

THE GUIANA TRAVELS OF
ROBERT SCHOMBURGK
1835-1844,
VOLUME 2

Peter Rivière



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THE GUIANA TRAVELS OF ROBERT SCHOMBURGK
1835–1844

Volume II: The Boundary Survey 1840–1844

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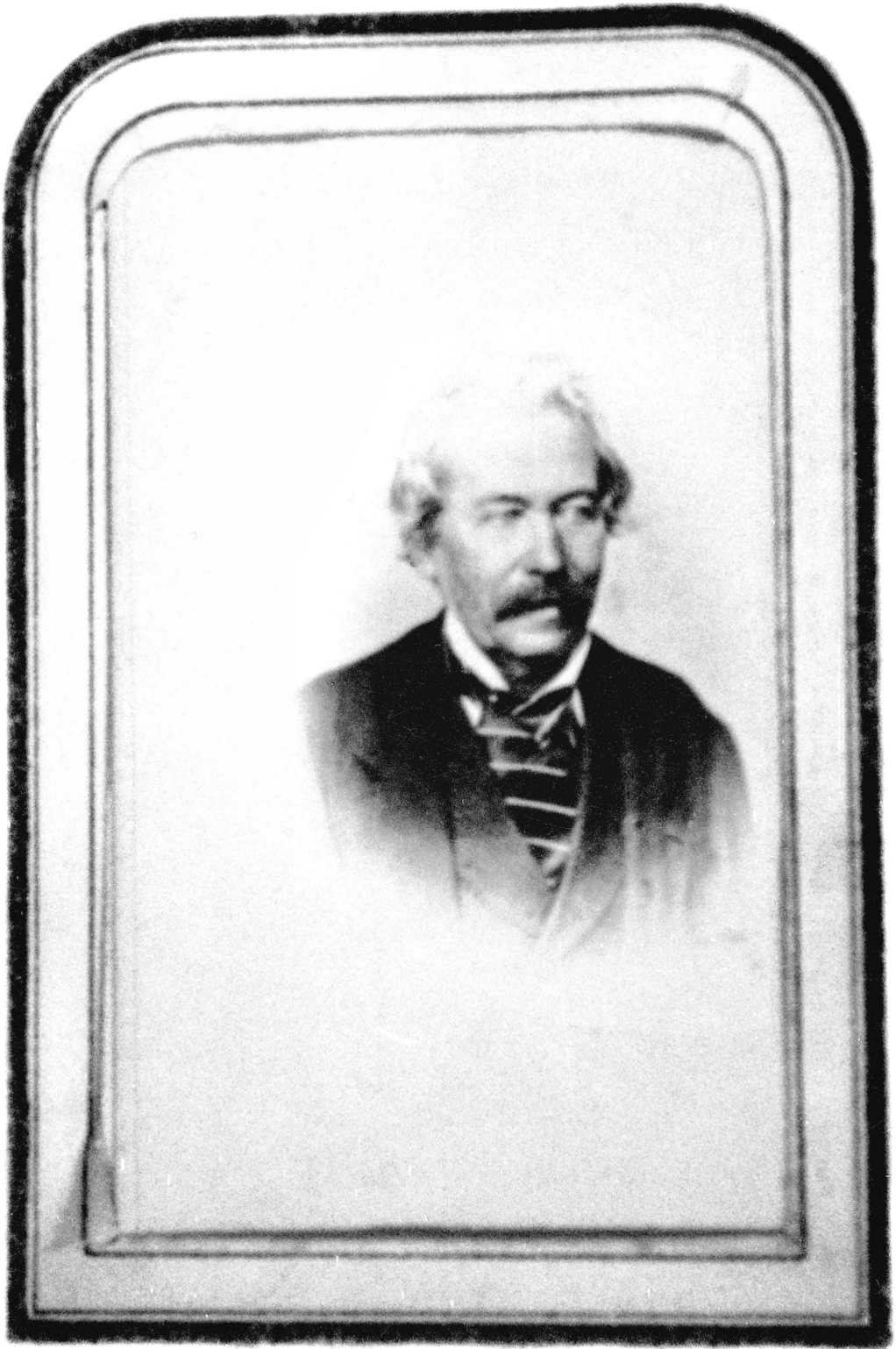


Figure 1: Sir Robert Schomburgk in about 1857. Photograph in the editor's possession.

THE GUIANA TRAVELS
OF
ROBERT SCHOMBURGK
1835–1844

VOLUME II: THE BOUNDARY SURVEY
1840–1844

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Peter Rivière

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CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
Illustrations	ix
Maps	x
Preface	xi
Chapter 4 Venezuela and the North-west Frontier: 1841	1
First Report	4
Second Report	19
Chapter 5 Brazil and the Western Frontier: 1842–1843	41
Journal of an Expedition to the Sources of the Takutu	44
Chapter 6 Dutch Guiana and the Eastern Frontier: 1843	115
Journey from Pirara by the River Rupununi to the Wapisiana Village Watu Ticaba	115
Journey from Watu Ticaba to the Frog Indians and thence by the Rivers Caphiwuin and Wanamu to the Pianaghottos	141
Journey from the Pianoghotto Village to the River Cutari and thence by the Corentyn to Georgetown in Demerara	178
Epilogue	207
Appendix 1 The Boundary Dispute	219
Appendix 2 Glossary of Vernacular Plant Names	223
Bibliography Part 1: The Works of Robert H. Schomburgk	229
Part 2: Works Cited	234
Index	243



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ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1: Frontispiece: Sir Robert Schomburgk in about 1857. Photograph in the editor's possession.
- Figure 2: Waika house and dance. This dance was held at the Akawaio village of Manari and is fully described by Richard Schomburgk, *Travels in British Guiana*, I, p. 160. The picture is taken from a copy of this work in the editor's possession. 23
- Figure 3: Pirara, a Macusi village. The picture also features the buildings of the military detachment and the survey team. Picture taken from the copy of Richard Schomburgk, *Travels in British Guiana*, I, p. 304, in the editor's possession. 43
- Figure 4: Mount Ilamickipang. Schomburgk surveying near Mount Ilamikipang. Watercolour by Edward Goodall, reproduced by permission of the British Library (Add. MS 16936/60). 56
- Figure 5: Inside a Wapisiana house. Picture taken from the copy of Richard Schomburgk, *Travels in British Guiana*, II, p. 16, in the editor's possession. 70
- Figure 6: Macusi houses in the virgin forest. Picture taken from the copy of Richard Schomburgk, *Travels in British Guiana*, I, p. 336, in the editor's possession. 89
- Figure 7: Near the source of the River Takutu. The figure seated, wearing a hat, is almost certainly Robert Schomburgk. Watercolour by Edward Goodall, reproduced by permission of the British Library (Add. MS 16939/10). 95
- Figure 8: Valley of the River Cotinga. Picture taken from the copy of Richard Schomburgk, *Travels in British Guiana*, II, p. 144, in the editor's possession. 109
- Figure 9: Young Wapisiana Mother *aet* 14. It seems highly likely that this is a portrait of the young woman referred to in the journal entry for 17 May. Watercolour by Edward Goodall. Reproduced by kind permission of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1884.117.80). 136
- Figure 10: Descending falls on the River Caphiwuin. Watercolour by Edward Goodall, reproduced by permission of the British Library (Add. MS 16936/32). 166
- Figure 11: A chieftain of the Pianoghottos. Watercolour by Edward Goodall, reproduced by kind permission of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1884.117.79). See p. 187, n. 1, for the identification of the subject. 186

