

Belizean Studies

Volume 27, No. 2 November, 2005

Special Issue

Colonialism and Nature in Belize



S
t
J
o
h
n
,
S
C
h
o
l
e
e
e



The Cockscomb in the Colonial Present

Joel Wainwright - Killam Research Fellow University of British Columbia

Christine Ageton - Deputy Director New Mexico Rural Water Association

Introduction

On a hot morning in October 1997, a group of Mopan Maya women from the community of Maya Center in the Stann Creek District blockaded the only entrance to the world's only jaguar reserve, the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary (CBWS). Though accounts of who closed the road and for how long vary, the political rationale for the demonstration is clear. The Belize Audubon Society (BAS), the non-governmental conservation organization responsible for governing the CBWS since 1984, had recently fired the Sanctuary Director, a respected Maya man who was then Maya Center's Village Council Chairman. BAS had also announced plans to begin collecting entrance fees in the Sanctuary proper, rather than at the Maya Women's Cooperative Building, leaving villagers with less park fee oversight. They felt that only a local director could protect their interests—such as the 10% surcharge on entrance fees paid to the village, employment at the Sanctuary, and tourism service concessions. Though access to the Sanctuary was blocked for only a few hours, the BAS agreed to continue collecting the entrance fees at the Craft Cooperative's building.

At the heart of the dispute that fomented the demonstration as well as the very act of

closing the road - lie different conceptions of the geography and meaning of the Cockscomb as a *place*. At one level, this conflict started on January 1, 1976, when a group of Mopan Maya families from San Antonio settled at the entrance to the Cockscomb and named their new community 'Maya Center.' Drawn by the fine soils and abundant wild game in the nearby Cockscomb Basin, the Maya foresaw excellent prospects in their new community. When a sawmill was erected at Quam Bank in 1978, several miles off the southern highway (at the present site of the BAS park ranger station), four Maya families were drawn by the promise of seasonal employment to move into the Basin. But after an American biologist studied the jaguars in the Cockscomb - Basin - and successfully lobbied the Government of Belize to preserve the Cockscomb the Mayas were expelled from Quam Bank. These places have been remade over the past twenty-one years, their natures redefined and the geographies of power renegotiated. The struggles over nature and space are clearly intertwined: as one of the villagers explained years after the protest, if the BAS does not respect the wishes of Maya Center in its management of the CBWS, "We can always shut the road again."²

²This and all quotations from Maya Center recorded in 2001 by Ageton (for details on methodology, see Ageton, 2001).

¹Corresponding author: jdw@geog.ubc.ca

In this sense, the dispute that caused the demonstration is a struggle over the distribution of benefits of a conservation area since the 1980s. Yet at another level, the dispute points to underlying processes of place-making and conceptions of a community's relation to a landscape. The road-closing, we argue, is grounded in broader struggles over power, nature, and different ways of conceiving of the relationship between a place and history. The struggle over the road raises several questions that, although they may appear mundane, prove to be quite complex: where are the Cockscomb and Maya Center? How are they defined as places and in relation to one another? How has the CBWS come to be seen as a place that is at once *natural* and *national*?

To answer these questions we draw from a theoretical literature on nature and colonialism (cf. Braun, 2000; Wainwright, 2003) to rethink the nature and temporality of the Cockscomb as a *place*. The Cockscomb, we argue, is not timeless. It has a history—and not only in the sense of a past that took place there. Rather the place as such, its being *made into a place*, has a history. The history of this place, we argue, is bound up with legacies of representing the Cockscomb as a space of nature, the insertion of this space into capitalist networks, and the production of territory through state practices. While these historical processes are rooted fundamentally in the experience of British colonialism, they continue into the present.

Moreover, we argue that the 'nature' of the Cockscomb is not strictly natural. It is produced as an effect of an ensemble of colonial discourses, conservation biology studies, capitalist social relations,

ecotourism businesses and park co-management. In other words, the nature of the Cockscomb is an intensely *social* affair. Thus, to understand the local conflicts over this particular environment, we have to first take apart the "historical and cultural practices by which the 'inert objectness' of nature was constructed and new domains of economic and political calculation brought into being" (Braun, 2000: 13). We aim to examine some of these practices by considering the overlapping and contested meanings of the space of Maya Center and the Cockscomb. In so doing, we highlight how this space and its relation to the state and the Maya people who live in this area has been framed in ways that reiterate colonial views and practices. From the broad history of events that have shaped the Cockscomb, we focus on three key episodes, beginning with its 'discovery'.

I. The Cockscomb—*discovered*

Strange as it may seem in a colony so old, and only eighteen days from England, the interior is less known than Central Africa.

J. Bellamy, 1888: 552

Just as historical events are said to 'enter history,' so too do regions, boundaries, and territories become geographical. The blank spaces on maps are filled in; the undifferentiated and open field of the world's space is divided, described, and named. Thus do we come to have particular places. The Cockscomb became geographically fixed—it came to be known as a particular place with certain geographical qualities in the last quarter of the 19th century. This is not to say that the trees, mountains, and jaguars that the Cockscomb is famous for today did not exist before the 19th century—surely they

did. But these things were not recognized, discerned, and named as a place until an intensive effort was made to know and define the area. Its mountains, rocks, plants, and rivers (the jaguars came much later) were not yet collectively assembled and known as the Cockscomb.

