



Smithsonian

National Museum of Natural History

Guide to the Matthew Stirling collection, 1926-1950

Human Studies Film Archives
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Human Studies Film Archives
Title:	Matthew Stirling collection
Date:	1926-1950
Identifier:	HSFA.1987.04
Creator:	Stirling, Matthew Williams, 1896-1975 Stewart, Richard H. (Richard Hewett), 1901-2004
Extent:	Film reels (9 hours 3 minutes; black-and-white silent sound; 18,296 feet; 16mm) 2 Videocassettes (1 hour 2 minutes; color sound)
Language:	English .

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Received from Marion Stirling Pugh, The National Geographic Society, and the National Anthropological Archives in 1987, 1991, and 2017.

Related Materials

The Matthew and Marion Stirling papers are in the National Anthropological Archives (NAA.2016-24). Film and photographs from the National Geographic Society and Smithsonian Institution archaeological expeditions to Central America are held in the National Geographic Society and the National Anthropological Film Collection in the National Anthropological Archives. Film copies of video materials are held in the Office of Inter-American Affairs records at the National Archives and Records Services.

Processing Information

Titles are supplied by the archivist for untitled films.

Preferred Citation

Matthew Stirling collection, Human Studies Film Archives, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

The collection is open for research. Please contact the archives for information on availability of access copies of audiovisual recordings. Original audiovisual material in the Human Studies Film Archives may not be played.

Conditions Governing Use

Contact the repository for terms of use.

Scope and Contents

Collection consists of film and video created and collected by Matthew Stirling in Papua New Guinea, Mexico, and Panama. Collection also contains annotations (recorded narratives).

Please note that the contents of the collection and the language and terminology used reflect the context and culture of the time of its creation. As an historical document, its contents may be at odds with contemporary views and terminology and considered offensive today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the Smithsonian Institution or Anthropology Archives, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Archaeological expeditions
- Archaeology
- Olmec (archaeological culture)
- Scientific expeditions

Cultures:

- Olmec (archaeological culture)

Names:

- National Geographic Society (U.S.)

Places:

- Central America
- Mexico City (Mexico)
- North America
- Oceania
- Panama
- Papua New Guinea
- Veracruz-Llave (Mexico : State)

Container Listing

Stirling New Guinea expedition

Film reels (4 hours 13 minutes; black-and-white silent; 8502 feet; 16mm)

[Video: Stirling New Guinea Expedition, 1926-1927](#)

Notes: Footage shot during an expedition sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution and the Dutch Committee for Scientific Research. Purpose of the expedition was to conduct ethnological investigations among the remote peoples of central Dutch New Guinea (Irian Jaya). Expedition traveled from Surabaya (east Java) up the Mamberamo River to its confluence with the Rouffaer (Tarika) River where exploration on foot and by airplane continued. Peoples encountered include Takutamesa Papuans along the Mamberamo River and Van Rees Mountains; Sebiri Papuans at expedition camp; Karikai Papuans along the Brown River south of the Van Rees Range, and Dem (Nogullo) Pygmies in the Nassau (Sudirman) Range. Documentation includes: stagings for the expedition in Surabaya; various expedition camps and work done by Dyak laborers and Malaysian convicts pressed into service for the expedition; trading with local people; Papuan material culture, dress, and foodways; Dyaks constructing camps, navigating rivers in dugouts, and dancing for recreation; villages along rivers; expedition fording and crossing rivers; first contact and trading with the Dem at Tombé Village; taking craniometric measurements; villages of Tombé and Damuneru; mock battle and demonstrating method of amputating fingers; house interior; preparations for a Dem feast which includes dancing, killing pigs, and heating rocks; the expedition plane, the Ern, and taking off and landing; and aerial shots over the Nassau and Van Rees Mountains. Cameraman: Richard Peck.

HSFA 1987.4.1

Smithsonian Institution-National Geographic expedition to Panama, 1948-1949

31 minutes (color silent)

Notes: Footage documents the joint archeological expedition led by anthropologist Matthew Stirling to Barriles and Palo Santo, Panama.

HSFA 1987.8.1

Uncovering an Ancient Mexican Temple, circa 1945

Film reels (70 minutes; color silent; 2614 feet; 16mm)

Notes: Edited film shot for a National Geographic Society/Smithsonian Institution expedition to Mexico led by Stirling, director of the Bureau of American Ethnography. Film traces the expedition from Mexico City to an archeological site. Footage includes: Mexico City; the countryside; establishing camp; local fruit and berries, flora, and foods; preparation of local foods for expedition members; local festival with masked dancing; excavating work and unearthing pottery; making pottery using coil technique; earthenware figures, vessels, and masks; and preparing objects for shipping.

