



Ministerial Statement
by
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Minister of Public Works
Railway Trail & Gibbet Island
31st May 2019

Good Morning **Mr. Speaker**.

I rise this morning to report on developments surrounding a portion of the Railway Trail and Gibbet Island Beach – more commonly referred to as Police Beach located in Smith's parish at the Flatts Inlet.

A portion of the Railway Trail was leased to a private Trust in June 1998 for 21 years to 31 May, 2019 to provide access to privately owned land off the Railway Trail. **Mr. Speaker**, the grant of this lease effectively blocked access to that entire portion of the Railway Trail to the general public – who cannot access it without traversing land that is now privately held.

Mr. Speaker, Gibbet is a beautiful island off the Railway Trail that now belongs to a private trust. The beach, although not accessible to the general public by land, one can see its wonderful tiny beaches from the North Shore Road. Gibbet Island also is unfortunately known as the “Gallows Island” due to its dark history. There, in the 1600s and early 1700s executions were held in full public view. That was a time when slavery was highly prevalent in Bermuda. A pole still seen there is sometimes wrongly identified as being part of the gallows. It is actually an earlier version of a navigation light for passing ships.

One of the more prominent executions held there was in 1681 when a slave named Indian John from New England was executed. He apparently tried to escape, lit the owner's house on fire and wanted to kill all members of his family. After his execution, his body was left hanging from the gallows for days after. Such a gruesome practice of a public display of executed bodies was meant to serve as a warning to other slaves who contemplated rebelling or escaping.

Mr. Speaker, from our research - the name “Police Beach” is derived from a 1977 agreement between the Bermuda Police Force (as it was then known) and the private landowner to allow policemen almost exclusive access to the beach. In practical terms – that meant white policemen only. That agreement formally ended in 1992.

Mr. Speaker, Gibbet Island is now part of the African Diaspora Heritage Trail and bears the dark historical marks of slavery in these islands. The Railway Trail in Smith's Parish passes through this area and into the Flatts Inlet. There used to be a railway bridge there that the train used to reach Shelly Bay and beyond – plans are afoot to replace it.

Mr. Speaker, with that background of both the Trail and the Beach I have decided to take a number of actions.

At midnight tonight – 31 May 2019 - at the expiry of the current Railway Trail lease – it will not be renewed and thus from tomorrow - visitors and locals alike will regain unfettered access to that portion of the Trail that has been denied for the last 21 years. The former lease holder – like any other member of the public will still be able to access their property from the Trail.

With regard to the beach **Mr. Speaker,** the railway Trail currently dissects the land that people refer to as Police Beach – that land, on either side is still under private ownership. While the beach is public from the high water mark - it is important that land access for the general public is provided. Presently the beach cannot be accessed from the railway trail without traversing private land – permission for which in recent times has been denied.

Mr. Speaker, in the first instance - the Ministry will begin discussions with the current owners of land to the North Eastern side of the railway trail to gauge their interest in selling it. Should that route be unsuccessful – the Government will pursue ownership under the terms of the Acquisition of Land Act 1970, specifically the provisions for compulsory purchase contained therein.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to acknowledge our past – all of it – but when the opportunity arises – even in a very small way – to take steps to correct past injustices – we must.

It is never too late to do the right thing and I believe we are doing so in this case.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**