

The North

The Northern Highway and its side roads take you from Belize City to the northern region of Belize. Whether you go by bicycle, bus, canoe or car, the lands surrounding the Northern Highway will give you a different view of Belize than you get from the Cayes or Mountain Pine Ridge areas.

In the north, there are **Maya ruins**, some of which are not yet excavated. It is a popular sport to cycle to Altun Ha and tent at Pueblo Escondito. Opportunities to spot rare wetland

birds are found at places like **Crooked Tree**. Virgin jungle foliage can still be found around places like **Gallon Jug**. **Cycling** is safe and a pleasant method of travel, and **canoeing** at least once on a jungle river in Belize is a must. In the north, the New River runs to Lamanai and the Belize River goes from Bermudian Landing to the sea. Both are gentle runs.

Although there are some upscale accommodations available in unique settings, they are the exception in this area. Often, food is local rather than international.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

➤ Along the Highway	73
➤ Leaving Belize City	75
➤ Bermudian Landing Area	76
➤ Old Northern Highway	80
➤ Altun Ha	80
➤ Crooked Tree Village & Sanctuary	84
➤ Orange Walk Town	90
➤ Indian Church & Lamanai Ruins	95
➤ San Filipe, Blue Creek	99
➤ Gallon Jug/Chan Chich	100
➤ Sarteneja	101
➤ Progreso & Copper Bank	105
➤ Corozal	107
➤ Directories – General, Accommodations, Restaurants	114

Along the Highway

Below, I describe the road going north from Belize City. As we come to secondary roads leading to other places of interest, we detour to visit them before returning to the New Northern Highway.

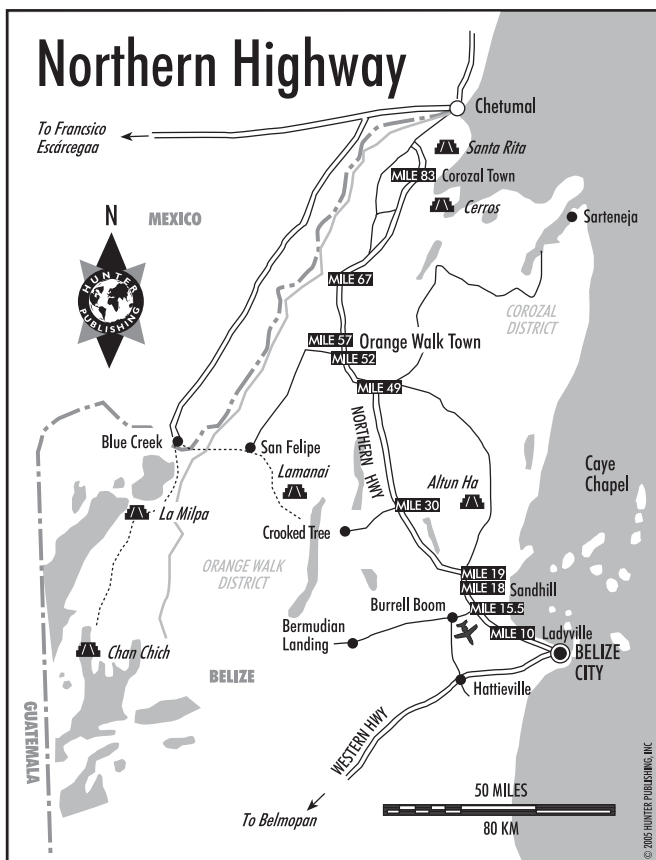
MILEAGE FROM BELIZE CITY TO MEXICAN BORDER

Mile 10	Airport/Ladyville
Mile 15.5	Turn west onto a secondary road for Burrel Boom/Bermudian Landing/Baboon Sanctuary
Mile 19	Turn east onto the Old Northern Highway/ Altun Ha
Mile 30	Turn west onto a secondary road for Crooked Tree
Mile 49	Old Northern Highway joins New Northern Highway

MILEAGE FROM BELIZE CITY TO MEXICAN BORDER

Mile 52	Turn west onto a secondary road for Guinea Grass/Lamanai and Blue Creek
Mile 57	Orange Walk Town. Turn east (over the New River) onto a secondary road for Copper Bank/Progreso/Sarteneja
Mile 83	Corozal Town
Mile 92	Mexican border

Although there are few mileage signs on the Northern Highways, people refer to locations by the number of miles along the road. To make things easy, I give all directions this way. If you lose track, ask a local resident.



