

Day 1
Monday 6th June
Cairns to Port Moresby

Scene: Cairns International Airport, Monday morning. Who was wearing a red something? Some safarists were, but we didn't identify the whole party of 22 until we reached Port Moresby.

James's wife, Sue, met us with a message that the alcohol level on the boat was low, and would we please top up at the Duty-Free.

Baggage, check-in, loading and a pleasant 1½ hour flight to Port Moresby, with helpful attendants and a welcome snack of ham, salad and cheesecake.

Scene: Port Moresby International Airport. We all cleared customs in half an hour. Then the pace of life slowed considerably, as we stood around in the foyer with our baggage, waiting. John Sinclair, our Fearless Leader, was nowhere to be seen.



Outside was parked a small bus marked Lamana Hotel, but we didn't think to ask if it was for us. Then, at 2.30 pm, things began to move. In two buses and three trips, Morgan, our guide, transferred us to the Lamana Hotel. Rooms were allocated, and we were offered a trip around Port Moresby. John, we were told, was in Room 94, too ill with blood poisoning to greet us.

Guided by kind, calm Morgan, we visited Parliament House (dffffffffffweeeeeee – this is Eric's contribution to this diary) and walked through the Botanic Gardens. (Unfortunately, the Museum was closed). Then we took a scenic tour along the new motorway to the harbour and the main town, driving back to the Lamana Hotel at Waigani through Ela Beach, Koki and Boroko. We arrived back at 5.20 pm, not long before dark. John appeared, looking, yes, very ill – too ill to eat.

At a leisurely dinner in the dining room, with its Greek scenes on the walls, we started to get to know our fellow safarists.

Day 2
Tuesday, 7th June
Joining Miss Rankin

John, our Fearless Leader, presented himself as himself, rather than the feverish, sweat-soaked, sorry being we glimpsed yesterday.

We enjoyed a delicious buffet breakfast at Lamana Hotel. Poached watermelon with cloves, poached pineapple and poached pawpaw were an 'epicurious' experience.

Morgan, our local tour guide-overseer, loaded our luggage and made sure we were all on board our buses to Jackson Airport. During the check in process, three of us were weighed, (to provide an average weight for our party?) We passed into a comfortable departure lounge. Some boarded a Twin Otter for a special direct flight to Gurney.

Others boarded the scheduled Dash 8 flight to Gurney via Losuia on Kiriwina, Trobriand Islands. This flight passed over the Sogeri Plateau and the Owen Stanley Ranges, but cloud covered land and sea for most of the time. The flight attendant was as professional in her presentation and appearance as the attendants on our Air Niugini flight from Cairns on Monday, and the landing on the long wartime airstrip was smooth.

There was a crowd at the terminal, and when the attendant opened the door, we heard sad singing. Then the reason for the need for our two separate flights became clear. There was a coffin on board, and someone important was returning to Kiriwina. The coffin was loaded onto the back of a white truck and covered in a blue tarpaulin and flowers. It was driven off, surrounded by men in white shirts and dark trousers. Other grieving relatives, including a number who were on the flight, followed.

The direct flight to Gurney was a smooth 1 1/2 hours duration. On occasion, we flew over 10,000 feet to avoid developing cumulus cloud and the associated turbulence.

At Gurney we were notified that:
DUE TO THE INCREASE IN CLAIMS ANY
LIVE ANIMALS & CRABS ETC WILL HAVE
TO GET QUARANTINE CLEARANCE PRIOR
TO UP-LIFT. THANK YOU

This was in between NO SMOKING and NO
BETELNUT.



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We waited about an hour for the other plane and passed the time observing kites. One of them was being harried by a Torresian crow. Some intrepid safarists wandered down the road and back.

We were loaded into our PMV using the spare tyre as a step, and travelled about 10 miles to Alotau. Everywhere we saw Nationals in colourful clothing walking along the roadsides.

Upon arrival at the jetty, luggage was taken out to 'Miss Rankin' via our rubber duckie, and Irma and Co. went shopping to supplement her depleted wardrobe. Unfortunately her case had disappeared between the hotel and the airport. Others ventured to the market at the other end of town.

Back on board by 2:00 pm via the rubber duckie for lunch.

Finally we up-anchored and began life aboard our floating hotel, experiencing moderate seas.

Noel and I flaked in our cabin. What did the others do?

We passed several inter-island vessels laden with happy, friendly Nationals.

We perked right up at dinner...freshly speared mackerel, rice and cabbage followed by yummy chocolate slice for desert.



Day 3

Wednesday 8th June

Hot Springs & Observation Point

After breakfast, we were ferried to Palagwau village on Fergusson Island to a warm reception by friendly people on a black sand beach. Their effort in preparing for us was evident in the manicured ground cover and flower-decked bamboo barriers directing us through their houses to the Siosiolina hot springs.

On this walk we noticed breadfruit trees, betel nut palms, sago palms and attractive ground orchids. The track was an old road which had become disused after the collapse of wooden bridges. Even as we walked along the banks of the stream flowing from the hot springs, we could see clouds of mist above the hot rocks. Soon we were looking at pools of boiling water about 200 cm below the encrusted, salty surface. In places, the water bubbled up to the surface. The village people accompanying us were

constantly vigilant to protect us from a red lobster death.

One of our male guides retrieved a handful of white, soggy crystals, which were a mixture of salts, including table salt (sodium chloride). Susan Peter placed about two dozen eggs in a basket, immersed them in the boiling water, and within a few minutes they were hard-boiled.

Finally, we arrived at a larger expanse of boiling water. At intervals of a few minutes, one sector would burst into a gush of water, as much as 1.5 metres high and about the same in diameter.

Before we returned to the 'Miss Rankin', shells, fruit, vegetables, carvings and stone tools were offered for sale.

