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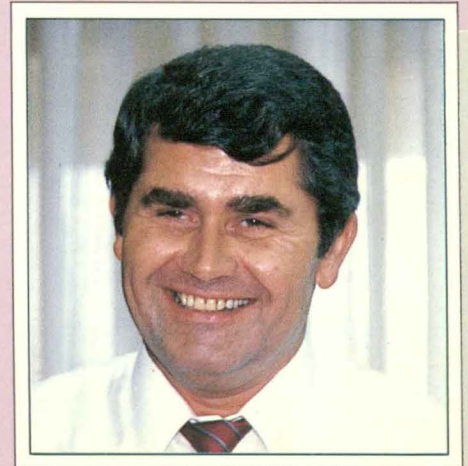
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Welcome Aboard,

Compensation payments between Papua New Guinean tribal clans have been a way of life in resolving differences big and small over the years. These ceremonies result in the offending clan or group compensating the other group with anything from money to pigs to cuscus to birds to almost anything that could be considered currency. This month Nancy Cohen describes how she witnessed a recent ceremony.

Come and explore with us this and other stories and enjoy your flight.

Dieter Seefeld
General Manager &
Chief Executive



Dieter Seefeld
General Manager &
Chief Executive

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Cover: Clan women witness Highlands compensation ceremony.
Photograph by Nancy Cohen.

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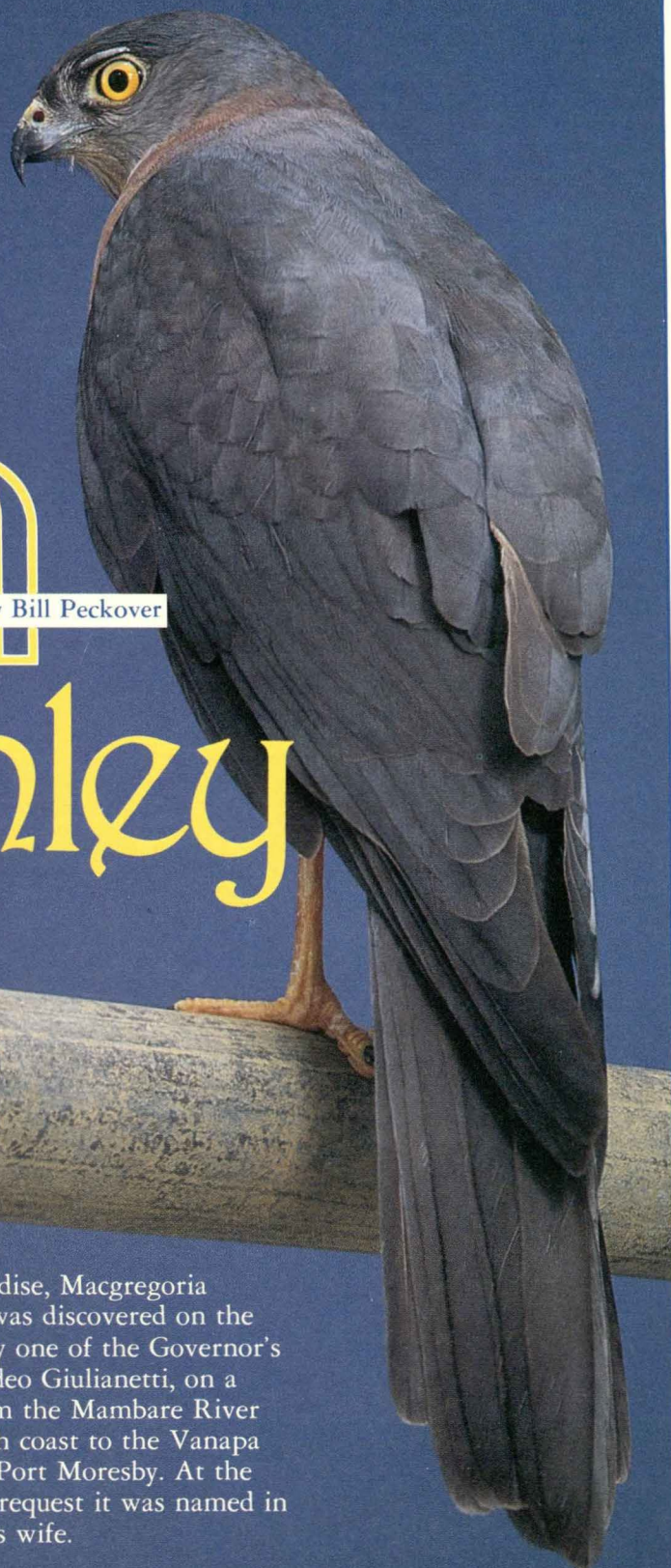
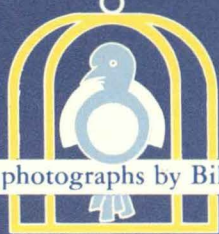
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Old Scratchley

Story and photographs by Bill Peckover



Named after Sir Peter Scratchley, the pioneer Special Commissioner (Governor) of British New Guinea, Mount Scratchley also has an association with Sir William MacGregor, the first man to carry the official title of Governor.

MacGregor's direct association with Mt Scratchley is MacGregor's

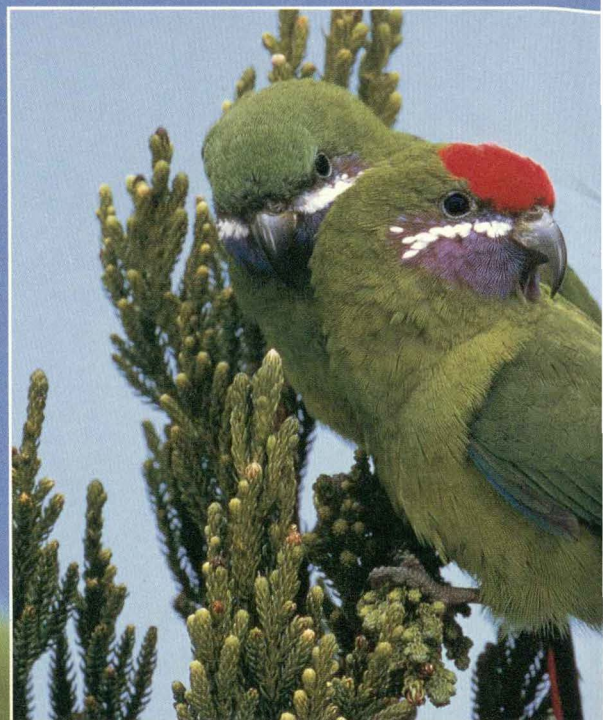
bird of paradise, *Macgregoria pulchra*. It was discovered on the mountain by one of the Governor's party, Amedeo Giulianetti, on a journey from the Mambare River on the north coast to the Vanapa River near Port Moresby. At the Governor's request it was named in honor of his wife.

The microwave repeater station near the Mt Scratchley summit has been my base for four visits at different times of the year to survey its bird life and to learn something about the behavior of MacGregor's bird of paradise. On my first and shortest visit of less than a week, I was amazed at the quantity and variety of birds at such a high altitude, 3,570 metres (11,500 feet). Although MacGregor's bird of paradise was seen every day on this visit and at some times on every subsequent visit I've not been lucky enough to photograph it.

On Scratchley as elsewhere, alpine growth is really quite stunted and is more prolific close to the ground. There are usually quite high concentrations of insects near ground level; one result, of course, is a higher proportion of ground frequenting birds than is usual at lower altitudes.

Brown Goshawk

Within an hour of my sighting a pair of Pacific swallows at the summit, many hundreds of metres above what the text books say is their range, I spotted a brown goshawk. It flew in to perch on one of the three-metre-high pipes of the repeater station's solar arrays. He looked me over, scanned the ground around the station for a full three minutes or so, then flew to an emergent tree in a patch of nearby moss forest. I guess the purpose of his visit was to catch an unwary New Guinea pipit among those which feed regularly on the helicopter pad. This brown goshawk also belied the text books which say his species stay below 1,700 metres.



Right Sooty Honeyeater. **inset, right** Whiskered Lorikeets.

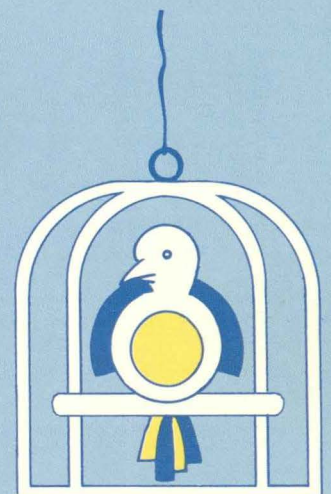


Whiskered Lorikeet

The male has the scarlet cap. Both are extremely handsome little, almost tiny, birds. Often heard but seldom seen on Scratchley. It commonly overflies the repeater station knoll. Its unique squeaky calls and the whistling sound of its rapid wing beats sometimes reveal its unseen presence in the mists as it flies past. These lorikeets feed anywhere, at the tops of forest trees, within the forest canopy and on flowering or fruiting heathland trees. The flowers of trees and small fruits are its food.

Sooty Honeyeater

Another common bird of the mountain. They move around singularly in the moss forest gleaning insects from the canopy and down almost to the ground. The name honeyeater is a misnomer; all or at least nearly all of its food intake is insects. Although more often found in the moss forest, it comes out into the heath to feed in the shrubbery. This species seems to have a resident population on the repeater station knoll, about the same number were seen each day on all four visits.





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Dimorphic Fantail

The photo is not an exaggeration, the pose is typical of this tiny insect eater. It is quite a common endemic bird of PNG mountains where it occurs above 1,800 metres. However it is not common at the upper limits of its range; on Mt Scratchley I encountered only this single individual. The name, dimorphic, denotes there are two color phases, a light and a dark. This is the dark phase.

Crested Berrypecker

The most common, and perhaps the most beautiful, bird on the mountain. A truly lovely bird to watch. Its delicate and subdued colors make it one of PNG's most attractive and handsome birds. Moving around singularly, in pairs and sometimes in flocks of up to about 15 individuals, it was seen every day, on all visits, feeding in the heath or the moss forest. In the heath, where it feeds in the afternoons and early mornings, its favored food was the orange colored berries of a small leafy shrub. These berries were plentiful in October and November when the larger flocks were seen. In April most of the berries were young and green and, at this time, crested berrypeckers were seen only singularly or in pairs.

Regent Whistler

One of the very handsome birds of PNG moss forests. This is the male. As usual where there is a sexual plumage difference the female is a much plainer bird. Regent whistlers are common in the mountains. They have a large altitudinal range, from about 1,350 to above 3,500 metres, but like the dimorphic fantail they are not common toward the upper range limit. The bird photographed was the only one encountered on Mt Scratchley, although I have seen a



Top *Dimorphic fantail.* **bottom** *Crested berrypecker.*

pair with young about the same altitude on Mt Strong. A slowmoving bird of the upper and mid strata of forest canopies, they feed entirely on insects gleaned from branches and leaves.

