

Among the Ruins

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Lori Collins and Travis Doering

(PhysOrg.com) -- In an ancient Mayan site, USF archaeologists use new tools to find everything old.

For the past three weeks, a team from the University of South Florida's Alliance for Integrated Spatial Technologies - a network of [archaeologists](#), geologists, historians and other disciplines - have been exploring the Guatemalan ruins of Tak'alik Abaj', an ancient city where Mayan priests once conducted rituals.

Using some of the world's most advanced scanning and photographic technology, the team is able to explore the ruins - considered some of the most fascinating ancient treasures in the world - without disturbing them in the site, which lies in southwest Guatemala, about 45 km from the

border with Mexico.

The AIST scientists are capturing three-dimensional images of the ruins which scholars around the world can study and allow for less invasive excavation of the vast site, which over the years has become the home of a sustainable coffee and rubber plantation and in some parts remains covered by thick vegetation in others.

USF archaeologist Travis Doering, who co-founded AIST with USF anthropologist Lori Collins, said the National Science Foundation funded project will eventually allow scholars to access images from the [ruins](#) on the Internet and examine them in as much detail as if they were there in person. In addition to being an important religious site for the Mayans, the area also flourished from 9th century BC through to at least the 10th century AD as an important centre of commerce.

“Everybody is going to be able to use the data, we’re going to make it available to the broadest audience available,” he said. “Particularly in Mesoamerican studies, the data is very closely held and it’s difficult to get to. The more people who can see it can interact with it the better the discipline is going to be.”

The group will be in Guatemala until March 14, but they’ve enabled readers to follow their journey in their blog, AIST Expedition Journal.

The Tak’alik Abaj’ project has been carried out in cooperation with the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Direccion General del Patrimonio Cultural y Natural, Proyecto Nacional Tak’alik Abaj’ and El Asintal, Retalhuleu.

Provided by University of South Florida

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