



Idaho State  
University

## Foundation for Anthropological Research & Environmental Studies (FARES)

Personal Equipment List and Travel Notes, 2024

### **MIRADOR BASIN PROJECT**

Peten, Guatemala

We welcome you on this expedition. You will be exploring some of the last great unknown regions of the world, and you will be among the first explorers to discover and observe the magnificent remains of the earliest Maya. The knowledge and experiences that you gain here will last forever, and we are delighted that you could share and contribute to this expedition in such an important and timely manner. The expedition is primarily archaeological in nature, but we have specialists on site in Tropical Botany, entomology, herpetology, mammalogy, lithics, ceramics, GIS, Remote Sensing, cultural anthropology, linguistics, epigraphy, osteology, iconography, architectural stabilization and consolidation, artifact curation, and tropical medicine. Because of the multi-disciplinary nature of the project, you will have a wide range of experiences and research opportunities that will enhance your personal interests and research goals.

This project is one of the most remote projects in the world. But in spite of the difficult logistics and remote location, you will find comfortable conditions that make the field research and course work a rich and rewarding experience. You will be working with some wonderful people who have had vast experience in tropical forests and ancient Maya sites and we are looking forward to your participation in this effort.

#### **Mandatory equipment:**

1. **Passport.** We will need a scan of all your passport pages (empty or not) beginning with your data and photo page. We also need two photographs of you (your passport photo will work if clear enough) for registration with the Guatemalan government. We will also need a complete cv.
2. **Academic credentials:** We will need a statement from your university stating that you are a student at your respective universities. Idaho State University will also provide a statement indicating that you are enrolled for the summer semester at the university.
3. **Medical notice.** You are required to notify the FARES Foundation, the Idaho State University Department of Anthropology, and the project director of any medical conditions, including HIV, diabetes, seizures, or any other medical or mental ailments that could impact you on this expedition. You will be required to sign a disclaimer that you are free from disease and sickness.

**4. Adequate clothing.** You will be needing cool, comfortable clothing, preferably cotton. Be sure that you have some long sleeve shirts, and light cotton pants (levi's are heavy, hard to wash, hot, and never seem to dry). Most cotton clothing can be found at a fairly reasonable price in most sporting apparel stores. We do not suggest any particular brand or store, but a wide variety of expedition and tropical weather clothing can be found in second-hand stores, or in specialty stores such as REI, Banana Republic, etc. **Do not bring** anything of a military appearance such as army surplus clothing (although boots are excellent).

### **Boots, Shoes**

Boots should be high top, lace boots, (or better yet, zip sides) especially if you are hiking in. If leather, they should be waterproofed. We suggest that you try to locate a good boot for a modest price. Please be sure they are worn prior to making the trip. This is one item you don't want to skimp on, although that doesn't mean you will need expensive boots. Just find some that you can hike comfortably in over rough terrain. It will be useful if you can tuck your pants into your boots (keeps ticks and chiggers out of your crotch). You will be needing another pair of cheap shoes as an emergency backup and rest pair. These can be inexpensive jogging shoes. A pair of rubber thongs would also come in handy for bathing.

Socks. High top cotton socks may provide additional protection against insect bites on the lower leg. Please wear at least two pair of socks on the trip in, and make sure that you have moleskin and tape. Feet problems are the greatest single affliction that we face due to the fact that feet turn soft and mushy due to the high heat and humidity. Moleskin or medical tape applied in Carmelita or whenever the blisters first start will save you sore feet farther along the trail.

### **Hat**

A hat is a necessity, primarily for insect control, and to discourage penetration of the bot-fly worms into the scalp where they are considerably more difficult to detect and eliminate. Common caps and wide brim hats are sometimes preferred since the mosquitoes tend to hover around the edge of the brim rather than on your head. Also, the wider brim hat tends to shelter the head and upper body from pollen and organic debris that fall from the trees and they protect from the torrential rainfalls that are common even during the dry season.

**Light Jacket-** needed for some evenings and early mornings.

**Rain gear-** we will be involved in rainstorms of tropical proportions. Important items should be placed in ziplock bags. Often, a small umbrella is useful where vegetation is not as dense. Plastic rain jackets are sometimes a double edge sword: they protect you from rain but you get wet from sweating underneath them.

