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# paradise

No 108 Jan-Feb 1995

Welcome aboard!

Aircraft made the development of the Papua New Guinea interior possible while shipping has played the major transportation role around our coasts and islands. In the 1990s, ships on the Fly River are the major transport for the nationally important Ok Tedi copper mine. We experience a trip on one of the river-going ore ships in this issue.

Kimbe Bay lures back the former Lord Mayor of Melbourne and famous hotelier-sportsman, Irvin Rockman. He describes the delights of the sea and surrounding attractions of this interest-filled corner of New Britain.

Enjoy the photo-essay of the indigenous arts of PNG, featuring pottery, carving and painting. The article explores the cross-over between traditional and contemporary art and some of the artists who have established international reputations.

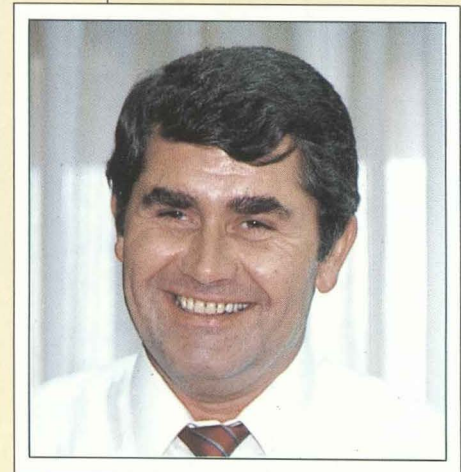
Have a pleasant flight.

Dieter Seefeld  
Chief Executive & General Manager  
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Cover: "I saw the future of PNG in the youth of Kimbe Bay."  
(see page 19). Photograph by Irvin Rockman.



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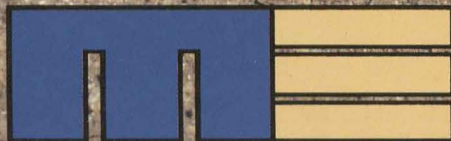
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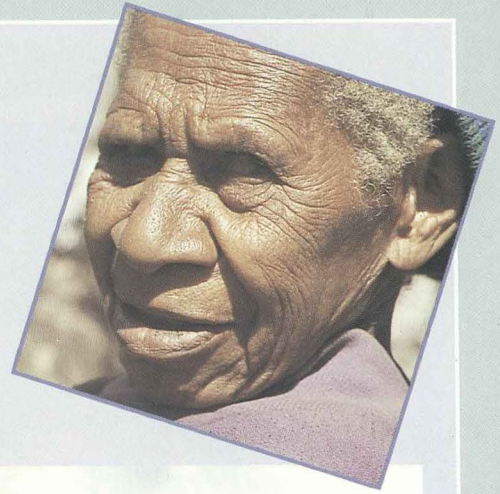
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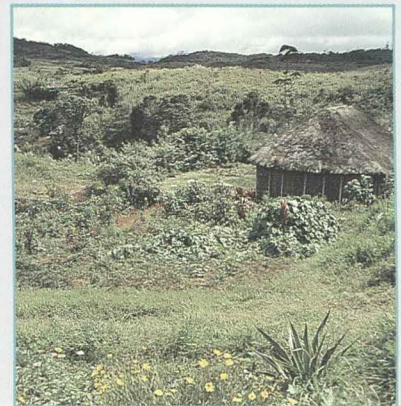
# H O U S E

*of friends*  
Story and  
photographs by  
Harry Haralambou

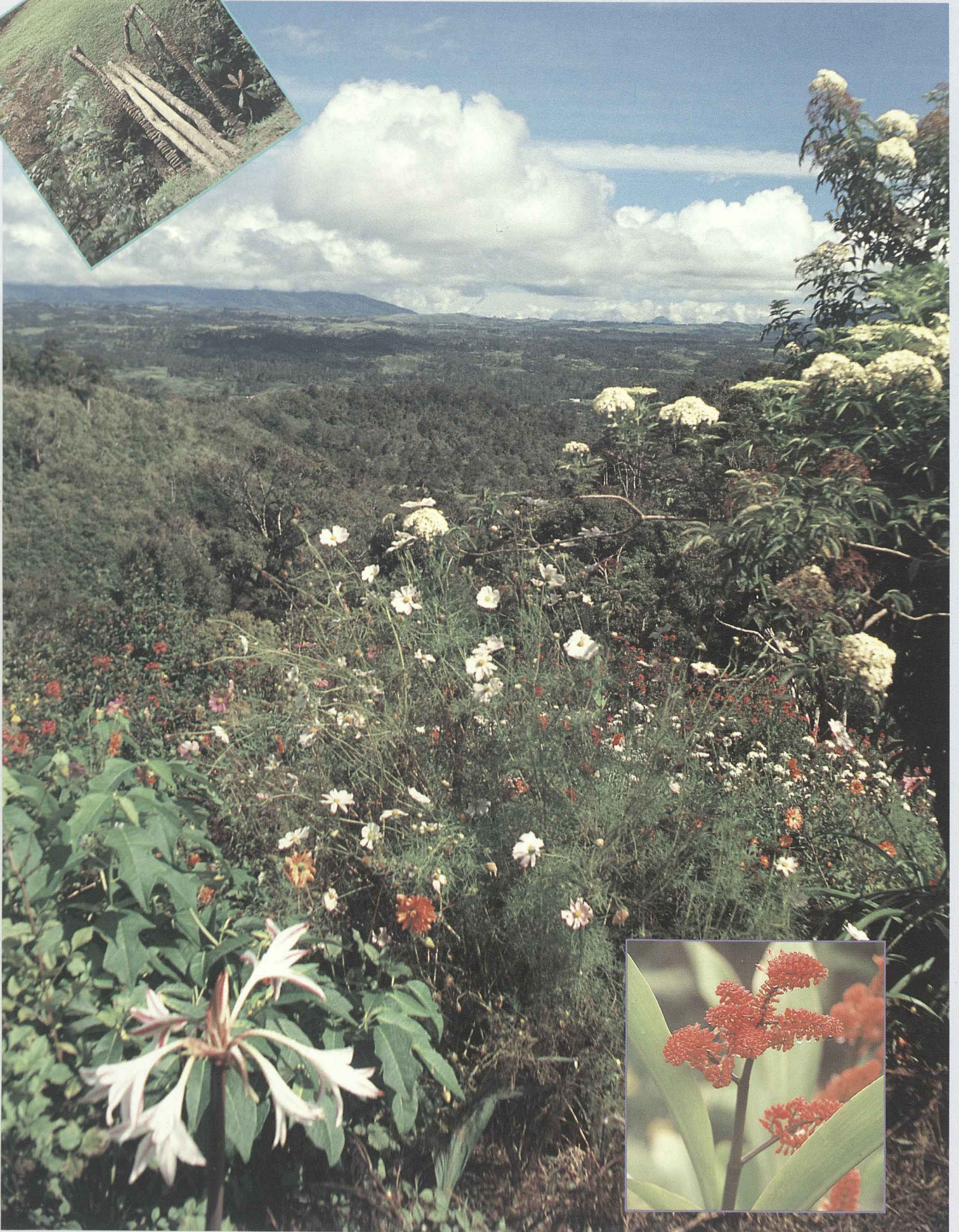
**Right** Villager of the Waghi Valley.  
**below** Gardens flourish in the  
Highlands climate. **bottom**  
Vegetable patch supplies the  
Poroman Lodge table.



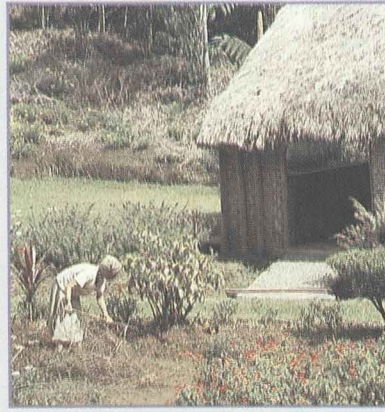
**O**ne of Papua New Guinea's most unusual offerings is Haus Poroman Lodge, perched high on a mountain overlooking the Waghi Valley. The Kuta road out of Mt Hagen, a 15-minute trip through the lush greenery of the mountain landscape, brings visitors to Haus Poroman. Splashes of brilliant color from the



**Inset, left** Bush materials bridge spans Lodge water course. **below** Lodge garden overlooks rolling high country. **inset, bottom** Splash of color in the flower garden.



**Right** Lodge staffer weeding the flower garden. **lower right** Hill stretch away in the distance from the vegetable patch.



native wildflowers provides stunning visual variation amid the green foliage. Along the way a procession of people may pass, climbing up the road on the way to their villages, the women carrying firewood and vegetables in their colorful traditional multipurpose bilums.

Up in the mountains, the air is cool and clean, a welcome contrast from the heat of the coastal towns.

The complex, which includes a main reception lounge, includes Kunai thatched roofed huts, and is set off by a backdrop of rugged mountains surrounded in mist and a series of undulating gardens.

Haus Poroman is owned by Maggie Wilson. "The lodge came into existence as a matter of necessity," she says. She studied and practised nursing in Australia during the 1970s and returning home, found herself besieged by visiting friends from Australia, as well as tribal friends from home. Old friends and visitors from Australia and PNG, admiring the spectacular landscape at the locale, and enjoying her gracious hospitality, suggested she open a 'hotel'.

She used the old village court house as the starting point in her new venture. In a short time, business was so good that she had to expand. The next phase in the project was to build a separate three-room house near the main house for expanded accommodations. Soon this too was not sufficient for the floods of visitors. By this time, she



had decided that she wanted accommodations for her guests which included 'contemporary conveniences', that would coexist with the traditional ambience of Haus Poroman.

Maggie decided that a beautiful lodge, patterned after a 'gutaba', traditionally the 'big man's' house in the village, was in order and the construction began. It was then that Maggie's friend and soon-to-be business partner, Liz, entered the Haus Poroman family. "We were building all right, but with no sense of direction," said Maggie. "It was Liz who had the foresight to move it in the right direction".

Beautiful gardens have been installed; flowers to enhance the lovely setting and vegetable gardens to provide fresh, healthy food for the table. Beyond providing food and beauty, plants are also used for medicinal purposes, a source of dyes for fabrics and cosmetic body decoration. The climate here is very hospitable for growing all manner of plants. Many different cultivars from far corners of the earth having been introduced, thrive. These include roses, daisies, golden trumpet lilies and dahlias.

A popular trek for lodge guests takes them through the vibrant rainforest to view a nearby spectacular waterfall, passing through villages such as Kunguma on the way.



In the evening, visitors from around the world and PNG all gather before the open fireplace in the centre of the main lodge. This is an ideal opportunity to meet the other guests and compare notes about the travel experience. Dinner is served from a large tapa cloth covered table and guests eat together family style. The vegetables are all locally grown and prepared with care.



*Inset, top Maggie Wilson and business partner Liz. above, right 'Dongas' (roundhouses) are guest rooms. above Peacock adds more exotic color to the gardens. right Butterflies abound among the flowers.*

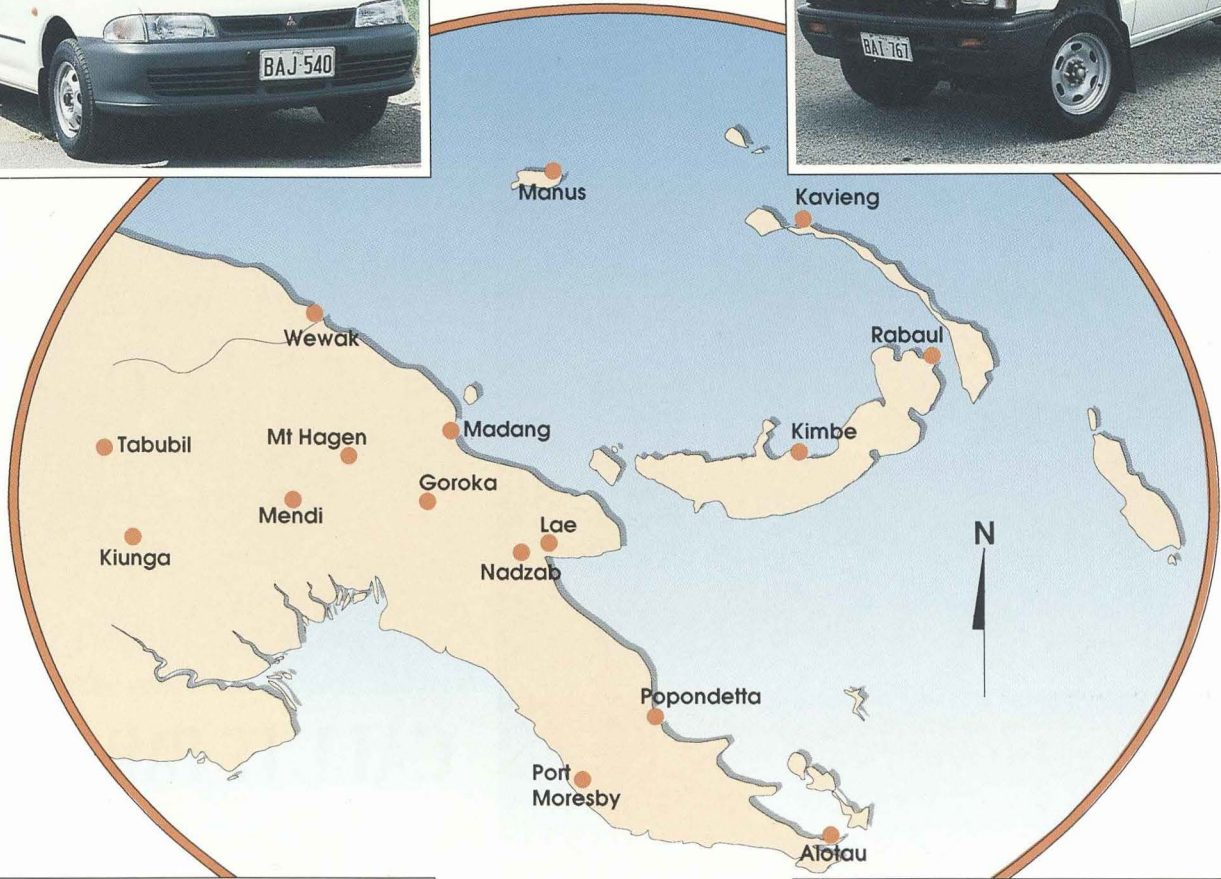
Traditional round houses, dongas, decorated with stunning artefacts from around PNG, provide spacious and comfortable accommodation with private toilets and showers. Every aspect of the project: the design, the construction and ultimately, the administration, is carried out by local people and any profits remain in the area.

