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First Community Guide Training Course Completed in Guyana

Iwokrama has licensed thirteen local guides to operate in the Forest. These residents of the North Rupununi successfully completed the training course taught in the Forest from October 6th, 2003 – November 2nd, 2003.

The course was supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and conducted in collaboration with Trekforce Expeditions.

Instructors were from Trekforce, University of Guyana, Guyana Forestry Commission, Guyana Water Inc., Ministry of Local Government, local communities and Iwokrama. Iwokrama Forest Rangers also trained by Iwokrama were also instructors. Trekforce Expeditions worked with Iwokrama to help develop the curriculum and manage logistics.

Emphasis was on learning by doing and practical activities. Participants were instructed in the nature and scope of ecotourism, its potential environmental, social and economic benefits and impacts; as well as Wilderness Survival, First Aid, Amerindian History and Culture, Conservation and Wild land management concepts, Interpretive Guiding, Leadership, Interpersonal Skills and Community-Based Ecotourism. At the end of the course there was a three day assessment period. Participants had to lead tourists into the Forest incorporating their newly learned skills and knowledge with emphasis on providing visitors with a rich, satisfying and educational experience.

Successful graduates were presented with their operator licenses at the North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDDB) Meeting held on November 7, 2003 in Annai. These Guides, along with Iwokrama Rangers, are the only persons authorised to take visitors through the Iwokrama Forest.

Iwokrama plans to expand the course to meet the needs of tour operators and the developing a protected area system in Guyana.

A major objective of the Iwokrama Guide Training Programme is to make an overall contribution towards improving the standard of guiding and interpretive services nationally through the introduction of qualified guiding personnel. It is also a component of Iwokrama's new ecotourism development strategy that includes strengthening links with the private sector and ensuring local community involvement in ecotourism in the Forest.

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Environmental Impact Assessment Initiated for Iwokrama Timber Harvesting

Iwokrama's timber harvesting feasibility studies and management plan have been used as the basis for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for timber operations. The EIA is presently being undertaken to secure Environmental Protection Agency and Guyana Forestry Commission approvals of the final Iwokrama timber management plan. The results of the EIA will help finalize the management plan to be implemented in late 2004.

Initial scoping exercises have been undertaken with the local communities and Georgetown stakeholders in December 2003 for the EIA. Iwokrama also initiated discussions with potential private sector partners including a presentation to the Private Sector Commission in November 2003.

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First Successful Aquarium Fish Shipment

Iwokrama is working in partnership with the NRDDDB to develop a sustainable, community-based aquarium fisheries business in the North Rupununi. The project focuses on the sustainable use of aquarium fisheries as a non-timber forest product, and as a means of generating revenue for indigenous communities. Funded by the Netherlands Committee for IUCN Tropical Rainforest Program, the project will help ensure ecological and social sustainability. Iwokrama hopes to influence South America's aquarium trade by working to introduce a certified 'green equity' trade throughout the supply chain resulting in greater regulation of the freshwater trade in South America.

Business development is based on the extremely diverse fishery in the middle Essequibo and Rupununi Rivers which have over 420 different species. Since receiving additional funding in April 2003 from IUCN Netherlands, the project has blossomed and moved toward ensuring the success of a long term, community-based aquarium trade. There have been six shipments completed totaling over 12,000 fish, with fish mortality greatly reduced and new monitoring systems in place. In addition, several community workshops have been held to ensure full participation of local people in business planning.

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Canopy Walkway Opening

In November 2003, Iwokrama's new canopy walkway was officially opened by Mrs. Yvonne Hinds and His Excellency, Mr. Samuel Hinds, Prime Minister of Guyana. Over 100 people of all ages gathered for the ceremony and inaugural walk. The canopy walk is a series of suspension bridges and decks of up to 30 metres in height. It gives visitors a new view on the forest and allows wildlife to be relatively free from human intrusion. The walkway is a significant sales feature for ecotourism development.

Mrs. Hinds gladly accepted responsibility for cutting the vine “ribbon” across the path to the walkway. Other honoured guests included donors, partners, and IBOT and NRDDDB members. Several of these guests shared thoughts and thanks for the walkway to the crowd.

A large multiple media press corps was there and spent the entire day in the region. A very positive and lengthy article appeared in the Stabroek News.

Click on link below for an online version...

<http://www.stabroeknews.com/index.pl/article?id=843422>

The press corps accompanied Graham Watkins and others to Surama, Annai and Bina Hill. Trustee Mr. Sydney Allicock had an opportunity to share the local communities’ successes and plans with visitors. One stop was at the new Surama visitor lodge – a low-impact structure at the edge of Surama near the Burro-Burro River. This project is supported through Iwokrama’s CIDA-funded community based tourism programme.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funded the \$180,000 USD state-of-the-art canopy walkway. The unique walkway construction allows trees to grow normally by using adjustable cables and braces throughout the support structure.

