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Annotations on - Travels in the Confederation [1783-1784], Journal of Johann David Schoepf

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**Annotations on -
Travels in the Confederation ¹**

[1783-1784]

Journal of Johann David Schoepf

Johann David Schoepf, author of the work from which this extract was taken, was born in 1752 in the German principality of Bayreuth. Educated as a physician and natural scientist, he arrived at New York in 1777 as chief surgeon of the Ansbach troops in the service of George III. Returning to Europe in 1784, Schoepf died in 1800 while serving as president of the United Medical Colleges of Ansbach and Bayreuth. The German edition of his book was published at Erlangen in 1788, and an English translation by Alfred J. Morrison appeared in 1911.²



“The straight road from Wilmington to South Carolina lies through a swampy region; the war had left the bridges useless, and we were obliged to go some miles up the Northwest Branch [of the Cape Fear River] by boat, to avoid the swamp. The low banks of the river were grown up on both sides with reeds and canes; closest in were the smaller varieties of evergreen bush, beyond which stood the higher evergreen trees: magnolias, laurels, *Hopea*, *Gordoma Lasianthus*, and the like, their green a pleasant prospect. Amongst this green grew splendid oaks, water-shrubs, *Tupalos*, tulip-trees, and others, the *Tillandsia* hanging in long filaments from their wide-spreading branches, and a number of climbing plants woven everywhere on trunk and limbs – but at the time, unfortunately, most of them were leafless and quite without blooms. The morning of this

¹ Travels in the Confederation [1783-1784], From the German of Johann David Schoepf, Translated and Edited by Alfred J. Morrison, Burt Franklin, Publisher, New York, 1911, 1968.

² <http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/sections/hp/colonial/Bookshelf/Travels/Default.htm>

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passage it was bitter cold, felt all the more because it was necessary to keep very still in the little open boat. The negroes rowing kept warm at their work, but none the less they had brought along a few chips with which they studiously kept up a little fire, of no use to them except for the pleasure of seeing it burn. They love fire above everything and take it with them whatever they are about, in the field, in the woods, on the water, and that too at the hottest time of the year. From the plantation where we were landed, (and where for two Spanish dollars cash we had bad tea, worse sugar, no milk, tough beef, and little bread), we came 10 miles, by a long labyrinthine woods-road, to Town Creek, and thence 37 miles of uniform forest, past Lockwood's Folly and Shallot Bridge, to Murray's house at the South Carolina line. The whole way from Wilmington we remarked scarcely 8 or 9 houses.

This road described, which took us through North Carolina, runs near to the coast and is therefore called the lower road. The country does not certainly appear to the best advantage here, but from the character of this region one must not form an opinion of the whole. Inwards from the sea-shore, for 80-100 miles, the land is uniformly a sand-slope, as in Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia. The higher and more barren parts of this surface are occupied by the immense pine-forests, and called therefore "dry pine ridges." or "pine barrens." In the lower parts of the forests everywhere are "evergreen or laurel swamps," and along the rivers and brooks there are very generally "cane-marshes," among which must be counted the "savannahs," very low tracts subject to overflow, where only canes, rush, and sedge come up, but trees and bush very rarely."³

South Carolina
[circa January 9th, 1784]

We found no sort of reason to speak well of our first tavern in South Carolina, either for comfort or charges. For a little bacon and tea, a night's lodging, corn and corn-fodder for our horses the hostess, to make an even reckoning, asked for 3 horses and 3 riders, head for head a piastre, or 6 Spanish dollars in all (14 fl. 24 kr. Rhenish). The night was very cold; what with the rain of the day before, and the night's snow, in the morning everything, earth and trees, was covered with a thin coating of ice. We saw nothing but sand and pine-woods for 16 miles, until we came to a few cabins and then to the plantation of Mr. Vareen [approximately 2 miles north of Singleton Swash]. Notwithstanding we arrived here early, the weather being bad as also the state of the road before us, we were obliged to spend the rest of the day, having 26 miles to ride before reaching the next human habitation. At Mr. Vareen's we saw for the first time the staple South Carolina dish, rice in place of bread; for such use it is baked compact and dry, a pound of rice to two pounds of water, so that it may be cut in the dish. Customarily no other sort of bread is seen in the country, and the inhabitants of these southern provinces are so used to rice that now and then it is served in this form in towns, and is preferred to bread. For a change, small, thin cakes are baked, either of rice alone or mixed with maize, and served warm. For the people of the hither Carolinian country rice is the most

³ Travels in the Confederation [1783-1784], From the German of Johann David Schoepf, Translated and Edited by Alfred J. Morrison, Burt Franklin, Publisher, New York, 1911, 1968. Vol. II, Pages 152-154.

