



# EXPEDITION DIARY Brazil 2006

By David Moore

21 October

Not so much of a diary entry, but a message to say David (Moore, your expedition leader) is about to arrive in Germany for the packing up and final preparations to start before we both fly to São Paulo on Monday. There we hope to pick up a Land Rover Defender, have some meetings and do some shopping, before heading to Matinhos (<http://maps.google.com/maps?q=Matinhos,+Brazil&ie=UTF8&z=12&t=h&om=1&iwloc=A>). If you click on this link and then look slightly south and west, then you'll be able to see the channel that David and I (and later you) will be heading up to reach base camp.

Work is in progress there already, overseen by Dr. Marcelo Mazzolli (your expedition scientist). David, Daniel (from Biosfera Brazil, whom some of you may have dealt with already when booking flights etc. and who will be coming out to assist for the first week or so) and I will be helping out over the next couple of weeks, putting the finishing touches to base, our procedures and work plan so that you have your nice comfy platforms and tents to sleep on/in when you arrive, as well as somewhere to work and something to eat. If you're lucky ;->

On another note, we are introducing a new procedure on our expeditions in an effort to reduce our environmental impact. Eventually something like the document I am attaching now will form part of everyone's welcome pack and I hope you don't mind if we are using you as guinea pigs on this expedition to test this out. David will talk you through the document and what's specific to Brazil during your first day briefing session, but I would be grateful if you could have a look at this now and come on the expedition with some thoughts and comments to give to David and me.

We're looking forward to seeing the first slot in a couple of weeks. Safe travels & see you soon.

Dr. Matthias Hammer  
Managing Director  
Biosphere Expeditions

25 October

Hi everybody! This is David and I'm sending you the first diary entry from São Paulo where Matthias and I arrived yesterday morning to begin the preparations for the launch of the new jaguar and puma research expedition. No tales of exotic animal sightings yet, but just a few lines to let you know what we've been up to the last couple of days: mainly shopping for some of the initial supplies for the base camp – stocking the first aid kit, getting stationery supplies and camping equipment. Luckily we've had the help of Daniel from Biosfera Brasil who has been indispensable at navigating us around the choking streets of this huge city and getting us to all the right places. Yesterday we spent most of the day at Land Rover Brazil negotiating the release of our lovely green Land Rover and it's already insured, installed with a GPS transmitter and appropriately decorated with the relevant Biosphere Expeditions and Land Rover stickers ready for slots one's arrival in about ten days.

This evening we're packing up and preparing to drive down to Matinhos tomorrow to meet up with our scientist Marcelo. From there we'll take the boat up the channel to get us to base camp where we can see how things are progressing and what still needs to be done. No doubt you're as keen as I am to discover our progress over the next few weeks. Hopefully the next email I send will be from the satellite link-up at base camp and I promise not to recount any exaggerated stories of mosquito or snake infestations or other nasty things (unless of course they're true). Looking forward to meeting you all soon....

30 October

Thursday's drive down from São Paulo to Matinhos gave a first glimpse of patches of the Atlantic forest, which once covered pretty much the entire coastline. Marcello was waiting for us at the harbour base from which our boat will leave for the three hour journey up the channel to our forest base camp.

In order to catch the high tide we made an early start on Friday to get straight to base camp and assess what still needs to be done for slot 1's arrival in a few days. Part of the base camp includes a working farm (with two entertaining pig-wild boar mongrel piglets) and a house, which we will use for cooking, eating, equipment storage etc. A local worker took us a few hundred metres along one of the trails to show us a puma track he had recently found. Marcello explained how to distinguish a puma track from that of a jaguar and how not to confuse it with that of a dog! We also decided on the location of the ten tent platforms and temporary shower booths, which are under construction now.

Mosquitos are not too bad and the citronella repellent seems to work well on them!

The weekend was then taken up in a shopping frenzy here in town. Everybody is really intrigued by our presence here and is asking lots of questions about the project and why we need 150 one-metre long poles of wood, 15 pillow cases, machetes, lamps, plastic showerheads etc... Fortunately the initial shopping list is now pretty much complete so we're moving on to laminating, photocopying etc. and tracking down the cook! We've also pretty much developed the work plan (attached). Slot 1 will be the trailblazers in the genuine sense of the word, setting up the trails, quadrats and transects that the teams to come for the next few years will be working over. But everyone in this first year, please remember that the itinerary is only a rough outline. Things have a tendency to change in the field, as you are about to find out ;->, so please stay flexible!

It's been great to meet up with Marcello and see how enthused he is by the project and the boost that it is giving to his work. He's looking very pleased indeed with the 25 camera traps which have just been delivered, and as you can see from the itinerary part of our task will be finding locations for these, installing them and checking them.