This process of defining the Cockscomb was thus an historical process, and a thoroughly colonial one in two senses. First, the British colonial state was instrumental to the process through which this place came to be the Cockscomb. Between 1879 and 1928, the colonial state sponsored no less than five expeditions in the region; even the Governor, Queen Victoria's personal representative and the head of the Colonial Government, participated in one expedition. But what explains the investments made by the state in these numerous expeditions? What explains the obsession with these mountains? Why would such a space need to be known and mapped by the state?

This brings us to the second sense in which the 'discovery' - more accurately, the *production* of the Cockscomb was a colonial affair. The production of the geographical knowledge that discerned this place was driven by colonial desires: to locate resources, map the interior, and settle territory. These desires could perhaps be explained by a theory of state interests. Clearly, the colonial government had an interest in resource development, since it was through the flow of resources - exporting timber to England and the USA and importing food and clothing from England that the state generated its revenues and justified the Colony's political existence. Putting the territory to work in this way

required efficient British government: as late as 1903, Belize was ruled by less than one hundred state officials, nearly all of them British men.³ Vastly outnumbered and uncertain of their hegemony, these state agents enhanced their power through an acute knowledge of the territory's spaces. Thus, a key aim of colonial expeditions was to settle the blank spaces on the map, to fill in the state's geographical knowledge (in Bellamy's words) of "the interior"—that which lies interior to the Colony's very uncertain territorial boundaries. This goal was carried out by developing a form of knowledge that was at once geographical and geological, political and territorializing.

The mountains of the Cockscomb had long served as references for Maya, Spanish, and British sailors. But in the last quarter of the 19th century, the place assumed new forms and came to be known and defined through a series of European 'scientific expeditions.' The Colonial Secretary Fowler passed near the area on his expedition of 1879 (Fowler, 1879) and the German geographer Karl Sapper wrote about the Cockscomb in 1889 (Grant, 1929: 143). In the first systematic resource survey of the colony, Morris wrote of the Cockscomb Mountains: "from the extent of country covered by them, as well as from their picturesque outline, especially as seen at sunset from the sea, they fully redeem the colony of the imputation of flatness so often brought against it" (1883: 9). Morris's study includes no map, but only a modest line sketch of the range's profile (see Figure 1).

Apart from these expeditions, the region had been visited by logging teams in the 1880s, and surely earlier.⁴ Yet notwithstanding these many visitors, the spaces, rocks, and peaks had not been carefully described by the British. The

³According to the Blue Books available in the Archives of Belize.

production of the Cockscomb as a place thus began in earnest with the Expedition of April, 1888. An expedition party comprised of six British men (assisted by no less than fifteen 'Carib' boatmen and carriers) hiked within distance of the Cockscomb range where they sketched and named the mountains. Upon returning to the Government House in Belize City after the expedition, the Governor enthusiastically dashed off this dispatch to the Colonial Office:

I have only just returned from the Expedition to the *hitherto unknown* mountain ranges of the Coscombes [sic] and am unable to give Your Lordship, before the mail leaves, all the details I would wish respecting a journey which has proved as rapid as it has been successfully throughout. I will therefore confine myself to the statement that a careful and thorough survey of this important range has disclosed the fact that from a climate as well as from an agricultural point of view, some of the most valuable land in this Colony has been *rendered accessible* which many old preconceived notions respecting the dangers attending any exploration of these mountains have been shown to be without foundation (1888, our italics).⁵

The expedition was thus framed as an opportunity for a "thorough survey" that measured the *value* of this region by opening it for study and speculation.

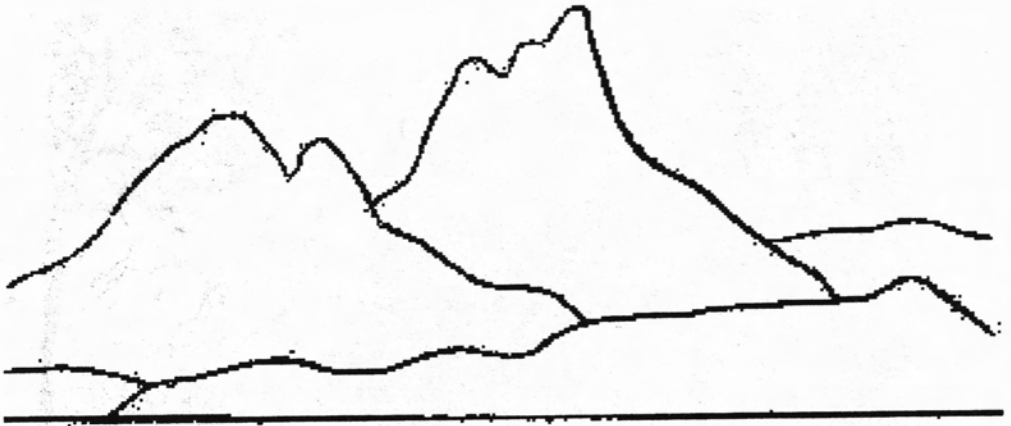
Bellamy's report on the

These are to speak only of European visitors. During the Classic period, the area known today as the Cockscomb was densely settled by the ancient Maya; at least four settlements have been found within the CBWS. The area was probably a center for the production of granite grinding stones (Lumb, 1996: 9).

