

## AMAZON REGION INDIAN COLLECTION ACQUIRED

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The Indians of the northwest Amazon area, a vast tropical rain forest cut by many rivers, have been less affected by modern civilization than the Indians of any other major area in South America. One of the most isolated parts of the northwest Amazon is the region of the Rio Vaupes, a western tributary of the Rio Negro, in southeastern Colombia. The Vaupes region is inhabited by about 8,500 Indians grouped into some twenty tribes, each speaking a different dialect. Most of the dialects belong to the Tucanoan stock, but a few fall in the Tupi and Arawak stocks. As in other parts of the tropical forest, *Lingua Geral*, a language based on Tupi-Guarani, serves as a *lingua franca*. Most of the commonly known geographical names in the region are derived from *Lingua Geral*.

During the last 100 years the only contacts of the Vaupes Indians with the outside world have been through sporadic visits of traders, explorers, missionaries, rubber gatherers, and scientific collectors. A good many of these tribes have been visited briefly by ethnologists but only one has been systematically studied. The first general account of the tribes of the region was published by the naturalist, A. R. Wallace, in 1853. Except close to the few mission stations, very few changes have taken place in the Indian cultures as a result of contact with the Whites, although in recent years the Indians have come to depend on such white trade goods as machetes, fishhooks, and firearms.

### WOMEN FARM, MEN HUNT

These Indians live by farming, which is done by the women, and fishing and hunting carried out by the men. The staple crop is bitter manioc, from which is prepared bread, a fermented drink, and *farinha*, which is a dry flour stored or used in trade. Fish are caught with hook and line, spears, nets, and in traps; shot with barbed arrows; and stupefied with *barbasco* poison. Spears, blowguns with curaré-poisoned darts, bows and arrows, snares and traps are used in hunting.

The Vaupes Indians live in settlements of 50 to 75 persons. Generally the village is housed in one multi-family dwelling. These palm-thatched houses, called *malocas* in *Lingua Geral*, measure as much as 60 x 75 feet and may be 30 feet high. They hold up to twelve families. A *maloca* lasts from three to five years, and then is abandoned because of soil exhaustion in the near-by fields or because the house falls into disrepair.

Warfare was formerly common, and is still carried on in the remoter districts.

The favorite weapon is a heavy wooden club. Dead enemies were, and probably still are, eaten at a dance celebrating a victory.

### BRILLIANT FEATHER HEADDRESSES

The Museum is fortunate in having acquired recently from Mr. Paul H. Allen a representative ethnological collection from the Vaupes tribes, particularly the Cubeo



AMAZONIAN CEREMONIAL HEADDRESS  
Worn by the young men of the Desano tribe. The lower part of the crown consists of a string of anaconda vertebrae.

and Desano. Mr. Allen, who is a botanist, made the collection during a three-years' stay in the Vaupes region while working on the rubber program during the war. The collection includes weapons, baskets of various types, pottery, toys, musical instruments, personal ornaments, and a great variety of ceremonial paraphernalia, including equipment used by medicine men in ceremonies for curing. Most spectacular are the brilliantly colored headdresses constructed of toucan, macaw, and egret feathers. The headdresses are of two types, one worn by young men and the other by tribal elders. Each headdress is constructed of about a dozen separate parts ingeniously fitted together. When not in use the headdress is stored disassembled in a special feather box or trunk constructed of palm leaves.

Mr. Allen was able to furnish a quantity of valuable information concerning the specimens and their use, as well as photographs and color slides illustrating various aspects of Indian life on the Vaupes.

### GIFTS TO THE MUSEUM

Following is a list of some of the principal gifts received during the last month:

#### Department of Botany:

From: Dr. Paul C. Mangelsdorf, Cambridge, Mass.—11 ears of corn, Mexico and Guatemala; Dr. William L. Brown, Johnston, Iowa—10 ears of old varieties of corn, United States; J. Francis Macbride, Stanford University, Calif.—87 cryptogams, California; Dr. Chester S. Nielsen, Tallahassee, Fla.—101 specimens of algae, Florida;

## SUMMER LECTURE TOURS TWICE A DAY

During August, conducted tours of the exhibits, under the guidance of staff lecturers, will be given on a special schedule, as follows:

**Mondays:** 11 A.M., Stories in Stones (survey of fossils, rocks, minerals, and gems); 2 P.M., General Tour (exhibition halls, all departments).

**Tuesdays:** 11 A.M., Our Living Plants (survey of all kinds of plants); 2 P.M., General Tour.

**Wednesdays:** 11 A.M., Animal Tales (general survey of animals); 2 P.M., General Tour.

**Thursdays:** 11 A.M. and 2 P.M., General Tours.

**Fridays:** 11 A.M., World Neighbors (general survey of people and places); 2 P.M., General Tour.

There are no tours given on Saturdays and Sundays.

Lewis E. Long, Bluefields, Nicaragua—herbarium specimens and a large collection of seeds, Nicaragua; Colin C. Sanborn, Chicago—61 herbarium specimens, Arkansas.

#### Department of Geology:

From: Republic Steel Corp., Massillon, Ohio—a collection of economic geology specimens; Anaconda Copper Mining Company, New York—a collection of economic geology specimens; American Brass Company, Waterbury, Conn.—a collection of economic geology specimens; Reynolds Metals Co., Richmond, Va.—a collection of aluminum samples.

#### Department of Zoology:

From: Robert R. Kohn, Madison, Wis.—6 lizards; Hobart M. Smith, Urbana, Ill.—a lizard (paratype), Florida; William H. Phelps, Caracas, Venezuela—a bird study skin (*Penelope granti*), Paraguay; Dr. Ross H. Arnett, Jr., Washington, D.C.—3 Oedeemerid beetles (paratypes), Florida; Dr. C. A. Reed, Tucson, Ariz.—5 salamanders, Oregon; Maj. H. T. Wright, U. S. Army—14 lizards, Japan; William S. Street, Seattle, Wash.—an Alaska brown bear, Alaska peninsula; J. E. Johnson, Waco, Tex.—32 reptiles and amphibians, Texas; C. B. Perkins, San Diego, Calif.—17 geckos, California; Harry Hoogstraal, Chicago—30 chameleons, Africa; Roger Conant, Philadelphia—20 snakes (1 type and 19 paratypes), Louisiana; Boardman Conover, Chicago—5 bird study skins, Sadiya, N. E. Assam; Dr. Don C. Lowrie, Las Vegas, N.M.—31 bats, New Mexico; Kenneth S. Norris, Los Angeles—6 lizards, California; Chicago Zoological Society, Brookfield, Ill.—3 mammals, a bird, and a turtle.

Motion pictures of the Museum, its activities, and the scientific subjects within its scope are being made by the recently established Division of Motion Pictures.





Collier, Donald. 1948. "Amazon Region Indian Collection Acquired." *Bulletin* 19(8), 7-7.

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