To the end of the world

Joachim von zur Gathen

Chapter 2: America

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The end of the world and our last hope.

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The front cover shows a woman stirring her drink on the market of Chivay, a village near Arequipa in Perú; see Figure 1247.

The frontispiece is a road sign from our motorcycle trip 2014 in Chile that translates as: *Road to the End of the World. Welcome. Province of the Last Hope.* See Figure 1305. In 1557, Captain Juan Ladrillero searched the Chilean coast for a shortcut to the Magallanes channel. His "last hope" was a fjord ending north of the Antonio Varas peninsula, near Puerto Toro and close to Puerto Natales. This dead end gave its name to a whole province and to this book.

On the back cover, the top image shows a rest stop on our hike in 1988 to the Laguna Chulup near Huaraz, Perú; see Figure 779. The bottom image is from 2015 in Lapataia near Ushuaia in Tierra del Fuego; see Figure 1334.

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America

America is named after Amerigo Vespucci, an Italian explorer and mapmaker who was the first to state, in 1502, that the *New World* recently "discovered" (in a Eurocentric view) is not part of Asia. In high school, I learned that there are six continents, America being one of them. My own children learned differently, namely about seven continents, with North America and South America two of them. This was the Canadian perspective, and it seems to exist only since the Second World War. Some continents like Africa, Australia, and Antarctica, are geographically well-defined. The division between Europe and Asia along the Ural mountains has always puzzled me: it is a rather minor chain of hills completely within Russia, and when you pass the border between the two continents, you have to look carefully for the marker to even notice it; see page 1201.

Within the Americas, the two landmasses of North America, including Mexico to the isthmus of Tehuantepec, and of South America are quite visible on the map. But where do Central America and the Caribbean belong? One could think of a linguistic or cultural division, say Germanic vs. Romance languages. But then where do Québec, Mexico, the English- or Dutch-speaking Caribbean, and Guyana belong? Wikipedia says that "North America is a continent ... It can also be described as a northern subcontinent of the Americas, or America". Since no rational explanation for the North American viewpoint of separating their continent from South America seems visible, I stick to the traditional European view of considering the whole as one continent of America. At least, that is geographically well-defined. And it includes several territories which are politically European, from St. Pierre et Miquelon, Martinique, Guadeloupe and other French colonies to the British Falkland Islands or Islas Malvinas, as the Argentines call them. Interestingly, in the *seven summits challenge* expert mountaineers climb the highest summits on each continent. Some count America as one and Oceania (with Puncuk Jaya at 4884 meters) as another continent.

As you see in many travel guides, it is hard or impossible to describe a two-dimensional country (or continent) in a linear fashion. The one rule I follow is to describe any single voyage in sequence. A chronological order for the whole book might be confusing, because then a single country would pop up in many different places. So I try a vaguely "geographical" order, roughly from north to south and from east to west. This cannot really succeed either, because even single voyages have criss-crossed the continent. Just look at the wild patterns in Figures 812 and 1064.

The islands in the Pacific and Atlantic, including the Caribbean, would logically form a part of this chapter. Unfortunately, I have to leave them out, because my printing company cannot manage many more pages than present here.

I lived in Canada for many years and have traveled widely in this beautiful country. But I only briefly mention some Arctic adventures in a different chapter; otherwise Canada and the USA are left out. The reader may want to consult the Foreword on pages 6-15 in Chapter I on Africa. The page numbering in this chapter starts where the previous one left off. Page numbers in future chapters on Asia and Australia, as given in the Table of Contents, will change. Times are given in 24 hour format, so that 16.00 is 4 pm.

Many thanks go to my family and friends for contributing to this work: Dorothea, Rafaela, and Désirée von zur Gathen, Martin Apsel-von zur Gathen, Anton Beck, Anton Cavin, Rodrigo Gallardo, Frank Guggenheim, Maria Nauer, Daniel Panario, Gadiel Seroussi, Nicolas Thériault, Tuba Viola.

Child's play: Canada to Fireland 1988/89

My best voyage ever—so far—starts in 1988: fourteen months, driving from Toronto all the way to Tierra del Fuego (Fireland) at the southern tip of South America, then by plane to New Zealand, Australia, and many months in the South Pacific. All this with my wife and our two daughters. This works out perfectly well, with numerous intermezzos, side trips, unexpected and unplanned visits to gorgeous places, positions as a visiting professor in Santiago and Canberra, meeting wonderful people, and having a lot of fun. These fourteen months together provide unforgettable memories for all of us, just like our many other trips together did, where we are together 24/7, unlike my working days at home. And still I have lots of time for "home office", better called "road office", on our trip.

Figure 649. From the US-Mexico border to the Panamá-Colombia border.

We are stuck in an almost vertical wall. We, that is my wife Dorothea and our two daughters Rafaela and Désirée, six and eight years old. And myself, the guy who created this problem. We are on a long hike to a glacier lagoon high up in the Peruvian Andes. At the end of the day, I still want to climb up that last obstacle between us and the lagoon. But it is getting dark and I lose the trail. There we are, steep drops in front and behind us. Our little group collects its courage. We slowly make it down again, step by step, holding on to roots, ledges, boulders. Don't look down, just up and ahead and where you step! Although it is getting cold, I sweat profusely. Why did I bring them up here? I

would curse myself for the rest of my life if something happened. We make it in the end without mishap and spend a comfortable night in our tent. This is just one of those exciting moments on our year-long trip where we extricate us from a difficulty and celebrate our salvation afterwards.

From the start, it is a wonderful but sometimes arduous journey. One of the truly marvellous things is that our two daughters Rafaela and Désirée never complain. Not about the (rarely) dismal food, not about the (rarely) crammed accommodation, not about whole days in a tiny car, not about being stuck in the middle of nowhere with a flat tire or an exhaust pipe that fell off, not about long and tiring hikes (to wonderful destinations), not about rain or wind or cold. They never utter any "when are we there?" or "how far is it still?". They are strapped into the back seats of the car and their only complaints are rare territorial fights, a centimeter here or there. Well, their parents set cheerful examples, that is the way they were brought up. I am really proud of our kids. Hurray to them! Many of the pictures in this section celebrate my heroines.

Why do we do this? We have traveled together on long trips, from Europe through South East Asia to Canada, or on the Transsiberian train. But this is in a different league. I want to show Dorothea and our children the wonders of Latin America, the impressive architectural remains of pre-Columbian architecture, the sights of snow-covered mountains up close, lava-spewing volcanoes, arid deserts, marvellous beaches where turtles lay their eggs, and, above all, the outgoing friendliness of people in these countries. Indeed, we get all that, plus a few glimpses of the crime and other challenges that exist here. That is also part of life. And they will learn about a central ingredient of adventure travel: trouble. Sometimes you get into real trouble. You are down, everything seems broken, the bottom has fallen away under your feet. Then you do not panic, but stand back and assess your situation calmly. You do whatever seems to make sense and slowly make some headway out of your predicament. With cool thinking and a bit of luck, you get out of your dilemma, maybe even with some help. And then you are on top again, jubilating about surmounting this difficulty. Up and down and up, like a rollercoaster. After surviving this, you feel like the king of the universe.

When we tell our daughters' school teachers and principal about our plans, the unanimous reaction is: "Wonderful! Your kids will learn so much more than at school." And indeed, it works out that way.

The voyage starts with a major problem. Dorothea insists on leaving our home in Toronto shipshape for the Japanese tenants to whom we will rent for this period, their sabbatical and ours. She packs things away and cleans our house. There is an infinite amount of things to pack and clean. We have agreed on a day for our departure, but in the evening, Dorothea is still packing and cleaning. Same thing next evening. And each evening for a whole week. In reality and deep down in her heart, she is reluctant to leave for over a year. Later she writes that she learnt how to grow new roots in new places, and to build a home wherever those roots are. Of course, I am not happy with this diddling and dawdling. Finally, on Tuesday, 21 June 1988, I insist on leaving *today*—and we make it, even if it is already 18.00. Six days late. When have you ever left for your holidays six days after the planned departure time? Every journey starts with the first step. Ok, this is going to be a longer trip, the longest and most interesting trip of our lives—so far. Not

just a holiday, but with a lot of work for me in between.

Figure 650. Leaving home. Finally!

Figure 651. The one and only burger on this trip—greener pastures await us.

The British were the first to start regular tourism, and in the 19th century the year-long travels of wealthy young Britons, usually to Switzerland, France, and Italy, were known as their *Grand Tour*. So we call this our own *Grand Tour*. Our little Toyota Tercel, about

ten years and 117 000 km old, is packed to the hilt, Rafaela and Désirée are seated in the back, Dorothea is riding shotgun, and I am—well, not happy to leave our wonderful house, but happy to start driving on a marvellous journey. The car boot is full, backpacks on top, camera bag dividing the kids' territories on the back seat, and all but the driver and tour guide have more stuff lying at their feet.

Our first border crossing is via the tunnel from Canada to Detroit, with easy border formalities. Those were the days ... Gas is incredibly cheap, less than 0.80 US$ per gallon. We race through Michigan and Indiana on the I-80 to Peru, for starters Peru IL, the real one will come later. It is hot, up to 42°C, we drink a lot. After watching a beautiful sunset from our campsite at Memphis Lake near Omaha NE, Dorothea, Rafaela, and Désirée go for dinner in the *Little bar* in the park, an idyllic place with the short fat owner and his wife straight out of a Western movie.

While Rafaela, Désirée, and I finish our breakfast, Dorothea goes to pack up our tent. Panic! There is a strong wind blowing and she almost flies away with the tent. Like *The Flying Robert* in Heinrich Hoffmann's kids' tale *Struwwelpeter* (Slovenly Peter). And of course, this is all my fault, the wind and the flying. From Lincoln NE, I make a long phone call to my PhD student Wayne Eberly about his thesis. I have accumulated a tall pile of quarters, but they disappear in the phone slot like sand through my hands. Such were the pleasures before mobile phones. The drive continues through the endless plains of the Midwest, the horizon flat in front of us. The heart of America. Agriculture everywhere, many wheat silos.

Figure 652. A big gulp to quench the thirst. The cows have a harder time.

We stop at Fort Hays on the Smoky Hill trail, where Buffalo Bill and James Butler "Wild Bill" Hickok served as army scouts. It is very hot, and when we saddle our horses again, the kids get into a little fight because they have too many arms and legs and too little space.

Our kids love the huge Carlsbad Caverns. We spend almost four hours inside, hiking about 300 meters deep, at a temperature of 13°C which we will not have again for a long time. So many stalactites and stalagmites, calcium water dripping, eerie lighting.

We face long border formalities in El Paso TX to enter Mexico. Tarjeta de turista, car papers, insurance—ours is not valid for Mexico, but they and we ignore this. Through the hopelessly dry country, with cactuses and low bushes, we drive to Chihuahua. Today, it

would be dangerous to travel there because of the narco wars. A geographical tidbit that I was not aware of: Toronto to Mexico's northern border is only 30 km longer than the distance from said border to Guatemala. Late in the afternoon it gets completely dark, because we are approaching a massive rain storm. It is fascinating to watch the wall of black clouds from a distance, and then to arrive in the middle of it.

Starting in the USA, when we tell people of our plans, the typical reaction is: "What, to Mexico? It's so dangerous there!" In Mexico: "What, to Guatemala? It's so dangerous there!" In Guatemala: "What, to El Salvador? It's so dangerous there!" In Honduras: "What, to Nicaragua? It's so dangerous there!" All this from people who have never set a foot across the border.

Via Chicomoztoc, we arrive late in Guanajuato, a beautiful city at 3000 metres of altitude, with steep lanes and old mansions.

Figure 653. Splashing down the water slide,
and then a fancy dinner in a fancy dining hall.

Figure 654. Kissing sisters.

Our days in the *Parador San Javier* are just wonderful. It is a large old hacienda, with well-tended gardens. The staff is friendly and helpful, they love our daughters. The kids enjoy the huge heated swimming pool with its long slide, Rafaela swims well, Désirée still needs water wings. In the dining room, previous owners look gravely down at us from their oil paintings. A marvellous old colonial palace. Unfortunately, we forgot Rafaela's doll with a nice dress crocheted by Dorothea in a previous hotel, but the excitement of the pool and the prospect of a new doll make up for this disastrous loss.

The town is full of colonial memories, so many cathedrals, government buildings, and residences. One church houses a rather grisly collection of bodies mummified by the high lead content in this crypt, victims of a cholera outbreak in 1833. But right outside, cheerful vendors ply colorful balloons and sugar candy.

Figure 655. Docile donkeys, and a grisly mummy in a museum.

Figure 656. Political games of election promises, and Désirée as *Schwarzer Peter* (Black Peter) after losing a card game. Does politically correct censorship still allow this?

The *callejón del beso* (kissing alley) is cute. Legend has it that a daughter of a rich family had her room with a balcony over this narrow lane. She fell in love with a poor

miner's son. He managed to rent a room right across from her balcony and sneaked over at night to be with his beloved one. The girl's father was mad when he learned about this affair, below his daughter's presumed standing. He surprised the guy one night in her room and threw him down from the balcony. Blind with rage, he also bludgeoned his daughter to death. Two young people were dead in the lane, and eventually this father turned mad. Today, local couples feel blessed when they kiss right under that balcony. Our daughters love each other, but are not more blessed than before.

The whole town has a festive and relaxed atmosphere. It is named a *World Heritage Site* in the year of our visit—but probably independently of that. One afternoon, a massive rain surprises us. Creeks flow across the streets and our feet. Dorothea panics again, but calms down when we can dry our socks and feet in a pizzeria.

On our drive to Tula, we pass the Volkswagen town of Puebla, where the last Volkswagen beetle will be manufactured in 2003, after 23 million of this iconic car have been produced. My first car was one of them, built in 1962.

Our car's exhaust pipe has acted up for some time, but on this bumpy road to Tula, it breaks off completely. This was to happen several times again—a minor nuisance, we are lucky that nothing worse ever breaks. The pedestrian zone is full of meaningless posters for the upcoming national elections, Salinas against Cárdenas. The leading party PRI (*Partido Revolucional Institucional*—what a combination! Institutional revolution!) promises everything to everyone: "mi compromeso es con X", where X is just about anything; a province, a city, los jovenes or las mujeres, la clase mediana, los trabajadores, el pueblo, el istmo, ... (young people, women, the middle class, workers, the people, the isthmus, ...) All these I have actually seen. If there is any political plan, then it is well hidden. A bad day for tourists, because everything is closed. But we get our exhaust pipe fixed.

We decide to avoid the moloch of Mexico City. I would rather show our children one of the major archeological sites in the world: Teotihuacán, with its immense sun and moon pyramids, on whose tops temples once stood.

Figure 657. Teotihuacán's sun pyramid from below and the moon pyramid viewed from the sun pyramid.

We gaze in awe at these man-made mountains of hewn rock. It is a special feeling to touch a surface that masons worked on many centuries ago. Even more, to scramble up the stairs of the sun pyramid, following in the footsteps of ancient rulers, and to share

the beautiful view into the distance that they once had. Since the pyramid is built in steps, Dorothea has no trouble in scaling it; her fear of height becomes worse when there is nowhere safe to look down. This is the first time that vendors follow us climbing up, trying to hawk their wares.

Figure 658. Dorothea climbing bravely down the stairs, and the Avenue of the Dead seen from the moon pyramid, the sun pyramid is on the left.

Figure 659. Stelae at the top of the sun pyramid and a slaughtering table for human sacrifices, now just worth a smile.

The wide *Avenue of the Dead* passes straight through the whole complex. At its northern end stands the *moon pyramid*. The first flight of its steps is too steep for some of us.

Intrepid Désirée still joins me on the climb up there, rewarded by a marvellous view of the whole ensemble. Originally, the great buildings were painted in dark red and must have been even more impressive. Many temples and large private houses were decorated with murals, thousands of them in total, but few have survived.

Figure 660. Colorful murals in Teotihuacán.

Figure 661. Bas relief with one obsidian eye remaining.
Fun in the hotel: Rapunzel, let your hair down.

At the height of its power, this was the largest city in America, long before the Aztecs conquered these areas. Little is known about its origins, except that it was founded around

300 BC and flourished around 450 AD. Scholars do not even agree on the ethnic group of its founders, or why it was destroyed around 600 AD; the most popular conjecture is internal unrest due to drought and the resulting famine. Though "only" 75 meters high (of which 64 meters remain today), it is the third largest pyramid by volume in the world, after the pyramid of Cholula, only 90 kilometers away, and the Cheops pyramid in Gizeh, see pages 240 and 245. Its orientation is carefully aligned with astronomical events such as sun observations during certain days of the year, important for agriculture. On my next visit, in 2017, nothing much has changed, except that the megacity of Mexico is slowly encroaching on this place.

We could have spent days here, but then drive on towards Cuantla and to Oaxaca the next day. We find a nice hotel and the famous *Asador vasco* restaurant with a balcony right above the Zócalo, the main square, watching people while we eat. No wine today, because elections take place tomorrow: *ley seca* (dryness law). But excellent food.

Figure 662. Giant cactus dwarfing our children and a rainstorm in the distance.

Figure 663. Dinner at the *Asador vasco*.
It still exists 22 years later (Figure 986).

The election suspense is over: Carlos Salinas de Gortari of the PRI is the new President of Mexico, winner of a fraudulent election. A steep smelly lane leads up to the Cerro del Fortín. Nice view over the town. A friendly local family with a small boy takes us back down into town; this is the first ride in the back of a pickup truck for Rafaela and Désirée. Another new experience.

Figure 664. Street life in Oaxaca.

Figure 665. Richly ornamented churches in Oaxaca—
but they pale in comparison to the Zapotec monuments.

Figure 666. Grand staircase—with no kids in 2010.

Oaxaca has an incredibly rich architectural legacy. Besides baroque churches and monasteries, vibrant markets, the most important one is at Monte Albán. Founded around 500 BC, it became the capital of the Zapotec empire for over one thousand years. The Zapotec Benito Juárez became president of Mexico in the mid-19th century, the only indigenous person in this office so far.

Figure 667. Grand staircase with small kids in the middle.

Monte Albán has a fantastic plaza with tall pyramids north and south, temples on the side, and a temple in the center. The whole top of a mountain is filled with buildings, a large area of about 200 × 300 meters.

One temple has a long broad "grand" staircase in stone and a hidden corridor leading to it from the inside. Our children have a great time exploring the ruins. They crawl through the corridor several times, and at one time they peep out of an otherwise invisible hole in a staircase. In this cute picture they seem to be looking out of a wall. On a later visit, in 2010, this staircase evokes wonderful memories to me, see Figure 981.

Figure 668. Overview of Monte Albán from the North Platform, the grand staircase on the right.

Figure 669. Stelae presumably representing prisoners.

Graves are richly adorned with colorful frescoes of warriors and the god of war. Triumphant stelae show captured enemies; some of them are mutilated.

Figure 670. Ballgame court.

Figure 671. Hand weaving loom and finished products for sale.

In Mitla, about 40 kilometers away, we find Toltec ruins and a Catholic church, partly built on the former. Two palaces and courtyards, adorned with fine mosaic friezes, which

used to be painted. And then there is the tourist market, a large square with one stand next to another. We are impressed and buy a domino game made of onyx. The Tule tree is allegedly 2000 years old. I have certainly never seen a tree with a girth like this. It is kept alive with a special hydration system.

Figure 672. The mighty Tule tree.

Figure 673. Again and again, we see massive rainstorms approaching.

At a lunch stop in Tapachula, a torrential rain comes down. Great fun for our kids. They enjoy running barefoot through the water, which turns the street into a river.

Late afternoon, we arrive at the border between Mexico and Guatemala on the Suchiate river. This is the start of an annoyance that will plague us throughout Central America, until in the end we refuse to play along. At the many huts of the border check point, I have to pay a few quetzales (the Guatemalan currency) every time and get a little paper slip. An older guy asks us to take all our luggage out of the car. We only pretend to do so and carry some things to a younger official, who is easier on us. It takes two hours in total and we pay 23 quetzales with a receipt and 5 quetzales without, just bribes. But once they start this lucrative game, why stop it? Right behind the next hill, another group of customs people ambushes us. In rather gruff tones, they want to see passports, car papers, luggage. But somehow our two pretty daughters (and maybe my pretty wife, certainly not pretty Yours Truly) defuse the situation and we get through quickly, without unpacking. And two bends further on, another customs hold-up. Again, with a few smiles from our kids we sail through easily. But all this gets on our nerves; unnecessary checkpoints, usually just to collect some pocket money—which I often refuse to give. In complete darkness, we arrive in Coatepeque.

All this is slightly annoying, but pales in comparison to the—sometimes mortal—difficulties that Central American emigrants face in 2019 when the Mexican government makes their entry here difficult, under pressure from the US president. See Figure 975 for a small insight into the hell that those emigrants are escaping from. In hindsight, on the one side it is a miracle how easily we pass through all of Latin America in spite of numerous

warnings (page 559) and depressing on the other side how difficult this can be for others.

Figure 674. Rafaela holding the fort at our hotel breakfast table in Guatemala City, and a street market downtown.

The next day, on our way to Guatemala City, we first follow the *ruta pacífica* (Panamericana), then veer off towards Lake Atitlán into the mountains. Soon dense fog surrounds us, I can hardly see anything and just crawl along. Trees and mountains vanish in the haze. Several viewpoints onto the lake are signposted—today we only look at a thick cloud of fog.

We spend four relaxing days in Guatemala City. I cannot get visas for Nicaragua, because their embassy ran out of forms for receipts ... Later they give me one, only it is useless because it has only my name on it, not our four names. The *Museo Popol-Vuh* has a rich exhibition on Mayan art. In the *Parque la Minerva*, our kids love their rides on old rusty carousels and the *tobogán* slide. These ancient contraptions look like they might collapse any minute, but at least they hold up for our visit.

Figure 675. Désirée at the Minerva Park.

At night, I read Rafaela from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, which we just bought; Dorothea and Désirée listen with eyes closed and half their ears. I was four years older than Rafaela is now when I read my first book in English, precisely this Treasure Island. I remember the pictures and the large print vividly. Many words were way beyond my two years of high school English, but I never looked up anything, preferring my own guesses over the dictionary's wisdom. And I had no idea how to pronounce difficult words like Squire John Trelawney's last name. But this exciting tale kept me hooked. The culmination comes early next year, when we pay homage to the great writer at Stevenson's grave in Samoa; see Figure 1577.

Our plan is to drive from Guatemala to El Salvador, but there is a *paro* (literally strike, but here a blockage of all traffic in that country) going on. This paro has been declared by the rebels in the poor country's civil war, and nobody can enter the country or move in it. At the Salvadorean border, they tell us that we would be shot at if we drove around. This is one of many times where the political situation has forced a change in travel plans.

Making the best of our forced delay, we decide to drive back and then directly from Guatemala to Copán in Honduras, an ancient Mayan town that flourished about 400 to 900 AD. On our route towards the border with Honduras, the last part is devastating, a continuous shaking on the bad road, crossing rivers, holes in the road, muddy sections. Our car's exhaust pipe does not enjoy this and decides to take leave of us, making an intolerable din by sliding along the road surface.

Figure 676. On the way to Copán: fording a river and a big ara by the roadside.

At the border checks, I have to pay two quetzales each for a large number of stamped little slips of paper, all absolutely necessary and each dealt with in its own little wooden hut, but never checked later. The car has to get sanitized with some obnoxious spray. It is dark when we arrive in Copán.

The next day at the Mayan ruins of Copán, intricately carved stelae line the trails, inscriptions everywhere. The *Hieroglyphic Staircase* is protected by a tent roof, a reconstructed ball playing field fires our baseball imagination. As I hike along a nature trail with Désirée, it starts to rain. Désirée runs and falls into the mud, Rafaela runs to help her and also falls. Oh well. Nothing bad happened.

Figure 677. Signposted aerial view of Copán—before drones.

Figure 678. Désirée having fun with a face mask ...

Figure 679. . . . and Rafaela with a relief.

Figure 680. Ball playing court.

Archeologists have excavated Copán for over a hundred years, with amazing results.

For example, they know that the ball playing court was built by the unpronounceable king Uaxaclajuun Ub'aah K'awiil and finished on 6 January 738. All this is due to the precision with which the Mayan builders constructed their monuments so that they would resist the jungle encroaching on them over the centuries, inscribed them in glyphs, and the toil of the archeologists in deciphering them. Isn't this incredible? Fixing the exact date!

Figure 681. Reliefs.

Climbing the pyramids is fun, except when we climb up the steepest one. Narrow steps, about half a foot deep but over a foot tall, make this quite strenuous. At the top, Dorothea has an attack of fear of heights. She cannot move. Indeed, looking down these steps it seems like an almost vertical drop. We do not know what to do. She asks me to call an emergency helicopter. The kids are anxiously waiting at the bottom of the pyramid, at least as worried as we are. Finally, Dorothea collects all her courage and walks down the steps, her face towards them and never looking down into the abyss behind us. I hold her tightly from behind. In the middle, her vertigo goes away and she can walk on her own.

Figure 682. Stelae with sacrificial tables in front of them.

On leaving the grounds, we are ambushed by a tropical rainstorm. We jump into the car, completely soaked, and tear off most of our wet clothes. Driving away half-naked, the

fogged up windows stop anyone from observing our ridiculous clothing, or rather the lack of it—and make navigating a real challenge. Driving by hearing rather than by seeing is not my favorite way.

I get our exhaust pipe fixed, again. This will plague us along the whole trip. Usually, the problem starts with a satisfying sound of a racing car coming out of some hole in the pipe, and then the whole assembly shakes loose. Here in Copán, the welders know what they are doing, but do not have the right materials to hang up the pipe. As a result, it rests much too low and hits every little bump in the road—clang clong cling. But I am happy: even in this fairly remote village, they can do a simple welding job, while any garage computer required by today's modern cars would be a long distance away.

Figure 683. Fixing our exhaust pipe.

Figure 684. Sombreros.

Getting back into Guatemala, I take the longest shortcut I have ever chosen. The road deteriorates quickly, large boulders impede our progress until we reach a point where our small car, with little ground clearance, cannot climb over the rocks and boulders that form the road anymore. Even turning around on this narrow bumpy road is a real challenge.

On a better road, we arrive back in Guatemala in time for the Sunday market in Chiquimula. Désirée wants to see the little chicks really close up, and would love to take some home—hard to do.

Figure 685. Sombrero for the señorita, and early Quidditch equipment, before *Harry Potter* appeared.

The next day takes us to Valle Nuevo, towards the border with El Salvador. Water flows along the road, our Tercel acquires liquid wings as I drive through rivers.

Comforting news at the border between Guatemala and El Salvador: the *paro* finished at midnight and one can travel through the country again. Indeed, there is quite some bus traffic. Long formalities at the border, eight and six paper slips on the two sides, and each costs a bit. The Salvadoreños are a bit more honest than the Guatemaltecos. We drive via Ahuachuantepec and Santa Ana to San Salvador. The landscape is beautiful, volcanoes, hills, everything is green, nothing moves. But the drive is eerie, overshadowed by a persistent inner question: will a band of guerrilleros show up after the next hill and shoot at us? We are the only vehicle around and imagine rebel ambushes around every corner.

Figure 686. Beautiful pottery and a turkey of disputable beauty.

Figure 687. The Rodríguez family (Victor, Alex, Elyn) with my three girls.

Everything goes well and we drive to the city center, where Dorothea discovers immediately the tourist office. They recommend the *Ramada Inn* with its swimming pool, US$ 25 per night for the four of us. It will turn out to be considerably more expensive.

At a recommended garage, an elderly mechanic knows his stuff and explains to me right away that he cannot fix our shock absorbers, because he does not have the spare parts. But he looks at other problems, and when I pick up the car two days later, he charges—nothing. I call my PhD student Wayne Eberly in Toronto to airfreight me four shock absorbers to Panamá, which he dutifully does.

Figure 688. Elyncita Rodríguez in their garden, and Désirée picking coffee beans.

Late in the afternoon, I meet Alejandro (Alex) Rodríguez in his *Farmacia Americana*, a pharmacy right in the city center. He is a long-time friend of my father's and our family, they visited us in my home town of Solingen, and I spent four weeks here in San Salvador with them on my first overseas trip in 1967; see page 716. My father has often seen them on his business trips in the area. We all go for dinner at a fancy restaurant. A sign at the door indicates the violent situation in the country: "Please leave all firearms in the cloakroom". We may be the only ones who have nothing to leave in the cloakroom except our jackets. Afterwards, we go to the Rodríguez' house in the upscale suburb of Colonía Escalón, where I spent almost all my time in 1967. And I am here now with Dorothea and our two daughters. Nothing has changed, the white antimacassars over their chairs are the same as twenty years ago, the dogs look the same but now have different names. All of us

are happy to see each other again. In particular Alex, who suffers from diabetes and has a pacemaker; sadly, he passes away a few years afterwards. His wife Elyn is fine, and with their daughter Elyncita, already slightly graying, they welcome us heartily, in particular Elyncita's friend Dorothea. Our two children show off their best, playing the piano, singing, and behaving in a grandiose way. Their parents are proud of them. Elyncita's son Victor Eugenio joins us later, a nice guy. Overall, we enjoy some wonderful days with our friends, seasoned by the taste of the Salvadorean reality of violence and crime. In this lamentable situation, the Rodríguez think of emigrating, but eventually decide against it. Elyncita is unhappy because she will only inherit the house and she and her husband are teachers with poor salaries, while her brother makes good money with his farmacy *Mi botica*.

Figure 689. With Victor Eugenio and Elyncita in a restaurant where our two children fall asleep on Dorothea's lap.

Figure 690. Horse riding on the Rodríguez' finca and the *Lago de Coatepeque*.

Victor takes us around, driving in his Toyota Landcruiser to his *finca* (farm, homestead). He planned the large building himself, and he keeps horses, cows, calves, and one bull. An employee saddles a horse and leads our children around on a leash. They enjoy this immensely, and also cuddling a one-day old calf.

We go to the near-by *Lago de Coatepeque*, a lake in a large volcanic caldera. The water level has sunk by several meters since I was first here 21 years ago. Presumably this is due to a fissure in the caldera, caused by one of the frequent earthquakes in this region. The water is seeping out slowly, dropping its level by about a meter per year. Back then, we would go from the dock into a motorboat and waterski around the lake. Now, the dock is a dozen meters away from the lakeshore. So we only go swimming in the warm waters. Désirée horses around with Victor, everybody has a lot of fun. We have to drive back into town before sunset, because afterwards you cannot be sure what the guerrilla will do.

Figure 691. Fancy turning signals. In the 1950s, European cars had simple yellow rectangles sticking out, but not such decorative ones.

One day, Elyn drives Elyncita and the four of us to the *Club Zunzal* on a Pacific beach. El Salvador is the only Central American country not bordering on the Caribbean. The black volcanic sand makes your feet look ugly. We take a short swim, the water is freezing cold: *agua rica*. Later, our kids go to the swimming pool. An elderly lady tries to chase them away, because children cannot swim on their own. She does not know our kids ...

Figure 692. Cold Pacific waters in the *Club Zunzal*.

Figure 693. Mothers mourning over and protesting for their abducted or killed children.

In twelve years of a bloody civil war, about 75 000 people were killed, many of them by the right-wing government and its death squads. Óscar Romero, archbishop of San Salvador and locally known as *monseñor Romero*, was an outspoken critic of the government and preached for human rights to be respected, the *voice of the voiceless*. My father knew him well. As he (Romero, not my dad) was stepping down after celebrating mass in the small chapel of *Hospital Capilla Divina Providencia* on 24 March 1980, a bullet from a member of an ultra-right death squad called ARENA went through his heart and killed him.

Figure 694. Shadow of a car that was burnt yesterday.
earthquake damage from two years ago, still not repaired.

The Salvadorean reality of a civil war with brutality on both sides also catches up with us, fortunately not in a deadly way. I have known about it from my father since boyhood. The family business of the Rodríguez is in sharp decline because of the many attacks in town. We once visit them in their downtown pharmacy. Another day, we want to go again

but cannot. A demonstration is going on, with the usual fighting, assaults, beatings. Ten cars get burned. In the afternoon, the air is clear and we can go. We see some of the damage, a car was set on fire and has burned its shape into the asphalt.

A big earthquake in 1986 destroyed much of the city. Across from the *Farmacia Americana*, a five-storey building collapsed and buried hundreds of people. Reconstruction is very slow, since much of the international help vanishes into the pockets of politicians.

In our hotel, a large printed notice offers the service of safeguarding valuables in their strongbox. Heeding the many warnings by our friends and others, I leave a sealed brown envelope containing our passports and travel money, about $1500 at that point. I tape it shut and scribble my signature across the tape. The hotel manager with a pock-marked face gives me a diabolical smile: "Yes, you can leave this safely with us."

A few days later, I ask the hotel manager to let me check my envelope. Surprise surprise: it has been grossly torn open and $400 are missing. The manager looks awkwardly at me and says nothing. What a brazen theft for the hotel manager to take money from his own hotel safe! I scream around in a wild rage, to no avail. We pack immediately, refuse to pay the hotel bill, and discuss this incident with Victor, who picks us up. He talks to the manager, also to no avail, and enlightens us about the general situation in this country. The Mexican owner of the hotel has a long criminal record. He did not pay his suppliers (several cases of whisky) and his sons are supposedly drug addicts. Yes, we could complain to the police. Our passport would be confiscated, they would start a lengthy investigation and possibly a court trial. This might take several months during which we would not be able to leave the country. Hired thugs might make our lives miserable, or even put an end to them. A corrupt judge might possibly rule in favor of the hotel owner and I might be accused of who knows what. And I could expect high fees for every (useless) step they might take. Aha.

In our home countries, we have a (basically) functioning system of police and justice, and it comes as an unwelcome surprise that this does not exist here. In El Salvador, after twelve years of civil war, the social web is torn and individuals fall through the gaping holes in it. Violence reigns. Individuals have to rely on themselves, their family and friends, but cannot expect helpful intervention by the state. Police and justice are just two further forms of organized crime, in uniform and in robes. The only way to obtain justice is by violence, but I am not up to hiring my own army of thugs. Indeed, a horrible state of affairs. Although I could have foregone this experience without regrets, it was interesting to be reminded of how good our own lives back home are. And after all, he did not take all the money, only a portion. A tiny remainder of conscience? Thank you, dear thief, for not stealing all of it, and leaving us our passports! And our daughters have learned another useful lesson: things may not be as pleasant as in our comfort zone at home.

After fleeing from the Ramada Inn, we move to the Hilton International, the allegedly best and certainly most expensive hotel in town. It is really beyond what we can afford, especially after today's drastic budget cut, but seems the safer solution for all of us. Actually, this large concrete block is more boring than the small-scale Ramada Inn, and we do not leave any valuables in their safe.

My first visit to the Nicaraguan embassy in San Salvador does not yield a visa, but another interesting experience. The insurgent Sandinistas, the *contras*, under their leader

Daniel Ortega have ousted the dictator Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua. Massive help in arms and money by US government agencies like the CIA to anti-contra (what a word! How do you call someone who is against them?) rebels continues to ruin Nicaragua, but eventually also plays a major role in the downfall of President Nixon.

Figure 695. Tiny demonstration in front of the Nicaraguan embassy, and Daniel Ortega set on fire.

Now I witness an anti-contra demonstration in front of the embassy, with about ten participants, ten journalists, and my humble self whom they take for a press photographer because of my big camera. Their slogans include demands for: *freedom of press, free elections, democracy*, none of which their Somoza regime ever granted, and also the things that these Somozistas want most: *total amnesty, abolishing repressive laws*, meaning the anti-Somoza laws, but not the repressive laws of Somoza. Their leader shouts "Muerte al dictador Anasta ... Daniel Ortega" (death to the dictator Anasta ... Daniel Ortega), a classical Freudian mistake. The whole affair has little credibility. They then burn a paper maché effigy of Ortega, soaked in gasoline. Quite a picturesque introduction to Central American politics. And the next day, I do get visas for all of us.

Soon we are on our way again, happy to leave this unhappy country. Through a rich green hilly landscape we drive towards the border with Honduras, via San Vincente and Amatillo. I do not share my nagging fears of a machine gun beyond the next hill with my family. Nothing happens, but it is disconcerting to move through this potentially dangerous terrain with wife and children. The border checks consume a dollar here and a dollar there at each little hut, quite annoying and time-consuming. But we arrive safely in Choluteca, Honduras, and rest for two days from our Salvadorean excitements.

Figure 696. Roadside handcraft in Honduras and the FSLN welcoming us in Nicaragua.

We approach our next border. The civil war in Nicaragua has ended recently with the victory of the Sandinistas (FSLN, Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, Sandinista Front for National Liberation) and the border station shows numerous gun hits. But it is working. There is practically no traffic. The only persons besides us are a mother and daughter who are desperate to get to Managua, to visit a son in hospital. Only the daughter knows that he is already dead. But there is no way for them to get away from the border, no bus or the like We offer to give them a ride, although this is quite a squeeze in our tiny car. We hardly have any breathing room for ourselves, let alone for two hefty persons in addition. Now Dorothea, Rafaela, Désirée, and the daughter sit in the back with bags on their laps, the mother in front besides me with her mighty suitcase sticking out of the window. Feels like driving a bus. And hoping that the rear axle will survive this heavy load. We thought our car was full with the four of us, but now we know better. How about a cat and a dog and ...?

Figure 697. Two more passengers in our crammed car.

Figure 698. The Nicaraguan civil war has left the infrastructure in shambles.

The road is pretty bad, and since our shock absorbers are shot, we feel each rock hitting

the car's underside. But then comes a really big hit—a hole, almost a trench, so large that there is no way to evade it. The big hole in the right front tire is irreparable. In the middle of nowhere, we have to unload all our stuff from the back of the car, get out the spare tire and tools, and change the tire. Fortunately, it has stopped raining for a while. Within half an hour, we are done.

Figure 699. Involuntary roadside stop. No surprise on these roads.

Figure 700. More tranquil transportation in León.

We arrive in León at 17.00. The only place we find for the night turns out to be the most miserable accommodation of this trip. An airless suffocating tiny room. The four of us share an uncomfortable bed. The total price of US$1.30 is just about right. Dorothea has a terrible back ache after a night on the worn-out spring mattress, and this pursues her for a long time. In a restaurant near the train station, there is neither food nor drink for our children, only beer. We are compensated for this dismal state by the wild party that is going on, with a loud band playing and everybody having fun. When we go to dance, we are the big attraction of the evening, especially our kids. Welcome to poor and lively Nicaragua!

