

THE *Current*

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[Andrea Estrada](#)

Agreement Between UCSB and Guatemala Paves the Way for Archaeological Peace Park

Three dignitaries from Guatemala will travel to Santa Barbara later this month to join UC Santa Barbara in signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that will establish a collaborative research program at the ancient Maya city of El Pilar and launch the El Pilar Peace Park Initiative.

Straddling the borders of Guatemala and Belize, El Pilar was mapped for the first time in 1983 by UCSB archaeologist Anabel Ford, who has been working in the Maya forest area since 1972.

Exploring Solutions Past ~ The Maya Forest Alliance will host a reception to welcome the dignitaries at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, October 21, in the Mural Room of the Santa Barbara Courthouse. First District Supervisor Salud Carbajal will formally greet them.

Signing of the MOU, which mirrors an agreement between UCSB and Belize signed in 2005, will take place on campus at 2 p.m. on Wednesday, October 22, in the McCune Conference Room, 6020 Humanities and Social Sciences Building. The MOU will be signed by Henry T. Yang, chancellor of UCSB; Ford, who is also director of the MesoAmerican Research Center at UCSB; Sarah Fenstermaker, director of the Institute of Social, Behavioral, and Economic Research (ISBER); Randall Fox, secretary of the nonprofit organization Exploring Solutions Past; and Guatemalan

dignitaries Hector Escobedo, director general of the Directorate of Cultural and Natural Patrimony in Guatemala; Erick Ponciano, director of the Institute of Culture and History; and Vilma Fialko, coordinator of the Project of Archaeological Site Protection of Petén.

The signing will follow a panel discussion on "The El Pilar Peace Park Initiative – Building Collaboration at El Pilar" that begins at 1 p.m. in the McCune Conference Room. Both events are hosted by ISBER.

"The site is a binational space, and building collaborative ties is critical to realize this dream of a peace park," said Ford. "If we can actually do it, it will be the first archaeological peace park in the world. Having the university establish a strong collaborative tie with Guatemala is very important."

The signing of the MOU marks the 25th anniversary of Ford's discovery of El Pilar. The research program and peace park initiative are the culmination of her efforts to reunite the ancient center that lies in both Guatemala and Belize. Currently, the site is protected in both countries as a natural and cultural resource. Each country has a management plan for its own section, but Ford advocates managing the site as one unit.

"ISBER is thrilled to have the opportunity to host this event with Chancellor Yang, Anabel Ford, the Office of the Dean of Social Sciences, and the MesoAmerican Research Center," said Fenstermaker. "The establishment of the Peace Park at El Pilar is an example of the important broader results achieved by UCSB researchers in the course of conducting their scholarly work. The Peace Park at El Pilar sets new standards for international cooperation, environmental protection, and consensus building among multiple private and public institutions."

In conjunction with the landmark visit by Escobedo, Ponciano, and Fialko, and the signing of the MOU, an exhibit focusing on El Pilar will continue through October 31 at Pacific Traveler's Supply, 12 W. Anapamu St. in Santa Barbara. The exhibit includes maps of El Pilar, the Maya forest, and the forest garden, and wall-sized panels that feature photographer Macduff Everton's images documenting the research of El Pilar.

At its most vibrant -- the period from A.D. 600 to 900 -- El Pilar had a population of more than 20,000 people who lived in a mosaic landscape of city homes and gardens. This contrasted with areas of forest reserve and agricultural fields, such as

present-day traditional Maya forest gardens. Today, El Pilar is at the heart of a 5,000-acre archaeological reserve linking Belize and Guatemala and celebrating the culture and nature of the Maya forest.

Individuals interested in attending the reception or panel discussion should contact Ford at ford@marc.ucsb.edu or (805) 893-8191.

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†[Video \(.avi, 100MB\): El Pilar Project](#)

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