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## Frederick Catherwood

(1799-1854)

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An early 19th-century world traveler including the exploration of Mayan antiquities, Frederick Catherwood was active in England, Central America, New York City and San Francisco during the early days of the Gold Rush.

Of Scottish heritage, he was born in London, England in 1799 to a prosperous family. He worked as an apprentice architect and then studied at the Royal Academy in the 1820s and then completed his formal education in architecture at Oxford University. Adept at drawing, he was noted for his accurate depiction of ancient monuments and reliquaries. In the 1840s he used his sketches of Yucatan Indian relics in his book *Ancient Monuments of South America*.

Although his training was in architecture, he decided his real passion in life was for art, especially images from his many travels especially the sites of ancient cultures, specifically the Mayans. His interest in ancient buildings had begun in 1820 when he attended some lectures on Piranesi at the Royal Academy in Somerset House. The painter Joseph Severn invited him to Rome, and there he began to study classic architecture.

He explored Central American jungles for many years with fellow explorer John Lloyd Stephens, and these visits to Mayan ruins occurred in two trips between 1839 and 1841 with John Lloyd Stephens. Their endeavors established the basis of American archaeology for future archaeological expeditions. From these explorations, Catherwood published 25 lithographs, a map, with text from over 200 original drawings, sepias, and watercolors. It is thought that Catherwoods', along with Stephens', most major contribution was the discovery of the Mayan calendar system. Catherwood's illustrated book, written by Stephens and titled *Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*, became a classic and influential work that opened up a whole new area of research into the Mayan people. The plates by Catherwood have become famous in themselves.

Early in his career, before discovering the cultures of Mexico, Catherwood traveled up the Nile River as an expedition artist in 1824 with Englishman Robert Hay, and the expedition is credited with laying the foundations for Egyptian archeology.

After nine years of traveling and drawing, Catherwood returned to London in 1835. There he became exposed to huge panoramic displays of ancient cities, and he formed an alliance with a

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man named Burford to produce panoramic shows. At one of these productions he met John Lloyd Stephens, his future companion to the Mayan region of the Yucatan Peninsula.

Catherwood did well with panoramas and in 1837 built a rotunda in New York City for exhibiting the first panorama shown in America. From these entertainments, he earned money for more travel. He had moved to New York City at the urging of Stephens because an 1835 fire had damaged the city, and Stephens saw the opportunity for Catherwood's architecture skills in rebuilding.

Little is known about Catherwood's personal appearance except that he was described as a tall, well-built man with light-colored hair. After the years he spent in the jungle of the Yucatan he earned a living as a civil engineer and was in San Francisco during the Gold Rush.

He died on September 20, 1854 after a French vessel, "The Vesta", rammed the boat on which he was sailing from Liverpool to the United States.

Sources:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick\\_Catherwood](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Catherwood)

[http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/information/biography/abcde/catherwood\\_frederick.html](http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/information/biography/abcde/catherwood_frederick.html)

Edan Hughes, "Artists in California, 1786-1940"