

The Struggle for Q'eqchi Community Conservation and Management of Mayan Sacred (Cave) Sites: The Case of Caves of Candelaria and Bombil pek in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. Anthony Stocks, Professor, Department of Anthropology, Idaho State University

Introduction

If it were possible to declare an entire country a World Heritage site on the basis of its archaeological remains, Guatemala would be a strong candidate. From the amazing city of Tikal with its sentinel pyramids and plazas in the jungle to the ancient cities now covered by glass buildings in the modern capital one can scarcely walk ten meters in the countryside without encountering the cultural remains of one of the most engaging civilizations the world has ever witnessed, the Maya.



While major attention has been focused on the Mayan ruins, particularly the remote Petén cities that the colonial powers failed to destroy, there are important aspects of the Mayan civilization that are literally hidden underground. The ancient Maya believed that they came from an underworld and the K'ichee' bible, the Popol Vuh, places the origins of important ritual behavior underground as well, in caves far to the east of the K'ichee's present home, where the first people went to await the dawn (Tedlock 2000). Thus, caves carry a good deal of symbolic weight and have a number of levels of associations. The Q'eqchi' people of Chisec, Alta Verapaz, sometimes say that the ancient Maya did not disappear at all. They simply went underground where the water was, from whence they can sometimes still be heard, their marimbas making ghostly sounds in the night.

The Candelaria Caves in Chisec municipality, Alta Verapaz, are a spectacular example of a cave-river complex used for ancient Mayan rituals, fully deserving World Heritage classification, but they are by no means the only example. Every cave we have discovered in the process of mapping remote Q'eqchi' communities north of Cobán and west of Chisec has Mayan early and late classic-era ceramics and obsidian, and occasionally burials, and every river that emerges from the ground is venerated. In the case of B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq', as well as having abundant evidence of old Mayan use, the caves are associated with modern rituals by Mayan traditionalists who are trying to maintain, revive, or re-invent, old customs.

After the devastating civil war of the 1980s, the Maya are awakening with an increasing sense of political power and a sense, as indigenous people, that they are not content to think of the past, as archaeologists are wont to do, as something remote and separate from them. For many Mayan people, the past and the present are seamlessly connected. They can relatively easily view archaeology as an instrument of their own cultural history, not necessarily as an enemy desecrating gravesites and sacred places. They have not felt the need, as have the powerless indigenous people of North America, to claim power by halting the enterprise, repatriating the bones, expelling the invaders. Halting the process of archaeology can still be a tactic as we shall see below, but the objective is participation, not defeat. Many Maya want to use archaeological sites as sacred areas and manage them for tourism as well.

However, one of the issues that make full participation difficult is the most intransigent, political, and complex problem in both cultural and natural resource conservation, the question of land tenure. The program discussed by this paper focuses on land tenure as an important instrument of conservation, a strategy supported by the USAID Guatemalan mission. The paper makes the argument that in archaeological sites where indigenous people are historically involved, the best protection for the natural and cultural resources may come through legalizing their claim over the site and actively involving them in its protection as owners and co-administrators (with the government) of the heritage, not outsiders.¹ Indeed, in indigenous areas in the developing countries, characterized by insecure land tenure, poverty, and distrust of government, legalization and participation in management may be the only solution that protects the site and provides stability of management.

The Candelaria, B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq' caves - important cultural and natural resources in Guatemala - are now subject to management and co-administration by Q'eqchi' communities who aspired successfully to own, the land on which the caves are found. The communities associated with Candelaria are now legalized and are entering into a co-administration relationship with the Ministry of Culture and Sports. The community associated with B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq' are administering the caves without such a formal arrangement and do not yet own the land, but their claim is in the process of resolution. As this is the first time in Guatemala, or indeed any Central American country that an experience such as this may be encountered, their success or failure at this important task will, in many ways, set the course of the future in Guatemala for indigenous communities in a similar position.

The paper that follows first focuses on the problems of parkism, statism, and elitism that have plagued conservationists of all stripes in Guatemala and elsewhere until the advent of newer models of conservation. It then describes the situation of the Candelaria, B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq' caves and the Mayan classic period palace at Cancuén before turning to the successful struggle by the Q'eqchi' Maya to gain control of these important sites along the ancient (and genuine) Ruta Maya that connected the highlands with the Petén. It ends with some conclusions and observations about the conditions under which successful community conservation may operate.

The Dilemma of Archeology

Archaeologists who work in indigenous areas of the developing world should probably learn three lessons that the conservation community has learned – or at least says it has learned (Cf. Western and Wright 1994; World Wildlife Fund 2000) – through the international experience of trying to accomplish biodiversity conservation in poor, heavily populated indigenous areas in the world where indigenous sovereignty is not recognized. I would argue that, in the course of pursuing archaeological research and conservation, archaeologists have been strategically guilty of *parkism, statism, and elitism*. While not necessarily bad in themselves, at least in a

¹ The cases of Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde in the United States would bear this solution, as attendees at the conference in which this paper was presented were told by Native American members of the Taos Pueblo.

proper context², they tend to strain relations with indigenous people when they are applied unthinkingly in socially sensitive contexts.

Parkism is the notion that, to protect something, you have to put a fence around it and keep everyone out except under your terms. Although not without a cost in indigenous lives and livelihoods, as in the famous case of Yellowstone National Park, this tactic works most of the time in countries where the concept of private property is essentially holy, the social system that binds people to each other is weak, and the system of rules and laws is strong and relatively evenly applied. In Guatemala the Ministry of Culture and Sports follows the *parkist* principle that archaeological sites are parks that belong to the state, even when on private property. They are considered protected areas, although the protection is more de jure than de facto. However, when the sites fall in areas of economically stressed indigenous communities that lack land titles and have suffered grave abuses at the hands of governments, problems ensue. This situation describes most of the indigenous communities in northern Guatemala.