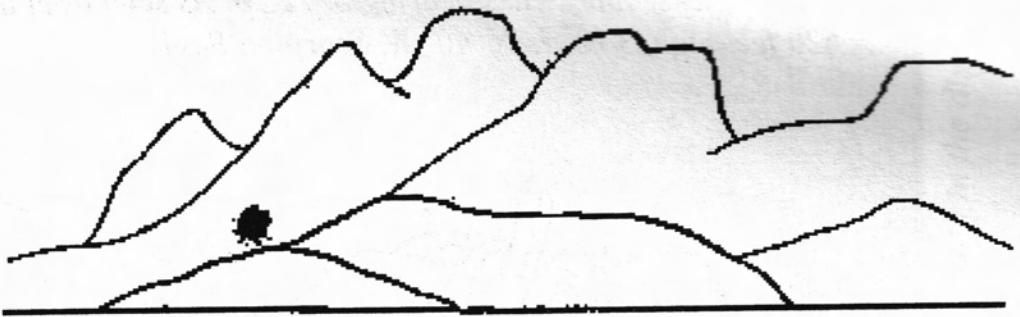
"Expedition to the Cockscomb Mountains" was subsequently published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* (Bellamy, 1889). The importance of this paper lies in the fact that it is the first substantive text that attempts to define and describe the Cockscomb within colonial discourse. Bellamy's text does not fall neatly into a genre. It is at once a travel narrative, scientific paper, development prospectus, and the official report of a state-sponsored expedition. Like all travel narrative, the text's structure is essential temporal, with a summary of findings and the events of each day (movements, sights, and travails). Woven into this chronology are details that lend the text its credibility as a *scientific* report. The writing carries the pretentious and weighty tone one expects of a colonial report, and yet with the exacting and detailed qualities of a scientific paper. Consider the paper's lengthy opening sentence:

Having been selected by Governor Goldsworthy of British Honduras to accompany his exploring party to the Cockscomb Mountains to survey and report on the geological and botanical features of that hitherto unexplored district, I left Mullins river on April 3rd, 1888, in my sailing boat, and joining Dr. Gabb at North Stann Creek, at North Stann Creek, we proceeded together down the coast for the mouth of South Stann Creek which we reached about 8PM, guided by camp fires of the Carib porters who had preceded us with baggage

An internal reply is recorded in the Colonial Office's Minutes: "The Governor has christened the ... highest of the Cockscomb Mountains ... Victoria. ... He asks that the loyal cheer which greeted the naming ... may be brought to the notice of Her Majesty. But he did not send any phonograph of it..." (Anon, 1888).



(a)



(b)

OUTLINE SKETCH OF THE COCKSCOMB MOUNTAINS, BRITISH HONDURAS,
(HIGHEST PEAK ABOUT 4,000 FEET)

- (a) As seen from Serpon Sugar Estate, near All Pines.
- (b) As seen from the sea off Point Placencia. The low coast ranges in the foreground.

Figure 1: Morris's 1883 Sketch of the Cockscomb Mountains

production of the Cockscomb as a place thus began in earnest with the Expedition of April, 1888. An expedition party comprised of six British men (assisted by no less than fifteen 'Carib' boatmen and carriers) hiked within distance of the Cockscomb range where they sketched and named the mountains. Upon returning to the Government House in Belize City after the expedition, the Governor enthusiastically dashed off this dispatch to the Colonial Office:

I have only just returned from the Expedition to the *hitherto unknown* mountain ranges of the Coscombes [sic] and am unable to give Your Lordship, before the mail leaves, all the details I would wish respecting a journey which has proved as rapid as it has been successfully throughout. I will therefore confine myself to the statement that a careful and thorough survey of this important range has disclosed the fact that from a climate as well as from an agricultural point of view, some of the most valuable land in this Colony has been *rendered accessible* which many old preconceived notions respecting the dangers attending any exploration of these mountains have been shown to be without foundation (1888, our italics).⁵

The expedition was thus framed as an opportunity for a "thorough survey" that measured the *value* of this region by opening it for study and speculation.

Bellamy's report on the

"Expedition to the Cockscomb Mountains" was subsequently published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* (Bellamy, 1889). The importance of this paper lies in the fact that it is the first substantive text that attempts to define and describe the Cockscomb within colonial discourse. Bellamy's text does not fall neatly into a genre. It is at once a travel narrative, scientific paper, development prospectus, and the official report of a state-sponsored expedition. Like all travel narrative, the text's structure is essential temporal, with a summary of findings and the events of each day (movements, sights, and travails). Woven into this chronology are details that lend the text its credibility as a *scientific* report. The writing carries the pretentious and weighty tone one expects of a colonial report, and yet with the exacting and detailed qualities of a scientific paper. Consider the paper's lengthy opening sentence:

Having been selected by Governor Goldsworthy of British Honduras to accompany his exploring party to the Cockscomb Mountains to survey and report on the geological and botanical features of that hitherto unexplored district, I left Mullins river on April 3rd, 1888, in my sailing boat, and joining Dr. Gabb at North Stann Creek, at North Stann Creek, we proceeded together down the coast for the mouth of South Stann Creek which we reached about 8PM, guided by camp fires of the Carib porters who had preceded us with baggage

These are to speak only of European visitors. During the Classic period, the area known today as the Cockscomb was densely settled by the ancient Maya; at least four settlements have been found within the CBWS. The area was probably a center for the production of granite grinding stones (Lumb, 1996: 9).

