

Wednesday, September 18 – Amazonia Lodge to Manu Wildlife Center Lodge by boat

Well, it was raining when we went to bed last night and it is still raining this morning. But that's fine with us. It cooled things down and by the time we went to bed it was no longer a stormy downpour, just a hard steady rain. Good for sleeping and we did get a good and comfortable night's sleep. We plan to leave before 8:00 am for a 7½ hour trip on the Upper Madre de Dios to Manu Wildlife Center Lodge.

After a quick breakfast the first thing we do is put on all the clothes we can. It has cooled down from yesterday morning's sweltering heat, and will be colder still on the river, to say nothing about the rain which continues to fall at a steady pace. Ann completely forgets her down jacket which would have been a life saver, but she does put on her trusty TSE



cashmere sweater, a long sleeved shirt that has now been worn 4 days, a poncho, long pants, wool sox, and her visor with the magic headband. The boat is 25 feet long with five seats, exactly the right number for us and plenty of room for our luggage. It has a roof to help keep the sun off us, but today that certainly will NOT be necessary. We have the same no name boat, and the same boatman, Ernesto "Boa" and his assistant Raoul. Raoul is a Machiguena Indian from the Yomibato community that lives within the park. Their boat will be our means of transportation (except for short, frequent jungle jaunts) until after we leave Manu.



When we are ready to board our boat, we notice a sign at the docking area that we missed when we arrived the day before yesterday. "No Guns, No Dogs, No Fishing"!

And now we're on our way. There is another boat that has just now brought in more lodge guests.



Needless to say, with all the rain, the river is up and running much faster than yesterday. Maybe that's good. We are making most of our trip downstream on the Madre de Dios, then the last 10 miles upstream on the Manu River.



There are big brush-piles in the river and along the bank from prior rains. Most of them ranging from “house-sized” to the size of small industrial buildings. They consist of huge branches and entire trees. BIG! But we also see a few “fresh kills”; entire trees that

had been growing along the river pulled down by bank erosion during the last rainy season five to six months ago. What are harder to see, and more dangerous because there is less time to react, are the smaller trees and branches at, or just below, the surface.

While it rains we just hunker down under our tarps. This is how it is and how it is going to be. A rainy cold front in the Peruvian jungle, go figure. And we're glad we piled on the clothing this morning, we need it. We do see some amazing birds when Doris points them out and identifies them. We peek out of our cocoons for a quick look.

But there are pauses in the rain too, and eventually it stops altogether. We're finally able to strip off the tarps and ponchos and other rain gear; it's not as cold now. Doris warns us to enjoy the comfortable temperature now. Today was today, but tomorrow it will be hot again. We all made sure not to drink more than one cup of anything at breakfast; this is not a trip where you can arbitrarily decide on a bathroom stop and pull over to the bank. We make it until 12:15, then do the bathroom stop at the first reasonable spot we come across. We eat our box lunches while drifting downriver.

While we are going downriver and the current adds speed, the river is also more treacherous. Boa must criss-cross it often, avoiding the fallen and floating trees and brush piles, and various other “bad spots” known only to him.

It seems like the high water will slow our trip, not speed it up, as Boa takes great care to avoid trouble. We are so far “out there” already, and the river is so treacherous, that “trouble” would very likely be fatal. Thank you for being careful, Boa!



Sometimes we pass other long, narrow boats like ours. Finally we turn up the Manu River. This time it's upstream, but the river is so much more “calm” than the Madre de Dios that we make better time for the last 10 miles. Soon we are at the docking area, which we can't see until we are right on top of it. Nothing but a couple of boards along the bank, and some primitive steps carved into the soil of the bank.



We arrive at the Manu Wildlife Lodge about 4:30 pm, somewhat later than planned. In the evening it's candles and our headlamps. Everything here must be brought in from Cusco or Puerto Maldonado and the cost is sky high. So, we are having the most expensive load of wash ever done now that we have the opportunity. It's about \$50, but there is no other way to get things clean and dry. And we are running low. We do have quick-dry shirts but most of our “basic” clothing is just normal stuff. Ann washes out underwear, but getting them to dry is a challenge and there is no “hair dryer” to move the drying along as there was in Cusco. And the electrical system doesn't extend into the cabins. There is electricity only in the main lodge building, and that for only two hours in the morning and in the evening, In fact, we

We think many of the cabins are full. It will be fun to be surrounded by others this evening, and a full bar to boot. Ann has finished the last of her gin, so it's cervezas from now on.

We have plenty of daylight left so we do some birding around the lodge and cabanas. We see an amazing long billed wood creeper who seems to be living right above our cabin. That Doris . . . if there are birds nearby there is no sitting around.

She finally "allows" us to go to the dining room. We head to our cabins for a clean-up and shower and agree to meet at the dining room in an hour. It feels good to be clean . . . at least for a few minutes. It's hot and humid again! The food here is wonderful. It has been great at all of these jungle lodges, but this may be the best. It turns out most of the other guests are from India, a group of Jains. They are a rather esoteric religious group, who rarely travel because of their extreme dietary and other restrictions. These are folks who won't step on an ant or kill a fly, so seeing them visit the jungle is a bit bizarre. There is no drinking of alcohol in this group, but they seem to have a jolly old time taking over the kitchen and cooking, The Lodge staff prefers this since they won't need to maneuver around the Jains specialized dietary requirements. The Jains are travelling with ingredients for all the food they will eat. It would have been fun to chat with them but only a couple spoke rudimentary English, and they stay together in the dining room.

We are early to bed as it is up at 4:15 tomorrow to see the parrots and macaws at a clay lick (this is a "lick" not a "lek" as with the Cock-of-the-Rock). The Macaws and Parrots eat clay to help their digestive systems neutralize the poisons in so many of the fruits they eat. In some seasons of the year the only food available to them contains various poisons, so the clay is critical. Doris promises many birds tomorrow.