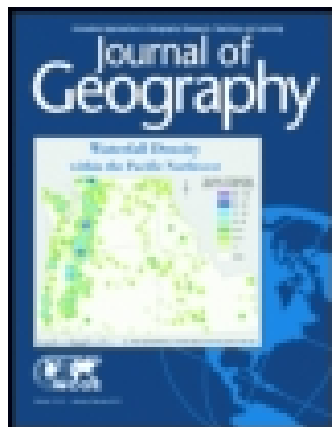


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### The Rio Theodoro, Colonel Roosevelt's New River

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**THE RIO THEODORO, COLONEL ROOSEVELT'S NEW RIVER**

By J. Paul Goode  
University of Chicago

THE ordinary map of South America, even as given in the better atlases, does not suggest any large uncertainties in the details of drainage. The rivers *look* natural enough, and are supplied with what seems like ample systems of tributaries. Yet in the most carefully made maps, such as those in the large atlases of Andree or Debes, one finds significant open spaces between some of the larger tributaries of the Amazon marked "unerforscht" (unexplored), and with the tell-tale dotted lines of uncertain drainage.

It was through the heart of the largest of these blank spaces that the famous expedition of Colonel Roosevelt journeyed a year ago. And this expedition gave the world a new great river, which carries more water than the Hoang Ho, perhaps three times as much water as the Rhine, a river almost as long as the Ohio River, through a hitherto unknown area larger than the state of Nevada.

How Colonel Roosevelt found the opportunity of coupling his name with this river, is in itself an interesting bit of geography. The river runs through the heart of the great plateau of Matto Grosso, a region of high rainfall, and dense tropical forest, a region where the rubber trees are found at their best. Now the demand for rubber in the world has been increasing by leaps and bounds; and all the rubber lands easily reached along the lower courses of the tributaries of the Amazon being occupied, the rubber men were pushing up every lesser tributary, farther and farther into the wilderness, and the plateau margin along the Madeira River came to be the richest and most promising of the new rubber fields.

The Brazilian government is very much alive in its wish to develop these new great states of Matto Grosso, Amazonas and Acre. The region of the plateau is seriously handicapped, in that its northward flowing rivers are much interrupted by rapids and falls, making river navigation quite impossible. So a great plan has been adopted of connecting this plateau by rail with the nearest Atlantic port of Sao Paulo. Much of the line is built from the southern end, and in the past half dozen years the engineers of the army have been pushing the surveys to the northwest, and laying an advance telegraph line to the falls of San Antonio on the Madeira River. The officer in charge of these surveys was Colonel Candido Rondon, and his work in the years 1907 to 1909 covered a wide tract in the western extension of the plateau of Matto Grosso.

The work of this survey is of very great significance, in that it has given us definite information about the drainage, in place of hearsay, or even conjectural drainage, which has found its way even into the best of maps. The first publication\* of this survey, outside of Brazil, shows how great a change there is in the position and tributaries of a large river, the Gy-Parana, and also

\*Petermann's *Mitteilungen*, 1910, pp. 260-261, with map, *Tafel* 47.

When Colonel Rondon left his work in this region in 1909, he had not only made over the map of the Gy-Parana, and its basin, but also that of a large part of the basin of the upper Tapajos River. And between these two basins he had traced the head waters of another group of rivers, which, con-

