

paradise

in flight with Air Niugini



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paradise

Welcome Aboard

In this issue of Paradise we are introducing a three-dimensional route map which shows just how comprehensive the Air Niugini network is throughout Papua New Guinea.

The map was produced by using a computer to project a simulated aerial view of our country, much as one would expect to see it from a low flying satellite. Once the computer had plotted the perspective, leading air brush artist Peter Shannon was engaged to translate the blueprint into a picture.

Air Niugini flies to 21 airports throughout the country with a total of 257 flights each week. This computer generated map will make it easier for travellers to identify landmarks as we wing you across our country.

Masket Iangalio
General Manager, Air Niugini

IN THIS ISSUE:

5 GABE

Eric Hirsch traces the preparations for a colorful feast in the Udabe Valley.

11 MALAYSIAN DELIGHT

Club Mediterranee's Malaysian resort gives you much more than a standard holiday.

15 AERIAL AMBULANCE

Thanks to pilot Mike Jelliffe's winged ambulance many lives are saved in Papua New Guinea.

20 AIR NIUGINI ROUTE MAP

Our domestic route network takes us to 21 ports throughout Papua New Guinea. This route map is an easy reference.

23 MEMORIES ARE MADE OF BILAS

Bilas makes unusual souvenirs. Susannah Hoe tells us about her collection.

27 SEPIK ENCOUNTER

Michael Gebicki looks at life along the mighty Sepik, Papua New Guinea's longest river.

33 NEW FISH

Sportfishing enthusiasts are excited about the discovery of a new fish species in Papua New Guinea.

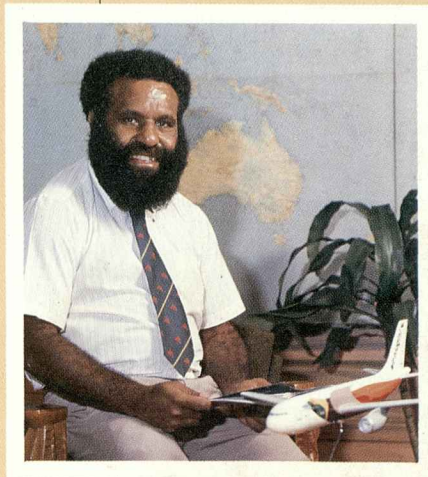
37 A FISHING PARADISE

Papua New Guinea waters offer interesting possibilities for sport and big game fishing.

Above: Mr Masket Iangalio, General Manager of Air Niugini
Cover: Journeying along the Sepik in dugout canoes.
Photo by Tom Cooke.

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For those who appreciate the finer things

GABE

The village specially constructed to house the tribes participating in the feast.

Story and pictures by Eric Hirsch

In all societies important changes in the life of an individual are marked by ritual and ceremony.

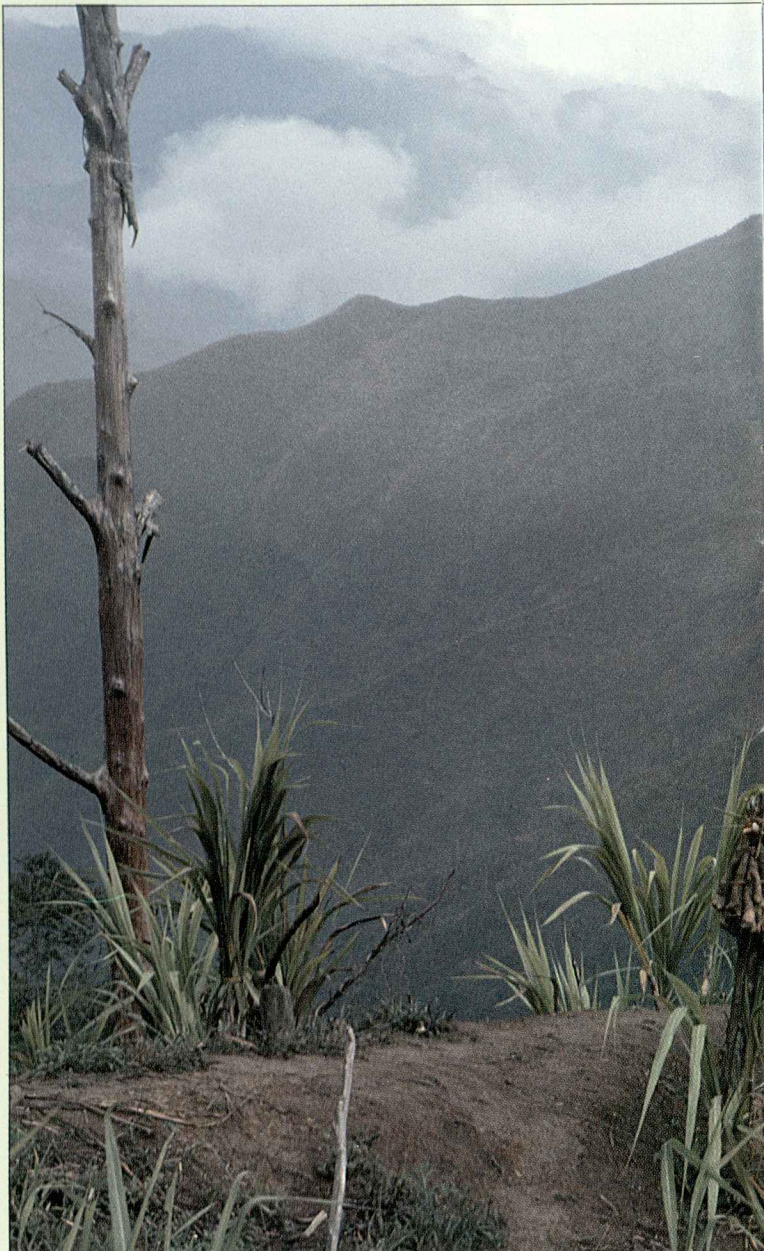
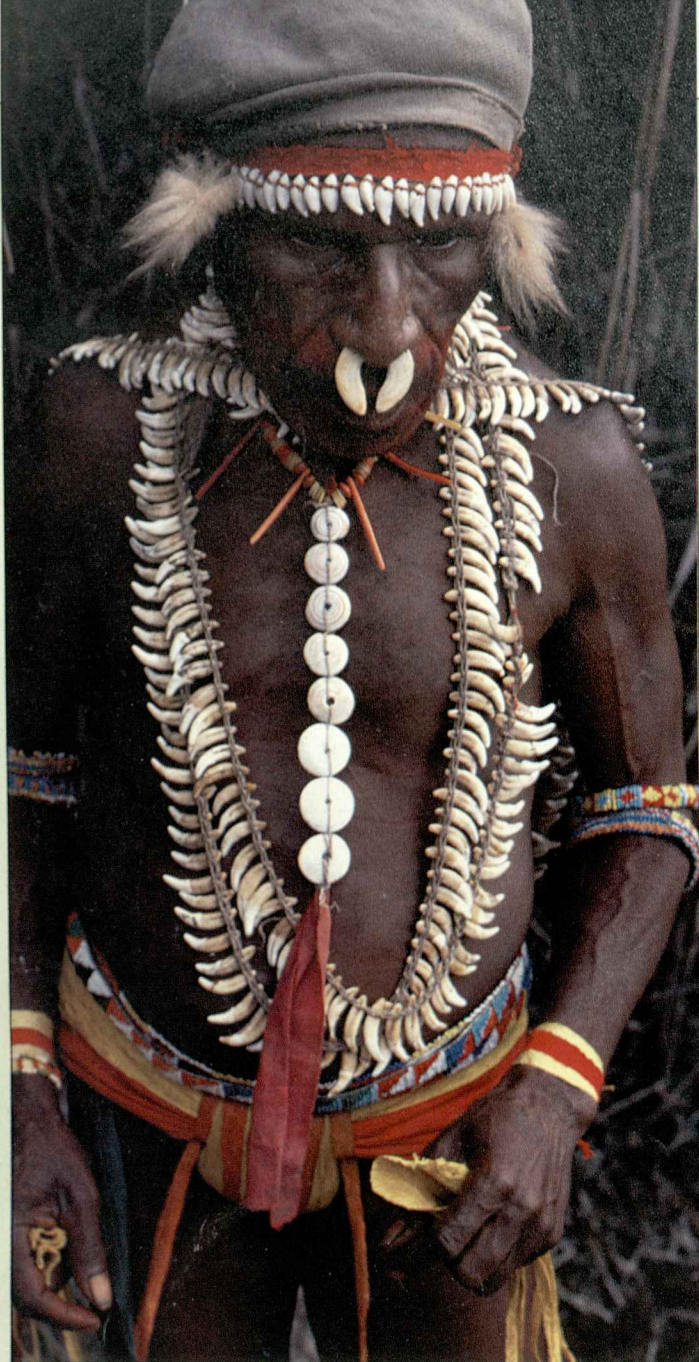
For the hundreds of tribes in Papua New Guinea, such events see a time of feasting and dancing, of following strict customs that have remained unchanged through countless generations.

To the tribes which inhabit the valleys of the Udabe,

Chirima, Dilava and Auga rivers of the Central Province, these rituals share the common name of *Gabe*.

Gabe, loosely translated from the Fuyuge language of the area, means feast or party.

In its most basic form *Gabe* centres on two main events—a great all-night dance with the killing of pigs and the subsequent feast.



But while these are the climax of the *Gabe*, there are many smaller 'lead-up' events which must be adhered to before a *Gabe* is possible. The *Gabe* is the culmination of months of elaborate preparation and planning. To understand the intricacies of a *Gabe* we shall follow the events of the Visi tribe of the Udabe Valley inviting neighbouring Ononge tribesmen to take part in the ritual.

Gabes can be called for a number of reasons, such as the elders in the tribe losing their teeth or their hair going white (referred to locally as *Mal*).

Once a *Gabe* has been decided upon, the Visi's leaders first determine whether their pig population is large

enough to share with the Ononge guests and dancers.

A ban is put on the killing or exchanging of pigs within the tribe until after the *Gabe*.

Preparations are also made for the planting of a large garden containing tremendous quantities of yams, taro, sugar cane and other foods for the feast. Associated magic and rituals are used during the planting to ensure a successful harvest.

With the food situation under control, the next major task is to select a site and construct the village which will house the Visis and visiting Ononges. This requires anywhere from four to six months of work.

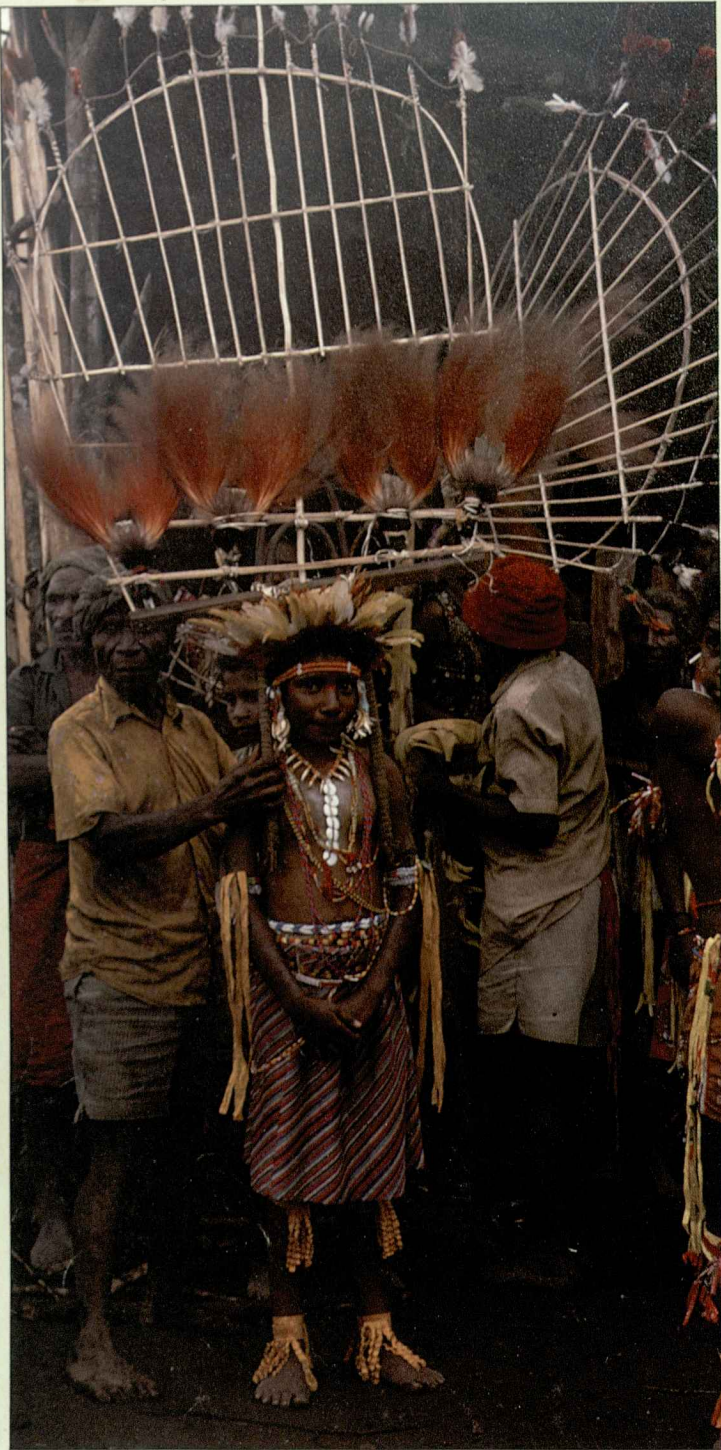
Once complete, the feasting



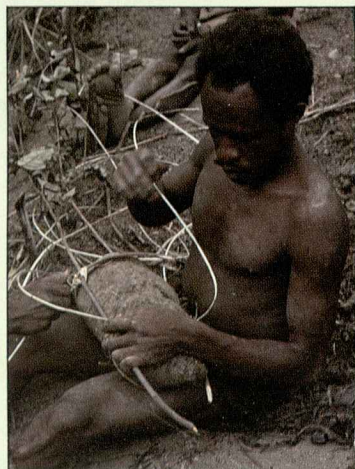


Top left: *Visi* dancer laden with jewellery made of dogs' teeth; **top right:** yams for the Gabe; **Bottom:** (left to right) *Visi* men, shiny with pig grease, dance to the beat of hand-

held drums; women carrying the harvested yams; pigs killed at Ononge for the *Visi* tribe; yams to be taken to the newly-built feasting village.



