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Hermounts

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The [Book of Mormon](#) mentions the term "wilderness" many times in a variety of contexts. See the article "[A Note about Wilderness](#)" in this blog. The wilderness of Hermounts [Alma 2:37](#) is one of only two wilderness areas in the text that carry a proper name. The other is the wilderness of Akish [Ether 14:3](#). The term "Hermounts" is mentioned only once in the Nephite text, while the wilderness of Akish is referenced three times in Moroni's abridgment of the Jaredite account. Careful exegesis allows us to identify eleven textual requirements for Hermounts, identified as **1** - **11** with aqua shading.

- Hermounts was a wilderness **1** with limited human population, outside of Nephite political control [Alma 2:36](#).
- This wilderness was northwest **2** of the local land of Zarahemla. [Alma 2:36](#).
- Hermounts was one part of a more extensive wilderness zone **3**. [Alma 2:37](#).
- The wildlife indigenous to Hermounts included large carnivores **4**. [Alma 2:38](#).
- Vultures **5** were native to Hermounts [Alma 2:38](#) as well as other areas (highland Guatemala) [Mosiah 12:2](#). Biblical cultures considered an unburied corpse a horrible indignity [Jeremiah 22:19](#) and several Old Testament passages contain curse language very similar to The Book of Mormon phrases about beasts [Helaman 7:19](#) and birds devouring dead bodies [1 Kings 14:11](#), [1 Kings 16:4](#), [1 Kings 21:24](#), [Jeremiah 15:3](#). Ravenous beasts and wilderness are formulaic in The Book of Mormon [1 Nephi 7:16](#), [Alma 16:10](#) as they are in the Old Testament [Ezekiel 29:5](#). Even the iconic Mormon [Mosiah 18:30](#) had wilderness characteristics because it was lightly inhabited [Mosiah 18:31](#) and had seasonal infestations of wild beasts [Mosiah 18:4](#).
- The Nephites did not fight in Hermounts. They fought the combined Lamanite-Amlicite armies in the local land of Zarahemla. The defeated, scattered, wounded invaders then straggled from Zarahemla across the border into Hermounts [Alma 2:37](#). Many of the attackers were so gravely hurt that they died of their injuries in Hermounts [Alma 2:38](#). Therefore, Hermounts and the local land of Zarahemla shared a common border **6**.
- This battle defended the capital city of Zarahemla [Alma 2:26](#) which was in the local land of Zarahemla. The nature of the conflict described in the text (defenders in

hot pursuit [Alma 2:36](#), invaders surrounded [Alma 2:37](#), wounded stragglers crossing the border and dying [Alma 2:38](#)) implies a modest distance **7** from the city of Zarahemla to Hermounts. It would be hard to textually justify any distance greater than 2-3 days travel (30-45 air kilometers based on a derived rule of thumb - see the article "[Land Southward Travel Times](#)" in this blog).

- The Lamanite-Amlicite fighters who died of their wounds in Hermounts were not killed by wild animals. Their dead and decomposing bodies were eaten by beasts and vultures [Alma 2:38](#). This means carnivores who eat carrion **8** inhabited Hermounts.
- Hermounts was not devoid of human activity. Enough hunting, gathering, or scavenging **9** was going on in this wilderness that Lamanite-Amlicite skeletons were eventually heaped up in bone piles [Alma 2:38](#).
- Hermounts and the local land of Zarahemla were at approximately the same elevation **10**. The defeated Lamanite-Amlicite survivors did not go "up" or "down" to Hermounts. They simply fled in a northwesterly direction until they "reached" the wilderness [Alma 2:37](#).
- The text mentions no significant topographical obstacle **11** (mountain, river) separating Hermounts from the local land of Zarahemla. The Book of Mormon routinely uses the term "over" to describe movement across a river [Alma 6:7](#), [Alma 15:18](#), [Alma 16:7](#) or mountainous area [Alma 27:14](#), [Ether 9:3](#). No such language appears in the description of wounded fighter movement from the local land of Zarahemla to the wilderness of Hermounts.

