

Summer 2007



From left to right: Annie Myrvang, Barbara Crowder and David Neilsam at the Long Course finish.

She Did It Again!

Sixteen year old Annie Myrvang from St. Croix is now two-time champion of the Friends Beach-to-Beach Power Swim! On May 27, 2007, a total of 142 swimmers from around the Caribbean, Puerto Rico, Argentina, and the United States entered the water at Maho Bay Beach for the 4th Annual Friends Beach-to-Beach Power Swim. Myrvang completed the 3-1/2 mile course to Hawksnest Beach with a time of 1:20:00! Annie is the first person ever to have won the Beach-to-Beach Power Swim two years in a row. And it was a close race at the finish line, as Dave Nielsam from St. Thomas finished second overall and was the first of the men to cross the finish line with a time of 1:21:10; and third place finisher was Barb Crowder from California with a time of 1:22:10. Crowder was the overall winner on the long course in 2004, the first year of the event.

We were again fortunate to have terrific weather conditions the day of the race, however, the surface was higher than usual, which made it more challenging for swimmers to exit the water, and for the beach volunteers to keep the finish gates standing! The event wrapped up at Oppenheimer Beach with a beach party, which included music, a BBQ, and an awards ceremony.

Scotiabank, a sponsor since the event's inception, added a little extra sizzle to this year's race by instituting the Scotiabank Team Challenge Award, to recognize our swimmers for their athletic skill. This challenge was open to swim groups/athletic groups that registered a minimum of 3 team members. The challenge was for swimmers on the long course; the finishing times of the top three individual swimmers from the same team were combined and the team with the overall fastest time won the challenge.

Of the four teams that entered, Team St. Croix took top honors, with a combined time of 4:33:19, along with the trophy and a cash award of \$250. Mr. Lawrence Aquí, Vice President of Scotiabank in

the Virgin Islands, was on hand to present the trophy to team members, who included Annie Myrvang, Elizabeth Armstrong, Bob Halk, and Ray Lutz.

We enjoy this event tremendously and are grateful to all of our sponsors, with special acknowledgement to our major sponsors, Hawaiian Tropic, Scotiabank, St. John Insurance Agency, Alfredo's Landscaping, Mongoose Junction, Theodore Tunick & Company, Maho Bay Camps, American Paradise Real Estate, Storage on Site, Jewels, Azura, and TOPA Properties for their continue support. We are very proud to have such outstanding corporate partners working with us on this family oriented community event. Please help us thank our sponsors by becoming patrons of their businesses.



Volunteer Safety Kayaker, Val Donaghue.

The Beach-to-Beach Power Swim requires approximately 85 volunteers to make it a fun, and more importantly, a safe event for our swimmers. We are so appreciative of our volunteers for sharing their valuable time and resources to assist us with this event. We could not do it without their support.

Congratulations to all of our sponsors, volunteers and swimmers, you are all winners in our eyes!

Students Come Together to Celebrate Earth Day!

Thank you to the students and teachers who attended Friends of Virgin Islands National Park's 2nd annual Earth Day Environmental Fair. More than 400 students from St. John School on Gift Hill, Methodist Pre-School, St. John Christian Academy, and Julius E. Sprauve School attended the fair. Students learned essential ecological lessons and useful tips from Virgin Islands experts in the fields of natural and cultural resources, recycling, and environmental education, while visiting various booths with interactive and captivating demonstrations.

There were a number of volunteers that made this event happen, and we thank them for their time and effort. We also want to thank the pre-

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Friends' Mission:

The Friends of Virgin Islands National Park is dedicated to the protection and preservation of the natural and cultural resources of Virgin Islands National Park and promotes the responsible enjoyment of this unique national treasure.

• TIDINGS NOTES •

Field Trips for VI Students

Over 450 students from all three Virgin Islands have attended field trips into VI National Park this school year thanks to Friends' Transportation Fund. This program was designed to familiarize local students with the Park through Park Ranger led excursions of the Reef Bay Trail, the Cinnamon Bay Loop Trail, Annaberg Plantation Ruins, and the seashore along Leinster Bay.

Dear Anna/Dear Peter

This spring's Carabana Ensemble Theater Co. performance, *Dear Anna/Dear Peter*, a story depicting the love affair between Peter VonSholten, Governor of the Danish West Indies, and his free colored mistress of 20 years Anna Haggard, was a hit. The performance ran weekly from January – April at the Cinnamon Bay Amphitheater. Thank you to our sponsor Tropico Management on St. Croix, because of their support, admission was free to all.