Maggie and family, with the collaboration of friends, have carved an appealing niche in the PNG tourism industry, balancing tourism, conservation and cultural preservation, in their unique and enchanting Haus Poroman – which means, appropriately enough, a 'house of friends'.





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# Goroka Coffee

Story by Shirin Moayyad Photographs from Angco Ltd



*Above* Washed coffee beans are dried in the sun. *right* Raw green coffee beans ready for export.

**L**egendary in the South Pacific region as the foremost producer of high quality arabica coffee, Papua New Guinea, although only a small producer by world standards, has developed an international reputation for quality coffee.

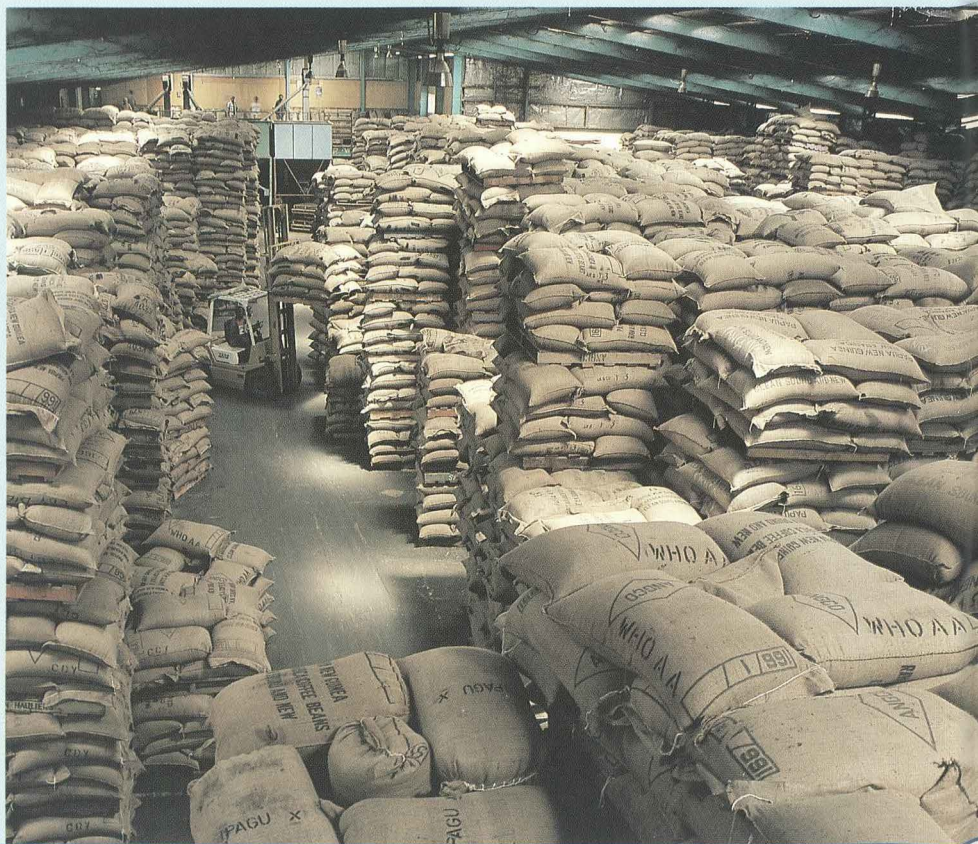
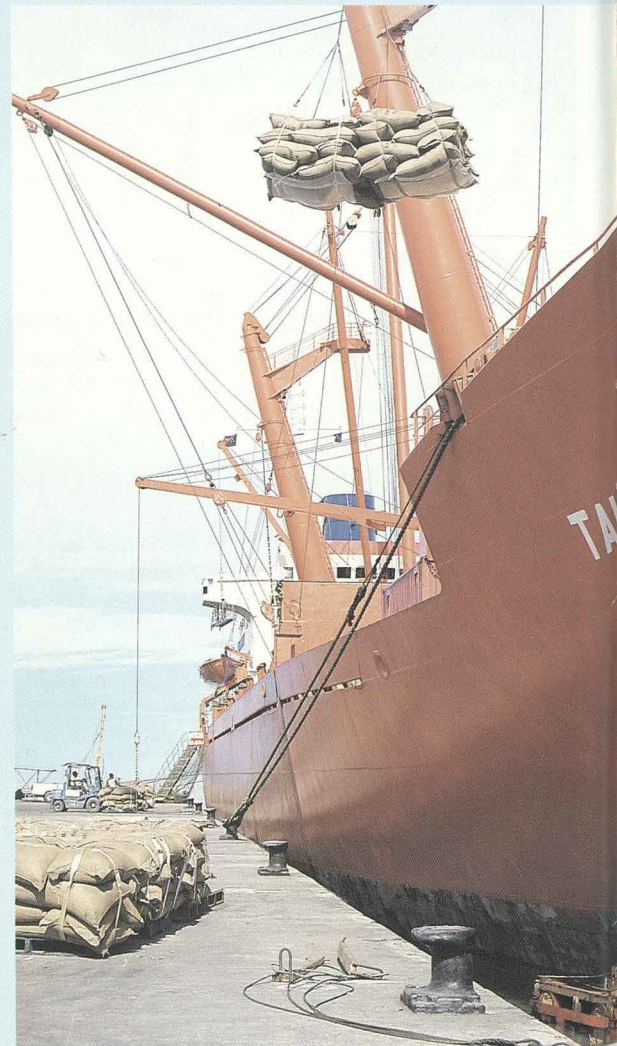
PNG's top estate grown coffees are equal to the finest in the world and growers can be justifiably proud of this high level of achievement.

Smallholder coffee grown in the mountainous interior of the country accounts for 70 per cent of PNG coffee exports, and is keenly sought after by major coffee roasters for its quality and flavor.

Some growing areas are certified for organic coffee production. This means that no chemicals, such as synthetic fertilisers or sprays, are used during any phase of production. This process results in a flawless, flavor-packed coffee giving the consumer the added comfort that no chemicals have been used. Although only a small sub-niche market, the demand for 'natural' food and beverage products is growing steadily and PNG is well placed to meet the market in organically certified coffee.

PNG has had the benefit of over 40 years' experience in commercial coffee cultivation to develop the finest blends available in the South Pacific. Experimental plantings were first undertaken by German missionaries before World War II, appropriately enough since today over 40 per cent of PNG's raw – green bean – coffee is exported to Germany. Most major German brands use PNG coffee in their blends.

In the early 1950s, coffee first took off as a significant cash crop with pioneer plantations in the Asaro Valley outside Goroka. Today, most of PNG's coffee is produced in the Western Highlands Province, with the Eastern Highlands running a close second and Chimbu third.



PNG coffee is hand-picked, pulped and fermented: a cleaning process that washes away the sugary outer coating found on the outside of the two coffee beans that lie in each cherry. Because care is taken in washing off this mucilage, PNG coffee is classified amongst the higher quality so-called 'washed arabicas'.

While the bulk of PNG's coffee has historically been exported to Europe in the green bean form, there has been a trend in recent years to roast and grind coffee locally – a trend which has made the PNG domestic market self-sufficient and accounts for about one per cent of PNG's total coffee production.

The pioneers in roasting domestically were Goroka Coffee Roasters, a small plant that quickly established its reputation as a quality producer after its establishment in 1965. Starting with one small roaster, the plant now has the capacity to produce several hundred tonnes of roasted



**Above, far left** Green coffee beans before roasting. **above, left** Goroka's finest coffee ready for export. **left** Warehoused sacks contain thousands of pots of best quality coffee.

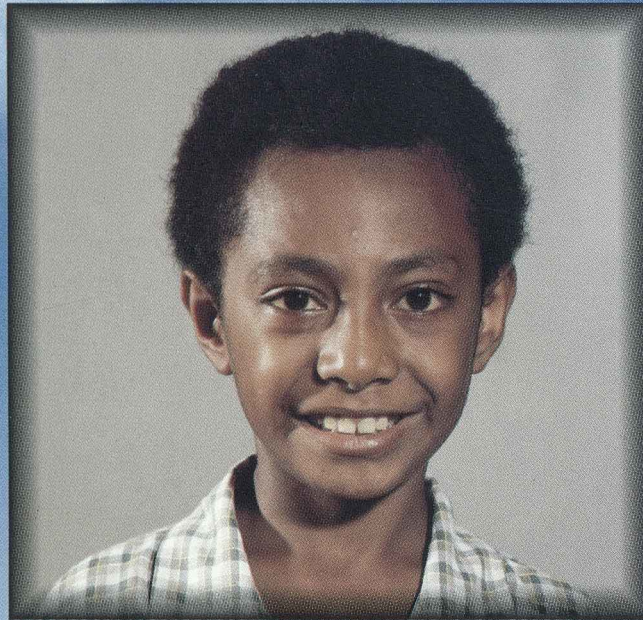


**Above and right** Coffee beans ready for harvest are red 'cherries'; and the Highlands crop is all hand picked.

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coffee a year. With eight full-time employees, the factory is poised to launch into new export markets.

Domestically, most hotels and supermarkets carry the established brand, Goroka Coffee, in its distinctive blue pack, featuring a Highlands warrior's head on the label. The organic label, Paradise Gold, is equally distinctive in a forest green and gold packet displaying a Paradisea minor bird of paradise on the front.

As an alternative to rainforest felling, primary agricultural products are very important in sustaining the livelihood of the grass roots villagers. Coffee is the single most important crop to the Highlanders and for many, their only source of cash income.

Most recently a new brand has been designed and produced as a private label for the country's flagship air carrier, Air Niugini. Bearing the stylised bird of paradise in Air Niugini's colors, this attractive white coffee pouch is labelled Air Niugini Blend and is distributed through the airline's in-flight duty free shop, and as a complimentary present to business class travellers.

Always supportive of domestic industries, Air Niugini has combined the consumers' known preference for PNG coffee with its own practice of displaying and promoting PNG products.

Exports are sold mainly to PNG's Pacific neighbors, Australia and New Zealand. In 1993, the PNG Government lodged a rural support scheme to lure growers back into producing tropical fruit

**Above** Revolving drums and flowing water separate ripe beans from the red husk. **right** Goroka Coffee's distinctive packets are readied for market.





crops. Under this scheme, exporters are given bounty payments for every kilogram exported.

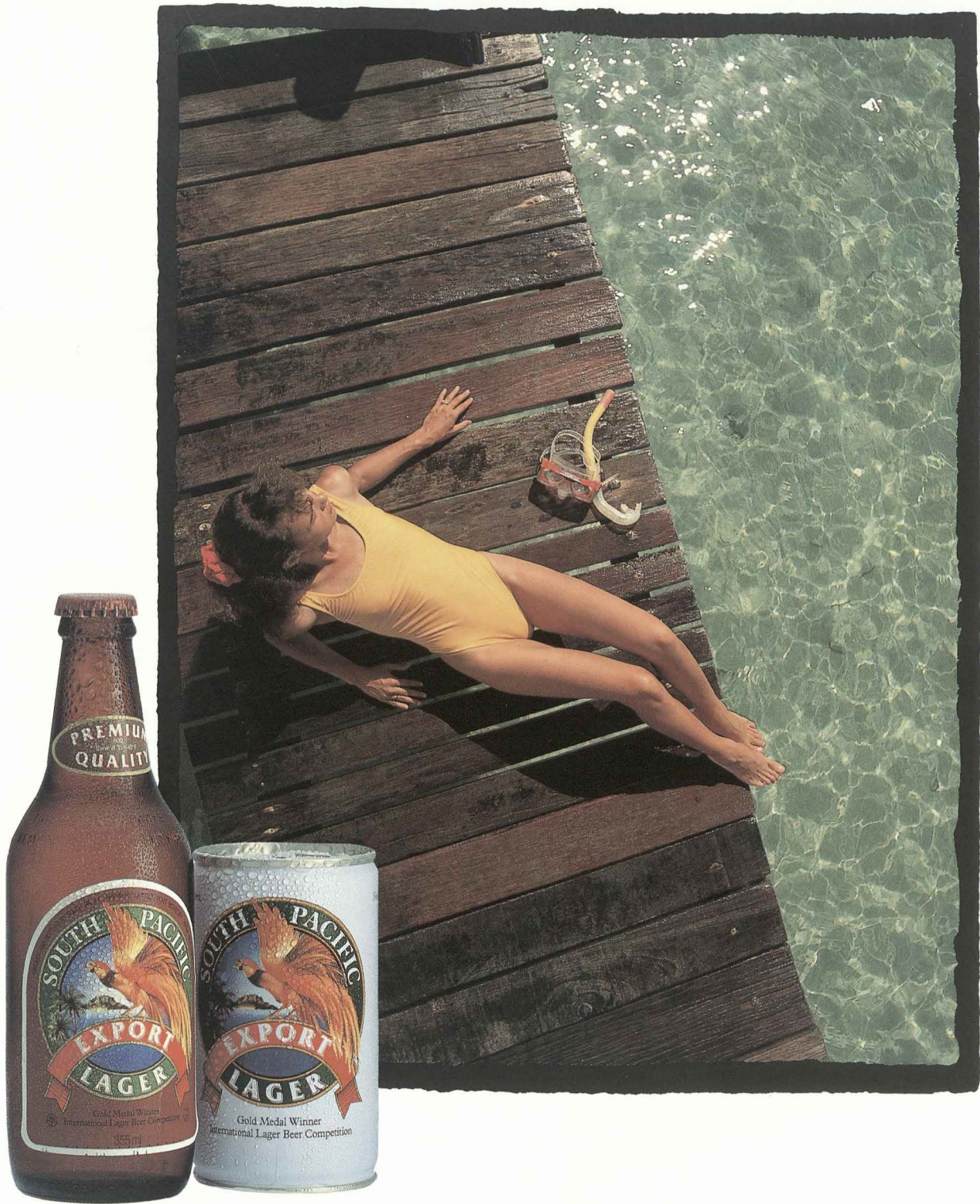
Early 1994 saw increases in world coffee prices of more than 100 per cent over the previous year, thus ending a seven-year slump in coffee prices that affected the smallholder farmer most dramatically. As world prices increased, so the PNG Government bounty decreased, eventually being eliminated in July 1994.

