

The best kids in the world, amazing sea life and an escape from Sydney's winter to the –

Solomon Islands

on the islands of Charapoana, Gatokae and Guadalcanal

23rd June to 21st July 2010

Barry-Sean Virtue and Steve Anyon-Smith



The Plan

Sydney's winter isn't too bad on an international scale of such things but it sure isn't tropical. So the plan was to go snorkelling and swimming, chase a few birds* and get into the island pace whilst downing a few SolBrews and chewing the fat (and a few tasty crustaceans) with the locals.

The Solomon Islands has a good list of endemic birds but you have to visit lots of islands to see them. The logistics of travelling far and wide in a country without much in the way of communications or electricity is daunting - but quite possible if you have plenty of time. The cost of travel within the islands is low, so we decided we would visit two major island groups - Western and Guadalcanal provinces.

Best of all we could leave Sydney in the morning, catch three planes, and be swimming in Marovo Lagoon (the largest saltwater lagoon in the world) before it got dark. The plan was a good one. I started planning for my second trip to the Solomons soon after we arrived...

Barry-Sean Virtue joined me for our tenth holiday together. Unfortunately just before he left Australia he developed what turned out to be very painful arthritis in his leg, making it painful for him to move very far; so the experiences detailed here are mostly my own.

* I have lost count how many times I have been asked - "the two legged variety?" Of course! Unless you are Paul McCartney I suppose... (sorry)

Quick summary

If you are a lover of salt water, wish to acquaint yourself with the greatest kids in the world and you don't want to spend a fortune, go to the Solomon Islands.





Itinerary (as executed).

We did not pre-book activities in Western Province (Charapoana and Ropiko), and those that were pre-booked on Guadalcanal were so subject to "Solomons time" that they may as well not have been, so I haven't listed them here...

General comments on sites visited are included in the Diary section (below).

Day 1, June 23 2010

Depart Sydney 0600 on Virgin. Depart Brisbane 0930 on Solomon Airways A320. Depart Honiara for Seghe at 1430. Transfer to Charapoana Lodge on Charapoana Island by boat. Fall in water.

Days 2-7, June 24-29 2010

At Charapoana Lodge.

Day 8, June 30 2010

Transfer by boat to Ropiko Eco-Lodge on Gatokae Island.

Days 9-15, July 1-7 2010

At Ropiko Eco-Lodge.

Day 16, July 8 2010

Fly from Gatokae Airstrip at 0930 to Honiara. Transfer to New Birao Village Stay on the Tina River about a half hour drive east of Honiara.

Days 17-24, July 9-16 2010

At New Birao Village Stay.

Day 25, July 17 2010

Transfer to Alistair's place about a half hour drive west of Honiara on the coast.

Day 26-28, July 18-20 2010

At Alistair's place (Steve) or the Honiara Hotel (Barry-Sean)

Day 29, July 21 2010

Fly from Honiara to Brisbane at 1445 on Solomon Airlines flight IE700. Fly from Brisbane to Sydney with Virgin at 1900.

Travel and Tours Guadalcanal

We booked through this "company" after finding it on the internet. I had earlier sent identical emails to a few companies but received only one reply. The others appear to be managed by Australians living in the Solomons. If there is a message here on why they did not reply it eludes me.....

The principal and only employee of the business is Alistair Morris Pae. I had some reservations with booking and wiring money to Alistair. I am still not sure whether he is a licensed travel agent, or even whether such beasts exist in the Solomons. His involvement for us included the booking and payment of our lodges in Western Province and all the activities on Guadalcanal.

Alistair is a Guadalcanal native, a "Gwale". He appears to be an honest man but he does not have much understanding of the tourism industry. Commitment and service are not key words in his business's mission statement. He would fail to arrive for some excursions altogether and on almost all other occasions the driver would be late - "Solomons time". And it was always someone else's fault. The driver would be late for a bewildering range of reasons - palsy, confusion, lost in a trance, just lost, death in the family, death in someone else's family (this actually happened), etc. The idea that a customer would expect a vehicle to arrive at a previously agreed time was a great and unfathomable puzzle to all concerned - excepting us the clients. Alistair was apologetic on a daily basis, but it got to the stage where I just didn't care.

It appears that nobody in the Solomons - with the exception of the switched on folk at Ropiko Eco-Lodge - owns a watch. It probably doesn't matter as they appear to lack the ability to interpret one.

Alistair may well evolve into a competent travel agent. For the moment I cannot recommend him.



Personal Security

Relax - no danger; except perhaps from other tourists, but they are quite rare. I took a money belt with me but left it lying around and didn't wear it. After a day or two you get used to the idea. As you are always on an island where everyone is related to everyone else - even on Guadalcanal - it is unlikely that anyone will steal anything. Having said that I would always be wary of large towns like Honiara because large towns are the focal points for idiots all over the world.

I was told by friends in Australia that walking about in Solomon Island's forests can be problematic with people often suspicious of your activity. Yet I wandered anywhere I liked after telling someone where I was going, and nobody cared. The only concern ever expressed was that I should try not to get too badly lost and to consider taking some kids with me just in case.....Just in case what - I turn into a catholic priest or something?



Wildlife and the Environment (see also bird list at the end of the report)

The Solomon Islands has been isolated from large land masses for millions of years. Vertebrate diversity is low but endemism high. A number of key factors will influence your chances of seeing birds or mammals. The most obvious one for finding land-based fauna is the attentions or otherwise of Asian logging companies.

There is not much virgin forest left in the Solomons, and what's left is hard to get to. The logging companies have the same access problem, but they will overcome.... It is estimated that no significant primary forest will remain within four to eight years. There are no plans to reduce logging. There is even a political push to increase the rate! Local people get little or no money from logging companies. You can guess who does....

Despite all this doom and gloom, the forest re-grows quickly. Some secondary forest has been re-logged three times. Of course it is not the same forest and the number of tree types and the attendant fauna is diminished as the best timber trees are always the ones targeted. This is the good news. The bad news is that where the land is relatively flat the forest is clear-felled for oil palms - the most evil plant on the planet.



The second most important factor for diversity is island size - big is always best.

Thirdly but no less importantly is the breed of Christian that lives nearby. Some, like the Seventh Day Adventists, don't hunt anything (aside from fish and each other), whilst others have an eclectic mix of what wildlife their version of Christianity deems to be okay to tamper with.

In general terms the bird and mammal life in Western Province is more numerous and confiding than their counterparts on Guadalcanal. In Western it is possible to see eclectus parrots in sizeable flocks, imperial pigeons in the thousands and the mud crabs and painted lobsters can hardly fit into their shells. The cuscuses look down at you remarkably stupidly, a talent they seem to have perfected.

For bird identification we used the *Birds of the Solomons, Vanuatu and New Caledonia* by Chris Doughty. I was familiar with the few mammals we identified. A few of the more interesting reptiles - all photographed - were identified from the internet.

We identified 86 different birds, which is about the number we once saw driving from Entebbe Airport to Kampala in Uganda. We managed just four mammals. Three of these were swimming in the sea.

Mammals

Nobody goes to the Solomons to max out their mammal list, despite a country list of 75. There is but one arboreal mammal in the Solomons if you exclude rats and bats. This is the spotted cuscus, which was probably introduced from New Guinea. They are not hard to see where the locals are Seventh Day Adventists. I saw one within minutes on my first attempt.

The others mammals seen were dolphins. Indo-Pacific bottlenose and long-snouted spinner dolphins were seen off Gatokae Island and inside Marovo Lagoon. Large numbers of the latter were seen well near Honiara. Distant pods of logging false killer whales were spied from the principal beer-drinking facility at Ropiko Eco-Lodge on Gatokae.

Flying foxes were seen in Marovo Lagoon and near Honiara but were not identified. Microbats were widespread. I had no means of determining what types they were. On

Guadalcanal there were fully diurnal microbats which could be seen in the forests in the middle of the day!

Birds

I wasn't unhappy with the low trip total of 86 because I managed quite a few endemics and 35 lifers. Western Province was best as the birds were quite easy to see and relatively tame. Nicobar pigeons were seen daily on Charapoana Island and a good variety of parrots, pigeons and flycatchers kept us entertained.

Guadalcanal was disappointing for birds. The only easily accessible primary forest near Honiara is along the road to the Goldridge Mine, west of the capital. We were effectively prevented from getting to Mt Austen by a few local tossers, but it has been heavily logged anyway. We failed to get to any forest at altitude so many birds were denied us. A number



of birds listed in Doughty as "common and widespread" were not seen. Chasing mixed flocks was unproductive with better results from sitting still in forest breaks for long periods. Not looking at all worked almost as well.

Quite often birdwatching was a minor activity with snorkelling and swimming taking precedence. Some days binoculars were not used.

Reptiles

There have been 87 reptiles recorded in the Solomon Islands. Many are easily seen. I suspect that reptiles have filled niches left available by the almost entire lack of understory birds. I saw quite a few snakes but could identify only two - the common Solomon Islands ground boa and Solomon's tree snake. A mighty two metre

mangrove monitor was seen after an encounter with a shark in the Charapoana Channel. The monitor will probably survive. I cannot report on the condition of the shark. There were squillions of skinks and a few geckoes but I didn't much bother trying to identify them. I swam with a green turtle and various other turtles are seen regularly.

Fish (to look at)

There have been 777 fish described in the Solomons. I must have seen most of them while snorkelling - and I am told I didn't go to the very best sites. Marovo Lagoon deserves another visit just for the snorkelling! Every time I plopped in the briny I had a different

experience and saw fish I'd never seen before. The Charapoana Channel was simply awesome, although being surrounded by numbers of four different sharks at once is a little unsettling, despite reassurances that only the locals ever get bitten (while spearing fish).

After long periods of staring down into the clear waters - visibility of 60 metres is not unknown - I would look to the surface to see an escort of barracuda, long toms, garfish or the girl in the black bikini staying at Uepi Dive Resort. I wish. Schools of tuna or big trevally would loaf past. Next time I'm taking a fish identification guide. That should give me plenty to do over a beer and a few nuts while I get my non-existent shark bites treated.



Fish (to eat)

I don't care what anybody says - there is great fishing in the Solomons. Next time I'm taking my own gear. Fishing with hand lines for giant trevally and yellowfin tuna is exciting but I would rather catch the fish than torment them. On the two occasions we set out from Ropiko it was clear that it wasn't a matter of catching fish, but how many we needed to feed everyone.