Summer Eco-Camps

Attention parents, Summer Eco-Camps are here! The Friends is again sponsoring environmental summer camps for children ages 8–16. These 3 day/2 night camps take place at the VI Environmental Resource Station at Lameshur Bay, and will introduce kids to the wonders of our island's ecosystems. Eco-Camps are free of charge to U.S. Virgin Islands students. Please call VIERS to register (340) 776-6721. Sign up now... Space is limited!

2007 Scholarship Recipient

Friends is proud to announce Thad Lettsome as the recipient of the 2007 Friends of VI National Park Scholarship. Thad is an outstanding senior at Charlotte Amalie High School, St. Thomas VI; in addition to being an honor society member, he is a member of S.P.A.R.K.S youth group and president of the student government for the Upward Bound Program at UVI. He was also recognized by Upward Bound as a "2007 Youth Role Model," an honor bestowed after nomination by his high school. Thad will be attending Fairleigh Dickinson University in the fall to study marine biology. Good luck Thad and congratulations!

2007 Summer Intern

Recent college graduate, Andrew Deppensmith, will be arriving shortly to fill the position of Friends' summer intern. Andrew majored in environmental science and spent last summer as an intern at VIERS, so we know he will be a good fit to assist us with Eco-Camps again this summer, as well as other summer projects like the SCA Summer Trail Crew, and the 2008 Seminar Series. Andrew will be with the Friends until the end of August. Welcome Andrew!

Friends' SCA Summer Trail Crew Hits the Trails

On June 20th, an eight member Student Conservation Association (SCA) crew of young environmentalists from St. Croix and the continental U.S. set out to repair and improve hiking trails within VI National Park. The crew members will learn about the natural and cultural resources of VI National Park while living and working within the Park for one month. This is the seventh summer Friends has sponsored the trail crew. If you are out hiking, keep an eye out for this hard working group, and please be sure to thank them for their efforts to maintain our trails.

Superintendent's Message



I feel like the luckiest person in the world to be serving as the Acting Superintendent at Virgin Islands National Park and Coral Reef National Monument for a few months. The beauty of this place includes not only an amazing variety of natural resources, but it is also rich with wonderful people who support the Park and each other.

When the Regional Director called to ask me to come to St. John for a few months, I jumped at the opportunity. Having worked in the high mountain deserts of Colorado, the mountains of Appalachia, and the wetlands of Florida and South Carolina, I had not had the opportunity to work in a place with such incredible ocean resources. I have spent a lot of my free time on St. John in the water discovering the coral reefs and enjoying the wide variety of fish that inhabit them. I find as I encounter these natural wonders that I am very concerned about the die-off of the coral and how it will impact all the other creatures that depend on them. I'm also concerned about the Park staff's ability to do everything that should be done in the face of a dwindling budget. In this area, the Friends support and assistance, along with other partners and volunteers from within our community is vital.

As in any stewardship endeavor, there is always more to be done. Other areas of importance include preservation/restoration of archeological and historic sites and future planning for Hassel Island. Additionally, we should try to ensure that development on St. John is accomplished in the most environmentally sensitive and sustainable way possible. The resources and way of life that draw people to our shores require our diligent attention and support.

Soon efforts will begin to finalize the Park's General Management Plan. The Plan will guide the future of the Park and Monument for the next twenty to thirty years. This process will include public meetings to ensure community involvement and input.

When your new Superintendent arrives in mid to late July, I'll return to my job as the Deputy Superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway in NC and VA. I'll leave St. John having been enriched by the wonderful people that I have met and by the adventures that I have had. Thank you for what you have done for me and for what you do for the Park!

Archeology Update

By Amber Davis, Archeology Intern

The Cultural Resource Management division of Virgin Islands National Park has been very busy recently. Last month, two interns from the University of Copenhagen arrived on St. John, after three months of research in the Danish National Archives. The goal in bringing these interns to the Virgin Islands was to return the stories about the early settlement of St. John to the place where they originated. Prior to their arrival, Laura Jensen and Jonas Pedersen conducted extensive research on the ownership of Lameshur and its surrounding plantations in the early 18th century.

