

# THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

## FOURTH QUARTER 1990

Dear Member

You are invited to attend the monthly meetings of the club to be held on Thursdays October 11th and November 8th 1990 and a Special Members Evening on Thursday December 6th, 1990 at 5.30 p.m. at the Audio Visual Room of St. Mary's College, Port of Spain. You are also invited to attend the field trips listed hereunder (provided the State of Emergency has been lifted)

### A G E N D A

1. Confirmation of the Minutes
2. Business arising out of the Minutes
3. Announcements
4. Exhibits and Miscellaneous Notes
5. Other Business
6. Lecture

### L E C T U R E S

- Oct. 11th - Ecology of some Trinidadian Mosquitoes  
by Dr. E. Tikasingh
- Nov. 8th - Environmental Concerns Related to the  
Extraction Processing and use of Industrial  
Mineral Resources of Trinidad and Tobago  
by Mr. Carral T. Alexander
- Dec. 6th - Members Evening with special emphasis on  
the Centenary celebrations

### F I E L D T R I P S

- October 28th - "Soho" Cave
- November 25th - Cerro del Aripo
- December 9th - Christmas Party (please come forward  
with venues, etc.)

### CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS - July 1990

The committee has been meeting on a monthly basis and all projects are on stream as far as they can be at this stage. Very hard working sub-committees are (1) The Guide to Nature Trails which is well ahead of schedule and has been meeting weekly. (2) Museum Exhibit which has also been meeting weekly. This sub-committee will be requiring assistance soon and we would like all members to help in whatever way possible so that the exhibit ends up being a whole-club effort. We hope to be able to give more details at the planned Members Evening on December 6th. However, there is the possibility that a Canadian taxidermist/Museum specialist will be visiting in early November 1990: we therefore ask members to keep in touch so that if workshops and or training sessions are possible that they will attend so that we will all be better prepared to assist with the exhibit.

Luisa Zuniaga  
Honorary Secretary  
1 Errol Park Road  
St. Ann's  
October 1, 1990



A ONE DAY HIKING TRIP FROM MATELOT TO BLANCHISSEUSE ON JUNE 14, 1990. - Paul Comeau

In order to attempt this trip it was necessary to have someone drop us off at Matelot and someone else pick us up in Blanchisseuse. Your President, Yasmin S. Comeau, kindly obliged to do the dropping while Brian Nothnagel, son-in-law of Roger Barnes (a member of the hiking group) did the picking up. In addition to Roger, the other members of the hiking party included Marlene Hosein and the author of this article.

The hike started off with a rainbow suspended over Matelot as we began walking from the Catholic Church at 8.30 am. The 45½ mile post near the start of the trail reminded us of the long trek ahead as we knew that it was not until we saw the 63¼ mile post at the other end that we would be nearing the completion of our walking-marathon. Sunshine, no wind, and high humidity accompanied us as we started climbing the steep hill at the western end of Matelot where the bench trail enters plantation forest, but the weather soon deteriorated as storm clouds moved in and rain began to fall. Fortunately, this did not persist for long and we were able to make good progress, climbing over the top of the divide behind Grand Matelot Pt. and descending to the footbridge over the Petit Riviere River. It took us about an hour and thirteen minutes to reach this point. The divide itself reaches an elevation of 195m (650'), the highest point along the trail, and the bench trail on both sides of its steep slopes is overgrown with weeds wherever short cuts eliminate foot traffic along the zigzags.

From the Petit Riviere River the trail climbs gradually and follows the contour as it winds and twists westwards. Just beyond the 50½ mile post a spectacular view occurs down the steep cliff edge to the sea below and westward along the coast. The bench trail west of the Petit Riviere River is well used and no time was wasted moving along it with the occasional mile post to indicate our progress. Two minutes beyond the 54 mile post, the trail forks. The right branch leads down to the shoreline east of the Madamas River, so avoiding this we headed up the left branch and soon reached a point where the trail started to descend steeply, zigzagging downslope to the Madamas. The river was slightly swollen due to recent rainfall and reached above our knees as we waded across. As it was raining at the time we decided not to take a swim and lunch break but push on towards Grand Tacarib Beach. We knew from a previous trip (from Matelot to Madamas) that our progress was good, having reached the river in 3½ hours, a distance of 9 miles (approximately 14 km.)

The rainfall made the walking slippery as we climbed the steep slopes west of the River. The trail after descending and climbing between two stream gullies brings you an hour later to the eastern end of Grand Tacarib beach. The beach was a welcome sight and as we walked along its one kilometre length, a light drizzle fell. We took an hour's break when we reached the western end. There were numerous Leatherback turtle tracks in regular rows along the beach, indicating much egg-laying activity the previous night. Roger and Marlene went for a swim, but I was too famished to postpone lunch. After replenishing lost energy and a change of socks, we felt ready to tackle the second half of our endurance test.

