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# JAMAICA JOURNAL

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Photos by John Rashford

# BARRINGTONIA

by John Rashford

*Editor's note: This article was written before the devastation wrought by Hurricane Gilbert. We are unable to verify which of the trees identified below are still standing.*

**A**LL JAMAICANS ARE FAMILIAR WITH the coconut palm (*Cocos nucifera*), one of the most useful trees in the island. And like so many of Jamaica's important plants, the coconut has its duppy counterpart. The duppy coconut (*Barringtonia asiatica*) is not widely known in the island but it is a remarkable tree, perfectly adapted to the tropical shores of the world.

Reaching up to seventy feet in height with a trunk diameter of thirty feet or more, the barringtonia is a huge, spreading, evergreen tree of the Old World tropics with large, glossy, thick, leathery leaves that are very similar in appear-

ance to those of the familiar almond (*Terminalia catappa*). A true strand plant, ideally suited to its coastal environment, the tree is found native or naturalized along the sandy shores of Madagascar, tropical Asia and the Pacific islands. According to Gunn and Dennis in their excellent book *World Guide to Tropical Drift Seeds and Fruits*, barringtonia fruits can remain buoyant for 'at least two years' although they are no longer viable after floating for such a long period of time. Gunn and Dennis conclude that sea currents do not play a very important part in the dispersal of this species 'except locally' and its pantropic distribution today is due largely to



1.

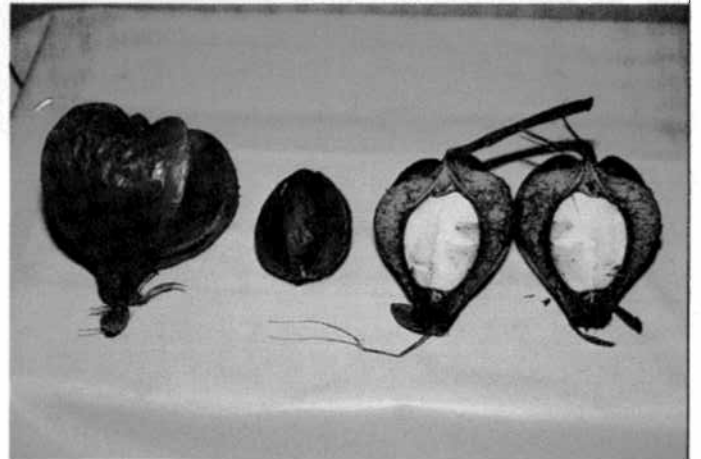
1. *Barringtonia* inflorescence.

2. Fruit on the Bath Garden *barringtonia*.

3. *Barringtonia* fruit with cross section showing interior.



2.



3.

human dispersal from tropical Asia and the Pacific. The name 'Barringtonia' commemorates the eighteenth century British naturalist, the Honourable Daines Barrington, and it is one of the most widely used common names for this tree, as well as the name of the genus and family to which it belongs. The genus *Barringtonia* is comprised of some forty species, mostly trees, many of which are naturally adapted for dispersal by river or sea.

The barringtonia's large, white, fragrant flowers are five to six inches across with a conspicuous central cluster of numerous white, pink-tipped, threadlike stamens three to four inches long and extending beyond the petals. These showy short-lived flowers are seldom seen without special effort for they bloom at night and fall from the tree the following day. From the flowers develop large, buoyant drift fruits that are described as pyramidal, quadrangular or box-like in appearance, having a broad base with four distinct sides that taper to a blunt point at the top. These fruits are approximately three to six inches in length, twelve to fourteen inches in circumference (when measured at the centre), and they weigh about eight ounces when green and four ounces when dry. Within each fruit is a single large, round seed roughly six inches in circumference, weighing some two and half ounces and surrounded by a thick fibrous, corky, waterproof husk very much like that of the coconut.<sup>1</sup> Gunn and Dennis [ibid.] noted that the fruit of the barringtonia was 'among the largest, most durable, and widespread tropical drift (fruit). . .' Like the coconut, the barringtonia is often among the first arboreal

species to reach newly formed tropical islands. Five years after volcanic eruptions had destroyed most of the vegetation of Krakatau in August of 1883, Treub [1888] reported that ten species of tropical fruits had reached the island by sea and among them was the barringtonia.

