

Local/Wisconsin

**WAR, WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR? A VACATION BACKDROP COLOMBIAN TREK LANDS MADISON MAN IN MIDDLE OF PARAMILITARY-GUERRILLA CROSSFIRE.**

Patricia Simms Wisconsin State Journal

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Detained by guerrillas for five days in a jungle compound.

Lodged in a Panamanian jail cell for the night with eight fellow travelers because there was no room in the local hotels.

Fed rodent (cooked) the size of a small dog.

For this experience, former Dane County Board member Mark Pocan paid money.

"It was a jungle trek of a lifetime," Pocan said Tuesday. "It was a good adventure."

Pocan returned last weekend from a trek through the Darien Gap, an almost impassable 80 miles between Colombia and Panama.

The trip was organized by a British company called **Encounter Overland**. "And it certainly was," added Pocan.

The nine trekkers were deposited in the Los Katios National Park after the park director assured them the area was clear of fighting between the paramilitary "right-wing death squads" and FARC, the main leftist guerrilla organization in Colombia. They were fighting over possession of the park.

But shortly after arriving, they learned otherwise. "We woke up at 7:30 in the morning to machine guns and hand grenades. We could hear bullets flying through the trees."

Guerrillas told the group they were being detained. "They said they would try to direct the gunfire away from the area," Pocan said.

"I ended up doing card and coin tricks for the guerrillas," he said.

On the fourth day a plane circled the compound, and Pocan said the guerrillas decided to move on. "Around dinner time, they gave us half a steer to eat and said goodbye."

The trekkers were later rescued by park workers.

And the night in jail? "The hotels were closed because it was New Year's Day so the police cleared out a cell and put nine of us in there."

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