

“Dan’s River Journal”

I left Manaus on 17th of April, at 6:30am, and arrived in Barcelos, Amazonas, Brasil at 7:30am the same day. I went up to Barcelos to accompany Pastor Valcides, a national Missionary, on a river trip from Barcelos up to Santa Isabel for a Bible Conference to be held there in the Igreja Batista 24 de Dezembro. The conference was to start on Saturday morning, the 26th of April. We planned to leave Barcelos on the 22nd in an 18ft. john boat with a 30hp motor. So, between the 17th and the 22nd, we planned some other short trips and meetings over the Easter weekend.

On Friday morning, the 18th, we loaded up in Pastor Valcides’ little john boat and headed down the Rio Negro River about an hour to a little village called Manacuaca. There we planned to have a church service (culto). Anytime you get out of the cities, in the Amazon region, even the small towns, you will see many villages with people who are living, what I call, “semi-primitive”! Manacuaca was no exception. They live in palm leaf huts, built up off the ground, have no electricity, no running water (except what is “running” in the river), and cook on an open fire on sticks. They live with less than we would have on a weekend “roughing it” camping trip in the states!

When we arrived, they were very excited! The word spread, and within 30-45 minutes, people started to arrive in wooden canoes and walk down trails, until we had over 30 people present to hear the Word of God, spoken, and in song.



After a brief time of singing, I sang “He Touched Me”, in Portuguese. Pastor Valcides preach about the Death, the Burial, and the Resurrection of Christ. The people were very attentive. Valcides then gave a time of invitation and 3 people came forward, in this little “house” that we were meeting in, and each one said, “I want to rededicate my life to Christ”!!!!



Isaquel, Maria Arberta, Valcenir

Two of them were under the age of 21 and one probably around 40 years old. We were so excited!!!! After a time of prayer and explaining exactly what it meant to “rededicate” your life to Christ, we began to prepare lunch. There were with Valcides and me, about 6 members of Pastor Valcides’ church there in Barcelos. He has a very mission minded group of people there. The women began to cut up chickens and crack open turtles, while some of the teenagers (guys) began to gather wood and start a fire to cook on. We had a great time of fellowship and food with this small group of Ingatu Indians, there down river from the city of Barcelos. We finished up and headed for Barcelos about 2:30pm. We are still in the rainy season so, yes, it rained on us nearly all the way back to Barcelos. We just rested up the remainder of the day. Those river trips are very taxing on the body, especially this American.....!

Saturday, the 19th, Pastor Valcides and I made several visits. Barcelos has been plagued with a rash of suicide attempts over the past few months. Most of them have been young people! Pastor Valcides is very well known and well respected in Barcelos and the region. Every time he would hear of an attempt by someone to take their own life, he would make every attempt to find out all the particulars concerning each incident. He had been planning for the past few weeks to have a special youth meeting on Saturday night, the 19th, for the main purpose of getting those people, who have tried to take their lives and not succeeded, in church so they can hear the Gospel. That Saturday, he and I made several visits to these people, to invite them again to the service. All of them said that they would come. Two of these were a mother and her daughter. The mother attempted suicide one day and a week later the 16 year old daughter tried. Praise the Lord, they were not successful! That night we had a packed house...! We sang and worshipped the Lord. The whole service was geared toward Jesus being our ever present help in times of trouble. We sang a song that I have never heard before. It was great, a very powerful song. It talks about *a person that is so lonely, in anguish, a person that has no reason to live, you don’t have to stay like this. There exists a Person that suffered in your place, believe Him, He is life. He will extend His hand, He will embrace you and calm your heart, He will lift you up and stay by your side forever. Believe in this Great Love that suffered until He died for me to save.* We sang this song 2 or 3 times during the service, and you could feel the Holy Spirit moving. Then just before Pastor Valcides preached I sang *The Anchor Holds*, in Portuguese. That night was the first time I had sung this song in Portuguese. As I sang, I looked out over the crowd and saw several with tears flowing freely. Pastor Valcides preached and gave the invitation. Several young people came forward. One came forward for salvation and the others for prayer. Please pray for these young people. We had a great service that night.



Saturday night service

By the way, that Saturday afternoon they had 105 kids in their Bible Club with 24 decisions for Christ! What a blessing to see all those kids in church. Saturday was a totally good day!! (Oh! Saturday, for lunch we had something that I have never eaten before. We ate PACA. Paca is that large animal that you have all seen in zoos and on the TV that looks like a giant rat, except it has a fat snout! We had that for lunch!)

