

Maroons Celebrate Treaty

Maroons celebrated the anniversary of their peace treaty with the British.

The sun blazed against the backs of dozens of Maroon elders from Accompong Town, St. Elizabeth, earlier this week as they marched through the streets of Accompong Town, dressed in traditional African gear and camouflaged in leaves.

Reminiscent of the age of Cudjoe and his band of fearless African warriors determined never to be enslaved by the English, the Maroons sounded the Abeng, chanted traditional songs and beat the gombay drums as they made their way to Kindah Tree and Old Town - the burial site of Cudjoe and other Maroon leaders.

Along the way, they were joined by Maroons from across the island, a host of local and overseas visitors and hundreds of students from schools as far away as St Catherine and neighbouring Manchester, who turned out to witness the annual Maroon celebration. As they had for close to two centuries following their 80-year war with the British forces, which eventually saw them signing a peace treaty and gaining land in the dense, hilly interior of the Cockpit Country, the Maroons gathered at Kindah Tree.

The large Kindah Tree that stands near Old Town, the first area in Accompong Town where the Maroons settled, means One family and it is here, according to Maroon history, that Cudjoe and his fighters gathered to plot guerilla strategy against the British. Here they partook of the traditional roasted pig - a black boar cooked over open fire without salt and seasoning - and continued their singing and dancing while paying homage with pork and rum, in keeping with their Zion religion, to the spirit of the elders.

The Maroon elders, as well as other Maroon descendants, then continued onto Old Town where according to folklore they called up the spirits of the dead and again paid tribute. Again this year the tradition of Maroons only was strictly enforced and many visitors, adamant to witness what went on beyond Kindah Tree, were forcibly rejected.

The all-day celebrations, which began at about 10:00 am and ended around 5:00 pm, continued with an official ceremony, where the Accompong Maroons told stories of their proud heritage and accepted greetings from civic leaders and Maroon leaders from other territories.

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