

A tentative filmography of Luiz Thomaz Reis, with special reference to footage concerning indigenous groups.

Paul Henley (April 2020)

Dates are dates of release, when known, otherwise they are dates of production. Unless otherwise stated, all films are monochrome, silent and with Portuguese titles and intertitles. Sources include:

- Lasmar, Denise Portugal (2011) *O Acervo Imagético da Comissão Rondon: no Museu do Índio 1890-1938*, 2nd edn. Rio de Janeiro: Museu do Índio – FUNAI.
- Lobato, Ana (2015) Da exibição dos filmes da Comissão Rondon. *Doc On-line* 18: 300-322. Available on-line at http://doc.ubi.pt/18/artigos_5.pdf
- Reis, Luiz Thomaz (2011) Relatório. In Denise Portugal Lasmar, *O Acervo Imagético da Comissão Rondon: no Museu do Índio 1890-1938*. 2nd edn. pp. 266-310. Rio de Janeiro: Museu do Índio.
- Rodrigues, João Carlos (1982) *Major Luiz Thomaz Reis: o cinegrafista de Rondon*. Embrafilme.
- Roosevelt, Theodore (1914) *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*. New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons.
- Sá Pereira, Nellie (1982) Filmografia de Luiz Thomaz Reis. In João Carlos Rodrigues, *Major Luiz Thomaz Reis: o cinegrafista de Rondon*, pp. 9-11. Embrafilme.

In 1910, Luiz Thomaz Reis, then a second lieutenant in the Brazilian army, was appointed to the government commission charged with the 'opening up' of the interior of western Brazil. This had been set up in 1900 and was headed by the then Colonel and later General Cândido Rondon, already a leading figure in Brazilian public life. Its official name was "Comissão de Linhas Telegráficas e Estratégicas do Matto Grosso ao Amazonas", but on account of Rondon's high personal profile, as well as for brevity, it was, and is, almost invariably referred to as the 'Rondon Commission'.

Reis's initial appointment was to the 'Design Section', which was responsible for archiving and distributing information about the work of the commission, including the substantial quantity of photographs that Rondon considered essential to the commission's work. Although there is no evidence that Reis had any previous experience as a photographer, let alone as a film-maker, in 1912, Rondon asked him to become the head of an independent Photography and Cinematography Section and sent him to Europe to buy the necessary equipment and film stock [Lasmar 2011: 93]

The following year, 1913, Rondon gave Reis his first commission, which was to make a film about the interior of the state of Mato Grosso, then largely unknown not merely to the general public of the large cities of the eastern seaboard of Brazil but even to many people who lived within the state itself.

1915 – ***Expedição Científica Roosevelt- Rondon*** – lost, duration unknown. Often listed as Reis's first work, this film concerns the first stage of the journey made between December 1913 and April 1914 by the former US President Theodore Roosevelt through Mato Grosso and the Amazon region of Brazil in the company of Reis's patron, Colonel Rondon. It appears to have been made opportunistically, when Reis was already in Mato Grosso working on the more general commission to make a film about the region [Lasmar 2011: 226].

Although the film itself appears to be lost, there is a summary of its content in an official Rondon Commission report dating from 1916. This suggests that it mostly concerned the logistics of the expedition and Roosevelt's hunting adventures: there is no mention of any indigenous groups and only limited references to features of the natural environment.

Reis appears to have gone to Buenos Aires to meet Roosevelt in mid-December 1913 and then followed him, first to Asunción and then up the Paraguay River to the Brazilian frontier which was where Roosevelt first met up with Rondon. The expedition then proceeded north on the Paraguay, visiting Corumbá and making various hunting side-trips on the Taquary and São Lourenço rivers along the way, before eventually arriving at Cáceres on the upper Paraguay on 5 January 1914. From there, they continued north on the Sepotuba River, a tributary of the Paraguay, to Tapirapuã, where the expedition disembarked and started on an overland journey through the Serra dos Parecis [see Lasmar 2011: 260].

According to the summary in the Rondon Commission report, the film ends here, in a seemingly abrupt manner since the expedition is left in mid-journey between Tapirapuã and its next major stopping point, Utiariti, a Paresí village and Rondon Commission base some distance further to the north on the Papagaio River.

