



Member of the American Hiking Society

Early 2007

NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 5060, Kingshill, St. Croix, V.I. 00851 - www.StCroixHiking.org

Off Island Adventure—

ST. VINCENT & BEQUIA, B.W.I.

By Olasee Davis

As one of the co-founders of the St. Croix Hiking Association, established in 1998, one of my goals was to visit other Caribbean islands. Well, a group of 32 members just returned from our annual "Off-Island Trip" to St. Vincent and Bequia in the Grenadines, where we hiked and visiting many natural, cultural, agricultural, and historical sites. St. Vincent and the Grenadines are part of the Windward Islands. Their closest neighbors are: to the north St. Lucia (24 miles away); to the south Grenada (75 miles away); to the east Barbados (100 miles away).

St. Vincent is lush and green with a mountainous interior and active volcano in the north rising over 4,000 feet, and an indented coastline on the leeward side of the island. It is 18 miles long and 11 miles wide and has an area of 133 square miles. There are some 30 islands and cays that make up the Grenadines with a total square mileage of 17. The annual average rainfall of the mountainous St. Vincent is 150 inches; while the coastal areas receive 80 inches.

Trevor Bailey, founder of Sailor Wilderness Tours, along with his

professional staff - which included Oswald, Desmond, Edwin, Elijah, and Bailey's wife and children - were our tour guides. We arrived on St. Vincent in the evening. Our accommodations were at the Villa Lodge Hotel on the south eastern coast of the island. Everyone was geared up, excited, and looking forward to the next couple of challenging days exploring the island.

Our first hike was to Vermont Nature Trails. On our way to the site, Oswald gave us a brief history of the first inhabitants on the island known as the Ciboney.

He also spoke about the Carib Indians who called St. Vincent 'Hairous' which means "Land of the Blessed". Caribs were extremely efficient in keeping the Europeans from settling on the island. Around his third voyage in 1498, Columbus sighted St. Vincent. However, with the heavy Carib resistance against the Europeans settlement, the island was prevented from being colonized long after other islands in the Caribbean were settled. While the French, Spanish, and British augured over the possession of the island, the Caribs resisted all claims. It was in 1635 when the first permanent settlers arrived on St. Vincent. These new comers were enslaved Africans who survived a sinking Dutch ship off the coast of St. Vincent. The escaped enslaved Africans quickly mixed with the Caribs, adopted their language and today are referred to as 'Black Caribs'. To make a long

Continued on back cover



Seated: Emily Walton, Rita Bannister, Henry Harris, Cathy Prince, Esther Sweeney, Raymond Hector, Raymond Harley, Tom Zimmerman, Robert Rios, Celina Santana, Sonia Maynard-John, Kiwan John, Onaldo Pedro, McLean Augustus. **Standing middle row:** Doreen James, Olasee Davis, Joyce Francis, Joyce Nix, Julie Beberman, Yvette Ballentine-Philips, Ivan Butcher II, Myrtle Pemberton, Annette Gereau. **Standing top row:** Isadore Griles, Joe Prince, Theresa Collingwood, Tony Elliott, Anita Thurston. **Not shown:** Kenneth Davis, Kathleen Larsen, Jose Rivera, Albion Thomas, and Ira Schullerbrandt who took the photo

Can It Get Any Better?

by Ivan Butcher II

Although each trip and island has its own special appeal, it seems like each year the trips get better and better.



The thing was...I got home from St. Vincent about 2 pm from the airport, so I decided to take a nap for a couple of hours and then head out to Cramer's Park for a party. It never happened. I woke up the next day at 6 am. I slept 17 hours straight through the night into the next morning. Can it get any better?

This trip reminded me of our stay in Jost Van Dyke; not so much the environment, but the group closeness as we spent a lot of time together. What I noticed was that, at some time or another, I found myself spending time interacting with everyone in the group. The hotel was cozy enough with special nooks all around. It was, also, close enough for the beach and provisions. Talking about food, the Puerto Ricans have been our best providers. When it was to be a buffet... it was a "Buffet": good, tasty food that could not be outdone.

The Vincentians seem to be proud humble people. We were well received everywhere we went. We were even comfortable walking the roads at night, although you would have to be pretty naive to think that in any country or town, there are no bad guys (vampires) out at night. But, you did have to lookout for the traffic. They drive very fast on those narrow roads even at night. It's like when you are hiking, you have to watch where you step and what you touch... and trust your instincts.

