In 1799, with extensive travel permissions from the Spanish government, Alexander von Humboldt and the botanist Aimé Bonpland departed for the Americas on a journey of exploration that would last well into 1804. In writing the “Personal Narrative…”, von Humboldt combined a description of the places and people of their travels with diverse scientific observations; but particularly of plants and animals, geology, weather and astronomy. von Humboldt’s narrative (and Thomasina Ross’s translation) of their adventures is marvelously well written and at times poetically descriptive. Volume I of the “Personal Narrative…”, covers their preparations, departure from Spain, and their travels to the Canary Islands, Tobago, Cumana and vicinity, and Caracas and vicinity in Venezuela.

Alexander von Humboldt was a member of the Prussian aristocracy. He was well educated and as a young man worked as an inspector of mines. After receiving an inheritance from his Mother, he was able to follow his desire to explore and follow scientific pursuits, and was sufficiently wealthy to equip and fund his scientific expeditions. Although not a household name today (unless you live in one of the 18 places named after him), von Humboldt was the best known naturalist of his day, and his published observations and interpretations have a very important place in the history of science. For example, he strongly influenced Charles Darwin. He aimed to find the universal principles that integrate all aspects of nature (the Unity of Nature) rather than to just describe and as such is considered to be the founder of biogeography; and he is recognized as being among the first to describe the effect of human activity on climate.

(written by Gail Timmerman-Vaughan)

Read by Gail Timmerman-Vaughan. Total running time: 22:49:29

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