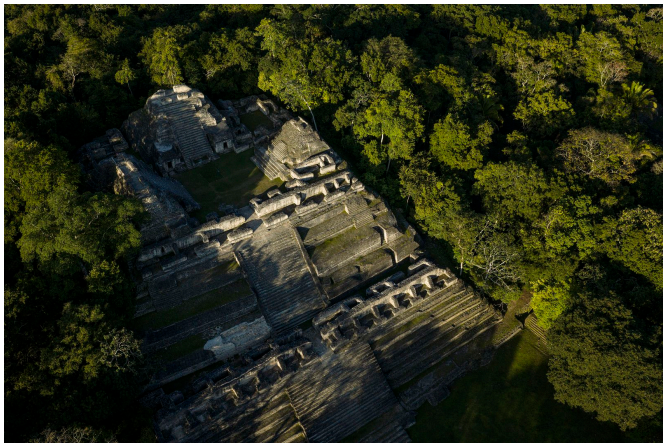
WHAT CAN A HIDDEN MAYA CITY TELL US ABOUT LIFE IN THE PAST?



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Deep in the rainforest of Belize lies Caracol, one of the largest cities built by the ancient Maya. For many years, historians imagined Maya cities as quiet religious centres with small populations living in the countryside. Research at Caracol has changed that picture. Archaeologists have found evidence of a huge city with more than 100,000 people, thousands of buildings, paved roads, reservoirs, farms and many local markets. New technology called lidar uses laser pulses to map the ground beneath the jungle canopy, revealing roads and neighbourhoods hidden by trees. Inscriptions also show that Caracol fought powerful rivals, including the famous city of Tikal. At one point, Caracol appears to have defeated Tikal and become the leading power in the region. The evidence suggests that Maya cities were busy, organised places where ordinary people traded goods and grew food as well as attending religious ceremonies.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

The Maya are sometimes wrongly imagined as people who only built temples and studied the stars. Caracol shows a more complicated society with farmers, traders, builders, rulers and soldiers. It also reminds us that historians can misunderstand the past when they rely on limited evidence or on accounts written by outsiders.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

“Why were Maya cities more than places for temples?”

Source: Smithsonian Magazine

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/archaeologists-ancient-maya-metropolist-forest-belize-debunking-long-held-myth-about-mesoamerican-civilization-180989