



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Smithsonian Tropical Research
Institute Oral History Interviews, 1990

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute Oral History Interviews
Identifier:	Record Unit 9580
Date:	1990
Extent:	1 audiotape (Reference copy).
Creator::	Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9580, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute Oral History Interviews

Use Restriction

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Historical Note

Many Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) staff live on Barro Colorado Island (BCI), an island located in Gatun Lake, part of the Panama Canal watershed. In 1923, the island was set aside as a nature reserve and site for research in tropical biology. The BCI Research Station was run by a consortium of universities and government agencies in its early years. Called the Canal Zone Biological Area (CZBA), it was transferred to the Smithsonian Institution in 1946 and was renamed the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) in 1966.

This group interview documents life on the island from the perspective of five residents, Brian C. Bock, A. Stanley Rand, Patricia Rand, Nicholas D. Smythe, and Tanis Smythe. A. Stanley Rand received his Ph.D. in biology from Harvard University in 1961. After working with Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology and the Secretary of Agriculture in Brazil, he began working at STRI in 1964 as a herpetologist. From 1974 to 1979, Rand served as Assistant Director, and he was appointed Senior Biologist in 1979. His interest in the behavior and ecology of reptiles and amphibians led to pioneering studies of frog communications. Patricia Rand came to live on the island with her husband in 1964 and raised their family there. She conducted research and prepared exhibits on the history of BCI.

Nicholas D. Smythe received his Ph.D. in biology from the University of Maryland in 1970. He began working at STRI the same year to develop baseline studies of the rainforest for the Environmental Sciences Program. His research interests centered on frugivorous mammals, and during the 1980s Smythe began a domestication program for the paca, a species of cavy, which is an excellent source of

protein and can be raised on forest by-products. Smythe's goal was a large scale paca industry which would prevent further destruction of the rainforest. Tanis Smythe took up residence on BCI with her husband in 1970 and also worked in the STRI library. Brian Bock, a herpetologist at the University of Tennessee, was a visiting scientist in STRI's Biology Program and worked at STRI with the iguana biology and management project.

Introduction

The Smithsonian Institution Archives began its Oral History Program in 1973. The purpose of the program is to supplement the written documentation of the Archives' record and manuscript collections with an Oral History Collection, focusing on the history of the Institution, research by its scholars, and contributions of its staff. Program staff conduct interviews with current and retired Smithsonian staff and others who have made significant contributions to the Institution. There are also interviews conducted by researchers or students on topics related to the history of the Smithsonian or the holdings of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

STRI staff who lived on Barro Colorado Island and raised their families in this unique environment were interviewed as a group to capture what life was like living and working in this remote tropical location.

Descriptive Entry

This interview by Pamela M. Henson, historian, Smithsonian Institution Archives, was recorded at the Rands' home in Gamboa, Panama, and documented reminiscences of former colleagues, students, visitors, and staff at STRI from the late 1950s to 1990, including experiences with ants (*Paraponera*), snakes, food, beer, long-term residence on Barro Colorado Island, increasing institutional management of STRI in recent years, laundry, pets, and children.

This collection is comprised of one interview session, totaling approximately 1.0 hour of recording and 40 pages of transcript.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Conservation of natural resources
- Herpetologists
- Interviews
- Oral history
- Paca
- Tropical biology
- Women -- History

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:

Bock, Brian C.
Henson, Pamela M., interviewer
Rand, A. Stanley (Austin Stanley), 1932-
Rand, Patricia
Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute
Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute
Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. Barro Colorado Island
Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. Canal Zone Biological Area
Smythe, Nicholas D.
Smythe, Tanis
United States. Canal Zone Biological Area, Barro Colorado Island

Geographic Names:

Barro Colorado Island (Panama)
Panama
Panama -- Description and travel
Panama -- Social life and customs

Container Listing

Interviews

Interviews

Interview 1: June 14, 1990

Interviews

Group interview discusses life on Barro Colorado Island when the Rands and Smythes arrived in the 1960s and 1970s, including: Reminiscences of visitors, colleagues, students, and STRI staff, including Adela Gomez, Neal G. Smith, and Martin H. Moynihan; stories about raising children there, pets, injuries, maintaining a beer supply, encounters with snakes and the stinging ants (*Paraponera*); facilities such as housing, labs, dining and laundry; field work, such as mistnets along Pipeline Road; changes over the decades; distinguished visitors to the island; and increased communication with and management by the central STRI offices in Panama City and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-40, of audiotape recording, 1.0 hour.

Interviews

Audio Recordings of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.0 hour

Note:

- Original Masters: 2 7" reel-to-reel tapes
- Reference Copies: 1 audiotape cassette