



2 The snow-capped Andes abutting lowland tropical rainforest. (*Renata Leite Pittman*)



First views of the Las Piedras River.



An indigenous community on the banks of Las Piedras.



The main deck of the Las Piedras Biodiversity Station.



My first moments with Lulu.



Field notes: walking through the forest with my anteater.



Hammock view of an anteater's afternoon nap.



JJ pulling the boat past a waterfall, giving careful instructions all the while.



Pico, the mad motorista, with his cane, rifle, and signature smile.



The infection: After seeing my face,
I was sure I was dying.



Peccary heads, macaws, spider monkeys, and many other forest
wildlife were found dead in the hands of poachers.



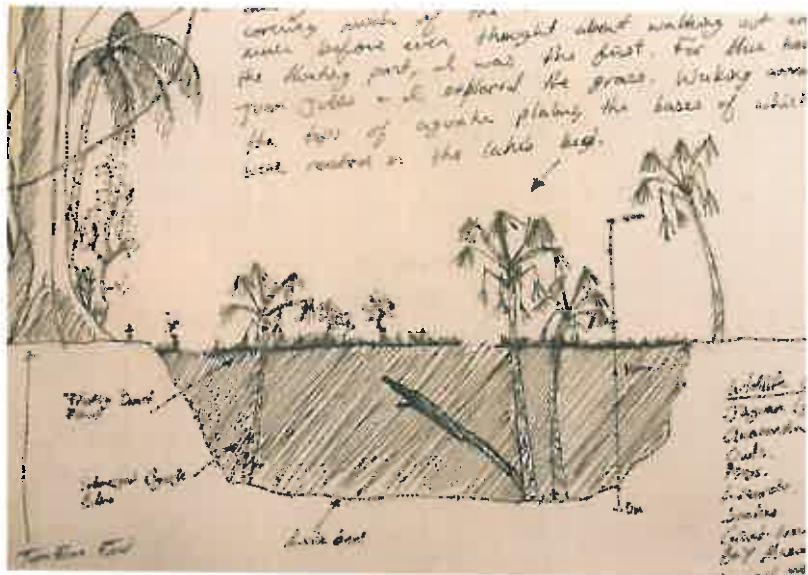
The seemingly endless La Torre winding through the surrounding Bahuaaja-Sonene National Park.



JJ and me with a heavy female anaconda.



Despite their fearsome reputation, anacondas are quite docile when they do not feel threatened. In this video still, a healthy fifteen-foot female allows me to inspect her.



Field notes: a diagram of the floating forest.



A rough map of the Madre de Dios. Protected areas are outlined in green, and stars mark places of note. *From top to bottom:* Las Piedras Station, Infierno, La Torre.

... from the bottom of the lake. ... the secondary ...
... trees can grow to 75 or 100 ft. ...
... on the left of ... the age of the ...
... - indicating the depth of the water. The ...
... of time that makes up the ... forest is ...

The most striking aspect of the floating forest ...
... appears to be a seasonal ...
... The water ... was ... with ...
... of ... trunks. They ...
... to that of an old ... in ...
... (dry season) ... of ...
... however, every season ...
... more information is ...
... of the ... female ...
... of ... with her ...
... male. We caught the male ...
... female was ...



Field notes: the mother of them all. On our first night out in the floating forest, JJ and I encounter a massive female anaconda.



Burnt wreckage in the wake of the Trans-Amazon Highway's creep toward Las Piedras.



The highway grants loggers easy access to the untouched forests of old-growth timber.



The skull of a howler monkey adorned with macaw feathers, in Santiago's hut. It was there that I first learned of the floating forest, the Western Gate, and the legendary anaconda with horns.



While I was lost in the maze-like swamp, the jaguar came within inches of me in the night—close enough that her breath warmed my ear.



A fourteen-foot female anaconda constricting a peccary.
(Gowri Varanashi-Rosolie)



The sweeping bulk of the Tambopata River. *(Tom White)*



An angry female anaconda twists and turns, throwing Gowri, JJ, and me around as we attempt to measure her. You can see her sinking a few teeth into my elbow.



Gowri's first time at Las Piedras.



