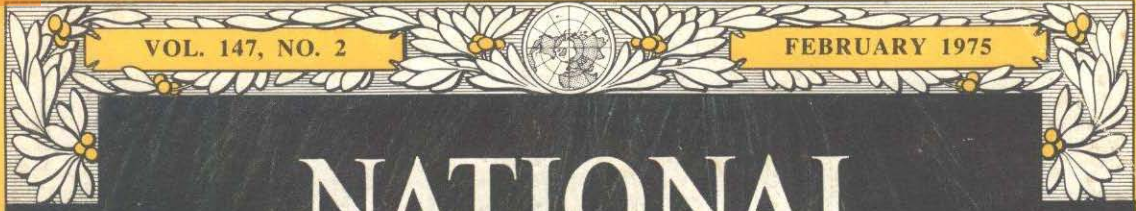


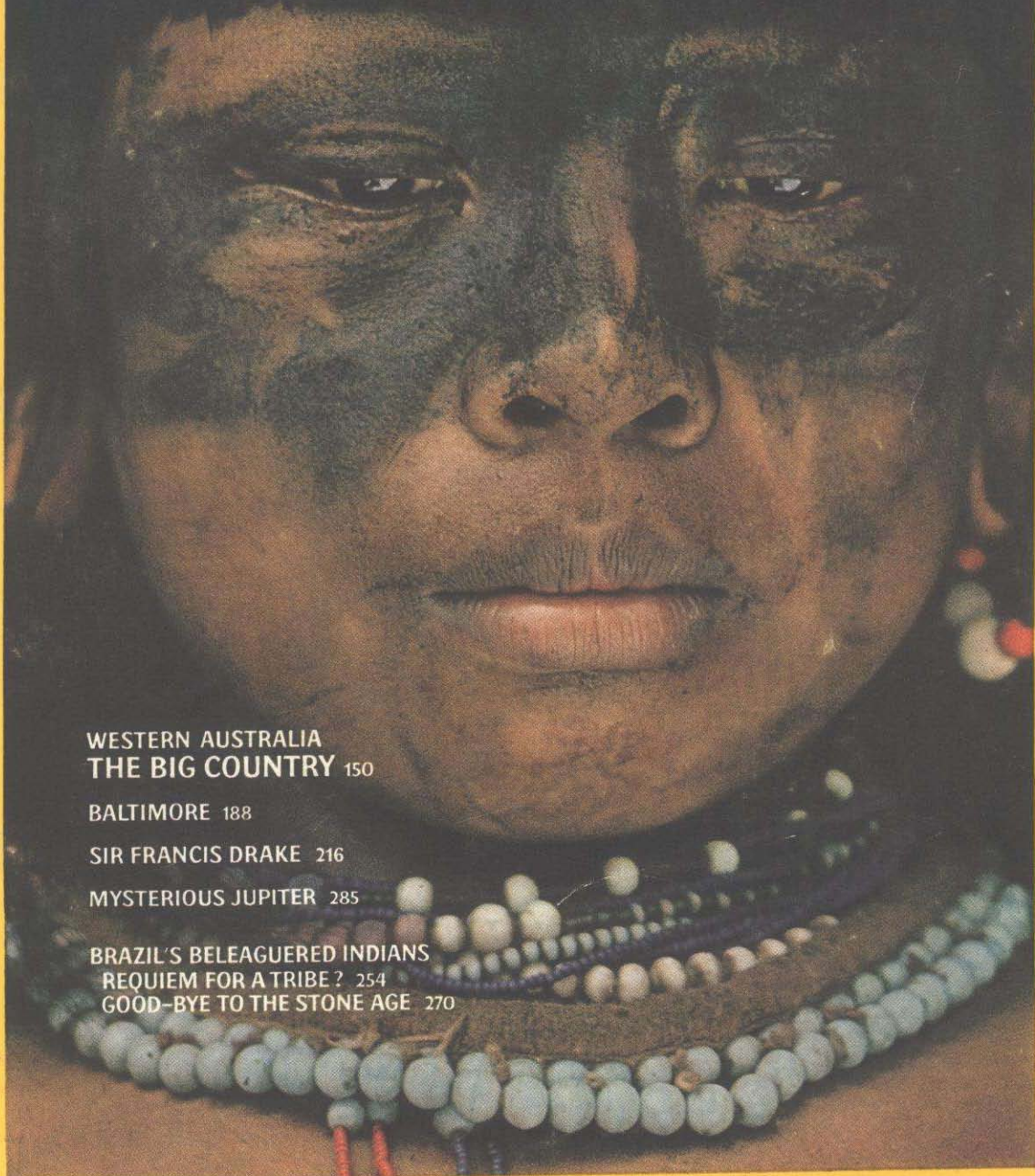
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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



