

Peacocks in the Jungle By Steve Rewick

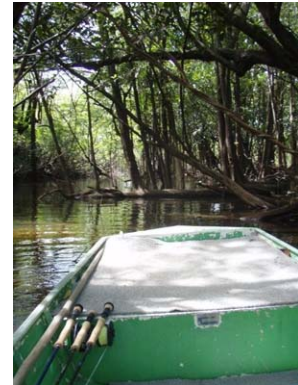


The plans for our fishing trip germinated near the shuffleboard table in a local pub. Over quite a few beers it was agreed that we would seek out an exotic fishing spot that had no prior knowledge of our group, that was warm and inviting (because we are all tired of snowy, cold Central Oregon in the dead of winter). Then the nachos came and all was forgotten for a few weeks.

Same spot, same shuffleboard table, and more beers a few weeks later and we were back at it. With visions of stimulus dollars in our pockets, we chose one of the most remote and exciting spots in the world. Not the Bahamas. Not Christmas Island or even the Seychelles. We were going to the Amazon Basin and northern Brazil. In our visions, Peacock Bass grew bigger and bigger. Loren overcame his nightmares of little fish swimming up not-to-be-mentioned orifices; Joe (above left) wondered about the availability of cigars; Dan was anxious to unleash his 500 mm lens; I was excited about trying out new flies for a new fish in a new area.

Our good friend at Flyfishing Adventures, Don Muelrath worked his magic and landed us 4 spots on the Agua Boa River during prime time in late February. With stimulus checks burning holes in our pockets, we plunked our money down.

The months leading up to the trip involved more beers, more nachos, \$500 worth of injections and medications, more beers, more worries about those darn little fish, and we were almost ready.



The day of the trip arrived. One word of advice, don't check your baggage through to Brazil if you plan an overnight in Miami. And better yet, don't leave your Miami to Manaus ticket in the bag you checked through. If you do, plan on a lot of time and a lot of money to get you out of that mess.

Manaus, Brazil is a fast growing city of 2 million people. As a tax-free zone where manufacturing is king, it attracts lots of workers from the outlying areas, just like every big city in the world. We were met at the airport by Ray Santos, the lodge representative and a master of organization and efficiency. He brought us and our gear to the Tropical Hotel in a masterly fashion. For dinner we took a hair-raising, wild ass



taxi ride to the famous restaurant, Bufãlo, an all-you-can-eat-meat-on-a-skewer-carved-at-the-table extravaganza. Not being able to communicate, we fell on their mercy. We had every cut of beef, pork and chicken you can imagine, and some you can't. It was plentiful, copious and came at a record setting pace. In about 5 minutes we had all devoured about 5 pounds of meat and didn't know what had hit us.



As we were digesting, the Chinese Ambassador to Brazil and his entourage descended on the restaurant to much fanfare. We decided to leave and noticed the salad bar on the way out.

Next day we were off to the lodge. Ray Santos was right on time. The airplane to the lodge was a twin engine job seating about 14 people. Boy were we anxious to get going. We were all loaded up in cramped quarters. Left engine – ignition. Right engine – sputtered a few times and then threw in the towel. Off we get for what we thought was a plane replacement. They towed our original plane a long way off, but still visible. What we saw was about an hours' worth of ball peen hammer work, numerous rolls of duct tape, and a few yards of wire applied. After we went through security again, we were reloaded onto the original plane and off we went. We could tell that the repair was successful because the pilot felt comfortable enough to read the newspaper for the duration of our flight.



The lodge had its own runway. Champagne and staff welcomed us, and we had another breakfast during orientation. Our cabins were more than comfortable with 2 queen sized beds, fans and air conditioning, which worked the whole time.

Rigged up and ready to go – 2 fishermen to an 18 ft aluminum john boat with an 80 horse outboard, which worked great (most of the time). The river was high for this time of year, but this didn't present any problems. The first day we hacked our way through the jungle, lifting and pulling the boat into a beautiful lagoon. All fishing was toward structure and eventually we were able to get our casts where they needed to be without hanging up too often.



The lodge has a fly shop, but be sure to bring your own. We had clousers, half & halves, deceivers, and some truly colorful ones up to 12 inches long, all tied of 2/0 and 4/0 hooks. Unfortunately, of the several hundred flies we had, only about 4 worked, small white little jobbies with some flash. Loren

(above left) brought a vice, but no one had the energy at the end of the day to tie.

Plenty of fun was had with floating lines and poppers, but more fish were caught on flies fished at the end of a 200 grain sink tip. Bring some extra sink tips, because piranha can turn a 200 grain tip into a 95 in a snap. We all settled into 8 wt rods except for Dan, who splintered a few cane rods in an attempt to bamboozle the bass. The leader is an uncomplicated affair – 6 feet of 30 or 40 pound mono.

As far as numbers go, each of us caught between 20 – 50 fish a day. Most were butterfly bass (at right) in the 4 to 6 pound range, but every day a number of double digit fish were landed, with the biggest going 18 pounds.



These fish pull, so better be sure to have plenty of hand protection, such as batting gloves, stripping gloves, lots of tape, nu-skin, Neosporin, and if you fish with a guy like Loren, a batting helmet. A Boca grip sure comes in handy.

We saw lots of exotic birds, parrots, mc caws, heron, egrets, storks, and a few monkeys to remind us of where we were, and we did have several incidents with caimans. Rex is the lodge's pet caiman. He showed up every afternoon as the boats returned with the hope that either someone brought him a fish or that some dude would fall out of the boat while docking.

O.K., I'll admit it. I did fall out of the boat while fishing on the bow of the john boat. I don't really know what happened, but I do know I hit the water face first either before or after breaking my rod.

If you made it past Rex, you were met by Mari and John. Mari had the cocktails and John had the appetizers. Dinner as well as breakfast was a buffet. The food was plentiful and delicious. Of course dinner included a fresh dessert, and I noticed that Loren struggled with seconds.

I'm sure we all came away with different memories. Mine include:

- A Rex-like caiman eating my peacock, and then taking a leisurely swim to the far bank. I had him only for a minute or so until he tired of the game.
- A huge bass eating my smaller bass. I had him on for a short time until he spit it back at me. Nothing like seeing a big bucket mouth swallowing what you think is a pretty nice fish. I don't think the fish was too anxious to be released.



The return home was uneventful but tiring. We all agreed that re-entry into the world as we know it was not all that enjoyable. I also knew the jungle telegraph (or cell phone) was working its magic, because everyone I saw for the week following was interested in my face plant in the Agua Boa.

The line cuts have healed, Dan is having a new 15 wt bamboo rod built, Joe is golfing in Argentina (he doesn't need flies but I bet he's bumming a few golf balls), Loren has finally removed the tape he used to protect himself from those darn little fish, and I am trying to improve my balance for the next trip.

See you at the tavern.



Steve

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