



THE FIELD NATURALIST

Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

October - December

No. 04 : 2000

FIELD TRIP REPORT

**Grand Tacarib Camp—August 27-28, 2000
by Averil Ramchand**

This is an account of the overnight field trip to Tacarib by a first-timer with the Field Naturalists' Club. We parked our cars at Blanchisseuse police station conveniently opposite the fishing boat jetty where we were to board two of the pirogues. There was a lot of luggage since one or two members came, well prepared for at least a week's trip, with big bags.

All the luggage was stacked in the middle of one of the pirogues. Fortunately, I had been told that all clothing etc. should be wrapped in plastic. This was definitely the most important piece of advice I received. In spite of taking this precautionary measure, at the end of the hour-long journey along the coast, my sleeping bag was slightly damp from the water which had settled in the middle of the boat. I was blissfully unaware of this as I enjoyed the excitement of navigating in and out of the rocks. Our pilot was obviously very skilful at this so that, despite a bit of apprehension by some members, the experience was very much appreciated, especially by the photographers. The weather was beautiful, with no indication of what was to come.

In retrospect, I can say that we need to be provided with some more official information about the field trips – for example, in this case, what was generally important for an overnight trip and what the particular trip entailed. When we landed at Tacarib we had to take a long walk, first over rocks,

to get to our camp site. We chose a site at the other end of the beach because of the fresh running water nearby which turned out to be a godsend. We set up camp. Dan began cooking with some assistance in preparing the vegetables. The menu was ambitious, considering the circumstances – a kind of curried channa soup, followed by curried mango, chinese vegetables and fried rice.

IN THIS ISSUE

Notice of AGM 2001.....p. 2

Boiling Lake, part 2.....pp. 3-6

Grand Tacarib (cont'd)....pp. 7-8

Nash provided a very nifty gadget which supplied hot water for tea and coffee at any time. The rest of the day was spent swimming in the breakers, walking along the beach and saving the baby leatherback turtles from being mauled by the corbeaux. The highlight of the trip was the sight of the babies emerging from the holes in the sand and struggling, in a swimming motion, down to the sea. Some members tried to help them, even to the extent of carrying them the

Cont'd on Page 7

Club Notices

REMINDER

Your Individual membership fee of \$50.00 becomes payable from January 2001.



OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2000

The quarterly bulletin of the
Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

Editors.....Calista Pierre

Contributors.....Averil Ramchand, Eurico Jardim,
Selwyn Gomes

Photographs.....Dan Jaggernauth, Eurico Jardim,

Design & Layout.....Calista Pierre

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation.

Management Committee, 2000

President....Carrall Alexander, Vice-President....Nigel Gains
Secretary...Anna Griffith, Treasurer.....Selwyn Gomes
Asst. Secretary....Cheryl Lee Kim, Field Trip Team Members...
Dan Jaggernauth & Sheldon Edwards, Junior Member....
Krishanta Maharaj

TTFNC's MISSION STATEMENT

To foster education and knowledge on natural history and to encourage and promote activities that would lead to the appreciation, preservation and conservation of our natural heritage.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Dear Member,

You are hereby notified that the **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club will be held on Thursday January 11, 2001 at the St Mary's College Audio-Visual Room, Frederick Street, Port of Spain from 5:30 p.m. The Agenda for this meeting is as follows:

1. Treasurer's Report
2. Adoption of Accounts
3. Secretary's Report
4. Committee Reports by the President
5. Election of Officers and Members of the Committees for the 2001
6. Appointment of Auditors
7. Any other business

Any member wishing to have any business discussed at this meeting may advise the Secretary in writing c/o P.O. Box 642, Port of Spain, giving particulars of the subject to be discussed at least seven days before the date of the meeting.

Yours Sincerely

Selwyn Gomes
Hon. Treasurer
Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

We Made It To The Boiling Lake - Part 2

Part two of Eurico Jardim's report on the TTFNC's field trip to Dominica, which took place during July 24-31, 2000.

Next morning I was up early for a shave, swim and shower and discovered with horror when I looked into the mirror that my right ear was covered with some sort of black stain! First thoughts of some mysterious, fast-acting plague contracted from the voracious insects of the night before were quickly dismissed as I reasoned that it *had* to be some reaction between the chemicals in my not-very-successful insect repellent and the black-lettered advertising on the plastic bag which had served as my pillowcase. But any fears (hopes?) I had that I would have to bear this "badge of courage" for the rest of the week vanished with the stain in the shower!