Our candidate for the wilderness of Hermounts is part of the largest wetlands ecosystem in North America, the Pantanos de Centla in the Usumacinta delta of Tabasco and Campeche. The Biosphere Reserve ([UNESCO](#) designation) is 3,020 square kilometers, about the size of the state of Rhode Island. This is a complex hydrological system including rivers, lakes, lagoons, freshwater swamps, mangrove swamps, salt marshes, and tropical forests. On the following map, we have outlined the permanent flood plain area between the Chilapa River on the west and the Usumacinta River on the east:



Pantanos de Centla area, candidate for Hermounts

Comparing this region with the eleven textual requirements outlined above, we get the following results:

1. Our proposed Hermounts has limited human population today. This map from [NASA](#) shows the light emanating from this region at night. The large Ciudad Pemex industrial complex glows brightly west of the Chilapa River. The town of Jonuta (2010 Mexican Census population 6,899) shows up near the confluence of the Usumacinta with its Campechean distributary, the Palizada. And, the town of Emiliano Zapata (Mexican 2010 Census population 20,030) is highly visible near the ruins we suggest for the city of Zarahemla. In the actual area we propose for Hermounts, though, there is little contemporary settlement.



Proposed Hermounts where few people live today

There was not a lot going on in this area anciently, either. We superimpose [EAAMS](#) data showing known archaeological sites on top of our proposed wilderness of Hermounts. There are clusters of sites along the large rivers, but almost nothing in our Hermounts itself.



Proposed Hermounts showing few ancient archaeological sites

This is an area of permanent lakes and rivers with ribbons of forest cutting through the swamps. It is wet year-round and even wetter in the rainy season. It has never been a highly desirable area for settlement. Much of the modern human activity in the region is

related to Tabasco's extensive petroleum industry (only the huge state of Veracruz in Mexico produces more oil and gas than the small state of Tabasco). Our proposed Hermounts qualifies as a Book of Mormon wilderness. Criterion 1 satisfied.

2. We place a white line on an exact northwest heading and superimpose it on top of a map of our proposed wilderness of Hermounts in green and the local land of Zarahemla in red.



Hermounts north & west of the local land of Zarahemla

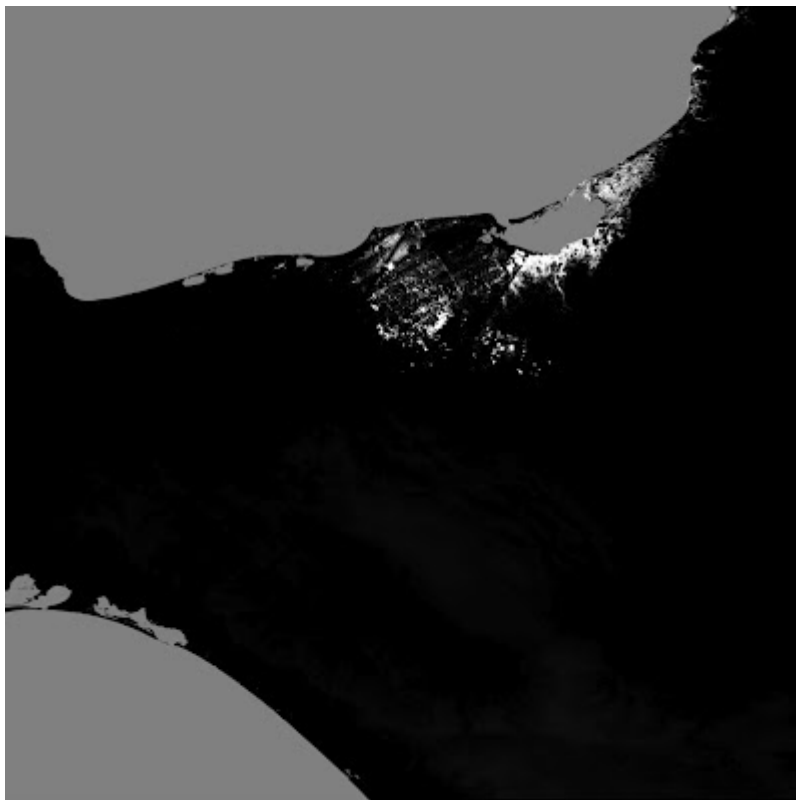
The location of Hermounts north and west of Zarahemla could hardly be more precise. Criterion 2 satisfied.

3. The area enclosed in white below (roughly 17,000 square kilometers) is the approximate extent of the permanent flood plain in the Usumacinta delta.



