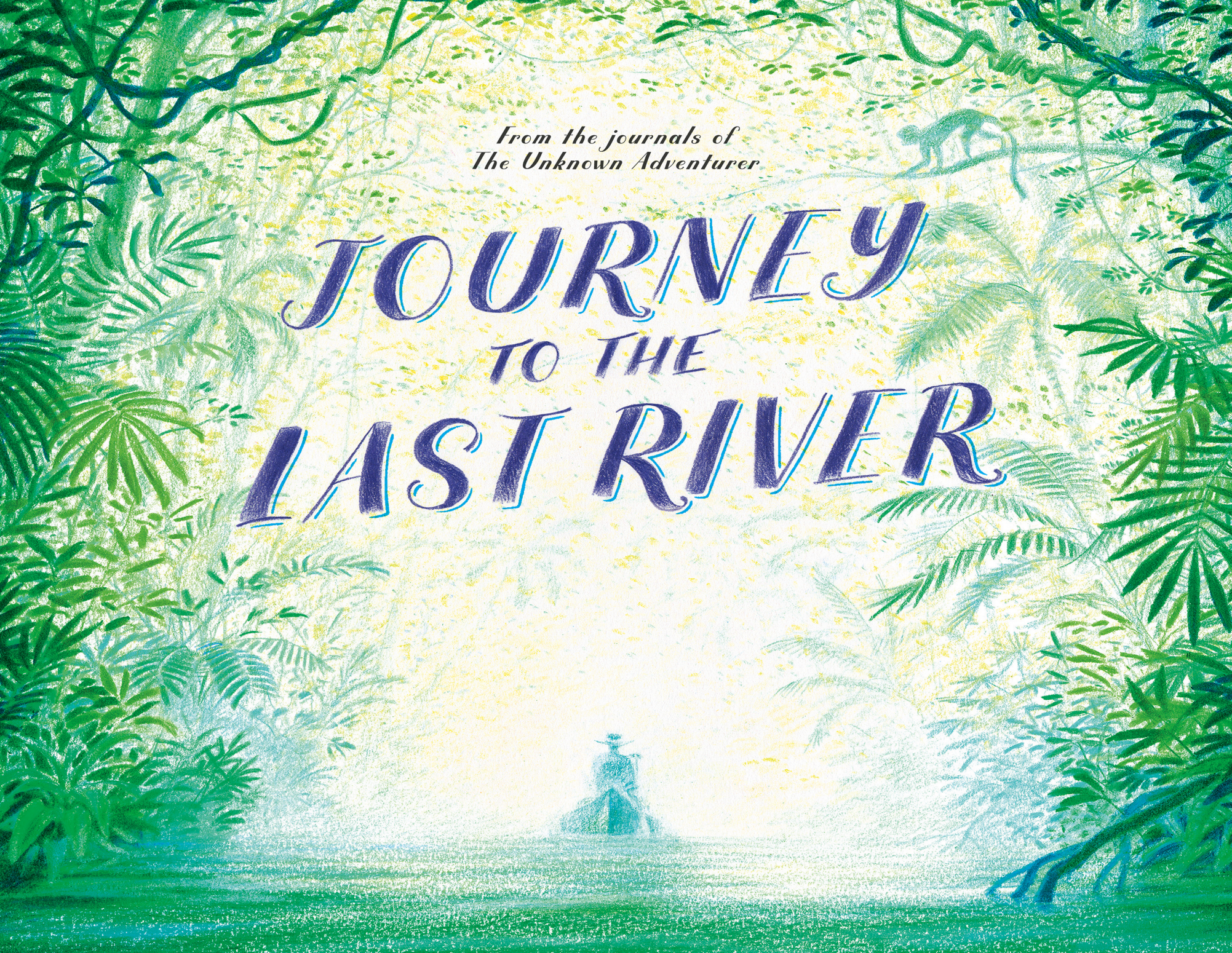
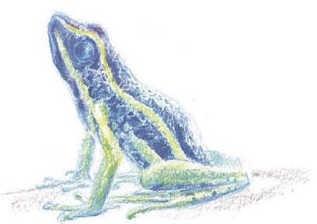

From the journals of
The Unknown Adventurer
JOURNEY
TO THE
LAST RIVER

JOURNEY TO THE LAST RIVER

WARNING

This book describes a perilous adventure into the Amazon rainforest, in which a number of dangerous activities are undertaken. None of these activities should be attempted without the supervision of an adult. The Publisher expressly disclaims liability for any injury or damages resulting from engaging in the activities contained in this book.