Insects (annoying / life threatening)

Malarial mosquitoes were not present at the sites we visited and at the time of year of our holiday. Flies were abundant on Guadalcanal and could be a real nuisance but only if you had cuts or sores. Even fake cuts painted on with a crayon would get them. This tactic would divert them to inanimate objects. The flies were also specially adapted to ignore insect repellent. In fact it only served to irritate them. I tried of total totally immersing myself in large bodies of water. This presented them with challenges that they soon overcame. Killing a hundred or so in Australia serves as a warning to others, but in the Solomons this just made them giggle.

There were no ticks or leeches seen, presumably because of the lack of hosts. Aside from a few pigs, and these were hardly common, I spotted just four farm animals.

Insects weren't really an issue.

Insects (not annoying / life threatening)

Not much; a few butterflies and many often colourful grasshoppers.

Queens of England and World Heavyweight Boxing Champions

None seen. However we met people who had either punched one in the head, or fed one, although not necessarily in that order. See also, "Food", below.

Food

I didn't expect food to rate too highly. Refrigeration is rare and shops are scarce and poorly stocked. Packaged food is quite expensive.

Surprisingly the food we were served in the Solomons was excellent. First and foremost it passed the gut test. I was never even slightly ill. Barry-Sean was, once - in Honiara. The culinary delights enjoyed at Ropiko Eco-Lodge alone provide sufficient reason to go back to the islands. The food at Ropiko was consistently the best I have had on any holiday ever - high praise indeed. Many guests wrote in the guest book at Charapoana Lodge that they served the best food in the Solomons. Whilst the food at this lodge was great - it exceeded everywhere else we stayed. Put simply, any fruit, vegetable or sea animal is picked, dug or dispatched from this earth within hours of it being on your plate.



What the islanders lack in food variety is compensated by their imagination - and thousands of years of eating the same things. There are few fast food shops in the Solomon Islands. Breakfasts would typically comprise fruits, bread - with French toast popular, an egg dish - often mixed omelette, and coffee. Lunches were lavish and dinners out of control. One negative - we never quite got the taste for cassava, taro or yam - and I still can't work out which was which.

Minor contributing factors which may have influenced the quality of the food include "Big Baz" at Ropiko being an international chef (and "Aussie" Joe Bugner's sparring partner) in a previous life, and Margaret's father at New Birao had once personally cooked for and served Queen Elizabeth II during a royal visit. It was stew, I'm told.

Regarding Big Baz, there were never likely to be any complaints about the food, the weather, his tablecloth's design or anything else. The former English and Australian expat was an ultra friendly and helpful host who routinely presented the grandest seafood spreads I have witnessed - from fish we caught the same day.



Solomon Islands people (generally)

The Gold Cup for Friendliness and Honesty goes to the people of the Solomon Islands. We managed to find a couple of non-threatening idiots on Guadalcanal but otherwise I have little fear of contradiction that visitors of all ages and both sexes will be safe and welcome anywhere in the islands.

Everyone in the country is good for a chat. Westerners are pretty well known, so they are not treated like gods as they can be in some countries. Nor are they treated as sources of



easy cash or "cargo". Whilst artisans - wood or stone carvers and the like - may try to sell you their artwork, they are not aggressive and don't seem to care too much if you don't buy. At no time did anyone else ever ask us for anything.

Conversely, if you ask a local for something, or even hint at it, someone would disappear up a coconut tree, out to sea or three islands away to the local shop without hesitation.

Solomon Islanders speak English, pidgin and their own local language. It is easy to communicate but only if you have acute hearing. Most people speak so softly that they might well be saying nothing at all. I didn't ask anyone to speak up because I don't think they can. They also smile a lot, maybe because they think I look funny, but I suspect it is something else. Maybe they are happy because they rarely see television advertisements, anything to do with the USA, McDonalds, a train timetable, or people in a hurry.

The country's people do not own anything. The clothes they are wearing on any given day represents about 40% of their total assets. One day I asked to borrow the village mirror so I could trim my face. The small broken sliver was so scratched it didn't reflect properly. Instead of seeing my own handsome face all I could manage was a hairy sunburnt weather-lined relic. This could only be deduced by using the "mirror" at various sites in the village so that different parts of my face could take advantage of the right light.

I peeked a look inside some homes (locks do not exist - nor are they needed) and marvelled that an entire family's lifetime accumulation of stuff - excluding cooking pots - amounted to less than was in my backpack. I couldn't decide whether this was a good thing or not, but it works in the Solomons.

Women are little more than the possessions of men. They progress from being naive young teenagers to baby factories in the time it would take you to decide that you didn't want Tony "Mad Monk" Abbott living next door. Sex education for both sexes is provided during conception. We were advised that formal sex education is taboo.



The Solomons has the second lowest representation by women in government of all democratic countries. Additionally 64% of women aged between 15 and 49 report violence from their "significant other". This is both sad and amazing given that Christianity is almost universal in the islands. Which just goes to prove..... Yet the women I spoke with were the only ones who seemed to have any passion on matters of environmental destruction. The men seemed to understand what was happening but said they could do nothing about it.

Solomon Islands people - kids

I don't particularly like children. This reflects poorly on Australian kids (and me, some might say). I find Aussie kids to be by and large arrogant, aggressive and incredibly antisocial. I lie awake at night dreaming of ways to bring them misery without getting myself arrested. I like the boys even less.

The children of the Solomon Islands gave me much joy. With Islander children it was a question of how many I could bring home by secreting them in my baggage and lying to



their parents and customs officials. "Nah, I haven't seen any of them this morning; bye - I have to go now." Those that I wanted to steal were all girls, no surprises here, but the boys were fine too. None of them were ever disrespectful, a nuisance or even mildly irritating. They were simply joyous, friendly, happy kids. How's this - I even went birdwatching in the forest with seven of them aged between five and 13! None of them made any sound and nor was there one complaint. If I

stopped and turned around all I saw was teeth.

The kids at New Birao were exceptional. All 200 of them. This number is a strategic estimate only. Special thanks must go to my thirteen year old escorts and bodyguards Elnora Michael and Prudence Henson (see photo on the first page). They were a true travel highlight.

I wish I could insert into Aussie kids a Solomon Islands Child Behaviour Software Patch, or insert something into them anyway. Imagine that - a Western society where kids loved their parents, their community, each other and visitors unquestionably. Fat chance. Hey, in New Birao you can even play with the kids in the river and you will not be arrested or charged with anything!

Religion

Pretty much all Solomon Islanders are Christian, or claim to be, with many obsessively so. Some even forego tea and coffee as evil stimulants.

Most people we spent any time with asked us our religion. When I said "None, I don't believe in god", their eyes would do unnatural things and they would go very quiet. The town dogs would start howling. If ambulances weren't required, they might then ask a follow-up question.

The second most common question was - "How many babies do you have?" "Fifteen" would be a good answer but "none" was not. If I felt a bit reckless I would ask some of the wiser folk about the origins of their faith. At this point they would generally remember they had to tend their gardens, give birth, or be late for something.

Lodges

We stayed in four different lodges. They are generally marketed as "village stays". The first rule of village stays is that the staff will always outnumber the guests by about five to one. All of them are inexpensive. As a guide, they cost on average perhaps \$A50 per person per day including all meals. Activities that require cars or boats are extra, but these are not expensive. All our digs had clean beds with sheets, mosquito nets (not that they were needed), pillows and a blanket. Towels and soap were also provided along with a washing service that I think was free. We did our own. Fresh flowers were a feature of the rooms and all the common areas. Self service tea, coffee and fruit juice was generally available.



Showers and toilets were variable. At Charapoana the toilet sits above salt water in a patch of mangroves. Ropiko's is the flushing variety, whilst on Guadalcanal you practice aiming to get everything to fall through a hole in the planks. Showers were Asian bucket-type at

Charapoana, just like home (well my home anyway) at Ropiko, and hurl yourself in the river at New Birao.

All the lodges were constructed from timber, sago palm fronds and bamboo. They are good.

It would appear that all the many small lodges dotted throughout the islands are sensibly located and almost always fronting water. I did not spend a night without the sound of the sea or a river, although Barry-Sean spent the last few nights in the Honiara Hotel. During our stay we shared one lodge for one night with one other tourist. Otherwise it was us, the islanders and plenty of space...

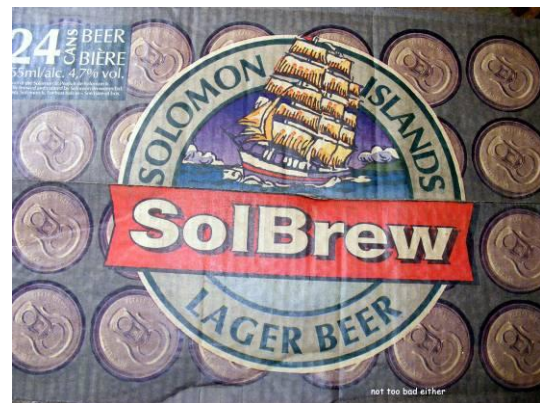
Weather

It was no accident that our holiday was timed for the middle of Sydney's winter. This coincides nicely with the dry season in the Solomons. Although it rained a bit in the early part of the trip, it hardly mattered.

Temperatures ranged from minima in the low 20's to the mid to high 20's by day. Perfect. The south-east trade winds dominated throughout so it never became uncomfortably hot, although the winds caused a few fishing trips to be cancelled or changed to sheltered locations. The sea temperature was surprisingly pleasant - around 26.

Beer, Wine and Coffee Mix

Solomons Breweries Limited makes a reasonable beer or three, with SolBrew Lager my choice. It can be taken cold, lukewarm or warmer. You can forget about wine and milk for your coffee.



Transport

We flew to and from Western Province from Honiara in Solomon Airlines Twin Otters. These ancient* but very safe and strong aircraft use a local rule that they shouldn't try to land in heavy rain because they have a tendency to fall off the runways and go into the forest. Although cancellations can be common we had no such problems and our flights landed and took off in the rain. The flights could be entertaining in a "last day on earth" sort of way.

