal surveyed and tested limited portions of the site as part of his regional Southern Belize Archaeological Project (SBAP). Leventhal mapped the now well known stelae plaza and documented several large outlying groups. He also conducted a series of test pits and small excavations beneath monuments in an effort to secure chronological data on the development of the site. During his investigations he encountered an intact, but collapsed, tomb in floor of the Stelae Plaza. While Leventhal's excavations did not produce any definitive Early Classic contexts, he remained convinced that Uxbenká was one of the earliest sites in southern Belize. This assessment was in no small part due to iconographic analyses of obvious Early Classic monuments from the site Stelae Plaza (now referred to as Group A). Leventhal (1990, 1992, and in an unpublished paper with Linda Schele) became the first to recognize that one of the monuments at the site potentially linked Uxbenká to Tikal. Unfortunately, due largely to hostility towards the project from one small faction in the modern Maya village of Santa Cruz, the SBAP did not continue excavations at the site.

Between 1990 and 2005 archaeological investigations at the site languished, and the only research conducted were periodic assessments of the over one-dozen carved monuments scattered across the Stelae Plaza (e.g. Wanyerka 1996). While these reports added significantly to the corpus of epigraphic data from southern Belize, and documented additional monument fragments not discovered by the SBAP, no new archaeological data on Uxbenká was produced during that time. In 1996 a Department of Archaeology (DOA, now Institute of Archaeology, IA) watchman turned over to the government a Middle Preclassic (ca 400 BC) jade spoon supposedly reportedly found atop a structure by an unknown villager, but more likely recovered from one of the many looted tombs that dot the site (Healy and Awe 1996). Unfortunately, due to the dispersed nature of the site core, and despite the presence of a DOA watchman for several years, looting activities and vandalism have resulted in numerous depredations. A 2002 Environmental Impact Assessment (McAnany *et al.* 2002) for a road-widening project indicated that the settlement associated with Uxbenká may be extensive and dispersed across a large area.

Currently, Uxbenká, located in the low hill above the coastal plain, and Ek Xux, located in the Maya Mountains, are the only southern Belize surface sites known to have settlements that predate AD 500 (Prufer 2005), although cave investigations in all areas of southern Belize have produced substantial Middle Preclassic through Early Classic contexts (Prufer 2002). The lack of Early Classic settlement in a region surrounded by earlier sites has puzzled numerous scholars. It may well be that the relative isolation of the region played a role in producing a unique developmental trajectory. Southern Belize is circumscribed geographically and difficult to access, both now and in the past.

To the north it is bounded by inhospitable pine-barrens, to the west by the formidable Maya Mountains, to the south by the swampy Temash and Sarstoon River basins, and to the east by the Caribbean Sea. Though it would be imprudent to suggest that these geographic features posed barriers to communication or trade, they may well have served as impediments to social contacts in the past, much as they did for most of the 19th and 20th centuries (see Thompson 1930). For residents of the Petén, southern Belize is most easily accessed through a passage in the low hills into the southern Petén, a passage that runs directly by Uxbenká and may have been a factor in the founding and long occupation of the site. Hammond (1978) has speculated that this may have formed a principal trade route in antiquity. The ridge that houses Uxbenká Groups 2-6 forms a perfect vantage point from which to observe traffic passing through this valley, which extends from a series of steep karst hills to the south to the escarpment rising into the Maya Mountains to the north.

Based on its relative geographic isolation, the presence of a passage into the Petén, idiosyncratic hieroglyphic texts, and unusual architectural styles southern Belize has been described variously as a "Maya realm" (Hammond 1975) or a "Maya cultural sphere" (Leventhal 1990, 1992) indicating that previous researchers see sufficient internal continuity in archaeological contexts to refer to southern Belize in a regional sense. Further, several researchers have observed that the distribution of sites across varied landforms in southern Belize may indicate their economic function for resource exchange with the southeast and the central Petén (Dunham and Prufer 1998; Graham 1994; McKillop 1996; Prufer 2002). Southern Belize is particularly rich in resources, both mineral and botanical (Dunham and Prufer 1997; Graham 1987). Geological and botanical resources from the volcanic Maya Mountains may have played a role in the development of sites in the foothills of the mountains (Prufer and Wanyerka 2001). The hills around Uxbenká and Pusilhá contain some of the richest soils in the Maya lowlands and may have been important for cultivation of cacao and other agricultural products (Wright *et al.* 1959). Even today the lands around Uxbenká are almost continuously farmed without fertilizers or the need for long fallow periods. Given its strategic location to potentially mediate or control trade, and its agricultural fertility, it is not surprising that Uxbenká flourished throughout the Classic Period.

Despite nearly a century of archaeological work in the region, the dynamics of how southern Belize was settled remain largely unknown. If Preclassic people resided in southern Belize we have no evidence of their settlements, despite speculation that such a resource-rich region would not likely be vacant (Dunham and Prufer 1998; Leventhal 1992). Until recently the discussion of early settlements in southern Belize were limited to two sites thought to have Early Classic components, Uxbenká and Pusilhá, as well as limited data from a handful of cave sites (Prufer 2002). Recent excavations at Pusilhá indicate that it was probably not occupied prior to AD 500 (Bill and Braswell 2005) despite retrospective monument dates indicating earlier dynastic associations. We can now add Ex Xux, located in the interior of the Maya Mountains, to the list of Early Classic sites, with a possible Late Preclassic settlement that extended through the Early Classic and possible links to the Stann Creek District to the north.

Neighboring regions were settled prior to the Early Classic. To the north, in the Stann Creek drainage and along the Placencia coast, there are settlements beginning in the Middle Preclassic and extending through the Postclassic (Graham 1994). In the southwestern foothills of the Maya Mountains in the Petén, the Atlas Arqueológico de Guatemala documented a number of Preclassic settlements suggesting the presence of stratified rural communities by at least AD 100 (Laporte 2001).

Today, Uxbenká is a substantial Classic Period site bordering less than 100 m north and east of residential compounds of the rural Mopan Maya farming community Santa Cruz, and less than 200 meters from the village center. The ruin is situated on lands of the San Antonio Indian Reservation, and portions of the site are currently under shifting cultivation with corn, bananas, okra, cacao and other subsistence crops. While the residents of Santa Cruz are fully aware that their "modern" village is situated upon the site of an "ancient" community, they have little knowledge of the significance of Uxbenká in terms of national or regional archaeological reconstructions. Because of Uxbenká's proximity to this indigenous Mayan village, and growing interest by the Belize Institute of Archaeology in the development of the site as a tourist destination, the UAP has also undertaken an applied social and cultural component. The collaborative archaeological-social anthropological nature of the project is intended to foster a constructive relationship between Santa Cruz village and the project researchers and to create a climate for sustainable community development situated around an archaeological cultural resource.

Archaeological Findings

The 2005 field season of the UAP addressed two specific archaeological research goals. First, we assessed and mapped both the size and spatial layout of the Uxbenká site core and all major architectural groups contained therein. Second, we began the process of documenting the settlement system through survey, mapping, and the collection of spatial data.

Our 2005 methodology was one of mapping and survey. Uxbenká was mapped using a Sokkia SET 610 Total Station. Mapping was conducted by Keith M. Prufer and Dr. Andrew Kindon, with assistance from Chuck Mustain. We mapped all of the structures in the civic/ceremonial core groups (A-G, K) and the surrounding topography. A base datum (0-N, 0-E, 0-Z) was established atop a small hill in Group K, at an existing permanent Lands Survey Marker. Permanent concrete datums were established in each architectural group at the site, and each datum was identified by both its location within the site grid (NEZ) and using a DeLorme Blue Logger GPS, with the locations corrected using PostPro correction software. These data resulted in a working map of the site core ([Figure 2](#)). GPS data was also collected from a sample of residential groups dispersed across hillsides within 2 km of the site core.