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important food and for their negroes almost the only food. The lands of our host being dryer and sandier, were not suitable for the culture of rice; therefore he occupies himself chiefly with Indigo.

They have sundry varieties of indigo; but in this flat, sandy region that which is best and most profitable is called, to distinguish it from the other sorts, "false Guatemala" or "true Bahama." It does well on soil of a moderate fertility, but if circumstances allow, new land is used or that previously dunged. A few prepare the land for indigo by green manuring, that is, they put on very thin seedings of oats or wheat, and when nearly ripe turn in horses and cattle to eat it off and firm it together.

The seed is planted after the first rainy weather in March or April, in rows 1 ½ -2 ft. apart, the plant growing almost that high. When towards the beginning of July the lowermost leaves grow yellow and begin to fall, and the blooms commence opening, the plant is regarded as ripe for cutting, which is done a second time about the end of August, and if it is a warm fall a third cutting may be had towards the end of September. In order that the work of cutting may be done forehandedly, and not hurried on account of the quantity to be handled at any one time, fields are sown so as to come in at distinct intervals. The plant



False Guatemala Indigo

should not grow over-ripe. Indigo-fields require much attention, and must be diligently kept clean of caterpillars and weeds. Some 20 negroes are necessary to look after a plantation of 50 acres of indigo land and prepare the indigo, over and above what must be done in raising what they themselves and the planter's household need. In cutting and gathering, the herb must be gingerly dealt with, so that the blueish farina, which covers the leaves and is said to add much to the richness and beauty of the color, may not be rubbed off; nor should the plant be bruised, for if so, its heavy juices spoil the delicacy of the color, which must be got merely by fermentation of the unmangled plants steeped in water. To this end, they are carefully placed in a vessel, the "steepers," 10-15 ft. long and 4 ft. deep, the plants lying 12-15 inches deep, over which water is poured; according to the state of the weather; after 12-18 hours the plants begin to warm of themselves, swelling and fermenting; the time of the greatest and most complete fermentation must be carefully observed; the method in use is to place a thin stick over the mass which rises as it rises, but should the mass fall below the point where the staff is propped at the sides of the vessel, it is then time to let off the water into another vessel called the "beater." In this vessel the water, charged with the color-particles thrown off in the steeper by fermentation, is by a peculiar process beaten until it begins to foam and rise over the sides, which happens according to the warmth of the weather in 25-30 minutes, more or less. To check a too vehement overflow of the material a little oil is poured on, which has an immediate quieting effect. This beating of the water furthers the association of the color-particles contained in a dissolved state; so as not to miss the point of time when this begins to take place, a few drops of the beaten water are at intervals taken on the finger-nail, on a tin plate, or in a glass, and so soon as a blue shimmer is observed, or blueish particles show themselves, this process also must be discontinued. There is then, with a

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gentle stirring a proportionate quantity of lime-water poured on, which brings about the precipitation of the indigo; when this is fallen to the consistency of a thick broth, the water standing above (now clear) is drawn off, and the sediment put into bags and hung up, until the moisture has largely come away. Finally this mass is taken out of the bags, kneaded on boards and wooden spades, divided into little cakes, and thoroughly dried, regard being had to the morning and evening sun. The preparation of indigo, which here and there is carried on with certain variations, is on the whole a chemical process requiring the most careful and exact attention in all its parts, the essential depending always on the right use of the proper moment, at which this or that should be done: The quality of the indigo is as much due to the exactness of its preparation as to the nature of the plant, of the soil, and of the weather. Hence indigo planters have not always equally good fortune, and often lose by the unskilfulness, malice, or carelessness of their headmen and workmen, much or the whole of a crop. The headmen in this sort of work are commonly negroes, and if they thoroughly understand the management of the indigo, a great value is set upon them, and they often fetch two or three times as much as they would ordinarily.



Workers prepare field for planting indigo.