When world prices increase sufficiently, growers in turn will be required to pay a levy back to the PNG Coffee Industry Corporation to repay Government loans to the industry and hedge against leaner times in future.

The turnaround in world coffee prices, was caused by shortages in Colombia due to crop infestation, frost in Brazil and war in Rwanda and Burundi.

Despite the setbacks of previous price slumps, Goroka coffee has retained its high quality over the years. Hand-picked from village and plantation trees, the best quality coffee is laid out to dry in the radiant Highlands sun. From there it is brought in by light aircraft or trucked over mountainous roads to Goroka where it is blended and roasted into the finished product. The coffee is vacuum packed, giving it an extended shelf life of 18 months, and is shipped to its various destinations.

**Left** Plantation workers weigh the day's harvest at the pickup trailer. **inset, left** Grinding and blending ensures the best taste.



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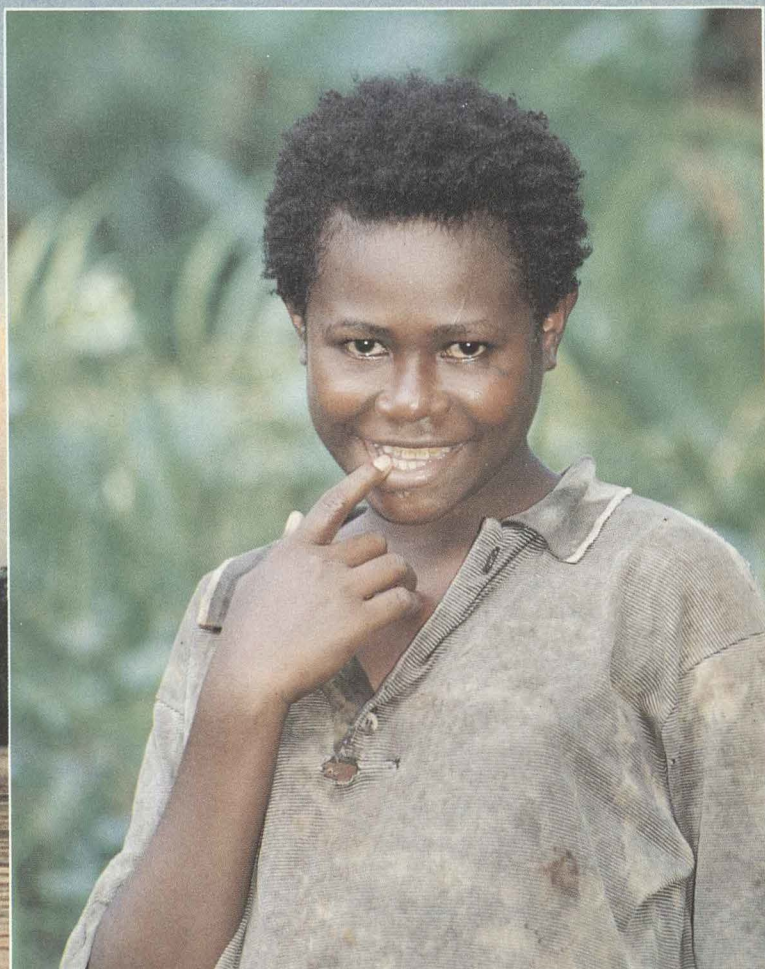
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# BACK TO THE Boy

When I disembarked from the Air Niugini flight from Hong Kong at Port Moresby, the first thing that I asked myself was why it had taken so long for me to return to Papua New Guinea.

Story and photographs by Irvin Rockman

I have had about 10 trips in the past 30 years to PNG and each time I had sworn to return more often than before. But somehow, the pressures of work and the hassles of everyday life in Melbourne had let the magnetism of this magnificent country disappear from my mind.

It was a twist of fate that my good friend, the publisher of a sportdiving magazine, had suggested I go up to Walindi Plantation and meet Max Benjamin, otherwise known as the host of Kimbe Bay. I had to go on a business trip to Hong Kong and I discovered that it was not out of the way to return to Australia via PNG.

With the business settled in Hong Kong I took the very comfortable night flight to Port Moresby along with my overladen and overweight dive gear, which was no problem to Air Niugini who give a special

baggage allowance to scuba divers. Not only was I exultant when I arrived at Port Moresby early in the morning but I was absolutely ecstatic to arrive a short time later at Hoskins.

Here I was again back in the beautiful surrounds of a tropical paradise! Visually perfect and a photographer's dream, with friendly warm people and of course, spectacular underwater scenery as well. Spending time in New Britain seems to be sanity itself.

Walindi guests can visit the Catholic mission on the hill at Bitokara. This is an interesting and scenic journey north-west along the coastal road, the mission situated about 200 metres above sea level.

The neat and tidy, colorful wooden buildings were built many years ago by the missionaries. There is beautiful bird life here and I

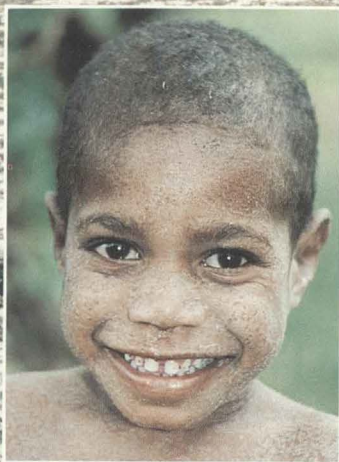
**Right** Women and children of the Bitokara Catholic mission. **far right** Mission woman offers friendly greetings to visitors.

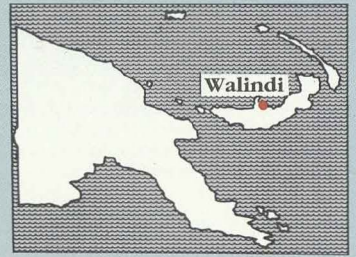
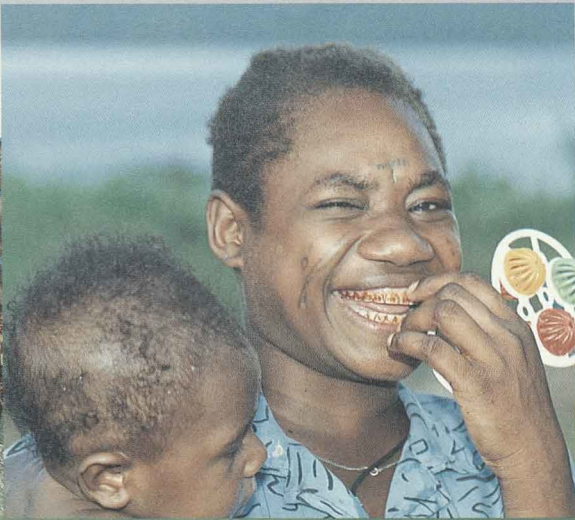
**Right** Colorful Kimbe Bay kingfisher showed no fear.

**Inset, far right** Kimbe Bay beauty. **far right** Practising traditional singsing skills. **right** Balance and beauty.

**Inset, left** Sea salt patterns on a bay sprite.

Irvin Rockman was twice Lord Mayor of the City of Melbourne, Australia (1977-79) and is the author of 'Underwater Australia'.





was fortunate enough to photograph a lovely kingfisher which meandered close to my lens.

Driving around the small community of Kimbe we passed the Gigo settlement on the outskirts. The local school children were dressed up in the colorful traditional outfits of their ancestors and seemed to be very happy to embrace for a moment the traditional ways of their people while they forge ahead with modern education.

The children were all smiles when I stepped out of the car and started pointing long-barrelled lenses at them. Papua New Guineans know how to smile at a camera better than anyone else I have ever seen.

Many other sights are within a stone's throw of Walindi, such as the hot mud springs at Naramatala. There are the fumaroles which are vents with steam,

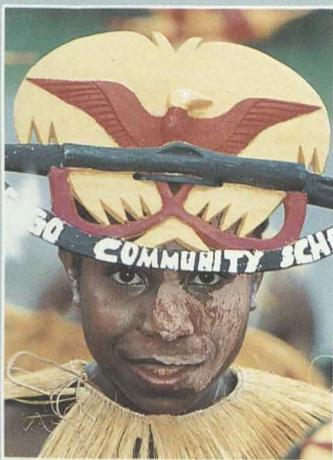
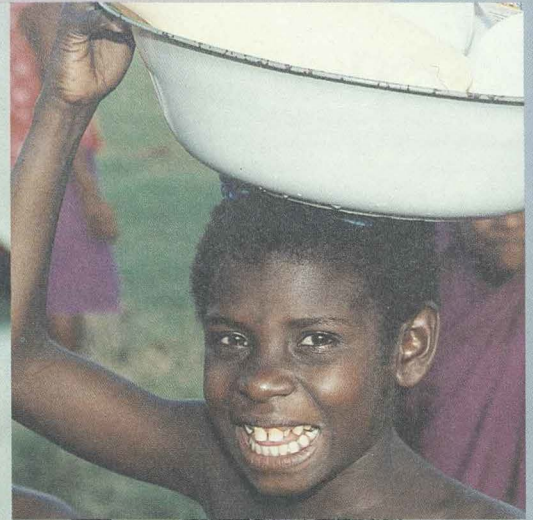


**Far right** Everybody smiles at Kimbe Bay, **right** Parrot graced by nature's brightest colors. **centre** World War II bomber wreckage at Talasea. **inset, bottom left** Gigo boy in bilas (finery). **bottom left** Carrying loads on the head is universal practice at Kimbe Bay. **bottom right** Walindi butterfly.

just behind the Talasea village. We were told that if you fell in one of these mud springs you might live for 12 seconds. It seems that the mud is at a very high temperature, just under boiling but certainly hot enough.

Wrecks of Second World War planes remain at Talasea. At an old emergency air strip which was used by the US Air Force during the Battle of the Coral Sea, and in reasonably good condition, there is a USAF B-25 Bomber and a Lockheed Ventura which was flown by the New Zealand Air Force. Apparently the B-25 was shot-up over Rabaul but managed to make it back to Talasea and landed with the crew on board intact.

Australia's nearest neighbor has so much to offer, especially the Walindi resort.

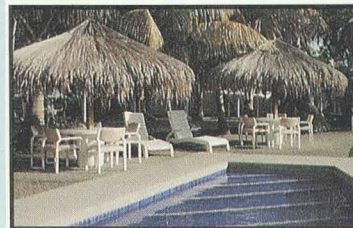




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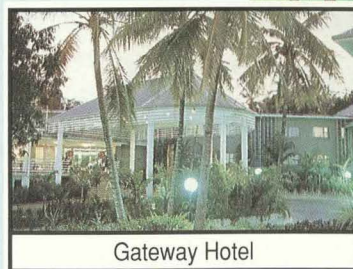


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***John Piawu, Manager of Sales***

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I really like working at RAMU. We all do. There's a close community feeling working here, and a calm and secure environment for my wife and me to bring up our family. Helen also works here at RAMU and there aren't many places you can both work together. We can both take advantage of our training and qualifications to build our careers, and still feel comfortable that the kids are safe and being well educated.

You can say without doubt, life is sweet for us all with RAMU.

