



APRIL - JUNE 2003

NEWSLETTER

THE VICE-PRESIDENT SPEAKS

by Milton Henry

Peace.

My humble thanks to the St. Croix Hiking Association for affording me the opportunity to served as its Vice-President. I will fulfill my obligations to the best of my ability. The year 2003 has started well for the Association, hopefully, we will continue for the remainder of the year.

The calendar for this year consists of some very exciting activities, the most exciting being the scheduled off-island trip to Dominica. I know this will be an exciting occasion and experience for all, for past off-island trips have all been enjoyable experiences. I pray that our trip to Dominica will be pleasurable as well.

In closing, I wish the St. Croix Hiking Association godspeed in all its undertakings. The cooperation and involvement of the entire membership will assure that the association continues to be a success.

Get involved.

Editor's Note: The following article is the first of three by Karl Knight on the topic:

HEEDING NATURE'S CALL

In keeping with the Mission of the Association to educate the community on the natural, cultural, and historic resources of St. Croix, Karl Knight uses this column to speak out about the pressing environmental issues of our day. The former secretary of the St. Croix Hiking Association, Karl holds a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering and is currently employed as a business planner with the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority.

If You Fail to Plan, You Plan to Fail

Let's start from the beginning. The fundamental element of any lasting civilization is good planning. It is no different here in St. Croix. In order to have a sustainable community we need good planning. That is why I am so utterly frustrated that the Government of the Virgin Islands has yet to implement a comprehensive land and water use plan.

Yes, you have heard of the comprehensive land and water use plan. It is the same one mentioned in the campaign platforms of almost every elected politician holding office today. For years, every time there's a discussion of development in St. Croix, you hear the cries for the creation of a comprehensive land and water use plan. But did you know that such a plan already exists? That's right, a comprehensive land and water use plan has already been developed.

Where is it then? That depends on the dimension in which you are looking for it. Physically, it is lying somewhere in the offices of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources. In reality, however, the plan is lost in the abyss of the government bureaucracy and special interest politics of the Virgin Islands.

Why you ask? Well a land and water use plan simply takes a map of the islands and spells out the areas (or zones, as they are called) where certain activities will be permitted. But therein lies the problem. The farmers want to maximize the acreage set aside for agricultural uses. The realtors want to carefully manage the property values of the choice undeveloped land. Those influential people with large parcels of land already have their own plan for it. (The nice gentleman with the

rock quarry at the mouth of Caledonia Valley comes to mind). Of course, no one wants the public dump zoned in their backyard, no matter how good the plan. You just can't please everyone. And so the plan was shelved indefinitely.

Well, I say a plan is just a plan. Let's not get hung up on details. Trust me, any plan is better than no plan at all, particularly in this case. A poor plan can always be amended and revised once it is implemented.

So then, who can rescue our comprehensive land and water use plan from its exile in the abyss? Try Dean Plaskett, the Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources. Chances are, the person responsible for keeping the plan well dusted on the shelf works for him. If you find him to be a tad bit elusive, then try Senator Louis Hill, the new Chairman of the Senate's Committee on Planning and Environmental Protection. Try writing him at:

*The Honorable Louis Hill
Legislature of the Virgin Islands*

P.O. Box 1690

St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands 00804

There are hundreds of acres of land for sale in the "rain forest" right now. I would hate to see them converted into a shopping center. Or worse yet...another gas station.

ALONG THE TRAIL

The Claremont Hike, on Jan 18, took us to an area previously unknown to most of the hikers. The hike was very well organized, exposing us to some most spectacular views. David Hamada prepared a very comprehensive documentation of all of the plants and places we passed along the way.

During this year's *Ag-Fair* which took place during the weekend of Feb. 15-17, our new Chairman of the Education Committee, Raymond Hector capably arranged the manning of our booth. Many visitors to the Fair had the opportunity to see pictures of the highlights of several of our hikes, and to discuss activities and the prospect of becoming members of the Association. A hearty "Thank You" to all members who assisted in making this annual undertaking a success.