Frances Lincoln
Children's Books



A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

In 2014 myself and some colleagues made a discovery in a remote part of the Amazon: a sealed case full of maps, diaries, sketchbooks and more. They belonged to an unknown artist and adventurer whose identity still remains a mystery.

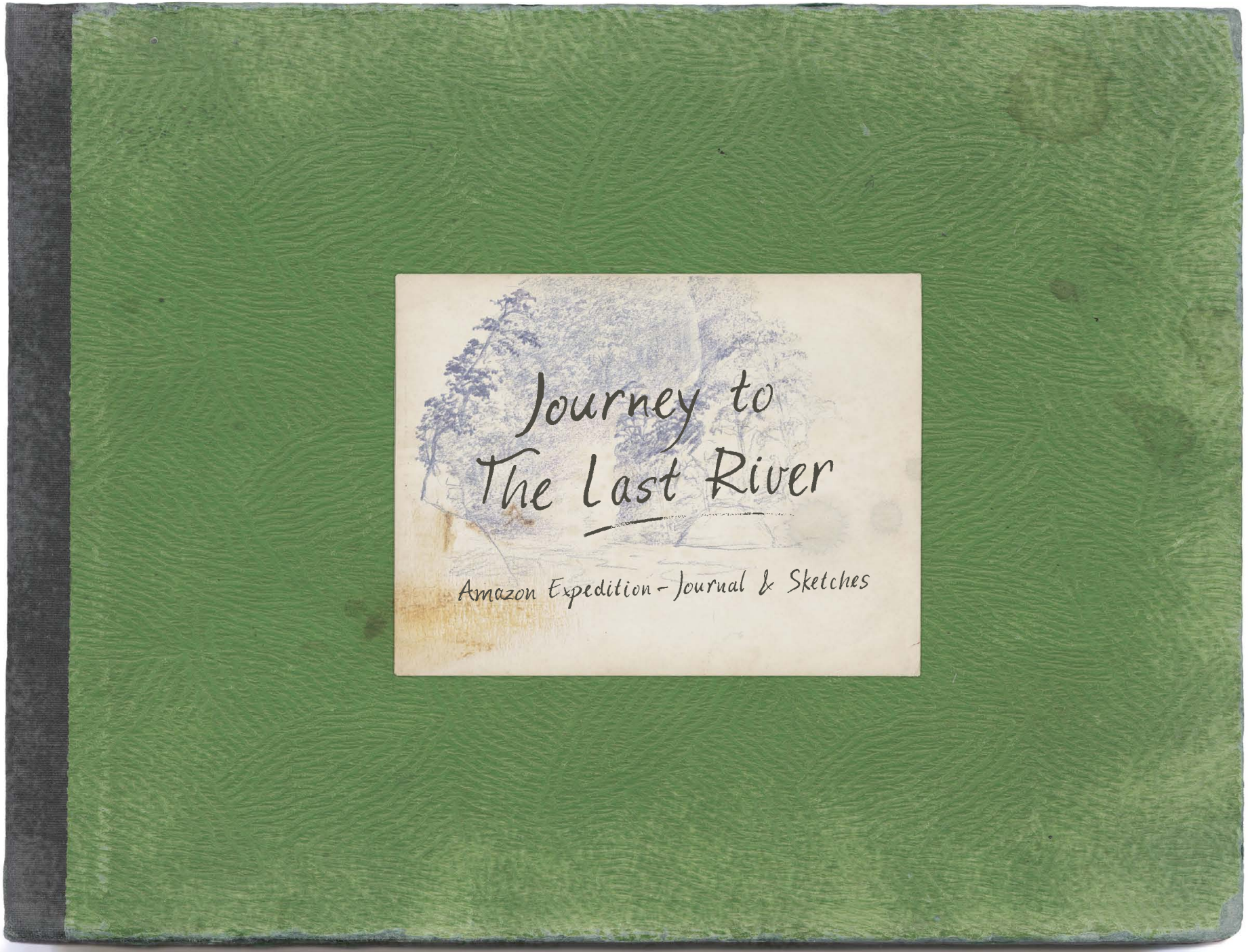
Many of the original notebooks and illustrations were curated into *The Lost Book Of Adventure*, a guide to adventure that has now been translated around the world. But there were a lifetime of stories and adventures that never made it into the original book. These so-called journals were detailed accounts of some of the Unknown Adventurer's most exciting expeditions.

I've chosen to start with what appears to be one of his first: *Journey To The Last River*, an incredible story of adventure deep in the Amazon rainforest that began with the discovery of a lost map. The location on the map has been kept a secret for reasons you will discover, but through our research we have found that the area in question is real and remains virtually unexplored to this day.

No yearly dates were written down, but judging by the kit, the expedition most likely took place in the 1960s. As with the original journal, all details and events in the following pages were recorded as they unfolded. Any errors and unfinished illustrations are simply the natural realities of travel writing in such an environment and have been kept as they were. Where translations or more explanation is needed, footnotes have been included.

At times, while compiling this historical document, I felt like I was right there with them on their extraordinary journey. I hope when you turn the next page, you too will feel the same thrill and wonder, and the urge to pack your bag and explore the world around you.

Teddy Keen
Editor & Compiler



When you turn this page, you are opening the Unknown Adventurer's original journal.

Every Adventure Has A Beginning

This journal is my personal account of a journey deep into the Amazon. If you are reading this, there is something you should know.

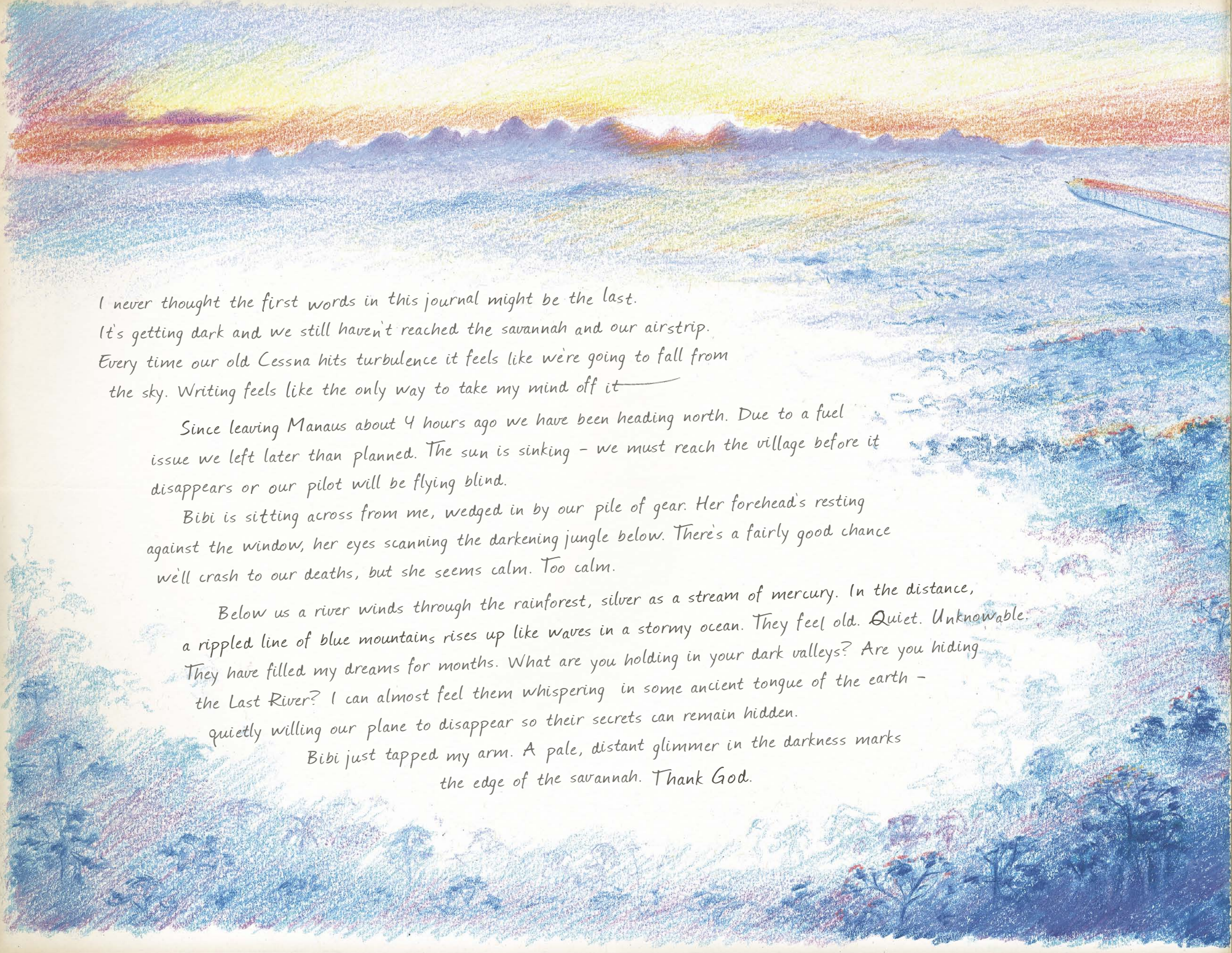
All adventures have a moment when they come into existence. This one began in the archives of the Royal Geographical Society when I came across a rare and weathered old book. A blow on its dusty cover revealed the following words: 'Travels in the northern Amazon – 1835-1844' by R. Schomburgk, explorer and botanist.

