

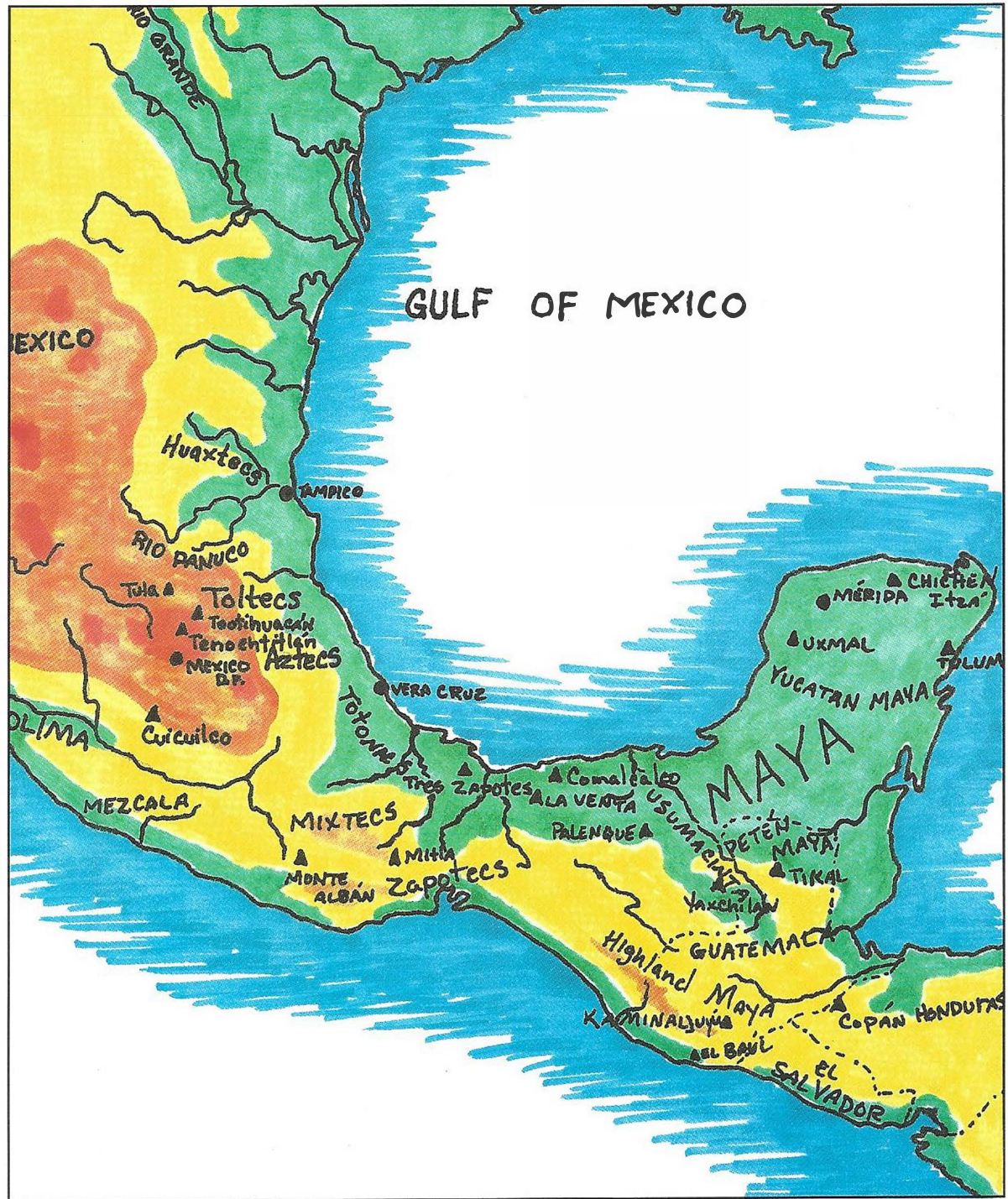
The Witness

The Foundation For Research On Ancient America



Winter 1991

Number 75



Book of Mormon Geography

The Witness

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The Foundation for Research on Ancient America is a nonprofit corporation comprised of individuals who desire to advance the knowledge of Jesus Christ and the Book of Mormon. Through instructional materials, archaeological research, testimonies, and related projects, members of FRAA seek to assist in bringing forth the light that is contained in the ancient scriptures of the Book of Mormon. A contribution to the Foundation for Research on Ancient America results in membership.

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Cover . . .

Book of Mormon scholars today believe that the geography of the record fits the cultural area called by archaeologists Mesoamerica. It includes parts of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and parts of Honduras. Julie Gatrost prepared an artistic rendering of the area especially for this issue. She also drew the maps on pages 6 and 14.

For about two years, the editors of *Biblical Archaeology Review* have strongly censored the research team who were given the task of translating the Dead Sea Scrolls. They call it the "Scandal of the Dead Sea Scrolls" because only a select group of scholars has access to the scrolls and the translation process has gone on for many years.

But, just recently, perhaps because of Hershel Shanks's (editor of *BAR*) efforts, the scrolls are becoming available in two unusual ways. On September 5, the *Kansas City Star* reported on two scholars who reconstructed the Dead Sea Scrolls from a concordance with the help of the computer. Then, quickly following that, the *Los Angeles Times*, September 22, revealed that the Huntington Library in San Marino, California has photographs of all the scrolls and is now going to make them available to scholars without restrictions.

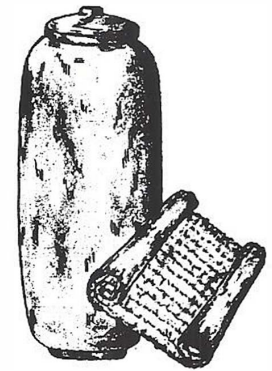
The scrolls were discovered between 1947 and 1956 by Bedouin shepherds in caves northwest of the Dead Sea. Since that time, they have remained in the hands of a few scholars who have jealously guarded them and have not permitted others to work on the translation process.

These incidents bring to mind the records "hid up in the hill Cumorah" by Mormon (Mormon 3:8). What will be the fate of these records? Who will have control over them? Has the Dead Sea Scrolls scandal set the stage and prepared the world to avoid a similar situation when the Hill Cumorah records are discovered?

Lehi prophesied concerning the plates of brass: they "should go forth unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, who were of his seed," and that they "should never perish, neither should they be dimmed any more by time" (1 Nephi 1:169-170). Surely the plates of brass are hid up in Hill Cumorah with all the other records waiting for the time the Lord wants to reveal them to the world.

May that time come soon.

Sherrie Kline Smith



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Foundation News

Book Stewards

At present about fifteen persons have agreed to be book stewards for the Foundation. They represent many different areas in the United States and will be the contact persons for materials published or produced by FRAA. Book steward Kathleen Haley in Michigan sold over \$800 worth of materials this past summer.

One of the latest items available is a royal blue tote bag with the Foundation's name and logo on one side and the Maya hieroglyph that translates "it came to pass" on the reverse side. These sell for \$15. See the book steward in your area or write to FRAA.

