Chapter X

Archaeological Investigations at Tamarindo

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After a brief hiatus, the Maya Research Program renewed archaeological investigations at the site of Tamarindo during the 2018 field season. Located on the western bank of the New River Lagoon (Figure 1), just south of San Carlos village, the site consists of a large prehispanic Maya settlement with abundant evidence of colonial and recent historic occupations. Research activities in 2018 were designed to achieve two main objectives: the continuation of survey efforts began in 2016, and the preliminary investigation of Tamarindo’s colonial occupation. The following paragraphs report on survey and excavation activities conducted in pursuit of these objectives.

Tamarindo Survey

To date, all survey and mapping activities at Tamarindo have been undertaken by Marc Wolf and Justin Telepak. Architecture and cultural landscape features were surveyed using a Trimble Geo 7X handheld GNSS (Global Navigation Satellite System) system. Structures were surveyed by recording structure corners, while also collecting streaming track-points around a structure’s perimeter and along

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1Trimble Geo 7X specifications: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BxW3dqQ5gdnTRkx0STNzUTF3b0k/view

**Figure 1.** Regional map showing the locations of Tamarindo and Operation TA18-01.
the centerline. In 2016, Wolf and Telepak surveyed 51 structures, including all monumental architecture within the site core and multiple residential groups located along the shoreline (Figure 2). In 2018, Wolf and Telepak mapped an additional 47 structures, most of which were located to the south and east of the central plaza. The 2018 survey data are currently being integrated into the Tamarindo GIS, and an updated site map will soon follow.

Figure 2. Tamarindo site map, 2016

TA18-01 – Late Colonial Settlement on the Island, Tamarindo

Tamarindo’s shoreline exhibits abundant evidence of colonial and historic occupations in the form of surface artifact scatters. Spanish and British colonial settlements have been documented at Lamanai (Graham 2011; Mayfield 2015; Pendergast 1982, 1991, 1993), which is located only 6 km to the north. The Spanish occupation was driven by evangelizing efforts, and included the construction of two churches: the first between 1544 and 1550 (Graham 2011:31-232), and the second likely in the 1560s (Graham 2011:236). By the mid-17th century, Spanish control over the region had diminished due to Maya resistance and British economic interests. In 1837, the Indian Church Plantation Grant allotted 200 acres of land to Hyde, Hodge, and Co. for the purposes of establishing a sugar cane plantation and constructing a sugar mill at Lamanai (Pendergast 1982:1). It appears that the actual mill was not built until 1866, and remained in operation for only a year before being destroyed due to mechanical failure (Mayfield 2015:20-21). Despite this short run, the long-term presence of the plantation and the regional logwood and mahogany logging industry left significant evidence of late colonial activities. Thus, the
authors were interested in exploring the relationship between the colonial settlements at Tamarindo and Lamanai.

Telepak reported that an area at Tamarindo known as the “Island” had an abundance of seemingly non-Maya artifacts on the surface. In actuality, the Island is an elevated spit of land that juts into the lagoon, with its landward sides bordering wetlands. These wetlands become completely submerged during flooding events, resulting in the spit temporarily becoming an island. A prehispanic mound supporting a historic concrete pad occupies the elevated center of the Island. Visual inspection of the shoreline confirmed Telepak’s report, as late colonial artifacts were abundant, and Maya artifacts to a lesser degree. This is particularly impressive considering Telepak’s report that the area has been heavily surface collected due to its popularity as a swimming location. Due to the high density of late colonial artifacts, and the presence of European and Maya materials, it was determined that the Island would be an ideal location to explore Maya-European colonial interaction.

Methods

The operation proceeded with the excavation of a 2 x 2 m test unit (TA18-01-A) placed approximately halfway between the mound and shoreline. Telepak noted that he had not witnessed the water level rise above the location of the excavation unit, though this may have occurred in the past. The test unit was completed by lunch of the last day of work at Tamarindo. As there was insufficient time to complete another excavation, a surface collection program was initiated utilizing a 2 x 2 m grid (Figure 3). The surface collection program was intensive, meaning all visible artifacts were collected. Preliminary excavation and surface collection results are presented below.

![Figure 3. Location of the Island and Operation TA18-01.](image-url)
**Excavation Nomenclature:**
Format: Site Abbreviation/Year – Operation – Suboperation – Lot#

TA18-01-A (Figures 4 and 5): 2 x 2 m test unit located on the eastern side of the Island. Datum NW corner @ 9cm above ground surface. Depth of unit from surface to bedrock was 67 cm.

TA18-01-A-1: Lot consisted of a humic layer with a color of 10YR 4/1 dark gray. Soil texture was a loamy sand with a large fraction (35%) of medium/coarse gravel. Lot was terminated at a maximum depth of 22 cm due to a natural change in soil texture and color.

TA18-01-A-2: Soil color was 10YR 3/1 very dark gray and the texture was a sandy loam. The amount of medium to coarse gravel decreased to approximately 15%. Lot was terminated at a maximum depth of 40 cm due to a natural change in soil texture and color. Artifact density decreased significantly in the last few cm of the lot.

TA18-01-A-3: Lot consisted of a 1 x 1 m subsection of the test unit covering the northwest section. The decision to decrease the size of the test unit was based on the appearance of a compact silty clay soil that was difficult to excavate and decreasing artifact density. Soil color was 10YR 2/1 black. The lot was terminated upon reaching bedrock at a maximum depth of 72 cm.

![Figure 4. TA18-01-A plan view.](image)

![Figure 5. TA18-01-A profile, west wall.](image)
Summary

Investigations on the island confirmed the presence of substantial Maya and late colonial occupations. Table 1 presents an artifact inventory from the excavation and 13 surface collection units. It should be noted that the classification of artifacts as late colonial or Maya refers to their origin of manufacture. It is certainly possible that Maya residing at or near Tamarindo utilized European goods, though the large number of pipe stems and colonial serving wares suggest that the majority of artifacts originated from the activities of British colonists (Figure 6). Categorizing the Island assemblage by origin of manufacture, 85% of the artifacts are of European origin, with 12% identifiable as Maya (Figure 7). Furthermore, the colonial assemblage is consistent with materials recovered from the British plantation at Lamanai, dating from 1837-1866, rather than the earlier Spanish settlement (Figures 7-11). The preliminary investigations reported here demonstrate that the British presence was not restricted to the immediate environs of Lamanai, but extended further south along the lagoon shoreline. Furthermore, the density of late colonial artifacts encountered suggests a substantial British presence at Tamarindo during the mid-17th century. Additional excavations on the Island and the shoreline to the north would provide further information on the nature of the British presence at Tamarindo.

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<th>*Artifact data presented as count/weight (g.)</th>
<th>Ceramic</th>
<th>Pipe Stems &amp; Bowls</th>
<th>Glass</th>
<th>Metal</th>
<th>Brick</th>
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Sum/Count | 214 | 84 | 319 | 41 | 2 | 63 | 30 | 3 | 26 |
Sum/Weight (g.) | 858 | 116 | 2603 | 666 | 156 | 453 | 133 | 3 | 33
Figure 6. TA18-01, artifact proportions by origin of manufacture.

Figure 7. Artifact proportions for all suboperations, TA18-01.
Figure 8. Multiple styles of printed underglaze earthenware. Production range: 1783-1890.

Figure 9. Pearlware, transfer printed. Production range: 1829-1859
Figure 10. Possible belt hanger or buckle prong. Metal.

Figure 11. Pipe stem fragments (left) and bowls (right).
References Cited

Graham, Elizabeth

Mayfield, Tracie D.

Pendergast, David M.