WESTERN AUSTRALIA
THE BIG COUNTRY 150

BALTIMORE 188

SIR FRANCIS DRAKE 216

MYSTERIOUS JUPITER 285

BRAZIL'S BELEAGUERED INDIANS
REQUIEM FOR A TRIBE? 254
GOOD-BYE TO THE STONE AGE 270

BRAZIL'S
KREEN-AKARORES

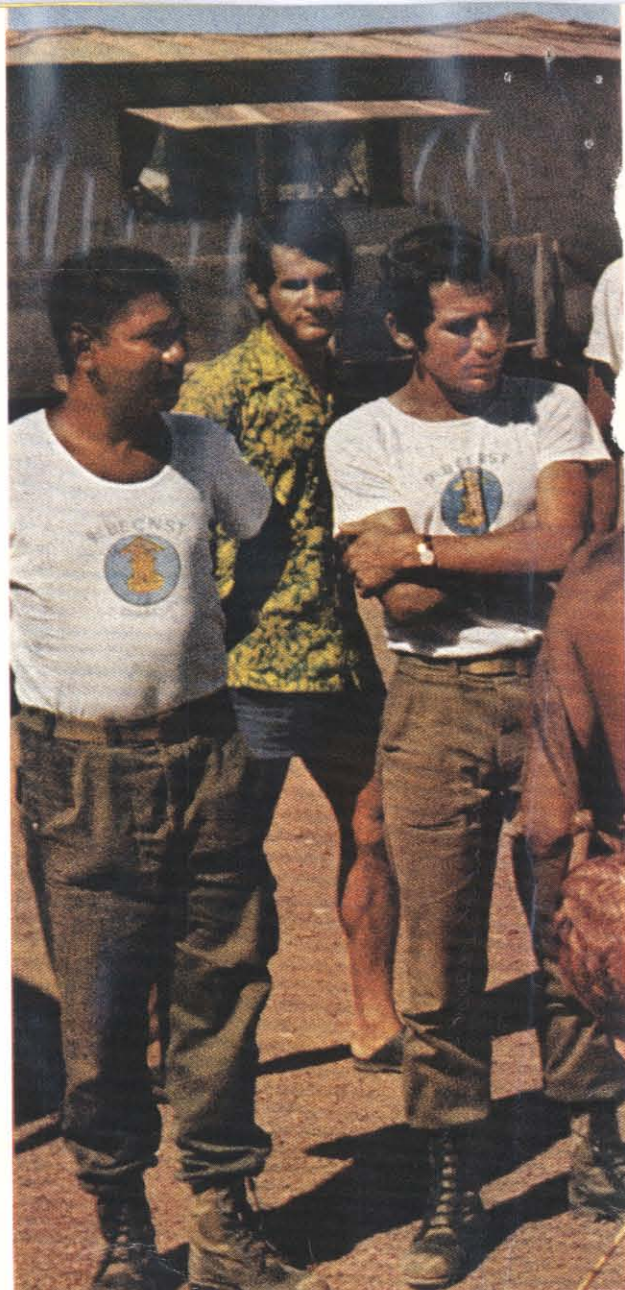
Requiem for a Tribe?

ARTICLE AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY
W. JESCO VON PUTTKAMER

Question: How should a Space Age nation deal with Indians so innocent of the outside world that many have never in their lives used a piece of metal? In this and the following article, explorer von Puttkamer documents the work of the Brazilian Government's National Foundation for the Indian (FUNAI) as it tries to answer that question in its dealings with the Kreen-Akarores and their old enemies, the Txukahameis.

FUNAI's successes are legion: Under its sympathetic guidance, tribe after Stone Age tribe has been introduced to the modern world, and at the same time has been shielded from its inevitable dangers. Each mission is a gamble, though, and sometimes—despite every precaution—there are losers. So it is with the Kreen-Akarores, whose first extended contact with non-Indians is described here. Sadly, we learn as this issue of the magazine goes to press that FUNAI's greatest fear has been realized: Influenza is sweeping the tribe. Of the estimated 130 Kreen-Akarores, a score are reported dead, and the fate of the others remains in doubt. Thus yet another of a dwindling handful of Indian tribes may succumb—not only to disease but to change, to civilization, to the relentless juggernaut called progress.

— THE EDITOR



IN THE STEAMING JUNGLE I sat and watched the myth of their inhumanity fade in the dancing light of welcoming cook fires.

For what was probably the first time in the hundreds of years since Europeans first glimpsed Brazil's wild and mysterious Mato Grosso State, the legendary "giant" Indians of Amazonia had peacefully led strangers into the sanctuary of one of their villages.

We were only six—two white *civilizados*, four "tame" Indians of another tribe. It would have been easy for the *gigantes*, now called Kreen-Akarores, to slaughter us with

their huge war clubs, as they have slain other intruders. Instead, they gave us food and water, touched us gently, tried to speak with us. They accepted the bewildering medicines, even painful injections, that only we—not they—knew would give them at least a chance to survive in a world that progressively threatens their wild kind.

In so doing, they justified our belief that they were as human as we, not untamable beasts, like the spotted jaguars. Savages they may be, but when we gave them our trust and love, they returned both in full measure.

Now my beloved native country has a grave

"Stay away from the road!" comes the warning to women and children of the Kreen-Akarores, until recently one of Brazil's most hostile tribes. But fateful curiosity draws the Indians into the camp of army engineers building a highway across Mato Grosso State.

responsibility. While developing the riches of the Amazon Basin, one of earth's last refuges for Stone Age peoples, Brazil must also somehow find a place for human beings whose ancient ways of life she cannot help but disrupt forever.

When, early in the 16th century, the Portuguese began colonizing Brazil, four million Indians stood in their way. The newcomers showed them scant mercy, brushing them aside by any means they could. Even in modern times, certain greedy *civilizados* have machine-gunned them, dynamited them from the air, and given them poisoned food.

Today Brazil can identify only about 200,000 pureblood Indians. Some of these—the Kreen-Akarores are among them—live in forests only now being penetrated by pioneer rubber tappers, loggers, missionaries, and, above all, the road builders who are opening Amazonia with a network of highways.

