



Member of the American Hiking Society

Late Winter - Early Spring 2006 NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 5060, Kingshill, St. Croix, V.I. 00851

Puerto Rico - The Total Package

by Ivan Butcher II

Each year, the St. Croix Hiking Association takes an 'off island trip' to neighboring islands, to conquer some of their highest peaks and to experience their cultural delights. Not to take away from any of our previous trips or our former hosts and guides... this year's trip to Puerto Rico was truly "The Total Package".

From the start, we were on a first name basis with our hosts/guides: Roqui, Diego, Noel, and Ramon. This was good, because where our group travels there are often no trail markers - so the guides are our lifelines for a safe return. Our guides' passion for the environment and their culture was matched only by their historic and scientific knowledge and their professionalism. They even took the



Intrepid members with their Puerto Rican guides

time to find out each of our eating needs. This was a first; and since all our meals were included in the package, it was nice not having to search out food. We had the dish "of the house", and there was plenty of it (meat, meatless, fish and dairy free) usually served buffet style.

On arrival, we were picked up at the airport, fed, and then given a tour of the The Lighthouse at the Fajardo Lagoon. Later, after settling into the Ceiba Country Inn, and having dinner, we were off to an adventure of a lifetime. We kayaked into the Bio Florescent Lagoon on a new moon night. The water glittered like a star lit sky. You were able to see the trail of the kayaks gliding and the fish and eels streaking in the water. It was really amazing and very surreal.

On the second day, we trekked to the top of El Yunque. This wasn't a hard hike, but it was slippery and rocky. Being in the group of hikers that went to the peak, we tried to keep up the pace set by our guide since our time was limited. Until I spoke to the others later, I thought I was the only one feeling as if I was experiencing signs of a stroke: shortness of breath, sweating, rapid heart beat. I can remember looking back at the others - no one else looked like they were in pain - so I just kept on pushing and the others did the same. It reminded me of how I felt on the Boiling Lake trail in Dominica, coming up from the bottom of the Valley of Desolation.

On day three, we moved to Pueblo de Casa. The rides to each of the hotels were always tours in themselves, and as exciting as the hikes. With each move we were in a different part of the island and we got a chance to experience each area's uniqueness. Also, we were able to "spread the wealth" around the island.

The lecture at Pueblo de Casa and the tour at Bosque de Pueblo in Jayuya was inspiring. How one man, Alexis Massol, made a difference in saving a whole forest region from strip mining was amazing. The lesson here was not to sit back and to wait...this would have allowed the politicians and developers the opportunity to destroy the environment without restraints. Massol's self-sufficient operation allowed him the ability not to have to depend on the government for funding. It is an example to emulate.

Day four brought on the "big challenge": Tres Picachos. There is a poster that reads, "The challenge isn't the mountain... the challenge is within." This is a well known mountain peak in Puerto Rico... but many locals have not been to the top. To our guides' knowledge, our group had the youngest and the oldest hikers ever to ascend the peak. The "wall", where we had to use ropes to climb and to descend, reminded me of the peak in Nevis. But it was not as scary, since there were no cliffs on the sides from which to fall into the mist.

I have to make note, here, of how both the Hotel Posada Jayuya and the chef and his family at La Fragua restaurant went out of their way to accommodate our special needs. The hotel allowed us to wash the dirty clothing from the hike, some of us having emerged covered in mud. The restaurant was quite sensitive to our varied food requirements.

On day five, we traveled to the Toro Negros Rain Forest region. As expected, it rained on us. But it was different and we weren't on a muddy dirt trail. But the rain did interrupt our afternoon plans to visit a farm and to swim in the river. Here was another example of how important it is to have good licensed guides. It was on their suggestion that we skipped the swim when there was a possibility of flash flooding. The following week, in the same river, two visitors were swept away in a flash flood.

The Hostal Villas del Lago was "The Spot". Dining was like eating at a five star restaurant. The hotel overlooked a lake which was lined all around by huge pine trees. The temperature was cool, so we felt we were in a very unique and different place.

Day six provided what I had been waiting for: the hike into the caves, which would include repelling and body surfing! I don't know how the others felt, but the helmets and life jackets heighten my expectations. Sadly, but on the side of caution, the repelling and the body surfing were also canceled. Myself and others will definitely be making arrangements to go back to experience the whole river tour.

Our visit to Jorge's organic farm was impressive. His self-sufficient life style is a model for a future in an unpredictable world. I especially admire the support he receives from his wife, a special woman in these times of materialism and the creature comfort "craze" which I witnessed in San Juan.



