



MAY - AUGUST, 2002

NEWSLETTER

STEP UP TO THE PLATE

by George Hampson

The St. Croix Hiking Association and friends went to St. Thomas aboard the Fast Ferry on April 7 in order to hike the newly opened Magens Bay Trail.

Everything went according to plan until we returned to the dock for our return trip to St. Croix when we were told by the counter attendants that management had decided not to send the ferry to St. Thomas to pick us up, because of rough weather. We were further informed that, in keeping with the Company's policy which was written on the back of the ticket, "the company is not responsible for trip cancellations", and that a part of our fare would be refunded and we would then have to find an alternative means of returning to St. Croix! This was totally unacceptable to us, and in most cases, impossible. Hikers, as a rule, do not go into the bush with excess cash.

Fifteen St. Croix students and their chaperones, who had gone over to St. Thomas to play softball, accepted the offer and left, leaving us to stand up for our rights. Some four hours later a ferry from St. John came to the rescue and brought us safely home. "All's well that ends well"? Not in this case!

Because of the poor performance of the Fast Ferry we had already postponed this hike which was to have been a part of the St. Thomas Transfer Day celebration, when the company announced that it was interrupting service in order "to prepare for the Carnival season".

While I do not question the wisdom of cancelling trips when the weather is bad, I believe that the company should be obligated, and compelled by the Licensing authorities, to complete a round trip whenever a round-trip ticket is bought, by having a contingency plan whenever the boat breaks down, as it so often does, or when the state-of-the art, technologically superior ferry is unable to brave the waters between St. Croix and St. Thomas.

How can our government allow a company to function (or malfunction), receiving tax breaks and other benefits, while it abuses the citizenry? This state-of-the-art boat could not deal with the stormy seas between St. Thomas and St. Croix on the evening of April 7. But a much smaller boat from St. John, which serves the Virgin Islands on a yearlong basis, was able to rescue us, returning us to St. Croix and taking the passengers whom the technologically superior Fast Ferry had stranded in St. Croix, back to their homes in St. Thomas.

As Virgin Islanders, don't we deserve the service for which we pay? Isn't it time for us to stop accepting the colonial treatment which is being given, and which is too often accepted by those whom we elect to look out for our welfare?

I am appealing to our licensing officers and agencies that are responsible for the safety and sanity of our citizens to investigate thoroughly the true condition of the Fast Ferry.

ALONG THE TRAIL

Magens Bay Nature Trail Reveals a World of Wonder.

- By Olasee Davis

Last weekend (April 7) I conducted a hike at the new nature trail within Magens Bay watershed for the St. Croix Hiking Association. The trail that was developed by the Nature Conservancy, started at Estate Canaan.

The Nature Conservancy has been in business for more than 49 years. Its mission is "to protect plants, animals and natural communities and lands and water they need to survive." The watershed of Magens Bay is a must protection area if the beach is to maintain the status of one of the ten best beaches in the world.

Crucians and St. Thomians who hiked on the trail learned a lot about Magens Bay and the Petersborg peninsula area. Hikers started off on the trail at about 450 feet above sea level. One of the first things hikers learned is that the forest of Magens Bay is a moist forest not a rain forest. They learned that the forest is not a virgin forest due to the deforestation of the area for agricultural uses and the construction of houses during the prehistoric and colonial period. This was evident from the terraces throughout the watershed as they hiked along the dirt trail.

The first human beings to set foot on the shores of St. Thomas came by sea up the Caribbean islands chain from the region of the Orinoco River on the coast of South America. According to archaeologists, The journey of the first people who set foot on the Caribbean islands was some 5000 years before the birth of Christ. When Columbus arrived in 1493, he met the Kalingo people - "Caribs".

Pottery griddles and stone casava grater teeth indicate the cultivation of manioc, one of the several floral species introduced into the Magens Bay area and throughout the island by prehistoric settlers.

Hikers also learned about the stone axes and other tools made by the indigenous people of St. Thomas. These tools were used to harvest large trees of the Magens Bay watershed area to construct canoes and houses. They learned also that not all trees within the watershed of Magens Bay are native to the island.

As hikers continued downhill, they observed the red soil in certain areas of the hilly landscape. This reddish brown gravelly clay loam soil is found in the upland watershed of the bay. The color of the soil is due to the high iron content found in the soil. For this reason, cleared forest land is unable to sustain crops for a long period of time. Thus, the practice of

slash-and-burn agriculture became common in many tropical countries.

As hikers climbed along the dirt path, they observed large termite nests. Even though we might not like termites because of what they can do to our homes, they play a critical role in the balance of nature.



There were three types of termites discussed on the trail. They were tree, wood and submarine termites. From here hikers continued until they got to a wooden platform overlooking the bay. Here we discussed in more detail about some of the trees and other things we saw along the trail. The grayish color stones hikers learned about and looked ancient were living moss and liverworts organisms. These organisms were an indication that the forest above received a high rainfall. These animals are mostly found in humid environment.

