

Pikes Peak River Runners

Costa Rica Adventure

Nov 2001



By Dave Sample

Executive Summary: Fun people, warm water, many rapids per mile, excellent food, fun side-trips, extremely nice people throughout the country and great accommodations. I will do it again.

10/25/2001 It started for us (Dave & Rosalyn Sample (check picture 856)) when we left the house at 7:30 AM picked up the Hawks (Rick & Marsha (check picture 769)) and arrived at the COS airport at 8:30 expecting long security lines. We got through the lines by 9:00 and waited for our 11:35 flight to Houston. The winds were with us and we arrived in Houston 20 minutes early where we met the Kopf's (Dana & Esther (check picture 770)) who had arrived from Albuquerque. The six of us boarded the plane in Houston an hour late (6:25) expecting to meet the rest of our group in the San Jose, Costa Rica airport. One from Idaho (Jim Siebe) and one from CA (Larry Sample) were supposed to arrive about the same time as us. Two from CO (Dave Shotts and Debbie Stewart (check picture 836)), one from CA (Ed Burzinski (check picture 803)) and Scott Mantooth ((check picture 759) Ocoee Adventure Center) from Tennessee had arrived the previous day. We filled out all the immigration paperwork on the plane that said we could not take food into the country so we threw all our peanut butter & jelly sandwiches out – 30 minutes later they said the weather would not let us land in San Jose (we did our landing approach and could see the ground from only a few hundred feet – so close) so we were diverting to Managua Nicaragua. 20 minutes later they said, "never mind", we have decided to land in Panama City, Panama. So, we headed south and landed in Panama about 11:00 PM. Continental did a surprisingly good job of sneaking us through customs, got us on busses and gave us a police escort (we never knew why) to a nice Caesar Park Casino Hotel. The airport is ~30 minutes from the city. On the way to the Hotel, we went through a security check with guys with big guns. We got to our room about 1:00 AM and prepared to be on the bus in the morning at 6:30 AM for our 8:30 AM flight to San Jose and hopefully get to our first river tomorrow.

10/26 We got our 5:30 AM (4:30 Costa Rica time) wake-up call without requesting it. We ate breakfast and boarded the bus with our police escort to the airport. We had our first Toucan sighting along the way. The airport was fun with a bunch of non-Spanish speaking Americans in a long, slow line. A local speaking broken English said to us "Continental/Houston" – since that was where we came from, that was all we needed to hear to follow her to a much faster shorter line. It turns out that when we got to the front, they decided we did not have tickets to go to Houston, so we went back to the end of the long/slow line. A Continental employee figured out that we were all from the same flight and herded us to the correct Customs line where we moved quickly to our gate. We were off again for SJCR where we arrived at 8:45 CR time. We found our luggage, which had sunscreen spilled on it from someone's luggage (they caught me – it was mine). We made it into the throng of eager/aggressive taxi drivers and were glad to see the "Dave Sample Group" sign held by Roger (Mad Dog) Madrigal (check picture 783). He got us into the van, and we started toward the "powerhouse" section of the Reventazon (exploding water) River. This was where we would meet the rest of the group. The night in Panama had not cost us a river through good work of Scott our outfitter from [Ocoee Adventure Center](#) . As we found out throughout the trip, Scott had everything arranged, making our trip more

comfortable and less hectic than other trips I have done. We started our trip with 2 safety kayakers (I think one is required by Costa Rica), 2 paddle rafts and Ed running an oar boat generally by himself because we needed the rest of the people for power in the paddle rafts. The powerhouse section was generally a bunch of class III rapids with one class IV+ drop (banana fields). The rapids were much closer together than I have ever run. We found this to be one of the easier rivers even though we had 3 swimmers (Dave, Dave & Larry) in "off-the-wall" and Esther separated her shoulder in "banana fields". We also had an unexpected tree across the river that we had to make a quick stop and portage. We saw lots of small horses running along the rocky riverbanks as we floated by. We had the first of our standard excellent river lunches including lots of fruits (pineapple was a favorite of most) and local specialty foods. We saw the local sites; birds, animals, and lots of cable chairs across the river for locals to reach their farm fields.

The Geliwa Hotel in Turialba would be our basis of operation for the next 3 nights. Geliwa was an older clean place in an excellent area where they served a nice breakfast every morning. It had on-demand hot water that I guarantee would not pass US wiring standards. It worked well. We were going to challenge the Pacuare (named by Indian Chief Huacus – Indian Cemetery) tomorrow and discussed the possibility that we might not have the personnel needed for that challenge. We decided to hire another local guide (vs us guiding our own boat).

