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PROPOSAL to ESTABLISH the ISLAND of ST. JOHN, V.I.
as a NATIONAL PARK

Preface

In 1939, the National Park Service undertook a comprehensive survey and study of the island of St. John, Virgin Islands, U.S.A. in the Caribbean, as regards its establishment as a National Park. War had broken out in Europe at that time and the Park idea was shelved. The National Park idea lay dormant until 1954, fifteen years later, when the old report was uncovered and the idea revived.

The question immediately arose as to what effects, if any, time had made on the area since the original survey. It was decided to restudy the island and bring the report up to date. The field work was accomplished in late October and early November 1954, and this report correlates current findings with the original report.

General Information

Location

St. John, lying 1,442 miles southeast of New York City, is classed as one of the Leeward islands in the Caribbean chain, although geographically it is one of the islands that form a unit with Puerto Rico which lies approximately 50 miles to the west.

Accessibility

The island of St. Thomas is the principal transportation hub of the American Virgins and nearly all visitors to St. John arrive via St. Thomas. Regular mail and passenger service is maintained between the two islands by municipally owned and operated launches.

The island is separated from St. Thomas on the west by Pillsbury Sound, a stretch of water two miles wide, very frequently called "The Graveyard." Here the currents of the Atlantic meet the currents of the Caribbean causing comparatively rough water most of the year. On the north, St. John is separated from the British islands by Drake's Passage, a stretch of water approximately three miles wide.

Physical Characteristics

St. John rises abruptly from the sea. The entire island is made up of a series of mountain peaks arranged in no particular order, as can be seen on the attached map. The highest elevation

is 1,277 feet, at the top of Bordeaux Mountain. The island is small, containing only 19.2 square miles of land. It is nine miles long and approximately five miles wide. At the present time about 85% or more of the island acreage is covered by bush and second growth timber, including such trees as mahogany, bay, cocoanut, West Indian ebony, cinnamon bay, tamarind, mango, lime and others. There is little arable land, the largest areas being at Parforce Valley (Reef Bay area), Lameshur Estate (Lameshur Bay area), and Carolina Estate (Coral Bay area).

The climate of the Virgin Islands is subtropical, equable, and exceedingly healthful. The northeast trade winds blowing in from the ocean temper the heat of the sun, making the days delightfully pleasant and the nights cool. The lowest temperature ever recorded for the island was 69 degrees, the highest, 91 degrees.

Rainfall averages about 50 inches per year, and the rains come in the form of frequent, short showers, usually at night. There is no so-called "rainy season" on the island.

There were 746 people residing on the island of St. John in 1950, as reported in the census records for that year.

Park Qualifications

Scenery

St. John is by far the most beautiful of the three U.S. Virgins. The pure white sand of her numerous beaches contrasts

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perfectly with the green of her wooded hills and the turquoise waters washing her shores.

Centerline Road, extending from Cruz Bay on the west to Coral Bay on the east, meanders generally along the high central backbone of the island. From this road practically all points of interest, such as Camelburg Peak, Bordeaux Mountain, the Carib inscriptions, etc., are easily accessible.

From many points along the road one can see breath-taking views of waters dotted with islands and cays belonging to both the United States and Great Britain. To the west, silhouetted against the sky lies St. Thomas, the two St. James islands, and Thatch Cay. In semicircular formation from west to north to east lie such intriguing islands as Lovango Cay, Congo Cay, Hans Lollick, Jost Van Dyke, Tortola, Peter Island, and on very clear days, the easternmost island of the chain, Virgin Gordo.

A most outstanding view is obtained from a point on the trail at Bordeaux where it drops abruptly to the northeast from the little settlement of Bordeaux towards Coral Harbor. The drop is about 1,200 feet in a half mile. From this overlook, the picturesque buildings of the Moravian Mission at Emmaus, the small native residences, and the sailing sloops anchored in the harbor provide an inspiring introduction to the vast island-studded sea beyond. Words are inadequate to describe one's feelings when first confronted

by this view. The reaction of beholders normally is that "This is it."

