

# Imaging Heritage Sites as a Tool for Conservation and Sustainable Community Development

Andrew P. Smith, M.A. Lecturer, University of Technology, Jamaica.

## Introduction

Photography is recognized as an essential tool in the conservation of natural and cultural heritage sites – both to record on-site conditions and also as a historical reference. This photographic knowledge and documentation is an important first step in the conservation of Jamaica's natural and cultural heritage and is necessary for our citizens to gain a greater knowledge and appreciation of our history and identity.



British colonial ruins in Jamaica's interior which the JNHT was unaware of before being informed by the researcher's team  
© Andrew P. Smith

These sites and associated communities have the potential to be developed sustainably through heritage tourism. Under Jamaica's Vision 2030 plan, the agencies responsible for developing and implementing a strategy for community-based heritage tourism are the Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT), the Tourism Product Development Company (TPDCo) and the Jamaica Conservation Development Trust (JCDT). For this research, it was decided that the web-site of the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) be chosen over the TPDCo because the latter uses photos to promote improvements to the tourism product whereas the JTB uses photos to promote Jamaica.

## Methodology

This is the first stage of a longer term research project that has its final aim being the creation of a model of sustainable community heritage tourism centred on Jamaica's natural and cultural heritage sites. This phase of the research involves:

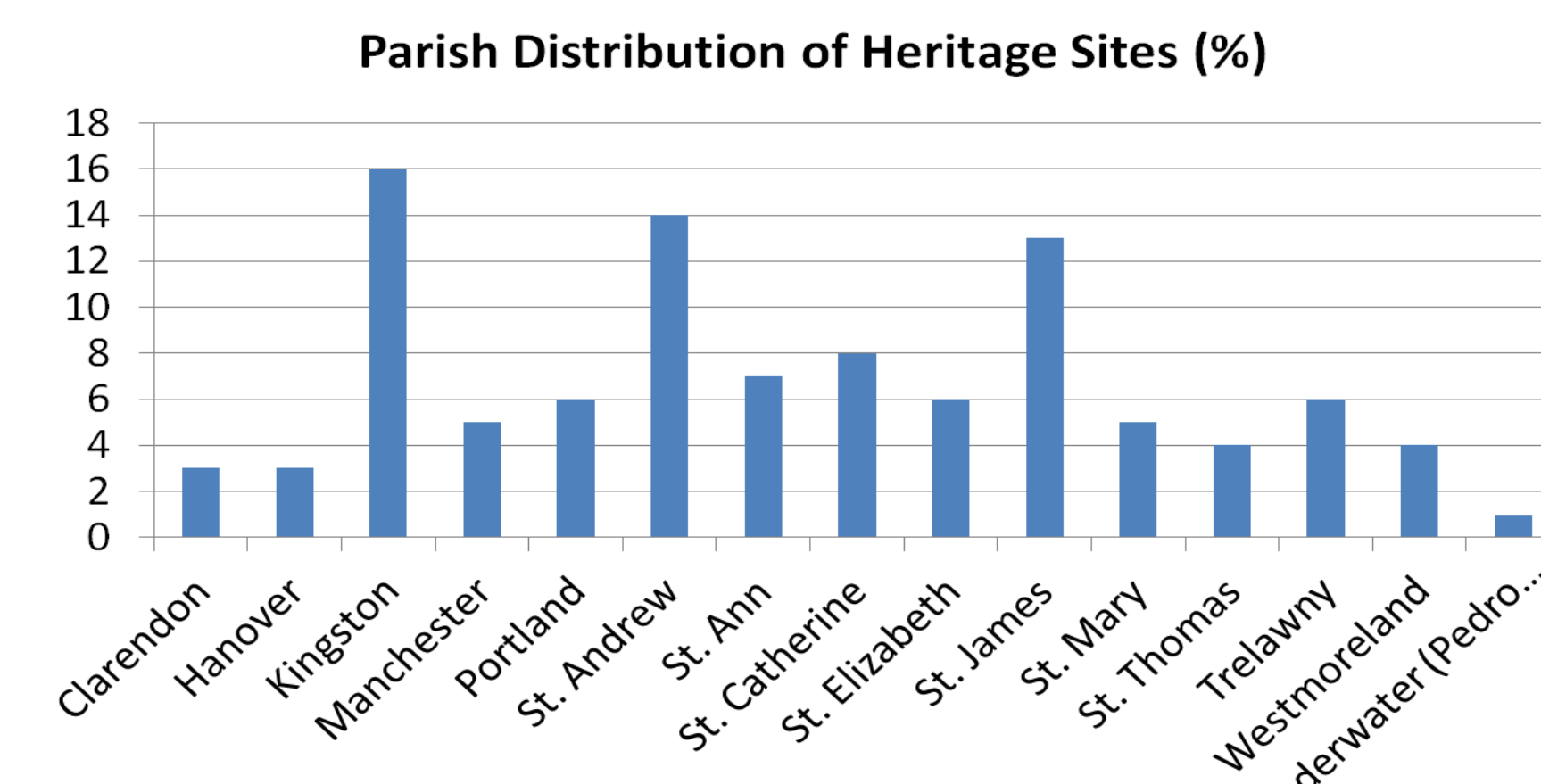
- Researching literature related to Jamaica's natural and cultural heritage and the use of photography as a tool for heritage conservation.
- Interviewing key agency personnel.
- Critically analysing and reviewing of the on-line photographs on the websites and Facebook pages of the JNHT, JCDT, the Blue & John Crow Mountain National Park (BJCMNP) and the JTB as at October 2013 and December/January 2014. The on-line photographs were chosen because they are the most visible and therefore give the most immediate information to the public.

