



September 27, 2001

To Whom It May Concern:

We are writing this letter to indicate our concern that some form of rescue archaeology be undertaken in the area that will be flooded by the Chalillo Dam. We have undertaken archaeological work in Belize on an annual basis since 1978 and have served as the Principle Investigators of the Caracol Archaeological Project since its inception in 1983 (see <http://www.caracol.org>). Any archaeological data that comes out of the Chalillo area is of great interest to us because of potential connections to the immense site of Caracol. It is clear to us that the Chalillo area would have been under domination by the extended Caracol polity during the Late Classic Period; thus, the archaeological remains from this region should prove very useful in answering questions about the social and political organization of the ancient Maya.

While we recognize the need in Belize for increased electricity, we would also note that Belize has been in the forefront in promoting its biological diversity and its cultural heritage. The archaeological resources represented by sites like Caracol are of major importance for the future growth of tourism in Belize – a fact clearly recognized in the GOB-IDB stabilization and parks management project currently being undertaken. To ignore the archaeological remains in the Chalillo Dam area would serve to undermine past, present, and future development efforts.

Before flooding the affected region, it is ethically imperative that the archaeological remains minimally be appropriately mapped and tested; if additional large-scale archaeology is warranted, then it too should be carried out in this area. Half a century ago, Mexico was faced with similar energy problems and flooded several valleys rich in archaeological remains between the states of Chiapas and Tabasco. In a time before cultural resource management was considered standard and necessary practice, the Mexican authorities had the presence of mind to undertake archaeological research before these sites were flooded. The salvage work that was done here provided crucial and tantalizing clues about the origins and spread of Olmec civilization. As in the Mexican case, the archaeological resources that will be inundated as a result of the Chalillo Dam surely contain important and unique data.

The country of Belize realizes the value of its cultural heritage and the Department of Archaeology has worked hard to preserve it. Initial surveys in the Chalillo area have revealed the existence of sites that should receive more archaeological attention. Importantly, the country of Belize also has a cadre of trained Belizean researchers who are capable of carrying out the required investigations. To not carry out such archaeological salvage work would be a travesty that would result not only in the loss of archaeological heritage for Belize, but also for the world.

For all of the above reasons, therefore, we urge the National Environmental Appraisal Committee (NEAC) to carry out a comprehensive survey of the area threatened by the Chalillo Dam and to undertake whatever archaeological work is deemed necessary by the Belize Department of Archaeology.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Arlen F. Chase'.

Arlen F. Chase
Professor;
Interim Director, Latin American Studies;
Co-Director, Caracol Archaeological Project

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Diane Z. Chase'.

Diane Z. Chase
Professor;
Interdisciplinary Coordinator, Academic Affairs;
Co-Director, Caracol Archaeological Project