The highlight of the trip for me was when I popped up, after being dragged under the waterfall and twirled around like I was in a washing machine. It was part horror and exhilaration. What a rush! In photography, when you talk of the precise moment, Ira captured that moment. The trek to the volcano seemed endless and it was raining and cloudy. The sky cleared up for only a couple of minutes, which made the journey into La Soufriere worthwhile. The wall inside the volcano looked terraced, like how they cultivated their mountainsides, but more like layers of red, orange and brown hues of the earth and rocks, speckled with some short shrubs. The base of the crater had some trees which surrounded a large pond. We were told later that the first group missed the view because of the rain.

The adventure didn't stop at the volcano. Next, it was a spooky walk through the amazing man made Black Point tunnel. The entrance was like a foyer to a big cave, as you walk in you can see a faint light, literally at the end of the tunnel. The floor was like a streambed because water was seeping through the walls and the ceiling. To add more suspense to being in the tunnel, there were bats flying when you passed them. At the end of the tunnel the view was like a photo from National Geographic. And oh..there was someone, always, nestled in the many caves that covered the mountain above the tunnel.

The turtle sanctuary procedure should be adopted here in the Virgin Islands. It is not only an attraction but, also, a needed attempt to try to prevent the endangering of such beautiful and unique creatures. The armadillo another amazing animal, which were imported into the islands, were illusive during our hike through the Vermont National park. But again, I was with the group that I saw three sets of parrots in flight from the lookout site. When we visited the botanical garden they did have parrots and armadillos on exhibit. The culture: this was the first island I have visited where the Caribs were not isolated but were, and still are, an intricate part of the history and the culture in their Islands. Olasee covers all of that history so well. As an artist, I noticed that there was an absence of art galleries and museums. Except for the exhibits at the fort, there is an untapped natural resource of creative talent.

We hiked their trails, climbed their peaks, swam in their rivers, sailed their seas, ate and partied at their restaurants, danced in their streets, applauded their Calypsonians. Our Association members, known as the "Crucian Posse" left the Vincentians with an everlasting impressionas they, most certainly, did on us. Can it get any better? I can see St. Vincent in my future.

P.S. Although these other islands have offered some very beautiful, exciting, breathtaking experiences..."there is no place like home". In a slightly lesser degree, we can experience almost all of those things - without traveling for hours by boat or plane. By just stepping outside and hiking for an hour or two, you can "get lost in Paradise" and "forget" you're on St. Croix.

Ivan Butcher II has been the Vice- President of the St. Croix Hiking Association:



Gone Bush....To the Maroons

BY JAMILA HAMMAD

On Saturday night, November 5th, my husband , Bob Sifniades, and I hiked under a bright moon to the Ham's Bluff Lighthouse on the north-west corner of St. Croix. To get to the lighthouse, at an elevation of 394 feet, we had to hike uphill through thick rain forest, all the while hearing the waves crashing below the nearby cliffs. When we finally came out to the clearing where the lighthouse sits, the views were majestic. We could see the rugged, undeveloped hills of Maroon Ridge and the shore line of Annaly Bay, Wills Bay and Davis Bay. And across the silvery expanse of moonlit ocean, we could see the lights of St. Thomas, a 40-mile distance to the north.

As we looked out from Ham's Bluff to Maroon Ridge, our guide Olasee Davis told us of the historic significance of these hills. When Denmark purchased St. Croix in 1733, a community of runaway enslaved Africans known as the Maroons took to these hills and hid in caves, determined not to be under slavery. Many of them jumped over these dramatic cliffs to freedom, either to their death, or to escape routes on stolen vessels to nearby Puerto Rico or other Caribbean islands.

Today, while the local government is entertaining plans to develop this last frontier of St. Croix, there is opposition here to this idea, and our guide Olasee Davis is one of the leaders of the movement to preserve this area for its natural beauty, cultural heritage and ecological significance in the Caribbean.

I am looking forward to enjoying more hikes like this one. Fortunately, the St. Croix Hiking Association, which hosted last night's event, is an active group that offers hiking activities at least once a month throughout the year.

