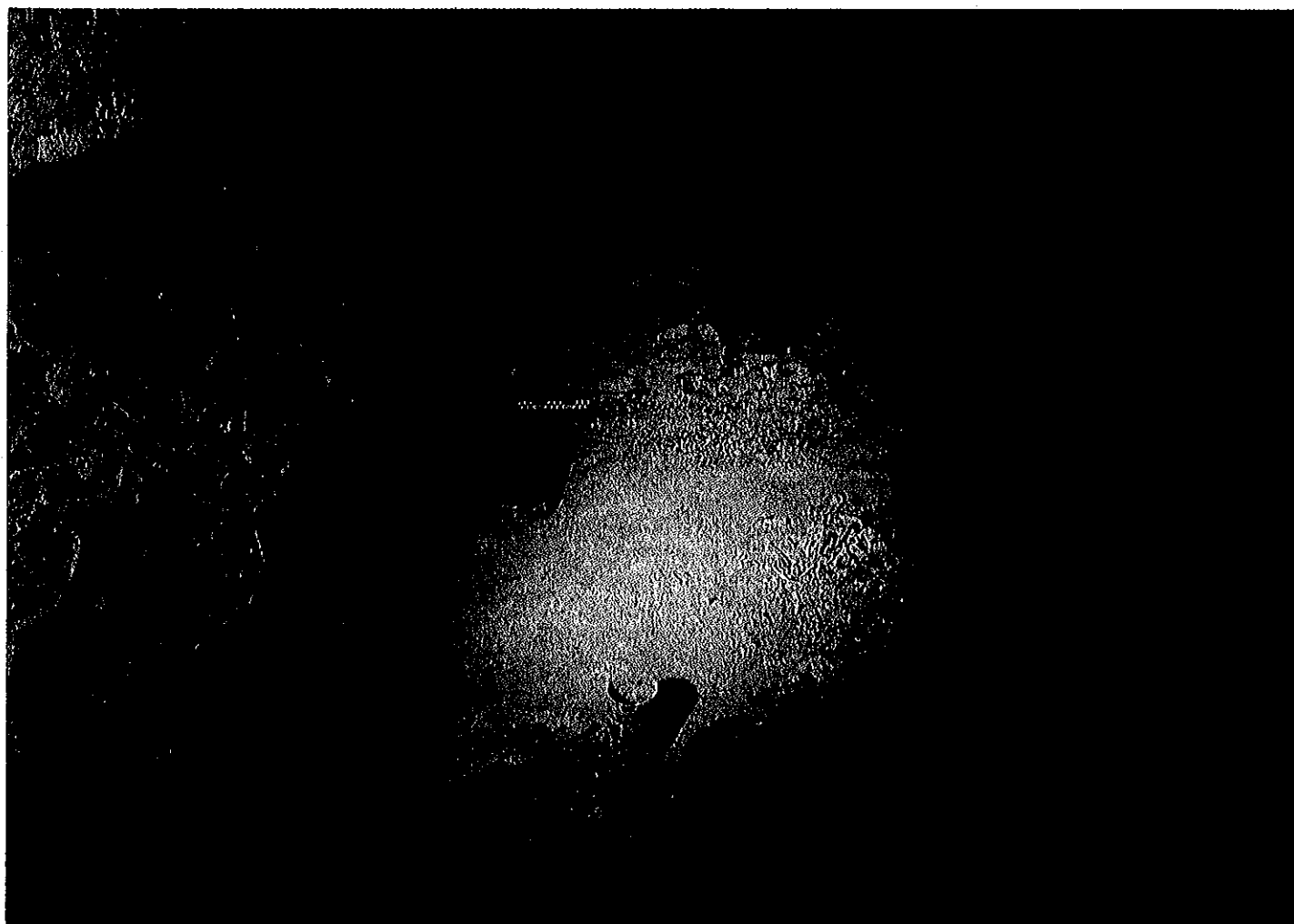
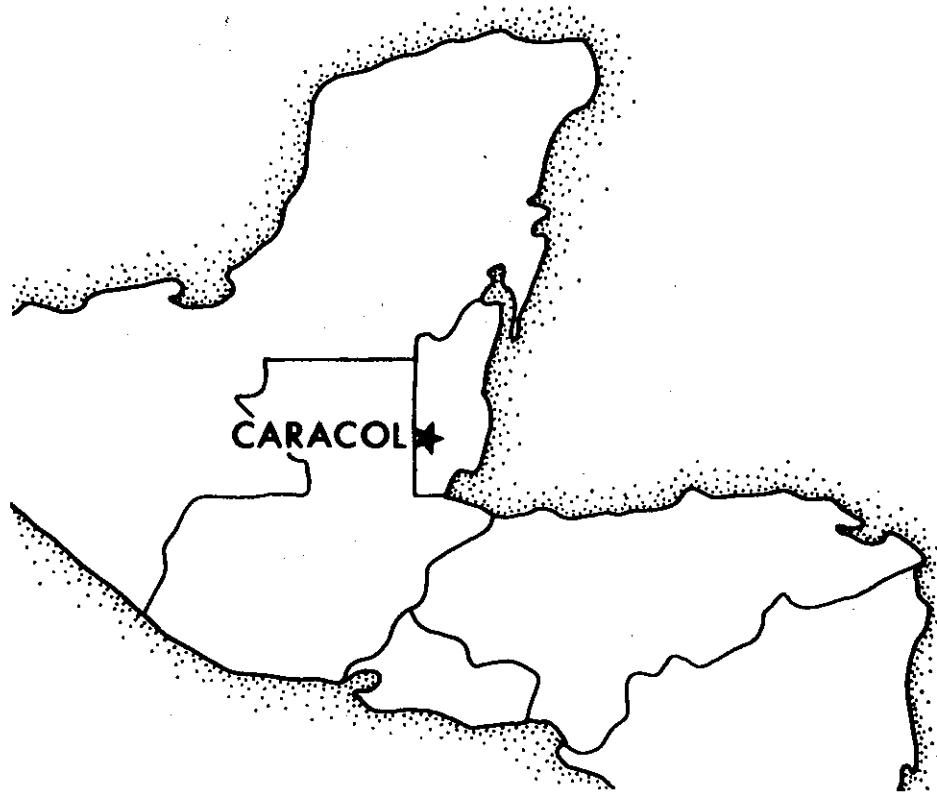


# Glimmers of a Forgotten Realm:

Maya Archaeology at Caracol, Belize





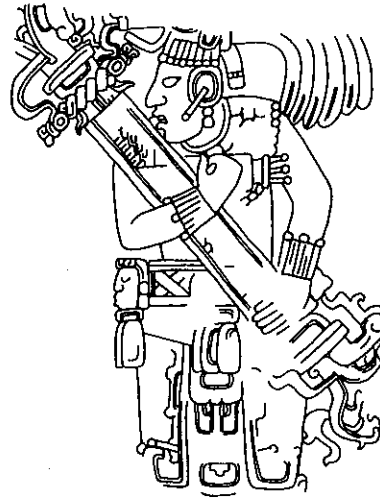
Map of the Maya area showing the location of Caracol.

Front Cover: The tomb associated with Caracol Structure B19-2nd  
as seen from the doorway to it.

## GLIMMERS OF A FORGOTTEN REALM: MAYA ARCHAEOLOGY AT CARACOL, BELIZE

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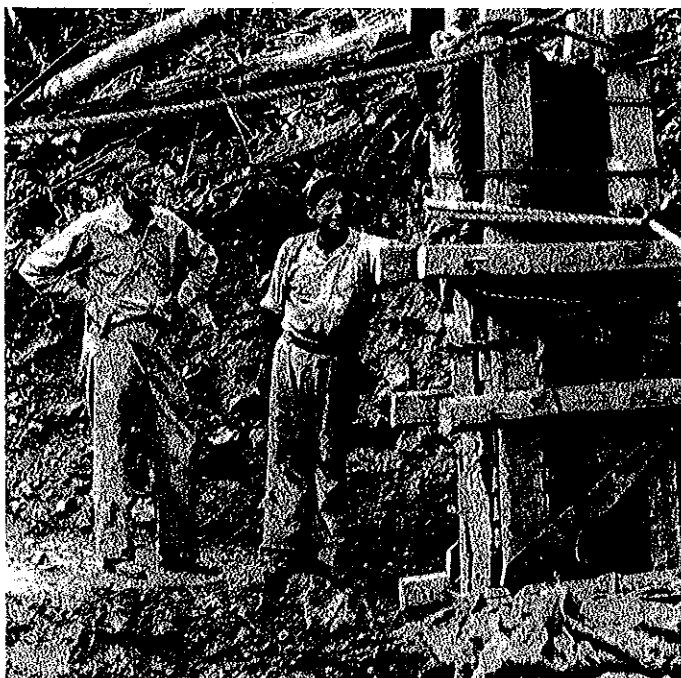
### THE DISCOVERY OF CARACOL

Caracol is one of the largest sites in the Maya area. Its areal extent, monumental record, and large architectural constructions testify to its importance during the Classic Period (A.D. 250-900). Yet, the city was not discovered by archaeologists until 1938. It was missed by the extensive Carnegie Institution reconnaissances under Sylvanus G. Morley that criss-crossed the Southern Maya Lowlands in search of hieroglyphic texts in the early part of this century. It was not encountered by J. Eric S. Thompson or his crew when they excavated at Hatzcab Ceel during 1928 and 1929, even though this Caracol outlier is less than 15 kilometers from the site. Caracol laid in wait while lumbermen worked the area in the early part of the twentieth century. Because the site was masked by the surrounding jungle until 1938 and went largely unrecorded until archaeologists began work there in 1950, Caracol is only now gaining the recognition that it is due.

