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# paradise

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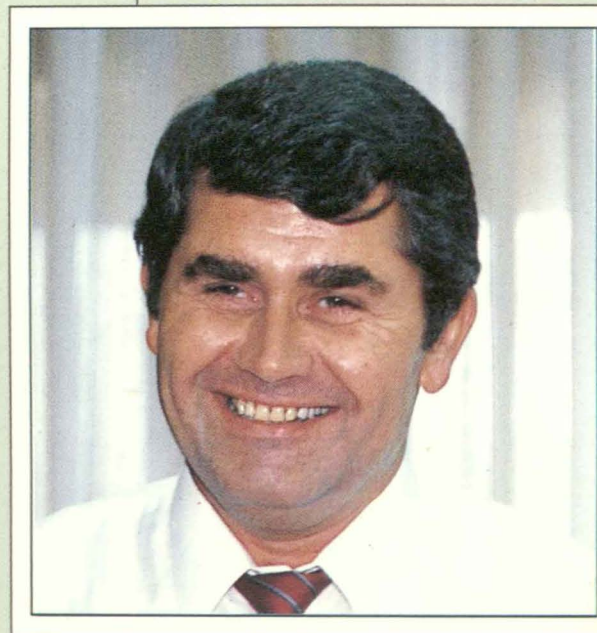
The spirit houses of the Middle Sepik village of Tambanum are among the finest known and are built and lived in with all due ritual and ceremony.

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Dieter Seefeld  
Chief Executive & General Manager  
Air Niugini



Dieter Seefeld  
Chief Executive & General Manager  
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Photograph by Jean-Paul Ferrero.



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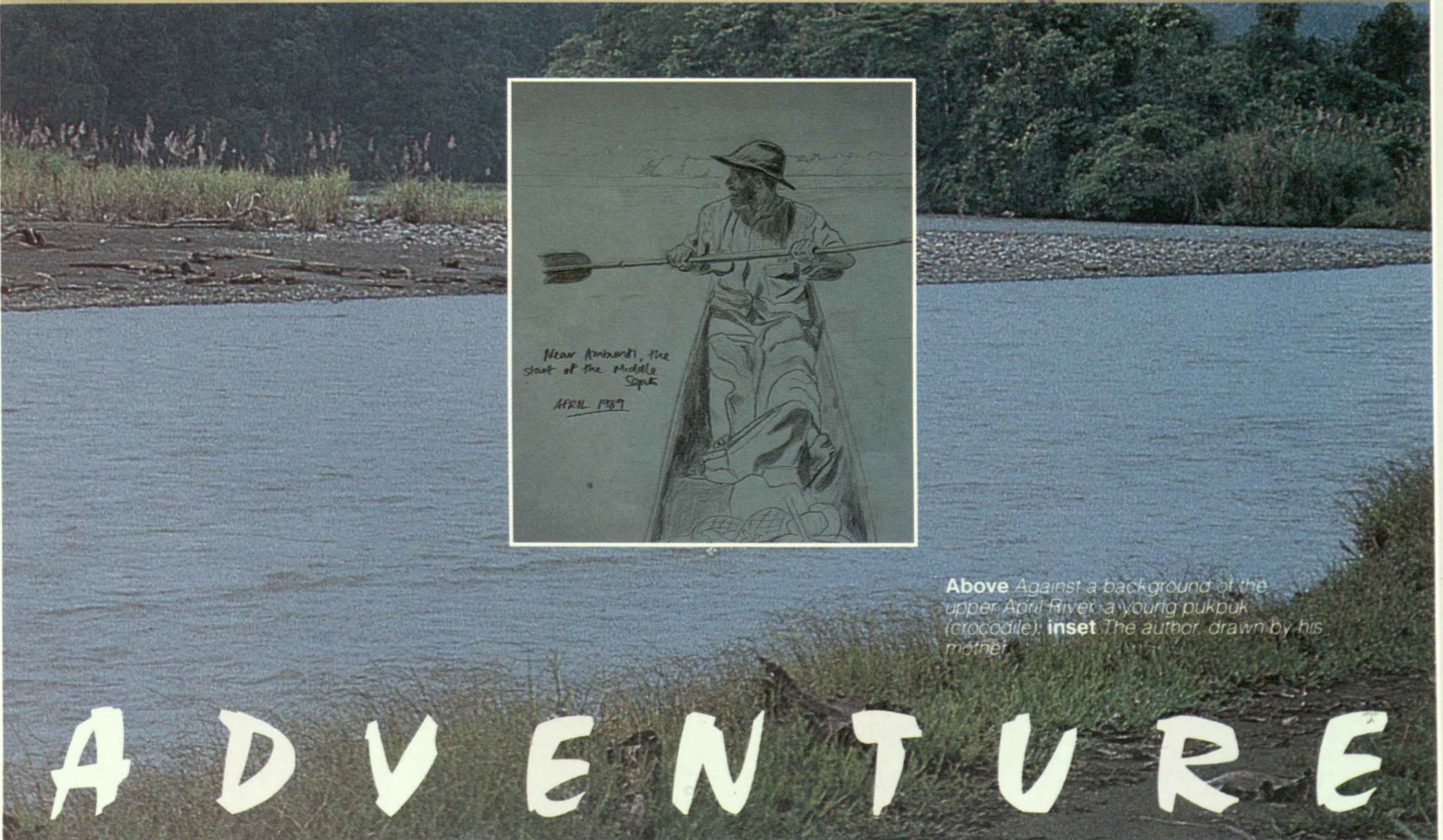


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# APRIL RIVER

Story and photographs by John Ross



**Above** Against a background of the upper April River, a young pukpuk (crocodile); **inset** The author, drawn by his mother

# A D V E N T U R E

Standing on the mountainous backbone of New Guinea I watched the heavy afternoon sky perform its daily ritual of drowning the land under a sheet of water. I rejoiced in its splendor, for I was straddling the divide that is the watershed for two of the world's great rivers, one foot resting to the south within the Fly River catchment, my other foot standing in the Sepik River basin. That a small country like Papua New Guinea should possess two great rivers worthy of a huge continent is a testament to the power of these mountains to harness the mighty equatorial atmospheric forces.

I had walked from the Southern Highlands and I would continue on foot until reaching the April River from where I would canoe downstream, eventually joining the Sepik. The Sepik is 1,125 kilometres long, with a huge catchment basin of 78,000 square kilometres. It starts in the mountainous border area then travels eastward parallel to the Great Central Ranges and is joined by major tributaries such as the April River.

On a map, the Sepik River system looks like a circulation diagram, a mass of connecting arteries and veins. The waterways are like arteries carrying blood through the body, they sustain and nourish the land and its inhabitants. In the centre of this river system lies the cultural heart, called the Middle Sepik. This is the most densely populated area with rich cultural traditions. Here one finds the huge spirit houses full of carvings recognised worldwide as being among the most dynamic artwork of the whole Pacific. Villages only kilometres apart produce markedly different styles of carving.



**Top** Local food for the trip; pineapple, taro, sweet potato, pawpaw and bananas. **right** D'Albertis creeper on the riverbank.

The Middle Sepik may be the cultural focal point but the physical heart of the river lies high up in the mountain periphery in places like those where I now stood. The heavy daily downpour of rain is the rhythmic pulse that drives the entire river system. The creeks and rivers of the headwaters froth with white water in their hurry to the lowlands. The Central Ranges are uninhabited so my guides and I were forced to follow streams and although they twisted and turned it was better than crashing through the trailless jungle. We were

running out of food so had to push on despite our many wounds that begged to be rested. Against the massive scale of the jungle a small band of humans is indistinguishable among the millions of insects and animals and must play the same harsh rules of survival.

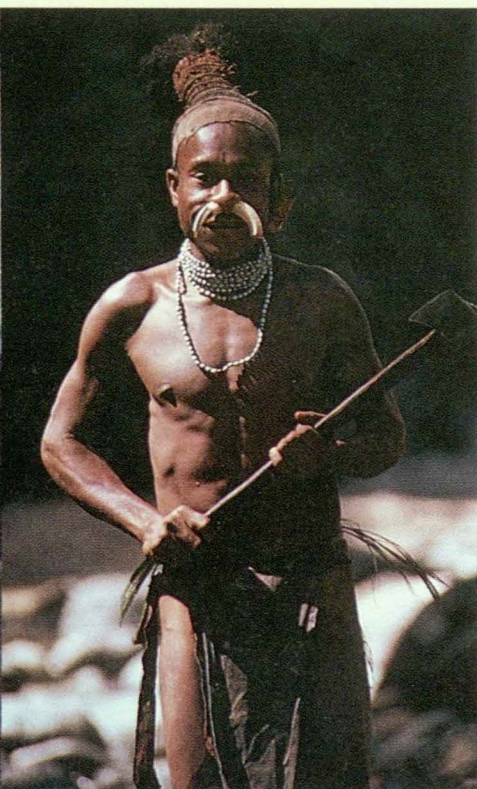
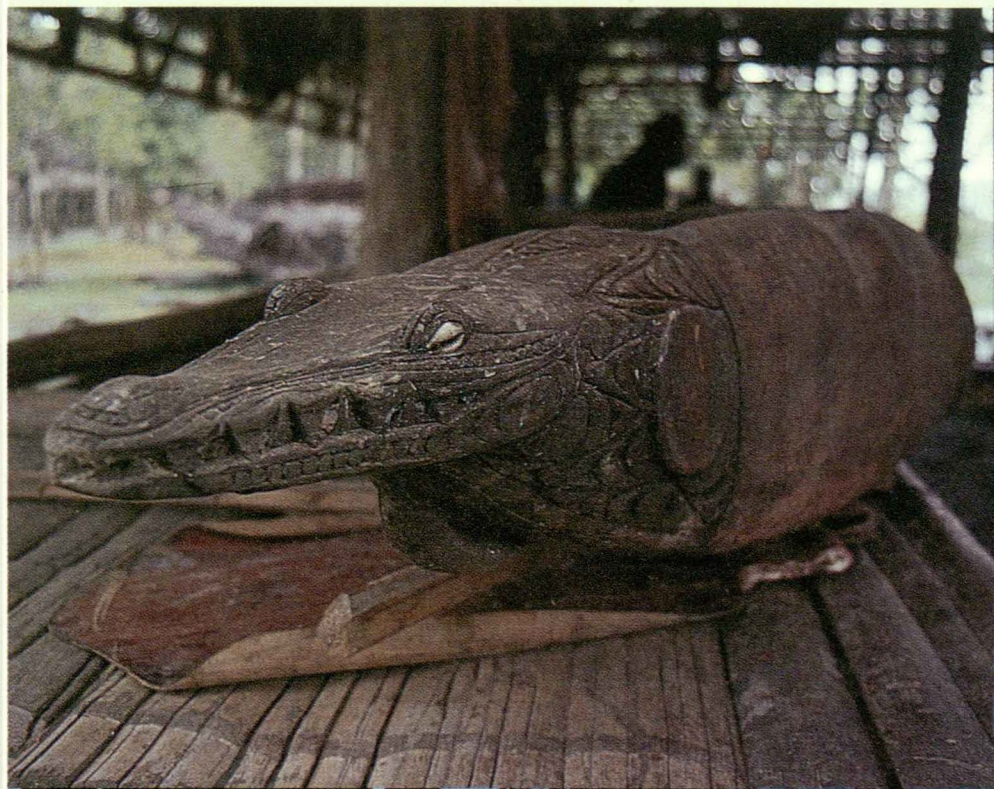
Finally my feet, now raw, gave way and I collapsed. A small inconspicuous stream would be my saving. The guides built a small raft that carried me on to the April River and the remote Niksek mission station. As the raft drifted along I marvelled at the beauty of the