Moreover, as Roosevelt would describe in his book about the expedition, *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*, published later in 1914, the phase covered in Reis's film represented only a very small part of the overall trajectory of the Roosevelt-Rondon expedition. Roosevelt dates the arrival at Tapirapuã as 16 January 1914, but the expedition would go on until the end of April, and after it left Utiariti, it would undergo many much more arduous experiences as it descended the Rio da Dúvida, or River of Doubt, a tributary of the Juruena. In recognition of the achievement of making this descent, Rondon would rechristen this river as Rio Roosevelt.

Intriguingly, at no point in his account of the initial phase of the journey up the Paraguay does Roosevelt mention either Reis or his filming, though he does frequently refer to his fellow travellers, even mentioning the humblest porters, watermen and hunting guides by name. This suggests that there must have been some problem about Reis' coverage of Roosevelt's activities. Certainly, Reis later complained that Roosevelt was always

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seeking to hide from his camera. Reis was also unhappy with the speed at which the Roosevelt expedition was moving because this did not allow him to do his work properly [Lasmar 2011, p.226].

Coupled with the abrupt ending in mid-journey, all this suggests that this film was a project that was abandoned when it became clear that Reis's objectives and those of the Roosevelt expedition were incompatible. If so, it must have been decision that was fully endorsed by Rondon.

But although the project may have been abandoned prematurely, the footage nevertheless appears to have been edited since the film was exhibited publicly for a brief period in Rio de Janeiro in 1915, as well as in Manaus and São Paulo. However, unlike *Os Sertões de Matto-Grosso*, which was the outcome from Reis's more general commission at the time, it was not a great box-office success.

1915 – ***Os Sertões de Matto-Grosso*** - duration unknown. Although the production of the apparently aborted Roosevelt-Rondon expedition film may have preceded it in time, this film is generally regarded as Reis's first major film. It offers an account of various different expeditions led by Rondon in the region of the Serra dos Parecis, a high savanna area that serves as the watershed between the Paraguay and Amazon river basins. As such, it served as a sort of model for most of Reis's subsequent films and was probably also his most successful in terms of popular acclaim.

Unfortunately, apart from a few fragments that may be viewed in the Museo do Índio, this film is also lost. However, the remaining contents and overall structure of the film can be discerned on the basis of the intertitles preserved in a Rondon Commission report from 1916 (reproduced in Lasmar 2011: 260-263).

These intertitles indicate that the film consisted of six parts, and was therefore probably quite long, perhaps an hour in duration or even more. The first two parts concern the journey from Tapirapuã, on the upper Sepotuba River, across the Serra dos Parecis to Utiariti. The subject matter of these two parts primarily concerns the logistics of the expedition itself and the natural environment. The second two parts mostly concern the Paresí of Utiariti, whereas the last two mostly chronicle Rondon's encounters with various different groups of Nambikwara: first, those whom he encountered around a Rondon Commission post on the Juína river and at the Três Buritis ranch, both lying at some distance to the northwest of Utiariti, and then back at Utiariti, where the Nambikwara are welcomed by the Paresí, even though they are traditional enemies. Right at the end of the film, Rondon goes on a visit to yet another Nambikwara village on the headwaters of the Juruena river.

It is probably significant that *Os Sertões* begins shortly before the point where the coverage of the Roosevelt's expedition ends in the earlier film, i.e. at Tapirapuã. Though some sources date the production of *Os Sertões* to 1913, or even to 1912, this suggests that Reis began to shoot the material that would appear in *Os Sertões* around the time that he stepped back from the Roosevelt film project, i.e. in January 1914.

However, the intertitles also indicate that after Tapirapuã, the *Os Sertões* production followed much the same route as the Roosevelt party, as described by Roosevelt himself in his book. Both groups went to Utiariti via the small town of Aldeia Queimada, visited the Salto Bello and Utiariti waterfalls, and had extensive dealings with the Paresí once they arrived in Utiariti. As Rondon features in both the book and the intertitles, it would seem that the two groups were in fact still travelling together.

