

Day 1
Wednesday 15th May
Getting to Tabubil

(or not getting there or not getting luggage)

This day has at least three different versions of events mainly based on the way Air Niugini have handled our booking made and paid for six months earlier and also how they handled the luggage.

Version 1 by the Fearless Leader and team: Having had our booking from Cairns to PNG made in early November changed from departing Cairns at 12.30 on 14th June to departing Cairns at 6.00 am on 15th June and having been reassured that we would be able to comfortably make the connection with the flight to Tabubil, we rose at 3.00 am to ensure we wouldn't be late. It was a long wait at the Cairns airport for FL, Su, Pam and Graham for the check-in, flight to be called and getting off the tarmac but we arrived to the chaos of Port Moresby only 15 minutes late.

Here the dramas began and after Fearless Leader & Su's luggage was checked through the check-in at the Domestic Transfers desk in the International terminal froze for 15 minutes and would not issue the requisite boarding pass. Eventually they were escorted to the domestic terminal leaving Pam stuck in the queue despite the notifications of her predicament without her knowing what was going on. At the Domestic terminal they discovered Graham was also stranded there without the boarding pass he had paid for. Despite all protests the plane took off without them but with FL's & Su's luggage. After a confrontation and protest with Customer Services that took hours to resolve they were eventually put up at Airways Hotel with nothing to do but wait out the day for the next day's flight to Tabubil that was later changed to Kiunga.



Airways Hotel

It appears that Air Niugini not only dishonoured the prepaid tickets but admitting later bookings on the flight but they so overloaded the plane with freight

that they had to discard the personal luggage of eight people on the Epic Voyage to enable the plane to take off. It was a sad start to the voyage for our stranded quartet.

Day 1
The missing gear group

Our eventful first day concluded, for some, with an extremely easy unpacking after boarding our respective vessels. Air Niugini surpassed itself by not only bumping people at the departure gates but also offloading seven bags because of a 'weight' problem. We waited in vain at Tabubil for our checked luggage to appear although there seemed to be quite a lot of freight and piles and piles of newspapers. After numerous mobile calls James arranged for our bags to be flown to Kiunga tomorrow afternoon while remaining somewhat skeptical that this would actually happen!

Day 1
Apostles Group
All went to schedule

At the airport departure lounge we could recognise people who were probably on the Epic voyage. Boarding was called and those of us who knew were concerned that Fearless Leader and Su had not boarded. Protests were useless, and anyway the cabin crew had no power to change the situation. We approached the Tabubil airport in considerable cloud cover, and as we dropped into the valley we could see high green mountains on both sides of the town. Tabubil is a small town which services the Ok Tedi mine.

We arrived half an hour late. Lost baggage caused a hold up, but Dianne turned up from the organisers and reassured everyone. Air Niugini told us that the plane had been overloaded.

We transferred to a bus and were taken up through the mountain for half an hour to Ok Tedi mine. At the lookout we heard a warning hooter, followed by the sound of the blast from the mist below. Di introduced us to the mine manager Geoff Innis who told us that his home was Townsville and his contract as manager was for three years. In his talk he told us:

- The mine's elevation is 1,400 metres with a rainfall of 3,000 – 4,000 mm pa.
- The ore is low-grade copper, silver and gold, but the large deposit makes it worth while mining.
- It is on record that the pollution of the Alice River flowing into the Fly has caused huge problems. This was allowed as part of the licence with the PNG government and BHP. Now the advances in technology have reduced the particulate load considerably

and all sulphides removed. In time the present owners plan to build tailings dams that will remove the need to spill into the river.

- Downstream there are 126 villages. At every change in mining practice, and at least once every two months, there are negotiations with the village elders.
- The mine employs approximately 6,000 people 95% are PNG nationals. The company assists with schools and provides technical training for all workers. Mining families are helped with all fields of education including University.
- 82% of the mine is currently owned by the PNG Government and the PNG Sustainable Development Fund and 18% by a Canadian corporation. Funds for the PNG Fund are sourced from monies provided by BHP, the former operators when the company exited PNG.

Afterwards we went back to the Tabubil golf club for a buffet lunch where we met James Collins, one of the ship's masters. It rained. We then boarded the two busses for the long three-hour journey to Kiunga.

We were welcomed by the staff and also met Tony Collins. Over drinks in happy hour James gave us a short safety briefing, then dinner and bed.

Day 2
Thursday 16th May
Kiunga
Jewel-Babblers Group

Day 2 Another early start, this time to catch sight of the elusive Greater Birds of Paradise at their dawn display and calling before they disappear into the forest for the day.



We departed the rafted vessels in the semi-darkness and were ferried ashore in the tenders to meet our intrepid bird guide Samuel and his crew who would

provide the day's epic exploits. Retracing part of yesterdays epic journey from Tabubil, we suddenly arrived at an imposing chained gate. Samuel ushered us through and we made our way into the rainforest along the dark and slippery trail accompanied by the alarm calls of a Blue-eyed Cockatoo and Eclectus Parrots. As we approached the singing tree, the ever louder rising 'whoa whoas' from two groups of Greater Bowerbirds challenged each other like opposing teams. We arrived to discover that their performance was a team effort, with the top dog (or chook) higher up leading the performance and trying to attract a greater number of the dull brown female fans while younger aspirants circled the performance.

Photography proved difficult and challenging in the dimly lit forest, making Attenborough's wonderful film of these same birds much more dramatic.



Backtracking also proved to a bit more arduous as although the light was much improved we had further muddied up the track. There were several slips and Mary lost her clogs in one quagmire - giant spiky millipedes and the holes of Spiny Crays became visible, making Mary's barefoot track back more hazardous than she knew.

We then return triumphant to an awakening Kiunga, teeming with shoppers, loiterers and Betel Nut sellers. Mangy dogs blocked our way now and again, pausing in the middle of the road to urgently scratch an itch. We were ferried back to the vessels for a delicious breakfast and awaited the arrival of the 10 o'clock flight carrying the Lost Legion. Happily, they arrived in time to join the expedition up river, while we all wondered whether or not a later flight would bring the Lost Luggage.

Now with our full complement including our Fearless Leader John, Sue, Pam, and Intrepid Guide Graham, we carefully boarded four banana boats fitted out with homemade chairs and set off up the mighty Fly River. We set off at a cracking pace and presently crossed via a narrow channel (just like a

Disney ride) into the nearby Elavala River. The Elavala shore has much less slash and burn clearing for the small fruit and vegetable plots than the Fly, which are extensively cleared for crops of breadfruit, pawpaw and bananas. Now and then, there were tiny houses seemingly growing among the remnant forest trees; the gardens overgrown and just starting to be cleared for sweet potato, taro and manioc.



On the Elevara River

Birds were scarce due to the lateness in the day but there were numerous sightings of Dollarbirds, Intermediate Egrets and several tree-top colonies of very large red Pig-eared Flying-foxes. Alas, after one and a half hours of travelling we failed to reach the birdwatching bush lodge, due to the flood run in the river from the previous nights rain. Instead, we pulled up under a shady overhanging tree and enjoyed our packed lunches of roast chicken, yellow sweet-potato, broccoli and rice. After a vote on fast or slow return for each boat, we made our (for some of us thrilling) return journey at various speeds back to the vessels with a flyover from a Mixmaster-him-belong-Jesus (Iraquoy helicopter) carrying sling loads out bush.

After a quick refresher we headed back to shore in the tenders and were bussed across Kiunga for a village welcome by children and a man traditionally decked out with paint and head-dresses and necklaces (one young lad wearing a penis sheath). The man knelt and sprinkled water from a bamboo tube as he led us through palm frond arches and a special path down among the houses. The ground between the houses was set out with a bird of paradise tail symbol in the centre where we were given a culture talk along with short ceremonial dances and even a wedding between very small children which caused great amusement, not least to the scores of locals who had come to watch as well. The children on the other hand seemed a bit stunned by the whole thing!

One of the dancers wore a head-dress adorned with the white neck hackles from a Brahminy Kite, seedpod and shell rattles draped over his shoulders and a strange curved seedpod rattle on his back like a tail. Barramundi cheek bones, shells, charcoal paint, flowers, bird of paradise and cassowary plumes, and seeds were all used to decorate their bodies for traditional sing sing. It was a long and rewarding day.

Birds were:-

- Greater Bird of Paradise
- Little Pied Cormorant
- Great Egret
- Intermediate Egret
- Pacific Baza
- Brahminy Kite
- New Guinea Bronzewing
- Pinon Imperial-pigeon
- Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
- Wompoo pigeon
- Unknown Lorikeet or Lory
- Double-eyed Fig-parrot
- Eclectus Parrot
- Common Koel
- Channel-billed Cuckoo
- Uniform Swiftlet
- Common Dollarbird
- Blyth's Hornbill
- Pacific Swallow
- Golden-headed Cisticola
- Willie Wagtail
- Spangled Drongo
- Unknown small honey-eater
- Helmeted Friarbird
- Unknown midrange honey-eater
- Sunbird
- Papuan Flowerpecker
- Brown Oriole
- Metallic Starling
- White-breasted Wood-swallow
- Black Butcherbird
- Hooded Butcherbird
- Trumpet Manucode
- Twelve-wired Bird of Paradise
- Bare-eyed Crow



Day 3
Friday 17th May
Kiunga and Down the Fly River
Chats Group

Those who missed out yesterday (being the late arrivals) and a few others, left early to view the Greater Bird of Paradise. As it had been raining, the track was very wet and slippery. The various bird calls and variety of plants and ferns made the walk very enjoyable.