Figure 12: Carib settlement at Tomatai on the Corentyn. Picture taken from the copy of Richard Schomburgk, *Travels in British Guiana*, I, p. 128, in the editor's possession. 203

MAPS

Map 1: Sketch map of Schomburgk's route while surveying the north-west boundary of British Guiana. Drawn by Julie Snook. xiv

Map 2: Sketch map of the River Takatu. This copy is taken from a proof; in the original published version 'Takatu' was corrected to 'Takutu'. Reproduced by permission of the Royal Geographical Society. 40

Map 3: Map of a portion of British Guayana to illustrate the route of Sir Robert Schomburgk, from Pirara to the Upper Corentyne. Reproduced by permission of the Royal Geographical Society. 114

PREFACE

Robert Schomburgk had arrived in London in September 1839 having completed three journeys in the interior of Guiana¹ between 1835 and 1839, under the sponsorship of the Royal Geographical Society. The first of these, up the Essequibo and Rupununi rivers, had done little to add to the sum knowledge of the geography of the interior but it did result in the first accurate survey of these rivers and it provided important experience for Schomburgk himself. While on the second expedition, up the Corentyne and Berbice rivers, Schomburgk failed to achieve his main aim, to reach the mountains of the interior, once again a great deal of previously unknown geographical knowledge about the interior, including the length and course of the rivers, was obtained. This journey is best known for Schomburgk's discovery, in the upper reaches of the Berbice, of the giant water lily, *Victoria amazonica*.² It was the success of his third journey, undertaken in 1838–9, that meant that he was received in London with Europe-wide acclaim and honours. This journey took him first to the headwaters of the Essequibo, and then via Mount Roraima to Esmeralda on the Orinoco to join up his survey with that of Alexander von Humboldt, who had been there forty years earlier. His reports of these journeys are the subject of Volume I of *The Guiana Travels of Robert Schomburgk 1835–1844, Explorations on behalf of the Royal Geographical Society 1835–1839*.

This second volume of the travels of Robert Schomburgk contains his accounts of the surveys he made as Her Majesty's Boundary Commissioner for British Guiana. These were undertaken in 1841–43 and were composed of three distinct journeys. The first, to the north-west, traced the boundary with Venezuela southward from the mouth of the Orinoco to the confluence of the Cuyuni and Akarabisi rivers, between April and July 1841. The second expedition, from December 1841 until January 1843, surveyed the boundary with Brazil, first southward to the sources of the Takutu River and then northward to Mount Roraima, from where the survey of the boundary with Venezuela was joined to the point on the Cuyuni River reached the previous year. The final survey, that of the eastern frontier with Dutch Guiana, occupied the months February to October 1843. The survey team then remained in Georgetown, completing calculations and maps, before returning to London in May 1844.

¹ As explained in the Introduction to Volume I, Guiana is used to describe a wide geographical area that includes parts of Brazil and Venezuela as well as the three political entities, Guyana, Surinam and French Guiana. British Guiana is used when reference is to a period prior to the independence of the modern republic of Guyana.

² Schomburgk was not the first European botanist to discover this plant. At least four others, Thaddäus Hänke, Aimé Bonpland, Alcide d'Orbigny and Eduard Pöppig, had previously come across it, but, for various reasons, had never publicized their find. Schomburgk, however, by requesting that the lily be dedicated to the young Queen Victoria (it was first called *Victoria regia*) and through delivering a painting and an almost intact specimen to London, ensured his place in its botanical history.

As he now held a government appointment, Schomburgk reported on his activities to the Governor of British Guiana, Sir Henry Light, who forwarded his reports to the Colonial Office in London; although, as explained in more detail in the editorial introduction to each survey, edited versions of these reports were then forwarded to the Royal Geographical Society. In the case of two of the reports, the Colonial Office does not appear to have retained a copy. No map accompanied the report on the first survey, that of the boundary with Venezuela, and a new map of the journey has been prepared for inclusion in this volume. As in Volume I, the maps that accompanied the original published versions in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* of the other two surveys, those of the boundaries with Brazil and Dutch Guiana, have been reproduced here.

There are a number of differences between Schomburgk's earlier accounts, those contained in Volume I, and those reproduced here. In the first place, the impact of Schomburgk's contact with the scientific world of Europe is obvious; for example, he shows himself familiar with a much wider range of scientific authorities, some of whose works he seems likely to have had with him in the interior. He himself also writes with more authority and in better English; the editor of the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* made far fewer editorial amendments to his words for the published versions. His accounts, however, remain equally austere but it should be remembered that he was writing official reports. For the reader who wants a more human and readable, if less reliable, story of what went on, there is the account by his younger brother, Richard Schomburgk, *Travels in British Guiana*, which, while not that readily available, is not that rare either.

The editorial conventions employed in Volume I are maintained here, and the text has been transcribed exactly as appears in the manuscripts without attention being drawn to misspellings, or grammatical and other mistakes corrected. Occasionally, where it is called for in order to clarify the sense, punctuation has been added in square brackets. Once again an attempt has been made in the provision of footnotes to steer the correct course between the over- and underestimation of the reader's knowledge.

Since Volume I went to press, a new book has appeared which may be of interest to readers.¹ It was published in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of Schomburgk's birth in 1804, and contains twelve chapters covering many aspects of his life and work. Usefully it includes an English translation of his autobiographical essay which appeared in *Leopoldina* in 1859.²

As the editorial work for both Volumes I and II was mainly completed at the same time, all those whose help I acknowledge in the Preface to Volume I are equally to be thanked for assistance with this Volume. There are a few exceptions to this and the later help of specific individuals is recorded at the relevant place. Finally, as a result of the publication of Volume I, John Moore, a photograph by whom was included as Figure 9 on page 277 of that volume, but whom I had been unable to trace to obtain permission for its reproduction, contacted me, having been alerted by a member of the Hakluyt Society. He was pleased to grant retrospective permission.

¹ *Sir Robert H. Schomburgk. Essays in Honour of an Explorer and Natural Scientist*, ed. James Rose, Georgetown, University of Guyana and German Technical Cooperation, 2004. Whereas the contributors to this volume are drawn from a number of different national backgrounds, the accompanying celebrations seem to have been a purely German and Guyanese affair.

² See 'Autobiographie', *Leopoldina*, 1, 1859, pp. 34–9, and also Volume I, p. 1, n. 1.



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Map 1: Sketch map of Schomburgk's route while surveying the north-west boundary of British Guiana. Drawn by Julie Snook.