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# Papua New Guinea



## Air Niugini



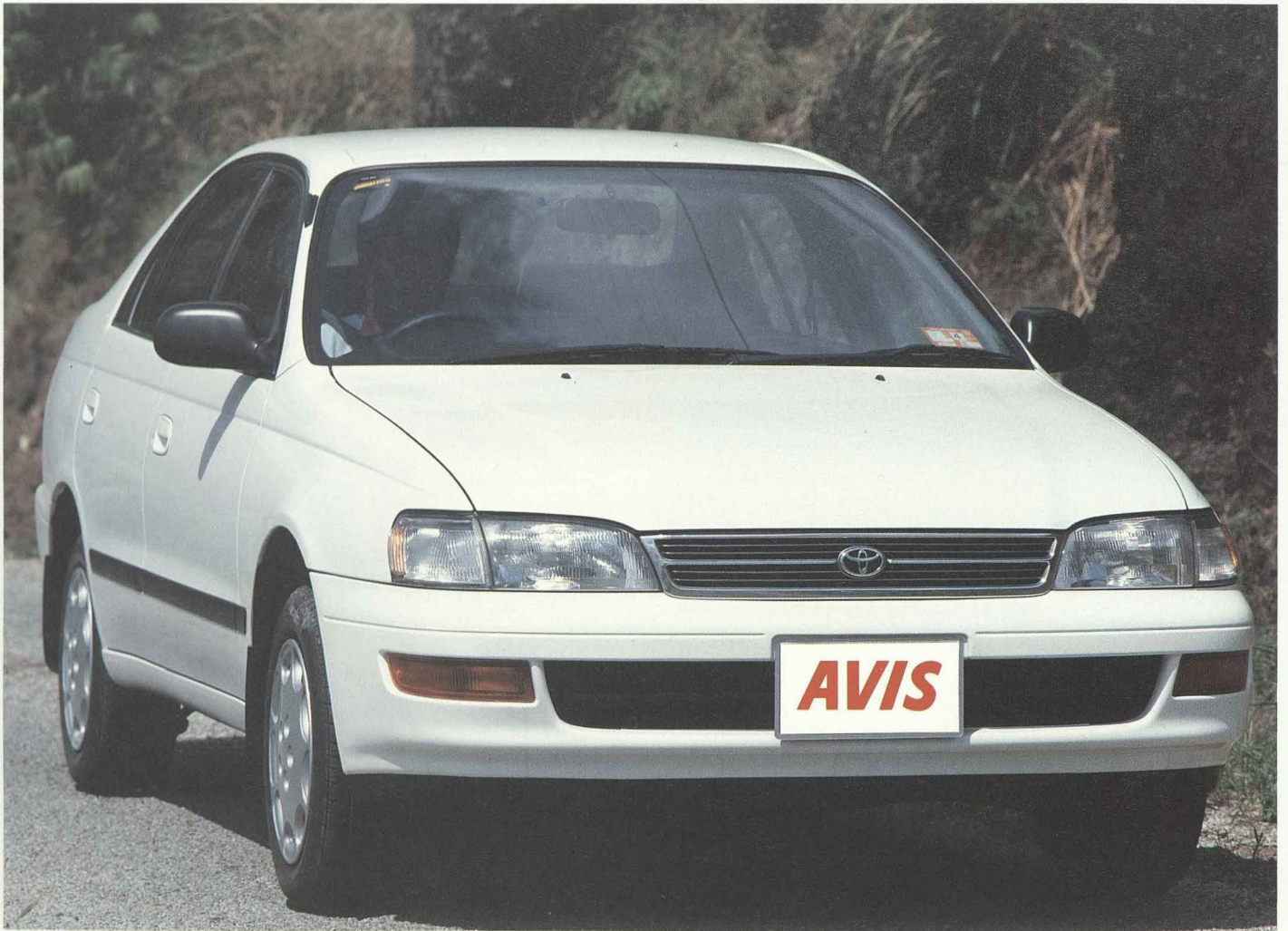
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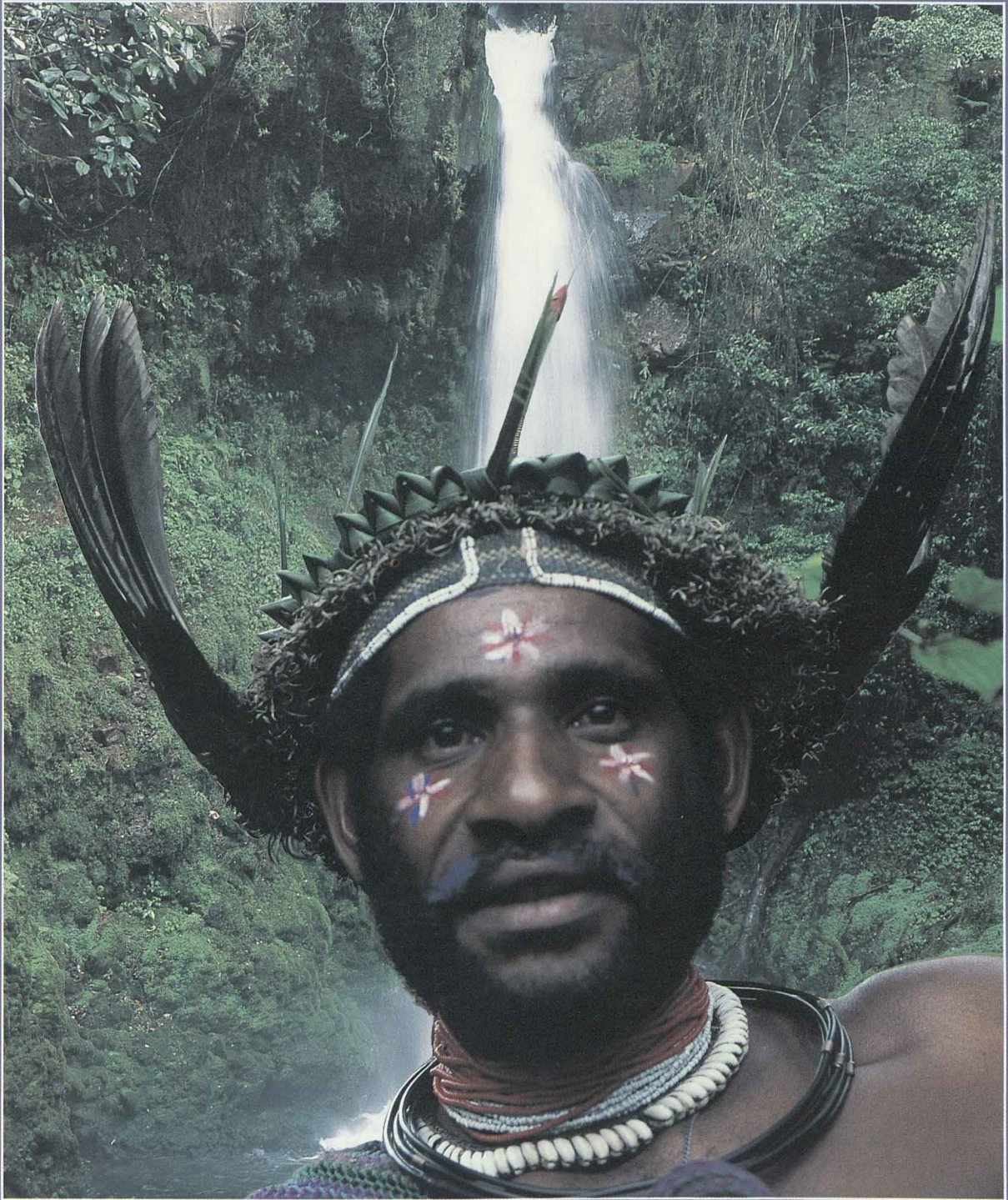
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W i l d



E D E N

Story and  
photographs by  
Frank Huber

The Highlands of Papua New Guinea still afford the traveller an unequalled opportunity to see and experience ancient cultures. It was this unusual opportunity that brought my wife Nancy and me on the long journey from Alaska to the Tari Basin, a Garden of Eden far from the modern world.

The Hulis, who inhabit the valley, are known for their custom of wearing elaborate wigs made from human hair. These striking and colorful wigs are held together with woven string and are decorated with feathers of all kinds, shells, flowers, and most anything else that attracts the eye of the wearer. The wigmen often wear pig tusks or a

pitpit stem, a kind of wild grass, through their nasal septum as well as facial and body decorations. Other common 'bilas', or personal adornments, consist of kina shells, hornbill beaks, and daggers made from the legbone of the cassowary, a large bird. This variety of costume and color is a photographer's paradise.

The Highlands Highway

to Ambua Lodge, a 45-minute drive from Tari airport, is through an interesting countryside of thatch dwellings, garden plots, and what at times looks like an impenetrable wall of vegetation. We learned from our driver that these barriers of vegetation were actually defensive walls built of sticks and mud which are camouflaged



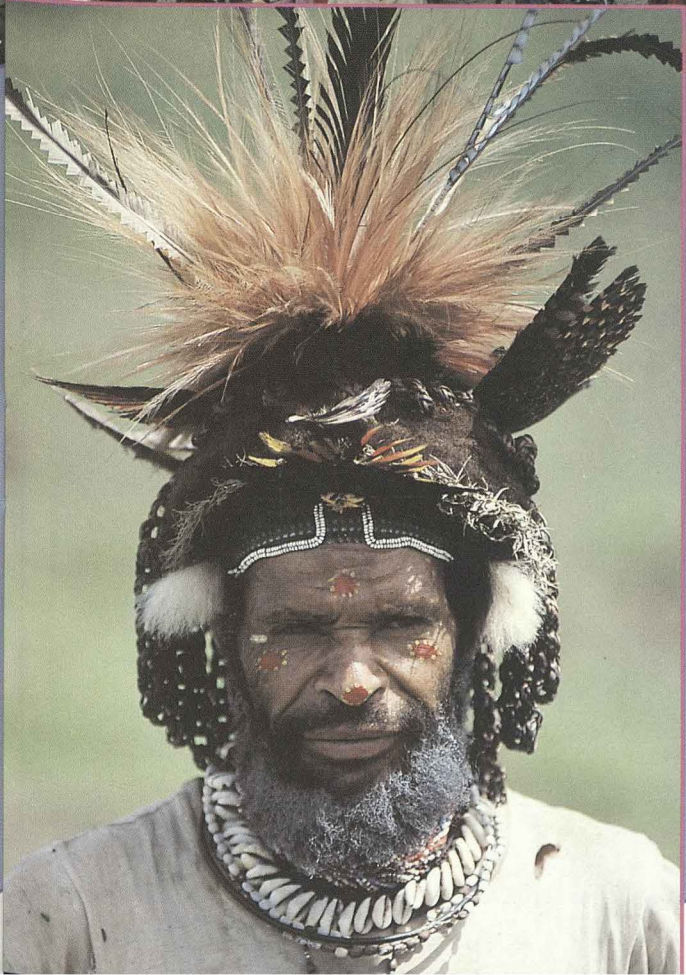




Lower left Huli woman with clan facial tattoos, with her child at Tari market. below Busy Tari airport. right Huli women prepare for a singing celebration.



Left Huli tribesman with distinctive wig of human hair and bird of paradise feathers. right Woman's grass skirt is distinctively Huli.



over time by the tropical undergrowth, with the entrances carefully hidden and extremely hard to see.

We arrived at Ambua Lodge, passing through a gate and guardhouse manned by two armed Huli tribesmen. A spectacular vista greeted us. Nestled in a moss forest at an elevation of 2,100 metres, the lodge

overlooks the entire Tari Basin. Mist hung in the low spots, and the smoke of cooking fires spiralled upwards in the distance.

The surrounding forest is dotted with dozens of species of high altitude orchids, and populated by hundreds of birds including 10 species of bird of paradise, as well as cuscus,



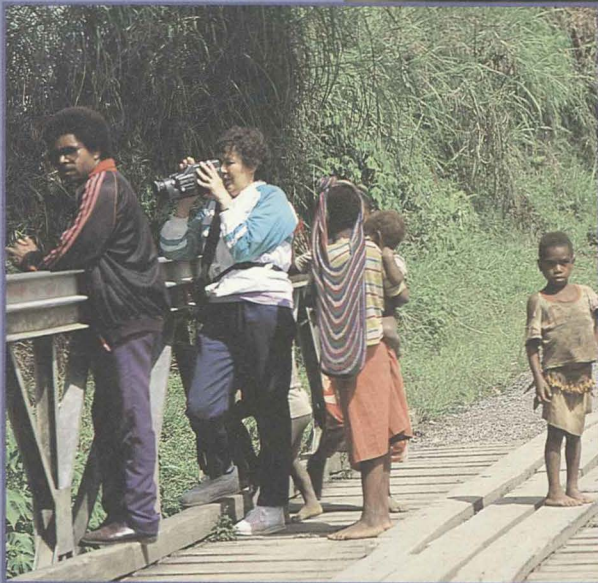
Aviation  
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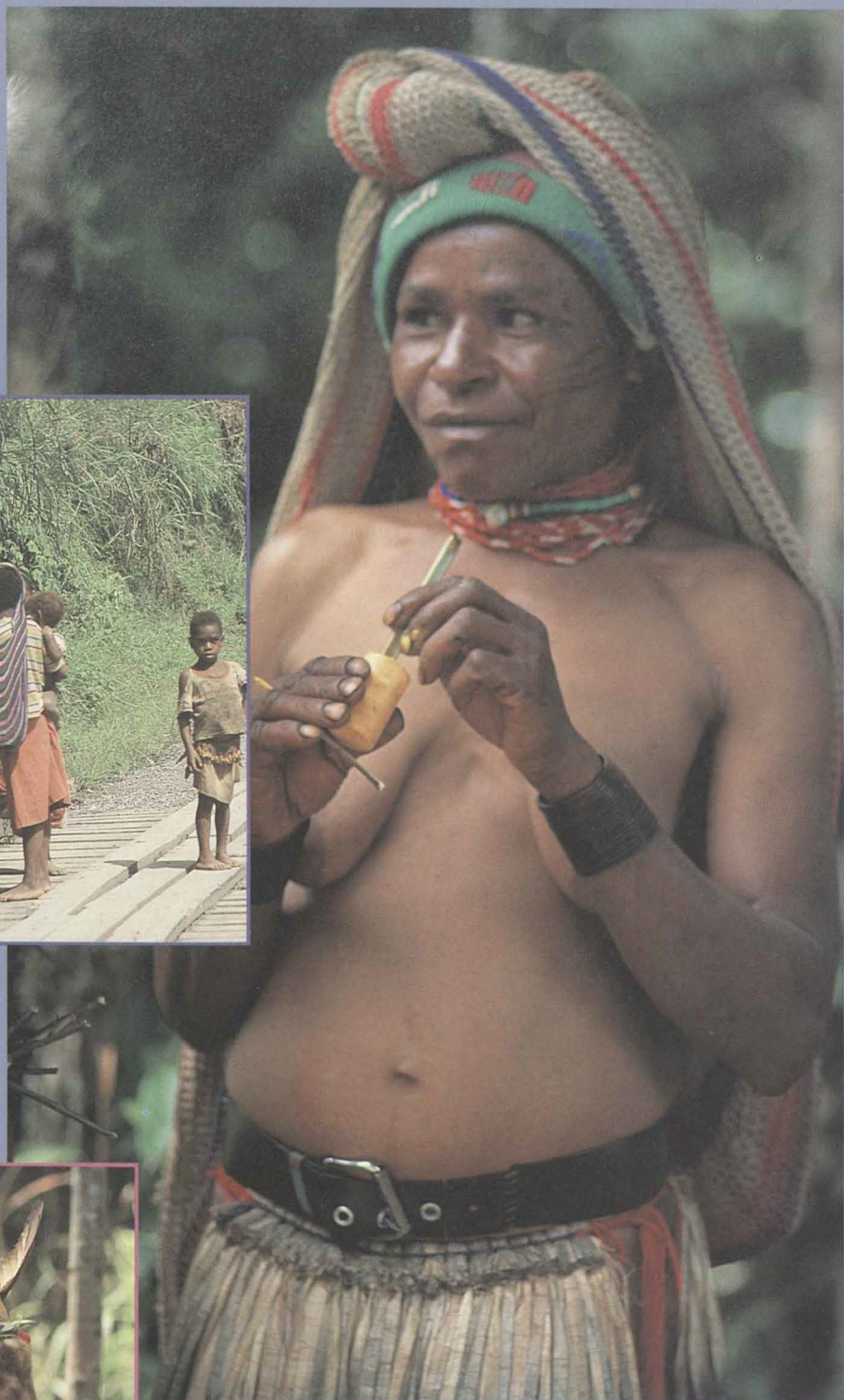
**Shell**