Contact Jim and Penny Dunning, book steward coordinators, if you would like to be a FRAA volunteer book steward at 210 W. White Oak, Independence, Missouri 64050.

Class For Teens

Beginning October 13, Aaron Smith, freshman at Northwest Missouri State University, will teach a class on the Book of Mormon for ages 14-19. Aaron has taught Book of Mormon classes at senior high youth camps. Some of the students who attended asked him if he would continue throughout the year.

The classes will be held at the FRAA building at 210 W. White Oak, on Sundays, October 13, November 3, and December 1 from 2-4 P.M. They will begin again in January and will be held approximately once a month. Call the FRAA office, 816-461-FRAA, for more information.

Class/Lecture Series

The second six-week Monday night Book of Mormon/archaeology class began October 7 and continued through November 11. The first series was held last summer in July and August. They will be held again beginning in February 1992.

FRAA Book Stewards

Kreg and Tracy Levegood
Dover, Ohio

David Norcross
Arlington, Texas

Helen Cottrill
Washington, West Virginia

Roseann Crown
Fort Scott, Kansas

Cheryl Reed
Fort Scott, Kansas

Glen and Mary Dailey
Brigden, Ontario

Kathleen Haley
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Independence, Missouri

Phillip and Cheri Tandy
Odessa, Missouri

Carolyn Campbell
Clinton, Mississippi

Gena Hopkins
Bedford, Texas

Mary Richards
Oxford, Michigan

Stephen La Hue
Independence, Missouri

Lyle Smith, chairman of the FRAA archaeology committee, Glenn Scott, a member of the FRAA archaeology committee, Frank Frye, and others have taught or presented the class. Topics included geography, writing, murals, mirror images, and many others.

For more information, call 461-FRAA.

Book of Mormon Conferences

In August, FRAA returned to Michigan for a second annual "Spend a Day With The Book of Mormon." Presentations included "Overview of Recent Book of Mor-

mon Discoveries" by Michael and Julie Gatrost, "Egyptian and Maya Hieroglyphs: The Same Writing System" by Sherrie Smith; "Ministry of the Book of Mormon" by Vivian Sorensen; "Growing Spiritually with the Book of Mormon" by Barbara Wilkinson; "Archaeology of Mesoamerica" by Lyle Smith; and "An Ancient Legal Perspective of the Book of Mormon" by Michael Gatrost.

A similar program was given at the second annual all-day conference at Hurst, Texas on November 9, 1991.

Helaman's Two Thousand

Latter-day Helaman's Two Thousand continues to grow. Over 1,000 contribute either monthly or annually to the Foundation. They are the backbone of the Foundation and key players in the work of the Foundation. They are committed to witnessing about the Book of Mormon and its testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the Holy One of Israel.

Funds are needed to carry out this mission. Costs for the new building, for publications, and the library require constant and dedicated giving from members of Helaman's Two Thousand. Won't you join this latter-day army for the witnessing of the Book of Mormon? Send your contribution to Helaman's Two Thousand, FRAA, 210 W. White Oak, Independence, Missouri 64050.

Members of Helaman's Two Thousand receive, in addition to *The Witness*, a quarterly newsletter called the *MIGHTY SUMMONS*. This update has testimonies, archaeology news, and information on how FRAA spends its contributions.

Become part of Helaman's Two Thousand today!

Calendar

January 19, 1992
2:30 P.M.

February 3, 10, 17, 24
March 2, 9, 1992

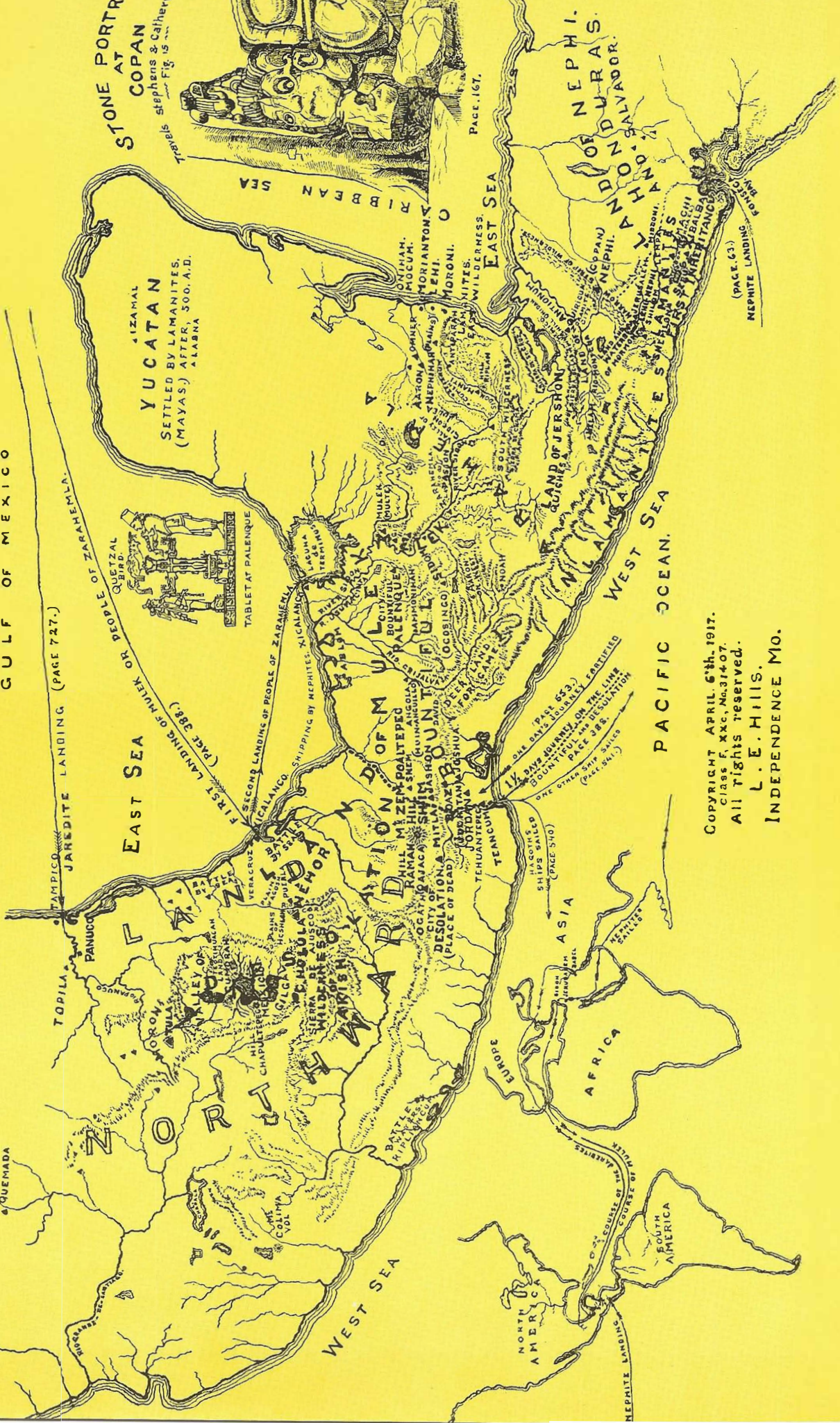
FRAA Annual Meeting
Waldo Avenue Restoration Branch

Monday Night Book of Mormon/Archaeology
Lecture/Class Series, 210 W. White Oak,
Independence, Missouri

DURANCO
HILL EPHRAIM
{ CERRO DEL MERCADO

MAP OF MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA. FROM 2234 B.C. TO 421 A.D.