Drake's Passage between St. John and Tortola is approximately three miles wide and takes its name from Sir Francis Drake, or "El Draque" as the Spaniards called him, who was the first to sail through its tortuous channels, in 1580. At no place in this channel is the water very deep, hence the ocean floor with all its exotic beauty and wonder can be seen through the clear waters. Just north of Mary Point and across "The Narrows" lies the closest British possession, Great Thatch Island. Here the passage is but .8 mile wide.

To the south stretches the limitless tossing Caribbean with the island of St. Croix looming out of the water forty miles away. Sand beaches on the southern shore are not as numerous because of the rougher waters. A breath-taking spectacle on the south side is created by the huge waves, caused by cross currents, breaking over a rocky promontory called Ram Head. This stone head is an exact likeness, even to the curled-back horns.

Nowhere does the sun set in such an array of ever-changing glory. Not only is the sky spectacular in the west but the after-glow in the east is a remarkable phenomenon.

When the 1939 report was prepared no motor cars disturbed the peaceful serenity of the island. Several jeeps and four-wheel

drive trucks have since been imported. Their use, however, has been confined largely to the Centerline Road and along the east and west shores where the large majority of the inhabitants live. Overland transportation between Cruz Bay and Coral Bay has been improved by use of these vehicles. As yet, they have not destroyed the charm and beauty of the island, nor have they destroyed its park values.

A network of trails suitable only for travel on foot or horseback exists, and all beaches and points of interest are accessible via these trails. They lead up hill and down dale, through wooded lands where the sunlight and shadows spread a lacy patchwork before the eyes of the beholder. When the summit of a hill has been reached, beautiful views of the surrounding waters can be seen, then down dips the trail into a dense, cool valley where stand the ruins of a great estate house, sugar mill, or other silent reminders of a more glorious period in the island's history. Usually visitors stop to explore these ruins and to their delight find old stairways, terraces, even burial grounds where today some of the dates are still visible on the weathered stones. Parts of old sugar mills are still standing, and in some of the ruins, portions of the equipment used in the sugar manufacturing process can be seen.

Photographers and artists find a wealth of subject material for pictures. They are delighted with the natural colors which

are at their best because of the ever clear atmosphere. The natives make excellent subject material and do not object to posing.

A trip around the island in a boat offers other unusually picturesque views of the mountains, villages, and ruins. I do not know of any other 19 square mile area that can provide the wide variety of scenic beauty that can be found on this island.

History

The historical study of St. John is fascinating, though much of the material of the early days is purely guesswork. According to all accounts, Columbus was the first white man to see St. John, one of the islands he christened "The Eleven Thousand Virgins." At that time the Carib Indians had already been occupying these islands, as can be determined by the stone picture writings they left behind. The pages of history of the period directly following discovery by Columbus are blank, but a German historian named Oldendorp records the statement that about 1555 the Caribs were driven from the Virgin Islands by Charles V of Spain and his "Conquistadores." At least there were no Indians on St. John when the first white settlers arrived in the 17th century.

Ethnologists believe that these Caribs came originally from South America, travelling up the chain of the Lesser Antilles in search of suitable places to live. Some of the tribes located on small islands not suited to agriculture, and these tribes became warlike, going off

in boats to plunder the tribal settlements on the larger islands. It is thought that the Caribs of St. John most certainly belonged to one of these warrior tribes.

The first mention of settlers on the Virgin Islands was made in 1625 but it is definitely known that St. John was not settled until 1684. All early attempts at colonization failed because the English from Tortola drove off the would-be settlers. In 1687 the Danish West India and Guinea Company laid claim to St. John but it was not until March 25, 1717 that the first permanent colony was established on the island. Twenty planters and five soldiers landed at Coral Harbor on the east end of St. John and defied the British to drive them away.

Immediately upon their arrival they built Fort Berg on the Summit of a small peninsula now known as Fortberg Hill, separating Coral Bay from Hurricane Hole. This was a most strategic location because no one could approach the fort from any direction without being seen by the soldiers stationed there. A "Battery" was built in conjunction with the fort at the bottom of the hill, but as was the fate of so many of the old buildings, they fell to ruins and today stand like lonely sentinels on the bush covered hill.

