

INTO THE UNKNOWN

Head-shrinkers of the Amazon

Jonathan Gray
© Copyright 2003
<http://www.beforeus.com>

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1 Midnight Drama in a Frontier Village

2 In the Hands of Two Murderers

3. Lost!

4. Leaping Rapids

5. An Offer Too Dangerous To Accept

6. The Witch's Curse

7. How to Shrink a Head

8. Weird Sounds in the Dark

9. The Fire-god Sacrifice

10. So You Want to Go Exploring!

INTRODUCTION

When he heard I was planning to plunge into the forbidden forests of the Amazon, my friend Andrew rocked with laughter.

“I’ll give you three precious tips,” he smirked. “Never put out a fire with your face. Never sit down with a bucket of ants. And finally, don’t ever go skinny dipping in a pool full of piranhas!”

Then he just rolled over and roared hysterically.

I was glad he was not coming with me. I was dead serious to fulfil a boyhood dream.

At the age of ten, I had been captivated by the story of Percy Fawcett, the British explorer. Fawcett had gone deep into the trackless Amazon jungles and come upon the ruins of a dead stone city. Its massive walls and deserted houses were choked with trailing vines. Trees grew out of the windows. Except for the chatter of monkeys and choruses of birds, all was ghostly silent. Its guardians were savages who wielded blowpipes with poison darts.

On a return voyage, Fawcett vanished.

A similar fate has befallen many others. Once an entire patrol of 1,400 vanished in the jungle without trace.

The Amazon Basin happens to be the largest unexplored jungle area in the world. This region is still little known – even in this twenty-first century. Just in my lifetime, a river tributary 200 miles long was discovered – and then only by satellite.

The Amazon system comprises 50,000 miles of navigable “trunk rivers” and an estimated 16,000 tributaries. The jungle on each side of the rivers is almost totally impenetrable, at least for a Westerner. I know of settlers who have lived on riverbank clearings for forty years and never ventured more than a mile back into the jungle.

The Amazon contains some of the most solid jungles and hostile environments to be found anywhere. There are vast stretches where the fog never lifts, and in others it doesn't clear until late afternoon.

Why did I want to go in? Because it was there. At the age of 34, I organised my first expedition, for the mystery, adventure and excitement of the unknown.

This was to be the first of 25 expeditions into remote, ancient corners of the earth. So sit back and I'll share it with you. Let's get started.

CHAPTER 1

MIDNIGHT DRAMA IN A FRONTIER VILLAGE

It was from eastern Ecuador that the journey began.

The Eastern Amazon lowlands is one of the last really wild, unexplored areas left in the world.

Here at the edge of the Andes Mountains is the beginning of the world's mightiest drainage system, the headwaters of the Amazon, and a vast, unknown, barely-explored tropical rain forest.

To the adventurer it stands as a challenge.

It is an immensely beautiful, virgin jungle land that civilization has yet to conquer.

Vast, and trackless, rugged and isolated, this region is laced with fast-running rivers that are often dangerous because of heavy, sudden flood rains, many rocks, rapids and other obstructions.

Because of these hazards, river transportation is dangerous.

To reach the Amazon required crossing the lofty Andes mountain range.

Excluding the Himalayas, the Andes comprise the world's highest mountains. Many peaks are more than 22,000 feet (7,000 meters) high, with cliff-hanging roads, deep gorges, and bleak slopes. Here, soaring in the skies, is the fabled condor bird, with a wingspan of 10 feet, 3 meters! What a fascinating place!

I rode on the back of a lorry. The tray was packed with Indians, all dressed warm, in little fat round balls. With their ponchos spreading out from their necks to their legs, they looked like large pumpkins with clothes on, or fat doorstops, with a hat on top of each, nodding rhythmically back and forth as the truck shook along the dusty road.

A movie would have been hilarious! But for one thing I did not have my movie camera unpacked, videos had not been invented, and moreover I

wanted to do nothing but to huddle in a ball and keep from freezing. After all we were 13,000 feet up on a barren, windswept plateau in the coldest hours before dawn.

The descent of the eastern slopes of the Andes toward the upper reaches of the Amazon jungle was gradual, at first. But soon a swirling, turbulent stream led us into the arms of the valley. For a while this was easy going. But ultimately the valley became crushed between high mountain cliffs, to enter a gorge.

The sparse growth now quickly gave way to thick, lush hanging vines and choking jungle. We descended steeply down, down, down beside the river, enclosed by these steep mountains.

The gorge snaked through, first one way, then another. It seemed endless. Any canoe trying to shoot down this river, with its currents whirling around and over massive rocks, would surely be dashed to pieces in minutes.

I was aware that this deep, hidden canyon was travelled, in ages past, by the Incas, that ancient mountain empire that was discovered and destroyed by the Spaniards. The Spanish conquistadores were in search of fabled jungle cities of gold, which they never found.

The brown waters continued to foam and roar beside us. The towering mountains threw the canyon into perpetual shade.

There was something about pressing into the unknown that drove me with fascination. Here at the edge of the tall Andes is the beginning of the world's mightiest drainage system, and a vast, largely unknown tropical forest. It is rugged, isolated, and virtually trackless, unconquered by civilization... one of the last really wild, unexplored areas left in the world.

Two areas of these headwaters were known to contain dangerous tribes, the Aucas and the Ashwaris, the later being a branch of the head-shrinking Jivaros.

I arrived at the jungle-enclosed outpost of Shell Mera, late in the afternoon. It was in every respect a "wild west" settlement. You would think it was out of a Hollywood movie – and with the meanest "hombres" you could wish for.

I trudged along the single dusty track. It was lined on one side with decrepit shop fronts. Hawk-eyed watchers followed my every step, as I sought out a place for the night.

At last I found, leaning over the dirt street, a matchbox-sized room above a saloon. There was no bed, just a hammock to bend your back in.

But after two days riding on a wooden conveyance, I was dog tired enough to sleep anywhere. In the hall that gave access to my room, gamblers and players were locked in raucous revelry. I jammed the door shut and curled into the hammock.

About midnight the door burst open and a drunk fell backwards onto me. We both, with the hammock, crashed to the floor.

Soon I was back asleep. But it happened again. And again. And Again. Honestly, as the night wore on, I lost count of how many times the door burst open and we crashed to the floor!

My consolation was that this would go on for no more than two or three nights. Then General Bolivar Pico would touch down in his plane and I would be away from here. Shell Mera had a tiny landing strip.

The military were expected to charter a plane within a few days, to fly in supplies to their jungle camp.

A doctor friend in Quito was introducing me to the general. Pico was a former consul to Great Britain; now he was a general of the Ecuador army. He flew weekly supplies to a scattering of army outposts deep in the jungle, hundreds of miles beyond the last road.

Ecuador and Peru, you see, were in a state of undeclared war over a large tract of unexplored jungle east of the Andes. Both countries had drawn their maps to include this disputed territory within their own borders.

Of course there were jungle folk that had never even heard of the outside world, let alone of the existence of Peru or Ecuador. And, in that dense jungle, border markers were useless. You could never know whose territory you were in.

