



October-December, 2003

# NEWSLETTER

## THE VICE-PRESIDENT SPEAKS

by Milton Henry

Greetings:

*The year 2003 has been an exciting experience for the members and friends of St. Croix Hiking Association (STXHA).*

*The Agriculture Fair in February, was a great success, and many Fair goers expressed interest about our ongoing activities. This resulted in an increase in Association membership. As usual, the STXHA hikes throughout the year were well attended and were enjoyed by all.*

*Dominica was the choice for our annual off-island trip, and it was a tremendous success. The annual camp out at Mt. Victory was enjoyed by all those who attended.*

*As the year comes to a close, the STXHA can be proud of its activities and its accomplishments. And we look forward to continuing in 2004.*

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Editor's Note: The Hiking Association has exposed its members to all areas of St. Croix. We see things that the average T.V.- watching, sit-at-home citizen is not aware of, and we are very concerned about what is happening to our beautiful island.

The two articles which follow complete the three-part commentary by Karl Knight on the topic:

## HEEDING NATURE'S CALL

*In keeping with the Mission of the Association to educate the community on the natural, cultural, and historic resources of St. Croix, Karl*

*Knight uses this column to speak out about the pressing environmental issues of our day. The former Secretary and a founding member of the St. Croix Hiking Association, Karl holds a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering and is currently employed as a business planner with the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority.*

## Getting Dumped On

by Karl Knight

The St. Croix Hiking Association has taken hundreds of people to the most remote parts of the island of St. Croix and you would be surprised by the out-of-the-way places where you find litter. From Point Udall in the east to Ham's Bluff in the West it's almost a sure thing. Almost as sure as Tan Tan and Guinea Grass.

Well, we need to do something about it. Surely, it has to be bad for business. With the large number of tourists that visit our shores every year, the last thing we need to hear them say is, "Oh look Honey, America's Paradise has trash too!" It sort of cheapens the experience. I am not trying to sound like a public service announcement, "Give a hoot don't pollute", so I'll be just a little blunter with my advice.

The most popularly trashed spots happen to be the pride and joy of the Virgin Islands...the beaches. The coastline areas are very popular on our hikes. Unfortunately, the beaches are also very popular with the picnic crowd. The culprits in this case, the "Cook Out Bandits"! cook out on the beach! Sounds good, but who is going to catch those plastic bags blowing all over the place? Or the Pepsi bottle that just rolled into

the sea? Not the Cook Out Bandits, they're too busy having fun. It does not help that most of our beaches do not have sufficient trash receptacles. My advice to them? Simple. "Don't be nasty!" Until

## "Don't be nasty!"

we get more receptacles on the beaches, we need to insist on taking home what we walked with.

The next big offenders are what we refer to as the "White Appliance Desperadoes". Rather than making the occasional trek to the Anguilla Landfill, these desperadoes prefer to back up their trucks in the middle of the night at the closest vacant lot and offload their "white appliances". For the unfamiliar, "white appliances" are stoves, refrigerators, washing machines and the like. Apparently, these items are not accepted at the public dumpsites. Although, I understand that a plan is in the works to correct that soon. Until then, my advice to the folks? "Don't be lazy!" The landfill is open

## "Don't be lazy!"

practically every day of the week, and you knew that you had to dump that stove weeks ago. Make proper arrangements, or hire one of the garbage hauling companies to take it for you.

Then there is my personal pet peeve, the "Used Car Outlaws". These come in two varieties. The first is the poor soul that held on to his old junker for too long and now doesn't know what to do with it. The other is a straight up crook that has joined the ranks of the growing number of car thieves and stripped a car down to its shell only to leave it out in the middle of nowhere.





(Well, the middle of nowhere for them, but not for hikers). My advice to the former is, "Don't be immature!" Owning a car is a responsibility that includes seeing to its proper disposal. For the latter, I have some choice words, particularly if they are the ones that stole my neighbor's car last month. But I won't get into that here.

Finally there is the hiker's nightmare, the "Inconsiderate Explorer". There is nothing like climbing the summit of Mt. Eagle and finding the Evian water bottle of the previous explorer who beat you there. And unfortunately, members of our group have been guilty of this in the past. I won't call names. I'll just say, "Don't be selfish!" It was beau-

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### **"Don't be selfish!"**

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tiful when we got there. Let's leave it how we met it for others to enjoy.