Above: Young girl wearing first head-dress; **right:** tying up yams for the Gabe; **far right:** seel presentation to Ononge tribe at the feasting village.



Right: Extravagantly bedecked dancers still moving energetically at sunrise; below: wari dance is performed before arriving at the Gabe.



village must be 'opened' with a dance involving the whole tribe.

Like the great dance to be performed by the Ononges some months later, these opening festivities include an all-night event with dancers wearing very large and spectacular headdresses. With that over, the Visis then invite their neighbours to a celebratory dance.

The invitation involves a series of smaller dances culminating in an all-night dance

performed by both tribes.

Some days later the invitation or *seef* to the *Gabe* is presented.

At this point the guests are told what valuables – dogs' teeth, feathers, small pigs or money – should be brought to the *Gabe* in exchange for the pigs killed in honor of those celebrating their *Mal*.

But, although the *seef* is presented it is not at first accepted. A few weeks later the *seef* is taken by the Visis to the Ononges village where

another dance is performed.

Now the stage is set for the invited Ononge guests to come and fulfill their 'contract'. But this does not happen immediately. Firstly, the Visis must harvest the crops and display the harvest around the sides of the newly-built feasting village.

Secondly, the invited dancers do not just 'arrive' at the *Gabe*. They first participate in various smaller feasts and dances – called *Gave* – within their own tribal area. Each

Gave in turn becomes geographically closer to the *Gabe* with the final *Gave* being virtually 'next door' to the feasting village.

Only then, can the *Gabe* take place.



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Malaysian Delight

Malaysia's east coast has beaches to rival the best in the world.

Long white stretches, palm-lined and washed by the South China Sea, the beaches are unspoilt and, possibly best of all, uncrowded.

In the province of Pahang there is one beach that even the Malays talk about with glowing pride.

That is Cherating, where Club Mediterranee have blended a unique 355 room village resort complex into 90 hectares of lush jungle full of tiny monkeys, tropical birds and hibiscus flowers.

Club Mediterranee, a paradise for those who want more from a holiday than most resorts have to offer.

Story by Lelde Ramma

A short flight from Singapore it is Asia's first Club Mediterranee and part of the worldwide network of 92 luxury resorts located throughout Europe, the Caribbean, Israel, Africa, the South Pacific and the Americas.

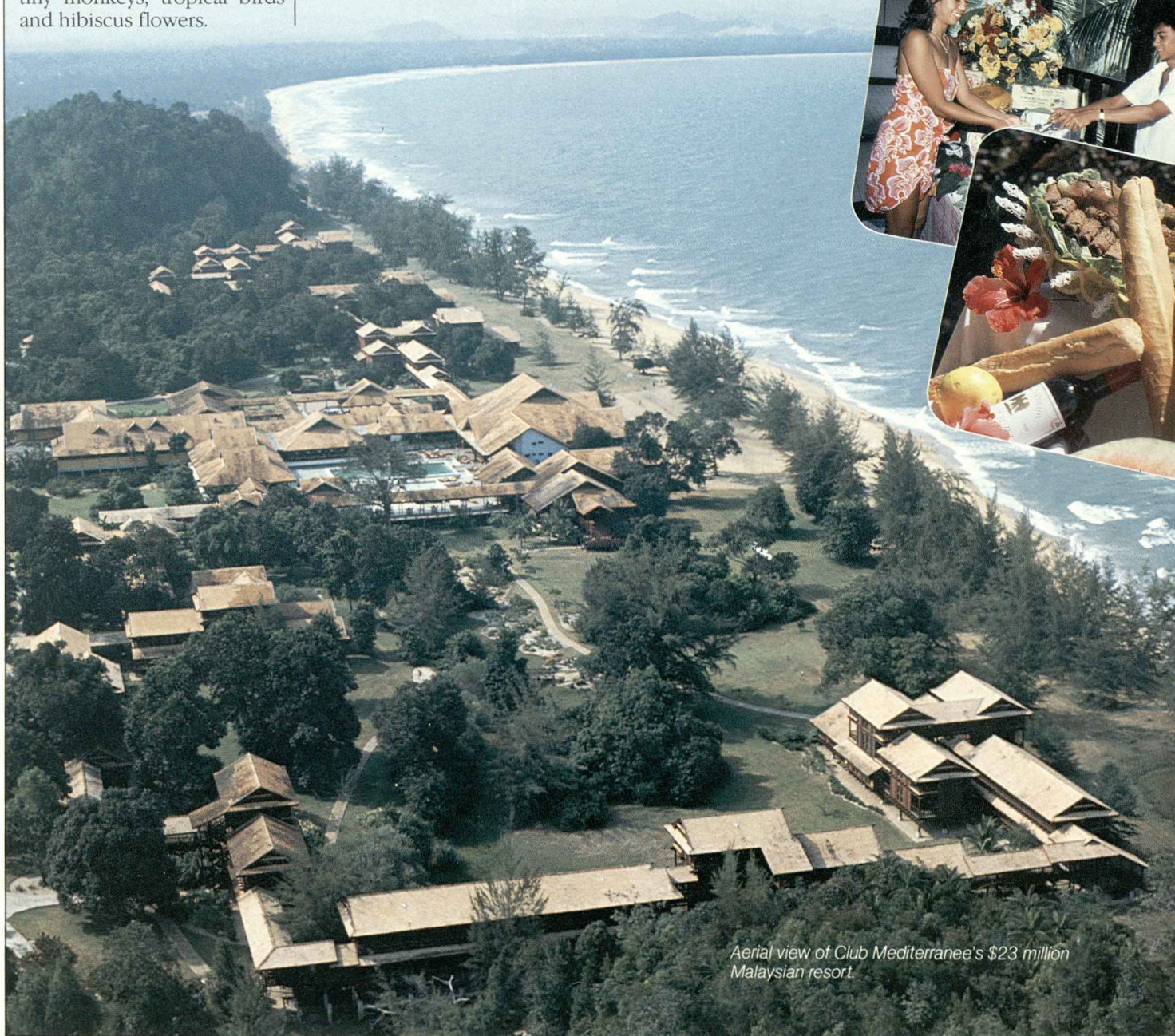
Initially founded as a private club in Majorca in the Mediterranean Sea in 1950, Club Mediterranee is today the

world's eleventh largest hotel chain. Each year more than 800,000 people from 30 countries escape to experience its delights.

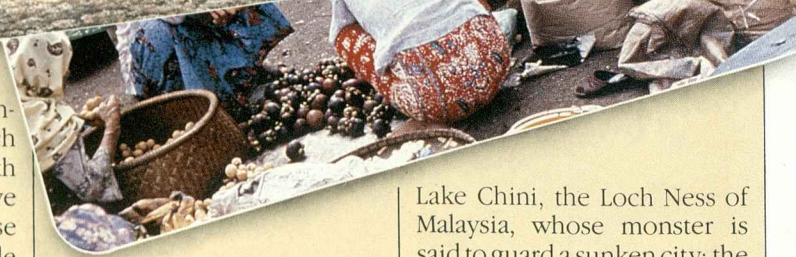
The holiday villages are mostly situated away from the reminders of the everyday world. They are based on the philosophy of relaxation, friendship, fun and a simple lifestyle.

At Cherating Beach, there is a free and easy spirit which begins the moment you pile out of the buses which bring guests from the airport. Malaysian music starts, fireworks go off and you are chanted through the entrance to the Malaysian-style village.

The resort is built around a huge swimming pool with a rambling bar and restaurant, open all around to the jungle and sea breezes. Guests are



Aerial view of Club Mediterranee's \$23 million Malaysian resort.



accommodated in traditional-style bungalows which have stilts, steep pitched roofs and are finished in mahogany and teak. They offer cool, comfortable living with each private balcony looking out onto the sea. Other facilities include a theatre, fitness centre, a boutique well-stocked with colorful sarongs and a restaurant overlooking the beach, where couples and small groups can dine quietly when they feel the need to detach themselves from the crowd.

Filling in the day is probably the most taxing decision of the whole stay - there is so much offered. Windsurfing, sailing, diving or tennis, with trained instructors ready to help. There is also yoga, callisthenics, ping pong, archery, aerobics, jazz ballet and even batik-making classes. And, as is the Club Mediterranee philosophy, there is no extra charge.

If that isn't enough, those wanting a holiday and also to improve skills, can attend a computer workshop or language laboratory.

While the Club has a reputation as a mecca for singles, families and kids are well looked after. Supervisors and classes are available for children's activities.

Dining at Cherating Beach is a relaxed affair and once again guests are faced with a difficult choice. European,

Malaysian, Japanese and Chinese dishes are offered. Lunch is a real feast. Starting with barbeque grills, you can move on to freshly cooked Chinese food and about 20 vegetable and pasta dishes before you reach a table laden with salads, terrines and fresh seafood. This is followed by numerous French pastries and a variety of exotic fruits and cheese. Dinner is a set four-course meal served family style at tables of eight.

Like all Club Mediterranee resorts, cash is the last thing guests have to think about. Almost everything is covered in the price of the holiday.

While all meals are served with complimentary carafes of French wine, drinks at the bar are extra. But there is no need to fumble in a wallet because at Club Mediterranee cash has been replaced with beads. So, for those extra drinks it is a matter of 'popping a few beads' bought from the hostess desk.

Unlike other holiday resorts it is hard to separate the guests from the staff. Called Gentle Organisers or GOs for short, the staff mix in and make sure everyone gets the most out of a holiday.

And they are entertainers too. Every evening after dinner they put on live stage shows which vary from lightly sending up the guests to in-house versions of favorite Broadway musicals. Sometimes the theme is advised in advance so that guests can participate. If the show is not enough the Club's disco starts buzzing around midnight until the sun comes up.

Guests can also get away from the resort to experience a little of the local life. Excursions offered include a trip to

Lake Chini, the Loch Ness of Malaysia, whose monster is said to guard a sunken city; the royal town of Pekan with its exotic palace; fishing villages and a three day trek into Taman Negara National Park, set in the world's oldest tropical forest. Some tourists also like to visit nearby villages to shop for local handicrafts - batik, baskets, kites and brassware.

Whatever your frame of mind, Club Mediterranee's lifestyle instills an overwhelming urge to relax, offering the freedom to do as much or as little, as you choose. It is unlike a holiday at an ordinary resort. To experience it is to be converted for life.

Air Niugini's Bird of Paradise, the Airbus A300 operates a weekly service to Singapore, departing Port Moresby every Saturday. For details about a Club Mediterranee Malaysia holiday, contact Air Niugini or your travel agent.

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AERIAL AMBULANCE

Story and pictures by Mike Jelliffe

Another patient is helped by the aerial ambulance service in Papua New Guinea.



“Lie down!” I glibly commanded my passenger. I was concerned that he do himself more damage. He was a fine muscular man, in his early 20s, I estimated. Fine, that is, apart from the arrow protruding from his abdomen! I do not usually carry passengers with arrows ‘in situ’ as such. I guessed it was a first time for him too. But my main concern was to reach Daru Hospital in time.

He had been hunting in the bush near Suki in the Western Province when he was accidentally shot. Three days of

stretcher bearing brought him to Suki station, and the radio calls began. The aid post orderly could do little to help him – surgery was vital, though after three days who knows what his chances were? Hunting arrows are not usually sterile.

I was called to fly him to Daru, one and a quarter hours’ flight from Suki by Cessna 206. I reckoned he was in pretty bad shape as we manoeuvred him off the rough bark stretcher onto the aircraft floor. The arrow shaft protruded rudely from his

distended belly. He did not complain.

"Lie down!" I gesticulated again, unable to actually reach him without vacating my chair – something I am loathe to do during flight! But, what good was an aeroplane ride if you could not enjoy the view. Sure enough, he had sat up, and was absorbing the scenery. I was absolutely astounded. He lived.

In Papua New Guinea, the aeroplane is often the ambu-

lance. For most of the country, light aircraft provide the only means of transport. Medical emergency flights, not always conveniently scheduled, are part and parcel of every bush pilot's program. Countless lives have been saved because of the *balus*.

With their operations orientated towards servicing the more isolated rural communities, and because they fly to many 'mission strips' not used by commercial operators, the church-related aviation groups carry the bulk of the

bush medical cases.

The largest of these groups, Missionary Aviation Fellowship, can have an aircraft on its way to an emergency site within minutes of a call coming in. MAF's comprehensive fleet of 19 aircraft operating from 12 bases around the PNG mainland, have flown many hundreds of hours on medicals.

In many rural areas, mission health centres still provide the backbone of medical services, under the auspices of the Health Department. The Christian Radio Missionary Fellowship has established an

efficient network of CODAN HF radios, linking even the remotest of outstations with the outside world. Each MAF aircraft carries the CRMF frequencies, putting the pilot in direct contact with any outstation at any time.

Mission doctors staff several health centres with radios. When a call is received from an outstation, other radio traffic ceases and a 'hot-line' with a doctor is quickly set up. Once the need to evacuate the patient is confirmed, the



Left to right: Landing onto an isolated airstrip; the air ambulance taxiing at Duranmin; a helping hand to get aboard.

nearest aircraft is contacted. Thus a three-way link is formed between the patient or medical orderly, doctor and pilot.

