

Field Museum of Natural History

FOUNDED BY MARSHALL FIELD, 1893
Roosevelt Road and Field Drive, Chicago
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FIELD MUSEUM NEWS

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Members are requested to inform the Museum promptly of changes of address.

BOTANICAL EXPLORATIONS IN VENEZUELA

BY LLEWELYN WILLIAMS
CURATOR OF ECONOMIC BOTANY

Venezuela is a fascinating country of Andean highlands with peaks towering up to 16,000 feet, of broad savannas and plains or *llanos*, and of extensive forests harboring many useful products. It received its name, which means "Little Venice," in 1499 when the Spaniard, Alonso de Ojeda, explored the north coast of South America, which in the seventeenth century became the Spanish Main of Sir Henry Morgan's piratical forays.

Its flora is unusually rich, conforming with the variation in the topography of the country, and furthermore serving as a link between the flora of Central America and that of northern South America. Botanically, the best known region is that bordering the Caribbean Sea, where explorations have been conducted by such eminent botanists as Loeffling, Jacquin, Bredemayer and Schacht, Humboldt and Bonpland, Vargas, Moritz, Fendler, Karsten, Ernst, Pittier, and others.

PLANT SURVEY FOR GOVERNMENT

From early in 1938 to the end of October, 1940, the writer (on leave of absence from Field Museum) as a member of the Botanical Service of the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, under the direction of its chief, Dr. Henri Pittier, has been engaged in the botanical exploration of little-known parts of Venezuela. Frequent excursions of brief duration were made to various areas along the coast and particularly to the National Park, a large tract of virgin forest extending northward from Lake Valencia to Ocumare de la Costa and Choroni. But the principal investigations were conducted

in the region south and east of the Orinoco River, which is popularly known as the Venezuelan Guiana.

History relates that the first white man to ascend the Orinoco was Ordaz, who in 1531-32 went as far as the mouth of the River Meta. After him followed the usual band of treasure seekers in quest of El Dorado, but instead of golden cities they found yawning graves in a hostile tropical forest. Early in the eighteenth century the Jesuit fathers established missions as far up the river as Esmeralda, near the famed Mount Duida, but these have long since disappeared. In 1800, Humboldt and Bonpland made their memorable voyage to the Casiquiare, the natural channel between the upper Orinoco and the Río Negro. Later, Richard Spruce and Richard Schomburgk explored these remote areas, to be followed at irregular intervals by a number of other scientific expeditions. In spite of all the efforts of these pioneers, both early and late, it is remarkable that even to this day the Venezuelan Guiana still remains one of the least known territories of the western hemisphere.

The first expedition to the Guiana undertaken by the writer left Caracas early in February of 1939 and returned in May, all of which time was devoted to the study of the middle and lower Caura. This is one of the principal affluents of the Orinoco, rising in the highlands near the Brazilian frontier (see FIELD MUSEUM NEWS, July, 1939, page 4).

In conjunction with the Venezuelan-Brazilian Frontier Commission, the second expedition started in late February of this year and was concluded in July. During this period investigations were made in the middle Paragua, at El Palmar, close to the Delta Amacuro, in the vicinity of the River Cuchivero, Middle Orinoco, and in the northern limits of the federal territory of Amazonas. A brief excursion was also made to the upper reaches of the Ventuari.

MANY IMPORTANT PRODUCTS

As a result of these explorations there were discovered many new species of plants, and others which, although known, were hitherto unrepresented in the principal herbaria. Duplicate specimens from these collections have been added to the Herbarium of Field Museum. At the same time there was assembled the first known collection of woods of the region, which is now represented by duplicate samples in the Museum's study series. In addition, there was gathered considerable data regarding the various types of plant formations, and the distribution and occurrence of economic forest products of increasing commercial importance at the present time, such as rubber, chicle, balata, fibers, and vegetable oils, particularly those of palms. Other plant materials now little known, but possessing potential value, were also studied. Among the latter are *barbasco*, a woody vine of

the pulse family, employed by the natives as a fish-poison and now finding extensive use in the manufacture of insecticides, and *curare*, a highly poisonous substance widely utilized by the various Indian tribes for application on the darts and arrows with which they hunt game.

NEW MEMBERS

The following persons became Members of Field Museum during the period from October 16 to November 15:

Non-resident Life Members

Oscar U. Zerk

Associate Members

George W. Dixon, Jr., Mrs. Moise Dreyfus, Edward H. Fabrice, Alan K. Gidwitz, Arnold Horween, Miss Isabel Kopf, George E. Kuh, John R. Magill, Miss Anne L. Milburn, Paul Moore, Clinton F. Smith, Merle J. Trees, Joseph J. Tumpeer, David C. Verson.

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A. J. Adams, Sidney Adler, Fred T. Brandt, Charles H. Cooper, Stanley Dobricky, Heber T. Dotson, Donald W. Easter, Walter L. Eckhouse, Hubbard H. Erickson, Donald N. Gellert, Mrs. Manny Guzik, Mrs. Byron Harvey, Jr., Charles M. Hofman, Arthur M. Hollaman, Joseph Hollerbach, Miss Berenice Holmes, Dr. Robert E. Huff, Miss Kathryn M. Johnson, Mrs. E. W. Kettering, William L. Latimer, David A. Lawson, Joseph Kirk Love, Mrs. Cora E. Lynch, Mrs. Donald MacMurray, Mrs. Albert F. Madlener, Jr., Alfred J. Moss, Mrs. William R. Payne, William C. Peck, Fred W. Rembold, Miss Maud E. Scott, Mrs. Ross Siragusa, John P. Suomela, Robert F. Taylor, William R. Uhlemann, Mrs. James J. Versluis, and Charles J. Zimmerman.

A FEW FACTS ABOUT FIELD MUSEUM

Field Museum is open every day of the year (except Christmas and New Year's Day) during the hours indicated below:

November, December,	
January, February . . .	9 A.M. to 4 P.M.
March, April, and	
September, October . . .	9 A.M. to 5 P.M.
May, June, July, August.	9 A.M. to 6 P.M.

Admission is free to Members on all days. Other adults are admitted free on Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays; non-members pay 25 cents on other days. Children are admitted free on all days. Students and faculty members of educational institutions are admitted free any day upon presentation of credentials.

The Museum's Library is open for reference daily except Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

Traveling exhibits are circulated in the schools of Chicago by the N. W. Harris Public School Extension Department of the Museum.

Lectures at schools, and special entertainments and tours for children at the Museum, are provided by the James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Foundation for Public School and Children's Lectures.

Free courses of lectures for adults are presented in the James Simpson Theatre on Saturday afternoons (at 2:30 o'clock) in March, April, October, and November.

A Cafeteria serves visitors. Rooms are available also for those bringing their lunches.

Chicago Motor Coach Company No. 26 busses provide direct transportation to the Museum. Service is offered also by Surface Lines, Rapid Transit Lines (the "L"), inter-urban electric lines, and Illinois Central trains. There is ample free parking space for automobiles at the Museum.



Williams, Llewelyn. 1940. "Botanical Explorations in Venezuela." *Field Museum news* 11(12), 6-6.

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