

Justified Concerns over our Mangrove

By H.E. Ross – Cayman Netnews - September 20, 2002



H. E. Ross

Kem Jackson of Botabano can trace back to at least eight generations of his family in the Cayman Islands, and he has two generations in front of him now counting his grandson, Joey Jr. Kem loves Grand Cayman, especially the North Sound where he still races Catboats, sometimes crewed by his grandson, Joey.

The first time he saw it he thought it was a kind of Red Mangrove dye seepage, locally called Mangrove water, coming from the area near the George Town dump. But, it nagged him so he returned to the area again only to see the same reddish discolouration near the shore. The colour and the bouquet emanating from the dump started his imagination stirring and he returned by land the next time with a jar and took samples, which he took over to the Department of the

Environment.

"They said I had to have sterilized containers to really get a good sample." Said Mr. Jackson. "And I said why would you want to sterilise a bottle to bring here. I don't even want to put my hand in it."

Mr. Jackson brought a few people to see the movement of the murk, some with knowledge in the chemical sciences. They pointed out things that have not been verified even yet, but were enough to continue his worry. A DOE biologist came down and took sterile samples. He got the local television station to go over to the spot not a quarter mile from the waste treatment plant and they became nervous at the sight.

Kem then brought his friend, Peter Milburn, an outspoken conservationist, Simon Boxall who has deep concern for ecological balance, and myself to witness the site. "The more people know the better." was his reasoning.

The first noticeable thing as we drove down the canal road was the stench of the waste management facility and nearing the site the relaxed demeanors of the workers. When you are not accustomed to the smell the thought crosses your mind, how can anybody work in this? But after a little while, except when a puff brings an extra amount to your nose you forget the smell.

The water in the canal to the right had an orange tint while the water on the right canal was uniformly brown.

There were no dying shrubs or tree limbs and aside the smell the overhanging mangroves seemed invigorated with the newly arriving rainy season.

At the end of the road was the spot that Kem was pointing out. Turtle grass was lumped on a shallow brown beach, with exposed mangrove root and broken branches cloaked in a thick and slimy green moss-like growth or residue. The water was brown with an auburn coating with small bubbles under hanging tree branches. The discolouration stretched out about a quarter of a mile where a line of blue water went off into the Sound.

Peter asked if it was like this at George Town Barcadere, on the other side of the point, to which Kem answered, "no, it is nice and clear. It's just here and going that way," indicating Northeast with a wave of his hand.

Simon thought the dead turtle grass might have been caused by the lack of light necessary for generating chlorophyll due to the discolouration clouding the water. Mr. Jackson pointed out the bright green mossy material and said that a friend of his had said that wherever that stuff was, it was not good.

Mr. Jackson is now waiting for the results of the Department of Environment test with the hope that the Black Lagoon quality of the scene was not anything serious; that the little spot in the Great Sound was just an aberration and was controllable. Upon first seeing the thick water his mind had immediately raced back to the waterfront of Port au Prince, to past thoughts of seeing what he knew he would never see in the Cayman Islands.