

**Panama Amphibian Rescue and Conservation Project Volunteer Travel  
Information for Gamboa and the Summit Zoo.**



*March 2011 – Please check [www.amphibianrescue.com](http://www.amphibianrescue.com) to see that you have the most up-to date version.*

The Panama Amphibian Rescue and Conservation Project is located on the grounds of the Summit Municipal Park in Panama, about a 20 min drive outside of Panama City on the Eastern side of the Panama Canal. The actual park is in the grounds of the Soberania National Park, and is a spacious zoo and botanical gardens. With some 100,000 visitors passing through each year, Summit features prominently in the minds of many young children growing up in Panama as it is an exciting day out, in a large safe green space outside the congested city. Established in 1923 as a botanical gardens to introduce and disseminate tropical plants from around the world into Panama, many exhibits are older style chainlink fence affairs, but they are spacious and the animals, all native to Panama, are well taken care of. The zoo is undergoing a significant renovation under a new master plan and prominent renovated exhibits include the Harpy eagle, the Tapir and Jaguar exhibits.

The Panama Amphibian Rescue and Conservation project is run by Dr. Roberto Ibanez, the leading amphibian research biologist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. The purpose of this project is to establish assurance colonies of amphibians from Eastern Panama that are threatened with extinction due to the invasive pathogen *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (Bd). This effort is intended to compliment and expand upon the first-ever in-country rescue facility already established in Western Panama, known as the El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center (EVACC). For more information about the project and its rationale, please visit our website [www.amphibianrescue.org](http://www.amphibianrescue.org)

Both local and international volunteers are sought to assist with various technical and non-technical aspects of implementing this project. International volunteers for the project will be expected to travel fairly independently i.e. make their own accommodation and transport arrangements, and this guide is aimed to facilitate that process for the uninitiated. International volunteers will typically be expected to commit for a minimum of 2 weeks full-time, or longer. Local volunteers are encouraged to volunteer for one regularly scheduled day per week and make a commitment of 6 months or more. If you would like to apply to be a volunteer, please send a letter of interest indicating what level of amphibian husbandry experience you have and a copy of your resume to [gratwicke@si.edu](mailto:gratwicke@si.edu).

The volunteer duties will be discussed with the volunteer coordinator on site, and will incorporate some basic husbandry tasks such as cleaning tanks, collecting food and feeding frogs. Each volunteer will typically be assigned one additional 'project' to work on once other duties are complete, and the project will be discussed with the coordinator and reflect the skills and interests of the volunteer.

### **Gamboa: Getting There and Around**

It is possible to stay in Panama city and drive out to Summit each day, but most people prefer the quiet, cheaper, safer option of staying in the small town of Gamboa, dominated by the Gamboa Rainforest Resort, the Panama Canal Authority dredging unit, and researchers connected to the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI). There are occasionally roadblocks and you will be required to produce your passport. Always carry it with you.

### **Taxi**

A cab from the airport to the Summit Park or Gamboa should cost around \$40, and are readily available at the airport. Tip is generally included in the price so you can tip a couple of bucks if you like, but it's not like the states. A cab from Panama city to Gamboa should cost \$20 each way, and you can flag down any cab on the street. Fix a price before you get in though "*Quanto questa hasta...?*" A cab from Gamboa to Summit can be found at the Gamboa resort around \$20, or a cheaper option would be to call a cabdriver in Gamboa. Cab drivers: 1) Many (Lives in Gamboa) email: [gmany@hotmail.com](mailto:gmany@hotmail.com) cell:65223693, 2) Miguel email:[tsamatour@hotmail.com](mailto:tsamatour@hotmail.com) phone: 220-4147

### **Car**

It is very easy to walk up to a car rental agency in the Tocumen airport after you get off your flight. It is cheaper to rent a car online and manual cars are also cheaper. Be aware that while the daily rental is quite inexpensive, the insurance and other fees will triple the quoted cost. . Even if your insurance or credit card does carry insurance, you are required to buy more. A rental for two weeks is about \$650 including the required insurance. While it is possible to get around by bus, unless you are fluent in Spanish, it is

difficult. Having a car is a huge asset so rent one if possible. **Avis**: phone: 238 4056, **Hertz** phone: 238 4081; **Budget** phone: 263 8777). From Panama city take the Avenida Omar Torrijos highway, along the canal following the signs to Miraflores locks and Paraiso. You will pass the grocery store REY on your right. Continue for 5km you will see Miraflores locks turnoff on the left, and after 7km you will reach Paraiso. From here look for signs to Gamboa and Summit. then continuing towards Gamboa, and after another 5km take a left turn at the Soberania National Park headquarters you can't miss Summit, 1.5km down this road.

