

# Hill Cumorah Expedition Team 2006

By Neil Steede

The 2006 expedition to Cumorah began with some ambiguity. We realized that obtaining entrance into the cave we have been attempting to open over the last three years was highly improbable. Moreover, the realization had come that the more we thought about Joseph Smith's experience of viewing the cave at Cumorah, we realized that these caves were not appropriate. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdry's vision witnessed that they observed what was described as a shallow cave. We knew that the caves we were investigating were very deep and connect with a myriad of other caves, therefore there were several problems. One, they were not shallow. Two, because of being connected with the network of caves inside the mountain there was a constant stream of humidity that would be very detrimental to the plates (while perhaps not the gold, definitely it would have adverse effects on the brass plates and other forms of media for writing).

At our Taste of Cumorah Exposition we stated several goals. One of those goals was outreach to one hundred converts. This goal was not obtained. Though several people are interested in what we are doing and several Book of Mormon's were handed out; no converts were obtained this year.

Within days of arrival we had two teams at the base camp. Each team was doing different explorations. These will be told of with other testimonies elsewhere on this website. Moreover, another couple went

to town and found a manuscript written by a doctor in Jalapa, and this will be shared in their testimony on the website as well.

My personal first steps were to contact the landowners Don Ascuncion and Don Julio, and well as the Mayor Alvero Rubio. We received immediate permission from Ascuncion to park on and cross over his land. Julio was not home though his wife assured us it would be okay; we told her we would be back later. The Mayor was out of town, so we made an appointment with the Mayor's wife to meet the next day to deliver the used clothing. The next day we handed the clothes to the Mayor's wife. We had prepared several PowerPoint slide shows. During our stay we were able to show these on four different occasions; The Mayor's home, Julio's home, Vincent's home, and the home of Moises. The CDs were each about 45 minutes long. The first dealt with artifacts from Cumorah, the second with Cumorah's location and items that were found on other Cumorah trips, the third was the Covenant Codex, and the fourth was the San Bartolo Murals. During the last two, we were given openings to testify to the validity of the Book of Mormon and the validity of the Native Americans knowing about Christ.

This year we had as many advances as we have ever experienced in the area of archaeological studies of Cumorah. One of our earliest archaeological discoveries was on the stela (standing inscribed stone) that we relocated last year. Upon visiting the stela we found some inscription on the front base of the marker. There is also inscription on

the backside and it is flaking off. We picked up some of the pieces, placed them on the obverse side of the marker where they belong, and we photographed them in situ for future reference. It was decided that the backside had been inscribed upon at least three times, possibly rendering it unreadable. The front side had flaked so badly that only the bottom line was readable. Photographs of the two sides are available here. The flaked pieces were collected and given to the Mayor to keep. While not immediately readable, much information could be collected from the immediate area surrounding the stela. The stela was erected on a seven-foot high platform. This platform measured thirty by thirty feet, and had an apron on the west-southwest face that was of the same size (see illustration). The construction of the platform was of chinked shale (readily abundant in the area). The longitude and latitude coordinates and magnetic orientation was recorded as illustrated in the drawing. After discussion it was suggested that the platform was a command platform for the valley below. From this particular vantage point one could observe troop movements and direct attacks and counter-attacks as needed. More discussion led to an observation of the how the battle might unfold in the valley below. As depicted in drawings, the east-end of the pass opens to a very large bowl-shaped valley at this point. One team member suggested that the other side of the valley directly south of the command platform should have a similar construction. Further discussion with another team member suggested that the command post

should be placed on the top of a smaller hill toward the center of the bowl-shaped valley. Observation of the smaller hill within the valley did reveal the distinct possibility of such a construction on the peak. These two points of construction would indicate that the stage for the final battle was set at this point. That is to say that these command centers would be used to coordinate the attacks of the military divisions. This revelation completely changes my previous viewpoints on exactly where and how the final battle occurred.

Further observation of the small hill inside the bowl seemed to imply that there were defenses built into the side of the hill. Once again this is only an educated guess. Only excavation will tell for sure. Notwithstanding, the discovery of these elements of the battlefield develops a much clearer picture of this final battle.