Climbing to the top of the cliff at the western end of the beach we came across a clearing and dwelling. A lonely occupant pointed us in the right direction and we continued westward with the trail climbing and descending between numerous stream gullies. The rain had stopped but the sky remained cloudy. Twenty minutes beyond Tacarib Beach we came across a well-built wooden house on a concrete-brick foundation, that was recently constructed. The building materials must have been transported to the site by boat, but there was no indication of any occupants, so we continued on our way. An hour and thirteen minutes beyond the house the trail descended to Murphy Bay with a nice sandy beach. We did not linger, however, we kept to the path through the coconut trees at the back of the beach.

At the western end of Murphy Bay the trail climbed to the top of Paria Pt. where a clearing and dwelling were found. Two suspicious looking and nervous characters greeted us as we approached the dwelling. They informed us that we could wade across the mouth of the Paria River rather than trek a half mile inland where we were told a bridge crosses the river. We decided the first option was best and so descended the steep bank of the east side of Paria. In order to get across the river we had to wade up to our chests in places, with guidance being shouted to us from the top of the bank by one of the occupants just encountered.

Paria Beach is almost as long as Grand Tacarib, and we paused briefly to empty sand out of shoes. From Paria the bench trail continues to ascend and descend between stream-gullies. We were now starting to feel the strain of the long walk, with Marlene and I suffering from aching knees. I also blundered into a wasp nest concealed beneath a Balisier leaf overhanging the trail and got stung in four places. Despite my warning to the others, Marlene also got stung once on her scalp.



Approximately 25 minutes from Paria Beach, after zigzagging up a steep hill, we came to a fork in the trail and proceeded up the left branch heading south. This proved to be a mistake as the track was taking us too far inland away from the coast. So, after ten minutes we turned back to follow the branch heading west. Not long after gaining the right direction, the trail began a very steep descent to a large stream, followed by a very steep climb up the other side. At the top of this steep ascent another trail junction was encountered, with a bench trail from the south joining the main one. This time we were not tempted to head south again as the southern trail did not look well used being overgrown with weeds.

The trail beyond this point descends after 15 minutes to Morne Poui Bay where a rotten bridge had to be negotiated. Just off shore a large cliff-rock looms with trees growing on top. Another 15 minutes hiking brought us at last to the 63' mile post, the first marker we had encountered since leaving the Madamas River. Seven minutes later sighs of relief were heard as the bench trail ended, joining the dirt road from Blanchisseuse. The time was 6.08 pm and the sky was glowing pink in the west as the sun went down. At 6.30, about one kilometre east of the suspension bridge over the Marianne River, we met Brian. Due to the approaching darkness we decided to end our marathon walk rather than attempt to reach the bridge which had been our intended goal.

Not counting the hour spent at Grand Tacarib Beach, and the 20 minutes lost by taking a wrong turn, the total time for the hike from Matelot to Blanchisseuse was eight hours and 11 minutes. We estimated that due to the inclement weather, 20-25 minutes extra time taken for the second half of the walk from Grand Tacarib Beach westward. The total distance hiked was 30km or 19 miles.

After completing the walk, I told the others that I didn't think I would do such a hike again. Now in retrospect, I think I might be tempted once more, but next time it would have to be in the dry season and in the opposite direction.

#### MORE NOTES ON THE MATELOT TO BLANCHISSEUSE HIKE ON JUNE 19, 1990 - Marlene Hussain

From a female's point of view and for those females who are wondering if they should try a hike of this magnitude, you definitely should, as long as you are healthy and strong and full of determination and willpower. It's an exhilarating challenge and you experience a natural 'high' when you are able to say "I did it!"

Having said that, let me tell you all about it now in as few words as possible.

We started hiking at 8.40 am, 10 minutes after arriving at Matelot. Immediately and for about 15 minutes we climbed an incline, after which it levelled off to a fairly flat walk. At 12.05 p.m. we arrived at the Madamas River which was swollen from all the rainfall. Actually, we got soaked as the rain fell throughout the hike, but we didn't really feel the cold as we were hiking at a brisk pace for the first 11 miles (20 minute mile pace). Water-baby that I am, I dearly wanted to plunge into this splendid river. It is rocky mostly, but is deep enough to swim in, especially in one area we saw there is a very deep pool. However, we decided to cover at least half the distance before stopping to rest and lunch, Madamas being ONLY 9 miles. Needless to say I swam through the river. Despite the rainfall, the water was quite clear.