Early tomorrow morning we'll be heading back up to the camp to finish construction and set-up. My next diary will be either from there by satellite uplink or from Matinhos again when we come back for last minute shopping and arrangements on Friday or Saturday before meeting slot 1 Sunday morning.

3 November

We've just arrived back at the Matinhos town base after three days up at the jungle base camp where we have been setting up the camp and getting everything in place for team one's arrival on Sunday.

We set up the first tent platform on Tuesday and began creating the tracks around the section of forest, which is now the newly named 'Palmito Grove' tent complex. We recruited the help of some of the farm workers, which meant we could also spend our time on clearing the trails, ordering the equipment, chopping wood for the fire, getting rid of the junk, rearranging the house, building the outdoor shower (it's amazing what you can do with bamboo and palm leaves!), finishing off the data sheets .... and much more! You'll also be pleased to hear that we also tracked down our cook, Olga, who lives a little further down the river and who made a great first impression in the kitchen.

This afternoon we're off to do the food shopping and printing in town and buying some of the last-minute supplies. Marcelo and I will then be leaving tomorrow to drive over to the Curitiba Holiday Inn where we'll be meeting the first team at 07:00 on Sunday morning. Matthias will be staying back here at the harbour base, preparing sandwiches for us before we take the boat in early afternoon. We've located a couple of shops in Matinhos that are open on Sunday and sell Wellington boots and other last-minute supplies you may want to buy, so we'll make a little stop there on our way.

Bon voyage and see you soon!

10 November

With six camera traps and six track traps set on quadrat 1 and a good progress on quadrat 2 today, there is lots to report from the first week here in the forest.

Our food supplies for two weeks along with twelve teams members and luggage made for a cosy boat ride and we weighed down quite heavily on the final approach through the mangrove before arriving at basecamp. The rains had made the track up to camp and the surrounding trail very slippery, but by evening time we were more or less settled in to the camp and acquainted with its workings, ready to launch in to a jam-packed training day on Monday. We spent quite a lot of time explaining the workings of the GPS and how to take compass bearings, etc. before venturing out in to the jungle. There Marcelo gave us instructions on how to set up the camera traps, one of our main tasks for this first week. With our brains full of all these details, I think we were pleased to get out in to the field on Tuesday to make our first 'recce' - quite a task on some of the muddy trails with some streams and log crossings to navigate.

Once familiar with the main trail of this quadrat 1, we split up on the Wednesday with two teams heading out to place camera traps 30 to 50 metres off the main trails and two other teams cutting secondary trails out in order to place traps further inside the jungle. Whilst the camera trap setters made good progress, the trail blazers found it tough going and their route blocked by dense thicket. Thursday saw a second more concerted hacking effort (while the other teams had the lighter task of smoothing over mud squares to create track traps) and with a further six traps set on the new secondary trails by the time the remaining hardcore "macheteers" made it back to base last night we were able to consider quadrat 1 'loaded and primed'!

Well in the swing of the work now and with drier trails and sunshine too (after some overcast days with torrential downpours) we made faster progress on quadrat 2 today. Slot 2, be warned though. Hot sunny days also means low cloud cover at night, so the heat radiates off quickly and night time temperatures dropped to 8°C. So come prepared with a warm set of clothing and a sleeping bag to suit as well as a thermarest to insulate you from the cold coming from the platform base.

While we finish off this patch tomorrow, Marcelo will be taking a small team over to the quadrat 3 to check out the terrain (and hopefully find a trail). Next week we'll be concentrating on transect work and trap checking before moving on to quadrat 3 with slot 2 to trap and sample that area.

The generator is on late tonight so we have electricity flowing for the lights and are recharging some of the equipment. Whilst a few of the team members have headed off for a well-earned bit of sleep, the rest of us are sitting here, chatting and quaffing our "51" Cachaça, the local "truck drivers" rum.

12 November

Quadrats 1 and 2 are now set with all cameras and track traps in place and quadrat 3 has been scouted out. Thanks to everyone for putting the effort in!

The team is now having a well-earned day off at base and we've had time to sort out the GIS (Geographical Information System) information on the computer and catch up on data entry.

When you read this the pictures on [www.imagestation.com/album/pictures.html?id=2101763541](http://www.imagestation.com/album/pictures.html?id=2101763541) should be updated, so have a look at what it's like out here!

Also attached are three files of interest. "gis brazil.jpg" shows the location of the quadrats, base and connecting trails. Red feet icons indicate track traps, blue cameras indicate camera traps and yellow deer the site of an animal encounter or a noteworthy track. We are hoping to add more information as time progresses and of course it will be slot 2's job to fill in the gaps in quadrat 3.

"gis brazil.kml" will only work if you have Google Earth (<http://earth.google.com/>) installed on your local machine. If you do, it will show you much the same GIS information within Google Earth and you can then zoom in and out and take a closer look at the trails and waypoints.