Figure 701. Bad roads but good fun.

It is quite difficult to get coupons for gas, as required, but eventually I succeed. Only then the gas station has no gas, so we drive towards the capital Managua without a full tank. The city was destroyed by an earthquake on 23 December 1972. With a magnitude of 6.2, it killed about 19 000 people, left the city center a pile of rubble and about two thirds of its one-million population homeless. The copious international help vanished in the pockets of the dictator Anastasio Somoza and his cronies.

Figure 702. The *National Palace* with posters of Sandino and Ortega.
View of the former city center, levelled by the earthquake.

The outrage over this corruption incited the anti-Somoza Sandinista revolution, after decades of the country's exploitation under Somoza with the help of banana companies like *United Fruit*. It is named after Augusto César Sandino, a national hero who fought against US troops in Nicaragua in the 1920s and 1930s.

Figure 703. Inside the cathedral.

Pedro Joaquín Chamorro was the owner of the leading national newspaper *La Prensa* and a friend of my father's. On 10 January 1978, he was killed by Somoza's henchmen, uniting the opposition and eventually leading to Somoza's downfall in 1979. Daniel Ortega, head of the Sandinista movement, took over and was re-elected in 1984. The *contra rebels*, supported by US President Nixon and the CIA, bitterly fought against the new government; see Figure 695 for a visual impression. *La Prensa* was closed by the Sandinista government two weeks before we got there, but a triumphant issue appears right on the day of our arrival. Later, Chamorro's widow Violeta Chamorro, an anti-Sandinista, is elected president in 1990. In a surprising turn-around, Ortega is voted into the presidency again in 2006 and 2011. At the time of writing (2020), Nicaragua is again in turmoil, this time against the corruption and brutal persecution of the Ortega government. *The revolution eats its children* has become true in too many cases, from the French Revolution to Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, South Africa, and on this continent, in Venezuela and Nicaragua.

Nothing has been done to rebuild the center of Managua, sixteen years after the quake, just a few buildings are standing, most are in a desolate state of collapse, and the once lively center is now basically a large park onto which a few ruined high rises look down. It

feels as if the earthquake had occurred just a month ago and is a terrible sight to see, in particular, thinking about the victims.

Figure 704. A broken city, 16 years after the earthquake.

With great difficulties, we find a hotel, *Las Cabañas*, with a swimming pool richly covered with green algae. A minor annoyance is that one morning, our front licence plate is missing. Cleanly removed with tools. Now a Canadian licence plate adorns someone's home in Managua. I put the rear licence plate in the back window, where it is not so easy to lift. We drive like this through South America and also later in Toronto, to Alaska and Florida. Nobody ever bothers us for the missing front licence plate—and nor do we.

Figure 705. Former bathroom and former cinema.

Figure 706. Swimming pool at our hotel,
and an upcountry dwelling without swimming pool.

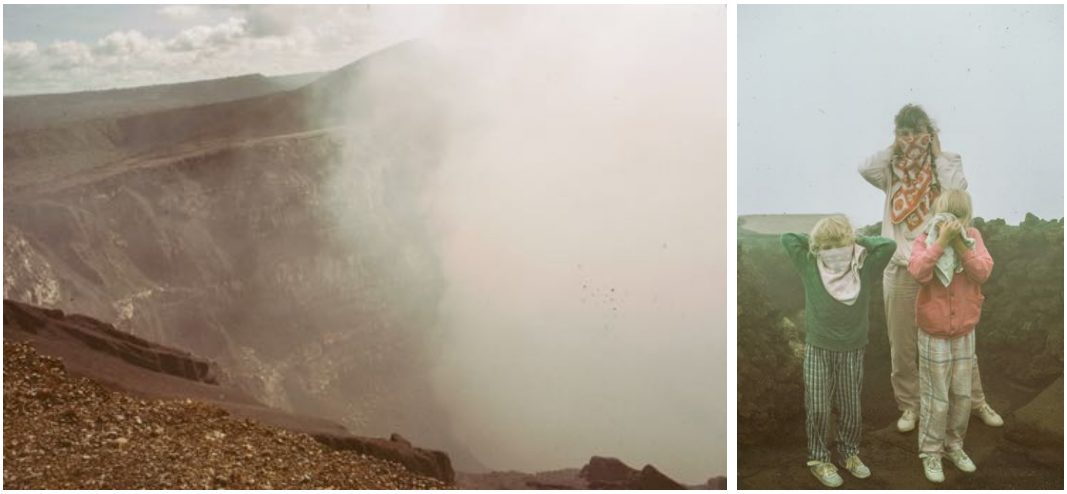


Figure 707. Sulphurous fumes at the Masaya volcano.

The Masaya volcano is our first excursion from Managua. Through rain and fog, we still have a beautiful view of the volcano and the lagoon. We walk around its Santiago

crater, which belches out a full blast of sulphur dioxide gas. Even with the wet towels that we hold in front of our mouths, the acid breeze scratches nose and throat terribly and cuts short our visit. An amazing sight are the green parakeets flying in and out of the crater. Obviously, their system has gotten used to the acidic gas. Further down, we hike on a green path through the black basaltic lava fields, the kids climb around on the lava boulders, careful not to cut themselves on the sharp edges.On our drive back, we go to the hot springs of Tipitapa. We have to wade through a layer of mud, and only the last pool is cool enough for swimming.

Figure 708. Our daughters monkeying around in the lava fields.

Figure 709. Hiking around the Masaya volcano.

Figure 710. Our tour guide and an open-air bus ride.

Figure 711. Tipitapa hot springs.

On our visit to Granada and Lake Nicaragua (Lago Cocibolca), some old palm trees are being felled. The crashing suitably impresses our children. A small motor boat takes us from our *Niantic Hotel* to an island with a restaurant.

Figure 712. Lake Nicaragua.

Finally, we move on to Costa Rica, one of the really nice countries on our Grand Tour. At the border post Peñas Blancas between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, we need almost a dozen slips of paper, but the total cost is only about one US$. We are the last to pass the border as they close at 15.30. Costa Rica is a land of natural wonders and suitably welcomes us with a wonderful rainbow that stays in front of us for a long time.

Figure 713. Welcome to Costa Rica!

On the drive to the capital San José, our car acts up more than usual, making loud creaking noises. Maybe the shock absorbers are finally shot. We limp into town and to a hotel. We will spend three exciting weeks in this wonderful country, visiting some of its fascinating volcanoes and beaches. But on our first day in the capital, we get a feeling for

the dark side of seismic activities: a small earthquake hits us. Nothing bad happens, but it is a funny feeling to have the floor dancing under your feet.

Costa Rica is, by Central American standards, a safe and clean country. We find signs like *No ensucie a Costa Rica, espere a llegar a su casa o a la nuestra y lo deposita en el basurero* (Leave Costa Rica clean, wait until you get home or to our house to deposit your waste in the garbage). It feels good to be back in a more civilized country. Downtown is crowded, but feels pleasantly safe after the pervasive insecurity in San Salvador.

Next day, we move to a much nicer and somewhat cheaper hotel, the *Casa Maria* in Escazú, where we stay for eleven days. From this suburb, we have a marvellous view over San José, especially impressive at night.

Figure 714. Downtown San José, the foyer of the National Theater, and sunbathing in Escazú in front of an approaching thunderstorm.

On an excursion up to the crater of the Poas volcano, 3432 meters high, we are lucky and can see the crater lake in its full splendor—it is often covered by clouds. Its waters are green and yellow, and mud bubbles exhale their vile fumes everywhere. It is always fascinating to see an active volcano. After lunch in a nice restaurant, Désirée and I decide to go for another hike. A marvellous experience in dense jungle, the trail not well marked, with aerial roots, bromelias on the trees, lianas, butterflies, several kinds of beetles, and trees to climb over and under. We take our time, enjoying Mother Nature on this lonely and peaceful trail, completely oblivious of the park's closing time of 16.00. When we arrive at the parking lot, happy as a bird, Dorothea is also happy to see us. The park rangers

have already started to search for us, but in the dense forest it is hard to find anyone. The whole affair made Dorothea understandably nervous, but now everyone is fine again.

Figure 715. Poas volcano and lake.

Figure 716. The Irazú volcano, with the Pacific Ocean in the background.

Figure 717. Rafaela sheltered under a leaf at the Irazú volcano.

Our next excursion starts with a drive up the Irazú volcano, the last bit very steep, in pouring rain with hardly any visibility, and hard to drive. Is it worth its while to get up at 05.30 on such a rainy and foggy day? It is! Just before reaching the crater, we pierce the cloud cover and are in brilliant sunshine. What a feeling! The crater is a moonscape, nothing grows here. There are fantastic views into the crater, but the highlight is a viewpoint from where we can see both the Atlantic (Caribbean) and the Pacific coast. Not many places afford this view.

Figure 718. On the Irazú volcano, Désirée exhausted.

It is cool at 3432 meters of altitude, and we walk over a narrow path of volcanic sand and ash, with steep abysses on both sides. After breakfast in the highest restaurant of

Central America, we drive on a side road until it peters out. The continuation is a logging road, unsuitable for our little car. I try to hike up a steep trail, in the pouring rain over crumbling and slippery rocks, sometimes on all fours, until I have to give up. It would be highly unsafe to scramble down this dangerous path. But back at our car, I can persuade Rafaela to take a walk with me along the logging road. It starts raining, and Rafaela takes shelter under giant leaves by the trail. We cross a high moor area, where I carry her for some time. Hard work, and we have a lot of fun together.

A solo excursion takes me on a white water rafting tour down the Reventazón river. It carries a lot of fast water these days, class III to IV. From the top of the mountain, I again see both Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Right at the start, big waves hit us and everybody is drenched and having a good time.

Figure 719. A hut in the country, and a rest stop on the Reventazón's bank.

Figure 720. Rain forest in Costa Rica and Désirée meeting a new friend.

I sit at the front, most of the time in thick brown water which we bail out constantly. It is cool, but not really cold. Our guide manouevres through lots of heart-stopping rapids in expert fashion. After a rich lunch we are almost dry, but launch ourselves into more of the wet adventure. Walls of water fall over us at places like the *hueco santo* (holy hole).

Three people fall out of their rafts, none out of ours, but are quickly salvaged. Real proof that this is an exciting trip. After four hours on and in the water, we are all happy to put on dry clothes. A beer, and then they drive us home. One of the few trips on our Grand Tour where I do not drive myself ...

Figure 721. Driving through torrents.

Via Ciudad Quesada we drive to Tabacón, at the foot of the Arenal volcano, 1633 meters high. An exciting day and evening begins. An eruption in 1968 buried three villages under its lava and ash.

Volcanic water at 23°C feeds a large swimming pool at the foot of the volcano. The kids love racing down on their bums the enormous water slide, with sufficient speed for Rafaela to get her elbow scratched twice. But that is only the beginning. We enjoy one of the most memorable dinners ever. The steaks are excellent and in the restaurant, we feel the rumbling of the volcano under our feet. A bit scary. Dorothea runs across the room for a better view and hurts her right heel badly; it takes three weeks to heal. Eventually we move outside and watch the truly amazing nature show. We have a clear view of the Arenal volcano, spewing forth red-hot lava. The superheated rock is ejected at the top, then not visible for a short time, the large masses split into three or four streams to finally hit the flank of the volcano and roll down. At one point, the explosion is larger than before, and a huge mass of red glowing lava falls down the sides of the volcano.

Figure 722. Désirée coming down the Arenal waterslide helter-skelter.

Figure 723. Arenal volcano at dusk, the lava is not visible.

Figure 724. Arenal volcano under an evening sky.

Figure 725. Little big explorer Rafaela near the Arenal volcano.

During the day, you cannot observe this colorful spectacle, because the flow of hot lava

is invisible through the small clouds surrounding it. But at night, the red glow shines through this dust. We are all excited about these spectacular natural fireworks. All this under a starry sky, the perfect place to relax far away from it all. The restaurant closes at 22.00, but we stay there until after midnight. An unforgettable evening for all of us.

Figure 726. Red hot lava streaming down the Arenal volcano.

We drive to a volcanic sand quarry near the volcano. Rafaela and I hike up a green hill surrounded by black lava. Later the trail leads over volcanic rock to the higher of two huts, from where we return. It is cloudy and the view is not good. On our descent, we see a large wall of rain slowly approaching. We decide to race it and scramble down quickly. Just as we reach our car, the first rain drops hit us. But we won the race! A few weeks

ago, a group of three US Americans walked up here. Two stayed somewhere in the middle, one of them continued climbing to the top. He was then probably hit on his head by a rock from one of the many explosions; his body was discovered only three days later.

Our drive to Puerto Limón and Puerto Tortuguero for adventures with turtles takes us across the continental divide, into the clouds, out of the clouds, until back in the Caribbean plain it gets warm again. Huge banana plantations, all covered with unhealthy-looking blue plastic against bugs. A strange sight. When I see bananas in a supermarket today, I always have to think of those blue plastic plantations.

Figure 727. On the boat to Tortuguero.

Figure 728. A little playdough pig, and the jungle reflected in the brown waters.

We get to the small port of Moín and try to assemble a group for the boat to Tortuguero. The big tourist boat cannot operate because of low water levels. Some Italians do not even answer my question. But finally Samuel and Scott, working for the US Peace Corps, Susan and Jim, also Americans, and the four of us rent a speedboat. Pretty loud, but a wonderful trip along the rivers, which widen at times to lakes connected to the Caribbean. We hear the jungle singing, but see few animals, only a few turtles stay on the river banks and ignore the din of our outboard engine.

Figure 729. Turtle and our comfortable cabaña.

We settle in a small *cabaña* with the sea breeze going through it in lieu of air conditioning and have dinner, when at 20.00 all electricity is cut. Marvellous occasion for us to stroll along the dark beach, with permission to do so. Tortuguero is named for the Atlantic green *tortugas* (turtles) that come here in the egg-laying season, at the end of which we arrive. They crawl awkwardly up the beach, sometimes up to 250 000 of them in one night. They look rather clumsy in their heavy carapace and leave a distinctive trail with their flippers. Then they dig a large hole, half a meter deep, deposit a clutch of their eggs, shovel sand over the eggs, smooth the surface to make detection harder, and finally go back to vanish in the dark sea.

Our two daughters are a bit scared at first in the pitch dark night, but get used to it quickly. We pass two local guys who are apparently collecting eggs, strictly forbidden in this National Park. Otherwise, we do not see much at first, but on our return walk, we come across our first turtle. She must be as frightened as we are. Our meeting with the presumed egg collectors inspires a brave deed to save the world, or at least a bunch of little turtles. With much enthusiasm, we try to obliterate the turtle tracks, well visible and pointing to her egg hatch, and in addition lay a false track by making impressions in the sand. The kids enjoy this little game a lot, proud to do a good deed in the middle of the night on a starlit beach.

I do not know whether it saved a single egg from being taken, but it is a moving experience in the dark of the night. We almost stumble across our second turtle, just crawling out of the water, and now digging her hole. Just as she has finished her egg-laying business, a Park ranger comes along and turns her on her back to check the marking on her flippers. The turtle fights this torture valiantly by beating the sand with her flippers, and we get covered over and over by sand. Apparently, the rangers come back in the morning

to check the marks against their records. It still looks brutal to see this poor defenceless creature lying on her back on the beach. I see egg-laying turtles again about thirty years later; see page 487.

Figure 730. Buried deeply in the black volcanic sand of Tortuguero.

Figure 731. A turtle on her way to lay eggs at night and a disconcerted Rafaela the next morning besides a turtle egg-laying hole, with flipper marks on the right.

Figure 732. Resurrected from a sandy grave, and enjoying life on the beach.

Figure 733. Taking a rest after so much monkey business.

On another day, Désirée is not feeling well, Dorothea attends to her, and Rafaela and I go on a boat trip with Susan and Jim. A fascinating trip over black waters—the whole area is volcanic, the sand black everywhere—without the din of an engine, just the gentle splash of oars. Butterflies and hummingbirds surround us, a large three-toed sloth hangs upside down from a tree, slothing away the time. So relaxed. In the evening, Rafaela and I go to the black beach again, but today there are too many people around and the turtles stay away. But overall, our stay in Tortuguero was one of the most relaxed and peaceful moments of our trip.

Figure 734. Fallen asleep on our boat ride back, and a villa on the Caribbean for sale.

Figure 735. Leaving their mark: Désirée, Rafaela, and their friend Gabriella (Rackoff).

Figure 736. Living shell and evening at Cahuita.

After cruising back on a boat to Moín, we visit a wonderful beach in the Cahuita National Park, sitting at a shady table and going out to swim and snorkel. Shallow waters, white sand, a pure delight. One tree on the beach is covered with spider webs, and multicolored spiders are crawling all over it.

Figure 737. Snorkeling in the Cahuita Park.

The *Manuel Antonio National Park* on the Pacific coast boasts a spectacular landscape of tropical rainforest right by the ocean. But the water is cold, the beach not particularly inviting with its pebbly sand, and sharp coral rocks everywhere make swimming difficult. One of Rafaela's flip flops decides to swim away and I get nasty scratches on my belly as I recapture it. This area certainly does not match the excitement of climbing the volcanoes nor the beautiful sandy beaches on the Caribbean side.

Figure 738. The Texaco service center in Cahuita—sorry, no electricity.

Figure 739. One big gulp, and the gas starts flowing.

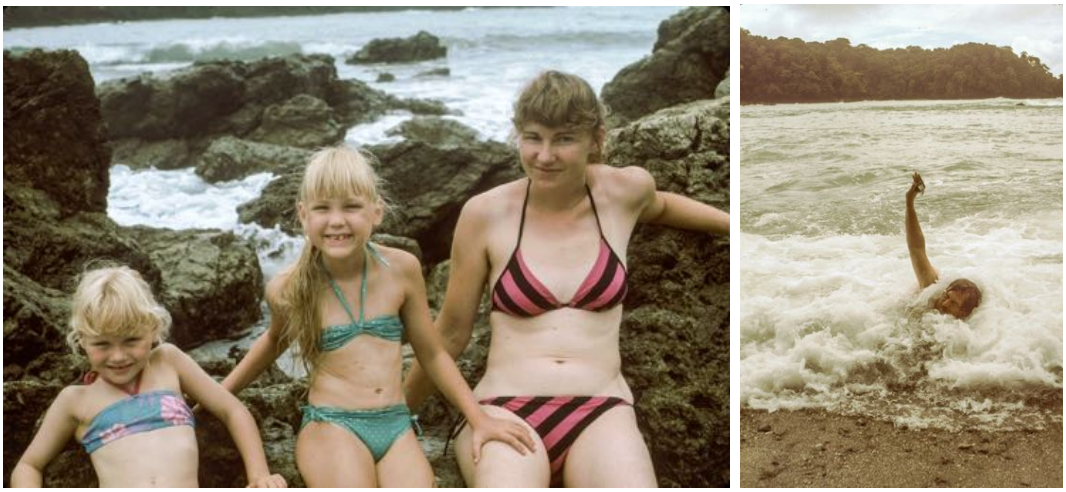


Figure 740. Three graces in the Manuel Antonio Park and a happy recapture of Rafaela's flip flop.

The border to Panamá is our last crossing in Central America. A pleasant aspect of travelling in Latin America is that with our German passports, we do not need visas anywhere except for Nicaragua. An annoyance is the usual line of little wooden huts on each side of borders, where I have to go in and pay a small amount, typically US$ 2 each

time. No receipt, no plausible reason given. I am fed up with this by now and refuse to pay. And somehow get away with it. *Just do it!*

Figure 741. The *Panamericana* in Panamá and the *puente de las Ámericas*.

A drive of 300 kilometers on a good road through the jungle brings us to the capital Panamá City. The last section crosses the giant *puente de las Ámericas* (bridge of the Americas) over the Panamá canal. It was opened in 1962 and eventually became a bottleneck for the traffic on the Panamerican Highway. Since 2004, the new *puente centenario* (centenary bridge) alleviates the congestion. The city is plagued by crime, and people warn us not to wander around at night. Too bad.

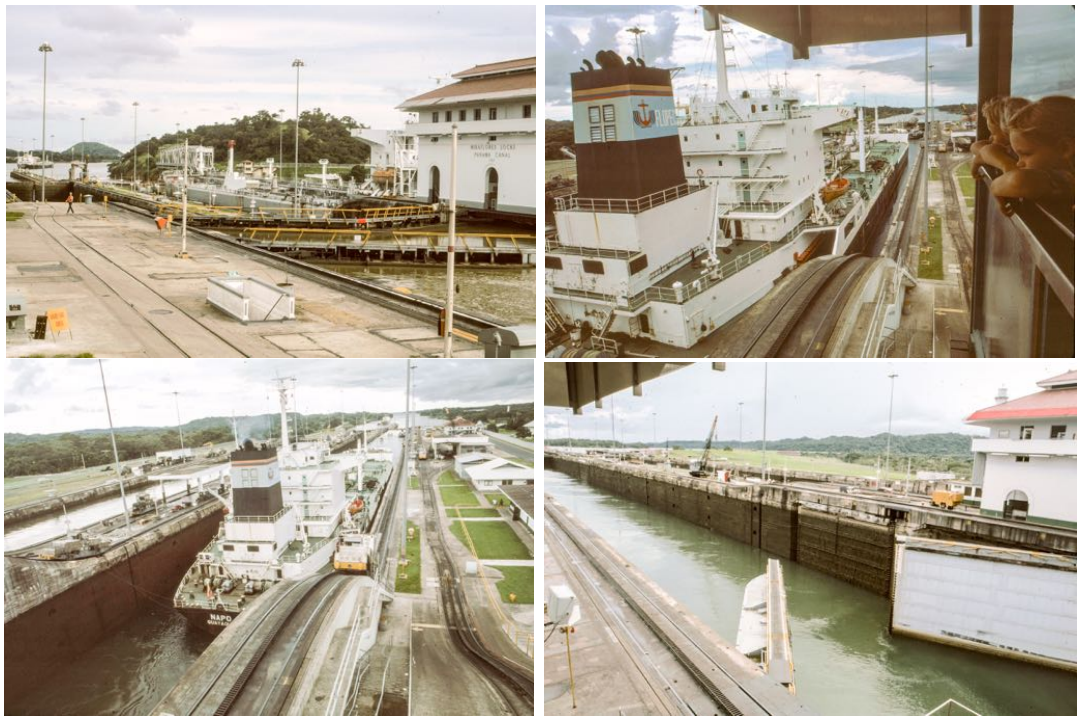


Figure 742. The Miraflores locks on the Panamá canal. Dorothea and our kids barely visible at top right, and the sluice gate opening at bottom right.

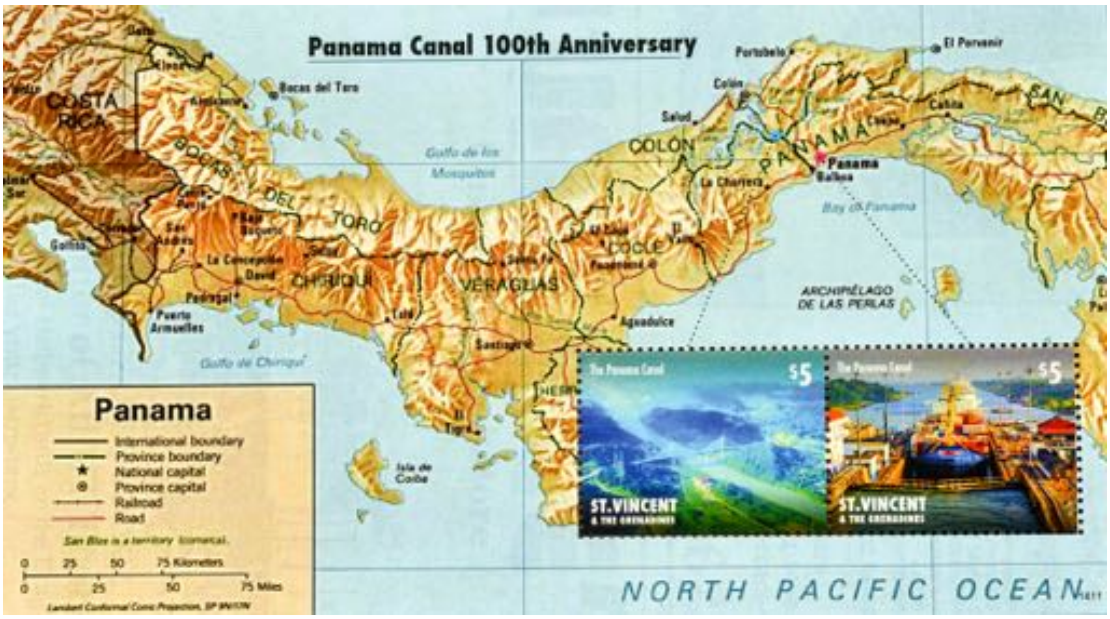


Figure 743. Block of stamps (issued by St. Vincent and the Grenadines) showing Panamá and its canal.

Huge ocean-going freighters pass through the Miraflores locks on the canal. They are lifted, up or down, by 16.5 metres. Giant sluice gates open to let the water and the ships out towards the Pacific, then close again to be filled by water coming from the Atlantic side, which lifts the ships going there. Everywhere large machinery, small but energetic locomotives pulling the ships. A fascinating operation. And a small repair shop in town installs the new shock absorbers that Wayne Eberly has graciously sent us. A counter-intuitive tidbit of geography: the Caribbean port of the canal is further west than the Pacific one.

Figure 744. Panamá City from our hotel swimming pool and a street in Viejo Portobelo.

The Panamerican Highway ends in Panamá, or rather it takes a break to continue in South America. From an engineering point of view, a road could fairly easily be built across

the swamps of the *Darien Gap*. But politics, possibly in connection with US pressure in their futile "war on drugs", have prevented this and are likely to continue in the future. We have to ship our beloved little Tercel to South America. The first leg of its trip is a drive along the Panamá canal to the port city of Colón on the Caribbean, see page 806 for my 1986 visit. About 50 kilometers northeast lies the fascinating small city of Portobelo at the mouth of the Río Chagres.

Figure 745. Cool kids with real Panamá hats.

Figure 746. Portobelo and its Spanish bridge.

Christopher Columbus (Cristóbal Colón) discovered this bay on his fourth voyage in 1502 and named it *Porto Bello* (beautiful port) for its idyllic location and safe harbor. In the 17th and 18th centuries, it became a major staging point for the transport of gold and

silver from the West coast of South America. These treasures were stored in warehouses until large fleets of Spanish ships brought them to Spain. We see the ruins of a church and a beautiful bridge that is still usable over three centuries after its construction. One wonders how many modern bridges would survive that long—if any of them.

Figure 747. Rivers, creeks, lakes: water everywhere in Portobelo.

Pirates were a well-established form of governmentally organized crime in those days and attracted by those riches. The English pirate Francis Drake, later knighted as Sir Francis by Queen Elizabeth I, looted Spanish gold and silver mule trains arriving on the Caribbean coast for transport to Portobelo in the 1570s. He died of malaria there. A century after that, in 1668, another pirate, the Welsh Henry Morgan, conquered with just 460 men the various forts of Portobelo in a single day. He was also knighted later. The pirates looted the city, with rape and debauchery, during two weeks before sailing back to Jamaica, where parts of the bounty were shared among the buccaneers and the English crown treasury. Several forts were built in and around Portobelo, but they could not keep the pirates out. Eventually, the Spanish crown reorganized the transport of gold and silver from the Americas to Spain.

Figure 748. The fort *San Lorenzo* near Portobelo.

In 1671, Morgan made a highly unwelcome return visit, overran the port city again and then marched his marauding band across the isthmus to the city of Panamá, roughly along where the canal is today. This was a tough hike through the jungle for his foot-heavy pirates, with little food. The city was heavily fortified, but mainly towards the

sea, and the pirates took the city. Knowing about his impending arrival and warned from his previous exploits, the Spanish authorities sent most of the treasures and children and women on a ship to Perú. The buccaneers killed and looted, and the inhabitants' wives and daughters were their prey. There was a fine legal distinction between ordinary pirates and *privateers*, pirates who carried an authorization by their country's ruler. Their victims did not appreciate this subtle difference. But in the end, Morgan returned with so little bounty that malcontent arose among his men, especially since he was accused of keeping a large amount to himself.

Figure 749. Our little Tercel is ready to sail on its own to South America, while we take an airplane.

Today things are not quite as rough. But Panamá City is still a dangerous place, and Colón even more so. Following admonitions by locals, we move around as little as possible, basically only to the *Puerto de las minas* (port of mines) and the shipping company Crowley Caribbean Transport Inc. As required, we empty our car completely, even of gas, and pay the transport fee of US$ 500. And then it is time to say good-bye, hoping for a good reunion; see page 622. We lug all our gear, the whole carful of it, to the airport. With luck and politeness, we manage to avoid paying extra charges for our load.

Figure 750. Glorious church in Quito.

Figure 751. Map of the Quito to Northern Chile part of our Grand Tour.

Our plane lands in Quito, Ecuador, the highest country capital of the world at 2850 meters. Wonderful fresh mountain air after a month in the steaming tropics. We reside in an ornate but inexpensive colonial-style hotel right in the city center. On our long walks through the steep streets of the city we see richly decorated churches and busy markets, and enjoy the views over town and the surrounding valleys.

Figure 752. In the streets.

We also have an encounter with the rough side of Latin America. Dorothea is going ahead of me through a crowded street, her handbag in front of her and the kids walking besides her. Near the church of the Compañía de Jesús (Jesuits), two young guys, about 16 years old, pass me and I wonder: why have they pulled their sweaters over their hands? Looks rather funny. And then they rush at Dorothea and slit open her hand bag with a sharp knife. I yell out and Dorothea even louder than me. The *compañía de ladrones* (gang of thugs) run off, vanishing around a corner. We inspect the damage. They have sliced through her bag, cut up a leather purse, some bills, and a plastic raincoat inside, and mutilated an innocent orange as collateral damage. Little material loss, but a big scare, also for our daughters. And they learned a healthy warning: crime exists. I tell them that in my experience, almost all people almost everywhere are honest. When I approach someone, I am completely trustful. My trust has usually been repaid, even to the tune of people returning goods to me that I just lost. But when someone approaches me, I am more careful. In particular, in big cities and crowded areas, like markets, train or bus stations. Pickpockets, say, can be expected anywhere, in our home town or in far-away countries. Many people are afraid of all kinds of things in foreign regions, from snakes to crocodiles or sharks. But the real danger on tour are traffic accidents, and these can also happen at home.

We meet Felipe Fried, with whom I spent amusing moments two years ago (see page 778), and have a wonderful outing to the town of Baños only 130 kilometers from Quito, far down in the humid Amazon region, but still at 1820 meters of altitude and surrounded by tall volcanoes. The name is due to its natural hot springs. Our picnic is *chicken on the rocks*, big chunks of delicious chicken that we eat on large basalt boulders by a mountain stream.

Figure 753. Little damage from an attack:
Dorothea's handbag slit open and a hole in her rain jacket.

Figure 754. Chicken on the rocks with the Fried family:
Felipe, Natalie (6 years), and Anaïs (3) at top left.

Figure 755. Désirée and Anaïs.

A memorable hike goes across a decrepit hanging bridge over the wild Pastaza river deep below. This is not for the faint-hearted, but Dorothea manages easily in spite of her fear of heights. In 1986, I hiked up the Tungurahua volcano that dominates the city but did not make it to the top, see page 764.

Figure 756. Hiking around Baños.

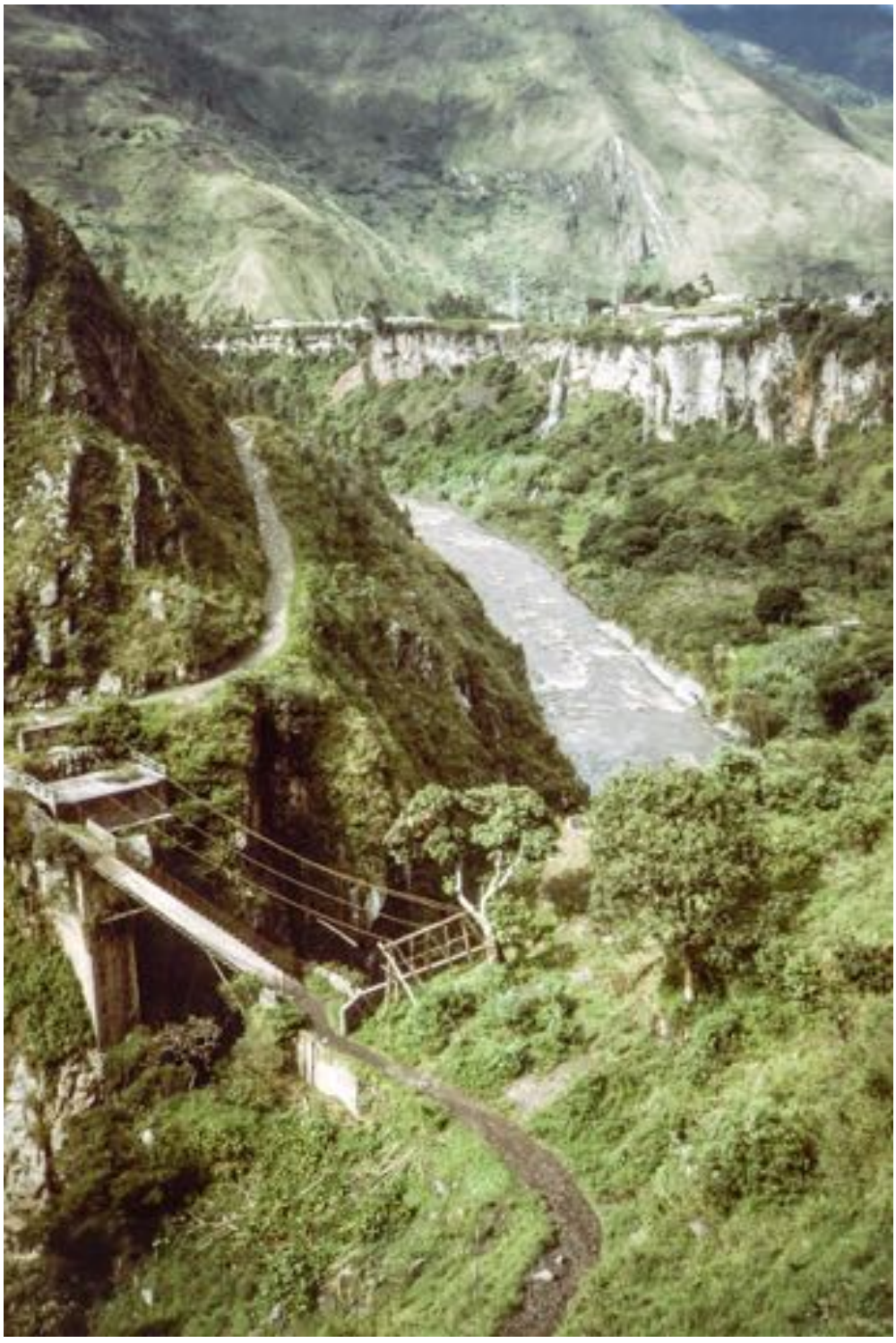


Figure 757. Bridge over the Pastaza river.

Via the colonial town of Ambato we cross into Perú, all the time carrying our heavy load onto and off buses. In our Baños hotel, I hide our passports and money safely under my mattress. Safe against thieves, but not against my forgetfulness. The first thing I forget

is to tell Rafaela about my precaution; she is a better guardian of things than myself. Then halfway to Ambato, a thunderbolt strikes me: I realize my huge mistake of not taking that package. After unloading everything at the next stop, Dorothea and the children have to wait at this godforsaken place. No shade, no food, no drink, and a yucky hole in the ground called a toilet. The three are tired, hungry, and mad at me. I take a bus back and walk to our hotel, full of apprehension of the impending difficulties should our papers and money have vanished. One touch under the mattress of the as yet unmade bed—and there lie our treasures. What a relief! Also for my three companions, when I return after four dismal hours from a self-inflicted undesired side trip.

Figure 758. Market in Ambato and a taxi fully loaded with our gear.

A bus takes us to the Peruvian port of Paita. Happy to drop our huge load of baggage in a hotel, we are now all excited about seeing our little car again, praying that it is in good shape.

I walk to the port in the morning—and there it is, our white Toyota Tercel in full splendor! What a relief! No major damage, just a flat tire. Usually I have to crank up the car on a small jack, taking forever. But a stevedore sees me take out this pitiful instrument, drives over in his heavy forklift, lift the car, and the tire is off and the spare on within minutes. My personal record time for a change of tires.

Figure 759. The *Capitanía* (Port Authority) in Paita and an easy change of tires with the help of a forklift.

On our whole trip, we have few bureaucratic problems with visas and importing or exporting our car. But now we need a customs document called *Carnet de Passage* for Perú, where our car enters by ship without being accompanied. This paper guarantees that the issuing Auto Club will pay import duties if the vehicle is not exported; the amount can be up to three times the car's value in the home country. Even if it gets stolen—adding insult to injury, because the holder has to indemnify the Auto Club.

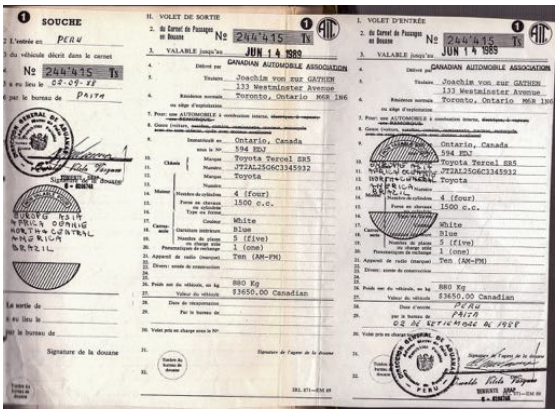


Figure 760. Carnet de Passage.

