

1

00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:04,000

In the ruins of one of the world's great civilizations

2

00:00:06,000 --> 00:00:07,000

are secrets

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00:00:07,000 --> 00:00:09,000

Holy good Lord

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00:00:09,000 --> 00:00:13,000

that may lead to the truth behind a terrifying mystery

5

00:00:14,000 --> 00:00:15,000

In the darkness

6

00:00:19,000 --> 00:00:20,000

Call me!

7

00:00:20,000 --> 00:00:21,000

Call Captain!

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00:00:31,000 --> 00:00:35,000

It seems like just yesterday everyone was talking about the impending Mayan apocalypse

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00:00:35,000 --> 00:00:39,000

but the year 2012 came and went without our world ending

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00:00:39,000 --> 00:00:42,000

However, the same can't be said for the once great Mayan Empire

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00:00:42,000 --> 00:00:46,000

that mysteriously collapsed a thousand years ago

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00:00:48,000 --> 00:00:52,000

Their once vibrant cities and imposing pyramids were deserted

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00:00:52,000 --> 00:00:54,000

reclaimed by the jungle

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00:00:56,000 --> 00:00:58,000

So what went wrong?

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00:00:58,000 --> 00:01:03,000

And can we protect our own future from whatever disaster consumed the Mayans?

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00:01:03,000 --> 00:01:09,000

For years, archaeologists had had many theories but no answers until now

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00:01:09,000 --> 00:01:14,000

New evidence is emerging, not in Mayan ruins but beneath our feet in Cenotes

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00:01:14,000 --> 00:01:19,000

dark flooded caverns that the Maya believed were portals to the underworld

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00:01:20,000 --> 00:01:25,000

In fact, a renowned archaeologist has recently uncovered a secret underground chamber

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00:01:25,000 --> 00:01:28,000

at one of the world's most important Mayan sites

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00:01:28,000 --> 00:01:33,000

A cavern that he believes may totally reshape our understanding of their collapse

22

00:01:36,000 --> 00:01:41,000

My plan is to join him and other explorers by descending into the Mayan underworld

23

00:01:41,000 --> 00:01:44,000

a place of monsters, ghosts and legends

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00:01:44,000 --> 00:01:48,000

to find out what happened to one of the world's mightiest empires

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00:01:49,000 --> 00:01:53,000

My name is Josh Gates

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00:01:53,000 --> 00:01:57,000

With a degree in archaeology and a passion for exploration

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00:01:57,000 --> 00:02:02,000

I have a tendency to end up in some very strange situations

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00:02:02,000 --> 00:02:06,000

There has gotta be a better way to make a living

29

00:02:06,000 --> 00:02:11,000

My travels have taken me to the ends of the earth as I investigate the greatest legends in history

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00:02:11,000 --> 00:02:13,000

We're gonna try, let's go

31

00:02:13,000 --> 00:02:16,000

This is Expedition Unknown

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00:02:17,000 --> 00:02:21,000

Mexico, America's sun-drenched neighbor to the south

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00:02:21,000 --> 00:02:24,000

and at the tip of the Yucatan Peninsula, Cancun

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00:02:28,000 --> 00:02:33,000

It was only a short flight here from New York, but my bag seems to have had other plans

35

00:02:36,000 --> 00:02:38,000

I'm sure my bag will be out any minute now

36

00:02:38,000 --> 00:02:40,000

I'm gonna go and get it

37

00:02:40,000 --> 00:02:42,000

I'm gonna go and get it

38

00:02:43,000 --> 00:02:46,000

I'm sure my bag will be out any minute now

39

00:02:55,000 --> 00:02:58,000

You know what you want when you touch down in the jungles of the Yucatan?

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00:02:58,000 --> 00:03:00,000

It's about 120 degrees out

41

00:03:00,000 --> 00:03:05,000

You wanna be wearing a nice thick pair of jeans and some roof-limbsy bow shoes

42

00:03:05,000 --> 00:03:07,000

That's gonna be interesting

43

00:03:08,000 --> 00:03:10,000

It turns out my bag was sent to Washington DC

44

00:03:10,000 --> 00:03:13,000

where I assume it's enjoying a tour of the nation's capital

45

00:03:13,000 --> 00:03:16,000

As for me, I'm carrying on without it

46

00:03:16,000 --> 00:03:21,000

I've always thought that most tourists come to Cancun looking to hit the beach, party and get laid

47

00:03:21,000 --> 00:03:23,000

What do you think of my outfit?

48

00:03:24,000 --> 00:03:27,000

Me? I just settle for a decent pair of boots

49

00:03:29,000 --> 00:03:31,000

No, no, no

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00:03:31,000 --> 00:03:34,000

After a quick trip to a local store, yes

51

00:03:34,000 --> 00:03:38,000

I pick up some appropriate adventure attire and leave Cancun in the dust

52

00:03:39,000 --> 00:03:42,000

Okay, I guess there's time for one spring break shop

53

00:03:51,000 --> 00:03:57,000

To unravel the secret of the downfall of the Maya, I'm driving an hour and a half south down the coast

54

00:03:57,000 --> 00:04:03,000

From downtown Cancun, it's kind of hard to imagine that an incredibly powerful ancient civilization once thrived here

55

00:04:03,000 --> 00:04:06,000

But all you have to do is head just down the road, run on the coast

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00:04:06,000 --> 00:04:09,000

and you can see evidence of one of their most beautiful creations

57

00:04:16,000 --> 00:04:18,000

This is Tulum

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00:04:19,000 --> 00:04:21,000

To the Maya, it was the city of the dawn

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00:04:21,000 --> 00:04:26,000

A fortified campus of temples surrounded on three sides by thick walls

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00:04:26,000 --> 00:04:28,000

On the other side, the Pacific

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00:04:29,000 --> 00:04:31,000

And atop the sheer cliffs

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00:04:31,000 --> 00:04:34,000

A stone pyramid gazing out to the sun

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00:04:34,000 --> 00:04:39,000

I'm meeting with archaeologist Carmen Rojas to learn more about the people who built the city

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00:04:40,000 --> 00:04:43,000

At its height, how big is this civilization?

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00:04:43,000 --> 00:04:45,000

Five million people

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00:04:45,000 --> 00:04:46,000

Five million just in the Yucatan?

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00:04:46,000 --> 00:04:47,000

Yeah

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00:04:47,000 --> 00:04:52,000

To understand how chilling the downfall of the Maya is, consider how high they soared

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00:04:52,000 --> 00:04:57,000

From 300 to 800 AD, the Mayan Empire exploded across the Yucatan Peninsula

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00:04:57,000 --> 00:05:01,000

And down through Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador

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00:05:01,000 --> 00:05:05,000

In unforgiving jungles, more than 4,000 cities emerged

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00:05:05,000 --> 00:05:08,000

Supporting more than 20 million people

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00:05:09,000 --> 00:05:11,000

The Mayans were an amazing civilization

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00:05:11,000 --> 00:05:14,000

But we have many questions because they are not here

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00:05:14,000 --> 00:05:15,000

So we can ask them

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00:05:15,000 --> 00:05:19,000

We only have their structures or their burials

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00:05:20,000 --> 00:05:24,000

Within about 100 years, the entire civilization ground to a halt

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00:05:24,000 --> 00:05:27,000

It is one of the greatest mysteries of archaeology

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00:05:28,000 --> 00:05:33,000

Why do you think that these large-scale Mayan cities were abandoned?

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00:05:33,000 --> 00:05:36,000

It's not really clear what happened

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00:05:36,000 --> 00:05:39,000

Some people say it's because of the political changes

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00:05:39,000 --> 00:05:42,000

Some others say it's because of the climate change

83

00:05:42,000 --> 00:05:46,000

What do you think personally caused them to walk away from these places?

84

00:05:46,000 --> 00:05:47,000

I don't know

85

00:05:47,000 --> 00:05:49,000

That's the question

86

00:05:49,000 --> 00:05:50,000

That's the question

87

00:05:50,000 --> 00:05:52,000

Not knowing is troubling

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00:05:52,000 --> 00:05:55,000

After all, if it could happen to the Maya, could it happen to us?