So we pushed on to Tacarib Beach which lay 2 miles from Madamas. We arrived at 1.15 pm. Here we rested and lunched and soaked in the sea, all for about an hour. I sat on the beach and stretched my legs straight out in front of me, then I lay in the water and let it flow all over me, especially my legs, which I "sapped" and "sapped", hoping the sea could provide me with a fresh pair of legs to complete the journey. Tacarib is just spectacular, so untouched and unspoilt and clean and sandy all around. There were a lot of turtle nests too and they looked as fresh as the night before. Tacarib, like Madamas, can only be reached by hiking or by fishing boats, so this would account for the beautiful, natural state of these areas. The water at Tacarib was also clean and clear. However, to reach Tacarib we had to cross another river which was very muddy we couldn't see what was in it and in some places it was up to our necks. YECH! I promptly washed out my clothes in the sea because I had to wear these same clothes for the second part of the journey. We departed this scene at approximately 2.30 pm by way of a track that led off from the beach itself, just like the one that took us straight onto the beach.

Now began the hard part, for me, as the trail inclined steeply for most of the rest of the way, and I am not good at climbing inclines/hills/mountains, but if I have to crawl on my hands and knees I conquer them all.

The view along this was is even more spectacular, looking down steep cliff-sides into deep aquamarine waters which is quite enticing (if you are a diver). There are several smaller beaches along this way too.



Due to the severity of this second part of the journey I was slowed down quite a bit and it seemed to go on forever, as every time I encountered a flat part of the trail, (which wasn't often), I would breathe a sigh of relief thinking it was the last hill, only to face another one up ahead. And if that wasn't hard enough, the trail was muddy and there were a lot of wet leaves too, the grips from under my shoes came off when I crossed the Madamas, so I was just slipping, sliding and falling all over the place. I acquired a stick to help me walk and I still fell down. I also experienced cramps in the areas just above the front of the knees which I had to stop and rub. Imagine my relief when the trail ended and we came upon the dirt road which leads to the bridge, where, upon reaching, this 20-mile journey will finally end. However, at 19 miles and some, Roger's son-in-law met us with the car and we decided to halt, thank God. I changed my clothes and practically fell into the car. My poor feet ached, my legs ached, and the lower part of my back ached. How I got out of the car on arriving home, and how I moved around the day after, now that's another story.

So there you have it. Determination and will power comes into play during the second part of the hike. I remember thinking that is too much for the human body to go through in one day. I would do the hike from Matelot to Tacarib again, but return to Matelot, not continue on to Blanchisseuse. For me, it would have to be two separate hikes. It would probably be even more fulfilling and rewarding to tackle the hard part first, beginning from Blanchisseuse. This way, when you reach Tacarib and/or Madamas, you would feel that it was all worth it.

But the way, could you imagine how I felt on learning that Guerra was held not far from where our hiking trail passed through? I remember mentioning this possibility to Roger several days before the hike as an excuse to extract myself from this expedition. I thank God that we were saved from this confrontation, and the next hike will have to be more peopled before I venture forth.

#### FURTHER NOTES ON THE LONG HIKE - MATELOT TO BLANCHISSEUSE - R.F. Barnes

It was a great hike, but there was not much time to stop and stare at Nature; however, there was much to see.

On the way to Matelot, coming down the hill into Grande Riviere, I saw what looked like a Corn-bird flying backwards - it turned out to be a Toucan! Then of course we saw snakes - three of them to be exact - all hurrying across the path in different places, probably to get away from the rain. They certainly had no time for us. The longest was about 1.2 metres, the shortest about .5 metres. They were all very slim and elegant and almost certainly not poisonous.

And later on the hike, after Paria, as the other two were going up the path ahead of me I was what looked like a black hound-dog with brown extremities at both ends, leap silently up a short-cut in a zig-zag after them and disappear into the bushes. Was it wild or just lost?

Paul mentioned the Jack Spaniards nest on a banana leaf hanging in the middle of the trail, but we also saw some small bees on one of the three fallen trees we had to surmount. This one was at the 50 3/4 mile post, and had fallen right across it. The bees were on the tree at the seaward end where there was a vertical drop off the part, and we had to go a few yards up-slope to cross it safely, finding the milepost hidden in the foilage. This treefall was new, as it had not been there on the trip before when Paul and Denise Lee and I went to Madamas and back on April 29th. There was another new fall further on. This was more difficult to negotiate as the tree had fallen along the path and obscured it for about 15 metres. The third was an old one where we had to walk along a fallen trunk about 1.5 metres wide and then walk under the root base of a real giant at least 3 metres wide.

The only other animals I can recall were some pelicans at Tacaribe and frigates further on towards Paria. There were also lots of turtle-tracks, not only at Tacarib but also three or four at Murphy's Bay.

The vegetation was also worth seeing. Much of it was estate land in cacao, coffee and of course nutmegs. The last were full of fruit which was just beginning to drop. We also found some delicious mangoes, three times, just when we needed a lift. The forest was also very pleasant, with some really big trees, and in several places there were many Spider lilies along the trail.

It was a really good day in spite of all the rain, but it would have been nicer to have been able to spend a little more time 'naturalising' along the way. Any time Paul or Marlene want to do it again, I am with them!.