



# INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CULTURE AND HISTORY

## BELIZE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH POLICY 2024

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## I. Glossary of Terms

Terminology and expressions used in this policy document are defined as follows:

**Institute of Archaeology:** is the Institute established under section 34 of the National Institute of Culture and History Act Chapter 331 of the Substantive Laws of Belize 2000, Revised edition 2024, with responsibility for the protection, preservation and sustainable management of Belize's archaeological and cultural resources.

**Archaeological Research (AR):** is the study of societies and peoples of the past that is aimed at discovering facts about their culture by examining the remains of their buildings, tools and other objects. It refers to both intrusive and non-intrusive study of past cultures and activities through practical methods such as but not limited to survey, excavation, and scientific analysis of archaeological data including electronic and spatial data from an ascribed area on land, underground, inter-tidal zone or underwaters of Belize.

**Permittee:** is the person authorized by a permit issued under issued under the National Institute of Culture and History Act CAP 331, part 6, Section 49 (a & b) to conduct activities as prescribed in the Archaeological Research Policy.

**Principal Investigator (PI):** is the primary individual responsible for the administration of the research project; grant, design, permitting, execution (conduct, ethics, health, and safety of project participants), post-excavation analysis (lab works), publication and dissemination of research project evidence in compliance with all applicable state laws, regulations and institutional policy governing the conduct and objectives of the research.

**Associate Investigator(s):** is a key project staff, who has co-responsibility to ensure that all AR project activities follow applicable national and international laws, regulations and institutional policies governing the conduct and objectives of the research. However, the PI has ultimate responsibility for the overall AR project management and permitting procedures.

**Regulatory Agencies:** refers to all Government Ministries, Departments and Institutions authorized by law to represent the Government of Belize.

**Keyhole Markup Language (KML):** is an XML-based format for storing geographic data and associated content (archaeological features) and is an official Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) standard.

**Shape File:** is a simple, non-topological format for storing the geometric location and attribute information of geographic and archaeological features.

**Archaeological feature:** refers to all non-portable cultural contexts and heritage assets that belong to the Paleo Indian, Archaic, Maya, and Historic periods or any other period of national memory or historical significance.

**Ancient Monument:** refers to any structure or building erected by humans or any natural feature transformed or worked by humans, or the remains or any part thereof, whether upon any land or in any river, stream, or watercourse or under the territorial waters of Belize, that has been in existence for one hundred years or more.

**Antiquity:** refers to any object manufactured or worked by humans and being of an age of one hundred years or more.

**Diagnostic Material:** refers to objects, particularly sherds of pottery, which can be dated to a particular chronological period because of the presence of specific stylistic attributes (i.e., vessel rim, base or handle), and so used to ascertain the date of a particular context.

**Tomb** refers to a specially constructed room with masonry walls and typically covered with capstones or a vault, which was used for burial and typically includes human remains and associated mortuary objects.

**Backfilling:** refers to the process of refilling a completed excavation to ensure preservation of a site and the features and/or architecture exposed.

**Monumental Excavations:** the systematic process of uncovering and exploring large architectural features such as temples, palaces, and residential stone structures. Specific intrusive techniques might include, but is not limited to, large areal excavations or trenches which allows researchers the opportunity to investigate the profile of the building and assist in determining the building's stratigraphy.

## List of Architectural Types:

- a. **House mound:** The mounded (built up) remains of a small structure. (Though most represent the remains of small residential buildings and/or their masonry platform, some prove to have served other functions). This is an all-inclusive term.
- b. **Altar:** Raised structure or monument on which offerings were made or incense burned.
- c. **Floor:** A level or nearly level surface that is deliberately produced by human agency.
- d. **Group:** A cluster of structures around or at least partly enclosing an open area, typically a plaza.
- e. **Stairs:** A single flight of steps uninterrupted by a landing. Can also refer to an isolated single step that is not part of a flight of steps.
- f. **Terrace:** A platform-like element that has the appearance of a large step in a substructure or platform. The bottom edge of a terrace is the foot and the top edge is the verge. Terraces that have vertical faces are termed 'in plumb', those with backwards-slanted faces are termed 'battered'.