Black Flyrobin

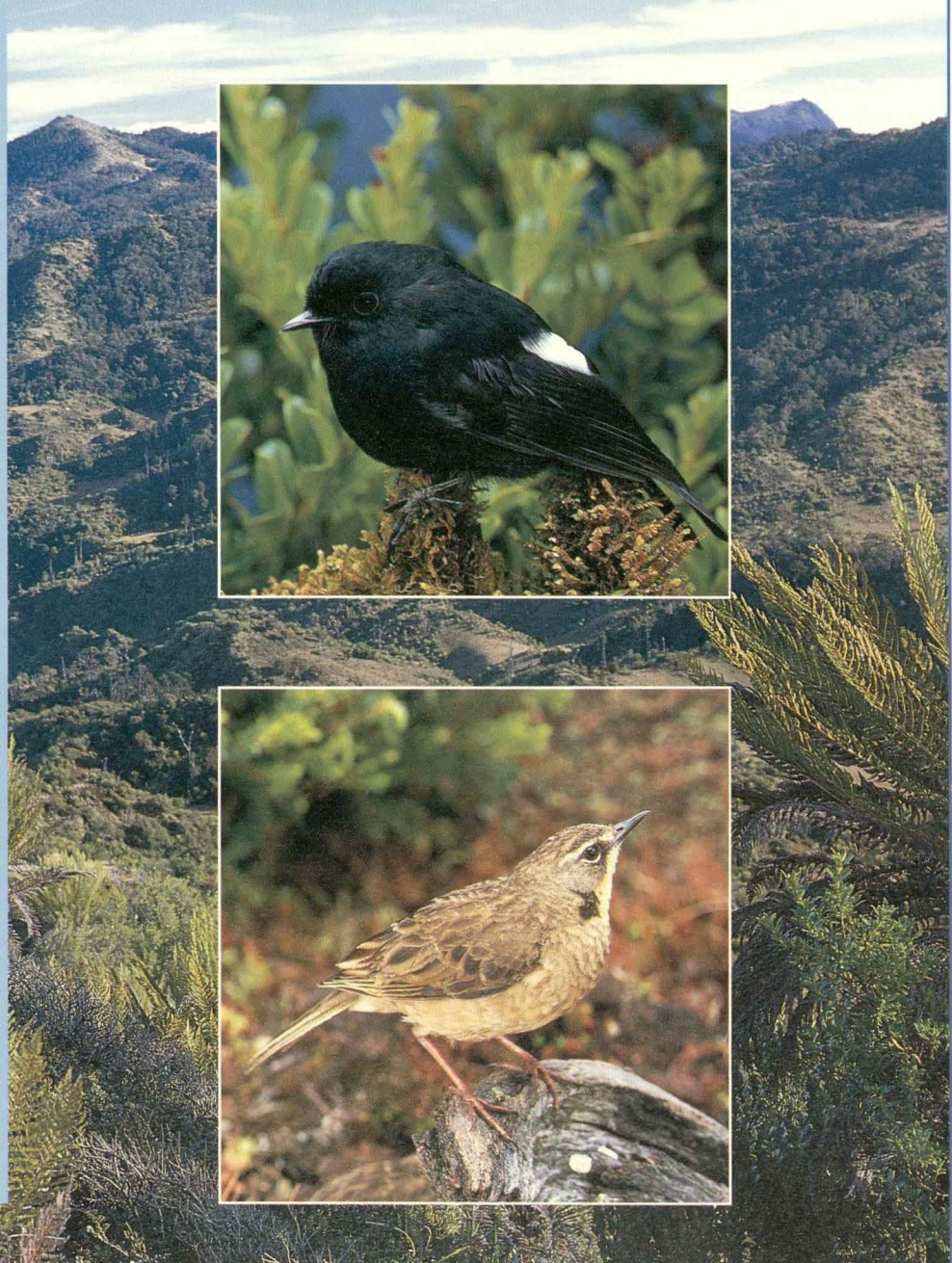
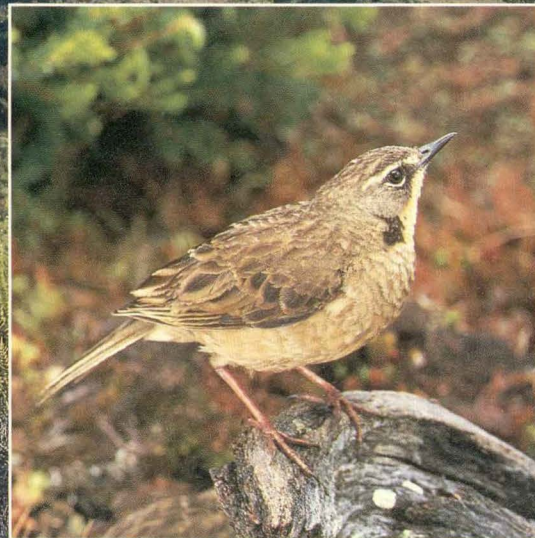
My first acquaintance with this black and white sprite was at Tomba on Mt Hagen where it can be seen daily along abandoned timber snigging trails foraging and feeding on insects, sometimes on the ground, sometimes on a perch near the ground and sometimes clinging sideways to the trunk of a tree. On Mt Scratchley it seems to be equally at home within the forest as in the heath, where it is a lot easier to observe. It won't allow one too close and will move out of sight with a downhill glide to behind a not-distant bush.

New Guinea Pipit

The New Guinea pipit is an open-country, ground bird, frequenting only grasslands and heath. Mostly seen in pairs but at times I have seen up to about a dozen birds feeding and moving as a flock. While foraging, individuals will come up off the ground onto the top of a shrub, a dead tree limb, a rock, or other vantage point to scan the countryside and at times give its trilling whistling calls. A favored feeding spot for both insects and seeds is the repeater station grounds and its helicopter pads. The nonchalant visit of the brown goshawk indicates this may be a spot regularly visited to enjoy an occasional meal of New Guinea pipit.



Top Regent Whistler. **middle** Black Flyrobin. **bottom** New Guinea Pipit. **background** Mt. Scratchley landscape.



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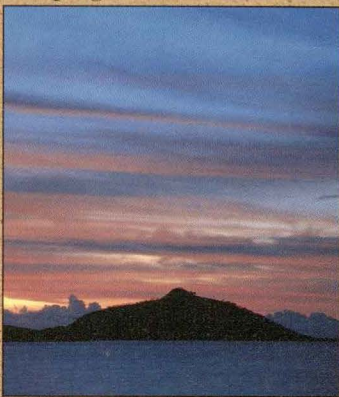
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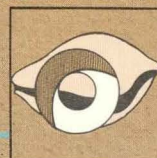


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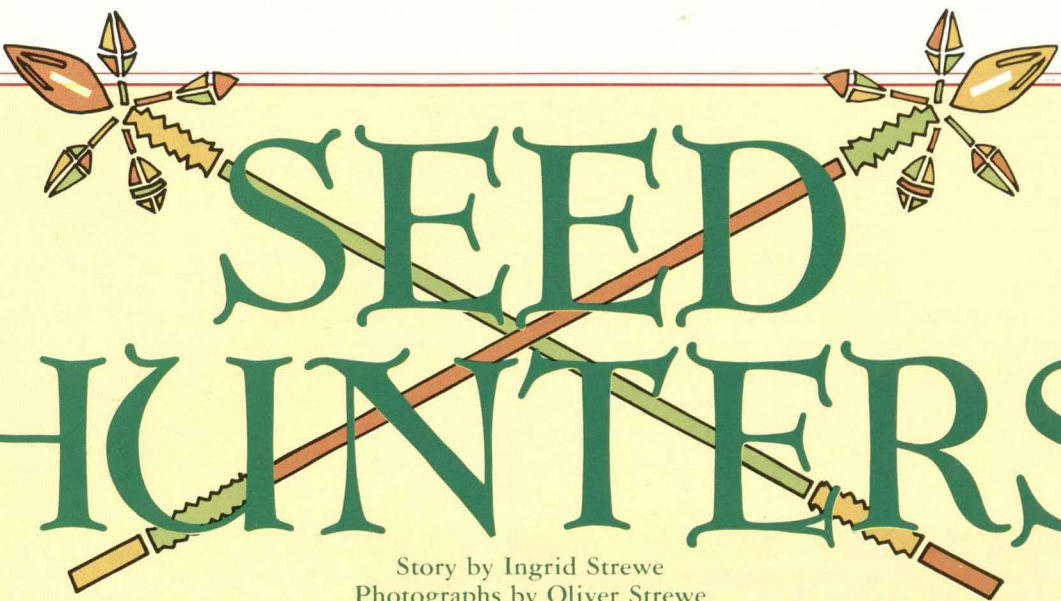
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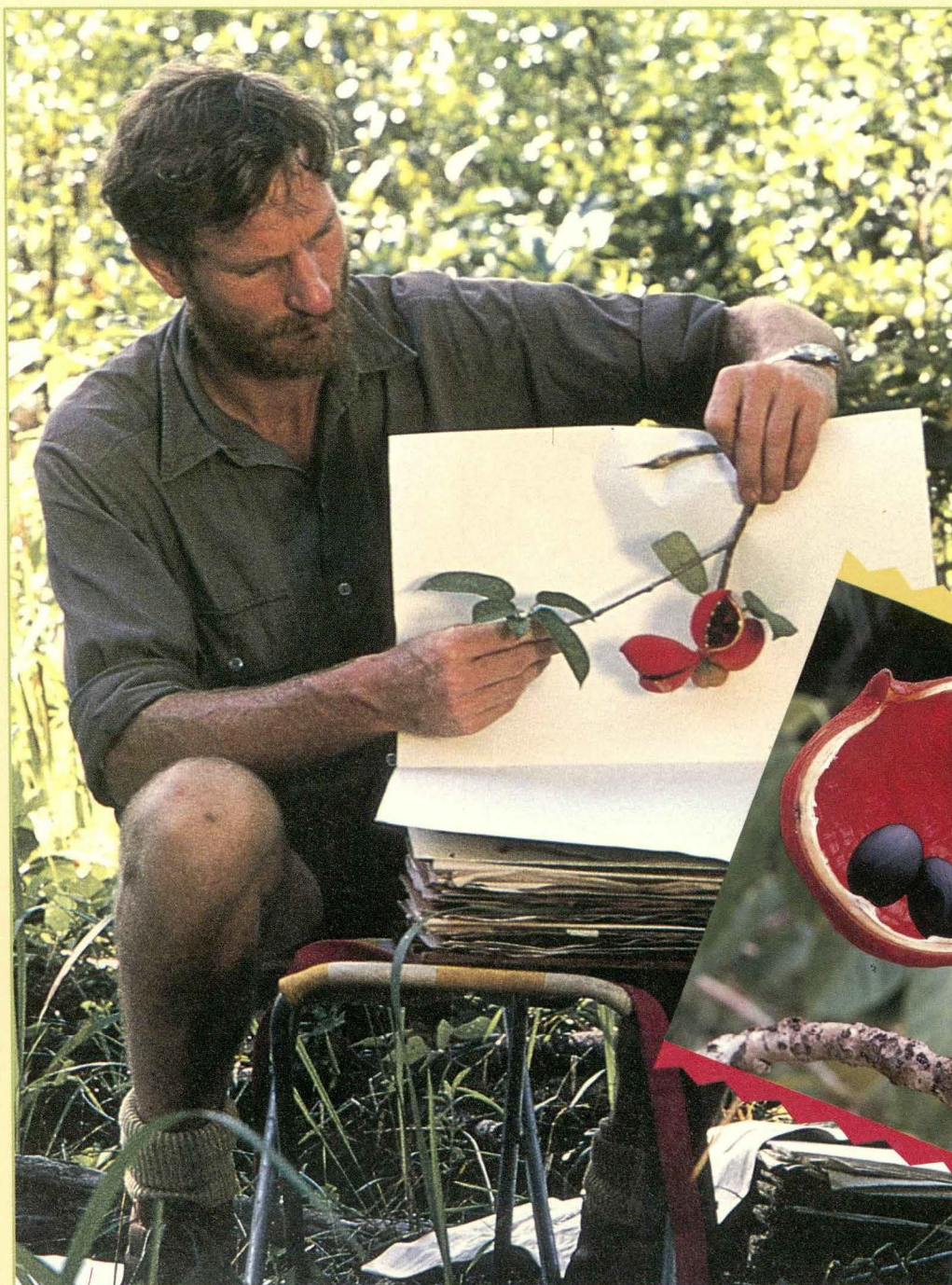


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SEED HUNTERS

Story by Ingrid Strewé
Photographs by Oliver Strewé



Tree Seed Centre scientists from Canberra have made two expeditions in the past two years into the hot humid Oriomo Plateau region in Western Province, Papua New Guinea, collecting seed from several trees, in particular *Acacia mangium*. Known in Australia as a fairly scrubby little tree the *Acacia mangium* grows straight and tall in PNG.

Left Seed hunter, Brian Gunn, pressing a flower in the field. **inset** Typical tropical tree seed pod.



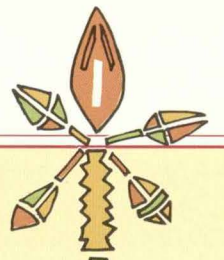
Last year, Maurice McDonald and Brian Gunn flew into Daru, the provincial capital and administrative centre of the Western Province of PNG, for their second visit in two years. They had with them enough equipment to make an independent expedition into Western Province, including 4,000 rounds of ammunition for two rifles, used to shoot down seed-laden branches.

McDonald and Gunn hired three boats in Daru to take them up the Oriomo River to the area where they intended to concentrate their collections. Demand for seed from this area is particularly high because of its superior growth rates.

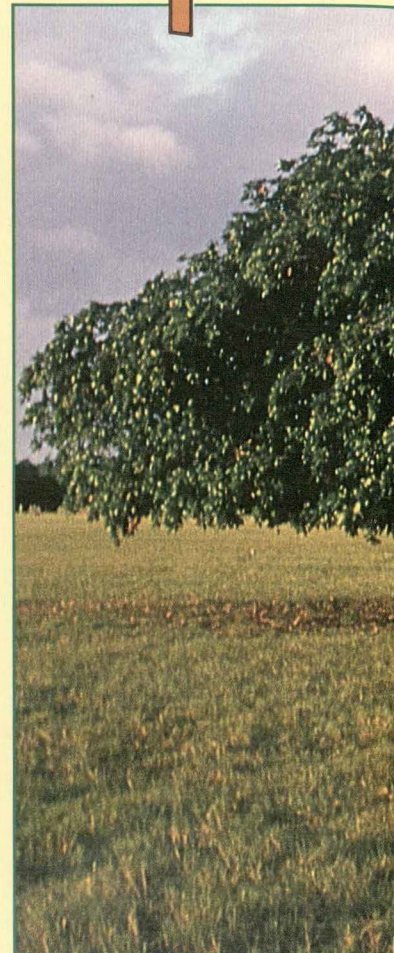
They were fortunate to find very large crops and engaged the local villagers to make extensive seed collections.

Some had done the work before during the previous expedition. All were good collectors as they knew the tree species well.

