This article was downloaded by: [University of Bristol]

On: 21 February 2015, At: 17:11

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK

Scottish Geographical Magazine

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rsgj19>

In the wilds of Venezuela

Major Stanley Paterson F.R.G.S.

Published online: 27 Feb 2008.

To cite this article: Major Stanley Paterson F.R.G.S. (1898) In the wilds of Venezuela, *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 14:11, 591-599, DOI: [10.1080/00369229808733011](https://doi.org/10.1080/00369229808733011)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00369229808733011>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

basin of Titicaca, giving it greater rainfall and fertility than it now has. Geological examinations show that Titicaca was once one of the largest lakes of the world, and that it has slowly been drying up. Does its gradual diminution date from the disappearance of the Pampean Sea and Mojos Lake?

Savage man may have lived in South America on the mountain slopes round the ancient sea. If so, he possibly hunted the mastodon, the megatherium, and numerous other members of the gigantic fauna which probably were co-existent with him. His only highway between the eastern and western halves of the continent must have crossed the elevated region at the head of the Pampean Sea, lying between 17° and 19° south latitude, which is still the only route in use for communication by land between Bolivia and Matto-Grosso.

IN THE WILDS OF VENEZUELA.

By Major STANLEY PATERSON, F.R.G.S.

UNTIL some two years ago, when the political complications resulting from the intervention of the United States of America in the British Guiana boundary dispute awakened a momentary interest in the country, Venezuela was little more than a name to the general public, and few even well-instructed people could give accurate information regarding its physical features, people, government, laws, and products, or tell whether or not it had been thoroughly explored.

For many years past geographical interest has been mainly centred in African and Polar exploration, while South America, a continent teeming with natural riches, has been greatly neglected, with the result that the vast expanse of country lying between the river Orinoco and the southern boundary of Brazil, is now practically less known to science than the darkest parts of Central Africa. Since, in the earlier part of this century, Baron von Humboldt explored the Orinoco, and Sir R. Schomburgk made an unparalleled journey from British Guiana to Esmeralda, on the Orinoco, no expedition of any importance has entered the northernmost portion of this territory, nor, so far as I am aware, has any attempt been made to connect the tracks of these explorers by investigating the country lying between them.

It was only in the autumn of 1896, when chance led me to stray into this out-of-the-way corner of the globe, that I realised how utterly unknown it was, and the idea of being one of the first white men to enter it so fascinated me, that I determined, given the opportunity, to organise a small expedition for the purpose. My idea was to ascend the Cuchivero river to its source, explore the reputed wonderful mountain of Icutu, said to be sacred to the Taparito tribe, cross the Sierra Guamapi to the head-waters of the Manapiare, descending by that river and the Ventuari to San Fernando de Atabapo, and return thence by the Orinoco.

A year later the sought-for opportunity arrived; so, hastily getting the necessary kit together, I sailed for Ciudad Bolivar, the main town on the Orinoco, and the farthest point to which regular steamer traffic is available. At Bolivar, formerly called Angostura, an old Spanish-built town, the capital of Spanish Guiana, five days were requisite to complete preparations and buy barter-goods from the local traders, who, being in constant touch with the up-country Indians, know exactly what is best to take. For these Indians have their fashions like other people, and if red and white beads happen to be their correct dress for the year, blue and yellow ones are a drug in the market. Brass wire, coarse fishing-lines and hooks, and handkerchiefs, if of a good gaudy pattern, are always acceptable. Money is almost unknown.

From Bolivar we chartered a small steamer for the further journey, and after four days' thrashing against a heavy current, arrived at Caicara, a small village of about 1100 inhabitants, at the great bend of the Orinoco, and about 500 miles from its mouth. This I had selected as my base of operations.

The moment we landed our difficulties began. I had been obliged to intrust most of the arrangements at this place to a friend—a Venezuelan and a General, as most men are in that country, but first, foremost, and above all a Venezuelan.