Leaving Belize City

◆ How to Travel

If traveling by **bus**, take a taxi to the **Venus bus station** at the main terminal and buy a ticket for the town you wish to visit. Corozal, the farthest town north of Belize City along the highway, is only three hours by express bus. All buses will stop anywhere along the road, except for express buses, which stop only in the major centers.

Driving, cycling or hitching requires a bit more work. From the Swing Bridge in Belize City, follow Queen and then Albert Street to Eve Street. Turn north and continue along the road that skirts the water. Eve Street becomes Barracks Road and, after it curves, turns into Princess Margaret Drive. When you arrive at a large traffic circle that has many flags in its center, take the first road to the right off the circle. This is the New Northern Highway.

Belize City to Bermudian Landing

THE NORTH

◆ Attractions

Travellers Liquors, Ltd., 2.5 miles along the New Northern Highway, ☎ 223-2855, www.travellersliquors.bz, was first established in 1953 as a store that sold liquor mainly to travelers going to and from Belize City.

Ladyville, 10 miles from Belize City along the New Northern Highway, is a small suburb with about 1,500 residents. Because Belize is growing fairly rapidly, Ladyville is now almost a suburb of Belize City. The most notable landmark in Ladyville is the **Philip S.W. Goldson Airport**.

A trip to the **Belikin Brewery and Coca-Cola plant** (in the same building) just a mile or so past the airport on the old airport road (turn left off the New Northern Highway) may also be of interest. ☎ 225-3195. Call in advance for tour times.

◆ Places to Stay

There are a few places to stay as you head out of town. **Belize River Lodge**, Mile 8.5 Belize River Road, ☎ 225-2002, bzelodge@btl.net, \$\$\$\$ is a first-class fly-fishing lodge that has been operating since 1960. Situated on the Belize River, the lodge is just four miles from the Caribbean. Besides a **restaurant** and bar, the hotel offers tours to other must-see spots in the country. All-inclusive prices are available.

Embassy Hotel, Airport Ring Road, ☎ 225-3333, www.embassyhotel-belize.com, \$\$, is the only hotel close to the airport. Since there is no flying after dark in Belize, there is no possibility of the planes keeping you awake.

Each of the 40 rooms has air conditioning, fan, TV and bath with hot water. Private parking is offered and there's a restaurant that opens early for breakfast, a roof-top courtyard and hammocks around the verandah. The hotel is clean and the hosts are hospitable. For the economy-minded you can have a car, room and breakfast for US \$99 a day.

- ▶▶ *To reach **Burrel Boom** and **Bermudian Landing**, turn west off the New Northern Highway at Mile 15.5 onto the secondary road. The communities along this stretch of road each have a population of between 500 and 1,500 residents.*

Bermudian Landing Area

◆ Getting Here

BY CAR OR BICYCLE: From the New Northern Highway, turn west at Mile 13 onto an unnamed secondary road. Drive for three miles and cross the Belize River. Less than two miles farther, you will pass a road going south (it leads past a Methodist school and the El Chiclero Hotel). Continue straight ahead on the secondary road and you will arrive at Bermudian Landing and the farming villages beyond.

AUTHOR NOTE: *A "sleeping policeman" is the local name for those speed bumps found at the entrance and exit of every town.*

BY BUS: Two bus companies travel to this area; **Pooks** leaves from the main bus station area in Belize City and **Russells** leaves from Cairo Street, two blocks east of the main station and one block north. Pooks buses leave at 5:10 pm, Monday to Friday, and at 2 pm on Saturday. Russells buses leave at 12:15 and 4:30 pm, Monday to Friday, and 12:15 and 1 pm on Saturday.

TAXI OR TOUR: Almost every tour agency or taxi driver will take you to the Baboon Sanctuary. A half-day tour would include only the sanctuary. A taxi would charge about the same as a tour. Hitching is possible, but there is little traffic to the villages.

◆ Introduction

The greatest draw to this area is the **Community Baboon Sanctuary**. The sound of these animals howling through the jungle is a thrill that should not be missed. If you happen to be alone when they start their lament, it will raise the hair on your neck.

