

World's Highest Waterfall

Part 2 – River Journey to the Angel Falls



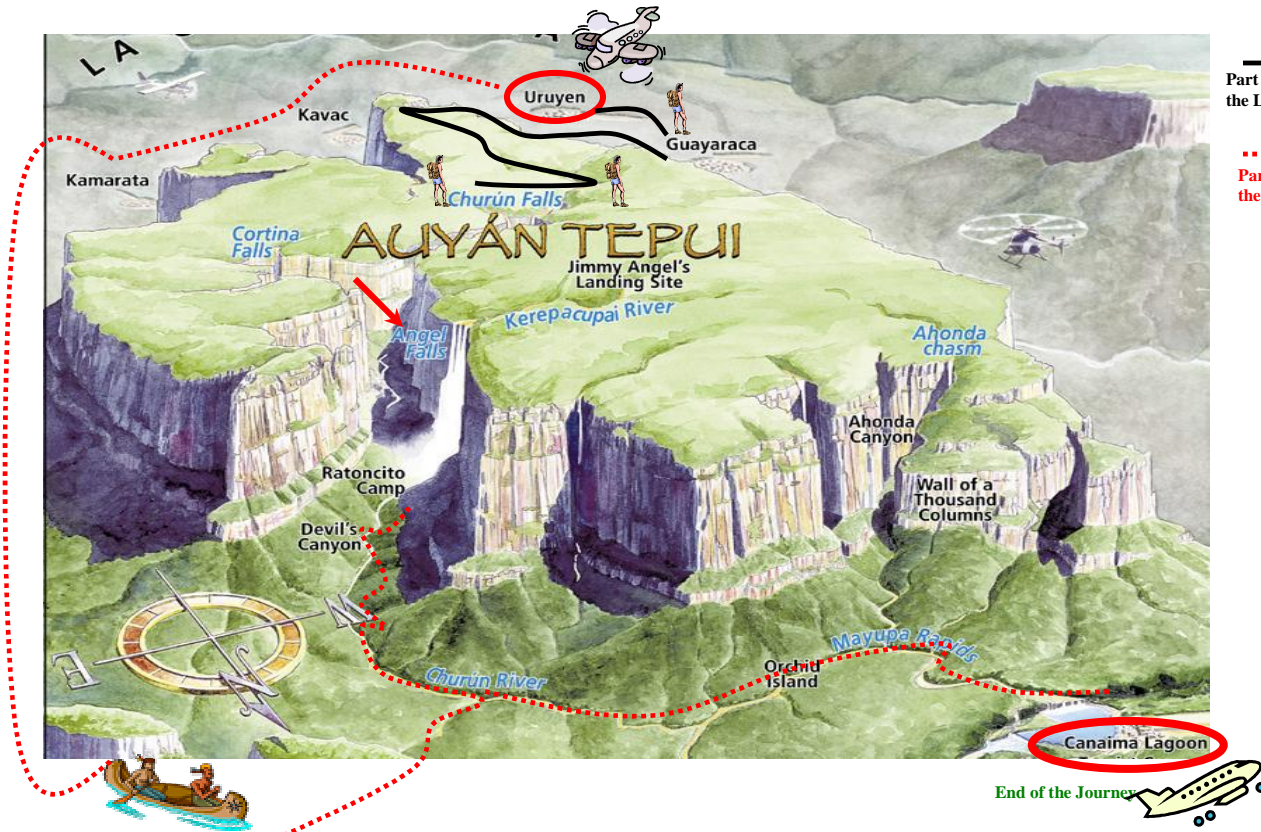
The Eighth Natural Wonder

About 20 times higher than Niagara Falls and more than twice the height of the Empire State building, spurting from a cliff nearly a mile high in the jungle fastnesses of eastern Venezuela is Angel falls, world's highest waterfall. Its total drop is 3,212 feet!

*November 30, 2005
by Chi S. Chan*



Beginning of the Journey



Part # 1 – Journey to the Lost World,

Part # 2 – Journey to the Angel Falls

End of the Journey

Our Journey to the Angel Falls

After completing the trek to the summit of Auyan Tepui¹, our group left Uruyen and traveled to the north side of the mountain to view the Angle Falls. We first drove to the village of Kavac, passed the beautiful Kamarata valley, then boarded on a dugout canoe, which took us down to the famous Churun River and eventually led us to the base of Angel Falls. This part of the journey was very relaxing. After 7 days' strenuous hike to the summit of the Lost World, it was a nice way to wind down my vacation.