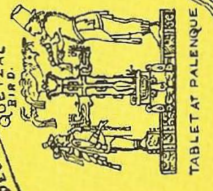
GULF OF MEXICO



STONE PORTRA
AT
COPAN
Stephens & Catherwood
Fig. 15



IZAMAL
YUCATAN
SETTLED BY LAMANITES,
(MAYAS) AFTER 300 A.D.
ALABNA



JAREDITE LANDING (PAGE 727.)

EAST SEA

FIRST LANDING OF MELX OR DEPLE OF ZARAMELA (PAGE 388)

SECOND LANDING OF PEOPLE OF ZARAMELA (PAGE 388)

SHIPPING BY NEPHITES

TEHUACAN

TEHUACAN SHIPS SAILED (PAGE 510)

14 DAYS HOURS ON THE LINE (PAGE 523)

ONE OTHER SHIP SAILED (PAGE 541)

ASIA

AFRICA

EUROPE

NORTH AMERICA

SOUTH AMERICA

WEST SEA

PACIFIC OCEAN

WEST SEA

PACIFIC OCEAN

WEST SEA

PACIFIC OCEAN

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L. E. HILLS.
INDEPENDENCE MO.

LOCATING THE LAND

AND CITY OF NEPHI



Glenn A. Scott

Maps of the 1894 Committee

At the RLDS General Conference of 1894, a Committee on Archaeology was appointed to outline and prepare a map of Book of Mormon history. It included such distinguished members as W. H. Kelley, F. M. Sheehy, S. A. Burgess, R. Etzen-

◀ *L.E. Hills published his first map of proposed Book of Mormon lands April 6, 1917. In the next few years, he refined this and in subsequent publications printed a revised version. It took many years, however, before people of the church accepted this area as the location of the account given in the Book of Mormon. A careful look at the map shows Hills suggested Copan as the City of Nephi.*

Hills was a pioneer in Book of Mormon geography, giving succeeding generations a firm foundation to work with in refining the book's geography. Ongoing research of scholars today provide further light on the locations of actual places mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Zarahemla Research Foundation is working on updating a map of Book of Mormon lands based on current understanding.

hauser, Louise Sheldon, and William Woodhead.

After much time and labor, members of the committee reached conclusions which they considered to be substantially correct. From these conclusions, G. F. Weston of Buchanan, Michigan prepared six maps of Book of Mormon lands for the committee. These maps were published in 1899 and widely distributed. *A Report of the Committee on American Archaeology* which included the maps was published in 1898 with a second printing in 1902 and revised and published again in 1910.* Although the church never officially endorsed the maps, the proposed geographical locations of Book of Mormon cities and lands on the maps made a lasting impression which has been difficult to correct.

Unfortunately, the committee made the easy assumption that the Isthmus of Panama was the "narrow neck of land" so frequently referred to throughout the of Mormon. This critical decision inevitably led to the conclusion that Lehi and his colony had to have landed in

South America, because the book's narrative makes it very clear that the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla were south of the "narrow neck." This assumption was widely accepted, perhaps in part because of the legends and ruins of the Inca and pre-Inca people in South America.

The committee equated the City of Nephi with Cuzco, Peru, and another city, identified as the city of Lehi-Nephi, is shown as a separate entity more than 500 miles northwest of the City of Nephi. I have long been puzzled by this premise that the Land (and city) of Nephi were separate and distinct from the Land (and city) of Lehi-Nephi. The use of the term "Lehi-Nephi" occurs only in the book of Mosiah in reference to that colony led by Zeniff which returned to "the land of their fathers" (Mosiah 5:12; 6:67). Throughout these verses, both names are used interchangeably. (Compare Omni 1:48; Mosiah 5:78; 6:1, 7-8). The author (or editor) obviously intended to use the term "Lehi-Nephi" merely to differentiate between the land then occupied by the main

*The FRAA Research Library has the revised 1910 edition and one of the maps.

body of Nephites and the land formerly occupied by them, from which King Mosiah I had so recently led them.

The committee not only failed to reconcile the many geographical references scattered throughout the narrative, but even more surprising, they were apparently unaware of a statement made by Joseph Smith, Jr. about the location of Book of Mormon lands.

Central America, or Guatemala [sic], is situated north of the Isthmus of Darien [Panama]. . . . The city of Zarahemla, burnt at the crucifixion of the Savior, and rebuilt afterwards, stood upon this land.