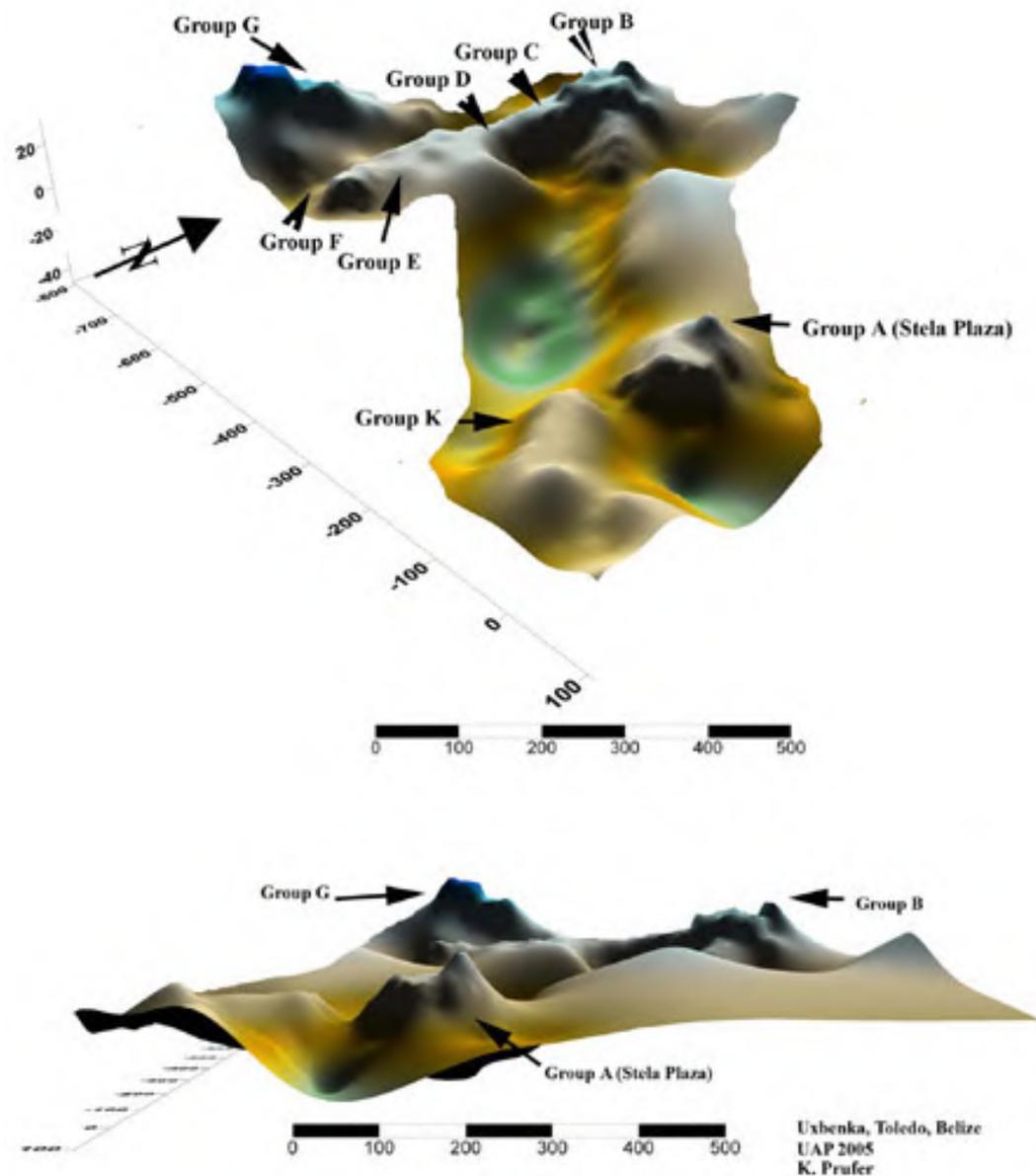


Figure 2. Surface maps of the entire site core at Uxbenká. The plan map (top) is viewed from above and facing to the northwest. The profile map (below) is facing west. Map by K. Prufer and A. Kindon.

The core area of the ruin, which appears to represent both the civic, ceremonial, and elite residential components of the ancient community, consists of seven architectural plazas spread across three sets of ridges and hilltops (Figure 2). Though analyses of the spatial data is still ongoing, and no excavations have yet been conducted, the layout of the site indicates that these plaza groups can be roughly grouped into three clusters: The stelae Plaza (Group A); a set of 5 conjoined plazas forming the core ceremonial

groups at the site (Groups B-F) and an 'acropolis' residential group (Group G) located atop the highest hill in the site core.

Group A is the well known Stelae Plaza, which was initially documented by Richard Leventhal ([Figure 3](#)) in the late 1980s and has periodically been open to the public over the last 15 years. This group is located atop a leveled and modified hilltop and consists of six structures surrounding a small (30 m × 50 m) plaza that contains a minimum of 22 carved and uncarved monuments and stela. Group A is dominated by a large (10 m high) triadic temple building oriented facing south. This building likely once had a substantial frontal stairway that has been partially looted and collapsed. The remainders of the buildings in this group are modest. The collapsed plaza tomb located and excavated by Leventhal is still intact. Group A is linked to Group K, a large open plaza bounded by three platforms and a long range structure ([Figure 4](#)). The link between Groups A and K is established by a two sets of stairways, each of which control access to their respective groups, oriented to face each other ([Figure 5](#)).



Figure 3. Photograph of the view of the Stelae Plaza (Group A) after clearing of vegetation. The large slabs of stone seen in the background are complete and fragmentary monuments. Photo by P. Wanyerka.

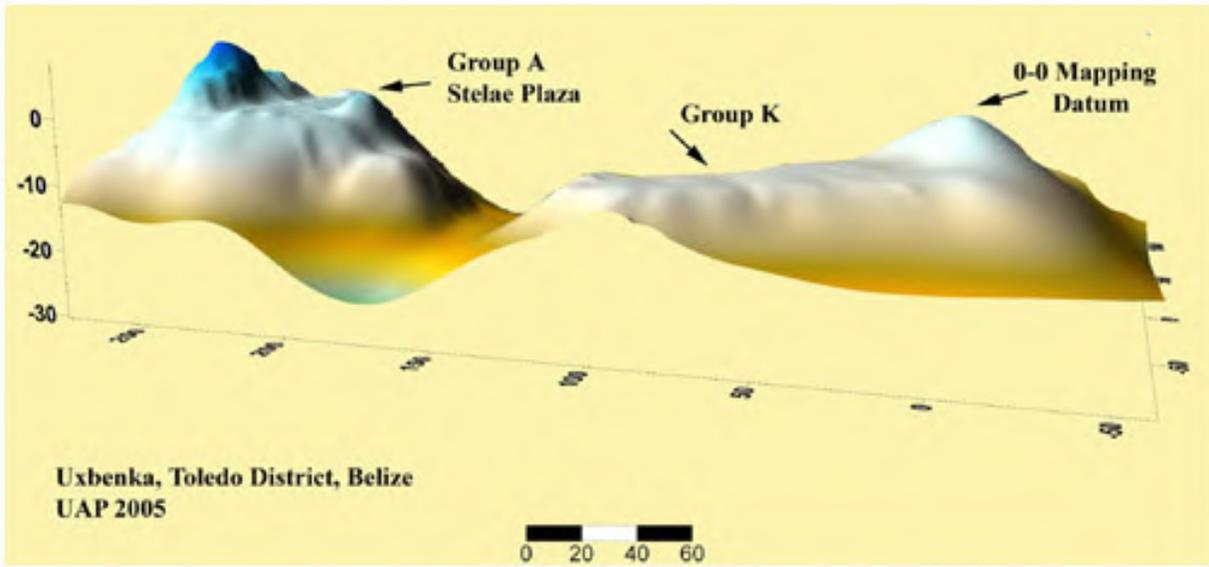


Figure 4. Surface map in profile of Groups A and K. The substantial triadic temple Str. A-1 is the tallest architectural feature at the site. Map by K. Prufer and A. Kindon.