The hiking Association has hiked the north western part of St. Croix very frequently. We have also hiked the eastern part. But a section of the south shore remained unknown to a lot of us. On February 23, we took care of that by hiking from the Divi hotel all the way to Great Pond, along the *South Shore*. This hike took us mostly along the shore line and exposed us to such areas as Grassy Point, Mt. Fancy salt pond, Camp Arawak and, of course Great Pond with its nice stand of Black Mangrove trees along the western end of the salt pond

This year's participation during our *Bike/Hike* on Mar 9 was not so good. There is an acute shortage of bicycles among our membership, and the bicycle rental shops have not reopened. Nevertheless, we explored the "rain forest", some cycling and others on foot. This is a regular activity of the St. Croix Hiking Association. So go out and get a bike, and make sure you know how to ride it.

The *Brook Hill Hike* on April 12 was mostly along a very steep road. Finally, we got to the wooded area just below the hill itself and lo and behold! we passed an area, not very far from inhabited houses, where stolen cars are dismantled. How big is St. Croix? How can these things go on so freely?

Brook Hill is covered by a military facility and is off limits to civilians. But standing not far from the peak we saw the south western and part of the western shoreline, including the pier in Fredriksted.

The Salt River Marina Hike - Our Fearless Leader gets lost! by Tony Elliott

I arrived at the marina at about 6:05 on the morning of Sunday, April 27 and Our Fearless Leader was already there awaiting the adventurous hikers. By 6:30 a.m. we were on our way to St. Croix-by-the-Sea, where the hike actually began. After a brief description of the area and the old abandoned hotel, we began our journey uphill through some minor bush to the top of the hill where we saw stones piled one on top of the other.

We were informed that this was a burial ground. I am not sure whether this was for Columbus' "thieving" sailors or for the Tainos and Caribs. From here we continued our journey down to the seaside, which, at one time was a nice beach, but which was now nothing but an abandoned rocky area seldom frequented or visited. Trekking our way down to an old, abandoned hotel, we actually went into the ruins, up some winding steps to the top of the steeple. One of our famed hikers complained and fussed about the old ruins and I really got a kick out of her fussing.

After leaving that area, we headed for the mangrove, and that was when the fun started to go away, and the frustration of walking in mud and water began to become painful. Prior to that I was given a machete and asked to lead the way. Of course I stayed away from the mud and swampy areas, and was doing a wonderful job when Our Fearless Leader decided that we should change course. And, boy oh boy, it was now mud and quicksand and more mud and sand. Some hikers headed for the water along the mangrove swamp while others stayed on the dry land trekking their way through the bushes.

By this time it was after 11:00 a.m. and we realized we were stuck. We had two choices: turn around and go back the way we had come, or call for help. We called for help. A new comer used a cell phone and called someone who dispatched three boats to rescue us. Thank God. They came and plucked us off an old, abandoned boat across from the marina, where we had sought refuge. It was an unruly sight to see the dirt and

mud on the clothes, shoes and boots of all the mud covered hikers.

We were all happy to get back safe and sound to dry land, and look forward to the next hike - but not in the swamp lands.

AROUND THE BEND

Bake Sale

Our hard working Fund Raising Committee members, under the leadership of Lystra Marquis will be holding a Bake Sale at K-Mart on the morning of May 10. Members can assist by contributing cakes, cookies and other goodies to this worthy venture.

Turtle Watch

Of all the turtles which frequent the beaches of St. Croix, the one which lays its eggs at Sandy Point is the Leather back. Weighing as much as 1400 lb. and reaching a total length of up to 7 ft, they are the world's largest ocean going turtles.

A Turtle Watch is being planned for May 22. This a courtesy for our members only. Please plan to attend.

Kayak Trip

We recently explored Salt River's muddy mangrove "when the fun started to go away, and the frustration of walking in mud and water began to become painful". On May 26 we have the opportunity of seeing the area from the dry decks of Kayaks. Further information concerning this Kayak Trip will be given at our next meeting.

Scenic Road West Hike

Watch out for details of our upcoming Scenic Road West hike in June.

Dominica Trip

Time is running out. Our departure for the Nature Island, Dominica, is fast approaching. Are you one of the fortunate hikers who will join us as we hike The Valley of Desolation? Will you be there when we scale the lofty 4,749 ft peak of Morne Diablotin, a mere 6-7 hour hike?