Meeting 16 • 28 February 2013 • Thursday
Week 8: Stars & numbers

Version: **2/28/13**

pictures of the week

Humboldt's sketch & data for map of Rio Meta

thought-bite of the week:

"I reckoned that it was my duty in this book to record all the data obtained from reliable sources..., investigate the causes and relations, and establish fixed points in the rapid course of time..."

(Humboldt, "Personal Narrative", from *Jaguars and Electric Eels*, ed. & trans. Wilson, p. 19)

mini-text of the week (start):

"...we forgot that there might be dangers descending steep slopes covered with a smooth, slippery grass in the dark."

Humboldt, "Personal Narrative", from *Jaguars and Electric Eels*, ed. & trans. Wilson, pp. 17-18 (read more)

Topics for today

	(5') Mini-text of the week: How high, at least on this Earth, is high? How deep is deep? Hot? Cold? How much of that have you experienced personally?
	(15') How accurate are whatever GPS apps you have on your mobile? How - which terms and numbers - should we define "accurate"? Some iPhone/ iPad apps - link to more info - that Humboldt would have killed for: "Theodolite", "SkyView Free", "GoSkyWatchP", "SkyTime". "Pirate Compass" would not have impressed him. Same/similar apps are available for Android. More about "shooting the sun" (or the stars): adjusting for calendar and clock; using Polaris (North Star) to determine latitude. Humboldt's map of the Casiquiare (article and large-scale drawing), which (hint!) is very near the equator, was 3 degrees of longitude in error. How big was that error, in terms of miles and percent inaccuracy and in terms of what may have caused it: a chronometer or other calculation of time that was used to determine longitude? Extra glory (not extra credit): How serious an error, in terms of Humboldt's claim to scientific precision in his own time, would have been an error of 3 degrees of LATITUDE?
	(15') Comparative validity of sources of evidence about "VERY long ago": a) pre-1700 "science" (word didn't exist then in that sense); b) oral history and tradition, including folk knowledge; c) classical ("pagan") history & "science"; d) Bible. What issues of truth, validity, purpose are raised here? Some misconceptions about earlier worldviews and conflicts (science vs. science; science vs. religion): flat/round Earth (Columbus and before); rotating Earth; geocentric universe with "Man as center of universe"; age of the Earth / world, including the notorious ••"4004 BC" dating.

	Small groups: Where do you get your citizen information, opinions, conclusions, solutions, and how do you check it out? If you are into "think globally, act locally", where do you get your **local** info? What "signs" are there that your sources are reliable?
	(15') Now and THEN, here and THERE: your own range of comparisons. The world Now and in 1600 (-1900+): your probable individual fate, and what you, transported back to then, would find very different (very absent, very present); standards of living for the (decile) range of population; What caused the change, and what did the change cause? How does that relates to social responsibility (activism?) and sustainable environmentalism? See also handout from previous meeting: pictures from Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip*; article from *The Economist*, about malnutrition in the present.
	(15') Humboldt's worldS, and a foretaste of next week's theme, as illustrated by the music by American composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-69) - Wikipedia link. Here (temporary link to comply with © restrictions) are two pieces incorporating musical motifs inspired by his childhood in the American South (French-speaking Louisiana) and his travels in the Caribbean and elsewhere in Latin America. Gottschalk's mother was creole.
	(5') Announcements, Checkups & Previews: 1) still more advice about "educated citizen" reading, with yet another example (NYRB); 2) one focus of "interpreting the past" to the present during the rest of the course: land and water allocation and use in the American West, including Oregon, and how Humboldt play an important role in that. One theme of next several weeks: Humboldt's influence on the development of systems of land and water measurement and management in the US.

Native Plant Center Volunteer Ventures: Volunteers help care for rare native seeds, bulbs and plant materials that support restoration projects. No experience necessary. Registration required. 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Sat, March 9. Metro's Native Plant Center, 2661 S.W. Borland Road, Tualatin; free; 503-797-1653

Naturescaping Basics: Design a low-maintenance, chemical-free landscape that conserves water and minimizes pollution while saving time, money and energy. Offered through East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District. Registration required. 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Sat, March 9. Community of Christ, 4837 N.E. Couch St.; free; www.emswcd.org or 503-222-7645

March Second Saturday at the Water Center – Celebrate Water: Observe World Water Day and learn more about international water cooperation. Kids and families can participate in a Walk for Water and enjoy hands-on activities focused on the Columbia River and other major international rivers. 1-3 p.m. Sat, March 9. Water Resources Education Center, 4600 S.E. Columbia Way, Vancouver; free; www.cityofvancouver.us/watercenter or 360-487-7111

Naturescaping: Lora Price teaches ways to create a nature-inspired backyard that works with nature while saving time and money. Registration required at website. 1-2:30 p.m. Sat, March 9. Portland Nursery, 9000 S.E. Division St.; free; www.portlandnursery.com or 503-788-9000

"Deep Green": Documentary about people around the world implementing solutions to the global warming crisis. 1 p.m. screening followed by a question-and-answer session with the director, Matt Briggs, plus a tour of his Lake Oswego home for those interested. 1 p.m. Sun, March 10. New Thought Center for Spiritual Living, 1040 C Ave., Lake Oswego; donations accepted; 503-646-8443 or matt@deepgreenfilms.org

28 Feb 2013 E 4