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00:05:55,000 --> 00:05:58,000

There are many theories about the Mayan collapse

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00:05:58,000 --> 00:06:03,000

Including war, disease, a natural disaster, or the arrival of the Spanish

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00:06:03,000 --> 00:06:06,000

Over time, though, these theories have started to fall apart

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00:06:06,000 --> 00:06:10,000

For instance, even though Tulum was still occupied when the Spanish arrived

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00:06:10,000 --> 00:06:12,000

It was in serious decline

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00:06:12,000 --> 00:06:15,000

And many other Mayan cities had been totally abandoned

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00:06:16,000 --> 00:06:19,000

One of those cities is just a little further inland

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00:06:23,000 --> 00:06:26,000

The Yucatan is covered in thick jungles

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00:06:26,000 --> 00:06:29,000

But beneath the canopy, there are secrets

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00:06:34,000 --> 00:06:35,000

These are the ruins of Koba

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00:06:35,000 --> 00:06:38,000

This is really one of the coolest sites here in the Yucatan

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00:06:38,000 --> 00:06:39,000

It's been partially excavated

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00:06:39,000 --> 00:06:41,000

But as you can see, a lot of it's really overgrown still

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00:06:41,000 --> 00:06:44,000

So it has this very mysterious kind of Indiana Jones vibe

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00:06:44,000 --> 00:06:46,000

The site covered 30 square miles

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00:06:46,000 --> 00:06:49,000

With a population of more than 50,000 people

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00:06:49,000 --> 00:06:52,000

That's larger than the city of London at the time

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00:06:52,000 --> 00:06:56,000

Today, the empty ruins give us clues about life in the Mayan world

107

00:06:58,000 --> 00:07:00,000

This is a Mayan ball court

108

00:07:02,000 --> 00:07:05,000

It's something that you find in every ruined Mayan city in the world

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00:07:05,000 --> 00:07:07,000

And not just one of them, most cities had lots of these

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00:07:08,000 --> 00:07:11,000

The Mayan!

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00:07:15,000 --> 00:07:18,000

It's a game that we only partially understand

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00:07:18,000 --> 00:07:20,000

There's still a lot of debate about exactly how it was played

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00:07:20,000 --> 00:07:22,000

And what its significance was

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00:07:22,000 --> 00:07:25,000

What's clear is that it was difficult and deadly

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00:07:27,000 --> 00:07:30,000

The Mesoamerican ball game was a fixture of Mayan society

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00:07:30,000 --> 00:07:33,000

It's a little bit soccer, a little bit racket ball

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00:07:33,000 --> 00:07:35,000

And seriously high stakes

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00:07:36,000 --> 00:07:41,000

Based on Mayan glyphs, it seems players would try to knock a ball through a stone hoop

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00:07:41,000 --> 00:07:43,000

But this was more than just a game

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00:07:43,000 --> 00:07:45,000

It was a ritual to the gods

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00:07:45,000 --> 00:07:49,000

During official matches, the losing team would be executed

122

00:07:50,000 --> 00:07:52,000

Sometimes the winning team as well

123

00:07:54,000 --> 00:07:59,000

Along with the ball courts, the buildings at Coba are some of the most impressive in all of Mexico

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00:07:59,000 --> 00:08:03,000

This includes Ismoha, the tallest Mayan pyramid in the Yucatan

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00:08:06,000 --> 00:08:09,000

But to really appreciate it, you have to get to the top

126

00:08:18,000 --> 00:08:22,000

I'm in Mexico searching for answers to the collapse of the Mayan Empire

127

00:08:22,000 --> 00:08:24,000

I'm exploring the ruins of the city of Coba

128

00:08:24,000 --> 00:08:28,000

And the crumbling remains of the tallest pyramid in the Yucatan

129

00:08:28,000 --> 00:08:31,000

Today's cardio workout brought to you by the Mayan Empire

130

00:08:33,000 --> 00:08:34,000

Here we go

131

00:08:36,000 --> 00:08:38,000

The pyramid has a hundred steps

132

00:08:38,000 --> 00:08:40,000

Actually, there's a lot more than that

133

00:08:40,000 --> 00:08:43,000

But I stopped counting when it felt like my heart was going to explode

134

00:08:44,000 --> 00:08:45,000

It's horrible

135

00:08:45,000 --> 00:08:46,000

The stairs are ridiculous

136

00:08:46,000 --> 00:08:48,000

I wonder if the civilization collapsed

137

00:08:54,000 --> 00:08:57,000

And soon, I arrived triumphantly at the top of the pyramid

138

00:09:00,000 --> 00:09:01,000

Oh god

139

00:09:02,000 --> 00:09:03,000

I'm just going to lay down right here

140

00:09:03,000 --> 00:09:05,000

If anybody needs me

141

00:09:05,000 --> 00:09:08,000

I'll just be here at the top of this pyramid for the rest of eternity

142

00:09:09,000 --> 00:09:11,000

Somebody send a helicopter up here, please

143

00:09:14,000 --> 00:09:17,000

Climbing to the top of the pyramid immediately puts a bunch of things in perspective

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00:09:17,000 --> 00:09:20,000

You realize first of all just how huge these structures are

145

00:09:20,000 --> 00:09:23,000

And it's so impressive that they were all crafted entirely by hand

146

00:09:23,000 --> 00:09:25,000

Without the use of modern equipment

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00:09:25,000 --> 00:09:30,000

But beyond that, you really get a sense of how much of the Mayan world was about jungle

148

00:09:30,000 --> 00:09:34,000

You look out and even a thousand years after the end of their empire

149

00:09:34,000 --> 00:09:35,000

It's the dominant thing here

150

00:09:35,000 --> 00:09:37,000

You know, it's undeveloped

151

00:09:37,000 --> 00:09:41,000

This is still just this incredibly difficult impermeable landscape

152

00:09:41,000 --> 00:09:44,000

It's so impermeable that you look out and you see these bumps

153

00:09:44,000 --> 00:09:46,000

Those are huge pyramids

154

00:09:46,000 --> 00:09:47,000

That's how difficult it is

155

00:09:47,000 --> 00:09:48,000

We know there are other pyramids here

156

00:09:48,000 --> 00:09:50,000

We haven't gone in to excavate them yet

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00:09:50,000 --> 00:09:51,000

It's that hard

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00:09:51,000 --> 00:09:54,000

In fact, of the 6,500 buildings in Koba

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00:09:54,000 --> 00:09:56,000

Only 2% have been excavated

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00:09:57,000 --> 00:09:59,000

And along with the jungle

161

00:09:59,000 --> 00:10:02,000

There's something else about the landscape that catches my eye

162

00:10:02,000 --> 00:10:05,000

There's no water anywhere to be found

163

00:10:05,000 --> 00:10:08,000

It's not until you get above the trees that you fully appreciate

164

00:10:08,000 --> 00:10:10,000

How difficult a place they were built in

165

00:10:10,000 --> 00:10:13,000

The Maya are the only large civilization in history

166

00:10:13,000 --> 00:10:16,000

To concentrate their cities in a place without rivers

167

00:10:16,000 --> 00:10:18,000

So how did they pull it off?

168

00:10:18,000 --> 00:10:20,000

That's what I aim to find out

169

00:10:22,000 --> 00:10:24,000

With daylight fading, I drive back to Tulum

170

00:10:25,000 --> 00:10:27,000

Only to find the city and its residents

171

00:10:27,000 --> 00:10:29,000

Have changed

172

00:10:34,000 --> 00:10:36,000

This is Dia de los Muertos

173

00:10:36,000 --> 00:10:38,000

The Day of the Dead

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00:10:38,000 --> 00:10:42,000

A national holiday to commemorate those who have crossed to the other side

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00:10:42,000 --> 00:10:45,000

It feels like I've wandered into a Tim Burton movie

176

00:10:45,000 --> 00:10:47,000

But this celebration has deep roots

177

00:10:47,000 --> 00:10:49,000

Elements of Spanish Catholicism

178

00:10:49,000 --> 00:10:51,000

Blended with the rituals of the Maya

179

00:10:52,000 --> 00:10:56,000

Dancing skeletons were a part of all Saints Day festivals in medieval Europe

180

00:10:56,000 --> 00:10:59,000

While here in Mexico, the native people wore skull masks

181

00:10:59,000 --> 00:11:01,000

As a way to confront death

182

00:11:01,000 --> 00:11:04,000

Something that on the surface looks incredibly ghoulish

183

00:11:04,000 --> 00:11:07,000

And macabre is actually unbelievably joyous

184

00:11:21,000 --> 00:11:23,000

The culture's unique relationship with the afterlife

185

00:11:23,000 --> 00:11:26,000

Can be seen in every living skull

186

00:11:26,000 --> 00:11:29,000

While many societies fear death, here it's a part of life

187

00:11:29,000 --> 00:11:33,000

And to the Maya, it's just another step in reaching a higher existence

188

00:11:37,000 --> 00:11:39,000

It isn't just a feast for the eyes

189

00:11:39,000 --> 00:11:41,000

The food is also out of this world

190

00:11:41,000 --> 00:11:43,000

I don't know about Day of the Dead, my diet just died

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00:11:43,000 --> 00:11:47,000

There's also one dish you definitely won't find at your local Mexican restaurant

192

00:11:47,000 --> 00:11:49,000

T Doesn't ItWe

193

00:11:50,000 --> 00:11:51,000

Can You Guess It!?

