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Agreement Between UCSB and Belize Continues Maya Research

Dignitaries from Belize will travel to Santa Barbara later this month to join UC Santa Barbara in signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to support a collaborative research program at the ancient Maya city of El Pilar and to launch a management program titled "Archaeology Under the Canopy."

Straddling the borders of Belize and Guatemala, El Pilar was mapped for the first time in 1983 by UCSB archeologist Anabel Ford, who has been working in the Maya forest area since 1972. In 1993, she initiated a campaign to protect the ancient Maya center in Belize and Guatemala, and today the site has protected status in both countries, as well as parallel management plans.

Signing of the MOU, which renews the agreement between UCSB and Belize signed in 2005, will take place at 2 p.m. on Monday, January 24, in the Chancellor's Conference Room on the fifth floor of Cheadle Hall. The document will be signed by UCSB Chancellor Henry T. Yang; Ford, who is director of UCSB's MesoAmerican Research Center; Sarah Fenstermaker, director of the Institute of Social, Behavioral, and Economic Research (ISBER), the organized research unit at UCSB that supports the MesoAmerican Research Center; Randall Fox, secretary of the nonprofit organization Exploring Solutions Past ~ The Maya Forest Alliance; Diane Haylock, president of the Belize National Institute of Culture and History; and George Thompson, acting director of the Belize Institute of Archaeology.

Exploring the Past ~ The Maya Forest Alliance and UCSB's MesoAmerican Research Center are hosting the landmark visit, which also includes a reception to honor the dignitaries.

"This MOU underscores the importance of our international relationships and the value of Mesoamerica, literally at our back door," said Ford. "Having an opportunity to celebrate the value of research, the importance of exchange, and the critical quality of conservation is in and of itself remarkable. That UCSB can foster this relationship is proof of forward thinking. Here is where the past can help the future of the Maya forest."

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 should contact Ford for more information at ford@marc.ucsb.edu or (805) 893-8191. For more information about El Pilar, visit www.marc.ucsb.edu

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The Meso American Research Center

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