Be aware that there are very few directional and street signs in Panama. If you arrive after dark, you may wish to stay at an airport hotel the first night. The Hotel Riande Aeropuerto is very nice, just a mile away, and will rent a room for \$115 if you negotiate the price with them. Regular rates are \$176. If you cannot rent a car, you should consider staying near the Albrook Mall if possible as it is a major bus hub and puts you close to a shopping center and the Rey grocery store. Once the project moves to Gamboa, having a car will not be so important.

### **Bus**

A bus leaves from Albrook Mall to Gamboa, (arriving in Gamboa around 40 mins later) and costs 65 cents. It stops at the Summit Park if you ask the driver. **Phone: SACA Bus 232-5529**. A cab from Panama city to Gamboa should cost around \$20. Schedule Weekdays: AM: 5:00, 5:45, 7:00, 8:00, 10:00, PM 12:00, 1:00, 2:00, 3:00, 4:30, 6:30, 9:00. Weekends: AM: 5:45, 7:00, 8:00, 10:00, PM 12:00, 2:00, 4:30, 6:30, 9:00.

### **Places to Stay in Gamboa**

We have listed the places for a short stay in Gamboa (less than one month). If you would like to stay longer, please let us know, and we can put you in touch with STRI housing coordinator and book you into an apartment owned by STRI or rented out to researchers by other locals. If you stay for an extended period we encourage you to register at STRI as a volunteer (Class A) and you can get keys to the Gamboa computer labs and use tupper library facilities, book accommodation on Barro Colorado etc. for more info visit this link: [http://www.stri.org/english/research/applications/coming\\_to\\_panama/index.php](http://www.stri.org/english/research/applications/coming_to_panama/index.php). Apartment rentals range from \$400-\$800 per month. There are many places to stay in Panama city and it is possible to stay in the city and commute to Summit, but preferably only if there are no suitable alternatives in Gamboa.. If you want to stay in the city, La Estancia on Ancon hill, a homey, pristine B&B with Wifi and daily visits from Geoffrey's Tamarins. Book well in advance, because they are always full. It is situated in a safe, quiet neighbourhood, a short cab ride from most attractions in the city. Web: <http://www.bedandbreakfastpanama.com>, Phone: +(507)314-1581 or +(507)6615-4155 or +(507)314.1604, email: [stay@bedandbreakfastpanama.com](mailto:stay@bedandbreakfastpanama.com).

### **Budget**

**Ivan's bed and breakfast.** Popular on the birding circuit, need to book well in advance, four small but comfortable AC rooms with their own bathrooms have been outfitted on the ground floor of Ivan's home. Delicious breakfasts are served on the patio, with agoutis roaming the yard. A vigorous Audubon Society member next-door has a well-stocked bird feeder. \$35 per person/ night cash only. Airport pickups possible \$45. Wifi \$5 per night. Telephone: (507) 314-9436 Mobile: 507 6688-1936 Email: [gamboacotours@yahoo.com](mailto:gamboacotours@yahoo.com).

**Donde Mateo Hostel.** Bed and breakfast lodging \$35 per night, cash only. Meals can be arranged. Owners authentic Panamanian family. You will stay in one of the cabins in the back yard and use an outdoor shower/toilet or in the house across the street which has two bedrooms and is more comfortable if your stay is long. It has a shared bathroom w/shower. Breakfast is cornflakes w/banana. You need to be able to speak some Spanish. No wi-fi. Mobile: (507) 6690-9664 E-mail: [mateofromgamboa@yahoo.es](mailto:mateofromgamboa@yahoo.es) web: <http://www.mateogamboa.com>.

**Soberania Research Station Hostel.** (AKA Guido's place). Located in the town of Gamboa, this large house has several different room options ranging from \$30-\$60 cash only. Guido is very difficult to locate so keep trying. Phone (507) 6676-2466, Web: <http://www.advantagepanama.com/soberania.html> email: [info@advantagepanama.com](mailto:info@advantagepanama.com).

## Midrange

**Simply Devine homestays.** A genuine homestay with Sharon Devine, an energetic, welcoming and knowledgeable American retiree. Her home is a quiet American suburban affair 'across the street from the rainforest'. Don't miss the humming bird feeders in the late afternoon. As an added bonus, the bus stops right outside her door. \$35- \$50 per night cash only, Free Wifi available, fabulous home-cooked meals available upon request. Mobile: (507) 6679-6484, E-mail: [sharondev@gmail.com](mailto:sharondev@gmail.com) web: [www.trail2.com/devine](http://www.trail2.com/devine).