From a pilot's viewpoint, this is ideal. He can discover quickly the exact nature of the emergency and any specific care the patient requires. The doctor can advise him how soon the evacuation is needed, bearing in mind the

disruption it will cause to his flight schedule. He can in turn advise the doctor of his arrival time at the hospital, and check the weather reports at the outstation - all in the same breath!

The nature of cases handled range from appendicitis to



Left: Gathering to meet the balus at Wawoi Falls; **above:** a stretcher case carried from the bush to Eliptamin airstrip, near Telefomin.

yaws. As a pilot, it helps to have a strong constitution – a case which needs evacuating generally is serious. Childbirth complications head the list. Then there are accident victims – the man whose house fell on him, was gnawed by a wild boar or struck by a stray arrow. Sometimes the bizarre – like the woman who was taken from her canoe by a crocodile. The crocodile settled for a leg, and the woman swam ashore. We flew her to hospital, to return some months later with an artificial limb.

Sometimes the evacuation becomes a time of great joy. Several babies have been

delivered en route to the hospital.

In the lowlands, snake bites are common. With the cost of anti-venene at K200 or more a dose, it is understandably kept only at selected centres. If the victim cannot be quickly transported to such a centre, his prospects are not good.

I recall evacuating a man from Lake Murray several years ago. The offending death adder accompanied him – in a jar! By the time we reached the Health Centre at Balimo, he had definite signs of ptosis, the sleepy-eyed

symptoms of snake bite. The anti-venene was administered while he lay in the aircraft. He is now a member of the Provincial Government.

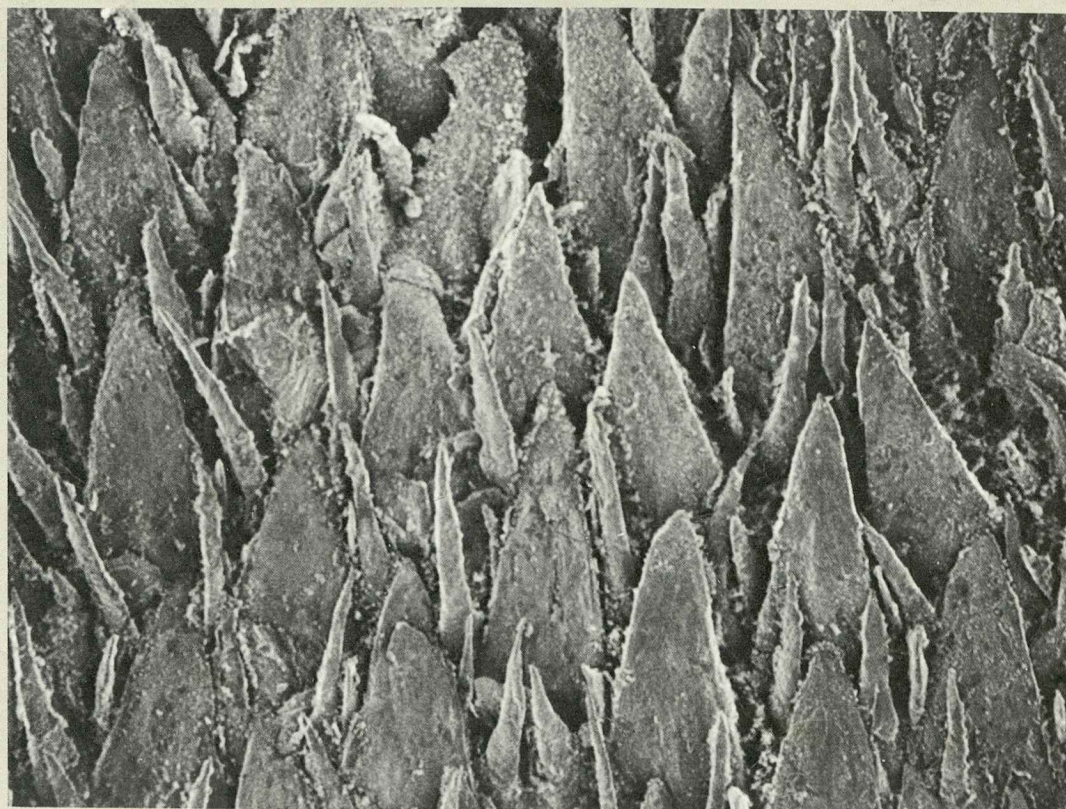
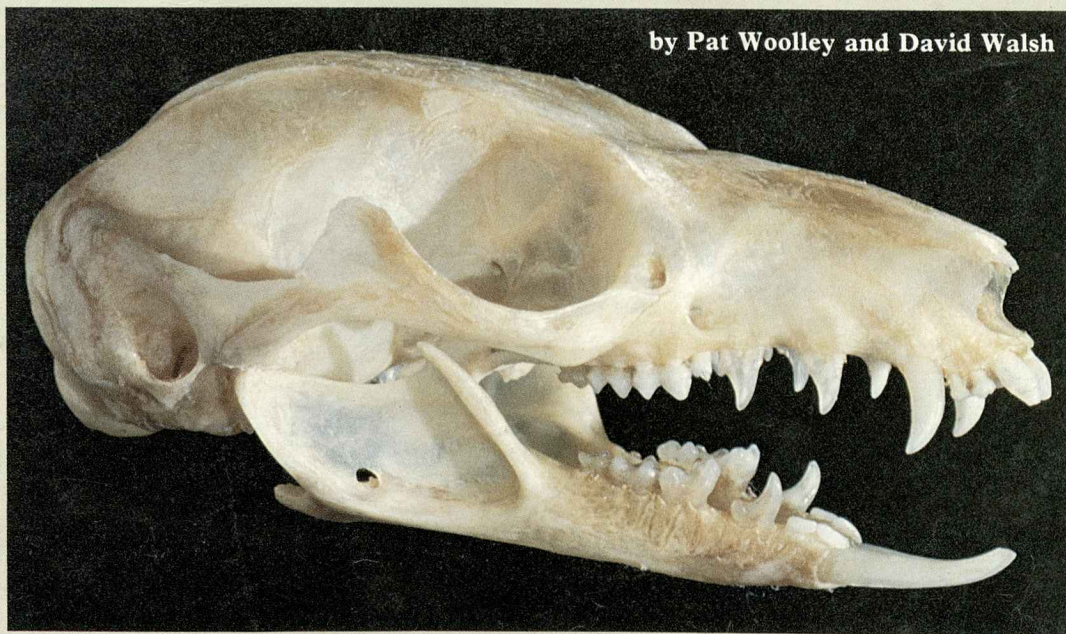
While the development of roads in many areas continues, in others the mountains are too steep, the swamps too deep or the money too scarce. For people in these areas, their only road is the sky – their only hope the *balus*.



Above: A Missionary Aviation Fellowship Cessna 206 taking off after visiting an outstation; **left:** nurse examining a sick child flown to a mission health centre.

FEATHER—TAILED POSSUMS

by Pat Woolley and David Walsh




NEW Guinea's Feather-tailed possum, *Distoechurus pennatus*, so named because of the fringe of stiff hairs like the barbs of a feather on either side of the tail, is a member of a small family of marsupials found only in Australia and New Guinea. Its closest relative is probably the tiny Feathertail glider, *Acrobates pygmaeus*, which features on the Australian one cent coin.

Feather-tailed possums are rarely seen because they emerge only at night from their leafy nests in trees in the rainforest. They have not been found at elevations greater than 1900 metres but below this they are widespread, if not common, on the island of New Guinea. There are records of them occurring from the Vogelkop in the west to the Owen Stanley Ranges in the east, on Sturt Island in the Fly River in the south and on Mt Kaindi near Wau on the northern side of the central mountain range.

Hunters find them in their nests, sometimes in what are probably family groups consisting of two adults — a male and a female, a juvenile and a baby in the pouch. Like all possums they have a deep pocket-like pouch between the legs on the lower part of the abdomen and the young are carried in this in the early weeks of their life. So far as is known Feather-tailed possums have only one young in the pouch at a time, even though there are two teats.

A fully grown Feather-tailed possum fits comfortably in cupped hands but the aggressive nature of these possums discourages attempts to handle



them. If disturbed from sleep during the day they will adopt a threatening posture, rearing back on their legs with arms outspread, all the while uttering loud noises. They may lunge at and bite a hand placed near them, and the stabbing action of their long, sharp, forwardly directed lower incisor teeth can cause a small but painful wound. Apart from defence, these teeth are used to cut grooves in the bark of trees, and the possums lick the sap which exudes. They also use them, in conjunction with their sharp upper canine teeth, to kill insects which form part of their diet.

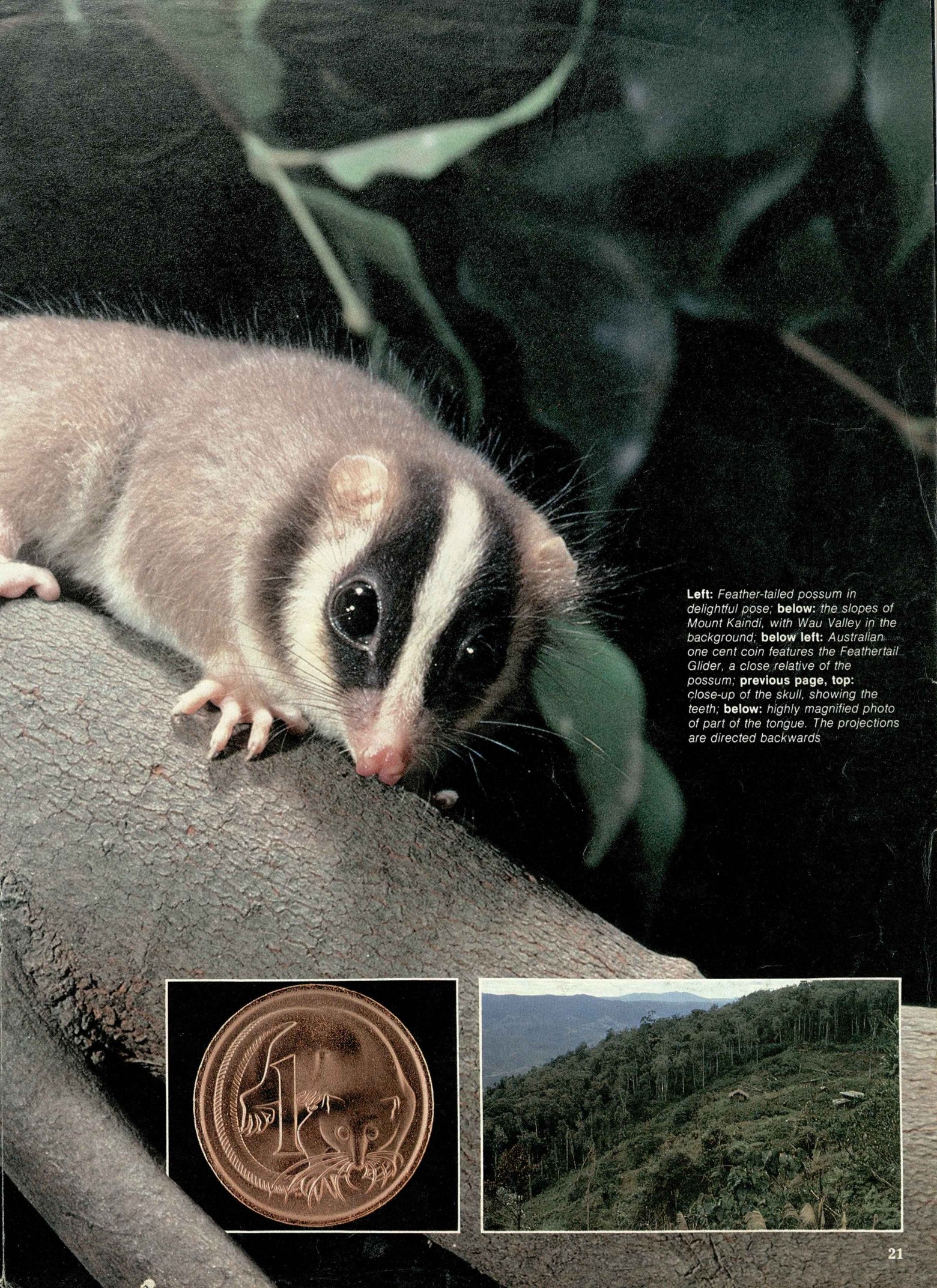
Large cicadas and grasshoppers are bitten on the head and front part of the body and when immobilised the soft contents of their bodies are licked out from the severed parts or through holes made in the hard exterior. The long pointed tongue, covered with backwardly directed projections, is highly suited for this job. Small insects are chewed with the back teeth and the hard parts spat out from the side of the mouth. Captive possums will also eat a variety of soft fruits and they are especially fond

of fresh grapes and soft dried sultanas.

