

# SCALE

FISHING & OUTDOOR MAGAZINE



⚡ **RILEY LOVE** ⚡

# WHERE THE WILD THINGS SWIM

GUYANA – THE LAND OF MANY RIVERS



PHOTOS	RILEY LOVE & STEVE YATOMI
DESTINATION	GUYANA/SOUTH AMERICA
TARGET FISH	PEACOCK BASS, PAYARA, ARAPAIMA, AROWANA
WEB	<a href="http://WWW.RILEYLOVE.COM">WWW.RILEYLOVE.COM</a>





We grow up with songs and poetry of plains, grasslands and mountains. But life teaches us that all rivers are story tellers. Guyana means "The Land of Many Rivers," but the 630-mile-long Essequibo dominates one of Earth's greatest regions of biodiversity.

### **Portuguese, Spanish, French, British, Dutch**

The Essequibo witnessed billowing sails upon Christopher Columbus's third expedition over the Atlantic's horizon in 1498. Then Amerigo Vespucci's [for whom both continents new world were named] in 1499. Don Diego Columbus, son of Christopher dispatched his deputy, Juan de Esquivel to enter the river which eventually bore his name.



Aboriginals migrating from Venezuela and the Caribbean settled here 5,000 years ago. They proved pugnacious to Europeans seeking colonization and a mythological city Manoa.





Constructed of gold and precious stones, it was the seat of El Dorado, "The Golden One." European lust for treasure ignited in 1595 by Sir Walter Raleigh's publication of *The Discoverie of the Large Rich and Bewtiful Emprye of Guyana*.

Explored by the Portuguese, plundered by the Spanish and sacked by the French- then centuries of warfare between the Dutch and English and their trading companies eventuated. The English colony Guyana, Dutch colony of Suriname and French Guiana settled into today's geography.

### Apoteri

Where the upper Essequibo's clear, dark water joins the white silty Rupununi lies the village of Apoteri, home to 280 Amerindians [shudder at political correctness term.] These indigenous trickled in the early 18th century from the Rio Branco and Rio Negro regions of Brazil. They were avoiding tribes trading slaves and Portuguese trying to push them into missionary settlements. They are mainly Macushi, famed for their use of curare and Wapishana.

Mankind began civilization on riverbanks. Here, husbandry of the bitter cassava root used for food, textiles and building material allowed generations to thrive. Early 20th century Apoteri prospered with the balata industry, abandoned since plummeting native latex prices and trees perished from their bleeding. Of 300 genera of aquatic life in the Essequibo, at least 40 are amenable to sportfishing.







Now this river speaks to me. It's multiple species fishing. Peacock bass are plentiful, but not as large as other genetic enclaves reaching about 12 lbs. However, 100 strikes per day is common. Vampire toothed payara above 40 lbs. are taken. There's plentiful arowana and species of catfish growing to immense proportions.