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a type of opossum, and myriad moths and other insects. We hiked several of the trails that wind through the forest and although steep and slippery in places, the magnificent waterfalls, deep gorges and abundance of beautiful orchids and other exotic flowers and plants make the effort worthwhile.



**Above** Tourist and guide on the Highlands Highway. **right** Mixing paint for face decoration. **below** Huli tribesman.



The footbridges spanning the streams and gorges are engineering marvels. Built entirely of small poles lashed together with bush materials, they hang from the trees on vines, using all bush materials with no metal fasteners of any kind.

Outdoor markets flourish in the Tari Basin. These are simply a sizeable cleared area where dozens of

vendors dump their wares on the ground and sit beside the piles waiting for a buyer. The vendors offer yams, sugar cane, pitpit, betel nut, usually with lime and mustard seed, and various trade goods.

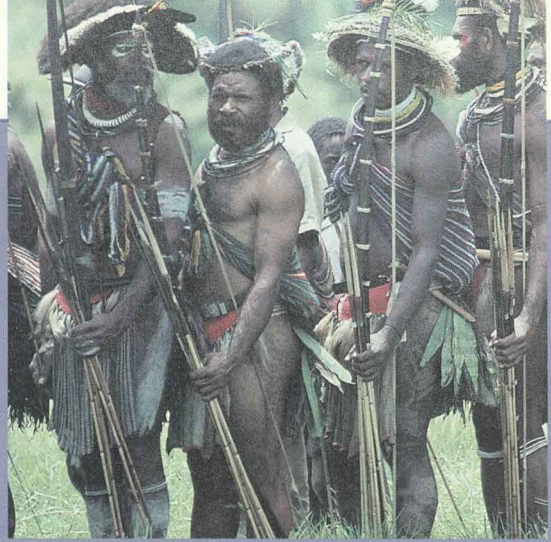
More exciting was a compensation payment ceremony we attended, which followed a fatal road accident and which drew

several hundred Hulis of two clans. The ceremony was to end enmity over the loss of life.

At one side of the field, about a dozen pigs, butchered, halved and smoked, were laid out on the ground. George, our guide, told us that if the two groups reached agreement these pigs would seal the bargain, but the bulk of

payment would come later in the form of live pigs.

Suddenly during the ceremony everyone relaxed; a deal had been struck. The men of the successful clan hoisted the smoked pigs on their shoulders and everybody looked happy. People began to mill around and we were able to mingle with them, bargaining in sign language for the



**Top right** Huli warriors armed with bows and arrows gather for compensation ceremony. **right** Painstaking preparation goes into body decoration for singing ceremony. **below** Huli woman at Tari market.



traditional Highlands hats, bilums, and whatever else struck our fancy. We finally called it a day and headed back to the lodge.

We spent the rest of our time at Ambua Lodge cruising the Highlands Highway meeting and photographing the people we met. In the mornings and evenings we prowled the grounds surrounding the

lodge. An incredible variety of moths and a species of beautiful red eyed cicada would gather at night and could be approached and photographed quite easily in the cool mornings.

Our good fortune had enabled us to visit this beautiful, unspoiled place. We both hope to return some time before too much changes.





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**A**rt has always been an integral part of life in Papua New Guinea. Carvings, designs and dance, were not generally produced for their aesthetic value but all were created as part of the process of connecting with the spirit world. Images and dance paid tribute to and personified spirits, both benevolent and malevolent. These objects and dances were central to the belief systems and spiritual lives of the people.

Today, many of these same objects are reproduced for commercial markets. Shields and carvings are

produced for aesthetic purposes but do not hold the power imbued in objects which have been used in ritual and carved for specific spiritual purposes. Many of

the carvings produced today are designed as commodities and are of a very different nature.

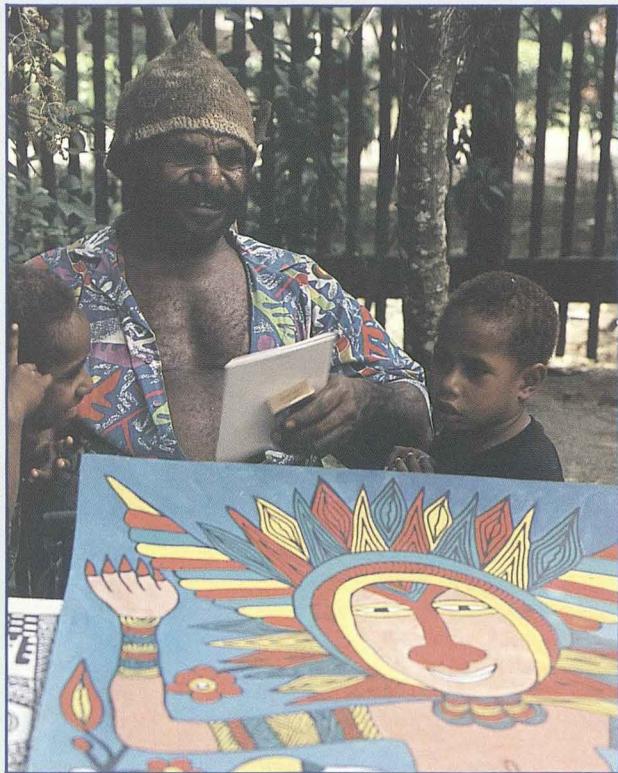
In addition to the creation of art pieces which

reproduces traditional shapes and forms, the contemporary art movement in PNG includes works in painting, silk screen, sculpture with metal, fabrics, photography, modern dance and many others. New mediums are being used by the increasing number of contemporary artists in PNG today. Many of these artists combine their contemporary experiences with influences and inspiration drawn from their knowledge of or experience of traditional culture. These combined influences often create work which is highly innovative and conceptually exciting.

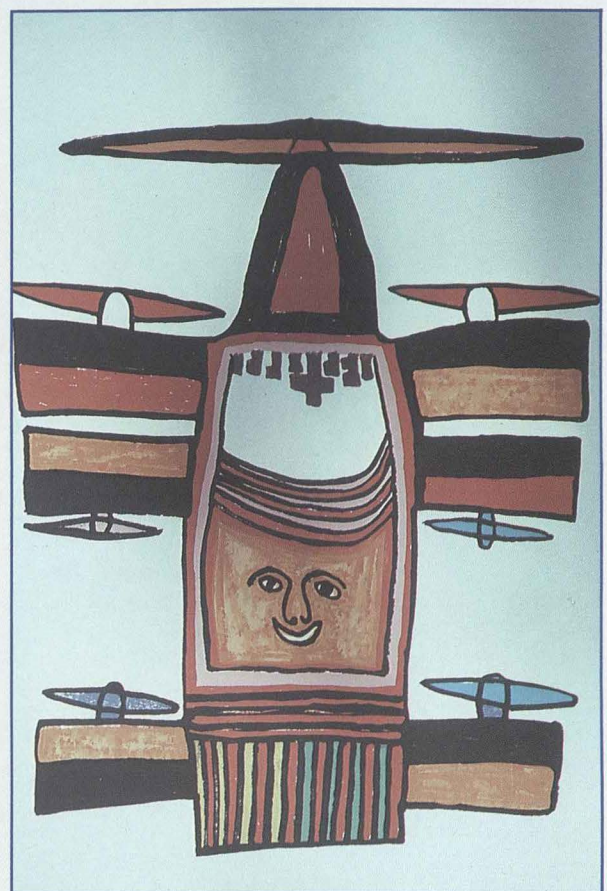
**A R T**

**from all over**

Story and photographs by Liz Thompson



Kuage, one of PNG's foremost contemporary artists here with his work, at the annual Arts and Crafts show held in Waigani Arts Centre. This image is typical of Kuage's strong, powerful, often brightly colored designs. Much of his work looks at tradition and the process of tradition coming into contact with development.

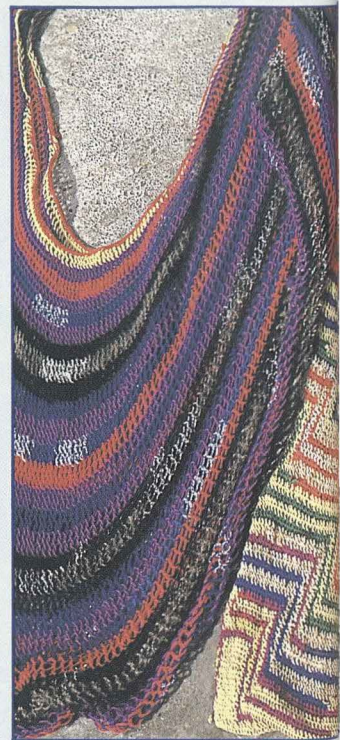


Kuage manages to blend obscure things together - an aircraft and a Highland man with all his feathers and paints, so that the two quite opposing elements become one. Kuage's work is unique, selling for high prices overseas and decorating numerous hotels and Parliamentary walls in PNG. He has recently returned from Germany where he was invited to produce street art and had an exhibition in London from which four of his paintings went to the Glasgow Museum of contemporary art, alongside a collection of classic European modernists and impressionists.

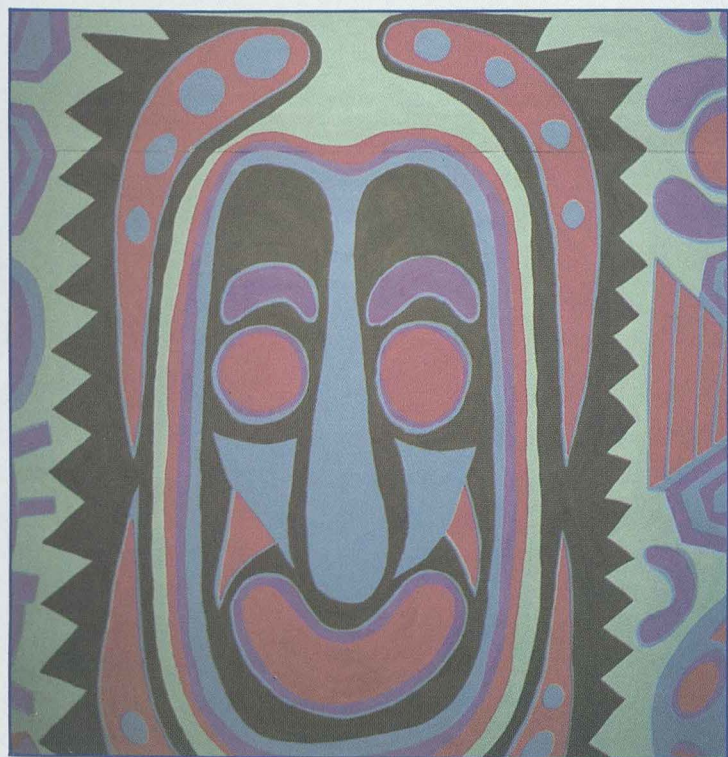
Print produced at the National High School in Port Moresby. Derivative of traditional design, it is an example of the many prints which have been produced in PNG. An excellent collection has been produced in a book called *Asimba*, available at University of PNG bookstores.



Bilum bags in PNG were traditionally made of thin strands of rolled bark which were colored with natural dyes, ochres and umbers and juices from plant and vegetable matter. These bags are often very large and carried across the forehead, so the bag is suspended down the back. Today they are still made using the traditional method but also from nylon twine available in most stores as are the brightly colored store paints which have been used to make these bilums. Available often in street markets and handcraft centres in PNG.



