



American Memorial Park – Saipan

A covenant between the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and the U.S. in 1976 included the lease of 133 acres for a park honoring the lives of Americans and Micronesians lost during the World War II (WWII) Marianas Campaign. American Memorial Park (AMME) was established in 1978 and is administered by the National Park Service in partnership with CNMI. AMME sits along the western shoreline of the island of Saipan. Today, AMME is regarded as a “living memorial” offering activities like baseball, bicycling, tennis, picnicking, and swimming.

Natural Resources: While much of the park is landscaped with ornamental, non-native plants, significant natural resources are contained in the 30-acre wetland and mangrove complex. Saipan’s entire distribution of the oriental mangrove, *Bruguiera gymnorrhiza*, is contained almost exclusively within the park boundary. The wetlands contain approximately 200 species of plants, trees, flowers, and birds. This includes two endangered bird species, the mariana moorhen and nightingale reed-warbler. Other types of vegetation found within the park include marshes, strand, coastal and weedy scrub. Wildlife species include collared kingfishers, Micronesian honeyeaters, bridled and golden white-eyes, rufous fantails, and island swiftlets. Some other threatened or endangered species found in the park are hawksbill, leatherback, loggerhead, and green sea turtles, and the Tinian monarch butterfly. Adjacent to the park are significant coral reef and nearshore marine resources enclosed in a lagoon with a well-developed barrier reef system.

Cultural History: The first inhabitants of the Northern Marianas were the Chamorros, who settled from Southeast Asia around 1500 BC. They are closely related to the Carolinians, who migrated to the Marianas during the early 1800s. Micro Beach, a fine white sand beach, was the site of the first Carolinian village. This beach served as a training site for celestial navigation. Another interesting archaeological site near the park entrance is a Chamorro Latte Stone which is composed of large limestone pillars with bowl-shaped caps of brain coral or

limestone, and it is believed to be a foundation for dwellings.

The decisive battle for Saipan represents the beginning of the end of the Pacific war. On June 15, 1944 U.S. forces landed on Saipan’s southwestern beaches, and the ensuing struggle resulted in over 25,000 casualties. Tragically, many Japanese and local Chamorro civilians evaded capture by throwing themselves off limestone cliffs, now known as the Suicide and Bonzai Cliffs, into the jungle and the sea. For more information, visit: <http://www.nps.gov/wapa/indepth/sections/pacificTheater.htm> and <http://www.worldwarII.info> The park contains many remnant structures from WWII such as Japanese pillboxes, bunkers, and a bathhouse complex.

Inventory and Monitoring Highlights:

Plant inventories from 1989 and 2001 may serve as a baseline for alien plant monitoring. A hydrological study of the wetland was recently completed (2005) by the US Geological Survey to improve understanding of groundwater dynamics in the park’s wetland habitat. The CNMI Division of Fisheries & Wildlife currently monitors birds in the wetlands. Since 1994, the Commonwealth’s Department of Environmental Quality monitors water quality parameters at six park sites.

Current Issues in Management: Micro beach is subject to erosion and the shoreline has shifted over time. Park staff are now assessing the rate of erosion in cooperation with CNMI Coastal Resource Management Office.

Wetlands must be conserved as natural areas to preserve endangered and indigenous species by controlling exotic species, especially the brown tree snake. Feral animals (e.g., cats and monitor lizards) also pose threats to native ecosystems and ground-nesting birds. Invasive plants such as vines, scarlet gourd, and chain-of-love are overgrowing the edge of the wetland, and introduced mosquito fish and tilapia are present in wetland pools. It is urgent that the park assess the distributions of alien and invasive species and formulate management strategies after initial inventories are completed. Future conservation efforts will involve improving water quality, maintaining the native wetlands including the existing flora and fauna, and protecting adjacent marine areas.

—Raychelle Daniel

Come visit us:

Saipan is the capitol of CNMI and is located 150 miles north of Guam and 3,200 miles west of Hawaii in the Indo-Pacific Ocean. Daily flights from Hawaii service Saipan, via Guam. On the Web at: <http://www.nps.gov/amme/>



From left to right: Micronesian honeyeater, AMME flag circle, mangrove wetlands, Micro beach, and the Mariana 8-spot butterfly

Photos by T. Fake, S. Henrickson and D. Hoover