



Traveletter

P.O. Box 5060, Kingshill, St. Croix, US Virgin Islands 00851
Visit us at our website: www.StCroixHiking.org

2008 Trip: ST. LUCIA

The St. Croix Hiking Association visited the island of St. Lucia for the annual off-island trip from July 6 to July 13, 2008. The 238 square mile island is mountainous with the central volcanic mountain range reaching as high as 3,145 feet above sea level.

The adventure for the group started on Pigeon Island, which is a National Landmark. Historically, the island was a stronghold of pirates, European powers, and Brigands known as maroons. It was a whaling station, U.S. military post, a holding station for East Indian indentured laborers, and the place for other important historic events of the island.

The following day we were introduced to Lawrence Jean Baptiste, a great tour guide and historian. We started off from Rodney Bay driving for over an hour and a half with Lawrence giving us the history of the island. After we stopped in Soufriere for water, we drove up the mountain to the forest ranger station. Here is where our cross country hike began. We hiked the mountain for hours climbing some 1,700 steps made from wood and tree ferns. Blue mahoe trees, an introduced species from Jamaica, dominated



ATOP PIGEON ISLAND (left to right) Front row sitting: Joyce Nix, Rita Bannister, Ivan Butcher II. **Middle sitting:** Laverne Fredericksen, Esther Sweeney, Nycole Thompson, Raymond Hector, Tom Zimmerman, Linda McIntosh, Myrtle Pemberton, Sonia Maynard-John **Standing:** Dorothy Flash, Franz Pristner, Joe Prince, Theresa Collingwood, Olasee Davis, Kiwan John, Anita Thurman, Henry Harris, and Cathy Prince **Not in picture:** Joyce Francis.

(Continued from page 1)

the forest. The ground was covered with native anthuriums, and moss and ferns hung from the trees. We crossed rivers. Far up above us, we heard the sound of the endangered Saint Lucia parrot, the island's national bird. The forest was humid - sweat was dripping off our bodies. We were tired. At last we arrived at La Tille Waterfall, an eco-site where we had an organic meal of food grown and raised on St. Lucia. The area was self sustaining getting its electrical power from a mini hydro-dam near the waterfall where we swam.

The next day, we traveled to the east side of the island to St. Lucia's newest tourist attraction, the Tree-top Adventure Park. It was a zip, whiz, and glide tour above the 100 feet high forest canopy. An exciting and challenging experience.

The next morning, everybody was up early ready to conquer the Gros Piton, (UNESCO World Heritage Site), a volcanic rainforest rising from the ocean floor to nearly 3,000 feet. The hike began - with the descendants of maroons as our tour guides - from a dry forest along the coast, to a rainforest and an upper mountain elfin forest, to a wind-swept dwarf forest. This hike took us to heavens above the island's landscape.

Another day and off again. We hiked to Grande Bois, Diamond Waterfall and the Botanical Gardens, Sulphur Springs and Mineral Baths, and visited the site where the Black Caribs made cassava bread.

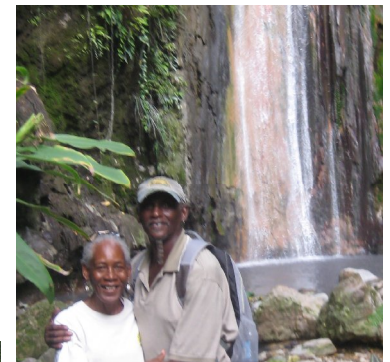
Friday, we shopped in Castries, St. Lucia's capital and historic town. That evening we visited the Anse La Raye Friday Night Fish Fry where we could eat all the sea food we wanted. We socialized, sang kareoke and danced past midnight.

Early Saturday morning, we took our last hike to Grande Anse on the northeast coast. It was a spectacular 12 mile trek and the perfect end to our trip.

St. Lucia is a beautiful and bountiful island which truly proved to be '**A Hiker's Paradise**'.

by Olasee Davis
Ecologist and Education Committee Chair
St. Croix Hiking Association

PHOTOS (top down, left to right): 1) Author Olasee Davis on Gros Piton with Petit Piton in background. 2) Pigeon Island. 3) Cassava bread being baked. 4) Downtown Castries. 5) Theresa Collingwood shopping. 6) Lawrence Baptiste at the Botanical Gardens. 7) Joyce Francis & Ivan Butcher at Diamond Falls. 8) Raymond Hector at Soufriere Springs 9) Stopping for coconut water. 10) Trekking Grande Anse.



St. Lucia Created a Lasting Impression by Ivan Butcher II

IT IS BECOMING MY MANTRA: "Can it get any better?"