Statism refers to the notion, common in the developed countries, that the mandate given to archaeologists by the state is not only a necessary, but also a sufficient, condition on which to premise fieldwork. *Statism* is a powerful ideological machine, fueled by the ways that international funds by bilateral and multilateral donors are often dispersed. While the state may jealously guard that privilege and may make the lives of archaeologists who skirt officialdom miserable, it is well to keep in mind that the relation in this hemisphere between indigenous peoples and the states in which they often unhappily find themselves has been problematic for over 500 years. Typical of the indigenous struggle is a movement for physical territories that they can control as ethnic groups under their own value systems and forms of organization. Archaeologists who advance into an area subject to indigenous communal land tenure often find that their “right” to conduct archaeological research is challenged by local people.

Elitism, in the present context, refers to the notion that only people who are trained and educated at the university level are capable of producing and consuming technical knowledge, and carrying out technical activities. The idea that local indigenous people can, without a formal education, carry out often quite complex technical tasks, reflect philosophically, produce and consume scientific information, and act on the information in a managerial sense is alien to this mentality. The role of indigenous people in archaeology is generally as laborers, guides, and transporters if they work for the project, and as dangerous interlopers when they do not. There are two mistakes here; one is to confuse education with intelligence, while the other is blindly overvalue formal education.

Indigenous Relations with Archaeology at Home and Abroad

Field archaeology in the United States ran into a serious snag with the passing of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, commonly known as NAGPRA. The law requires that bones and associated artifacts presumed to be indigenous that are

² The proper context might be a case in which no indigenous populations were present, or a case in which a fragile area of land, lake, river, or sea had no claim upon it that could not be purchased in the market.

disinterred on federal and tribal land be repatriated to the modern tribes found to be historically associated with them. This law affects at least 2/3 of the archaeology done in the United States each year and has vexed museum curators enormously. Within science, as the case of Kennewick Man has shown, the main difficulty is in the question of associating archaeological remains with modern tribes. While ethnicity is indicated by language and ascriptions of identity, archaeological remains do not speak except through style and location. Furthermore, the geographic movement of peoples over time often makes the relationship between specific ethnic groups on the ground and ancient graves a matter of speculation.

NAGPRA, of course, is the result of a long discourse between indigenous people in the United States and people who study the remains of prehistoric cultures. Where one sees cultural and historical continuity the other sees ambiguity or discontinuity. Furthermore NAGPRA, or at least Kennewick, has become a lightning rod for racist discourse. As testimony before congress (June 10th 1998) by Vin Steponaitis for archaeology, and Armand Minthorn, Umatilla leader, makes clear, NAGPRA has pitted indigenous North Americans against scientists in an interesting, and as many Q'eqchi' would see it, quite unnecessary, way.

The reason for the difference undoubtedly relates to the differences in the way the two see their relations with the society in which they live. In North America, those indigenous people who failed to assimilate early on were subjected to extermination, war, and humiliating and exploitative treaties. They have been marched smartly this way or that, placed on reservations as wards of the government, and discriminated against as ethnic and racial minorities. They were not valued even as a labor force. In this powerless position, scientists have treated them as exotic curiosities and shopkeepers treat them with suspicion and hostility. Meanwhile the government agency supposedly dedicated to their welfare (the Bureau of Indian Affairs or BIA) has cheerfully managed to lease their lands to white farmers and ranchers at fire sale prices while doing little about the fractionation of their lands that theoretically justify the BIA control.

In the late 20th century, the American Indian Movement, the books of Vine Deloria and many others, and the ease of transport and communication, have stimulated the creation of a pan-indigenous polity in North America. A plethora of powwows and conferences has aroused a sense of common problems, especially land problems, and an increasingly common earth-based religious philosophy. In one sense, NAGPRA is muscle flexing, the result of indigenous demands for the same rights enjoyed by other ethnic/racial groups. However in a deeper sense, it is part of a construction project; its result is like the walls placed around construction sites in a city. Indigenous people are demanding to be allowed to re-invent history to reconstruct themselves as peoples and cultures, free of pressure from scientific objectivists.

In the case of speakers of Mayan languages in Guatemala (glossed here as “Mayans” without entering the debate about who constructed whom or how different they all are), their colonial and post-colonial history has been quite different from the North Americans. Mayans have always been a majority and they have always posed both an opportunity and a threat to their colonial and post-colonial oppressors. The threat was dealt with by subjugating them as a

labor force, not by eliminating them or hiding them on reservations in remote areas. Their relations with Guatemalan society have been the result of a conqueror's need for large quantities of land and a workforce and their own need for a living space in which to exercise their own cultural identities. As modern citizens of Guatemala, their major demand has been for a more equal share of the land and the economic benefits. They don't instinctively want to stop the process or isolate themselves. Rather, they want to participate and share in the benefits.

Through the recent internal conflict, the scattered demands of various villages and ethnicities became unified in the peace agreements, which tend to deal with all indigenous Guatemalans as a single category. Applied linguistic work that began well before the conflict and continues afterward (cf. England 1990; 1994) has resulted in a common alphabet for Mayan languages, which has stimulated interethnic communication. All of these influences are crystallized in what some people call the "Mayan Movement" which is characterized by a growing willingness on the part of poor rural people to be identified as "Maya" and a few "Mayan" institutions supported by various international donors. It tends to lack strong or representative bases, unlike the "movements" of indigenous people of the lowland tropics.³ Nevertheless the Mayan Movement seems to be gathering strength ideologically.

