

Historic Lethem - Orinduik Road Linking Regions 8 & 9



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Hoping to travel by road to the Orinduik Falls in the near future? Well, that is now a possibility, since a road network was established, making travel easier, safer and less expensive.

The Regional Democratic Council of Region Eight (Potaro/Siparuni) has completed constructing a road network, which links Regions Eight and Nine (Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo).

Recently, the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development Mr. Harripersaud Nokta and a team of more than twenty persons, including Regional officials from both Regions, embarked on a historic journey across the mountainous terrain in four pick up trucks and two tractors, to conquer the trails.

Paying tribute to the father of the nation

The journey started from Karasabai in Region Nine on Saturday, March 22, after Minister Nokta joined the Prime Minister Mr. Samuel Hinds, Minister of Health Dr. Leslie Ramsamy, Minister of Amerindian Affairs Ms. Carolyn Rodrigues and other officials in a memorial service in honour of the late Dr. Cheddi Jagan. Residents in Karasabai constructed a monument honoring the founding father of the People's Progressive Party in gratitude for the contribution he made to the development of the villages in the Rupununi and the Region.

During the 1960s, when Dr. Jagan was Premier, the Revolving Heifer Scheme was established and involves a process where one heifer was sent to a ranch; when the heifer delivers a calf, the heifer was sent back to the village and sent to another ranch to continue the process. Karasabai was one of the first villages to receive cattle from the Scheme. Over the many years, the herd has developed and expanded and to date the village is still benefiting.

Conquering the trails

Minister Nokta and his team left Karasabai and traveled to Monkey Mountain in Region Eight, making brief stops at Tiperu, Rukumuta, Yurong Peru, and finally the Echilibar River, which is the borderline between the two Regions.

The team arrived at Monkey Mountain, which is approximately 3,500 feet above sea level, at nightfall, after an accelerated journey via the new road.

The team started off from Monkey Mountain at daybreak to continue the journey to Kato, where they spent the night. Kato is another community perched atop one of

the many mountains in the Region and gets very cold during the night, due to the altitude.

On the way to Kato, the team made brief stops at Tuseneng and Paramakatoi to talk to residents.

It is pertinent to note that Region Eight is also home to the majestic Kaieteur and many other waterfalls, which possess a compelling beauty. The Region also guards many of our splendid lush forests and magnificent mountains including the Pakaraimas.

After spending the night with nature's own air conditioning, the team made an early start on the last leg of the journey, to Orinduik.

On the way to Orinduik, the team made a stop at Kurukubaru, one of the highest and coldest peaks in the Region, where some Amerindians have settled.

The road, which is rough, since it is in its initial stage, will be upgraded every year, so that in years to come, there will be a highway linking the Coastland to the Hinterland Regions.

Making History

The journey was historic, since travel to the Region by road was not possible before, and Minister Nokta and his team are the first persons to traverse the completed road.

The safari drove up mountains, across savannah lands and crossed creeks as they traversed on this historic drive. All members of the team were jubilant and excited and as they entered the various villages, residents greeted them enthusiastically.

The young and old also came out in large numbers to welcome them. It was the first time in history that four land rovers and two tractors and trailers were seen driving into the various villages.

At each stop, the Minister and his team were greeted with cheers of joy, since residents were happy to see, that at long last, a road link has been completed and for the first time also vehicular traffic from Lethem to Orinduik has been accomplished without any difficulty.

Passing through the villages along the way, there was evidence of significant development, since most of the villages have been provided with schools, health centres and trained medical personnel. Supplies of drugs for health centres in the villages are abundant and residents are only given referrals for terminal illnesses.

Although residents have established their villages in far-off locations, which are fairly difficult to access, the Regional Administration has been working assiduously to provide necessary supplies, care and improved social services for these communities.



A dream comes true; residents awed at seeing vehicles in their village for the first time in History.



Crossing the Echilbar River into Region Eight: Minister Nokta and team celebrate reaching the border between Regions Eight and Nine.



