



This sapodilla tree bears multiple machete slashes. The slashes were made to allow men

to collect the milky sap of the tree, which is made into chicle for chewing gum.

Jaguars pad green Belize non-stops from Chicago

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cleros, but never met any of them on the trails. It's just as well. Who knows how these jungle men would greet a lone gringo invading their frontier?

Sometimes bootprints of soldiers appeared in the mud. Great Britain maintains a garrison at Belize. Troopers use the Chan Chich wilderness to train for jungle warfare.

While back a soldier wandered away from his squad. The jungle swaled him. Helicopter pilots and 600 men searched in vain. He stumbled out of the jungle four days later, cut and bruised, his fatigues torn to shreds.

NO WONDER the lodge cautions visitors to stay on trails. It's hard to think of danger when you're taking hot showers and eating candlelight dinners at a luxury lodge like Chan Chich. But the staff constantly reminds you "it's a jungle out there."

And it's prudent to pay attention. One man who went on a hike with me ignored the warning. He left the path to explore a pile of rocks that looked like a Mayan ruin. Two barbed thorns buried themselves in his forearm, inflicting a nasty wound.

I hated to leave Chan Chich, but decided to go to the Mayan Mountains in east-central Belize to visit the world's only jaguar preserve.

RETURNING TO Belize City, I checked into Hotel Mopan. Proprietors Tom and Jean Shaw came to my aid, arranging for me to rent a four-wheel-drive station wagon for my daylong trip.

On the way down, an alert gas station attendant averted a possible crisis.

"Tire low," he said, pointing to the front. "Do you want to me fix it?"

I quickly agreed. He found a small nail and patched the hole. If he hadn't noticed the slow leak, I would have suffered a flat tire in the bowels of the jungle.

My trip had other complications. A tropical disturbance churning in

the Caribbean threatened to wash out the roads. Luckily, the storm veered off. The road into the refuge was muddy anyhow. Two streams and several bogs nearly defeated me, but I finally conquered the five tough miles.

NEAR THE preserve's building, a bearded man loomed into sight. He turned out to be Robert Bristow, an environmentalist from the Black Hills of South Dakota. He had packed in the night before. And what a hike he had.

"At sunset, I saw fresh jaguar tracks in the mud," he said. "Night fell. I was in the middle of nowhere and not sure where I was going. Walking in the dark with that cat on your mind. That's spooky."

No one was at camp headquarters. Luckily, the bunkhouse was unlocked, so the two of us spent the night there.

Before bedding down, I explored several jungle paths. A river trail yielded the tracks of a tapir and a large jaguar. The cat's tracks were smoking hot. I knew how my friend felt the night before.

ROBERT DROVE out with me the next morning to buy food at the nearby village of Mayan Cenot. On the way, we met Ignacio Pop, the refuge's head warden.

He indicated the jaguars there are thriving and multiplying and said about 25 were in the area.

Despite their large numbers, seeing a wild jaguar seemed to compare favorably with winning the national lottery. That doesn't mean it never happens. A couple picnicking in the preserve saw a flash of orange. A jaguar had slunk down to a nearby creek. It lapped up water, glanced around, then melted back into the jungle as silently as it had come.

Time was running out. I had to hurry back to Belize City for my flight home. On the way I took time to pay a brief visit to the Community Baboon Sanctuary at Bernandian Landing. The principal animals there are black howler monkeys often called baboons by the locals.

THE VILLAGERS protect the monkeys and their habitat. The apes, in turn bring in tourist dollars.

"Want to see monkeys quick?" asked Sanctuary manager Fallett Young. "It could be a small troop on the other side of the road."

After crossing over, we entered a stand of scrub jungle. Twenty minutes later we heard the distant grunts of a dominant male. As we got closer, the grunts turned into lion-like roars. The leader of the troop saw us below and was doing his best to chase us off. He won. The jungle still range with his bellows as we made our way back.

During our brief search, Fallett seemed oblivious to the dangers of the jungle, he slogged along the muddy footpaths in lowest leather shoes.

"PROBABLY NO poisonous snakes here," I volunteered timidly. "Oh yes," he replied cheerfully. "Tommygooff, coral snake, Central American rattlesnake. Big, too. They come to us at night."

He must have been right. We didn't see a single snake.

During my stay in Belize, I explored the tropical rain forests daily. My aching feet tramped 50 to 60 miles of tropical turf. Yet during that time I was never menaced by man or animal.

This ought not to have surprised me. On my way to the jungle adventure, I glanced at my daily horoscope in a well-thumbed newspaper. It said, "a short pleasure trip provides a welcome break in the workweek."

