

Mr. Petrullo brought back a representative collection of objects made and used by the Yaruros in their daily life and ceremonial occasions. Some of these objects are now on exhibition on the lower floor of the Museum.

*Mr. Petrullo's  
Report*

**T**HE region lying between the Apure and the Meta rivers (both of which are western tributaries of the Orinoco) is inhabited today by the Yaruro and Guahibo Indians. Other peoples have disappeared. Over a considerable portion of the area cattle raising has been carried on successfully, and as a consequence there are scattered about pioneers, most of whom are descendants of old Spanish and Indian stock. The Indians naturally resent the gradual occupation of their country, and, particularly with the Guahibos, friendly contact is very difficult.

At one place called El Buron I met the first band of Yaruros. I stayed with them a few days, but since most of the men were away I moved on to the river, where I was informed there were several larger groups. From this point on I traveled only with Indians, and soon afterwards settled with a group of them on a vast sand beach exposed by the withdrawal of the waters of the Capanaparo, living with them intimately, eating their food, and because of illness, completely in their care. The small quantity of food that I had brought with me was given to them, and after that was exhausted we shared the products of the hunt.

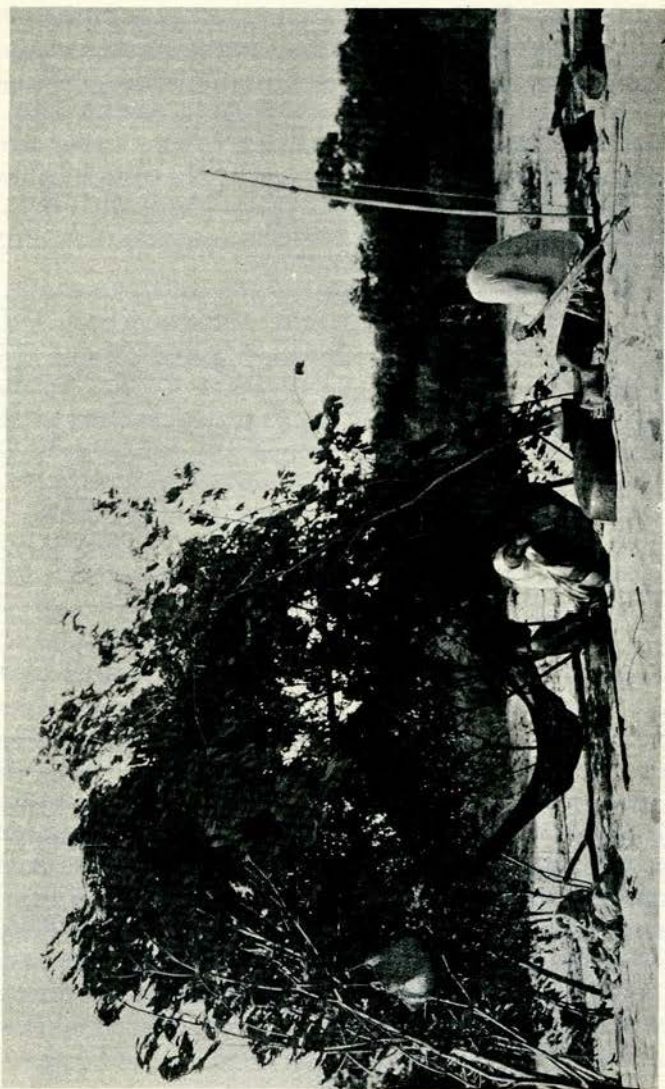
The Yaruros call me 'elder brother' now, but not so at first. When I met the first group, no friendliness was shown towards me, and I found a resistance on their part to any attempt that I made to break down their reserve. Strangers that have come among them apparently have not treated them well, and, as mentioned above, there is a certain amount of resentment that their lands are being occupied by the pioneers. However, one night this resistance disappeared, and from then on they accepted me as a relative.