Anyway, like Ecuador, Peru had cleared its own pin-sized circles in the vast forest and dropped in soldiers to “possess” the green deep of unknown rivers, trees and savages.

Neither side knew if the other had a clearing nearby or a hundred miles away. The boundaries were on paper only.

As it turned out, my acquaintance Doctor Fields had graciously written a note in Spanish to his general friend, introducing me.

I waited. And to my relief, it was only two days. Before sunset I heard a droning sound. I looked up and there was the DC3 circling the sky. It zoomed down, dropped its wheels and and bumped to a stop along the little grass airstrip.

My heart beating with excitement, I ran out to greet him.

Pico scanned the note and smiled. “Si, senior. When supplies get here the day after tomorrow, I’ll load them on board and off we go.”

I sought him out because, as General of the Ecuador army, he could fly me deeper into the jungle, beyond the last road end. And this would cut weeks off the overland trampling.

This man told me that recently he had flown over the part of the jungle occupied by Aucas, and the natives came out and looked up, shaking their spears madly at the plane.

Pilots now avoided flying over Auca jungle, because they knew that if they came down, there was no chance of survival or escape.

Four weeks earlier, some rubber men had crossed the river from their camp in the face of a warning from the Aucas, to survey a patch of jungle for rubber. At night, they failed to return to camp. Their mates went to investigate. The four were found with lances through their bodies.

The Jivaros had the quaint custom of shrinking human heads to the size of an orange. This was the area of my planned expedition.

The reputation of the Jivaros for deadliness goes back nearly 400 years.

They caught some Spaniards in 1599 and poured molten gold down throats.

Just a few months before my visit, two groups of Ashwari Jivaros engaged in a savage jungle massacre and practically wiped out one another.

They are the most warlike Indians in all the continent.

Nevertheless, I could hardly wait to plunge into these forbidding jungles and visit these tribes. There were things I just had to discover for myself.

It would entail the penetration of an area in eastern Ecuador that was virtually unknown. I had one of the best maps available for the start of the journey. But beyond a certain point even that map was blank. We would literally walk off the map!

The general was very co-operative. We sat down and discussed our plans. Surprises were in store.

CHAPTER 2

IN THE HANDS OF TWO MURDERERS

The next afternoon, all was ready. The DC3 had only two seats – one for the pilot and myself. It was crammed wall to wall with boxes and sacks of cargo.

Soon we were up and flying eastward. In this vast unknown, nothing but brown swollen rivers and endless jungle spread out below us.

After a few hours, a tiny clearing loomed up ahead. All grass, barely enough space to land. I took a deep breath as we approached the ground.

This lonely outpost, comprising a couple of sheds in a tiny clearing, actually had a name. It was Taisha.

Men were running out.

In a series of bumps we touched down. The soldiers were now forming into two lines. ...about forty men, I calculated.

The general pushed open the door and motioned me to follow. “Come through the guard of honour with me.”

That was nice.

I trotted along behind the general.

The commander offered me a bed in a small, private room. So here was I, by a quaint set of circumstances, the guest of the Ecuadorian government.

...Over dinner we discussed plans.

“Senor, we’ll send out a patrol to the nearest village. It’ll take about two days. And they’ll bring back a couple of natives to carry your gear.”

The officers were wonderful. We could hardly speak each others tongue, yet we got to understand each other marvellously! By body language and

signs in the sand, we asked each other questions, and what fun it was to work at the answers, until we all burst into laughter at each successful try.

That first night, a strange animal, a cosumbo, looking like both a huge rat and a monkey – came in to keep me company.

One just could not shake hands too much here! Before each meal, everyone shook hands, after a meal they shook hands, before separating to each one's room, and even just coming in from the compound. All day long, at every excuse, they shook your hand!

Meanwhile a troop of soldiers travelled into the jungle to the nearest village to get my two carriers. These carriers would be essential for the trek into the deep unknown.

On the second afternoon they returned with two natives. These men, I was assured, were both killers. That made me feel good!

A soldier was given me as well, to go with us. Fortunately, he had the only weapon, a rifle.

The carriers were needed to carry food, clothes, medical supply, hammock, bullet proof vest, and so on.

Some time earlier, I had been told that if we found ourselves in need of carriers, when the word “carry” was mentioned, men stoop back in dignity and summon their women. But, as it happened, I was able, through acquiring two carriers at the outset, to get men. Typical of their race, they were very short, no more than 5 feet (150 centimeters).

Before setting out on foot, I assembled a variety of simple goods for the purpose of befriending anyone we might meet.

Knowing that I would be at the mercy of the two natives who were to carry my equipment, I had an insurance policy in place. It was this. Calling them into my room I lay out on the floor for them to see, an array of other items which would be left here at the camp as a reward to them if they should bring me back safely.

There were brightly coloured lengths of cloth, bright red ribbon, beads, buttons, balloons, shell necklaces, mirrors, combs, fish hooks and a mouth organ. Such an array of treasures would set them up for life, in the eyes of their kinsfolk, as rich men!

This was my only guarantee of a safe return. I also donned a bullet-proof vest, in case of poisoned darts.

The rainy season was supposed to be over by now, but rain still fell almost every day and the rivers were swollen.

“Too dangerous to go down the river much by canoe,” said one of the carriers. So we would have to ‘hoof it’ for most of the expedition, except where rivers must be crossed, by swimming or canoe.

I had deliberately brought to wear a pair of cloth-topped, rubber soled shoes. As soon as the army officer saw them, he said, “Those will be no good, you will need heavy boots!”

He brought some out. “You need these,” he urged. “They will be protection. Don’t go into the jungle with your shoes!” But I took mine, and how glad I was later. They were lighter, cooler, and much more comfortable. Certainly they gave less trouble than the boots my carriers wore.

So the next morning we set out for the pathway of the primitives.

Birds filled the air with their melodies and hysterical screeches.

Soon we were perspiring copiously, not from the heat but the dank humidity. The towering, pressing foliage completely blocked the sun most of the time.

In fact it was so dark, that in broad daylight a camera flash was needed for pictures.

In parts there seemed to be no track at all, but we pressed through the trees and tangled, interjecting vines. The carriers had to get down on their knees and crawl under some of it.

CHAPTER 3

LOST

The first day we waded four rivers and countless small streams and swamps. Even these were deeply over-towered by trees, so we would stumble upon them unexpectedly.

On another occasion, my guide splashed down knee-deep into the mud. It oozed high up over his legs. He then motioned me to encircle the swamp, which I did. But when I emerged, he was nowhere in sight. Neither was there a track. I stood still and listened. There was no sound. I whistled. And then listened. No response. Just the silent jungle at noon, when all nature sleeps.

Barely a moment before he had been just in front of me. Now I was truly lost. No guiding footprints. No visible track. No sound.

And looking back to the direction from which we'd come, it was impossible to see any track. There was no visible way out!

You can be just a few meters from a river bank, and not even know it. The jungle is like a sponge. It soaks up the sound.

I looked at my watch. It was 11.30, and I thought, "my friends back in Australia will never know how I came to an end here."

