



THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

DOMINICA 2000

A pictorial diary

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club visited Dominica from July 24 to August 1, 2000, in coordination with the Dominica Conservation Association.

This trip was eagerly awaited after the success of the Club's visits to St. Lucia in 1994 and to Bequia and St. Vincent in 1999.

Over 30 members took part in this field trip and enjoyed a memorable week exploring the "Nature Island of the Caribbean."

Photographs by Clayton Hull and Selwyn Gomes.

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DAY 1: Scott's Head, Soufriere

Scott's Head

Scott's Head is a promontory at the southern tip of Dominica, joined to the rest of the island by a narrow causeway. A trail leads up to the summit, which commands a panoramic view of the southwestern coast of Dominica.

With its view of the ocean to the west and south, Scott's Head is also said to be a good vantage point for spotting whales.



Looking across Soufriere Bay towards Scott's Head



View from Scott's Head towards Soufriere and Roseau



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Relaxing at the summit. The town of Scott's Head is in the background.

Soufriere

The town of Soufriere, on the South-West coast just north of Scott's Head, is located in a valley which contains hot springs and geothermal vents. Following the trail up the valley, we came to one of the areas where vented gases had created an extensive sulphur deposit. Rising steam could be detected at several active vents.



Sulphur deposits at Soufriere



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Day 2: Sari-Sari Falls, Carib Territory

Our first look at a real Dominica waterfall.

The route to Sari-Sari took us across the island to the Atlantic coast. The trail starts in a banana plantation, and after a steep descent to the river, a short walk upriver brought us to the falls.

The first sight of Sari-Sari was quite breathtaking. Getting to the pool at the foot of the waterfall was not easy, but those who made the effort were rewarded with an invigorating swim in the perfectly clear water.

The pool was teeming with fish, many of them brightly coloured (in contrast to the generally drab colours of the fish in Trinidad's rivers.)



Crossing the river on the way to the falls.



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After visiting Sari-Sari, we continued northward along the coast to the Carib Territory. This is the home of the descendants of the original Carib population of Dominica. The Territory is governed by a semi-autonomous Council. We were granted an interview with the current head of the council, Chief Joseph.



Traditional cane basketwork items sold by the Caribs



At the Council Office

Photo: Selwyn Gomes



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Day 3: Portsmouth, Cabrits, Syndicate

After leaving the Carib Territory, we continued along the east coast and around the northern tip of the island to the second-largest town, Portsmouth, where we spent the night.

Portsmouth was once the capital of Dominica, but was abandoned in favour of Roseau because of the threat of malaria due to the abundance of mosquitoes (of which we were to have first-hand experience!)

The town is located on Prince Rupert Bay and has a long sand beach, quite unlike most other areas in Dominica.



Powder magazine at Cabrits

Cabrits National Park occupies a peninsula at the northern end of Prince Rupert Bay. It was a major military base up to the nineteenth century, and many of the stone structures have survived.

The park is a popular recreational area for local residents, one of whom, Prime Minister Roosevelt Douglas (now unfortunately deceased) we encountered on his morning constitutional.



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Photo-opportunity with the Prime Minister

Photo: Selwyn Gomes



Indian River, which flows into Prince Rupert Bay, drains one of the few wetland areas in Dominica. Small rowboats (motors are not allowed!) ferry visitors upriver to enjoy scenes like this.

On the way back to Roseau we stopped at Syndicate, where the two indigenous parrots, the Sisserou and the Jaco, can be seen. Our group caught sight of the Jaco, but the Sisserou did not put in an appearance for us.



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Day 4: Middleham Trail, Trafalgar Falls



The Middleham trail

Tree-ferns like these are a prominent feature of Dominica's forests.



The spectacular Middleham Falls



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Trafalgar

The twin falls at Trafalgar are easily accessible via a short, well-maintained trail. Of the eco-sites we visited this was the most developed, and its popularity is justified.

Those willing to clamber over the large rocks can enjoy a swim in the pool under the "Mother" waterfall, as seen here.





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Day 5: Morne Diablotins

At 4,747 feet, Morne Diablotins is the highest peak in Dominica. As such, it was a prime objective for those members of the group who prided themselves on their physical fitness and determination.

Seven intrepid adventurers set out for the peak - and all of them made it, in spite of heavy rain and a trail that was almost nonexistent (unlike the well-maintained trails we found at the established eco-tourism sites.)



On the way to the peak.

Photo: Selwyn Gomes



Field Naturalists at Morne Diablotins

Photo: Selwyn Gomes

Those who passed up the Morne Diablotins trip paid a visit to the headquarters of the Dominica Conservation Association, where a youth camp was being held. As one of our joint activities with the DCA, Dr Carol Draper was to give a demonstration of the construction of a solar oven, while Maureen Ottier would display some of her nature paintings.



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In the picture above, Carol Draper has the undivided attention of her young audience as she builds a solar oven out of a sheet of glass, two cardboard boxes and some shredded newspaper.

Day 6: Sorry, no whales!

A whalewatching trip was offered as an optional activity for Day 6. In the event, almost all the members of the group chose to go on this trip. We drove just outside Roseau and boarded a well-equipped boat used for diving tours as well as whalewatching. We sailed along the coast for a couple of hours, pausing at intervals with engines off while our captain listened with a hydrophone for whale or dolphin sounds. Unfortunately, nothing was heard or seen of either whales or dolphins and we had to give up and return to port - disappointed of course, but we had been warned that there was no guarantee of seeing anything.

The day was not wasted, however, as we still had time to do some sightseeing around Roseau.



The Roseau Botanic Gardens



The town square.

Once the site of slave auctions, this square now houses a permanent craft and souvenir market.



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Day 7: The climax - Boiling Lake!

Dominica's famous Boiling Lake, located in the Morne Trois Pitons National Park, was our final trip and the climax of our week in Dominica. The hike to the lake, reputed to be a major test of endurance, turned out to be less of a challenge than we had anticipated. Perhaps we were helped by the solemn prayer and invocation delivered by Eurico Jardim before we set out!

In any event, all the members who attempted the trip succeeded in reaching the lake.

The trail to the Boiling Lake starts at Titou Gorge, itself a major attraction. It is similar to Trinidad's Guanapo Gorge, but the depth of the water is greater and it is much more difficult to swim through. An interesting fact is that below the Gorge the entire flow of the river is channeled into a large pipeline which, along with a supply from the Freshwater Lake, feeds the island's hydro-electric power generating system.



The Valley of Desolation

The trail to the Boiling Lake passes through this area of geothermal activity. Bromeliads like the one in the foreground are among the few plants surviving near the active vents.



Hot streams in the Valley of Desolation

White and black streams, coloured by different minerals, converge at the lower end of the valley.



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Hot mineralized water issuing from geothermal vents leaves multicoloured deposits on the rocks.



A hot pool to soothe tired muscles before the long trek home.



Members celebrate their arrival at the Boiling Lake.
That's steam behind them, not mist!
(Photo: Selwyn Gomes)



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General view of the lake

The actively boiling area at the centre is visible through the clouds of steam.



The lake edge

Two small streams empty into the lake at this point.

(Photo: Selwyn Gomes)

The End