

Enjoy the atmosphere of the 'Hollows'

By CARL MAHABIR

...a photographer's playground... a favourite picnic spot... a haven for botanists and geologists

WE are often captivated by the beauty of the countryside and this is due mainly to the distant landscape, flowering trees and huge rocks. All these beautiful spots are also provided in a small way at the Rock Gardens, St Clair, Port of Spain.

Visit the Rock Gardens this weekend and you will react with pleasure at the small ponds, the scenery, the large number of flowering plants and rough, hard rocks. There is also a cool atmosphere enhanced by the chatter of wild birds.

The Rock Gardens is located at the northwestern end of the Queen's Park Savannah. It extends from a point opposite the Emperor Valley Zoo to the St Clair Circle, which is at the top of Maraval Road, and spans an area of about 120,000 square feet. It is not an enclosed area, so visits can be made any time, night or day.

This section of St Clair is full of activity and crowded with many historic buildings. The Gardens are surrounded by the Ministry of Agri-

culture, Lands and Food Production, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Emperor Valley Zoo, Prime Minister's Office, Queen's Royal College and the residence of the Archbishop of Port of Spain.

Scores of youth from Belmont, St Ann's, Cascade and Boissiere visit the Gardens regularly, some for studying the

plants, others for sketching and painting, while a few go there just to relax. Nearby, the playing fields are usually occupied by groups taking part in basketball, cricket, football and hockey. There is always some activity going on near the Rock Gardens, which is also called the "Hollows."

To get to the Rock

Gardens, just board a St Ann's or Cascade taxi at the corner of Hart and Frederick Streets, Port of Spain, or a Maraval taxi at the corner of Charlotte and Duke Streets, and the driver will take you there for \$2. A Maraval, Cascade or St Ann's bus from the Public Transport Service Corporation will drop

you there for just 50 cents. If you are driving, remember the traffic around the Savannah flows in a clockwise direction.

Recently, vandals destroyed a large number of the bougainvillea plants that lined the small waterway which passes through the close-cut lawn of the Hollows.

Fresh trees had to be planted and some of them are about 12 inches high. David Maharaj, an attendant at the Rock Gardens, pointed out that the small canal which begins from the zoo empties into Maraval Road.

The Hollows is that part of the area which is below the surface of the surrounding ground. This depression is kept clean, tidy and orderly. There is a pitch walk passing through so you should not walk on the lawn. Every day attendants from the Ministry of Agriculture cut the grass and clean up after visitors.

Several large rocks are placed around the five flowering beds which form a garden and this is how the Rock Gardens got its name. There are large collections of rocks, stones and boulders of all sizes, and a few with hard rough surfaces. The rocks have aroused much interest in students studying geology.

The two ponds with fishes are at the centre of the region. There are numerous water lilies with floating leaves and flowers. Every day, dead leaves and other unwanted debris are removed; the water is changed about once every two weeks.

Groups of benches and tables are placed around areas near to the saman trees, palms and ferns, providing shaded areas with a cool atmosphere. There are many flowers and plants with coloured leaves. Some of these are bougainvillea,

ferns, Christmas bush, hibiscus, lilies, ixora, coraleta, poinsettia, crotons, buttercups and many with five angle flowers.

The Rock Gardens have always been considered a photographer's playground and a favourite place for weekend picnics. Here, because of the landscape, and the flowers, which form a good background for light and shade, blur and sharpness, today's photographers find pleasure in taking snaps with surprising results. The setting is fitting for describing the beautiful, humorous and commonplace.

When we arrived, the sun's rays were passing through drops of water in the air, and reflected in the form of a brilliant arch of prismatic colours. This rainbow was best seen when the rain was falling while the sun was shining.

Discussing the plants at the Gardens, one student pointed out that plants growing under dry conditions are called xerophytes. They try to take up as much water as they can from the soil, and to lose as little as they can through their leaves. Some of these have small leaves or no leaves at all, so they do not lose water that way. Others have an abundance of roots so they can gather as much water as possible from the soil.

Visit the Hollows and you will see all this for yourself and will feel relaxed in the cool atmosphere of the Rock Gardens.



●THERE'S even place for a steelband concert at the Hollows.