After loading our stuff into the car, we leave the town away from the coast, towards the Panamericana which runs inland. The sides of the road are strewn with garbage, quite an unappetizing sight, but then excellent asphalt goes straight through the Sechura desert with beautiful dunes of light-brown sand on both sides of the road. The cold waters of the Humboldt current off the Peruvian coast make it one of the most arid places in the world.

Figure 761. Loads of garbage along the road and one of the many memorial crosses.

Annoyingly, the sand does not always stay where it belongs. Small tongues of sand cross the road. I can drive around them, but after some time a sizeable dune blocks our way, about a meter high and thirty meters long. Ha, I think, you little sandy bastard will not stop our mighty Tercel that has taken us from Canada to Perú. So I simply drive across it, but the bastard strikes back. Already after a few meters, the bottom of our low-clearance car gets glued to the sand below it. We are stuck! Now what?

Figure 762. Beautiful dunes by the road, and small intrusions that are easy to get by.

Figure 763. Sand slide for Rafaela and a sunset picture of the four of us.

Figure 764. Fun in the dunes.

Figure 765. Fleet-footed young ladies.

We face the task of digging our car out of the sand. There is so little space on board that no room is left for any kind of expedition equipment like a shovel. In fact, one of the things I like is that we got so far without being encumbered by all the stuff that most people carry on such trips, from spare gas tanks to fancy sets of tools or winches. So all of us work hard with makeshift tools: a plastic waste basket, a potty for emergencies, cups, and our hands. We toil to exhaustion in the burning sun and sweat is dropping like from gravel trucks. After about two hours, the sand clinging to the undercarriage is removed and a trail for the wheels has been cut. In a large cloud of sand, I drive the car out of this trap. We are justifiedly proud of having managed this with our primitive means—and determination.

Figure 766. Our Tercel staring at the obstacle ...

Figure 767. . . . and rather ineffective attempts to get over it.

We are all pretty blasted and almost despair when a little later an even larger dune blocks our way. What can we do? We have not seen a living soul since Paita, and our only option is to restart our primitive digging again.

Figure 768. A hopeless task, we will never get through this sea of sand.

But then we luck out. A large van arrives from Paita, bringing about ten workers from a fish factory to their homes. A bunch of these heavy-set strong Indians gets out of their van, looks at our disaster, and tells us that this will not work. That is our opinion as well, but all on our own we have no alternative.

Figure 769. We will never get over this huge dune—until our saviors arrive. Then we blast through the sand and enjoy beautiful views.

The burly guys use a biblical trick: levitation. They simply pick up our light car and carry it across the dune. A miracle! The car weighs only 600 kilograms plus luggage, far too much for us, but not even a real challenge for these strong men. We thank them profusely and ask if we can follow them. Apparently there is an even bigger dune ahead, which not even their 4WD vehicle can master. Even they have to drive off the road right through the sands of the desert.

Staying closely behind them, the foreseeable happens: we get stuck again. And again they get out and carry our small vehicle through the deep sand trough in front of us. Many

thanks again. Without further mishap, we reach the Panamericana about 200 kilometers inland from Paita. We look forward to following this highway to its end, far away in the south, the end of the world in these parts.

Near the port town of Trujillo, is is a pleasure to stroll through the ruins of Chan Chan all on our own. By now, our children are somewhat familiar with the precolumbian cultures of America and strut around as if the place was their own. Which, in fact, it is for today.

Figure 770. Small multicolored salt lakes in the desert.

Figure 771. Daddy, can we take these chicks home? A comfortable bedroom-garage.

Figure 772. Garage inside the *Gran Hotel Perú* for our car, and a stroll along the promenade in Trujillo.

The *Chimú* culture flourished roughly 900 to 1470, when the Incas conquered it. The capital Chan Chan (the name probably means Great Sun) was the largest city in America at its time. It lies in an extremely arid plain at the foot of the Andes, not far from the Pacific coastline. Its adobe structures are threatened by heavy rains generated by *El Niño* and global climate change. The only larger adobe site is Bam in Iran, built around 500 BC and devastated by an earthquake in 2003.

Figure 773. Entrance to Chan Chan and walled compounds inside the ruins. Désirée strutting along a wall, and Rafaela in front of bird-like gods.

In 2011, 140 burials, mainly of children of up to 14 years, were discovered in the vicinity of Chan Chan. Archeologists speculate that this was a ritual sacrifice in the early 15th century to appease the gods who were flooding the area in the course of *El Niño* events. Ritual killings are reported from several sites in the world, but this one has hard evidence.

Figure 774. Bas reliefs of fiery gods.

As in many American countries, rampant inflation has led to several changes in the names for the Peruvian currency. it was called the Sol (sun in Spanish) or Sol de Oro (gold sun) in the 19th and 20th centuries and roughly equivalent to the US$ at first. In 1985, the Inti (sun in Quechua) replaced it and seven years later came the Nuevo Sol (new sun), worth one billionth (10^{-9}) of the old sol. Quite literally, the sun went down ...

Figure 775. Chan Chan on a banknote of 1000 Intis.

The Panamericana runs north-south roughly parallel to the Pacific coast, but mostly at a distance from it. In Casma, we drive off into the mountains, towards the beautiful valley of Huaraz in the Callejón de Huaylas. In a nice hotel, we get acclimatized to the altitude.

Figure 776. Crossing bridges on our way to Huilkahuaín. Picnic and the ruins.

Figure 777. Indio women and children on the way.

We make a short excursion to the ruins of Huilkahuaín, built by the pre-Inca Huari culture around 1100 AD and located at 3400 meters of altitude. My poor Quechua is

enough to ask for and understand directions from the locals, who do not speak Spanish. Unfortunately, the bunch of mangy dogs that attacks us speaks neither language, and I have to throw a few rocks to keep them at bay. Sometimes it is enough to just bend down and pretend to pick up a rock, and they scuttle a few meters away. Quite unpleasant, and our kids are a bit scared, rightly so.

An exciting two-day hike to the Laguna Chulup first takes us up a never-ending trail on the side of a mountain. Dorothea musters all her courage by looking only up the mountain, never down.

Figure 778. Driving to the Laguna Chulup and resting with a view.

Figure 779. Hiking to the Laguna Chulup and a rest.

It is fairly late in the afternoon when we reach the foot of the towering natural dam that creates this glacier lake. Dusk descends like a veil and we cannot see the lagoon from below, but the next morning the creek emptying the lagoon is well visible, see Figure 780, to the right of a large rock. As described on the first page of this story, we miss this trail in the dusk and I make the serious mistake of continuing to climb up, but to the left of the rock. There is no visible trail and I get lost about half way up. Bushes and roots around us, an almost vertical drop behind us. My courageous party of three does not lose their spirit, and step by step we climb down, hanging on to rocks and roots. We all know that this is rather dangerous, especially in the fading day light, and are relieved when we come to level ground.

Figure 780. On our way up, we finally see the dam of the lagoon, first in the far distance (center of left picture) and then from closer up.

We are all mighty relieved after surviving this dangerous situation without mishap, set up our tent, and start preparing dinner. My second mistake of the day: I forgot our can opener in Huaraz. So I have to improvise with a wedge-shaped rock and a heavy round one to open the can of corn that is our meal for tonight. After all this excitement, we go to sleep early.

Figure 781. Scrambling upwards through difficult terrain.

Figure 782. Preparing dinner with a makeshift can opener of two rocks.
Getting ready for a good night's sleep.

The next morning, we can see the trail up to the lagoon clearly in the bright sunlight. It follows the creek flowing out of the lagoon. We scramble up the steep trail, still difficult but much easier now with sufficient light. At the top, we are rewarded with a beautiful view over the ice-green waters of the lake and the glacier in the background.

Figure 783. Intrepid Désirée forging ahead and finally our arrival at the glorious lagoon Chulup.

Figure 784. Can't get enough of rock climbing.

I enjoyed our hikes immensely, in spite (or maybe because) of the dangers we faced. But now I want to go on a longer hike in the Cordillera Blanca, definitely not suitable for our children. We meet Margret Stevenson, a school teacher, who is also interested in walking the Santa Cruz trek. Later, she invites us to her school in Lae in Papua Niuguini, where we spend some interesting days; see page 1409.

Driving along the foothills of the Cordillera Blanca to the beginning of the hike, the five of us come across a sinister site. On 31 May 1970, a submarine earthquake rated at a strength of 7.9 broke off one third of the northern flank of the 6800-meter volcano Huascarán. An avalanche from the lagoon below it obliterated the village of Santo Domingo de Yungay, leaving 20 000 people dead. By chance, all children were on the top of the cemetery hill to watch a circus show. The avalanche of rock, mud, and ice swept up a 200-meter hill and then through the village, burying everything in its path. The children survived, but they were all orphans from one second to the next. Just terrible.

Now, eighteen years later, we walk on the site of destruction, on a solid mass hard as concrete. Only the church spire peaks through the surface of the deadly mud. A sad sight.

Figure 785. Laguna Chinancocha in the Quebrada Llanganuco.

A catastrophe like the Yungay disaster might occur at any of the many active Andean volcanoes, usually hosting glaciers on their sides. The run-off feeds beautiful green and blue lagoons high up in the mountains, contained by natural dams that build up over the millenia. When a volcano erupts or is partly destroyed by an earthquake, much of the ice melts, drops into the lake, carries rock and mud with it, and sometimes this breaks the dam. Then all the liquid contents from the lagoon inundates the valleys below it. At first this is just water, but it quickly picks up so much mud and debris that it becomes a heavy

brown mass of earth and stones. Presumably as a consequence of global warming, Andean glaciers have lost about 25% of their mass in the last decades. Water levels in the lagoons rise and people are afraid of inundations and invest in flood protection. Saúl Luciano Lliuya, a farmer from Huaraz whose property is threatened by a possible inundation from the Palcacocha lagoon, at 4562 meters of elevation and just 23 km from Huaraz, filed a complaint in a German court against the energy giant RWE (Rheinisch-Westfälisches Elektrizitätswerk) for their contribution to global warming and the potential dangers it creates for him. Several rebuttals by the corporation were not accepted, a higher court ruled in favor of Lliuya's basic arguments, and the case is still pending. In 2019, RWE announces later that they will not invest in new coal-generated energy in the future.

Figure 786. Steep rock walls of the Quebrada Llanganuco.

Later, we drive through the narrow valley of the Quebrada Llanganuco and ford the Llanapaccha creek twice, all this fairly level at 4000 meters) We feel like little ants crawling through the walls of rock on either side. Eventually, the gravel road starts winding steeply uphill towards the Portachuelo Pass through tight hairpin bends, just wide enough for a single car. Larger boulders require some careful manoeuvring. Apparently sometimes buses or trucks drive along it. At each bend, they have to back up several times to get around it. Looking down, the terrain seems to fall away vertically, there is nothing like a railing or a low wall. A drive not for the faint-hearted.

Figure 787. The road up to the Portachuelo Pass.

Figure 788. Driving up to the pass.

Margret and I get off on the Portachuelo pass at 4750 meters. Dorothea drives back to Huaraz with Rafaela and Désirée. She still gets nightmares today when she remembers this worst drive of her life, responsible on her own for getting around those dangerous bends with the almost vertical drop-off on one side. And there is no "safe" side of the road, because it is so narrow that you always have the mountain right next to one wheel and the abyss right next to the other one.

Figure 789. Views from the Portachuelo Pass.

Our three-day hike leads Margret and me at first through gentle meadows and hills, partly on old Inca roads, the 6180 meters of the Chacraraju mountain looming in the distance. The creeks carry delicious fresh water, mountain flowers and hummingbirds abound, we stop for our frugal dinner before sunset and then crawl off into the two tents we brought.

Figure 790. The pass of Punta Unión is the little notch at the top in the middle.

Early next morning, we continue on an easy hike along the Quebrada Huaripampa, but then the hills get steeper, and eventually we approach the killer stretch: the *punta unión* pass, at 4780 meters.

Figure 791. View of Mount Huandoy before the pass. A lake from the top of the pass.

From our altitude of about 3000 meters, we see the pass in front of us for almost half a day, first at great distance, then getting closer and closer, and finally we stand in awe in front of it. An almost vertical wall with a drop of 800 meters, with a tiny notch indicating the pass. The trail winds steeply uphill, we are huffing and puffing through soft volcanic pumice from the 5830-meters Nevado Taulliraju: two steps ahead, one step sliding back. Marvellous views of the green valley behind us and the snow-capped volcanos on the side do not distract us from the nagging question: will we make it? We do, but I am totally exhausted from this gruelling climb when we finally reach the top.

After a long break, the march downhill is much easier. We have solid ground under our boots, walk through peaceful meadows and past beautiful lakes, and camp by the *Santa Cruz* creek. The days are sunny and warm, but at night we shiver in our tents. After not seeing anyone for three blissful days of strenuous hiking, and no animals either, it is a rude awakening from a dream to arrive in the small village of Cashapampa at the end of the trail, and then in a crowded bus to Huaraz.

Figure 792. Lush valleys and a lake in front of us, while we hike along and camp.

Dorothea and the kids stay in our hotel during the three-day hike. Their main excitement is a mouse that creates a din at night crawling through our plastic bags. But even it has to go to sleep sometime, and in the morning, a hotel employee catches it in the fold of a curtain, quickly opens the outside door, and gives it its liberty outside. Welcome back to the wild!

With Rudolf Berz and his wife, who have grandchildren the ages of our children, they chat, play cards, and while away the time until I return from my hike. The Berz also visit us in Santiago, and later we visit them in their home in Dreieich near Frankfurt.

Figure 793. Driving through the Cordillera Blanca.

Figure 794. Charcoal burning and a guanaco.

Figure 795. *Puya raimondii* dwarfing humans.

We take the chance to play the dwarfs below the tallest flowers in the world. This is the *Puya raimondii*, a bromeliad and endemic to rocky slopes at over 3000 meters in a few Andean valleys. One of them is the Quebrada Pachacoto, our next destination. These giant plants flower in an 80-year cycle and then can reach a height of 15 meters, just its flower head measures up to 8 meters. True gigantism in the floral kingdom.

The rock paintings of Carpa, in the Huascarán National Park, were created about 1500 years ago on an overhanging cliff, well protected from the rain. The artists used mineral pigments of various colors, mainly red. The meaning of the human figures and other designs is unknown. Some of them may represent star constellations or other astronomical ideas of the people who made them.

Figure 796. The Carpa rock paintings.

Our next stop is the base of the Pastoruri glacier, over 5000 meters high. For Dorothea and our children we rent horses. The trail crosses a few creeks and is a pleasure to walk.

Fortunately, none of us shows any sign of altitude sickness. We have had enough time to get acclimatized to Andean heights.

Figure 797. Towards the Pastoruri glacier: creek and horses.

Figure 798. At the glacier.

Figure 799. The Pastoruri glacier tunnel.

Finally, we stand at the foot of a mountain of ice. It feels good to touch the cold stuff and suck on an icicle. The water from the glacier has cut out a large tunnel, shining in all hues of white and blue. Due to global warming, the glacier has substantially receded

in recent years, apparently creating a lagoon instead of the tunnel. Tourist access was prohibited in 2007 for four years, but now there is a *climate change trail* around it. They even resorted to the unorthodox measure of covering part of the glacier with sawdust.

Figure 800. Inside the tunnel.

Figure 801. Grisly reminders of the dangers of driving in the Andes.

Driving around the monster city of Lima, we pass through Pisco, home of the *Pisco sour*, the national drink of Perú and Chile; see page 1031 for the Chilean version. Nearby on the Pacific coast is the small fishing village of Paracas. A small boat takes us to the

islas Ballestas where guano (seabird excrement) is still being harvested as fertilizer. A smelly job, but we only observe the many cormorants, pelicans, penguins, and seals from a distance. The main attraction is a huge figure *candelabra* on the hillside, over 50 meters tall, which has served fishermen for centuries as a guide. Its origin is unclear.

Figure 802. Village fiesta by the road and fishermen in Paracas.

Figure 803. Off into the pool at the *Hotel las Dunas* and then into the sand.

Figure 804. The Huacachina oasis.

On our whole trip, we usually stay in simple but adequate lodgings, sometimes fancier, rarely in abominable ones, see page 589. Not many guide books exist at this time, and

we travel mainly with a *South American Handbook*, a venerable publication on wafer-thin India paper that is now defunct. It has on its 1340 pages a single color ad of a hotel, showing a beautiful swimming pool. Rafaela helps a lot with organizing our voyage and browses the book regularly. She is totally fascinated by this picture and it is in Ica, right on our way! So we must go there. The *Hotel las Dunas* indeed turns out to be a perfect choice. When we get there—splash, our daughters are in the large clean pool. They enjoy the cool waters. And then on for another kind of dive: down the large sand dunes in the nearby oasis of Huacachina. And after that: into the pool again. The friendly Austrian couple running the hotel is fascinated by our daughters.

On we drive to Nazca with its famous lines, see page 819 for more on these mysterious designs from my first visit in 1982. Besides the lack of dating and of understanding their purpose, one of the unexplained mysteries of the Nazca lines is how their creators actually looked at them. From the surrounding hills?

Figure 805. It is windy on the Nazca plain.

From the ground, one cannot gain an impression of these huge designs. Today, we can. Namely, the four of us take a plane ride in a five-seater Cessna of the local *Aeroica* airline. More as a joke, I ask the pilot if he can remove the door so that I can take better pictures. "Ningún problema" (no problem) is his reply, and we are off in his small plane without the passenger door. Indeed, I take nice pictures of the designs. It is a special experience to be seated in an airplane with a seatbelt fastened around me but no door next to me to keep me from falling out. Already at our low flight level of a few hundred meters above ground, it gets quite cold from the strong winds blowing in.

Figure 806. Our joy flight in a Cessna with passenger door removed.

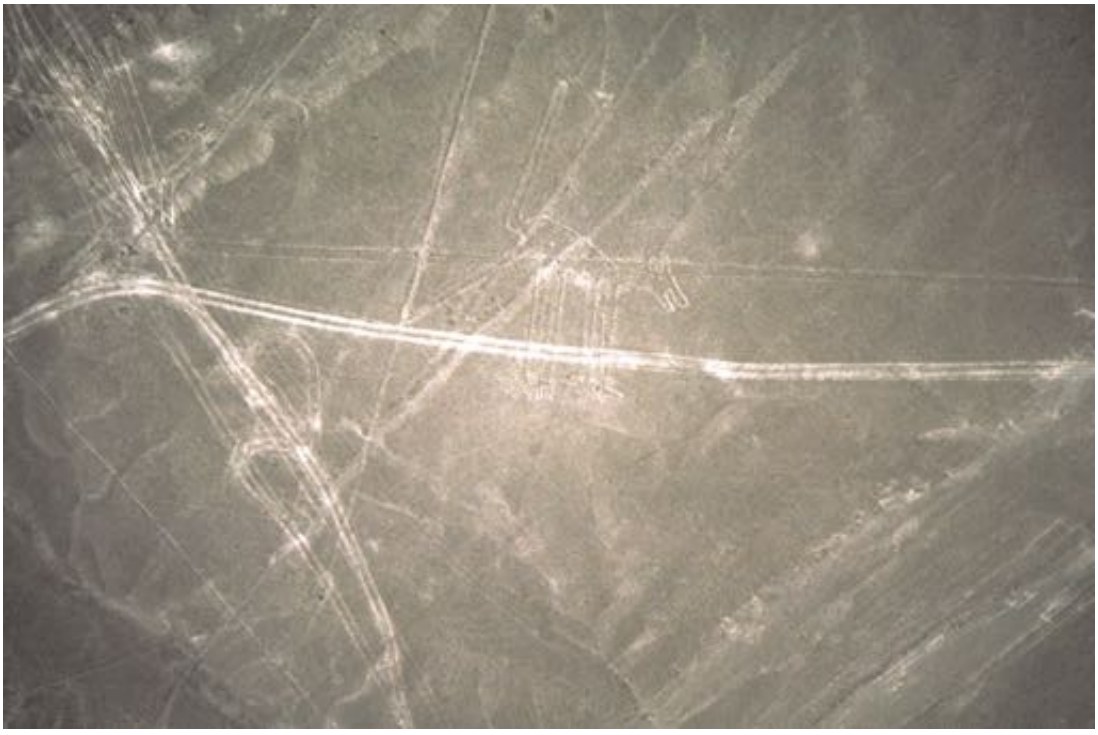


Figure 807. A canine animal crisscrossed by vehicle tracks.

Already in 1955, Maria Reiche (Figure 1072), the pioneer explorer and guardian of the Nazca lines, took aerial photos with her camera tied to the fuselage of a helicopter. Our solution is much easier. Her book shows the same image as in Figure 807, but the fat tire tracks were not there yet.

Arequipa is a large city that retains a distinctive colonial flavor. Narrow cobble-stone streets, the *plaza de armas* in the center of town, restaurants with large balconies overlooking the plaza and serving delicious Pisco sour and yummy dishes. A perfect place to celebrate Dorothea's birthday. The city preserves a large cultural heritage, and its son Mario Vargas Llosa is one of the towering figures of literature, crowned by the Nobel prize in 2010.

Figure 808. The Panamericana running along the Pacific coast.
Our daughters in Arequipa's monastery.

Physically, the volcano Misti towers over the city skyline with its 5800 meters. The *monasterio Santa Catalina* (Saint Catherine's monastery) is a world of its own. Founded in 1579, between its vividly colored buildings in the Mudéjar style, narrow passages with steps and doors lead to God knows where. It is fascinating to wander around in this island of history. In 2012, I am in Arequipa again and make an excursion to the *Colca canyon*, see page 938.

Figure 809. Peaceful open arcades and courtyards.

Figure 810. Cloister, courtyard, and an oven in the monastery.

Figure 811. Cathedral on the main square and a stroll along a creek, the Misti volcano in the background.

Figure 812. Map of the leg (in light blue) from southern Perú to Puerto Montt of our Grand Tour.

On our drive towards Santiago, we come to the Chilean border town of Árica and are delighted to see the first road sign with the final destination of this first leg of our Grand Tour: Santiago 2083 km. Almost there!

Figure 813. We are almost in Santiago. Most of the Panamericana runs on a plateau, but sometimes descends to an oasis in one of the rare valleys.

It is a long drive through the Atacama desert, one of the driest places in the world. The Andes fall into the Pacific Ocean with a steep drop-off, and the Panamericana, *Ruta 5* in Chile, is built high up on the cliffs. The area is somber, with its extreme dryness and black scorched volcanic rock and sand. From time to time, the road descends into a broad valley carved out by rivers from the mountains. They rarely carry water, but when they do, they shove anything out of their way. On a few steep mountain slopes, we see designs similar to the Nazca lines, probably created by the same people.

The largest of them is the *gigante de Atacama* (Atacama giant), a human figure 119 meters tall on a hill, possibly presenting a shaman. It is estimated to be between 500 and 1000 years old. Of course, we have to go there and climb a bit on the hill, carefully away from the giant. The scorching sun limits our exertions. Then we drive on. At least, that is the plan. But our car is stuck in the sand where I parked it.

Figure 814. The huge Atacama giant in the background, and our little Tercel stuck in sand.

Our digging skills, honed in the Peruvian Sechura desert (page 623), are unsuccessful. What to do? We are stuck in the desert, far away from civilized places, and it might be a week before other people come to look at the giant. Fortunately, we brought enough water for all of us. I decide to walk to Huara, the nearest town, about 15 kilometers away. A nice hike through the desert, the sun burning on my head.

My hiking pleasure on the dirt road leading towards the Pacific (and my family's agony of waiting) is cut short by a car passing me after about an hour. I get a ride and am in Huara much quicker than I expected. Now the *carabineros* (police) in Chile is the only police force to which I (as a foreigner) would turn with confidence in all of Latin America. And indeed, they are immediately eager to help. The boss rounds up a gang of young men, not from the police, and we drive out to the gigante. Great relief to my family when they see us coming!

Figure 815. A poor lonely attempt, salvation arrives, and then we push her out of the sand.

And then it goes fast as lightning. They examine the disaster, see the hopeless entrenchment of our car, carry and push it back to firmer ground, and off I go! Many many thanks! And of course we stop by the police station to express our gratitude.

We spend some days in the oasis of San Pedro de Atacama, see also pages 859 and 1025. The doors of houses are usually made of cactus wood, with a characteristic pattern of holes where the thorns grow. The town is already a bit touristy, but we enjoy the good food and pleasant surroundings.

Figure 816. Churches in Toconao (top) and in San Pedro. Cactus wood door.

Figure 817. Inside the San Pedro church. Weaver.

One of several excursions takes us to the *valle de la luna* (moon valley), an area of bizarre erosion pillars and caves. I try to walk up one dune in sandals, but have to return: the hot sand fries my feet. And bad luck strikes again: we get stuck in a sand hole on the road.

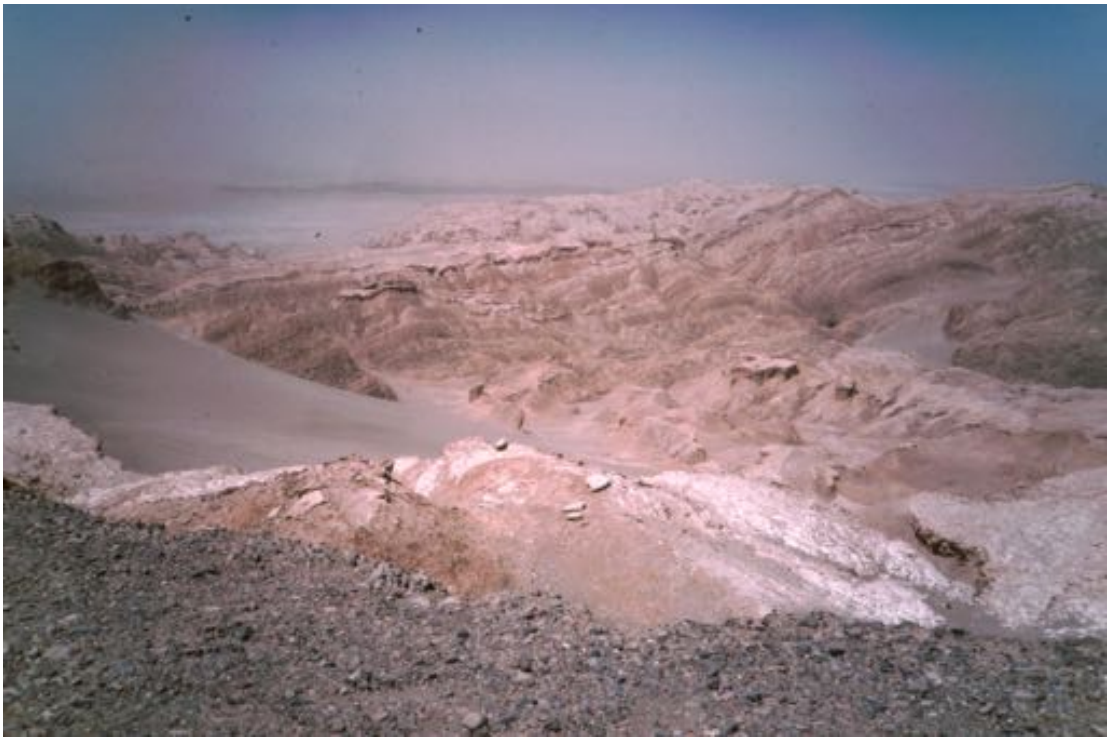


Figure 818. Erosion landscape in the *valle de la luna*.

This is worse than before. A violent wind storms through the channel created by the steep canyon walls and sand-blasts us and our car. This is no place to hang around. We put on sweaters, in spite of the heat, but the sand just blows through them and hurts our skin even then. We dig quickly, put our rubber foot mats under the tires, and eventually get out of this trap. Our training in the Sechura desert and near the *Gigante* has honed our

skills. This is the last time we get stuck on this trip and we do not really regret the lack of further tests. The sand-blasting damages our windscreen severely and I see thousands of stars when driving at night (which I avoid in South America), one for every little chip the sand made. We have to get the windscreen replaced back home in Canada.

Figure 819. Getting sandblasted in the *valle de la luna*.

Copper is the main export commodity of Chile and I want to show the origin of copper to my children. So we go to a huge hole in the ground, the Chuquicamata mines. Down at the bottom, toy-size excavators scrape the copper-laden ore from the sides of this open mine, and load it onto tiny trucks.

Figure 820. Toy trucks in the distance in the Chuquicamata hole.

These chug up the long winding path on the sides of the hole to the top, to emerge as house-size trucks. Their tires are almost three meters in diameter, and their clearance is so large that you can drive a sedan right under them; see also page 1405. We are suitably impressed and also visit the smelter, where liquid copper pours into large troughs.

Figure 821. A big hole in the ground: Chuquicamata.

Figure 822. Monster trucks from up close.

Figure 823. How many children fit into this shovel? In the copper smelter.

Figure 824. Hairy horns in the wind, and getting ready for the smelter.

Already at school, Dorothea was fascinated with geography. One particular sound sticks in her memory: Antofagasta in Chile. When we pass that port town, bingo! her dream of seeing this name posted in reality has come true!

Finally, after 97 days of traveling for 19 000 kilometers we arrive at our current destination: Santiago, the capital of Chile. Like a belt keeping clothes together, it holds the 5000 kilometers of this long thin country together. My friend Leopoldo Bertossi has arranged a fancy rental apartment for us. Richly decorated with vases, trinkets, porcelaine figurines, glass bowls, all kinds of knickknack—so our daughters have to be really careful. It comes

with a household maid, the standard in Santiago's middle class. She even dusts the leaves of the gum trees on the balcony every week and is surprised when we tell her that Dorothea will cook meals, not she. And totally flabbergasted when we invite her to have her dinner at our table, not alone in some corner of the kitchen. That just is not done in the proper circles—but then we come from a different culture and lifestyle.

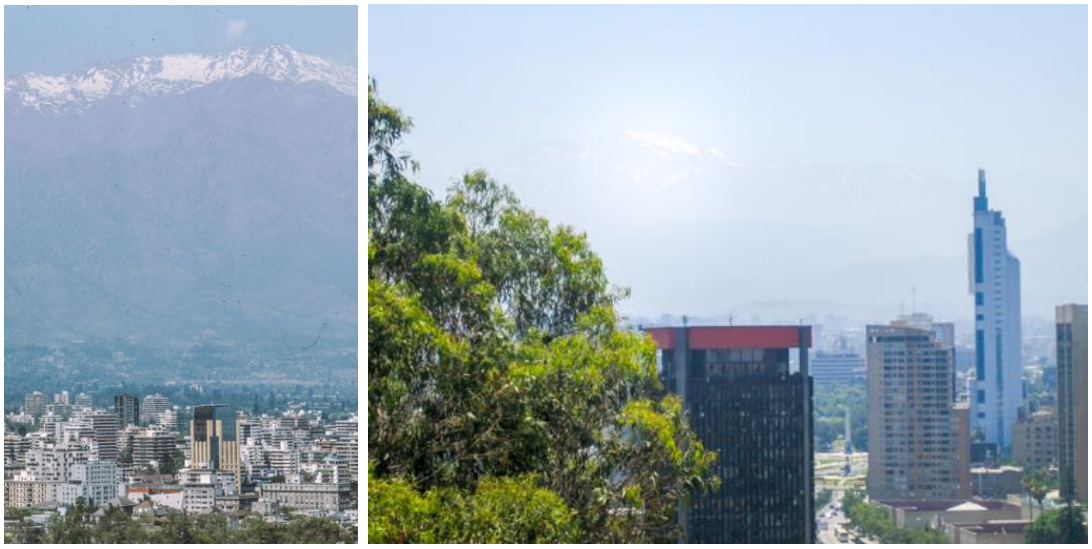


Figure 825. Views of Santiago.

Figure 826. Two angels on our terrace.

Figure 827. Our metro station.

Eventually we find a nice rental house for us at 300 San Pascual, with terrace and garden. No maid. That is more appropriate for our way of living. We spend three happy months here during which I lecture at the Pontifícia Universidad Católica de Chile. A year later, I invite him for a year to University of Toronto, and he stays in Canada, now as a professor at Carleton University in Ottawa. We also undertake an interesting trip to Labrador together, see page 1581.

Figure 828. Our house at 300 Pascual, with Désirée's best friend Camila and with many friends at the beach. Sweaters at the height of the summer, and "agua rica", meaning ice-cold water in the Pacific ocean.

Figure 829. Everybody is having fun at Rafaela's birthday.

Figure 830. One queen and seven princesses.

Figure 831. Rafaela hitting the piñata—a Latin American birthday tradition.

Figure 832. Rafaela's classroom at the *Alianza Francesa*.

Rafaela goes to the Alianza Francesa *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*, a private school run

under the supervision of the French government. She loves her teacher Mme Lama, and the school fees are a good investment. The children wear school uniforms, which simplifies the choice of clothes in the morning.

Figure 833. At the *Alianza Francesa*.

Figure 834. Rafaela is a diligent student also at home, and Désirée loves little animals.

It is warm now in the middle of summer and hard for us to believe that Christmas is coming. But Dorothea offers to some of her friends to teach the art of making German-style advent wreaths. Soon she has ten ladies assembled on our terrace, mostly mothers from Rafaela's school. They produce the wreaths to perfection. It is not easy to get pine branches here, and even harder to keep them fresh for about a month. What to do? Put them in your freezer!

We have dinner and birthday parties in a convivial environment. Our first dinner invitation at Leo's house, a few days after our arrival, is for 20.00. We are there on time and a colleague of ours, professor Herbert Gross, arrives shortly after. I took his algebra courses at ETH Zürich as a student. Then ... nothing. We chat amiably and wait and wait. Around 23.00, the next guests trundle in, the barbecue is started, a delicious meal served at midnight. A bravo to our daughters who were promised dinner at 20.00 but never uttered a word of complaint.

Figure 835. My ladies inspecting pottery in Pomaire. I carry a whole suitcase full of this heavy stuff to Toronto, it almost tears off my arm.

Figure 836. High up in the tree and halloween masks at the handicraft market *Pueblo de los Dominicos*.

Figure 837. Vintage train and steamroller in Santiago.

Figure 838. In the parks of Santiago.

Figure 839. Our favorite restaurant *Chez Henry* and the funicular to the Cerro San Cristóbal.

The western slopes of the Andes are close to Santiago and Leo takes us on several wonderful hikes into the mountains, one of them to the nature sanctuary *Yerba Loca* (crazy grass) and also to the *Laguna del Inca* (Inca Lake) near Portillo and the pass towards Mendoza in Argentina.

Figure 840. Laguna del Inca: Leo, Dorothea, Désirée, and myself. Rafaela took the picture.

Figure 841. The lake from a distance and the mountains around it in the setting sun.

Figure 842. Resting on the trail and at the camp fire. Crossing creeks.

We almost lose our house in Toronto during those days, see Figure 650. A renter's cheque bounced and as a result, there are not enough funds in my own account to cover the mortgage payment. It is a small amount compared to the fortune I owe the bank, but Canadian banks are fussy, communication is slow and difficult in those days, and only frantic phone calls stall the imminent foreclosure by the bank.

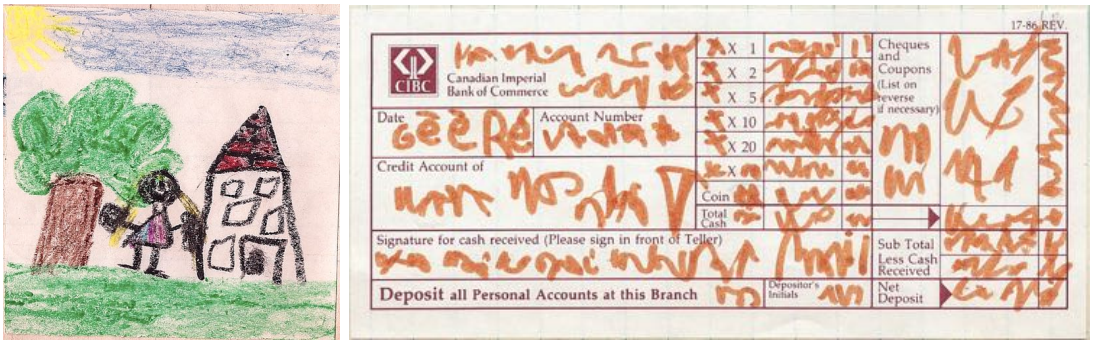


Figure 843. Désirée's drawing of our home and her deposit slip to my bank—the amount is not quite sufficient.

A major event shaping Chile's future occurs right while we are there: the downfall of the brutal dictator Augusto Pinochet. He led in 1973 an uprising against President Salvador Allende, during which the latter was killed. An iconic photo shows him in an entrance gate of the *Moneda*, the presidential palace in Santiago's center. He and a Kalashnikov-toting guard stare incredulously at the sky, presumably at Pinochet's planes flying air attacks. In the ensuing roundup of leftists and intellectuals, an estimated number of 3000 people were killed, and Pinochet ruled the country with an iron fist for a decade and a half, ruthlessly persecuting anyone in disagreement with his politics. He was despised around the world, but less so in his own country. We actually partook—inadvertently—in a celebration of people who profited from his coup; see page 70. Thus we have, in some sense, witnessed both Pinochet's rise and fall. In 2014, Dorothea and I visit a German community (Figure 1402) in central Chile on whose grounds Pinochet's secret service tortured and killed dissidents.

Figure 844. Pro-Pinochet demonstrations in Providencia.

Figure 845. Fans with Pinochet mask.

In 1988, feeling secure of the love of his people due to economic improvements, Pinochet runs a plebiscite to extend his presidency by eight more years. On the large Avenida Providencia near our house in a posh neighborhood, convoys with young people cheering for Pinochet drive up and down. They are well organized, but obviously do this out of their own will (or that of their parents). We are surprised to see so many people in favor of this dictator, while outside of Chile he is held in almost universal contempt for his murderous regime. Downtown is heavily guarded by carabineros (police) in armored vehicles and water cannons. The anti-Pinochet demonstrators there, not from posh areas, march on foot rather than drive cars and motorcycles. But Pinochet's idea backfires.

Figure 846. Anti-Pinochet demonstration in downtown Santiago.