## 2. Context

The Institute of Archaeology is mandated through the National Institute of Culture and History (NICH) Act, Chapter 33 I of the Subsidiary Laws of Belize 2000, Revised Edition 2024, to promote the research, documentation, interpretation, and dissemination of knowledge of Belize's archaeological heritage.

Section 49 (a) and (b) of the NICH Act, has empowered and entrusted the Director of the Institute of Archaeology to grant Archaeological Research Permits and to formulate policies for such, which governs archaeological research, including the consolidation and/or stabilization of ancient monuments, and safeguarding of Belize's archaeological heritage. This policy, therefore, applies to anyone interested in conducting archaeological research in Belize.

## 3. Policy Statement

The Institute of Archaeology (IA) and its parent institution the National Institute of Culture and History (NICH), is committed to fostering research, and promoting the protection, preservation and sustainable development of Belize's cultural and archaeological resources. As such, it recognizes the need to develop and implement strategies to ensure the integration of research, education, cultural awareness and history into its primary objectives. The IA also recognizes the need to work closely and in partnership with Researchers and academic institutions to preserve and protect the past for future generations.

## 4. Scope of Policy

This policy applies to anyone interested in conducting archaeological research in Belize whether upon land or any river, stream or watercourse or under the territorial waters of Belize. It is therefore the responsibility of the IA to enforce this policy and for Principal Investigators and Institutions to adhere to this policy.

## 5. General Considerations

The investigation of a cultural or archaeological site or landscape must be conducted according to the highest possible scientific and ethical standards. Research actions should be governed by an informed respect for cultural property. Researchers should recognize the responsibility for preventive conservation by undertaking limited damage or deterioration to cultural property and aim to minimize the environmental impact of the project area. The findings of such research should be published and disseminated to peers and the public domain. Additionally, public engagement in awareness for the protection and conservation of archaeology should be supported by researchers through various means with the public, including but not limited to, public lectures and presentations.

At the commencement of a project, researchers must have a specific plan for the documentation,

preservation and publication of archaeological records and for any related conservation efforts. The Principal Investigator must have suitable and accessible storage and curatorial facilities for all archaeological materials, records and archives. Research results should be used in an appropriate fashion and communicated via appropriate and timely activities, in accordance with established scientific principles and in accordance with Belize's legislation. All research records must be properly secured by the Principal Investigator. Additionally, the Principal Investigator must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that participants are not harmed or adversely affected by participation in a given research project.

## **6. General Research Objectives**

- To support the conservation of cultural heritage and the long-term protection of archaeological and historical records.
- To protect and preserve ancient archaeological sites, monuments, and remains of historical and archaeological importance.
- To promote cultural awareness and sensitivity to archaeological research in fostering a better understanding of Belize's culture and history.

## **7. Application Procedure**

To apply for an Archaeological Research Permit, the following conditions must be fulfilled and necessary documents submitted to the Institute of Archaeology a minimum of two (2) months prior to the intended start date for a research request to be considered:

- i. A formal letter requesting permission to conduct research and/or permission to conduct laboratory analysis. This letter should be addressed to the Director of the IA and must state the nature of the intended research, the site name or area where the intended research will be conducted, and the length of the field season, including the beginning and end dates for the intended project.
- ii. For first-time applicants, three (3) letters of recommendation; two letters must be from former or current PIs working in Belize and one from any other Maya, Historic, or Underwater archaeologist (depending on the nature of the intended research activity).
- iii. A detailed research proposal that outlines all research questions that will be addressed and describes the scope of activities and methodologies to be utilized during the field season.
- iv. Where applicable, a specific plan, including budget, for any proposed conservation/consolidation activity, including the preservation of excavated materials and publication of archaeological records.
- v. Confirmation of a suitable and accessible storage and curatorial facilities for all archaeological materials and records.
- vi. A detailed research budget using the prescribed Institute of Archaeology format (see Archaeological Research Permit Budget Form, Annex No. 1). Written proof of all funding sources and quantity of funding must be declared, including those acquired from the