The skull of a black caiman.



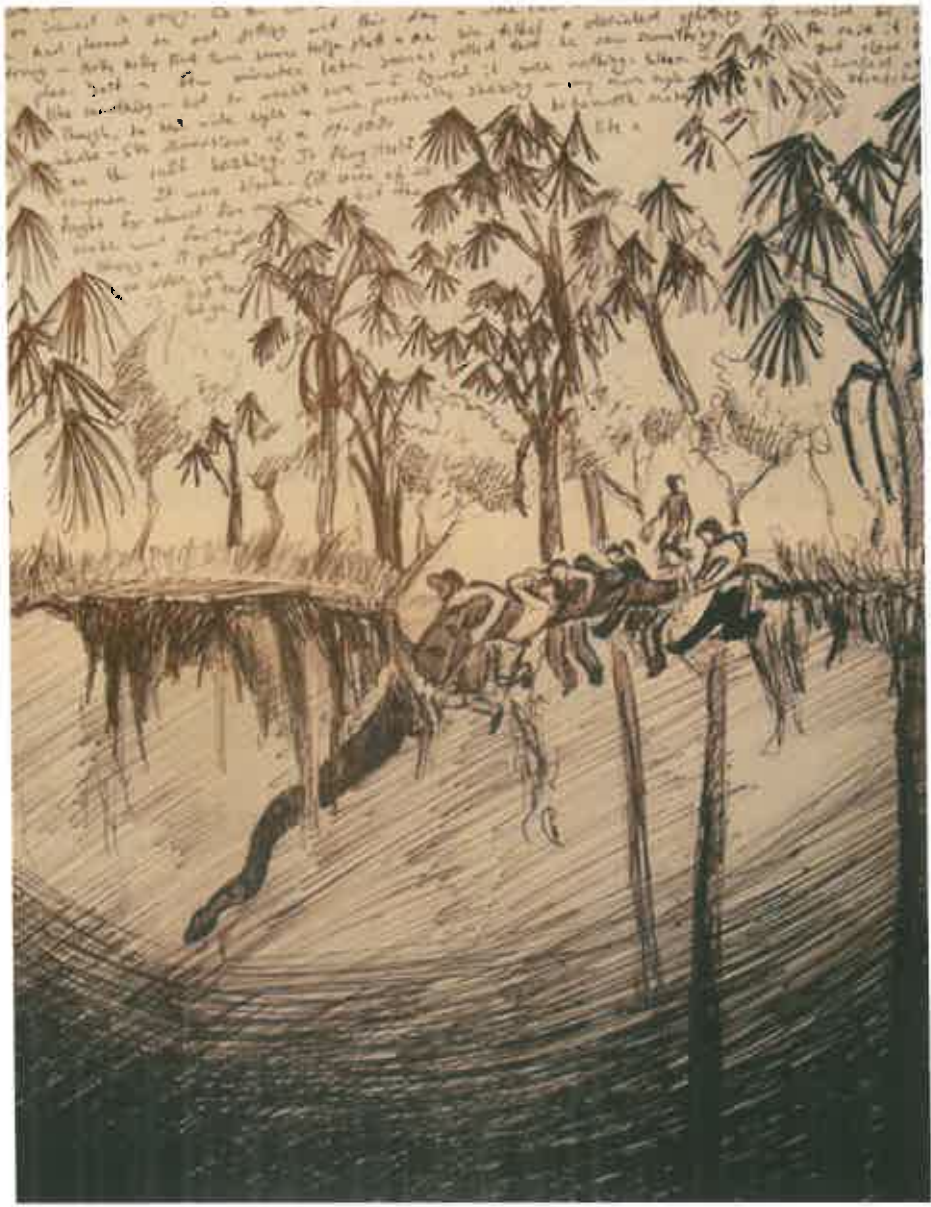
Macaws, parrots, and other animals regularly visit the colpa located in Las Piedras.



Video still: a small tributary several days' journey beyond the Western Gate.



Beyond the Western Gate, alone, in the deepest jungle on earth.



Field notes: seven people versus one anaconda in the floating forest.
The giant took us down.