—1842:3:927

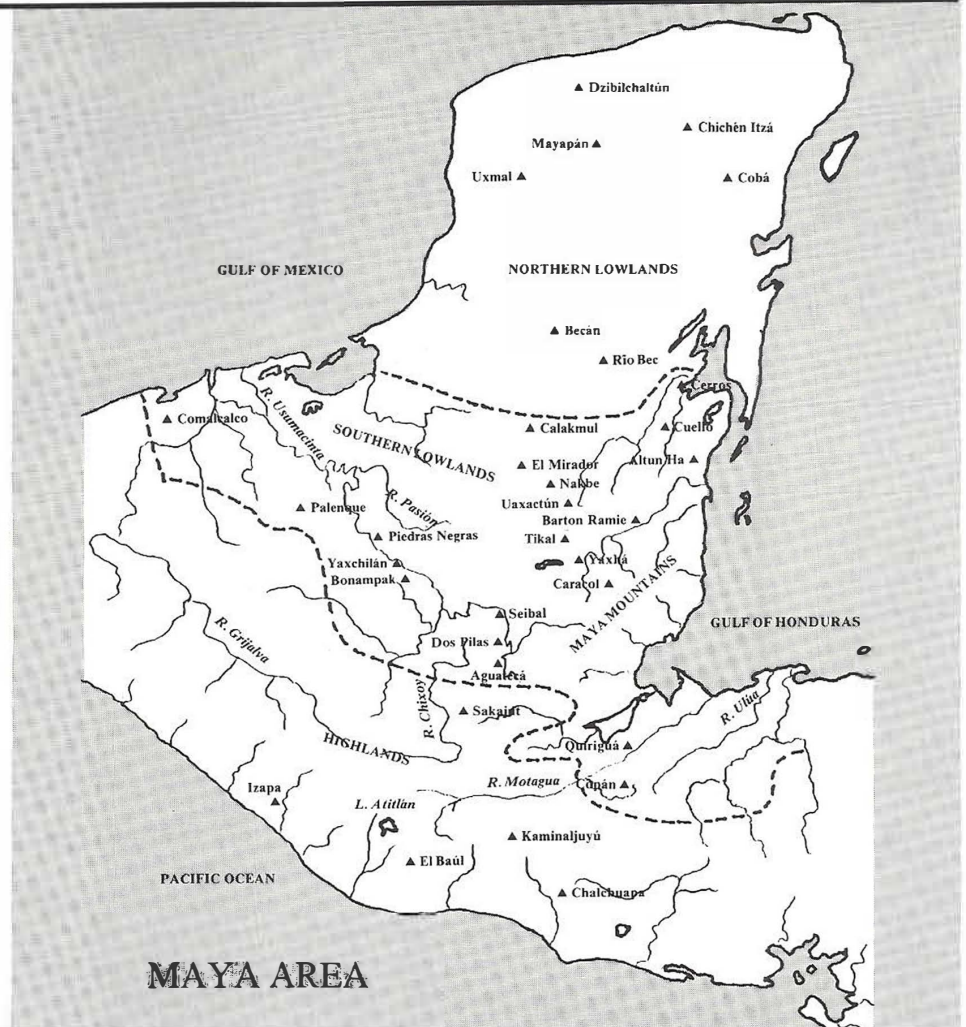
Louis E. Hills Map

Around 1917, a longtime scholar of the Book of Mormon, Louis E. Hills of Independence, Missouri noted that many of the physical features of Panama and South America simply did not agree with the geographical descriptions found in that record. He pointed out that the common excuse that the great upheaval of A.D. 34 had so changed the land as to make it unrecognizable was not valid, not only because so many of the geographical descriptions were written after A.D. 34, but also because there remain to this day the remnants of so many cities built before A.D. 34. Apostle Paul M. Hanson agreed that

Mormon's reference to it [narrow pass] in A.D. 360 establishes that it remained practically unchanged by what occurred in the earth at the time of the crucifixion of Christ.

—1951b:29

Hills compiled an exhaustive list of every geographical reference in the Book of Mormon



which he then carefully cross-indexed. Based on this data he began testing for possible alternatives. The long Isthmus of Mexico and Central America contains a number of narrow places (some proposed as possible routes to the Panama canal) between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea.

After testing and discarding several areas, he tried the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. To his understandable delight, everything seemed to snap into place. The main criteria fit: 1) a great river (28 references) running into the sea north (Hel. 2:8); 2) a narrow strip of wilderness (Alma 13:68-69) running from the sea east (Caribbean) to the sea west (Pacific) which divides the highlands to the south from the lowlands to the north; 3) water nearly surrounding (Alma

13:77) the bulge of land between the narrow neck of Tehuantepec to the west and Honduras to the east (an area archaeologists call the heartland of the Maya); and perhaps most importantly, 4) remains of great cities exactly where the Book of Mormon requires them.

As a result of his research and analysis, Hills drew a new map of Book of Mormon lands (see p. 4), and between 1917 and 1923 wrote a series of booklets* explaining his rationale. Considering the sketchy knowledge of Latin American geography at that time, his conclusions have stood the test of time and the scrutiny of many scholars remarkably well.

The nearest to an official endorsement of Hills's revolutionary revision came from Apostle Paul M. Hanson in his paper "Archaeology and Geography of

the Book of Mormon" which he presented at an institute in 1951. In this paper, (also reprinted in the January 8, 1951 *Saints Herald*), Hanson stated:

Location of the "narrow neck of land" [is] of great importance as a key to the geography of the Book of Mormon. *The Isthmus of Tehuantepec appears to meet the requirements of the Book of Mormon (emphasis added).* —1951a:91

Locating the Land of Nephi

In recent years, scholarly opinion has made a dramatic shift in regard to Book of Mormon geography. This change moves the location of the Land of Nephi from somewhere in South America northward into Mesoamerica, a name used to designate a cultural area which includes parts of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador.

Most current Book of Mormon scholars seem to generally agree that the Land of Nephi lay south of the Sierra de las Minas mountains that run east and west and merge into the even larger Sierra Madre range which borders the Pacific Coast. The Land of Nephi then would include all of the Pacific coast and southern highlands of Guatemala, all of the country of El Salvador, and, that part of Honduras directly north of El Salvador and west of the Ulua River.

Locating the City of Nephi

Louis Hills and Conrad Booton equated the City of Nephi with the ruins of the Maya city of Copan in western Honduras. This location had much to recommend it. It was a major civic center located just south of the narrow strip of wilderness (mountains). In addition, if the southern highlands

were the region of origin of some of the earliest lowland colonists, the intervening areas through the *Copan*, *Poloche* and *Mojo* valleys, and parts of Belize, would provide the most direct route for migration to the lowlands.

For many years I accepted Louis Hills's and Conrad Booton's assessment until I learned that the city of Copan was not built until about A.D. 250, 800 years too late to be the City of Nephi. Although there is evidence of settlers in the Copan valley from Archaic times (2500 B.C.), archaeological excavations reveal no major city occupied this site during the period required by the Book of Mormon for the city of Nephi (565–200 B.C.).

According to Mosiah 5:33 and 6:11 another requirement for locating the City of Nephi is there must be a satellite city nearby. Interestingly, both Copan and another candidate site called Kaminaljuyu, meet this requirement.

Very close to the ruins of Copan are ruins of a smaller site called Santa Rita de Copan or Rio Amarillo and just south of Kaminaljuyu are the smaller sites of San Antonio Frutal and Solano.

Almost reluctantly, I have come to accept Kaminaljuyu (adjacent to modern Guatemala City) as the most likely location of the City of Nephi. The majority of LDS scholars claim that the Grijalva River was the River Sidon, and the location of Kaminaljuyu supports that assumption. Kaminaljuyu, however, is located very close to the headwaters of *both* the Grijalva and Usumacinta rivers. This could explain how the 43 scouts, sent out by King Limhi to search for the Land of Zarahemla, got lost. They simply followed the wrong river.

Solid archaeological evidence of a major civic center at

Kaminaljuyu exists during the required period of 565–200 B.C. and beyond. In addition, a reasonable pass through the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes (northern highlands) follows the Usumacinta River downstream. This would, if followed, lead directly to the major Maya city of Yaxchilan, believed by many RLDS (and some LDS) scholars to have been the capital city of Zarahemla.

Archaeologist Gordon Willey observed,

There were two important trade routes from the Guatemalan Highlands down to the Lowlands. One of these went down the Motagua River . . . The other . . . followed down the Salinas-Chixoy drainage which forms the headwaters of the Usumacinta which flows eventually to the Gulf of Mexico.

—1985:181

Many anthropologists, including Richard Adams, Gareth Lowe, Robert Sharer, and others, believe that the Maya lowlands were settled around 600 B.C. by people from the Gulf Coast and around 250 B.C. joined by people from the southern highlands. Lowe (1977) proposed that the Usumacinta, Pasion, and Peten regions may have been peopled from the Gulf Coast, but he also expressed preference for an *additional* migration into that area down from the Guatemalan-Salvador highlands.

David Freidel and Linda Schele hypothesized that between 100 B.C. and A.D. 250

the Lowlanders borrowed certain Highland religious concepts, along with iconographic elements and the idea of hieroglyphic writing.

—Willey 1985:4

In the article "Tikal, Guatemala, and Emergent Maya

Civilization," William Coe described the excavations at Kaminaljuyu where carved monuments, one with a glyphic text closely resembling Classic lowland Maya forms, were discovered. He stated, "These discoveries reinforced suspicions that Classic lowland Maya achievement was highland Maya in origin" (1965:1403).

