

American Canal Society Canal Index

CANAL Lost Canal of the Raspadura		STATUS Still Lost		ACS
STATE/PROVINCE: Colombia, South America				HAER
COUNTIES:				
LOCATION (Endpoints of Canal): <p style="text-align: center;">?</p>				
TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS: US National Ocean Survey Tactical Pilotage Chart TPC L-26A				
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:				
<p>Alexander von Humbolt, in his <u>Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain</u> (London, Longman, 1811) mentioned in connection with possible routes across Central America, that he had heard that some years before, a Spanish monk had induced the indians to build a canal for canoes from the Raspadura River, a branch of the Atrato River, to the Pacific Ocean. Since then the Lost Canal of the Raspadura has remained lost, in spite of efforts to find and use it as an ideal trans-isthmian canal route. In the 1860's, financier Frederick Kelley financed an expedition to rediscover the canal; the leader of the expedition, engineer John C. Trautwine, came to the conclusion that there was no such thing, and that the indians had, perhaps, built a "canoe slide" which had led to the canal legend. The most recent expedition to the Atrato Swamp, with rediscovery of the canal as an objective, was an all-female expedition mentioned in a UPI article in the 3 November 1976 LOS ANGELES TIMES. Unfortunately, the UPI office informed ACS that the expedition had returned without finding the canal.</p>				
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:				
<p>The US National Ocean Survey Tactical Pilotage Chart TPC L-26A (1:500,000) which covers the Atrato region, does not indicate any Raspadura branch. It does however show the Napipi branch, and Cupica Bay on the Pacific, which formed the Napipi-Cupica route, another possible trans-isthmian canal route suggested by Humbolt.</p> <p>In <u>Canals and Irrigation in Foreign Countries</u> (Special Consular Reports, Washington D.C. 1891,p.59) the Colombian Vice-Consul says the canal was opened in 1783 by a monk of Novita, between the headwaters of the Atrato, and those of the San Juan. This would place the canal about 5½° N, between Novita and Quibdo, over 200 miles above the Atrato mouth and swamps.</p>				
NAMES & ADDRESSES OF GROUPS CONCERNED WITH CANALS PRESERVATION/RESTORATION:				
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY:				
<p>This information is from <u>The Path Between the Seas</u>, by David McCullough (Simon & Schuster, 1977), an excellent account of the history of the Panama Canal, pp. 30 and 39. He refers to Humbolt's book, and Trautwine's expedition report in the May 1854 <u>Journal of the Franklin Institute</u>.</p> <p>See also "Women's Canal Expedition - A Bust" in the August 1978 AMERICAN CANALS.</p>				
UNPUBLISHED RECORDS, PHOTOS, DRAWINGS (CEHR,HAER,HABS, Local or Regional Historical Societies, Libraries, etc.):				
EXISTING OR RECOMMENDED LANDMARK STATUS (CEHR, National Register, etc.):				
REPORTER'S NAME & ADDRESS: W.E. Trout, III, 1932 Cinco Robles Drive, Duarte CA 91010		DATE: 19 Sep '8		
RETURN TO: CANAL INDEX COMMITTEE, c/o P.H.STOTT, HAINES ROAD, MOUNT KISCO, NY 10549				