

ENVIRONMENT



MEMBERS of the TTFNC and the British Sub-Aqua Group on Leotaud Estate on March 22, 1964. PHOTO BY IAN LAMBIE

'Actions and consequences'

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At the Arima Police Station where, by then, word had spread to the families of the missing men, they were gathered in a group out-side the station, where there was speculation as to what had happened and there were some hopes that the men had found the fabled inner cave or at least a pocket of air and were there awaiting rescue.

I could do little more and left for home. I kept in touch with John Dunston and Elliot Olton the next day and they told me briefly about the rescue efforts by Malcolm Brown and his brother who, with a team of helpers, several donkeys to carry the need-

ed equipment, including powerful lights and safety harnesses and all that was necessary for diving in such hazardous conditions, had found and retrieved the body of only one of the men, Victor Abraham.

In those years the daily newspapers were not published on a Monday, but that Tuesday, the 24th, there was maximum coverage of the tragedy, where more details and photos were given of the rescue efforts and how though they had recovered the body of Victor. Adam Richards' body was not recovered due to the crumbling walls of the cave underwater and the threats to the rescuing divers.

The headlines screamed "Nightmare Death Pool at Cumaca" among other sensational sentences and even a week later, the *Sunday Guardian* bannered, "Chamber of Horrors in Picturesque Countryside."

I could not reconcile what we had been taught about actions and consequences, and I could not believe that those two young men in the flush of their life could have done anything so wrong or terrible to have deserved that death, alone and terrified, underwater, and in the dark, in the bowels of the earth.

I in later years talked to Malcolm Brown and he told me details of what he had seen and experienced that day. How both he and his brother had also nearly perished negotiating the passages underwater that the two had dared, and how when he found Victor's body, he was stark naked except for one flipper, and that he saw parts of Adam's body, but he was covered by fallen rocks with only a leg, an arm and one of his tanks visible in the swirling pea-soup, murky waters, deep in Cumaca Cave. They found the roll of tape too, but it was defective, in that it had once been broken, and the two parted ends had been simply taped together with what looked like common Sellotape. The water had softened this joint, and the tape came apart, so if even the two lost divers had managed to find the spool, it would have led them nowhere and their death would have been certain.

When he told Adam's father, who had travelled in to the cave that night, what he had found of his son, the elder Richards had pragmatically reasoned, in that Adam was dead and virtually buried already, it was unwise to risk any more lives to retrieve the body.

It is passing strange how this event has touched my family. Years later, for he cannot recall the exact date, my cousin Nigel Boos, hiking in the same river near the mouth of the cave, came across a bone which he thought might be human and sent it to Sir Henry Pierre, the noted Trinidadian surgeon, who had it identified as a human leg bone, the tibia of the lower leg.

Putting all other coincidences aside, this bone was more than likely the leg bone of Adam Richards.

The cave was giving up its dead.

Today's feature was written by Hans Boos. For more information on our natural environment, you can contact the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club at admin@ttfnc.org or visit our website at www.ttfnc.org.

Note: In last week's piece, Victor Abraham was mistakenly identified as Vincent Abraham. The error is regretted.

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The Cumaca Cave Tragedy of 1964 (Part 2)

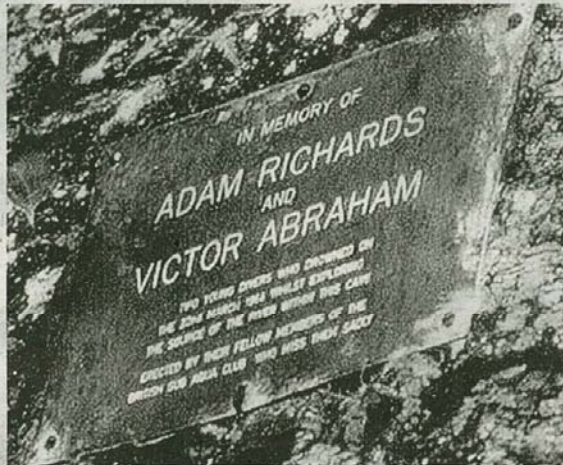
THIS week we continue the account published last Thursday in *Newsday* of an incident that occurred at the Cumaca Cave on March 22, 1964.

The water immediately clouded up again and we who had come to attempt to capture the catfish moved out of that chamber and made our way downstream, going towards the entrance of the cave to see if the silt would have settled out by then and allow us to bait the fish from their hiding and to net them.

In the excitement of the next hours I do not recall if we caught any catfish, but I remember giving up as I had strained my back coming in and the pain was such that I only wanted to get back to the cars and then home.

As we made our way up the slippery slopes of the hills out of the valley, suddenly we heard the sound of running feet and one of the Sub-Aquas ran past us as if a devil was at his heels. He ignored our calls of enquiry. A few minutes after another man, this time an Englishman, came running and paused only long enough to tell us breathlessly that they had lost two men. "They went in and did not come out." And they were going to get more air tanks from their cars to continue the rescue efforts as all the air they had in the cave had already been used up in the search.

Members of the Club wanted to go back to help in these efforts, but I dissuaded them on the grounds that more people in the crowded cave certainly would escalate the danger level, and that our flashlight batteries were almost exhausted anyhow, so it would be folly to trek back into the cave. I told them that the best thing we could do was to hurry to the Arima



THE plaque at the entrance in memory of Adam Richards and Victor Abraham. PHOTO BY HANS BOOS



Police Station and make a report and that I knew a professional diver who I would try to contact when we could get to a phone.

A while later the two men came running back, grey faced with exhaustion, and carrying fresh tanks of air to enable them to continue the search for the missing men.

About an hour later I made the report to the police at the Arima station, from the little information

I had, and then hurried to the home of John Dunston who lived on the out-skirts of Arima; using his phone I began to try to contact Malcolm Brown who was an oil-field diver of some experience.

It took quite a while before I managed to get in contact with Malcolm. He was attending the Southern Games, a yearly popular sports event held at Guaracara Park in Pointe-a-Pierre. I explained the situation to him as best I could and he told me that he would try his best to assemble a team and equipment and rendezvous at the Arima Police Station where he expected he could get more current news of the status of the developing tragedy.

John Dunston called a mutual friend and experienced bush man, Elliot Olton, and we three drove back to Arima.

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