According to Lee Allen Parsons (1984:9), the earliest Maya monumental art and iconography derived from Kaminaljuyu. David Sedat and Robert Sharer (1972) reported that ceramics common to the sites of Kaminaljuyu and Chalchuapa (El Salvador) which may be as early as the late Middle Formative (600-400 B.C.) have been found in excavations at Sakajut in the northern highlands.

Michael Coe and Kent Flannery (1964) speculated that the first immigrants into the northern highlands were pioneers moving into an essentially vacant area in search of agricultural land. This movement, beginning as early as the early Terminal Preclassic (200 B.C.) might reflect population pressures from the Pacific coast and southern highlands, where village life was demonstrably earlier.

These migrating people can reasonably be assumed to have pushed on north until they reached the lowlands of the Peten, for it is only a week, or less, by foot travel from Sakajut. There they might have found other newly established populations, possibly from the

lowlands of Tabasco (Sedat & Sharer 1972).

One of the unexplained mysteries of the Book of Mormon is why the Nephite record makes no mention of meeting, or even finding evidence of other peoples until they met the people of Zarahemla around 250-150 B.C. The archaeological record reveals the presence of Olmec colonies at several points along the Pacific coast, and evidence of previous settlement in Kaminaljuyu.

Of course these sites may well have been vacant when Nephi and his followers arrived. Joseph W. Michels, who studied Kaminaljuyu for Pennsylvania State University, believes, "Within the onset of the Late Formative, Kaminaljuyu emerges as an incipient regional center" (1979:138).

It is my conclusion that these contributions from recognized and respected archaeologists rather neatly sum up the situation as described in the Book of Mormon, i.e. Nephites, fleeing pressure from the Lamanites of the southern highlands, left the City of Nephi (Kaminaljuyu) and migrated through the Sierra de Chuacus (part of the narrow strip of wilderness) down the Usumacinta valley into the Peten lowlands (Land of Zarahemla) where they met the Mulekites from the Gulf Coast of Tabasco.

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Guatemala City surrounds the ruins of Kaminaljuyu, nearly swallowing it up. The Guatemalan Department of Anthropology and History, though, maintains the site and continues investigation and restoration of the ancient city.



Don Beebe

Cumorah South

Frank Evan Frye

Introduction

Like most people in the Restoration Movement, I had heard how young Joseph Smith, Jr. had been directed by the angel Moroni in 1823 to a hill near his home in New York. There he first saw the engraved plates which he later translated by "the gift and power of God" into the English language. This record, another witness that Jesus Christ is the son of God, came to be known as the Book of Mormon.

It has been commonly assumed that Joseph Smith, Jr. named the hill in New York State Cumorah. No reference can be found, however, in church history wherein Joseph calls this hill Cumorah. The first mention is in some letters written by Oliver Cowdrey to W. W. Phelps (*Messenger and Advocate*, 9-7-1834-9-22-1835). Cowdrey describes the hill and implies it is the hill Cumorah as related in the Book of Mormon. He probably misunderstood Mormon 4:8. Ever since, the hill in New York has been confused with the hill described in the record.

Mormon, general editor of the record, hid up in the hill Cumorah "all the records which had been entrusted to him" by the hand of the Lord, save it were these few plates [the Book of Mormon] which he "gave unto" his "son Moroni" (Mormon 3:8). Thus, Mormon says he hid in Hill Cumorah all the records except the Book of Mormon. Moroni obviously took these few plates given to him by his father and hid them, not in

Cumorah but in the New York hill.

Where is Hill Cumorah, if it is not located in New York? A careful reading of the Book of Mormon reveals it must be near the narrow neck of land.

In Alma 30:6, Hagoth built a ship "on the borders of the land Bountiful, by the land Desolation, and launched it forth into the west sea, by the narrow neck." According to the record, the Jaredites were destroyed in the land Desolation at Hill Ramah (Alma 13:74; Helaman 2:6), the same hill the Nephites called Cumorah (Ether 6:83).

If Desolation borders on Bountiful, and both are close to the "narrow neck" of land, then Cumorah (which is in the land Desolation) must also be close to the "narrow neck." There is no narrow neck of land near New York State. (See "Locating

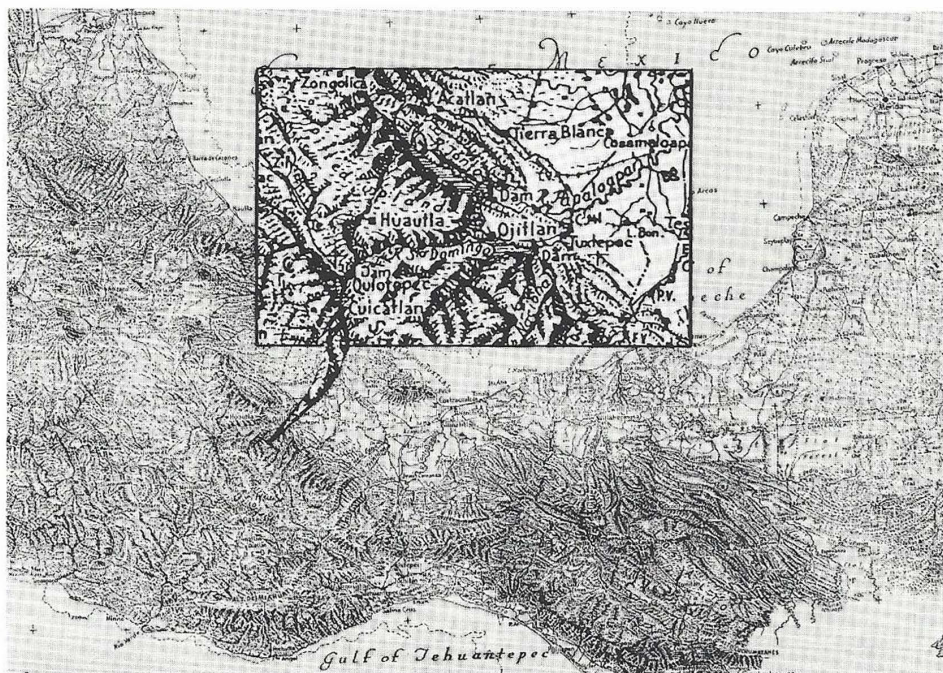
the Land and City of Nephi" in this issue.)

In recent years, the area known as Mesoamerica has been generally accepted as the geographical setting for the Book of Mormon. This hypothesis is called the "Limited Tehuantepec" theory. If the internal evidences of the Book of Mormon fit this theory, then Hill Cumorah/Ramah should be found in Mesoamerica.

Many believers of the Book of Mormon have searched for Cumorah in this area. Some people in the Reorganization tried to place it just north of the ruins of Teotihuacan at a hill called "Cerro Gordo." It meets few if any of the requirements, however, of the true Hill Cumorah.

