

Guanica, The Desert Forest of Puerto Rico

The Guayacan Centenario, *Ligna vite*, was two hundred years old when Christopher Columbus, on his second voyage, passed it by and returned to Spain with a worthless load of Gumbo Limbo.

Today Guayacan estivates, half-reclining, above the parched floodway, wedged into raw limestone, roots mining veins of sanguine soil. The patterned bark, with marbled russet swirls, is home to frill-like spiders and pseudoscorpions. Its umber resin cures cholera.

Sapo concho, the crested frog, also estivates like Guayacan, wedged deep in a limestone fissure. He has waited eighteen months for the rain to call him to his long march across the desert forest to the ephemeral lagoon at Tamarindo, the only place on earth his kind can multiply.

Teddy Roosevelt and his rough riders stormed in from the sea at Guanica, but missed Guayacan and *Sapo concho*. Franklin Roosevelt's C.C.C. inmates ignored them, blasting a plantation of mahogany trees into the cemented valley.

The runty mahoganies, long abandoned, persist. Their fruits are like hand grenades. Crescent casings litter the desert shade after the helicopter-seeds are deployed.

The Battle of Guanica continues. Molotov cocktails hurled by vandals and saboteurs scorch the toes of the dry woodland. Guayacan and *Sapo concho* are in the way of a Club Med world.

But the dry forest of Guanica, inexplicably, will not burn.