An internal reply is recorded in the Colonial Office's Minutes: "The Governor has christened the ... highest of the Cockscomb Mountains ... Victoria. ... He asks that the loyal cheer which greeted the naming ... may be brought to the notice of Her Majesty. But he did not send any phonograph of it..." (Anon, 1888).

and provisions (542).

En passant Bellamy thus defines the purpose of the expedition: “to survey and report on the geological and botanical features of that hitherto unexplored district.” The exact notation of the dates and times in this sentence foreshadows one of the major themes of the text, that of defining this space scientifically. Bellamy provides painstaking notes, detailing the times and bearings of occurrences and sightings, thus allowing the reader to follow the party's steps during the sixteen-day journey. This tone reflects a desire to produce a geography of particulars, a desire to nail down every detail about the terrain, one's movements, and relative positions. These are the tools needed to fix this place as a geographical object.

Bellamy's pedantic records also reflect one of the underlying purposes (or at least the justification) of the expedition: to explore and document the region's forest and soil resources. He collects potentially useful specimens and occasionally 'prospects' for minerals, particularly gold and silver). Approaching the Cockscomb range from the east, Bellamy notes that “there is not much big timber...[, but the river] banks would make excellent sites for cacao and coffee plantations” (545-5). He elaborates his vision of the Cockscomb:

The mountain ... district we had explored ... had never been visited, and had always been enveloped in a cloud of mystery. ... The one thing wanting is a good road, and if that were made ... much of the land in its vicinity would be taken up for cacao and coffee plantations, for which it is particularly adapted, but up til now the Government seems to have done nothing to encourage immigration.

... [T]here is considerable mineral wealth, and ... it would pay to have it thoroughly prospected. The probability is that gold will be found on the southern slopes of the mountains.... (551).

We find here three elements of this discourse combined in a synthesis of colonial desires. The expedition was justified through a discourse of discovery (to “explore” an area that had “never been visited”), the pursuit of scientific knowledge (piercing the “cloud of mystery”), and facilitating capital investment (“wealth”... “it would pay”). Herein lies a distinctive place, firmly demarcated within the colonial territory and open for business.

These three aims are articulated with a particular fascination with the colonial state's *vertical* resources. With the development of geology as a discipline and discourse in the late 1800s, the earth's very substratum “became a new 'frontier' for capital, as the relentless search for profit seized upon the ... newly intelligible domains” (Braun, 2000: 25). In Belize as in many other colonies, this 'vertical territory' was first examined by colonial state officials dressed in scientific garb. In this way, geology and government collaborated to open up “a space simultaneously epistemological and geographical that could be incorporated into forms of political rationality” (Ibid., 28).

The importance of the Cockscomb's verticality was not limited to the gold that Bellamy sought in the Cockscomb's southern substratum. As his report makes plain, the driving desire to conquer this place was generated by the very altitudes of the Cockscomb's peaks. Were the Cockscomb not seen as the home of the tallest mountains in the Colony's territory, the Governor would

never have sweated his way along on the expedition. The desire to overcome these giants—driven subconsciously by their phallic association—was satisfied by the act of *naming* each mountain after members of the expedition party. This was practiced with an obsession for hierarchies of height and rank: the taller the mountain, the more senior the rank its namesake. The relatively modest mountains in the range were thus named for the subalterns in the party, and the second-tallest mountain became 'Goldsworthy Peak.' Governor Goldsworthy himself did not succeed in reaching his Peak; he stood on a hill at a distance, close enough to oversee the ritual cheer and oath-taking when the tallest mountain in the range was named after Queen Victoria. When later expeditions discovered that this mountain was not, in fact, as tall as one of the others in the range, 'Victoria's Peak' was moved so as to keep the territory under her commanding view.

There are no mountains in the Cockscomb range named for the Garifuna and Q'eqchi' Maya porters that carried the British team to these peaks.

Visualizing the Cockscomb

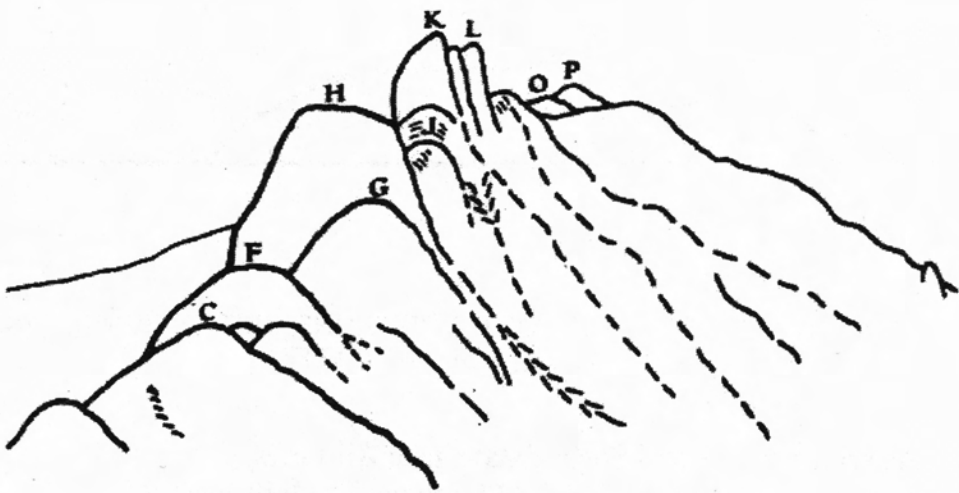
The making of place always requires visual aids, such as Bellamy's sketch of the Cockscomb (see Figure 2 on p. 41). Bellamy's hand-drawn sketch of the Cockscomb range emphasizes the range's vertical rise by representing a row of even peaks, rising from a jungle valley into the clouds. His sketch is realist insofar as it attends to details of the shapes of mountains (compare with Figure 1 on p. 40) and the distinct tree species in the foreground. Individual leaves can be made out easily, but also mountain ridges. Yet his sketch remains equally a romantic portrayal, composed with

