

VENEZUELA'S RIO CARONI EXPEDITION

FEBRUARY 5, TO APRIL 9, 1997

THE RECON TRIP

April, 1996

OUR FIRST VENEZUELA ENCOUNTER

The DC3's twenty seats had been nearly filled on the first leg of the flight but most of the people got off at Canima. Canima is the closest airstrip to the highest waterfall in the world, Angle Falls. As the near empty DC3 continued on to Santa Elena Jen and I moved to window seats on the right side of the plane. I pressed my forehead against the window and watched the massive green wall rising into the clouds above the airplane. This huge table topped mountain is called Auyan-tepui. Auyan-tepui has over 700 square km of relatively flat terrain on its summit and its vertical walls rise some 5,000 feet above the jungle floor. Its cloud shrouded top is 8,385 above sea level. As the plane passed the eastern most shoulder of the mountain the vertical wall suddenly drops away and we looked out over a vast region called the Gran Sabana.

This southeastern corner of Venezuela is a unique mix of tropical rain forest, grassland and towering mesa like mountains. The Pemón Indians, the indigence people of the area, call these flat-topped mountains Tepuis. Most of this area, over 13,000 square miles, is wilderness. As the DC3 moved on to the east and south the jungle gave way to grasslands. These grasslands are called sabana. The light green color of the grass was divided by dark green ribbons of jungle that follows creeks and rivers as they wind across the highlands. Suddenly a much bigger river comes into view, the Rio Caroni.

The source of the Caroni is on the eastern most edge of the Gran Sabana near the highest of all tepuis, Roraima Tepui. Three rivers drain the region to the west of Roraima all flowing west and south. When these three rivers join they form the Rio Caroni. Soon after becoming the Caroni it turns north until it eventually meets the Rio Orinoco. The longest and most northerly of the Caroni tributaries is the Rio Apongau.

The Apongau and the Caroni Rivers were the reason for our flight to Santa Elena. We were on a reconnaissance trip to find the put-in for a kayak expedition that would take us the length of the Rio Caroni including its tributary the Rio Apongau. Our plan was to put in as far up the Apongau as we could get, then follow it for over 680 miles to the confluence with the Rio Orinoco.

The trip has never been done and there is very little information on the area. In fact for the first 100 miles the only maps available are large scale maps, 1 to 500,000s. The contour lines are over 1500 feet apart. Some very big drops could be hidden in that much relief. Fortunately we were able to get good maps of the lower river. By studying the maps we discovered a section of the river, in the middle of the trip, that looked treacherous. The river appeared to lose between 200 and 250 ft. per mile for over 5 miles, starting with a 100 foot waterfall call Salto Eutobarima.

We first thought a canoe would be good but with this new information we decided that

kayaks would handle the white water better than a canoe. Also with one boat, if something happens to it, we would be in big trouble. With two, at least we would have a chance. We looked around at different kayaks and settled on Prijon, Yukon Expeditions. They are made of durable plastic that can withstand the punishment of whitewater rivers but they are fitted with rudders and have straight hulls for speed in flat water. They are 14.5 feet long with a volume of around 110 gallons so they can take a big payload.

On Feb. 5, 1997 we left our home in Park City, Utah in a raging snowstorm, heading south for Venezuela and the first ever Rio Caroni kayak descent.

As might be expected, Jen and I saw different things or should I say we saw the same things in different ways. I have included some of these differences by adding parts of her journal in to mine. Jen's additions are indented and with this text style.

GETTING THERE

Feb. 10, 1997

MIAMI AIRPORT!

The drive from Utah to Miami was educational. We learned how far from home we really are and how the world changes from the cold country to the warm. We will fly across the Caribbean, but we will then drive from Caracas to the Gran Sabana and the start of the river. I'm apprehensive about our travel from Caracas to Gran Sabana. I have little control over it. I don't know what Marlon has in mind. Marlon has been our Venezuelan connection for a year and a half now. We first met him and his wife, Helena, in Utah but that is a story all on it's own. Last year on our reconnaissance trip we stayed at their house. He works as a computer technician for an international bank in Caracas and has access to the Internet. We bought a new computer and got on line just so we could communicate with him. We tried using land mail with other Venezuelan connections but nothing ever got there. So we used the Internet, communicating at least once a week for the last year. Marlon can be very scattered and I don't know if he knows how much gear we have with us. All we can do is go and see.

I am anxious to get on the river. I feel a little like my son, Prescott, waiting for Christmas morning. I feel like I'm going to pop. I want to stop preparing and start doing. I want to know if we have the right food, boats, paddles, clothes, etc... Just like Prescott, I will just have to sit tight and wait. It will all be okay.

I was nervous about shipping the boats but it went well. They charged us \$491.65 for both boats, \$10 less than they quoted me on the phone. We dropped the boats off at Avenza Cargo before dropping off the rental car we used to get here from Utah. We have 120 lbs. of food and another 200 lbs. of other gear to lug around even after we got rid of the kayaks. The car rental shuttle bus dropped us off in front of Avenza Airlines and here we sit waiting for the plane, our bags safely checked. I hope!

We left a garbage bag of goodies in the bushes outside the airport for when we return; winter clothes, car rack, maps, refill cups, etc. Will it still be there when we return in a few months???? We will see?

Feb. 12,

CARACAS

On the plane to Caracas Ken turned to me and asked, "Are you excited?" I had to think a few minutes before I answered. Right at that moment I was still just getting there. I don't know exactly what my answer to Ken was but the question certainly stirred my thoughts.

There was so much I didn't know and couldn't real imagine. The expedition still seemed quite a long way off and I was having trouble sorting my feelings. What was I feeling? I thought, "when I'm at the river put-in I will be both excited and scared". I'll be excited that it is finally happening but with a healthy fear of the unknown. I do believe there are many incredible experiences in store for us. I truly believe we won't need any of the medical supplies for ourselves but maybe we will be able to help someone else with them.

Ken sometimes gets wrapped up in the adrenaline and excitement of things. That may not be unsafe but sometimes he is willing to accept more risk than I. I have to make sure I stay a thinking person and don't just go along with things until I'm too stressed and scared. I have to be careful to not get angry with Ken because of my insecurities and fear. Sometimes I blame him for my short comings. We are going to see some amazing wildlife and waterfalls, I feel blessed for the opportunity and education. I anticipate meeting many fascinating natives and learning, learning, learning, but I'm not willing to die for it. I believe we will try to do things as safely as possible. That will be my mission.

We made it to Venezuela, a short 2 ½ hour flight. The Caracas International Airport is actually in the town of Maquitéa, 30 to 40 minutes north of Caracas, on the coast. Marlon and Helena were there to greet us.

It was very easy to enter the country. No questions asked, just stamp the passport and adios. We were glad when we found our bags right there on the baggage carousel but what about the boats. After inquiring we were told we had to get the boats from the cargo department but they were only open during the day. The next day, Tuesday, was a holiday so that meant we would have to wait until Wednesday to get them.

Marlon and Helena live in a small town on the south side of Caracas. It's almost a two-hour drive from the airport to their house. It can be much longer if the traffic is bad which it is quite often.

Marlon has a little black Fiat and he drives it like a mad man. Someone from New York City might think nothing of the traffic in Caracas but it's very impressive to us mountain folk. With Marlon behind the wheel it seems like a dance, ducking and swerving, zigging and zagging. What seem like certain disasters are just close calls. They don't even faze Marlon. He moves from lane to lane without even a glance, an opening always appears just as it seems like certain calamity. It is as though all the drivers involved have rehearsed it many times.

On Wednesday morning we dropped Marlon off at his office and Helena got behind the wheel. Suddenly, into the dance four left wheels were thrown. Helena, it turns out, seldom drives. Marlon does it all. She can't let the clutch out without stalling. This causes problems when she can't get out of the intersection. It's unpleasant to stop because that means she has to get going again. So to avoid stopping she uses the horn to let pedestrians and other cars know they had better get out of the way. It's un-nerving for all and most of all Helena. We did make it to the airport but it was a lip-biting trip.

When we drove into the cargo area a group of men flagged us to a stop and one of them jumped into the car. He explained to Helena that we would need him to get through customs and he would be cheaper than the official customs handlers. His name was Jordan and Helena believed his every word. He has a fancy badge but I don't really trust him. Now he is stuck to us like glue.

Even though we spent the last year working on our Spanish we only get small parts of the conversation so we never really know what is going on. When we got to the Avenca Cargo Department we were told the boats hadn't come on our plane but they would be in on the flight this afternoon. We could get them at 3:30 PM. Jen and I were upset and wanted to call Miami and ask what happened. No one else was interested in this idea and we hadn't learned yet that we had to do it ourselves if we wanted it done. Jordan went with us to waste several hours

waiting for 3:30 to roll around.

After a very expensive lunch, on us, at the beach we returned to Cargo. The boats had not come. After some calling around they found the boats. They **had** come on the plane with us on Monday after all. But they had not been taken off the plane. They went on to València. After many calls by Helena it was decided they would be at Maquitía early the next morning. We would have to make the long drive down again.

The next morning we were told they had shipped the boats back. **BUT!!!!** "Well, somehow they had gone on to Miami". This time we demanded to talk to Miami. They were very nice and said they would turn them right around and send them back by noon. The story is getting a little tiring by now and you may guess what happened next. Yes, the plane came from Miami and no boats.

Now they say they know where they are. They are over at the airport in the baggage department, **BUT!!!** it's late and they don't have time to get them over here. It will be tomorrow. We yelled a lot. I said I would go over and get them myself. In 10 minutes the boats were pulling in on a pickup. **BUT!!!** They go into customs, paper work and more paper work. Now they want money. We can't tell who gets what money but we know we are being ripped off, over \$200 to get our boats out of hock. With the \$1,100 we paid for the boats and the \$490 we paid to ship them, these are getting to be very expensive boats. The price went up when we found they had been opened up and Jen's life jacket was gone. It cost us another \$50 to buy a very cheap one in Caracas. At least we finally have the boats. It has only taken 3 days. We finally can go!!!

Feb. 14, **VALENTINES DAY DRIVING OUT OF CARACAS TO UPATA**

Originally the plan was to go to the Gran Sabana with Marlon, Helena and one of their friends, Luis, who has a big Land Cruiser. We would all go and climb Cuquenán, (koo-kee-non) one of the big tepuis, before they dropped us off at the river. Plans changed. We would now drive out and climb Roraima with Helena. Marlon and Luis would meet us with our boats and gear a week later and then take us to the river. I am still a little nervous about not having our boats with us. It's hard on me when things are out of my control.

Ken tried to convince Marlon that Helena could wait and come down with him. We could make it on our own just fine, but he wouldn't have it. Helena had a very difficult time driving. When Ken drove it was a much smoother ride. He could switch gears and get out of first, but she was a very nervous passenger. We didn't know how to drive in Venezuela she said, "It is very dangerous..." It was a long drive under the given situation. I had the feeling she got stuck with us and didn't really want to be there. We drove to the town of Upata and spent the night at Hotel Andre. Helena's work partners had recommended it. It was a long drive with a stop in Puerto La Cruz to exchange money. Our timing was bad so when we got into Puerto La Cruz the banks were closed. We had to wait around for 3 hours for them to open again. We still arrived in Upata by 9 pm which was good. On the drive Ken slipped me cards with thoughtful sayings on them for Valentine's Day. He is very loving and thoughtful. The hotel in Upata was reasonably priced and clean. We showered and went to bed. Ken and I celebrated Valentines Day.

The road was, at one time, a pretty good two-lane highway but now it has deteriorated in places and is quite rough with killer chuckholes and washed out bridges. I would be cruising along at 60 mph and all of a sudden a hole the size of a large kayak would appear. One hole I had to swerve hard to avoid or we might have lost the entire undercarriage of the car. For the next 10 minutes I heard about how I shouldn't swerve like that, it was very dangerous. Helena never got the picture that driving in the U.S. is the same as here. Well, not quite. For the first day she told me to read the signs, "they will tell you when dangerous curves are coming". The problem is they never remove old signs. I would see a sign saying freeway ends in 100 meters so I would slow down to get ready. A kilometer would go by and it wouldn't end. The freeway had been finished several years ago but the signs were still there. As I'm zooming along at 110 km/h I asked what the sign with the 60 and a circle around it meant. "Oh, that is an old speed limit sign it means nothing", Helena said. Jen drove for a while too. But I think Helena got to her even worse. Jen seems to be losing her patience with Helena.

Feb. 15

SANTA ELENA

It was a good morning, but I soon was in a cranky mood. I was really feeling frustrated with Helena. I needed to take a time out in the back seat of the car. The day went much better for me after my meditation. I have to remind myself that she may not want to be here with us. She was set up. This may not be much fun for her either. I'm really anxious to be on our own.

We made it to Santa Elena around three in the afternoon, found the airport, and checked into flights to look at the difficult sections of the river. It is very expensive but it seems necessary to have a better idea of what is there. We will fly first thing in the morning. Then we will drive to a town called San Francisco where we will hire a driver to take us up the steep four wheel drive road to the trailhead at Para-Tepui.

This evening we found Ivan. When we came last year to investigate and decide if it was possible to run the river we hired Ivan to drive us to the prospective put-in. He did that as well as shared with us much information about his country. He is a small man, shorter than me in his early thirties. He seemed excited to see us and tell us what he had learned about the river. He had seen a video a helicopter pilot took of a waterfall on the Caroni. It's not a rapid he told us, "it's an explosion." Below the falls there are more huge rapids. I continue to pray for flat water and beautiful waterfalls to portage around. Seeing the jungle up close will be enough excitement for me.

Feb. 16, Sunday

PARAI-TEPUI

Today we flew over parts of the Caroni and Aponguau Rivers. We paid 150,000 Bolivar's (B's) or \$324.00 for a 2-hour plane ride that lasted 1½ hours in a Cessna 210 we met our pilot

out on the tarmac and quickly piled into the airplane. We flew up the Apongau to the first big rapid (Big Falls) then we turned and followed the river down to the Eutobarima section, the crux of the run. At Eutobarima the river started dropping fast a mile or so above the falls and continued for another 5 miles below. The canyon and the rapids keep going for a long way after that but they seem to be runnable. From the airplane most of the river and rapids looked like no problem but Eutobarima is not runnable for at least 5 km. We will have to portage. Ivan told us that a friend of his had heard that years ago the miners put in a trail around the Eutobarima section. That was all the information there was. It would be nice to have a trail around but it's a huge jungle and only a small roomer. If it is there we don't know where it is. We don't even know if it's on the north or south side of the river. I don't think we can plan on it. We will most likely be on our own for the portage.

Ken, Ivan, Helena and I all piled into the Cessna airplane prepared with cameras and binoculars and the pilot headed up the river. The river looks much better from the air than I anticipated. The rapids that are big are VERY BIG. If we can in fact cross through the jungle on the Eutobarima section it will please me. It looks like a death defying canyon. There are still many more difficult rapids below the bend, but from the sky-view it seems we can scout, and if need be, portage.

I had pictured longer stretches of Grand Canyon type wave from listening to Ivan. Of course I have never flown over the Grand Canyon before. Ken assured me everything here is much grander.

Ivan got very sick on the flight and used the airsick bags several times. It made the whole plane smell real bad. Jen and Helena were holding their noses and looking ill. Not so much from the plane ride but from the smell of Ivan's bag. When the pilot looked back and saw them looking green, too, he panicked and decided it was time to get back on the ground. He headed straight for Santa Elena. I would have objected to cutting our flight short but under the circumstance it seems like a wise decision.

This evening I am sitting at the edge of the little village of Parai-Tepui. Behind me the voices of children playing kickball mix with the sounds of exotic, tropical birds. I'm looking across grass-covered hills with the evening sun streaming in under the clouds. It rained hard this afternoon so everything has that extra green, shiny look you get when the sun shines on a wet landscape. Across the green hills the black massive of Roraima Tepui rises high into the swirling clouds. The sun paints the clouds pink and yellow as they dance back and fourth across the face of Roraima. The huge flat top of the tepui has caught millions of gallons of rain, collecting it into streams and rivers that rush to its edge and dive off in white ribbons. From where I sit, I can see the ribbons of water floating down the black walls to the forest below.

Tomorrow we will load our backpacks and hike across the grassy hills to the foot of Roraima. It will take two days to get there. Then we will climb to the top and explore the lost world of the tepuis.

So far it seems we have seen cities, highways, cities, cars, cities, roadside truck stops, cities, hotels, stores, towns, airplanes and cities. I'm ready to get out of the cities and into the wilds.

We have been shoveling out money at an incredible rate, hotels, plane rides, truck rides, taxes and fees. We spent \$16 for a mosquito net yesterday. We paid \$53 for the truck ride here

and another \$80 for a guide for 5 days on Roraima. It is required to hire an Indian guide to climb it. Hopefully we won't be able to find anywhere to spend money for at least the 5 days on Roraima.

Feb. 17, Monday ON THE FLANKS OF RORAIMA AND RAINING

It probably rains here 360 days a year. In the dry season it just rains an hour or two a day, in the wet season 12 hours a day and the other 12 hours the mist and clouds envelope the mountain in moisture. From the first day we arrived in Venezuela we have been told that it is an unusually wet year. The rainy season should have ended over a month ago but it is still raining as though it was not over. Here in the Gran Sabana, we are told this is the wettest dry season they have ever seen. It has been no problem for us so far. The rain is warm and it has never really rained hard while we were out in it. That may change in the next few days as we head up this mountain. For now it is only keeping the water level up in the river and that is good.

Last night we stayed in a hut at Parai-Tepui. There were a lot of cucarachas, (cockroaches) running around so we put up the tent in the hut for protection from them and any other small critters that might be lurking. There was a British guy named Chris who works for the Canima National Park (Imparque) on a project to improve communication between the Indians and the Imparque. Apparently there are some conflicts between the native Indians and the park service. An Indian had gone so far as to shoot an arrow at the director of the park. Fortunately he missed but after that they decided it was important to work on relations with the natives of the park. Apparently this is why it is required to hire an Indian Guide to take us up Roraima. It gives the local Indians a way to make a living without destroying the environment. I was afraid to telling him our plans because officially we may need permits to be on the river, which we have none of, but in the end it did come out. He had no problem with it and was very helpful with information about the Pemón Indians. He was interested in having us count the mining operations along the Caroni. Apparently it is illegal to mine on the Caroni but the government has a hard time enforcing it. The miners are considered outlaws and shun anyone that looks the least bit official. The military does fly-overs in airplanes but it's not a real accurate way to count.

Last night it was decided that we would start hiking between 7:00 and 7:30 AM. Our guide, Ilirio, told us it was important to get an early start. Sounds good to me. Jen and I got up, ate and packed. At 7:30 Helena looked close to ready. Ilirio seemed ready too. We told Helena we would start and they could catch us in a few minutes. We walked along slow but they didn't come and didn't come. We sat down and waited on the top of a hill. Almost an hour later Helena showed up but no Ilirio. She didn't know where he was. Great, we've paid him \$20 a day for five days and after one hour he's gone. We thought this pay first idea wasn't so great, now we know. Two hours out of camp and we have only gone 2 km and already lost our guide.

We made pretty good time for the next few hours. The trail was good and mostly flat. We were following a long ridge across the grasslands. Roraima was gradually getting closer. Finally we saw Ilirio. He had 2 other people with him. When he finally caught up with us we found out he had been working a deal with the two other people to guide them as well. Now he had a group of 5. We didn't sign up for a group tour. This was a private trip. The other two are a father and son from Caracas, at least they seem like nice people. Leo is a senior in an American high school in Caracas. He is working on a major school project on Roraima Tepui which is due in a week, thus the trip to climb. Al, his father, is a psychiatrist in Caracas.

Around 1:00 we came to a river crossing, the Rio Cuquenán. The river was steep and full of

rapids in both directions. As we came down the hill to the river we could see several people on the other side trying to find a place to cross. They were mostly Europeans, German and Austrian I think. They were trying to cross in the fast moving rapids up stream. It looked like a dangerous situation to me. The heavy rains had made the river rise. It would have been a dangerous river to kayak but to swim it without a lifejacket would be nearly certain death. Normally the crossing was an easy wade. The guides had never tried crossing with this much water. Just below the normal river crossing was a deep pool with only moderate current. We could swim the pool easily enough but the problem would be getting the packs across. The pool was the only safe place as far as I could see. I stripped down and started wading out into the pool. The current felt swift but I could hold against it. Half way across I was swimming but I could still touch the bottom if I reached down with my tiptoes. I made it across the 100 feet of river and swam back.

I reloaded my pack putting all I could in waterproof bags and what wouldn't fit in bags I wrapped in my poncho. I balanced the 50 pound pack on my head and started out into the river. I was up to my chin but the extra weight of the pack held me down and actually made it easier to stand. Three quarters of the way across I came to a big rock. Water was going over and around it but it formed an eddy to stand in. About 8 feet of fast water separated the rock from the shallow water along the far shore. The problem was the slippery rocks on the bottom. I stepped into the current and onto the slick rocks. My feet started going in every direction. I dropped the pack to save myself. I quickly picked it up only to drop it again. Jen had just call the others attention to the success of my crossing so they all watched as I flipped and flopped and dropped my pack several times. I was glad I had taken the time to waterproof my gear. I eventually made the far bank dropped my pack under a tree and swam back across to get Jen's pack.

I did much better with hers, only dropping it once. She swam across and we were past this obstacle. Now we had to get our guide and his following across. I guess I wasn't instilling a lot of confidence in them with my slipping and sliding but the alternatives were bleak.

Ilirio and the Europeans had tied a rope and a piece of cord together and strung it across the river between two trees in the middle of the steep rapids. Some were making it across but just barely and after falling down and flopping like fishing lures in the current their packs were much wetter than mine. One guy lost his pants while hanging off the rope. I asked Helena if she wanted me to take her pack across. "No, it's much too dangerous, I will cross where Ilirio crosses" she told me. Ilirio had decided the rope idea wasn't going to work. If I would take his pack across he would go my way. I was learning the details of the riverbed, now I knew how to step on the slippery rocks with out falling. I didn't drop any more packs. In all I carried 6 packs across and instructed numerous people on how best to swim the river. It was warm but by the time I crossed the last time I was shivering with cold. In all I crossed the river 13 times.

By the time we reached camp I had a dehydration headache; I hadn't eaten lunch so I was feeling weak; I had walked into a nail back the hut in Parai-Tepui poking my eye lid which was now sore; I was sunburned; and my body ached from using new muscles. Ken also felt a little haggard. We had a quick dinner and were in bed by 8:30. The rest of the group went to bed without dinner. I laid still for a short time listening to the rain bounce off of the canopy of our new tent.

Feb. 18, Tuesday

THE SUMMIT OF RORAIMA

2,810 meters (9,210 ft) above sea level

We made it up Roraima around 2:30. The Gods were with us because as soon as we got up the fog lifted and we could see. The sun even came out. There was a group heading down just as we got up. They had been up here for 2 days and they said this was the first time they had seen it. It is a strange black and green landscape. The rock is actually pinkish white but it is covered with a black coating of something, probably some kind of algae. The trail to camp is easy to see because the black coating is scraped off by all the feet shuffling across it leaving a white stripe through the sea of black. Flat topped is a relative term for this tepui. The rock is not flat; towers of rock, ravines and crevasses are everywhere. It is difficult to travel. All the lower areas are filled with plant life and water. Soil is scarce due to the extreme rain and wind, the plants have a tough time getting a foot hold. There are only a few bushes that are as tall as me, most of the plants are less than 2 feet tall but some of the rocks are 102 feet tall. We have only caught glimpses of the area surrounding the tepui, the clouds are still thick around the edges blocking the view.

I felt much stronger today. I was being careful to stay hydrated and fueled. The landscape here is incredible. Thick leaves rich with chlorophyll glisten with moisture, fern, as well as many plants I don't recognize.

While we waited for the others, Ken and I had a bite to eat in the sunshine. It was absolutely incredible. Towers of black rock surrounded us. We explored the plants, frogs and bugs. The whole way up we were preparing to not be able to see much, but the clear view was amazing. We were aware it could be short lived. The group hadn't made it yet and the temptation to take advantage of the sunshine was too great for Ken. Within minutes he was up on top of the highest point we could see. The plan was for me to go with the group to camp then keep an eye out for Ken and try to let him know where we were. It was very hard on Helena that we didn't stay with the guide. "It was very dangerous up there without him", she protested. We were figuring out that if we waited for the guide we weren't going to get to see much.

Feb. 20, Thursday

BACK IN THE GRASSLANDS

We splashed our feet in the waters of the, "Mother of all waters" as Roraima Tepui is called in the tourist literature we have. The water-laddered clouds and fog that shrouds the top of Roraima supply the water for rivers flowing into 3 countries. The Kako flows to Guyana, the Cotingo flows to Brazil and the Cuquenán flows to Venezuela. The Cuquenán joins with the Yuruani and Apongau to form the Caroni. We will follow this water for the next 650 miles, almost to the ocean.