## Highend

**Gamboa Rainforest Resort.** Pretty standard luxury resort with swimming pool, lawn in the front is populated by herds of capybaras, tennis court and sweeping views of the Chagres river. If time is an issue and you'd like to do some excursions on a boat, or fishing, then come down to the resort reception and book yourself in. Even if you are not a guest here, you will likely spend some time at the resort bar which offers reasonable bar food a la carte (\$8-\$15), or the downstairs restaurant that offers a large daily buffet or a la carte menu, prices are high for mediocre food (\$15-30), but the view compensates. Free Wifi is available in the lobby.. The only ATM in Gamboa is in the hotel lobby, and cabs are usually available outside the front. Other things that may be worth checking out are the canopy tower with fantastic view of river and canal (a steep walk up the hill, take the path through Ken's marsh - see map), orchid garden and serpentarium. \$150-285 per night. Phone: (507) 314-5000 or 1 877 800 1690 <http://www.gamboaresort.com/>. It may pay to look for specials online as they are hardly ever full.

**Canopy Tower Lodge.** A birdwatchers magnet in a hideous former military installation/observatory midway between Summit and Gamboa. They have small rooms and an observation deck for the forest canopy. Birdwatchers come here from miles around to see rare Blue Cotingas which I guess compensate for the high prices and small rooms. Don't show up without a reservation, as they don't have any patience for non-guests and won't let you in the barbed-wire encrusted gate. \$105-\$245 per night. Phone: (507) 264 5720 web: [www.canopytower.com](http://www.canopytower.com) Wifi available.

**Radisson Summit Panama Hotel & Golf.** New Radisson, just before you get to the Summit Zoo on the Avenida Omar Torrijos road. It opened in December 2009 and is a luxurious hotel perched on top of a hill surrounded by a golf course. It boasts 3 restaurants: Tero's, Mulligan's and La Jacana and they are trying to lure patrons from the city for extravagant Sunday brunches \$21 and barbecues \$14. \$150-175 per night 1-800-395-7046 US/Canada Toll-free Telephone: (507) 232-4653 email: [hotel@summitgolfpanama.com](mailto:hotel@summitgolfpanama.com) web: [http://www.radisson.com/panamacitypan\\_golf](http://www.radisson.com/panamacitypan_golf)

## Money

Panama uses US\$ making travel very simple. There is an ATM machine at the Gamboa Resort reception There is also an ATM at the entrance to the ACP canal authority in Gamboa and there are several ATMs in the city of knowledge, a 15 min drive towards Panama City. Best to bring and use cash in \$20 or smaller denominations, especially in Gamboa.

## Stores

There is a large grocery store called REY in Miraflores about 20 minutes from the zoo. Take a left out of the zoo onto Gaillard Highway, turn right at fork in the road and then go straight with the canal on your right and you will eventually see a Subway and a sign for the "Rey" grocery store on your left. Also on this road is the turn off for the Miraflores canal museum on your right before reaching the grocery store, and often at this corner is a Kuna woman selling beautiful molas for very good prices. You will see her colorful merchandise strung on a line almost daily. Just before getting into town from Gamboa is a Terpel fuel station with a small Chinese-owned fresh fruit store – it has the BEST fresh fruit and veg in town and is much better than REY for that sort of stuff.

If you are staying in the town of Gamboa, there is a small tienda in the backyard of Building 308 that is good for essentials like bread and cold beer. Stay straight on the road from the zoo and turn right on Gavis Street (the intersection past the police and post office, right before the bright green and pink houses and the large potholes.) The tienda is in the garage in back of the hot pink house.

Food:

The Gamboa Lodge has an inexpensive bar menu in the evenings and a more expensive restaurant. There are some vendors who sell hot lunches to the canal workers but they are not open in the evening. You should bring your packed lunch to the zoo or take your chances with vendors at the zoo also sell hamburgers and empanadas but they are not great

Clothes:

Project staff wear jeans. Take comfortable, clothing it isn't a fashion contest! There is no public laundry in Gamboa so bring plenty of changes of clothes or arrange to use the laundry facilities of your host. The work is fairly dirty, cleaning bug cages and such. Slip off sandals are required as you have to remove your shoes to go into quarantine or the pod so you will do that several times a day.