When I opened the book, an old piece of paper slipped out. It was a hand-drawn map showing a mountainous rainforest cut through by a winding river. But most of the details had been removed and a large area had been rubbed out. Raising the map to the light I could just make out a thin blue line and the words, 'Last River'. What was this Last River? And why had it been rubbed out? It was as if the mapmaker was trying to hide something. I read the book but the explorer's account gave no mention of the map or an expedition into the mountains. In that moment I felt an irresistible urge to know the truth. I put the map and the book in my bag, and left.

I researched the map for weeks but found nothing. That might have been the end of the story had I not posted a photo of it to Bibi, a scientist friend in Brazil. By chance, she recognised the area shown on the map as part of an ancient mountain shield running across the northern Amazon - a wild and untamed land.

I would mention the area's name, but I can't. All I can say is that this map would lead us on an expedition into the unknown, hoping to find the Last River for ourselves. What we discovered was enough to make me remove or change the place names in this journal – just like the map maker. Soon, you will know and understand.

If you are reading this, promise that you will keep it secret. You are now a guardian of the Last River, too.



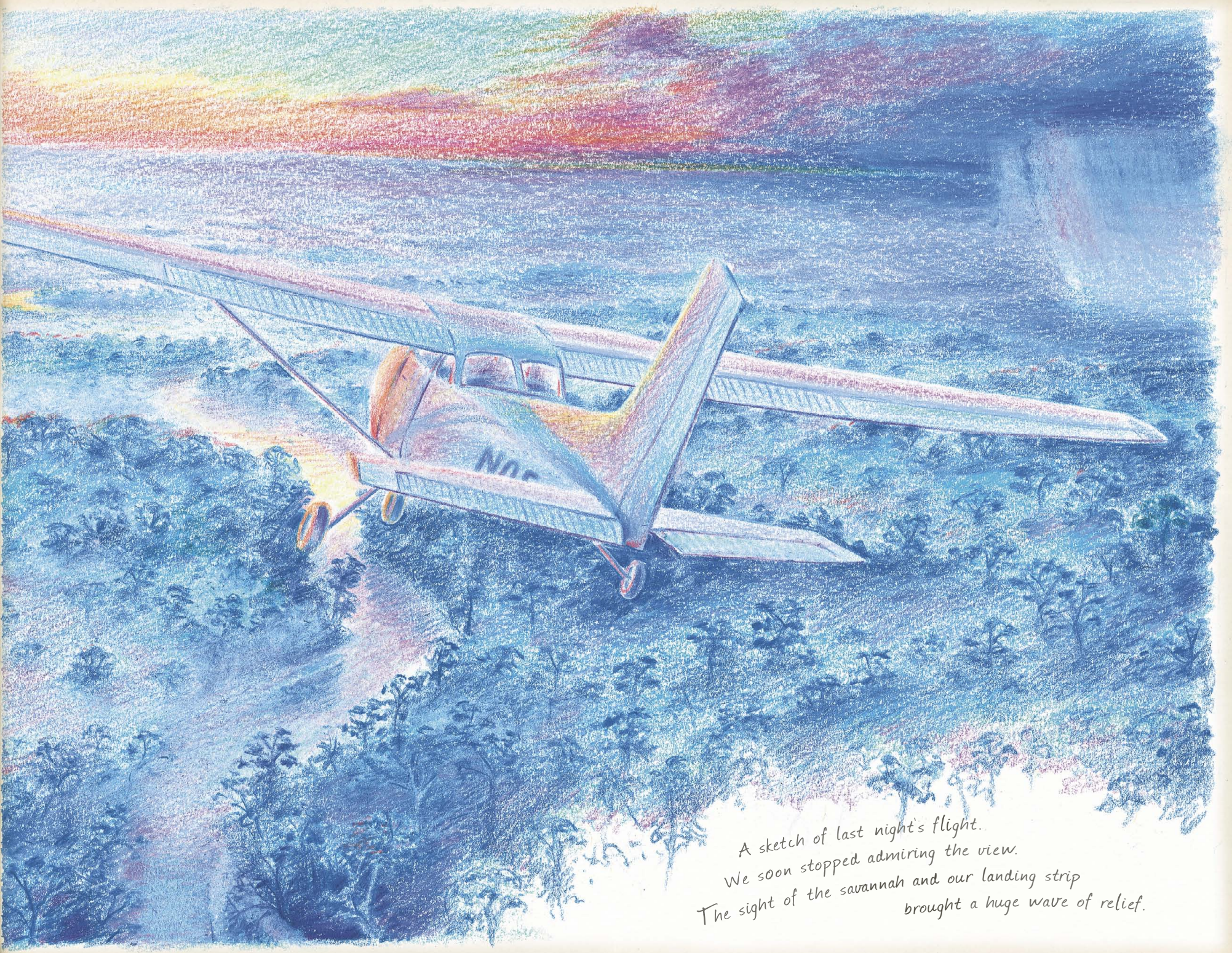
I never thought the first words in this journal might be the last.
It's getting dark and we still haven't reached the savannah and our airstrip.
Every time our old Cessna hits turbulence it feels like we're going to fall from the sky. Writing feels like the only way to take my mind off it——