Caracol was not the Maya name for the site; what that name was is unknown, although the hieroglyph which represented the site during the Classic era is well-marked on stone monuments. Caracol is the modern name given to the archaeological ruins of a once immense Maya city, primarily because of the difficulty in reaching it via a long and winding road, which twists and turns much like the

spirals on a snail shell. From the modern village of Augustine, the road to Caracol snakes down to the Macal River and, having passed over a well-appointed concrete bridge and having left the last permanent flowing water source behind, then climbs up into and meanders about the foothills of the Maya Mountains. Shortly past the Macal River, the road maintained by the Department of Forestry is left for another, more "countrified" lane. As in the past, this lumber route is often impassible due to its mudholes, skeeter ruts, and/or rock strewn passage. Even with improvement, it is easy to understand how the site came to be named "Caracol;" the road still defines one's access, and indeed relationship, to the site.

Caracol was found in 1938 by Rosa Mai, a woodcutter. It was immediately reported to A. H. Anderson, the first archaeological commissioner of Belize, who investigated the site during the same year. Anderson found eight carved stone monuments and reported many mounds and some standing architectural remains. In 1950, Linton Satterthwaite of the University of Pennsylvania visited the site for three weeks, finding thirty-two monuments, two causeways, and "five large courts of major ceremonial buildings." In order to record the hieroglyphic texts on these monuments, Satterthwaite returned to the site in



Linton Satterthwaite examining the crating of Caracol Stela 1 for removal to Belize City in 1951 (from Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981: x, courtesy The University Museum).

1951 and 1953. He succeeded in mapping the central portion of Caracol as well as in photographing the majority of the monuments; in addition, two major tombs were fallen upon by chance and fully recorded by Satterthwaite and Anderson. Much of this initial research was published in two articles in the *Bulletin* of The University Museum in Philadelphia in 1951 and 1954. Anderson returned by himself for two more seasons of work at Caracol in 1955 and 1958, probing mainly in the South Acropolis and in the A Court; he found and recorded three other tombs at this time. Preliminary accounts of this later work appeared in two articles published in conjunction with the International Congress of Americanists in Copenhagen (1956) and Costa Rica (1958). The full publication of Anderson's work, however, was forestalled when his notes, which were stored in Belize City, were washed out to sea in 1961 as a result of the disastrous Hurricane Hattie. The monumental record for Caracol fared better, however, and

witnessed full publication in 1981 by The University Museum. Later research efforts in the late 1970s included the movement of Caracol Stela 21 to Belmopan by the Belize Department of Archaeology and the investigation of terraces in the Caracol area by Paul Healy of Trent University.

The present project had its inception in August 1983 when a brief reconnaissance was made to the site with the current archaeological commissioner, Harriot Topsey, to ascertain the feasibility of a long-term research project at Caracol. As this sortie proved promising, a more extended reconnaissance was made for a two-week period spanning the end of December 1983 and the beginning of January 1984. Following this spurt of activity, a more detailed plan was conceived for the excavation of Caracol. In January of 1985 the first season of the Caracol Project was carried out under the sponsorship of the University of Central Florida in Orlando. This initial season lasted from January through May of 1985 and was primarily concerned with the construction of a permanent camp and working out the logistical nightmare involved in keeping over 40 individuals in the jungle for an extended stay. While some excavation was carried out, most of the first season concentrated on cleaning up looted areas of the site, mapping, and simply trying to assess the extent of Caracol. The second season of the Caracol Project was successfully carried out from January through June of

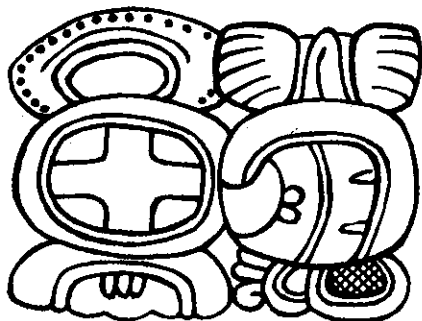


The Caracol Project camp, as of mid-season 1986, from the air.

1986. During this season, the archaeological camp was largely completed, the road was somewhat improved, and the importance of Caracol to the rest of the Maya area during the Classic Period was established through both excavation and interpretation of new hieroglyphic remains. The third, 1987, season will complete the initial phase of research for the project at Caracol. Excavations and fieldwork are, however, planned to continue for at least a decade.

## THE CITY OF CARACOL

The site of Caracol is located within the Vaca Plateau of the Cayo District of Belize in an upland region on the southern side of a massive valley which sinks down to the north and northwest of the site. Most of the major constructions at the site are located on high ground above and amid a cacaphony of terraces that dot almost every small valley in the region and extend into the core of the city itself. By the conclusion of the 1986 season, it was discovered that the central precinct of Caracol forms the hub of a vast array of causeways that wind outward from the epicentral groups for anywhere from under 1 to over 3 kilometers. These causeways transverse the many field systems which lie in the valleys about Caracol and serve as a system of communication for the huge site, effectively integrating its widespread population with the central precinct. The causeways and their termini define what is referred to as the "Caracol core." Beyond the termini of the causeways is the Caracol sustaining area or



The Caracol Glyph, a Maya hieroglyph found only in association with the ruling lineage on monument and burial texts at the site.

periphery, included in what is referred to as "Greater Caracol." Settlement along the seven known causeways is continuous and dense. While no tall pyramids, comparable to those in the central precinct, are presently known to occur along these causeways or at their ends, very elaborate acropolis constructions are common off the sides of the causeways, obscured by the deep bush.

### The A Court

The central precinct of Caracol may be primarily defined by reference to its two largest groups and its functioning reservoir. One of the largest groups at Caracol bounds the A Court. The A Court consists of three pyramids surmounted by buildings on its south, west, and north sides; its eastern side is defined by a large platform which supports five other buildings. During the Early Classic Period (A.D. 250-550), it is likely that the buildings surrounding the A Court functioned as an astronomical observatory, similar to the one known from the Guatemalan site of Uaxactun. In the early part of the Late Classic Period (A.D. 550-900), the constructions which are now visible were built; these new constructions and their emphasis on tall pyramids undoubtedly meant that the function of this group also changed at this time. The A Court itself contains the largest number of stelae and altars found at Caracol. These monuments include both the earliest known from Caracol (Altar 4, the *ahau* altar in the center of the plaza, and Stela 20, from in front of the platform supporting Structure A6, both dating to around 9.3.0.0 or A.D. 495) and the latest one known from the site (the all-glyphic Stela 10 in the center of the plaza, which dates to 10.1.10.0 or A.D. 859). For the most part, the centrally arrayed stone monuments date to the Late Classic Period and are presumably in association with Structure A2. A smaller number of monuments are found set in relationship to the rest of the buildings that bound the court, including Structures A1, A3, A4, and the platform in front of Structure A6. Unlike the predominantly Late Classic monuments which occur in the center of the A Court, those in association with Structure A4 and indirectly with Structure A6 on the eastern side of the plaza are some of the earliest known from Caracol. Satterthwaite also uncovered a beautifully carved stela and altar at the rear of Structure A1; today this monument pair resides in the Bliss Institute in Belize City.



The massive Caracol Structure A2 as seen from the A Court; Caracol Altar 17 is visible near its summit, while Caracol Altar 4 and Stelae 9 and 10 are visible in the foreground.

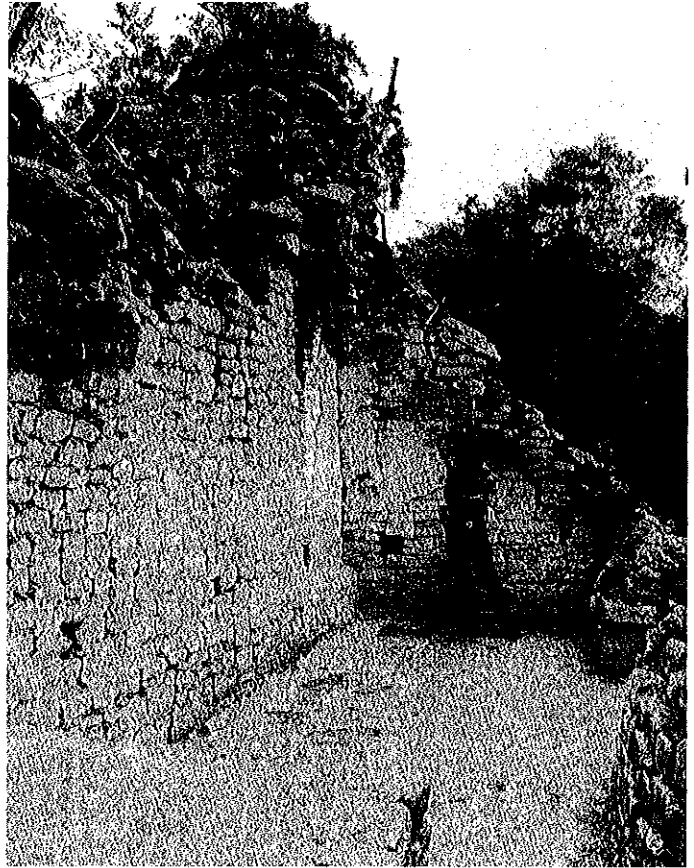
### *Structure A2*

On the western side of the A Court is one of the most massive constructions known from Caracol. This is Structure A2, which rises over 20 meters above the plaza floor of the A Court. The base of this pyramid was preliminarily investigated by Satterthwaite, but no other work has been done on this huge construction. Altar 17 rests on a terrace near the summit of Structure A2 and dates to 9.11.0.0.0 (A.D. 652), perhaps indicative of the date of the final construction for this huge pyramid.