Now Venezuelan arrangements pan out all right if one can afford to wait for a month or a year or so, but with these people "to-morrow" is always preferable to to-day, and "presently" or "a little later" is even preferable to to-morrow. Consequently we found that things that should have been settled a month before were only being thought of. The mules which were to have met us were not forthcoming, though we were solemnly assured they would arrive to-morrow, as they were only "out on the savannah." Everything that is lost or unready in Venezuela is always "just out on the savannah." Three days' bustling procured sufficient horses, mules, and donkeys for the expedition; then it was discovered that the saddles had been quite forgotten!

Next day a mixed assortment of these was collected somehow, and at three o'clock in the afternoon we were able to start on our journey to Lajitas on the Cuchivero river, where the men for the mountain work were to meet us. As the baggage donkeys could go but slowly, we rode these seventy miles by easy stages, stopping on the way at Santa Rita, Vainas, Bucaral, and Corosal, almost the only houses we encountered.

The country we passed through in the first part of the journey was absolutely flat savannah land covered with long rich grass, and broken occasionally by belts of forest, or marshes full of the useful moriche palm, from the fibre of which the natives make cordage for all purposes.

Numerous small hill ranges strewn with quaintly standing water-worn rocks and covered to the summits with dense forest, rose abruptly from the plain, whose vastness, dwarfing their height, gave them the semblance of rows of giant ant-heaps.

Roads, properly speaking, there were none: a half-obliterated trail, barely perceptible in the rank savannah grass, better marked in the marshy moriche country, and disappearing entirely amid the rocks, was

BOLIVAR.

CAICARA.

all we had to follow. Several creeks had to be swum, the baggage being carried across extempore bridges of dead trees, and the Guaniamo river had to be crossed in many successive trips of one small canoe, the horses, mules, and donkeys swimming alongside. After crossing this river we passed through more broken and hilly country as far as Lajitas, when another stretch of rich savannah land commenced and continued as far as the foothills of the Cerro Cuchivero.

Each night we slung our hammocks in some wayside *ato* or farmhouse, by no means the abode of profuse luxury. The edifice usually consisted of nine or ten forked tree stems, one at either end and one in the middle to bear the ridge pole, the others equally distributed along the sides, carrying the rafter bearers. The roof, slightly thatched with leaves of the moriche or coroba palm, was rarely watertight.

In the better class *atos* one end of this shed was filled up by a small dark room built of adobe or of logs, and used as quarters for the women and children, and sometimes in farms of pretension an adobe wall about two feet high was carried round the remainder of the house, only a narrow doorway being left.

The floor was invariably of mud, and the only furniture consisted of a rickety bench and a huge water calabash set on a tripod of logs, the household goods, which were scanty, being stored on the rafters or hung round the wooden supports.

Beds are superfluous, every one in Venezuela carrying his own *chinchorra* or hammock, which on arrival at a house he immediately slings in the airiest position possible. In most of our sleeping-places there was but one room, in which cooking, eating, sleeping, and dressing the children was done, though, by the way, but little of the latter was requisite, the scantiest garments sufficing for the elder children, while the piccaninnies went about, as Hans Breitmann would say, "mit nodings on."

A dozen people sleeping in such a shed unpleasantly overcrowded it; and to add to the discomfort, all the ducks, hens, dogs, pigs, and even the donkeys and cattle, crept in at night for shelter, making sleep a matter of some difficulty.

In some of these places mosquitoes were literally in clouds, even the smoke from several greenwood fires that were kept burning night and day round the houses and cattle-pens, having apparently no effect in driving them away, and, notwithstanding our indispensable mosquito-nets, sleep was frequently impossible, dozens of the wretches managing to creep through somehow, keeping us muttering and slapping all night long. At Lajitas we camped at the most southerly house in that part of Venezuela—a house belonging to a half-breed Indian called Cimforoso, who was to take charge of our canoes—and from there sent back the horses, mules, and donkeys. I took quite an affectionate farewell of my good grey horse "Guzman Blanco," named after an ex-President of the State, I presumed on account of his colour, but on inquiry was told, "No, señor, he is such a thief he eats all the other horses' corn!" Scarcely respectful to the ex-President! Of course, as usual, nothing was ready at Lajitas, and as the canoes could not well be "out on the savannah," they were

somewhere *abajo*—down the river—instead, and could not be collected, and it was only after three days' constant worry that at last we got one large canoe capable of carrying the entire party, which now consisted of Diedrich Capellen, a great lusty Norseman, my companion and general factotum; Reuben, a Trinidad negro, engaged as cook to the expedition; twelve Venezuelans headed by Juan Nuñez, with Cimforoso as chief boatman, and myself.

