

Amazonian civilization no longer myth

BY MARGARETHUMBLE
Reporter

Some call it El Dorado, others the City of Z. Spanish conquistadors ventured into the Amazon rainforest seeking fortune. Since then, more adventurers followed; they were convinced they could find the lost civilization said to rival the Aztecs and the Incas. This ancient empire of extreme beauty and treasure hidden deep within the Amazon jungle is the essence of a legend that initially drew many explorers, archaeologists, and adventurers to their deaths. The jungle swallowed the explorers, and the city was never found, which prompted the rest of the world to dismiss the existence of the Golden City and call it a myth. Now, however, those believers and dreamers have been proven right; there was a great civilization that existed in the Amazon.

Researchers and 20th century scholars claimed surviving in the Amazon was too dangerous because of the heat. New

satellite imagery reveals more than 200 huge geometric earthworks carved in the upper Amazon basin near Brazil's border with Bolivia. Spanning 155 miles, the squares, circles and various other geometric shapes, some dating as early as 200 AD, form a network of avenues, ditches, and enclosures built long before Christopher Columbus had even set foot in the New World.

Scientists who have mapped these earthworks have reason to believe that there may be another 2,000 structures beneath the jungle canopy, vestiges of abandoned societies yet to be discovered.

According to the January 2010 issue of the "Antiquity" journal, these formations, many of which were discovered following the clearance of the forest for agriculture, point to a more "sophisticated pre-Columbian monument-building society."

Networks of trenches created such structures that were about 36 feet wide and several feet deep, lined by banks that

rose up to three feet high. Some trenches were surrounded by low mounds containing decorated ceramics, charcoal, and stone tools. Many of these mounds were symmetrical and slanted towards the north, prompting some researchers to believe they had some type of astronomical significance.

Archaeologists believe the structures were used for fortifications, homes, and spiritual ceremonies. They actually could house a population up to 60,000 people, which was a higher number than residing in European cities of that era.

Denise Schaan, a co-author of the study and anthropologist at the Federal University of Pará, in Belém, Brazil, believe these discoveries have demolished the idea that the soil in the upper Amazon was too infertile to support extensive agriculture.

"We found this picture is wrong. And there is a lot more to discover in these places, it's never-ending. Every week we find new structures," said Schaan in an interview with

"National Geographic" in its December 2009 issue.

Researchers were especially intrigued by findings that claimed earthworks in floodplains and uplands were of a distinctly similar style, suggesting the same culture built them all.

"In Amazonian archaeology, you always have this idea that you find different peoples in different ecosystems," said Schaan. "So it was odd to have a culture that would take advantage of different ecosystems and expand over such a large region."

In 1999, the geometric shapes were discovered, but only now, as satellite imagery can reveal the sites, the scale of the settlements becomes clearer. Some anthropologists and archaeologists believe the feat, requiring a high level of skill and sophisticated engineering, canals and roads, rivals Egypt's pyramids.

"These revelations are exploding our perceptions of what the Americas really looked like before the arrival

of Christopher Columbus," said David Grann, author of "The Lost City of Z," a book describing an attempt in the 1920s to find signs of abandoned ancient Amazonian civilizations.

"The discoveries are challenging long-held assumptions about the Amazon as a Hobbesian place where only small primitive tribes could ever have existed, and about the limits the environment placed on the rise of early civilizations," said Grann. "They are also vindicating Percy Fawcett, the explorer who partly inspired Conan Doyle's book 'The Lost World.'"

"Fawcett led an expedition to find the City of Z, but the party vanished, bequeathing a mystery," said Grann.

One of the greatest archeological discoveries, a vast and complex ancient civilization, has prompted researchers to estimate that nearly ten times as many such structures of unknown purpose still exist undetected under the Amazon's forest cover.

Change for Change: World empties its pockets to help devastated Haiti

BY ELIZABETH DETMAR
Editor-in-Chief

On January 12, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake with an epicenter 16 miles away from Port-au-Prince struck the impoverished capital of Haiti, causing horrific damage to the island's coast. Following 33 aftershocks, 14 of which had reported magnitudes between 5.0 and 5.9, Haitian Prime Minister Paul Antoine Bien-Aimé confirmed over 150,000 deaths in the metropolitan area alone, making this quake one of the deadliest of the 21st century, second only to the Indian Ocean quake of 2004.

Rescue crews from countries all over the world arrived at Toussaint L'Ouverture Airport in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. However, medical efforts were hindered due to the lack of hospital facilities. News stations reported military hospital conditions, as surgeries were performed without morphine. Despite these setbacks, most countries have

donated at least \$1,000,000 in humanitarian aid. Additionally, the US and Canada have offered displaced Haitians temporary immigrant status; however, international aid to Haiti will continue to flow in the coming months.

Even before the earthquake occurred, Haitians lived in extreme poverty, as Haiti ranks 149th of the 182 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index. As such, poorly constructed, cheap infrastructure left Port-au-Prince a cataclysm waiting to happen; any severe natural disaster would destroy roads, factories, schools, and homes. As a result, the United Nations and the US in particular will reconstruct Haiti from the ground up, a difficult feat that will cost both time and money.

Governments are not the only agencies who have extended a helping hand to Haiti. Hundreds of companies and non-profit organizations, such as Microsoft and the YMCA, have donated substantial amounts of money directly

to Haiti or through organizations like UNICEF. Apple, Inc. allowed customers to donate to the American Red Cross anywhere between five dollars and \$200 via the iTunes store. Hollywood Stars banded together in the "Hope for Haiti Now" telethon event on January 19. Citizens could place donations by calling the hotline manned by celebrities like P. Diddy and Julia Roberts. Simultaneously, artists like Bruce Springsteen, Alicia Keys, Coldplay, among others, were broadcasted on numerous channels in the US and England. Money raised from "Hope for Haiti Now" will be equally distributed between The Clinton Bush Haiti Fund, the United Nations World Food Programme, Oxfam America, Partners in Health, The Red Cross, UNICEF, and the Yele Haiti Foundation.

Students and staff members also decided to make their own contributions to the Haiti relief effort. On January 20 after school, students, teachers, and parents met in the media

center to brainstorm and share ideas for helping Haiti. After two meetings, it was determined that students could buy Haiti Relief wristbands for \$2.00. The athletic department and booster club decided to host a "Hoops for Haiti" event during the basketball games against Dudley and Page in late January. A raffle and free throw contest at halftime took place, and all proceeds were sent to the Haiti relief fund.

When the Indian Ocean earthquake caused a tremendous tsunami in 2005, Guilford County Schools enacted Operation H.O.P.E. (Helping Other People Everywhere), a program encouraging students and parents to offer any monetary donations they could to organizations like the American Red Cross and YMCA.

Individuals wishing to make donations or learn more about ways to help the people of Haiti should visit www.ymca.net/worldservice, www.redcross.org, or www.hope-for-haiti.com.

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A Haitian walks past a collapsed building after the 7.0 M earthquake struck the capital Port-au-Prince. A sign reads, "Welcome the U.S. Military. We Need Some Help. Dead bodies inside." *Internet graphic*