

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

GSH-18: Glimpses of Brazil

Apartado 8-3870
San Jose, Costa Rica
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Mr. Peter B. Martin
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
Wheelock House
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755

Dear Peter:

Lynne and I took advantage of an excursion fare to Brazil to include São Luís, Brasilia, and Rio de Janeiro on our planned trip to Jari, via Belém. We offer this potpourri of impressions of Brazil from our 16 day trip. Newsletters addressing specific topics will follow. We had been trying for several months to obtain permission for a return visit to Jari (that will be reported separately), but until I called the New York office of National Bulk Carriers with a new contact, I was beginning to wonder if anyone I knew was still working at Jari.

Mike Thomas, a close friend and commercial flower grower in Costa Rica who wanted to accompany us on our 1979 visit to Jari (GSH-12) and desperately wanted to join us this time, was on vacation in the U.S. when a Jari vice-president gave permission for the visit. Though Mike would return to Costa Rica four days before our departure, he wasn't about to miss this trip to Jari. I made arrangements with my travel agent to expedite Mike's airline ticket and Brazilian visa.

We knew we were off to a promising start when we saw Don Pepe (José Figueres, thrice ex-president of Costa Rica), current second vice-president and minister of the economy, José Miguel Alfaro, and the executive president of the national oil refinery (RECOPE) José Antonio Lara, on our San José-Caracas part of the flight. Given Costa Rica's serious economic problems, some wags might have considered it unattractive to fly with the minister of the economy, but having Don Pepe on board made the flight interesting. One advantage of LACSA's (Costa Rica's national airline) "All First Class" seating is that we were impressed by the lengthy conversations between Don Pepe and Vice-president Alfaro--two important politicians of different major parties.

As we disembarked in Caracas, Lynne stopped in the aisle to allow Don Pepe to go ahead, but he insisted she deplane ahead of him. Lynne responded that she would exit if Don Pepe would give her a kiss; the popular 75 year old ex-president's "beso" hardly slowed the exit.

The VARIG flight from Caracas to Belém, Brazil, brought aboard another ex-president, Carlos Andres Perez (CAP) of Venezuela. We marveled at the contrast in style and security as five obviously-armed plain-clothes men swarmed aboard the plane before CAP. Our midnight to five a.m. (red-eye special) flight demonstrated that even an ex-president can be disheveled from traveling.

Gary Hartshorn is a Forest & Man Fellow writing on man's relation with the forest resources in tropical America.

Lynne and I breezed through immigration in Belém, but Mike ran into a snag because the Brazilian consular official in San José had inadvertently entered the passport's issue date in place of the current date on Mike's visa. Belém officials insisted Mike could not enter Brazil on an expired visa. Since male officials in Latin America are more willing to listen to foreign women, Mike and I let Lynne explain that Mike's visa number sequentially followed the numbers of Gary's and Lynne's (in addition to having the same signature on all three, the same stamp, etc.), therefore the 1980 date was a mistake. After about a half hour, an official agreed that anyone could make a mistake and stamped Mike's entry permit in his passport, then smiled lamely--after all, it was not yet 6 a.m.

