

Inside PAGES

PAGES welcomes five new members to its Scientific Steering Committee this year. **Jerome Chappellaz** is Deputy Director of the National Laboratory for Glaciology and Geophysics of the Environment in Grenoble, France. Jerome has scientific interests in geochemistry, isotope geochemistry, atmospheric dynamics and chemistry and biogeochemical cycles. **Eystein Jansen** is Research Director of the Bjerkness Center for Climate Research, and Professor of Geology at the University of Bergen. Major

research accomplishments include documentation of changes in thermohaline overturning associated with the last deglaciation as well as using very high sedimentation rate sites to reconstruct oceanographic condition over the past millennium. **Peter Kershaw** is Professor of Geography and Environmental Science and Director of the Centre for Palynology and Palaeoecology at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. Peter has worked on reconstructing the vegetation histories of the tropics and Australia and the impacts of Aboriginal peoples. His recent interest in marine palynology provides a valuable link between land and ocean paleoenvironments.

José Ignacio Martínez is a researcher and lecturer in paleoceanography and micropaleontology at the Universidad EAFIT in Medellín, Columbia. He has expertise in the late Quaternary climates of South America and the tropical Pacific including ENSO. **Ricardo Villalba** is a senior researcher at the Argentinian Institute for Snow, Ice and Environmental Research in Mendoza. Ricardo brings expertise in Southern Hemisphere climate variability over the past millennium, Southern Hemisphere dendrochronology, and statistical analysis.



Tales from the Field

A Novel Use for the Classical Hiller Borer

This happened some 15 years ago in the remote tropical jungles of the Orinoco basin, in northern South America. We were conducting a survey on the summits of the tepuis, the spectacular sandstone table mountains that led Arthur Conan Doyle to write his popular 'Lost World' in 1912. We used to reach the target sites by helicopter, due to the inaccessibility of most of the tepui tops. The place with which the present story is concerned is called Cerro Ichún, and appeared on the topographical maps as a typical tepui that, at that time, was unexplored. We were very excited with the possibility of being pioneers, but not exactly in the way we became. Let me get to the point. The expedition departed by plane from Caracas in the direction of Canaima, a wonderful tourist spot in the core of the jungle, where the helicopter was waiting for us. To reach the Ichún, we split into two flights. The first group, with the expedition head, Otto, the phytogeographer, and all the field equipment, was charged with choosing the site and

establishing camp. In the second group, were a geologist, a zoologist, and myself, a paleoecologist looking for peat bogs. After a recon flight, Otto did not observe any tepui in the area, and decided to land on a sandy riverbank with all the material, and wait for us to arrive to make a decision. When we reached the site, Otto was in shock, "A tiger!" he said, "A tiger!" and nothing else for quite a while. Once recovered, he told us that while he had been organizing the field gear a tiger (really a jaguar, called 'butterfly tiger' by the natives but no less frightening) had come from the other side of the river to inspect its territory and had begun to circle around him defiantly. At first Otto was paralyzed but after a while he reacted, got onto the boxes and looked for something with which to try to keep the beast away. The first idea that came to mind was...yes, my Hiller borer! Face to face with that fierce creature, he actually managed to assemble the borer extensions and put together a sort of taming tool, which he successfully used to protect himself until the "tiger" ran away when our helicopter approached the site. After hearing his story, we decided

to relocate to a tepui we had visited previously. However, the helicopter was called away to put out a fire and had to leave us in a neighboring forest clearance. The clearance was no more than 50 meters in diameter and we didn't know when the helicopter would be available to come again. There we were, lost in the middle of an impenetrable jungle, with nothing to do, far from any tepui, and hundreds of kilometers away from the nearest city. We waited for days to be rescued. On that occasion, I didn't find any peat to bore with my Hiller device but it probably saved Otto's life.



Fig. 1: Aerial view of a meandering blackwater river from the southern Orinoco basin, with several sandy riverbanks like that in the present story.

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Do you have an interesting and humorous story from your paleoenvironmental fieldwork? Write it down in 500 words or less and send it to us, so that we can put it in PAGES news!