



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

AIA Site Preservation Grant Will Protect Underwater Maya Wooden Structures

BOSTON—June 28, 2010—The Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) announced today that the **only known Classic Maya wooden structures**, located in **Paynes Creek National Park in Belize**, will benefit from a \$25,000 Site Preservation Grant. The project, led by **Louisiana State University Professor, Heather McKillop**, will help protect the underwater wooden structures and make information available to area residents and tourists.

The Classic Maya period extended from around AD 250 to 900. Generally wood and other organic materials from this period do not survive in the archaeological record; however, the waterlogged environment at Paynes Creek created unique preservation conditions, giving us a rare glimpse of how the ancient Maya used timber. Maya Archaeologist and AIA Programs Director, Ben Thomas, believes “this project will have a tremendous impact on the local population of southern Belize where many descendents of the ancient Maya still reside today and on the tourists who come to the area. It will be great for people to see the wooden artifacts created by the ancestors of the local inhabitants—this kind of awareness is critical for the protection of the site.”

With the three-year grant from the AIA, McKillop will construct an observational platform in Paynes Creek National Park. Tourists will be able to observe the underwater archaeological site through a plexiglass window in the platform without damaging the fragile remains at the site. Additionally, McKillop plans to host a series of workshops and talks in the region to raise awareness of the site in conjunction with an exhibit and a website for archaeological tourism with educational information for schools, tour guides, and the public. The exhibit, to be displayed in the nearby town of Punta Gorda will highlight one of the project’s best finds—a wooden Maya canoe paddle.

About AIA Site Preservation Program and Grants

The AIA Site Preservation Program emphasizes outreach, education and the spread of best practices in site preservation. The Institute also supports preservation projects in Texas, Cambodia, Chile, Cyprus and Turkey. In addition to grants, the program includes advocacy to stop the destruction of archaeological sites, informs U.S. Troop of cultural materials they may encounter while deployed, presents outreach activities for children, maintains online resources for the public and professionals, hosts workshops, and gives awards for best practices. All aspects of the program, including the awarding of grants, are made possible through donations to the AIA. To learn more, please visit archaeological.org/sitepreservation.

About Archaeological Institute of America (AIA)

Founded in 1879, [The Archaeological Institute of America](http://archaeological.org) (AIA) is North America's oldest and largest archaeological organization. Today, the AIA has nearly 200,000 members belonging to 107 local societies in the United States, Canada and overseas. The organization promotes public interest in the cultures and civilizations of the past, supports archaeological research, fosters the sound professional practice of archaeology, and advocates for the preservation of the world's archaeological heritage. The organization hosts archaeological fairs, lectures and other events throughout North America; publishes [Archaeology](http://archaeology.com) magazine and the [American Journal of Archaeology](http://ajonline.com); awards fellowships and honors; and leads global archaeological travel excursions.

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