**Clothes soap-** please be frugal with the amount of clothing you bring along. The project has a group of laundry persons that can wash your clothes. For those of you who want to wash personal items, the powder concentrate, environmentally benign clothes soaps are

recommended, and in most cases, can now be purchased in Guatemala. Powdered soap can also be purchased in Flores or Carmelita. We will have buckets for washing clothes or personal bathing. Again, the project will have a laundry person with whom you can have laundry done.

**5. Camp gear.** The basic camp gear is required. This includes:

**Day pack/fanny pack.** Useful for hiking in, and carrying water and supplies.

**Sleeping bag/sheet.** Preferably a cheap cloth bag (ie. \$15), and even better are the small fleece blankets (\$9 at Walmart). They absorb perspiration better, dry out well, provide adequate warmth, and can be left behind if necessary.

**Foam Pad or Air pad (or both).** A cot of some sort is also recommended, but not required. The project is providing cots and beds for staff and students.

**Duffle Bags.** Duffle bags are easier to handle on mules and on helicopters. Get the ones that zipper along the entire length of the duffle bag. Pack frames tend to get bent and caught in vegetation, and receive more abuse.

**Flashlights with batteries.** The small AA or AAA cell batteries are adequate if they provide a bright light, but try to find a light with good illumination. There are rechargeable lights now that are excellent. You will need adequate illumination for walking trails and observing the night animals active in the trees. Remember that fer-de-lance are also nocturnal hunters.

**Clothes line.** Always handy

**Tents.** The project will provide tents for all personnel at the site. Project Tents are large and spacious, and individually assigned, meaning that you will have your own tents.

**Plastic ground cloth and/or tarp that will also provide an additional rain fly.**

**Canteen.** The 2 quarts or larger sizes are beneficial since you will be consuming large quantities of water on the trail. However, large plastic bottles for soft drinks (2 liters) are also a cheap, efficient way to transport water and can be carried in a fanny pack. The project has an extensive water collection system and all water is purified. However, if you have a canteen, make sure that the strap is nylon and not cotton in order to withstand the abuse and the heat and humidity. More numerous smaller bottles on a belt, especially those found in Army surplus or Boy Scout supply stores, are also fine and in many ways superior to the larger canteens because they free the hands and can be carried personally on belts, fanny packs, or day packs (whereas the others most often end up on the mules, and most likely not with us. Gatorade is a great electrolyte replacement as a powder, which can be added to your drink. May make a difference on the way in.

**Small Plastic Wash tub-** optional but always useful and can be procured in Flores, Guatemala. A small toilet plunger is marvelous for washing personal clothes and can also be obtained in Flores. The project will provide laundry personnel to wash clothes for staff and students.

**Machete-** purchased in Flores, Guatemala. When properly used, is a very useful and essential tool.

**A small water filter may be useful on the trail.**

**Personal First Aid Kit, and snake bite kit.** The project maintains a doctor in all project camps, but personal kits are always handy.

## Compass

### Personal Toilet Kit

Soap, Shampoo

Shaving equipment

A couple rolls of personal toilet paper (you never know)

Towel

Dental needs.

Feminine supplies

Caladryl lotion-Antihistamine cream. You will especially grow to love

this stuff.

Anti-fungal cream, such as athletes' foot cream and vaginal yeast infection cream such as Vagisil do wonders for crotch rot. Crotch rot is a severe rash that can totally incapacitate you on the trail or in the site because of extreme heat and moisture. Pay attention to this one...

Mosquito Repellent. After much experimentation, I have determined that the voracious insects of the Peten have little regard for most all popular brands of repellents, with the exception of Deep Woods Off and a brand found in Guatemala made by Bayer. Other repellents, especially those of a liquid nature and heavy Deet content] are not recommended because of damage to equipment and materials.

The aerosol sprays are preferred because they are less messy and can be applied abundantly to clothing. They also tend to do less damage to equipment, as Deet has proven to be extremely damaging. Most repellents are quickly washed off by perspiration and will need to be applied frequently to exposed skin.

Archaeologists should try to procure a **Munsell Color Chart**, although charts will be available on site.

**Personal Photographic equipment.** Make sure everything is insured. All photographs are considered property of the project, but you will be allowed to keep the photos that you shoot. Please make sure that the photographer is identified in the lettering below each digital photo or folders of fotos (e.g. elm danta 2022 rdh0567.jpg or elm 117k db2548) Publications of any sort in any venue **must** have project authorization before publication

and submitted to project directors before submitting to any press (Government requirement). There will also be **restricted** use of photos on internet (government requirement). Also, no images will be allowed to be exported from the site via emails or facebook because of government restrictions.