Later, in the 1960s, Albert Loving decided that the hilltop

This physical map of Mexico of the area near the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (narrow neck) shows the topography of the land around Cerro Rabon. The Santo Domingo River runs through the pass at the foot of Cerro Rabon. The Olmec and later peoples used this river pass as a major trade route. See also the map on page 14 for the Olmec trade routes. (Printed by permission from Raisz Landform Maps.)





fortress Xochicalco must be Hill Cumorah. He had two reasons for this choice. The first was a carving on one of the pyramids that he claimed to be a representation of a box with a rope around it being pulled by a hand. The carving was clear; the meaning was not.

His second reason to choose Xochicalco as Cumorah resulted from it being located near some natural springs. This is important because Mormon said that Cumorah was in a land of many waters, rivers, and fountains. Loving interpreted the word "fountains" to mean "springs" of water. The word "fountain" probably did not mean "spring" in the Book of Mormon. This will be addressed later.

My Desire For A Testimony

As a young boy, I was fascinated with the Book of Mormon. This intense interest led me to point my life in the direction of Latin America. The testimonies of men like Brother Roy Weldon inspired me to hunger for a testimony of my own. The year I graduated from high school, my parents gave me the opportunity to go on an archaeological tour of Mexico. On that tour, we saw Brother Loving's choice for Hill Cumorah.

Later, in 1967, I attended the

University of the Americas then located in Mexico City (now in Cholula). During that year, I had the opportunity to live with Wayne and Verneil Simmons for a number of months. While there I heard Verneil relate her testimony of their search for Cumorah which eventually led to the hill known today as Cerro Rabon.

Verneil's Quest

At the age of fourteen, Verneil had an experience that awakened within her a keen interest in the Book of Mormon. A stranger met her on the way home from school and gave her a prophetic message for her father which soon proved to be true. After she shared the message with her father, the family pondered what had happened. They came to the conclusion that the man could have been one of the "Three Nephites."

After her marriage to Wayne Simmons, they moved in 1941 to Aruba. During their five years there, she studied the Book of Mormon in relative isolation. It became apparent to her as she studied that the lands described in the Book of Mormon were not in the places identified by prominent teachers in the church, but rather in a more limited area.

She wrote the church historian in Independence and asked for any information avail-

able about alternate geographical views and an alternate location for Hill Cumorah. The tone of his reply indicated surprise that she should even consider such a thing. The prevailing opinion of the time was that these matters were settled.

Her research became quite frustrating, but in 1946 she received a copy of Paul Hanson's book *Jesus Christ Among the Ancient Americans*. Hanson proposed that the location of the lands described in the Book of Mormon had to be limited to Mexico and Central America. This helped Verneil as it reinforced her research conclusions. Many years later, after zeroing in on Mesoamerica as the lands of the Book of Mormon, Verneil discovered the booklets written by L. E. Hills in 1917 and the 1920s. She was gratified to discover that he had come to very similar conclusions. (See p. 5 this issue.)

In the summer of the same year, Wayne and Verneil returned to the States for a visit and hoped to attend a reunion. The only one that fit their schedule was held at Columbus, Kansas. Verneil had been praying that the Lord would give her some evidence whether to continue with her studies of the geography of the Book of Mormon and her search for Hill Cumorah. She felt she had gone as far as she could without



some direction from the Lord. She went to reunion looking for an answer.

Arthur Rock was the teacher for the women's class that week. During one of the classes, he stopped and said, he was not sure why, but he felt led to share an experience about an open vision he had been given. In the vision, he was taken to a hill with a cave. He saw the area around the cave and the many records within it. His description of the terrain outside the cave did not fit the hill in New York. He said he was given to know that the records would be protected until the Lord was ready for them to come forth. His testimony was a great blessing to Verneil and a direct answer to her prayers. She returned to her research with a renewed sense of purpose.

Criteria for Hill Cumorah

In the search for Cumorah, Verneil made a list of significant characteristics that must be met in order to locate Hill Cumorah.

1. It must be very prominent since its name was given to the surrounding land. Most other lands in the Book of Mormon are named for people or cities. (Mormon 3:3-5; Ether 6:83; and Mormon 3:8).

2. It must have an extensive

view southward. An elevated view from Cumorah must make it possible to view the great number of Lamanite soldiers advancing northward from the land southward (Mormon 3:9-10).

3. It must have some strategic advantage over other hills. The Nephites hoped "to gain advantage over the Lamanites" (Mormon 3:5). The Jaredites must have had the same idea in mind because of all the places in the land north of the narrow neck, they also chose Cumorah (Ramah) to make their last struggle for power (Ether 6:83). Ramah/Cumorah must have protected some great isolated area where the people could live and not worry about attack from the outside.

4. It must be on or near the eastern sea coast. Omer, the great-great grandson of Jared, lost his kingdom because of a wicked son. To preserve his life, Omer left the land of Moron "where the king dwelt" (Ether 3:42). Moron was the land of their first inheritance and the place of the capital city from the time the Jaredites arrived until the time their nation was destroyed (Ether 6:40). Omer left Moron, which was, if not actually on a seacoast, then near one. He "came over and passed by the hill Shim, and

came over by the place where the Nephites were destroyed, and from thence eastward, and came to . . . the sea-shore" (Ether 4:3-4).

This gives a good description of the lay of the land in southern Mexico if one leaves the western coast and travels over the Sierra Madre del Sur mountains on the west, crosses the central plateau, and then descends the Sierra Madre Oriental mountains on the east. Once on the eastern seaboard, one can travel past Rabon (Ramah/Cumorah) and on to the east seashore and arrive in the area called by archaeologists the "Olmec heartland."

5. It must be near the narrow neck of land. (See Introduction.)

6. It must be "in a land of many waters, rivers and fountains" (Mormon 3:5).

7. It would most probably protect important trade routes. This is speculation, but logical since such an important route between two lands would obviously become a trade route.

The Search

In the summer of 1961, Wayne and Verneil attended the University of Mexico in Mexico City. Wayne studied Spanish, and Verneil chose archaeology. While studying about southern

Mexico, Verneil felt a strong assurance when suddenly all the descriptions of the trade routes and the tribute demanded by the Spaniards (gold as one) came together. She knew then that the ancient trade routes were an important factor in the placement of Hill Cumorah.

She and Wayne examined possible trade routes on relief maps and settled on only one that easily led from the lands south of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec into the central Mexican high plateau. This route had a river through the pass that emptied from both Oaxaca and near the Valley of Mexico out into the coastal plains, forming a very swampy coast. (See map on p. 14)

On vacation the winter of 1963, Wayne and Verneil traveled to Tuxtepec, Mexico, the area they had identified as the likely location. They went specifically to find out if any prominent mountain overlooked the river pass in that area. Arriving on an overcast, cloudy day, they could not see any hills. They asked around, though, and found indeed, an extremely prominent hill called today Cerro Rabon. The natives all pointed and said, "Yes, it's right over there." Although disappointed not to have seen it, they knew they were on the right trail.

