



120 Village Square #9, Orinda, CA 94563  
www.conservationvip.org  
info@conservationvip.org  
A Non-Profit 501c3 Tax Exempt Organization

## PROJECT REPORT

### Virgin Islands National Park Volunteer Trip

April 5-16, 2015



### Executive Summary

Conservation Volunteers International Program (Conservation VIP) organized and led a volunteer expedition to Virgin Islands National Park (VINP) on St. Thomas and St. John in the US Virgin Islands from April 5-16, 2015. Ten volunteers and two Conservation VIP leader-

volunteers participated, along with Anna Adams, the Volunteer Coordinator for The Friends of Virgin Islands National Park. Mark Hardgrove and Ed Eads were the Conservation VIP trip leaders. Work consisted of trail maintenance and removal of vegetation from plantation ruins and the cultural landscape. Aggressive vegetative growth quickly claims trails and the Virgin Island National Park's cultural resources. Maintenance involves removing trees with a diameter less than six inches; grasses and other vegetation; and catch-and-keep, a thorny vine. The work was completed on the Yawzi Point, Drunk Bay, and Tektite Trails, and at the plantation ruins at Lameshur Bay and Leinster Bay. The Conservation VIP volunteers, leaders, and Anna Adams completed approximately 518 hours of volunteer work, maintained approximately 1.1 miles of trails, and maintained approximately 3.3 acres of historical sites and cultural landscapes.



## Detailed Trip Report

Brushing and Pruning: Many sections of the trails, cultural landscapes, ruins and gravesites had heavily encroaching grasses, vines, catch and keep (a thorny, stick to your clothing plant), cactuses and brush. As a result, volunteers worked every day on pruning back and removing the vegetation so that the trails, ruins, cultural sites and gravesites can be navigated by visitors to the park and hikers without the bush impeding their travel or safety. Where brush growth and/or tree branches encroached upon the trail and cultural landscapes width or height it was cut back and dispersed. Significant quantities of trees, tree limbs and roots on the trails, cultural sites and ruins presented a hazard for tripping and hazards to the cultural sites and were sawed off by hand and discarded from the sites

These intensive work efforts by the Conservation VIP volunteers greatly improved trail quality and preservation of the cultural landscapes while providing for increased visitor understanding and visitor safety.



Lameshur Bay Plantation Ruins, Gravesites, Yawzi Point Trail, and Yawzi Point Ruins: 125.5 hours over two days; approximately 3 acre site at Lameshur Bay and 0.3 miles on the Yawzi Point Trail. The Lameshur Bay Plantation Ruins and the Yawzi Point Trail are a short 15-minute walk from Virgin Islands Environmental Station (or VIERS, our home base) and see many visitors. These sites were cleared by Conservation VIP in November 2014 and were in very good shape as a result. On this trip, we removed newly grown vegetation, removed additional invasive grasses, and utilized ladders to remove vegetation from the top of the sugar factory walls. In addition to the structures cleared previously, we cleared vegetation from several cattle related structures and the foundation of a structure not previously cleared. Ken Wild, the NPS Archaeologist, speculated that the new structure could have been the enslaved children's school. In total, the volunteers removed vegetation from the Yawzi Point Trail, 2 standing houses, 3 foundations, 1 sugar factory, 1 bay rum still, 2 cattle water/feed stations, 1 cattle dip, and the Lameshur Plantation gravesite.

The Lameshur Bay Plantation Ruins are historically significant, because they represent the changing agricultural products that were produced at this site and on St. John. The plantation began by producing sugar, then cotton, then cattle, and finally bay rum at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.





Tektite Trail: 197 hours over three days, 0.5 miles of trail maintenance completed and approximately 0.125 acres of vista lookout points cleared. The volunteers removed brush within the trail corridor that had grown into the trail and impeded safe passage on the trail. The trail was heavily overgrown and required the removal of trees under six inches in diameter, large cactuses, grasses, and vegetation and vines. In addition to the removal of vegetation, volunteers moved softball-sized stones off the trail tread that posed a safety hazard. The volunteers also cleared three vistas that allowed for viewing the beauty of St. John and the Virgin Islands National Park. This site was the most strenuous and challenging of all of our projects. The exposure to sun and heat were significant enough to warrant shortened workdays. The volunteers took regular snack and hydration breaks and monitored each other to ensure that everyone was safe.