**Lap top computer.** We have generators and internet at El Mirador; and generators at other sites. Please bring your own surge protector.

**Chloroquin/Anti-malaria.** Because of the remote nature of the sites (malaria mosquitoes require human vectors), many of the staff do not take anti-malaria medicines because of health hazards created by the medications. However, after years of dealing with this, we recommend healthy spraying of insect repellent near villages and try to reduce your exposure that way. However, we suggest that each person consider anti-malaria control. Discuss this with your M.D.

**Suggested optional equipment:**

Small camp cot. Totally optional, since the project provides cots and/or wooden beds, but the issue is to keep you off the ground. The project has cots and beds on site.

Folding lawn or director's chair. The project does have chairs on site for archaeologists and artists.

Hammock- can be purchased in Flores. We recommend the hammocks that are solid cloth or canvas, not mesh, for insect relief.

Smart phones: Especially great for recording those unbelievable jungle sounds. Nobody at home will believe what a Howler monkey sounds like, and the exotic calls of birds like the *Chachalaca* and the *Oropendola* will bring back memories for a lifetime.

Lanterns. A florescent lamp with a solar panel is the best.

Munchies, candy (that will not melt), jerky (especially nice); dried fruit. But be conservative, please.

Vitamins, particularly Vitamin C.

Journal.

**NOTE THAT THE PROJECT HAS STAFF PHYSICIANS AT ALL TIMES AT THE SITE DURING THE FIELD SEASONS, SO BE ASSURED THAT WE CAN DEAL WITH MANY MEDICAL SCENARIOS IN SPITE OF OUR EXTREMELY REMOTE SITUATION**

**DO NOT BRING:**

**Handguns** of any type.

### **Military clothing**

**Absolutely no drugs**, of any type, unless specifically prescribed by your physician. Guatemalan prisons are much more unpleasant than those in the U.S. We will actively prosecute any violation of this.

**Absolutely no alcoholic beverages.** We need you to have your wits about you at all times.

Anything that would draw unnecessary attention to yourself. **For men, we have found that short haircuts (mid-ear or higher) tend to avoid police and military scrutiny, unnecessary inspections, and generally lend to a better relationship with authorities.** Jungles are not conducive to maintenance, cleanliness, and safety of long hair.

### **Notes on Conduct and Behavior:**

Remember that we will be guests in a country that is not particularly pro-U.S. People are very polite, considerate, and tolerant for the most part, and you will make friendships there that may last for a lifetime. Please extend to them every consideration possible while visiting their land, and you will enjoy the pleasant associations and relationships that you will develop. We will be subject to Guatemalan laws and legal responsibilities and we will cooperate with all government and law enforcement agencies. You will have personnel with you who have lived for years in Guatemala and other areas of Latin America, who understand and speak the language with native fluency, and who understand the cultural and social/political systems. Please trust their judgment and experience in dealing with the Guatemalans.

Guatemala is also one of the most beautiful areas in the world. This great natural beauty is enhanced by the abundance of native populations found there (mostly Maya). It is one of the most purely indigenous countries in the Western Hemisphere. We hope you will appreciate the rich cultural heritage that exists in Guatemala, and take advantage of the opportunity to understand and appreciate their way of life.

Guatemala has undergone great internal pressures and upheavals. There has been a great deal of bloodshed and atrocities prior to the peace accords of the late 1990's. Most of these activities have greatly subsided, although a few sporadic outbreaks have been reported in the Highlands. We believe that we are geographically far from any conflict and we know that the total isolation found in the Peten is also a magnificent sanctuary. May we suggest some recommendations:

Please do not attract unnecessary attention to yourself by loud or boisterous behavior. Appearance should be neat, clean, and groomed.

Be discreet with wallets, cameras, purses, and especially with bank transactions. While in the Highlands and Lowlands, do not travel alone at night in a private vehicle.

Do not be alarmed by the presence of fully armed military personnel.

Do not antagonize any Guatemalan authority.

Try to see as much of the country and its people as possible. There may be some areas of cities or the country however where you should not go. These will be indicated to you by project personnel. Keep in mind that most of the recommendations listed above would apply equally in areas of Los Angeles, Salt Lake, Denver, New York, and Miami and any other major city in the U.S.