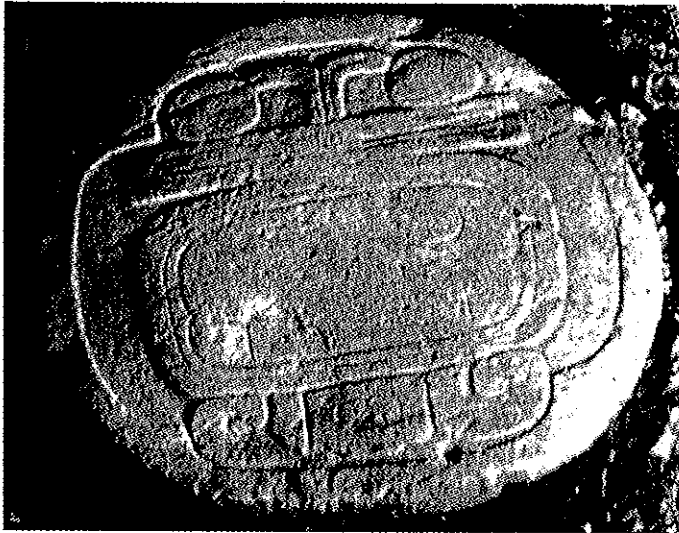
### *Structure A3*

Rising 16 meters above the plaza floor, Structure A3 defines the northern limit of the A Court. The almost perfectly proportioned pyramid is crowned by a long building which was once vaulted. The plan of this building is tandem with two long east-west rooms; the back room is entered through a central interior door, while the front room was entered by any one of three doorways which pierced the front wall of the building. The rear room was raised and protruded into the front room as a bench-like

projection. Excavation of Structure A3 during 1986 revealed that the upper facade of this building had once been covered with an elaborate red-painted and modeled stucco frieze. No earlier formal constructions were found in the core of the pyramid. Excavation also revealed that the bench-like projection into the front room had been constructed to cover an intrusive tomb. This tomb contained a single extended individual with eight pottery vessels in its northeast corner and the remains of at least a dozen birds around the individual's feet on the south side of the chamber. A painted capstone contained a hieroglyphic text which has been dated to 9.13.3.15.16 or A.D. 695.



View of the front room of the building that caps Structure A3.



"Giant Ahau" Caracol Altar 7 in situ in front of Structure A4 prior to its removal to Philadelphia (from Satterthwaite 1951: 35, courtesy The University Museum).

### *Structures A4, A5, and A6*

The eastern side of the A Court is dominated by a huge platform, which was once approached by a broad central stairway leading to Structure A6. In front of this platform, to the southern side of this stair and in association with two stelae, is a double-chambered tomb found by Satterthwaite and excavated by Anderson; like the associated monuments, it dated to the Early Classic Period. Of the five buildings that surmount the platform, three of them have been partially investigated. The northernmost building is Structure A4. Satterthwaite investigated the three monuments which originally fronted this small pyramid; beneath the altar set in front of one of the two stelae he found two more buried stelae. Like Altar 7 above them, Satterthwaite removed these two monuments from Caracol for placement in The University Museum in Philadelphia. Satterthwaite did not investigate Structure A4 itself. However, prior to 1983, illicit excavations uncovered two tombs in Structure A4; the lowermost one was investigated by the Department of Archaeology and found to date to the Early Classic Period; the uppermost one was cleaned out by members of the Caracol Project in 1986

and found to date to the Late Classic Period. East of Structure A4 is the similarly proportioned Structure A5, a building savagely looted prior to the onset of work at Caracol in 1985. Remains of part of its superstructure are still preserved at the summit of this small pyramid. The central and most important building on the platform, at least architecturally, is Structure A6. Structure A6 is also known as "The Temple of the Wooden Lintel," because of a surviving wooden lintel that is still visible spanning a doorway in a once buried northern room at the summit of the structure. Structure A6, especially when seen from the rear, is notable for the amount of preserved standing



Deep excavation in the platform fronting Structure A6, revealing an earlier Late Preclassic construction.

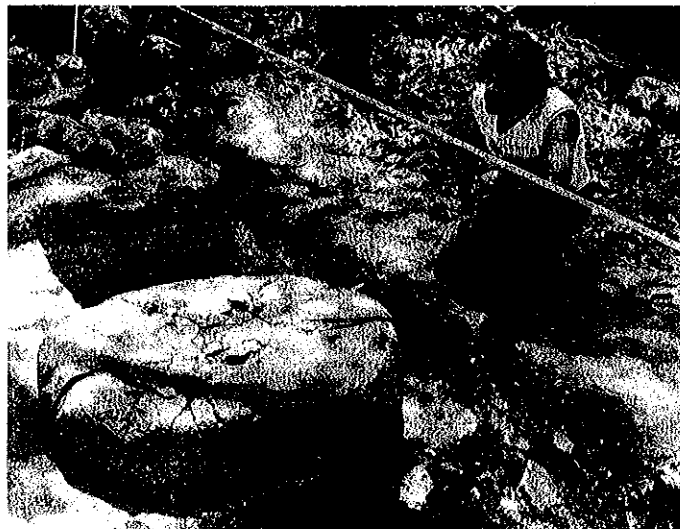
architecture. Satterthwaite and Anderson both probed this construction, especially along its western side. Their probes revealed the buried central doorway and monolithic stairway of an earlier building, both currently visible. This building can be dated to the Early Classic era, based on a sealed cache found in the core of this construction in 1985. Further excavation deep in the core of the platform in front of the substructure for Structure A6 revealed both a midden and a construction that may be dated to the Late Preclassic Period (300 B.C.-A.D. 250), thus indicating a long use-life for this locus. It is likely that Structure A6 was not surmounted by a formal building during the Late Classic Period, when the earlier construction was buried within the core of a later platform.



Standing architecture visible at the rear of Structure A6.

### The A Ballcourt: Structures A11 and A12

Just to the south of the A Court is one of the two ballcourts from Caracol. The parallel sides of this playing court are defined by Structures A11 and A12. Excavation within the playing court in 1986 yielded one of the most important monuments yet found at Caracol. A new altar, designated "Altar 21," was found in the center of this



Caracol Altar 21, located in the center of the A Group Ballcourt; this monument records Caracol's victory over Tikal in A.D. 562.

court and contained one of the longest hieroglyphic texts known from Belize. Although the monument likely dates to 9.10.0.0 (A.D. 633), its texts record a successful war by Lord Water of Caracol against Tikal in 9.6.8.4.2 or A. D. 562. The monument also records the birth of Lord Water's son, the equally warlike and successful Lord Kan II, who conquered Naranjo in 9.9.18.16.3 or A.D. 631.

### The Main Reservoir

Only one permanent body of water is still to be found at Caracol; this is one of the reservoirs built by the Maya. It is located south of the A Ballcourt and immediately north of the South Acropolis. The importance of this reservoir to the Maya is signaled not only by its location in the central precinct, but also by the fact that two of the known Caracol causeways, the causeway leading to Pajaro-Ramonal and the causeway running south towards Retiro, each have one of their termini at the reservoir area. This suggests that the reservoir had a ceremonial as well as a strictly utilitarian use. Even though at least a meter of silt has been laid down in the reservoir since its construction, the central reservoir still serves as a landmark in the dessicated region in which Caracol is located. With the exception of drinking water which is now gathered by a



roof-cistern system from the ample rains at Caracol, the reservoir still serves the day-to-day water requirements of our modern archaeological camp. As it still holds a significant quantity of water some thousand years after its construction, the Main Reservoir serves as a reminder of the engineering ability of the Maya.



The Main Reservoir at Caracol.

### The South Acropolis

Situated on the tip of the ridge forming the southern prometry of the central precinct, the South Acropolis towers over a valley located immediately south of it and also presides over the two causeways which run into the central precinct on either side of it. The South Acropolis was the focus of intensive excavation by Anderson, and his trenches are still visible today. It is clear that this area was a major locus of construction by the Maya of Caracol. Access to the Acropolis was via broad stairways through buildings located on its north side. It is evident from the architecture of the group that access to the northernmost court was very limited. A very impressive tomb was found in Structure D17 during Satterthwaite's first season at the site; this was excavated by Anderson. Anderson later returned to the South Acropolis, finding two more interments in the adjacent Structure D18. All of this material is dateable to the early part of the Late Classic Period. Based upon the exposed architecture still visible in the remnants of Anderson's excavations, both Structures D17

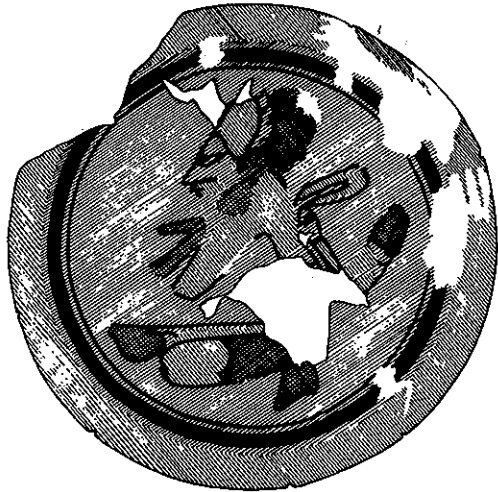


Caracol Stone 28, now visible in Belize City at the Bliss Institute, as found in association with the South Acropolis (from Satterthwaite 1954: 28, courtesy The University Museum).

and D18 had vaulted buildings at their summits. Parts of the South Acropolis were also decorated with tenoned stone heads, an example of which is on view in the Bliss Institute in Belize City.

### The Central Acropolis

Located almost equidistant from the A Court and the B Court is a massive platform rising some 8 meters above the surrounding area. The platform towers over the modern archaeological camp, which is located immediately west and north of it. On its southern end, a "mini-causeway" links this acropolis to the Main Reservoir. Use of this causeway required the walker to go through the southern building located on the top of the platform. A large palace-like construction lines the western end of the acropolis. Two large pyramids delineate its eastern and northern limits; both of these were obviously important structures. The eastern structure was looted sometime prior to the advent of the 1985 season, and a tomb was located within its core. Based on the four partial vessels that were recovered, this construction dates to the early part of the Late Classic Period. It is, therefore, likely that the Central Acropolis, as presently constituted, dates to this same era. Based on the massive platform underlying the buildings, however, it is clear that an earlier complex must lie buried beneath these late buildings.