Ivan Butcher II

(continued on page 8)

Our Adventures in Puerto Rico

by Cathy Prince, Off Island Trip Coordinator

The St Croix Hiking Association departed St. Croix for Puerto Rico on July 2nd, 2005. We were not sure what to expect when we got there. At the airport we were greeted by the ACAMPA group, Raymond, Roqui, Diego, and Noel. After getting my walking stick out of the luggage conveyer machine, we loaded our bags into the bus and off we went. Our first stop was for a lunch of snapper, seasoned rice, plantains, salad, and a homemade drink. We, then, proceeded to "Cabezas de San Juan" in Fajardo. This is a nature preserve where you get a tour of the beach, mangroves, a lagoon, and get to see colorful iguanas. There was also a historic lighthouse with some aquariums inside, where we had the chance to touch a sea cucumber. Then we were taken to our hotel, Ceiba Country Inn, which is located on a hill with a great view. We were welcomed by dogs and assigned rooms from where we spied the coconut trees. The "oldest member" of our group on the trip showed us "young uns" how to climb the trees. We enjoyed delicious coconut water later on. Two new Hiking Association members flew in from the States and arrived by taxi. There were introductions all around. Dinner was catered and we relaxed in the cool night breeze. We, then, dressed to go kayaking, and off we went to experience the bioluminescent bay. It was a blast!! Sometimes it looked like bumper boats, kayaks going all the wrong way. Then we noticed the glow in the water when the paddles went in and the fishes appeared white as they passed by. Just putting your hand in the water made it glow. We all slept well that night.

In the morning, after breakfast, we headed to "El Yungue" the most talked about rainforest in PR. It was crowded, but we did enjoy the hike along the trails; we, also, had a chance to get wet in one of the waterfalls. By this time, we were like one big family on the bus...lots of talking and laughing.

We checked out of the hotel the next morning and headed for "Adjuntas". Raymond, our guide, gave us a lot of history and information of the areas as we drove. We stopped at "Casa Pueblo", which was a lesson of what happens when a town stands up to industry. Minerals were found in the area and a company wanted to start mining. It was not to be. The hills are protected. We saw a butterfly area, lettuce growing in water in PVC pipes, and the machine that grinds the coffee. They make small batches of coffee that is sold in the gift shop, along with jewelry, and other handmade items. We took a drive and had a tour of the hills. We saw an open air theater; there was a trail for children that had swings, and look-out spots. We also saw a "batey" court. This was game played by the Taino Indians.

We drove to Jayuya after lunch and checked into our hotel. Dinner was at a nearby restaurant "La Fragua", owned by a former revolutionary. Raymond briefed us on what to expect on the next day's hike. In the morning four people decided to stay behind and walk around the town, the rest of us took off for "Tres Picachos". Our driver, Noel, decided to join us. The first portion was not bad, until we got to what they referred to as "the wall". The slope was slippery and the ropes were wet and we only had about 800ft to go. After making it to the peak, Raymond said this is only one of the three, we would have to go to the second one that was "the flag". So off we went again, we scrambled to the top, took pictures and enjoyed the view. The descent was scary, there were slips, slides, tumbles and ripped pants. All in all, we made it back in one piece. We met the rest of the group at "La Fragua" for the traditional meal of "asopao"- a rice soup for the mountain climbers. Those who stayed behind enjoyed the town, shopping, going to a museum, and

walking to meet us at the restaurant for lunch. Back at the hotel, some people threw away shoes or pants, and everyone slept well after a hearty dinner.

The next day, it was off to another hotel. On the way, we stopped at Toro Negro rainforest. There were no tourist crowds here. It was raining, but we enjoyed the forest. There was a stone tower at the peak, similar to one at El Yungue. Our lunch was at a family owned one stop-gas station with a restaurant and grocery store. It was a very relaxing place. We proceeded to our hotel "Hostal Villas del Lago". What a sight, it was nestled on the shore of a lake. Unfortunately, we could not go into the water. Raymond took us on a short walk to see the nearby dam that was built in 1948. The hotel was quiet and we enjoyed a great dinner. Afterwards, some relaxed at the bar. It was great to have balconies, grounds to walk around on, and to hear music from the bar. The next day we headed to some caves. We would not do the river adventure because of the heavy rains. We were issued helmets with spotlights before we started the hike. The terrain was very uneven with a lot of ups and downs. The first cave had a lot of bats and there was a lot of rich fertilizer - guano. The Tanama river ran through the cave, and we were able to see it as we stepped to the edge. We stopped at a second cave, and then continued on so as to be on time for our "special" lunch. We arrived at an organic farm run by Enrigue and his wife. They prepared an organic vegetarian meal which was very tasty. The house was comfortable and there was an abundance of fruits and vegetables. The closest neighbor was miles away. The climb out of the valley was as bad as Annaly Bay, and it was a relief to make it to the flat road. Then, it was back to our lake resort to put our feet up and have a delicious dinner.