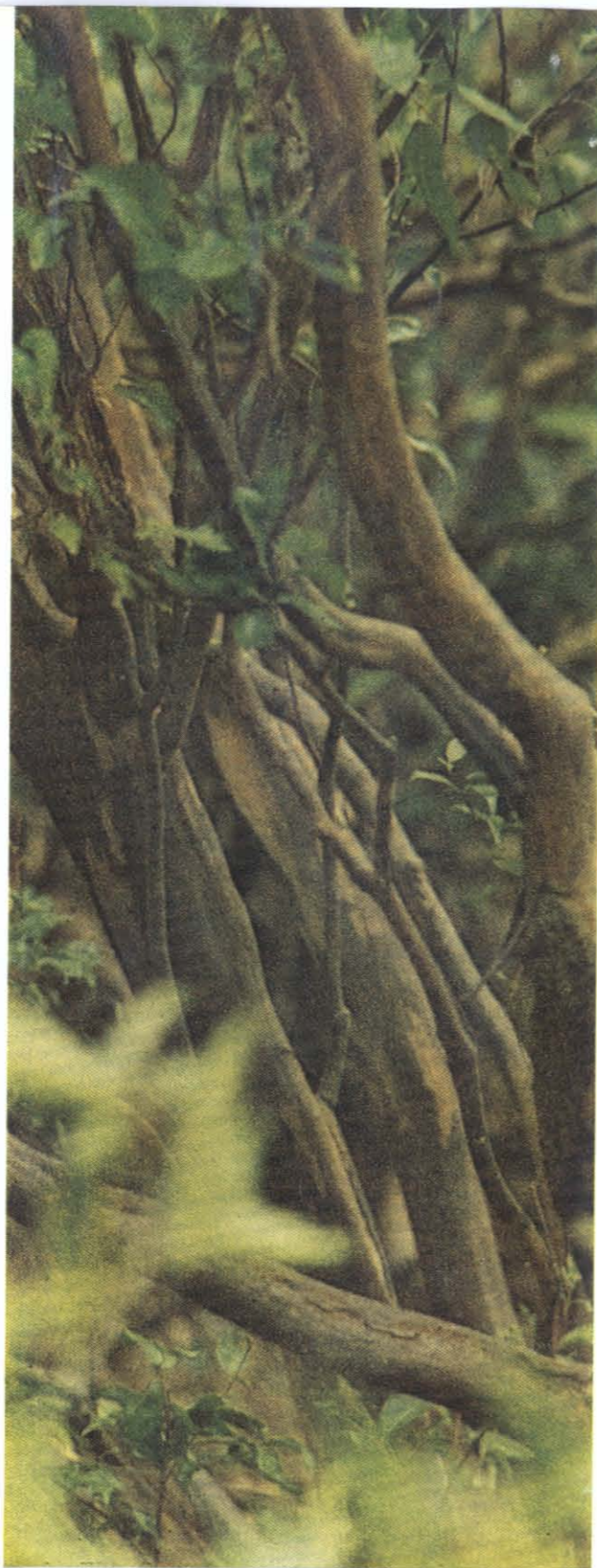
Sertanistas Form Vanguard of Change

To overcome the savage hostility of these innocents, Brazil formed the National Foundation for the Indian, called FUNAI for short. Its spearhead is the small body of *sertanistas*, "men wise in jungle ways," possessed of almost mystic love for the people they must both protect and render harmless to *civilizados*.

As photographer and diarist, I go often with FUNAI "pacification" expeditions. I watched the *sertanistas* make the first contacts with the dreaded Txikaos and Cinta Largas.* I went with the Villas Boas brothers, Orlando and Claudio, candidates for the Nobel Peace Prize, to cover the first tense overtures to the Kreen-Akarores in 1968. Five years later, when the young *sertanista* Apoena Meirelles took over from the exhausted Villas Boas brothers, I returned to join him at FUNAI's advance Kreen-Akarore pacification camp.

Now Apoena and I sit in our hammocks as night falls. I savor the familiar jungle noises—the cough of a prowling jaguar, the rustling of sleepy monkeys in the forest canopy, the bellow of a lovesick caiman in the nearby Peixoto de Azevedo River, and the cry of the *curiango*, a night bird.

"Listen," says Apoena, and at last I hear what he hears: the distant booming of dynamite, the rumble of road-building machinery.



One with her wildwood home, an Indian girl beholds outsiders covered with something unknown—cloth. Her decorative stripes, made with the juice of genipap



fruit, double as camouflage. Ever since FUNAI's first attempt at contact in 1968, the Kreen-Akarores had evaded outsiders by burning their own villages and moving on.

To gain their trust, FUNAI expedition members daily placed presents on jungle trails. Finally the Indians responded, leaving war clubs in return for the gifts.

*See: "Saving Brazil's Stone Age Tribes From Extinction," by Orlando and Claudio Villas Boas, September 1968; and "Brazil Protects Her Cinta Larga Indians," by W. Jesco von Puttkamer, September 1971.

"They work even at night," Apoena says. "Soon they will have pushed their road to the Kreen-Akarore village we have seen from the air. You know as well as I do that these city people carry the seeds of death to the Indians. Germs against which the jungle people have no immunities. *Cachaça* [rum]. Vice.

"Jesco," he continues, pausing to swat at the mosquitoes that in the night forest replace *barrachudos*, the biting flies of the day, "we must take dreadful chances and hurry this pacification."

I know what he means by "dreadful chances." The skilled sertanista does not press hostile Indians, but only leaves gifts for them, an act that seems to disrupt their normal reflex to kill intruders.

Then one day, often only after months or years, the Indians will themselves make the overtures of friendship. But the Kreen-Akarores have not yet made these overtures—and time is growing short.

So we press the Kreen-Akarores. Each day we sally from the post in search of them. We know they are all around us, watching us. Our Xavante Indians, the people of Apoena's god-father, tell us so.

"Sometimes we see them, but not clearly," the Xavantes tell us. There is a curious quality to jungle sunlight. Sifting through the great trees, it blinds as it is reflected from wind-stirred leaves. Rather than illuminating living things fully, it blurs and camouflages them.

Songs and Gifts Pave Path to Peace

Every day or so we go in an outboard-powered dugout to a riverbank *tapiri*, a rude shelter where we have been leaving gifts of pots, pans, steel machetes, and the like. One day we see three Kreen-Akarores, faces smeared with black dye of genipap juice, standing on the bank as we pass on the river. They are not the giants of legend, but they are hostile. To bows taller than themselves they fit long feathered arrows.

We do the only thing possible for sertanistas in a hurry. Singing, laughing, shouting at full voice, we move toward them. In the jungle, the man who comes with noise cannot be an enemy.

On my accordion I play polkas and Viennese waltzes. Trembling fingers hit wrong keys, but I play loudly.