Since leaving Manaus about 4 hours ago we have been heading north. Due to a fuel issue we left later than planned. The sun is sinking – we must reach the village before it disappears or our pilot will be flying blind.

Bibi is sitting across from me, wedged in by our pile of gear. Her forehead's resting against the window, her eyes scanning the darkening jungle below. There's a fairly good chance we'll crash to our deaths, but she seems calm. Too calm.

Below us a river winds through the rainforest, silver as a stream of mercury. In the distance, a rippled line of blue mountains rises up like waves in a stormy ocean. They feel old. Quiet. Unknowable. They have filled my dreams for months. What are you holding in your dark valleys? Are you hiding the Last River? I can almost feel them whispering in some ancient tongue of the earth – quietly willing our plane to disappear so their secrets can remain hidden.

Bibi just tapped my arm. A pale, distant glimmer in the darkness marks the edge of the savannah. Thank God.



A sketch of last night's flight.
We soon stopped admiring the view.
The sight of the savannah and our landing strip
brought a huge wave of relief.

March 13th

I'm writing this from my hammock, watching small birds take turns stealing breakfast crumbs from the table. Beyond their chirping, the savannah hums with the sound of cicadas. Through the cracks in the floorboards below me I can make out a couple of mangy dogs inspecting our kit. One of them shakes up a cloud of red dust, then wees on my rucksack. I stamp my heel but it doesn't even look up. Typical.

We're in the village of [redacted]* a 4km walk from the grass airstrip we finally landed on last night. A local man – Atorai – and his family have let us use their outhouse – a raised wooden building with the traditional thatched roof of layered palm fronds. We are keen to get going, but a 6-week canoe adventure requires preparation. We need food supplies and I want to speak to some of the locals about the map to see if they know anything. Hopefully we will set off the day after tomorrow.

From my spot I can see where the savannah meets the edge of the jungle. The distant wall of trees dances, tantalisingly, in the heat.

*Many names have been crossed out by the author.

Bibi's gone off to find a mango tree. It has been good spending time with her again. We met in São Paulo three years ago, while I was wandering around South America. She hasn't changed, still the same worrying mix of curiosity, practical jokes and an unnatural fondness for amphibians and reptiles, particularly the dangerous ones. It's something she now has a degree in.