It was so easy to lose another in a matter of ten seconds!

I whistled again and again. Heard a whistle, but the direction was indistinct. I whistled a few more times, but without any result.

There was no other option, but to take a stab in the unknown and chance the most likely direction. I had to face it, I was really lost. We had walked off the map into unmarked territory. Nobody would find me. I could not see the way we had come. And if I could not find the guide, this would become the last place I would ever see.

Fortunately, this turned out to be the right direction! Just as well, or you wouldn't be reading this story now.

This sort of thing happened quite frequently. It is probably the most scary thing that can happen in the jungle. More scary than the vicious insects; more alarming than meeting a wild animal; even more frightening than meeting wild men. Being lost, not knowing where you are, or the way you've come, with no hope of ever getting out on your own. That is really scary.

And it is easy to lose one another in a matter of seconds!

Previously I had soaked my socks in water, ready for this long trek. This would help to prevent blisters. But in practice there was no need, they got submerged constantly as we passed through streams and swamps.

Going on foot was real slogging! We found ourselves tight-rope-walking on decayed logs which sometimes lay below the bog surface, or barely above it. But it was fun. Slipping, sliding, laughing, just trying to keep on a log and splashing off into deep oozy mud always evoked laughter. Sometimes we slid into a bog and our feet got stuck properly. It was "Ooh... ooh... and splash!"

Many a time we crossed over a busy moving trail of cutter or umbrella ants holding aloft green chunks of leaf many times larger than themselves. It was fascinating to pause and watch them. They could find lots of leaves near their own nest, but no, they go away to find these leaves as far away as 300 to 400 feet, then make the long carry-journey back home. There they store them up until they go mouldy, and they eat the mould.

I was wading through a swamp 30 inches, 75 cm, deep. Or should I say I was standing on sticks or leaves and leaping over it in sections, when a fluorescent blue butterfly with a wingspan of 6 inches, 15 cm, flitted gracefully and brilliantly in front of us and on into the thick trees.

The boys shot a couple of magnificently beautiful birds. I was naturally most interested in seeing them, but felt sorry that my expedition became the occasion for their slaughter. The men would eat them.

I spoke no Spanish. My soldier could speak only Spanish – as well as the dialect of the native carriers.

Here's how I got answers to my questions. At meal stops, I would pull out my one-cubic-inch "Spanish-English Dictionary". The procedure would involve three steps. Firstly, you look up the appropriate Spanish

words. Secondly, you figure out how to pronounce them so he could understand me. And thirdly, you try to get the words into the correct order to make sense.

This invariably required several attempts.

But, as soon as he grasped what I was trying to say, Carlo would toss me an amused smile, then pass my question onto the carriers.

As they responded he would immediately rattle off their answer to me in Spanish.

May I ask you. Have you ever tried to understand someone who speaks fast in another language? Boy, what a challenge! So back to my language dictionary! Why? To look up the words which mean “Please speak s-l-o-w-l-y!”

He’d keep trying. Then I would have to break up his sentence into individual words, and after that figure out how to spell them –so as to look up their meaning in English.

Can you imagine how long all that took? Each one of us learned to become extremely patient with each other! To get the answer to a single question could take every bit of a half hour!

We jesticulated... drew picture signs in the sand... did whatever it took to get understood. Oh, what a relief when the message finally clicked! Suddenly the built-up tension evaporated and we all broke into laughter. Those were our most precious moments.

Needless to say, conversation was almost non-existent while we journeyed. To talk meant that everything else would have to stop.

CHAPTER 4

LEAPING RAPIDS

We came upon a brown, rushing river. There was a native canoe by the bank. Such canoes are regularly borrowed by natives going downstream, and later returned to the same spot by natives travelling upstream. We piled into it and out into the churning rapids.

In parts of the river you might thread through narrow rocky channels, pushing and pulling the canoe through. You unload and reload time and again.

You notice the glassy-smoothness of the water at your elbow and the racing speed of blobs of foam.

You speed toward the vortex ahead, where the mist rises like smoke and white water roars.

You do not carry your goods around these rapids, you either sweep safely through with your knapsack, camera and film, under your chin, or you are tumbled onto the melee. You have to sit absolutely still!

The young men in the bow hold their paddles tensely. Just above the white water, the leader stands up to choose his channel.

At his shout of command, the boys release the canoe and it shoots forward. The first rush of water is exhilarating, but as you sweep into a stretch of wild, leading waves, you turn pale.

Where the entire river pours into a churning maelstrom, the leader shoots the canoe across diagonally, and the boys in the bow swing their paddles madly.

You have to cut across the rapids with enough speed to prevent the waves from swamping the canoe, and with sufficient skill on the pilot's part to keep it from falling into the furious rush of surging water in the main channel.

You look up from bailing to see the whole expanse of river pouring in upon you, and your arm freezes in mid-air!

You are across in seconds, but this split-second dash seems like an eternity. The boys laugh weakly and the pilot shouts with relief. And so you are through the rapids with all their devilish, effervescence, whirlpools and wide expanses of leaping waves.

Then when it is all over, the hard-working native men, relieved that disaster has been averted, relax and burst into giggles...

We sped downstream some more and eventually to the other side. There we had a bathe and washed our clothes.

As we entered the jungle on that far side of the river, a track disappeared into the thicket. We started out along it.

It is truly a vast, virgin zoo, where monkeys constantly dance through the high limes above, and great flocks of the most gorgeously rainbow-hued parrots screech a deafening chorus.

“Puma tracks,” said my guide, pointing.

“Armadillo,” “Tapir,” came further identifications. One was doubtless near, perhaps watching us with concealed eyes. “Puma tracks”, said my guide, pointing. “Armadillo,” “tapir,” came further identifications. One was doubtless nearby watching us with hidden eyes.

I fast gained respect for their ability to see what was not there.

Further along, one of the carriers stopped short. He bent down and closely examined the foliage, and the ground.

“Jaguar,” he said. “A female. She crossed this spot yesterday afternoon.”

At night, jaguars roared and tapirs stole down to the river to drink.

We would also have to be on our guard against the most dangerous of jungle fauna, the snakes. Protective colouring renders many varieties almost impossible to detect.

The tiny viper may lie in the centre of the path, but the dappled pattern of its skin so blends with the pattern of sunlight on fallen leaves that the traveller seldom sees it.

The bushmaster carries enough poison in his sacs to kill 100 men.

The coral snake, whose poison attacks the central nervous system and causes death without previous symptoms in 24-48 hours, is one of the smaller species, and therefore more difficult to see.

Here also may be found the Boa Constrictor, Anaconda, Iguana, Tortoise, the crocodile and the armadillo.

A party on the trail had strung up hammocks between tree trunks so as to sleep above the ground. The next morning, everyone arose except one guy, who continued to lie in his hammock. He refused to move – or talk. His face showed fear. Finally, as his mates watched, there was movement under his blanket and a snake slithered out, over his shoulders and back up into the tree! It had enjoyed a warm spot for the night.

