
Preface

When I was contacted by Edgardo Latrubesse, at that time Latin American representative of the International Association of Geomorphologists, I felt that a dream I had been caressing for several years was becoming real: he proposed that I prepare a book on Colombia for the series **World Geomorphological Landscapes**. The challenge was ambitious and demanding, but it was finally carried out thanks to the generous collaboration of several friendly colleagues and institutions.

Why does the interest for the landscapes of Colombia, a country with such a diversity in climatic and biologic aspects, happen so late?

Several hypotheses can be established. From the historical standpoint, the Spaniards, who conquered the country in the fifteenth century, considered nature an enemy: in fact, mosquito-transmitted fevers and other tropical diseases killed certainly more Spanish soldiers than the brave Indian warriors. On the other hand, these rapacious adventurers were more interested in gold than in landscape inventory or contemplation. Chroniclers' reports tend to confirm this supposition. Furthermore, rules dictated by the Sevilla Council of the Indies obliged Spaniards to live in cities, isolated from the countryside.

The first description of Colombian landscapes came from European travelers, from the end of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century: Bouguer, Humboldt, Boussingault, Gosselman and later Hettner, Reclus, Crevaux, and others. The middle of the nineteenth century was also the time when a quixotic adventure took place through the inspiration of President T.C. Mosquera and under the able direction of A. Codazzi, an Italian military engineer: the *Comisión Corográfica* (Chorographic Commission), which went across almost the entire country from 1850 to 1859 and left maps, pictures, and reports, was unfortunately published at that time in an erratic manner. This national expedition—like the other travelers—had to face great difficulties to carry on their task: the three jungle-covered cordilleras form tremendous natural barriers. Steamship navigation along the Magdalena River only became reliable at the end of the nineteenth century, when the first railroads were built. At that time, it took about 10 days to travel from Bogotá to Cartagena and 8 days to reach Medellín. It is understandable that airplanes, which started to cover domestic itineraries just after World War I, are considered as the first real integrators of the Colombia nation.

Since the last three decades of the past century, guerrillas and illegal drug-trafficking activities were also an important inconvenience for tourism, a situation that has diminished significantly in recent years. Nowadays, most of the roads can be taken without any risk. This is reflected by the abundance of tourist guides published in English and French.

Little by little, Colombians have learned how valuable their landscapes are through the works of scientists, writers, and painters. And thanks to the development of roads and government efforts to foster domestic and international tourism, many people have begun to enjoy the natural beauties of this country, where not only landscapes are worth seeing but which also possesses attractive cities, such as Cartagena, Popayán, Bogotá, Mompox, and famous archeological sites like *San Agustín* and *Ciudad Perdida* (the Lost City in the Snowy Santa Marta Massif).

The geomorphosites selected are located in the western part of the country. They were selected due to their easy, secure access. Others are missing, such as the *Chiribiquete* Ridge and the *Mavicure* Mounts, which belong to the Amazonian domain. Both deserve aesthetic and scientific interest but require costly air trips to be reached.

During the past 60 years, first as a student and then as a geologist, I have had the privilege to travel across this country using all the possible transports, from walking to mule and canoe to helicopter.

I hope this book may be useful to transmit the very deep enthusiasm I still feel when facing the many beautiful landscapes of Colombia.

August 2014

Michel Hermelin

Series Editor Preface

Landforms and landscapes vary enormously across the Earth, from high mountains to endless plains. At a smaller scale, nature often surprises us creating shapes which look improbable. Many physical landscapes are so immensely beautiful that they received the highest possible recognition—they hold the status of World Heritage properties. Apart from often being immensely scenic, landscapes tell stories which not uncommonly can be traced back in time to tens of million years and include unique events. In addition, many landscapes owe their appearance and harmony not solely to the natural forces. For centuries, and even millennia, they have been shaped by humans who have modified hillslopes, river courses, and coastlines and erected structures that often blend with the natural landforms to form inseparable entities.

These landscapes are studied by geomorphology—“the science of scenery”—a part of Earth Sciences that focuses on landforms, their assemblages, surface and subsurface processes that molded them in the past and that change them today. To show the importance of geomorphology in understanding the landscape, and to present the beauty and diversity of the geomorphological sceneries across the world, we have launched a book series *World Geomorphological Landscapes*. It aims to be a scientific library of monographs that present and explain physical landscapes, focusing on both representative and uniquely spectacular examples. Each book will contain details on geomorphology of a particular country or a geographically coherent region. This volume presents the geomorphology of Colombia, a South American country that is home to highly diverse physical landscapes, from tropical coasts and extensive floodplain within equatorial forests, through Andean mountain chains and intramontane plateaux, to numerous volcanoes. The latter are beautiful, but can also be deadly as the famous case of Nevado del Ruiz illustrates. It is the first time ever that landforms and landscapes of this country are presented in a coherent, systematic manner.

The World Geomorphological Landscapes series is produced under the scientific patronage of the International Association of Geomorphologists (IAG)—a society that brings together geomorphologists from all around the world. The IAG was established in 1989 and is an independent scientific association affiliated with the International Geographical Union (IGU) and the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS). Among its main aims are to promote geomorphology and to foster dissemination of geomorphological knowledge. I believe that this lavishly illustrated series, which sticks to the scientific rigor, is the most appropriate means to fulfill these aims and to serve the geoscientific community. Very little of the geomorphological diversity of Colombia has been known so far to the global community and I am extremely grateful that Prof. Michel Hermelin added this book project to his professional agenda and delivered such a fine product, successfully coordinating the large team of authors. I am sure that readers of this volume, after seeing how immensely scenic Colombian geomorphological landscapes are, how many “hidden jewels” exist there, and how surprisingly easy some of them can be accessed, will quickly add Colombia to their list of destinations to go.

Piotr Migoń



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