



All photos accompanying this article by A. C. Langlois. Above: *Malortiea latisecta* (*Reinhardtia latisecta*), Stann Creek Valley.

A Trip to British Honduras

to see and photograph the palm "with the windows in it leaves"

M. A. Langlois

After becoming interested in palms our great desire for many years had been to see the palm "with the windows in its leaves," at one time listed under the genus *Reinhardtia*, but now usually known as *Malortia*.

Dr. Max Burret of Germany, a well-known palm botanist, had been sending us his bulletins on palms for years and in one of them he described certain palms from British Honduras, among which were two palms of this genus, the *Reinhardtia latisepta* and the *R. gracilior*. Also palms of interest mentioned were the *Schippia*, *Asterogyne*, *Calyptogyne* and *Hexoptea*. All of these were new to us and we wanted not only to see them but to photograph them, so we packed up our bags for British Honduras.

Through the kindness of the Forestry Department in Belize we were invited to spend a short time at one of their mahogany camps, Camp Silk Grass, located in the depths of the virgin forest where we lived in an Indian hut, the sides of which were built of the stems of the *Paurotis Wrightii* and the roof of which of the leaves of the Cohune palm, *Orbignya Cohune*.

We had a wonderful week there. Every day we went into the forest and collected and photographed *Geonomas*, *Chamaedorcas*, *Euterpe*, *Eleutheropetalum* and *Synchanthus*.

The day before we left the camp we had the great fortune to see a "Cohune ridge." This is a term given to a stand of Cohune palms where they grow to the exclusion of all other vegetation. This wonderful sight is best described by a Mr. R. Temple, who was Chief Justice of British Honduras in the year 1854—

"The Cohune resembles in appearance

the Cocoa-nut Palm, but it is not nearly so high as that tree, and the trunk is considerably thicker. The order and regularity in which it grows is surprising. I have seen rows of it presenting the appearance of having been planted with the greatest care, long avenues which clearly resemble the nave and aisles of a cathedral, the arched leaves meeting overhead and producing an exact imitation of the vaulted roofs, and if the sun was declining, the horizontal rays, shining at intervals through one side of the avenue, created the splendid effulgence of the most richly painted window."

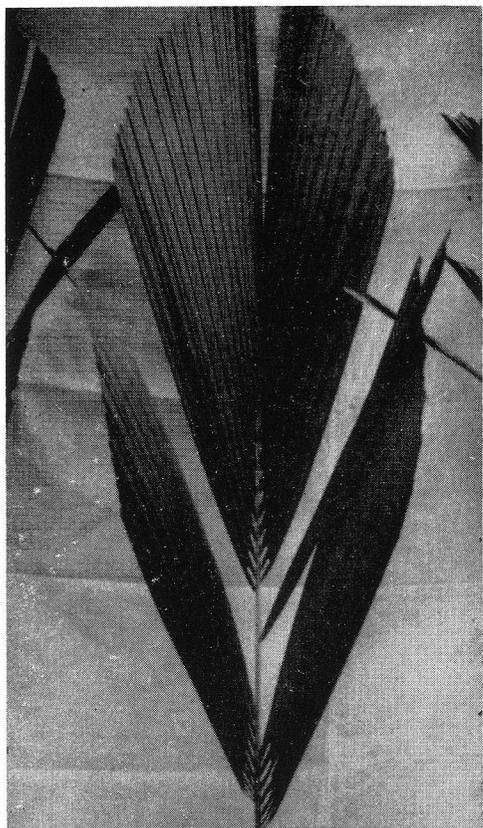
Mr. J. H. Faber, Crown Surveyor in the same year, writes:

"The cohune-trees grow at an average distance of fifty yards from one another, thereby forming arches of evergreens, which soften the ardent rays of the tropical sun, and give a grand air to these forests, the silence of which is only broken by the twitter of bright plumaged birds, or the solitary cries of some wild mammal roaming in the wilderness."