After a quick breakfast several of us went with Suzie to the markets. Some impressions of the markets were – catfish so fresh they tried to leap off the stall; meat on display including smoked crocodile fresh killed pig and a live turtle lying on its back; lots of varieties of green vegetables including leafy king kung, which we had for dinner. Colourful red rambutans, hairy melons, yellow star fruit and pitpit, nuts in tiny bundles, colourful bilums. Plastic bags were for sale. Most locals carried bilums. There were large ex fertiliser bags for sale.

We lifted anchor and set off on the Fly River. Kiunga is 458 river miles from the mouth of the Fly. Here the Fly has pristine water undamaged by tailings from the mine.

At 438 miles the Alice River joins the Fly bringing the water from the Ok Tedi River and mine. The area of degradation was apparent. Silt and rocks have caused the water level to rise, which in turn has caused flooding and a higher water table killing many trees and vegetation. In addition, the past failing of the tailings dam has brought cyanide. The pyrites is in the mine waste and produces sulphuric acid when in contact with oxygen. This too has damaged the environment.

Dredging takes place 20 miles back on the Alice River to provide for a holding tank covering 9,000 acres and 30 metres deep. This helps contain the silt and mine waste. We passed a research vessel which monitors the river floor.

The vegetation along the river consists of cane grass with a lot of tall dead trees and a few live ones. Many of the trees are covered by vines which can make amazing shapes – sort of natural topiary!

At 430 river miles was Wiogamba Refugee Camp. Here the river is the border - Port side is Indonesia and starboard side is PNG. This camp has become a settlement after 20 years and receives aid from the UN. People cross over to each country quite easily.

We anchored 370 miles and enjoyed a most glorious sunset and happy hour. The Surveyor and Miss Rankin moored side by side with those on the Surveyor being late arrivals for happy hour.

Gorgeous red clouds with fabulous reflections. Another delicious dinner.



Kukujaba Sing-sing participants
Day 4

Saturday 18th May
Kukujaba and downstream
Darters Group

Up early for a bacon-and-eggs breakfast before a 7.30 departure via little boats to Kukuzaba village on a side creek called Binge Ck. Grey mists over a grey river. Ours was the first ever tourist visit to this community. Everyone was on the bank to greet us except late-comers paddling their family over in long canoes. There was a traditionally dressed welcoming party and the first male and female ashore were greeted by spears hurled in a way to miss them...then they were garlanded. Head-dresses, body-paint and face-paint were used on men and women and small children according to gender. Decorative materials included whole dead birds (Western Black-capped Lory) on the head, as were some gorgeous plumes of the Greater Bird of Paradise. Other decoration included Cassowary feathers, woven bodices and raffia skirts (on both men and women). Two young boys had the traditional penis sheath of the bill of a Blyth's Hornbill (kokomo).

Off to a meeting-house, we were now kind of part of the ceremony/procession. It's a peace ceremony used to greet people, Jack Bola the village

spokesman explained. Then everyone shook hands. Some had their first experience of a Fly River greeting custom... handshake with knuckle pull.



We were then all invited to stroll through the village and view women demonstrating weaving of various kinds. Pathways and houses were adorned with orchids and staghorns collected for our visit. There were lots of kids and many rather emaciated dogs. Around 10 people lived in a house and there were maybe 800 souls in total in the whole community.

Peter Smith bravely accepted the challenge of chewing buai (betel nut) which left him rather light-headed for 10 minutes or so.

Pigs caught in the jungle were fattened in small raised covered enclosures behind each house; a cassowary similarly was being raised for sale. Down near the very old rubber trees there was a penned crocodile. A few cats were spied, including one literally on a hot tin roof! One proud man showed us his five round cakes of latex, each weighing around 20-30kg it would appear. These he would take to Kiunga.

The village was in mourning and could not perform a traditional sing sing, but after another song and exchange of speeches of mutual appreciation, it was back on the small boats to return to our two 'mother ships', which had already been separated in preparation for continuing our downriver journey. 'Surveyor' stole a march on 'Miss Rankin' and led the way until dusk. Just before Happy Hour and the lead boat change we passed the large Lake Manda to port, which Arnold (Chief Engineer) said teems with metre-long barramundi.

Day 5
Sunday, 19th May
Kuatru & Suki Wetlands
Eagles Group

Another fabulous Adventure In Paradise

Despite a slight navigational error during the early morning we regained our course on the main channel of the Fly River. We tied up off Suki Creek and set out in our banana boats and tenders. We left a little later than planned as the boats from Suki

Village hadn't arrived as planned – they thought it was the following Sunday.

On entering Suki Creek we were mesmerised by the beautiful reflections of the surrounding sago palms and mixed forest. It was reassuring to see the sign for Suki Lodge with its warning to Beware of Headhunters. Many locals were standing on the banks at Suki Village waving with great enthusiasm.

At Suki Lodge we were joined by Danga who is a field officer for the OTTF (Ok Tedi Development Fund) and who accompanied us up the Creek. He explained that he is involved in local community projects such as deer farming, rubber planting and taro crops.

Around Suki Village there were mangroves similar to those in Queensland, then the Creek opened up into wonderful extensive wetlands full of water lilies and patches of flowering lotus (with evidence of invasive hyacinths). All over there was an abundance of birdlife.

Along our 'shortcut' one of our boats got clogged up in the river grasses and was constantly stopping much to Bruce's chagrin. We needed the help of a passing family in their dugout canoe. They towed us to everyone's delight into deeper water. He preferred to use his pole/paddle rather than risk his motor 'buggerup'. We gave them a tennis ball, apple and Sydney Swans football which the young toddler grabbed and held as though he were born for it and he was not letting it go!

We stopped in at Riti Village where we were again heartily welcomed and where we all did a B-line for the Haus pek-pek (toilet) to the amusement of the locals. After a very short stay with billum viewing and pig patting we 'all aboard' and continued on to our destination – Kautru Village. As we approached we could hear the sound of voices and drums, war cries and kundus! 'Menacing warnings' in the form of bows and arrows flying through the air and landing strategically in the water beside us.

We landed and walked through the Welcome Arch shaking hands with all the villagers along the way uphill into the village. The little kids shyly embraced the hand shaking. The welcoming committee were dressed in magnificent traditional costume with elaborated body painting and attire. We proceeded through the village where we were treated to the Round Dance led by Monster from the River and others. Several from our party joined in wearing grass skirts and head-dresses. After the Sing-sing we had the opportunity to buy exquisite local crafts.

This was the first time that tourists had visited this village and they embraced this event with great joy and pride and carried out their ceremony with great

enthusiasm. The only unfortunate observation was that there are still young children suffering from yaws, a fungal disease easily treated by modern anti-fungal cream.



The Kuartru Reception team

They waved us goodbye and as we headed back we passed many waving villagers and children sitting in dugouts. Also we saw locals dressed for the Sabbath in their Sunday Best. We came across many people fishing with various techniques and skill. We also passed a dugout carrying men out for a deer hunt.

In the late afternoon we had a speedy return journey, just in time for an early Happy Hour. Sods law had it that both banana boats that had accompanied us back down the Creek ran out of petrol 100 metres from the ships much to the amusement to those safely aboard!

Another fabulous Adventure in Paradise.



**Day 6
Monday, 20th May
Sapuka
Flycatchers Group**

Peter: Another day, another village, another Bruce indiscretion – at least it was downwind!

The Sapuka Village (120 NM mark and pop 'about' 842) visit was in sharp contrast to yesterday's spectacular welcomes and sing sings. This time we were not expected. However, word soon spread and we had many helping hands up to the clay river bank from our banana boat. The village is on hilly ground, quite spread out and very orderly. Loggers in the 80's laid the road (which accounts for the area having being cleared of primary forest).

Accompanied by the villagers we were taken on a leisurely circular tour that revealed gardens with an impressive array of fruit and vegetables (including yams, banana, potato, mangoes, pineapples, coconut, breadfruit, soursop, cashew nuts, guava, cassava, sago, and betel nuts). One of our guides, Wari informed us that this was mainly women's work while the men did the hunting. He said most of the hunting was done at night using spot lighting and guns. Cassowary is his favourite meat, but he also hunted pigs, wallabies, tree kangaroos and deer. There was also a plantation of several hundred rubber trees.



Sapuka garden

Religion plays an important part of village life. There are three churches in the village. We visited the Mormon church in a prominent position on the top of the hill. We enjoyed a pleasant breeze at that spot; a welcome relief from the hot and humid condition.

The houses were usually made from local materials and inhabited by one family.

Meanwhile Mary followed the scent of a different story. She enquired about the use of the pile of giant bamboo poles she spotted on arrival. Don Hook was able to find the answer from one of the local men, Samatari Moedo: they were for fencing. Pause. Fencing for live crocodile. Our new mate agreed to lead us to them.