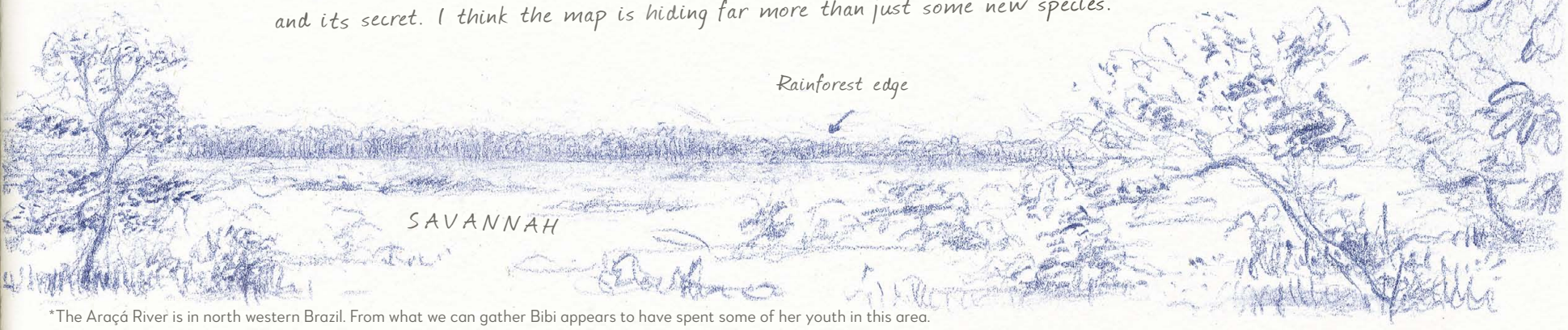
When Bibi saw the map she understood its potential immediately. Moving 100m on land in the deep jungle can take a whole morning of machete-hacking and snake-dodging, but rivers out here are the pathways into the unknown and are a haven for wildlife. The chance to explore a new one is enormous and we both know it. Given her obsession with snakes and amphibians, I know she is hoping to find some new species – no doubt she will use me to lure in some especially deadly specimen.

But I'm glad she is here. We realised early on that a small, 2-person expedition was our only option. We had planned to hire local guides, but our meagre savings didn't stretch that far. I just hope we won't regret it. This is my first proper jungle trip and I'd be lying if I said I wasn't nervous. If something goes wrong, we are on our own.

Fortunately Bibi grew up in Araçá* and has some handy forest skills – skills we may need out there. Perhaps I'm relying on her too much, but she is my ~~best~~ only chance of finding this Last River – and its secret. I think the map is hiding far more than just some new species.

The distant edge of the rainforest mirrored in the mirage

Bibi scanning the savannah



*The Araçá River is in north western Brazil. From what we can gather Bibi appears to have spent some of her youth in this area.

March 14th

Went to the village this morning – all was quiet. A few tame peccaries wandered about. In the store, drying strips of beef hung like old rags on a clothes line. Have picked up our supplies. The fishermen will be back this afternoon.

I'm attaching the map over here ⟶ One less thing to lose. The plan is to travel on foot into the jungle to the [redacted] River. Then, paddling downstream, we hope to reach the mountains in a week's time and a couple more days to reach the tributary, or mountain river, as I call it. With any luck we will then follow the waters upstream towards the rubbed-out section in the map's top-right corner. Given the age of the map, we are well aware that there is a chance the mountain river is now impassable. That's a risk we will have to take.

Officially, our mission is to explore as far into unknown territory as we can and to document the wildlife we come across. But we both know that the real reason we came is the mysterious blue line on the map. Who made the map and drew that line? If it was Schomburgk, why did he rub out that particular area? And why didn't he include the map, and his journey into the rainforest, in his account? There must be a reason. Deep down I think that he discovered something. Something that he wanted to keep secret.

