

1 / First contact with the Mishimishimaböwei-teri

A thousand previous days concluded with the same melodic incantations, pierced irregularly by a half-scream, half-growl as the shaman struck a powerful blow with his arm or arrow at one of a multitude of humanoid spirits (*bekura*) radiant in their fiery halos, bearing incandescent names, and partaking of the substance of human souls. I did not have to look up to know that the score of glistening men, streaked with green, *ebene*-laden nasal mucus, were growing more aggressive and violent as the effect of the magical powder hit them, and their foreboding preoccupation with sickness and death became more complete. They were growing surly, and I made a mental note to avoid that area as I methodically went through my IBM printout of village residents and photographed people, moving unobtrusively from house to house. I had run out of film and returned to my house—a section of the roof I shared with the headman and his family—to fumble another roll of Tri-x into my Pentax, attempting to keep my sweaty hands from fouling the pressure plate and focal plane. Droplets formed on my forehead, tickling as they coalesced and ran down my nose, stinging as they seeped into the corners of my eyes.

Dedeheiwä, the accomplished shaman, and Möawä, his son-in-law and the man whose house I shared, were leading the afternoon session in front of Yoinakuwä's place, some 40 yards off to my left. I could recognize their somber droning above the voices of the others, for I had gotten to know these two men quite well over the past three years. The village *uaiteri*—"fierce ones"—were assembled to drive out the perceived, but mostly imagined, sickness that Dedeheiwä diagnosed as the effects of *bekura* sent by his enemies in Yeisikorowä-teri, a village far to the south. Dedeheiwä, as was his style, led the attack—very vigorously for a man his age. I remember taking periodic glances in their direction, unconsciously aware that the mood was volatile and a few of the men were becoming uncontrollable. I was concerned about what the headman's younger brother, Yahohiwä, might do. Living in the shadow of the headman's renown, he had every reason to be concerned about his status and ferocity. He was, however, an unpredictable character and quite capable of violent expressions. Earlier in the day he expounded about his ferocity to me at considerable length and named the men he had killed on various raids—just before demanding a machete. He was piqued when I didn't give it to him, annoyed because I was seemingly oblivious to the status he had and had developed so carefully in his exposition. Later, he openly insulted me as I passed before his house-taking identification photographs and making



...or traveling between Bissai-teri and Reyaböwei-teri. Rerebawä looks on
rd some of his observations. (Photograph by Timolby Asch.)

Kaobawä chanting with a Shamatai. He warned me about them.



sketches of the hammock positions and sleeping arrangements there. When I paid his remark no attention and passed his hammock in silence, he became more irate. I didn't see him coming and realized the degree of his anger only when I felt the sharp blow of his clenched fist on my chest. I could let his verbal insult bounce off unattended, but I could not take a smart thump on my pectoral that lightly. Why? Two reasons. First, it invites more of the same—or escalation. Second, after three years of that kind of thing I was reaching a saturation point and beginning to despise the pecking system within which I had to conduct my fieldwork. In this particular case, I retained enough of my wits and cultural relativism to measure my response. He was an edgy, unpredictable, and boisterous man, and very concerned about his personal status. Yánomamó men do not tell you how fierce they are unless there seems to be some question about the validity of their claims.

I dropped my field books and pencils when he hit me, and pretentiously mimed, in the most grotesque manner, the kinesthetic prancings of Yánomamó ferocity incarnate. The observing women and children giggled and squirmed, as I expected they would. The scene, potentially explosive, was now one of the sub-human buffoon fieldworker exhibiting agonistic stances of the least convincing kind; clearly aware that the provocation called for a reaction, but seemingly incapable of pulling it off in the appropriate fashion. But, the reaction was recognizably Yánomamó for all its ribaldry. In the midst of the chuckles I smacked him



Figure 1.1—Some of the shamans were growing sunny.



Figure 1.2—High on drugs, a Shamatari shaman is "cooled" by his more sober peers.

back on the chest. To the observer, it was one of those slow-motion, fake blows. But I put a little "English" on the tail of it and I knew from his surprised look that it stung, just enough to communicate to him that I might not be teasing as much as my antics implied. It was a joke with a grain of kinetic truth.

For the time being I had made a public farce out of something that I knew was gnawing at him, and went about my work as if there were nothing amiss. I knew him well enough to avoid him for the time being, and when he and the others assembled for their daily *ebene* party, I was well advised to stay at a distance.

I closed my camera and began putting my notebooks and tape measure back into my side pack to resume my work. The din of the chanters suddenly gave way to the alarmed screams of women and children who scrambled in terror for the safety of the backside of the *shabono* roof. Men shouted and tried to disarm Yahohoiwá, who had, in the ecstasy of his high, taken up his bow and arrows and was now running back and forth, eluding his pursuers and intimidating the women and children. I watched briefly as the men approached him cautiously and attempted to disarm him. They stayed at a comfortable distance, and he kept them at bay by ominously pointing his arrow at them. I had seen this, too, on many other occasions. The rules of the "game" are to permit the man to display his ferocity (chasing women and children), even to the point of letting him discharge an arrow or two wildly into the roof. The general panic he creates strokes his ego, and the concern that the men show for him, their attempts—often very delicate, flattering entreaties to disarm—reinforce the feeling that *bere* is a man to be feared and respected. They usually succeed in taking the weapons away and then devote their attention to the man to "cool" him down. Rarely do

world at large. He was a true *waiteri*, a true leader, and a true Shamatari. As the Yānomamö say, he was a *rä bārowei*—the one who *really* lived there. We ultimately came to irreconcilable differences in 1972 and parted on strained, if not hostile, terms.

Kāobawä and Rerebawä (discussed in Chapter I of *The Fierce People*) had been accurate in their predictions of what my experience among the Shamatari, the collection of some dozen villages to the south of their village, would be like. These were the people against whom Kāobawä and his ancestors had waged ceaseless war for half a century, war that continues to this very day. They had warned me about the treachery of the Shamatari and I ignored their counsel. This was unwise in some respects. In 1971 I made an error in judgment that very nearly cost me my life. I made a similar error in 1972. These specific incidents ultimately led me to decide to terminate particular aspects of my field research. But before I get into these incidents, personality conflicts, and the



Figure 1.3—Yaboboiwä—he was at a poor angle and his arrow missed me.

these displays lead to actual violence, although I recorded a few incidents that did. My reaction was: they are 40 yards from me and the men are already attempting to disarm him, so I can ignore it.

I congratulated myself at the wisdom of having decided to avoid that area of the village and continued putting my cameras and notebooks into my side pack. Then the women and children in the house next to me shrieked in unison and scattered. Most of them escaped by diving out the back of the house. I looked up to see Yahohoiwä staggering toward me with a wild, glazed look on his face. His nocked arrow was aimed right at my chest. Yānomamö, like most people, resent being stared at. I looked into his eyes and knew that the glint was not altogether chemically induced. I decided I was not going to play this stupid game with him and do what he obviously wanted me to do: turn tail and dive out the back of the house as the women and children had done. I also suspected that if I *did* play the game he might not be compelled, because of the earlier incident, to play the game according to the rules and shoot to miss. The thought of his barbed arrow in my retreating rear did not appeal to me, and quite frankly, I was getting angry. I decided to make a stand and stare him down. He was about to shoot when he realized that I was not going to run, and this startled him enough that he temporarily "lost" the nock in his arrow. I could tell he was annoyed, but by the time he had recovered his nock he was at a poor angle to get a good shot at me: he had run almost past me and had to turn slightly to shoot. His arrow whizzed past my ear and imbedded itself in the roof behind me. The men caught up to him and dragged him back to the chanting arena in front of Yoinakuwä's house and soothed him. I went about my work, but with diminished enthusiasm.

He came over to visit with me that evening and sat silently, watching me prepare my supper. When he decided to speak, it was in a low, carefully chosen, apologetic tone. "Older brother!" he began. "I was very frightened of you today when you stared into my eyes. I fear you now because you do not run from danger." I listened to his explanation and told him that I, too, was frightened of him and thought, when I saw his face, of all the men he said he killed. I told him that I knew him to be fierce and that others, even in distant villages, knew of him and his reputation. He seemed relieved at this and quite pleased. His mood changed immediately, and he began to chatter inquisitively about my work. Order was established again. We both knew what to expect from each other in the future, more or less.

I was always on less certain terms with Möawä, his brother, the headman of Mishimishimaböwei-teri. He was the toughest, most successful headman I ever met. The kind of relationship was essentially the same: peck a little, create a crisis, then back off at stalemate—and begin again. Unlike Yahohoiwä, Möawä was confident of his reputation and status. He did not have to resort to displays only while on *ebene*. There was no mistaking that Möawä was a man of his word, someone who commanded awe and respect. He was formidable; it showed in many ways—his tone of voice, his bearing, the way others jumped at his suggestions, or fled from his presence when he was angry and hurled insults and threats at the

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 coercive power of gifts and gift-giving, let me begin with the history of my interest in the Shamatarí population and how I made first contact with Mōawá's village.

It is increasingly improbable that anthropologists will have the opportunity to be the first representatives of their culture to make contacts with peoples who have never seen outsiders before. There are few descriptions of what this is like, so I recite in considerable detail what my own experiences were. The methodological lesson has to do with the wisdom and necessity of visiting large numbers of villages in order to make censuses and check on the accuracy of genealogies, because a settlement pattern study by design and nature requires this kind of data. My own reasons, after a number of unusual setbacks and obstacles, became quite irrational in spite of the scientific merit that the objectives had.

Actually, my intent from the very beginning of the fieldwork was to study the Shamatarí groups to the south of the Bisaasi-teri. Although most of the Shamatarí were totally uncontacted by the outside world, members of two of their villages—



Figure 1.4—Mōawá, headman of great renown.



Figure 1.5—Kəobawü, leader of great poise and dignity. He knew the treachery of the Shamatarí first-hand and advised me not to go there.

Mōmariböwei-teri and Reyaböwei-teri—regularly visited the Bisaasi-teri to trade and feast (see Figure 1.7). My plan was to spend enough time in Bisaasi-teri to learn Yānomamö and then initiate work among the two Shamatarí villages to the south. I made no attempt to conceal my interest in the Shamatarí, and this, I later came to realize, annoyed the Bisaasi-teri. It was clear to them that I was to be merely a temporary guest in their village.

I actively sought out Shamatarí informants who had moved into Bisaasi-teri from one of the two villages, or who had been captured by the Bisaasi-teri in past raids. They earned many of the trade goods (*madobe*) that I initially gave out in Bisaasi-teri. Rules of etiquette are such in Yānomamö culture that visitors like myself should not display a lack of interest in the hosts, and it goes without saying that the visitor should generously give his *madobe* to his hosts. The Bisaasi-teri were justifiably aggrieved that my objectives to live with the Shamatarí would ultimately lead to a lack of supply of steel tools, so they incessantly advised me not to go to the Shamatarí villages.

It took longer to learn Yānomamö than I expected, and before long I was deeply involved in the study of the Bisaasi-teri and related groups. As I planned to return to the field the following year, I elected to spend the remainder of my



Figure 1.6—Revebauä, frequent companion on my trips to the Shamatarä.

first field trip rounding out my data on the Bisaasi-teri and scale down my project on the Shamatarä to more modest proportions. I decided that I would make a more elaborate study of the Shamatarä on the next field trip.

