

Teaching at Trunk Island

By Andrea Milam

When nearly two and a half acres of Trunk Island came up for sale in 2014, the Bermuda Zoological Society jumped at the chance to invest in the property. The BZS had already been willed a share of two-thirds of the island; the purchase of the remaining portion would give the non-profit access to the entire island, opening up a world of possibilities for Bermuda's youth.

"It gave us the chance to take something from scratch and turn it into something pretty special," says Bermuda Aquarium, Museum, and Zoo principal curator Dr. Ian Walker. "It seemed like an amazing opportunity to be able to get kids unplugged and out onto an island in our own backyard. Having access to the entire island allowed us to turn it into a living classroom for the children of Bermuda."

Though it's one of several tiny islands and cays that dot Bermuda's ocean landscape, Trunk Island is unique in that it's surrounded by land, yet it's the most isolated island in Bermuda. Located in the northwestern part of Harrington Sound, an inland "lake" that's open to the ocean only via a small channel on the sound's southwest side, Trunk Island is the largest of 10 islands found in this body of water. It has its own sandy beach and three shallow bays.

With the push to take the pressure off of Nonsuch Island, where youth camps and the general presence of humans threatened the critical Cahow habitat, the opportunity to immerse young Bermudians in their home's natural environment at Trunk Island was a welcome one. Dr. David Wingate, whose tireless efforts to restore Nonsuch Island led to the Cahow being brought back from near-extinction, has created a management plan for Trunk Island.

"Our wish is to get as many kids as we can to Trunk Island to see what Bermuda was like before man," says Ian. "We can get an entire class there in just a five-minute boat ride from the aquarium. Thirty kids can be out there exploring things they've never seen before."

The island's size and shallow bays also provide the ideal setting for children to learn to snorkel, Ian adds. From short day trips to the island to week-long residential camps, Trunk Island has welcomed a wide range of students from across Bermuda. In addition to the planned implementation of boys' and girls' dormitories and restrooms to elevate the current "roughing it" camping experience, there are big plans in the works for the island's natural environment.

"We're slowly removing all the invasives and replanting the island with natives and endemics," says Ian. "More than 60 Bermuda cedars have been being planted, as well as 10 yellowwoods and a lot of Bermuda palmettos. That's just the start. We look at this as a 30-plus year project. It'll be absolutely magical."

Not that Trunk Island doesn't already possess its own sort of magic, Ian continues.

"There's an amazing rare stand of palmetto trees out there, which is what it would have looked like in Bermuda before man arrived," he says. "You can sit in this grove and when the wind's blowing, it whispers through the palmettos, and there's no other sound. It's a special experience."

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Trunk Island for Tourists?



The main focus of the Trunk Island project is to allow Bermuda's students to experience the island's unique natural environment, but visitors to Bermuda can also benefit from the BZS's access to the island. Here's how.

Tours

Though visitors can't currently set foot on Trunk Island, there are tours of Harrington Sound aboard the BZS's 30-foot Beachcat, Callista. Harrington Sound is a unique body of water where cliffs and cave systems mark the perimeter and spotted eagle rays glide into the lake's narrow opening via Flatt's Bridge. A diverse collection of

sponges filter feed in the water, some of which create bio-erosional notches at the cliff bases, essentially turning the rock to swiss cheese. Expert tour guides provide a wealth of knowledge on the sound's incredible biodiversity, and best of all, going on this tour directly assists BAMZ's education department in its mission to inspire appreciation and care of Bermuda's environment. Book a tour at www.islandtourcentre.com.

Honey

As part of its work on Trunk Island, the BZS has established beehives on the island. The first 20 pounds of honey have already been harvested, and visitors can purchase a jar of fresh Trunk Island honey at the aquarium's gift shop.



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