

SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 2002

# NEWSLETTER

## THE PRESIDENT SPEAKS

by Sonia Maynard-John

*"Come hike with Olasee".*

*It is past midyear. The STXHA has visited many shores and there is a lot left to be accomplished. Be open minded and willing to learn. We should build a library within ourselves so that we can retrieve information and share what we have learned about the historical and cultural aspects of our environment, as well as the medicinal uses for common plants.*

*Life is special; live and savor every moment. Be an over comer; don't let anything hamper your path.*

*Among the benefits derived from participating with the STXHA are: the many things we learn, the physical toning of the body, the opportunity to interact with and share with others, and the opportunity to visit new places.*

*Someone once remarked, if you want to lose weight, "Come hike with Olasee". It is truly a challenge to climb hills and, sometimes, cliffs. The hikes range from easy to strenuous, but after each hike you get a good feeling of accomplishment.*

*Life is special. Yesterday is history: tomorrow may be a mystery. Today is a gift, that's why it is called the Present.*

*Lets strive to enhance and improve our organization and become more actively involved. Everyone has a role to play. The president's position is not set in concrete; anyone can lead - if I can so can you.*

## ALONG THE TRAIL

### **Turtle Watch**

Sea turtles once numbered in the thousands on the white sandy beaches of

St. Croix, especially Sandy Point. Today, the leatherback, hawksbill and the green turtles are endangered - locally and worldwide.

Leatherback turtles return annually to the same beach to lay their eggs. This activity seems to be a programmed one where the turtles are driven by a force which dominates their lives and makes them oblivious to extraneous forces. They come to the same beach every year and deposit their eggs in holes dug in the sand.

On this occasion, the evening of May 17, we were fortunate to see an adult female approach the beach shortly after our arrival, and go through the process of laying her eggs.

Another turtle was less fortunate. She apparently could not find a suitable location for laying her eggs. She, therefore, returned to the sea before depositing her eggs.

It was a memorable experience. Observing a massive volkswagon-like creature come from the sea and surgically dig a nest for her eggs was worth the few mosquito bites which we experienced.

### **Moonlight Hike**

During the day, the hike to Annaly Bay is a very challenging affair. At night, in spite of the romantic atmosphere produced by the full moon, it is simply awesome. On the evening of May 6, our tour guide outdid himself when we arrived at the mill at Wills Bay Plantation. He seemed to have been communicating with his long deceased forbears. It was an exalting experience.

The moon, beaming down soothingly on us, seemed to be sympathetic to our aches and pains as we ascended the uneven path, back to the point where we started our hike, on the ridge. We must do this hike again and again.

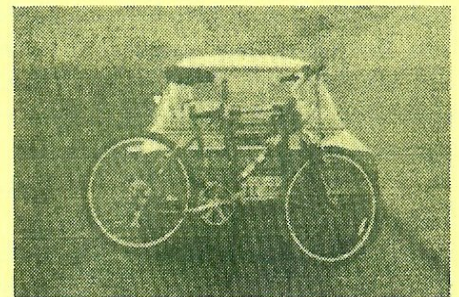
### **Oxford/Lawaetz Museum Hike**

We retraced the path taken by our forebears, from Frederiksted, along Mahogany Road, through Oxford, Annaly Estate and back to Frederiksted via Mahogany Road.

Tony Elliot was our intrepid guide. He led us to an old school house at Estate Oxford where we picked citrus fruit and soursop from trees along the way. At Annaly estate we found some of the most delicious mangoes just waiting for us to pick them. We concluded our hike by returning to Frederiksted after making stops at St. Croix LEAP and the Lawaetz Museum. This was a 7.25 mile journey along mostly tree-shaded roads.

### **Bike/hike**

The departure of the cruise ships from our shores have had a serious effect on our everyday way of life. The taxi drivers are suffering, the scooter and bike rental companies have closed down, and our annual bike/hike, which was held on July 3, was hard hit by the unavailability of bicycles. Nevertheless, a few bike owners as well as some hikers had a very enjoyable morning.



Assembling at Cheeseburgers-in-Paradise, the bikers rode east on Rte 82 and returned to the starting point via Rte 60. The hikers walked to Great Pond and returned to Cheeseburger-in-Paradise.

## Where is Heaven?

-By Ivan Butcher II

Saturday night on St. John, after we had settled down following dinner, we began discussing different topics. The conversation was very stimulating, especially since our religious beliefs varied. During the interchange, I was asked where did I consider Heaven to be. Being raised in the Roman Catholic church, my conditioned response was, Heaven was being in the presence and in the Grace of God.

It wasn't until the next day, July 14, a beautiful Sunday morning, just as we began our hike down the Reef Bay Trail, surrounded by the majestic forest, that it struck me that we were in Heaven in all of God's Glory. I then shared my thoughts with those who were involved in the conversation the night before and we all agreed that this, if nothing else, was Heaven on Earth.

From the very beginning, I was inspired by the way everything was well organized, setting the stage for the entire trip. Sonia, Tom and others made sure that we were well stocked. This was especially important because of the high cost of food stuff in the British V.I. Others at times agonized about the frequent loading and unloading of the boats and vans even though this cooperative effort seemed to draw us closer together.

The boat ride from Charlotte Amalie to Tortola was excellent, the sea was calm and it was a beautiful day. This was really the first time that I had traveled by boat between so many islands and cays. Seeing the islands from the sea made me think of how it must have looked to those who first settled here hundreds of years ago. And although things have changed since then, there is still a vast amount of unspoiled areas that needs to be preserved.