jungle. I had spent weeks walking in it but only now looking from a distance could it actually be seen. An even more beautiful sight was the mission, the only Western influence on the entire April River. The mission is run by the South Seas Evangelist Church (SSEC) and has provided invaluable health and educational services since its founding in the early 1970s.

I rested for a week contemplating my forthcoming canoeing adventure, but just finding a canoe was to be an adventure itself. A large flood had recently destroyed Niksek village and

carried away many of the canoes. I had a large raft built complete with a luggage rack and found a guide to accompany me. We made good time, carried along by the swift current, free to admire the scenery. The lush rainforest teems with exotic birdlife, parrots, hornbills, egrets and eagles. The beautiful red D'Albertis creeper erupts from the verdant green and seems to cascade into the river like a small waterfall.

That evening we slept at a small hamlet where I purchased a six-metre dugout canoe for about K30 worth of trade goods. Very cheap when you consider it can take up to a month to axe out a canoe from a solid log. I quickly became familiar with the art of paddling. Vertical strokes on the right provide the thrust while any steering is accomplished by holding the paddle behind at the rear of the canoe, from where the paddle takes on the function of a rudder. Just when I thought I was getting really good I found



**Far left** Garamut drum with carved crocodile head. **left** One of the guides who led the author through the Central Ranges. **below** A village on the April River.



out that only women paddle sitting down — men stand! At a nearby village a convoy of canoes was about to set off downstream to the town of Ambunti, with the purpose of selling sago and some of the canoes. In the Upper Sepik and tributaries canoe making is an important source of income. Much of the Middle Sepik no longer has accessible timber suitable for canoes.

The villages on the April River are small, scattered and without the dynamic art of the Sepik but the people are very hospitable and friendly. They are fortunate to live in one of the most beautiful areas in all PNG. The lush virgin rain-forest, beautiful mountains and plentiful wildlife can be enjoyed without the terrible mosquitoes and sweltering heat of the lowlands.

After four days' travel on the April River we came to the great Sepik River itself, a huge brown coiling serpent that seemed more like a sea than a river. The cultural differences between the April and the Sepik were immediately obvious; larger more prosperous villages and huge haus tambarans (spirit houses or men's houses).

Although the origin and meaning of the name Sepik remains a mystery to academics and local people, it seems painfully obvious to any mosquito-bitten traveller that it could only mean 'Mosquito River'. Even the local pidgin translation of the bible describes hell as a place with hordes of mosquitoes. I was travelling in the wet season which is the worst time for these insects. The best time to visit the Sepik area is the dry season, between July

and November.

Crocodiles are seen occasionally and are still of great spiritual and economic importance. The skin is sold to traders, the teeth are kept for ornamentation and the meat is highly prized for its tasty flesh.

Crocodiles are very wary of man. Drifting along in my canoe I sometimes startled crocs which would plunge into the water, their shape soon lost in the murky water.

At Ambunti I parted with my guide and continued on to Pagwi, a small town with the easternmost road connection to the provincial capital of Wewak. I had run the full gauntlet of physical and cultural experiences, from the remote and primitive upper reaches, along the April River and finally to the mighty Sepik with its amazing artistic traditions. In all its different stages it is fiercely beautiful but dangerous. Not because of crocodiles, tribesmen, jungle or even mosquitoes. Dangerous because it gets into the blood stream and once experienced it can lure a traveller back time and again.

**Below, left** Raft used by the author in search of a canoe. **below, right** Upper April River.





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# TAMBANUM *homes*

**Below** *The carved face of this decorated Tambanum house peers out from under the eaves.*

Story and photographs  
by Liz Thompson



**T**raditionally the construction of Sepik River haus tambarans (spirit houses) involved the death of an enemy. Before the huge king posts at either end were put into the ground, a captured enemy was placed at the bottom of the prepared hole and the post was deftly dropped on his head. Skulls were found at the base of the posts as they were replaced over the years. Ritual codes of behavior were, and in some instances remain, an integral

part of the construction of buildings.

Houses have names, they are female and festivities celebrate their completion, their birth. In Tambanum Village in the Middle Sepik these practices remain intact. The construction of the enormous and beautiful houses involves much ritual and observation of tradition.

All Tambanum houses are considered to be females. They are raised from the ground on a series of large posts and a ladder leads to the door, above which is

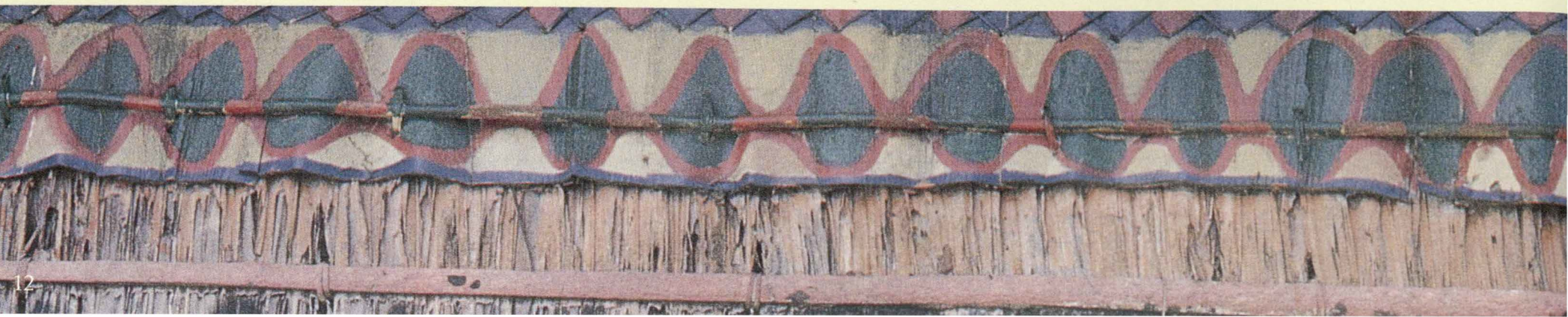
a decorated face. The face of the house is complete with eyes, nose and mouth. From the side gables earrings hang and close to the face are red, wooden pointed breasts. Each house has a secret name given to it by the elders at the ceremony to celebrate its birth.

Every big house (there are several smaller dwellings in Tambanum which do not concentrate on such detail) has a brain. A circular panel made of wood or sago palm and painted, it sits almost hidden beneath the

fronds of the roof. The door is the navel.

"When everyone sleeps at night, the house has swallowed everyone up," said Henry Gawi, a member of the Pig clan in Tambanum. It is as though, in the dark interior, amid the low fires burning in hearth pots, beneath the mosquito nets, in the warmth, the house is the womb and the inhabitants have returned to it, protected while they sleep.

Construction of the house is not an individual process. It



involves numerous villagers but not the same clan as the house's owner-to-be. The clan members who take on the job are supposed to work on it fairly continuously. One or two years' labor can be involved and for the entire period the owner is obliged to feed the builders three times a day. That, says Henry, involves killing chickens, dogs, pigs, buying food store rice, canned fish, sugar, tea and chocolate drink. It also involves a continuous supply of betel nut, pepper and lime, which are

chewed with the nuts and Spear, the local tobacco.

Two huge king posts made of garamut are dropped at either end of the building and one in the centre with three more on each side of these. Parallel beams are laid across the top. Black palm or 'limbum' is used on the floor and the roof is made of sago leaves, as are the walls. The floor is changed periodically as it wears out.

Beneath the floor under the cross beam, is placed a small wooden house spirit which

protects the house and its occupants from enemies. On many of the large houses the side posts are carved with faces of ancestral figures.