It happened that I went to their camp on a sand beach—a camp consisting of numerous small sticks planted in the sands, a few baskets, water jars, bows and arrows, placed about, and a number of small fires, over which were roasting crocodiles and turtles. The Yaruros construct no houses, living in the open; during the day they protect themselves from the sun by planting a few branches of trees in the sand which give a thin shade [Plate II]. I went among them at sunset, tried to engage them in conversation, and failing



to do so, sat down watching the camp life, and listening to the roar of the howling monkeys brought to us in waves by the wind. Soon it was dark, and as the stars began to move across the sky I attempted to converse with them but without much success.

At last, following a whim, I asked for a gourd rattle, and calling one man over to me who appeared to be the chief I sang a number of songs, accompanying myself with the rattle, and explaining that these songs were Indian songs. He listened carefully and soon became interested. A number of his men surrounded us and also commented on the similarity between their songs and those I was singing.



A YARURO FAMILY—CENTRAL VENEZUELA



YARURO WOMEN MAKING POTTERY

I stopped and we conversed in a more friendly spirit. Soon the chief, who happened to be the 'medicine man' or priest, also picked up the rattle, sat down facing the east, and saying to me that since I had sung for him he would sing for me, he began a most beautiful chant. His people, entering into the spirit of the occasion, soon had joined us and we sang and danced all night, the music becoming more and more intense, more and more beautiful as the night wore on. The dancing became more spirited, and we sang and danced without resting, on the sand beach in the moonlight in truly primitive style, until sunrise. In the morning I noticed that their attitude towards me had changed, and soon I was told why.

The medicine man had realized that I knew something about Indian religion and that I was sympathetic towards them and their culture. Puzzled, he sought an explanation from his Gods, and he was told that I was a relative of the Gods, that I knew a great deal about them, that I lived close to their abodes, that I had come among the Yaruros merely to visit them in a friendly spirit, and that I loved them as my brothers. Thus, through a religious performance and through religious revelation, I received a passport which opened to me the hearts of my hosts.

As a result I was able to study their religion, social organization, ethics, and so forth, since they were more than anxious to talk to me about the things they had been most reticent about before. They also sought information about me, my family, my people, and our religious practices. Understanding that I wanted to know everything, they worked patiently with me day and night, sleeping but little, and even going hungry, since they preferred talking with me to hunting.

My reputation spread, and as I moved down river I found the other Yaruros more than willing to talk with me. More religious ceremonies were held, and the Gods often came at night, and greeted me through the medicine man whose body they entered while his spirit went to their land. They even brought me news

that my own people were well but grieving over my long absence. It was in vain that I tried to explain that I was not related to the Gods. The Gods had spoken, and the Gods were right according to the Yaruros.