By this time everyone else had moved on (see above) so Don and Mary followed the group of crocodile hunters to view their catches. As we took off Samatari said 'Excuse me' and pulled out a metre long knife from the front of his shirt, adding 'I was working when you arrived. It was a surprise'.

The crocodiles in the enclosure were no more than a foot across but those will be kept till they are 51cm when they will fetch 350k each for their skin plus money for meat. The minimum size they can sell for skin is 21 cm.

Any eggs laid by the captured crocodiles are either eaten or if hatched, farmed for meat and skin. A crocodile can lay 50 – 60 eggs and the rate of successful hatching is high (80% +), though it would take five or six years for a crocodile to reach the optimum size. These skins will change hands so that by the time they reached the manufacturers of luxury bags and belts, their value would have appreciated many times.

Samatari casually mentioned that a large crocodile is on the loose and they have not located it. When asked 'how large' he said, 'about the size of that coconut tree'; it was a tall coconut tree. When questioned him again he measured out a distance of approximately 2.5 M and said again, sadly, 'we can't find him'.

On our way to join the rest of the group at the school, we met the Rev. Simon Sumido who proudly announced that he is also a builder and in fact built the school house in a day with help from the men in the village who built the walls and the women of the village who covered the roof. However, though the building went up easily, it was another story when it came to staffing. Not only does the village lack teachers, they have a hospital with no staff.

Rev. Simon Sumido proved to be more than a builder, as he showed up later with a bunch of spears for sale and Mary bought one (20K)– the spear was made from the stem of the Pit Pit and the tip made with bone. The barbs were from the echidna; attached onto the spear with a 'cement' made with animal blood and lime. The red and yellow stripes were applied with plant dyes. The spear can be detached into two parts which makes it easier to transport.

We finally arrived at the school precinct which was spread out of four main blocks in a neat large grassed and treed area. There were six teachers and Headmaster Mr Guitemi Kisuna. Like the medical centre and water supply the school had been partly set up by OTML but continuing funding for services was sadly lacking.

A lady who accompanied us spoke excellent English and when asked why she does not teach she admitted being a schoolteacher but as her husband is already involved with the elementary school, he does not want her to teach as well. That would bring too much wealth into the family and that would not be tolerated.

School fees of 70 to 100 Kina a year; most was spent on building and maintenance while the govt covered salaries and education materials. (The HM said that children who could not afford the school fees would be given some time to pay it).

The children do a public examination at year 8 and currently there are 70 year 8 students so hopefully a number of them will go on to train as teachers and return to support the school. However, we were told that there are a couple of girls in the village with Year 12 qualifications (by correspondence) but they cannot afford to leave the village for further education.

FL presented the HM with a parcel of school materials and Jacky tossed in a Swans Footy.



Swans Sapuka Football presentation

We were blessed by the 'weather gods' for our Burei Creek exploration. The rain cleared as we set out and started again shortly after our return. Three boats slowly made the way up the creek (some being towed to decrease engine noise) against an outgoing tide and run-off from the recent storm. In great contrast to the devastated upper reaches this waterway was rich with a great variety of trees of varying heights lining the narrowing stream (from huge figs to mangroves). For the next three hours the calls and sightings of birds were an absolute delight. (Dragon monitors and a mudskipper or two were also seen). Hornbills and Palm Cockatoos were obvious winners but many other species kept the birdos speculating and cheering (see separate bird lists).

The day end with the arrival of some local deer hunters from Sapuka and the rain set in again.

Helen and Fiona's birthdays were celebrated with cake and candles (and ice-cream). Happy Birthday was sung with the trio of ukulele players' accompaniment. D



Day 7
Tuesday, 21st May
Mouth of the Fly River
 Apostles

On *Surveyor* Elizabeth got stuck in the bathroom. There had been trouble with the privacy lock before, and she had been warned, but forgot. In the end the crew would either have to break the door down (with an axe hanging on the wall for fire) or Elizabeth would have to work it out herself. Peter had been caught there too, and gave instructions through the door, eventually Elizabeth worked it out and managed to jiggle the bar into position. Lembiki then removed the faulty lock.

6:00 Weighed anchor and started our journey down the Fly river. The day was overcast and provided some excellent cloud background for photographs.

8:00 Passed Sturt Island the site of an old sawmill and settlement. Although on an earlier program, the Collins brothers said it was not worth stopping.

9:30 Ship slowed to pass shallows caused by a sandbar. Women in an outrigger canoe came out wanting to trade deer haunches for processed food, tinned food, biscuits and salt. A dumb barge towed by a tugboat was ahead of us and all ships stopped because of the shallow water at low tide. This place was described as "hornbill central" with many pairs sighted. Also whistling kites came down to take advantage of the meat scraps left after the crew had butchered the venison that had been traded.

10:00 Proceeded down river slowly.

14:00 Surveyor had a bump on the bottom. Very shallow water at 1.5 metres the lowest. Tony warned Rankin by radio.

14:30 Passed Tapila the store/supply depot for the Ok Tedi mine. Don had brought with him a DVD of "Walk to Paradise" a 1955 Chips Rafferty film set in PNG. Screening started on the upper deck.



16:30 Sighted a very large crocodile basking on the mud-flat of an island we were passing. Simon was able to take a good photo of it using his powerful camera with a 1200 mm zoom lens. With the incoming tide the draft was deeper and less troublesome.

Sunset: Very beautiful sunset with setting sun shining on the cloud and a view of Rankin on the river.

Happy hour and dinner was enjoyed while still on the river before entering the ocean. After dinner the ship began to rock and many retired early.



Day 8
Wednesday, 22nd May
Airds Hill
 Jewel-Babblers

We are sitting here in Aird River Delta watching "In Bruges" awaiting for the incoming tide, so we may be here some time. Everybody slept in today after a bumpy night crossing from the Fly Delta to visit the mission built 100 years ago by Ben Butcher at the Aird Hills. Anyway, whatever.

Our destination the Aird Hills was visible out at sea but now entering dense stands of Nipa Palms and the lighter green of *Sonneratia alba* mangroves create a confusing maze of passages and islands that make up the Kikori Delta. Our route passed the village where Ben's predecessor James Chalmers and party met their end in 1904 followed by a reciprocal massacre by the constabulary of Port Moresby; the villagers now provide cheap labour for an Asian timber pillager.

We pass into several rivers and linking channels to again sight the Aird Hills a ring of abrupt low peaks, possibly the remnants of an ancient caldera. A large house with a commanding view occupies a ridge on one of those hills, and we set course for this in our dinghies to the village of Arrow. Ashore after some questioning we are kindly guided by Reverend Roy and Jack, the Grandson of the village head Williamu who provided the crucial link that made Ben's mission a success. Landing at the site of the mission jetty we walked along the old track-way built through the shore swamp past the old slipway, now only short inlet where Ben built several large vessels to supply the missions. The Aird River now flows several hundred metres away and an island blocks direct access to the jetty and slipway.

Scaling the track and now accompanied by most of the school kids we set off to the house which was Ben's residence, the school is in Arrow and four hundred children attend it with three teachers. The town is the largest of the Kikori District with twelve hundred residents of the Motu language group. Samoa is nearby and was settled by a large number of Samoans, hence the name. Ben's house is almost unchanged, and after availing ourselves to its comforts, visit Phyllis's grave, Ben Butcher's eldest daughter. Then guided by Jack, slip and slide down the hill to the small ruined hydro generator and dam, before walking back to the boat.



The centenary of Ben's arrival will be held on the date of his arrival in November, they had hopes of Ben's descendants attending but are unable to find them, Jackie who has her own missionary connections may be able to help them. This village was our first to see healthy dogs and no signs of Grilli-grilli in the children. Our disembarking provided much mirth to the gathered children as by now the boats were a metre lower, and several slips and falls occurred, Jackie to further aggravate broken toe. A mixed message for the school supplies resulted in Rev. Roy invited to have lunch with us and receive the box of gifts for the school children.

With Happy Hour well underway we set course for Port Moresby with the Aird Delta aft and the distant highlands a line of lightning lit thunder storms.

Day 9 Thursday, 23rd May Across the Gulf of Papua to Moresby

Folk were slow to appear for breakfast this morning. Some were unfortunately not well. A few also had the misfortune to get wet in bed during the evening. Their cabins leaked!!! As Anne related; "my face felt wet, then my hair was wet!!"

We learnt quickly to hold onto mugs and plates as the boat gently rolled and after a few mishaps. We also learnt not to be surprised at the 'bidet' effect of the toilet!

The day proceeded quietly as we sailed across the Gulf of Papua. The sky was overcast so it was not very hot. We had a beautiful double rainbow in the morning.

As we crossed the gulf, we had troughs and crests kept us on our toes testing our balance.

Not far out of Moresby we passed the LNG Exon Plant. Although a lot of men are employed locally they still have to fly in and fly out Australian workers. We arrived in Port Moresby around three and we docked on the Navy wharf.

Shortly after 2 vehicles arrived to take some of us to the Botanical Gardens (now called a Nature Park). One was an open back truck which had 16 of us in the back. What entertainment for the locals – a lot of waving and tooting.