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00:11:51,000 --> 00:11:52,000

Yes, it does

195

00:11:52,000 --> 00:11:53,000

Oh those are insects

196

00:11:54,000 --> 00:11:56,000

These are little tiny crickets

197

00:11:58,000 --> 00:12:00,000

But they are big on flavour

198

00:12:00,000 --> 00:12:02,000

I'd say their blood fat

199

00:12:04,000 --> 00:12:05,000

On a confine with their blood

200

00:12:06,000 --> 00:12:07,000

It's Succeed

201

00:12:08,000 --> 00:12:11,000

I'm like, that's AgoCh ■■ United

202

00:12:11,000 --> 00:12:13,000

Why did I take like 200 of them?

203

00:12:13,000 --> 00:12:15,000

That's a lot of Nvidia of Vietnam to get through

204

00:12:15,000 --> 00:12:22,000

I'm starting to get into the spirit of things, so I decide to get my own morbid makeover.

205

00:12:22,000 --> 00:12:24,840

I look like John Candy in Spaceballs.

206

00:12:24,840 --> 00:12:31,580

After a bit more dabbing, painting, and blending, my transformation is complete.

207

00:12:31,580 --> 00:12:35,640

With my new look, I go from an outsider to being the afterlife of the part.

208

00:12:35,640 --> 00:12:40,160

Sorry, is this skeleton throwing gang signs right now?

209

00:12:40,160 --> 00:12:41,160

This is much better.

210

00:12:41,160 --> 00:12:42,160

I feel like I'm blending in more now.

211

00:12:42,160 --> 00:12:43,160

It takes a little weight off me.

212

00:12:43,160 --> 00:12:44,160

It's a very thinning look.

213

00:12:45,040 --> 00:12:46,540

I gotta go skeleton more often.

214

00:12:51,960 --> 00:12:55,360

The next morning, I hit the ground running to continue my investigation.

215

00:12:55,360 --> 00:12:59,520

To understand how the Maya thrive without any rivers, I'm meeting archaeologist Jovana

216

00:12:59,520 --> 00:13:03,160

Jimenez at the entrance to a natural cave complex near Tulum.

217

00:13:03,160 --> 00:13:04,160

Hola.

218

00:13:04,160 --> 00:13:05,160

Hola.

219

00:13:05,160 --> 00:13:06,160

Jovana.

220

00:13:06,160 --> 00:13:07,160

Yes, nice to meet you.

221

00:13:07,160 --> 00:13:08,160

Yeah, nice to meet you too.

222

00:13:08,160 --> 00:13:09,160

I'm here to learn about caves.

223

00:13:09,160 --> 00:13:10,160

Yes.

224

00:13:10,160 --> 00:13:11,160

I see you've got a weevah wetsuit on?

225

00:13:11,160 --> 00:13:12,160

Yes.

226

00:13:12,160 --> 00:13:13,660

Well, we're going to need it, you know, actually.

227

00:13:13,660 --> 00:13:17,160

Oh, I was picturing something dry, no?

228

00:13:17,160 --> 00:13:18,160

No.

229

00:13:18,160 --> 00:13:19,160

Not at all.

230

00:13:21,160 --> 00:13:25,000

After a quick wardrobe change, she leads me down a rickety wooden staircase into this

231

00:13:25,000 --> 00:13:26,160

subterranean maze.

232

00:13:26,160 --> 00:13:30,160

There's like millions of stalactites.

233

00:13:30,160 --> 00:13:33,660

Beneath the surface is another world.

234

00:13:33,660 --> 00:13:34,660

Unbelievable.

235

00:13:34,660 --> 00:13:37,660

These chambers are known as cenotes.

236

00:13:37,660 --> 00:13:40,660

The Yucatan Peninsula is made of limestone.

237

00:13:40,660 --> 00:13:45,000

Over millions of years, rainwater has flowed through the surface, slowly dissolving and

238

00:13:45,000 --> 00:13:46,160

weakening the rock.

239

00:13:46,160 --> 00:13:52,000

Eventually, the limestone collapses, turning the underside of the Yucatan into Swiss cheese.

240

00:13:52,000 --> 00:13:56,460

The cenotes filtered billions of gallons of fresh water into flooded tunnels, creating

241

00:13:56,460 --> 00:14:00,360

a clean, plentiful source of water vital to the Mayans.

242

00:14:00,360 --> 00:14:01,360

How old is this formation?

243

00:14:01,360 --> 00:14:04,660

This place would be about two millions years old.

244

00:14:04,660 --> 00:14:06,160

Two million years old.

245

00:14:06,160 --> 00:14:09,660

And how many cenotes are there in the Yucatan?

246

00:14:10,160 --> 00:14:13,160

Well, just to be conservative, we have about 6,000.

247

00:14:13,160 --> 00:14:14,160

That's insane.

248

00:14:14,160 --> 00:14:18,660

And what about tunnels that connect them?

249

00:14:18,660 --> 00:14:25,160

There is about 1,000 miles that has been discovered, but that's just the 10%.

250

00:14:25,160 --> 00:14:29,660

So there's almost 10,000 miles worth of tunnels that nobody has been into yet?

251

00:14:29,660 --> 00:14:31,160

Yeah, it's like a tree, let's say.

252

00:14:31,160 --> 00:14:38,160

You know, it has many branches, so you have to really connect those passages.

253

00:14:38,160 --> 00:14:42,600

As we make our way deeper into the pitch-black cenote, the light bouncing off the crystal-clear

254

00:14:42,600 --> 00:14:44,500

water is disorienting.

255

00:14:44,500 --> 00:14:49,740

The caves are both beautiful and creepy, and totally otherworldly, which is exactly what

256

00:14:49,740 --> 00:14:53,160

the Mayans thought.

257

00:14:53,160 --> 00:14:59,660

Central to Mayan life was the belief in Shabalba, the underworld known as the place of fear.

258

00:14:59,660 --> 00:15:04,960

Ruled by the Mayan death gods, this mythological realm was filled with demons, serpents, and

259

00:15:04,960 --> 00:15:07,660

spirits of the dead.

260

00:15:07,660 --> 00:15:10,660

Shabalba, it turns out, is more than just a story.

261

00:15:10,660 --> 00:15:13,660

It's a real place.

262

00:15:13,660 --> 00:15:15,660

And we're wading right through it.

263

00:15:15,660 --> 00:15:17,660

It's just like endless.

264

00:15:17,660 --> 00:15:18,660

Yes.

265

00:15:18,660 --> 00:15:20,160

How many hours could you walk for down here?

266

00:15:20,160 --> 00:15:23,160

You could walk a whole day and no finish.

267

00:15:23,160 --> 00:15:24,160

Really?

268

00:15:24,160 --> 00:15:25,160

Yep.

269

00:15:25,160 --> 00:15:26,660

Do you ever get freaked out being alone down here?

270

00:15:26,660 --> 00:15:27,660

Yes.

271

00:15:27,660 --> 00:15:28,660

You do?

272

00:15:28,660 --> 00:15:29,660

Yes.

273

00:15:29,660 --> 00:15:30,660

All right, good.

274

00:15:30,660 --> 00:15:35,860

Mayans regarded these cenotes as sacred conduits to this otherworld, and would perform elaborate

275

00:15:35,860 --> 00:15:42,760

ceremonies and even ritual sacrifices at the edges of these seemingly endless caves.

276

00:15:42,760 --> 00:15:47,160

After what feels like a mile of darkness, Javana leads me to something that takes my

277

00:15:47,160 --> 00:15:48,160

breath away.

278

00:15:48,160 --> 00:15:49,160

No way.

279

00:15:49,160 --> 00:15:57,160

Look at that.

280

00:15:57,160 --> 00:16:01,360

I'm traveling Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, looking for answers to the disappearance of

281

00:16:01,360 --> 00:16:02,360

the ancient Maya.

282

00:16:02,360 --> 00:16:07,660

Now, I've been led deep into an underground cave called a cenote to discover a breathtaking

283

00:16:07,660 --> 00:16:08,660

artifact.

284

00:16:08,660 --> 00:16:09,660

No way.

285

00:16:09,660 --> 00:16:10,660

Look at that.

286

00:16:10,660 --> 00:16:16,420

That is unbelievable.

287

00:16:16,420 --> 00:16:21,860

It's amazingly rare to see an intact piece of Mayan pottery and in such a remote location.

288

00:16:21,860 --> 00:16:23,380

So why is it here?

289

00:16:23,380 --> 00:16:24,860

How long has this been down here for?

290

00:16:24,860 --> 00:16:28,780

Well, this is from about 800 years ago.

291

00:16:28,780 --> 00:16:29,780

And it's in position?

292

00:16:29,780 --> 00:16:30,780

It's where it was found?

293

00:16:30,780 --> 00:16:32,280

Yes, probably it was a part of an offering.

294

00:16:32,700 --> 00:16:36,300

If they came to put it down here, it means it was something really important.

295

00:16:36,300 --> 00:16:41,940

It was unnerving enough getting here with modern headlamps, wetsuits and guidelines.

296

00:16:41,940 --> 00:16:44,020

Imagine having only a torch.

