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Saba, Crater Treasure of the Indies

By Charles W. Herbert

With Illustrations from Photographs by the Author

WITH the dawn came the light and with the light a background to distinguish that cone-shaped speck of land, Saba, standing proudly apart from the other islands on the long bow of the Caribbean chain (map, page 621).

Saba *is* apart and different. Its sheer, steep rock walls, lashed by waves from all sides, discourage casual visitors and limit commerce to providing bare necessities for modern Sabans.*

Steamers plying two major lanes and planes of the Pan American Airways and of the U. S. Navy's neutrality patrol pass Saba almost daily. Their passengers look across sky and water and see clusters of doll-like houses hanging tenaciously to rocky ledges.

The real thrill of navigation comes when, after you have laid down a course from the map, followed it for an extended time, you see your goal dead ahead at the figured time. This thrill is heightened when the course has carried you across a choppy cross sea, fanned with a stiff northeastern breeze, through the long night.

We left St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands at five in the afternoon aboard the *Hardtack,* a 35-foot ocean-going cruiser owned and captained by Larry Pond of Norwalk, Connecticut.

Saba is 100 miles southeast of the U. S. Virgin Islands and we dropped anchor at nine in the morning off Fort Bay Landing. Within a half hour, the harbor master, customs officer, boatmen, and porters had made their way down to the landing to receive us. Attracted to Saba by an article I had read in the National Geographic Magazine,† I had come to make a documentary film.

After clearance formalities are over and you have received the official welcome, it's time to be all set for the dash ashore.

Luggage and supplies (in my case 24 boxes of film and equipment) were loaded from the *Hardtack* into a sturdy Saba surfboat (Color Plates II, III). There is no wharf on Saba—only a ragged, rock-bound coast that is continually buffeted by the mighty waves rolling in from the open sea all around.

There is a way in, and only the Saba men know it. They point their bow to a 20-foot opening between two treacherous rocks. The ease with which they maneuver through the billowing waves allays fears as you see the foaming water rise and recede around the rocks.

You think you are going in for a landing, but quickly the key man in the boat swings her broadside into the trough of the waves with scant clearance from the right-hand rock. At this point the boat surges back and forth with each succeeding wave, but never comes too near the rock, as sure hands steady her.

"Let's Go! Now!"

You wonder what to expect next. The skipper has his hands on the tiller oar and his eye on the sea. You think you are there for the rest of the day until suddenly he lets forth an excited jabbering which, condensed, means "Let's go! Now!"

Things really begin to happen. The two seamen in the bow pull with powerful strokes and the skipper himself works his short oar double quick as he swings the nose shoreward, bellowing commands to the men at the same time. The little boat now has a decided tilt forward. There's a big wave crowding close behind it and you are riding the crest. The crew is still pulling like mad and you are passing the rocks with a narrow margin.

Suddenly the boat strikes hard bottom with a grind. You look up to see what the seamen will do, but they are already waist-deep in the surf, steadying the boat and tugging away shoreward as thunderous waves break behind (page 600). Willing hands from the shore now join in, and with several synchronized "heave ho's" the little boat is high and dry, with a big adventure swallowed up in the pounding surf just behind.

You are glad to set your feet on solid ground and glad, too, that you are among the few outsiders who make this short but adventurous trip each year.

* Note: Saba retains its status as a part of the Netherlands West Indies under the Act of Havana, 1940, which also provides: "That when islands or regions in the Americas now under the possession of non-American nations are in danger of becoming the subject of barter of territory or change of sovereignty, the American nations, taking into account the imperative need of continental security and the desires of the inhabitants of the said islands or regions, may set up a regime of provisional administration."

† See "Skypaths Through Latin America," National Geographic Magazine, January, 1931, and "Southward Ho! in the *Alice*," March, 1938.

Photograph by F. S. Lincoln

Visitors See Why Saba Is Nicknamed "Napoleon's Cocked Hat"

The steep volcanic cone, with its hatlike high crown and cloud plume, seems to offer no landing place. Not until a ship is near shore can a small, half-sheltered cove be seen. Saba was occupied by the Dutch early in the 17th century, but most of its 1,600 inhabitants today speak English.

The Lady on Horseback in Saba Is the Schoolteacher

Because this instructor has a long ride to class every day, one of the few horses on the island has been assigned to her. Saba has both government and parochial schools. Classes are conducted in English, but the Dutch language is also taught. In the background rise the houses and a church of Windward Side (Plate VI).

Fort Bay Landing is at the mouth of the mile-long Gap that winds down from Bottom. Geologists attribute this gap to the overflow passage of lava from the crater 1,500 feet above.

Man has selected this passageway as the line of least resistance and built for his convenience a trail which has remained the main artery of commerce. Every foot of lumber, every pound of nails, every sack of plaster and cement, every piece of furniture, every ounce of medicine, every pound of food, every yard of cloth that built and sustained Saba has been carried up this Gap to the settlements on the heights above either on a Saban's head or a donkey's back.

Donkey an Innovation

Until fifteen years ago there were no donkeys. When the first ones were brought to Saba, the porters who made their living carrying supplies were almost in the frame of mind to start a revolution as they visualized the donkeys eventually depriving them of their livelihood. Now the donkey carries many of the loads. The owners draw the pay and spend a lot of time and energy packing grass on their own heads to feed their donkeys.

Through the years that have passed, the trail has been improved by the Government from irregular rock steppingstones to well-made steps which decrease the grade as much as possible. One portion in the middle is relatively flat and steps are not needed. The upper end has recently been graded and cemented with a hard, smooth, yet steep surface.

