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ECO-EDUCATIONAL TOURS



University of the Virgin Islands
Cooperative Extension Service ■ Dr. D. S. Padda, Director ■ St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands

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by

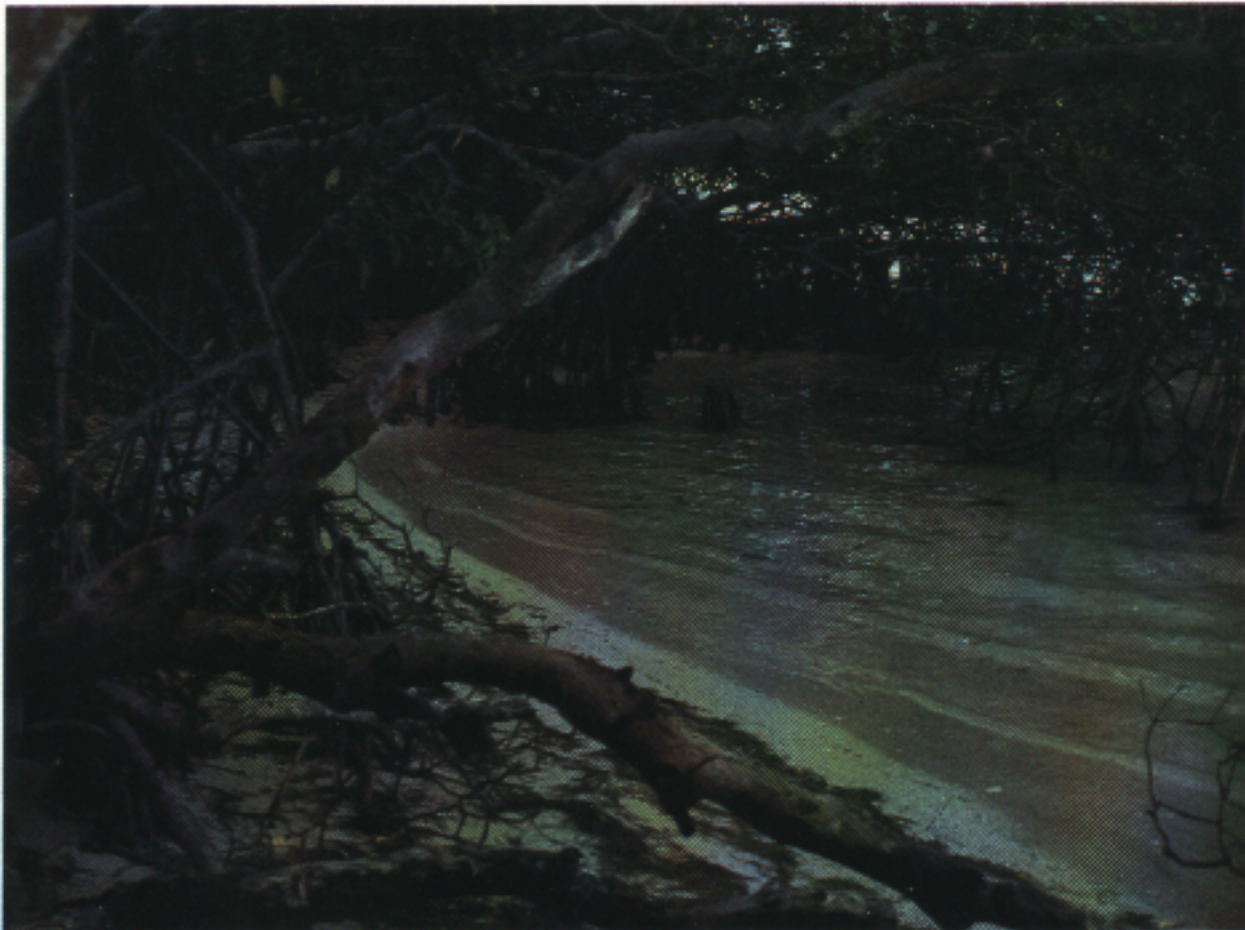
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ECO-EDUCATIONAL TOURS

INTRODUCTION

As part of the Natural Resources Environmental Education program, the University of the Virgin Islands Cooperative Extension Service offers field trips to schools, summer camps and other interested groups. These field trips help participants understand and appreciate the unique resources that we are fortunate to have in the complex ecosystems of the Virgin Islands. The following are brief descriptions of the various sites. For more information contact the UVI Cooperative Extension Service at 778-9491/ 692-4080 or 692/4060.