He loses on 5 October 1988 the plebiscite by 44% to 56%. His dreams of reigning forever are shattered, and the elections next year install a democratic government under Patricio Aylwin from the Christian Democrats. Since then, Chile has prospered. It has its problems, like a huge gap between the rich and the poor, the essential dependence on the price of copper, its main export, and—close to my heart—an absurd commercialization of education. In the students' view, the universities provide bad education for exaggerated fees, and this policy has allowed university administrators to fire dissenting professors. One victim is my friend Andrés Polymeris from our student days at ETH Zürich. He is now at the *Universidad de Concepción* in central Chile and embittered about the way they treat him there. This becomes worse around my longer visit to Concepción in 2014, when they actually fire him, see page 1034. He goes to court, but loses. Big capital reigns the Chilean universities, the banks make huge profits from loans the students have to take for the expensive programs, and troublemakers are undesirable.

But Chile is still the most prosperous country in South America, and I have enjoyed repeatedly the hospitality, friendship, and conviviality of my Chilean colleagues during stays of several months in Santiago and Concepción.

One unexpected procedure in Chile is that you get a *boleta* (receipt) for even the smallest purchase; my diaries are full of them. The implication is that tax fraud, ubiquitous elsewhere in Central and South America, is much less frequent in this country. Nice. By 2020, other countries have adopted this, but in Germany there is still a discussion about fraud-safe checkouts.

Figure 847. Cool Rafaela at the *Saltos de Laja*.

From Santiago, our brave little Tercel takes us south to the *end of the world*. This time

it is not six days, only six hours that we are late. Back on the road again. After three wonderful months in Santiago, we have a hard time leaving our new friends behind. We pass the *saltos de Laja* (Laja waterfalls), impressive at a height of 47 meters, and arrive in Pucón on Lago Villarica in Chile's lake district with good infrastructure, beautiful lakes and impressive mountains.

The beaches of Lago Villarica of black volcanic sand are not particularly attractive, but the towering *volcano Villarica* is, snowcapped even in the middle of summer at 2860 meters. A gravel road leads up to it. It is a beautiful sunny day, but as soon as the sun goes away, it gets cool. We climb up the volcano until we get to a snowfield, which we are too timid to cross; the danger of sliding downhill into eternity is too great. We settle for a picnic. Rafaela and Désirée build for themselves "skis" from bamboo sticks. They actually slide a bit on the snow. Good fun for all. It is a gorgeous day in the sunshine and the fresh air of the high mountain.

Figure 848. Ice-cold delicacy at the volcano. Waterfalls for hiking pleasure.

The area of Puerto Varas has substantial German and Swiss settlements, and our dinner is cheese fondue and strawberries with cream for dessert—very Swiss/German. They have even set up a Christmas tree now in mid-December, and Désirée admires one shiny glass ball after the other.

Figure 849. The *volcano Villarica*.

Figure 850. Our girls on makeshift bamboo skis.

The waterfall *salto Petrohué* is not very high, but carries a lot of bright green water, glacier runoff. In the small town of Petrohué, we catch a ferry to Peulla on the other side of *Lago Todos los Santos* (all saints' lake); there is no road connecting the two places. When the clouds break up, we see the imposing cone of the snow-capped volcano Osorno, a perfect circular pyramid. From Peulla, we walk to another of the many waterfalls in this area, the *salto de los novios* (the fiancés' waterfall). Picturesque in the jungle, rich vegetation all around. In Puerto Varas, our children want to build a volcano on the beach of Lago

Llanquihue, but by then our remaining energy is barely enough to toss some pebbles into the lake. A wonderfully relaxing day.

Figure 851. German influence is ubiquitous in the Lake District.
My friend Leo disguised as a water hydrant, see also Figure 1312.

Figure 852. Tall reeds and the perfect cone of the Osorno volcano.

Figure 853. Two crowned princesses.

A short drive takes us to Puerto Montt, where we first check tomorrow's departure of our ferry to Puerto Natales. We are relieved: all is well and will go according to our plans. An excursion to Calbuco impresses us with the old wooden churches with cemeteries, views of the sea, fishermen. All is peaceful, even our children. The skew wooden houses here in Patagonia, with curtains behind windows with blue frames, remind me of Siberia (page 1201).

Figure 854. The village of Calbuco in Southern Chile.

Figure 855. Puerto Montt.

Figure 856. Rich harvest from the sea in Puerto Montt.

The Panamericana ends in Puerto Montt. Our car gets stored on the ferry *Tierra del Fuego*, which will be our home for the next four days of sailing south to Puerto Natales. We are looking forward to the long trip through the maze of islands off the Chilean coast. It is a wild and sparsely inhabited area. The indigenous araucaria tree dominates the vegetation. In the 1930's, large tracts of land were burned to make room for fast-growing pine trees; the smoke created a haze even on the Argentine coast, on the other side of the continent.

Figure 857. Boarding the *Tierra del Fuego*, our home for four days.
Hold on tight to our little car!

Figure 858. Sketch map of our Grand Tour (in blue) in southern South America.

We meet several interesting people on this trip. Among them Rafaela and Harald, two young German teachers who work in Chile for two years, luxuriously paid by the German government. They travel with their bicycles, each of them carrying a basket with a little dog in front. Cute. I stand a lot outside besides the bridge and just watch the green islands go by. Not a living soul to see.

Figure 859. At home and at dinner.

The scenery is gorgeous. Over millions of years, the tectonic Nazca plate has folded up the Andes like a table cloth. But later, this mountain chain sank in altitude towards the south, former peaks and valleys were partially submerged under the waters of the Pacific Ocean and now form islands and waterways. Just imagine! Our boat route goes around the summits of the Andes, or rather what is left of them.

Figure 860. Cruising the magnificent fjords of Southern Chile.

The ferry navigates through narrow channels, protected by islands from the Pacific storms. These are rimmed by steep hills, densely forested in the wet climate, and with waterfalls around each corner. The isolation is perfect. Except for a few places where we stop, there is no sign of human habitation anywhere. The weather changes at breathtaking speed. In the span of half an hour, we may have a solid downpour of rain, then beautiful sunshine, then hail. Sometimes we can look into mist-covered fjords, while sailing in the sun. Our kids are happy, play cards with others, and impress everyone with their four languages. On the second day's afternoon, we leave the inland waterway which is well-protected by outlying islands. Big waves of the Southern Pacific now slam our ship, two to four meters high, the spray covers the whole front deck, the boat is rolling and heaving wildly, and so are most passengers' stomachs. The toilets quickly become unusable, but are cleaned every hour, and for dinner we are alone in the usually full mess room. The gangways are a mess, too. At our table of four, we make cheap jokes about the other passengers. One of us four cannot really laugh, and all of a sudden turns green in the face, gets up and runs outside, feeding the fish.

Figure 861. Heavenly greeting.

When we wake up the next day, all is quiet again. Surprisingly many people show up for breakfast, some still slightly green in the face. Maneuvering through the *Angostura Inglesa* is a challenge to the captain, with very tight bends and fun to watch. Around noon, we stop in front of *Puerto Edén*, which does not really deserve this idyllic name. It is an isolated place, connected to the rest of the world only by sea. Eight launches bring and fetch goods, some mussels, crabs, fuel, and milk are loaded, and mainly wine

unloaded, I guess at least 1000 liters. Everybody is happy about the rare arrival of this supply and I guess there will be wild and drunken parties tonight. People look indigenous but everybody wears Western clothes.

Figure 862. The fishing village of Puerto Edén.

We arrive in Puerto Natales after four days of marine adventures and have solid ground under our wheels again. A good feeling. And just in time: on 17 February 1989, less than two months after our arrival, the strong Patagonian winds hurl the *Tierra del Fuego* so hard against the pier that she sinks, with a hole of 15 by 3 meters in her hull. Our friends Rafaela and Harald are on board, en route back to Puerto Montt, but neither they nor any other of the 144 passengers are hurt.

In Puerto Natales, our children climb onto an antique steam locomotive. Decades later, the same locomotive still stands in its place; see Figure 1307.

Figure 863. The old steam loco at Puerto Natales.

We find a group of six Australians who share the hire of the motor vessel *21 de Mayo* with us for an excursion to the Balmaceda and Serrano glaciers. The Río Serrano flows into the Última Esperanza sound, whose name appears on the frontispiece. We start out in glorious sunshine, our friends half-naked on the upper deck. But after a few minutes, a fresh breeze comes up, and soon spray and cold wind drives most people inside the cabin, only the courageous stay outside with sweater, jacket and hood. Juan Carlos, the captain, even advises us that we may have to return, but we keep calm and carry on. At the Serrano glacier, we climb up a small end moraine to take in the lagoon it forms, the glacier, and floating ice. Such glaciers are always an impressive sight. Rafaela and Désirée collect chunks of ice. On our way back, they have fun with the Aussie kids, playing cards.

Figure 864. We are experienced seafarers by now: Balmaceda and Serrano. And enjoy playing games.

Figure 865. Plenty of ice at the glacier.

Figure 866. Balmaceda glacier.

Figure 867. Our charming posada. Hiking below the Torres del Paine.

It is evening when we get back to Puerto Natales, but the days are long in the middle of summer and we drive through sunset and the beginning night to the *Parque Nacional Torres del Paine* (Paine Towers National Park), one of the natural wonders of this world. The kids fall asleep in the car, a clear moon accompanies our rattling and shaking progress over the dirt track. We check in at the simple *Posada Río Serrano*, a wonderful place to stay over for Christmas. The region is famous for the Torres del Paine, three rugged peaks of 2500 meters that show, in favorable light, colored bands of yellow and black rock.

Figure 868. Hiking and camping at the Torres del Paine.

During the next days, we explore this wonderful National Park on long hikes. The children catch a glimpse of the joy of spending days on end outside, walking up and down the mountains, falling asleep easily in a tent after the day's exercise. Our backpacks are

heavy, and the strong Patagonian wind (see page 970) threatens to blow Rafaela over, I have to hold her hand. Our goal is the *refugio Pehue* (mountain hut, shelter). Other hikers coming from there tell us that it is full, but we keep on going. In a deserted place by a lake and protected by a forest, we put up our tent. We all sleep very well, the rain showers at night do not bother us.

After hiking the morning through wind and rain, getting pretty much soaked, we arrive at the refugio. Almost all guests are young Israelis, who take some time off after their three-year stint in the army. Their respect for cleanliness and other visitors is moderate, to put it mildly. But we know André from our ferry, a really nice guy from Poland. He prepares a noodle soup for our children, and we hang up our clothes for drying. When we are dry and warm again, André makes coffee for us, and we share our apples and salami with him. A *guardaparque* (park ranger) visits and allows our children a round on his horse. Most enjoyable. Then we start trekking down again, away from this overcrowded refugio to our camp site from last night.

Figure 869. At the *refugio Pehue*.

Next morning, we walk back to Serrano and our posada, with the wind in our backs. Makes it easier. Dorothea's left foot is hurting from a blister at its heel. When we reach the dirt track, Désirée and I continue to fetch the car for our two foot-lame ladies. After lunch at the Serrano, we drive to Lago Pingo. Already from the parking lot, but even better from a hill less than an hour's walk away, we have a marvellous view of the glacier-green waters of Lago Grey and the numerous chunks of ice floating in it, with the Grey glacier in the background.

Back at the car, we take our backpacks and walk to the next refugio. As we approach it, the chimney is smoking, everything looks inviting. Inside four young Israelis are cooking. Désirée is much disappointed that they do not offer her even a little bite. On our trip, she has gotten used to overwhelming friendliness of people, offers of something to eat, and sometimes people cooked something especially for her and Rafaela. Oh well, she will have to learn that the usual kindness of people has its exceptions. We eat our cold crackers with salami and soon go to sleep in the refugio. There is no space for us in one room, and we sleep separately in two rooms. Somehow, we had imagined this night in the refugio to be more pleasant.

Figure 870. Lago Grey and its glacier.

Figure 871. Carrying on to the *Café DoRaDé*.

Figure 872. Rafaela leaning into the Patagonian wind at the Torres del Paine.

24 December is Christmas eve! (In the German tradition.) I start out early from the refugio towards Lago Pingo. Dorothea, Rafaela, and Désirée have a leisurely morning, cooking mint tea from the mint that grows just outside the refugio, wonderfully fresh. As the day goes on, hikers pass by on their way down. Three lovely waitresses at the newly opened *Café DoRaDé* offer tea and biscuits and inquire about the missing guy. "Oh yes, we have seen him. The one with the beard. It will take him a while . . . ". Our friends Rafaela and Harald with their dogs also drop by. Eventually, tea, biscuits, and patience run out and they start on their way down. At yesterday's campsite, the kids loudly claim their Christmas gifts, and Dorothea gives them each their Playmobil set. They must have glimpsed the other presents as well, there is no place to hide anything in our small car.

Figure 873. Guanaco posing.

Figure 874. A rainy hike, with picnic in a shelter.

I arrive at 18.00, completely wet, exhausted, and happy. I thoroughly enjoyed my quiet afternoon hike through beautiful forests and the fine views of the valley of the *Río de las Vueltas* and the *Piedras Blancas* glacier. Rafaela and Désirée are playing happily in the mud with their new toys, and Dorothea is reading a Patricia Highsmith detective story. On the one hand, it is nice to do without the usual Christmas shopping and hurrying, on the other hand, some of the festive atmosphere is lacking. But it will come later! Anyways, this does not bother our children. At the Serrano, after a shower we celebrate our private Christmas: silver rings, necklaces, and bracelets with lapislazuli, beautiful objects from Chilean craftsmen (see also Figure 1314), and warm sweaters. I only receive one present, the best of all: 11 days in Antarctica (see pages 1538ff). We have a nice dinner in the Hostería, with only four other guests.

At midnight, we are invited to the employees' Christmas party. Delicious canapés (small sandwiches), olives, champagne, and the Chilean delicacy of *Pan de Pascua*, a tasty cake that is baked only in this season. Pascua (from Passover) is a rather surprising term for Christmas and used only in Chile; elsewhere in Hispanic countries and in other Romance languages it refers to Eastern, as it does with the Chilean Easter Island. Santa Claus is *papito pascuero*. As time takes its toll and my hair turns whiter over the years, I seem to provoke that image and have been asked numerous times whether I am papito pascuero; see Figure 1285. The staff's families are also present, including the grandmother. We all dance together and have a whale of a time. Our kids just love it and everybody loves them.

Figure 875. Guanaco.

The affluent residents in the luxurious *Hotel Pehoe*, just across a bridge from our posada, fare much worse. No dinner is served and they have to go to bed early. Even the

bar is closed. Why? Because the employees are having a party to which the guests are not invited. This is a perfect example of why I always prefer small and simple hotels over the five-star ones.

After resting for a quiet day, with sleeping in, playing cards, and short walks, we drive on a little excursion to *Salto Chico*, *Salto Grande*, *Laguna Verde*, and *Laguna Azul*. It turns into a wonderful game drive taking all day, we count 299 guanacos, many ñandús (Rhea), flamingos, and hares.

Figure 876. Ñandú, and flamingoes.

After seven days, we finally decide to leave this wonderful place that we enjoy very much. Kind people, simple accommodation. We drive to El Calafate on bad dirt tracks. The exhaust pipe falls off again, and Dorothea has to hold the rusted mud-encrusted steel tube on her lap, sticking out of the window.

Figure 877. Oh no! The damned exhaust pipe. But it gets fixed again. Not for the last time.

At the border with Argentina in Cerro Castillo, Dorothea has to squeeze across the driver's seat to exit the car, because the metal junk blocks her passenger's door. She fetches the customs official from the restaurant where he is eating and—mainly—drinking.

More rattling dirt tracks to Esperanza, violent winds as usual in Patagonia at this time. Rafaela's great-grandmother was called Esperanza, and this is also Rafaela's second name. I tie up the remains of the exhaust pipe, which also threaten to become loose. This is no fun in strong winds and lungfulls of dust.

After lunch and our first decent coffee in quite a while—in Chile you only get Nescafé—we are on a short stretch of asphalted road. But the continuation to Calafate is under construction, actually still on my next visit almost three decades later, see page 972. In Calafate, we search in vain for a hotel. I am so exhausted that Dorothea takes over the search, equally fruitless. We sit in a little café and chat with the waiter, and indeed he finds us a nice place. To make up for the day's hardships, we have big steaks in a *parrilla*.

The exhaust pipe gets fixed and we drive to the *Perito Moreno* glacier, one of the highlights of this trip. It is an incredible sight to see house or tower sized chunks of ice tumble down into the lake. A lot of noise, a lot of waves. I take plenty of pictures, always scanning the glacier front to see where a breakoff is happening. The cracks in the ice emit an intense blue light. And behind it, the icefield extends as far as we can see.

Figure 878. Perito Moreno glacier with its ice field in the background, and tumbling ice towers.

This large glacier comes down from the Patagonian icefield and ends in a lagoon. The glacier front is over 70 meters high. As the glacier grows, it blocks an affluent from the *brazo rico*, a side arm upstream. When the water pressure from this affluent becomes too much, the lower part of the glacier breaks away and a huge flood empties into a lagoon. This happens about every five years. But throughout the years, towers of ice keep dropping off the front of the glacier. They splash into the lake, creating large waves. Careless tourists, trying to get really close to the spectacle, have been pulled by the backwash into the lake in the past. But now, the lower part of the hill across from the glacier's face is closed to visitors. An elaborate system of walkways and steps gives easy access to the hill and great views over the glacier.

After a picnic, we manage to tear ourselves away from this spectacular sight and drive to Chaltén and the Fitzroy mountain. Again, a dirt track that truly challenges our little car, which is not made for such difficult drives. But our newly welded exhaust pipe holds up, for the time being. At our camp site, the kids meet four Argentine boys their age and play exuberantly, catch me if you can and other wild games. The parents invite us for a glass of wine, no wild games.

Figure 879. Magnificent spectacle and highly impressed spectators.

On 31 December 1988, I go for a long hike by myself. It rains continuously and I get dripping wet. Because of the rain, Dorothea cannot dismantle the tent properly. With the wet tent in the back, we drive to El Calafate, and at her suggestion, mount it in a corner of our hotel room, where it can finally breathe and dry. After a nice dinner, we play cards in our room and wham! the clock strikes 12 and it is 1989. This year starts well, with extensive travel and holidays.

The first day of the new year is quiet and relaxed. We like the Perito Moreno glacier so much that we go there once more. More of the exciting spectacle, but by now we are old hands at this.

As we start out from El Calafate towards Ushuaia, it rains all day, we drive on muddy roads, and our windows are covered in dirt.

Figure 880. Rest stop in La Esperanza, together with a vile-smelling sheep truck.

Figure 881. Lonely camping with a visitor and magnificent views.

Via Río Gallegos we get to Balsa, from where the ferry across the *estrecho de Magallanes* (Magellan strait) leaves. It separates the South American continent from the island of *Tierra del Fuego* (Fireland). Quite an experience, to cross this passage where so many ships have sunk over the centuries, driven onto one of the many rocks by the strong Patagonian winds, or in dense fog. From the friendly captain's cabin we feel quite close to the choppy waters. On our landing at the insignificant Puerto Espora in Tierra del Fuego, Dorothea jumps out and takes a few pictures of our arrival. It's not every day that you land on this island, so far to the South!

Figure 882. Gauchos.

Figure 883. Crossing the Magellan Strait.

We continue our trip towards Ushuaia. The dirt road is atrocious. Heavy trucks have carved deep holes into the former asphalt, of which only pieces remain. It is basically a sequence of potholes. Difficult and tiring, often I cannot go more than 20 km/h. The car gets plastered with so much mud that we can hardly look out of the side windows. Our children enjoy this, pressing their noses against the dirty panes for funny pictures.

A group of Fiat Pandas comes in the opposite direction. According to the race-like panels on their doors they are on a *safari Roma - Buenos Aires - Ushuaia*. With vans for kitchen, repairs, and medical needs. If this well-organized and well-protected group is a safari, then what is our trip? A courageous expedition without any help in tow? One difference is that they drive like crazy, but we are much more careful—no repair van accompanies us and our car has to bring us back to Santiago in one piece.

This is the worst main road on our trip. Several oil and gas exploration areas are by the roadside, with their "nodding donkey" pumps. After passing Río Grande, we stop in a pleasant hotel at Kaikén on the shore of Lago Fagnano. This is the civilized part of the lake, almost three decades later I also visit the wild part on the Chilean side; see page 991. In the evening, our children play cards with Argentine kids and learn the game of *Carioca*.

Figure 884. Pig-nosed children inside the mud-covered car.

Figure 885. Argentine oil exploration in Tierra del Fuego—no gas at the gas station.

Figure 886. Nodding donkeys—dirty business.

Figure 887. Arrival at the end of the world.

The next day, I can finally keep a promise that I made to our faithful little Toyota Tercel in Toronto: you will see Ushuaia, the southernmost city of our planet and the southernmost point that is easily reachable by car from Canada. The end of the world. And "easy" is relative. La Quiaca on the northern border of Argentina with Bolivia is a whopping 5171 kilometers away. We are all proud of this achievement and duly take pictures and celebrate.

Now comes the big moment that has kept me worried me all the time south of Santiago: I go to the *Hotel Las Lengas* and their Antartur office. For months, I dealt with them by letter and phone concerning my trip to Antarctica, eventually obtaining a good price. Does this office exist? Is it a serious enterprise? Do they know me? Do they even have my reservation? In one minute, this get clarified: everything is ok! Huge relief for me. I will be on their ship *Bahia Paraiso* from 6 to 16 January.

The Lapataia Park is a dozen kilometers away and even further south than Ushuaia at the end of *Ruta 3*, by about three kilometers. The sign says "Buenos Aires 3202 km". Over the next 26 years, Buenos Aires will move south by 123 km (Figure 1334). From a large beaver dam we hike the *Los Castores* (beavers) trail down to the bay. We meet a group of young Argentine scientist, among them "my brother" Willie, who will travel to Antarctica on the same ship as I. At first, the trail is crowded with tourists, but already after five minutes we are on our own. Through a forest with lots of mosquitos, then along the sea shore.

Figure 888. Bahía Lapataia: another end of the world.

Dorothea and the kids find loads of pebbles and shells, all of which I have to carry. From time to time, we have to climb over tall boulders. Désirée jumps from rock to rock like a little monkey, up trees, happy in her element. This is a very enjoyable afternoon. At

our camp site, we collect tons of wood and have a lot of fun with our new Swiss friends Urs and Franz: barbecuing sausages, playing cards, some wine, a truly enjoyable evening. Désirée is proud to light a big fire with just one match.

Figure 889. Monkeying around the rocks at the end of the world.

On 6 January, we pack up and drive to Ushuaia. Nobody knows when my ship will actually leave, and this is typical of the lack of information also on the trip. At 15.00, I can deposit my backpack on the ship, but in the wrong cabin. Dorothea is understandably unhappy, the kids horse around the quay, which makes me a bit nervous. At 19.00, the *Bahía Paraiso* finally sails; see page 1538. Bye bye to Dorothea, Rafaela, Désirée, and Tierra del Fuego. Too bad that the shipping company did not allow six-year old Désirée on the voyage. It would have been even more fun for the four of us together.


Figure 890. The town of Ushuaia and our Playmobil daughters.

On their own for eleven days, Dorothea, Rafaela, and Désirée stay at the pleasant *Hotel Las Lengas* and make a few excursions. One is to take the chair lift to the Glaciar le Martial in Ushuaia. Beautiful view over Ushuaia. The Museo Territorial presents a nice exhibition of local fauna and flora. They take a boat excursion from Ushuaia to penguin and seal colonies on the *Islote de los lobos* (seal island). A special day is on 11 January, when Dorothea celebrates ten years of marriage with the guy who is now far south in Antarctica.


Figure 891. Dorothea, Rafaela, and Désirée on Seal Island.

On 16 January 1989, the *Bahía Paraiso* returns from Antarctica and docks in Ushuaia at 14.00. I am on the lookout for Dorothea and our children. No-one around. Some disappointment. It turns out that they have constantly been given erroneous information and thought we would arrive at 16.00. As they leave their lunch restaurant, they see the ship in the harbor and race down to meet me. A happy reunion, we are all well. Kisses here and kisses there. Then we quickly load my stuff into the car and drive to Lago Fagnano. At 19.00, I go on a walk with Rafaela and Désirée along the lake, in pouring rain, returning at 20.45. Dorothea drives towards us, but we are too wet to enter the car. Anyways, hiking is more pleasant than driving. Back in our bungalow, we kill our Sylvester bottle of champaign and celebrate ten years of marriage and 23 years of being together. The kids

fight over who gets which bed, Désirée wants to sleep near an adult. So Rafaela settles in with Dorothea, and Désirée with me. Snuggly and comfortable after being separated for a week and a half.

Figure 892. Curious ñandú, flamingoes, and a volcano crater with its lake.

Some time later, we learn that the ship on which I travelled to Antarctica has sunk (page 1547), and that the ferry on which we reached Puerto Natales (page 683) has suffered a similar fate. This worries me a bit: would every ship sink after I have been on it?

We drive in the only direction available out of Ushuaia: north. The road weaves in and out of Chile and Argentina for the next few days. The treatment at the many border posts that we cross is much friendlier than what we got used to in Central America. We have to fill forms and pay a minor amount for temporary importation of our car, but with receipts and polite officials.

Via Río Grande we drive to the ferry across the Magallan strait. Terrible roads, mud and dry dirt. The road does not have potholes, rather the holes have pot-asphalt between them, sometimes at considerable distance. Driving is strenuous, for the passengers, the car, and even the driver. We hop on the last ferry and stay in the *Hotel Pehuelche* just after the crossing. We meet a German couple from Lübeck, teachers at the German school in Puerto Montt; the woman refuses to drive further south on these challenging roads. With Andi Hirt from Switzerland, we all have an entertaining evening. When they turn the lights out in the dining room, we continue upstairs in the salon.

Figure 893. Our car needs a wash, and the Patagonian winds almost blow our daughters over.

In Río Gallegos, our brave little Tercel gets a present of 900 kilometers of asphalt for

the next days, a well-earned reward. We arrive in Tres Cerros at 22.30, exhausted. Our two blonde pretty daughters are a major attraction, people stare at them.

Figure 894. Two loving sisters in wet clothes. These poor kids are having fun!

Figure 895. Motherly love.

The highly welcome asphalt ends at Comodoro Rivadavia. People tell us about winter storms in this port city with speeds of more than 200 km/h. Then they cannot leave their homes, even parked cars sometimes get overturned. We had some of these ferocious Patagonian winds in Torres del Paine and El Calafate, but nothing that bad.

Our visit to the petrified forest near Río Mayo is fascinating. These remains cover a large area, from whole tree trunks to small wooden chips, like in a carpenter's workroom, only these are all petrified. The structure of the wood is clearly visible, only the bark

has vanished. Our daughters crawl through one of the trunks. Its interior probably had rotted before the outer structure petrified. They love this kind of adventure and have fun collecting a few pieces of wood-turned-rock. The *cerro colorado* (red hill) glows in the distance, eroded badlands of marine sediments and volcanic ash.

I explain to our children how in special circumstances, wood does not decay but anorganic substances move slowly into the cells and replace the organic material by hard crystals. The wood is about 200 million years old and covered in sediment. Erosion exposes some trunks of pine and palm trees, now petrified as silicates and quartzes, and later destroys them. The longest tree measures 28 meters, the thickest one has a diameter of one meter.

Figure 896. Petrified forest of Río Mayo. Six-year old on million-year old.

Figure 897. Badlands around Río Mayo.

We cross the border again and for the last time into Chile, to arrive in Coihayque at 16.00, and then to Puerto Chacabuco. With great luck we just get a space on the *M/N Calbuco* (motor nave, motor ship *Calbuco*) going to the *Laguna San Rafael* and leaving at 18.45. We spend the night on the ship.

Figure 898. Cruising towards the Laguna San Rafael, mighty waterfalls in the background.

Most of the next day, the *Calbuco* cruises in front of the massive glacier, which sends towers of ice crashing into the *Laguna San Rafael*. The San Rafael glacier drops from the Northern Patagonian Ice Field into this bay, connected to the ocean via natural waterways. As at the Perito Moreno glacier (Figure 878), it is impressive to see house-sized chunks of ice drop into the bay with a big splash, sometimes generating whole icefalls in their wake. You can stand on the ship for hours and admire this active scenery, with the bluish icefield extending as far inland as you can see, hemmed in by black rock walls.

Figure 899. The San Rafael glacier.

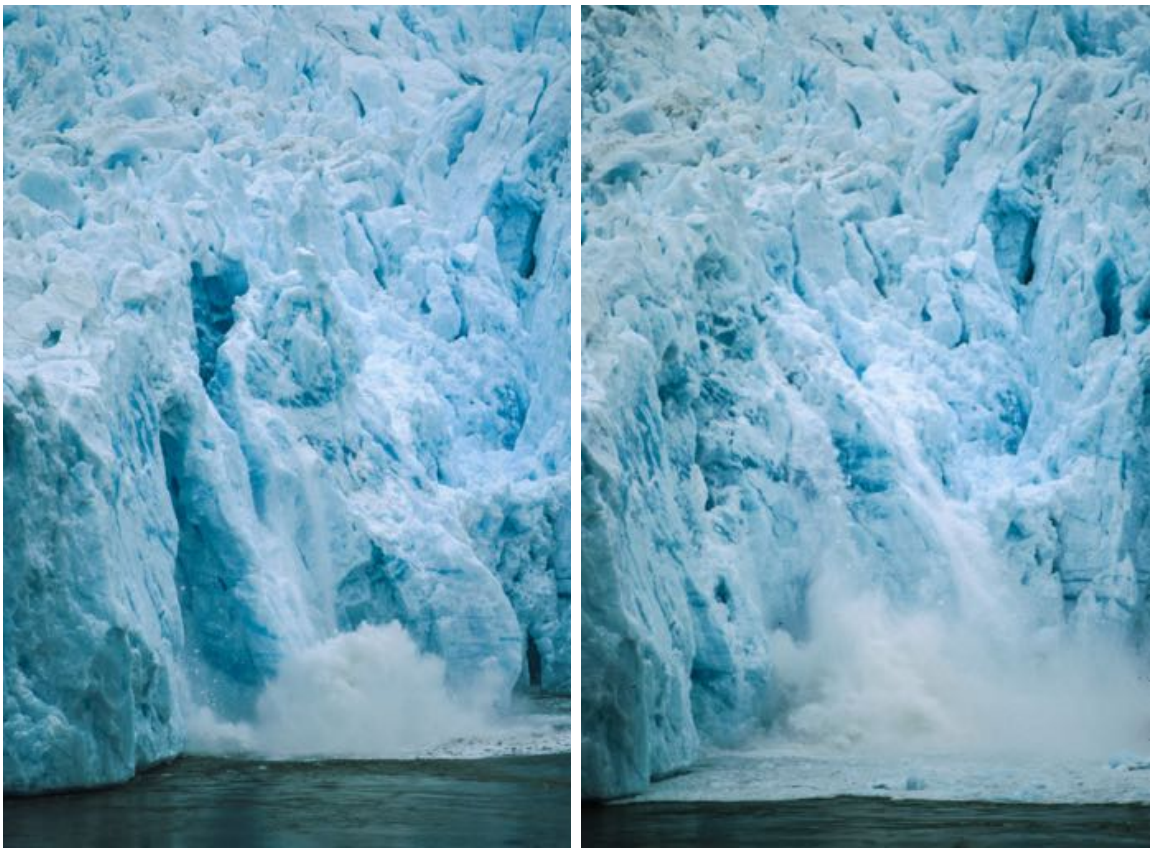


Figure 900. Tumbling ice.

Even more exciting is the excursion on a rubber dinghi close to the ice wall. The waves of falling ice shake the little boat considerably. All around us, dark green glacial water with ice floes that albatrosses, cormorants, seagulls, and sea lions use as a resting place. The almost luminescent blue of the cracks in the glacier contrasts with the black waters and the white ice around. A marvellous sight. It makes you feel like a speck of dust to be so close to this magnificent spectacle of nature, the glacier dominating everything, noisily calving its icebergs.

Figure 901. In the dinghi.

Figure 902. Sea birds.

We start our long trek north to Santiago along the famous *carretera austral* (southern highway), a major highway project in the extreme south of Chile. It was begun in 1976 and in 2020 stretches for 1240 kilometers to Villa O'Higgins. Some extensions are planned, but the Great Patagonian Icefield blocks progress straight south from there. Parts have been opened only months before our arrival. It is one of the most beautiful, varied, and challenging long-distance highways in the world, but not for the faint-hearted. A main purpose is to affirm Chilean sovereignty over its southern territories, which are sparsely populated and difficult to access because of the terrain and extreme climatic conditions. There have been clashes with Argentina over some uninhabited islands near Tierra del Fuego, and the government wants to increase population and presence.

Most of this highway is a rough dirt track, but manageable by our small car. Much better than the highway on Tierra del Fuego. Constant improvements and repairs are required to cope with rock falls and creeks flowing across the road. When I drive here again almost three decades later, many road works are going on, but my overall impression is that nothing much has changed; see Figure 1275.

Figure 903. Lonely sentinel after a storm and waterfalls galore.

Beautiful and constantly changing scenery forms the backdrop of our whole drive along the carretera austral. Small isolated villages line the well-maintained dirt road at great distances from each other, and in between waterfalls and dense forests growing on steep

mountains, often hidden by thin veils of fog. The area, with mountains rising to over 2000 meters almost straight out of the Pacific Ocean, is very wet and completely covered with trees, including *araucarias*, the national tree of Chile. In the 1930s, large areas further north were cleared for agriculture by slash-and-burn, creating clouds of smoke that darkened the skies even on the Atlantic coast, on the other side of the continent.

Figure 904. Hiking in the Pacific mountains.

The road is interrupted from time to time by fjords where it would be too expensive or impossible to continue building a road. On our many ferries, our children learn Chilean card games from new friends that they meet on the boat, and we have a lot of fun with the other passengers. Dirt engulfs our car. A flat tire is quickly changed, but then we do not find a place to fix the tire. It is a queasy feeling to drive over these difficult roads without a spare tire. We get it fixed in Puerto Montt.

Figure 905. Ferry, badly needed car wash, and one tire got a big hit.

After a night in Los Angeles, we get to Paine, not far south of Santiago. The day's easy driving on the Panamericana (Ruta 5) is rewarded by a wonderful dinner in the parrillada argentina *Los Buenos Aires de Paine*, where I will dine again on my motorcycle trip decades later, without recognizing the place, see page 947. Finally, we get to Santiago, where our friends welcome us.

We bid a fond temporary good-bye to our Tercel in the port city of Valparaiso. This faithful donkey has carried us in seven months for 30 800 kilometers from Toronto to Valparaiso, without any major mishap. It is a small but sturdy and reliable car, and even in remote hamlets we could always find a welder to fix the minor broken things, mainly the exhaust pipe. Try that with a modern car, full of electronics!

Our car makes it well back on a freighter to the port of New York City, where my Ph.D. student Mark Giesbrecht picks it up to drive back to Toronto. He has quite an adventure getting it out of US customs. Four of the car's doors rusted shut on the salty sea voyage, he can get in and out only by climbing either through the driver's window or the rear hatch. This does not create the best of impressions with the customs officials. But worse is to come—we spilled some detergent in the otherwise empty trunk without noticing it, and when they see the floor covered with a white powder, in a car arriving from South America, all alarm bells ring. Eventually, they convince themselves that this is indeed only detergent, and let Mark go. He probably already saw his career as a PhD student interrupted by a few years in an American jail. Well, such things make up for a well-rounded graduate education. And indeed, he writes a wonderful PhD thesis, becomes a professor, eventually at the University of Waterloo and Director of their Department of Computer Science. He has earned higher degrees in travelling since then, we still do research together, and have our laughs over that situation in the NY port.

Figure 906. Leaving Santiago for Easter Island—and no, we did not take our neighbors' baby along.

Our children learnt a lot on this trip. Not so much schoolbook material, but real life. Climbing around ancient ruins, hiking on steep mountains, boat trips and glaciers, getting

to know animals. Never complaining. They have widened their horizons, both literally and figuratively, much more than possible in half a year of school. And the most important thing on any voyage: they met so many lovely, friendly, and entertaining friends. Part of that human experience is also encountering the other side of mankind, thieves and crooks; but rarely. Being together in our tightly knit family creates lovely memories for the rest of our lives.

But it is not over. Far from it. We now go off for another seven months to the *happy islands* in the Pacific, mostly small specks of land scattered around immense open waters, and Australia and New Zealand. Beautiful beaches of white palm-fringed sand and the azure sea, rocky volcanic cliffs, including some with grisly reminders of a war a generation ago. And again we make many friends, at school and on the road. Let's go!

Central America 1967

My very first trip outside of Europe is in my summer school vacation of 1967, at the age of seventeen before my last year of high school. It infects me with my morbus peregrinandi *disease described on page 9. The voyage is one of the really nice and generous things my parents did for me, besides allowing me to study at ETH Zürich (and paying for it). Flying across the Atlantic Ocean was then still something special. In several Central American countries, I usually stay with friends of my father's. My walks around town and other excursions wet my appetite for travel in tropical areas.*

Concerning my *morbus peregrinandi*, I actually have vague memories of my travel desire from much earlier. When I was seven years old and in elementary school, my brother Christoph was five years old, not yet in school, and allowed to accompany our parents on a trip to Biarritz and San Sebastián. I was so disappointed to miss this opportunity to travel to a far-away country like Spain—I might never get there. Well, from age 19 on, travelling to Spain becomes a routine affair, but I could not know this as a child.

Figure 907. From left: my mother Lotte, Elyncita & Elyn Rodríguez, my father Joachim, my sober self, 1967 in Solingen.

My father, also called Joachim, ran a company together with his three brothers, that my great-grandfather Wilhelm founded in 1880. From our home town of Solingen in Germany, famous for its knives and scissors, they sold gift articles all over Latin America. Companies bought them, together with advertisements or their logo stamped or printed on them, for presents at Christmas time. On his numerous extended travels to this area, my father made many friends in his outgoing manner, among them Alex Rodríguez,the owner of a chain of pharmacies in San Salvador. Eventually, he suggests that I visit his family in San Salvador over the summer, and some other countries.