Sabans dream that some day there will be an automobile road, but that time may be years distant and it will take a good car fortified with a special low gear to make the grade.

When a cheerful porter asks you, "Head de bags up de Gap, sir?" you wonder. And you wonder still more after you reach the top almost exhausted, without carrying any load yourself. The fortitude of these men is amazing. One man thinks nothing of "headin' " up a load that requires four men to raise up so that he can get under it (Plate VIII).

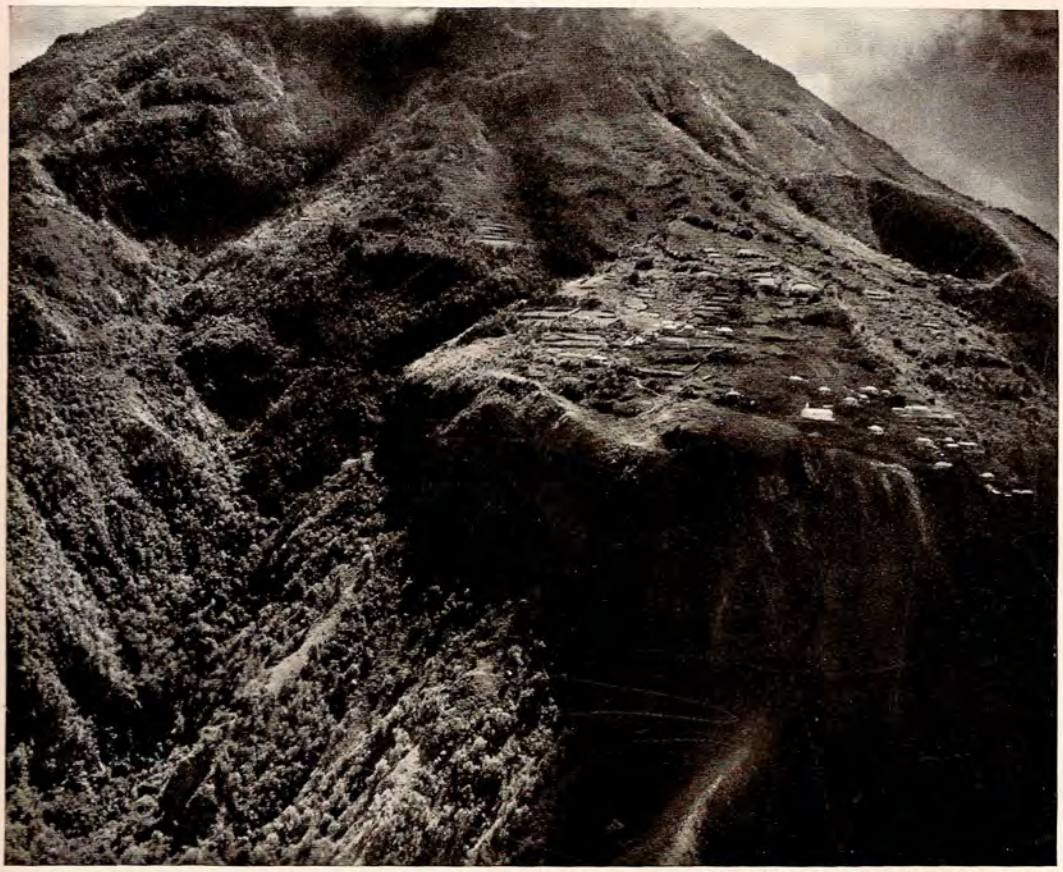
With loads on their heads, the men start up the trail in twos and fours talking as they go, hardly pausing for extra breath until they make the top. Most of them carry a stick to help steady them across the rough places.

A Trim Dutch-style Home Welcomes Visitors to Lofty Bottom

Bunker Hill Cottage, with its scrollwork and picket fence, stands at the entrance to Saba's capital.

Every Landing at Saba Is a Thrilling Adventure

Even on days of comparative calm, such as pictured above at Fort Bay Landing, a dash must be made through the surf between treacherous rocks (page 617). To guide the craft safely, boatmen jump into the water as it nears the shore. Others drag it high and dry as quickly as possible (map, page 621).



Photograph courtesy Pan American Airways, Inc.

Crumpled Saba Takes On a Formidable Appearance in an Aerial Close-up

The rugged little island is the result of comparatively recent volcanic activity. The steep sides of the 2,887-foot cone are ribbed with old lava flows and dotted with craterlike fissures. The settlement clinging to the brow of the cliff (right center) is called Hells Gate.

A porter receives from 25 cents to a dollar for a load he carries on his head up the Gap, depending on its weight and destination. They spent a little time looking over and feeling the weight of my lot and made me a price of $10, compromised on $8, and we were on the way.

The first 200 feet is just about straight up, with switchbacks to make the going easier; then the way flattens out somewhat. On the way we passed an extensive slide which had buried the first settlement on Saba in 1640.

Friendly Bottom, at the Top

Farther on, the precipitous cliffs above silently guarded their secret of how the early Sabans successfully drove off an attacking party of French by rolling rocks and boulders down upon the soldiers as they attempted to advance up the Gap.

Vegetation is scarce in the Gap and rocks of all sizes abound, the trail dodging the larger ones. There's a forbidding silence along the way, which makes you wonder just how friendly Saba is.

This doubt is quickly removed when you reach the rim of the crater. There you see the houses of Bottom, smiling a friendly greeting from an abundance of trees, bushes, and flowers, their freshly painted faces assuring you of the pride and contentment that is Saba.

Sabans mind their own business. There are no curious faces peering at you from windows or front yards. Anyone you pass on the road has a sincere way of welcoming you, and you will be completely amazed at the trimness of the houses and the cleanliness all along. This, of course, is a typical Dutch characteristic.