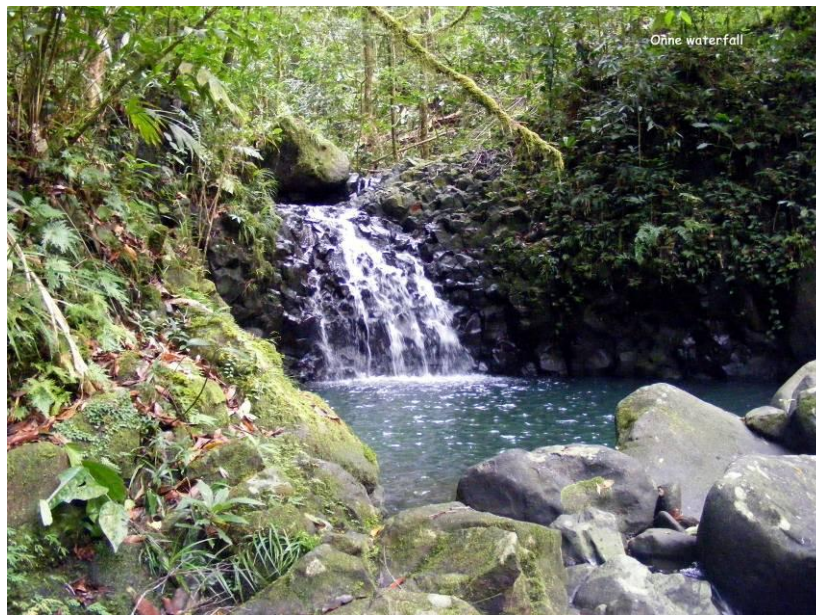
*Twin Otter Series 300 aircraft like we ones we were in were made between 1969 and 1988. As the safety-on-board cards for ours were last reprinted in August 1978, we thought ours might be rather old planes.

The only roads we saw led to and from Honiara. These were unremarkable in every way.

Inter-island travel is achieved primarily by boat, whether they are large scheduled ferries or small outboard driven jobbies. The ferries would be an economical and probably rather fun way of getting around but they are allegedly more unreliable than planes. Swimming between some of the islands is possible but it can be difficult to keep your luggage dry and some of the islands are well out of sight of each other.

Scenery

There's lots of it, particularly around Marovo Lagoon. Much of the best scenery is under the water with amazing drop-offs (up to 1000m), coral and other live stuff. Many of the islands are rather mountainous but if you can access the hilly bits the loggers have been there first.



The Solomon Islands Government

A new government will be elected in August 2010. It will be just like the old one - thoroughly hopeless and corrupt, and not representing the best interests of the people that live in the place. Not much more to say.

Diary

Day 0 - the day before we left - Tuesday 22nd June 2010

I really didn't know what to expect in the Solomons. I reckoned the people would be great and the snorkelling and swimming very good. I figured the saltwater would be hot. I didn't think the birdwatching would be too productive and boredom might be somewhere on the agenda for parts of Guadalcanal. Certainly winter would be left behind, and with it, hopefully, my long-running bout of flu.

A fairly crippled Barry-Sean was collected at Sutherland Railway Station at 1800. Mayette cooked a lovely dinner.

Day 1 - Wednesday 23rd June 2010

Although the day was always going to be something of a transport marathon, if all the termites held hands we would be swimming in tropical seas before sunset.

Our taxi arrived at 0430 for our 0600 Virgin Blue 737-700 flight from Sydney to Brisbane. At least at this time of the morning planes rarely run behind schedule. The flight was cruisy, on time, and enhanced by the Singaporean lass sitting next to me.

We hopped on the bus to the international terminal at Brisbane for our Solomon Airlines A320-300 flight to Honiara, scheduled to leave at 0930. I purchased a bottle of Cragganmore 12 y.o. just in case a need for it arose.

Tara, the friendly and very attractive Solomon Airlines salesperson from their Brisbane office came into the plane to say hello to me. What great service! All was good with the world.

Our A320 was carrying "Strategic" livery. I had never heard of such an airline? There was nothing strategic about how they dealt with the time and motion stuff. At the time we were due to leave someone decided to remove all the baggage and mail from the flight to Brisbane, despite the fact that the plane had been sitting where it was for an hour or so. Steady rain fell, mainly on our baggage as it sat on the tarmac. Don't you just love baggage handlers?

We were really keen to get going as we only had a 45 minute window at Honiara before our domestic flight left for Seghe. The captain announced a six minute delay. We left 66 minutes after that. Our new scheduled arrival time preceded our departure for Seghe by five minutes.

It was soon evident that at least half a dozen others destined for Seghe were sitting around us. Much of the three hour flight was taken up by discussion on whether the domestic flight would wait for us. A charming Japanese flight attendant informed the captain of our dilemma, so he contacted Honiara. The domestic flight waited for us. Great service, Solomon Airlines!

On arrival at Honiara we were herded through immigration and customs quickly, whilst various relaxed and gentle locals each explained that they were the ones personally responsible for delaying our domestic flight. Our ground agent, Alistair, took us to an ATM and drove us the 400m to the domestic terminal. This thoroughly computer-challenged facility provided much needed comic relief as the passenger and bag processing proceeded at no pace at all.

Our antique Twin Otter Series 300 aircraft (the last reprint of the safety on board card was in 1978) was joined by a jolly grey-haired Aussie pilot who took time out to chew the fat about the reason for the incoming flight's tardiness, which only served to further delay the domestic flight. But now we didn't care. "Snowy" breezed through the safety on board nonsense with tongue firmly planted in cheek.

The incoming Brisbane flight's passengers represented a clear majority of those bound for Seghe, and we were all excited to get back in the air. The excitement didn't last long as we could not land due to the pilot failing to safely locate the grassy and monster-puddle afflicted WWII airstrip due to heavy rain. So we had an aerial tour of the northern half of Marovo Lagoon while we waited for the rain to ease. This was a bonus as we flew low over our intended destination - Charapoana Island - a number of times, allowing us good views and the opportunity to take a few photos. The island and the area surrounding it is a mix of islets, turquoise water of various depths, coral reef and sand. Yummo.



Our aircraft aquaplaned to a stop with acclamation and relief from all aboard.



Barefooted Jae, the manager of Charapoana Lodge greeted us as we personally retrieved our luggage from the plane, or else it would languish in a tarmac pond. We were joined by Jae's offsider, Brenton, and were soon motoring across the lagoon to the lodge. The journey was cool and pleasant. Terns and parrots flew past.

The lodge was great - clean, rustic and unbothered by other tourists and said to remain that way for our week's stay. Jae and his wife, Tania, were the duty managers (these things are shared among family members) and their staff had tarted up the lodge, with orchid flowers poked everywhere.



Charapoana Island is three kilometres long and a few hundred metres wide. It is made of limestone and is by no means flat. The forest on the island is pretty much intact and Jae indicated a couple of trails.

Barry-Sean lay on his bed with pain in his hip. I enjoyed a Cragganmore before a delicious dinner of fish, local vegetables and fruit.

Day 2 - Thursday 24th June 2010

It rained during the night. The offshore breeze slowly died and had stopped by sunrise. This enabled a pre-dawn swim to test the mettle of the local shark population. The water was mild - not hot - and effervescent.



I used the mangrove toilet, making tuneful splashes into the sea below. I could not resist having a look to see if a specially adapted creature had been waiting underneath. Alas no such animal was present.

The forest around the lodge had a great volume of birds. All were quite tame. Prior to breakfast I'd seen island imperial pigeons, superb and claret-breasted fruit doves, Solomon Islands corella, cardinal lory, starlings, mynas, cuckoo-shrikes, sunbirds, white-capped monarchs and Melanesian megapodes.

Breakfast was omelette, pancakes and biscuits and was more than adequate.

Snorkelling on the coral reef inside the lagoon to the north was next. At this point in the holiday my imagination on what was possible to see was not fully developed so I was overjoyed to be spying so many fish, corals and starfish right next to the lodge. There was something remarkable in every metre. I have no idea what the lake animals thought of me.

After a great lunch and a short kip, more snorkelling, this time within the lagoon to the south. The corals here were amongst the most impressive seen on the trip because they escape any strong winds. Painted lobsters, triggerfish, anemone-fish, scorpion fish and hundreds of others were seen. The lodge has a tropical fish identification guide, which led to hours of frustration trying to memorize fish seen and then not find them in the book.

Exhilarated, and after another swim, I sat with Barry-Sean on the end of the pier in a cool breeze, watching sharks swim by as the sun set and the full moon rose. Whilst this was going on, our gin and whisky-assisted vigil produced Papuan hornbill,

eclectus parrot, beach thick-knee, pied goshawk and two Nicobar pigeons! So on our first full day the only bird that really mattered to me was seen, the widespread but increasingly rare Nicobar pigeon.

Five different dishes + rice were served for dinner. Another month of this? Bring it on!



Day 3 - Friday 25th June 2010

A pre-breakfast swim in the 26 degree lagoon was followed by a post-breakfast snorkel a couple of islands away on the sea side. En route we bought five lobsters off a local fisherman for \$A10.50. Whilst the fish life on the reef was nuts, including a two metre long lemon shark, the corals were not as varied.

Later I snorkelled along the Charapoana Channel. Amazing and abrupt changes in water temperature kept occurring. It would rise and fall by six to eight degrees, sometimes for just a few metres.

During yet another swim I discovered my sunburnt back and face so spent much of the afternoon in the shade chatting with the lodge staff. Brenton had caught a small Solomon's ground boa, which was photographed and released.

Jae and Tania went to a funeral. Jae wore his brand new aboriginal motif black T-shirt for the occasion. We also went to a funeral, the lobsters'. We consumed them out of respect.

Day 4 - Saturday 26th June 2010

Our scheduled activity was the "0630 visit to the manta ray cleaning station". At 0630 there was no sign of anyone. Working on the principle that "in the absence of

information, do whatever you like", I went swimming. At 0730 I asked Jae if we should visit the manta rays. He reacted like he had never heard of such an incredible idea. He wobbled about a bit, sniffed the air and said "okay, good idea, let's go".

We arrived at the manta ray snorkel site (in the lagoon - pretty much in the middle of nowhere) with our Uepi Resort friends from the plane. They were already searching for the animals and when they found them we shot over in our boat and plopped into the lagoon. Two mantas were cruising about in five metres of water. It was an amazing experience enhanced by the opportunity to study some of the other wildlife - including some of the other snorkellers.....

We gave Jae some money to procure a box of beer from a shop he was to travel near whilst "doing some errands" by boat. I retired to the seaward side of the island to search for seabirds. Massive flocks could be seen out to sea but they were too far away to identify.

A trail was discovered leading through the centre of the island. It starts at the southern end of the beach on the lagoon side. Although my excellent adventure was in the middle of the day, it was a great walk, adding rufous night-heron to the trip list and flushing Nicobar pigeons from the ground.

On the far side of the island is a fascinating shallow lagoon with colourful crabs, beach kingfishers and flowering *Dendrobium* orchids. I determined not to mention my newly discovered trail to Jae in case he banned me from using it. I needn't have worried.