The Sacred Land

The native name of this magnificent waterfall, given by the Pemon, is Kerepacupai Meru. Kerepacupai means, "The deepest place," while Meru means, "falls". The Pemon probably knew the existence of this waterfall before the "white men" entered into their lands. The Tepuis are the home of "marawiton" spirits. The native Indians are in awe of those mountains. They fear to approach them, claiming that evil and mischievous spirits lurked there. They named Auyan Tepui as "Devil's Mountain" and the narrow canyon that leads to the falls as "Devil's Canyon". Before 1949, the natives had never been up to the Devil's canyon or set foot to the base of the falls. The "deepest place" as they described was well hidden from the outside world.



¹ See part #1 - Journey to the Lost World



Early reference to the Waterfall

“Venezuela is a land to be so rich in gold that the natives powered themselves with gold dust.” Sir Walter Raleigh, is credited with the first record of Venezuela Tepui, and also, in some sources, of Angel Falls itself. Born in England in 1552, he was an explorer, sailor, pirate, scientist, and historian. Returned to England in 1590, he went on to tell of a crystal mountain that he saw in Venezuela. The mountain, as he described, covered with diamonds, gold and other precious stones and where waters gushing down to its valley. He claimed to hear *"a terrible noise and clamour, as if one thousand great bells were knocked one against another"*

His description of the mountain is deemed to be the earliest written reference to a Tepui and the gold and diamonds he mentioned are indeed the treasures buried underneath the emerald forests of Venezuela. Possibly, “the waters gushing down,” as he pointed out, is the world highest waterfall that was first ever witnessed by a white man.



Discovery of Angel Falls

Perhaps it would be more poetic if the name Angle Falls derived from a mysterious Indian legendary figure, or resonant the shape of the white plume cascading down from the Heaven. The truth, however, is far more entertaining, and, in a land rich in gold and diamonds, far more appropriate.

In 1921, J. R. McCracken, an explorer, contracted a Canadian Air Force pilot called Jimmie Angel, to fly down to the Venezuelan jungle. McCracken was secret about the place they were going. He neither showed Jimmie a map nor gave him a detail description of the area. He simply told Jimmie where to go. Jimmie did as he was told, eventually landing his plane on top of a Tepui. McCracken proceeded to pan a river, and fill a sack full of gold nuggets. So many, in fact, Angel feared they would not be able to take off again with the extra weight. They returned to Caracas, and McCracken paid Jimmie the money he had promised him: \$3,000, huge sums back then.

Jimmie never forgot the “River of Gold”. Over the following years, Jimmie returned to the area many times and searched for that remote mountaintop. One of those trips took him into a dead end canyon where he stumbled upon the world’s highest waterfall.

It was the year of 1935; Jimmie had been flying around the labyrinth of cliffs and canyons surrounding a huge plateau, called Auyan Tepui. Through the mist, he saw a column of water so high that he turned to look. Jimmie estimated the waterfall to be a mile high; it dwarfed his tiny plane. He returned to Caracas and told his discovery. Not many had believed his story of the gold before, and not many believed his discovery of the waterfall this time either.

Not until 20 years later, an expedition was sent by the National Geographic Society to measure the waterfall and recognized it as one of the world’s great natural wonders. Jimmie Angle then became famous for his discovery. After his death in 1956, Jimmie’s ashes were scattered over the falls. It is a peculiar irony, thought that a waterfall from Devil’s Mountain should come to bear the name of Angel.



Early Exploration to Angel Falls

In 1949, a young and brave American female journalist, Ruth Robertson organized and led an expedition to the falls. With the help of the local Pemon, she trekked through deep Venezuelan jungle and traveled to a place where no woman ever dared to reach before. She later wrote an article about her journey and National Geographic Magazine published it on the November 1949 issue. Reading her journal, I can imagine how difficult it must be for a woman venturing to a place that was so inaccessible and forbidden half a century ago. Her detail accounts of the eerie forest, the murky water of Rio Carrao, the stunning vista along the Churun River, the mystifying tales of Devil's Canyon, the exceptional character of the Pemon, and finally the unimaginable waterfall, all slowly but surely came back to life before me as I retraced her footsteps to the Angle Falls.