Having your own transportation makes it easier for you to visit villages in the area. Tenting is permitted near the sanctuary.

There are also two **canoe** routes that can be enjoyed along this stretch of the **Belize River**. One is the 60-mile run from Bermudian Landing to the Haulover Bridge in Belize City and the other is the 60-mile run from Guanacaste Park to Bermudian Landing. If you are really ambitious, have the time, and enjoy jungle rivers, do both of these trips.

◆ History

This area was a logging center from the 1700s until the end of Belize's mass-logging period. Now the area is farmland. Burrell Boom got its name from a time when logs that were floating loose down the river were "boomed." Booming is the process of grouping a large amount of logs together and holding them together by a chain or rope. The "boom" is then floated downriver in a controlled fashion. Loose timbers were stopped from floating past Burrell Boom by a huge chain strung across the river. Parts of the chain and chain anchors can still be seen along the river near the village.

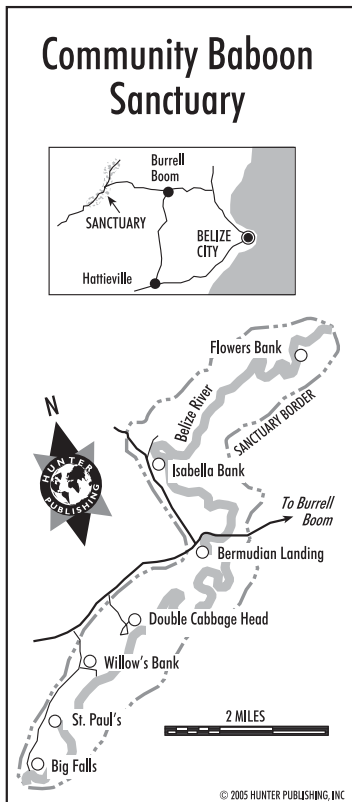
◆ Things to Do

Community Baboon Sanctuary

A **Natural Wildlife Museum and Visitor Center** at the far end of Bermudian Landing (there's only one street) is the official headquarters for the sanctuary. Their mailing address is PO Box 1428, Belize City, ☎ 220-2181 or 220-2158, www.howlermonkey.bz. The center is open daily from 8 am to 5 pm. The entry fee is US \$5 and the ticket is good all day. You can leave and return to the sanctuary at no extra charge.

I highly recommended hiring a local guide, available at the center, to take you through the jungle. The best time to see the monkeys is in the early morning or at dusk. The shorter trails take as little as 10 minutes, while longer ones can take two to three hours.

The modest natural wildlife museum, opened in 1989, takes only a few minutes to visit, but the information will fill in details not always available elsewhere. The museum is open during the same hours as the park.



❖ MONKEY BUSINESS

The sanctuary offers a Sponsor a Monkey program. The annual cost is \$20 for adults, \$10 for children. Supporters are supposed to receive quarterly updates and photographs of their adopted monkeys. I found that this does not happen.



The center sells the book, ***Belizean Rain Forests; Community Baboon Sanctuary, 3rd edition***, by Robert Horwich and Johnathon Lyon. Previously used copies are available at www.amazon.com.

The Community Baboon Sanctuary is operated by the citizens of the surrounding communities who have cooperated with each other to create an environmental haven for the black howler monkey. The management of the sanctuary is completely voluntary, as is the agreement to practice farming techniques that will not harm the natural habitat of the monkeys. Before the formation of the sanctuary, these creatures were endangered due to loss of habitat.

The sanctuary has also been generously supported by the United Nations Development Program. The UN's latest project is to set up an education center at the museum so that both locals and visitors can learn more about the area in general and the monkeys in particular.

The sanctuary is bordered by the banks of the Belize River, with its riparian and broad-leafed forests that are abundant in vines so popular with baboons. Inland from the river are marsh, pasture and farmland. The eastern end of the sanctuary has cohune palm, while the west is bordered by pine trees and savanna.

The monkey species found in the sanctuary is one of six similar types living in Central and South America. This particular species dwells only in southern Mexico, northern Guatemala and Belize. After the sanctuary had been in operation for three years, the monkey population had grown to about 1,000. But there were still many unnecessary deaths. Monkeys were caught in barbed wire fences or run over by cars at night. Bridges, ropes and wooden ladders were placed in strategic places so the animals could travel over and around these hazards safely. This has contributed to the increase of the population that is now believed to be over 3,000. One such bridge can be seen strung high above the road as you enter Bermudian Landing.