Population is very sparse. The people do not live in villages. Each family has its own compound, living in a single oval hut with up to forty persons. From one house, through the jungle to the next, entailed anywhere from two and a half, to ten hours' jungle tramping.

Eventually we came upon a clearing in the jungle. In the clearing were two buildings. The first had a circular roof and a mud floor and no walls. At the highest part of the roof, in the centre, was a hole to let out the smoke from a fire which was burning below it. This building was lived in during the day by both the people and animals.

The other house was most sophisticated. Rectangular in shape, it had a raised bamboo floor and bamboo walls, and a door with wooden hinges top and bottom, cut out of one giant slab of wood. The house was topped by a grass roof.

As I've mentioned, the people in this region of the Amazon are known as Jivaro (pronounced "Heevaro"). Jivaro tribes have been famed for their capture and shrinking of human heads.

We approached cautiously, but this group seemed not unfriendly. The father was away. One woman had a stick poking out through her jaw, a sign of beauty. She wore tight bands of coloured string around her neck. Wrists and ankles were tied tight with cloth bands. Her little daughter likewise had the jaw punctured with a sliver of wood about the size of a match stick.

The dirt floor was expansive. There were lots of children. We entered and sat down, one of my guide-carriers talking.

I did not see any old people. Apparently these natives die at an early age.

They were filthy but seemed happy, this particular group. I loved them.

Hospitality with a big "H". But I was about to experience hospitality that could be deadly!

CHAPTER 5

TOO DANGEROUS AN OFFER TO ACCEPT

If you should meet a Jivaro on the trail, he will be wearing a short hand-made skirt. Above this wrap-around, his body will be bare except for painted designs and various ornaments. If he is “fully-dressed”, he will also have on a fur and feather crown. He likes delicately-applied face-paint in geometric designs. He also wears large plugs in the lobes of his ears. He adorns himself with necklaces and other ornaments and is very sensitive about his hair. He cuts it straight across the forehead and lets it grow to about waist-length at the back. He wears 3 pigtailed. He believes his hair possesses a sort of soul power.

In the jungle, he will usually carry an 8-10 feet spear, and a shield, or a blowgun and poison darts. Wound-scars on his face and body are the result of head-taking raids.

The blowgun is from 7 to 10 feet long. It is made from two pieces of chonta neatly grooved and bound together with fiber and pitch. It takes 2 months to make one.

The poison arrows are somewhat like knitting needles. A tuft of kapok cotton on one end makes it glide airtight in the barrel of the gun. There is a fairly deep groove around the end just back of the poison tip, so that it breaks off in the wound.

The poison, curare, is black. Birds struck with curare darts fall to the ground almost instantly. Monkeys may linger 5 to 30 minutes. Larger animals several hours.

At one place, I was permitted to try out a blowpipe with a poison-tipped dart. And was surprised at how easy it is to hit an orange at a distance, when it sits on a pole.

Jivaros are accurate with the blowgun up to about 45 metres, 135 feet. I was glad to have my bullet-proof vest.

The Jivaro man is a little over 5 feet tall. His movements are light and quick. His voice is solemn and incisive. He is suspicious by nature, particularly where his women are concerned.

Anyone encountering a man of his description should assume him to be on the touchiest of terms with his neighbours and intent on the taking and shrinking of human heads.

He is also likely to blame a stranger for any illness or other misfortune that coincides with the newcomer's visit.

Marriageable girls wear a small cane lip-plug in a hole in the lower lip.

Girls of six to twelve sometimes enter a token marriage, waiting till full maturity to assume a wife's full duties.

In a wedding ceremony, the bride is carried in somebody's arms to the groom who sits on a primitive chair made of three pieces of wood crossed in a triangle, in much the same way as a boy scout places sticks for a camp fire. The seat is actually quite comfortable. Quickly assembled and collapsible!

The women are kept close to home. When the men go hunting or fighting, the women work in the garden clearings.

Due to warfare, women outnumber men. I heard of women who, in warfare, had been captured up to ten times, living in as many villages, one after another.

If a man suspects infidelity, he will cut his wife's legs or head repeatedly with a machete, and stop just short of killing her.

A mistreated wife, in turn, may try secretly to poison her husband or bewitch him, or she may hang herself.

Incidentally, the men, unmarried and guests, occupy one end of the house, the women and dogs the other, behind split bamboo walls.

When a person is sick, a witch doctor puts the wings of a bird over the patient's stomach. Then he bends up and down, either blowing or sucking on the stomach.

Among the Jivaro people, music is played with a kind of flute, called the “quipa”. This rare instrument consists of a bow and one string, which is bitten. The different pressure changes the pitch.

The painting of the body has magical import. A man would not go to war or hunting without employing the aid of this red magic paint.

I saw one old woman who had swastika-bordered breasts and arms beautiful with red “lattice-work.”

The purpose of body-painting is to invoke friendly spirits, or to ward off evil spirits.

A warrior may be fiercely cruel. Yet, when not on a head-taking expedition, he is the picture of domestic tranquillity, a mere little man, dressed in a skirt and decked in feathers, content with his weaving and other fancy work.

In some areas the Indians go duck hunting. A particular tree-snake will imitate the quack of a duck – and when a native, attracted by the sound, passes under the tree, the snake drops down on to him and wraps itself around his neck!

Sometimes men have been tied to anthills as their sentence of death. The ants come up and make a thorough job, leaving just the skeleton.

Despite such horrors, this is a land of enormous beauty. The swift, clear, fast-running river cuts into a 5-story high jungle, crammed with animal life and vegetation so thick that even the animal trails seem invisible to the untrained eye.

.....

We continued on into the unknown without serious incident.

I heard that the Indians on occasions report the tracks of some gigantic animal in riverside swamps. But we saw none.

There were also reports of enormous alligators and of an anaconda that had been killed and measured in excess of eighty feet!

Beyond doubt there are still numerous mysteries lurking in this lost world!

As we journeyed birds were frequently shot out of the trees for food. My companions fired. Nothing happened at first. Then a large thudding sound as something crashed down from branch to branch. It was a monkey. With sadistic pleasure my carriers beat it to death. This upset me, but there was nothing I could do.

Then, using the monkey's head, they demonstrated to me the scalping process for a human head. It was hideous.

They esteem the contents of a monkey's stomach. When mixed with water, it is said to resemble a good fruit drink. I took their word for it.

As we drove deeper into the unknown, I did some trading. For two balloons and a small mirror, I was able to get two quivers of darts. For a small paring knife I received two ceremonial feather-tipped sticks. For yards and yards of coloured cloth, somebody gave me a complete set of native headgear (called a Taiwasa). For a tiny pilot torch, I acquired a five-foot blowpipe and a quiver of poisoned darts. And for four garlands of shells from the Pacific, I was given a plumed pigtail of human hair tied with red feathers.

(Of course I did not stick around long enough to see what happened when the batteries of the pilot torch eventually gave out. But the recipient would have pleasure for a time.

We slept in our clothes. At each large river, we paused to wash our clothes and enjoy a good, cool, soapy bathe.

And I shaved every day, can you believe it? That made me feel more civilised!