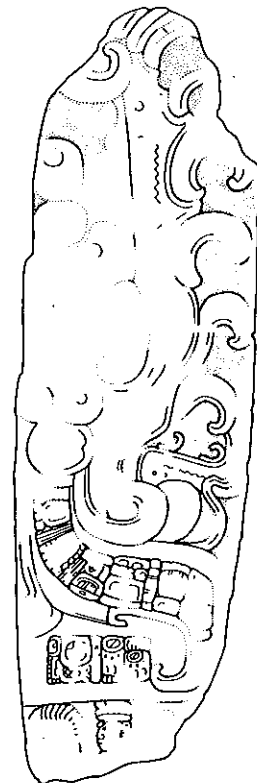
A seated lord from the interior of a polychrome plate found associated with a tomb from Caracol Structure A37 in the Central Acropolis; diameter of plate is 28 cm.



Caracol Structure B5 and its wings as seen across the B Court from Caana.

### The B Court

The two most impressive plaza areas at Caracol were the A Court and the B Court. The B Court is bounded by Caana to the north, by a ball court to the west, by a series of acropoli complexes to the east, and by the winged Structure B5 to the south. This plaza area and its surrounding constructions form a striking entranceway to the central precinct for the causeways coming from the Machete and Conchita groups. A single stela dating to 9.19.0.0.0 (A.D. 810) and portraying a snake rests in the eastern part of the B Court, while three monuments dating from 9.19.10.0.0 (A.D. 820) to 10.0.0.0.0 (A.D. 830) were set in front of Structure B5; one of these is a badly eroded stela, which is still in situ, while the other two are portrait altars possibly showing scenes of alliance between Caracol lords and foreign individuals; one of these monuments is in Belize City and the other is in Philadelphia. Excavation of the western Structure B5 wing in 1986 revealed a tandem plan palace with three doorways and a central altar facing the B Court; a long architectural sequence for this wing was also in evidence.



Caracol Stela 18 portraying a rearing snake.



Caana, the most massive complex at Caracol, as seen from across the B Court.



Earlier constructions and facades visible on the southern side of Caana.

## Caana

The tallest man-made construction at Caracol is the immense Caana complex which rises some 42 meters above the B Court and dominates the northern side of this plaza. At this height, it is the tallest Maya construction known from Belize. A range of rooms is set midway up the south side of this massive pyramid, and the top of the pyramid is entirely enclosed with rooms and crowned by three pyramidal structures on its western, northern, and eastern sides.

### Structure B18

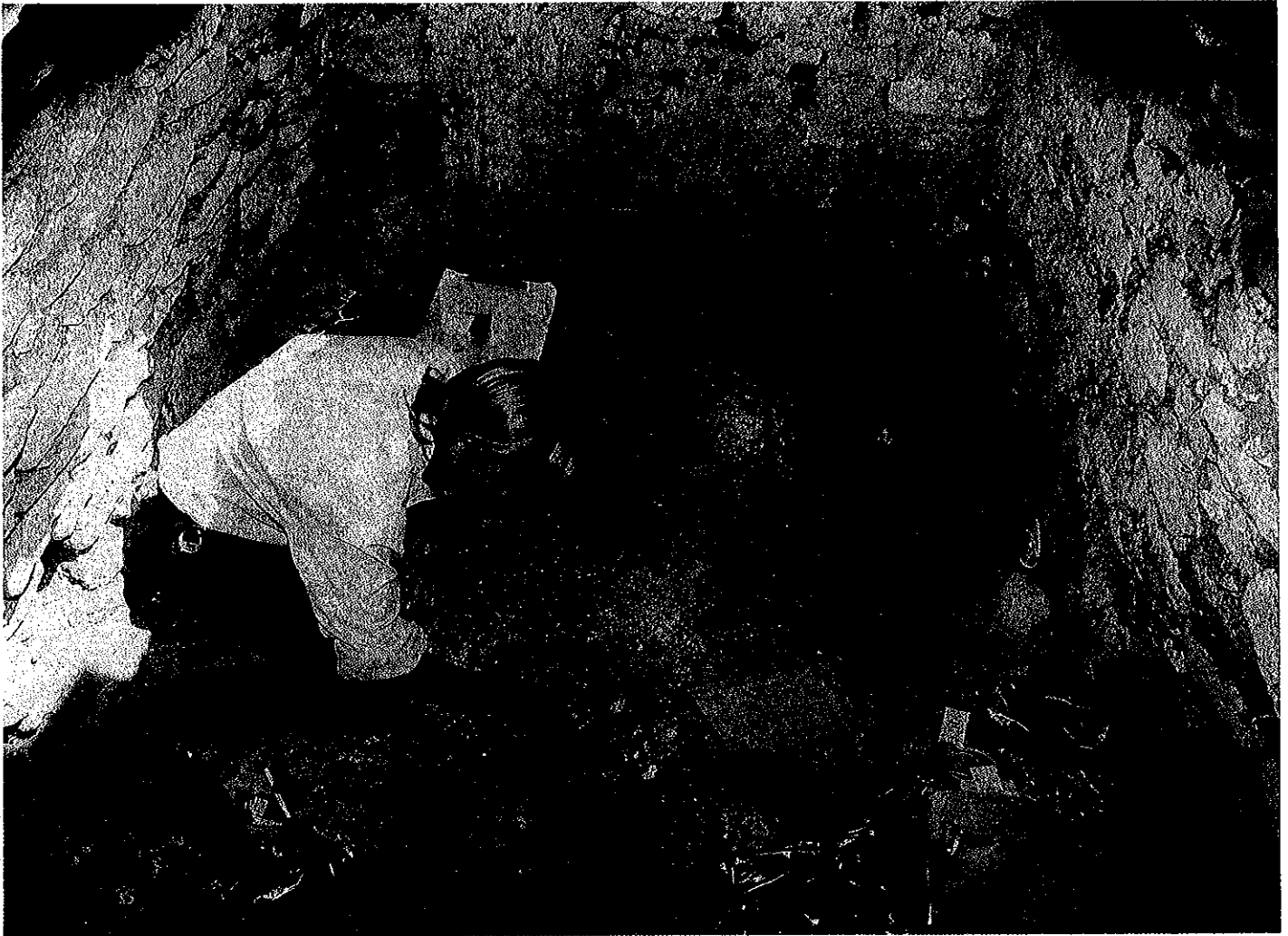
Structure B18 was composed of a range-like building at its summit which was approached by a broad stairway flanked by free-standing masks at each terrace juncture. This western pyramid at the summit of Caana expanded to engulf adjoining buildings on its north and south sides. The engulfed northern building was adorned with painted medallions of hieroglyphic texts formed in stucco.

### Structure B19

Crowning the summit of Caana and clearly the focal point for the group was Structure B19. It is likely that a building once stood atop the pyramid. At the base of the substructure, vaulted rooms flanked the central stairway



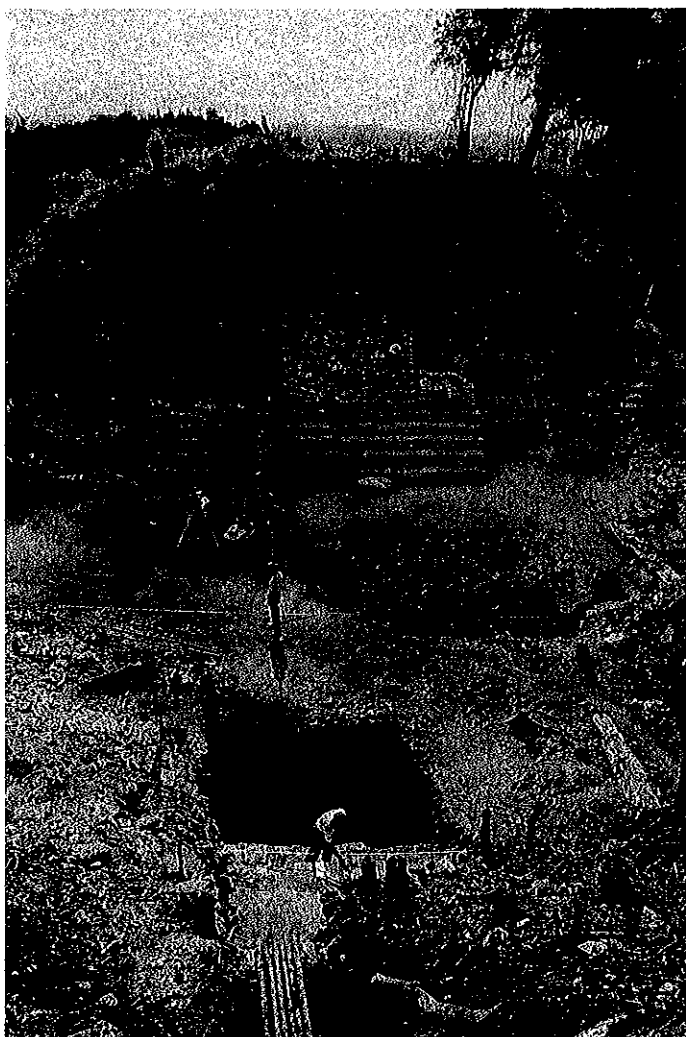
Molded stucco mask once associated with the upper facade decoration of Structure B18.