ANNALY & WILLS BAYS

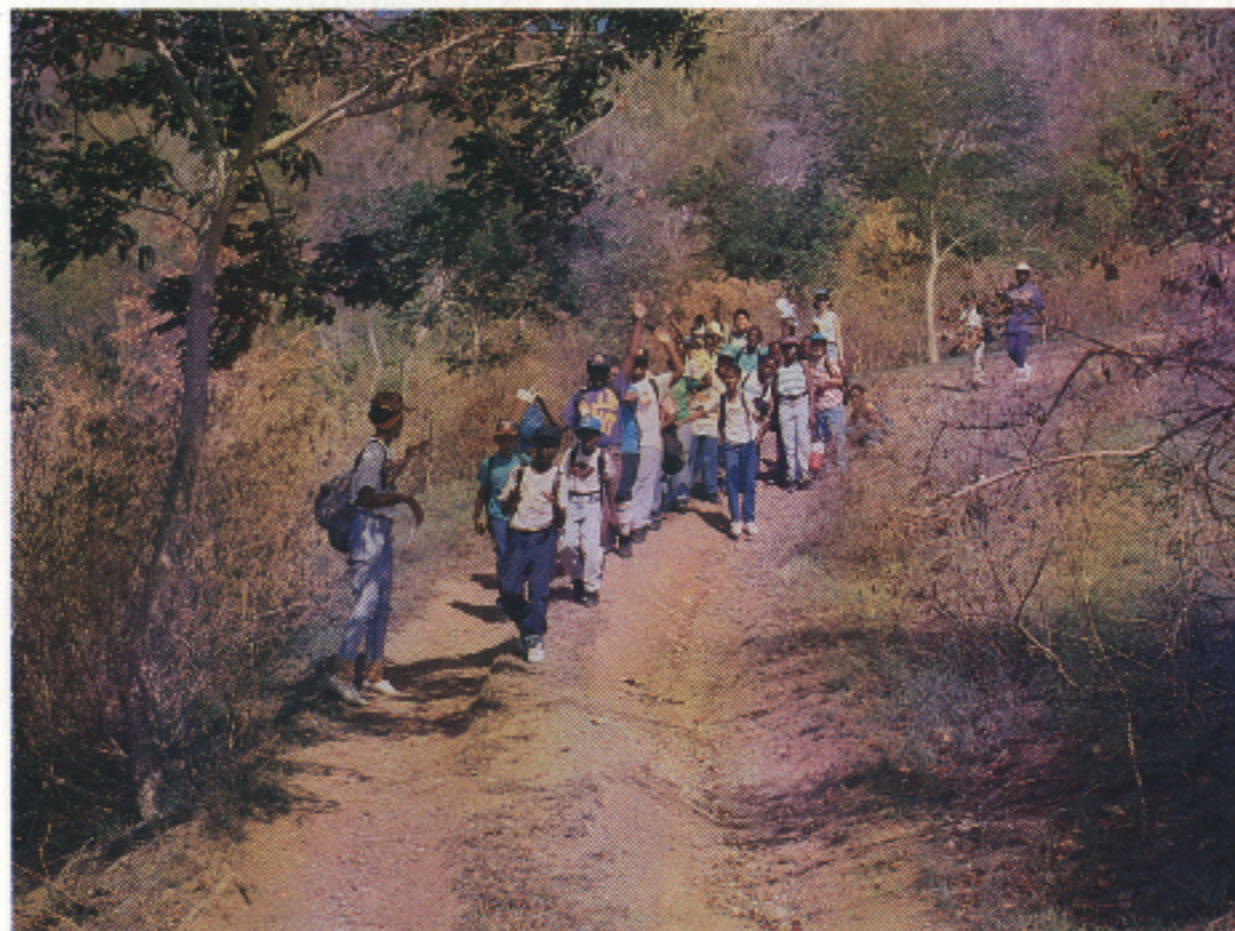
The Annaly and Wills Bays hike is the most difficult. It encompasses a moist forest, a rocky shoreline, slopes, valleys, small and large pools of water, and an algae forest with various plant and animal life. Along the shore of Annaly Bay some coral reefs are exposed creating underwater caves and, occasionally, saltwater waterfalls. The four mile