We left late the next morning for the Arecibo Observatory. The drive took us through beautiful countryside. As we got to the Observatory, there was a sign that read: "You have to walk about 500 stairs to the top." So much for a day off! We sat through a short video and then went outside to see the radio telescope. After, we shopped in the gift shop for souvenirs. While waiting under a shade tree, we tasted some of the fruit - which was delicious - but no one knew the name.

Now, we headed to San Juan and our last hotel of the trip. The hotel was in walking distance of Old San Juan - so off we went. It was too late to see many of the stores, but we had fun, and we rode the bus back. The last day was a "free" day. The shoppers went to Plaza Las Americas, while others walked around the area.

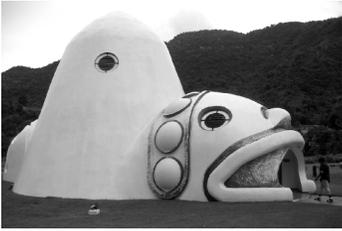
Soon it was time to check out and await the bus ride to the airport. Raymond showed up with a box of mangoes. Then Roqui, Diego, and Noel showed up. Many pictures were taken...and there was lots of kissing and hugging.

The week really felt like it had been two weeks because the adventures started the moment we came in. This was a very memorable trip. The ACAMPA group did a great job with all the arrangements: hotels, meals, tours, and transportation. They were extremely knowledgeable about the locations, were very safety conscious, and always helpful.



Cathy Prince and her brother,
Joseph Prince

Puerto Rico: July 2—July 9, 2005



Cena Museum



Arecibo Observatory



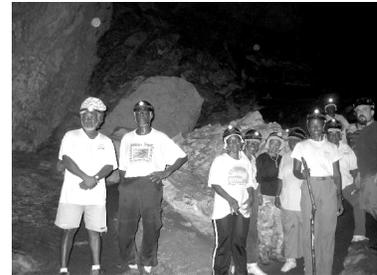
Roqui, Justin, and Ivan



Batey Field



El Yunque



Angeles Cave



Janice and Myrtle



Sonia and Justina

Photos taken
by Joseph Prince



Hostal Villas del Lago



Tres Picachos



Toro Negro Tower

TAKING CARE OF OUR ISLAND

The following letters were written by Ivan Butcher II, our Vice President and Male Hiker of the Year 2005. They were submitted to the both VI newspapers. While hiking on Scenic Road, Raymond Hector - Education Committee Chair, found illegally dumped tires. He alerted Dept. of Planning and Natural Resources and Waste Management. As a result of both Raymond and Ivan's efforts, three investigative reports were published in the St. Croix Avis and St. Thomas Daily News. Ivan is currently working on a video entitled "Leave Only Your Footprints" which will be used in schools and as a public service announcement.

HOW COME???

During last month's hike given by the St. Croix Hiking Association, one of our members, Raymond Hector, pointed out four different areas where hundreds and hundreds of tires are still being dumped along the Scenic Route West, between The Beast and the ridge above the Carambola Golf Course. **How come...**after the Association notified the media and the authorities about these dump sites, that several months later, at those same sites there appears to be hundreds more tires having been dumped? **How come...**those waste management regulators / enforcers - with the government waste management study available to them and knowing the numbers of tires that are being imported every day, month, year here on St. Croix - have not questioned the whereabouts of those disposed tires? **How come...**we, as consumers, have to pay a \$3-\$5 fee to dispose of worn tires and there has been no announcement that the businesses responsible for the dumping have been cited and fined? **How come...**there has not been some kind of color coding system put in to place which could be used to more easily identify those businesses which are dumping tires illegally? **How come...**someone can illegally dump tires and believe that they will profit and not get caught? **How come...**someone can illegally dump tires and not think that they are doing any damage to our island? Those tires are not only a horrid eye sore but a terrible fire hazard, and a breeding ground for mosquitoes and rats. **How come...** someone can be so self serving?