The acacia species are in high demand for pulp, reforestation after shifting cultivation and soil stabilisation following logging in rain forest. Requests for seed from PNG is particularly high and is increasing. There is rising



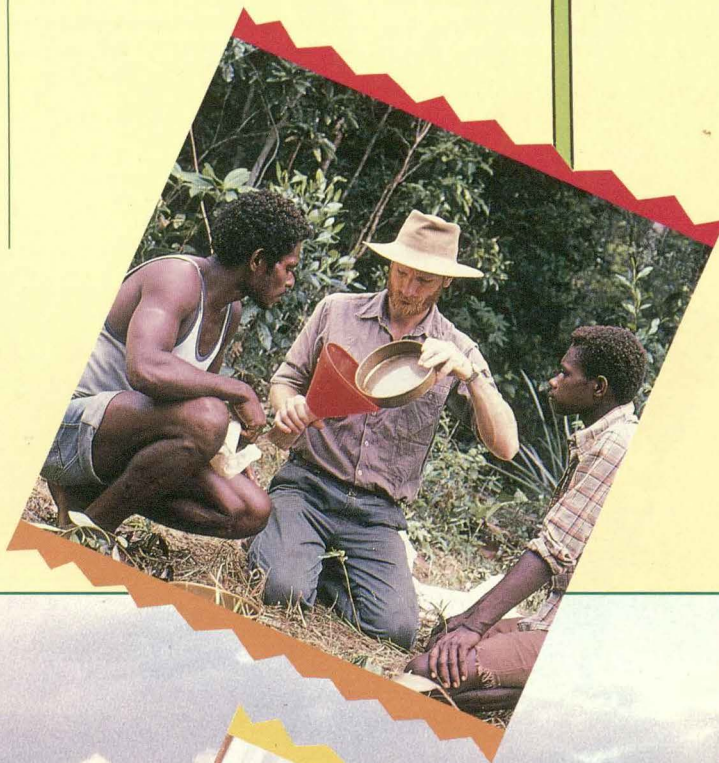
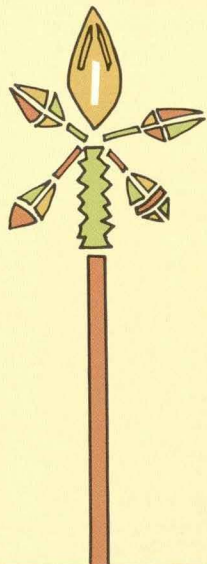
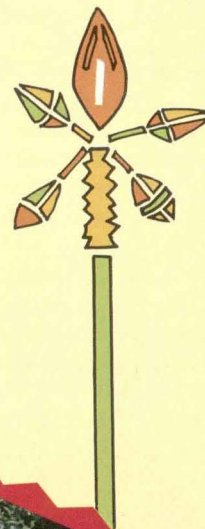
Left Oriomo Plateau villagers bring in seed pods for drying.





demand from countries in the wet humid tropics as acacias' natural role is as secondary forest growth. Disturbed or destroyed forest must pass through several stages, gradually returning to rainforest condition. The rapidly growing acacia shades out the useless bladey imperata grass, enriches the soil (fixing nitrogen) and nurses other rain forest species as they recolonise sites. In some sterile areas of Thailand, Malaysia, Laos, the Philippines and Vietnam these species offer the only hope of ensuring a continuing supply of high quality timber and aiding rainforest regrowth.

Arid zones such as West Africa have different problems that are being overcome by the same species. Here there is a heavy human and animal pressure on the landscape and although the native acacias are useful they are slow growing and are no longer coping with demand. Australian and PNG species, already popular in places like Senegal and the



Clockwise, from top Acacia seed pods; Brian Gunn cleaning seeds with villagers; acacia flowers; Oriomo Plateau landscape.

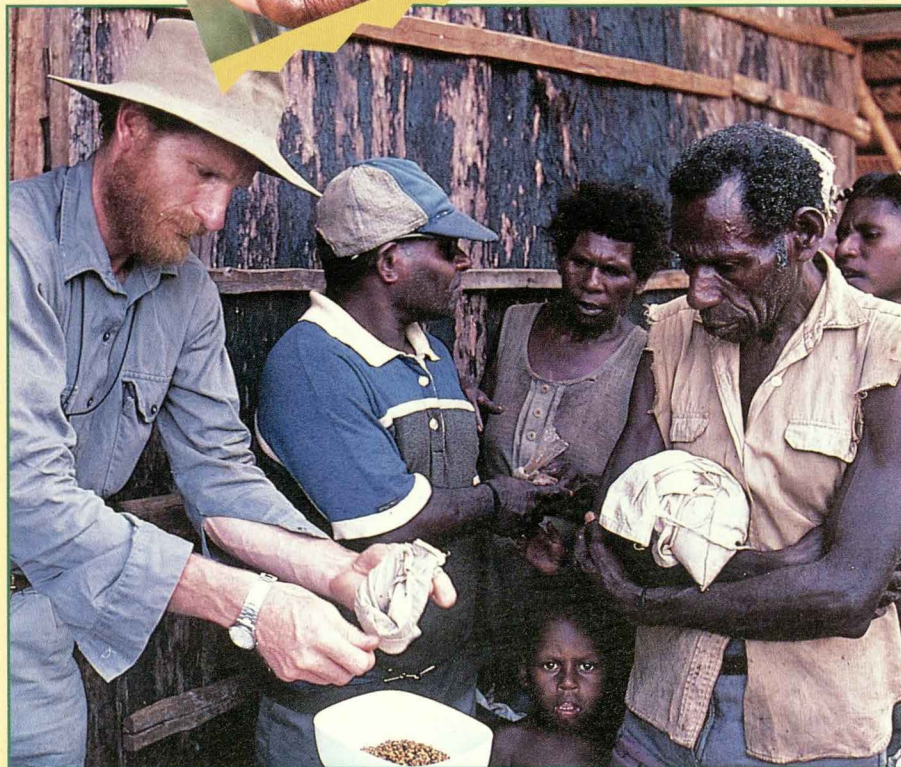
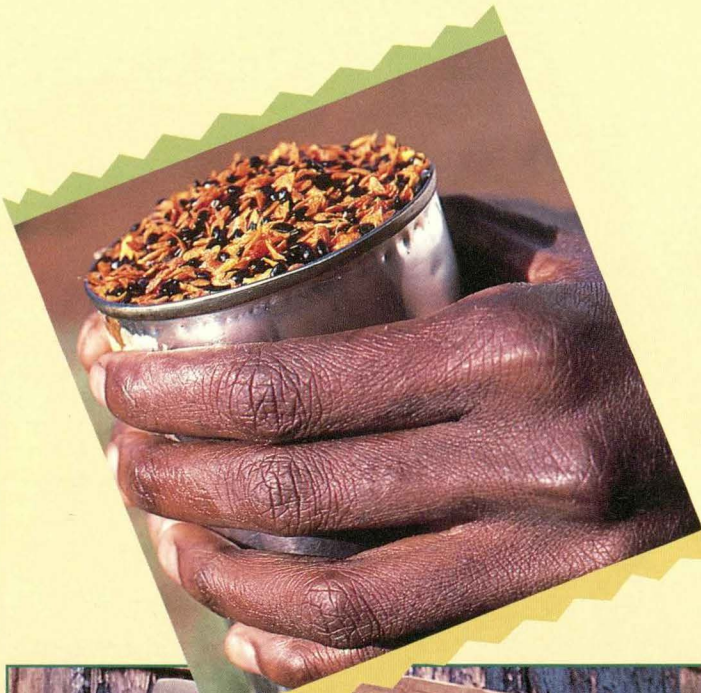
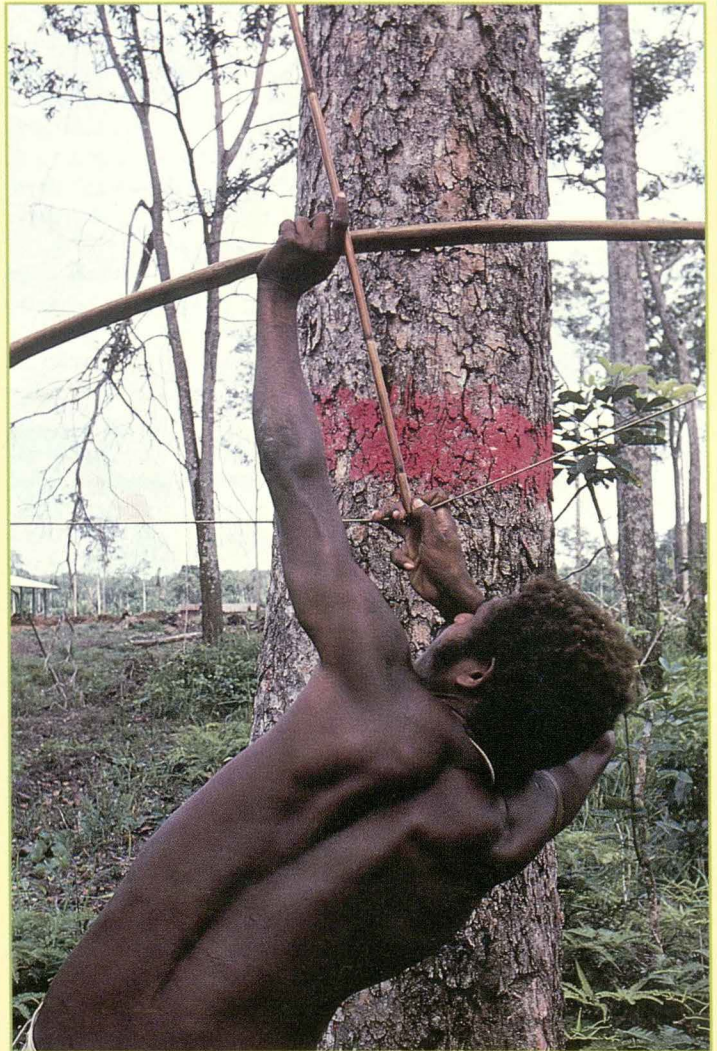


Cape Verde Islands, are being planted as protection around native species. Then when fuel wood is needed the nomadic herdspeople are more likely to cut down an Australian acacia than the slow-growing local which is the better fodder tree for their herds.

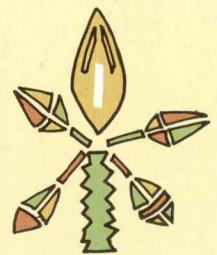
The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates that almost one third of the world's population depends solely on wood for cooking and heating. In developing countries a massive 86

per cent of the annual consumption of wood is used for fuel and the FAO has forecast a deficit of more than 100 million hectares of plantation by the year 2000.

Right Pigeon hunter Nike Nike takes aim (tree marked for preservation). **below** *Acacia mangium* seed.

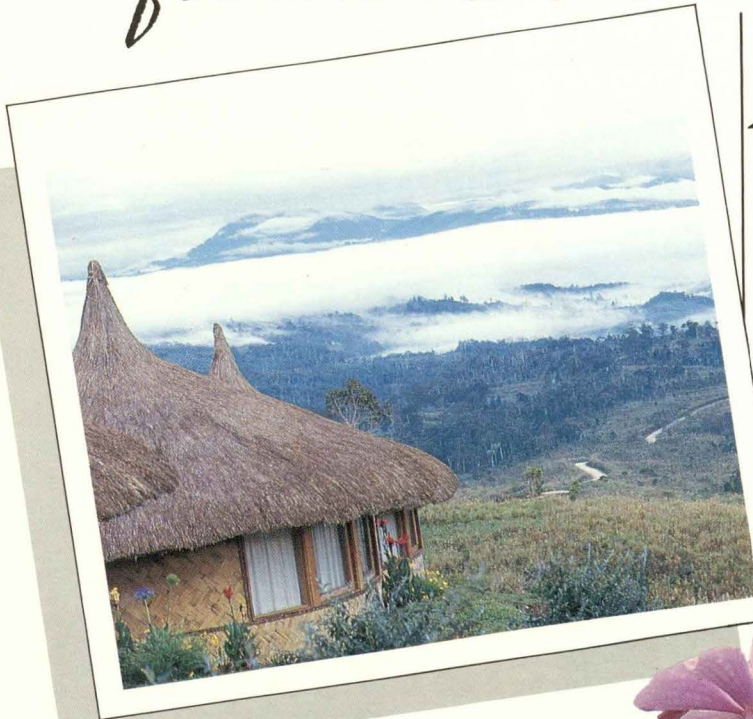


Left Brian Gunn buying seed from collectors.



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Ambua Lodge, at 7000 feet, has its head in the clouds and looks down on a valley that first saw Europeans less than 50 years ago. Completed in 1985 the lodge has 20 spacious cabins with private modern bathrooms and huge picture windows that look out over the Tari basin. This is home to the Huli people whose body decoration is still a part of everyday custom - bold,



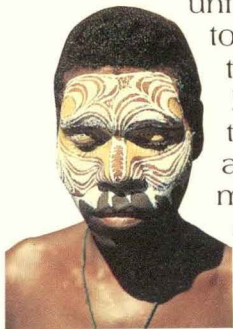
dignified and quite startling. The surrounding mountains are frequented by 13 species of the Bird of Paradise and these can be seen in the orchid studded forests behind Ambua Lodge. Send for our brochure "Papua New Guinea - tomorrow it won't be the same"



Karawari Lodge takes its name from a tributary of the legendary Sepik River. It is renowned the world over as a luxurious base occupying an



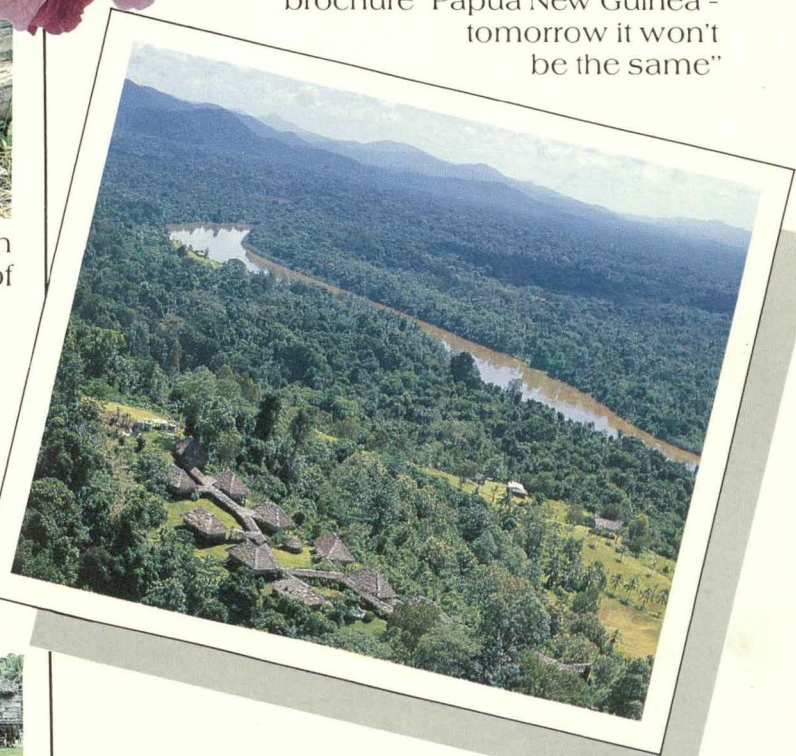
unforgettable setting from which to explore the unique culture of the Sepik basin. The main lodge is designed as a traditional haus tambaran and guests enjoy all the modern comforts of bar, dining and swimming pool, etc. amid stunning examples of Sepik sculpture and folk law.