But even a *small* study of the Shamatarä was not to the liking of the Bisaasi-teri, who actively attempted to keep me in their own village. It soon became known to the members of the two Shamatarä villages that I was interested in living with them, and, furthermore, intended to visit other villages to their south, especially a village that everybody referred to as "Sibarariwä's village" (Moäwä's village—Mishimishimaböwei-teri). Sibarariwä was the acknowledged headman of the Mishimishimaböwei-teri group, a man with a reputation for treachery and ferocity. He was deeply involved in the treacherous feast of 1950 which claimed the lives of so many Bisaasi-teri men, and the Bisaasi-teri despised him. The two closest Shamatarä groups also despised Sibarariwä, for he and his people raided them constantly, even though they were closely related to each other. While members of the first two Shamatarä villages were anxious to have me visit them, they were not enthusiastic about the possibility of my visiting Sibarariwä. They, too, wanted a monopoly on my steel tools. Despite the fact that they were at war with Sibarariwä's village, a few individuals from these two villages continued to visit

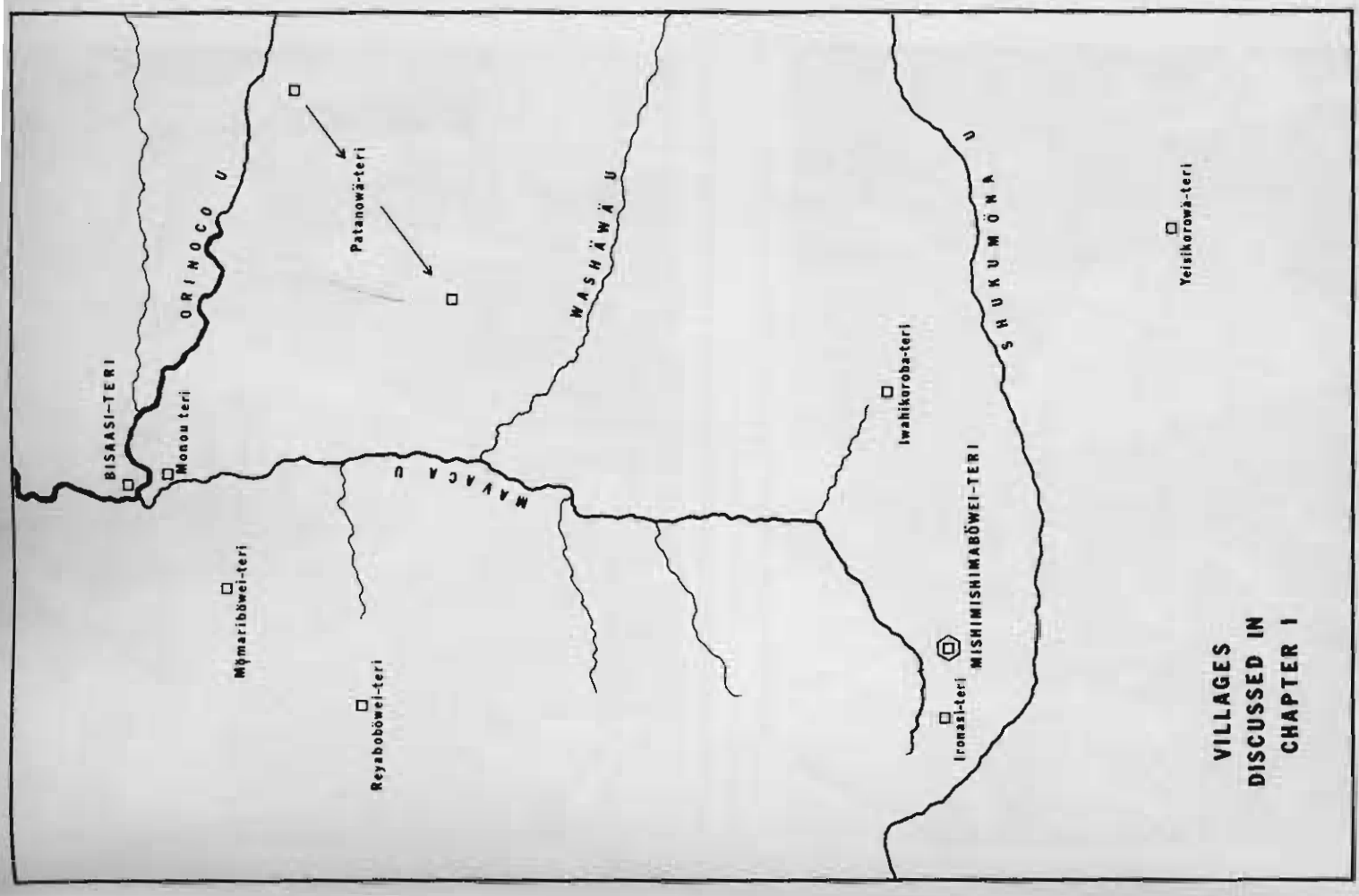


Figure 1.7—Villages discussed in Chapter I.

their kinsmen in Mishimishimaböwei-teri, and this visiting kept a small, but constant trickle of badly-worn steel tools going to Sibarariwä's village. The Bisaasi-teri would obtain machetes from foreigners like me or the missionaries. When these were worn out, they would pass them on to the first Shamatarí group, the Mõmariböwei-teri, who would wear them down even more before passing them on to their neighbors, the Reyaboböwei-teri. By the time the tools reached Sibarariwä's village, they were usually unrecognizable as machetes. Most of them were broken into two or more pieces, and none of them had handles. The Bisaasi-teri did not want me to give my tools directly to the Mõmariböwei-teri when I went there to visit, and the Mõmariböwei-teri did not want me to take my tools past them to the Reyaboböwei-teri. Each group wanted a monopoly.

It was not difficult for me to get guides to take me to the first village (Mõmariböwei-teri) in the trading network, since a considerable number of young men from that village were living in Bisaasi-teri as sons-in-law while they were doing bride service. They were more than willing to take me to their village if the pay were a machete. I usually brought a few extra machetes with me to their village (Mõmariböwei-teri) for trading purposes. Once I reached the village (a 10-hour walk), my guides would be coerced by their elders to terminate the trip there. They did not want me to continue on to the Reyaboböwei-teri, suspecting that I might give valuable machetes to them. They usually told me that the village was very far away, the trails were terrible, the jungle was flooded and, besides, nobody was home: "they all went on a long trip far, far away" was a common story, and it usually worked. The thought of walking two more days to find an empty village is not an exciting prospect.

Still, I managed to accumulate a rather large body of demographic, historic, and genealogical information on the two closest Shamatarí groups, and it soon became clear from these data that I had to visit Sibarariwä's village to fill in many gaps. The genealogies clearly showed that the residents of Sibarariwä's group were agnatically related to the residents of Reyaboböwei-teri and Mõmariböwei-teri, and the historical data¹ showed that the three groups had a common origin: they had once been a single village.

The Bisaasi-teri and the two closest Shamatarí groups used a different strategy to prevent me from visiting Sibarariwä's village, which was said to be located somewhere on the Shukumõna River, not far beyond the headwaters of the Mavaca River. They recited to me the gruesome tales of treachery and violence that characterized their own dealings with Sibarariwä's people, and assured me that Sibarariwä would kill me and my guides if I ever went there. At first these stories impressed me enough to cause me to question my plans to contact Sibarariwä's group. It was clear from the demographic data I collected on "cause of death"² that Sibarariwä's village had a well-deserved reputation for fierceness, for many Bisaasi-teri, Mõmariböwei-teri, and Reyaboböwei-teri had died at the hands of Mishimishimaböwei-teri archers.

¹ By "historical data" I mean *informants'* verbal accounts of the past history of villages—the migrations, fissions, wars, and consequences for group dispersal.

² See Chapter 4.



Figure 1.8—Sibarariwä, the fabled headman of Mishimishimaböwei-teri.

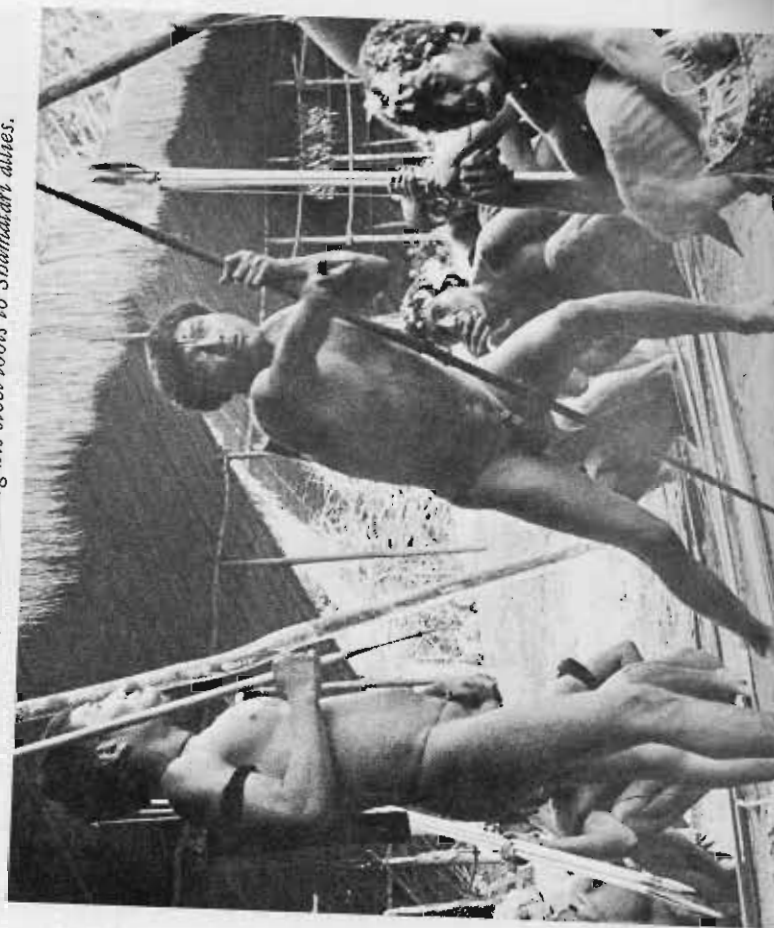


Figure 1.9—Kəobawü trading his steel tools to Shamatarí allies.

As the months wore on and I became better acquainted with the nature of Yanomamö trade, and, as trade principles applied to me, their desires for monopoly, I began to suspect that much of the information I had been given about Sibarariwä's group might have been exaggerated. I also became better at identifying the circumstances in which informants would most likely lie, and the informants who would most likely lie under any circumstances. By carefully selecting the informants and the circumstances, I began broaching the question from a less direct angle. I cannot describe all of the factors that went into identifying the truthful informants—much of it has to do with judgment and subjectivity that can best be described as intuition. To be sure, I could make objective determinations on the accuracy of statements about genealogical relationships, and so forth, but to evaluate the accuracy of an informant's statement about the probability of an event happening is quite another matter. The question, essentially, was: would the Mishimishim-aböwei-teri kill me if I went there to visit them? The answer that the Yanomamö had uniformly given me until then was a unanimous *Yes*, but the circumstances were always the same: the answer was always given in public by the older men who were concerned about the possibility that I would give machetes to the Mishimishimaböwei-teri, machetes that they might otherwise claim for them-

selves. The Mishimishimaböwei-teri, of course, were their enemies, and even if I refused to heed their advice, it was unlikely that I would be able to recruit guides from among the Bisaasi-teri.

I decided to approach this question differently: I would only inquire about the matter *in private* from younger men who were keen on adventure and most likely able, for kinship reasons, to visit Sibarariwä's village with little chance of personal danger to themselves. I never broached the subject unless I was working privately with an informant whose word I had learned to trust on other matters. My first encouraging answer came from a young man named Wakarabewä, who had married into Bisaasi-teri. His father lived in Mõmariböwei-teri and was a brother to Sibarariwä. Wakarabewä said his father occasionally visited Sibarariwä, and he felt that I might be able to go along on such a visit also.

Let me describe, to the extent that it is possible, some of the factors that I weighed in making a subjective conclusion that I might visit Sibarariwä's group and come back unscathed. Wakarabewä was a stranger in Bisaasi-teri and quick to point out the lies and deceptions that the Bisaasi-teri fed me. He had married into Bisaasi-teri and was doing bride service to his father-in-law, the headman of the lower group of Bisaasi-teri, whose *shabono* (village) was some two hundred

Figure 1.10—Shamatari archer from Mishimishimaböwei-teri.



Figure 1.11—Wakarabewä, my first Shamatari guide. He feared neither the notorious residents of Sibarariwä's village nor the Rahaaras.



yards downstream from Kaobawä's. As a son-in-law he was expected to do all manner of onerous tasks for his father-in-law, and as a Shamatarí was subject to a considerable amount of ridicule and harsh treatment. Like many other people, the Yanomamö tend to be bigoted and seize upon any opportunity to make invidious distinctions between themselves and anybody else who is slightly different: the Bisaasi-teri in general, have a low opinion of the Shamatarí—and vice versa. I discussed this in *The Fierce People* when I described the relationship of Rerebawä to the Bisaasi-teri—he, too, had married into Bisaasi-teri from a different group and experienced the same kind of treatment.

Wakarabewä's father-in-law was particularly unpleasant to him. He denied Wakarabewä sexual access to the girl while at the same time he allowed the young men of the natal village to enjoy these privileges. Wakarabewä was bound by the taboos associated with the in-law relationship and could not complain about it, but he privately related his bitterness to me. He was not related by blood to anyone important in the village and, out of his bitterness, freely told me about lies that had been given to me by the Bisaasi-teri. When he told me in private that he didn't think Sibarariwä would kill me if I went to his village, provided I was with Wakarabewä or his father, I concluded that a trip there was not entirely out of the question. But, I had an uneasy feeling about accepting the word of a seventeen-year-old youth when the consensus of the adults was precisely the opposite. Still, other young Shamatarí informants, under similar circumstances, concurred in Wakarabewä's predictions to varying degrees. I was careful not to let them know what Wakarabewä told me, so as to have independent opinions. As I became better acquainted with some of the older men in Bisaasi-teri, men like Kaobawä, I was able to create circumstances during informant sessions in private that led to important modifications of their public positions. None of these men ever said that I would be perfectly safe if I should visit Sibarariwä's village, but some of them suggested that the possibility existed. This was qualitatively a different kind of story than the official position that a trip there would lead to certain death.

