## Robert Hermann Schomburgk (1804–1865): Denkschrift zu einer geplanten Forschungsreise durch Britisch-Guayana. Tortola, Oktober 1833, S. 1–14. Handschrift: Royal Geographical Society, Archives, JMS-6-9.

|1| Remarks to accompany a Map of the rivers Orinoco, Essequebo, Branco &c. &c. Part I.  
by Robert H Schomburgk. corr. Memb. of the Ryl .Geogrl. Socy.

|Amongst the expeditions, which since Columbus times have been undertaken to the new continent, shine conspicuously von Humboldt’s Travels to the equinoctial regions, the happy result of which has so vastly enriched physical science, that those publications which issued from Humboldt and Bonpland (his courageous and enlightened friend and fellow traveller) as the fruits of their combined investigations during their perilious journey, have been called by a competent judge a work “of gigantic extent and richness to which the modern literature of Europe can hardly offer a parallel.” – It does not belong to my present subject to enumerate the addition which sciences in general received from this expedition, their value has been acknowledged long before this by a grateful public and placed the name of Humboldt amongst those, which even time will not obliterate.

More than thirty years have elapsed since Humboldt returned to Europe and his expressed wish, that he soon might find a successor in a similar undertaking, may have been partly realized, but still not to the full extent as the philosopher wished. Several journeys have been undertaken to Colombia and the Brazil, but neither has had a pure scientific view for its object, and though Geography and Statistics in general may have reaped some additions by these casual journeys Humboldt’s expressed hopes remaine unrealized,– no geographical situations have been determined, no botanist has herbalized on the banks of the |2| Meta, Vichada, Branco and Negro.

The height of fame which Humboldt has reached by his journey and his subsequent publications, which resulted from the same, might perhaps prevent the planning of a similar expedition, where the predecessor was so richly endowed with a genius, which in his sphere stands single at the present age, – but circumstances are the rulers of human undertakings and though Humboldt determined the nature of the Orinoco’s communication with the Rio Negro , the more interesting object of their journey, the mighty river’s sources, remained a geographical problem. The hostile Indians prevented the travellers from penetrating much further than Esmeralda. The circumstances may have changed, and what Humboldt found at that time impossible, may be accomplished by perseverance. But this is not the only stirring impulse to action, the illustrious traveller expresses frequently the wish, that several geographical positions which unfavourable weather presented him to ascertain, might be hereafter astronomically determined. – he entertained likewise the hope, that a botanist might herbalize on the banks of the rivers, Meta, Vichada, Zama, Branco, Negro &c. &c. and says especially, that a traveller, who was favoured with the hospitality of the missionaries could spend a year on the bank of the rivers Atabapo, Tuamini and Negro, and a second year on the mountains of Esmeralda and the upper Orinoco might easily triplicate the species described by Aublet and Richard. He was further |3| obliged to restrict his investigations only to the Skirts of the Sierra Parime, and the interesting part, encompassed by the branches of this mountain-chain, remained unexplored. Thus a rich field has been left open for further investigation, the happy result of which may amply reward the dangers and perils connected with a similar enterprise, and though but few in the lapse of centuries could dare to enter the lists with a Humboldt whose rare talent possessed a variety of knowledge to avail himself of every advantage, where opportunity offered him to exercise the same, still I do not shrink from planning a new expedition to South America. Blessed with a strong constitution and acclimatized during a sojourn of four years in the West Indies, the most time of which was spent in botanical excursions and surveying expeditions, accustomed therefore to bodily exercises and possessed of some knowledge of physics, I hope a European public will not consider it presumptuous and chimerical at my having resolved to undertake a scientifie journey to South America, provided I am encouraged and assisted; and in this respect I have placed my chief anchor of hope on England , which has always shown herself ready to protect schemes of utility and to give her powerful assistance to the execution of plans, which have been connected with the advancement of science and the furtherance of useful knowledge.

