

Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance Project

Pre-departure information

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BVAR FIELD SCHOOL ESSENTIALS

If this is your first time attending a field school, traveling out of your home country, or even your first time in Central America, the following information should be considered and will benefit you in your travels and fieldwork. Please read through the entire document prior to purchasing tools and other items. Note: Any brands mentioned below are suggestions and or the most commonly used brand, purchasing these brands are not a requirement.

REQUIRED TOOLS

- Trowel
- Geological/Archaeological Pick
- Compass
- Measuring tape (metric)
- Line Levels
- Plumb bob
- Standard clipboard
- Notebooks (2)
- Ruler (metric)
- Pencils/Ballpoint Pens
- Whisk broom + dust pan
- Reusable water bottles
- Field Bag/Backpack
- Hat/cap and sunscreen
- Work or hiking boots (see below)
- Watch
- Flashlight**
- Pocket Knife**
- Batteries**
- Gloves (gardening /lightweight)**
- Kneeling pad**

*** Not required, but suggested*

Marshalltown Pointed Trowel (5-7 inches) - USD\$ 15.95 Marshalltown #53689

The **masonry pointed trowel** is the primary tool used by archaeologists. If you plan to pursue a career in the field of archaeology, you should own at least one pointed trowel. This is specifically a masonry pointing trowel and is NOT a gardening trowel. Please save yourself some money and avoid buying the square trowels. These are not the efficient trowel for archaeological excavation.



Estwing Geological Rock Pick or Ingalls Co. Archaeological Hand Picks – USD\$ 36.25 #53689

Geological rock picks are preferred for the type of fieldwork you will be conducting during your time on BVAR. Be sure to get a pick weight that you are comfortable handling. The most common weights range between 14 and 22 ounces. Hardware stores will have them as geology picks, or masons picks. They are silver or black with a blue rubber handle.



Metric measuring tape – USD\$ 16.95

Measuring tape must be metric (in meters) and should be no shorter than 5 meters. These can be difficult to find in local hardware stores, but can be purchased on Amazon.com.

Metric ruler – USD\$ 2.25

Rulers are essential for archaeological drawing. You can pick up a simple ruler almost anywhere, but be sure it has metric units (centimeters) on at least one side.

Compass – USD\$ 25.00

Your compass is another important tool you will need for conducting archaeological fieldwork. Compasses can be expensive depending on the specs, but the Suunto A-30L runs between \$20 and \$30 and is a perfect compass for beginners (you do not need to spend any more money than this!)

Line levels (aluminum or plastic)

Line Levels will be used throughout the entire field season and are essential for unit setup, elevation documentation, and other tasks such as mapping. It is always helpful to bring two line levels, as they are the most commonly lost item. You can purchase two-packs on Amazon.



Plumb bob – USD\$ 1850 #43660

A **plumb bob** will be needed throughout the season as well, along with the line level plumb bob and gammon reels allow for precision during unit set up, mapping, and taking elevations (see image to the right).



Whiskbroom and dustpan

Although these items do not sound like essential tools, they very much are. You will be using your dustpan and broom every day, all day as you excavate. While excavating can get dirty, archaeologists strive to keep units clean and tidy so any materials or features can be made visible for documentation, without having to be physically extracted. Additionally, your broom and dustpan will help you pick up more dirt, which is more efficient.

Notebooks

It is suggested that you bring two (2) **notebooks**. It is required by the BVAR project that all students turn in their field notebook as part of their field school completion requirements. Some students like to keep a second notebook for detailed notes for future reference. Basic cord-bound Mead Composition books are fine). If you can find a notebook with metric, and only metric, graph paper on one side (physics notebook) you have scored!

Pencils and Ball Point Pens

Pens must be used when writing in your notebooks (the humidity will make gel pens run and the ink bleed through paper!). Pencils are also essential for drawing. We recommend Bic ball point pens as they are cheap but effective.

Gloves (gardening/lightweight)

Gloves are a personal preference item. Some students like having extra grip in the humid environment and help prevent blisters. Gardening gloves work fine because they are lightweight and breathable yet have some grip.

Reusable water bottles

Reusable Water Bottles are great for the field. Many students buy gallons of water from the local convenience stores (~ USD\$ 2.50) to have a reliable supply of water. Reusable water bottles also reduce unnecessary trash. We recommend Nalgene and Hydroflask brands (one liter each, bring at least 2), but any reusable bottle will do. Because hydration is a very important concern, each site will have an emergency water supply.