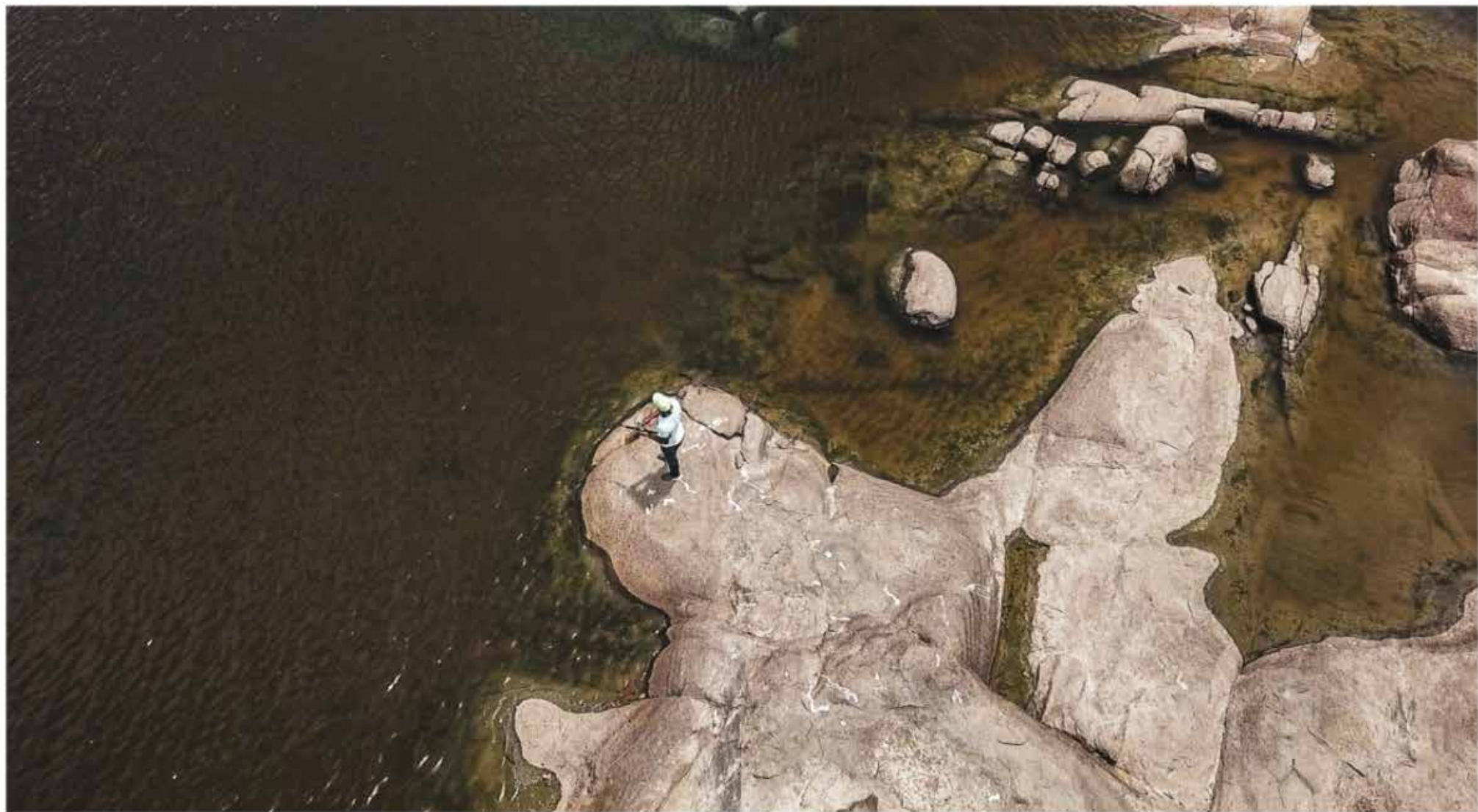
This is our best locale for arapaima, the largest scaled freshwater fish on the planet. Campbell James, previous Apoteri chief worked with biologists from England, the United States and IWOKRAMA, Guyana's International Centre for Rain Forrest Conservation and Development. Once depleted arapaima populations have increased 10-fold. You are virtually assured of encountering these giant trophies in the dry season. The 2015 world record on flyrod 416 lbs. stands from neighboring Rewa river.

### **A Woman on Point**

So, the river relates a contemporary story of modern enlightenment, fishing conservation and a bold young woman entrepreneur as relevant as any from New York's Hudson or the Seine in Paris. Fay James, Campbell's daughter is yet to see her 30th birthday. She stands at the crossroads of her native traditions and the modern world, perhaps more than anyone else from Apoteri. The simple village is mainly single room handmade wooden huts, some with thatched roofs. A product of Apoteri primary school, Fay went on to study at Bina Hill Institute in Annai. There she won a scholarship to The Guyana School of Agriculture which she attended as a fisheries student.







































During college that she forged her idea of a sustainable fishery-based program to bring back to her community. She studied fisheries across Guyana. With her first post-grad year she gained experience working inside the tourism industry as a free lance guide and tour operator. Through her work, she met Californian Steve Yatomi- International Game Fish Association rep and veteran of guided fishing tours into exotic locations in 81 countries. She showed Steve the upper Essequibo and at 22 years of age began King William Adventures, named for falls upriver bearing this name. She built hand hewn wooden huts 23 miles upriver as a permanent fishing camp. Now she has also developed a guest house nearby the village also catering groups of fishermen.