The technique works! The three warriors take the arrows from the bows. We step onto the riverbank slowly, carefully. Now we see

six more warriors, two women, and a small boy peering from the forest.

It is still a dangerous moment, for the Indians are anything but relaxed. But we push nevertheless, as we must. We make signs for them to board our canoe and come to the post.

They do! The trip up the piranha-infested river in an overloaded boat goes well, and so do things at camp. We talk in sign language; the Kreen-Akarores accept our food.

When night begins to lower, we take the Indians back to the *tapiri*, whence they vanish on the trail to their village.

Jungle Meals Ease the Pain of Waiting

Now many frustrating days of waiting begin. The Indians do not show themselves. Have they abandoned us? We do not know. It is difficult for a *civilizado* to fathom the minds of people who have little concept of time.

Our Xavantes hunt to augment our meager supplies. They shoot monkeys, but I can eat them only when I am almost starving. They look too human.

I like *tapir*, though, especially its roasted liver. Rank as it is, I enjoy the tail meat of the crocodilian caiman. *Mutum*, or curassow, the size of a wild turkey, is very good. So is *armadillo* cooked in its shell.

We break the monotony with daily trips to the *tapiri*. One day, finally, we see an Indian youth on the riverbank. We pull to the shore, and although he trembles with fright, he stands his ground mutely and we have a pleasant visit.

After this, trade picks up at the *tapiri*. But there are no contacts.

"Whatever they have been doing, the Kreen-Akarores now have finished with it and are watching us again," the Xavantes say.

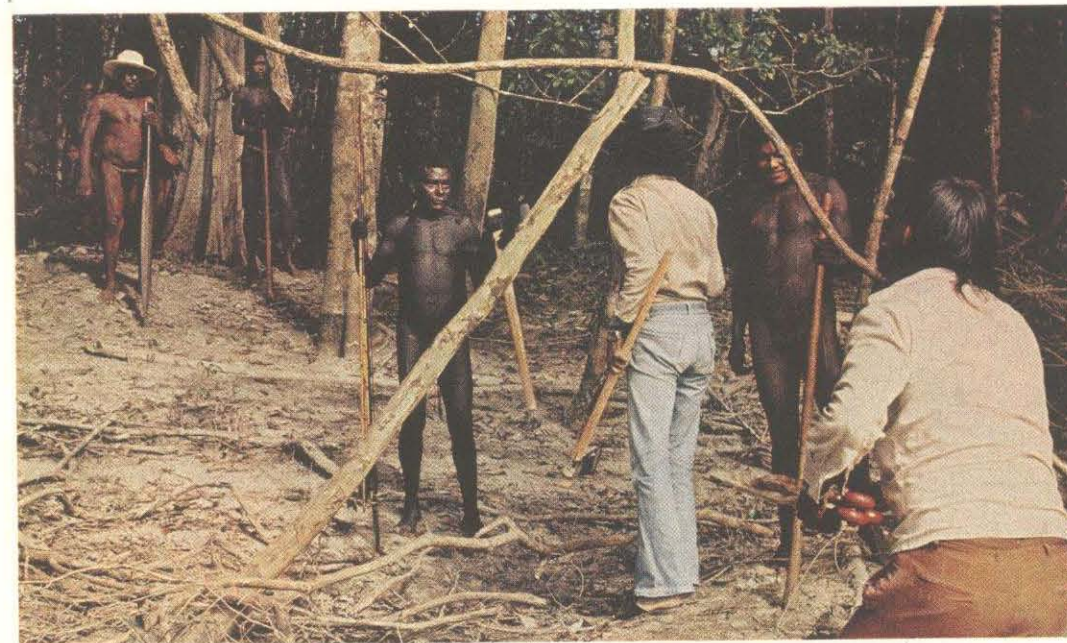
Twice young warriors visit the post. One even spends the night.

"They are testing us," says Apoena. "I will test them in return."

We leave him all alone at the *tapiri*. When we return for him, he is grinning.

"I climbed on the roof where I could be seen," he relates. "I played a mouth organ. Nothing. Then I whistled. From the forest came answering whistles and a shout: '*Hoo!*' I turned slowly around to find five Indians, three warriors and two small boys, standing beneath my perch. We had a nice meeting. Then they went away."

The wild ones vanish again for a week. Then a large band of Kreen-Akarores shout



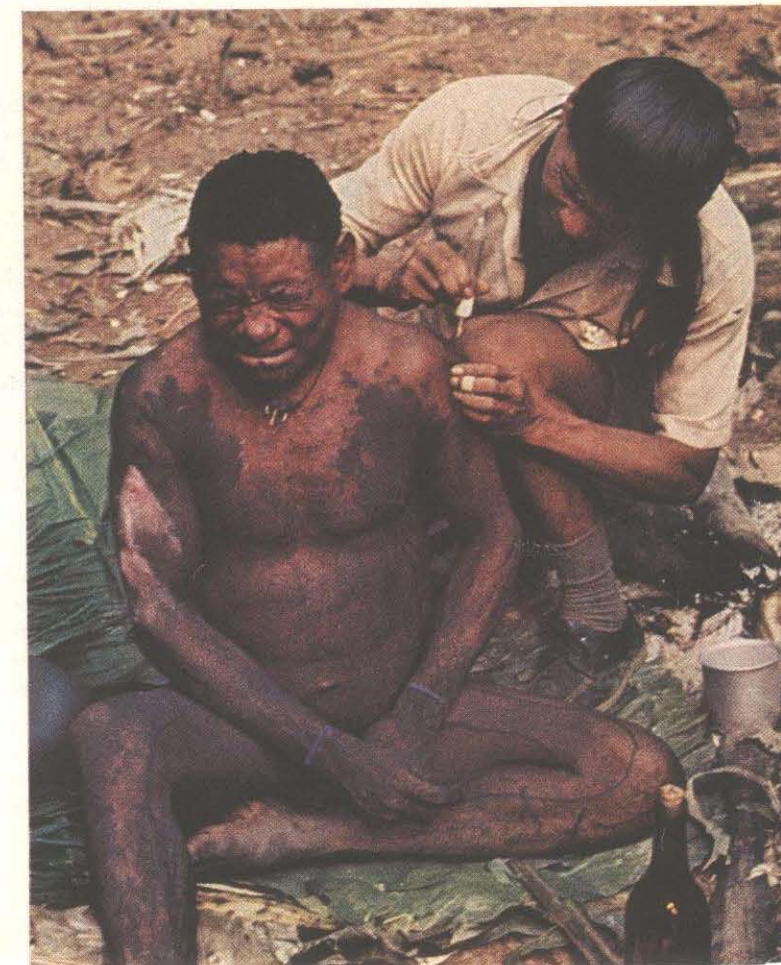
Face-to-face with the future: Warriors in black war paint—and one, mysteriously, wearing a store-bought hat—meet FUNAI members on a sunlit riverbank in the expedition's first contact. Controlling his tension, for a single wrong move could