I am all excited, but almost blow it. The Rodríguez family (Alejandro, his wife Elyn, and their daughter Elyncita) visit my parents' home in Solingen, Germany, around Whitsuntide 1967. One Sunday afternoon, I go to the house of my friend Dieter Herzog, with Joachim Müller, and we shoot the crap as 17-year olds do. Somehow, a bottle of whisky materializes. We are used to playing cards and drinking beer, lots of it, but not to the hard stuff. I stagger home, not aware that the Rodríguez are there. I greet them in our living room, swaying heavily and hardly being able to keep my balance. As I find, with difficulty, my way upstairs to my room, I know that I have lost this wonderful opportunity. Who would want to accommodate a 17-year old drunkard?

But I luck out, they take this as youthful exuberance (which it was, and not repeated), and I am still invited. We become good friends and with my wife and children, we visit them again in 1988; see page 579. My first transatlantic flight takes me via Lisbon to Port-of-Spain in Trinidad. I walk along a never-ending corridor in the airport, covered with large insects standing lopsided on just one pair of legs. So these are the tropics? Hordes of big critters, looking quite intimidating (but actually harmless)? It is a dramatic introduction to the tropical animal kingdom. For a map, see Figure 649.

In Panamá, I walk around the city and shop for trifles like toothpaste. This is nothing special today, but back then it was really exciting to be all on my own in a far-away country, buying toothpaste with my own US dollars. Wow!

My next stop is Managua in Nicaragua, my stay arranged by friends of my father's. I remember an excursion to the sandy beaches of Lake Managua, and resisting the advances of pretty young Nicaraguans, remembering my girl friend Dorothea at home. Yo ho, and a bottle of rum *ron flor de caña* is always around, but I hardly touch the stuff remembering my Whitsunday near-disaster.

I stay for about four weeks in the large and comfortable mansion of our friends, the Rodríguez, in the upscale suburb of *Colonia Escalón*. It is well-appointed, with an overwhelming collection of bric-à-brac from all over the world and white anti-macassars over their chairs and sofas. They do everything to keep me happy, an unforgettable experience of unbridled hospitality. One morning, I cannot get into my shoes. Did I put a sock in there? No—it is a huge cockroach, presumably overdosed on my foot odors. RIP. Another lesson in tropical wildlife. I will eventually learn how to cope with such little surprises.

The Rodríguez take me to their holiday home on Lago Coatepeque high up in the mountains. This lake sits in the crater of an inactive volcano. They drive me around in their speedboat and I learn to water-ski. We have lots of fun. This is not possible anymore today, since the water level has dropped substantially, as we see two decades later on a visit with my family, see page 581.

The wealthy Rodríguez family runs three pharmacies in town, and I can go there by bus. One day, it is very hot and I stop by a street vendor of ice cream. He takes the lid off his containers, chases away most of the flies, and I enjoy his cone with refreshing cold ice cream. Today, I know enough about hygiene and would not accept such a dangerous delicacy, but back then I just loved it. And it did no harm to my gastro-intestinal tract. On the contrary, this recklessness and similarly careless behavior later in India and South East Asia have presumably fortified my immune system so that in the last decades, I have not suffered from any such problems which affect most travelers.

Figure 908. The Rodriguez' *Farmacía Americana* in downtown San Salvador.

On my next stop, in Guatemala City, my father's friend Mariano Vadillo welcomes me and puts me up in a hotel. And then comes the end of my trip, in Mexico City. I have thoroughly enjoyed the freedom and independence, and also the challenges, during the six weeks of my first trip far away from home.

Mayan ruins in Central America 1987

The precolumbian ruins of Central and South America have lured me to many visits. With Dorothea, Rafaela, and Désirée, we spend a month in 1987 on the Yucatán peninsula, famous for its Maya civilization.

Figure 909. Always travel light!

After a three-month sabbatical visit to Saarbrücken in Germany, we are somewhat overdosing on luggage. Two days in Toronto, then we are off again. Our *Eastern Airlines* plane sits on the ground for a long time. When I ask the stewardess to give our daughters, five and seven years old, something to drink right now, before our turn, she balks at me: "That would not be fair!" I am neither surprised nor annoyed when Eastern goes broke a few years later. In Cancún, we pick up our rental Nissan with air conditioning. We require five tourist cards, one for each of us and one for Rafaela's doll Katharena. Our first cabaña, in Puerto Morelos, is built of round tree trunks and wide open to the outside. Our swinging beds have mosquito nets. The kids jump into the pool right away, they are all excited. For a map of this trip, see Figure 649.

After breakfast, the kids are in the pool again and make a fuss when we tell them that it is time to leave. In Tulúm around 15.00, we take a hotel that looks nice. Unfortunately, the abundant mosquitos mar our next days. The ruins are impressive: a huge pyramid on cliffs by the sea, with steep steps that we climb easily (well, with one exception). Colorful frescoes, sculptures of their main divinity, the Diving God, massive buildings with inward-sloping walls.

Figure 910. Désirée strolling around the ruins of Tulúm.

The kids enjoy the swimming off the pretty beach with palms and white sand, but are a little bit scared of the ocean waves. We let a little caterpillar crawl over our hands and Désirée calls her *Emma*. The kids love her, but she does not talk back to us. Désirée hardly wants to let her out of her hands. A few weeks ago, she would have been afraid of holding such an animal.

Figure 911. The Diving God and a war mask.

Figure 912. Relaxed kids and their caterpillar *Emma*.

Unfortunately, three mosquitos have cheated their way into Rafaela's mozzie net overnight; I sentence them to capital punishment, and my job as executioner leaves me with plenty of (our own) blood on my hands. Still, we presumably lost the battle 3:4.

Figure 913. Enjoying the pool at our round hut.

In the afternoon, we drive to Puerto Carillo and Bacalar, then through a beautiful bougainvillea alley to the *Hotel las Lagunas*. Very nice, pool, the *laguna de siete colores* (seven colors lagoon) deserves its name, and we see a sea turtle in it. My Canon A1 camera, otherwise a wonderful tool, breaks at some point: the mirror does not move up when I release the shutter.

At the Kohunlich ruins, we see fantastic masks (*mascarones*) at a pyramid, climb up a palace, and walk over the ball-playing park, now in the middle of the jungle. The extreme heat is a problem for some of us, but everybody faces this courageously. Désirée climbs up a vertical wall, just holding herself with fingertips and toes—good job!

Figure 914. Kohunlich ruins rise out of their green graves of the last five centuries. At the Temple of Masks.

Figure 915. Climbing all over the Kohunlich ruins.

We next drive towards the Mexico-Belize border with some apprehension. Already back home, I have learned that, in principle, we are not allowed to take our rental car out of Mexico. But we sail easily through the border controls. We find a nice hotel in Belize City, the country's largest town, arriving at 19.00 against my determination not to drive in the

dark, not even those few minutes. Nice dinner in the Château Caribéen, but the heat is too much for the three girls, they just nibble a bite and move into the cool reception hall.

After waiting 15 minutes for breakfast the next morning, the girl tells us that she does not know how to turn the oven on, and nor does anyone else. Aha. No worries, we drive to the Fort George Hotel in Belize city for a nice and filling breakfast. A watermelon we buy is not quite ripe, but delicious three days later—and the whole car smells of melon.

Figure 916. Harborfront in Belize City, and the deserted center of Belmopán.

In 1962, hurricane Hattie largely destroyed Belize's capital Belize City; the country was then actually the colony of British Honduras. In 1970, the government decided to build a new capital inland, a bit like Brazil's Brasília; see page 1111. However, this one failed even worse. The five-storey ministry buildings in Belmopán stand around at haphazard distances like guests at a party trying to start a conversation—but nobody does. Wide black tears run down the concrete and give the impression that they are crying at their neglect, large holes for ventilation pock-mark the buildings. Broad avenues are overgrown with bushes and grass, nothing moves except their leaves in the breeze. The tropical vegetation is starting to take over again. A sorry place.

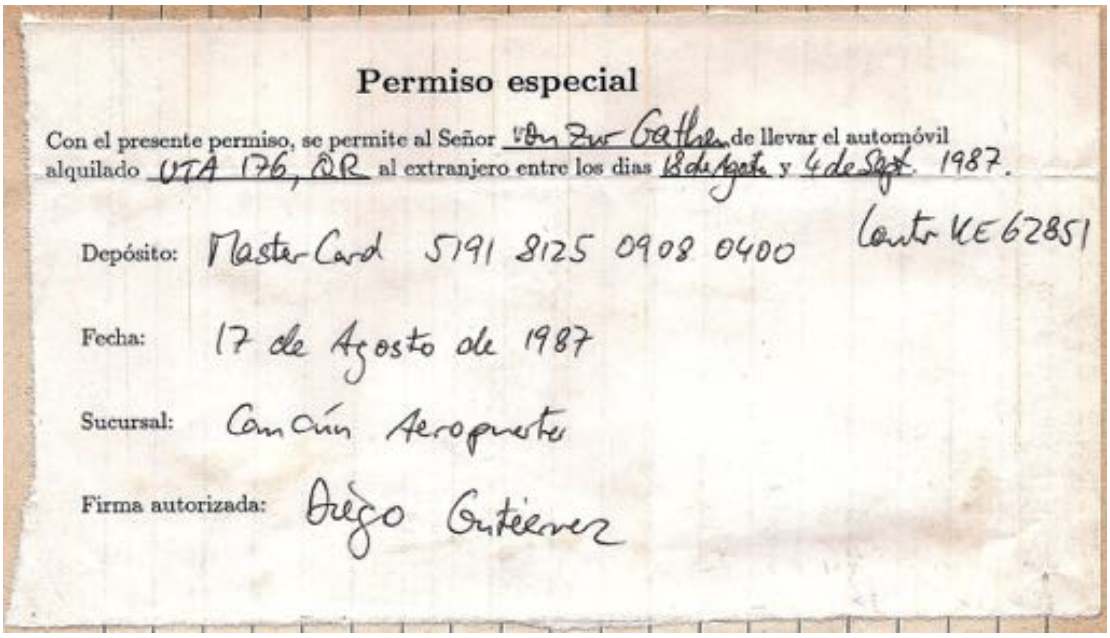
Figure 917. Arriving at the *finca suiza*.

Over a dirt track we follow a sign saying *finca suiza*, but it looks like the end of the road: a river in front of us, some rusted cars in the bush, no other sign of human habitation.

After a while, a young man comes out of the bushes on the other side of the river and pulls us across on a cable-pulled ferry. Our kids fall in love with the animals, Burt the dog, a monkey, horses, and above all a few tiny cats. They fit into a hand, one has its eyes still closed. Désirée does not want to relinquish them.

Figure 918. The *finca suiza* in the middle of nothing.

Then it is off towards Guatemala. At the Guatemalan border post we get into the trouble that I expected on exit from Mexico. A large flyer is posted inside their hut saying that one cannot enter Guatemala with a rented car. I know about this rule and am prepared for it.



Permiso especial

Con el presente permiso, se permite al Señor Dr. Burt Gathen de llevar el automóvil alquilado UTA 176, QR al extranjero entre los dias 18 de Agosto y 4 de Sept. 1987.

Depósito: MasterCard 5191 8125 0908 0400 Cont. KE 62851

Fecha: 17 de Agosto de 1987

Sucursal: Cancún Aeropuerto

Firma autorizada: Diego Gutiérrez

Figure 919. My truly special permit.

The head of customs, Ramón the gorilla, sits in a pub next door, completely drunken. He cannot even walk. After some sweet talking, he agrees to do Rafaela the favor of looking at our car, expressly not to me! He is too stoned to say anything sensible, but then I pull my trump from my sleeve: a self-manufactured *permiso especial* (Figure 919) does the trick. Some more sweet talking about the funny things that foreign companies (here: Avis) do, a sober but not very clever agent scrutinizing my paper and nodding, and the gorilla makes a sign to let us through. All this takes two hours, during which Dorothea and the kids sit in the unbearable heat of our car.

Quite understandably, they leave the air con running all the time, not giving any thought to technical details like the energy level. When it is time to drive away—cluck—nothing.The battery is dead. The car has an automatic gear shift and cannot be pulled to start. The customs people, except the gorilla of course, turn from harassing us into helpful normal humans, giving us all sorts of advice and help. Finally one of them connects his own car's battery to ours—and wroom! we are moving. What a relief! It is too late to go further, and we sleep in a tiny hot room in the next village, Melchar de Mencos. After several attempts, we succeed in arranging the four of us in the bed so we lie besides each other, not over and across each other. We are so flexible, even after a strenuous day!

Figure 920. Rutted road and wooden bridge.

Figure 921. A shop on our way, with a monster pig,
and lazing around in hammocks.

Figure 922. On a horse and in our hut at the Lago Petén.

A whole day's drive takes us to the posada *Gringo perdido* right on Lago Petén, famous for the Mayan ruins nearby. It is beautiful and serene place, nice bungalow. Just as we walk into the national park of the Tikal ruins, it starts pouring so much that we cannot go on. We run back to the car, take off our soaked clothes, and drive in underpants (and a bra for one of us). Hilarious. The windows keep fogging over, and I drive more by hearing than by sight. The kids have dry spare clothes in the car.

Figure 923. Wet excursion to Tikal and a change of clothes in the parking lot.

We spend a wonderful day in the impressive Mayan ruins at Tikal. All four of us climb to the top of Temple II (of the high priest). I climb down in front of the kids, then up again to guide Dorothea down, who has great trouble due to her fear of heights. But a little hand-holding does the trick. Only courageous Désirée and I attempt Temple I (of the Great Jaguar king), partly pulling ourselves up on an iron chain. The higher we climb, the more nervous get Dorothea and Rafaela, especially when Désirée walks very close to the edge. They are mighty relieved when we make it back to solid ground. After a simple lunch in front of Temple IV all of us master the ladders leading to its top. The last steel ladder is so hot that my hands feel like getting fried. But then we enjoy the incredible views over the jungle. At 74 meters this is the highest in Tikal and the tallest pre-Columbian structure

in all of America. Quite appropriate for the most powerful Mayan city from about 200 to 900 AD, founded in the 4th century BC.

Figure 924. North Acropolis.

Figure 925. Wow! Will we ever make it up there? Yes, we can!

It starts raining again, and while the others dry themselves, I climb a bit on the *mundo perdido* (lost world) and the *palacio de las nueve ventanas* (palace with nine windows). Désirée was afraid of any kind of animal even two weeks ago, but now she has learned to deal with them. Mosquitos you shy away or, in the car, kill them mercilessly. She loves small animals, in particular geckos.

Figure 926. Yeah! We made it.

Figure 927. The jungle quickly devours all human efforts.

Figure 928. Our relaxed daughters in Tikal.

Back at the *Gringo perdido*, the still waters of the dark blue lake invite us for a swim. Rafaela, Désirée, and me enjoy the cooling off after a hot day. Later at the main building, the kids have a good time, playing with the owners' boy and some animals around: parrots, a baby ozelot, a peccary pig. And they help release a young caiman into the lake ... shock! Caimans in the lake! I have been swimming there twice with our daughters, quite a bit into the peaceful lake. I almost have a heart attack when I realize my humongous mistake. Out of pure luck, we did not have a run-in with these monsters. And later I see a warning sign depicting a caiman. That is scary. And our guide book says: *good swimming in the lake*.

Figure 929. Involuntary swim with caimans.

Figure 930. Teaching the art of tortilla making.

After the Petén jungle, it is shake, rattle, and roll all day long. We start with 30 km of asphalt to Santa Elena (Flores), but then swaying and clanging for 175 kilometers via Poptún, taking 8 hours at an average of 22 km/h. The road is barely feasible for a regular car like ours, a 4×4 would be appropriate. Large rocks in the middle of the highway, stretches of mud, never-ending shaking, and steps in the road, where washouts left rocky ledges high above the partially disappeared soft material, creating stairs in the road. Our car takes the continuous beating equanimously, some of its passengers do not. The physical suffering aside, the drive is beautiful, through the jungle, untouched in parts, butterflies galore, many birds including eagles, lianas. In the villages naked children, pigs, and ugly dogs.

Figure 931. The pleasures of riding through the Petén.

At 19.30 we are finally at the Río Dulce, in total darkness. Someone offers us a ride in a motorized canoe to the *Hotel Catamarán*, on an island in the Río Dulce. The children are surprised that one can ride a boat through the night. White spray jumps up the hull, nice to see. The hotel used to have one bungalow some years ago, now there are many. As a reward for the day's duress, we take a bungalow that rests on pillars right above the water. We can see the water moving through some slits in the wooden floor panels. The kids pass out in their beds quickly, but Dorothea and I enjoy a peaceful evening on our terrace. What a relief after being shaken so thoroughly!

Figure 932. An ara (parrot) on the road and
Désirée in front of our fabulous hut over the water.

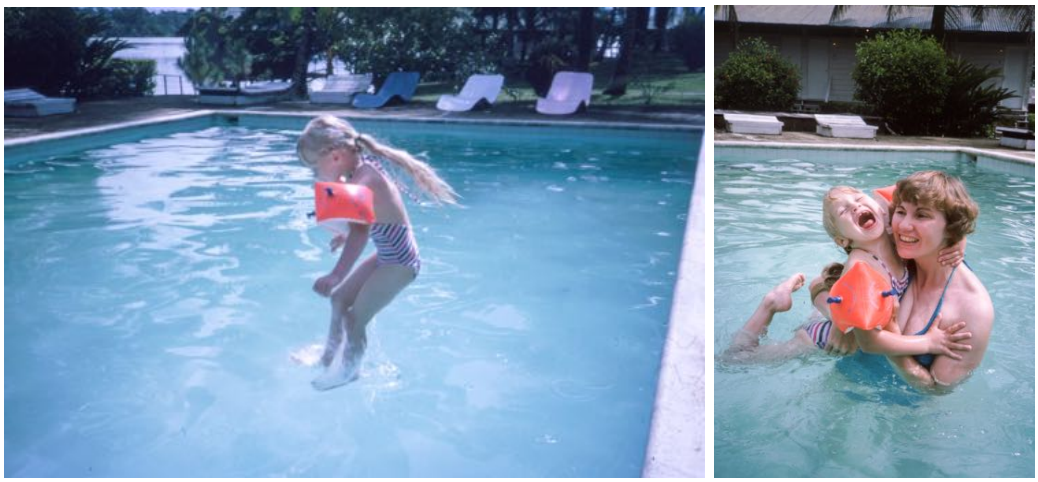


Figure 933. Splashing fun.

After a long morning swim in the pool, we leave for Guatemala City. Relaxed driving on asphalt, and we find our *Hotel Colonial* quite easily. The next day is a ladies' day. First shopping for shoes, colorful towels, fabric and ceramic knickknack, and some of the beautiful cross-stitched Guatemalan table cloths that we used a lot in my parents' home. In the evening we meet the Vadillo family, friends of my father's: Mariano (79 years old, see page 717), and his two sons Mariano and Xavier. With nice steaks, wine, and amusing

conversation the evening passes quickly. Our two daughters are tired, but super-pleasant and fall asleep on a wooden bench.

I take my non-functioning Canon A-1 camera to a shop whose owner truly knows what he is doing. One look and: "aha, that must be the MG". Indeed, a magnet *MG* that pulls up the mirror when you trigger the shutter was broken. And he fixed it. I am so happy when I receive my repaired equipment.

Figure 934. Guatemala City.

After breakfast in the Lido Café, where my father was a regular, we drive to Antigua. This is the old capital of Guatemala, given up because of too much volcanic and seismic trouble. We visit some sights: cathedral and the San Marcos university, more beautiful but less productive than the University of Toronto.

Figure 935. Doors in Antigua.

Figure 936. Earthquaked cathedral.

Figure 937. Happy and thoughtful children in Antigua.

Then comes a fascinating drive through the highlands to Chichicastenango. One bend in the road has seen numerous fatal accidents. We stay overnight in a former monastery, all walls skew, fireplace in each room, an atmosphere like in a well-run museum. We enjoy a tranquil evening in front of our fireplace. I love those Guatemalan city names ending in -tenango, and particularly the fictitious Gringotenango, used humorously for Antigua because of the many young US tourists staying there for language and other courses.

Figure 938. Rafaela's image of the traffic towards Chichicastenango.

Figure 939. "Dangerous descent, use engine brake"—not everyone listens.

Figure 940. Looking out from our inexpensive luxury lodging and someone earning his money the hard way.

Figure 941. Market. The bananas may not look so good, but are much sweeter and juicier than anything you get in our supermarkets..

Via Huehuetenango we drive to Mexico. At the border, a Mexican quarantine official holds a sermon on pest and cholera, which come from Africa. I assure him that I have never been to Africa—leafing through my passport would have revealed that I was there last month. Luckily for us, a sudden downpour sweeps away the customs officials' desire to search our trunk. Our hotel in San Cristóbal de las Casas bears a fancy name, the *Palacio de Moctezuma*, and is in a pretty colonial building, but the interior is Ikea-style drabness.

Figure 942. Going to town.

Figure 943. Driving through a multi-colored landscape.

Figure 944. Our daughters observe with interest a gas pump without pump.

Figure 945. ¿Qué sombrero desea el señor?

Our kids love their ride in a horse-drawn carriage through the narrow winding lanes of San Cristóbal. Then we are off to Palenque. At the sight of those impressive ruins, I am so excited that I get out of the car right there, and the three girls find the pleasant Hotel Tulija for us. There is too much to see in those Mayan ruins. The *templo de las inscripciones* (Temple of Inscriptions) houses the tomb of King Pakal, or K'inich Janaab Pakal, who reigned for an incredible 68 years and died in 683 AD. Up to the top of the 21-meter high pyramid, then down into the burial chamber, very hot and humid, up again, then down. Good exercise. A large triangular hewn rock is the door. The burial lid, weighing tons, is put above the grave, as if it was floating in the air. The four-storied tower in the palace is a joy to climb. As everywhere, no ropes, nets, nor handrails, just fun. I hear an American

mother complain loudly how dangerous all this is. She's right, and she's wrong. Good fun can be dangerous, but that is no reason for me to skip it. Finely carved bas reliefs in the temples *de la luz* (light) and *de la cruz* (cross) show priests, shamans, kings, and warriors. The temples were originally richly decorated in vivid colors. The Mayas often used the technique of corbel arches, where each layer of masonry protrudes a bit beyond the level below it.

Figure 946. Temple of inscriptions.

Figure 947. At left: corbel arches are a distinctive feature of Mayan architecture.

Figure 948. At the temple of inscriptions. A black obsidian table, possibly for ritual sacrifices.

Figure 949. Reliefs: a shaman and a warrior.

Figure 950. A day spent climbing up and down steep stairs ... until exhaustion hits.

They close at 17.00, and my private taxi picks me up. A jump in the pool, dinner, and I fall exhausted into my bed. Rafaela has kept herself busy with a charming translation of a warning note at the swimming pool. French and Spanish are her third and fourth languages at age eight. I am proud of our kids!

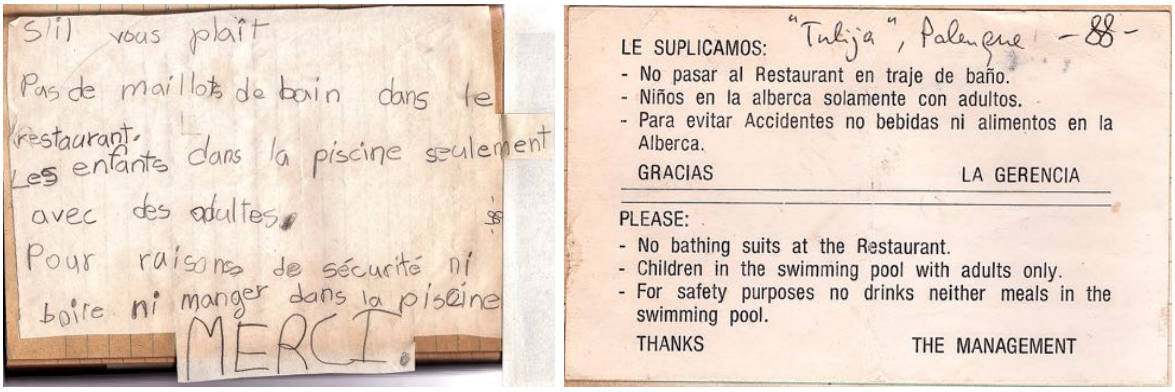


Figure 951. Rafaela's linguistic exercise, and the original at right.

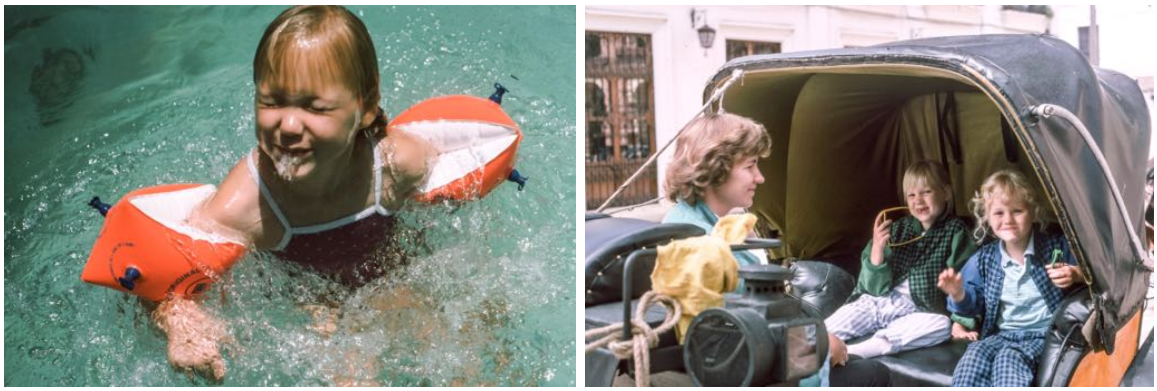


Figure 952. In the pool, not drinking or eating. Enjoying a horse-drawn ride.

We all go together to the Palenque ruins and climb up and down the steep stairs. Dorothea has a bit of trouble with the steepest of them, but manages in the end. The kids get tired and want rather a coke than culture. Fine. After lunch, we leave for Campeche. It is sweltering hot. In the evening, the kids have deserved a few rounds on a decrepit carousel for being so tough and uncomplaining while traveling.

Figure 953. Fort at Campeche and a Caribbean sunset.

After a morning stroll through Campeche, with its imposing colonial city walls and two forts almost intact, we drive to Uxmal. The three girls stay in the hotel pool, while I go exploring the famous ruins. The 60º degree stairs up to the prophet's temple are quite something, each step quite high and very narrow, only half of your foot rests on it. They are adorned with nine plus nine Chaac masks, five of which survive. Chaac is the Maya god of rain, and processions prayed for rain with a mantra-like repetition of *Chaak mol*. At the top I see the largest Chaac mask in existence. Its mouth is 2.2 metres high, I can easily walk through it—possibly a sacrilege, but it remains unpunished. The nuns' monastery features again Chaac masks, also serpents and many reliefs. The jaguar throne in the *templo grande* (great temple) with its double head is fascinating.

Figure 954. Uxmal, the *Magician's pyramid* at left, ball playing court at right.

Later in the afternoon, bus loads of tourists leave and I stroll around in the heat all alone, enjoying myself immensely. In the hotel, the kids enjoy playing in the bathtub—after spending all afternoon in the pool. The right thing for them in this heat. In the evening, the ruins come to life at the *luz y sonido* (light and sound) spectacle. Laser beams draw images of strange figures in the sky: kings, warriors, athletes, eagles, jaguars, feathered snakes, frightening masks. A fascinating show presenting this 2000 years old civilization whose precise astronomical observations and calculations predicted solar and lunar eclipses with almost the same precision as current methods do. From our seats on the broad steps, we see the top of the pyramid of the prophets. A long Chaac procession with loud prayers for rain after a long drought. And then the rain batters down—fortunately only via the loudspeakers. Of course, the light and sound show is rather kitschy, but we like it.

Figure 955. At right: masks along a staircase.

The next day, I leave for the Uxmal ruins early, the others meet me at 11.00. The excitement of the day starts with the climb up those 60° degree stairs. Dorothea already shivers during the ascent, and at the top proclaims that she will never get down. Her fear of heights is a disease, annoying for us but much more for her, the poor soul. While we three enjoy the feeling of standing on top of an old important tall pyramid, she only fears the climb down. I first bring the children down the narrow steps, all is fine. Désirée stumbles on one of the lower steps and can just barely hold herself up by the iron chain. My heart misses a beat. Then up again, while they wait in the nuns' monastery.

Figure 956. Steep staircase and masks along it.

I help Dorothea down the eastern stairs a bit, then she wants, against my advice, to go up again. She talks about staying there forever or getting fetched by a helicopter. Finally I take her tightly from behind into my arms and walk her slowly down, step by step, with many pauses. When we reach the bottom, big relief! Another adventure is over. All of us feel sorry for Dorothea's suffering, which is in no way made up or invented.

Figure 957. Gate with Chaac masks. And a little live interlude.

After this miserably failed attempt to enjoy one of the architectural highlights in the world, the three have no desire to look at more ruins, not even the monastery where we were the evening before. We pack immediately and are off to Mérida.

Figure 958. Calendar and a prisoner with hands tied up, head cut out later.

A delicious large pizza with many glasses of juice, orange, papaya, and mango calms everybody down a bit from the excitement. Just before sunset we arrive in Chichén Itzá, where the children immediately jump into the pool. In the evening, we sit on the large square in front of the Kukulcán at Chichén Itzá for the *sonido y luz*.

Figure 959. Ball playing court.

Figure 960. Ring for the ball game, presumably a variation of basketball.

Dorothea drives me in the morning to the Chichén Itzá ruins. I climb the 365 stairs to the top of pyramid dedicated to the main god Kukulcán. Nearby is the *cenote*, the holy well with a diameter of about 30 meters. I stand on a pedestal from which presumably the humans to be sacrificed were pushed into the calm deep green waters. A chilling thought. A US family nearby is annoyed about the missing safety fence: "terribly dangerous". Things are relative: dangerous to whom? The Tzompantli houses a scull gallery. Inside this pyramid is an older pyramid. At the top is a human-jaguar sculpture, and below a red jaguar with jade eyes and plates. A young American to his friend: "No, it's not worth the climb. Nothing up there." Presumably 1000 years old red jaguars with jade ornaments are abundant in his home town.

Figure 961. Victims were killed on a sacrificial table and then pushed into the cenote.

Figure 962. Personage with snake, a skull.

Around 10.00, tour buses start to come in and it gets a bit crowded. Dorothea, Rafaela and Désirée arrive and we go to the warrior temple with the ball playing field. It is huge, about 35 by 85 meters. Presumably the king sat in the royal lodge atop the jaguar pyramid. Impressively macabre reliefs of the killing of the losers—do you ever feel that way when your club has lost? After plenty of Coca Cola, we leave town and drive about three hours to Cancún.

Figure 963. Driving with gloves at an unbearably hot steering wheel.
Bird shit fun.

We hope for some relaxed days there, but that is not to be. We lodge in a fairly expensive but badly run hotel, loud disco noise all through the night. The maids start scrubbing the floor in front of our room at 06.00, not worried by our *do not disturb* sign. I am livid and we spend the day doing nothing and in a bad mood. The high-rise hotels and stereotyped service with plastic smiles after all the Latin hospitality elsewhere are not to our taste. We call the place "Cancún Florida"—and that is not a compliment.

Figure 964. On the Cancún beach.

The next day we fly to Toronto. Yeah! Sleeping in our own beds. We saw so much impressive Mayan architecture on this trip and met marvellous people, except that the last two days in Cancún were a disaster. Our kids enjoyed the swimming pools and all those animals, the little ones most of all. And they survived the overdose of mesoamerican culture that we administered to them.

Honduras, Mexico 2010

A 2010 trip to Honduras and Mexico takes me to the Caribbean island of Útila and San Pedro Sula, a city devastated by drug-related crime. In Oaxaca, Mexico, I meet many friends at a conference and go to the Zapotec ruins of Monte Albán.

I arrive in San Pedro Sula, the second largest town of Honduras and a hub of drug dealing. The city is devastated by the narco wars between different criminal gangs, and the local newspaper reports 13 killings on a single day—"by 21.00". More on that later.

For a map of this trip, see Figure 649. My taxi driver from the airport to the bus station thinks it is impossible to catch the 16.00 boat from La Ceiba. In principle, he is right, but Lady Luck smiles on me. As we arrive, today's last bus for La Ceiba is just leaving. My taxi drives around it, stops the bus, I throw my backpack into the bus, and off we are. And just as she is sailing, I catch the *Utila Princess* for her 90-minute trip to the island of Útila.

Figure 965. Safe and happy travel to Útila!
On the *Princess*, not the rusty old *Express*.

Together with Roatán, these *Bay Islands* attract a lot of North American visitors, yacht travellers in particular. And a good number of young backpackers, often staying for a long time on Útila with its quaint wooden houses, while Roatán has fancy hotels for the posh traveler arriving on his own yacht or on a cruise ship.

Figure 966. Arrival at Útila and in my hotel.

Figure 967. Egret and mangroves on the beach.

Útila is divided by a channel into two halfs, one of which is left to itself—no hotels, no restaurants, accessible only by canoe. The islands are populated by black people, an outcome of the slave trade in the 19th century. The language is English, the food American, there are no particularly nice beaches. This is not the ideal destination for me.

My pleasant and simple hotel right by the beach has the fancy name of *Sandy Bay Beach House*. Snorkeling right in front of my room is nice, a pretty coral reef with fan corals and many fish. I rent a bicycle and ride around the island. At one point, a small opening through the bushes leads from my narrow dirt trail to an immense highway. I cycle happily on this enormous gravel road until I realize that it is actually the island's airport. I am riding in the middle of the runway! Panic! I look around, but no airplane is approaching. Have you ever dropped your bicycle right in the center of an airport runway? Well, I did, right then and there. I continue, but on the side of the landing strip, to the small huts that form the terminal. Out to the dirt road again, and I am safe. A plane is about to come in, officials and passengers are milling around the buildings, but nobody bothers about me riding my bicycle from the runway through the arrivals area into the parking lot.

Figure 968. The rental agency for my rusty old clunker.

Figure 969. Riding around Útila.

Figure 970. You can unfasten your seat belt now.

I meet Lars Holger Holm from Sweden and we walk around together. He asks me interesting questions about the fundamentals of mathematics, like: what is a proof? Why is one needed? I explain some basics of Peano arithmetic. Although I try hard, I am not sure how much he can concentrate. Anyways, we have fun with a bit of elementary math.

In the bars and restaurants, most customers are weather-beaten American sailors. I share a few beers with some of them. Conversation is loud and boastful, not my style.

Figure 971. In the streets and at a car wash.

Figure 972. Sunset . . .

Figure 973. ... and sundowner.

Back by ferry on the mainland again, I take a bus to San Pedro Sula. My father stayed here for many months on his frequent business trips and told me stories about how pleasant it was. Alas, that is long gone. Honduras is, like other countries of Central America, a hotpoint of drug dealing. Everybody advises me to not go outside after 18.00, and I follow their advice. The title page of a local newspaper displays detailed sketches of two murder scenes and the headline: "7 people shot in San Pedro. Three men were attacked from another car at a red light in the San Carlos de Sula street. In the suburb of Chamelecón, two men and two women are killed in a house." In the house of an elderly woman, the whole family was shot, including a student renting a room there. These murders were allegedly drug-related, except that the student was an innocent bystander not involved in trafficking at all. Page 2 of the newspaper gives a précis of the situation: "13 violent deaths occurred in San Pedro Sula yesterday until 9 pm, in spite of police presence." This is too much for me, and I flee the country on the next airplane.

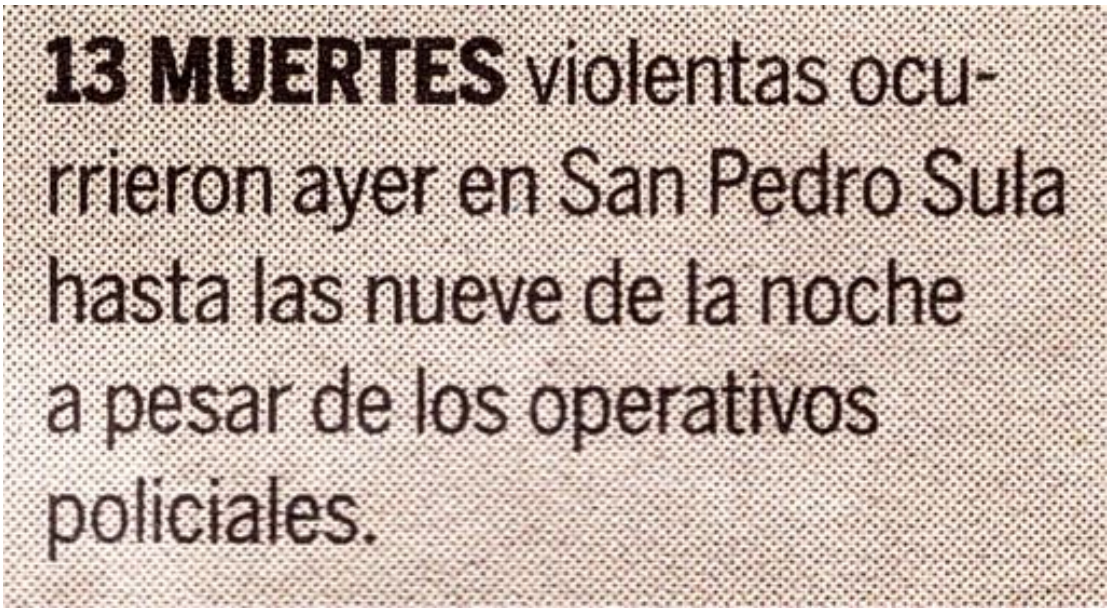


Figure 974. "13 violent deaths until 9 pm."

Figure 975. *La Prensa*, San Pedro Sula, 16 April 2010.

In the following years, the situation gets worse, not only here, but in many parts of Central America including Mexico. San Pedro Sula is now totally dominated by the narco gangs and their hideous crimes. It was termed *the murder capital of the world*, until in 2016 Caracas in Venezuela took this dubious crown, topping out at 120 annual killings per 100 000 inhabitants. If you want to live, let alone live a decent life, you do not have many options except to join them. All the honest people, young and old, men and women, see only one chance: get out of here! Many try to escape to the USA, but they are often prey to Mexican gangs who rob, rape, and kill. Later comes the idea of seeking security in numbers, forming so-called *caravans* to walk to the US border. A famous one forms on 12 October 2018 in San Pedro Sula and reaches the Mexican border town of Tijuana after

a month's walk. The US government, supported by media like Fox News, accuses them to harbor many criminals, without proof. This becomes a main argument in the campaign for the then imminent midterm elections. I was not there, but from what I saw in San Pedro Sula years before, my guess is that these were people fleeing the crime engulfing their country. And one might ask what role the US plays in making drug dealing such a dominant factor in some countries' economy.