Karawari is built on a ridge, high above the river, the view goes on forever. Each of the 20 guest rooms have



private bathrooms and verandahs - the ideal place for early morning tea with fresh cinnamon rolls. The river is your roadway to villages and people who delight to show you their culture and skills - a glimpse of life generations from the 20th century.



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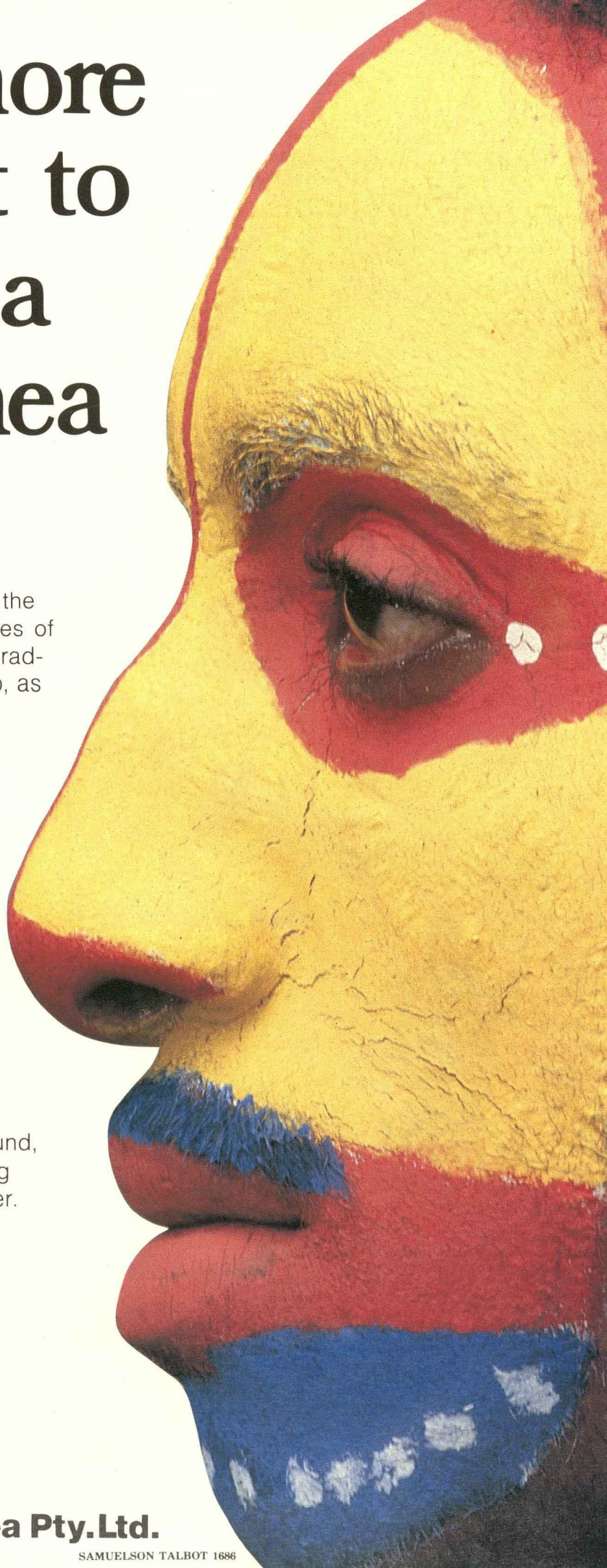
ICI Plastics wrap everything from seedlings on a New Ireland plantation to vegetables in a Port Moresby supermarket.

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All in all, there's a lot more holding ICI DULUX together than just paint. Rather like Papua New Guinea.



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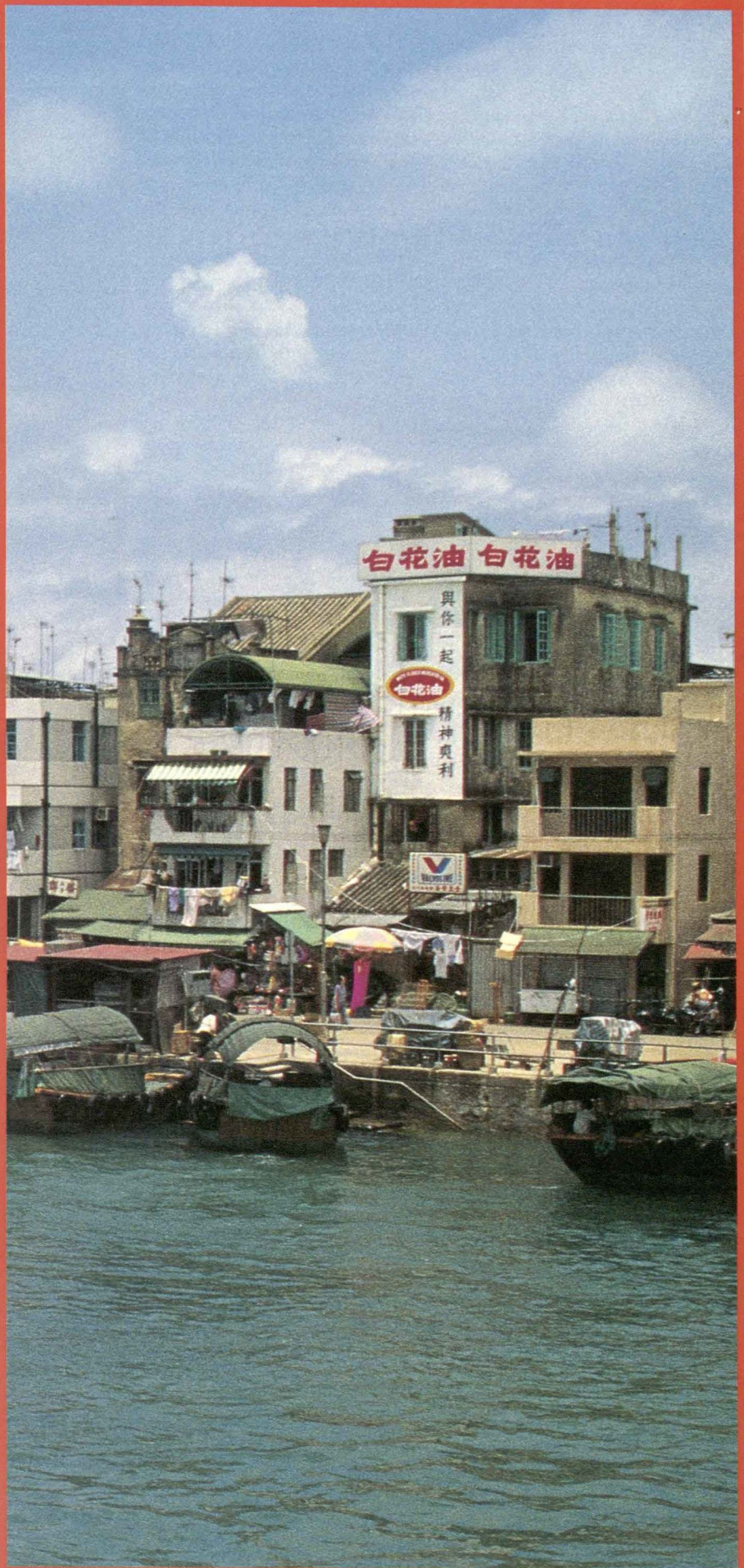
Hong Kong

香港

Story and photographs by Roger Hunter

'Foreign Mud', as the 19th Century Chinese referred to opium, and the conflicts between Britain and China surrounding the trade of this commodity, undoubtedly led to the formation of what is today one of the world's largest ports.

Hong Kong's growth as a major trading entity must also be attributed to Britain's determination in the 1840s to gain a secure trading base in southern China. Now, almost a century and a half after the Union Jack was first raised upon a once barren, rocky island in the South China Sea, what must be the world's most fascinating and successful emporium has evolved there.



In spite of Britain's negotiated 'eviction notice' of June 30, 1997, the Royal Crown Colony of Hong Kong appears to prosper as much today as at any other time in its history. Evidence of this prosperity can be seen just about anywhere throughout the territory in the form of soaring new apartment buildings and commercial highrises. Hotel occupancy is very high and visitors to this shoppers' paradise are advised to secure accommodation well in advance. New hotels are being built and many more are planned in the next few years to cater for the increasing tide of visitors.

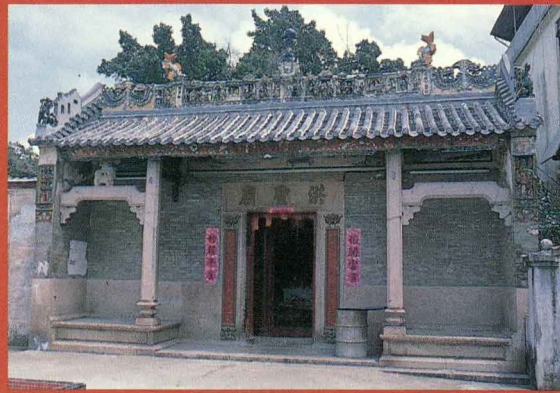
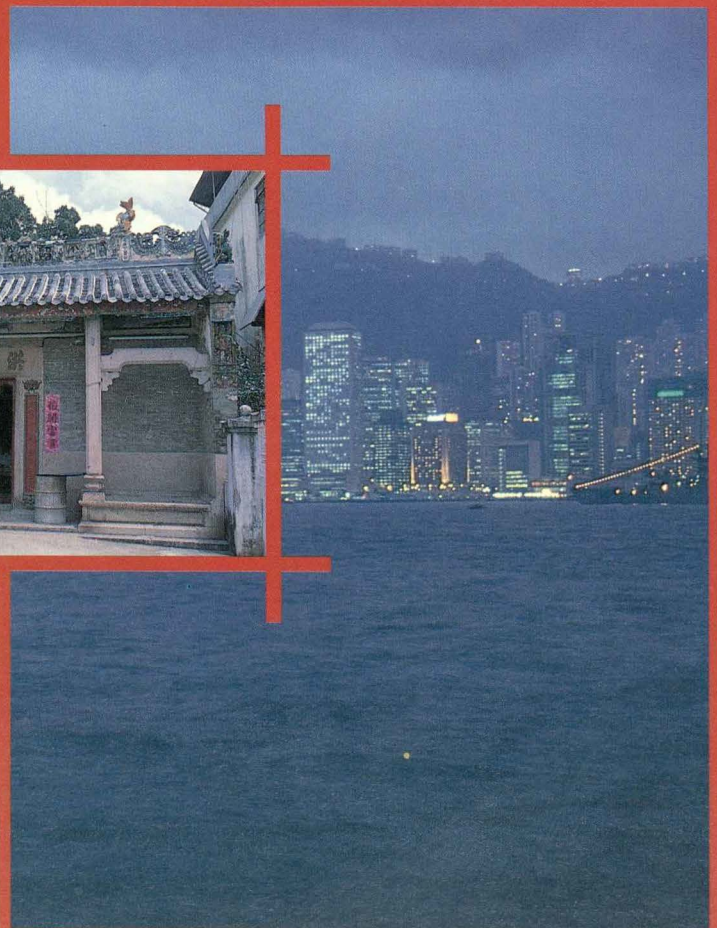
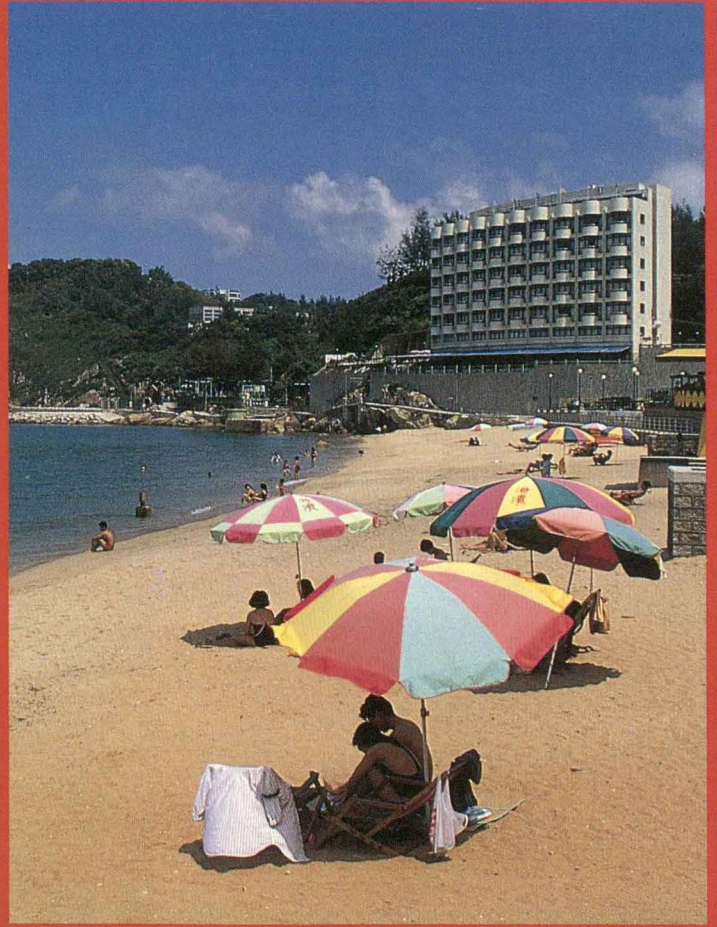
Most tourists arriving in Hong Kong head for the Tsimshatsui District on the southern tip of the Kowloon Peninsula. Here can be found the greater concentration of larger hotels and streets packed with shops offering an endless assortment of merchandise mostly at duty free prices. The area also has many restaurants, the majority specialising in Cantonese style cooking. Many other ethnic Asian restaurants including Japanese, Korean and Indian are also well represented here and elsewhere in Hong Kong.