At the park we saw wallabies and tree-kangaroos, cassowaries from a boardwalk, and lots of parrots and other birds in the aviary. Lots of palm trees, a rainforest grove and clipped hedges of orange-flowered Ixora, and the diverse colours of the crotons. The park was beautifully set out with paths, lawns and gardens with big old trees.

Happy hour and dinner proved to be most entertaining. Ann and Norma were surprised when their stepson Mungo Maxtone Graham appeared on board. Norma's English husband's first cousin, Peter Maxtone Graham came to PNG in the 50's, planted coffee and had a native wife who father a son Mungo. Mungo's father, Peter drowned in the Waghi River and Ann and her husband tried to adopt Mungo age 7. The missionaries persuaded his mother to take Mungo to the coast. At age 15 he had left boarding school and was working for the airline in Wewak when Norma was there in transit - met Mungo and brought him up to the Highlands where she and her husband were growing coffee. Mungo was persuaded to go back to school – Cranbrook in Sydney and then to Orange Ag. He was selling tin meat and then returned to PNG – and married a girl from Wellington.

Mungo was on board with his son Peter, 20 years old now working up here – and Mungo's brother Jamie and his son, Will Rutledge – son of coffee planters in the Waghi and friends of the boys. Lot of beer and red wine were consumed!

Gill was almost married to Mungo, but he felt she had to change her will to favour him! We await the next instalment.



Day 10
Friday, 24th May
Port Moresby

Up on the wharf listening to the colours being raised on the adjoining naval vessel, we waited and we waited for our "8.00" departure. PNG time meant that we were finally away by 8.45.

First stop was the Adventure and Nature Park which also housed the National Orchid collection. The bird collection was fabulous and John became good pals with a very friendly Hornbill. Many were able to take photos of the Birds of Paradise in an aviary which was wooded and naturalistic. Many other birds were also on display, especially Goria pigeons, Lories and other parrots.

Tree Kangaroos fascinated, especially one with a joey in her pouch. Their enclosures contained huge trees and the kangaroos took full advantage with many lying right up at the top on outer branches. There were more domestic animals for children – and even an enclosure of large plastic African animals.

The orchids were beautiful with many in bloom and generally the plant displays showed how effective mass plantings can be when designed well.

The Bomana War Cemetery was as well-maintained as they all are. The cemetery was started during the war and contains the graves of more than 3,000 men and one woman, all from Commonwealth forces killed during the PNG campaigns. It was a serene location.

Then on to lunch at the Royal Papuan Yacht Club, at a huge table on the verandah overlooking the marina. It was a pleasure to meet James's wife Elouise and his son Hamish.

The museum was the next stop and was really fascinating. Really our hour there didn't do it justice at all. It contained wonderful old drums, billums, shields, masks and canoes from all parts of PNG and from all eras of history and collecting. A 4,000 year old spade and similarly ancient axe head were stand outs.

A brief stop at the Parliament House for a photo op. preceded a return towards town and a visit to Hanuabada. Much of the village was not just on stilts but built out over the water, with very precarious-looking walkways between them.

Jackie had a terrific day, not only did she see Lawes' Parotia named after her great-grandfather (*Parotia lawesii*) but we went to the marker at the site of his house. He was the first white missionary in Papua, arriving in 1874.

Journalists from the Post Courier had got wind of this story and came to interview and photograph her.

We sadly said farewell to our first half naturalist Graham, and welcomed Paul Horner who arrived rather later than scheduled, but in time for Happy Hour.



Day 11
Saturday 25th May
Snorkelling off Wakauveli Island

After a rolling night – we woke to find we had anchored off Walaiveli Island for us to have a morning of snorkelling and swimming. The crew ran tenders back and forth ferrying us – good to be in the sea with warm temperatures and clear water. Tiny crabs moving SO fast across the sand – small shells 'walking' by the waters edge (inhabited by hermit crabs). We noted sites under the trees where islanders had visited to smoke their catch of fish in the traditional manner – on wooden racks over a smoky fire.

This was a well-vegetated island with quite large trees. We heard frequent calls of the Varied Honey-eater. An Imperial Pied Pigeon flew over. There were fruit bats that flew from the treetops when we disturbed them.

Tony found a couple of shells on the beach which were a real find – an intact Nautilus and a large helmet shell. It felt like a deserted island but that illusion was broken when we came across a temporary shelter with fisherman in it. We chatted with them and learnt that they were from the mainland and had stayed the night and were to return back later in the day.

The water was pristine and clear. In the shallow waters, you could see the white crushed coral which formed the seabed. Further out, seaweed and coral provided food for an array of small brightly coloured tropical fish. Clams, starfish, soft coral and brain coral were found in deeper waters.

After our pleasant sojourn on the island, we set off around noon. We continued to head south-east keeping the coastline within sight. It was a relaxing afternoon, books, newspapers and crossword puzzles kept us occupied and 'nanna naps' did too.

Happy hour proceeded while the full moon shone brilliantly on the Coral Sea. The swell picked up and our chairs rolled along the back deck so we held on as best we could.



Day 12
Sunday 26th May
Samarai

After one of Miss Rankin's roughest nights at sea, the casualty count was high amongst the passengers as well as the ship's hardware. The latter included the loss of the heavy timber table-top which now represents a Coral Sea hazard. As well as the high wind there were intersecting swells. Most of us made it for breakfast and exchanged horror stories. There was much relief as we anchored off Suau Island (for a quick snorkel and bird watch) and pondered our immediate future in the rain.

Given the conditions, it was decided that we proceed directly to our next port of call, Samarai, where we arrived just after lunch. The recent history of this port goes back its being the capital during colonial times and its strategic importance during WWII. The Allies bombed the town to prevent the Japanese using it as a base.

After the war the town was rebuilt. Now it has a rather strange atmosphere with many of the once substantial buildings in disrepair. However the hospital and school were in good condition and the former offered free medical and dental services.

The school especially impressed us with its range of subjects, the depth of the syllabus (quite in contrast to the Sapuka School) and the displays mounted by the teachers and students. More impressive was that the school was open on Sunday with the school principal Gissella working with one of the Grade 8

students. She came to the boat to collect the donation of goods we had for the schools.

Large shady trees and elaborate plantings and gardens made up for the largely unmaintained buildings. The usual religions, as elsewhere, were represented — Anglicans, Lutherans, Uniting & Catholics all had churches here.

The Anglican minister, Father Reginald struck up a conversation with Mary and offered her some pomelo that she promptly accepted. So the School Inspector Mr. Mario from Ferguson Island climbed up the roof of the house and picked half a dozen for her to take back to Miss Rankin.

Father Reginald mentioned that there are plans by the PNG government to spend some millions on rebuilding the island to its former glory; the construction is expected to begin next year. The Anglican Church will also be rebuilt on its original site.

Mr Mario the school inspector lamented the fact that few tourists visit his home island and was delighted to learn that Ferguson Island is our next port of call.

It appears from being the largest and most important port in all of Australian Papua there has been a steady decline. Port Moresby usurped the shipping trade, the evacuation and subsequent bombing during WWII marked its demise. After the war Alatau assumed the leadership of Milne Bay Province and the grand Debutante's Balls and other social highlights ceased but Samarai still supports a population of 900 people on its 52 hectares. Surprisingly (perhaps due to the higher education standards the birth rate seems much lower and there are only 180 students at the school.

Email from Uncle Long Nose:

Hi All Intrepid Tropical ePickers,

Many thanks for all your prayers, good wishes & support. It has worked out well in the end & the surgeons from Round 2 collectively gave me a full clearance from any further treatment (eg. radiation, etc.) & told me to go & not darken their corridors again! Clearly some of my medical jokes were not too good! Anyway, shortly I'll be back in Kakadu for some ranger training & then off to South Africa to wrestle a warthog & climb a giraffe. I'll include a few gruesome photos so you'll know I'm not faking it. There has been some vast improvement since those photos were taken. I asked the head surgeon to get a few snaps during the ordeal...& he did! I won't send you those.

What a damn pity this fell right on my last two Kimberley runs & worse still..... PNG. On top of that, FL keeps telling me what a good time you are all having!!! Then I heard that Captain Tony has a good supply of tawny port in the wheelhouse - beware on concert night, lest ye fall by the wayside & can't complete your item! Shame!! The other tragedy is we don't have Eric the Cuscus to entertain you any more either.

I hope to answer each of your emails shortly & I really hope they put this trip on again next year so that I can verify all your alleged stories. Make sure you see some of John Grylls' marvelous nature documentaries whilst you are steaming if you haven't already.

Thanks for sailing without me! May the Bird of Paradise fly up your river.

Day 13
Monday, 27th May
Deidei & Dobu
Apostles

After a mercifully smooth sail from Samarai we arrived at Palagwau (east Fergusson Is) to visit the Dei Dei hot springs. Initially we were greeted by friendly villagers on the beach and when we were all ashore the local man in charge welcomed us and introduced our guides. We were allocated into groups of 5 with a guide each. Before we set off we received a final instruction not to pull up any of the ground orchids in the area; this we obeyed. The track we took was formerly a road which had fallen into disuse after a bridge collapse and had deteriorated into a narrow 'goat track', and as it had been raining heavily overnight the track was ankle deep in water in places and very muddy in others, some came close to being bogged but as always there was help at hand!

