

The progress of the colonisation sponsored by the INCRA

The zone along the Cuiabá-Santarém highway

No INCRA-sponsored colonisation had taken place within the sphere of influence of the Cuiabá–Santarém highway until 1975, although *nordestinos* had settled near Santarém in the years before and there had been an expansion of the number of large livestock holdings in the area north of Cuiabá. An FAO commission had recommended colonisation based on arable farming along and near this highway, as well as on the basis of forestry and livestock farming, possibly with financial support from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, but it was not known when this colonisation would begin nor what its character would be.⁶⁴

Rondônia⁶⁵

The territory was made more accessible in the years preceding 1970 through the building of a number of roads. The road to Porto Velho was completed in 1965. The region was also beginning to play a more important role nationally as a result of the growth in tin-mining. This greater accessibility, the economic growth and the good agricultural land which was present in various places led to increased voluntary migration, mainly from areas in the Centro-Sul, and to an increase in spontaneous colonisation along the principal roads (BR-319 and BR-364). This migration was strengthened when the existence of good *terra roxa* soils was proved in various places and the government suggested that Rondônia could become an important colonisation area for large population groups. During the period 1965–1974 the population of Rondônia grew from 97 000 to 143 000, mainly through voluntary migration.

The spontaneous occupation of large areas of land led to chaos and tensions in respect to property rights. The activities which the INCRA developed in Rondônia after

64 Apart from the area near Cuiabá and Santarém, the districts around Fordlândia, Belterra and Daniel de Carvalho, in particular, offered possibilities for further colonisation, because a more developed infrastructure already existed there (including the former Ford plantations and the hydro-electric power station near Curuá-Una). There had also been a large amount of spontaneous occupation in those areas. Near Belterra there were certainly 180 000 hectares of land available for colonisation. If this land was parcelled out in lots of 100 hectares, however, it would nevertheless be necessary to settle some of the squatters outside the Belterra region (*Diagnostico perspectivo para o projeto de colonização ao longo da rodovia Cuiabá-Santarém* n. d., 147).

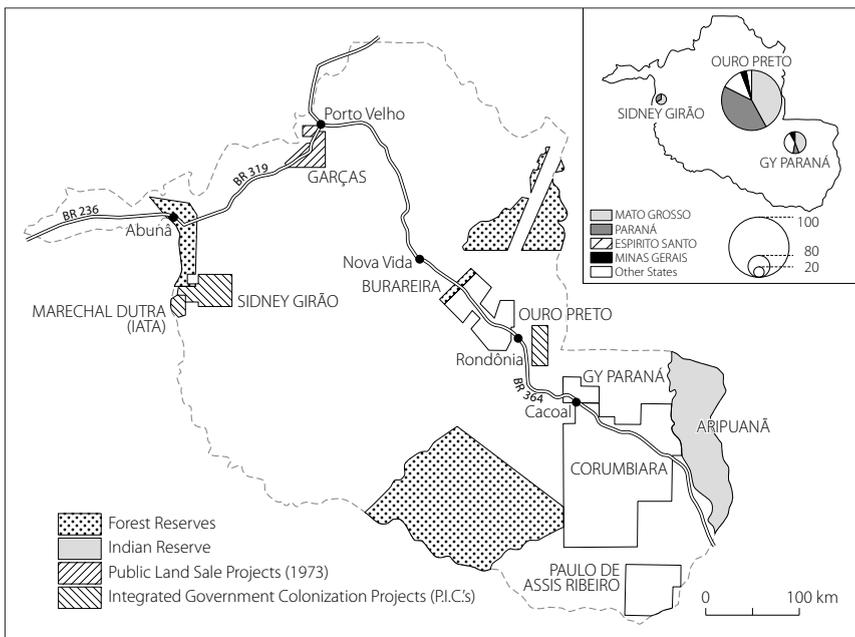
65 Data derived mainly from: Ministério da Agricultura (1971c; 1972a) and Arruda (1972).

