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## **Documentation of the Blue Creek Jade Shaft**

**Research Year:** 1995

**Culture:** Maya

**Chronology:** Late Classic

**Location:** Belize

**Site:** Blue Creek Ruin

In the closing hours of the 1994 field season at the **Blue Creek Ruin** in northwestern Belize, the excavation team discovered the beginning of what became the second largest cache of jade objects discovered in the Maya world. To understand its significance, it is necessary to understand the general chronology of construction of the monumental architecture at Blue Creek.

The site plan was clearly in place by approximately 100 A.D. with both the Main Plaza and the Plaza B complexes largely organized. For the next 400 years, construction continued at a rapid pace. Structure 9, for example, was built in 6 construction phases during this period. On the front of one of those buildings was a set of plaster masks declaring it to be a Nikteil Na or Accession House for kings.

The last major ritual act during this part of Blue Creek's history was the excavation of a large section of the center front of Str. 4 on the Main Plaza. When this was refilled, a stone lined shaft approximately 6 meters deep was left in place. Then, in an event securely dated to 500 A.D., the shaft was filled with human adornments, smashed and burning incensarios and other objects, including more than 900 jade artifacts. All of these jade artifacts were body adornments and many were anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, including a full set of four royal bib heads.

For approximately 300 years, there was no more major monumental construction at Blue Creek. In fact, the graceful, 50' tall, Structure 1 with its 16 columns supporting a thatch roof, was razed to accommodate a final royal tomb and a platform top at the same time or a bit later.

We see the ritual deposit, the "jade shaft," at Str. 4 as representing a pivotal moment in Blue Creek's history. Speculation regarding its meaning ranges from preparations for a disastrous war to the death of a king and the end of the ruling lineage. In any case, Blue Creek's autonomy seems to have ended.

FAMSI funds were used to allow the excavator and an assistant to return to Belize in the fall of 1994 and continue documentation of the materials from the cache.

## Sources Cited

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*Submitted 04/01/1998 by:*  
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