

Belize - 2004

We had talked of going to Tikal (in Guatemala actually) for decades and one way to do it is with a so-called surf and turf trip to Belize. So, since a major review at the lab took place the week before Thanksgiving and Thanksgiving week not only has a couple of off-days in it but the lab is always somewhat quiet that week and because it would be after the major rainy season down there but before the major tourist season - it was a natural. We were even able to get frequent flyer tickets on TACA airlines, a partner with American but not booked for Thanksgiving travel since the flight was SFO to San Salvador wherein all the American flights go through Miami or Atlanta and were heavily booked.

Sunday-1: We didn't leave until Sunday so that I could have Saturday to catch up on things at home having just had a major batch of NASA and UK visitors at the lab all that week. The flight left SFO a bit before midnight and the Weavers gave us a ride to the airport, with us taking them to dinner at a Mexican restaurant in Belmont on the way - trying to pay them off a bit for all the times Dick does airport runs with us. Checking in was easy as is almost always the case at the SFO International Terminal. The plane was full but our seats weren't too cramped and we tried to get some rest.

Monday-1: Arrived San Salvador a bit late but not bad and our connecting flight was right next door so no problem getting it (and no problem for our one shipped bag getting to that plane as well). Short flight to Belize City (BC) with some fine views out my window. Basically flying up a bit of Central America having overshot to get to San Salvador.

Went through customs fine, picking up our shipped bag to go along with our carryons. Got some money from the ATM and picked up our rental car. Actually, the tires on the car they were giving us were not great so I pressed a bit and got a different one. Took extra time but we were pleased with ourselves for actually doing it. Headed out of town to the West. Not great countryside but always interesting to see new things. Stopped at a small store to get essentials like water and beer and a Styrofoam cool chest and some ice. That part didn't work out too well because it broke a bit when we hit a (one of many) speed bump in the road. Got to San Ignacio, which is about 12 miles from Guatemala, and from there to our accommodations, Crystal Paradise Resort, a few miles south of town. It's a casual jungle lodge run by Belizean people - one of the few that is and you have a cottage/cabana plus breakfast and dinner as part of your price. Rested a bit, explored the grounds including a modest walk down to the river, and then had dinner. Nice open air area, friendly folks, honor system bar; but immensely overcooked beef. The rest of the meal was OK and the wine, although not cheap, was good (from Chile). Off to bed. No A/C but fine overhead fans and a good night's sleep.

What else to say about the place? Wonderful thatched roofs on the cabanas, the eating spot, etc. The owners made, and still make, their living by building such roofs for many of the lodges.

Tuesday-1: Some good scones for breakfast along with coffee, fruit, juice, and scrambled eggs with spinach. Fine and relaxing. We then headed off to our first outing - the ruins at Xunantunich. It was an important Mayan site, sits on a hill with a fine view, has the second

tallest structure in Belize (still!), has a reasonable visitor center, and all in all much better than I anticipated; so we took plenty of time there. Not crowded either. Also getting to it (and back) is part of the fun for you cross the Mopan River on a little raft that has a hand crank to pull it along some wires. Fun; and at the river there were some huge iguanas sunning themselves in the trees for we tourists to stare at. Lunch was an apple while at the site.

After that we head toward the Medicine Walk Trail since it was nearby. However, it wasn't clear where it was and I followed signs to Black Rock Lodge and then found out we were wrong. The Medicine Walk Trail was just up the river a few miles but it would take going back over the 6 miles of jungle dirt road/gravel and then out again to get there. Chatted with a nice chap who was tending bar at the Lodge and decided we should go on a hike to some waterfalls near there. Excellent choice what with great jungle views and then wonderful rocks near the falls. Much better than doing more driving at that point in the day. It began pouring rain right after we got back to the lodge so we watched it come down in buckets from under a thatched roof (by our folks again) with a beer in hand. Then we went back to our place, had the usual shower to cool down, slightly cleaned up, and had dinner. It was stewed/spiced chicken and quite good.

An interesting aspect that evening was that the rental car people had faxed the needed paperwork for taking the car into Guatemala to our lodge. We said, but gee they didn't know where we were staying and the answer was the cars have GPS in them so they did know where we were. Humm..... some nice aspects and some not so nice aspects of technology. We'd gotten paperwork for the first car but not for the one we switched to for the better tires.