Exposed coral reefs can be seen along the shoreline of Annaly Bay.

hike passes over very hilly terrain, ranging from sea level to about 700 ft., through old mahogany stands and a sugar plantation. The hike continues toward a partly sandy shore with exposed coral formations.

The moist forest ecosystem consists of rare plants. These include the sea hibiscus and sea boxwood along the coastline, and anthuriums and tyre palms along the hillside. This area also has medicinal plants and fruit trees like mango, guava and kenip. Hikers can hear and see pearly-eyed thrashers, common ground doves, bananaquits, red-tailed hawks, bridled quail doves, and other birds along the valleys and hills. Deer, although very common in this area, are seldom seen.



Students from the Ricardo Richards Elementary School encountered steep slopes on their hike to Annaly and Wills Bays.

CALEDONIA

The Caledonia Valley, locally called the "rainforest," is a good example of St. Croix's moist forest ecosystem. This is one of the few areas where water can still be found year-round. The two and a half hour hike begins at an old quarry with fantastic sedimentary rock exposures, continues along the gut and culminates at a waterfall about 200 ft. above sea level. Hiking the entire Caledonia Valley would require about nine hours.

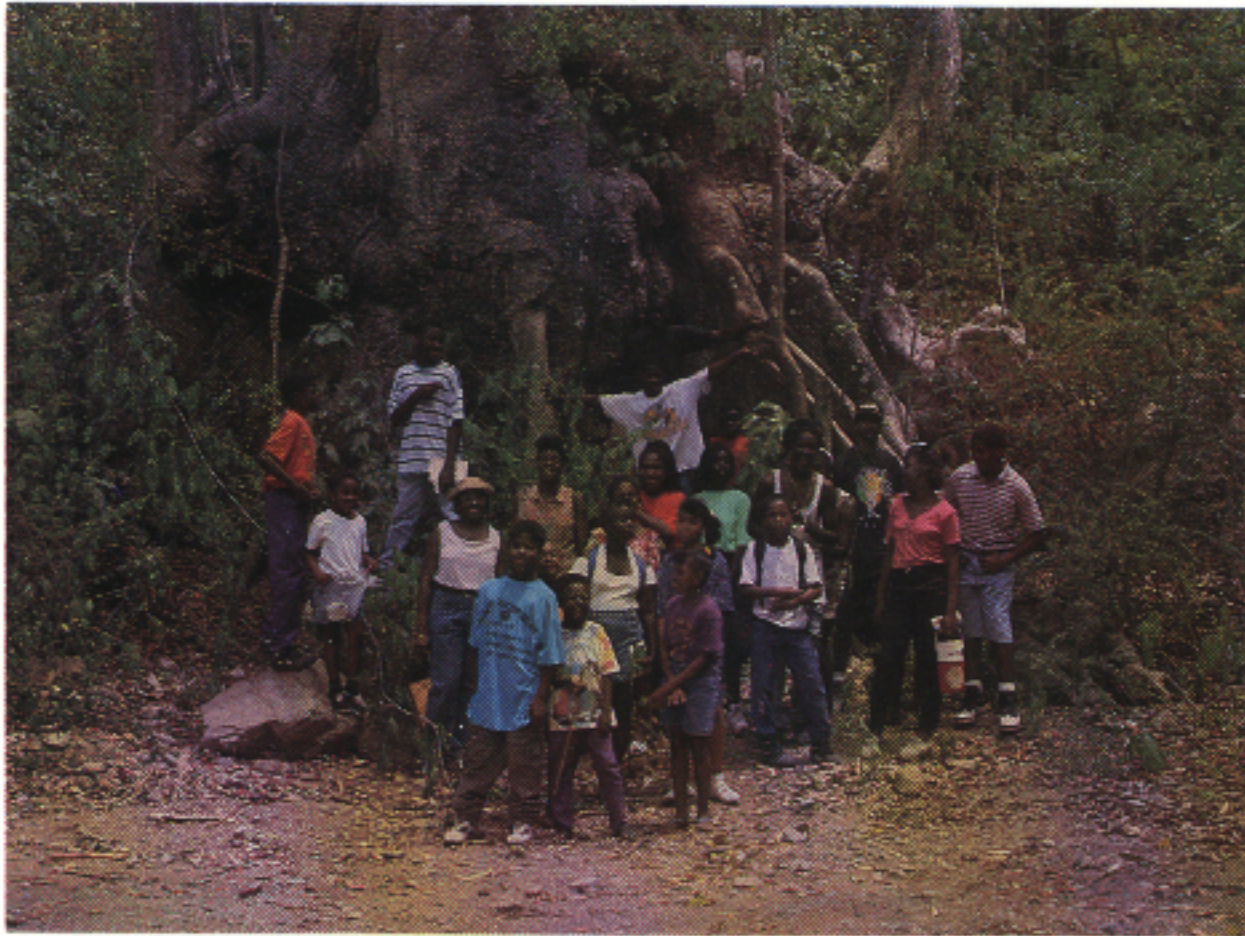


Many types of ferns, including the rare swamp fern, can be found along the gut. People who once inhabited the area

