

AMAZON EXPEDITION

The Lower Amazon Archaeology Project: 2005 Reconnaissance in Brazil

As part of her long-term archaeological study of prehistoric cultures of the Lower Amazon, Dr. Anna Roosevelt returned again to Brazil in October 2005 carrying Wings WorldQuest Flag #5.



Dr. Anna Roosevelt and her 2005 expedition team at the Caiapo Indian reserve, site of a significant discovery

Her purpose was to find sites that might yield Paleoindian artifacts, such as projectile points and stone tools. Since beginning her project in 1983, Anna's many trips to this region have provided her with a network of loyal colleagues, willing students, and dedicated local people who work with her to discover new sites, protect past discoveries, and piece together clues about the Amazon's earliest cultures.

This seven-week expedition found Anna's U.S.-Brazilian group of professors, students, and helpers bumping along dusty roads by truck, paddling along Amazon tributaries by canoe, trekking to inspect the condition of sites found in previous expeditions, meeting local experts, and scuba-diving to explore underwater sites.

FINDING EVIDENCE OF EARLY CULTURE IN THE AMAZON BASIN

The focus of Anna's project in Brazil's Lower Amazon has been to investigate the long-term sequence of human development in this equatorial region and to gain a greater understanding of people's interaction with the environment. Anna's search for evidence has concentrated on the interfluves of the Amazon tributaries – the areas between the rivers.

For years, other scholars assumed that these areas – far from the rich resources of the big river – were too poor to have sustained the Paleoindian hunter-gatherer culture. Contrary to this assumption, Anna has discovered many sites with early-style projectile points, other tools, and the remains of nuts, fruits, fish, shellfish, and small animals. Because many of the ancient sites are now underwater, the old wooden materials from thousands of years ago tend to be very well preserved, yielding arrows, spears, and harpoon trappings.



WHO

Dr. Anna C. Roosevelt

WHAT

Exploring new archaeological sites with Brazilian colleagues

WHERE

Lower Amazon, Pará State, Brazil, South America

WHY

To find evidence of prehistoric Paleoindian culture

ADVICE ON MAKING DISCOVERIES

- Don't underestimate the value of interacting with local people. Some are experts in local vegetation or animals; others know the rivers.
- Follow your own ideas. Preexisting scientific understandings are often uninformed. If you only follow the party line and are afraid to challenge the consensus, you will discover little, if anything, that is fresh or of interest.

CONDUCTING A LONG-TERM FIELD STUDY

Anna's primary goal has been to use her many expeditions to this region to create a framework for understanding the sequence of cultural history. In the past, it was assumed that people inhabited the Lower Amazon for only a few thousand years, but using radiocarbon dating on new finds, Anna estimates the time of earliest occupation to be 11,000 to 10,000 years ago.

Although Anna's 2005 field itinerary was thoroughly planned, a chance encounter led to one of the highlights of the expedition – finding a stone tool workshop where Paleoindians made rock-crystal projectile points.

ANCIENT POINTS FROM ROCK CRYSTAL

When Anna discussed renting boats for her group to tour the Curua River, the proprietor told her a story about an artifact found in 2002 by his son, Marcelo Gomes, and other miners. While digging for gold in an underwater gravel bed, they noticed many small, shiny flakes of crystal. While sifting through the gravel, they found a large, perfect projectile point that Marcelo thought might be an important artifact. When the Belém museum did not return his call, another miner sold the beautiful point to a collector from a nearby city. In 2002, Anna and her Brazilian colleagues had dived to and mapped another projectile-point site



In Pará state in northeast Brazil, Anna's team traveled far inland to study archaeological sites at Santarém, Taperinha, the Monte Alegre Hills, the Xingu River basin and the Curua drainage within it, and the Cayapo Villaga at O Bau, as well as the mainstream Amazon itself.

identified by miners near the Curuaia Indian Reserve. Anna told the Caiapos of Marcelo's find and promised to try to return it to them. With Marcelo's help, the purchaser was traced and the point was given to Anna, who gave it to Señor Bey Cayapo, who took it to the Caiapo authorities.

The clear rock-crystal point has highly controlled flaking, making it, according to Roosevelt, "one of the most important – if not the most important – artifact of early indigenous heritage yet found in Amazonia."



A rock-crystal projectile point made by the earliest Amazonians

EXPEDITION PARTICIPANTS

Expedition Leader:

Dr. Anna Roosevelt, Professor of Anthropology, University of Illinois-Chicago

Counterpart Scientist:

Dr. Pedro Funari, UNICAMP, Sao Paulo

Archaeologists:

Dr. John Douglas, Professor,

University of Montana-Missoula

Megan Val Baker, historic landscape archaeologist, Cornwall, U.K.

Dr. Ellen Quinn, ceramics specialist

Mauro Barreto, Federal University of Pará

Dr. Denise Gomes Cavalcante

Students:

Marcio Amaral, Faculdades Integradas do Tapajos, Santarém

Jennifer Stephens, University of Illinois-Chicago
Federal University of Pará, Santarém:

Heliberto da Silva Filho and Eloane da Silva

(biology), Judithe Gama (sociology), Daniela

Bianchi (biology), and Darcilene Godinho

(agroforestry)

EXPEDITION RESULTS

Anna's long-term work in the Amazon and her 2005 expedition have had several successful results – confirming sites of up to 11,000 years old away from the river, working underwater with scuba gear to examine underwater sites containing early-style projectile points and other well-preserved tools, and collaborating more closely with students and professors at the Federal University of Pará.

New techniques have been pioneered – use of fine-grained stratigraphic excavation, better identification of biological remains through more intensive soil processing, and innovative mapping of underground site layouts.

Future work will include excavation of the new underwater sites and more excavation at sites in Santarém and on Marajo Island.



Anna with Wings WorldQuest Flag #5

ABOUT DR. ANNA ROOSEVELT

With her discoveries on the longevity of human habitation in the Amazon, anthropologist Dr. Anna Roosevelt has radically challenged assumptions about the prehistory of the Americas. She continues her groundbreaking Amazon work, and has extended her search in the Congo for early humans.

For her many accomplishments, she has received the 2003 Wings WorldQuest Award for Human Life, a MacArthur Fellowship, Fulbright funding, an Explorers Medal, a Bettendorf Medal from Santarém, and the Order of Rio Branco from Brazil.



Anna's group visits the Curua River discovery site.

*“If you are curious and questioning,
you have a chance to
make a discovery.”*

– Dr. Anna Roosevelt