a eye for a balance of shades of light and scales: the dark, bent trees on each side draw the viewer's eyes toward the light center of the image, where the Cockscombs rise to the heavens. Although no human subjects are placed in the frame, the sketch nonetheless produces the sense that this is a human landscape: the valley below opens with an inviting vista and we learn from the caption that this view was "seen from a hill ... 3 hours N[orth] ... of Scorpion Bank." The image thus produces a sense of place in part by *placing itself*.

In 1928 a second round of expeditions ventured to the Cockscomb, in large part to produce new representations of this place: more-rigorously surveyed maps, geological diagrams, and photographs. These expeditions shared much in common with Bellamy's. They were also backed by the colonial state (the larger 1928 expedition was led by the two senior officials of the recently-established Forest Department, Oliphant and Stevenson); they revisited the same peaks; and they shared the twin aims of scientifically describing the territory and naming mountain—sin Oliphant and Stevenson's case, by giving 'Victoria Peak' an upgrade (1929: 135). There is, however, a notable shift in tone between the Bellamy's report and Oliphant and Stevenson's. Whereas the former is mainly concerned with describing the impressions of the landscape and speculating on its potential riches, the latter studiously focus on what they *measure*. Their only comment about geological wealth is: "No indication was observed ... of the presence of any mineral in paying quantity" (134). Their report is no more or less detailed, but the observations are organized more narrowly around the problem of potential development. They



Figure 2: Outline of Cockscomb Peaks bearing S. 72° W. As seen from a hill 620 feet high, 3 hours N. 40° W. Scorpion Bank.



Westwards from B (Hill of Pines)

Figure 3: Sketch of the Cockscomb from the 1888 Expedition

explain their purpose as analyzing the Cockscomb's "possibilities for forest development [and] agricultural settlement" (to which they add, anxiously: "While we were naturally desirous of reaching the highest point, the expedition was not intended as a mountain-climbing 'stunt'") (123). Noting the presence of "deep fertile loam," they wonder that "this obviously fertile valley has never been seriously considered as a potential site for agricultural expansion" (133).

The shift in tone can also be sensed by comparing their visual representation of the Cockscomb. In contrast to Bellamy's romantic portrayal, Oliphant and Stevenson's sketch of the Cockscombs focuses exclusively on the relative altitudes of the mountains, with neither shading nor vegetation (see Figure 3 on p. 41). This hand-drawn image abstracts the mountains precisely to avoid a subjective human touch; rather than fill in the blank space on the page, de-emphasized areas are left white and unknown mountain planes are drawn with dotted lines. Armed now with cameras (undoubtedly the first to be aimed at the Cockscombs) the diagram of the range is complemented by a series of low-resolution, misty photographs of each peak (e.g., Figure 4 on p. 42). If these black-and-white photographs fail to produce the same effect as Bellamy's drawing, they cannot be doubted for their accuracy and objectivity. With simplicity if not grace, they document the arrival of British scientists to the Cockscomb. Taken together, the photos, maps, and diagrams provide an ostensibly 'objective' view of this space, but it is one that is represented, as it were, from nowhere in particular. The definite position of each peak is settled in a more rigorous and absolute

sense of global space, with the effect of situating the Cockscomb more concretely within known territory.

Perhaps the only definite effect of these expeditions was to open the area for more extensive logging. The Cockscomb forest was logged intensively and continuously between the 1920s (when the first tractors were used to haul mahogany out) until 1961, when the forest was devastated by Hurricane Hattie. Logging resumed in 1970 and continued (with considerable Maya labor) until 1984, when the last logging concession was granted for the Cockscomb. The meaning and purpose of the Cockscomb then changed abruptly.

II. The Cockscomb—*preserved*

By all accounts, the transformation of the Cockscomb into an area devoted to Jaguar conservation came in March 1983, when a young American wildlife biologist named Alan Rabinowitz moved to Quam Bank to conduct a survey of the jaguars inhabiting the Cockscomb forest. With funding from American conservationists, Rabinowitz was asked study the jaguars of Belize—to determine their numbers, ranges, and habits, and to discern prospects for jaguar conservation. Over the course of two years, Rabinowitz conducted this research, established ties with a few state officials, and lobbied for a conservation agenda. After Prime Minister George Price protected the Cockscomb in 1984, Rabinowitz wrote a book about his feats, entitled *Jaguar: one man's struggle to establish the world's first jaguar preserve* (1986). The "one man" of the subtitle is undoubtedly Rabinowitz himself although the CBWS was created at the behest of Price alone ("The prime minister turned to the minister of natural



Peaks K and L from H; Copetilla in the distance Phot. D. Stevenson

Figure 4: A photograph of the Cockscomb range from the 1928 Expedition

resources and told him to move ahead with protecting Cockscomb" [322]).