1970 were therefore aimed at limiting this unorganised settlement and at supporting the officially permitted occupation of the land by such means as technical assistance, financial support and the granting of property rights. The INCRA hoped, through stimulating the colonisation process, to be able to satisfy the increased demand for agricultural products and to ensure the preservation of this economically and strategically important frontier region. According to plans drawn up in 1972, the INCRA proposed to settle about 8000 families in Rondônia by 1975. Although not all spontaneous migrants and settlers would be absorbed by then, it was hoped that this colonisation would help to restrict the unorganised occupation.

In 1970 and the following years the INCRA proceeded with the realisation of a few guided colonisation projects.⁶⁶ In the mid-1970s there were five recent projects, i. e. Gy Parana, Ouro Preto, Sidney Girão, Padre Adolfo Rohl and Paulo de Assis Ribeiro (Vilhena). Fig. 6 shows them to be situated along the two principal roads through Rondônia, i. e. BR-364 and BR-319.

Apart from settlements in these project areas, the INCRA had reception centres at Pimento Bueno and Vilhena. They were established to provide the migrants with advice and to direct them to the project areas.

Figure 6. General reference map of Rondônia



Source: Atlas de Rondônia (1975).

66 In addition, there were still a few projects in execution dating from the 1960s or earlier. One of them was that of Presidente Dutra (Iata), where 976 colonists had been settled up to June 1976 and the settlement of a further 224 families was planned for 1977.

8,935 colonists had been settled in these five areas up to 1976, which meant that the integrated colonisation projects in Rondônia no longer lagged behind the programme which has since been realised along the Transamazônica, as they still did a few years previously. The distribution of the colonists was as follows:

Gy Paraná	2070	Padre Adolfo Rohl	1164
Ouro Preto	3564	Paulo de Assis Ribeiro	1732
Sidney Girão	405		

The colonisation in Gy Paraná was still at the preparatory stage at the end of 1972, but it was hoped to begin the settlement there in 1973 of 500 families whose movement had already been planned in 1972. The project area was situated near the Pimento Bueno reception centre on highway BR-364, about 500 km from the little town of Porto Velho (see Fig. 6).

Colonisation was further advanced in the oldest project zone – that of Ouro Preto. This zone, which had a total area of 226 000 hectares, was situated along highway BR-364, about 330 km from Porto Velho, between Rondônia and Ariquemes. Colonisation began here in August 1970. The target of the plans was the settlement of 2000 families, of whom 1079 had already been established in 1973. They had all come to Rondônia on their own initiative and originated mainly from the west and south east of Brazil. The settlers received grants of 100 hectares of land if they were engaged exclusively in arable farming and between 150 and 200 hectares if they were engaged mainly or exclusively in livestock farming. The soils were of good quality.

The colonisation zone of Sidney Girão was situated in the valley of the Rio Mamoré, 270 km S.S.W. of Porto Velho and 65 km from Guajará Mirim, close to the Bolivian frontier, on the road from Abunã to Guajará Mirim. The first colonists arrived in 1971 and only 210 families of a projected 500 had been settled by October 1972. The planned target for this area was 1500 families, settled on holdings of between 100 and 200 hectares. The total area of the colonisation zone was about 200 000 hectares. Many of the colonists up to mid-1973 originated from the neighbouring agricultural colony of Iata, which was established in 1957 near Guajará-Mirim. For various reasons, the majority of the approximately 600 families settled in this colony led a rather poor existence. The INCRA therefore decided to open the sponsored colonisation project of Sidney Girão to these people as well. 80 % of the heads of households resident in Iata were born in Ceará.

By far the greater part of the colonists came from the Centro-Sul (mainly Mato Grosso and Paraná), a very small minority came from the North East. It should be added that some of the colonists were already living in Rondônia as *posseiros*. Settlement had taken place on *lotes* and not in *agrovilas*.