The death in Jae's family sparked a major Melanesian migration to parts elsewhere. We were left in the company of two 13 year old girls who were given instructions on how to service us. At hearing this they joyfully went swimming. As a consequence, lunch was a diminished affair and dinner more-so.

Warm SolBrews added a dimension to the wharf-sit. Black-tipped reef sharks, rain showers, shoals of fish and more Nicobar pigeons kept us company. Golly, when do the boring days start?

Day 5 - Sunday 27th June 2010

We were supposed to be going birdwatching on New Georgia Island. I was up early, had been for my swim and lurked menacingly waiting to go. Nothing happened. At 0830 Jae went to Uepi Island to buy flour (of all things). He failed to return and it started to rain. I informed Tania that the activity was cancelled.

Snorkelling in the rain is perfectly acceptable. I tormented a large lobster but failed to capture it. This was followed by more forest exploration, swimming and further

attempts to get our time-and-motion-challenged staff to agree on a plan for the following day.

For the first time during daylight the breeze stopped. This improved the fish-watching off the jetty. Half a dozen squid were joined by schools of mullet, big blue-lined trevally and a variety of reef fish.

I explained to Jae that I intended to walk barefoot to the seaward side of the island, crawl across razor-sharp rocks, stomp across some fringing coral, hurl myself into the sea, and guessing that the tide should be coming in, float through masses of sharks and other biters to the start of the Charapoana Channel. I would then drift along it to "Barry-Sean Island". "Okay" said Jae. He couldn't see how anything could possibly go wrong with such a well-considered plan.

Perhaps the few spots of blood from my nearly intact feet made all the difference because no sooner had I entered the water I discovered I was not the only large animal around. The point where the channel meets the sea is the hang-out spot for the local shark population. Grey reef, white-tipped, black-tipped and black-tipped reef sharks could all be seen - all at once! Fourteen of them were counted at one point. Some of them delighted in swimming up, counting my ribs or slowly following my progress. Whilst enjoying this, the patch of water in which I was suspended decided to rapidly relocate itself. It was pointless trying to swim against it. I was going up the channel.

The drop-off at the north-east corner of Charapoana Island is amazing. The visibility of 30m or so revealed nothing but fish and water and no bottom. The channel itself is much the same. As the current took me into the lagoon I was joined by barracudas, long-toms, garfish, emperors and parrotfish - to name a few. Smaller fish were a constant backdrop. Emerging triumphantly just short of Barry-Sean Island and into a tropical downpour I trudged up to our preferred drinking site on the jetty....

Day 6 - Monday 28th June 2010

The night was so cool I had to put on a jacket!

The pre-sunrise swim revealed a few flying-foxes. I showered and was rearing to go on the re-scheduled (0700) New Georgia Island walk. I was the only such person ready for this venture so I proceeded to make a fair amount of noise....



We left on time (well, for the Solomons anyway). It took the boys a while to identify the start of the trail. This wasn't all that surprising as I was the first tourist ever to request this listed activity. A local man showed us through his garden to the end of a logging road we were to follow. I said to him "It's a beautiful forest". His reply - "what's beautiful about it?" Then he laughed at my mystified expression.

The loggers had left low value trees, like figs, so there were plenty of birds to be seen as they crossed the open spaces. There had been no significant hunting since guns were all confiscated about ten years earlier. Almost 40 different birds were seen along the 2-3km walk. I managed seven lifers, with six of these endemic. Some patches of intact forest were so birdy it was hard to know where to look. It took 45 minutes to get past one tree! This was in stark contrast to the difficult birding on Guadalcanal Island later in the holiday.

A repeat of the snorkel up the Charapoana Channel revealed less sharks but more big fish. We invented a term for post-identifying reef fish - "Seansing". This matches Siemsing (after David Siems) - the art of identifying birds from a field guide long after the bird was seen. Both names have the same number of letters and start with an "S". This must be important. I suspect alcohol aids in the ID process.

By this stage I was well into planning my 2011 holiday to the Solomon Islands.

Day 7 - Tuesday 29th June 2010

After an early swim Jae and I picked up a tourist from Seghe, or at least that was the plan. Jae stopped at Bukibuki Island to buy fuel. This is not a simple process and took the best part of an hour. I pointed out the distant plane to Jae as it was landing and indicated we may be a tad late.

The guest, an odd Italian chap, had panicked when nobody arrived to pick him up. We found him on another boat - driven by the same guy whose garden we walked through the previous day - and transferred him across. When he saw me he was understandably reluctant to move.

After dropping off our new guest, we visited the Onne Waterfall, located on New Georgia Island inland from an area of extensive mangroves which house an increasing number of crocodiles. Despite our late arrival the birding was excellent, no doubt due to the state of the relatively untouched forest. Kolombangra monarch and green pygmy parrot were seen well. The parrot is just nuts. It is just 9cm long but looks smaller. It can be pished in and just sits there staring at you, no doubt thinking "funny, this guy doesn't have a chainsaw".

More snorkelling, swimming and chatting with the natives before the inevitable drinks.

Day 8 - Wednesday 30th June 2010

It's always interesting to see how other tourists get about things. Our Italian friend wanted to do some manta ray spotting. He also wanted to take underwater photos and video of the creatures. So I go out with Jae to help find the buggers. After a

considerable search we get onto them. At this point Italy decides to get his camera gear ready. This took so long the creatures died, went to manta ray heaven, and were never seen again. With the assistance of the Uepi boat we found another one. Mr Organisation eventually jumped in the water. Even the unflappable Jae was shaking his head.

After brekkie we said goodbye to our friends at Charapoana Lodge. Jae and Brenton then took us to Ropiko Eco-Lodge on distant Gatokae Island, a distance of 50km or so through the lagoon and then briefly into the sea outside of it.



The journey was an adventure with moderate to strong winds, stormy rain, large flocks of feeding noddies and terns, classic Marovo Lagoon scenery, soaring Solomon sea-eagles, and, eventually, a rather treacherous transfer from boat to rocky seashore. There was no chance of goodbye handshakes as the seas were rising and as an intensifying rainsquall fell on us. We may never know whether the boys ever made it back!

Despite the average conditions there was a scrum of friendly folk of all ages to meet us and carry our gear away to shelter.

We were so happy with our rooms at Ropiko. Once more we were the only inmates in our new home which sits perched just two metres from the sea. The lodge has flush toilets, proper showers and best of all - the owners, Barry and Jenna, were great company.

After an extended gasbag there was more snorkelling, seeing new types of stunning coral, big giant clams and different fish. Barry has a fridge and a small quiet generator, so guess what? Cold beer!

Dinner was ridiculous. Spicy pumpkin soup and bread rolls followed by homemade meat pies with chips and vegetables. Banana fritters for desert. I was just starting to get used to the lifestyle.....



Day 9 - Thursday 1st July 2010

After a lavish breakfast I wandered to the village and the forest beyond it. Ronsie (somehow related to Jenna but I've forgotten how) intercepted me and came for the walk. The small patch of good forest behind the school grounds is possibly the best nearby forest for birds without walking for hours to get to the forest on the main mountain that forms the centre of the island. It held dozens of eclectic parrots. Some six year old logging trails were already overgrown and eventually proved too difficult to follow. Mackinlay's cuckoo-dove was the only new bird seen.

Ronsie planned a fishing trip to sea for the following morning after I found out how absurdly cheap it was. It costs \$A4 for the boat hire and \$A7 for the skipper - for the day! Basically the skipper wants to go fishing anyway but can't afford the fuel. He then gets to feed his family and provide fish for dinner for those at the lodge. The lodge saves a little on food costs - so everyone's a winner.

A post-lunch snorkel with a green turtle was enjoyed prior to the Festival of the Petrol Drums.

The Festival begins when the small RORO ship arrives and parks itself in a moderate sea off the lodge grounds. Other Festival tools include a canoe, a length of rope,



but local stevedores hunt them down mercilessly...

several children from the village, and thirteen 200-odd litre drums full of petrol. The ship stops off the reef and all the drums of fuel are tossed into the sea. The Festival then begins.

Many Festival initiates may

not be aware that the drums need to be imprisoned in an upright position in a specially constructed prison on land. The drums have other ideas. After being incarcerated on board ship they relish their newfound freedom and seek to escape to their ancestral breeding grounds.

Festival veterans show no mercy as they attempt to corral the most determined drums and herd them to shore. This is where experienced petrol drums can be at their most dangerous as they try to pin the unwary against their mates or impale them onto the coral. Concerned relatives line the shore to offer unwelcome



women smile to their loved ones...

advice, cheer any outstanding manoeuvres (by the drums or their family) and blow kisses to their loved ones. They also ponder possible funeral arrangements.

Everyone becomes wet. This includes onlookers. It is customary for it to rain during the Festival of the Petrol Drums. The festivities conclude with a free-for-all game of beach volleyball. Here contestants try not to fall over too many times in the sand in their wet clothes.

Beer. Whisky. Dinner.

Day 10 - Friday 2nd July 2010

At last I was staying with people who understood how to read a watch. Ronsie turned up at the agreed 0500 and along with "Ryan", an Americanised local (he married an American girl) we were soon speeding out to sea in the darkness. We had a small delay when the boat had a violent collision with a stray mass of tangled rope which killed the engine and caused all on board to rapidly migrate toward the bow. Fortunately we had all the necessary first aid and survival gear, i.e. nothing.

Night trolling commenced. I thought this was never going to work but we had a few big hits though failed to hook anything. At first light we spotted a few dolphins and clouds of feeding birds - noddies, shearwaters and boobies - above a school of yellowfin. Ryan hooked two fish but lost both. We later managed to troll some nice blue-lined trevally and a dog-tooth tuna before we started running out of fuel.



It was sad to leave the smooth windless sea. On Mbulo Island, wide of the lodge, are the best coral reefs I have seen. I planned to go back with my snorkel gear but we never made it. Next

year....

There was time for a swim and snorkel and an unsuccessful attempt at using the village's internet before lunch. Apparently the internet "proprietor", Rocky, had gone fishin'.



A short afternoon kip and a few cold beers on the beach completed an exciting day.

Dinner was quite mad. We had fish curry, sweet and sour fish, baked fish and fried fish. There was every vegetable you can think of. We were joined in this feast by Ryan and his wife Liz and the ever-smiling Minnie.

I decided I could not delay my cuscus hunt any longer so with a torch and no binoculars I set forth westwards toward Kavalavata. A cuscus was quickly seen. I returned, because if my torch died I did not wish to spend a moonless night in the forest with ravenous vengeful packs of coconut crabs.

Day 11 - Saturday 3rd July 2010

Barry-Sean said he had never seen me so happy on a holiday.