About ten months after I had been in the field a group of young men from Reyaboböwei-teri visited the Bisaasi-teri. They also visited me to ask for steel tools when the Bisaasi-teri were not in my hut. They mentioned that a group of men from Sibarariwä's village had recently visited Reyaboböwei-teri. They told me that Sibarariwä's group had recently moved away from the Shukumöna River and was now living very close to the headwaters of the Mavaca River. After careful, devious questioning, I concluded that it was possible to ascend the Mavaca River in my dugout canoe to a point very close to the putative new location of Sibarariwä's village. The rivers were quite high because of recent rains, so I decided to make an attempt to contact Sibarariwä's village.

Wakarabewä, in a matter-of-fact way, agreed to come with me and suggested the names of a few more young Shamatarí men who might be amicably received by the Mishimishimaböwei-teri. I talked with these young men and secured their promises to come with me.

Word soon spread through Bisaasi-teri that I was, at last, planning to go up the Mavaca to try to find Sibarariwä's village. My hut was visited by party after

party of Bisaasi-teri who strongly advised me against such a foolish thing. When their stories of treachery and murder failed to frighten me into canceling my plans, they began a new tactic: *Rabaras*.

Rabaras were created when Man was in his infancy. They were associated with the Great Flood and deep water. When the flood receded, the *Rabaras*—awesome serpents—took up residence in the Orinoco River, somewhere near its headwaters. They have never been seen in the Orinoco, so the presumption is that they migrated to other rivers after the Flood and now live there.

While no one had ever seen *Rabaras*, their behavior was well known to the Yanomamö. They rise up out of the water and devour those who are foolish enough to attempt to cross the rivers, especially rivers that are unfamiliar to the Yanomamö. Furthermore, it is alleged that an underground river connects the Orinoco with the upper Mavaca, and that the *Rabaras* took this course and migrated to the Mavaca.

Rabaras almost resulted in the cancellation of my planned trip up the Mavaca. Since none of the Bisaasi-teri or Shamatarí had ever ascended the Mavaca very far, they were unable to discount the assertion that it teemed with *Rabaras*. Kaobawä and Shararaiwä, his youngest brother, took it upon themselves to apprise me of the dangers. Shararaiwä told me and my Shamatarí guides that the *Rabaras* would surely rise up and devour us—canoe, motor, gasoline, and paddles. The others nodded and clicked their tongues to indicate their subscription to Shararaiwä's claim.

My guides, who were by this time being badgered by the Bisaasi-teri to withdraw from the trip, looked gloomily at the ground and remained silent. I could see that the *Rabaras* story was frightening them, and I was worried that they would refuse to come. I was also growing very annoyed with the Bisaasi-teri for going to such ludicrous ends to prevent me from reaching Sibarariwä's village. I had a long, heated argument with Kaobawä and Shararaiwä on the existence of *Rabaras*, but concluded that any further discussion along this line would be fruitless. Just as you don't argue with the missionaries about the existence of God and angels, you don't argue with the Yanomamö about the existence of *Rabaras*.

I changed tactics and conceded that perhaps there were *Rabaras* after all. Yea, I knew there were *Rabaras* and had, in my youth and in my native jungles of Michigan-urihi-teri, slain many of them.

Yanomamö logic, fortunately, permits of such inconsistencies: it is not so much a matter of *what* you assert, as of *how* you assert it and the kinds of details you give to support your argument.

Yes, I knew *Rabaras* very well indeed. I was a good shot when it came to *Rabaras* and most certainly would be able to apply my skills should we run into any *Rabaras* on the Mavaca. I would keep my double-barreled shotgun loaded at all times with *Rabaras* shot to be ready for them.

My young guides listened attentively and seemed less gloomy as I continued my argument.

I knew from my vast experience at *Rabaras*-hunting precisely where one had to hit a *Rabaras* in order to kill it in one shot, and I gave an anatomical demonstration: "Right here! In the neck! Just below the head!" I also had a very special

kind of cartridge called *Rabara Brabaisbaömönmö* ("something made for killing *Rabaras* at a distance") and showed them several cartridges with rifled slugs protruding from the plastic jackets. Back in 1965 it was possible to make such an argument, since none of the Yanomamö had yet been given shotguns. Now it is impossible: I know of at least forty Yanomamö in various villages along the Orinoco, including the Bisaasi-teri, who have shotguns.

Shararaiwä flushed with anger when I shifted my argument and asserted that I had special knowledge about the fabulous beasts. He and Kaobawä held the advantage only so long as they had a monopoly on knowledge, and since neither of them had ever seen a *Rabara*, let alone killed one, I immediately gained the upper hand. Shararaiwä stalked off in a huff, muttering that he was sure the *Rabaras* on the Mavaca were bigger and fiercer than those in Michigan-urihiteri. In quitting the argument he lost it.

At least I thought he lost it: one of my four guides backed out the next morning and another asked me if it wouldn't be wiser for him to come on my second trip, after I exterminated the *Rabaras*. My canoe was loaded for the trip and I knew I had to get under way immediately, since the risk of losing all my guides increased by leaps and bounds the longer I remained in Bisaasi-teri. I managed to talk the guide into making the trip by doubling the previously agreed-upon pay but I was unable to recruit one more guide to replace the one who backed out. We left Bisaasi-teri with my dugout canoe heavily loaded with provisions, the roar of my outboard motor drowning out the screams and rejoinders of the adult men who were still attempting to prevent me from finding the Mishimishimaböwei-teri. They were angry with me and with my guides: "You'll see! They'll kill you all! They will pretend friendship at first, and when you are off your guard they will fall on you with bow staves!"

The trip was unsuccessful. We ascended the Mavaca River for two full days, chopping our way through logs and deadfalls for much of the second day. When we pulled up along the bank to make camp for the second night, the river was so narrow that it was difficult to negotiate the hairpin curves in the current without touching the river bank on one side or the other.

When my guides set about collecting vines, leaves, and poles for our temporary hut, they returned hastily to the canoe where I was cleaning game, their faces ashen with fear. They had found a fresh, recently-traveled trail a few yards away from the river. I was happy about the discovery and went to investigate. As we examined the trail and speculated about its origin and terminus, two of my three guides demanded that we leave for home immediately: they were sure we were very close to the village and they were not going to go any further. Only Wakarabewä indicated that he was willing to go on. Since you do not abandon your guides in the middle of enemy territory, there was no choice but to turn back. I was furious with them and asked why they decided to come in the first place. Their answer: "For a machete, an axe, and a large cooking pot!"

They had been so certain that we would never get close to the village that they came along for the ride and the pay! They also knew that on such trips I always shot a great deal of game and gave it away to the families of my guides. For them, the trip was just going to be a hunting trip with high pay, and they

Figure 1.12—The upper Mavaca River—*Babama-u*. A vast and nearly unoccupied expanse between the *Namowei-teri* and the *Shamatari* villages. It is said that this river abounds with *Raharas*.

had no intention of reaching the village. Needless to say, I turned the canoe around and we went home. I was so furious that I refused to let any of them have any of the game that I shot, which was considerable, since nobody had hunted in that region for years.

I made a large smokerack outside my hut when we returned and put the meat on it to cure. Most of it was stolen during the night by the Bisaasi-teri. The next day, Torokoiwä, one of Kaobawä's older brothers, visited me to tell me the following story. It was good, he argued, that I did not actually reach the village. Some years ago a group of foreigners like myself ascended the Shukumöna River and met a hunting party from Sibarariwä's village. The foreigners had guns and machetes. The Shamatar hunters acted friendly and gained the confidence of the foreigners. They asked them if they could examine their strange possessions. When the foreigners gave them the shotguns and machetes to examine, the Shamatar fell on them with the machetes and hacked them to pieces.³

Perhaps I was foolish and perhaps it was fortunate that I did not make it to the village. Perhaps the Shamatar were every bit as treacherous as the Bisaasi-teri made them out to be and I was not experienced enough to predict their behavior. I decided to put Sibarariwä's village out of my mind for the remainder of

³ Torokoiwä, I later learned, had gotten the story confused. Foreigners were not involved, nor were shotguns. A group of Yanomamö from several mission villages ascended the Shukumöna River to raid Sibarariwä. They killed one man from Sibarariwä's village, not vice versa.

my field trip and concentrate on improving what data I had on the Bisaasi-teri and the two closest Shamatarí groups.

Just before I left for home at the end of my first fifteen months of fieldwork I was again visited by young men from Reyaböböwei-teri. They told me that a group of men from Sibarariwá's village had visited them shortly after my abortive trip, and that they informed them of the trip. I asked them what the reaction was among them, and their reply was, in effect, that Sibarariwá's group wanted me to come and visit them. The visitors had asked the Reyaböböwei-teri to pass this information on to me. The Reyaböböwei-teri, of course, passed it on only when they were certain that I was leaving for home and would not have an opportunity to act on it! I had seen numerous Reyaböböwei-teri since they had been informed of the invitation, but none of them mentioned it to me until I was already packed for my trip home.

My fieldwork the following year, 1967, took me to Brazil. On my way home I stopped in Venezuela to again make an attempt to contact Sibarariwá's village. I intended to have Wákarabewá's father guide me, but as luck would have it, he had been bitten by a snake and could not walk.

I returned to Venezuela again in 1968 for more fieldwork among the Yánomamö. It was determined to contact the village during this trip, for it had now become an obsession. Most of my first month of the 1968 field trip was committed to participation in a medical-anthropological and ethnographic film study of the Yánomamö (see Preface and Appendix G). When my medical and film-making colleagues left for home, I turned my attention to Sibarariwá's village once again. My guide problems seemed less severe because I had the good fortune of meeting Karina, a young boy about twelve years old who had lived all of his life in Sibarariwá's village. He was actually from Mömariböwei-teri, but he and his mother were abducted when he was an infant and he had returned to his natal village only within the past year. I had met him briefly in 1967, shortly after he had returned to Mömariböwei-teri, but since he had never seen a foreigner before, he was then very frightened of me and avoided me all the time I was in Mömariböwei-teri.

Like many of my best informants, Karina was something of an outcast. The Yánomamö are very strange in their treatment of people like Karina. His father was the headman of Mömariböwei-teri, a man who had sired at least a dozen children. Many of this man's sons were adults and very prominent in the political affairs of the village. Yet Karina, because of his long residence in Sibarariwá's village, was rather badly treated by his kinsmen when he returned home—almost as though he were a complete stranger from an enemy village. For example, they knew he was petrified at the very thought of being near me—a foreigner—when I visited them in 1967, so they kept dragging him—kicking, weeping and terrified—over to me so I could frighten him even more. The boys of his age also teased him mercilessly, and the adults ordered him around as if he were a recently captured enemy child.

I met him again in 1968, after he had visited the mission at Mavaca and had lost most of his fear of foreigners. When I asked him if he would take me to Sibarariwá's village, I was giving him an opportunity to show the others that he

was important, an opportunity that he enthusiastically accepted. He was almost at that age when Yánomamö boys like to show their elders that they are fearless and responsible, but because of his constant mistreatment in Mömariböwei-teri during the year, he was even more anxious to make this kind of demonstration.

He was very willing to tell me the names of everybody in Sibarariwá's village and how they were related to each other, a tremendously important addition to the genealogies I had at that point.

I worked with Karina for about a week on genealogies and census data before we made our first attempt to contact Sibarariwá's village. One of the members of the medical group, a young geneticist, remained with me after the others had gone home. He wanted to collect blood samples from the members of Sibarariwá's village should I ultimately reach the group and find them favorably disposed toward the blood sampling. The decision would rest on me and my interpretation of their probable reaction. I mention this only because the presence of the geneticist created a schedule that had to be met. We had arranged at a considerable expense for a bush pilot to come in and pick up the geneticist and blood samples on a specific date. The pilot would land at one of the recently cleared airstrips down the Orinoco, and we had to be there at that date, with or without the samples. The geneticist had to catch that flight, whether or not we had blood samples from the Shamatarí.

We made several attempts in rapid succession to ascend the Mavaca. On the first two trips we were forced to turn back after getting only about a half-day upstream. The first time one of my barrels of gasoline turned out to be diesel fuel, and the motor would not run on that. The second time we had an electrical failure in the ignition system of the motor and had to return for repairs.

