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2418 2419 2420

Form 504

U. S. COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

DESCRIPTIVE REPORT

Type of Survey: Topographic

Field No. 2415 2416 Office No. 2417 2418 2419 2420

LOCALITY

State: Puerto Rico

General locality: Port Ponce

Locality: and South Coast eastward to Point Vieuto

~~1894~~ 1899

CHIEF OF PARTY

W. C. Hodgkins

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U. S. COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY.

H. S. Pritchett, Superintendent.

State: Porto Rico

DESCRIPTIVE REPORT.

Topographic Sheet No. 2415
2416, 2417, 2418, 2419, 2420 seq.

LOCALITY:

Port Ponce and south coast eastward to Point Viento

1899.

CHIEF OF PARTY:

W. E. Hodgkins

Descriptive Report

to accompany Topc Sheets 2415, 2416, 2417, 2418, 2419 & 2420, of the south coast of Porto Rico from Point Cuchara, west of Ponce, to Point Viento, east of Patillas Bay, 1899.

This part of the south coast of Porto Rico is low and flat, being the edge of the alluvial coastal plain which lies between the foot-hills and the sea, with the exception of the island called Caja de Muertos, which lies about 8 miles southeast of Ponce. This is a rocky knob over two hundred feet high and apparently of volcanic origin.

The Porto Rican shore as a rule is not very bold, but the soundings face off very rapidly when the edge of the submerged plateau is reached and where coral reefs fringe the shore the water is often bold alongside.

The more exposed portions of the coast exhibit beaches of sand or broken coral, but in the more sheltered bays and coves the shore is often fringed with mangroves.

On Muertos Island, most of the shore line is solid rock and very rough.

On the higher land a little back from the shore, as on the low hills west of Ponce harbor and those near Aguirre, there is a considerable variety of scrubby growth, thorny bushes and small trees being intermingled with cacti of various kinds. Cocoa nut palms are found at times, but usually only in groves. Banana plantations are not infrequent a little back from the shore. The pine apple is also cultivated but the staple crop of this coast region is the sugar cane which here grows luxuriantly on the alluvial bottoms through which run many little rivers in their course from the mountains to the sea.

The tall chimneys of the numerous sugar refineries are often the only well marked objects over large sections of the coast, but frequently their very number and great similarity make it difficult to distinguish them apart. The only absolutely definite objects which can be recognized by a stranger without uncertainty are the lighthouses on Cardona Island, on Muerto Island and on Figuera Point, the twin towers of the church at Santa Isabel and the belfry-crowned mass

of the church at Guayama, northwest of Arroyo. The two hills at Aguirre are also characteristic when seen from the eastward but do not show well from a point abreast of them.

The mountains, which at Ponce are several miles back from the coast, gradually approach as one proceeds to the eastward and finally press directly into the sea at Cape Mala Pascua, which is the southeast point of Porto Rico and only a few miles to the eastward of Point Viento where this work terminated.

The principal towns of the district lying back of this stretch of coast are Ponce, with its port, called "Playa de Ponce", Santa Isabel, Salinas, Guayama, Arroyo, and Patillas. Of these, Ponce is by far the largest and most important and, in spite of its very inferior harbor, it does a very large commercial business.

The principal exports are coffee, sugar, molasses, rum, tobacco, and live cattle. All kinds of foodstuffs and manufactured goods are among the imports.

Guayama is next in importance of the above towns and through its port of Arroyo, handles a considerable amount of business.

There is a fairly good dirt road along the coast which passes through all the towns mentioned and over which the mail is carried by wagon. The great military road also affords communication between Ponce and Guayama by a somewhat circuitous route.

All heavy freighting is done by water whenever possible.

It is curious to note that Ponce and Arroyo, the two principal shipping points on this coast, have about the worst harbors to be found on it.

The excellent harbor of Aguirre or Jobos and that of Salinas just to the westward have been entirely neglected.

At all the Porto Rican ports, goods are transferred to the shore, or the reverse, by lighters handled by men who push them with long poles.

This system imposes upon all commerce a heavy burden of expense and delay.

The general absence of wharves is due to two chief reasons, the shelving character of the beaches which would necessitate very long wharves and the difficulty of maintaining them on account of

their exposure to heavy seas and to the attacks of marine worms upon ordinary wooden structures.

The rivers of this coast are small but are subject to sudden freshets during heavy tropical rains. At such times they frequently leave their banks and flood the low-lands.

An iron bridge across the Portugues River on the military road from Ponce to the Playa was lifted from its foundations by one of these sudden floods and was carried about 200 yards down stream, being left high and dry on the right bank of the river.

W. C. Hodgkins
Chief of Party