Harvesting indigo crop

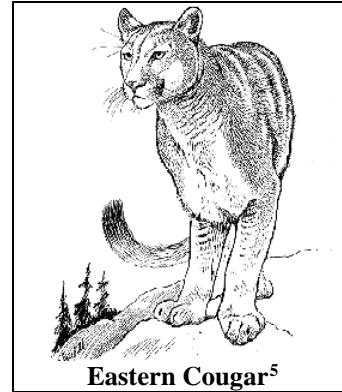
In the average it is expected that an acre of land will yield 50 pounds of indigo, but very good land 60-70 pounds. Sundry marks determine the quality of the indigo in the eyes of those skilled; its lighter or darker, even and pure color, and the fineness of its particles, are exterior indications by which the practiced eye fixes the value: besides, the best sort must float in water and quite dissolve, and in the fire be consumed entirely; the more it departs from these peculiarities, the less good and genuine it is held to be. After rice, indigo is the chief staple of Carolina, and the yearly production and export reaches several 100,000 pounds' weight. Its cultivation may and will increase, since there is no lack of suitable land, nor is any great capital necessary for a first beginning. At Charleston a pound at this time, according to its condition, brings 3-5-7 shillings sterling: but neither in quality nor in price is the South Carolina indigo equal to that from the Mississippi, the West Indies, or South America. Besides that mentioned as most usually raised, the "false Guatemala," there is cultivated here and there in Carolina the French or

⁴ <http://www.bell.lib.umn.edu/Products/Indigo.html>

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Hispaniola Indigo, which however does not do so well, because more susceptible to cold, and on account of its deep roots demanding a fatter and richer soil. A third sort is called wild Indigo (*Amorpha fruticosa* L.): an indigenous growth, regarding the quality of which opinion is not yet settled, but from its easier cultivation and greater productivity this should be preferable to both the others.

At Mr. Vareen's house I saw the skin of a female red tiger or cougar (*Felis concolor* Linn), which had been brought down in the neighborhood a few days before. The length of the stripped, and now somewhat shrunken, skin was over five foot from the muzzle to the beginning of the tail, the tail itself somewhat more than three foot long. The back, the sides, and the head were uniformly fallow, nearly fawn-colored, but the flanks and the belly whitish grey. The individual hairs were of one color throughout. The end of the tail verged somewhat on black, but the rest of the tail was of the color of the body. A paw had been preserved; the claws were crooked and very strong, but there were no bony cases, (as with other varieties of this species), into which they might be withdrawn; they stood free, but so that they could be out-stretched and bent upwards and backwards. Several of the negroes ate of the flesh of the animal, and found it not at all distasteful. The man who killed it came almost upon it in the woods, before he observed it; it fled before him from tree to tree, until he could bring it down with his gun.



These animals are nowhere plentiful this side the mountains, and are hardly to be met with except in the most solitary forests of Virginia and Carolina. They are everywhere regarded as timid, and it is claimed that there are no instances where men have been attacked by them. They venture very rarely into settled parts; in the woods they find prey enough among the tame and wild herds, for which they lurk from among the trees.

Shortly before, a bear had been killed in this region, no less than 7 ft. 4 in. in length, and weighing 500 pounds; evidence that predacious animals find abundant nourishment here; bears in the northern provinces do not reach this size.



Proceeding from the last-named plantation, after a few miles of woods-road, one comes to the so-called Long Bay or Beach [Long Bay began after you crossed Singleton Swash heading southward]. Here for 16 miles the common highway⁶ runs very near the shore. Lonely and desolate as this part of the road is, without shade and with no dwellings in sight, it is by no means a tedious road. The number of shells washed up, sponges, corals, sea-

⁵ <http://www.nature.ca/notebooks/english/estcoug.htm>

⁶ [This road ran along the strand of Long Bay in what was then known as All Saint's Parish, Georgetown District. It was a section of the main road between Wilmington, NC, at Cape Fear and Georgetown, SC, at Winyah Bay. The section that Schoepf is referring to is the strand at Myrtle Beach between Singleton Swash and Surfside Beach, in Horry County, South Carolina.]

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grasses and weeds, medusae, and many other ocean-products which strew the beach, engage and excite the attention of the traveller at every step. Circumstances did not admit of our tarrying here at pleasure, however, we industriously collected whatever seemed to us notable. This beach-road consisted for the most part of shell-sand, coarse or fine, with very few, often no quartz-grains. So far as the otherwise loose sand is moistened by the play of the waves it forms an extremely smooth and firm surface, hardly showing hoof-marks. At a distance of perhaps 30-50 paces from the water, there runs parallel with it a line of low sand-swells, 3-6 ft. high and averaging 8-10 ft. across. Towards the sea these undulations were cut away almost perpendicularly, but on the other side were sloping and sparsely grown up with thin grass and bush. These sand-swells which the ocean itself seems to have set as its limit, were notwithstanding broken through here and there, and the land lying immediately behind was much ravaged as a result of occasional overflow.