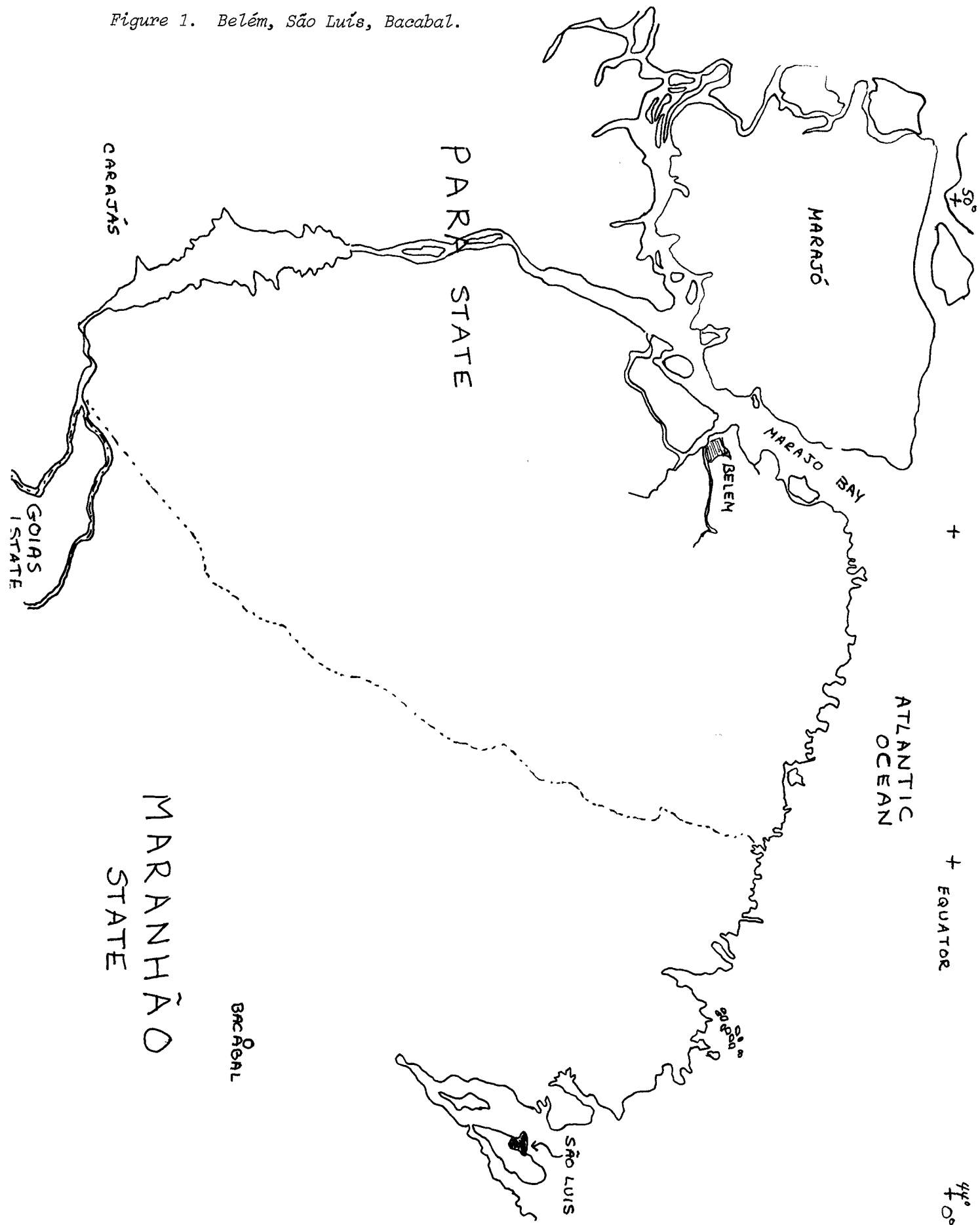
Later that morning, I was told at the local Jari office that our party of five (Lynne, Mike, Jack Ewel, Anthony Anderson and I) could go to Jari, but that local flight reservations had not yet been made for us. As part of company efforts to drastically reduce overhead, Jari had turned over part of the airline service between Belém and Monte Dourado to TABA, a private Brazilian company. The arrangement was working well until a week before our arrival, when TABA substituted a 17 passenger plane for the 48 passenger plane formerly used for the flights. After several phone calls failed to get us any closer to Monte Dourado, I decided to apply the sit-in approach, i.e. spend the afternoon at the Jari office in hopes that my presence would not permit our request to be ignored. Norma, Jari's Belém secretary in charge of logistics, was trying to convince TABA to schedule a second flight for the afternoon. While waiting, I explored alternatives such as a charter flight (\$1,500) or boat (30 hours). Five minutes before closing time, Norma received word from TABA that we were confirmed on the next morning's regular flight. We don't know and didn't ask who got bumped or how Norma arranged it, but we hope Norma realized how much we appreciated her invaluable help. So, 26 hours after arriving in Brazil, we were on our way to Monte Dourado for our second visit to Jari. (Had we not been able to make the Friday flight, we would have had to wait until Monday for the next scheduled TABA flight or take the boat.)