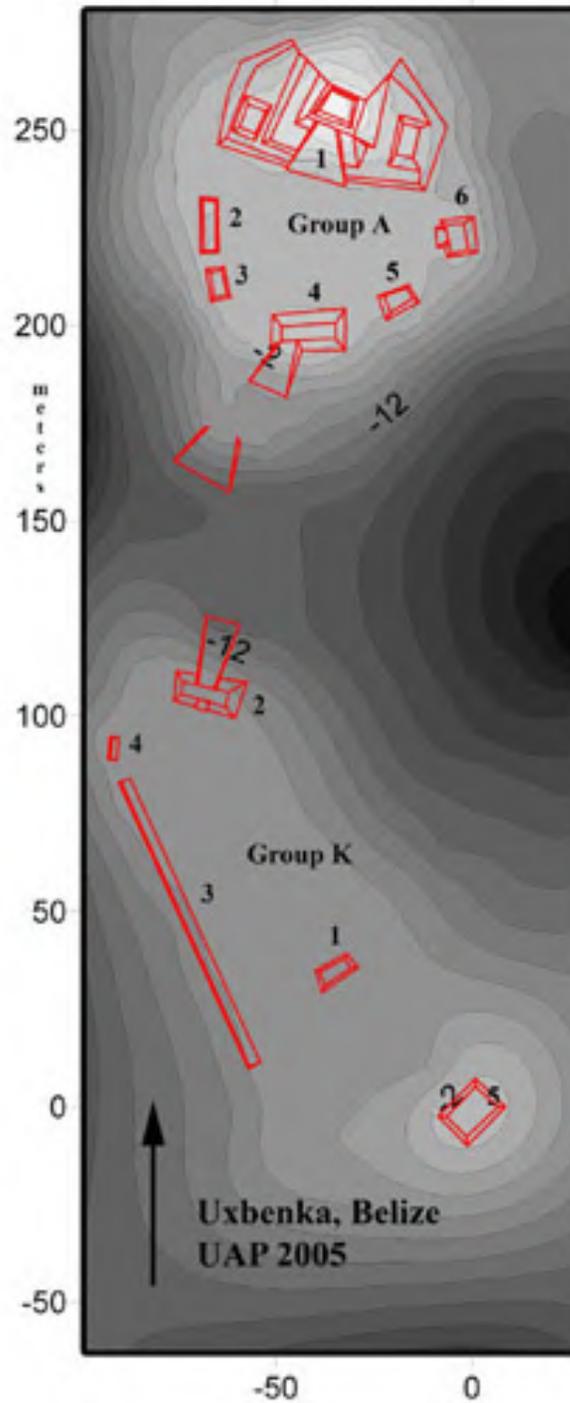


Figure 5. Topographic map and line drawings of structures in Group A and Group K. Note that each group is accessed by stairways facing onto each other. Map by K. Prufer and A. Kindon.

At the base of the Group A hilltop, directly below Structure A-5, we documented a small modified spring or well ([Figure 6](#)). The well is a 110 cm diameter circular depression

carved from soft limestone at the point where a small spring emerges from a crevice in the bedrock. The area around the well was walled in antiquity with dressed blocks, perhaps indicating that the well was part of a larger water containment feature ([Figure 7](#)). Further excavation and clearing will clarify the size, organization, and function of this feature.

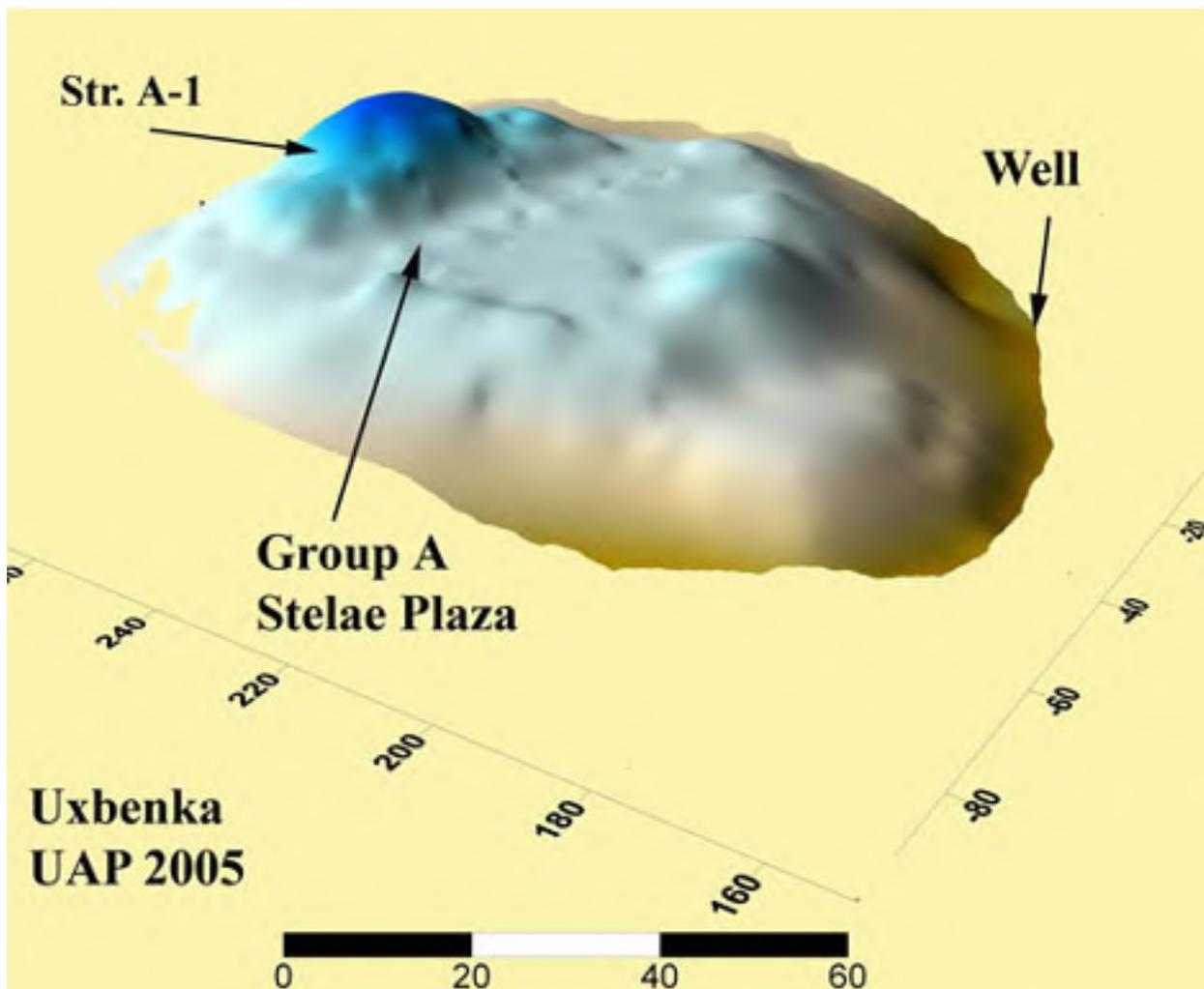


Figure 6. Detailed surface map of Group A, Stelae Plaza showing the location of the modified well or spring below Str. A-5. The relief features in front of Str. A-1 are the locations of known stela placements. Map by K. Pruffer and A. Kindon.