There is something about the houses in Saba that makes them stand apart. They are different, as Saba is different. I have never seen such religious application of paint. The

A Bulletin Board Serves as the Island's Newspaper

In law-abiding Saba one of the duties of a policeman is to keep this glass-enclosed case for notices up-to-date. Government orders and money exchange rates are the chief items posted. Although there are no banks in Saba, the daily rate of the dollar, pound, franc, guilder, and mark are conscientiously written on a slate. As in other West Indian islands, residents get news of the outside world by short-wave radio.

inside is homelike, too, spick-and-span with varnished floors always waxed. I saw modern furniture, curtains and covers fashioned by the women of Saba, as well as cherished knickknacks.

In one home, which houses two attractive marriageable girls, there is a complete smoking-stand set with briarwood pipe, ash tray, match box and tobacco container, waiting hopefully in a prominent place in the living room. Radios and automatic iceboxes are scarce in Saba. There are two pianos—packed up by twelve strong men—and numerous phonographs. The Governor's house has the only electric plant.

Our first call in Saba was on the local Governor. His house, a spacious colonial type, had all the appointments of a city home. He received us with a warm handshake and a gracious welcome in perfect English.

After refreshments we were sent to the Guest House (page 614). My room had a four-poster large enough to sleep three people. There was a living room with many chairs, a bath with running water, a dining room, kitchen with kerosene refrigerator, and Alberta the cook, thrown in for good measure.

Errol Hassell, recently returned to Saba from a fifteen years' stay in the United States, was appointed by the Governor to guide us around the island and help us with arrangements for taking pictures.

First, Errol took us on the rounds to see Bottom, make contacts, and select locations. Our most difficult task was to keep moving and turn down the many friendly invitations to come in and visit awhile. Everyone we met was eager to talk to someone from "the outside." When they learned we were from the States, their interest increased. Almost without exception they proudly told us of their stay in the States or of relatives there.

A One-Policeman Capital

As a necessary official formality, we called on the Brigadier, who holds eight official posts of duty—chief of police, fire marshal, harbor master, justice of the peace, and bailiff are those I remember. He gave us many valuable suggestions.

Bottom is the seat of government. The streets are barely wide enough for two loads to pass, and are paved with flat Saba rocks, cemented in place and lined with neat rock

Saba Knows No "Blackout," Except on Moonlit Nights!

Ornamental iron lamp posts, brought to the island years ago, have never been wired for electricity. On moonless nights the island lamp tender puts a modern gasoline lantern in them at sunset. When there is a moon the lamps are not lighted (text below).

walls. Three churches—one mission, one Roman Catholic, one Anglican—serve the community (Plate VI).

The police station stands in the middle. There's one man on duty all day until 10 o'clock at night. His most exacting duty is to strike the hour and half hour on the bell which serves as a timepiece as well as an alarm in case of fire or emergency. The police department keeps busy without being troubled to make arrests. Crime is almost unknown in Saba. Each night (except when moonlight) the officer in charge carefully prepares fourteen gasoline lanterns for street lighting.

A Veteran Lamplighter

Old "Uncle," a faithful darky, carries these lanterns out four at a time, places them in old-fashioned stands before 6 p. m., takes them down three hours later. Rarely does one have reason to be out after nine; most folks are already tucked in their snug beds before the lights go out.

A Government-sustained doctor makes headquarters at Bottom, where there is a hospital. He is subject to calls anywhere in the island, rides a horse at a trot, and has a fleet-footed boy carry his grip at an even pace with the horse. Birthdays, deaths, weddings, struggles, and tragedies come to Sabans as to those of us anywhere. Down one street we met two servant girls, each carrying a tray decorated with brilliant flowers, sweets, and packages. They turned into a yard, up a flower-lined walk to a friendly porch where they were met by the lady of the house, smiling in genuine birthday radiance.

These servants performed their errand of happy greeting in a proud, serious manner, conveying the respects of their mistresses to their friend.

Next turn of the road brought us face to face with a sad group. A tall, lanky man carried a limp bundle. His drawn face told of the tragedy that had struck down his last-born. Behind came the mother, hiding her grief with a close-drawn shawl. Death had claimed a young victim too frail to put up the winning fight that has been Saba's heritage.

Up the street, full-cheeked children were playing with a homemade wagon, unmindful of life's struggles.

A man passed by with a gun on his shoulder, triumphantly bringing in a hawk that had been raiding his chickens.

Two neatly dressed elderly ladies stood by a gate talking. They willingly posed for me.

Next came the Brigadier riding one of the six horses in Saba.

In the afternoon we got under way and had cameras set up after lunch shooting some road-building scenes. Errol was in charge of the work and took pride in his accomplishment to date of laying down the first section of the concrete road to connect Bottom with Fort Bay Landing. His crew, recruited mostly from farmers of the Windward Side who needed an opportunity for a cash job, certainly could be rated as the world's most willing construction gang.

Their Day Begins at 3 A. M.

These iron-muscled men rose at 3 a. m., climbed up the mountain to their garden patches, worked them, gathered grass for their livestock, came back to their homes for breakfast and chores, swung lunch pails over their shoulders, and then spent an hour and a half over an up-and-down mountain trail to get on the job.

Their work is pick and shovel plus for eight hard hours. No modern road-building machinery aids them, and the end of the day leads to a long, hard trail home where the chores of the early morning are repeated.

Four years will be needed to complete the task. That is the way Saba has been built.

