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I recently attended a camp where a prominent professor was offering a lecture titled: "Alexander von Humboldt: The last man who knew everything." Since I am from Humboldt County and knew next to nothing about our namesake, I decided to attend.

In about 30 minutes Dr. Johanson convinced me that while Humboldt did not know everything, he came close—. His full name was Friedrich Wilhelm Heinrich Alexander von Humboldt: a long name, but here's his story in short form: Humboldt was born in Prussia in 1769. For some reason he was born with an itching curiosity about nature, and equally passionate itch to travel. No doubt it spurred his wanderlust when he became close friends with Georg Forster, who had been a companion to Captain James Cook on Cook's second voyage.

The most famous of Humboldt's explorations occurred in 1799 when he traveled with a Frenchman named Aimé Bonpland to America. Crossing the Atlantic, Humboldt explored volcanoes, observed meteor showers, discovered new bird species and finally arrived at the coast of Venezuela. The two of them explored the course of the Orinoco River and its tributaries traveling over 1700 miles through this wild and mostly uninhabited region. What did Humboldt do for those many months and miles besides swat mosquitoes and avoid alligators? He chronicled countless new species of plant and animal life in the jungles, discovered the connection between the Orinoco and Amazon River Basins, documented several native tribes, and got bit by some eels that delivered an almost lethal electric shock. He next traveled to Cuba, then back to Columbia where they climbed into the Andes to an elevation of about 19,000 feet—higher than any human had ever climbed at the time. A tempestuous sea voyage brought them to Mexico and for good measure Humboldt decided to visit the United States and talk to President Thomas Jefferson. Along with making countless observations, Humboldt was asked for advice on what kinds of crops would flourish in Cuba, calculated a thumbnail sketch census for Mexico, and compiled huge collections of flora and fauna everywhere he went.

When Humboldt finally returned to Europe he was one of the most acclaimed citizens on the Continent. He was honored by King Frederic William III of Prussia and inducted into almost every Academy of Science on the planet. He returned to Paris, which he considered his true home, but finally was lured to the city of Berlin by financial and political necessity. He mentored countless other scientists, lectured widely, seldom using notes, and published a huge amount of his theories, discoveries and findings. In the end, he'd spent most of his large inheritance on his travels and publications.

Perhaps Humboldt's life and accomplishments can best be summarized <sup>in his own words:</sup> ~~by his statement:~~ "Nature is an inexhaustible source of investigation." If only we can help our ~~young~~ pupils get the Humboldt-itch for learning, we could make this county worthy of our namesake.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment