



The Ahau Chronicles



Volume 27

June 12, 2011

Subscribers: 398



3 Ahau

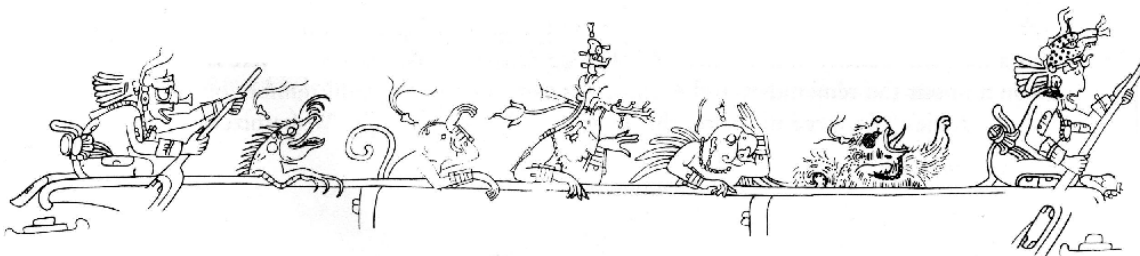
8 Zotz

Long Count: 12.19.18.8.0



Anatomy of an Expedition

Preparations for the proposed **Countdown to 2012 Eclipse Expedition** in November of this year are underway and the preliminary steps are outlined below. The dual purpose here is to make the preparation phase as transparent as possible for those who are interested in participating, as well as to inform readers who may want to embark on an expedition of their own design. Typically any worthwhile expedition involves an international airplane flight. Ours will deliver us to Arturo Merino Benitez International Airport in the Chilean capital, Santiago, nestled in the Central Valley below the picturesque Andes Mountains. The city is a bustling modern metropolis with museums, shopping, and restaurants. Efficient buses and a subway system make transportation easy.

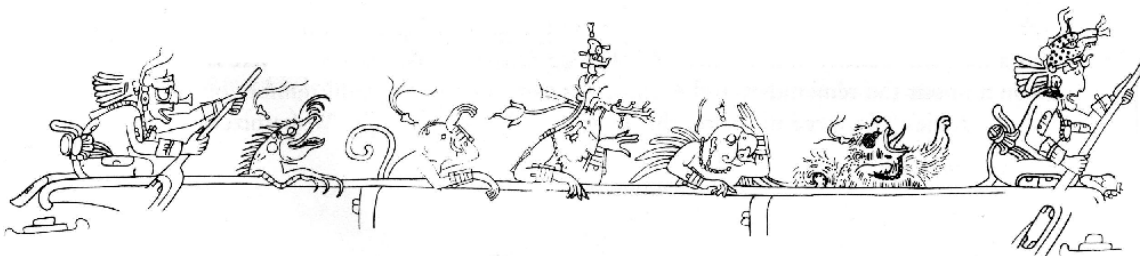


When the expedition team has been assembled in Santiago and a favorable window of weather has opened, we will depart from Tobalaba airfield for the flight to Robinson Crusoe Island. In my research regarding ATA Airlines for these flights I was surprised to discover an online presentation on the ATA website about my discovery of the island monument. Visit <http://www.aerolineasata.cl/aerolinea.html> and click through the “presentation” link in the center of the page to be horribly misinformed (in Spanish) about my research and the impending end of the world. We will reach out to ATA in the hopes of rectifying their errors and perhaps getting some discounted flights for our expedition.

Once we have landed on the island and taken a boat around to the island’s only village, San Juan Bautista, we will unload our gear and settle in to our accommodation. The islanders are some of the most hospitable people you will ever meet and they are always happy to welcome visitors. You can hike to the old Spanish Fort overlooking the village or visit the missile shells embedded in the hillside from the sinking of the German battleship Dresden in the closing days of World War II. For underwater adventures, snorkel or scuba dive in Cumberland Bay where you can see indigenous species of seals among the tsunami wreckage strewn across the ocean floor.