Wednesday-1: The prime target for this day was the ancient Mayan site of Caracol. It is a huge site that has only recently become easily accessible to tourists. Easy meaning they have made much improvement to the gravel/dirt road that winds its way through pine forests and jungle to the site. The pine forests have been 90% demolished by the southern pine beetle unfortunately. The site was absolutely excellent and we initially had it all to ourselves and later more folks showed up but still a long way from being crowded. And it is very extensive so we did lots of walking and lots of climbing up pyramids. It was much more excavated than I had expected. It contains the tallest structure in Belize and the view from the top is great. Did some walking in the forest/jungle and saw lots of neat trees with a pair of magnificent Ceiba trees being the highlight. Another highlight was some fine woodpeckers to watch. The visitor center was OK as well.

On the drive back from Caracol we had a bad car accident. I'll save the details for an appendix. After getting ourselves and most of our stuff out of the car we went from the ditch (with water running in it) to the road and waved down some local folks who then gave us plenty of help. Basically, getting me to the top of a hill where we could use one of their cell phones to call the Rental Car folks and getting both of us to a place where we could wait a long time but eventually get a ride back to our Lodge. When we did reach the lodge we were about 20 minutes late for dinner but that wasn't a problem so we relaxed with a nice spaghetti meal and some glasses of wine. During that time a tow truck appeared which (a) delivered us a new, should say different, car and (b) headed out to get ours out of the ditch. We were skeptical the single kid driving the tow truck could do this by himself and it turned out he really got it out the next morning. As we finished dinner and went to our cabana we began to realize how wet everything was and began

the drying out process of things like money, passports, documentation, etc., etc. Took quite a long time to get things positioned to dry more over night. Finally got to bed & sleep. Oh, yes, I should have mentioned that on the slope to the ditch where we did the car thing, the bugs ate us up pretty well so we had many bites to deal with as well.

Thursday-1: Had breakfast and gradually left after more drying of things and time spent on the telephone to VISA and the Car Company; slow world. The goal for today was Tikal. Going through the border to Guatemala was chaotic to say the least but a kid adopted us (for a tip later on) and showed us which lines to go to in what order. Each line had more paperwork to fill out and needed some money, but eventually we were cleared. Probably took an hour and none of the lines had more than a couple people in them. It would be absolute Hell if crowded. Much of the road to Tikal was poor and gravel and needless to say we were not going too fast today. Got there in the early afternoon, checked in to our on-site hotel, and then gave the ruins a quick (couple hours) viewing to get our bearings. Very impressive. Ate at our hotel, again we were staying in like a cabin, and it was very slow and charmless. The pepper steaks were OK food, however. Oh, yes, this was Thanksgiving dinner for anyone who is keeping track. It began to rain hard while we were eating and poured throughout the night. In fact, Dawna got rained on while eating and had to move her chair to finish the meal. We slept fine; once again ceiling fans are the key to hot-humid areas when you don't have AC.

Friday-1: Had something to eat at our hotel and then hit the ruins for a full day of going everywhere, reading our literature at various sites, etc. As the books say, the jungle walking between the good ruins are almost equal to the ruins themselves. It was only drizzling a bit and pretty soon just heavy mist (if one sees pictures of Tikal such mist is typical) and eventually even some sunshine. Lots of birds to see/watch when either walking on the trails or sitting at a site (mucho parrots). Also, monkeys, but no snakes/reptiles although they are supposed to be around. A bit after noon we went back to our cabana and the general main area, had some soup, spent time in a quite nice little museum, and relaxed for a few minutes. Then back into the ruins for the late afternoon and sunset (they don't let you stay for the moonrise which would have been neat because it was a full moon). Very enjoyable day. That evening we went next door to a less expensive "hotel" with the idea of having a drink and some snacks for dinner. Lots of "kids" staying there and a much more enjoyable/active place so we ended up eating a real dinner, having some drinks, and thoroughly enjoying the scene.

Saturday-1: Went back to the fun place next door and had breakfast. Bought a few souvenirs and then drove back to Belize. Before crossing the border we used up our Guatemalan money for gas. The same kids was there so we said hello but going this direction didn't take much guidance, effort, or money compared to the other way.

We had now completed our start-of-trip planned activities so made some decisions on what to do next. Picked a resort right near the road a mile or so from San Igancio and then went to the Belize Botanic Gardens. It was down the same gravel road as the Medicine Trail we had tried to go to a few days ago. Had a good time there walking around the gardens, plus as always the drive to and from was enjoyable. Went into town for dinner at a very local place. Excellent, having basically East Indian food. Also found out that the Belkin (THE local Belize beer) stout was much better than the regular ale. Even had desert, which gets mentioned here because it was

as good a flam as we've ever had in our lives. Oh, yes, we had hit the Saturday Farmers market earlier in the day for some fruit and also had tried, unsuccessfully, to get money from an ATM.