Jamila Hammad and her husband, Bob Sifniades, are new members of the Association. You can read more about her life on St. Croix at her web blog: www.quilterinstcroix.blogspot.com



The Ham's Bluff Lighthouse is located on Maroon Ridge of Ham's Bluff, Northside Quarter "A", St. Croix, USVI. The historical names of the area are "Cape du Diable" and Maronberg. The lighthouse was put into operation in 1913 by the Danish Government in response to the building of the Panama Canal. They believed that the main route for ships from Europe to the Canal would be between St. Thomas and St. Croix; and that new navigational facilities would be needed in the Danish West Indies. They, also, believed that it would make the Virgin Islands a needed way station, and would enhance the Islands' attractiveness to the U.S. Government.

The Danish Lighthouse Service Board purchased the land on July 20, 1912 from J. W Blackwood for the amount of 2,812.50 francs, according to records of the Recorder of Deeds Office in Christiansted. The construction of the lighthouse and auxiliary buildings started in late 1912. Sometime during 1913, the engineer, Mr. Brinck, went out on the boat "Donnenborg" with "a Mr. Merwin" to determine how far the Lighthouse would be visible (which was estimated at some point in time to be 25 nautical miles). The Danish Government was the owner of record; and according to reports in the St. Croix newspaper, the AVIS, the building costs were estimated at 60,000 Danish kroner. The Lighthouse was inaugurated on July 15, 1913. Since the lighthouse was a manually operated gas light, the two auxiliary buildings - which were located at the foot of the access road -were used to provide housing for the lighthouse keeper and his assistant and storage for oil and general supplies.

The Danish Government sold the lighthouse, dwellings to the U.S. Federal Government in 1916. The U.S. Navy assumed operation in 1916 (note: all of the U. S. Virgins were purchased in 1917). In 1919, the operation of the facility was taken over by the U.S. Lighthouse Service. Currently, the U.S. Coast Guard operates the Lighthouse. The auxiliary buildings have been used by the U.S. Naval Avionics Center as a calibration laboratory along with storage and administration facilities.

The Ham's Bluff Lighthouse is a cylindrical 35ft. high tower made of cast iron and built on a concrete foundation. The tower, which is 12 feet in diameter, is painted white; the cupola on top is painted black. Unfortunately, it is in poor condition and in 2003 was put on a lighthouse "Doomsday List". Today it is an automatically operated solar powered light which flashes every 30 seconds at a focal plane 394 feet above the Caribbean.



Ham's Bluff Lighthouse: A Spiritual Beacon Comments and Photographs by Stanley Sneed

The Ham's Bluff lighthouse is a rusty iron behemoth, standing tall on a steep hillside above the cliffs of Estate Ham's Bay in the area known as Maroon Ridge. It is a spiritual and special place. The lighthouse stands as a memorial to the many enslaved Africans who threw themselves off the 394 foot cliff to escape the extremely harsh, inhuman treatment legislated and carried out by their Danish enslavers. For me, it sets a shining light on the history of those enslaved Africans, and is a beacon by which their descendents can find their way and continue the struggle of their ancestors in manifesting their freedom, hopes, and dreams.

I took these photographs while on the November full moon hike to the lighthouse. I used a Sony DSC F828 digital camera. Two of the shots were taken without a flash or tripod. Some enhancements were made with Photoshop to increase dark detail.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR: A Member's Opinion Voiced in the Media

"They Just Don't Understand" by Ivan Butcher II

When I first saw the news report about the Annaly Development Project, it made me sick to my stomach. My first thought was they don't understand.

Everywhere I have traveled in the Caribbean, those countries are trying to preserve and protect their forest areas for their future generations. Realizing that land on an island is a limited natural resource, they need to put restrictions on overdevelopment, especially, in 'eco' sensitive areas. Even countries that could swallow up our total territory are trying to preserve their forests.

Recently, I have had the opportunity to spend time with some students on opposite ends of the learning spectrum. They feel that adults and leaders in the community are corrupted and misinformed. Those I spoke to feel that society is making mockery of the adages "it takes a village to raise a child" and "the children are our future". Because of the corruption in business and government, those students (who are more disrupted to the educational system) say that what goes down in the streets is called "street taxes" and you don't need to be in school to make a good hustle. The students I interviewed at this year's Agricultural and Food Fair felt the same disdain, but chose to express themselves through themes addressing creative businesses and environmentally sound options to the deforesting and to massive construction. Their question was: "What kind of future are they planning for us when land will be scarce and too expensive for us to ever own any property here?" This year's theme: "Agriculture and Tourism Working Together in 2006" made the timing perfect for drawing attention to the many agricultural venues and eco-tours featuring architecture, history, farming techniques, culture, plants and herbs, birds, etc.

