

Jungle Tramp

By W. W. Butcher

I GUESS it's high time for this ole jungle tramp to begin thinking about his New Year resolutions, and just for a starter—to be sure he is getting off on the right foot—he is heading his list with a subscription to *Sooner Magazine*. He admits that he should have done this very thing a long time ago, but he begs you to remember that there is such a six-letter word as *manaña*, and it would hardly do for him to slight its reputation down here 'neath the Southern Cross, where it no doubt originated.

Perhaps his Sooner friends would like to know how he spent Christmas in this foreign land where Christmas trees, at least where he is located, are just a memory. You see it's just a shade warm down here in this delta for one of those trees and the jolly ole fellow with the long white beard. However, it didn't keep two drillers, "Shorty" Marrett, Tom Booker, and a geologist (yours truly) from looking for those two.

It entered our minds that perhaps those two would be more likely to be found in higher country than this low delta region, and acting accordingly we packed provisions for a two or three day boat trip into that famous and little known region—the Guayana Highlands.

Our wildcat camp, being just north of the mighty Rio Orinoco, made it possible for us to make a quick trip into that region. Five hours from our camp found us in the town of Barrancas, on the Orinoco, seeking a pilot to guide us through those treacherous stretches of water that lay ahead of us and the town of San Felix. We weren't long in finding one, and each of us admitted feeling much better when he took over the wheel as we had set our minds on proceeding ahead even though we could not find an available pilot.

Our *capitan* told us in his best Spanish that it would be necessary for us to stop at Los Castillos for permission to proceed on up the river. At first we presumed that he had some friends there with whom he wished to visit, but further questioning made us withdraw that conclusion for he informed us that the place was fortified and would fire on any ship that attempted to slip by without stopping; the presumption being that such a ship would be carrying contraband or smuggled goods. We soon verified the truth of this statement for we found Los Castillos to consist of two picturesque forts and a few mud houses.

These forts, occupying two granite knobs, were built in 1591 and established the first European settlement in the Guayana Highlands. The lower of the two



Above is W. W. Butcher, '37geol, who sent the accompanying article from Venezuela. He is shown with his pet guacamaya, and a string of caribes, a small but dangerous fish found in jungle waters. The fallen tree in the background is covered with orchids, and the rope acts as anchor for the houseboat where the oil crew lives. The walk runs to their derrick.

forts was one that handed Sir Walter Raleigh his defeat at the hands of the Spaniards. A Trinidadian further informed us that Simon Bolivar, the Washington of South America, captured these two forts from the Spaniards. A detachment of soldiers now occupy this lower fort, and with their rifles and two small cannon guard the river against smugglers. The officer in charge looked over our credentials and issued another paper that entitled us to proceed on to San Felix.

Arriving in San Felix at night we threw out anchor and waited for daybreak. Dawn found us up and cooking a breakfast on board in preparation for an early start. As our boat was too large for safe passage up the Caroni River we had to scout around for a small launch and someone to guide us as none of our crew or the Barrancas pilot knew the waters of the Caroni. We didn't lose much time locating a small motor launch and the owner said we would pick up a native guide at the mouth of the Caroni.

The Caroni River rises on the north flank of Serra Pacarima, a small mountain range, by the Brazilian frontier and

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thence flows to the north for several hundred kilometers before entering the Orinoco River between San Felix and Isla Fajaro. It is famous for its diamonds and gold, but few white men have penetrated far up its course. A Venezuelan doctor had informed the ole jungle tramp about a trip that he had made to its waterfalls, and his vivid description of their beauty furnished the inspiration for the Christmas trip, that is, other than the desire to visit new and little known territory.

A wave of anticipation touched us as we approached the mouth of the Caroni for it was wide and flowing a stream of black water into the muddy brown waters of the Orinoco. A native hut, surrounded by mango trees, was discovered on the left bank of this river. Our launch swung into the shore and a brown skinned boy came down to meet us. A small amount of haranguing was all that was necessary to persuade him to accompany us, that is, all except a few bolivars on the side.

At first the river appeared easy to navigate, but as we proceeded farther inland we observed huge rocks barely inundated. A dense jungle reached to the water's edge and many tropical birds not common to our section were seen. Occasionally a dug-out canoe with an Indian and his fishing equipment was encountered. The equipment consisted of trot-line, bow, and steel tipped arrow; the arrow being tied to the shaft by means of a cord thus when the arrow point enters the fish it disengages and permits the shaft to rise horizontally to the surface of the water.

The first indication of a waterfall came in the form of large patches of whitish foam which offered quite a contrast to the black water of the Caroni. The river also became swifter and it was not long before we sighted the falls ahead of us. The river made almost a right angle bend at that point and we put into shore as near to the falls as it was safe to approach. We then had to make a steep climb up the bluff that hid the falls from our view. However, this was an easy task and we were soon gazing at the falls in all of their splendor. I hardly know how to describe them other than to say they were quite awe inspiring.

The spirit of adventure made us eager to see what lay ahead of us upstream, and as we progressed up its course huge cataracts met our view.

The trip back was quite pleasant as the trade winds fanned our faces and spray from the waves washed our deck. At Los Castillos we picked up a couple of the guards that were down with the fever and took them to Barrancas for medical treatment. Shorty gave the kids at Los Castillos a treat in the form of some candied cookies that we had taken from our commissary supply. Eleven o'clock found us back safe and sound with pleasant memories of a Christmas spent in the land of mañana; a Christmas long to be remembered.

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