### Distribution

The barringtonia is a post-Columbian introduction to the tropical and subtropical regions of the Americas. It now grows in the southern parts of California and Florida. Little *et al.* [1964] indicate that in Florida it is often 'killed back by freezing temperatures'. The barringtonia is widespread in the Caribbean but it is not common in any particular location. I have seen it in St Croix and Antigua, and it has been reported for Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Trinidad and Tobago.

In Jamaica, the barringtonia is a rare tree although scattered specimens can be found in most parts of the island. Adams [1972] described it as a 'cultivated tree' in Jamaica, and the location of most trees around the island suggests that they are indeed the result of cultivation. Adams [ibid.] also reports that the barringtonia was 'probably naturalized in (the) coastal parts of the parish of Portland' and my own survey of the Portland coast lends support to this suggestion. However tenuous its grip, the barringtonia is now capable of successfully reproducing and spreading on its own in Jamaica.

In addition to the trees along the Portland coastline, barringtonias can also be seen in the following places: In Kingston, there are two trees on the University campus at Mona; one at the southwest corner of the Craft Market; one in front of the Marescaux Medical Centre on Marescaux Road; one in front of the Anglican Deaconess Residence on Caledonia Avenue (probably the tree Alex Hawkes [1969] was referring to when he wrote in his column in the *Daily Gleaner* that 'there is one in a private garden on Caledonia Avenue'); one on Arnold Road, close to the intersection with Camp Road and one in a garden along Waterloo Road just north of West King's House Road. Andreas Oberli told me in June 1988 that two young trees had been planted at the residence of the American Ambassador by Patricia Hewitt. There is also an herbarium specimen (No. 73700-A) at the Institute of Jamaica indicating that there is a tree on Allerdycce Drive.

In the Bath Botanic Garden in St Thomas there grows the oldest barringtonia on the island which was planted soon after the garden was created in 1779. In St Mary, there are two trees at Castleton Botanic Gardens and one in the Broadgate District along the Junction Road. I have seen three trees in St Ann, all in Ocho Rios: two at Turtle Towers and one at Shaw Park. There are other reports of barringtonias in St Ann. Hawkes [1969] noted that there were 'two big trees on the grounds of White River House, White River, near Ocho Rios' and in his small book illustrating Jamaican plants [1974], there is a photograph of a tree he described as 'a splendid specimen. . . growing in a private garden at Oracabessa'. In St James, I saw a young tree that was already flowering at 6 Doris Avenue in Montego Bay, and Hawkes [1969] also mentions the existence of 'a splendid large specimen at Richmond Hill Hotel (in) Montego Bay'.

I saw five beautiful trees in Hanover, all in the vicinity of the Great River where it intersects with the main coastal road. One was close to the bridge the other four were located just west of the bridge on Tamarind Hill Road. These are easily seen as one drives by. When I first visited the trees on the Tamarind Hill Road, the people I met there told me that there had once been a fourth tree at the roundabout where Tamarind Hill Road intersects the coastal main road but it was deliberately killed when road workers were 'fixing the road'.



Portland coast with young barringtonia.



Barringtonia and coconut seedlings growing in close proximity.

The barringtonia is also found in St Elizabeth as Hawkes indicated in his *Gleaner* column of August, 1970. He mentions his tours with his 'honoured botanical guest, Dr D. G. Huttleston of Longwood Gardens, Kennel Square, Pennsylvania, USA', including a trip to Black River and a meeting with the horticultural society of the parish. Hawkes wrote:

And when Mrs. Mary Walters, second vice-president of the St. Elizabeth Horticultural Society kindly brought along leaves and fruits of the Bishop's Mitre Tree, *Barringtonia speciosa*, from the towering example of this species growing on the grounds of the Black River Court House, for discussion at our well attended meeting, I felt that my day was distinctly made! I have discussed barringtonia before on several occasions in these pages, and Mrs. Walters was a bit unhappy that I had not noted the Black River tree amongst the prime examples of the species to be seen in Jamaica.

The herbarium specimen No. 26383 in the Natural History Division of the Institute of Jamaica which was collected by Mrs Iris Sangster in 1957 was probably taken from this tree on the grounds of the Black River Court House. The barringtonia is definitely a rare tree in Jamaica, but no doubt there are other examples of this species in Kingston and elsewhere around the island.