TOILETRIES AND FIRST AID

- Bug Spray
- Sunscreen
- Soaps**
- Deodorants**
- Baby wipes
- Advil
- Electrolytes
- Laundry Bag (garbage bags)**
- Toothpaste**
- Band-Aids
- Neosporin
- Sting-Ease
- Feminine Products**
- Aloe

These products can be purchased at any local store in town, and many stores carry the same brand name items you can find here in the states. **Bug Spray and Sunscreen can be purchased in town, though the prices are very inflated compared to the states, and sometimes the stores do run out.

Bug Spray

You **should not** use **100% deet products** as they can be harmful to your skin and can cause rashes, sores, and burns. The chemical Deet does cover your pores making it feel hotter, because your body cannot sweat as effectively. It is best to stick with 30-45% deet products, if needed. If you have a strong concern about bugs, we suggest using a bug repellent clothing rinse such as **Permethrin**. Permethrin is a bug repellent that stays embedded in your clothing for up to 10 washes and tends to be very effective.

If you are looking for a more **natural option**, but still want effective bug spray there are many options available and can be found online. Two options we suggest are:

1. Mixing your own essential oils with water in a separately purchased glass/plastic bottle such as the Nature Shield blend below (also comes in a roll-on).
2. The Repel lemon Eucalyptus ready-to-go bottles also work great, but you will need several bottles depending on the length of your stay. Keep in mind that you will be reapplying bug spray several times a day, so if you have **sensitive skin**, you might seriously want to consider the natural option for your own comfort.



Sting Ease

This will help reduce the uncomfortableness of bug bites. **Bugs will bite you** regardless of all preparations so it is best to prepare for being bit rather than preventing being bit. **Cortisone** creams also work very well to this effect, but you may want to consider roll on applicators since your hands will often be dirty in the field.

Aloe Vera Gel

Aloe can be helpful if you burn easy and is known to help reduce bite inflammation. A travel bottle at Target is \$1.

Baby Wipes

This item doesn't seem like a necessity but can be extremely handy. Some of the sites you will be working at may not have reliable running water. Having baby wipes can come in handy during lunchtime as well as other times throughout the day.

Electrolytes

Electrolytes are important to keep handy for yourself or your fellow BVAR-ites. Dehydration can be serious and as previously stated, staying hydrated is very important due to the environment and workload you will be taking on. It is common to see students in the field with one large bottle of water and a smaller bottle with electrolytes that can be sipped on throughout the day. Examples of electrolytes to bring include Nuun or Emergen-C.

Laundry bags

Having a place to store dirty laundry is great. If you will be doing laundry in town, you will have to carry it back and forth to the laundromat. Garbage bags can be used but may not be the most durable.

MEDICATION

If you are prescribed any medication or require any specific medical product, you MUST to bring those with you. You will also be required to disclose all medication to BVAR upon arrival. There is a pharmacy in town that carries most basic production, but not all of them. There are also doctors and a Hospital in town in case of an emergency, however obtaining medication from the local hospital can be pricey.

The following list makes some suggestions as to what products are commonly brought to Belize:

- Cipro
- Benadryl
- Dayquil/Nyquil
- Epi-pen (if necessary)
- Imodium
- Claritin
- Tums
- Fiber/Probiotic/Multivitamin Supplements

*If you take any supplements make sure to bring enough for your stay, as you will not find many options in San Ignacio. Also, keep in mind that our shared meals offer some vegetables and fruit, however you may be getting less fiber in your diet here than you are used to.

CLOTHING

BVAR does not have a dress code. However, faculty or staff reserve the right to ask you to kindly change into appropriate field attire if you are not dressed appropriately. Our project works closely with local Belizean communities. It is out of respect for local customs and associated institutions that we ask our students to dress appropriately. Additionally, your field attire and leisurewear should be based on individual comfort.

Clothing to bring:

- Field Pants (hiking/cargo) (3 pairs minimum) 2 are recommended)
- Field Shoes (hiking boots are recommended, and they should be broken in)
- Old T-shirts (3-5 per work week)
- Tank Tops/T-Shirts
- Field Shorts
- Lightweight Button-Ups (for sun protection, 1-2 are recommended)
- Field Hat
- Sunglasses
- Bandana
- Casual Dress Wear (bring enough sets of clothing for one week after work)
- Sandals
- Socks

****Keep in mind that you may not get a chance to do laundry more than once a week, so bring enough work clothing use during the week.** Make sure to bring high-up/hiking socks for the field (bugs +dirt).