The road leaving the beach [in the Surfside Beach area], which extends far away of a similar character, one again traverses gloomy and lonesome woods to the neighborhood of the Waccama or Waggomangh, and beyond, by a narrow tongue of land between that river and the ocean, to Winguah Bay. The Waggomangh is one of the rivers most advantageous for these southern parts; it flows through a considerable tract of the interior country, and is navigable for large freight-boats. Shortly before its entrance into the ocean, it unites with the Pedee and the Black rivers, and they together make the fore-mentioned Winguah Bay.

On this Bay lies Georgetown, that is, at the mouth of the Black River. This place is said to have contained formerly 200 houses, of which the greater part were burned during the war by friends as well as foes. The situation is convenient for shipping and trade, and the town is therefore the depot of all the produce raised by the plantations on the neighboring rivers. It is the capital of the District of the same name [Old Georgetown District included what is now Georgetown, Horry, Marion, Dillon and Williamsburg Counties and approximately half of Florence County], its distance from Charleston being 65 miles. We saw this town only from afar, having been landed several miles below it, on crossing the Bay. Twelve miles farther we had the North and South Santee to pass, which in this region are separated merely by a low, marshy island, half a mile wide but several miles long. This island, like all swampy spots on the rivers, was quite covered with evergreen bush, but a plant in bloom was nowhere to be seen. Here stood the canes already mentioned, and of an astonishing length; I saw many of them 36-40 ft. high, and single shoots or joints 10-12-15 inches long, and proportionately thick. The Santee at its mouth is of a considerable breadth; the rivers Catawba, Congaree, and Wateree unite with it. The remainder of the road to Charleston was as little remarkable as that which went before, the way lying through barren, flat, sandy pine-forests, seldom a house or a cabin to rejoice the eye, since everything is crowded near to or on the rivers, or where there is water. Finally, on the 14th of January, we reached Bolton's Ferry, opposite Charleston, and were that evening set over the Bay, three miles wide, to the city. It was a pleasure to us to see our journey from Philadelphia hither now happily ended, for in the present condition of the country, and at this dismal time of the year, travelling was beginning to be very disagreeable and inconvenient. However, the uniformity of the regions we had

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traversed had this effect, that even on first entering it, the agreeable and lively aspect of this city made upon us the most pleasing and cheerful impression.

Charleston is one of the finest of American cities; Philadelphia excepted, it is inferior to none, and I know not whether, from its vastly more cheerful and pleasing plan, it may not deserve first place, even if it is not the equal of Philadelphia in size and population. The city contains a number of tasteful and elegant buildings, which however are mostly of timber. This circumstance is explained in part by the natural scarceness of stone in this region; but there seems no reason why bricks might not be used here for building quite as well as at Philadelphia and New York, since nowhere are better materials to be had, or in greater plenty. The number of the houses is estimated to be about 1500. In the plan of the houses especial regard is had to airy and cool rooms. Most of the houses have spacious yards and gardens, and the kitchen is always placed in a separate building, the custom throughout the southern provinces, to avoid the heat and the danger of fire. The chief streets are wide, straight, and cross at right angles; but they are not paved, and hence give rise to a double inconvenience, in rainy and in dusty weather. The greatest length of the city is little short of a mile.”⁷

“The manners of the inhabitants of Charleston are as different from those of the other North American cities as are the products of their soil. The profitable rice and indigo plantations are abundant sources of wealth for many considerable families, who therefore give themselves to the enjoyment of every pleasure and convenience to which their warmer climate and better circumstances invite them. Throughout, there prevails here a finer manner of life, and on the whole there are more evidences of courtesy than in the northern cities. I had already been told this at Philadelphia, and I found it to be the case; just as in general on the way hither, the farther I travelled from Pennsylvania towards the southern country, there were to be observed somewhat more pleasing manners among the people, at least there was absent the unbearable curiosity of the common sort, which in the more northern regions extends to shamelessness and exhausts all patience. There is courtesy here, without punctiliousness, stiffness, or formality. It has long been nothing extraordinary for the richer inhabitants to send their children of both sexes to Europe for their education. The effect of this on manners must be all the greater and more general since there were neither domestic circumstances to stand in the way nor particular religious principles, as among the Presbyterians of New England or the Quakers of Pennsylvania, to check the enjoyment of good-living. So luxury in Carolina has made the greatest advance, and their manner of life, dress, equipages, furniture, everything denotes a higher degree of taste and love of show, and less frugality than in the northern provinces. They had their own playhouse, in which itinerant companies from time to time entertained the public, but it was burned some time ago. A like misfortune overtook an elegant dancing-hall. A French dancing master was the promoter of this building; the necessary amount as advanced him by the first minister of the town who not only had no hesitation in a matter of furthering the pleasure of his parishioners, but afterwards when the property fell to him, the Frenchman being unable to return the loan, made no scruple