Feather-tailed possums are very agile as they move through the tree tops searching for food. They lack the gliding membrane which spreads along the sides of the body between the arms and legs of their close Australian relative but they do not hesitate to leap from bough to bough. The prehensile tail can be used as an anchor and sharp claws on fingers and some toes help them to maintain a firm grip. The fingers are widely spread and the big toe, which lacks a claw, is opposable like a thumb and both hands and feet can be used for grasping smaller boughs. As in all possums the second and third toes of the feet of the Feather-tailed possum are bound together with

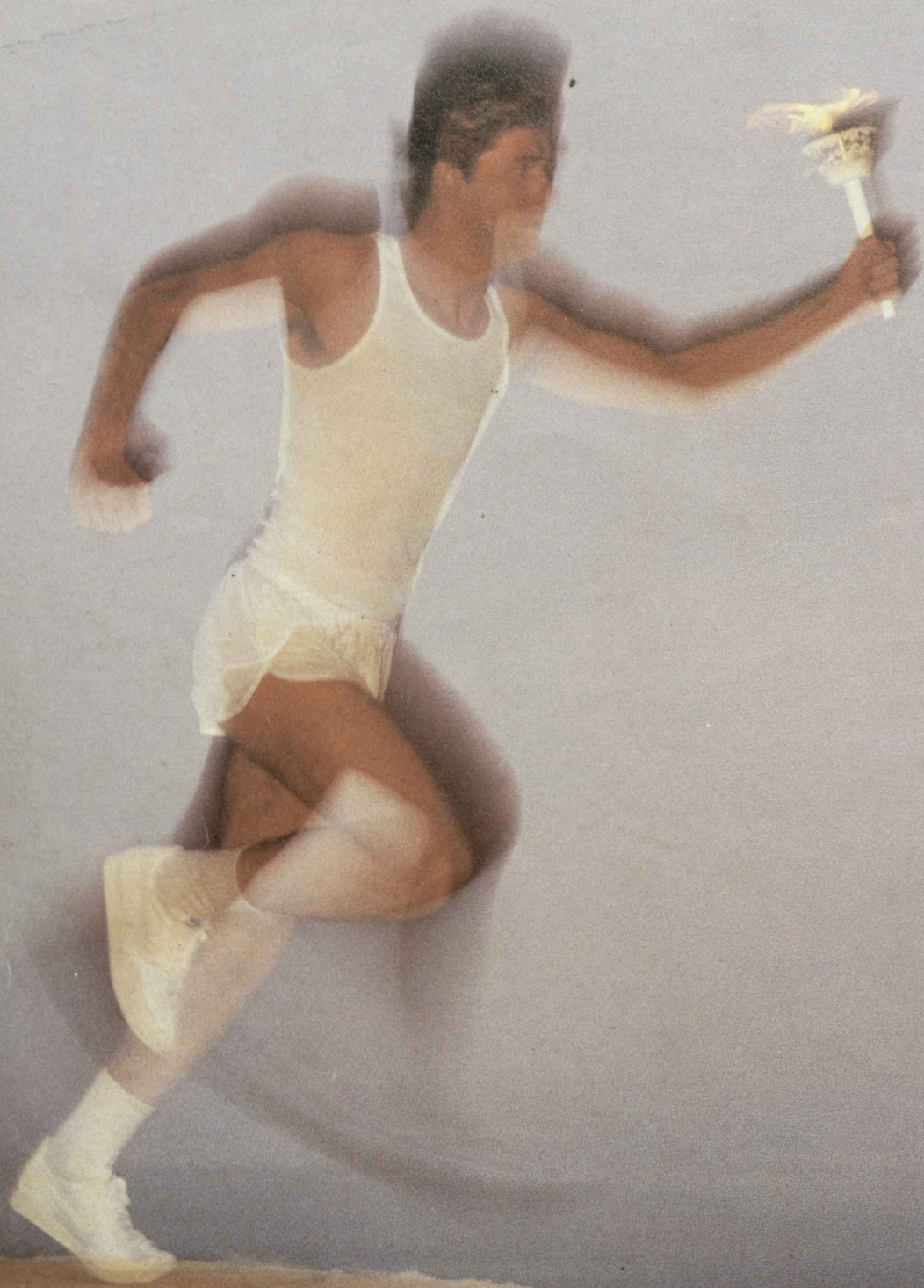
skin and the claws form a comb for grooming their soft brown coats.

Much remains to be learnt about the lives of Feather-tailed possums and their interactions with other animals in their natural environment. Because these unique New Guinea possums live at low elevations where forest is cleared for food gardens and timber it may be necessary to reserve areas in which they are known to occur to guarantee their survival. ♣



Left: Feather-tailed possum in delightful pose; **below:** the slopes of Mount Kaindi, with Wau Valley in the background; **below left:** Australian one cent coin features the Feathertail Glider, a close relative of the possum; **previous page, top:** close-up of the skull, showing the teeth; **below:** highly magnified photo of part of the tongue. The projections are directed backwards





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PAPUA NEW GUINEA

1975 - 1985

10



Ten years on....



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10th Anniversary of Independence Advisory Committee,
Director: LEITH ANDERSON,
P.O. Box 4970, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.
Phone: 21 7211. Telex: NE23048.

BENSBACH RIVER

Daru FLY RIVER

Kiunga

Ok Tedi Mine

Tari PORT MORESBY Mendi

Mt Hagen

Kundiawa Vanimo

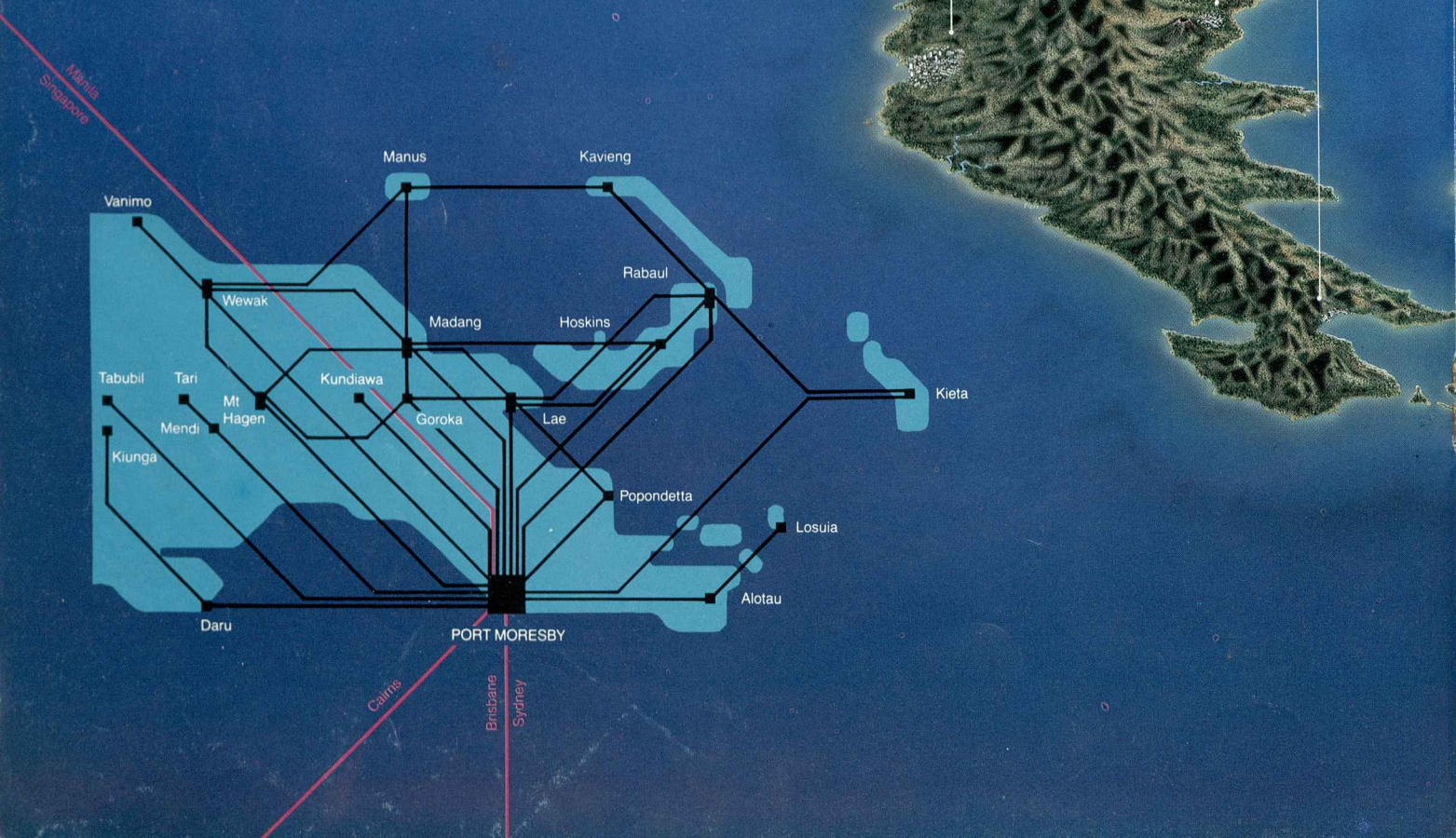
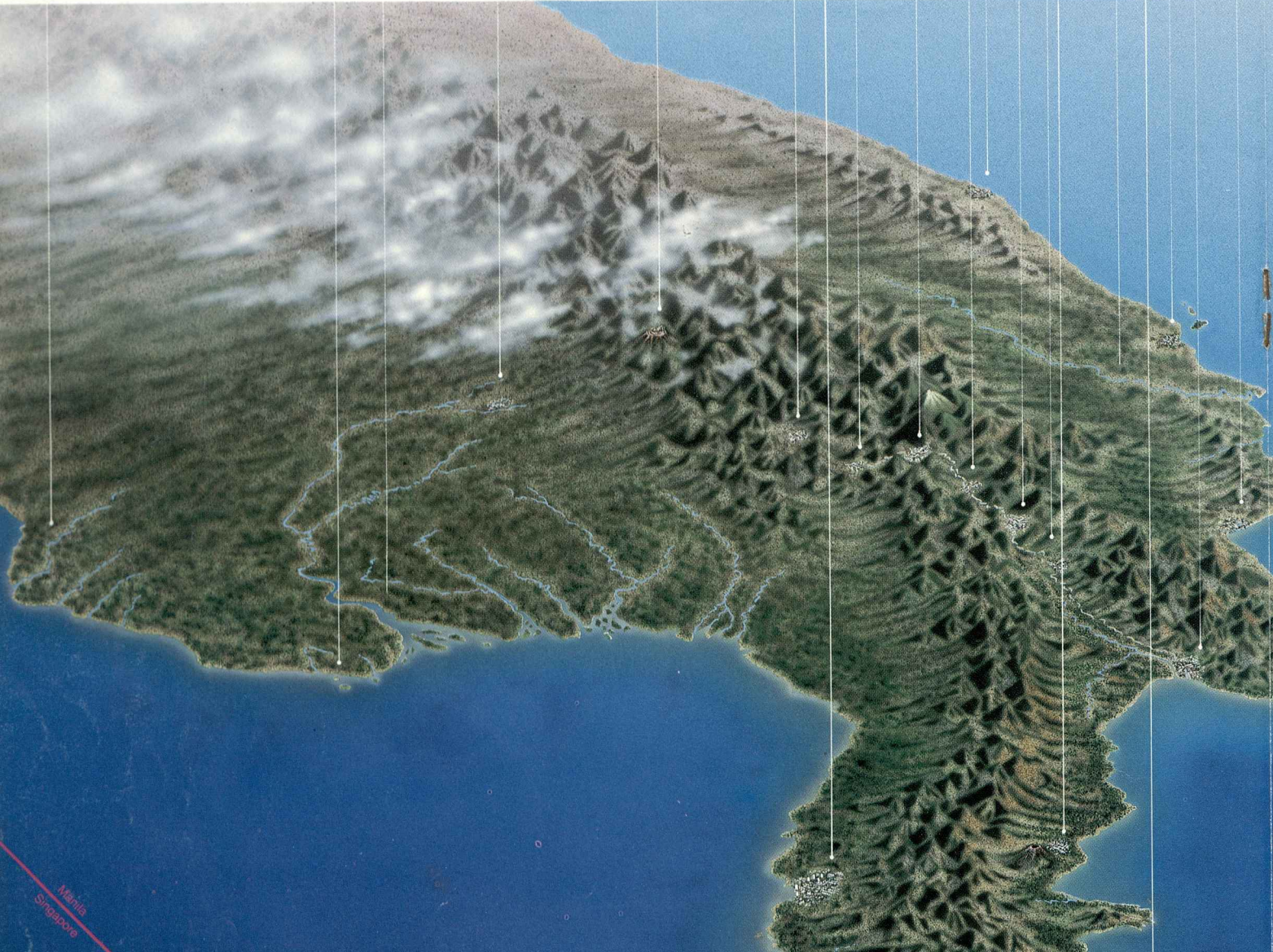
Goroka Kainantu

