

With the funds I received from the Jane C. Waldbaum Scholarship I paid the remaining cost of the Belize Archaeology Field School. Which meant my dreams of digging archaeologically in Central America would no longer be just a dream. A few years ago I became interested in Central America and its passed inhabitants due to learning about the mysterious Olmec culture. Today there is still much to learn about the Olmec and their way(s) of life, but for the length of the field school I would study the Maya. This meant that I had been given the opportunity to learn about and work with the remains of a culture closely related to the Olmec. Eventually I would like to conduct osteological research with the few biological Olmec remains that can be found; but for now I had the chance to investigate the Maya. Unknowingly the funds I received changed my educational career for the better. Before attending the Belize Archaeology Field School I was full of doubt, due to being unsure if I would like to work in the field or strictly keep conducting and assisting lab research. Now that I have gained field experience I know that I love everything from finding artifacts in the dirt to experiencing new cultures in exotic places. The field school, however, did much more than this. It gave me the ability to test how I enjoy hands on osteology. My only other experiences with bones had been matching up animal bones with their species; so my experiences in Belize truly allowed me to know that osteology is the right field for me. For two years now I have been looking into getting a masters in osteology, but I was unsure if it was the right study for me. After learning how to dig up human bones using just a kabob skewer and a spoon (instead of a trowel and dust pan), I realized that I do have the patience to work as an osteologist at an archaeological site. The other thing I learned about myself, in Belize, was that I am quite comfortable in new places and new cultures. I even loved hiking through the dense temperate forest. This trip has exposed me to so much that I simply could not have learned from inside any class room or any textbook. I even have the ability to say that I met my first mentor in osteology.

Originally I was brought into the field school to work strictly with two Maya burial sites, however we were flooded out of our site. By this I mean that rain caused the Rio Bravo to flood and we could not reach our site. Despite this David Hyde from Western State Colorado was generous enough to allow me to work with his group at the Medicinal Trail site under the supervision of Kimberly Wren, who was to become my osteology mentor for a few days. Although I was only allowed to work on burials for two days with his group it left the biggest impression with me, as did the rest of the field school.

My professor, Marisol Cortes-Rincon, was very open to letting students get hands on experience in the lab as well as in the field. In fact she encouraged it. With her guidance, as well as the guidance of others, I not only learned to clean artifacts, but learned how to classify them with a time period, use a total station, GIS, line and tape procedures and so much more. Kimberly Wren even welcomed me into the lab and personally taught me how to determine bone, side teeth, and properly store biological artifacts. Every single aspect of the field school seemed to teach me something new and if given the chance I would relive the experience one hundred times over!