As in the colonisation projects along the Transamazônica, the colonists were allocated 100 hectares of land, which they had to clear themselves and 50 hectares of which had to be maintained as *reserva florestal*. A limited number of grants of larger holdings had been made, which were devoted to cattle ranching. In Ouro Preto, for example, there were 200 *lotes*, each with an area of 200 hectares.

After clearing the land, the majority of colonists here, as along the Transamazônica, began the cultivation of a limited area of food crops, such as rice, maize and beans, both for home consumption and the market. No use was made of fertilisers. Rice was

the most important crop in terms of area and here, too, it could be disposed of to the government at the official minimum price. To deal with these sales CIBRAZEM had two stores built in Gy Paraná and Ouro Preto.

The majority of farmers were also trying to turn to more commercial crops such as coffee, rubber and cocoa. Some farmers had gone further in this direction than others. The area of cultivated land, therefore, varied on each holding, but was generally limited here as well, i. e. on average less than 10 hectares. The growing of cocoa was on the increase, particularly since the Brazilian government had set itself the aim of making Rondônia the second cocoa-growing area of Brazil after South Bahia. The Burareiro project (Fig. 6) in fact also fitted into this policy. Its aim was to settle 200 small cocoa farmers from southern Bahia on holdings of 199 to 400 hectares. In addition, 240 holdings of 1000 hectares had been planned, for which farmers from other regions were also eligible. By mid-1976 the INCRA had already settled 332 families.⁶⁷

The problems which occurred in the Rondônia colonisation projects were largely similar to those occurring along the Transamazônica. Here also, the division into parcels was not everywhere satisfactory, communications were defective, credit facilities and agricultural advice were not as good as they might be, there was an absence of local markets, crop rotations were inadequate, farm incomes were low and there were problems in the field of health care.

There were also differences. In Rondônia there were many more problems arising from claims upon the land than there were along the Transamazônica. They had been caused mainly by the failure to produce colonisation plans of any magnitude after the completion of the road from Cuiabá to Porto Velho. Many migrants then began to clear plots of land on their own initiative. The situation became even more chaotic because of the occurrence of all kinds of dubious practices referred to generally as *grilagem*.

These practices involved individuals or companies trying to gain control of large areas of land by the use of false deeds or other methods. Any *posseiros* living on the land were driven off, if necessary, with the help of private "police." Sometimes land was even acquired by driving off official colonists. The *grileiros* generally did not use the land to cultivate for their own subsistence, but to divide up and sell to people who wanted to start a small farm themselves and were waiting in vain for the government to meet their wishes. The *grileiros* themselves suffered little risk through these practices. It was the prospective farmer who might hear in the course of time from official sources that he had bought land from dishonest enterprises.

The main companies involved in *grilagem* were CALAMA and Gainsa-Guaporé-Agro-Industrial S.A. There were also several smaller ones.⁶⁸ CALAMA had managed to get its claims, which were based on a document from about 1915 and related to about one million hectares of land, recognised by the INCRA and had also succeeded in exercising control over a considerably larger area than the original claim. One of the areas controlled in the 1970s by CALAMA included the settlement of Vila Rondônia. More than 30 000 people lived in and near this town, as well as thousands of *posseiros*, some of whom regularly received a hint to leave the land.

CALAMA could go its way unhampered because it was supported by the INCRA and enjoyed the protection of the police. The latter even permitted the company to re-

67 Data supplied by the INCRA at Pôrto Velho.

68 The details which follow have been derived from Senna (1975, 77–80).

move unwanted settlers with its own well-paid *pistoleiros*. It need hardly be said that in such a situation there were fatalities from time to time.

The GAINSA was under the control of two large landowners. It did not enjoy the official recognition and support of the INCRA, but did have the protection of the magistrate in Porto Velho, as well as the support of the whole judiciary and police of Rondônia. In addition, the owners, known as the *Máfia dos Arantes*, had a hundred *pistoleiros* at their disposal. GAINSA operated mainly in the areas of Abuña, Nova Vida and Cacoal.