As a substantial part of the Guatemalan economy is based on archaeological and cultural tourism, Mayans have wanted to share in this as well. They have actively participated in a cultural construction that allows participation rather than isolation as in the North American case. This construction undoubtedly is one of the elements that fuels the movement of Q'eqchi' traditionalists in northern Alta Verapaz. The Q'eqchi' use a number of archaeological caves and ancient Mayan cities as ritual areas in a tradition of asking *Tzuul Taq'a*, the spirit of the mountains and valleys, for blessings over the annual planting of corn.⁴

The Vanderbilt University project in Cancuén on the Passion River is an interesting case of a community's relation to an archaeological site, recently studied by David Garcia (2002). The site of Cancuén is a park, the property of the state. The nearby Q'eqchi' community of El Zapote, formerly content to contribute scores of workers (at high wages) to the excavation and reconstruction of Cancuén has asserted a growing demand for a kind of spiritual ownership of the site. This year (2002), the dream of an old woman was interpreted as a requirement that they conduct two rituals to make the site safe for workers and archaeologists. As they have asserted ownership, they have also wanted to participate in the management of the site for tourists and Vanderbilt is actively involved in promoting that goal and has involved nearby communities as well in an effort to promote "ownership" of the site and a share in the economic benefits of tourism.

³ In the struggle of lowland indigenous people, each group tends to form one or more representative ethnic organizations, which are joined at regional and national levels. The Mayan Movement generally lacks these bases.

⁴ I do not wish to imply that there is not an unbroken history of ritual behavior among the Q'eqchi', only that there is a question whether the rituals that took place a millennium ago in the caves of northern Alta Verapaz have this relationship with modern Q'eqchi' rituals.

In a second case, this one not involving tourists, Q'eqchi' traditionalists have rallied around the protection of a sacred mountaintop near Cobán (David Garcia, personal communication). Using the epistemology of dreaming, they have “discovered” the true name of the mountain, Chaj Xucub, have managed to get it named as a national cultural patrimony, and are involved in a dispute with the land reform agency, FONTIERRAS, about the legalization of a nearby Q'eqchi' community, which they feel threatens the site.

The Conservation Lesson

What archaeology is experiencing in Guatemala is something that the international conservation community has been experiencing for over 30 years. It is that biodiversity conservation is very difficult to achieve in populated areas without involving local populations. This is especially true in indigenous areas where land claims have gone unheard by governments. There have been few successes and many setbacks so far (IWGIA 1998; Oates 1999; Western and Wright 1994; World Wildlife Fund 2000), as the lesson have been slow to learn and difficult to apply.

While there are a number of essential misunderstandings when indigenous people and conservationists regard each other in a mutual gaze (Stocks 1996), one of the most serious is the failure of conservation organizations to take indigenous land claims seriously. Strategies of conservation and development with local communities tend to be indirect; one “works with” people to improve production, income, or services without addressing the land claim itself. I have observed, however, that if the jurisdictional disputes cannot be resolved or clarified and ameliorated, projects tend not to prosper over the long run.⁵ Several years ago, Brandon and Wells (1992a;1992b) conducted a review of ICDPs for lessons learned and that particular lesson was not included in the list. It should have been.

The Caves

Candelaria

The Candelaria Caves lie in one of the most beautiful parts of Guatemala where all along the northern slope of the enormous east-west trending Cuchumatán Mountains there are spectacular folds and foothills of cretaceous limestone covered with dense tropical forest and cratered with caves and sinkholes. Rivers spring from underground and flow away to the Usumacinta River which runs north to form the border between the Guatemalan state of Petén and Mexico.

North of the town of Chisec, Alta Verapaz the Candelaria River emerges into the open air from an area of hilly karst topography with elevations up to 800 meters. It winds through the valley as a normal stream for a few kilometers and then enters the ground again when it encounters the San Simon Hills at the community of Candelaria Camposantos, another karst area characterized in its eastern sector by enormous jungle-shrouded tower karsts unique in the Americas. Here the river has formed an amazingly complex system of impressive caverns and passages, occasionally lighted by skylights and caves that penetrate from the surface. The

⁵ There are also a lot of bad projects around with ineffective, ignorant, or irresponsible NGOs that fail for internal, not theoretical, reasons.

river briefly emerges from the dark and re-enters the mountains seven times before leaving the underground 13 kilometers later around the community of San Antonio de las Flores. From there it joins the San Simon River and flows on to become a major tributary of the Passion River.⁶

According to owners of a tourist hotel in the cave area, the Candelaria Caves may be the site of the mythical Tulan Zuyua mentioned in Part 4 of the Popol Vuh., the K'ichee' equivalent of the old testament. The tourist brochures refer to the "Sacred Mayan Caves of Candelaria" and the site receives hundreds of mainly European visitors each year who are treated to walks of various degrees of rigor in different parts of the cave area.

"Tulan Zuyua, Seven Caves, Seven Canyons is the name of the Citadel. Those who were to receive the gods arrived there." (Tedlock 2002:4, Part 4)

The story in part 4 of the Popol Vuh⁷ alleges that the first worship of the images of the creators of the Maya and the first bloodletting rituals occurred in the Seven Caves, Seven Canyons. Additionally, almost any of the massive fissures that descend precipitously from the heavily wooded hills to the level of the river could be the "Great Abyss" where the brothers One Hunapu and Seven Hunapu, often depicted as monkeys, descended into Xibalba, the underworld in Part 3 of the Popol Vuh.

This is powerful stuff. The very limited archaeology of the Candelaria Caves (Carot 1989) indicates major rituals did actually take place that probably involved bloodletting and large audiences. The fact that the Candelaria River emerges and enters the caves seven times is suggestive. And the black carbon cave paintings in several caves, including B'omb'il Pek depict two monkeys who some allege are the two brothers.