BELEM

Belém, capital of the state of Pará, has served as the gateway to Amazonia for almost four centuries. Located south of Marajó island (see Figure 1), Belém benefitted enormously from the turn-of-the-century rubber boom; today the major exports include Brazil nuts and jute. The city has several attractive colonial mansions and occasional buildings that still bear a façade of imported tiles. The construction industry seems to have increased significantly since our last visit, especially in the central part of the city. Many tall apartments and offices dot the flat landscape of the city. As a result, old residential sections are being dwarfed by the new construction and the colonial atmosphere is becoming less obvious. Fortunately, mango trees that line most of the older residential areas still produce abundant fruit, and you can see many strings hanging from the branches with sticks attached. At first we were curious about the hanging strings until we saw kids harvesting the mangoes.

In contrast to the normal aromas of a port in the humid tropics, Belém has some unusually pleasant odors emanating from shops selling essences and oils extracted from local woods. It is a delight to walk along a sidewalk and detect the fragrances. Lynne bought many vials of natural essences and wood shards to prepare gift sachets. The permeating fragrances can even mask unpleasant odors! Unfortunately, the strong demand for rosewood oil (pau rosa) is threatening the source tree with extinction; collectors set up a temporary distillery in the forest and harvest all the pau rosa trees (*Aniba roseadora*, Lauraceae) in the area. Considering the quality and demand for pau rosa oil, it is surprising that there are no commercial plantations.

Figure 1. Belém, São Luís, Bacabal.



On our first day in Belém we decided to walk the streets looking for a place to eat lunch. The luncheonettes did not look too appetizing so we decided to walk toward the port area in search of a seafood restaurant. (How do you find a good seafood restaurant? By not being able to smell the fish, for one thing.) Having walked more than 20 blocks (and they seemed as long as in New York City around the American Museum), Lynne successfully argued in favor of asking a taxi driver to take us to a good restaurant. We were taken to a fortress located on an active naval base. The restaurant happens to be one of the best in Belém, we were told, and we were quite pleased with the river-side atmosphere. The tasty typical dish we ordered at the suggestion of the maitre 'd was excellent.

In the evening of our first day we had dinner with Anthony Anderson (graduate student from the University of Florida) and his professor, Jack Ewel. Jack and Anthony accompanied us to Jari the next day. Being able to visit a restaurant with a local expert is another treat and Anthony took us to his favorite haunt, a Japanese restaurant near our hotel. Nobody in our group had less than raves for the place--all of a sudden we were connoisseurs of raw fish.

Belem fruit vendors amazed us with the array of fruits for sale, as well as bags of Brazil nuts. There are many fruits available that you do not find in the western Amazon, i.e. Perú, Bolivia, Ecuador, or in Central America. What a variety of tastes! But the palate must be developed for appreciation of strange tastes. For example, fruits dominate the available flavors of ice cream. For an ice cream aficionado like me, selecting from 150 flavors from a popular Belém shop (one of Anthony's favorites) is difficult. Those who know my fondness for pejibaye palm (*Bactris gasipaes*, Palmae) fruits will be surprised to hear I am not impressed with pejibaye-flavored ice cream. My critique--"too dry".

Mike and Jack left Brazil after our return from Jari. We were glad Mike left with a Jari employee who spoke Portuguese and would handle his exit visa.

Between appointments and planned visits we were able to squeeze in some time at the Museo Goeldi, site of the major herbarium for the Amazon and local zoo. A major attraction for us, after the botanical garden and herbarium, is the captive pair of harpy eagles (*Harpia harpyja*, Accipitridae). The most powerful birds in the world, Harpy eagles are rarely seen in tropical forests. Our fascination for them began on our first trip to Belem in 1979, and we had anticipated seeing again these awe-inspiring birds. Harpies fly inside the forest feasting primarily on monkeys. It is not difficult to imagine the fear native people have of this bird because of the stories one hears of a Harpy eagle plucking a young child from the forest floor with its huge talons and two-inch thick legs.