To get a comprehensive view of Bottom, we climbed up to the "Shoe" by a winding trail. Here, over 500 feet above, we looked down on the capital, at the bottom of an extinct volcanic crater. The walls of the crater outlined a nearly perfect circle around the town. Two definite breaks were visible in these walls—one the gateway toward Fort Bay Landing; the other, leading to the Ladder Bay Landing, infrequently used, although a shorter but steeper way to the sea.

The road, light-colored, ribbonlike, twisting to Fort Bay, well traces the course of hot molten lava which once flowed to the sea.

From this high perch the whole of Bottom was visible. Distance dwarfed the buildings until the whole set looked like a miniature.

On the heights to the right of this lookout point, clusters of houses make up the outline of St. John village. Some houses barely retain a foothold on the steep cliffs that break away 1,500 feet almost straight down to the sea.

Down in Bottom again, we were invited to an ice cream feast. Ice made in St. Kitts, brought 38 miles by the regular steamer to Fort Bay Landing, then headed up the gap to Bottom, cost $3.25 a hundred laid down on the freezing scene. Saba has a few milk cows, so canned milk and canned peaches made up the mix—truly a novel luxury.

There are no wheeled vehicles on Saba. Almost everyone walks. Anywhere you want to go you must climb up or down.

The trails are hard, age-worn, steep, and ragged. Sabans go up and down them like mountain goats, usually carrying some load on their heads for balance. I was almost ready to give up the job after the first day, but with a little perseverance I soon became acclimated and turned out to be a pretty good mountain goat myself. Fortunately a donkey was pressed into service to carry my 150 pounds of camera equipment.

Next day was steamer day. Everyone knew it and everyone had been looking forward to it for two weeks. There was excitement like the night before Christmas, with farewell gatherings in many houses. Letter writing was at its semimonthly high. Last-minute mail-order blanks were being filled out fervently, some for a new pair of shoes or a hat, some for a piece of furniture, others for a long-sought knickknack.

Dawn brought pressure on the trails from all corners of the island as a hundred souls made their way toward Bottom and Fort Bay Landing. Soon there was a crowd around and inside the post office. Donkeys already packed to capacity with mail sacks waited impatiently; others were held in readiness for a late post.

Eager eyes kept turning toward Signal Hill on the ridge high above Bottom. Here an old watchman keeps his weather eye peeled for approaching craft. Despite his age he rarely makes a miss. Few boats come each year besides the regular steamers. As soon as a boat is spotted, he runs flags up the signal mast to designate the kind of craft and the direction from which it comes. The signal to announce the approach of the regular steamer is put up in time to allow all hands to reach the landing before she drops anchor.

Landing Through the Surf

When the regular steamer is in, the landing through the surf is repeated over and over by several surfboats till all passengers, baggage, and cargo are shuttled to or from the steamer. Each steamer brings mail, supplies, and a few passengers, mostly Sabans going to or coming from neighboring islands.

A look at the landing place from the heights above gives you an impression of a busy port, but most of the people who crowd the narrow strip along the shore have either come to welcome a returned relative or else to bid godspeed to a departing one.

Water, For Man or Beast, Must Always be Rationed

Saba, like Bermuda, has no streams; hence drinking water must be caught on roofs and stored in cisterns. Lack of forage also restricts raising of livestock.

 Kodachromes by Charles W. Herbert

Sturdy as His Rocky Home Is This Weather-beaten Saba Boatman

Heading the graceful curve of the Leeward Islands, only 100 miles east of the U. S. Virgins, Saba rises from the Caribbean to an altitude of 2,887 feet. Because of its peculiar cone shape and cloud plumes, the tiny island is sometimes known as "Napoleon's Cocked Hat."

A Moment's Rest, Then Over the Cliffs She Goes!

Despite a lack of beaches or sheltered coves for shipyards, Sabans are master small-boat builders. The craft are put together far above the sea and guided by steady hands down steep paths.

 Kodachromes by Charles W. Herbert

Strong Arms Make Light Work of the Long Haul Upgrade

When a Saba boatman leaves the island for any considerable time, his neighbors help him drag his rowboat from the sea to his back yard for safekeeping until his return.

 Kodachrome by Charles W. Herbert

"The Sea Was Two Miles Away, and 1,500 Feet Down!"

A stout line, snubbed to an anchoring post (Plate VIII, lower), eases the boat bow foremost down the steepest embankments on its way to the water. The barren, volcanic nature of most of the island is clearly revealed in this photograph. Only at Windward Side (Plate IV) is there moisture enough to support much vegetation. Even in the dry season, cool, damp nights bring heavy dews.

Kodachrome by Charles W. Herbert

On the Moist Green Slopes of Windward Side Early Colonists Raised Sugar Cane

A well near the foot of this surf-lashed cove was once the only source of drinking water for people living on this face of Saba. Many a man today remembers the tedious daily trips he made back and forth carrying water on his head for his family. Cement cisterns now store rain water.

Kodachrome by Charles W. Herbert

Fine Drawn Work, Made and Marketed by Saban Women, Is a Source of Island Income

Each girl must create her own "mail order business" by sending her sewing on speculation to women's clubs and other organizations in the outside world. Some pieces are lost, and some are refused or stolen, yet many find ready buyers. Practically every girl over sixteen in Saba helps to support herself and her family in this way.

 Kodachrome by Charles W. Herbert

Dressed in Their Best, Sabans Head for St. Paul's Church

When there is a funeral, nearly everyone on the island attends. Women predominate because they outnumber men on the island nearly two to one. Most of the males early in life get seafaring jobs or work in oil refineries of Aruba or Curaçao. At the right is one of the little rock-bordered fields in which food crops are raised at Windward Side. The walls are built of stones cleared from the thin layer of rich red soil.