We spent several hours romping around exploring the summit. It is a huge area, about 8 miles long and 2 miles across in some places. We only covered a small part of it. The fog was a bit of a hindrance, making it hard to navigate. Even in the fog we could explore the micro world of plants, bugs, animals and rocks. There are so many strange plants, many of which are only found here on the tepuis of the Gran Sabana and some only on Roraima. There are a lot of bug

eating plants. There is a species of bromeliads that catches their nutrients by digesting insects that fall into the water in their throats. They're called Pitcher Plants. According to our books, bromeliads are a wide-ranging tropical family, "but only on these tepuies have they displayed this carnivorous behavior". Different plants use different means of capturing the insects. Some have sticky stuff while others close over them.

We found several of the little black toads (*Oreophrynella*) that are not supposed to be able to hop. This seems to be an unfair rumor about the poor little fellow. To his credit he crawls very well but we observed a fine demonstration of hoping, covering a distance of 8 inches with 4 or 5 nice hops.

No matter how leisurely we were Helena was always behind us. We would pack, load and wait. It could take half an hour to get the last 3 things into her pack. Then she walked so slowly. We finally just left her. When we reached the summit I wanted to see all I could while the sun lasted but I was told it was too dangerous and I must stay with the guide or I would surely be lost. But the guide had to stay with everyone else or they would be lost. In the morning the weather was pretty good, some fog floating around but some sun too and it wasn't raining. I was excited to get out and see what we could see. Helena came over and asked what I wanted to do. I said, "explore". She said, "but the weather is too bad we must go down". I couldn't believe it.

It was all because Ilirio made a small mathematical error. He was being so smart hiring out to 2 groups at the same time. He would get paid double for his trip up the mountain. We hired him for a 5-day trip and Al and Leo hired him for a 3-day trip. So now he was finding the flaw in his plan, he couldn't go down with them and stay up with us too. I couldn't believe Helena was falling for his crap. All I knew was I was going exploring not back down the mountain. It took a couple hours for them to settle it all. There was another guide with a couple from Israel camping not far from where we were. We could team up with the Israelis and their guide and Ilirio would go down with the father/son team.

By the time it was settle we had missed the good weather, the fog was heavy and it was raining. They wanted me to wait while this other guide and his people took naps before getting ready to do a little hike. I finally got mad and said I was going hiking and all of you do what you like. So Jen and I set off. We wandered through the mist and across the rugged terrain examining the strange plants and rocks. We eventually found the edge of the cliff that dropped back to the jungle floor thousands of feet below. We couldn't see anything but there was no missing the edge. The wind was blasting up the wall so hard that when we tried to throw a stick over it went up not down. It blew up over our heads and landed behind us. We picked it up and threw it again and again it went up.

Another amazing feature was the quartz crystals. They filled creek beds like gravel and lay in piles on the rocks. Some were bigger than two of my fingers. When we left the beaten track we found bigger, more perfect ones. Many were covered with the same black algae as the other rocks. Others were bright white from being polished in the streams.

After a few hours of wandering we met up with Helena the others in the new group. They had decided that they too had seen enough and would be going down today. I don't know why but I agreed to head down that afternoon and meet them at the lower camp.

Everything was too dangerous. Danger is a relative thing. The guides have yet to show us anything we couldn't find out on our own, they are just a big waste of time and money. I will be happy when we are on our own and can make decisions based on reality.

We took a bath and washed our hair in Rio Cuquenán. The water had receded to waist deep

making the crossing easy. We continued across the grasslands to a small creek only about 6 km from Parai-Tepui. Here the Sabana or grasslands stretch on for miles with gentle rolling hills. We have set up camp on a small hill beside the creek. There is a soft layer of dark clouds drifting across the blue sky. In the distance the sun has lit the hillside intensifying the contrasting colors. The songs of the birds in the trees lining the stream we drink from are a pleasure.

Jen is relaxing in her Crazy Creek chair while Helena prepares a dinner. We are having tuna salad with hearts of palm as a special treat. There are biting insects so we sit covered in clothing with our mosquito nets pulled over our heads. The sun heats up our back as it breaks through the clouds. Jen has removed her shoes to relieve the pain of her blistered feet.

ON THE APONGUAU

Feb. 22, Saturday

LAUNCH DAY, WE ARE ON THE RIVER!!!

We had an uneventful retreat from Roraima. Yesterday morning we got up and casually walked the last 6 km out to the village. Marlon and Luis were coming to get us in Parai-Tepui late in the evening so we had most of the day to kill. If we could get a ride down to the highway it would save time and he wouldn't have to drive the rough road up the hill. We found a truck that would take us down at about 1:00 PM. We were just waiting around for the truck to leave when we heard another truck coming up the hill. Suddenly there was Luis's Land Cruiser with our boats on top.

We got to the little village of Cama-Meru around 3:00 PM. Jen and I immediately went to work on our gear. We had a lot of organizing and loading to do to get everything ready to go in the morning. Before loading my kayak I took it for a spin in the little river next to the village. Partly to demonstrated it's capabilities to Marlon and company and to the Indian kids and partly because I just couldn't wait to get on the water. After I showed them a few rolls and other tricks Marlon and Luis gave it a try. The Indian kids were very amused.

Last night I couldn't sleep. So many things to think about, the excitement and the worries over all the little thing we may have forgotten. The night before Jen had a small panic attack. She started thinking about the dangers that lay ahead. The what if's. It's easy to see how it could happen when you think about the upcoming events. Walking off into the fog on Roraima is like a walk in the park compared to what we have ahead of us in the hundreds of miles of unknown. There is really no way to know what we will be encountering. We know there are a lot of waterfalls and rapids, we know it's miles and miles of wilderness jungle that we know virtually nothing about, poison snakes, poison plants, frogs that can kill you, ants that can too. We read about a lot of dangerous thing but we really know nothing about them. Then there is the human factor, the Indians and the gold miners. Will they be friendly to us? There is certainly no law enforcement in there. And as far as I can see there is no rescue either. We have no radio and even if we did we don't speak good enough Spanish to talk to anyone. I think we are all on our own out there.

After a very leisurely morning, due to our dependency on the group, we loaded everything and everyone into the Land Cruiser and drove 40 km to a little bridge where Highway 10, to

only paved road in the whole Gan Sabana, and the Aponguau River cross. We carried the kayaks and gear down the embankment beside the bridge. We did the final loading of the boats, took some pictures, waved good-bye to Marlon, Helena and company and launched. Finally, after so much time, we dipped our paddles in the waters of the Aponguau!!!

The river is narrow, only 30 or 35 feet across at it's widest and no deeper than my hip. I'm guessing 150 cubic feet per second of water (cfs). The banks are steep dirt. The trees lean out over the river to meet in the middle forming a canopy of leaves over much of the water. The water is a dark coffee color from the tannic acid in it and about 75°. The river grew with every mile but it's still not very big. It's mostly flat and meandering, looping back and forth like a giant snake. There was a couple of small, class II riffles, just enough to make us sit up and take notice. We paddle 4 hours and made maybe 15 km.

We saw an Otter. We watched him swimming across the river before rolling and diving out of sight. Farther down river the water and brush along the river suddenly exploded when we scared three tapirs out of the water. They had been lying in the water along the right bank only 30 feet from us when we scared them into action. One climbed out of the river and crashed off through the brush. The others disappeared underwater along the bank. We had been hearing the strange call of what we were told is a "Bellbird" but we could never see one. Today I got a look at one. Not nearly as impressive as it's call, only about 8 or 10 inches tall and mostly gray. There is another bird called an Amazon Kingfisher. He is maybe 8 or 10 inches tall with dark, shiny, oil green color on his backs and head, a white collar and a large thick bill. He likes to sit on branches just a few feet above the water until we are almost to him then he flies ahead to another branch and waits again.

It has been raining on and off but it's warm as it falls and feels refreshing. The small biting flies are called puri-puris and they are thick. We wear long sleeve clothing most of the day only to protect ourselves from them. When on shore we dawn our mosquito nets and try not to sit still. Tonight the moon is full. Life is good and the puri-puris have gone away for the night. Thank goodness they disappear as soon as the sun sets.

We should get to Salto Aponguau tomorrow. Salto is the Spanish word for waterfall; meru is the Indian word for waterfall.

Feb. 24, Monday Morning JUST ABOVE SALTO APONGUAU

Yesterday Ken used his recorder to talk his journal; I used mine to listen to music for a while. We saw capybara and some turtles dove into the water as we got close. A couple of times we tried to go to shore to figure out where we were and to scout a rapid, but the puri-puri's were relentless. Our foreheads and ears look like war-zones... we lost. The only reason they have not caused us to go insane is that they go away after dark. I just counted 27 bites on Ken's forehead, 25 on mine, and 23 bites on my lower back where they got under the bottom edge of my shirt. My left arm is still swollen from a puri-puri bites I got yesterday. I must start being more careful to avoid as many bites as possible. They are very small and travel in 100s so it can be difficult. My wrists are laced with bites also.

We ran a couple of rapids today. There is a village on the right bank across from the rapid where we scouted. A boy came over to talk to us as we

studied the route through the rapid. He let us know he thought we should camp at his village because the rapid was long and it was getting late. He told us it was three hours by river and 25 minutes by foot to the falls. We explained to the boy, in our broken Spanish, that we had a long way to go so while there was light we must travel. Unfortunately we didn't make it far. The rapid continued farther than we thought. So we were forced to camp half way down the rapid. It is amazing how the river meanders back and forth. We will never know how many kilometers we actually paddled. Sometimes I'm not very efficient with my stroke. It seems I'm behind all the time. Descending from Roraima I fell and got a scrap on my forearm. I didn't think much of it but in no time at all it was infected and swollen. It is still infected but I think it is starting to heal now. It was a mistake to think if left alone it would heal up on its own

When dinner was finished we both bathed and retreated to the tent. After all we are on our honeymoon. It is now 10:00 am on a very wet Monday morning.

Yesterday we paddled and paddled, 9 hours in our boats. Not because we liked it, but because if we stopped the puti-puti's swarmed us in clouds and drove us crazy. Puri-puris are little biting flies, almost as small as fruit flies but they bit like deer flies. They leave a small red dot where they bite and it itches. They aren't much of a problem in our boats but once we step on land they attack. Then they will follow us back to the boats and drive us crazy until the wind blows hard enough to get rid of them. Jen has a much more serious reaction to their bit than I do. They bit me and make a hole that itches a while but it goes away in a few hours. Jen seems to get more bites and the bites stays longer with swelling, itching and rash. Hers may last for days or weeks. We found if we just stay in our boats on the river we are better off. A floating lunch in mid-river works well. The puri-puris seem to grow more fierce as the afternoon wears on. Just before dark they are ravenous and nothing stops them. It's tough finding a place to camp in the dark so we have to pull off the river while we can still see and the puri-puris are still out. It's a question of can we get the tent up before we are eaten alive. The only good thing about the little buggers is that just at dark they all go away. Night is beautifully, cool and bug free. We took baths in the river last night in the dark.

Last night, and the night before, it rained a lot. This morning it is still raining. We had a lot of cloud cover yesterday. I had my shirt off for maybe half an hour and I got sunburned.

We saw a giant white heron today. It flew ahead of us and stopped on a high branch to watch. Then when we got close it would fly ahead again. We saw a rust colored bird in the trees, magpie size and shaped, very pretty. I also saw some capybaras, a pig size rodent that likes the water. They are the largest rodent in the world. One swam ahead of me for sometime today.

We are camped next to the biggest rapid we have seen so far, a long class III and fairly rocky looking.

It's scary running rapids in our big heavy boats. We have very little maneuverability. I think we will get more comfortable in them as we go along. This rapid is near a small Indian village. A man and his son came over to talk when we stopped to scout. He wanted us to come over and camp at their village but we explain that we had many miles to go and we had to keep moving. The kids from the village ran down the bank to watch us run the rapid. We didn't get very far

and ended up camping just down stream of the village but on the opposite side of the river.

Our rechargeable batteries aren't working so great. We have a couple of solar chargers that work pretty well but two of the 3 sets of batteries we brought were dead when we took them out of the packages and they don't seem to be recharging.

Feb. 25, Night 4 SOMEPLACE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

Yesterday we got up and paddle a few km into Iboribo. It's a little Indian village a few miles above Salto Aponguau. The Indians there make money-taking tourist on tours of the falls. It is the last place for 100's of miles that a road reaches the river. Ivan told us that it would be good relations to hire some Indians to help us portage around the falls. When we pulled our boats up onto the beach a couple of guys came over to investigate. In my broken Spanish I arranged for them to help carry our boats and gear around the falls. They would take the trail to the falls while we paddled. It was much farther from the village to the falls than I had thought, almost 2 hours. The porters beat us there. We passed a gauging station on the way to the falls. (1,100 cfs, 27 CMS)

We were over a mile up river when we first heard the roar of the falls. It is hard to imagine a 360 foot high waterfall with 1,100 cfs going over it. Standing at the top of the falls it sounds like a jet taking off. After we got everything carried around the fall I paddled my kayak out into the gale force winds under the falls, water pellets stung my face, blinding me. The wind blast at the bottom of the falls create big ocean like waves in the pool. Together the wind and the waves made me afraid I might lose control of my boat and tip over so I retreated before actually making it to the falls itself. It was very exciting to experience the awesome power of the falls in such an up close and personal way.

I ran a good-sized drop down to the next pool below the falls where we could reload our gear. I clunked a rock with the tail of my boat but it was empty so no big deal?!?!

The porters were worried about me running the drop below the falls but were impressed afterwards. That may have had something to do with our not taking their warnings of danger down river seriously. They said we would come to a rapid not far down river. It would be unrunnable but there was a trail on the right side that would take us around it. They said they weren't exactly sure just how far below that we would come to a place that was unpassable, it would be maybe 6 or 7 miles of bad waterfalls and rapids. They spent a long time trying to convey this message, drawing in the sand and using our dictionary. We didn't take them too serious. We know how to run rivers and these Indians may not even know how to swim.

Just as they said we came to the unrunnable rapid and just as they said there was a good trail on river right. The Indians used the trail to get their canoes around the rapid. It was worth the \$15 we paid the porters just for the information. The boat carrying was a bonus. We tied a rope to Jen's boat and dragged it along the trail around the rapid. Jen's boat weighs around 180 lbs and mine is over 200 lbs. We had to unload mine and made extra carries to get all the gear to the other end. When we unloaded it I found water in my rear compartment, not a lot but enough to be concerned.

The rapid was beautiful. Giant, rounded boulders spilled into the river from the near by hills, the water going this way and that to get around them. Much of the water was going under the rocks and for that reason it was impossible to run. With more water it would be a wild run for a real whitewater kayak but not for our big boats.

That afternoon the sky turned black and it started to rain. Just before dark we picked our

way through a small rapid and made camp just below on a sand/gravel bar. When I opened the back of my kayak it was full of water again. It was too much to be leaking in through the hatch. Something was wrong. I check for holes and sure enough there it was a three quarter inch split just in front of the rudder mount. I had called Prijon, the makers of the boat, just before leaving and mentioned my concern about the design of the rudder mounts on this boat. I was assured it was very strong. One small tail clunk had shoved the rudder mount forward and split a hole in the 1/32 inch thick plastic it was mounted to. It was devastating. Day 3 and I had a hole in my boat and a lot of wet food. How would I paddle this thing 550 more miles without hitting another rock? Impossible.

Jen sorted through our wet food salvaging what was possible. We lost quite a few crackers and now had a full bag of soggy GORP. The wet crackers were unsalvageable but we couldn't afford to throw that much of our precious GORP away so Jen worked on drying it.

Dinner in the rain added to my already dark mood. Jen realized she might have left her cup and spoon on the rocks at the portage. We went to bed and it rained even hard, lightening flashed outside our little nylon shell and the thunder rolled across the sky. As we lay there I realized we were only 2 feet above water level. What if the river comes up? What if it comes up fast? Are we in danger? I went out into the rain to check our options. We could move up the steep riverbank to a semi-flat spot but it wouldn't be pretty. Everything would get wet and muddy. I put a stick in the sand at the edge of the water intending to get up and check it soon. Wet and sandy I crawled back into the tent. I lay there thinking about the character of the river, mostly flat, slow moving, it wouldn't just surge up I thought. But I didn't really know. I really don't know much about this tropical wilderness. Could it be that we are in over our heads? We fell into restless sleep waking often to the sound of rain and the river slapping the shore just outside the tent. Without something to push us it was just too ugly to get up and move.

It was still raining when we woke in the morning. The river had come up more than a foot and was still rising. I got out the stove to dry the back of my kayak and the repair kit so I could start patching it. I worked at melting the plastic together by heating pliers on the stove and then ironing the plastic. It didn't work very well. But I Gooed it up enough to hold for a while. Jen found her cup and spoon in the nose of her kayak. By the time we took the tent down the water was only inches from the door. We had made it through the night without disaster.

It was around 11:00 in the morning when we paddled up to the village of Tuauken. The Indian porters at Iboribo had given us such good information we thought it would be good to go into this village and see if these people knew any more about the difficult section we had been warned about. The village sat a few hundred yards back from the river. We tied up our boats, climbed the steep dirt bank out of the riverbed and started across the grassy flats toward the huts. For some reason we were nervous and a little scared. A young girl spotted us and ran to tell the village we were coming. We rounded the corner of the first hut. Sitting in the doorway was an old man with no teeth and a rifle in his hands. His face was dark with deep wrinkles creasing it and his clothes were old and dirty. I was shocked to see the gun but I tried to sound calm and unworried. "Buenas dias" I said. He grunted some words I didn't understand but he quickly put the gun in the hut and waved a greeting. A couple of women appeared with curious looks on their faces. They were all very friendly. All our fears were for nothing. The young girl then took us to find the "Captain" of the village.

We tried to explain our plans and showed him the map but he wasn't very helpful with information about the river. He told us that it was a 2-day hike over the hill to get to the next village, no other way. The language barrier seemed to be in the way again. They didn't seem to

understand that we were in boats and wanted to get there by river. We left knowing no more about what was to come than when we had arrived. The whole town followed us back to the river to look on as these strangers in their strange boats paddled off down the river. They must have been thinking, "those stupid gringos".

We stopped a few miles down river and talked with an Indian family camped there. The guy was making a new paddle for his new dugout canoe. We took pictures and gave them some of the trinkets we brought from home. They had no more information on the river than the folks in Tuauken. There seemed to be something wrong with our question. But he offered to go along as a guide. Since he didn't seem to know much about what was down river we decided he wouldn't be much use as a guide. Besides we had tried Indian guides on Roraima without much luck.

Not far down river we started encountering rapids. They were the same character as before, huge, round boulders with the water chocked into channels around them. One of them had a portage trail around but I decided to run the boats through anyway. Once again a 14½-foot kayak weighing in at close to 200 lbs. can make small rapids very exciting.

We are camped at the top of a long rapid that I really hope to run tomorrow. If I can't it will be a very long portage. Here there is no trail. This would be a very fun rapid in a regular whitewater kayak. It's scary looking in this Yukon Expedition.

There is a small hut made of sticks and leaves and a couple of old canoes here. It's good to have the hut because it has been raining again. It must be an Indian outpost. At least we know they come this far down.

We are camped on the edge of the jungle. If Ken runs the boats through the next rapid I will need to travel through the jungle a ways on my own. It's easy for me to spook myself thinking about the wet darkness, and deadly plants and animals that lurk in the jungle. My rational mind knows it's just fear of the unknown. I was a bit nervous when walking into the village Tuauken. But it turned out to be a rewarding experience, as will jungle travel I'm sure.

Feb. 26, Night 5

3 KM DOWN RIVER

It was a day of rapids. I was able to run the rapid right below our camp but farther down we ran into more unrunnable stuff. It is so hard to keep things in perspective. The rapid I ran was probably only a class III+ but we worked it up to being class V just by worrying it to death, worrying what if I'm wrong, what if I miss my line, what if I can't turn this big boat. Back home it's a lot easier to be brave and go for the challenge. Here it seems more important to not make any mistakes. There is no hope of rescue so "what if's" have heavy penalties. We unloaded and carried the gear around. With an empty boat it was easy to run the rapid. Carrying the gear around was much harder and time consuming.

Not far down river we came to another rapid with more drop to it. It had a few rocks to miss and a bit of a right hand turn but not bad. We scouted briefly and I ran it. It was harder to make the right hand turn than I thought it would be. I had to paddle hard to get across the current and I still didn't make it were I had planned. I got out to be ready for Jen's run and to get some pictures. She did real well until it was time to get right. She said later she thought she was right but she wasn't. She came straight at the rocks I was standing on. She hit the front one, the boat turned sideways and stuck. For a split second she looked right at me with a look of pure terror. The boat tipped upstream and she went under. It washed off the rock and she bounced through

the rest of the rapid upside down. It was too much for her and she swam out. I threw a rope to her but she was confused and unable to get it. She started swimming for shore and I jumped into my kayak and took off after her. She made it to the eddy but her boat was getting dangerously close to the next boulder sieve. I grabbed her paddle and threw it as hard as I could for the eddy. I clipped onto her kayak with my waste strap and started paddling for shore. When I got the boat to shore I looked for the paddle and it was gone.

By the look on Kens face he saw it coming, but the rock I broached against took me by surprise. As I slid off of the upriver side of the rock my helmet and boat took several blows from rocks below it. I've been upside down and hit my head on many rocks before but this time was different. I was in Venezuela on a stretch of river that had never before been done. If injured, it could take days to evacuate. Needless to say I panicked. I forgot how much I hate to swim from a boat when I pulled that spray skirt and ejected from the cockpit.

Ken threw his rescue rope to me. It was just out of reach up stream. He yelled, hang onto your boat and swim for the rope. The boat weighed 180 lbs without water in it and now it was full of water. I was not making any gains toward the rope but I was quickly getting washed down river toward the next boulder strewn rapid. I let go of the boat and began swimming toward the bag to save my life. Ken commanded, "swim for shore," since the throw bag wasn't a good option any longer. I swam toward him but he yelled, "the other shore." Scared and defeated, I swam as hard as I could to get out of the river.

I swam into an eddy, dragged my soggy body out of the water, and joined Ken who was rescuing my boat and paddle. As we lifted my water logged boat up to drain the water out I noticed the drain plug was already open and the boat was draining with force. With closer inspection it was clear that while dragging upside down bashing on rocks, the whole rudder assembly was now hanging by the rudder cables. The river had ripped the whole rudder mount and drain plug assembly out of the boat. Now we had two broken boats. I felt very bad that I had let Ken down. When I do well he is very proud of me when I screw up he doesn't know what to say.

We now had 2 broken kayaks and we would have to pull out our only spare paddle. Things were starting to look a little shaky and we hadn't even made it 80 miles yet. The next place we could get back to civilization was still over 50 miles down river.

We pulled the boats up on the rocks for repairs and to go though the gear that had been flooded in Jen's boat. Most of the stuff we keep in waterproof bags and is okay but there are always things that get wet. Fortunately we brought an extensive repair kit with several kinds of glue and tape, wire and clamps. We used a big rock to smash the rivets back into their holes and smeared glue over everything. It would take a while for the glue to dry so I had time to walk down river a few hundred yards to see what we were in for next. It didn't look good but I found Jen's paddle wedged under a rock and was able to pull it out. I walked back to where Jen was waiting and we made a plan. Jen would stay and put up a camp and dry her wet gear while I went down river to see just how far and how bad the next rapid really was.

First I tried going up into the forest but soon decided it was much too thick for traveling. I went back to the river and headed down the bank. It was a mass of boulders. In many places

the whole river just disappeared under the rocks. I could hear the water under me as I walk down the middle of it. Some places it was runnable but the consequences of a mistake were really high. The thought of being sucked under the boulders was too much. I had boulder hopped along for about an hour when the river turned back into a big flat lake. Off in the distance I could see more boulders. I don't know what is to come. We can only hope this is the end.

We didn't pick this place for a camp it picked us. We had lunch on the rocks in the river. We ate dinner out on the rocks in the river as well. Jen spent the afternoon relaxing on the same rocks but it wouldn't do for the tent. She went back up into the trees and chopped out a place to put it up, then hauled all our sleeping gear up as well. She organized the food bags, pulled out dinner and made the arepepa (a typical food for Venezuelans, a cornmeal mush biscuit), and filled the sun-shower with river water. Needless to say it was really nice to come back to camp with all the work already done. One nice thing about this place is the puri-puris are gone. They seem to infest the grasslands not the jungle.

This part of the trip wasn't supposed to be like this. It was supposed to be easy. The river was going to wind through the sabana with a few little waterfalls and rapids, nothing more. It was to be a warm up for the tougher stuff down on the Caroni. This is a true adventure, the kind that are hard to find these days, like John Wesley Powell had on the Colorado, traveling through uncharted regions of the world with only the few provisions that can fit in the boats. I have been thinking a lot about how Powell and his men must have felt. Just like them we really have no idea what is to come, how far or if it is even possible. It has never been done for good reason. The porters said the bad section was maybe 6 or 7 km long but they didn't really even know where it was. What if it is longer? Is it bigger than the two of us? What if we come to something impassable? How will we get out? Somewhere off to the east 30 to 60 miles is the highway. But what would make me think we could get there any easier than we can get down this river. There may be a trail some place up in the forest above us to the west, maybe 5 to 10 km away but I had trouble going 100 yards in there. The grasslands are gone. We are in the jungle. There are no sign that Indians ever come here.