Illegally dumped tires

LEAVE ONLY YOUR FOOTPRINTS

When we, the St. Croix Hiking Association, go hiking off island, what is posted at the entrance of most trails is a sign that says, "When you leave this trail, take only pictures and memories and leave only your footprints. The tire dumping was only the last straw, because there are many more issues needing to be addressed. On our trails, here on St. Croix, there is litter, dumpsites, stolen cars, and non-point pollution. **To the community,** some of you, when hiking or picnicking at the parks can't seem to find the strength to take your garbage back with you when leaving. Instead, many choose to fill the trash barrels to overflowing with the attitude that it's Public Works' responsibility. "Two wrongs don't make a right." "Leave only your footprints." **To the authorities,** when there is a rash of stolen cars, including those abandoned cars, all anyone has to do is to go to the auto graveyards that exist on many of our dead-end roads. If you, the authorities, were to clean up these areas, it would send a message that these sites are being monitored and patrolled. **It is understandable,** but not acceptable, that maybe the non-point pollution that exists in our guts goes unnoticed. But those in authority have to know that all this garbage is there waiting for the next storm to wash it in the sea or into our backyards. Worst yet, is the mountain of visible debris that washes up on our beaches and coastline after every storm. Recently the association sponsored a hiking trip to Hassel Island, St. Thomas, where the mooring dock looked like our Anquilla dumpsite. The guide told us, that this was where the trash from Charlotte Amalie Harbor collects. It makes sense that if the debris collects in this area wouldn't it be easier to clean it up, instead of leaving it there for all to see? **To the young brothers,** who lime under the trees, the talk is that you have nothing constructive on your minds, in addition to that, psychologist say that your environment and your surroundings are often a reflection of your state of mind. Look around you. Clean up, if for no better reason than the fact you are leaving around both your DNA and your fingerprints...someone could create a database. "Leave only your footprints." Not to forget the off road lovers in the house...do you throw your condoms down because they're biodegradable or because they're nasty? If it's because it's nasty, what makes you think anyone else wants to see them. You, too, are leaving your DNA behind. The perfect evidence for a custody or a divorce case or even worst. **There is an influx of new residents,** visitors, and investors into these islands whose perception of us is that we do not appreciate what we have here! So from now on..."leave only your footprints."



Members picking up trash at Spring Bay

And they came...

The St. Croix Hiking Association participated in the Coast Week Beach Cleanup on September 24, 2005. Members and friends trekked to Spring Bay on the Gasperi Farm south shore property. There, three pickup trucks were filled with trash bags stuffed with refuse that had been thrown overboard by boaters and fishermen and garbage that had been carelessly left at the beach.



MAIL TO: St. Croix Hiking Association

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MEMBERSHIP FORM

Cut along the fold

The St. Croix Hiking Association is a non-profit organization of the Virgin Islands dedicated to educating the local community and visitors about the Territory's areas of natural, cultural and historical significance. By the efforts of its members, the Association intends to facilitate the preservation of these areas through enforcement of legislation and by other appropriate means. We, of course, really like to hike on St. Croix and neighboring Virgin Islands; and, once a year, take special pleasure in hiking and exploring other Caribbean countries and points beyond.

Membership Dues: \$25.00 regular - \$10.00 student. Mail form with check/money order.

New Member

Renewal

Student

Name: _____ Date: _____

Mailing Address: _____ Amount paid: _____

_____ Place of Work: _____

_____ Occupation _____

Home phone: _____ Work Phone _____

E-mail: _____ Cell Phone _____

Please volunteer to participate in one of the following committees or activities by checking the appropriate box.

Fundraising Committee

Special Events

Public Relations Committee

Off-Island Trip

Education Committee

Newsletter Material

Cut along the fold

Office Use Only	
List	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mail	<input type="checkbox"/>
Card	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Membership Form on reverse side.
To use...cut on the fold.**

GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT

Sonia Maynard-John

2005 was a year that was filled with many activities! As part of the St. Croix Hiking Association community outreach programs, we participated in the opening of the Estate Adventure Nature Trail in February. Later in the month members manned a Hiking Association booth at the Agriculture and Food Fair. In March, we hiked the Bitch and the Beast near Carambola. Raymond Hector led a hike in the Cane Bay area in April. In May, we explored Estate Hermitage and later took the Fast Ferry to St. Thomas to hike on Hassel Island. In June, on a full moon night, we watched with wonder as giant leatherback turtles laid their eggs on the beach at Sandy Point. In the same month we trekked from Brooks Hill to Mahogany Road. Our annual Off Island Trip to Puerto Rico was in July. It was eight exciting days of touring and hiking and learning. To this day, members still talk about the wonderful experiences they had while they hiked, visited historical sites, and kayaked upstream to see the microscopic dinoflagellates light up in Laguna Grande Lagoon. In September we held a moonlight hike with Olasee Davis as our guide. An East end shoreline hike took place in October and, also, a hike to Rust Op Twist on the North shore. The St. George Gut, which was filled with water, was explored in November. In December, at the annual Christmas party at Mt. Victory Campsite, we celebrated 2005 - another eventful and fun filled year. Special awards were given out to members. Everyone had a great time eating, socializing, and dancing.