Figure 7. Photograph of the constructed well at the base of the Group A hill. The feature is surrounded by stone walls, many of which are still partially buried. Photo by K. Prufer.

In a small residential group just east of Group A we also noted the presence of Early Classic and Late Preclassic ceramics in looted contexts, though these were not collected. This group of modest .5 to 1.5 m high buildings contained at least one well made cut stone tomb that had been looted in the last 10 years, based on vegetation growing in the disturbance.

Groups B through F ([Figure 8](#)) consist of a series of descending and conjoined plaza groups linked by stairways and low steps. Group B, the highest of these plazas, is located 450 m NW of Group A and dominates the 550 m north/south modified ridge. It consists of 9 structures including a south facing temple building, four patio structures, and a large ballcourt. Its access appears to have been highly restricted. One structure (C-1) is shared between Group B and Group C, with a low stairway facing north towards the ballcourt (Strs. B-7/8), a temple building (Str. B-4) and a second larger stairway leading into the plaza of Group C. The largest structure in Group B is the temple building (Str. B-4) which is almost 8 m in height. Group B houses architecture almost as tall as the Stelae Group (Group A) and more massive. Where architecture is exposed it reveals finely dressed blocks, many of which were cut at angles to create sloping walls, and covered with layers of plaster ([Figure 9](#)). One of the Ballcourt structures (B-7) has been badly looted, revealing that the entire core of the building was constructed of cut-

stone blocks rather than dirt or rubble fill. At least half of the buildings in this group have not been damaged by looting (Figure 10). The hillsides surrounding Group B are steep and dressed with cut stone terraces creating the visual effect of exaggerating the size of the architectural group considerably (Figure 11).

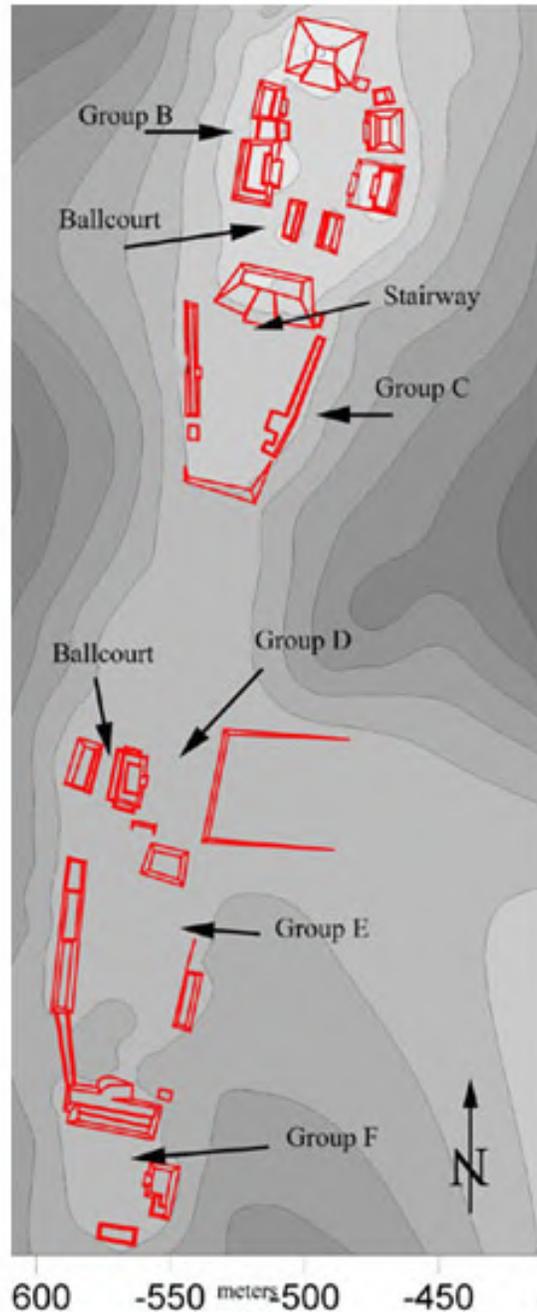


Figure 8. Topographic map of the ridge atop of which Groups B through F are located. The locations of both ballcourts are also marked. Map by K. Prufer and A. Kindon.



Figure 9. Photograph of the detail of Group B Str. B-5 showing cut blocks coated with plaster. These blocks were exposed by looting activity. Photo by K. Prufer.



Figure 10. Photograph of Group B after clearing. The transit is set up atop a patio group (Str. B-2) and in the background is the central temple building (B-4). Photo by K. Prufer.



Figure 11. Photographic view of Groups B and C from the trail leading to the Stelae Plaza. Photo by K. Prufer.

From Group B the abovementioned stairway descends into Group C, which consists of an open plaza ringed by cut stone terraces and three low buildings ([Figure 12](#)). Aside from the stairway accessing Group B, there is no monumental architecture in Group C. Group D is located below Group C and has two major features: a ballcourt located along the western edge of the plaza and a large (60 m × 70 m) low (< 2 m high) platform that may have been partially or completely paved with large limestone slabs. Group D is separated from Group E by a single raised step and a low, but badly looted platform. Group E consists of two range structures along the east and west edges of the ridge and facing onto Groups A and G ([Figure 13](#)). The ridge terminates with Group F, a three-structure group that faces directly towards Group G, the Acropolis. Quite interestingly, looting off the sides of structures in this group has produced scatters of Early Classic ceramics, providing clues for future excavations targeting the early component at the site.

Group G, the 'Acropolis' consists of two plaza groups atop two flattened hilltops ([Figure 14](#)). The top 1/3 of the hillside (between 12 and 30 m high) had been faced with cut stone giving the hill the massive appearance of a large platform. However, the architecture atop the hill is quite diminutive, consisting of 6 small structures, the highest of which is just slightly over 3.5 m tall ([Figure 15](#)). Both hilltops of Group G have commanding views across the entire valley and into the foothills of the Maya Mountains, several miles distant ([Figure 16](#)). The upper terrace at Group G was at least partially

constructed from cutting away the hillside to create the effect of a two-tiered platform. On the north face of the upper terrace at least three exposed and looted plaza tombs were mapped. These appear to be similar to the plaza tomb excavated by Leventhal in Group A in 1990.