Popondetta

SEPIK RIVER

Alotau Wewak

Lae Madang



Losuia

NEW BRITAIN

Kimbe

MANUS ISLAND

Hoskins

Lorengau

Rabaul

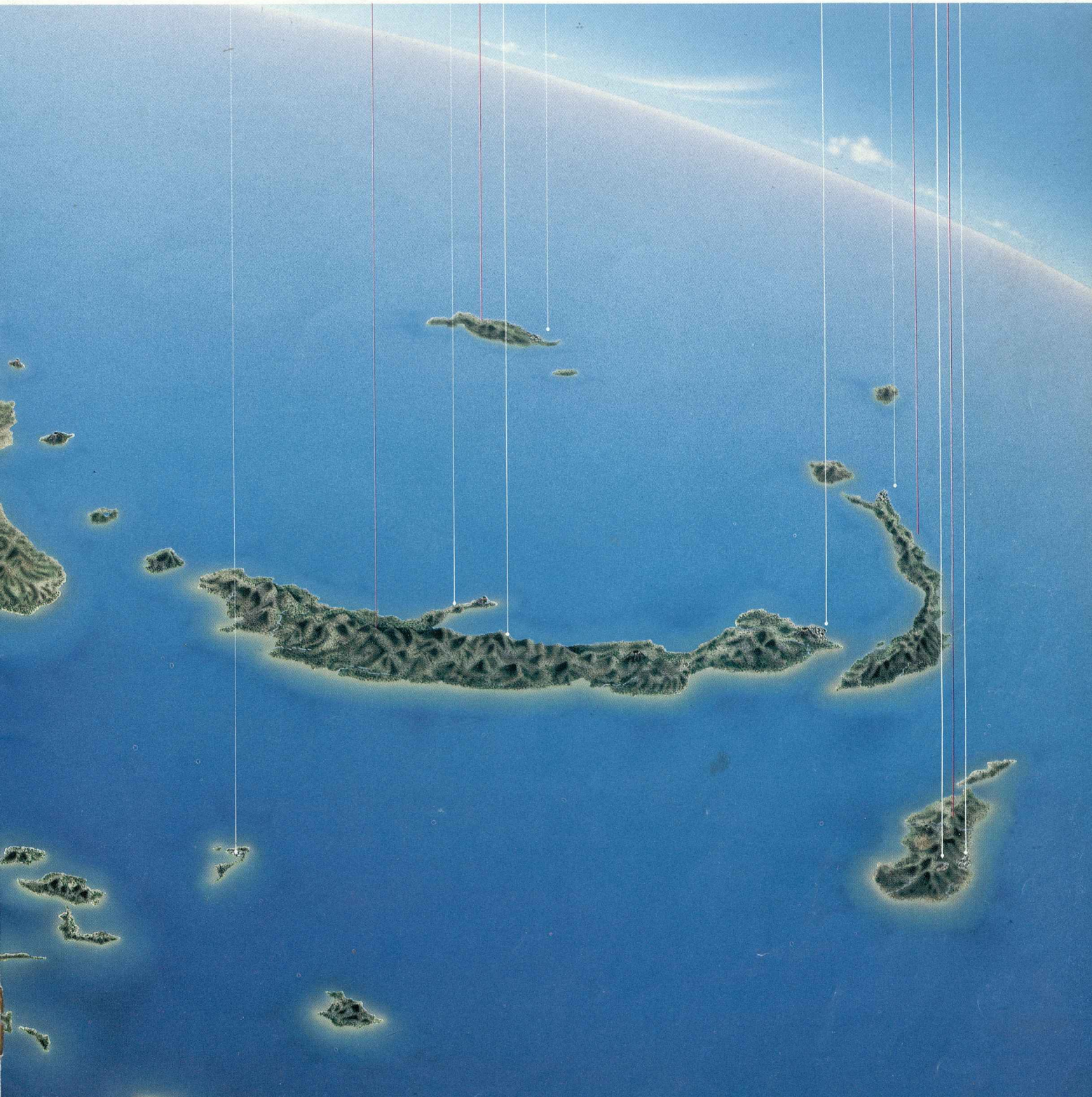
Kavieng

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Kieta



Papua New Guinea

Air Niugini Route Network

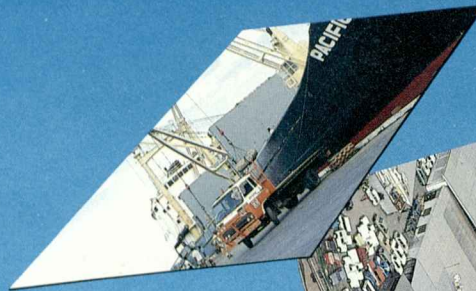
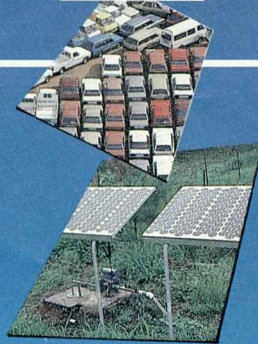
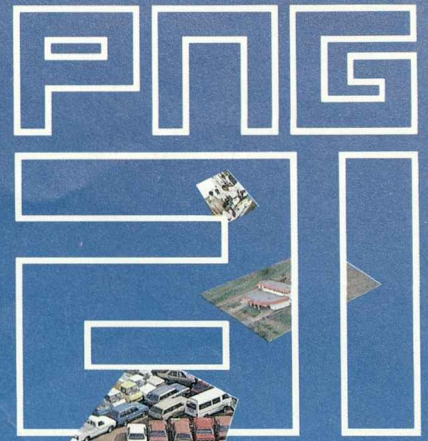
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MEMORIES

are made of bilas



Story by Susanna Hoe
and pictures by Derek Roebuck

One of the benefits of travelling is collecting memorabilia. Of all the places in the world visited by tourists few can compare with Papua New Guinea for its abundance of artefacts. And they can be purchased at reasonable prices. However, there is a limit to the number of carvings that can be fitted into a suitcase.

One range of artefacts is more portable - *bilas*, that is, the finery or regalia traditionally worn by Papua New Guineans.

For festive occasions Papua New Guineans still dress up in costumes which feature Bird of Paradise feathers, leaves, cuscus fur bands, necklaces of beads and shells, with brilliant pigments as face paint. This *bilas* looks marvellous on local singers and dancers proud of their cultural heritage but most of it would look out of

place if worn by a foreign visitor back home. Nevertheless, some items do suit Western fashions and examples are presented here as a guide to what is available. A warning should be added; *bilas* are not easy to find. Those shown in the accompanying photographs have taken nearly three years to accumulate.

Part of the fun of owning a piece of *bilas* stems from knowing its background. Where it came from, how it is worn and why it is important. *Bilas* is an integral part of PNG culture; very often it is the basis of a whole network of relationships and way of life within a tribal community.

Outside PNG the best-known examples of *bilas* are shell armbands and necklaces. They form part of the *kula*

exchange ring described by anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski in his famous book, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* written in 1922.

The *kula* ring which takes in most of the islands off the east coast of PNG goes back many years. It is essentially a brotherhood engaged in the ritual exchange of wealth items mainly by means of canoe expeditions.

It not only enabled neighbours to maintain inter-island trading relationships but within each society the exchange gave a focus to the lives of the men involved. As the white armbands travelled anti-clockwise and the red necklaces the reverse, relationships

were cemented between partners and members derived status within their group from the exchanged wealth.

Malinowski put forward these ideas about the meaning of the necklace and the exchange:

"The net result will be the acquisition of a few dirty, greasy and insignificant looking native trinkets, each of them a string of flat, partly discoloured, partly raspberry-pink or brick-red discs, threaded one behind the other into a long, cylindrical roll. In the eyes of the natives, however, this result receives its meaning from the social forces of tradition and custom, which give the imprint of value to these objects, and surround them with a halo of romance. It seems fitting here to make these



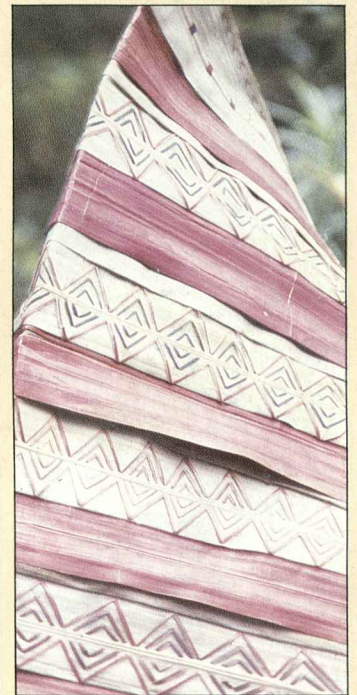
Woven cane armbands purchased at Kundiawa market in the Highlands.



Belt encasing green scarab beetles. Usually worn by men as a headband.



Armbands woven from an orchid stem and purchased from a Kiriwina lad.



Raincape made from woven pandanus leaves on Bougainville Island.

few reflections upon the native psychology on this point, and to attempt to grasp its real significance.

It may help us towards this understanding to reflect, that not far from the scenes of the Kula, large numbers of white adventurers have toiled and suffered, and many of them given their lives, in order to acquire what to the natives would appear as insignificant and filthy as their *bagi* are to us – a few nuggets of gold. Nearer even, in the very Trobriand Lagoon, valuable pearls are found. In olden days, when the natives on opening a shell to eat it, found a *waytuna*, as they called it, a 'seed' of the pearl shell, they would throw it to their children to play with. Now they see a number of white men straining all their forces in competition to acquire as many of these worthless things as they can. The parallel is very close. In both cases, the conventionalised value attached to an object carries with it power, renown, and the pleasure of increasing them both. In the case of the white man, this is

infinitely more complex and indirect, but not essentially different from that of the natives. If we would imagine that a great number of celebrated gems are let loose among us, and travel from hand to hand – that Kob-i-nor and Orloff and other celebrated diamonds, emeralds and rubies – were on a continuous round tour, and to be obtained through luck, daring and enterprise, we would have a still closer analogy. Even though the possession of them would be a short and temporary one, the renown of having possessed them and the mania of "collectioneering" would add its spur to the lust for wealth." (pages 351-2)

The necklace often available for travellers to buy is not in fact the *bagi* but a shortened version, the *kuwa*.

The *kuwa* is often worn by the children of *kula* partners – as a special decoration to increase their attractiveness to the opposite sex. This cutting up of the *bagi* is part of a tradition that stems from a myth described by Malinowski. It says that an old man broke apart a *kula* necklace and gave the separate pieces as presents to three stars who led him home safely.

The *kuwa* sold to the tourist

is one of these same pieces. An occasional difference is that the *kaloma* or larger disks surrounding the wild banana seeds between the roll of small red *spondylus* shells can be made of plastic; the limited number of real ones being kept for the family *kuwa*. Frankly, plastic *kaloma* add a touch of reality to my *kuwa* bought from a man who cut up a plastic bucket and did not hide the fact. It is part of a new tradition. However, beware of *kuwa* which consists of all plastic shells – you can test them with your teeth! These are commonly worn by children but a few enterprising Kiriwinans try to sell them to unwary tourists as the genuine object.

The *kuwa* sold to tourists for between 40 and 100 kina in 1984. The string on which the *kuwa* is threaded may chaff the neck a little but, if that bothers you, have the shells restrung and benefit too from a safety catch.

As for the pearls which the islanders used to throw to their children, they are still available. Until recently *Pinctada Margaritifera*, or the black-lipped pearl shell, which feeds by filtering tiny plants from the water, was commercially farmed near Samarai

Island in the Milne Bay area. I bought some of these beautiful pearls in Port Moresby and had them set in silver. The color and gleam are marvellous.

Some of the *bilas* to be found in the Highlands are part of a similar though distinctive system of exchange that cements relationships. The network spreads out far beyond the immediate district, as is suggested by the importance of shells to these inland groups of people. The most celebrated is the *kina* – the gold-lipped pearl shell cut into a crescent and after which PNG currency is named.

Some years ago shells were used as money for trading, but they have been overtaken by



Seed necklace made by Sepik people living in Madang.



Ornamental collar made from mother of pearl.



Bilums are all-purpose string bags which come in all shapes and sizes.

coins and paper money in most areas. However, pearl shells are still part of an important ceremonial exchange, for example, the *moka* in the Mount Hagen area. In the pure *moka*, as opposed to that which follows warfare, sets of eight or ten pearl shells, often set in hardened resin boards, are given away to exchange partners by men of a donor group or a single bigman, in exchange for a pig and two pearl shells.

The resin board is used because a special lustre is added by the rust color behind the shell. Red ochre is sprinkled over the board whenever the shell is displayed to supplement the effect. The degree of luminosity of a particular shell adds considerably to its value. Pearl shells have also been used to 'purchase' magic services, and the iridescent gleam is itself considered a magical property

which is said to attract further wealth.

Many years ago pearl shells were very scarce in the Highlands. Each shell had its own name and an attached knotted tally showed how many times it had changed hands. But once the area was opened up in the 1930s, Europeans brought in shells to pay for labor and food, and flooded the market. It was not uncommon to see a woman dancer wearing a chain of pearl shell crescents reaching from her neck to below her knees.

Simple crescents are worn round the neck by married women who have been given them by their menfolk - husbands, fathers or brothers. They are said to belong to women in their own name as are aprons, trade store beads and marsupial fur pendants. Young girls also wear crescents when courting to attract a good bride wealth payment,

for example, the daughter of a bigman is likely to be the most brightly adorned. The more valuable mounted shells are owned and worn only by men, usually when they wish to impress their friends and obtain further wealth. A married woman sometimes wears these, but only to indicate her husband's wealth before the shells are passed on to her kin. They are worn at the back of her neck because of the common saying among men that 'a wife's people are at her back, while she faces her husband'.

White pearl shells have retained their value, *nassa* (Nassarius or dog-whelk) shells have not. These little shells have the pointed ends filed off. The resulting rings are bleached and sewn onto bark cloth for use either as headbands or larger mats draped from a woman's waist like an apron.

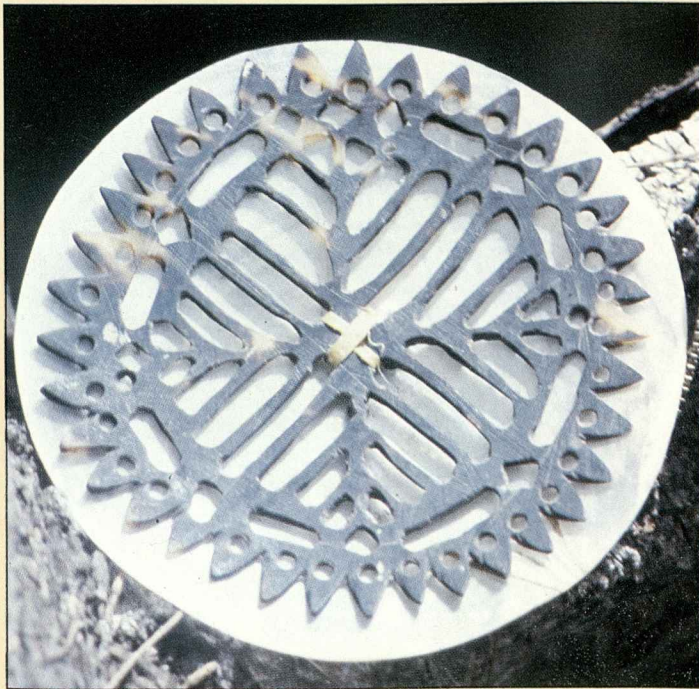
In the past a bigman might have decorated a young female relative with *bilas* for courting, including a *nassa* headband, so that he might later have had a share of the

bride wealth given to her family. Now aprons are rather out of fashion, though the smaller headbands are still fairly popular among men.