Along the track we saw the ground orchids, other orchids and pitcher plants, occasional birdwing butterfly and were treated to the melodious sound of calling manucodes. These proved to be curl-crested manucodes calling to defend their territory. Soon we arrived at the hot springs, pools of bubbling water, steam curling around the air and the sound of bubbling mud greeted us. The odour of sulfur permeated the air, although not overpowering. The guides explained that some of the pools were used for cooking and the people had to be vigilant about where they walked as to fall in to a pool has disastrous consequences. We were careful to follow the footsteps of the guides!

Some stories were related about 5 people, including children, who had fallen in to the scalding pools. Our guides then took us to a nearby creek which had warm water to bathe in. Some epickers took the plunge in spite of a steep muddy bank to negotiate. We slowly returned to the village where the locals had some shells for sale and some bags. The bags were a different design to those we had seen so far, they were shaped like a Western style handbag, triangular looking side on with a purple pattern on the front, a bargain at K30 but not a good shape for packing.

Once more we boarded the dinghies and returned to our ships where the talented Essie had produced a delicious lunch of fish and chips. After a short rest

we went for a swim/snorkel leaving off the back of the ships for some, whilst others were ferried across in the dinghies. We swam over sulfurous bubblers and viewed a little bit of coral reef although the visibility was very poor. Some swam back to the ships and others returned in the dinghy. By this time there were a large number of small outrigger canoes off the island. Some approached our boats with fresh produce for sale but we had a surfeit of fresh fruit and veggies on board, although a turtle was purchased and later released back into its ocean home. FL turned K260 into a handsome woven mat, a large pandanus fibre mat with a beautiful purple coloured pattern.

We remained rafted up and enjoyed a magnificent curry for dinner, then headed off still rafted up, later parting company and proceeding on our way on a reasonably calm sea.



Day 14
Tuesday, 28th May
Kiriwina Island and Losuia
Jewel-babblers

Smooth steaming overnight from Dobu with 0'400 arrival and dropped anchor at Muwo Islet, disregarding our safety FL has whistled up a 15 knot and rising wind; now we are swinging and swaying at anchor, water visibility is so poor there will be no snorkelling only a short beach walk after a bumpy wet dingy ride, ashore, lush vegetation and beautiful beach but swarms of mozzies attacking anyone venturing into to forest. After lunch set sail for the larger Trobriand Islands dimly visible to the north through the haze and white-caps.

At Kiriwina Island and managing to locate a shallow anchorage of 30m on a shelf right in front of a reef, 0'100 arrived and no support boats in sight, we embarked into the two metre seas to a twelve kilometre ordeal, (at times doubting our sanity,) and James almost calling the trip off. Halfway, everybody sodden by spray and occasional wave over the gunnels, we received some respite from the fringing reef sheltering the channel into Losuia.



Within sight of Losuia the support boat arrives to give aid to the stragglers with a hair-raising transfer in the rough sea. Kenith our Trobriand cultural guide introduced himself at the Losuia landing. Beware Kiriwena the Dim-dims have arrived (the local name for a white person), then tearing us away from frenetic trading in intricate mock ebony carvings with pearl shell inlays, (and being given the final shine with brown boot polish and a well worn tooth brush), sorted the infirmed to the small van and the rest balanced on plastic chairs in the back of a small truck.

Passing through the markets with mounds of yams, taro and what looked like dirty logs but were in fact cassava roots, and the ubiquitous Buri dealers. A large range of small fish strung into loops of ten, the largest was a metre long Black-tipped Reef-shark, there were also Long-toms, Bony-bream, Parrot-fish, and many more types. We then made a hard right almost taking out the gatepost for a toilet stop in the local council compound, the nearby vehical lockup there was a totally stripped down tractor and tuk-tuk with only the rear wheels missing. Then much relieved we proceeded to Kavatari, featuring more traditional style of thatched single room house, and a very small hut with raised floor and roof, no walls and appeared used for sleeping and sitting during the day with the benefit of catching any breeze.



With persistent sellers with their mat of beautiful carving underfoot, a medley of traditional dancing

and music was performed for about an hour, possibly enjoyed more by the village than ourselves, Possibly because many of the subtleties and meanings to the dances and music were missed. Then after a frenzy of trading we backtracked to the Kiriwena Schools to present gifts, the small party presenting the gifts were in turn surprised with lei's and a sing-sing performed by the students.

Final frantic haggling back at Losuia landing, then a faster but wet return with the extra banana boat, to Miss Rankin with a high-stepping boarding in the one metre swell, shuttling passengers to the correct boats in calmer waters then to a mooring for the night at the northern end of Kiriwena Island near tomorrows start, with a brief visit by a Brown Booby.



Day 15

Wednesday, 29th May

Kiriwina Island — 3 Sing-sings and Cricket

Today was an early start, leaving the boat at 7:30am for an 8:00am connection with transportation. We landed on the beach at the village of Kaibola at the school and were swamped as soon as we landed by artisans eager to sell their wares. (This was repeated wherever we went during the day). The things on offer included Ebony which was often wood polished with black shoe polish!

The transport was on PNG time, so was late - we started walking! Once we got out of the village, there was little shade and it was quite hot; some strode out and some walked, some sat down in the shade and waited.

Before the shade ran out, Bruce gathered the stragglers, and told the villagers that we were old meris who had lost their husbands. Beautiful mats were laid under a shady tree and the group was surrounded by the locals with their wares. Mary did us proud by buying something every three minutes

although everyone helped with frequent purchases. The group was given bananas to eat and a demonstration of how banana money was made. Half an hour passed quickly but finally the sound of the air-conditioned minibus was heard.

Finally we were all collected in the minibus and of course on the back of the truck. Our first stop was to see megaliths which was a burial place. The locals believe that the megaliths are man-made by people who lived on the island prior to the current people.



The first village visited was Omarikama, where we saw a sing-sing with 6 athletic young men who danced the whirlwind and bush fowl dance. They had feathered head dresses and mouthpieces made from tubular plant pith. We began to understand the particular significance of the yam in the community. Yam 'towers' and yam houses had been built to store these important items. The Paramount chief's yam house was very grand, quite large with a beautifully decorated front. The Paramount Chief can have up to 15 wives! He is chief until he chooses to abdicate and the successor is chosen through the clan of women.

The next village was Obweria, where we enjoyed a very different dance spectacle of about 20 young men and boys who performed in unison in rows using "strings" with "seed" bells, co-ordinated by one of the dancers with a whistle. This exceedingly energetic dance was accompanied by a group singing in harmony and playing guitars. We were also given coconuts to drink the refreshing coconut milk.

Next stop was Butia Lodge for lunch, where we were met by cool drinks. The dining area was open sided with carved poles and carved coffee tables. Lunch was a buffet with a variety of food including mud crabs and a taro and sago pudding.

After lunch we were treated to a demonstration of how widows made money from banana leaves.

Our afternoon village visit was to Yalumugwa where 40 men accompanied by conch shell and whistle entertained us with a sing-sing to introduce the cricket match. Cricket whites were replaced by the usual red lap-lap.

The cricket match - this was at the football field. James had previously arranged and paid for the game to be played for us. Sadly this is hardly played any more. It was now 2pm and getting hotter. We piled out of the air-conditioned mini bus and truck to the "members stand" - a house wind built for the occasion. Nearby, a tall slender man in lap-lap seen standing next to a huge palm frond stuck in the ground was identified as the score-keeper. At the far end of the field were 50 men dressed in sing-sing and they chanted to a steady beat with shouts and a conch shell blowing the beat. They danced down the field towards us.



Everyone was dressed the same so you could not tell who is on which side - but it turned out it was all of them against us! First to bat was Peter S, followed by James R. and Paul and Don and F.L. John and finally Bruce. Batters never knew who was bowling. The warriors would march and whistle towards each batsman to intimidate them. The steady rhythm of the chant continued - over and over - never stopping for the hour this game was on. Bruce hit a four and a six and was the acclaimed man of the match. After the game Peter S presented the boys with a bat and a new ball he had brought from Oz - we had all signed the bat. The object is NOT to win but have a good time - their sledging of our batters leaves the Australian team for dead.

After the cricket match we drove to Bweka, the place of the Premier Chief, John lived. It was a beautiful clearing surrounded by large shady trees and groomed lawn and gardens. Twelve girls dressed in grass skirts and six boys dressed in red laps laps performed to the music of a band of men singing in harmony and playing islander music on their

guitars. The music was very gentle and rhythmic as they swayed to the beat.



John welcomed us and said he wanted to speak about yams and Kula. Kula is the trade of the Trobriands whereby certain objects are traded either clockwise or counter clockwise around the islands - this can take up from five to fifty years. It is a system of ritual exchange. This used to be done by canoes at unknown time but now replaced by Digicel and powered boats.

There are two kinds of yams. One called Tadoo which are in clusters and the other called Cooe which are very long slender and grown very deep in potholes one to two metres deep. The longest yams are highly prized and placed between two thick logs and tied with vine and carried on poles. Some are marked with black and white circles, others with commas. These long yams are a status symbol for successful gardening.