For breakfast I had one of my "mataburros" with granola, cornflakes and milk and later the other one with a granola bar for lunch. That I live to tell the tale suggests that either I followed precisely all the instructions or I have a cast-iron stomach! Some of us made a trip up Indian River nearby, which flows so gently that our boatman/guide had no trouble in rowing us up the mile or so for which it is possible. Here I was introduced to the *mahoe* flower which mimics human behaviour as we get up every morning: some "early risers" change their overnight colour of orange to a bright yellow while other "sleepyheads" remain orange for much longer. I made a mental note to tell Andrea about them!

Later in the morning we strolled to the Cabrits National Park, whose administration buildings are visible across the bay from the Purple Turtle. Near the car park we were fortunate to meet up with a very affable Prime Minister Roosevelt

Douglas. The Dominican papers are careful to spell his pet name "Roosie", which avoids the effeminate overtones of "Rosie" as the T&T papers call him. After being greeted individually we were soon clustered around him for a taste of unaccustomed (for me, anyway) celebrity treatment as members vied to record the moment on film.

Later I regretted not advising him to make use of his God-given dimples to further his career: I have a theory that people instinctively trust and find it difficult to think ill of those so gifted! I also forgot to ask him if his interest in computers has remained with him from his days at University!



Top of Sari Sari Falls

All the trails in the Cabrits Park are well-marked and some of us made the half-hour trek up the highest one, at the end of which we were rewarded with the sight of a cannon and a marvellous view of where Guadeloupe should have been - if it had not been obscured by a distant haze!

Soaks of varying lengths were enjoyed by everyone in the gentle waters in front of the Purple Turtle before our uncharacteristically late maxi arrived to take us to the Syndicate Nature Trail for

some bird-watching.

Being just about able to distinguish a hawk from a parrot I did not get much out of the bird-watching but the easy stroll along a well-maintained trail through pristine forest was rewarding enough. I was reminded of Kilmer's "Only God can make a tree" by the several towering examples of His handiwork on view, including the *gommier* which the Carib chief had told us was preferred for the construction of their canoes. Then it was back to what, after the Purple Turtle experience, seemed to be the princely accommodation of the Youth Centre!

Thursday morning saw us heading to the Forestry Office in the Botanical Gardens to link up with the guides who were to shepherd us to Middleham Falls. The trail was wide and not too challenging until it took a sharp left turn and descended very steeply. Then some of us were glad for the "walking sticks" we had managed to persuade the guides to cut for us from forest saplings.

For some reason nobody was keen on negotiating the last thirty or so feet to have a swim in the pool. We all contented ourselves with enjoying the view and the light spray from a convenient lookout point near a large tree.

Earlier arrivals back at the maxi made use of the buckets of water and scrubbing brush thoughtfully provided by the driver to clean our boots. Luckily they were not needed for the comparatively easy trek to Trafalgar Falls which came next.

Before using the changing room facilities and while having lunch near the snackette in the building at the entrance to the trail some of us forgot aching muscles to groove to the captivating beat of the Dominican group Exile One's celebratory "Twenty One" being pumped out by the snackette radio.

Then it was off to see the twin Trafalgar Falls. Yes, there are two of them! Both visible from a lookout point a short way along the trail. Then the more hardy (foolhardy?) among us

continued along the trail to have a swim in the pool at the foot of the one on the right. Our rapidly-developing mountaineering skills were put to good use in negotiating the huge boulders strewn at the approach to the pool. This is one of the more easily



Valley of Desolation

accessible larger waterfalls and quite a few locals and visitors were enjoying it. You can imagine how well you sleep after such a day!

There was some mix-up on the Friday when our itinerary had carded a climb up Morne Diablotin and I was told on the morning there was no room in the small maxi that had been chartered. I was delighted to have the decision taken out of my hands, and even when I was later offered a place made available by someone who had chickened out, decided not to tempt Providence and declined the offer. Later, when the eight or so hardy members who struggled up the 4700-plus feet, often in pouring rain, related how tough it was, with enveloping mist obscuring any possible view from the top, I was only too glad I had conserved my energies for the high point of our trip, the Sunday trek to the Boiling Lake,

the largest in the world.