In order to become more acquainted with the real object of my planned expedition, I attract|4| the reader’s attention to the following observations which with the assistance of the annexed Maps will partly point out my proposed route. The Map as well as the observations have been mostly compiled from Humboldt’s travels to the equinoctial Regions, Bolingbroke’s Voyage to Demerary, Colombia & Vol. London. 1822. – and for the further constructions of the map, I have been assisted by "Tanner’s map of South America on the basis of John Carg’s and La Cruz’s maps of the whole continent. Humboldt’s geographical Atlas and his map of the Orinoco were unfortunately not in my reach.

South America, or the southern half of the new world, forms a triangle and extends from Latitude 12°. N. to 52° 30’ S. and from 35° to 80° W. Longitude. It is connected with the northern part of the new continent by the Isthmun of Darien and its greatest extent from the Gulf of Maracaybo to the straits of Magellan has been computed to consist of 4600. miles – its greatest breadth from Cape St. Roque (Lat. 5° S.) to Cape Blanco (Lat 4° S. to 3500. Miles – its superficial area to 7,400,000 square miles. A chain of mountains which extend along the western coast, and stretch from north to South, or from Cape Pilares at the western part of the strait of Magellan to the Cape of Paria, opposite the Island of Trinidad. This mountain-chain, which is famed for its lofty summits, covered with eternal snow and for its volcanic character, with many volcances still |5| in activity, is known by the name of the Andes (Cordillera de los Andes) – Separated from the same are three groupes of mountains, which have no connection with the Andes , one of which is northerly situated from the same and two to the east; namely  
the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta   
the Sierra de la Parime, between the 4th. and 8th. parallel of northern Latitude  
and the mountains of Brazil (Chiquitos, between the 15th and 28th parallel of southern Latitude.

This singular division of mountains, forms three great basins, which contain 4/5th of the whole surface of South America , between the mountains of Venezuela and the groupe of Parime extend the plains of Apure and the lower Orinoco; between the Sierra of Parime and those of Brazil ‘s are the plains of the Rivers Amazon, Negro and Madeira, and between the mountains of Brazil or the Chiquitos and the southern end of the continent are the plains of the Rio Plata. Their division distinguishes the valleys of the three great rivers, which drain the whole continent, the Orinoco, the Amazon, and the Plata.

The llanos and plateaus or elevated plains, are striking features in the Geography of South America. The llanos, the first of which extends (i.e. from the mountains of Caraccas, to the forests of Guiana and the delta of the Orinoco) over a space of 250,000 sq. miles and form three divisions connected by narrow openings, two of which, namely the llanos of the lower Orinoco and those of the Rio Plata or Buenos Ayres, are overgrown with grasses; the one which is situated between them, or the llanos of the |6| river Amazon is covered with impenetrable wood. The plateaus or table land of the Andes are inferior in extent scarcely 100. miles in circuit, but they are from 8. to 9000 feet elevated above the sea – the plains of quito are 12,000 feet above the level of the sea – and are separated by deep valleys.

The climate of this vast continent is colder than other regions under a similar latitude. Many of the summits of its mountains are covered with perpetual snow and even under the line, the heat is not found so extreme, as one would suppose; arising very probably from the narrowness of the country and the elevation of the land. In some of the countries on the banks of the Amazon and the Rio Negro it rains during ten months of the year and there are other places on the shore of that continent where none falls for several years. But generally speaking two seasons divide the year, the dry and the rainy.

No one can imagine the clearness of the atmosphere between the 4th and 10th degree of northern Latitude from the month of January to that of December; the sky is then constantly cloudless, the llanos, these immense plains which in the rainy season display a beautiful verdure, are scorched, and assume the aspect of a desert; the earth cracks and whirlwinds raise large clouds of dust; the alligators and the large serpents remain buried in the dried mud, till they are awackened from their lethargy by the first showers, which set in; at the Orinoco about the end of April. The heat increases progressively, the azure colour of the sky disappears and a grey tint is spread over it; dense vapours cover the atmosphere, which is conovulsed by frequent |7| thunderstorms; the rain falls in torrents, and the rivers rising above their banks, innundate the surrounding plains. Thus the woody marshes of Guiana are rendered insalubrious and become the abode of swarms and insects, which are the unceasing torment of men and beasts.