According to Arthur Demarest (personal communication), the rituals that took place in these areas of natural caves and tower karsts are the prototypes of the rituals that took place on the pyramids of the Mayan classic, constructed hills with artificial "caves" on top. Demarest

⁶ The Passion River is the central highway of the ancient trade route from the eastern Cuchumatán Mountains to the Usumacinta River, the true Ruta Maya. On its banks sat the enormous palace of the king of Cancuén who controlled the interchange of goods between highland and lowland for most of the Petén. South of Cancuén is the site of another ancient city on the outskirts of the town of Raxruha'. This city, along the banks of the San Simon/Candelaria River, was the city most closely associated with the Candelaria Caves during the Maya classic period.

⁷ According to the story, the first four humans were Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Mahucutah, and True Jaguar. When the creators gave them wives, they gave rise to all the rest. It was they who led the pilgrimage of all tribes east from Quiche to Tulan Zuyua while waiting for the first dawn. There they received the images of their gods Tohil, Auilix, Hacautz, and Middle of the Plain and learned to worship them through bloodletting rituals. They also encountered their own Tower of Babel and their languages became mutually unintelligible. Their gods turned into powerful culture heroes who give them fire, agriculture, and many other things. The gods were eventually placed in strategic points around the Mayan highlands, one of which is alleged by modern Q'eqchi' to be Chaj Xucub near Cobán.

maintains that the Kings of Cancuén didn't need artificially-constructed pyramids. They had tower karsts nearby with suitable caves that connected to the underworld.

B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq'

The Candelaria Caves are not the only sacred cave sites around the Alta Verapaz northern foothills. There are perhaps thousands of cave sites scattered through the karst country, each with broken ceramics, obsidian blades, and occasionally even burials. None were residential sites. Many of them, such as the caves of B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq' close to Chisec, show abundant evidence of modern ritual use (cf. Woodfill, et al, 2002). Several times a year, traditionalist religious leaders from surprisingly distant places enter B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq' to make offerings to *Tzuul Taq'a*, the earth god for a good planting and a bountiful harvest.⁸

Management History of the Caves

Candelaria

The Candelaria Caves were brought to the attention of the Euro-American community by a French speleologist and adventurer, Daniel Dreux in 1974 (Dreux 1978). Dreux explored a number of caves in Alta Verapaz between 1966 when he was a student and 1974 when he visited Candelaria in a joint Guatemalan-French professional expedition. The cave area was sparsely inhabited by Q'eqchi' migrants who were filling in the areas of difficult terrain judged uninhabitable in the first migratory rush to the rivers of the Petén in the 1950s. Local Q'eqchi' from Las Ruinas, the site of caves he visited in 1968, say that he looted the caves he visited⁹; certainly the looting job was later completed by local "guicheros," excited by the thought that the caves of interest to the exotic Europeans might have something more valuable than they had thought.

Dreux, having converted himself from speleologist to filmmaker, returned to the caves in 1984 during the "internal conflict" to add hotelier to his credentials. In the interim the Q'eqchi' had named their community Muq'b'il Ha' [literally 'buried water' although often translated by non-speakers as 'hidden water']. The early 1980s were the times of huge massacres and roundups of Q'eqchi' in Chisec. The municipal capital was virtually abandoned. Raxruha' was the site of the local military base and attracted thousands of people who did not wish to be slaughtered by the army as sympathizers or as guerrillas. A few people hung on in the more remote areas like the San Simon Hills and La Ventana and cooperated with the army's Guns and Beans program in which they carried out sham "patrols" to spot rebels.

⁸ Sacred mountains are known as well. Chaj Xucub, located near the city of Cobán is such a site. Traditionalist Q'eqchi' elders believe that it is one of the sacred mountains mentioned in the Popol Vuh (see footnote 7) where one of the culture hero/gods were left.

⁹ For his part Dreux (1979) denies that he illegally removed artifacts, except those turned over to the Guatemalan government after each of his visits. These are not identified in his coffee-table book on Candelaria. Whatever the case, the ceramics removed have not been seen since. It is possible that the government simply lost or misplaced the materials coming from a special bi-national expedition that was outside the normal channels for accumulating artifacts. IDAEH has undergone a number of changes in structure and venue since the creation of the Ministry of Culture and Sports. On the other hand, special visitors to Dreux's hotel are rumored to have been treated to some backroom art exhibitions.

Under the circumstances, Dreux thought it prudent to advise the military of his presence and, when he appeared in Muq'b'il Ha' in 1984, it was under military protection. Members of the community say they were told by the army to leave him alone to do what he wished. What he said he wished was access to the caves. What he did was pay the Q'eqchi' family farming in the area of a key cave entrance \$1000 for "rights"¹⁰ to a ¾ of a hectare of land for a "camp."

Dreux's "camp" has expanded from ¾ to 22 hectares without further permission of the Muq'b'il Ha' community or further payment to the farmer who sold him rights originally. He exerts control over all the caves in the first 12 kilometers of the river's 13-kilometer run. He lives in France most of the year and runs a profitable business with French tourists in August and December who pack the hotel and tour the caves and other nearby tourist sites. As his tourist business has grown, he has undertaken his own reconstructions of Mayan walls and platforms in the caves and one of his favorite things is to conceal bottles of good French wine in remote parts of the caves to produce magically when his over-heated and flushed guests are at the ends of their string.

