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Thomas Whiffen

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The North-West Amazons

This 1915 volume recounts Captain Thomas Whiffen's travels in Brazil and Colombia in the region between the rivers Issa (or Içá) and Apaporis, and the Putumayo District. The study looks at the way in which the indigenous peoples, especially the Boro and Witoto, relate to their land. He describes their way of life, including their homes, agriculture, food, weaponry, warfare, clothing, health and medicine, songs and dances, magic and religion, tribal organization, the social status of women, and their reaction to strangers. The practice of cannibalism is also addressed and Whiffen suggests some possible reasons for it, including vengeance and supreme insult to enemies, the need to consume all available meat, and the desire to adopt some characteristics of the dead. Appendixes include detailed lists of the Native Americans' physical features, deities, vocabulary, and names, and an example of tribal poetry.

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*Notes of Some Months Spent Among Cannibal
Tribes*

THOMAS WHIFFEN



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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108007337

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2009

This edition first published 1915

This digitally printed version 2009

ISBN 978-1-108-00733-7 Paperback

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BORO MEDICINE MAN, WITH MY RIFLE

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THE NORTH-WEST AMAZONS

NOTES OF SOME MONTHS SPENT
AMONG CANNIBAL TRIBES

BY

THOMAS WHIFFEN

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CAPTAIN H.P. (14TH HUSSARS)

LONDON

CONSTABLE AND COMPANY LTD.

1915

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TO THE MEMORY OF THE LATE

DR. ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE, O.M.

THESE NOTES ARE DEDICATED

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P R E F A C E

IN presenting to the public the results of my journey through the lands about the upper waters of the Amazon, I make no pretence of challenging conclusions drawn by such experienced scientists as Charles Waterton, Alfred Russel Wallace, Richard Spruce, and Henry Walter Bates, nor to compete with the indefatigable industry of those recent explorers Dr. Koch-Grünberg and Dr. Hamilton Rice.

Some months of the years 1908 and 1909 were passed by me travelling in regions between the River Issa and the River Apaporis where white men had scarcely penetrated previously. In the remoter parts of these districts the tribes of nomad Indians are frankly cannibal on occasion, and provide us with evidence of a condition of savagery that can hardly be found elsewhere in the world of the twentieth century. It will be noted that this area includes the Putumayo District.

With regard to the references in footnotes and appendices, I have inserted them to suggest where similarities of culture or variations of a given custom are to be found. These notes may be of some use to the student of such problems as the question of cultural contact with Pacific peoples, and at the least they represent the evidence on which I have based my own conclusions.

THOMAS WHIFFEN.

LONDON, 1914.

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