From the first I doubted these Venezuelans, fearing they lacked the necessary grit to face the difficulties undoubtedly before us, and after-events proved that I judged them rightly; but they had all been specially chosen for the expedition, so I could not but take them. The spare time at Lajitas we employed in surveying, to the undisguised surprise and interest of the few inhabitants, who were fully convinced that some white man's devil's-magic was being practised.

Surveying in Venezuela is not altogether unalloyed bliss. Day work has to be carried out in the full blaze of a tropical sun, which makes one's instruments almost too hot to hold, and the moment one takes advantage of the smallest spot of shade thousands of sand-flies, mosquitoes, and small stinging beetles hold an unholy orgie on every bare spot of skin, making accurate work a matter of extreme difficulty.

Sextant work by night is no less trying. First, there is the strain of keeping awake after a tiring day's work till the particular star you want has reached its meridian, or, in forest work, the one opening between the trees where it can properly be seen; then the irritation caused by clouds of mosquitoes, seemingly able to bite through the thickest clothing, and, finally, the very heavy dew that dims the lenses and horizon glass before a contact can be made, sometimes making a whole night's work quite useless. In this district the compass was quite useless for surveying purposes, the needle varying at times as much as 40°, owing to the quantity of ironstone in the rocks.

On the afternoon of the fourth day we were fairly launched on the waters of the Cuchivero, here a fast-running stream about 100 yards in width, and now entered the unknown, no white man having been farther south in this district than Lajitas, and only two having previously penetrated as far as that. What with the strong current and the frequent portages over *raudaes*, or rapids, progress was lamentably slow; and though the men worked fairly well, it took us four whole days to reach the Caño Anapui, each day being marked by some dispute with the Venezuela crew.

It began with weighing out the food. We had brought with us a large supply of rice, cassava, coffee, and *tasajo*, the sun-dried beef of the country, and as we did not expect to obtain fresh supplies for at least six weeks, it was obviously necessary to carefully husband what we had; so Capellen was bidden to issue daily a certain quantity of rice or cassava and about a pound of *tasajo* to each man in the party, ourselves included. But do you think our Venezuelan friends would have this? Not a bit of it! They threw the lot on the ground and refused to touch it, saying they were accustomed to eat as much or as little as they liked and would not be fed by measure. Vainly we explained the necessity for care—

they only answered that when the food was done they would go without it; so we finally agreed to a compromise, with the result that the original allowance was seldom eaten, but double the quantity was wasted.

Our original intention was to push on up the Cuchivero as far as possible before taking to the mountains, but the men told us such wonderful stories about a bottomless lake called Laguna de la Vaca, which lay between the mountains La Tor and La Vaca, the rocks and sand round which, said they, were full of gold, that though we gave but little credence to their story, the natural cupidity of man made it impossible to leave the spot unexplored; so detaching half the party to take the canoe to the Caño Quebradaonda, the remainder started early in the morning for the promised El Dorado, taking only two days' supplies with us, as Cimforoso, who declared he had been there once before, said we could easily do the journey in that time.

We had now left the savannah country far behind and were deep in the densely forest-clad mountains of the Cerro Cuchivero, a district into which the Venezuelans rarely venture. Cimforoso and a companion, both half-breed Indians, were the only two men who had previously been so far south.

