

It's 2012, another year for 'doomsday' chatter

by [Kathleen O'Brien](#) in the [February 8, 2012](#) issue

On December 21, 2012, the Mayan calendar reaches the end of its 5,126-year epoch. That's a cause for consternation among some end-time adherents—and for amusement among some descendants of the Maya.

Fresh

from having survived one end-of-the-world prediction—a two-stage affair covering 2011's drop-dead dates of May 21 and October 21—we now plunge into the countdown for End-Time 2012.

Should you be inclined, you can use your smartphone to check how many days are remaining before a date that was carved into rock by a pre-Columbian civilization. You can blame—or credit—the Maya for the commotion. Or, more likely, their New Age adherents.

The ancient Mayan calendar does technically end at 12/21/2012. But Mayan experts say it's simply a case of one long Mayan epoch—of 5,126 years—coming to an end, in much the same way the 1900s came to an end.

"I don't think the Mayan put a picture of Porky Pig at the end of their calendar and said, 'That's all, folks,'" said Jefferson Harman, a Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, "intuitive," or dream interpreter, who runs a workshop called "Beyond 2012."

All this

calendar talk is news to Firmo Choc, a 39-year-old Mayan farmer who lives in a rural village in Belize. Only recently did he hear of the New Age crowd's fuss over his culture's ancient calendar, when his North American employer told him about it. Not only was Choc taken aback to

hear the end of the world prediction attributed to his people, he was surprised that outsiders are even familiar with the calendar. He, his family, his friends and neighbors all use the standard Western calendar.

"The

Mayan who surround me have no idea that some calendar their ancestors created indicates that a great change is to occur in 2012. They are just hoping their corn and cacao crops will be plentiful so their family won't starve in 2012," said Choc's employer, Anne-Michelle Marsden, a Rutgers University professor who lives in Belize.

About a decade ago, Marsden spent her sabbatical year in Belize producing a documentary called *The Living Maya*.

Choc travels to the coast by bus along unpaved roads twice a week to work as her groundskeeper. He has eight children; the oldest boy had to stop his schooling to help on the family cacao farm. He's Catholic but participates in the Mayan Deer Dance ceremony when it is celebrated in his village.

Choc is not concerned about the world ending any time soon. He's mostly concerned about supporting his family. School fees are very expensive, wages are low and job prospects for nonfarmers poor.

Mayans

in parts of Guatemala and Mexico still refer to the ancient Mayan calendar, consulting it in part because of the belief that certain glyphs, or pictures, that accompany the calendar's days influence events in much the way astrological signs are said to hold sway.

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Mayan calendar is a veritable cottage industry for archaeologists, anthropologists and numerologists, who have been throwing out theories of interpretation since the turn of the previous century. With very little in the way of written documentation from the calendar's originators, the theories are hard to prove—or disprove.

The

end-time proposition has been floating around for 30 years or so, put forth by New Age spiritualists like the late Terence McKenna, who

claimed that it signaled the start of a period of broader human consciousness.

Denise Saracco, a self-described shaman and massage therapist who runs a workshop called "Demystifying the Mayan Calendar" at the Peaceful Paths store in Butler, New Jersey, learned about the calendar as part of her two-year shaman apprenticeship. Saracco believes that 2012 is a key date—although she stops short of predicting what will happen. "Is it the end of the world? No," she said. "It's the end of the world as we know it." —RNS