MARANHAO STATE

With Anthony Anderson we traveled by car from Belém to Bacabal, Maranhão. Anthony and his wife Suely are doing research on the babassu palm in Maranhão. Maranhão State is east of Pará and is transitional from the Amazon forests to the arid northeast. The babassu palm (*Orbignya speciosa*, Palmae) dominates the landscape of central Maranhão--but the babassu story deserves a separate newsletter. We could characterize Maranhão, and Bacabal especially (where Anthony and Suely live), as the kind of climate tourists expect in the tropics; the heat was extremely oppressive--little wonder that the mid-day siesta is so important (see Figure 1).

Prior to our Jari trip, the Andersons hosted Anthony's major professor and a tropical geographer for a week of intense research activities and discussions; thus we Hartshorns were apprehensive about imposing as visitors. Suely welcomed us warmly and helped us learn about Maranhão. After a quick review of the Andersons' research on babassu, Anthony and Suely took us to São Luís for a refreshing overnight stay.

São Luís, the capital of Maranhão State, is situated on an island between two coastal bays. In contrast to Manaus and Belém, the local authorities of São Luís have actively and successfully preserved the colonial sections of the city. Each colonial building has a tiled façade distinct in color and design; the tiles were originally imported from Europe. City regulations permit interior modifications and renovations but require preservation of the colonial façade. We were delighted with São Luís, wishing we could have stayed for several days to sample the beautiful beaches.

