



The St. Croix Labyrinth By Nancy Ayer

I am in the process of just completing the only labyrinth in the Virgin Islands. It is a 7 circuit Chartres-style labyrinth made of Eucalyptus and Cedar mulch with lines of sea stones collected from the St. Croix beach. Totally organic! The labrys are laid mosaic-like with tiny sea stones, sea glass and coral.

This labyrinth is nestled among our 18th century sugar plantation ruins. The labyrinth is always open to the public and will be used for special walks such as a Solstice Walks and Earthdance walks.

THE BACKGROUND:

St. Croix is an island about 90 miles east of Puerto Rico and is the eastern most part of the US.



The island is 28 miles long and 7 miles wide with 56,000 residents. The population is about 12% white, 12% of Spanish decent, a small percentage of Palestinians and East Indians. The rest are black from here as well as from the islands further down the leeward chain. Mt Washington has the only labyrinth on the island, and it is my guess, is probably the only labyrinth in the Virgin Islands. St. Thomas is incredibly steep and St. John is mostly national park.

The property where my husband and I live is situated on 14 sloped acres of a Danish sugar plantation built in 1750 and located in the St. Croix rainforest. (St. Croix was owned by the Danes until 1917 when the US bought the 3 Virgin Islands. I might add, we have the names of every owner since 1750, the names of the slaves, their places of birth (many from Africa), their religions, job descriptions, and dispositions!)

25 years ago, we accidently stumbled upon some of the ancient stone walls which were totally overgrown with trees and vines. The stone walls are on two parts of the property - the sugar factory ruins (as partially shown in my photograph) and the Great House higher up on the hill. After clearing the vines and the trees out of the walls, and stabilizing the walls that existed, we restored the Great House for our home. There was no roof, no floor, no doors and only some window openings and some stone walls! Our project and labor of love took us 2 1/2 years.



My first attempt at building a labyrinth on Mt. Washington was too temporary and too labor intensive. As it was to be, it was destroyed by heavy rains. This first location - up on the old carriage drive by the Great House - never truly felt "right" to me and I guess the rain gods knew this! The old stones down in the ruins knew this as well because they often talk to me and through their pain let me know how grateful they are that the old wounds of slavery are being healed by the labyrinth in its

new location - which it chose. In fact, my labyrinth is now located on the exact site where field workers' homes were. And so the sacred meets - once again - the profane as it pours its curative powers deep into the old lesions of Mt. Washington.

The sugar ruins (where labyrinth is located) are always open to the public and consist of a rum factory, a sugar mill, a boiling house, animal stables, and ruins of 17 slave cottages. Surrounding the labyrinth are palm trees, key lime trees, avocado and orange trees, and rosemary and lemon grass plants.

The Construction:



Things grow very quickly here in the Caribbean and my big concern was the weeds. As I did not want a labor-intensive project, (because I live on Orcas Island 6 months of the year) I needed something to help control this growth. I also insisted on having an organic labyrinth. First we dug out the stones, rocks and grass making a 35 ft. diameter circle.

(My dear husband didn't understand why I did not want a poison put on the space to kill the grass.) The remaining dirt was then tamped down by

machine. Then a layer of limestone - made from sedimentary rock, (calcium carbonate) was put down to help with weed control. Next a non-synthetic black weed cloth was nailed down.

On top of this weed cloth we placed 185 bags of eucalyptus and cedar mulch which amounted to over 400 cubic feet! This was then tamped down again. Of course each time we tamped down the mulch, we found we would need more!



We then laid out the 7 circuit lines, including the center petals and the lunations. We used a lime spreader to mark the lines.



In addition, we also used organic white spray paint for the labrys. The real labor for me is in the sea stone collecting! I have been collecting these ancient beauties for about a year now. Now, all the lines have been laid. The center circle has larger stones with each petal ending in one of the heart stones from my collection. The lunations each have a single large stone. I have begun to lay the labrys, mosaic-like, using very small sea stones, sea glass, pieces of 19 century pottery (called shards), small shells and coral. I shall search for just the right round rock or piece of coral to place in the center.

About the Author

An island person, Nancy Ayer lives on land with strong connections to the ancient. She and her husband divide their time between St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands, where they restored an 18th century sugar plantation. On the property of her second home, located on Orcas Island, WA, a 14,000 year old bison skull and bones were discovered. Sensing a strong message, Nancy often writes about her life in two worlds, both literal and metaphorical. Nancy is a Veriditas Certified Labyrinth Facilitator. She enjoys teaching labyrinth workshops to all ages. She also speaks on the connection between the soul, the labyrinth, and ancient mythology.

Nancy can be reached at: stxnancy@gmail.com