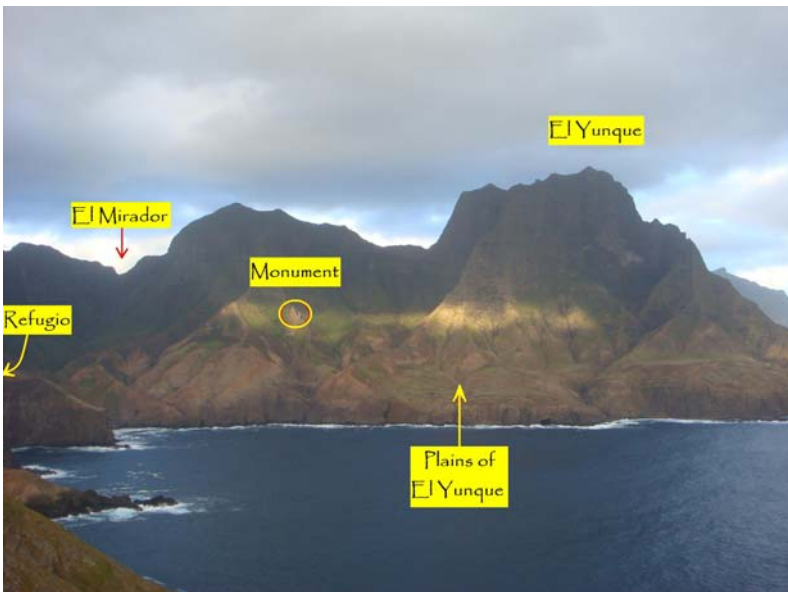


The photo above, taken by Marcelo Rossi, shows divers recovering a grave from the bottom of the bay. The 2010 tsunami washed ashore and dragged much of the village back into the sea upon its retreat. Pedro Niada’s Land Rover lies at the bottom of the bay and is undoubtedly being newly colonized by coral and schools of fish, oblivious to the tragedy to which their new homes bore witness.