This trip was our first real experience of the difficulties of travelling through mountain forests, and it proved a fairly rough one. The loose, broken rocks hidden beneath a tangle of undergrowth made walking painful and difficult. Every few yards huge, misshapen boulders imbedded in dense thickets of prickly wild bamboos had to be overcome somehow, while from morn to night our machetes were never idle, but were hacking, hacking away at the lianas, thorn vines, palms, and other undergrowth that barred every foot of the way. Instead of one, it took us two and a half hard days' work to reach the lake, which we found to be a large weed-grown pond with the forest branches dipping deep into the still water on the near and far sides, while to right and left huge precipitous red rocks, rising sheer from the water's edge, towered hundreds of feet toward the sky. Dead silence prevailed, and not a sign of life was visible, neither bird nor insect flitting across the glassy surface of the laguna.

The men at once dispersed to hunt for gold, and soon dozens of rock specimens were piled up in front of us, but sorely disappointed were our avaricious followers when, after inspection, we threw the stones away one by one, the fancied gold being in all cases either mica or iron pyrites. They still insisted that there was plenty of gold somewhere near us, because the *pajaro minero*, or mining bird, had called loudly to us all the way up. The Venezuelans confidently believe that this little bird, who hides in the topmost branches of the trees, and utters a loud cry, translated by them into *hay oro* (there is gold), is a certain indicator of the presence of precious metal. How can one work with such children as these? for children they are, spoilt children, with no sense of responsibility or idea of discipline, and with an inherent dislike to continuous work, though, let it be said, they can work really hard on occasion.

To them life is one vast joke, a disagreeable one at times, perhaps, when food is scarce and troubles arise, but a joke nevertheless; nothing

is really serious—government, revolution, war, poverty, starvation, and even death, all have their jocular side somewhere; and though this trait makes them impossible people to work with, one cannot help liking them for it. The lower and middle classes are honest and reliable, and the *peons* are from necessity fairly good workers, but the middle-class men (of whom my crew chiefly consisted), being all owners of small *atos* or *canuquas* (gardens), are too independent and too much *Caballero* to do any work that pleases them not, and frequently will nearly starve before they take the trouble to hunt a deer or go fishing. Two days' hard cutting down the Caño Quebradaonda brought us to the canoe in an utterly famished, exhausted, and generally pitiable state. We had been without food for over fifty hours, noxious insects of all descriptions had battened on our blood till our faces and hands were swollen out of all recognition, jiggers, the worst pest of South America, had burrowed under the skin of our feet, we were full as pincushions of thorns and palm spikes, and finally, our tempers were heavenly!

The navigation now became both difficult and dangerous, and on reaching the falls, a short inspection showed the impossibility of taking the canoe farther, the river having now become practically a mountain torrent. Here we halted for three days to redistribute the baggage in man-loads, taking only the absolute necessities of life with us, as the men could carry but little in this mountainous country.

The remainder of the baggage, along with the canoe, was hidden in the forest.

Meanwhile I spent the time in climbing the adjacent mountains wherever they were bare of forest, and was well rewarded by the magnificent view that met my eye.

Away down below ran the turbulent Cuchivero, foaming white over a hundred rocks, or, mightily pent up, hurrying silently through gloomy chasms and gorges, making a silver streak amongst the forest greenery as far as the eye could reach.

To the west ran the high range of the Cerro Cuchivero, ending in the three conical hills of the Alto, decked by countless flowering trees, red, yellow, and white, the outlines of the Cerro Guamapi showing blue in the distance. Eastward rose abruptly the sombre heights of the Negro and its unnamed neighbours, while to the south, solitarily filling up the gap between these ranges, stood the main object of my hopes and ambition, the mighty Icutu—sacred mountain of the Taparitos. This curious mountain, which by my calculations is just 11,000 feet above sea-level, rises abruptly from the plateau for about 8000 feet, when some 1000 feet of the top, which is evidently of harder rock than the lower strata, curls over like the head of a fungus, or the top of what I believe is called a "cottage" loaf of bread. The Indians say no man can ascend it, and therefore the Great Spirit lives in solitary grandeur on the top. Only on one day was I able to obtain a full view of Icutu, great grey cloud-masses obscuring the summit the remainder of the time we were in the country.