297

00:16:44,020 --> 00:16:47,820

Believing this was a supernatural realm filled with serpents and demons.

298

00:16:47,820 --> 00:16:52,140

If the Mayan were so intimidated by these cenotes, why do you think that they would

299

00:16:52,140 --> 00:16:54,340

come all the way down here to put that there?

300

00:16:54,340 --> 00:16:58,860

Well, probably no water, no food, something like that could be happening.

301

00:16:58,860 --> 00:17:03,160

And then you really need to do something like coming through the underworld.

302

00:17:03,160 --> 00:17:04,160

Right.

303

00:17:04,160 --> 00:17:06,800

If you really needed that bad, you're willing to come down here.

304

00:17:06,800 --> 00:17:07,800

Yeah.

305

00:17:07,800 --> 00:17:09,440

Could this offering be a clue?

306

00:17:09,440 --> 00:17:12,760

And could water have something to do with the collapse of the empire?

307

00:17:12,760 --> 00:17:16,640

To find out, Jovana and I make the long trek back into the light.

308

00:17:16,640 --> 00:17:24,840

And she leads me to what appears to be a large pond, but appearances can be deceiving.

309

00:17:24,840 --> 00:17:28,600

This is another cenote, but it's filled to the brim with water.

310

00:17:28,600 --> 00:17:31,340

To explore it, we need to dive.

311

00:17:31,340 --> 00:17:32,340

Okay.

312

00:17:32,340 --> 00:17:37,620

I've brought along a remote operated vehicle, or ROV, that will help film our journey and

313

00:17:37,620 --> 00:17:49,020

navigate any tight spaces.

314

00:17:49,020 --> 00:17:53,940

We submerge and I'm stunned by the clarity of the water.

315

00:17:53,940 --> 00:17:58,140

The walls of the cenote are like vertical cliffs, and as we descend, the light from

316

00:17:58,160 --> 00:18:07,120

the surface begins to fade away.

317

00:18:07,120 --> 00:18:20,080

As we dive deeper, I suddenly see something rising up from the darkness.

318

00:18:20,080 --> 00:18:24,600

It looks like a monster, but these tendrils are the tops of branches from a huge tree

319

00:18:24,600 --> 00:18:27,440

that fell into the cenote ages ago.

320

00:18:27,440 --> 00:18:43,260

What's truly unsettling is the strange looking fog hovering underneath it.

321

00:18:43,260 --> 00:18:48,620

This is a layer of hydrogen sulfide, an acid suspended in the water which creates an illusion

322

00:18:48,620 --> 00:18:50,700

that I'm flying above clouds.

323

00:18:50,700 --> 00:18:55,100

I'm starting to see why the Maya thought these cenotes were supernatural.

324

00:18:55,100 --> 00:19:06,640

I'm also realizing how huge this place really is.

325

00:19:06,640 --> 00:19:15,280

I follow the ROV and discover that this cenote is part of a massive labyrinth of tunnels.

326

00:19:15,280 --> 00:19:19,000

Beneath the Mayan Empire is a watery looking glass world.

327

00:19:19,000 --> 00:19:22,320

Once I get over how spooky it is, I realize something else.

328

00:19:22,340 --> 00:19:28,100

This may be the most beautiful place I've ever seen.

329

00:19:28,100 --> 00:19:33,140

These cenotes were the only source of water for the entire Mayan Empire in the Yucatan.

330

00:19:33,140 --> 00:19:35,540

Even the jungle above is drinking out of them.

331

00:19:35,540 --> 00:19:46,860

And while I want to keep exploring, it's important not to go too far.

332

00:19:46,860 --> 00:20:04,400

Not wanting to permanently join the land of the dead, we return to the surface.

333

00:20:04,400 --> 00:20:08,280

To better understand how these cenotes relate to the collapse of the Maya, I'm heading

334

00:20:08,280 --> 00:20:13,280

west to meet with archaeologists that have recently made a stunning discovery.

335

00:20:13,280 --> 00:20:17,380

On the coast, I'm driving about 100 miles through the city of Vaya del Lid, and then

336

00:20:17,380 --> 00:20:21,460

onto the Mayan city of Chichen Itza.

337

00:20:21,460 --> 00:20:23,540

This is the real Yucatan.

338

00:20:23,540 --> 00:20:26,980

Undeveloped, unspoiled, wild.

339

00:20:26,980 --> 00:20:32,300

And even though the cities of the Maya have long been abandoned, Mayan people still endure.

340

00:20:32,300 --> 00:20:37,060

There are an estimated 7 million Maya living throughout the Americas, some in traditional

341

00:20:37,060 --> 00:20:40,260

villages, others in cities, like Vaya del Lid.

342

00:20:44,280 --> 00:20:49,580

You'd be hard pressed to find a more charming town in the Yucatan.

343

00:20:49,580 --> 00:20:52,900

This is the colonial city of Vaya del Lid, which is established by the Spanish in the

344

00:20:52,900 --> 00:20:53,900

1540s.

345

00:20:53,900 --> 00:20:54,900

This place is bold.

346

00:20:54,900 --> 00:20:56,460

It's also kind of a sleepy town today.

347

00:20:56,460 --> 00:21:01,380

In the 1800s, the local Maya actually staged an uprising against the Spanish here, and

348

00:21:01,380 --> 00:21:02,380

they were successful for a time.

349

00:21:02,380 --> 00:21:04,300

They actually took the whole city.

350

00:21:04,300 --> 00:21:06,820

Today, it's a pretty quiet little place.

351

00:21:06,820 --> 00:21:08,100

Most tourists just bypass it.

352

00:21:08,100 --> 00:21:11,980

They go from the hotels out on the coast, take the big highway over to Chichen Itza, and

353

00:21:12,200 --> 00:21:16,000

they don't really stop in here, which is really a shame because this town is gorgeous.

354

00:21:18,200 --> 00:21:22,360

The only downside to this colonial paradise is that it's absolutely sweltering.

355

00:21:24,200 --> 00:21:25,640

Hola, señor.

356

00:21:25,640 --> 00:21:27,520

It's very, very hot here.

357

00:21:27,520 --> 00:21:28,520

Is this ice cream?

358

00:21:28,520 --> 00:21:29,520

Gelado.

359

00:21:29,520 --> 00:21:30,520

Can I have one, please?

360

00:21:30,520 --> 00:21:31,520

Coco, por favor.

361

00:21:31,520 --> 00:21:32,520

Pequeño.

362

00:21:32,520 --> 00:21:35,520

Oh, this is going to hit the spot right here.

363

00:21:35,520 --> 00:21:36,520

Cuanto cuesta.

364

00:21:36,520 --> 00:21:37,520

How much?

365

00:21:37,520 --> 00:21:38,520

Thank you.

366

00:21:38,520 --> 00:21:39,520

How much?

367

00:21:39,520 --> 00:21:40,520

Vente pesos.

368

00:21:41,520 --> 00:21:43,520

And I am out of money.

369

00:21:44,520 --> 00:21:46,520

I just bought an ice cream with no money.

370

00:21:46,520 --> 00:21:47,520

That's embarrassing.

371

00:21:47,520 --> 00:21:51,980

Unfortunately, this guy doesn't take credit cards, but he's come up with another way for

372

00:21:51,980 --> 00:21:53,520

me to pay off my bill.

373

00:21:53,520 --> 00:21:54,520

Ice cream for sale.

374

00:21:54,520 --> 00:21:55,520

Gelado.

375

00:21:55,520 --> 00:21:57,520

Gelado for sale.

376

00:21:57,520 --> 00:21:58,520

Anyone?

377

00:21:58,520 --> 00:21:59,520

Ice cream?

378

00:21:59,520 --> 00:22:01,520

I'm working off of debt, people, please.

379

00:22:01,520 --> 00:22:03,520

Anybody can buy an ice cream for me.

380

00:22:03,520 --> 00:22:04,520

Gelado.

381

00:22:04,520 --> 00:22:06,520

What a man on the sky's got.

382

00:22:06,520 --> 00:22:07,520

You have watermelon?

383

00:22:07,520 --> 00:22:09,520

This guy's hurting my business.

384

00:22:09,520 --> 00:22:11,520

It turns out I have a little competition.

385

00:22:11,520 --> 00:22:12,520

Cuanta cuesta.

386

00:22:12,520 --> 00:22:13,520

Ten pesos.

387

00:22:13,520 --> 00:22:14,520

Ten pesos?

388

00:22:14,520 --> 00:22:15,520

Five pesos.

389

00:22:15,520 --> 00:22:16,520

It's right here, people.

390

00:22:16,520 --> 00:22:17,520

Five pesos.

391

00:22:17,520 --> 00:22:18,520

I'm taking you out, buddy.

392

00:22:18,520 --> 00:22:19,520

Gelado, sir.

393

00:22:19,520 --> 00:22:20,520

Would you like a gelado?