Moving to Dobu Island during a leisurely lunch, we went snorkelling over luxuriant beds of seagrass with alternating hot and cold currents, caused by hot rocks below. In one spot the water actually felt hot. Streams of bubbles came from many places on the sandy and rocky bottom, looking just like air bubbles in a tropical fish tank. They looked pretty and felt like feathery tickles on our faces.

Further out, where a stick poked out of the water, there was a group of corals with small, colourful fish of several varieties. (The only hitch for some snorkellers was the trouble of getting back into the rubber duckie to return to the ship!)

In heavy rain, we crossed to Observation Point (Pisa Pisa) on Normanby Island. Here we had an opportunity to take a short, bird-watching walk, led by Ian, our Intrepid Guide. While Noel Barrett and Phil Carr were walking on a small, two-log creek crossing, one of the logs snapped, causing Noel to over-balance and land on his back on the stones at the bottom of the gully. He was bruised and discomforted, but his immediate concern was to recover his glasses. After half an hour of searching in the stream, they were found by Daniel, one of our boat crew, hanging in the vegetation on the sides of the gully.



Day 4
Thursday 9th June
Fergusson Island, Goodenough
Island to Cape Vogel

The day started with Eric, the most photogenic cuscus, wanting to be entertained from five o'clock onwards. The Cuscus foster father assured us there would be enough warning from Eric for his once-a-day poo/wee for us to be safe in our nurturing. He raises his tail, he looks intently into your eyes and then you have 15 seconds in which to prepare for the occasion.

We rolled across in the rubber duckie to the 'poor village' of Galaiwawu. The simple houses on stilts were built on the rocky foreshore. We were seated under a tree on a raised platform and entertained with songs from the elders, World War II, sad songs. Then was a choir of young men and women with a guitarist strumming, just quite delightful.

We were told that the village population was about 250 of which only 40 were adults. Poverty was apparent in the clothing which included naked children, people in ragged clothes and some bare-chested women in grass skirts.

Only a very small proportion of children attend school. We were told by some of the villagers 'they don't want to attend school'. Factors could be the distance of the school from the village, the fact they have to pay for schooling and there is little motivation for formal education.



After visiting the village, the group toured the lagoon looking for birds of which few were to be seen due to the windy conditions. Towering above the island to 2,566m is Mt Oiautukeka at times hidden by cloud on its summit and then the peak visible above low-lying mists.

One group returned to the boat and the others returned to the village and walked a kilometre

through the gardens and were then welcomed by the United Church coordinator and shown hospitality at his home with fresh coconut drink and pawpaw.

After lunch we were instructed to prepare for a rough crossing from Goodenough Island to the mainland. Most people retired to their bunks for this hour and half trip and emerged to see everybody's idea of a tropical island paradise, a coral cay with waving coconut palms, white sandy beach ...

We crossed to Bogaboga village on the mainland. What a contrast to the previous village! As soon as we were spotted the people rushed to set up the market they had planned for the next day when we had been expected to arrive. There was a wonderful array of shell jewellery, carvings and billums. John delivered much needed paper and pencils to the school. All the children seemed healthy, bright and inquisitive. Most said that they attend the school and many spoke at least some English.

The main sources of income for the village are Beche-de-mer and the sale of artefacts to the visiting dive boats. We were all sorry that we were able to purchase so few items.

Perfect tropical evening, new crescent moon, Venus on the horizon, a cloud of jellyfish in the water and a cake with sparklers for our Captain's 37th birthday.

Contacts:

Galaiwawu - Penuel Aias
Vollo Vollo
PO BOX 19
Perofilia PNG

Bogaboga - Robert Toromata
Bogaboga Elementary School
c/-Tarakwaruku Primary School
Alotau
M-B Province PNG



Day 5
Friday, 10th June

Cape Nelson Rias, Tufi & Komoa

After travelling all night we reached Cape Nelson, seeing extensive grasslands for the first time. The Miss Rankin sailed up a ria, a deep, fiord-like gorge formed by lava from 3 volcanoes flowing into the sea - a spectacular sight.

Landing at Tufi, we climbed up a steep hill to the village with views of the inlet and ocean. Unlike other villages there were few children to greet us - they were in school.

We visited the school and health centre where dedicated staff were working with extremely limited resources. About 200 children attend the school, some coming from outlying communities, and there were 5 teachers. The pupils were working quietly when we arrived. In the lower school the curriculum consists of Health, Religious Education, English Language, Reading, Maths, Environmental Studies, Community Living and Spelling. Older boys were working in a classroom and under a shelter. The buildings were made of fibro, cement blocks and corrugated iron but the children Saturday at desks. The teacher of the senior class (Grade 8), Bessie talked to us. She is expecting her third child very soon. She is still teaching and will have the baby at the Health Centre. She spoke sadly of the lack of educational resources, and the high cost of continuing education at Popondetta and beyond (K1,500 for Year 9 increasing with advancing grades).



When asked she told us that the sea provided the main source of income of the village through fishing, shark fins, shells, but the returns are low and restricted by high transport costs. A trip by sea to Alotau costs K79 (one-way p.p.).

The resort pays workers very low wages and is no help to the economy (later James told us this may change under new management.)

The health centre consists of several simple buildings with a 2 ward hospital. There are two

full-time workers. Its work was described by the senior worker who had a three year basic training followed by a mid-wifery course. The cost was met by an Australian woman.

The main illnesses treated are malaria and pneumonia. Everyone is infected by malaria at some time. There are two patients with mental illness in hospital at present controlled by medication. There is a vaccination programme financed and carried out by the Government and an educational programme regarding AIDS and contraception. Condoms are provided by the Government.

The Nursing Sister is able to consult more expert medical personnel by radio and in extreme emergencies, usually accidents, patients may be taken by air to better facilities. The centre lacks basic equipment. Sterilization is carried out by chemicals. At times she is able to work co-operatively with villages practising traditional healing. She impressed us as a very competent, sensitive woman doing excellent work for the community under difficult conditions.