⁷ Travels in the Confederation [1783-1784], From the German of Johann David Schoepf, Translated and Edited by Alfred J. Morrison, Burt Franklin, Publisher, New York, 1911, 1968. Vol. II, Pages 156-164.

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of receiving the rent; whereas in the New England states the bare thought of such a thing would have disgraced any minister.”⁸

Other interesting observations taken from Schoepf’s journal:

“In the midst of the sandy levels and the forests there are here and there little lakes, often pretty deep, and apparently with no outlet or supply from other waters. In several of these, fish are said to be found, coming from no one knows where. The same is true also of South Carolina, where in deserted rice-plantations rain-water assembles in large ponds, which have no running water outlet, and yet fish are found in them. The people believe that the seed of the fish fall down with the rain, and the wild ducks and numerous other water-fowl which visit these ponds are not suspected.”⁹

“A chain of small, low islands lies close in to the main-land, along North and South Carolina, forming a narrow, navigable sound. The soil immediately on the coast is not altogether bad, in many places better than that more inland, and many people are tempted to live there, where in addition to farming they may get a support and money by fishing. The shore, it is said, is pretty well settled already; and it was astonishing, after we had come the whole way from New-Bern [to **Snead’s Ferry on the Neus River, in NC**] without meeting a soul, to be assured here that by a few musket-shots and in an hour’s time, 200 men might be brought together from the adjacent country.”¹⁰

“In North and South Carolina, besides corn, a small kind of peas, called Indian peas, is very much raised. They yield heavily and in good years produce 40-50 for one. They plant them the end of April or the first of May and gather in October.”¹¹

“The lack of salt and its dearness during the war, when a bushel often cost one or two Spanish dollars, brought it about that on the coast of North and South Carolina they began to boil sea-water in pans. This was done at the time with good success and great profit, but is now given over since it can be had in plenty and cheap from the West Indies. Since the value of wood may be counted as nothing, this manner of preparing salt would still be profitable, if the price of salt continued at no more than 3/8 of a dollar, but this is not the case. No attempt has been made to get salt from sea-water by evaporation in pits. The expense for salt is considerable, and many vessels are engaged in its conveyance. Besides that necessary for pickling fish and meat, it is the custom in the back parts and the country at a distance from the coast to give the horses and black cattle a little salt several times a week, as well with a view to the health of the cattle as to accustom them to the house and the plantation, and the cattle hanker after it. Near the coast, however, even where the cattle cannot get to salt-water, they are not so lickerish: and no salt is

⁸ Travels in the Confederation [1783-1784], From the German of Johann David Schoepf, Translated and Edited by Alfred J. Morrison, Burt Franklin, Publisher, New York, 1911, 1968. Vol. II, Pages 167-168.

⁹ Ibid. Page 135.

¹⁰ Ibid. Page 136.

¹¹ Ibid. Page 139.

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given them, the people believing (but mistakenly) that the air itself and the falling dews are laden with salt evaporated from the sea.”¹²

“Sweet water is found almost everywhere along the coast at a slight depth. Even near the shore, if a pit is dug with the hands in the sand, it soon fills with water tolerably fresh. A few miles from the sea, water is found in the clay-bed under the sand at a depth of 2-4-6 feet. Also there are very good and fresh natural springs in this low country; in the midst of the swamps strong, pure springs are found, for which commonly a way is opened by trees rotting out and leaving holes.”¹³

¹² Travels in the Confederation [1783-1784], From the German of Johann David Schoepf, Translated and Edited by Alfred J. Morrison, Burt Franklin, Publisher, New York, 1911, 1968. Vol. II, Pages 139-140.

¹³ Ibid. Page 140.