394

00:22:20,520 --> 00:22:21,520

Delicious.

395

00:22:21,520 --> 00:22:22,520

Don't buy from this gentleman.

396

00:22:22,520 --> 00:22:24,520

He's wanted by the authorities.

397

00:22:24,520 --> 00:22:25,520

Gelado?

398

00:22:25,520 --> 00:22:26,520

Gelado, sí?

399

00:22:26,520 --> 00:22:29,520

Okay, this is what we're talking about.

400

00:22:29,520 --> 00:22:31,520

I have a coca o piña.

401

00:22:31,520 --> 00:22:32,520

Coco?

402

00:22:32,520 --> 00:22:33,520

Coco.

403

00:22:33,520 --> 00:22:34,520

Coco o piña.

404

00:22:34,520 --> 00:22:35,520

Coco.

405

00:22:35,520 --> 00:22:36,520

Trace Coco.

406

00:22:36,520 --> 00:22:37,520

Coming up.

407

00:22:37,520 --> 00:22:38,520

I can do this.

408

00:22:38,520 --> 00:22:39,520

It's a little melty.

409

00:22:39,520 --> 00:22:42,520

I'm definitely going to give you a napkin with this.

410

00:22:42,520 --> 00:22:44,520

Coco, that's for you, my friend.

411

00:22:44,520 --> 00:22:45,520

Yup.

412

00:22:45,520 --> 00:22:47,520

Coco, there you go.

413

00:22:47,520 --> 00:22:48,520

Coco, for you.

414

00:22:48,520 --> 00:22:49,520

Gracias.

415

00:22:49,520 --> 00:22:51,520

Thank you very much.

416

00:22:51,520 --> 00:22:52,520

Okay.

417

00:22:52,520 --> 00:22:54,520

Making money at this.

418

00:22:54,520 --> 00:22:57,520

Gracias, sir.

419

00:22:57,520 --> 00:23:00,520

With my debt paid off, I'm free to leave town.

420

00:23:00,520 --> 00:23:04,520

But before I go, I need to make one very important stop.

421

00:23:04,520 --> 00:23:06,520

The very cool thing about these cenotes is that,

422

00:23:06,520 --> 00:23:08,520

yes, some of them are out in the middle of nowhere

423

00:23:08,520 --> 00:23:10,520

and are hard to get to, but some of them are literally

424

00:23:10,520 --> 00:23:12,520

right in the middle of town.

425

00:23:12,520 --> 00:23:16,520

We're making our way out.

426

00:23:16,520 --> 00:23:20,520

We're making our way out.

427

00:23:20,520 --> 00:23:23,520

I'll enjoy freedom.

428

00:23:23,520 --> 00:23:25,520

Yes, cenotes are dark.

429

00:23:25,520 --> 00:23:26,520

They are mysterious.

430

00:23:26,520 --> 00:23:30,520

But in this heat, they're also very refreshing.

431

00:23:31,520 --> 00:23:36,520

I'm taking our way.

432

00:23:36,520 --> 00:23:41,520

We're making our way.

433

00:23:41,520 --> 00:23:45,520

We're making our way.

434

00:23:45,520 --> 00:23:46,520

Woo!

435

00:23:46,520 --> 00:23:50,520

I tell you, it's cool off.

436

00:23:50,520 --> 00:23:52,520

I'd spend all day cooling off in this cenote,

437

00:23:52,520 --> 00:23:54,520

but I've got work to do.

438

00:23:54,520 --> 00:23:59,520

About 25 miles down the road,

439

00:23:59,520 --> 00:24:03,520

I pull over and walk along a jungle path.

440

00:24:03,520 --> 00:24:07,520

In the clearing ahead is one of the most stunning ruins in the world.

441

00:24:13,520 --> 00:24:16,520

I've come to the Yucatan Peninsula chasing new leads

442

00:24:16,520 --> 00:24:19,520

in the mystery of the downfall of the Mayan Empire.

443

00:24:19,520 --> 00:24:21,520

My travels have brought me to a jungle path

444

00:24:21,520 --> 00:24:24,520

that leads to a stunning sight.

445

00:24:30,520 --> 00:24:33,520

This is Chichen Itza,

446

00:24:33,520 --> 00:24:37,520

the most famous Mayan city in the world.

447

00:24:37,520 --> 00:24:39,520

Sprawling out over a thousand acres,

448

00:24:39,520 --> 00:24:41,520

it contains imposing temples,

449

00:24:41,520 --> 00:24:43,520

a stellar observatory,

450

00:24:43,520 --> 00:24:45,520

sacrificial altars,

451

00:24:45,520 --> 00:24:46,520

and a massive ball court

452

00:24:46,520 --> 00:24:49,520

that feels like the Colosseum of the New World.

453

00:24:49,520 --> 00:24:50,520

And at the center of it all,

454

00:24:50,520 --> 00:24:53,520

archaeologists discovered El Castillo.

455

00:24:53,520 --> 00:24:55,520

When they stripped back the jungle growth,

456

00:24:55,520 --> 00:24:58,520

they revealed the finest pyramid in the Americas.

457

00:24:59,520 --> 00:25:02,520

In fact, it's actually a massive calendar,

458

00:25:02,520 --> 00:25:06,520

with 365 steps, one for each day of the year.

459

00:25:06,520 --> 00:25:08,520

On the spring and fall equinox,

460

00:25:08,520 --> 00:25:10,520

the sun's shadows even create the illusion

461

00:25:10,520 --> 00:25:14,520

that a massive stone serpent is creeping down the stairs.

462

00:25:16,520 --> 00:25:20,520

I'm here to meet with famed Mayan archaeologist Guillermo de Anda,

463

00:25:20,520 --> 00:25:22,520

who has recently found new clues

464

00:25:22,520 --> 00:25:24,520

as to why this mighty city fell apart.

465

00:25:24,520 --> 00:25:27,520

How long have you been studying Chichen Itza?

466

00:25:27,520 --> 00:25:29,520

Over 20 years.

467

00:25:29,520 --> 00:25:31,520

Is this site built here and aligned here

468

00:25:31,520 --> 00:25:33,520

simply because of astronomy?

469

00:25:33,520 --> 00:25:35,520

I mean, so much of the Mayan world seems to be fixated on us.

470

00:25:35,520 --> 00:25:36,520

Yes, we believe not.

471

00:25:36,520 --> 00:25:40,520

Astronomy was a very important part of this building.

472

00:25:40,520 --> 00:25:42,520

It's like a huge calendar.

473

00:25:42,520 --> 00:25:48,520

But also, it's built there in relationship with cenotes,

474

00:25:48,520 --> 00:25:53,520

because most of the main deities lived in cenotes and caves.

475

00:25:53,520 --> 00:25:57,520

Specifically, one god, Chak, which was the rain god.

476

00:25:58,520 --> 00:26:01,520

Few Mayan deities were treated with greater reverence

477

00:26:01,520 --> 00:26:03,520

than the rain god Chak.

478

00:26:03,520 --> 00:26:06,520

The Maya relied on rain to fill the cenotes with water,

479

00:26:06,520 --> 00:26:08,520

essential to their survival.

480

00:26:08,520 --> 00:26:11,520

When that rain didn't come, blood was shed.

481

00:26:11,520 --> 00:26:14,520

In some cases, priests even cut the beating hearts

482

00:26:14,520 --> 00:26:16,520

out of sacrificial victims.

483

00:26:17,520 --> 00:26:19,520

And why do you think they fixated on cenotes?

484

00:26:19,520 --> 00:26:22,520

Is it because they're naturally kind of mysterious places,

485

00:26:22,520 --> 00:26:25,520

or because they were filled with water which they needed?

486

00:26:25,520 --> 00:26:27,520

What was it about the cenotes that drew them?

487

00:26:27,520 --> 00:26:29,520

I think it's both things.

488

00:26:29,520 --> 00:26:32,520

They were amazed as we are, with the beauty of the places

489

00:26:32,520 --> 00:26:34,520

and the mystery of the places.

490

00:26:34,520 --> 00:26:36,520

And when you go into a cave, everything changed.

491

00:26:36,520 --> 00:26:40,520

The humidity, the temperature, the light conditions, the smell.

492

00:26:40,520 --> 00:26:43,520

Going there is going to the supernatural.

493

00:26:45,520 --> 00:26:48,520

Is the whole reason that Chichen Itza is here

494

00:26:48,520 --> 00:26:49,520

is because of these cenotes?

495

00:26:49,520 --> 00:26:51,520

Yes, I think so.

496

00:26:51,520 --> 00:26:54,520

If you really want to understand, you have to see it from above.

497

00:26:56,520 --> 00:26:59,520

To better understand the significance of the cenotes to Chichen Itza,

498

00:26:59,520 --> 00:27:02,520

we head to the local airfield to catch a ride.

499

00:27:02,520 --> 00:27:03,520

Ready to fly?

