REVOLT IN THE AMAZON

Think you could be friends with these fellows?

Or this guy?

Sure you could. My son Jackson had no problem...

...when we visited their village in the Amazon in 2002. They live in the deepest heart of the Amazon, along a tributary of the Xingu (*ching-goo*) River. They call themselves the Xicrin (*chick-reen*), a branch of the Kayapo tribe. They made newspaper headlines around the world this week.

During our visit four years ago, the Xicrin asked for our help. In the middle of a pristine rain forest next to a beautiful river, they said they needed a well for drinking water. We were incredulous. They explained that their water was polluted with poison from a huge Brazilian mine on a river that drained into theirs.

That's when I learned about CVRD.

Companhia Vale do Rio Doce is the world's largest iron ore company. Their Carajas mine complex, upstream from the protected Indigenous Territory in which the Xicrin live, produces 275,000 tons of iron ore *a day*. All the effluents and chemical garbage left over from this are dumped in the rivers, which end up in the water the Xicrin drink, bathe, and play.

We raised the money for the drilling equipment to dig a well, and CVRD paid a bribe to FUNAI, the Brazilian Federal Indian Bureau, to be left alone. The Xicrin got safe water to drink, but the river and the fish in it were still being poisoned.

This month, they couldn't stand it any longer. Some 200 Xicrin warriors armed with clubs and bows and arrows paddled in their canoes all the way to Carajas and shut the mine down.

For two whole days.

That interrupted the export of 550,000 tons of ore, costing the company $10 million. Nobody was hurt, the Xicrin harmed no one. They just stole the keys to the buses that transport the workers from their living quarters to the mine.

CVRD responded by announcing their payments to FUNAI would cease.

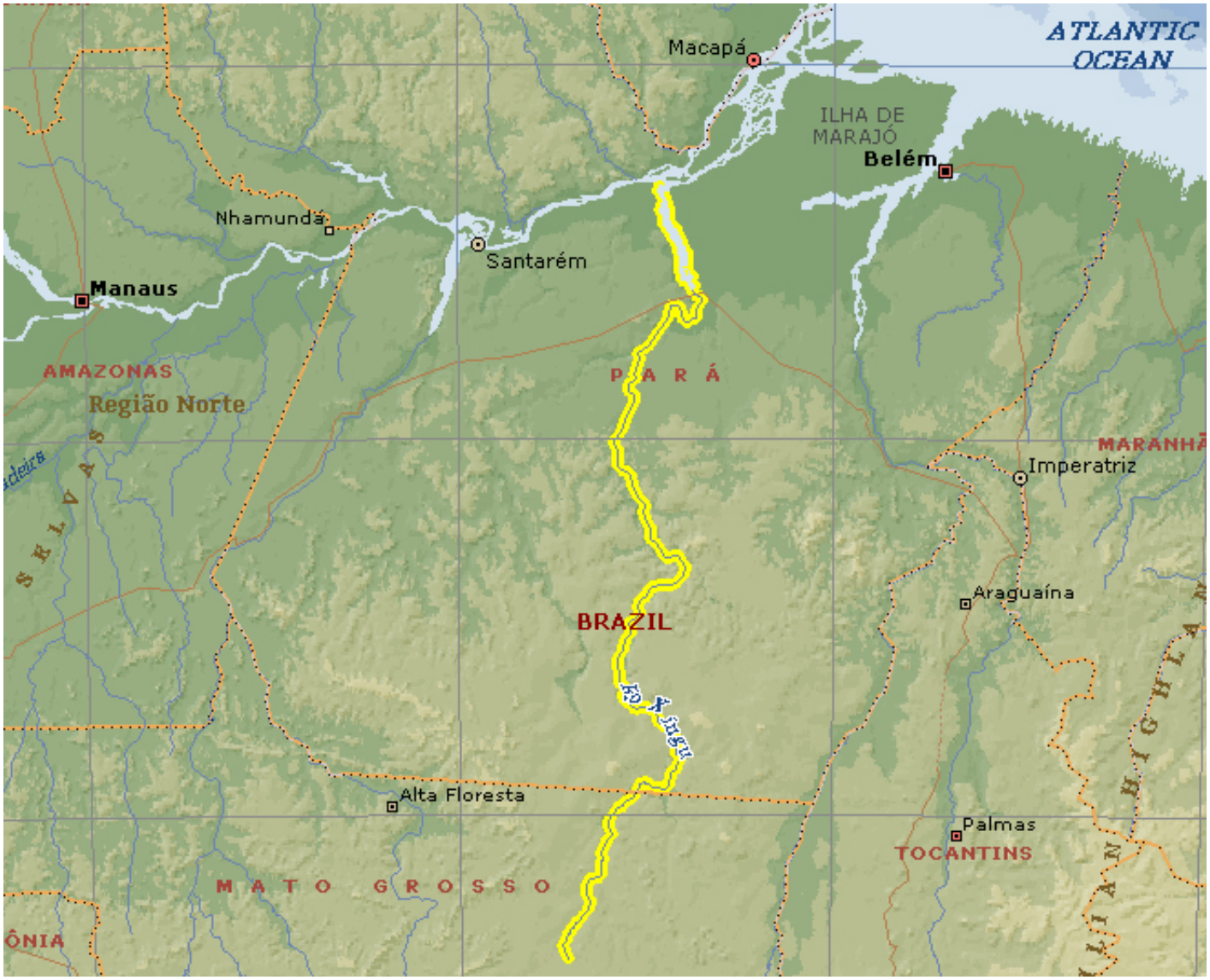
You have heard stories about environmental destruction in the Amazon. I can tell you that they are true. I have flown in small planes over much of the Brazilian Amazonian rain forest and it is *staggering* how much of it has been wiped out.

The trees are cut down for logs and timber. The forest is cleared for cattle raised by illiterate peasants from the cities enticed by free land. But the forest canopy protects the clay soil from being baked into, well, clay. The ground becomes so hard that little grows, the cattle can't be sustained, requiring they graze on yet another gigantic swath of land cleared of forest.

The CVRD is just another example of the Brazilian government's indifference to the destruction of its environment, resources, and peoples.

I can only hope that the worldwide publicity the Xicrin have gotten will help their situation. But clubs and bows and arrows have no chance against bored and bribed bureaucrats. I just thought you'd like to know the truth behind the exotic headlines.

Note: Here's a map of the Xingu. The Xicrin live near the "r" in "Para," the name of a Brazilian state.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