On the third trip, with our schedule now very tight, we made it two full days upstream before another electrical failure in the ignition system occurred. Under normal circumstances—that is, when I am working alone with no definite schedule to meet—I would have continued on in spite of the motor trouble, even if it meant paddling back for three or four days. But the geneticist faced the risk of waiting another month at a desolate airstrip for another flight to come in. The failing motor slowed our speed down to almost nothing, since it was running on only one cylinder. It showed every indication of getting worse, so I reluctantly turned back when it became apparent that we could not reach the village with sufficient time to get to know the people well enough to set upon them with needles and test tubes, and still get back to the airstrip on schedule.

My two guides—Karina and another man—were growing very disgusted by this time. We had made three abortive attempts to reach the village in a single week, and turned back just when it seemed that we were very close to our objective. They do not understand about things like airplane schedules and being at a specific place at a specific date. I got the geneticist to the airstrip in time and then spent the entire night tearing down the motor. The problem was a faulty coil, which I repaired by cannibalizing one from another motor. The problem was a faulty coil, the time I had reassembled the motor, it was four o'clock in the morning. I had not unloaded my canoe, so I had to be up before six to make sure that the Bisaasi-teri did not unload certain portions of it for me.

I learned at dawn that Karina was sick and that the other guide was not going to come with me. He was disgusted and decided to go on a long fishing and hunting trip; he had left during the night so as to prevent me from tempting him into going by increasing the pay.

Karina was reacting to a measles inoculation I had given him. Measles had hit the Yānomamō for the first time in their biological history. It entered the tribe at a number of missions. (See Neil, Centerwall, Chagnon, and Casey, 1970.) There are very few human populations in the world that are virgin for measles, a fact that attests to the long isolation of the Yānomamō population. The vaccination causes a mild case of measles—a high fever for two days or so. I knew that Karina would be a little weak from the vaccination, but I knew that he would be back to normal in two days. We had vaccinated 2,000 Yānomamō during the previous six weeks, and I knew what the reaction would be.

After some considerable persuasion, I managed to talk Karina into coming along one final time. I was obsessed with determination to reach Sibarariwā's group. I coaxed him from the village into the dugout canoe, covered him with my clothing, and set a small aluminum boat over the top of the larger canoe to protect him from the rain and the sun.

There I was, with a twelve-year-old guide, so feverish that he could barely walk, about to set off again for the almost legendary village of Mishimishimaböwei-teri, tired and disgusted. I was also feeling a little phlegmatic myself from a severe fungus infection. Some three weeks earlier I had visited the Patanowā-teri and, as is customary, entered the village as a Yānomamō visitor, resplendent with feathers, red paint, and a scarlet loincloth. [Documented in Neel, Asch, and Chagnon, 1971, *Yanomamo: A Multidisciplinary Study*.] Unfortunately, I did not have my own loincloth with me, so I borrowed one from a Yānomamō. He happened to have a rather contagious and virulent fungus infection of his groin. Soon afterwards I didn't need a loincloth: I was naturally scarlet from my knees to my navel, itching and burning like crazy. The condition was aggravated by sitting in the rain in wet clothing for days on end, and the only remedy I had was a can of foot powder. You can't imagine the mirth provoked among the Yānomamō by watching the resident fieldworker in a most indescribable position sprinkling foot powder on his groin. By now I was down to the last of my gasoline supplies and I was worn to a frazzle—no sleep, countless hours of running an outboard motor, disappointed in my luck. This would be my last try at reaching the village. If I did not make it this time, I decided I would give up. I had wasted altogether too much time chasing a phantom.

I did not know if I would encounter rapids and new deadfalls on the trip and I needed another guide. Karina was too small, even assuming that he recovered in two days, to help heave the bulky, heavy dugout canoe over logs and rapids. A few young men appeared at the canoe to see us off for the umpteenth time. I asked one of them, Bākotawā, a youth of some eighteen years, if he would be interested in coming along with us. He said he would like to, provided I would pay him an axe, machete, and cooking pot. I agreed to his price and asked, "Will you be afraid like my guides were before and want to turn back when we get close to the village?" He scoffed and said that he didn't "know how to be afraid"

... he was already a man, and fierce. He added that he would tell the Mishimishimaböwei-teri that he was from Patanowā-teri, not from Bisaasi-teri. I asked Karina if he would support Bākotawā's story when we reached the village. He whimpered an affirmative, so Bākotawā quickly got his weapons and hammock and joined us. He also brought the few missionary rags he called clothing—to show the Shamatarī he was no mere savage, but cosmopolitan.

We traveled eight hours the first day. Karina was feeling much better that evening, and his fever had broken.

The second day brought an unexpected and unwelcomed surprise. We had gone only about two hours when we ran into two huge, partially submerged trees that blocked our passage. The river had dropped enough during the week to expose about a foot of the immense logs above the water, far too much to get over with the dugout. The trees were submerged too deeply in the river to try to cut through them with axes, so we had to leave the big canoe behind at this point and transfer the supplies to the small, aluminum canoe. I had a small, brand-new outboard motor with me for the aluminum canoe, but my luck was consistent: it wouldn't run. (I learned later that the gasoline lines were plugged with dirt.) We had no choice but to use the much larger motor, or paddle. I had made it at least one full day beyond this point on previous trips and I knew we had a long way to go, so I elected to use the large motor. We set off with a giant motor on a tiny canoe. We couldn't go as fast as we had been going in the dugout, but we were going much faster than we could paddle, so it was a reasonable choice.

We traveled nine and a half hours the second day. The river had dropped at least five feet since my trip of a week earlier, but we had fewer problems with deadfalls. The small canoe was light enough so that we could easily drag it through or over any obstacles.

On the third day, about eleven o'clock, Karina suddenly motioned me over to the right bank: "There! Over there! I know this place!" He jumped out of the canoe and disappeared into the jungle. Bākotawā and I followed quickly behind him. There was a large trail a few yards from the river. Karina said that we were within a day's walk of Sibarariwā's village, and that this was a trail they used when they visited the Iwahikoroba-teri, who lived due east of this spot.

Karina also said that the river turned west from here (see Figure 1.7) and that it would be quicker to walk to the village, which lay somewhere to the south of us. Karina and I were very excited and pleased about reaching this familiar point. Bākotawā became very moody and said nothing.

The riverbank was steep and high. I was afraid that if we left the canoe in the river, a sudden rain would swell the river enough to wash it away. I insisted that we put the boat and motor up on the bank, knowing that we would have been in serious trouble if our boat got away.

Our load had been reduced considerably by this time. We had used up much of the gasoline and had dropped off most of the remaining fuel along the way for the trip home. We were down to our food, hammocks, my trade goods for Sibarariwā's people, my cameras, tape recorder, notebooks, film, two shotguns, and a transistor radio. Everything but the trade goods fitted comfortably into the two

packs. Since we were within a day's walk from the village, we decided to leave everything except a few trade goods behind and later send the Shamatarí down to the boat to get them. We also decided to cache food here for the trip home, since it would be silly to carry it into the village and then back.

In making an inventory at this point, I was surprised to discover how little food we had with us. I had been so preoccupied with motor problems, gasoline, and guides that I had paid too little attention to our food. The box was the same one I had packed for the first trip, and I had not added anything to it. Our food consisted of about three pounds of rice, two pounds of manioc flour, one pound of sugar, several cans of sardines, two chocolate bars, three cups of powdered milk, a quarter-pound of salt, and one pound of coffee. It was not anything to worry about if Sibarariwá's village was just a day away, since we could expect to be fed by our hosts. And as long as we had cartridges, meat would be no problem. I still had *all* of my *Rabara* cartridges. We left the sugar, milk, manioc, coffee, and half of the sardine supply at the river for the trip home, bringing the rice, chocolate, and the remaining sardines with us, plus a small cooking pot for the rice.

It took us about an hour to store our supplies, make sure they would keep dry, and load the packs. We started off shortly after midday. Although it had not rained much downstream for the past week, the trail here was unusually slippery and wet. We followed the base of a large hill most of the time, gradually getting higher and higher. I was surprised to find swamps and potholes so high above the river elevation. About three o'clock a terrific storm broke, and we huddled together under a small plastic tarp for almost an hour trying to keep the packs from getting soaked. We continued after the rain stopped, reaching a Yānomamō "resting" stop on the trail.

Well-traveled trails have these spots every three hours or so. They are usually flat places where the trees are thin and widely scattered and the sky can be seen. The Yānomamō stop to rest on long trips, and usually fall into the habit of using the same place over and over. Some even have names. As they sit around and chat, their hands are always busy, breaking branches, chopping on logs with machetes or axes (if they have any), repacking their loads in their baskets. The resting stops soon take on the aspects of junkyards, battered trees and discarded debris lying around. One often hears about the putative "conservation" concerns of primitive peoples for their environment. My experience has been that if the Yānomamō had our technical skills and their "conservation" attitudes, Amazonas would be a cesspool in no time.

Karina told us about the last time he was at this spot, on a trip from Iwahikoroba-teri. He showed us the log that Borösöwá, the Iwahikoroba-teri headman, sat on, where the others sat, what they talked about, who threw away the pack basket that was lying there rotting, and so on. For the first time since I had been trying to contact these Shamatarí groups they seemed real; they were no longer just names in a genealogy. I was certain for the first time that I was going to reach their village.

Karina told us that there was a large camp ahead of us and, a few hours beyond

that, the village. It was four o'clock by the time we reached the camping site. It had not been used for at least a year. Karina said that Sibarariwá made this camp after a fight in the village with Möawá. Afterwards part of the group moved here temporarily until tempers cooled off. It was fairly large, large enough for over a hundred people. The things that impressed me most were the mildew and dampness of the area, and the thousands of termite grubs that were hatching out in the dilapidated huts.

We decided to sleep there for the night, since by going on we would arrive at the village after dark. I preferred to have as much daylight as possible during my first day's visit, a Yānomamō trait that I think is functionally useful. I made the mistake of not hanging my shoes or the packs up over the fire that night, and they were covered with termite grubs inside and out the next morning.

We were famished. The only meal that day had been some dry, smoked alligator left over from the day before. We decided to eat a big meal before pushing on, knowing that our visit would cause such a sensation in the village that we were not likely to have much time for cooking or eating. We boiled enough rice for both supper and breakfast and stuffed ourselves with it.

That night Karina was in a mischievous mood and began teasing Bākotawá. He recounted the treacherous feast that Sibarariwá had staged for the Bisaasi-teri and the revenge feast that the Bisaasi-teri held in return. He told him of their anger over the deaths that resulted, and implied that he *might* tell Sibarariwá that Bākotawá was actually from Bisaasi-teri, not from Patanowá-teri. He talked about how fierce the people in this village were, and how many raids they had gone on, who they killed, and how much they hated the Bisaasi-teri. I finally had to shut him up. I knew that Bākotawá was getting frightened.

The next morning Bākotawá announced that he was too frightened to go on and said he wanted to go back to the canoe. I was angry, mostly about Karina's mischief, but I was determined not to turn back this time. Silently, so as to not expose my anger, I unpacked the food and gave him his share of the rice. There were matches and cooking pots at the canoe, and he knew where to find them. I had two shotguns, although neither Bākotawá nor Karina knew how to use them; I brought the extra one along to make them feel more secure. I gave one of them to Bākotawá, along with a dozen or so cartridges and a quick lesson in how to load and shoot a gun. There were also fishhooks at the canoe, so he would be able to keep himself fed while Karina and I pushed on. I sternly warned him not to put the canoe in the water for *any* reason. He argued that although he was frightened now because we were so close to the village, he would not be frightened at the canoe. He said he would make a camp there and wait for us to return. I told him we would be gone about three or four sleeps, and he agreed that he would be quite content to wait for us there.

Karina and I left about 7:00 A.M. and before long began running into fresh signs of Yānomamō. We saw footprints in the mud that were made during or after yesterday's rain, and we found several *rashba* fruits on the trail. Someone had passed through the area yesterday, and was carrying *rashba*. About an hour after we left our camp we came upon an abandoned garden and an old village site,

one that had been deserted for many months. Someone had been foraging in the garden and had cut the *rasbā* from the still-producing trees. My skin began to tingle; we were very close.

At 9:30 we crossed a small stream at the base of a hill. Karina said it was the one that the people bathed in and got their water from, but since there were very few footprints in the sand he was sure the village was deserted. A few minutes later we crossed over the peak of the hill and found ourselves in a modestly large Yanomamö garden. We stopped and listened, but heard only sounds of the birds and insects. Karina pointed out the top of the *shabono* over the tops of the banana plants. We continued down the trail and walked into the village. It was deserted and all but one small section had been burned down. We walked over to this section and put our packs down in the shade. Karina was more disappointed than I was. We sat there, discussing the possible location of the group. Karina pessimistically suggested that they had gone to one of their several camping areas on the Shukumöna-u but hesitated to guess which one.