Usumacinta delta permanent flood plain

This striking visual, from satellite imagery, shows standing water at the height of the epic floods of 2007:



2007 floods in the Usumacinta delta area

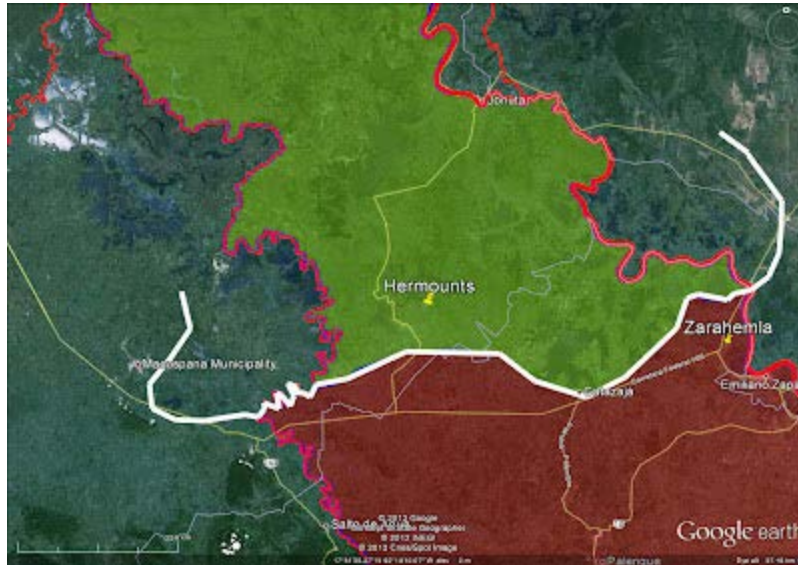
The area we have identified as Hermounts is in the middle of a much larger wetlands ecoregion that extends to the west, north, and east. This was a huge (on the order of 17,000 square kilometers or about the size of the state of Hawaii) wilderness area in Book of Mormon times with strings of settlements along the large rivers and the coastal estuaries, but little human habitation throughout vast stretches of lakes, wet lowlands, and mangrove swamps. Criterion 3 satisfied.

4. Large carnivores native to the Pantanos de Centla Biosphere Reserve include the apex terrestrial predator jaguar (*Panthera onca*) and the apex riverine predator crocodile (*Crocodylus moreletii*). Criterion 4 satisfied.

A side note. Hugh W. Nibley was delighted when he finally discovered an Egyptian correlate (Graecized Hermonthis) for the name "Hermounts." He explained the etymology of the term in *Since Cumorah* chapter 6, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* chapters 12 & 15, and taught it in his Book of Mormon class recorded as *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, Semester 2, Lecture 44. According to Nibley, Hermonthis in Egypt was a place along the Nile infested with large wild animals such as lions and crocodiles. It is the modern town of Armant on the west bank of the Nile about 19 kilometers south of Thebes in upper Egypt.

5. Vultures indigenous to the Pantanos de Centla area include the lesser yellow-headed vulture (*Cathartes burrovianus*) and the larger king vulture (*Sarcoramphus papa*). International birding tours often include the Usumacinta River from Yaxchilan to the Laguna de Terminos on their itinerary because this is the most reliable place in Mexico for birdwatchers to see the king vulture. Criterion 5 satisfied.

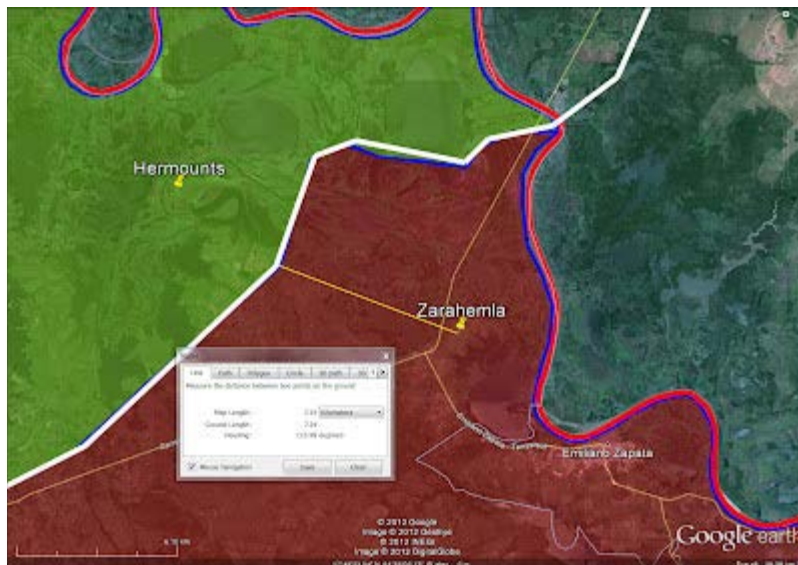
6. Our proposed boundary between the local land of Zarahemla and the wilderness of Hermounts is the edge of the permanent Usumacinta flood plain. South of this line, traditional agriculture flourishes. North of this line, fishing, hunting and gathering activities predominate. South of this line, there is a definite dry season and rainy season. North of this line, the ground is largely saturated year-round. South of this line, traditional travel over paths or roads is typical. North of this line, you will need some kind of water craft to get very far into the back country. The white line on the map below shows this approximate border:



Border between Hermounts in green and the local land of Zarahemla in red

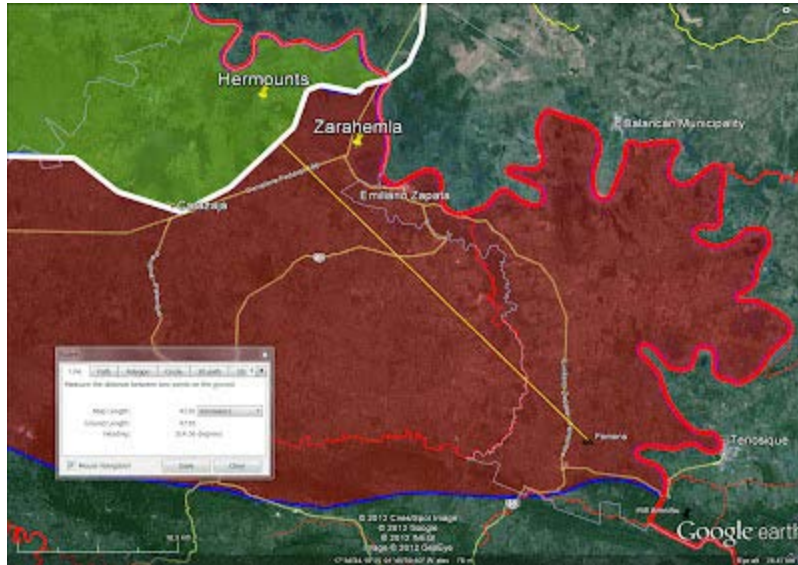
Our proposed Hermounts and Zarahemla do share a common border. Criterion 6 satisfied.

7. Our proposed city of Zarahemla (the Calatraba/Nueva Esperanza/Nueva Esperanza II ruins complex) is less than 8 air kilometers southeast of Hermounts.



Proposed city of Zarahemla near wilderness of Hermounts

Pomona, another possibility for the city of Zarahemla, is about 48 air kilometers southeast of our Hermounts.

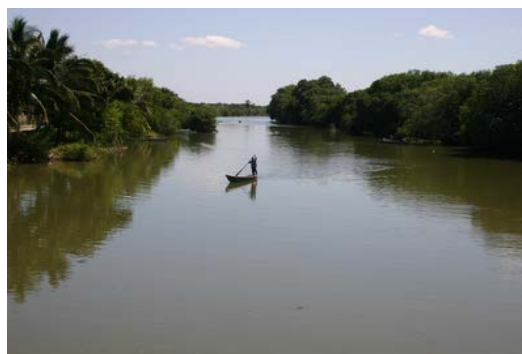


Another possible Zarahemla, Pomona, near Hermounts

There are other possible sites for the city of Zarahemla (Aguacate, Arenitas) within our proposed local land of Zarahemla. All are within the reasonable distance from Hermounts implied by the text. Criterion 7 satisfied.

8. Jaguars are opportunistic feeders. They prefer fresh kill, but will eat carrion. Crocodiles, on the other hand, always eat meat that is partially decomposed. When a crocodile kills prey, it typically stores the carcass for a few days in an underwater lair so the meat will soften enough for the reptile to tear it into bite-sized chunks with its limited jaw motion. And, vultures, obviously, consume carrion. Criterion 8 satisfied.