Cell Phone:

Your US cell phone will probably not work in Panama. You can buy a phone there for under \$20 and add minutes as you need them. It would be handy to have one but it is not essential. Alternatively there are several project cell-phones, you can borrow one, but please remember to return it before you leave.

### **Internet**

We are working towards having internet available at Summit Park for our volunteers and staff, but it currently not up. If internet services are not offered at your accommodation, you can get free Wifi at the Gamboa resort bar or Ivan's B&B (\$5 per day). Longer term volunteers may want to register with the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute and have access to internet facilities at the Gamboa schoolhouse or building 183.

### **Other activities**

We will have plenty to keep you occupied, so don't plan on having a lot of free time or 'weekends off'. Please plan to have a few extra days of vacation time into your trip to get to see some more of Panama, or prearrange your time off with the volunteer coordinator. Nonetheless, there are a bunch of interesting places nearby, that can be explored opportunistically. We highly encourage you to make the most of your time in Panama, explore the area locally as it has a lot to offer.

**Barro Colorado Island** – Probably the best studied patch of tropical rainforest in the world with a very comfortable accommodations and lab facilities for researchers. The best way to get to Barro Colorado Island is to book ahead and get a tour through STRI, [http://www.stri.org/english/visit\\_us/barro\\_colorado/](http://www.stri.org/english/visit_us/barro_colorado/) or for a bambi seminar and dinner (\$6) that usually takes place every Thursday evening on BCI. The ferry leaves from the STRI dock 5:00pm, returning around 9:30pm. To book a place on the ferry email [stri-bambi@si.edu](mailto:stri-bambi@si.edu) well in advance to secure a place (they fill up rapidly) or phone BCI during office hours 212-8951. If asked you who you are working with, say you are working with Dr. Roberto Ibanez on the amphibian project.

**Pipeline road** – Excellent birding spot and beautiful forest. Walk in about 4km down pipeline road (keep to the right to ensure you don't land up at the rainforest discovery center). Continue down the road to the second stream for good frogging spot there is a sign "Rio Frijolito" at the bridge. If you do go frogging, please make sure you shower and change into a completely different, freshly laundered outfit before coming back to work – we don't want any Bd hitchhikers. **Bd IS present in all the streams around Gamboa.**

**Wounan Village of San Antonio** – Lanky Cheucarama works for the amphibian rescue project and lives at the San Antonio Village. He can arrange a tour for you for a small fee and have you taken across the river by boat to meet his family and buy hand-made baskets and tagua carvings. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwTRxsO5VE8> Lanky is a talented artisan and he makes taguas of amphibians in our collection, but you need to give him notice as it takes a long time to carve these things.

**Miraflores Museum** – A must see even if you are not interested in the canal! (also nice to have lunch/café break in nearby “Pan y Canela” coffee shop in La Ciudad Del Saber, which is right across the street from the museum.

**Casco Viejo** – Panama’s second capitol is the old Panama City with incredible Spanish architecture on a small peninsula near the mouth of the Panama canal. Here you can get great views of the city, explore the historical sites of Panama and enjoy fine dining. Manolo Caracol is probably the nicest restaurant in Panama that serves local gourmet cuisine inspired by the Caribbean coast using the freshest local ingredients. Dinner is ~ \$50 per person but they have a really nice lunch menu that is much cheaper. You have to pass through one of the worst, most dangerous parts of town to get there so don't try and walk, cab it or drive.

**The Causeway** – lots of restaurants right on the water – the Smithsonian Discovery center there is quite nice and offers an excellent vista.

**Pomodoro** (Hotel Veneto and Fiesta Casino in the Congrejo area) – probably the best courtyard dining experience (= need to go at night). Food is cheap and delicious. Panama’s twist on Italian food with exceptionally delightful results.

**El Valle de Ancon** - Home of the outstanding El Valle Amphibian Rescue and Conservation Center on the grounds of El Nispero zoo, \$1 admission. A good place to visit to get an idea of what we are trying to develop at Summit, but focusing on Eastern Panamanian species. The Golden Frog Inn or El Capitan are great places to stay. The Golden frog inn has a small room with 2 beds for ~ 70 bucks/night. Fabulous farmer’s market on Saturday and Sunday. Bruchetta is a great place to eat, as is as the local bakery (the one just across from the large church).