He wanted to turn back and go home. I suggested that we look around in the garden to see if anyone had returned to it recently. We soon found many signs of life; the people could not be very far away, for they were returning to the garden to fetch food. We found a stalk of ripe plantains and ate several of them.

We decided to follow their trail along the Mavaca River to the southwest, toward a camping area. Karina said they preferred to others. We left everything behind except our hammocks and our weapons and traveled quickly. It was soon apparent that we were on the right trail, for their signs became fresher and more numerous as we went along. We had followed the trail for about an hour and a half when Karina suddenly stopped and motioned for me to be quiet. Ahead of us we could hear people talking! We had found them!

I suddenly felt very limp and worried. What had I gotten myself into? This was it, buddy. Perhaps all those earlier troubles were Fate's way of telling you to stay home and mind your own business.

Karina told me to stay where I was and let him go in first; they would be very frightened if I walked in with absolutely no warning, and might shoot me. I gave him my shotgun and took his bow and arrows. He disappeared down the trail, entered the temporary camp, announcing himself with a series of short, high-pitched whistles. The voices stopped for a second and the jungle was quiet. They then cheered when they recognized who it was. They stopped again and all was quiet for several minutes. Then there was a moment of excited buzzing. I knew they had been informed of my presence. I wiped the mud off my legs and straightened my loincloth. Karina soon reappeared and beckoned me to come in. I stalked into the clearing in proper Yanomamö fashion and stood there in the middle while the men ran screaming about me, waving their bows and arrows and pointing them at me. My head was whirling with excitement, and my mouth was dry. Out of the corner of my eye I could see women and children running from the houses, making for the woods and safety. It was too much for them. Finally, one of the old men grabbed me by the arm and led me to a hut, motioning me to lie down in the empty hammock. They were as nervous as I was. Each time I moved, they jumped away from me. I lay in the hammock as a visitor

should, one hand behind my head and one hand over my mouth, with my legs crossed and eyes fixed on some invisible object above the heads of everyone.

In the hammock next to me lay a young, muscular, handsome man of obvious importance, a man whom I recognized as a leader. He was too young to be Sibarariwä, or else Sibarariwä had preserved his age well. I managed to attract Karina over to my hammock and ask him if he were Sibarariwä. He answered: "No! He is someone else. He is big!"

I later learned that his name was Möawä. A year later I learned that he was *the* headman, and his renown had eclipsed that of Sibarariwä—his classificatory father. Indeed, they had fought, and Sibarariwä left with the largest faction of the village with him. Möawä, because of the force of his character, was beginning to lure them back into his fold, and by 1970 he had most of Sibarariwä's earlier followers in his village. Thus, the old leader, whose name and reputation had been indelibly fixed in the minds of his mortal enemies, the Bisaasi-teri, was replaced and driven out by a younger, fiercer man. That must have been an accomplishment of great moment, for Sibarariwä was by no means old, decrepit, or senile.

Karina told them that we left the packs at the *shabono* and two men were sent to get them.

It is impossible to describe the noises they made on seeing me for the first time.

Figure 1.1.3—We were disappointed to find their village deserted.



are not supposed to approach the visitor for several minutes, and should not stand upright over the hammock. The etiquette system fell to pieces that day. Only Möwä remained aloof, eying us all with an expressionless, cold glint. Finally one of them touched my leg and pulled his hand back as if he had burned it. He clicked his tongue excitedly. Another tried it, and another. They grunted and clicked some more. One thing they kept exclaiming effervescently, over and over again, was: "Whaaa! Look how hairy he is! He is covered with hair!" They gradually got bolder, and soon there were dozens of hands being rubbed up and down my arms, legs, and chest. Finally, one of the older men in the front row screamed at one of the younger men in back to go out into the woods and fetch his father and the others who were camped there. He bolted away and ran out of the village, reappeared a second later with a sheepish look to fetch his weapons, and zipped off again. He was so excited that he almost left his bow and arrows behind, which is pretty excited for a Yanomamö.

The examination went on for over an hour. They observed the etiquette rules in that they did no ask me any questions at first, but finally they began directing their comments to me. The first thing that they wanted to know was why I took so long to visit them. They claimed that they had repeatedly sent messages out to me by the way of the Mömariböwei-teri and Reyaböwei-teri, asking me to come and visit, but I never came. They told me many things about myself that surprised me. They quoted things I had said to other Yanomamö, and related in considerable detail how I recently fell off a rock on a trip to Reyaböwei-teri and hurt my arm. They wanted to see the scar. They rubbed it gently and told me they knew how much it hurt me at the time of the accident. I was flabbergasted. They scolded the women for running away in fear and ordered them back into the village. I was a friend. Finally Karina, who had been fed but largely ignored up till now, suggested to them that I was weary from my trip and probably hungry. Some of them leapt to their feet and dashed home, returning with ripe plantains, bananas, and whatever other morsel of food they had around, offering it to me. I had hardly gotten a mouthful down when I heard the shouts of the others returning from the jungle. A dozen more men ran into the village shouting: "Where is he?" "Where is he?" The examination process was repeated again. Others straggled in and joined the crowd. I was covered with red pigment from head to foot. It was getting dark and the crowd began thinning out, but the village was a din of excited conversations. The people of Mishimishimaböwei-teri had seen their first foreigner. He was larger and fuzzier than they had imagined.

It started to rain hard and people frantically began hauling leaves in from the jungle to patch up the holes in their roofs. I was relieved that they left, and strung my own hammock. This caused another minor sensation, as they had never seen a hammock like mine. It was made of nylon, and was three times the size of theirs. Things quieted down again for a while, but the chatter was very lively.

By and by a distinguished looking older man walked silently out of the rain into the village clearing, carrying a long pole. He was using it as a walking stick, although he was not hobbling. He headed straight for the hut I was in and, as he approached, a man in one of the hammocks next to me got up quickly and re-

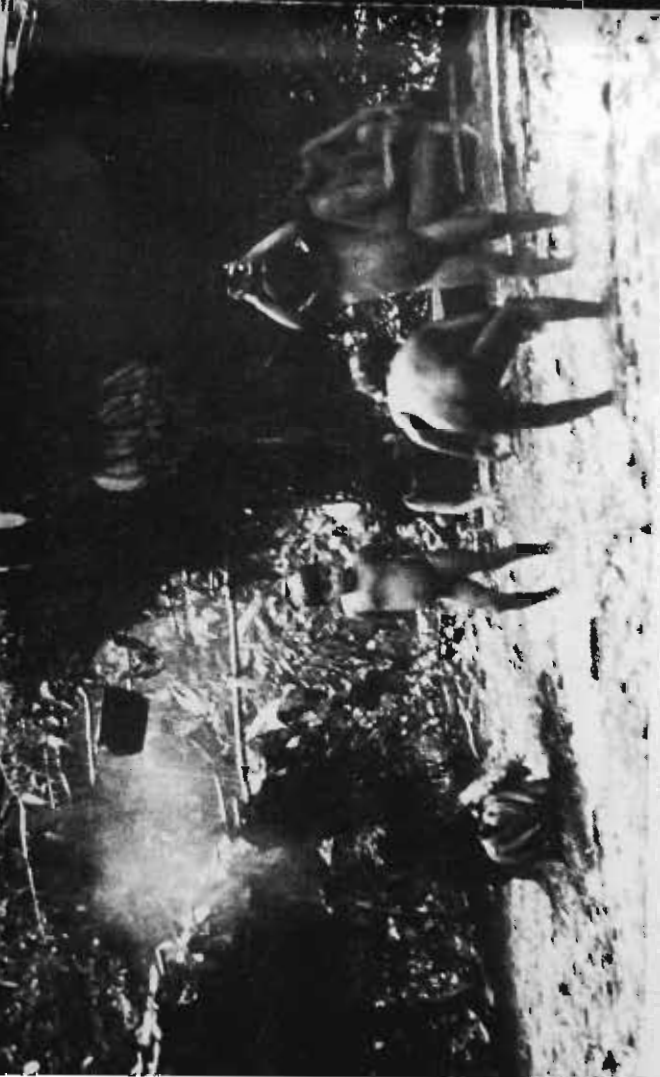


Figure 1.14—Mishimishimaböwei-teri camp, where I first made contact with them.

The Yanomamö are noisy people to begin with, but when they are excited, they are even noisier. They hissed, clucked, and hooted, and screamed. The adult men shooed the younger ones away and crowded around the hammock, each trying to elbow his way closer for a better look. Soon they were all around me. They

Figure 1.15—Möwä—meaner than Sibaranäwä, his predecessor.



faced, and pretended not to know I was there. I was afraid that the tensions building up because of our silence would lead to bad feelings, so I called to him: "Father-in-law! I have come to your village to visit you and bring *madobe*. Is it true that your people are poor and in need of machetes?" I could hear the whispers of excitement around us after I spoke. "Yes! We are poor in machetes," he said cynically, implying that I ought to know better than to ask stupid questions when I could plainly see that they were poor. His tone of voice did not inspire any warm feelings in me.

We chatted half-heartedly for a while. I could tell that things were not going too well and that this old goat was not going to be overly friendly with me. I concluded by telling him that I would give him the cooking pot I had with me and one of the knives in the morning, and that I would bring him a *big* gift on my next visit. This visit was primarily to discover if they were friendly and if they were in need of steel tools, as the rumors said—a story I always tell when I visit a village for the first time. One must always imply that he has many more possessions *back home* and intends to bring them on his next visit, provided the people are friendly. It is like the relationship between the goose and golden eggs. If you want more eggs, be nice to the goose.

Sibarariwā's solemn arrival and demeanor threw a cloud of uncertainty over an otherwise enthusiastic welcome. I decided to ignore him and struck up conversations with people in the other huts. Both he and Mōawā ignored each other conspicuously. Soon a modestly large crowd of men were around my hammock again, and the mood reverted to the excitement of midafternoon. I explained to them that I came to see how many people there were and told them I already had their true names memorized. They were surprised, and moderately annoyed, and wanted to know who told me. I said it was "someone from Mōmaribōwei-teri," thereby keeping Karina out of trouble. I would speak to each one in the morning and find out what kind of item he would like me to bring him on my next visit. They were enthusiastic about this and agreed to cooperate with me and point everyone out when I mentioned their names. So long as I already knew their names there was no point in lying to me about them. I showed them my field ledger and where their names were written. They would point to a name and ask me who that was. I would whisper the name into the ear of one of them and he would relate it to the others by some reknonymous or kinship reference, and they would roar with laughter, amazed that the magical scribbles actually meant something.

That night I dug my transistor radio out of my pack and tuned in a news broadcast. They were amazed again at the strange contraption, but were able to recognize male and female voices. They insisted on my tuning in a station with a female speaker, and crowded around to listen attentively to a language they did not understand. (As I recall, it was in Dutch, and I didn't get much out of it either!) Every once in a while I would try to find a station more to *my* liking, but they insisted on hearing a female voice. Most of them went home when I turned the radio off, but a few of them hung around to stare at me—and periodically ask me if I were sleeping yet.

I fell asleep worrying about Bākotawā. More precisely, I began worrying about



Figure 1.16—Sibarariwā. His entry into camp cast a shadow of gloom over everything.

treated to the hut next door. The older man leaned his club on the front pole of the house, wiped the rain from his face and got into the hammock that had just been vacated. A woman in the hut next to us immediately brought him some roasted plantains and retired nervously. The village had become strangely quiet after the older man came in. I knew I was in the presence of Sibarariwā.

Karina had told me that I should address him as either *shoriwā* (brother-in-law) or *shoabe* (father-in-law, grandfather, or mother's brother). This would relate us to each other in the best possible way according to the Yānomamō kinship practices. It would automatically create between us a kinship bond that implied certain modes of behavior and mutual obligations that other kinship terms did not convey. I decided that I would call him *shoabe*, since it implied more obligations on my part, and thus put him in a somewhat superordinate position, something that I felt would be appropriate. He certainly commanded the awe of the others; the village was no longer the same after Sibarariwā entered. It was tense and strained. I did not like it.

The few stragglers who were sitting around my hammock at the time got up and left, saying nothing, leaving the two of us lying in adjacent hammocks trying to ignore each other, each waiting for the other to make the first gesture. Since I was the visitor, I expected him to break the ice. He was silent and poker-

what he would do. What if he got so frightened that he could no longer bear to wait for us to come back? What if he took the canoe and left us? I decided that I would go to the river soon and check on him. The Mishimishimaböwei-teri, thanks to Karina, knew he was there and insisted on inviting him to the village.