Notwithstanding the obvious differences of length, age, and audiences, *Jaguar* shares certain qualities with the earlier reports of colonial expeditions. Like the colonial reports, it combines elements of travel writing and scientific reporting with narratives of personal struggle and triumph. All are singular texts insofar as they tell *particular* stories about *individual* scientific triumphs, and they all produce a romantic sense of place to achieve their effect. In the case of *Jaguar*, the author's subject-position and the production of the book's setting are central to the book's aim, which is to portray the emotional and personal trials of conservation work and thereby "dispel the myth of the field biologist as a purely objective scientific observer" (xiii).

For the purposes of our argument, *Jaguar* has three notable qualities. The first is the way that it reveals certain assumptions about the Cockscomb as a place. The text is marked by frequent references to the Cockscomb as a secluded land that required outside scientific study. For instance, Rabinowitz characterizes his research project as "untouched scientific territory" (4) and describes looking at a map of the Belize only to find "shades of green showing different elevations of uninhabited jungle and swamp. These were the areas I knew I'd have to penetrate" (8). By reiterating the colonial theme of an empty and ahistorical Cockscomb, the forest comes to invite outside expertise: "I needed to go... deep into the areas that held the secrets and mysteries of the country (10)." As in 1888, the Cockscomb is framed as unknown territory, unnamed, and wanting the application of heroic science. The whole of

Belize is characterized as "unaffected and all but oblivious to what is going on around it" (9) a young and naïve country, in need of trusteeship.

The second notable quality of *Jaguar* is its insistent *ethnographic* tone. Rabinowitz goes so far as to reproduce his field notes about the individuals he meets in the Cockscomb and Quam Bank, describing them (using their real names) in terms of race and personality. Rabinowitz's gaze falls mainly upon the Maya. He cites anthropological studies to pepper the text with 'facts' about Maya culture,⁶ and unflattering descriptions of Maya people set many of *Jaguar's* key scenes. The book opens with Rabinowitz, complaining of dusty and degraded roads, seeing "seminaked Maya Indians" (3). Some of the photographs that Rabinowitz uses in *Jaguar* align with his depiction of the Mayas as noble savages. His inclusion of photos of women from Maya Center breastfeeding remains a source of resentment. When asked why these pictures bother them, one woman explained, "is not right to show a woman that way" (personal communication, 2001). Another said, "we thought he was our friend but he did not ask us what we wanted" (Ibid.).

Jaguar's treatment of the Maya consistently iterates two points. First, the Maya are always linked with the *nature* of the Cockscomb. Rabinowitz laments that the Mayas' "old ways" and "traditional stories" are in decline, but comforts himself with the thought that the "power of the forest wouldn't let them completely lose hold of their heritage" (188). Nature protects Maya culture, which bleeds back into the forest: to his ears, even the Mayas' Christian hymns

⁶Such as: corn "is their reason for being" (89), and "the past is not dwelled upon" (189).

"blended strangely into the jungle" (226). Second, *Jaguar* interprets the 'modern' Maya in light of the achievements of the ancient Maya. Relaxing at an ancient Maya platform in the Cockscomb with one of his hired Maya field assistants, Rabinowitz writes: "I looked at Cirillo ... and I mentally dressed him in a jaguar headdress and skins. You belong here, Cirillo, I thought. You've always belonged here" (252). Rabinowitz's descriptions of the people he hires to assist him the same people who use the land that he wishes to 'preserve' are structured entirely by race. While gazing at "Indians in Cockscomb go about their daily lives," he writes, "I could easily imagine them building and worshipping at these ancient temples" (255). The people that he lives with are seen as 'modern' versions of an ancient race. To see the strangeness of this perspective, we need only reverse it: how odd it would seem if the residents of the Cockscomb were to describe the daily behavior of a white American biologist in terms used by archeologists to interpret a European site that lay in ruins since, say, 900AD?

This view carries a dangerous edge: the living Maya are described as members of a *fallen* race that has lost its place and its history. We are told that "the modern Maya seem completely out of touch with the historical reasons behind many of their actions" (88) and that "virtually nothing seems to remain of their ancestors' cultural achievements" (99).⁷ While such thoughtless lines may seem unimportant, we can easily discern their effects when we consider them alongside *Jaguar's* overarching aim of justifying restrictions to

Maya livelihood practices in the Cockscomb. When we are told near the end of the book that the Maya "had simply lost their ancestors' knowledge of proper shifting cultivation" (how? we are not told) and that "the Maya in Cockscomb ... didn't concern themselves with the future" (317), it becomes clear that the essentialist, ethnographic tone that runs through the text conforms with its justification of colonial trusteeship.