Besides the howler monkey, the sanctuary has Baird's tapirs, Morelet's crocodiles, iguanas and Central American river turtles. There are over 250 birds hanging around the 100 or so species of trees that border many of the Maya house mounds still unexcavated in the sanctuary.

Adventures

Crocodile hunting is a two-hour, after-dark activity. You can rent a canoe and guide for this either at the Howler Monkey Lodge or at the Nature Resort for US \$40 per person. Hunts offer views of more than crocs. Bats come out

to feed during these early evening hours, as do some birds. Insects seem to sing more at dusk and blooming flowers are most pungent at this time of day.

Horseback riding through the sanctuary is available, but should be booked ahead of arrival. Call the sanctuary, ☎ 220-2181 or 220-2158, for information. Rates are US \$10 per hour.

Canoeing from Big Falls to the sanctuary takes one day and is highly recommended. Canoe rentals and shuttles can be arranged from either lodge in Bermudian Landing or from the sanctuary. The cost is dependent upon the length of your trip.

The canoe ride from Bermudian Landing to Belize City is in deep water that is slow and flat. There is lush jungle on both banks. After Flowers Bank the river really gets boring (there isn't even a riffle) as you push your way through mangrove swamp. If you are a birder, this section will be anything but boring. The greatest draw during dry season is the possibility of seeing sharks that come up the main channel from the coast.

I highly recommend at least one river trip while in Belize and if your skills and confidence are low, this may be a good one. The worst that could happen is that you could tip, get wet and then be attacked by a shark.

◆ Places to Stay

The Nature Resort, next to the sanctuary's visitor center, ☎ 604-9286, naturer@btl.net, \$\$, has spacious and clean cabins beside the river. Each thatched-roof building has a fan, writing desk and fridge. The shared bath is about 20 feet from the front door.

Howler Monkey Lodge, ☎ 220-2158, h_monkey@btl.net, \$\$, is just before the visitor center and a short distance off the main road. Each little cabin, nestled in the jungle on the banks of the river, has two double beds, a fan and a private bath with hot water. The lodge has a reference library and a one-for-one book exchange. **Tenting**, \$, along the river at the Howler Monkey Lodge is permitted. Camping in the sanctuary is not permitted.

El Chiclero, Burrell Boom, ☎ 225-9005, soffit@io.com, \$\$, is a stucco building, clean and neat, with air conditioning. Each room has two double beds, private bathrooms with tile floors and hot water. There is a swimming pool on the grounds and the sundeck overlooks the town. Special weekly or monthly rates are available.

◆ Places to Eat

The **Baboon Sanctuary Restaurant**, \$\$, beside the visitor center, is open from 8 am to 5 pm seven days a week. The food is cooked and served by local women, who use their own secret recipes.

Howler Monkey Lodge, \$\$, run by the Womens' Conservation Group, offers Creole and international cuisine, all home-cooked. Vegetarian and special dietary requirements can be met as long as the cook knows in advance. The meals are family style; you get what everyone else gets.

There's a **supermarket** just half a mile past the visitor center on the road going to Double Head Cabbage. It's not a long walk and is a good spot to buy groceries and snacks for your cabin.

El Chiclero, Burrell Boom, ☎ 225-9005, \$\$\$. The owners take pride in serving some of the best meals available in the north. Although El Chiclero has a two-star price, it has five-star hospitality and quality.

▶▶ *Return to the New Northern Highway at Mile 15.5 and continue north. Turn east off the New Northern Highway at Mile 19, just past Sandhill.*

Old Northern Highway

The Old Northern Highway is single lane and paved for most of the way, but also dotted with numerous potholes. Occasional extensions in the width of the road allow vehicles to pass each other. There is one bridge with no side guards. This style of roadway encourages careful driving. However, the road is excellent for cycling.

A bus goes from Belize City, past the turn for Altun Ha, to the village of **Maskall** three times a day; at 1, 3:30 and 5:30 pm. The **Maskall Bus Company** vehicles leave from Mosuel Street, just off Princess Margaret Drive (near the Flag circle) in the city and **Russell's** buses leave from Cairo Street, just two blocks from the main bus terminal. The bus drivers will let you off at the road to Altun Ha and you can walk the rest of the way.