Because we were observing the entire region on a much larger scale to comprehend the particulars of battle movements, we consulted maps of the region at various times. At one point, a Quaker State Book Map was consulted. Only because of the particular layout of that book could I see that the City of Desolation (La Venta) and Quiotepec (West end of the pass) were within longitude minutes of the same latitude. This only becomes important when one tries to reconstruct the last days of the Nephite civilization. As one is reconstructing the final days of Nephite civilization and as one retraces the step-by-step fall back of the Nephites being pursued by the Lamanites, one realizes that the Nephites

were trapped in a gauntlet-like situation. In fact, for the first time I realized that a reference made by Mormon to a “narrow pass” was referring to a sand bar located in the middle of this gauntlet. For years I had lived in this area and yet I had not realized this detail and it makes a complete difference to my understanding of Book of Mormon geography. In a future paper I will be dealing with these geographical locations. The point of mentioning it here is that it was only through a moment of inspiration that my spiritual eyes were opened and I was able to comprehend the complexity of this problem for the first time. Thus, I include this as one of our obtained objectives from this expedition.

On previous expeditions we have gained much insight into the weaponry used during the Nephites and Jaredite final battles. As has been reported, we can classify these weapons into categories that give them definition as to which of the two battles they belong. In the case of the Nephite battle we can even identify the origin (Nephite or Lamanite) of the weaponry found. Because of this we can demonstrate that the Lamanite army was four to six times larger than the Nephite army was, just as reported in the Book of Mormon. Over the years we have also tested these weapons for traces of blood. We have found all of the weapons to test positive for blood. So, it would seem that further information on weaponry during this year’s expedition would not be useful. Somewhat surprisingly, we did not have a tenth of weapons presented to us as we have had the last three expeditions. This raises

several questions. Have the surface finds by the natives been depleted? Has our desire to not create a wholesale market for these weapons been achieved to the point that the natives are no longer bringing them to us? Or, have we learned enough about the weaponry that the Holy Spirit is now leading us to other aspects of the final battle period?

Answers to these questions were found during a series of interviews. It seems that the weapon finds along the ravines by the natives are as prolific as ever. However, since there is no demand created by wholesale purchasing of these artifacts, then there has been no driving desire by the natives to collect them. On the other hand, the natives brought us a large amount of pottery from two different sources. The first was pottery found through ravine erosion. And the second far larger group was pottery found in caves.

As described in previous expeditions, we know that the mountain is honeycombed with caves. Having gone to the same location for years we have developed the trust with the natives not only to show us their find from such caves, but to also have them show the caves to us for us to look through. Realizing that I am bias, I would still express my belief that the Holy Spirit has moved us into a new realm of discovery. We were able to photograph all of the pottery that was shown to us by the natives. Much of the pottery was Colonial Period (after the Spanish occupation). However, there were some very interesting pieces that were obviously pre-conquest (before the arrival of Cortez). The pottery

that we believe was from Book of Mormon times was almost exclusively Lamanite and Nephite origins. As previously demonstrated bits of Cholulan pottery have been found before. The importance of this is that a supplier for the Nephite was exposed. However, for the first time we see an abundance of common pottery. Much of this pottery could have been produced locally by the armies for their immediate use. This would mean that the pottery would actually be of local origin, whether Nephite or Lamanite. An exception to this rule was a large amount of Oaxacan Black pottery. At this time we do not know if this type of pottery is from Jaredite times or Nephite times. We were able to see some bits of Teotihuacan Fine-Orange Pottery and Teotihuacan Polychrome Pottery. Both of these types fall into the same time period and general geographic origin as the Cholulan Polychrome Pottery mentioned earlier. (Polychrome means multi-colored) All of the above implies that the Teotihuacan/Cholulan complex was supplying the Nephite army. Along with the Otumba (green) obsidian demonstrated in previous reports, show that the Nephites relied heavily on their northern neighbors for supplies.