With the "rain forest" being subdivided and William and Punch sited for development, Annaly is our last undeveloped forest area...a



secondary forest from after the sugar cane era that took decades to grow. The current NOAA predictions is that the 2006 hurricane season will be more intense. If and when we have another "Hugo" or worse, Annaly will look like Point Udall.

All can agree that there has to be some development; and if left to a vote, most would

prefer to look for an alternative to selling off all the prime land. Here are some suggestions made by students and concerned alike.

St. Croix could be the educational center of the Caribbean offering instruction from Art to Zoology. This would not only bring in students and their family members, it would, also, create trade schools for our own children so that we could be exporting skilled trades men and women. With all the claims of the seven flags and the diversities of our culture and history, we should be creating an enviable marketing package selling cultural and intellectual products: art, crafts, music, literature, curriculum, fashion, etc.

There are studies that support the benefits trees have on the human psyche, especially in the area of recovery. It has been suggested that if the medical services were up graded that many people from around the world would come to our shores for both health care recuperation.

This Annaly project and, others like it, bring up a lot of questions about the feasibility studies which have been done. For one, we have yet to solve all our solid waste management issues and, in addition, fix all the roads, traffic and non-point pollution control problems. With a land and water use policy, these issues could be answered; but, this may not happen until there is a self-governing territorial status here creating controls for how the land is sold and used.

Other questions are: Why would someone come here seeing the quaint beauty of the island and act so selfishly because they have the means and money to change this place into 'everywhere else' just because they can. They are showing no concern nor compassion for the people here. Instead of them discovering and embracing our unique culture, they are forcing people off the land, and they are using the laws just to buy what they want. The talk is that some of our politicians are not able to think outside the box because their minds are stuck in the pockets of the investors. There is a saying in scripture which says "What good is it that a man possess the world and lose his soul?"

The planned developments are bad enough, but the growth would be more acceptable if the plans were for our returning retirees, graduates, and successful local professionals who would like to have a first or seasonal home here. Instead the plan is to create exclusive gated communities.



POSITIVE STEPS TO PRESERVE THE HAM'S BLUFF AREA BY ESTABLISHING A MAROON SANCTUARY PARK

The St. Croix Hiking Association - along with the St. Croix Environmental Association and many other non-profit organizations and concerned businesses - have been involved with the **SUCCEED** (St. Croix Unified for Community Culture Environment and Economic Development - formerly known as CAMP) project since its inception in March 2006. Since the north-west "Northside A" quarter was slated for a major "inappropriately" scaled and sited hotel/casino development in the Hams Bluff watershed, this area was judged to be among the three most critically threatened areas on St. Croix. All involved in **SUCCEED** have devoted a great deal of time to the **Maroon Sanctuary Park** effort. They seek, also, to establish economic incentives for appropriate development in "Northside A", with the **Maroon Sanctuary Park** itself as the core attraction, with its cultural, historical, and ecological importance highlighted by supportive businesses and educational and recreational activities. In spite of unresponsiveness of the developer, **SUCCEED** has initiated a public relations campaign targeted at educating the public about the significance the **Maroon Sanctuary Park** would have in the VI, the Caribbean, and the world. This information relates to the Maroon experience, the African Diaspora, and the Underground Railroad, with particular importance being placed on an international designation as a "World Heritage" site. High-level local and international contacts have been made to attain this goal, and pressure has been maintained to fulfill the legislative mandate to create a V.1. Parks System, where the **Maroon Sanctuary Park** would stand perpetually as a jewel, along with sites on St. Thomas and St. John (Vessup Beach and Lindqvist Bay, respectively).

