

Sunday, September 22 – Traveling and MORE traveling !

We are up at 4:00 am and on the river before 5:00. It looks to be a much nicer day than our trip here, and we're eating our picnic breakfast in our seats at 6. We head downriver and it is smooth cruising. There is a thin cloud cover through which a lovely sunrise greets us.



There are birds, but we have already seen many of them by now. We did see a whole row of Sand-colored Nighthawks roosting on a log in the river, probably about 20 of them. It was a good sighting except we were unable to see them through Doris's scope. And, our binoculars were buried under our clothing. With the river moving us along in addition to the motor we only have a brief look before we're past them. We see six Jabiru storks overhead. We saw one thorough the scope earlier in the trip. They are big, beautiful birds.



The current is reasonably fast and the river is "hungry". We see bigger and bigger brushpiles, some of them consisting of accumulations of entire trees, and pass places where the bank is being eroded by the river. We see trees freshly fallen into the river, perhaps within the last couple of days.

This is the result of a relatively minor rain and we wonder what it looks like after days and days of heavy rain during the rainy season. Seems to us it would be terrifying to be out on the flooded river in a boat. Yet for the people here the river is the only road, they have no choice.



We are heading for the town of Colorado located where the Rio Colorado enters the Rio Madre de Dios. Colorado is a gold mining town that has “sprung up” in response to the gold boom here. Really just a collection of shacks; it has the look of a place that was built rapidly and sloppily. And so tiny it’s not even on the map. But it’s so nasty that Doris suggests we stop 15 minutes upriver of town and get out of the boat to handle the “call of nature”.



As soon as we’re out of the Manu preserve we can see from the boat where whole gravel shores of the river have been dug and sifted and left destroyed by the wildcat miners. There are even a few similar spots inside the preserve, just not as extensive . . . yet.

This is the typical motor set-up on the boats here. Ours has a conventional outboard, but it is an exception. The propellers of most boats are at the end of an 8-10 foot long shaft and the motor swivels up and down as the boat and propeller run over the sunken logs and brush that fill much of the river.



When we get to Colorado we’re glad we made our restroom stop along the river. The people here are mostly impoverished wildcat miners and their families, who are part of the massive destruction of the Madre de Dios river basin. There are at least 750,000 of them in Peru’s upper Amazon basin in various towns and settlements like Colorado. We can certainly feel for the miners and their families. They are incredibly poor and must make a living somehow, but the rain forest destruction they’re a part of is horrible as well. Sadly, it’s probably only a matter of time until . . . ?



And here we are in lovely Puerto Colorado. As we leave we see “no fume” . . . AND no petrol!



There is a dirt road connecting Colorado with the Inambari River. We take taxis from Colorado (all pre-arranged and waiting for us) to Rio Inambari, where the boat taxi will be waiting. As we are driving along the dirt road we see that they have replaced many of the wooden low water bridges with wooden high water ones. And the old ones, many with good planks and beams were just left in the water to rot. It seems

wasteful and a shame that nothing was done with the lumber from these old bridges.

The road is bumpy and dusty but the drivers have a schedule to keep to get us to the boat waiting for us at the Rio Inambari in time. It's a fast and rough ride. That's O.K. since there's nothing much to see except the forests' “green wall”. We are in two taxis, Ed, Doris and Ann in one and Donna and Doug in the other. Just as we approach the river, Donna and Doug's taxi has a flat tire. With the condition of the road and our speed, 200 we're surprised it didn't happen sooner.



The road is especially rough here, and as the taxi is approaching the river bed where we'll load into the boat (low water this time of year), the tire burst. Doug and Donna said that the kid driving them immediately left the taxi and ran to other taxis waiting to pick up passengers going to Colorado and brought one to take them that last 1,000 yards. Not that far, but with the luggage, a world away. And, perhaps surprisingly, no one asked for money. All of this is important as D & D have a 1:30 plane to catch at Puerto Maldonado, still two hours away.