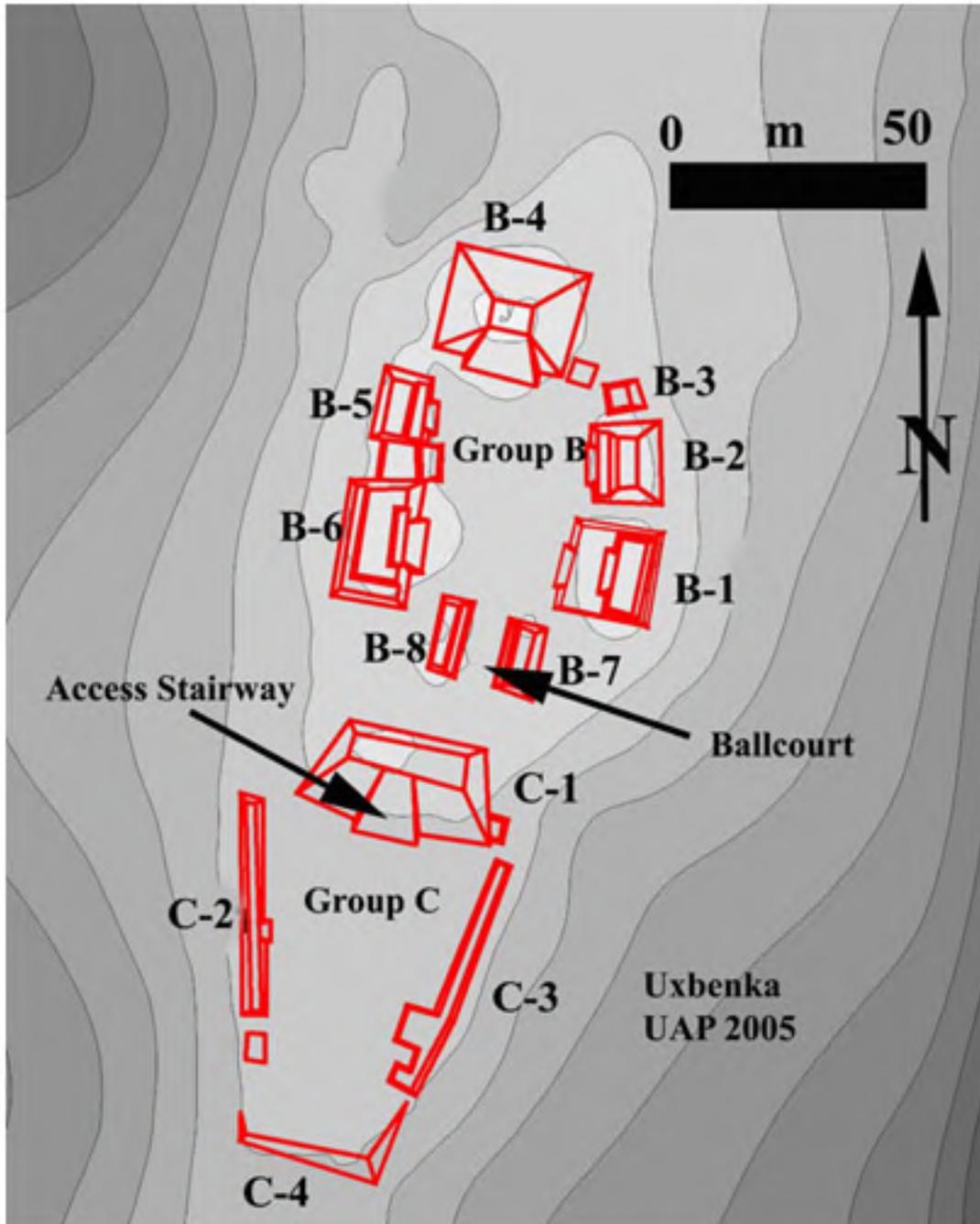


Figure 12. Topographic map of Groups B and C showing the stairway access into Group B from below and the location of the ballcourt. Map by K. Prufer and A. Kindon.

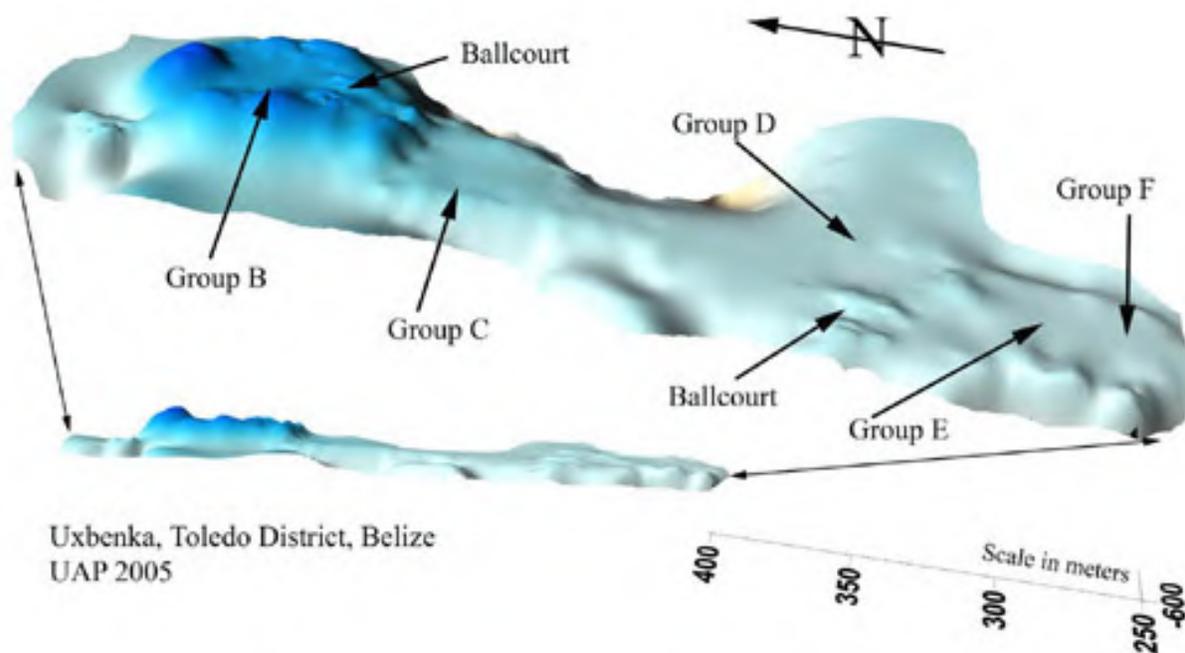


Figure 13. Surface maps of the ridge where groups B through F are located. The ridge slopes from the highest point (Group B) to the lowest (Group F). Map by K. Prufer and A. Kindon.

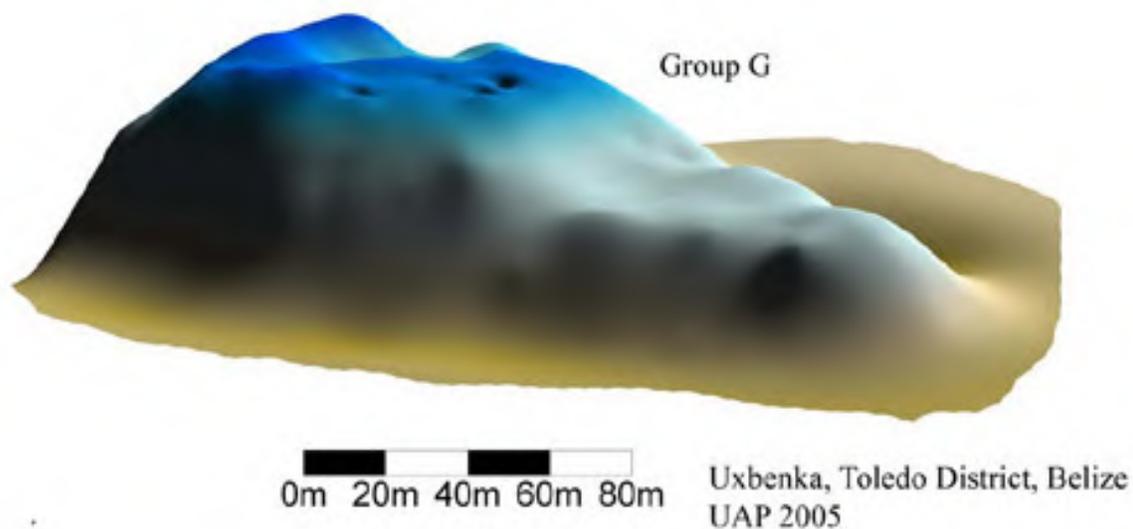


Figure 14. Surface map of Group G, Acropolis, viewed from the southeast. The shallow depressions on the upper terrace are looted tombs. Map by K. Prufer and A. Kindon.