The next morning I began the delicate task of identifying everyone by name and numbering them with indelible ink to make sure each person had only one name and identity. I estimated their ages and noted their spouses if my information was incomplete in this respect. I had 270 names in my field ledger, but the village contained no more than 80 people at the time. There had been a recent fight over a woman and the village was split into two parts. As luck would have it, I had found only the smallest part. The others were across the mountains on the Shukumöna-u living near another garden. My present hosts were mad at them and did not want to take me there. They felt sure that they would reunite again, probably before my next visit. I methodically identified everyone, whispering the names into Karina's ear, who then translated them into kinship circumlocutions. By ten o'clock I had numbered everyone in the group and the census was as complete as I could make it for the time being. I had noted after each name the item he or she wanted me to bring on my next visit, and they were surprised at the total recall I had when they decided to check me. All I did was look at the number I had written on their arm, look the number up in my field book and tell the person precisely what he requested me to bring him. They enjoyed this, and pressed me to mention the names of particular (unimportant) people in the village, laughing hysterically when I would whisper his name into someone's ear. The others would ask if I got it right, and the informant would give an affirmative quick raise of the eyebrows, causing everyone else to laugh.

After this task was over, I had essentially completed the major objective of the trip and passed the time with my hosts, doing what they wanted me to do. They wanted me to shoot my gun, as they had never seen one before. I had them fill a gourd with water and blew it to pieces at 15 yards, spattering water and debris all over. This impressed them. They wanted to see how strong I was and we lifted each other, bent arms to show our muscles, and other silly displays. They wanted to show me how close the Mavaca River was to their camp site and we went for a walk to the river. There was a small waterfall they wanted me to see. It had no name, and when I indicated my surprise, they decided to name it for me. It is now *Shaki tä bora*, at least to the people who really know. ("Shaki" for Chagnon, *bora* for falls, and *tä* is the classifier.) By midafternoon we were back at the camp, and it was raining hard. They knew I had trade goods at the boat and were anxious to have them. They badgered me constantly until I agreed to go to the canoe to check on the trade goods. Most of the adult men decided to come along to see my canoe, but Sibararwä was not among them. He had left at dawn and returned to a small camp he and a few others had made away from the others, taking the cooking pot and knife I had given him.

We left for the canoe about three o'clock, using a much better trail than the one Karina and I had followed. It rained hard all the way and we traveled at a very fast pace, knowing that we would not make it by dark. We intercepted the original trail about an hour before reaching the river. We found spent cartridges

every few hundred yards. Bäkotawä had been playing around with the shotgun, probably shooting at everything from parakeets to spiders. There was no telling how many cartridges he had shot before he got to this point, but at the rate we were finding the empties on this stretch of the trail he probably was out of ammunition by the time he reached the canoe.



Figure 1.17—The author and the Mishimishimaböwei-teri at *Shaki Tä Bora*. (Photograph by Karina. The scratches are because the film got wet.)

None of the men brought food or hammocks with them. They planned to take me to the canoe, trade bows and arrows for the machetes I had cached there, and return home early the following morning. They would be hungry, but they were too excited to think about food. They could make hammocks from bark in a few minutes and would sleep in these makeshift contraptions for the night.

Karina was in the lead, followed by several men and myself. The main body followed behind me. About 6:30 P.M. as dusk settled and walking became difficult, we reached the spot where we left the canoe. Needless to say, my greatest fears had been realized. Bäkotawä had taken the canoe, motor, trade goods, food—everything. I refused to believe my eyes at first. He did not know how to run the motor, so why would he want to take that? Why the trade goods? He knew that the Shamatarari would be furious when I promised them fifteen machetes, six axes and twelve cooking pots and then was unable to deliver them. It was as if he were trying to get me into the most unpleasant of all possible jams.

He had not even spent the night there: there was no sign of a house, no fire, nothing. At first I thought we were at the wrong place, but on close inspection

and after Karina insisted, I was convinced we weren't. The river had come up several feet since we had left the spot two and a half days ago and it did not look the same. But our tracks were there. My first suspicion was that he had moved everything across the river and downstream a little, to get off the main trail and conceal himself. I fired my shotgun two times, but no reply came. Perhaps he knew I had Shamatarí with me and was too afraid to return my signal.

We made camp in complete darkness. I had a piece of plastic tarpaulin with me, and when the rain came all my twenty companions huddled together around my hammock and spent the night shivering. It had been too dark to make adequate shelters, and the driest spot was under my tarp, so none of us got much sleep. At dawn I gave Karina my shotgun and two cartridges and a quick lesson in how to fire both chambers. He was to walk along the river until midday and fire the cartridges when he turned back, waiting to see if Bákotawá would reply. Meanwhile, some of the young men were sent back to the garden, which was four hours behind us, to fetch food. I spent the morning contemplating my plight and trying to weigh the alternatives in the event that Bákotawá could not be found. I was almost out of food and had only five or six cartridges left. I could get vegetable food from the Yánomamö in case I had to walk back, but I would have to have them carry it. Our packs already contained just about as much as two men would want to transport over that distance.

There were two possible ways to walk out. The trail to the northeast would take us to Iwahikoroba-teri, two or three days' walk from our camp. The Iwahikoroba-teri were uncontacted, and my companions were not anxious to have me find out where they lived, probably because they suspected that I would visit only them in the future and bring my steel tools there. From Iwahikoroba-teri it was four or five days' walk to a new garden made by the Patanowá-teri, a group I knew well. I had spent two weeks with them a month earlier, but at their old garden. I knew that if I reached their village, I could get some of them to guide me to Bisaasi-teri, a further three- or four-day trip.

The arguments against this plan, besides the reluctance of my potential guides to consider going this way, were several. First, the rainy season had started and most of the jungle before us was inundated. Many detours would be required and walking would be slow through the swamps. If it were eight or ten days' walk in the dry season, it could easily become fifteen or more days' walk in the wet season. Second, my shoes would not last that long, and my feet were in no condition to make such a trip barefooted. Third, if anyone heard about my plight and tried to find me, I would be too far away from the river to hear them and an embarrassingly large "rescue" operation might develop unnecessarily.

The alternative trail was to the northwest, to Reyaboböwei-teri. It was at least a week's walk to that village according to my companions, and two or three days from there to Bisaasi-teri, depending on how fast you walked (I did it in two and a half difficult days earlier in 1968). All of the above arguments applied against this alternative, in addition to two further disadvantages. The distance between provisions was greater, and there was a war developing between my present hosts and the Reyaboböwei-teri. Wadoshewá, a prominent local man, told me that he had recently visited the Reyaboböwei-teri and was chased out

of the village by their headman, Idahiwá, who threatened to kill anyone who visited there in the future. The possibilities of walking out seemed remote at best, and I decided to consider doing so only as a last resort. I could, after all, live indefinitely with the Mishimishimaböwei-teri if I had to, and I was certain that someone would sooner or later come up looking for me. It might be weeks or months, but they would come.

The thought of living for weeks with the Mishimishimaböwei-teri on the occasion of my first contact did not appeal to me, and my mind turned to other possibilities.

While waiting for Karina to return, and already convinced that Bákotawá was gone for good, I decided to make a bark canoe with the help of the Shamatarí. Whenever the Yánomamö have feasts they make troughs to contain the gallons of soup consumed at the feasts. The troughs are similar to crude canoes, and are occasionally used as such. They are so heavy and poorly made that they are usually discarded after the maiden voyage, usually a downstream trip. The bark deteriorates rapidly and loses its resiliency after a few days. It then collapses like a post-Halloween jack-o-lantern, and rots quickly. When I asked my companions to help me find an *awapuri* tree, the tree whose bark is used for the trough, they insisted that none could be found in the area. My spirits sank again. Making the bark canoe and going downstream in it would have been merely an inconvenience and I was largely viewing my plight as exactly that. Now that I learned that the bark canoe idea was out of the question, I began worrying that perhaps my situation was more serious.



Figure 1.18—The type of bark canoe I had hoped to build to descend the Manaca.

Next, I decided to make a log raft. The Yānomamō groups near the Orinoco all know how to make them. The Shamatarī knew what I meant when I asked about log rafts, but confessed that they had never made one. I was amazed at this information, since I thought this was a universal cultural trait among them. And since they had at one time lived on the Shukumōna-u, I was doubly amazed at their ignorance of this craft. They explained that they only cross the Shukumōna-u in low water, and make bridges for that purpose.

Log rafts are simple to make, and I knew that they could do it with a little help. Their palisades are essentially upright log rafts, so they had the basic skills to execute the task. We had my single machete to work with and spent most of the morning cutting logs and collecting lianas with which to lash them. I was not happy about this alternative, since rafts are very clumsy, and Karina was by no means an accomplished seaman. We would have great problems guiding a log raft through the snags and curves in the river, but it was still a much better option than walking.



Figure 1.19—My spirits sank when the log raft did. They turned to hide smiles.

I instructed them to cut only light, pithy trees. I helped pick out the trees, measuring the proper length, and hauled them to the river when they were felled. My companions took turns chopping with the machete. By mid-day we had assembled the materials at the river's edge and were ready to lash the logs together. My spirits picked up as we tied the logs together with vines. By early afternoon it was as wide as I dare let it get and still be controllable: I called the work to a halt.

The Shamatarī gathered at the bank for the test run. I stepped onto the crude craft and it promptly sank, and with it, my spirits. My companions tried hard

to look concerned and worried, but many of them turned their faces so I could not see their grins. They laugh at the most unusual things.

I slunk back to my hammock to wait for Karina to return and thought once again about walking out. Perhaps we could make it back to the spot where we had left the large canoe, which I calculated to be about halfway between our camp and Bissasi-teri. But we would have to follow the river for the greater part of the way in order to be sure that we did not pass the canoe. And, the river naturally flows through the lowest area and, therefore, would bring difficult walking. The major argument against this alternative was that I could not predict Bākotawā's behavior. Since he took with him virtually everything I left at the river, there was little reason to expect that he would pass the big canoe by without adding that to his list.

I moped in my hammock for the remainder of the afternoon, and took notes on the events of the past few days. Later in the afternoon Karina and his companions returned silently to the camp and flopped into their hammocks. They had walked all day, reaching the spot where Karina, Bākotawā, and I had made our last camp. Karina reported that not only was Bākotawā not there, he had even stopped to collect the empty gasoline tank we left behind! Karina had fired the shotgun twice, but Bākotawā had not responded.

The rest of the village learned of the situation and people were streaming into our camp all day long, bringing food and hammocks. A more substantial camp was ultimately constructed, and all the huts were covered with *kedeba* leaves to keep the rain out. At least we would be dry, fed, and rested.

While I was lying in my hammock contemplating my situation, one of the men confronted me with the following argument. Since I was a foreigner and since foreigners knew about canoes, I ought to know how canoes were made. I told him that I knew how to make them (which was not exactly true) but I did not have the appropriate tools with which to do it. It would take axes, and Bākotawā had taken all my axes. He then said that they had two old axes in the village.

With this my spirits lifted once again. I told him that if he would send for the axes and help me hollow out a tree, we would make a canoe. I was the best damned canoe-making foreigner they would ever meet. Two young men were immediately dispatched to the village to fetch the axes. They must have run all the way to the village and back, for they returned a few hours later, after dark. They covered the round-trip distance in about six hours, the time that it took Karina and me to walk it just one way!

Meanwhile, we went looking for an appropriate tree. I did not know what trees the Makiritare Indians used for their canoes. I told my companions that I needed a large tree that was pithy on the inside, and they presently found one that they claimed met these requirements.

We all retired in much better spirits that evening, listening to female voices on the transitor radio and munching on roasted plantains and *raiba* fruits that the women had brought to us.

The 6:30 A.M. broadcast the following morning from the Catholic Mission had no news about airplanes, and the seven o'clock broadcast from the Protestant

Mission said nothing about Bákoraŵá coming back yet. The Protestants did advise me, knowing that I had my transistor, that the plane scheduled to pick me up had been moved ahead from the fifteenth of April to the sixth, which gave me three days' notice! Even if I had been at Bisaasi-teri this would have been inconvenient. From where I was, it was impossible to make it back to Bisaasi-teri in three days. And, I feared, in three weeks.

We began working on the tree about 8:30 in the morning. The axes were so badly worn down and dull from use that progress was quite slow. The axes had been traded inland to the Shamatari after having been used by previous owners until they were nearly worn out.

