



Report on a visit to the Caribbean 30th May – 10 June 2009

by the Director, Membership Development and Services

Introduction

The visit originally came about as a result of a briefing meeting with Catherine Quick, the Coordinator of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), in November 2008. She informed Catherine Leonard and myself of the biennial Conference that was due to take place on Grand Cayman the following May/June and felt that representation by INTO could be worthwhile in view of the number of National Trusts that were likely to be represented.

In January this year it was decided that I should attend and while I was not given a speaking slot at the conference itself a Poster Presentation was agreed.

I also decided that, whilst in the Caribbean, I would take the opportunity to visit the Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT).

For me, the main purposes of the visit were to sell the idea of INTO, to encourage non-members to join, to encourage attendance at the Dublin Conference, to learn from the Conference, to network and to offer help and advice to the JNHT

The Conference: 31 May – 5 June

The Conference was entitled 'Making the Right Connections' which fitted well with my purposes above! About 100 delegates attended from Great Britain and the OTs, including 2 former Governors of the Cayman Islands, the Liberal Democrat MP for Hereford, Paul Keetch, the CEOs of the National Trusts for Bermuda (Jennifer Gray), Anguilla (Farah Mukhida), British Virgin Islands (Joseph Smith-Abbott), Montserrat (Lady Eudora Fergus), St Helena (Jamie Roberts - designate, starting in 3 months), and Turks and Caicos (Ethlyn Gibbs-Williams). The Cayman Islands were represented by the Chairman of the Council, Roger Corbin, and Lois Blumenthal, a staff member who attended the Washington ICNT, in the absence of the CEO who was attending a family wedding elsewhere.

Dace Ground, a member of the Cayman and Bermuda NTs' Councils and a Council Member of UKOTCF, was also present

Two other organisations represented, that are potential INTO members, were La Société Guernesaise (formed in 1883!) and Falklands Conservation, represented respectively by Dr Charles David and Dr Pierre Pistorius. Dr David is the immediate Past President of the Société and is on the

Council of the Guernsey NT; Dr Pistorius is the Conservation Officer and acting CEO of Falklands Conservation.

The first day of the Conference was devoted to optional tours on or around Grand Cayman. All the tours met at the Botanic Gardens for lunch and a structured discussion ensued during which I was able to ask a question, giving me the opportunity, by way of introduction, to announce the founding of INTO and the Dublin Conference.

The next 4 days were all in plenary session which, in my view, was not the best idea. Much of it was rather technical and scientific but there were interesting sessions on the Darwin Initiative, Climate Change – Impacts and Adaptation, Raising the Profile, Enhancing Capacity including a useful session on Fundraising, and Joined-up Thinking. Rather than go into great detail here, the final report on the Conference will be circulated in the near future which will provide useful information for the INTO Secretariat. The Appendix to this report highlights some specific points and outcomes of private discussions with some of the NTs.

The Poster Presentation session proved to be rather harder than I had anticipated as the poster that Catherine Leonard had painstakingly prepared and sent by post to the organisers, failed to arrive! Fortunately an electronic version was available and was put on the screen in the main conference hall, albeit a different room from where the posters were displayed and the presentations were taking place!

On the last day, Roger Corbin arranged for all the NT representatives to sit at the same table at lunch, which gave me a final opportunity to encourage those not already INTO members to seriously consider joining.

On one of the evenings, we were taken to the Mission House, an NT property, to a dinner hosted by the National Trust for the Cayman Islands. This colonial building had been virtually destroyed by Hurricane Ivan in 2005 and, subsequently, completely and beautifully restored. A historical re-enactment in period costume was provided as well as live folk music!

Conclusion

There were certainly some useful lessons from the Conference itself and these will be followed up in due course.

There is no question that face to face meetings with the NT representatives was hugely beneficial so that they could learn more about INTO from the 'horse's mouth' and express their concerns and needs. As a consequence of talking to each representative individually I have a short list of areas where I believe INTO can and should help, as shown in the Appendix.