HSFA 1991.16.2

Uncovering Mexico's Forgotten Treasures, circa 1945
2 Film reels (54 minutes; color silent; 2000 feet; 16mm)

[Video: Uncovering Mexico's Forgotten Treasures ca. 1940s, circa 1940-1950](#)

Notes: Edited film shot for a National Geographic Society and Smithsonian Institution expedition to Mexico led by Matthew Stirling, Director of the Bureau of American Ethnology.

HSFA 1991.16.4

Hunting Pre-history on Panama's Unknown North Coast, circa 1945
u Film reels (64 minutes; color silent; 2596 feet; 16mm)

Notes: Edited film documents a National Geographic Society/Smithsonian Institution expedition to Panama led by Stirling, director of the Bureau of American Ethnography. Film follows the expedition from Panama City to archeological sites in the countryside. Footage includes murals depicting pre-Columbian life; coastal landscape; countryside; making pottery using coil technique; flora; village women using large mortar and pestle; carving gourd; outlining petroglyphs in chalk; excavating archeological sites; unearthing pottery, pottery figurines, large cache of pottery "ladles," and shards; and sorting and assembling pottery shards.

HSFA 1991.16.7

Exploring Panama's Prehistoric Past, 1950
Film reels (71 minutes; color silent; 2584 feet; 16mm)

Notes: Edited film documents a National Geographic Society/Smithsonian Institution expedition to Panama led by Stirling, director of the Bureau of American Ethnography. Film shows aspects of an expedition to Panama to excavate various sites of pre-historic people. Film includes shipboard activities on the way to Panama; various city, coastal, village, and countryside scenes; aerial views; field camps and life in camp including shower, cooking, and eating meal; excavation work including clearing land, digging trenches with pick axes, and unearthing pottery; transporting, cleaning, and packing pottery; examples of excavated pottery and jewelry; examples of local flora and fauna; local wedding and other celebrations including music and dancing; construction of local building with straw and clay mixture; local bullfight; and cross country travels by horse.

HSFA 1991.16.6

A Treasure Trove of Jade, 1942
1 Videocassette (36 minutes; color sound; 1/2 inch)

Notes: Edited film focuses on the National Geographic Society and Smithsonian Institution Expedition to Veracruz, Mexico led by Matthew W. Stirling, Smithsonian Institution archeologist. Shown is excavating Cerros de Las Mesas site near Piedras Negras. The various excavations filmed show clearing jungle to access earth mounds; uncovering, cleaning and documenting the large stone heads and stelae; a plaza where stones once stood; pottery vessels containing male skulls; uncovering clay artifacts from pots including masks and figurines; and on the last day in camp uncovering the,

at the time, largest cache of Pre-Columbian jade artifacts including ear plugs, human figures and beads. Additionally, excavating in trenches is explained and shown as the workers dig up to 20 feet into the ground including a burial find. Also at Cerros de las Mesas, the film shows constructing the camp using local construction and thatched roofs; a fiesta hosted by local peoples including music and dance; tamale making; and agriculture and artifacts of pottery and parchment fragments. Included with the archeology is traveling on unpaved roads in the station wagon; new grade school at Tapachula; Tehuantepec potters; market and making of palm fiber mats and hats in town near Tehuantepec; Acapulco; Mexico City Zocalo; and Aztec site Teotihuacan. Film was produced by the Office of Inter-American Affairs and narration was written by Matthew W. Stirling.

HSFA 2017.10.1

Jungle Quest for the Great Stone Heads, circa 1942

1 Videocassette (26 minutes; color sound; 1/2 inch)

Notes: Edited film focuses on the National Geographic Society and Smithsonian Institution Expedition to Veracruz, Mexico lead by Matthew W. Stirling, Smithsonian Institution archeologist. Shown is excavating Cerros de Las Mesas site near Piedras Negras. This film documents the expedition's second season in Veracruz excavating the colossal basalt stone heads and altars at La Venta. Other film footage of archeological interest is digging the trenches and removing the clay soil; earth mounds; uncovering and cleaning stone head and stelae. Film also includes travel to Tres Zapotes and the camp. Scenes of local village life include fishing; local foods (iguana, tortillas and green coconut); the arroyo, the source of water for the village; rag dolls made for the village children; pottery making; and huapango dancing.

HSFA 2017.10.2