Donkey, Horse, and Man Power Are Saba's Means of Transport

Everything from pianos to flour, lumber, baggage, stoves, and matches are brought up the steep cliffs by animals or men in this wheelless Eden.

 Kodachromes by Charles W. Herbert

Social Amenities Are Graciously Preserved in Tiny Saba

On her way to extend birthday greetings to a friend, this kindly lady pauses to bid good morning to one of the Dutch Government agricultural agents. In her hand she carries a bouquet of bougainvillea.

In Saba You Must Climb 900 Feet to Reach Bottom!

The principal settlement, called Bottom, rests in the crater of an extinct volcano. "Headin' a load up de gap from de landin'," hardy island folk seldom pause to rest.

 Kodachromes by Charles W. Herbert

Rock and "Elbow Grease" Drive the Heavy Stake Home

When tools are lacking, men of Saba make the most of the simple materials they find at hand. The stake will secure the line used to lower boats down the cliffs to the sea (Plates II and III).

There are only a few families on Saba—the Hassells, Simmonses, Johnsons, etc. Rare is the passenger who doesn't rate 50 or more relatives to see him or her on or off the island. Few traveling salesmen come to Saba. Occasionally a missionary arrives to change posts, a roving Dutch judge to hold a quarter-annual court, and once or twice a year a man brings a portable motion-picture projector with numerous programs. Each winter sees several pleasure yachts stop by long enough for the owner to see Saba, and every year one or more writers and photographers include Saba in a swing around the West Indies.

In peace times the regular steamer S. S. *Baralt* leaves its home port, Curaçao, fortnightly, sails to Aruba, and straight across the Caribbean 600 miles to St. Martin, then to Saba and St. Eustatius, terminating its run at St. Kitts. It doubles back to St. Eustatius, Saba, St. Martin, Bonaire, and Curaçao. This schedule allows a layover in Saba of two and a half days. You can see Saba in this time, as its total area is only five square miles, but you can't know Saba in that brief stay.

It was almost sundown when the *Baralt* blew its departure whistle.

After the last surfboat pulled out with its load of passengers, the stay-at-homes made their way up the tortuous trail toward Bottom. From the first level they saw the *Baralt* disappear behind the point. Boatmen pulled their boats high and dry to security, headed a load of cargo, and made their weary way up the Gap. Through the island Sabans filtered into their homes.

Over on Windward Side

Soon we were besieged with invitations to come over to Windward Side. Everyone assured us that it was more beautiful, more healthful, and more friendly. The pressure became so great that we had to yield and postpone further operations in Bottom (Plate IV).

One morning before sunup we were on the way. Four donkeys were loaded with our baggage, equipment, and provisions that Alberta had gathered up. Alberta assured us that she could do much better when we got to Windward Side, as the stores there carried many more different foods for her to choose from. On the way she told us that she had always wanted to travel. She assured us that we would not make a mistake if we took her along as cook when we left Saba for other islands.

It took us a good half hour to climb to the first ridge. Frank, the donkey boy, pushed along with "Charlie" in the lead, the other donkeys following readily. Down a steep incline, along a level ledge, then up a long, steep grade we went before the outskirts of Windward Side came into view.

There was still a half mile to go, but as soon as we got to the first house it was really different. The road ducked under a bower of tropical vegetation and there were healthy-looking bunches of bananas almost in reach as we passed along. There were more houses. Some were closer together in places, while others stood apart inside neat picket-fenced enclosures and a few rock walls.

When we walked along the streets in Bottom, we met nearly as many negroes as whites. On the streets of Windward Side we hardly saw a negro.

The house that Errol had arranged for us to live in was in the center of activity, directly in front of one of the best stores. As soon as our baggage was unloaded, Alberta went on a buying spree, emerging with a gleeful display of her finds—fresh carrots, beets, pigeon peas, cassavas, and bananas, backed up with a can of imported fish roe and a package of prepared custard pudding. Like all commodities, foodstuffs are high in Saba.

There was a gathering of village folk in front of the Central Store. Down at the corner there was another general store and across from it the Bulletin Board (page 602).

Here we filmed the local police officer as he chalked up the latest money exchange for guilders, francs, dollars, pounds, and marks. We couldn't reason why, but this was a task that he did punctually each day with figures received from headquarters at Bottom.

All Sabans speak English and nearly all business in Saba is transacted with United States money, but the Government pays off its employees with guilders, which the natives refer to as "Dutch money."

Arranging a Sewing Bee

We met Maisie Hassell at her store at the turn of the street. She was a leading light of the community, always busy about housework, running the store for her fiancé (one of the few marriageable bachelors in Saba), supervising Girl Guide activities, going to church, being the official welcomer to strangers, and doing fancy drawn work when she had time for a stitch. We needed her help, which she readily gave, in arranging for a sewing bee and tea for us to film.

Windward Side is high and cool, conducive to sound sleep. Early next morning I was awakened by a blast of "Roundup Time in Texas" coming from a house on the side street. We went over and found that it was the school-

Hospitable Saba Provides a Guest House for Visitors

Because the islanders have few callers, Saba has no hotels or boarding houses. The Government equipped this furnished dwelling for traveling officials, writers, photographers, and yachtsmen, who make up most of those who come to Saba from the outside world. Guests pay only for their laundry, food, and for the hire of a cook, the latter being 50 cents per person per day.

teacher playing the phonograph. She rode horseback daily to teach all grades to thirty children in a one-room schoolhouse (page 599).

