

C A R I B B E A N

# LAND & FALLS

A visitors & sailors magazine about the Islands of Eastern Caribbean • Vol.2 No.2 2005

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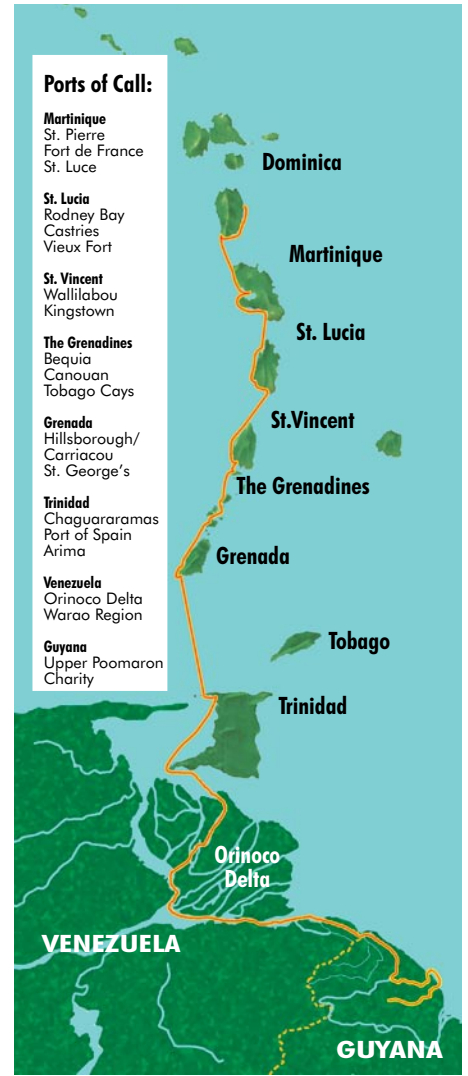




# How a unique voyage sparked new interest in the indigenous people of the Caribbean and their crafts



The Voyage of Gli Gli retraced the route of Dominica's Carib ancestors back to their origin which was over 1,000 years earlier.



Words of inspiration printed on T-shirts were given to the Carib people during the voyage. Translation,

**"Bananas are finished Craft is Coming."**



The perceived history of the Caribbean implanted in the tourist mind has come from novels and Hollywood movies. For historians most of the popular media on this subject is seen as fictionalized entertainment. Authors and script writers along with producers have learned how to spice up historical facts into a plot which is guaranteed to attract a large audience. Correctness is often ignored and replaced with swashbuckling tales of buccaneers and cannibal savages.

Aragorn Dick-Read, an artist born of English parentage in Tortola, developed a curiosity of island history at an early age. He furthered his interest in University by studying anthropology. His artistic talents are influenced from the Caribbean environment where he grew up. Arago-

rn's passion is studying the indigenous people of the Caribbean. His desire to build a Carib sailing canoe drew him to the Island of Dominica.

It was by a chance meeting in the summer of 1994, while riding a local bus in Dominica, that he met Jacob Frederick, a Carib indian. Jacob's shared interest in art and the history of the Carib people created a mutual friendship. A synergy was created that would develop into a unique voyage of discovery.

Jacob Frederick is an activist for his people. His dream was of one day traveling by a traditional Carib dug out canoe to reconnect with the few remaining Caribs in the Caribbean. His vision was to retrace the journey of his ancestors, who 1,000 years earlier, sailed north from the Orinoco basin of South America to settle in the islands of the eastern Caribbean.



After sailing 400 miles in open seas, the voyage changed dramatically in the Orinoco Delta. Shallow water, a strong out flowing current and debris made travelling slow. Biting insects as well as bandits with guns made travel a bit more uncomfortable.

Aragorn clearing the outboard's prop, a task that was repeated several times each day.



Photos of the Gli Gli project courtesy of Aragorn Dick-Read and members of the expedition



Jacob Frederick talks to his people

expanded instantly into a worthy purpose, which could benefit the remaining indigenous Carib people. It was quickly decided in this new found friendship the task would be to build a Carib canoe large enough to make passages to other Caribbean islands visiting all the remaining Carib tribes. For Jacob his dream to unite Carib people, at least symbolically, would give what is left of

The devastation of Carib tribes caused by the colonial period has left only small isolated groups of Carib Indians throughout the region today.

Aragorn's desire to just have a Carib canoe

his culture a chance of survival.

The project was born, named *Gli Gli* after the Sparrow Hawk, an ancient Carib totem for bravery.

Etien Charles master canoe builder, known as "Chalo", was engaged to oversee the canoe's construction. Their first task was to find two large Gommier trees high up and deep in Dominican Carib territory.