Sunday morning, April 20th, we had over 80 people in Sunday School! I taught the adult class which was an experience in itself. In Brasil, Sunday mornings are usually just Sunday School. I taught the Adult Class. Sunday nights in Brasil are your largest crowds. That Sunday night we had a full house-I would guess somewhere in the neighborhood of 100 plus! THAT is a large crowd for Brasil, especially in the interior. I sang again and Pastor Valcides preached, and again, several decisions for Christ were made. Another great day!

Monday the 21st was a holiday. We had planned to go down the Rio Negro about 30 minutes past the village of Manacuaca, (where we went on Friday), to hold another service and have a time of fellowship, soccer and food. Pastor Valcides made an announcement Sunday night about our plans to go to the village of Boiaseca ("snake with two heads"), and hold a church service, play soccer, and eat. He asked if anyone would like to go. Within a few minutes, we had 3 boats and several promising to show up in the morning at 8:00am to leave. When the morning came, sure enough, we had 3 john boats and 22 people wanting to go. We divided everyone up among the 3 boats, as well as the food and headed down river for a 1 ½ hour ride.



We are going to church in Boiaseca, I am in the boat on the right, (taking the picture)

We had a little rain, but not much. When we arrived, everyone in Boiaseca was excited and waiting. We ended up with about 45 people in the service, which we held in the little one room schoolhouse. Pastor Marcos preached and although no decisions were made, publicly, the seed was sown.



Meeting in the one room schoolhouse

After the service, many of the guys divided up to play soccer...and I got sucked into it! I have never played soccer in my life, so they put me as Goalie! WE WON!!!! We then were called in to the cooking area of the village to eat lunch. We had chicken, calabresa, turtle, farinha, rice, beans. For these people, this was a feast of great magnitude!!



If you will look close, you will see Chicken, Sausage, Turtle, and all the trimmings!



This is the kitchen in Boiaseca!

We finished with lunch and cleaned up everything and about 3:00pm, loaded up our 3 john boats and headed up river for Barcelos. The trip back to Barcelos would take about 2 ½ hours. We encountered quite a bit of rain, but no wind or rough water. After we arrived back in Barcelos, we rested the remainder of the day and made preparations for our BIG trip the next morning for Santa Isabel.



**During the rainy season the weather can change quite suddenly!
You will hear more about that later!!!!**

Tuesday morning the 22nd came, and we found ourselves running around like a bunch of chickens with their heads cut off. Our plan was to leave Barcelos at 1:00pm. We had to buy food, water, soft drinks, etc. for four guys. Going on the trip would be Pastor Valcides, Pastor Marcos (an American missionary there in Barcelos), and Bro. Yumberto. We did most of our running around in the rain, on bicycles. We had lunch and the rain was pouring. We didn't want to leave in the rain, even though we would probably get rained on anyway and be soaked. We just didn't want to load the boat in the rain. Finally, about 2:30pm, the rain stopped long enough for us to get everything loaded and get our gasoline. There is no place to buy gas along the way to Santa Isabel, so we have to make sure we take enough with us. So, now we are loaded, gassed up with 50 gallons of gasoline, and we are on our way to Baturité!



We are loaded up, getting gas, trying to beat the rain! Mark is sitting facing the camera, Pastor Valcides is standing with his back to the camera, and Bro. Yumberto is hidden by Pastor Valcides. It is 2:30 in the afternoon!

With all of us, our baggage, and gas, we are loaded very heavy for an 18ft john boat! Our plan was to make it to Baturité the first night and have a church service there and spend the night. However, because we were loaded so heavy, we could not travel very fast, so we only made it to the Rio Negro Lodge.



The Rio Negro Lodge is owned by an American. It is a fishing resort here in the Amazon Region of Northern Brasil- it is a very “high class” resort. I have known about this place for several years. When I worked at Elliott’s Hardware, I sold the owner of this lodge, Philip Marsteller, some decorative lighting for the Amazon Queen, his river boat here. Anyway, we met with Mike the foreman, because Philip was in Manaus, and asked him if we could have a church service with his workers. He said sure that would be fine. Then he said that we could spend the night there, so he let us stay in one of the cabins. It was great! We had running hot water they even fed us supper, so we didn’t have to cook anything! We had the service in the cafeteria. There were about 22 workers that showed up. As I preached, they were very attentive and there were a few that appeared to be really thinking about what I was saying. After the service, Mike took us back to our cabin. Marcos, Valcides, Yumberto and I sat up for a while and talked. It was a great time of fellowship and getting to know Pastor Marcos and Yumberto. I couldn’t believe it...here we were in the middle of the Amazon jungle, on a river trip where we usually sleep in hammocks hanging under a thatch roof, take baths in the river, and brush our teeth in the river, but this night, we were sleeping in 4 **queen size beds**, with **sheets and pillows**, a **shower with hot water**, and **electricity**, all **free!!!** This made us all realize again that God is in control, if we will just let Him be in control.