Of the four National Trusts who were not already members of INTO, Montserrat joined then and there and the other three, Anguilla, BVI, and Turks and Caicos all took away application forms and said they would be signing up. In the case of Turks and Caicos and Anguilla, both are in serious financial difficulties at the present time so I agreed to waive the membership fee (\$100 in each case) for the remainder of this year and said we would review the position in January 2010.

In every case I provided them with a hard copy of the latest e-bulletin and a list of member benefits. I also directed them all to the ICNT website and I believe that most of them will try to come to Dublin, in some cases subject to bursary funding which I urged them to apply for straightaway. I have followed this up with an email in each case

I have also given the documents to La Société Guernesiaise and will be sending the necessary information to Falklands Conservation.

Some other very useful contacts were made not least with Sarah McIntosh, Executive Director of the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI), who is responsible for a large funding budget through the Darwin Initiative, particularly for capacity building of the Caribbean OT NTs.

Jamaica National Heritage Trust – 5-9 June 2009.

JNHT is not an NGO but rather an arm of government. Nevertheless it has considerable autonomy and each year seeks funding from sponsorship and other sources over and above its annual subvention from the Government. It is based in a government building, the old senate house.

The CEO, Laleta Davis-Mattis, is an extremely dynamic leader and desperately overstretched. She had arranged for me visits with individual members of staff to five very different properties including Port Royal, near Kingston, where the English fought a victorious battle against the Spanish in 1670 to gain control of the island which they retained until independence was granted in 1962. This property and Seville Estate, an old Plantation House with sugar mill, estate buildings and a reconstruction of a slave village on the north coast, which I also visited, are both on the tentative list for World Heritage Site inscription.

I also visited two ruined castles, Edinburgh, in the hills, and Stewart, on the north coast, both of which are undergoing clearance of the surrounding and invasive vegetation (jungle!) prior to consolidation, and the historic town of Falmouth where I met Dr James Parrent, the inspirational Executive Director of Falmouth Heritage Renewal and his Board. He attended the Delhi ICNT where he spoke about the work of FHR. There are many best practice lessons to be learnt from this organisation and I believe there should be a feature in the next e-bulletin.

My final full day was spent on a staff tour with 38 Jamaicans on a coach journey to the Appleton Rum factory (not a JNHT property) where we had an excellent guided tour preceded by a late breakfast, and an inevitable dégustation and lunch!

I managed to see much of the wonderful landscape and mountains of this invigorating island. Reggae music, Gospel choirs and cricket is all around but sadly crime, for which the island is noted, is still very prevalent and is a cause of concern to those trying to attract tourists and business entrepreneurs.

On the morning of my departure I had a breakfast meeting with Laleta Davis-Mattis at which I promised to provide her with a report on the outcome of my visits. In exchange I believe she will join her organisation as an Associate member and she herself now plans to attend the ICNT in Dublin.

I consider the whole trip to have been very worthwhile and very much in keeping with my rôle. I hope that I have been able to help the JNHT through the recommendations included in my report.

Oliver Maurice

Hon Director

Appendix

Outcomes of discussions with various Caribbean Trust representatives

1. Turks and Caicos – Ethlyn Gibbs-Williams

Owing to the current turmoil on the islands owing to government corruption, life is proving very difficult for the islanders. I have asked for a copy of the TCI NT strategy plan and annual report in order to take a view on their needs. Immediately they need help with fundraising and it is possible that the Canari (Darwin) project might be able to assist. They might be a suitable case for a task force or GVI volunteers as an emergency measure.

2. Anguilla – Farah Mukhida

Require's support in establishing a museum and in environmental work

3. Cayman Islands – Roger Corbin

They have taken on an inexperienced Environmental Officer, aged 23, who is currently at Cambridge University completing his studies. They wish him to embark on a 3 month exchange programme, in another country to start with, so that he can learn the practice before embarking on his new role