Nassa headbands are found in other areas of PNG, notably the Sepik. In New Britain *nassa* shells are strung in long strands and still used as money called *tambu*.

In the Highlands cowrie shells are now less sought after. In the late 1930s women sometimes danced in baldrics of cowrie ropes but today shorter lengths are preferred.

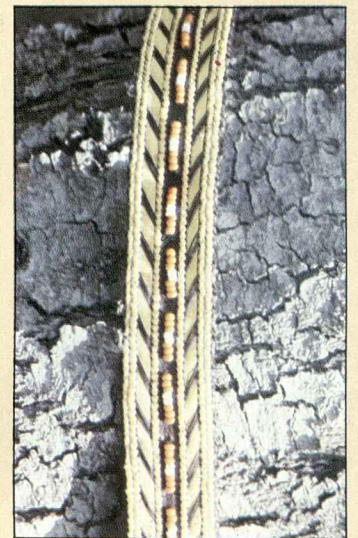
Travellers attending a *singing* or festival in the Highlands will see hundreds of pearl shell crescents and dozens of *nassa* headbands and cowrie shell necklaces on display. They may find some for sale. While they may appear dirty and insignificant at first sight, these ornaments are unique and back home will outshine the brightest diamonds.



Worn by dancers, this kapkap is made from filigreed turtle shell disc and pearl shell.



Trochus shell bracelet from coastal areas of Morobe and New Britain.



Beaded belt from Kiriwina, usually worn above a low slung grass skirt.

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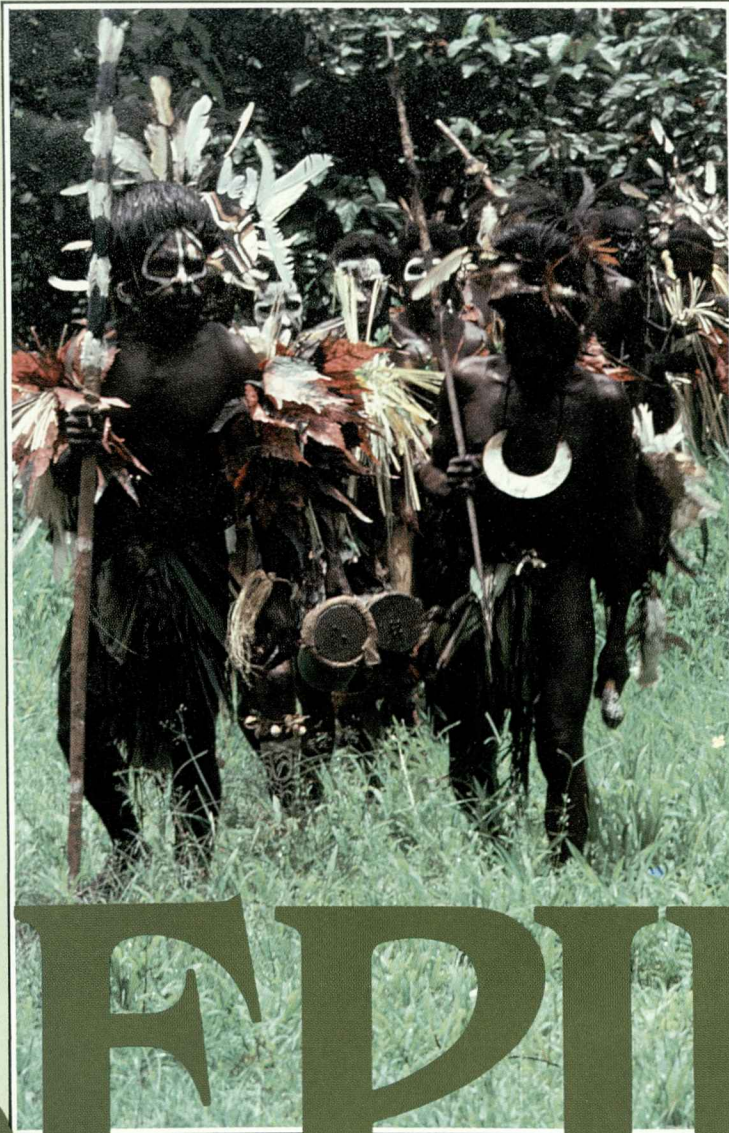


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SEPIK ENCOUNTER

Story and pictures by Michael Gebicki

I first encountered the Sepik River some years ago in an antique shop. Browsing through a pile of dusty relics I came across a brown wooden mask. The eyes had been hollowed out and daubed with ochre paint, a pair of yellowed pig's tusks protruded from the nose and a black mat of woven fibres hung from the scalp. It was a haunting, powerful piece of imagery, conjuring up visions of a world of primitive

rituals and tribal magic. Even here, thousands of kilometres from its home, it sent shivers down my spine and the sunken eyes stared back with a promise of dark secrets and blood-curdling adventures.

"Sepik River," said the label. "Possibly Chambri Lakes."

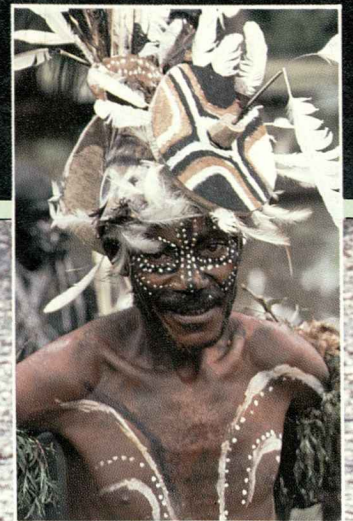
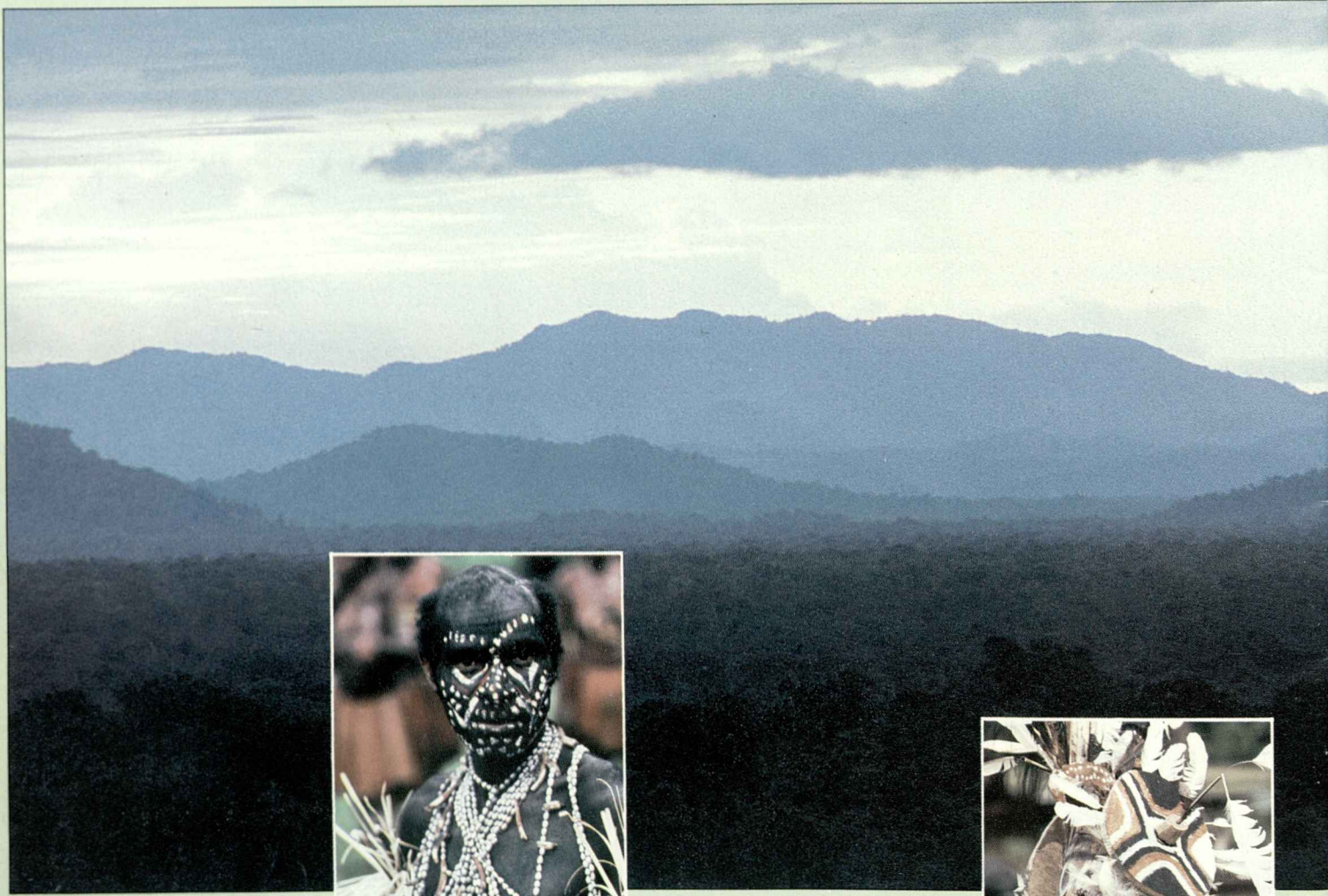
My next meeting with the river was no less dramatic. It took place off the northern

coastline of Papua New Guinea, still about ten kilometres from the mouth of the Sepik, when the sea suddenly changed from deep blue to a muddy brown.

"Sepik water," said one of the crew, and pointed toward the shore. We sailed closer to where a line of breakers crashed over a reef, then the swell of the sea declined, the

banks closed in and we entered the river. It seemed then, exactly as the mask had promised, that we were sailing into the unknown.

The Sepik begins high up in the mountainous spine in the far west of PNG. At first it tumbles bright and clear down the slopes, foaming over boulders and through steep-sided mountain chasms. Slowly the rush subsides and for the next 1200 km the river



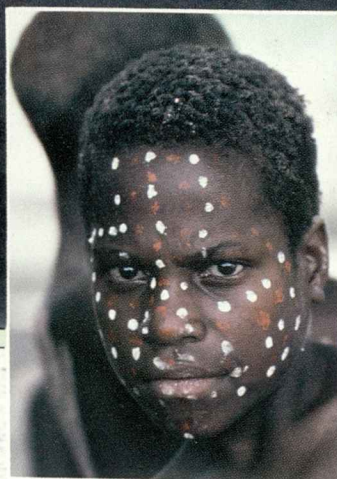
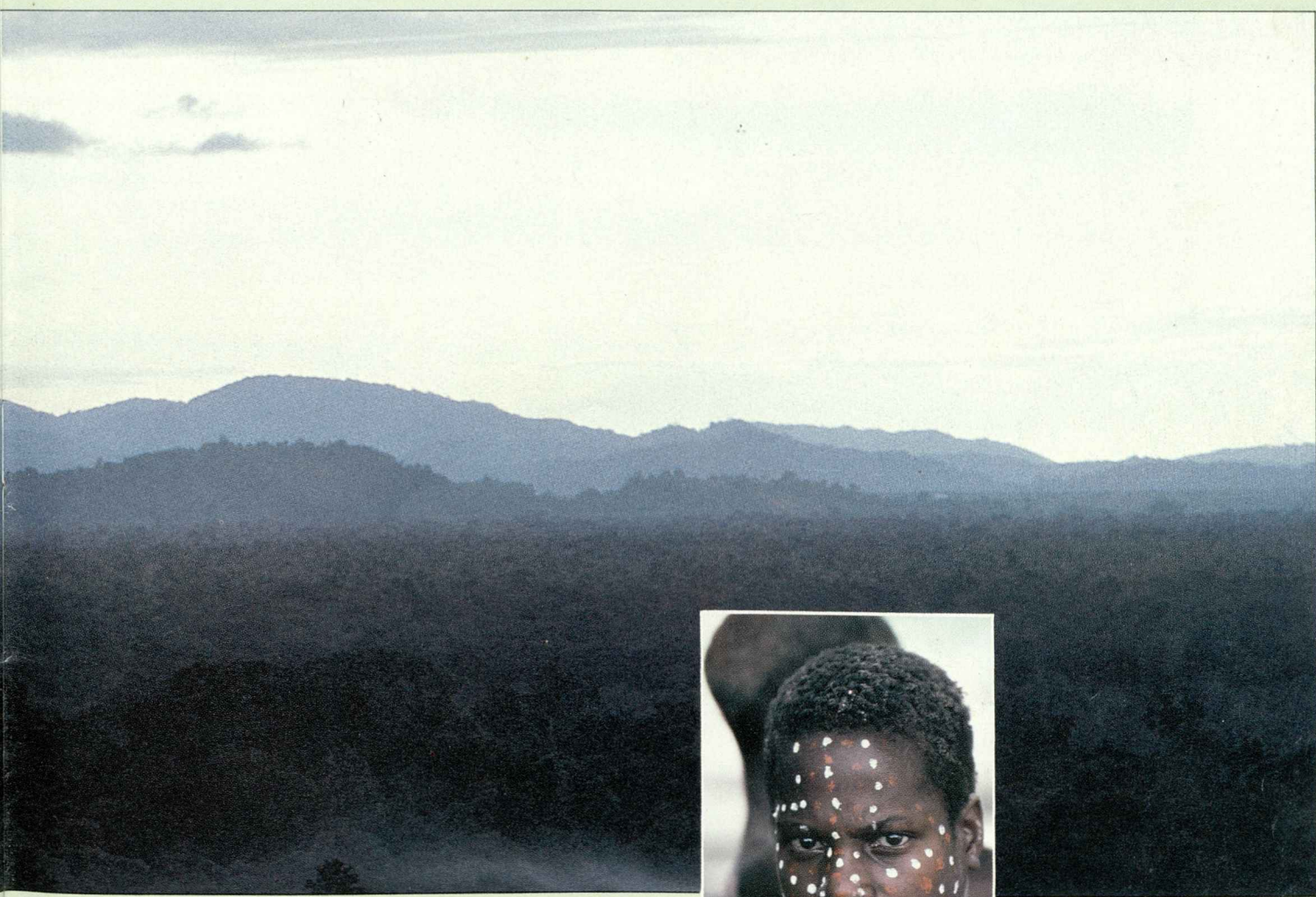
twists and turns through vast, impenetrable rainforests, washing over the backs of crocodiles and licking at the stilts of the villages along its banks.