When I first learned that familiar coastal plants such as the coconut, sea grape, sea bean and almond produce seeds or fruits (containing seeds) that are dispersed by the sea, I wondered how these fruits or seeds were able to get from the water to the land beyond the shores. It was not until later that I understood how this was made possible by the actions of animals, including ourselves, and by rough seas, swells, storm waves or tidal waves.

My chance to observe this process came quite unexpectedly when after Hurricane Allen in 1980 I found large numbers of barringtonia seeds beached along the Portland coast. When I came back the next year, I found that many of them had germinated and by the following year, there was a thick stand of young seedlings. I decided to observe them carefully from that year on and this paper is in part the result of that effort.

The trees now naturally dispersed on the Portland coastline are probably the offspring of the two hundred-year-old tree at the Bath Botanic Garden, about forty-two miles from



*The Bath Botanical Garden barringtonia, over 200 years old.*

Kingston. The garden is approximately seventy feet above sea level. It was Hinton East's famed private garden in Gordon Town – one of the most impressive gardens of its time – which inspired Sir Basil Keith, then Governor of Jamaica, to introduce legislation in 1774, with the support of the Assembly, to create the Bath Botanic Garden, the second garden of importance to be established in Jamaica, and the first government garden of its kind. Dr Thomas Clarke, an English 'Practitioner in Physic and Surgery', was appointed Superintendent of the garden in the same year. Bath was not actually begun until 1779, fifteen years after the first botanic garden of the West Indies was created in St Vincent in 1764. While not the first, Bath is today the oldest botanic garden in the West Indies judged from the point of view of gardens that have been continuously maintained.

Because of flooding and the alienation of land for housing and farming, Bath Botanic Garden today is little more than a half acre in size, only a remnant of what it once was. It would seem reasonable to assume that the magnificent trees in what remains have been preserved over the years because the garden has been protected; but in fact, it is the garden that has been preserved because of its unique trees. In 1882, the Director of Public Gardens and Plantations, D. Morris, noted: 'This old Botanic Garden of the Colony has been fenced and kept clean for the sake of its valuable trees and palms.' A similar perspective was offered in 1888 in the annual report of William Fawcett, Morris's successor. He felt that 'although the garden was only a small portion of its original size, it contained some valuable trees and shrubs, which it would be a pity to lose'. Among the 'valuable trees' growing in the Bath Botanic Garden today is the magnificent barringtonia which Eyre [1966:23], described as 'the finest tree in the garden. . .'. This is, without a doubt, the oldest and most spectacular barringtonia in Jamaica and its enormous size dominates almost a third of the garden. In 1964, Aimee Webster reported that 'the circumference of the trunk was about thirty feet'. In June, 1988, I measured the tree at six feet from the ground and it was thirty-four feet six inches in circumference. I would estimate its height to be seventy feet or more.

There are probably many occasions on which the fruits of this tree might be washed or dumped in areas where they would end up in the Plantain Garden River to be carried down to the sea and dispersed along the eastern and northeastern coast. We know that the garden has been repeatedly flooded over the years; this was one of the reasons for abandoning

Bath and creating Castleton Botanic Garden in its stead.

The barringtonia at Bath flowers continuously, producing large quantities of fruit which germinate readily in the extensive area of ground cover beneath the tree as well as in borders, hedges and ornamental beds. This makes it one of the worst weeds in the garden and it must have been so for well over a century. In the late nineteenth century when the barringtonia would have been close to a hundred years old, D. Morris [1886], described it as 'a large handsome leaved tree from the Moluccas, now nearly fifty feet high and producing abundant fruit'. What is truly remarkable about the barringtonia is that throughout the year it 'produces abundant fruit' from which spring very vigorous seedlings.

Magnus Reid is the gardener in charge of maintaining the garden and he does a superb job. When I visited the garden on 8 June 1988, his son, who helps in the garden, was busy uprooting barringtonia seedlings and disposing of them in the dump heap which was itself already full of barringtonia seedlings. The same was true of the dump heaps associated with the Shaw Park tree and the Broadgate tree.