The research process entailed finding relevant articles, hoping the pertinent sections had been preserved, and then translating the Gothic Danish text found in tax records into modern Danish and then into English. Simply finding a document with information pertinent to the Virgin Islands amidst the entire collection of the National Archives was a trial in patience and luck. Now, within the next month, we plan to

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Students Celebrate Earth Day!

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senters who were on hand to teach our youth about their fragile island and global environment through creative activities and booths. Students got muddy planting seeds in their own take home containers, designed their own planet, colored the Annaberg School House, joined a fact finding scavenger hunt, operated a solar power shower, and danced around during some very participatory stories about the earth.



Thank you to the presenters: Alfredo's Landscaping, Animal Care Center, Avelin Samuel, Coral Bay Community Council, Cristina Kessler, Curtis Bridgewater of Heaven & Earth Landscaping, Eleanor Gibney, Dr. Gary Ray of Virgin Forests Restoration, Ital Anthony, Jared Hill & Maho Bay Camps, Kelley Hunter, LaDoris Bias-Davis, V.I. Audubon

Society, V.I. National Park Service, Renata Platenberg of National Fish & Wildlife, St. John Historical Society, Steve Prostermen, and V.I. Resource, Conservation & Development Council Inc.

A special thank you to the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands for the generous grant to purchase supplies for the event; also to V.I. Audubon Society, Cool Signs, Peter Alter, St. John Ice Company and V.I. Fire Department.

Friends continued its celebration of Earth Day, sponsoring beach and trail cleanups throughout the weekend. Participants of the Friends' Adopt-A-Beach/Trail program removed debris from their adopted beach/trail as part of an island-wide cleanup. Kudos to Fish Bay Homeowners Assoc., Holiday Homes, Maho Bay Camps, R & I Patton, St. John Brewers, St. John Land Sharks and St. John Phone Book, St. John Rotary, V.I. Audubon Society, and William Neill and Carla Cox for cleaning their adopted sites on Earth Day!

Mark your calendars! Friends will host the 3rd annual Friends' Earth Day Environmental Fair on Fri., Apr. 18th, 2008. THINK GREEN!

A Sensational 2007 Seminar Series Wraps-Up

Due to the many knowledgeable and devoted seminar instructors and generous boat owners, Friends' 2007 Seminar Series was a great success. Over 420 people attended the 26 seminars, raising over \$15,000 that will help support environmental and cultural programs in the Park.

Seminar participants gathered at the overlook at Annaberg Plantation Ruins March 17th to take part in the Oil Painting Seminar led by renowned local artist Kat Sowa. What better way to celebrate the natural resources of VI National Park than to spend the morning painting the majestic view scapes from atop one of the Park's most significant historical sites. This seminar was one of the ten new seminars offered this season.

Special thanks to: Arawak Expeditions, Guy Benjamin, Rafe Boulon, Eddie Bruce, Calypso, Cinnamon Bay Campground, Rob Crane, Cruise Ship Excursions, Dr. Barry Devine, Eleanor Gibney, Flamingo Club, Kelley Hunter, David Knight, Love City Pan Dragons,

Low Key Watersports, Magic Carpet, Christy McManus, Jeff Miller, Michael Milne, Don Near, Irene Patton, Dr. Renata Platenberg, Caroline Rogers, Dr. Gary Ray, Sadie Sea, Deanna Somerville, Kat Sowa, Gilbert Sprauve, Joyce Sprauve, Carrie Stengel, and Ken Wild. We couldn't have done it without all of you!

Help to make next year's series even more successful! Planning starts in the early fall, so if you have any suggestions for changes or additions, please call us. We would be happy to accommodate your interests.

New and Not So New Volunteer Programs

This past winter season Friends of VI National Park launched the Volunteer Work Party, a new volunteer program that has the potential to be a real catalyst for change in the level of maintenance of our hiking trails and historic ruins in Virgin Islands National Park. Modeled after the volunteer program in Acadia National Park, volunteer Jeff Chabot spearheaded the program's development and brings to us his knowledge and experience as a volunteer working in the Acadia program, and Denali National Park.

The program began late in the season, but in only seven Saturdays, the volunteer crew repaired and cut back vegetation and rebuilt stone stairs on the Lind Point Trail, cleared vegetation from the Caneel Hill ruins, and removed vegetation, uncovering the previously hidden enslaved peoples' huts at Annaberg Plantation ruins. Tools for the program are supplied by Virgin Islands National Park and the Friends, so that participants can simply show up the morning of the maintenance project with water and sturdy hiking shoes. The maintenance projects vary weekly, and Jeff provides instruction on proper vegetation removal and trail construction techniques. We plan to expand this program for next season offering the Volunteer Work Party on Thursday mornings in addition to Saturdays. The program will resume late November.