Tsimshatsui is dissected by Nathan Road which starts near the waterfront between the gracious Peninsula Hotel (built 1928) and the more recent Sheraton Hotel and continues north about 3.5kms to Boundary Street. North of Tsimshatsui, Nathan Road passes through the Yaumatei district noted for its huge typhoon shelter, home for many of the colony's boat people and the night markets of Temple Street. After sunset this otherwise ordinary street transforms into a colorful and crowded bazaar where bargaining for the wide variety of knick-knacks, clothing, toys and gadgets can be as much fun as walking through and soaking up the atmosphere.

From Yaumatei, Nathan Road runs into the district of Mongkok. A wander around the side streets near the intersection of Nathan Road and Argyle Street offers interesting shopping away from the main tourist beat and bargains not found in the lower and somewhat more expensive end of the Golden Mile. Nearby is Hong Lok Street, a fascinating alley crammed full of birds for sale along with timber cages from the simple to the very ornate and fresh food in the form of all kinds of jumping and crawling insects to keep the birds happy.

Perhaps the best and cheapest way of viewing the street life of Hong Kong Island is from the top deck of one of the vintage double decker trams. These brightly painted mobile billboards rattle and shake as they lurch their way from Kennedy Town in the west to Shau Kei Wan in the east. While the trams are

Top Main beach, Cheung Chau Island. **bottom** Hong Kong by night. **inset** A temple.



Symbol for "tea"



confined to the main roads, the fascinating side streets, especially in Central and Western Districts, should be explored on foot.

Wing On Street, dubbed locally as Cloth Alley, is devoted entirely to shops selling bolts of textiles of every description. In neighboring Western District, Man Wa Lane is the home of many chop makers. Chops, or name stamps, are carved from ivory, jade, wood and stone and are testament to the Chinese love of the art of calligraphy.

Hong Kong's famous snake shops on Hillier and Jervois streets present yet another curious facet of life in the colony. Chinese believe that a tonic of snake venom mixed with wine keeps out winter chills.

No visit to the British Territory would be complete without a visit to Victoria Peak via the Peak Tramway. Early

European settlers, looking for respite from the summer heat, made the journey in coolie-powered sedan chairs until the tramway opened in 1888. To the uninitiated, this world-renowned cablecar ride can be somewhat unnerving as the carriage claws its way, seemingly vertical at times, to the upper terminus, stopping occasionally along the way to let off passengers. The reward for this nail-biting excursion is the spectacular panorama stretching from Macau to China. When planning a visit to the Peak careful attention should be paid to the prevailing weather. Clouds and swirling mist can interrupt the magnificent views.

Nestled on the shore of a pretty bay on Hong Kong Island's south side is Stanley Village. Once the haunt of 18th Century pirates, Stanley is now famous for its market, drawing thousands of bargain hunters weekly to its shaded alleys. On offer are the latest fashions (mostly seconds or over-runs), brass objects, porcelain and an almost limitless display of locally made gadgets and

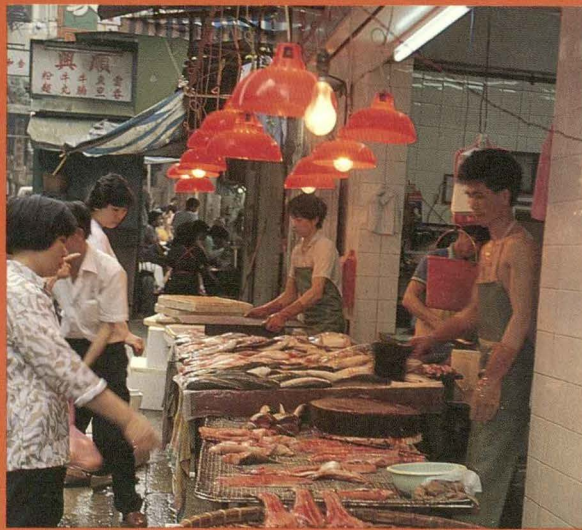
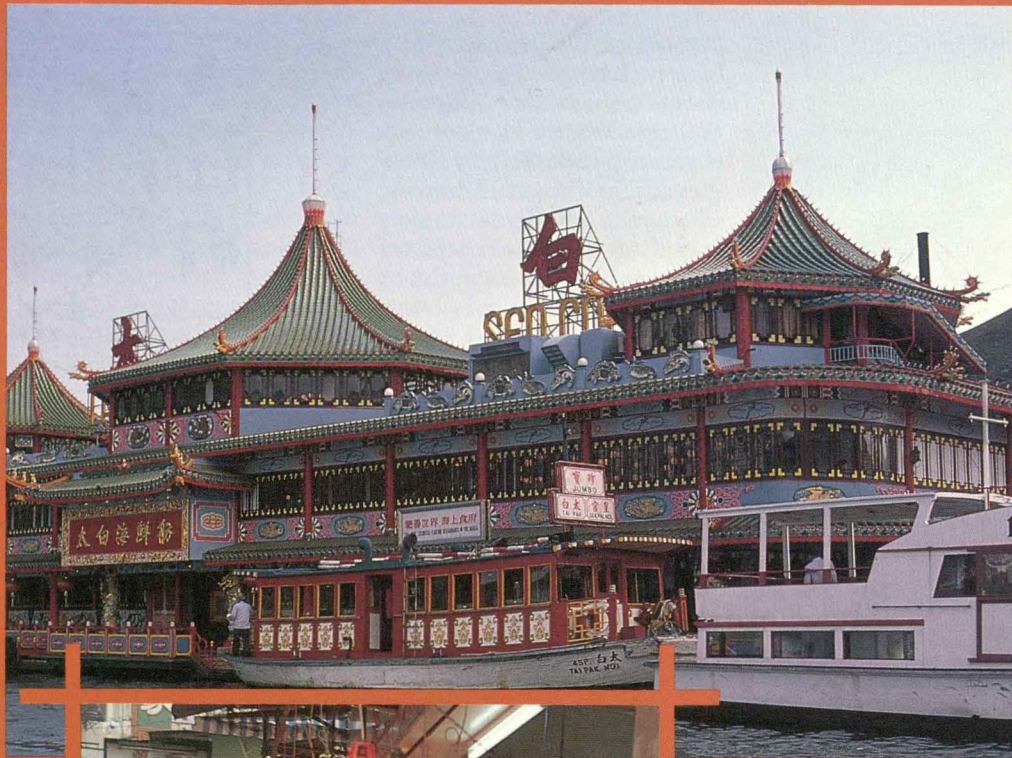


Symbol for "wine"



Right Hong Kong Island tram. below Fishing Junks.





Top Floating restaurant, Aberdeen.
above Fish market.

What visitors to Hong Kong rarely experience is a trip to some of the colony's outlying islands. Of the 235 within the British Territory, Lantau (the largest) and Cheung Chau, both easily accessible by regular ferry services from Central District, offer an escape from the cacophony of Kowloon and Hong Kong Island.

Before China opened its borders to world tourism, the New Territories of Hong Kong gave outsiders the only impression of what rural life was like behind the 'bamboo curtain'. Stretching from Boundary Street on the Kowloon Peninsula to the Samchun River on the Chinese border to the north, the New Territories comprise 585 of the colony's 640 square kilometres. Although still an important supplier of farm produce to Hong Kong, the rapidly changing New Territories provide much needed space for the colony's mushrooming housing and industrial estates. However, the visitor to this region can still find traditional walled villages and temples amidst the fish ponds, duck farms and vegetable gardens scattered through the countryside.

Only seven years remain before Britain is scheduled to return sovereignty of this jewel in the South China Sea, to China. Exactly what impact this will have on the future of the colony and its people remains a subject of intense speculation both in Britain and Hong Kong.

curios. There are numerous eating places and a couple of English style pubs along the waterfront.

A few kilometres along the coast to the south-west is Ocean Park. Since opening in 1977, the park has evolved through added attractions into one of the finest oceanariums in the world and is Hong Kong's single most popular tourist venue.

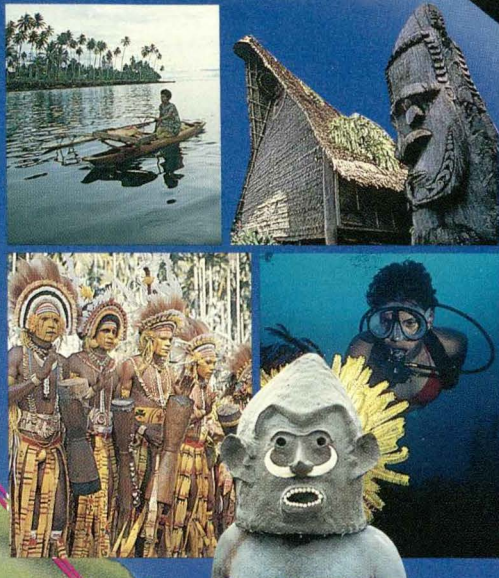
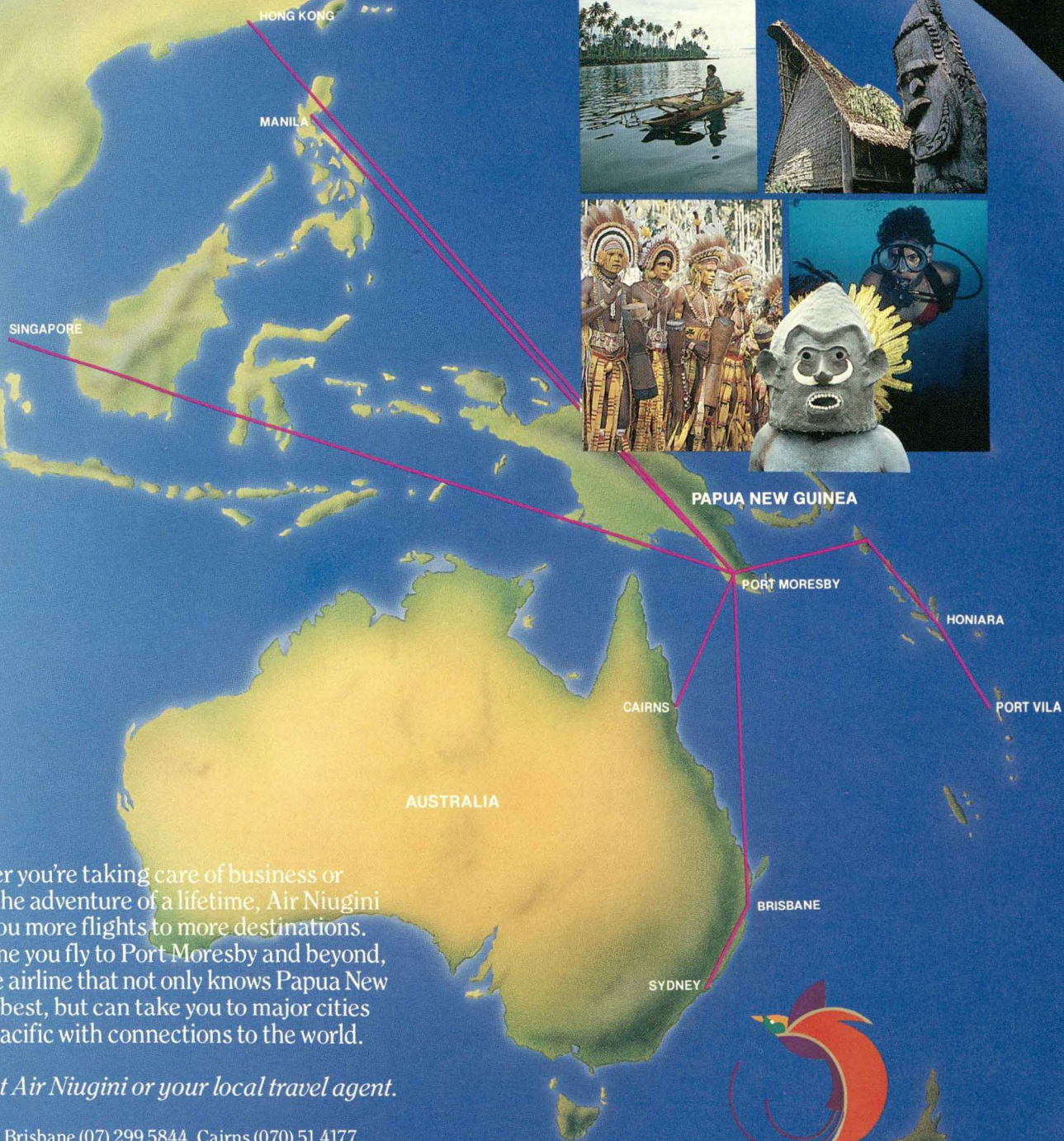
Nearby is the town of Aberdeen, better known for its harbor which forms a natural typhoon shelter and is home to about 20,000 of Hong Kong's 70,000 boat people. The mass of junks and sampans, in various state of repair, create a floating slum and the government is encouraging and assisting these people to move ashore to new housing estates. The gaily decorated floating restaurants continue to be a major drawcard to those seeking the delights of Chinese cuisine. On neighboring Ap Lei Chau Island, now linked to the mainland by bridge, are many of Hong Kong's accomplished boat builders. Apart from traditional junks and sampans they also produce modern commercial and pleasure craft. To get a closer look at life on Aberdeen Harbour, bargain for the price of a half hour cruise with one of the little old women at the helm of their sturdy teak sampans hovering around the waterfront.