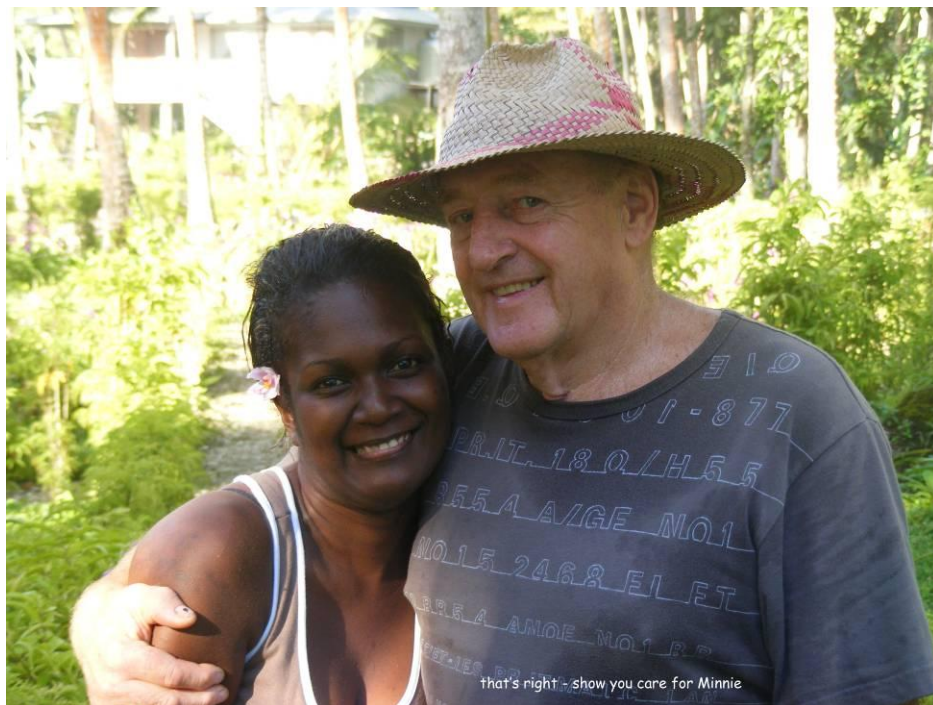
It bucketted down rain all night and was still raining come sunrise. Coincidentally we didn't have any scheduled activities as it was a Saturday and all the locals are "SDAs". The weather didn't prevent snorkelling or swimming.

Barry-Sean and I walked to the "school forest" but a flooded river and a general malaise sent us dawdling back to the lodge. A pre-lunch snorkel added stingaree and unicornfish to the virtual fish list. A distant pod of what appeared to be false killer whales could be seen going nowhere in a hurry out to sea toward Mbulo Island.

Along the coastal trail to Kavalavata is a very large cave with microbats. During my visit the buggers wouldn't land so I couldn't photograph them.

Rain drove me into the sea for another snorkel. This time a couple of the extraordinary Solomon Island flathead were seen, along with sand eels and yet more colourful fish.

We had beers at Baz's place. He explained away his imposing size by mentioning he was Aussie Joe Bugner's sparring partner, a trained chef and once owned a large trucking company in Brisbane. Other than that life had been pretty boring I guess.



Dinner was mud crabs with all the trimmings. They looked so good on the plate it was a shame to eat them. I pondered the cost of such fare in Sydney.....

Day 12 - Sunday 4th July 2010

A personal record of sorts had been set - the longest time I have spent on earth without being able to see a road. This singularly unimportant statistic gave me pause to think of all the things in life I didn't need.

At Ropiko there are no nearby shops, save for the erratically operated internet place, located inconveniently beyond the top of a treacherous trail that runs up the side of a cliff. Yet Barry and Jenna are very happy, have a millionaires' view and have a comfortable, practical, airy and cool home with just a few termites to share it with. They have things to do, plans (and for that matter planes - a crashed Zero fighter), a constant stream of local visitors, no crime, no disaffected youth, no obvious rules or regulations and no depressing news of the outside world.

Anyway this was to be Solomon Islands Culture Day. We boated off to the nearby village of Kavalavata where Apong-Stephen and Vincent received us, and shared the storytelling and demonstrations. The "Apong" part of Apong-Stephen apparently reflects the local view that he looks Chinese. This demonstrates that Solomon Islanders must have monochromatic vision. He looks about as Chinese as Bugs Bunny.

A traditional welcome consisted of a scrum of fierce war-painted warriors attacking us from the jungle with axes and incredible body odour.



Western Province's history and living culture was explained, and where possible, demonstrated. A-S told us of the halcyon days of headhunting and cannibalism. Sadly for us, it is apparently now illegal to fatten small boys and eat them in front of fascinated tourists. We were also told of the traditional role of women before and after the arrival of missionaries. No change at all here.

Then on to more practical matters with the construction of stone containers for cooking and storage, the manufacture of bark clothing from aerial fig roots, wood carving, and house roof construction from sago palm fronds and bamboo. We would have been able to view women at work too but as we were men the boys figured we wouldn't be interested.... hmmm.

Lunch was served.

The most demanding and challenging demonstration was the traditional production of fresh tomatoes as compensation to Jenna for sending the village some business. The quest begins as village members disperse all over the island seeking the elusive red treasures. Visiting tourists sit about for an age before getting bored and walking back to the lodge. In a practise deeply rooted in Kavalavata culture, a village elder or two then try to run down the escaped tourists while clutching a small plastic bag with tiny captured tomatoes. These are then gifted with some ceremony.

The day had been windy and one and a half metres of swell made the afternoon swim more interesting, much to the amusement of the watching villagers. I was amused too - I was thinking of what it would be like to be at work in my office.

Beer and yet another lavish meal rounded off a boring day. Not.



Day 13 - Monday 5th July 2010

A relentless SE wind killed off our planned fishing trip.

After some birdwatching in the "school forest" and a walk to the airstrip I lurked hopefully at the internet place only to be told that the proprietor had "gone to Seghe", and that his offsider had "gone to her garden". I had more luck after returning from a swim, snorkel and lunch.

My Facebook page would not allow me to make any changes but I managed to email my dear mum, who had no doubt been constantly monitoring local volcanic activity, civil strife, ferry disasters and reports of shark or enraged bird attacks since my departure.

I made one error whilst fiddling with the computer - I checked the share market. I doubled my alcohol intake to "celebrate".

Day 14 - Tuesday 6th July 2010

Not much to report. The wind kept blowing just enough to stop us going to sea. So another day of swimming, snorkelling and chatting.

We tracked down some coconut crabs after some of the boys set some "traps" in the form of coconuts cut in half and elevated on short sticks. These endangered crustaceans are the world's largest terrestrial invertebrates.



Day 15 - Wednesday 7th July 2010

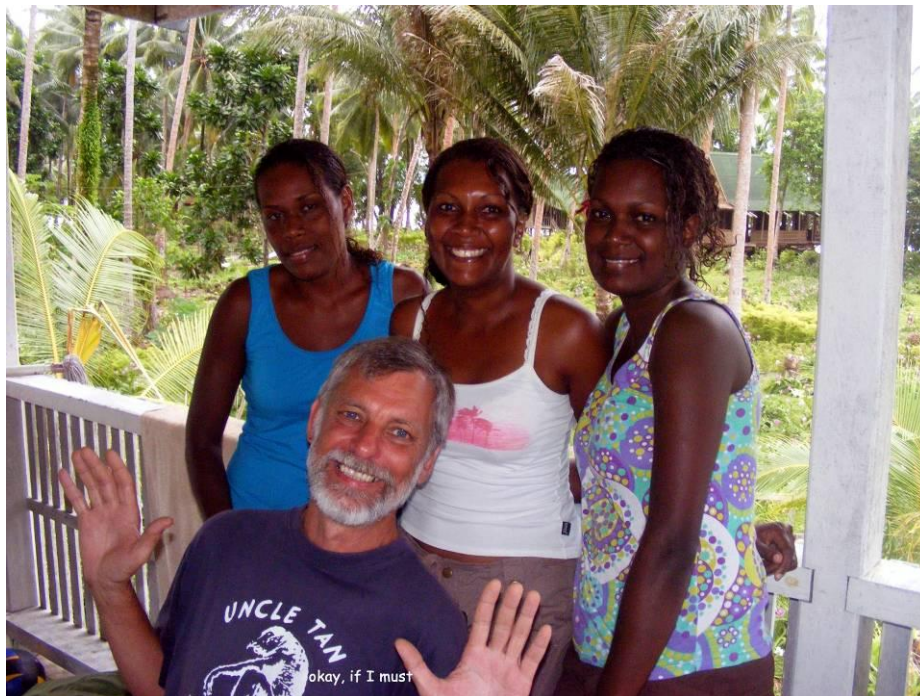
This was a far more active, interesting and slightly dangerous day. Rodley (skipper), Minnie (deck ornament), Barry-Sean and I went fishing and exploring inside the lagoon. We left at 0600, returning at 1330. If I ever needed a reason to return to Ropiko, and I didn't, our boat trip provided it.

Despite the desperate nature of fishing gear and lure selection we managed quite a few fish. These included rainbow runners, various types of tuna, barracuda and almost a giant trevally that busted some 100lb + mono. Our fishing allowed about 4000 gallons of water to use the inside of the boat as a transit point. Most of this sprang at us from the sea, drenching the deck ornament and at the same time making her look more alluring..... I was busy bailing, making it more difficult for all but the most determined chunks of seawater to hit me in the face.

The birdwatching was also good with schools of pelagic fish being shadowed by hundreds of noddies and terns - include one roseate tern (thanks Barry-Sean). Also seen were two pods of dolphins - with long-snouted spinner and Indo-Pacific bottlenose.

A quick snorkel on an amazing reef was possible before our lunch on a beautiful sandy beach.

Final beers and a sumptuous farewell dinner concluded our last day at Ropiko - until next year.



Day 16 - Thursday 8th July 2010

After a leisurely breakfast we said our goodbyes as Rodley and an escort of small children took us on the very short journey by boat to Gatokae Airstrip.

Most airstrips are flat. Gatokae Airstrip is not one of these. It has a hill in the middle of it. That we would be flying at all was a matter of some doubt. The "air traffic control" at Gatokae, a bare-footed local chap hopped on the wind-up radio and bellowed to the pilot that it was "all clear and no rain". Then he went outside his shed and wandered over onto the runway, just like all the kids and I had done. Heavy rain then started.

