

Dear Club:

I am basically a coward at heart. Watching nature shows (in the comfort and safety of my living room) of expeditions exploring jungles makes me break out in a cold sweat. Still I am fascinated by most anything having to do with Latin America. So enclosed is a check for \$30 to enroll me in a regular Membership in the Club.

Nervously yours,
John A. Mathews

Dear Club:

A couple of days ago I sent you a letter, but after reading Loren McIntyre's excellent story on the source of the Amazon, I feel the need of submitting this letter, which perhaps might clarify some of the dark points about which should be considered the real source of a river.

Loren McIntyre's article on the centuries-old quest for the source of the Amazon is undoubtedly the result of extraordinary research work, brilliantly written, clear and convincing.

Let me, however, disagree on one fundamental point of the general assumption that the farthestmost well of a stream has to be considered its origin.

I have discussed the question with friend Kevin Healey while he was drawing his latest South American map, and after arguing with him—and my own conscience—I arrived at quite a different conclusion: the real source of any river system is not the remotest spring, but the highest well above sea level regardless its distance from, or to, the mouth.

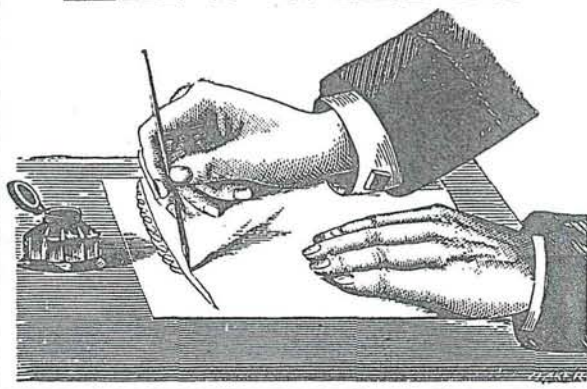
To understand my claim and my thesis, consider this simplified example: a basin consists of two tributaries, for the case Río Negro and Río Blanco; their liquids join at a certain point forming the Río Grande.

Río Negro is the longer of both, though the well of the shorter Río Blanco is located at a higher altitude.

If a dam is to be built at any point along the Río Grande, an artificial lake would start to form and its level will rise until covering the far away Río Negro source; the only water still flowing and feeding the lake will, naturally, be that of the Río Blanco.

This is by no means an extremely hypo-

LETTERS



thetical thought. Consider that one day the ocean level might rise because of the melting of the Antarctica ice shield: in this case the last feeders still flowing would ultimately be those originating in the highest springs.

Federico Kirbus

Dear Club:

In reply to Doug Hyde's letter in Number 28: The Editor notes that "Healey's South Sheet" shows a certain boundary for the Viceroyalty of La Plata. This has to be the original sheet map *¿verdad?* Do you still have copies of that? Please sell them and be done with it. This map is now out-of-print and will remain so because it's unacceptably out-of-date. If I had my way, all copies would be pulped! By the way, in the editor's note to the letter of Krzysztof Obidzinski in Number 29, "Healey's North Sheet" is mentioned: again, I must assume it refers to the original two-sheeter rather than the newer North-west sheet. The Perimetral Norte is not shown as seasonal on that but as "U.C."—under construction. However, this again reflects the age of the map and should be ignored.

The current extent of this road is shown correctly on the NW and NE sheets and on the "Amazon Basin" map (which, incidentally, is more up-to-date). The Perimetral Norte leaves the Manaus-Boa Vista "highway" just north of Caracarai and runs about 200 km west to Catrimani Mission, then a further similar distance along the boundary of the Yanomami Reserve to the Río Demimi where it ends. I spoke to a scientist who had recently been on this sector; the

road does exist and is in fair condition (i.e., typical penetration standard seasonally affected by the wet season) as far as the Mission. The whole Perimetral was another grandiose road-building project of the seventies, designed to open up northern Amazonia to colonists and to encourage the construction of several new dams and mineral site exploitation. The Transamazonica Highway wasn't the big or easy success that was expected; diminishing budgets, rises in oil prices and agitation for the establishment of Indian protected areas in northern Roraima and Amazonas combined to stifle the continuation of

the Perimetral. It was planned to run west to Sao Gabriel de Cachoeira and Icana on the Negro, but remains stalled at the Roraima/Amazonas border.