I haven't said anything to Jen but we have the 1000-meter line coming up on the map in about 15 km. I know that Globule Positioning Systems (GPS) devices aren't real accurate on elevation but our GPS says we are still above 1100 meters. If it is even close it means we have at least 330 feet to loose in less than 10 miles, 33 ft/mile gradient. Not super steep but steep enough for these boats and it means it's not going to let up for a while unless we find a very big waterfall and loose it all at once. I know it can't be a constant drop for 10 miles so we must have some big drops someplace along the way. It makes me very nervous and a little more scared. It's hard to keep a positive attitude.

We tried the GPS in the trees last night and nothing happened. It can't pick up a signal in the forest. It is becoming questionable what we can accomplish. If we make it down the Aponguau, then what? We have two broken boats and we are going through our supply of food. We know we have big problems at Salto Eutobarima. I can now see what an 8 or 10 km portage could be like. Jen is not real positive. She's working really hard, carrying big loads. I'm sure she is feeling like she may be in over her head. Her swim was the last thing she needed. She was already scared of the rapids and it's not looking like we are done with them for a while. I think she would quite right now if there was a way. She was better this afternoon. She relaxed in the sun, no bugs, no rain, no place to go for now. We will see what tomorrow brings.

I've asked these questions many times in the last two years but not in the present tense. What are we doing here? Are we in over our heads? I know a lot about rivers but what if this river is different than the rivers I know? How fast will the river rise, is a good example. I don't know. I do know there are things in this water that aren't in any river I've ever been on. We read about them in the medical book on the drive from Utah to Florida and any of them can get you and you won't even know it. And what about the rapids and waterfalls, what do I know about this kind of river? I have spent my life in the high, cold places of the world. I know a lot about icy mountain peaks, avalanches and frostbite but what do I know about tropical jungles? I've never been on my own in anything close to a jungle. I know about rattlesnakes but what do I know about any of the snakes or other animals that live in this place? The best think I have going for me is I don't even know what I should be afraid of. If you get lost in the mountains you go down, that will almost always get you out, but what do you do out here when you are lost? I'm afraid I know the answer to all these questions, NOTHING. I know nothing about this place.

Feb. 27, Night 6, Thursday

A PRETTY PLACE

It was another rough day. We went only 1 km, just over half a mile. To move our nearly 400 pounds of gear on land we have to make several loads each. To get the 1 km we had to carry 3 loads each. That's 6 km of travel over unbelievably difficult terrain. We still have to bring my boat down. While jumping from rock to rock across some deep water today Jen missed her landing and fell. She cut her leg up a bit. Just a small thing like falling on a rock could put us in great danger. I have made so many trips up and down this pile of rocks my shoes are falling apart and the skin on my fingers is coming off. Last night while returning to camp my shirt slipped off from around my waste and dropped down a crack into the water. In the rush to get it before it was sucked under water I bumped my glasses and one lens fell out and down the crack, gone to the river. We put Jen's rudder in her boat for the carry across the rocks. Bad idea, the main pin fell out and it's gone. I have spare glasses but we haven't got a spare main pin for her boat.

The rocks in the riverbed are a chocolate brown color and very dimpled and rough. It has good traction for traveling, but it cuts at shoes and skin or anything that rubs against it. It has all sort of patterns etched into it. Some look like imprints of starfish or sea urchins. Many of the big rocks have channels carved into them by rainwater running down them. A lot of different kinds of lizards live among these rocks. The big ones are about 8 inches long and an inch thick. Some have white spots that match the white lichen that grows on the rocks. There are hundreds of rock spiders too. They run really fast across the sides of rocks. I think they can even run on water but they are so fast it's hard to tell. Some are as big as 4 inches across from leg tip to leg tip. There is a giant spider on it's web near this camp. His body alone is 2 inches long and as thick as my little finger. We walk a wide circle around him.

The temperature is warm but not unbearable even when the sun is direct. At night it cools off to 70 degrees or so. With a light sheet over us we are very comfortable at night. Sometimes the light blanket is nice just before dawn. But when we get up in the morning shorts and t-shirt is all we need. The water is a cool 76 degrees, it's a shock to get in at first but once in it's very comfortable and refreshing. In the evening there are some mosquitoes, very tiny ones but here in the jungle we haven't seen the puri-puris. In the daytime we are bug free. It's sooooo nice.

There are beautiful colored everything's; butterflies, flowers, spiders, lizards, birds, leaves,

and rocks. We saw a black hummingbird with a grey head this evening. It had a very long tail with a white slash at the end. The book says it may be a Hermit not a hummingbird. Across the river there is a big clump of purple flowers, orchids I think. They have been all along this stretch of river. Above us are some white flowers hanging on vines. I have no idea what they are. The leaves come in so many shapes and sizes and shades of green. Some that at first glance look like leaves are really giant pods. Vines hang from every tree, some hang down straight as arrows while others twist and turn like the ribbons and bows on a birthday present. They rap themselves around trees and rocks, anything they can reach. Some vines are as big around as my leg. The thin little flexible vines the Indians use as cord or string. They even use them to tie up their canoes. The Indians can make all kinds of things with the vines and sticks they collect in the forest. There are surprisingly few thorny plants. There are some, like the stuff we call, "grab on grass" that can be really hard on us. The, "grab on grass" grows along the edges of the forest where it can get sunlight. It's very tall and very sharp. When you walk past it grabs onto anything it can and cuts and tears. The other day some brushed across my lip and cut a slice like a paper cut.

We are healthy and strong. We have lots of food. We are in no danger at this time. We will take it as it comes, one day at a time.

We passed through the jungle long enough for me to get a tick lodged in my arm. I saved it in my Chapstick container just in case I get sick. As I stumbled across the boulders with my heavy load struggling to maintain my balance, I decided I'm not much of an expedition woman. I was having a heck of a time keeping up with Ken crossing the sharp, black boulders, and I let myself get discouraged with fear and pain. I was having a hard time with the fact that we made many trips hauled heavy loads, yet we didn't make it all the way. We made it less than 1k. Somehow I find that discouraging.

Ken had hoped to get to the pool below this spot by tonight. No such luck. We managed to get dehydrated and worn out. The place we are is incredibly beautiful and it seems a shame to me to rush for the goal. There is also the fear that this portaging could go on for days. We can see a pool but not beyond. The only thing we can do is take it one step at a time and deal with situations as they come. I believe few if any people have traveled along these shores. There are deep, green, cactus with ruby, red flowers growing right out of the rocks. I've seen some of the largest spiders I have ever seen, some a little closer than I cared for. The thought of accidentally walking through one of their webs is not pleasant. We also have seen quite a few different species of lizards, and we hear many birds.

Ken ran the boats part way through a boulder garden section. I took pictures to document the first descent on the Aponguau. It will probably be the only run ever. I am sitting next to the remains of a less fortunate Indian canoe. It probably got away in high water and lodged itself way up here on top of the boulders. It is apparent just how much water is here during high water. I'm glad we are here now with lower water when there are boulders exposed to portage on.

We camped at the bottom and still have to go back up in the morning to retrieve Ken's boat and another load of gear. Ken is truly an amazing

man. I can't carry as heavy a load and I'm not as strong in any area. But he doesn't take it out on me; he takes it in stride. I really appreciate that and all he does. He is loving and affectionate. Truly all I could want in a husband. The hardest one on me is me. It will take all of today, part of yesterday, and part of tomorrow to go less than 1k. The bottoms of our feet are very sore from carrying the loads on the sharp boulders.

Feb. 28, 1997 Night 7,

STILL IN THE BOULDERS

I had a difficult time staying positive today. My mind kept getting away from me. It kept going between, "don't get overwhelmed, one day at a time," to "this jungle sucks." If Ken gets hurt we're both screwed. Much pressure is on Ken. I'm not some great explorer. I'm just a girl who wants adventure and fun in her life beyond the average but not necessarily to the extreme. It's all I can do to get my head up with the heavy weight of the pack on my shoulders. I carry a stick when I'm in the jungle and swirl it so I don't get webs strung across my face. It also works well to hold back the vines with sharp thorns on them to prevent more flesh loss.

Ken, on the other hand, seems perfectly content being a great explorer. He charges on through the jungle swinging his machete, knocking down any vines that stand in his way. When the spider webs enclose his face he casually wipes them off not slowing his pace. He doesn't travel without his camera and stops to take pictures and look at things often.

The hope is to move camp down one beach further and possibly get at least one boat to the gear we have stowed 2k down river. I pray for our safety today as well as an end to the portage. I must keep in mind, one day at a time. I love Ken more and more every day we're together. He believes in himself and in following a dream. I wonder how some people are able to take a grandiose dream such as this and make it a reality. What does it say about the great explorers? In very expedition I know of there is a team; sponsors, safety backups, porters and medic etc. Our team is just the two of us, which is both amazing and terrifying at times, amazing that we could go from fantasizing about exploring tepuis in South America, while looking in a magazine from the safety of our home, to swinging a machete through this jungle. We could have never dreamt all of these details which bring me to the terrifying part. What is to come that we didn't factor in? Will we both live to tell this tale? Dreams are safe but reality holds so much risk. I want to live to tell the tale. My goals are to stay safe, healthy, and to learn as much as possible. I hope my mom is dealing with her fears while we are here.

We made it only one kilometer again today. It looks like we have about 5 km to go. I'm hoping 2 days. I base this on the 1000-meter line on the map. The map we are looking at is like using a map of Arizona to run the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon. It has contour lines 500

meters apart (1,600 ft.). We were unable to get good maps of this part of the trip. Our good maps start some 40 miles down river.

We went into the forest and hiked a couple km down river. I think we can move the boats faster in the forest. It's another world in there. It's easy to let your mind get carried away and scare the hell out of you. What is out there? Spiders, snakes, bugs, lions, poison plants, poky things, things you never even knew existed???? Today I was walking along through the brush, suddenly I felt a sharp pain in my shoulder. It was like several bee stings right through my shirt. After looking at the stings I turned the leaves over to see what had gotten me. What I found were a couple of hairy caterpillars. They were about 2 inches long and they had hairy spines about 1 inch long. The spines are stingers. I had walked into them and in one swipe I got at least 10 stings. The book said they could be quite severe. It swelled up for maybe an hour and then went away. Not so bad. As it was it was almost worth the suffering just to see the things. Caterpillars; just one more thing to worry about out here in the jungle.

The snakes are always in the back of my mind. There are at least 4 kinds of poisonous snakes in this jungle. Some, like the Bush Master, are deadly poisonous. In many places the tree roots cover the ground. Then the dirt washes out from under the roots, leaves cover them, and then I come walking along, falling through, sticking my feet down between the roots. What if something was in there or in the brushes as I push through? We have a venom extractor kit but will it really do anything? It would be deadly serious to get bitten by a snake here. It's a long way to a hospital.

Jen has been great. The bugs and spiders, snakes and other creepy crawly things don't seem to bother her. She just keeps going. A lot of people would be having breakdowns by now. Relationship wise we are doing well, we need each other. In all the nights I spent with my friend Christoph on mountains I never got a single massage. I've gotten several already from Jen.

The four good rechargeable batteries charge pretty well during the day but I'm nervous about over using them. I've been trying to do some of my writing in the mornings to conserve battery life. We have headlamps, our tape players and the G.P.S. that use batteries. Because it is dark by 6:30 every night we need to use our headlamps almost every night. We probably don't need the G.P.S. for most of the trip but if we ever make it to the lake at the end we will need it to navigate in the open water. I'm saving an extra set of batteries just for that. I've pretty much stopped using my tape player. It's just extra weight at this point.

Mar. 1, Night 8,

PARADISE BEACH

We spent the day crashing through the forest, chopping trail, hauling packs and dragging boats. The forest isn't a lot faster but it is less hard on gear. We don't leave blue and red plastic everywhere like we do in the rocks and a fall isn't so dangerous. We have gear strung out for a full kilometer. We are camped here at the beach, my boat is just back in the woods, Jen's kayak is an hour through the jungle down river in a place we are calling, "The Park". Just past that we have a food cache hanging in a tree and more gear is a bit farther down at the rivers edge. We think we can get back in the river at this last place. It may not be the last portage but at least we will get to float the boats a little while. There is grassland on the other side of the river down there. It would be easier hauling gear in the grasslands.

We are camped on a big, white sand beach with a calm pool in front of us. There is a rapid above where the water filters through the rocks, splashing into the pool. Tall trees surround us

and a short, flat-topped tree in the middle of the beach provides shade from the sun. Just to the left of the tent, is another small tree with an arrangement of beautiful, purple orchids growing on it to add to the color of the place. When we first walked onto this beach we dubbed it Paradise Beach. I got out my fishing gear and tried a little fishing but no luck.

I really want to complete the whole trip. I don't know if it's possible now or not but we will see what comes.

When we got the two food bags as far as seemed reasonable, Ken moved across the rocks with speed while I waited, resting. He returned very excited about what he found. He said, "we may or may not be able to run the boats in the river but on the other side there is Sabana for as far as I can see." This means easier travel with bigger gains.

In some ways it seems sad to leave the jungle. I would never have done what we are doing by choice, but since it has been the only way, it has been quite an experience. At first, the trauma of having spider webs draped across my face, and being bitten and poked by bugs, ants and plants was stressful. After a short while, I found myself no longer searching for what was biting me. Instead, I wiped my neck and figured it was another ant or the likes. As the thorns ripped at me, I no longer had to look to see what the damages were. It was what it was, and in the evening I would wash much of the days travels off in the river.

Mar. 2, Night 9,

NO LONGER IN PARADISE

We made it a little farther then our average today, maybe 2 km. It is hard to see how we can spend so much time, working so hard, and making so little headway. We struggle and sweat all day and by evening we are only a stones throw from were we started. Part of it is we have so much stuff. I'm sure we have more then we need but which things are we sure not to need later on? The rope and climbing gear is over 10 lbs and hasn't seen the sun but if we need it we will be glad we have it. We have a lot of food but we need all of that. I can tell we are going through food. I have more room in my boat every time we load up.

We spent the first 4 hours in the forest dragging boats. We got them down to the river and spent quite a while loading them back up just to paddle them a few hundred yards before more impassible rapids. It looks like I will spend the morning repairing my boat once again. It fills with water so fast now it may sink within an hour of hitting the water.

Tomorrow we have free paddling for maybe 1 km if that. Then there are more of the dreaded boulders. I sure hope we are near the end. The GPS thinks we have more to go down, 50 meters or more. I sure hope it's wrong because we would have to drop over 50 feet per mile for the next 3 miles.

The left bank of the river is grassland now. Good for traveling and seeing but bad for puri-puris They are out in force. This camp is not paradise beach. It's just a place to sleep. The frogs are really noisy, and it smells like a swamp.

Sometimes the pack felt so painful I believed my vertebras were being compressed under the weight. I found that taking a shallow breath helped prepare me for the stab of pain that was going to occur as soon as I reached

up to tie the ribbon. It's only for a short time, I would remind myself. Not everyone gets to do this sort of expedition, let alone for their honeymoon.

By 12:15 we had all of the gear and both boats on the rocks at the put-in. Again we had to deal with puri-puris and they're relentless. We ate some lunch and loaded the boats. After my legs were fully welted (the puri-puris laughed at the repellent), I succumbed to putting my long pants on in the heat of the day. The day didn't get any easier. We paddled a few yards to the next boulder choked rapid. A short portage across some sharp boulders and we ran another few yards. This continued a few more times then we decided to hike ahead through the puri-puri infested grassland on the left bank. For as far as we could tell it looked like more of the same, a pool at the end of a boulder choked section.

I walked down river a ways in search of a campsite while Ken dealt with the boats. I wasn't sure if it was the end of the portage or not but it looked like a fine place to spend the night and I thought maybe the hard stuff was behind us. I was so excited I couldn't stand it. I ran back with renewed enthusiasm and tripped over my words as they flew out of my mouth. We had to get to the place I saw. I wasn't sure if there was a camp spot but it seemed reasonable that we could find one. Ken was tired at this point and was a little impatient. I was supposed to be looking for a camp spot. He was concerned because night was approaching quickly and we hadn't made it to a camp-able spot.

In the end we made it to a small beach 7.5 k from the start of our boulder maze portage with both boats and all of the gear. It's strange not knowing where we are going. Every evening Ken turns on the G.P.S. to see how far we have traveled. Lately it feels like I have worked hard enough to have covered 50 miles but the G.P.S. tells me I have hardly gone anywhere at all. Sometimes it's difficult not to get discouraged. My body is very sore and tired. My loving husband is about to give me a full body massage. I guess the hard work is worth it. From up on the hill above us we have a wonderful view of Cuquenán Tepui.

Mar. 3, night 10,

A LONG PULL WITH PURI-PURIS

It was pretty much for sure that we would have to wear combat gear against the insects today. We woke up with them swarming our tent door. Today's trek across the Sabana got us further but proved to be equally as challenging. The biggest challenge was the same for me, the heavy loads. Today, in addition there were millions of blood-sucking puri-puris chasing us down and giving us welts, leaving a blood spot in the middle as their signature. At one point they were swarming on my net so thick that a few got in and bit my face and lips. I looked at my hand and found three had penetrated through my calloused palms and one was biting my pinky. It was time to put on my gloves. Dozens of them latched on to my sleeve waiting for their opportunity to suck on my wrists. A swipe of my glove and score- I just killed half a dozen.

While dragging the boats Ken lost track of his mosquito netting long enough to get brutalized. He received 32 bites on one ear and 27 on the other. His eyes are itchy. They were bitten also. It is dangerous between 3:00-6:30 PM. I have yet to figure out how the Indians live with these bugs. They certainly don't run around with mosquito nets on their heads. Since starting this portage we haven't seen any signs of humans. The only signs of animal life we see are traces of large anteaters. (They leave large holes in the termite mounds).

Another tiring day is coming to a close. We made it 3.5 k today. Our longest day since the portage began. Unfortunately we still have one full load and Ken's boat to retrieve in the morning. The river is not yet wide, deep and flat. At some point the character has to change. Hopefully that will be soon.

We loaded the kayaks and paddled almost 10 minutes down river before running into the same old thing, impassable rapids and boulders. It looked like a long section. I knew it was coming but it was still hard on me to have to pull out again. I was asking the same old question, "when will it ever end?" We pulled the boats out, loaded up the portage packs and headed across the sabana. We stayed high above the river listening to the roar of rapids below. We knew not to drop down yet. I wanted to get close to the 1000-meter line before we stopped. We had to cross one creek bed, a thick jungle filled gully 50 feet deep and 400 yards across. Once inside it's not too bad but getting past the thick growth and "grab on grass" at the sunny edge of the forest is a frustrating job. The brush is so thick I could hardly chop my way in. At least there was a cool creek at the bottom.

After a couple hours of walking we dropped back down to the river, discarded the loads and headed back across the sabana for a second load. It is rough and rocky terrain as well as hot and buggy. The rocks that cover the ground are so sharp they are finishing off the job the river rocks started on my shoes. Our muscles and minds were starting to slow. On this second load when we reached the edge of the gully I couldn't get past the edge of the forest. Sweat was running in my eyes and stinging. I had lost my bug net so the bugs were eating me alive. The branches grabbed and pulled at my clothes and skin. I could feel panic building up inside. I couldn't do it. I back my way back out of the thick brush and sat down on the kayak, head in my hands defeated.

Jen gave me some water and found a spare bug net and put it on me. After a few minutes we moved to another location to try to penetrate the brush. Finally we made it down to the creek in the bottom of the gully. We sat by the water and drank and ate. It gave me time to relax and recover.

We are camped just above the river where the sabana and the trees meet. I'm very tired. The bugs got me today. I have hay fever from the grass, so my eyes water and itch and my nose is running.

We hit the first of the bad rapids on February 25 it is now March 3. We have covered a grand total of 7 miles in the last 6 days. How long can it go on like this?

When we returned to the tent for the evening we talked about our goals. With so much unknown it is difficult to set goals very far out. Ken said

if we make it to Canima he will feel we have succeeded. Right now I have a hard time seeing that happen. That means we will portage another 9 kilometers or more around Eutobarima Falls. With my body aching as it is I can't say I would sign right up for that for the sake of success. My goal is very limited - to make it out healthy, more educated, and stronger than when we came. I'm still not sure what my goal was before I came beyond making sound decisions one day at a time as they arise. There was so much neither of us knew. This is really Ken's dream. Sometimes it's like he's on a mission and I happen to be part of it. I struggle to keep up and to not be too much of a set back or burden.

In general I expect much of myself. I am very strong and capable, but I am also weak and vulnerable. There are definite limits to my abilities which vary with my confidence level. Unfortunately I haven't found the control switch to turn them up or down at will. I get frustrated with myself when fear over takes me. But in the heat of the moment it's a struggle to diminish my fear. Ken has been having a hard time when I chicken out of running something that appears to him under my ability level. I can't explain what happens in my head. I just know when I'm too afraid the mistakes could be fatal.

Mar. 4, Night 11,

WE HAVE MADE IT!!!!

This morning was one of the toughest so far. The past week had taken its toll. We planned to get up early and cruise back up across the sabana to get the other boat before the sun was high and the bugs came out, but we couldn't get moving. The sun was hot before we got out of camp. My muscles ache and my feet hurt. They didn't want to move. It was like trying to drive an old car on a cold winter morning without warming it up. It took a long time to get the oil pumping and the juices flowing. When we got to the boat we sat down and ate but I was still tired. To move the kayaks I tie a rope to the front, make a loop in the end, put the loop over my shoulder and pull. Jen hefted her pack and I stepped into my harness. It was all we could do to get this last load moving back across the grassland for the 6th time.

Ken suggested we abandon our previous plan of pushing on and take the afternoon off. We have been going strong for many days and it seems to have caught up with us. We retreated to the tent, rested for a half hour, then both of us were restless brewing up a plan. My plan was to take a day pack and walk as far as possible. Ken's plan was to load his boat with stuff we didn't need and for him to kayak as far as he could. So be it.

He's down the river and I'm lying in the hammock shrouded with mosquito netting, listening to Rich Wyman on my tape player, writing in my journal. I always worry when he heads off alone down the river. I know he's very skilled; I hope and pray that he is very cautious too. If all goes well he will go down a ways and we will be out of this canyon. Then he will have to run my boat and I will carry a load. I'm not comfortable running whitewater solo.

I think of Prescott and the rest of my family now and again. I try to picture each of them doing their thing: Prescott running around playing full speed ahead, not worrying about his dad and I; my mom flying her airplane; Eric flying

TWA's planes; my dad playing cards. As they chart our journey, they have us paddling down the Caroni now, if they only knew. I hope my mom doesn't let her mind get carried away into worrying. I try to send mental telepathy so she knows we are doing fine.

When we got back to camp we sat by the river under our mosquito net and discussed our next move over lunch, Kipper Snacks, crackers, trail mix and jerky. I would load my boat with things we wouldn't need for the night and run it down river a ways, until I got stopped or made it through to open water, then walk back up to spend another night here.

Up river the rocks were rough and very big. The river just went through them. It seems the reason the riverbed is so rough is that there are small mountains on each side of the river at this point. As the river cuts through the mountain continues to dump debris into the river. Here the river is different. Only one side has a mountain and the rocks are smaller and more polished. The riverbed keeps the water on the surface. The rapid beside us is more of a wide cascade, shallow and bouncy. It looks much friendlier even though it still has a lot of drop, class three-ish looking. We could tell it had changed but was it for good?

I told Jen to look for me around 6:00 PM and I paddled into the current. After 2 km of fun class III to IV- rapids I pulled my boat up onto a beach near an old broken down hut, our first sign of man since we entered the boulder section. I looked down river and there wasn't a boulder in sight. I think we've made it.

I was so excited to get back up and tell Jen. I thought if I hurried we could move our camp down today. My enthusiasm was soon dampened when I realized I had left my machete in my kayak and had to go back and get it. By the time I went back for it and then cut my way through the forest I realized there was no way we would be moving camp tonight. I made it back to our camp only minutes before nightfall.

If we can keep our gear together and our strength up, I feel we can make it to the Caroni in 3 or 4 days, at most 5. Then we have maybe 2 days to get to Uonquen. That is where we have to decide what we want to do. We can get out there if that is what we decide. We understand there is an airstrip at Uonquen so we can fly out from there. To go on means we must go at least to Canima and we will have to go around Eutobarima. In some ways this portage was good to do because now we know what it means to do a long portage. This one was tough because we had no idea what we were up against. Not knowing was the hardest part. The Eutobarima portage we will know. Now we know the GPS doesn't work in the forest. We will have to use a compass to find our way. It won't be as far as this portage and we will have less food to carry. But what about food? Will we have enough food to get to Canima? I guess we have a few days to figure it out.

