

astronomical observations. One arm of the Orinoco, (the Cassiquiare,) running from north to south, falls into the Guainia, or Rio Negro, which, in its turn, joins the Marañon, or river Amazon. The most natural way, therefore, to go from Angostura to Grand Para, would be to ascend the Orinoco as far as Esmeralda, and then to go down the Cassiquiare, the Rio Negro, and the Amazon; but, as the Rio Negro in the upper part of its course approaches very near the sources of some rivers that fall into the Orinoco near San Fernando de Atabapo (where the Orinoco abruptly changes its direction from east to west to take that from south to north), the passage up that part of the river between San Fernando and Esmeralda, in order to reach the Rio Negro, may be avoided. Leaving the Orinoco near the mission of San Fernando, the traveller proceeds up the little black rivers (the Atabapo, the Temi, and the Tuamini), and the boats are carried across an isthmus six thousand toises broad, to the banks of a stream (the Caño Pimichin) which flows into the Rio Negro. This was the course which we took.

The road from San Carlos to San Fernando de Atabapo is far more disagreeable, and is half as long again by the Cassiquiare as by Javita and the Caño Pimichin. In this region I determined, by means of a chronometer by Berthoud, and by the meridional heights of stars, the situation of San Balthasar de Atabapo, Javita, San Carlos del Rio Negro, the rock Culimacavi, and Esmeralda. When no roads exist save tortuous and intertwining rivers, when little villages are hidden amid thick forests, and when, in a country entirely flat, no mountain, no elevated object is visible from two points at once, it is only in the sky that we can read where we are upon the earth.

San Fernando de Atabapo stands near the confluence of three great rivers; the Orinoco, the Guaviare, and the Atabapo. Its situation is similar to that of Saint Louis or of New Madrid, at the junction of the Mississippi with the Missouri and the Ohio. In proportion as the activity of commerce increases in these countries traversed by immense rivers, the towns situated at their confluence will necessarily become bustling ports, depôts of merchandise, and centre points of civilization. Father Gumilla confesses, that in