



**THE AUSTERITY KITCHEN**  
BY CHRISTINE BAUMGARTHUBER

Where the alimentary is  
elementary.

In 1915, Algot Lange threatened to dump five thousand pieces of prehistoric pottery dug from the mouth of the Amazon into the East River. “I’m going to dump the whole collection ... off Ward’s Island,” he vowed. “I want to go back to South America for three years, and I can’t afford to have the collection stored again [so] I’m going to dump it into the East River, and they can dig for it as I did.”

The Mangeromas cherished an abiding hatred for Peruvians, who worked in the rubber industry. These migrant workers trespassed on the cannibals’ land and often abducted their women.

“The chief difference between European and American savages lies in the fact that many tribes of the latter have been eaten by their enemies,” observes Immanuel Kant in “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch” (1795), “while the former know how to make better use of their conquered enemies than to dine off them; they know better how to use them to increase the number of their subjects and thus the quantity of instruments for even more extensive wars.”

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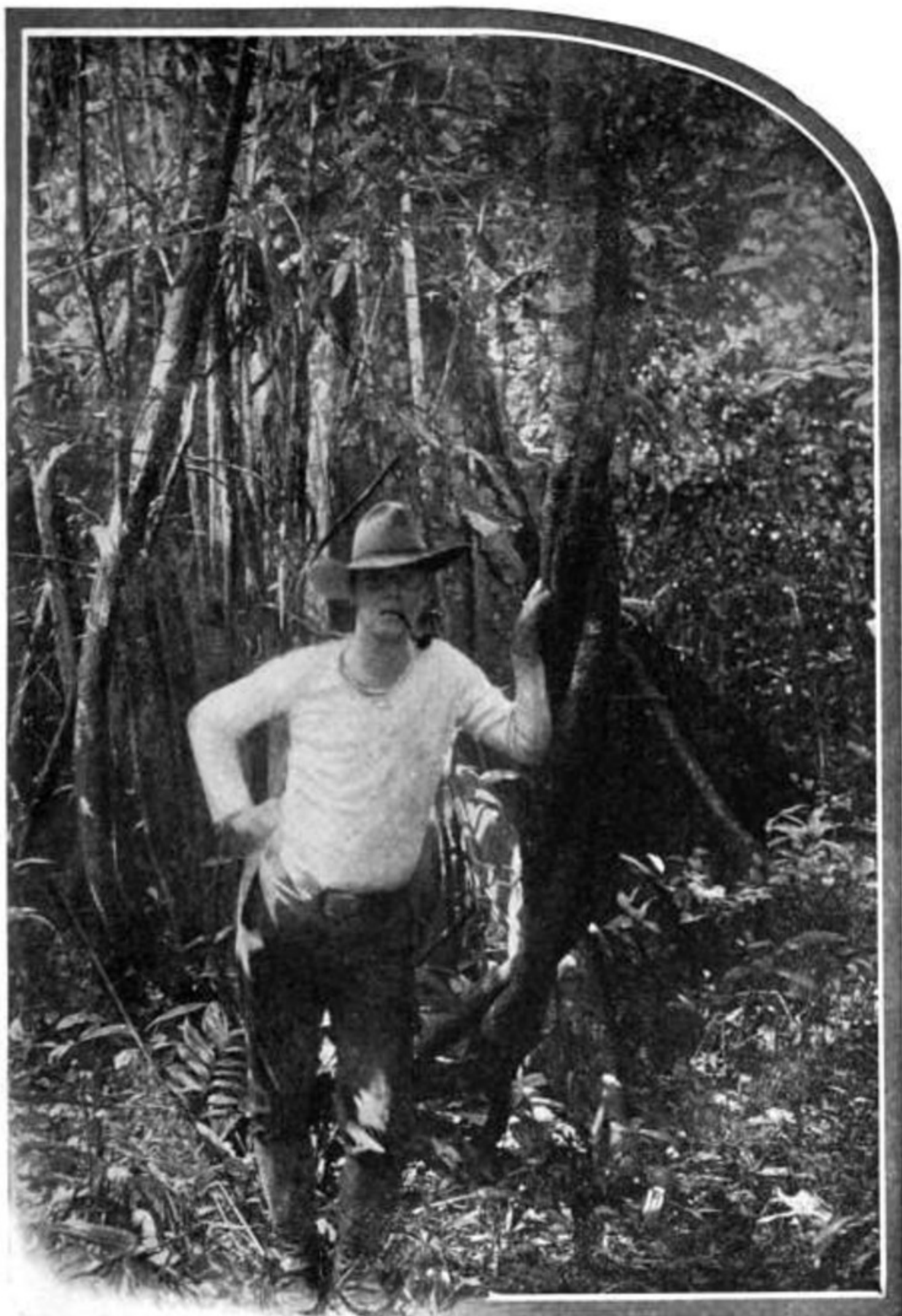
Coweye Burgers and  
Plastic Malts

Dinner with Caligula

A Contrary Image of  
Steaming Excrement

Fillet of Sole

By CHRISTINE BAUMGARTHUBER



THE AUTHOR IN THE JUNGLE

While exploring the jungle around the Javary River, one of the most formidable and mysterious regions in South America, the Swedish adventurer Algot Lange nearly met his end. All around him vegetation formed a gloomy tangle teeming with insects and reptiles. The air throbbed with suffocating, soporific heat. Through a constant downpour he trekked, feverish, starving — and completely lost.

