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Leading articles

St. Vincent Volcanic Eruption

La Soufriere in northern St. Vincent began erupting on 9th April, after several months of warning signs and a minor eruption in December. This led 20,000 people to flee the eruption zone. Some of these people have been evacuated aboard cruise ships but this has been limited by the requirement for people going aboard to have received a Covid vaccination.

Antigua and Barbuda, and St. Lucia agreed to accept some evacuees. Many Vincentians are however reluctant to leave the island and several thousand are packed into shelters, whilst others have taken refuge with friends and family.

The explosive eruption reached a height of approximately 26,000 feet on 16th April. The ash cloud contains both tiny shards of rock and gas. The amount of ash is such that it has caused several roofs to collapse. Local water supplies have also been contaminated by the fall out, and the ash cloud has also caused several flights to be cancelled.

The winds have caused the ash cloud to spread to the east, as far as Barbados some 120 miles

away, affecting both the Barbadian capital of Bridgetown and Grantley Adams International Airport. It is feared that Martinique and Guadeloupe may also be affected should the wind pattern change.

The authorities in St. Vincent are worried by the possibility of a further outbreak of Covid-19 during this incident. More cases have been reported amongst the thousands that have fled and have been forced to crowd together in shelters. Other health concerns may arise from the lack of water and the volcanic gases, such as sulphur dioxide, affecting those with existing ailments, including asthma. Vincentians are recommended to wear face masks and long-sleeved clothing to protect themselves. It may take several months to restore the water supply and the eruption has also destroyed the island's crops.

Heavy rainfall made matters worse, resulting in major flooding and landslides. The effects of the eruption are widespread as large amounts of sulphur dioxide linked to La Soufriere are now being detected over northern India, which could possibly result in acid rain.

Other islands in the region are sending relief supplies, including water tanks, torches and generators, and CARICOM has held an online meeting to coordinate a regional response to the crisis. The World Bank has provided \$20 million USD to support St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the United Nations has released \$1 million USD from its emergency fund. The United Nations has also launched an appeal for \$29 million to help with the crisis. It is feared that it may cost up to half of St. Vincent and the Grenadines' Gross Domestic Product, \$0.78 billion USD last year, to recover from this disaster.

La Soufriere previously erupted in 1979, when no lives were lost, and another previous eruption in 1902 killed 1,600 people. The eastern Caribbean is home to 19 live volcanoes, sitting at the junction of the North American and Caribbean tectonic plates.

The Caribbean and Covid

Most Caribbean islands have now reopened to international tourists, with most islands requiring a negative PCR test before arrival. Requirements, of course, vary and the Bahamas are permitting the arrival of visitors who have been fully vaccinated with one of the AstraZeneca, Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines, without a pre-arrival test, although all visitors must apply for a Bahamas Travel Health Visa and observe social distancing and use face masks where appropriate. Trinidad and Tobago, however, tightened restrictions at the beginning of May. The arrival of the Brazilian variant of the virus, believed to have brought by an illegal migrant from Venezuela, has led to concerns that the country's hospitals will be overwhelmed.

Vaccination programmes in the Caribbean continue. Take-up of the AstraZeneca Vaccine has been limited in St. Vincent due to concerns amongst the population about the potential side effects, despite the reassurances of the Vincentian government. Only around 13% of the Vincentian population has been vaccinated thus far. Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves is prepared to offer St. Vincent's several thousand AstraZeneca doses to other Caribbean nations before they become unusable. St. Vincent has ordered 50,000 doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine.

With vaccine take-up also low in Antigua and Barbuda, Prime Minister Gaston Browne has criticised those discouraging people to have

the jab, and has even raised the possibility of a mandatory vaccination programme. He has also put forward economic arguments to encourage vaccination, saying that the economy, already heavily damaged by the pandemic, will only get worse without widespread vaccination and that the job someone saves by having the jab could well be their own.

Cuba is still attempting to develop its own vaccines, with both the Abdala and Soberana-2 vaccines currently undergoing final trials, due to be finished this month. However, as case numbers in Cuba spiked in recent months, the government began a vaccination programme on 12th May using these two vaccines, with the country's medical regulatory body saying that the benefits are deemed to outweigh the risks. Cuba hopes to be able to produce enough vaccine doses for its entire population by August, although sources in Cuba say that this is being hampered by ongoing sanctions placed on the communist state by the USA.

Prince Philip and the Caribbean

Many nations and territories across the Caribbean have marked the death of his highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, at the age of 99 on 9th April. Prince Philip visited many countries in the Caribbean during his lifetime during several Royal Tours, which are fondly remembered, starting with the Coronation Tour of 1953-54, with a final visit in 2009.

The governments of the British Overseas Territories, such of Anguilla, observed official periods of mourning, including flying flags at half-mast and a minute's silence on the day of the funeral. Some marked the Prince's passing with gun salutes, such as the Royal Turks & Caicos Islands Police Force, which gave a 21-gun salute at noon the day after the Prince's passing.

Prostate Cancer

Within our lifetime, many of the mysteries of cancer will hopefully be answered, but for now some remain and it makes sense to encourage people to lead as healthy a lifestyle as possible while we learn more.