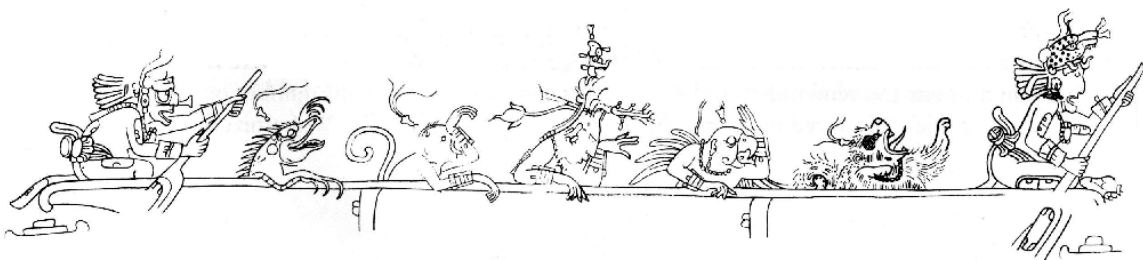


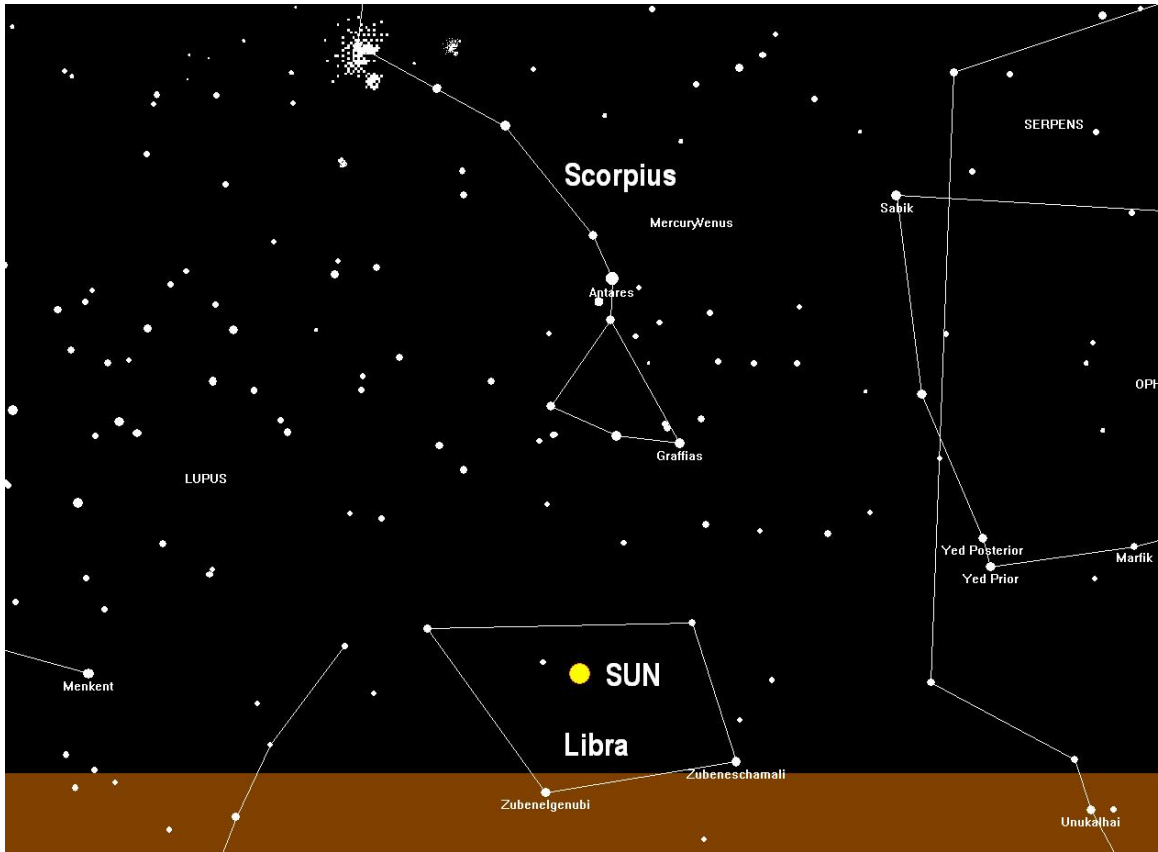
On the morning of Saturday November 12th we will depart from the village and begin the trek up the volcanic ridge toward El Mirador and the far side of the island where the Sun God monument is located. We will pass through a number of eco-zones where the vegetation changes as the elevation rises.

On the hike to El Mirador we can visit the ruins of Alexander Selkirk's camp where he was stranded for 4 years and 4 months in the early 1700s before being rescued. His story was the inspiration for Daniel Defoe's famous novel *Robinson Crusoe*. In 2005, Daisuke Takahashi excavated the site.

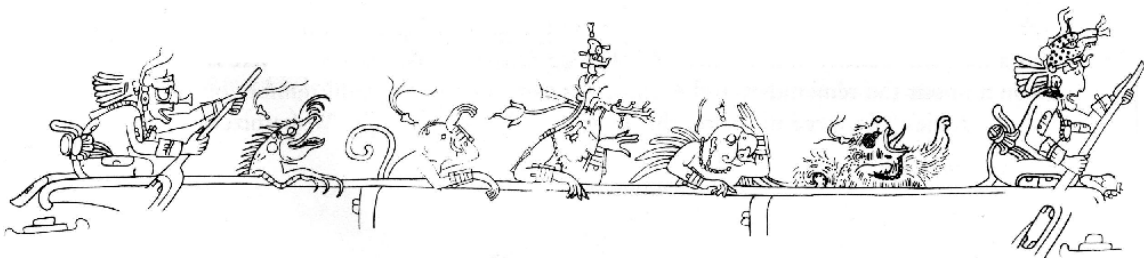
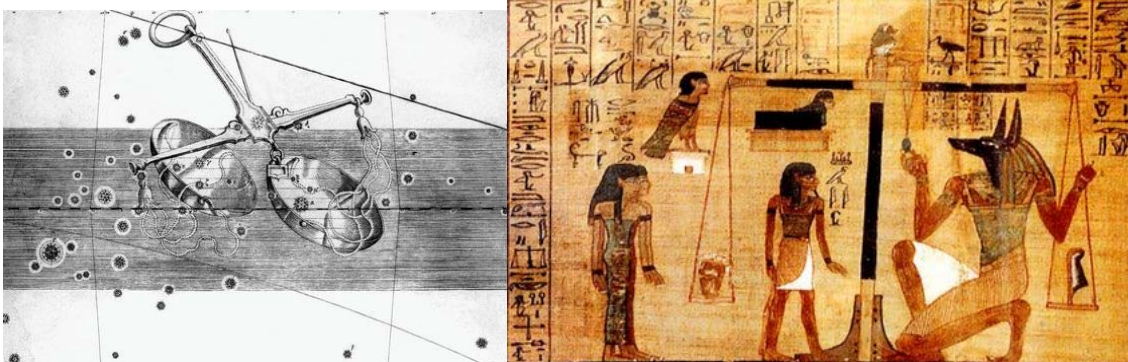