Finally, the outline plan for slot 2 is also attached.

And that's it for modern gizmo stuff for today – I'm back to my hammock. It's Sunday after all ;->

14 November

We're sitting on the bench outside the base camp house where Alan is photographing the new patch of blue sky, which is coming our way after a couple of rainy days, making for some interesting swampy trails.

Clare, Martyn, Alfred and Marcelo have just returned from their afternoon reconnaissance boat mission to the much-talked-about 'Peccary Island', a possible location for an eventual fourth quadrat (perhaps next year!). No peccaries spotted, but Clare was very amused by her sighting of the abandoned toilet bowl in this remote location. The team was pleased to see that the GPS reading showed that they were not too far from some of the waypoints Helmut had noted when traversing quadrat three on his trail finding sortie yesterday. With many of these trails and locations now transferred to the satellite map, we're starting to see where some of the trails link together and can build up a reasonable picture of the surrounding terrain.

Marcelo also had a good conversation with some of the inhabitants in quadrat three who indicated areas where jaguars are known to descend from the mountains at certain times of the year.

The transect cutting has proved challenging in the muddy hills and mammal sightings have been low, unlike the snakes who have been turning up every day in various shapes and sizes. I just missed today's commotion at base camp when a two metre yellow and black fellow dropped from a tree near the doorstep amid a flurry of birds who set about dive bombing him (perhaps he'd been stealing eggs) as he slithered under the rocks causing a mouse to scarp! According to 'Google', he was the rather common and non-poisonous 'Caninana' (translated as tropical rat snake).

Weather depending we shall set about checking and changing the films if necessary of the quadrat one camera traps tomorrow!

17 November

The soaring temperatures during the last two days of the first slot (up to 32°C yesterday) meant we were able to return to all the camera traps in the field, check that they were in full working order and change the batteries and films as necessary. A couple of cameras needed to be brought back to base to be fiddled with in order to restore them to full functioning capacity. Whilst most of the analogue cameras still had film in them, Alfred's counter had already moved up to '20 photos', so we have just dropped the film in to be developed back here at the harbour base to see if we have captured any images. Meanwhile, one of the digital cameras has offered us a glimpse of an armadillo's backside disappearing down the trail!

With slot one now continuing on with their travel plans or returning home, we're looking forward to meeting the next team and progressing further with the data collection and improving our understanding of the area around our base.

21 November

The trails are more like streams and the waterway, which once stopped about 300 m from the house is now almost up to the house, but this has done nothing to dampened the enthusiasm or hamper the indomitable spirit of slot 2's initiation to the delights of Palmito Grove. Lots of the 'local' red wine has helped too, especially when accompanied by Italian Uno card rules.

Everybody was quick on the uptake for the GPS and jungle navigation training yesterday and even quicker up and down the trails out along the main trail to pick the first half of the cameras on quadrat 1 in the afternoon. Marcelo took Ali, Alice and Tom out along the far secondary trail B whilst I headed out to the end of the main trail with Robin, Brian and Georgie. We picked up the other cameras from the first part of the main trail and secondary trail B today. Slot 1 will be pleased to hear we located them with no trouble, even if some of the stream crossings now require extra balancing powers! Richard stayed at base yesterday and fashioned some very impressive removable mosquito screens for the windows and doors around base.

There was much excitement as we looked over digital cameras numbers 03 and 05 which had been brought back from the field. 03, which Janet, Alain and Helmut placed in the field together with Marcelo contains a reasonable shot of a red brocket deer and two unidentified mammal rear-ends! The rear-ends are really quite clear with nice large bushy furry tails, but despite all zooming and resizing efforts we are unable to decide whether it is fox, coati or even anteater. This is one of the disadvantages of the digital cameras compared to the analogue which are able to react to animal movement more quickly. If we do not place all the cameras out in quadrat 3, we shall return to the spot and place another analogue camera in the same location to try to secure a clearer shot. There was a similar case for the 05 digital, where a blurry striped tail could be made out against the dark background.

With the retrieval of the remaining cameras quickly completed, some of us are now back at base where we have been changing batteries and film and testing the cameras ready to take them out to the new quadrat over the next couple of days. Meanwhile Alice, Robin and Ali have taken the boat over to quadrat 3 with Marcelo to talk to the inhabitants over there and arrange a boat pick-up for us tomorrow morning so we can all head over for a full-scale recce of our new terrain.

25 November

Three days of sunshine and sweltering heat have meant a run of good days out in the field. Robin, Ali and Alice made a full scale recce of 'Peccary Island' on Wednesday, exploring all corners, setting five camera traps and confirming its island status i.e. no overland trails. They found armadillo, fox and racoon tracks and spoke of a pungent smell of 'cat' in several locations. The rest of the team went over to quadrat 3, walked the hilly Rua Iguaçu and established more camera traps.