In December 1995 the first of the trees were felled deep in the rainforest. A gang of craftsmen, with adzes and saws, transformed the Gommier tree (*Dacryodes Hexandra*) into the hull of a sleek canoe shape. Three weeks later, forty men gathered for the two day task of dragging the rough-cut vessel down the steep forest hillsides to the village of Salibia, still a thousand feet above the sea. Now on flatter ground the process of widening the narrow dugout log was to begin. Fires were built on each side of the canoe, rocks were heated in the fire then placed inside with water added. The process took several weeks. Chalo, satisfied with the increased beam, then supervised the raising of the free board, adding frames for strength, cutting planking, building the rudder, mast and other bits and pieces of necessity to have a seaworthy canoe.



**It took 40 men to wrestle the 35 foot three ton canoe down the mountain to flatter land.**



**Fire, hot rocks and water are used to widen the canoe. Master canoe builder, 'Chalo,' supervises the operation.**



**Hollowing out the log took several weeks high up in Carib territory. Spending the nights in make shift shelters and living off the land this crew experienced life in the bush as it was thousands of years ago.**



The end result of the "opening out" was a canoe 6 1/2 feet wide, which when started was only 3 1/2 feet. At 35 feet in length the canoe was the biggest made in living memory of the Dominican Carib (Kilinago) people.

Eleven months after the tree was felled, the finished canoe was trucked down to the port of Marigot to receive the traditional Carib blessings – to be encircled with gommier smoke and sprinkled with coconut milk - prior to

Now painted bright yellow with bold red Carib tribal design on both sides, all were excited about the coming voyage to reconnect with their people. Then hope was lost. For Aragorn there was a problem. Financing the project. The building, which took over 11 months, used up most of the funds. For the safety of the voyage and to carry supplies, a large yacht or a small ship was necessary. The cost was far more than anticipated: Twenty thousand dollars was needed to continue.

All eyes looked to Aragorn, Carib people have suffered immensely for decades, no empathy for their kind. Their culture torn apart by colonialising land grabs. A free spirited people, not wanting to succumb to European slavery, they fought back and headed for the hills and dense jungles of the Caribbean to survive. The small number of Carib people today have little in concessions from the developed world. So when Aragorn announced the problem they knew nobody outside of their culture cared.

In a crash effort to find money fast, Aragorn called everyone in the world he knew and had heard of who might offer support. Response was dismal. Friends sympathetic to the cause informed Aragorn of a British man who had spent many months in Dominica and since died but left a Trust in his estate for the benefit of the Carib people. The sum of money was considerable. Aragorn's initial contact with the Trustee, (a lawyer) was "No!" With all other avenues for funding looking grim, Aragorn applied pressure through documentation of the project being worthy of the dead

philanthropist's money. After months of pressure, a miserly grant for 10,000 British pounds from the C.T. Robinson Trust to partially fund the expedition and to aid research into the Carib culture was released. Far short of the amount needed, it was just enough to pay for the support vessel. The schooner *Carmela* quoted the cheapest rate for the expedition's security ship. The *Carmela* is an old 120 foot wooden trading schooner built in Dominica.

Jacob and Aragorn agreed this was enough money to make a go. They discussed selling Carib crafts along the way to make ends meet. Carib ingenuity and resourcefulness are not money

**The launch of Gli Gli for the Dominican's was cause for a great celebration, for Aragorn Dick-Read and Jacob Frederick it was a relief that the philanthropist's funds were released so the project could go ahead.**

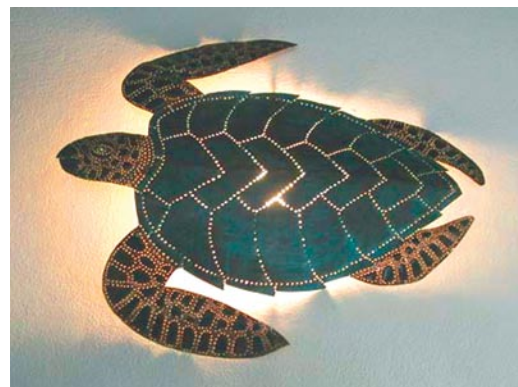






**Aragorn's Studio in Trellis Bay, BVI houses the regions largest collection of Caribbean crafts.**

**Aragorn's Studio is much more than a crafts shop. Several artists from the region work in the studio. The art and crafts for sale are all made in the Caribbean. Baskets made by Carib people are crafted in the same way as their ancestors over 1,000 years ago. Contemporary work using local Caribbean materials are also created at the studio by visiting artists.**



and *Gli Gli* sailed away from Marigot, Dominica to Scotts Head to rendezvous with *Carmela* and then headed south for Martinique then on to St. Lucia and St. Vincent. Stopping at several island ports of call, Government officials praised the mission of *Gli Gli* and Carib people came to meet the courageous crew of *Gli Gli*. Inspiration was given to Carib people for a better life if they connect with other Caribs to build a unified voice. Carib crafts sold well in just about every port, proof of the worth of the skills of the Carib people. Sailing on down into the Grenadines, yachting tourists took a keen interest in the *Gli Gli* project and showed their appreciation by buying a considerable amount of crafts from the crew. This was more proof of the marketability of Caribbean crafts. Tourists learning something about the colorful history of the Caribs see their crafts as something to cherish and respect.