A'aron Talufar is a graduate of the textile department at the Arts faculties of UPNG. His work uses strong bold designs which often draw on traditional influences and traditional design. He frequently incorporates mask and shield designs into his work. This fabric design by A'aron Talufar was inspired by designs on a traditional shield.



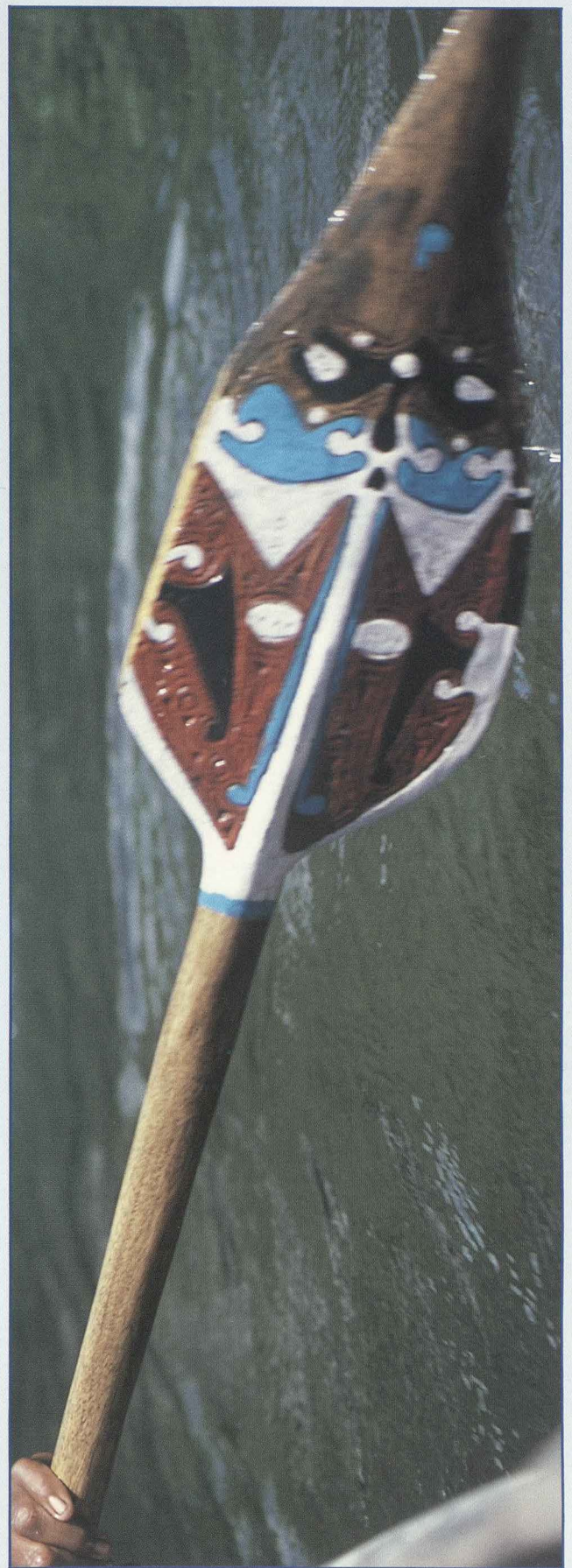
These poles were produced by the UPNG Arts faculty's sculpture department and appear at several police stations around Port Moresby. They are based on traditional poles which were sometimes decorated with carvings but clearly the subject matter has been altered. These poles appear at Gordons police station in Port Moresby.



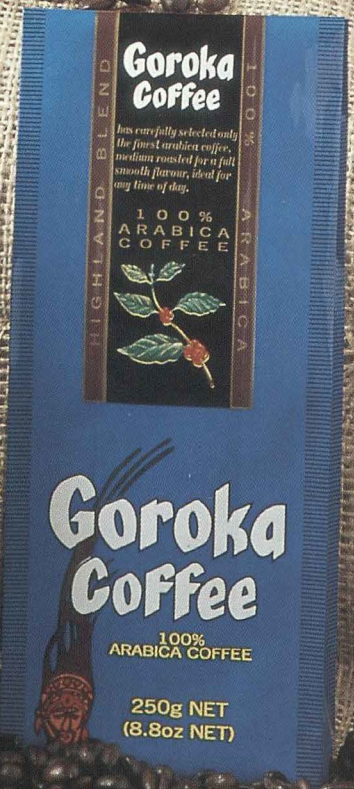
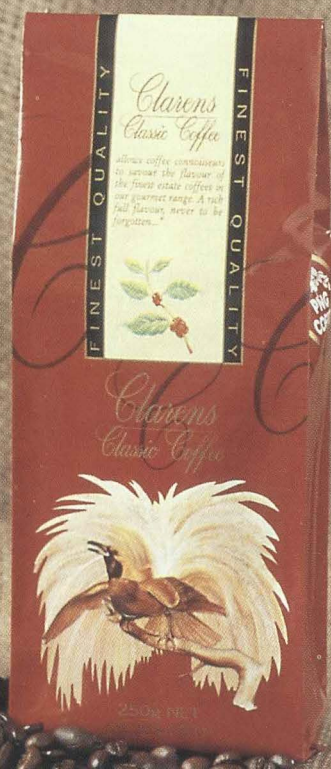




Paddles from Sissano lagoon in West Sepik Province where all the canoes are highly decorated. The designs tell traditional stories and are all owned by particular people. The custodianship of designs is an important responsibility and it is said that if someone paints a design on their canoe that is not rightfully theirs, the rightful owner may well come and cut out that section of the canoe. Sometimes these designs tell complex stories, sometimes they can identify clan membership, sometimes they are simply decorative. Much of PNG's traditional art work has been bought up by overseas galleries or privately owned. The PNG National Museum is struggling to keep as much of what is left in the country, though its budget is limited it still holds a fabulous collection of work to be viewed by the public.



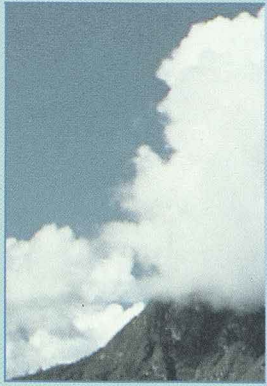
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# HIKING THE HEWA



I had first heard about and became intrigued by the Hewa, a remote part of Papua New Guinea, where the provinces of Enga, Southern Highlands, and East Sepik come together, years before my chance to visit the area finally came. I went with a French anthropologist looking for a research site well off the beaten path. With soap, salt, and stick tobacco to trade, tea and sugar to share, and contour maps, we felt confident as we flew north from Tari in the Southern Highlands, to Wanakipa.

We hired two men to guide us and carry our packs as far as the next village, a day's walk away. Both wore simple, traditional dress consisting of only a bark belt holding up a woven apron in the front and green leaves in the back.

By the time we started out east early the next morning, our party had grown to six with the addition of the older guide's daughter and a handsome young man going our way.

The Hewa are known for large, communal treehouses, built mainly for protection

from enemy attack, and we were delighted to come upon one. For the main support, two or three huge trees standing close together are cut off about 10 to 15 metres above the ground. Smaller logs are added for additional support as the platform for the house is built. Unfortunately, for those who appreciate these structures, now that there is no tribal warfare in the area, most houses are built on the ground.

Later, during our mid-day break, I glanced over to see our two guides making fire with a stick, a strip of rattan,





and dry grass. In no time, they were smoking cigars made of brus (native leaf tobacco). In all my years in PNG, this was the first time I had seen fire made, not as a demonstration but out of necessity.

We reached the first cane suspension bridge in the late afternoon. Each end was hung from a tree top at the edge of the river and was reached by climbing a crude ladder. The bridge itself was made of three pieces of cane no fatter than rope and tied together with bush fibres. On each side was a cane handle above the head.

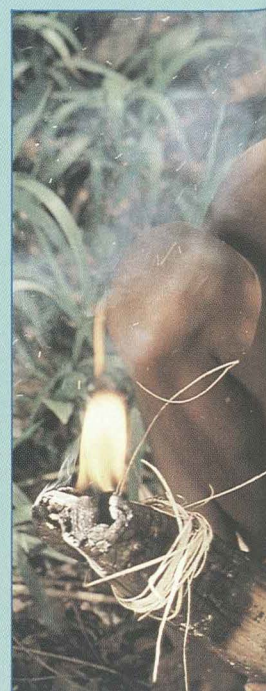
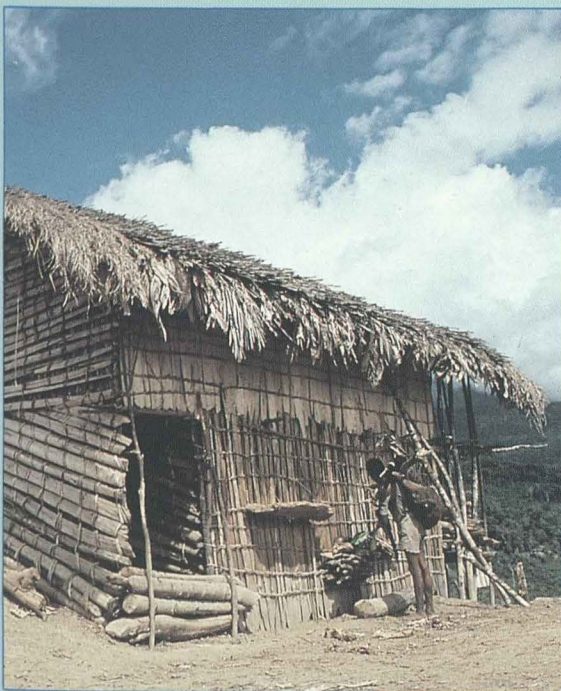
While not the ultimate in safety, we easily crossed the bridge one by one. The only scary part was in the centre where the handles were now no higher than our knees, and the whole contraption began to sway above the rocky river.

The first day, although long, passed quickly and painlessly. There had been no rain for a long time, so the trails were dry and the streams so low we could jump from rock to rock rather than wade across. And the narrow, one-log bridges, which are a slippery nightmare when wet, were relatively easy to negotiate.

We reached Wisiki before dark and were ushered into a small house overlooking the pretty village in a deep valley. We ate tiny sweet potatoes roasted under the coals as the house filled up with village men wanting to tell stories, and women and children crowded the doorway simply to observe. At a loss for a way to communicate well, Philippe, with much gusto, recited 19th Century love poetry. Our hosts enthusiastically agreed that French was almost the same as Hewa.

**Left** Hewa communal treehouse. **below, from left** Multi-family house, Folini village; Wisiki village; Fire-making, the Hewa way; Ambi village girl; Preparing an omelette of scrub fowl egg.

**Far right** Hewa man with pig tusk nose decoration.



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In the morning, we were happy to learn that the guides, Tison and Andrew, who were both strong, gentle and likeable, had decided to make the entire trip with us. The following days were much the same with more cane bridges, adventures, mishaps, and spectacular panoramas. It is amazing how the endless, mountain-top view of a pristine world can immediately cure the aches of a two-hour climb!

