

Les voies intérieures

Pistas en el interior

Trails into the Interior

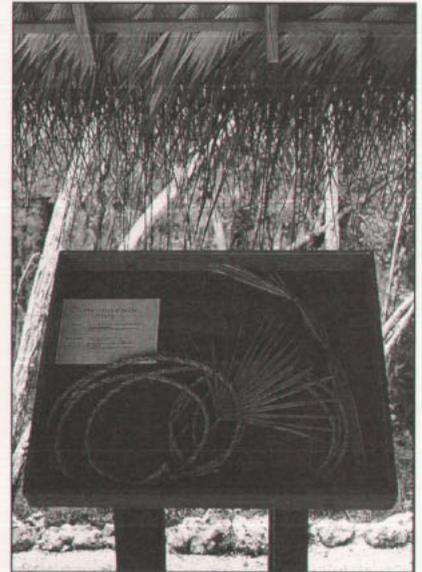
First open to the public in February 1994, Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park is a developing 65 acre botanical garden and nature preserve located on the east-central section of Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands. Approximately 45 acres of the Botanic Park have been set aside as a preserve to protect a segment of Cayman's rapidly disappearing interior woodland, and to serve as an outdoor classroom for environmental education.

The flora of Grand Cayman falls into three main categories: dry-evergreen formation, seasonal swamp formation and swamp formation. The Botanic Park occupies a site that encompasses most of the island's habitat zones with the major exceptions of coastal and swamp vegetation. It has been estimated that 40-50% of Grand Cayman's native flora occurs naturally within the boundaries of the Botanic Park, though a detailed floristic survey has yet to be conducted.

In addition to the conservation aspect of the Botanic Park site, a determining factor for securing the Woodland Preserve and developing its 0.8 mile walking trail was the unique educational possibilities the site affords. While the coastal vegetation of the island is quite familiar to both resident and visitor alike, the island's interior is virtually inaccessible to all but the most determined and intrepid of individuals due to the often treacherous terrain made up of exposed sharp jagged rocks and deep sink holes. In addition, many of the plants in the Park are protected by sharp spines or thorns, urticating (stinging) hairs, and leaves and stems that contain chemicals which are extremely caustic to human flesh. The trail winds its way through the

Botanic Park's Woodland Preserve, and offers a unique opportunity to view both the flora and fauna of the island's interior. The trail is 11 feet wide to easily accommodate large groups such as school children, and to make the trail accessible to emergency and maintenance vehicles. The surface is suitable for both wheelchairs and pedestrians .

A major advantage of the Botanic Park site is that it contains an intact natural ecosystem requiring little restoration. While there is evidence of past human activity, mainly farming and logging, the site is believed to have been left undisturbed for the past 70 years. The chief concern in the development of the preserve was that the construction of the walking trail should cause as little impact as possible. Rare plant species and populations were located prior to trail development. Many orchids and bromeliads were relocated, though the sheer number of epiphytes made it possible to save only a fraction. Many other plants were also relocated, such as *Zamia integrifolia*, *Agave sobolifera*, and a number of species of cacti. The major restoration work was the removal of Logwood (*Hamatoxylum campechianum*). This tree, native to Central America, was introduced to the Caymans in the 18th century as a cash crop for the purple dye that is produced from the heartwood. It is highly invasive on seasonally flooded land and chokes out native vegetation. Large colonies of this species have invaded seasonally flooded areas of the Woodland Preserve. In the areas along the trail where the Logwood have been removed, native species have returned, and grasses and other herbaceous plants attract many butterflies, moths and other insects.



Close attention has been paid to the various habitats within the site. The trail is designed to pass through many of these habitats, allowing visitors to experience as great a diversity of plant and animal life as possible. Major habitats along the trail include: dry cactus/thorn thicket; Buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*) seasonal swamps; fresh water and brackish ponds, dry evergreen woodland; and grassy meadow created where invasive naturalized *Hamatoxylum campechianum* has been removed.

While the entire site is a nature preserve, a maintenance policy of selective hand weeding of the five to fifteen feet on either side of the trail is enforced. All naturalized exotics are removed wherever practical. Native plants that produce toxic skin irritants are also removed if found growing near the trail, though a few individuals of each of these "dangerous" plants have been left, with signs warning of their dangers. We believe it is important for

people to be able to identify these plants in order to avoid them. In addition, the trail margins are kept selectively weeded in an effort to prevent the trail from becoming so overgrown that it is difficult for visitors to distinguish individual species. There are quite a number of native species that do not naturally grow along the trail. In some cases, these plants have been relocated near the trail so that visitors may see a wide range of Grand Caymans flora.

The following criteria are used in deciding whether or not to introduce a species to the trail: it must be native to Grand Cayman; it must naturally occur in the type of habitat in question; and it must have some educational or conservation value to justify planting in the preserve.

A self-guided trail brochure has been developed. Visitors receive a trail guide giving basic information about the woodland preserve and highlighting the different ecological habitats encountered. A number of information shelters with traditional palm thatch roofs are placed along the trail. The shelters give information on plants and animals native to the preserve and on traditional uses of many of the plants. Additionally, the plants along the trail are labelled with engraved signs giving the scientific name, local Caymanian name (if there is one), family name and native range. Labels also provide information such as important wildlife uses, traditional cultural uses, interesting botanical facts, and the meaning of the Caymanian common names. Botanical processes are also explained, such as monocarpism as exhibited by the Agaves; parasitism and hemi-parasitism; and epiphytes.

The Botanical Park has several on-going ex-situ plant conservation programs, including work on two highly endangered endemics: *Pisonia margaretae* and *Hohenbergia caymanensis*. Examples of these species are planted along the trail, and interpretive labels explain the Park's conservation efforts in regards to these and other species.

As the Botanic Park is a young and developing facility, the education programs are also in the development

state. A newly constructed Visitors Centre includes classroom space complete with audio-visual equipment, microscopes and other educational material and equipment. The Botanic Park plans to develop educational natural history programs for local schools, including teacher training. Programs for adults are also planned. The Woodland Preserve is an excellent outdoor laboratory for studying the natural interior environment of the Cayman Islands.

▲ Resumé

Ouvert pour la première fois au public en février 1994, le parc botanique Elizabeth II est un jardin botanique et une réserve naturelle de 65000m² situés à l'est de la partie centrale de l'île Grand Caïman. Un parcours de 1300m offre l'opportunité aux visiteurs du parc de connaître la flore des Grands Caïmans et se transforme en une classe de nature pour les élèves de Sciences Naturelles. La composante éducative principale de ce parcours est la visite du parc à l'aide de brochures. Cependant, le parc est en train de mettre en place des activités éducatives pour les adultes et les scolaires.

● Resúmen

Abierto al público por primera vez en 1994, el Parque Botánico Reina Isabel II es un Jardín Botánico y reserva natural de 65 acres localizado en el Centro de Gran Caimán, Islas Caimán. Unas 0.8 millas de senderos de bosque conducen a través de una gran variedad de hábitats naturales en los 45 acres de reserva natural. El camino proporciona a los visitantes del Parque la oportunidad de admirar la flora endémica de Gran Caimán y sirve como aula exterior para la enseñanza de la historia natural. Aunque el principal componente educativo del camino es el recorrido autoguiado, el Parque esta desarrollando en la actualidad programas educativos para colegios y adultos.

Andrew Guthrie is the General Manager of Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park, PO Box 30865, Seven Mile Beach, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands. Tel: 345 947 9462, Fax: 345 947 7873, E-mail: guthrie@candw.ky

17

Information shelters with traditional palm thatch roofs are placed along the trail.

