The trail across the Cordillera in Northwest Panama from the province of Chiriqui to Bocas del Toro on the Caribbean side is a rugged three-day hike. El Cunico Tree de Naviembre is a beautiful walk, and as I looked back at the mountain range from the lagoon at Chiriqui Grande from the plane flying back to David, I couldn’t believe I’d walked through such rugged terrain.

We started from the pueblo of Caldera, about ten miles south of the city of Boquete. The trail is at first a rough dirt road, negotiable for a few miles by a four-wheel vehicle. It begins at about 400 m. (altitude) and runs parallel to the Rio Chiriqui, large, rapidly flowing river full of white water. The view of the river below as the trail ascends is magnificent, and I kept stopping to take pictures, only to find the view at the next bend even more spectacular. On the first day the trail crossed the Rio Los Volcanes, Quebrada Mariposas, Quebrada Cupé, and the Quebrada Alparaboa. At this point the road ends and the trail becomes narrow and rocky, ascending with many sharp ups and downs to 1,000 m. at the Rio Farrisadero. We stopped here at 4:00 for the night.

Here one has just left the dry, windy region and entered true cloud forest, full of mists which become insufferable from rain. With the sun out, there are many brilliant rainbows (arcades) that descend into valleys below, leaving no doubt as to where 66% of gold must be. The trees here are gigantic, covered with moss, spectacular bromelads, lichens; full of chattering birds, and it is one stops to watch, monkeys. My guide killed a snake (1.5 m. long) on the trail and claimed that it was the feared boa constrictor (Phur-dur-dur) "cayo venenoso! Mata la gente!" I am doubtful, however, because it was unable to move the characteristic 'pit' between the eyes and the nostrils.

We stopped for the night at the finca of Pancoito Samudio, a gentle man of about 45 with ten children, six under the age of ten, his house, a two-story wooden house with a tin roof, quite comfortable, and heard incredibly poor. It is of rough, hand-sawn board with great spaces where the cold wind blows through. Chicks feeding on the ‘living room’ floor. Piles of yucca root on the dirty floor, sacks of coffee, rice, nails strewn around. Some clothes, rifle, and matches, hammer, saw were about the only items that distinguished the house- hold (at first appearance) from the Stone Age. Though supposedly dressed, the children were health-looking, shy, and well-behaved.

Peter Sterling tosa a Associate Professor of neurobiology at the University of Pennsylvania.

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but can't get the pronunciation from the book, and asked
my haip. I worked with him for almost an hour - after which his
daughter served the best coffee I've ever tasted; grown, roasted,
and ground right there. Perfect rhum took a crude quiver, of
which he was very proud, and began to play and sing sweet, melan-
choly tunes while the wind bowled and half-risk poured off the
setting, galvanized roof. All the while the late sun illuminated
the poinsettias and roses that surrounded this house of unmentionable
equator. I asked jokingly if he had also learned guitar by cor-
respondence, and was astonished to be answered affirmatively. His
daughter (about nine-years-old, I'd guess) cooked dinner over the
fire in the shed - our delirious soup, mixed with their rice and
vegetables, and shrins, which I'd guess they collect from the
river. I was given a bed (a board with two grain sacks for a pil-
low), while my guide slept on the floor, and the family, all night,
slept in the main bedroom on one big bed. After breakfast the next
morning, I gave him a regalo of $2.00, which he tried to refuse, till
I made it clear it was a present and not payment. He gave us a
package of homemade sugar, fresh ground coffee, and grapefruits,
and we were off.

We left at 8:00 a.m. in the sun-rain. I tried wearing my pon-
cho, but we had to cross many, extremely swift rivers, and the pon-
cho caught the wind like a sail, almost peppering me downstream.
Besides, when you're up to your thighs in cold water, keeping your
shoulders dry at considerable energy expenditure made little sense.
We crossed the Rio Pararaima and climbed sharply all morning,
reaching Pino 2 (Coro Pino 2) on the map at 10:00. Here there is
another small finca, and it is an alternative stopping place. Just
before Pino 2, Juanito pointed out the place where one of their
horses had died from exhaustion on the last trip over the mountains.
That will give you some idea of the kind of walk it is. As it
turned out, we moved faster without pack animals. We stopped at
once in a small shed to cram food into our mouths, but could not
pause for long because the wind was howling through our wet
clothes and we were bitterly cold unless moving. At 11:00 we reached
the top (about 2000 n.), the continental divide, and began our descent
into the Province of Bocos del Toro. The afternoon, though raining,
was warmer because there is no wind on the Caribbean side and the
trail leads through dense rain forest. No Indians here, and we
didn't see a soul for the next twenty-four hours. Giant plants of
the kind that grow in dunes, Boston living room: 'elephant ear'
leaves as big as I am, great butteressed trees, covered with moss;
bright red and yellow fungi. After a few miles along the trail,
Juanito stopped to point out tracks in the mud of el Tigre' (Jaguar)
and there could be no doubt about it.