Packing

After all the drinking and celebration last night, Carlucho² told us we would not be leaving so early next morning. I spent the entire morning sorting out and repacking my luggage. The sun in Venezuela was very strong; all the wash that I did was completely dry in 2 hours under the hot sun. It was nice to have some clean clothing to wear again. Alexander³ showed up around 10:00 am that morning. I was very happy to see him again. He was watching me so I waved to say hello.



Around 11:00 am, Carlucho asked us to load all our gears on a pick up truck, a 4x4 brakeless vehicle. Although the condition of the truck is so poor, it is a luxury and an essential item for the locals. Originally, the truck was flown in by plane in pieces and subsequently assembled back together. It is now served partly as transportation for the tourists and partly as a commuter vehicle for the locals. What took Alexander two hours to walk home last night, only took him 10 minutes to drive here this morning.

We were scheduled to visit Kavak by noon, another small Indian village, perhaps visited another interesting canyon, depending on the weather as Carlucho said. Afterward, we would continue on to Kamarata, a much bigger Indian community where Alexander and most of our Indian porters live. As we got on the truck, a few locals joined us for the ride. My teammate, Jenn and I sat in the front next to Alexander to avoid the direct heat from the sun. I was already very dark and did not want any more sun bathing. The two boys; Giles and Edward together with Carlucho and the Indians were drinking and laughing at the back of the truck.

² Carlucho, our Spanish guide.

³ Alexander, our assistant guide, a native Pemon Indian

Rough Ride

Alexander took us through some extremely rutted and bumpy ride over the rolling savannah. There were no clear paths, no paved roads, no bridges, not even a decent dirt road to follow, just jeep tracks. They were un-maintained and were very rough to ride on. After crossing a few rocky hills and flooded swamps, I realized it was a big mistake to sit in the front. I was terrified at one point when the vehicle was tilted to a nearly 45-degree angle. I thought the truck was about to flip over. The boys and Carlucho, however, were enjoying the ride. I could hear them cheering and shouting at the back of the truck every time when we rode over some bumpy hills. Jenn and I were just petrified.



Alexander is a very skill driver but on a few occasions, he asked me to hold on the shift stick for him so he could concentrate on putting the wheels on a right spot. The most scaring part of the ride was to cross the streams. Numerous times, we barely made it across. The rivers, although quite shallow, were wide. Before each crossing, Alexander would slow down the vehicle nearly to a halt, and then advanced cautiously. Sometimes, he would say a few words to Carlucho and one of the younger Indian boys would jump out of the vehicle, placed a few rocks or logs underneath the wheels. Each time, with great effort, Alexander managed to restart the vehicle. Outside the village of Kava, our luck finally ran out.

Alexander was struggling with the steering wheel while Jenn and I were rocking back and forth, swinging left and right beside him, trying so hard to maintain our balances. All the sudden, the vehicle took a deep nosedive, and next thing I knew was, we were in the middle of the river. The young Indian boy jumped out of the truck and did what he was supposed to do, but the car would not start this time. Alexander, Carlucho and all the passengers went out to help. I had a bad feeling about this but just quietly retired myself to the riverbank, sat there and waited for the miracle to happen.

All the men start unloading our luggage and supplies. They lifted the truck and let Alexander dive under the water. Few seconds later, Alexander reappeared to the surface holding a piece of metal in his hand. I did not know what it was but everyone just cried out with disappointment. After about an hour, Alexander managed to re-install the metal and the truck was moving again. It was the good news, but the bad news was yet to come.....

Kamarata Valley

After a quick lunch stop in Kava, we were back on the Toyota heading towards Kamarata Valley where Alexander calls home. The ride towards Kamarata was very pleasant. The vast savannah stretched across the hill covering with scrub vegetation, mostly small trees and green bushes. Occasionally, we saw white orchids; yellow flycatchers dart from tree to tree, and grass flowers covered the entire open field.



Kamarata is located near to the eastern wall of Auyan Tepui. During the drive, we could see the impressive line of the Tepui appearing on the horizon. The dramatic forms of the mountain, like a row of irregular teeth, dominated the entire western sky. It loomed above the forest and a small Indian village just quietly rested right underneath. It was a peaceful setting. The landscape mirrors a daily life of the Pemon.