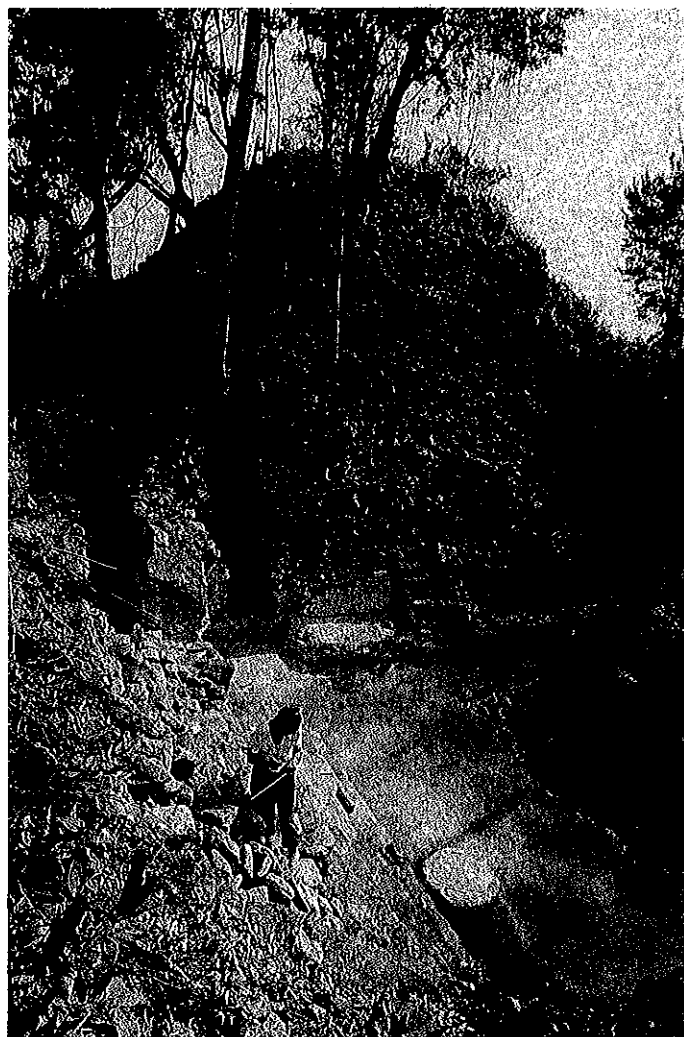
Excavation of the tomb in the core of Caracol Structure A3.

and were worked into the terraces of the pyramid. A stepped stairbalk was set in the middle of the Structure B19 steps. Altar 16, representing 7 Ahau, was once set on the first terrace of this balk. Excavation in the plaza area in front of Structure B19 revealed a buried, earlier version of this building. The earlier building had a vaulted room

which could be entered through three doorways. A large tomb had been built into the core of this construction. The tomb contained a single female, interred with eight vessels; the whole could be dated to 9.10.1.12.? or A.D. 634, by means of an associated mural text on the northern wall of the chamber.



Caracol Structure B18 on the summit of Caana.

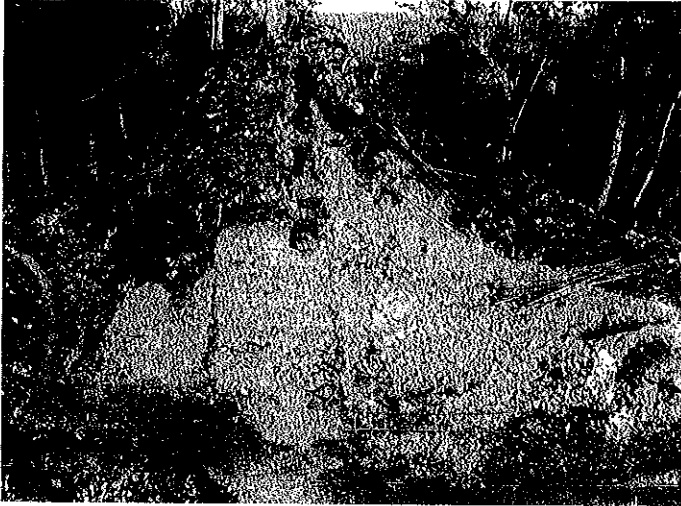


Caracol Structure B19 as seen from across the front of Caracol Structure B18.

### ***Structure B20***

The eastern pyramid at the summit of Caana is Structure B20. It, too, was once capped by a small structure. Looters ripped apart the construction prior to 1985, discovering three tombs, all built into the core of an earlier construction. Each tomb had an entranceway leading into

it, and two of them had associated painted texts. The looters had ripped through one of the texts, but the innermost tomb text was largely preserved and has been tentatively dated to 9.7.3.12.15 or A.D. 576. A total of seventeen ceramic and one alabaster vessel are associated with this

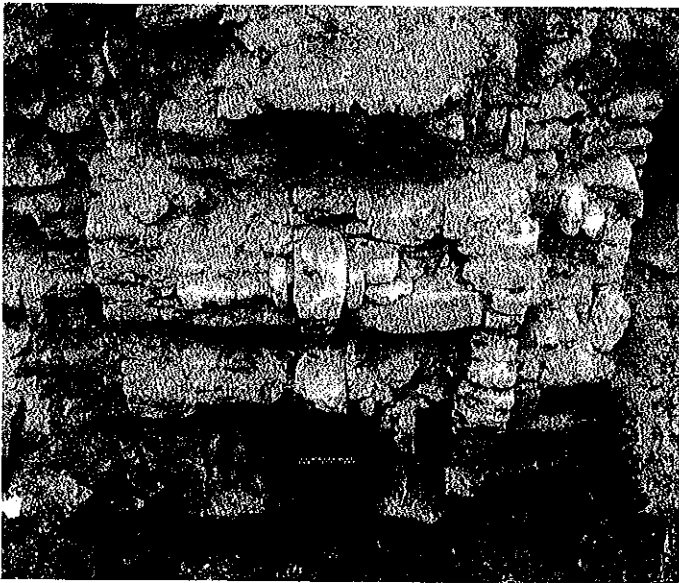


Caracol Structure B20, the eastern pyramid on the summit of Caana; the gash through the upper portion of the pyramid, as well as much of the debris to its side, were the results of looting prior to the onset of the project.

tomb. All three tombs were encased within the same pyramidal substructure which was fronted on its western side by a large mosaic-like earth monster mask set medially into a broad stairway. This mask had a hollow area behind its face where incense was burned, causing smoke to billow out from its open eyes and mouth. At the summit of this substructure was a building completely painted black; graffiti on one of its interior walls illustrates a ritual procession that may have taken place in the court on the summit of Caana. It is clear that this eastern building was one of the most important on Caana and was presumably devoted to ancestor worship. This "cult of the dead" is graphically represented by the positioning of the open-mouthed earth monster mask, which literally swallows the dead lords into the belly of the Maya underworld.

### The Walled Groups

An interesting feature is located immediately east of the Machete Causeway and south of the series of acropoli to the east of the B Court. A walled area, penetrated by two gateways on its northern side, surrounds two architectural groups. These groups are bounded to the south by a



Stone mask associated with the stairway for Structure B20-2nd; height is 2.2 m.



The simple burial of a woman associated with items for weaving cloth, from within the walled precinct of Caracol.

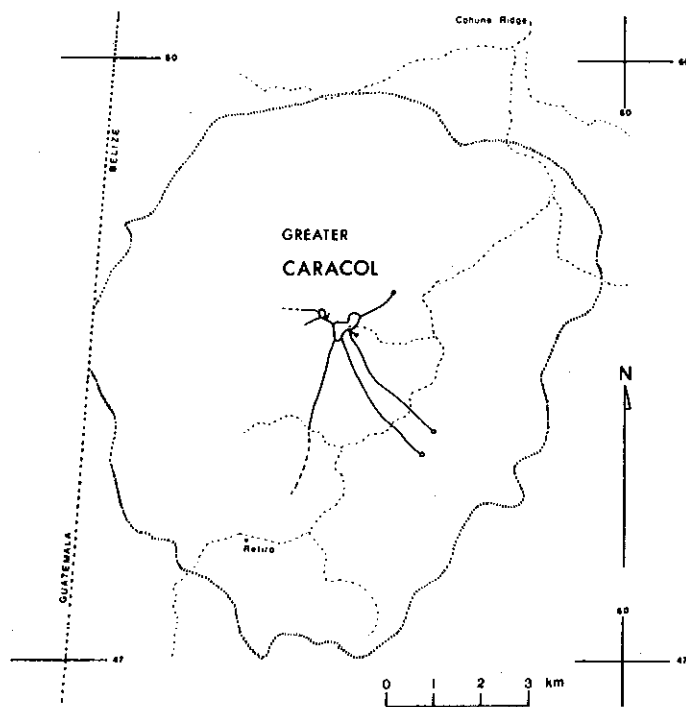
sinkhole. Excavation in the northernmost walled group in 1985 revealed a benched tomb containing multiple individuals as well as debris which could possibly be associated with the working of hard stone. A double-plaza southern group is joined directly to the Machete Causeway via its own small lane or "via." Exactly why these groups are bounded by a wall is not clear at this time. Excavation of objects associated with various specialized activities have led to speculation that practitioners of handicrafts may have resided here, presumably at the beck and call of the ruling elite.

### The Caracol Causeways

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of Caracol is the fact that there are seven causeways leading out of the site epicenter to groups located either within or near the edge of the Caracol core area. Two of these causeways are over 3 kilometers in length, and one has been followed for over 4 kilometers. The others are all shorter in length. These causeways are a more direct means of transportation and communication within Caracol than the current road into the site. They are intra-site roadways, linking not only distant architectural complexes directly to the site core, but also the terraced fields and the populations living throughout the core. While pilgrimage or ritual purpose may be ascribed to some of these causeways, their very layout stresses their primary role in communication and integration of the site core. Walks down these ancient Maya roads provide an excellent way to view the tremendous variety of flora and fauna within the Caracol area.