Officially, the INCRA had the task of stopping such practices as quickly as possible and ensuring that as many farmers as possible quickly came into legal possession of their own holdings. Apart from settling colonists in project areas, it had, where possible, to do this by legalising the property rights of *posseiros*, where they had taken possession and cleared the land. In practice, however, not enough was done. The INCRA worked slowly and inefficiently and its officials supported dishonest practices. The same was true of part of the judiciary, the police and the government. As a result, thousands of migrants led a marginal existence on land from which they might sooner or later be driven off. This situation was also exposed at the time by the North Brazilian bishops.⁶⁹

Landownership problems

Undesirable situations as mentioned above occurred not only in Rondônia. In the mid-1970s, more or less all the land along the completed section of the Brasília–Manaus highway (from Brasília to the crossing with the Cuiabá–Santarém highway) seemed already to have fallen into the hands of *grileiros* and *posseiros*. In a great many places they had already started clearing the forest and were maintaining certain stretches of the road from personal interest, where it was already in a poor condition, although only recently completed. The government denied the existence of such unauthorised occupation, but was in fact unable to act effectively against it.⁷⁰

In Acre there had been large, mainly illegal sales of public land to capitalists from the Centro-Sul and the atmosphere of violence and insecurity which accompanied the operation of *grileiros* had caused many farmers to migrate to Peru and Bolivia, where living conditions were more favourable. This had been happening particularly after 1970. It was estimated that some 40 000 people had emigrated to these two countries in the past few years.⁷¹

Grileiros also seemed already to have become active along the Transamazônica (in the area at a distance of more than 10 km from the road, i. e. outside the zone reserved by the INCRA for occupation by small farmers. Some pieces of land had already been sold several times. INCRA officials had also succeeded in acquiring land there.⁷²

69 See "Pastoral da Terra" (1976).

70 "As rodovias e a integração." *Última Hora*, 8th August 1976.

71 *A Crítica*, 23 August 1976.

72 This has been revealed by information obtained verbally at Altamira. It was noted in the area near Humaitá by Müller *et al.* 1975, vol II, p. 639.

A similar development was feared along the Cuiabá–Sontarém highway, which was fully open to traffic in October 1976. It had already become a reality along the first section which came into use in 1972 (470 km).

While there were tensions between landowners and *posseiros* and conflicts between *posseiros* and *grileiros*, resulting in threats to the livelihood of the weaker population groups, the Indigenous population was also threatened by the illegal occupation of reserve lands. There was evidence that the Parque Indígena do Aripuaná along the road from Cuiabá to Porto Velho had been infiltrated by several thousand families who had obtained land there through the Companhia Colonizadora Itaporanga, established in São Paulo. This company had been operating in the area since 1972 and had already sold 1.2 million hectares of land in Rondônia. Apart from *posseiros* there were also *garimpeiros* (simple miners) living in the reserve. The Indigenous' service Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI) had also given various companies permission to carry out mining surveys in the park. If even the reserves were no longer a secure territory, it was clear that the existence of the Indigenous was even more threatened outside them, not only by small-scale settlement, but also and, especially, by large land developers or speculators (Chimamovitz 1973).

Amazonas

In the state of Amazonas the INCRA had only one integrated colonisation project in progress in 1973, namely, in Bela Vista, on the Rio Negro, some 10 kilometres from Manaus. In mid-1973, a total of 246 colonist families (including 34 Japanese families) had been settled on parcels of land of between 50 and 100 hectares. The settlement of a further 100 families was expected shortly.

An important aim of the colonisation project was the better provisioning of the rapidly growing city of Manaus with vegetables, fruit, poultry, eggs etc. Apart from growing these products, some of the colonists were engaged in other forms of cultivation, such as pepper growing. The majority of the colonists were already living in the area as spontaneous occupants. An investigation by the IPEA showed that, in 1971, besides 110 colonist families, there were already about 1300 squatters living in the area. The INCRA was gradually settling them on the land legally. Once they had become official colonists, they also received supervision.