The one interesting thing in San Pedro Sula is the terminus of the banana railroad that the US *Standard Fruit Company* (now Dole Food Company) built here. They pretty much controlled the country, appropriately called a *banana republic*. The surviving steam engines are a feast for the eyes of a train buff like myself.

Figure 976. Banana trains.

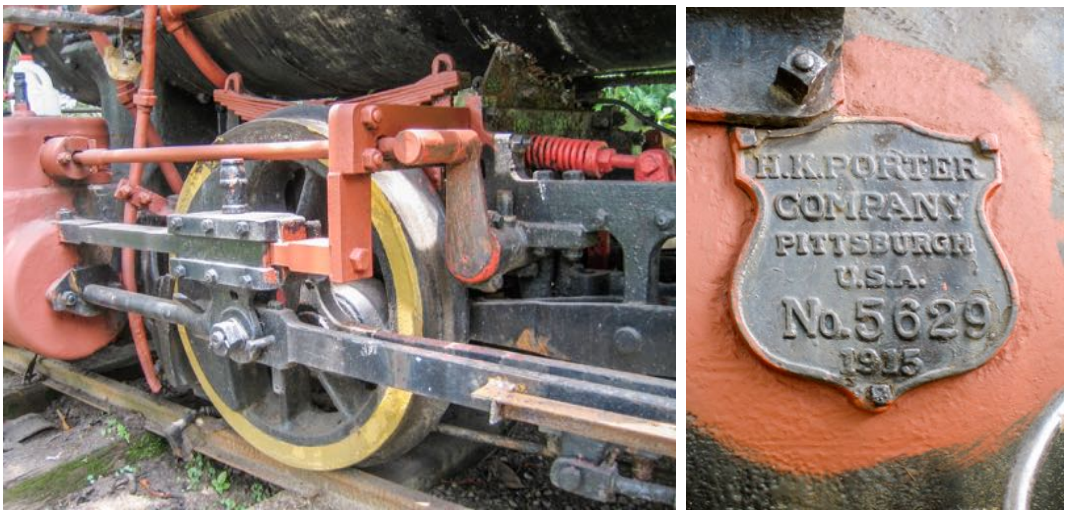


Figure 977. More banana trains.

My next stop is the LATIN conference in the beautiful city of Oaxaca in Mexico. Strolling around town evokes pleasant memories of our stay in 1988, see page 564. And so does our group excursion to the Zapotec ruins in Monte Albán, where my daughters peeped out of a monumental staircase (Figure 667). It all looks unchanged.

Figure 978. Oaxaca: street scenes and fiesta.

Figure 979. Oaxaca: My *Parador San Augustín* and a scribe who writes letters for illiterate people—a job that has died out in our society.

The conference organizer, Alejandro López-Ortiz from Waterloo, handles a tough job extremely well. The meeting is to be held at the local university, Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca, but on the first day, the professors go on strike and the university closes. He has to find a new location and we land in a big hotel, far away from town.

Figure 980. Monte Albán.

In the wake of the volcanic Eyjafjallajökull eruption on Iceland, air travel between

Europe and America comes to a standstill. Many Europeans are expected to participate, but they have to cancel their visits and talks.

Figure 981. The grand staircase.

Figure 982. Ball court and a bas relief.

The whole program has to be rearranged at short (or no) notice. One of the victims is my PhD student and coauthor Konstantin Ziegler. This was to be his first voyage to America—and it comes to zilch. The plan was for him to give our talk. Fortunately,

he has sent me the file with his presentation and I can speak about our results. But several people tell me afterwards that they missed it because of the extremely short-term notification about the time change.

As at any conference, social gatherings are highlights and, believe it or not, vital for furthering science. Such discussions, over coffee or wine, infect everyone with new ideas. Online there are no such infections, as we bitterly realized during the world-wide Corona lockdown.

Figure 983. Monte Albán, Les Valiant and companion.,

Figure 984. Church Santo Domingo de Guzmán.

Figure 985. Exhibits at the *Museo de las Culturas de Oaxaca*.

Figure 986. Here we are at the *Asador Vasco*, see Figure 663.

On arrival in Frankfurt, I see the aftermath of the airport difficulties caused by the Eyjafjallajökull eruption.

Figure 987. Emergency beds at Frankfurt airport.

On a short visit with Dorothea, Rafaela, and Désirée in 1992, we drive south from Berkeley CA via San Diego to Tijuana and Ensenada in Mexico. The border is "protected" by a rather helpless fence, designed to keep the poor away from the tables of the rich. But it does not work. I take pictures of two men who disappear into paradise through a tunnel below the hole. Close by, more aspirants to paradise are waiting for their chance.

Figure 988. The border fence between the US (left) and Mexico (right), and an illegal immigrant vanishing in a hole under it.

Ecuador: volcano and raft-building 1986

My attempt to scale a volcano in Ecuador fails miserably and I am saved by friendly farmers. In the jungle, I build, with others, a raft and sail down a tributary of the Napo and Amazon Rivers.

We float down the Río Nashino on our self-built raft. Every hour or so, we have to jump into the cold waves and steer the raft around some rapid. Not really dangerous, but highly unpleasant: we sit in wet clothes all day long. At one point, we ram a tree trunk. Everything falls into the fast waters, including me. On this day, I have decided to take my camera on board for once; otherwise I did not take the risk of getting it wet. Bad choice! According to eye-witnesses, only my head and one arm with the camera stick out of the water. Our companion Jane swims over, maybe to help and maybe not, and pushes my head under water. It must have been quite a sight to see my arm holding the camera over the water like a lighthouse in a fierce storm on a desolate coast.

Even before this rafting adventure, my trip starts with a miserable failure; my boat trip in the Galápagos islands will not take place. The ship I booked is unavailable. But about a month later, it will be. And indeed, this eventually turns out to be a wonderful tour; see page 1409. Lesson learnt: always have a month or two to spare on adventure travels.

Figure 989. A landslide with an improvised kitchen.

Figure 990. Heavy machinery clearing our path.

So for now, I leave from Guayaquil to the eastern jungle areas of Ecuador. Figure 751 presents a map of this trip. On my bus ride to Riobamba, the road is obstructed near Pallatanga by an earthslide and opens only after 18.00. That is when we arrive, and two bulldozers shovel a path across the mountain of debris, rocks and mud.

Figure 991. Cloud-veiled Tungurahua looms in the distance over Baños.

In Riobamba, at 2800 meters of altitude, I find a beautiful and cheap hotel in a colonial house. With Fernando, a civil engineering student from Cuenca, I share a few beers in a restaurant and later in a dimly-lit uncomfortable *cabaret*.

After a stroll around town, I take a bus to Baños, at 1800 meters of altitude. My nice looking *Hotel Delicia* has a marvellous view on the Parque Central. Bad mistake.

Figure 992. Baños with the Tungurahua in the back and the Río Pastaza in front, and mighty flushing for municipal toilets.

Figure 993. The *Basílica de Agua Santa* in Baños with the Parque Central in front and a donkey on its way to the grotto of San Francisco.

After lunch, I take my hiking boots to task. Across a shaky hanging bridge over the wild Río Pastaza and up the mountain. Beautiful views of the little town. I meet Ají, a farmer, and he wants to know a lot of things: how much do people earn, how much does the flight cost, etc. We chat amiably for quite a while.

Figure 994. Ají.

Figure 995. Bridges across the Río Pastaza.

The volcano *Tungurahua* (fire throat in Quechua) looms high above the town and presents an irresistible invitation to me. Well, maybe tomorrow. With a height of 5023 meters, it has been dormant since 1918, but in 1999 erupts again violently. In the following years, this continues at varying levels, and Baños and its surroundings are repeatedly evacuated for some time. After dinner, I go to bed, really tired from a long day. At 01.30, it stops raining and a group of young people fires up their ghetto blasters in the park right in front of my room. Very loud, not my kind of music, I cannot sleep and am really mad. But what can I do?

The next morning, I get up at 06.00, still tired. I start my long and difficult hike up the Tungurahua. Not to the top, I am not equipped for that, but as far as I will get. At 09.00, I reach the Christian broadcast station, then Runtún. The trail is very hard to find. There are many branches, and often I have to take the smaller trail among them. Around noon, I am completely stuck in dense undergrowth, at around 3500 meters of altitude. No way forward or backward. It would be time to panic, but I forget to do so. I start downhill again, trying to keep my bearings. And then a miracle—I come to a clearing and there is a human! I am so relieved. In fact, it is Luis Merino Pérez, a peasant cultivating his fields of avas (beans) high up here. He explains the trail to me. But five minutes later, I am lost again. I retrace my steps to Luis and ask him if he wants to be my guide. He does not want to do that, but in the end comes along. Good luck for me, and for him.

Luis cuts a path with his machete through the dense undergrowth. He leads me along a precarious abyss and through dense meadows without any sign of a trail. This would be completely impossible for me to find, but this way it is an exciting and wonderful hike. In a field near Puyoyacu, we drink clear fresh mountain water and share my chocolate bar. Luis calls loudly for his 13-year old son Saúl Yehosua; his family are members of some evangelical church. With his dog Lupe and four liters of fresh milk, Saúl catches up with us. He is a really bright kid, even knows some words of English (good morning, numbers from one to ten), although he has never taken any classes in the subject. He wants to know everything about the climate, number of inhabitants, number of borders with other countries, and so on. He cannot go to college (six years from age 12 to 18), because his family cannot afford

the 5000 Sucres (US$ 30) of annual fees. These farmers have practically no cash income. We spend a wonderful afternoon together, chatting endlessly.

Given the right opportunity, this boy might have a great future. When I tell Luis that I will pay Saúl's tuition fees, he does not say anything at first, then has tears in his eyes. So do I, it is such a good feeling to help these people.

Figure 996. The trail is well visible in the beginning, and when I get lost, I have the good luck to meet Luis and Saúl.

Figure 997. At Luis' house, with dog, wife, and son.

Figure 998. Luis.

The aftermath of my encounter with Luis and Saúl is rather sad. I had given them US$ 30 and told them that I would send at least as much every year (I was rather thinking of $ 100), provided they send me a letter about Saúl's progress and his report card. They clearly understand what I mean. But to my two letters later sent from Canada, I never get a reply. Too bad. Possibly the father distilled the school money into something drinkable. I still like to think that they may have saved my life, because they point me the right way and I find the way down to Puntún by myself, and then on to Baños, a shower and dinner. This was the perfect opportunity for me to help someone who deserves it, and they failed. Was asking for that one annual letter too much? Luis might be illiterate, but there are professional letter writers all over South America who help such people.

My 06.00 bus drives down towards the Amazon, past a large dam in construction, to the Pastaza valley. Amazonian fog creeps up, quietly, secretly, but unstoppable. The sierra comes to an end, one can sense the Amazonian jungle approaching. I get the feeling I could look right down to the Atlantic, but actually 20 meters is the limit of visibility. The Shell company controls the oil exploitation here in the jungle area of Ecuador, and they have a checkpoint called *Shell-Mera* where Shell even controls my passport. Such is their power in this area. Puyo, Puerto Napo, then another bus to the cute indigenous village of Misahuallí. I find the pleasant hostel *Etsa* (sun in the local Indian language), which also serves as money changer and Tourist Information.

Figure 999. Welcome to the tropics.

I try to find a tour down the Río Napo, which flows into the Amazon. The minimum is four people. After some days of asking everybody in my hostel and elsewhere, I meet five

others interested in a similar excursion: Gérard (21, from Wiesbaden, Germany), Andreas (Andy, 26, from Teufen AR, Switzerland) and Vreni (26, St. Gallen, Switzerland), Sandra and Jane (both 25, from Perth, Australia).

Figure 1000. Rainy afternoon at my hotel *Etsa*.

Our guide is Carlos Cordero, the owner of the Etsa guesthouse. His helpers are the 15-year old Domingo who turns out to be rather useless, although he is the only one with experience in the jungle, and Tío (uncle). The latter is garrulous and vain, tells us consistently wrong times and distances. This is his first time in the jungle. Thus, concerning the staff, the trip is a total failure, but it still remains a highlight of my travels. Such difficulties are part of the adventure.

Figure 1001. Hiking through the steaming jungle.

It has rained all day and night yesterday, the mood at breakfast is depressed, and I fear that the trip would be cancelled. But around 09.00 it stops raining, and this is sufficient to make Carlos move his ass and get going. He takes our passports to the *marina* (port

police) where they will remain for the duration of our trip so that nobody can exit to Perú surreptitiously. Ecuador still has strained relations with Perú about the areas that it lost in the Rio de Janeiro protocol of 1942.

The level of the river passing by Misahuallí has risen by about one meter since yesterday. A canoe with outboarder engine picks us up and sails one hour downstream to the Río Arajuno. We start a long hike through the dense jungle, crossing a mountain ridge and down to the Río Nashino, a tributary of the Río Napo. Walking is strenuous on this slippery narrow trail, avoiding the large tree roots that cross it. It rains all the time, which does not increase the pleasure. But we are looking forward to our adventure. *Tío borracho* (uncle drunkard) got so drunk last night ("solo unas copitas"—just a few glasses) that he has trouble walking uphill. He has to stop every five minutes, breathing heavily. Others have to carry part of his load. For me, it is a beautiful jungle hike, plants and lianas everywhere, butterflies swarming about, a well-camouflaged frog. At 16.30, we arrive at our *campamento*, our home for the next three days. Previous excursions have left a wooden construction for building a roof. We throw a big blue plastic sheet over it and collect firewood. From the start, our group is rather dysfunctional, now the two Australians stand around and watch us guys setting up our camp. Carlos prepares a delicious dinner on a big fire, which invites to long chats around it during the evening. But the unpleasant situation in the group does not encourage this, and we all go to sleep soon on big leaves on the ground.

Figure 1002. Cutting balsa trees and iron wood.

We start around 08.30 on our first task, that of cutting balsa trees for the *balsa* (raft). We guys wade across the river to where the trees stand. Tío is very efficient with his machete, cuts the balsa trees as if he had a circular saw, swish swish, down comes a big tree within 30 minutes, a smaller one takes him only 10 minutes. Unfortunately, they brought only one machete and we cannot cut several trees at a time. I also start hacking at a tree. At each hit with the rather blunt machete, the recoil sends an alarming shot of pain into my wrist, and I cannot do this for long, for fear of getting a massive carpal syndrome. When a tree is about to fall, we clear the area around it and only one person makes the final strokes. Bang! another trunk whistles through the air. With Carlos' help, we cut the big tree lengthwise into halves, with wedges from hardwood, and then to the desired length, about four meters, strip it of its branches and bark, and lug it through the forest to the river bank. We float it across the river to the other bank, where our camp is set up. When you buy balsa wood for toy airplanes, for example, it is very light. But the living trees are quite heavy and remain submerged for about 90% of their diameter. Once sufficiently many trunks are assembled, Carlos cuts some wedges, around 20 centimeters long, of ironwood, hammers them into the soft balsa wood, and ties up trunk by trunk around those wedges to form a raft.

Figure 1003. Carlos and Tío.

Besides being strenuous, the work is also extremely uncomfortable. All day long, we are completely wet, the river usually reaches to our knees and thighs, but sometimes up to

our breast, and when we are not in the water, the rain makes up for that from above. On other hikes, I like to keep the inside of my boots dry, but now it does not even make sense to empty the water from them, because ten minutes later I will be in the river again.

Figure 1004. Ferrying balsa trunks across the river and assembling the raft.

Figure 1005. Ironwood wedges enter the balsa trunks easily for holding the raft together.

In the evening, I hang up my wet clothes on a line, but in this humidity, there is no chance for them to dry in any sense. I have dry clothes for the night, but still shiver with the cold. Because we are in wet clothes all day long, a delicate part of my thighs starts getting inflamed. So one day I put on my bathing trunks in the evening and am immediately punished by a hundred mosquito bites. Those beasts have decided to simply ignore the plentiful repellent I put on. Oh well, part of the adventure is the contact with nature, although I could happily have forgone this one. The worst part is getting out of my sleeping bag in the morning and having to put on those dripping wet clothes, underwear, pants, shirt, boots, all cold and extremely uncomfortable. Shiver! Again, part of the adventure.

After two long days, our two rafts are ready—one for people, one for luggage. When we want to cast off early the next day, Tío is still busy with the rafts. Carlos helps him

with the machete and gets mighty blisters on his palms. Our luggage goes on the small raft, about 3 by 4 meters and manned by Tío, and us eight passenger on the large one, about 4 by 5 meters. Eventually we get going.

Figure 1006. Dinner at our makeshift home for three days.

Figure 1007. After a last dinner, we finally cast off.

Figure 1008. Shallow waters are a real challenge.

Proudly sitting on our self-made conveyance, we drift slowly down the river. Our raft is smaller than Fitzcarraldo's ship, but we made it ourselves and are now happily riding it to our destination, something he never achieved. Our Tío bears a certain resemblance to Klaus Kinski in aspect and character. We have a clearance of less than five centimeters and waves wash over our bums and legs all the time. The whole-day misery of being drenched to the bones continues.

Figure 1009. Driving through a rapid.

Carlos has no clue about driving a raft and steers from aft. Gérard knows a bit more about this business and steers with a long pole from the bow, happily ignoring all the commands that Carlos shouts from behind. This raft ride is incredible fun. In quiet waters, we just drift, look at the passing trees, and enjoy Mother Nature. This changes in the rapids, about twenty per day. We all have to jump off and steer the raft clear of the dangerous rocks, sometimes up to our knees in the water, sometimes up to our chins. The ground is sometimes soggy and our boots get stuck in it, but mainly it is rocky and we slip a lot. At one interesting rapid the raft gets entangled in lianas and we have to struggle mightily to cut it free, fighting the strong current up to our necks. This is really hard work and a lot of fun. Carlos keeps talking about lunch, but that is on Tío's raft and has disappeared in front of us. This is certainly one of the memorable days of my travels. Beautiful weather, at peace with nature, just drifting most of the time. No photos—too hard to keep a camera dry. At 18.00, it gets dark and Carlos dispairs of ever meeting up with Tío.

Eventually we arrive at the first hut we see on our trip, a straw-thatched cabaña that their company owns. We can sleep in the old house of the Auca family that lives here. Tío

struts about and gives directions to the Aucas, but does not do anything himself. Carlos and Tío thought this trip would take 2.5 days, but in fact we arrive after eight hours. They really have no clue of where we are.

Figure 1010. In the Auca village, our bedrooms are prepared: partitioned off by blankets.

Figure 1011. Our Auca host and some of his children.

The Auca children love the chocolate we give them. Their tribe has an interesting water conduit of hollowed-out bamboo branches. In the evening, we sit on branches and rocks around the fire, after a delicious Auca dinner, from their local products of manioc and bush meat. They used to practice polygamy. Carlos tells Auca fairy tales like this one. There was this Auca who loved to sleep with women, but always sent them away in the morning.

One evening, he is in the jungle without a woman. He sees a frog and says: "Oh, if only you were a woman", and bang! she is a woman. He sleeps with her, but in the morning, he is frightened to see his penis grow longer and longer, down to the river. He prays to Etsa, the sun god, for help, and he comes and cuts off all but the necessary length; 20 or 30 centimeters according to Carlos. The cut-off piece turns into a boa constrictor. Etsa exhorts him to keep his women for longer, not just one night. Every time he sees a boa, it is supposed to remind him of this.

Figure 1012. Auca technology, well adapted to the environment.

Figure 1013. Dayuna children and a baby.

Just like in the past days, it has rained all night. Getting up out of the comfort of our hammocks and onto the raft is tough. We continue drifting down the river. At one point, we have just gotten over a rapid, but then ram a tree trunk in the Río Nashino. Everything falls into the fast waters, including me. On this day, I have decided to take my camera on board for once. According to eye-witnesses, only my head and one arm with the camera stick out of the water. Jane swims over, maybe to help and maybe not, and pushes my

head under water. It must have been quite a sight to see my arm holding the camera over the water like a lighthouse in a fierce storm on a desolate coast. It is a wonder it does not get wet, and the bruises on my bum do not really matter. Eventually, the rain stops and we take some short hikes through the bush. Lianas, butterflies, birds including toucans, falcons, parrots, and hummingbirds, traces of tapirs and ocelot.

Figure 1014. Dripping in the jungle.

At noon, we arrive at the miserable village of Dayuna, all houses with roofs of corrugated iron. Behind lines for drying laundry, a poster of Carlos' party PSD (Lista 9). He claims to become governor of the province of Napo soon. We take apart our rafts. One may wonder how ecological the cutting down of those beautiful trees is. A minor comfort is the hope that now the balsa wood is put to good use at the place where we leave it. Four hours of hiking through deep mud to a cabaña for the night. I walk in boots and swimming trunks, my legs splattered completely with mud. Neither Carlos nor Tío really know the way and we get lost several times.

Then comes the last day of our jungle adventure. After being ferried by an Auca Indian across the river in a rowboat, a six-hour hike through the jungle starts, continuously up and down the hills. The rain soaks us completely, the thick mud makes a sloshing sound at every step, several times we cross creeks or foul standing water on shaky tree trunks. One of them collapses under Gérard, and we have to pull him out. Rather scary, he could easily have broken a leg. The organization breaks down completely. Tío is overtaxed with the hiking, almost breaks down, and again others have to carry his load. Four of us, with Gérard and the Swiss couple, walk quickly with Carlos, but then while we wait for Tío and the two Aussies to catch up, Carlos simply walks away. He is fed up with those three, but this is a no-no for an alleged tour guide.

Figure 1015. Quito.

At 15.00, we arrive at the Río Napo. Señora Cordero from the company has sent a boat with a wonderful picnic basket, lemonade, sandwiches, and boiled eggs which are still a

bit warm. Yummy. It's so delicious that I pig out. The three late-comers Tío and Aussies arrive an hour later, and the trip back to Misahuallí can start. After two hours, we are back in the Etsa hostel, and after 20 more minutes, my bus leaves for Tena. Rather hectic shower and cursory cleaning of my boots and gear.

In Tena, I had planned to take a bus to Quito the next morning. But the place is so dismal that I decide to forego a hotel night here and take the evening bus, via Baeza. The trip is comparable in comfort with the last few days in the jungle: the bus is completely full, when I try to sleep, my head bangs on a metal hook just behind me. In the morning, I have a soft spot at the back of my head, like a good muslim has on his forehead.

Quito is a charming city, much of the colonial style has been preserved. However, the richer people now live in the north, away from the hustle and bustle of downtown. I stay in the lively area and buy some souvenirs for my family. Buying a sweater: ¿Qué material es?—Lana.—¿Lana de qué?—Lana de orlon, pura lana de orlon. (What material is this?—Wool.—What kind of wool?—Wool from orlon, pure wool of orlon.)

I meet Felipe Fried, whose brother Alan Fried rented our house in 1984/85, and his wife Myriam. He is originally from New York and they have five kids, from various marriages. Felipe runs a big dealership for car spare parts that his father founded. Their kids are perfectly bilingual, in Spanish and English. Felipe and I are similar in spirit, we keep giving each other the cue for the next little joke.

In Felipe's Chevy Cheyenne, we drive in a group of seven people to the Cotopaxi volcano, at 5897 meters the second highest mountain in Ecuador and on earth.

Figure 1016. Picnic on our way to the Cotopaxi.

The nearby Chimborazo volcano has a height of 6263 meters and is the tallest mountain on earth. Because of the *equatorial bulge*, the oblate spheroid shape of earth, it is further away by 2163 meters than Mount Everest from the center of the earth. Besides Felipe's family, also two young visitors from Israel, Dror and Renat, come with us. We have a lot of fun, also with Israeli English: "please close the back dror"—with a heavy Israeli accent. Dror explains how to distinguish wool from nylon by lighting it with a match: "Excuse me, lady, can I light your fig?" (he means wig)—at which Felipe erupts with laughter. All in good humor. From the *Refugio José Félix Ribas* at the foot of the volcano, Felipe, his eight-year old son David, Dror, and I hike up to the first *refugio* on the Cotopaxi's flanks. A freezing wind drives ice particles in our faces, really hurting. In the soft black volcanic pumice, it's one step up and three-quarters sliding back; very tiring. I am not acclimatized with just one day in Quito after the Amazonian lowlands, and make very slow headway. The refugio is full of people and charges an entrance fee, which upsets Felipe so much that he wants to turn back right away. Ok with me. The great explorer and scientist Alexander von Humboldttried in 1802 to ascend the Chimborazo, but did not succeed in getting to the top because of altitude sickness and the poor hiking equipment of his times. We also have mediocre gear, but mainly fail for lack of the steam and stamina that von Humboldt had. At least we are in good company.

Figure 1017. Struggling up the Cotopaxi.

Back from our naïve attempt at mastering Cotopaxi,, we drive to a pleasant picnic site. Chicken, cheese, bread, and lemonade, *all kosher* as rabbi Fried proclaims. Overall, a wonderful time with new friends. Two years later, on our family drive to Chile, we will repeat this experience (see page 618). But for now, I just go to Guayaquil and start my Galápagos trip; see page 1411.

Angel Falls, drug dealers, and walking on a lake 1986

The Angel Falls *in Venezuela are overwhelming with their drop of almost one kilometer. After hitching a flight into the remote savannah area of Venezuela, my involuntary run-in with Bolivian drug dealers is a bit scary, but nothing untoward happens. I continue through the three non-Hispanic countries in north-western South America. The famous French penitentiary on* Devil's Island*, the space station at Kourou, and a walk on a tar lake in Trinidad are further highlights.*

After a marvellous tour in the Galápagos islands (page 1425), I meet friends in Santiago and speak at a conference. My friend Ignacio Casas is a professor here. Together with his brother Sergio and Ken Sevcik, my colleague from University of Toronto and Ignacio's PhD supervisor, and Carmen, Ken's long-time girlfriend from Madrid, we go skiing in Portillo, about an hour's drive from Santiago. It is a wonderful day with bright sunshine. I show off my skiing skills, everybody is suitably impressed. I talk with the dean of mathematics to lay the groundwork for my planned sabbatical two years down the line. In the end, this works out very well, see pages 660ff.

Figure 1018. Skiing in Portillo and Ken at a dance.

Venezuela has been on an economic roller-coaster in the last decades, from oil-rich until the 1970s to empty supermarkets under the Bolivarian president Hugo Chávez and his successor Nicolás Maduro.

Via its capital Caracas, I fly to the jungle resort of Canaima near the Angel Falls. The Orinoco region in the eastern part of Venezuela, where Canaima and the Angel Falls lie, was explored by Alexander von Humboldt in 1800. He followed the course of the *Casiquiare canal*, a unique geographic feature connecting two major rivers. It flows out of the Orinoco River into the Amazon. The first reports about it were regarded with incredulity: a natural canal connecting two rivers? Impossible. But von Humboldt put it on the map. South of the Orinoco lies the flat area of the *Gran Sabana* (Great Savannah), containing several towering Cambrian sandstone structures called *tepuys* (table top mountains). They may be remnants of the continent of Gondwana, which split into Africa and South America about 135 million years ago. The hard rock at the top withstood erosion better than the softer limestone below. Plentiful tropical rains create waterfalls, the tallest of them on the *Auyán-tepuy*. In 1927, the Spaniards Félix Cardona and Juan María Mundó Freixas were the first Europeans to see these falls, although their claim has been disputed.

Figure 1019. Map of this trip.

The American aviator James (Jimmie) Crawford Angel (1899-1956) got excited by their reports and flew over the falls on 16 November 1933. The laconic entry in his flight diary reads: "Found myself a waterfall". His niece Karen Angel wrote a fascinating piece of aviation and family history entitled *Why the World's Tallest Waterfall is Named Angel Falls*[24]. Returning on 9 October 1937, Angel crash-landed his Flamingo G-2W monoplane on top of the *Auyán-tepuy*, with his wife Marie, Cardona and another person. After a difficult 11-day jungle hike, they were back to civilization. Angel's stories brought the falls to the attention of the outside world. On measurement, it turned out to be the highest waterfall in the world, with a sheer drop of 979 meters. Of course, I have to see this.

On approaching the Auyán-tepuy ("devil's house" in the local Pemón language) from Caracas, the pilot banks our Boeing 707 steeply to the right and flies around the huge rock, providing marvellous views of the fall and also of the top of the rock, which you do not see from below. He announces this well in advance and exhorts everyone not to move from their seat, even if seated on the wrong side of the plane. Namely, after a complete circle, he banks again and flies around the rock a second time, now in the opposite direction. An interesting experience and great service by the pilot and his airline Avensa.

[24]Terrae Incognitae, 44(1), April 2012, 16–42. `jimmieangel.org/Website Documents/WHY THE WORLD'S TALLEST WATERFALL IS NAMED ANGEL FALLS`. Last visited 13 January 2020.

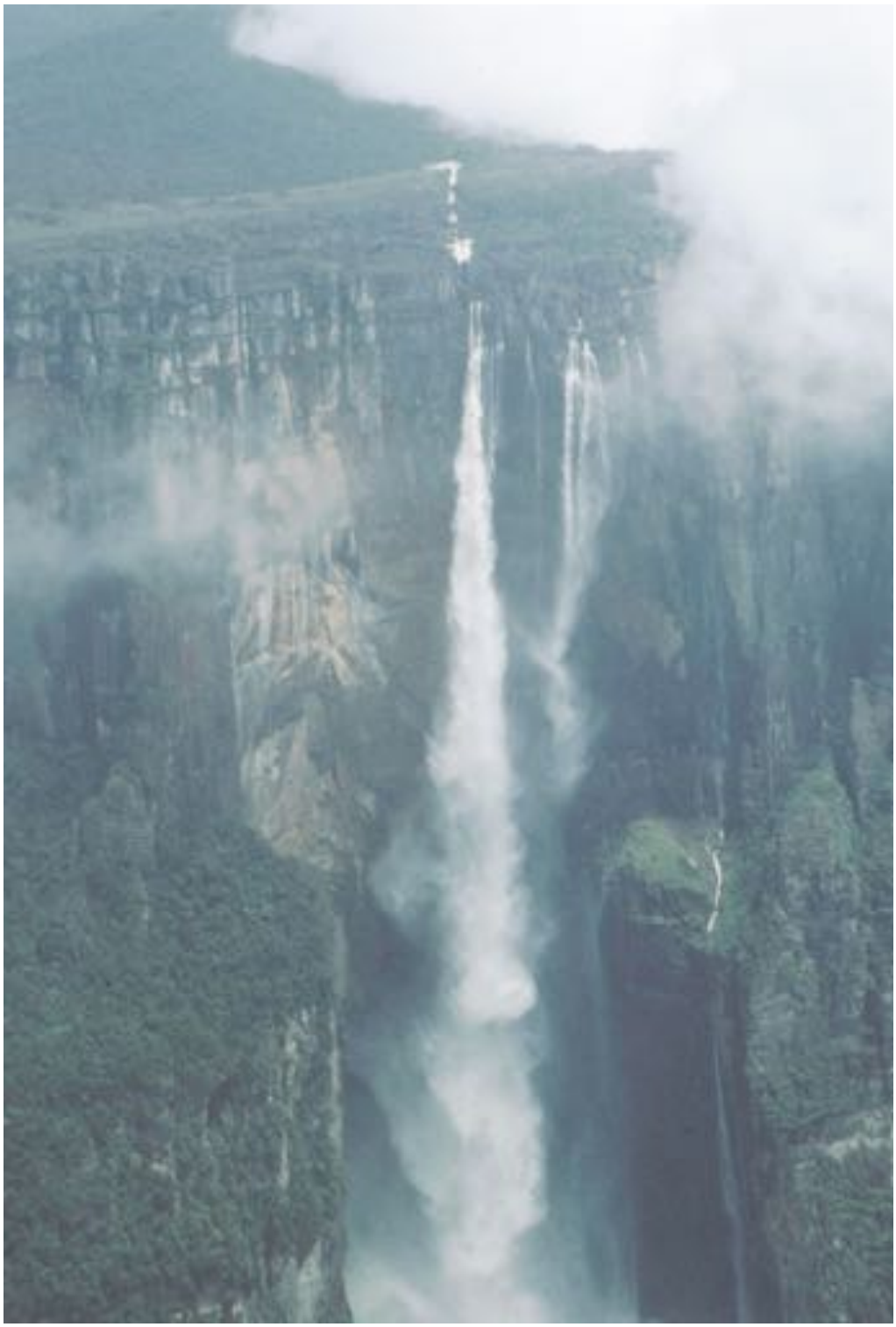


Figure 1020. Dramatic view of the top of the Angels Falls from the airplane.

I do not care, I have a wonderful view from my window seat. On the Auyán-tepuy, the river tumbles down like a huge rope dangling from the mountain's edge, then disperses

into a veil of water, looking like it disappears into the air and none of this fluffy mist would arrive at the bottom. From the airstrip in Canaima, I walk up to the *campamento Canaima* and am lucky to get a room. Others, even with reservations, do not get one. The toilet does not work, instead of emptying down the drain it overflows. Yuck! Canaima is located on a beautiful large lagoon with a white sandy beach and a waterfall rushing into it.

Figure 1021. The Canaima water fall, with a tepuy in the background.

The next morning, I board a boat for a four-day excursion to the falls. Quite full with eleven people: Italians, Venezolans, French, Swiss, Canadians. Our motorized *curiara* (canoe) moves quickly up the Corrao river. Ten minutes later we have to board a land vehicle that takes us around a rapid. Back in the boat, we drive upstream through another rapid, a wall of water about 50 centimeters high. I am suitably impressed, since just two weeks ago I was on a raft for which this would have been impossible.

Lunch is at the *pozo de la felicidad* (well of happiness), with a nice shower. After a total of three hours, we arrive at the *isla de la orquidea* (orchid island). Dinner and off to sleep in a comfortable *chuchorro* (hammock). A short but heavy rainfall interrupts the night.

Figure 1022. The approach from Canaima to the Angel Falls on Laime's map, and a difficult passage for our boat.

After breakfast, we start at 7.30. Our guides are busy spreading the rumor that we will not be able to get to the Angel Falls, the water is too low. I am all too familiar with this type of scam, where travel agencies try to reduce their cost and effort for prepaid excursions. We travel upstream at half speed, corresponding to the captain's half will. To scare us, the engine stops in a harmless place—just another well-known cheap trick. The captain declares that he has to turn around because of difficulties upstream. Indeed, there are cases where this is necessary, but not here—the water is plentiful but not overwhelming. I tell him that we want to see this for ourselves, but he simply turns around. I translate our heated discussion from Spanish into Italian, French, Swiss German, and English for the other passengers, who are resigned to accepting the captain's decision without complaint. I try to incite a little rebellion for our rights. In the end, he promises another attempt tomorrow, with other boats. I remain skeptical.

Before lunch, we visit Aleksandrs (Alejandro) Laime, an interesting hermit of Latvian origin who has been living with the local Pemón people for years. He was the first European to reach the falls' base, led the first expedition to measure the waterfall's height to its base in 1947, has appeared in the *National Geographic Magazine* and elsewhere, and written several books. I am the only one in our group who talks at length with this fascinating person. As a present, he gives me two maps of the area, one signed by him. In Figure 1024, the falls are roughly in the middle, the Río Churun flows to the top and left, eventually into the Carrao River and finally the Orinoco River. For our unprepared hike through a forest, "stumble" would be more appropriate, because our guide does not know where to go. Nothing happens the rest of the day. We play card games, at which I lose. The Angel Falls seem to move further away with each new deck of cards.

Figure 1023. Alejandro Laime and his hut.

Then it is breakfast at 6.00 and we are off. Exciting trip across various rapids, where we have to get out and walk on land. It is fascinating to see the crew power the little craft up the mountains of water that come down. Our new captain Jiménez knows what he is doing and has the intention of getting us to our destination. What a change! We land on the *isla ratón* (rat island) in the Churun river and hike an hour and a quarter to the falls. At one point, we cross a creek that reaches to our hips.


Figure 1024. Map signed "3.8.1986. A. Laime". Getting towards the falls.


Figure 1025. Angel Falls, a fantastic view.

Finally, the goal of this trip: a close-up look at the Angel Falls. From the top of a rock at the *mirador Laime* (Laime's viewpoint), I see the full jet of water shooting over the rock at the top of the falls, then a solid stream of water shooting downwards, hitting a sloping cascade, looking as if it was dissipating in the air, and ending a vertical drop into the lagoon with a big splash. Foam and veils form, balconies and curtains of water, everything moving fast all the time. But from a distance, all looks as if in slow motion. I could watch

this for hours. After five minutes, we are ordered back to a small waterfall where one can take a bath. I stay on the top of my rock, now in complete solitary peace, watching the clouds drift by the falls. Smaller waterfalls left and right are stopped by ledges half-way down. I want to burn this image into my memory, a fascinating spectacle. Walking a kilometer is nothing from me, but seeing a column of water standing upside down for a kilometer is awe-inspiring. I stand there speechless, it looks like out of this world—and indeed the region has been called *The Lost World* after Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 1912 novel *The lost world*. It is a story about a world of living dinosaurs at the tepuy of Monte Roraima and was an inspiration for the character of Indiana Jones.