### The Northwest Group

Directly behind Structure A2, a causeway follows a natural ridge leading to a large raised platform at the end of that crest. Four structures surmount this platform. The eastern one was looted prior to 1985. The western structure, equal in size to the eastern one, was investigated during the first season of the current project. Excavations revealed an earlier construction sequence at this locus and also investigated a collapsed tomb in the rear of the western building. The ritually-disposed remains of at least twenty-five individuals were found in this chamber. The importance of this group is also attested to by its spatial associations. A causeway, probably an extension of the causeway leading to the Northwest Group, runs south



Greater Caracol illustrating the extent and radial pattern of the various known causeways.

from the group to other architectural groups. Another causeway leads northwest from the western side of the Northwest Group.

### The Northwest Acropolis

Located in the shadow of the Northwest Group on the northern side of the same ridge is an even larger architectural complex known as the Northwest Acropolis. A smaller road or "via" connects this complex to the causeway linking Structure A2 and the Northwest Group. Looters uncovered a Late Classic tomb chamber in Structure A63, a small focal construction in the Northwest Acropolis. An interesting feature associated with this acropolis is a sunken reservoir which looks very much like a small amphitheater. The central construction of the Northwest Acropolis consists of a totally enclosed courtyard group; the architects used the steep hillside to create an illusion of great height and massiveness for this unit.



### ***The Machete Group***

A large raised platform supporting an impressive plaza group surmounts a hill half a kilometer southeast of the B Court. The Machete Group is directly linked to the Caracol epicenter by means of a causeway which is flanked by parapets near the B Court. The eastern structure in the Machete Group was excavated during the 1986 season and yielded a series of deposits. The most elaborate was contained in a tomb chamber which had been desecrated by the Late Classic Maya and then reburied. A painted capstone associated with the original interment, however, yielded a date of 9.9.0.16.17 or A.D. 613.



Excavation of the tomb within Caracol Structure L3 in the Machete Group.



The standing monument in the Plaza of the Two Stelae.

### ***Plaza of the Two Stelae***

Located at the end of a causeway 1 kilometer northeast of Caana is a small plaza group containing the remains of two uncarved stelae, one of which is still standing upright. The causeway leading to this plaza begins amid a series of impressive architectural groupings immediately east of Caana and follows the terrain and natural ridge out to the "Plaza of the Two Stelae." In some places this causeway is raised almost four meters above ground-level.

### ***Conchita***

Another smaller and longer causeway branches out from the causeway linking the Machete Group to the B Court and runs southeast. Three kilometers away from the B Court, at the end of this causeway, is a group referred to as "Conchita." The group is located immediately below the summit of a very high hill which the causeway climbs. Three buildings in this group had been looted and a double-chambered tomb, entered by a central shaft, was found in one of the eastern constructions. Almost forty vessels and at least five individuals could be associated with this elaborate interment.





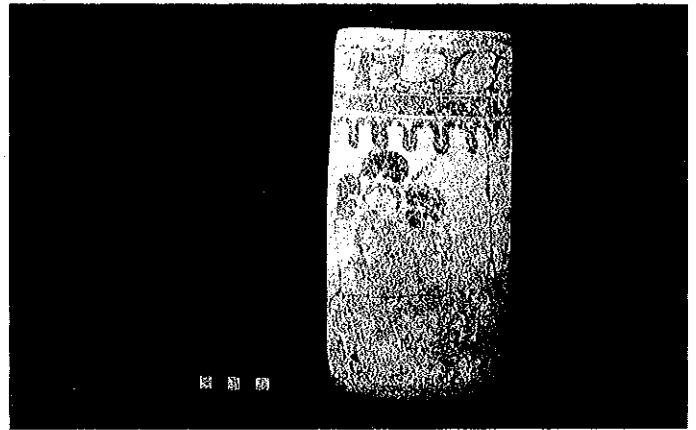
One of the looters' trenches through an eastern building in the Conchita Group.

### *Pajaro-Ramonal*

About half a kilometer south of the Conchita Group, another impressive, and looted, acropolis group is linked directly to the epicenter of Caracol. A causeway beginning on the eastern side of the South Acropolis runs for over 3 kilometers, eventually terminating in this hilltop group. The area around the terminus of this causeway is referred to as "Pajaro-Ramonal" and is characterized by a large number of imposing architectural groups. It is clear that the Pajaro-Ramonal area comprised an important part of the site.

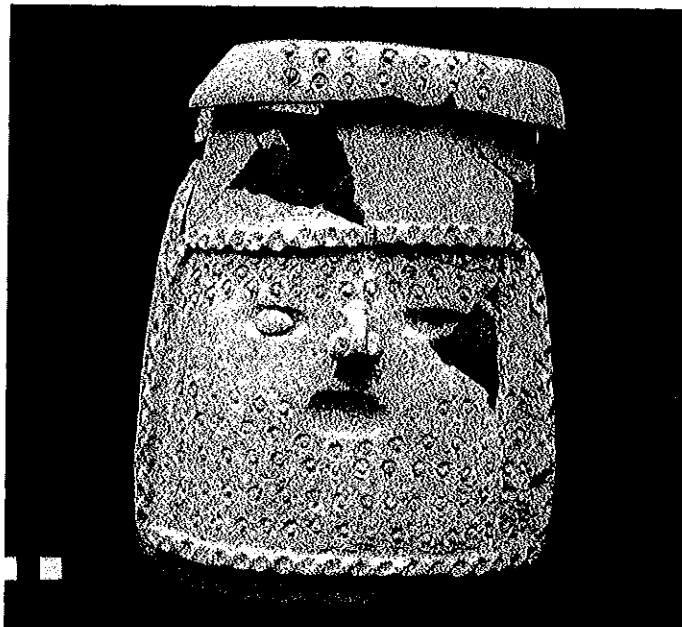
## MAYA ARCHAEOLOGY AND LOOTING

As clearly seen at Caracol, the ravages of time and nature are not all that Maya sites face. Increasingly, the once magnificent cities of the Maya are being gutted and savaged by unscrupulous modern day looters. There is an illicit world-wide market for antiquities, and more often than not many priceless Maya relics appear on this market for sale to the collector. What is not appraised in this looter-collector relationship are costs involved in site destruction and the loss of national or, more realistically, world heritage. A beautiful artifact, once removed from its context, has lost much of the meaning imbued it by ancient cultures. In addition, such looting often does more damage than mere theft, for buildings are ruthlessly gutted often as not in a fruitless search for isolated salable pieces. In contrast, modern archaeology consists of meticulous recording methods involving written descriptions, careful plans and drawings, in situ photographs, and even a video or film record. In order to appreciate the past, one needs to fully understand and record the society and contexts associated with the recovered objects. This rich wealth of data is lost through the illicit excavation done in looting and, once lost, cannot be recovered. Archaeologists do not seek to own the materials they excavate; rather they seek to preserve them and their import for all humanity by carefully reconstructing as much as possible of all aspects of ancient life.



One of the polychrome cylinders found by the looters in the double-chambered tomb at Conchita; height is 25.8 cm.

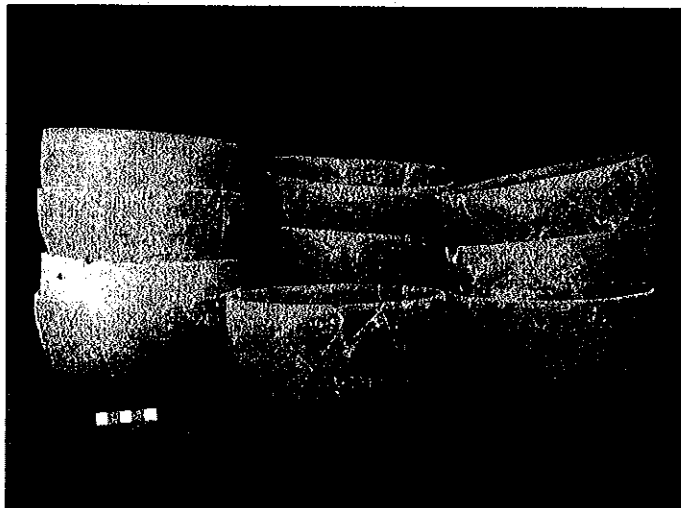
Unlike the many sites in the Peten of Guatemala, Caracol had witnessed minimal looting in the recent past. However, had the Caracol Project not started in 1985, it is safe to say that much of the site's history would have been lost to the looter's pick. When the advance crew arrived at Caracol in January of 1985, they found cooking fires still warm in the several make-shift camps that dotted the epicenter of the site; in effect, the presence of the project disrupted ongoing looting and ran the gangs out of the central part of the site. This was not before significant damage had been done, however, to Structures A5 (literally ripped apart), A37 (axially trenched), A61 (summit gutted via an expanded trench), A63 (axial trench and tunnel), B20 (front axial trench from summit to base and rear tunnel below front trench), D1 (trench from summit to base) and F4 (cross-trenched and gutted); a rear trench had also been started through Structure B19 and an axial probe had been made on Structure B7. Prior to March 1984, looting activities in the epicenter had been limited to Structures A3 (rear wall cut through), A4 (one trench and one tunnel), and A9 (gutted near its summit). To attempt to curb such activity in the future, permanent caretakers were installed at Caracol and arrangements were made for both the British and Belizean forces to patrol the area on a regular basis.



A looted cache vessel recovered from the Pajaro-Ramonal section of Caracol; height with lid is 25 cm.



Smashed vessels associated with the innermost tomb in Structure B20, as found in 1985.



Reconstruction of some of the smashed vessels associated with the Structure B20 innermost tomb; diameter of the bowls is generally 18 cm.



A member of the Belizean Defense Force in front of a looters' trench in the Pajaro-Ramonal section of Caracol.