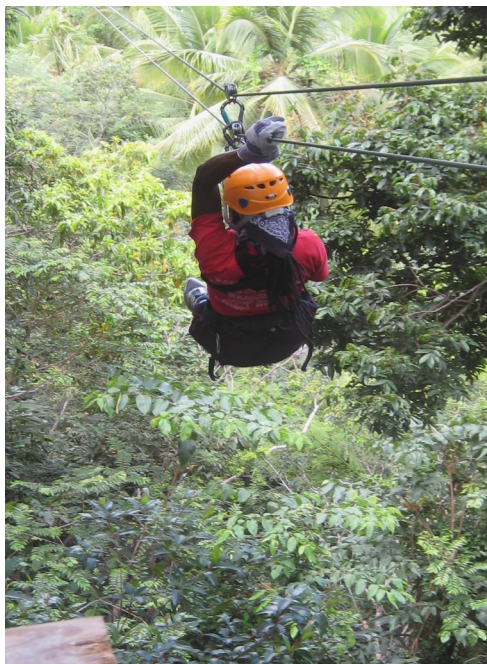
Although each island that we have visited has had a unique appeal, it was our interaction with the people which has made this trip to St. Lucia a very unforgettable excursion. In particular, our tour operator Cyril Mangall and our tourism guide Lawrence Jean Baptiste were the most gracious and well informed.

My first impression of the people was that they were friendly but reserved. On the first morning, I had the opportunity to walk from the MJJ Hotel in Rodney Bay to Pigeon Island with a local group of walkers. They were participating in a walk for health promotion. I began walking and talking with a secondary grade level math teacher. What he expressed is that the state of the school system there is suffering from some of the same ills we have here in our islands: supply needs, students' problems, lack of personnel, indifference, and non-supportive parents, etc. Their challenge is to compete with the multimedia distractions and the negative impact it is having on their culture.

On our first hike, about half way along the Edmund Forest Reserve Trail - in the middle of nowhere - we had a serious emergency. Myrtle Pemberton slipped and fell back breaking her wrist. After putting her arm in a cold pack and sling and dosing her with Tylenol we were on our way. Two and half agonizing hours later - with me steadying her the whole time on a narrow slippery rocky path - we made it to the bus without further injury to her hand. Our driver Cyril was very accommodating in getting her to the hospital, where she was given the best of care.

Out of all the unique experiences we have had on our trips, the zip line was one of the best. What a rush!!

I was confident of the cable system, but I had doubts about my control. On the first length, I stopped short and had to pull my way to the end of the cables. The next length, I ended up spinning around. It wasn't until the third length that I got it together...big fun. I would have liked to have gone around again. This is something that could be developed here on St. Croix.



The Tree Top Adventure Park zip line

Our night out on the town in Anse La Raye was a blast. After sampling all of the different delicious dishes of locally caught seafood, we took over the karaoke street party. We definitely left a warm impression on the people of the village. I am sure at least one person there, every Friday night, will talk about the night the Crucians came to town.

The final hike - to Grande Anse - seemed as it would never end. But it was the best hike. We traveled the hills, mountains, valleys, low lying guts (snake country), and beaches. All along the way we sampled the fruits in season: berries, coconuts, genips, mangoes, bread and cheese, jambola plums, and guavas.

The tours to Pigeon Island, the Botanical Gardens, the volcano, and the capital city were all very enriching and added to the total appeal of the island and its people.

My final impression was how my feelings changed about the seemingly distant attitude of the people. What I learned was that St. Lucians are a proud, serious, hard working group engrossed in their lives and moving with purpose. But when they take the time to smile and converse they are very beautiful and warm people.

Oh...and what is more, I learned that I actually have blood relatives on **St. Lucia**.



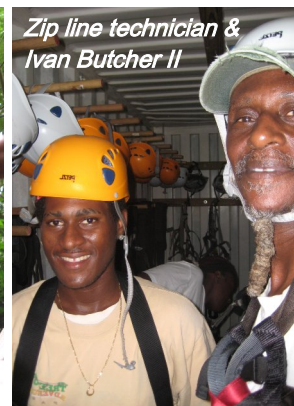
A brave Myrtle Pemberton



Members at the ready...or not.?



Outward bound... Nycole Thompson



Zip line technician & Ivan Butcher II



Coconut water



Lawrence Jn Baptiste



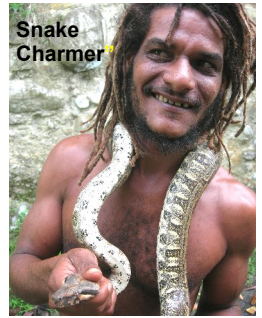
Grös Piton Guide



Mrs. Mangall caterer



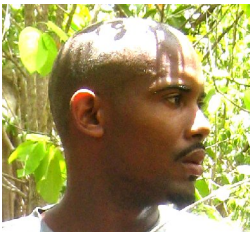
Organic Farmer



Snake Charmer



Zip line outfitter



Grande Anse guide



Joyce Nix



ST. LUCIA

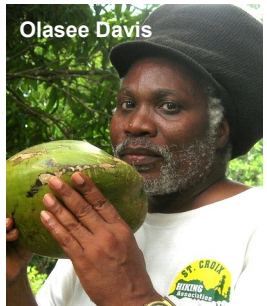
Gros Piton & Petit Piton



National Park guide



Joe Prince & St. Lucian friend



Olasee Davis



Raymond Hector off Pigeon Island



Franz Pristner & Anita Thurman



Linda McIntosh, Sonia Maynard-John, Cathy Prince, & Joyce Francis



Dorothy Flash



Anita Thurman



Kiwan John



Rita Bannister at Anse La Raye Fish Fry



Cathy Prince & local talent



Local art