That Friday morning some of us accompanied Carol Draper to a workshop on solar-powered cooking she gave to a group of primary school children at the headquarters of the Dominica Conservation Association. This was combined with a display of some of the artwork of Maureen Ottier. Our big-hearted president had sacrificed the Morne Diablotin ascent to be able to videotape the workshop. As a past practitioner myself it was a pleasure to see and hear an expert teacher perform. At least one of our members promised to try later at home the simple solar-powered cooker she so ably demonstrated to the kids.

Our hard-working president had arranged a Friday evening talk-cum-slide-show by a Forestry official. He informed us that the level of the lake had dropped by some forty feet or so some years before, only to resume its former level some months later. He also told us the hair-raising story of a guide who had slipped down into the lake in his solo effort to retrieve a camera dropped by a visitor the previous day. Fortunately for him another party turned up later that day! He was flown out to Martinique for treatment and survives. Some of our group met him and he vouched for the accu-

racy of the story but would allow photographs only for a financial consideration.

The Forestry official also told us that visitors often boiled an egg in one of the several boiling pools in the Valley of Desolation.



Boiling an egg in one of the pools in the Valley of Desolation

So I announced my intention to use boiling my own egg as an incentive to reach the Valley of Desolation! Maureen said I could use one of her three eggs in the fridge for the experiment.

I did not join the group that went whale-watching on Saturday morning. Instead I visited the small museum and the market in a stroll around Roseau. I tried several music shops (none of which accepted credit cards) before I finally

tracked down a CD of Ophelia, Dominica's premier *chanteuse*. I also got a copy of Creole Attitude, the Exile One CD containing Twenty One, which had so energised some of us at Trafalgar Falls.

I later learned from

the would-be whale-watchers that somebody had forgotten to tell the whales: none of them turned up for viewing!

After the 7 p.m. Saturday evening Mass in the Cathedral a few of us were picked up by friends of one of the group and taken to their



Boiling Lake

home in the hilly suburbs to sample the famous "mountain chicken". These are, of course, large frogs and *not* "crapauds". One of the group couldn't bring herself to join in the "sampling" but the rest of us thought it really *did* taste like chicken! Our hostess told us that during the open season they can be bought "undressed" (with the skin removed) in supermarkets. It was closed season when we were there but we were assured that what we sampled was from someone's freezer.



I did it! Boiling Lake

Our departure for the Boiling Lake next day was scheduled for 6 a.m. and I was keen on getting as much rest as possible. So after the "sampling" on the porch followed by a little chitchat I made a bathroom visit and stretched out on the living room floor! Our hosts took my (impolite?) hint and we got back to the Centre soon after 10.15.

Everyone had told us how "challenging" the ten-mile return trip to the Boiling Lake is and we were not disappointed, except for our resident "warrior princess" Diana, who insisted it was "a piece of cake." Perhaps she meant rock cake?

But the Dominican tourist authorities take their responsibilities seriously and most of the steep parts of the trail have been made more manageable by the insertion of various forms of wooden steps. Some of these have rotted or slipped out of position but most remain in place.

The trail goes up and down over a couple of mountains, the highest point of which, we were later told by our guide, is over 3000 ft. Before you get to the lake itself the trail, not always visible, wanders down through the Valley of Desolation, which is very aptly named. Bare of vegetation, it has several boiling pools, with many small fissures and streamlets of varying colours depending on the minerals present. A strong sulphur smell was noticeable in several places.



Recuperating from Boiling Lake!

The Boiling Lake eventually made all the effort well worth while! The warm steam rising from the lake is blown about by the breeze and soon misted my glasses over. But as you wait the breeze soon shifts and you are rewarded with the sight of a huge central portion of the 280-foot-wide lake energetically boiling and bubbling!

Until someone reminded me I had forgotten all about the egg I had carefully wrapped in paper and styrofoam packaging! So on the way back I left it for seven minutes in one of the fissures in the Valley of Desolation and brought it back home. But when after dinner I tried to share it with Maureen and Luisa it turned out to be soft-boiled so I made the sacrifice of eating it myself!

Most participants felt that a "Dominica 2" in 2002 is a must!