In addition to the possibility that the barringtonias along the Portland coast were naturally dispersed from Bath, we must also remember that barringtonia fruit and seedlings were probably deliberately dispersed from the garden as well. We know that during the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, Bath provided a wide variety of useful economic and ornamental plants to small farmers, estates and other gardens. This was especially true in 1862 when the remoteness of Bath from Kingston, its frequent flooding and the difficulty of transporting people and plants to and from the garden, led to the creation of Castleton Botanic Gardens, Jamaica's third public garden.

It is clear that a barringtonia was planted at Castleton at the time the garden was created, for J. H. Hart, the then Director of Public Gardens and Plantations, wrote in his annual report of 1886 that the tree at Castleton had flowered for the first time. Hart described Bath as 'useful to a small extent only in the way of providing seeds of trees which have become established of kinds not sufficiently advanced at the other Establishments to bear fruit'. This was certainly true of the barringtonia at Castleton.

The annual reports of the different Directors of Public Gardens and Plantations indicate that they intended to distribute economic plants such as Liberian coffee, cacao, nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon, vanilla, camphor, mangosteen, oil palm, sugar palm and rattan cane, but the barringtonia, which is of no real economic importance, could still have been one of those distributed. At least one report substantiates the fact that the barringtonia was dispersed from Bath: William Fawcett's annual director's report for 1900.

Between 1860 and 1890, as the result of a deliberate effort, Bath was an important centre for the dispersal of plants. In his annual report for 1881, Morris [1882] pointed out that 'an effort (had) . . . been made to establish nurseries and to propagate plants for distribution in the district'. This was important, for at that time, Morris viewed the Bath area as 'one of the most promising in the Island for new products.'

I visited Castleton in August of 1988 to see if I could find the tree which Hart had reported as flowering for the first time in 1886. If the tree at Castleton had been grown from a seedling taken from Bath between 1860 and 1870



*Barringtonia shoot growing from the stump of a century-old tree at Castleton Gardens.*

when Castleton was created, then it would have been sixteen to twenty-six years old in 1886 and one hundred and eighteen to one hundred and twenty-eight years old today. At Castleton I spoke to Zedekie Pecco who had worked there as a gardener over the past eighteen years. He said there was only one barringtonia tree in the garden which I immediately assumed to be the very tree I was looking for.

I was surprised when I saw the tree for it could not have been more than about forty to forty-five feet in height and was only four feet in circumference measured at one foot from the ground. This was a young tree relative to what I expected to find, although it was already flowering and fruiting. After I had finished measuring and photographing this tree, I went back to Zedekie Pecco to ask if he had ever seen another barringtonia in Castleton. He showed me a large stump growing close to the main road that runs through the garden, not far from the upper entrance. This was all that was left of a very large barringtonia which he said had died about two years before. When I saw the size of the stump I realized that this could have been the remains of the tree I was looking for. It was ten feet six inches in circumference measured at two feet from the ground. To my surprise, however, the stump was alive. A young shoot with the characteristically thick, glossy leaves was growing from the top of the stump, much of which was already badly rotted. I asked Zedekie if the tree had died because it was toppled. He told me that it had been standing when it died.

Uriah Bennett or 'Big Bee' as he was called was one of the best-known gardeners at Castleton having worked there for many years. Today his son, Roy Bennett, can be seen showing tour groups around the garden. I spoke to him about the old barringtonia and he said, it had been 'killed' by a tremendous vine which had grown up into the tree. 'It was the weight of the vine,' said Bennett, 'that broke it down.'<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the natural dispersal of fruits along the Portland coast and the deliberate human dispersal of fruits and seedlings from Bath or Castleton garden, trees from fruits

or seedlings collected from trees on the coast could have been planted by individuals in the botanic gardens, in home gardens or along roadsides. At Broadgate, I was told, people do stop and collect seedlings from the large number that are always under the tree and one individual offered to collect some for me.

### Uses

The barringtonia has few uses in Jamaica where it is cultivated only to a limited extent as a garden specimen in the botanic gardens, and in home gardens or on public or private grounds as a curiosity or an ornamental shade tree.