Dreux, until very recently, has refused access to the caves to non-French scientists and (unfortunately for him) to Guatemalans who now hold power in government. Ironically the caves have been little used for modern Mayan rituals because Dreux, as self-appointed owner and savior of the caves and the surrounding forests, does not allow Mayans to roam about with torches and candles in hand unless he has staged a filming session for one of his romantic and imaginative films about the caves. His peculiar construction of Mayan cave rituals is as a kind of "culte de l'eau vierge (zuhuy ha)"¹¹ which, in his films, apparently requires a cast of women in white dresses and men dressed as Lacandones dancing on rafts as they drift into the caves.

B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq'

Daniel Dreux and the archaeologist, Patricia Carot first explored these caves in 1968 guided by the 15 year-old Otto Rubio. Local residents from Chisec were well aware of the caves because of their current ritual significance. The expedition encountered an abundance of ceramic artifacts described by Dreux as "incredible" and Dreux's book has a photograph of Carot excavating in the caves (Dreux 1978). Where the artifacts went is unknown. When Dreux and Carot returned in 1971, the looting of the caves was advanced. There is no indication in Dreux's account of the expedition that he distinguished the modern artifacts (Woodfill et al 2002) from the ancient ones. In a recent letter (Dreux 2002, personal communication), Dreux seems to take some responsibility for the later looting because he failed to take measures to protect the caves.

¹⁰ The rights purchased in this way are weak as the land belonged to the state, not the farmer who sold the rights. The persons doing the "buying" and selling are called "posesionarios"[possessors] in law and the transactions are classified as "customary" rather than formal.

¹¹ Modern theorists tend to think the cave rituals in classic Mayan times were ceremonies that took the form of bloodlettings and ritual dramas that validated the reign of kings, the same kinds of ceremonies described by Schele and Miller in "The Blood of Kings" (1986).

Nevertheless, B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq' are highly significant caves. According to Woodfill, et al (2002), the carbon symbols in Jul Iq' increase the corpus of known Mayan cave paintings significantly and the uses to which they were put may add a new dimension in our knowledge of Mayan ritual procedure. B'omb'il Pek seems to add to our knowledge of Mayan ritual practice as well, because it seems the natural amphitheatre that surrounds the tiny cave entrance was employed as a kind of theater-in-the-round with audiences massed on the rim observing the political/religious leaders as they emerged from the ground.

After the looting between 1968 and 1971, the caves remained relatively untouched by "güecheros"[looters]. They continued to be used for annual pilgrimages by religious traditionalists around the times of corn planting (twice a year in Chisec). People from Chisec began to settle in the hills between the San Simon and Canruha Rivers where the caves are located. While B'omb'il Pek is situated in a rocky area judged unsuitable for agriculture and is therefore heavily forested, the forest around Jul Iq' has been cut for milpa. In 1994, the farmers who used the area registered their communal land claim as an "agricultural subdivision" [parcelamiento agrícola] and named their community Porvenir 2.

In September of 2001, a municipal Peace Corps volunteer began to work with the community of Porvenir 2 as part of a larger project of developing community-based tourism in Chisec. Subsequently the community formed a tourist association, legalized it, and has begun to manage tourism for the caves. Guides have undergone several training periods and, under a USAID small grant to the project, the community constructed a graveled path to the caves, built a guard station, and a parking garage. The main struggle of the community of Porvenir 2 has been to legalize their land claim. The importance of this step cannot be overestimated. Sooner or later the Ministry of Culture and Sports will identify the caves as important and, if the community does not have a management plan, will halt the legalization procedure.

The Conflict over the Candelaria Caves

For their part, the Q'eqchi of Muq'b'il Ha' were startled by Dreux's revisit in 1984 and immediately began to petition the government for land rights, as they feared foreign invasion. In 1989, the government of Guatemala "adjudicated" the land to them, which means the nation judged them to have a right to receive a title. Boundaries were established with neighboring communities and their land claim was legally measured at 2,361 hectares including all the land that Dreux occupied. Due to the negotiations at the end of the war, in the 1990s little was done until 1997. By then INTA, the old agrarian reform agency, was dissolved and a new land reform agency, FONTIERRAS, had been created under the 1996 peace accords. They revived the land titling issue and, by 1997, it seemed a title was imminent for both communities involved with the caves, Muq'b'il Ha' and Candelaria Camosantos.

Dreux and his Guatemalan associate, Sierra, panicked. They assumed that the Q'eqchi' (the "eventful savages" of Dreux's website), were incapable of protecting the caves, let alone managing the tourism. To have them, as owners of the land was unthinkable. They petitioned then President Arzú to protect the area as a National Cultural and Natural Patrimony under the

new Ministry of Culture. They also managed to pressure the new Protected Areas Council (CONAP) to consider the caves as a national park and CONAP went so far as to commission a technical study by a consulting firm (FIIT 2001) which remains in their archives. However, after a visit to the area in which the deep conflict between the hotel and the communities was exposed, CONAP decided not to proceed. The Ministry of Culture and Sports was not so wary. In 1999 they declared the Candelaria Caves a National Cultural Patrimony and showed its boundaries on a map for which the original source was a map created by Dreux. Believing that the site would also be a national park, the ministerial document erroneously refers to the area as Candelaria Caves National Park.

Under Guatemalan law, all recognized archaeological sites (national patrimonies) are supposed to be “inscribed” in the national land registry to the Institute for Anthropology and History (IDAEH) whether they are on private, communal, or public land. The legal terminology is that the state “reserves dominion” over the site and there are restrictions in the activities permitted. The communities of Muq'b'il Ha', Candelaria Camposantos, and San Miguel Sechochoc were informed by FONTIERRAS that the title process could not be completed because part of their land claim fell within the Candelaria Caves protected area.

