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## *The Local Environment*

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The fertile alluvial and well-drained soils on the terraces of creeks and rivers in the Stann Creek District have always been an important agricultural resource in both ancient times and contemporary times. Within a 20km distance, from the Caribbean Ocean to the east and the Maya Mountains to the west, there is a large diversity of environments, transitioning from shoreline to mangrove lagoons to pine savannah to broad leaf forest with alluvial valleys to the foothills of the Mountains. Numerous navigable rivers provided direct access to the coast. This diversity in environments, food, and raw materials provided the ancient Maya with most of the resources they required to be self-sufficient and sustaining, including salt and lime production and fishing on the coast, agriculture and broad leaf food and medicinal products along the coastal plain, river valleys, and forests, as well as hard rock materials from the Maya Mountains and foothills. Products that were not available locally, such as obsidian, were obtained by trade as far away as the highlands of Guatemala.

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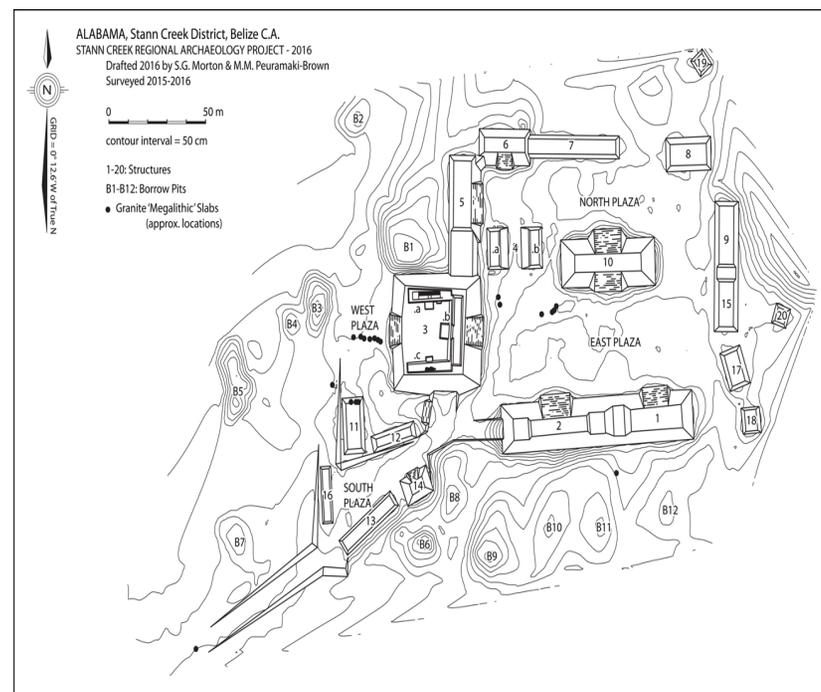
## *History of the Site*

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As with most Maya sites, the original ancient name is unknown. The name “Alabama” is derived from the work camp of the Waha Leaf Banana Company, which was in operation in this area in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Alabama was both built and occupied between 1300 to 1100 years ago (700 and 900 AD) during the Late Classic to Terminal Classic Maya periods. There is some evidence of later activity at this site between 1100 to 800 years ago (900 to 1200 AD) during the Early Post Classic Maya period. What spurred both the late settlement, the brief occupation and later abandonment of the site are presently under investigation by careful archeological work. Alabama is currently on private land within an orange orchard, however the actual site has been left in a natural rain forest setting where the structures are overgrown with vegetation, waiting to be uncovered.

# The Maya Alabama Site

Located in the Stann Creek District of east-central Belize near the village of Maya Mopan along the Waha Leaf Creek, the Alabama site has had very little attention until recently with efforts from the Stann Creek Regional Archaeology Project initiated in 2014. Even though the main epicenter is compact (2.48ha), it has most of the features usually found at larger sites. There are over 20 structures as well as four plazas, a ball court, a sacbe (causeway), numerous large granite slabs and several monumental buildings, the largest being building #3 at 7.5m high. There are several surrounding depressions used as borrow pits for construction and fill material and subsequently used as water containment reservoirs and perhaps also for defense purposes. In addition to the core area, over 150 residential house mounds have been identified over a 2 km<sup>2</sup> area. This provides a population estimate of 550 to 864 people living in close proximity to the Alabama ceremonial centre.



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## *What Makes Alabama Unique?*

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Alabama stands out among other Maya sites for several reasons. Firstly, the building material is granite rather than the limestone that most other Maya sites are constructed from. Locally available from the nearby Cockscomb pluton, the much harder granite was used as the main construction material for building faces on monumental buildings and other structures, stairs, platforms, and megalithic slabs. Secondly, the site appears to have been built and occupied during periods when the rest of the Maya world was in a state of change and decline. Thirdly, the occupation of Alabama was short-lived and rapidly developed in what appears to be a single phase of construction, while many other Maya sites were completed in multiple construction phases and some were continuously occupied for over thousands of years and beginning much earlier.

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## *Previous and Current Research*

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The earliest published archaeological work carried out at the Alabama site was done by Elizabeth Graham in the late 1970's with the only additional work carried out from 1986 to 1989 by Jeff MacKinnon and his team. The site was left untouched otherwise until the most recent work started in 2013, entitled "Stann Creek Regional Archaeology Project" (SCRAP) led by Dr. Meaghan Peuramaki-Brown. The project is currently ongoing and works closely with the local Maya communities, as well as Belize's federal archaeological interests to ensure the research methods employed are not only executed with the highest scientific standards, but the results are shared with and are in the best interests of the communities and cultures they impact.

Future archaeological work will seek to shed some light on important questions such as:

- Why was this site chosen to build a ceremonial centre?
- Why was it settled so late in the history of the Maya civilization, and why was it short lived?
- Why was it ultimately abandoned?
- How was the monumental architecture constructed?
- Where was the source of the raw materials?
- Was the hard stone a trading commodity and a source of economic prosperity?
- What was the relationship between its neighbouring communities and its far-reaching trading partners?
- How did the collapse of many inland Maya sites during this time and subsequent migration of people impact this area?
- How did the socio-political fabric shape this community?

The preservation of sites like Alabama are important to help understand ancient cultures and bring to life their history for their living decedents and all who are interested. The employment of proper archaeological investigation is critical to achieving these important goals. SCRAP is committed to ensuring that all actions taken at the Alabama adhere to proper research protocols and involve the local community.

