



The Journal of an Expedition Across Venezuela and Colombia, 1906-1907: An Exploration of the Route of Bolivar's Celebrated March of 1819 and of the ... of Boyacá and Carabobo (Classic Reprint)

Hiram Bingham

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Excerpt from The Journal of an Expedition Across Venezuela and Colombia, 1906-1907: An Exploration of the Route of Bolívar's Celebrated March of 1819 and of the Battle-Fields of Boyacá and Carabobo

For the past eight years I have been collecting material for a history of the South American Wars of Independence and for biographies of San Martin and Bolívar, the chief heroes of that era. As I worked on the life of Bolívar it appeared to me to be particularly difficult to form a just estimate of his achievements; I could find no maps of his battle-fields and few trustworthy accounts of the scenes of his greatest activity.

In 1819 Bolívar conducted an army across Venezuela and Colombia by a road that was deemed to be impassable. The official despatches state that many of the soldiers succumbed to the hardships of the march and that all the saddle and pack animals died on the way. The result was the permanent expulsion of Spanish power from Colombia. It has been maintained by Spanish-American historians that this march of Bolívar and his army was as wonderful as the more famous marches of Hannibal and Napoleon. I found it to be almost impossible to form an intelligent estimate of the actual obstacles that were overcome by the Liberating Army, for the region is not one that is easily visited and the published descriptions of it are very meagre.

I came to the conclusion that if I wished to understand this period in the history of South America, it would be necessary for me to undertake an expedition that should have for its object not only a study of the country where Bolívar lived and fought, and a visit to the scenes of his most important battles, Carabobo and Boyaca, but also an exploration of the route of his most celebrated campaign. Accordingly I left New York about the middle of November, 1906, spent a fortnight in the islands of Vieques, Porto Rico, and Curacao, and reached Caracas early in December.

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