The next morning, Mike took us on a tour of the grounds. It is quite a set up! They have over 15 miles of paths that wind their way through the property, a dentist’s office with a Dentist, a doctor’s office with a Doctor, a research lab, and a school with 2 teachers. They have a workers community with houses, little roads, electricity, water, sewer, a wood shop, two 450hp Caterpillar generators, 3 water wells, (1 for watering the plants and 2 for drinking water), a large garden, (they grow all their own vegetables), and during the fishing season, they employ over 200 nationals, most of which are from the local villages. It is essentially, a small town out in the middle of the jungle.

We left the Rio Negro Lodge that morning about 9:00 headed on up river. We had to make a quick stop in Baturité, because somewhere along the way, Valcides lost his paddle for his boat. We knew that the Indians there would have an extra one to sell. We were there for only about 20 minutes, and then we headed for Nazaré. Nazaré is a small village about 6 hours up from Baturité. Nazaré is on an island in the middle of the Rio Negro River. We arrived there about 6:00pm as the sun was just going down. We met with the captain of the village and asked if we could have a service there that night and then spend the night. We talked about it for a few minutes and then he said yes. We told him we would like to start about 7:30 and he said that it

was ok. We also asked him if there was someone that could cook our food for us. He said yes, so we gave him our meat, some rice and noodles. At 7:00pm, he came over to us and said that the food was ready, and that they would bring it over in a minute. When they brought it over, we prayed and ate quickly. We only had 12 show up for the service, and I preached. To be honest, it seemed a little dead. But, the seed was planted! After the service the captain told us that we would be sleeping in another place. He took us over to another little thatched roof shack with no walls. He said this would be our sleeping place. It was about 14ft. by 20ft. We hung our hammocks and crawled in. What a contrast...the night before we were sleeping in the lap of luxury, and this night we were under a thatch roof in hammocks, no bathroom, no electricity, no running water (except in the river), but we were comfortable. Such is the life of a missionary in the Amazon! The captain of the village had to leave at 3:00am to take a member of the village up to Santa Isabel to the doctor. We asked him to buy us 25 liters of gasoline and drop it off at Acaituba. He said that he would so I gave him the money.

Sometime around 3:00am, it started to rain. It rained "boat loads"! The wind also began to blow and was blowing the rain in on Mark and me. We were getting drenched! We had to get up and move our hammocks. When I put my feet on the ground to get out of my hammock, I discovered that "a river" was flowing through our little "hotel" room!



Our "Hotel Room" in the village of Nazaré.

I moved my hammock, but by now I was wet and cold. I laid back down until about 6:30am. It was still pouring rain when we all got up. We went across to the other little building for breakfast, which consisted of Nescau and cookies that I brought along. We had planned to leave Nazaré early in the day but it was still pouring at 10:30am! The rain started to slack off around 11:30am, and by 12:00 noon, it had almost stopped, so we loaded up and left for Acaituba.

We arrived in Acaituba at 1:30pm. When you arrive in a village like Acaituba, most of the Christians will come, either to the river or to your sleeping place, and say their "hello's"! So far, the captain of Nazaré had not left us our gas! After we visited a while, we hung our hammocks and rested for a bit. After resting, we got together a game of volley ball. We played until the sun was almost gone and then everyone made a run for the river to take a bath. By the time we finished bathing, the captain of Nazaré showed up with our gas! We were glad since we had never made this trip loaded this heavy, and it was taking more gas than we thought. We didn't have enough gas to get up to Santa Isabel, and we planned to leave early in the morning.

