

pins and finally slashing chunks out of its flesh. Sometimes you'll land nothing more than the victim's head. Obviously, a struggling animal triggers the stimuli through well-defined underwater vibrations. How this differs from a quietly wading man is apparent, but the occasional piranha attacks reported in South American newspapers are probably augmented by the more numerous "drownings" resulting from accidents which are frequent in countries where all the main highways are rivers. The basic native craft is a dugout, one of the tippiest boats I've ever had the misfortune to travel in, and rollovers are commonplace.

SEVERAL years ago, I talked with an Indian on Venezuela's Cinaruco River who lost his little daughter and her dog. His dugout turned over one evening and in the commotion that followed, the child and dog disappeared. Not a trace could be found of either victim, despite the fact that the river was in an almost currentless dry season stage. Even if we assumed that his daughter drowned, the father's reasoning was that the dog could swim and, therefore, both had been lost to the piranha. This is fairly typical, although there are reliably documented cases of actual attacks on wildly splashing people. Dr. Alvarez Aguirre of the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro told me that when they were laying railroad track along the Amazon, one of the laborers jumped in for a noon swim and his enthusiastic hand splashing turned him into an armless corpse bobbing in the current. It just happened to be the wrong time, the wrong place, and the wrong piranha.

One would imagine that such an aggressive fish would be easy to catch. At times you can cast endlessly and not get a touch—despite the fact that they will apple-core any other fish you hook. Surface lures as a rule won't even interest piranha, except for a flashy silver plug. A deeply fished jig is perhaps the most effective lure but even then certain species like the white piranha are as shy as any brown trout, and Wimple's piranha *never* to my knowledge takes an artificial (and seldom a natural) bait. The dusky, ruddy, Natterer's, red, black, Holland's and blacktailed piranhas are easy marks most of the time. They are not spectacular gamefish although the larger fish of three pounds or more put up a fast bottom-boring fight. Piranha are one of the better food fishes in South American rivers, particularly when deep fried to a golden crisp. The meat is very white and delicately flavored. It's easy, just close your eyes and bite.

