

## SLNT Youth Group visits Cas-en-Bas Amerindian Burial Site

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The enthusiastic members of the National Trust Environmental Youth Group had an informative tour of the Amerindian burial site at Cas-En-Bas beach on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2009. On arrival at Anse La Voutte, we were taken to the site by Anna, a Caribbean history student at the Leiden University situated in The Netherlands. Leiden University is one of only three universities in the world that offers courses in Caribbean History and Archeology. The other two universities include the University of London and a university in Florida, USA.

As we maneuvered through the stones being extremely careful not to damage any equipment or bones, Anna explained that the area located on the right side of the site was thought to be the Amerindian dumping area where they discarded broken shells, clay pots, fish remains and any unwanted debris. The archeologists were able to clearly identify these remains by digging in the soil and revealing a horizontal cross-section of the different layers.

Bones, jewellery, artistic carvings and crafts, evidence of tree stumps pushed into the ground for constructing small wooden or thatched huts and human skeletons were all discovered. The bones unearthed included what was thought to be a young child- given the tiny bones and small head. An older corpse was found, having harder and more closely linked joints than other adult remains. We were also pointed to the skeleton of an adult male - readily identified by his protruding, wider brow bone, bigger, longer bones and narrower hip bone (as compared to female skeletons). Each skeleton was found in a similar fetal position. The skilful archeologists also discovered that two of the corpses were tampered with after death as one grave had two skulls and in another, the head was moved slightly, leaving the jaw bone protruding in the opposite direction to the rest of the head. These findings prove that the Amerindians were involved in ancestral worship and in fact, buried close relatives in their huts or very close to their villages.

It was also confirmed that the Amerindians lived in small communities of 80 to 100 individuals and rarely migrated except for trade or interbreeding with other Amerindian groups. We were also surprised to learn that it is very difficult to differentiate between Arawak and Carib remains, by studying their bones. They can only be classified by language.

The site revealed much about the Amerindians' way of life. We were informed that they only consumed fish and rarely grew crops. This also reinforces the importance of trade, even during those times. Trade was proven to be a significant part of the Amerindian lifestyle as a beaded necklace indigenous to Grenadian tribes was found at this site.

Prior to our tour of the historical site, we enjoyed the cascading sea water and enticing sea breeze, the beautiful scenery, minute crawling sea creatures and green lush trees and vegetation that have made Cas-en-bas their fantastic beach home.

We were informed that this natural historical site would soon be used for the construction of a golf course. It is most saddening that this has been approved by the government, because it may hamper our knowledge of a prehistoric civilization which dates back to 800AD; which is part of our heritage and can never be replaced. This construction can also annihilate this habitat for the many species of forest wildlife and sea creatures that live there. Not to mention, the drain on our water resources – this basic need is still only a privilege in some parts of our island!

We strongly urge government to postpone this venture until Anna and her crew of archeologists and specialists return to completely excavate this area and unearth all the bones, remains and corpses so that they can be preserved – hopefully, in an approved museum(s) and/or interpretation centres. This may also bring more revenue to the island and attract more tourists than a golf course ever could. In addition, we would also ensure the preservation of our heritage for **all** Saint Lucians to enjoy. Is preserving heritage sites for locals and tourists alike not the point of the Heritage Tourism initiative? Do we need a golf course in Cas-En-Bas when there is a fantastic golf course situated minutes away in Cap-Estate, which is perfectly functional and adequate? We certainly do not think so...

**Please protect what is ours and secure our history and environment  
Saint Lucia!**