This is also suggested by the fact that the existing fragments of *Os Sertões* present very particular situations that are also described by Roosevelt. Thus, for example, Roosevelt refers to the distribution of calico cloth to Paresí women by Rondon at Utiariti, adding that this was much appreciated by the women. One of the *Os Sertões* film fragments also shows the distribution of gifts to Paresí women. Although this is being carried out by Reis rather than by Rondon, and does not involve cloth as such, there are several photographs of Rondon *and* Reis together giving calico dresses and other gifts to this same group of women [see Lasmar 2011: 212, 213, 215]

This film fragment is also accompanied by an intertitle that declares, "The Roosevelt party gave the women some calico dresses – and they thought it was Christmas". This intertitle is in English and was probably made when Reis took a film based on extracts from this earlier works to the US in 1918 in an (unsuccessful) attempt to find a distributor (see below). This suggests that the rupture between the Roosevelt film project and filming for what would become *Os Sertões* was not fully complete until after this point.

After Utiariti, the two groups do indeed appear to have gone their separate ways. In his book, Roosevelt records that his group headed off in a westerly direction on 3 February 1914, making their way towards the headwaters of the River of Doubt, which they would then descend. By contrast, the intertitles suggest that the latter part of *Os Sertões* was shot, initially, at the telegraph post on the Juína river, which lies in a somewhat more northerly direction. Although part of *Os Sertões* was shot at the Três Buritis ranch, which was also visited by the Roosevelt party, thereafter the action of *Os Sertões* returns to Utiariti, before moving on to a Nambikwara village on the Juruena River.

However, Rondon is prominent both in Roosevelt's account of his journey to the River of Doubt and in the last two parts of *Os Sertões*. Clearly, he could not have been in two places at the same time, so the Roosevelt

journey to the River of Doubt and the shooting of the final two parts of *Os Sertões* could not have been simultaneous. The most likely hypothesis is that the last two parts of *Os Sertões* were shot sometime later in 1914, after Rondon had returned from the Roosevelt expedition.

When *Os Sertões* was screened publicly in Rio de Janeiro in 1915, it was a huge box office success, and was subsequently distributed around many other parts of the country. Reis himself took a very active part in promoting the circulation of the film. When he returned to Mato Grosso to make *Rituais e festas borôro* in 1916, he took a copy *Os Sertões* with him and screened it in Corumbá and possibly also Cuiabá in order to raise money for his new production.

1916 – ***Matto Grosso em revista*** - duration unknown. This was based on material shot on his way to and from São Lourenço to shoot the material for *Rituais e festas borôro* (see below) This included various scenes around Corumbá on the way there, probably in June 1916, and a military display on the outskirts of Cuiabá, shot on the way back in October. Reis claimed that he made this film in response to the concern expressed by the audience attending the screening in Corumbá of *Os Sertões* that this film suggested that in Mato Grosso, there was nothing to be found except natural phenomena and indigenous people. But although he undertook to show this material in the coastal cities of Brazil, in fact it seems that it was only in Mato Grosso itself that he screened this material (see Reiss 2011: 268, 282-283; Lobato 2015: 307-308).

1917 - ***Rituais e festas borôro*** – 31 min. Shot between July and October 1916 at the now disappeared Eastern Bororo village of São Lourenço. Discussed at length at <https://www.silenttimemachine.net/films/amazonia-films/ritos-e-festas-bororos/>

1917 - ***Indústria da borracha em Mato Grosso e Amazonas***. This may be an alternative name for ***Ouro Branco*** made for the Asensi Rubber Company based on the Jiparaná river, a tributary of the Madeira in Rondônia. The film was made to repay the company for the help that it had given to the SPI. Reis had a very high opinion of this film, based on 2000m of footage (approx. 2 hours) but now apparently lost [Lasmar 2011:153].

