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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Coca Bitters—Numbing the Fatigue Rather Than the Pain



Historically, the debilitating, recurring fevers of malaria were remedied with cinchona (quinine vs. shivering) and coca (cocaine vs. fatigue)—botanically, a bark and a leaf, respectively. However, quinine has direct antimalarial properties, which coca lacks. This reality did not prevent New York City's Quichua [*sic*] Coca Company from falsely advertising the malaria-fighting powers of pharmaceuticals and beverages mixed with the company's Coca Bitters. The printer's proof (*above*) of the logo for those bitters trademarked a presumably cocaine-driven Quechuan Amerindian hiking through Peruvian jungle carting a seated man whose chair was lashed to the tireless porter's forehead and waist. So, 5 yr before Karl Koller's research on the numbing properties of topical cocaine, Coca Bitters were peddled in 1879 as socially acceptable stimulants for numbing the effects of fatigue. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists' Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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