John then made a presentation of yams to James and bananas for Bruce thinking Bruce of was Collins brother! It was a warm exchange. All our school supplies were given to John to distribute on the island.

Some people went to the grotto - and a few had a refreshing swim. The pool was hidden underneath a huge limestone cave. The water was clear cold and blue.

The rest of us enjoyed a long saga of the snail by John. This is the sacred symbol of God.

Time was late so James packed us into the vehicles back to the station Losuia. The traders were out in force as we boarded our boats - their last chance to sell their goods!

Darkness falling and seas rising we set out in our boats. It was a long difficult trip with motors straining - when we saw the lights of our ships at last, the crew welcomed us home!



Day 16

Thursday, 30th May

Tuma (Spirit) Island — Trobriands

A leisurely start to the day with anchors up early and away to Tuma Island which is (5) five miles long and half a mile wide and sparsely inhabited. Several Manta Rays were sighted in the beautiful turquoise waters. Two barracuda and one mack tuna were caught by the crew reeled in by Bruce aka 'Chips', Susie dealt with the mudcrabs on the back deck in preparation for our lunch. We ventured on the southern side of Tuma Island until shallow reefs prevented us going further; we then returned to try the other side finding a safe anchorage off Cadai Island. We practised rafting up but were not successful until the second try, in the meantime we experienced a tropical squall.

LUNCH - yum yum yum.....mud crab - plain & chilli - were thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Then we scrambled into the dinghies and were ferried to shore, for those who wanted to (almost everyone). Walking (goanna and several skinks seen), birding (Lesser Frigatebirds soaring in small groups and one large flock of about 50, a sea-eagle, and a female Varied Triller), snorkelling (the highlight was a black and white banded 'snea snake', though some of us loved the bright blue starfish and the yellow 'termite mound' coral, and of course the fish).

Skippers Tony and James, back from fruitless spear-fishing, called for refreshments which came in a round Eski delivered by Moabi. These were enjoyed by many, especially those drinking the SP while wallowing in the shallows.

Sashimi, of tuna and barracuda caught earlier, delighted many but disgusted others, when served up as part of Happy Hour. Dinner was another Susie triumph, this time a spicy coconut fish curry.

Thus ended a restful day which we all appreciated after high octane activity on Kiriwina Is. And not a trophy seller in sight!



Plastic litter collected from 100 metres of beach

Day 17

Friday, 31st May

Gudaraba Island — Lusancay Island Group

After a smooth night at anchor we set sail into an increasing swell which culminated in in mayhem at breakfast time!

We passed a number of picturesque islands searching for a sheltered anchorage. We eventually anchorage off Gudaraba Island using 'Tony's Indian rope trick' which entailed tying the rope to the bombie and attaching the anchor to the rope.

We watched a banana boat under sail gracefully land on the beach. About eight islanders jumped out and we later discovered that they were from the Trobriands and were stranded by the SE trade winds needing to await more favourable conditions to return home. We gave them some provisions – fresh water, tinned fish and some Cuban cigars!

We spent a pleasant day at anchor snorkelling the length of the bombie. A nice drop-off, a good variety of fish, a little coral, some blue starfish and clams were spotted. This was another spectacular setting of beautiful blues, greens and aqua. Our fishermen (Tony, James and Bruce) met expectations by bringing back a large coral trout, crayfish and assorted other.

Just before we went ashore a juvenile tern was rescued from the water as he floated past. After much photography he was placed gently into a bucket and taken ashore. After sitting in the shade for 2 or three hours he had sufficiently recovered to undertake a test flight. Sadly, he crashed on the beach where he was duly rescued again and taken to another shady spot and left to his fate with our best wishes.

Early happy hour with more sashimi and early dinner before setting off into the night for 17 hour journey to Tami Island hoping for favourable conditions!!!



Day 18

Saturday 1st June

Tami Islands

All slept extremely well as we sailed through the night with a following swell. Our sea legs are now well developed.

(Trivia: Each ship has two 365 HP CAT diesel engines – when cruising as we did last night each vessel uses about 80 litres of fuel per hour).

We woke to a grey dawn however wind had abated.

During a leisurely breakfast there was a shout of "Fish!" and we all rushed out to watch Bruce battle a very large marlin for an hour (24 kg line for 150 kg fish). It was an heroic effort given he had to move around the back deck and landing platform while trying to relay radio instructions to the bridge. He was not attached to any sort of safety equipment.

In the end – just as the tracer part of the line was being pulled in - the fish got a lit bit of slack and escaped (to cheers from most of the onlookers).



We pulled into the sheltered waters of the Tami Islands at lunchtime. Still overcast but it gradually got clearer later in the day. A mini shopping frenzy

took over before we walked around the very orderly village.

John and Mavis presented the teacher with a soccer ball and box of school items. Some intrepid snorkellers ventured into the rather fast flowing current.

We had "Happy Hour" early at 5.30 gazing onto the mainland on the Huon Peninsula, before dinner and casting off at 7.30 for the night's "rough" voyage to the Vitiaz Straits.

Thinking back to Tami in 2005 it was sad to realize that the unique architecture of their hand crafted dugout canoes may disappear within a generation as islanders acquire banana boats to replace them. Doubtless there are great advantages from the possession of a banana boat but the unique styles of canoes that have varied from place to place during this voyage may be soon lost forever.



Day 19
Sunday 2nd June
Ritter and Hien Islands

We anchored off Ritter Island also called Kul Kul Island. This is the remnant of a volcano that erupted in 1888. The eruption caused a tsunami wave of 60 metres taking with it a huge coastal population, including two German scientists. To date the surrounding islands and coast are sparsely populated. Our ships were anchored in the caldera of the volcano, with a second smaller outcrop nearby. The face of the main island showed a huge plug of basalt, with rubble that made ascent too difficult to attempt. We learned that sea bed surveys have shown that rubble from the eruption extends 130 nautical miles to the NE. The island is situated at Lat. 5.29 S and Long. 148.06 E.



Although it was not possible to go ashore for "walkabout" there were opportunities to snorkel. Simon was first off with the scouting dinghy with his gear to snorkel. He reported seeing lion fish, White's anemone fish, neon blue herring and plate coral down to 30 metres. Two hawk-billed turtles were also seen.



Lunch was beer battered Spanish mackerel and chips. The fish was caught by the crew of both ships. Sailing on, we passed Umboi Island with several huge volcanic peaks, some to perhaps 1400 metres. The plan was to go ashore on the tiny Hein Islet, but a choppy sea prevented landing and stingrays were sighted. We continued overnight to Long island.



Day 20
Monday 3rd June
Long Island

This morning we awoke with the news that we would be climbing a volcano! We anchored near the village of Matafum in a calm inlet and climbed into the boats. On shore, Bruce and Tony negotiated with the locals who unfortunately demanded 1,000K to guide us up to the crater. It was decided that it was an outrageous demand so back into the boats we went and steamed back to our morning anchor site.

Some fantastic snorkelling. Conditions couldn't have been better, with a calm sea and crystal clear water. The coral was very close to the surface and a gentle current carried us across the site. Some of the group chose to walk with a local guide along the black sand shore where they were regaled with stories of local life and heard of the perils of doing your washing in the fresh water pools where the crocodiles live.

After lunch, some of us went ashore to find megapodes. We carefully picked our way along the shore and wondered at the log jams brought down

by flooding rains. The megapodes apparently nest in these vast trenches of sandy soil but despite our guides' best efforts, we did not find any eggs. Most of the group gave up the chase after 30 minutes or so but some of us persevered and heard the orange footed scrub fowl somewhere in the distance - naturally on the other side of the trench to where we were standing! Gill's camera was stolen while she swam but soon word went out in the village and the hapless thief was made to give up their prize and all was well again.

Today was one of those days where each experience provided the inspiration for prose. Due to a lack of talent in that department, our compilation of observations follows:



A hive of bee eaters; a bottleneck of dolphins; a greed of Matafume; a cannery of tuna; a fleet of frigates; a breast of boobies; a spectacle of sailor's eyes; a torpedo of turtles; a montage of crays; a sunset of rays; a gourmet of coral; a chowder of clams; a planetarium of starfish; a barbecue of shrimp; an eruption of volcanoes; a cluster of fruit bats; a mound of megapodes; a crown of kingfishers; a stage of starlings; a collection of ebony sand; a stampede of snorkelers; a raft of canoes; a scatter of skinks; vexatious villagers; a fellowship of fins; a dentition of cus cus.



The quick brown megapode jumped over the lazy diarist.



Bruce Alexander was reduced to tears at his farewell party

Day 21
Tuesday 4th June
Madang

We arrived in Madang at dawn after a smooth night sailing. Early breakfast and onto the dinghies landing at the Yacht Club (The Madang Club) at 8am where the bus, from THE DIVINE WORD UNIVERSITY was on time! This was the last time our "saviour and friend" Bruce loaded us into the dinghies.

We had a Cooks tour around town and environs. Leaving town we were swallowed up in enormous potholes. Fortunately the bumper to bumper traffic was going the other way.