Pemon Culture & Their Noble Character

A typical Pemon community is comprised of between 7 and 50 persons, consisting of one or more families. The idea of very large communities is strange in Pemon culture. They live on fishing, hunting and farming. They are impassive, proud, and regal, moving effortlessly through the jungle and the vast savannah. Pemon Indians are exquisitely equipped to survive in their environment. Carlucho told us, the Pemons have a very different culture and language from ours. Their language is extremely difficult to learn. Perhaps the difficulty is an advantage, or their culture might be assimilated, losing their individuality forever.



The Venezuelan government has done a wonderful job by letting the Pemon Indians alone. The native Indians have not been moved to desolate venues with no means of support. While they are given a choice to live as they wish, they are also entitled to receive the same benefits as people living in Caracas, although not so convenient to obtain. Traveling from one village to another usually requires 4-5 hours walk. For medical emergency, a helicopter is flown in to take them to the city.

Carlucho once told me a story about a well-educated Pemon woman returning to her village after spending a few years in Caracas. She gave up the modern life in the hustle and bustle city and chose to live a peaceful life with her family back in the jungle.

Our Alexander is also another example of the Pemon's choice of living. He once lived with an English family for two years in Caracas when he was a teenage boy. Now he is back to his people and prepares himself to be a future Pemon tribe leader.



Here, in the depths of the forest, lives of the Pemon are virtually unchanged for centuries, in houses whose basic ingenuity and aesthetic beauty are startling. I just wish the Pemon culture and their noble characters, as if the ancient Tepuis, forever lost in times and will never be tamed by the modern world.

Boarding to a Dugout Canoe

Alexander took us to a little shop in Kamarata so Edwards and Giles could purchase some new batteries. Having spent 7 days in the remote jungle, we seemed to arrive back to the heart of civilization in Kamarata, but the reality was, Kamarata is very much out of a limb. Virtually all the visitors to this remote community either come by river, walk, or fly in on one of many chartered aircrafts. Carlucho urged us to carry on to the river



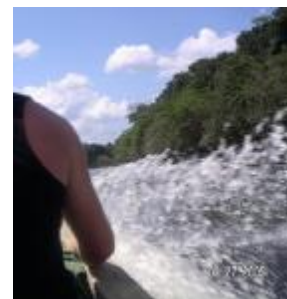
where our boatmen were already waiting for us. Everyone pitched in to help loading our luggage and supplies to a 40 foot motorized dugout canoe. I learned that these canoes are not just for tourists use but commonly used for transportation by the local as well. They are made from long straight hardwood trees that naturally float and last an average of 10 years before rotting. A large one like ours (5 feet in width and 40+ feet long) takes tree men two months to make with hand tools and it can accommodate as many as twelve people

with gears. Our supplies and kit bags were carefully loaded aboard and then covered with a plastic tarpaulin, in case of rain. There were so many puri-puri flies by the riverbank; I must have been bitten a hundred times. My mood was not so good L

Our skill boatmen shoved off the canoe into the middle of the river, and the outboard motor spluttered into life, this was it; the expedition to Angel Falls had begun!

1st Campsite

Our dugout made rapid progress down river. It leaned dramatically from side to side as we just sat and watched the dense rainforest slip past on either side. After a while, a certain amount of water gradually seeped in. At full speed, the water ran to the back. As soon as the power eased back, splash of water would soak through us and the boatmen would be laughing at us with joy.



During the 4 hours on the canoe, I hardly made any conversation with Jenn or Carlucho. It was late afternoon when we left Kamarata. The sun began to set, and I just watched the sky turned from pale blue, to grey, then finally losing all its color. I began to feel sad.

Eventually we reached our destination. We had to walk a short distance along the river to get to our first campsite. We all got out of the canoe and carried our luggage and supplies with the help of the local Indians. Soon we reached a large open sided thatched shelter. The shelter contained a long table in the centre, with wooden benches running all the way round the circular edge of the hut. This was to be home for the night.

BBO in the Bush

As soon as we settled in, our boatmen began to hang up rows of hammocks under the roof. Each hammock had a mosquito net arranged to cover it. Carlucho warned us to keep the mosquito net close all time or we would be bitten alive at night. Although our hammocks were spread out to give each of us a comfortable space, there would be no privacy at all. As for the bathroom stop, Carlucho just pointed to the bush 100feet behind our hut.