planted fruit trees such as coconut, cocoa, and mango. Most of the plants, however, are native trees, shrubs and vines. Medicinal plants are also common in this area. Certain trees have epiphytes on their branches. Lichens, liverworts and mosses are abundant. Water holes can also be found with fish, fresh water shrimp, hermit crabs and, occasionally, fresh water crabs. The endangered Puerto Rican screech owl, blue pigeons, pearly-eyed thrashers and quail doves make the Caledonia Valley their home. During the winter months, many migratory birds, such as the scarlet tanager, American redstarts, various warblers and even a peregrine falcon can be found in the Caledonia Valley. If you are lucky, you might see a deer drinking at a water hole.

CREQUE DAM

Built in the 1920s by the U.S. Navy, Creque Dam was originally intended to supply Frederiksted with water. Known as Creque Dam "Rainforest," much of the area along the gut has been used for livestock. Consequently, pigs and cattle are often seen along the road and gut. However, there are areas still covered with tall trees giving the appearance of a rainforest. There are trees with air plants and Spanish moss hanging from branches, and water trickling in some places along the gut. This area is also used for horseback riding and gathering fruits during the summer time. Birds can also be heard and seen flying through the trees. This easy two and a half mile hike focuses on the medicinal plants along the road. The hike begins at the intersection leading to the Tranbergs' estate in Estate Mount Victory and ends at Sprat Hall Beach.