Please remember that you not only portray your country to them, but you are an expedition member on a research project with more than 40 universities and research institutions. Since your conduct may possibly have a bearing on the future success and participation of the project in Guatemala, please be aware of your conduct and appearance at all times and act accordingly.

For those of you who drink, we will insist that there be no public intoxication. Drinking, if at all, should be light in public, and for the most part, should be strictly a private affair. The project will cover all soft drinks, juices, and water expenses, **but you must pay any and all alcoholic beverages consumed in towns and cities.** We request (and it is now a Guatemalan law) that **there be absolutely no alcoholic beverages once we have left "civilization" and while we are at the sites.** Our experience has indicated the potential hazards and serious problems that detract from, or could even destroy, the success and the scientific purposes of the expedition.

There may be some of you who may have fallen in love with Maya art and artifacts. We insist that there be no purchasing of artifacts or removal of artifacts of any kind from Guatemala. Guatemalan laws are very strict on this issue, and your baggage may be subject to a thorough search by Guatemalan authorities prior to your departure from the country. Any illegal possession of Pre-Columbian or Colonial artifacts will result in severe legal penalties, immediate arrest and imprisonment, as well as seriously jeopardize the scientific status of the expedition. We will prosecute, jointly with the Guatemalans, any violations of the laws regarding artifacts.

## **Literacy and Educational Training for Workmen**

One of the standard practices that the Mirador Basin Project has pioneered since 1989 is the opportunity to teach illiterate Maya workmen how to read and write. Every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings, project staff and personnel will work with hundreds of Maya workers in teaching reading, writing, mathematics, history, art, and household finance. This has been a rewarding and rich contribution to improving the lives of impoverished workers who have never had the chance to have a formal education. Project staff may be asked to present any educational topic of their own choosing (1/2 hour) to workmen on weekend evenings. We then work on literacy programs with small groups of workmen. This is not a mandatory participation, but highly encouraged for all students and staff. The change you can make in someone's life is remarkable, and you will sense the value of this program as you work with workers.

## **Additional notes and travel**

### **Travel to Guatemala City and Flores**

**If you are a student, please note that you are responsible for your round trip plane tickets to Guatemala City.**

**We will have someone pick you up at the airport (usually), but be sure you have contacted the project director with your itinerary.**

The lab facilities in Guatemala City are at 20 calle 8-23, Zona 13, Colonia Aurora 2, which is very close to the international airport. If for some reason your contact person is not at the airport to pick you up, tell a taxi driver to go to the south (towards the volcanoes) past the Aeroclub and a military compound (on right). As soon as you pass the military compound, you will find the gated entrance into Aurora 2 community. You will need to give identification at this point. Then proceed straight on the main road until you reach a triangular basketball court as a sort of park. At the southern (distal) edge of the court, turn left and the lab is the 2<sup>nd</sup> house on the left. It is yellow with a brown garage door. Phone at the laboratory is 2261-4437.

Luis Gonzalez is usually the best contact if you get snagged somehow in Guatemala City. His cell phone is (502) 5859-9902. Edgar Suyuc and Gustavo Martinez are the Guatemalan co-directors of the project and their cell phones are (502) 3569 3676 and Cell phone for Dr. Richard Hansen in Guatemala is (502) 3023 3536 and 3586 2628 skype address is richard.d.hansen. Email for Dr. Hansen is [rhansen@pmt.org](mailto:rhansen@pmt.org). WhatsApp number is +12084314289.

The project does have a hotel complex for students and staff to stay which works with the project. The hotel is called **Casa Blanca**, 15 Calle “C” 7-35, Aurora 1, Zona 13, Guatemala. Tell them you are with Dr. Hansen and the Mirador Basin Project, and they will take care of you, including meals. We are also negotiating now with a hotel adjacent to the project lab which will make logistics even better.

### **Flores Travel**

The project usually contracts a bus to transport staff and equipment to Flores. You are welcome to travel with the staff at no charge, other than your snacks or meals in route. Once you arrive in Flores, you are entirely covered by project costs. Some of you may prefer to fly, instead of the 9-hour bus ride. TAG Air and Avianca are the two airlines that fly back and forth regularly from Flores. All departures are now from the International side of the airport.

For the most part, students and staff will hike in from Carmelita. There should be a helicopter based at the Maya International Hotel in Flores, but this is extremely limited and approval must be obtained from the project director before anyone can fly in. You may pay for it yourself however, if you are so inclined (approximately \$2500- \$3000) dollars.