The boatmen had lit a fire and had a number of chickens roasting on sticks over the fire.

The sticks were stuck in the ground at 45-degree angle and a special kind of woods was used to build the fire. The chickens were absolutely delicious, having been beautifully spiced during cooking. Carlucho also served us some salad together with Jucca; we had the best meal that night. Darkness fell quickly by the time we finished our supper. Edward took me out to the open air and showed me the Milky Way again. He knew I was a bit sad and wanted to cheer me up. Edward is really a gentle boy. Throughout the whole trip, he was always very tentative to Jenn and I. We stood under millions of twinkling stars and completely enjoyed our surrounding. Gradually, the winking green lights of fireflies appeared everywhere. They were curious about us as we were to them. All the insects in the world, I think firefly is the most welcome of all.

We soon saw lightning flash overhead, and the rumbling sound of the thunder followed. The nightly rainstorm of summer was approaching. It was time to turn in and have my first try sleeping in a hammock.

Sleeping in a Hammock



Sleeping in a hammock is an acquired taste, but worth it for the novelty value. Carlucho gave us a lesson on how to get into it without falling. Getting in for the first time was definitely the worst part, but once safely inside, I found it quite comfortable and relaxing. I enjoyed sleeping in it over the next few days

The rain finally arrived and it built up to a real torrents. The thatched rooftop, however, did not let in a drop. I moved my kit bag directly under my hammock, and went inside the mosquito net to change, assuming in the dark, no one could see me. The unfamiliar sounds of the forest kept me awake for a while, until fatigue took over and I slept soundly inside the hammock. I realized how snug and dream-inducing hammock could be.

Carrao River

At dawn, I was awaked by the smell of Carlucho's coffee. With his excellent skill of cooking, Carlucho turned every morning into such a delicious moment. Today, he cooked us the Indian pancake that Alexander once made for us in the jungle. The happy face that Alexander drew on the pancake for me emerged once again from my memories. I smiled as I ate the pancakes.



We left camp early since we would be spending a whole day traveling on the Carrao River. Our wide dugout boat powered by motors glided past the eastern flank of Auyan Tepui. Here were many many great views of the Tepuis as the boat slipped through this spectacular canyon. The heavy rainfall of the last few nights had made waterfalls spring from every mountainside. The flowers and flowering vines on the river grew more beautiful as we went along. There were purple flowers hung everywhere along the riverbank. The river journey was easier than the climb. We were able to relax and absorb the spirit of this secret and beautiful region. The journey settled to an enjoyable pace.

As we progress to the Rio Carrao, the rapids, at certain spots, became too dangerous for us to get through. We had to get out of the boat and walked on the riverbank while the boatmen were maneuvering the dugout through. One time, the boat was over turned by the currents and all our gears were floating everywhere on the river. Luckily, I had all my clothing sealed tightly inside plastic bags.

Side Trips

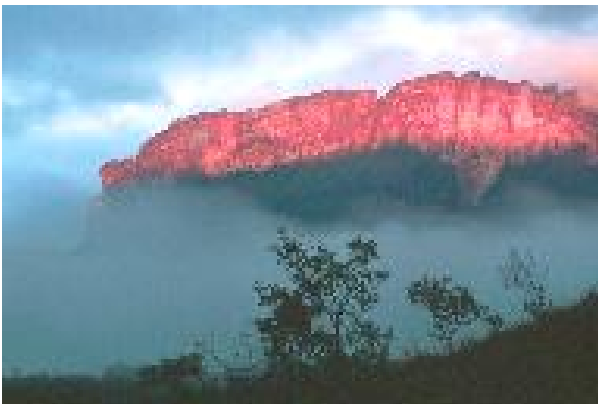
Lunchtime, Carlucho took us to visit a plantation where the Pemons grow cassava (for the Indian breads) and plantains. We made stop at a small house to see how bananas and cassavas are grown and learn about the long process to make the staple cassava bread. Their method of cultivation is still very primitive. Even now, periodic burnings are still being use for farming. After the visit, we set off in the dugout once more, and had only been going for a short while when Carlucho asked us if we wanted to see a DC-3 that had crashed on the savannah thirty years ago.