mean disaster, expedition leader Apoena Meirelles steps forward to offer a gift. To make this contact in the shortest time possible, the FUNAI team disregarded its own rule—"Let them come to you"—and rushed forward at the risk of their lives.



Acceptance comes slowly. A young envoy (above) arrives with Apoena by canoe—a craft he has never been in before—for a night in the FUNAI camp. Only after he returns safely are expedition members invited to spend a night in the village.

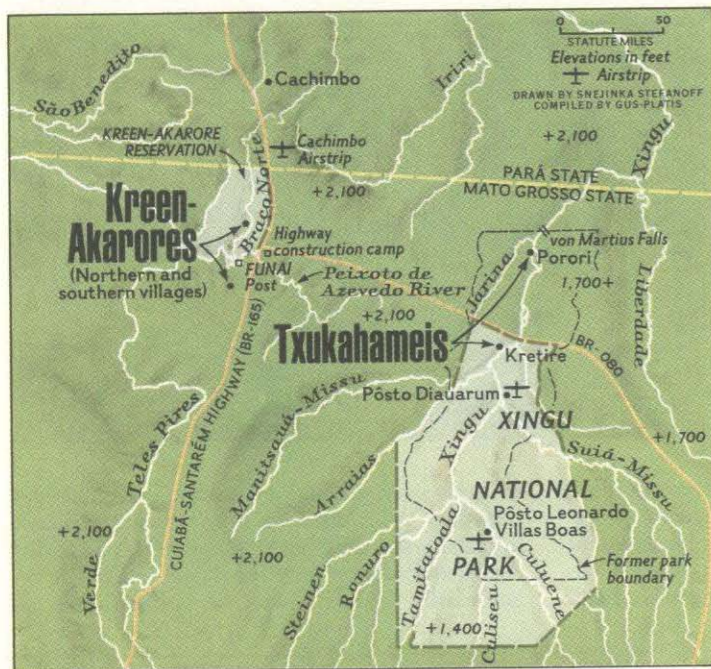
Chief Krekon (right) leads the way as the first Kreen-Akarore to receive a penicillin shot—but only after his tough skin had broken two needles.



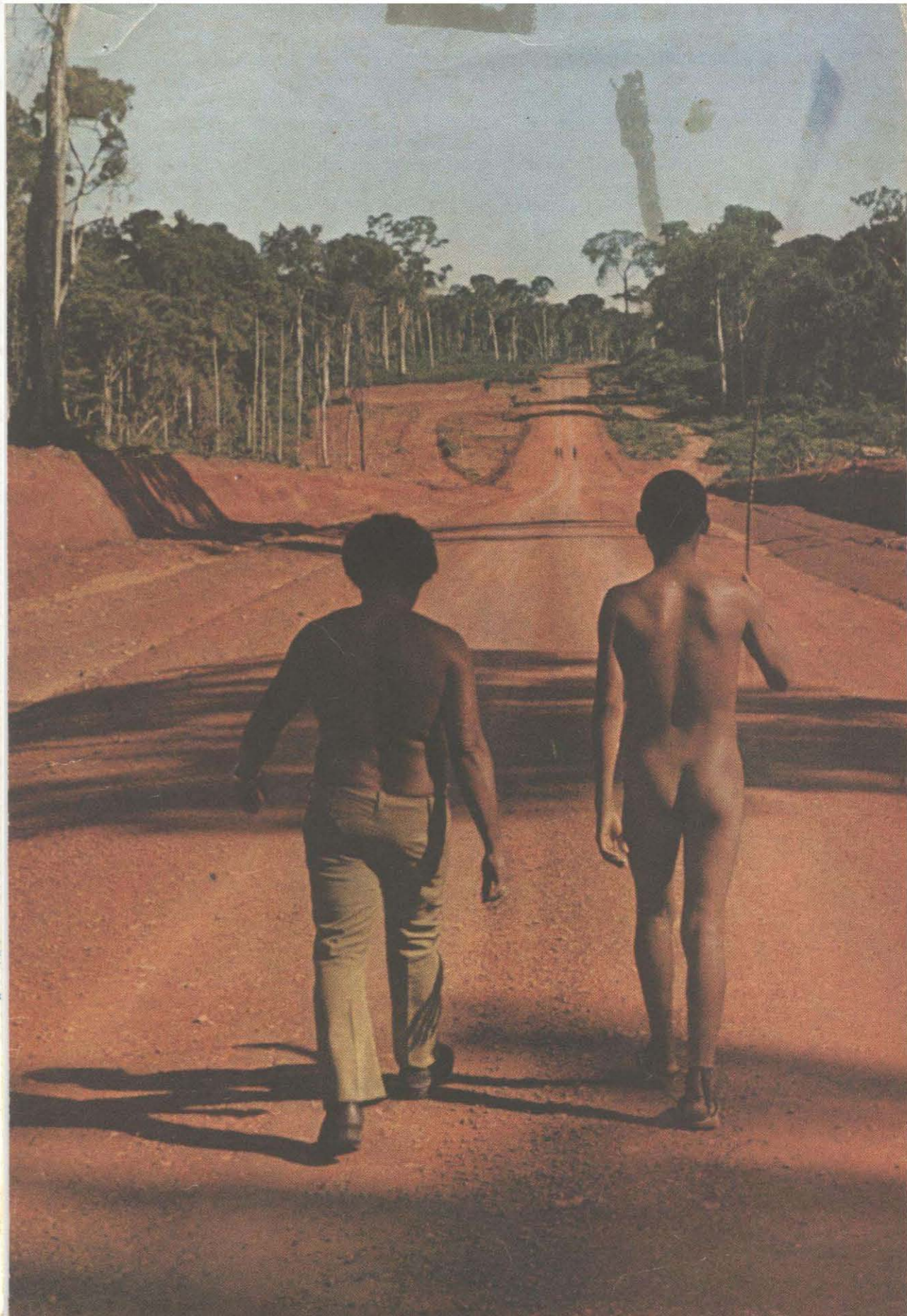
Hoping to shield forest innocents from the modern world, Brazil in 1973 set aside a temporary refuge for the Kreen-Akarores. In 1961, the