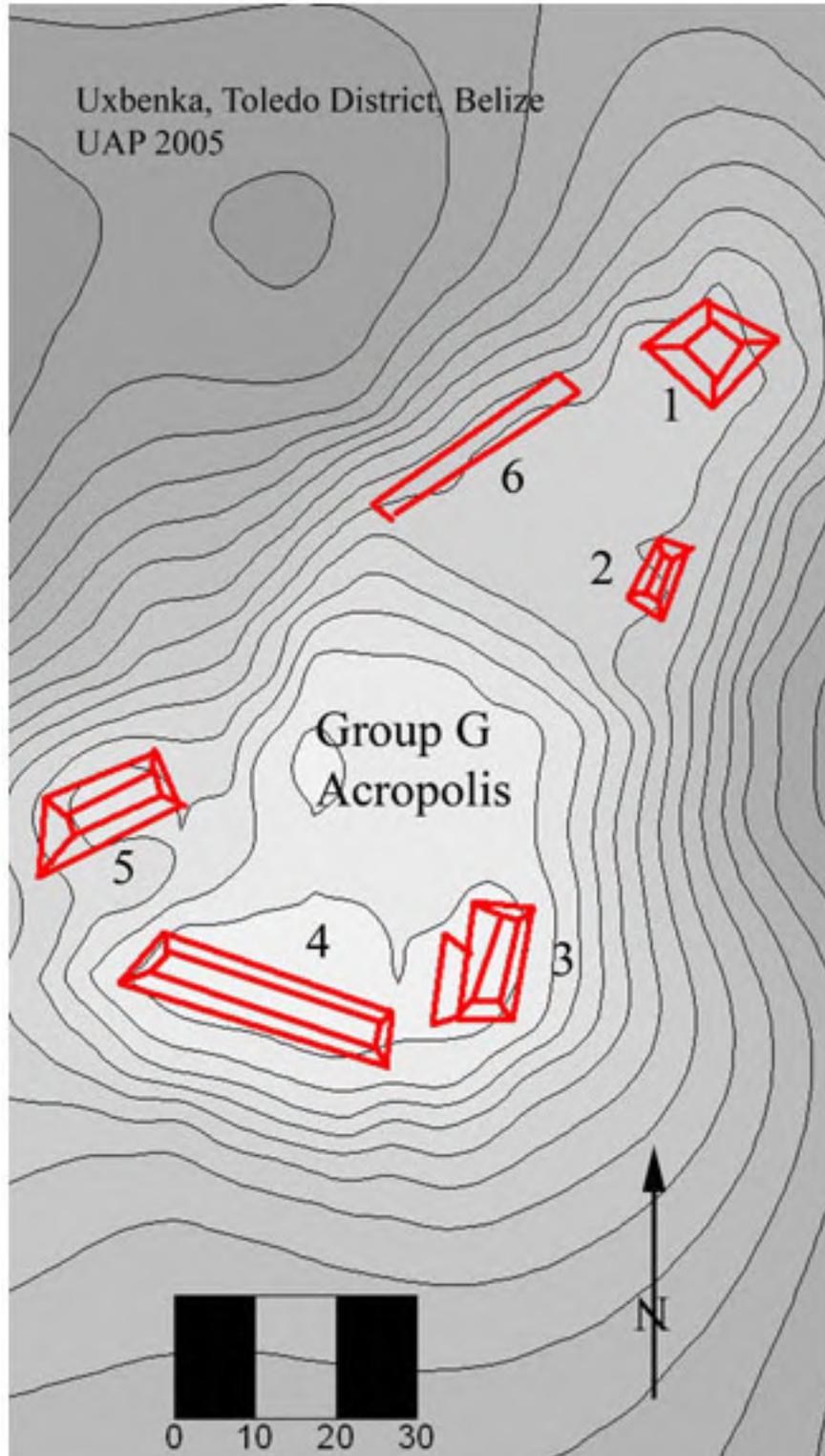


Figure 15. Topographic map of Group G, Acropolis, showing the location of structures within the group. Map by K. Pruffer and A. Kindon.



Figure 16. Photograph of the view from Group G to the north and towards the foothills of the Maya Mountains. Photo by K. Prufer.

The second aspect of archaeological research, the settlement survey, was initiated in order to begin to assess the organization and structure of the population that resided at Uxbenká. In 2005 we specifically intended to determine whether settlement architecture was confined largely to hilltops and ridgelines. This determination has important methodological implications for future research designs involving settlement surveys in the region. Based on pedestrian survey and spot-checking of hilltops at varying distances from the site core, it now appears that residential architecture is confined to hilltops and ridgelines, and that no residential architecture is located between hilltops or in small valleys. A total of 19 residential groups, consisting of at least 60 structures were documented and mapped to the east, west, and north of the site. No studies have yet been conducted to the south of the site, along the Rio Blanco drainage, but we have been told by local informants that there is extensive, and in some cases quite large, architectural groups in that area. Settlement groups were mapped by pace and compass and their locations marked using a DeLorme Blue Logger GPS with the data later post-processed using PostPro software. Settlement studies will continue in 2006.

Epigraphic Findings

Fieldwork for the epigraphic portion of the UAP was conducted between 3 June and 2 July, 2005. Epigraphic studies were limited to the Stelae Plaza (Group A) area of the site. We anticipate that subsequent seasons will produce additional epigraphic data from other areas of the site. In 2005 four activities were undertaken: First, a reassessment of the known monuments and sculptures; second, cleaning of the extant monuments; third, an exploration of the Stelae Plaza for new monuments and monument fragments; and fourth, the relocation of selected monuments from the site core to the Community Center in nearby Santa Cruz. The cleaning, reassessing, and documenting of monuments, as well as the disassembling of several modern stone walls containing sculptural fragments were overseen by project epigrapher and co-PI Phillip Wanyerka with assistance from project photographer Jack Sulak ([Figure 17](#)). All project members, including workmen, were involved in efforts to locate new monument fragments.