## Preliminary Results

The following are some of the issues and challenges that came to light during the analysis of the photos and from interviews:

### Underrepresentation of Jamaica's Heritage on Websites

According to the JNHT, there are 196 declared sites and monuments, with the parish distribution as follows:



On the face of it, this implies that most of Jamaica's important heritage sites are in Kingston, St. Andrew and St. James. **However this might more accurately reflect Griffith and Emmanuel's (2005) assertion that there are gaps in the knowledge of Jamaica's heritage sites because "...only 5-10% of Jamaica has been surveyed over the past 7 years in terms of locating historical/cultural sites in Jamaica."** (19)

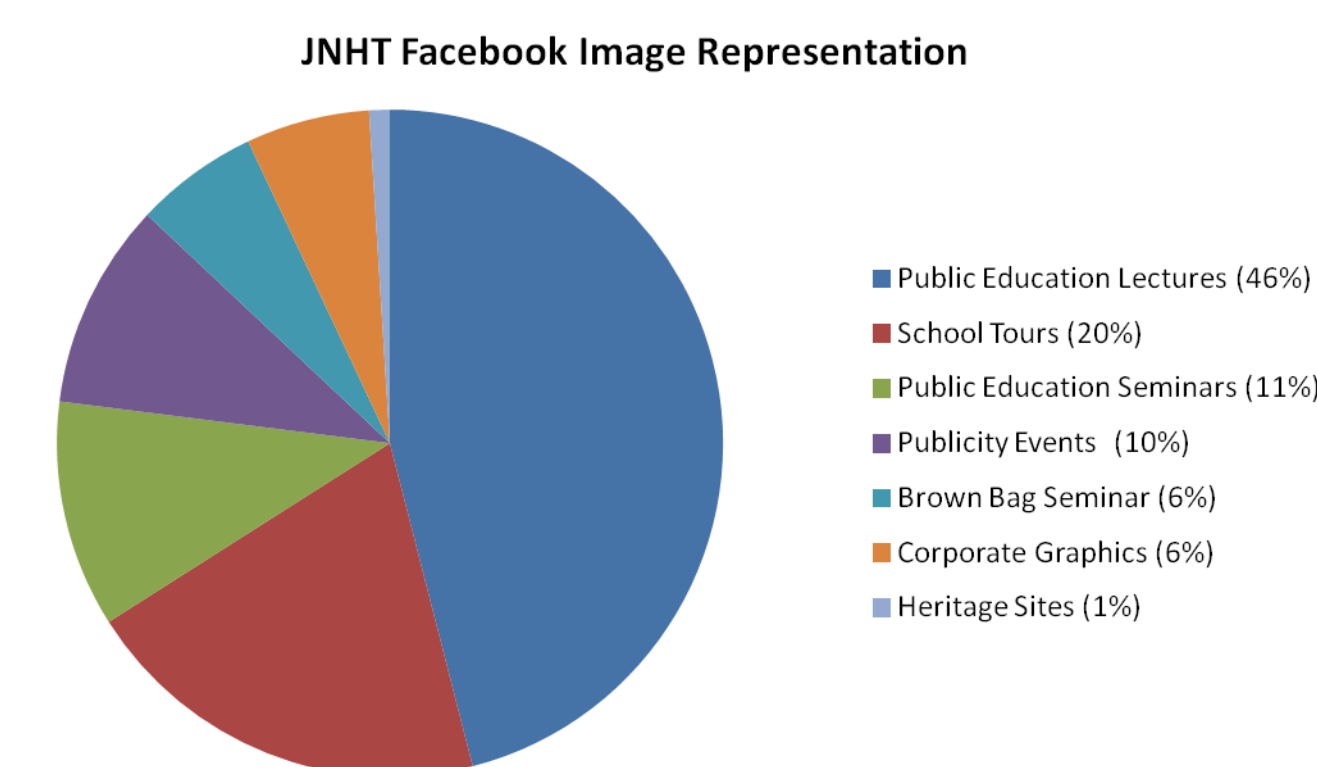
The biodiversity of the BJCMNP is poorly represented on the BJCMNP and JCDT websites, with the main photo gallery consisting of 19 images of species found in the Park. This is although according to Scott Dunkley and Barrett (2001), "In the Blue Mountain region, of 240 species of higher plants, 47 percent are endemic. In the John Crow Mountains, 32 percent of the 278 species of flowering plants are endemic."

