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Something There Is That Doesn’t Love a Wall: Excavations of Wall Structures at Actuncan, Belize

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Excavations of even the smallest architectural features, such as walls that stand only a meter high, can reveal important implications about the layout of a city and the social and political interactions between people who lived in that area. For this project, excavations were conducted on two separate wall structures located within the civic center of a Maya site, Actuncan, located in the Belize River Valley near the Belize/Guatemalan border. The two walls highlight important sections of the city: the first (named the King Lear wall in the field) forms part of a plaza unit, or open space surrounded by three possibly ritual structures on one side and an elite residence on the other side, while the second (the Scout wall) also encloses a plaza group and a possible ritually and cosmologically significant E Group of structures as well as outlining the edge of the civic center, beyond which lie household groups. For each wall, test units were dug bisecting the walls in order to best approach the front of the walls and gain a better understanding of their construction. Artifacts were sifted through ¼ inch screens and ceramics were collected from the wall fill for dating. Based on preliminary analysis, the King Lear wall may have served to delineate space or block access between the ritual structures and the elite residence. The Scout wall, on the other hand, may have served as a palisade with a perishable wooden or cloth component built up through the middle. The dating results will help to place the construction of these walls within the chronology of other structures in the site and therefore relate their construction to shifting politics within the site.