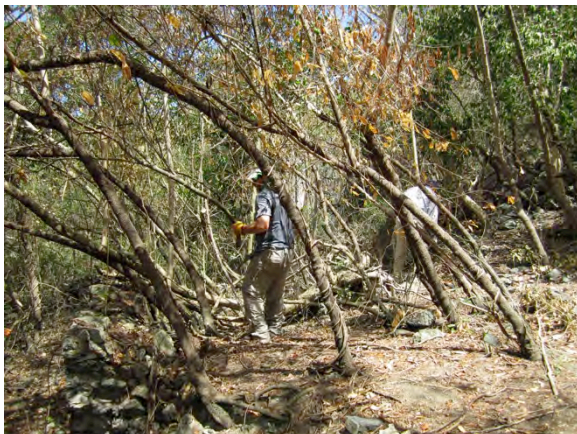
The Tektite Trail is named after the Tektite Habitat Projects that occurred during the years 1968-1970. There were two iterations of the Tektite project in which scientists lived in an underwater habitat for up to 58 days. Tektite was cosponsored by several government agencies and it left a lasting legacy in psychological research relating to individuals cohabitating confined spaces. The psychological research was utilized as recently as 2010 in the rescue efforts for the mine disaster trapping 33 men at Copiapó, Chile. The Tektite trail roughly follows the bulldozed road that served the project and was later abandoned at the conclusion of the project. The trail is a fantastic hike due to the interesting terrain, ruins and lovely vistas.





Leinster Bay Plantation Ruins: 149.5 hours over two days, approximately 0.25 acres cleared of vegetation. The volunteers removed thick vegetation from the Leinster Bay Plantation's horse mill and two building foundations as requested by Ken Wild, NPS Archaeologist. The large horse mill was used, during the plantation's working years, to press sugar cane and extract the juice. The structure is a large circle that would have had mechanized components in the center and livestock revolving around the circumference. Previous volunteers had felled a number of small trees that were dragged by our volunteer group farther from the ruins. The volunteers then removed substantial vegetation that threatened the structure, including the never easy to remove – catch and keep. The site was substantially improved by the volunteers' efforts and the volunteers enjoyed a peaceful flat 0.5-mile hike along Leinster Bay to/from the worksite.

The Leinster Bay Plantation's location bears particular historical significance. It was within sight and reach of the British Virgin Islands, which were emancipated prior to St. John. Many enslaved people sought their freedom by escaping to the British Virgin Islands. The plantation had a guardhouse on a slope above it that could easily view the surrounding waters and any enslaved people attempting to reach the British Virgin Islands.





Drunk Bay Trail: 45.5 hours over a half-day, approximately 0.3 miles of trail maintenance completed. The volunteers removed brush within the trail corridor that had grown into the trail and impeded safe passage on the trail. The Drunk Bay trail is a very popular trail that meanders along Salt Pond and ends at Drunk Bay. Numerous hikers walked past our group and thanked the volunteers for their work.



## General Information

Social Interaction: The team of volunteers worked and “played” extremely well together and friendships were quickly formed. We ate breakfast, lunch and dinner together each day and we washed and dried our own dishes after each meal.

Safety: We started each day and each new project with safety briefings and safety reminders. In addition, we worked together to watch each other for dehydration, safe tool use, use of protective equipment and safe work practices.

The team readily and cheerfully adopted all safety guidelines for tool usage and tool transport. All personnel were required safety gear while working on the trails. Volunteers cordially and occasionally reminded each other to adhere to all safety guidelines throughout the workday.

Transportation: The National Park Service (NPS) provided a government owned van at no charge for transportation during our entire volunteer work program. A second six-passenger van was rented at the St. Thomas Airport. The vans were driven by the Trip Leaders, which proved to be exciting as the custom is to drive on the left side of the road in the US Virgin Islands. Interestingly, there are no traffic lights on St. John and the average driving speed is about 25 miles per hour. Each day the vans transported the volunteers to and from the work sites with afternoon stops at the market to provide volunteers an opportunity for special treats or the spirits of their choice. Travel between the islands on the first and last days of the trip was accomplished by using the vehicle ferries that run between Red Hook, St. Thomas and Cruz Bay, St. John.