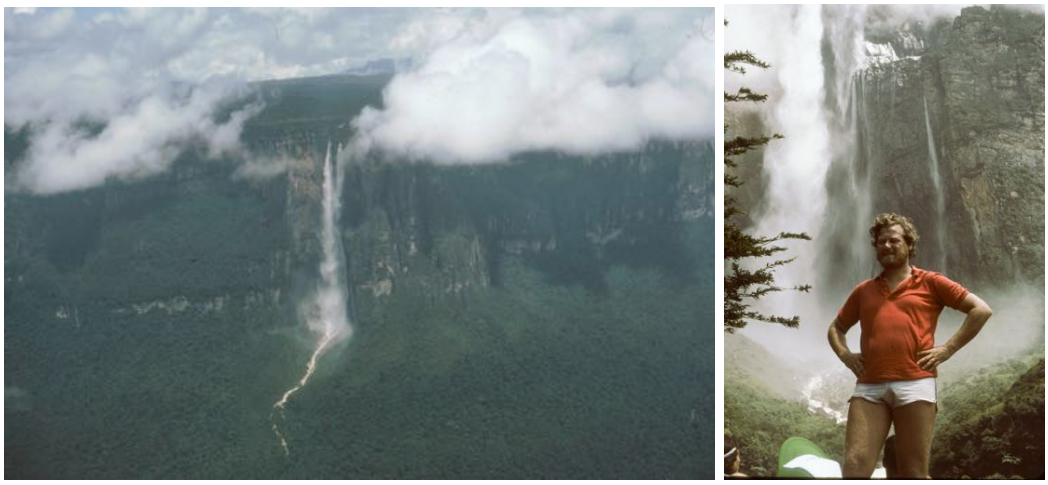


Figure 1026. View from the air, and finally there.

All of a sudden, everybody is back and we start our return track. Early next morning, our boat starts back to Canaima. It has rained a lot and the river is high. We see little wildlife on the whole trip: some predatory birds like falcons and goshawks.

Figure 1027. Hitching an airplane ride.

The only regular flights out of Canaima go northwest to the Maiquetía airport of Caracas, but I want to go in the opposite direction, south towards the border with Brazil.

So I try my luck for the first (and only) time in my life at aero-stop: I walk around the airstrip, asking people in the two or three small aircraft where they are going. There is no notion of airport security as at larger airports and all planes seem go to Caracas. But then Lady Luck comes my way: one 6-seater Cessna flies to Kavanayén, straight south. I run to fetch my belongings, and off we go, after agreeing on a fare of US$ 20, no frequent flyer miles. This is the only time I hitchhiked an airplane ride.

The pilot is a young guy, and the only other passenger his girl friend. Short check of everything, and take-off. As we gain some height: "Oh no, I forgot something." He looks out of the open window backwards along his airplane, banks steeply and returns to the runway, without bothering to talk to the tower. Then he jumps out, bangs some door or hatch on the outside shut, and takes off again. An inventive maneuver to increase the confidence of his passengers.

But then the low level flight is marvellous. He passes the Angel Falls, although they are in the opposite direction, and then begins a low-level flight over the Orinoco jungle and the endless savannah, *gran sabana*. It is green as far as you can look, with some jungle giants sticking out of the canopy of trees, punctuated by tepuys in the far distance.

Figure 1028. Flying over the jungle.

Without getting lost, he lands after an hour in Kavanayén, a village in the middle of nowhere whose name I have never heard but which, according to my map, has a connection to the main north-south Venezuelan highway going into Brazil. Two Spanish padres from the Franciscan mission welcome us in mechanics' overalls on the airstrip. They drive me to the mission building, where I can leave my luggage. My search for food and drink is

less successful. The cook in the only restaurant answers to my question: "No hay nada." (We have nothing.) I buy some basics in a store, dry biscuits and a can of sardines. A little boy, about a year and a half, helps me with my lunch. The village consists of fifteen houses. I meet Gerd and his family from Austria who are visiting a relative who works as a missionary here. They produce plastic items in Caracas, and their friend Luis fabricates circuit boards. We chat for a while and I become somewhat of an attraction with all my travel stories. We spend a pleasant evening eating, drinking, and chatting. I get a mattress on the floor, and my powerful insect spray puts a monster cockroach to a painful death.

Figure 1029. Mission at Kavanayén.

Figure 1030. Mission buildings at Kavanayén
and my bedroom of 100 square meters.

A big German breakfast with good bread, cold cuts, cheese, and coffee is a welcome change from the usual. Gerd and his family will drive out to the highway, some 100 kilometers away, and I am happy to come along. Very few vehicles drive along this minor road and I would not have any idea how to get out of here. Tall grass by the side of the road, small forests. Now the *The lost world* of Monte Roraima lures in the background, wrapped in a poncho of rain clouds and looking gravely at us mere humans. The three

countries Venezuela, Brazil, and Guyana meet at this point. In Luepa, there is a fort, the Kama falls, and the intersection with the main north-south highway. At 14.00, we reach Paso Pacheco, about 1.3 hours away from Santa Elena de Uairén, the last major town in Venezuela on this road. Gerd and company put up a tent in the big wide Gran Sabana. But where? Right next to a large local family, maybe with disco lights and music in the evening. I do not understand such decisions. When I am out in the wilderness, I like to be on my own, in peace and quiet. I sit by the highway and write a letter to Dorothea which Gerd will take home.

Figure 1031. Main street in Kavanayén and my Austrian friends.

Figure 1032. The Kama falls and crossing a river.

Eventually a big yellow oil truck rolls up, 21 000 liters of gas. "Two hours to Santa Elena". I gladly accept the ride, quite comfortable in the passenger's seat. Such experiences present to me the epitome of traveling: in the morning, I had no idea where I would be this afternoon, now I ride a truck through the savannah. Driving onto a ferry, the cardan shaft decides to take a rest and jumps out of its bearings. Wading in the water, the drivers fix this quickly, in 30 minutes. Same story again when we leave the ferry. Their act is well practiced, this is clearly not their first time with this problem. But the ferry captain is skeptical: "No sirve, este." (This thing does not work.) But we do get to Santa Elena, everything is fine. The driver is unusually careful in sneaking his way down the zigzag from the savannah plateau. Afterwards, I invite him and his sidekick José for a beer.

Figure 1033. Bridge in the jungle and fixing the cardan bearing of my oil truck.

Early morning I take an Eucatur bus to Bõa Vista in Brazil, a Marco Polo vehicle that looks very reliable. Immigration formalities are easy, on both sides. Soon after crossing into Brazil, we pause at a rest stop. The usual 30-minute lunch break? No, the driver has turned rather taciturn. After several questions, he admits that four springs are broken in the suspension and the bus cannot continue. The bus driver calls his company. "No worry"—a replacement bus will probably arrive tonight, and we will be in Bõa Vista by tomorrow, or the day after at the latest. There is no reason to be concerned. The passengers are resigned and just sit around in depression. Except Yours Truly. The situation reminds me of Garoua (page 228), where after such a breakdown I met interesting people. I take my luggage out of the hold, and wait by the road side for miracles to happen. And they do. After an hour's wait, a brand new white Toyota Land Cruiser stops at my sign. I run over and somewhat reluctantly, he agrees to take me on board. I feel like a king, sitting in the passenger's seat. That's traveling, happy when you are riding in a bus, down when the bus breaks, preparing for an uncomfortable night under the stars, and then some miracle comes along and picks you up. And it gets more and more interesting.

Three burly guys in their thirties are in my car and we travel in a convoy with three other identical Land Cruisers, driven by six Italians and one German. My driver looks a bit like Scarface and we chat amiably. I tell them about some travels of mine, and they talk about their own trip: by plane to Miami FL, a week of holidays on the beach (more likely, in the clubs and whoring around), then a flight to Caracas, where they picked up these brand-new vehicles and now are driving them via Manaus, Porto Velho, Guajará Mirím across the Amazon jungle to their destination Santa Cruz de la Sierra in Bolivia; see pages 814 and 886. The holy name of Santa Cruz comes with the unholy reputation of being the drug capital of Bolivia. Oops! What does this mean? Silence descends in the car. Honi soit qui mal y pense. Everyone knows that everyone knows that they are drug dealers and have converted some of the illicit proceeds from Miami into these vehicles for their boss. We carefully avoid any discussions about drug matters and our conversation becomes quite low-key. I am a tiny bit worried about what will happen, because human lives are cheap in this business, especially here in the empty savannah. I am relieved to be dropped off in Bõa Vista without further ado, after inadvertently catching a glimpse of one small facet of the drug trafficking business. After this little adventure, a beer, dinner, and good night.

Figure 1034. My bus before the terminal break down,
and one of the drug dealers that saved me.

I drink many juices, of maracujá, oranges, and other local fruit, one of the delicacies that the Brazilian North has to offer. Many Guyanese come to Bõa Vista to purchase goods for trading, the bus to the frontier with Guyana is full of boxes, packages, bags, one of them as big as a fridge. Two of the bolts holding one rear tire broke off, and the driver stops every thirty minutes to tighten the remaining screws. It would be too much to ask for arrival in daylight, but we get still today to the river forming the border. Ferry across the Rupununi river, then a taxi to Lethem. He does not drive along roads, but just straight across the grass. My hotel is quite nice. They do not serve dinner anymore, but breakfast. At the time, Guyana is famous for the *Peoples Temple* sect whose leader Jim Jones forced 918 of his followers to suicide by poison in Jonestown in 1978. At 22.00, the generator for the village shuts down. Pitch dark.

Figure 1035. The main square of Lethem—just nothingness.
My Indian friends' home ...

Figure 1036. ... and their children.

Figure 1037. The most beautiful thing in Lethem is the sky.

No passable land route exists between Lethem deep in the jungle and the capital George-

town on the Atlantic coast, so I have to take a plane. I arrive at 6.00 at the airport for my confirmed flight from Lethem to Timehri (Georgetown). At 8.00 they announce that there will be no flight today. The mood in the crowd is between annoyed and rebellious, apparently most pilots and copilots left the country because their pay is so miserable. Already in the bus, people complain loudly to me about their country, where nothing works, nothing to buy, the government prohibits the import of dairy products, split peas, and toilet paper, all of which are not produced locally. I am told to expect a wait of some weeks or a month; last week only four of ten scheduled flights took place. General gloom reigns.

I start my efforts to get out of miserable Lethem. The East Indian Takoor Persand invites me to his home, he used to work for the government. After some breakfast, I go to Mr. Zammet, the Guyana Airways station manager, at Takoor's recommendation. I explain to him that I urgently need a flight to Georgetown, where my wife, pregnant in the sixth month, waits for me. Quite a convincing story, at least to me.

With my new friend Edwin I go to the office of the comrade chairman, chair of the Rupununi Region. But she is just visiting a village 23 kilometers away. Edwin collects a few coconuts from a tree. I visit Harding, the immigration officer, to get my visa extended. He is helpful and gives me an extra three days, to be stamped in my passport only the day I leave the region. Back to Takoor's place, where some friends of his hang out terribly bored and take my presence as an excuse to empty some rum bottles. They do not enjoy their drinking, but pour it down, pull their faces, and hope to get drunk as quickly as possible. I hint at my (non-existing) diarrhea and get away with very little alcohol. Nice lunch prepared by Takoor's sister. At 18.00, the comrade chairman allots me three minutes to explain my problem. She promises to be at the airport tomorrow morning.

Figure 1038. Welcome departure from Lethem.
Can I put my cow leg as hand luggage in the overhead bin?

Indeed, at 5.30 at the airport, I get—surprise, surprise—a ticket and say goodbye to my many friends in Lethem who will not be able to travel today. They are not envious about my ability to leave, hanging around for a few days is ok for them. We Westerners could learn a lot about a relaxed attitude towards time, about stress reduction by being less uptight. Anyways, I am happy to leave for Georgetown, the two-propeller airplane flying low over the savannah. In Timehri, my luggage arrives quickly, currency declaration required. The guy wants to go to an office with me for counting my money, which I refuse given previous experiences. I take a mini bus to Georgetown, past wooden houses on stilts.

Figure 1039. Stabroek market, the beach front, and "friends" hanging around in Georgetown.

Figure 1040. Colonial houses in Georgetown. Political incorrectness reigns in a beer hall.

From Stabroek market, I take a bus to Rossignol. An unpleasant drive, much too fast, we have many near misses with donkeys, people, dogs, goats, cars, bicycles, trucks, chicken on the road. After the ferry from Rossignol to New Amsterdam, *Tapir* bush taxis wait for passengers to Springlands. A friend recommended a hotel in Springlands, but it is now run down, more of a brothel, unpleasant people. I walk around town and people accost me time and again to applaud my courage of just strolling around. Seems like really dangerous. I ask about a trip to Arawak for a jungle trip, but everyone advises against it.

Without problems I get a ticket for the early morning ferry across the Essequibo River from Springlands in Guyana to Nickerie in Surinam, a former Dutch colony. Endless dealing with lazy border agents, they tell me that I cannot get by bus to Paramaribo today. But someone tells me about a cheap flight and I hurry to catch it. The Surinamese border agent demands US$ 40, which I end up giving him after some resistance, because I am in a rush. A one-hour flight along the coast takes us to Zorg-en-Hoop, the city airport of Paramaribo. A stroll through town reveals nothing of interest to me. I ask a Dutchman who lives there what the interesting sights are, and his reply confirms my impression: “Nothing, really.”. Dinner is in a dirty Chinese hole-in-the-wall with the improbable name of *New Sheraton* and stay at the shabby *Hotel Johnny*.

Figure 1041. Athletic show on the ferry and a fruit.

Figure 1042. Suriname.

Figure 1043. Bird enjoying the fresh air and a cow shopping for furniture.

Figure 1044. Sitting on the dock of the bay, waiting for Madonna to show up.

My bus to Cayenne in Guyane Française (French Guyana) first crosses the Suriname River. The Nazi Germans sank their ship *Goslar* here in 1941 in order to stop the transportation of bauxite, but the river is so wide that this produced no effect. The ferry across the Maroni river between Albina, Suriname, and St. Laurent du Maroni, French Guyana, takes about thirty minutes. Again I suffer through a lengthy border control, but no extortion this time. Overnight in Kourou.

Figure 1045. Homes on the Maroni river, somewhat less fancy than villas on the Côte d'Azur. Sunken ship now adorned with "five years revolution".

With difficulties and nothing to eat, I find a taxi to the *centre spatial de Guyane* (CSG, the Guyana space center). A reservation ahead of time is required, but I am allowed anyways. The geostationary telecommunications satellites of the European Space Agency ESA take off on their *Ariane* rockets from here. The location was chosen because it has a granite underground, the coast is straight and nearby, there are no hurricanes or cyclones, and the area is sparsely populated. Furthermore, its location near the equator provides a speed boost of 15% due to the earth's rotation, compared to Cape Canaveral in Florida.

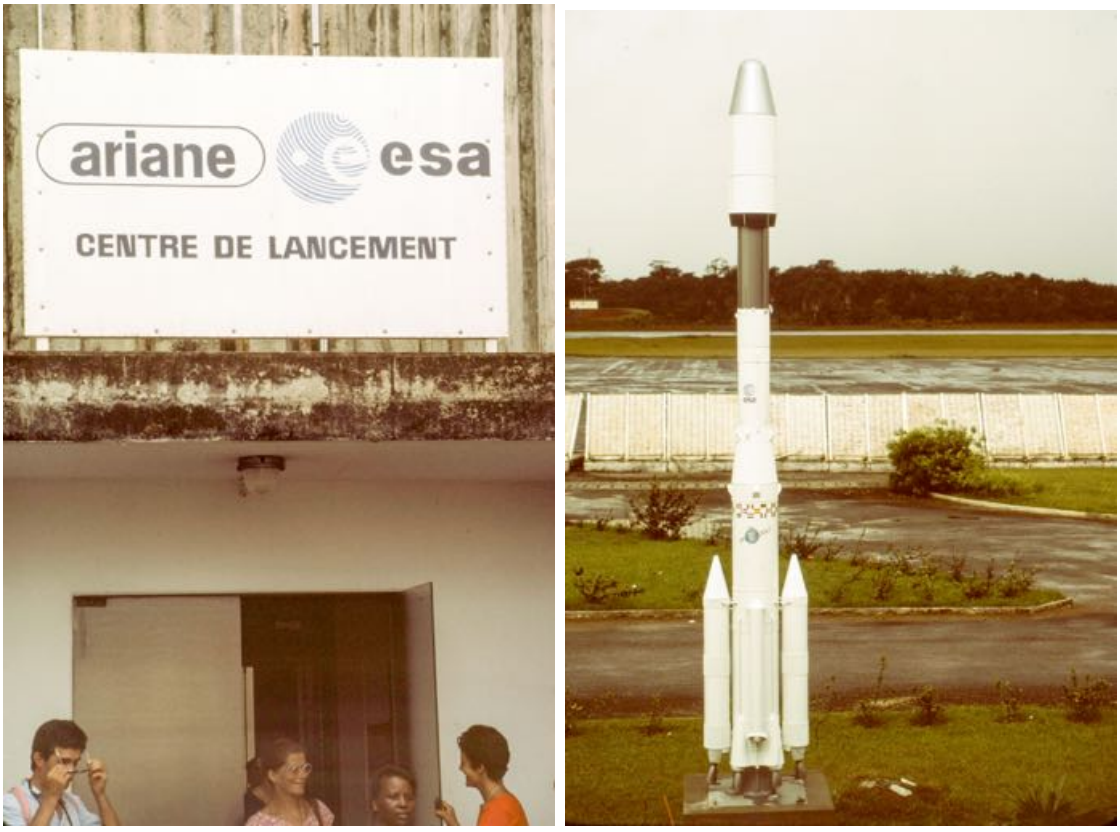


Figure 1046. The launch center and a rocket model.

We are driven to the *établissements de lancement* (launch pads) ELA1 and ELA2 and allowed into the control center, about 200 meters from the pads. 80 centimeters of concrete and lots of sand shield it from the rocket blasts. It is full of serious young people in front of monitors that look rather outdated today.

More down to earth, hundreds of white Renault R4 cars from the *centre national d'exploration spatiale* (CNES, National Center of Space Exploration) circulate here and in Cayenne—it must be damned difficult to find your parked car amidst a hundred look-alikes.

Figure 1047. In front of the launch center and rows upon rows of Renault R4.

In the afternoon, I take a boat to the *Île royale* (Royal Island), the penitentiary from which the convicted murderer Henri de Charrière allegedly escaped; his 1969 bestseller *Papillon* fascinated readers worldwide, including this writer, with its lively description of the tortured life on the neighboring *Île du diable* (Devil's Island) and his daring escape. The story is largely fictitious. Until today, the administration keeps getting requests on how to get into the penitentiary and then become a millionaire.

Figure 1048. *Devil's Island* where Dreyfus was imprisoned; now peaceful yachts sail along it. The inmates of the Administration Building shared the isolation, but not the discomfort of the prisoners.

On my next visit in 2014 (page 1534), nothing much has changed. The two islands, together with a third one, form the rather ironically named *Îles du Salut* (Islands of Health).

Figure 1049. Row of cells and a building recovered by nature, *cellules* (cells) with stands for iron bedsteads.

The most famous inmate 1895 to 1899 on Devil's Island was Captain (later Lieutenant-Colonel) Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1935), victim of an antisemitic witch hunt instigated by the French military top brass. Based on false allegations of high treason, which were supported by documents forged by his colleagues, he was sentenced to deportation here.

Figure 1050. Cells and rusted iron window bars.

A cryptographic tidbit of special interest to me is an encrypted message that the Italian military attaché, Colonel Alessandro Panizzardi, sent to his army general staff in Rome. Able French cryptanalysts deciphered the message correctly, after some false starts. It clearly spoke for the innocence of Dreyfus. But at the trial, only an early version of the cryptanalytic solution with additional fabrications was shown and construed to prove his guilt. Shame on those officers! Genuine documents found by more honest colleagues proved his innocence years later. The writer and journalist Émile Zola published a flaming letter to the French president Félix Faure: "J'accuse . . . !". A state crisis ensued, incited by the violent nationalism and anti-semitism in large parts of the French population and supported by hate-filled comments in the press. Dreyfus first receives a presidential pardon, then his sentence is revoked and he is judged innocent in 1906. He is received back in the armed forces, rises in rank and receives high decorations, but the shadow of this affair looms over him for all his life.

Figure 1051. Urinal and a gate, now open.

I can see the *banc Dreyfus* (Dreyfus' bench) on the adjacent Île du diable. A museum guardian tells me that this island is closed because it is overgrown with vegetation which would be expensive to clear. Also, some well heads are now overgrown traps. The *banc Dreyfus* was built after Dreyfus' release, "Il n'a jamais mis ses fesses dessus" (he never put his bum on it). Many of the prisoners were hardened criminals and, within the notions of their times, deserved such treatment. But for an innocent prisoner like Dreyfus, it must

have been hell, and one can imagine the feelings of an innocent person incarcerated at Guantánamo.

Figure 1052. Open-air bathtub. Iron posts to shackle individual prisoners and long bars for many of them.

On the island, I get a hammock in a room for twenty people, but I am the only overnight guest. The restored prison buildings today make a grisly impression which did not change much between my two visits, twenty-eight years apart. One can imagine the screams of prisoners tied to rusty iron bars and being flogged. Narrow damp dark cells with beds made of brick, long iron bars with shackles for the inmates, both for hands and feet.

Figure 1053. The island lighthouse and an ara.

Next morning, I go on a more relaxing walk through the rich tropical vegetation with banana trees, bougainvilleas, coconut palms, tall grass, and a noisy ara (parrot) in a tree. A boat takes me back to Kourou and a collective taxi to Cayenne, the capital of this *département d'outre mer* (overseas department) of France. It does not hold anything of interest to me and is spread out over a large area, so that without a car it is not easy to move around. I take a plane to Paramaribo in the afternoon. In contrast to the earlier stages, this part of my trip is rather hectic: Cayenne-Paramaribo-Nickerie-Springlands-Georgetown-Port of Spain-Caracas-Panamá-Havana. I stay again at the *Hotel Johnny* in Paramaribo. The owner asked me to buy sugar and coffee for him in Cayenne, I dutifully bring them, and now does not want to pay for the goods. Quite annoying. Then two drunken policemen in civil clothes show their badges to me and want to confiscate my belongings. I leave them standing there and abscond with a beer to my room. If their task was to enhance the image of Suriname towards tourists, everybody failed miserably today.

The early taxi promised by Johnny does not appear, I go looking for one myself, and a private car eventually takes me to the Zorg-en-Hoop Fligveld. Now all I need is a ticket to the border town of Nickerie; they do not sell them in their downtown office. I get one and also the penultimate seat on the plane, one wait-listed passenger is not allowed to board because of weight (not his, but the plane's). The ferry from Nickerie to Springlands in Guyana is fairly quick, but the customs check on arrival take their time. A single customs officer searches mountains of suitcases, boxes, bags, packages, bundles, and cartons of all descriptions. The other customs officers stand around, concentrating on the reflection of what their duties might be. Tough job. The taxi man to Georgetown drives like crazy, racing like a maniac. After five minutes, the left front wheel is almost shaking loose. He stops to tighten the screws, but does not even think of checking the other wheels. Donkeys, goats, chicken, dogs, and children run across the road all the time—not his concern. They have to be careful! I'm so glad on arrival. Alive! I spend the next day sightseeing in Georgetown, but there is not much to see. A lighthouse, the Stabroek market with its black market currency changers, generally not a pleasant slice of humanity. In the evening, I spend my last Guyana dollars at the airport bar, waiting for my flight to Trinidad.

My one-hour flight from Georgetown to Port of Spain in Trinidad lasts from 01.30 to 01.30—Trinidad is east of Guyana. This was my first tropical country, when I landed there at the age of seventeen. I have an indelible image of the tropics since then in my mind: a corridor at the airport whose floor was covered with large brown insects that were all limping on one side; see page 716. My first view of tropical abundance. Now I recognize the corridor, but there are no insects. My stroll around town is another let-down. On this Sunday, the shops are closed, the only restaurants offer fast food, the rain pours relentlessly, and some areas right near the center do not feel safe. Tensions are visible everywhere, warnings about not going here or there, people eyeing me curiously.

My Nissan Sunny from Singh Auto Rentals is interesting: dents all over, rust, the seats are completely worn, and when I open the window, I hold the handle in my hand. The front wheels start shaking at moderate speed. The heating does not work and I clean the fogged windshield by hand. Just my type of car, a good challenge! I drive via San Fernando to La Brea and its famous tar pits. There are hardly any street signs, but so few roads that I do not succeed in getting lost. On arrival, self-designated "official guides" descend in a swarm

on me, but I first walk a bit on my own, in a pouring rain. It is fun to "walk on oil", but does not feel too safe. Soon I understand that it is advisable to hire a young guy, which I do. Asphalt flows naturally to the surface here and forms an asphalt lake on which you can walk, more or less. The hazards are large holes in the tar surface (into which you vanish, maybe to the center of the earth?), especially now in the rainy season when everything is covered in water, sometimes up to my hips. There is commercial exploitation, and already the bloody murderer Captain Morgan (page 615) sealed his pirate ships with tar from here.

Figure 1054. Walking on tar, black goo.

The surface changes, from *elephant skin* to *mother pitch*, a soft variation, gas bubbles, sunken tree trunks, and sometimes a hard crust. It is exciting to walk on this asphalt lake, and even the rain lets up during my two-hour visit. At the parking lot, the pseudo-guardians have decorated the hood of my car with black tar stripes and now demand money

for guarding my car. Crooks. Unfortunately, Trinidad is populated by too many of them. And, back in town, too few nice restaurants. In fact, I land in a dismal pizza plastic joint for dinner.

Figure 1055. Standing on a fragile tar bottom, water to my knees.

After an early morning flight from Trinidad to Maiquetía, the airport of Caracas in Venezuela, I go to Macuto on the beach, sparing myself a visit of the crime-ridden city of Caracas. The next day takes me to Panamá. The country has its own cent coins, but all bills from $ 1 on are US currency. It is strange for me to see Latin Americans openly handling US$ bills, not on some black (or gray or blue) market. Like almost all my flight reservations on this trip, the Cubana airline does not know about my ticket to Havana. As a minor diversion, they also cancelled the flight which I had reserved. Ok, I am flexible and buy a ticket for the following day. I have to choose between preparing my next talk in Bratislava or a day trip to the port city of Colón on the Caribbean coast of the country. Of course, the latter wins. The train ride through the exuberant tropical landscape is fascinating, with many views of the Panamá canal shrouded by dense rainfall, and of ships moving stealthily through the jungle as in a silent movie. Everybody I speak to warns me about Colón: "thieves everywhere", see page 616 for our 1988 visit. So I only stay a short time and sleep from exhaustion most of the train ride back to Panamá City.

Figure 1056. A bestselling German childrens' book: *Oh wie schön ist Panama.*

Figure 1057. The Miraflores locks.

On a stroll through town to the *bóvidas*, sea walls supposed to defend against pirates, A heroic memorial recalls the failed French attempts at building a canal, by Ferdinand de

Lesseps, builder of the Suez canal, and others. The Cuban doctor Carlos Finlay provided the decisive step for the US success when in 1881 he discovered the transmission path of yellow fever by the aedes mosquito, which killed about 10% of the workers per year during the French effort. I take a bus to the Miraflores locks and watch the passage of two freighters, the empty Russian Командарм Фед'ко (Komandarm Fed'ko) registered in Batumi, now Georgia, and a Norwegian container vessel. This is a most impressive spectacle, the flowing in and out of water to the locks.

My next flight on Cubana goes from Panamá to Havana (La Habana), Cuba. On arrival, it takes an hour to get a hotel. When I ask a Cuban, about 50 years old, for buses into Havana, he not only tells me where they leave but gives me the required tickets as a present. I am to meet much of this friendliness of the simple Cuban during my stay, much in contrast to the officials. In my hotel *Bristol*, water is available only for half an hour each morning and each evening. Adding insult to injury, a sign in my room promises a 15 % discount in this case, but this is of course not given. Changing on the black market (about eight times the official rate), I get cheated for the first time in my life with this: I receive three old 10 Peso bills, not worth anything, for a loss of US$ 5. Next time, watch out!

Figure 1058. Spanish forts in Havana: *castillo de la real fuerza* and *castillo de la punta*.

In town, I meet Raúl Fernández Delgado, 20, an electrician who wants to learn a different job because his work is too hard. We take a bus to Havana vieja and the *castillo*

del morro. This is very well preserved, the Spaniards have built for eternity. If only we had such workers at home! We eat something in the *Floridita* bar, a Hemingway hangout where the Daiquiri was invented, and meet Raúl's girl friend Tania, a ballet teacher. Later we go to the beach and have interesting discussions. Tania's father is a high-ranking police officer, four of her six siblings are died-in-the-wool communists, but she is not.

Figure 1059. Castillo de la Punta viewed from the beach front *Malecón* and a revolting dog fight in its precinct.

After three hours of hard work on my slides for my talk in Bratislava next week, I meet Raúl and he shows me around town. The colonial architecture is beautiful, some houses are reasonably well kept, but others have been torn down because they were beyond repair. We have two yummy mojitos in the *bodeguita del medio*, another Hemingway drinking hole. Behind the *castillo del Morro*, next to the *castillo de la punta*, I chance upon an ugly dog fight. Lots of blood, people are betting like crazy. A revolting spectacle. In the evening, on our stroll with Raúl and Tania, we get into a police checkpoint. Nothing happens, but they are scared like hell. It is depressing to see how friendly these people are and yet how much afraid of officialdom to be seen with a foreigner. Raúl only talks English, since then he is taken for a foreigner himself. Several times, I have to walk at a distance behind them, or they cross to the other side of the street when someone comes who might recognize them and notify the police. Secret rendez-vous, most depressing. I meet a Belgian couple traveling with a baby. They bitterly complain that they cannot find any milk for their little child.

Figure 1060. *Floridita* bar and the famous cigar factory *Partagas*.

Figure 1061. Vintage cars alive in Havana.

On my last day here, Raúl takes me to the *Hotel Vedado* where he buys clothes with my US$$. I show my passport, he "has forgotten his". As a goodbye present, I leave him my tourist guide to Cuba. He will have better use for it than I do. I buy six cheap boxes of Montecristo cigars in the street, a very good deal. Hopefully customs will not make this more expensive.

From the Amazon to the Nazca lines 1982

This is the first of many times that I visit South America. It turns into an adventurous trip, sailing down the Amazon River on a rickety wooden freighter, visiting the opera house in Manaus, crossing the Brazilian jungle on a road that only existed for a few years, through the tropical lowlands of Bolivia to its freezing altiplano, several Inca sites including an almost failed hike to Machu Picchu, and a flight over the Nazca lines. A major annoyance is the theft of all my belongings on the penultimate day of this trip.

Figure 751 and sketches the first part of this trip. At the very end of this tale, you learn how my diaries and photos, about 60 films of beautiful Kodachrome slides from this colorful trip, disappeared forever. So this story has to do without any visual interludes except for very few taken on the last day or on later trips. Too bad.

This first visit to Perú starts in an unusual place of entry: Iquitos on the Amazon, called the Ucayali here. Hardly any tourist is around, but this will change over the years. It is an urban island in the jungle, not connected by road to anywhere. The rubber boom of the 1880s has left many architectural relics, among them *la casa de fierro* (iron house), covered with decorated iron sheets imported from the International Exposition in Paris in 1889. Every day, I wander down to the pier and inquire about ships travelling downstream. Yes, the *Tres fronteras* (Three frontiers) is leaving tomorrow, more precisely: mañana. Fine, where can I buy a ticket? Please come back tomorrow. This goes on for days, and a long succession of mañanas stretches into a week, but then she actually sails, with me on board. I see numerous speedboats racing downstream, but everyone tells me they are trafficking cocaine and do not take passengers. Better so.

The boat trip is totally relaxed. This small wooden freighter carries goods of all kinds, metal and wooden building materials, tools, clothes, food and drink. The thirty passengers share an open space on the top deck, where everybody strings up their hammock to pass the night and much of the day. Food is included in the fare, but rather monotonous. Always rice with something, the something usually being fish, snake, or monkey. The latter is supposed to taste like human flesh, but for lack of cannibalistic experience I cannot tell.

We stop at numerous villages along the river. The cook strings out his "fishing gear", a simple line with a hook at its end. A frequent catch are pirañas, 15 to 20 centimeters long. Everyone is afraid of these "dangerous" animals, said to be able to tear a human into pieces. My experience is different. While the cook is fishing them, about two meters away children are splashing in the water, completely unmolested by these maligned but harmless beasts. Maybe they attack you only when you have a bleeding wound.

An unpleasant, arrogant, and braggadocious passenger resembles *il cattivo* from the "Spaghetti western" movie *The good, the bad, and the ugly.* He is drunk most of the time and persuades others to play cards with him; he pays his bills from his winnings. The villages are traditional, with mud streets and simple wooden huts. There is no pier for the ship to make fast to, and usually a narrow plank is laid from the railing down to the river bank. Balancing along this plank is precarious, in particular toward the end of the stop, when it is covered with slippery mud from many boots. In one place, the ugly one buys four bottles of local alcohol in the village. Everyone on board is watching as he makes his way up the steep plank, fairly drunk and waving two bottles in each hand for balance. But

the generally hoped-for big splash does not take place, he and his bottles arrive safely on board, to general disappointment.

After four days of peacefully chugging along the Amazon, we arrive at the three borders that give our ship her name: Perú, Colombia, and Brazil meet in an imaginary point on the Amazon. I walk from the Peruvian village of Santa Rosa de Yavarí to the Colombian town of Leticia, a run-down place with dirt streets, across from Tabatinga in Brazil. In a *cambio* (money changer), I tender a twenty-dollar bill to change into Colombian pesos, which I reckon to be enough for my one-day visit. The currency dealer sneers at me: he does not take such pittances, I would have to change at least one hundred dollars. Which I then do. Now in Ecuador and Perú, twenty dollars is not a fortune but not to be despised either. It dawns on me that the speedboats are responsible for this: they carry the cocaine out of the country, but the money also has to flow back, and this probably happens here in Leticia and elsewhere. No wonder that my poor budget is no match for the fortunes of the *narcotraficantes*.

The next day, I get out of narco hell and fly from the border town of Tabatinga, near Benjamin Constant, via Tefé to Manaus over the Amazon. See Figures 1019 and 1064 for maps.

This city of two million people (today) at the confluence of the Solimões (Amazon) and Negro rivers flourished during the rubber boom between 1879 and 1912, when the rubber barons built palaces and the famous Opera House *Teatro Amazonas*. The boom collapsed with the introduction of latex producing trees in the British colonies of Malaysia and elsewhere, and the rubber barons left the area. Then came and went other booms in the Amazon basin administered from Manaus: tropical woods, gold, agriculture. As Brazilians say: "Brazil was, is, and will always be the land of the future.".

I am lucky to get a ticket to the Opera House, built in 1896 during the rubber boom, incorporating noble materials like French glass and Italian marble. Already the square in front of it is grandiose, with its wavy lines of intertwined black and white paving stones. This artful two-dimensional (flat) pavement creates a three-dimensional aspect, with hills and valleys. A visual marvel from over a hundred years ago. The year I visit, 1982, Werner Herzog ends his famous movie *Fitzcarraldo* with his title-giving character sailing to the opera house to hear Enrico Caruso sing. The latter event actually occurred in 1917.

Figure 1062. The Opera House.

Figure 1063. The pavement on the square in front of the Opera.

Apparently, operas do not keep the monument alive, but stand-up comedians do. The

show that I see in the opera house has a rather bizarre humor, mainly of a genital nature. On a later visit (in 2011, see page 1148), I see a real concert by a youth orchestra.

From Manaus, I take a bus to Porto Velho on the 870-kilometer highway BR-319. The slim red band of the highway cutting straight through the green forest around looks beautiful from a distance. But up close, it is a mess of mud, potholes, and quagmires following each other in close succession, with streams running across the dirt track. A gruelling ride. It was opened in 1976 and my bus travels over it in 1982, but by 1986 it has deteriorated so much due to the harsh tropical conditions, the heavy trucks passing, and lack of maintenance, that it becomes impassible. Plans to rebuild it pop up from time to time, but by now environmental concerns about deforestation and habitats for indigenous people and wildlife speak against brutal construction as in the 1970s under the military dictatorship. But in Brazil, you never know what will happen next.

A stark reminder of what can happen is the *Transamazônica*, another project for connecting Manaus by land to the other parts of the country. It started in the 1950s, settlers soon populated the lands on both sides of the highway, slashing and burning the virgin forest to grow their crops. They did not know much about the jungle ecology, so that after a few years the poor soil was exhausted and nothing would grow anymore. The thin layer of fertile soil, once protected by giant trees and undergrowth, was gone for good.

Figure 1064. Map of the Brazilian part of my trip.

In Porto Velho, I see another monument of wasted government expenditure: the Madeira-Mamoré Railroad to Guajará-Mirim, abandoned in 1972. It was constructed during the

rubber boom, but soon after the world economy changed and the jungle took over the railroad tracks. I love to watch the steam engines shunt at the former train station, now a museum, but the trains do not go anywhere.

The Brazilian village of Guajará-Mirim lies on the Mamoré river across from its Bolivian sister city Guayaramerín. They are non-descript villages on the two sides of the river, with muddy streets and a ferry between them.

Through Santa Cruz de la Sierra, the capital of Bolivian cocaine trafficking (see also pages 790 and 886), Cochabamba in the mountains offers fresh air after a month in the tropical jungle, and orange juice, freshly squeezed in front of you, at 5 cents a glass. I barely avoid overdosing on vitamin C.

Figure 1065. Open air chess in Santa Cruz.

While Sucre is nominally the capital of Bolivia, La Paz is the seat of the government. It lies in a deep bowl at 3650 meters of altitude, surrounded by the *altiplano* at 4100 meters. Above all of this towers the volcano Illimani at 6430 meters, visible from most places in town.

I take a bus up to the Cumbre Pass in the *Cordillera Real* (Royal Mountains) and hike further up to the Chucura Pass at 4780 meters of altitude. The marvellous *Choro trail* down into the valley starts here, many sections on an old Inca road. Precolumbian ruins, stairs and Inca *tambos* (way stations) adorn the path. A true pleasure, eventually leading from the icy Andean heights to the subtropical *Yungas*.

But at some point, I take a wrong turn. No longer do I walk on Inca pavement, the trail gets narrower and narrower, and after a while, it peters out completely. And I am completely lost. Here I am, at 2500 meters of altitude, in a forest with nowhere to go. Time to panic. Instead of doing that, I sit down to collect my wits, if any. It is clear that if I do anything stupid, I will remain on this mountain forever. Nobody knows I am here, and nobody will come to my rescue. Since leaving the bus, I have not seen a single person.

Walking in the dense undergrowth is difficult, but I try to walk around my position in circles, as well as possible. Always leaving traces of broken twigs to tell me when I come back to a place where I have been before. Like Hänsel and Gretel in the dark forest. After an hour of erratic straying through the bush, I finally discover the trail that I had lost. Great relief! I was really scared.