By 1731, 38 planters had taken up estates on St. John and life was prosperous and gay. Every phase of life went smoothly

until November 23, 1733 when the slaves revolted. Part of the white population fled to Peter Durlieu's estate, now known as Caneel Bay Plantation. The white settlers stayed there four months during which time the Negroes killed, robbed and burned the places that the whites had made. Fortberg fell to the Negroes but was later retaken by the whites. Finally French soldiers from the island of Martinique arrived, quelled the riot and carried off many of the Negroes to a period of French slavery. (See footnote.)

One legend is worthy of recording. "Rather than be captured by the soldiers, a band of Negroes fled to Mary Point, joined hands and leaped over the edge of the cliff to the water below. The waves dashed them against the rocks till not one escaped and to this day, their bloodstains can be seen on the rocks at the foot of the cliff."

With the abolition of slavery it was impossible to keep up the old estates, so the island began to go back to bush, the white owners departed, and for years the remaining Negroes on St. John have lived an uncomplicated life. Thus we find them today, a happy, contented people with a pride and courtesy which is unbelievable.

The Virgin Islands were purchased by the United States from Denmark in 1917. It is interesting to note that as early as 1867

Footnote: Discrepancies in historical accounts of the rebellion of the slaves and the results of that rebellion make further research of this subject desirable.

the United States was interested in them. Lightbourn's West India Annual and Commercial Directory of 1897 states in part: "... and as these pages are going through the press there is much talk of the islands being purchased by the United States of America... Already, in 1867, a transfer to the States was nearly accomplished--the failure being due to the refusal of the U. S. Senate to ratify the treaty arranged between Secretary Seward and the Danish Government. Should this be consummated doubtless their advantages as a winter resort will also become patent and the pushing Yankee may turn them to good account that way..."

St. John was well-known in the days of piracy and buccaneering because of her excellent harbors. Coral Bay is listed as being one of the best harbors in the Lesser Antilles. It is $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles wide at the entrance and $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles long. Its depth is recorded as being 13 fathoms even at the shore line of some of the finger-like projections: Otter Creek, Water Creek, and Princess Bay. Coral Bay is three times larger than St. Thomas Harbor and offers the best kind of protection against the hurricanes that sometimes blow in the region.

The history of Christianity on the island is interesting. All early evangelical work was done by Moravian Missionaries who came to St. John from St. Thomas. The westernmost point of St. John has been called Moravian Point in commemoration of the "Unitas Fratrum" or Moravian Brethren who began the Christianization of the natives.

The first meeting place was at Wilthagen's Plantage, but soon a meetinghouse was built at Bethany, a small settlement east of Cruz Bay. Here the church still stands and services are held regularly.

In 1738, the Moravians built a large church and school at Emmaus, near Coral Harbor. These buildings were destroyed during the hurricane of 1916, but were rebuilt, and though the school is no longer in use, the present Moravian missionary has his headquarters there. A young Baptist minister is presently building a church in the Coral Bay area.

Science

Perhaps the most unique features of scientific interest found on St. John are the Carib inscriptions or petroglyphs located in the Reef Bay area. Research along archeological lines was carried on by Theodore De Booy in 1916-17. In his report he states that the petroglyphs, or stone writings, were made in pre-Columbian days and that many of the inscriptions have already been obliterated by weathering. Even so there are, at the present writing, distinct figures remaining on the rocks at Reef Bay near the waterfall, and also on Congo Cay and Carvel Rock off St. John to the northwest.

On the north side of the island at Old Oven Hill near Leinster Bay, potsherds of Carib origin have been found. De Booy states that the period of Carib occupancy must have been of comparatively short duration. It has recently been reported that artifacts associated with the

peace-loving Arawak Indians have been uncovered in the Magen's Bay area of St. Thomas. This tribe predated the Caribs. It is possible that remains will be found associating them also with St. John.

Facts of scientific interest are offered not only to the archeologist but to the biologist as well. Dr. Whitehouse from the University of Toronto found several very rare species of dragonflies on the island. Ichthyologists have an unusual opportunity of studying fish and other forms of marine life. Especially interesting are those forms inhabiting the reefs, for the shores of St. John have many coral reefs extending great distances into the water.