Sunday-2: Decided to stay local for even yet another day. Had mixed fruit for breakfast, went into town for some coffee and another ATM failure, and then did a tour to a cave (Barton Creek by name). Went with a guide and just the two of us. Another interesting drive through jungle to get there (his car and he was driving and telling us things about the jungle, the extensive orchards, and the Amish community we were driving through). The cave was extensive, you do it in a canoe and use a bright light to see things (or turn it off to experience real darkness). Besides wonderful cave formation you see some Mayan artifacts and a lot of bats – yes, Dawna loved that. All in all a fine way to spend 3 hours. After getting back to our lodge I went for a swim and then we went to dinner and at a different local place in town. Dawna's rice & beans & pork was good but my baby back ribs were nothing to write about (even if I just did). And the ATM still didn't work.

Monday-2: Ate fruit in the room, checked out, and into town for a coffee. Tried the ATM but still not working. Headed eastward. Pulled off the highway at Belmopan to see about their bank/ATM. Found it, and it also didn't work. More of a game than a panic because we weren't out of Belizean money and it also seemed that US money was accepted everywhere at the standard/nominal exchange rate of 2 to 1. Had a taco-like thing from a stand near the bank that we tried in Belmopan. It, by the way, is the capital of Belize with a population of about 10,000. Belize city is the commercial center with like 50,000 folks. Pretty unpopulated country. In fact all of Belize has about the same number of people as the Mayan cities of Caracol and Tikal did so very long ago. Next stop was the Belize Zoo, highlighted in all the books for how it grew up as basically an animal hospital and has local animals, including birds, in natural settings. Strolled around looking at everything and seeing a large percentage of the residents. Hot and humid, but what else is new. We then headed southward to explore a new area taking a shortcut unpaved road that was in pretty good condition (and yes, we did it in 4-W drive and with extra care). Orchards, orchards, and more orchards. After 45 miles and a couple hours we got to our destination of Dangriga, a small village on the coast but still the largest one in southern Belize. Very rural and we stayed in a quite non-fancy, and quite inexpensive, guest house. Walked the town, people quite friendly (as usual), and ate at a book-recommended cafe. I had pretty good fish (snapper). Our room was tiny with only a standard double bed, but we slept fine what with a fan blowing at us and our ear plugs in.

Tuesday-2: Had breakfast at the same place we had had dinner and our egg dishes were good as was a sopophila(sp) like item, plus Dawna got them to give us some pulled pork that was left from the dinner menu the night before and it was quite tasty. We then drove a bit further south to Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary. Quite a jungle. Did a couple of hikes, one of which had trees identified. Walked slowly due to the heat but one still just sweats and sweats in the humid environment. Saw a fair number of birds and heard a lot we didn't see. Actually, the best bird viewing was when we sat at a camp site area to relax and have a drink of water and then just watched various birds doing their thing.

Mid afternoon and we drove to Belize City, using the long way rather than the shortcut just for a different set of scenery. Very good road and relatively scenic. Got to BC around 4 PM and

navigated to the part of town with some possible accommodations in what used to be stately British homes/mansions. First place we tried was now a residence rather than a guest house, second place didn't seem to exist, but the third place took us in and was very nice. A big room, fine wood, nice bathroom, etc. Took advantage of all this and then ate at the downstairs restaurant. Dawna has some excellent fish (snapper still) with a breaded crust made from a root of some sort, while I had spicy Jamaican pork that was only OK (spice hot but not a lot of flavor). Then a good sleep in our air conditioned environment.

Wednesday-2: Got up in our nice room and had fruit cocktail for breakfast plus coffee via the in-room coffee maker. Then went to the Car Rental Agency, which was about 4 miles out on the Northern Hiway. Probably spent 2 plus hours there. The fellow was very knowledgeable while of course looking after his own interests. I'll relegate the details of what took place to the Appendix.

One of the car people then drove us back to the center of town, also near our hotel, where we would catch the water taxi to Caye Caulker. Although it had been a tiring morning dealing with the car paperwork and wondering how much it would end up costing us eventually, we still were up to exploring Belize City a bit and did so, following a walk described in Lonely Planet. Did it slowly. Along the way stopped for lunch in a very very local place (also listed in LP) and had some quite fun stuff from some most enjoyable people. After that it was a walk to the hotel with a bit of window shopping along the way, got our bags, and went back to the water taxi place. Ended up on like the 3 PM water taxi. Belize City is a relatively grubby Caribbean sea side city but it had been fun to explore it a bit, checking things out, etc. Although it has a pretty bad reputation for crime we saw and felt nothing of concern (of course it was day light but still there just weren't groups wondering around causing trouble, etc, as near as we could tell).