Ken and I sat under the netting to wait for nightfall, and had a discussion on the end goal. Ken is extremely driven. He believes if we push hard and paddle long days we can make up time and in the end make it to the Orinoco. I, on the other hand, will keep that end goal out there but I'm not willing to die for trying. I plan to take one day at a time. I think it's frustrating a bit to Ken that I don't share the same drive. I need a purpose beyond being able to say I did it. I continue to plot my escape routes just in case I need out. I am much better off focusing on doing the best I can today and preparing physically and mentally for a successful tomorrow. Using my

judgment on what sections I should stay in my boat and what sections I should walk. I can't let the pressure of being an equal get me into a life-threatening situation.

Mar. 6, Night 12,

FINALLY MAKING MILES

After an oatmeal breakfast, we packed up. Ken got my boat ready to paddle down river and I loaded the pack to follow the map Ken had made of the overland route he had followed back from his kayak. He went over it several times letting me know that he hoped I could find it. "It isn't too difficult, but it could be tricky to find some of the land marks I left," Ken explained.

I followed the east bearing just like I was told. The problem was I never saw any of the cairns I was suppose to see or the huge dead tree which was marking the place I was suppose to enter the jungle. I looked a bit then decided to go for it. What I found was an embankment dropping away vertically. The jungle was very thick at this point and the drop off was around 20 feet with loose dirt. It wouldn't be good to be lying at the bottom with a broken leg. I could be there some time before Ken found me since I wasn't where I was supposed to be. Even if he did find me, then what? Back tracking seemed like a better option. This must be why Ken was so specific about where to cross. He must have had a hard time finding a way that we didn't need a rope to descend.

After I emerged from the jungle back out in the light of the grassland I walked the tree line in waist deep grass in search of the burned log I supposedly couldn't miss, while the puri-puris searched for exposed flesh. During the 30 minutes of searching I fell into a ravine about 7 feet deep. It took me quite a while to work my way back up the other side to the plateau then across to a high point. From there I discovered I was walled in by jungle. I walked to the edge of the forest toward the water but it seemed much too dense.

I was worried that Ken would think something had happened and try to find me. I hate to admit, but by this time I got a bit panicked. Not because I had to make my own way, but I was overwhelmed with a feeling of failure. I had this simple task with specific directions and I screwed it up. The only solution was to back track, get down around where I believed the dead tree was suppose to be and attempt another crossing. I did. Without much trouble I got to the bottom of the creek bed.

It was then that I realized how stupid I had been. That was all I had to do in the first place and I'm smart enough to know that. I have become so dependent on Ken I expected him to burst through the forest at any moment and show me the way. I felt terribly frustrated. I had put so many limits on myself believing I had to follow Ken's plan so closely. There are times when I can still lead.

When I worked for Outward Bound I believed in myself enough to lead groups of kids on the river and in the mountains. Since then I have lead

many children and adults alike in technical skills activities with confidence. Since I've been with Ken, who has even stronger skills than me, this confidence has deteriorated. Am I losing myself? This thought worries me. Or am I just embarrassed because I have taken such a back seat here that it took me two hours to accomplish what I easily could have accomplished in thirty minutes? Needless to say Ken was a little discouraged with me when I finally arrived. I promised myself that when appropriate, I would think, and lead with confidence.

After I got there he opened his compartment to find it full of water from running the river the night before. He was discouraged with himself for not checking it earlier. It could have been drying. Our expensive books were again waterlogged.

This morning we broke camp and went off in different directions. I paddled Jen's kayak down the 2 km of fun river and Jen went hiking into the sabana. It took me 20 minutes to make the run down to where my boat was waiting. I figured it would take 1 ½ hours for Jen to walk it. I found a comfortable place to lie down and got out the Spanish book to do a little studying. After 2 hours I knew she was having an epic. I really didn't want to hike all over looking for her. I was tired and my feet hurt from days of marching over rocky, riverbeds, rough jungle and sabana. I tried whistling and yelling. I even thought I heard her whistle back. Finally I had no choice. I got up to start out after her and just then she came into view over the ridge. She had an epic. She had tried to follow my directions but they didn't make sense so she kept wandering looking for something that did. She may have been mad at me for not coming after her but she didn't say anything directly. She was blaming it on herself for relying to heavily on me.

We got in the boats and paddled through a few small riffles and then it was flat, flat water going on and on. Flat water never looked so good to me. We had to manufacture a new main pin for Jen's boat out of a piece of wood and then put the rudders on for the first time in a week. We stroked along ticking off the kilometers. It felt so good to be getting someplace. By mid afternoon the thrill of it was wearing off a little and a break would have been nice but we were driven on by the terrible puri-puris. This part of the world could be heaven if it weren't for these pesky bugs. If we stop they get us, it's that simple. So we float mid-river for lunch and breaks, making one or two quick stops to pee on mid-river rocks. But mostly we go down river. The GPS says we are 18.5 km from our last camp. That is a straight line. With loops and bends we paddled maybe 30 km. Around 5:00 we found a very nice sand beach. We got out, threw the tent up, got in and waited for sunset and the bugs to go. When we reach the Caroni we will be going back into jungle for a long time and we will be rid of the puri-puris for awhile.

We spent the hour before dark in the tent looking at maps and discussing our plans. Jen has really been spooked by the whitewater. She is very worried about any upcoming rapids. I would say only 5% of the river actually has rapids and ½ of the 5% is unrunnable. But that is my logic not hers. She would be more than happy to say we were defeated and take out at Uonquen. I admit we may have to quit there but I want to know we **have** to quit. I don't want to stop because I'm afraid of what the future **might** bring. I want to make it to the Orinoco. I think there is a good chance we can. I got frustrated with Jen because I don't want her to decide she can't go on.

We made lots of miles today but the last 7 days really killed our daily average. We spent the

last 8 days going 8 miles. We have been on the river for 12 days and covered a grand total of around 50 miles. I figured the trip would be about 650 miles total. Our average now is 4.16 miles per day, with 600 miles to go we will get to the Orinoco in 144 days at this average speed. We started with enough food for 30 days. We will go onto our good maps soon and we should have clear sailing for sometime now.

I seem to have the ability to find poison ivy anyplace. I've developed it on my stomach and wrist. My toe is hurting; it may be an ingrown toenail.

It is a beautiful morning. The birds are singing; I can hear the hooting of an owl; and several humming birds search the exterior of the tent for nectar or maybe they are just checking us out while getting nectar from the tree next to us. They are fascinating birds. As we lay there listening, we studied the maps. We guess it will take us an hour's paddle to be on to the detailed maps. Then we will know exactly where we are and how far we have traveled. The G.P.S. will be easier to chart and know we're accurate.

Mar. 7, Night 13

BIG FALLS, 2 WEEKS ON THE RIVER

We left PC a month and 2 days ago.

We paddled a beautiful piece of river today, surrounded by hilly forest. The usual steep mud banks fell away and rocks and boulders seemed to be strategically place for looks and beauty. Huge boulders, the size of houses, would loom up from the bottom of the river and our rudders would tap, tap on the rock as we glided over them. The forest had a lot of palm trees mixed in with the others, giving a different look to the green walls bordering the water. The sounds changed as well. At one point it sounded like a bunch of kids had been given party horns and whistles and sent out into the woods to see how much noise they could make. A few of the kids had buzz saws.

Now and then we came across small rapids. Jen would get goose bumps. But they were mostly class II, III-'s and she did fine. We stopped on a huge boulder in the middle of the river for lunch, peanut butter and jam on crackers with jerky for desert.

As we rounded a bend and the forest came to an end, we heard the sound of a rapid. It was a much louder deeper roar then the ones we had been experiencing. It looked like something worth scouting.

It was a 3 meter high ledge drop with a ramp around one end. Two thousand cubic feet per second of water makes a lot of noise going over a 10 foot vertical drop. The ramp was runnable but we had too much to loose. I couldn't afford more boat trouble. The portage was easy and a lot easier on equipment, I thought. As I lowered my boat down a little stream of water beside the rapid the rudder bumped a rock. The homemade aluminum rudder was fine but the rudder mount on my \$1,100 "expedition" kayak broke right off as though it was made of clay. It's not that I have to have a rudder to paddle my boats but it sure takes it less work. Without the rudder I have to think about my strokes to keep it straight. When I stop paddling the boat wants to turn. With the rudder you just push the little pedals and the boat goes were you want. It doesn't work in whitewater but it sure does on the flat stuff. I taped the broken piece back on with strapping tape and duct tape as best I could and we limped on down the river into the grasslands.

We have found that by tying a poncho between our paddles and holding the boats together

we can sail along quite well. The prevailing winds come from the northeast, off the Caribbean, across the Orinoco Delta and up over the Guayana Shield. We are going, for the most part, southwest giving us a tail wind most of the time. We were able to sail for 5 kilometers today.

Around 4:30 in the afternoon we paddled up to a rapid, Ken said, "I don't think it's a big deal. The map says it loses a meter over a couple of kilometers." He did agree with me when I reluctantly said, "it sure sounds big to me." We paddled closer. When we arrived at the top of the rapid, the horizon line told us it was, in fact, **big**. We were looking at the tops of the trees below.

We named the rapid Big Falls. This is the area we flew over when we did the reconnaissance flight. The plane turned around right above the rapid that I broke my rudder mount in. From the plane it looked like a little 2-foot ledge. This rapid looked big, but not like this. It's not on the map but we have named it Big Falls. It drops over 11 meter in a quarter of a mile, 140 ft/mile. It's beautiful and it's a portage. When we got here there were 2 Indian kids and their dad fishing in the rapid. They had a nice mess of fish. The fish looked a bit like piranha but not quite, round and flat. The big ones were 10 inches in diameter. Maybe we have to go fishing.

When we got out and walked down the shore to take a look we could see men fishing in the rapid below us. We were curious but hunger and fatigue won. We decided to pop some popcorn and crawl into the tent to avoid the pesky insects for a while and study the maps some more. While Ken was out popping more corn, the man and two young boys were returning to their canoe with several large fish on a stringer. The man was very friendly and surprised to see anyone camping here let alone two people that looked like us. In spite of his need to hurry home, he came over to greet us. Ken followed him back to his canoe to take a couple of pictures. They paddled up stream as hard as they could to avoid getting pulled into the rapid. Then they paddled across to the other side of the river where they hiked up the trail and over the hills to their house. It's amazing how little is expected of children in the United States. I wonder if many of the problems in the U.S. today stem from this lack of expectation. Just a thought.

We had our first campfire last night. I wasn't worried about the environmental impact or whether or not I might start a wild fire because in this country the goal is to start wild fires, not stop them. Across the river from our little camp we watched the orange blaze of the grass fires burning across the hill. The Indian and his two boys said they had set the fires earlier in the day. I have reasoned that they do this to keep the forest in check. Once the brush gets a good foothold it can't be burned off and then the forest will take over. So the Indians set fires every year in the grasslands to insure they stay grasslands. Up in the rapids, where we spent so many days portaging, it was jungle. That was because the Indians don't go there because of the bad rapids and steep hills, so it's never been burned.

Mar. 8, Night 14, BUG IN THE TOE BEACH

We got a slow start this morning. We had to portage around the Big Falls rapid and that took time but the fishing really took the most time. Inspired by the Indians the day before, we got out the poles to try our hand. We didn't catch much, one sardine about 2 inches long. I think they know something we don't. It was 1:00 in the afternoon by the time we got in our boats.

Ken was in great spirits. Seeing the size of the fish the Indians caught the day before encouraged him to let up on his push to make up time and try a little fishing. I was surprised and pleased. I really enjoy it when we take time to enjoy the journey as opposed to just pushing for a goal.

The man and his two boys at the rapid were the only people we've seen since Tuauken. That was 11 days ago. We saw a lot of fires yesterday so we know there are a few people out there but they aren't on the river. This area looks like wheat farms, grassy hills rolling on and on. Dark green lines of trees follow the gullies and ravines and cluster under hillsides. I keep expecting to see a farmhouse among the trees or a farmer atop his tractor plowing a field. But this is not Kansas. This is a wilderness, no houses, no tractors, no farm fields, only big open nothing.

The wind blows a lot out here. We had a good tail wind today and we sailed a lot. It's great, it feel like we're getting something for free. It always feels good to get something for free and the best part is we are tied together when we are sailing, shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm, completely equal.

My second toe on my right foot has been hurting for some time now. I have a vague memory of noticing some pain back on our first days in the kayaks, but I thought it was just getting used to the foot pedals in the boat. During the portaging everything hurt and I didn't even notice it. But yesterday it was really bothering me. I decided it must be an ingrown toenail and I would have to operate on it. As soon as we got to camp I got out the first aid kit and my Leatherman knife and went to work. It looked like a small blister at the edge of the toenail. I tried popping it with a needle but nothing happened so I got bigger. I used my knife to cut under and through it. It popped alright! Black and white goo, a lot of it, came squirting out. It was a much bigger pocket than I thought. I yelled to Jen to come see something really gross. Of course she did.

Ken said, "Want to see something really gross?" Of course I did. I had no idea what I was looking at. There was a big black blob of sludge with some white stuff that came out of the hole in his toe. How all that stuff could fit in there I wasn't sure. It appeared he had squeezed out some sort of worm. To my amazement when he squeezed again and wiped it on his shirt there were a couple of dozen tiny white eggs. Some parasite chose his toe to host it's family. As he continued to squeeze some stringy thread-like worms emerged. This was one of the strangest things I had ever seen. It was the stuff we read about but thought the odds were slim we would experience it since we wear shoes and are very clean.

Ken was very calm and seemed a bit stunned by it all. After the immediate excitement and amazement, I began to worry about what it could be. Many of the parasites we read about can cause you many problems or even kill you. We thought we had to be concerned about caterpillars that

sting, ticks, puri-puris, mosquitoes, ant bites, and poisonous plants, but this parasite thing opens up a whole new category of concern. We decided that any closed wounds that don't look right need to be opened right away.

We flushed the hole out with betadine and neosporyn and taped it up. I will have to watch it. I think it may have been a Niguas flea, a small burrowing flea, the female of which imbeds itself deep in calloused skin and lays it's eggs.

After fixing my toe I started on the rudder mount on my kayak. I had been paddling with a broken rudder mount since the ledge drop up above Big Falls. Once again the repair kit was worth every ounce of weight. I drilled a hole through the main boat just ahead of the rudder mount, spread lots of two part epoxy on the broken part and held it together with a nylon wire strap through the hole I had drilled. Then, I filled the holes with Marine Goop.

My poison ivy is doing well. It just keeps spreading. I think I will start taking Prednisone today. We have a very extensive first aid kit as well as repair kit. I hope the Prednisone is the most serious drug we have to use. We are still quite healthy aside from these small problems. We have been eating well. In another week our diet may get less interesting but for now it's good eating.

The Aponguau has grown a lot. It's a big river now, 2500-3000 cfs. But the Caroni will be twice that size. Tomorrow we should get to the Caroni.

Mar. 9, Morning 15 ON THE CARONI!!!!

We did it! We have kayaked the Aponguau and are now on the Caroni!! **It's big!**

We had a very nice camping place our last night on the Aponguau, a gravel/sand bar just below a small rapid with miles of grassland surrounding us. At night we could see the orange glow of grass fires burning off in the distance. We got up and were on the river by 8:45. I am feeling a sense of urgency after being delayed so long up river. No time for lying around.

We had a number of small rapids to run. At one I couldn't help but catch a surf for a few minutes. The rocks in these rapids are gorgeous, red and yellow, polished jasper shining in the sunlight. As we approached, the rocks above water glisten red and as we passed the water turned red from the rocks below. So many of the things we see are hard to describe. I don't think we will ever be able to let people know what it is really like here.

When the Aponguau and the Cuquenán (koo-kee-non) rivers join they form the Rio Caroni. The Cuquenán pours over a 40 foot high ramp of rock called Salto Pampata. Right at the bottom of this falls the two rivers meet. At 2:30 PM we paddled onto the Rio Caroni, we crossed the waters of the Cuquenán and stopped on a huge sand beach just below the falls. We spent an hour on the beach romping around and celebrating. For some reason there were no puri-puris so we swam and ran around barefoot. I was so excited to have made it to the Caroni. I had a real feeling of accomplishment. For over a year now I have been picturing the place in my mind. In my mind it was not such a hard place to get to. This was supposed to be the warm up for the real adventure down river. If this was only the warm up what is to come.

We spent about an hour playing around on the confluence beach. A big, glorious, white sand beach it was. There was a time not too many days past that we dreamt of making it to this far off place. Now here we are. It seems like there should be colorful umbrellas, people laying, playing and picnicking

here. Instead there are two gringos with sore muscles, bug bites, and no time to stay.

Only a few km below the confluence we saw a big motorized launch tied to shore. As we passed we could hear a motor running back in the trees. I figured it was a miners dredge up the small side creek, our first mining operation.

The river was wide the first few kilometers and somewhat overwhelming. Dark trees lined the banks with over half a kilometer of water between them. I was feeling very small. What are we getting into? We heard roaring water ahead but the river was so wide it was hard to know where to go. We passed through our first riffle on the Caroni, half a km wide and a km long, but it was still just a riffle.

Jen pointed out a giant vulture eating something on the side of the river. He was huge with a white chest and partially white wings. His head was bright red. I took a picture but he didn't seem to want to leave so I took it as a warning to not get too close. I have learned it was a King Vulture, averaging 30 inches tall. It gets its name because all the other vultures that are feeding on carrion immediately retreat to a safe distance as this much larger bird approaches.

We passed a village with wash buckets and boats on the beach and clothes drying on the rocks, a very lived in place but we didn't see a single person. We are camped on a small sand beach just below a mud and grass house. We went up last night to visit with the inhabitants but no one was home. We must have been too early and they were out doing whatever it is they do. We have seen several people in canoes and along the shore, so we know people are around. The houses are very nicely built. The typical hut is maybe 30 feet long and 15 feet wide. It's like a circle that has been cut in half and straight walls added between the two half circles. The walls are made by constructing a frame out of sticks tied together with vines. The frame is maybe 4 inches thick and is then filled with mud. They have stick framed rafters with palm branches or grass roofs, very picturesque. Mostly they are used for the sleeping area. All other activities take place in our buildings that have no walls.

Things seem a bit stressed between Ken and I. During the portage we worked together very well, maybe it's just the transition from needing each other to the independence of paddling down river. We don't touch much these days. We paddle, eat, and write. Our plan is to get to a village called Uonquen. Here we hope to gain some information on the river below and see if it is something we can fall back on in the event the next portage is impassable. I'm a little nervous of the whitewater we will encounter as this river keeps growing. I feel Ken will push on no matter what. He's not about to be defeated. I have to keep the risk within the boundaries of what I'm willing to accept. It seems we are both putting defenses up. Ken gave me a poor excuse for a back rub. He must have felt he owed it. I tried to stop my brain and forget about it. I'm not sure how to recover from the situation we are developing.

I know Jen is very nervous about our new river. It is big and we don't know what to expect. It was extremely wide for the first few hours after the confluence and I was feeling a little overwhelmed myself. If it's this big now, what will it be like 200 miles down? She does real well on the flats. We paddle long and steady and she never complains. She is a strong paddler.

She also does amazingly well with the other aspects of the trip. We know there are piranhas in the river, even if we have no clue what else is in there, but she just jumps right in every night for her bath. She doesn't worry about the bugs any more than I do. She carries her loads without complaint even though I know it's hard on her. But the whitewater has a disabling affect and she can't seem to get over it.

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I'm not sure if it's that I feel less lovable or what but I feel Ken is getting his defenses up against me. He's not going to let me ruin this for him. He doesn't say anything; he just keeps to his world and makes short comments to me. I did say, if I felt it was too much I could leave him to finish it on his own and I could fly out. Just because I chose to stop, it wouldn't mean he would have to. This morning Ken held me and asked me if I knew he loved me. It was a much needed opener to end what we were developing. Tears slipped from my tear ducts and some of my fears regarding us started to subside.

I itch like crazy this morning. It feels like there are tiny fleas biting me but I can't see anything, just old bug bites and nerves. The river seems to be receding. Even here on the massive Caroni in the morning we can see the water mark from the previous night. The mornings have been overcast then it burns off through the day and leaves the night sky twinkling with star. The temperatures remain very pleasant. We are camped at the bottom of a rapid. It looks like flat water for a while. Ken said he remembers seeing two significant rapids from the plane between here and Uonquen. Hopefully they are easily portaged. The size of the river gets more intimidating each day. It's a long way to the opposite side of the river. I wake up and pray for a safe day; to learn something new and enjoy some is good. It's 7 am and we have a big day ahead.

Mar. 10, Day 17,

LOOP RAPID

It has been a couple days since I last wrote because we hiked into the village of Uonquen and ended up spending the night there without our journals.

The day before yesterday we ran a number of good rapids. Some of them were big and fun. The river split into several channels so it's a guessing game as to which one is best to run. It may not make any difference. What it does do is reduce the amount of water in any one channel so it's not so big, only 3,500 cfs instead of 7,000 cfs.

We met a group of Indians fishing with a poison plant called Barbasco. We stopped to watch the action and learn some new fishing tricks. In a very small channel of the river they lay the Barbasco on rocks and beat it with baseball bat like clubs. Dipping the plant into the water releases the milky juices into the stream. This juice is poisonous to the fish and they float, paralyzed, to the surface. While the men beat the bundles of Barbasco up stream, down stream

the women and children wander through the stream bed and collect the fish. The fish they were getting looked like a small catfish of some kind. Most were less than 6 inches long. So far they only had a dozen or so but they said they might get 200.

We were passing another group of Indians when they called to us to come over. It has been more common for them to run to the river bank and stand and stare in amazement with no attempt to communicate. The women in small groups or alone, will try their hardest to not look at us, at least until we have passed by. So when this group yelled and waved us over we turned our boats and paddled up to them. They were very friendly and talkative. If only we could understand more of the language. It was a large family group, at least 3 generations or more. There was an older man who was obviously the head of the family. He did most of the talking. He leaned on the barrel of his antique gun and asked where we were going. We told them of our plan to paddle the Caroni from its start up in the headwaters of the Apongau to its end at the Orinoco. Perhaps he didn't understand the words but more likely he didn't understand the concept. Why would you want to do such a thing? There are dangerous waterfalls and other perils waiting out there. Why would you put yourself in their way when there was really nothing to be gained?

As we paddled, we were flagged down by a large family curious about who we were, where we were headed, and why. They scooped some liquid up with a plastic bowl from a five gallon bucket. One man drank it down. This was repeated by a different member. Then they offered it to us. We had heard of this drink, curchiri, a wine made from yuca root. While sipping from this dirty bowl thoughts went through my mind about what I could be exposing myself to. Later as we paddled down river Ken and I talked and agreed that the saving grace was the fact that it's alcohol. Hopefully most of the bad things can't survive the alcohol. Not far down river we encountered another family. This was a quicker visit, more wine exchanged, and on we went. When we met the third family Ken said, "No thank you," on the wine, explaining that we have many kilometers to paddle.

My son, Prescott, and his 2nd grade class made little books with photos of themselves and drawings of their houses, dogs and families, etc. for us to bring down here and give away to the Indian kids. We pulled out a bunch of them and gave them to some of the kids. We also had some photos of us skiing and in an igloo and our house covered with snow. They seem to know about snow but they were impressed that we actually lived in it.

The village of Uonquen has an air strip. We had planned from the start to stop there for supplies and information and a possible escape route if we needed to get out. It is up a side river about 8 km, the Rio Carroui. We paddled up the Carraui 1 ½ km to the village of Caruaquen. We walked into Caruaquen to find out how to get to Uonquen. There were a few old women and few kids in the village but that was it. The women didn't speak Spanish, only Pemón, but they pointed us in the direction of the trail to Uonquen. We went back to the boats and got our day packs and water bottles, closed up our boats and headed up the trail around 2:40 in the afternoon.

We wandered through the slash and burn crops for a few kilometers. The Indians grow lots of different things in these clearings they chop out of the forest. I couldn't identify many of the fruits and plants but I recognized bananas and plantanos, pineapples, papaya, guava, sugar cane,

peppers and the yuca they make so many things out of. There was one fruit that I had never seen but looked pretty wild. It looked like a green Puffer fish with spines. I think they call it a guabanan.

After 40 minutes or so we emerged from the forest into the sabana. We saw grass huts scattered across the grasslands connected by little trails but no sign of a town. Off in the distance tepuis loomed into the hazy sky. As we looked out across the land it came to my attention that it might not be so easy to find our little village out here. We marched on across the grasslands hoping it would become obvious where we were going. We just kept to a northerly direction, picking the trail that went the closest to it. At the crest of a hill, off in the distance, we saw what appeared to be a two track dirt road. As we got closer it became more and more curious. In this wild land of Indians and mud huts we saw barbed wire fences. At the river crossing we found a small dam and a hydroelectric generator, power poles carrying the power over the hill. When we walked over the hill we saw what looked more like a big ranch compound than a wilderness village; horses and cows in fenced pastures, big gardens, penned chickens, tractors, barns and outbuildings, even a weather station. We walked up the road in amazement. As we neared the center of the village, surrounded by a 7 foot high chain link fence, we were greeted by children in nice school clothes. The compound was full of kids of all ages. On the map it had said, "Mission De Uonquen" but I didn't know this was what a mission was. It was already 4:30 pm when we entered Uonquen.

