

# TIME FOR KIDS

- **CHINA**  
A dinosaur with feathers!
- **JAPAN**  
The country gets a new leader, again.
- **U.S.**  
Hollywood braces for a strike by TV and film writers.



Adrian Chase, 11, searches for Maya treasures in the dirt.

## DIGGING UP THE PAST

An American family uncovers an ancient city in Belize

# A FAMILY DIGS TOGETHER

The Chases have made exciting discoveries

hammocks. The kids work with their parents at the dig site every day after morning lessons. The three have found pieces of stone tools and clay pots. "They're really good at fitting the pieces together," says their mom. "It's like a jigsaw puzzle, but not so neat." The kids participate in almost all the excavation activities, including sifting dirt through screens and washing the pieces they find. Next year Adrian will begin to make detailed technical drawings of

the excavation.

The Chases have made many fascinating discoveries at Caracol. This year they found two new tombs as well as a very worn-down monument. They realized that they had walked by the monument many times before—it looked like a large stone. After examining it more closely, Arlen and Diane



Adrian, Elyse and Aubrey sift through soil taken from a tomb.

**A**UBREY CHASE PEERED INTO THE DARK TOMB. HE noticed red fungus on the walls, which had flourished in the sealed, dank air over thousands of years. Then he saw something scurrying away from a shaft of light. Aubrey leaned in closer, reaching out for whatever it was. Something white with spindly legs and beady little eyes—a white scorpion! "It didn't startle me," he says. "It was white because it hadn't been in daylight for a very long time."

Crawling around creepy tombs is not a typical pastime for a 9-year-old boy, but it's routine for Aubrey, his brother Adrian, 11, and their sister Elyse, 6. Their parents, Arlen and Diane, are archaeologists—scientists who study the remains of old civilizations. Both teach at the University of Central Florida and spend two months a year exploring the ruins of an ancient city called Caracol (*Car-ah-coal*) in Belize, Central America.

Caracol was built more than 2,000 years ago by the Maya, native people of Central America and Mexico. It is one of the largest Maya cities ever found. Arlen and Diane Chase have been studying Caracol's ancient temples and tombs for 17 years, searching for clues about the Maya and how they lived.

## TREASURES IN THE DIRT

While in Belize, the Chases live in a hut without running water and sleep in



The view from above the Maya palace Caana, which is Mayan for "sky palace." The city of Caracol was built around the palace.



# Y THAT GETHER...

## coveries in the ancient Maya city of Caracol

ane noticed an image of a person inside a moon sign. They think the symbol may tell a Maya myth.

The Chases also found an exciting clue that may help them learn what caused the collapse of Maya civilization: a huge stash of well-preserved pottery that dates back to A.D. 895. It was found in the last part of Caracol to remain occupied—"literally right before they left," Arlen says. Usually, Maya artifacts are found in tombs. But these were left in their ordinary environment, which will help the Chases understand what was going on right before the collapse.

A day at the dig site is hard work. But the kids are never too tired to climb the 99 stone steps leading up to the top of Caana, an old palace at the center of Caracol. Once there, the young explorers are able to look out over the jungle. "It's a great view," Aubrey says.

### A FAMILY ADVENTURE

Each of the Chase children has been going to Caracol since the age of 2 months! Workers there say the three know so much about the site that they can explain everything from the structures of the tombs and temples to the historical findings and what they say about the Maya.

## MORE ABOUT THE MAYA

The Maya built mighty cities and were successful farmers. They had one of the most advanced civilizations of the ancient world. Archaeologists have unearthed many interesting Maya facts. Here's the dirt:

✦ The Maya were very good at math. Their use of the zero allowed them to calculate very large numbers. Scientists say the Maya were the first in the Americas to use the zero.

✦ The Maya used their advanced number system and understanding of planets to create three basic calendars. One was similar to

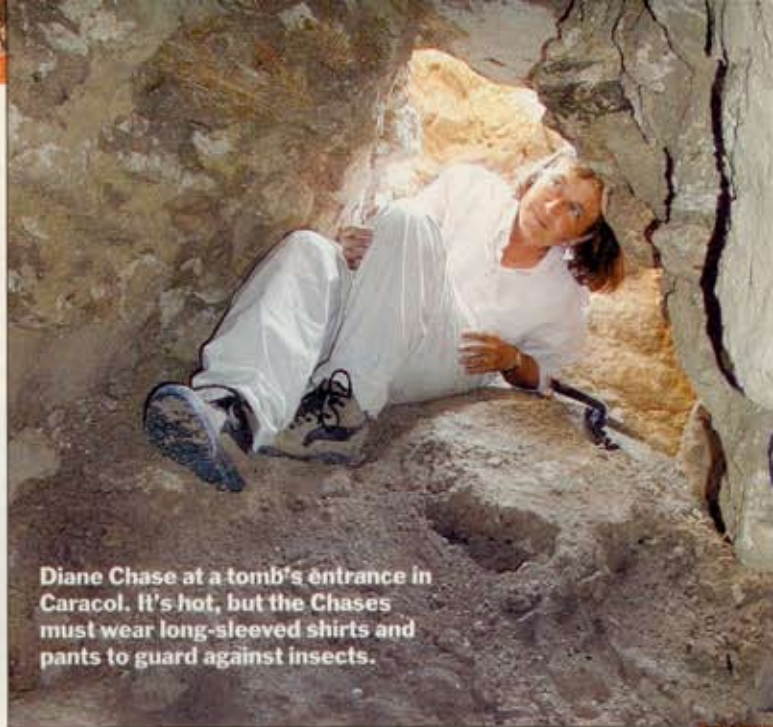
what we have today—made up of 365 days. They used it to record daily events, as well as planting and harvesting dates.



✦ Scientists say the Maya had the most advanced writing system of all Native American groups. They used hieroglyphs—pictures or symbols that represent sounds—to record information.



✦ The Maya had their own notions of beauty. When a baby was born, the head was bound between boards. This resulted in a long, sloping forehead that was considered attractive.



Diane Chase at a tomb's entrance in Caracol. It's hot, but the Chases must wear long-sleeved shirts and pants to guard against insects.

"It's just part of their lives," Diane says. But the experience hasn't grown old. The siblings are surrounded by treasures—in the jungle around Caracol as well as at the dig site. They have seen many exotic creatures, including toucans, parrots, howler monkeys—and bugs, of course. "There are lots of butterflies, and there are snakes and tarantulas," Elyse told her classmates in an e-mail.

The Chase family returned to Florida in late March. Adrian says he will miss the starry nights and "all that nice quietness" in Caracol. But the stars and the Maya secrets will be waiting in that quietness when the Chases return next year.

—By Kathryn Hoffman