CHAPTER 4

Venezuela and the North-west Frontier: 1841

Robert Schomburgk had arrived in England in September 1839 and he was to be there for the next fifteen months with occasional visits to the continent to see his family in Germany or to meet Alexander von Humboldt in Paris. He had busied himself with writing and had involved himself in the scientific world of mid-nineteenth-century London. What, however, was probably of most concern to him was whether he might be able to continue his South American explorations as boundary commissioner for British Guiana. He had high hopes of this appointment.

In July 1839, on his return from Esmeralda, Schomburgk had presented to Governor Light a memorandum on the line of the boundaries of British Guiana, to become famously known as the 'Schomburgk line'. He proposed that the boundary with Brazil should be formed by the Takutu and then run north along the Surumu and Cotingo to Roraima. The boundary with Venezuela would be along the watershed between the Mazaruni, Cuyuni, Barama and Barima Rivers and the tributaries of the Orinoco until it reached the sources of the Amakura River whence it would follow the course of that river to the Orinoco Delta. Unfortunately no one had any idea just where this watershed was, and it turned out to be much further west than was realized. This was particularly true of the Cuyuni which rises far west, not far from the Caroni River. To the south and east the boundary was to run along the Serra Acarai from the sources of the Takutu to those of the Corentyne and then down that river to the sea. These claims have given rise to endless and continuing trouble, of which a brief account is to be found in Appendix 1, but it might be noted here that Schomburgk, at least as far as the Surumu/Cotingo line was concerned, realized that the claim was probably excessive and already appreciated that the Mahu or Ireng would form an acceptable fall-back position. Governor Light transmitted Schomburgk's views on the boundaries to the Colonial Office on 15 July 1839 and had strongly urged that some immediate action be taken on the question of defining British Guiana's frontiers; he also recommended that Robert Schomburgk be employed as boundary commissioner.¹

It was not until February 1840 that the Colonial Office acted, partly, it would appear, because the memorandum prepared by Schomburgk had been mislaid. An internal minute of the 11 February expressed the view that there was no longer any reason to delay consideration of the boundary question and went on:

Motives of humanity & the obligations which this country may be considered to have contracted towards the Aborigines, w^d seem to urge very strongly the duty of

¹ The National Archives (hereafter TNA), CO 111/164. Letter with enclosures from Light to Colonial Office, 15 July 1839.

extending to the Indians as far as we have any right to extend it, the protection of British territory.¹

Schomburgk had originally held the view that it would be better for the Indians to move downstream, closer to the colony, where they could be afforded protection. In an 1837 draft of what was to be published in 1840 as *Description of British Guiana* he had recommended that the Macushi and Wapishiana be induced to settle among the colonists for whom they could provide labour while learning to reap the benefits from contact with ‘civilization and religion’.² However, by the time *Description of British Guiana* appeared his views on this matter had changed. There is no longer a question of persuading the Indians to settle among the colonists. In fact, his thinking was now the reverse, and he argued that at present there would be no hope of so persuading them and that it would only be the introduction of ‘religion, civilization and industrious habits’ that would induce future generations of Indians to come and settle among the colonists. In keeping with this new advice the Colonial Office now discarded its earlier policy as unrealistic for nothing would induce Indians to leave their homes. It was concluded:

[Accordingly it would be] extremely desirable for motives of humanity & also with a view to support the efforts of the missionary ... [to] give them all the protection we can where they are ... The Indians are the only parties who have any just or natural claim to them [territories] ...

However, their lack of power made such a claim nugatory and therefore it fell to Great Britain, in whom the Indians had confidence, to protect them. Pirara lay a long way inland but it was thought that Brazil may not be ‘tenacious of this wilderness’.³

A memorandum along these lines was sent to the Foreign Office and the response of the Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, on 18 March, was to propose that Britain should proceed in the following high-handed manner: that a map be drawn according to the boundaries proposed by Robert Schomburgk and copies of it be sent to the governments of the three countries adjoining British Guiana (that is, to Brazil, The Netherlands and Venezuela) as a statement of the British claim, and if any of the three governments objected:

It would then rest with each of the three governments above mentioned to make any objections which they might have to bring forward against these boundaries and to state the reasons upon which such objections might be founded, and Her Majesty’s Government would then give such answers thereto as might appear proper and just.

In the meantime, commissioners should proceed with the erection of *permanent* markers along boundaries claimed by Britain. Palmerston further considered that ‘it would be expedient that the Brazilian detachment should be required to withdraw from Pirara’.⁴ This remark was to lead to a military expedition being sent to retake Pirara from the Brazilians.

In April Robert Schomburgk was duly appointed boundary commissioner and he began making plans for the survey. The summer was spent in negotiating with the

¹ TNA, CO 111/162. Letter with enclosures from Light to Colonial Office, 9 January 1839.

² TNA, CO 111/150. Letter with enclosures from Carmichael Smyth to Colonial Office, 30 August 1837.

³ TNA, CO 111/162. Note of 11 February 1840 on letter of Light to Colonial Office, 20 February 1839.

⁴ TNA, CO 111/164. Memorandum of Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 18 March 1840, enclosed with letter of Light to Colonial Office, 15 July 1839.

Colonial Office on the matter of expenses, Schomburgk insisting that it was essential to have high-quality survey instruments and assistants. The Colonial Office immediately started getting cold feet about the cost of the whole business and a minute to one of Schomburgk's letters reads:

It was originally supposed that on the writer's intended journey he would be able to accomplish this business with but little trouble to himself and little expence to the Public. But the fact is obviously otherwise.

It was also suggested that the cost of the boundary survey should be equally divided between the home country and British Guiana, and this proposal was conveyed to Light.¹

Inevitably the preparations took longer than expected and it was not until 19 December that Schomburgk left London for Georgetown. He was on this occasion accompanied by one of his younger brothers, Richard Schomburgk, who was to make collections on behalf of the Royal Prussian Museum and the Botanical Garden in Berlin.² Three other members of the commission recruited in London were Lieutenant Adam Glascott RN³ as assistant surveyor, Thomas Hancock as secretary,⁴ and W. L. Walton as draughtsman.⁵

Schomburgk arrived back in British Guiana in January 1841, but it was not until mid-April that the work of the boundary commission got underway. There were various reasons for the delay, most of them local obstructions of a more and less serious nature. On the petty level was the refusal of Georgetown city council to give permission for Schomburgk to erect on town land a temporary wooden observatory from which to take observations to provide a baseline for his survey. More serious was the position adopted by the Combined Court, dominated by planters, who insisted that the colony's boundaries and the cost of fixing them were solely the responsibility of London and that

¹ TNA, CO 111/175. Letters from Schomburgk to Colonial Office, 29 May 1840, 10 July 1840; TNA, CO 112/21. Letter from Colonial Office to Light, 17 August 1840.

