

On My Mind

6/23/06

Though the new beautification committee has already proved to be both action-oriented and effective, something it has not addressed, but perhaps should - under the rubric of "restoration"? - is the on-going erosion of Managaha. Apparently, it is no small thing, with ironwood trees and pala palas increasingly threatened - and falling - with every passing week. Over-all, the island is not losing sand - it's just losing it on one side and gaining it on the other. But it is losing the green part of the island; what's growing is the area of vegetation-free sandy beach.</P>

It all started when the Marianas Visitors Authority, in its benighted wisdom, and in conjunction with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, declared the rusting skeleton of a ship half buried on the port-side of Managaha a safety hazard, and removed it. It was a stellar example of unintended consequences - which come about when one does not think through the impact of one's actions.</P>

The problem is that there is no known solution to this type of erosion. Whatever is built, or devised, merely moves sand elsewhere, or in a different direction - it does not stop the sand from moving. No one can predict with certainty what would happen if a barrier were built where the wreck was removed, particularly since by now a strong current - and a channel - seem to have developed in that area.</P>

If nothing is done, it would appear that more of the "port" side of the island will erode, eventually reaching the Aghurub statue and beyond. Some say that the present dock will erode as well. Given that Managaha is a major tourist attraction, someone must decide - and sooner rather than later - whether to try "protect" the island and attempt to stabilize the erosion, and if so, how. Or whether not to fool with Mother Nature, let nature take its course - and even capitalize on what is happening there by focusing on it as a lesson in resource management, a sort of eco-tourism display of the forces of nature.</P>

It doesn't help that it does not seem to be clear as to whose responsibility it is to make that decision.</P>

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Another of the island's natural resources under stress - albeit a different sort - is the Grotto. For the sake of accommodating the less able, goes the rhetoric, construction of a mono-rail type vehicle is being proposed that would enable older divers, among others, to participate in Grotto scuba diving.</P>

Equal opportunity of access is all very well, but that's not the point, not the issue, here. Scuba diving is not for everyone. A diver enters a hostile world, and must be ever alert, knowledgeable, physically and psychologically able, to deal with unexpected and/or trying circumstances, if s/he expects to survive the experience. Divers take courses, pass tests, just to qualify as beginners, and then must acquire experience before they can safely take part in drift dives in strong currents, enter and exit through rough surf, go deeper than 60-70 feet.</P>

The Grotto is not an easy dive. It takes stamina to climb down - and back up - those stairs. It takes discipline to stay with the dive guide, to stay at safe depths, to find one's way in and out the underwater access holes. It puts beginning divers, not to mention infirm divers, at considerable risk to dive there - of which the numerous accidents that have occurred there give ample proof - and prudent dive guides will not take them there. To make such an arduous dive more accessible to the weaker divers is sheer insanity.</P>

To address equal opportunity of access briefly, not everyone gets to climb Mt. Everest. Or take part in the gruelling "Tour de France" bicycle race, or participate in the Iditarod - Alaska's formidable dog-sled race. The very nature of such events precludes any but the most skilled, the most capable, the strongest, from undertaking such trials. And that is as it should be. We are not all equal in such attributes, nor do we expect to be. The rest of us admire those who are able to compete, and though we may strive to emulate them, in our hearts we know that we cannot, and that is ok too.</P>

The Grotto dive is a similar trial of skill, ability, strength. We should admire those who qualify to take on the challenge. But just as one does not either lower the altitude of Mt. Everest or build a tramway up its side, does not add training wheels to bicycles in the Tour de France, or pave the route for the Iditarod, so should the Grotto be left "au natural" - as nature intended it, insofar as that is still possible - as a measure of one's abilities.</P>

As a test of endurance and stamina, the Grotto can have an even greater appeal to the dive world than if it were accessible to all and sundry. It would be prestigious to have successfully completed one or more dives at the Grotto - an achievement worth bragging about - rather than a wimpy experience aided by a grotesque and incongruous mono-rail that utterly destroys the unique natural setting the Grotto now enjoys.</P>