The water taxi was an open boat that handles like 30 people and goes pretty darn fast. It started to drizzle as we got in and they pull out large tarps and you share holding them over your head. Of course once you get racing forward the wind from the boat's motion tries to pull the tarps away from you and the boat spray adds saltwater to the rainwater (drizzle only thank goodness). Quite a scene. The books had been very unclear about how long the ride was but after 45 minutes of bouncing on a hard bench you sure are ready to have it end. Grabbed our bags and walked to our accommodations – the Iguana Reef Inn.

Caye Caulker is the laid-back, small, island of the pair that all the tourists go to; with Ambergris Cave being the larger/main other island. No cars on CC for example, just golf carts and bikes. We had deliberately picked CC instead of the usual, and more active, AC. But we also deliberately picked the nicest place to stay on the Island and it was quite nice. All manner of appointments throughout our large room with two queen size beds and a tiled bathroom with a tub as well as a shower. Small eating table, frig, bright lights, AC, etc. A good choice.

Cleaned up, had a beer (we bought some at a nearby store), watched the sun set into the water, and then went to dinner. A rustic place wherein I had a quite reasonable piece of snapper. Walked the few blocks long main drag checking out the scene including many outfits selling tours (snorkel, dive, mainland, you name it). A good long sleep was then enjoyed.

Thursday-2: Continental breakfast came with the place and I sat in the outdoor bar area with coffee in hand staring at the blue water until joined by Dawna in a bit. Then it was a casual breakfast of fruit and sweet rolls and yogurt and cereal and more and more coffee. No hurry, man, when you are in this place.

Went the block or two to the main street and signed up for a snorkeling outing that would leave at 10:30. It would be a 3 hour deal while the other one, which actually went to a supposedly better spot) was a 6 hour deal with 1.5 hours of that on AC and we figured that was more than we really wanted. Our trip had 3 snorkel stops (as did the 6 hour one too, actually). There were 5 of us tourists and two of the locals/guides in the boat and both of them went in the water with us to point out things, and to be sure we were doing OK I suspect. Saw reasonable coral and quite a lot of fish. Dawna did quite well but also got plenty pooped and was ready to quit by the time it ended. One of the 3 stops was at a place where stingrays swarm as the guides feed them so you swim amongst them, and amongst large fish whose name I've forgotten and a few "mother sharks."

We pooped folks then went back to our room and cleaned up and rested and had some snacks to eat. By now I had picked up a book (The Da Vinci Code) from their lending library so I began to read it since that's rest enough for me. Next move was to walk along the shore to the bottom of the island, seeing some birds and just generally exploring. Couldn't make a loop back up the other side because didn't know if it did so and also the sun was setting (which we watched from a dock). Back to the room to cool off a bit and then to dinner. For the heck of it we had conch steaks that night and they were as tough as they had been in the Yucatan 30 years ago. Never learn I guess. Very nice weather with us sitting on a porch watching people wander the street, however, and a good ice cream from a shop afterwards.

Friday-2: A real lazy day with no activities planned since we decided not to upscope our ambitions and go on the 6-hour trip and it seemed that no one did a shorter trip that went to the most-likely-best fish viewing spot (Ho Chan Marine Reserve). So, I read my book with coffee and sea breezes, we had our relaxed breakfast in the same setting, and then we walked the short distance to the top of the island. There is actually a lot of island further north but a split with water running through it formed during one hurricane not a real long time ago and there is no way to get across. Guess no one wants to since it is just jungle "up there" but we would have explored it if easy to access. Hit the small local shops and even bought a few things. Fruit for lunch in the room. Relax/read/read. Then went walking down island again but on different paths/roads. We had seen a nice Iguana and a couple good birds right at our inn and a fellow there said one could see more at the dump, so that was our general target. Found it and some nice folks went to a lot of effort to show us a fine iguana, some herons, and a baby alligator. Having looked for eagles at a dump on Vancouver Island a couple months ago, I began to wonder if this dump excursion thing was going to become a habit. They have a small/new nature preserve on the island and we did it's short trails reading all the labels on the different flora.