The kids were chanting "bad luck, bad luck, no plane today" as the airport staff, all one of him, started to panic. He did a couple of 360's than hared off to the "terminal" to tell the pilot to go away, but it was all too late as the plane could be seen descending through the rain and splashing onto the runway.



I wanted to take a photo of Rodley and asked him if this was okay. He gave a scary look and said no, it would not be okay. He then burst out laughing.

We left Gatokae a little late which meant we were exactly on time. Alistair met us at Honiara. We then did the rounds of dropping Barry-Sean off at the doctor, visiting a Solomon Islands Brewing depot, stopping for a few groceries and relatives and then off to our new home at New Birao Village Stay. With us were Henson and Margaret, two of the village stay's co-owners.

It had always been difficult getting information out of Alistair on what to expect from New Birao. I was given to believe it was located in the mountains and it had primary forest very nearby. Such is not the case.

After leaving Honiara we journeyed east for a bit and then inland by about six kilometres. I feared we were nearing our destination when we started driving along a footpath. This placed us adjacent to the very good Tina River and at the first hint of the island's foothills. No forest could be seen from the village stay but some quite good much-logged regrowth forest was readily accessible on and beyond a ridge running behind the village.

Our arrival was a much-anticipated affair by local children and adults alike. We were the lodge's very first visitors with the building only being completed during our stay in Western Province. As we were driven through the village young women screamed and giggled. As I was standing in the back of a utility I looked down and checked - all okay.



the delightful Elnora, 13

Thousands of orchid flowers were sacrificed for our overwhelmingly warm welcome. Responsibility for our welfare appeared to be based on the pass the parcel principle as a bewildering number of individuals said they would be looking after us - and look after us they did!

Our new home was a child's dream - like an adult version of a cubby house. It is beautifully sited over the river and given just a little more time to advance the rudimentary sanitary arrangements it will be a perfect place to stay to observe village life. New Birao was our home for a record number of nights for any holiday I have undertaken - with the record now standing at nine.



Henson's brother Michael (+ seven kids) took me for a walk into the forest behind the village after our lunch. The forest had been logged but it was quite birdy, including chestnut-bellied monarch, yellow-throated whistler, black-cowled honeyeater and midget flowerpecker. Some of our "train" of kids were still clutching recently acquired stuffed toys and made no sound. They were delightful!! Ferns and leaf vegetables were harvested during our walk. These later comprised part of our dinner.



Swimming in the river was possible. According to Barry-Sean my rather unorthodox swimming style (double-handed backstroke) was being copied by some of the children.

Day 17 - Friday 9th July 2010

The breakfast procession came and went and I soon found myself with Michael and his son Gabriel walking further into the forest. The trails were so slippery after overnight rain that my thongs were useless, so I put them in my daypack. Several kilometres later we started emerging out the other end of the forest so we retreated. The birds were incredibly slow; some of the least productive birding I have ever entertained. Never mind, I added yellow-bibbed lory - a truly stunning bird, ultramarine kingfisher and black-and-white monarch.

Whilst the forest was quite benign to bare feet it did them in when I stopped walking. All my toes wanted to be somewhere else. I guess they had spent too much time trying to grip the steep muddy trail. Michael commented that I was very fit so I hid any discomfort!

I plonked my swollen feet in the river and left them there whilst I set about the rest of the day. The river bed was a hot-spot for visitors. Deryk, a trainee professional god-botherer, chatted with us while we had a couple of SolBrews. A gallery of children gathered behind him. Deryk told us that word had got out on both sides of the river that there was a good chance of spotting white monkeys at New Birao.



Just on dusk, Wilfred, a gentle and thoughtful soul from up-river arrived for a chat about logging, hydro schemes, the upcoming election, religion, corruption, and the scandalous cost of train tickets in the former Soviet Union. Actually we didn't discuss the upcoming election at all - I made that up. A shame really as Wilfred would have made a good politician.

Day 18 - Saturday 10th July 2010

Although our itinerary indicated we were going on an excursion to Mt Austen "very early before dawn to see birds" etc, nobody arrived to pick us up. In fact nobody arrived to pick us up for this activity for seven days - a new Melanesian record!

I wandered along the road toward the Prince Phillip Highway that leads to Honiara thinking that I would either see a few birds or meet Alistair coming the other way. Neither happened. My delightful and utterly charming bodyguards, Elnora and Prudence (two 13 year olds cousins) found me and escorted me back to the village. Prudence was then assigned to accompany me to the back of the village gardens to try

my luck finding fruit-doves in the treetops. She spotted brown-winged starlings instead.

Swimming and being slothful took up most of the rest of the day. River chatting became a wonderful way of usefully spending time. It had the advantages of being cool, offering good and changing company and allowing occasional bursts of energy to be expended whilst trying to swim upstream. The village of New Birao has two focal points - the community water tap and the river.

I talked with Daniella, Henson's 20 year old daughter. She was given the last of my T-shirt gifts out of sympathy for the fact that I was sleeping on her bed. Other kids, some with kids of their own, lined up to say hello. I must go back to this place. I am almost in tears with sadness typing this to think I could not see my new friends again...

Day 19 - Sunday 11th July 2010

Rohan and Prudence were assigned to walk with me to areas of forest I had already visited, but I eluded them. The birding was diabolically slow but I delighted in the freedom to wander at will. I re-emerged from the forest at about lunchtime and headed for the river.



It was a simply wonderful afternoon with a succession of visitors, including an extended visit from Michael. Elnora returned from a disappearing act on the other side of the river and failed to leave us. She tried to teach us pidgin and promised to write some translations for us, which she soon did, listed here:

English --- Tok Pisin

Eat --- Kaikai

See you tomorrow --- Lukim iu tumoro

Where are you going? --- Wean a iu go?

What do you want? --- Wat nao iu laekem?

How are you? --- Iu hao?

I'm fine --- Mi alraet

Where have you been? --- Wea naoi u stop?

Day 20 - Monday 12th July 2010

Henson's sisters-in-law, Liso and Cathy, accompanied me on a journey up-river to Senge, the last upstream outpost. Along for the ride were Elnora and Prudence, and

two younger sisters, Gwynda and Mamae. None of the kids had ever been to Senge, a mere seven kilometres away. Cathy had not visited for 20 years.

We travelled by 4WD to a logging road above the river. This was something of an extreme sport as the Toyota Hi-Lux slithered all over the muddy road. The plan then allowed for us to walk down a trail to the river to Senge and follow the river back to the village.

This was the morning of the soccer world cup final in South Africa and it pains me that I missed the photo opportunity of the trip by not stopping, shortly after sunrise, to take a picture of 30-odd men sitting on an exposed ridge-top in the middle of nowhere, watching a television hooked up to a generator with one bloke holding up the aerial. They all laughed as we swept past. They laughed?

The trail from the logging road to the river at Senge was the steepest and the slipperiest I've ever seen. All six of my bare-footed girlfriends kept their footing with ease. Actually I lie when I say they were bare-footed. One of them had one left-hand thong.

Best of the birds were a melanistic pied goshawk and pale mountain pigeons.

We found Senge to be a semi-existent and abandoned "village" in a deep gorge. It belongs to "my" extended family. They pop in from time to time to cause terror to the fruit and vegetables.



The walk back to New Birao took a few hours and took us through villages that belong to Moro communities. These guys are animists who take breast pendulosity to new lengths... Fortunately I had my wide-eyed 13 year old bodyguards to protect me.

Although at times I wasn't too sure who was protecting whom. Quite often the three of us were well ahead of the others. This brought many stares from the Moros.

Three thoughts were competing to be foremost on my mind when we arrived back at the lodge - beer, immersion in the river and not walking. I decided on all three - simultaneously.



Prudence and Elnora pleaded with us to be able to service our room. I think they viewed it as fun. They were starting to get on my nerves; they were just too perfect.

Upon his return from the office, Henson told us that our almost utterly useless ground agent in Honiara was busy with the upcoming election and could not take us on our booked excursions until Saturday.

Day 21 - Tuesday 13th July 2010

After a brief ridge-top sit hoping to see flying chooks, but largely failing, I caught up with Michael who wanted to take me to a different area of forest. We crashed about, on-track and off, before finding a good mixed flock, the highlight of which was a flock of inquisitive green pygmy parrots. I answered their question as best I could.

Lunch was followed by swimming in the river with the kids. Despite my age and growing list of infirmities I was trying to capture them in the water. Understandably many ran away screaming. Some of the others were snared for me by Scarvengar the Confused, a sexually ambivalent aquatic creature with some language skills. Scarvengar bore an uncanny resemblance to the Feral Child in Mad Max, save for the skin colour.

Scarvengar was slow to react when I switched from mauling his prey to detaining him. A short but frantic chase cornered him against deeper water. Scarvengar was

then bound by his Viking ancestry to enquire of my name so it could be engraved in the legendary conquering visitors' section of the rock on the riverbank. Valhalla awaits us both.

Drinks were called. Kids gathered outside our lodge. I made paper helicopters and flying fish. The children responded by making much sturdier balls, cubes and spinning tops from stripped pieces of coconut palm frond. So much for white man magic.

Scarvengar turned out to be an eleven year old boy from across the river and not an aquatic animal after all. His father is a schoolteacher and it showed with Scarvengar (real name David) able to identify almost every animal and most sites from my photo album.



Henson came home from work and informed us he had no luck persuading Alistair to take us anywhere. He felt sorry for us and arranged to take us out the next morning. Henson works as the driver and security for the Premier of Guadalcanal and managed to get half a day off work and borrow a government car. Champion chap!

Day 22 - Wednesday 14th July 2010

We left at 0720 for Goldridge Road. Not surprisingly this is the access road to a gold mine. What was surprising was that it passed through the only unlogged forest we managed to get anywhere near on Guadalcanal. There were birds in profusion. I picked up Solomon Island cuckoo-shrike among them. This road would be great for a walk right on sunrise, assuming you didn't get arrested for something, but I doubt it.

We visited Tenaru Beach where 800 or so Japanese died storming an entrenched American position because the Japanese commander was a complete idiot. Only one

Japanese soldier lived. Next was New Zealand Camp, presumably a place where you could get into an argument about cricket.

After stopping at the Solomon Airlines office we had lunch at the Pacific Casino Hotel where we caught up with Alistair. He apologised a number of times and went away. I practised my Genghis Khan hard face.

We caught the public bus back to New Birao, where the driver broke new ground by delivering us right to our door. To celebrate I jumped in the river.

I noticed my glands were swollen from infected coral cuts on my feet. I decided a lay day was needed - and the need to buy some foot protection for next time.