This is quite unlike the Old World. There, the large trunk is used for canoes, the soft wood for furniture, the buoyant fruits for fishnet floats, the seeds for lamp oil, and the bark of both trunk and root for folk medicines and fish poison, as are the crushed fruits and seeds. Although the barringtonia has few uses in Jamaica, examination of specific trees in different parts of the island reveals that they are always of interest to children, and especially the fruits.

### Panton Hope

I first became aware of this association while interviewing children in Panton Hope, the district closest to the stretch of Portland coastline where the naturally distributed trees are most heavily concentrated. The children of Panton Hope said that they use the fruit as a toy to play football, handball and 'dandy-shandy'. Anything that is relatively round and soft in Jamaica stands a good chance of being used as a football and this is certainly true of the barringtonia fruit. With handball, the batter hits the fruit with his hand and tries to run around three bases back to home base without being struck by the ball. In 'dandy-shandy', one player stands between two others who throw the fruit back and forth in an effort to hit the one in the middle who is supposed to show great skill in avoiding it.

The children of Panton Hope also use the flower and fruit in a variety of ways that imitate adult life. They call the barringtonia 'big tree coconut'. They 'husk' the fruit of the barringtonia like the fruit of the true coconut, and use the seeds to 'mek oil' which they use to play 'dolly house'. In this world of childhood fancy, the flower is also called 'ice cream' and they 'sell' it to one another with 'play money'.



*Youths shelling barringtonia fruit at Panton Hope, Portland.*

### Happy Grove

Three former students of Portland's Happy Grove School told me of two large barringtonia trees which they had known there at different periods between 1940 and 1955. These trees, valued for their shade, were at the very centre of the campus and they were known as barringtonias. The Happy Grovians remembered that the trees produced abundant fruit but they were not sure whether or not it was ever widely used to play catch or in throwing games. They did remember quite clearly, that they used the fruit as footballs and to play cricket with a coconut bat. They also recalled that the trunks of the trees were covered with initials, names and other kinds of messages carved there by students. These barringtonias at Happy Grove as well as one along the Belle Castle Road were all toppled by wind.

### Bath Botanic Garden

Interviews at Bath, Broadgate, the Marescaux Clinic and the Anglican Deaconess Residence indicate that the fruits from these trees are also used for playing football and other games. The Bath gardener, Magnus Reid, said, 'The boys come to the garden to collect the fruits of trees,' especially those of the cohune palm (*Orbignya cohune*) and a variety of the otahiti apple (*Syzygium* spp.) which they eat, and those of the barringtonia which are 'used for sport'. I spoke to a group of boys who were playing football (with a real ball) in the street on the east side of the garden. They said they knew the fruit well and that they called it barringtonia. They knew of no other name for the tree or its fruits and they were sure that there was no other name.

Magnus Reid and another informant in Bath mentioned a woman who made starch from the barringtonia seeds as an experiment. The seeds were removed from their fibrous husk, broken, grated like the coconut and mixed with water. The water containing the extract from the seeds was then squeezed from the pulp and placed in the sun where 'it comes starch'.

### Castleton Botanic Gardens

At Castleton I also asked Zedekie Pecco if anyone collected and used the fruit and if he had ever observed children playing with them. He said that the fruit was of no use and he had never seen children playing with them. Children, he said, would hardly have a chance to get the fruit, because 'they don't have any time to stay on the ground; as soon as the fruits fall, we clean them up and throw them in the rubbish heap'. He had never observed seedlings in the rubbish heap because it was burned regularly. Pecco said he knew of no other barringtonia tree in the Castleton area or anywhere else around the island.

### Broadgate District

There is no widely known common name for the barringtonia in Jamaica. We have seen that in Bath, Happy Grove and Castleton, the tree is known as barringtonia and this clearly reflects the influence of the botanic gardens. While the children at Panton Hope call it 'big tree coconut', the older men of the district know it as 'wind break' - a name which reflects the usefulness they attribute to the trees growing along the coast. Those I spoke to at Great River and in Mon-

tego Bay identified it as 'rubber tree' and one person in Montego Bay thought it was a fig (*Ficus* spp.). In the district of Broadgate, the tree growing in front of what used to be the Broadgate All Age School on the main road is known as 'English almond'. The reference to the barringtonia as a kind of almond is simply the recognition that the leaves are very similar in appearance, a point noted by Webster [1964], Hawkes [1969] and others. 'English' they told me commemorates the fact that the tree was brought to the district by a 'white priest' about seventeen years ago.