We plodded slowly across a wide-open area of savannah in the strong sunshine. It took us about half hour to reach the crash site. Edward and Giles were both keen to see it. After all, planes that have crashed in the jungle are a kind of stereotypical image of adventure in South America. They both were bouncing on the end of the wing, getting

in and out of the pilot and co-pilot seats while Jenn and I were taking shelter away from the strong afternoon sun.

Leaving the DC-3, we walked a short way over to a small Indian shop near the river. Inside the shop, I immediately recognized a small bracelet that was made of some beautiful red and black seeds. Those were the same seeds that Alexander had given me when he found them on the jungle floor. I picked up two of the bracelets and put them on. The combination of the red and black color reminded me the radiant rock of Auyan Tepui as well as the mythical dark eyes of Alexander.



Auyan Tepui Again

We were back on the river. The rapids got progressively more swift and dangerous. Carlucho wanted us to wear the life jacket starting this point on. The boatmen were very skillful and there were many sections of rapids, which did not look to be feasible, but feasible they prove to be. The scenery also got more and more spectacular as we went further down to the river. Our dugout canoe rounded a Tepui and suddenly, in the

distance, was the north side of Auyan Tepui, the colorful rocks and sheer cliffs looked so familiar to me. It bathed in the late afternoon sunlight. The view was absolutely stunning. One of the great things about this expedition was that the scenery we were enjoying is truly exceptional and only occurs in south east of Venezuela.

Rain, Rain and more Rain!

Around 4 o'clock, the weather began to change. First, we saw lightning flashing behind the Tepui, and then the roaring thunder echoed through the nearby canyons. Directly above us, the late afternoon sunlight however, was still filtering through the clouds. We sensed the storm was approaching, but did not anticipate it to be so imminent. As soon as we had our rain jackets on, it started to rain. A light drizzle lasted only a minute, then it came the downpour. Within seconds, we already soaked to the skin.

We were wet and chilled down quickly on the boat. All we had was a pair of shorts and a T-shirt. The heavy downpour lasted nearly 2 hours. Jenn and I were shivering with our feet soaking deep in the water. Our boat was leaking rapidly. By the time we reached shore, we closed to have hypothermia. We ran towards the shelter, and a bundle of dry wood was spotted inside. The boatmen promptly made us a welcome warm fire. We huddled around the fire, wringing out our wet socks and cloths hanging them over the fire to dry.



After washing off some of the mud, I climbed to my hammock waiting for dinner. I was damp and uncomfortable. It was probably at this moment of the trip that my spirits were at their lowest. With the sound of the falling rain, it was hard to be cheerful; especially without Alexander looking after me.....

Missing Alexander

Although Alexander managed to restart the truck, the vehicle was not completely repaired. Knowing how important the truck was to the locals, Alexander had no choice but stayed behind to fix the car. Carlucho told us the bad news right before we left Kamarata. It was by the Akanan River; Alexander and I parted.

For the 7 days we spent in the jungle, Alexander and I became very fond of each other. The flirtation between us, sometimes, got so intense that I had to restrain myself from talking to him. The day when we had our celebration in Uruyen, while we were bathing in the river, Carlucho approached me with an advice. "Chi, Alexander is very happy that you like him, listen, it is no body's business if you want to have some fun with him". With his wicked smile, half-drunk and half-joking, Carlucho urged me to stop torturing Alexander. "Don't get into the hammock with him again if you have no intention to stay there, you are driving the man crazy Chi!"

Choose to be Free

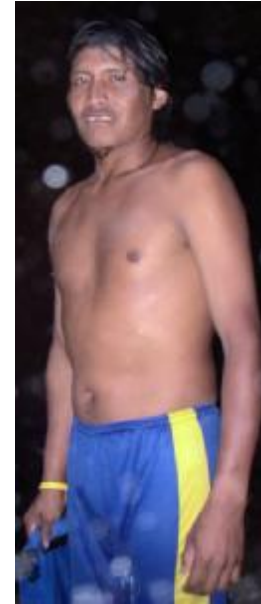


I understood what Carlucho was trying to tell me, and I wish I were true to myself at that moment. Now looking back, I do have some regrets not following my heart.

The time I spent with Alexander was precious, but it would not have lasted, I know. After all, we both come from two different worlds. If I have a choice, I would rather much be a Pemon Indian girl, but the reality is, I am not. After the vacation, I have to return home and face my responsibilities: my job, my mortgage, and my family.

