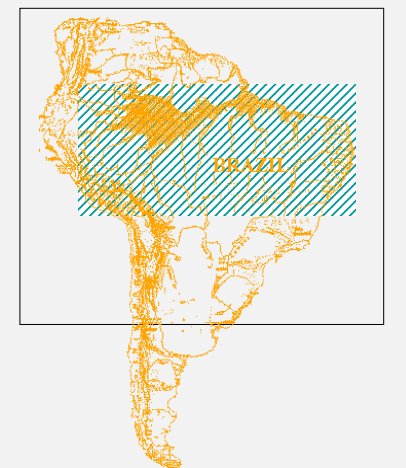

THE LAST PAGE OF GENESIS

*I*n truth, its ruin, like all things under
the sun, is only a matter of time.

— Last diary entry, November 1972,
The Amazon Valley



The Amazon isn't just another jungle, it's the greatest of all jungles. Like the morning mist that rises silently over the Amazon River, enveloping the jungle and the beasts of the forest, the Amazon is shrouded in mystery and myth. It invades our dreams and stands as an archetype of all that is primordial and eternal.

The idea of destroying the jungle, the entire Amazon Valley is absurd to us. Who could ever cut this down? It's too big we argue. How could we ever pollute the great rivers? They'll flow forever we say. How can we endanger the wild-life? It is us who are in danger in the jungle. How can such a vast of forest ever be destroyed? It will never happen. That's what everyone thinks. That's what everyone says.

We want to keep the mystery alive, we want to believe in the myth, the myth which whispers to us that the Amazon is indestructible, invulnerable, immortal. But it is none of these.

The truth is much different. When road-builders, ranchers, colonists, adventurers, speculators and gold miners venture into the Amazon valley they are, without realizing it, writing the last page of Genesis.





There's majesty about the jungle. Great torrential storms rage across the sea of green trees like landlocked hurricanes. From the air you can see two or three, even four at a time, rolling over the flat planes of the green canopy like great tall ships, driving all manner of birds and animals before them.

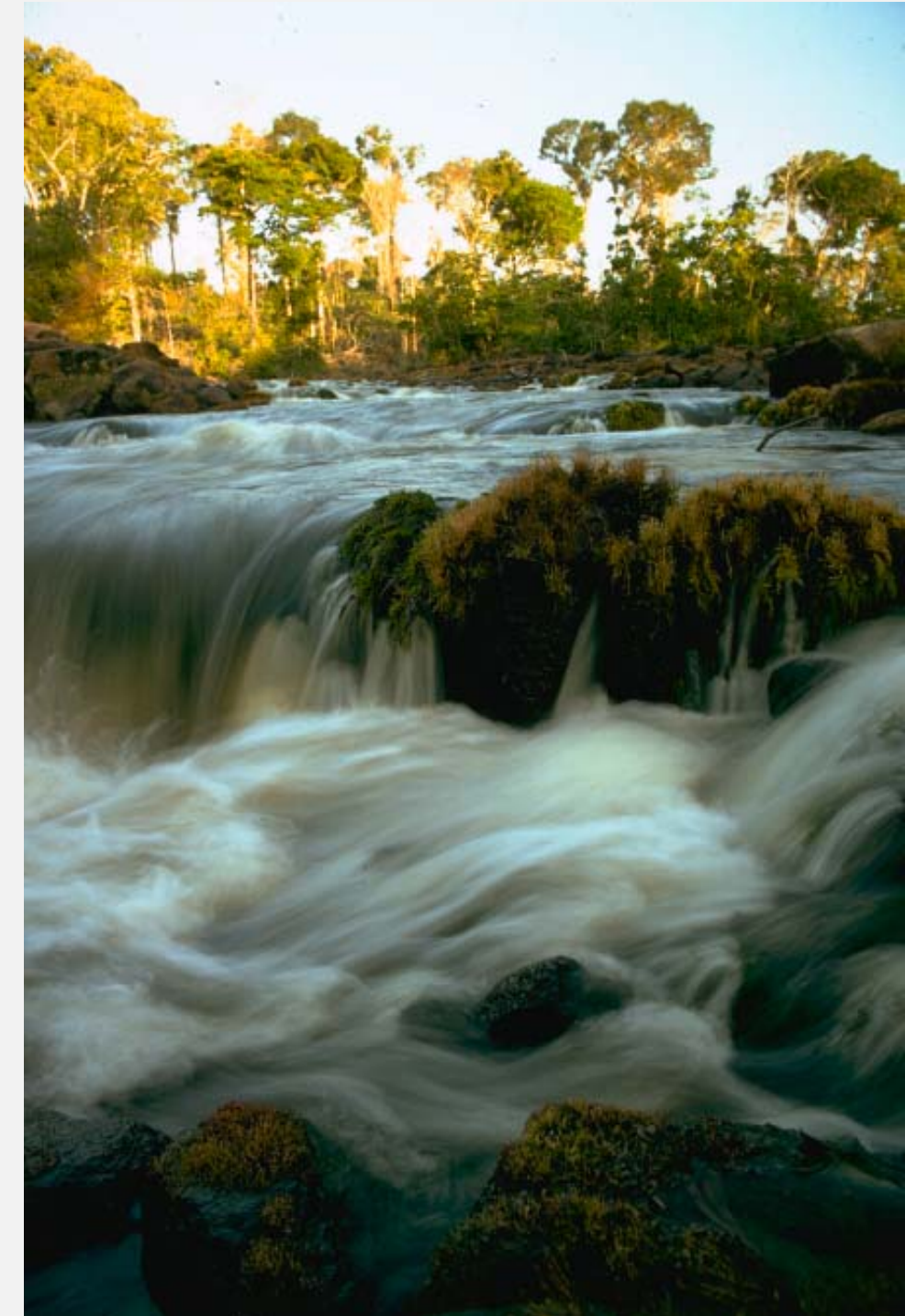
In the rainy season these isolated storms gather together and fill the sky with clouds so thick and dark it blots out the sun for weeks. Thunder rolls back and forth and lighting all pink and yellow and blue ignites the skies with frightening regularity. This goes on for weeks until the heavens open up. In the Amazon it doesn't just rain. Water simply falls from the sky in biblical proportions.

—Diary entry, November 1972
Itaituba



The insects are so colorful they look like Van Gogh painted them. At times there are so many butterflies that you can't see ten feet for all the fluttering of design and color about you. The greatest of these is the Morpho, whose iridescent blue wings are brighter than the backsides of king-fishers. Some grow to be ten inches from wing-tip to wing-tip. It doesn't flutter like most butterflies. It glides until it loses altitude and then, with one intermittent flap of its great wings, will catch another current and soar until it loses altitude again. It looks more like a bird in a thermal than a butterfly. At night the jungle fills with strange and beautiful sounds, a symphony of primordial music coming from a thousand species of birds, reptiles, mammals and insects. All manner of chirping, cawing, croaking, roaring, slithering, clicking, buzzing, fluttering, hooting, whooshing, flapping, thumping, whistling, and other sounds too strange for words echo back and forth in the inky darkness.

—Diary entry, Rabelo Construction Camp, Front Line of the Transamazonian Highway, at night in my hammock with a flashlight



There are millions of Igarapes or smaller streams that overflow their banks in the rainy season and fertilize millions of acres of forest, insuring the continued existence of countless species of plants, fish, animals and insects. The Amazon river overflows its banks every year flooding the forest sixty miles inland along its banks.

—Diary entry, September 1972 Near Sao Luiz-Itaituba



The jungle is full of danger. Full of death. There's a beautiful frog called the *Dendrobates Leucomelas*. Its back is shiny black and yellow. If you just touch it, even with one finger, you'll die. Not right away. Slowly, over a period years. The poison destroys the nervous system. There are various species of the Assassin Bug which bite you on the neck or face and then, gorged with your blood, they defecate next to the wound. When you scratch the sore, you rub the droppings into your bloodstream. You get an incurable and fatal disease called Chagas. Mostly, they bite at night when you're sleeping. You scratch in your sleep and kill yourself.

—Diary entry, September 1972, Itaituba



Electric eels lay buried in the mud on the bottom of rivers. If you step on them, they'll deliver a five-hundred volt shock of electricity. It won't kill you. You'll just pass out and drown. Don't ever shave before bathing in a stream. The piranha will strip you to the bone in less than three minutes.

Don't swim nude. There's a fish so small it can swim up your anus. It'll lay eggs and they'll get in your bloodstream and kill you eventually. And don't urinate in the water. There's an even smaller fish called the Candiera that swims up the warm stream of urine and enters the penis. Once inside the urethra, it'll open its barbed fins and implant itself. The pain is unbearable. They say the only way to get rid of it is to cut the penis open and take it out by hand.

— Diary entry, September 1972
Things I heard while bathing in the Tapajos River
Itaituba





The jungle has plenty of everything. Fish, fowl, insects, trees, plants, herbs, water, diamonds, iron ore, tin, gold. How can we ever exhaust its riches. It's an infinite treasure-house waiting to be plundered. The forest stretched unbroken as far as the eye can see. Some of the trees are two-hundred feet high and so big around at their base it takes ten men, hand to hand, to circle the trunk. Before it rains, the skies fill up with dark clouds for weeks before a drop of water falls. When it finally rains, water falls from skies for days, sometimes weeks at a time. And lighting. I've never seen so much and in such color: yellow, pink, red, blue, white and even green. I saw three separate storms moving across the Amazon river at the same time. The sky lit up every two or three seconds. There's no end to it. The Tapajos river is so clear you can see clean to the sandy bottom from three hundred feet up in a helicopter. Last night, there were frogs so large and in such vast quantities that I couldn't hear the guy in the next hammock snoring for all the croaking that went on. There's so much gold in the Tapajos river that people joke about the river not having enough room for water.

—Diary entry, October 1972
Santarem



The Amazon River is like an ocean. Two hundred times the total daily usage of water in the United States flows out its mouth every day. The Rio Negro is so pure you can see the bottom sixty feet down. The Solimoes has more species of fish in it than the Atlantic Ocean. The Tapajos has more gold in it than all of Africa. The Xingu is as green as an emerald, and the life-source of one of the greatest Indian Tribes in the world.

—Diary entry, November 1972
On a boat approaching Belem, in the Straits of Breve



The Amazon forest is so rich in variety that you can find over a hundred trees pertaining to sixty different species growing in less than three square acres.

—Diary entry,
Transamazonic Highway, 1972





I watched a bulldozer knock over a two hundred foot tree today. When it fell, it took many lesser trees with it. It's not sensible to think that we could tear down the whole jungle. Though it's only a two-lane, hard-packed dirt road, the Transamazonian highway cuts right through the middle of the Amazon jungle and will probably spell the beginning of the end of the forest. The jungle's life depends on a delicately-balanced symbiosis between flora and fauna, between waterways and weather patterns. It's hard to imagine a two-hundred foot plank-buttressed forest giant, sixty feet in circumference at its base, as something fragile. But it is.

— Diary entry, September 1972
Front Line Camp The Transamazonian Highway





The beauty is unearthly. In the morning, just before sunrise, a shrouded of soft mist rises from the moist jungle through the canopy and into the sky. At sunset, the sky is filled with striking combinations of delicate pastels -- pinks, blues, purples and greens mixed with brilliant rays of red and gold. At night, the air is so pure the stars look like you can touch them.

It's a Garden of Eden. Today, I waded in a stream so full of Tucunare', a large trout-like fish, that with one swift kick of my boot I landed three beauties on the banks. Who would miss three fish? I thought, or three million for that matter? We lay swinging in our hammocks deep in the jungle, with rifles pointed into the branches above us, waiting for dinner to show up. It almost always does in the form of a small monkey called Guariba. Bam! And they fall right into your lap. Well, almost. The young ones look like little babies when you skin them. They taste like Swiss steak without the tomatoes.

—Diary entry, Rabelo
Construction Front Line camp between Itaituba and
Jacarecanga



There's one tree in the jungle that has thirty four species of ants that live in it, which, by coincidence, is the exact number of species of ants in all of England. With every step I take in the jungle, over 1200 species of vegetable and animal life lay under my boot, counting fungus and microorganisms. Over two million different species live in the Amazon. Of these, only thirty percent are known by science. The rest are disappearing at a rate five hundred times greater than the natural cycle of life and death imposed by Nature.

—Diary entry August 1972, Manaus



A *n excess of heavens above an excess of water...and
is the last page of Genesis that has yet to be written.*

*— Euclides da Cunha, 1903, Brazilian
writer and poet Upon seeing the Amazon for the first time*