- participation of any graduate and undergraduate students or other personnel within the project.
- vii. A list of the names of all project members, including the Principal Investigator(s), all staff members, specialists, students, and/or volunteers, the status of each member within the project must be indicated. Any related field school participants must also be listed. A current CV must be provided for the PI and any research staff member. The addition of new personnel during the project should be immediately shared with the IA in writing.
  - viii. A consent letter(s) from the landowner(s) or of the authority managing the land, providing access to research areas, where applicable. Letters of consent must be submitted along with research proposals on an annual basis. Consideration for approval of excavation permits will not be provided without the accompanying letters from landowners granting access to the PIs.

## 8. Qualification to conduct Archaeology Research in Belize

- i. The Principal Investigator must have a PhD in Archaeology or Anthropology and have a minimum of five years of experience working in the Maya or Caribbean region.
- ii. A letter of support, verifying PIs employment and good standing with an accredited academic institution, must be submitted to the Institute of Archaeology (this may be from the Dean or Department Chair).
- iii. Under no circumstance will graduate students be considered as a Principal Investigator regardless of their academic status or research experience.
- iv. The Institute of Archaeology will not grant Archaeological Research Permits to any Principal Investigator who will be away from the site for extended periods of time. Principal Investigators are required to be on site 90% of the duration of their research project. The Institute of Archaeology must be informed, in advance and in writing, should the Principal Investigator be required to leave the site for any period of time beyond seven (7) days.
- v. In the absence of the Principal Investigator, a previously designated and approved “Associate Investigator” will be responsible for all activities on site. However, the responsibility for all activities associated with the project ultimately rests with the Principal Investigator.

## 9. Conditions

- a. A non-refundable Archaeological Research Permit Application Fee of BZ \$500 must accompany any research proposal application. Payment will be collected via credit card transaction or online deposit to the Institute of Archaeology/NICH. Payment of the application fee **DOES NOT** guarantee that an Archaeological Research Permit will be granted.
- b. A Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) fee must be paid upon approval of the Research Permit. This cost is 20% of the total local project budget expense. These funds will be allocated for monitoring and evaluation of the project, processing of export materials,



the management and storage of artifacts by the IA and other cultural heritage management related expenses deemed necessary by the IA.

- c. A comprehensive summary of the previous field season must accompany the research permit application. One (1) electronic copy and one (1) hard copy must be submitted. This report should be no less than ten (10) pages. Field season reports must be perfect bound, which is best suited for long-term display in the IA library. This requirement does not apply to first-time applicants.
- d. A detailed consolidation budget must be submitted if any architectural features are to be targeted for intrusive monumental excavations. Intrusive monumental excavations will **ONLY** be permitted, if necessary, to support the proposed and approved research. All intrusive monumental excavations must be pre-approved by the IA. Details of such activity must be included within the research design and an appropriate consolidation budget must be allocated and approved by the Director of the Institute of Archaeology.
- e. Artifacts submitted to the IA at the end of the field season must be accompanied by a completed Artifact Catalog Card. PIs should make requests for Catalog Cards from the IA Research Unit at the beginning of the field season.
- f. PIs are required to notify the Institute of Archaeology whether they intend to apply for an Export Permit during the application for permit phase. Export materials must be submitted to the Institute of Archaeology for processing within a minimum of two (2) weeks prior to the intended export date. This request must be accompanied by an Export Permit Application Form and must be provided on the prescribed forms. Incomplete packages **will not be considered**. Processing may be delayed due to unforeseen events or circumstances; therefore, it is the responsibility of the PI to coordinate with the IA Research Unit to ensure the smooth processing of requests.
- g. A Principal Investigator wishing to conduct a **Laboratory Season only** is required to apply for a research permit and should submit the same documents as those listed in the Application Procedure of this document substituting “laboratory analysis” instead of “field research” where applicable.
- h. The issuing of an archaeological research permit is subject to PI not having any outstanding export materials that are already due for return to the IA/NICH. Where the PI has any outstanding export or loaned materials/object(s), the Director of the IA may determine not to grant an archaeological research permit until all materials/object(s) have been returned to the IA/NICH.
- i. A Principal Investigator wishing to conduct a **LiDAR survey** (regardless of method) must indicate this within their research proposal and must submit all relevant documents within the application package. This facilitates the IA providing the PI with





