

# Brasso Seco, site of famous Cipriani plane crash

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**B**RASSO SECO is famous for the Madamas waterfall cascading off the Northern Range.

These falls are visited by hundreds of local and foreign tourists annually. They are the main tourist attraction in this rural village located some 16 miles from Arima. The area is also a birdwatcher's paradise, the site where one can, with luck, observe the little hermit hummingbirds, now under study by researchers.

Another reason why Brasso Seco lives on in the minds and hearts of many is that it was among the rugged hills that Mikey Cipriani's plane, the *Hummingbird* crashed on June 3, 1934, while he was attempting to fly to Tobago.

Cipriani, a war veteran, had learnt to fly a plane while in the army.

On his return to Trinidad, he ordered his own aircraft from de Havilland and had it shipped home. He and his friend Leslie Bradshaw, while on their way to Tobago, crashed into the mountain and died.

The incident made news headlines because according to the historians it was the first time an aviator had ventured to fly to the sister isle. The tragedy is still remembered by a few villagers from Brasso Seco. Frasisca Estrado, 94, was 16 when the incident occurred.

She and her father,

Cipriani and Bradshaw were taken to Port of Spain for burial at Mucurapo Cemetery.

Recalling the incident, Estrado said, "I was home and all I heard was a swish, as if an electric knife was cutting down the trees, then as loud bang. All of us were curious to know what the noise was all about. It was only after the police came to the village and told us about the tragic event that we understood what had happened."

On the way to one of the falls, the remains of the plane can still be seen. There is a visitors' centre at Brasso Seco where Cipriani's compass, which was retrieved after the accident, is kept in a glass case, along with other items of interest.

The visitors' centre is used as a stop-off point for tourists before they embarked on hikes or research on the mountain. Estrado said her parents once lived at Caura, but she was born at Brasso Seco.

"And, Mister, I born here and I will die here," she said proudly. Her father was one of the first cocoa panyol settlers in the village, after the occupation by the Spaniards who were the ones who named the village Brasso Seco.

Estrado said her father was a pioneer in Brasso Seco. "The whole place was only forest and my father had to cut trees and bushes to build a home for his family," she said.

Recalling the days



from the springs."

"Those days were hard, but we were happy, and we used to run down the year fast, fast, fast, for Christmas to come early." She said, "Christmas was the main holiday in the village, and it was parang morning, noon and night."

**A**part from Estrado, there are two other villagers over 80 years old. Joe Wharton will be 93 in August, and Frederick Francois is 84. Together they know about the development of the village, dating back to the days when planters used to dry cocoa in cocoa houses, and every farmer carried a "pouyont" (cutlass) in a leather case attached to



his waist.

"That was the time when cocoa was king in the village, but now that dead," said Estrado.

Now there are hardly any thriving estates in Brasso Seco, except Avondale Estate, which is owned by the Long family. Katherine Long, an Irish woman from Dublin, and her Trinidad-born husband purchased an abandoned 99-acre estate at Brasso Seco and are in the process of reviving the cocoa plantation.

"We are working hard to fulfil one of our dreams and so far we are having some success," she said. In addition to looking after the estate, she belongs to a cadre of social workers in the village.

On weekends and public holidays she teaches yoga at the visitors' centre, which also serves as a community centre for various activities. The centre provides information to visitors and organises tours to historical sites.

Apart from two guesthouses in the village, which can be rented at a nominal rate, there is a camp in the heart of the forest, close to Petit Tacaribe beach.

Paria Bay Road, on the outskirts of Brasso Seco, is one of Trinidad's most picturesque hiking trails. It passes through eight miles of untouched forests, then onto Paria Bay Beach, which is only accessible by foot

or boat. Most times visitors will have this pristine beach for themselves.

**T**urtle watching is possible during the turtle-laying season between May and August. Years of environmental protection are now coming to an end and quarrying operations are soon to begin. Concerns have been raised by the villagers about the effects quarrying will have on the conditions of the road, the air and the environment in general. "We know the quarry is on private lands, and we could never stop it from opening up, but it is important for us to get our concerns known," said a villager.

A meeting has been arranged with the quarry operator and the villagers about his intention to begin quarrying.

Most of the early residents of Brasso Seco came from Caura, where, in the 1940s, they were asked by the government to leave the village to allow for the construction of a water dam. Some went to Lopinot, others to Luengo and other hillside places where they set themselves up as small farmers growing crops such as chive and vegetables. Brasso Seco was named by the Spaniards because the low lands were dry.

Historians record that it derived its name from the discovery of

**PROUD:**  
Brasso Seco's oldest resident, Frasisca Estrado holds an old coalpot iron.  
—Photos:  
LOUIS HOMER



dry branches in areas that were never cultivated. All of that is a far cry from what the village has achieved over the years. It has many small farms, vegetables growing almost wild, especially christophene and papaw.

In the area of social development the village has a new primary school, a community centre, health centre, two churches and a vibrant community consisting of committed villagers who work alongside the Tourism Development Authority to ensure that Brasso Seco remains a valley of life for generations to come.

**WORKING HARD:**  
Catherine Long, estate owner at Brasso Seco.