“Struggling with my career and trying to make a better living for myself, I have put my marriage on hold..” or *“I just could not find the right person...”* I wish I could use these excuses to justify why I am still being single, but the shameful true is: I enjoy being single, I do not want to be tied down.

“You always fell for a playboy!” my friend Gloria always scolded me. Yes, I agree, but it really takes one to find one. Although I am not exactly a playgirl, I am definitely not a stay-home mom!



The free spirit of the Pemon is a reflection of my inner self. The “jungle” is the nature I love, the “grand savannah” is the open space I enjoy, the “bathing in the river” is the uninhibited soul I possess and “Alexander” is the dream I have been living in. This journey re-confirms my deepest desire for freedom.

1st glimpse of the Angle Falls

The roaring sound of the red howler monkeys from the forest woke me up early next morning. The rain from last night flooded the forest floor. Water was everywhere. Breakfast this morning was porridge, not exactly what I like, but I gushed it down with a few cups of good Venezuelan coffee.

After the uncomfortable routine of struggling into our wet things, we set off once again on our river journey. Today, the canoe would take us to the Churun River and enter the wide mouth of a gorge, which would narrow down into the canyon leading to Angel Falls. The Churun was running rapidly. Certain shallow spots, we had to get out, walk by the riverbank, and let the boatmen push or pull the dugout through.





Carlucho pointed out that the water in the rivers here was very acid and mosquitoes could not tolerate it, which meant that there would be very few biting insects in this area, which was a good news.

The beauty at the mouth of the gorge was a breath-taking sight but the Indians are superstitious about the Devil's Canyon we were soon to enter. I recalled tales Carlucho once told us about the evil spirits inhabiting around this jungle area. The Indians usually have their faces painted with deep red paste before entering into the canyon. The paste was to make them invisible to the spirits. The boatmen, although did not have their faces painted, they were quiet and solemn as soon as we reached the canyon.

Further down to the canyon, massive walls of rock encircled us, with color that range from deep pinks and reds to mauve. High jagged rims of Auyan Tepui, like an old

friend, once again welcomed us. I caught glimpses of its fantastic pink crags looming out of the cloud and haze, and then, a shout went up ahead. The first view of the falls!

There is no describing what it did to our spirits. We did not have a full view of the falls, but rather a profile from the northeast side, and an outcropping of rock hid the lower part from view. Nevertheless, the sight was stunning! Later in the afternoon, we arrived at a permanent camp near Angel Falls.

Final Campsite

The river around our camp is used much more often by tourists than anywhere we had been so far, and we were amazed to find out how luxury our final campsite was. There were two massive churuatas (Indian huts) built on the bank. The first contained a long table in the center, with wooden benches running all the way round the circular edge of the hut. The second was for sleeping in, and for the first time on the journey, there was a separate toilet further inshore! Carlucho occupied a large corner of the hut for his cooking. He boasted that he was going to cook us the best meal ever.



As we wandered around the first churuata, Edward and Giles discovered a lot of ant-eating beetle traps on the sandy floor. They caught a small ant and showed me how the trap worked. The trap resembles the crater of a volcano with a tiny sand dune in the hollow center. The beetle was hidden inside the sand dune. Giles dropped the ant to the trap, immediately; a small amount of the sand sprout out from the dune and the ant gradually became disorientated. It stumbled around and could not climb out of the trap. We were amazed and continued to play with the traps like some little kids for a while and finally we got bored and let the poor ants alone.

After dinner, I strolled around the river to watch the moon. In the distance on the other side was a classic Tepui. In the moonlight, the small mountain looked like a mysterious dark fortress. Behind the Tepui, I could see forks of lightning shot across the evening sky. A nightly storm was approaching. I went back to my hammock and swayed gently with the breeze. I watched the fireflies glittering around me and drifted off to sleep.



We set off in the dugout once more. Just right around the corner of the Devil's Canyon, I saw a familiar figure standing under a tree by the riverbank. He had the traditional bright red Indian costume wrapped around his waist. While carrying a longbow on his right shoulder, he held a slender pipe gun with his left hand. Our dugout was very fast but I managed to have a second look at him. IT WAS ALEXANDER! I screamed and asked Carlucho to stop the boat, but the boatmen just kept going. With his long black hair flying in the wind, Alexander was running after us and I got even more anxious. "Carlucho, Carlucho, Carrrrrrr....." then, I woke up, it was only a dream.