nation had established the 8,500-square-mile Xingu National Park, now home to 16 tribes. Among them are the Kreen-Akarores' traditional

enemies, the Txukahameis (pages 270-83). After highway BR-080 cut through the park, boundaries were shifted to make the road the northernmost limit.



Down the road together: A member of FUNAI and a Kreen-Akarore walk highway BR-165. To the right lies land open to prospectors and ranchers, against whom Indians must be safeguarded; to the left is the Kreen-Akarore reservation, legally off limits to *civilizados*.



from the jungle across the river and signal for us to ferry them to our camp.

We do as they ask. Apoena invites the leader of the party to sit with him in his hammock. The chief sits down, the hammock breaks. The two men tumble to the ground.

Shocked, for these people understand hammocks not at all, the warriors seize their clubs. We could be in peril. We are only nine.

Apoena breaks the tension. He roars with laughter. Rubbing his backside where he hit the hard earth, the chief also laughs. The bodyguard joins in the merriment. I breathe freely again.

When the Indians leave for the night, Apoena comes to me.

"Did you feel the same thing I did? These Kreen-Akarores are surrendering! Each time there was a dynamite blast, they looked at us with fear and pleading in their eyes. They know they cannot overcome men who can make the very earth shake. They are begging for our protection.

"Tomorrow we will go to the village. I cannot tell you how I know this, but they will be

waiting for us in the morning, and they will lead us to their homes."

Dawn. Shouts through the fog that shrouds the river.

"Now," says Apoena.

We toss our gear into a canoe and cross the stream toward the waiting Kreen-Akarores. They point downriver, toward the tapiri and the head of the trail to the village.

Tears Mark Welcome for Unarmed Guests

We land at the tapiri. Apoena does not hesitate. He takes a burden of water-filled gourds from an Indian woman and adds it to his own. A frowning warrior points to our firearms. We leave them in the hut.

The Kreen-Akarores fear pistols and rifles; several bear scars of gunshot wounds.

We are six from the post. Apoena. Four Xavantes. And I, Jesco, or as other Indians named me, Borbula, "man with the great moon face." With the dual handicap of heavy cameras and a large belly, I fall behind. The Kreen-Akarores give me bananas.

We march almost 24 miles, then we come

upon neat plantations and a collection of huts covered with banana leaves.

Women and children scamper screaming out of the village into the jungle. For a few seconds, we see only bare brown backs. Our escorts laugh and call to the hidden ones. They return one at a time.

Now what we take to be welcoming ceremonies begin. A medicine man blows his breath upon us. To rid us of the civilizados' diseases? The savages may be more prescient than we think.

Warriors deliver orations that sound like prayers. And they weep great tears!

A giggling woman paints Apoena's countenance black. My "great moon face" she decorates with the brilliant red juice of urucú plants. The solvent: spit.

At dusk women stir the cook fires into leaping life. They wrap bananas and manioc cakes

in banana leaves and put them among pre-heated stones.

The Kreen-Akarores eye the food hungrily. They are undernourished. We think they have not planted all the sweet potatoes, squashes, peanuts, cassavas, and corn they need because their routine has been disrupted by the presence of so many outsiders.

Pantomime Helps Chase a Devil Away

Almost all the Indians have skin infections. Several are too sick with fever to walk. After much palaver in sign language, we are allowed to treat the infections with sulfanilamide powder. But when we approach the seriously ill with penicillin needles, we meet frightened resistance.

I try a trick that we have used with other tribes. I squeeze first the head of a sick man, then the whole body down to the feet. I make

motions of throwing away the sickness devil.

The patient smiles. I jab him with the needle. He grimaces, but the smile remains.

In World War II Germany, where I was educated, the Gestapo lamed my left leg. I feel a sting in its calf. The medicine man is giving me shots—with tiny arrows fired from a little bow. (And next day my leg feels better than usual!)

