



The beginning of *Istoru Kurukkay* - our newest walking trail

## Halgolla Plantation Home

Accommodation of a different kind

– April 2015 –

We forgot to mention in our March Newsletter about the establishment of a new walking trail, *Istoru Kurukkay*, connecting what is now Nutmeg Grove #1 with what used to be the production facility (“Factory”) when Halgolla Estate existed as a fully-fledged cocoa and rubber plantation. This path has opened up a whole new area of what was intended as a pioneering orchard project prior to Emil leaving Sri Lanka in 1973; the only survivors from that time are some huge Rambutan trees from which we’ve not harvested one fruit in the past ten years, thanks to the monkeys and giant squirrels and the fact that the whole area is a veritable jungle! This new initiative promises significant challenges to an enterprise already with more than its fair share of them!

To launch the new “recovery project” we sold off some of the large trees with marginal lumber value. Unfortunately, the man who bought them suffered serious injury when one of his tree-fellers dropped a large limb from one of the trees on his employer. We understand that the casualty is not in danger any longer but it will be a while before he resumes felling the quite large trees he’s bought.

We have a great crop of *biling* (*Averrhoa bilimbi*) and, apart from using it as an acidic flavouring agent in our rice-based dishes, Arlene and her cohorts made our first batch of *biling* jam (somewhat under protest which dissipated when she proclaimed it was her new favourite!)

Our single, bearing *nelli* (*Phyllanthus acidus*) tree has also provided us with a plentiful crop, its branches covered with the little miniature-pumpkin-shaped fruit and Emil is looking forward to a fresh stock of the delectable jam made from this fruit (his particular favourite) which has the reputation of being phenomenally rich in Vitamin C.

We’ve had the biggest nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*) crop in recent memory and are hard pressed to harvest and do the minimal processing that is required to prepare the crop for market. While this is a great challenge, it is, nevertheless, a significant one—the husk has to be removed quickly after the fruit has been picked, otherwise that task becomes very

difficult and the mace, which is inlaid on the nutmeg shell and is a very high-value part of the crop, is irreparably damaged. Arlene, of course, has the additional challenge of deciding how much jelly to make with the huge quantity of “husk” now available!



Arlene cutting nutmegs with Senevi

And speaking of hitherto unexploited plants, an old friend of Emil’s from his days in Alberta has expressed an interest in importing very large quantities of *Moringa oleifera* (“Drumstick”) leaves. This has led to a quest for shippable quantities of this vegetation until we can begin to grow these trees on a more-than-home-garden scale in order to produce enough leaf for export. Never a dull moment at HPH!

Our vanilla has begun to blossom again and we are trying to make Mallika’s task (in addition to everything else she does at HPH!) manageable by “flagging” the flower-bud bearing vines with strips of bright-coloured polythene so that the flowers can be pollinated no sooner they open and can, thereafter, be monitored from time to time until the beans are ready for harvest. A simple step that should make our already over-extended human resources go a little further!

We are exploring the possibility of enlarging one of our recently-impounded bodies of spring water which will

result in a quantum increase in our potable water supply, something the need of which we've been very conscious of ever since the terrible drought we had a few years ago. That extended spell of dry weather very nearly drove us out of HPH. The only thing holding back this new instalment of that initiative is the perennial issue (that faces all farmers!) of .....cash-flow!



**Gamini & Mallika removing nutmeg pulp from the fire**

The month ahead will see yet another Sinhala and Hindu New Year celebrated when our human resources will be at their thinnest and we will be formally greeted by all our employees and friends, bearing gifts of sweetmeats such as oil cakes (*kavun*) that are traditional at this time of year, while we'll join in the appropriate rituals at the auspicious times which are determined by those claiming expertise in the occult. This is Sri Lanka's premier celebration of fellowship and bonhomie!

Warm regards,  
Arlene and Emil

## Plants of interest at HPH – Panama rubber

Last month we wrote about *Vanilla planifolia* and this month we have chosen a plant from the same part of the world – Central America – but with a very different history.

*Castilla elastica* (Panama rubber) originates in that part of the Americas which has Mexico as its largest and most powerful country. Some of the information that follows was conveyed to us by much-travelled French guests at HPH who spent significant time in Mexican museums.

*Castilla elastica* owes its presence in Sri Lanka to the fact that many plant species were being sought as sources of rubber after the invention of the pneumatic tire made rubber almost as valuable as gold. Apart from *Hevea brasiliensis* which completely dominated and continues to dominate the plantation world as a source of natural rubber, *Castilla elastica* was also introduced into East and West Africa, where it has proven to be a huge problem as an invasive species, and into Sri Lanka. It has (so far) not been a problem at HPH though there are many trees on our land.



The Mesozoic Indians gathered the latex coagulum into large balls nearly the size of footballs and used them in a game in which the balls were thrown through hoops. This called for not only great skill and a good eye but also for muscle strength beyond the ordinary because of the weight of the solid rubber balls.

Whether this was, possibly, the precursor of basketball is an interesting thought. The deadly twist to this recreational activity was the fact that the winner of the competition received as his prize...wait for this .....DEATH. This was considered an honour, apparently, as the termination of life was considered an "elevation" into the spirit world! We certainly would appreciate any feedback and/or additional information any reader has on this fascinating subject.

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Sri Lanka: rated as a top tourist destination by [The Lonely Planet](#); [Condé Nast Traveller](#); [The New York Times](#); [National Geographic](#)

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**For each booking in the month of April -**  
**a vanilla bean from our first crop**  
**in addition to the "sampler pack" of HPH-grown and -**  
**roasted coffee**  
**and the "Surprise Basket" of HPH "goodies"**  
**which has become a trademark of HPH hospitality**

**Halgolla Plantation Home**  
■ rated as [Best Home Stay](#) in Sri Lanka 2013  
■ recommended in the [Bradt Travel Guide for Sri Lanka](#) 5th edition, 2014

**For information or to book your accommodation, check our website [www.halgollaplantationhome.com](http://www.halgollaplantationhome.com) or contact Emil van der Poorten: [emil@halgollaplantationhome.com](mailto:emil@halgollaplantationhome.com) or by phone: 94-77-347-0702 or 94-72-284-9770**