The tree indeed was pithy in the center, a factor that contributed to our progress as the dull axes detracted. I measured off the length I thought would be sufficient to carry Karina and me—about 12 feet—and we cut off the trunk at that point. The tree was about 24 inches in diameter. Next, I scratched an outline of the area we were to hollow and we set about removing the interior of the tree. It was hot and humid and we soon were puffing and sweating profusely. The men were in excellent spirits and cooperated happily, making a game out of the project. I, delighted with their cooperation, had to watch them like a hawk, since in their enthusiasm they chopped recklessly, getting the canoe too thin at spots. By early afternoon it was taking shape. It looked like a cigar with a gouge cut out of it, but it looked suspiciously seaworthy. By that I mean that it looked as though it would float. I decided that I did not know enough about canoe making to attempt to spread it open with heat, which would have made it flatter on the bottom and therefore less likely to roll over, but would risk splitting the log in half. I decided to lash an outrigger on it. At about 2:00 P.M. I felt any further effort to get it thinner with the axes and machete would risk splitting the log in two. There were already several serious cracks appearing in the bottom, and we had to wrap vines around the ends of the log to prevent it from splitting further. We dragged it to the river, some 100 yards away, where we planned to rest its seaworthiness. I was a little anxious that the canoe would be like the raft—buoyant enough to float by itself, but not buoyant enough to hold two men.

We had gotten almost to the river when the lead man spotted a tree with honey in it and the work came to an immediate halt. There is nothing that will excite the Yānomamō like a cache of honey, and they immediately set about smoking the bees out of the nest and digging the sweet liquid out of it with leaves. A crude basket was made from another kind of leaf, and the honey was put into it with water. The Yānomamō are not what we would consider sanitary chefs. They end up with a brew that is about 5 percent honey, 80 percent water, and 15 percent debris consisting of half-dead bees, wiggling larvae, leaves, honeycomb, and dirt. It is all consumed with great gusto, the container being passed from hand to hand, each man taking a deep draught before having it snatched by the next. They usually blow the most obnoxious debris off the surface and drink under it, but I was never thirsty enough to drink very much of the beverage.

As luck would have it, the honey tree was right at the spot where we planned to launch the canoe. Most honeybees in this area are stingless, but these were an exception. Soon the water and the bank were covered with groggy insects

that attacked furiously, but the men didn't seem to mind. They just swatted their ankles and dipped the larva-filled honeycombs into the mead and munched on them, clucking with gastronomic pleasure. The bees were too much of a nuisance to let us do much more work on the canoe that afternoon, and besides, it was getting late.

Still, we had to see if it would float and cautiously put it into the river. To everyone's delight, especially mine, it stayed on top of the water. However, like any log, despite every improvement, it promptly rolled over. We even rested it with one man inside while the others prevented it from rolling. I breathed easily for the first time: it still floated. I managed to talk a few of the more enthusiastic workers into cutting the poles for an outrigger, and to find one of the "buoyant" trees we used for the raft. I cut two pairs of notches on each gunwale and tightly lashed in the outrigger poles with vines. Then we lashed the outrigger log to the end of this and tried the canoe again. This time it remained afloat without rolling, but the outrigger log was not very buoyant, and would sink if too much weight was put on that side of the canoe. I called for a volunteer to find a more buoyant log. By this time my companions were understandably tired of raft and canoe manufacturing and insisted that there was not a more buoyant log in the jungle. They wanted to go home.

I had difficulty talking them into helping make canoe paddles, but Mōawā volunteered to help me and ordered a few more young men to join in. That night we whittled three crude paddles by the dancing firelight, one being a reject that had been thinned too much on the handle to make it very useful. I decided to take it along as a spare.

We listened to the radio again that night, stations with female vocalists and newscasters. The people of Holland will be pleased to know that their relay station at Bonneaire in the West Indies passed on a lesson on the Dutch language that was attentively heard by some 35 Yānomamō. We slept well, satisfied that the crisis was over and I could get back downstream. We were proud of our labors. I listened to the mission broadcasts again in the morning, but still no word about Bákoraŵá, who had been on the river four days at that point.

We walked to the canoe, which was moored with vines a few hundred feet below our camp. We carried the packs and their contents to it, including a number of *toras*, bamboo containers that I bartered for with small knives. The *toras* all contained large numbers of curare arrow points that were made in the village while I was visiting.

The bees had regained their strength and inflicted revenge on us for robbing the honey, so we worked quickly. Karina wanted to be the first to try, the canoe, an honor I conceded to him without argument. One of the men swam across the Mavaca with the long vine that was tied to the canoe. Karina jumped in with one of the paddles, and the man pulled him out into the river and across. Trying desperately to look like an expert boatman, he paddled the clumsy log with his equally clumsy paddle. From the difficulty he had keeping his balance in the canoe I could tell that it was going to be an interesting trip. Karina weighed all of 75 pounds and the canoe was just barely afloat. I weighed twice as much, and our gear, despite its small volume, probably accounted for another 40 pounds. With

some difficulty he managed to maneuver the canoe back to port and we carefully loaded the equipment in, tying everything down with vines, including the shotgun. The cracks that I noticed yesterday were worse, and my friends tried to plug them with mud. I managed to convince them that it would wash out and gave them one of my shirts to tear up and use as caulking. The repairs took just a few minutes and seemed to be adequate.

The moment of truth having arrived, I bade my companions goodbye and told them I would be back in the following dry season with many trade goods to repay their kindness. They assured me that they would reunite with the others who had separated from them and rebuild the *shabano* at the spot where the old one was burned down, urging me to return as soon as possible. I instructed Karina to sit in front and to exercise great caution when paddling, for the canoe was very tippy. I climbed in the back.

Much to my horror I discovered that the water came to within a half-inch of the gunwales. We were floating, but just barely. Then Karina took one small dip with his paddle, shifting his weight ever so slightly from center, and the left gunwale dropped below water level. We sank instantly, not having gotten one foot offshore. Everything got soaked except the few items—cameras, lenses, and field notes—that I had put into a waterproof rubber bag. We frantically tried to grab the packs before they went under, but it was too late. Only our heads were above water, and we looked very stupid indeed. Our friends turned their faces to conceal their grins. It *was* funny, and I had to turn my face also.

We dragged the canoe out into the bank again, unpacked everything, and resorted it. The *tonas* full of curare arrow points were the first to go. Mōawā, who had helped me whittle the paddles, ordered a number of young men to make a small hut across the river in which I could store the items I would leave behind. He then told me he would make sure that nobody stole anything, since he was well aware of the fact that I disliked theft and might not return if they stole anything from me. I normally would have been enchanted by such a friendly gesture, but at this point I was feeling pretty low. It really did not matter very much if they did steal everything, did it? I humored them by pretending I was still concerned about my worldly possessions. I took only those items that were absolutely essential for survival, and those that had some scientific value, keeping my field notes and leaving behind things like antivenin for snake bites. The Shamatarī transported the excess equipment to the other side of the river, using the canoe as a ferry. They were perceptive enough to swim *alongside* the canoe rather than ride *in* it. One of the biggest losses when we capsized was my remaining package of cigarettes, and I desperately needed one then.

After reloading the canoe, we went through the motions of farewell, but only halfheartedly. We all expected that the canoe would capsize as soon as we got into the current, and that I would be returning to the village with them.

Karina and I climbed into the canoe for the second time. The water came to within two inches of the gunwales; my hopes revived slightly.

The canoe was in a shallow backwater adjacent to a sharp bend in the river. There were several large logs blocking the way, but we pushed off into the current anyway—and promptly got hung up in the snags and sank instantly. Fortunately,

we were able to stand on a sunken log and refloat the canoe while the others chopped the logs out of our way. I could tell that paddling was going to be almost out of the question: Karina was too clumsy. Each time he took a stroke, he leaned over, and the water rushed into the canoe. While we were waiting for the Shamatarī to clear this deadfall, I asked one of them to cut us two long poles.

I tied the paddles down with vines and bailed the canoe out with a gourd, which its friendly owner suggested I might find useful for this purpose and presented to me as a farewell token.

We climbed into the canoe again and were immediately caught up in the current. We were so precariously balanced that we couldn't turn around to wave to our companions. I was very grateful for their help and encouragement.

I do not know how many times we swamped that first day. I had no idea that a boy so small could be so inept and so clumsy. Each time he moved, he immediately caused the canoe to ship water. Instead of jumping out when he saw that we were sinking, he hung on for dear life and sank with the canoe. Had he jumped over the side, as I did, the canoe would have continued to remain afloat and we could have bailed it out with no problem. Still, he did not seem to catch on, and we ended up dragging the swamped canoe and contents to shallow water, bailing it out, and starting over again.

There was a logical reason for Karina's reluctance to jump out of the canoe into the river. He explained that he was afraid of *yabedibā* (electric eels). I assured him that there were none and urged him, whenever the canoe started to swamp, to jump out—the consequences would have been the same for him whether or not he jumped out. In both cases he had to get into the water. Still, he was frightened of eels. With good reason. About midday, as we were bailing out after one of our mishaps I stepped on a log beneath which lived an electric eel. I didn't know what hit me, but I felt a sharp pain in my leg and was knocked flat from the jolt. I saw the eel swim into deeper water as I got to my feet.

The outrigger was a bright idea, but had one built-in disadvantage: it acted as a snag-catcher and caused us many problems. We invariably capsized when it got caught on a snag: the current was strong enough to turn us sideways in the river, and since we were held fast by the outrigger, the water would rush over the edge and swamp us.

Sharp bends were a problem also. Unless we managed to keep to the inside of the bend, the current would force us against the bank on the opposite side and when the outrigger touched the bank we would go under again in the deepest water. It is a hopeless feeling to see a sharp bend ahead of you and try to delicately pole such a clumsy canoe to the inside of the curve. The immediate reaction is to pole harder, but when you do, your weight shifts just enough to cause you to ship water. Once it starts coming over the edge, you're done.

The natural hazards were not nearly so frustrating as the one sitting in the canoe with me. Yānomamō are not river people, and if Karina may be taken as a typical example, they have good reason not to be. By the end of the first day of travel he still did not know which side he had to pole on to make the canoe go to the left or right. There were times that first day when I could not really decide whom I wanted to choke the most, Bākorawā for abandoning me up the

Mavaca, or Karina being so incompetent. By the time it was dark I was so hoarse from screaming "to the left," "to the right," and so on, that I could barely talk. He would sulk conspicuously, and turn away as an uncontrollable smile lit his face, a pedestrian imp dwarfed by my undershirt. I had to choke down an occasional smile myself.

Although it rained most of the day, compounding our discomfort, and the river was coming up quickly, we managed to find a sandy spit on which to make camp. We were in a very swampy area and exhausted from the day's work, so we did not look very hard for leaves to cover our shelter.

When it came time to cook our rice for supper, another discovery capped our comic tragedy. I had been conserving the rice for the trip home and had not eaten any since the evening before contacting the village. I had given my *only* cooking pot to Sibaririwá! There we were—no pot to cook our only food in. I had luckily stored the rice in a tin can, and we were obliged to use that as our cooking pot. It was a stroke of luck that I had given Bákotawá his share of the rice in the plastic container. We would have gotten pretty hungry had I kept the plastic container and given Bákotawá the tin.

Our hammocks and clothing were soaked, and it was uncomfortable to be in them. But the fire warmed us up and the hot rice tasted good. The thing that really picked up our spirits was the evening broadcast from the Protestant Mission that Bákotawá had arrived in Bisaasi-teri late that afternoon. The broadcast was full of static, but I managed to hear several things. The missionary could not do anything to help. The measles epidemic had spread to another village and the only available motor and canoe were being used by those who went there to help. He did not know if they had a transistor radio, or when they were coming back.