Virgin Islands Environmental Research Station (VIERS) Accommodations: VIERS provided rustic and affordable accommodations with clean rooms and facilities. VIERS is run by Clean Islands International and provides one of the most environmentally friendly lodging operations in the Virgin Islands. The camp is operated by a mostly volunteer staff that, like us, clearly love their work. The food, lodging and amenities were basic and welcoming with acceptable bath facilities and sleeping arrangements.

Overall Logistics: Everything worked as planned. The ferries were running on-schedule, we ran on schedule with planned buffers built-in to daily events, the rest-day activities went as planned, and the volunteers were prepared for scheduled departures as well (with a few stragglers here and there).

Tools: Conservation VIP brought and donated a selection of tools to the Friends of VINP. Total tool expenditure was \$181.00 and was comprised of bow saw blades, hand pruners, and two Fiskar handsaws that proved invaluable. These were tools identified by Anna Adams, Volunteer Coordinator for the Friends as being particularly helpful. All other tools were provided by the Friends of VINP and were in good working order.

Weather: The weather on this trip was consistently very warm–hot and dry with average temperatures ranging from 85-95 degrees. Most days were sunny to mostly sunny with a few showers here and there. The Lameshur Bay and Tektite Trail worksites were particularly exposed to sun and heat, which resulted in shorter workdays for volunteer comfort and safety. The trip leaders carried extra snacks, sports drink, and water to help ensure the volunteers were fed and hydrated. All in all, it was quite lovely Caribbean weather.

Free Time: The volunteers were provided with two days to rest and enjoy St. John. On the first of the two rest days, Virgin Islands Ecotours operating out of Honeymoon Beach treated the volunteers to a complimentary guided eco-tour. The tour used kayaks to travel to two snorkeling destinations that allowed the volunteers an opportunity to see Green and Hawksbill Sea Turtles and myriad corals and tropical fishes. The guides were excellent and the volunteers expressed their delight multiple times during and after the tour. The volunteers also enjoyed the beach chairs and stand up paddleboards provided by Virgin Island Ecotours. The volunteers enjoyed this experience so much that most came back to Honeymoon Beach for the second rest day. The volunteers also had time after each workday to snorkel or swim at Little Lameshur Bay or to rest before dinner in their cabins.

Educational Opportunities: The volunteers were provided with several educational opportunities to provide context for their work and appreciation for Virgin Islands National Park:

- The group met with Ken Wild, NPS Archaeologist and his interns on two separate occasions. Ken provided the group with historical context and recommendations for working within the historical and cultural landscapes of the Lameshur Bay Plantation Ruins and the Leinster Bay Plantation Ruins. The interns from Denmark explained the historical context of the Leinster Bay Plantation Ruins and the plantation's significance as the closest plantation to the British Virgin Islands, which were emancipated and a destination for enslaved peoples to escape their enslavement.
- Brion Fitzgerald, USVI NPS Park Superintendent, thanked the volunteers and discussed some of the unique challenges faced by the Virgin Islands National Park.
- Joe Kessler, President of the Friends of the VINP, thanked the volunteers and explained how the Friends assist the Park.
- Laurel Brannick, NPS Interpreter, led a guided bird walk and historical discussion at Francis Bay.
- Anna Adams, Volunteer Coordinator for the Friends of VINP, guided the group at the Annaberg Plantation Ruins and explained the various components of a sugar plantation and sugar factory.
- Interested volunteers attended a NPS stargazing event at Concordia that oriented them to the night sky over St. John.



## Summary

The trip was a complete success with 518 volunteer work hours donated to the Virgin Islands National Park. The volunteers and leadership team greatly enjoyed the trip as measured through overwhelmingly positive feedback and exclamations of appreciation. The trip's success was in large part due to the organizations that hosted Conservation VIP and the volunteers on St. John. We would like to thank the Virgin Islands National Park, including Brion Fitzgerald, Superintendent; Ken Wild, Archaeologist, and his team; and Laurel Brannick, Interpreter. We would also like to thank the Friends of VINP and their team including, Joe Kessler, President, and Miss Anna Adams, Volunteer Coordinator. We are deeply grateful for both the kindness and generosity that Virgin Islands Ecotours and their staff have shown this and prior Conservation VIP groups. We are also deeply grateful to the fine volunteers and staff at VIERS; they are professional and attentive to every detail, while warmly welcoming and making our group feel at home. We are particularly grateful to Randy, Tony, and Carla for their hospitality and assistance. We are proud to have worked with so many fine organizations, people, and of course the wonderful volunteers.