Table 1
Candelaria Caves Land Distribution

Community	Total area in the community (hectares)	Area of the community within the Candelaria Cave protected area (hectares)	% of the community in the protected area	% of the protected area occupied by the community
Muq'b'il Ha'	2,362.304	608.526	25.76	64.64
Candelaria Camposantos	747.787	93.462	12.50	9.93
20 Private Properties	415.480	239.402	57.6	25.43
Totals	3525.571	941.391	-----	100

What Dreux hoped to accomplish was to block legalization of the land in favor of the communities and obtain absolute control over the caves as the administrator of the national park. He managed to accomplish his first objective but failed in the second. Under Guatemalan law, private institutions and NGOs can manage (co-administer) protected areas inscribed to CONAP and several national parks are managed in this way. Dreux had formed an NGO in Guatemala to protect the caves and handle donations. He assumed that his NGO, Tierra Maya, could administer the caves. When CONAP backed away, he was left with Ministry of Culture and Sports whose interpretation of the law was initially that they “owned” the land. IDAEH has no legal arrangements under which outsiders can manage archaeological sites.

The owners of the hotel, frustrated by their failure to obtain control over the protected area and conscious that their legal position was shaky, spread the word to community members that Ministry of Culture and Sports had “stolen” the land from the communities. Resentment thrived and the communities stiffened their resolve to hold on to the land. In July of 2001, attempts were made to resolve the conflict, but when members of IDAEH visited the communities accompanied by a regional NGO and a member of the Peace Corps, they were met in San Miguel Sechochoc with matches and coke bottles full of gasoline ready to splash on them. Attempts by USAID to provide a negotiating opportunity with the communities, FONTIERRAS, and Ministry of Culture and Sports in November 2001 met with failure. The hotel continued its control.

The ISU/USAID Project

Out of B'isis Kab'a' and into Candelaria, B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq' - Getting People to Talk

The Chisec Community Conservation Project was born in April 2002 when USAID decided that a participatory redesign of the B'isis Kab'a' Biosphere Reserve in the Ixil triangle of Quiché department was impossible under the existing Chajul Municipality government.¹² Obviously some re-thinking was necessary for my own goals. In general the thrust of my work is to search for solutions to conflicts between conservation goals and those of indigenous peoples. The Candelaria Cave issue was one that met those requirements; this time what was at stake was not only a sizeable chunk of tropical forest but also a magnificent cave system with enormous historical significance.

After analyzing the case, in my opinion the problems were the following:

¹² The mayor who had invited me in August of 2001 to assist the Ixil in a participatory redesign of the reserve turned out to have more to gain politically from telling the Ixil that the “gringos” had stolen the land than he could gain from resolving the problem of the reserve. The problem was a classic issue in which the conservation community had outdistanced Ixil public opinion. One day the Ixil found that the 55,000 hectares of highland forested mountains and valley, which they had preserved for millennia, was no longer accessible to them, even for lianas, medicinals, and copal burning on the sacred mountains. It had become the core zone of a biosphere reserve, which, under Guatemalan law, is untouchable except by scientists.

1. Some members of IDAEH had taken a hard line on the ambiguous issue of the “reservation of dominion” over the caves when they could have taken a much more accommodating line.
2. The NGO supposedly coordinating the mediation had failed miserably in every one of its tasks because of its inability to make good on its commitments. It had lost all credibility with the communities.
3. The owners of the hotel were not operating in good faith to find a solution.
4. FONTIERRAS had taken an unconscionable time with the communities’ request for a lower price for the land.

I began to work behind the scenes to convince the Ministry of Culture and Sports to take a softer line with regard to their communal relations. As the caves were underground and most of the terrain was broken up into steep karst towers that were covered with forest, the notion that there might be an accommodation between community uses and the “protected area” became reasonable. After all, the main task of the surface vegetation is to maintain an even flow of moisture to the caves. While mature tropical forest is desirable it is not the only solution. Permanent crops in certain places such as shade coffee or shaded cardamom can achieve nearly the same effect. I suggested that the Ministry of Culture and Sports request a management plan for the use of natural resources in the polygon of the Candelaria Patrimony. Through the USAID connection with FONTIERRAS (they are one of the donors) we discussed the possibility of setting a land price that reflected the original adjudication in 1989, a price which takes into account the long bureaucratic and legal delay because of the conflict with the hotel and the protected area. This is within their regulatory ability to do.

With the communities we established a cordial contact through Q’eqchi’ friends without making any promises or serious commitments. After nearly 3 months of analysis and negotiation with the government entities, the Ministry of Culture and Sports wrote a letter to the communities inviting a management plan for the protection of the caves and assuring them that the ministry had no intention of taking over their land. If the communities agreed, the ministry would withdraw its objections to the land title and the title would include the entire protected area. At the same time, FONTIERRAS wrote a letter to the communities offering them a price of \$7.74 US per hectare (60 quetzales) for the land if they would mend their fences with the Ministry of Culture and Sports.

Our project arranged the meeting to be in Chisec on July 12th, 2002 in the municipal building. The meeting was strictly between the parties doing the negotiation without the presence of outsiders. The combination proved irresistible. The communities deliberated for a few days and then accepted both offers. Their acceptance was delivered to the two organizations in Guatemala City ten days after the offer. Subsequently all three communities wrote to our project requesting assistance with the management plan.

Training a Team Appropriate to the Culture

The first task was to recruit Q’eqchi’ people to form the project’s technical team. Although my wife and I were taking Q’eqchi’ lessons, we were not fluent. Even had we been fluent, I have found it best to form a technically trained cultural bridge for the work of natural resource

planning with indigenous communities. To help select personnel we asked for recommendations from a local NGO, SANK, whom I hoped to involve in future activities. They had no experience in natural resource use planning at community levels but knew community life well. We asked that selections include people from the communities who filled the minimum requisites, 6th grade education, good character, reliable, intelligent, and familiar with farm work.