Soon after this excitement, it is time to sleep. I eat some of my meager provisions and spend a peaceful but cold night under the stars in my sleeping bag. I do not carry a tent, because most of this two-month trip is in tropical areas. On my way to Machu Picchu, I will again pay bitterly for this; see page 816.

The hike of the next two days is easy, all downhill and in bright sunshine. Still, I am relieved to see signs of civilization at the end of the last day, as I approach the valley with its road, near the village of Chairo at 1270 meters. After some hours of waiting, a truck carrying oranges comes along and gives me a lift back to La Paz. I do not immediately realize the luck I have with this. All trucks in the country are going on a *paro* (strike) the next day, and none of them will drive for the whole next week. I caught the last one out of the valley, and otherwise would have been stuck down there for a full week.[25]

I want to go from La Paz to Perú, without waiting for a whole week. So I have to walk up from downtown to the rim of the altiplano, a difference in altitude of about 500 meters. With all my luggage. On reaching the top, I am at the end of my tether and sit down for quite a while. Then I am lucky to get a ride in a passenger vehicle—they are still running—and eventually arrive at Tiwanaco (Tiahuanaco).

This Inka city is famous for its *Gateway of the sun*, whose intricate reliefs show a high skill at stone-cutting. I make a funny mistake there. Waiting for the sun to bring out the reliefs on the gate better, I only see the shadows getting worse. Eventually, I realize that I am in the southern hemisphere and that the sun moves in the opposite direction to the one I am used to. Silly.

On Lake Titicaca, a reed boat takes me to *Isla del Sol* (Sun Island). Small stalls sell local handicraft. Not many people are travelling there, but it looks a bit too touristy for me. In 1947, Thor Heyerdahl took these tiny reed boats as the model for his expedition ship *Kon-Tiki*; see page 1408.

My next destination is the Inca capital of Cuzco, a magnificent place. In 1532, the Spanish *conquistador* Francisco Pizarro took the Inca (King) Atahualpa prisoner and demanded a large room full of gold as ransom. The Inca administration obliged, Pizarro melted down the treasure of gold, beautiful statues and implements for the Inca's use, and then killed Atahualpa anyway. He entered Cuzco in 1533 with his "army" of 500 soldiers. One may wonder how Pizarro's small band of soldiers could conquer this large empire, which had extended its domain to a length of 4000 kilometers, with powerful armies and a successful administration that created thousands of kilometers of (pedestrian) highways along which messengers passed. One explanation is that Inca mythology predicted the take-over of the Inca empire by a man with a white bearded face. And that was a good description of Pizarro. Also, the soldiers' guns and horses had never been seen before in South America and created havoc among the Inca armies which outnumbered the Spaniards by far.

The Spanish colony *Virreinato del Perú* (Vicekingdom of Peru) initially consisted of almost all of Spanish South America. They tried to demolish the Inca buildings in Cuzco as much as they could, and then built their cathedrals and palaces on top of the ruins. But the foundations of the Inca structures were so strong that even the Spaniards had to give

[25]My diary was stolen and I thank Bastian Müller (`b.mueller@landmarktravelbolivia.com`) for reconstructing my trek from my vague memories and his extensive knowledge of the Bolivian Andes. Also thanks to Anton Beck for connecting us.

up. Still today, the streets of downtown Cuzco are lined with these foundations made of hard rock and carefully cut into multifaceted blocks which fit together so precisely, without any mortar, that I cannot even stick my pocket knife into one of the joints that fit together. And on top of them, you have the colonial buildings. But the colony collapsed in the wars of independence, at whose Peruvian conclusion José de San Martín declared independence in 1821.

Figure 1066. Colonial houses built upon indestructable Inca foundations.

Figure 1067. Inca fountain and Spanish balcony.

A visit to Cuzco is not complete without an excursion to Machu Picchu. I take the slow passenger train and get off at *kilómetro 88*, in the middle of nowhere. A trail goes up the mountain, but at the top, 4200 meters high, I lose it and walk off in the wrong direction on a different trail. After realizing my mistake, I walk back to the *camino Inca* (Inca trail). It is late in the day by then, soon gets dark, and I cannot see sufficiently well on the rocky trail. So I lie down in my sleeping bag, without a tent, in the middle of the trail, preparing for a quiet night. And quiet it did get. Around midnight, I wake up in an eerie silence. Snow flakes are settling all around me, and soon all is white, all sounds muffled by a soft blanket. Wonderful to see, but my thin sleeping bag does not protect me from the cold. Soon it is completely wet and I lie there, shivering like a leaf in the fall.

The night turns into a nightmare. My rain jacket protects the upper part of my body, but my legs are aching with the wet and the cold. I would like to get up in the middle of the night and continue walking. But the rocky path is hard to see and very slippery with an abyss on one side. Too dangerous. Lying there in misery, thoughts of pneumonia cross my mind.

Figure 1068. Cuzco cathedral.

With the first light, I start walking again in my soaked clothes. In the sunlight, temperatures rise above freezing, but not by much. The trail is partly overgrown by tall grass and ferns through which I have to make my way. They unload all their accumulated wetness on me as a poor victim. The beauty of the trail compensates for the inconvenience: it largely consists of original Inca pavement, with several small Inca ruins by its side, and wonderful views into the valley. However, my mind is more occupied with the prospects for my health ...

In the late afternoon, I reach the *Inti Punku* (sun gate) for my first view over the ruins of Machu Picchu, 2430 meters above sea level. I spend a wonderful half hour, almost alone in the marvels of this lost world. The steep Huayna Picchu rock seems to protect the ruins, and the ragged edges of the Urubamba massive frame the whole ensemble at a lofty 5000 meters.

Except for right after leaving the train, I do not see a single human on all my trek. But the negative effects of mass tourism are already visible. There is only one spot, roughly circular, along the trail that is flat enough to put up tents easily. Around it, there is an uninterrupted circle of deposed toilet paper and you-know-what. Really ugly and bothersome. Today, permits are given for about 200 hikers each day. The other 1.4 million visitors per year come by less strenuous means. Fortunately, my visit is not constrained by such rules, but would not be possible today. No more solitary wandering around the site in total peace. A large airport is planned near Cuzco to make a visit even easier.

Hiking the Inca trail usually takes four to five days. I lost time with the detour at the beginning and still make it in two long days. But I know I cannot survive another night outside and hurry so much that I complete it that quickly. I hate hectic hiking, but this is the day for it. I am too tired to take in much of the ruins, and it is getting dark. A gravel road leads down to the Urubamba river, 600 meters below. Tourist buses go up and down the road during the day, but not at this time. After crossing the bridge, there is no

road or path towards Cuzco, only the train line. In the waning light, I walk from sleeper to sleeper along the train track. The distance from one sleeper to the next is larger than one of my steps, so there is a short step between sleepers. This is a bit tricky because I do not want to hurt myself. Soon night falls—better than me falling.

A tunnel! How can I cross it? I do not carry a flash light and there is no light in the tunnel. Lacking alternatives, I start walking through the tunnel in total darkness. Not a thing to see. I have to step very carefully in order not to strain an ankle or worse, but eventually the welcome brightness of the night sky signals the end.

Walking under the open sky has become easy all of a sudden, after the difficulty in the dark. And then: another tunnel! Oh well, I know how to cope with it ... until in the middle of it, a nightmare strikes: a red flame-throwing dragon rolls towards me. A coal-fired steam locomotive with a few cars. What to do? In total darkness, I feel for the ditch besides the tracks, throw my backpack in front of me, and lie down flat in the water-filled ditch. Adrenaline and heart beat at emergency levels. The engine and its cars chug past me, without realizing that someone is in the ditch, and the danger is past. But I am shaken to the bones, not only from the wet and cold.

When I see the lights of the next village, Aguas Calientes, I am filled with joy. Dreams of a comfortable hotel room, no matter at what price, drying myself and getting into clothes that do not drip, a nice meal to reward my exertions. Instead, insult is added to injury. There are only four *hospedajes* and they are all full. What, do I have to camp outside again? No way! I discuss, plead, beg, and finally get a bed in a four-bed room. I quickly get out of my soaked clothes and hang them up around the room, dripping all over, somewhat to the dismay of my three companions. But I explain my situation and they understand.

The next step back to humanity is a long bath in the hot spring which gives the village its name. It feels so good to stretch my legs in the warm waters, just lie there and not be worried about the rest of the day. A pizza, and then off to bed. In spite of my exhaustion, I cannot go to sleep well. Too many thoughts about the day's adventures and pains trouble my mind.

The next morning, I get up, happy to be dry and in good spirits. I am not even coughing and pneumonia is no concern anymore. I walk back along the train tracks and up to the ruins, where I spend a marvellous day.

Machu Picchu was built by the Incas in the 15th century, abandoned at the Spanish conquest of Perú, and the Spaniards never learnt of its existence. Hiram Bingham, a lecturer at Yale University, rediscovered them in 1911. The fine masonry of the Inca buildings represents the best of Inca architecture. They cut large blocks of stone into various shapes, sometimes quite irregular, but so precisely that they fitted together without mortar and withstood the numerous earthquakes in this region. In addition, its placement is spectacular, on a saddle between two mountains, great views down into two valleys, and steep cliffs above the Urubamba.

After some quiet days of rest in Cuzco, I take a bus on a suicidal road down the Andes to the Pacific coast. One cross by the road reads: *Aquí murió Juan Fernández con sus 35 pasajeros* (Here died Juan Fernández with his 35 passengers), and I see the skeleton of a burnt-out bus deep down in the abyss.

My next destination is the desert site of Nazca with its famous lines. These are mysterious geometric and zoomorphic patterns drawn in the desert by turning the reddish-brown iron oxide-coated pebbles over, so that the brighter clay underground becomes visible. They were constructed when the Nazca culture flourished, between 800 BC and 500 AD. The area is extremely arid, with about 4 millimeters of rain per year. Many of the 1500 patterns are just straight lines, some one or two kilometer long. But there are also huge images of other objects, like dogs, monkeys, snakes, and spirals, up to 270 meters long. Most are drawn in a single continuous path forming lines, circles, spirals, and more. The total length is estimated at 1300 kilometers.

Figure 1069. Barren surroundings of Nazca.

The most profound and serious student of the Nazca lines was Maria Reiche (1903-1998), a German mathematician, astronomer, and archeologist. Erich von Däniken created quite a stir with his 1968 book in which he read airports for extraterrestrial visitors into these designs, later extending his humbug theories to other places. Reiche wrote furious postcards to him, to no avail. He became rich, she remained poor but did not care about that. However, she succeeded in making Nazca a protected area, and in 1994 it became a UNESCO world heritage site.

I have the chance to visit Maria Reiche. This small frail woman saved the Nazca lines from destruction by averting in the 1950s a large irrigation project that was to flood the whole area. On my visit in 1982, she is reaching her 80s and slowly turning blind. In her small house near the lines, she installed an intricate system of woollen threads at head height, and her hands sliding along these threads guide her through the rooms. The house is now the *Museo Maria Reiche*, and the local airport is named after her.

Figure 1070. Next to the Panamericana, the *Torre Maria Reiche* and a bird-like figure just below it. Bottom image: a winged animal with a feathery tail.

Figure 1071. A bird below the plane's wings?

Figure 1072. Maria Reiche at age 79 in her home.

Figure 1073. Bird at top, a strange figure at the bottom.

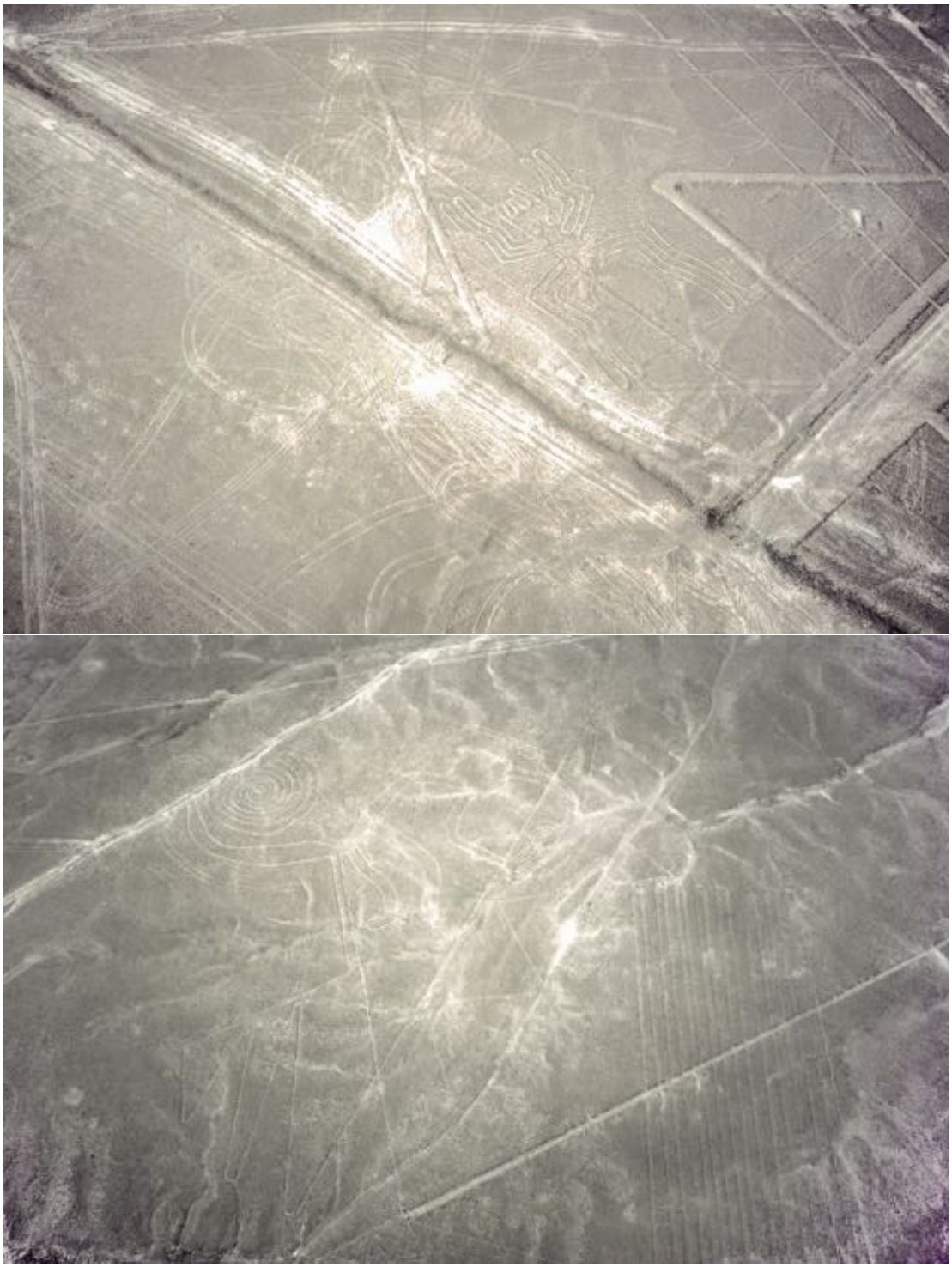


Figure 1074. Spider and monkey with spiralled tail.

Maria Reiche graciously signs a copy of her charming book *Geheimnis der Wüste*[26] for

[26]Maria Reiche, *Geheimnis der Wüste - Mystery on the desert - Secreto de la pampa*, in German, English, Spanish. 1968 (also 1976, 1980), Selbstverlag Maria Reiche, 92 pages.

me. She fought hard against the senseless destruction of the lines by driving all-terrain vehicles across them, and installed an 25-meter tall observation tower *Torre Maria Reiche* (Maria Reiche tower) from which one can look at some of the lines. In spite of signs prohibiting this, a truck drove into three images in January 2018 and damaged them severely. This idiocy reminds me of the senseless destruction of the Ténéré tree; see page 54. Drivers on the infamous Rallye Dakar also have caused damage, as well as a Greenpeace action gone awry.

On my second visit in 1988, I take the pictures presented here on a low-level flight with the airplane door removed; see page 648. Maria Reiche preempted me on this. In 1955, she persuaded a helicopter pilot to allow her to tie herself with her large-format plate camera by Fairchild to the skids. And off she went to build the first photographic overview of these mysterious lines, hypothesizing that they align with astronomical data, such as the sun's position during summer and winter solstices.

Arriving by bus in Lima, it is difficult to find lodging, and I end up in a rather miserable place. Returning after an afternoon in town, the day before my flight back home, I face another disaster: my hotel room has been burgled. Everything is gone, clothes, diary, cameras, and, above all, about sixty slide films that I shot. This is a devastating loss, by far the worst I have suffered on any of my trips. I go to the nearby police office, but they only sneer at me. I have to pay them for each form that they reluctantly fill. After talking to people in restaurants around the hotel, a bitter truth emerges: this happens frequently in that *hospedaje* and the owner is in cahoots with the thieves, or possibly the thief himself. Getting no help from officialdom, I offer the owner five dollars for each exposed film they stole, but he only grins devilishly at me.

Figure 1075. A lantern parade for peace in a country torn by a guerrilla war, and my last (and depressing) day in Lima.

This human-inflicted misery is much more annoying than what nature did to me on the Inca trail. But to be honest, I do not hold a grudge against the country or its people in general. Instead I still have happy memories of all I saw and the people I met. The only sad thing is that I do not have my pictures or diary from this trip.

Figure 1076. A nice meander of a river seen from the air.

The next day adds more insult to injury. Customs and immigration at Miami airport take so long, over three hours, that I miss my connection to Toronto. I spend a miserable night in Miami, and am happy to be back with my family the next day.

Buenos Aires to Chaco and Chile 1984

This trip is my introduction to the southern parts of South America. From Buenos Aires and Montevideo., I ride buses and trains north to the Iguaçú Falls, one of the natural wonders of this world. In the chaco of Paraguay, I see the life of a Mennonite settlement and the adversities of the local climate.

Figure 812 presents a map of this trip. After arriving from Toronto, the flight from Santiago to Buenos Aires is my first crossing of the Andes. A marvellous sight. The mountains are so close that I feel I can touch them. The glistening snow makes me shiver in the airplane, and I can imagine the freezing winds that blow down there. This sight gives way quickly to the foothills, shaped by broad former river valleys and with lakes and white salt-encrusted beaches. And then comes the huge pampa, stretching forever to the horizon, with straight roads and checkerboard towns.

In Buenos Aires, I go straight to the house of Daniel Mendelzon, a brother of my colleague Alberto Mendelzon in Toronto, and his wife Marta. Very friendly reception. Daniel resembles his brother enormously. He is a rather quiet type, but I talk a lot with Marta in the next days. In the evening, they take me to a restaurant by the river. First a huge plate of various meats to share, then a filet steak for myself. Delicious. But I have to adapt to the huge quantities of meat that are the standard in this part of the world. I like it. Some wine on top, and after 44 hours of traveling I fall asleep immediately at home.

I stroll through town. On the *plaza de mayo*, in front of the presidential palace *casa rosada* (pink house), every Thursday some mothers of the roughly 30,000 *desaparecidos* (disappeared people) assemble to protest the killings under the military dictatorship. The generals were brought down in 1983 due to their brutal actions and economic failures, hastened by their defeat in 1982 on the Falkland Islands (*Islas Malvinas* for Argentines). Most Germans today are happy to have gotten rid of the Nazi dictatorship, even if that involved losing a World War and ceding whole provinces. But in Argentina, the Malvinas are a festering sore and national trauma, reminders of which I see again and again in other places, see pages 999 and 1392. A similar lack of rationality occurs in Bolivia, about the Pacific ports lost to Chile in 1884, see page 858.

Several members of the Mendelzon family disappeared around 1976. They could call home from time to time until 1978, then—silence. I am surprised to hear Marta say *Claro, nuestros militares son bestias, pero son siempre mas cultos que los de Bolivia y Paraguay.* (Of course, our military people are beasts, but they are still more civilized than those of Bolivia and Paraguay.) In 2017 I try, with some colleagues, to investigate historical Argentine cryptography—but the military blocks access to their archives. My friends show me the *Recoleta* cemetery, where Evita Perón and other famous Argentines are buried, see Figure 1566. After a museum with political art, I see a show *Aquí estoy* in the *Teatro Cómico* (Lola Membrives). Sometimes funny, always very political; the main performer, Nacha Guevara, sings about her life in exile. Then I am fed up with arts, politics, and murdered friends—off to an excellent dinner and home.

Figure 1077. *30.000 detenidos desaparecidos—aparicion con vida* (30 000 detained disappeared—return them alive). Memorial to the fallen heroes of the lost Falklands war, which eventually brought the military dictatorship down.

Figure 1078. Tango show in Buenos Aires and the national flag matching the sky.

My visit to Buenos Aires is not the sort of adventure travel that I usually like, but rather civilized. In many places, I could not tell whether I am in Argentina or in Spain. Down to the fact that even with my fair skin and blonde hair, I am not immediately taken for a tourist. This is my first visit to Argentina and Buenos Aires, but I will come back many times later.

Then a slow boat takes me from the port of Buenos Aires to Colonia in Uruguay, just across the lazy Río de la Plata. Slow mud-brown waters, hardly any waves. After this three-hour passage, a bus to Montevideo. Culture shock: after urban hectic Buenos Aires, I see farms, fields, oxen, vintage cars, a very laid-back life in Uruguay. Completely relaxed. I find a hotel, drop my backpack, and walk off to explore the city. On the main

square, the cold black mausoleum to Artigas, the hero of independence, crushes the visitor with its darkness. The 22nd floor of the post tower affords a beautiful view of the city. Afterwards some coffee with pleasant people working at a hospital, Juan and Cecilia Ríos Leiria among them. The harbor exhibits the anchor of the *Graf Spee*, a German cruiser scuttled in 1939 in view of superior firepower of the British navy encircling the bay of the Río de la Plata; this was partly due to a British ruse of sending false information about arriving reenforcements in a code that they knew to be broken by German cryptanalysts. The military dictators ruling Uruguay in 1964 added an inscription: *Que perduren los ideales que juntos defendimos.* (May the ideals last that we defend together.) Fortunately, those Nazi ideals have vanished for decades, but, unfortunately, are finding an audience again today.

Figure 1079. Artigas mausoleum and the anchor of the *Graf Spee*.

Figure 1080. Rural Uruguay.

Three days later, my bus leaves at 01.30, frighteningly early, to Fray Bentos, then across the *puente internacional* (see page 1063) to Gualeguaychú in Argentina.My main reason to visit this place is the wonderful sound of its name. In the afternoon, a bus to Larroque, another miserable town with miserable rain and cold. I wait in the miserably cold train station for my evening train to Posadas until the station master invites me to his heated office. We chat amiably. He asks about salaries in Canada. I hate to tell him that they are five to ten times as much as here in Argentina, but then point out the price of daily items and rent.

Figure 1081. 1960s overtake 1860s. Wait for the bus or take a horse?

Because of inundations, trains to/from the north cannot reach Larroque, but the train company offers a car ride to a place 20 kilometers north. It is fun for me to listen to the traffic in morse and rail telephone: "we are still waiting for the car to show up". And it rains and rains outside. Eventually I get on the train, sharing a bench with a local. In spite of all the stories (and my experience in 1982, see page 826) about thieves in South America, I trust him enough to ask him to take care of my luggage as I go to the dining car. While I eat there peacefully, my old car is decoupled at a station from the dining car, which then moves on with the main part of the train. I do not even realize this action. Big scare! But my unknown friend has carried my backpack into the moving part of the train, connected to the dining car. Big relief! What a wonderful honesty! See page 1014 for another story about honest Argentines.

Figure 1082. Too much rain along the Río Uruguay
and my red-eye train in Argentina.

After an uncomfortable all-nighter on this red-eye train I arrive around noon in Posadas, only to catch a bus to San Ignacio Miní. Jesuits have proselytized this part of the country in the 17th century and created huge domains, where about 3000 formerly free Indians worked the land in the name of God. Shortly after the Jesuits were expelled from the area,

the locals destroyed the mission in 1817—their love for God or the Jesuits cannot have been too great. The remains of the buildings in the *Guaraní baroque* style are impressive. Among other constructions on the central plaza, there is a magnificent church built from local bright red sandstone, with walls two meters thick.

Figure 1083. San Ignacio Miní. Inscription: *This "heart of stone" tree has swallowed one of the columns which is still inside of it.*

Figure 1084. San Ignacio Miní.

After two nights practically without sleep, I am close to a physical breakdown, but still take the bus to Puerto Iguazú. Quick dinner near the hotel, and it is off to bed. I spend all of the next day on the Argentine side of the Iguazú falls, one of the world's natural wonders and its most beautiful waterfall, finer than Niagara, Victoria, or Angel Falls. The Río Iguazú drops over a total width of 2.7 kilometers into an abyss, up to 82 meters deep. The churning waters then calm down and after only 23 kilometers, then flow into the mighty Paraná river. First an overview from an observation tower, then long walks along the water. On the *circuito inferior*, the lower boardwalk, I see the calm unsuspecting waters of the Río Iguazú approaching the *San Martín* falls. In a wide brown curtain, they tumble down, still a coherent body of water, onto a precipice, where tons of water splash up again to a height of 15 meters, and then jump into the depth of 72 meters like an angry lion. The noise is overwhelming. If the waters' flow were music, it would begin with an adagio, then move into allegro, a strong bass attacks the listener, and in an overwhelming crescendo the liquid masses tumble over the edge. The spray collects the sunshine in beautiful rainbows. Also at other places, like the *dos hermanas* (two sisters), Ramirez, and Bozzetti falls, I can walk up right to the edge of the precipice. There used to be boardwalks also higher up, but these were destroyed in a flood in 1983. Apparently this is mainly due to the large-scale deforestation along the Paraná's course in Brazil.

Figure 1085. Wow!

Figure 1086. The mighty Iguaçú falls.

In Canada, I live about an hour's drive from the Niagara falls and have to take all our European visitors there, of course. They are much smaller but still impressive, but here you are closer to the water and the falls spread over a large area. Their tropical beauty is not spoiled by highrises like those that ruin the view of Niagara.

Figure 1087. The Macuco trail and my helicopter.

In the afternoon, I go for a hike along the *sendero Macuco*. A broad trail leads through the abundant jungle, the air is laden with humidity, and the many puddles on the trail reflect the green trees and the blue sky. Birds fly by, and butterflies dance around me.

A marvellous solitary experience. The trail leads down to the *Río Iguazú*, whose waters are still agitated from the big splash they took over the falls. Back in town, the *tres hitos* (three milestones) indicate where the Paraná and Iguazú rivers meet and one can see Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay.

Figure 1088. Butterflies: one of flesh and slightly eaten, one of steel and intact.

I cross the border to Brazil the next day and take several buses, eventually to the falls. Another wow! The Brazilian side is even more impressive than the Argentine one. It offers a wide view of the many falls. The main attraction is the boardwalk to the *garganta do diabo* (devil's throat). The water thunders below the footbridges, I get soaked from the spray. And then I am right at the precipice, the famous throat to my left, the angry waters roaring below me, the wooden floor shaking from all that power. The visual impression is so strong that I almost feel like falling down with all that water. The mist from the falls rises high into the air. A 3-D experience that challenges all senses. Plain unforgettable.

Figure 1089. Puente de la amistad.

At the fancy *Hotel das Cataratas*, the arrogant waiter refuses to serve me. Well, I probably look more like a hobo than like his usual clientele. Nearby is a heli pad—the flights are too expensive for my budget. But while I wait at the bus stop, at the end of the afternoon, the boys from the helicopter come over and offer me a seat on their last flight, back to their base. Only US$ 20. Chop chop chop, we cruise at low level over the falls. From the air, the view is impressive. The misty cloud over the gargantua looks like

several hundred meters high, now in the setting sun. And I see the whole panorama of the upstream part of the river, which is not visible from the ground. From the heli base, I walk to the bus station and take a bus to Paraguay. The border crossing is easy, I am the only passenger to alight on the Paraguayan side in order to collect an entry stamp in my passport. Just so I do not get into trouble later as in Sénégal, see page 24.

Culture shock after crossing the Paraná river on the international *puente de la amistad* (friendship bridge) to Puerto Stroessner (now Ciudad del Este) in Paraguay. Hong Kong on the Paraná. One glittering "dutyfree" shop after the other lines the main street, selling everything from Japanese electronics to German household appliances. In the grassy center lane, stalls with handicraft. Import taxes and thus prices are much lower here than in Brazil and Argentina, and short-term visitors from there cram the shops. At dinner, the Argentines at the next table brag about their lucky purchases and show them to each other. I refrain from buying a washing machine or the like—somewhat awkward to carry on a bus.

In the capital Asunción, I walk around town and come to the *Panteón de Heroes* (pantheon of heroes). A large herd of military brass has assembled, admirals (of a non-existing fleet) and generals with gaudy decorations. People tell me that it is the 49th anniversary of the Paraguayan victory in the Chaco war, on 12 June 1935. For travelers like myself, public holidays are always a nightmare, because everything is closed. The big man, President Stroessner, shows up in person at the *Panteón*. Maybe to welcome me? He is one of those brutal South American military dictators whose hands are covered in blood. From a distance of 15 meters (and the security personnel turning their back to me), I shoot him—with my tele lens. RIP.

Figure 1090. President Stroessner (with military cap) leaving his car and shot on the spot by me.

Near the zoo, I visit a sorry village of *Macá*, the remnants of an indigenous tribe who had to leave their previous location on an island because of flooding. They live in makeshift housing of branches, leaves, plastic sheets and corrugated iron. An open fire in the middle of a hut, but no chimney. An old shoemaker has wood blocks through his *orejones* (big ears). The inhabitants are incredibly friendly and invite me to their homes. But their living circumstances are so sad to see.

Figure 1091. Young Macá woman.

Figure 1092. Indigenous village of Macá.

I leave Asunción on the 06.00 vehicle of its famous bus line NASA—fewer than 600 million people watch our take-off. Soon we cross the Paraguay river and enter the Chaco paraguayo, through which I want to travel. The chaco is now divided between Brazil, Paraguay, and Bolivia. Paraguay lost in 1870 almost half of its territory to Brazil and Argentina after a war, and Chile conquered Bolivia's Pacific coastline in the *Pacific War* from 1879 to 1883; see page 857. From 1932 to 1935, the two losing countries Paraguay and Bolivia engaged in the bloody *Chaco War*, in an area rumored to contain rich oil deposits. No oil was discovered there until 2012. The war ended with a resounding victory for the Paraguayans, obtaining three quarters of the disputed Chaco territory. Most of the 90 000 deaths were due to malnutrition and lack of water.

The chaco is a totally flat landscape, with lakes, puddles, and swamps in all directions, a lowland of shrubs and poor soil. The weather is determined by the winds, the southerlies sometimes bring rain, while the northerlies are dry because the Andes shield the area from the Pacific. Amazing is the multitude of birds: herons, ibis, pelicans, storks, and buzzards galore. In the 1920s, Mennonites speaking *plautdietsch*, an older dialect of German used in some parts of Prussia, settled in the chaco paraguayo to escape the military draft and religious persecution. They emigrated originally from Western Prussia to Manitoba and Saskatchewan in the Canadian prairies, starting in 1874. During the First World War, the government of Canada, then a British colony, withdrew their permission for German-language schools. A few hundred of those Mennonites emigrated to the Chaco, from 1921 on. But this Promised Land turned out to be an inhospitable place whose land was hard to farm and brought typhoid fever, and they were cheated out of signed land contracts. Many of them left after a few years, but some remain stubbornly until today. They founded *colonies* with names like Menno, Fernheim (far home), Neuland (new land), and Hoffnungsfeld (field of hope). And they have made agriculture a successful business, by local standards. In the late 1920s, more Mennonites with a similar background fled Stalin's terror regime in the Soviet Union. After the Chaco War, they collected rusting military hardware and, quite literally, beat swords to plowshares, because iron is not available in the Chaco.

Figure 1093. Mud racing along Filadelfia's main street, with German names of settlements.

Now I sit in a bus to Filadelfia in the center of the Gran Chaco. Next to me sits a pleasant Guaraní Indian in his thirties with the typical look of his people: a large face with

coarse features. We chat a bit in Spanish, but when he learns that I am from Germany, he dumb-founds me by talking in excellent German, with a Prussian accent that does not exist anymore in Germany and which I have never heard before. He explains that he went to a religious school in Filadelfia, our destination, and that most teaching is in this obsolete form of German. It is quite a miracle to hear a lost accent of German here in the far-out Chaco from a native American Indian.

Towards the end of our long trip, it starts to drizzle. I do not mind, because I do not yet know that this little bit of rain will ruin my travel plans during the next week. Namely, I spend the following five days in the desolate village of Filadelfia in the Chaco, part of the *Menno* colony. Most shops are run by tall blond blue-eyed Germans who address me in their antiquated form of Prussian German when I enter, taking for granted that I speak the language. They are not particularly friendly to an outsider like myself. I buy delicious ice cream and other items regularly in the grocery store of their *cooperativa* and pretty soon know all the faces, but even after days they pretend to not know me. I never see them smiling or being friendly to each other. Their rigorous religion and its prohibitions dictate a joyless life. Fun is for the afterlife. The adolescents sit around at street corners on their small motorbikes, bored to death. One can only have pity on them. The Latinos in the village are loud and happy, but everyone wants to get out of here. Including me.

Figure 1094. Careful where you step!

The fine drizzle continues most of the time. I look for some transport towards Bolivia, but the roads are impassable. Arnildo Sentena from Tarija, Bolivia, is going the right way, but the road is so much soaked that even his truck cannot drive it. It would take a few

days for the highway to dry and become passable again. He and his helper invite me to share their gourmet food of pig legs.

Figure 1095. Arnildo (at left) with truck and sidekick, sharing dinner with me in a muddy kitchen.

Figure 1096. The streets of Filadelfia.

Figure 1097. No locks on doors and my NASA travel agency.

Figure 1098. German names in a cemetery.

Figure 1099. J. W. Siemens was Oberschulze (mayor) of the Kolonie Fernheim. These boots are made for walking . . .[27]

Figure 1100. Steam engine fuelled by the local quebracho trees.

Changing plans, I buy an airplane ticket for *mañana* to Asunción from Herr Friesen, the gruff owner of the NASA travel agency. But planes cannot land because the grass strip is too soggy. On my ritual daily visits to his office, Friesen always tells me that there is no flight today. Indeed, no plane the next mañana, none the mañana after. The third

[27]Nancy Sinatra, 1965, Reprise Records.

mañana, the shop is closed and a large sign hangs on the door: *Hoy: No hay salida. Ruta clausurada. Tranquilo.* (No departure today. Road closed. Keep calm.) The situation is unpleasant, but I have to laugh at his humor. I use my spare time to write my slides for a presentation later in Chile.

Figure 1101. The future of Filadelfia in the arms of her mother and its present airport sunk in mud.

Indeed, patience is one thing that you learn on such travels. If you are involved in the ratrace of job and, in my case, science, patience is far away from your mindset. It takes some time to learn it, like I did here from Herr Friesen. There is nothing anyone can do about the wet runway or the impassable road, and the best option is to sit back and relax, waiting patiently for things to happen.

Peter P. Klassen (1926-2018) fled from Russia in 1931 with his family and a large group of Mennonites. He became the historian of the Paraguayan Mennonites and wrote several books about the fate of this group. His 12-year old son Oscar Klassen shows me around a small museum and a factory with a steam engine fired with wood.

Finally, relief! Friesen announces the arrival of a 6-seater Cessna, chartered by New Tribes Mission, in the afternoon. The pilot will only take four passengers, because the ground is still soft. Friesen's daughter, now de Silveira, also comes along. I am happy to leave and enjoy the low-level flight. First there are some isolated farms, but then nothingness, just bush and grass in the flat landscape of the Chaco.

From Asunción I continue to Resistencia in Argentina. A pleasant little town, with many statues both of old heroes that are famous for having killed many people, but also of children and young people. I see the aftermath of the brutal military dictatorship: paper silhouettes of *desaparecidos* (disappeared persons) stuck on walls, and a poem of Pablo Neruda: "Quiero castigo" (I want punishment). The military insists on an amnesty ...

My evening bus towards Tucumán is packed. First asphalt, then a dirt road which the persistent rain has turned into a slippery mud slide. After a while, our driver is cautious enough to just stop by the roadside, joining a long column of waiting trucks; we saw others that had skidded into the ditch. With only five hours delay, we arrive in Tucumán. I prefer this kind of prudent driver to the usual pilots racing Formula 1 buses. A demonstration of mothers of *desaparecidos*, loudly banging on empty pots, passes by.

Figure 1102. Protests in Resistencia against the military dictatorship.

The last leg of my almost uninterrupted rush from Filadelfia to Santiago is in an old Chevy, about the same fare as a bus. After passing through the vineyards around Mendoza, we ascend steeply for my first land crossing of the Andes. At a stop at the *puente del Inca* (Inca bridge), a natural bridge, it is freezing cold, the fierce *viento blanco* (white wind) blows ice crystals into my face. We pass the foot of the mighty Aconcagua with its 6960 meters, where I will hike with Dorothea, Rafaela, and Désirée in 1988. On the Chilean side, some snow and ice plates cover the road, but driving is easy past the ski resort of Portillo with its pretty *laguna del Inca* (Inca lagoon), see Figure 1018.

Figure 1103. Crossing the Andes by car.

My first destination on a short walk in downtown Santiago is the *Moneda*, the government palace where Salvador Allende died in Pinochet's coup of 11 September 1973. An iconic photograph shows him at the door of the Moneda, beside a gun-toting guard. We were unsuspecting witnesses of this event in Algiers, see page 70. The damage from the aerial bombings is repaired, but large patches of dark on the concrete look as if the blood of the victims were to come over the putschists. To make up for these dark thoughts, I enjoy a wonderful dinner of ceviche and ensalada de palmitos at *Chez Henry*, which becomes my favorite restaurant in Santiago—until it closed forever.

At the Fourth International Conference in Computer Science at the Universidad de Chile, my talk is about *ecuaciones lineales sobre anillos de valuación* (Linear equations over valuation rings). I meet many Chilean computer scientists and get invited for next year. Indeed, I will come back many times to this wonderful country.