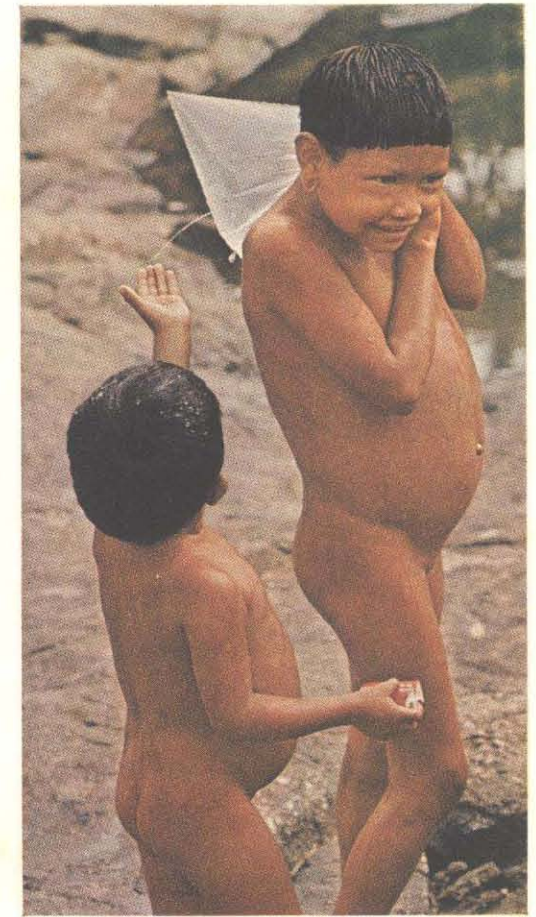
We eat. Now, by the light of the cook fires, the dreaded Kreen-Akarores, faces wreathed in beatific smiles, sing for us—strange chants, simple lines each ending in a shouted "Ahow!"

Then they dance.

"Join in," says Apoena. "It is the Indian way of relieving tension."

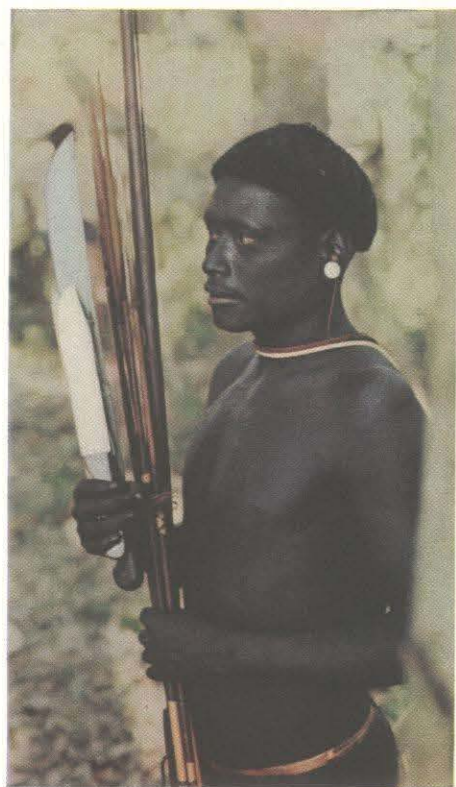
I wish someone had troubled to photograph Borbula, urucú-dyed face and all, stomping about a jungle clearing with the very same tribe that, 12 years earlier, had

"They've burned their village and run again," guessed the author when he saw charred huts amid unharvested sweet-potato fields. When he flew over several days later, however, rebuilding had started and the Indians came out to wave (below left). Expedition members learned that the holocaust was due not to fear of the civilizados, but resulted from an intratribal blood feud that orphaned two children (below). FUNAI personnel thwarted a subsequent attempt to drown the siblings, then sent them to Cuiabá, where the organization has assumed responsibility for their upbringing.



Stone for steel: The Kreen-Akarores exchanged Stone Age axes (**below**) for machetes, which one warrior (**lower**), completely covered with war paint, adds to his bow-and-arrow arsenal. Two chiefs—one 6½ feet tall—and a boy (**facing page**) marvel at the strange outsiders who gave the youngster the fishline he holds and must yet learn to use.

Once known as the “giant” Indians of the Amazon, the Kreen-Akarore tribe today counts only a few taller-than-normal individuals.



murdered the English explorer Richard Mason near Cachimbo.

The party ends in moonlight. We lie down, but we get no sleep. Warriors watch us all night, and every few minutes they pound the earth with enormous war clubs.

Why? Are they telling us they are still a free, strong people? Are they showing us that they, too, can make the earth tremble?

In our remaining time in Kreen-Akarore territory, we made several visits to this village of about 85 people to inoculate all of them against tuberculosis, smallpox, measles, and other diseases of civilization. FUNAI was later to inoculate the rest of the known Kreen-Akarores; they live in a village of roughly half that size some 30 miles to the south. We knew, despite the injections we administered, that continuing contact with *civilizados* could expose the Indians to illnesses impossible to guard against—especially influenza. The Indians have built up no natural immunity to flu, and no medicine offers protection against all the strains of the virulent disease. An influenza outbreak here, so far from medical facilities, could be disastrous. At FUNAI's request, the government declared most of the Kreen-Akarore territory off limits to outsiders.

Giants in Deed Only?

We learned much, meanwhile, about the gigantes—including the fact that they are not giants at all. If very tall warriors were ever common among these Indians, most are dead now. Only a few Kreen-Akarores today are of imposing height.

We found they speak a Ge tongue, one of the four main language groups of Brazil's Indians. Another Ge tribe, the big-lipped Txukahamei of Xingu (pages 270-83), were their worst tribal enemies in the mystic, ritualistic wars of the Amazon.

For centuries the Kreen-Akarores and the Txukahameis fought standoff battles. Then in 1967 the Txukahameis fell upon a Kreen-Akarore village with shotguns stolen or traded from pioneers. Some thirty villagers died.

In our brief visits to their village, I developed a quick and lasting affection for the Kreen-Akarores—and I retain many vivid, random impressions of their ways:

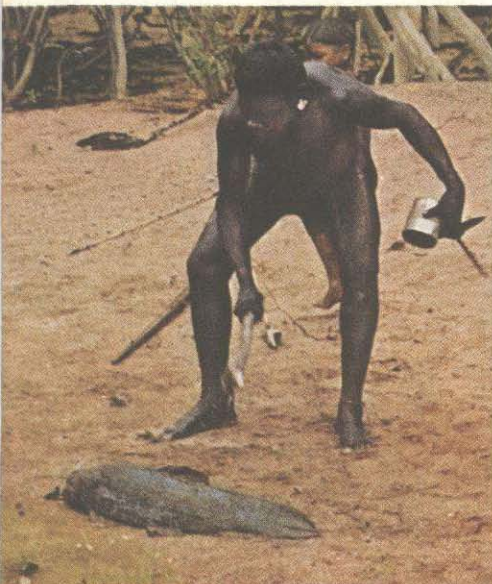
The Kreen-Akarores cut their hair short with knives of split bamboo; indeed, the name means “men who cut their hair short” in the Txukahamei tongue.