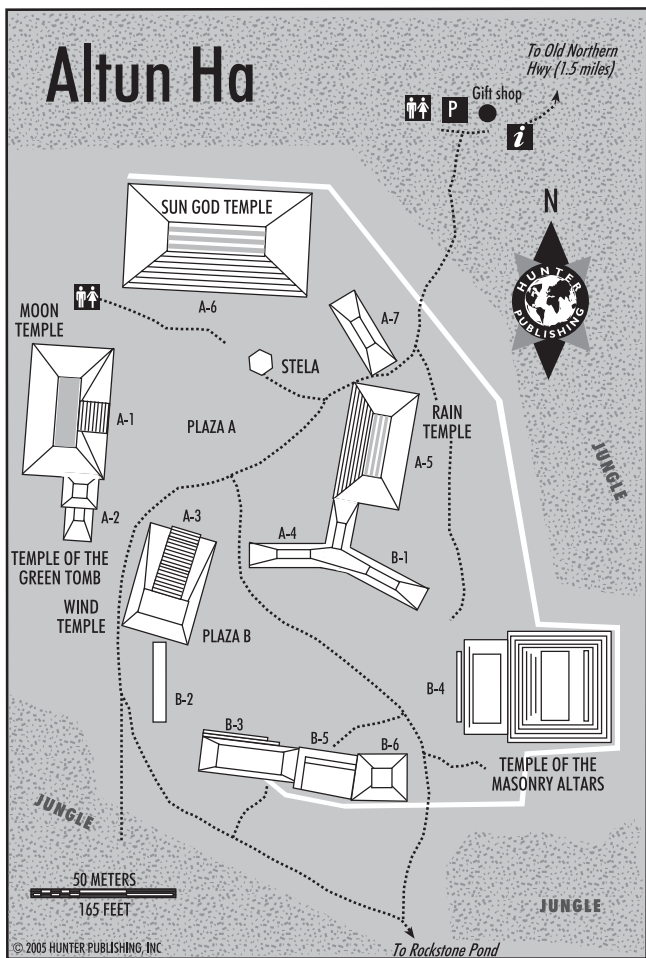
▶▶ *If driving or cycling, turn off the Old Northern Highway at Mile 10.5 to reach Altun Ha.*

◆ Altun Ha

Altun Ha Maya ruins are three miles along an unnamed secondary road. The ruins are open daily from 8 am to 4 pm and the entrance fee is US \$5 per day for foreigners. Trained tour guides are available and they can give you tons of information about the area. There is also a confectionary, a gift shop and toilet facilities at the entrance to the ruins.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 200 BC | Earliest settlements are at Altun Ha. |
| 100 AD | Most of the larger structures are built during this century. |
| 550 AD | Temple of the Green Tomb was built. |
| 600 AD | Tomb with jade head carving of Kinich Akau constructed. |
| 1963 | Archeologist AH Anderson finds jade pennant in BC that led to money being awarded for more exploration at the ruins. |
| 1968 | Seven tombs found, one that had cable markings where the body was lowered into the tomb. Other tombs had been vandalized. |



Exploring the Ruins

Although the earliest settlements are thought to have been around 200 BC, most of the large structures were built about AD 100. At its peak Altun Ha had over 3,000 people living in the center and an additional 5-7,000 people living in the vicinity.

The ruins consist of two main **plazas** surrounded by 13 **temples**. The ceremonial center sits inside a 1.5-square-mile area and is surrounded by about 500 **residential mounds**.

❖ "ALTUN HA"

Altun Ha means "stone water" and was named after the rockstone pond beside which a small reservoir was built. However, the main 71,000-square-foot reservoir is southwest of the ceremonial complex along a trail leading from Plaza B. It has a stone and clay dam at its south end. Beside it was where the first temple was built. Because of the plentiful water supply, the housing density near the reservoir is higher than elsewhere in the site.

Altun Ha's temples are unique in structure. Most were built in four phases and each phase had an altar on top. At the altar, carved jade objects were thrown into a fire and burned, along with incense. The next phase was then built over the altar and sacrificial objects. In Plaza B at the **Temple of Masonry Altars**, there were eight phases of construction.