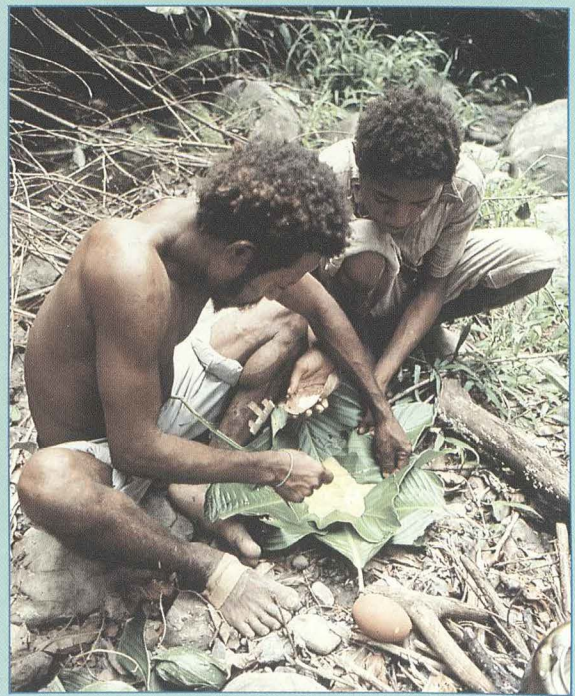
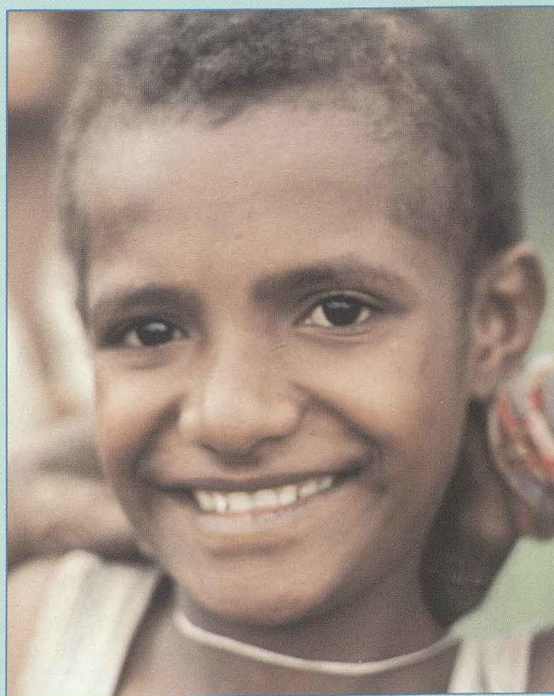
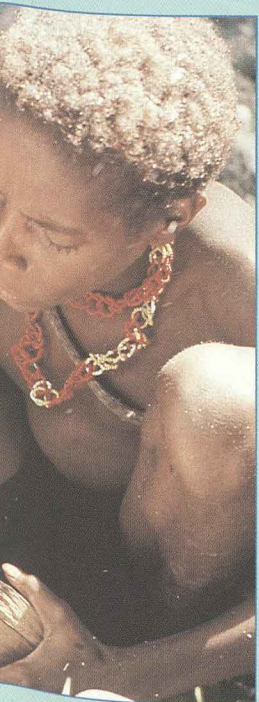
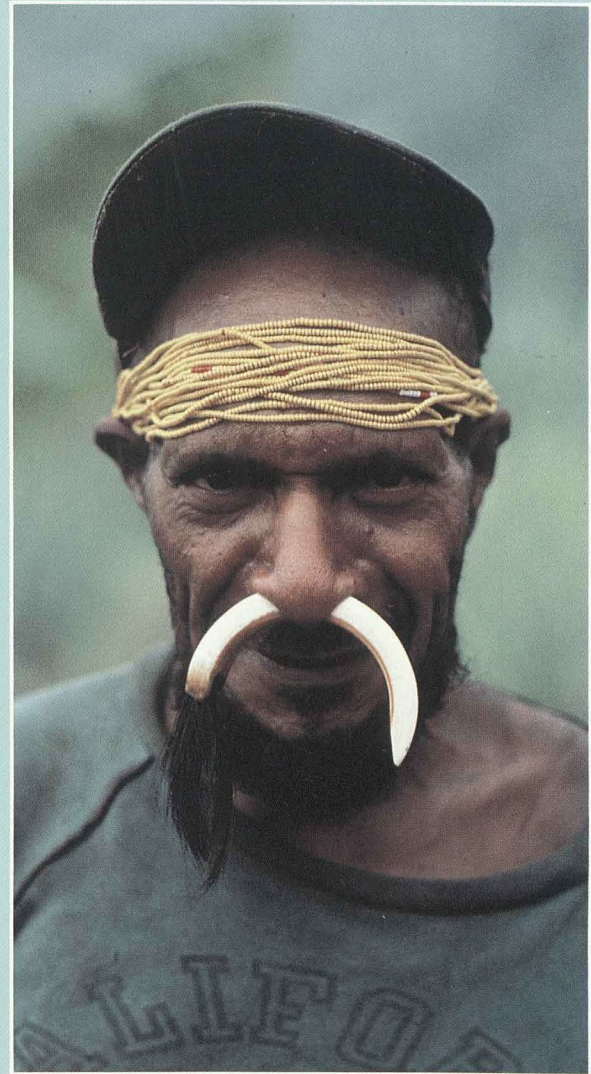
One afternoon, after we had taken much too long for a gruelling 1,000 metre descent, we were obliged to set up camp on the sandy bank of the cool Pori River. Under a full moon, we told the story of men having gone to the moon and walked around. Did our companions believe or even understand us?

The entourage grew. We walked a circle and passed back through Wanakipa where we picked up Andrew's new, shy, young wife and her not-so-shy, pubescent brother. We were now one, happy family, and in true PNG fashion, sharing everything any of us had.

Because of the drought, there was little garden food and no meat, so imagine the excitement when we came across a scrub fowl's nest! The hen lays her eggs in a large heap of leaves, twigs and dirt built by her and her mate, and the heat of the compost incubates the eggs.

That evening, from the bottom of the pack, we dug out a small, precious onion, and our anthropologist-turned-bush-chef ceremoniously prepared a one-egg omelette for seven.

Throughout the trip, I was amazed at how few Western material goods there were –no matches, salt, or even the most basic utensils. When we made pots of sweet tea for our village hosts, our two tin cups were passed around and around.



The Hewa, which refers to the people as well as the area, is vast, yet sparsely populated with only about 1,600 people. Villages are small and far apart, and people were often away in the forest or gardens when we arrived. One evening, at the completely empty village of Waiki, our guides opened the door to the house of our choice. We later left behind small gifts, 'for the house'.

We walked west as far as the Strickland River to Ambi, a 'real' village with an aid post and future airstrip, where we decided to rest and enjoy the open, golden landscape. On our day off, we ventured down across the hot, bright grasslands to get a better view of the famous river and deep

gorge that had historically been a natural barrier against travel. In places, smoke billowed out of the gorge as men, with bows and arrows hunting for pigs, burnt the dry grass.

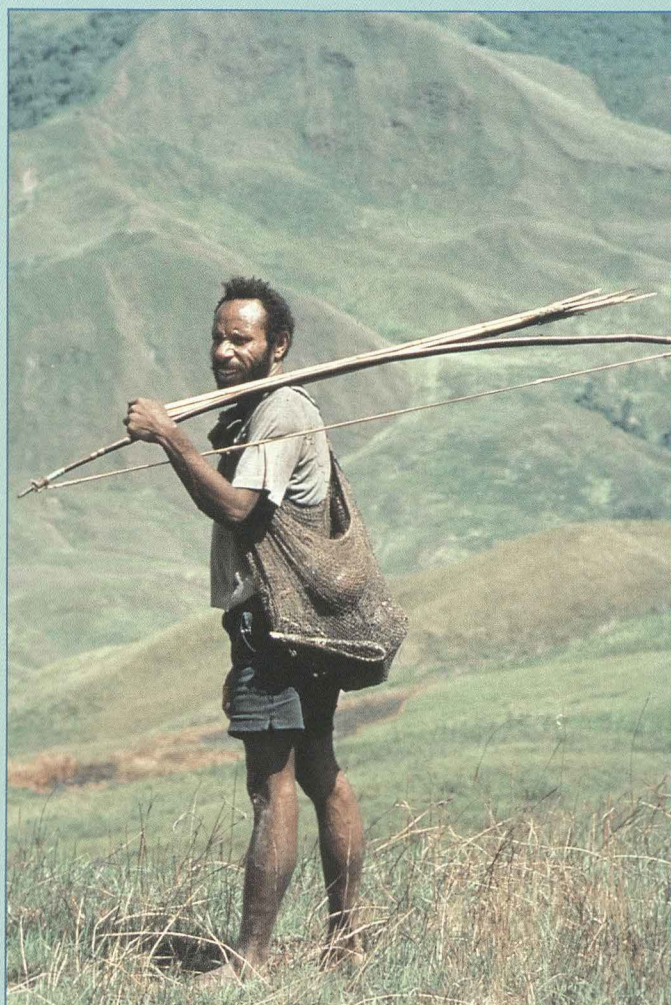
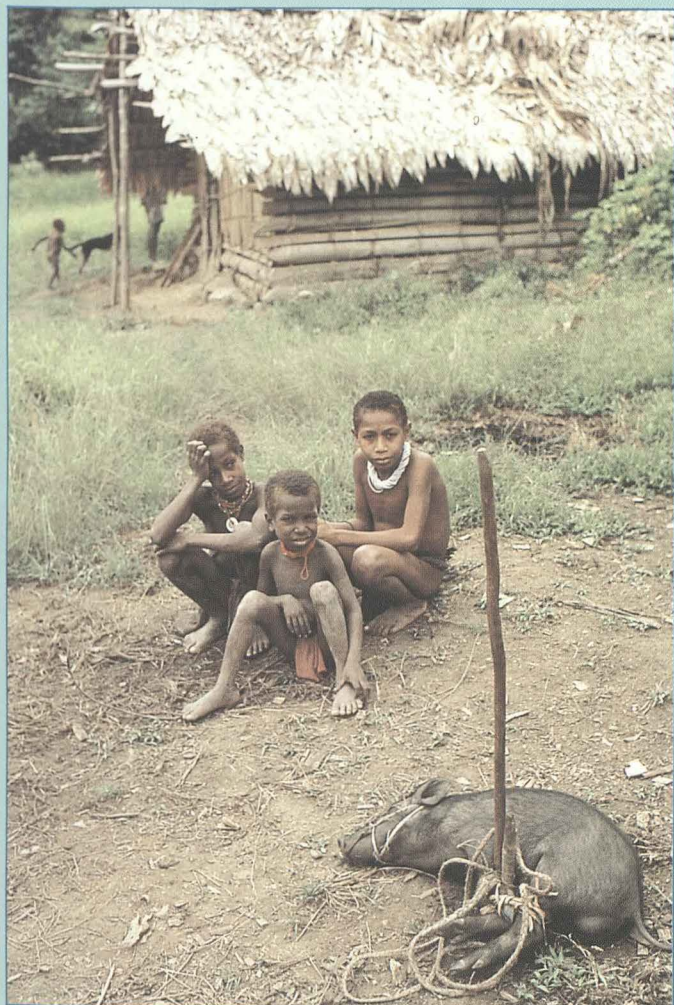
The next day, we walked south for hours through the hot grasslands and then turned east where we entered the territory of another language group, the Duna. It was higher and

colder there and the houses, built to preserve heat, were low, airtight, and smoky beyond belief. Our Hewa friends did not feel comfortable in this foreign place, so we hurried on.

A day and a half later, we arrived at Lake Kopiago, a government station with a few of the comforts of civilisation, such as sweet biscuits. We were only two days south of where we had started 10 days earlier. We paid Tison and Andrew for each day, plus a generous tip to be shared with the others.

After promises to send photographs, we said a sad goodbye. And although Philippe had not found his ideal field site, we had both enjoyed a wonderful PNG experience.

**Below left** Wisiki village children await pig kill for mourning feast.  
**below right** Well-armed hunter above the Strickland Gorge.





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# Rhythm

Story and photographs by  
Elizabeth Sandeman-Gay

The rhythm of life on Ok Birak, or the Fly River, is not exactly hectic. The industrial activity along its shores harmonises with the river's natural beauty – and it is remote from the tourist track.

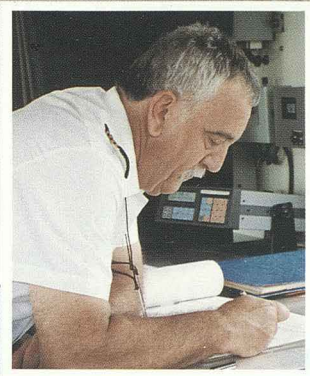
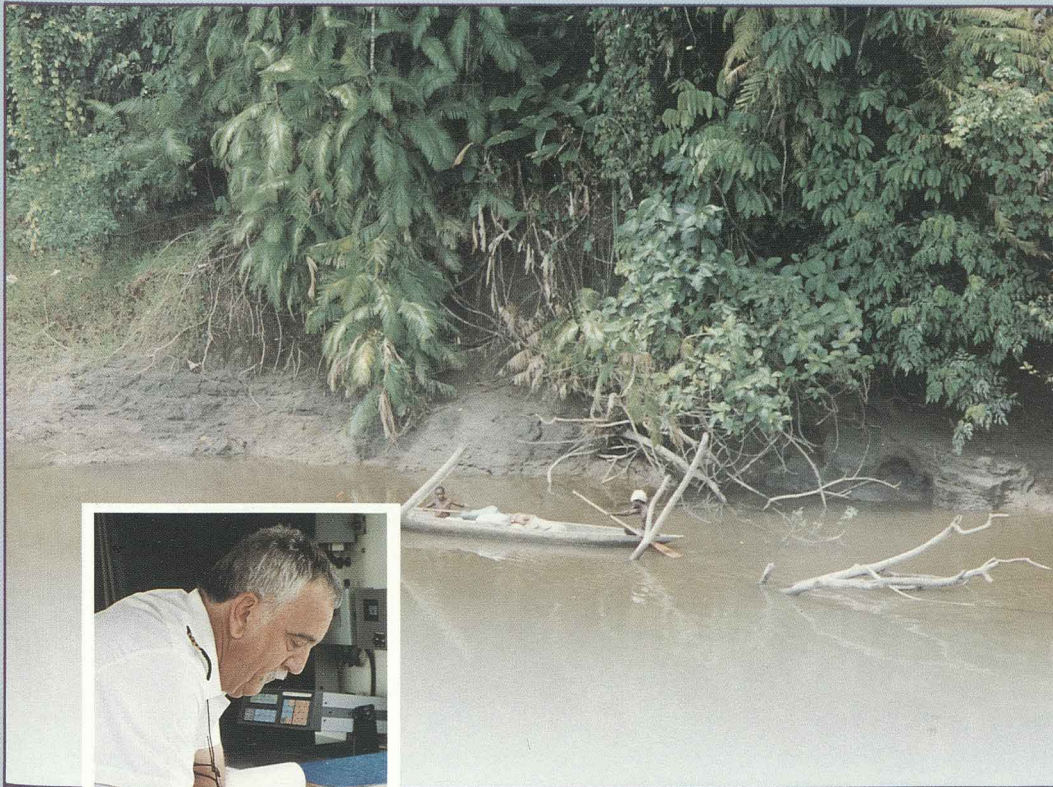
"Let the stern line go, aft." "Single up to a headline please." "Let go your headline, fo'r'd." "Lines clear, sir." "Let go, aft." "All clear, sir."

The master steadily turns the vessel away from Kiunga wharf, and heads for the distant sea. Watching out for the splashing town kids, he cautiously crosses the shallow parts of the channel, avoids the submerged concrete ramp to starboard and breathes again. It is very easy to go aground anywhere here.

The MV Obo Chief is a mini bulk-carrier which holds 2,600 tonnes of powdery copper concentrate loaded by belt over six hours. She was specially designed to voyage the sharp and shapely contours of Ok Birak, the great Fly River.

