

GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

REPORT TO COUNCIL ON THE STUDY TOUR
TO PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND IRIAN JAYA
JUNE - JULY 1989

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ORGANIZATION

The organization for this study tour began over a year before departure. A great deal of effort was put into securing the lowest possible price for tour participants, and in the end travel arrangements were made directly with Air Niugini and Niugini Tours. The final cost of the study tour was \$2199 for members of the Geographical Society and \$2249 for non-members. The duration of the study tour was 16 days.

A preparatory meeting was held for tour participants about four weeks prior to departure to explain details of tour organization, meet the tour leader and tour escort, for participants to get to know each other, and to view a preparatory video ("First Contact"). In addition, a 19 page information page information booklet was issued to participants, giving details of tour administration, the final itinerary, equipment and clothing list, medical information, and information on weather, violence, currency, photography, artifacts, cultural background, Dani and Melanesian Pidgin language tips, and pointers for further reading.

Compared with many other study tours organized by the Geographical Society, a larger than average proportion of the participants were members of the Society. It was pleasing to be associated with the organization of a study tour which appealed to Society members as well as members of the general public, and the wealth of geographical expertise of the tour participants, and the consequent sharing of observations and insights, represented a real richness of this study tour experience, especially on those sectors when tour escorts offered little information (especially the Sepik and Port Moresby).

TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

The high quality of Niugini Tours' travel arrangements was matched only by the exceptionally poor service given by Air Niugini while away. Almost every flight with Air Niugini resulted in an unpleasant experience for some or all of the group due to organizational or operational difficulties. Some specific examples should exemplify the point:

Saturday 24th June: The connecting flight from Port Moresby to Wewak was about an hour late, and all but five items of group luggage were offloaded en route at Madang. This meant that the group spent four full days with only the travelling clothes they were wearing from Sydney Airport, including three days in the (hot, humid) Sepik staying in Tamabnum village.

Wednesday 28th June: The flight from Wewak to Vanimo was delayed four hours. At Vanimo the group had to change planes into a Douglas Airways Trislander for the hop across to Jayapura. We knew that the group (size = 17) would not all fit on one flight (plane capacity = 12) and that the plane would have to operate a quick shuffle. Although the flight from Vanimo to Jayapura is only half an hour's duration, it was four hours before the second flight arrived, and then two members had been left behind. They arrived only after a second plane was put onto the service, meaning that the small planes had undertaken four return flights on the day. As a result of this, the group did not have lunch until 5:30 p.m. that day.

Wednesday 5th July: In order to connect with the flight from Vanimo to Mount Hagen, an early Douglas Airways flight was sent to Jayapura to take half the group into P.N.G., the intention being to return promptly to collect the other half of the group. Unfortunately, the pilot could not be persuaded to make the return flight, and the second half of the group did not leave Jayapura for another four hours (this time being a couple of hours after the first half of the group had arrived in Mount Hagen). A charter could not be arranged and the second half of the group had to stay overnight in Vanimo, catching a Talair charter to Kundiawa the next day to catch up with the rest of the group. One member's luggage was lost on the Jayapura- Vanimo- Mount Hagen leg, and at the time of writing had not been recovered.

Through these difficulties, I was particularly impressed that Niugini Tours were monitoring our difficulties from Sydney, and were in constant contact by telephone (from Sydney) at Vanimo and Kundiawa Airports, and with the leaderless half of the group which made it to Mount Hagen. I have not previously experienced such a high quality of service and concern from any travel agent on any other study tour I have led, although similarly I have never experienced such difficulties from an airline either, and I include travel in China and Burma, as well as previous experiences in Papua New Guinea, in this observation!

Our travel in Irian Jaya was with Merpati Nusantara (Jayapura to Wamena) and Airfast (Wamena to Jayapura). The former flight was punctual, while the latter was delayed several hours, although adequate notice was given of this beforehand.

ITINERARY

With the exception of the changes necessitated by problems with Air Niugini, the itinerary was largely as proposed in the brochure for the trip.

A summary of the main studies undertaken on the trip is given below, together with members' evaluation of the studies. In order to evaluate the educational value of the studies undertaken, the five point rating scale employed on previous Society tours was used:

- 1 = very poor, well below expectations
- 2 = poor, below expectations
- 3 = good, average, as expected
- 4 = very good, above expectations
- 5 = excellent, much above expectations

STAGE 1: THE SEPIK (TAMBANUM)

	GRADE
Inspection of Tambanum village	3.4
All day expedition to Maramba village	5.0
Drive and walk to Kamingai village	2.0

STAGE 2: WAMENA

Walk to traditional bridge and hydro plant	4.1
Wamena Markets	4.3
Walk to village to see penis gourd vines, pigs, etc	3.9

STAGE 3: RURAL BALIEM VALLEY

Walk to Wollo village	4.7
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Ridgetop walk to Miagima village (in heavy rain!)	4.3
Pumo village and mummy	4.7
Pig kill ceremony at Miagima	4.8
Walk to limestone caves and salt pool	4.2