That the governor has been heard to say the Grotto monorail project will go through is not only depressing and distressing, but proof, once again, that he is deaf to those most knowledgeable and concerned, and that his emphasis on "business" is about as anti-environment as it gets. It also raises questions about his definition of "business" - it would seem to exclude local businesses almost entirely....</P>

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I'm sorry, but the mindset of some of the CNMI's legislators just baffle the mind. Today's Tribune carries a story about House members who believe that investors who propose to mine pozzolan ash should not be eligible for a Qualifying Certificate such as is granted by the Commonwealth Development Authority. The QC program has not been an unqualified success as it is, largely because legislators have attempted to use it to promote unrelated policies of one sort or another.</P>

The purpose of the QC - at least as I understand it - is to encourage foreign businessmen to invest in the CNMI. Not happy with the results, there appear to be several efforts underway to revise the QC program, including provisions, as House Bill 15-125 describes it, for "public benefit contributions and meaningful participation by the people of the Commonwealth, particularly in terms of ownership and joint ventures...." And while that almost sounds like it was written spe-

cifically for JG Sablan's discredited mining application, on its face it seems a worthy addition. Was, then, House Bill 15-145, already passed by the House and on its way to the Senate, proposed solely to further deter JG Sablan? What possible motive, otherwise, could there have been?</P>

H.B. 15-145, according to the Trib, claims that because mining pozzolan removes resources instead of increasing them the industry should not be given a QC. But it would be a new business. It would, theoretically, at least, bring employment, profit, and other benefits, to the CNMI. Will, now, all fishing-related ventures also be denied a QC, because they remove resources? Please!</P>

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Though the immediate threat of a constitutional convention has passed, constitutional provisions continue to be the object of discussion, not only among legislators and attorneys, but also among members of the general public. Yet an updated copy of the CNMI Constitution, incorporating all amendments to date, has been available only on the web, or to those with access to bound copies of the NMI Code.</P>

Remedying the situation, Marianas Printing Services Inc., publishers of the original Constitution, in 1975, has now published a new up-to-date version, as it appears in the NMI Code, and incorporating all amendments passed to date. However, case references included in the Code have been deleted so as to provide a cleaner copy of the Constitution itself. Some minor spelling (advice instead of advise; extent instead of extend) and grammatical errors (who instead of which) have been corrected; details are spelled out in an insert provided with the copy.</P>

Copies of the Constitution are available from Marianas Printing, located on Beach Road in San Jose, for \$10 each; discounts for quantity purchases are available.</P>

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At the risk of sounding like a grinch, when is the CNMI going to join the rest of the health-conscious world, and ban smoking in its restaurants? Or at least require adequate ventilation and separate areas if smoking is to be allowed? I know that generally speaking, Asian tourists do not yet seem to be concerned about the effects of smoking on their health, but does that mean we should encourage and support such attitudes?</P>

In fact, on more than one occasion, when I have shown my unhappiness with tourists sitting nearby who have lit up, they have quickly put out their cigarettes - which says to me that they are not unaware of its impact on others, if not themselves. Isn't it about time that the CNMI passed a law controlling smoking in restaurants? Doesn't the community owe it to itself to protect its members?</P>

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The Micronesian Games kick-off today. May all go well, and may the best team win! I'm still bothered, though, by the decision, higher up in the sports world, that only citizens of the countries competing qualify for participation. Doesn't the skill in the sport matter? Shouldn't that be recognized? What would happen if ability were the primary criterion for competing? I've been told that one element that would suffer under such a scenario would be sponsorship - who would fund and organize and hold such games if not countries? I don't have an answer -

and it's not as though I am personally involved, but it just doesn't feel right that sports should be subservient to nationalism.</P>

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This week's movies: there seems to be some confusion. The on-line review "Rotten Tomatoes" rates "Click" as PG-13; the Trib rates it as PG; it rates "Cars" as G, though the Variety rates it as PG-13. Thus, there are actually 1 G, 2 PG's, 5 PG 13's and one R.</P>