5 January 2020

Dear Friends of Exploring Solutions Past:

A year unlike any other, 2020 will not easily be forgotten. Thank you all for your continued interest and support in our work.

From our remote home offices – where, since March, we have been carrying on our work – we have made remarkable progress on our three main areas of outreach:

- Archaeology Under the Canopy,
- Forest Gardens, and
- the Peace Park Initiative.

We have compiled and drafted all our El Pilar excavation plans and profiles and we have updated and confirmed our mapping data for 14 km^2 surveys from 2014 to 2019. We have published several articles on our work with forest gardeners and have established the foundation for a museum exhibition on El Pilar and the Forest Gardens in Belize. We have advanced our international work participating in the Selva Maya consortium, with a proposed multi-organizational collaboration through the NASA DEVELOP program, and a podcast with the Organization of American States or OAS.

I had a lecture on El Pilar focusing on our Lidar mapping and our community outreach programs at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln on the 10th of March. When I got back to UCSB, the world was crackling with unsettling intelligence that had been brewing, and, shortly thereafter, we were all sheltering at home. Our work transformed. Remote, internet facilitated meetings were scheduled near and far; lectures and meetings were managed with Zoom. Amazingly, we discovered new and exciting ways to work towards our goals. Technology prevailed and kept us working and connecting.

Archaeology Under the Canopy: No field season for 2020, but there is plenty of lab work. Reporting on the amazing story of El Pilar, while published in overview, has not been detailed. Paulino Morales, our Guatemala Research Fellow, is a talented archaeological drafts person and repurposed his attentions from the field to finalizing our c. 130 plans and profiles from our extensive field notes from 1993 to 2004. These data reveal the long prehistorical construction of the major center of El Pilar. In addition, we were able to update our Maya Forest Atlas with our detailed site survey data on ancient Maya settlement and dominant trees recorded from 2014 to 2019. This establishes our foundation for completing the final 6 km^2 that we see on the forefront for 2021 …..

Our UCSB collaboration is being rapidly expanded. Our interns have developed a way to visualize the Milpa Cycle for El Pilar setting the stage for spatially examining the sustainability of the system. Dr. Keith Clarke, VP of ESP Maya, and I were awarded a National Science Foundation grant to gather new data on vegetation and soil for El Pilar. Based on this UCSB collaboration, with these data, we will work with our citizen scientist Forest Gardeners to explore the geographic patterns of ancient Maya settlements in detail based on our local area predictive model of Maya land use.

The Maya Forest Gardens: The core of our research and outreach is centered on understanding the Maya milpa forest garden cycle and how it links to ancient Maya land use. We look at our exhibitions, presentations, and publications as re-awakening the understanding of these time honored traditions, native to the Maya Forest. Interviews and news reports preceding the celebratory closure of the Mexican Embassy exhibition in Belize City highlighted a real public interest in forest gardens. The

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success of this exhibition aroused attention of the Museum of Belize, setting the stage for its redesign for a permanent setting intended to meet the new education curriculum of the nation.

An award from the New England Biolabs Foundation continues support of our Forest Garden outreach, allowing our team on the ground to carry on their valuable work engaging students and practitioners in the vitality of the gardens. We have been able to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Museum of Belize to move ahead in our collaboration on exhibit plans. We are joining with the Belize AgroForestry Policy team to develop our school programs as part of the implementation phase ahead. We see heightened interest in gardening, in action for climate change, and in caring for people; this is the aspiration of the Maya forest garden.

No travel means new modes of outreach. Our lectures, presentations, and discussions via Zoom have touched new audiences. Eva Haller's Solon featured a view of *Magic Realism in the Maya Forest* as a narrative of the Maya forest is a garden. The Pre-Columbian Society of Washington D.C. learned about alternative interpretation of the Maya land use. A contribution for the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati addressed the nature of traditional tropical agriculture. We also made appearances for NEPRIS, a K-12 remote education program that promotes a chance for youth to meet scholars remotely. As you can see, we have been fortunate to be able to continue to expand our network in these times.

The Peace Park Initiative: The longstanding challenge of working in Belize and Guatemala is the imaginary line between them. The *YES* vote to address the territorial dispute was accorded in both countries, opening opportunities to highlight work across the divide. El Pilar is one resource in two nations. Our research, therefore, is a long standing example of confidence building. We have representation at international workshops, maintain rapport with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in Belize and Guatemala, interact with embassies, and have worked in various capacities with the Organization of American States. The OAS included El Pilar in their binational podcast series and they have plans for more attention to El Pilar in the future.

Wrapping up the year we say **"Thank you!"** for helping us meet our diverse goals. As every year draws to a close, it is an occasion to look ahead to the coming year. We are excited about our agenda and see that we have multiple ways to achieve our initial aims using a little bit of ingenuity.

Sending you our gratitude for your support through this unorthodox year.

Onward!



Anabel Ford
President

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