

THE HISTORY OF 'GLI GLI'

On a visit to Dominica in 1994 Aragorn Dick-Read, a Tortola-born artist, had a chance meeting on a bus with a Carib artist and activist named Jacob Frederick. Shared interest in the art and history of the Carib people created a new friendship, which was soon to trigger an unusual cultural adventure.

Since he was a young boy, Jacob had a dream of building a large dug out canoe in the traditional Carib way, and retracing the journey of his ancestors, who hundreds of years earlier, had sailed north from the Orinoco basin in South America and settled in the Caribbean. The devastation of the Carib tribe caused by the colonial period has left isolated groups of Caribs through out the region. To unite these people, at least symbolically, Jacob knew would give their culture a better chance of survival. For Aragorn, a student of tribal arts and culture, this offered a unique opportunity to collaborate with the Carib people. From this the Gli Gli Carib Canoe Project was born, named for the sparrow hawk: an ancient Carib totem for bravery.



Jacob Frederick



Aragorn Dick-Read

After obtaining the necessary permission from the Chief and Carib Council, the master canoe builder of the Caribs, Etienne Charles, known as "Chalo", was engaged to oversee the canoes construction. Their first task was to seek out the two large gommier trees needed to build the canoe, one for the hull, the other for the large planks for the canoes sides, used to raise the free-board of the ocean going vessel.

In December 1995 the first of the trees was felled high in the rainforest of the Carib lands. A gang of craftsmen, with adzes and saws, transformed the raw log into the hull of a sleek canoe. Three weeks later forty men gathered for the two day task of dragging the rough-cut vessel down the precipitous forest hillsides to the village of Salybia, in the heart of the Carib Territory.