Was glad to have my medical items (especially charcoal and ammonia), since it turned out I had to be doctor for the party as we approached the climax of the excursion!

At the most distant village on the whole expedition, I tossed a used biscuit paper into the fire at the centre of the day house. A woman got up and raced madly to rescue it. Although the paper was badly burned, she hung it up in a favoured place to keep it.

Oh, something else. I was proudly shown a metal sheet, or plaque, engraved with Egyptian hieroglyphics. It is held that traders from a

faraway land across the Eastern Sea sailed up the Amazon river system and this was one of the items they traded to the ancestors of these villagers, who once lived in shining cities. The mind boggles at forgotten history...

As a matter of fact, the native name for the Amazon is "Solimoes". It is the same as Soliman, or Solomon, and is suggestive of the biblical claim that the ships of Kings Solomon and Hiram of Tyne made voyages lasting three years, to a secret destination. Semitic names are rather common in the Amazon Valley. And many Phoenician inscriptions have been discovered.

But today things are different. Hatred and fear, revenge and bloodshed, dominate these people.

Even a death from natural cause is often interpreted as a result of witchcraft from another person.

The surviving relatives then blame the most likely suspect and pledge new revenge.

I was made to understand that if anyone in the village suffered an accident or sickness while I was there, they would probably suspect that I had placed a curse on them, and my shrunken head might stay in their village forever.

Another motive for head-taking is the lust for spiritual power which is acquired by capturing another man's soul.

The most important act for a man on arising each morning is to induce vomiting and recite his hatreds to his sons.

For this he first boils up a concoction of strong tobacco juice and repeatedly draws it up his nose. He then takes a magical mouthwash from a plant, and swallows it.

If this combination does not cause him to vomit, he may thrust his finger down his throat.

The reason for the vomiting is to get rid of any evil substances that have remained within him all night.

Next comes his morning beer, which his wife has made by chewing large quantities of yucca, and spitting the pulp into a jar to ferment.

Soon one of the woman approached us with a hollow dish containing a whitish liquid, chicha. This is prepared from a plant known as yucca (the same as cassava, or tapioca). Banana and yucca grew all around the clearing.

She brought it to us, each in turn. Visitors, they say, are obliged to partake of the pre-masticated beer or give offence! (And in this land of human head-shrinking it might not be prudent to break the rules.)

I touched it to my lips reluctantly. All of them watched me closely. I made a motion of drinking, as they kept staring at me and urging, but I couldn't drink.

It seemed, as I licked my lips, to resemble the taste of ginger beer, but I couldn't be sure, I didn't swallow enough. It must have been quite nice (my team kept asking for more), but I could not relish it, knowing it had been pre-masticated with corn and saliva to ferment, by the woman who probably had tuberculosis.

The lady who waited for me to drink kept squeezing a piece of yucca and rinsing her hands through the bowl. Ugh!

The offer of this drink was from kind heart. But it could be an offer dangerous to accept.

Her husband came home.

He sat down and drank.

As soon as his drink was finished, he spat straight through his fingers on to the dirt floor, an accurate shot. It cleaned his hands!

(They spit! spit! Everywhere they spit! spit!)

CHAPTER 6

THE WITCH'S CURSE

Witchcraft and sorcery, hate and murder, take deep roots early in life.

Children, as they fall asleep at night are taught to repeat a list of names of those they must learn to hate.

They are not cruel, except that they are made that way by a religion of fear and evil spirits with which they hope somehow to cope with their sin problem.

The following incident illustrates this.

A witch visited a group of the Macuma tribe. He was from another section.

For some reason or other he got mad and cursed a certain woman. Usually Jivaro difficulties are over women, who are soulless possessions of the man, and are frequently stolen or traded in business deals.

At any rate, the woman that had been cursed died within 24 hours.

Her husband, brothers and father then felt duly-bound to avenge her blood because the witch was as guilty as if he had shot her outright.

They went over to the other tribe and brutally killed the witch and another fellow.

Killing is routine. There's no end to the killings.

The miserable part is, that, to pay off these debts, as they call them, they don't necessarily have to kill the very murderer himself. Any relative will do.

Their consequent fear determines even the construction of their houses, which are very much like military fortresses.

They often place early warning devices in the trails for their suspected enemies. Under the surfaces of paths leading to a village, angled slivers of wood with sharp points can be skilfully buried at an angle. Any

stranger, not knowing the location of such spikes may inadvertently tread on one. As the needle-sharp palm-wood spike goes through his foot, the intruder's sudden scream gives warning that a stranger is approaching. And through the bamboo walls people inside a house are able to shoot at the visitor with their blowpipes and poison darts.

On the trail further, we heard a dog barking. In the thick tangle of vegetation, a leper emerged beside the track. He covered his face to hide the hideous corrosion. His voice was merely a pitiful whisper. A woman stood with him, perhaps his wife.

We trudged on and on. Suddenly we came upon a youth, almost naked, with red painted face and long black hair. He held a five-foot-long blowpipe and from his shoulder was strung a quiver of poisoned darts. He was out hunting.

He just stopped and stared. We did likewise. After some minutes of this mutual astonishment, he turned and beckoned us to follow.

Some distance on, we reached a clearing with a house. A woman and her children were home, but the father was away. We were unable to communicate very well with them, but their hospitality was welcome and we sat there for hours. It was great relief from the long jungle walk.

Just before nightfall, I was reclining in a corner of the house when something happened that quite startled me. A man with black, rotten, teeth and war paint and brilliant-coloured feather headdress, tight cords around his neck, and sticks through his ears, rounded the corner of the house carrying a lethal weapon on this shoulder and appeared suddenly at the door. I looked up and he was glaring down at me.

I shuddered. The war paint, poison darts and blowpipe screamed out that he was a killer.

Not overly friendly, I concluded. We had better be careful. Fortunately, I had earlier given one of the young boys a balloon and he had become quite proficient at blowing it up.

So now I felt in my bag and drew out a balloon for this man. He squinted at it, stuffed it into his mouth to chew, pulled it out, fiddled with it, and looked very puzzled. Then his son came to the rescue. Soon this fierce warrior was prancing around the yard, showing off to his family how

clever he was, giggling with delight as he blew it up and let the air scream out. Oh, yes, now he was friendly to us.

We were now permitted camp for the night in a bamboo structure, the floor of which was raised about half a meter above the ground.

CHAPTER 7

HOW TO SHRINK A HEAD

I had brought biscuits with me, as a periodic reward to the natives who carried my bags.

At this village I tossed an empty biscuit paper into the fire.

Suddenly an old lady jumped up. She thrust her hand into the fire, pulled out the biscuit paper, stamped out the flames with her bare feet – and tenderly examined the piece of paper, before hanging it on a wooden hook at the side of the house. You see, this was the very first time these people had seen paper!

You may wonder what food was available in this primitive land.

Actually, we ate well. From the house clearing, there radiate out paths through the jungle to other nearby clearings. Here the women grow a variety of vegetables.

So we enjoyed maize, tapioca, beans, chilli, planfalu, a sort of savoury banana ...and, of course, the river about a mile away through the forest provided fish.