About that time, their oldest son Neil, who was in college in Normal, Illinois told them that the Hebrew word *yam* can be translated as fountain, but means a bay, inlet, or arm of the sea. This explained 1 Nephi 1:36 which refers to a "river that emptied *into* the fountain of the Red Sea," and clarified Mormon 3:5 which states that Cumorah "was in a land of many waters, rivers, and fountains." Previously, the term fountains was considered to mean springs of water. Now the description became clearer that fountains meant a swampy area

with inlets, streams, etc. This describes perfectly the land between Cerro Rabon and the ocean which has many inlets and arms of the sea.

In June 1964, the church sent Wayne and Verneil to Mexico City. The next summer (1965), Neil and Gareth (their second son) visited them in Mexico City. While there, they both decided to do research in the library at the Museum of Anthropology.

Neil found a report that the name of a fortified hill on the inside of the river pass (named Quiotepec) when translated meant "hill of the tablets." That caused some excitement, but the location was not right. An army that had fought its way through that river pass would have already won the war.

Gareth came home with the exciting news that he had found a site report by a Dr. Lorenzo who had done his master's thesis in 1934. Lorenzo related in this unpublished manuscript that the villagers around Hill Rabon told of three mysterious men who come to this mountain in the spring of every year. The three men informed the villagers they were the custodians of a national treasure. They go up the mountain each year and disappear. Dr. Lorenzo explained that he included this legend in his report to emphasize how superstitious the people were.

That summer, Wayne, Neil, and Gareth made the trip to Hill Rabon. This time, the view was clear and they returned with excellent photos of the area.

As Verneil continued to visit with Arthur Rock from time to time, she would show him photos of different places and ask if they fit. None did until he saw the pictures taken in the Rabon area. He said it had the kind of vegetation and appearance he had seen in the vision.

Limited space prohibits sharing the other numerous testimonies confirming Cerro Rabon as the Hill Cumorah as related in the Book of Mormon. (See p. 14 for one of these.)

Conclusion

The search for the Hill Cumorah may seem to some a quest for an unattainable and perhaps useless piece of information. But the hill contains a great treasure of records with a special promise.

And when they shall have received this [the Book of Mormon], which is expedient that they should have first, to try their faith, and if it shall so be that they shall believe these things, then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them.

—3 Nephi 12:3

(See also the promise concerning the brass plates 1 Nephi 1:169-170.)

How do believers show that they do verily believe? How do they try their faith?

For the Simmons's family it has been to take seriously the clues in the Book of Mormon about the hill and relentlessly pursue this knowledge by study and prayer until the location of Cumorah is established beyond reasonable doubt.

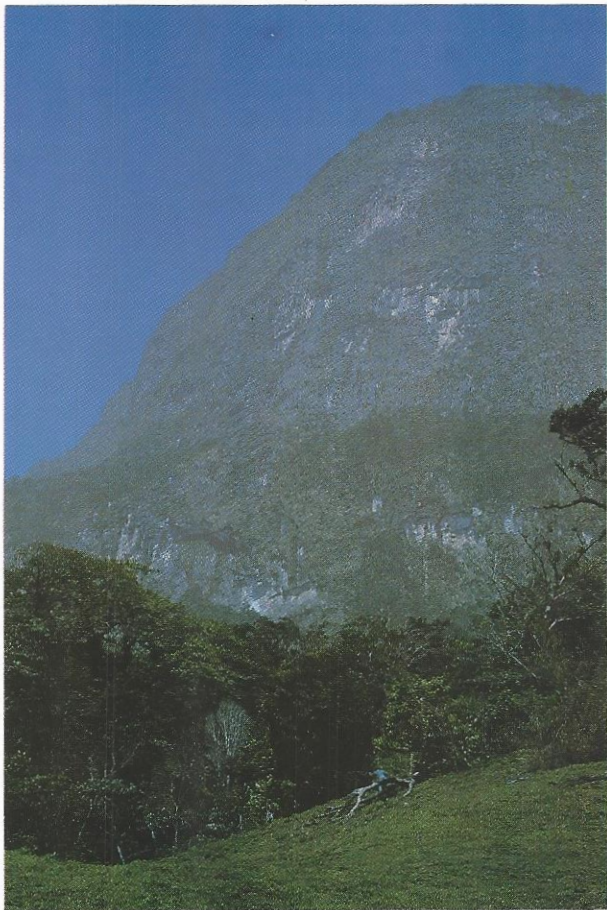
I believe somewhere in Cerro Rabon a great treasure of scriptural truth lies waiting a people who shall pass the test. Do you test your faith in the words of the Book of Mormon?

Let's unite our faith and look forward to the day when the remaining records will come forth.

(Printed with permission from the Simmons family.)

Editor's Note: See also *The Witness*, July 1985, Number 50.





Photography of all photos of Cerro Rabon by Frank Evan Frye.



Confirming The Hill Cumorah Testimony

Frank Evan Frye

In March of 1972, Wayne Simmons, a seventy for the church, was invited to speak and show some slides at a banquet in Wheeling, West Virginia. Many nonmember friends of the church were to be present because one of the deans of the local university had invited his faculty.

Wayne chose to speak about people from Latin America and to end by showing a slide of Cerro Rabon, which he believes to be Cumorah South or the hill where Mormon hid all the records.

Attendance was good that night. After showing the slides and explaining a little about Cumorah South, the audience was invited to ask questions. A man stood up in the back of the room and asked Wayne if he truly believed that Rabon was the real Hill Cumorah. Wayne answered yes, and the gentleman responded, "Good!"

The man then began to explain all of the things which were in the hill. As he named things that Wayne had never considered, Wayne became curious. He leaned over to ask the District President who this man was, but the District President was asking the same of someone else.

The man ended his comments by commending Wayne for having the courage to share this in public for the first time. (Wayne had not mentioned in the talk that this was the first time he had publicly shown the slide of Cumorah South.)