Prostate cancer is common in older men, and for many people it will not surpass chronic status. Indeed a great deal of men die at advanced ages (60% of test subjects over aged 90) without knowing they had prostate cancer at all. This is good in the sense of general longevity, bad in the sense of complications in procedures for the elderly, and terrible for those who have the rare misfortune of contracting it at a young age without clear signs. In the UK, the lifetime risk of contracting prostate cancer is roughly 16%, and this commonality makes it the second leading cause of male cancer deaths. In the Caribbean, it is the leading cause.

If there's no causal proof, there are inferences; cancer may be affected by any number of factors but studies do show that latitude and Vitamin D (the main benefit of sunlight) correlate to lower amounts of Breast and Prostate (hormonal) cancers. People living in cities in the far northern and far southern hemispheres were more likely to contract both than those living in the tropics.

The destruction of cancer cells carries the difficult side effect of poisoning our other cells, so any major headway we have to make in treating prostate cancer is about dealing with side effects.

It's not all negative; part of the reason that cancer is such a prominent illness is because modern medicine has adapted to deal with other afflictions. Moreover, current epidemiology states that Hodgkin's Lymphoma, Breast

Cancer, and Prostate Cancer have all gone from a position of high mortality within a decade to most patients making full long term recoveries. The trend is healthy but there's more work to do.

Hormones stimulate two of the aforementioned cancers: Breast and Prostate. So our ability to treat them has grown in proportion to our understanding of proscriptive drugs preventing metastasis in early onset patients.

If the treatment side is on a positive trajectory, then the difficulties come with prevention. Smear tests are crucial to the containment and treatment of cervical cancers for example, but screening unfortunately does not translate effectively into a mass prevention of Prostate cancer-linked deaths. By the time the symptoms are abundantly obvious, it is often at a serious stage.

Beyond that, we are struggling to mitigate risk where we don't understand the express cause. Prostate cancer prevention does not usually go beyond the obvious i.e. alcohol reduction, not smoking, and keeping a healthy weight. These are general health cues we should all adhere to, but unlike Lung or Stomach cancers, none of these things has a highly specific relationship with preventing prostate cancer.

This is not just problematic for the incertitude of patient treatment, but also medical logistics; even in free at the point of use healthcare systems like the British NHS, inefficiencies around costing can lead to deadly setbacks.

Healthcare providers normally follow a three-stage programme to decide on long-term cost-effective treatment: identifying resources, measurement of resource utility, and validating the monetary value of the resource through

statistical analysis. You can't do this as efficiently without effective screening. Given the comparative advantages of those living in the tropics, and the link to Vitamin D exposure being tough to ignore, we hope to raise more awareness and debate in the Caribbean about how we can study, prevent, and successfully treat this all too common issue.

Notes of Interest

Raul Castro is stepping down as the First Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party. 89 years old, Raul Castro was president of the country from 2008 to 2018, following in the footsteps of his elder brother Fidel, the revolutionary leader. It will be the first time since the Cuban Revolution in 1959 that a Castro has not been at the head of the Cuban Communist Party. It is currently unknown who will succeed him, but Mr. Castro has previously indicated that he favoured Miguel Díaz-Canel, his successor as president.

Dust from the Sahara Desert has blown over the Atlantic Ocean and has been affecting several Caribbean islands. Mixed with volcanic dust from the eruption on St. Vincent, this has reduced air quality and people have been advised to limit the amount of time that they spend outside, particularly if they suffer from respiratory problems.

The future status of Puerto Rico has been debated in Washington DC as a committee of the House of Representatives held hearings about two bills that could either lead to independence for the US territory, or to it becoming the 51st state. An indicative referendum last year, with a turn out of 55% of Puerto Rican voters, indicated that 53% of the populace want to become a fully-fledged state of the United States.

Juan Carlos Sikaffy, president of Honduras's

business council, has said that businessmen will attempt to buy up to 1.5 million doses of coronavirus vaccines to aid the Honduran government. The Honduran government has thus far obtained around 52,000 doses, but announced a deal in March for 4.2 million doses of the Sputnik V vaccine from Russia.

Joseph Jouthe, Prime Minister of Haiti since March 2020, has resigned, as the numbers of killings and kidnappings have spiked in the Republic. President Jovenel Moïse accepted his resignation, having refused it on a previous occasion. The President has nominated Claude Joseph as the new Prime Minister, Haiti's eighth since 2015.

The Eastern Caribbean Central Bank has launched a year-long trial of a new digital blockchain-based currency, aimed at speeding transactions and being usable by those without bank accounts. 'DCash' is available in Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, and St. Lucia. The new currency was created by Bitt, a company based in Barbados and its value is fixed to the Eastern Caribbean Dollar. It operates via an app on Smartphones which utilises QR codes and limits are currently in place as to how much money people can send, nor does interest apply.

Redonda, the uninhabited island that is part of Antigua and Barbuda, has been subject to an intensive environmental project since 2016 to rid the island of invasive species and regenerate its ecosystem. These invasive species, including long-horned goats and rats, introduced by settlers and guano miners over the centuries, had caused significant damage to both plant and animal life on the island, before they were finally removed from the island in 2018. Conservationists, visiting the island for the first time in eighteen months, have discovered that the ecosystem is

recovering well, with fresh vegetation and young animals being seen, including some of Redonda's endangered endemic lizard species.