CONTACT: STXSUCCEED - Tele: 340-778-4711

HOLIDAY PARTY

The St. Croix Hiking Association's annual Holiday Party was held on the evening of Saturday December 16th at the Good Hope School Pavilion. Cathy Prince and Henry Harris coordinated the event, and along with the help of Jose Rivera and Roy Pancho - who supplied all the beautiful plants - did a great job of decorating the circular pavilion. The donated space was perfect for the party affording ample room for the pot luck buffet, plenty of tables and chairs for dining, and a large dance floor. Attendance was very good and there was more than enough excellent food and drink.

As in past years, awards were given out to deserving members. The 2006 Best Female and Males Hikers were: Joyce Francis and Alan Bronstein. The Most Improved Hikers of the Year were: Doreen James and Fred Flint.

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of Joe Prince's DVD chronicling the St. Vincent / Bequia Trip. He did a great job of capturing the beauty and excitement of the adventure by using still photos which he and Ira Schulerbrandt had taken. The music Joe used to accompany the piece was excellent. You can purchase copies by contacting Cathy Prince: 772 2073.

Members and their guests spent the remainder of the evening socializing and dancing to the great holiday mix of our own DJ Misha Williams.



FROM THE PRESIDENT: Sonia Maynard-John

2006 was an exciting year filled with a variety of hikes in areas extending from the beaches of the South Shore to the hills of the North Shore and the arid East End to the lush West End...with some cool and refreshing water filled guts in between. The highlight of the year was, of course, was the annual Off Island Trip to St. Vincent and Bequia. For me, it seems that these adventures just keep getting better and better.

2006 was, also, the year when the St. Croix Hiking Association membership swelled to over 100. More and more people on St. Croix seem to want to get 'into the bush' to experience and learn about our beautiful island environment. Another draw to our Association has been our Off Island Trip...which in 2007 will be to the Dominican Republic on July 7th to 15th. This trip is only open to members in good standing. The 2006 memberships will have expired as of December 31 and members should renew in January and February.

The St. Croix Hiking Association is truly a wonderful fellowship. Our officers: **Ivan Butcher II**, Vice-president; **Tom Zimmerman**, Treasurer; **Cathy Prince**, Assistant Treasurer; **Dorothy Flash**, Secretary; **Joyce Francis**, Assistant Secretary are to be commended. They have supported me and made my job much easier. To the Committee Chairpersons - **Cathy Prince** and **Olasee Davis**, Education; **Justina Joseph** and **Henry Harris**, Fund Raising; **Joyce Francis**, Public Relations; **Dorothy Flash** and **Ivan Butcher II**, Newsletter; and all those who helped me with the Off Island Trip - I want to extend my utmost appreciation and thanks.

At the February 2007 General Meeting, the Membership will be electing a new group of officers. I urge all members to attend and make your voices heard. I would, also, like to encourage everyone to become more involved and to consider standing for any of these positions. Also, you can be an active participant on any of the the Committees. As President of the St. Croix Hiking Association, my my life (and that of my son **Kiwan John**) has been enriched physically and spiritually. May God bless you and keep you all well in 2007.

Contact **Sonia Maynard-John**

BEST HIKERS OF 2006

Joyce Francis & Alan Bronstein





January to December 2007 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JANUARY

10th (Wednesday PM):
15th (Monday AM):
31st (Wednesday PM):

General Meeting 6pm UVI Ext. Rm. 133
Blue Mountain Morning Hike
Introduction to First Aid & CPR: 6 - 9pm

FEBRUARY

7th (Wednesday PM):
25th (Sunday AM):

General Meeting & Elections: 6pm UVI Ext. Rm. 133
Estate Thomas Experimental Forest Morning Walk

MARCH

7th (Wednesday PM):
17th (Saturday PM):

General Meeting 6pm UVI Ext. Rm. 133
Estate Bodkins Mill Moonlight Hike

APRIL

4th (Wednesday PM):
15th (Sunday AM):

General Meeting 6pm UVI Ext. Rm. 133
Annaly & Wills Bay Morning Hike

MAY

2nd (Wednesday PM):
6th (Sunday PM):
26th (Saturday AM):

General Meeting 6pm UVI Ext. Rm. 133
Estate Upper Bethlehem Afternoon Walk
Cramer, Isaac, & Jack's Bays to Goat Hill Hike

JUNE

6th (Wednesday PM):
10th (Sunday AM):

General Meeting 6pm UVI Ext. Rm. 133
Scenic Road: Morningstar to Ham's Bay Trek

JULY

4th (Wednesday PM):
7th thru 15th:
28th (Saturday AM):