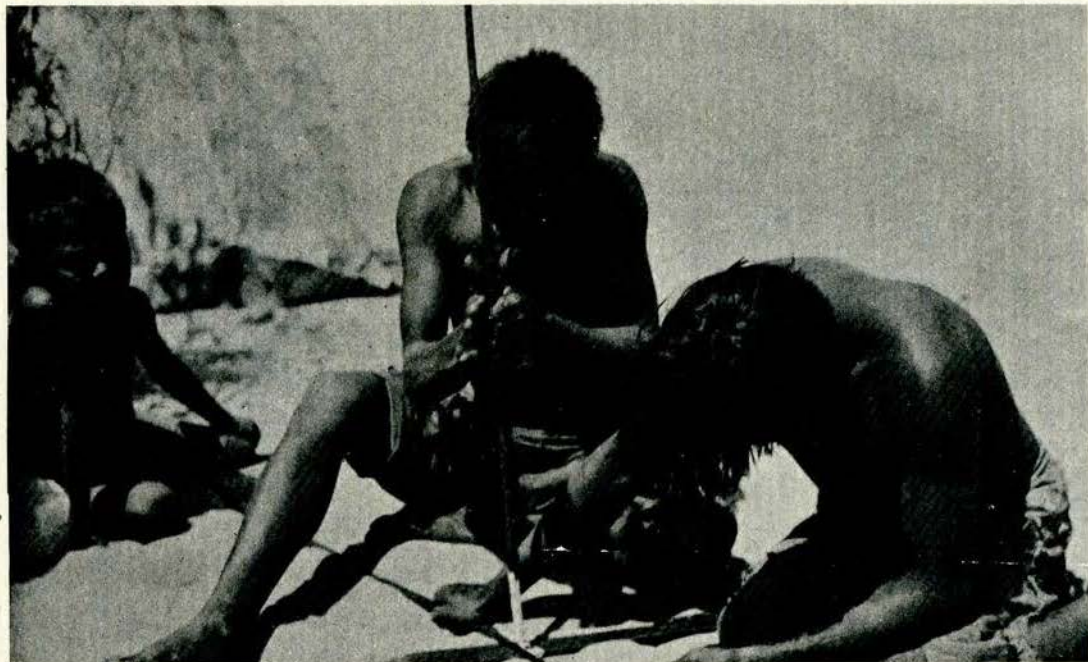
I stayed with them until the end of March, and during this time they took excellent care of me. It happened that for a month I was unable to walk, so they did all they could to make my visit comfortable and profitable. The best food was mine, and they went to special trouble to obtain delicacies for me. In the meantime they made various articles for me to take back when I should go away, as presents to my people. The medicine man never left me, being as anxious as I was to talk about their customs and exchange religious lore. We communed with the Gods; we investigated together the mysteries of our universe, and the principles governing this life and the next. They, who in their economic culture must be considered to be about the most primitive of the extant South American aborigines, have indeed a most poetic concept of the Universe. Day and night they are in intimate touch with their Gods and their dead ancestors. Theirs is not a Universe of fear, but one of quiet understanding and of hope.

The Yaruros believe that in the beginning there was nothing, and that there appeared Kuma, a female Goddess who created everything. Other Gods appeared later. Humanity is descended from them, and the Yaruros consider themselves children of Kuma. Some of the descendants of the Gods mated with the anaconda and the jaguar, and from this mateship sprang the Yaruros. A grandson of Kuma, by a trick, gave fire to humanity.

Marriage is strictly regulated among the Yaruros, and there is an obligation on the part of everyone to marry. There are neither spinsters nor bachelors. A man must marry the daughter of his mother's brother, but he is prohibited from marrying either the daughters of a sister of his mother or a brother of his father. These girls he considers as sisters to himself, and calls them by that



YARURO WOMAN WEAVING A BASKET



YARUROS USING A FIRE DRILL



title. Thus a man must marry his cousin. Polygamy is practised, a man marrying two sisters, but this can happen only if there are not enough men, or if a woman's husband dies, when her brother-in-law is obligated to take care of her, although she must wait a year before marrying again.

A man looks to his uncle for instruction: that is, the mother's brother, who is his future father-in-law; on marrying the daughter the son-in-law goes to live with the parents of his wife: that is, he hunts with the uncle who is also the father-in-law. A son-in-law is not permitted to talk to or even look at his mother-in-law, although they must take care of each other. If they are in camp together they sit facing away from each other, and if there is necessity to speak to each other they have to do so through a third person. The same applies to the daughter-in-law and the father-in-law.

There is a division of labor. Food is plentiful but it has to be hunted and gathered. Therefore, the women occupy themselves with the gathering of roots and fruit, the cooking, the weaving of basketry, the making of pottery, while the men engage in hunting, canoe making, hammock weaving, and so forth. Both sexes are busy all of the time. Food does not fall into their mouths and they work very hard.

The Yaruros have never been studied before. Linguistically they are not affiliated with any other group of Indians and as is seen from the above, they must take their place among the most primitive people of the world. Thus by an extraordinary religious experience of the shaman, permitting my living among them with safety and on intimate terms, it proved possible to bring back invaluable information on a most interesting people.

V. P.

*The Piedras  
Negras Expedition*

**T**HE Museum's Expedition to Piedras Negras, Guatemala, has commenced the fourth season at this Maya 'Old Empire' site. Mr. Linton Satterthwaite, Jr., the field director, is