MYSTERIOUS MAYA: *Kinich Akau was the patron God of Uxmal and father of Itzamna, lord of night and day. It is believed that Kinich Akau descended into the city of Uxmal every day at noon in the form of a macaw and ate the offerings left on the altar. Kinich Akau often appears with filed teeth similar to those of a jaguar and wearing Kin, the symbol of the Maya day.*

In Plaza A, at the **Temple of the Green Tomb**, which was built around AD 550, over 300 items were found. Some items were of carved jade, others were pieces of stone jewelry. Numerous stingray spikes were also found. These were used by the Maya for bloodletting.

It is believed that Altun Ha fell due to peasant revolts in the Late Classic Period. Following that, the trade center for the region moved to Lamanai.

Today, under the leadership of German archeologist Andrea Ruf, many of the temples and masks are being restored.

◆ Belize Jungle Gardens & Aquarium

The Jungle Gardens, Rockstone Pond, ☎ 609-5523, are open Sunday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm, and are located a half-mile from the ruins on the way back toward the Old Northern Highway. This tastefully designed garden has a river-to-reef aquarium, and cages that contain reptiles and amphibians. Another building displays insects and plants, and a saltwater touch tank is filled with touchable marine animals and plants. There's also a butterfly garden, nature trails, reptile cage, gift shop and a healing herb garden.

Belize Jungle Gardens offers educational workshops and river snorkeling tours or survivor-island (as in the TV program on Discovery Channel) camping. Ask at the desk or phone for details.

◆ Places to Stay & Eat

El Pescador Restaurant, ☎ 609-5523, \$\$, on the Belize Jungle Garden's grounds, can seat 70 people in its covered gardens. It serves gourmet food and specializes in seafood.

❖ HOTELS	* RESTAURANTS
\$ \$10 to \$20	\$ under \$5
\$\$ \$21 to \$50	\$\$ \$5-\$10
\$\$\$ \$51 to \$75	\$\$\$ \$11-\$25
\$\$\$\$ \$76 to \$100	\$\$\$\$ \$26-\$50
\$\$\$\$\$. over \$100	\$\$\$\$\$. over \$50

Maya Wells Restaurant, ☎ 209-2039, \$\$, opens Tuesday to Saturday from 9 am to 5 pm. They are reputed to serve good local cuisine. The restaurant is in a covered garden similar to El Pescador.

▶▶ *Return to the Old Northern Highway and continue north. The road is riddled with potholes.*

Along the Old Northern Highway at Mile 30 is the popular cycling destination of **Pueblo Escondido**, ☎ 614-1458, www.pueblo-escondido.net, \$, a "farm and observation garden," where **tenting** is permitted. Some sites are under covered huts for protection against rain. There are hiking trails, fishing ponds and wetland birding sites on the property. There is also a good cycling road at the back of the property that leads to the Altun Ha ruins.

On the Old Northern Highway at Mile 39 is the **Pretty See Jungle Ranch**, ☎ 209-2005, \$\$\$\$, which was once a macadamia nut plantation. It is located on 1,300 acres of pasture land and jungle. The opportunity for seeing wildlife along its many trails is good. The hardwood, octagonal-shaped cabins sleep four. There is a bar and restaurant on the premises.

❖ COOL ABODE

It is believed that houses built in an octagonal shape are easier to keep cool. Thatch huts should never have air conditioning as the cold air goes up through the roof. It is much better to have a fan.

Maruba Jungle Resort and Spa, Mile 40.5 on the Old Northern Highway, ☎ 322-2199, www.maruba-spa.com, \$\$\$\$\$, is *the* luxury accommodation on this stretch of road. There are standard rooms, suites and villa suites (\$450/day) tucked into the jungle on the property. For entertainment, you can go to a Maya psychic reader, rent a car with a chauffeur, ride horses or soak in the Japanese hot tub. There is a mineral bath and a viewing tower. For those who want to relax by the pool but have gone through all their reading material, there is a one-for-one book exchange. Other amenities include a restaurant and bar, laundry service and airport pick-up service. The resort offers honeymoon and wedding packages, as well as "mood mud therapy." Best of all, a waiter can deliver tropical drinks made from local fruit to anywhere on the

property. The owners speak Spanish, English and German, and any tour you may want can be arranged from the reception desk.

The Old Northern Highway joins the New Northern Highway at **Carmelita**. This little village, with its great community spirit, uses some of the profits from its sand pits to fund the primary school.