General Meeting 6pm UVI Ext. Rm. 133
Off Island Trip to Dominican Republic
Walking Tour of Frederiksted Town

AUGUST

1st (Wednesday PM):
12th (Sunday):

General Meeting 6pm UVI Ext. Rm. 133
Spring Gut and Spring Garden Afternoon Hike

SEPTEMBER

2nd (Sunday PM):
5th (Wednesday PM):
29th (Saturday AM):

Estate Clifton Hill Plantation Ruins Afternoon Walk
General Meeting 6pm UVI Ext. Rm. 133
Estate Clairmont Morning Hike

OCTOBER

3rd (Wednesday PM):
14th (Sunday AM):
28th (Sunday PM):

General Meeting 6pm UVI Ext. Rm. 133
Caledonia Valley Tropical Moist Forest Hike
Est. Castle Coakley Plantation Ruins Afternoon Walk

NOVEMBER

7th (Wednesday PM):
11th (Sunday AM):
24th (Saturday AM):

General Meeting 6pm UVI Ext. Rm. 133
Waldberg Gaard / Cane Valley Morning Hike
Walking Tour of Christiansted Town

DECEMBER

5th (Wednesday PM):
8th (Saturday AM):
Date to be announced:

General Meeting 6pm UVI Ext. Rm. 133
Cane Bay - North Ridge of Mt. Eagle Hike
Annual Holiday Party

Times and meeting places will be announced in media. All events subject to change!
Please, bring your own water and snacks for hikes. Wear appropriate clothing, shoes, and hat.

Continued from front cover

long story short, fights between the French, British, and Caribs continued until the islands were finally taken over by the British. In 1979, St. Vincent and the Grenadines gained their independence.

On our travels around St. Vincent we learned about the forest types, the whistling frog, black snake, agouti, armadillo, and the endangered species parrot. The following day was for waterfalls. We drove on the west coast of the island on steep roads where we saw cliffs, black sandy beaches, and friendly people. On our way, the guide pointed out the site Wallilabou where the movie *Pirates of the Caribbean* was made. Then, our bus drove over rough roads and through thousands of bananas, mangoes, and ground provisions planted both on steep slopes and in valleys. An interesting fact is that St. Vincent is the world leader in the exportation of arrowroot. At one of our destinations, we hiked through a lush secondary tropical forest to Trinity waterfalls. The falls are located in a deep volcanic canyon with three falls behind each other. Oh, what a sight to behold. Everybody had a great time swimming and taking pictures. Then, we drove to other waterfalls called 'Dark and Light' falls. Here again, we hiked across a bamboo bridge to the falls. According to Bailey, St. Vincent has over 68 waterfalls - some not even discovered by the tourist industry.

The next day, we traveled on boat to the island of Bequia. We explored the island and learned about the history, culture, and people. We, also, shopped, swam, ate, and visited the sea turtles conservation center.

The following morning was the day everybody was mentally waiting for: to hike La Soufriere. This an active, but now quiet, volcano rising over 4,000 feet. The earliest recorded eruption was 1718; then followed in 1811, 1812, then 1902 when 1565 people were killed: The volcano, also, erupted in 1972 and 1979. La Soufriere is St. Vincent's major tourist attraction. This time we drove on the east coast of the island.

The day started out sunny. Few hours later, our bus broke down as we drove through the Mesopotamia Valley, the bread basket of St. Vincent. The valley is fertile with rivers running through it and meeting at one point. The entire island has many rivers and streams making St. Vincent self-sufficient in food production. As we got to the base of La Soufriere, the sky turned dark and it eventually rained. We hiked into the forest until the plants became shrubs and weed-like plants. As we continued to hike, we came to rugged edge of the crater. Wind started to blow clouds under our feet, and the temperature dropped to where every hair on our bodies turned white with the cold. From here, we hiked into the crater where there was a large body of water. It was a truly spiritual experience.

During the next few days we visited historic sites like the Botanic Garden, Fort Charlotte, Black Point, the northeast salt pond and the Carib Indians area known as New Sandy Bay. We shopped until we dropped and enjoyed the island festival. St. Vincent was Eden on earth.

Olasee Davis, is co-chair of the Education Committee



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