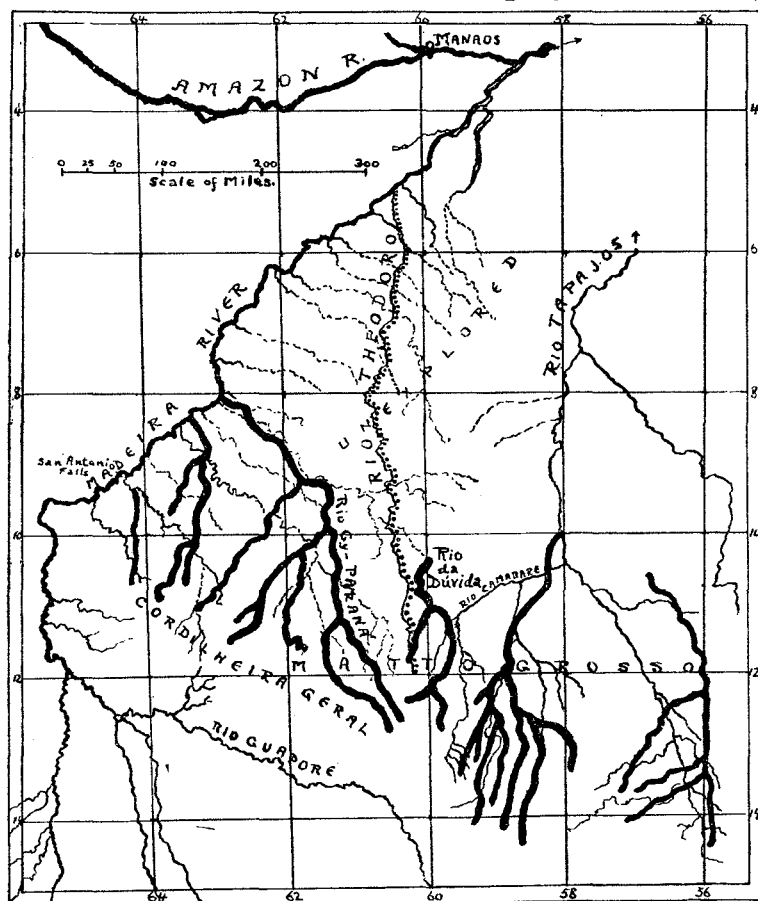


Fig. 1. The base of this map is traced from Tafel 47, in Petermann's *Mitteilungen*, 1910, to accompany note on pages 260-261. It is a preliminary sketch map, over printed in red to show the new drainage mapped by Col. Rondon. The Rio Theodoro, shown by the row of dots alongside, is constructed from the excellent map on a scale of 1:2000000, given by Joerg in *Bull. Am. Geog. Soc.*, May, 1915, facing p. 262. It will be noticed that the Rio da Duvida of the Petermann sketch does not integrate with the refined survey of the Rio Theodoro.

verging toward the north, gave promise of a large river, but offered no clue as to what basin its waters were to be added to. On the accompanying map, which is copied from the article referred to in Petermann, the drainage as shown in the best maps is given in light lines, and the drainage as reconstructed by Col. Rondon, is shown in very heavy, smooth lines. The main

river in the new basin might bend to the east and join the Tapajos; or it might bend to the west and add itself to the Gy-Parana; or it might reach farther northwest and add itself to the Madeira; or it might even reach still farther north and join the Amazon in some of the little known bayous along its course. Because of all these uncertainties, Col. Rondon called it, on his own map, the Rio da Duvida, that is, the River of Doubt.

Colonel Roosevelt, having invitations for addresses from several cities in the South, wished to return over a new route, through the wilderness, and hunt and collect museum specimens of the forest life. Mr. Lauro Mueller, the eminent secretary of foreign affairs of Brazil, called his attention to this unknown river, as good "game" in itself, and Mr. Roosevelt was glad of the "opening." So the Brazilian government sent Col. Rondon with a corps of army engineers, to co-operate with Colonel Roosevelt in following this river to its mouth, and putting it on the map; and the venture was officially called the "Expedicao Scientifica Roosevelt-Rondon."

The results of this venture all the world now knows, and every geography student and teacher will enjoy immensely reading the intensely interesting story of it in the account given by the senior commander himself.\*

The river as now known, trends almost due north from the place where Col. Rondon left it, as the Rio da Duvida in 1909, and proves to be a great river, the largest tributary of the Madeira, perhaps nearly a thousand miles long. Col. Rondon, his first assistant Lieut. Lyra, and Kermit Roosevelt made a detailed survey of the river through its whole course. Latitude observations were made at each half degree of latitude, and the positions taken have been coupled up with astronomically proved stations near the source and near the mouth. Doubtless no river of equal size has ever been so accurately mapped in its first navigation.

In the accompanying map (p. 8) the position of the new river is indicated, beyond the point reached by Col. Rondon in 1909, by a line with dots alongside. One may see from this, how very much the drainage established by the actual survey differs from that given in the earlier maps.

Col. Rondon was authorized by the Brazilian government to name the river, if it turned out to be a large one, in honor of Colonel Roosevelt. So when they reached the mouth of the river, a monument was erected, and the river formally christened Rio Roosevelt. But when the survey data reached Rio de Janeiro, the government felt that Mr. Roosevelt's christian name, in the Portuguese form, would be a more appropriate form than the unfamiliar and foreign sounding name Roosevelt. So it goes down on the map for all time as Rio Theodoro\*\*.

\*Roosevelt, Theodore; *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*; N. Y. Scribners, 1914. 80. pp. XIV+383. Maps and illustrations.

\*\*Some confusion has been introduced by the press, in the form of the name. It was first printed in the Spanish form, Rio Teodoro, with an accent over the "e" which does not belong in the Spanish name. Nor is there any accent used in the Portuguese form Rio Theodoro. See W. L. G. J. in *Bull. Am. Geog. Soc.*, July, 1914, pp. 512-519; also *Geographical Journal*, Feb. 1915, with a very detailed map on a scale, 1/400000; also a note in *Bull. Am. Geog. Soc.*, May 1915, pp. 361-362, and a fine map on a scale of 1/2000000. See also Joerg. W. L. G. "The Geographical Results of the Roosevelt-Rondon Expedition" in the *American Museum Journal*, March 1915, pp. 129-132, with maps.