Botanists will find a wealth of interests in the semitropical plant life, and for those who have never seen orchids growing in their native habitat, the waterfall area at Reef Bay offers a real thrill, for the rocks and trees are covered with them. Camelburg Peak and the Bordeaux Mountain areas offer many unusual species of plant life. Coffee, guava, bamboo, and breadfruit trees can be seen growing at Estate Adrian on Centerline Road.

St. John is a Conchologist's paradise. Practically all of the beaches abound in shells of many species, the most beautiful being the King and Queen Conch shells. Native boys will dive for the live conch, remove the body, and deliver the shell in perfect condition. Most of the shell fish found are edible, and if prepared in the native way, are delicious.

The mammalian zoologist will find little to interest him as there are no wild animals on the island. Neither are poisonous snakes to be found there, thus ensuring perfect safety for all who care to roam through the woods and bush. Few birds inhabit the island with the exception of pelicans, booby birds, doves, and wild pigeons. Parakeets have recently been seen on the island around Bordeaux Mountain. Harmless little lizards sleep in the sun or scurry through the grass. One unusual animal that inhabits the island is the mongoose. In the 1930's this little fellow caused so much destruction among the native fowl that a program of extermination was initiated; however, the mongoose is still on the island.

Development Potentials

Recreation

To become completely acquainted with the charm of the island, it is best to travel either by horseback or on foot. It is possible on most of the existing trails to plan a trip that will include both mountain scenery and seaside beauty without retracing any of the route. Hikers and horseback riders do not find either of these activities under the tropical sun uncomfortably hot because of the frequent shade and the constant blowing of the trade winds that give the island its equable climate. In the interest of preserving the present park qualities and the quiet atmosphere, it is proposed to confine auto traffic to Centerline Road and the more heavily

travelled seashore drives along the east and northwest shores. Since there is no need for high speed roads, their design should be as simple as possible. All other island trails should be restricted for horseback riding or travel on foot.

Yachting and boating possibilities appear to be unlimited. The many land-locked harbors and sheltered coves offer ample anchorage. The winds and tides around the island are ideal for sailing most of the year. There are many cays and islands in the vicinity of St. John just waiting to be explored by the venturesome. Nearby British islands offer interesting old-world atmosphere. The waters around St. John reportedly abound in fish of many varieties to test the boatman's fishing skill.

There have been several conflicting reports concerning the values of the waters for deep sea fishing. It is felt that more intensive surveys are in order before a positive statement can be made on this subject, and before comparisons can be made between these and other fishing waters. A lack of competent guides in the area offers an open field to the fishermen who enjoy exploring new waters and who may wish to engage in public guide services.

Swimming is one of the most popular sports of the area and opportunities for this activity are many because of the numerous, excellent beaches of pure white sand. The best beaches are located at Francis, Mahoe, Cinnamon, Hognest, Caneel, Cruz, Lameshur, and Frank

Bays, as well as Limetree Cove in Round Bay. People from nearby islands frequently anchor their boats in a St. John Bay for a beach picnic and swim. There are ideal spots for picnicking also along the inland roads and trails.

Education

A definite part of the educational program for park visitors should be the establishment of a museum, to include an herbarium of the region, display cases for a complete shell collection, perhaps an aquarium in which the smaller rainbow-hued fish could be kept, and any relics of the past that might be available now or unearthed as scientific study of the island progresses. It would even be interesting to have an exhibit of the everyday implements that are used by the natives, such as charcoal pots for cooking, machetes for cutting bush, calabash cups, and many other of their unique domestic articles.

Nature walks could be a definite part of the educational program. The flora is so vastly different from that of temperate U.S. areas that interested visitors should be given the opportunity of seeing and learning to know the trees and other plants of the island. Too, trips to the beaches should be planned, for a whole new world is hidden around and under the reefs and rocks. Glass-bottomed boxes and glass-bottomed boats could provide the means of introducing visitors to this marine world. Aqua-lung enthusiasts will find the sea around St. John a veritable treasure house for their underwater forays.