- ▶▶ *You'll return to the New Northern Highway at Mile 19 and continue to Mile 31. Turn west onto a secondary road that leads to Crooked Tree Village and Sanctuary. The secondary road goes for three miles until it reaches a causeway that takes you across the Northern Lagoon to the village. Prior to the building of the causeway in 1984, the village was accessible only by boat.*

Crooked Tree Village & Sanctuary

Crooked Tree Village and Wildlife Sanctuary is located on an island that covers about 20 square miles and has a population of about 900.

◆ Introduction

Serious **birders** can't afford to miss this spot, considered the top birding site in Belize. The wetland bird population is second to none, plus there are two families of the rare Jabiru storks that make the sanctuary their yearly nesting place.

A second important draw to this little island is the **Cashew Festival** that takes place over the first weekend in May every year. Attending will give you a pleasant memory of Creole culture (see below).

Crooked Tree is set up for outdoor exploration. Tenting, canoeing and hiking are popular pursuits.

◆ History

The village of Crooked Tree has been around for over 300 years and is thought to be the oldest settlement in Belize. There are three popular stories about the naming of the community.

- ❖ The first is that three **buccaneers** came to the area and called themselves the "crooked three." It is reported that the three hid a bucket of gold in the swamps north of the village.
- ❖ The second story is that it was the **logging** industry that first settled in the area and named the place after the crooked branches of the logwood trees.
- ❖ The third story concerns the **cashew tree**, which grows abundantly in the area. During storms, it has been known to topple over but continue to grow, crookedly.

❖ **LUCRATIVE LOADS**

During the 1500s logwood sold in England for £100 per ton. One ship could carry about 50 tons of logwood, which could be sold for a total of £5,000, more than a year's profit from any other merchandise shipped during that time. In the mid-1700s a total of 13,000 tons of logwood left Belize in one year. That comes to a total £65 million paid for the one export product. It was only after the aniline dyes made from coal tar were discovered that the use of logwood decreased.

◆ **Getting Here**

BY BUS: There are four direct **Jex Busses** going from Belize City to Crooked Tree. They leave daily at 10:30 am, 4:30 and 5:30 pm from Pound Yard Bridge in Belize City. The fourth bus departs at 4 pm from the Novelo Bus station (main terminal).

If these times are not convenient, take any non-express bus going north and ask to be let off at the junction going to the sanctuary. The walk to the village takes about an hour, and you stand an excellent chance of seeing a lot of birds along the way. Returning buses leave Crooked Tree at 6 am, 6:30 and 7 am daily.

◆ **Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary**

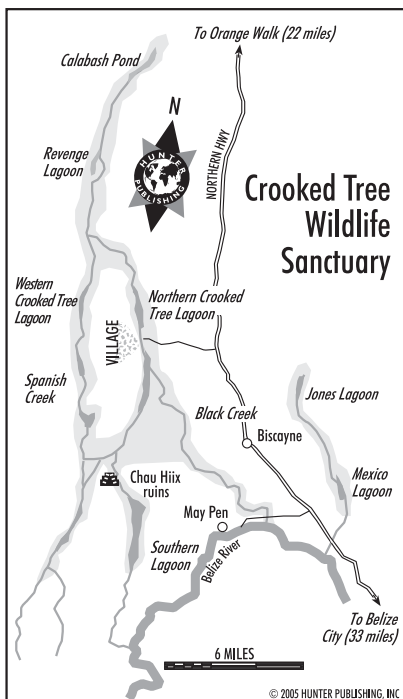
Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary is under the care of the Belize Audubon Society, 12 Fort Street, Belize City, ☎ 223-5004 or 223-4987, www.belize-audubon.org. The visitor center, located beside the causeway at the entrance to the village, is open daily from 8 am to 4:30 pm. The cost to enter the sanctuary is US \$5 per day for foreigners.

AUTHOR NOTE: *In 1998 the sanctuary became the 108th member of the Ramsar Convention, at which time it was declared the first wetland of international importance.*

There are three ways to visit the sanctuary: on foot, by boat or on horseback. Boats and horses are available in the village and at the resort within the sanctuary.