The IPEA observed in 1971 a quite considerable difference in prosperity among the colonists. The more successful farmers – the majority of them Japanese in origin – were engaged in horticulture, poultry farming and in growing permanent crops such as pepper and guaraná. In this “upper crust” the average income per worker was 4.1 times the official regional minimum wage. The poorer farmers, by contrast, were mainly engaged in traditional shifting cultivation, serving primarily the local market. The average income per worker in this group was equivalent to 1.2 times the regional minimum wage (Tavares *et al.* 1972, 84).

In mid-1973, the settlement of some 500 colonist families around Tabatinga, on the left bank of the Solimões, near the frontier with Colombia and Peru, was at the project stage. Here too, provision was made for holdings of about 100 hectares. It was hoped to be able to begin the execution of this project in 1974. The aim of the project was particularly to expand the production of food crops, both for the supply of an army unit stationed in Tabatinga and to feed the growing civil population. A further motive was

the desire to increase the population density of the frontier zones of Amazônia in order to prevent possible infiltration by Peruvian *caboclos*.

Maranhão and Goiás

In Maranhão there was only one small colony under the supervision of the INCRA, namely that of Barra do Corda. Within the framework of the Programa de Integração Nacional a total of 238 families had been settled here up to October 1972, as against a proposed settlement of 500 families during that year. The INCRA had also begun to legalise the settlement here of some 3500 squatter families (Ministério da Agricultura 1972a, 32).

In Goiás activity was limited to the previously mentioned colony of Bernardo Sayão, where colonists long had to contend with inadequate government supervision, so that many had hardly been able to rise above subsistence level. The INCRA hoped to be able to raise the level of prosperity through the provision of adequate supervision. Up to October 1972, 515 colonist families had been settled in Bernardo Sayão. It was hoped to be able to increase this number to 700 in 1973 (Ministério da Agricultura 1972a, 32 and 34).

Pará

In the state of Pará the INCRA was responsible for the small colonisation projects in Guamá and Monte Alegre, which began in about 1970.

In Monte Alegre 804 families were officially settled in 1971. There were also about 1400 families who had the status of “occupier.” In May 1972, a total of 2505 *lotes* had been taken up by squatters and official colonists. 331 families had been settled in Guamá. A total of 532 *lotes* had been taken up here by official colonists and squatters in May 1972. The holdings in both projects had an area of 30 hectares.

In these two colonies also, the IPEA observed remarkable difference in prosperity in 1971. The more successful farmers consisted largely of Japanese, who were better educated, possessed more capital and enjoyed the support of the mother country. They often helped each other. This group concentrated to a large extent on pepper cultivation. The average income per worker in this “elite” was 10.3 times the official regional minimum wage in Guamá and 6.5 times in Monte Alegre. The group of less successful farmers depended mainly on traditional, subsistence agriculture. The average income per worker was only 0.9 times the official regional minimum wage (Tavares *et al.* 1972, 83-86; Arruda 1972, 30).

