

BOOK REVIEW

The Ethnobotany of the Chacobo Indians, Beni, Bolivia. Brian M. Boom. *Advances in Economic Botany*, Volume 4. New York: New York Botanical Garden. 1987. Pp. 67. \$15.00 (paperbound). ISBN 0-89327-312-0.

This book is an important contribution to the ethnobotany of Amazonia, particularly of an area which is relatively underrepresented in the literature. Its presentation makes it a useful tool for anthropologists and botanists alike.

This highly concise work provides a brief introduction to the context and objectives of the study. It includes a description of the study area and an ethnographic vignette of the Chacobo. Though largely historical it provides the reader some insight to the relative acculturation of the groups prior to 1983 when the author initiated his investigations. Field methods are described as including two basic approaches. These are the "artifact/interview" approach of anthropologists and the "inventory/interview" technique in which informants are interviewed about names and uses of plants following the active collection of specimens.

The largest section of the book contains an accounting of the 360 species collected within a one-hectare area south of the village of Alto Ivon. The collection is distributed in at least 221 genera and 79 families. Where possible, each entry includes the Latin, Chacobo (with English translation), and Spanish names, local frequency, habit, habitat, geographic range of species, voucher citations and commentary on use. The remainder of the book considers the variable uses of plants in Chacobo culture. Of 305 species utilized, 102 are food plants, 75 gathered wild from the forest. The latter are of interest as they reinforce the author's suggestion that the Chacobo were traditionally hunter-gatherers as opposed to agriculturalists. Fuel plants include 22 species of trees, while species utilized in the context of construction and crafts include 68. Medicinal plants include 174 species, and are tabulated by ailment treated. Only five plants were considered useful due to their toxic properties. The most notable conclusion of Boom's work is the fact that the Chacobo utilize 82% of all species and 95% of all trees, with utilization rather evenly distributed among medicinal, construction, and crafts and food categories.

This book is well written, and contains excellent tables and illustrations and useful appendices on Chacobo names and nonvascular plants from the area. Beyond its obvious scientific value this book notes the significant implications of ethnoecological research in allocation of lands for self-sustaining Indian reserves.

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