Following the Cayman Islands' general election on 14th April, Wayne Panton, the independent MP for the Newlands constituency, has been appointed as the new Premier of the British Overseas Territory. He was the only representative in the 19-member parliament nominated for the task. 12 Independent MPs now sit in the Caymanian parliament, with the remaining seven seats held by the People's Progressive Movement. Mr. Panton is a former member of the People's Progressive Movement.

Mark Collins, the former Chief Constable of Dyfed Powys police, has been sworn in as Commissioner of the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force. Mr. Collins has 33 years of policing experience, having previously served as Deputy Chief Constable of Bedfordshire and Police Commander of Walthamstow as part of London's Metropolitan Police. He was awarded the Queen's Policing Medal in the New Year's Honours 2020. It is hoped his appointment will help to tackle the growth of serious organised crime in the British Virgin Islands.

A [new study](#) has revealed how the first arrival of humans in the Bahamas changed the environment of the islands. The Lucayans, who arrived on Great Abaco, deforested the island of its hardwood trees, and their hunting radically changed the number of animals on the island, driving some species to extinction.

Hubert Hughes, the former Chief Minister of Anguilla, passed away on 7th May this year. Born in 1933, he was first elected to the House of Assembly in 1976 and served as Chief Minister on three occasions between 1994-1999, 1999-2000 and 2010-2015.

The West India Committee Report

Our [exhibition](#) in partnership with the National Army Museum, *The West Indian Soldier*, opened on 19th May in the National Army Museum's Focus Gallery in Chelsea. The exhibition outlines the role that West Indians have played in the British Army over the last 400 years and features artefacts from both the West India Committee and National Army Museum's collections, as well as items kindly loaned by the Grenadier Guards and the College of Arms.

The exhibition will be open until the end of October and will be free to view, although prospective visitors to the National Army Museum will need to [book](#) in line with current government restrictions relating to the Pandemic. Those wishing to learn more about the history of the British Army's relationship with the Caribbean can read our new [e-book](#), written by the staff and volunteers of the West India Committee, as well as watching our [online lectures](#). An expanded, hard copy book will be available to purchase later this year.

Caribbean Cookery

Toto Cake

This cake's origins date from when slaves in the Caribbean would supplement their meagre diet by mixing coconut molasses with flour and then cooking the mixture on hot coals. It survives today as a popular Caribbean dessert.



Ingredients

3 cups Plain flour
1 1/2 cups Brown sugar
1 1/2 cups Desiccated (unsweetened) or freshly grated coconut
3 tsp Baking powder
1 tsp Baking soda
Optional – mix some desiccated coconut with icing sugar and a little water to glaze the cake.
1/2 tsp Ground Allspice
1/2 tsp Ground Nutmeg
1 tsp Ground Ginger
1/2 tsp Salt
1/2 cup Raisins (optional)
2 Eggs, whisked together
2 cups Milk
1/2 cup Butter, melted
1 tsp Vanilla Extract
1 tbspc Jamaican rum (optional)

Instructions

Preheat oven to 350 F/ 175 C
Mix all the dry ingredients together in a large bowl. Then beat the eggs and milk together and add the melted butter. Then add the vanilla and rum to the wet mixture. Add the wet mixture to the dry and mix together until just blended. Place batter in a greased baking tin (about 33cm x 20cm) and bake for 1 hour. Cool in the tin and cut into squares.

From the Library

The Kingdom of Redonda 1865-1990

This quarter's library item is from the Maureen Hanton Collection. Mrs. Hanton was a committee member for many years and collected a large personal library of materials relating to the Caribbean, many of which were kindly donated by her sons to the West India Committee following her passing. Amongst them is this history of the island of Redonda, now part of the nation of Antigua and Barbuda.

Part of the story of Redonda, which has largely remained uninhabited save for a few brief attempts at colonisation, is the tale of the 'Kingdom' of Redonda, after Matthew Dowdy Shiell, father of the writer M.P. Shiel, is said to have claimed the title of King in the belief that the island was part of the territory of no nation. The younger Shiel used to grant peerages to his friends. The micronation has never been recognised by any country, and the 'crown' of Redonda has been disputed by several parties over the years.

Published in 1991 on behalf of the Redondan Cultural Foundation, the book features a foreword by King Cedric of Redonda and a romantic history of the microstate with contributions by several authors, covering the history of the island, biographies of its kings and an analysis of the works of M.P. Shiel. Its appendices feature a full list of Redonda's colourful peerage from the Kingdom's foundation to the time of publishing.

THE KINGDOM OF REDONDA 1865-1990



THE WEST INDIA COMMITTEE

The West India Committee is a UK registered charity that works to improve the welfare of the people of the Caribbean and the societies in which they live and work, both domestically and globally. Please complete this form by hand and post it to The West India Committee, Suite 53, 4 Whitehall Court, Westminster, London, SW1A 2EL.

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