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## Povos Indígenas no Brasil

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# Brazil Indian steps in from another age

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United Press International

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil—In the end, the years of solitary wandering became too much. So a nameless Indian, perhaps a rare descendant of a once-great nation, came out of the jungle and surrendered to the 20th century.

"He wasn't hungry or ill," said anthropologist Andre Toral. "I think he just gave up."

The Indian, a man in his mid-30s dubbed "Ava," made peaceful contact with peasants near Angical, 350 miles northeast of Brasilia, in October.

"It looks like the strain of living alone became too great," Toral said.

From the man's speech and song patterns, Toral and other anthropologists think he might belong to either the Ava-Canoeiros or the Awa-Guaja tribe, now fragmented and retreating before encroaching settlers in the eastern Amazon.

Brazil had at least 8 million Indians when Portuguese sailors arrived in 1500. Slavery, smallpox and systematic slaughter have left perhaps 220,000, mainly deep in the Amazon.

Great nation-tribes such as the Yanomamis, Ticunas and Makuxi still number up to 10,000 each. Many, like the Awa-Guajas, have dwindled to a hundred or less. Others are extinct.

The Ava-Canoeiros, one of the most critical cases, are but a step away from dying out. Some live by raiding isolated farms.

Peasants at Angical, alerted by an arrow wound in a pig, found Ava in the bush. He was wearing a ragged cotton dress. His straw backpack held 130 pounds of possessions—smoked pig-meat, two iron cooking pots, a rubbing-stick to make fire, a bow and 17 arrows.

"He was lucky he was found by well-meaning people," said Sidney Possuelo of the federal Indian agency. "Otherwise he might simply have been killed."

Possuelo took "Ava," the root word for "man" in the old Indian language Tupi, to his apartment in Brasilia.

"At first he was very frightened,"



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"Ava" (right), one of the survivors of a vanishing South American Indian tribe, talks with Sidney Possuelo of the federal Indian agency in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Ava recently came out of the jungle and gave up his struggle of living alone.

said Possuelo, who had trouble communicating with Ava even after 23 years' experience with remote tribes.

Ava spent hours spitting at the apartment's windows, fascinated by their invisible surface. He accepted a shower but would not wash himself. Tribal tradition required that someone else do the washing. Possuelo obliged. He would not use the toilet.

"A primitive person doesn't understand anything, how to get water out of a tap or how to use a cup to drink," Possuelo said.

"He didn't pay much attention to the television, except when Possuelo ran a video about another tribe," said Eliana Lucena, a writer who specializes in Indians.

Lucena described Ava as an affectionate, warm person. "But often he would seem sad and melancholy, like a fish out of water."

Gradually anthropologists pieced together Ava's history. Both their theories pointed to a lone fugitive from violence.

In 1980 settlers attacked one of the last remaining Ava-Canoeiro villages, killing about 10 Indians. In 1978,

settlers attacked an Awa-Guaja village in western Maranhao. Some Indians fled, but a boy of about 8, impaled on a barbed wire fence, was captured and handed to the local Indian agency post.

This boy, called Txiramuku, is now able to translate into Portuguese.

Extraordinarily, he has tentatively identified Ava as his father. Ava has shotgun marks matching wounds the boy recalls his father receiving.

Ava's troubles might not be over. Probably he'll end up on a tribal reservation. But the principal Awa-Guaja reservation is not yet legalized, and it's in an area where prospectors are finding valuable mineral deposits.

The Ava-Canoeiro have a reservation, but much of it will disappear under the waters of a hydro-electric dam now under construction.

Many anthropologists think neither fate is right for Ava or other Indians.

"If the superpowers can get together and spend millions of dollars to save a couple of whales, I think we [Brazilians] should make an effort to save our indigenous people from extinction," Possuelo said.