

# ST. CROIX HIKING ASSOCIATION MOONLIGHT EXCURSION TO SANDY POINT WILDLIFE RESERVE

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By Anthony K. Mills

Challenging, but interesting and of course rewarding was the hike to and through the Sandy Point Wildlife Refuge at the South Western tip of St. Croix, Virgin Islands.

To start off we gathered at the West End of MHE Highway for registration and an overview of the impending hike. Hiking were about 30 persons, some members of the St. Croix Hiking Association and others from the community including a handful from the Education Department. After the briefing, we jumped in our vehicles for a short drive to a safer parking area near the Sandy Point Wildlife Refuge Offices.

At the Refuge parking area, we listened to another briefing by Guide Olassee Davis of St. Croix Hiking Association before he took off. Hikers fell in line behind the leader as he headed North passing AARJH in White Lady. Beginning at White Lady, dogs were barking wildly from both sides of the road, aroused by the unlikely visitors invading their neighborhoods. Hikers just marched along admiring the scenery. We were guided up the street to the intersection to Estate Two Brothers road and entered the residential area. The houses and spacey well-kept lawns were lovely. After winding through the streets of Two Brothers, we turned west down a hill to meet Dorsch Beach.



From Dorsch we took the stretch South to the Vincent Mason Resort (F'sted Pool) and the Sandy Point Wild Life Reserve. Stop! After another briefing and a look around to ensure everyone was there who was continuing with the hike, we hit the sand --- a long track of white sand where you can't see the ending. It seems as it goes on forever. The longest beach front in the Virgin Islands we were told. Enhanced by the light of the full moon, it was an amazing scene. No wonder this sandy beach is known as the ideal nesting place for the Leatherback turtles. Imagine those hatchlings wallowing in the sandy beach of St. Croix for the first days of their lives before swimming the oceans of the earth. What a way and place to begin life!

The long trek along the beach in the mushy and grueling sand quickly took its toll on the unaccustomed hikers. We trod south parallel to the seashore, maneuvering our steps carefully through meddlesome sand bars for a very long time, over miles it seemed. Luckily, we didn't have backs; it wasn't their hallows in the sand nested. We cut east for solid grounds and ing on the Reserve: its etc.



Though the trail to the everyone was just re-bothersome sand. We Hope we'll find our way rowing path. There posted were hardly the moon. One wrong ever. But the guide cessfully, from the stars

We opened up into a path and brushes or talgically, it took us was only the moon to light the path at nights. The fruit trees like the coco plum were small although bearing blossoms or fruits. Olassee quickly explained that we were actually in a "dry forest" where "big" trees are dwarfed as opposed to the North of the island where there are the Rain Forest with tall trees and lots of moisture. The walk along this path was quite enjoyable; we admired the moon light and the flora, and learned from Olassee the kind of fauna that frequent this tranquil habitat.

Believe it or not we ended up on a sandy shore again. But our fears were suddenly diminished when we saw the lovely view looking east to Christiansted from the South Shore of St. Croix. We hiked east in the direction of a string of lights adorning the far eastern South Shore. "This shore had much more sand but it was taken away," we were told by our guide. But who cared now. Bad as it was it couldn't compare with what we had to go through at Sandy Point.



our eyes fixed on the thick brushes on the left praying that we wouldn't miss the turn off into another trail that will take us to solid ground. But luckily the guide was only joking: he knew where he was going. He directed us onto another trail which would eventually lead to a nice wide dirt path: even cars could take this road. We wondered if any was coming our way. But the only lights confronting us were shining from the moon, flashlights and cameras.

We crossed over a bridge overlooking a salt pond as we headed home. It didn't bother us that it was a long walk back. It was the moment to wind down. Walking briskly, we joked around, took pictures in the moonlight and had lots of fun until we reached our starting point unharmed, amazed and energized.

It didn't faze Ms. Jacobs and her colleagues from Education that they were bringing up the rear most times. She was just too flabbergasted being there and completing the hike. But she told the guide point blank, "I am not going again."

Hiking is more rewarding than just walking. In hiking there's that inner spirit pushing to achieve something much more than health and physical fitness. It's a greater challenge and experience. But it makes good sense to keep on walking and exercising because fitness is certainly a prerequisite for hiking. When hiking, we are sightseeing, learning, keeping fit, laughing and having lots of fun.



St. Croix Hiking Association sponsors regular hikes throughout the Virgin Islands and the Caribbean. Check out their website at [www.stcroixhiking.org](http://www.stcroixhiking.org) to link up with their next hike on St. Croix.

(According to Wikipedia: **Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge** preserves habitat for threatened and endangered species, with particular emphasis on the **Leatherback Sea Turtle** (*Dermochelys coriacea*). Its two miles (3 km) of sandy beaches on the southwest corner of **Saint Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands** is an ideal nesting place for leatherbacks. The **National Wildlife Refuge** is open to the public for limited hours on Saturdays and Sundays.