None here shared a background in the tourist industry, Fay was on her own. Apoteri was losing its young people to faraway jobs like gold mining. Goals included job creation for the new generation, maintaining cultural heritage, sustaining fisheries using catch and release only, and active monitoring programs. Her business limits 100 fishermen yearly and avoids fishing during the spawning season. The village receives fees for each guest; and she has trained 16 boat captains and guides who now have jobs at home. Like most successful entrepreneurs she's hands-on, escorting clients upcountry for extreme survival treks, bird and animal spotting and through Georgetown, the nation's capital. An avid fisherman herself, she keeps a lot of nice gear at the camp. Fay is also the mother of two, maintaining her tours during the pregnancies- like to try that on for size big fella?





## Magic and El Dorado

As the tannin stained water of the Essequibo roils around your legs, you start to feel a rhythm. From pools and rapids where payara, peacocks and the large black piranhas await, there's no sign of man. There is the river, the forest, and the myriad wildlife. The crash of giant river otters along the bank is the only disturbance on the first morning.

The native people make a pronounced impression of sincerity. Remote from "connectivity," their isolation has preserved an integrity we admired very much. Their compass needles align with natural forces around them. We all feared that their needle's iron would soon swing wildly in the magnetic tempest of the outer world advancing inexorably over the horizon toward them. It was only a matter of time... an uneven trade never to be undone was in the offing. Our hearts were heavy with this knowing.

Despite Christian churchgoing, Apoteri's natives consult their Shamans on all matters of import. Their stories abound with mythical spirits or Durimas. Once in the rhythm of river and forest these mystical animals and spirits become increasingly real. At night, they are just beyond the edge of the lantern's light. It would be easy to give yourself over to the wild here, like Jack London in the north. Perstinaciously one might devolve into Joseph Conrad's Marlow who, like the mad Kurtz had gone "too far up the river" in *The Heart of Darkness*. Away from the distant world one's mind takes flight under the florid stars at night, smoothly fueled by a distilled spirit, "El Dorado." Named for the legendary ruler of the golden city, this rum is the pride of the nation and a model of patience, waiting in cask 21 years for our nocturnes on the water's edge.







Also, there are Binas or charms. My guide, a young villager in sunglasses and a Nike cap, had a pocketful of special leaves to produce one. This charm would make him irresistible to girls upon his return. I snuck some into my camera bag for the trip home.

There is a clear difference between fish which are accustomed to seeing lures presented constantly and those naïve to our angling methods. Their passion is not adulterated; striking with wild abandon revealing of their true predatory character. It ignites prana in the spinal cord, setting the angler's world on fire. This kundalini keeps us coming back. Decades ago, Costa Rica and Panama were like this, even the Florida Keys. No longer. It's ever harder to find a natural locale. Pausing to tap a freshwater stingray on the noggin with my flyrod and continue wading towards the dark, clear pool just ahead... he's the only other fisherman sharing this dreamy place.

Over a half-century ago, my brother and I started these fishing quests. Initially, they were Robert Louis Stevenson adventures. Later they became Jack Kerouac mythical journeys and then, Hunter S. Thompson mind-busting gonzo edgework. Now, I've become Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe studying footprints in the sand. Across the lengthy sandbar they trace my march, metaphor for a lifetime- wandering; arriving finally where our marks on the world would end, a last footprint in the sand. Then erased forever by nature's storms leaving a clear path for some future wanderer.