



ST. CROIX HIKING ASSOCIATION
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**David Hamilton- Hard Labor
Ecological Preserve And
Historical Park**

This ecological preserve, once inhabited, offers a cultural and an agricultural history of plants and animal life. The preserve encompasses a 1796 windmill tower on top of a hill looking over the fertile valley of Estate Hard Labor. There is also a 1780 animal mill, great house, and other historical architectural structures and ruins integrated in the forest environment.

In 1917, the St. Croix Labor Union led by D. Hamilton Jackson acquired Estate Hard Labor and Grove Place. The land remained under Union ownership until 1994 when Samuel Raphael purchased the property.

Much of this secondary forest land has steep slopes on either side of streambeds (guts) with a dense gallery of moist forest. The hike starts at one of the stream's bottomland at Estate Hard Labor. Upstream at the beginning of the hike, you will encounter along the streambed, garbage such as old abandoned vehicles and make-do shelters.

On both sides of the streambed, mango (*mangifera indica*) trees line the waterway. Some trees are over one hundred years old. Other large trees in the bottomland are Monkey-pistol, Sandbox, Monkey-no climb me (*Hura cerpitans*), Royal palm or Puerto Rican palm, (*Roystonea borinquena*) rare native fig (*Ficus obtusifolia*) tree with

its large buttress root system, Silk cotton or Kapok (*Ceiba pentandra*) tree reaching high above the forest floor.

There was also erosion along the streambeds due to deforestation such as clearing of lands, cultivation of crops, grazing of animals, and roads along the banks. If you observe closely as you hike, there are ruins of check dams in the area. These check dams were built to control sediment and to recharge the underground aquifer and improve surface water in the stream. The dams were probably built during the 19th and 20th centuries.

You will observe few termite nests along the trail path. Termite nests are built with a mixture of termite feces, saliva, and soil. Tree termites (*Nasutitermes costalis*) contribute in the recycle of wood and other plant materials. As you continue to hike upstream, there are a few dry waterfalls along the path. During the rainy season, these falls become active with the force of water flowing from a height of 700 feet above sea level.

Before the falls, you will see ruins on your left hand side. The bamboos scattered among the ruins were imported to the islands to hold soil along the bank of streams. Thus from the waterfalls, one being seven feet high, you will make a left turn until eventually you connect to a paved road. Not far, you will encounter the water tower, animal mill, and other historical structures of Estate Hard Labor. The estate is of the Prince Quarter.

The attached article that I wrote for the Virgin Island Daily News gives a little more history of the estate.

Olasee Davis, Chair of the Education Committee
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