



Pulltrouser Swamp: Ancient Maya Habitat, Agriculture, and Settlement in Northern Belize (Texas Pan American)

B. L. Turner II

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Among Mesoamericanists, the agricultural basis of the ancient Maya civilization of the Yucatan Peninsula has been an important topic of research—and controversy. Interest in the agricultural system of the Maya greatly increased as new discoveries showed that the lowland Maya were not limited to slash-and-burn technology, as had been previously believed, but used a variety of more sophisticated agricultural techniques and practices, including terracing, raised fields, and, perhaps, irrigation. Because of the nature of the data and because this form of agricultural technology had been key to explanations of state formation elsewhere in Mesoamerica, raised-field agriculture became a particular focus of investigation.

Pulltrouser Swamp conclusively demonstrates the existence of hydraulic, raised-field agriculture in the Maya lowlands between 150 B.C. and A.D. 850. It presents the findings of the University of Oklahoma's Pulltrouser Swamp Project, an NSF-supported interdisciplinary study that combined the talents of archaeologists, anthropologists, geographers, paleobotanists, biologists, and zoologists to investigate the remains of the Maya agricultural system in the swampy region of northern Belize.

By examining soils, fossil pollen and other plant remains, gastropods, relic settlements, ceramics, lithics, and other important evidence, the Pulltrouser Swamp team has clearly demonstrated that the features under investigation are relics of Maya-made raised and channelized fields and associated canals. Other data suggest the nature of the swamps in which the fields were constructed, the tools used for construction and cultivation, the possible crops cultivated, and at least one type of settlement near the fields, with its chronology. This verification of raised fields provides dramatic evidence of a large and probably organized workforce engaged in sophisticated and complex agricultural technology. As record of this evidence, *Pulltrouser Swamp* is a work of seminal importance for all students and scholars of New World prehistory.

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