By 4:00 I was tiring and beginning to stumble, but trying to
be polite because the trail is steep and 'routy', and a broken leg
here would be a disaster. At 6:00 we reached a meadow of waist-high
grass, the greenest, lushest meadow I've ever seen, shrouded in
clouds, with concolor hazel and a spectacular display of arbutus and
partridge pea. Above (altitude, 900 n.) is called 'Bocas Vista',
and when it cleared up, we could see a roll of rabbit on the
Horizon. After sliding the sweet milk of green coconuts (tupas) we
dined. At Bocas Vista there are two small houses with floors and walls of split cane, with thatched palm roofs of which we sat and slept. We walked around the night. In the
dusk the fireflies glowed throughout the valley and the frogs
croaked loudly outside our hut. At 7:30, we pulled out by 8:00; it
had been ten hours of strenuous walking. I was awakened at 5:00 a.m.
by a sharp bite on my eyelid, then on my arm, and repeated bites

virtually everywhere on my body — I was writhing in a swarm of *tarmakar* or butcher ants. My flashlight revealed a virtual carpet of them on the same floor; and in a minute my companions were up skipping and stamping the floor to drive the ants back up into the thatch overhead. Uncomfortable as the experience was, I moved to the other hut where I finished the night in peace.

Down at Buena Vista began with gray mists drifting across the valley and shrouding the huge trees of the surrounding hills. By 9 o'clock, the weather had cleared, revealing the Caribbean to the north.

We started our descent, through lush jungle, up and down rocky streams, knee-deep in mud at times, crossing several waist-deep rivers that were cool and rapid, with rocky bottoms and gravel beaches. The river banks are lined by huge, vine- and bromeliad-covered trees. In one of these river beds, a friend had found a stone carving, obviously a phallic (circumcised), an artifact of the Guaymi civilization. My own search for such a prize was unsuccessful.

We stopped at 1:00 for lunch after crossing the last large river, the Rio Juan Cabeza. By 1:30 we were in Punta Vela. This is a small pueblo with a boarding school, almost no one was in town when we arrived, but we were fed lunch by one three men who were working on the school. Again, as throughout the trip, no one waited for us to ask for food or lodging — it was supplied on a matter of course, with great generosity and obvious pleasure.

Normally, it is possible to travel the last ten kilometers from Punta Vela to Chiriquí Grande by boat, a small flatboat pulled on rock-slick railroad tracks by horses. Unfortunately for us, the river, as well as the people, was attending a festival at the other end of the line, so we walked the track to Chiriquí Grande, it was a painful, hot, three-hour walk. For the tides are not ever so regularly, making it impossible to establish a schedule. The country-side is beautiful, however: stands of rice and platanos; dark groves of cacao trees, the fruit of which is attached by a tough stem to rather stout stalks — almost as though they had been stuck by a sticky glue. The cacao trees are covered with moss and bromeliads and thick with birds: parrots and several large colonies of Oropendola with their magnificent scrotal notes.

After seven hours of walking, encountering the Caribbean shore was like entering paradise. I discounted my guide's warning of *tucucho lapiertas* (crocodile) in the water. striped, and slow is. Great to rinse off three days of sweat and change into clean clothes. From the distance, there seemed no land for miles, but we came upon a plot of land by the Club Hotel; one street right along the beach, green hills sloping diagonally, but both hills and slope ended in a hump, a water's edge from the water. Coconut palms grow right up to the water's edge and shade the horizon. The landscape is lovely, the sky is coral reds and browns are the black vultures that soar in numbers overhead, still the seagulls and white I, and none in the palms over the water. They are to Chiriquí Grande we are snuggled to Cape Dad. Pelicans and frigate birds were overhead any, at dusk, fell, the Jesuita and frigate's crowing dominated the town.

Looking back on my experience in Panama and on this trip. I would enlargo on these that if you wish to gain knowledge in traveling, you must bring it with you. If you want to get to understand the lives of the people you must bring something of yourself. I did. I did. We had partial success, with working by the people and giving gifts where possible. I think the tourist who wants what people really wanted to know about me and my life. I want two evening evening discussing philosophies to my guide, Guaymi. I took him of houses where 1000 people lived (Which astonished him; he
could hardly believe it when I told him that there were no cows or horses in Philadelphia, and when I told him that there were no chickens, he rolled on the bed in mirth.

IF YOU GO . . .

The trail is often indistinct and passes through such rugged terrain that a guide is recommended. Peter's guides were Leslie Cumbie and John Jumonville, his seventeen-year-old son. John has now made the trip three times, is highly resourceful, and would be perfectly capable of being a solo guide. Either man can be found by asking around at Laurel or Other. Peter could tell you plus expenses for their services. Price Venkman, a gringo friend of his, and well known in Bogota, would probably help any non-Spanish-speaking traveler to arrange the trip.

If you decide to go it alone without guides you should be an experienced trail finder and map reader. Sunny Goudstikker puts out an excellent map of the area which helps the trail. If you follow Peter's itinerary, whether it is available on the way or at a tent is unnecessary. Even in the dry season the weather is cold and wet so dress accordingly. Bring a complete change of clothing. Some hikers clearly never dry out and sleep in their wet clothes on the next morning. Luckily, plenty of wool socks are a must. Your boots are always walking wet, so Never Buy-Your-Boot Boots, or better still, Jungle Boots from Sears. I am more suitable thin leather ones.

Do your guard against hypothermia. A warm-watered jacket would save your bottom. Instead of water, you must have a beer for matter a 'syrup.' Susan's idea to boost del tint. From those you can fly back to World, or take the ferry to Acapulco and then the train to Chetumal. This is the Caribbean route into Costa Rica. ***