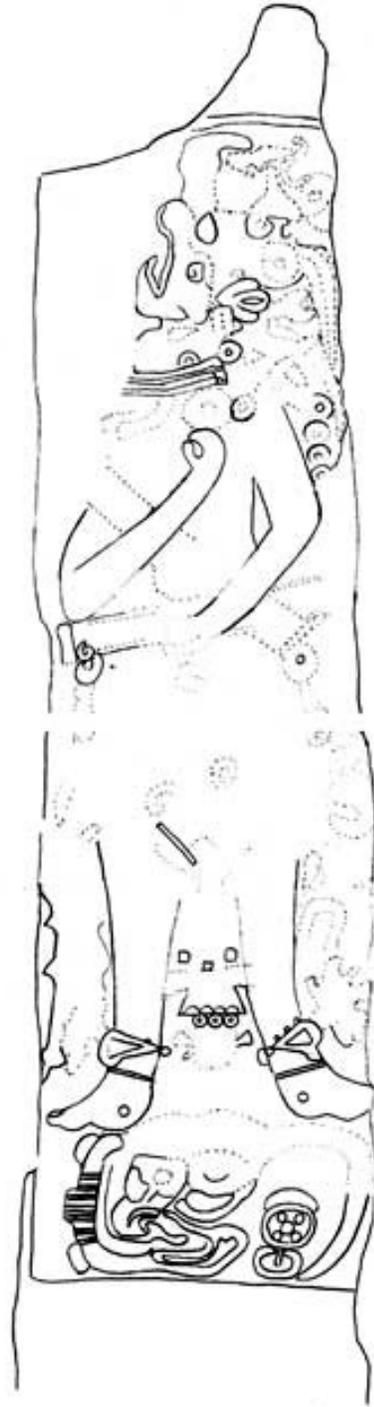


Figure 17. Project photographer Jack Sulak documenting the in situ base of Stela 6 in the Stelae Plaza (Group A). All of the known monuments were re-photographed using hi-resolution digital imagery. Photo by P. Wanyerka.

All of the known carved monuments at Uxbenká are found in Group A, the Stela Plaza. While the majority of these date to the Late Classic (AD 500-900), Uxbenká's Early Classic (AD 250-500) monuments may be among the earliest dated stelae in Belize. One nearly complete monument provides the most direct evidence for connections between Uxbenká and Tikal during that time period. Uxbenká Stela 11 has been dated stylistically to within one K'atun of approximately 8.18.0.0.0 (AD 396). It records the name of an Early Classic Tikal ruler: *Chak Tok' Ich'aak I* (Grube *et al.* 1999; Wanyerka 2005), who was also quite likely the last ruling member of the first Tikal dynasty. Diagnostic elements on Stela 11 include a *Sak Hix*, a Tikal founder motif and an *Une B'alam*, the name of a personage from Tikal, as well as a probable but badly eroded Tikal Emblem Glyph. These features appear to stylistically link Uxbenká Stela 11 directly to Tikal Stela 31 (a more detailed discussion of the entire corpus of monuments from Uxbenká can be found in Wanyerka, 2003).

During the 2005 season we conducted inventories of all 22 of the known stelae (both carved and uncarved) and of the 41 plain monument fragments located in the main Stelae Plaza (Group A). With the exception of one fragment, all of the previously documented carved monuments were accounted for, cleaned, reexamined, photographed, and checked against extant drawings. Following the clearing of the Stelae Plaza, and an extensive search of the area, it was determined that a substantial portion of the right lateral half of Stela 21 (an Early Classic monument first reported by Leventhal) is missing and presumed to have been stolen. This monument fragment depicts a fine-line portrait of an Early Classic ruler holding an undulating Serpent Bar. While this fragment has been previously documented, its loss is significant and speaks to the need for increased protection of the monuments at Uxbenká.

In the course of locating and verifying each monument and monument fragment, two previously unknown carved monument fragments belonging to Stela 6 were identified ([Figure 18](#)). Re-fitted, it now appears that Stela 6 measured over than 3.5 m in height and may depict a finely dressed royal personage. While no new hieroglyphic inscriptions were found in association with these two new fragments, the figural scene likely portrays a standing male (facing left) possibly adorned with an elaborate headdress. Unfortunately, much of the monument is badly eroded. What is quite interesting about this monument is that the central fragment has been known and numbered for years. However, the carved image was obscured by thick layers of lichen and/or mosses. It was only in the process of cleaning the monument that the image revealed itself.



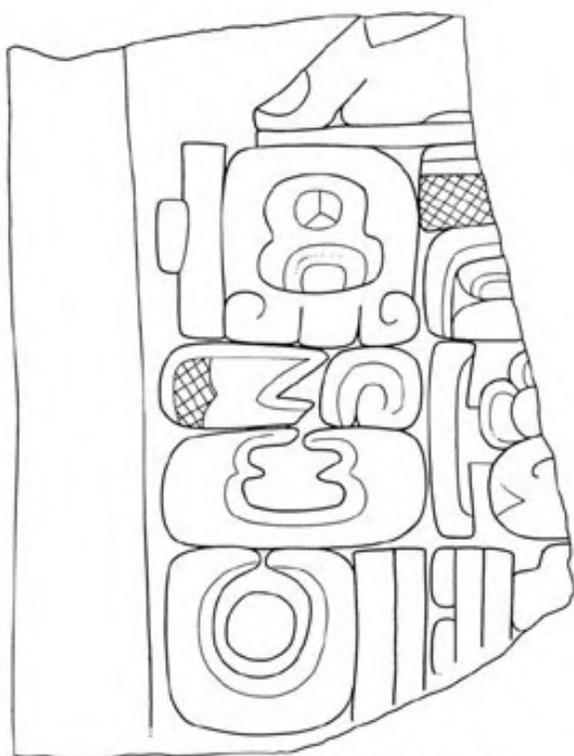
Drawing P. Wanyerka



**UXBENKA: STELA 6
Photo J. Sulak**

Figure 18. Uxbenká Stela 6. The line drawing on the left is based on the mosaic of monument fragments reconstructed digitally. Drawing by P. Wanyerka, Photo by J. Sulak.

While clearing vegetation atop the southeastern corner of Str. A-5, in the main Stelae Plaza Group (Group A) a workman directed our attention to a fragment of Stela 23, lying face down alongside a looter's pit (Figure 19, also see Figure 5 for a map showing the location of Str. A-5). The stela fragment is carved from fine-grained sand or mudstone, measuring 31 cm high × 23 cm wide × 24 cm thick. The text is extremely well preserved with an almost "cookie cutter"-like relief. Carved on the front of the fragment is a short six glyph block text and a partial figural image of a right foot. The text and image clearly represent only a small portion of the monument. This suggests that a portrait of a standing Uxbenká king stills lies somewhere at the site. Given the remarkable preservation of this text, and the likelihood that it came from a sealed subsurface context, we are hopeful that excavations will produce more fragments of this monument.



Uxbenka Stela 23
UAP 2005
Drawing: Peter Mathews



Photograph by P. Wanyerka

Figure 19. Line drawing and photograph of Uxbenká Stela 23. The Calendar Round date of the monument is 9.1.0.0.0 6 Ajaw 13 Yaxk'in, or 25 August, AD 455. Drawing by P. Mathews, Photo by P. Wanyerka.

The Stela 23 fragment is an Early Classic in style and records an Initial Series date of 9.1.0.0.0 6 *Ajaw* 13 *Yaxk'in* (25 August, AD 455). Photographs of the text were circulated to epigraphers Nikolai Grube, Simon Martin, David Stuart, and Peter

Mathews. All four of them concur that the date of this inscription refers to the Period Ending of 9.1.0.0.0 (personal communications to Wanyerka, September 2005).