A long standing (centuries old) relationship between the Lamanites and Teotihuacan plays an important role in our interpretation of the final battle. It is now known and accepted in the archaeological world that K'olich Yax Kuk Mo (Amalikhah) of Copan established southern Mayan relations with Teotihuacan. Copan's immense jade supply was almost

exclusively consumed by the Teotihuacan/Cholulan complex. Eventually, the trade and political alliance became so strong that Teotihuacan carried political clout in far more southern Mayan cities than Copan. Kaminaljuyu (Guatemala City), Quirogua, Tikal, Dos Pilas, El Mirador, and others were drawn into the “Copan Alliance.” All of the above cities mentioned, and more, are now known to have been forced into an alliance to destroy the Nephite nation. This is substantiated by the inscriptions from all of the locations mentioned as well as Calakmul. In fact, the Calakmul inscriptions also inform us of the Lamanite troop advancements beyond Zarahemla (Yaxchilan). The point of all of the above is that the Nephites did not stand a chance. Where the Nephites thought they would be fighting possibly three Lamanite armies, they were in fact fighting ten to fifteen (we are using the terminology “army” referring to the total amount of fighting men from any one given city). The complexity of this whole issue is now understood much better by us because of the pottery samples we were able to observe.

We realize that the complexity of the situations described above could cause some dismay among the readers of this report. We are aware that the dismay arises from the lack of archaeological background used to support the views given. We assure the reader that we are not trying to be mystical, condescending, or evasive in our explanation of the new material gathered on this expedition. However, if not conveyed as expressed above, then the whole story is not stated. Therefore, I do not

apologize for the complexity of the statements. If the previous paragraph seems overwhelming then we ask you to prayerfully review the information presented so that the Spirit can compensate for our verbal shortcomings.

Finally, to tie all of the archaeological evidence together, we must remark that the geographical distribution of archaeological sites, both city locations as well as individual defensive positions help us develop a greater comprehension of the final days of the Nephites. The advantages of this are multiple. We will enumerate a few in the following sentences. First, small curious statements such as those made by Mormon concerning the unification of Gadianton robbers with the Lamanites now make much more sense. Second, it seemed incomprehensible that the Lamanites first refused to fight the Nephites and then attack with such sizable numbers until we add the powerhouse of Teotihuacan into the equation. Three, though normally not considered to be of great importance to Book of Mormon scholars, the 2006 Expedition made Mormon's recitation of their defensive withdrawal from Nephite Territory not only comprehensible but necessary. By this we mean if he had not recited those maneuvers we would not understand the immensely strong evidence for Hill Cumorah's location today, as well as specialized terminology used (i.e. narrow pass).

Obviously, we have archaeological evidences such as inscriptions that have not yet born fruit because of the necessary steps that must be taken to study and translate. Inscriptions on both sides of the stela need to be addressed as well as some incised pottery. The inscription of the Proclamation Tablet seems to have more promise at this time. However, until this is verified, we will not discuss this at length. We do have photographs of a cast pottery piece that also looks promising. Once again, time will tell.

As most readers know, I do not have a tendency to mix archaeological material with spiritual material. However, just as in my 2005 Expedition testimony, I must also include such in this testimony. On the morning of April 5, 2006 our group broke into several teams to complete tasks that had been assigned. During the whole two weeks we spent in the Jalapa area I had planned to have a few moments of prayerful solitude and had not yet had time to accomplish this. The opportunity finally presented itself that morning. I let the team coordinator know that I was going to take a walk to have a prayerful reflection, and that I would be out of radio contact for approximately half an hour. Upon arrival at my destination, I sat on the edge of ravine and gave several prayers and reflected on what we had learned during this year's expedition. I realized that I had misquoted the Book of Mormon several times to the natives as I explained what we were looking for on the hill. For example, to the Mayor I had referred to both

armies as being Maya and referred to the Nephite army as being the good guys and the Lamanite army as being the bad guys. Though I knew this was somewhat incorrect in some ways because Mormon tells us that in some ways the Nephites had become more corrupt than the Lamanites, but I was trying to simplify the story for the listener. Over the years I have told the story innumerable times to a multitude of colleagues and as I have done this I have constantly expressed the Nephites as the good guys and the Lamanites as the bad guys. I have done this so often that I subconsciously think of the armies with the titles of good guys and bad guys. The reason I explain all of this to the reader is because of what I experienced as I sat on the edge of the ravine. I believe that because of the time I have spent in the research and because of the amount of archaeological details that have been made clear to me over the years that the following experience was to help me refocus.