The meat is allowed to mature. Before long it is covered in little white crawlies and big black ones, too.

When the men go hunting, they may take the pet parrot. When hunting is bad, they will eat it.

As I concluded my meal, a lady seized my enamel plate, which I always carried with me, and took it to the dishwasher.

Come off it, you say. Dishwasher? Not in the remote jungle!

Oh yes. It stood on four legs. Black in colour, it was most efficient... with its long tongue.

And after this obliging dog had fulfilled its plate-cleaning duty, the hostess then returned the plate to me, ready for the next meal!

(I decided that my plate and I needed a trip to the river, after that... before the next meal!)

The warrior is afraid of snakes and evil spirits, and avoids the forest after dark.

They never travel without weapons. Fear and hate are common emotions. Other Jivaros are often their enemies.

Each morning, the head of the house formally and energetically recites his hatreds, particularly if he feels the house may be threatened by attack.

The outpourings of his rage always follow a similar pattern.

He reminds the young men (and even his 6-year-old son is expected to listen) of:

- The various crimes that have been committed against his people;
- And names the relatives who have been killed;
- Praise for himself and his friends is mingled with: insults for the enemy;
- And all are told to become worthy of their father, and to cultivate valour.
- Unrelenting vengeance, he says, will be rewarded by blessings, good luck, long life and the opportunity to kill enemies.

The drink drug may now be passed around again.

Then comes breakfast: boiled manioc, tapioca, boiled or roasted plantain, cooking bananas, fish and meat.

The heads of enemies were still being shrunk in the remote compounds.

The procedure is as follows:

For a week before a head-hunting raid, the men of the household assemble in the hut every night.

They develop a plan of attack and each of the men exhorts the others to fight without fear and not to abandon comrades. They place great faith in visions in extravagant colour which they get from a drug they drink, as to how the raid will succeed.

The women remain at home, singing and performing ceremonies to increase the chances of victory, but not knowing if they will ever see their husbands again, unless, perhaps, in miniature.

The whole gruesome event was demonstrated to me. I shall describe it to you as I saw it.

Approaching the enemy house, the attackers have as their main purpose to slaughter as many of their opponents as they can before reinforcements can be summoned by a signal drum.

The invaders must approach cautiously, because the enemy will have fortified their house by pitfalls cleverly covered over and containing sharp spikes.

Spring-set weapons may also have been installed on the trail in such a way that a mere touch will release a multiple spear, driving as many as 12 one-foot-long wooden spikes through the intruder's body.

Ultimately the showdown comes. But before the defenders come out to fight or flee, they pause long enough to hold a dance ceremony in the doomed hut, using a special flute made from the leg bone of a jaguar. Extreme brutality follows.

The murder accomplished, the invaders pick up the bodies and cut off the heads.

Women are always subject to capture. But older women, filled with hatred for the attackers, are likely to make poor wives.

The victorious warriors hurry away from the scene, dripping with blood, and with the heads dangling at their backs.

Hatred, fear and blood lust now give way to a mood of triumph, made more gratifying by the opportunity to perform indignities upon the enemy head.

Firstly, the victor has tobacco juice forced up his nose to protect him from the spirit of the slain enemy.

Then come rituals aimed at mastering the dead man's soul.

Shrinking begins by cutting the scalp up the back of the head far enough to peel it off the skull.

Special care is taken to trim the inside of the face away from the bones and from the cartilage of nose. When removed, the face and scalp hang limp.

The skull is disposed of then the remainder of the head is held by its long hair, into a bowl of boiling water, into which are mixed herbs.

After some two hours of cooking, the skin is thick, rubbery and pale yellow. It is cooled on a stick.

A ring of vine is made to fit the final size of the shrunken neck opening.

The scalp is then sewed up.

To further shrink the skin and remove fatty tissue, several small stones are heated. They are inserted through the neck hole and separately in the head rolled around. The heat of the stones draws in the outside of the head causing it to shrink. While this is occurring, a man skilfully kneads the face of the shrinking head with his fingers in much the same way as a person would mould a model out of plasticine. This helps to preserve the natural shape of the face.

After a certain time when the head was much smaller the hot stones are tipped out and replaced with hot sand. The head is rotated, with the hot sand being replaced from time to time.

Between treatments, the face is carefully moulded. Some of the hair is plucked and particular care is taken to keep the eyebrows in proportion to size of head.

The head is finally about a quarter of the natural size, about as large as a small orange.

Next, a loop is passed through a hole in the top and tied to a stick on the inside so that the head can be hung up.

Then all the holes in the head are sealed shut either by using skewers or by sewing. It is believed that inside the head is the spirit of the dead person. If that spirit could be trapped inside by closing off all the holes then the new owner of the head, the man who has shrunk it, will possess this extra strength in addition to his own, in time of battle.

Finally, the head is dyed black with charcoal, and smoked, and polished. Much as any piece of leather, until it is quite hard.

Even the ears, with lobes pierced, are perfect miniatures of the original.

Sometimes, strings about 15 inches long are suspended from lips.

The new owner will dance and sing to the shrunken head while he holds it aloft on top of a pole.

This procedure was demonstrated to me by some of the men using the head of a newly killed monkey and I was made to understand that if anybody in the village suffered an accident or sickness while I was there they would probably suspect that I had placed a curse on them and the result could be my own shrunken head staying in their village forever.

Head-shrinking, I understood, was being carried on in remote areas.

Among my many photos, is that of a woman's head. It is rare for a woman to have her head shrunk. Women are usually taken from enemy compounds to become wives.

I also possess a photo of the shrunken head of a German engineer – as well as that of a Spanish priest. The circular tonsure around the top of his head is quite obvious.

Some time earlier two white men had fallen foul of the natives. In his escape, one man was separated from his companion. Years later, the fortunate escapee again met his lost companion in a jungle hut. He recognised his friend's face. The features were identical, except that the head was a fraction of original size – and now hanging on a pole.

It takes about twelve hours to clean and shrink a head, then about eight hours more to smoke it.

Back in the civilised world, on the coast, fake shrunken heads are sold. However, a genuine one will have long hair the lips sewn or pinned, and all facial hair removed except eyebrows, skin, black-smoked and polished.

CHAPTER 8

WEIRD SOUNDS IN THE DARK

It is now celebration time. The victors and their families will dance, feast, strictly diet, for month. After that comes a ceremony to purify the victor further from the evil influences that stick as a result of taking and handling the head.

The dance is ghastly, the noise is frightful and the participants are deranged by intoxicants and narcotics.

In the ceremony, the priest takes the killer by the wrist, and makes him touch the hair of the victim, saying: “Have courage. Do not fear the Great Serpent.” The Jivaros hold the boa in great reverence as the father of witchcraft.

There is a dance which has a name meaning “the killing of the enemy’s soul”, so the spirit will not haunt them, and a song with a dismal, howling effect.

... I tried to sleep. But the throb of drums beating rhythmically sounded through the night air. Some kind of wooden flute – at least two of them – broke into a dismal scale.

I unzipped my hammock and crept out cautiously.