a requisite endorsement letter to Belize Department of Civil Aviation (BDCA). The PI is responsible to process his/her application for LiDAR permit with the BDCA and other relevant governmental institution. Upon completion of the LiDAR survey, a copy of the **LiDAR data** must be submitted to the IA accompanied by the **LiDAR data metadata** on a hard disk. The LiDAR data must not be disseminated to the public in a manner that can result in national security risks or pose looting threats to any archaeological features.

- j. A Principal Investigator wishing to utilize a **drone** for research purposes must indicate this within their research permit. An application for a **Drone Operation Permit** must be requested from the Belize Department of Civil Aviation prior to drone arrival in country. Application forms for use of drones must be requested from the IA at least one-month prior to arrival in Belize. These forms must be completed and submitted along with any other relevant documentation. The IA/NICH will forward application along with a letter of support to BDCA for consideration. The PI is responsible for paying all fees related to the drone permit and for collecting said permit from the Belize Department of Civil Aviation upon arrival at the Philip Goldson International Airport.

## 10. DELIVERABLES

- a. At the end of the field season and prior to leaving Belize, the PI shall furnish the Director of the Institute of Archaeology with legible copies of all significant information relating to the excavations, including electronic copies of all digital photos and copies of all to-scale drawings of either excavations or artifacts.
- b. A comprehensive report of the archaeological research activities in pursuance of the granted research permit must be submitted to the Director within one year of the dated permit. The annual report shall include significant photographs, inked and finished copies, of all site maps, plans and drawings, as well as architectural section drawings of all structures. Where applicable, the PI must submit an Excel sheet of relevant GPS points, a topographic shapefile (derived from total station or any other survey equipment/application) related to their research.
- c. The PI shall also furnish to the Director a detailed breakdown of all expenditures in Belize and the number of Belizeans employed by the project. Intentional non-disclosure or alteration of information may merit the **suspension or permanent cancellation** of an Archaeological Research permit in Belize.
- d. The PI shall furnish the Director with one (1) printed copy and one (1) electronic copy of the final field season research report and the outcome thereof as well as any other articles, theses, exposition papers or presentations, unpublished or published, relating to the archaeological research conducted in Belize. All reports must be perfect-bound prior to submission to the Institute of Archaeology.
- e. The PI shall not give interviews, documentaries and/or any press release for television, newspaper or popular magazine without prior approval and written consent from the Director of the Institute of Archaeology. Such approval requires that a copy (printed



or electronic) of such item to be published be submitted to the Institute of Archaeology.