By 9 a. m. Maisie had assembled twenty girls with their fancy drawn work. They would have looked in place in the average American city. Some of them had applied lipstick and rouge with a masterful touch. Their dresses, trim cotton prints, were either last-boat mail-order-house buys, or copies which they had made from pictures in American fashion magazines. The peasant scarf was much in evidence—and becoming, too.

Saba women, unlike the men, stay indoors. Their complexions are clear and healthy-looking, though lacking the outdoor coloring. But they fooled us when we went on a traditional Saba picnic later on.

From childhood, girls learn drawn work. When they are 16 they can work intricate patterns. From then on they devote a large part of each day to hemstitching collar and cuff sets and dresser combinations. Each girl must create her own market for her work (Plate V).

Very few pieces can be sold on the island, as potential buyers are few and far between. The girls must look outside of Saba. They make contacts through the mails by writing to women's clubs and organizations and by getting names from Sabans living outside. Most of their pieces are sent through the mail on speculation.

Once a girl gets a customer, her list of possibilities fast expands into a chain from names given her by the last customer. Practically every girl in Saba helps support herself in this way and some even take care of their families with this outside money.

Often they find men customers. Romance through the mail is common. While there have been offers of marriage from the mainland, Saba girls usually are too proud to venture away from the rock. They hold on steadfastly, waiting for someone who will come for them.

Saba has always had a surplus of women. Today there is scarcely a chance for even the most attractive ones, especially with most of the young men of Saba going away and no men coming in from the outside.

Many, many years ago, the iron men of Saba recognized the hopelessness of being able to provide modern comforts and opportunities

for their families from the receipts of their toil on the island. They went forth and became seamen on sailing vessels, particularly the Yankee clipper ships.

Today many are captains and mates on American vessels and others hold down harbor-master posts. Most of the houses on Saba have been built and families supported by the monthly checks sent back home by these seamen.

The advent of steam, tightening of maritime regulations, labor laws, and unions have closed the door of seafaring to Saba men today. Yet the men are still going away, now for cash jobs in the oil refineries of Curaçao and Aruba, and leaving the women home as before. Thus Saba is still predominantly a women's land.

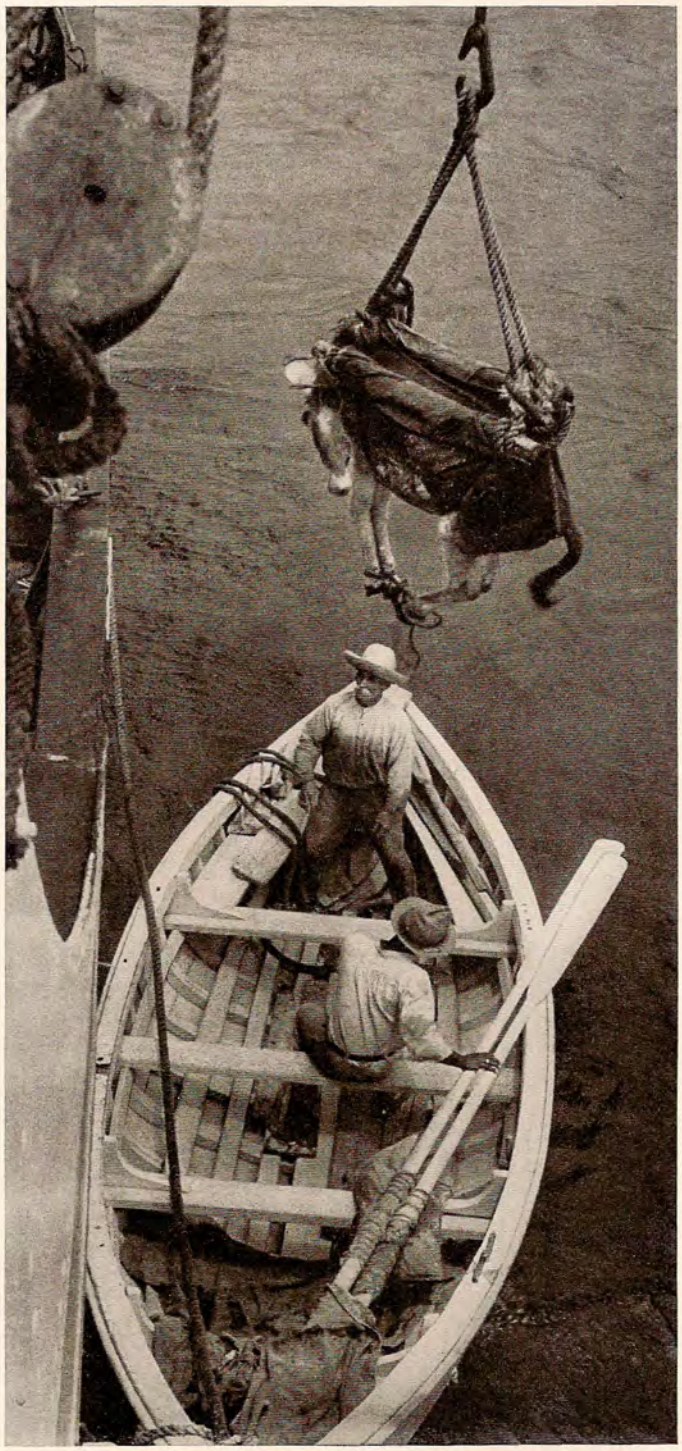
Saba women are born to accept life as it is. They can always draw a thread and make a stitch. Their bloom may fade but not their courage. They share this characteristic quality with the men.

"Heading Up" Windward Side Heights

To the east and west of Windward Side there are hills that slope up to lofty heights above. Man-made rock-walled plots dot the hillsides with irregular patterns. The trail up is tortuous, dodging enormous boulders here and there. A donkey can't make the grade with a heavy load.