Initial training of the project technical team took about three weeks. We started with 5 people, eliminated three, recruited four more, eliminated two, and so it went until I was comfortable that we were on the right track. The group was trained in the Garmin 12 GPS unit, the use of the Brunton compass with a tripod, and the use of topographic maps. They were trained in navigation in the field and on maps and how to move back and forth between the two.

We then turned to creating technical teams in the communities with which we would be working. We had decided to include the community of Porvenir 2 in the group of three Candelaria communities. With help from Peace Corps volunteers and small grants from USAID, Porvenir 2 had already begun to manage tourism in the B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq' caves, both of which are archaeologically and culturally significant (Woodfill, et al 2002). Vanderbilt archaeologist Brent Woodfill surveyed the Jul Iq' cave in April of 2002 and had helped with the training of community guides. However well they did at tourism, their gains were threatened by the fact that they had no land titles and no management plan. Porvenir 2 was located in a piece of land called a "baldío" in Spanish which means that it had never been registered on the national land registers as belonging to anyone, not even the nation.¹³ As the process of legalizing land to people located in baldíos is long, we thought that the community should begin the process early and produce a management plan for the protection and management of tourism in the caves that would satisfy the Ministry of Culture and Sports when they got around to protecting the site.

Each community named two people to be GPS technicians and three people to conduct studies of demographics, socioeconomic patterns, and natural resource use. We spent a week on the GPS group. The social research group took a little longer because we had to develop and test a protocol for a cultural area with which I was not all that familiar.

Studying with the Communities

When the community technicians were trained, we were ready to begin fieldwork. During the last week of training, engineers were hired to place monuments on the 12 corners that describe the Candelaria Caves protected area within a meter of accuracy.¹⁴ Archaeologists

¹³ Chisec Municipality has one of the highest percentages of baldíos in Guatemala because of the karst tower and conical karst mountains. Until now, few have chosen to try to live among them so thousands of hectares have gone unclaimed and covered with primary forest. In the roughest part of the mountains, ISU is beginning to work on the community conservation of jaguars through legalizing the land and planning for the conservation of forests in steep and rocky areas directly with the communities involved. This will be the subject of a forthcoming paper.

¹⁴ The Ministry of Culture and Sports required that the polygon be marked and monumented in the field with great accuracy, although we discouraged the deforestation that would result from physical demarcation of the sidelines on the basis that the topography itself discouraged most uses.

from IDAEH and members of my team in training accompanied them. During the search for the points on which a desk-created coordinate would actually fall, our team discovered that San Miguel Sechochoc was not within the Candelaria Caves protected area at all as government surveyors had told us¹⁵. We were all shocked, especially the people from Sechochoc when they thought about all the trouble they had suffered over the mistake and the years of delay in their land titling.

Mapping with the communities involved geo-referencing the community boundaries, the individual parcels assigned to individuals, and the land uses. San Miguel Sechochoc, for example, has 28 corners, each of which was visited and geo-referenced within a few meters. Each community has assigned working places, called parcels, to its members. We geo-referenced each of these for each community. Using an adaptation of plane table techniques¹⁶, we mapped land uses all over the mountains and hollows of each community. We included categories of primary forest, secondary forest, annual croplands, permanent crops, pastures, cemeteries, urban areas, and, for Muq'b'il Ha', the area occupied by the hotel.

The socioeconomic researchers from each community conducted their own house-to-house surveys in their own community with a member of the project technical team providing quality control by collecting and reviewing the surveys each day. The survey was quite specific about quantifying forest use and valuing forest products. There were some surprising results. For instance, on average the value of the sale of all agricultural products plus the sale of animals was about 1/3 the value of products taken from the forest. Although typical of peasant communities, the researchers were startled to discover that the returns to labor in cash exceeds the value of the sale of farm production in each community.

Making Rules

Armed with the information from the Arcview maps of parcels and land uses as well as the socioeconomic information, we trained the researchers to facilitate public meetings in their home communities in which community rules were fashioned for the protection of the Candelaria Caves, as well as B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq'. The meetings were long and sometimes boisterous. However, the knowledge that their insecurities over land tenure were on their way to be resolved and that they, not some stranger, would derive the benefits from the management of tourism was a powerful catalyst for making rules for the protection of the patrimony. As the minutes for the Muq'b'il Ha' meeting recorded:

¹⁵ As the work has progressed we have discovered that there are often enormous differences between where the INTA surveyors thought a community was and where we know it to be from GPS work. None of the INTA work in the 1970s and 1980s was geo-referenced. Communities mapped by INTA as being contiguous might have as much as a kilometer between them. There are particular problems with azimuths. Sometimes we have found that the polygon of a community is more or less accurate, but the entire polygon needs to be rotated as much as 12 degrees to make it fit the GPS coordinates within tolerances of 10 meters.

¹⁶ Instead of a plane table, each person carried a hard tablet carrying a single-page map of the working area for that day at 1:10,000 with 10 meter contours and shaded hills. The person locates herself with the GPS, plots their position on the map, then uses the compass to orient herself with some line of sight to a landmark identifiable on the map. Now oriented, she proceeds to draw in land uses on the map as far as she can clearly see what is going on. Then she moves to a new location a few hundred meters away and repeats. The technique is very precise and distinguishes crops under forest cover. The field maps are then entered into the Arcview system.

“When the caves were owned by the foreigner, we used to try to get around his rules, break them when we could. But now the caves belong to us. They are the heritage of our children. Now we all agree that they must be protected.”