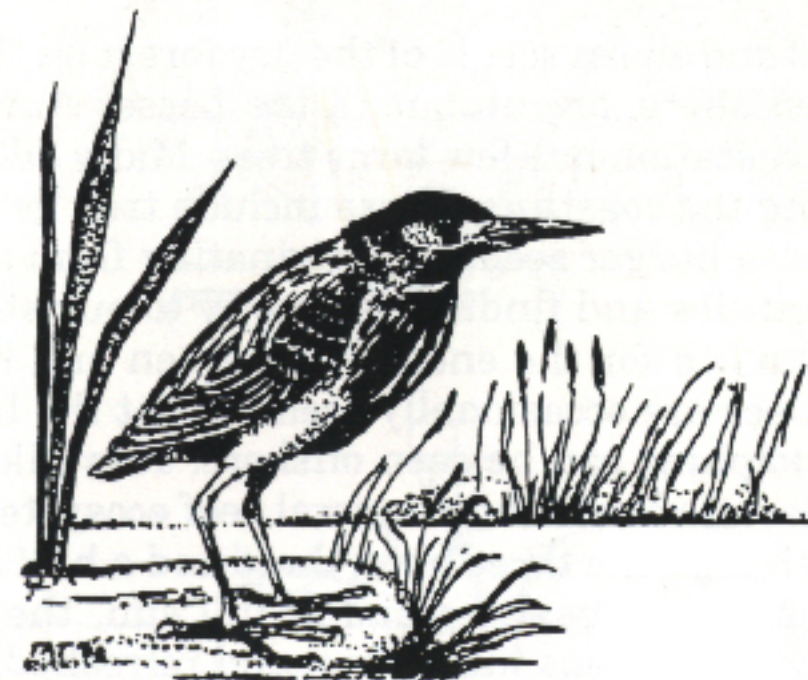


and trees can be found along the coastline. This two and a half mile hike starts from the bay estuary of red mangrove and heads northwest toward the Howard M. Wall Boy Scout Camp. The hike lasts about two and a half hours.



GREAT POND

Located on the south shore of the island, the pond is the second largest salt pond in the Virgin Islands. The pond has a large mangrove stand along the beach, which serves as a habitat for resident and migratory birds (some of which are endangered) and a nursery for juvenile fish. Some fishermen use the pond as a staging point, some small game hunting occurs in the littoral forest, and a few fishermen harvest crabs from the pond mudflats. Along the south shore at Great Pond, sea grass beds and coral reefs can be seen. Coastal plants, such as sea purslane, beach bean, sea grapes, and other shrubs



JACK & ISAAC BAYS



The cactus and thorn scrub, of the dry forest on St. Croix's southeast shore, are unique in the Lesser Antilles. The dry coastal vegetation has few large trees. Many oddities can be found along the coastline. These include tree fern trunks, bamboo and sea burger seeds, all originating from islands in the Lesser Antilles and finding their way to our shore. This area is also known for the endangered green and hawksbill sea turtles. Deer are occasionally seen and, at the beginning of the year, dolphins can be seen offshore. This hike focuses mainly on coastal plants and the coral reef ecosystems along the shore. Although the three hour, three and a half mile hike is mostly along a sandy shore and in full sun, the constant southeasterly wind keeps hikers cool and refreshed.

SALT RIVER

The Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve contains one of the few intact natural ecosystems left in the Virgin Islands. This preserve has fresh water streams, salt ponds, a mangrove forest, flood plain, and an estuary with extensive seagrass beds. The mangrove forest ecosystem is also one of the best in the Virgin Islands. Severely damaged by hurricane Hugo in 1989, the forest is slowly recovering. The area is known historically for Columbus' landing, a large Indian settlement, as well as many endangered plants and animals. The two hour hike passes along the old river bed and through the mangrove forest. Hikers learn about fossils, oysters, crabs, and mangrove ecology on the swamp hike. At the landing site, they learn about the history of the area.



**DAVID HAMILTON - HARD LABOR
ECOLOGICAL PRESERVE AND
HISTORICAL PARK**

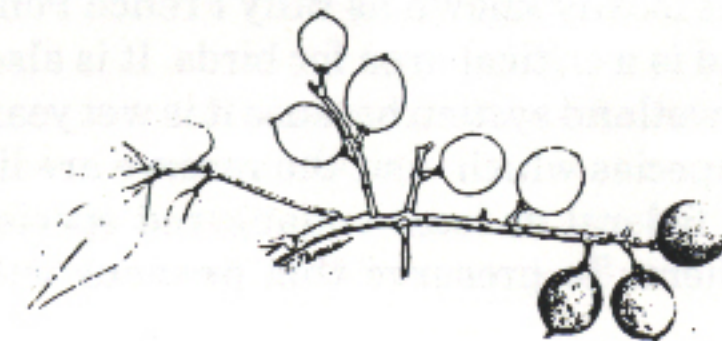
This ecological preserve, once inhabited, offers a cultural and an agricultural history of plants and animal life. The preserve encompasses a 1796 windmill tower, 1780 animal



mill, great house, and other historical architectural structures integrated into the forest environment. In 1917, the St. Croix Labor Union led by D. Hamilton Jackson acquired Estate Hard Labor and Grove Place. The land remained under Union ownership until 1994 when Samuel

Raphael purchased the property.