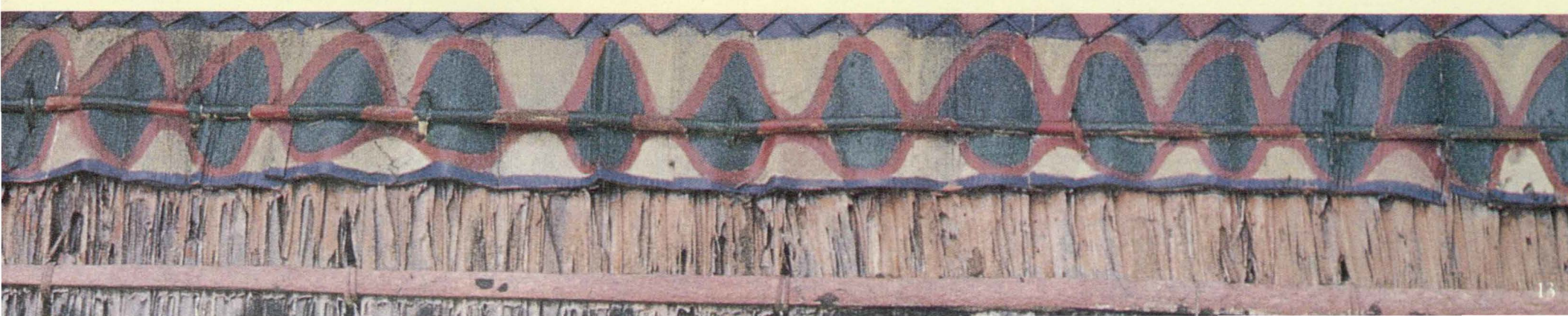
Most of the work is carried out during the dry season as water and mosquitoes in the wet make things difficult. With the

slow erosion of much of the banks of the Sepik, many of the houses in Tambanum built close to the water are having to be replaced.

Ritual is involved in building a house and living in it. Generally men sleep in the front of the house and the women at the back. If two brothers share a house, the elder lives at the front and the younger at the back. In some instances houses are given two names, one for the front and one for the back. Likewise, the older brother will

*Below Carved post supporting a corner of a Tambanum house.*

*Far left, upper Religious icons indicate the missionary influence on villagers. far left, lower Staircase leading to the front door. left Carved female figure typical of the Sepik artists.*



use the front steps and the younger the back entrance. If a villager is unfortunate enough to have his house fall down before he has been able to build a new one, temporarily he will live with friends but it is customary that he provides those friends with food for the duration of his stay.

In Tambanum there are three clans, the Pig, Crocodile and the Bowi or Sago clan. The village is roughly divided into areas which each one inhabits though the boundaries cross over and some

villagers are members of two clans. The village is one of the largest on the river and is beautifully laid out. The huge old houses run through the centre and closer to the banks and farther into the bush smaller houses are scattered. Earth pathways form a network between them and villagers stroll from one house to another visiting relatives and friends.

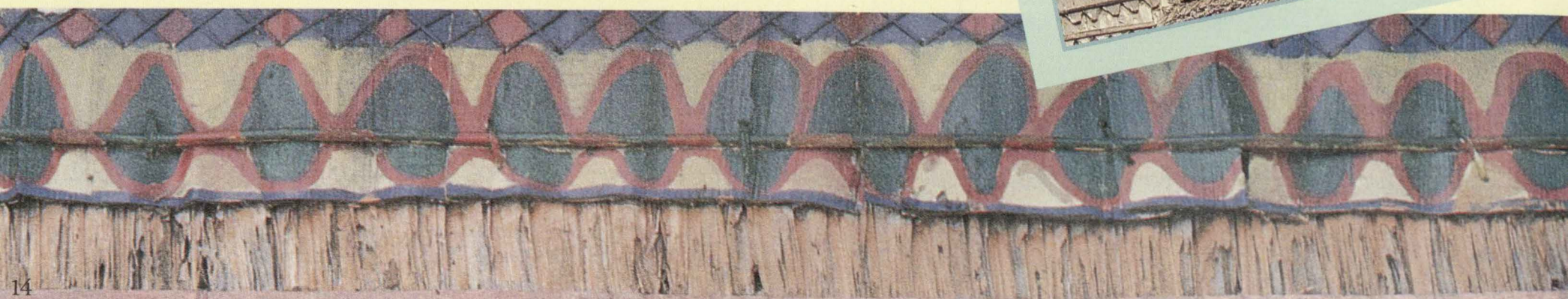
The huge area beneath the house which is created by having a raised floor is usually the area inhabited during the day.

Women sit on tiny wooden stools around smoldering fires baking sago in flat pots. Large carved figures, which many of the villagers sell, lean against the house posts. Masks decorated with cowries hang from the rafters. Small baskets filled with sago hang above the benches which run beneath the house. Children play and dogs scavenge for leftover food.

During the day the village is a scene of relative tranquillity, women weaving, feeding children, men talking in the men's house.

People rarely leave the village and much of their lives are spent in and around their houses. Their relationship with their home is quite different to that of most Westerners. The construction of a home is a community endeavor and its completion a cause for community celebration.

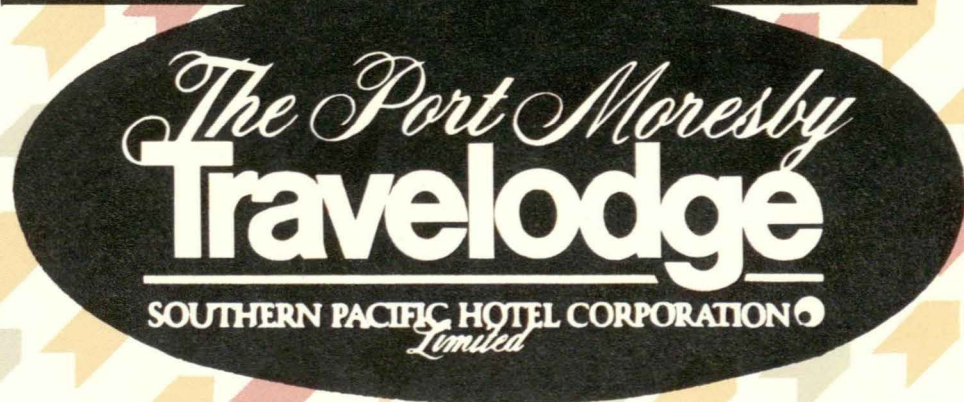
*Left* Typical family scene in the day quarters. *top right* Private chapel inside a Tambanum house. *bottom right* A house face.



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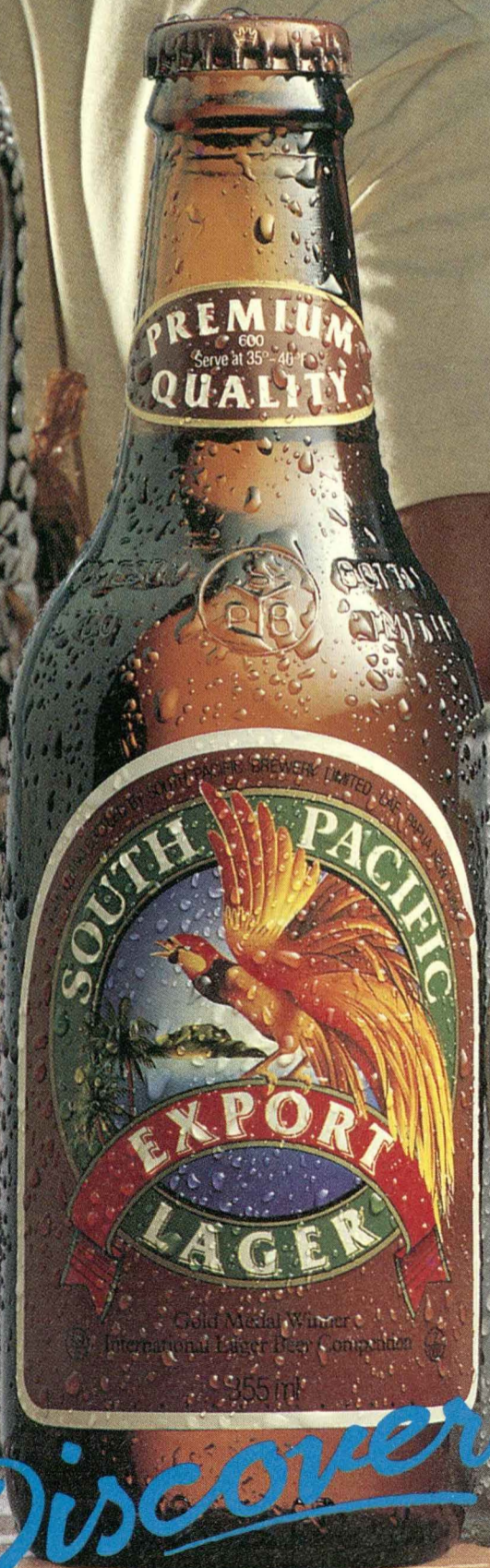


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Story and photographs by Lyn and Pat Manly

## CENTRE STAGE



**Above** Huli tribesman William Aiya in bilas (finery) at Sydney's Darling Harbor. **right** Sydney Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbor.

Sydney's Darling Harbor Exhibition Centre was the ideal place for the most recent Holiday and Travel Show. Weekends are a hive of activity as the complex is a major Sydney tourist attraction rivalling both the Opera House and The Rocks. Clowns and buskers entertain throughout the day, along with brass bands and rock bands. Scottish bagpipers contribute to the overall potpourri of sounds, creating a carnival atmosphere.

Huge crowds visited the three-day show waiting up to an hour to gain entry. They were entertained by dragon dancers from China, a mime artist and an assortment of musicians.

Inside, the most popular section was the South Pacific Village built around an elevated stage on which colorful dancing, handicraft artists and musical sessions were presented. All

exhibitors in this area were set up in thatched huts styled to resemble a 'traditional' village. Each hut carried the name of one of the 13 exhibiting island nations.