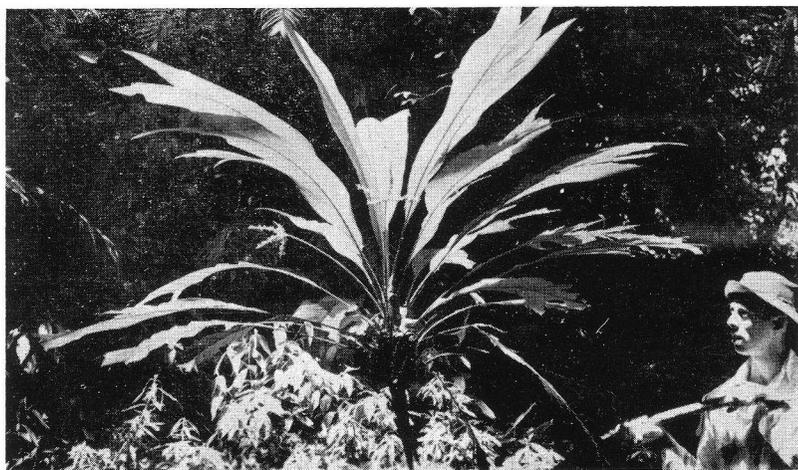
Regardless of all these wonderful sights we had not yet seen our *Reinhardtia*, but were not surprised or disappointed as it had been described by Dr. Burret as located by William Schipp in the Stann Creek Valley at Mile 19, so we went back to Stann Creek and lived with the Agricultural Officer and his wife who were extremely kind to us. (There was no hotel or boarding house in Stann Creek. This we did not know.)

By this time the young forestry man in charge of Camp Silk Grass had become interested in what we were doing and being a botanist had been able to help us with some of our determinations. Therefore he decided to come down to Stann

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Showing the leaf of the *M. latisecta* with its "windows."



Asterogyne Martiana—a full grown plant with fruiting spadix.

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Creek not only for the weekend as he usually did but to stay over and help us locate the Reinhardtia.

We were able to hire a taxi and with great expectations entered the forest at Mile 19 in the Valley. It was lovely — breathtakingly lovely—tall trees, ferns, palms, and a stream. Running water was there and all it conjures up when flowing through the depths of a forest. We crossed over this stream by means of a huge log as thick through as a man's body, and there before our unbelieving eyes was the palm we had come to British Honduras to see. It was more beautiful than we could ever have imagined. In all its parts it was a perfect gem. In leaf of the deepest green, in fruit the colour of a ruby, in fruiting stem the colour of blackest night, in habit of growth graceful beyond description. The small picture gives but a small idea of its loveliness.

We were perhaps slightly disappointed at the size of the "windows." I do not know what we had expected to find, but we had thought that the windows would be larger and more spectacular; however, in the picture of the leaf of this palm will be seen these fascinating little "windows."

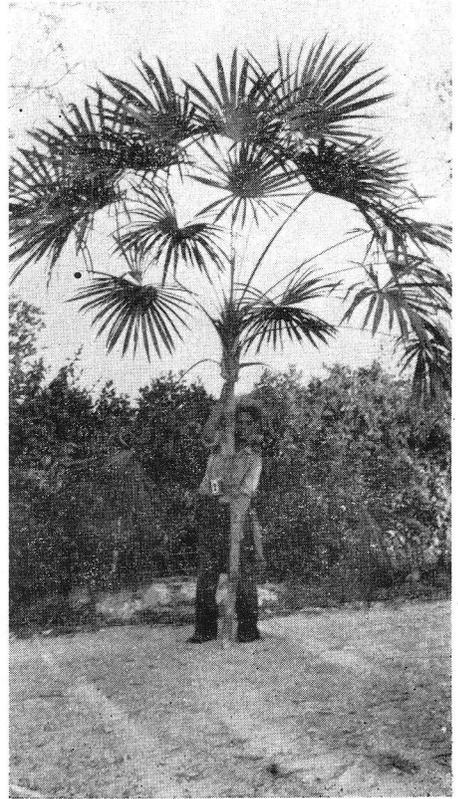
What was the most spectacular thing about the palm was its general appearance. It is a suckering palm that attains a height of fifteen to twenty feet, and in the quiet and hush of the dense forest each leaf is perfect, crisp and of the greenest green, and with its bright red fruit hanging from a jet-black fruiting spadix it is a lovely thing on which to feast one's eyes.