After a period of confusion we found someone who seemed to be in charge and asked if we could buy some supplies. There was concern as to whether we wanted to **buy** the supplies or be given the supplies. We assured them we had money and would buy them. We got powdered milk, crackers, canned hotdogs, and chocolate milk mix. They said we would have to go to the "village" for fruit. The village was where everyone but the school kids lived. It was outside the fenced compound and a few hundred yard across the fields. By now it was 5:00 PM. It had taken us almost 2 hours to get to the village, it would take at least that to get back. It gets dark at 6:30. Walking through the jungle in the dark would be a bad idea so we started asking about a place to spend the night. We finally were able to paid 4000 B's to sleep in an abandoned building.

We were sitting in front of the building entertaining some girls when a women came by and asked if we would like some dinner. Things seemed to be happening that we weren't seeing. I guess she saw what a nasty place we were going to be sleeping in and took pity. The next thing I knew we were staying in her guest room and she was feeding us a delicious dinner.

Out here in the middle of nowhere was a little oasis of civilization. The hydroelectric plant provided electricity enabling them to have TV's, complete with VCR's and satellite dishes, refrigerators and showers. They had a water system as well as sewer. There were cars, trucks, and bikes. The houses were as nice as Marlon's back in Caracas with flowers and fenced yards, and beautiful little gardens growing all kinds of fruits and vegetables. How did this happen? Just a few minutes walk in any direction and life is a grass hut, the nearest stream or river for water, the toilet is the nearest bush. They only speak Pemón in Caruaquen, the little village our boats are in, only 1 ½ hours walk away and here they are learning algebra. It's hard to conceive.

Maria, the women who put us up, is a history teacher at the school. She fixed us breakfast and went to work. We thanked her and headed for Caruaquen and our boats. When we got there all was well except my helmet was gone. Some Indian is paddling his dugout canoe around out there in a nice Prijon helmet with a visor. The stove leaked gas while we were gone and my clothes smell like gas now. We climbed in and paddle off down the river.

The water was calm for a long time but we knew we had a big falls coming up. We've named it Loop Falls because it has no name on the map but it has a side channel that makes a big loop. The map showed a drop of 22 meters (72 ft.). A km or so before the falls we started into rapids. Jen was very nervous but she was doing it. The river got really wide, maybe half a kilometer across and with many different channels. Any one of them would be a sizeable river just by itself. We hugged the right bank working our way down the easier stuff. It all looked so big, and knowing that there was a giant waterfall out there someplace made it a bit overwhelming. We got out to scout and Jen was done. She wasn't going to paddle the rest of this rapid. We walked down quite a ways and could still see the river but no falls. There were huge waves along our side of the river but it was definitely runnable. There were big pools mixed in with the rapids. It could take hours to haul everything around but I knew I could run it safely.

I ran back up to the boats to run one through. We have learned to remove the rudders before running anything big, so after doing that I climbed into Jen's boat and paddled it into the current. I lined up on the right edge, waited, paddled hard for the left angle wave, punched through into the first eddy, turn around and slid passed a monster hole, back to mid-stream, punched the last few waves and grabbed the eddy on the right. One and a half minutes and it was over. Jen was waiting beside the eddy. I ran back up and did it again with my boat.

By the time we were both back in our kayaks sun was low over the river. Down river all that could be seen were sparkles of sunlight and silhouettes. But 2 of the silhouettes seemed to be moving. A man and woman were fishing in the quiet parts of the rapid. We paddle down and stopped to talk. As usual we got some real surprised looks. We never really know just what they have said. We are so limited in our Spanish. But these people are also limited. It's a second language for them as well. "De donde va", where are you going, is always the first thing we understand. "Mucho baja", very far down, we reply. Where did we come from? is next. It all must seem quite impossible to them. I ask about Eutobarima. Can we get around it? Is there a trail? BLANK. Something seems to be wrong with the question. We always get the same response, "dangerous, very dangerous", but nothing usable. They watch in amazement as we paddle off down the rapid, an unthinkable thing by itself. The hope of finding the miners trail is getting very faint. We have yet to find anyone who knows anything about it, only the friend of Ivan who heard it from someone else.

Early this morning I found a piece of Styrofoam floating in the river. It was moving in the wrong direction, very suspicious. So I paddled over and pulled it in. It had fishing line and hooks tied to it and a fish on one of the hooks. It must have gotten away from someone up river. I stuffed it all in my boat and we had the fish for dinner. It was a little smaller than my hand and about the same shape. It was good eating but full of small bones.

Mar. 11, Night 18,

EUTOBARIMA CAMP, THE PORTAGE

It was a day of running rapids. Our Indian friends showed up early in the morning to dig worms on our little beach. We showed them our photos and our equipment. They were very interested in everything. We had pancakes for breakfast while they, "dug worms". Finally they moved on down to the falls to fish, a good place to fish today because the tourists may try to run the falls and you don't want to miss that.

Below the main falls was a big pool. Coming out of the pool was a glassy, green tongue of water dropping some 20 or 30 feet before exploding into a chain of giant waves that lead to the

terminal lake at the end of the rapids. It was like a giant, wet roller coaster. Jen gave up on scooting down the little streams along the edge and started hauling her boat over the rocks. A good move unless you have your eye on a roller coaster ride. Just above the falls I got out to check my route. Our friends decided to get closer for a better look and seeing Jen left on her own with that big boat, they came to her assistance. They helped her carry around the rapid.

The smaller channels have a plant growing in them. It's a thick green coating that covers the rocks making it quite gentle on the kayaks. Because of this, I was able to run a very steep, shallow ramp down into the pool below the main falls. The Indians thought that was the show, but now what's he doing. They couldn't believe I would run my boat through that churning foaming roller coaster. It was very exciting but uneventful, no flipping or swimming.

After that we ran or sneaked around several rapids. At one rapid there were some beautiful big waves with eddies coming back up both sides. I couldn't help it. I had to stop and surf. A smaller boat would have surfed for days on one of these big waves. You could probably get 5 or 6 kayaks surfing on one of them and there were at least 4 different ones out of the same eddy. But in a loaded 14 ½ footer it was a little tricky staying on for long. I managed to flip a few times.

This afternoon our GPS and maps told us we were nearing the Eutobarima section. On the map it shows the river starting to increase its gradient about a mile before it dives over the falls. From the plane we could see that we would have to stop before the first rapids or we might run the chance of not being able to get out in time to miss the falls. We would camp a quarter mile above the first rapid. The right bank became very steep and would be tough to haul the boats up if we went any closer than that. As we scanned the tree line for a possible place to pull out we saw signs of a man made clearing along the right side. It was over grown with trees and brush but it looked different than the rest of the forest. We glided across the glassy water to get a closer look. It was an old camp. It even had a dream catcher hanging by the water as a signal to boaters of it's whereabouts. The Indians had been using it more recently but we could tell from the garbage that it was an old mining camp. It had old oil barrels and hoses and other junk Indians don't usually carry around with them. It is in the jungle but it's a pretty good place for camping and right where we needed it to be.

Mar. 12, Night 19

WE'VE SEEN THE OTHER END!!!

Ken and I were studying the maps and I came to a frightful realization. I had it in my head that if we made it through this portage we were on easy street and nothing could stop us. Now I know that at the end of the portage there are many significant salto's and raduls. I'm fighting to not get discouraged or overtaken with fear of the unknown.

This morning we paddled across the river, pulled the boats up onto the rocks and walked 1 ½ km down river to Eutobarima Falls. The river was nothing but a mass of foam and froth. It started out with a 30 foot ledge drop and didn't quiet down until after the 100 foot falls. It had boils of water that blasted up out of the foam 20 feet into the air. It is like taking the North Fork of the Payette and blowing it up to 11,000 cfs and then putting a 100 foot waterfall in the middle of it. The falls itself was not as big as I had imagined, only about 100 to 120 feet high, but the canyon below was incredibly narrow and quiet looking. It would have been a fatal mistake to decide to lower the boats over the falls and continue assuming that it was flat water below.

From this point there was no warning of the even more deadly rapids just a half mile down river. Seeing the river from the air had told us that it was too difficult to think about running it, seeing it up close only confirmed that appraisal.

At the start of this section the river turns south and makes a U turn and comes back north before continuing on west. The total distance is about 10 km. Our plan was to cut across the top of the "U". We figured it should take about a week to hack our way across. The map shows a ridge about 3 km back off the river and about 300 feet above it. By taking a bearing from our camp on this side to a point on the other side of the "U" we could hopefully find our way through the jungle without getting lost. We had never gone far from the river on any of our other portages. Here we wouldn't have it as reference point to keep us on track.

We returned to camp and changed into our, "crash through the forest" clothes. After taking a bearing of 250 degrees, we set off with machete in hand. Jen had been saying for several days now that she was sure we would find a trail across. I laughed, "ya, how nice that would be". After pushing our way through the undergrowth for maybe 20 minutes we came across some what of a trail. I thought maybe a game trail. We started following it as best we could but unlike most game trails it kept going. It was going in the general direction of our bearing. It slowly became apparent that it was the miners trail and it was headed for the other side of Eutobarima. It's not a highway, rather a twisty, turny, cobwebby, root laced, drippy, wet, over grown, log blocked, track through the dark jungle, but the fact is it's so much better than nothing it looks like a freeway to me. We followed it for 3 hours and came to the other side, not the river, that's a 1000 ft down in the hole but I could see the canyon and hear the water below. The roomer of a trail was true and the most amazing thing about it is that in this vast wilderness, we found it. It had seemed impossible to me. It will be a long hard road with lots of slippery bumps and bruises but we will make it. Without the trail, could we?????

There was no time to look at things or enjoy. This was work. I struggled to keep up, stopping only when Ken decided to take a picture or get a drink. I have time to think. Much of this trip has been a struggle for me, to be brave, to keep Ken's pace, and to be someone Ken and I can be proud of. I find myself in tears when no matter how hard I try to be strong enough, quick enough, brave enough, etc, I'm not quite up to scale. Ken tries to encourage me by telling me to look at my past skills on the river and draw from them. If I don't start running more I may not be prepared when I don't have the option to portage. My theory is I'll do the best I can each day. If we come to a canyon where I don't have options I'll decide then what to do. There are parts of each day that I enjoy. I can handle hard work and I do understand the need to push to keep the schedule Ken has set his sights on.

I push on, day dreaming of my time after this adventure. I find myself dreaming about going to visit my family in Sonoma. I could go spend a day in San Francisco with my mom, go bike riding, etc.. No one would be there to tell me how I need to be. I will have one week with no stress. I don't think Ken will be able to come.

As the hours of tripping on vines slipping on wet roots and rock, slogging through muck over the tops of my boots passed, I could feel more blisters developing on my water logged feet. I crawled inside myself and just maintained. We'll get as far as we can with one load and repeat it the next

day. We still have quite a bit of weight to haul. This jungle is dense. The trail seems to go on forever making many little twists and turns, with major detours where trees have fallen in the way. Had we not come across this trail life may have been quite desperate. It will be hard work but we will make it. We turned around from our exploration at 3:15 and moved as fast as we could to get back before dark. We made it with no time to spare. On the return trip I was fatigued. As I stumbled on a wet root and fell to the forest floor, I resorted to coaching myself. It's okay, you're doing fine... just one step at a time and soon we'll be to camp. The idea of having pizza delivered tonight instead of cooking was appealing.

Mar. 13, Night 20, SAME CAMP, EUTOBARIMA

I must now get dressed, one of the most difficult parts of the day in the jungle. I first put on a soggy jogger bra and panties that I rinsed out in the river the night before, then the musty, mud stained socks that haven't been dry for days. As I tug them on, loose dirt and twigs drop to the ground. Ah, now the pleasure of working my rain and sweat soaked molding pants on being careful not to get my hands in the webs which are remains from the prior day's adventure. A decision then is made whether to put the rotting t-shirt on first or just my long sleeve disintegrating shirt. Once that is settled the only part left is my molding boots. I can't say I have ever owned a pair of shoes that excreted an aroma such as these boots. And to think a little over a month ago they were brand new. Not all women get to experience this when getting dressed on their honeymoon.

We took a load over today. My boat and most of the food is on the other side now. We got going just after 8:00 this morning. We kept moving most of the day, 9 hours. It was long and wet. It rained off and on all day, once real hard. The forest plants were wet and they dripped even when it wasn't raining. As wet as we were all day we could have just as well been walking in the river. I was becoming a prune. By the time we reached camp all I wanted to do was to get into some dry clothes. Camp is in the jungle too so it's not like relaxing on a big white sand beach. Already I can't wait to get out of the forest and back on the river. It's dark and sticky in here. The bugs are noisy and we have a horde of ants living with us.

They come out mainly at night but there are millions of them, red leaf cutters. They did a little cutting on our poncho, two perfectly round holes the size of dimes right out of the middle of it. We had another visitor for dinner last night, a flying beetle with headlights. On its back it had two fluorescent green spots that glowed like the fireflies. The fireflies flicker on and off, but this guy's just stayed on. I don't know if his lights were to see with or to make him look like a firefly. It would be interesting to find out more. We had a couple reference books to look things up but one was a casualty of flooding, and we left it. The other also flooded but we are still using it. I will see if our beetle friend is in there.

We carried loads across today. I came across this waist high log across the trail, a beam of sunlight made it through the canopy and shown bright in that one spot on the log. I sat down on the log in the beam of light to

rest my load, and was inspired. I thanked the lord for the trail before us. I believe it made this step of the journey the least miserable possible. Then I asked if I could see a monkey, the whole monkey. Not just sounds and branches moving in the tree tops with glimpses of brown. When my shoulders stopped aching I hefted the load and continued. A few yards down the trail, low and behold, I saw my monkey. There was quite a bit of activity in the tree tops. Lower than the rest and out in the open one dark brown monkey stared down. I was truly inspired. For a while I even forgot how much the heavy pack made my body tremble with pain.

At every stream crossing we would drink as much water as we could which was quite a lot. The sweat seemed to just pour out of us. I ran my tongue across my upper lip to catch a drip of sweat and it suddenly dawned on me that it didn't taste salty. I asked Ken if he noticed that. We talked about what it meant, and immediately went for the salt tablets in the first aid kit.

We saw a lot of animals and birds on the trail today, monkeys, frogs, snakes. The monkeys we caught glimpses of yesterday, but today we saw more of them. They fly around in the tree tops making it hard to get a good look. Jen spotted a frog hiding in a pile of decaying leaves. I have no idea how she saw it. She pointed it out to me but I couldn't see it. "Where is it? I can't see it" I said. I was bent over looking right where she was pointing. I was only inches from it but I couldn't see it until she poked it with her finger. It looked exactly like the yellow/brown leaves it was sitting on. In the pouring rain she also spotted a snake. It was a python 5 or 6 feet long and as thick as my wrist. I nearly ruined the camera trying to change film in the rain just so we could get a picture of it. We saw several big birds, I think of the Guan family and possibly the Tinamou family. The Guan is the size of a goose or turkey.

This evening as we walked back through the forest we heard a sound like no sound you can imagine. It was like the biggest meanest lion you ever heard roaring through a drain pipe. It sounded big enough to eat us both in one bite. I started running through my mind all the things that could be out here that big, dragons? Sasquatch? T-rex? Then it hit me, something I'd read, howler monkeys.

HOW A HOWLER HOWLS

The loudest of the New World monkeys, and certainly one of the noisiest animals for its size anywhere, is the howler. Its roar, beginning as a pumping growl that bursts into a series of drum like booms. The sound originates in the larynx but is greatly amplified by the bony sound box-the hyoid apparatus-in the howler's neck, nearly 25 times as big as that of the similar-sized woolly monkey. The roar is produced when the howler contracts its chest and stomach muscles, forcing air under pressure across an opening at the top of the sound box. Their infamous howling serves to mark the troop territory. Two troops will come to mutual agreement about the real estate without ever meeting one another. The howling carries for nearly a mile through rain forest and even more over the water.

Tomorrow we will brake camp here and carry it all over the ridge to the other side, hopefully all the way to the river. We will still have to come back up to the top of the canyon for the other

stuff but not back here. It shouldn't be as long a day because we only have to go one way this time.

Mar. 14, Night 21,

WE'VE MADE IT PAST EUTOBARIMA!!!!

My mood started with an all time low. We looked at maps after a restless night . I got discouraged when Ken corrected me, letting me know that we weren't yet half way done with the trip. For some reason I had decided that when we made it past this portage we would be on the home stretch.

Throughout the morning I was struggling emotionally. I'm sure exhaustion played a part. When Ken asked me what was the matter during one of the water stops I couldn't hold my tears from rolling out.

I told him this was his thing and I felt I was held captive by my choice. I was a prisoner of his plight. It seemed it would never end. Where is the end? The Orinoco? The Ocean??? With every success it seems further away. After much discussion and tears spilled by both, we walked only a few yards. At that point I realized they were my feelings, and I needed to own them. I apologized. I explained that I was overwhelmed, disappointed, etc... Things improved from there.

Jen had a bit of a breakdown last night or this morning, and it came out on the trail today. Yesterday was a pretty tough day and we were both tired. With the rain and the heavy loads and the suppressing darkness of the forest, it's hard not wish to be someplace else at times. And then there is the ever present fear of the unknown. I can understand her feelings but it was very hard on me the way it came out.

The problem wasn't her breakdown, it was what she said. She said, "It isn't my trip. I'm not doing it. You are just dragging me along. I'm just following you on your adventure." It hurt a lot. If that was true then what was she doing the last 2 years that, "I" have been planning "my" trip. It's very scary to hear her say this. Is everything in our lives, "me" and she is just tagging along? I know it was brought on by the fears of the moment but it hurt me.

I can understand the fear Jen must feel. The natural fear of the unknown; what big thing lurks up around the bend, something bigger than us, something we can't over come, it's hard to not let it get the better of you. Sometimes when I'm in bed and I think about the rapids and how big the river is I get this feeling I might make a mistake and get sucked into something really bad. But when I'm on the river paddling my boat I don't have that fear. I know how to run rivers and I'm very careful when it seems dangerous. I know they won't just sneak up on me. Jen is less confident, she may still have the fears even in her boat. At least out here we know the things we are afraid of. At home, in everyday life, we have fears too. They make us do and say things we really don't mean. The difference is back home it's not so easy to know what it is we are afraid of.

Even though I understand the problem I wish she didn't turn it on me. I want her to feel good about what she has done. I believe she really wants to do this whole trip but she sounds like she would get off at the next possible place. I hear a lot of it as being negative and I'm not ready to be negative. We are making good headway. Anyway I think she wants it but it's scary so she tells herself, "it doesn't matter, it's okay to quit". I will work on not reacting to her and just try to comfort her.

We have one boat an hour up the hill, which we will get in the morning, but we are past Eutobarima. The big portage was not so bad. Without the trail I don't know what we would have done. Mentally it would have been almost impossible I'm afraid. It was hard enough with the trail. I was having trouble with a blister on my toe today. At first I was afraid it might be another bug but after looking at it, it was obviously a blister. We stopped for the 3rd time to put tape on it. When I got up to start down the trail I couldn't tell which way it went. I took a few steps forward and could see something that looked like a lake or pond. My mind was having trouble registering it. Suddenly it hit me, THE RIVER! We were at the river. Another couple hundred yards and we were on a sand beach at the bottom of a small rapid.

We talked more today and helped each other along. It turned out to be a more together day. At 3:45 we made it to the other side with a load and one boat. We were both excited. As the sky rumbled and threatened to pour we quickly set camp, bathed and climbed in the tent. We continued our re-bonding and celebrating our latest success. Later we did laundry and had lasagna and aerapas for dinner. Ken built a fire to dry our shoes and one of mine accidentally tipped over into the fire and got a little fried.

I saw another snake. Ken dragged the boat right over it. I followed it while Ken got his camera out and came over. This one was charcoal grey to black and it had a strange ridge on its back. It was around the same size as the Python we saw the day before, 5-6 feet long. By that time Ken got his camera out it had ducked under the leaves and into the bushes. We decided it wasn't a good idea to chase it into the bushes and left it alone. I now think it was a Bushmaster, a highly venomous viper.

The sun was shining above the trees today. The forest is much easier on me when it's brighter and not so wet.

I took my last prednisone tonight but I'm already getting more patches of poison ivy. I'm a bit scared of what could happen. A few times in the past the poison ivy came back right after the last pill.

Mar. 15, Day 22,

URCARA FALLS, A BIG DROP

This morning we woke and set about the morning chores. I went over to the river to wash out our cups and notice the water was much higher than it had been the night before. It was our worst nightmare come true; Jen's boat was gone. "Oh God", I yelled at Jen, "what a mistake!" I only had on shorts and sandals and Jen was in her bra, but we took off running in opposite directions. It was complete panic. After crashing through the rocks and brush for a couple minutes the pain brought me to my senses and I returned to camp for shoes and shirt. Jen had gone up into a backwater just in case the wind had blown the kayak into there. I took off running down river. As I ran I tried to think what we would do if we didn't find the boat. We would have only one paddle and just one life jacket. Could we stay on the river if we didn't find the boat? We knew there were a lot of huge rapids coming up, at least 20 miles of them. One of us would have to walk all of that and then where would we be? Two of us balanced on top of one kayak? From what we knew from the maps we were about as far from civilization as we could get. The closest place we knew about was Mission De Uonquen some 50 miles up

river. I ran through the brush and rocks even faster as these thoughts filtered through my brain. I crashed through some more brush and could see something red ahead. A quarter of a mile down river in a giant eddy below a small rapid, there it was, waves slapping it against the sand on the beach. We learned our lesson. From now on we will be hauling the boats far from the water and then tying them up.

Once the little drama was over we readied ourselves for the climb up to the top of the canyon to retrieve the other kayak and the load of gear. We were back at camp by 9:30. Jen organized food and we dried our jungle soaked clothes in the sun. By 11:00 we were headed down river. I wrote the next part sitting on a rock in the river waiting for Jen to hike down the river where she could rescue me if I didn't make the moves.

It's 1:20 PM and we are working our way through a very big rapid. This rapid is over a kilometer long and loses something like 40 meters (130 ft.) We've been moving down nicely but we just entered a tough area. The forest comes right to the water's edge and the small channel we have been following has grown sizeable. The roar of the river is awesome. Out in the main flow the waves are mammoth. We didn't even consider running anything out there. From here I look up river and it's just huge whitewater forever. I look down river and all I see is a horizon line and a lake way below. I'm waiting for Jen to get in position with the throw bag so I can run the boat out onto a mid-river rock, carry it over the rock, lower it down the other side, run another couple drops and eddy-out in a small pool above what from here looks like a good size waterfall. The rock I have to land on is big and flat and should be easy to hit but if I'm not reading it right and I should miss, it would be serious. To miss right will take me over a 15 foot waterfall that crashes into a wall of rocks. To miss left is a series of ledges and holes that may or may not be keepers. If I miss and end up swimming, Jen's job is to throw me the rope so I don't have to swim the BIG waterfall below. I plan to make it. My heart is beating pretty fast. It's an easy move it's just thinking about all the things that could go wrong. Things that have never been done before are always more exciting. It's also more exciting to think that there is no one out here to help us if something does go wrong. I guess I'd better go do it before I think of more things to scare me.

I made it to the rock, piece of cake. We had lunch under the trees beside the little pool above the BIG waterfall. From there it was a short easy pull through the woods to the end of the rapid. The waterfall was a very impressive 20 foot river wide ledge.

Below the falls we entered a narrow canyon. Imagine what a rapid might look like with over 11,000 cfs squeezed into a river bed only 120 feet across and dropping at 100+ feet per mile. Jen was terrified. She did run a few things but she was too scared to enjoy it. I ran her boat through the rapids and then mine while she walked around and took pictures. They were mostly compression type rapids, giant wave trains that tossed the boats around like a little cork but I encountered no killer holes. I had a blast. I felt bad because she wasn't enjoying it but what could I do. This evening Jen did some practice rolls in the eddy and had no trouble. Maybe it will boost her confidence. The boats really do pretty well in this big whitewater. They are real stable and with all the extra flotation they ride up and over the waves rather than diving under them.

In Ken's frustration he said, "I'll make you a deal... we'll stop over by that beach and for every roll you make, I'll give you a back rub and for everyone you

miss you give me one.” Of course in the calm with no suckie swirlies to suck me down I completed eight rolls. This was not a bad idea since Ken now owes me 8 back rubs. The point was to prove to me I could roll the boat and the two times I swam out of it were mainly due to outside forces. I decided since it was 4:30 and another loud rapid was rumbling just below, we should camp on this beach. We have a big beautiful beach and why have more stress today when I can save it for tomorrow. From the maps it looks like we will be in this canyon for 2 more kilometers. We hung out the laundry that was still wet from last night’s washing and made camp.