The Broadgate barringtonia is six feet nine and a half inches in circumference measured at three feet eight inches above the ground. The tree is a gathering spot and those I spoke to under it said that it was the only tree of its kind in the area. Apart from its value as a shade tree and a curiosity, neither fruit, leaves or any other parts were used in any way. The people I spoke with were clearly unfamiliar with the tree although some of the men had 'experimented' with the fruit to see if it was edible.

As at Panton Hope, Happy Grove and Bath, the children at Broadgate also used the fruit to play 'kick ball' and other games, especially when the Broadgate All Age School was open. Children would sit in the shade of the tree and classes were sometimes held there. The tree is useful in the same way today. In its shade, and in the shade of a beautiful star apple tree, are various makeshift seats and a bench and also a stand and a stall where fruits and other goods are offered for sale.

### Tamarind Hill Road

When I first saw the trees along the Tamarind Hill Road in Hanover, a young man was lying under one of them with his back propped against the trunk. People were also sitting under the tree along the roadside by the Great River Bridge and this tree, like the one at Broadgate, seems to be a place where people routinely gather. The fruit of the trees by the Great River were also used by children in ways similar to those I have already described for Panton Hope, Happy Grove, Bath and Broadgate.

### Marescaux Medical Centre

The tree in front of the Marescaux Medical Centre is approximately forty feet tall and the trunk is six feet two inches in circumference measured at one foot from the



ground. There were both flower buds and fruit on the tree as on those at Panton Hope, Bath, Turtle Towers and Broadgate. None of the fifteen individuals I spoke to in the area around the tree knew its scientific name or its common names. Ethlyn Burke, who has worked in the tuck shop adjoining the Medical Centre for the past five years, said, 'You always see people passing and looking up at the tree.' Vernon Miller who takes care of the grounds of the Marescaux Centre said he did not know the name of the tree and that he had never heard the tree identified by any particular name.

The Marescaux tree provides shade like other barringtonias around the island but for cars as well as people. Many of Jamaica's barringtonias have scars indicating that they have been chopped with a cutlass and this tree is no exception. Unlike other barringtonias I have seen, however, it has initials and other writings carved on the trunk. This tree is also of interest to children. Ethlyn Burke said the students from Mico All Age School climb the tree on their way home and use the fruit to play football. She had never observed them using the fruit to play catch, cricket, 'dandy-shandy' or any other game or using any other part of the tree. She did say, however, that on several occasions she had seen them trying to open the fruit to see what was inside. Vernon Miller said that he had seen the students 'flinging the fruit after one another'. The children do not seem to make much use of the fruit possibly because the fallen fruit is regularly collected when the grounds are cleaned and, as Vernon Miller said, taken away by 'rubbish truck' or burned when the truck fails to turn up.

#### Anglican Deaconess Residence

The tree at the Anglican Deaconess Residence is seven feet eight inches in circumference measured at three feet from the ground. No one I spoke to at the residence was able to tell me the name of the tree, where it came from or who planted it. Deaconess Jean Forbes who is in charge of the residence suggested that it must have been planted during the time of Archbishop Nuttall, the man who built the house in 1893. She said she had seen a picture (either at the National Library or the Institute of Jamaica) with Archbishop Nuttall standing in front of the building beside the barringtonia tree.

Arnold Stewart, the gardener at the residence, said the tree flowered and fruited 'all through the year' and that it dropped fruits and leaves 'all the time'. He said many people who see him sweeping up the leaves and fruits ask the name of the tree but he is unable to help them. He had seen children using the fruit to 'fling after one another'. Apart from this, and the fact that this barringtonia was also regarded as a curiosity and used as a shade tree, he knew of no other use for the tree as a whole or for any other part of it. This tree, like the tree at the Marescaux Medical Centre, did not have seedlings under it since the seeds are collected by the gardeners as soon as they fall and burned in their rubbish heap.

#### Duppy Coconut

I have argued in previous articles in the JAMAICA JOURNAL that plants associated with the spiritual realm are plants that are unusual in one respect or other or plants that are associated with death, especially with graveyards. Plants that have the word *duppy* as the generic term in their compound common names are especially important in this regard; typically they



Deaconess House, Caledonia Road.

resemble or imitate a useful plant but are frequently inedible or poisonous. This is true of the barringtonia which I have only occasionally heard referred to as duppy coconut.