“Come?” I whispered to my guide.

“No,” he grunted.

So I crept through the darkness past the yucca and banana trees in the direction of some lights that glowed a couple of hundred meters away. Sticks several feet high were standing upright. From their tops rose flares of violent flame. These fires were positioned to surround an open-walled bamboo building.

I darted very slowly from bush to bush, gradually getting closer. Cautiously, I tried to avoid being spotted.

Then, all at once, came all the terrors of the night one would wish to avoid. I was about 25 meters away, when

1. I almost sneezed. Of all times to have to fight back a sneeze!
2. Immediately I heard a rustling – something was creeping through the bushes in the darkness, close to my feet. Then snorting.
3. I moved back a little, to avoid being discovered – but oh! Twigs crackled loudly under my feet.
4. Then a light suddenly appeared behind me. It was approaching. And I was caught between that approaching light and the clearing. “Must not be seen! Must not be seen!” I told myself, desperately sidestepping behind some shrubs. Three savages, one of them holding a flaming stick, slowly passed... just inches away.
5. With my heart skipping, I turned back to face the direction of my quarters – then stared up in horror as another yellow light suddenly flashed close to my head... To my surprise, it instantly vanished – right before my eyes! And was it close! So close, that for a flash second I was certain someone had discovered me. After all, my shirt was white, and although the night was very dark, I was sure my cover was blown, so close to my face was that light. My heart skipped violently. Then it flitted... no, not my heart... it was the light - it flashed on again and flitted... Thank God! I understood now. It had to be just an insect! Perhaps a fire-fly. What a relief! Then I saw another and was sure!

I will tell you, that was some hairy experience. So I went back to get my dark leather jacket then cautiously returned to take another peek at whatever was happening.

A woman broke into a mournful jungle chant. How I wished that I had not sold my tape recorder to obtain supplies in Quito! This would have been historic!

Again I crept close, but to a different spot. There was lots of movement in the clearing, but it was hard to see precisely what was occurring.

I had been peering through the trees scarcely a minute when a man seized a light and began walking across the clearing toward my hiding place. Had he smelt me, or something? I tell you, I was not going to wait and see. Not after everything else. So I beat a quick retreat, frantically crashing into trees and shrubs, and made for my hut in respectable haste.

I sensed that this ceremony, or whatever it was, was not for strangers to witness. It was wise not to make anyone angry. If my spying presence was discovered, the result could be unpredictable.

Sadly, the state of war is the normal state of the Jivaro. He never knows the restful calm of peace.

There is nothing but assaults, surprises, blood scenes and never-satisfied hates.

So tense is the atmosphere of distrust that whenever another Jivaro meets another in the jungle or goes visiting, he must go through elaborate formalities in order to justify his presence.

A formal greeting, which may take 10 or 15 minutes, is proper.

First, a man makes a loud noise, before approaching a house, to give notice that he is coming. Then reaching the men's door of the hut, he says: "I have come."

"You've come?"

"Yes, I've come to your house."

"Why have you come?"

Then he is told, "You have come well."

This is all done with an explosively artificial voice, with smackings of the lips, exaggerated gestures, and frequent spitting.

During the quarter hour of this greeting, the host may only grunt occasionally, perhaps saying some phrases such as: "You say it was that way?"

Finally, both men relax, and resume their normal voices, and become friendly.

No matter how many people are present, the newcomer goes through this dialogue with each one.

That a people who live with so much fear and practice such frightful customs could hospitably entertain a visitor, may sound contradictory.

Anyway, I'll tell you now about a most intriguing custom and how it probably began...

CHAPTER 9

THE FIRE-GOD SACRIFICE

The Jivaro jungle people believe in two main deities, the Earth Mother, to whom they address songs and prayers, and the Great Serpent.

Here's one thing I need to say. The established theories of history have missed the mark!

Today's so-called primitives are not emerging from a Stone Age. Rather, they are the wreckage of more highly developed societies, forced by various circumstances, such as natural disasters, to lead a much simpler, less developed way of life. (See my book *Dead Men's Secrets*, pages 51-59)

They're not coming up. They've come down. There are numerous evidences that prove this to be so. However, to labor those evidences is not the purpose of this book.

The primitive tribes do not have any legends which suggest they evolved from animals. Rather some of them possess a racial memory of ancestors who lived in great "shining" cities which were once destroyed, and the survivors went bush.

Originally these people were highly civilised.

They also believed in the Creator who made heaven and earth.

And they held that there was a time in the past when mankind was in harmony with the Creator, when animals were neither wild nor harmful, when there was no rivalry or enmity among men, when there was plenty, security, harmony, and right living on earth in all directions.

However, there had been a departure from harmony with the Creator, from his laws which were based on love.

Now they were separated from the Life-Giver, and the consequence was the process of death. But they also believed in the Creator's love for human beings, and in a rescue plan He had promised them, that a mighty One would come down, who was to assume human nature and die for mankind, and eventually restore everything that was lost.

They understood that to help mankind understand the rescue plan, a teaching device had been set up. It was known as the sacrificial system.

The requirement was that when a person was sorry for his wrongs, he would take an innocent lamb and kill it with his own hand. The message was that just as an innocent animal now died, so at some future date, an innocent deliverer would die for guilty man and free mankind from the curse of death.

They also believed that the spilling of his blood would bring cleansing and forgiveness to those who would accept his sacrifice.

The sacrificial rite was an act of faith in future deliverance.

Archaeology reveals that this sacrificial system was handed down and became part of the culture of all nations.

However, it appears that gradual corruption set in.

Over time, the universal worship of the Creator who was behind the sun, moon and stars, degenerated into veneration of these visible heavenly bodies themselves. Sun worship became widespread. And later, animal sacrifice became perverted into human sacrifice.

The knowledge of a loving God who would rescue mankind was lost. It was replaced with the notion that the Creator was a cruel tyrant, who needed to be appeased.

And we see this in the religion of these Amazon natives.

In their sun worship, the Jivaro Indians revere a mountain called Sangay.

You see, the Book of Exodus relates that long ago God descended upon Mount Sinai and spoke before a whole nation, His law of love. It is said that His very presence caused the earth to tremble and lightning flashed and thunder roared. The whole mountain appeared to be on fire with His presence.

So in the South American Andes we have a mountain which smokes with fire. It is a volcano. And it has been given a name suspiciously like Mount Sinai. They call it Mount Sangay, the mountain of the god.

And because these people, with a perversion of an original truth, are sun worshippers, they regard Mount Sangay - the fire mountain - to be an earthly counterpart of the fiery sun.

So to this smoking mountain, the natives sacrifice a pig.

Then after they have sacrificed the pig, they kill a chicken and sprinkle the blood of the chicken over their legs just in case they have incurred some guilt by killing the pig!

What do we see here? In this chicken's blood that "cleanses" them from sin – what is this but a carry-over from the original knowledge of an atonement, a reconciliation by blood?

History seems to show us that when a nation turns its back on God, then that nation goes down, that the whole civilisation starts to disintegrate, spiritually, technologically and physically.

