



International Boundary Study

No. 161 – February 9, 1977

Belize – Mexico Boundary

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**The Geographer
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Bureau of Intelligence and Research**

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

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BELIZE – MEXICO BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Belize–Mexico boundary is approximately 250 kilometers (155 miles) long. Inland from the Boca Bacalar Chico on the Caribbean coast, it extends through the Chetumal Bay for about 81 kilometers (50 miles) to the mouth of the Hondo (Rio Hondo). The boundary follows the thalweg of the Hondo and Blue Creed (Rio Azul) upstream to the meridian of Garbutts Fall. It then follows this median southward to the tripoint with Guatemala on the parallel of 17°49' North.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The British Bay Settlement was established in the area which is now Belize¹ in 1638. By the Treaty of Madrid of 1670, Spain accorded recognition to the de facto British possessions in the Caribbean area, but it did not accept Great Britain's contention that the terms of the treaty included the Bay Settlement.

In the Treaty of Paris in 1763, Spain, while retaining sovereignty over Belize, conceded to the British settlers the right to pursue the logwood industry. This was confirmed by the Treaty of Versailles on September 3, 1783, for the area in northeastern Belize between the Rio Hondo and the Belize river. On July 14, 1786, the Convention of London reconfirmed the right to engage in woodcutting, and the logwood concession was enlarged to include the area between the Belize and Sibun rivers, while Great Britain gave up its claim to the Mosquito Coast farther south on the mainland of Central America.

Mexico became independent from Spain on September 16, 1810, and the United Kingdom and Mexico signed a treaty of friendship, commerce, and navigation on December 26, 1826. Article 14 of the treaty adopted the limits of Belize indicated by the Treaty of 1786 between Great Britain and Spain.

A treaty between Guatemala² and the United Kingdom on August 30, 1859, delimited the present Belize–Guatemala boundary. It stated that the boundary would extend due north (along the meridian) of Garbutts Fall to the Mexican frontier.

On July 8, 1893, the United Kingdom and Mexico signed a treaty which affords the present delimitation of the Belize–Mexico boundary. The two governments signed a convention on April 7, 1897, which added a new stipulation to the 1893 treaty as follows:

¹ Commonly referred to as Belize during the early British period of settlement, the territory was made the colony of British Honduras in 1862. From 1862 to 1864, British Honduras was administered by a lieutenant governor under the Governor of Jamaica. The name of the colony was changed from British Honduras to Belize on June 1, 1973.

² Guatemala became independent from Spain on September 15, 1821.

Art. 3, bis. Her Britannic Majesty guarantees to Mexican merchant vessels in perpetuity the absolute liberty, as at present enjoyed, of navigating the Strait opening to the south of Ambergris Cay, otherwise known as the island of San Pedro, between this cay and the mainland, as well as of navigating the territorial waters of British Honduras.

III. ALIGNMENT

The Belize–Mexico boundary is delimited by the treaty signed by the United Kingdom and Mexico on July 8, 1893³, as follows:

CONSIDERING that on the 30th April, 1859, a Treaty was concluded between Her Britannic Majesty and the Republic of Guatemala, Article I of which was as follows:

"It is agreed between the Republic of Guatemala and Her Britannic Majesty that the boundary between the Republic and the British Settlement and possessions in the Bay of Honduras, as they existed previous to and on the 1st day of January, 1850, and have continued to exist up to the present time, was and is as follows: Beginning at the mouth of the River Sarstoon, in the Bay of Honduras, and proceeding up the mid-channel thereof to Gracios a Dios Falls, then turning to the right and continuing by a line drawn direct from Garcias a Dios Falls to Garbutt's Falls on the River Belize, and from Garbutt's Falls due north until it strikes the Mexican frontier;"

That on the 27th September, 1882, the Mexican Republic negotiated a Treaty of Limits with that of Guatemala, and, on fixing the dividing line between both countries in the Yucatan Peninsula, they determined as such the parallel of 17°49' north, which should run indefinitely towards the east;

That it is of manifest advantage for the preservation of the friendly relations which happily exist between the High Contracting Parties to define with all clearness what is the Mexican frontier to which Guatemala referred in its Treaty concerning its limits with the British possessions in the Bay of Honduras, and what are in consequence the boundaries of those possessions with Mexico;

Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and the President of the United Mexican States have appointed as their Plenipotentiaries to conclude a Treaty of Limits:

Her Majesty the Queen, Sir Spenser St. John, Knight Commander of St. Michael and St. George, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Her Britannic Majesty in Mexico;

³ Treaty between Great Britain and Mexico, respecting the Boundary between Mexico and British Honduras. Signed at Mexico, July 8, 1893 [Ratifications exchanged at Mexico, July 21, 1897]. British and Foreign State Papers, Vol. 85 (1892–93), pp. 58–60.

And the President of the United Mexican States, Senor Don Ignacio Mariscal, Secretary of State for Foreign Relations;

Who, after having communicated to each other their full powers, found in due form, have agreed upon the following Articles:

ART. I. It is agreed between Her Britannic Majesty and the Republic of Mexico that the boundary between the Republic and the Colony of British Honduras was and is as follows:

"Beginning at Boca Bacalar Chica, the strait which separates the State of Yucatan from Ambergris Cay and its dependent isles, the boundary-line runs in the centre of the channel between the above-mentioned cay and the mainland, south-westward as far as the parallel 18°09' north, and then northwest midway between two cays, as marked on the annexed map, as far as the parallel of 18°10' north; then turning to the westward, continues across the adjoining bay first westward to the meridian of 88°02' west, then north to the parallel 18°25' north, again westward to the meridian 88°18' west, and northward along that meridian to latitude 18°28-1/2' north, in which is situated the mouth of the River Hondo, which it follows in its deepest channel, passing west of Albion Island, continuing up Blue Creek until the said creek crosses the meridian of Garbutt's Falls at a point due north of the point where the boundary-lines of Mexico, Guatemala, and British Honduras intersect; and from that point it runs due south to latitude 17°49' north, the boundary-line between the Republics of Mexico and Guatemala leaving to the north, in Mexican territory, the so-called River Snosha or Xnohha."

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared by the Office of the Geographer, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of the Office of Management and Budget Circular No. A-16.

Government agencies may obtain additional information and copies of the study by calling the Office of the Geographer, Room 8742, Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520 (Telephone: 632-2021 or 632-2022).