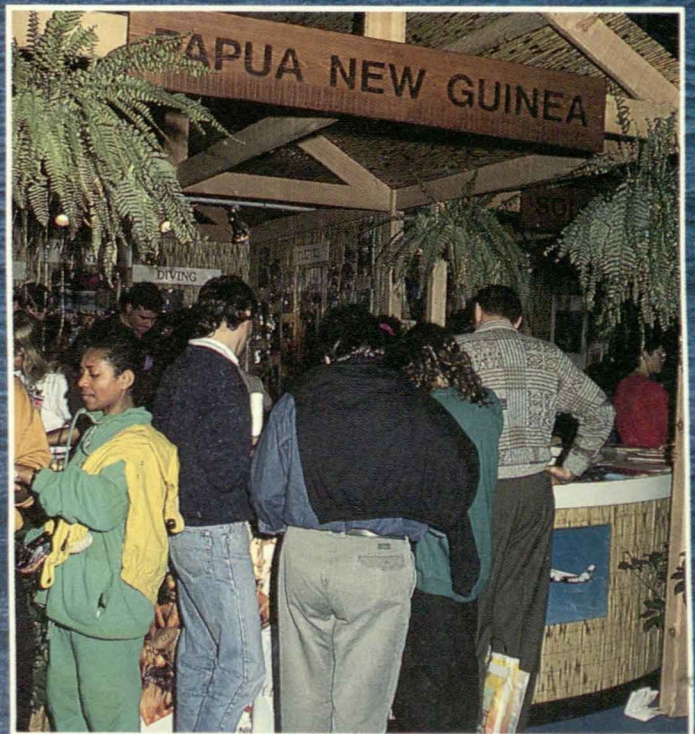
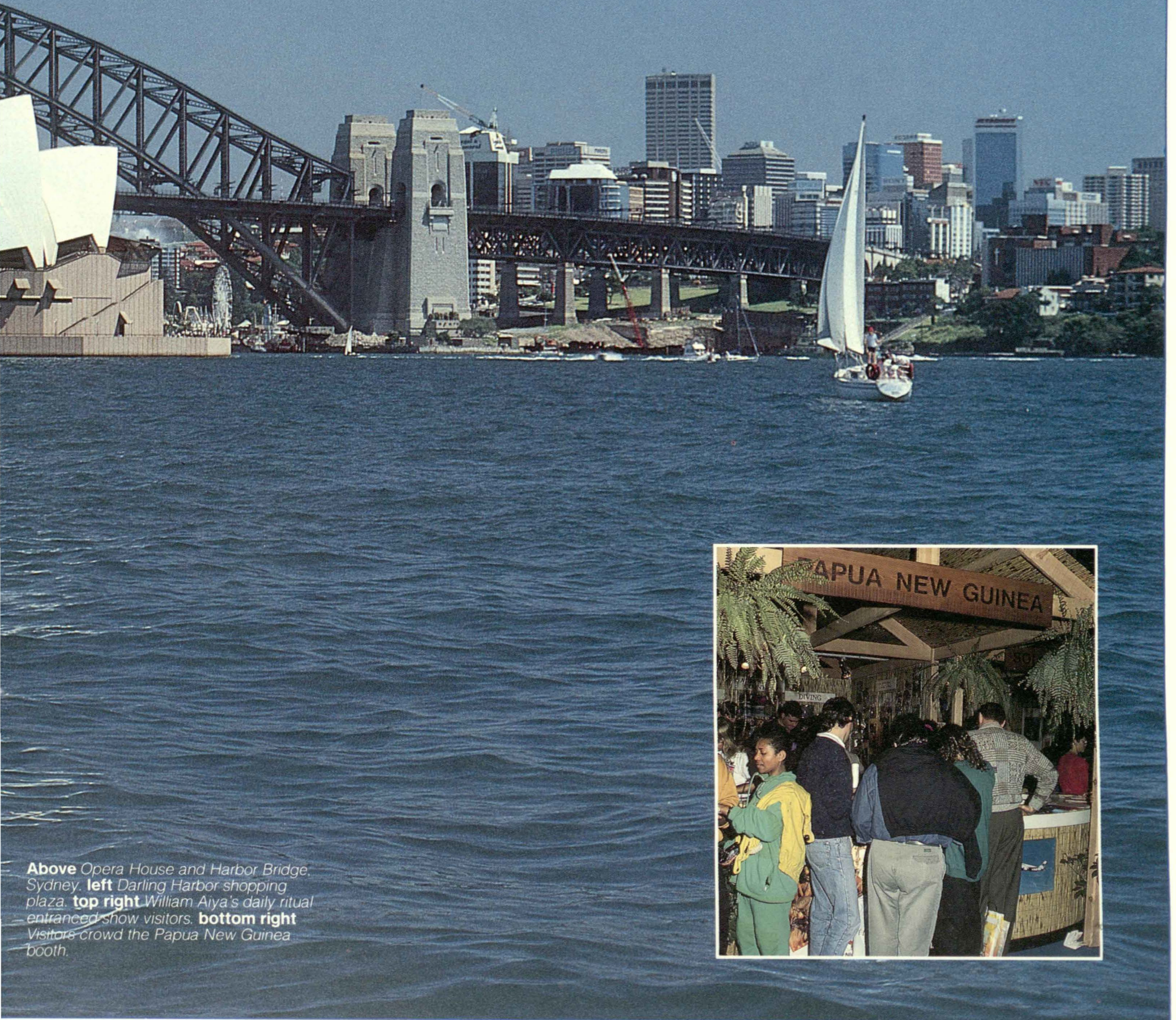
As the saying goes: "All the world's a stage". Centre stage in the South Pacific Village attracted a packed house as beautiful Cook Islands girls performed their rhythmic dances,

followed by a panpipe band playing the haunting music of the Solomon Islands. Male dancers from Fiji excited onlookers as they belted out war cries and menacingly thrust spears at the audience. Between scheduled shows, Henry Gawi, from Tambanum Village on the Middle Sepik, demonstrated his skills in woodcarving. By the close of the show he had created



an exquisite Sepik spirit mask.

William Aiya, from the Huli tribe of the Tari Valley in the Southern Highlands, took centre stage at opening time each morning. He had one hour to paint his face in the elaborate Huli way. Areas of skin were sectioned off, an undercoat of white then a topcoat of yellow with portions of red were applied. The pattern was



**Above** Opera House and Harbor Bridge, Sydney. **left** Darling Harbor shopping plaza. **top right** William Aiya's daily ritual entranced show visitors. **bottom right** Visitors crowd the Papua New Guinea booth.



finished off with a series of uniform white dots along the centre and dividing lines. William is an old hand at travel shows. He has travelled to Italy, Germany, Brisbane in Australia and now to Sydney to promote Papua New Guinea.

Once his hour was up, the main show would start, William would pack up his various jars of colored ochre and take up his

**Above** Sydney Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbor. **left** International Hall, Holiday and Travel Show. **right** Cook Islands dancer.

position at the PNG booth to assist with the constant stream of enquiries.

It was here that I met William Aiya. His traditional dress, in particular the well-known Huli wig, fascinated me. I had seen wigman photographs in magazines and brochures on many occasions, but I had not had the opportunity to have a real 'bird's eye view'. I have to

admit that the color and decoration of the entire ensemble lends itself to be repeatedly photographed and that the wigs of the Huli, and other similarly attired tribes, always attract a tremendous amount of interest.

William explained that the wig was worn by adult males of his village and that it was made of human hair, decorated with parrot feathers and cuscus fur

and crowned with bird of paradise feathers. He gave permission for me to touch it, although back in the village this would not be allowed. He kindly obliged many show visitors who requested photographs, ourselves included. We went with him outside, onto the Darling Harbor promenade and shot off a series of photos against the city skyline. It was quite a



contrast as one culture met another and that theme was emphasised at the PNG booth: "Join us in adventure country, a land of color, age-old traditions and contrasts".

William's role in Sydney was not confined to the Holiday and Travel Show. He was the special guest of South Pacific Divers Club for the Australasian Underwater Photographer of

the Year presentation.

The event attracted a capacity crowd of 800 divers and their friends. William, still in traditional bilas, presented first prize — a dive holiday package to PNG.

William informed the winner, Gary Bell of Victoria, that diving in PNG was a real treat and he invited the audience and other club patrons to call in at

the Holiday and Travel Show and stop by at the PNG booth.

Sunday morning it was business as usual and as the doors to the Holiday and Travel Show opened William took his place again on centre stage. Paint pots and brushes were set up, his hand mirror taken out of his bilum, and the ritual started for the last time, at least at this travel show.

**Right** Sydney skyline from the Darling Harbor shopping plaza.

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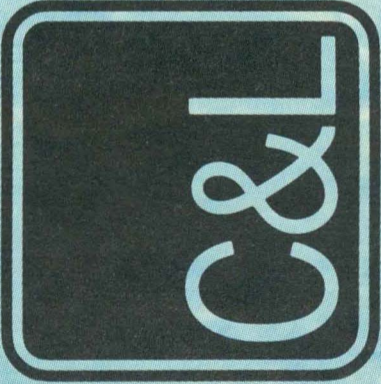


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Story and photographs by Jean-Paul Ferrero

# T ree Kangaroo

Above Grizzled tree kangaroo, Tarricelli Mountains



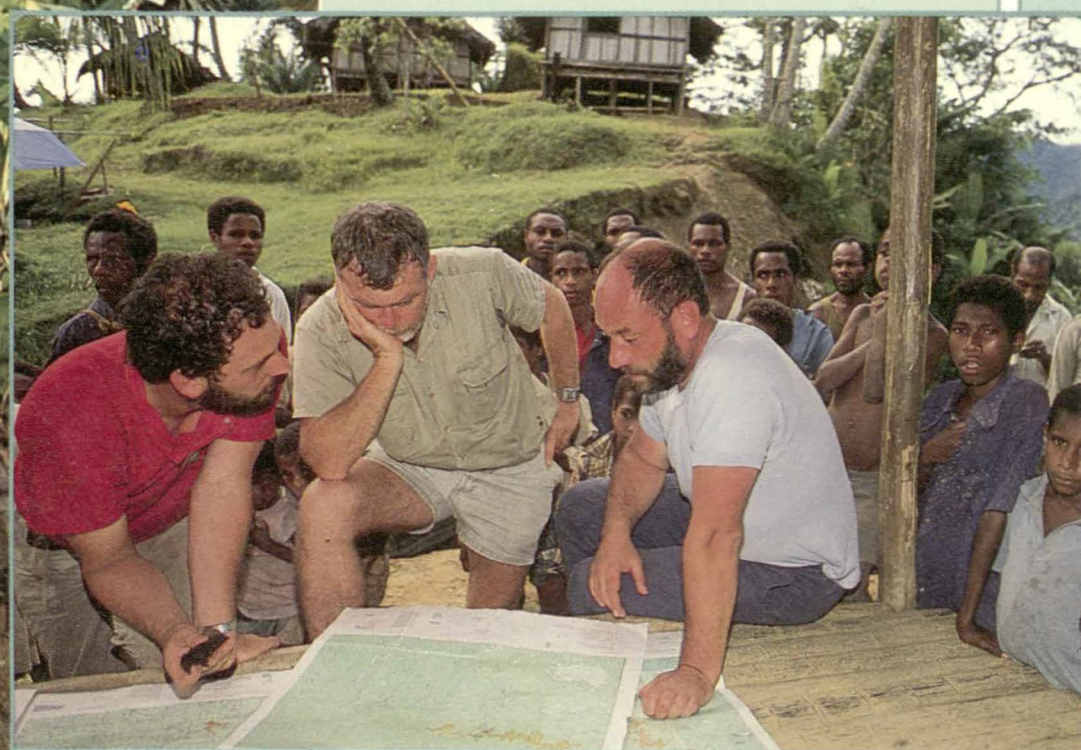


**U**ntil last year, nobody in the world scientific community had heard about Scott's tree kangaroo. Not that the macropod bearing its name was unknown to the villagers of the Torricelli mountains in the Western Sepik region of Papua New Guinea but simply because the animal had neither a common name nor official status as a species described by zoology.