² For a life of Moritz Richard Schomburgk, see the PhD thesis by his great-granddaughter Pauline Payne, 'Dr Richard Schomburgk and the Adelaide Botanic Garden', University of Adelaide, 1992. Richard is probably as well known as his brother and they are often confused. He is best known for his three-volume account of his travels, originally published in German in 1847 as *Reisen in Britisch-Guiana in den Jahren 1840-1844*, and then in English, in two volumes, in 1922 as *Travels in British Guiana*. Richard's work, although it contains natural historical and ethnographic information, belongs more to the genre of travel writing than the rather drier scientific reports of Robert. It suffers from inaccuracies of various kinds and Richard was not above suggesting that he witnessed certain events which he knew only from hearsay. In 1848 he migrated, together with his brothers and sisters, other than Robert, to Australia. He became the successful director of the Adelaide Botanic Garden from 1865 until his death in 1891.

³ Adam Gifford Glascott had already had experience of surveying in the region of Kurdistan and the Black Sea. He was given leave by the Admiralty to join the British Guiana Boundary Commission.

⁴ It is not clear who this Hancock is, but it would be surprising if he were unrelated to the Dr J. Hancock who lived in British Guiana in the early decades of the nineteenth century and whose name has already been referred to on several occasions.

⁵ We know little about Walton. Schomburgk had some difficulty in finding a draughtsman and he had to be taken on at rather the last minute without entirely satisfactory references. This was clearly a mistake as Walton took fright on arrival in Georgetown, first at the possibility of contracting yellow fever and then at the dangers of the expedition, and demanded to return home, which he was allowed to do (Richard Schomburgk, *Travels in British Guiana*, I, p. 60). He does not, however, seem to have departed in a hurry as he was still in Georgetown at the end of August (see Goodall, 'The Diary of Edward Goodall Esq. during his Sojourn in Georgetown from 28th July to 11th December 1841', *Journal of the British Guiana Museum and Zoo*, 35, 1962, p. 39).

the colony was not going to contribute to the expense. As we have seen the Colonial Office had assumed that the colony would bear half the cost and had written to Governor Light in those terms. When confronted with refusal, it was unable to understand the position of the Combined Court and considered cancelling the whole exercise. In fact, the Combined Court never did provide any money and the survey only went ahead because Governor Light, despite objections from the Combined Court, drew on a contingency fund at his disposal. The people who suffered most were the members of the commission as Light was unable to meet the half-share of their salary from this source, and they were on half-pay until the matter was sorted out after the commission had finished its work.

Schomburgk submitted two reports on the Boundary Commission's first survey, that to the north-western region of British Guiana and the frontier with Venezuela. The originals of both of them are to be found among Colonial Office papers in The National Archives. The first of these, in the form of a communication to Governor Light, was written on 22 June 1841 at the River Manari, and was forwarded by Light to the Colonial Office.¹ The main part of Schomburgk's communication is a letter of forty-three pages, not all of which are numbered, together with certain enclosures to which reference is made as appropriate.

The second part was written in Georgetown and takes the form of an official report.² It consists of thirty-five sheets, written on both sides, and numbered 1–70. The Colonial Office sent copies of both parts to the Royal Geographical Society, but before doing so deleted certain passages. Virtually all references to the frontier, to the setting-up of boundary markers and to reports on the Venezuelan treatment of the native population were excised. Attention to examples of these is drawn at the appropriate places in the text.

The Royal Geographical Society published the reports consecutively in 1842, in Volume 12 of its *Journal*, as 'Expedition to the Lower Parts of the Barima and Guiana Rivers', and 'Excursion up the Barima and Cuyuni Rivers'. It made few changes to the manuscript received from the Colonial Office. Those it did are mainly of an editorial nature, and even if, for example, the editor changed 'negligence' to 'sluttishness' as a description of the state of the Warao Indians, on the whole Schomburgk's own prose survives remarkably intact compared with what it had previously suffered. The one major change is the removal of a lengthy passage on the Bartica mission (pp. 36–8), which had also been sent by the Colonial Office to the Church Missionary Society.

[FIRST REPORT]

River Manari,
a tributary of the Barima:
June 22nd. 1841

Sir

In conformance with the plan which I had the honor to place before Your Excellency and which received Your Excellency's approbation, the Boundary Expedition under my

¹ TNA CO 111/179. Letter from Schomburgk to Light, 22 June 1841, enclosed with letter of Light to Colonial Office, 19 July 1841.

² TNA, CO 111/!80. Enclosure in letter from Light to Colonial Office, 21 October 1841.

command, composed of the individuals mentioned in the accompanying document,¹ left Georgetown on the afternoon of the nineteenth of April in the schooner *Home*, which had been chartered for the purpose of conveying us to the Waini, or Guiana. After a stormy passage, which the vessel and her crew appeared to be but ill calculated to meet, we arrived in the afternoon of the twenty-first of April at the mouth of the Waini, where I resolved on disembarking our baggage; and selected a bank composed of sand and shells, heaved up by the sea, as the site of our camp. With the exception of some provisions, which were damaged, all our baggage was disembarked in good order.

I resolved on remaining at the mouth of the Waini a sufficient length of time to enable me to fix the geographical situation of that point with some precision, and also for the purpose of ascertaining to what extent the entrance of the river was navigable. I accordingly commenced a survey, and, with the assistance of M^r Glascott, completed it by the thirty-first of April.² I have the honor to send herewith for transmission to the Right Honorable Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies,³ a copy of the original Survey.⁴ It will be observed that, although shallows and sand-banks do not qualify that river as a resort for larger vessels, nevertheless if, at a future period that part of British Guiana should become of importance, it may serve for vessels of smaller size, as during high water it affords a navigable channel of from twelve to eighteen feet at the bar, and a greater depth in the basin. It labours, however, like all tidal rivers along this coast, under the disadvantage that fresh water can only be procured within the distance that can be made in a boat with one tide in its favour. During our sojourn at the shell-bank, I had to send a boat's crew to the river Aruka,⁵ a tributary of the Barima, in order to procure drinkable water, which was connected with the delay of a day and a half. The scarcity of water induced me to despatch, on the twenty-seventh of April, part of our Expedition who were not indispensable for the survey to Cumaka, a settlement of Warrau Indians on the banks of the Aruka; and M^r King, the Superintendent of Rivers and Creeks,⁶ kindly took upon himself to command them. The remainder of the party followed on the first of May, after the survey had been completed. – On the twenty-eighth of April we received the visit of a Warrau chieftain from the Canyaballi,⁷ a tributary of the Waini, and about two days' journey from

¹ The accompanying document is 'Enclosure A'. The individuals were the three officers of the expedition; Schomburgk himself, Adam Gifford Glascott, RN, as assistant surveyor, and William Leahy Echlin, a medical doctor who volunteered to act as well as artist/draughtsman, in order to replace Walton who, as we have seen, abandoned the commission before it set out.

The rest of the crew consisted of two coxswains, Hermann Peterson and Class van Cornelinsen, both of whom had accompanied Schomburgk on previous expeditions, four chief boatmen, an interpreter and nine canoe men including Hamlet Clenan, the cook and clown of the expedition. Attached to the expedition, but not officially part of it, were Schomburgk's brother, Richard, and Thomas Hancock, who is described as a secretary and had accompanied the commission from London. There may well have been others since we know Richard Schomburgk hired two German assistants, a young man, Florenz, and a Wurtemberger called Gottlob Stöckle, although there is some doubt about the status of the latter as Robert Schomburgk lists him as a crew member (Richard Schomburgk, *Travels*, I, p. 79).