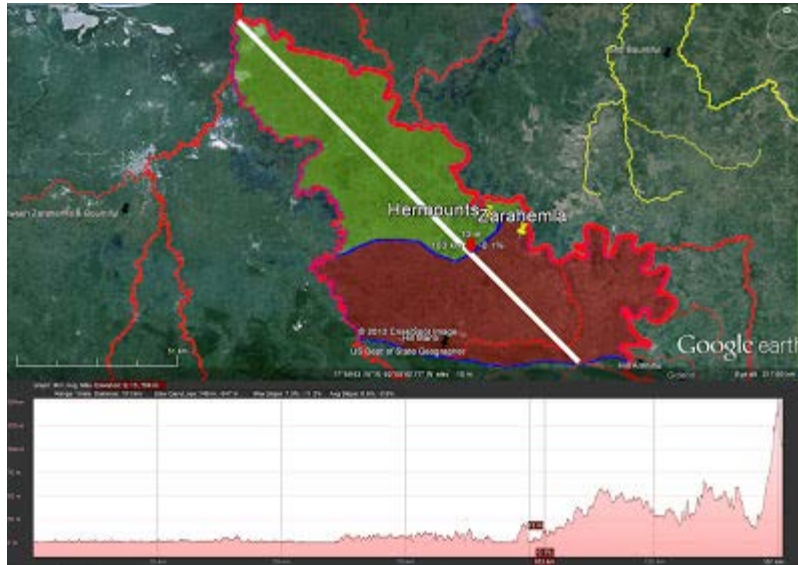
9. Hunting, fishing, gathering and scavenging have always gone on in the wetlands we have identified as Hermounts. This photo is courtesy of the [Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies](#) at [Duke University](#).



Boatman in the Pantanos de Centla

Humans are present in the area, just not in large numbers. Criterion 9 satisfied.

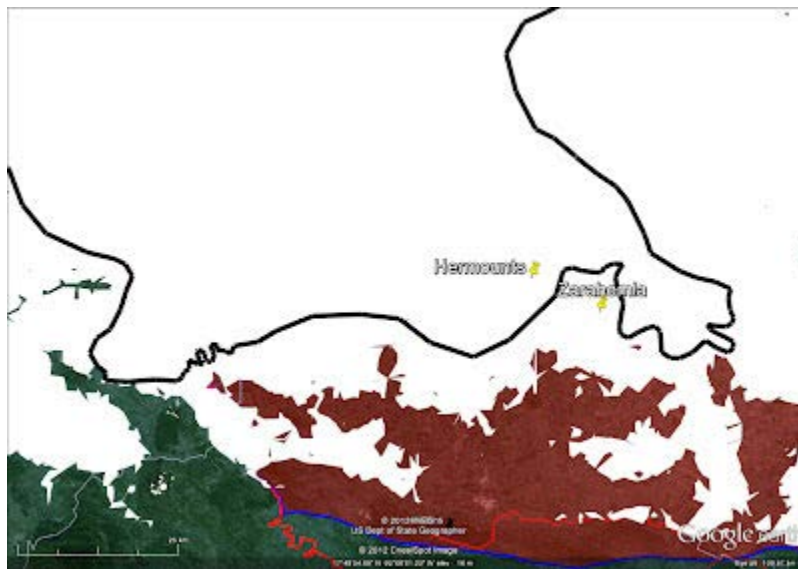
10. We will run a northwest to southeast transect through our proposed wilderness of Hermounts and local land of Zarahemla, then show its elevation profile.



Elevations of a NW to SE transect through the proposed Hermounts and local land of Zarahemla

This transect shows the wilderness area to be very level at an elevation of approximately 1 meter above sea level near the coast and 13 meters above sea level at the edge of the permanent flood plain. The likely local land of Zarahemla begins at about 13 meters above sea level on its northern boundary and rises to high points of 50 - 60 meters elevation throughout most of its extension. The piedmont area on the extreme southern boundary of the local land of Zarahemla rises to heights of 150 - 160 meters near the river Sidon (Usumacinta). Average elevation of this transect through Hermounts: 3 meters above sea level. Average elevation of this transect through the local land of Zarahemla: 41 meters above sea level. Both areas are clearly in the lowlands. Furthermore, the boundary area is quite smooth. Average elevation of this transect for 10 kilometers on either side of the border: 16 meters above sea level. Coming from the coast, one has clearly come up to the local land of Zarahemla [Alma 22:31](#), but moving northwest from Zarahemla to Hermounts the slope is gentle enough that elevational prepositions are not used in the text [Alma 2:36](#). This terrain in Tabasco, Chiapas (and Campeche if you include the entire ecoregion) fits the text well. Criterion 10 satisfied.

11. No large rivers or mountains divide our proposed Hermounts from the local land of Zarahemla. Our Zarahemla is at a higher average elevation, but the slopes in the transition zone along the border are gentle. Coming from the populated area to the south, one simply arrives at the wetlands without going over any stark topographic features that clearly define the boundary. The map below shows all elevations below 40 meters in white. The black line is the boundary of the permanent flood plain in the Usumacinta delta, the southern portion of which is our proposed border between the wilderness of Hermounts and the local land of Zarahemla.

