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# Amazon indians confront UCSD explorer

Two San Diegans draw opposition as they retrace Roosevelt's trek along 'River of Doubt.'

By **Gary Robbins** 7:34 P.M. NOV. 3, 2014 Updated 7:09 A.M. NOV. 4, 2014

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UC San Diego engineering professor Marc Meyers *Courtesy of Jeffrey Lehmann*

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*UC San Diego engineer Marc Meyers and Emmy Award-winning Del Mar filmmaker Jeffrey Lehmann are traveling on the Roosevelt River -- or the 'River of Doubt' -- in Brazil, retracing the path that Theodore Roosevelt followed a century ago. Meyers and Lehmann are sending periodic dispatches to the U-T from the jungle. This dispatch was received on Nov. 1.*

We were descending the river after the Naivete falls when we were met by a power boat carrying six (Cinta Larga) Indians. They did not respond to our friendly greetings and one of them photographed us. Upon arrival at the Cinta Larga Village, Sargent Douglas, our contact in Vilhena, told us that there was trouble. Soon an Indian wearing a

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feather headband and followed by a group of children crossed the bridge. Joao Brabo ( Mean John) faced us and, with a stern posture, stated a long discourse in his native language, staring at us with anger and contempt. |We did not understand the words but the tone was clear. We did not have the right to invade his lands.

We gave him a gift, which he accepted and asked his permission to distribute candy to the kids. This broke the ice but he was emphatic when we repeated our request. We had no option but to load our gear and drive off. Upon stopping at the Federal Police Camp Diamante, the officer informed us that that group had been responsible for the **death of over 120 diamond miners**. He also informed us that they had threatened to burn the post. We also learned the Cinta Larga allows diamond miners to enter their territory only after they pay \$3,000. When disagreements about percentages are not peacefully resolved, people die.

In addition to the illegal logging in their territory, they are involved in diamond mining. So, we felt relieved to be out of their territory. We bypassed it and re-launched 100 miles downstream. We have now been paddling for five days, covering an average of about 20 miles a day. It is a very hard job, since the river is hardly flowing in portions interspersed with rapids and waterfalls. We are learning how to overcome these difficult barriers using three methods: running the rapids when possible, using ropes to slowly lower the boats, or (as a last



Filmmaker Jeffrey  
Lehmann Barnstormer  
Productions

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resort) portaging. The scenery is marvelous and there is wildlife everywhere. We constantly see and hear parrots, we paddled among the endangered Giant River Otter, watched a tapir, and have seen many more. We are enjoying the pristine river that has changed very little in 100 years.


(Note: The river is today known as the Roosevelt River.)

Oct. 27th installment: Rough start for UCSD expedition





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**RIVER OF DOUBT**    

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**Michael Lehmann** · San Diego, California

Jeffrey is a pro with the camera and a seasoned traveler. I can't wait to see the footage and hear the stories.

Reply · Like · November 8, 2014 at 7:25pm



**Adam Posik** · ★ Top Commenter · Vista High

What a cool story. Hoped they gopro'ed the tense exchange with the natives and the trek downstream.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · November 3, 2014 at 8:21pm



**Gary Robbins** · ★ Top Commenter · Science and defense writer at U-T San Diego · 193 followers

Jeffrey is taking a lot of video. But they are in such a remote region, they don't have a way to transmit it back yet. But they will, eventually.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 1 · November 4, 2014 at 6:44am

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