It was only in 1986 that the full extent of looter damage at the Maya city of Caracol was realized. Reconnaissance throughout this vast core area proved that gangs of looters had been busy in previously unknown parts of the area for some time. The ends of the Conchita and Ramonal-Pajaro causeways had been savaged. All of this destruction appeared to have been done within the past three years. The looting at the end of the Conchita Causeway had been done during the 1985 rainy season by an

armed, probably five-man, group just prior to the arrival of our crews in January of 1986. Thus, requests were made to the British and Belizean forces for more military patrols in the greater Caracol area. These requests have been graciously honored and it is hoped that this roving presence in the Caracol area, during both the dry and the rainy seasons, will continue to keep looters out of both the site and the forest reserve.

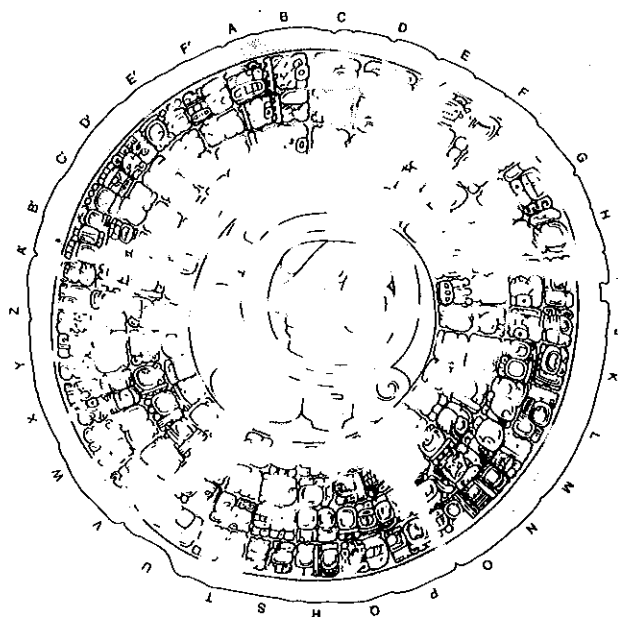
### THE IMPORTANCE OF CARACOL IN MAYA PREHISTORY

As presently understood, Caracol spans the Late Preclassic through Early to Middle Postclassic Periods of Maya prehistory or from 300 B.C. to about A.D. 1250. A Late Preclassic presence is evident in both the A Court area and the Pajaro-Ramonal area while Postclassic sherd materials were recovered by Satterthwaite in the A Court. It is clear from both the archaeology and the hieroglyphic texts that the site was at its apex during the Classic Period (A.D. 250 to 900). Caracol, in fact, appears to have dominated the eastern part of the Southern Lowlands during the transition from the Early to Late Classic Periods, probably through its success in ritual, and other forms of warfare. Until A.D. 700, Caracol blossomed and built many of the constructions that characterize the site. Shortly after this time, as the Guatemalan site of Tikal began its Late Classic surge to new architectural and dynastic heights, Caracol entered what may have been a short era of decline; perhaps this brief era of hard times resulted from retaliation by Tikal for Caracol's role in Tikal's troubles 120 years earlier. By A.D. 780, however, the Caracol dynasty was again erecting monuments and the site continued on an upswing through the end of the Classic Period. The Terminal Classic monuments of Caracol evince some unusual iconography and foreign influences. In particular, Stela 18 portrays a feathered serpent while a series of other monuments (Stela 17 and Altars 10, 12, and 13) seem to show scenes of alliance between the Caracol ruler and a series of foreign individuals. These monuments strongly suggest that Caracol may have had close ties to other Maya cities far to the north in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. While definitely present, the Post-classic occupation of Caracol is little known or

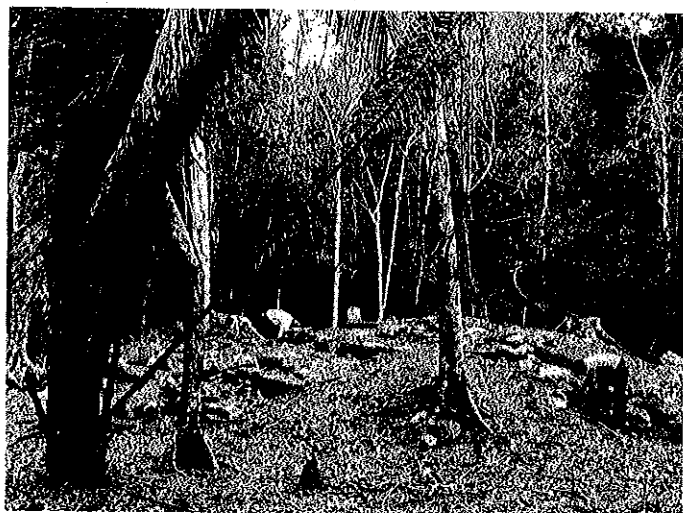
understood, thus presenting a similar situation to that found in other comparable Classic Period sites of the Southern Lowlands.

Of all the sites in the Southern Lowlands of the Maya area, Caracol has the potential for answering more questions than any other concerning the nature of the transition from the Early to Late Classic Periods. It is evident from both the monumental record and the archaeology undertaken during the first two seasons that the site flourished precisely at the time that Tikal was in an unsettled state. Importantly, the postulated role that the great site of Teotihuacan in the Valley of Mexico may have played in the transition from the Early to Late Classic Period in the Maya area is in need of re-evaluation. In the past, the Maya "hiatus," a term often employed in reference to the transition between the Early and Late Classic Periods, has been related to the declining power of Teotihuacan. The Caracol data, however, suggests an alternative picture - one that emphasizes internal ritual warfare in the Maya area at the close of the Early Classic Period, directly leading to the onset of the Late Classic Period.

Whereas Tikal may have been a supreme power, perhaps with a monopolistic-like hold on foreign trade, during the Early Classic Period, it was unable to maintain its stranglehold shortly after A.D. 500. At this time, other



Drawing of Caracol Altar 21, containing one of the longest hieroglyphic texts in Belize.



Small structure excavations in the Tabanos Group of Caracol.

centers began to rival Tikal in political and economic power. Caracol was one of these "other" centers and, presumably, one of the most important ones based on its disruption of the Tikal dynastic line in A.D. 562 by Caracol Lord Water through warfare. This success in war continued with Lord Kan II who celebrated a victory over Naranjo in A.D. 617. The major building programs at Caracol can be related, at least indirectly, to these two war events, thus indicating that labor may have been part of the spoils for the successful party following warfare.

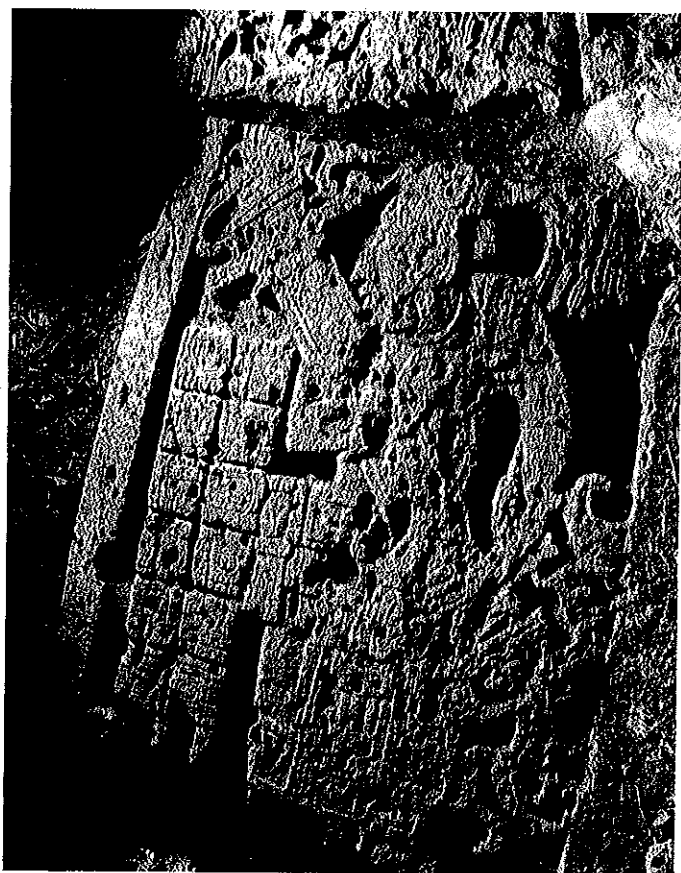
The site of Caracol is located far from any water source in the middle of the Vaca Plateau. A waterless location is characteristic of other major Classic Period sites such as Tikal, but it is unclear why this site was situated in such a way. The recovered archaeological remains at Caracol also belie its participation in cultural practices not found in the heartland sites of Tikal and Tayasal. The many tombs at the site and the proclivity for placing multiple bodies in such tombs is not a common practice to the



Detail of a free-standing terrace mask associated with Structure B18.

west of Caracol during the Classic era. Yet, the architectural patterns found at Caracol match those in the western sites of Tikal and Tayasal. Thus, it would seem that Caracol spanned two distinct sub-cultures of Maya society. On the one hand, its architectural patterns and epicentral tombs mimic those in the heartland while, on the other hand, distinct architectural combinations and burial practices are clearly not those found to the west. To some degree, it could be simplistically argued that the ruling family at Caracol was integrated with its western neighbors, while the local elite integrated both the populace and the ruling family.

By far the most notable features found at Caracol are its many causeways. These long linear features, radiating out from the site's epicenter, integrate not only the epicenter of Caracol and the causeway termini, but also both ends with an extensive system of farm terraces and other architectural groups that are enclosed within and/or border these terraces. Just as the causeways of Caracol bind the site together and provide a means for understanding how the social fabric of Maya society was interwoven, the first two seasons of archaeological research at Caracol have similarly linked together diverse data relating not only to Caracol but also to other sites in the Southern Lowlands, truly providing us with "glimmers of a forgotten realm."