The *Visit Jamaica* website has ten (10) photos representing the Port Antonio region and thirty-three (33) representing the South Coast as against 331, 290 and 214 from the Montego Bay, Ocho Rios and Negril regions respectively. Kingston is represented by 155 photographs.

## Preliminary Results

### Underutilisation of Social Media to Promote Heritage

All three agencies have Facebook Pages which are used primarily to promote agency activities, an example of which is the JNHT's Facebook page:



JCDT's Facebook page has 92% of the photos promoting and communicating company activities while 8 % are photos of biodiversity and landscapes. On the BJCMNP Facebook page 54% of the photos are promoting company activities and usage of facilities, 33% represent biodiversity, landscapes, attractions and heritage and 13 % focus on environmental issues in the park.

The *Visit Jamaica* Facebook page has 2375 images in 77 albums. The album 'Historical/Heritage Sites' has 5 photos. - 2 of Fort Charles, 1 of the Bob Marley Mausoleum, 1 of Spanish Town and 1 of Coke Methodist.

### Influence of local media coverage

Personnel from both the JNHT and JTB believe that local media can contribute more to the public knowledge of Jamaica's heritage and play a better part in combating the influence of programming from the United States.

### Lack of appreciation of Jamaica's heritage

JTB and JNHT personnel believe that Jamaicans lack an appreciation for their country's built heritage and we need to see these buildings not as "old run down sites but historical buildings that link to every Jamaican". The JNHT says that many owners of sites see conservation as an impediment to doing what they want with their own property.

### Use of local vs. overseas photographers

All agencies used overseas photographers for their major projects and campaigns, including the JNHT's Golden Jubilee publication, "Jamaica Heritage in Pictures". The justification from the JTB was that overseas photographers "know what the market wants".

### Societal ambiguity to our colonial past

There is a lack of interest in preserving aspects of Jamaica's colonial legacy which might be a reflection of the emotion that Jamaicans feels towards their colonial heritage. The JNHT combats this by arguing that such structures were built with our ancestors' hands and creativity.

## Recommendations

The following are recommendations that have arisen from the analysis of the agency's photographs and suggestion made from agency personnel:

### Filling in the gaps of knowledge.

The aforementioned gaps of knowledge of Jamaica's heritage sites was confirmed by the JNHT who have had plans from the 1990s for an island-wide inventory of built and archaeological sites but this has not been implemented due to lack of funds. The JNHT has invited the public to inform them of any sites that they are aware of. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and Instagram could be used for this.

### Unequivocal GOJ conservation policy for Jamaica's heritage.

There has to be a clear management plan for Jamaica's natural heritage sites. The uncertainty of the GOJ's official stance on the conservation of Jamaica's natural and cultural heritage position has arisen with the invitation to China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) to establish a trans-shipment port at protected sites – first Fort Augusta and then in the Portland Bight. In addition, although the JCDT is named as part of the Vision 2030 management plan, its executive director refutes this since they are responsible solely for the BJCMNP. The Protected Areas System Master Plan that would address this has not yet been implemented.

### Private Sector Involvement in Conservation

The private sector has to be more involved in heritage conservation through public-private partnerships. Basil Smith of the Jamaica Tourist Board is of the opinion that these partnerships can be used to maintain and capitalize on existing heritage sites such as Spanish Town. The private sector can also assist conservation by providing grant funding for research of sites. Incentives could be given to the private sector to motivate them to invest in the discovery, conservation, preservation and promotion of Jamaica's natural and cultural heritage.

### Creation of Multimedia Packages for Digital Platforms.

Jamaica needs to utilise 21<sup>st</sup> century technology such as applications, games, documentaries and other educational multimedia packages in educating about the country's heritage.



The Blue & John Crow Mountains National Park has been submitted as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. © Andrew P. Smith