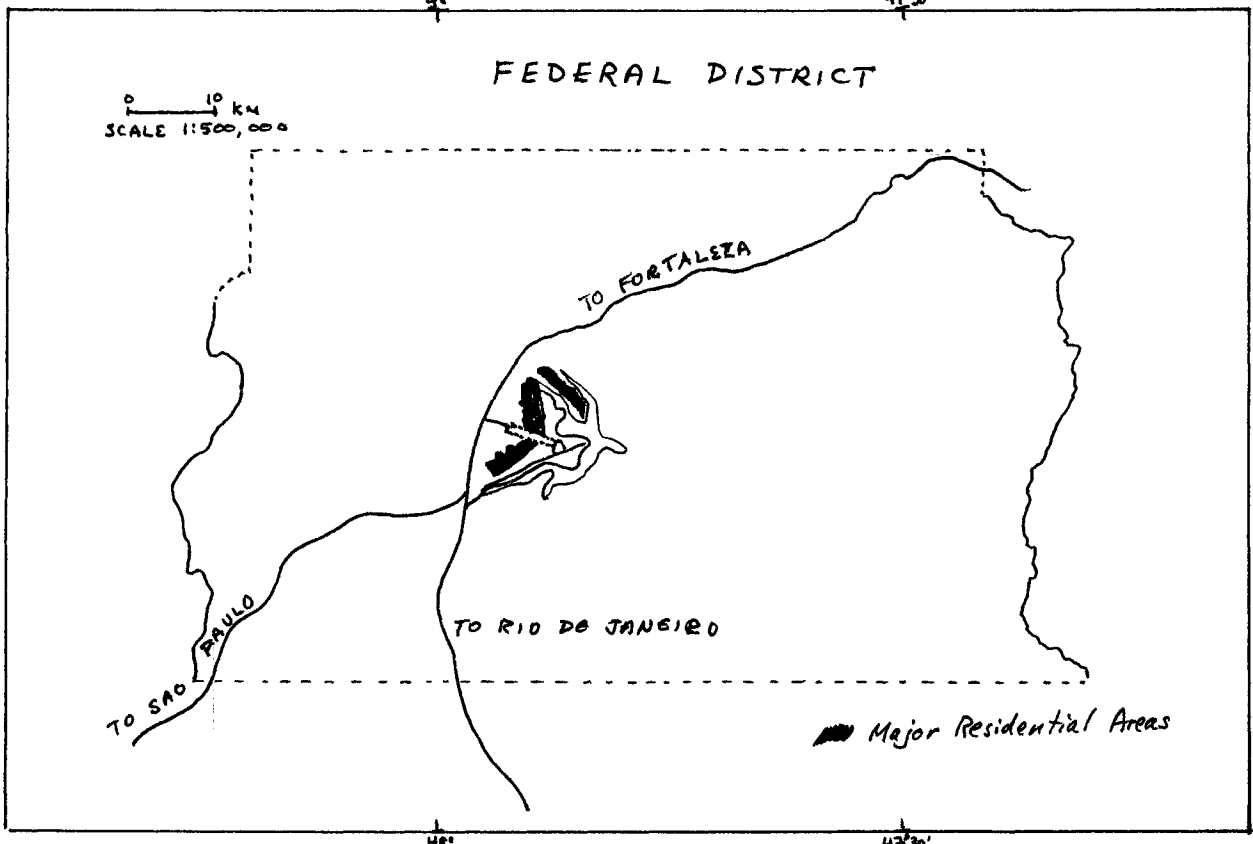
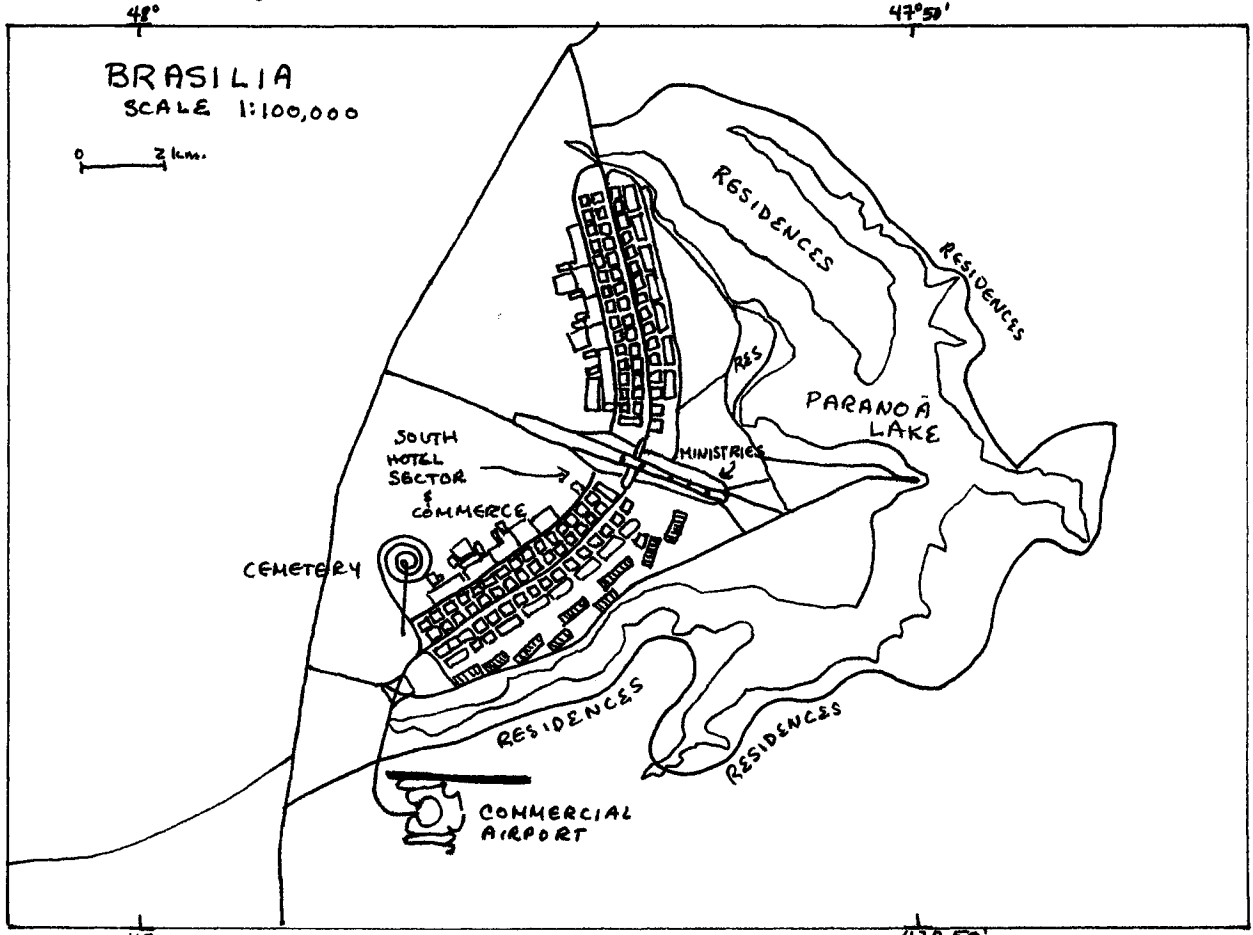
The strong respect for colonial history and beauty in São Luís will have to stand the onslaughts of major development brought on by the construction of bauxite smelting facilities by ALCOA. A major railway is also under construction to bring iron ore from the enormous Carajás deposits to the São Luís port. We hope that development is limited to the mainland to give Brazilians and tourists a showpiece of preserved heritage.

BRASILIA

We included a visit to Brasilia for two principal reasons: to see a modern planned city and to corroborate a story about local climatic change caused by the large artificial lake on the edge of the city. The capital of Brazil was transferred officially from Rio de Janeiro to Brasilia on April 21st, 1960. The Federal District of 5,771 square kilometers lies on the vast planalto (high plain) of central Brazil. The more than 200 years of government discussions about an inland capital covered a gamut of reasons from escaping pirates to more hospitable climate, but the need to develop the planalto and lessen the demographic pressure on the narrow coastal zone of Rio certainly favored the central state of Goiás (see Figure 2).

Brasilia was built in five years according to a well-conceived plan that concentrated government branches and agencies along a major boulevard. A major highway bisecting the boulevard provides easy connections with residential areas. Brasilia was clearly designed for automobiles and cheap fuel. Coming from the airport, one sees only large apartment complexes with parking areas out of sight. The abundance of overpasses, underpasses, loops and multi-lane highways interspersed with government buildings and residential blocks makes practically everyone dependent on vehicles. We had expected to easily find our way in a planned city, and after purchasing a city map, we were okay. But taxi drivers have a penchant for shortcutting through parking lots and residential areas in order to avoid a kilometer of loops and this, no doubt, contributed to our disorientation.

The spacious setting for large buildings gives the deceptive impression of closeness. Lynne found out just how deceptive when she decided to walk from the hotel district to the shopping district that appeared reasonably close. We both felt that the extensive grassy areas along highways need a major reforestation project to reduce the sterile appearance of the city. I was disappointed but not surprised at the preponderance of exotic trees planted in Brasilia. Beautiful lavender-flowered, native *Tibouchina* trees were seen growing in the less-developed city outskirts, but not one was seen in the city center.



We were especially interested in the stories of climatic change in Brasilia caused by the man-made lake and by tree planting within the triangle of the city bordered by the lake. We saw few trees. From a climatic perspective the amount of tree planting in and near Brasilia is inconsequential. The large (roughly 15 square kilometer) horseshoe-shaped lake encloses most of the planned city, hence it certainly could increase humidity. In our visits with forestry and environmental officials, the question about local climatic change often provoked a smile and the response that the official had also heard the same story. We finally tracked down the remotely-located National Meteorological Institute where a helpful official told us that the lake had increased average relative humidity by only 3%. Such a slight change is imperceptible to most humans. The official did show us a report comparing the climate of Río de Janeiro, the former capital, with Brasilia. The biased report was obviously written with a preference for Río and concluded that the monotonous climate of Brasilia is healthy, but would produce a sharp decline in physical and mental activity compared to Río.

While in Brasilia, we had the good fortune of visiting with Maria Tereza Jorge Padua, director of Brazil's national parks system. Maria Tereza was extremely helpful with official contacts, an overview of national conservation efforts and visits to national parks. During a visit to Maria Tereza's home, I was able to identify an unusual tree in her garden.

Maria Tereza arranged an excellent half-day tour of Brasilia National Park, a 30,000 hectare area that protects the potable water supply of Brasilia, as well as typical "cerrado" (woodland savanna) vegetation. The Park has tributaries to the three major Brazilian river systems: São Francisco (east); Amazon (north); and La Plata (south). The principal Park entrance is only 10 kilometers from center city, thus public access to and use of the recreational area of the park is quite easy.

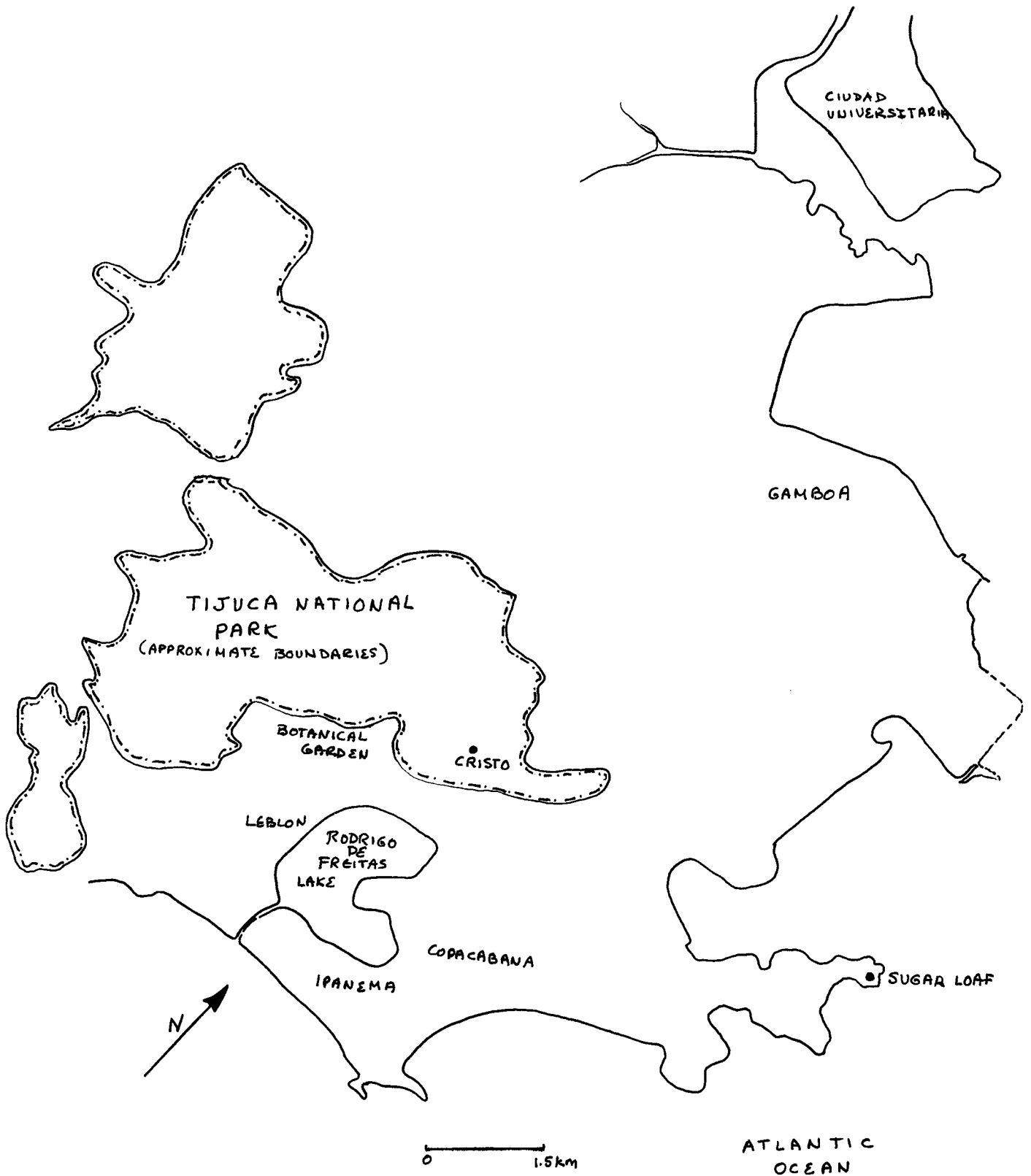
An interesting aspect of the life and culture of Brasilia came to light while having lunch with Maria Tereza: since the city is only 20 years old, most of the people who live in the city or its outskirts do not feel that the city is their home. Many of the inhabitants are Paulistas (from São Paulo) or Cariocas (from Río) and when holidays come, people go home, much like the inhabitants of a college campus. The obvious constructions (theaters, sporting and art centers) represent a lively city but it will take at least a generation before the occupants take on a feeling of belonging. This feeling is obvious in very old, tightly-structured cities--the people seem more relaxed and friendly. Brasilia is a government city where government employees work, but often they don't want to live there. The fringes of the city show that housing and jobs must be in short supply; façades are not so carefully preserved there. But the city's fringe area may give rise to the private commercial sector and the people who will eventually call Brasilia their home.