We were now entering the Indian territory, and it behoved us to be careful, especially at night.

The mountains east of the river are inhabited by the tribe already

mentioned, the Taparitos, who have the reputation of being fierce and warlike, and stoutly opposed to any violation of their territory.

On the other bank are the Panares, a tribe generally peaceful, but treacherous and thieving. Some of these men managed to creep into camp one night while the watchman slept, but were luckily frightened out before they got any booty. Both these tribes are nomadic, living beneath rocks or trees according to circumstances, and moving about after their food, which consists chiefly of parrots and monkeys.

The day after we left the Raudal Alto these Indians began to show on the hill-tops round us, in continually increasing numbers according to the men, who, sharper-sighted or more timorous than we, saw Indians where Capellen and I could distinguish nothing but forest.

Already our men were grumbling audibly because of the terribly hard work and the scarcity of food—the meat had long ago given out—and when on the third morning they began to talk amongst themselves of our all being killed and eaten by the Indians, we began to fear trouble was brewing. However, all went well till after breakfast, when they rose in a body and refused to advance a step farther.

Persuasion, arguments, and threats were alike useless, and finally the whole Venezuelan party marched off homewards, leaving Capellen, Reuben, and myself sitting on the rocks. These two faithful ones were ordered to follow the runaways in order to see that our stores at the Alto were not tampered with; but they, probably divining my intention of going on alone and trusting to luck and the Indians, only moved away a couple of hundred yards and then lay down behind the rocks to watch me. Consequently, I had hardly started on my solitary march when, hearing much puffing and panting behind me, I turned round to find them following. Under these circumstances further progress was impossible—the Indians, who hate a black man, would probably have killed Reuben at once—so, making the nearest track to the river and following its course, we cut our way back to the old camp at the Alto.

Sore though I even now feel at the desertion of the men, I do not altogether blame them, as I lay the entire responsibility on Nuñez, whom they were all afraid to oppose. But for him I am certain that the *peons* and possibly some of the better-class men of the party would have accompanied me through anything, though it must be said their hearts were not in the work, and they regarded the whole journey as a picnic to be continued only so long as it amused them.

More prisoner than master I was taken back to Lajitas, where we again camped close to Cimforoso's hut, and much to the men's surprise discharged them all without paying them a cent on account of their broken contract. They soon found a means of retaliation. Nuñez, it appears, was *Jefe civil*, or civil magistrate of the district, and his word was law, so we immediately found a strict boycott established against us. Not a soul would sell us provisions, nor could we get a single donkey or canoe to transport our baggage. After this had continued for three days one of our late canoe men crept into camp, and, professing great sympathy with our plight, said he had arranged for a canoe and four men to take us to Caicara for \$120. As this was just five times the proper cost

we politely declined the offer, and our friend left, apparently somewhat disconcerted. Next night another man crept into camp and excitedly informed us that information had been sworn before Nuñez that we were in reality dangerous revolutionaries who had been carrying arms up country, and that soldiers had been sent for to put us in prison.

Another hint about the canoe followed this news, but we failed to rise to it. The following morning a deputation of three arrived with a message from Nuñez that the soldiers were now on their way, and that unless we were clear of the district within twenty-four hours, we should be committed to prison. A reply to the effect that this was the one thing of all others we most ardently desired, as the only means of recouping ourselves through the Venezuelan Government, seemed to frighten them, for, although we heard various murmurings regarding soldiers and prisons in the next few days, no further steps were taken to actively coerce us.

We were determined not to give in to their exorbitant demands, so finding something must be done to get out of this *impasse*, on the eighth night Reuben and I swam the river together—no pleasurable job considering the number of crocodiles, electric eels, and carib fish that are in it—borrowed a small canoe that we found lying some distance down the far bank, paddled it back to camp, loaded the baggage, and next morning before the Venezuelans were astir were peacefully floating down stream in the frail craft, which was terribly overloaded and leaked like a sieve. That evening we reached the small farm of Laguna Susia, finding the owner much perturbed about his wife, who had been lying dangerously ill for a month past at a house some four miles distant, as he had no one to tell him what ailed her or to give her any medicine.