1918 – ***Wilderness***. Invited by the National Geographic Society in 1918, Reis travelled to the US with a film entitled *Wilderness*, clearly a reference to Roosevelt's book, which had sold very well. This film had five or possibly six parts (it is possible that Reis would have re-edited the film various time in accordance with the audience that he anticipated at a given venue): the first part was about Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the second was a sequence from the Roosevelt expedition material (probably the scene of distribution of gifts among Paresí women, described above), the third was a sequence of the Paresí rubber ball game while the fourth may also have

been a Paresí sequence. The final two appear to have been sequences shot for the Bororo funeral film, *Rituais e Festas Borôro*.

However, despite the fact that it was screened to an audience of 2800 at the Carnegie Hall in New York with Roosevelt himself giving a preliminary talk, Reis returned to Brazil without managing to get the film into commercial distribution [Rodrigues 1982: 2-3; Lobato 2015: 310-314].

1920 – ***De Santa Cruz***. This appears to have been a reversion of *Wilderness* for distribution in Brazil. This had five parts, including two new parts, one about a jaguar hunt and the other about the Iguazu falls, both of which Reis had shot in late 1916 or early 1917. However, which of the parts of *Wilderness* were sacrificed to make way for these is not clear: Rodrigues' suggestion that *De Santa Cruz* was 'less scientific' suggests that it might have been parts relating to the Bororo funeral but Lobato suggests that it was the part on Rio and São Paulo that was pulled [Rodrigues 1982: 3, Lobato 2015: 311].

1922 – ***Inspeção no Nordeste*** - Reis accompanied General Rondon on his tour of inspection around the Brazilian Northeast at a time of great famine and shot 4000 metres of (approx 3.5 hours at 16fps). It is not clear if this material was ever cut into a film. The footage is seemingly lost [Lasmar 2011: 153]

1926 - ***Ronuro, Selvas do Xingu*** – 15 min. Reis went on an army expedition overland from Cuiabá to the headwaters of the Xingu, led by Captain Vicente Vasconcelos, July-September 1924. He was assisted by Miguel Mendes. He shot 2000 metres (almost 2 hours), including sequences of Bakairi, Kamayura, Nahukuá and some other (here unnamed) Xinguano groups on the Curisevu and Culuene rivers. It ends with a heart-rending scene in which the beautiful Xinguanos are dressed in absurdly ill-fitting clothes by the expedition. This film was screened at a geography congress that took place in Vitória, capital of Espiritu Santo state in southeast Brazil in 1926 but does not appear to have been exhibited commercially. Later, however, it was incorporated into the first section of *Ao Redor do Brasil* (1933) [Lobato 2015: 315]

1926 – ***Operações de guerra*** - Reis shot 4000 metres (approx 3.5 hours) in 1924-25 when he accompanied Rondon during the campaign that the latter led against a military uprising that had originated in São Paulo, but whose principal participants had subsequently taken refuge in Paraná State. There is a record of this being screened at a leading cinema in Rio de Janeiro in 1926 but it is now apparently lost Lasmar 2011:55; Lobato 2015: 315]

In 1927, Reis followed Rondon to the Inspeção de Fronteiras. During the first year, they worked in the north of Brazil, in the states of Pará, Amapá and

Roraima. Their base was Fazenda São Marcos, at the junction of the Urariquera and the Takutu, tributaries of the Rio Branco [Lasmar 2011: 55].

- 1928 - ***Viagem ao Roroimã*** – 34 min. Production: Inspetoria de Fronteiras. Mostly about the expedition itself (which was supported by 180 Makushi porters, both men and women), but there are some beautiful individual portraits of Makushi, and also a scene of Rondon toasting with a Taulipang chief. Certainly shot in 1927 because a photograph shows Rondon and Reis posing with the Brazilian flag on the summit of Mt. Roraima with the date 29 October 1927 written on the rock behind them [see Lasmar 2011: 56]. By the time they got back to Rio and edited the film, it would probably have been 1928 before it was released.

In the second year, between July 1928 and February 1929, Rondon and Reis inspected frontiers further east, along the frontiers with Dutch and French Guiana. (At the same time, José Louro Fernandes, formerly Reis' assistant went to the upper Rio Negro and shot the material for his own film No Rio Içana).