Originally these people enjoyed a high, sophisticated culture. Their religious ideals went down, and the collapse of the civilisation followed.

Now these people live in mortal fear of an ambush on the jungle trail. To them the bark of a gun means sudden, mysterious death. And they think all men in the world are killers like themselves!

Is there a warning in this for us?

Today, the Amazon tribes hear of the white man's steady advance deeper into their unknown world, and they are scared ... scared whether to face him. They are struggling with an idea as revolutionary to them as nuclear physics. Until recently, their known world was the circle of villages within walking distance. Now there is another, a new, enormous outside world to contend with.

Over recent centuries, all of Planet Earth, just about, has come into the sphere of civilisation. Only an extreme fear keeps a few tribes out. And this fear thrives in the jungle isolation.

My expedition ended without casualties. And I thanked God that we were protected from deadly snakes, blood-sucking bats, poison spiders, injury and complications from wounds.

Rain stopped us exploring further. Tramping is not the easiest way to travel. Yet the constant sweating, like a steam bath, and the tramp, tramp, tramp, was good for keeping one in physical shape.

On the second day before returning to the military jungle outpost, I gave one poor shirt its final loving wash. Already I had left a pair of underpants with one native family and was also able to discard an old pair of socks.

An explorer comes to learn that whilst gliding down a river with the current is rapid, the return trip is tediously slow as the natives labour with long bamboo poles to push the narrow dug-outs foot by foot, stroke by stroke, up river against the rushing current.

Those hard-working carriers got their reward ... and I my freedom. Never shall I return. But the experience was priceless!

CHAPTER 10

SO YOU WANT TO GO EXPLORING!

Here are a few things that an aspiring jungle explorer should know:

What to take for yourself

Epsom salt
Eye drops
Eye ointment
Mosquito repellent
Charcoal, for poisons
Ammonia, for snake bite
Water purifying tablets
Band-Aids
Needle
Pincers
Paring knife
Matches
Cooking pot and pan
Torch and batteries
Sleeping bag
Hammock
Mosquito netting
2 small blankets
Miniature pillow
Reading material, plenty

Trade goods

Small beads
Fish hooks
Mirrors
Bright ribbon
Cotton skirt material
Bread knives
Dish towelling
Toy airplanes with wheels and propellers
Salt

Food to take

Rice
Red beans
Salt
Dates
Forinha

Did you know that you can cook food in a paper bag? Here's how. First, you half fill the paper bag with water. Then place the food inside it. Fold over the top of the bag to close it. Then place the bag in the coals. To cook anything will take about twenty minutes. You can even boil eggs this way.

To bake potatoes, cover them deep in the coals. When you think they are baked, you can tell which ones are ready by grabbing them in your bare hands.

Only potatoes that are not cooked will burn you. A cooked potato will not burn your hand.

Feet

Wash your socks every day. If you cannot dry them, then place them close to your body for warmth. This will dry them.

Here is how to treat blisters. You can lay any green leaf over the blister. Then pull your sock over it, and no infection will result.

To prevent sticks or stones from entering your footwear and making a hole in your socks, simply wrap a rag around inside the top of your boots.

For a long journey, always soak your socks in water. This will minimise blisters.

It is helpful also to wear shoes two sizes longer and wider, for your tramp.

Food

Watch what birds and animals eat. Such things will be reasonably safe for you also.

Usually, green things are safe to eat. As a general rule, if the juice of a plant or tree is white and like water, then the plant or tree leaves are edible. If the juice is black, red or coloured, it may be toxic.

The roots of swamp grasses are very nutritious. All green grasses are okay.

If you are not sure, it is best to eat just a little of it and wait a few hours to see if there are any ill effects. If you experience no unpleasant symptoms, then you can be sure that it is safe to eat plenty of it.

(I did this in the ruins of an ancient city and ended up having the best feed of self-sown strawberries in my life!)

The new shoots, as well as the top portion of a palm trunk that would normally produce green leaves, will last several days. The taste is similar to that of celery. There is always some at the top of the tree. But taking it will kill the tree.

Water

When you get to water, examine it carefully.

Below a waterfall, for example, look at the pool. If the bubbles break quickly, the water is fine to drink. If the bubbles continue for a long distance, the water is bad for drinking.

If you are very thirsty when you arrive at an impure water source or a swamp, here's what you can do. Pull back a distance, dig a hole and let

any muddy water run into it. Even though it be muddy, this water is filtered by the ground through which it seeps. It is pure and safe enough to drink.

Another thing you can do with impure water (even sewer water!) is to run it through charcoal once. Or you can put powdered charcoal into it and drink it with safety.

Charcoal, dirty though it looks, is one of nature's wonder products. It adsorbs up to 80 times its own volume, or any poison. Carry it with you.

Shelter

Caves are good, because temperatures are even.

Also, in a snake-infested area, snakes will never penetrate in more than a few feet.

To discover if animals are already in a cave, look for tracks at the entrance.

Sleeping

If the temperature is biting cold, lie on the ground and lay your coat lightly over you. This will be warmer for you than if you have your coat tightly buttoned up on you.

Light a good fire. Then throw up a bank of dirt a few feet away. Lie down between the fire and the bank. The bank will reflect the heat and keep you warm if you are sleeping.

If you have to lie on the bare ground, it is a good idea to dig a small, shallow hole for your hips. This will make the ground more comfortable for sleeping. You will avoid waking up with a sore back.

Supposing a large group is in your party, here's how everyone can keep warm. Throw up a bank around two feet high, right around the camp fire. Then position everyone to sleep with feet to the fire. They will stay warm, even with no covering, even while others in sleeping bags outside the area will freeze. This is an old Red Indian trick for staying warm.

Also, another tip: you can count on it being up to 20 degrees warmer at the top of a hill than in a valley.

String your hammock between two trees at the edge of the forest. To keep off the dew, which falls like rain, throw ponchos over the mosquito netting canopy.

Avoiding potential enemies

- (a) Wild animals: Don't keep eyeing them, but just glance up and look away. They can feel you looking at them.
- (b) People: Some people can also feel you watching them. So don't stare at a potential enemy. Just glance and look away.

If you are lost, you can use smoke to attract attention. But remember, it is also a dangerous give-away. In open country you might be spotted as far as 20 miles away.

So even if you are not lost, but need a fire, try to make it small and hot, so as to avoid smoke.

Another tip: you can tell where the enemy is, by listening to the bird squawks.

How to cover your tracks, so that no one can follow you

If you are in open country and travelling at night, sneak along the low spots, not along the top of a ridge or pile. Don't get silhouetted.

Walk among rocks, leaves and grass, not where your track will show. Or walk in a stream.

While you are in sight, do as animals do. An animal will run in a straight line until it is out of sight, then it will turn and go in almost the opposite direction.

Do not cough, yell or make a sound.

If the terrain permits it, and someone is tracking you, you should hide in a place that is almost open, in very small bushes or grasses. You see, the enemy will always look for you in the larger cover.

When looking out to see where the enemy is, never look out over the top of a bush. Your silhouette will be easy to spot. Always look out from the edge, or side.

Having said that, happy exploring!