

A Walk on the Mild Side and a Walk on the Wild Side

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Photos: Louise _____ and Constance Elson

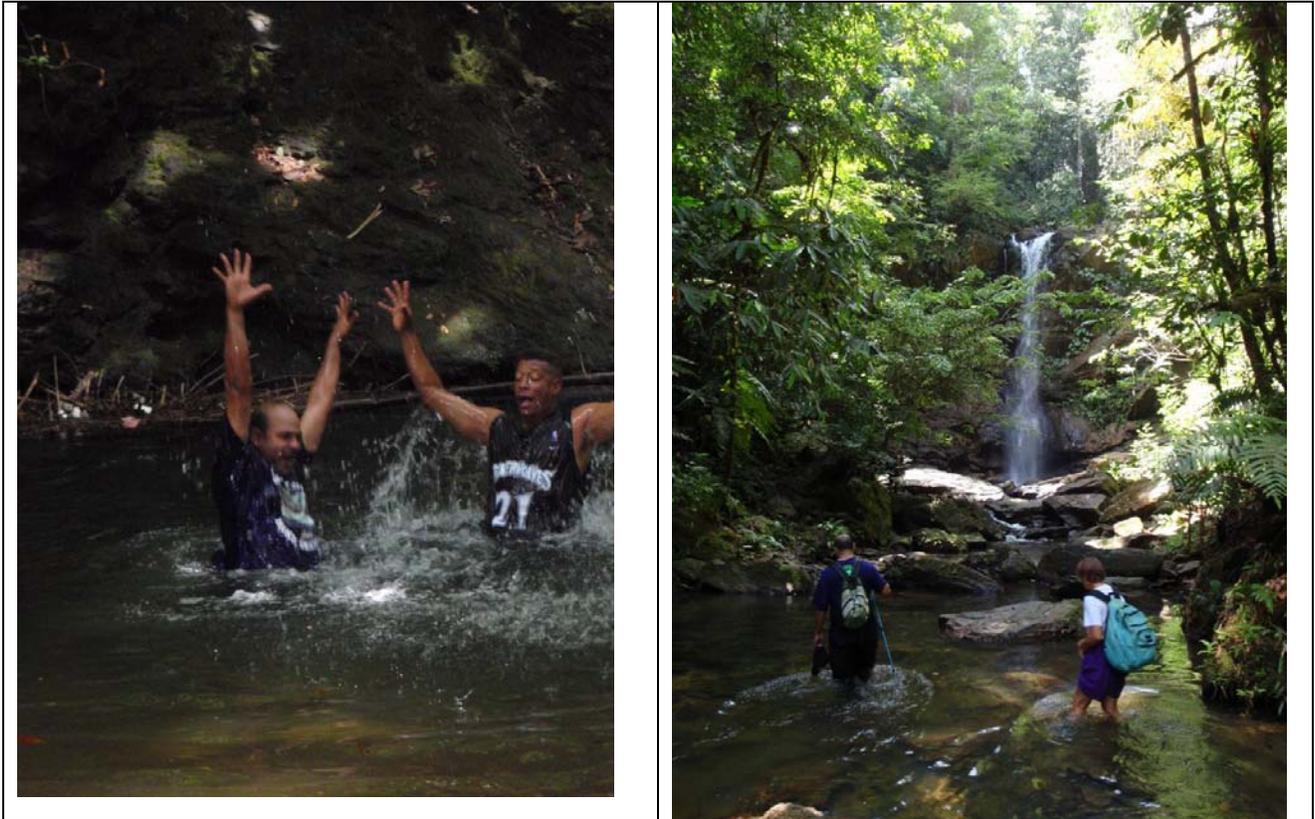
Trinidad is blessed with spectacular natural scenery and many wonderful waterfalls; Jesse James makes sure sure that visitors interested in seeing either get lots of opportunity. Here is a short saga about two trips made in Summer 2008.

Early July—Avocat Falls: We arrive at 7 am at Maracas Beach to rendezvous with SnakeMan, aka Laurence Pierre, intending to climb to Rincon Falls. Jesse and Snake survey the physical condition of 4 of us and tactfully inform us that it has been “much too rainy” and we will hike to Avocat Falls instead.

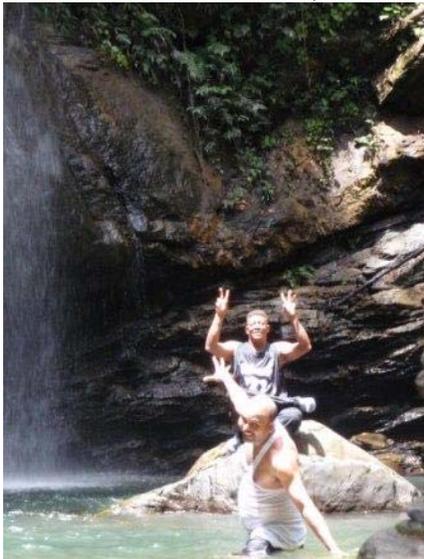


Snake talks a bit about plants and critters of Trinidad (his day job is conducting survival training for Trinidad soldiers) and then extracts a gunny sack from his very full car trunk and produces a fer de lance. Alas, something in the trunk has compressed the fer de lance’s head so that its fangs have punctured its gums, thereby causing it to perish from its own venom. Undaunted, SnakeMan cuts the top off an empty Coke bottle (32 oz size), stuffs the snake into it and fills the bottle with rum.