I walked down to get a sneak peak at the morning’s rapid, hoping it would allow me to sleep better. On the way I saw one of the biggest spiders I have ever seen. Its leg span was easily 4 inches across. I also saw a smaller rapid I would run and a larger rapid I will have to scout and decide when the time comes. In the next kilometer we lose 20 meters. That’s 66 feet which is a lot, especially with 11,000 cfs of water in it.

What a beautiful camp, a big sandy beach, some big rocks for cooking and keeping things out of the sand, a little stream coming out of the forest, perfect temperature, warm water and a beautiful women walking around the beach with nothing on but a smile. I could be in heaven.

I think of my climbing days and how harsh it all was. After a hard day of hauling loads with frozen face, fingers and toes, I would pitch camp in the ice and snow, try to choke down some bad food and crawl into a tent with a smelly, snoring climbing partner. Sometimes at night I would wear my boots to bed so I wouldn’t have to put the frozen things on in the morning. Here, on the river, I sit in the soft, warm sand beside the fire, the fireflies dancing in the trees and my loving wife waiting for me in the tent. My biggest problem now is how to get the sand off my bare feet before crawling into the tent. Hauling loads in the jungle is tiring, muddy and hot but it’s nothing compared to frost bite, falling down tired and lungs burning for oxygen. Life is pretty good here on the river.

The trip has been great. It’s exciting and challenging, doing something no one has ever done and not many could do. We still don’t know if it can be done. We made it past the big Eutobarima portage but now we find a narrow canyon that loses over 60 feet in just the next mile. The unknown lurks in the darkness of the future.

I fished a little tonight and caught two funny looking little fish. I would have had three but the last one bit my line in two. We cooked them in the fire and ate them for dinner, once again small and boney. We think we have about 2 weeks of food left. With a little care and a few things from the locals we should make it to the end.

This afternoon I was breaking firewood by hitting it over a rock. One piece flew into the air and came down on my foot. I had no shoes on and the wood stuck in the top of my foot. It went all the way through the skin. It’s pretty bruised too. Ah, life is so dangerous. I accidentally left our cups and spoons up at Urcara Falls. My poison ivy isn’t getting any worse, thank God. We think of home more and more now. We’ve been gone a long time. We left home 40 days ago.

Mar. 16, Morning 23

ABOVE AREPICHÍ FALLS

Yesterday I got up, grabbed the machete and headed back up to Urcara Falls for our cups and spoons. It sounds so unimportant, but life without them would be difficult. We could have

carved wooden spoons and used something else for cups, but the 2 hours I spent trekking through the woods was much easier. I've gotten better at traveling in the forest.

I got back to camp at 8:30. Jen had camp packed up and pancakes waiting. We loaded the boats for a day of whitewater. When we started this trip we had so much stuff we had to tie things to the decks of the kayaks and sometimes we still tie things on top for easy access but this morning we had clean boats, even the rudders were stowed inside.

And we ran whitewater. Only 100 yards below camp the river dropped into another foaming, frothing, churning mass of waves. Once again there was so much water with nothing in its way, just get on the tongue and hold on to your pants. I ran everything twice, once in my boat then in Jen's. This stuff was big so I didn't even try to talk Jen into running it. She did well running some of the smaller rapids and she should have gotten some great pictures of the big stuff. It takes so long running these big rapids. The scouting is what takes the time but you have to do it. There is no guide book saying class IV wave trains for the next 2 miles. So we pull into the eddy, clamber over the rocks, check for a route, look for bad holes or rocks or other obstacles and where it will end, walk back to the boats, -whoosh-, 30 seconds and it's over. Walk back up and -whoosh- the second one is though, forty five minutes to run 60 seconds of rapid. Two runs were good because I would take the conservative, easiest line on the first run and on the second I could go for something more exciting.

I ran most everything in the canyon, but we did have one portage that we had to unload and carry everything, fortunately it was a short one. We did a few other portages when the rapids looked too treacherous, but we just slid the boats over the rocks. One rapid I spent half an hour trying to decide if I could do it. It had a technical move in it and I didn't know if I could make the move in such big boats. I had to hit a small slot moving across the current between a big hole and a rock. It was a move I would have thought nothing of in a smaller kayak. Here in the middle of nowhere in a boat full of cargo it took a lot of thinking. When I finally worked up the nerve to try, it was easy. Another rapid took the boat and stood it right up on its end. It's a strange view looking up the deck of a fourteen and a half foot boat pointed straight up at the sky. At one point the whole 110 gallon boat was sucked under water by the powerful hydraulics at the end of the rapid. I was still in the boat and the water line was up to my chin. In another rapid the full power of the river slammed into a wall, half the river turned right and continued the other half turned left and entered a high speed eddy returning to the middle of the rapid. I got sucked to the left and got stuck in the eddy. I had to go around several times and I was beginning to worry that I might have to get out and carry my kayak around the wall below the eddy before I was finally able to get far enough across the current to escape the recirculating water.

As the day went on I started wondering when it would let up. Is it ever going to end? Around 2:30 or 3:00 we slid our kayaks over some rocks at the end of a 10 ft high, 400 yard wide waterfall. Below the river was wide, flat and moving slow. We had been fooled before by lakes like this before but this really seemed to be the end of the canyon.

A few km below the falls we saw what looked like a house floating in the middle of the river. It was a long way ahead and we watched it for some time trying to figure out what it was. As we drew closer we started hearing the chug, chug, chug sound of a diesel engine. This was the last thing I thought I would see this far up the river. We were supposed to be in the middle of nowhere, only a few Indians for miles. What was this thing? As we got closer we could see several men aboard the thing. It had a black plastic roof with wood pole supports. It was the size of a medium sized garage but it was on some kind of floats. If we were surprised to see all

this out here we were even more surprised when the men hailed us with a big “hello” in English. As we slid up along side the thing they spoke to us in English. It was a very heavily accented Caribbean kind of English but we could understand them just fine. As surprised as we were they may have been more surprised to see us. We knew there were mining dredges on the river someplace but I’m sure they never dreamed of anything like us on this river.

They invited us aboard and showed us around the dredge. One miner, a big black guy with lots of scars and missing some toes, took us out on the diving platform to show us how they would dive down to the bottom to suck up the sand and gravel and hopefully gold. We spent an hour or so talking to them. The black guy seemed to have a pretty big chip on his shoulder about a lot of things so when he told us we could stay at their camp that night it sounded just a little too scary for me. The Caroni River is in a national park and it is illegal to mine here. These guys are not exactly law abiding citizens so a little space between them and us seems prudent. As we paddled away Jen asked if I was planning to go to their camp. I said, “no way”, and we paddle on.

They told us about a town called Uriman some 125 miles down river where we can buy food. I’ve seen it on the map but I didn’t know it would be a re-supply.

Mar. 17, Night 24, A BEAUTIFUL BEACH CAMP

Last night we were trying to get to Salto Arepichi for the night but didn’t make it. Just as it was getting dark we pulled into an abandoned miner’s camp in the woods, a real pit. There were oil drums and oil in the water and on the land and garbage everywhere. To make it even worse it rained and then dripped all night. When it rains and we have to use the tent fly it gets really stuffy, hot and humid in the tent. We lay on top of our blankets and sweat; breathing is hard in the unbelievably steamy air. Bugs and animals rustle around and make strange noises all night long and I lay awake trying to decide what is out there. Some of the noises are just leaves and branches falling off the trees, but others are definitely animals; who knows what kind. In any case we had a rough night.

This morning we made a hasty exit from the miner’s camp in the woods and paddled 20 minutes down to Salto Arepichi.

The portage at Arepichi falls was slow this morning. We took our time. I pumped water to mix some instant breakfast to go with our pop-tart while Ken patched his wounded feet. We spread our clothes and gear out on the rocks to dry since just about everything was wet. Ken’s boat had broke again, swamping the contents, and the heavy rain last night got the rest.

A helicopter circled above us. They probably haven’t seen anything quite like the sight they saw today. They passed over us several times to investigate.

Salto Arepichi was the other end of our airplane reconnaissance run. We turned around and flew back up river right over it. I remember clearly looking down at Salto Arepichi and thinking, “Oh, it’s nothing, just one big wave between two lakes”. I really thought it would be runnable. After seeing what the rest of this river looked like, I knew my evaluations were off by quite a lot, but it was hard to believe just how I could have been so far off. It’s a huge drop, over 150 yards long with massive waves. But all the water goes through, with no obstructions.

I could see a line that would shoot me through like a rocket. I wanted to do it but the boats were on shore, unloaded and ready to carry. It was only a couple hundred yards to carry the boats across the rocks. To run it would be for the thrill, it would serve no other purpose. The risk was too great for a thrill. Maybe I can return some day with some hare boater friends and run it then. (15,000 cfs)

For the first few km after the falls there was a lot of mining activity. It was depressing to think that we could have motor boats zooming past us from mining camps and dredges the rest of our trip. It would take away some of the thrill of paddling. But soon we left the miners behind and came to more quiet parts of the river, only a few Indian huts and one or two dredges for the rest of the day.

We met a young couple on the river and asked if they knew of some place we could buy some fruit. They looked more like city kids than Indians and the boy said quite proudly that he was a miner. He looked awfully young for that but he could have been 18 years old. He just didn't look as rough as most of the miners we have seen so far. He took us to an Indian village a little way down river. The kid seemed to know everyone around the village but he didn't live there. We wandered around the plantation for a while and the kid gave us some sugar cane. He showed us how to peel the sugar cane and eat it. It's like drinking sugar water. We were also invited to drink cachiri liquor. The village men were taking a break from their tree cutting and were working on a five gallon bucket of it. It looks to me like the Pemõn go through a lot of the stuff around here. There was some kind of problem when we were leaving and I think the alcohol had something to do with it. The young kid got into a disagreement with one of the Indians. It seemed it might be over not paying for the sugar cane. We had taken one and the kid had taken two. I asked him how much we owed for it and he said we owed nothing. As it escalated into a fight we decided it was time to exit. We jumped in to our kayaks and headed down river and didn't look back.

We covered 30 km today and really only paddled about 4 hours. We quit pretty early. A helicopter buzzed us this morning at Salto Arepichi several times. Hopefully Ivan, back in Santa Elena, will get the news that we are still moving. No one really knows where we are. We sent postcards out to our folks in the USA with Maria back in Uonqean but the chances of them ever getting to where they were going is not very good. We've been on the river and out of touch for over 3 weeks now. If something bad would have happened back up by Eutobarima, or anywhere else of that matter, no one would know.

Our camp tonight is a big step up from last nights. We are sitting in our chairs on the beach watching the sun set over the Caroni, eating Mountain House, Chicken Ala-king and rice. There are no bugs so I'm in shorts and t-shirt, toes buried in the sand. The temperature is a comfortable 78 degrees and the water is about the same, just right for taking a bath. We saw several sets of Red and Green Macaw's this afternoon. They are big, colorful and loud. They can get up to 35 inches tall. They are really beautiful when they fly over with long, bright, red tails and wings spread out against the sky.

Life is quite good here, a shower and some chicken-a-la-king for dinner, and pistachio pudding. I have been saving it to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. Another interesting day comes to a close. The temperature tonight is very pleasant. I have the funny habit of flinching when the water hits me, but the water here is so warm it feels soft. The biggest shock is that there is no shock. It also makes bathing at the day's end a desirable experience. I'm

not much for jumping into cold mountain water.

We need to go through the food we have and guess how much more we will need so we can do an accurate shopping spree in Uriman.

Mar. 18 Night 25,

WE ARE ON OUR WAY HOME

We paddled 40 km today.

We keep counting up the days it will take to get to the confluence and the end of our trip. We have a lot of miles to go, more than 250 miles, but it looks like clear sailing from here. Our thoughts have turned to finishing the trip and getting home. We are planning how to sell the boats and how we can get back to Caracas; when we should fly to Miami and where we should go from there. Uriman is only about 30 km away and we can buy supplies there, so lack of food shouldn't stop us.

Motor boats go past us at a rate of nearly one every hour and planes are about the same. I never expected this when we were planning the trip. At least we will have help if we have an accident. Jen thinks it would be a good idea to get a ride from one of them if they offered, but few even slow down. I think it would be hard to say we paddle the whole Caroni if we get a ride.

The river is wide and getting wider. I can't imagine what it is going to look like after another 200 miles. The water is just a little muddy with a reddish tint to it and very warm, about 78 to 80 degrees. It hardly even cools me off when I get splashed. There are a lot of rocks sticking up out of the water. Some are quite small and others are giant rock pile islands.

Last night, well after we had gone to bed, we heard a motor boat coming up the river in the dark. Its motor slowed as it pulled up to our beach. We were nervous. What were they doing on our beach? Were they going to camp here? Had we unknowingly camped in front of their village? We flashed our lights to let them know we were already here. Soon they came over to check us out. It was two Indian couples, one older and one younger. They had been drinking beer and most likely cuchiri so they were pretty happy. They weren't stopping to camp, just to pee. They were very interested in us so we gave them the whole tour. We showed them our pictures of home. We showed them our boats and told them about our trip. They stayed a half hour or so before piling back into their boat and speeding off up the river. I guess they know the river pretty well. With all the rocks out there in the middle of the river it seems pretty risky to me.

I'm imagining these guys in the morning telling each other about the dream they had last night. "Ya, I dreamed we stopped to take a pee and there were these aliens on the beach with big plastic boats and pictures of snow". "Ya, I had that same dream!"

Tonight we are on another sandy beach. I love them. The sun is setting, casting long shadows across the river. Birds of all kinds fly by, I can recognize the parrots and the cormorants but most of them I have no clue what they are. There is a very big tepui sticking high above the trees just across the river. We have passed several of them this afternoon. They loom just behind the low hills that line the river. The massive block of rock goes on for miles, the top shrouded in clouds. When we started the trip I thought we might climb this one. That was back before we spent so many days carrying our gear through jungles and boulder fields. Now I'm feeling like I've spent enough time crashing through the steaming jungle. I really have no desire to do more. We know how tough it is to go anywhere in there. There is also the always present fear that we could run into another difficult section. We didn't know the eight

day portage was there, what if we came across another one, what if it was even longer? We can't afford to waste time, energy or food on side trips.

An Indian couple pulled up to our beach just now. They were out setting gill nets along the banks of the river. We must be good luck for fishing. The Indians like to put out their nets near our camps. We talked a bit and I checked out their dugout canoe. The man was in the front with some netting between his feet. As always, resting beside his seat he had his trusty old shot gun. We have noticed almost all the men carry an antique gun with them. I guess it has replaced the blow gun and poison dart for hunting small animals and birds. The woman was in back with a little dog. They also had a big pile of yuca, some very green plantanos and a pineapple. I said something about the pineapple and he offered to give it to me. I didn't want to take it from him so I gave him 50 B's for it, 10 cents. He seemed very pleased.

This morning could see people splashing and playing and laughing by the edge of the river so we decided to see what was going on. By the time we reach the shore they had all disappeared. We walked up the river bank to the huts and all we found were two women sitting solemnly under a grass roof. I asked if they had any fruit they would sell. They decide they did and started bustling around to find something. They loosened up a little as we talked and some kids appeared from hiding. They sold us some very green bananas, sugar cane and a casava. By the time we were leaving most of the clan had re-appeared.

Casava is a flat bread made from the yuca root. It's like a giant white cracker, about a half inch thick, 3 feet in diameter and hard. Yuca is a root that grows in these jungles and is a main stay of the Pemón diet. Most villages have a crop of it growing in the slash-and-burn plantations around their houses. We have learned that there are actually 3 different kinds of yuca, one for making sweet casava, one for making plain casava and one for making cachiri. The yuca is also boiled and eaten like a potato. It has some kind of tannin that makes it poisonous until it is treated somehow.

To make casava they grate the yuca root on a grating board, and then they squeeze as much liquid out as possible in a woven wicker tube, something like a giant Chinese finger trap, called a sebucon. They push it up short and fill it with the yuca mash, then hang it and put weights on the bottom. The weight squeezers the mash and the liquid drains out the bottom of the sebucon. They then collect it in a big vat until they are ready to cook it. I assume they once used big rocks to cook it on but now they use a big piece of steel over a fire. It slow cooks over the fire for several hours. When it's done it seems to have amazing storage capabilities. They simply pile it in the rafters of their cooking hut where they take it down as needed. You would expect it to mold or collect bugs but we found it in an abandoned hut along the river and it was bug and mold free after who knows how long. The Indians like to dip it in the river before eating it. It makes it much softer. It seems to have a different taste depending on who makes it. It may depend on the wood that is used to cook it and how much it ferments before cooking. Jen didn't think much of it but I kind of like it, especially with peanut butter on it.

We saw a lot of dredges today. Most of them are about the same size, maybe 20 feet wide and 30 feet long, like a medium size garage. They are on floats made out of 55 gallon oil drums or metal pontoons. They have a roof over them made of wood poles collected from the forest, with black plastic over them. Today we saw the exception. Two giant dredges working side by side. They were over 2 stories tall, with big cranes to move the vacuum hose around. They had cables on winches going to both shores to anchor them in the river. We were told these big dredges are Brazilian.

It is hard to imagine that the government can't find these guys and shut them down if they

really want to. I don't really see the problem with the mining by itself. The river will put the sand back where it came from in a very short time. But the oil and garbage is a problem. There are thousands of 55 gallon oil barrels scattered all over this river along with all kinds of other garbage the miners leave behind. Without the mining there would be no reason for anyone to be here. This region would be a pristine wilderness, untouched by modern man, only the Indians and a couple of tourists from Utah.

After a satisfying dinner of beans and rice, we strolled the island arm in arm and talked. We were both feeling lucky to be where we were, and privileged to be spending our lives with the other. Ken and I seem more connected and together than ever.

Mar. 19, Night 26, WE MADE IT TO URIMAN

The Indians came before sun up to collect their fishing nets. Day to day life here is amazing to me; planting, hunting, foraging, getting by by working for it. It's hard to conceive how far from our roots "civilization" brings us. Our needs in North America seem so far out of proportion. So many people where we live never have enough to satisfy. They always want more, newer and bigger. In Park City it isn't uncommon for a couple and two small children to grow out of a four bedroom 4000 square foot home. I'll never understand. Even folks like us who think we live so simply, have so much extra "stuff".

We were up and out of camp by 7:30 this morning. I guess we were excited about getting to a town. The idea of buying a meal at a restaurant was one that kept us moving all day. We didn't go hard or fast, we just kept putting in the time. We paddled the 29 km in 5 hours. It was still a tough section of river, tough in that it was big and flat with no current to push us along. Most of the way the river was over a kilometer wide. We came around a bend and could see for miles down the river. It was like looking out to sea, it just faded off over the curve of the earth. It was hard to know just how far we were seeing but as we paddled it became apparent it was a long way. Jen thought she saw a bird landing in the trees down the river a ways. It turned out to be an airplane landing at Uriman. It only took another 2 hours to get there. While we paddle we worked on our Spanish, so we would be able to talk to folks in town. We also ate the pineapple we got last night. I even tried fishing but through all of this we paddled down river. We never got out of our boats. Jen even peed from the deck of her kayak.

We had a number of on lookers as soon as we landed in Uriman. While they watched we closed up our boats very carefully and carried them up off the beach. Uriman was not what I expected, but how could I know what to expect. It wasn't an Indian village. It was bustling with activity. Boats lined the shore and planes buzzed over head. The actual town was only about one square block made of low clay buildings with corrugated metal roofs. A few buildings were painted yellow or white but mostly they were painted blue. In my mind the town was all blue with a lot of garbage and trash strewn about. The river made one boarder of town and the airstrip made the other. The main street from the river to the airstrip was maybe 15 or 20 feet wide but most were just paths winding between the low hut like buildings. There were numerous grass huts scattered haphazardly along the river bank both upstream and down.

One of the first to greet us when we hit shore was an old crazy or drunk guy, I guess he was drunk. He was into "helping" us but we couldn't understand anything he said. He followed us across town to a nice restaurant by the airstrip and then we couldn't get rid of him. There were several other people eating at the restaurant and they weren't Indians or dredge miners. They looked like professionals. I thought they could be tourists but they looked more like engineers or business men and what would tourists be doing out here? We learned later they were most likely gold dealers. The miners like to sell their gold in Uriman because it is too risky for them to take it out and sell it in Bolivar or some other city. The police are looking for them in the nearby cities. We were told the dealers fly into Uriman, buy the gold at very discounted prices and fly it back out to other parts of the world where they sell it for full market prices.

While we ate we watched a big gray biplane land at the air strip. It was a Russian made Antanof, very slow, very powerful and carries big loads. The air strip is just a wide dirt road running along the back edge of town but it seemed to be pretty busy.

We had to bribe the drunk guy into leaving us while we had lunch. I told him if he went back and guarded our boats until we got back we would buy him a beer when we left. The meal was great, fried chicken, rice, pasta with some kind of sauce and cheese that tasted great, beans and something like coleslaw. We each had 2 cans of cold Coke to go with it. It cost us 5200 B's (\$11.00) not cheap but it was a full plate. After lunch we went shopping and spent \$50.00 on food and miscellaneous things. There is no road into Uriman. Everything comes in by air, so I guess that ups the price. We don't have much money left so when we saw the total it took us by surprise. We stopped shopping.

Back at our boats the drunk guy was going on about something in the newspaper, something about two Americans who were going down the Caroni in kayaks. Marlon's friend, Luis, had put us in the paper after all.

I don't know why but we were in a hurry to get out of town. Maybe our boats sitting in plain view made us nervous or to many people after being on our own for so long but for some reason we wanted to get back on the river. We bought the drunk his beer and shoved off. Ten minutes down river we remembered we had other business in Uriman. We had hoped to send out some postcards and letters. If our letters didn't make it out of Uonquen, no one in the outside world has heard from us for almost a month.

We paddled another couple kilometers to Capaure Rapids. The first drop in the rapid was a big ledge drop with a nasty looking recycling back wash below. We followed the miners portage trail around it. Before we even started the portage Jen noticed my rudder mount was broken again. And my rear compartment is still leaking.

We ran the next couple drops in the rapids and decided it was best to camp early and fix my boat. We pulled onto a big beach at the bottom of the rapid. It's not our usual beautiful white sand beach. It has a lot of willow like brush growing on it and it's covered with garbage washed down from Uriman. There is a miner's camp just next door. But it's better than the wood's and tomorrow we move on. The moon is so bright we can almost write by it. Almost.

Mar. 20, Night 27, MORE ABOUT GOLD MINING

Last night one of the miners came over to talk to us. His name was Ivers and he was the camp cook. Once again he and all the others working this dredge are Guyanese. We finally asked the silly question, "why do the Guyanese all speak English." The answer; up until 1966 it was British Guyana, a British colony, the only Latin American country that is English speaking.

It is a kind of Caribbean English. Some of them have a heavy Jamaican kind of accent and are hard to understand. We have counted 16 dredges on the river so far and I guess at least a third of them had Guyanese miners on them.

There are 12 people at the camp, Ivers, 6 divers, 2 sailors, the owners son as crew boss, and his wife and 2 year old son. They will work out of this camp for 5 months before moving on to another part of the river. They each stay at the camp for 6 week and then fly out from Uriman to Bolivar for 2 weeks with their families. These guys were different than the ones we met up river. Those guys had no families and I doubt they went out even once a year. They were a rough neck bunch. These guys may not be your run of the mill family men but they're several steps closer than the black guy we met at the first dredge.

We asked so many questions about the mining and gold that Ivers finally went and got some little gold nuggets from his cache and gave each of us a little piece. I gave him a spare watch I had with me in return. We asked about the river below here. He seemed to think it wasn't too bad except for Salto Baba, a big rapid several days down river. He said something about a tourist camp that had been built near there. He also invited us up to his camp for breakfast this morning. We had scrambled eggs and some kind of scone-like bread that was very good.

After breakfast we went out to the dredge. The night crew was finishing up their shift. They had started around 7:00 in the evening, spent the first 5 hours moving around looking for a location that would produce gold. Around midnight they found it. The divers stayed down from around 12:30 till 6:30 AM. Six hours at around 40 feet. They have a compressor powered by a diesel engine that pumps air down for the divers to breath and to run the vacuum they use to suck the sand and gold off the bottom of the river. The diesel engine chugs out exhaust and only 10 feet away the compressor intake hose sucks it in and sends it down to the diver to breath. I don't expect these guys have a long life span but they do a bigger share of the gold. Everyone is paid on commission; cook and sailors get 5% the divers get 10%. The owner and his son pay the bills and split the rest. The sailor's job is to work on deck. He operates the dredge while the divers are down, taking signals from the divers to give more vacuum or turn it off, etc... They use a system of jerks on the air hose to communicate.