Birds were another attraction on the forest trail. The song birds, including the wild parrots of the island, could be heard singing throughout the forest canopies.

Along the forest floor, hikers observed droppings of birds that indicate that birds help the forest to grow. They do this by eating the fruits of trees and dropping the seeds wherever they go. Birds, insect, bats and other animals that live in the bay forest are a good indicator of a healthy forest. Each one of these organisms plays its role by keeping the forest in balance with nature.

As hikers continued downhill, one hiker found an 18th century Jim bottle. The Jim bottle and many other things attracted the hikers on the trail including terraces up and down the hill and how dead trees benefit the forest environment. Before hikers got to the bottom of the trail, they discovered an old gravel quarry against the hill. This quarry served in building structures throughout the landscape in the olden days.

The trees at the bottom off the

hill were much taller and larger. This was an indication of how the original forest was like more than 200 years ago. The bottom forest also is an indicator of change in plant species such as the mangrove forest that feed to the bay.

The new nature trail built by the Nature Conservancy enhances the product of the tourist industry on St. Thomas. It adds value to both visitors' and locals' education of the cultural and natural environment of the island.

Christiansted Historic Site Jan. 16

A group of 12 persons toured the area of Christiansted, visiting the Scale House, the Warehouse, the Custom House and walked through that general area.

Mount Eagle Hike

On Saturday, February 23, The St. Croix Hiking Association conducted a hike to Mt. Eagle, elevation 1,165 feet, the highest point of St. Croix. East of Mt. Eagle, covered with antennae and dishes, we saw the second highest peak, Blue Mountain whose elevation is 1,096 feet.

The hike did not begin at sea level, so we did not ascend the entire 1,165 feet. It was a moderately difficult hike, during which our tour guide, David Hamada, pointed out the unusual flora and fauna of the area, and the monument at the top of the mountain. The view to the north, overlooking La Vallee and Cane Bay was breathtaking.

South shore Hike (Apr. 14)

One of the interesting things we observed during this hike was this pillar sitting in the sea quite a distance from the land.



This is what remains of a concrete beach house which was on the Cane Garden beach during the 80's and early 90's. How did it get so far out into the sea? Was it a case of severe erosion, or did the waves wash it out to its present location?

Starting at the Boy Scout Camp, we climbed a steep hill behind the shoot-



ing range and proceeded along the coast line, making our first stop at the ruins of Estate Fareham. Once a cotton, and later, a sugar plantation, the mill is now used to store water for the Senepol cattle.

Much of the area through which we passed is pastureland. Here Senepol cattle grazed contentedly, that is, except for one protective bull who, perhaps, thought that we had come to his territory to mess with his family..

The trail took us past a fishermen's hangout spot and Spring Bay. As we looked out to sea, we could see fish swimming among the sea grass, and further offshore, the barrier reef ecosystem surrounding the bay for miles.

After we rounded Ferrall Point we entered Half(Ha')penny Bay. Halfpenny and Manchineel Bays are connected to form a very long and beautiful bay side. Inland are the ruins of Estate Diamond Keturah. Close to the end of the beach, we turned right into an abandoned pasture and hiked to Peter Minde Point, continuing on to "a romantic beach spot to swim" - our destination.

Looking west we saw the broken down beach house at Canegarden beach and the storage tanks at Hovensa.

AROUND THE BEND

{Upcoming Events}

Turtle Watch (May 17)

This exciting opportunity to observe leatherback turtles laying their eggs is on a first come basis. Try not to miss it. These turtles are the largest living turtles, weighing as much as 1400 lb. and reaching a length of 7 feet. And yet they are graceful swimmers.

Moonlight Hike (May 25)

Even though there will be a full moon, hikers are urged to bring a flashlight. Bring, also, the usual water,

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fruits, etc. We will hike down from a parking area off the Western Scenic Drive

Dominica trip (May 25-31)

After doing a lot of research trying to get the best arrangement for a trip to Dominica, it was decided to fine-tune our research efforts and try to do the trip at some time in the future.

Carl & Marie Lawaetz

Family Museum (June 22)

We will visit the Museum, tour the grounds and hike up to Oxford. This should be an easy outing.

Eastend bike/hike (July 3)

Ride, walk, run, stop when you are tired. Starting at Southgate and going east we will make a loop past Divi and return to the starting point

Off island trip (7/19-7/22)

Join us as we hike the BVI and St. John.

RECOMMENDED READING

Peter Horcer Jensen: **From Serfdom to Fireburn and Strike**, Antilles Press, Christiansted, St. Croix, 1998

- The history of Black Labor in the Danish west Indies from 1848-1916

Lennox Honeychurch: **The Dominica Story**, Macmillan, UK

- The only up-to-date history (to 1995) of Dominica, interwoven with information on the island's geography, natural history, folklore, the arts and social customs. Illustrated with photographs and drawings. Comprehensive and readable.

St. Croix Hiking Association
P.O. Box 5060
Kingshill, St. Croix
VI 00851-5060