Day 23 - Thursday 15th July 2010

I walked to the village square (aka the water tap). Prudence asked if she may follow me. Not much was happening there so I retreated and lounged at our lodge. Glyn, the third of the three brothers, visited and explained Gwale (the locals on Guadalcanal) culture. It seems there are peculiar rules on marriage, probably to eliminate in-breeding but maybe to ensure your daughters (or was it sons?) move as far away as possible. I was so confused I relocated to my "lime tree bower" prison to contemplate whether warm beer cured leg infections. I concluded it would not do any harm.

For a brief explanation of the history of our hosts and some of their customs, see Appendix A.

Prudence arrived with a semi-conscious uniform swiftlet she had found on the riverbank. Its little feet had a strong grip so I hooked it onto the wall of our lodge. Some hours later it became quite agitated, cursed us a few times, and then promptly flew away.



Our farewell dinner was held, despite it being the second last night of our stay. It was difficult to count the population of the "three families" and there is no guarantee they had stopped breeding for the event. It was superb. Thoughtful speeches were made and fine food was eaten. The kids led the adults in

the singing of gospel songs - I suspect these are the only songs they know. I asked about the national anthem. All joined in a stirring rendition of what sounded like another gospel song. A wonderful occasion for all.



Day 24 - Friday 16th July 2010

My glands had stopped being sufficiently sore for me to have to stay in one place so I went for a walk. A long and sustained attack from annoying insects caused an early return.

We chatted with Michael and Cathy about producing a brochure for New Birao. Elnora and Prudence visited. We almost had a conversation. Most of the time they would just sit and smile and act shy.

The major sport played at New Birao is river soccer. The field is marked by goalposts and a soccer ball is used. All other similarities to the more common form of the game are coincidental. At all times the players have to make outrageous dives into the water - even if they are not playing at the ball. I think this is meant to test the hardness of the river stones they land on. I should make the point that the feet, head and shoulders of a Solomon Islander rate a 9 on Moh's Hardness Scale. The rocks in the river get only a 7. Apparently a contingent of the RAMSI peacekeepers came to New Birao for a swim. These guys thought they were tough until they met the local kids running full pelt on the river stones.....



So we watched the Tina River Premier League Coconut Cup teams take the field before the 1st Division match-up between the New Birao Sweet Potatoes and the Other Side of the River Paw-Paws. Meanwhile Henson arrived with the daily papers. These were read while drinking gin, fresh lime and fresh young coconut juice. No complaints.

Henson and Daniella paid us a visit after dinner. It turns out that Henson's father, Amon, was the cook for the British High Commissioner in the country's colonial past. He once cooked and personally served Queen Elizabeth II a stew during a royal visit. Henson also had some form on the board, being the first ever goalkeeper in the national soccer team.

Day 25 - Saturday 17th July 2010

We wondered whether the elusive Alistair would materialise. He did, but of course he was late.

Our sad goodbyes were paid to the most wonderful families I have ever met - despite their religious fervour and their unsustainable population growth. Here is a community with a sense of community, where crime is rare and generally trivial, and despite an almost complete lack of physical possessions - or perhaps because of it - everyone has something to do and wears a smile on their face. They pay no electricity bills, council rates, insurance, car costs and I suspect very little tax. Most of their food pops up out of the ground (for sure, after a bit of effort) and the kids never get time to feel "disaffected" because they are too busy doing chores, playing and loving life. I will see these people again.



An attempt to get to Mt Austen, which had become something of a holy grail, was frustrated by a rare piece of local tribal idiocy on the part of a couple of numbskulls lounging on the side of the road who demanded that we pay them before we could drive up the road. One even insisted on coming with us. They could all go and get stuffed. We moved on.

We visited an abandoned Japanese war memorial before moving on to a pristine American one. This was excellent, well maintained and security guarded. I decided I needed to read up on the Guadalcanal conflicts when I returned home. A visit to the National Cultural Museum was a disappointment. Termites had eaten most of the exhibits.

Alistair took us to his new home, about 30 minutes drive west of Honiara and right on the coast. Barry-Sean must have been toxed out on drugs because he expected white tiles, flush toilets and electricity. The reality was far different. A temporary and dangerous "staircase" led to a two room structure built from local materials. Thin mattresses lay on the floor. The toilet was a hastily erected hole-in-plank affair, and the open air shower afforded nice views of the showeree to those strolling along the beach. Barry-Sean's leg was getting worse so he decided to seek a hotel in Honiara.

Our last visit for the day was an open air WWII military museum just near Alistair's place. A local lady named Sylvia gave an adequate commentary on the history of each exhibit. It was really very good with a range of field artillery pieces, planes and other bits and pieces. Some of the Japanese field guns are still good enough to fire!! American 44 gallon drums were still intact!



Alistair's house and guest accommodation

I said goodbye to Barry-Sean for a few days. This was very sad and I considered whether I should join him. But I saw no purpose in this, except honour (who needs it?) and Barry-Sean would have felt bad about it anyway. So I wandered back to camp with Andrew, who was to be my local guide for the rest of the stay.





It was quite distressing sitting alone with a beer. Historically it has only even been women who have caused me any emotional distress.

Alistair has plans to turn his house into an eco-lodge. Good luck Ali. The beach has no safe access for swimming as the waterfront for miles in any direction is a combination of rocks, coral and WWII wreckage. The corals have mostly died from a logging-induced silt-laden flood. There are no decent forest remnants nearby. Family members roam the grounds with sling-shots shooting at birds and the first thing you see, and hear, when you arrive is a pack of multicoloured woofers, the dominant local life form. Cats are also present. Rubbish is strewn about. It is fascinating that in some cultures leaves are swept daily while rubbish is not. There were some dugout canoes for use - but all the fishing gear had been borrowed by someone else. So the sum total of possible eco-activities is confined to concentrated staring at the sea.

I scribbled in my diary in order to keep occupied. Kuvien, Alistair's lovely wife came over to chat with me. She is the niece of Liso from New Birao. You soon discover that everyone in the Solomons is related to one another somehow. Kuvien said that while she was visiting her uncle in hospital, Liso and Elnora spent the whole day discussing Barry-Sean and I - and in a positive light. Elnora said that she and Prudence really enjoyed hanging around with the "old white men". Yeah, I needed an ego boost.



Day 26 - Sunday 18th July 2010

I woke to the unmistakable sound of a pig being unhappy. I thought positively; maybe it was to be slaughtered for food, my food. Regrettably this was not the case. A whole throng of people (+ one reluctant pig) had collected around Alistair's boat before sunrise and were leaving for the far side of the island - the Weathercoast. And they were hoping to get going before the weather did.

I wanted to go for a swim so I picked a passage through the coral and bits of rusted steel. Miraculously I didn't hit anything. I later discovered that getting out from shore is relatively easy. A surprising current funnels into the sea where I had entered, making it a pretty dodgy process in reverse. I later went for a one minute snorkel - possibly some sort of record - before deciding that the lack of visibility along with the wind and waves had won the day.

So it was 0945 and I was looking forward to my first drink. Happily I rather enjoyed the rest of the day chatting and writing a draft of this nonsense.

Day 27 - 19th July 2010

Various folk wished me well on the planned excursion to the Tenaru Waterfall. I said the trip didn't happen unless a vehicle showed up. This was said to occur at 0630. Further questioning of Alistair saw this time revised, first to 0700 and then 0730ish. By 0800 I abandoned the quest altogether. Alistair used the dead-uncle-in-law defence. Whilst the uncle-in-law had indeed died, I couldn't quite make the connection between his sad demise and the lack of a vehicle. The lame reason given was that the very same vehicle, a Toyota Hi-Lux, had been pressed into hearse duty.

I went for a walk with Andrew toward the distant forested mountains. Even Andrew was 24 hours late. He was supposed to turn up the day earlier but had to go "to a meeting". The walk was pleasant without being exciting.

Alistair's place was a hive of activity with sand being moved about and stumps being removed. Occasionally the men assisted. As the wind had failed to arrive I went for a



swim. Chatting with wonderful women for an hour or two energised me for another attempt at snorkelling. The reef was better than I expected but hardly exciting. There were some live corals and lots of fish but nothing very big.

The evening's entertainment including a bit of wife-bashing. The recipient was the lovely Mary, the dear young lady who cooked my food and never stopped

working. I staged a strategic retreat lest I feel the urge to apply my large Maglite torch to someone's head. Meanwhile Mary's husband did a windmill impression and started chucking stuff. Mary went bush and wasn't seen until morning.

Kitchener, a gentle and softly spoken 20 year old lad was good for a long discussion on life and gender roles on Guadalcanal.

Day 28 - 20th July 2010

I gave Mary a hug and said I was so sorry about the way she had been treated.

This was the penultimate day of the holiday and the last chance for the oft-rescheduled Tenaru Waterfall gig. To be honest I was no longer interested but as it was paid for I reckoned the day would provide the chance to further test my patience - and I was right.

We left a little over an hour late but I was well prepared for this. After navigating the dire access road to its end, George, the driver, and Andrew argued with a number of villagers over fees and guides. One lady, who was the proud owner of the biggest breasts ever known, set up a wail that was better than anything Mecca had ever heard. This further delayed us. I sat in the car thinking of AK47s.

Confusion reigned over how long a walk to the waterfall would take. Somewhere between an hour and never. I still have no idea because we ran out of time and had to return. I hardly cared. At one point the village dickhead got stuck into our child guide for walking across the corner of his village with a white man. He told us to walk up the middle of the river instead of using the trail. On the return journey I made a point of walking exactly the same path to see what he would do but Mr Happy had gone elsewhere.

George was late picking us up; so what else was new? I reconfirmed our flights at the airline office and visited Barry-Sean in his rather dreary and run-down Honiara Hotel

prison. Then back to camp to finish the last of the beer and enjoy a farewell motu of chicken, fish and vegies.

Day 29 - Wednesday 21st July 2010

I contemplated going to Honiara with Alistair - just to make sure I got there - but I am glad I didn't. The flat windless sea lured me for one last pre-dawn swim.

A very large pod of spinner dolphins about 500 metres offshore was keeping me entertained when I saw something big floating just under the surface. I mentioned it to Luke, the wife abuser, and within seconds a few of us had put to sea in dugouts. Our crew arrived at the site of a large rainwater tank just before rival salvage crews from other villages.



I peeled off to spend time with the dolphins, which was just awesome. They regularly raised their heads to look at me. I wondered how long it would be before I fell into the sea as my dugout skills were untested.....

Our tribe successfully captured the errant tank and landed it with much fanfare.