... Tacarib (from Page One)

whole journey to the sea, which I am not sure was such a good idea. I felt that perhaps that trip allowed them to develop some muscle power in their flippers to help them afterwards in avoiding the next predators, the fish. We were told by those more knowledgeable that only one or two from the fifty or so little ones would survive to become an adult of about 900 pounds.

We missed no opportunity in watching them as they struggled to emerge from below the surface of the sand; it was very fascinating. After dark, a swim was organised at the far end of the beach, where it was more sheltered; However, only a few intrepid souls ventured in; the rest of us gave moral support. We had been alarmed earlier, during a walk along the beach with a aid of a torchlight, by the brightly flashing lights of what, we assumed, could have been a cocaine-smuggling boat expecting to make a drop. We theorised that the smugglers could have been confused by our torchlights (some of our party even flashed back to them). We, however, remained rooted to the spot until, eventually, the boat left.

The night in the tent was not the most comfortable. It rained heavily and the ground was hard for those who did not have either an inflatable bed or a hammock. The sea was soothing until the rain started. Then it sounded angry and storm-like. I imagined a tree falling on us. In fact something did - a small branch. I was worried about Dan without a tent and sleeping in a hammock covered only by a tarpaulin. I need not have worried because he knew what he was doing. Next morning, despite the tent, some members complained of getting wet.

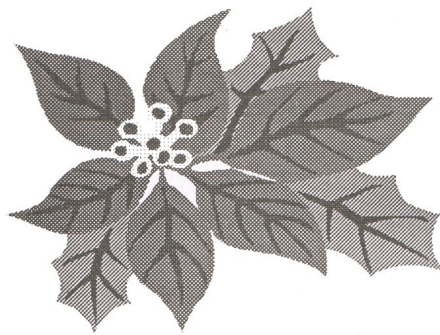
Early in the morning we discovered that some of us had been roamed the beach during the night and had sighted some leatherback turtles coming in to lay their eggs. We had indeed seen the tracks of this the day before. One of these turtles was already tagged and the number was noted to be sent on to the appropriate authority. Some of us were privileged to see a leatherback making her slow tired way back to the sea in daylight, so, of course, we were able to take pictures without any fear of disorienting her. At one point, it appeared as though she was confused and **was** returning to the sand but apparently this was done to confuse the predators. It **was** exhilarating to witness the moment when she reached the water and swam strongly away.

On Sunday we hiked to Madamas River. It was pelting rain when we were scheduled to start and **so** some members decided to stay back. The main concern, of those of us who went, was that **we** should have dry clothing to change into on our return. To attempt to stay dry during the hike **was** useless. The path was very muddy in places and the streams which we normally **would** have navigated by stepping stones were very useful for washing off the mud, so we **egan** to tramp through them all.

Our party was composed of members of varying degrees of fitness. We took our time going - an hour and twenty minutes but some of us made the return trip in fifty minutes. The most memorable experience was encountered as we passed a swampy area where we could hear frogs singing. It was a kind of thrumming, reverberating, shrieking, whirring, loud sound. We went in to investigate. Nash picked up a copulating couple - they were a bright saffron yellow, probably poisonous. Nash wanted us to see particularly the sticky mucus they were using to attach themselves, and a photograph was taken. On the way back a small specimen was captured to be taken to UWI for identification.

The river at Madamas was muddy but we could have imagined how beautiful it was under nor-

Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club
P.O. Box 642, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago



mal circumstances. The beach, soft but grainy, dropping from a flat plateau, steeply, to the sea. There were lots of pelicans sitting on rocks, a few plovers walking along the sand by the water's edge; unspoiled except for one or two remains of campers at camp sites. I was interested in the *clusia* tree, also found at Tacarib, and I collected some specimens of the flower and the fruit. On my return home, I looked up the tree in my copy of *Native Trees* by Quesnel and Farrell. I was also interested in the rock formations in the whole area of Tacarib, very beautiful, varied layers, with different colours, and interesting shapes formed by the sea, with some crystalline specks as fine as dust which were only visible when a torch was shone on them at night.

It was a memorable experience for me. There are some things I would do differently, however, and I have of items it would be useful to acquire. I am suggesting to the Field Naturalists' Club that a list of things to do and items to bring would be very useful for the inexperienced, like myself. It should also be made clear what each field trip entails.

One problem I thought on this trip was the division of the party into two distinct groups at opposite ends of the beach. In addition, Dan needed more unsolicited help to pack up.