The 16,400 acres of waterways and swamps make up two groups of lagoons that, in turn, make up the sanctuary. The largest group includes the Calabash Pond, Southern Lagoon, Western Crooked Tree, Revenge and Spanish Creek. They are linked to the Belize River by Black Creek. The second group, located south and west of the first group, includes Jones and Mexico Lagoons. They run into the Belize River via Mexico Creek. Until 1984 when the causeway was built, these linking waterways were the only highways into the area.

The lagoons are as much as one mile wide and 20 miles long (1.6 km by 32 km). During high water, Northern Crooked Tree Lagoon reaches a depth of eight feet (2.4 meters), while in May, the peak of dry season, it can be dry.



The lagoons and creeks are inundated with log-wood thickets, marsh and broadleaf forests and pine/oak savannas. This makes them a haven for both migratory and indigenous birds. The lagoons also house manatee, crocodiles, iguanas and every species of freshwater turtle found in Belize.

Interpretive trails lead through the sanctuary. Ask for directions at the visitor center or follow any of the sandy trails from the village – they go for miles. The sanctuary has the longest elevated boardwalk in Belize and it stretches .6 miles across a section of the wetlands. This walk has signs along the way.

Although waterfowl are the most prominent birds found at the sanctuary, the

greatest draw for birders is the possibility of spotting a jabiru stork with its three- to four-meter (10- to 12-foot) wingspan. Belize has the largest nesting population of jabirus in all of Central America and the sanctuary has two pairs that nest there every year. They arrive in Nov. and build stick nesting platforms in the lowland pine savannas. The birds remain until Apr. or May, when they join other jabirus and head out, leaving just as the rains arrive.

Apr. and May is also when migratory birds are passing through. The bird population at this time is immense; to date, a total of 276 species have been seen.

◆ Adventures

Canoe rentals and **horseback riding** can be arranged either at **Sam Tillett's Hotel**, ☎ 220-7026, or at the **Bird's Eye View Lodge**, ☎ 225-7027. The cost of a canoe is US \$15 per day. Taking a motorboat tour with four people will cost the same (per person) and you have the advantage of a guide. However, the canoe is far more ecologically sensitive to the lagoons and less intrusive to the birds. Horses can be rented from both places and cost US \$10 an hour from Bird's Eye without a guide and US \$15 from Tillett's with a guide.

Cashew Festival, on the first weekend of May, is actually a three-in-one event. There is the harvest of the cashews, an agricultural show and a display of Creole village life at its best. During the festival, cashew wine (which is sweet) flows into the mouths of all except the very young or very weak and counters the spices of the Creole foods that are served. The wine, in turn, makes the Punta Rock music (see Dangriga, page 196) less abrasive and the greased pole climb more appealing. There is also a story-telling event, a beauty pageant and Creole games of every kind.

❖ IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

During the beauty contest, “E too maaga,” meaning “she’s too thin” in Creole, can be heard often as the beauties line up for the pageant. “Manfi” is the desired requirement. Manfi means shapely bust and hips. Besides not being too thin, the beauty pageant contest winner must also be a local girl with good moral conduct, top grades at high school and a polite manner.

Overnight hiking can be arranged at **Sam Tillett’s**, above. He will take you into the jungle where you can spot many inland birds and possibly see some animals. Prices can be negotiated and depend upon where you go, services required and the number of people in your group. Having your own equipment will save on rental fees.

AUTHOR TIP: *Gasoline can be purchased from a private house, even though there is no service station in the village. Ask locals for directions. The lady purchases the gasoline by the barrel in the duty-free zone and sells it to locals for less than the cost at service stations. However, she will sell only the amount needed to get you to a service station.*

Birding Pals, www.birdingpal.org, is a networking group who try to put birders from different countries in contact with each other. The purpose of the group is to have people share the special interest in birds and learn about one another’s cultures. The list of participants is growing daily, so check the website just before heading to Belize if you would like to develop such a friendship.

The group also lists professional guides available for hire. These listings give the qualifications of each guide so you can satisfy your own special needs. This list is also growing rapidly, so log on to their website just before you leave and see who’s available.

Birding Pals was started in Apr., 2000 by Knud Rasmussen of Toronto, Canada. Since the group’s inception, the list of members has become substantial. There are over 1,500 pals in 166 countries. Mr Rasmussen gets no funding for this, nor does he charge for the immense amount of work he does. His motivation is his love of birds and he believes that birders are very special people.