Although Rabinowitz sees connections between Maya culture and the history and landscape of the Cockscomb, he does not conclude that the Mayas have indigenous rights to the Cockscomb or even a voice in his efforts to conserve jaguars.

This brings us to the third notable quality of *Jaguar*: the way it portrays the Cockscomb as a place for jaguar preservation. His studies confirming the presence of jaguars, and given that "Parts of the area were still untouched," Rabinowitz concludes that "Cockscomb would make an ideal jaguar preserve" (153). From the vantage of Quam Bank, he saw a pristine landscape threatened and "surrounded by numerous Indian villages and major cattle and citrus interests" (320). This conception of the place, as we have seen, differs tremendously from those of the colonial reports that recommended agricultural development.

An equally important shift concerns subjectivity. Whereas the recommendations of the colonial reports reflect the pronouncements of individuals writing in the first person, *Jaguar's* narrative of conservation triumph expresses the perspective of an un-reflexive 'we'. Rabinowitz explains his task as "determin[ing] the relative density of jaguars throughout the country. Then we could ...

⁷Nowhere does Rabinowitz reveal these "historical reasons behind ... their actions". Nor does he reflect on the conditions that make possible such criticism.

select key areas where a jaguar preserve or park might be established" (7, our ital.). This curious shift between the first person singular ("My task") and the unspecified plural subject ("we") reappears throughout *Jaguar*. At the only point in the text where Rabinowitz comments on the implications of his political lobbying for Maya livelihoods, he asks: "If we succeeded in getting the Cockscomb designated a forest reserve, the Maya would be forced to leave. Did I want this?" (170).⁸ The 'we' of Rabinowitz's question is left unexplored. This 'we' stands in for a subject-position-outside experts, international conservationists—that Rabinowitz fills. The Maya, for their part, are spoken *for*—also by Rabinowitz. The colonial habit of speaking for the Maya haunts the book's final lines, where Rabinowitz places his words in the mouth of one of his former Maya research assistants: "My eyes met Ignacio's.... He nodded his head ever so slightly. ... It's okay, he was saying to me. ... Cockscomb is safe now, and everything is going to be all right" (361).

Whether everything is "all right" in the Cockscomb remains an open question. After all, the fate of this place did not come to a conclusion in 1984, when the BAS took up the management of the CBWS. Although all of the Mopan Maya residents of Quam bank were moved to Maya Center, they remember the Cockscomb's abundant game and the fertile soils, well-suited for growing maize and beans. Speaking of Quam Bank, one villager told us in 2001: "It was beautiful. We had everything that we needed" (Personal communication, 2001). Seventeen years after the Sanctuary was established, villagers' feelings about Quam

Bank remain unchanged: "I would move back [to Quam Bank] tonight if they would let us" (Ibid.).

III. The Cockscomb—*managed*

The remaking of the Cockscomb has had implications for peoples' livelihoods—particularly for those who call the Cockscomb home. Between 1999 to 2001, the Sanctuary's management came to include Maya Center under the rubric of 'co-management', a concept that garnered attention in international environmental networks in the 1990s. In 1998, BAS submitted a US\$ 1.2 million proposal to the European Commission for the "development of Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary and Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary as centers for co-management of protected areas" (Salas, 1998). The grant aimed at involving "relevant stakeholders in ecosystem management" as part of a plan to pass the onus of management to the communities and relieve pressure on BAS's budget (Ibid.). When their proposal was accepted, BAS used these funds to sponsor workshops in leadership development, environmental education, and co-management awareness.⁹ They also organized agricultural extension programs comprised of training and materials for beekeeping and coco yam production, which BAS hoped would serve as an alternative to traditional farming and game hunting. Through these efforts, BAS sought to train leaders who would serve as village-level advocates for the Sanctuary, but their workshops were poorly attended because villagers did not understand their purpose; moreover, the workshops did not address the villagers' stated needs—above all, land acquisition.

Critics of co-management note that the

Our italics. He answers his question, "the Maya could move, and the jaguars could not."

rising emphasis on community involvement in international environmental discourse has not brought about a substantive shift in conservation politics (cf. Western et al. 1994). This criticism applies to the CBWS. For the villagers in Maya Center, co-management has had two main failings.

First, although Maya residents in the Cockscomb region have their own history of this place, their land use priorities have been subverted by conservation and ecotourism plans that were prepared and inscribed onto the landscape without their active participation. While BAS sought to boost leadership and environmental consciousness, most villagers did not perceive a leadership deficiency or see a need for environmental education. Men in Maya Center would like to farm and hunt in the CBWS but are not allowed to do so. These differences gave villagers little reason to believe that meaningful collaboration between the community and BAS would develop.

Second, co-management has exacerbated the inequities of power in the community based upon differences in literacy, social status, gender and economic power. In 2001 a representative sample of Maya Center's 350 residents were interviewed concerning local history, the creation of the Sanctuary, and co-management. Interviewees were chosen based on education level, languages spoken, and socio-economic status within the community. Out of fifty-seven adults interviewed, only five (or nine percent) were familiar with the co-management project. These same five people arguably the best-educated and politically-connected individuals in the community were the only ones who regularly engaged with BAS.

Most other community members had very limited contact with BAS, due to communication difficulties, suspicion of the organization, or lingering resentment about the creation of the CBWS. As one villager commented, "I heard a little bit about co-management, but I am not sure what is the purpose, what is the benefit. ... I don't know what it really means" (personal communication, 2001).