The Fly drains a catchment of about 76,000 square kilometres where the annual rainfall exceeds 8,000mm. When it rains, the river fills fast, and when it does not the river gets dangerously low.

**Top** Paddlers steady canoe against submerged tree as the Obo Chief passes. **inset** Ship's master studies navigation charts. **left** Seamen clear and clean anchor chain for departure.



# Of The River



**Right** Village at the 330-mile mark. **inset** Ship's master converses with a passing ship via radio. **lower, far right** Alongside the mother bulk carrier, MV Karabi. **lower, right** Bobcat clears last of copper concentrate from Obo Chief's hold.

At a stately 10 knots, the ship glides downstream surrounded by jungle. Around Dolly Parton's Bend, then Monkey Bend, and safely over the infamous Rock Bar. Again the master relaxes a little. The water deepens as his vessel cruises among the dense tropical vegetation that tangles skyward with creepers, vines and twisted white roots.

Daily at 0900 hours a tide pole reading of the depth over the Rock Bar is broadcast to all ships. The deck-apprentice records the reading and the position of all river ships.

Some 150 kilometres of the Fly are navigable by ships; the whole 1,760 by canoes.

Two canoes pause now in their passage across stream to let the Obo Chief pass – a single paddler standing in the back of one dugout, a family of eight and two dogs in the other.

The rhythmic pattern of

voyages for ships is governed by the slurry and conveyor belts of the Ok Tedi and Kiunga mines and by the rise and fall of water in the river. A voyage is two days down and almost three days up, water levels permitting. The pattern has constancy but one of the constants is frequent interruption.

At ARM 447 we pass a forlorn looking Kiunga Chief on her 29th day aground, an extended break in her working rhythm. Nearby a hawk, rust with white head and underside, settles on a leafless stump.

ARM is an acronym for Assumed River Miles. It is the way the Fly is measured and the way ships locate each other. Every five miles a marker – usually a white disk with red or white reflective tape – is attached to a tree.

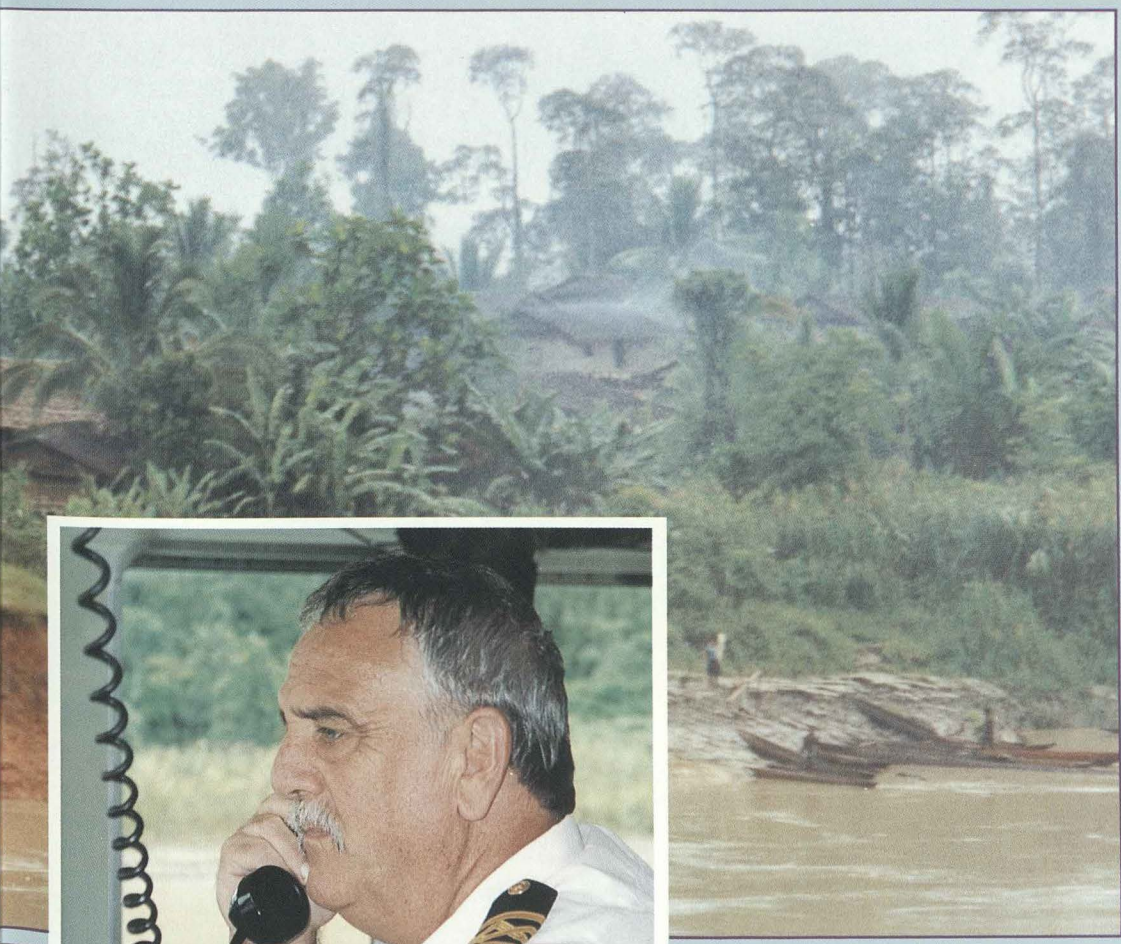
Breadfruit trees, balsas, ficas, black alders, bamboos slide past. Coconut, sago, cabbage tree, fan palms and

the shimmery split fronds of magnificent fishtail palms go quietly by. Three falcons cruise above. Further downstream, marshlands emerge and ibis and egrets dot the green.

Across the drowsy afternoon airwaves the Obo Chief receives a call. "Obo Chief, Obo Chief, Western Endeavour. My position is ARM two five seven decimal five, speed 7.75. Over." "Western Endeavour, Western Endeavour, Obo Chief. I'm at two five nine decimal two, doing 10 knots." In five minutes the two vessels will pass as they round the next bend. "Starboard to starboard, OK?" "Green to green. Romeo."

Both ships slow to avoid wash and suction. The 'blue boat' hugs the western bank at ARM 258 and Obo Chief takes the channel, starboard sides only metres apart. "Obo Chief, Obo Chief, Svenborg Guardian. My position is ..." Obo Chief





eases past the Svenborg 21 minutes later. It may not be exactly hectic but there is no time for relaxation.

At night, the pattern of work on the bridge continues by floodlight. A constant flutter of moths gleams in and out of the masthead beam that picks out logs and snags on the surface ahead. Port and starboard search-lights frame the passage. A reddish mirrored light glints mysteriously ahead in the grassy fringes of water. Gradually the thin dark shape of a canoe, and two barramundi fishermen using a fire brand for light, unfurls in the beam and dissolves again into the dark.

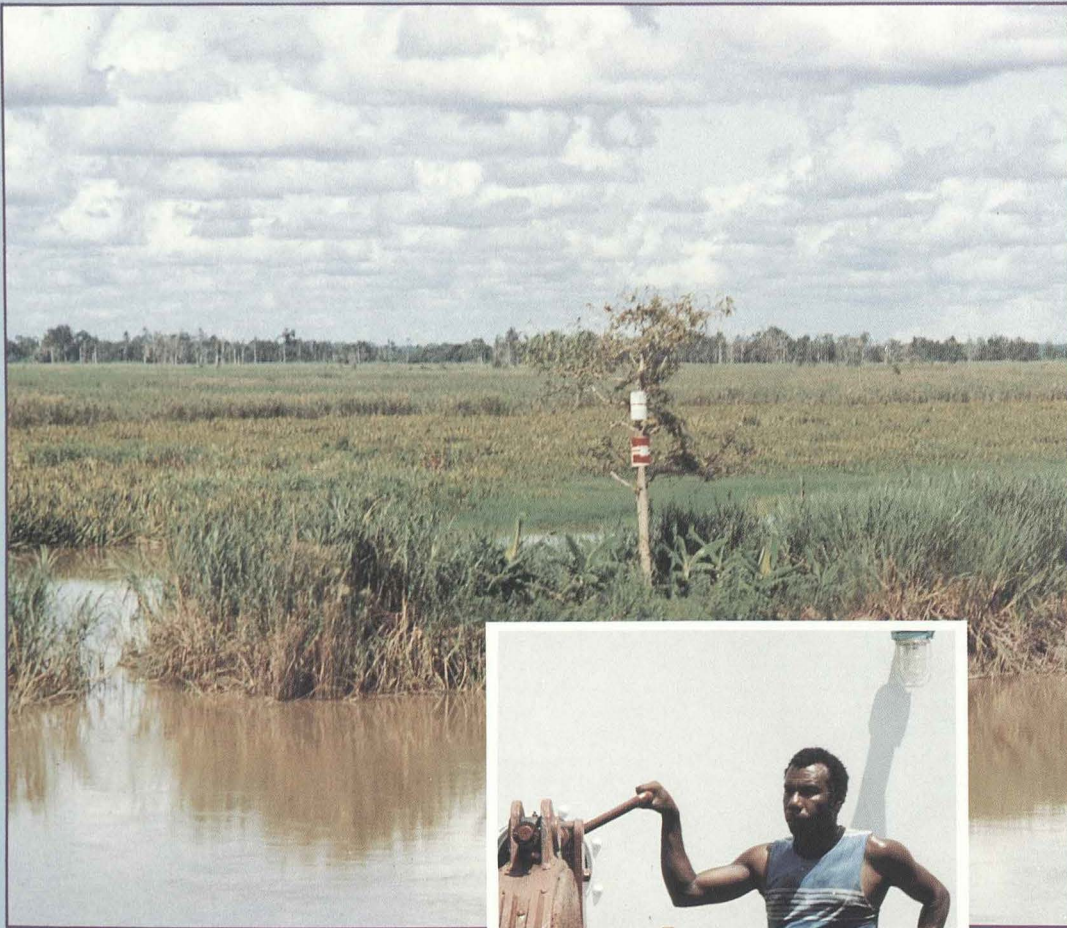
Inside the wheelhouse, luminous green tracers track the shape of the river on radar and the orange and purple of the depth sounder show how close the bottom is.

A constant chatter on the radio and occasional bleeps of the 'sat-nav' play an eerie tune. Engine revs rise in unison with the escalating clackety racket of the wheel as the helmsman turns into the curve of another bend. The orchestra of ship sounds ebbs to stillness in the straight but rises again for each curve.

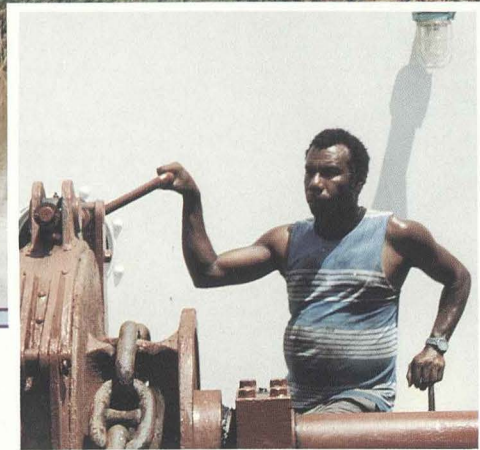
Evening of the second day sees the ship close to the river's tidal mouth. Earlier in the day, a four-metre tidal bore rushed through tearing at the banks. Whole trees are now rushing past, branches and roots reaching, ugly and menacing. For the propeller's sake the ship heads for Sumogi Island where the waters are smoother.

By radio the master learns the berth at Karabi will not be available till 0700 hours, so he waits at anchor behind Umuda Island till dawn. The moon gleams silver on the busy dark water.





Left Marshland marker denotes 170 river miles. inset Seaman works anchor winch. bottom MV Karabi's cranes unload the Obo Chief.



At sea in the morning, rain and low cloud press in. The mother ship MV Karabi, is yawing quite a bit in the swell ahead. Being berthed beside Karabi is awesome. Obo Chief's bridge-deck height is equivalent of a four-storey building, yet it is level only with the main deck of the massive mother ship, whose bridge is another four or more storeys above. The men on Obo's main deck throw the heaving lines to reach the seamen waiting above. Four 25-tonne cranes loom ready for work and the hatches are open.

The swell is enormous and both vessels creak and clang with clashing discord. Despite the huge rise and fall, the mother ship rhythmically discharges the black \$6 million cargo. For four hours, two grabs lift, swing, lower, grab, lift, swing and drop the concentrate into hatches then lift, swing, lower and grab again. For another two



hours a bobcat, lowered in, scoops the leavings into piles for the remaining grab to take.

A strangely sweet coppery perfume hangs, mixed with industrial oily smells and salt spray of the sea. Soon, the expensive dust and its heady scent will be fire-hosed away.

Back into the estuary, 100 kilometres wide, where the ARMs start from zero, Obo Chief heads upstream for Kiunga, lighter and slower. Tomorrow morning there will be a fire drill, the next day boat drill. Sister ship Bosset Chief and the Kiunga Chief, freed after 31 days aground by a rise in the Rock Bar level, pass.

Obo Chief steams again past 23 villages with their bush homes on stilts. Seamen wave to the waving people in their banana gardens or canoes and the men will call to the flirting girls on the mudflats and red earth banks. The men will spot a crocodile, and six deer will watch from a clearing surrounded by slender white trunks and filigree branches with lacework foliage.

At Kiunga wharf, Ok Tedi's shed and mountains of copper drying in clouds of steam, the sirens blast and raucous radio crackle, await the empty cargo ship. But for now all is quiet and beautiful nature. This is the rhythmic and constant but constantly changing Fly River, Ok Birak.



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