In these climates nature is marked by the most stupendous features and its scenery abounds in the sublime and beautiful; thus are its productions as peculiar as its features and the wonders which it exhibits are but sparingly known in European countries. Since Humholdt and Bonpland’s return, we have alone become acquainted with 87. Species of Palm trees, these characteristic und distinguishing signs of tropical vegetation, the pride of warmer climates, which alone give grandeur to a landscape by their lofty forms and majestic appearance. The banks of the Orinoco and Amazon are clothed with forests of the greatest extent, characterised by a variety, and a magnificence to which the graphic and discerning pen of a Humboldt could only do justice. Enormous plains extend their verdant surfaces beyond the visible horizon and the most juicy fruits, and aromatic trees, which diffuse a delightful odour, arrive to a perfection which no other region can boast of. The cultivated ground yields the sugar cane, the coffee-tree, the Cocoa, the latter of which grows wild in some parts, as well as cinnamon, vanilla, the nutmeg, pepper, the camphor tree, the delicious Ananas, Oranges and a variety of other fruits; many medicinal plants and various sorts of woods, used for dyes and carpentry. The Cow-|8|tree is peculiar to South America, being famed for the abundance of glutinous and nutritious milk which its trunk yields, when incisions are made in the same, and European grain is likewise cultivated upon fields, which rise from 5 to 9,000 feet above the level of the sea, which gives to South America the advantages of the torrid and the temperate zone.

In Guiana the air is filled with numerous butterflies of the most splendid colours and in the forests, myriads of shining flies astonish the traveller by night. But as if to counterbalance these shining peculiarities of the torrid zone, insects exist, which occasion the greatest annoyance to its inhabitants. Thus are the different tribes of tipulae of which the mosquito forms a species, – and of the tribes of reptiles, the largest and most venomous snakes, e.g. the boa constrictor, the rattle snake and several other kinds, dangerous for their being armed with deadly poison. The rivers abound in fishes and likewise in Aligators. A variety of birds, distinguished by the richness of their plumage or their size, from the Colibri to the condor, people the trees of the forests and the plains. Apes of the most fantastic appearance are distributed through the woods – the peculiar tribe of quadrupeds, defective with respect to teeth, appear to be confined to the new world, thus are the sloth, the ant-eater, the Armadillo. The forests are neither void of beasts of prey, and the Jaguar and Puma or Couguar (Felis onca and Felis concolor & discolor, commit depredations and the first attacks even men. Extensive plains are |9| covered with herds of horses, mules and oxen, the offspring of European races.

These animals were introduced by the spaniards in 1548. and have since multiplied to that extent, that Humboldt supposes millions to rove wild over the llanos during the periode of his travels, the export from Venezuela to the West India Islands amounted annually to

30.000 mules  
147,000 cow-hides  
and 140,000 Arobes of Tassajó or slightly salted and dried meat.

Nor is the mineral kingdom poor in productions; Brazil produces diamonds, gold; and other parts of South America abound in iron, tin, lead, quicksilver – like precious ores are found in Chiles and the silver-mines of Potosi are famed for their risk returns.