500

00:27:03,520 --> 00:27:04,520

Ready.

501

00:27:09,520 --> 00:27:10,520

Okay, let's fly.

502

00:27:22,520 --> 00:27:23,520

It's amazing.

503

00:27:23,520 --> 00:27:27,520

It's not until you get up here that you realize just how forest this place is.

504

00:27:27,520 --> 00:27:29,520

It's just covered in thick jungle.

505

00:27:29,520 --> 00:27:32,520

There's hundreds of cenotes down there.

506

00:27:32,520 --> 00:27:37,520

It's amazing how the Maya could have lived here and conquered this land.

507

00:27:37,520 --> 00:27:42,520

For years, archaeologists assumed Chichen Itza was aligned to the sun and stars.

508

00:27:42,520 --> 00:27:47,520

But Guillermo and others have made a series of discoveries that have to do with cenotes.

509

00:27:47,520 --> 00:27:50,520

I can see El Castillo. I can see the pyramid.

510

00:27:50,520 --> 00:27:52,520

Just rising up from the jungle.

511

00:27:52,520 --> 00:27:54,520

Incredible.

512

00:27:54,520 --> 00:27:57,520

The most famous cenote at Chichen Itza is the sacred cenote,

513

00:27:57,520 --> 00:28:00,520

which we see at the end of a straight path north of the pyramid.

514

00:28:00,520 --> 00:28:04,520

In this gaping mouth, hundreds of people, mainly children,

515

00:28:04,520 --> 00:28:07,520

were sacrificed and dumped into the murky water.

516

00:28:08,520 --> 00:28:10,520

But there are other cenotes here.

517

00:28:10,520 --> 00:28:14,520

Along with the sacred well in the north, there is Cenote Canjium to the east,

518

00:28:14,520 --> 00:28:18,520

Echtelach to the south, and to the far west, Holtun,

519

00:28:18,520 --> 00:28:20,520

which was only found in the last decade.

520

00:28:21,520 --> 00:28:25,520

The Maya were fantastic builders and mathematicians

521

00:28:25,520 --> 00:28:29,520

and they knew exactly where and how to put their building.

522

00:28:29,520 --> 00:28:32,520

This is part of their sacred geography.

523

00:28:32,520 --> 00:28:36,520

This sacred geography may have been the reason behind Chichen Itza's design.

524

00:28:36,520 --> 00:28:39,520

The four cenotes create a diamond,

525

00:28:39,520 --> 00:28:42,520

and at the center is the pyramid of El Castillo.

526

00:28:42,520 --> 00:28:44,520

It turns out the entire layout of the city,

527

00:28:44,520 --> 00:28:48,520

and in fact of many Mayan cities, was dictated by the location of water.

528

00:28:49,520 --> 00:28:53,520

The little explored cenote of Holtun is remote and hard to reach,

529

00:28:53,520 --> 00:28:58,520

but Guillermo believes this sacred well could provide answers to why the Maya disappeared.

530

00:28:59,520 --> 00:29:02,520

Holtun, it's very hard to see from up here. It's sort of shrouded in the jungle.

531

00:29:02,520 --> 00:29:04,520

I can show it to you.

532

00:29:04,520 --> 00:29:05,520

Yeah? Can you see it?

533

00:29:05,520 --> 00:29:07,520

Sure. We'll go there.

534

00:29:07,520 --> 00:29:09,520

Alright, I'm in.

535

00:29:15,520 --> 00:29:17,520

Okay, good flight.

536

00:29:18,520 --> 00:29:23,520

Back on the ground, Guillermo and I waste no time setting off into the deepest jungles of the Yucatan.

537

00:29:23,520 --> 00:29:26,520

I'm eager to understand the secrets of Holtun,

538

00:29:26,520 --> 00:29:31,520

a cenote that has only been explored by just a handful of archaeologists to perform me.

539

00:29:31,520 --> 00:29:33,520

But getting there is no walk in the park.

540

00:29:33,520 --> 00:29:36,520

You know, even though Chichen Itza is such a well-known site,

541

00:29:36,520 --> 00:29:41,520

I now finally understand why this particular cenote was kind of off the map for so long.

542

00:29:41,520 --> 00:29:45,520

The jungles here, they grow so fast that if these little trails aren't tended to,

543

00:29:45,520 --> 00:29:47,520

they just grow right in and disappear.

544

00:29:47,520 --> 00:29:49,520

It is not the kind of place you want to get lost.

545

00:29:49,520 --> 00:29:51,520

Luckily, Guillermo knows where he's going.

546

00:29:51,520 --> 00:29:54,520

Everything in the Yucatan is sharp, Guillermo.

547

00:29:54,520 --> 00:29:57,520

Yes, it is. You've got to be very careful here.

548

00:29:58,520 --> 00:30:00,520

I'm literally trapped in these jungles.

549

00:30:00,520 --> 00:30:02,520

Don't leave me, Guillermo.

550

00:30:06,520 --> 00:30:08,520

These jungles are the real deal.

551

00:30:08,520 --> 00:30:12,520

And even though some of the Yucatan's local residents are making me wish I was back on the plane,

552

00:30:12,520 --> 00:30:16,520

I continue to follow Guillermo, eager to see this rarely explored cenote

553

00:30:16,520 --> 00:30:19,520

that may hold the answers to the collapse of the Mayan Empire.

554

00:30:19,520 --> 00:30:22,520

So when was this cenote really discovered?

555

00:30:22,520 --> 00:30:23,520

Just a few years ago.

556

00:30:23,520 --> 00:30:24,520

So very recently.

557

00:30:25,520 --> 00:30:26,520

This is it.

558

00:30:26,520 --> 00:30:27,520

This is it. We're here.

559

00:30:27,520 --> 00:30:28,520

Wow, look at that.

560

00:30:28,520 --> 00:30:30,520

Just a little hole in the ground.

561

00:30:30,520 --> 00:30:31,520

Yes, that's what it is.

562

00:30:32,520 --> 00:30:34,520

Whoa! How far down is that?

563

00:30:34,520 --> 00:30:35,520

78 feet.

564

00:30:35,520 --> 00:30:37,520

That's a bad fall if you go down there.

565

00:30:37,520 --> 00:30:38,520

Oh, yeah.

566

00:30:40,520 --> 00:30:42,520

And how exactly does one get to the bottom of this thing?

567

00:30:43,520 --> 00:30:45,520

We're going to use ropes. There's no other way.

568

00:30:45,520 --> 00:30:48,520

And we're going to use these to support us?

569

00:30:48,520 --> 00:30:49,520

Yeah.

570

00:30:49,520 --> 00:30:52,520

We had only had maybe three people falling.

571

00:30:53,520 --> 00:30:54,520

That's not much.

572

00:30:59,520 --> 00:31:01,520

You know the saying, it takes a village,

573

00:31:01,520 --> 00:31:04,520

but it applies to more than just raising children.

574

00:31:04,520 --> 00:31:07,520

Guillermo brings in a small army of men from a local village.

575

00:31:07,520 --> 00:31:09,520

These are the descendants of the Maya,

576

00:31:09,520 --> 00:31:12,520

and they help us move all of our essential gear out to the cenote

577

00:31:12,520 --> 00:31:14,520

and prepare for the descent.

578

00:31:14,520 --> 00:31:17,520

Now all that's left to do is suit up.

579

00:31:17,520 --> 00:31:20,520

Wet suit plus harness is very packaging.

580

00:31:22,520 --> 00:31:24,520

You may need to blur some of this out.

581

00:31:26,520 --> 00:31:27,520

Total again?

582

00:31:28,520 --> 00:31:29,520

Oh boy.

583

00:31:29,520 --> 00:31:31,520

Holy good Lord.

584

00:31:31,520 --> 00:31:33,520

That log is suffering.

585

00:31:33,520 --> 00:31:36,520

Why are you messing with me right now?

586

00:31:36,520 --> 00:31:37,520

Okay, let's go.

587

00:31:37,520 --> 00:31:38,520

You're good.

588

00:31:38,520 --> 00:31:39,520

See you later.

589

00:31:39,520 --> 00:31:41,520

See you later. Good luck, Lord.

590

00:31:41,520 --> 00:31:42,520

Here we go.

591

00:31:42,520 --> 00:31:44,520

Into the darkness.

592

00:31:49,520 --> 00:31:52,520

Oh my God, you are not going to get out of here.

593

00:31:52,520 --> 00:31:54,520

You're going to get out of here.

594

00:31:54,520 --> 00:31:56,520

You're going to get out of here.

595

00:31:57,520 --> 00:32:00,520

Oh my God, you are not going to believe this.

596

00:32:07,520 --> 00:32:10,520

My mission to uncover the ultimate fate of the Maya

597

00:32:10,520 --> 00:32:14,520

has led me across Mexico to the ruins of Chichen Itza,

598

00:32:14,520 --> 00:32:16,520

and now deep in the jungle

599

00:32:16,520 --> 00:32:19,520

to a little explored cenote known as Holtun.