### **Health**

The Canal Zone is considered to be free from malaria and yellow fever, but precautions should be taken to avoid insect bites as dengue is occasionally reported. Hep A and typhoid vaccinations are recommended. Wear long pants in the dry season as chiggers can be a problem. The water should be safe to drink from municipal supplies. It's hot, please wear a hat and sunscreen when outside and insect repellent in the forest. Bring some immodium and or Cipro in case you catch a stomach bug. *\*Disclaimer\* Please follow advice from your doctor re: vaccinations and preventative medicine for your trip. **You must be responsible for all your own health-care and travel insurance arrangements.***

- **Centro Medico Paitilla** - Avenida Balboa y Calle 53, Panama 5, Panama City. Telephone: 507-265-8800 ext. 7040
- **Clinica Hospital San Fernando** - 3a Via Espana Final, Las Sabanas, Panama City Telephone: 507-305-6300
- **Hospital Nacional** - Avenida Cuba (entre Calles 38 y 39), Panama City, 507-207-8041
- **Hospital Punta Pacifica** Boulevard Punta Pacifica con Boulevard Punta Darien, San Francisco, Panama City, Telephone: 507-204-8041

### **Other Useful Contact Information (Country Dialing Code for Panama = 507).**

- **American Embassy in Panama City** - Demetrio Basilio Lakas Avenue, Building 783, Clayton, Panama City, Panama, Phone: 207-7000, Email: [panamaweb@state.gov](mailto:panamaweb@state.gov), Website: <http://panama.usembassy.gov>
- **Project Director (in Panama)** – Dr. Roberto Ibanez, [ibanezr@si.edu](mailto:ibanezr@si.edu) cell: 6650-6544
- **Volunteer coordinator (Washington DC)** – Dr. Brian Gratwicke [gratwickeb@si.edu](mailto:gratwickeb@si.edu) Phone 202.633.7399 (US number).
- **Police** -104 (Gamboa) 276-6256
- **Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (Tupper Center HQ).**
- **Amphibian Rescue Pod** Cell Number: 6591-1799
- **Danny Medina** - 6800-5556

### **Some Helpful Spanish words:**

Crickets- Grillos  
Grasshoppers - Saltomontes  
Termites- Termites  
Fruitfly - Mosco  
Dirty- Susio  
Clean- Limpio  
Wet- Mojado  
Dry- Seco  
Sick- Enferma  
Healthy - Saludable  
Cages- Cajas  
Tanks- Tanques  
Leaves- Ojas  
Feed – Alimentar  
Work - Trabajo

### **What to Bring**

- Sunblock
- Bug Spray (do NOT put it on when you're working with frogs because it is very toxic to them)
- Flashlight or Headlamp
- Sunglasses
- Flip Flops (to go in and out of quarantine easier)
- Small gifts for the zookeepers
- Cash in 10s, 5s and 1s since its difficult to get cash from many bank machines and nobody has change (The bank machine at the Gamboa resort has been the most dependable for getting cash with credit cards or debit cards)
- Travel Toilet Paper
- Small Towel
- Water bottle (you can drink the water along the Panama canal but keep water with you because you will need to drink often after all the sweating you'll be doing)
- Freezer bags to store food and equipment like cameras and binoculars that you don't want to get wet.
- Small pair of binoculars (the birding is awesome, so is the monkeying – is that a word?)
- Camera
- Meds for Diarrhea (ie. Pepto Bismol), for allergies (i.e. Benedryl), Acetaminophen for just about everything, Triple Antibiotic Ointment w/bandages
- Clorox wipes
- Wristwatch for timing treatments
- Rainy Season: rubber boots, umbrella, light raincoat.
- A Guide to Panama with maps, especially of Panama City
- Safety Equipment for Use with Power Towels if you are going down to build tanks or develop infrastructure for the PODS.
- Patience and a Sense of Humor.

### **What we always need.**

If you want to help by bringing things for us from the USA, we always need:

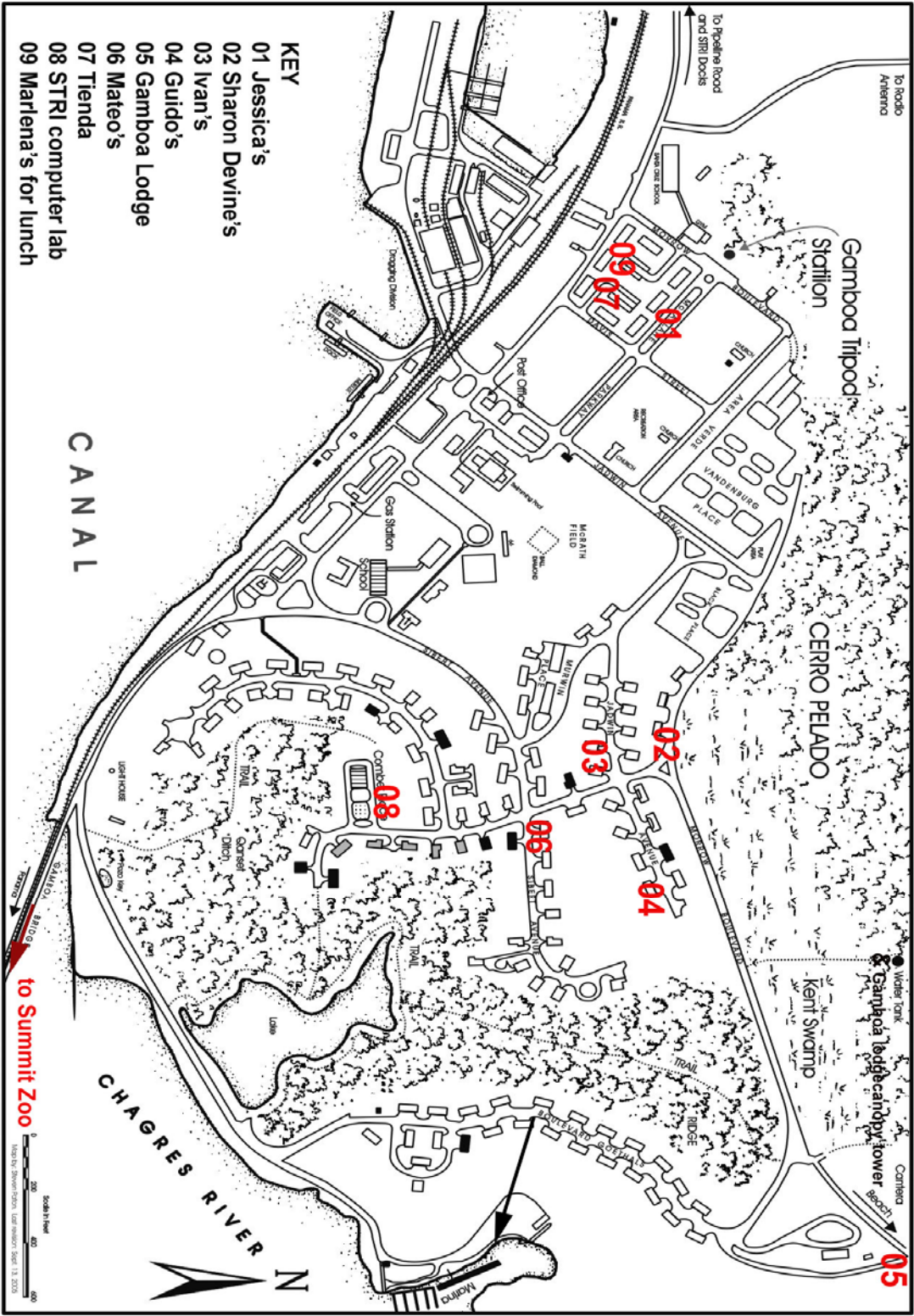
- Brewers yeast
- Nitrile gloves
- Microscope slides
- Sera Micron tadpole food

- Alcohol-proof markers
- Kritter-keeper cages
- MW100 chytrid testing swabs
- Contact [ibanezr@si.edu](mailto:ibanezr@si.edu) if you want a more detailed list of supplies that would help.

**Help us!**

- Send any recommendations or additions to this guide – [gratwickeb@si.edu](mailto:gratwickeb@si.edu)
- Share your pictures on our flickr group <http://www.flickr.com/groups/amphibianrescue>
- Join the project facebook fan page <http://on.fb.me/13Yc8E>
- Write a blog post for [www.amphibianrescue.com](http://www.amphibianrescue.com) and submit to [gratwickeb@si.edu](mailto:gratwickeb@si.edu)
- Donate online at [www.amphibianrescue.com](http://www.amphibianrescue.com)
- Tell your friends.
- Come back again!





- KEY**
- 01 Jessica's
  - 02 Sharon Devine's
  - 03 Ivan's
  - 04 Guido's
  - 05 Gamboa Lodge
  - 06 Mateo's
  - 07 Tienda
  - 08 STRI computer lab
  - 09 Marlena's for lunch

to Summit Zoo

Scale in feet: 0 200 400 600