Air Niugini and Cathay Pacific operate a joint weekly direct service between Port Moresby and Hong Kong.

Symbol for "eat"



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SHOW



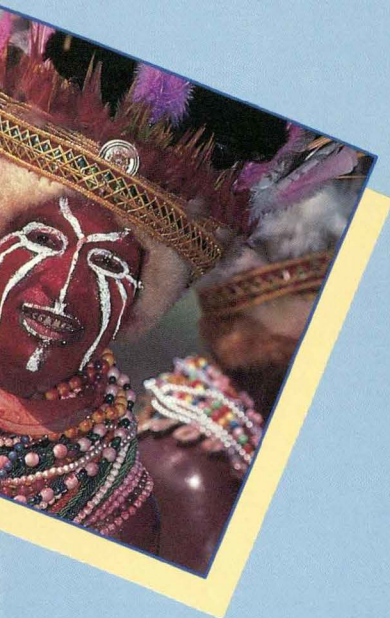
Story and photographs by
Georgie and Ron McKie

On Queen's Birthday weekend in Port Moresby most of the city's population walks, drives or buses the few kilometres to Moitaka Showgrounds for the annual three-day Port Moresby Show. Last year a record 105,000 people streamed through the gates.

The show is the result of the year's work by a dedicated group of volunteers, for the last several years led by John Mudge MBE.

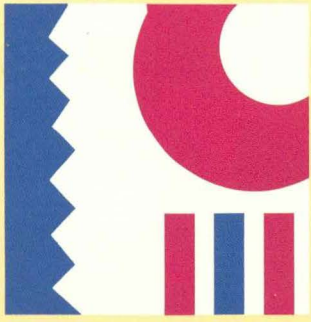
Many business houses take the opportunity to display their latest and innovative products; Government Departments arrange educational displays; schools and charitable organisations promote their activities and the Show Society arranges arena entertainment. Let us take you for a stroll around the Showgrounds.

T I M E



Left and right Mekeo dancers of the 1st Veifa Scouts and Guides troop. centre Performer with the Bagl women's group.





Left School fundraising booth. **top right** Sideshow alley booth. **centre right** Fun rides draw the children. **bottom right** Part of the amphitheatre crowd.

Entering the main gates we find the arts and crafts pavilion to the left with displays of paintings, photography, pottery, and traditional crafts. Sand painters, potters, sculptors, and carvers are hard at work. They explain with pride what they are doing and what their work represents. Many are from the National Arts School, but people producing traditional pieces such as cooking pots also display their skills.

Leaving the crafts we hear the sounds of music, coming from a large amphitheatre where a huge crowd gathers throughout the day. Bands, gospel groups, soloists, rock groups and string bands enter-

tain from 10am to 5pm. The amphitheatre is one of the most popular features reflecting the PNG love of all kinds of music.

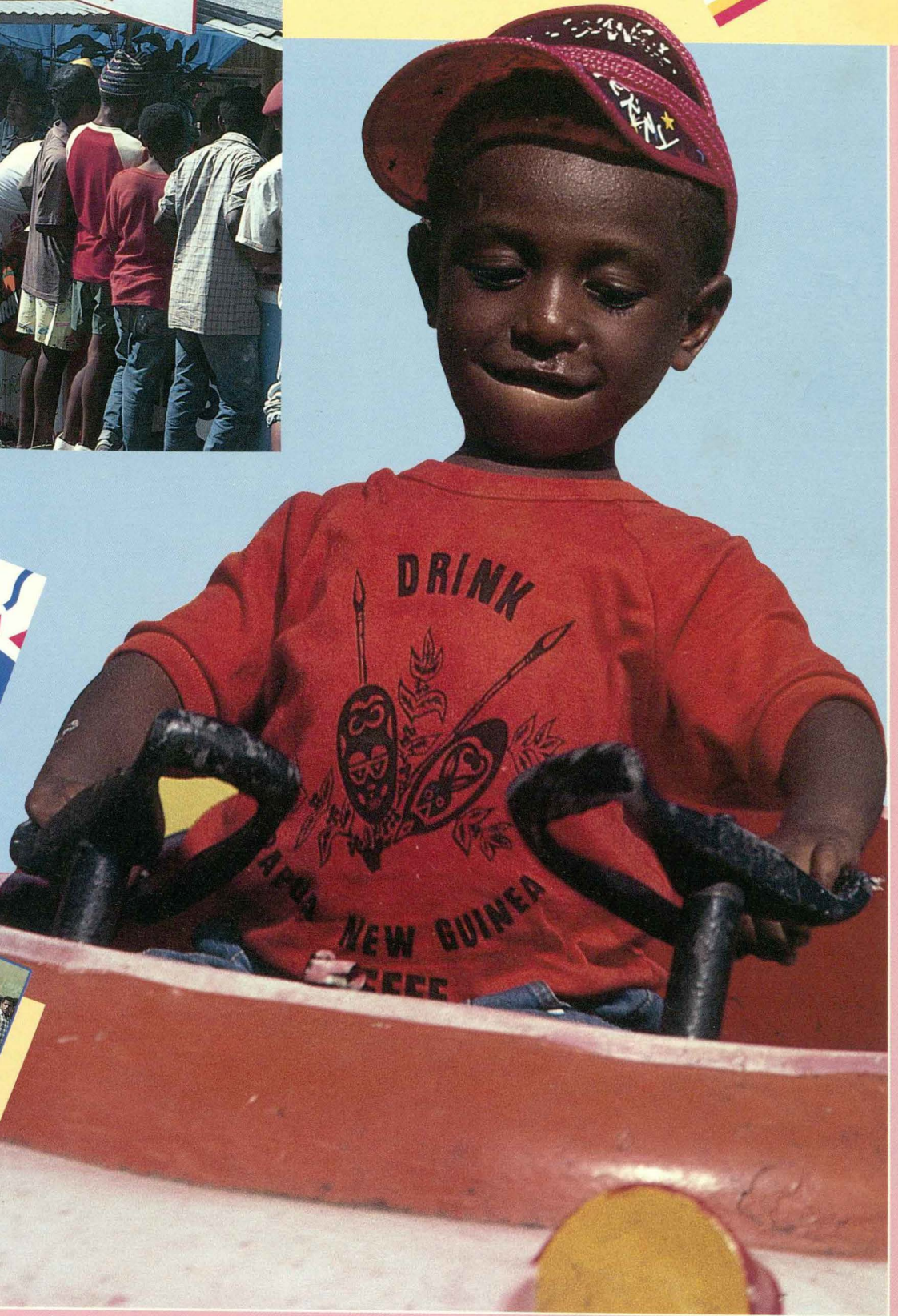
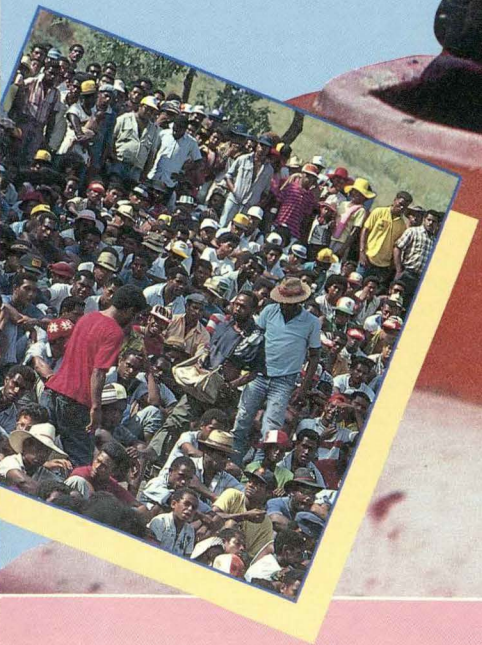
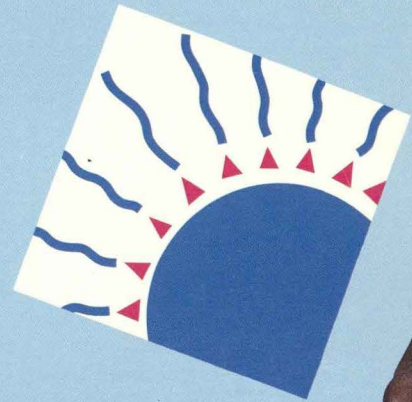
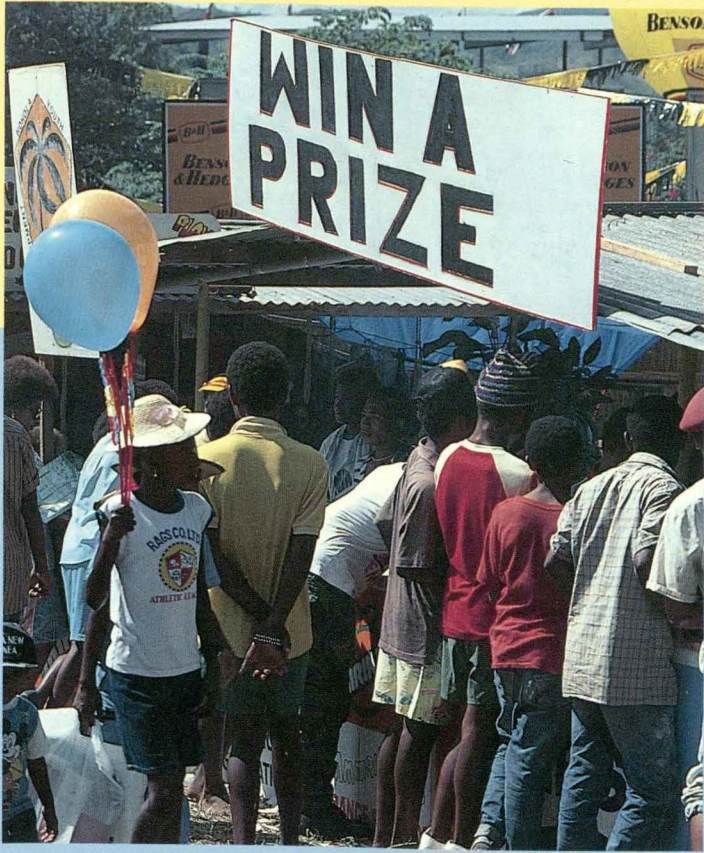
We walk back past many stalls towards the commercial display area. Here games of skill and luck are offered; lucky wheels, darts, hoops to toss over prize money, ball-throwing — all ingenious and challenging. Stalls sell refreshing coconuts, t-shirts and lappas to raise money for schools or charities.

Outside the commercial displays, crowds are building, wide eyed children clutching balloons and showbags. As noon approaches, there is a general movement of people

towards the arena. Suddenly all eyes turn skywards as skydivers appear, parachuting to the arena. The PNG Skydivers have been favorites for years and herald hours of entertainment in the main arena. Other regular favorites include the Band of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary, for their precision marching and bright music.

Last year the most thrilling arena event was a daily, one-hour performance by a stunt group from Australia, known for its work in Mad Max and Chuck Norris movies. The stunts included breaking through walls of fire with motorcycles.







Above Stall holders sell 'show bags' of exhibitor's products. **left** Bull riding in the rodeo events. **bottom** Mobdu Theatre youth group performers.



The arena throbs to the sounds of motorcycle racing, equestrian events and rodeo. Rodeo is always exciting, men pitting their strength and skill against cattle and horses.

We find the boxing tent at the rear of the arena. It offers not only boxing, but also weightlifting and Tae Kwon Do. Nearby, the playground, animal nursery, zoo and pony rides are popular with children.

Government Departments are well represented. Up on the hill the National Broadcasting Commission beams out its FM radio programs from 'Radio Moitaka' live from the showgrounds. The Department of Agriculture and Live-stock always presents an interesting and educational exhibit.

Completing our circuit of the showgrounds, we arrive at the cultural arena, where for most of the three days, traditional dancing and singing are featured. The last show had participating groups from seven provinces.

The emphasis is on integrity in dress and performance. The variety of dance is amazing. Each year a new group seems to appear and it was good last year to see the Bagl Women's Group from the Western Highlands Province. Their headdresses are valued at thousands of kina and the brilliant face painting makes these women very spectacular.