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### **What's That Floating By?**

by Karl Knight

While the temptation is often strong, it never pays to be cheap. You usually end up paying more in the long run. Particularly when people's health and livelihoods are at stake. That is the situation currently faced by our local government and the municipal sewer system.

Let me explain. Wastewater entering the municipal sewer system is treated at a wastewater treatment facility such as the one at Estate Anguilla on St. Croix or Bovoni in St. Thomas. These facilities take the raw sewage and provide a primary "treatment" that separates out the more undesirable elements of the waste (solid fecal matter) from the balance. The filtered effluent is then dis-

charged into the sea on the ocean side of the nearest coral reef.

The problem is, the national standard requires an additional treatment step, referred to as "secondary" treatment, prior to the effluent being discharged. This treatment further purifies the effluent and removes many of the harmful microbes and additional suspended solid matter. (FYI: There is even something called "tertiary" treatment that produces effluent clean enough for you to bathe with). The facilities in the Virgin Islands were never required to provide secondary treatment because these facilities were built before secondary treatment of sewage became a federal requirement through the Clean Water Act. In other words, they were "grandfathered" in. Recently, however, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has requested that the local facilities begin secondary treatment of their wastewater before release of the effluent into the sea.

That's where the cheapness comes in. The local government, cash-strapped as it is, quickly tried to secure a waiver to avoid complying with the additional treatment process. Why wouldn't we want to treat our sewage to the fullest extent possible? If it were up to me, I wouldn't even stop at "secondary" treatment. I would go for "tertiary" treatment and whatever comes after "tertiary". If the technology was available I would treat it until I could bottle it and sell it. Only then would I release it out to the sea. If we want to maintain our pristine beaches and boast about fresh fish-of-the-day, then we might as well take care of the resource that makes it all possible — our coastal waters.

While I am on the subject, allow me to get a few jabs in. First of all, let me point out that the frequent sewage bypasses at our pump stations are particularly intolerable. This is wastewater that has not even gotten the benefit of "primary" treatment. We are talking about the real raw stuff. Sewage in its

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**"Sewage in its untreated form is a highly toxic, pathogenic concoction".**

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untreated form is a highly toxic, pathogenic concoction. We currently,

*unintentionally*, pump millions of gallons of this stuff each year outside the Christiansted Harbor, on the Southshore in the Fig Tree area, and in the downtown Frederiksted area. Are we waging biological warfare on ourselves? If so, we are using a very potent weapon.

And finally, no discussion of contamination of our coastal waters can be complete without mention of the molasses effluent from the Cruzan Rum Factory in Estate Diamond. One of our most treasured cultural icons, Cruzan Rum, quietly dumps its effluent, a thick, syrupy ooze — a by-product of rum production, into the sea on the south shore of St. Croix. They have a pipe from their factory that takes the effluent across the highway and into the ocean. What's worst, the stuff doesn't dissipate like typical sewage! It settles to the bottom and just sits there. So let's report them to the EPA you say? Well recently, the EPA struck a deal with Cruzan Rum. They would allow Cruzan Rum to produce more effluent at its facility if the resulting additional excise taxes are used to improve the government's municipal wastewater system. Talk about an indecent proposal. We'll turn a blind eye to the mess you make if you help us with our mess. Again, despite the potential damage to our pristine waters, very little protest was raised.

Don't get me wrong. Everyone loves Cruzan Rum. You don't even have

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**"Everyone loves Cruzan Rum".**

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to drink it to know that it's good stuff. But must we destroy our ecosystem in order to produce it? Can't we dry out the effluent and dispose it in the landfill or some other non-polluting strategy?

There seems to be a conspiracy to destroy the natural beauty that we are blessed with on our beaches. Keep this up and we will have to drop Tidy Bowl

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**"...we will have to drop Tidy Bowl in the sea around St. Croix just to keep the water blue".**

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tablets in the sea around St. Croix just to



keep the water blue! What good is advertising sun, sand, and sea, if we no longer have the sea? Let's not be too cheap to care for one of our most precious resources or else we may lose the benefits of its use forever.

**ALONG THE TRAIL**  
(or Things Past)

*A Visit to Dominica*  
(7/19 - 26)

DOMINICA-  
Isle of green;  
It cannot be  
believed,  
It must be seen!

