

POVOS INDÍGENAS NO BRASIL

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Rain Forest Indians Hold Off Threat of Change

By JAMES BROOKE

Special to The New York Times

KAPOTO, Brazil, Nov. 28 — The arrow, long and slender with a hardwood point, was found one recent morning imbedded in a post in Raoni's lodge here.

"It's a wild Indian," the Kaiapó elder mused, running a thumb down the shaft to a familiar fletching of lashed bird feathers. "It's Kaiapó."

Mr. Raoni said he thought the arrow was not intended to kill him, but was a calling card from a Kaiapó too fearful of civilization to come into one of his own tribe's villages.

The fact that an Indian band could still roam the rain forest shunning contact with modern society in the late 20th century is a tribute to the vast green wilderness that is the Xingu National Park. Isolated at Brazil's geographic center, the Xingu has long occupied a central position in the nation's psychology as a preserve of primeval Brazil.

Used by 17 Tribes

Indians from 17 tribes hunt, fish and farm in the Xingu jungle and use it as a pharmacy, living as their ancestors did.

But from the air, one can see the geometric patterns of encroaching change: cow pastures, soybean fields and red dirt roads stretching to the edge of the park boundary.

In the wood smoke of Mr. Raoni's lodge here, conversation today revolved around meeting the challenges of the outside world.

"We need to demarcate the Mekragnoti area so there will be no problems with gold miners, loggers or ranchers," Mr. Raoni said as other men listened, some squatting impassively, others eating watermelon.

As one man wove freshly cut grass into a basket and another braided a necklace, Mr. Raoni reminded his listeners that they moved to Kapoto this year because of 15 deaths caused by an outsiders' disease, malaria.

The move was made possible by another outside force, The Rainforest Foundation. Today, sharing a bench with Mr. Raoni was Sting, the British rock star and founder of the New York-based Indian aid group.

Toured Europe Together

Last year, Sting, a wiry blond, and Mr. Raoni, an Amazon Indian with his lower lip extended by a wooden plug, became a familiar sight as they toured Europe, meeting with Pope John Paul II, President François Mitterrand of France and King Juan Carlos of Spain.

Brazil's President at the time, José Sarney, had made Mr. Raoni and Sting a deal. If they raised the money to pay for demarcation of Mr. Raoni's homeland, the President would order demarcation, a crucial step toward a



James Brooke/The New York Times

Kaiapó Indians at Raoni's lodge in Xingu National Park, a vast wilderness in central Brazil where members of 17 tribes live as their ancestors did, hunting, fishing, farming and using the jungle as a pharmacy.

When President Fernando Collor de Mello greets President Bush today, his welcoming smile may be stretched thin by a wave of bad economic news. *Business Day*, page D1.

protected reserve.

The world tour netted \$1.1 million, roughly enough to pay topographers to survey the 19,000-square-mile area and to place markers on the boundaries. But when Sting and Mr. Raoni reappeared at Mr. Sarney's office in February, the politician responded by ordering a new study, the fifth.

On a visit to the park in November, Brazil's new President, Fernando Collor de Mello, promised Mr. Raoni a more efficient study group.

If preserved, the Mekragnoti area would link the Xingu and another Kaiapó area in 44,246 square miles of Indian reserves, nearly the size of New York State.

Back in the smoky interior of the men's hut, Mr. Raoni took offense when a visitor undiplomatically suggested that 44,000 square miles might be a lot of land for 5,000 Indians.

"We are owners of the land," he said, rising angrily off his log bench. "My grandfathers and great-grandfathers were born there."

Black body paint glistening on his powerful build, he leaned over and yanked the left ear of his questioner to make sure he was listening closely.

"White people only think of cutting down trees to raise ducks, chickens,



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Kapoto is in an isolated area where Indian tribes hunt, fish and farm just as their ancestors did.

and cows!" he shouted, the blue and orange parrot feathers of his head-dress bobbing. "We need the forest to go hunting — tapir, agouti, monkey, deer and armadillo."

Not Often Stepped On

"White people always step on us," he said.

But historically the Kaiapó have been among the least stepped on of Brazil's indigenous peoples. Their militance spared them the fate of hundreds of other Amazon tribes: decimation through diseases spread by contact with whites, and cultural extinction through assimilation.

Kaiapó Warriors killed dozens of squatters and miners. In 1985, when official Brasília dragged its feet on demarcating a Kaiapó area, local warriors decided to speed the process by abducting five officials.

Effort Defused by Politicians

But the Kaiapó's militant defense of their land has often been defused by invisible hands in the back corridors of power in Brasília, the capital 550 miles southeast of here.

"The state of Pará has interests in the area," said Olympio Serra, a former director of the Xingu park, now director of the Brasília office of the foundation. "The largest source of revenue in the state is the sales tax on lumber."

The Kaiapó believe that vigilance remains their best defense. They use video cameras to record politicians' promises and hunting rifles to drive away unwanted intruders.

But bows and arrows are still needed, sometimes. "The Government won't give us hunting ammunition because they are afraid we will kill white people," Mr. Raoni said, settling back onto his bench with an ambiguous chuckle.

DO NOT FORGET THE NEEDIEST!