We got on the dredge just as they were starting the cleaning of the collector mats. For the last 24 hours they had been sucking sand, mud and rocks off the bottom of the river. All of it gets pulled up the vacuum pipe and washed over a wooden ramp covered with green outdoor carpeting. There are wood strips nailed across to slow the flow and get the gold to settle out. The water and sand wash down across the carpet and out the back of the dredge. The gold dust is heavy and gets stuck in the fiber of the carpeting. We watched as pulled up the carpet and shook the gold dust and dirt out into a big wooden box. After shaking all the carpets they ran the slug from the box over a piece of carpet again to get rid of more of the sand and sludge. When they were done they had maybe 3 inches of sludge in the bottom of a 5 gallon bucket. One of the divers took a scoop of the sludge in a shovel and ran some water over it to show us the gold. As the water washed away the black sand particles the gold powder was plan to see. They said they should have about 100 grams (3.5 ounce) of gold in the bucket. At \$400 an ounce that would be \$1400.00.

These dredges move so much sand they make sand bars in the middle of the river. They told us that they make holes in the river bed 20 feet deep. They have to get down through the soft sand because the best gold deposits are in the old, hard, compressed sandstone below. It requires chipping away the sandstone with hammers and bars. They do all this work without lights. It's all done in total darkness. Some of the big dredges use a different system called a

torpedo. The dredge has a crane-like boom on it that moves the vacuum hose around and breaks up the sand and stone with a rotating drill-like device on the end of the hose.

We have been putting in a lot of miles the last several days. I am starting to feel it. I am quite tired tonight.

We gave Marlon's number to Ivers. He was going to radio out to Ciudad Bolivar and have them call Marlon. Maybe it happened. I don't really miss the outside world. I just feel an obligation to wonder about it now and then.

Right now, as I'm writing, a group of Howler monkeys mark their territory above in the tree tops. I imagine I'll never hear an animal call as strange and alarming as their call. My back is very sore from the days paddling. We are camped on a tiny beach just down river from 5 dredges. There is an Indian village across from us. It was getting late and my shoulders and back were in a lot discomfort so I decided a micro beach was good enough. We made a flat spot in the sand and put up the tent. Then I washed my clothes and took a bath. Just as I got in the water Ken noticed a canoe coming across toward us from the village so I cut my bath short. I was disappointed as I retreated to the tent to dress. It is always rejuvenating to me to bathe at the days end.

It is another beautiful evening. The river glistens with evening light. The forest across the river is layered with horizons, the furthest out being a tepui. Down river the smoke from the Indian village drifts across the surface of the water. And the Howler monkeys drowned out the hum of the diesel engine coming from the dredges up river. Ken and I started talking about going to Puerto La Cruz after we make it to the Orinoco to sell the boats. Somehow now it seems okay to fantasize about the future. I hope it's not premature but I can conceive of it now. It is a beautiful evening. The moon is three quarters full. Again I'm writing by moon light. The temperature couldn't be more pleasant.

Mar. 21 Night 28, 32 KILOMETER CLOSER

An uneventful day. We paddled in one hour intervals with a break on shore after each hour today. It was a little easier on me. We stopped at 3:30 and that helps too. It rained a little today. We have had incredibly little rain. We haven't needed the fly on the tent for 5 nights now. We had some hard rain back on the portage around Eutobarima but only some sprinkles since then. I kind of like it this way.

This evening is beautiful. There is a line of cliffs 1000 to 1500 feet above us all along the other side of the river. The cliffs are black with white splotches where the overhangs keep water from getting to the rock. The whole thing has a greenish shade to it because of all the plants clinging to the wall. Down the river a huge block of rock juts out high above the jungle, part of the Auyan-Tepui. On the other side of Auyan-tepui, Angel Falls plunges some 3,310 feet straight down. The tepui has a cap of dark clouds and off to the east a rainbow. The sun is shining in under the clouds illuminating the cliffs. The still water of the river reflects the scene in reverse. Parrots and Toucans squawk and cackle noisily from the trees around us and off in the distance I can hear the weird sounds of the Howler Monkeys.

We had a fancy dinner tonight, starting with afternoon popcorn and then moving on to canned corn beef and rice with arepas and cheese. We bought the corned beef in Uriman. Arepas are a Venezuelan food. It's a flat fried corn meal biscuit. Like a fat white pancake. We got a bag of arepa mix in Caracas before we left. It gives our river menu a flavor of Venezuela. The food has been very good the whole trip, enough variety, quality and quantity. With the stuff we got at Uriman we are in great shape for the rest of the trip.

Tomorrow we pass San Salvador De Paul or just Paul (*Pow ul*) as it's called around here. We're told it's another Uriman. It's the supply point for the lower part of the river. Unlike Uriman it has a 4x4 road to it. It takes a few days and is only open when it's not raining but there is a road. The number of small planes flying over is amazing. It probably averages 5 or 6 every hour all day long.

We were sitting here on our beach this evening when Jen said "What's that buzzing"? I looked up at the sky just as a dark, buzzing cloud passing over the river at an altitude just above the tree tops. It got closer and closer and then pased right over us. Bees, millions of them swarming across the sky.

Mar. 22, Night 29,

CLOSE TO CANIAMA

One Month since we put on the river.

This morning we woke to fog but as we broke camp it burned off and gave us an incredibly beautiful morning. Dead calm with wisps of fog floating down out of the dark trees like giant ghosts looking for a place to hide. White foam swirling on the glassy surface of the river gave the tepuis a snowy looking reflection. We slid our kayaks into the water sending ripples out across the mirror. As we dipped our paddles and started down river it was like the boats were sharp knives cutting through the picture painted there. It was a glorious morning and I found myself paddling along chuckling with the joy of the place. Sometimes I get so focused on the goal that I don't appreciate where I am. It's not that I don't see the beauty around me. I do. I just don't focus on it, I'm too busy focusing on getting someplace or solving some problem. This morning I couldn't help being drawn into the beauty and awesomeness of this place.

An hour or so down river we stopped for a brake on a giant sand bar. Just below, on an island, was a miner's camp. As we passed by someone yelled from the shadows, "dangerous falls ahead, watch out". It made us wonder. Had we taken the right channel? Were we supposed to be on the other side of the island? We are getting used to people telling us it's very dangerous. We know it's dangerous. We haven't done anything safe since we left Miami, maybe since we left home. It was a fun little rapid. Jen even thought it was okay.

Not long after the rapid a motor boat came up behind us and stopped to talk. He said he was going down to Paul and asked if we would like a ride. I looked at Jen, she said "sure!" How could I argue? It took about 25 minutes to get to the Paul landing. It would have taken us about 3 hours to paddle. We discovered the town of Paul is an hour walk back off the river. We had no reason to go into Paul; we already spent all our money in Uriman. The river landing had a few buildings, a parked truck and a couple of people hanging around not doing much. As I walked up I suddenly noticed that sitting at a table under a tin roof was a man in a military uniform, gun propped against the wall, probably National Guard. I didn't really want to see him or rather him to see me. If he decided we were doing something wrong it could cause trouble.

We are starting to get the idea that the National Guard is more likely to guard their own wallets than anything else. Mining on the Caroni is illegal and the National Guard is supposed

to be here to enforce the law. The miners say they come in and harass them, sinking their dredges and shooting things up, in general scaring everybody as best they can. When the miners pay them off they go away. If they wanted to stop the mining all they would have to do is go in and stop the supply lines. Everything comes in through Uriman or Paul. If they set up there and stopped the flow of supplies up and down the river, the dredges would soon stop. But if they stopped the mining there would be no kickbacks to collect. So the mining goes on.

Fortunately this guy wasn't thinking about getting anything out of us. The boat driver told him what we were doing and we had to show our passports and the National Guard guy wrote down all our information on his paper. Then he asked if we were going to the tourist lodge for the night. This was the second time we had heard about "the tourist lodge" but what is this tourist lodge? It must be the same one Ivers mentioned. What kind of tourist lodge would be sitting out here on the side of the Caroni anyway? The boat driver explained to him in a tone that sounded a little like, "you idiot, they won't make it to the tourist camp for at least a couple more days". The Guardsman followed us back to our boats to watch our departure. Once again we were such an oddity he didn't know what to think of us. By the time he would have time to think, we would be gone.

Just above Paul the river changed character, more current and narrower, rockier banks and mid-river islands. The left bank is a solid slab of rock some 50 to 60 feet high and sloping 45 degrees into the river. It looks like it could be a fault line or something. It has been going like this for 20 km now. There is almost no forest on that side of the river. It looks like the Indians have cleared and burned it sometime ago so there are shrubs and bushes growing up now. The right bank still has forest.

We ran several small rapids then we came to a place where the whole river slid over against the fault line rocks on river left and shot down a long slope, all 17,000 cfs of it. It had ocean size roller waves standing one after the other all the way down it. We got out and scouted it and then I walked up for an awesome ride. It was all compression waves, that means there are no rocks to hit and it's relatively safe. I didn't complain about getting to do it twice and Jen didn't complain about having to hike down the bank to get the pictures. We make a pretty good team. I'm calling it Ocean City Rapid. I had some amazing whirlpools at the bottom.

Jen climbed back in her kayak and we finished the run-out of the rapid and pulled onto this big beautiful beach for the night. I checked out the plant life along the edge of the forest and Jen took her afternoon bath. I've been collecting tree pods for Prescott's class. I found a few good ones here but still not the kind I'm looking for.

It got windy this afternoon. It's hard to make much time when you're pushing a strong head wind. Back around the time we hit Apepichi Rapid the river finished it's slow right hand turn and started running almost due north. The winds that we were sailing on back on the Aponguau are now head winds.

One month ago today we put on the river. At that time getting this far was so many miles away it was inconceivable for me. Not for Ken, he could dream of the days all the way through. That's probably why we're here. It doesn't seem like that long until I try and recall all of the events, then it seem much longer.

This morning Ken found a scorpion by the food bags. I hadn't realized we would see scorpions. It will make me think twice before reaching in my boat without looking or putting on my clothes before giving them a good

shake.

Our latest guess is that we will make it to the Orinoco in seven days. I get filled with excitement with the thought that we are really going to complete it, all of the way. A dream made real by determination and hard work. We are still a long way away in many respects with our theoretical boat ride across the Guri reservoir. The time it may take to portage the falls etc. I do believe we will make it; our time frame just may be off.

Mar. 23, Day 30,

THE ERAKUNA HOTEL!!!

This morning we got out of camp early, 7:15. We were trying to beat the wind but it didn't happen. We had a strong head wind all day. We passed the mouth of the Rio Carrao; the river that goes up to Caniama. We flew into Caniama last year on our reconnaissance trip. It's the jumping off place for thousands of tourists visiting Angel Falls, the highest waterfall in the world. We had originally planned to go there and see the falls and to get supplies. We decided a long time ago that Caniama wasn't that important. If we hadn't found Uriman to re-supply we might have been forced to go there but now there was no need. That was good because just above the confluence was the first big rapid on the Carrao. It would have been really hard to paddle up so we may have had to walk the 30 miles or so overland and that is probably impossible.

At one point we were deciding which way to go around the islands at Caño Negro when a guy paddled out to me. He didn't speak but he drew pictures on my boat explaining which channel to take up ahead. He then went back to Ken and redrew pictures for him explaining the upcoming dangers. As we got through that section we came across a large farm. We stopped to see what they were growing in hopes of learning something. We found yuca, lemons, cotton, guava, corn, bananas and many other varieties we couldn't identify but we couldn't find any people so we traveled on.

The Carrao added a lot of water making the river even bigger. We passed the big islands at Caño Negro. The river braids into many channels around the islands. The river at this point is very wide. If we took the wrong channel it could have meant several extra miles and a lot of extra paddling just to get to the same place. Who knows if we took the best route? I guess it doesn't really matter. Past the islands the wind really started to pick up. It pushed the water up into waves with whitecaps that rolled over our decks. We hugged the shore line trying to avoid the wind and waves. We were struggling to make headway. Three Indians in a canoe past us when we were stopped on shore eating lunch. Then too were hugging the shore but there were three of them powering one boat. We chased them for 2 ½ hours before we caught up. We asked if there was a tourist lodge around here. They point down the river to the other end of the straight away.

It was a long straight away, maybe 2 miles long. We could see something that looked like some kind of huge ski lodge. It seemed to have a massive sloping roof with gables and beams. How could they fill such a big place out here in the middle of nowhere? We started planning how we could pay for a real meal in the restaurant. I did have a credit card. But as we got closer we could see what it really was. The huge sloping roof was a hill, the gables were grass

huts and the beams were trails going up and down the hill in many directions. Our minds had produced an American size resort out of nothing. Never the less, the place is still very impressive.

Before we could make it to the lodge a powerful thunder storm had developed. We were in the middle of the river when the storm hit. All day we had been paddling into a strong headwind and big waves, but now it really picked up. I had to paddle hard just to keep my position so I decided it was time to get to shore. By the time we got there the storm had pretty much blow by so we paddled on into the tourist camp.

Once again we were a big surprise to everyone. How did we get here? They are used to tourist but not ones that get there on their own. The place is called Erakuna and the people are unbelievable friendly. We asked if it would be possible to buy a meal at the restaurant. They told us no, it wasn't really possible but if we waited until evening we could have dinner with the guests. Of course it would be dark by then and we would need a place to stay so they let us have one of the rooms in the hotel. They aren't really hotel rooms, more like cabins. It is a nice hotel cabin with beds, shower, electric lights, a flush toilet; the works. The company that owns this lodge built it as part of their Angle Falls tour. They fly their guest here, give them deluxe accommodations and introduce them to the people and environment of the region before flying them up to see the falls. That way they don't have to share the income with the owners of the facilities in Canima.

The lodge has a big aluminum speed boat to shuttle the tourist around the river. The boatman, a young Indian kid, was taking some of the workers down the river to there villages in the boat. The manager of the resort suggested we go along. They took us down to look at Salto Babas, our next big rapid. With the 115 horse power outboard motor it only took ten minutes to get there. It will take us much longer tomorrow. On the way they pointed out a building on the side of the river and told us it was a government building that measured the river flow.

We now know the falls is a portage. It might be runnable with a lot more water but at this level it's a 20 foot vertical drop into a killer reversal and that's just the start. With the boatman and a couple of his friends we scramble down the rocks along the waterfall. They showed us how they can catch fish with their hands in the falls. They also showed us an Indian pictograph. They told us that the ancient Indians had put it there back when the falls had been first named by their ancestor thousands of years ago. The word Babas means crocodile and Erakuna means 'place of the ducks' in Pemón. They said there were once a lot of crocodiles and ducks in this area but not long ago (a few decades ago) the natural acidity of the water went up and they move down river to less acidic waters.

So tonight we had dinner in the big dinning hall with all the guests. We started with appetizers and drinks then we had chicken and potatoes for the main course. We all sat around a big table, I think there were 18 of us. The guests are English, Welch, Austrian, and even one American. I sent a postcard to Prescott via the American Tourist. He said he would mail it when he got back to the U.S.A. They all spoke English. Even the guides speak English. They were all here to see Angel Falls and the jungle. They are a different class of tourist then the folks we saw on Roraima. They stay in hotels, and take airplane excursions. These people can't begin to know where we have come from or what we've done. I think that will be the case with most of the world. One thing I know, in my wildest dreams, I couldn't have imagined we'd be staying in a place like this out here, and for free.

Mar. 24, Night 31,

BACK IN THE WHITEWATER

We had a great breakfast of eggs and arepas, cheese and ham, cereal, oatmeal, fruit, sausage, coffee, tea, milk and juice. I got plenty to eat.

After breakfast the tourists were going for a boat ride up the river to visit a Pemón village. We had just come from there but it seemed we could ask questions about Pemón life that we hadn't been able to ask because of language barriers. So we all loaded into one of the big speed boats and motored 10 km back up river. It had taken us 3 hours to come down this stretch the day before. In the speed boat it took only 15 minutes even against the current. At the village we asked a lot of questions and learned a lot that helped us better understand this country we have been traveling through.

When we returned to Erakuna we said good-bye to the tourists before they flew off in the Cessna and we climbed in our kayaks and head down river. They went off to see Angel Falls and we went off to carry around Babas Falls. Before leaving we asked to have a message radioed out to Marlon. I hope one of these messages make it out. *The American tourist did send the card to Prescott from New York and he got it within 9 days, none of the radio messages ever made it Marlon.*

We stopped to talk with the man at the gauging station just below Erakuna and tried to get flow information for the river. A gauging station is a place where they have instruments to check water flows. The department running the huge reservoir down river installed this one to determine the amount of water going into the reservoir. With our cryptic Spanish we had a lot of trouble communicating with the man. He didn't seem to have actual flow information on hand. He said we would have to get it in Puerto Adaz. We asked him about our plan to hire a motorized launch to take us across the Guri Reservoir. Once again the language thing got in the way. He seemed to be trying to say there are no villages. But our map and several other people have said there are. I don't know what he was saying. It makes no sense.

The portage around Babas was easy. There are no miners left below Babas now but their remains are everywhere, including their trail past the falls. Our loads are so much smaller now; I put most of my gear in a pack and carried it while pulling my kayak behind me. Jen started out that way but 2 Indian boys came by and carried her boat the 400 meters to the bottom of the falls.

The Indians near the falls were cleaning and smoking fish. We were under the impression it was a fish run at the falls so they were collecting as many as possible to dry for later. There was a little boy and girl about three years old playing on the beach. They were so cute. I gave them stickers and showed them how to make them stick. They giggled and giggled I don't think that was something they had seen before. Then two young boys came over to help carry my boat. I gave them some trinkets in return and Ken invited them to join us for lunch. We were eating peanut butter on casava. It was obvious they weren't impressed with peanut butter and the expressions on their faces after the first bites were priceless. Needless to say this wasn't worth hanging out for. They politely said adios and tossed the casava and peanut butter in the bushes when they felt they were out of sight.

We asked a lot of questions about what was below Salto Babas but answers were mixed. The conscience was we had rapids ahead, big or small that was unsure. The answer is a relative

one. It depends on who you ask. Ask a flat water canoeist "how big was the rapid" and he may say it was really big. You ask a wild, class V kayaker about the same rapid and he'll say it's nothing. I somehow got it in my head that it wouldn't be very big but I should have known that any rapid on a river this size is big. We were missing the map of this particular section of river so we couldn't consult the map. We found ourselves running rapids immediately after Salto Babas and they continue. How far will they go on? I don't know. We are camped at the edge of a quiet pool between two big rapids.

Jen was making herself sick she was so frightened, even little class III wave trains were terrifying her. She was saying she wished she had flown out and wasn't here. I got very frustrated with her. It wasn't the thing to do but I couldn't help it. She has kayaked many difficult and dangerous rivers over the last 4 years. How can she be letting this get to her now? I feel like it's all in her head. I thought she should be working on her head weeks ago. She just keeps saying, "I can't, I won't, I don't want to". It is so frustrating for me. I know I shouldn't let it get to me but it does.

The rainy night and the sound of rapids both up river and down only darkened an already dark mood. Because of the rain we had to have the fly on the tent so it was hot and stuffy and hard to sleep. We lay there looking at the nylon walls of the tent, sulking to ourselves, thoughts of waterfalls, class VI rapids, dark jungles and the safety of our own beds back home and the question, "why are we here?" all running through our heads.

If we could read the guide book and it could tell us, "three miles of class III and IV rapids, run left on the first two" etc., it would be easier but we have no knowledge beyond the wave right in front of us. Anything could be out there and the mind makes it bigger than it really is. We are so close to the end of our trip. The reservoir is only 30 km down river.

We could make it there tomorrow if we had flat water. Then we could hire a boat and the next day we would be back to civilization. But what if there are more unforeseen problems. A long section of rapids could slow us down to a snails pace. The river is so big now, somewhere between 17,000 and 20,000 cfs. Any rapid in a river this big is potentially a real hazard. The fear of another 8 day portage is not so far in the back of my mind. We have food for about a week. That would be plenty if we can keep moving but what if we ended up averaging a mile a day again? It keeps running around and around in my head and I can't sleep.

I chose to be here and I made it this far. I probably wouldn't have chosen this trip had I known the extent of the whitewater involved. When we planned it, it was suppose to be flat water and waterfalls. That is what all of the climbing gear was for. Boy, was that a missed guess. Anyway I am here and very close to making it. My decision is I'm going to make it even if I need to portage more then Ken. It has to be give and take. Ken too made a choice to come here with me; I will do the best I can. It is a dreary rainy night. Ever since we got to camp it has been rainy on and off. It is muggy in the tent. I feel bad for Ken because he doesn't know what to do. He just wants me to want to run the rapids and to enjoy them without fear. He believes I don't want to try. That I've already decided not to try. The truth is I'm not as strong as he and I'm scared. I'm scared of the power of the water, the fragility of life, and of making a fatal decision out of guilt. I do feel I know where my skills lie and I must work within them. The difficulty of rivers I have been confident on in the past doesn't out weigh how I feel right here and

now.

My desire is not to be somewhere else. It is to get through this scary section and continue enjoying with less stress to both of us. My plan is to get up early and portage around this rapid we are camped at, then, possibly get through or around the next one that I can see from here, before Ken gets going so I won't hold things up too much. This can only go on for 4-5 k. We'll make it.

Mar. 25, Night 32,

IN THE ISLANDS NEAR EL PLOMO

It was a long night, but morning still came too soon. I want to be brave, but I can't help just wishing it was behind me. This morning I am still battling with the fears of running big water and doing something out of guilt.

Ken's fears are that we will come across a section that is unreasonable for me to portage so I might as well start looking at everything as runnable. He talked to me about turning on the part of my brain that chose to run Gore Canyon, the Scott River, or the Grand Canyon. It would be great if it were that easy for me to shift gears. I can't say that I really know where the keys are to my files. Reality is those choices were made by me just as the choices to not run things were made by me. I always calculate the consequence of a mistake, the odds of making one, and whether or not I'm willing to chance it.

We are both in the tent writing trying to relax and prepare for the day each in our own way. As I look over the maps I become more unsettled. We are missing some sections of maps and the sections missing seem to correlate with drop in the river. In two km we go back on the map but it doesn't mean much. The river narrows for the following 2k but narrow doesn't necessarily mean difficult. It could be steep and narrow or flat and narrow. With the missing map it's hard to say where the drop occurs. It could be gradual, or it could drop all at once. We won't know until we get there.

I didn't make it out of camp without shedding more tears, this time for a different reason. When I went to get my boat and I found a card Ken left on top about friendship and the value of ours. I was very touched. It was welcome to feel overwhelmed with the emotion of love instead of terror. I was reassured that even though I wasn't the brave whitewater woman he thought he married he still loved and respected me. What more could I want.
EVENING:

It is now evening and we are safe at camp. It was a very long day with many rapids. The best part about the day is that we made it! I only cried once. Luckily it was toward the end. I think I was worn out from worry. I ran most of them and walked a couple. Ken only showed frustration with me a couple of times today. He really is very patient and tries not to show his disappointment when I chicken out. We paddled through mazes of islands

not really knowing where we were. With every drop I would encourage myself. It was scary and big but it is that much less elevation to lose down river.

Jen did a lot better today. Once again we ran a lot of rapids and she didn't seem as terrified. The first one this morning we had to portage. There were two possible routes; the first was a wave train with waves the size of houses, the middle wave folding back with an explosive force. The second was a steep, rocky, hole strewn slot with probably 1,500 cfs pouring through it, both probably class V. Both routes could be done, but did I need to do it? It took 20 minute to decide and only half an hour to carry around.

I have found that when the river is so big it gives you a lot of room to make your line. I look at a line and think I've got to hit that spot exactly. When I get there my 14.5 foot kayak can go through the slot sideways it's so big. Many things turn out to be much easier than I anticipate.

The last of the really big rapids was just below last night's camp. Then we entered the island section. The map shows the river to be over 7 km wide with hundred of islands. The section is almost 10 km long. There are so many channels to choose from, we just take the one that seems to have the most water going into it. All the channels go the same place in the end but if you get the wrong one you could be in there for several extra days just wandering around. There were a lot of small rapids so we went pretty slowly. It would be a great place for a kayak school. Everyone could start at the same place and end at the same place; take channel 2 for a class II run or channel 6 for a class VI, there is a channel for every ability.

Once again we saw the remains of old mining operations but it wasn't until near the end of the island section that we encounter any mining. We only saw one dredge but a lot of miners and motor boats. We were told that about 3 years ago the army, different than the National Guard, were brought in to do away with the illegal mining operations. They destroyed most of the dredges on the river. At that time it was believed there were over 120 operations on the Caroni. We saw enough wrecked dredges to believe it. But we've only seen 26 operating dredges on the whole river. We could have missed some in the island areas, maybe another 5 or 6 at most.

At the end of the island section the river came back together for only a few kilometers before spilling over Tayucay Falls and then split again into a second island section. This second island section has a lot of Indians living along it. We stopped at one village this afternoon and spent an hour or more talking and looking around. They were very friendly and happy to try to talk with us. What I have been calling a village is usually a family home. The family is more than mom and dad and the kids. There will be several generations of the same family. This family had 3 homes on this section of river, this one was the banana plantation home, 4 km across the river was the yuca plantation and down river 8 km, in the big village of El Plomo, is their city home. They move around from one to the other as is needed. When I asked to see the inside of the sleeping hut the man wasn't sure why I would want to do that but then he seem to understand that we were just interested in how they lived and he took us on a tour of the hut and then the whole plantation. The banana plantation was huge with lots of tall banana trees. In Spanish banana is banana but here they say cambul and in Pemón it is mecuru.