The native islanders are expert weavers and their whist reed and palm strip products such as hats, bags, and mats are as gay and colorful as one expects tropical products of this type to be. Provisions could be made for them to display and sell their products, as well as to demonstrate their weaving and dyeing processes.

Fish, which are an important part of the local diet, are trapped in woven fish traps or "fish pots." A display of the fish pots and an explanation of their fishing methods would be of interest to many.

There are numerous ruins of sugar mills and processing plants scattered throughout the area. The education program might well include the selection of a typical plant and its reconstruction, in the interest of telling that portion of the island story.

Recommendations

Conservation

The island of St. John is not important from the standpoint of either agriculture or industrial development; therefore, the welfare of the natives does not depend on developments along these lines. Its greatest value is for park and other recreation purposes. It can tell the interesting and colorful story of life and existence in these islands from the time of the Carib Indian occupancy throughout the second voyage of Columbus, down to the present time. Conservation of the Carib inscriptions at Reef Bay,

the old forts, the estate ruins, and other historic and scientific features as well as existing scenic and recreation features are all important if the most complete story is to be told and the values retained.

Indications are that the U.S. Virgin Islands are steadily increasing in popularity as tourist resorts. This popularity is important in that it is the best possible means of making the islands self-supporting. The establishment and orderly development of a National Park on the island of St. John will accomplish much in promoting this objective. It is therefore proposed that a major part of the island of St. John be set aside as a National Park.

Park Boundary

It is proposed that the limits of the park be held in general within the boundary as shown on the attached map. About one third of the island's acreage would remain outside the park. Principal reasons for excluding certain sections of the island from the park are:

1. To allow ample space for native residences adjacent to the more congested areas (the Cruz Bay area, the east end of the island, and along the east side from Nanny Point to Borck Creek).
2. To allow space for developments that would not necessarily fit into the park atmosphere.

It is also proposed that nearby cays and rocks, viz., Whistling Cay, Cinnamon Cay, Trunk Cay, Perkins Cay, Ramgoat Cay, Henley

Cay, Rata Cay, and Congo Cay, as well as Carvel Rock be included in the park area. This is desirable because of their relation to the northwest shore line approach to the proposed park, also because of the presence of Carib petroglyphs on some of them.

Tourist accommodations are presently available within the proposed park area at Caneel Bay and Trunk Bay and it might be advisable later on to have other housing facilities at other points within the park. There might be the need for a Fisherman's Club at one of the attractive bays in the park. This club would provide accommodations for fishermen, sell fishing equipment, and perhaps operate a boat rental and guide service. The necessity for having a saddle horse concession might also become apparent.

At the present time, and outside of the proposed park boundaries, tourist accommodations can be found at both Cruz Bay and Coral Bay. It is possible that more accommodations, the establishment of boat clubs, and horse rental stations will be provided outside the park boundaries. With increased visitation to the islands will come opportunities for the natives to display and sell their baskets, hats, local preserves, and other products.

[As stated before, the closest British possession, Great Thatch Island, is just across the "Narrows" from Mary Point. This situation offers the unique possibility of an International Park. The matter will merit further consideration and discussion with the

British Government if the proposed National Park on St. John is authorized. (See footnote.)

Administration and Protection

Under the present form of government, the Municipalities of St. Thomas and St. John function as one unit with an island Administrator stationed at Cruz Bay. He is in constant contact with the Government Offices in St. Thomas by radio telephone. Policemen are stationed at both Cruz Bay and Coral Bay.

Public schools are located at Cruz Bay, Coral Bay, and Calabash Boom. A small hospital with a nurse in attendance is located at Cruz Bay.

If the park is established it will be necessary to provide a superintendent and assign to him a naturalist and a ranger staff in addition to maintenance personnel to prepare programs for park visitors and properly manage and protect the park.

No complicated administrative or protective problems are anticipated. It is deemed advisable that an effort be made to have the Municipalities of St. Thomas and St. John zone the island's lands which fall outside the park boundaries. By so doing, the possibility of the establishment of undesirable developments will be minimized.

Footnote: The International Park idea was conceived by Director Wirth of the National Park Service during the November 1954 survey of St. John Island.

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There Are Many Subjects
For The Artist
Cruz Bay Dock



Reef Bay
Estate House