This vast empire was formerly almost in the sole possession of two European nations, the Spaniards and Portuguese, but with the exception of Guiana, it is at present entirely independent of Europe. It is divided into the empire of Brazil , the Republics of Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Eucador, Bolivia, Chile, Buenos Ayres or the united Provinces of la Plata, the Banda oriental, Paraguay and the terra del Fuego, the latter of which is in the possession of the natives; the whole population having been estimated at between 13. and 14. million, there would not be more than 2. persons on each square mile of its superficial area. The inhabitants are composed of whites, Indians and Negroes and their mixed races. The white are mostly creoles, the number of Europeans is but small. The Indians or native tribes are in some parts still independent, and have been in others subdued and mostly converted to the catholic religion. The Negroes are Africans or descendants of Africans.

|10| When I spoke of the groupes of mountains, which subdivide the southern part of the new Continent, I mentioned likewise the Sierra Parime , and after having given a rapid sketch of South America in general, I shall now dwell more particularly on the country encompassed by this chain and its branches, as it is to form that region, to the investigation of which, I intend to dedicate the first years of my planned expedition. But I shall prefer to point out firstly the main object of my journey, and to propose a route which shall conduct me to the attainment of the same and like the traveller, whose steps lead him gradually to new prospects and to the beauties of a favoured climate, describe on the way the prominent features, which according to those, which visitted or described these regions before, astonish the wanderer or attract his contemplative and reflecting mind to the mighty handiwork of the creative power.

The object of this planned journey is

1 to examine the features of the country, its mountains, – the bed and banks of rivers, whether navigable, whether tributary streams or the confluence of several – the river’s descent, the productions of the soil, through which it drains, the country’s climate – its animal and vegetable Kingdom.

2. The Character of the inhabitants – whether civilization has been attempted or is in progress and by what nation, or what prospects there are for attempting it; – furthermore to make most minute |11| observations, whether trade might be carried on with them, in what the barter probably would consist and in what way the same might be carried on to the greatest advantage for Europeans.

3. To determine geographically the country, which I investigate, by ascertaining astronomically the most prominent features and to collect such materials, as will assist in forming accurate delineations of the same and to neglect no opportunity to note such phaenomena as might contribute to a description of its physical Geography.

4. To form not only collections of plants, but likewise of minerals, insects &c. &c.

Conformable to an expressed wish of the Royal Geographical Society of London, I would commence my researches in Demerara, and laying the investigation of the Imataka montains (between the 7th and 8th degree of northern latitude) for the present aside, I place the reader at once on the river Essequebo, which is nine miles west from the Demerary River, and its mouth above twenty miles wide. At the mouth of the same are three Islands, which are valuable for the high state of their cultivation; the easternmost is Leguan, that in the centre Walkenaam and the next Tiger Island, which form four entrances into the river. Southward of these are a succession of other Islands, which extend five and twenty to |12| thirty miles beyond the first. About fifteen miles from the mouth is Fort-Island , which was formerly fortified, but is now in decay. The tides of the Essequebo are pretty regular and extend nearly a hundred miles up. The confluence of the rivers Coyoni or Cuyuni and Mazerony, with the Essequebo takes place about forty miles before above the river’s mouth (Lat 6° 24’ north) The Rinocote and the Usupania mountains give an opening to the Mazarony by a break in the hills which form in the Essequebo the 39. falls which are accounted from Arinda (a former military post Lat. 5°30’ N.) to the mouth of the Rupunuri. Long before we approach the confluence of these three rivers – (where there was formerly opposite the stream Tupuro a dutch military post, Kyk-over-al) all traces of cultivation have disappeared, and the eye observes only an impenetrable forest, which stretches from both sides of the river deep in the interior. The next river of consequence which flows into the Essequebo, is the Sibarona, the sources of which are found on the northern side of the Pacarayna mountains, at the same time the Tavaricuri, a tributary stream of the Rupunuri originates on the southern side of the same groupe of mountains– thus drains the Essequebo both declivities.