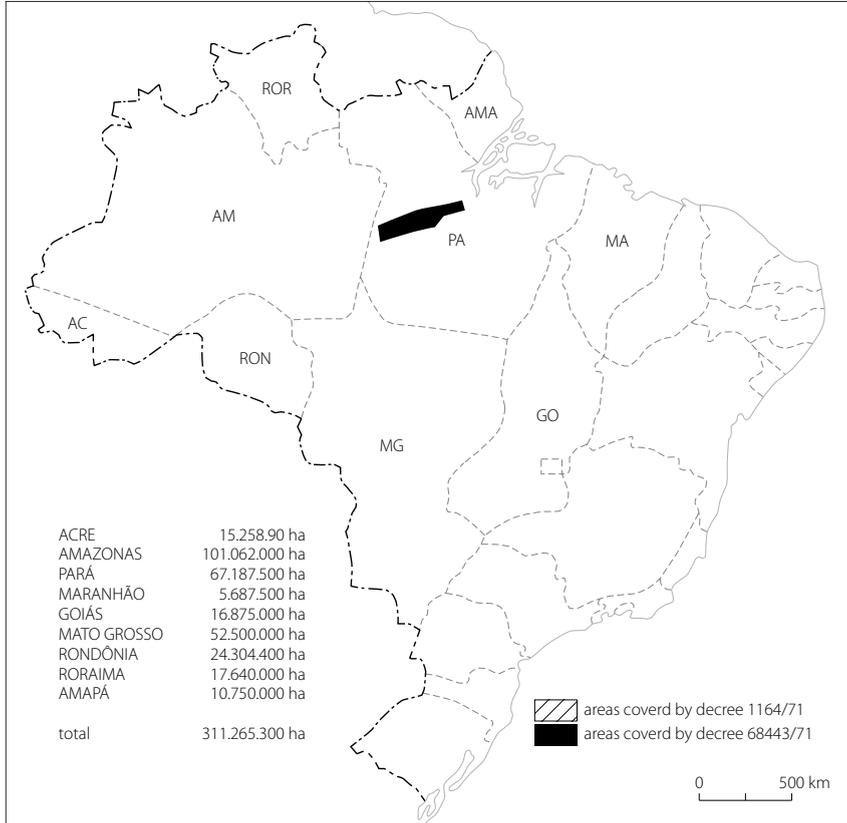
The Marabá-Altamira-Itaituba zone

Much more important than the colonisation activities of the INCRA in Guamá and Monte Alegre were the institute’s activities in the zone of Marabá–Altamira–Itaituba, along the section of the Transamazônica that was completed in September 1972. This was the main area of supervised colonisation in the early 1970s, not only of the state of Para, but of the whole Amazon region.

The legal basis for the colonisation in this region was laid in Decree No. 67.557 and 68.443 of 12th November 1970 and 29th March 1971, respectively. In these decrees a *polígo-*

no in the area between Altamira and Itaituba was declared to be a region of social importance, thereby facilitating, if necessary, the expropriation of private property and the realisation of land reform and colonisation projects.⁷³ This *polígono* had an area of 64 516 square kilometres (see Fig. 7).

Figure 7. Areas in Amazônia Legal zoned for agrarian reform projects and colonisation



Source: Author's own elaboration.

The field of operations of the INCRA office established in Altamira extended 235 km to the west of that place, from where began the area under the jurisdiction of the INCRA office in Itaituba.⁷⁴ Within the zone of Altamira attention was particularly concentrated on the area 20–120 kilometres west of the town, where the soils largely consisted of fertile *terra roxa*. A detailed colonisation plan was drawn up for a part of this area which came to be called “Altamira I” and was in execution from 1971. The aim of the

73 The decrees laid down, that the land of those who could satisfactorily prove their ownership would not be expropriated and that they would receive support from the INCRA to improve their holdings (Ministério da Agricultura 1971b, 25).

74 The distance from Altamira to Itaituba is 490 km.

project was the settlement of 3000 families, the building of 66 *agrovilas* and the establishment of three larger settlements (*agrópolis*) (Ministério da Agricultura 1972b, 1).

In the zone which extended from 120 to 150 km west of Altamira no colonisation would take place for the time being. The forest here would remain a *reserva florestal*, because the land had proved through the nature of the soil and the topography to be less suited to arable farming. Colonists would be settled, on the other hand, on the land situated between kilometres 150 and 235. In August 1973 there were still only 80 families living here in self-built dwellings on land located on side roads. No *agrovilas* had yet been completed, although eight were under construction, where colonists would be settled at the end of 1973. The building of an *agrópolis* was also planned for this zone at kilometre 190 (Camargo 1973, 27).

In the area west of Altamira, the first colonists arrived in December 1970 and, in June 1971, the first *agrovila* was completed near kilometre 46 (measured from Altamira). In August 1973, a total of 18 *agrovilas* had been completed as a first stage. Eight of them were situated directly on the Transamazônica and ten on side roads. There was also a larger service centre (*agrópolis*) under construction about 45 kilometres west of Altamira, called Brasil Novo. A second was planned at about 90 kilometres from Altamira.