Ivan's Place on Jost van Dyke was a trip into the past. In these days and times, to be able to open your facilities to everyone on a trust system day and night was a lesson in love, respect and trust. Ivan explained that there was a book and money pan there for everyone to register what they used and pay when they wished. You made your own change, fixed your own drinks and food etc... In addition, all guests, whether they were off the boats, renting a cottage or a tent at the site, were there as one, very intimate. The most astonishing thing is that most of us

were of different backgrounds and cultures, yet we all meshed under the "stress free" atmosphere that Ivan has established there. Ivan's was definitely a humbling experience.

Hiking wasn't the highlight of the Jost Van Dyke trip for me. It was the boat rides, being able to see the coast line, and the morning spent on the beach. I enjoyed the hike around the Cay. It would have been nice if the famous Bubbling Pool was bubbling, but we did gather some delicious whelks to add to the pot, and we saw a sea snake. After becoming very comfortable it was time to leave. I really would have liked to stay at Ivan's Place, but I was also looking forward to the journey and to new discoveries.



The peace and tranquility of Jost Van Dyke slowly receded upon our arrival at Customs in St. John - not very visitor friendly. The campsite at Cinnamon Bay, St. John's, seemed too commercial and sterile. I and others commented that we preferred the set up at Ivan's, where we were steps away from the beach and the intimacy of the camp. But after going to the beach, hiking and seeing some of St. John, it became more acceptable. Meal-time involved most and brought everyone together, especially since there was just the propane lamps, a 10 p.m. noise curfew and the wild creatures loose in the bush.

I had an Epiphany. An answer to how and why some impoverished people can maintain a sense of happiness, and bond with their neighbors under dire conditions. Making a comparison of the two campsites, Ivan's place, at first glance appeared to need repair and a sprucing up, like a depressed area. Cinnamon Bay campsite, on the other hand, was more like a plush tree-lined, gated development, with security, where the "well-to-do" live with a home owners covenant. The harmony I felt at Ivan's was why I would

have preferred his set up to the well groomed, policed Cinnamon Bay. Ivan's was like a Heaven in the Spirit of Togetherness.

Despite the fact that most of the islands have similar architecture and history, the mill at Catherineberg was one of the most creative and architecturally challenging mills I have seen, a definite highlight. Noteworthy also were the African petroglyphs on the Reef Trail.

I know it is very hard when private owners possess property with ruins on them, but I would like to see owners of such properties on St. Croix receive compensation, the property turned over to the people, and these sites restored, like what we witnessed on St. John. (Wishful thinking?)

Eco-tourism has to be the way for our future economic growth. We have to preserve our environment. Hurricanes do enough damage. Why should we compound the problem by advocating industrial complexes. We are presently not able to dispose of the waste we are discarding every day. How Absurd!

I could go on and on, I was that inspired. But from what I experienced, I would have been upset if I had missed the experience. I swim daily, but it wasn't enough exercise for my legs, so I began hiking. The added bonuses to hiking with the St. Croix Hiking Association are the people you meet as well as Olasee's lectures.

In closing, come take a walk in the bush with us and give your heart and your soul an uplift.

### *Mt. Victory Camp out*

One of the best kept secrets in St. Croix is the camp ground at Mt. Victory. The camp is located 0.7 of a mile above Creque Dam. The facilities are very comfortable, enabling the camper to have access to some of the most interesting and challenging hiking trails in St. Croix. The STXHA had the pleasure of spending the period August 9 to 11 at this camp.

This is what one of our guests wrote to our tour guide, Olasee:

"Thank you so much for including me in the hike on Saturday. Although it was a long hike, I found the new scenery and forest to be very energizing. I've never been in a forest like the one you led us through. So much diversity and so dense. I especially appreciated your insights into

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the cultural impacts on the resources and the people over time. I have many pictures to share with my friends and family and to help me remember the special time that I had with you and your friends...

"Everyone made me feel very welcomed. People were also very helpful in helping to recognise plants and to answer any questions I had on anything to do with the islands. When everything is so different from back home, it is nice to have friendly people who are so eager to take me under their wing and make life easier....

Your friend, Rich Straight  
Agroforester  
Lincoln, NE"

Our host, Mr. Bruce Wilson, saw to it that we had a most memorable stay at his camp. You too can experience this back-to-nature camp by calling Mr. Wilson at 772-1651. Several of our members have expressed the desire to make this an annual occurrence.

## AROUND THE BEND

(Upcoming events)

*Butler Bay/Nicholas  
Annaly Hike (Sept. 15)*

*Blue Mt/Mt. Eagle Hike  
(Oct. 14)*

*Manning's Bay Hike  
(Oct. 27)*

*Eastend Hike (Nov. 11)*

*Sweet Bottom Hike (Dec. 8)*

## MILESTONES

**Condolences to Raymond Hector** whose father passed away on July 30, 2002.

**Congratulations and welcome to Aaron N'Kosi Phillip**, who was born to Ron and Yvette Phillip.

## RECOMMENDED READING

John Lorenz Anderson: **Night of the Silent Drums**, Maps Mooned Editorial Division, Ltd  
The Ocean Conservancy 2002 Report: **Health of the Ocean - Ocean Conservancy 2002**  
I. I. Holland & G. L. Role: **Forests and Forestry, 5th Ed.** - Interstate Publishers, Inc.

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