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# GOING WHERE TEDDY ROOSEVELT DARED A CENTURY AGO

## UCSD professor to retrace trek exploring Brazil's River of Doubt

By Gary Robbins 12:01 A.M. MARCH 17, 2014

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UC San Diego is mounting a scientific expedition to South America to retrace the path that Theodore Roosevelt took a century ago when he explored the uncharted, piranha-infested River of Doubt — a journey that nearly killed the former president.

Materials engineer Marc Meyers will visit his native Brazil this week to seek the involvement of the Brazilian army, which could provide leadership, equipment and guides to help researchers navigate one of the most remote regions of the Amazon basin.

The proposed 1,500-mile, three-stage trip would begin on the gentle Paraguay River, proceed north across rugged plateaus and savannas, then stretch up the perilous, fast-moving rapids of the River of Doubt.

Roosevelt explored the Amazonian river in 1914 with famed Brazilian explorer Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon during an expedition devoted to science, mapping and hunting. Along the way, Roosevelt contracted malaria and suffered a leg wound that required bush surgery. He became so weak that he asked to be left to die on the jungle floor. Although he survived, historians said the trip ultimately shortened his life.

Scientists and filmmakers have explored the River of Doubt since then. But the region remains little known, a fact that's been tugging at Meyers, a veteran explorer of the Amazon.

The expedition, tentatively set for this summer and fall, would be "a

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homage not only to Roosevelt and Rondon, but to the native tribes they encountered," said Meyers, 67. "I also would like to see what kind of transformation there has been in the past 100 years in the nature of the river, in the fauna, flora and in the people who live there."

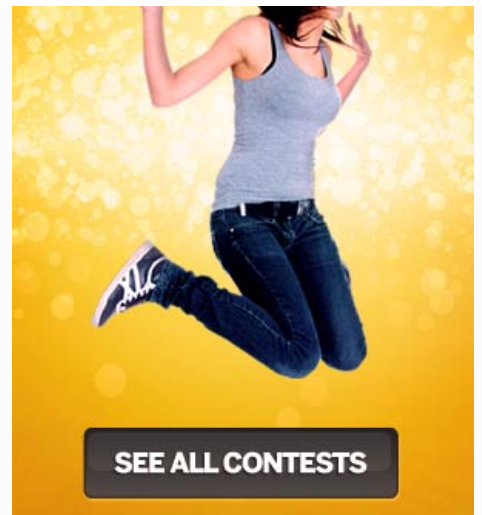
Meyers is collaborating with Jeffrey Lehmann, an Emmy Award-winning filmmaker from Del Mar who specializes in travelogues. Lehmann is owner of Barnstormer Productions, which has created programming that has aired nationally on PBS and other networks worldwide.

"I'm excited to share in my documentary what Theodore Roosevelt experienced," said Lehmann, 49, a UC San Diego graduate. "We'll also be sharing out scientific discoveries. We'll benefit greatly from a century of advances in film technology, outdoor equipment and medicine."

Lehmann and Meyers have discussed the possibility of using a small, camera-toting drone to film canopy and terrain during the expedition, which is expected to take about six weeks to complete. The focus will be on changes in flora and fauna.

Meyers also plans to spend time on one of his main research thrusts: biomimicry. He studies natural materials in living organisms and tries to find ways to use them in products that can help people. For example, Meyers has paid special attention to the beaks of toucans, which are light, strong and rigid, and to the arapaimas fish, which is armored against piranha attacks.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to return to the Amazon in the afternoon of my life, 45 years after I spent two months in a village helping the population, and to contribute to knowledge through this exciting venture," Meyers said.



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