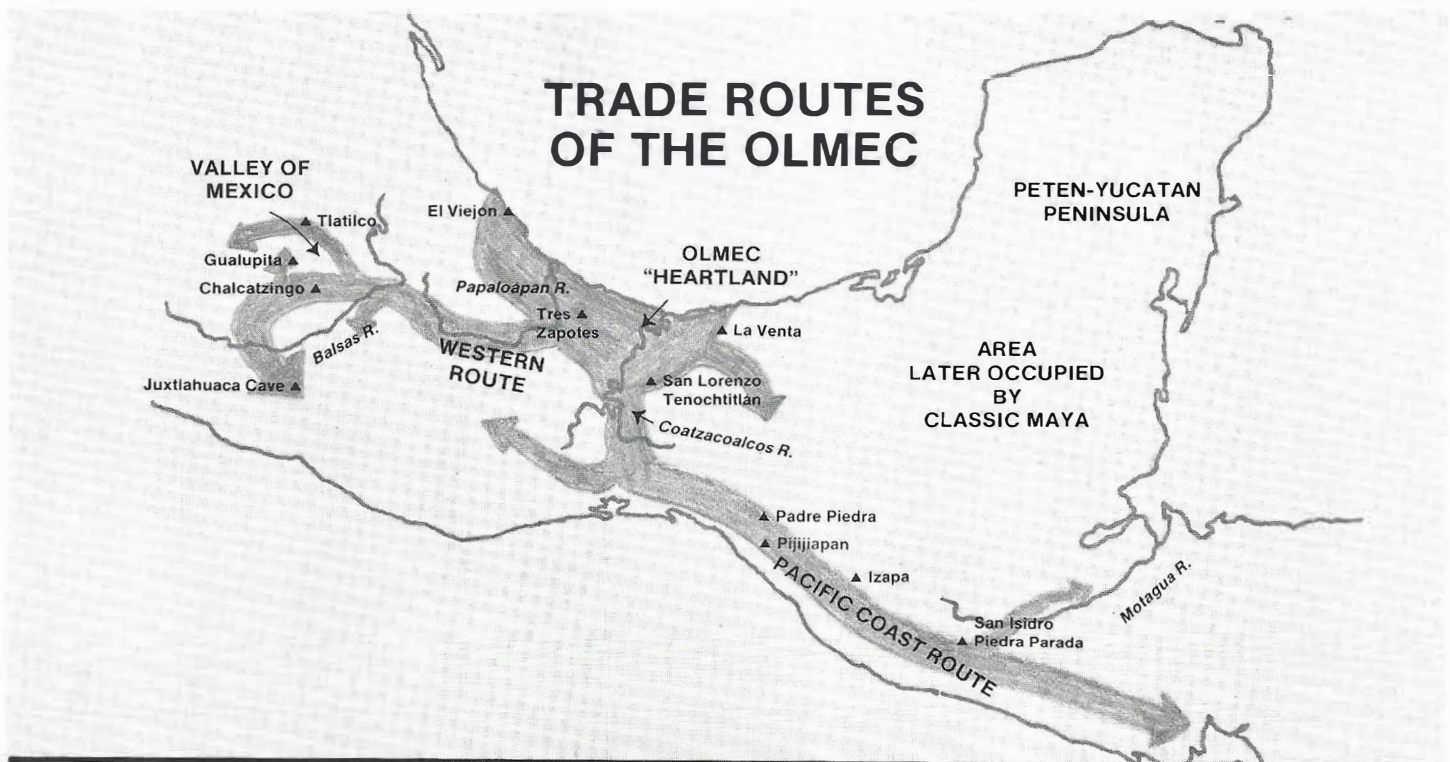
After the meeting ended, many of the faculty wished to speak with Wayne. By the time he could get to the back of the room, the man was nowhere to be found. Wayne then went to the door and asked the person in charge if he had seen the stranger. He replied yes he had seen him, and that when the

meeting was over, he had gone straight to the door in order to meet him. The man did not leave by the door. No one saw the stranger leave the room that evening.

By the next General Conference in April, the church people from Wheeling, West Virginia, were openly speaking of the "Nephite" that had been to one of their meetings.

This experience provided a powerful witness and confirmation to the Simmons family and others that Cerro Rabon is Hill Cumorah where Mormon "hid up in the hill Cumorah, all the records which had been entrusted to [him] by the hand of the Lord, save it were these few plates which [he] gave unto [his] son Moroni" (Mormon 3:8).

For more about the search for Hill Cumorah, see the article "Cumorah South" in this issue.



Notes and News from the FRAA Research Library

Sherrie Kline Smith

Reference Questions

The research library opened its doors and began official operations in September. Since that time, and even before, the library received requests for information. A sample of these questions follows:

- Where in Madrid is the Madrid Codex located?
- Calendar information for a school science project.
- Anything on secret societies.
- Requests for particular publications.

One that seems to pop up again and again concerns the footnote at the bottom of page 1 in the Book of Mormon—Esdras 5:21. These footnotes are not part of the original document but were added by Alvin Knisley “assisted by eleven Independence Saints.” This information is found on the page following the Preface and previous to the first page of 1 Nephi.

First and Second Esdras are books in the Apocrypha. In *The Self-Interpreting Bible*, Vol 3. 1895), 1 Esdras 5:21 reads:

They of Macalon, a hundred twenty and two: they of Betolius, fifty and two: the sons of Nephis, a hundred fifty and six.

Knisley and the others were simply pointing out that the name Nephi appears in the Apocrypha.

Recent Articles Worth Reading

“Library Lifts Veil on Dead Sea Scrolls,” in Valley Edition of

the *Los Angeles Times*, Sunday, September 22, 1991, section A.

“First Dates: The Maya Calendar and Writing System Were Not the Only Ones in Mesoamerica—or Even the Earliest,” (“The Maya Rediscovered,” Part 3) by Joyce Marcus in *Natural History*, April 1991.

“Turning Points: Maya Archeology Comes of Age” by Jeremy A. Sabloff in *Natural History*, January 1991.

“A Most Happy Mayanist” by Gillett Griffin in *Archaeology* September/October 1991.

“A Triumph of Spirit: How Yuri Knorosov Cracked the Maya Hieroglyphic Code From Far-Off Leningrad,” by Michael D. Coe in *Archaeology* September/October 1991.

“The Decipherment of Ancient Maya,” by David Roberts in *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1991.

Serials Subscriptions

FRAA Research Library subscribes to publications/journals that would not generally be found in the local library. These include:

American Antiquity (Journal of the society For American Archaeology—Quarterly)

Ancient Mesoamerica (Cambridge University Press—Bi-annually)

Expedition (The University Museum Magazine of Archaeology/Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania—Quarterly)

Institute of Maya Studies Newsletter (An Affiliate of the Museum of Science in Miami—Monthly)

Insights (Newsletter of The Foundation for Ancient Re-

search & Mormon Studies—Bi-monthly)

Latin American Antiquity (Journal of the Society for American Archaeology—Quarterly)

Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute Newsletter (Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute —Occasional)

The Research Library has back issues of other journals and magazines that have been given as gifts, such as *Biblical Archaeological Review*, *Bible Review*, *Art and Archaeology*, and *Archaeology*.

Many journal subscription costs increased over 100 percent in the last few years. This greatly inhibits the amount of serials the Library can subscribe to. Gifts of your back issues, or contributions to fund subscriptions will be greatly appreciated.

Wish List

- * Funds for Computerizing Catalog—\$5,000
- * Acid Free File Cases for Periodicals—\$200
- * Photograph Preservation Supplies—\$500
- * The Latest Tikal Report— \$350

Call the FRAA Research Library at 461-FRAA if you can contribute to any of these projects. Thanks.

In the last issue (p.15), the Wish List included several books. *The Blood of Kings* was donated to the library by Michael and Julie Gatrost, and *Deciphering the Maya Script* from the Zarahemla Research Foundation. The others remain on the Wish List!



FRAA returned to Port Huron, Michigan for an all-day conference, "Spend a Day with the Book of Mormon." Among the attendees were Sharon Teskey (left) and Barbara Eliason. They not only shared the excitement of the day, but recalled past adventures experienced on the FRAA sponsored tour to Mexico the previous December.

*The Foundation actively promotes the Book of Mormon in many ways. It continues to present regional all-day conferences throughout the United States and to lead yearly Book of Mormon tours to Mesoamerica. It now has an operating research library, and sends **The Witness** to over 18,000 homes.*

Join with us and support the Foundation's efforts to let people know about the Book of Mormon. Become a member of FRAA!



Lyle Smith

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