Acaituba has a Baptist Church there; they don't have a Pastor, but they are very faithful to meet and worship the Lord. The village of Acaituba was started about 30 years ago by a man that Missionary Joe Hawkins led to the Lord. At that time, the man lived up river a little ways. When he got saved, his village ran him off! So he took his family and headed down river, and stopped at this large rocky point to build a home for his family. Since then, the village has grown to over

25 families, and many are faithful believers in Christ. The night that we were there, we had church. I sang, Valcides played the guitar for me, and Mark preached. Those people really like to sing! After the service, the leader of the church, Rosilano, came up to us and told us about a woman who had a small child-I am guessing 1 ½ years old-that was sick and she wanted us to pray for her. We said ok and had a word of prayer. Afterwards, we headed down the muddy, dark trail to our sleeping area. A few minutes after we got back to our hammocks, Rosilano came up to us and said that he had forgotten that there was another sick child in the village that the parents wanted us to come and pray for. He said that she had been sick for over a year. We said sure, so we gathered our Bibles and flashlights and headed back up the muddy trail. We arrived at a mud house with a thatch roof. They invited us in and we followed the Dad to the back of the house where we saw a hammock hanging. When we entered the room, we were met by an extremely foul odor. Lying in the hammock, in a dark corner of the room, was the most pitiful, heart wrenching sight that I have ever seen in my 46 years! The odor was almost unbearable. In fact, during the prayer, I had to put my face in my hand so I could smell something else besides the odor that was in the room! We shined our flashlights in to see the 8 year old girl....we were horrified! There lay a little girl, wrapped in a blanket, with her arms, neck and head exposed. All the skin on her tiny, frail body was falling off in large sections...! Her hair was gone and in its place were large, thick scabs. She was so weak that she could not get out of the hammock. She was so thin that she looked like a skeleton with skin draped over it. She just lay there in that dirty hammock, staring up. We fought back tears and managed to keep from gagging as we prayed for the little girl and her family. Our little john boat was loaded to over max, or we would have loaded her up and taken her to Santa Isabel. We told the family that when we arrived in Santa Isabel we would talk to the health officials, because they have a medical system set up just for situations of this nature. They have a speed boat that they use to go to these villages and get sick people that have no way to get medical help. We got to Santa Isabel and that afternoon they sent the boat. The last we heard, she spent 3 days in the hospital and was responding to the medication, and would be going back to Acaituba by the 29th, and would be outside playing with the other kids soon.....! Praise the Lord!

We left Acaituba, at sun up, (6:00am) and arrived in Santa Isabel about 7:30am, talked to the health officials, and then bought gas. We planned to go across the river on the other side of the island to a place called Paricatuba. On the upper side of Paricatuba, we stopped at Dona Maricota's brother's house. (Dona Maricota helps us here in our house.) His name is Alexandri and he is 84 years old. We visited with him and his wife for a while and then headed on up river to Dona Maricota's cousin's house. We went up there just to see the largest tree on the upper Rio Negro.

Look at the bottom left of the

All the "old timers" in the area HUGE, but it is dying! We left cousin for a while, and headed Alexandri's house.



trunk...I am standing there...

say it is the largest. The tree IS there after visiting with Maricota's back down river towards



This is the island; we have clothes hanging out to dry.

We stopped about a kilometer up from his house on an island to swim, take a bath, and wash clothes. We killed about 1 ½ hours there until it was 12:00 noon, then we loaded up and went on to Alexandri's for lunch. After lunch we visited some more and left there about 2:00pm.

We arrived back in Santa Isabel about 3:30pm on Friday, the 25th. Mark and I stayed in the house of Sr. Francisco and Valcides stayed in the house of Dona Nilda and her 20 year old son. We walked around the town that afternoon and met new people. We were supposed to meet with Elaine Hawkins to work on music for the conference. They asked me to take care of the music and we were scheduled to meet at 7:00pm. When everyone saw the lights on and the doors open, people began to show up, come in, and sit down. By 8:00pm we had a church full of people! They are so accustomed to having church on Friday nights that they just came anyway, even though no service was scheduled. Someone got Valcides, Mark, Joe, and Francivaldo, (the new young Pastor that came to assume the pastorate of the church there), and we had a church service.



minute or two and then Mark and I walked him and Elaine back to the hotel room.

We ate lunch at noon, sharp, both days-fish, chicken and beef-all, of course with noodles, rice and beans.

After the service, I worked with the young people of the church. They had put together a choir, so we practiced for a little over an hour. Mark and I finally got back to our sleeping place a little after 11:00pm. Saturday morning, we had breakfast at 7:00am and the service started at 8:00am. Mark preached first and then Joe Hawkins. Joe started his message and about 8 minutes into it, he nearly passed out. Valcides was up on the platform and help him sit down for a





This is the kitchen there in the I Igreja Batista 24 de Dezembro of Santa Isabel!

