

At the Water's Edge: Fighting Poaching on Sacred Landscapes

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The 25 Cara Blanca pools in central Belize are home to ancient Maya ceremonial sites that were visited during the Terminal Classic droughts (700-900 CE). Owned by a sustainable logging company, the land is closely monitored. The rich cultural history and diverse natural ecology of the pools put them in particular danger of looting— for artifacts, for fish, for lumber. The Valley of Peace Archaeology team works at these pools every summer to record archaeological contexts before they are destroyed or removed. In the process, we have surveyed each pool to record changes in ecological condition. During our 2017 summer field season, we macheted through dense jungle to reach the last of the pools, Pool 25, captured here by drone. Unfortunately, a fire had recently been ignited by poachers and the only remaining green was on the pool's boundary, saved by the inundated landscape. This photograph acts as a compelling argument in our quest to further protect and monitor the Cara Blanca landscape.