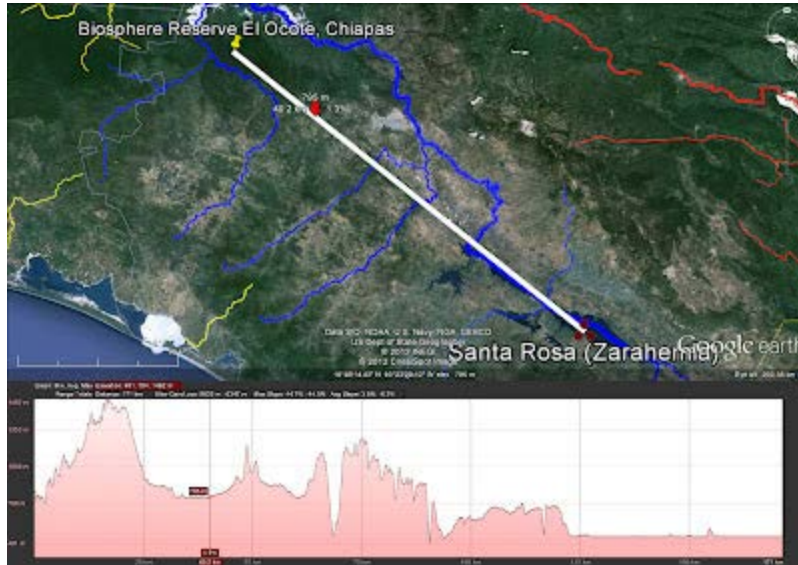


40-meter elevation terrain plane superimposed over the Hermounts/local land of Zarahemla border region

Again, this terrain fits the text precisely. Criterion 11 satisfied.

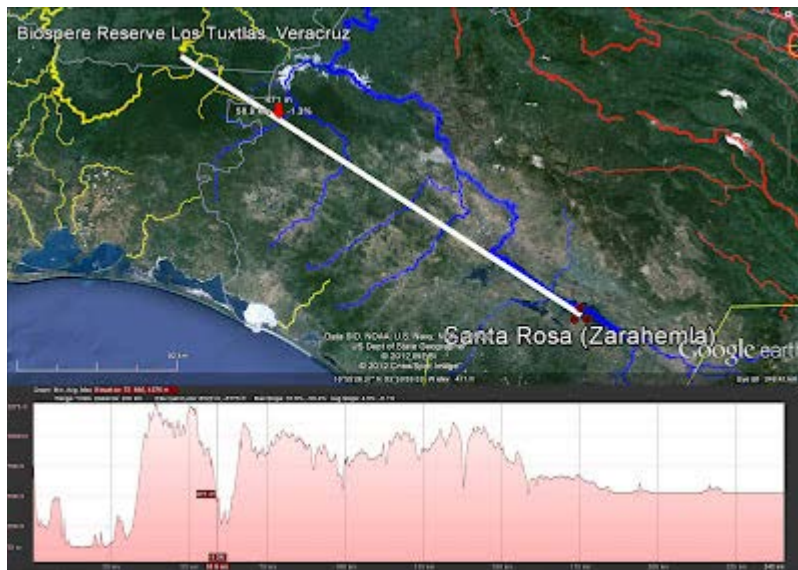
With all 11 textual criteria satisfied, we are comfortable positing the Pantanos de Centla area in the Usumacinta delta as a viable candidate for The Book of Mormon wilderness of Hermounts.

In the Mezcalapa-Grijalva/Sidon correlation theory, one biosphere reserve in Chiapas and another in Veracruz have been proposed as candidates for Hermounts. This map shows the El Ocote Reserve in Chiapas, the site of Santa Rosa in the central depression of Chiapas, and a 171-kilometer-long transect between them with its elevation profile.



El Ocote Reserve to Santa Rosa, Chiapas transect

And, this map shows the Los Tuxtlas Reserve in Veracruz, the site of Santa Rosa in the central depression of Chiapas, and a 240-kilometer-long transect between them with its elevation profile.



Los Tuxtlas Reserve, Veracruz to Santa Rosa, Chiapas transect

It should be obvious that both proposals for Hermounts fail multiple criteria and are poor fits to the text of Alma 2. As we demonstrated conclusively in the blog article "[The Usumacinta/Sidon Correlation](#)," the big picture strongly favors the Usumacinta as the

Sidon, and if that correlation is true, then we should find dozens of localized correlations (such as Pantanos de Centla/Hermounts) that also show a high degree of fit to the text.