



Nature's jottings

Newsletter of the Natural History Society of Jamaica

Sept. 05

WHAT'S HAPPENING? !

SEPTEMBER ACTIVITIES

International Beach Clean Up Day 2005

NHSJ Members come out and assist the National Environment & Planning Agency (NEPA) on Beach Clean Up Day.

Date: Saturday September 17 from 8.00am-2.00pm

Venue: Halfmoon Bay, Hellshire

Transport and lunch provided by NEPA. The bus will leave the NEPA office, 10 Caledonia Avenue, Kingston 5 at 7.00am

You will need to register especially if you plan to travel on the bus.

Please let us know your plans by calling Jill Byles at 977 8007 before Sat. Sept. 12.

Remember to take sun protection, plenty of water and wear stout shoes. Anything else you may need will be provided.

***An Evening of Nature Poetry,
Photography & Art***

Date: Thursday September 29, 2005

Venue: PCJ Auditorium from 4:30 - 8:00 p.m.

Persons who wish to participate may contact Tracy Commock at Natural History Division, Institute of Jamaica by Sept. 16.

10-16 East Street, Kingston

Telephone: (876) 948-8116

Fax: (876) 922-1147

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or Cicely Tobisch at 702 2888.

Your Jottings

FROM DALLAS TO GOOD HOPE, Saturday June 4 2005 On Saturday June 4, 2005 an exceptionally large group of enthusiastic adults and children set off walking from Dallas along an undulating, ancient trail shaded by secondary forest. The trail would eventually become a steep incline of loose gravel before reaching a road of sharp shale chips, leading right to the ruined Good Hope great house and left to Mount Dispute or Flamstead.

Before setting out on the drive to Dallas, which took us past Elletson Flats, over the Hope River and up the road bordering Dallas Mountain, we were advised by Andreas Oberli to look out for the flowering Maypole *Agave sobolifera*. Its bright yellow flowers are favourites of hummingbirds and bees. He also expected us to see the endemic *Portlandia albiflora* with its white, pink tinged trumpet shaped flowers. It was pointed out that as we travelled east there would be a geological change from limestone to volcanic igneous rock. The drive was steep with good views behind and below until we reached Lindo's Gap, where we turned right descending again.

Our walk started at the Barbecue River, which we soon crossed. For most of the walk we had the river far below us, in the valley to our right. But just before descending to a loop in the river we passed some old stone walls, the remains of a mill close to the trail.

Several Dallas youngsters joined our party and were eager to show off their athletic dexterity. There were many varieties of fruit trees lining the path, particularly along the steep side of the valley, showing that the area was once cultivated. Some of us eyed the fruits longingly, especially the mangoes that were in abundance, as a means to quench out thirst and the boys were only too ready to supply them by vying with one another in climbing the trees to get them. They were either eager for the jack fruits for themselves or were eager to show off their prowess. The trees were tall and defied gravity on the vertical side of the valley but the boys climbed up as though climbing a tree for coconuts and having dislodged the fruit safely, managed to leap clear of bush and barbed wire to land without injury.

The trail crossed several cooling tributaries of the Barbecue River and we found a shaded spot with a small waterfall where we could picnic. The spot was so pleasantly

cool that it was the end of the trail for many people. However, quite a few walkers did go on, finding that the path forked. The path taken lead us under shady trees, into the valley where the trail became indistinct but climbed precipitously over the loose shale to the rough road above. Its entrance onto the road was hardly noticeable. We were then more than 400 metres above Dallas.

Among the flowering plants seen were *Portlandia albiflora* (*Rubiaceae*) that is endemic to Dallas and Long Mountains, some spectacular Locust Berry trees in full bloom, *Byrsonima coriacea* (*Malphigiaceae*). The flowers are bright yellow. There was also Spanish Elm in full bloom, *Cordia gerascanthus* (*Boraginaceae*) with off white flowers.

After some debate a small group decided to explore further to find the Good Hope great house.

At this point Trevor Yee takes up the story.

THE PART OF THE TRIP TO THE GOOD HOPE GREAT HOUSE

A dozen eager hikers set out on the part of the trail to the Good Hope Great House, now in ruins, we being advised that there was a trail from there to Mount Dispute, where we thought the other members of the group were headed and we would catch up with them there. Led by the two Andreases, we made good time to the ruins. Andreas Oberli was a very knowledgeable guide at the ruins, he having been very familiar with the Great House before it got damaged by Hurricane Gilbert in 1988 and then by one of the several earthquakes that occurred after the hurricane. After that, the house went into a rapid decline and was vandalized. Andreas showed us the 3 entrances, the foyer, living room which he demonstrated had blue panel walls, a few still surviving, mahogany floors, a beautiful spiral staircase made of mahogany, leading to the bedrooms upstairs, Bulletwood beams, some still standing, large panoramic windows, now gone and a high cathedral roof, now also destroyed. He also showed us where the road, used to approach the house until very recently, and the exquisite terraced gardens that surrounded the house, now all completely overgrown.

While we were being fascinated by the tour of the ruins, unfortunately one of the group stepped on an old nail, and wanted to get down to tend to the wound. The few local youngsters who came along said the way we came was the longer route and they would take us on a shorter route down. This trail started off very gradually, past old gate posts belonging to the Great House and larger more modern water catchments tanks for the house on a nearby adjacent hill.

From there, however, the trail became very hairy in a several places and some of us mentioned that it was like a sloping Governor's Bench in some of these steep narrow parts on the edge of the mountain with no bottom to be seen. Many of us went down on our bottoms on these parts of the trail, I being an expert spending more time going this way down the steep areas than any of the others. What made the trail more treacherous was the loose shale of which almost the entire trail consisted and there were many skids and slides on the way down. Not all members took the way down with such trepidation, and a few almost ran down some of the tricky parts. Noticeably scarcer were the many Botanical identifications, and the noticing of the different vegetation, that many of our

guests had found so interesting on the way up to the Great House, everyone appearing to have had more immediate concerns, some might say life-threatening ones, with which to contend on the way down.

Eventually but some would also say not uneventfully, we all made it down in one piece and found that the others members of the group had not gone on to Mount Dispute, as we thought they were headed but to the Unity Bar on the way back. We weren't as innocent as they might have thought, having found a nearer bar close to the starting point of our walk.

NHSJ WEBSITE – A REMINDER

Our website can be viewed at www.jamaicanmarketplace.com. Please send comments on the site to nhsj@uwimona.edu.jm. It will eventually be hosted on the UWI's server.

For future reference, you might want to note the NHSJ's email address too. Please make use of it to let us have your nature comments and jottings.

*Prepared by Jill Byles
27/8/05*