A substantial financial gift from the estate of a wealthy Sydney woman gave the kangaroo a name and Dr Tim Flannery, from the Australian Museum, the means to undertake a long term study of the 'Dendrolagus scottae'.

Most Australians would be surprised to learn that the rainforests of north Queensland shelter two species of kangaroos that climb trees. On the island of New Guinea, nearly everyone knows about the seven species under local names such as ugwa, d'bol, timboyok, ulea, wangoerie, yonquile and the now famous tenkile. All have been hunted as highly prized food by the people of PNG and Irian Jaya for eons.

The challenge of discovering a major species of mammals — a male tenkile weight is estimated at 20 kilograms — toward the end of the 20th Century is tantamount to finding another set of Great Pyramids.

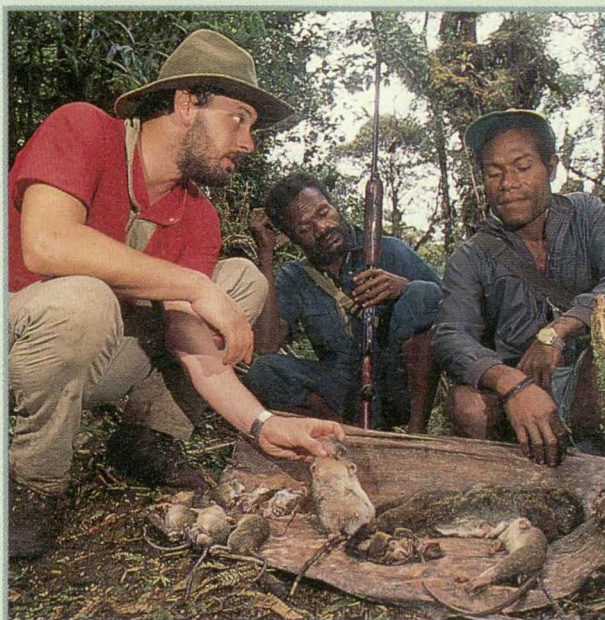


**Left** Base camp in Wabute village. **above** Tim Flannery (left) and expedition members study maps of the search area.



Tim Flannery's quest started three years ago when, by accident, the claw of an unknown animal came to his attention during a field trip in the Torricellis. Back in Sydney, he realised it had to belong to an undescribed species of tree kangaroo. This was later confirmed when the body of a young tenkile killed by dogs was sent to the museum. The single most important clue to the identity and habitat of the new species came in the encounter between a live joey and Father Pat McGeevey in the village of Fatima. In 1989, the Irish, Peter O'Toole-lookalike priest was presented with a young animal orphaned by a hunting party. Tender care did not

**Below** Tim Flannery examines a water rat among hunters' haul in the Torricelli Mountains.



however prevent the youngster from dying before the wildlife authorities got to it.

In February, 1990, Tim Flannery, Roger Martin, a zoologist involved in the study of the Australian Bennett's tree kangaroo, a film crew and myself set off for the Torricellis in search of the tenkile.

In the village of Wabute, our base camp for the next two weeks, we met Lester Seri and his assistant, Viari, from the PNG Wildlife Department.

The forested slopes of Mount Somoro seemed to be within touching distance from our stilted house. We were soon to spend the better part of a full day climbing through thickly

**Left** Tube-nosed bat previously unknown to science. **right** Believed to be a sub-species of Doria's tree kangaroo.

vegetated escarpments and crossing rivers to reach the summit of Mount Somoro, in the heart of the tenkile habitat.

Soon the local hunters disappeared in the mossy labyrinth of the upper montane forest. A very different hunt for them: We all definitely preferred a live tenkile to a dead one. With a lame dog and a pregnant one left behind, the chances of success were remote. No tenkile was sighted on the first night.

Besides this project, Tim is working on a comprehensive survey of the mammals of PNG. Days were spent processing the catch secured by our local helpers.

As a wildlife photographer, my interest grows with the size and any wealth of color displayed by my models. Tim's enthusiasm fires with rare specimens of drab appearance: "See this little guy," he said, handing me a trap in which a small-sized rat was caught. "That's only the fourth I have ever seen."

Taking it to my small tent, by then not only sleeping quarters but also portable field studio, I managed to get a few frames of the rare northern hydromine, unknown to me until now and most likely destined to future obscurity for the rest of the world.

I certainly got more excited when a yellow-spotted, tube-nosed bat had been caught in one of our mist nets. "Looks like a new species," declared Tim.

The following nights were no more successful for our hunting friends. The evening camp fire was now the venue for interviews and exchange of stories about the tenkile. It transpired that the older hunters had killed many kangaroos in earlier days. "Not so many these days," professed our cook, Anton. It was to be the most understated prophecy as we headed



**Left** Tropical rainforest of the Torricelli Mountains. **below** Undescribed species of frog found on Mount Somoro.





**Left** Small-eared *nyctophilus* bat in the Torricelli Mountains. **above** Rare northern hydromine (water mouse). **below** Torricelli Mountains tropical rainforest.

back toward the village after almost a week in the forest.

After a short flight from Lumi, we landed to the only access point to our second search area: the small airfield of Utai. We were to trek to the village of Fas No. 3 along the Gredike River flowing from an unnamed range at the eastern end of the Bewani mountains.

We were informed that no tenkile existed in the area but the 'fiwo' were plentiful up the mountain. The description fitted the tenkile physical attributes. We settled for a change of name.

In this desolate part of the country, people rely much more on hunting than their counterparts in more 'urbanised' areas. The Fas hunters had plenty of hungry looking dogs and exuded more confidence in their abilities than the Wabute villagers.



Next afternoon the commissioned hunting party walked into the village with three dark-furred tree kangaroos. The male had been killed but the female and young were alive. There was a sudden rush of activity: one grabbing a camera, one a tripod, sound recording equipment and instruments of measure in an effort to welcome the 'tenkile-fiwo' into the world of scientific recognition.

Upon examination, and to our greatest discomfort, Tim declared: "They are not tenkiles." Then he added: "I have never seen such tree kangaroos. They look like Doria's tree kangaroos but are much too small."

We did not return to Sydney empty handed. We had a couple of 'fiwo' specimens, now being subjected to DNA analysis to determine if they are a new species or a sub-species of the Dorias, and we had valuable information about the tenkile.

We now have a much better idea as to where the elusive kangaroo is waiting for our next expedition.



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# Silvertip SHARKS



From June to November the south-east trade winds bring clear skies and calm weather to the waters of New Hanover and northern New Ireland. These fair conditions and the excellent diving that we have experienced in previous visits, tempt us each year to cruise north from our home base at Alotau in Milne Bay in our 20-metre dive charter vessel MV Telita.

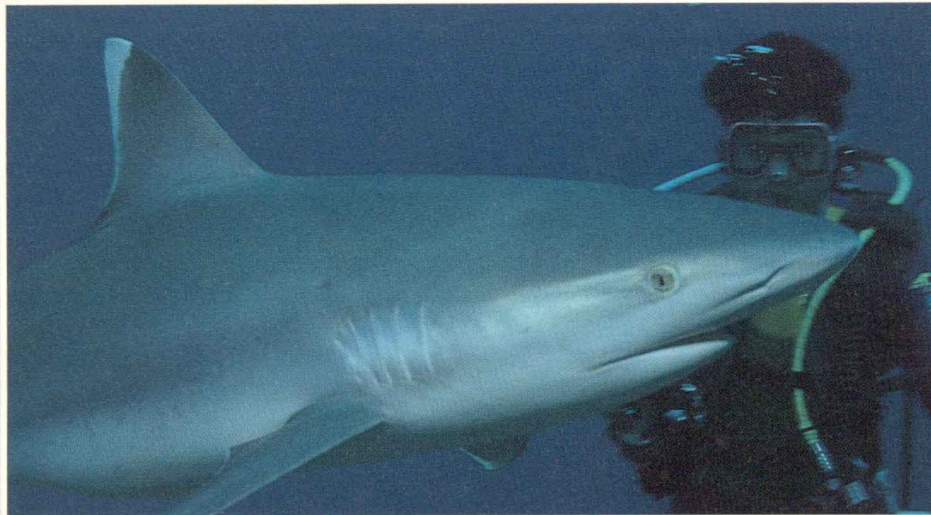
We are lucky to have been the first divers to systematically explore underwater the exquisite virgin reefs of this idyllic part of Papua New Guinea. It was on one of these untouched reefs that we discovered one of the most exciting dives in all of my 17 years of diving in PNG.

As we prepared to explore the reef, probably to be the first humans to see its secrets, I looked around at my fellow divers and sensed the joy of adventure that we were sharing.