I learned also that Bákotawá had tipped my canoe over a few times and had lost much of my equipment. He did manage to save the motor and drag it out

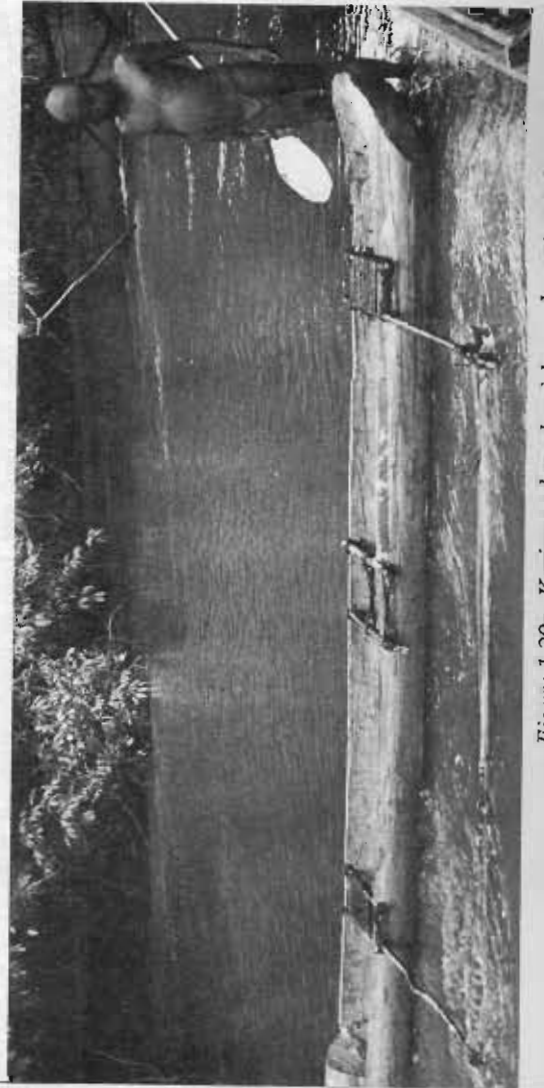


Figure 1.20—Karina and my hand-been dugout canoe.

of the river onto a bank somewhere, but only he knew the precise place. When he got to about an hour above Bisaasi-teri, he unloaded the axes, machetes and cooking pots "because they were heavy" and he was "tired of paddling" their dead weight. He had paddled them four and a half days and decided, one hour away from his destination, that they were too heavy! Why did he take them in the first place?

I decided that it was best to push on the next day. It might be some time before help came and we were getting low on food. Our fire went out during the night and at dawn we woke up shivering, cold, and damp. We ate the leftover rice, packed the radio and hammocks, and pushed off once again.

The river was broader and deeper now, and our poles were only marginally useful. It was not long before we had to abandon them entirely and revert to the paddles. When we did, we had a rapid series of misfortunes. We had gotten fairly efficient with the poles and could keep from tipping the canoe after some practice, but the paddles required more exertion and we capsized several times before we could get the hang of it. We lost our spare paddle on one sinking. Later in the day we got snagged in an overhanging tree and capsized again, losing another paddle. At about three o'clock that afternoon, shortly after losing the second paddle, we reached the big canoe. We were both surprised that it was still there, but were very happy that it was. Even the nest of cooking pots I had left in the canoe was still there!

I had hoped that Bákotawá would have put the motor in the big canoe as he went by, but he had discarded it somewhere upstream, before reaching the big canoe. We transferred our equipment to the big canoe and cut more poles for pushing. The river was now quite deep, but the poles enabled us to keep away from the banks and overhanging brush, keeping the bugs from falling onto us as they had been doing for the past two days. Our single paddle was too short and too small to be of much help in the big canoe. We were largely at the mercy of the current.

I remembered that our original first camp was only about two hours downstream by motor from the big canoe. I had hoped we could reach it, for if help did come, they would probably camp there at the end of their first day. It was one of those inviting camping places—high, and with a sandbar.

Now that we were in the big canoe, we could stand up, walk around, and in general, revert to our old, clumsy ways. More important, we could unlash the shotgun and shoot game for supper. I had not looked at the shotgun for two days. It was a mess. I had tried it under my seat and it had spent much of the past two days under water. The barrels were badly rusted, and the breech opened with considerable difficulty. I loaded it and kept it handy. Before long we glided past a large alligator, which I killed on the first shot. We dragged him into the canoe after severing his spinal cord with the machete.

Alligator meat is pretty grim fare. It looks tasty, white, and firm like a boiled lobster. It even resembles lobster in flavor. But it is as tough as shoe leather, no matter how you cook it. But I was pretty hungry for meat at that point, and even the thought of alligator made my mouth water.

By dark we decided that we could not reach the earlier campsite, so we made

camp at the mouth of a small creek. I shot another alligator at this spot, so we had plenty of meat for the remainder of the trip. The last few hours with the big canoe convinced me that we would have to make another paddle before going on in the morning. The canoe was just too heavy to control with our single, crude paddle.

We were now at a point on the Mavaca where we could make it all the way back to Bisaasi-teri in about 24 hours of continuous travel. From here the river was broad, and all we had to do was keep the canoe in the middle of the stream. The current would do the rest.

We boiled more rice and roasted some of the alligator for supper. We were both dog-tired and fell asleep as soon as we finished eating.

The next morning I learned by radio that the other missionary and his Makiritare Indian companion had returned to Bisaasi-teri. They were planning to come up to look for me immediately. The radio message also gave the approximate location of the spot where Bākotawā had put my motor. We had already gone past it, and would have to go back upstream to get it when the missionary got here. We decided that it was better to remain in camp all day, since we had to go back to get the motor anyway. Thus, we spent the day lying in our hammocks, chatting, and wishing we had some tobacco. I was not feeling very well and needed the rest. My numerous scratches and insect bites were infected and the fungus on my groin was flaring. The combination of poor food, tropical bacteria, and work was wearing on me. I thought about my tins of powdered milk and powdered chocolate, and how good the combination would taste.

We came to life when we heard the soft humming of wild turkeys in the jungle behind us. Karina went ahead of me and quickly pointed one out. I shot it and ran on to see if there were more. Karina was ahead of me, excitedly pointing out another bird. I was down to my last cartridge. When I closed the badly-rusted breach the chamber fired accidentally: the firing pin had rusted so badly that it did not retract when I opened the breach after the previous shot. Karina stood there gaping at me as a three-inch sapling toppled over just a few feet from his head. I had almost shot him, and I was very badly rattled from this experience.

By late afternoon we had forgotten about the close call and were waiting for the turkey and rice to get done. We dined in great comfort and style that evening, although we were both disappointed that the boat had not reached us. Perhaps we were further upstream from my old campsite than I thought.

By nine o'clock that night we were convinced that the boat would not reach us until the next day, so we went to sleep. A shotgun blast just a few feet from our hammocks got us to our feet in a second: it was Antonio, a Makiritare Indian, and Rerebawā, my fierce friend. They had made it to my old camp and were out hunting for their supper. They were unaware that Karina and I were sleeping just a few feet above the alligator they had just shot, and our shouts to them were as startling as their shotgun blast was for us. They paddled to shore and Rerebawā and I hugged each other happily. He was nearly convinced that the Shamatarī had killed me and was relieved to see me alive and well. He told me that he would never let me go on another trip without him, despite the

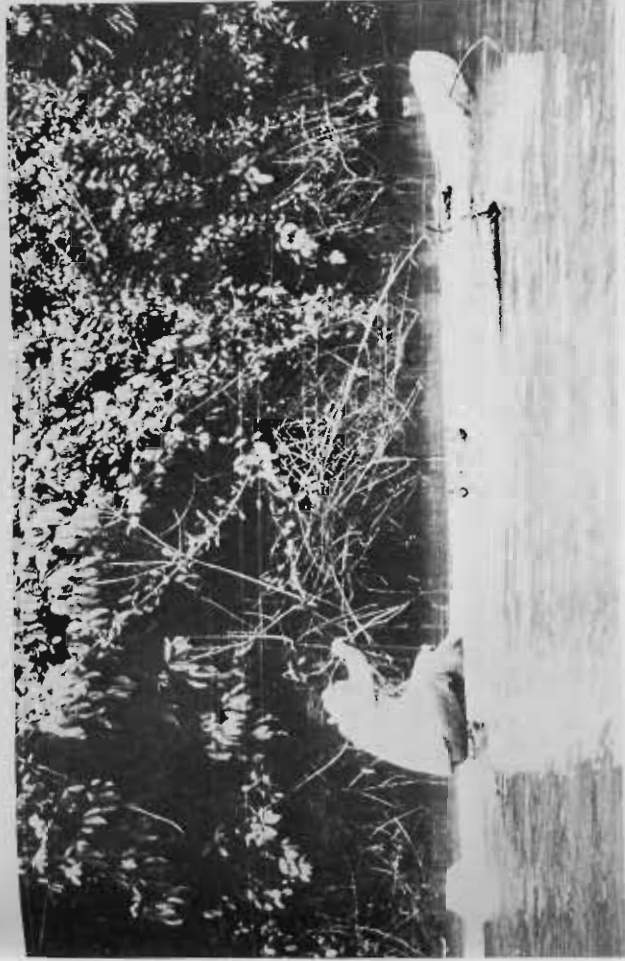


Figure 1.21—Antonio, expert Makiritare canoe-builder, simply had to try my canoe.

dangers to which he might be exposed. Karina begged half of his wad of chewing tobacco and collapsed back into his hammock, contented. "I nearly died of poverty!"⁴ he exclaimed as he lay in his hammock, contentedly sucking on the shared wad. I myself was having such a nicotine fit that I considered asking for a share in the wad. Knowing the missionary attitude about tobacco, I didn't really expect to be able to burn a cigarette from the rescue team.

I was so delighted to see the "rescue" team that I presented Antonio and Rerebawā with the cooking pot of boiled turkey and rice. They took it back to their own camp, a few minutes downstream, to share with the missionary. As it turned out, I had as much food as they! They had left in such a hurry that they brought only enough manioc flour to last them one day, plus the shotgun I had loaned to Bākotawā. It was amusing to me to ponder the question of who was rescuing whom. Had I remained upstream, they would have gotten pretty hungry within the next day, especially if I had remained in the village. They could have eaten alligator or turkeys for a long time, but meat without vegetable food is not very satisfying. I fell asleep thinking about the Yanomamō verbs that describe eating. Particularly the verb *debiāō*: "to eat a bite of meat and then a bite of vegetable food and chew both together." Their language captures so many important sensations.

The next morning at dawn they returned the empty cooking pot and we left to collect the equipment I left behind, and to look for the motor. Another missionary, who remained downstream, had questioned Bākotawā for hours and had drawn a

⁴ Their word for "being without tobacco" is best translated as "poor" or "poverty."

crude sketch map with the approximate location of the motor. It made very little sense to anybody except Bäkotawä, Karina, and me, since it was full of references to things like "where Shaki shot two turkeys," "where we left the empty gasoline can after our second sleep," and so on. Still, it was meaningful enough that I knew approximately where we had to begin looking for the motor, which we found late that morning. It was in poor condition, to say the least. Both cylinders were full of water, and we worked for about an hour before we got it all out. In attempting to start it we accidentally set it on fire, but we acted quickly and got it out before too much damage was done to the wiring. It finally started, and we were on our way again.

The river had come up four or five feet; it had been raining almost constantly since we left in our makeshift canoe. All of the deadfalls that caused us so much grief as we gingerly tried to prevent a capsized canoe were now covered with water. We were able to travel at full throttle most of the way up to the cache of equipment, since I had chopped out those impediments that were above water level. By dusk we had found the cache and were on our way back home. Nothing was missing, so Möawä had kept his word.

The next morning we reached the spot where I had abandoned the makeshift canoe. Antonio, an expert boat maker, was enchanted with my first canoe and simply had to try it. He got in, paddled it around, inspected the outrigger, and then began laughing and shaking his head. He was surprised at my resourcefulness, but apparently not at all satisfied with the technical execution, for he kept pointing out various other species of trees that would have made a much better craft.

When we reached the spot where we first met the rescue team, Karina and I transferred over to my large dugout and we came the rest of the way down by ourselves.

Thus began my work among the Mishimishimaböwei-teri, the village that had, in my mind, become almost a fable because of the numerous setbacks I had sustained in previous attempts to reach it. The several and confusing village names reduced to just one: it was no longer "Sibarariwä's village" nor Möwaraobateri, nor Daadaamoböwei-teri, nor any of the other names that it used to go by. It was now Mishimishimaböwei-teri, and the man who now "really lived there" was Möawä, who was younger than Sibarariwä and presumably more competent politically. He was competent enough to cause Sibarariwä to move off and form his own small village, a new group called Ironasi-teri, which lay a half day's walk to the southwest of Möawä's group.

I was now in a position to initiate the more tedious work of checking all the information I had accumulated up to that point and expanding on it. The friendly first contact led to reciprocal obligations between me and the Mishimishimaböwei-teri, verbal promises that would effect the transfer of my *matobe* to them, moving against continued cooperation and friendship. Past experience taught me that their expectations would increase with time, and I worried, as usual, whether my fieldbooks would become justifiably enriched with the esoterica of my craft. I also knew that they were very many, and knew that large villages contained correspondingly large egos in the persons of their leaders. The Bisaasi-

teri had, for years, related to me the renown of Sibarariwä. I had just met the man who succeeded him, and he communicated authority and competence in a most unmistakable way. It concerned me. I had not previously studied a village as large as this one, and I suspected that it remained large because of the skill and authority of Möawä's presence. I knew that life there would not be as tranquil as it had been in the smaller villages to which I had grown accustomed.