Then the usual series of clean up, cool down, a drink, and dinner. This time Dawna had Lobster+Shrimp and I had seafood cannelloni. Good stuff although we still are not great lobster fans except when we have them at Kingsbury's. Our do nothing day had worked out fine. The people all over the Island were very friendly and would chat with us whenever we (read Dawna)

wanted to and being in no hurry, we chatted with them as well. Oh, in between our walk and our dinner, I did a swim just off our accommodations and saw some reasonable fish there too.

Saturday-2: During our walking around the prior day we had decided on a different route of heading home the next day, and bought airplane tickets from San Pedro (AC) to Belize International. So, this morning we had our breakfast, checked out, and took the water taxi to San Pedro, the main (only?) city (village) on AC. A half hour trip and no rain or sea spray but still kept one holding on what with the bumps and hard bench and wind in the face. At SP we left our bags at the taxi office (a stretch of that concept) and walked the town. Even watched a bit of a girl's basketball game. Outdoors, cement "floor", scoreboard, and a good crowd. Fun. It was a significantly larger than our village on CC but still small. Cars on the dirt streets so much dirtier and a cramped feeling. Took in the scene and Dawna even bought a bracelet at one place.

And we found a place that had Grouper, the fish I like so well in Florida. I had it in a garlic-butter sauce while Dawna had it in a batter and both were quite good. Got our bags, walked to the airport (a strange concept) and were there before 1 PM although our plane was at 2 PM. So, got on the 1 PM plane. Probably a 12 seater or so; a pilot but no co-pilot. Good views as he went to Belize City, landing at the domestic airport on a 2-bit runway. Four folks or so got off there and then a 5 minute flight to the International airport. Checked in way early and Dawna found a few more trinkets to bring home. I guess I forgot to mention that we/I bought a Mayan mask while in San Pedro to add to our general bunch of such things in our den.

Sat around the Belize Intl airport for quite awhile but at least it was air-conditioned. Also, there were some tables outside of a bar so had a beer and did a bunch of typing on this trip letter using my Palm Pilot and foldable keyboard. I had been concerned that our connection time in San Salvador was only a half hour but also felt the gates there were close together and there was a backup flight to SFO a bit later than our scheduled one. Plus, when I'd looked at things on the internet a few times I'd noticed that the plane from BC to SS seemed to often leave early. Sure enough, this time it left 15 minutes ahead of schedule so it got us to SS in plenty of time to catch our plane to SFO. Strange system. Neither flight was full and we thus had a window and aisle with no one between us, which makes for much nicer flying. However, it was still a pain since we'd been up all day and hot/sticky much of it and we were getting to SFO at 11 PM local or 1 AM in Belize. Actually after about an hour on the flight Dawna moved to an entirely empty row so we both had rows to ourselves and could stretch out a bit to rest.

Got through customs at SFO easily as no other planes come in at 11 PM. Unfortunately our communications with Dick Weaver had been unclear and he was waiting at home for us to call him while we were waiting there for him to show up. Eventually we called and learned of this and he did pick us up but it made for a darn late night/early evening return. Was glad I had decided to return on Saturday midnight rather than Sunday so had Sunday to get a bit caught up.

Summary: A good outing. Fantastic ruins and fun jungle walks. Enjoyable Caye and snorkeling and tiny villages. Lots of bird. Lots of CD burners in tiny places – high tech is upon us and the backpacking youth like to download their digital photos. Surprising number of Christian churches and schools (not all Catholic by any means). And, since English is the native language, because Belize was British Honduras, one could communicate with locals much better than in

most third world countries we've visited. We had almost no inconveniences from rain, which I think was very unusual for this time of year – makes up for just the opposite when we were in Vancouver Island a few months earlier.

Appendix: The Accident

We were on the way back from Carac01 on the nicely improved road but obviously (after the fact) going too fast for the conditions and were not in 4-wheel drive even though the car had it. Went over the top of a hill and headed down the other side when the washboard with sand on it made the car float and head towards the right shoulder. Dawna overcompensated and into the left ditch (there was no shoulder there) we went. It felt like being in a movie as the car crashed into the ditch brush and at least turned on its side but probably turned entirely over (sidewise) plus one fourth more. When it came to a stop we checked that both of us were OK but the drivers side (with Dawna in it) was in water. It was really surreal. We gradually got my (top side now) window open and both of our seat belts off and Dawna out through the window onto the side (highest point) of the car. I collected things that were floating in the car like our bag packs, her purse, a duffel bag, and put them onto the car "top" and she threw them to the bank of the ditch. I then climbed out. In the process I cut my hand. Lots of bugs biting us as we gathered our stuff and moved it up to the road. I even took a side mirror up that had been knocked off as we crashed thinking that would help us flag down help. We were soaked as was our stuff but we were feeling extremely lucky to have no real injuries and real stupid to have had this accident.