While meditating and reflecting, a scene opened before me. I immediately understand that I am now at the same ravine almost four hundred years after Christ. That is to say I have gone back in time. I was immediately given to understand that I am standing among my fellow Nephites looking to the east toward the opposite edge of the ravine and I see a hoard as numerous as ants coming over the top of the ravine. I immediately recognize them as Lamanites. Among hair arrangements were many ponytails—all backward falling. There were several that had a hair bun arranged over the occipital lobe of the head.

But, one had that same hair bun arrangement on the top of the head. The hair buns were arranged in various styles. Some had arrangements of three feathers through the bun with the point shooting upwards and the feathers draping over the neck and shoulder. Some had feathers in groups of four and five arranged in a flat fan off the back of the hair bun so that the feathers maintained the same plane of the top of the head. Others had feathers mounted in the hair bun in a vertical fan that appeared to crown the head when viewed from a profile side. While yet others had completely covered the hair bun with down feathers and then placed the feathers in various arrangements with the down ball as a base. All of them were extremely colorful. Many of them had the exact appearance as shown in the Cacaxtla Murals. Most of the warriors were painted totally black, though the paint had an appearance of being old and scaling. However, many of them had a band of lighter colored paint, some green, some yellow, some blue, all of them encircling the eyes. A few others had the same color as a band around the arms. Most of the hands were completely filthy with soil and dried blood on the arms was flaking off. In some places the oil-based body paint was flaking off as well. There appeared to be no jewelry on any of the warriors. Several had jaguar pelts draped over the shoulder with the paws still intact on the pelt. Several of them wore a loose rough cloth tunic with arms completely open and others were stitched up the seam

from the waist to the armpit. Several had leather strips banded on the arms and wrists.

One warrior had a pair of tight fitting stitched white shorts with loops that was cinched with a cord at the waist. The interesting thing about the shorts was that it was a woven textile and it was tight fitting with a square-cut fringe. It was arranged with about an inch and a half flap of fabric and then about a half-inch flap cut out. Many had loincloths, however the loincloth was not a simple small square patch over the loin area, but more the size of hand towel coverage where the sides where overlapped. Many wore some type of dark cloth as a girdle type covering over the loin area. A few had bands below the knees that had ornamentation or feathers hanging from them.

Many of the warriors were barefoot with thickly callused soles on the feet. But, some had above-ankle boots. While I do not recall there being a sole on them I do remember that many of them had lacing. Some were laced tight with four or five eyelets. One or two had leggings that went from the boot to the knee, and a couple had lacing that went up to the knee.

Nephite garb was essentially the same with the following exceptions: there were far more eagle feathers then colorful feathers in the arrangements. There were no Quetzal feathers at all. I was given to know that the lack of Quetzal feathers meant that there were no true believers in the Quetzal religion (Christian) and that the eagle feathers

were for those who claimed a belief but did not seek the fullness of the truth of spiritual things. Nephite faces also had war paint used as stripes on the face but the stripes were like finger stripes on the cheeks and forehead. I was given to understand that the Lamanites used the paint to create a mask and hide what they were doing for they seemed understand on some level that what they were doing was wrong. As opposed to the Nephite reason for face paint seemed to be a glory in the battle. Among the Nephites I did see some adornment such as ear plugs, lip plugs and nose plugs. But, there were not prolific in any sense of the word as it is displayed in murals.

I saw the Lamanites ruthlessly cutting down my brethren and was abhorred by the bloodiness of the slaughter. I had never imagined it so horrific. To actually see the carnage is quite different than simply talking about it millennia later. I can not express how literally sick I was at not only the nastiness and stench of the battle itself, but the ghoulishness literally choked me. I do not wish to dwell on all the details of the carnage, but I do wish to recount the three murders that I witnessed. The first murder was that of a Nephite who was killed by the Lamanites. My comrade had been wounded and the Lamanites had caught him. They were questioning him and torturing him while questioning him. And then, since he didn't know any information, they simply slit him open, disemboweling him and allowed him to bleed to

death while he was conscience. My abhorrence was only next to his as he views himself bleeding to death while the Lamanites laugh.

