U.S. COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY.

H. S. Pritchett, Superintendent.

State: Porto Rico.

DESCRIPTIVE REPORT.

Topographical, Sheet No. 2475,
2416, 2417, 2418, 2419, 2420, 52705.

Locality:
Port Ponce and south coast eastward to Point Viento.

1899.

Chief of Party:
W. J. Hodgkins.
Descriptive Report

to accompany Top Sheets 2415, 2416, 2417, 2418, 2419 + 2420, of the south coast of Porto Rico from Point Buchana, 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 Baja de Muerito, 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 Muerito 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 Aguadilla, there is a considerable variety of scrubby growth, thorny bushes and small trees being intermingled with cacti of various kinds. Cocos and palmas are found at times, but usually only in groves. Banana plantations are not infrequent a little back from the shore. The pineapple 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 chimney 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 Bordona Island, on Mariana Island and on Figueroa Point, the twin towers of the church at Santa Isabel and the lighthouse-crowned mass
of the church at Guayama, northwest of Arroyo. The two hills at Aguira 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 Puesta, which is the southeast point of Porto Rico and only a few miles to the eastward of Point Viejo to 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 Aguadilla or Jobos and that of Sabana, just to the westward, have been entirely neglected.

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 floods during heavy tropical rains. At such times they frequently leave their banks and flood the low lands.

An iron bridge across the Portuguesa 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