It was discovered in several islands of the eastern Caribbean, south of Dominica, that small numbers of Amerindian descent were living. In Martinique no distinct group was found, yet traditional canoe building thrives in contemporary society. Gommier racing canoes carved from a log are transformed into sleek

racing machines carrying 9 crew members for ballasting the power of a huge sail. Canoes are also built for fishing most powered by outboard motors.

On the northern coast of St. Lucia approximately 2,000 Caribs live on the steep mountain side. They call themselves Callinago. Many are of mixed decent of African slaves known as "Black Caribs." The most flourishing Carib crafts are clay pots found in the Choiseul region in the south of the island. Made in the same way as pre-Colombian ceramics, these simple pots are used for cooking and are also sold to tourists.

On the island of Carriacou one family that is descended from a Carib woman who migrated from the Orinoco region of Venezuela was found. The grand child of this woman joined the *Gli Gli* expedition to trace her heritage. Both Carriacou and Grenada once had a large population of Amerindians evidenced by rich archaeological remains of which are still being discovered. Land developers discover Amerindian

remains when excavating. Unfortunately important finds are often ignored due to ignorance of their historical value.

Trinidad, being a melting pot of several cultures, has a significant amount of Carib blood mixed into its 1.3 million population. The Carib community of Santa Rosa in the urban town of Arima maintains separateness as a Carib people. In fact, this small group of only 500 has done more for their identity, pride and cultural roots than all other Amerindian people. Since 1990, "Amerindian Cultural Week" is held. This annual event attracts representatives from four Caribbean countries. They have been a force to correct misconceptions of their culture as being extinct and have applied pressure to Governments for recognition of their place in the larger societies where they live. They have connected with indigenous peoples organizations in the USA, Canada, Central America and South America.

The arrival of *Gli Gli* was a major event for this small group who made sure a big noise about the expedition

**In March 2005 craft makers of several islands exhibited in Trellis Bay, BVI. The connection made through the voyage of Gli Gli with the Carib people has opened up a healthy market for their crafts.**



**Aragorn discusses a project with George Barbou of St. Vincent.**



**John Francis from Carib Territory, Dominica.**



**Algenon Frederick from Carib Territory, Dominica.**



**Casiner Auguste from Carib Territory, Dominica.**



appeared in Trinidad's media. A woman from Trinidad of Carib descent joined the crew for the onward journey into the Orinoco Region. With only 20 miles of open ocean from the southern tip of Trinidad to the Orinoco Delta, the passage was fast. Entering the river system of South America required another method of propulsion. An outboard motor was attached to *Gli Gli's* stern for power to get up stream.

The final destination planned to be to the Pomeroun Carib community in the northern part of Guyana. But first the crew had to navigate through Venezuela's complex river system. Due to restrictions and limited money, the expedition could not visit with the surviving Carib tribes known as the Karinia, located in the middle of Venezuela's Orinoco region. The Karinia's have a history of being fierce warriors and were never overcome by the Spanish colonists. They survived the colonial war years working for the Dutch and English to harass the Spanish colonies. Their numbers are now small because of new diseases, war and the disruptive efforts of missionaries. Today the Karinias speak Spanish and their own Karinia/Carib language.



Transiting through Venezuela was

a dangerous journey. One night while sleeping on the banks of the river, police in search of money raided the *Gli Gli* camp. With their guns pointed at the crew, cooperation with the robbers bought their lives. For the crew of *Gli Gli* happiness was waiting in Guyana. Thanks to Captain Charles Thomas and Jennifer Wisheart of the Walter Roth Museum of Anthropology their pre-planned assistance through the Ministry of Amerindian affairs provided the Guyanese Coast Guard to safely escort *Gli Gli* into their friendlier territory.

The estimated Carib population in Guyana is 4,000. Most are in the upper Barima river region. The expedition's last visit was with the Upper Pomeroun Caribs. Numbering about 800, this group is similar to the Caribs of Dominica. They produce crafts of straw and clay as well as beautiful wicker furniture made from forest vines.