Annaberg Docents

The Annaberg Docent Program is a volunteer program with a little more time under its belt. Begun five years ago by Paula and Kent Savel, the Docent program continues to offer visitors to Annaberg Plantation ruins with an unforgettable glimpse at the earlier days of the plantation and St. John. These devoted volunteer guides share the story of this historical site

and VI National Park, while walking visitors through the process of producing rum and molasses. Three new docents joined the volunteer program this season, bringing with them some fresh perspectives and new energy. Docents are on site at Annaberg Monday thru Friday 10-2:00 December thru April.

Thank you to all the volunteers who donate their time, knowledge, and skills to help preserve and protect the resources of VI National Park and make it a better place to visit! For information about either one of these programs please contact the Friends at (340) 779-4940, or check out our website: www.friendsvinp.org.

Archeology Update *(Continued from Page 3)*

corroborate as much of the historical data as we can with the physical archeological record.

Several plantations that exist in the tax records have not yet been physically uncovered. This means there will be some heavy-duty hiking in our future, but that's what archeologists love (at least I do). At the end of the month, we hope to have learned a great deal more about the early settlement of St. John and add several new historical sites to our ASMIS database (Archeological Sites Management Information System Database).

In addition to the discoveries made by the Danish interns, there have been some recent significant strides towards the restoration of Creque Marine Railway on Hassel Island, which is the oldest steam-powered marine railway in the Western hemisphere and the only one still in existence globally. This site is an important part of the history of the Virgin Islands, and unfortunately is in desperate need of stabil-

ization and preservation. The long-term plan for the site is to open it up to the public as an educational exhibit, which will increase knowledge and appreciation of Virgin Island Maritime heritage.

Excavation continues at Cinnamon Bay to ensure that the re-internment of human remains (previously unearthed) will not disturb other archeological artifacts/sites. We have excavated to the level where prehistoric meets historic, (the contact period between the native Tainos and the European explorers), and will spend some time carefully exploring this important time period. A prehistoric red bead from a zemi figure, the first one found on St. John, was just unearthed from this site.

The research conducted by the Danish interns, the many archeological excavations, and the discovery of plantations that need our protection would not be possible without the support of Friends of the Park and its members. We thank you for making it possible and hope you will come out to visit us.

President's Message *By Joe Kessler*



As a member of the Friends you are obviously concerned about the well-being of VI National Park, as well as other national parks around the country. You probably share my dismay at the chronic underfunding of the nation's national parks, which currently amounts to a shortfall of more than \$800 million. Here, VINP regularly operates with only 70% of the budget which it needs, about the average for all national parks.

While this seems dire, Congress is, or will shortly be, considering several very promising funding proposals that will help provide the funds that national parks need to survive, if not prosper:

- First is a record breaking increase of the Park Service's annual operations budget. This additional funding is the first critical step in reversing the crisis in our parks. More funding will help ensure that park facilities are properly maintained, enough rangers are on hand, and educational and interpretive programs are available to children and other park visitors.

- Next is restoring funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund to its previous levels. This fund is the primary source for acquiring additional lands for national parks and could, for example, be used to help

acquire Estate Maho Bay.

- Last is the Centennial Challenge. The Park Service will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2016 and the Centennial Challenge is an effort to prepare the nation's national parks for their next 100 years. It will include (over the next ten years) an additional \$1 billion in operations funds for parks, \$1 billion raised by private groups, (friends groups) and matched by federal funds for special projects.

National parks are called "the best idea America ever had." As we approach their 100th anniversary, let's increase our efforts to ensure that they are healthy so they can continue to educate and inspire visitors today and for generations to come.

I encourage you to contact your congressional representatives and urge them to support these funding proposals for VINP and all national parks. One strength of the Friends is in the geographical diversity of our members — we have members from every state in the union (as well as a dozen foreign countries), so please make sure that your elected representatives understand that the preservation of national parks is a priority for you.

Thank you again for your support and for continuing to keep VI National Park and the Friends as one of your philanthropic priorities.

See you in the park!

Friends of 
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NATIONAL PARK**

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