Walking out to the house with him, Burroughs and Welcome case in hand, I did my best for the old lady, who was simply dying of neglect, and for this small service the old man was so grateful that on my explaining our difficulty anent the canoe he at once gave us his own large one, with three men to work it, and undertook to return the borrowed one to its rightful owners.

The remainder of the journey to Caicara was tedious and uneventful. We succeeded in shooting some deer, pig, and ducks, so, for the first time for weeks, food was plentiful.

On arrival at Caicara, finding that the time at our disposal was too limited to attempt reaching the Sierra Guamapi by way of the river Suapure, I determined on a small expedition up the Tortuga river to the country of the Colorado Indians, a semi-civilised tribe living beyond the Serrania Cerbatana, for the double purpose of discovering whether the country was easier to travel through in that direction, and also whether the Colorados would be useful men to employ on a future occasion.

This time I succeeded in obtaining three men of a very different type from the last—regular Orinoco boatmen, excellent hardy fellows, ready to do anything in their own line, though they expressly stipulated against being obliged to carry loads through the forest.

The current was so strong that in spite of a strong wind behind, it took us four days to reach the mouth of the Tortuga, which we found to be a narrow, shallow stream, more of a creek than a river.

At this time of year it was so dry that after three days' paddling we could no longer float the canoe, so had to take to the forest, here entirely composed of ironwood trees—most uninteresting but comparatively easy to walk through. Two days' march brought us to the rocky mountain forest of the Cerbatana, and this proving too much for our boatmen we leisurely retraced our steps to Caicara. Close to the mouth of the Tortuga we discovered the remains of an ancient Indian village, which had evidently been built out on piles over the river, the dry bed of which was strewn with fragments of broken pottery, most of them marked with curious Runic-looking designs. As the Indian tribes in this district have quite lost the art of making pottery, it is probable that these fragments were of considerable age.

During this journey we had plenty of shooting, deer, pig, water-hog, geese, ducks, wild turkey, turtles, crocodiles, and snakes keeping us busy with gun and rifle all day.

We also saw two magnificent jaguars, but unfortunately failed to get a shot at either of them.

Three days after our arrival at Caicara we were lucky enough to find a steamer going to Trinidad, and with our embarkation on her ended my wanderings in the wilds of Venezuela.

THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION AT BRISTOL, 1898.

THE Geographical Section, which assembled in the music hall of the Blind Asylum, under the presidency of Colonel George Earl Church,¹ F.R.G.S., held its first meeting on Thursday the 8th September. The President's address on "Argentine Geography and the Ancient Pampean Sea," which was of remarkable interest, and was delivered to a large audience, appears in this number of our *Magazine*. After a vote of thanks to Colonel Church, proposed by General Sir Charles Wilson and seconded by Dr. Scott Keltie, Mr. Vaughan Cornish read a paper on "Waves." Its author is engaged upon an investigation of the phenomena of waves so far as they come within the scope of physical geography, and exhibited to the Section a well-executed and most interesting series of lantern slides illustrating various branches of the subject, including ocean waves, breakers, the tidal bore, ship waves, waves of rivers, the rippling of sand by wind, sand dunes, ripple mark and ripple drift, wave

¹ The other officials of the Section were:—

Vice-Presidents.

Col. F. Bailey, Sec. R.S.G.S.
Professor Boyd Dawkins, F.R.S.
Colonel J. Farquharson, C.B.
J. Scott Keltie, LL.D., Sec. R.G.S.

B. Leigh Smith.
F. F. Tuckett.
General Sir Charles W. Wilson, K.C.B.,
F.R.S.

Secretaries.

H. N. Dickson, F.R.G.S.

H. R. Mill, D.Sc., F.R.G.S. (*Recorder*).
H. C. Trapnell, LL.B.