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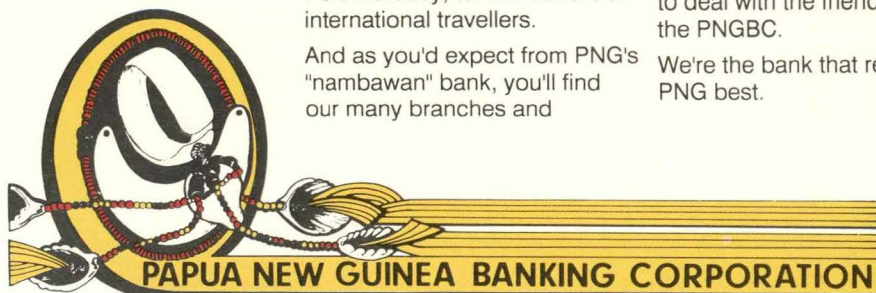
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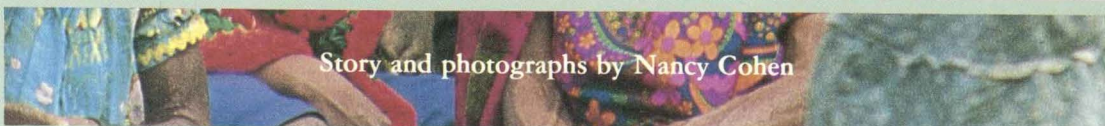
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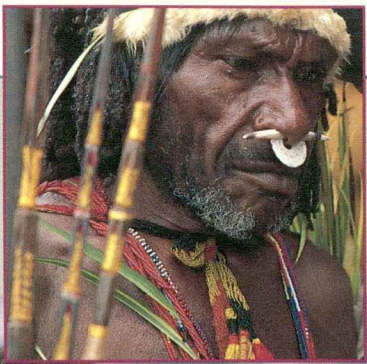
compensation



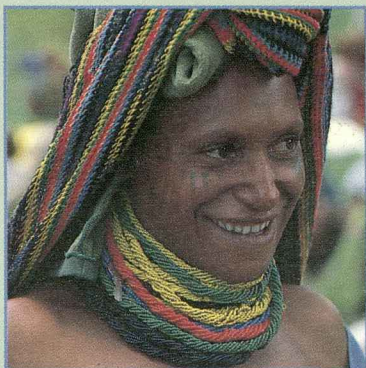
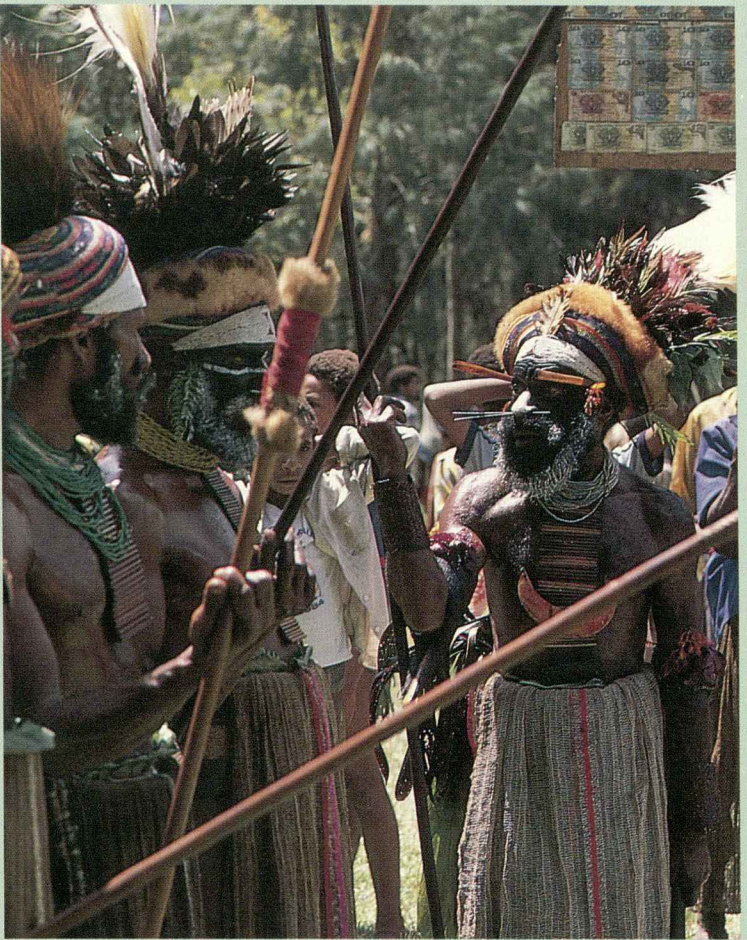
CEREMONY



Story and photographs by Nancy Cohen



Title page *Clan women and children gather to witness a compensation ceremony near Mendi.*



My visit to Papua New Guinea became one of my life's most exciting experiences when I was invited, along with two travelling companions, to attend a compensation ceremony near Mendi, in the Highlands. The young man who invited us worked at our gatehouse and knew we were searching for adventure.

We asked what a compensation ceremony was. He explained that one of his clan had been killed in a car accident. Formerly this could have provoked war, causing loss of life and possibly lasting for a long time. In recent times, however, economic compensation has come to prevail. The

clan suffering the loss of a member is compensated by the clan of the offending party. The compensation takes the form of money, pigs, birds, cuscus — just about anything considered currency.

This explanation did not prepare me for the enormous treat in store for us. We boarded a truck for a long, bumpy trip and by the time we reached the ceremony, there were several thousand people massing. As the only outsiders, the temptation to wander freely among these colorful people was too much to resist.

Surrounding an area about as large as a sports arena, people sat or stood in groups. In the centre a small gathering of what seemed to be organ-

isers or leaders were apparently discussing the events which were about to take place. Women were adorned in their finest beads, often matching their clothing. Children were carried on shoulders. Amid welcoming smiles, I found I was as interesting to the local people as they were to me.

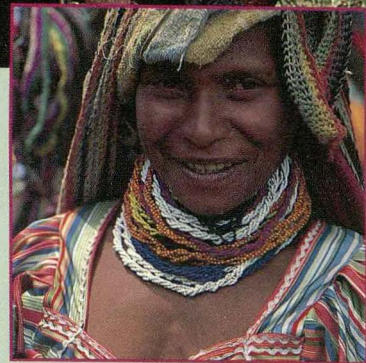
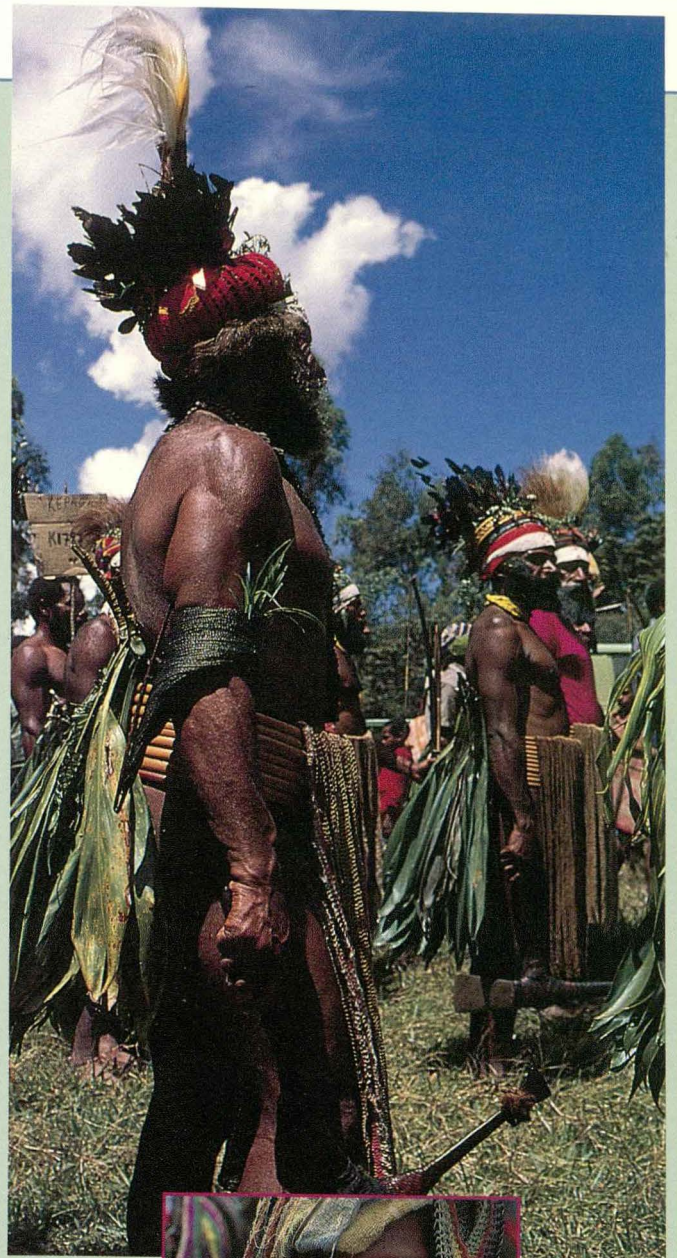
A large group of men caught my attention. They wore great headdresses of beads and feathers and were carrying spears and axes. Their nearly naked, muscular bodies were well-oiled, and their faces were painted in bright colors I've come to associate with PNG.

Loud chanting began among a large group of the clan which was bearing the compensation, or paying. Several people

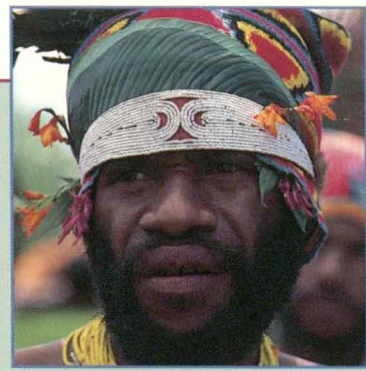
carried large boards covered with rows of paper money made into colorful signs. Others were gathered around someone who was shouting. A row of pigs' quarters neatly laid out on the ground in front of him was part of the compensation.

Near the chanting group I saw a group of men who formed a procession — six men across and eleven rows long — and danced around in a circle. Children watched them, fascinated by their colorful elders. When the procession stopped, the leader delivered instructions.

Friendly faces became serious and a large procession began to form from all the groups preparing for the



Facing page Both sides come armed but the mood is friendly, albeit a little apprehensive as shown by the woman at **bottom left**. **This page** Compensation ceremonies call for traditional dress but non-traditional paper money (**left**) is acceptable.



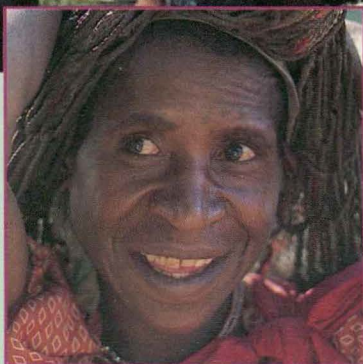
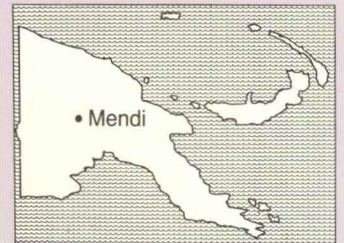
ceremony. Men carried pigs' quarters on their shoulders; others carried money signs above their head. In front of the procession was the flag of PNG, followed by poles to which a cuscus and an eagle had been tied. A man walked behind a cassowary bird.

The chanting became louder as the procession grew. Excitement was mounting. The compensation recipients were all seated in the centre of the circle of marching warriors. As the parade of fierce compensation payers circled around and around, they chanted, raised weapons, and displayed their wealth for all to see.

After speeches were delivered, compensation approved and received, the excitement

wound down. We were on our way back to Mt Hagen, having experienced a fascinating part of PNG's ancient culture which is adapting to the face of new ways such as the use of money for compensation.

Air Niugini operates regular services to Mendi from Port Moresby.



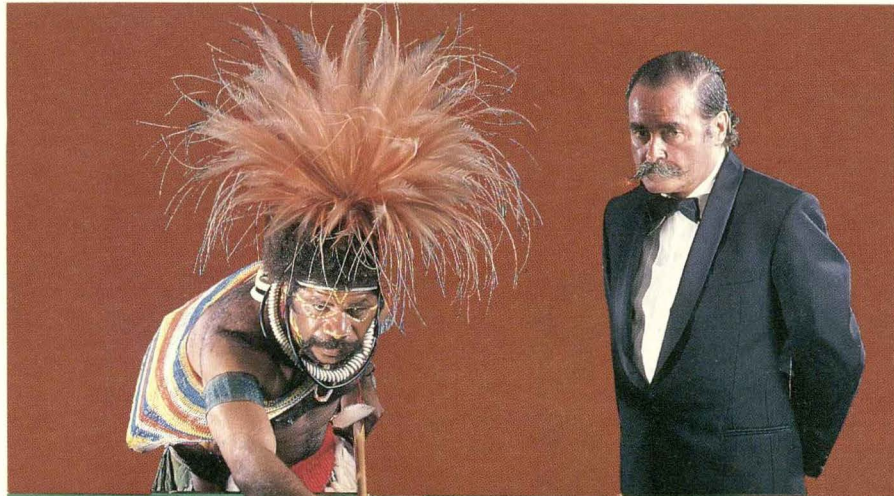
Top National flag flying over proceedings is another modern touch but traditional sides of pig (**bottom right**) remain the basis of compensation.