On return to the boat we had lunch and prepared for our sing-sing experience. Half-Moon took most of the party while others had a wild ride in the rubber-ducky. We met at the beach to walk the rise to the village of Komoa where we were met by the committee and directed to where the sing-sing was to be held.

Wonderful costumes, exposing the best male specimens we have seen. Head-dresses were spectacular, displaying an amazing variety of feathers. 4 women with shakers and 10 men with drums beating a rhythm repeated by shuffling feet. The display brought forth admiration tinged with awe. Our applause was genuine and fulsome.

Almost immediately on our return to the boat we began our 16 hour journey to Thong Island. Seas were less than calm so our Barbecue was delayed until we reached calmer seas where we were sailing with the wind.



Day 6
Saturday, 11th June

Thong & Lasanga Islands

Up early to overnight rain and a 17-hour trip from Tufi but a clear day.

The drama of the morning involved Eric who attacked a pawpaw from the kitchen and pee-ed in Clara's hair, and we assume it finally ended up in the fruit salad, as it was very meagre and late arriving in the saloon. Eric later continued his bodily functions on the saloon floor – it was certainly Eric's day. He also exhibited his penchant for corn flakes and milk.

We had a brief sighting of small dolphins who neglected to play in the bow wave.

At smoko Ian showed David Parer's DVD on studies of the Tasmanian Devil – fascinating for those who had not seen it on TV.

Thong Island was to produce the snorkelling from heaven but recent flooding had reduced visibility, however there was excellent coral and fish and to the Serious Snorkellers who went out further, there were wonderful sponges and soft corals. Clown Fish just like Nemo's Dad tried to frighten the snorkellers away. A man and boy were already on the beach with their outrigger, fishing gear and their smouldering camp fire but they left soon after our arrival. After lunch we returned to the island and walked around it on a track made by a white man who had lived there for a "long time". This man had also dug a well and constructed a dunny with a door – privacy must have been a priority! Nothing else is known about him. Eric also came and enjoyed the Pongonia Pinnata, and was hard to dislodge. A pair of hornbills flew by and we were dogged by elusive honeyeaters.

Lasanga Island, a larger island nearby, looked odd with scarecrow trees – the result of a massive fire there in 1997. A lot of land had been cleared for gardening.

We accompanied the rain all the way to Salamaua with its bright city lights! After another fine Susie dinner of honeyed chicken limbs accompanied by Oxford Landing Sauvignon Blanc some stayed up to watch Waking Ned Devine – great!



Day 7
Sunday, 12th June
Salamaua

The rain continues and the early morning is marked by a display of lightning and distant thunder just before dawn. As we get our first daylight glimpses of Salamaua harbour, a lone swimmer is seen near the boat investigating some Unicorn fish which were surfacing a short distance away. This of course was Phil, who never misses an opportunity to get in the water. At about 7 a.m. the heavens opened up and it looked like the rain would be with us for some time. Breakfast of fruit, cereal, toast, etc., was enjoyed by all and of course we were joined by Eric the cuscus who had his fill as well. After breakfast, F.L. delivered the briefing for the activities we would experience through the day and the rains continued.

Two groups went ashore and a wetter, more miserable, umbrella-toting group you have never seen. We scribes were witnessing this activity from the dry, air-conditioned comfort of the upper deck saloon of the "Miss Rankin" (we're not silly). Some turned left to do the walk along the isthmus then past the village gardens on the very steep sides of the hills to the pre-WW11 cemetery where early settlers and gold miners are buried. We were informed that this proved to be very overgrown and the track was very wet and slippery in parts. The walk along the isthmus revealed the damage being done by the constant erosion from high seas particularly to the basketball court which has been partially washed away. The old breakwater installed by the Americans during the war is sometimes visible at low tide but is now a hundred or so metres off shore. Still the rains came down.

The others turned right to walk past the ex-pat holiday homes down to the traditional village. It was reported that there was a visit to one of the expat houses where a good N.G. coffee was served and a short history of the area was given. That particular house has a concrete water tank which still bears the scars of warfare in the form of the tracks of bullets across its surface. All the expat houses are supplied with electricity from a communal generator which is housed in what was once the Bank of NSW vault. And still the rains came down.

Everybody except a few who were left stranded ashore returned to the "Miss Rankin" for another tasty lunch and the rain stopped. Eventually it was discovered that several people were missing so they were finally retrieved from the shore before all the lunch items had been devoured. The rain now ceased.

After lunch another shore trip was arranged but some elected to go snorkelling instead. I. G. escorted another walk out to the old cemetery while F.L. took several of us, including your scribes (after all the rain had now stopped), on another walk through the village. A short way along the track we were approached by several nationals who suggested we return to our ship as we had not arranged entry to their village through them. Dianne Cross, a representative of the Provincial Government Tourist Authority, came to our aid and escorted us through the village without further interference.

We walked through the village and on through the current cemetery to the Francisco river which was running very swiftly due to the recent rainfall in the surrounding hills. The rains began to fall once again.



The return trip to the “Miss Rankin” was uneventful, in fact, the whole day had been fairly relaxing and uneventful. Everyone had enjoyed some R and R during our stay in Salamaua. Happy Hour was followed by a great dinner of venison and vegetables. Of course a wine or two added to the pleasure. For once Eric did not join us. Soon after we all gravitated to our respective cabins and another night at the Salamaua anchorage. Tomorrow we will set off early for Lae and another day of our P.N.G. adventure.



Day 8 Monday, 13th June Lae

BRAVO IAN! In this morning's Queens Birthday Honours Ian Morris received the Order of Australia for services to the environment, education and to the advancement of indigenous communities of Northern Australia.