² An unknown hand has written in the margin 'A new day'.

³ This was Lord John Russell.

⁴ The map resulting from the survey is to be found in TNA, CO 700/20.

⁵ The Aruka River is a left-bank tributary of the Barima, the mouth of which is a few miles upstream from the Mora Passage.

⁶ Robert King, Superintendent of Rivers and Creeks for Demerara.

⁷ Possibly Kuniaballi, a right-bank tributary just below the mouth of the Barama River.

its mouth; who, having heard of our arrival, came with part of his men to visit us,¹ and appeared rejoiced that at last it should be decided whether the Waini was in the British or in the Venezuelan territory, as at present they did not consider themselves secure against being carried away by the Venezuelans, and forced to work at low wages at Angostura, or in other parts of the Venezuelan territory. The captain is known among the colonists of this part under the name of Sam Peter, and appeared a very intelligent old man. – During the interval, the weather had changed, and it became now apparent that the short rainy season had set in. We ascended the Waini to the remarkable passage which connects that river with the Barima, and although not navigable for sailing vessels, affords a ready communication in boats and canoes between the two rivers. This natural channel, which may be compared in some respects to the Cassiquiare, which connects the upper Orinoco with the Rio Negro, and is known in the colony under the name of the Mora creek.² The Warrau Indians, who inhabit these rivers, call it Morawan. Where we entered it from the Waini, I estimated its width one hundred and ten feet; and near the entrance we found a depth of sixteen feet.

During the flow of the tide, the current sets from the Waini to the Barima, and with such a velocity that the Steersman has to use precautions not to be swept against trees, which in one or two places obstruct the bed of the river, and which become the more dangerous, since the passage is so very winding – for this reason, though the depth would permit vessels of six to eight feet draught to navigate the Mora, its numerous windings and rapid tide render it only fit for boats and canoes. The ebb tide sweeps with equal velocity through this natural channel, from the Barima to the Waini. The Barima offered, where we entered it from the Mora, the sight of a much larger river than I would have expected it to be. I estimated its breadth seven hundred feet; its water, still subjected to the influence of the tides, was of a dark colour, and its depth from eighteen to twenty-four feet. About five miles distant from the Mora, flows the river Aruka into the Barima on its left bank. – Before the conjunction the two rivers are nearly of equal breadth, namely about four hundred feet. – The Aruka has, however, yellowish muddy water. A few houses, inhabited by Warrau Indians, are within a short distance of the confluence of the Aruka with the Barima. They, with others who inhabit the lower Aruka, acknowledge a Warrau by the name of William as their Chieftain, who resides at the small brook Atopani. We followed M^r King to the Warrau settlement Cumaka, within a short distance of Atopani, where we landed in the evening and found a large assemblage of Warraus, with their Chieftain William, all of whom confessed that they had always considered themselves under British protection; and, as proof thereof, their Chieftain bore one of the sticks which are given as a badge of Chieftainship by the authorities of British Guiana, and which he is said to have received as early as seven years ago.³

The Indians assembled offered a distressing sight of suffering under Ophthalmia.⁴ My former travels have made me acquainted with numerous tribes who inhabit British Guiana or the adjacent territories, and though that disease is by no means unusual

¹ The rest of this sentence was deleted from the copy sent to the Royal Geographical Society.

² Mora Passage.

³ The practice of recognizing Amerindian chieftains by presenting them with a staff as a badge of office has a long history in the Guianas and was certainly practised by the Dutch in the 17th century.

⁴ I.e., ophthalmia, an inflammation of the eye.

among them, I no-where saw it so frightfully exhibited as here, where at least fifty per cent of the inhabitants are suffering under the disease; or, in consequence of it, have their eye-sight impaired. I ascribe it to their inhabiting the low marshy grounds, where it appears they are more subjected to colds than in the open savannahs or on the high mountains, and to inexcusable neglect.

Cumaka is situated on rising ground. These hillocks, which are the first high ground from the sea inland, form a small chain that extends in a western direction; they are composed of indurated clay, highly ochreous; and, to judge from their vegetation, and the provision grounds of the Indians on their declivities, I consider the soil fertile. It is only here that the vegetation of the banks of the rivers commences to change. Hitherto it consisted of Curida,¹ and Mangrove trees, and numerous Truli and Manicole palms; but when we had reached the rising ground, we observed noble forest trees; as, per example, the Crab-nut tree, useful for building materials, Locust, Curahara, Siruaballia, Souari and others.

From the Curahara, the Warraus prepare canoes and corials; and, from the size of these, I judge of the height of the trees from which they are made.

Several of the crew were indisposed, and the first Coxswain dangerously ill. It was therefore necessary to make a stay of some days at Cumaka, to restore the health of those who suffered. The skill and usefulness of Mr Echlin, who accompanied the Expedition as Artist, but who by his study and experience on attending the Colonial Hospitals, possesses medical knowledge, were therefore in constant requisition. I employed the interval to determine the geographical situation of Cumaka, as a point in the interior on which to rest our pending operations, and to calculate and draw the plan of the river Waini.² A native Warrau, who spoke somewhat of the English language, was engaged as Interpreter, and through him we gave the Indians who continued to visit us, plainly to understand, that it was the wish of Her Majesty's Government to afford every protection to those who inhabited the regions within the limits of British Guiana, and that the object of our present Expedition was to ascertain how far Her Britannic Majesty had the right to claim these parts. Many of these Indians had to relate acts of cruelty committed by the Venezuelans, and in some instances they accused their persecutors even of murder.

I resolved, as soon as the general health of my crew was restored, to proceed to the mouth of the Barima for the purpose of examining that part of the river, and to plant a Boundary Post at its eastern point as a testimonial of Her Majesty's right of possession, and another at the western point of the river Amacura,³ as a testimonial of Her Majesty's claim to the right bank of that river, as the western limit of Her colony of British Guiana. I engaged six Warrau Indians, under the command of the Chieftain's son, to accompany us, and we set out on our journey on the tenth of May; and having paddled through the greater part of the night, we landed the following day at the mouth of the Barima, where we encamped not far from Point Barima on the river's right bank.

The survey of the river was commenced on the twelfth, and after having inspected the localities in the neighbourhood, I fixed upon a small sandy bay at a short distance

¹ See Appendix 2, 'Glossary of Vernacular Plant Names', for the identification of these plants.

² This is the plan referred to earlier and is to be found in TNA, CO 700/20. The passage from here to the end of the paragraph was deleted from the Royal Geographical Society's copy.