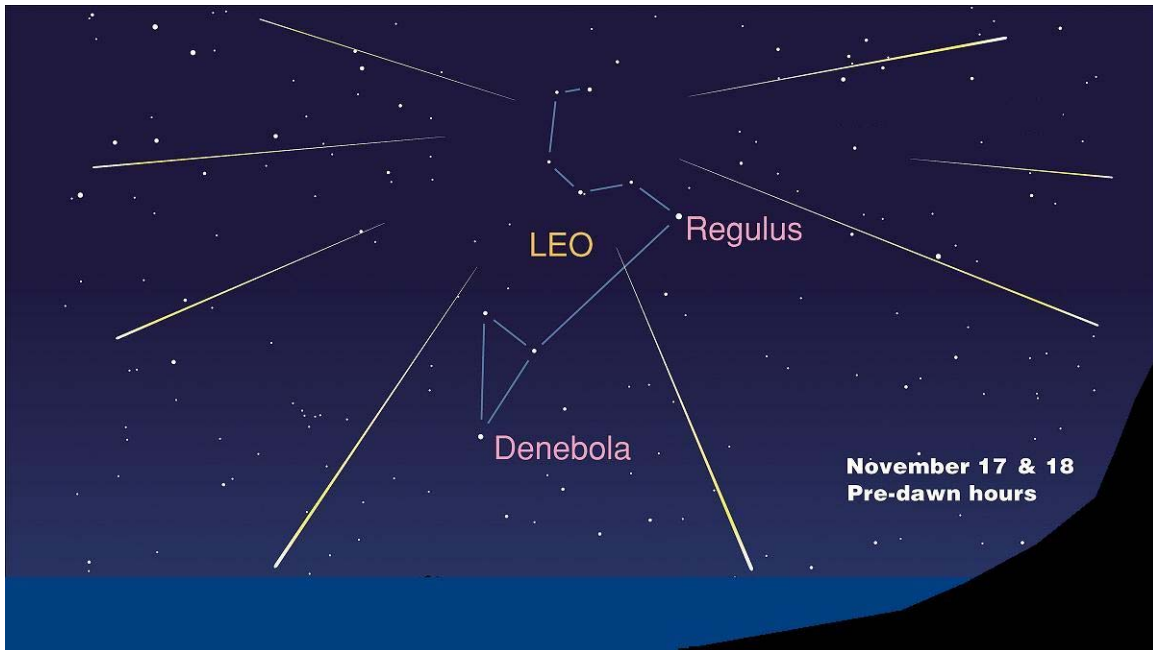
We will be crossing over the mountain ridge at **El Mirador** and descending to the **Refugio**. After our camp has been made we'll proceed across the flank of the volcano to the **Monument**. At the **Plains of El Yunque** we can get a long-distance view of the Sun God face from the exact spot it was first discovered in 1996.





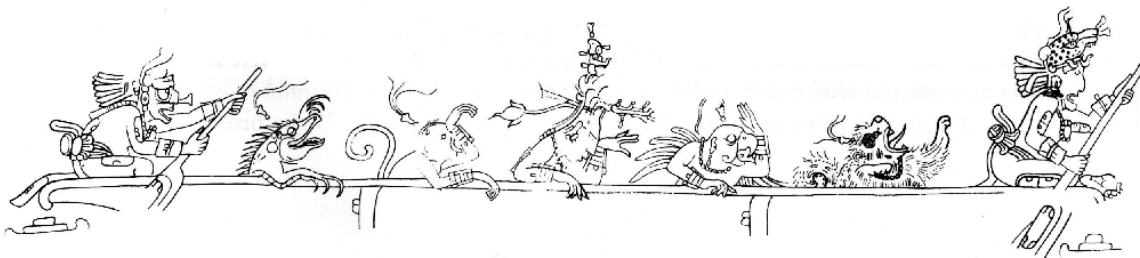
Observing to the west at sunset from the location of the monument, the sun lies within the constellation of **Libra** on Nov. 13th. The background stars will be invisible this year (2011) but will be revealed in 2012 when the sun is in eclipse 40 days before the end of the Mayan Great Cycle. The constellation **Libra** is known as “The Scales” and is represented as a set of measuring pans affixed to a balancing beam much like merchants would use. I cannot help but be reminded of the “Weighing of the Heart” scene from the Egyptian Book of the Dead where Anubis weighs the heart of the deceased against a feather while declarations of purity are made to allow the soul to enter into the Afterlife. Is the 2012 eclipse the moment of judgment for the current 5,125-year-old World Age?