The text begins with a beautiful representation of an Early Classic Ajaw (Lord) glyph. Recorded at A1 is the *Tzolk'in* day name 6 *Ajaw*. Immediately following the *Tzolk'in* is a truncated Lunar or Supplemental Series featuring the Lord of the Night. In this case G9 appears to have been recorded since the main sign appears to feature a half-darkened *K'IN* sign. The text continues at A2 with an unusual form of what is likely Glyph D. According to Nikolai Grube this example may be a "New Moon" reference (personal communication to Wanyerka, September 2005). The only other known glyphic combination of a *ti'* syllabic sign and the *CH'EEEN* (T769) logograph is found on the left side text of La Milpa Stela 7, a monument that has been proposed to date to 9.17.10.0.0 (Grube 1994). The context for both texts suggests that the scribe was implying that the moon was no longer visible. According to the Vienna Dictionary, the Yucatek term *binaan u, binan u tu ch'en uh* translates literally as "the moon gone, the moon has gone to her well" (Thompson 1950:236). Though we cannot specifically read this particular form of Glyph D, the *ch'een* or "cave" sign suggests that this was the intended meaning. On the Period Ending date of 9.1.0.0.0 the moon was 28.9 days old (25 August, AD 455) which would mean that the moon would not be visible, hence in the new moon. Following Glyph D is an unusual form of Glyph C, this time recorded with a *na* prefix indicating "first" along with a highly stylized form of the Jaguar-Eye element and "flat-hand" of the standard Glyph C collocation. This probably indicates that the first lunation had ended. Following at A3 is Glyph A, stating that the lunation was 30 days long. The *Haab'* date is recorded as 13 *Yaxk'in*. Taken together, the Initial Series and supporting lunar data record the Long Count date of 9.1.0.0.0 6 *Ajaw* 13 *Yaxk'in*, making Stela 23 one of the earliest dated stela in southern Belize.

Another previously undocumented carved monument fragment was located just south of a looter's pit near Str. A-1. This carved fragment (37 cm by 40 cm) may represent a stylized eye, perhaps a component of a carved Witz (Mountain) Monster. Unfortunately, this monument fragment is too eroded to provide additional data.

As part of the exploration for carved monuments and monument fragments three modern walls, originally created by the watchmen during the 1990's, were disassembled by Wanyerka and each stone examined for evidence that it may have been part of a monument or sculpture ([Figure 20](#)). These three walls, two located atop the Stelae Plaza (Group A) near the stairway of Str. A-1 (Wall 1 and Wall 2) and one located on the medial terrace leading up to the Stelae Plaza from Group K. These walls yielded four highly eroded carved or shaped stone fragments, including a possible representation of a feline head. The other three fragments (most under 20 cm in length) are so eroded that, though shaped, they contain largely unrecognizable iconographic motifs.



Figure 20. Moderns walls constructed over the last 20 years by workmen and watchmen at the site were disassembled in our search for new monument fragments. Photo by P. Wanyerka.

Finally, after consultation with Dr. John Morris, Associate Director of the Institute of Archaeology, three of the most elaborate and beautiful monument fragments were removed from the site core to the Community Center in the village of Santa Cruz. These monument fragments were relocated because they are portable enough to potentially be stolen from what is currently (in 2005) an unguarded site. These fragments were placed in sealed wooden crate constructed specifically to contain them, and are currently under the care of the village Alcalde and the Chairman of the Santa Cruz Village Council with permission of the IA.

Social and Cultural Research Findings

The cultural component of the Uxbenká Archaeological Project 2005 field season was intended to accomplish two related goals: First, to build trusting relationships as the foundation of long-term collaborative relationship between archaeological researchers and the Mopan Maya community of Santa Cruz; and, second, to assess the attitudes, sentiments, and desires of the local community towards potential development of Uxbenká as a tourist destination. The UAP is firm in its belief that long-term protection of cultural resources located so close to a community can only be successful in the

context of collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships between the local community, researchers, and those government agencies responsible for cultural preservation ([Figure 21](#)).



Figure 21. Project Director Keith Prufer surveying in a Mopan Mayan maize field. Working at Uxbenká requires extra sensitivity and consideration of the presence of the modern economic system that can be disrupted by archaeological activities. Photo by UAP.

Considering that the ruin of Uxbenká is located literally adjacent to the indigenous Mopan community, and that the community has had no experience with archaeologists in over 15 years, these efforts are particularly important and timely. Specific cultural research was conducted under permits issued by the Institute of Social and Cultural Research (ISCR) to the UAP. Collaborative partner and cultural anthropologists, Dr. Rebecca Zarger (University of Oklahoma) and the project director (Prufer) along with Doctoral Candidate Shoshaunna Parks (Boston University) are currently working on a long-term plan for Uxbenká that will incorporate the needs of the nearby community into both research and development plans. Fieldwork in 2005 was intended to gather primary demographic data on the community and to complete a survey dealing with concerns and attitudes of villagers.

In order to acquire a range of community opinion a survey was developed and administered over a period of approximately three weeks during June and July 2005. Those included in the survey were drawn from a village-wide sample intended to fairly represent the interests of different families and religious factions within the community. This careful selection of participants allowed the opportunity for researchers to directly consider the concerns, hopes, and expectations of individuals rather than relying solely on village leaders to represent all members of their community (Figure 22). The gathering of this data will contribute to our goals in two ways: First, survey data allows researchers to assess varying opinions of people in the village and will assist researchers and developers in determining future strategies for collaborative development of archaeological tourism in and around Santa Cruz; Second, direct interaction and consultation with multiple households within the village helps the residents to feel a sense of ownership in both the research and development processes and sets the precedent of making the community "shareholders" in future activities at the ruin.



Figure 22. A pathway and home in the modern Mopan Maya village Santa Cruz. Photo by S. Parks.

The survey administered to residents of Santa Cruz covered a range of topics regarding the Uxbenká ruin, including what the participant would like to see happen at the ruin,

whether other local villages should be included in work at Uxbenká, potential opportunities for employment and development of the site, the best method for consulting the community, and whether the ruin should be developed for tourism. All questions were approved in advance by ISCR and met with Government of Belize guidelines for Human Subjects in Research.

Survey participants were selected from approximately one-third (24) of the 67 households currently present in Santa Cruz. Heads of household, both male (14) and female (10), were specifically targeted because of their authority to represent the interests and opinions of their immediate family. Representatives of approximately one-half of the households employed at Uxbenká during the 2005 field season (23 out of 47) were included in the survey. Only one survey was administered to a villager who was not employed at Uxbenká due to the absence of a social security card. This deficiency in the survey data is attributable to the lack of information regarding households that were not employed during the 2005 season during the period of time when surveys were being conducted. This discrepancy will be rectified in the 2006 season. All surveys were conducted within the confines of the household of the participant. While other family members, including spouses and children, were often present during the administration of the survey, only the responses provided by the participant were recorded. In two cases (both involving female participants) a child was chosen by the participant to help them translate the English questions into Mopan Maya. All surveys were administered verbally and recorded by hand by the surveyor. The identities of all respondents were intentionally kept confidential and no personally identifiable information was collected.

Conclusion and Future Directions

In 2005 the UAP set out to document the size and spatial layout of the site core at Uxbenká and to assess the condition of the site for future archaeological research. These goals have been met, allowing us to now develop a strategy for excavations at the site beginning in 2006. Our epigraphic goals were to document the extant monuments in Group A and to search for new monuments and monuments fragments. Our success in locating new monument fragments, some of which are well preserved, is encouraging. We are hopeful that excavations in Group A, and continued clearing of vegetation in the site core, will produce additional monuments and fragments. Our social research goals were to establish a working relationship with the village of Santa Cruz, where Uxbenká is located. These goals were also met, and we feel we have developed both a spirit of collaboration and friendship with the village leadership and the residents of Santa Cruz Village. Their support will be critical to our future success.

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