If you somehow find yourself in an independent position in coming either to Flores, Carmelita, or coming into the Mirador Basin, please note the following information concerning the Flores-Carmelita-Mirador section of the trip:



In Flores, our agent is Brandon Barrientos. His cell phone is (502) 5756 6233. He can help you get to one of two places where we usually stay: the Hotel Nakbe which is close to the Maya International (be sure to ask for the Mirador Basin Project rate and have some sort of proof that you are with the project). You can charge your rooms, meals, soft drinks, and water there. Please see that the meals are modest (no lobster or other high-priced items, and **NO alcoholic beverages will be paid for by the project**). If you somehow missed the trip to Carmelita, you can check with Brandon on how best to get there. Brandon can be counted on for about everything, and he is a crucial contact in Flores-Carmelita.

In Carmelita, our storage facility is on the east side of the runway in the long, cement floor building, known as the former residence of Brigido Perez. However, Adrian Carminante is the person entrusted with the dispatch of mules. We can eat at several local family “restaurants” in Carmelita and there are several other new dining opportunities as well as at the offices of local tourist the organization and the Visitor’s Center (with the green roof) across the airstrip. **Please pay for your meals in Carmelita so that we don’t have a list of undocumented meals. We will reimburse you** at the site, but get receipts. There are several other restaurants in the village.

There are several stores in the village although several others are now starting to appear. Cold soft drinks, beers, and limited items can be purchased there.

### **Trail notes**

You should have lunches prepared for the trail by someone in Carmelita, particularly with the Community Guide Association. Please be sure you pay for all your personal food for the trail unless you are with one of our cooks or you are with project staff and personnel. If by some good fortune, you are with our cooks and staff, they can arrange to have food prepared for the trip in. Please coordinate this with the project agent and staff in Carmelita. Food on the trail usually consists of tortillas, beans, and a can or two of canned meats.

Our mules are always coming in and out, and will always be going to our storage. Facility (“bodega”). Check with Brandon and the agent in Carmelita about when the next available mule trains will be in. Please have your gear ready to go early in the morning, as muleteers have to load the mules and get the gear to the first camp site on the trail so that they have time to cut *ramon* branches for the mules to eat. You will be hiking through at least seven Maya sites on the trail consisting of Preclassic and Late Classic Maya settlements. The trail has been shifted to the ancient Maya causeway between Tintal and El Mirador (saving you another 6 hours of hiking), so you will be actually hiking on one of the earliest “freeway” systems in the world.

Please take the opportunity to climb some of the largest pyramids at Tintal when you arrive at the site after you get to the camp, but be sure you go with a guide (one of the workmen or guards can take you). This site is much larger than Tikal, and, like other sites in the Mirador Basin, up to 1000 to 2000 years earlier than Tikal. Tintal has a magnificent ancient moat system that you should be sure and see.

Do not swim in any of the lakes or aguadas on the trail, regardless of how tempting it appears or how hot you think you are. Large crocodiles inhabit these lagoons, and the consequences could be serious. Always keep an eye out for snakes. Many are harmless, but **never** take them for granted. We also have several frog species with potent toxins on their skins and there are toxic trees on the trail. Please make sure that you have a local guide or workman with you, who can be procured anywhere in Carmelita, as the mules move quickly through the forest and often cannot be kept up with. This means that you will not see your luggage until the first night once it is loaded on the mules. There are hundreds of forks on the trail, and you will be hopelessly lost for days if not weeks, by disregarding this bit of advice. Please have your night time gear (tents, sleeping bag, etc.) in a duffle bag and marked in the costal (gunny sack bag that the muleteers pack everything into) so that we don't have to open every bag to find your gear. Try to keep all the night time gear in the same bag.

**Additional Post-class work (Post August 5).**

Students may choose to stay longer in the site to work on their projects if they are willing and able, at no additional charge. This may be particularly useful if a student finds a particular project or interest in a possible MA Thesis or a potential Ph.D. dissertation topic. The maximum field work possible is always a positive opportunity to gain prime data for such research.

The project usually winds up work near the end of August because of increasing rains in September. This is frequently variable, but we try to leave the site by about August 20 to 25. However, we will work with your schedules to make sure you are taken care of and will coordinate your leaving the site to accommodate your individual itineraries.

**Again, great to have you on one of the most amazing expeditions in the world.**