600

00:32:20,520 --> 00:32:23,520

The opening is little more than a hole in the ground,

601

00:32:23,520 --> 00:32:26,520

which gives way to a 70-foot drop into the unknown.

602

00:32:27,520 --> 00:32:29,520

We've lowered down a camera and one light,

603

00:32:29,520 --> 00:32:30,520

and I'm next.

604

00:32:30,520 --> 00:32:31,520

Into the darkness.

605

00:32:32,520 --> 00:32:33,520

I'm going to be honest,

606

00:32:33,520 --> 00:32:35,520

I am pretty freaked out right about now.

607

00:32:36,520 --> 00:32:39,520

The narrow sides of the opening are covered in vines,

608

00:32:39,520 --> 00:32:40,520

but as I descend,

609

00:32:40,520 --> 00:32:42,520

the hole opens up to something larger.

610

00:32:43,520 --> 00:32:44,520

Much larger.

611

00:32:45,520 --> 00:32:48,520

Oh my God, you are not going to believe this.

612

00:32:50,520 --> 00:32:52,520

It's a huge cavern.

613

00:32:52,520 --> 00:32:54,520

That's everywhere.

614

00:32:55,520 --> 00:32:58,520

The tiny entrance above is actually a door,

615

00:32:58,520 --> 00:33:01,520

the top of a domed cavern more than 100 feet wide

616

00:33:01,520 --> 00:33:03,520

and dripping with stalactites.

617

00:33:03,520 --> 00:33:06,520

And below me, it's a long way down.

618

00:33:07,520 --> 00:33:09,520

Okay, keep going.

619

00:33:09,520 --> 00:33:11,520

I'm about halfway there.

620

00:33:12,520 --> 00:33:13,520

As I approach the water,

621

00:33:13,520 --> 00:33:15,520

I feel overwhelmed with adrenaline.

622

00:33:15,520 --> 00:33:17,520

Since this cenote was rediscovered,

623

00:33:17,520 --> 00:33:21,520

only about a dozen people have made this descent into the darkness.

624

00:33:21,520 --> 00:33:23,520

I guess I'm lucky number 13.

625

00:33:30,520 --> 00:33:31,520

As I hit the water though,

626

00:33:31,520 --> 00:33:34,520

the reality of my situation sinks in.

627

00:33:34,520 --> 00:33:35,520

I'm floating in black water,

628

00:33:35,520 --> 00:33:37,520

and there's no way out but up.

629

00:33:40,520 --> 00:33:42,520

Alright, Guillermo, let's do this.

630

00:33:44,520 --> 00:33:45,520

Get down.

631

00:33:45,520 --> 00:33:46,520

I'm just panting.

632

00:33:47,520 --> 00:33:48,520

Can't take.

633

00:33:52,520 --> 00:33:54,520

I'm slightly anxious for some company.

634

00:33:56,520 --> 00:33:57,520

Once Guillermo arrives,

635

00:33:57,520 --> 00:34:00,520

we don our masks and descend.

636

00:34:08,520 --> 00:34:10,520

Oh, the water is a little bit cool.

637

00:34:10,520 --> 00:34:12,520

Visibility is good, about 50 feet,

638

00:34:12,520 --> 00:34:14,520

but very, very dark in here.

639

00:34:15,520 --> 00:34:16,520

I can't see the bottom of it all.

640

00:34:16,520 --> 00:34:18,520

Guillermo, how deep does this thing go?

641

00:34:18,520 --> 00:34:21,520

This goes 450 feet.

642

00:34:21,520 --> 00:34:24,520

I mean, it looks like it goes down forever down there.

643

00:34:24,520 --> 00:34:26,520

Yeah, and we can see the bottom from here.

644

00:34:26,520 --> 00:34:27,520

It's like a bottomless pit.

645

00:34:27,520 --> 00:34:29,520

The visibility is so clear,

646

00:34:29,520 --> 00:34:31,520

and the cenote is so dark

647

00:34:31,520 --> 00:34:33,520

that I feel like I'm floating,

648

00:34:33,520 --> 00:34:35,520

not in water, but in space.

649

00:34:35,520 --> 00:34:37,520

Because the water is so clear,

650

00:34:37,520 --> 00:34:39,520

it's very hard to get a sense of how deep you are

651

00:34:39,520 --> 00:34:41,520

or the distance between things.

652

00:34:41,520 --> 00:34:42,520

It's kind of disorienting.

653

00:34:42,520 --> 00:34:45,520

You have desensitization under our flying.

654

00:34:45,520 --> 00:34:47,520

It's down here, Josh.

655

00:34:47,520 --> 00:34:49,520

I want to show you some of the beautiful

656

00:34:49,520 --> 00:34:51,520

pay-per-mations here.

657

00:34:51,520 --> 00:34:53,520

Absolutely incredible, just these huge

658

00:34:53,520 --> 00:34:56,520

curds and formations, and since the lag ties,

659

00:34:56,520 --> 00:34:59,520

it's just unbelievable down here.

660

00:34:59,520 --> 00:35:01,520

Guillermo's team has made a number of huge

661

00:35:01,520 --> 00:35:03,520

finds in this darkness.

662

00:35:03,520 --> 00:35:05,520

First, they've realized that Holtun is critical

663

00:35:05,520 --> 00:35:08,520

to the alignment of all of Chichen Itza.

664

00:35:10,520 --> 00:35:12,520

Every May 23rd, when the sun reaches its zenith

665

00:35:12,520 --> 00:35:15,520

or highest point, it shines directly down

666

00:35:15,520 --> 00:35:17,520

into the mouth of Holtun,

667

00:35:17,520 --> 00:35:20,520

bathing this black water in ethereal light.

668

00:35:20,520 --> 00:35:22,520

Then, that night, the sun sets directly in line

669

00:35:22,520 --> 00:35:26,520

with the cenote and the side of Chichen Itza's main pyramid.

670

00:35:26,520 --> 00:35:29,520

Okay, so where are we headed over to the wall?

671

00:35:29,520 --> 00:35:31,520

Yeah, we'll go to the wall to one side,

672

00:35:31,520 --> 00:35:33,520

whether it's on the little cavern,

673

00:35:33,520 --> 00:35:35,520

or there's a slab of the shelf.

674

00:35:35,520 --> 00:35:38,520

Okay, let's go ahead and check if we can.

675

00:35:46,520 --> 00:35:49,520

Josh, come on, come on here, look at this.

676

00:35:50,520 --> 00:35:52,520

Oh my God, look at that!

677

00:35:52,520 --> 00:35:56,520

Incredible pieces of pottery, incredible intact ceramics.

678

00:35:56,520 --> 00:35:58,520

Yeah, this is one thing the cenotes have.

679

00:35:58,520 --> 00:36:02,520

They preserve materials in an incredible way.

680

00:36:02,520 --> 00:36:04,520

But there are other secrets here.

681

00:36:04,520 --> 00:36:06,520

As beautiful as the cenote is,

682

00:36:06,520 --> 00:36:09,520

it is also undeniably scary.

683

00:36:09,520 --> 00:36:11,520

Really scary.

684

00:36:11,520 --> 00:36:13,520

This truly is the Mayan underworld.

685

00:36:13,520 --> 00:36:16,520

To them, this was the home of Chak, the rain god.

686

00:36:16,520 --> 00:36:20,520

Who knows what rituals the royalty at Chichen Itza conducted here.

687

00:36:21,520 --> 00:36:26,520

Amazing pottery down here definitely offerings to the gods.

688

00:36:26,520 --> 00:36:30,520

Very dark in here, terrible, may need some of your light.

689

00:36:33,520 --> 00:36:36,520

Climby, look at that!

690

00:36:43,520 --> 00:36:46,520

Oh my God, it's a human skull!

691

00:36:46,520 --> 00:36:48,520

I have bones in here!

692

00:36:48,520 --> 00:36:50,520

Amazing!

693

00:36:51,520 --> 00:36:54,520

Teeth look perfect on a skull!

694

00:36:54,520 --> 00:36:56,520

Yeah, they are very well preserved.

695

00:36:56,520 --> 00:37:00,520

They tell us that this person was proven high-stash.

696

00:37:00,520 --> 00:37:02,520

But the truth is, they are not.

697

00:37:02,520 --> 00:37:04,520

They are not.

698

00:37:04,520 --> 00:37:06,520

They are not.

699

00:37:06,520 --> 00:37:08,520

They are not.

700

00:37:08,520 --> 00:37:13,520

They preserve, they tell us that this person was proven high-stash.

701

00:37:13,520 --> 00:37:18,520

Because it has a very good health and a lot of them death.

702

00:37:18,520 --> 00:37:21,520

And look at it, bones, undeniably.

703

00:37:22,520 --> 00:37:24,520

Another skull right there.

704

00:37:27,520 --> 00:37:29,520

How many bodies are here?