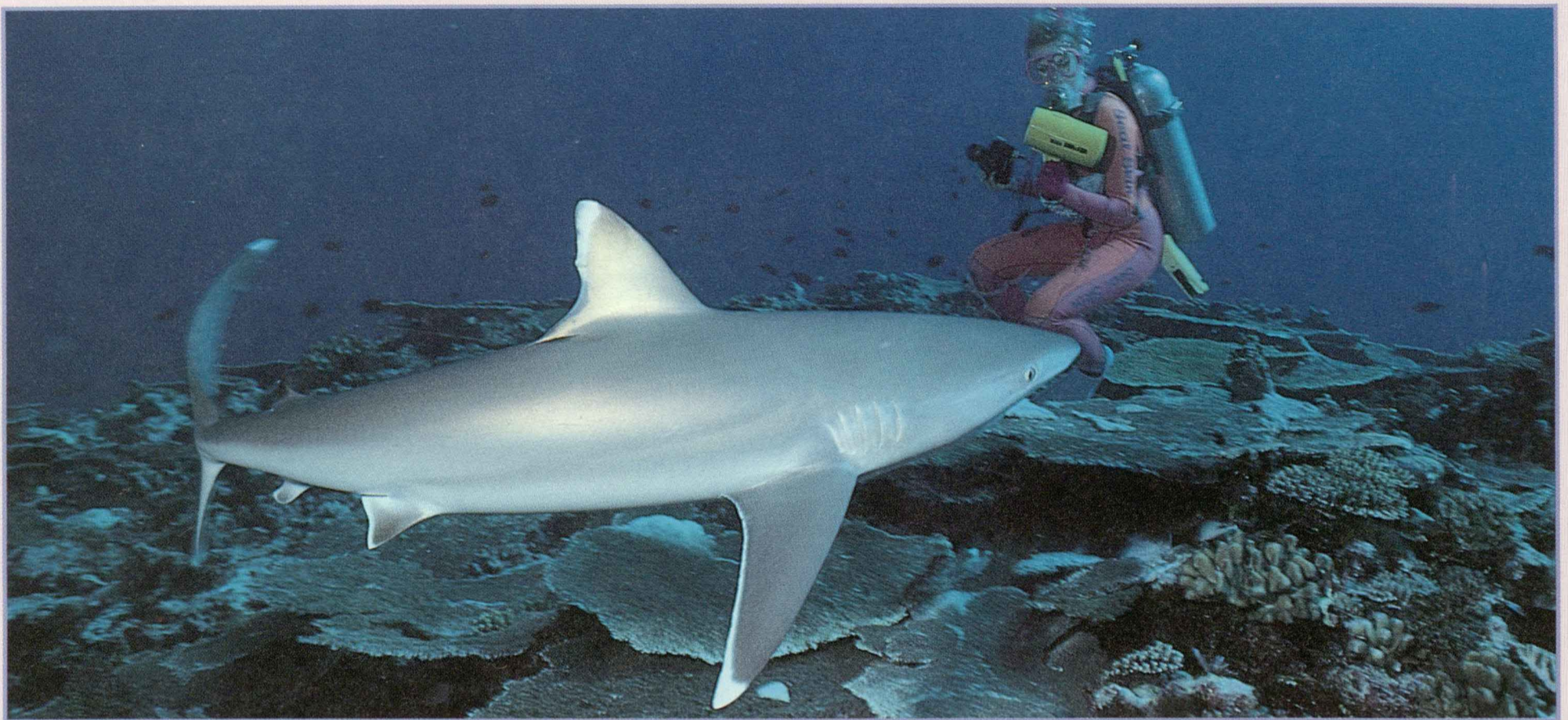
The water was very clear and it was easy to see the sandy slope from the top of the coral reef. Myriads of exotic tropical fishes were flashing a kaleidoscope of rainbow colors. But no grey reef sharks. This was strange.

**Left** Shark expert Valerie Taylor hand feeding a silvertip shark, an activity not recommended by the author. **inset** Master of the deep, a silvertip with distinctively colored dorsal fin.

Soon however some sharks did appear but instead of the ubiquitous grey reef they were the magnificent silvertip shark, *Carcharhinus albimarginatus*. This shark is often seen in PNG, particularly on the outer reef walls near very deep water. It is a large shark growing to three metres, and has a big girth. It has a light bronze color and is distinguished by brilliant silver edges to its fins.



**Left** A silvertip making a close pass by Dinah Halstead. **below** A silvertip moving in for a closer look at Valerie Taylor.



When you see a silvertip you know you are seeing a real shark! One of diving's greatest moments is to be looking out into the blue water on an outer reef and notice silver lights weaving their way up from the deep. As the shark nears, the rest of its shape becomes apparent. It prefers a direct approach and will move straight towards you veering off only at the last moment, a little unnerving for the uninitiated. Those in the know stay still and hold their breath. Then the shark will come within touching distance before turning and swimming away.

Several silvertip sharks swam around the reef, but there was not a sign of any grey reef sharks. After the dive, Dinah and I started thinking of the possibilities. We had never been in a situation where we were

able to feed the silvertip shark without grey reefs coming in and making the feed chaotic. When the silvertips were involved, the grey reefs seemed to agitate them. The grey reefs, although smaller, always managed to get the baits before the silvertips. Here we had a very unusual situation where we had silvertips without any grey reefs; what would happen if we started to feed them? Returning to New Ireland for our next charter season we were determined to try.

On our first two feeds we simply tied off some fish baits and watched what happened. Both times only silvertips took the baits and both times the sharks were very much calmer than any previous experience that we have had with feeding grey reef sharks.

On the following charter we

entertained a Japanese friend and Australian diver and film maker Valerie Taylor. Valerie, with her husband Ron, has had more experience filming sharks than anyone else in the world. I was anxious to tell Valerie about our find and to get her expert advice on how to proceed. The advice we received included the news that she knew of only one other reef in the world where silvertip sharks could be found without other sharks being present.

She was very enthusiastic about diving our silvertip reef and explained to us some of the important steps necessary to get very close to the feeding sharks, even hand feed them, without getting bitten. We definitely do not recommend that anyone reading this article attempts to do this, in fact we recommend that you do not.

After a couple more feeds we encouraged the sharks to approach a 'dining area' in a calm and confident manner. Valerie demonstrated that it was possible to hand feed them without causing signs of frenzy. The sharks even showed signs of affection in the same way that a pet dog does. This was rather strange and I have certainly never felt that other sharks, apart from the whale shark, could possibly be friendly. They did not act aggressively to us or to other divers that we brought to the reef.



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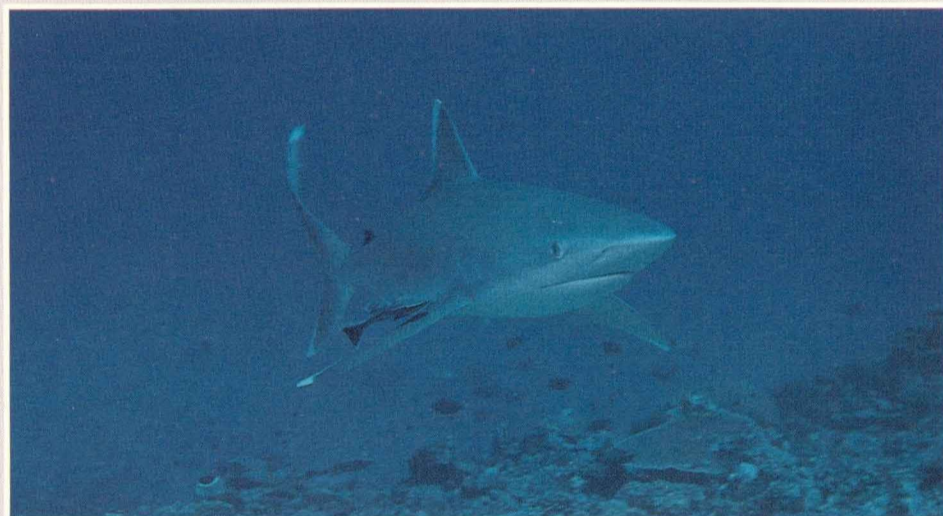
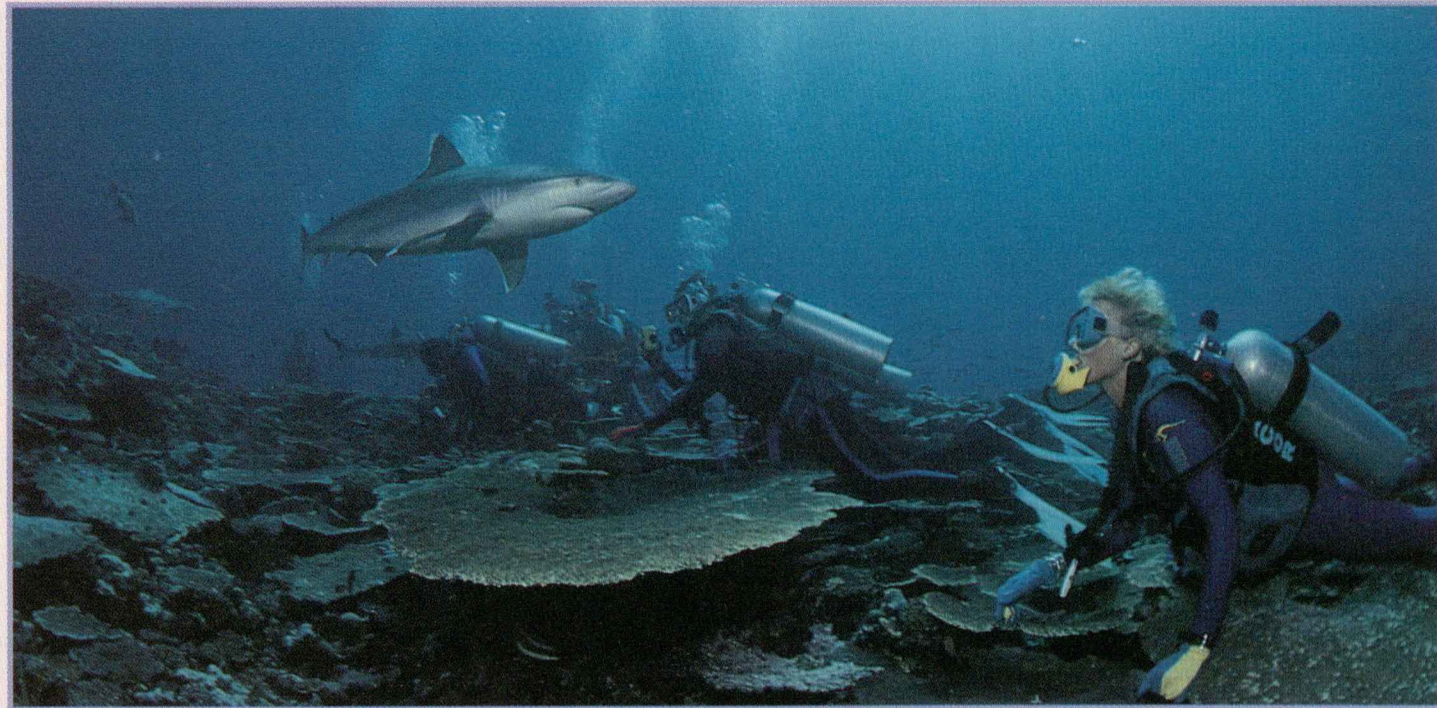