People stopped to help immediately and drove us like another 5 miles up (northward) the road where there was a hill they could drive up to a tower to get enough phone reception to use their cell phones. I called the Rental Agency and reported the accident and after he found out we were OK he mainly talked about getting us another car. I hadn't thought about that aspect of things. There was a workers camp, for a new (named Challilo) dam they are building, near there and we hung out at it for a couple hours having been told the boss would take us "home" after a meeting that some of our rescue folks were attending. In retrospect we probably could have caught/hitch-hiked a more timely ride and the couple hours were more like 3. During this time we tried to stay amused, tried to dry some items out, and reflected on the worse wreck either of us had ever been in. Sigh.

Eventually the boss did drop us at our accommodations on his way to San Ignacio. It was like 6:50 so we simply sat down and had dinner. Boy did the wine hit the spot that night. Meanwhile, a tow truck showed up that both brought us a new car, and paperwork to go into Guatemala, and headed out to get our wrecked car. We couldn't imagine how the young kid driving the truck could get our car out of the ditch by himself but also couldn't see how we could help. Turns out he only got it the next morning. After dinner we really examined the extent of the water damage wherein various things were wet that we hadn't realized. Emptied wallets and paperwork out and set up a drying spot on one of our two beds, hung lots of other things around the room, etc. and went to sleep. Next day we used the newly delivered car to continue our journey, after first talking to the car people on the telephone as well as to our VISA card folks, Lockheed Credit Union folks (who issued the card), etc. The thrust was to get it reported correctly so as to be set for claiming the costs "against" the credit card folks since they say they cover such things. A weird aspect of all this was that I couldn't get a claims number from VISA unless I did it by mail

(which would take a week to 10 days) or by Internet (which would be immediate but I didn't have internet access).

As noted, everything that was with us got wet but luckily our two main suitcases were not in the car but rather at our cabana since we were on day-2 of a 3-day stay. If it had been a day when we were between places and had everything in the car, what an additional painful story it would all be. I've already mentioned drying of paperwork (like money, passports, tour books, etc, etc, etc) and clothes. In addition there were the high-tech problems associated with water damage. My binoculars, our camera, and my Palm Pilot all refused to function. Dawna's binoculars actually worked. This was all inconvenient at differing levels with the lack of my nice binoculars probably being the most frustrating. However, I keep trying and also worked at drying things out via the car air conditioner and lamps at lodgings and gradually more and more things improved. One could watch the binoculars clear up as water droplets left the interior of the lenses day by day and a similar happening took place with the camera image. Plus, after a few days the Palm came to life gradually as well. By the end of the trip the only high-tech damage seems to be several functions of the camera that do not work; but who knows if they too will recover eventually (but they haven't). Another inconvenience was breaking my glasses while climbing out of the car (not during the crash and not the lenses just the "string" holding the lenses in place. Tried to get them fixed in San Ignacio and failed but bought some fishing leader and did a good enough fix myself to last the rest of trip.

The other item that will take awhile to settle out is the financial aspect of the accident. As always we waived the extra insurance on the rental car because their literature says they/VISA covers it. We had previously checked out that our car insurance in the US would not cover things in Belize. As I've noted, we informed VISA (and Lockheed) of the accident and basically were just told to fill out the claims forms when we got home. Meanwhile, the rental people wanted/required half of the money up front. It took a bit of effort to round up the money because our VISA limit at Lockheed was lower than Dawna thought and we didn't have our typical other major credit card with us because Citibank had recently switched from VISA to Mastercard, which we didn't care for, so we had cancelled it and ordered a new VISA from United Airlines but not received it yet. But with a call to the Lockheed folks we were able to work things out. The chap at the rental agency was quite knowledgeable in what all information we'd be needing like photos of the damaged car, an accident report, etc, etc. Plus I used his computer to get on the Internet and get a Claim Form from VISA. Now only time will tell how it all pans out. Of course the real keys are (a) we didn't get hurt, (b) it didn't spoil our vacation, and (c) we are to blame for the accident; so what comes of it is "the breaks." As of now (12/17) little has happened towards closure other than we've sent in the required forms and contacted both VISA and the Rental Agency via e-mail. Time to start using the telephone.