On Thursday we returned to quadrat 3 and took the remaining cameras. Having got used to fairly rapid lunches under the canopy with our mosquito friends, we were really pleased to discover the end of the main trail in quadrat 3 with a couple of habitations and open land, great for bird-spotting and with amazing views of the surrounding mountains.

Yesterday (National River Day) saw a gathering of local NGOs at a settlement about three hours by boat from here. Marcelo took one team over to attend the meeting and inform them of the work we are doing here. Even if the proceedings were obviously in Portuguese, it was a good chance to share our discoveries (notably the complete lack of animals in our research area!) and get in touch with the local environmental police and other members of the local community working in conservation and interested in the potential development of ecotourism in this area. Meanwhile the rest of us set off on another exploration trek, this time to the end of quadrat 2 as far as the wide track and then off on new trails in search of the fabled jaguar river. The locals have talked to us about this spot, which we hoped we would be able to reach on foot. Though we managed a good 15 km, we found our progress hampered in both directions by impassable rivers. The GPS map is proving - very useful for logging these new trails and letting us see where we've been in relation to the surrounding topography. Tomorrow will be a rest day, but we're going to hire a local guide for Monday to reveal the navigable trail to this new spot.

Three dry nights have meant plenty of opportunity for spotting animal tracks. Hopefully the rain will continue to hold off so we can take the boat along the waterways tonight and fine tune our animal spotting skills by torchlight!

30 November

With our batteries recharged after a rest on Sunday we were ready to launch in to Monday's activities despite the steady rains. Thanks to local knowledge of one of the farm workers, Robin, Rich, Alica and I were able to make it over to the distant Jaguar River, lunch in a small hovel on the river banks and make it back in record time. The others headed off in the boat in search of a route through the swamplands up towards the mountains which had previously been a possibility for a base camp. No route was found, but the team were enthused by the waterways they had taken through the maze of swamp and reed.

Tuesday was the start of our camera recovery operation. While Rich and Brian recovered the closer cameras of quadrat 2, Ali and Tom managed to bring back all of the cameras from quadrat 3, having great fun making their way back through the underwater track. This day was my chance to discover the charms of Peccary Island as I headed off with the team to recover the five cameras planted over there (one of which contains a good shot of an armadillo). Despite its fearsome reputation as a tick haven, we benefited from the previous groups who had cleared decent paths and built up a good picture of the trails so we escaped fairly unscathed.

George, Brian and Tom had a tougher time getting the further cameras back from quadrat 2 on Wednesday, wading thigh high through the waterways. Robin, Rich and I took the softer option of driving the boat an hour down river with Olga to find the 'Jungle Bar', a favourite weekend haunt of the farm workers, to get in some supplies of our favourite singing wine and cachaça for our upcoming last-night celebrations. We were quite surprised to find ourselves in a very civilised little establishment in the middle of 'Banana City', a vast banana-producing swathe of land. We were able even to buy a large block of ice which survived the return journey back to base and made a refreshing addition to our afternoon/evening caipirinhas.

All cameras were skillfully recovered!

2 December

My last diary entry comes to you from the departure lounge at Sao Paulo airport. Packing up camp and shuttling the supplies down to the boat for the return to Matinhos and on to Curitiba went very smoothly and we had a great last night in the Matinhos pizzeria and down by the beach. Marcelo, Ali, Tom and I then had our last 'putting the expedition/world to rights' session at the Holiday Inn last night (as well as making detailed plans for Marcelo's much-mentioned dream Sumatran expedition!). Tom said last night that it was the mud and rain that really made the expedition special for him. Maybe he'd had too much wine by that stage! In any case, only a day out of the jungle and we were already reminiscing about our days staggering through the undergrowth, getting covered in ticks, pulling out the worm from George's toe, not to mention the evenings holed up in our cabin with 'kashaaasa' and Uno. The night Ali spent lying awake hammering SOS morsecode on to the platform for three hours due to suspected large cat outside her tent probably deserves some kind of diary mention as well. And Marcelo also says that he heard a large cat roar on the same night...we'll have to see what kind of mention it gets in the report!?

Thanks to everybody for all their hard work and enthusiasm, and all their tips and suggestions for next year's expedition (thigh-high waders were quite high on the list – or perhaps just plain old webbed feet - along with more hammocks for test-driving when back at base!). Marcelo is already enthusing about his further plans and ideas for 'getting beyond Peccary Island' and perhaps even introducing Land Rover based activities from Banana City. I shall back at Biosphere's German office on Monday so will be bringing Matthias up-to-date of all our discoveries, adventures and ideas! Best wishes and Merry Christmas...!