Anchor up at 6:00 am on a beautiful clear morning. Two hours sailing brought us to Lae, the second largest town in PNG. Lae has a deep water harbour and looks picturesque set against the backdrop of the magnificent Finisterre Ranges. This is the wetter season for Lae which is contrary to most other provinces. The annual rainfall for Lae is over five metres.

The boat berthed at the wharf and waited another two hours before the buses arrived to take us to the Rainforest Habitat. During that time Noel was taken to the Tusa Private hospital where he was checked out and given treatment.

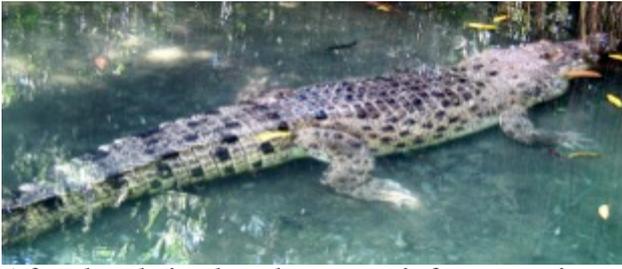


The two buses arrived with our minders — Timothy, Danny, Kenly and Nanib. The Guard Dog Security buses had steel mesh on the windows and doors and two guards with pump action shotguns and ballistic resistant glass in the windows. We proceeded to the University where the habitat was located, picking up Noel on the way. We passed houses protected by high fences, razor wire and in some cases by the presence of a security guard. Those that didn't have a guard had a notice on the fence saying protected by Guard Dog Security.

Most people went into the aviary where they saw a great display of birds and vegetation. In addition to this they saw the birds in the breeding programme for the birds of paradise. In other areas were tree kangaroos, echidnas, wallabies and cassowaries. Agro, a large salt-water crocodile with attitude attracted much awe and attention.

The craft shop had for sale an impressive range of masks, jewellery, shells and artwork. There were large framed butterfly collections which included *Ornithoptera Victoriae*, *Alexandrae* and

Goliath. Security here was stepped up by the presence of Pablo the 2 ½ m Olive Python conspicuous on the counter. Security guards with their shotguns prowled the habitat while the group was there.



After lunch in the pleasant rainforest setting of the aviary we returned to our buses for a tour of the town. We spent some time reflecting at the War Cemetery. Many fine young people lost their lives in the fighting around New Guinea in WW2.

Today being Queen's Birthday Holiday, most businesses were closed, but there were long queues waiting outside Bank of South Pacific at the ATM. Some of us took the opportunity to walk in the busy streets and shop accompanied by conscientious guards. Irma extended her wardrobe and others bought artefacts at a street stall on the footpath. The guards took great care to get us safely back to our buses. We went to the Melanesian Arts and Crafts, which was closed as was the shop in the Lae International Hotel. However we were able to buy stamps at the Melanesian Hotel.

We returned to the wharf at 3:00pm. Some people went to the yacht club for happy hour. (a pot of beer K2.10) The rest had happy hour on the boat. Dinner was pork with apricots. We steamed out of Lae at 5 to midnight.



Day 9 Tuesday, 14th June Tami Islands

The boat engine started about 2 a.m. as we went off to the Tami Islands. The anchor dropped at 20 past 6 only to be shifted again 30 minutes later for the current was too strong and we needed to be closer to the island.

There were big schools of fish behind the back of the boat and as we were watching a school of 5 dolphins hurried past. Circling the Islands were a pair of white-bellied sea eagles. Other birds were the great egret, crested terns, grey reef heron, Torres Strait Imperial Pigeon and welcome swallows. Some canoes came out to the boat, they were the sturdiest canoes that we had seen so far. We went ashore on Wanam Island where the locals had a market selling many things including wooden bowls and bone fishhooks. They were beautifully made all by hand and polished off with pig tusks. They have a beautiful satin sheen.

After we had purchased our bowls 4 of us went for a walk all the way around the island. On the footpath down to the village the people had planted pandanas, aralia and hibiscus, providing a beautiful walkway to the other homes.

Not a scrap of rubbish was anywhere to be seen and the fire-wood was stacked nicely and everything was so tidy. Some of the houses were made of tin, others of woven palm and others of bamboo poles placed vertically. We walked to the Lutheran Church that was one of the few churches we have seen that has seating, and also to the basket ball court.

The steep slopes behind the village were densely covered with a variety of rain forest plants.

We came across a man on the beach fashioning a canoe with an adze from a big branch of a tree that he had chopped down. He said it would take about 3 months to complete it. The tide was going out and we were able to walk right around the island on the uplifted coral reef. A man came past us with a bow and three arrows that had wire prongs on the end for spearing fish, but he did not have any fish to show us.

We found out that a lot of the bowls are carved from wood that has drifted from other islands.

Some people went to Kalal Island where they had the local elementary school with two teachers. They did have another two teachers but they have gone back to Lae because they had not been paid. The lady teacher and some of the students were brought out to the Miss Rankin to show them how to print the photos of themselves

that they were then able to take back to their school to display.

Some other people walked up this steep hill to another village where the ladies put on a Sing Sing for them with three songs. They were dressed in grass skirts and one had a cassowary feather veil that flopped over her face as she danced.

The snorkelling was lovely and clear and the fish was very colourful. We were dropped at a little island called Isinut and the last little island of the Tami group was called Izan.

At 2 o'clock we set sail for Saidor coconut plantation. James put a line out from the boat but it was not strong enough when an 80 kg tuna jumped out of the water trying to spit the lure out of its mouth.

We steamed down the Vitiaz Strait and every now and then we came to where a river came down to the sea and the water turned an aqua blue because the rock under the top-soil is limestone.



The group all got quite excited when the Steps of Sialum started to appear. These were formed when what was once the shore has been forced up out of the sea at the rate of 8cm a year and are part of the Finisterre Ranges which tower up to 13,000 ft. above sea level.