And that's exactly what happened.

John Castle, a Birmingham resident, refers to himself as a cryptozoologist, a person who investigates unusual animal phenomena. He also is a co-owner of C&R Communications.

Vacation certificates should get 2nd look

The Better Business Bureau continues to receive numerous inquiry calls about an advertisement that has appeared in several area newspapers for the National Air Safety Advisory Service.

This firm is offering round-trip airfare certificates to Nassau, the Bahamas or Orlando, Fla., at a cost of \$33.

The ad also states that consumers will be sent a questionnaire; the company claims results of questionnaires are sent to airlines.

The location and the cost make this offer particularly tempting; however, the BBB urges consumers to exercise caution before entering into any vacation certificate offer.

UPON REVIEW of the company's ad, the BBB has discovered that the

\$33 fee is contingent upon a consumer paying for a minimum six-night stay at one of the firm's selected hotels.

Prices for these hotels range from \$22 to \$200 a night. The company has included a deadline for the offer in the ad, but the date varies and has been extended. More important, the consumer will not receive actual airline tickets but certificates, redeemable through a designated agent.

The company address listed in the ad is a mail drop. Mail sent to that location is forwarded to a customer service office, in the residential Nashville, Tenn., area. The telephone number listed in the ad is for an office in Chaska, Minn.

AS WITH any vacation certificate offer, the BBB reminds consumers

to realize that there may be hidden costs, such as processing or service fees.

In cases where a consumer has to pay for accommodations from a selected group of hotel/motels, he or she should obtain information on the types of accommodations offered.

Consumers should also understand that preferred travel dates may not be available when desired. Also, the BBB urges consumers to inquire about the company's refund policy, should there be a problem with scheduling of accommodations.

Consumers interested in obtaining further information on this company offer should contact the BBB for a report by calling 862-7566 or by writing the Better Business Bureau, 150 Michigan Avenue, Detroit 48226.

Brazilian airline to begin non-stops from Chicago

Varig Brazilian Airlines will introduce the first non-stop flights from Chicago to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on March 15. Week-long packages are also offered, complete with hotel accommodations for six nights, airport transfers and sightseeing starting at \$988 per person, double occupancy.

For reservations and more information call 1-800-GO-VARIO.

The sales and ticket office is at

233 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

60601. The telephone is (312) 565-1391.

Flights operating with DC-10 equipment will operate on Thursday and Sunday, departing Chicago's O'Hare Airport at 5:30 p.m., arriving Rio de Janeiro at 7:15 a.m. the following morning. Connecting services to Sao Paulo and other major cities in Brazil as well as Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Santiago, Chile, are also offered.

With the introduction of daylight saving time on April 1, the Chicago departure time will be one hour later

at 6:30 p.m. Arrival time in Brazil remains unchanged.

Flights from Rio to Chicago will operate on Wednesday and Saturday, leaving Rio at 10:30 p.m. and arriving in Chicago at 6:40 a.m. the next day. After April 1, the Chicago arrival will be one hour later, at 7:40 a.m. Departures from Brazil remain unchanged.

Aircraft are configured with 30 first class, 35 business class and 171 economy class seats.

Grand Traverse weekend features soap opera stars

Grand Traverse Resort's one-of-a-kind "All My Children" Soap Celebrities Weekend" March 23-25 provides guests the opportunity to mingle with popular daytime television soap opera stars. The two-night package is presented in cooperation with WZZM-TV 13, Grand Rapids.

Packages start at \$160 per person and include two nights deluxe accommodations; souvenir welcome

packet; "meet the stars" luncheon; Saturday banquet dinner featuring the stars; Sunday brunch, gratuities on food and use of health club facilities including swimming, pools, whirlpools, saunas and weight room. Reservations can be made by calling (800) 748-0303.

Scheduled to appear are Jean LeClerc, better known as Jeremy

Hunter, and Kate Collins, who portrays Natalie Courtland.

Besides a meet the stars luncheon, a photo session will follow where participants can receive their own personal photo with Hunter and Collins.

A banquet dinner Saturday evening brings the stars back to answer questions from the audience.

Carnival will begin March 10 at Indianhead Mountain resort

More than 170 inches of snow already this year should provide great conditions for the traditional Spring Carnival set for the weekend of March 10-11 at Indianhead Mountain/Bear Creek Ski Resort in Wake-

field, Mich.

Live music on Friday night by "On the Road" starts off the weekend. A kiddies race for ages nine and under is on Saturday morning and Frisbee

Distance Toss is scheduled for 1 p.m. on Saturday.

NASTAR racing and an obstacle race with video playbacks are also planned for Saturday.

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