In middle age it spreads out across a vast network of swamps, forming canals and lakes where white egrets nest in huge flocks along the banks and dazzling orchids cling to the tree trunks. Raw, primitive country. "Genesis country," the author Colin Simpson

called it. The locals say that the powerful bronze current of the Sepik comes from the very beginning of the world.

The great rivers of PNG – most notably the Fly and the Sepik – provided relatively easy access to the interior. By 1887, two years after the mouth of the Sepik was located, a German expedition had travelled upriver for 600 km. But apart from the occasional outboard motor and a few roads on the lower

Top: Sepik panorama; **Centre:** dugout canoe on the river; **insets:** Sepik men and women painted and feathered for a traditional ceremonial display and a young mother with child.



Sepik, the river remains largely undisturbed by the twentieth century. The people live much as they always have, hunting crocodiles for their valuable skins and existing on a staple diet of flour from the sago palm.

Pull in at any of the villages here and you enter a world not far removed from the head-hunting days of the past. Slender dugout canoes glide out to meet you, brown hands help you ashore and the vil-

lagers crowd silently around. The centrepiece of these villages is the *haus tambaran*, the spirit house, the traditional guardian of tribal culture. Inside are the sacred objects and the musical instruments which are used for ceremonial occasions. Here the young men are initiated and legends re-enacted – and its secrets are kept well-hidden from the eyes of the women. In the middle Sepik the *haus tambarans* are at their spectacular

best, elaborately carved and decorated, their shaggy roofs of thatched reeds towering above the surrounding houses.

The quiet, shy people who live in these villages are amongst the greatest primitive artists on earth. Theirs is a rich culture and their bowls, canoe prows and totemic figures are expertly carved and invested with the strength of several thousand years of legends and dreams. Each village produces

its own distinctive style of art, but probably the best place to buy is at Angoram, on the lower Sepik, where people come from the surrounding villages to sell their artwork inside a commercial version of a *haus tambaran*.

All along the broad reaches of the river and the shallow backwaters, the dugout canoe is the king of the Sepik. They answer every need, from the short one man canoe to the longer family version and the



Houses along the Sepik;
inset: the expedition vessel,
Melanesian Explorer.



jumbos, the heavy-duty cargo transports. The larger motorised canoes are used for long-distance journeys, often painted in the distinctive livery of their owners. 'EAT MY DUST' read the message in large letters on the side of one with a powerful outboard.

The oarsmen here have perfected the difficult skill of paddling their unstable craft standing up, an almost impossible task for anyone not born to the business. From a tender age children are taught to paddle, and on the quiet backwaters especially, boys of five or six manage their canoes with expert ease. To see the

canoes gliding across the water in the evening – black silhouettes against the molten gold of the river – is one of the great sights of the Sepik.

Missionaries, moneymakers and misfits are, so they say, the three types of white men found on the Sepik. The river has always attracted rugged individualists and a recent arrival is a crocodile hunter who came here from Melbourne 24 years ago and has not been back since. These days he lives quite happily with his wife and children on the banks of the river – part of a large extended family which includes the local witch

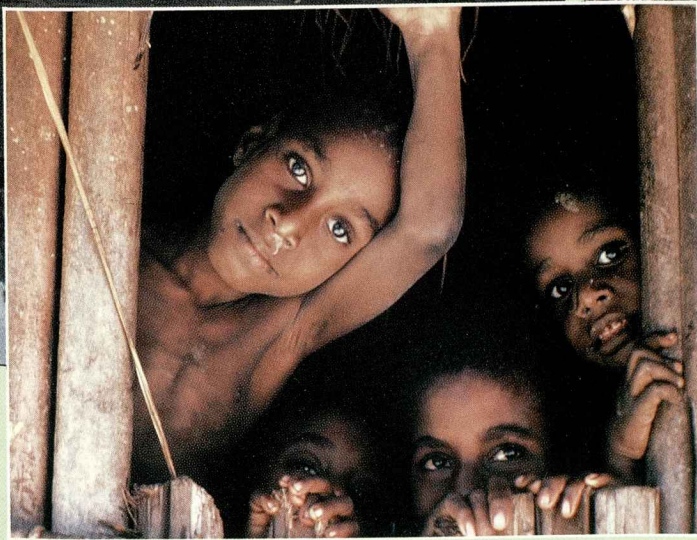
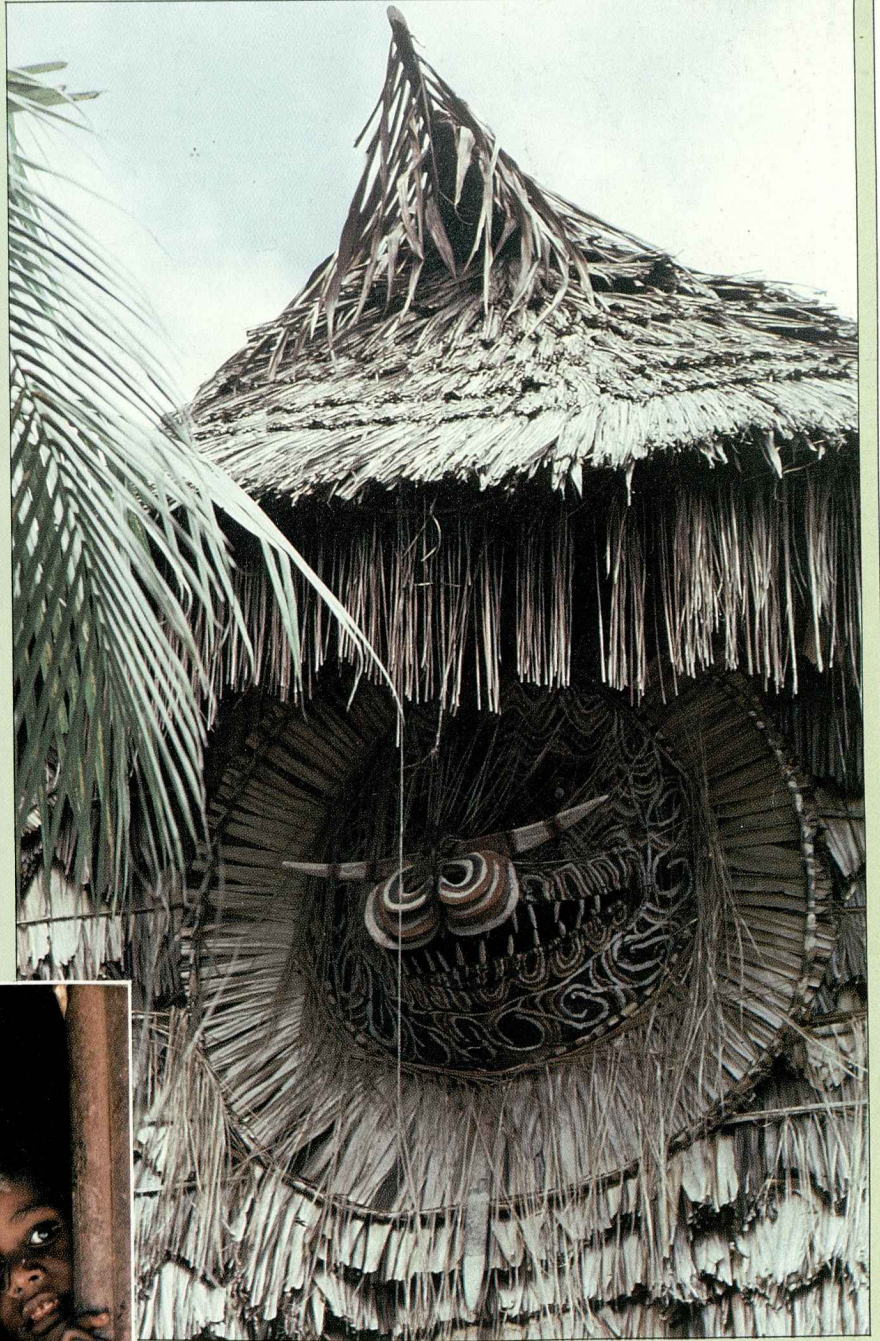
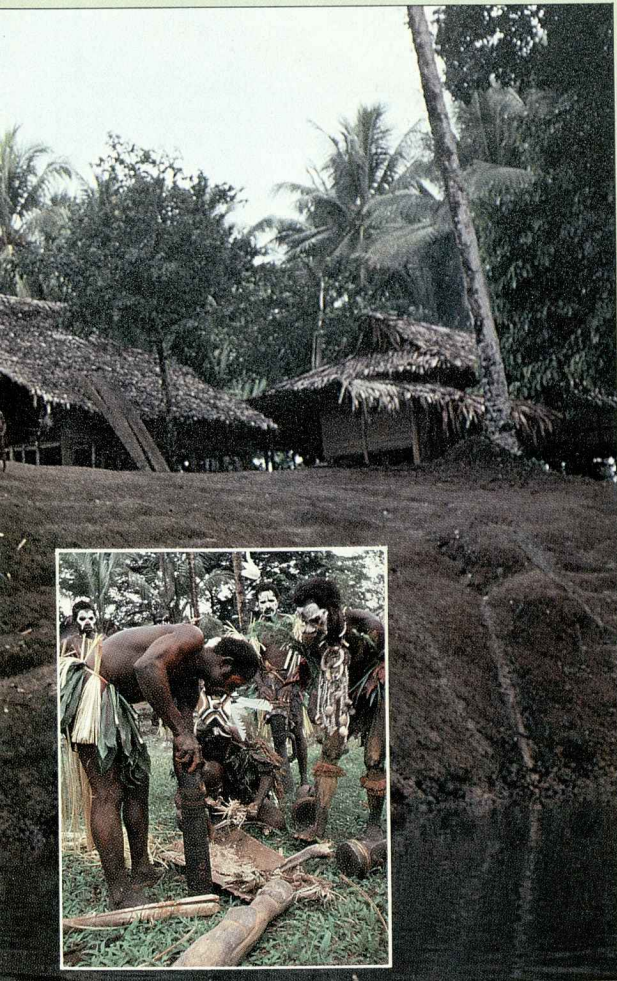
doctor. But even this isolated stretch of the river was becoming too crowded for his liking and he was thinking of moving – perhaps up one of the tributaries, where he could get away from it all.

More than anything else, it is the natural splendor of the Sepik which is so unfailingly impressive. In the morning whiffs of mist curl up from the river, birds cry and drums echo across the water from the villages. To feel the vastness of this landscape, to feel the steamy breath of the forest and to stand sniffing the silky smell of mud and lush greenery is to feel yourself transported back

to the very beginning of the world.

You can choose to travel the Sepik either in local style, by dugout canoe, or in considerable luxury aboard the *Melanesian Explorer*. The *Melanesian Explorer* makes a five day voyage from Madang to Ambunti, and a further four day cruise from Ambunti along the upper Sepik. Facilities on board include a fully air-conditioned bar and lounge, and every evening there is an audiovisual show and an expert commentary on the following day's proceedings.

Alternatively, if you prefer



Above left: Traditional method of fire-starting; **above right:** elaborate house construction; **centre and below:** village children.

your pleasures on dry land, Karawari Lodge is an oasis of comfort and style set in the rainforests above the Karawari River, a tributary of the Sepik. In the morning you are woken by a waiter bearing a tray of coffee and fresh cinnamon rolls and you can sit on your balcony, munching away while the sun rises over the basin of the Sepik River – one of life's unforgettable awakenings.

Most experiences in travel can be safely marvelled at and filed away behind the doors of memory. Not the Sepik. The customary traveller's response of 'how wonderful' is all too inadequate when confronted with huge acres of primeval swamp or the pulsing drama of a tribal dance.

And when it's all over, when you are safely home from the numberless terrors of the primitive world, you may well

find yourself left with unsettling memories of the river, and caught in unguarded moments by the penetrating stare of the mask. That's how it is though – they say you can leave the Sepik, but the Sepik never leaves you.

Air Niugini operates frequent scheduled F28 jet services to Wewak, gateway for Sepik River adventures.

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NEW FISH



Top: Bass of this size are the largest that can be landed using a rod and reel.

Story and pictures by Rod Harrison

One of the world's rarest fish has been found in Papua New Guinea.

It is the Niugini bass, a robust and very large fish estimated to grow to well over 20 kilograms.