His condition eventually got the best of him. Into his ninth day of wandering, Lange collapsed in a thicket. Having no idea how long he lay in such a state, he woke to find himself in a hammock surrounded by forty or fifty men, women and children. Every man wore through his nose two feathers. Oval wooden disks pierced the women’s lower lips, and thick scarlet and black lines encircled their eyes. These folks offered him chicken soup and foul-smelling nostrums, which he ate and drank warily. Between meals he dozed, and the days passed.



CHICO, THE MONKEY  
Then, one day, he returned, chain and all

Once Lange regained his strength the people took him to their chief, a man who wore a floor-length feather garment and whose smile revealed two rows of teeth filed to points. The chief explained through hand gestures how members of his tribe, the Mangeromas, had found the explorer asleep in the jungle. Surprised at this discovery, they carried him to their village. The Mangeromas occupied an unmapped region of the jungle, one isolated from Brazilians and the people who lived by the river. Limited contact conditioned them to treat strangers with suspicion. Yet the chief proved a most welcoming host by making Lange an honorary subject.

With tribal membership came its privileges. The chief charged two young girls with the task of ministering to Lange’s every need, and the tribesmen invited him to tag along on hunting trips and other amusements. They showed him how to concoct the poison in which they dipped their arrows and tutored him in the tribal tongue. Evenings saw lavish dinners, of which the Mangeromas, true gourmands, eagerly partook. Happy to leave behind his invalid’s diet of stinky broth, Lange joined these nightly feasts, inhaling turtle eggs by the dozen, and devouring countless cutlets of marsh deer, plates of fried pirarcu (a fish of monstrous size), and roast parrot with bananas. Grilled wild boar delighted him, and broiled monkey he munched with gusto. Only one dish did he refuse, one which the Mangeromas considered a delicacy: stewed Peruvian.



THE PACA  
A nocturnal rodent whose flesh is very tasty

Not that the particulars of how to trap, cook and eat a man failed to interest Lange. He made inquiries into their cannibalistic culinary practices, which he understood the Mangeromas kept a closely held secret. He nonetheless gained their trust, and they allowed him to glimpse their man-traps, which they constructed in any one of several ways. Sometimes they dug a pit, they explained, which they covered with dead leaves and twigs. Other times they strewed poisoned stingray bones on a piece of frequently trod ground. Lange found the most ingenious of their man-traps one that consisted of a blowgun operated by means of a bush rope. Tripped by an unsuspecting passer-by, a bark-flap slapped against the opening of the gun to fire a poisoned dart at him. To reap this gruesome harvest the chief sent out a party specially designated as “police warriors.” Any victims found still living this party dispatched without hesitation; unlike other cannibal tribes, the Mangeromas had no stomach for undue suffering. Upon arrival at the village, the dead Peruvians had their hands and feet chopped from them by the village women. Palm and sole flesh, the choicest tidbits, they stripped from the bones and fried in tapir fat until crisp, while the rest of the bodies they boiled in large cauldrons.

During such prandial preparations Lange made himself scarce. “How long would it be,” he noted in his memoirs, “before they would forget themselves and place my own extremities in the same pots and pans.” But he saw nothing but kindness from them, and they eventually allowed him to proceed on his way intact. A few months later he returned to his home in New York, where he would aver that his native hosts “convinced [him] that, even at the late period of the world’s history, our earth has not been reduced to a dead level of drab and commonplace existence.” Indeed, the bustle of the Big Apple left Lange hankering for the pace of life enjoyed by the Mangeromas — as well as for the strange fruits that sustained them.



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Photographs from Algot Lange’s *In the Amazon Jungle* (1912)

“They declared that this whimsical Englishman ate nothing but boiled, roasted or stewed monkey; that he would see no one; that he talked to himself hours at a time and many other surprising things that made people think that he was different from other men.” — Guy de Maupassant, “The Englishman of Étretat” (1882)

A native recipe for Amazon Turtle Eggs: Collect a dozen or so eggs and store them for two to three weeks. Then tear open the shells and squeeze out the yolks and mix them with farinha, the fibrous starch grains obtained from the roots of the poisonous maniwa plant. Serve at room temperature.