One of the spots was called Fortification Point because it has a rock that looks like a castle on the top and it is used as a navigational aid for big ships coming from Australia. These straits can be feared more than Bass Strait by sailors because of the rough seas they can produce. We were lucky today for the sea has been so smooth. There were five fires that affected visibility.

Sunset was very ordinary but we did see a flock of terns feeding as we went along.



Day 10 Wednesday, 15th June Saidor Plantation

After a solid night of steaming Captain Tony brought us to anchor with typical panache at 2.00 am.

The day started in typical style, Judy up at 4.00am, John at his i-Book, Phil in the water, and the rest in bed. 'The Palace', that is the homestead of Saidor plantation, was an impressive sight overlooking our mooring.

The snorkelling nuts had a fine time mid morning before we all embarked for the plantation tour. Our host Mr Bernie Leahy, met us at the shore for a conducted tour of his cocoa and coconut operations. He kindly had us to lunch at his fine homestead.

The cocoa trees live happily beneath the coconut trees and bear from 3 years of age. Cocoa pods ripen, from green, to brown, to yellow colour, on the trunks of the trees. These are collected for weekly shelling and placing the messy white beans into the fermentarium. Fermenting beans need to be shovelled over daily to avoid overheating in the bottom of the bin. Drying starts after a week, with the beans being placed on concrete panels for sun-drying. In wet weather the roofs may be rolled over, or even fires may be lit underneath.



After four days drying, the beans are graded for size, and bagged for sale to Madang merchants. Some cocoa is also processed for small producers from the region. Cocoa beans bring about \$2,500 per tonne currently.

The fallen coconuts need collecting within 3 months of falling. They are husked, and halved in the field, before bagging. The halves are dried on racks above a slow fire of coconut shells. On drying the copra pops out of the shells and, about

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30 tonnes per week, is ready for shipping out on the company boat to Madang.



Copra brings about \$ 400 per tonne, coconut oil brings \$1000 per tonne. Saidor is preparing to set up a copra press to produce oil, leaving coconut meal for use in stock foods.

Saidor homestead provided a grand setting for lunch. Thank you Bernie.

After lunch almost everybody snorkelled themselves into a sodden state including trips to the outer reef rim. Philippa needed strong persuasion not to attempt the kilometre long swim back to our ship!!

Our fearless ships officers set out to give Bernie a fine afternoon of fishing. They returned in a boat empty of both beer, and fish, so the trip was not entirely wasted.



After dinner, eight of us went via the *Half Moon* and Bernie's ute to his palace to view the State of Origin Rugby League match. For New South Wales supporters, it was a great match. Some Queensland supporters thought it was the ref's night.

The ocean swell seemed to adopt something of the fury of the occasion, and our late night revellers had to leap from the safety of the *Half Moon* onto the *Miss Rankin*.

Day 11 Thursday, 16th June Madang

After a somewhat rough night at sea we glided into the smooth waters of Madang Harbour. Hardly anybody would have slept through the racket of the docking process in Tony's backyard where a tail-wagging German Shepherd was eagerly awaiting his master. The morning was hot and muggy. Early morning walkers to the Sir Donald Clelland Gardens found a somewhat grubby lilypond. We boarded the bus for our Madang tour at nine o'clock. On the bus we were joined by "Sepik John" Gai, our guide for the rest of the trip.



After a short bus ride beyond the outskirts of Madang we arrived at the Sulphur Springs and the Balek Wildlife National Park that was the location for the Robinson Crusoe movie. The stream was a light blue and the creek bed covered by stringy, sulphur deposits which the locals use for cuts and wounds. The stream emerges in a cave at the base of a vertical-limestone cliff covered in thick vegetation, in particular great hanging vines. In the pool in the cave there were tortoises and fish and further downstream the locals fed a number of large eels. On the way back one local lady showed off her skills climbing a tall betel nut palm with the

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help of a strap of sago leaf around her ankles. In the village the group had the opportunity to observe the traditional way of weaving sago palm tiles for the roof.

Back on the bitumen we got glimpses of thatched huts and waving locals before we turned off to Bil Bil. This village is known for its pottery, which is functional as well as a trading item. The clay is sourced from nearby hills and the distinctive glaze is also from a local source. The surprising thing was that those pots were hand-made without the help of a pottery wheel. A staged method of drying the pots is used, with the final process being similar to the Japanese raku method, using the sago palm leaf for fuel.

As usual there was an instant market displaying pottery, carvings shells, beads....

Now it was time for our preordered lunch at the Madang Club. After lunch the group split up. One group went straight back to the boat and the rest spent the afternoon wandering in small groups exploring central Madang and indulging in some individual retail therapy. Within easy walking distance from each other there was a huge contrast between the plush resort hotel and the crowded public markets; fruit and vegetables creatively displayed in neat parcels, billums spread out on the wire netting fence and colourful dresses hanging under the trees.



Some group members went to the supermarket for No 1 Tea, PNG coffee and local CDs. Although security in general seemed a lot better than in Lae, a the security guy at the supermarket warned us to beware of pickpockets and to stay together in a group.

At three o'clock the shoppers boarded the bus for mad trip to join the boat further up the coast. On the way we were held up by a gang of workers doing much needed repairs to the road. After a cool drink at the local store at our destination, Dilup, some of the group continued by bus and the rest walked the remaining two kilometres to the landing stage where the boat

was due to arrive. Three local men accompanied us "just for security" we were told. Eventually *Miss Rankin* arrived and we boarded with a great farewell from the locals.

The day concluded with a great sunset and a barbeque on deck while the boat started on its journey to the Sepik River. Many people missed two local volcanoes. One, Kar Kar, was passed when the boat travelled from Madang to Dilup. The other, Manum, was passed at 1.00 am on Friday and viewed by the newly formed, and partially insomniac, Miss Rankin Volcanological Appreciation Society.