705

00:37:29,520 --> 00:37:31,520

We believe in total in this cenote.

706

00:37:31,520 --> 00:37:35,520

We have a minimum number of 15 individuals.

707

00:37:36,520 --> 00:37:38,520

That looks like a weapon.

708

00:37:38,520 --> 00:37:41,520

That's probably a sacrifice of life.

709

00:37:41,520 --> 00:37:44,520

But we want us to see that sitting there on the shelf,

710

00:37:44,520 --> 00:37:46,520

and just getting incredibly dangerous.

711

00:37:46,520 --> 00:37:48,520

Such a good shape, yes.

712

00:37:48,520 --> 00:37:50,520

How many people have been down here to see this?

713

00:37:50,520 --> 00:37:52,520

Very, very few, yes.

714

00:37:52,520 --> 00:37:55,520

And a lot of researchers, our team.

715

00:37:55,520 --> 00:37:57,520

Amazing to be some of the first people down here

716

00:37:57,520 --> 00:38:00,520

since this sacrifice took place probably.

717

00:38:00,520 --> 00:38:04,520

Yes, yes, it's overwhelming, I will say.

718

00:38:04,520 --> 00:38:07,520

After exploring what appears to be a sacrificial altar,

719

00:38:07,520 --> 00:38:10,520

Guillermo leads me to the other side of the cenote.

720

00:38:10,520 --> 00:38:13,520

George, just be very careful here.

721

00:38:13,520 --> 00:38:17,520

The object of the two is there and taught for centuries.

722

00:38:17,520 --> 00:38:19,520

Okay.

723

00:38:21,520 --> 00:38:23,520

I hope you tell us, Guillermo,

724

00:38:23,520 --> 00:38:26,520

so many things I'm looking at you, what are we seeing here?

725

00:38:26,520 --> 00:38:29,520

There is human bones, there's human skulls,

726

00:38:29,520 --> 00:38:31,520

which are obvious, there's lots of animals,

727

00:38:31,520 --> 00:38:33,520

there's deer, dogs.

728

00:38:33,520 --> 00:38:36,520

That plot has bones coming out from it,

729

00:38:36,520 --> 00:38:39,520

when they laid and was placed with an animal inside.

730

00:38:39,520 --> 00:38:42,520

The stone shelf contains a grisly scene,

731

00:38:42,520 --> 00:38:44,520

but it's not just the bones that are disturbing.

732

00:38:44,520 --> 00:38:46,520

It's their organization.

733

00:38:46,520 --> 00:38:48,520

There's so many things on the shelf.

734

00:38:48,520 --> 00:38:50,520

Guillermo, what do you think we're looking at?

735

00:38:50,520 --> 00:38:52,520

Is this a funerary offering?

736

00:38:52,520 --> 00:38:55,520

Is this a sacrifice? What do you think this is?

737

00:38:55,520 --> 00:38:58,520

We assume that this is a sacrifice in policy.

738

00:38:58,520 --> 00:39:01,520

If blood was important for the gas,

739

00:39:01,520 --> 00:39:04,520

so it would be great, so probably this is a sacrifice.

740

00:39:04,520 --> 00:39:07,520

At more than 20 feet underwater,

741

00:39:07,520 --> 00:39:09,520

it would have been impossible for the Maya

742

00:39:09,520 --> 00:39:11,520

to arrange these items so carefully.

743

00:39:11,520 --> 00:39:14,520

Unless, of course, none of this was submerged at the time.

744

00:39:14,520 --> 00:39:16,520

We believe it was a huge drought.

745

00:39:16,520 --> 00:39:20,520

The archaeological material matches that time,

746

00:39:20,520 --> 00:39:25,520

and we believe that water level was at least 20-25 feet

747

00:39:25,520 --> 00:39:27,520

below what it is now.

748

00:39:27,520 --> 00:39:30,520

This shelf is actually a ceremonial altar,

749

00:39:30,520 --> 00:39:33,520

which means the water level must have plummeted far enough

750

00:39:33,520 --> 00:39:35,520

for the Maya to descend here on foot

751

00:39:35,520 --> 00:39:38,520

and make desperate sacrifices.

752

00:39:38,520 --> 00:39:41,520

Have you really excavated around here at all yet?

753

00:39:41,520 --> 00:39:43,520

Have you looked under the sediment?

754

00:39:43,520 --> 00:39:45,520

No, we're really waiting for better technology

755

00:39:45,520 --> 00:39:49,520

to know what's down there before we even touch anything.

756

00:39:49,520 --> 00:39:52,520

The bones had been dated to about a thousand years ago,

757

00:39:52,520 --> 00:39:55,520

the exact time when the Mayan Empire began to collapse.

758

00:39:58,520 --> 00:40:00,520

This analysis is now being confirmed

759

00:40:00,520 --> 00:40:02,520

in other parts of the region as well.

760

00:40:02,520 --> 00:40:05,520

Recently, samples drilled in a massive cenote and belize

761

00:40:05,520 --> 00:40:07,520

show mineral deposits indicating

762

00:40:07,520 --> 00:40:10,520

a terrifying lack of rainfall at the time.

763

00:40:10,520 --> 00:40:13,520

No rain, no drinking water, no corn.

764

00:40:13,520 --> 00:40:16,520

And just like that, the whole delicate balance of life

765

00:40:16,520 --> 00:40:18,520

begins to topple over.

766

00:40:19,520 --> 00:40:21,520

Just a place is getting low.

767

00:40:21,520 --> 00:40:23,520

I think it's time to go up.

768

00:40:23,520 --> 00:40:25,520

I'm going to be right behind you, Guillermo.

769

00:40:25,520 --> 00:40:28,520

We ascend to the surface and with the help of the modern Mayans

770

00:40:28,520 --> 00:40:30,520

get pulled back toward the sun.

771

00:40:33,520 --> 00:40:35,520

Oh! He's gone! He's gone!

772

00:40:39,520 --> 00:40:41,520

That's a long way back up.

773

00:40:41,520 --> 00:40:43,520

Okay.

774

00:40:48,520 --> 00:40:51,520

Guillermo, I'll see you later. I'm getting out of here.

775

00:40:53,520 --> 00:40:55,520

There's a whole other world down there.

776

00:40:55,520 --> 00:40:59,520

It's a dark, scary and very cool world.

777

00:40:59,520 --> 00:41:02,520

It's going to be back up here in the land of the living.

778

00:41:06,520 --> 00:41:08,520

As I make my way out of the jungle,

779

00:41:08,520 --> 00:41:10,520

it's now clear that the Mayans

780

00:41:10,520 --> 00:41:13,520

oriented their entire world toward water.

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00:41:13,520 --> 00:41:16,520

And yet, though brilliant, they weren't able to anticipate

782

00:41:16,520 --> 00:41:19,520

that their environment could turn on them.

783

00:41:19,520 --> 00:41:21,520

By the time of the drought,

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00:41:21,520 --> 00:41:23,520

they had cut down most of the trees in the region

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00:41:23,520 --> 00:41:25,520

for firewood, building materials,

786

00:41:25,520 --> 00:41:27,520

and to clear fields for corn.

787

00:41:27,520 --> 00:41:31,520

A new NASA computer model shows that the loss of that many trees

788

00:41:31,520 --> 00:41:35,520

likely caused a 20 to 30% decrease in rainfall.

789

00:41:35,520 --> 00:41:37,520

In other words,

790

00:41:37,520 --> 00:41:40,520

the Mayans brought on their own demise.

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00:41:43,520 --> 00:41:45,520

The Maya themselves didn't vanish.

792

00:41:45,520 --> 00:41:48,520

The culture and generations of people have survived.

793

00:41:48,520 --> 00:41:51,520

But the empire that once was is gone.

794

00:41:53,520 --> 00:41:56,520

It is said that those who cannot remember the past

795

00:41:56,520 --> 00:41:58,520

are doomed to repeat it.

796

00:41:58,520 --> 00:42:00,520

World populations are exploding.

797

00:42:00,520 --> 00:42:02,520

Deforestation is rampant.

798

00:42:02,520 --> 00:42:04,520

And droughts are becoming more common.

799

00:42:05,520 --> 00:42:08,520

The seemingly silent ruins of the Mayan world

800

00:42:08,520 --> 00:42:09,520

whisper to us.

801

00:42:09,520 --> 00:42:11,520

We just need to listen.

802

00:42:11,520 --> 00:42:13,520

From crumbling pyramids above ground

803

00:42:13,520 --> 00:42:16,520

to the miles of flooded chambers in the underworld,

804

00:42:16,520 --> 00:42:18,520

the message is clear.

805

00:42:18,520 --> 00:42:20,520

We must strike a true balance with nature

806

00:42:20,520 --> 00:42:22,520

and live within our means.

807

00:42:22,520 --> 00:42:26,520

If not, we may be destined to answer to the Earth itself.