Right by the Akanan River before we boarded the canoe, we said our goodbye to Alexander. Jenn, Edward and Giles urged me to say a few words to Alexander on behalf of the group. The sudden departure really put me off guard. I had thousand words to say to him but I could not find one. I was so looking forward to have him accompanying us to the river journey, but now...

Finally, I thanked Alexander for taking good care of us and wished him well. Before I could finish my sentence, Alexander moved closer and gentle held me in his arms. I looked into his eyes, and I saw the reflection of Auyan Tepui, a mountain I shall forever remember.



Climb to the base of Angel Falls

We were up fairly early and after breakfast, I put on my mud-encrusted boots again for the first time since the end of the jungle trek. Today, Carlucho would take us to the bottom of Angel Falls. The canoe carried us across the river and we disappeared into the forest. After 15 minutes walk, we began to hear the roar of the falls, but could see nothing because of the jungle growth. 30 minutes later, I caught a glimpse of the top of the falls pouring off near the rim. We re-entered into the dense growth again and climbed upward in that direction. After struggling up the incline and over a jumble of exposed roots and awkward rocks, we came to a break in the forest where a stone ledge looked out on Angle Falls. Carlucho led us carefully onto the smooth rock and there, we had our first full view of the falls. Plunging through jagged rocks a few feet below the canyon rim and nearly a mile in the first unbroken drop roared the falls. Carlucho led us further along the trail. After another 10 minutes hike on a rising path we at last emerged at the very bottom of the falls.

The Eighth Natural Wonder



Towering above us, Angle Falls dressed in a lovely copper pink color. I looked up to the falls and it was so tall then I had to force my neck all the way back in order to see the very top. Millions of dancing droplets swirled as I gazed upon the falls. After the hot walk up, it felt like an angle's wing caressing my face.



At the top of cliff, I could see that there were three or four main jets of water that cascaded off the mountain rim, which were all joined together as one great spray. Near the bottom, the rock face curved and opened out into a smooth bowl shape. I realized the world's tallest waterfall was actually very quiet. Since the drop is so great that very little of the water ever reaches the base of the falls. As the wind blew, the water whirled in spirals and it became spray, carried off by the winds. The mist hit a vast slope covered in boulders. Re-converging into a river, it flowed down through a path and plummeted over a drop, forming a small waterfall and creating a nature swimming hole right underneath.

Everyone in the group went for a swim at this stunning spot and I continued taking lots of pictures of

this spectacle falls. Looking down from where I stood, I could see an endless sea of jungle with Tepuis jutting above it like black icebergs.

Final Night in the Jungle

Exhilarated, we made our way back down to the camp and enjoyed our final night in the bush. Tucked in for the night, I was protected from the vicious little flies and other night insects by a fine-mesh mosquito net. The air was calm, full of the eternal hum of insects. Knowing this would be our last night in the jungle, I stayed awake and did not want the night to end. The droning sounds of the mosquitoes; somehow did not seem to be so annoying tonight. I wrestled with the chill inside my damp hammock and as soon as I had my eyes closed, the images of these two weeks events reappeared over and over. Before long, I drifted off to sleep and had many many dreams till dawn.

The river had risen very high during the last few rainy days and our dugout flew like a bird on top of the water. It was downstream all the way now. The sun came out when we arrived at Canaima. Here, we visited and also walked behind another waterfall. The excitement nevertheless was not as great. The lagoon here is a paradise for most tourists, but for me it marked the end of my adventure. I was sad to be back to civilization again. The small plane took us back to Caracas and I said my final farewell to Carlucho, Jenn, Edward and Giles.



Epilogue

The expedition to Angle Falls had certainly lived up to its “strenuous” rating by World Expeditions. Hiking in the jungle had been a difficult but rewarding experience. I had been privileged and blessed to see the World’s highest waterfall, to climb to the summit of the Lost World, to face to face with a hummingbird in the wild and to learn the culture of the Pemon Indians. The trip had been another unforgettable journey.

I shall forever remember the ancient Tepui and an indigenous Pemon Indian named Jose Alexander. They both reside deep inside the jungle of Venezuela, a place I named my Shangri-la.



The End