We engaged three men to head up the equipment. At seven there was a heavy traffic. Men, old and young, augmented by boys, led up cows, donkeys (without loads), and sheep.

All livestock is taken up to the farms in the morning and staked out to graze while the men and boys work the garden patches and gather firewood and grass. At night the animals are brought back to the homes in the village. The men, boys, and donkeys always bring back enormous loads.



A Burro Goes Ashore by the Aerial Route

With a special humane sling the patient animal is lowered into a waiting rowboat. Only in recent years have donkeys been used as burden bearers on Saba. When the first ones were imported there were vigorous protests from men who depended upon carrying freight up to the villages for their cash income.

A Favorite Island Picnic Spot Is the Shingly Beach at Spring Bay

With rocks and camera boxes for seats, a hiking party makes a day of it to the beat of booming surf. The cook (right) welcomes an opportunity to go along and show her skill over an outdoor fireplace. Going home will be a long hot climb back up the mountain (Plate IV and page 618).

This "Pocket Handkerchief" Beach at Fort Bay Landing Is the Main Portal to Saba

With the departure of the semimonthly steamer, and valuable cargo neatly stacked, the boatmen help each other drag their craft out of reach of the waves. Packages and bundles not taken up by the regular porters are carried by the boatmen. No one climbs back home empty-handed when there is a chance to make another quarter or half dollar, depending upon the size of the load.

Second-growth Cabbage Looks Like a Freak Plant

In her backyard garden patch on the mountainside a Saban woman has a convenient source of vegetables. Saba's tropical climate, tempered by cool breezes and clouds on the upper slopes, gives it a year-round growing season. The "leggy" appearance of the cabbage results when the plants are not frozen back or the heads pulled up by the roots.

Each farm is outlined by a rock wall. Inside are a few acres of tilled soil where ragged rows of potatoes, beets, carrots, and cabbages twist around defiant rocks. Behind each farm lie the toil and sweat of several generations. Here and there unkept farms attest to the decreasing trend in Saba's farm population.*

Men of Saba with bared forearms grasp short hand-cultivating tools, bend in body-breaking toil to nurse along their precious crops. Rain is scarce in the dry season, but cool, damp nights bring heavy dews, keeping the plants alive.

There are no running streams or springs on the heights of Saba. Thirty years ago fresh water was packed up on heads from Spring Bay 2,000 feet below the village at Windward Side. Today every home of consequence has a large underground cement cistern, fed with rain water from the roof of the house during the rainy season.

For the next day there was arranged for us a picnic in Saba style. When the sun came over the mountain, we were set up in front of Maisie's house to film the start. Two donkeys were just leaving with cans of fresh water and heavy provisions. In the house six girls ran around gathering up baskets, bathing suits, and bundles, and putting on hats.

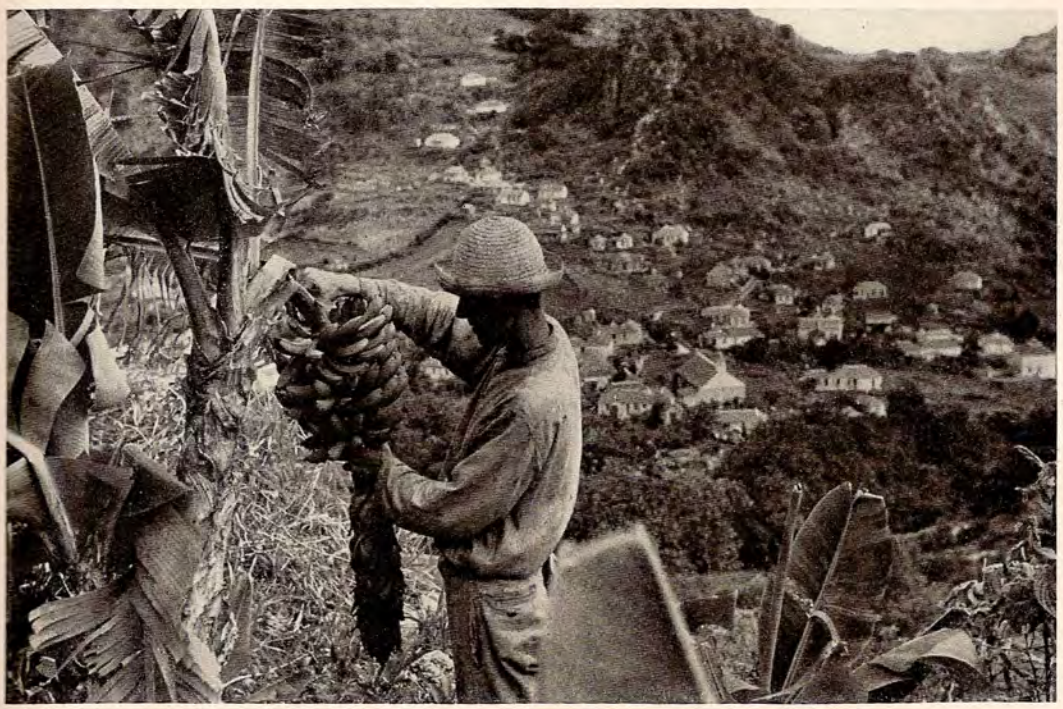
* See "Hunting Useful Plants in the Caribbean," by David Fairchild, in the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE, December, 1934.

Home Girls Stalwart Hikers

The camera outfit was stripped down to bare working necessities so that men could "head" it for us. No sooner did we leave the village than we took off for sure—not up, but down, down to Spring Bay (page 616). The trail was truly a hardship.