As President of this wonderful Association, I would like to express my thanks to everyone for their effort and hard work making 2005 a great success. I, also, would like to welcome all new members to the Association. You are adding to the strength and potential of the organization. Let us look forward to a brighter 2006 with God as our light and protector.



Looking back at St. Thomas from Hassel Island

Hikers-of-the-Year 2005



Rita Bannister



Ivan Butcher II

Special Appreciation Awards

Most Tenacious	Onaldo Pedro / Celina Santana
Most Entertaining	Henry Harris
Cleanest Hiker	Joyce Francis
Most Gone Bush	Cathy Prince / Raymond Hector
Most Treasured	Tom Zimmerman
Most Innovative	Dorothy Flash
Most Knowledgeable	Olasee Davis

Elected Officers February 2, 2005 - 2007

President	Sonia Maynard-John
Vice President	Ivan Butcher II
Secretary	Dorothy Flash
Assistant Secretary	Joyce Francis
Treasurer	Tom Zimmerman
Assistant Treasurer	Cathy Prince

Newly Appointed Committee Chairpersons

Education	Olasee Davis / Cathy Prince
Fund Raising	Justina Joseph / Henry Harris
Newsletter	Dorothy Flash / Ivan Butcher II
Off-Island Trip	Sonia Maynard-John
Public Relations	Joyce Francis / Mike Ramos

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REFERENCE ONLY LIBRARY BOOK LIST:

Available in Tom Zimmerman's Office in the UVI Research and Extension Center
Room 121, Tel. 340-692-4074



1. Caribbean Wild Plants & their Use, by Penelope N. Honychurch. 2003. Macmillan Caribbean.
2. Traditional Medicinal Plants of St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John, A Selection of 68 Plants, by Toni Thomas. 1997. University of the Virgin Islands.
3. Exploring St. Croix, by Shirley Imsand and Richard Philibosian. 1987. Travelers Information Press.
4. The Complete Walker, a Hikers Bible, by Colin Fletcher.
5. Dominica, Nature Island of the Caribbean. 1989. Hansib Publishing.
6. The Remarkable Baobab, by Thomas Pakenham. 2004. W.W. Norton and Company.

The Total Package (continued from page 1)

On day seven, we toured the Arecibo Observatory. The place and equipment were impressive; but the film which they show about the operation, to me, fell short of really presenting any of the results of their endeavors over the years. We, then, headed back to San Juan. It is always interesting to me that I get such a rush when I am in a city; and San Juan reminds of any big city with the traffic, the noise, the people, the smells, the stores, etc... The next day we headed home to St. Croix.

One week after the trip, Olasee Davis and I had the opportunity to return to Puerto Rico to participate in the 10th Annual Forestry Conference in Caguas. Surprisingly, most of what we had done on the Association's trip had not been experienced by members and employees of the USDA and Urban Forestry Council. Our first hand experience and the information that we learned from our guides made it easy to relate to the issues that were being addressed at the conference. We even met Sr. Alexis Massol of Pueblo de Casa. It was confusing that out of all of the presenters - forest employees and

scientists - there was no one at the conference who spoke about or represented the tour guide industry. These individuals are the ones who have first hand knowledge of the health and well being of the forest. They, also, have direct contact with the many students and visitors who take advantage of their services. This is an industry which has a vested interest in the preservation and protection of the environment. They, also, bring in much needed revenue to Puerto Rico.

All and all, what made this "2005 Off Island Trip" exceptional were our very professional guides: Roqui, Diego, Noel, and Raymond (Ramon) owner of ACAMPA Tour Company out of San Juan. (www.acampapr.com) I, also, have to give special consideration and thanks to our own Association hikers: Cathy Prince, Olasee Davis, and Raul.

George, our host at Hostal del Lago (Los Pinos Lake Resort) delivered a heart felt message to us as we left his property earlier in the trip: "...a perfect climate, a perfect setting, a perfect vacation, a warm welcome, and friends forever" This is how we all felt when we bade farewell to Puerto Rico.

BECOME A MEMBER and join us on future Hiking Association adventures. As a member you will receive, in the mail, updated schedules of hikes and events and a newsletter.



**St. Croix Hiking Association
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