STAGE 4: JAYAPURA

Hamadi markets	1.4
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STAGE 5: P.N.G. HIGHLANDS

Performance of Chimbu Players	3.1
Performance of (imitation) Mudmen	2.6
Drive through Chimbu Gorge from Kundiawa to Kegasugl	4.7
Sing Sing at Kegasugl	3.2
Visit to burial cave	2.8
Goroka Coffee Factory	2.3

STAGE 6: PORT MORESBY

Bomana War Cemetary	3.3
Sogeri and Variata National Park	3.9
Parliament House inspection	4.8
Shanties at 6 Mile rubbish tip	4.1
Koki Markets	3.1
Paga Hill Lookout	4.2
Hanuabada stilt (Motu) settlement	4.0

SERVICES EVALUATION

Accommodation and other services were evaluated using the same 5 point rating scale as above. The details were as follows:

	Accommodation	Helpfulness	Food	Atmosphere
WEWAK:				
Sepik International Beach Resort	2.9	3.4	3.1	3.9
TAMBANAM: Tambanam Guest House	3.3	3.1	2.9	4.2
JAYAPURA: Sentani Hotel	2.5	3.3	3.1	3.0
WAMENA: Jayawijaya Hotel	4.1	4.8	5.0	4.8
BALIEM VALLEY: Tents at Wollo and Miagima villages	3.2	4.7	4.5	5.0
JAYAPURA: Numbai Hotel	3.5	3.7	4.5	3.6
MOUNT HAGEN: Kimininga Lodge (half group)	2.8	1.2	3.8	2.4
VANIMO: Vanimo Resort Hotel (half group)	3.4	3.8	4.5	4.3
KEGASUGL: Herman's Hut	4.0	4.6	3.4	4.5
PORT MORESBY: Civic Guest House	3.2	3.8	4.2	4.2

I have already communicated details of a number of problems with some of

the accommodation to Niugini Tours, particularly the lack of water at Tambanam Guest House, the outrageously expensive food at the Sepik International and the extreme lack of helpfulness and apparent deceit on the part of Kimininga Lodge.

CONCLUSION

From the comments made by most of the tour participants, and the personal letters I have received from many of them since our return to Australia, the study tour was undeniably successful in satisfying the expectations of those on it. It was not the easiest or most comfortable study tour the Society has undertaken, but the demands for value for money and the nature of the places visited necessitated some measure of discomfort. The group expected that luxury would not be a keynote of the "expedition", and they coped with the difficulties with exceptionally good cheer. The principal complaints on the study tour were:

- a. the atrociously poor luggage handling and people handling by Air Niugini;
- b. the lack of commentary from local organizers in some places, the Sepik being the most notable example; and
- c. leaking tents in the Baliem Valley.

Thanks are due to many people for their assistance in organizing what was obviously a well appreciated study tour. I particularly appreciated the advice and assistance given by Jack Cashman of Air Niugini, whose efficiency is in marked contrast to that of the luggage handlers of the same airline. Owen Coney was an excellent tour escort with an enthusiasm for Irian Jaya and the Dani people which was infectious. I especially appreciated the assistance of Ruth Dicker from Niugini Tours for her care for the group during the difficult time when the group was split into two, half the group being leaderless in Mount Hagen with the other half madly trying to arrange a connecting flight from Vanimo to the Highlands. The Society can be very confident in Niugini Tours' capacity to stand by groups which have organized itineraries through them, even in the face of the obstacles posed by Air Niugini.

Finally, I would like to place on record my thanks to the members of our group for their assistance, suggestions and support through the trip. Through the many minor (and less minor) organizational problems which inevitably arise when travelling in remote areas of Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya, they remained tolerant, cheerful and willing to help. The different backgrounds of members and the group's enthusiastic sense of enquiry made the experience a most intellectually stimulating one for all concerned. In my mind, the tour was noteworthy for the people we met and the people we travelled with. As tour leader, I appreciated the group's support, interest and friendship in making the study tour so obviously worthwhile.

16th July, 1989

ITINERARY

At the time of writing (late March, 1989), the itinerary was identical to that in the original promotional brochure. For the record, this itinerary is reproduced here...

Saturday 24th June: Depart SYDNEY on Air Niugini flight PX4 at 8:10 am, and arrive at PORT MORESBY at 1:30 pm. At 3:30 pm connect with Air Niugini flight PX128 to WEWAK, arriving at 6:20 pm. Transfer to Sepik International Hotel. Overnight budget room accommodation with share bathroom facilities

Sunday, 25th June: Morning transfer by bus from Wewak to TAMBANUM on the SEPIK RIVER (4 hours). Afternoon inspection of Tambanum, which is a large, prosperous village with carved houses, known for its artifacts such as masks and pottery. Two nights accommodation at Tambanum Guest Lodge, including share bathroom and cooking facilities and all food (6 meals, to be cooked by group members).

Monday, 26th June: Day trip by motorized canoe along the Sepik to the scenic CHAMBRI LAKES, with a visit to AIBOM, a small village noted for its pottery. Return to Tambanum for overnight, including all food.