In mid-1973, a total of some 2400 colonist families was settled in the area up to 235 km west of Altamira. Apart from the *agrovilas*, they lived scattered along the Transamazônica (at intervals of from 500 to 1000 metres).

Colonisation activity east of Altamira was also modest in mid-1973. In the zone extending 240 km east of this town no side roads had yet been opened by August of that year and only a single *agrovila* had so far been built (18 km from Altamira). Nearly all the colonists lived dispersed along the highway and a total of only 400 families had so far been settled in this zone.

The field of operations of the INCRA Marabá office began 240 km east of Altamira.⁷⁵ In that area, too, only one *agrovila* (Coco Chato, approximately 40 km north of Marabá) was in existence and the majority of the settlers lived dispersed along the Transamazônica. No side roads had yet been built in mid-1973, although a start had been made on their construction. A total of 643 colonists had then been settled in the Marabá zone of operations. One *agrópolis*, called Macapá, was under construction and a second would be built 63 km west of Marabá (Camargo 1973, 27 f.).

In the area of INCRA-Itaituba, no side roads had yet been constructed mid-1973, nor had any *agrovilas* yet been built. Colonisation was still limited to the settlement of families in isolated dwellings along the main road. A total of some 600 *parceiros* had been established. One *agrópolis* (Meritituba) was under construction in the neighbourhood of Itaituba, while preparations had also been made for the building of a still larger centre (*rurópolis*) near the crossing of the Transamazônica with the Cuiabá–Santarém highway (Camargo 1973, 28). In mid-1973 these centres were still inhabited almost exclusively by people employed by institutions concerned with colonisation and opening up the country, as well as people engaged in providing services for this group.

To summarise the foregoing, we may state that, in mid-1973, about 4000 colonist families had been settled in the Marabá–Altamira–Itaituba zone, 28 *agrovilas* had been completed or were under construction and seven larger centres were being built. By far the most important zone was the area west of Altamira. The above was the result

75 The distance from Altamira to Marabá is approximately 510 km.

of some two-and-a-half years of INCRA activity, at least if the settlement of the first colonists in late 1970 is taken as the starting point.

The following are the reasons why attention was concentrated in the first instance largely on the Altamira region:

- few problems were to be expected here in respect of property rights. The construction of the Transamazônica had opened up a large area of virgin land;
- the topography generally lent itself to arable farming. The terrain was predominantly gently undulating;
- fertile terra roxa soils occurred there;
- there had already been some colonisation in the vicinity of Altamira; the colonists already settled in the area would be able to benefit from the supervision of the INCRA;
- Altamira was a larger centre and consequently possessed some infrastructure, which facilitated the realisation of the colonisation plans, while the town would also later quite easily be able to perform a service function for the colonisation area, thanks to the infrastructure;
- no important concentrations of Indigenous were known near Altamira.

Conclusion

It appears from the broad review of the INCRA activities given in this chapter that progress up to the middle of 1973 was still quite modest. The ambitious plans drawn up in the latter part of 1970 and the early part of 1971 were still far from being realised. The target of 100 000 families settled in a period of four years would certainly not be achieved. Up to mid-1973 the INCRA had succeeded in settling no more than 1,300 families in Rondônia and 4000 families along the Transamazônica, although a large part of its activity was concentrated in these areas. One is justified, therefore, in speaking of a serious delay.

The principal colonisation zone was the area covered by Altamira I. In the next chapter the process of colonisation in this area will be analysed in greater detail, with the emphasis on answering the question of to what extent there was a well-organised and supervised colonisation here in mid-1973, providing a decent living to the population group concerned.

The other INCRA colonisation projects will not be discussed in greater detail, because they are less important and the INCRA adopted generally the same approach to colonisation in the various areas. Consequently, in our view, the following case study of the area near Altamira presents a sufficiently representative picture.