That night we ate at a Jamaican "Kingston Restaurant" – the chef came out and gave us personal service by explaining all the dishes. He was obviously (and correctly) proud of his food. This was just the first of many excellent restaurants. This was where we were introduced to the Costa Rican fruit drinks. We all enjoyed several in the subsequent days.

The safety kayakers were the best I have ever seen. Mad Dog Madrigal was the Costa Rican National champion for 8 years ('93-'00) and Alex (trained by Mad Dog) is the current National Champ.

10/27 The drive to the Pacuare takes us down a long narrow road to the river. The 400 Acres around the put-in is for sale. Reported to be about \$1.5 M. The Pacuare is the most popular river in the country (50,000 people per year). We saw 4 boats at the put-in. I think that was the last time we saw any other boats. I found the Pacuare to be lots of fun rapids but did not seem to be the continuous drop that we found on 3 other rivers. Most rapids seemed pretty forgiving except for one that required lots of maneuvering to negotiate. This was the most beautiful river for me, lots of waterfalls and high canyon walls. Dos Mountains was a place where 2 mountains narrow the channel to only a few feet. Some of us jumped in for the "it's the code" swim. I think this river could really change personalities at other flows. We saw a local youngster carrying his balsa log and kayak paddle back to the top of one of the smaller rapids. You had to see it to believe it.

There was a room temperature (75 degree) shower at take-out that made it even more pleasant than other takeouts. It is the end of the rainy season and we got lots of heavy rain after we got off the river tonight. A few stayed in the rain to load the gear. The warm rain was pleasant since we were still in our river clothes. The frogs were pleasantly noisy at the take out.

Observations: Fewer bugs than expected but the ants are quick to make painful bites. It is nice to have dry clothes and the bus waiting at the take-out without us doing any shuttles. Danny (check picture 818) the bus driver is very accommodating – do not mention it unless you want him to do it. We have been drinking the water at restaurants and no one is having any problems. We eat after 8:00 PM every night and we are done LONG before the local people even start. They party late here. When a rapid has a "sneak/cheat" run the

locals call it the "West Virginia" run. To be called a town in Costa Rica you need the following: Bar, Church, School and Soccer Field.

10/28/2001 On the way to the river we stopped at a local "snake-man". He delivered an interesting talk about the poisonous snakes in Costa Rica – he ended every statement with "don't worry". The bushmaster is the most poisonous – 80% of the bites are fatal and most of the rest result in an amputation – but "don't worry". He has 3 of the 4 bushmasters in captivity. He stated that all politicians should have a bushmaster as a pet loose in their houses. We enjoyed seeing all his snakes from behind the screens. He had lots of pretty frogs that we could touch. He said that no one could kiss the frog because it was really a politician that he did not want changed back. He has the same opinion of politicians as I do. He also let us in the same picture frame but at a safe distance as some of the smaller poisonous snakes.

Pasqua section of the Reventazon was our river today. It was easily the most fun and difficult river for me. Grand Canyon sized waves, successive rapids requiring lots of maneuvering in the rapids. We only scouted one rapid because we were following a 14-year veteran guide. There is not time to scout the rapids. Everyone was exhausted after today. We had 4 swimmers (Dave, Dave, Debbie, Rosalyn) in one big wave and Ed flipped in the same rapid. Recovery went quickly and we headed down river again after we caught our breath.

We stayed at the Selva Verde Lodge – look this one up in the guidebooks - nice "cottage" atmosphere on stilts above the rain forest. Everyone had a hammock outside of their room and mosquito netting above the beds. The netting was not required. Birds and butterflies abound. Unfortunately, we had 2 rooms burgled in the night. They took cash but left other valuables like cameras. They cut the screens above people's heads and took stuff from nightstands. I think only 2 rooms had shutters open.

10/29/2001 Sarapiquí is today's river running through a farming region – bony for our run. Looks like it could be wild with a little more water. This river was like the Arkansas from BV ballfield to fisherman's bridge at low flow. We had another portage today because of down trees. This was a good rest day for us before Rio Toro (The Bull) is tomorrow. We had lots of rain on the 29th and 30th. Watched the movie of the Pasqua section on a small bar TV. Cannot wait to get the film and show it on a bigger screen.