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We now have a situation where, on arriving at the reef, our 'family' is waiting for us. There are at least eight individuals all but one of whom are females, two babies less than one metre long, two adolescents just under two metres long, two adults over two metres long and two grandmothers at nearly three metres long, one of which is easily recognised as it has lost half of one of its pectoral fins, presumably to another shark. After we anchor, our guests can see the sharks circling Telita. We give the divers a very detailed briefing then enter with the baits and swim down to the dining area, tying off the dinner to a convenient coral head and keeping a few fish for hand feeding tucked under a plate coral.

The sharks quickly pick up the scent and come in to have their meal. Soon the sharks are swimming around, between and over the divers who can gently touch them as they swim by. A firm tap on the snout is administered if a shark seems to be getting a bit cheeky and this is sufficient to establish control. After each shark has fed from the dining area, Dinah takes a fish in her hand and offers it to one which comes in and sees the bait. After a couple of passes, each time coming a bit closer, seeing and smelling the bait, the shark makes its decision, moves directly to Dinah, closes its eyes and gently takes the bait from her hand. If the bait is moved, it is surprisingly difficult for the shark to find it. Usually the shark will have to make another pass and try again.

We are not trying to tame the sharks and teach them circus stunts, rather to understand them and find ways to communicate with them. We are trying to show the sharks that they can regard us as fellow creatures of the deep, not to fear us, but at the same time to respect us. We are going into their environment, not dragging them into ours. Captive sharks are often dispirited and feeble, in fact many do not survive long in



captivity and bear little relation to the animal in the wild.

These wild sharks have plenty of opportunity to bite divers if they wished. But what we see is a magnificent, glorious creature, perfect in its evolution, and we are happy and grateful to be able to spend a few moments of our lives underwater in awe of the beauty of the beast.

**Top** One of a family of silvertip sharks sweeps past watchful divers. **centre** Silvertips usually approach divers head-on at first sight, swerving away only at the last moment. **bottom** MV Telita at anchor.



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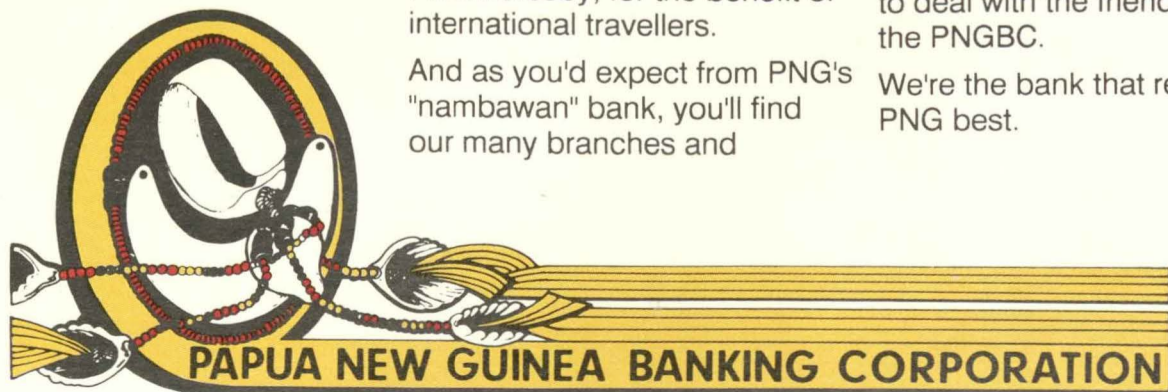
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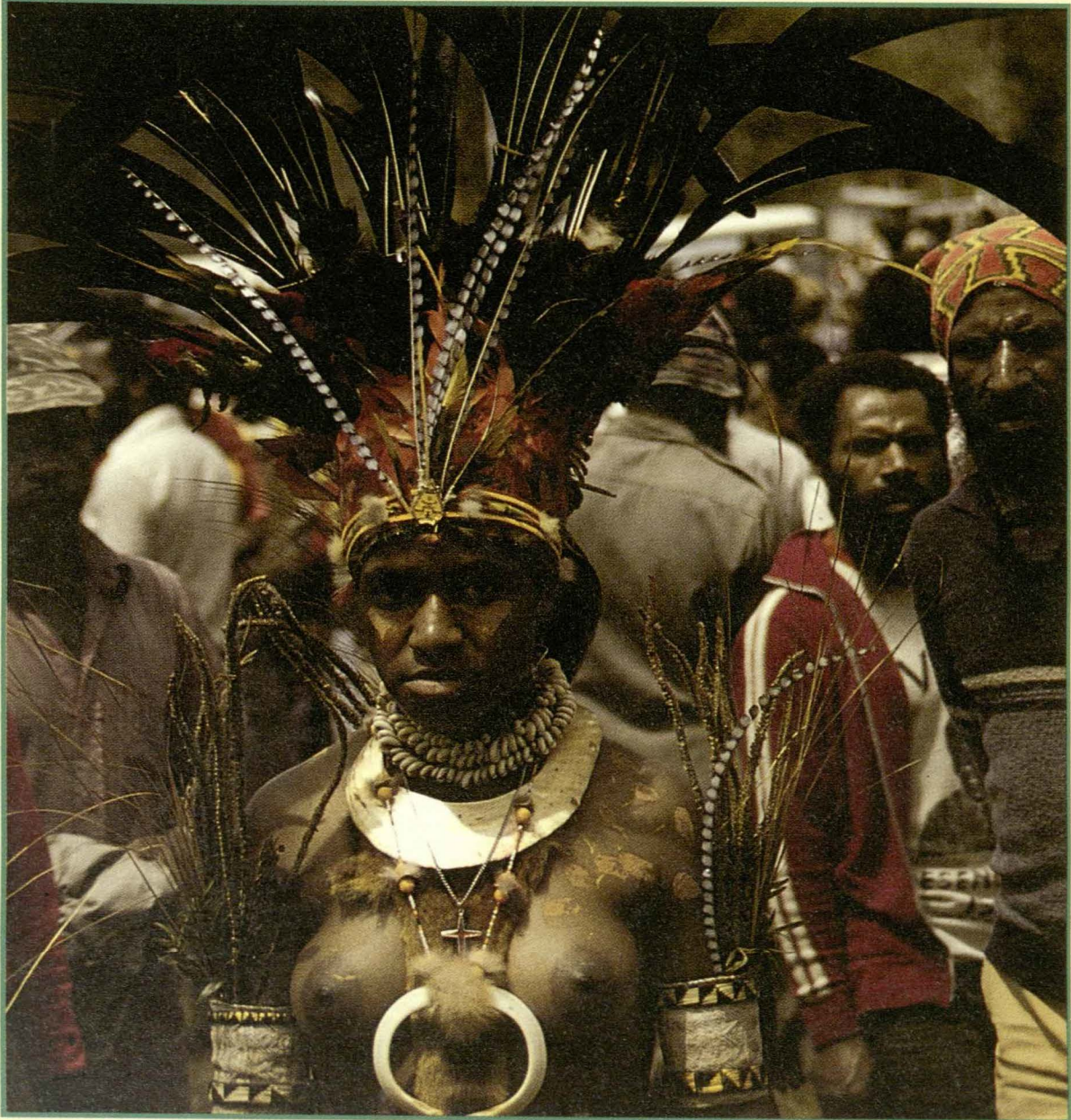
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# ORCHID LODGE

Story and photographs by Daniel Kumbon



**Above** Birds are abundant at Kaiap Orchid Lodge.



**Above** A young Chimbu woman visitor to the lodge.





“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways!! Beautiful setting, excellent accommodation, lovely people and what a shower,” are the words entered in the visitors’ book by one Peter Crossett of Geelong, Australia. In the same year, an American couple, Jim and Kathy of Tucson, Arizona, wrote: “A little bit of Heaven! Spectacular views, wonderful people, great food.”

Lots of comments to this effect are made by tourists about a small lodge 2,700 metres above sea level overlooking the Lai and Ambum valleys in Wabag, Enga Province. The Kaiap Orchid Lodge, started in 1978 on the advice of Andree Miller, author of *Orchids in Papua New Guinea*, is built mostly of bush materials and is run and staffed by the local Kamainwan clan.

I went to Kaiap Orchid Lodge for the first time in 1984, and could not quite believe it. Since then I have been a regular visitor. Kaiap is indeed, a village with a difference. Nowhere else in Enga is there such a place.

The lodge has outlived any other such project started by an individual or group in the province and celebrates its eleventh anniversary in March this year. The lodge is largely a result of the vision and hard work of proprietor and Kamainwan leader, Councillor Peter Piaon. The project has set a good example to other villagers seeking an appropriate way to attract and benefit from tourism.