³ Amakura River or Río Amacuro.

south from Point Barima to plant the first Post. This took place on the thirteenth of May, with such ceremony as circumstances would permit. From thence we proceeded to the river Amacura, where we planted on the same day a Post, as a testimonial of Her Majesty's claim to its right bank as the boundary of British Guiana. The two original documents which accompany this, will serve as an attestation of our proceedings. We took the liberty to name the point of the Amacura, where the post was planted, after the Her Most Gracious Majesty, Point Victoria.¹

The situation of the river Barima, near its mouth, offered various difficulties to fix on a base-line for its survey. I resolved, therefore, to determine the respective distances of some of its chief points from each other, by intervals noted by chronometer between the flashes and reports of Guns fired from three stations. M^r Superintendant King offered his services to the Assistant Surveyor M^r Glascott in firing the Guns on the 18th. of May, when, I am sorry to say, he experienced much temporary injury by the explosion of one of them. I was at first apprehensive for his sight; but am now happy that my fears on that score are entirely removed.² Our survey of the Barima was finished by the nineteenth of May; and I have the pleasure to send herewith for Your Excellency's transmission to Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies, a copy of the original plan.³

It will become evident by an inspection of this plan, that the Barima near its mouth labours under similar disadvantages with the Waini; but if once entered, it offers an uninterrupted navigation to vessels of two hundred and fifty to three hundred tons burthen from its mouth to the junction of the Aruka. Indeed, a finer river for steamers could not be desired. Its banks are, however, marshy to its junction with the Aruka, and so much subjected to the tide that we could not find any spot fit for our night-quarters. If the lower tracts were to be put into cultivation, it would cost the same labour and expense which were required to render the coast land of Demerara arable and productive. This has no reference to the upper regions, which have not been visited as yet by me.

If the difficulty of procuring at all times fresh water could be overcome by building tanks, &c. the Barima and the Waini would offer excellent fishing stations, and the easy communication, either by sea or by the Mora passage, between these rivers, enhances their importance as such. The fish known under the name of Querriman⁴ in the Colony, abounds in these estuaries, and its value is acknowledged, as in its dry state it brings in the market of Georgetown five to six bits (one shilling and nine-pence to two-shillings

¹ The two documents referred to are to be found as 'Enclosures B and C'. Enclosure B records the erection of the boundary marker in these words: 'Post branded with Her Majesty's initials, as a testimonial of Her Majesty's right of possession to the River Barima and its tributaries, and all the land through which they flow'. Enclosure C claims the right bank of the Amakura River to its sources.

It was the erection of these two boundary posts which was to cause great offence to the Venezuelan authorities. Everything in this and the previous paragraph was deleted from the copy sent to the Royal Geographical Society. This account, as well as others, certainly belie any claim that Schomburgk and the British government made, when the Venezuelan government protested, to the effect that the marks were made purely for scientific and surveying purposes.

² One of the mortars went off prematurely as a result of pouring gunpowder into its barrel while it was still hot from the previous firing.

³ This plan is to be found in TNA, CO 700/21.

⁴ Queriman: 'A large grey fish said to be exactly like a large mullet; it is much prized for the richness of its flesh; *Mugil braziliensis*' (Richard Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, Oxford, 1996; hereafter DCEU).

and three pence) each. Of equal, if not greater value is the Morocotto,¹ which frequents the rivers that fall into the Orinoco, and which weigh in their natural state from ten to twelve pounds. I consider it of importance to point out every resource that the country possesses. These fisheries, if followed up in a proper manner, would no doubt become a useful branch of internal commerce.²

I scarcely need observe to Your Excellency, that during our operations at the Barima, we met no obstructions from the Venezuelans; of whom we saw none, although the Commandant at Coriabo,³ which is the first Post in Orinoco, must have been aware of our proximity, as several Indians who had visited us in our camp, went from thence to Coriabo. It was at first my intention to pay a visit to the Commandant, and to assure him, as being the nearest Venezuelan authority, of the friendly intention of her Majesty's Government, and that the present demarcation was merely a preliminary measure, open to future discussion between the respective Governments; but after having proceeded a considerable distance, an uncommonly rough sea, such as our corial was not at all calculated to encounter, obliged us to bear away for the nearest beach, and there remain till the following morning, when finer weather enabled us to return to our camp.

In a memorial on the boundaries of British Guiana which I had the honor to address to Your Excellency, I observed that the Dutch, when in possession of these Colonies, were in actual occupation of the mouth of the Barima, and some Merchants of Middleburg, subjects of the States General, had a Colony in that river. Colonel Moody⁴ of the Royal Engineers, who was sent in the earlier part of this century to report on the Military situation of the Orinoco, observed at the mouth of the Barima the remains of the former Post. I report this circumstance, as the site of our camp, at the mouth of the Barima, gave evident proofs that the ground had been under cultivation, and the environs showed vestiges of trenches. I noted some straggling Cassada plants, and a few shrubs of Arnotto, which does not grow wild on grounds subjected to tidal influence. These circumstances, as simple as they appear, contribute to attest the undoubted right of Her Majesty to the Barima, with all the tributary streams which flow into it. But as in the demarcation of a territory it is of great importance to fix upon a line of boundary which is permanent and fixed in nature, and which cannot be destroyed by human hands, I thought it advisable to claim the eastern or right bank of the river Amacura, preserving for Her Majesty, or for such of Her subjects as may deem it advantageous for their purposes, the same rights to the navigation and fisheries of that stream as the Venezuelans may claim hereafter.

The pale or post at the mouth of the Barima was planted as an attestation of Her Majesty's undoubted right of possession to that river. This point in the possession of Great Britain, is of great value in a military respect. The peculiar configuration of the only channel (Boca de Navios)⁵ which admits vessels of some draught to the Orinoco,

¹ Morocot: 'A freshwater fish with a flat body, averaging 2-2½ ft in length and sometimes growing to weigh 30 lbs; it is much prized for its firm salmon-like flesh and is often salted and dried; *Colossoma spp.*' (DCEU).

² The next four paragraphs, all on the subject of the boundary, were deleted from the copy sent to the Royal Geographical Society.

³ Curiapo.

⁴ Thomas Moody. He was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in 1806, and saw active service in the Caribbean between 1809 and 1815. He retired in 1846 and died in 1849.

⁵ Also Boca Grande or Great Mouth.

passes near Point Barima; so that if hereafter it became of advantage to command the entrance to the Orinoco, this might be easily effected from that point. This assertion is supported by Colonel Moody's evidence, who visited the spot in his military capacity in the commencement of this century.

When the limits of British Guiana are established, it will be highly advisable that some person of authority should be placed at this point, not only for the protection of the native tribes, but likewise to command from the neighbouring States that respect, to which a British Colony like Guiana has full right. Venezuela has a Post, and a Commandant within a short distance from the mouth of the Orinoco; the Post nearest to the western boundary of British Guiana is in the river Pomeroun, a distance of one hundred and twenty miles from the Amacura; and it follows, consequently, that the Postholder of the Pomeroun can never exercise his influence, or protection over the Indians who are settled on the Barima, or its tributaries; and which, as I have been assured by the Superintendent of Rivers and Creeks in this district, amount to a large number.