Then we go off and have our hike. It consists of a not-very-strenuous short climb up and along a ridge, moving through sun-dappled rainforest and passing a White-Bearded Manakin lek. We drop down into a pretty stream bed. This stream could be (and was) forded fairly easily by most of us, but Jesse and Snake do it the dramatic way. We waded up the streambed several hundred yards and voila! Avocat Falls, aka Marianne Falls.



We eat lunch, some of us swim in the pool (cold after Trini acclimatization) and Jesse and SnakeMan clown a bit (something about those two and water . . .).



The trip home was just a short wade down two streambeds. Back at the car we discover that the people whose property we have parked at have cooked up the several types of sweet potato that Snake had shown us in the morning and we dig in. But the best was yet to come: remember that bottle containing snake and rum? Snake drank a short glass of fer de lance poison and rum, I kid you not. Why do you think they call him Snake Man?



Mid-September—Rincon Falls:

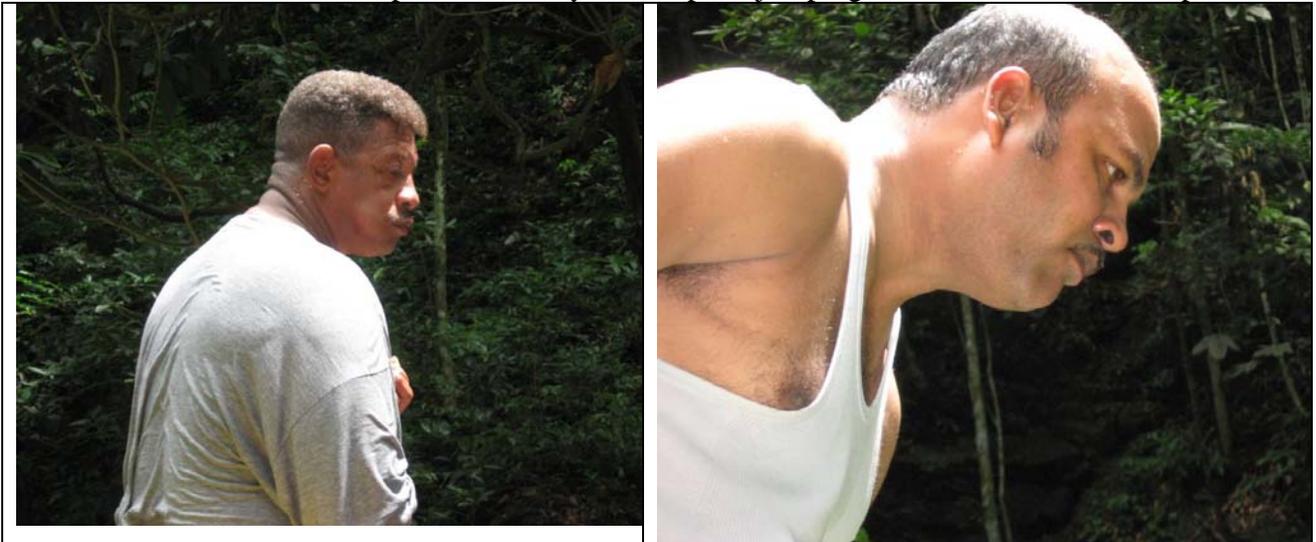
A considerably more fit crew assembles for a second try at Rincon Falls. Again we meet SnakeMan at Maracas Beach at 7 am and go immediately to the trailhead. This time we each sign statements agreeing that it is our responsibility to be prepared and to follow directions – a reminder to those of us who were here at the time that a weather-related tragic event occurred in mid-summer to a local hiking group led by Snake. This time Snake’s snake of the day is a small <get name>___, not poisonous. It is overcast and since we don’t want to be caught by rain, we hike briskly to the falls. This is a genuine hike – total round trip distance is about 6 miles, with about a 1500 foot elevation gain, interspersed with level parts and a few drops. The first half is along a jeep trail that provides access to agricultural plots tucked back into the hills and the second half is along a narrow trail. The footing is good. The last half mile consists of a stiff uphill climb (Snake Man sings lustily while the rest of us huff and puff along), followed by a steep scramble down to the falls. SnakeMan deploys ropes along this part, mostly for confidence but also quite helpful in one or two spots. The falls are worth it: very high, with two scooped out basins part way down the cliff and a big pool below.



Being quite overheated from our climb, we all jump into the (cold!) pool eagerly and then spread out for lunch and a rest. It hasn't rained and a hazy sun keeps us warm but not hot.



Jesse and Snake seem a little pensive as they contemplate jumping off a small cliff into the pool:



But since the children do it, they do it too. Go, guys!

The walk back seems shorter and the sun is out so it is definitely hotter. Which just means that when we reach the stream down in the valley, it makes sense to just find a deep pool and sit down in it, clothes and all. After all, there are dry clothes for everyone just ¼ mile down the road in the van.



Our hike ends, as it should, with Shark and Bake at Richard's stand in Maracas Beach.

So having made both hikes, here is the question I ask myself: one hike was more strenuous but which was the wilder one?