## **II. Conservation and Stabilization**

- a. The Permittee may be required to consolidate and/or stabilize all or any portion of any ancient monument excavated, only after consultation with and at the absolute discretion of, and to the satisfaction of, the Director of the Institute of Archaeology.
- b. All consolidation and/or stabilization must be done immediately following excavation and must be financed by the PI.
- c. The Director will recommend a conservator to undertake the supervision of the consolidation and/or stabilization.
- d. Field records documenting all consolidation and stabilization efforts must be kept and a copy provided to the Director. This should include photographic records and illustrations. All excavated architecture must be photographed and illustrated. Illustrations must include horizontal plans, plan views and cross-section drawings. Photos must also include frontal and side views of the architecture.
- e. Only when absolutely necessary should architecture be removed or disassembled. At all times the PI should make every effort to work around standing walls, stairways, or other preserved architectural features.
- f. If any architecture, (i.e., walls, stairs, terraces, benches, floors, ballast, etc.) must be partially destroyed to allow excavations to penetrate a structure (e.g. in trenches) (see glossary for a list of architectural types), the PI must make detailed drawings of the architecture to be affected. All cut or dressed stones of the architectural feature must be numbered with markers (and in pencil on the drawing). Following the completion of the excavation, the architectural feature **MUST** be reassembled in such a way that will ensure that all original dressed stones are placed in their original position. Additionally, the PI must make every effort to preserve sections of plaster floors for future interpretation and educational purposes. This means proper excavation, exposure, and recording through drawings and photography.
- g. Reassembly of architectural features must be conducted professionally. It is preferable that cut stones are mortared together rather than dry laid. Only trained masons with conservation experience will be allowed to conduct this work.
- h. If preserved stucco decorations are uncovered during excavation, the Institute of Archaeology must be informed immediately. At no time should these decorative elements, or the walls on which they were placed, be destroyed, removed or left exposed to the elements. The IA will make all final decisions for the proper treatment and conservation of these features.
- i. When a significant discovery is made, such as major tomb or burial, the Institute of Archaeology must be informed immediately. The methodology for excavating these features is to be discussed with the IA. The purpose of these measures is to ensure that correct and scientific procedures will be applied in the recording and conservation of all grave goods and human remains. The IA will also provide guidance on the preservation and storage of human remains.

- j. At the completion of each field season, the Principal Investigator must ensure that exposed architecture is stabilized and that all features and units are backfilled to the satisfaction of the Institute of Archaeology. Backfilling is part of the processes of archaeological research and as such the PI is responsible for properly backfilling. All backfill must achieve pre-excavation landscape appearance for the integrity of the structure, wildlife and humans, especially at sites open for tourism. Therefore, backfilling operations is the sole financial responsibility of the research project.

## 12. Artifact Documentation and Exportation

- a. The management, protection, and preservation of all ancient monuments and antiquities recovered by any research project shall rest with the Institute of Archaeology, National Institute of Culture and History, Government of Belize.
- b. Artifacts recovered each year must be completely catalogued using the prescribed Institute of Archaeology cataloguing systems and catalogue cards. All pertinent drawings and photographs must be provided upon delivery to the Institute of Archaeology. Catalogue Cards & Accession Numbers must be requested from Institute of Archaeology personnel, prior to the start of the new field season.
- c. After the completion of the field season, PIs are expected to deposit all complete artifacts and any items deemed to be a security risk to the Institute of Archaeology in Belmopan; this includes diagnostics artifacts. All artifacts brought to the IA must be stored in sturdy and secure bins. Cardboard boxes will not be accepted.
- d. All archaeological items, including artifacts for storage or export materials, must be delivered to the Institute of Archaeology office in Belmopan at the expense of the PI and/or Archaeological Project. No other point of delivery is acceptable.
- e. When it is deemed necessary that certain artifacts should be exported for further analysis, no matter what the artifacts are or the quantity of artifacts, the Principal Investigator must apply for an Export License a minimum of two weeks prior to their departure date (see Guidelines for the Application and Submission of Archaeological Material for Export Annex No. 2).
- f. A complete catalogue of all artifacts, including field numbers and provenance of those items to be exported, must be submitted to the Institute on the export forms provided. The Institute of Archaeology also requires a digital copy of the export list. Failure to comply will result in the rejection of the submitted materials. Materials will only be processed once they are received in the format requested. Incomplete packages will not be processed.
- g. All materials being exported must be properly packed and stored in dry, sturdy boxes or storage bins/containers only. Export materials in plastic buckets or deteriorating boxes will **NOT be accepted or processed**.
- h. A staff member from the Institute of Archaeology will examine all export material before any container is sealed. All export material must be properly recorded by the project, using the Institute of Archaeology catalogue system, i.e. accession number, provenience, etc. Only **ONE EXPORT** license will be granted to each project per year. The IA will not entertain any additional export requests without sufficient



justification. Only the Director of the IA can make any waivers for such extraordinary requests.