We get loaded into our boat-taxi without incident, helped no doubt by the presence of one of the ever-present Peruvian "Perro Locos". We notice a truck being loaded with lumber further down the shore. The only place this boat-load of timber could have come from is within the Manu reserve. Doris confirms that this "timber poaching", along with the gold mining, is one of the problems with preserving the forest here.



We cross the river, only a 15-minute trip, and arrive at the mining town (they are ALL mining towns around here) of Puerto Carlos. As we near the town there are beautiful "flame trees" blooming along the river.

Waiting for us on the opposite shore of the Inambari at Puerto Carlos is a nice air conditioned; get that: “AIR CONDITIONED” van. This is the first AC we’ve encountered since we left the Lima airport almost a month ago. So we ride in “luxury” the last 2 hours.



The first 15 minutes over a dirt road and then onto the Trans-Oceanic Highway that runs from Lima to the Atlantic in Brazil. It’s in wonderful condition (relatively new) and we make good time, allowing for the moto-taxis, motor-cycles, children, dogs, fruit-vendors, and enormous speed bumps that bring traffic down to a near-halt as we pass schools, towns and the like. Remember, there are few stop signs, or traffic lights . . . speed bumps control traffic speeds all over Peru.



We pass through two sizable “towns” (if you could call them that), Alto Libertad and Labertino. They are much bigger than Colorado was but are similarly constructed of scrap limber, sheets of tin and plastic sheets.



We also pass vast areas of former rain forest that have been cleared for cattle grazing or for large industrialized mining operations. Everything we've seen since leaving the Manu preserve is devastated. Depressing!



What becomes so clear is that we have spent our eight days in the Peruvian jungle as it exists only in storybooks . . . or national preserves. The Manu preserve is huge, but not nearly as large as the wholesale destruction epidemic in the rest of the Peruvian Amazon. Whether its miles laid waste by the gold mining or cut and burn of jungle growth to create a new cow pasture or plant papaya trees, it is going fast. The towns we pass through are squalid and we can only imagine what it is like when the rains come.

Ann looked up a little bit of information about this gold mining boom in Peru and it's heartbreaking. If you Google "gold mining Madre de Dios Peru" you will get lots of information on this issue and none of it is pretty.



But all's well that ends well, We make it to the airport with time to spare, a lot for us, very little for Donna and Doug. Doris is an excellent organizer and all the players along the way and for this entire 27 days have been dependable, prompt, patient and courteous.



We have a cold beer (Limonada for Ed) with Doris in the tiny airport café and eat our last picnic lunch together packed by the Lodge. But poor Donna and Doug need to sprint to catch their plane and have to forgo the food. We are able (with Doris' help) to get our flight to Lima moved forward a couple of hours figuring that it would be nicer to wait in cool Lima than in hot Puerto Maldonado.



That decision had drawbacks though; we learn when we arrive in Lima at 3:00 pm that the American Airlines check-in does not open until 7:15 pm because our flight from Lima to Miami is the ONLY daily American Airlines flight. No Admirals Club or first-class lounge here, so we kill time in the massive food court, to minimize luggage hauling and enjoy a dinner, Ed of pizza and Ann of fish creole. But it's still much more comfortable to wait here in Lima than in Puerto Maldonado.

Another drawback with our schedule is that on this return trip we have long, long layovers both here in Lima and in Miami, and "semi-long" at DFW. Thank goodness for the first class lounges and the Admirals clubs in MIA and DFW . . . but still boring, boring time-killing.

All going well so far though, except Ann's Kindle won't charge in Lima. Even though we can charge Kindles on 110 or 220, it seems that hers has developed an aversion to 220 because once we get to the Miami AA lounge, it is charging again. After we check in at American in Miami, we finally have access to a first class lounge where we are able to wash up and change into travel clothes that are clean, albeit wrinkled.

We have two long days of travel; today and a good part of tomorrow getting back to Tucson. All made longer because we are flying on air miles, and there are more limited choices than paying full fare. But we have no complaints as we are able to manage this trip all business and first class which has been a real treat, with access to the Admirals Club or at least a first class lounge. Nicer places to "hang out" as we wait for our flights than the main terminal. And Ed is
204 in love with the new American "lie-flat" seat adjustments in business class.