Shortly following this I saw a wounded Lamanite among his brethren begging for help from his comrades. His fellow Lamanites could see that there was no repairing his wounds, and in fact that he would be a burden to care for. The wounded Lamanite was begging for his life when without a word, one of the more powerful Lamanites stepped forward and ran the begging comrade through with his obsidian blade. As he withdrew the blade, the powerful one turned to his Lamanite comrades and they all laughed as the fellow Lamanite died. With total shock and abhorrence I turned away from the scene with a knot in my throat.

Turning to my fellow Nephites, and I saw several Nephites gathered around one of their comrades who had fallen mortally wounded, and as he also begged for his life, one of the Nephites bashed in his forehead with a stone ax. With the force of the blow, the blood splattered with such violence that the executioner was drenched in blood. He looked down at himself and being completely drenched in the blood of his comrade he held out his arms and turned toward his companions wearing the blood of his brother as a banner of his blood lust. All three of them laughed. At this moment I understood for the first time that there was not only a war for the survival of a civilization, but that the hatred of these opposing armies was so complete that there

was only a total lust for murder; a total lust human destruction; a total lust for evil whose only source could be Satan.

Now, for the first time, I understood how stupid it was for me to try to utilize terms such as good guys and bad guys, even in trying to simplify the story. The story was even simpler than that—it was complete murderous lust. At this moment I am so sickened that I can feel the bile in my throat, my legs are weak, I can not feel my arms and again I turn away to once again face my enemy—the Lamanites. As I do, one extremely powerful Lamanite who is finishing off a comrade of mine, his powerful forearms bulging with veins that are glistening with the spilled blood of his victim, raises himself and turns to look at me. I then realized there was no difference between the Lamanites and the Nephites.

Until this moment, no one in this scene has looked me directly in the eye, but the Lord has not yet finished teaching me. Now, the gaze of this powerful Lamanite falls upon me and I know that he has made a conscious decision that I am the next victim. In this fleeting moment I can see the darkness of his eyes. There is no spark of light there for the adversary has complete control. In that moment, I knew that I was going to die and there was such a total sinking feeling in my soul that I whimpered, “Enough,” almost as though I wished the Lamanite could hear me. I was not speaking to God for I am a Nephite and had turned away from God. So at this lowest point, at the moment of death, I had

no where to turn. There was nothing. I was witnessing the empty and harrowing experience of facing death without God and without hope. At this moment, I have the first pangs of remorse, but alas not repentance, in that I realize that our pride has brought us to this abyss of darkness. Here the scene ended. It dissipated before my eyes and once again I was looking at a bare ravine.

The ninety plus degree wind blew into my face and I shivered for I was still deathly cold from my fear and brush with death. I sat for several moments and contemplated what I had just witnessed, not so much in disbelief as in shock. Still finding myself shivering I was able to find strength to stand up and shakingly took several steps toward the barbed-wire fence that I had crossed to find this location. I stood steadying myself for several moments while I tried to stop shaking before I crossed the fence. I turned the radio and informed the coordinator that I was now on my way back. Even as I spoke I realized that my voice was completely hoarse. I don't know why for I don't recall screaming or making any sounds, but yet I could barely speak. And, as I am setting this down in print three days later, my throat is still sore. It took me five attempts to make it across the barbed wire fence that an hour before I easily crossed.

As I walked towards the parked vehicles that were still out of view I found myself constantly staggering. This seemed to be from numbness in my legs as well as my arms. I could still feel the coldness in them

though they were not asleep. Every two or three breaths my chest would have to shiver. I was totally relieved to break over the crest of the hill and see our modern vehicles for it was reassurance that I was back. I begin walking through the field to make it to the vehicles and I slipped and rolled off a seven to eight foot drop to the path below. Although I was embarrassed I was not hurt, and all I could think was I could not wait to be among my brethren again. I finally made it to the vehicles. My voice and demeanor were noticeably changed, but I was so comforted to be among my brothers and sisters.

I can only thank the Lord for loving me enough to allow me to have this experience and yet remain in tact, thus allowing me a much fuller comprehension of what actually happened at the very site which we explore.

Thus now armed with a much larger array of archaeological evidence than ever before, and armed with an unimaginable insight I believe that our team is much closer to becoming the tool that God needs to have in place for his final day revelations.