Much of this forest land has steep slopes on either side of a gut with a dense gallery of moist forest. Along the gut, fruit trees, native royal palms, ferns, medicinal plants, sweet pea, guavaberries and other plants unique to the northwestern hills of St. Croix can be found. In addition, birds and other animal life add to this forest ecosystem. This hike lasts about an hour and a half.

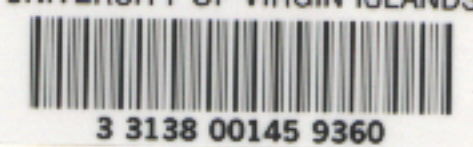


UVI WETLANDS

In 1991, the Foundation for the University of the Virgin Islands transferred 300 acres of property to Hess Oil Virgin Islands Corporation (HOVIC). As part of the transfer agreement, a monetary donation was given to the university for the development and maintenance of 52 acres of wetlands on St. Croix.

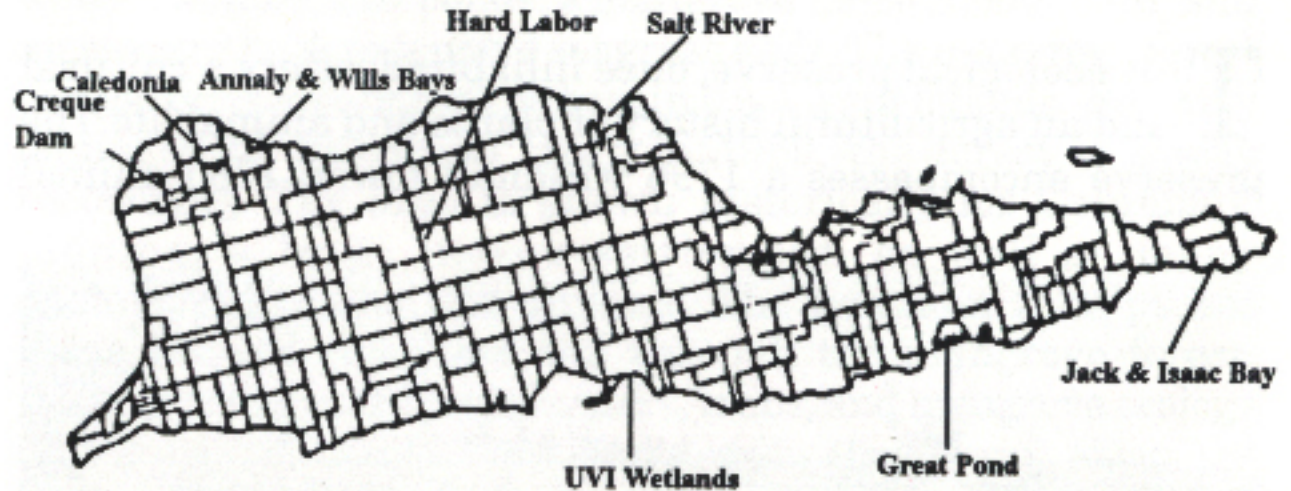


The area is locally known as Billy French Ponds or Cassava Gardens and is a critical area for birds. It is also important to the island's wetland system because it is wet year-round. Many of the bird species which visit the reserve are listed on either or both the federal or local endangered species list. Turtles also nest there. To preserve this precious wildlife reserve,



Marcia Taylor, a marine advisor in the Eastern Caribbean Center's V.I. Marine Advisory Service on St. Croix, manages a project to develop this property.

MAP OF AREAS



Waterfall near the Spring Field quarry in Grove Place.