### **13. Monitoring and Inspection**

- a. The PI shall not conduct any type of archaeological research outside of the limits prescribed in the granted permit. Any deviation from approved permit research may warrant a suspension or cancellation of the permit in accordance with section 17 of this policy.
- b. The IA will conduct planned and unplanned site inspections of the research project. The land explored by the PI, and any ancient monuments and antiquities discovered by said PI, shall be open to inspection at all times by the members of the Institute of Archaeology, and the PI shall afford every facility for inspection.
- c. Research Site Inspections shall be led and conducted by the IA's Research and Enforcement Unit only.
- d. At the conclusion of each inspection, a feedback letter will be shared with the PI, providing feedback on what was observed, lessons learnt, challenges (if any) and/or any other observations, as well as recommendations where necessary.

### **14. Community Obligation**

- a. The PI shall, under the conditions of the granted permit, convey in a responsible manner, at least once during the field season, the nature, ethics and morals of their archaeological research to the local community.
- b. All PI's must participate in the Belize Archaeology Symposium held by the Institute of Archaeology and must submit a paper on the result of the field season for publication in the Research Reports in Belizean Archaeology.
- c. All PI's must make an effort to engage the communities that buffer the Research Site in socioeconomic opportunities. A log of all recipients and their performance (where applicable) must be shared with the IA.

### **15. Project Area and Development**

- a. Under no circumstance will the PI enter into any negotiations or make any commitment to any villages, landowners, community groups or NGO on any matters relating to tourism development, infrastructure development, management of archaeological sites and/or any other matters relating to the development of any project area for tourism purposes.
- b. That responsibility lies solely with the Institute of Archaeology where, if it is deemed necessary to develop a particular site, consultation will be undertaken with relevant agencies/stakeholders. Decisions on such matters will then be made that are in line with the Government of Belize's policy for national development and the Institute of Archaeology mandate for the protection and preservation of Belize's cultural heritage.

## **16. Provisions of the Laws of Belize**

- a. The PI shall strictly abide by all provisions of the Laws of Belize, the Department of Customs, and Department of Immigration and all other relevant regulatory agencies. Furthermore, the Institute of Archaeology is in no way accountable for any transgressions of the Laws of Belize by the PI or any member of the research project. All requirements and regulations of customs and immigration in Belize are subject to the process and authorization of the Belize Department of Customs and the Department of Immigration.
- b. Under the Laws of Belize, all persons operating motor vehicles or vessels must have third-party liability insurance. PIs must contact the Belize Department of Transport or Belize Port Authority to ensure all the proper documents and requirements are met, as it relates to crewmember(s) operating motor vehicles or vessels in Belize.

## **17. Suspension and/or Cancellation of Permit**

- a. The PI shall be liable to suspension and/or cancellation of all permits in the event of any breach of this policy and its conditions herein stated; or of non-observance of the National Institute of Culture and History (NICH) Act; or if in the opinion of the Director, anything whatsoever done, or omitted to be done, by the PI is inconsistent with the purpose for which the permit has been granted.
- b. It is the responsibility of the PI to comply with the Archaeological Research Policy; non-compliance may merit suspension and/or cancellation of permit. Where the permit is suspended the PI will be given an opportunity to clarify and justify the actions that led to merit such, no new permits will be issued to the PI until all obligations are fulfilled, and/or corrective measures taken to address the non-compliances.

## **18. Revision of Conditions**

It shall remain the purview of the IA/NICH to undertake periodic revisions of its Archaeological Research Policy. A written notice of any revision shall be forwarded to the PI within an appropriate period of notification.

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