One of the women was spinning yarn out of cotton. When she got enough yarn she would make a hammock out of it. It would take her 6 months to complete the hammock. I asked if I could buy a spinning spindle. She didn't have another nice one so she took all the yarn of the one she was working. She said she wanted 500 B's for it but I gave them 1000 B's (\$2.00) for it

and some red bananas.

Once again our camp here is on a beautiful beach, this time on an island. We pulled in with the sun low, casting beautiful light across the river, the trees and the sand, the macaws, parrots and toucans flying about squawking. We got a lot of funny looks from the Indian at the house across the channel as we popped out of our boats with so much colorful gear and proceeded to spread it all over the beach.

The moon is so big and bright tonight. I think it was full a few nights ago. "I see the moon, the moon sees me, the moon sees the one I long to see. God bless the moon, God bless me, God bless the one I long to see." It's been a long time since I last saw Prescott. Maybe he's looking at this moon too.

Mar. 26, Day 33,

EMBALSE GURI, THE RESERVOIR

This morning we broke camp after a breakfast of pancakes with butter and honey. Still in the island section we paddled along through flat, calm waters and some small rapids. Then as the island section ended the whole river came back together. It is so powerful when it's all in the same channel. We entered what appeared to be a small rapid. I surfed a few seconds on the big glassy entry wave but when I reached the bottom of the rapid I was surprised by the power of the hydraulics. They pulled at my boat and yanked me around here and there. I watched and prayed as Jen came down. Please don't let them get her. They started pulling her around just like they had me. All of a sudden she looked up at me with a terrified look and tipped over. She got half a roll in but that was all. At least she tried to roll. She did a good job of holding on to her kayak. It would be really scary swimming in that kind of hydraulics without the flotation of the kayak. I pulled up and towed her to shore. She said "I tried, I really tried to roll up". She was okay but her rudder stick was broken and we couldn't get the broken end out of the hole. Out on the reservoir she would really need that thing. We spent over an hour with knives, a drill bit and pliers, getting it out and making another so she wouldn't have to go rudderless.

We entered a rapid that was big, not huge; I wasn't too intimidated until I got to the bottom. For quite a distance below the rapid there were HUGE suckie swirlies caused by the massive volume of fast water running into the flat water. Ken was ahead of me and making it through. I did ok until I saw a giant whirlpool open up and I dropped in. The problem was I turned upside down as I did this. I attempted three rolls and failed at all three. The last was an attempt to get a breath to buy some time. I missed that too. Oh dear, then I was crawling out of my boat in hopes of getting a breath. I didn't dare let go of the boat. The more volume I can have to get to the surface the better. Who knows how far down the suckies could pull me if I let go of the boat. I didn't want to find out. The first words out of my mouth were, "I tried to roll... three times.. I swear, Ken I tried". He was very calm. He let the suckie water grab his boat and spin it in different directions not fighting the natural course. "Just stay with your boat", Ken directed.

Ken made it to where I was swirling in the water and we swirled together for a while. The river wasn't ready to let us go yet. As soon as it let us go I tried to swim with my boat to the left shore. It didn't work to well I couldn't move the boat in the current. Then Ken got in front of the boat and

paddled while I hung on to his and mine and kicked as hard as I could. Finally we made it to shore. I was still trying to convince Ken that I tried. I didn't panic. It just didn't work. The rudder mount stick was broken clean off in the mount hole by the force of the water. It took close to an hour to dig the old one out, carve a new one, and sort the wet stuff. I lost our last red bananas, my rescue saw, and a stick of sugar cane.

While all this was going on I was a little ways down stream two canoes slowly traveled on. They must have known about a canoe route.

Soon after that we were discussing the volume of water that was in the channel, I was saying, "this is a huge lake, you can't even tell there is any current here" Then I looked around and realized it was a lake. We were in the upper reaches of the Guri Reservoir. We would have no more current for 90 miles or more. In a short time it became obvious that we were in the lake. It opened up into a huge body of water with ghostly shapes of dead trees sticking up out of it's surface and we were leaving the shore behind. We got out the GPS to help guide us to the village of Las Nieves where we hoped to hire a boat. The map that showed the village didn't show the coordinates. The one with the coordinates didn't show the village. I made a guesstimation using them both and entered it into the GPS. It would have been very difficult to know just where to go with out the GPS. We never really knew just where we were. With out knowing where you are the compass has a hard time telling you where to go. The GPS said we had 13 miles of open water to cross to get to Las Nieves the village we hope to hire a boat to take us across the lake. As we paddle out of the river channel the lake just got bigger and bigger and this wasn't even the main lake. The wind was blowing hard out of the north forming 2 foot swells. It wasn't enough to be scary but it was enough to make paddling and staying on course difficult. I was sure hoping the GPS knew what it was talking about because my mental compass kept telling me we were going the wrong way.

As we got closer we couldn't see anything that looked like a town or village. Where was this place? We crossed the channel leading out to the main lake. It looked like the ocean out there. Big rolling waves were coming through the channel. They must be really big out there. Jen had made me promise I wouldn't decide we had to paddle across the lake. I agreed we would hire a motor boat even if I thought we could paddle it. As we crossed the channel and I looked out into the big ocean I didn't have any great urge to change my mind. The GPS started flashing our arrival; we were at the coordinates I had entered.

The GPS said this was Las Nieves but we were still 300 yards from shore and no sign of a town or even a hut on shore. We were starting to understand what the man at the gauging station was telling us. There were no more towns; they had razed the dam and the water was now 30 feet high. The old towns were underwater but there must be new ones someplace around here. It was looking like we might get to paddle across the reservoir even if we didn't want to.

We paddled along the shore for sometime looking for some sign of civilization. We entered a little cove and I spotted a grass roof on the other side of a hill. Not exactly civilization but I knew we had found a village. We parked the boats and walked over the hill toward the hut. I could see it was a group of grass huts but as we came closer something was wrong; there was a water tank and walkways lined with rocks. I could hear a generator running someplace near by. When we could see into one if the huts we saw coolers and cases of Coca Cola and beer. It was suddenly looking a lot more civilized. A well dressed Venezuelan came out of one of the huts to

greet us. Once again we were having trouble understanding what he was saying. It sounded like he was tell us it was a fishing camp for tourists and the guests were out fishing. I didn't think rich Venezuelans would be so into fishing out here in the wilderness. We asked about getting a boat ride across the lake. We understood him to say it would be no problem but we also thought he said it would only take 1 hour and I knew that was wrong. He said the man in charge would be back around 5:00 or 6:00. We could make ourselves comfortable and wait for him.

When the boss man showed up a bit after 6:00 he was quite a surprised to us. He was an **American!** And all the guests were Americans too. It was an **U.S.** fishing camp. The boss mans name was Steve and he and a U.S. partner owned the fishing camp and several thousand acres around it. He has been in Venezuela for about 10 years now. He has a Venezuelan wife and kids in Puerto Adaz. He was at least as surprised to see us as we were to see him. He told us that in all his years of fishing and boating on these waters no tourist has ever come floating down the river.

As it turned out we had stumble upon the only place for miles and miles that would do us any good. Steve said fifteen miles up the Rio Paragau there is an Indian village. There are one or two houses scattered around this end of the lake but other than that it is wilderness. Steve tells us that paddling the lake is very dangerous. He said that just yesterday the engine on one of their boats wouldn't start and the wind and waves were so bad it was necessary to sink it to keep it off the rocks. They will go back later and recover it.

We have heard many times about how dangerous things are but in this case I guess I may have to agree. I know a lot about rivers but this kind of open water is out of my league. It sounds like getting a ride all the way to the dam is not real likely either. No one goes there. There is a town half way up the lake called El Monteco. Steve can give us a ride there in a few days. From there we will have to find a way to the dam.

We offered to do some work around camp to pay him back for all his hospitality but Steve said no, just to be part of the adventure was enough.

Mar. 27, Day 34,

JESSIE PARKER'S PEACOCK BASS FISHING CAMP

We have been out with the pros. Jen actually caught a 1 lb. peacock bass this afternoon. The fishermen are paying something like \$420 a day for this experience. We could end up gaining back all the weight we've lost on this trip if we stay here long; lots of food and rest. It has been another amazing unexpected oasis in the wilderness. Tomorrow around noon the fishermen will head back home to the U.S.A. and we will catch a ride to El Monteco with them. Until then we have nothing to do but wait. From El Monteco I don't know where we go.

Steve is quite a character. He's in his early 50's, around 6 feet tall, a good bit over weight, the usual male enlarged stomach problem, with sandy, slightly graying hair, bright blue eyes and a hint of the big red nose of an alcoholic. He has a way of twitching his mouth and eye to emphasize a point when telling one of his many stories. The stories tend to get less interesting as he has more to drink. As long as he has anything to say he is inclined to talk over anyone else who tries to talk. He was in Vietnam and spent 7 years in Cuba fishing and maybe more. He spent several years in Central America "Consulting". He wouldn't say more then consulting but he lead me to believe he was working for the CIA or somebody like that. Nine years ago he came to Venezuela and El Monteco where he married his third and present wife, a 29 year old Venezuelan. Now they live in Puerto Adaz where their 3 kids can go to a good school. He ran fishing camps out of El Monteco until 3 years ago when he and Jessie Parker bought this place

on the south end of the reservoir.

He says he knows the lower Caroni well. He explained, "I won't travel up these rivers without a sawed off shotgun hanging across my chest". He tells us that we have passed through, "some bad ass country with some bad ass people". He probably exclaimed twenty times, "I can't believe you did it without a gun". According to him, "Up the Caroni is no man's land, the wild west with desperate men hiding from the law, men who will shoot you for \$10. The National Guard is afraid to stay back there after dark. Up there, when people fall in the river and drowned, no one even looks for the body. The piranha will take care of it in a few days. When the river is high they lose 2 or 3 miners a week".

We pased through this "bad ass" land with innocence and surprise as our weapons. We were so bright and colorful we could be seen coming for miles. No one had ever seen anything like us. If they were, "bad ass" people they forgot they were for just a few minutes. Two things we had going for us: *Innocence attracts goodness* and *God takes care of those that have fun*. We started the trip as innocent as babes in the woods when it came to knowing anything about this country and we certainly have had fun.

Steve told us that he had flown over the Caroni River between the dam and Puerto Adaz. He says it has a lot of really bad rapids. He said some Canadians had tried to run it once in kayaks, several of them died. It's back to that relative factor again. How bad is bad and who kayaked it, in what? I guess we will find out when we get there.

Mar. 28, Night 35,

WE HAVE COME FULL CIRCLE, UPATA

Today we loaded the kayaks into a 25 foot aluminum launch with a 125hp outboard motor and together with the eight American fishermen we sped some 45 miles across the lake. On our way across Gary, one of the fishermen asked where we would spend the night tonight. I told him I had no idea because I had no idea where we were going after the boat dropped us off. He was shock at the idea of not knowing where we were going or where we would spend the night.

The van was waiting to whisk them all away to reserved hotel rooms and airplane departures. By tomorrow morning they will be at their homes in the U.S.A. with their families. The fishermen were gone and we were left to our own devices again. We stood on the boat ramp with our bright colored shorts and kayaks as a boat load of "bad ass" miners carrying tortoises weighing 10 lbs each piled out of an aluminum launch. The tortoises would be fiesta dinners for the up coming Easter holiday.

Now what? We still wanted to get to the Guri Dam than on to the Orinoco. We tried several options to get to the dam from El Monteco but they were either long shots, expensive or both. After several attempts to find someone to take us across the lake in their boat we finally found a guy who said he would do it for \$110, reluctantly we agreed but when he tried to start his motor it wouldn't start. We finally settled for a \$30 taxi ride to Upata. I think the motor not starting might have been someone looking out for us. Getting in that boat might have been a bad idea.

As we rode across the lake and I got a better look at it I felt we could have paddled it. After spending two days on the lake at the fishing camp and after the winds had died down and the big waves had dissipated, paddling across it didn't seem so undoable. I think I would have paddled it if I hadn't told Jen that I wouldn't. Oh well, I feel good about what we are doing now and it wouldn't have been anything fun, just long and tiring.

We are back at the Hotel Andre; we spent Valentine night here on our way to Santa Elena with Helena, in this very hotel.

After dinner Ken and I lay in the light of the overhead lamps and marveling at what we had experienced in the past 40 days and the changes we have gone through. We are stronger, darker, more knowledgeable, and more in love with each other. It is a good feeling to be me, a good feeling to be exploring with my husband.

For the last 35 days we have been very special people, so unique that everyone that saw us had some kind of powerful reaction. Some would stand and stare, others would run up to us yelling and waving, others paddled miles down the river after us just to ask where we were going. At Uonquen, Erakuna, and the fishing camp we were treated like royal guest. We were given seats at the head of the table, private rooms, everyone's attention was on us. Even the miners offered us dinner and a place to stay. One can get used to that kind of treatment and start to expect it. Now, back to Upata and back to the busy world of modern man, suddenly we are just part of the masses, just two more people the hotel clerk has to deal with. Two people who can't even speak the language. It is so easy to become a nobody here in the world of cars, telephones and money. When we met another boat on the river, both parties would study the other for some time as we paddled closer. As total strangers we would greet and begin a conversation. Even though the Indians on the river couldn't imagine what we were doing or what would possess us to undertake such an adventure, they knew what it meant to do it. They could appreciate our feat even if they couldn't understand it. We were doing something unique, we were special. I told the desk clerk that we had just paddle the length of the Rio Caroni, he shook his head up and down as to say, "gee, that's nice". I like the feeling of being someone special.

We have a few civilized world problems to overcome right now. It is Friday and Easter weekend. All of Venezuela is celebrating. We have about 25,000 B's left between us, about \$50. The banks will be closed until Monday. It was tough finding a place to change money in Caracas with no holiday. It could be some time before we find a place that will exchange money here. Also we want to do a tour of the dam but if it's closed for the holidays that will be tough too.

Mar. 29, Night 36, WE MADE IT, PUERTO ADAZ

The desk clerk at the hotel told us the dam tours operate all day so we hired a taxi to take us to Guri Dam. Like our last taxi ride we tied the kayaks on the roof of the old beat up taxi, loaded the trunk with gear and headed for the dam. I was determined to run the lower part of the river below the dam even if I had to portage most of it. We planned to see the dam and then paddle on to the Orinoco.

About 1 hour out of Upata the old blue sedan we were riding in squeaked to a stop in front of a guard station with gates closed and armed guard out front. The guards just shook their heads at us. We learned it was prohibited to go in with the kayaks. There is some kind of paranoia about kayaking the river. The Canadians had died and now it was against the law. It all seems somewhat out of proportion. They would let us go in only if we left the kayaks outside the gate. The taxi driver went in and talked with them a while. After ten minutes he and the guards came back out. The guard said, "Okay, you can take the kayaks with you but they better come back out with you". The taxi driver may have had to sign his life away

guaranteeing that he wouldn't let us get in the river. He was a young kid with what seemed like the personality of a door mat. But of course we couldn't even talk to him so we can't really blame him. And he did get us in with our boats.

Guri Dam produces more hydroelectric power than any dam in the world with the capacity to produce 10,000 mega watts of electricity. Only the Itaipu Dam in Brazil has greater potential but it has never produce at its full capacity of 12,600 MW. The reservoir behind the Guri is the 8th biggest man made lake in the world. When it is full it holds an estimated two and a half million acre feet of water. The Caroni below the Guri has one dam in operation with 3 others under construction. When they are all on line this 50 mile stretch of river will produce 17,254 MW of power, almost 3 times that of Grand Coulee Dam. The more sobering side of the story is there are plans for all the major falls and rapids of the Caroni to eventually be dammed. Eutobarima, Arepichi, Auraima and Tayucay are all being calculated into Venezuela's potential power production plans. If plans go ahead many of the places and things we have seen will be gone for ever.

They have a clean and simple tour at the dam, with a video and bus ride that takes you around the dam. Fortunately our tour guide spoke English so we got some ideas on how to get flow information for the Caroni and Apongauo.

I couldn't see any way we were going to get on the river and with all the dams down river it seemed like it would be certain we would be caught down river anyway so after the tour we headed back to Upata. We had discussed going on to Puerto Adaz but we had no money. It was 15,000 B's (\$30) for the ride to the dam and it would be another 15,000 to go to Puerto Adaz. We had a grand total of 25,000 B's. The taxi driver wanted to take us to Puerto Adaz. He stopped at the junction to give us one more chance to change our minds. After some negotiating we gave him 20,000 B's and a well used Leatherman knife. We were off to Puerto Adaz.

Puerto Adaz is a big city with freeways, skyscrapers and millions of people. We asked the driver to take us to the river and after a few failed attempts we found a park with river access. We pulled the boats off the car roof and the gear out of the trunk and the driver rattled off. Immediately a man in a uniform, carrying a large gun, strolled up. He asked what we were doing and of course, what else could we say, "kayaking down the river". "Oh, no", he said solemnly, "you can't do that, it's PROHIBITED." I'm starting to like the word dangerous more and more. At least I get to make up my own mind with dangerous, Prohibited sounds so final. We talked with him as best we could in our broken Spanish for a while. We told him what we were doing and how far we had come. I guess he must have understood some of it. He finally decided if we just got out of there quick he would look the other way. We dragged the boats to the river and vamos'ed.

If it was prohibited to kayak on the river we were pretty obvious paddling our red and blue boats but there wasn't much we could do about it so we paddle on. I heard a motor boat coming up from behind. Did I dare look? I did and it was, National Guard! They stopped 20 meters away and one of them yelled something. I cupped my ear with my hand like I was trying to hear him. He gave hand signals to put our life jackets on. They were strapped to the decks of our kayaks. We had them on in a flash. They motored on and we sighed a great sigh of relief.

It took a little over an hour to get to the confluence with the Orinoco. We paddled into the muddy, white waters of the Orinoco that marked the end of the Caroni and our journey. This was it; we had come to the end. The Orinoco was big, windy and wavy. We sailed across the mouth of the Caroni and took pictures of the waters mixing. We pulled the boats up onto a sand beach and dances around for a few minutes and took a picture of the end of our journey.

We had come to the end but we weren't done. We climbed back into our kayaks and paddled back up the Caroni a mile or so to the island we are now camped on. We are sitting on our island in the middle of the river looking across at the lights of the city. High rise buildings make up the skyline. Down river a huge ship, the Paragon, is docked and waiting to be loaded at the steel mill. We are out of the wilderness yet we are sitting in the sand, sleeping in the tent, washing in the river and cooking beans and rice for dinner on our little camp stove. It feels more like home than the hotel across the river would.

After two days of cars, highways and hotels, it feels good to be back on the river. I feel like I belong on the river. We were told that the Guri Dam was releasing 250,000 cfs. That is a lot of water. The river is a kilometer or more across here with a lot of current. On the east bank of the river is the city of San Félix, on the west is Puerto Adaz, together they make up the area called Ciudad Guayana. It is a huge city and we are in the middle of it. Several large bridges crossed the river with hundreds of cars zooming by every minute, tall buildings poke into the sky on both banks, hotels and marinas overlook the water, speedboats speed and tugboats tug, the sound of rock n' roll music floats across the water. It is the day before Easter and a holiday for everyone. Thousands of people jammed the beaches along the river as we paddled by today. All this civilization is a bit overwhelming. I have no desire to go ashore. Do any of these people know what lies up river? I doubt anyone even cares.

We have a few more things to do before we are done. To travel on land with these boats will be tough. It is our dream to sell the kayaks. I would like to get \$600 for them both with skirts and paddles included. Maybe we will be lucky. We need to figure out where we are going from here and how we are going to get there. We have no money right now so it would really help to sell the boats.

Well, we did it. The journey was quite a bit different than I pictured in my head. This was a strange ending. But it worked. The unknown I guess can only be predicted mildly accurate. The amazing part is that neither of us has been sick or hurt. There was much potential for both. I believe we had many people praying for us. Tonight is another beautiful evening with a light breeze. We are enjoying a candle light dinner. More unknown is still in store for us. How to sell the boats? Where to travel from here?

Mar. 30, Day 37,

SELLING THE BOATS

If all goes as planned this will be our last night to live on the shore of the Caroni. It is sad and exciting in the same breath. The river has been very good to us. Right now we are provided with another breathtaking evening. I could stare all night at the lights glittering against the ripple of the current. We are very lucky people to have learned how not to be afraid of life. In order to live we must take risks. Each day I learn a little more how to let go and worry a little less than the day before. My goal is to worry less about the things I can't change and to work hard at accepting or changing the things I can. I do believe Ken and I were meant to be together. The two of us together can accomplish much more than one alone. I feel lucky to have a man so willing to learn and grow with me. Ken doesn't seem like he has anything to prove. He is who he is and that's a good thing. Our lives

together certainly aren't dull. We have a goal to keep working on speaking Spanish. After we have kids it would be good to do an exchange in a Spanish speaking culture to learn and have the kids learn early.

Mar. 31, Day 38, WE EAGERLY AWAIT THE SALE OF OUR BOATS

Yesterday morning, Easter Morning, we were sitting on our island in the middle of the Caroni having breakfast and making plans for selling the kayaks. We would go to the beaches, where ever we could find people that look like they might be able to afford such things and offer to sell them. It somehow seemed like a long shot but what else could we do. As we were finishing up breakfast a motorboat pulled up and two men got out. They poked around and finally came over to say good morning. One of them spoke a little English and the other was willing to help us with our Spanish so we talked awhile. They live in Puerto Adaz, the one man said he could see the island from his house but in 15 years he had never been to the island. This morning on their way out fishing they decided to stop and see what was there. We asked if they knew of anyone who might be interested in buying a couple kayaks. They said they would try to think of someone who might buy them. They would stop back by the island after fishing or we could meet them at the Marina Club where they keep their fishing boat.

Not being very good at just sitting we paddled around and ended up at the Marina. It was a place for rich Venezuelans, the kind of place we might be able to sell the boats. We found the boat that belonged to our fisherman friends but we couldn't find them, so we waited... and waited and waited. We tried to find other people at the marina who want to by them. We made little "SE VENDE" signs and put them on the kayaks but with no luck. It was around 5:30 in the afternoon only half an hour before dark and we still had to paddle back out to our island. We would have to leave soon to get there before it was totally dark. It looked like selling the boats was now unlikely. Then we saw them, the fisherman showed up with incredible news. They would buy the kayaks themselves! We didn't hesitate; we started pulling everything out of the kayaks! Jen's was unloaded in less than a minute. But then they explained it was Sunday and they couldn't come up with that much money until tomorrow when the banks opened. We would have to wait until morning to sell them. We had to load everything back in the kayaks and head out onto the dark river.

It was an anxious night on the island. We spent a lot of time that evening debating whether they would really show up with the money or not. We had already decided that if we sold the boats we would go to Puerta La Cruz, a beach town on the Caribbean, and have a real vacation. But what if they didn't show? How many days could we stay on the island while trying to sell this stuff? We were up at 6:00 AM loaded and on our way across the river by 7:00. Here we sit eagerly and anxiously awaiting their arrival.

1:00 PM IT HAPPENED!!!!

One of the guys showed up with 282,000 B's (\$600.00). We've sold the kayaks! He took us to the Hydroelectric office to get flow information and then to the bus station. He was very helpful at both places. Now we are on the bus to Puerta La Cruz and the beaches.

We were on the river for 38 days, 8 days longer than my original estimate, but how was I to

know we would spend 8 days covering 8 miles on the Rio Aponguau. With the 5 days we spent climbing Roraima Tepui we followed the river for 43 day. I had planned to spend more time exploring side rivers and climbing tepuis but we seemed to have our hands full just getting down the river. I'm sure we will tell everyone we meet about this trip for a long time to come but I don't think anyone can really know what it was really all about. It has been a truly great adventure.

THE END

Epilog

We were so happy to sell the boats. We had money and the time to play. We spent a few days in Puerto La Cruz collecting sea shells, shopping for gifts and eating good food. We had been in Venezuela for 50 days without any sickness. Then in Puerto La Cruz Jen came down with the runs and was very sick. Fortunately it didn't last to longs. We caught a bus back to Caracas and booked a flight to the Los Roques Archipelago, a group of island 100 miles out in the Caribbean. We spent 2 days enjoying the blue, blue water, white sand beaches, colorful fishing boats and quaint little houses painted bright colors. It's what travel posters are made of but I'm not a very good tourist. I was bored and ready to go home. We bumped our flight up a day or two only to find ourselves stuck in the Miami airport for two days. Jen's brother, Eric, works for TWA and gave us comp tickets to get home from Miami. But we were flying standby and the Miami airport was maxed out. At least we had time to go and find the bag of things we had left in the bushes outside the airport two months earlier. We finally got a flight out and flew to Jen's Mom's house in Sonoma, California. I returned home after a few days there but Jen stayed on for another week. She didn't want to come home until it warmed up. It was 9 degrees Fahrenheit the night I got back to Park City the middle of April.

It was a trip of a life time, a honey moon to remember. I would do it again tomorrow but tomorrow I may think up something even better.