Day 12
Friday, 17th June
Sepik River — Angoram

By daylight we were in the Sepik River and as the sun rose we gazed on a display of sunlit ripples. A lot of floating hyacinth is seen all along the river as we progress while along the banks we see a wall of plumed grass which is called phragmites'. A number of villages were passed and the inevitable canoes appeared from everywhere. A lot of these seem to be occupied by children. The construction of the canoes is somewhat different to those used on the islands. They seem longer and do not have the outrigger. This is probably not necessary on the calm waters of the river.

In places the river seems to be divided by islands and by midday a dense forest of Sago Palms was passed.

The Lonely Planet quotes 'Angoram' as the oldest Sepik station established by the Germans before W.W2. It is now an administrative centre for lower and middle Sepik River.

Sir Michael Somare's party represents them. (People are said to be dissatisfied, for example they attempted to burn the administrative building.) The village is in decline, no mains power for the last 15 years.

Angoram was the first village we visited on the Sepik. We motored through little islands of vegetation with plumes of 'pitpit', a wild form of sugar cane, water plants with delicate mauve flowers.



All sorts of craft were laid out for us:- Billims, A carvings, animals of wooden material. There were many things we have not seen before and a

sense of mythical traditions. All sorts of wooden statues some 4 to 5 ft. high, some looking old, some decorated with shells and feathers, woven material. Many coloured masks of different sizes, painted red black and brown in delicate designs, story boards depicting canoes manned by many men, hats often with feather decorations, little pigs, penis gourds. There were some good billums made of wool and natural fibres.

On our return, there were several canoes selling wares from the market we had just left.

Once we were all aboard it was up the river again with an electric storm threatening. The canoes scattered as did the Miss Rankin adventurers. We all gathered for refreshments and the inspection of one another's purchases.

Thunder, steely grey skies and heavy rain turned the saloon into a trap for the afternoon crowd — oh what a hub-bub. The lightning gave us quite a display and we thanked our luck for letting us return before the storm broke.

The afternoon passed quietly with brave souls dashing back and forth in the rain to attend to whatever business was important — like being somewhere else just for variety.

It was a lovely peaceful afternoon after the storm allowing us to catch up on reading while savouring and salivating the over the aromas coming from the kitchen.

As evening came, we steamed towards a strangely misty horizon which was gilded as the sun began to set. We were still points of interest for the canoes criss-crossing in the suns rays on the river-as an exotic sight as one could want. Such joyous wavings and happy sounds creating a finale to the day.





Day 13
Saturday, 18th June
Sepik River — Palembangi

After a typical night of mozzies and insects on the Sepik by the village of Palembangi where we had moored, and some more good fruit from Susie's department, we went ashore for a 1 ½ km walk. The very good track had been prepared by the villagers with grass piled on the wet patches. We came to a fine grassed space in the middle of a village which featured the magnificent Haus Tambaran (the Spirit House) at one end, and some aged Ancestor Stones. The remains of an old spirit haus which had been bombed during the war because it had been suspected of being full of Japanese, was in the middle. At the other end was the temporary Spirit Haus used while the real one was being built. Both Haus were full of great carvings.

We were treated to an excellent Garamut drumming recital. We Western women were allowed in the Haus Tambaran where the village women are not. The experience was well worth the walk!

And what an array of bilems etc for the happy shoppers! Irma had her own private display just where we landed so she did not have to walk too far!

After lunch we went across the river to a village opposite — Kanganaman. Here we boated up a barat and landed and walked to another Haus Tambaran, the oldest on the Sepik River. The carved posts from this spirit house are being removed for conservation by the National Museum. We were greeted by a couple of masked dancers who ran out in very dramatic style to the drumming of the garamut. It was a relaxing pleasant stroll. We spoke to the pastor who studied theology at Port Moresby. An

anthropologist from U.K. is staying the in village for two years studying to complete his PhD.

It was a fruitful day too for the birdwatchers. Always there were the various white egrets and pied herons, the black, and whistling, and brahminy kites, black ducks, whiskered terns, and lots more.



Day 14
Sunday, 19th June
Kamaninbit - Chambri Lake

All were up early this morning to allow for an 8.30 a.m. departure for Kamaninbit village which, by the number of villagers awaiting our arrival, looked like one of the more prosperous ones along the Sepik. Appearances don't always tell the true picture however. There was an enormous display of artefacts all spread out on what appeared to be the only "Victa mowed" lawn we have struck so far. It was easily the largest market we have seen. So many wares to buy and so few of us to purchase, but that is life for the villagers as they sit stoically behind their wares and are happy for any purchases we make. The display included wood carvings of all shapes and sizes, string items, wickerwork, bilums, bone knives, flutes, decorated gourds and just about anything else you could imagine. Although we were not able to do justice to this display, we were told that other cruises often come to the village to make purchases as well as the occasional American wholesaler who makes massive purchases to ship back to the States.

While in the village we were entertained by a fully decked out warrior giving a spear throwing demonstration using a throwing stick. We were amazed by the distance he was able to achieve by its use. This was followed soon afterward by a Sing Sing within an enclosed space which was evidently because the dances are not to be seen by the women. The music was provided by two long flutes, "big brother" and "little brother". Big brother could supply three notes but Little

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brother had only one. It was a good display and totally different to the Sing Sing we had previously seen along the coast. One disturbing thing we found at this village is that they have no elementary education for the children due to the mission not having the funds available to employ a teacher and the Government is not forthcoming with any funds either. This must have long term effects on the village as the children grow older with reduced prospects.

As we departed the village we saw a canoe load of leftover wares being taken away and on return to the "Miss Rankin" we found that John, our Sepik guide, had loaded a huge collection of wood statues and carvings, all tightly wrapped in black plastic, for transport down to Madang and then for export to France. This is a major source of income for this village.