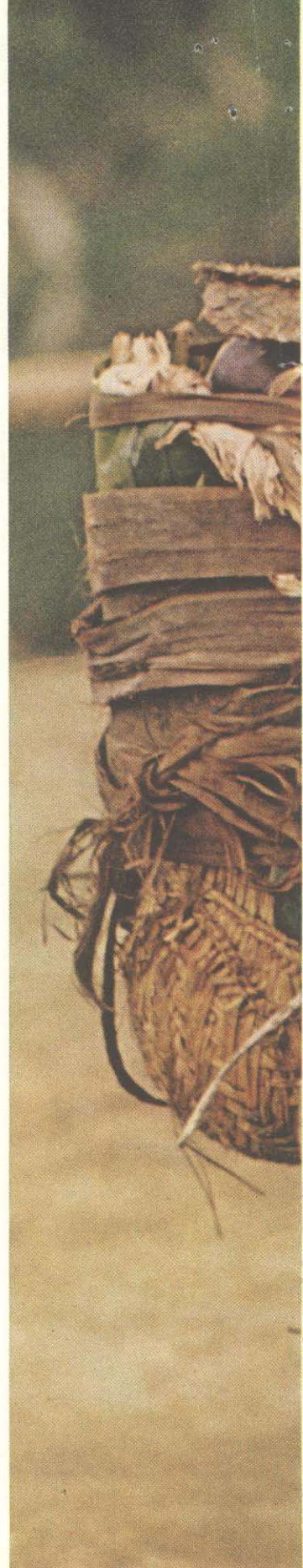


Taut as his bowstring, Chief Krekon aims a six-foot arrow (left) at a fish gliding through the shallows. Then he beaches his prey and kills it with a stick (below). The Indians sometimes use the poisonous bark of a vine called timbo to capture fish. Crushed and spread in shallow water, it stuns the prey, making them easy to gather when they float to the surface. The toxin is harmless to humans. Fishline and hooks now often replace both arrows and poison.

In addition to fishing, Kreen-Akarore warriors may roam for weeks on hunting trips that take them hundreds of miles from their villages. While men provide game, women cultivate sweet potatoes, cassavas, and corn.



Carrying her weight in food, a maiden in shell earrings (right) totes a backpack of bananas and sweet potatoes. Genipap fruit, gourds, and a land turtle fill her hands. At 13 she assists older women with the chores, leaving the men free for hunting and fighting. The girl's short hair, cut with a blade fashioned from split bamboo, signals her arrival at the threshold of womanhood.



They neither make nor use pottery; at first they would not accept our aluminum pots. And, unlike other Amazon tribes, they would not take our mirrors, matches, or dolls.

They once feared and hated aircraft; from the air I have seen them shoot arrows at us. Now they wave at passing airplanes.

The Kreen-Akarores once hunted fish only with arrows or poison. Now increasingly they use our more efficient fishhooks. They eat earth and clay—perhaps instinctively for minerals, perhaps to fill empty bellies.

Unlike the irrepressible Cinta Largas, who made off with everything they could carry, the Kreen-Akarores never stole from us, although they accepted gifts and traded freely.

They play a game, like some other Amazon tribes, in which relay teams of warriors race with hundred-pound logs on their shoulders. They also fight stylized duels with heavy war clubs, taking care not to strike an opponent



A new life begins as a 15-year-old mother (above) gently bathes her two-day-old baby. The child's survival—indeed the survival of all Kreen-Akarores—remains in doubt because of the influenza epidemic that swept the tribe after this article was written. FUNAI's field staff, working desperately to save the remaining Kreen-Akarores, continued its frustrating efforts to convince the Indians to join other tribes in Xingu National Park. There they could receive better medical care, and adjust gradually to the culture they have just met. Enjoying a moment of the jungle's dwindling solitude, a girl (right) perhaps was contemplating her uncertain and bewildering future.

on the head. (We did set one broken arm.) Children and grown-ups alike were fascinated by a special talent of mine: I can wiggle my ears and nose and wildly roll my eyes.

When it came time for Borbula, wiggler of nose and ears, to leave them, they cried unashamedly until tears rolled off their chins.

Facing Sad but Certain Change

And what of the future for the Kreen-Akarores? There are dangers.

FUNAI has learned through bitter experience that goodwill alone does not guarantee success. When it brought the Nambikuaras to their new reservation, many of the insufficiently immunized Indians died of respiratory diseases. Apoena inoculated the Kreen-Akarores as his first responsibility. Still, not all diseases respond to such measures.

After pacifying the large Cinta Larga tribe, FUNAI, plagued with budget problems, left the pacification post too thinly manned and inadequately supplied. When medicine ran out and the Cinta Largas started dying, they attacked the camp, killing two sertanistas. A large band of the Indians vanished into the jungle. It will be difficult to pacify them a second time.

The road that borders the Kreen-Akarore territory is FUNAI's great fear, for it exposes them, too much and too fast, to *civilizados* whose diseases they are not equipped to resist. In time FUNAI hopes it can persuade all the Kreen-Akarores to go willingly to Xingu National Park, a large reservation set aside for wild tribes.

There, we hope, they will live with other tribes, including the Txukahamei, in peace and safety until the day comes when they can enter fully into the life of modern Brazil. No sertanista views such assimilation without sadness, of course, for it means the destruction of a beautiful and distinctive culture.

But I believe it is the best solution in the long run. Until they adapt to each other's lifestyles, a black-dyed Kreen-Akarore warrior and my neighbor up the street in Goiânia cannot dwell under the same roof, be it made of wild banana leaves or ceramic tiles. □