



PhotoStory



Reaching the 'Reach'

land is my favourite parish in Jamaica. Its rainforest-like beauty and quiet charm are almost impossible to resist. I'd never had an opportunity to see the local waterfalls, so with a brochure recommendation and the assistance of a road map I decided to visit Reach Falls.

A drive from Kingston to Portland was only an hour but poor road conditions took another 30 minutes. My excitement grew as I drove through Port Antonio, the parish where, I'd be washing away my obstacles in the enchanting waters of Reach Falls. The drive from thereon was rather pleasant, with country air and views of the glistening sea. A change from the heavily constructed Kingston. After a few miles and two brief stops, I spotted a sign that my destination was a mile ahead. The hill path was bordered by lofty trees and brown bushes, everything amazingly green despite three months of drought.

I came upon a group of men signalling that I was a bit hesitant but pulled over. A young man approached, telling me that the falls had been closed for almost two years. The news was a

bit difficult to digest but he further explained that for a small fee, I could still visit the facility. Apparently he had been a guide at Reach Falls, but since its closure he'd been resorting to offering private tours to the occasional misinformed visitor, like me. I briefly considered his proposition then agreed. It would have been pointless to leave without seeing the falls. My new guide hopped onto the back seat for the rest of the ride.

Upon arrival, the property's entrance was blocked by large branches and another 'welcoming committee' of two. It was only after recognising the guide that they allowed us to continue on foot. There were no visible signs of renovation. Instead, I was greeted by a dilapidated wooden security post and a partially burnt concrete structure, which appeared to have once been a snack shop. Disappointed, I slowly walked by unkempt bushes and little garbage piles before reaching the entrance of the falls.

After carefully descending a small flight of steps, I found myself amidst a surprisingly breathtaking product of nature. Dozens of beautiful wild birds fluttered happily in trees surrounding a falls. Water cascaded down from

large rocks, forming a crystal stream below, about a chain from where I stood. With renewed excitement, I hastily discarded my flip-flops to enter the shallow part of the brook. The afternoon sun sparkled on the cool water, highlighting the millions of multicoloured pebbles beneath my feet.

I was overwhelmed with mixed emotions; while angered by the proprietor's negligence in maintaining the facility I was nevertheless elated that I was enjoying a wonderful slice of paradise. Later, I immersed myself in the water, allowing my grouses to temporarily recede. In that moment I became one with nature as I surrendered to the mystic of Reach Falls.

Since my visit in May 2006, I've learnt that the facility has been reopened to the public. Their website, www.reachfalls.com has pictures of the property and other local attractions. I'm planning another trip, later this year, as I am eager to see the improvements that have been made

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