A road has been built north from Sao Gabriel to the border town of Cucui (192 km), good for smugglers from Venezuela but not much else. They did start construction of the Perimetral extension west from Icana about ten years ago, with the hope of reaching Mitu in Colombia. About 20 km west they ran into quicksand and the whole idea was sensibly abandoned.

Heading east from the Río Branco, the Perimetral is passable (and quite heavily trafficked) to Novo Paraíso, a bustling truck stop where the road to Manaus turns off south. It then runs on east about 100 km to Sao Joao da Baliza, and beyond—in lousy condition—to Uberlândia. A track continues on, stopping, significantly, at the Roraima/Amazonas state border. The road east to Amapa is only a twinkle in bureaucrats' eyes! At the eastern end of this mighty scheme, a paved section runs NW from Macapa 200 km to the large mining area at Serra do Navio/Icomiland. It presses on west into the forest past Terezinha as little more than a muddy track for about 130 km and gives up before it reaches the Río Jari!

There is a dirt road which runs north from the aluminum mining complexes around Porto Trombetas/Porteira, paralleling the Río Trombetas to a point where the Perimetral Norte should join it (at least on paper). There are some quite heavy vehicles using this road; where they go I haven't been

able to find out! One thing's for sure: the grand sweep of the full Perimetral Norte Highway is nothing more than a hopeful line on planning maps in Brasilia. It was shown boldly and optimistically on Brazilian maps for years (and still is on some, of course), but more recently has been labeled "Planejada" (planned) on, for example, this year's Quatro Rodas road map. It's unlikely that it will ever be completed. There are tracks, naturally, throughout this region. It may even be possible to motorcycle the Perimetral in season using the forest trails and surveyor's picadas. But no conventional 4-wheeled vehicle can as yet drive from Macapa to Mitu, and perhaps none ever will.

Regarding Honduras' "Ciudad Blanca": well, it's marked on my Central America map (ITM #156), but with a question mark beside it (grid square H4). This is roughly the accepted location by the Honduran government, but, as has been said, no one has actually reached it on the ground yet. Airline pilots have made sightings. I'll be doing more research when I begin compiling our

Honduras map probably next year, so keep me posted if any members reach it or can locate it accurately on a map. *Gracias*. I may also invest in a copy of *Henry's Hint\$ on Honduras* when the time comes nearer. No doubt I'll get a copy of *Honduras Guide* (presumably by Glassman) from Vancouver when it's published. This will join their series of guides to Belize and Guatemala. Incidentally, there are quite a few recent new guides appearing for Belize, Guatemala and the Yucatan; a pity that the Club doesn't review Central American guides.

Hasta despues,

Kevin Healey

Dear Club:

I have initiated contact with the Botanical Preservation Corps in Sebastopol, CA, in case they might need a contact in Colombia. You might need such a contact as well, so I would be most interested in your sending me some information on exactly what sort of services you are providing, who your members are, and what sorts of services your

South American offices need to provide.


With 13 years in Cartagena, fluent Spanish, and as a person well integrated into the local scene, I might be able to be of some use to your organization.

Cartagena could be a fabulous jumping off place for people on their way south, and certainly a sort of "recuperation center" for people coming back. It is located on the Caribbean coast and has great sailing, diving, and windsurfing. More important, from a cultural point of view, is the Old City, a walled Spanish colonial city founded in 1533, and a cornerstone of the Spanish Empire in the New World. It has been declared a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO of the United Nations.

In and around Cartagena it is possible to dive on centuries-old Spanish shipwrecks with cannon and other elements still intact. There is also the possibility to arrange extended dive trips even as far away as the San Blas Islands on the southern coast of Caribbean Panama.

Enough for now,

Lee Miles



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