Important Notes on Field Attire

- Most student prefer to wear **Pants** in the field to prevent additional bug bites and for additional protection (and this is what we recommend). It rains frequently which means it can get muddy which is another reason students prefer pants. REI is a great place to buy field pants but they can be expensive. Other places such as thrift stores, like Goodwill and Savers, have been successful for field clothes in general.
- **Shorts** can be nice for really hot days in the field, but need to be appropriate cut and material (yoga shorts and cutoffs are not acceptable for the field). Cargo or bermuda shorts are a common favorite of students.
- **Field Shoes** are the one item that people worry about the most. Remember you will be wearing these all day so they need to fit and be comfortable. This is an item you should buy in store so they can be properly fitted. Breathable material is commonly preferred due to the heat. Common field shoe brands include Vasque, Merrell, Lowa, Keen, Asolo ect. Choosing a type of shoe (boot, hiking shoe, athletic shoes, etc.) is up to the individual.
- **Field hats** are required for extra sun protection as well as for rainy days. Any hat that is comfortable to you is best.

In Town Attire: You will want to be as comfortable as possible. It is still hot and sweaty even when you are not in the field. Again, you are representing your BVAR on a daily basis, so please keep that in mind when you are in town and be respectful.

Clothing Quality: Do not bring your finest garb down to Belize, as more than likely you will not even find an opportunity to wear it, and it will just wrinkle in your suitcase all summer. Also on that note, avoid bringing anything you would generally hate to part with down to Belize. Keep it simple, and light.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE

- Passport (make sure it is current!)
- Cash
- Credit or Debit Card (there is an ATM)**
- ID
- Purse/Day Bag
- Chargers (no converter necessary)

YOUR PASSPORT MUST BE CURRENT (WITHIN A YEAR OF EXPIRATION).

Important Notes on Spending Money

- The currency exchange in Belize is \$1 USD to \$2 BZD (50 USD = 100 BZD). US dollars are accepted everywhere, but it is best to stick with smaller bills (\$5, \$10, \$20).
- There are ATMs available or cash withdraw (in BZD). Contact your personal bank about international withdrawal fees.
- Some banks will flag your card for fraud when you use it in Belize. You can avoid this by setting up a travel notice with your bank. It's easy and you can tell them exactly where you will be, so if you do lose your card, they should catch any unusual purchases fairly quickly.

Other Optional Items to Bring

- Laptop
- Water Shoes (like Keens)
- Speaker
- Games
- Dry Bag
- Camera
- Back-Pack Rain Cover
- Travel Sewing Kit + Safety Pins

TRANSPORTATION

- It is \$10 BZD to take the local bus from San Ignacio to Belize City. It can be as cheap as \$2BZD to take the bus to any surrounding towns outside of San Ignacio.
- Taxi's are available in town but you must negotiate the price before getting into the cab. The typical cost of a taxi ride around town is \$5BZD. To travel from San Ignacio to Unitedville (11 Miles) it cost \$25 BZD via taxi.
- Water Taxi's are needed to get to the Cayes, which run out of Belize City. Cost information and a daily schedule can be found on <http://www.belizewatertaxi.com/>

FOOD ON THE WEEKENDS

You will be providing your own food for all of Saturday and most of Sunday (not dinner). There are plenty of options if you are worried about food costs. You can buy food for under \$5 BZD from market vendors on Saturday, smaller restaurants, street food, and the convenience store. There are nicer restaurants available in town that are reasonably priced depending on the dish (\$10-40 BZD).

THE LONG WEEKEND

This is a four-day break usually over the third weekend of each session. During this time, you will be able to arrange your own trip or just hang out in town and relax. Note: The project is not responsible for arranging any trips over the long weekend; however, those traveling will be required to provide faculty and staff with their destination location and contact info, as your safety is still our primary concern.

Popular trips: The islands of San Pedro and Caye Caulker are both popular destinations during the long weekend. Both have beautiful beaches, snorkeling, boat trips, and fun nightlife. Placencia is a popular beach on the coast of Belize in the Stann Creek district. Additionally, many students find Flores Island in Lago Petén Itza, Guatemala to be a nice change of pace. Many faculty members and staff can provide advice and other information about these trips, as many of us travel to these destinations regularly.

Common Archaeological Trips: There are weekend trips available, independently organized by staff members that are open to students. Usual trips include ATM Cave, Caracol, and Tikal. The approximate prices per trip range between 100-200 BZD including lunch, transportation, and Park entrance fees.