After a week of being delighted by the dark skies of the island and the exotic constellations of the Southern Hemisphere, the grand finale will occur on our final night when the Leonids meteor shower will dazzle over Cumberland Bay. Radiating from the constellation of Leo the Lion, the shower is one of the most productive of the year with dozens of meteors per hour. The next morning we make our departure from the island.

The second phase of the expedition will consist of an attempt to get to Marambio Base in Antarctica to witness the Partial Solar Eclipse of Nov. 25th. The photo below at left, measuring about 7 miles across, shows the small peninsula that houses the base, surrounded on three sides by frigid iceberg-strewn waters. The base, shown at right, sits in the middle of the small plateau with easy access to the shore so we can find the ideal vantage point for viewing the eclipse. Access to Antarctica is restricted and difficult with most of the bases serving military and scientific communities. We may be forced to fly in the day of the eclipse, witness the midnight spectacle, and then depart the next morning. The experience would be a perfect climax to an already exciting expedition.



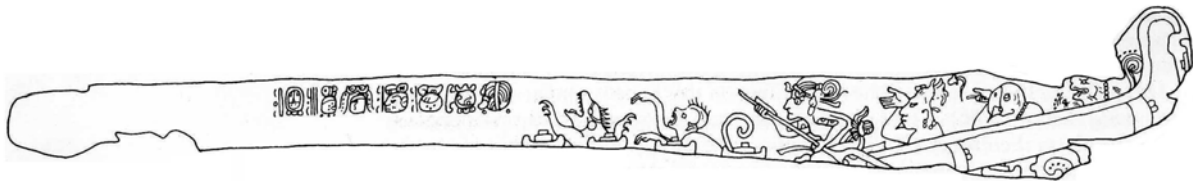
POSTSCRIPT

After writing about the “Midnight Sun” eclipse in the previous newsletter I was delighted to read that on June 1 of this month there was a similar eclipse across the high northern latitudes that set the Web buzzing. Not only did the partial solar eclipse occur at midnight but it crossed the International Date Line west-to-east, officially ending on the day **BEFORE** it started.

While I understood the physical characteristics that allowed these strange circumstances to occur, I was more impressed by a comment made in passing by Joe Rao of New York’s Hayden Planetarium. Writing about the eclipse path over northern Russia in an article entitled “Partial Solar Eclipse's Midnight Twist” he says: “During the few minutes in which the eclipse will reach its peak, with the top three-fifths of the sun bitten away by the moon, the sun will take on the appearance of a huge boat sailing out over the icy Barents Sea.” In a flash of realization it occurred to me that the same metaphor could be applied to the November 13th, 2012 Total Solar Eclipse as seen from the island monument but with even greater symbolic importance.

The “Midnight Sun” eclipses, both the recent one and that which we hope to witness this coming November from Antarctica, occur with a sun that barely skims the horizon but doesn’t actually set. This phenomenon occurs at high latitudes in the extreme north and south. The 2012 Total Solar Eclipse occurs at sunset from the mid-latitude location of the island where the “huge boat” of the eclipsed sun on the horizon will then sink below the water, disappearing out of sight with overwhelming death symbolism as the end of the Maya Great Cycle approaches.

Readers of this newsletter are by now accustomed to the image of the Paddler Gods at the bottom of each page spiriting away the dead king to the Underworld. But there were other similar carved jaguar bones in the same cache at Tikal that display additional imagery, including the one below showing the canoe plunging under the surface of the water. Schele and Miller conclude that the Maya “equated death with the sinking of a canoe into the watery Underworld.”



How fitting then that the cosmic spectacle chosen as the penultimate event before the end of the 13th Baktun in 2012 should be the sun as a thin sliver of light in the shape of a boat sinking below the surface of the southern ocean as seen by the stoic Sun God and jaguar monuments, silent sentinels standing witness to the end of time.