We passed villages and markets and after an hour arrived at the sulphur springs. The lovely owner, Merigren, told us how fortunate she was to have this spring on her property. She swims every day and drinks this water when not well. She also told us about her family hiding in the grotto when the Japanese came only coming out at night to scrounge for food.

The colour of the water changes from white to blue to green. We were amazed to see half a dozen turtles in the grotto swimming around. They were covered in a whitish film from the sulphur. Merigran also said they scrape the white sulphur film from the rocks and use it for healing their skin. The garden and walk to the grotto was beautifully landscaped with colourful plants and shrubs.

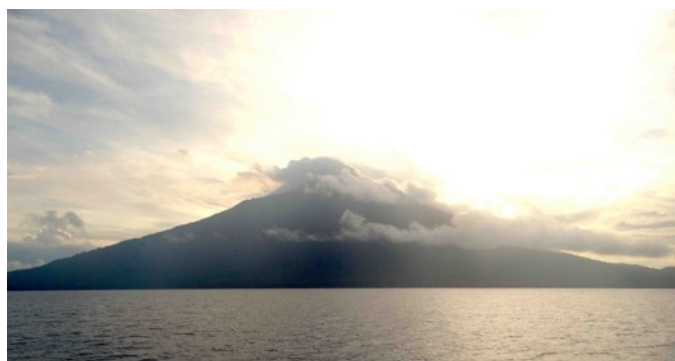
The rain poured down as we continued to Bil Bil, for the pottery demonstration. Under shelter we watched the demonstration. They do not use a wheel - everything is done by hand. It takes a day to form a pot and a week for it to be fired in hot coals. We watched four people demonstrate these four different stages. Most of us bought a pot.

We filled in a hour shopping in Madang and then had a delicious Chinese banquet at the Country Club. Some continued to shop while others headed back to the boat.

Just before we left, a New Guinea Eagle completely spooked the fruit-bat colony in the casuarinas outside our lunch venue, sitting triumphantly in the tree, to the delight of many. Paul then decided on a skink hunt and doubled the number of species he'd seen on the trip as he walked back from the Country Club to the Madang Club.

Meanwhile the drama of a cancelled flight from Wewak to Moresby on our last day was unfolding. Eventually everyone was changed to an earlier flight. We remain hopeful that this flight will still be operating in a week's time.

Happy Hour welcomed John, the Collins' eldest brother who had driven from Lae to continue the trip, and Eloise, Joan, Hamish and Bernie Leahy, from Saidor, who was in town. We are fortunate to have Chris from the Sepik on board as our special guide for the last part of our trip.



Day 22
Wednesday, 5th June
Along the coast and up the Sepik

The spirit of the predawn volcano watchers was alas! not reciprocated by the Manam Island volcano which showed no spirit at all. Despite this it was a lovely sight with the peak occasionally showing through a ring of clouds surrounding it. Plumes of ash and smoke were occasionally seen with binoculars. The early waking was made worthwhile by the magnificent sunrise that followed.

Other volcanic islands were seen as we progressed north-westward. Mid-morning we crossed the demarcation line between the blue sea and the brown outflow of the Sepik River. There was a 'race' between our two boats and a tug towing a barge to enter the river. There is almost no tidal influence even a short way up the Sepik due to its high flow rate. Progress was slow due to the strong current remaining after heavy rains last month.

The vegetation changed back to sago palms, cane grass and the inevitable water hyacinth (and some salvinia). Different from the island flora we had become accustomed to over the last week or so.



Birdwatching on Miss Rankin's back deck

Birders found a few more species as we had a lazy afternoon chugging up the river. Notable species for the day were Great-billed Heron, Pied Heron, New Guinea Eagle and Variable Goshawk. Chris told us that Fisheries introduced Piranhas to clean up water- weeds but they have cleaned up local fish too. Can this be so? We're not standing on the edge to find out.

We rafted together for Happy Hour and dinner, after which Paul gave us a rundown on the fauna (mainly skinks) that have been seen since he joined us in Port Moresby. We then had around three hours' sailing to an anchorage for the night near Angoram.



Day 23
Thursday, 6th June
Sepik River — Angoram and Kambaramba

We sailed through the night and anchored off Angoram about 7.00am. Suddenly we were told we could all go ashore - so a hasty breakfast and a short trip to the river bank. The lower part of Angoram had been badly affected by the high river levels so the formal market buildings on lower ground had been rendered unusable, and the market moved uphill.

We walked along the bitumen road by the shore, meeting people along the way. We turned up the hill to where business was in full swing. This was not a 'tourist' market but a full blown local market with a huge range of foods and household items set out on the ground on mats, under some huge Rain Trees. A vast array of fresh vegetables sorted into selling size

lots, sago wrapped in banana leaf parcels, fish so fresh some were still jumping, live turtles tied by the legs, clothing, the occasional billum – the variety seemed endless! It was fascinating and so colourful.

On reaching the top of the hill we walked along the bitumen road again, as far as the Angoram area Administration Office. Along the way were scattered buildings of the conventional European kind, some in disrepair and all looking rather overgrown. We passed the 'Treasury Office with some interesting artwork painted on the façade. An elderly man slashing grass with his bush knife/machete gave a nice smile and 'hello'. In fact the whole way we had 'hellos' and 'morning' and lots of smiles! We reached the Administration Office to find it completely empty of the administrator (he apparently prefers to work from home!). A man appeared in what one would call the 'front office', to explain the absence of the Administrator – the office itself being devoid of anything resembling a working office except for an empty counter. We did admire the carved 'veranda posts' at the entrance.

We retraced our steps to the ship, once again checking out the market and making the odd purchase.



While the others were over at Angoram the rest of us relaxed on board with light entertainment by Alouis and others as Jacky presented Alouis with remaining Sydney Swans bag and footballs. Photos were taken and an immediate redistribution of caps and footballs ensued.

We moved on and moored off Kambaramba Two Village which showed obvious signs of damage flood. After lunch we set off with extra personnel and longboats for the eagerly anticipated visit to Kambaramba One village. This was so keenly Fearless Leader originally got the inspiration to begin collections for the local schools of the rivers.

We had an exciting ride on the tenders and longboats cutting our way through vast

accumulations of water hyacinth and salvinia. The barats (waterways) opened up into the huge lake of Kambaramba One Village with its stilt houses. At the entrance we were welcomed by children waving water hyacinth flowers and standing by beautifully crafted outriggers whose furled sails were arranged so as to resemble an archway of welcome.

This village had obviously also been devastated by recent floods and the houses were in delicate condition to say the least with many rendered unliveable. Others supported large numbers of people leaving us simply contemplating our different realities.

Especially sad was the discovery that the school we had planned to visit no longer exists and so the 'package' could not be delivered here but an alternative school up the river was located.

Despite the disappointments there was much to enjoy with lots of people coming out to say hello, children gleefully showing of their water skills and there was laughter all around. While most of the village celebrated there were several women working hard processing sago, one even in a beautiful black bra!

There were also many animals brought out for show and/or sale pigs, dogs, a white-bellied sea eagle which seemed to belong to the village and moved from dugout to dugout – he made a particularly stunning appearance on the bow of the dugout captained by Bob Marley. Someone even spied a cat!

And of course there was the cuscus hat which did the rounds for photo opportunity.

We left Kambaramba One and returned via K2 where Fearless Leader located a local school teacher and he was able to arrange for the local councillor to come aboard for the delivery of the school package. Fearless Leader and the councillor made speeches and shook hands to great applause.

Fearless Leader later showed us photos of GO BUSH Safaris' previous trip to K1 which demonstrated the great differences resulting from the flood damage.

We rafted up with Surveyor and had beautiful BBQ dinner and cake because it was Chris' birthday. We then up anchored and headed up river to Tambanum.





Day 24

Friday 7th June

Sepik River — Tambanum and Kaminabit

Many artifacts were on display at our first stop, the village of Tambanam. These included many face masks, crocodiles, sea eagles, storyboards, stools, flutes and carved breasts. However, the only live item, a small short-necked turtle, was snapped up by Michelle with the noble intention of saving it.

We were also treated to a live demonstration of sago production. The Men's house, with its spectacular eagle/woman carvings attracted much attention. Many items returned to the boat including a spectacular shield purchased by the Skipper. The only disappointment was the absence of face painters.

After morning coffee and tea we set off again for the three to four hour journey to Kaminabit. The day was clear and sunny and the mountain ranges were visible in the distance.

After lunch we arrived at Kaminabit, where our local guides, Chris and Teddy, organized the afternoon's entertainment. We hopped onto the tenders or into the long boat for the quick trip, especially with the fast flow of the river aiding us, to Kaminabit "One" for a shopping bonanza, fresh coconut juice and then back to K "Two" for last minute purchases and a Sing-sing.

These villages have suffered substantial damage from the recent floods – for three months (up to a metre above ground level) and the worst since 1973. The schools were flooded and have remained closed for the past six weeks to recover. There is a noticeable difference from the neat gardens and grassed area from the 2005 visit. Now just a muddy surface. John Sinclair was pleased to be re-united with a long-lost friend in the sing-sing troupe who expressed delight on seeing him!