I had practice with the young people from 2:00pm until 3:00pm, Saturday and Sunday afternoon. We were getting songs ready for every service-Saturday night, Sunday morning and then Sunday night. I really enjoyed working with them; we had a great time and they could really sing!

The service Saturday night was really good. We had over 250 people there Saturday and Sunday. All were Indians from up and down the Rio Negro River as well as other rivers. It was very exciting for me. Both Saturday and Sunday nights, they would have specials from each village. They would sing in Portuguese and then in their own language.



These are some of the folks from up river, 3 days!



Pastor Francivaldo and his family.

Joe preached Saturday night, Mark and Valcides preached Sunday morning and then Valcides and Joe preached Sunday night. Sunday night was also a service to pass the church “officially” to Pastor Francivaldo.

It was a great service. That church has been struggling for years without a pastor. Mark and I were up Saturday night until 4:00am Sunday morning, just talking. We had a good time of fellowship. We got up Monday morning at 6:00 and headed for the river. By the time we got gas, food, ice, and got everything loaded and were ready to travel, it was almost 8:00am! When we left Santa Isabel, we had good weather and smooth water.

We stopped in Acaituba to pick up Yumberto; he had gone back to Acaituba Sunday night with the rest of the villagers. We didn't go up the bank; because we would have been "stuck" there for a while visiting and we didn't have time. Yumberto had about 35lbs. of farinha, about 40lbs of mangos, plus his bag! We were **really** loaded down. Next, we stopped off at Nazaré. On our way up river, we stopped there and had a service, spent the night and about half of the next day, because of rain. While we were waiting for the rain to stop, we talked with one of the elders of the village, and found out that they make clay pottery. He showed us several pieces that they had made. I told him that on our return trip to Barcelos, on Monday, I would like to stop there and buy some. So, that's why we stopped. Mark and I were the only ones that got out of the boat. Mark ended up buying something, too. We continued on our trip, still with great weather and good water. We stopped about 10:30am to prepare lunch and swim. We were back on the river by noon. Several hours later we also stopped in Baturité so Valcides could pay for his paddle he got on our way up river. We were only stopped there about 15 minutes. The time at this point it was already 4:00pm. We had had good weather for traveling on the river up to this point but that was about to change!

About ½ hour below Baturité, after we rounded a curve, we noticed about 15 miles ahead there were dark clouds, lightening, and rain. Another half hour and the wind started to really pick up. From Baturité to Barcelos is only about 3 ½ hours by boat, so by now we were only about 2 ½ hours from Barcelos. The sun started to set and the clouds were getting very dark, the wind was blowing several miles per hour, it started to rain, and the waves were up to 2 – 2 ½ ft tall, and we had no lights. We had to slow down a little, but we couldn't slow down too much or the waves would come over the bow of the boat. By now, we had moved over as close to the shore as we dared to travel, so if we had to swim, we would have a better chance! We all began to pray for direction and help. Up until now, we had been able to travel just fast enough to stay on top of the water. But now, the sun is down, the wind and rain are peppering us to the point we can hardly keep our eyes open, and the waves are about 3 ½ feet tall. Now we can not go fast enough to stay on top of the water. Mark and I were getting hammered by the waves that were coming over the bow of the boat. At this point, we began to look for a cove we could get into for refuge and wait out the storm. About 6:45pm we finally spotted a small cove. As we turned into it, there were tree tops and logs everywhere, but we managed to get in and find a place to pull the boat up on the mud and wait. We waited there for a little over an hour. At about 8:00, we noticed the wind and rain were settling down, as well as the water. We loaded up and shoved off. About 30 minutes into this part of the trip, the wind and rain stopped, the water was almost smooth and about 40 minutes later we were pulling into the port of Barcelos. We arrived in Barcelos about 9:15pm, only 3 hours late! The cove where we stopped was only about 20 miles from Barcelos...but at night, on the river, in the jungle, in the middle of a tropical storm, that 20 miles may as well have been 200 miles! When we pulled in we all shouted "**HALLELUJAH!**" We were thankful for God's protection and guidance throughout this journey.

The next morning at 11:20, I boarded a plane and by 12:30pm, I was in Manaus. It's hard to imagine the contrasting cultures here in the country of Brazil. They seem to change from village to village and from town to town, but one thing that never changes is their need to hear the Gospel and to be taught the Word of God.