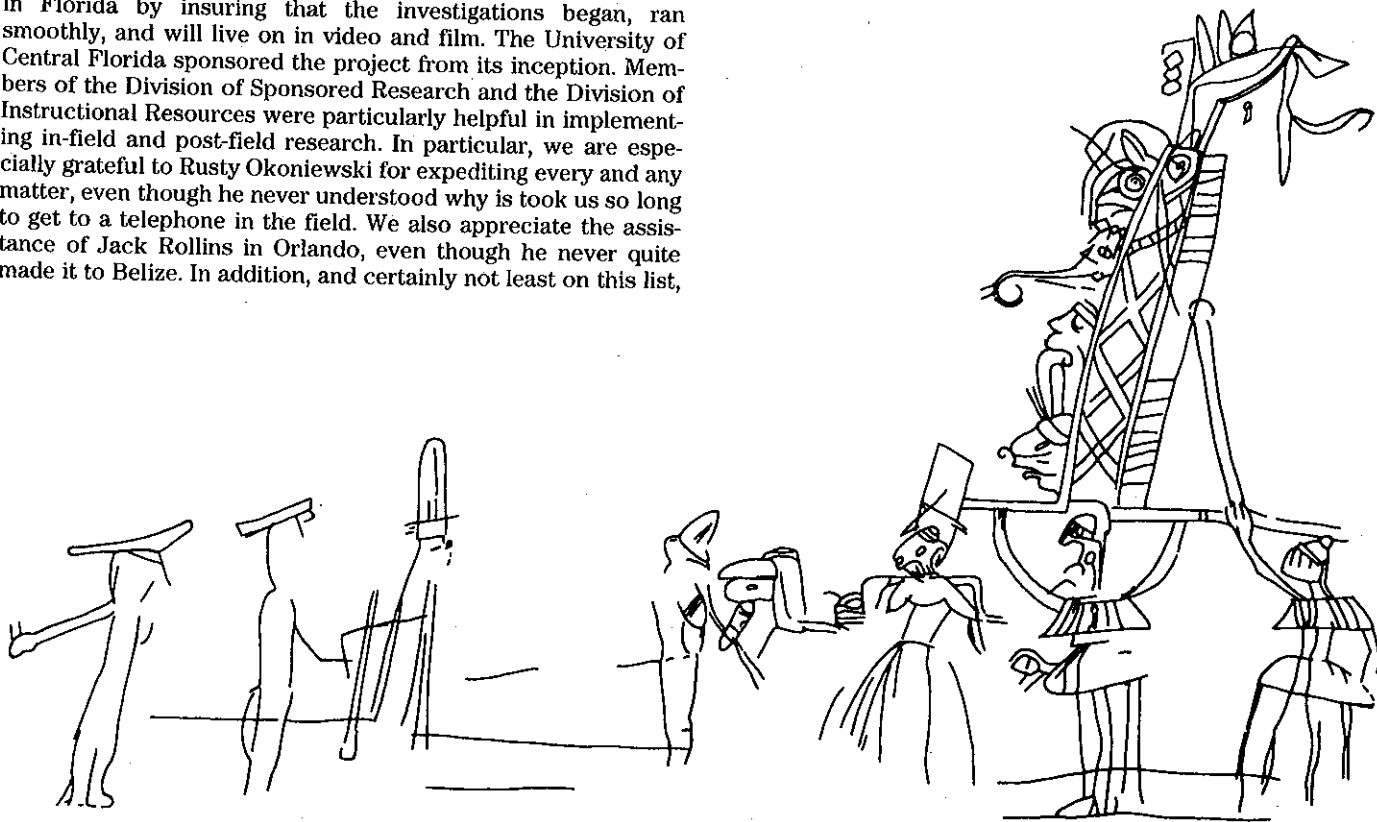
Caracol Stela 11, located in the A Court, was re-discovered, re-cleaned, and re-drawn during the 1986 season.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Caracol Project could not have existed without the support and assistance of a number of individuals, departments, and institutions. In Belize, Earl Green and the Division of Forestry were our closest neighbors and were always ready to help us in any way they could. The Department of Archaeology, and particularly Harriot Topsey and Winnel Branche, worked expeditiously to aid the project and to educate the public as to the importance of Caracol. Also in Belize, the British forces and the Belize Defense Force provided patrols for Greater Caracol and could always be counted upon for emergencies; they also served as ready opponents in volleyball for the Caracol home team. John Crosby, Tony Jerram, Rick Atkinson, Mike Hodges, Barry Board, and David Webb-Carter are all to be thanked for all their assistance, which went far above and beyond the call of duty. Robert Schyberg helped in innumerable ways both in Belize and in Florida by insuring that the investigations began, ran smoothly, and will live on in video and film. The University of Central Florida sponsored the project from its inception. Members of the Division of Sponsored Research and the Division of Instructional Resources were particularly helpful in implementing in-field and post-field research. In particular, we are especially grateful to Rusty Okoniewski for expediting every and any matter, even though he never understood why it took us so long to get to a telephone in the field. We also appreciate the assistance of Jack Rollins in Orlando, even though he never quite made it to Belize. In addition, and certainly not least on this list,

the Caracol field and laboratory crews are to be thanked and congratulated on their painstaking group effort to uncover and fully record the remains of this ancient Maya city.

All photographs utilized in this publication are by D. Chase, A. Chase, or R. Spencer. Drawings are by A. Chase, D. Chase, S. Houston, or K. Davis. Paintings in the exhibit are by either T. W. Rutledge or L. Pantling. H. Mulford, A. DuBois, and S. Jaeger were instrumental in the installation of the exhibit at the Orlando Museum of Art.



Graffiti from within the front room of Structure B20-2nd, illustrating a procession with a bound prisoner.

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Back Cover: The massive Caracol Caana complex rises over 42 meters above the jungle floor.

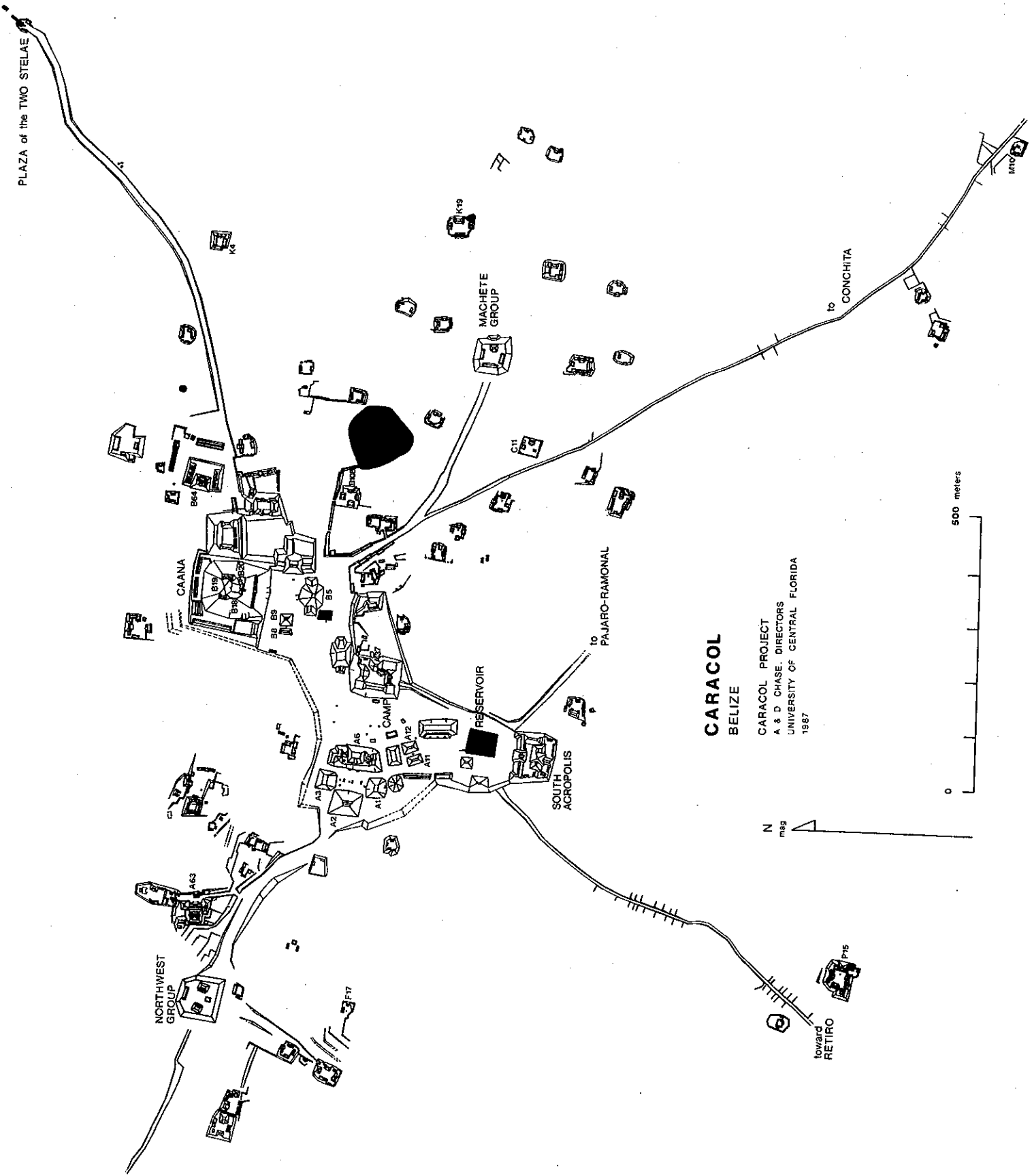
Insert: Map of the archaeological site of Caracol, Belize.



**Prepared in Conjunction with an Exhibit  
at the  
Orlando Museum of Art at Loch Haven  
Orlando, Florida  
January 25 through December 21, 1987**







**CARACOL  
BELIZE**

CARACOL PROJECT  
A & D CHASE, DIRECTORS  
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA  
1987