The unsettled state of the weather during the period we encamped on the Barima, made our astronomical observations very precarious. Mr Glascott and myself, however, succeeded in fixing the situation of our camp to our satisfaction; but, as much as I should have liked to extend the survey of the mouth of the Barima to the Boca de Navios of the Orinoco, the unfavourable weather, the ill state of health of my crew, and the delay, which would have been connected with it, prevented me from executing a work, which although my instructions did not point out such an undertaking, would have found every excuse by its general usefulness to navigation, if circumstances had been more favourable.

We left the mouth of the river Barima on the 20th. of May, and arrived at Cumaka, which we had selected as our depot, the following day.

The exposure to the heavy rains which had set in, did not fail to show its influence on the crew, and five were reported on the sick list. The twenty-seventh of May arrived, therefore, before we could start for the Amacura. Mr Glascott, the Assistant Surveyor, being indisposed, he remained at Cumaka; and I was only accompanied by Mr Echlin.

Thirteen miles from Cumaka, in a southern direction, the Aruka is joined by the Aruau,¹ by means of which the portage is reached, which facilitates the communication between the rivers Aruka and Amacura. I resolved however, to follow the Aruka some distance beyond the junction, in order to visit a Warrau settlement, and to become acquainted with the nature of that river at its upper course. It lessens materially in size, being scarcely more than thirty yards across. The banks, still swampy, are studded with Manicole and Truli palms, along the stems of which we saw the aromatic Vanilla trailing in large quantities, forming natural festoons, and its numerous white flowers diffusing a delicious perfume. The water of the river was of a jet black, and so clear, that it proved difficult to discern where the reflected image, which the trees and shrubs that bordered its banks cast into the river, separated from the real object. It was late in the evening before we reached the Warrau settlement, which consisted of eighteen individuals. Another village of fifteen inhabitants was higher up, which it appears is the last inhabited place in the Aruka; that river having its source about fifteen miles farther south. The incompetency of my crew for the pending journey, in consequence of several

¹ The Aruau River is a left-bank tributary of the Aruka.

having been left sick at Cumaka, made it necessary that I should engage some Indians, to assist in transporting the corial across the portage and through the smaller creeks; and three Warraus were accordingly engaged for that purpose.

We returned next morning to the junction of the Aruau with the Amacura,¹ and, following the former river upwards, reached in the evening the portage, whence we had to transport the corial to one of the rivulets which flow into the Amacura. The ground rises here to about forty or fifty feet; and, extending from N.W. to S.E., forms the separation between the small streams which flow into the Amacura and the Barima. The portage is somewhat more than a mile long, in a south west direction. The size of our boat, and the narrowness of the path, were such, nevertheless, that our crew were occupied nearly two days ere they had got the corial across to the river Yarikita,² which falls into the Amacura. The soil consisted of rich loam; and I observed several trees useful for Naval and Civil Architecture, as the Crabwood, Siruaballi, Suari, Mora and many others. One of the Mora trees astonished me by its gigantic size. If required, and a thicker population and increased industry were to render it expedient, there would be little or no difficulty in connecting, by means of a permanent water-course, the river Barima with the Amacura: this might be effected by cutting a canal across the portage. The soil, as already observed, is an ochreous clay, and, with the exception of a few blocks of granite, which no doubt had been transported by water, there was no rock *in situ*, that appeared to offer obstructions to such an undertaking. The course of the Yarikita was W.N.W., towards its junction with the Amacura. After having been joined at its right bank by the small rivers Waina, and Wayuma,³ it increases considerably in size. – The Botanist would have been here much delighted, in a diversified and interesting Flora. Orchideous plants, the *Peristeria*,⁴ or flower of the holy spirit; several *Epidendra*, with scarlet blossoms, and many others of equal interest, adorned the trees. A *Crinum*⁵ with white flowers and a delicious perfume bordered the banks; *Bignoniaceae* trailed along the trees; and the *Brownea racemosa*,⁶ which has been compared to our rose, added to the variety by its bright scarlet colour, especially when contrasted with the green of the surrounding shrubs and trees. The river is subjected to the influence of the tide, which, it appears, rises here about two feet. A short distance from its junction with the Amacura, rise on its right bank some hills to the height of about five hundred feet. They are called Manibari, and were the highest we had seen since we left Demerara. On the left bank, and close to the confluence, is the hillock Arikita, of less size than the former.

We entered the Amacura at two o'clock in the afternoon, and, following its course downwards were at five o'clock in the evening at the mouth of the rivulet Otucamabo,⁷ flowing into the Amacura from the right or eastern bank. We ascended it, in order to pay a visit to Assecuru, a settlement of Arawaaks and Warraus, under the Arawaak

¹ This is clearly a mistake for Aruka. It has been corrected in the published version, p. 173.

² Yarakita.

³ The Wayuma is the Waiuma, and the Waina may be the Mobaina. They are left-bank tributaries. This has been corrected in the published version, p. 174.

⁴ A genus of Vandoid orchid.

⁵ A genus of the family Liliaceae.

⁶ *Brownea coccinea*.

⁷ Probably the Tokamabo.

chieftain Jan. We were received by him in a very friendly manner; and found in him an intelligent man, who spoke the Creol Dutch perfectly. The settlement consisted mostly of Arawaaks, and only a few Warraus. The greater cleanliness in person of the former, compared with the latter, was striking. We did not observe among any of the Arawaaks, (whether children or adults) those tumours which are caused by an accumulation of chigoes, and which, being neglected to be extracted in time, render many of the Warrau children lame: indeed, as the chigoes penetrate other parts as well as the feet, these poor children suffer, by the neglect of their parents, not only the greatest pain, but are rendered in their appearance absolutely offensive. This was not the case with the Arawaaks, among whom the filthy state of the Warraus is proverbial; nor did they suffer from those opthalmic complaints which I have mentioned as being so common to the Warraus of these rivers, and of which the extent has been underrated in the statement that even fifty per cent of them suffer under it.¹

The complaints of Captain Jan of the cruelty of the Venezuelans or Spaniards, as they are generally styled, were numerous. He related that they frequently came to his place and took from him and his people, plantains, cassava, hammocks, paddles &c. without paying for them at all, or at the best very inadequate prices. One of the women showed me an ell² of salem pores, of the value of one shilling, for which they had taken from her four bunches of plantains. But as hard as these proceedings must fall on the poor people, who frequently by brutal force are obliged to give the produce of their fields to their oppressors, and suffer in the sequel want themselves, it would be well if there it stopped. But, alas! the system of carrying Indians from their habitations to distant parts of the Orinoco and Venezuelan Guiana, and there oblige them to work in bondage and subject them to chastisements, is frequently perpetrated upon these poor beings. In the small river Otucamabo, which Jan inhabits, there was, at a short distance from the mouth, a settlement of Warrau Indians, called Awarra, who, a few months ago, were surprised by a number of Venezuelans, led, as they told me, by the Commandant of the lower Orinoco, and three of them were carried to the Venezuelan post Coriabo. Some time after, however, they found means to get away at night, in a small canoe; and, as they are now staying at Assecuru, I conversed with them through our interpreter. Even supposing that much of what they related is exaggerated, still, if any part of it be true, the conduct of the Venezuelans towards the Natives is stamped with tyrannic cruelty. One of the Indians, who had been forced to work at an estate called Carussima, as I understood, said that those who, by age or infirmity, were not able to finish their tasks, were flogged with a four-tongue whip of ox-hide or they were drawn up with their hands to a beam in the workhouses, and, when thus hanging above the ground, were unmercifully beaten. Their nourishment, during the period they were forced to work, was scanty, and of the coarsest description; and, as to a reward for their labours, if they should be allowed to return to their homes, this was out of the question. I will not relate any more of the cruelties which were mentioned as having been inflicted upon them or others; but the truth of these was attested by all the Indians who were present; and they observed, likewise, that it frequently had occurred, that Indians who travelled with their

¹ The whole of the next two long paragraphs was omitted from the copy transmitted to the Royal Geographical Society. Except for major excisions no further examples of such deletions will be given.

² An 'ell' was a measurement of length that varied from country to country. In England it was 45 inches, and in Scotland 37.2 inches.

families in canoes, had been overtaken by the Venezuelans, who, after having tied the men, had violated in their presence their wives and daughters. – I cannot think for a moment that the higher authorities of the province are acquainted with these diabolical proceedings, to which, no doubt they would put a stop. But the poor Indian, who, in consequence of the distance of the seat of the Provincial Government can never bring forward his wrongs or expect any redress, must not suffer; much less he, who, according to the right of possession, or the claim of Her Britannic Majesty, considers himself under her protection.

As I possess, myself, some knowledge of the Creol language, and as the chief Boatmen, Prentice and George Albert, speak it perfectly, I examined Captain Jan whether he believed in a supreme being, a future life, or was aware of the nature of an oath, and the punishment which awaits those who perjure themselves; to all which he answered in the affirmative, having acquired some knowledge of the Christian religion during his stay at the Essequibo, where in former times he worked for wages; and he asserted that, if required, he would confirm by an oath the truth of what he had told me. I desired him to assemble next morning his people, and I found that their number amounts to fifty-nine; namely, nineteen men from the age of fifteen years upwards, fourteen boys, thirteen women, from fifteen upwards and thirteen girls. I told them, through our interpreter, the object of our coming here, and that it was not the wish of Her Britannic Majesty's Government, since it claimed the right bank of the Amacura as the limit of the British Colony of Guiana, that they should be molested; and that I should make it my duty to bring their complaint, through Your Excellency, to the knowledge of the Right Honorable Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies. Meanwhile, I advised them, if these oppressions of the Venezuelans continued, rather to leave their present habitation, although it might be dear to them; and to draw nearer to the cultivated parts of the British Colony, where the law would secure them against such oppression; which proposal they promised to consider. I drew up the accompanying document,¹ of which I left a copy in the hands of the Chieftain Jan; and under the supposition that the Venezuelan authorities of the Orinoco have been informed through their Government of the intentions of Her Majesty's Government, I hope that, by presenting this document, it may prevent the repetition of similar atrocities. At the same time, I beg leave, submissively, to suggest to Your Excellency, to transmit a copy of this protest to the authorities at Angostura, and to desire them to stop these proceedings of their inferior servants, as the Indians of the Amacura accuse the Commandant of the Orinoco, who resides at Coriabo, of having led the party who surprised the Warrau Indians at the Amacura, and carried them into bondage.

With Captain Jan of Assecuru as a guide, and our crew increased by several of his followers, we left the settlement on the second of June, and followed now the Amacura upwards. After having passed the Yarikita, which we had descended two days previously, we found that the Amacura decreased materially in size, lessening in the course of the day to a stream. We ascended, at five o'clock in the evening, the stream Curriyabo, which joins the Amacura from its western bank, on the Venezuelan territory, where we intended to halt during night at a Warrau settlement, especially as it had rained almost continuously and in torrents during the whole day.

¹ This is 'Enclosure D'.

The Indians have all withdrawn from the banks of the Amacura, and selected small streams for establishing their settlements upon. They suppose that by doing so they are less subject to the visits of the so-called Spaniards; and, in order to increase their security, these streams are almost allowed to be grown over, so that one only who is well acquainted with their navigation, would suppose them to be inhabited by human beings, or be able to reach their abodes.

The intricate navigation rendered it very difficult to make any progress in our large boat. The settlement consisted of only twelve individuals; but there are several other settlements in the vicinity, and about forty Caribs live in the neighbourhood. The whole population, including the Caribs, amounts nearly to ninety persons; but as these natives are, according to the limit at present claimed by Her Majesty, in the Venezuelan territory, I did not consider myself authorised to hear, or interfere in their complaints against Venezuelan oppression; nor would I give them any encouragement to settle in British Guiana, in order to prevent the Venezuelan Government from accusing me, hereafter, of having enticed inhabitants of their territory to settle in the British Colony.

The succeeding day (June third) proved so rainy that we were obliged to remain stationary. We started, however, on the fourth of June, to continue the survey of the Amacura to its falls or rapids, which are caused by a ledge of granitic rocks that cross the river, and throw an impediment to its farther navigation. It had dwindled the previous day to a stream; but the torrents of rain which had fallen lately, rendered it impetuous in its course. Near the mouth, the Curriyabo is only divided by a short neck of land from the Amacura, which latter river has still low banks, and is quite serpentine. As we advanced, I found its banks to increase in height, and studded with noble forest trees. The gorgeous flowers of the *Brownea racemosa* and *Gustavia angustifolia*,¹ were so abundant, that they added considerably to the beauty of the sylvan scenery. A few miles above the junction of the Curriyabo with the Amacura, the stream Tusa joins the latter river from its right bank. It appeared to be of the same size as the Amacura. The course of the Amacura is much farther westward, in ascending, than laid down on extant maps; our course was today generally west-south-west to the fall Cuyurara. This fall is about twelve feet in perpendicular height; two others are higher up, and the whole descent may amount to about thirty feet. The small size of the river renders the aspect of the falls by no means imposing, and it may be said, that the Amacura above its junction with the Yarakita, is only fit for the navigation of the small boats of the Indians.

We did not proceed farther, which in our large boat would have been impracticable; nor did it appear to me that I was so far warranted in risking the health of the individuals who accompanied me, as to prosecute the stream's course in small boats, where protection against the inclemency of the rain proved impossible. Astronomical observations were so precarious, that, since we departed from Cumaka, we had not seen either sun or stars. There are no more inhabitants at the banks of the Amacura, or its tributaries beyond the junction of the Curriyabo; and, according to the evidence of the Indians, who pretended to have been at the source of the Amacura, it is about two days' journey, in their small boats, from the fall Cuyurara.

The fifth of June saw us on our return to Assecuru. Arrived at the junction of the Yarikita with the Amacura, I selected one of the trees on its left bank to engrave on it

¹ Also *Japarandiba angustifolia*.