There are only two possibilities I can think of. Firstly: that he came across the remains of some kind of lost civilisation. It sounds far-fetched, but when Machu Picchu was rediscovered in 1911, few believed it. It is also recorded that Schomburgk came across ancient stone markings further up this very river and for hundreds of years explorers came to this region in search of the fabled lost city of gold: El Dorado.*

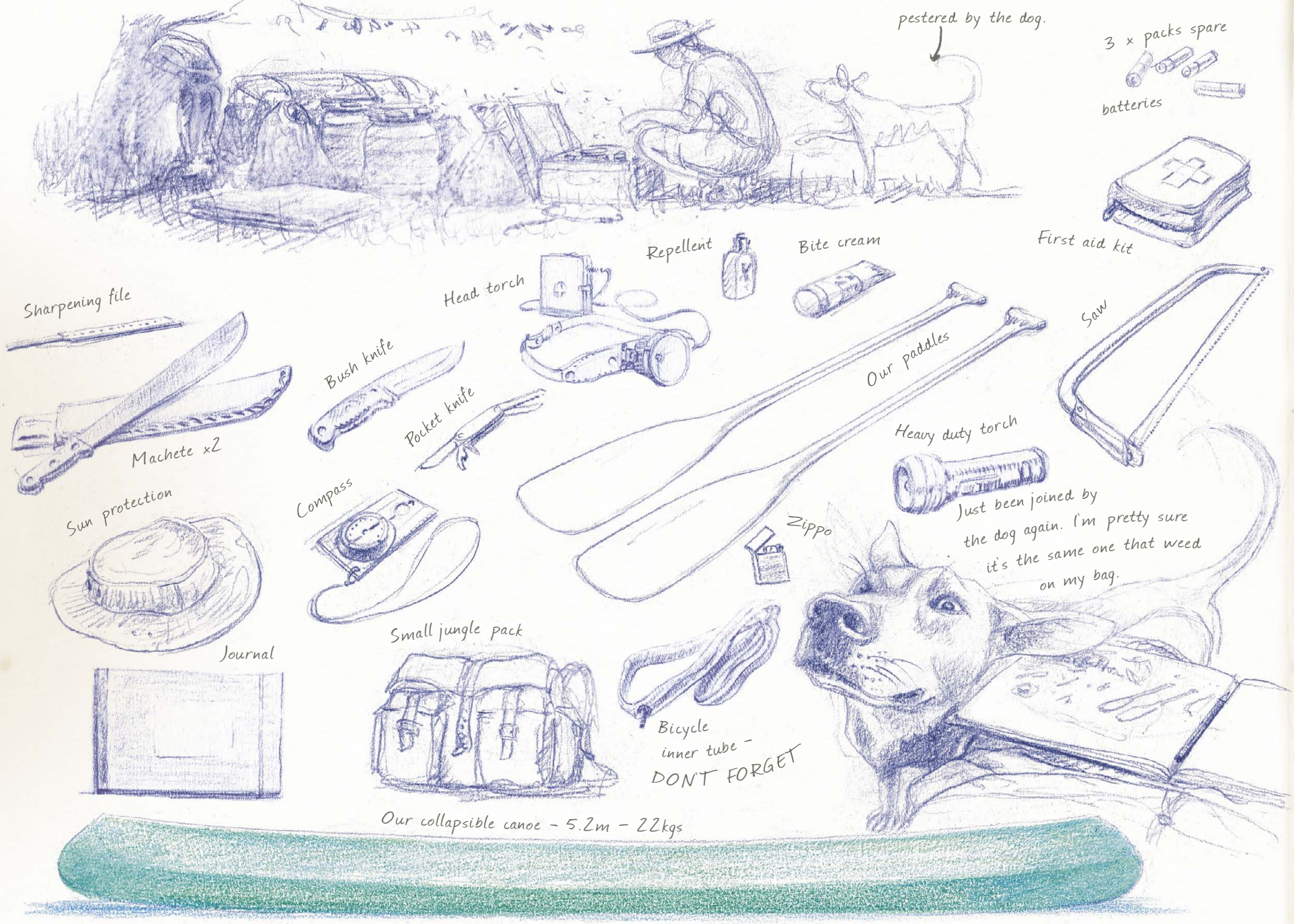
Secondly: that his secret was the treasure itself. Perhaps he found gold or diamonds buried within these mountains. It makes sense. The geology of this landscape is known to hold these valuable minerals. The more I have looked at the map, the more convinced I am that that is why it was rubbed out.

I can hear Bibi packing below. I haven't told her my theories. She thinks I'm here as some kind of adventuring artist. If she knew my real reason – if she knew that I have gold on my mind – she would never have come. And I need her.

* The lost city of El Dorado was believed to be paved with gold and led many explorers to this part of the Amazon.

I've sketched out our kit here. A useful inventory if nothing else.

Bibi sorting through kit while being pestered by the dog.



DON'T FORGET REPAIR KIT!!