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Ground-breaking Agreement Signed between the Government of Guyana and Jacksonville Zoological Gardens

For over three years, Iwokrama has worked with Jacksonville Zoo in Florida to develop links between zoos in the USA to fund conservation activities in Guyana. In November 2003, this culminated in an agreement for cooperation between the Zoo and the Government of Guyana. The agreement outlines cooperation between Jacksonville Zoo and the Government including partnerships with Iwokrama, the Guyana Environmental Protection Agency, the Guyana National Parks Commission, and the North Rupununi District Development Board representing communities close to Iwokrama Forest.

The focus of the agreement is Guyana’s loan of animals to Jacksonville Zoo for the specific purposes of raising awareness, increasing market access for forest products and tourism, and raising funds for conservation in Guyana. In March 2004 Jacksonville Zoo will open a new exhibit - “*Range of the Jaguar*”, which includes information about the Iwokrama Forest, Rupununi Wetlands and many projects run by local communities, Iwokrama and Government Agencies. The exhibit will present conservation issues from local and national perspectives rather than from only the international perspective.

The agreement between Jacksonville Zoo and the Government of Guyana is consistent with international conventions including the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. Animals loaned from Guyana to Jacksonville will only be those that can no longer be released back into the wild such as animals that have already been in captivity for a long time. In addition, the importation of these animals into the USA requires the Zoo to show that the display of these animals will help the survival of the species in the wild. Once on display, the animals and the exhibit will be used to raise funds for conservation and development in Guyana.

The agreement also describes the Zoo’s conservation support efforts in Guyana including wildlife management policy and legislation, surveys of key endangered species, environmental education, capacity building and infrastructure support for the National Parks Commission. The agreement is worth US\$120,000, but is likely to blossom as new

sources of funds and new markets are found. Iwokrama already benefits substantially from American Zoo and Conservation community support totalling between US\$100,000 and US\$250,000 every year.

This agreement will serve to solidify this support and several other zoos have indicated strong interest in working with Guyana through this agreement or by developing similar relationships.

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Eden Project to Support Annai Wildlife Festival

In October 2003, Terrence Brasche of Annai Village and Susan Williams of St. Ignatius Village attended an Education and Environmental Expo in Bermuda. The Expo - "We are the World", was facilitated by the Eden Project and Education Ministry of Bermuda.

Guyana's ambassadors were funded by the Eden Project through the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and Iwokrama. They had the privilege of meeting with the Premier (Head of Government), the Minister of Education and the Minister of Environment. They also visited six primary and secondary schools, and spoke about environmental issues.

Terrence showcased indigenous culture and environmental change and described the challenges faced by Amerindians. He described Guyana's environmental clubs and how they are contributing to sustainable resource management in the North Rupununi. Terrence also talked about the annual wildlife festival, the citizen science monitoring programmes and school yard ecology. As a result, the Eden Project kindly donated US\$500 for the April 2004 wildlife festival. Terrence and Susan were the only South American indigenous people who attended the Expo.

Please contact Aiesha Williams (awilliams@iwokrama.org) if you are also willing to support this year's festival.

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Iwokrama Retreat Helps Teamwork

"It made us work as a team, made us realize how others would perceive each other. There were lots of ideas some we can implement right away. But most all, I love the fact that all of us are determined to make the programme work."

Iwokrama held a very successful staff retreat at the Field Station in December 2003. Fifty staff and volunteers attended the two day retreat which examined our present situation and ways to focus the Centre on future income generation from timber, tourism, training and conservation. The retreat also allowed for interaction and relationship building between Georgetown and field staff; increased communication was seen as a key to increasing efficiency and cooperation.

Several key issues arose from the retreat including the need for a strong public relations campaign in Guyana to ensure Guyanese understand Iwokrama and the development possibilities that come through working together. This campaign should also help teach others in Guyana what we have learned in terms of collaborative management and developing forest based businesses. During the retreat, staff also discussed the threats of HIV, malaria, substance abuse and security risks that will be exacerbated by the Georgetown-Lethem road. Dealing with these threats will require increased monitoring and patrolling and new awareness programmes for staff, visitors and local communities.

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Shirley Felts Book Launch

Shirley Felts' book –*“The Iwokrama Rainforest”* was launched in Guyana in October 2003 at the Castellani House. The launch was attended by His Excellency Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, President of Guyana, His Excellency the Honourable Prime Minister Mr. Samuel Hinds and Her Excellency, Mrs. Janet Jagan, former President of Guyana.

Shirley's book is already an Iwokrama ambassador, indicating the art and culture that runs steadily through Iwokrama's blood. The book exemplifies the kinds of products that interest Iwokrama; products that will ultimately lead to the development of truly sustainable businesses. The book is a strong indicator of the innovative and culturally sensitive products that will make Iwokrama a household name for sustainability in the future.

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Iwokrama Merchandise Available

In November of 2003 Iwokrama began retailing a line of clothing and related accessories as part of its mission to make the Forest a self-sustaining enterprise. The items include knit polo shirts, t-shirts, oxford shirts, tote bags and caps - all with the Iwokrama logo.

The merchandise is sold at the administrative offices in Georgetown and the Field Station. The products will also be available from Wilderness Explorers, tour operator for Iwokrama's new canopy walk, as well as regional ecotourism destinations such as Surama Village and Rock View Lodge in Annai Village.

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