Here travellers stay in a comfortable guest house in a remote mountain setting. Food is prepared on a woodfired stove. Home-made bread, roasted coffee and locally grown vegetables are all part of the lodge’s service. “The atmosphere we try to create is one of friendliness and informality,” said Councillor Piaon. “We try to create a little haven of perfect peace in which to relax.”

The lodge houses a huge collection of artefacts from many provinces in PNG,



ranging from intricately woven lalibu baskets from the Southern Highlands and penis gourds from Telefomin in the West Sepik province. From Enga, string-bags, caps, kundu drums, stone axes and bird of paradise plumes adorn the interior of the lodge.

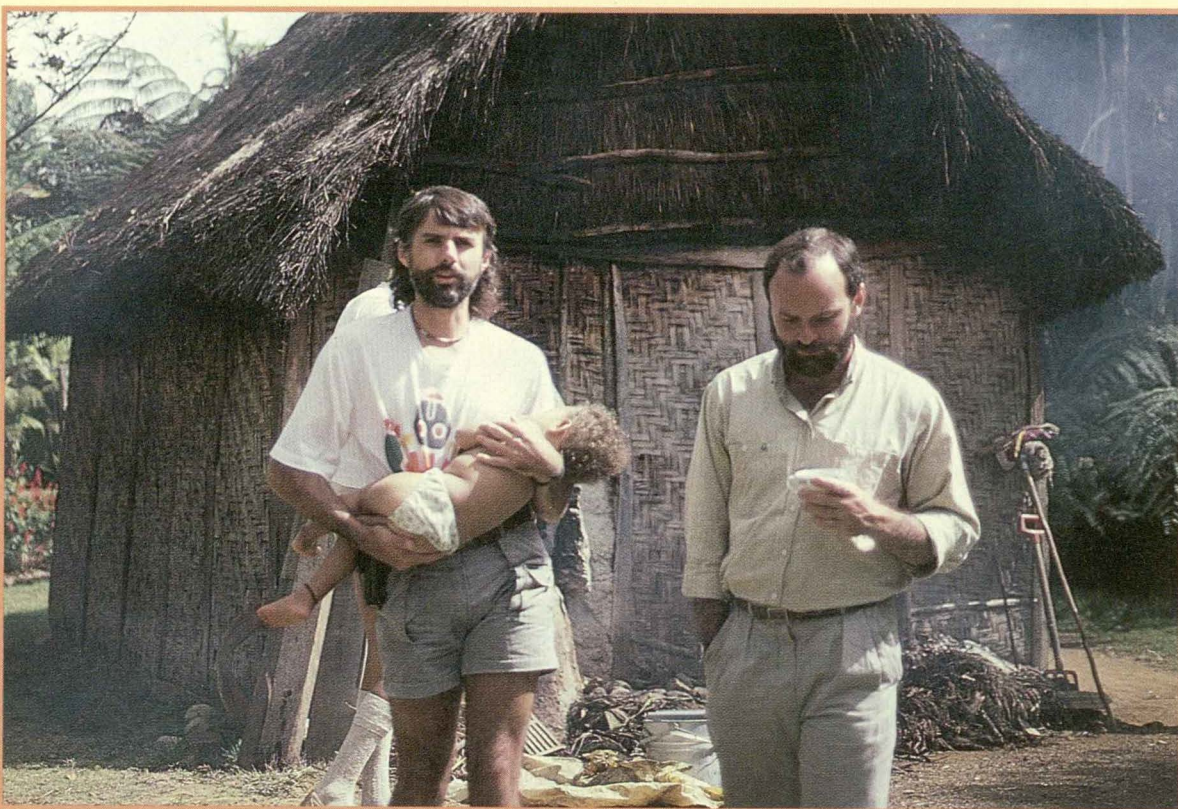
An extensive garden with more than 100 species of orchid has been cultivated on the grounds. One species, *Dendrobium Engae*, is unique to the province and the provincial government adopted it as the flower symbolised on the provincial flag. Four species of bird of paradise have been sighted from the lodge, so it is recommended that tourists bring their binoculars.

There are 10 twin rooms and two double rooms. There are no videos or telephones in the rooms, giving guests the perfect opportunity to escape from it all. The lounge features a large log fireplace and a library of novels and magazines on various aspects of PNG.

"I will not put telephones or videos in the rooms," said Councillor Piao. "I just want the lodge to be a quiet place for people who want to get away from it all. I want people to sit

**Top left** Visitors entertain themselves in the bar. **bottom left** Outdoor conference in the lodge grounds. **top right** Visitor with Kamainwan villager. **bottom right** Picnic party arriving with supplies. **insets** Two of 100 orchid varieties on show.





down, relax and see the views, see how the birds fly and feel the wind blow. I want people to sit on the ridge and see the sun rise and set and see how the clouds cover the valleys below."

Councillor Piaon hopes that the current average of 40 to 50 people who go to the Lodge every month will gradually increase. Although that is not a huge number of people it is just about right for a village-style lodge to accommodate.

Says Councillor Piaon: "It is not a big income earner, but it is something worthwhile for us villagers. You know, I enjoy providing this service in my village, my home. I was born here, grew up here and I want to see people coming to my village." If guests feel active there are various walks around the local area. There is a chance on these walks to see traditional Enga houses, gardens and some aspects of life.

To encourage PNG participation in the travel industry, the Travel Association of PNG introduced awards for contributions to the industry. The first such award was presented to the Kaiap Orchid Lodge at a recent ceremony at the Travellodge in Port Moresby. This was a big encouragement for Peter Piaon and the people of Kaiap.

They want visitors to come to their villages — and into their houses as well — for they want to show as much of themselves to visitors as possible. Being an Engan myself I admire the work of Councillor Piaon and his people. They are doing a fine job and I recommend Kaiap Lodge to any visitor who decides to come to Enga.

I guarantee that you will discover Enga the land, the beauty, the life-style and the very nature of the 'real Engan' through the Kamainwan people of Kaiap.

**Top** A corner of the lodge garden. **centre** Expatriate family groups are frequent guests. **left** Shaded tables are used for outdoor conferences.

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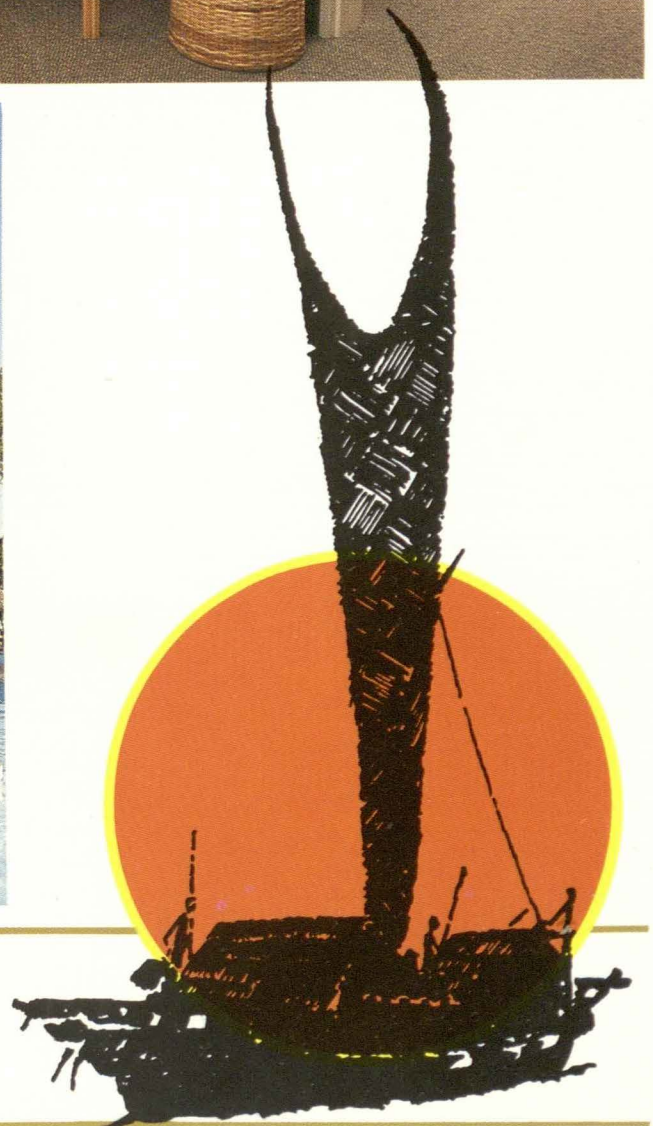
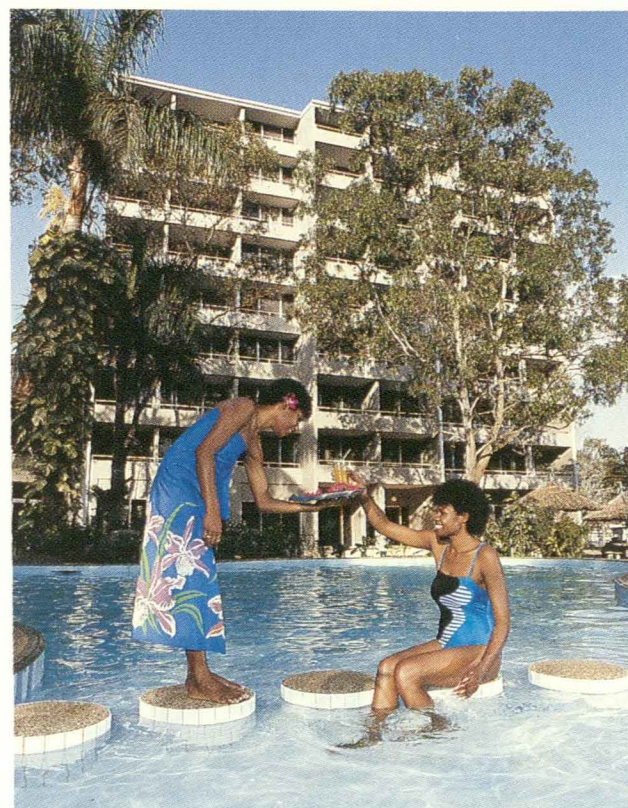
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