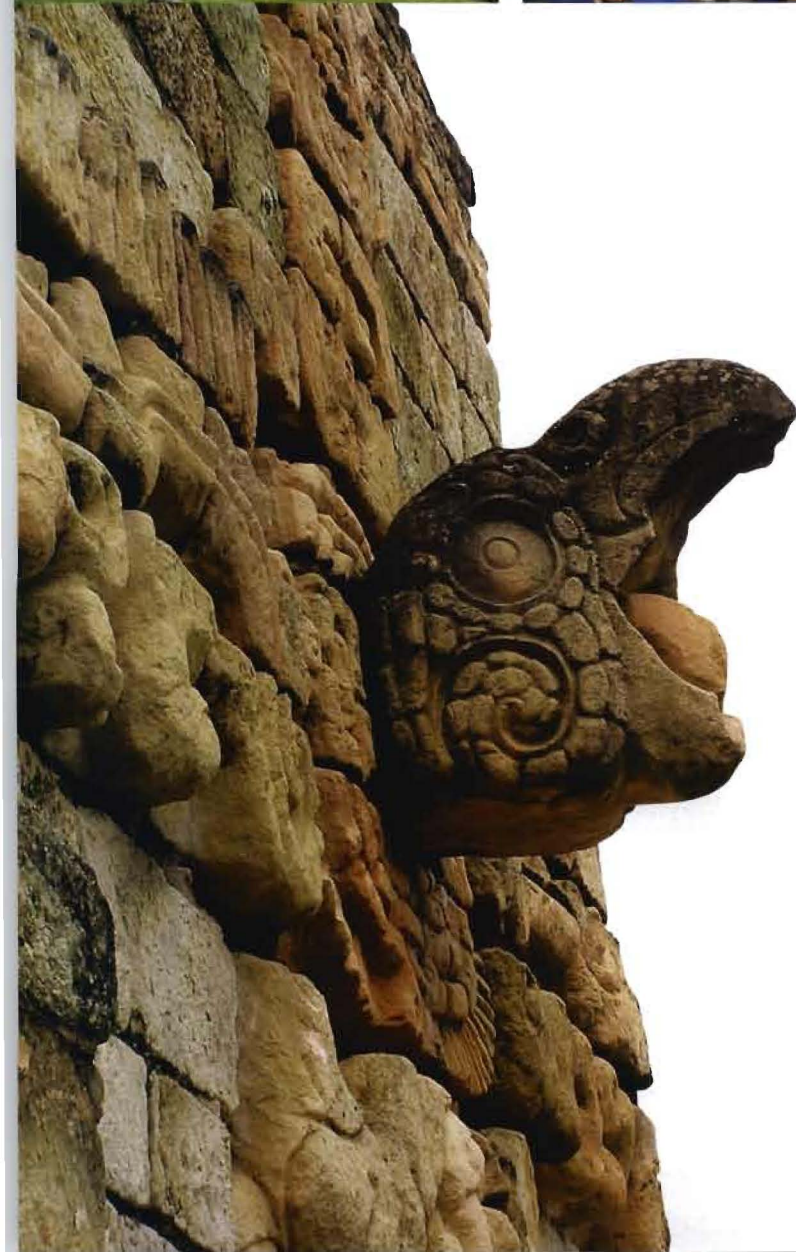
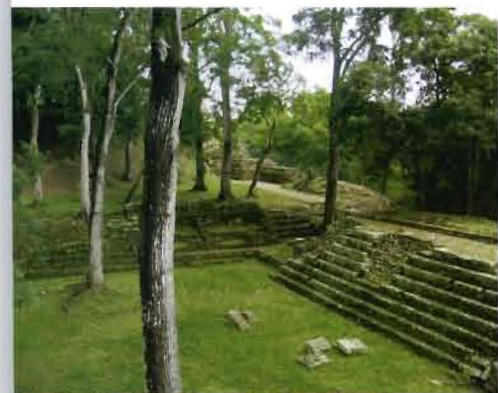


# PRESERVING

## FACULTY, STUDENTS



WHEN JOE DONALDSON LED A SMALL GROUP of Cal Poly students and faculty to Honduras last October, he knew early on it would be no mere sightseeing trip.

After enduring a 24-hour ordeal of air travel from San Luis Obispo to San Pedro Sula, his group encountered a mudslide that closed the highway five miles from their hotel in Copan, forcing them to hoist their luggage up over their heads and slog knee-deep through mud.

"It was raining hard; the river was swollen with red mud," Donaldson said. "Buses and cars were stopped in the road, and people and animals were everywhere. We were so tired, we couldn't believe we'd have to walk five miles with our luggage."

Once they got through the "moving mud" – it was still an active landslide – a van took them to their hotel. "It was pitch-dark. I remember all of us standing out in front, rinsing off the mud with a hose and laughing. Believe it or not, we were actually enjoying ourselves."

Welcome to Copan, an ancient village of hand-hewn houses and cobblestone streets set in the steep terrain of Northwest Honduras. Once isolated, this rain forest community's culture and natural resources are now threatened by civilization.

Roads and dwellings sit on top of 1,500-year-old Mayan ruins. A two-lane highway rumbles through the heart of the ruins. Land along the Copan River, once shaded by dense rain forest, is almost void of vegetation and wildlife due to deforestation. Devastating landslides are common.

To help with some of Copan's problems, the Honduras Ministry of Tourism asked the Cal Poly crew of six students, landscape



# THE PAST

DEVISE PLAN TO PROTECT MAYAN RUINS

BY SUSAN MCDONALD



architecture Professor Donaldson, and a handful of other faculty to create a plan for protecting the area's vast cultural and natural resources and sustaining the area environmentally, economically and socially. The World Bank provided funding for the project.

Working alongside members of the Honduran Institute of Archaeology and university counterparts from the Centro de Diseño, Arquitectura y Construcción (Center of Design, Architecture and Construction) of Tegucigalpa, the Cal Poly group helped develop a plan for an 80-square-kilometer buffer zone around the Copan Archaeological Park. Its extensive Mayan ruins are so spectacular that UNESCO designated it a World Heritage site in 1980.

Though the Honduran government ordered protection of the area 20 years ago, the rules have not been enforced, Donaldson said, pointing out a Texaco gas station built amidst a beautiful natural area at the entry to the park.

Back home, the students are finalizing a plan for regional sustainability to protect and improve the environment, economy and culture. "We're creating design guidelines," said Rudy Castro, a fourth-year landscape architecture major who was born in El Salvador. "It's not easy. They do things a lot differently over there. We can set the guidelines, but without anyone enforcing them, things won't change."

The Honduran people need to realize what they're sitting on, he said. "We're trying to help them find the best places to grow their food, to live and survive, and ways to protect their resources. It's very intense, there are lots of layers. Finding the right balance, that's our real challenge." ■