Also found on board was a bag of river turtles which caused some dissention amongst the passengers as to whether we should be engaging in, or condoning, this trade. The subject was raised and discussed, with the result that the turtles were offloaded. As to whether this was a move for conservation of wildlife or an unhelpful delaying action towards the villagers is still debatable but, in any case, it did clear some consciences.

We sat down to our lunch of Hot Dogs with onion and bread rolls prior to our second trip of the day, which was a Chambri Lakes excursion. During lunch we were provided with an interesting sight of millions of May Flies cruising just above the river surface. These were being feasted upon by swooping Black Kites and Dollar Birds.

Sixteen of us set off in two outboard powered dugout canoes of considerable size to find our way to the Lake. We had a really close up view of the May Flies' activities in the early stages of the trip but, soon after, one motor broke down and we ended up in the one larger canoe and set off once more.



Along the way we saw many different birds, including Greater, Intermediate and Little Egrets, Little black Cormorants, Snake Birds, Pied Herons, Night Herons, Long Tailed Bee Eaters and Tree Martins. Finally after about 90 minutes we arrived at Chambri Lake and called in at the Chambri Village. They quickly organized a small market where very colourful carvings, drums etc. were displayed. Some were coloured with red and purple dyes which we were told came from a large local tree.

We set off once more for the return journey and called in at the village of Aibom which makes a special kind of pottery. One item was bought by F.L. but there was very little on display. Back in the canoes and not particularly looking forward to the long trip back, we tried to position our increasingly numb extremities for the least discomfort. Eventually the "Miss Rankin" came in sight and most breathed a sigh of relief. Dugout canoes proved to be about the least comfortable mode of transport encountered so far. All had a most welcome clean up and after a very enjoyable dinner most retired to their cabins to recover from a long and tiring day. Of course, the dedicated card playing group stayed up much later.



Day 14

Monday 20th June

Tambanum – Kamaramba

Sepik River

Anchored in the river on another overcast morning the topic of conversation at breakfast was the indignity of being bitten by mosquitoes on body parts not protected by repellent. Most likely this occurs in the bathroom.

Many dugouts were ferrying children across the river to school in another part of the village. We could see the villagers setting up their market as usual, another very long one. We just had enough time to get to the end before the rain started getting heavier. Most people were in the

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spirit house where Ian, Irma and Mary had their faces painted with very dramatic designs by local artists. They used black white and reddish clay obtained locally. Mary bought the mask that they copied her design from. John Sinclair bought a small statue that looks very like our prime minister and we think it will be a great conversation piece at his house if it gets through customs.

Tambanum village is renowned for its carvings and according to the Lonely Planet Guide, Margaret Mead, the famed American anthropologist, lived and studied here. Some of the menfolk were expressing their displeasure/non-approval that we had not visited their village on our way up the river. There is rivalry amongst the various villages for our custom. One man successfully sought trade of his artefacts for clothing.

In the afternoon most of us went to both parts of Kambaramba village which is similar to Albury/Wodonga but with a bigger space between. We proceeded up a long narrow canal to Kambaramba 1 where we were welcomed by an armada of canoes. The village is partly built over the water and all buildings are on stilts to cope with annual flooding. John S delivered school supplies and we were thanked with a charming rendition of *Alouette*.

On the way back we bought shellfish and fish near the crocodile holding pen. Ian noticed some strange fish as we neared Kambaramba 2 and went ashore to identify suspected Pirhrana. A sing-sing given at the mouth of the canal completed our memorable visit.

Contact details of the Kambaramba school teacher to whom we delivered the stationery:

Mr Atunia Joseph
Kethro Elementary School
c/- Karansas Local Church
PO Box 44
ANGORAM E.S.P PNG

The school has 79 students but the teacher does not have even a blackboard to work on.



Day 15 Tuesday, 21st June Wewak

We motored all night. As we went through the Sepik River mouth to the sea was quite rough and the ship rolled from side to side.

About 7.00 a.m. we anchored at Muschu Island only to move about an hour later to another spot further around the island closer to the resort and to a sheltered coral lagoon. Some of us jumped in straight away and went off to investigate the reef only to be disappointed for the reef was dull and there weren't many little fish around. The rubber ducky took people backwards and forwards to the beach either for a swim or to walk along the beach.

At the back of the ship was a tall tree with a group of hanging metallic starlings nests that looked like apartments for birds one being on top of the other. The noise that came from the tree was a constant shriek and when an Oriental Hobby landed on a branch the noise turned into a loud scream as all the birds took off at once in a cloud of black.

Under one big tree we noticed a huge green turtle shell set out on the branches to dry.

Birds seen on the island were metallic starlings. Oriental Hobby, Varied honeyeater, Brahminy Kite, Willie Wagtail.

The tide was going out all morning whilst we were there. We found out from talking to a local that in 2002 the reef was lifted out of the sea by up to 3 metres in places by an earthquake and that is why it is in the bad state it is in.

As we sailed away from the island you could look back and just see a Japanese gun on the tip of the point, there is also a rumour that a ship loaded with gold was sunk somewhere in the harbour. Two Japanese planes are also crashed somewhere on the island.

It turned out to be a most interesting visit.

After lunch we cruised over to Wewak where most of us went ashore to sample the delights of the shops and super markets.

Day 17 Wednesday 22nd June To Cairns and Home

Cruising New Guinea
Jim Sellers 2005

Some Australian Adventurers came to Port
Moresby keen to explore
Some interesting areas and islands along New
Guinea's shore.

At Milne Bay the fog hung around low like a
shroud
Making mountaintops on each side disappear in
cloud.

Hot pools, steam rising, boiling-bubbling geysers
spurting an exciting scene,
Where villagers cook their food, and wash their
clothes clean.

To a volcanic area in the sea, an easy swim from
the shore,
Where continuous columns of gas rise from
vents in the sea floor.

A long walk past stalls at Boga Boga market—
Day ends on the deck, watching a delicately
coloured sunset.