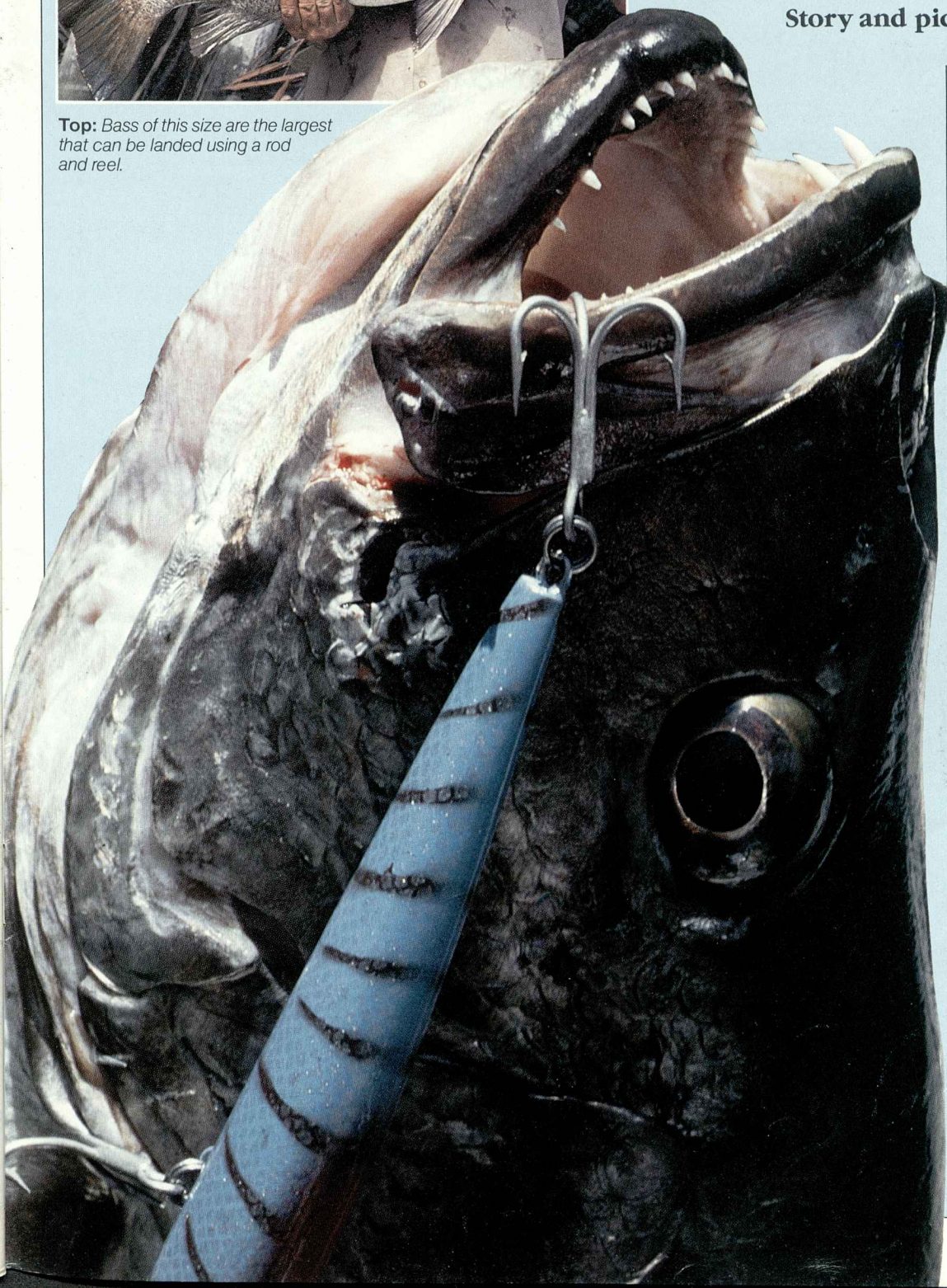
While the fish are well-known to villagers as *batwok tu pulim bikpela wara pis*, the outside world has little knowledge of them.

The Niugini bass which has two and perhaps more subspecies, belongs to a worldwide family of fish scientifically known as Lutjanids. Found throughout the tropical zone, there are about 60 species extending from rivers out to coastal reefs. Some are purely river fish, others are essentially saltwater animals. There are others that alternate between river and sea. The famous red emperor is also a member of the Lutjanid family.

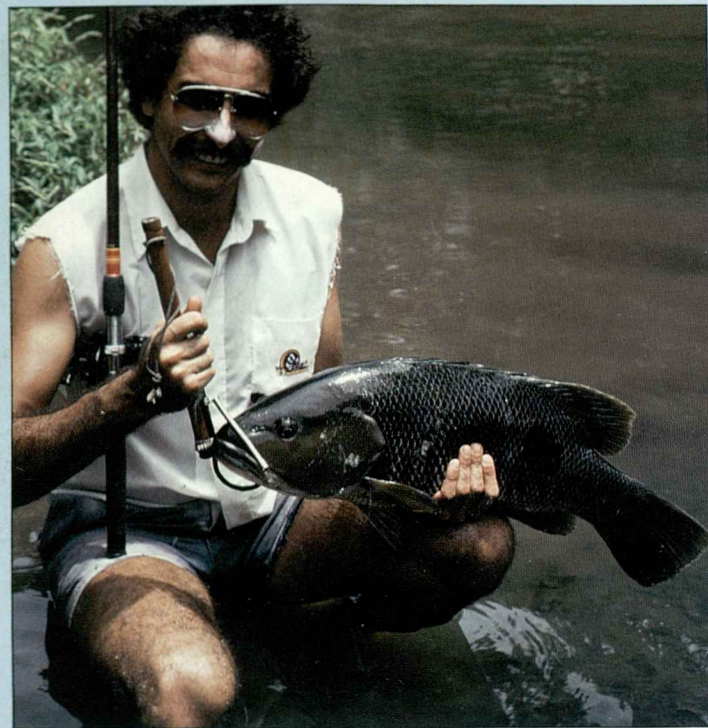
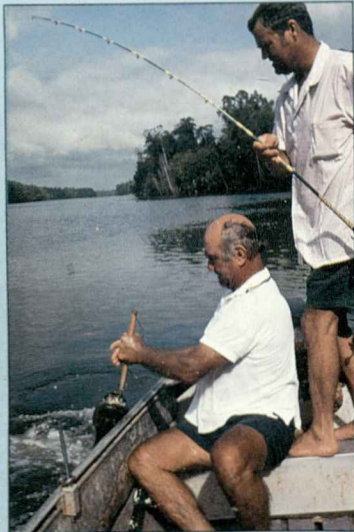
It is thought that the Niugini bass is endemic to PNG. Interestingly, it is not found in the waters of northern Australia, a little over 100 kilometres away as the crow flies. However, every other known Lutjanid in PNG is present in Australian waters.

The anatomy of the Niugini bass is powerful. Like others in the Lutjanid family, it is an extremely compact fish, almost as deep as it is wide. Its thick, muscular body has a steely torque that can break a strong man's grip.

Lutjanids have a massive bone structure and a cardio-



Clockwise from below:
 one that didn't get away; the
 explosive force of the Niugini
 bass; a mixed bag of Lutjanids,
 a bass species commonly
 found in the upper reaches of
 rivers in New Britain; results of
 a successful fishing trip.



vascular system far larger than other fish when viewed on a kilogram for kilogram basis.

When the environment of the Niugini bass is considered, it is easy to understand why it is the strongest fish of its size. The bass migrates considerable distances along rivers to swim into the teeth of raging currents during the PNG wet

season. This requires lots of strength and endurance.

Rivers in PNG are rich with cover - overhanging vegetation, mangrove roots, Nepa palm, pit-pit and the tangled remains of countless trees laying on the riverbed. When not swimming, the bass which congregate in numbers, lay among this deep shelter. Well

hidden, they can dash out and seize smaller passing fish. This feeding method is common to Lutjanids. Their jaws are studded with large canine-like teeth which are used to impale their victims who are devoured when the fish returns into its cover. Mud crabs with claws large enough to take a man's hand off at the wrist, are commonly found inside Niugini bass.

Little is known about the growth potential of Niugini bass. Some fish approaching 20 kg have been taken by line fishing methods. However, from the many stories told

about broken lines, holey nets and other failed attempts, it seems only the smaller fish get caught.

The largest known Lutjanid is the Curera snapper of Central America, which can grow to 70 kg. Locals believe that the Niugini bass grows to at least as big!

While the fish is fascinating to naturalists interested in rivers, its effect on sport-fishing enthusiasts has been irresistible. To land a Niugini bass is a real prize.

Communication among these anglers is extraordinarily good. Many of them know all

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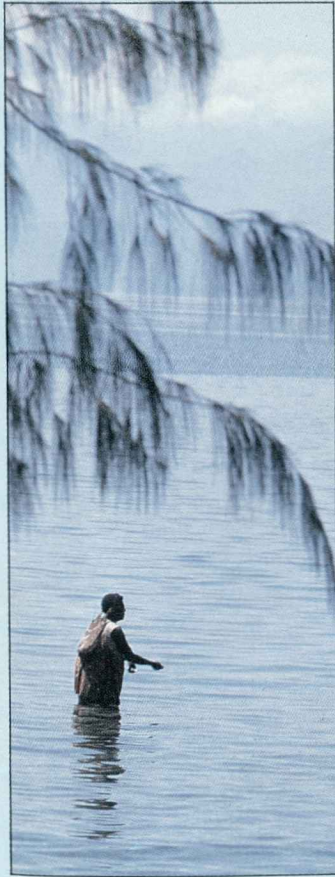
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Great spots for fishing – below: Madang; right: Samari Isle, Milne Bay; below right: Bensbach.



about the Niugini bass, at a time when its various species have yet to be fully classified and given proper scientific names.

To anglers the Niugini bass represents the ultimate fishing challenge. Its size, great strength and tangled habitat make it almost uncatchable at times. While it has the natural aggression to readily take baits and lures, the electrifying jolt of its strike is as close as some fishermen get to it.

A Fishing Paradise

Papua New Guinea has perhaps the best fishing territory in the world, much of it not yet exploited.

Captures made by fishing club members throughout the country have been spectacular both in terms of quality and quantity. Many Australian and world records have been broken.

Most major centres have fishing clubs of some kind. The accent is on light to medium game fishing. These fishing clubs are the best source of information about boat charters in the country. Visiting fishermen are always welcome and club members will often go out of their way to show them their favorite spots.

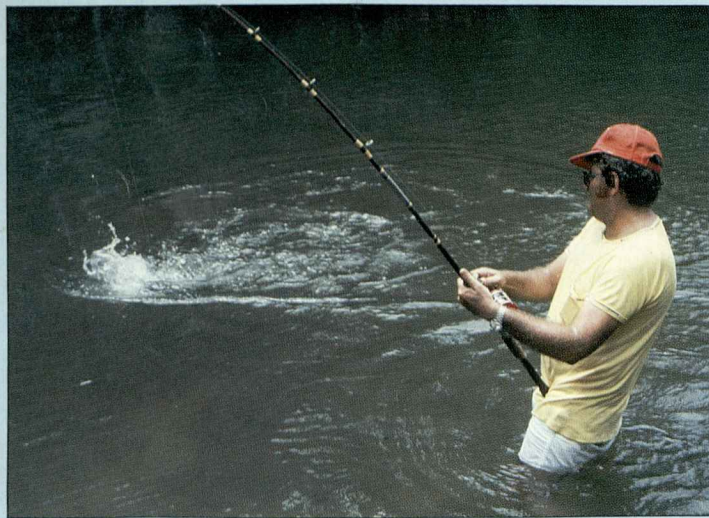
National Gamefishing Titles are traditionally held over the Easter break each year and attract anglers from all over the world. The titles are hosted in turn by the five major fishing clubs: Madang, Rabaul, Kieta, Lae and Port Moresby.

A common feature of PNG waters is an abundance of coral reefs with sheer cliffs and deep undersea trenches. These play host to a wide variety of game and reef fish.

Black marlin and sailfish are common, the latter offering record-breaking potential. Mackerel and wahoo also test tackle to the limit with their dazzling speed. Big turrum and a variety of trevally can be caught all year. Barracuda, rainbow runners, queenfish, dolphin fish, yellowfin, bluefin, mackerel, big eye, dog tooth and striped tuna are all usual.

Sportfishing enthusiasts can wade extensive flats and cast to bonefish, at Losuia on the Trobriand Islands.

Reef fishing is always good for emperor, sweetlip, grey snapper, coral trout, maori wrasse, cod and a seemingly



Top: Rabaul – the ideal place for a fresh water or sea fishing holiday.



endless variety of brilliantly colored coral dwellers.

Saltwater river and creek fishing is popular for mangrove jack, trevally, thread-fin salmon, barracuda and barramundi.

Freshwater fishing can justifiably claim to be the best in the world, particularly the barramundi run on the Bensbach River. Transported along the river by outboard powered barges, anglers fish from either grassy shores or the boats. A cast of only a few metres is required to locate fish. The barramundi range in size from as little as 1 kg to fish the size of the current record, a whopping 21 kg cleaned. These fish travel in schools and, once located, the action comes thick and fast. The barramundi is a great sporting fish and his high twisting leaps and powerful runs provide an unforgettable spectacle.

In addition to superb fishing in the sea and streams, PNG offers anglers a special bonus in that the fishing often takes place in uniquely beautiful settings.

At Bensbach one is never out of sight of deer or wallaby and bird life is abundant. On the blue water the locations are so varied that they seem like different worlds.

Madang is famous for the beauty of its gardens and rich natural growth. The game club there looks out over an enormous lagoon dotted with many small islands.

Rabaul is surrounded by a ring of volcanoes. Fishermen leaving Rabaul harbour often look up to see great cones disappearing into white cloud.

Tufi is like something out of a fairy tale, where deep fiords cut back into jungle-clad heights and the blue sea is littered with blazing coral reef gardens.

There is much awaiting the fisherman in PNG – one of the few places left in the world where fishing is still much the same as it was a hundred years ago.

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