The residents of Maya Center have responded to these failings in ways that reflect power imbalances vis-à-vis BAS. The most powerful residents have actively worked to reform Sanctuary management policies through their leadership roles, such as Sanctuary Director and Chairlady of the Women's Craft Center. Those who hold these positions are influenced by other villagers who lack political power or formal education, but who exert pressure in discrete ways. Through their leaders and occasional demonstrations like the road-closing Maya Center's residents have often questioned and confronted BAS. Every few years they have petitioned BAS for limited hunting access in the Sanctuary. They argue that wildlife is abundant within the park and that well-regulated hunting would neither impact animal populations nor harm tourism. To date their requests have been denied.

BAS's desire to manage Cockscomb for ecotourism-centered jaguar conservation reflects a particular historical understanding of the place. For BAS, the Cockscomb region's history began in 1982 with Rabinowitz's study. This shallow view has been exaggerated by frequent employee turnover; many BAS employees present in 2001 had no direct experience with the creation of the CBWS. By contrast, all the villagers of Maya Center who were at least

five years old in 1984 remember this event. They do not see the arrival of co-management as a discrete and fundamental event, but rather as another iteration in their continuous history of being visited by outsiders.

Conclusion

Colonial travel accounts are replete with references to the Cockscomb. For those sailing along the coast, gazing at verdant British territory, the Cockscomb comprised the most distinctive form on the landscape. From Europe this towering range solicited geologists, foresters, geographers, and state officials. With each sketch, map, and expedition report filed in London, its qualities were reinterpreted, its place in the world reinscribed. Today, the Cockscomb continues to serve as a beacon for outsiders who are looking for a place that is natural, distinctively Belizean, and open for exploration. The focus of the colonial gaze has shifted over time from the Cockscomb's peaks, to the jaguars in its forests, to the social relations within Maya Center. Yet with each episode, the Cockscomb has been framed as an essentially natural place—even as it is mapped within the space of the nation-state and embedded in capitalist social relations.

Derek Gregory's recent study of the "colonial present" (2004) offers a useful way of thinking about contemporary imperialism. By the 'colonial present,' Gregory refers to the fact that colonial power continues to define the world today. Imperialism, he argues, perniciously reproduces radically

unequal geographies of power in ways that define the present as such. Gregory's illustrations the USA's policies toward Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan may seem far from the placid Cockscomb. But it would be impossible to understand the Cockscomb without considering the living effects of colonial power.

Fundamentally, colonialism involves remaking places through travel, settlement, and the execution of power over subaltern social groups. The colonial production of place is never a simple event; rather, it is the outcome, or effect, of a set of mundane practices that are backed up by and written through with power. In banal but significant ways, such colonial practices continue to define Belize. Thus the Cockscomb, silent beacon of the colonial present, reflects something of Belize's very nature.

References

- Ageton, C. (2003). *Trust and Equity: A Case Study of Maya Center Community Perspectives on the Co-management of Cockscomb Basin Sanctuary*. Unpublished Master's thesis (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico).
- Anon. (1888). Return of Governor & Party from Visit to the Cockscomb Mountains. MP 46/1888, 19 April 1888 (Kew, England: Public Records Office).
- Bellamy, J. (1889). Expedition to the Cockscomb Mountains, British Honduras, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*,

- 11(9), 542-552.
- Braun, B. (2000). Producing Vertical Territory: Geology and Governmentality in Late Victorian Canada, *Ecumene* 7(1), 7-46.
- Fowler, H. (1879). *A Narrative of a Journey across the Unexplored Portion of British Honduras, With a Short Sketch of the History and Resources of the Colony* (Belize City: British Library C.S.F. 400/4).
- Goldsworthy, R. (1888). Report on the Expedition to the Cockscomb Mountains. Despatch 1888-79, 21 June 1888 (Kew, England: Public Records Office).
- Grant, H.T. (1929). A Second Cockscombs Expedition in 1928. *The Geographical Journal*, 73(2), 138-144.
- Gregory, D. (2004). *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell).
- Lumb, J. (1996). History of the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary. In *Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary: Its History, Flora and Fauna for Visitors, Teachers and Scientists* (Belize City: Angelus Press), 9-17.
- Morris, D. (1883). *The Colony of British Honduras, Its Resources and Prospects* (London: Edward Stanford).
- Oliphant, J.N., & Stevenson, D. (1929). An Expedition to the Cockscomb Mountains, British Honduras, in March 1928. *The Geographical Journal* 73(2), 123-137.
- Rabinowitz, A. (2000 [1986]). *Jaguar: One Man's Struggle to Establish the World's First Jaguar Preserve* (Washington, DC: Island Press).
- Salas, O., et. al. (1998). Proposal to the European Commission: The Development of Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary and Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary as Centers for Co-Management of Protected Areas (Belize City: Unpublished manuscript).
- Western, D., Wright, R.M, & Strum, S.C., Eds. (1994). *Natural Connections: Perspectives in Community-Based Conservation*. (Washington, DC: Island Press).
- Wainwright J. (2003). *Decolonizing Development: Mayanism, Agriculture, and Colonialism in Southern Belize*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota).