

TRAVEL

Bass fishing on the Amazon: too good not to repeat

By HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

At the ASAP Machine Shop in Plymouth, Mark Swain has posted the "Amazon Rules."
"It's hot. The fish are rude. I'm going back."

A display of pictures, colorful fish scales and a pirana's skull also decorate the shop.

Swain's fishing trip on the Amazon with his brother, Rick, was supposed to be a "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity. But as Rick had already discovered, once isn't enough.

"After you've gone down there, it can't be a once-in-a-lifetime trip. You have to go back there, the fish are so incredible," Swain said.

Rick, who works for Jack Roush Racing and lives in West-

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land, had taken the trip a year before and invited Mark to come along.

"He read about it in Bass Master magazine," Mark said.

Mark, 44, owner of ASAP Machine and a Plymouth resident, took the bait this October and signed up with Ron Speed Adventures to join his brother to fish the Amazon and its tributaries for peacock bass. He said he's been a serious bass fisher for five years.

"We fished a tributary of the Amazon, the Utama, in an area near Manaus in central Brazil," Swain said.

Manaus is one of Brazil's largest inland cities and in the late 1800s one of its richest

when rubber trees brought in a fortune. It is famous for its opera house.

"You stay in an air-conditioned river boat all week. Two boats go along together, one for the guides and support people and one for the fishermen," Swain said.

Fourteen American fishermen were aboard in late October, coming from Texas, Oklahoma, California and Michigan.

A head guide speaks English, but most of the guides speak Portuguese and only a little English. Each day the fishermen would go out in pairs with a guide on an aluminum 17-foot bass boat.

"The daily routine was to get up in the morning, breakfast would be laid out for you. You grab what you want and as soon as you and your partner are ready, Gilberto (the guide in charge) calls over for a guide," Swain said. "Every day you have a different guide. Your tackle is already there. He takes you fishing. Your lunch is laid out and then you go out after lunch and come back for dinner, which is already laid out."

"After dinner it's time for fish stories."
"The fish were really yanking me around," Swain said. "They put up a fight."

A peacock bass can reach a top weight of 28 pounds. Swain said he used a 7-foot heavy rod with 100-pound braided line. He said even a 4-pound peacock bass will give "everything you can handle."

Swain was enthusiastic about the provisioning by Ron Speed.

"It was a first-class operation," he said. "There are cheaper ways to go down there, with lesser houseboats and lesser fishing boats."

The trip costs about \$3,500 from Miami. It includes a night in a luxury hotel in Manaus.

Swain said the cook, Velma, provided great and sometimes exotic meals. In addition to cooking some of the peacock bass, Velma also served up some "pretty tasty" crocodile.



Dropping a line: Rick Swain tries his luck fishing a small inlet on the Amazon.

"Well, I won't say it tasted like chicken. It's not a red meat, but it has the texture of beef and the taste of fish," Swain said.

Crocodiles made their presence known but generally stayed clear of the boats. The exotic pirarucu fish, herons, parakeets, howling monkeys and piranas were also evident, either because they could be seen or heard.

Swain said one boat encountered a shore fight between a monkey and a wild dog.

The human population along the river was sparse. Swain said the primitive Indian tribes often shown on the Discovery Channel live deeper into the Amazon. There were lone cabins along the river, built on stilts in anticipation of floods.

The guides knew their way along the river and knew what was needed to catch fish.

"All the guides were friendly, always smiling, very helpful about what tackle you have to

buy," Swain said.

Each day the guides competed for a kitty raised by the fishermen. Winnings were given for the boat that caught the most fish and the boat that landed the biggest fish.

Swain said he saw some of the notorious fires that have been burning out the rubber plantations to make way for development.

Swain said he had never fished in such an exotic or exciting location and is looking forward to going again.

Anyone interested in finding out more about fishing on the Amazon can call Swain at ASAP Machine, (313)459-2447.



River dwellers:
Natives along the Amazon and its tributaries live in still houses to protect against the rising river.

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Caught one: Mark Swain displays his 10 pound peacock bass catch with his guide Samuel.

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