At the fiord's misty end they saw one of the
great sights of P.N.G.
The rainforest plunging straight down from the
clouds to the sea.

Next something special that's done whenever
visitors come,
Small dancer's grass-skirted hips sway to the
beat of the drum.

At the colourful traditional sing-sing all had a
front seat
To see feathered headdresses bob in unison to
the drum's hypnotic beat
A sing-singing songs about war, work and some
that were tribal
And, due to missionary influence, there were
some from the Bible.

Rough seas will make climbing stairs and
walking corridors quite a battle;
So relax in your bunks till you hear the anchor
chain rattle.

They steamed all next day just stopping for a
while,
To snorkel around and explore a small tropic
isle.

The cemeteries and the village were the places to
go

On a soaking, squelchy, sunless Sunday in
Salamaua

Dawn broke with clear skies bright sunshine
their best start for days,
Accentuating the stark dramatic beauty of
mountains all clear of the haze.

Gun-toting guards in steel-meshed, windowed
vans, labeled "Guard Dog Security",
Swept them to the Rainforest Habitat absolutely
securely, and safe from rascality.

On to the War Memorial and into the town,
Where due to the holiday most shops were shut
down.

Tami market to see traditional fish hooks and
beautiful hand carved dishes;
On the top they were bowls; on the backs of
some were fishes.

Next village's sing-sing was all dancing girls,
but the drummers were male.

None wore the feathered headdresses, but one
wore a cassowary feather veil.

The steps of Sialum were terraced steps of all
heights and sizes
Created by the effect of the sea on the land, as it
rises.

At Bernie's cocoa beans were fermented then
spread to dry in the sun
And copra from coconuts was produced by the
tonne.

Watching State of Origin see them tackle, kick,
catch, pass, and run,
And when the battle was over it was New South
Wales that had won.

At Madang they visited a sulphurous spring that
fed a stream full of eels
To Bil Bil village where they hand make round
clay pots without any wheels

Now the New Guinea God of Volcanoes can't be
a very obliging bloke;
Some stayed up quite late and saw no fireworks
— just smoke.

Steaming up the Steamy Sepik its surface a sheet
of shining brown glass
Watching daily life on the river and its banks as
they pass.

Some villagers would gather on shore to jump
shout, wave and rave
Others quickly paddled out in their dugouts to
surf our bow wave.

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Another market with necklaces feathered hats
and all kinds of masks
Always available for a cheaper second price if
you only just ask

The vegetation on the banks made strange shapes
and outlines against the clouds in the sky
And created an ever-changing mesmerizing
moving mural as they slowly passed by.

In the spirit house drummers beat racy tunes on
the big pig drums,
Then to buying from an ever expanding market
with all kinds of billums.

The oldest spirit house welcomed them with
dancers in costumes shaped like a bell.
It contained unusual carvings some with stories
that Sepik John would tell.

Each evening there would be some discussion
about what tomorrow's agenda might be.
Will it be Plan A or Plan B or Plan C or — um
— just maybe Plan D?

The biggest and best lot of artefacts was set out
for sale —
One wonders how often they're presented, and
how often they fail.

The spear throwing and dancing was one of
those really great photo shoots;
Musical accompaniment from lime gourds and
two different length flutes.
It's a pity those fierce looking bone wearing
lords of thatched houses
Have swapped feathers, paint and penis gourds
for T-shirts and cotton trousers.

Then lunchtime for another of P.N.G.'s very
unusual sights —
Myriad mayflies on the river being swooped by
terns dollar birds and kites.

One canoe's outboard failed so the *Busy Bee* had
to take
All twenty to visit the villages and the second
largest lake.
Between those two villages it was very hard to
tell,
Which one was mosquito Heaven, and which
one was mosquito Hell.

Against mossie bites ladies sprayed the usual
areas with great care.
So they got a very unpleasant surprise when
stung on the derriere.

Rain started and a market disappeared leaving
just a few traces
So in the spirit house some village artists painted
three faces
They looked very ordinary right there at the start
But when they were finished they were real
works of art

F. L. bought a nude statue of our P.M. sitting
there in all his glory;
If he gets it back to Queensland he'll make it a
never-ending story.
And he grumbled and complained saying, "*This
really sucks!*
*I didn't get the right change, so it cost fifty
bucks.*"

Back in the boats again just heading for the shore
For the last Sepik village visits — there won't be
any more—
To the lake village that has been built
Out in the water and high up on stilts.
Small in dugouts just paddled harder and harder,
To be first to our boats — beat the welcoming
armada.
Then every village dugout without any exception
Came out from the houses to join a happy,
smiling reception.

Last village an energetic sing-sing where both
the old and the young
Rattled necklaces and stamped feet in time to the
songs that they sung.
The masked figure turned and shook his bum as
all the troop danced;
This had both the locals and tourists completely
entranced.

So everyone was watching how his hips did
rotate,
Hearing the drums going boom, seeing the
dancers gyrate.
A great end to the river ramble for at the next
stop they'll be
Well past where the mighty Sepik joins up with
the sea.

If those snorkellers could be granted all their
wishes
They'd spend more watching the smorgasbord of
pretty coral and brightly coloured fishes.

I think I should mention before I run out of
words,
All through the journey they saw lots and lots of
birds.

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But sadly all great journeys must come to an end
And those weary mosquito bitten travellers wend
Their way back home from those exotic lands
afar,
Loaded with memories photos billums and
object d'art.

But when they reflect on where they have been,
The people they've met, the sights they have
seen,
The villages, the scenery, the sing-sings, the
Sepik's burbling brown stream,
These magic moments will replay in their minds
like some wonderful dream.

Many thanks to John, Ian, Eric, and *Miss*
Rankin's captain and crew;
The success of this adventure is down to all of
you.
So friends in the future may the traveller's gods
keep you safe from all harm
And may the arrival of luggage give you no
cause for alarm.