10/30 Near the put-in we saw 3 sloth's (check picture 823). Looked like Ma & Pa and a baby – they sure move slowly. We never saw the big one move. I think this was the first day that we saw the leaf-cutter ants. We could see them for about 40 feet up into the tree. Just like National Geographic. Some decided that Rio Toro was not for them so today we pared down to two safety kayakers, a paddle boat and Ed running the oar boat with 2 in front for paddle assist. The put-in was a ~ mile carry down a nice road to the river. The road was gated. The run was twelve miles in 1 hr 45 min. including time spent eddying out to wait for Ed to catch us. This was a fast river with little time to rest. There were 2 difficult rapids and lots of class 4 rapids on this section. I got a paddle in the mouth and still have a bit of a swollen lip 2 weeks later. The take-out at the dairy farm was interesting. They drove a big four-wheel drive tractor with a wagon about a mile to the river to pick us up. The tractor was the only way out (check picture 799). At the dairy farm we changed clothes and washed the "dairy mud" off us before heading down the road again. The Rio Toro is about 30 km from Nicaragua. Chumpy (Maurice) joined us today as the 2nd safety kayaker. The kayakers were great at pointing out problem areas in the river. Patting the top of their head signaled a dozer. There was discussion that Ed may have been the first ever to row the Rio Toro section.

10/31 Spent the night at Mt Arenal. After 5 days of wild rivers, we had some time to relax and reflect on the amazing sites we have already seen. Including the Bano trees (check picture 815)

Many fences were built with newly cut posts that would sprout because the ground is so wet and fertile.

Driving: The traffic has been fast moving with lots of bluff decisions to be made by the driver. I am glad I did not have to drive. We saw a truck off the road partially rolled after he got a wheel in the mud. We witnessed another truck run off the road in front of us from a similar condition. It looked like a slow-motion movie. Danny, our driver has been great. We have seen people passing on curves and barely making it. We have seen bikes riding late at night with no lights. Something that we cannot figure out is the people sitting on the road in towns at night. Seems dangerous to us but we see it very often.

Weather: We have had lots of rain (end of rainy season), but it has not caused us any changes to our travel plans. Extremely high humidity is constant – some areas have more.

The cabin at the base of the volcano is a nice break from the rooms we have had. We have a sun porch that has a little breeze; we are hoping something dries while we are here. The hotel will wash shirts etc for \$1 each, so a bunch of us had some laundry done here. Activities today include a hike to a 233' waterfall where we bought necklaces from some local boys. Later we feed the Coatimundi, see howler monkeys, Toucans, and other cool birds. When we got back to the hotel the volcano growled a couple of times and belched some smoke for some excitement. Now we are headed to the Tabacon hot springs to soak. This is an amazing setting with lots of greenery and varying temperature pools nestled at the base of the volcano. There was a water slide that allowed us to compete for biggest and longest splashes. In addition to the beautiful setting the volcano put on a display by spewing lava, then we watched it slide down the mountain. Danny made a special trip back to town so people could read their email.

11/1 We left for Jaco Beach – it rained all the way. We drove past 2 major mudslides. One covered the road until they could get a big tractor to clear the way. We rested, played in the ocean, and walked around town this afternoon.

11/2 We went to the National Park 50 km south of Jaco. Rick knocked a big swordfish off the wall at a restaurant. We had some time to play in the Pacific Ocean again today. Ed took the public transportation back to San Jose to be back for a wedding. This was supposed to be the day we did our final river. The Naranjo River is only run able during rainy season, but it has rained too much the last few days to run. It was way out of its banks.

11/3 Last day in Jaco we loitered in town and played in the ocean. People got their shopping done and got the temporary tattoos.

11/4 We headed back to San Jose. We saw 2 big crocodiles from the bus in one of the local coastal rivers. We stopped to take pictures, have not seen the pictures yet. The Hawks head back today. Larry, Jim, and Scott leave Monday. Sample's and Kopf's leave Tuesday while Dave and Debbie are scheduled to return Wednesday.

11/5 Kopf's and Samples used their best Spanish to get on the public transportation and head 2 hours North to the Paos volcano (about 50 km). (check picture 851) The volcano obliged by clearing from the mist long enough for us to see into the 2nd largest volcano in the world. We did more shopping in San Jose today.

General Observations: There was more "litter" in the country than expected. San Jose was VERY littered.

General Disclaimer: Dates and facts deemed accurate based on hearsay and memory.