The last leg of the journey: the team arrives at Kato in Region Eight.



Minister Nokta and team reach the last village in Region Nine: Yurong Peru.

Changing traditions

For centuries, there were no roads linking the villages in Region Eight from Maikwak to Monkey Mountain and similarly no access roads from Karasabai to Yurong Peru in Region Nine.

Amerindians living in this part of Guyana are basically of the Patamona and Macushi tribes, who traversed the area on foot, climbing mountains, crossing rivers, plains, savannahs and swamps to get from village to village.

Journeys, which took days and weeks, saw men, women and children, having to carry heavy loads on warishees strung across their backs and tied to their foreheads. By not having this access road, life was stagnated.

For many years, the villages in the Pakaraimas were all land-locked and the only way to get into a village was by aircraft and only where an airstrip was located. The Amerindians who do primarily farming, hunting, mining and fishing suffer social and economic stagnation, due to the lack of market for their produce and survive by doing subsistence farming.

Residents expressed gratitude for the road network, which makes life easier in many aspects.

Many communities are engaged in cash-crop farming on a reasonable scale, but access to markets was limited, since the farmers had no way of getting their produce out of the Region. The only way possible was by aircraft, which proved to be expensive for the farmers and not economical. When farmers took the chance to transport their produce over the mountains, they suffered great losses, since their produce would be destroyed before they could get to a buyer.

With the completed road network, it is now easier for farmers to source markets and transport their produce to far-off areas in Region Nine, Georgetown and even Brazil.

The road from Orinduik to Maikwak passing through Kamana and Kopinang has already been established, and Minister Nokta commissioned this road link last year. Last year, the road link was not fully completed, and the Minister had to walk approximately three hours to get to other villages.

This road must be regarded as a historic and great achievement of the PPP/C Government. Once maintained and kept in good condition, it will serve the residents of the North and South Pakaraimas for all times, facilitating with ease transportation of goods and services to and from the respective communities.

The long-felt burden of fetching produce on backs in warishees may disappear with the introduction of vehicular transport. Produce going in and out will arrive on time and in larger quantities. Use of charter flights, now may be unnecessary, thus bringing down the cost of living and promoting greater productivity in the Regions.

The journey took three days from Karasabai to Orinduik, as the journey began on Saturday and ended on Monday. The team returned to Georgetown by aircraft.

Construction of the road network in the Region began approximately three years ago and the Regional Administration assured that it would continue to place emphasis on this project. Over the three-year period approximately \$21M was spent on the road network in Region Eight.

The Region's thrust for last year was on the completion of the road network and roads were constructed at Chenapau to Kopinang, Kanapang to Itabac, and Monkey Mountain to Yurong Peru.

Since 1992, Government commenced rehabilitation and reconstruction of infrastructure, vis-à-vis, schools, health centres and other social infrastructure, while introducing measures to expand on mining and agricultural development.

Prior to the road network, an increased population improved production and had to incur at the same time, increased costs for air transport to market their produce. To get in the Pakaraimas from the Coastal belt is as difficult as getting out, hence the saying: 'they are either locked in or locked out.'

Year after year, it became more expensive for residents to travel by passenger or charter flights. Recognizing the need for an access road linking the villages of Region Eight in the North Pakaraima, Karasabai in the South Pakaraima in Region Nine and to Georgetown, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, started exploring a road link with the help of the residents of the villages in locating a 'friendly terrain.'

For three years, construction of this access road started using local labour and simple agricultural tools to clear the alignment. First, it was a rough pathway, traversed only by two tractors and trailers provided to Region Eight by Central Government.

In December 2002, funds were available to complete the last portion of access road from Morabaiko Creek to Yurong Peru, the last village in Region Nine.

Government has been working diligently over the last few years to bridge the disparity between the Capital City, Georgetown and the outlying Regions. This process has advanced significantly and Guyana can be proud of the development that has been effected throughout the country, despite the locations.

Map showing road linking Regions 8 and 9



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