Back on board again to proceed upstream – the river glassy smooth in the late afternoon sun.

It was a great birdwatchers' dusk as the sun went down and we finally rafted again for dinner. We were moored off the banks of Palambe.

Chris (who comes from here) gave us a most interesting talk about village life and customs of the area (lower middle Sepik): of tribal relationships and practices including the initiation of young men under the guidance of their maternal uncles. A spectacular lightning and thunder display provided the finale for the evening. Mosquitoes were out in force in this part of the river.



Day 25

Saturday 8th June

Sepik River — Palembei and Kanganaman

We started early today (7.30am) to visit two villages.

The tenders crossed to the left bank of the Sepik to visit the village of *Palembei*. After navigating the narrow entrance canal from the Sepik, we entered the village where the flood-waters had not fully receded and the tender had to be pushed because the depth was too shallow for the props. There were two spirit houses to visit.

We had to climb the ladders into the room, first removing our hats. Inside it was rather dark but once our eyes had adjusted, we could see the large number of artifacts laid out by the men for display and sale. Photographs were allowed except for the image of the "War Spirit". There were many masks, as well as carvings, story boards, etc. The houses had several very large drums of the slit type made from logs.

Towards the end of the visit to the spirit houses we were entertained to a drumming session. Several drums were played sometimes with two men to a drum. It seemed that one man was a leader and was able to signal to the others when a rhythm was to be changed or the drumming was to end.

Several of the visiting party bought artifacts, some quite large.



Between these two spirit houses, we passed by a number of large poles, which were remnants of the supports of an earlier spirit house taken over by the Japanese as a communications centre in WW2. It was later bombed by the Americans.



Outside, there was a patch of dry land where the women sold decorative items such as shell necklaces, straw fans and bilums. They were seated by smoking wood fireplaces, which gave some respite from the mosquitoes. It was difficult to get ashore here but several in the party bought items.

The tenders then sailed back to the ships to unload the artifacts, many of them large enough to be a nuisance as we resumed our short trip to the other side of the river.

Then we sailed on to the village of *Kanaganaman* where the very large spirit house is World Heritage listed. We were met by two dancers covered by huge dancing masks. They were dancing *the forest dance* to the beat of drums coming from the spirit

house. Our guide Chris told us to follow the dancers towards the spirit house, where the dancing stopped and photos of various visitors were taken, hands clasped with the dancers.



We entered the house at ground level. Here five huge supporting posts were ornately carved and we were told that they were very old. These posts had been erected in the "Cannibal times" when a captured man from another tribe was sacrificed alive and put at the base of each post as it was erected. This procedure gave the owners of the spirit house very strong magical power. Again artifacts were on display, but this time not for sale. Again we were treated to drumming, and afterwards there were speeches, including one from James Collins praising the people for maintaining the house in current condition, and explaining that it was indeed a "tourist attraction".

We were then invited to walk about the village where there were a few items made by the women for sale. There was also a collection box in aid of health and development of the community. Most visitors contributed. (Remembering that the "Epic Tour" always negotiate an "entry fee" to villages.)

We then returned to the tenders and onwards to the ships, casting off at 11:30 am as planned. This was our last port of call along the Sepik River and the ships turned about to sail downstream at a cracking 11.1 knots. At this point we had sailed 148 nautical miles up the Sepik from our river mouth entry.

In the afternoon we sailed back down the river with plans to reach Marienberg at dusk. Although our down river speed was almost twice as fast as our speed travelling up the river we fell short of both

Marienberg and Angoram with plans to amend in the morning.



Marienberg delegation returning with supplies for the school.

Day 26

Sunday 9th June

Sepik River— Marienberg and Party Night

The day began with an extraordinarily early start with breakfast concluded by most by 7.00 am

We almost passed Angoram with Teddy going ashore there but without the school supplies we had brought with us. This was quickly rectified and we continued down river to Marienberg.

The Marienberg market was operating in full swing and in good voice on this Sunday morning.

Marienberg this year celebrates the 100th anniversary for the mission established here. There are to be five days of celebration in December and the congregation is inviting guests and donations from around the world especially Germany given the strong German connection. An unusual feature of this Catholic church was the huge painted wall behind the altar depicting Mary. There was also a photo of a former Archbishop, Leo Askell who was a good pilot who Don Hook, recounted an interesting anecdote about flying with the Bishop.

The school has five teachers and the running of the school is paid for by the government. At the end of the visit the

There was a machine-gun emplacement as a relic of the war when the Japanese occupied the site. Marienberg has an operational airfield and is comprised of three small villages. It is also used as a base for a large Malaysian owned logging operation.

After a splendid lunch the two ships then detached to proceed down to Darapap to collect crabs for our penultimate night and our eagerly anticipated Party. Unfortunately the crabs weren't where we were expecting them. That didn't though diminish the pleasurable repast for our Party-night that featured

prawns and fish and some Simon made well laced ice-cream and birthday cake.

The party was also planned to be a surprise that we would spring on Tony Collins that it was doubling as his 47th Birthday Party but someone leaked out this information during lunch and the surprise element disappeared but didn't diminish our party spirit.

Some of the party pieces to be immortalized have been provided as an appendix to this diary. However it would be difficult to capture in full the hilarity of the Queen's Speech. There was a touching moment when the crew choir sang the PNG National Anthem. This concert, also featuring jokes, original verse and songs (many with a tone about aging), was all followed by dancing. The saloon kept rocking until midnight. As the party quietened down though it was discovered that a nameless person from the Surveyor wasn't capable of negotiating the gang-plank between the two vessels and he ended up on the floor under the kitchen table.



Malaysian timber operations at Marienberg

Day 27

Monday 10th June

Wewak

Alas, the details for the day couldn't be included in the original the diary DVD needed to be burnt before the day was over. The scheduled stop to do some snorkelling at Muschu was abandoned because of the time and the grey day that was less than ideal for snorkelling. It was even unsuitable for rafting the two boats together as we dropped anchors near the Yatch Club.

It didn't take long for Chris, our local guide to line up a couple of buses for a tour of Wewak. It was just as well because we would be leaving Wewak in the dawn darkness. The object of the tour was to see Cape Wom, the site of the Japanese surrender at the end of WWII. However it enabled us to get off the boats for a while and to see another aspect of PNG

including another local market and some of the town as it was in relaxed Queens Birthday holiday mode.

Towards the end of the day there was anxiety because we were all scheduled to start well before dawn in the morning to catch the Air Niugini flight that had caused so much problem because of the schedule changes without any advice being communicated to the passengers.

It was a subdued night as everyone retired to their cabins packing and preparing for the 3.00 am start.



**Daphne delivering the Queen's Speech
Day 28
Tuesday 11th June
Ending a great Voyage**

The dismal weather turned to rain overnight but it eased off as we negotiated the last voyage in the dinghies in the darkness with our luggage and some people decked out in garbage bags. There is little to be added as the group farewelled the "Miss Rankin" and the "Surveyor" and the crew in the Wewak darkness and dispersed to respective destinations as far afield as Cairns, Darwin Adelaide, Launceston and places between. We all made it to Port Moresby and (to our welcome relief) so did all of our luggage without anybody being charged for excess baggage. The only charges were for Simon who had to buy another ticket due to the mishandling by Air Niugini — (Another Tang Fu).



The Collins Brothers — John James and Tony

Summary

While everyone enjoyed the Epic Voyage there was mutual agreement from passengers and crew that this pioneering 28 days is a bit too long to repeat. The Collins Shipping Line are though anticipating running future voyages of shorter duration and focussed on particular themes such as the Fly River and Torres Strait, the Milne Bay province that includes the Trobriand Islands and the Madang Sepik area. They were the three parts of this voyage that had the greatest interest,

While people had anticipated a polluted Fly River from the Ok Tedi mine things are on the improve slowly, both environmentally and in the communities. It was fascinating to see those glimpses of Nature in the untouched side-streams and in the hills. The great Sing-sings were also a feature especially as they were so different from anything seen later. The visit to Airds Hill had special interest because we had read Ben Butcher's story of what it was like just 100 years ago.

The islands of the Milne Bay Province including the Trobriands were of special interest because of the snorkelling and opportunities for beachcombing and to see such volcanic activity at close hand. It was especially encouraging to see the greater emphasis on education in this province. However although not much of the natural environment remains in the Trobriands the anthropological interest more than compensated holding our interest and rapt attention with four beautiful sing-sings and a game of cricket.

The trifecta was completed with the Sepik which was more of a swampland than some had anticipated. It was revealing to observe how people could subsist on not much more than sago and fish. The garamut drumming, the forest dancers, the craftsmanship on display everywhere and the *haus tambarans* were all Sepik highlights.

The weather for the trip was unusual. The most remarkable feature was the late monsoon event that lasted for the first 8 days of the trip.

The group had diverse interests. For the bird-watchers Jane has arranged to place her bird list on the web. It can be accessed by Googling "Bird Au1base" or "Eramaea".

Our group was impressed everywhere by the welcomes we received and the people we met and the help and cooperation of the crew of both vessels. We may have offered some backhanders to the wonderful Collins Brothers but we have to hand it to them that they can put plenty of fish on the table and provide us with great adventures.