The Rupunuri falls at 4° 10 Lat. into the Essequebo; between one of its tributary streams, which I named already, the Tavaricuri and the stream Pirara, a tributary of the Mahu, exists a land carriage (Portage) – a small tongue of land, which divides the basin of two rivers and over which the boats are either carried upon the shoulders of the crew or dragged upon collers – I shall henceforth call them "Portage" – , a second one is more southerly |13| between the Rupunuri and the Sarauri, which flows into the Tacutu. The first European which crossed the latter portage was Nicolas Hortsmann a native from Hildesheim in Germany and who had settled as surgeon in Guiana. Attracted by the reports of great riches which might be discovered in the interior, he manned in 1739 a canoe (coreal) with Indians and ascended the Essequebo and followed its course by dragging the canoe along its rapids and causing it to be carried across the narrow neck of land, until he reached the Rio Branco, which he descended to the Rio Negro and arrived in 1740 in Pará. Here he met the french academician M. Condamine, to whom he communicated a map of his route and a sketch of his journal. This was very likely the journal, which afterwards was found amongst the papers of the celebrated Geographer d’Anville and which Humboldt found an opportunity to peruse.

At a later periode (1793) Don Fr. José Rodriguez Barate (then stationed as ensign in Pará ) crossed this Portage twice on his way to Surinam, where he went on the object of business for his government; and but lately there arrived (February 1811.) several dutch colonists by the same is isthmus at the portuguese fort San Joaquin in order to receive permission from its commander. to descend the Rio Branco.

Having crossed the more northern portage between the Tavaricuri and the canno Pirara, we find ourselves at once upon the classical ground of El Dorado de la Parime and in the midst of the high mountains, which since the 16th century encircled the Laguna de Parime or the lake of |14| Rupunuwini, that figured until lately upon the maps of South America; regions which to this period are but imperfectly known and which are inhabited by independent tribes of Indians. In the journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London II Vol. S. 227. is an able treatise on the Indians which inhabit Demerara, to which I shall refer the readers for information.

It was my intention to speak before this of the different groupes of montains, which we have passed in our route, but as particular interest is attached to the spot which we have reached and which obliges us to make a halt and to recall by-gone days; I shall repair this omission and give now a connected view of the most distinguished branches of the whole System which Humboldt has called the System of Parime.

I. The base of the mountain-barrier, which separates the plains of the lower Orinoccofrom those of the Rio Negro, extends from the 3d to the 8th parallel of N.Lat and between the 66th and 68th Meridian (counted west from Greenwich). Its general direction is westward which course is likewise kept by its lateral branches; – from the mouth of the Apure to the delta of the Orinoco, the distance of the ridge from the banks of the river is generally 10. to 14. miles; some detached groupes approach however its very banks and form the rapids of Tomo, the Boca del Infierno and the narrow passage at St.Thomas , from which the town has been named Angostura .

1. The most northern branch of this groupe, is the |15| one which extends from the Rio Arui (7° 50’)[[1]](#footnote-1) to Angostura and from thence towards the Rio Carony and the sources of the Imataca (62° merid).

2. An other groupe rises from the basin of the Rio Caura , where they form the rapids of Mura; they stretch to the springs of the Rio Cuchivero and encompass by a detached branch Encaramada.

3. The next are the Chaviripe mountains (7’’ 10’, which send off a branch to the southward (6.° 20’ to 6° 40’.) and being connected with the Corozal and Amoco mountains, this groupe joins lastly the high ridge of the Matacuna mountains.

4. The Baraguan forms the narrow passage of the Orinoco (7° 5’) which has received its name from this mountain-chain (Angostura del Baraguan). It takes afterwards its direction towards the mountains which separate the sources of the Rio Caure from those of the Ventuari.

5. At latitude 6° 25’ rise the Carichana mountains, of wild appearance but interspersed with rich pasture grounds.

6. The western bank of the Orinoco, which has been mostly level, distinguishes itself by the Peak of Uniana which rises from a plain to the height of more than 3000 feet (6° 42’) – the dyke which forms the Cataract of Apures, diverges from the Peak of Uniana and rises on the eastern shore to a groupe, which approaches the Cerro Cunero (5° 35’ to 5° 40’).

1. All the parallels are northern and the Meridians west from Greenwich, where the contrary is not observed. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)