RIO DE JANEIRO

We were lucky to visit Río in the off season; the cool, rainy spring weather wasn't conducive to sun-bathing on Río's famous beaches, and we didn't have to worry about lack of time to frolic on the Copacabana beaches. Two quick days in Río did not permit us to seek out forest and man issues, so we spent several hours in the Botanical Garden and shopping in downtown Río. Nevertheless, we were able to take advantage of Maria Tereza's arrangements for us to visit Tijuca National Park. The 3,300 hectare park is actually in the city (Figure 3) and includes the spectacular peaks that offer such impressive views of the city and coastline.

Figure 3. *Río de Janeiro* showing location of the Tijuca National Park within the City limits.

RIO DE JANEIRO

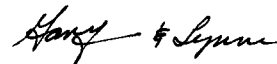


Flying from Brasilia to Rfo gave us a chance to visit with an old lady-- the Helen Hayes type from the movie "Airport"--who was an interesting study. She spoke Portuguese and Lynne spoke Spanish and they discussed Brasilia, Rfo and the Brazilian government. When our dinner arrived, our Miss Hayes pointed out that we should not eat our meat. Smoking was terrible. The wine was nice. Yes, she would have another glass of wine. She invited us to share her cab when we cleared customs and warned Lynne to remove her gold bracelet lest some quick thief remove it for her. Having cleared customs, she waited with Lynne while I arranged for a cab--she made no move in that direction. (At a booth in the airport of Brazilian cities you pay in advance for your cab to a specific location.) But our Miss Hayes was right there with her baggage and told us she would come with us when we secured our taxi. Lynne and I were enjoying this interaction and wondered what would happen next. The ride to Leblon, where we would stay, was interesting especially since the driver was aware of our situation. Miss Hayes cheerily had given the driver her directions and said goodbye at her residence. When we reached Leblon, the driver looked again at the address I had marked on a piece of paper and informed us that the address was incorrect, but he called for the information he needed to get us to our destination. Having had unfortunate experiences with taxis in Belm and Brasilia, we renewed our faith in the cabdrivers everywhere who get a bad name from their less honorable peers.

Dr. Antonio Aldrighi, director of Tijuca National Park, took us on an enjoyable half-day tour of Tijuca. Although the scenery and views are truly spectacular, what most impressed us was the personal rapport Dr. Aldrighi has with Park employees. Whether we stopped at popular tourist spots such as the huge statue of Christ or at remote guard stations, all employees knew Dr. Aldrighi and he always spoke with them.

From our brief glimpses of a few aspects of Brazil, we wish we could spend a lot more time there. It is such a vast and heterogeneous country that these glimpses only begin to stir our interest to see and learn more about Brazil. On the other hand, it might be even more difficult to characterize the smaller contiguous USA in such a short visit!

Sincerely,



Gary S. Hartshorn
Forest & Man Fellow

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