- Alan Bronstein

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It was an eight-day journey through mud, rain and sun, from the north, south, east, west, and the interior of Dominica's tropical rain forest.

Dominica is 29 miles long and 16 miles wide and is located between the French islands of Guadeloupe to the north and Martinique to the south. It is more than 290 square miles and is the most mountainous island in the Eastern Caribbean with peaks rising over 4000 Feet above sea level.

It was the last island in the Caribbean to be colonised. This is mainly due to its rugged topography and the resistance of the indigenous people known as the Kalinagos (Caribs) and runaway enslaved Africans, known as Maroons. Its rugged mountains was a natural fortress against European settlers. Today, the island retains more than 50 percent of its dense tropical rain forest and about 80 percent of its natural vegetation.

In 1761, the British captured Roseau where they found about 50 or 60 French peasant families, and a couple hundreds of Maroons living in small vil-

lages in the mountainous region of the island. The fight between the British and French for possession of the island lasted for centuries until the British conquered the island. The British, however, couldn't totally eradicate the indigenous people from the island. In 1903 some 3700 acres of land was set aside on the northeast coast of the island for these, the last Amerindians who survived the European powers in the Caribbean.

Our first hike, on Sunday, July 20, was to the Valley of Desolation and the Boiling Lake. It was a strenuous 9 hour, 32 mile hike in rugged mountains, crossing rivers and valleys. The trail was mostly steps made from tree ferns which grow wild on the island. Our tour guide for this and all hikes was Mr. Arlington Moise.

The Valley of Desolation used to be a lush forested area but it now appears to be almost devoid of life. In this area, the earth's surface bubbles, sending up water that is colored various combinations of black, green, gray, yellow, brown and orange. These colors indicate minerals from water deposited on the stream beds for centuries. Sulphur was the dominant mineral we smelled in the air for miles. The Boiling Lake is the world's largest - water actually boils, sending up clouds of vapor.

On the following day we went to the Kalinago Indian Village where we were given a brief history by one of the inhabitants. After that we stopped at the Emerald Pool. This is a waterfall with a large pool at the bottom where our hikers rested their tired bodies.

We hiked to Sari-Sari Falls on the next day, crossing several rivers



along the way. This is an impressive waterfall, dropping more than 100 feet.

On Wednesday we went to Scott's Head, Soufriere Marine Park, Sulphur Springs, Botanical Garden, Tra-

jalgar Falls, and shopped in Roseau.

Morne Diablotin, the highest peak on Dominica, rises 4747 feet above sea level. This was our challenge for Thursday. It was a muddy and long hike to the top of the mountain, way up above the clouds. Kiwan John, a five year old native Crucian, made history, according to Mr. Moise. He is the only 5-year old to hike the highest peak on Dominica,

**"He is the only 5-year old to hike the highest peak on Dominica, ..."**

as well as the first from the Virgin Islands.

We toured Indian River and visited Cabrits National Park in Portsmouth, the second town of Dominica on Friday.

- Olasee Davis

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The trip to Dominica was the highlight of my year. Two of the hikes, The Boiling Lake and Morne Diablotin, were very strenuous, but enjoyable. We were able to see a lot of the island and bathe under waterfalls.

The people are very friendly. The island is a must for hikers.

- C. Prince

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I love the lush vegetation, the beautiful scenery of the mountains, canyons, and waterfalls along the hike trails. I also like visualizing the imaginary line between the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea.

- Janice Brooks

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You may have overheard me vowing to trade in my hiking sticks for knitting needles if I made it off Morne Diablotin? Yet here I am, one short week later planning my next hike. I will try to explain why, in this sort of "view from the rear":

#1. Hard as it is, someone has to be worst, last, and muddiest. I believe that I have proven myself to be the most qualified member for this position, and,

#2. No mere armchair traveler will ever truly experience the most unbelievably beautiful view I was privileged to see when I actually did reach the 4,747 foot summit of this most challenging



mountain.

Say What?!? You are surprised that I mention the "VIEW?" Did you, perhaps, see only fog & clouds? Well who could blame you? You had to be one of the last up to see what I saw. Because there was no other way you could see yourselves! Shivering, exhausted, muddy & wet - yet cheering for us! Welcoming us!