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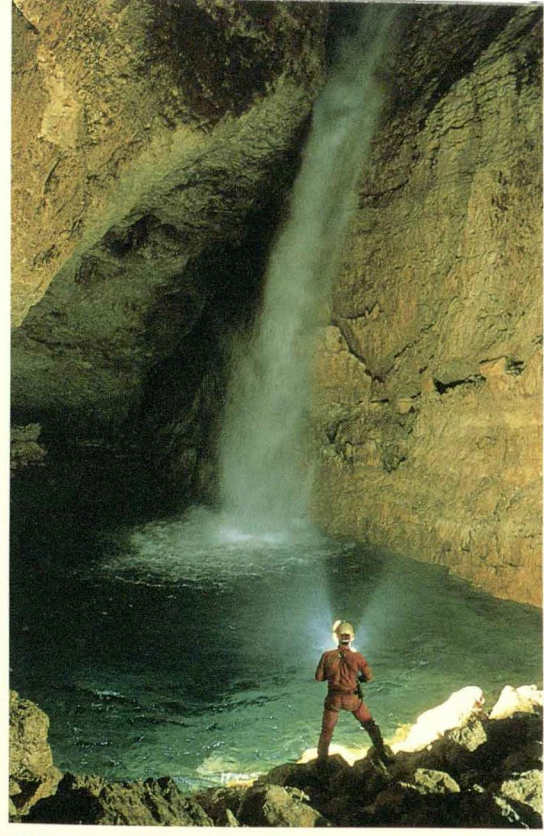
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Left The Galowe River, where it emerges from the mountains behind. **top** Arturus Cave waterfall, 440 metres underground.

CAVEMEN of NAKANAI

Story and photographs by Jean-Paul Sounier

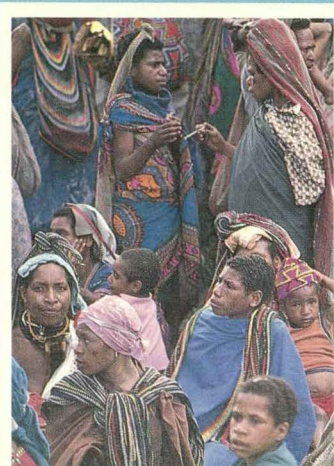
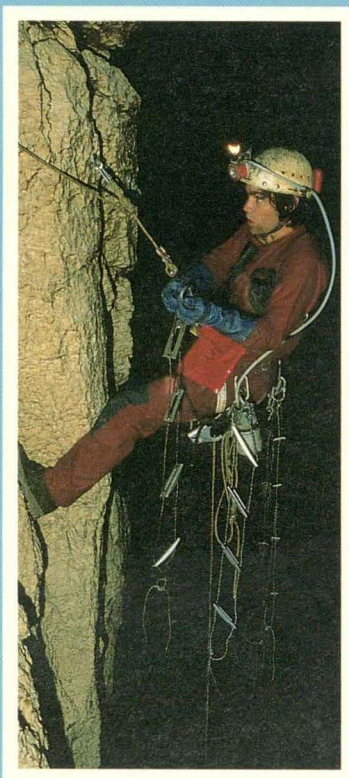
I am back in the limestone country of New Britain, still looking to discover more of the giant caverns which I believe lie hidden, unseen by human beings, beneath the jungle. This is the area where our 1985 expedition discovered Muruk Hole, 637 metres deep, Papua New Guinea's deepest cave. Subterranean rivers inside the Nakanai Mountains have carved immense chambers in the limestone rock. One of the rivers is the Galowe which gushes with such volume and force from the ground that we are sure it must have created great galleries deep inside the mountains. We are intent on finding a way into that underground system.

A helicopter transports all our gear from Pomio on the coast to a small clearing at an altitude of 1,540 metres. This takes five trips. We set up our base camp and two days later we start looking for caves. To do so we spot on the aerial photographs the streams meandering on the surface of the plateaux. Sooner or later, they disappear underground. These are the places we are looking for. By this means, many caves are discovered around our camp. To reach the entrances we have to clear our way through the thick bush. Plodding our way under the big trees with heavy rucksacks packed with caving gear is exhausting. To make things worse, all the caves we find are blocked.

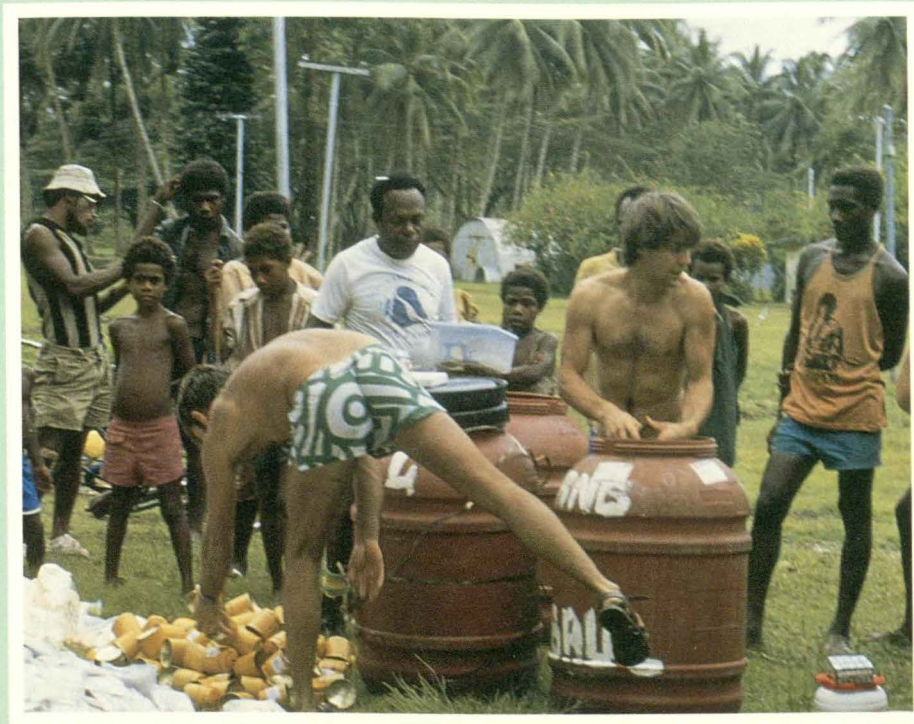
Consequently, I become more interested in an area located south of the camp. During a three-day trip there, I find with Eric two promising caves. We name them after the bright stars, Arcturus and Antares. Inside the latter, we explore quickly one kilometre of galleries and we discover a small stream. The following day, six of our expedition go back to Antares cave but they are stopped by a sump, not far from the spot where we had backtracked previously.



Above Caver wading in a stream 230 metres underground. **left** Abseiling into the unknown. **bottom** Galowe village.



Below Sorting equipment before the major exploration of Arturus Cave.



Above Cavers in one of the huge galleries of Arturus Cave 400 metres below the surface.

So, all our hopes of finding a big cave rest on Arcturus. Eric, Jean-Marie and Bruno explore Arcturus down to a level of 200 metres. Two days later, I enter the cave, followed by Franck, Jean-Marie and Bruno. Without being able to explain it, I have the feeling that Arcturus is going to be THE cave of the expedition. But in our world of darkness, everything is possible. We might discover a huge cave or be stopped a few metres down.

Hampered by a bag full of caving ropes, I scramble down the cave passages. I like it. Vertical in its first part, it is now a sloping gallery about one metre in diameter. The floor is formed by rimstone pools. Between these natural dams made of calcite, the stream feeds crystal pools. We have to stride over each dam. Sometimes, the pools are so deep that we have to cross spread-eagled over the water by bridging our legs and arms on the opposite walls of the gallery. In less than two hours, we reach Eric's limit of exploration. The unknown cave lies ahead of us.

We rush on. Several little pits have to be rigged. In case of floods, the ropes have to dangle far from the waterfalls. Deep pools lie at the bottom of the drops. So we have to climb across the smooth walls. At a depth of 250 metres, I reach the ledge of a more important shaft. I throw a small rock down the pit and count the seconds until the impact noise. This rough estimate gives me 25 to 30 metres in depth. To find a good rigging spot is not easy. Coral limestone is rather porous and not suitable for expansion bolts. Fortunately, natural rigging and cracks, where I succeed in wedging 'nuts', do the trick.

I start to abseil down, slowly because of the unstable rocks which might fall from the shaft walls. I 'clean' my route by dislodging those which are on my way down. Busy in doing



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Left A tight squeeze in a narrow passage of Arturus Cave. **below** Inside base camp.

so, I have not bothered to look around me. I stop and turn my head to the left. I am expecting to see a white limestone wall. Instead I am looking at a wall of darkness and then, I realise that I am standing on the edge of a huge underground chamber.

I just cannot believe it! The discovery has taken my breath away. I yell at Jean-Marie adjectives of wonder: "It is huge, fabulous, superb...". Jean-Marie can hear me quite well but from where he stands, he cannot see what I have discovered and probably thinks I am crazy! I resume by abseiling down and set foot on what I think is the bottom of the shaft. In fact, it is a small ledge located on the wall of the huge chamber. Jean-Marie catches up to me. I take a rock and throw it into the darkness. I count five seconds between the throw and impact. It means the bottom of the chamber is 100 metres from where we stand. A bag full of ropes dangling from my harness, I start to rig a route down the underground cliff. Here, the limestone is more compact and I can drill it in order to hammer in expansion bolts. Rigging slows down my progress.

Half an hour later, I set foot on the floor of the chamber and start to explore it. I walk 100 metres and reach a gallery 20 metres in diameter. The chamber is 100 metres long, 60 metres wide and 130 metres high! From where I stand, I can see the faint glow of my three friends moving down along the wall chamber. The scenery is magic. My friends catch up with me and together we scramble downstream.

The gallery I have discovered extends into another chamber, smaller than the previous one. At its far end, we enter another big tube. Suddenly, I hear a familiar noise: beyond the wall of darkness is either a roaring river or crashing waterfall. We hurry downstream. I hope to come across a river but we



discover a beautiful waterfall gushing from the cave roof, 20 metres above us, landing in a deep pool.

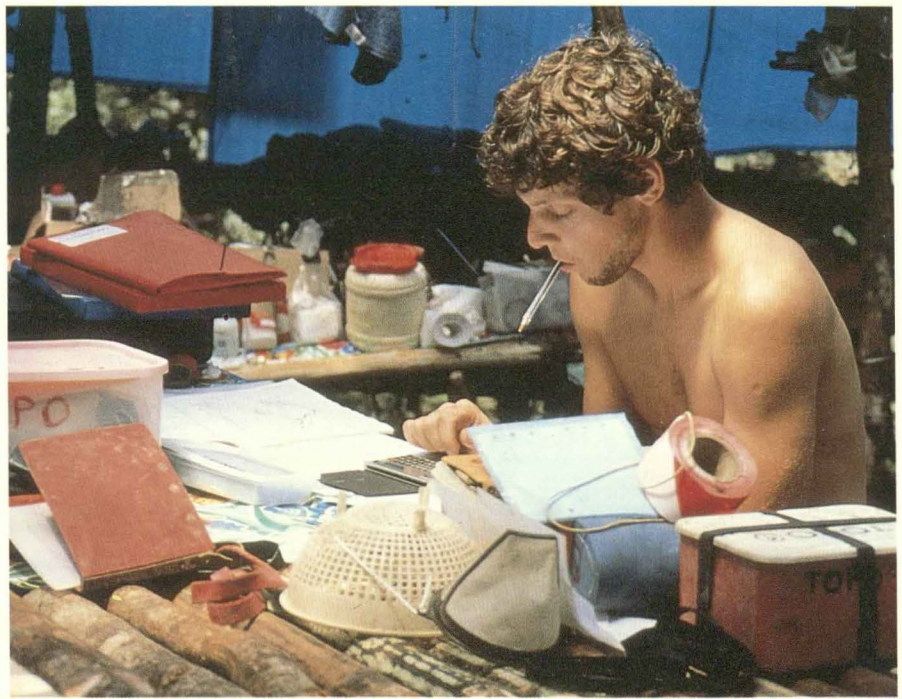
We plunge into the water and succeed in crossing the pool by using the holds on the wall opposite the waterfall. We reach the other side of the lake and we follow the river which flows into a gallery 10 metres wide and two metres high. The slope is nil. It is a bad omen. One hundred metres further, we enter another big chamber.

Again, the cave roof recedes into darkness. But, on the opposite side of the chamber, a deep sump ends the cave. Franck dives into the water just to have a look at the sump. The tube keeps plunging straight down. There is no hope without diving gear. Arcturus cave ends at 445 metres deep. It measures two kilometres long and is, now, one of the deepest caves of the Nakanai mountains.

Our expedition ends without having discovered a 1000 metres deep cave or a way to the underground Galowe River. But this is caving! Unlike the climbers who see the summit they are going to conquer and know its height, the cavers explore an invisible and unknown world. The prospect of discoveries is still enormous. PNG is, for the cavers, the 'Himalayas of the depths'. This French expedition in the Nakanai mountains represents only a step in the conquest of the underground world.



Below Camp duties include book-keeping.



Above Cooking lunch deep inside Arcturus Cave.

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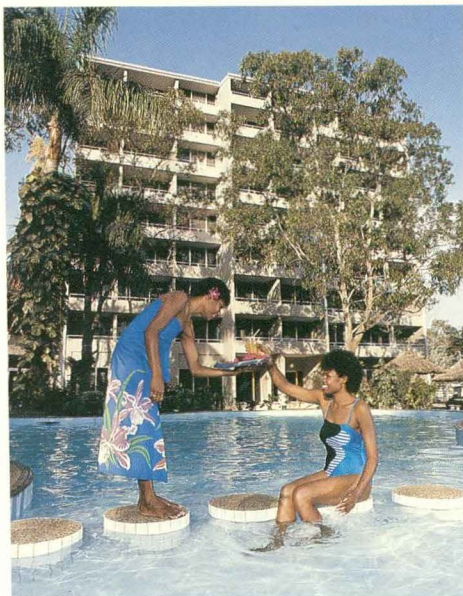
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GOROKA 721844 • MT HAGEN 521888 • WEWAK 862255 • POPONDETTA 297266
KAVIENG 942132 • KIETA 956188 • KIMBE 935155 • TABUBIL 589060
VANIMO 871254 AND PORGERA

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