To make our joy complete that morning we found also the *Asterogyne Martiana*, a lovely little palm. We were very happy that we recognized it immediately from the description. Very encouraged, we then made a thorough search for the other Reinhardtia described, the *R. gracilior*. We never found it.

The new genus, *Schippia*, was also described as being found in the vicinity of Mile 19 and we looked for that, but failed to find it in the first few days; however,

on the last day, Moody, my Indian boy, and I went in search of it. The husband had to remain at the Agricultural Station to pack up the plants we had collected in the forest.

This boy, Moody, had been loaned to us by the Forestry Department when at Camp Silk Grass and had made himself



Tree of *Schippia concolor* which was cut and brought in by Moody for photographing.

indispensable to us, and was our faithful friend and helper up to the very last moment when our boat weighed anchor to leave British Honduras. In this effort to find the *Schippia*, Moody made me climb three waterfalls without finding anything, so when he promised me faithfully that there was a stand of them back of the "hill to the west," I told him to go by himself and bring me one to photo-

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The flowering spadix of the *Schippia concolor* which resembles somewhat that of the *Cryosophila*.



The reclining trunks of the *Opsandra* found on the hillside of Jones' Landing, Sabun River.

graph, also if possible a couple of seedlings to take home to Nassau to plant. This was a tall order, but I did not expect anything. After an hour or so of waiting Moody returned with a palm on his shoulder and two seedlings in his hand. (See the photograph with Moody and his palm.)

It was the *Schippia*. It fortunately had a flowering spadix which was later determined by Dr. Bailey to be that of the *Schippia*.

After our return to Belize we went into the north country and saw and photographed the *Acrocomia belizensis* and the *Cryosophila argentea*.

One day we took a trip up the Sabun River in quest of the Hexopetion, which our Moody had promised us we should find there. (Later we discovered his family lived on the Sabun and it was one way to visit them.)

We did not find the Hexopetion, but at Jones' Landing we found an *Opsandra* growing on a hillside and owing to lack of soil there the trunks were reclining as shown in the picture. The *Opsandra Maya* had been described by Dr. Cook from Guatemala and Dr. Bailey

felt that this palm of the Sabun River might be a new species. Material was sent him by the Forestry Department, but no definite conclusions were reached as far as we know. This tree is growing and fruiting at The Retreat should any botanist wish to determine whether it is a new species or Dr. Cook's *O. Maya*.

We are grateful to Moody for taking us up the Sabun. This river winds its way through limestone cliffs, and on its banks grew bamboos and many flowering trees having flowers of yellow, blue, white, pink and red. The bottom of the river was clear sand and the water blue, and the canoe slipped quietly through the water. It was a lovely day.

So ended our trip to British Honduras and even though we were unable to grow the *Reinhardtia latisecta* in The Retreat garden our memories of it are very pleasant and we hope someone, who has conditions more suitable to its well-being will some day bring it out into cultivation where it can be admired by many or all palm lovers.

— The Retreat, Nassau,
November, 1956

HOW TO JOIN THE SOCIETY

Anyone interested in the palms may join the Society by notifying the Secretary of his wish to be enrolled.

The society has no fixed dues at present, for moderate dues, with the still small membership, would not produce enough revenue to pay all expenses of operation. It is relying for its support upon voluntary contributions from the members in such amounts as their circumstances warrant. This method of support is being tried out for an experimental period of one year. Nevertheless the Society must have funds in order to subsist at all, and prospective members are urged to send a check, if able to do so, at the time of their application for membership—which would obviate the necessity for solicitation, thus saving time and expense.

Please address the Secretary: Mrs. Claire Hargert, 195 Halifax Drive, Ormond Beach, Florida.