I will never forget how genuine caring and delight were reflected on your faces, nor the amazement on my husband's. Now that is what I call a "beautiful view!"

It was only a few moments, yet it helped to remind me of all that is special and why I work to stay fit for our hikes. I know, without doubt, that it is only by the grace of the continual support, encouragement, help and, not at all least, jokes that we share!, that I could have found the strength to even begin "such a t'ing, such a t'ing, such a hard, wonderful t'ing".

- Dorothy Bronstein

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### Mount Victory Camp out

This year's Mt. Victory camp out ran from Friday, September 12 to the 14th. When we checked into the camp on Friday, there were three hikers six years old or younger. After setting up we were treated to a delicious dinner of oxtail and rice with pumpkin soup which was prepared by our host, Bruce Wilson.

Saturday's hike got started on time and took us past the Mt. Victory sugar mill along a newly developed 140 plus acre farm. Seeing this new development with its paved roads and the vast deforested expanses was a surprise to those of us who had not been in that location recently.

We had to be very careful as we headed down the trail leading to Annaly Bay for much erosion was evident. The scenery, however, was very green and lush for as far as the eye could see.

After a brief stop at the Will Bay sugar mill, our hike really got serious as we headed down the hill to the gut. On our way up the gut we saw how the enslaved Africans terraced the hillside to slow down the water in the areas that they cultivated. Ascending the hill in

single file and leaving the gut behind, a walking stick, as well as anything we could hold on to, was most helpful. Finally, after stopping periodically to rest and refresh ourselves, we reached the paved road, full of joy that this most strenuous climb was over.

Back at the camp, we feasted on



chicken, rice and beans, grilled fish, and tofu. "Gone Bush" gave me such a big appetite that I went back for seconds and... maybe thirds(?)! After dinner, while sitting in the dark watching the moonrise on this quiet and peaceful evening, I announced to my fellow campers: "Look at those shooting stars".

### "Look at those shooting stars".

They informed me that I was looking at fireflies! I guess I was intoxicated with Nature.

Sunday's hike followed the first part of Saturday's hike. When we got to the farm we visited an experimental herb garden and saw a variety of fruit trees. Going toward the Caledonia Gut we passed a tree house owned by one of the farm workers.

It was 9 o'clock when we entered the Jack Spaniard-infested gut. Descending the gut we used a length of rope to lower ourselves down two waterfalls which were now dry. The gut has quite a number of trees lying across the trail. We had to either go over or under them, a somewhat strenuous undertaking which caused many of the hikers to say, "I can't wait to get out".

But as we exited the shady gut the scorching sun was there waiting to greet us. We were relieved, however, to arrive at Ham's Bay where we cooled off our hot and tired bodies.

It was now 1 o'clock in the afternoon and it was the consensus that it

was too late to go back up the gut. Two of our fellow hikers hitched rides back to the camp and returned with their vehicles to pick us up. Arriving back at the camp, we feasted on salt fish, rice, tofu and grilled fish. And after dinner we cleaned up our area, packed, and broke camp at about 5 PM.

We had a nice and accident free weekend, and lots of fun.

- Raymond Hector

### AROUND THE BEND (or Things to Come)

#### Survival Hike

This event will take place during the weekend of October 11 along the South shore of the island. During this weekend every hiker will be responsible for his/her own camping supplies: tents, food, water, etc. We will set up camp at Spring Bay and then move on to Cane Garden Bay, hiking the South Shore area.

A *Southgate to Coakley Bay Hike* is planned for Saturday, November 15. This area is a famous bird watching spot, a part of it, at the Southgate Pond, being preserved by SEA. You will also see some interesting ruins.

The last hike of the year will be at *Mt. Washington* on December 7. That is the Fredriksted Mt. Washington. On this hike you will see the ruins of a sugar factory and an animal mill. As you approach the estate you will see lots of guavaberry trees growing at the side of the road. From the top of Mt. Washington, you will experience a Kodak Moment allowing you to capturing some beautiful views from Fredriksted all the way to Sandy Point. This will be an easy, but very interesting hike.

Our *Annual Xmas Party* will be held on December 20, hopefully, at the same venue as last year's. Plaques for male and female hikers of the year will be awarded. Please plan to attend

### RECOMMENDED READING

Lennox Honeychurch, *The Dominica Story* (1995); MacMillan Education, Ltd.