The knowledge that we must retrace our steps was enough to discourage even the strongest heart. It was almost unbelievable, after seeing these girls sitting at home sewing, to watch them negotiate this trail. Along the same path 30 years ago, men and boys had packed water from this only usable fresh-water supply at Spring Bay. If they could do it then for life necessities, Saba girls could do it today for the movies.

We stopped several times for a picture and all of us were glad for the rest. The farther down we went the hotter it got, reminding us of the delightful cool breezes up at Wind-



Bananas Are 25 Cents a Bunch on Windward Side

On the cool semitropic heights of Saba, potatoes, beets, pumpkins, onions, and cabbages also flourish. Along with cassava root, from which bread is made, and imported dried fish, these vegetables are the staple diet.

ward Side. Certainly the invigorating climate atop the rock was one of the deciding influences which led early Sabans to build on the heights instead of nearer the coast as in the other West Indian islands.

When we reached sea level there were no sandy beaches or waving palms—only a quarter-mile crescent-shaped area studded with black rocks varying in size from bowling balls to tank cars. The sun was beating down with burning force intensified by the glare from snow-white foam in the churning sea.

Behind a boulder, in its thin strip of midday shadow, Alberta had set up her camp and quickly signaled that the stew, a sort of chicken gumbo, was ready. The girls busied themselves unpacking baskets and spreading out sandwiches, pickles, cheese, pies, cakes, beer, and soft drinks.

When young people go on a picnic to Spring Bay they always take along their bathing suits. There's really no suitable place for comfortable bathing, but it is a novelty and relieves the everyday monotony. To keep a footing on the rocks was a task, but to hold their own against the waves required nerve and determination. These girls took their parts in a do or die determination to show the world that Saba has bathing girls, too.

The way up was hard; it took twice as long as the way down. We were tired out when we reached the village.

Anyone who has heard of Saba remembers tales of early Sabans. Most widely broadcast is that fantastic story of shipbuilding. Almost without exception, when Saba is mentioned, they will say, "Oh, yes! That is the place where they build schooners on top of the mountain and lower them over the cliff by ropes, down into the sea."

The catch is that Saba has no native lumber suitable for building schooners and, if the material were imported to Saba, it is hard to believe that men would struggle to carry the massive timbers 1,500 feet up to the top, to be faced with the colossal task of getting the completed schooner down to salt water. Launching a boat at the base of one of the cliffs would be impossible. If schooners were ever built in Saba, they were built on one of the narrow strips of shore close to the sea.

We did learn, however, that small 15- to 20-foot surfboats are built up in the settlements and that they are carried down to the sea by manpower. Fortunately one had just been completed at Windward Side. We arranged to film the launching.

The boat was built by a Johnson. He was

In a Crude Press, Juice Is Squeezed from Sugar Cane

Although less adapted to the cultivation of sugar than Puerto Rico, the Virgins, Barbados, or Martinique, Saba yields a usable crop of cane. Some of it is peeled and eaten like stick candy by children. Leaves and tops are fed to the stock. Here the sweet juice is being extracted for drinking.

just painting "Blue Bell" on her stern as we started shooting. From then on we had action aplenty as 20 strong men gripped the gunwale and headed for the sea two miles away and 1,500 feet down.

From Johnson's yard they clambered over the rock wall into the street and started through the settlement. The news spread, and by the time they reached the center of the village both sides of the way were lined with onlookers.

With a burst of strength, the men carried the boat for a few hundred yards and then took a breather. As they progressed, the crowd enlarged and followed. A half mile out of town they left the road and crossed a field strewn with rocks. Not far away they came to the top of a cliff which dropped down into a deep ravine, a short cut to the sea. Almost the whole village was on the sidelines now.

Four stout hands raised a large flat rock, forming a human pile driver as a heavy anchoring post was set for rigging. A heavy rope was fastened to the stern of the boat and around the post with two hitches.

Easily the little craft slid over the top, down the cliff safely to the bottom 200 feet below (Plates II, III, and VII).

The men scrambled down the hillside, took hold again, and continued to the sea.

By the time she was touching the beach below, the extra hands were down there waiting with shoes off and trousers rolled up to their thighs. With superhuman force they slid the boat into the water, manned the oars, and pulled for the open sea. No champagne was broken to send this craft on its way, but childish joy burst forth from these hardened men as they watched her take the swells.

Our time to leave Saba was drawing near. The *Baralt* came again on the way to St. Kitts, making its fortnightly call at Saba. We completed the sequence at Bottom with a few more street scenes.

Down at the landing we felt like real Sabans as a host of friends gathered around to watch us load our equipment into a surfboat and shove off.

Looking toward the island over the stern of the *Baralt,* I knew that the lure of Saba was not wrapped up in any single spectacular shipbuilding achievement, but in the strange fascination that held those living there apart, yet in complete satisfaction and relative comfort despite the natural handicaps of their extinct volcanic crater home.

America's New Crescent of Defense

Drawn by Ralph E. McAleer

Military Outposts Leased from Britain Put New Teeth in Uncle Sam's Defenses

In trade and as gifts, the United States has acquired the right to develop eight new air and naval bases in Newfoundland, Bermuda, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Antigua, St. Lucia, Trinidad, and British Guiana. Newfoundland dominates the vital northeastern approaches to Canada and the United States. Bermuda lies within a few hours' flying time of important maritime cities of the continent. The new bases in the south will provide defenses for the all-important Panama Canal. Guarding the Caribbean area at present are United States bases at Guantánamo, Borinquen, San Juan, and St. Thomas. The inset shows Saba (page 597), smallest of the strategically located Netherlands West Indies.