In each community meeting, the rules that the Ministry of Culture and Sports had placed for the management of archaeological sites provided the organization. Each rule was discussed and the community decided whether, or in what time frame, they could observe the rule. As the Muq'b'il Ha' community itself lies largely within the protected area, obviously some flexibility was needed. However, nearly 58% of Muq'b'il Ha' s protected area is in forest already. Of the 26% that is in some form of agriculture, the community decided to move toward increasingly converting the area into permanent crops and orchards rather than the annual burning that accompanies the milpa system in Chisec. Candelaria Camposantos already has 76% of its protected area in forest and the parts in milpa are not within the karst tower area and do not threaten the caves. The two people who had parcels in as-yet-uncut primary forest agreed to farm elsewhere. Each community registered its decisions about the protected area in the minutes of the meeting which were signed by everyone present, a majority of the community in each case.

The Results

The communities of Candelaria Camposantos, San Miguel Sechochoc, and Muq'b'il Ha' received their land titles on the 29th of October, 2002 to great rejoicing. The president of Guatemala, Alfonso Portillo, presented the titles, accompanied by the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Culture and Sports, the governor of Cobán department, the mayor of Chisec, and the Italian ambassador. The president, whose photographic team had been refused entry to the Candelaria Caves by Dreux's employees the night before, spoke harshly. He said a foreigner had dominated the caves illegally for too many years. Now the foreigner would either be expelled from the country in twelve days or he would be in jail. Traditional turkey soup and tons of tortillas followed the presentation.

At the ceremony, Otilia Lux de Coti, the first indigenous minister of Culture and Sports since the institution's founding, spoke strongly about community land rights and promised that the ministry would move toward a relation of co-administration of the caves. Our project had already moved toward the formation of civil associations to manage the tourism of the caves, a parallel with the already-established associations of B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq' and the Sepalau Lagoon. The associations were legalized on the December 2, 2002.

The management plan for the caves was completed in draft form with all maps and tables by the 30th of November and submitted to the Ministry of Culture and Sports. The ministry agreed to hire four community members, two each from Candelaria and Muq'b'il Ha' as employees of IDAEH.

Conclusions

This paper has presented a moment in a long process of Q'eqchi' adaptation to the colonization of their homeland and the events following the "internal conflict" of the 1980s. The development of large coffee farms in the highlands in the last hundred years has expelled thousands of Q'eqchi' families who have populated large parts of the Petén and Belize in the process. In the course of their expansion, they have changed culturally in many ways, but despite the huge impact of protestant atomization and settlement in new economic situations in which private property may make as much sense as communal property, a traditional earth-based religious philosophy has survived into the 21st century. This philosophy is evident in the numbers of sacred sites including caves and mountains in Alta Verapaz. The events of the 1980s and their aftermath in the peace accords fueled a growing sense of human rights and a nascent ethnic political movement. One of the instruments of attempts to change the balance of power is the claim of spiritual rights, a claim that resonates with many sectors of the national and international society.

The Q'eqchi' who have spread out in modern times to reside in the lowland karst foothills of Alta Verapaz and the southern Petén regard the development of archaeological and ecotourism with some alarm. The issue is complex. For one thing such development threatens their own claims to the land, which have gone unanswered in large part. For another, it threatens their access to sacred sites when the policy of the state is to place archaeological or other cultural sites under the exclusive control of state institutions, or worse, allow them to be captured by private economic interests to the exclusion of both the state and the local communities as in the case of Candelaria. Additionally, they view as unfair and discriminatory the distribution of evident economic benefits accruing to those who control access to the sites. One response to this situation of exclusion has taken the form as a claim of spiritual ownership of sites.

The struggle to vindicate land rights, expel outside interests and manage the Candelaria Caves is the most visible case among many smaller processes in the region. The struggle of El Zapote to participate in the management of Cancuén is another. The case of the management of B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq' is yet another and the case of Chaj Xucub mountain near Cobán is a fourth. In all these cases, given all the options available, the management of the sites by local Q'eqchi' communities seems the best option. In the case of Candelaria, the site had been essentially privatized by outside interests to the detriment of the community's rights to land and the sound management of the caves themselves. In the case of B'omb'il Pek and Jul Iq', the caves were without management, open to further looting, and in an area of ambiguous land tenure. In the case of Cancuén on the remote Passion River, if the local Q'eqchi' communities do not assert ownership and responsibility for the site, it is difficult to see how it can be protected.

What seems necessary is a clear set of principles involved in a healthy relationship with communities who would qualify as managers of cultural and natural patrimonies. In all cases, I would argue that there are three keys:

1. Invite genuine participation. Do not mistake consultation for participation
2. Resolve issues of jurisdiction by legalizing community land claims and clarifying the relations between state or private institutions and communities with regard to site management.
3. Structure the benefits of management and ownership so that the proper management of the site will be seen as part of the economic and cultural interest of the communities.

What is going on in Chisec and the southern Petén is a new model for Guatemala in the management of cultural and natural heritages, a community-based model. There is now a line of communities along the “Ruta Maya” from the Sepalau lagoons to Cancuén that actively manage archaeological, and natural, resources in specific arrangements with the state. The sites receive better protection than they have in the past because their management benefits communities economically and culturally. In indigenous areas of poverty and land insecurity, community conservation principles have a lot to offer the protection and management of world heritage sites. Instead of enemies, indigenous people can be the site’s strongest allies.

Of course the struggle is not over. It never is. Outsiders have powerful political connections and governments change. In some ways, the indigenous presence is the only permanent feature of the political and institutional panorama while our own institutions of management seem vulnerable and unstable. Population growth threatens sites, but economies change and educational systems continue to offer other opportunities for indigenous youth. Especially interesting in this regard would be the development of an increasingly sensitive and educated workforce in which the management of tourism in archaeological and natural resource areas offer new horizons. Without such economic opportunities, population growth and deteriorating land bases will further threaten significant world heritages.

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