

With American Sportsman's Crew

Burton Journeys To South American Jungles

Five years before "Roots" sent thousands of blacks to Africa in search of their past, Dr. S. Allen Counter of Harvard University was hacking through the jungles of South America to find descendants of rebel slaves and a missing link in black history.

Late last week Dr. Counter made his fifth expedition to those jungles where he has already discovered a group of former-slave tribes living an African tribal life reminiscent of Africa 300 years ago.

LaVar Burton, who played the young Kunta Kinte in ABC-TV's highly acclaimed series, "Roots," and ABC Sports' "The American Sportsman" crew headed by producer Bob Duncan is accompanying Dr. Counter on this unusual trip to meet these former slaves who have become known as the Auconer warriors of Surinam.

"The American Sportsman" hopes to shoot unprecedented footage of a peaceful interreaction between Africans and the indigenous jungle Indians who taught the Auconers much about survival in the Amazon Rain Forest, and will air its findings on next season's (January-April) series. Burton will serve as narrator

on the program and relate his own experiences with these warriors.

In explaining the purposes of the expedition, Duncan said that 300 years ago many Africans, brought to Dutch plantations in Surinam, escaped into the jungles and succeeded where Kunta had failed in gaining his freedom. Vanishing into a vast jungle similar to what they had known in Africa, the slaves regrouped into five major tribes, known as the Auconers, and waged a brilliant guerilla war against the Dutch. The hundred-year war ended when the Auconers annihilated a mercenary force of 1500, forcing the Dutch to

seek and receive peace treaties.

Dr. Counter, the first North American black to meet the rebels, found the Auconers fiercely proud of their history, often reenacting century-old battles in ritual dances. On his four trips, Dr. Counter has collected valuable data on herbal medicine, the correlations of diet to nervous system disorders and, most importantly, knowledge of uprooted Africans who developed their own society based upon freedom.

Burton and Dr. Counter will concentrate on the remarkable wilderness skills that enabled the escaped slaves to

survive in the forbidding jungle. "The American Sportsman" footage could prove invaluable to future generations as the culture of the Auconers and all wild Indians of the jungle is being destroyed in a manner sadly reminiscent to that of North America 200 years ago.

The crew plans to spend two weeks with the Indians, beginning with a flight to Parimari-bo, the capital of Surinam. From there a small plane flies the group into the interior where they will be met by Auconer tribesmen in dugout canoes to continue their journey upriver and deep into the wilderness.

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