

Translation of letter from Thor Heyerdahl to Captain Forholt

Quito, Ecuador  
19th January 1947

Dear Bjørn:

Many thanks for your telegram about the boys' leave, which arrived today. It was a great pleasure to us. Apart from that, we have not received any mail since the two letters in Quayaquil. Our address will now again be "Hotel Metropolitan, Quayaquil", but first we will be away in the jungle, cut off from all and everything until the timber is sprouting on the river.

We have just packed our personal property which goes by plane to the coast, and have got ourselves khaki slacks in addition to our big boots and old shirts, and start tomorrow morning at 5:30 a.m. on "Expedition pre-KON-TIKI".

This is a hell of a country, and so primitive that one cannot comprehend it without actually having seen it. I have yet to find a single telephone in the whole of the country which can be used for anything except shouting "Olla" into the wall with. If anything can be postponed until tomorrow, well and only, then one postpones it until the day after the day after tomorrow. It is a wonderful country--beautiful, impressive, and singular in its charm. But, my God, how long one sleeps between the revolutions.

We have achieved the following, to the greatest astonishment of everybody here: There was no way of reaching Quevedo before the dry period came again and the roads clear through the jungle would be passable. From Quayaquil it was impossible, except with hollow canoe upstream--bigger boats could not go until farther into the rainy period. From Quito it was the same as in Quayaquil--one could possibly get down through the Andes and through the jungle all the way down to Quevedo. Up here we were told that nobody could take that trip. Now we have to try from Quayaquil. Well, we have run our heads against the wall before, and learnt that there are never four whole walls in a room. I dragged the Consul General, Bryn, with us up to the American Military Mission, explained the situation, and asked for (a) an airplane and two parachutes or (b) a jeep and a native driver. They understood that we would not leave until we got what we asked for, and gave us the last.

Today a captain in the Ecuadorian Engineer Troops reported to us at the hotel and said that he was ordered to drive us to Quevedo--mud or no mud; he should combine the trip with giving a report about conditions to the military authorities, and was entirely at our disposal. So tomorrow we drive over the Andes and into the lower country. The papers have written that there are robbers in the district, and we are therefore armed to the teeth. Consul General Bryn gave us personally his calibre 45 Parabellum. Captain, has also got a rifle in Alvarez

addition to his normal arms, so we can at least shoot some wild animals if we need the bandits. We are asked to shoot at their legs if there is any trouble; but if we kill some, we only have to bury them and shut up to avoid more trouble. What a country!

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We count on reaching the coast at the end of the month again, when the timber is floating on the river and everything is in order. We are probably going down from Quevedo in one of the hollow canoes that the Indians use. Remember that three-quarters of the population here are Indians, and there are practically nothing but Indians outside the cities and large farms. These are not Indians with collar and tie as in North America. Here there are still in the jungle masses of tribes which run around quite naked and cut each other's heads off where the collar usually is. In the middle of Quito City there are masses of Indians in clothing who sit down on the pavement and do their necessary business there. Well they do other things too, but this was sort of something which made an impression on Herman and myself. Otherwise, we are getting quite tough.

We heard the following story at the evening meal yesterday:

Our good friend Horche, with the nickname "the Crazy Flier", told about his life as a gold digger in the jungle here. (He is pictured as such on the Ecuadorian postage stamps.) He had at the time a friend who steadily came with gold and sold it to him for other goods. One day the friend was killed in the jungle, and Horche found the murderer and said he would shoot him as punishment. Now it had been that this murderer was one of those who usually sold the shrunk ewes' heads which Ecuadorians are so famous for. You know, they remove the cranium and fill the head with warm sand until it shrinks to the size of an orange, but keeps all its features unchanged. Only her eyebrows and beard keep their normal size. The Indian now admitted that he had the head of Horche's friend, and gave it to him to save his own life. Horche said that he was quite touched when he saw his friend again and took the head back home to his wife. She fainted every time she saw it, so Horche had to keep the head in a suitcase. But in the jungle it was so damp that green mold grew on the head, so Horche had to take it out and dry his friend's head off once a week. He hung it by the hair for drying in the sun on the clothesline. Two years went happily by like this while Horche nursed his friend's head with motherly care until a rat one day had chewed its way into the suitcase and eaten the cheeks. It was a great sorrow for Horche, who buried his friend with great ceremonies on a landing strip for aircraft. "He was, after all, a human being," said Horche.

"Thanks very much for the meal", said I.

But take it easy, my friend, we intend to get through the jungle without changing our size of hats, and will write again as soon as we are through. We hope everything goes well on your side of the front. The timber will at least be in Lima at the scheduled time.

Best regards to Munthe-Kaas and all at the Embassy, and also Trescott and other friends. Au revoir,

Your friend,

Thor

P/S. As mentioned before, we are anxious to hear how your grand speech went off and, naturally, if there is any financial news. (over)

P.P.S. Yesterday I danced for the first time in a hundred years with a real Indian girl. We only have to buy them that a country!

Take it easy, the jeep leaves at 5:30 tomorrow morning.

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