- 1928-29 - ***Parimã, Fronteiras do Brasil*** – 32 min. Production: Inspetoria de Fronteiras. Here Lasmar's information on the production schedule is contradictory, variously dating this film as 1927 and 1928-29 [compare p.55 with p.254], but the latter seems more likely. The film consists of two separate expeditions: first to the Oiapoque river, demarcating the boundary between French Guiana and Brazil. Here they meet Saramaca people (descendants of escaped slaves). There is also a brief encounter with an indigenous community. The geographical location suggests they would have been the Wayapi, but the material is very superficial, consisting of no more than a few staged portraits.

Halfway through film there is a break, the main title is repeated and a second expedition begins, this time moving up the rapids of the Rio Branco, where they eventually meet another indigenous group, probably Trio, who mostly live in Surinam. This sequence is a little longer and again there are some interesting portraits of individuals, but it only shows a first contact situation.

In the third year of Rondon's appointment at the Inspetoria de Fronteiras project, Reis accompanied him on a trip starting from Cuiabá in September 1929, and proceeding down the Araguaia to the Tocantins and from there on to Belém and Manaus. During this trip they shot:

- 1929 - ***Os Carajas*** – 10 mins. This material was shot in and around the SPI post of the Ilha do Bananal in the Araguaia River. As well as shots of the post and the school etc., it shows the impressive 'Aruan' dance, which features elaborately masked dancers performing to music from long paired flutes reminiscent of those played in the Xingu. It is not clear whether this

material was ever screened in public as a free-standing film, but it was certainly later incorporated into *Ao Redor do Brasil*.

Reis and Rondon then set out again on an inspection of the frontiers in Acre, Rondônia and Mato Grosso, reaching as far as the frontiers with Paraguay (where they arrived at the end of August 1930) and then eventually Argentina. It was during this phase of the journey that they shot:

1930 – ***Posto Alves de Barros*** – 17 min. Production: SPI. This post is located in what is now Mato Grosso do Sul. However, apart from some preliminary shots of Caduveo in their Sunday best, there are no sequences of indigenous groups.

1931 – ***Matto Grosso e Paraná: Fronteiras com o Paraguay e Argentina*** – 17 min. Production SPI. The only meeting with indigenous people is a visit to a school at a Posto Indigena for the 'Caiuás', a generic term for Guaraní groups now known as Kaiowa and Nandeva.

1933 – ***Ao Redor do Brasil*** – 80 min. This represents a sort of compilation of material from a number of different expeditions in the period 1924-1930 on which Reis had worked as the official cameraperson. It was commercially released in São Paulo in 1933. However, although it is a technically accomplished film, the references to indigenous groups are scattered through the film and are all relatively brief and superficial.

The film begins with the material from the 1924 expedition to the Ronuro River, including various shots of the Bakairi and the Xinguanos, while about half way through, there is a short though interesting sequence on the Karajá, based on the footage that Reis shot for his 1929 film for the Inspetoria de Fronteiras.

The most extended sequence occurs at about 70 minutes, and concerns Rondon's meeting, probably in early 1930, with a group of Nambikwara at Porto Amarante, on the Rio Cabixis, near the town of Vilhena. [NB this is clearly a different group of Nambikwara to those whom Rondon had encountered in the 1915 film, *Os Sertões de Matto-Grosso*]. But this consists of no more than a series of portraits, albeit striking, of the Nambikwara who have gathered for the meeting with Rondon. This sequence is followed by a brief visit to a Posto Indigena, where Pakaas Novas (now known as Wari') are shown pounding grain or hoeing, all dressed in European-style clothing.

1938 – ***Inspetoria Especial de Fronteiras*** – 99 mins. Production: Ministério da Guerra. This is a long film that follows Colonel Ferreira da Cunha, who had succeeded Rondon as the Inspector of Frontiers, as he travels up the Rio Negro in 1938 to visit frontiers with Venezuela and Colombia. Reis was assisted by Charlotte Rosenbaum, one of the first women to play a significant role in Brazilian documentary film-making. The film mostly

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consists of a series of visits to schools, missions, military parades etc. There are only a brief few minutes, right at the end of the film, of dancing in a Tuyuka village on the Rio Tiquié, on the Colombian side of the frontier.