

**A JOURNEY ON THE  
BERBICE RIVER AND  
WIEROONIE CREEK**

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A Journey on the Berbice River and Wieroonie Creek by Ernest H. Glaisher

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**ERNEST H. GLAISHER**

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# A JOURNEY

ON THE

*BERBICE RIVER AND WIEROONIE CREEK,*

BY

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**NOTE:**

*The following Journal, which is a narrative of an expedition made on the Berbice River and Wieroonie Creek during the months of October and November, 1884, was originally intended to be placed before the Directors of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society in the form of a Report. In writing the notes out for publication the account became so extended that the Author thought he would probably anticipate the wishes of the Directors by putting them into their present shape.*

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## *The Berbice River in 1884.*

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### PART I.

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**O**N the 6th October, 1884, I started from Georgetown for a two months' natural history expedition on the River Berbice and its tributaries. Chiefly having in view the following objects, viz.: to obtain information of the fauna in the neighbourhood of the falls, and to make journeys into the interior of the country away from the river banks for the purpose of gaining some fresh knowledge about this part of the colony which at present is almost a terra incognita.

On the evening of the 7th I arrived at plantation *Friendship*, where the river steamer anchors for the night, and on the following day started to go higher up taking with me three Arawak Indians, who had been procured by Mr. PATOIR to form part of the crew for my expedition. I had secured the services of Mr. BARNARD LEPS, a well known resident of the river and a first rate bird-stuffer, whose duties were to accompany me as captain and to give me assistance in the procuring and skinning natural history specimens; it was indeed a disappointment when he told me, almost at the last moment, that it would be impossible for him to travel in consequence of the sudden sickness of one of his relatives. In his place I afterwards engaged Mr.

EDWARD PATOIR the son of my host at Pln. *Friendship* who undertook to act as captain and perform all the necessary skinning work. As the steamer passed Zeelandia I was joined by Mr. J. W. GLADSTONE who was of the greatest service to me, and who did his best, in the face of considerable difficulties, to enable me to make a satisfactory start on the expedition. At Maria Henrietta, where Mr. GLADSTONE has a large house, I landed with the three Indians, my captain remaining on the steamer with the stores in order to take them to Koomaka Downs, where he had instructions to procure more hands. At Pln. *Landsgroom*, opposite to Maria Henrietta, I expected to obtain the boat that had kindly been placed at my disposal by the river Magistrate, Mr. CALDER; this boat to my great disappointment I found almost in pieces and quite unfit for such an expedition as I proposed taking, it had been placed by the owner in charge of a Portuguese shopkeeper who had allowed it to become almost a total wreck. I at once made enquiries about obtaining another boat and luckily remembered seeing, as we passed the mouth of the Wieroonie creek, a large keelless plank boat which seemed suitable for my purpose. I immediately sent down my three men to make inquiries about it, in the evening they returned, bringing the boat with them, and as the hire of it was reasonable and it seemed in fair condition I engaged it for the journey.

The next day with the new boat I started to Koomaka Downs, where we arrived after a three hours' heavy pull against the tide. Between this place and Maria Henrietta the river is exceedingly populous and it was with surprise that I saw the number of benabs and dwelling houses situated on its banks. Close to the water's edge the wild cocoa

grows in great profusion and was to be obtained in all stages of development from the bud to the ripe fruit.

The settlement at Koomaka Downs (the name Koomaka is Indian for "silk-cotton", an enormous specimen of which tree is growing in the midst of the village) is very prettily situated at the foot of some wooded downs, it consists of about six or eight houses which are rather widely scattered and inhabited chiefly by Indians and half-castes; the houses as a rule are large and clean, one of them having a wooden flooring. In the midst of the settlement is situated a large well built church connected with the Church of England; service I am told is held there about once a month. At the back of the village are a great number of very large cocoa trees which are the remains of an old Dutch cocoa estate, and I was told that the pods are collected and sold, the proceeds being kept for the benefit of the settlement Church. Behind the downs above mentioned is the large savannah which lies between this river and the Demerara River, across which are numerous paths. On the banks of the river opposite to Koomaka are several smaller settlements, and also a thriving shop belonging to an old Portuguese settler.

On landing I found that my captain had placed all the stores in a large benab belonging to a man named PORTER who was lolling in his hammock suffering from a bad attack of sore eyes. Here I wished to procure only two hands but unfortunately the good men were either sick with sore eyes or away hunting. A Piwarrie feast on a large scale was to be held the following night at a settlement on the opposite bank of the river, and I was well aware that if I did not obtain hands and commence my journey