Whether it is called big tree coconut or duppy coconut, it is interesting to ask why Jamaicans have identified the barringtonia as being a kind of coconut. The obvious reason for this association is, I believe, the surprising resemblance between the fruits of these two trees. Both are roughly similar in appearance being somewhat diamond shaped, smooth on the outside, fibrous on the inside, and containing a single large round seed; both are dispersed by water and are capable of floating for a very long time; and both are found in the same coastal habitat. Where the two fruits really differ is that the coconut is edible and the fruit of the barringtonia is poisonous. It is important to note then that the name 'duppy coconut' implies not only that the fruit of the barringtonia looks like the fruit of the real coconut, but that it is inedible, even deadly. We have already noted that the fruit of the barringtonia is used for fish poison in tropical Asia. In Antigua, at least, the fruits were known to be poisonous and, as I discovered quite by accident, were used as a source of poison.

In 1987, while attending the annual meeting of the Caribbean Food Crops Society which was held in St Johns, Antigua, I met Keithlyn Smith, the author of a very interesting book that had recently been published titled *To Shoot Hard Labour: The Life and Times of Samuel Smith, An Antiguan Workingman*. The book presented a fascinating view of life in Antigua in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, based on the life of Samuel Smith, Keithlyn Smith's grandfather, who lived from 1877 to 1982.

Keithlyn told me that there was a tree that was very important in his grandfather's time and he wanted me to identify it. According to Keithlyn, his grandfather told him that people used to poison cattle on the estate by throwing the leaves and fruits into the pond from which they were watered. When we finally did get to see the tree, it turned out to be a barringtonia. Keithlyn said the name of the plant in Antigua was 'pain killer'. In his book he tells us that:

The leaves of the large pain killer tree at North Sound Estate was to cure pain. Whoever pick the leaves must pay the tree, either with a coin or a ten-penny nail. People say that if you did not pay the tree, the leaves would be of no effect and the pain would not get better. Back then the people truly believe in that story and pay the tree at all times. The nails and coins are still there for all to see.



The medicinal use of the barringtonia seems to be generally known in Antigua even though the tree is rare. In the Natural History Division of the Institute of Jamaica, there is an herbarium specimen (accession No. 53283) showing leaves from the tree at North Sound collected by Harold Box on 14 June 1938. Box notes: 'There is only one tree in the island, apparently very old, by the roadside at North Sound. *It produces abundant seedlings* (my emphasis), which are now being grown in gardens.' Box also points out that 'the leaves are used by. . . (Antiguans) to alleviate headaches'.

### Conclusion

This has been a brief introduction to the barringtonia, a rare tree in Jamaica and one of the least known of the island's duppy plants. Even though it has been in Jamaica for some two hundred years and typically produces many seedlings under and around the parent tree, it probably has remained a rare tree because Jamaicans do not find it very useful. As with the john crow bead, cotton tree, calabash and other plants, a close look at the barringtonia indicates that there are discernable cultural reasons for this or any plant to be associated with the spiritual realm. This is particularly true of those plants that have the word *duppy* or *jumbie* as the generic term in their compound common names. Such usage points to an underlying coherence in the traditional world view of the African Jamaicans, a coherence that is especially manifest when looked at from the world of plants.

### NOTES

1. The figures provided here for the size and weight of the seed and of the fruit as a whole are based on the measurements of fourteen samples. Seven were collected green from the tree in the Bath Botanic Garden. The other seven were dry fruit collected from the coast at Panton Hope, Portland. The length of the fruit was measured along one of the four ridges that give the fruit its quadrangular shape and the circumference was measured at the widest point of the fruit.
2. There were two other barringtonia trees at Castleton Garden that were other than the species *asiatica*.

Tree Measurements not given in Text

Tree	Circumference	Height at which Measured
Tamarind Reef 1	9 1/2 feet	2 feet
" 2	2 feet 2 inches	1 foot 11 inches
" 3	4 feet 7 1/2 inches	2 1/2 feet
" 4	7 feet 1 1/2 inches	2 feet

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