

Part O.W. Geographical Expedition

Since there is room, we present another in an extremely popular series 'What I did in my Holidays'.

Easter is the time when the Vincentians visit their volcano, La Soufrière, columns of picnickers in festive mood clambering up to the crater edge. Such celebrations were forestalled this year by a massive eruption on Good Friday, since when further upheavals have thrown ash 40,000 feet in the air, and sent lava streams five miles across the island. Another explosion was not completely unexpected: in 1812 an eruption caused ash to fall on Barbados, a hundred miles away, and sent the Caribs scuttling, and eight years later another eruption occurred. (In Martinique, in the same year, 40000 deaths ensued from the eruption of Mt. Pele, the only volcano survivor being a criminal awaiting execution in a earthy underground cell, whose photograph can be seen in the Barbados museum).

Last October, one of the first enquiries I made on landing on St Vincent was how to climb the peak. Guided tours were recommended, mainly because of the tricky route, and the risk of being attacked by ganja-smoking Rastafarians, a party of whom had assaulted and killed a couple of German tourists in a remote bay some weeks before, but to whom the Government had given land on the slopes of the mountain. Our last contact had had to close his volcano-trekking business, but recommended a man in ~~the~~ Georgetown, about five miles from the volcano to the north. We drove over to see him:

The main road on the east is called the 'Leeward Highway', but it soon deteriorates into a stony, rutted, winding track. ~~It~~ ~~is~~ ~~no~~ ~~longer~~ ~~to~~ ~~go~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~mountain~~. We fixed up a day, and presented ourselves at eight a.m., where we soon piled in to a land-over to take us the first steep mile or two. We crossed the famous Rebecca Dry River (the name is a bit of a story, and is not to be taken too seriously).