For Jacob Frederick and Aragorn-Dick-Read, the expedition and its years of planning achieved its goal to reconnect the Carib people with their roots.

As a result of the expedition, Aragorn's Caribbean Artisan Network has grown considerably providing much needed income for the Carib com-

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munities which were visited. A future expedition to Belize is being planned as well as the Carib canoe *Gli Gli* participating in the 2006 Antigua Classic Yacht Regatta.

To see the BBC documentary made about the *Gli Gli* expedition and the largest collection of Carib crafts in the Caribbean you can visit Aragorn's studio 7 days a week in Trellis Bay right next to the BVI airport.



It's the night of the full moon in Trellis Bay, more people than normal are arriving just after sunset. Tables are set up outside the Trellis Bay Cyber Cafe for a buffet dinner. Later, a band arrives then a group of Jumbies waft in out of the darkness down the sandy path onto the beach. Children wait anxiously, sitting cross legged on the sand, they are staring out at huge sculptured balls sitting on top

of the water. The fun is about to begin. The giant balls are the creation of artist Aragorn Dick-Read. His main medium is sculpting metal. (His decorative copper sculptures of Caribbean birds and mangroves have been exhibited in London and New York). The balls are now a light and a crowd of about a 150 people line the beach seeing something they've never seen before. Great balls of fire and Jumbies towering above

**It's a full moon night. Suddenly fire balls & Jumbies appear.**



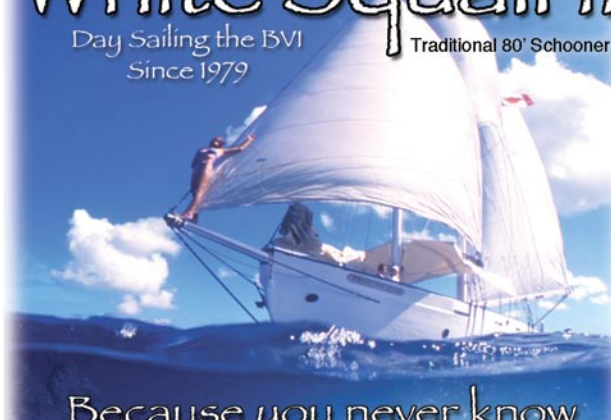
Photo courtesy Nick De Costa

**TRELLIS BAY**  
 ART STUDIOS, WATERSPORTS, FERRIES, CAFES AND RESTAURANTS

<b>DE LOOSE MONGOOSE</b> FRIENDLY CASUAL BAR & RESTAURANT BREAKFAST, LUNCH & DINNER MOORINGS AVAILABLE  SUNDAY BBQ WITH LIVE MUSIC  BEEF ISLAND GUEST HOUSE COZY B&B ON THE BEACH FREE PET ACCESS  1/4 MILE FROM AIRPORT.	<b>ARAGORN'S STUDIO</b> THE LOCAL ARTS CENTRE  THE LARGEST COLLECTION OF LOCAL ARTS AND CRAFTS IN THE BVI  FINEST HAND MADE ART T-SHIRTS AND PRINTS  A LOCAL FRUIT DEPOT LESSONS IN POTTERY, HOME OF GLI-GLI THE CARIB CANOE	<b>TRELLIS BAY CYBERCAFE</b> BOARDSAILING BVI  WIRELESS DSL INTERNET E-MAIL, MAC'S & PC'S  REAL WEST INDIAN FOOD WICKED SMOOTHIES AWESOME SANDWICHES  A VERY SPECIAL SPOT  SURFING, KAYAKS, WINDSURFING LESSONS, GUARANTEED SUCCESS	<b>D' BEST CUP</b>  ALL TYPES OF ESPRESSO BASED COFFEES OTHER DRINKS, HOME MADE ICE CREAM, PASTRIES  HOT DOGS, TOSTADAS BAR & BOUTIQUE SUNNY CARIBE SPICES CUBAN CIGARS  1 MINUTE WALK TO AIRPORT	<b>TRELLIS BAY MARKET</b>  STOCKED WITH GROCERIES, PRODUCE, ICE, U.S. NEWSPAPERS,  WINE, BEER, LIQUOR, DRY GOODS, CUBAN CIGARS, PHONE CARDS  RELAX ON OUR PORCH WITH AN ICE CREAM OR A COLD DRINK  HERTZ NORTH SOUND EXPRESS PHONE GARBAGE	<b>FLUKES</b>  THE MOST ORIGINAL ART STUDIO AND GIFT SHOP IN THE ISLANDS.  FINE ART ORIGINALS, MAPS, LIMITED EDITION GICLEE PRINTS, GIFTWARE  EXCLUSIVE T-SHIRTS BY INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED ARTIST  BROWERS WELCOME
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