Tuesday, 27th June: Road transfer from Tambanum to WEWAK. Overnight at the Sepik International Hotel, budget rooms with share bathroom facilities.

Wednesday, 28th June: Transfer to Wewak Airport. Depart at 10:15 am on Air Niugini flight PX48, arriving at JAYAPURA (IRIAN JAYA) at 11:00 am (time change = 1 hour). Jayapura is the provincial capital of Irian Jaya, and one of the centres of Indonesia's transmigration programme. Meeting at Jayapura (Sentani) Airport, porter assistance with baggage, and transfer to Jayapura city 30 km away. Check in at hotel, transfer to restaurant in Jayapura for lunch. Visit to museum and markets, afternoon free. Dinner at city restaurant. Overnight accommodation at Numbai Hotel overlooking Jayapura Harbour.

Thursday, 29th June: Breakfast at hotel before transferring to Jayapura Airport. Morning flight on Merpati Nusantara Airlines Fokker Friendship to WAMENA (BALIEM VALLEY). The Baliem Valley is in the Highlands, and is populated by the Dani people who were only discovered by outsiders in 1938. Dress, culture and lifestyles are much more traditional than in P.N.G., although there are some impacts from culture contact. Transfer to Hotel Jayawijaya on arrival at Wamena, lunch at hotel. Afternoon walk through food gardens and villages to traditional rope bridge and hydro-electric power station. Visit to markets. Return to hotel for dinner and overnight accommodation.

Friday, 30th June: Road transfer to JIWIKA to see cave system and 400 year old mummy. Three hour walk with porter assistance for all baggage to WOSILA village for ceremony including pig kill and dancing. Overnight camping at village including all meals. Note that all walks in this itinerary are "soft trekking" which are very easy and mainly on flat surfaces.

Saturday, 1st July: Walk to POMMO village (2 hours), crossing Baliem village by traditional canoe. Village visit to see 300 year old mummy. Walk to JACOBS VILLAGE (3 hours), source of penis gourds. This walk is via a small valley running off the Baliem with classic limestone gardens on almost vertical slopes, and magnificent landform scenery. Overnight camp accommodation at Jacobs village, including all meals.

Sunday, 2nd July: Walk to JIWIKA (4 hours). Road transfer to WAMENA (45 minutes) where balance of day is free. Overnight accommodation at Jayawijaya Hotel with all meals.

Monday, 3rd July: Short flight by missionary aircraft to KOSAREK village in the YALE valley, which was only entered by Western missionaries in the late 1970s. Lifestyle, culture and dress of the Yale people is still almost untouched by outside influences. The day is spent with the Yale people, looking at the effects of recent missionary activity in the area. Return to Wamena for overnight.

Tuesday, 4th July: Transfer to airstrip for flight to JAYAPURA (Sentani) airport. Transfer to Hotel Numbai, where overnight accommodation and all meals have been arranged.

Wednesday, 5th July: Transfer to airport. Depart Jayapura at 9:00 am on Air Niugini flight PX49 via Vanimo and Wewak to MOUNT HAGEN, where arrival is at 1:00 pm (time change = 1 hour). Mount Hagen is something of a frontier town despite its status as capital of Western Highlands province. Transfer to Kimininga Lodge for overnight accommodation with share bathroom facilities. Afternoon tour of Mount Hagen with visits to markets and cultural centre.

Thursday, 6th July: Breakfast at Kimininga Lodge. Depart Mount Hagen by bus for day transfer through the Wahgi Valley to the capital of CHIMBU province, KUNDIAWA, and through the spectacular shifting cultivation and villages of CHIMBU GORGE to KEGASUGL. En route, visit the village of MINGENDE to see the Chimbu Players who dance and mime traditional village lifestyle. Kegasugl, with an altitude of 2469 metres, lies at the base of MOUNT WILHELM, the highest mountain in Papua New Guinea. Overnight at Herrman's Hut at Kegasugl, which has share bathroom and cooking facilities. Provisions for 3 meals (to be cooked by group members).

Friday, 7th July: After visit to Gembogl High School at Kegasugl, depart Kegasugl by bus for day transfer to GOROKA via the ASARO VALLEY, visiting a performance by the mudmen and visits to coffee and tobacco plantations and a cigarette factory. Arrive Goroka by 3 pm to check in for flight. Visit Raun Raun Theatre. Depart Goroka at 4:55 pm on Air Niugini flight PX115, arriving at PORT MORESBY at 5:45 pm. Transfer to Civic Guest House for a 2 night stay including breakfast and share bathroom facilities.

Saturday, 8th July: Full day tour for visit to squatter settlements, Bomana War Cemetary, rubber plantations at SOGERI, and Variarata National Park. On return to PORT MORESBY, tour the township with visits to Hanuabada stilt village, Paga Point lookout and Koki markets. Overnight at Civic Guest House.

Sunday, 9th July: Breakfast at Civic Guest House before transfer to airport. Depart Port Moresby at 11:00 am on Air Niugini flight PX3, arriving in Sydney at 4:10 pm.