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The Land Zarahemla

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Abstract: Identifies an area in Bogata, Columbia as the Land of Zarahemla. Presents photographs and a description of the geography, climate, and vegetation of the area, drawing parallels with passages of the Book of Mormon text.

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THE LAND ZARAHEMLA.

THE name Zarahemla was applied by the Nephites to that region of country in South America lying within the confines of the great ranges of the Andes, north of the headwaters of the Magdalena river, the Sidon of the Book of Mormon, and south of the isthmus or narrow pass which led into the land northward. While the area of this region is quite extensive, probably exceeding 200,000 square miles, the habitable parts

of it, because of the peculiar conditions which prevail there, are only about one quarter of the total area of the country.

About one and one-half degrees north latitude and 76 degrees west longitude occurs what geographers call the mountain Knot of Pasto: a region where the various ranges of the Andes unite in one great mass, covering nearly 2000 square miles and reaching a height of nearly 19,000 feet. There are several volcanoes in this region and several important rivers like the



THE EASTERN RIDGE, FROM PLAZA BOLIVER, BOGATA.

Magdalena, the Cauca, the Patia, and several tributaries of the Amazon have their source there, but our principal in-

nated as the Western, the Central and Eastern Cordilleras.

Leaving the Knot of Pasto, the Western



TUEQUENDAMA, THE FALLS OF BOGATA, (ONLY ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF THE FALL IS HERE SHOWN.)

terest in the region is that out of it comes the three great mountain ranges which form the characteristic features of the Land Zarahemla. These ranges are desig-

range runs westward for about fifty miles forming the divide between the valleys of the Pasto and the Cauca. It then turns northward for several hundred miles, form-

ing the divide between the Cauca and the San Juan and Atrato rivers, and terminates in hills near the Gulf of Darien. The mean elevation of this range is about 10,000 feet, although it has peaks which reach nearly 16,000 feet. Out of this range comes a ridge which, forming the divide between the rivers San Juan and Atrato, turns northward and becomes the mountains of the isthmus. From the summit of this ridge on a clear day one can look out on the broad expanse of the Pacific, or turning eastward can overlook the forest covered Valley of the Atrato with the broad river flowing lazily through it, and in the distant north the blue waters of the Gulf of Darien; while on the East, stretching southward as far as the eye can reach, are the cloud capped summits of the Western range. This was the Land Bountiful of the Nephites, so called because of its luxuriant vegetation.

The Central range runs northward and is a continuation of the main range of the Andes, and is for the most part a single ridge of immense proportions. Its lowest pass is nearly 12,000 feet above the sea and its highest peaks nearly 20,000 feet. For the first 300 miles its summits are vast paramos ranging between 14,000 and 15,000 feet above the sea and which are almost always buried in clouds and over which wintry blasts sweep almost continually. North of five degrees north latitude the range widens out and encloses a number of beautiful valleys and breaking up into hills terminates at about eight degrees north latitude. Deep gorges and boggy slopes make travel over this range very difficult: only three trails cross it in 300 miles. The distance over it is about 85 miles and it requires four or five days to make the journey. This mountain corresponds to the wilderness often referred to in the Book of Mormon as being west of Manti, Melek and Ammonihah.

The course of the Eastern range is mainly

towards the northeast. The first 75 miles is a single ridge forming the divide between the Magdalena and the Amazon valleys. This ridge drops down until one pass near the Ceja is only 4,000 feet above the sea. This pass is nearly east of the upper part of the Magdalena valley and on a line with the southern pass over the Central range and seems to have been much used by the Lamanite armies in their wars against the Nephites. North of the Ceja pass the Eastern range rises rapidly, culminating in snowy peaks reaching nearly 18,000 feet above the sea. North of four degrees north latitude the range widens out into a broad plateau enclosing the valley of Bogota, which is a vast level plain forty miles wide and one hundred miles long and lying 8,500 feet above the sea. The river which drains this valley breaks through the western rim at the south end of the valley and drops down rapidly towards the Magdalena, descending over 5,000 feet in a few miles. At one point it falls 742 feet and forms one of the highest and most beautiful cataracts in the world. The plateau region extends northeast of the Bogota Valley for more than 150 miles and contains a large number of beautiful valleys. The range then divides, one ridge running northward and uniting with the Santa Marta mountains on the shores of the Caribbean sea, the other turns eastward and forms the plateau region of Venezuela.

The main ridge of the Eastern range forms the eastern boundary of the plateau region. Its rounded summits bear witness of the great glaciers which have rested upon them. There are no rugged peaks in this range like those of our Wasatch Mountains. The broad summits resemble a series of rolling hills, destitute of timber, grass, or vegetation of any kind, on the eastern side the range drops off suddenly towards the great hot plains of the Orinoco. For nearly 250 miles there is no break in the range. The first accessible pass north

of the Ceja occurs at a point a little north of east of the city of Zarahemla, at this point a broad open canon penetrates the range and affords an easy passage between the plateau and the plains. Here again are seen evidences of the old inhabitants of the country; for many miles along the mountain slopes up and down the canon are numerous terraces where once stood the homes of the prehistoric people. Judging from the number of terraces a very numerous population once occupied the country. At or near this point was located the Zoramite City, Antionum.

We are of the opinion that the Nephites originally applied the term "East Wilderness" to all of the mountainous region lying east of the Sidon Valley. The Lamanites occupied the greater part of this region until expelled by the armies of Moroni who founded there a number of important cities. All about the mountain valleys evidences of the old cities may still be seen; these indicate that the old people lived in communities. There seems to have been no compact center but each habitation seems to have been surrounded by the land which the family cultivated. The temple, where the people assembled for worship, and the market place, where they met to exchange their wares, seem to have been near the center of the commu-

nity. These peopled districts usually covered forty or fifty square miles, between them were spaces of eight or ten miles which bear no evidence of having been occupied or cultivated.

The habitable parts of the country are confined to the Cauca valley, lying between the Western and Central ranges, to the Magdalena Valley, to the plateau region, and to a strip along the Caribbean sea where the trade winds greatly modify the climate.

The uninhabitable parts are the hot unhealthy region along the Pacific Coast, the great timbered plains lying between the isthmus and Lake Maracaibo and extending up the Magdalena Valley 600 miles to the Honda rapids, to the hot plains of the Orinoco and to the vast mountain summits lying above 11,000 feet. The forest region is a tropic forest in all the words imply. It is for the greater part an immense swamp whose poisonous exhalations and dews make it exceedingly dangerous for those who even visit there. Wild animals such as jaguars, panthers and other varieties of the cat tribe are numerous; snakes and reptiles, mosquitoes and gnats, spiders and ants, all combine to harrow up the souls of those who venture into those forbidden wilds.

Joel Ricks.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

COLONIA DIAZ.



IN the early settlement of the Mormons in Chihuahua, the only railroad running through the state was the Mexican Central, which did not cover a district of country advantageous for colonization. The train now running from Ciudad Juarez, across the Rio Grande river from El Paso, to Dublan, had not then been built. The colonists, therefore, went to Deming, New Mexico,

fitted up there and crossed the Mexican line eighteen miles from the present colony of Diaz. It was at this point that the Casas Grandes river was first reached. This was really, in the early days, the starting point and Diaz' was the first Mormon settlement reached on a trip through the Mormon colonies in Chihuahua.

The survey of the present townsite was made August 24th, 1886, by Elder W. Derby Johnson who, when the ward was