A final snorkel was possible before I slowly packed my gear for the trip home. I made my way over to Mary and Luke and made a point of saying what a beautiful hard-working young lady Mary was and said if I wasn't already married I would steal her. Mary said something to Luke who wanted to apologise but couldn't quite get the words out. He was clearly embarrassed. I am told that local custom dictates that he must compensate all the witnesses to his loss of temper as a form of reparation.

The car for Honaira and the airport was almost on time! Ronny, Alistair's brother, provided a running commentary all the way to town. I hardly understood a word of it but grunted and ahh'd at what I thought were the appropriate moments.



Our flight left on time at 1445. Our luggage was loaded onto the correct aircraft. This wasn't too tough on the baggage handlers as ours was the only flight being handled. The chap sitting next to me in the plane was Josh Bullock, the assistant manager of the Uepi Resort, a nice young bloke who gave me some good tips for my next visit to the Solomon Islands in 2011 - if I can wait that long.....

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 30th July 2010

EL-SHADDAI SHIPPING

M.V. DAYSTAR - JULY SCHEDULE

DATE	SCHEDULE TRIP	ETD	ETA
Monday 26th July 2010	Honiara - Auki	6:00PM	10:00PM
Tuesday 27th July 2010	Auki - Honiara	9:00AM	1:30PM
Friday 30th July 2010	Auki - Honiara	6:00PM	10:30PM
Saturday 31st July 2010	Honiara - Auki	9:00AM	1:30PM

SEAFARE: MAIDEN TRIP SPECIAL FOR JULY 2010

1. ADULTS: * 1st Class - \$120. * CHILD: Below 12yrs old - \$100.
 * Economy - \$100 * CHILD: Below 12 yrs old - \$80.

2. DEAD BODY (ECONOMY ONLY) - FREE OF CHARGE PLUS 2 RELATIVES.

3. VESSEL DEPARTS ON THE DOT. (on time)

4. NO TICKET SALES ONBOARD THE VESSEL.



MV DAYSTAR

Now that's reaching your target market.....

Appendix A

The New Birao Village Stay Host Families

In 1963 Amon and Mary brought their young family by boat from the 'Weathercoast' of Guadalcanal to Honiara where Amon worked as a cook for the British High Commissioner. He even cooked for and served at table for Queen Elizabeth in 1978 when she came to the Solomons for independence celebrations.

In 1986 the family moved to live on Manukiki tribal land at New Birao Village. Mary, who died in 1990 wanted to make this trip from Maniwasu village on the Weathercoast to give her children more opportunities, near the city of Honiara, to make money and for two daughters to go to Australia, where they still live.

Amon and three of his sons and their families still live at New Birao and have made a village stay business. They are Henson who is married to Margaret and has seven children, Michael who is married to Cathy and has five children and Glyn who is married to Liso and has four children. The three wives and sixteen children are all, by custom, Garavu tribe.

During the troubles of 1999 to 2003 between Gwale and Malaita peoples, Henson and Michael and their families went to live in the hills.

Marriage Custom on Guadalcanal

There are two Gwale tribes; Garavu (big) and Manukiki (small). *This is a bit misleading as size has nothing to do with anything.* Everyone should marry a person from the other tribe to their birth tribe. All Gwale children follow their mother's tribe. The SDA church and most people on Guadalcanal respect this custom.

So, as Henson Michael and Glyn are Manukiki, their wives, Margaret, Cathy and Liso and all their children must be Garavu. All the children must marry someone from Manukiki tribe. If any of these children marry someone from another province or nation and live as Gwale people there must be a council meeting to confirm that they become the other tribe, Manukiki.

Family Name

The family name changes with each generation. Children take as their family name their father's first name. So Henson's, Michael's and Glyn's family name is Amon (their father's name) and their children take Henson, Michael and Glyn as their family name. Wives take their husband's first name as their family name when they marry.

Food grown by the "three families"

Yam, pana, sweet potato (kumara), cassava, taro, bananas, paw paw, sugar cane, peanuts, tomato, eggplant, beans, pumpkin, cucumber, pineapple, cabbage, lettuce, green pepper, coconut, deke (slippery cabbage), lemon, orange, mandarin, lime, rambutan, mango, apple (syzygium), avocado, inikori, breadfruit, nali nut, cut nut, guava, beetlenut.

Cash crops include cocoa, coconut, coffee and chilli.

Bought food includes rice, canned fish and meats, tea, sugar, Milo, biscuits, lollies, chips, noodles, bread and soft drink.



Bird List

Notes:

Page - the plate number in Doughty

WP(C) - Western Province, Charapoana Island
WP(N) - Western Province, New Georgia Island
WP(G) - Western Province, Gatokae Island
GC - Guadalcanal Island

The numbers in the columns represent the first “Day Number” – see diary, that each bird was seen at each site.

Page	BIRD		WP(C)	WP(N)	WP(G)	GC
28	Little Pied Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax melanoleucos</i>				17
36	Wedge-tailed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus pacificus</i>			8	
40	Great Frigatebird	<i>Fregata minor</i>			9	
40	Lesser Frigatebird	<i>Fregata ariel</i>	1		9	
42	Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	1		8	
44	Pacific Black Duck	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>				16
50	Pacific Reef Egret	<i>Egretta sacra</i>	2		8	17
52	Rufous Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax caledonicus</i>	4			
52	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>	3		10	20
54	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	1	6	8	27
54	Pacific Baza	<i>Aviceda subcristata</i>			10	18
54	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	1	6	8	18
56	Sanford's Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus sanfordi</i>		8	9	18
58	Grey Goshawk	<i>Accipiter novaehollandiae</i>		6		18
60	Pied Goshawk	<i>Accipiter albogularis</i>	2	6	9	20
60	Meyer's Goshawk	<i>Accipiter meyerianus</i>				24
62	Oriental Hobby	<i>Falco severus</i>				18
68	Melanesian Megapode	<i>Megapodius eremita</i>	2	7		17
70	Buff-banded Rail	<i>Gallirallus philippensis</i>				16
70	Plain Bush-hen	<i>Amaurornis olivacea</i>		6		
72	Purple Swampphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	4			
84	Beach Stone Curlew	<i>Esacus magnirostris</i>	2		8	
	Masked Lapwing	<i>Vanellus miles</i>				16
92	Greater Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bergii</i>	1	6	8	22
94	Roseate Tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>			15	
96	Black-naped Tern	<i>Sterna sumatrana</i>	1	6	8	
98	Bridled Tern	<i>Sterna anaethetus</i>	6		8	
98	Brown Noddy	<i>Anous stolidus</i>			8	
98	Black Noddy	<i>Anous minutus</i>	8		9	
102	Nicobar Pigeon	<i>Caloenas nicobarica</i>	2			
104	Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove	<i>Macropygia mackinlayi</i>			9	17
104	Stephan's Dove	<i>Chalcophaps stephani</i>		6	14	17
108	Superb Fruit Dove	<i>Ptilinopus superbus</i>	2	6		21
110	Claret-breasted Fruit Dove	<i>Ptilinopus viridis</i>	2	6	11	18
112	Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula rubricera</i>		6	10	17
112	Island Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula pistrinaria</i>	2	6	8	
114	Pale Mountain Pigeon	<i>Gymnophaps solomonensis</i>				20
116	Green Pygmy Parrot	<i>Micropsitta finschii</i>		7		21
116	Solomon Islands Corella	<i>Cacatua ducorpsii</i>	1	6	8	16
116	Singing Parrot	<i>Geoffroyus heteroclitus</i>			14	
116	Eclectus Parrot	<i>Eclectus roratus</i>	2	6	9	16
118	Cardinal Lory	<i>Chalcopsitta cardinalis</i>	1	6	8	16
118	Rainbow Lorikeet	<i>Trichoglossus haematodus</i>		6	8	16

Page	BIRD		WP(C)	WP(N)	WP(G)	GC
118	Yellow-bibbed Lory	<u><i>Lorius chlorocercus</i></u>				17
120	Meek's Lorikeet	<u><i>Charmosyna meeki</i></u>		6		
122	Shining Bronze Cuckoo	<u><i>Chrysococcyx lucidus</i></u>	4			
124	Common Koel	<u><i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i></u>		6	9	20
124	Buff-headed Coucal	<u><i>Centropus milo</i></u>		6	9	16
126	Solomon Islands Hawk-Owl	<u><i>Ninox jacquinoti</i></u>				22
130	Moustached Treeswift	<u><i>Hemiprocne mystacea</i></u>	5	6		17
132	Glossy Swiftlet	<u><i>Collocalia esculenta</i></u>				18
132	White-rumped Swiftlet	<u><i>Aerodramus spodiopygius</i></u>			9	
132	Uniform Swiftlet	<u><i>Aerodramus vanikorensis</i></u>	2		10	16
134	Ultramarine Kingfisher	<u><i>Todiramphus leucopygius</i></u>				17
134	Little Kingfisher	<u><i>Alcedo pusilla</i></u>		7		
134	Common Kingfisher	<u><i>Alcedo atthis</i></u>			10	20
136	Collared Kingfisher	<u><i>Todiramphus chloris</i></u>			15	20
136	Beach Kingfisher	<u><i>Todiramphus saurophagus</i></u>	3		8	
136	Sacred Kingfisher	<u><i>Todiramphus sanctus</i></u>	1	6	9	16
136	Papuan Hornbill	<u><i>Rhyticeros plicatus</i></u>	2	6	9	19
138	Dollarbird	<u><i>Eurystomus orientalis</i></u>	4			16
142	Yellow-vented Honeyeater	<u><i>Myzomela eichhorni</i></u>		6	14	
142	Black-cowled Honeyeater	<u><i>Myzomela melanocephala</i></u>				16
148	Yellow-throated Whistler	<u><i>Pachycephala orioloides</i></u>				16
150	White-winged Fantail	<u><i>Rhipidura cockerelli</i></u>		6		17
150	Willie-Wagtail	<u><i>Rhipidura leucophrys</i></u>	1	6		16
152	Rufous Fantail	<u><i>Rhipidura rufifrons</i></u>		7		16
156	Chestnut-bellied Monarch	<u><i>Monarcha castaneiventris</i></u>				16
156	White-capped Monarch	<u><i>Monarcha richardsii</i></u>	2	6	9	
158	Black-and-white Monarch	<u><i>Monarcha barbatus</i></u>				17
158	Kolombangara Monarch	<u><i>Monarcha browni</i></u>		7		
160	Steel-blue Flycatcher	<u><i>Myiagra ferrocyanea</i></u>		6		16
168	Barred Cuckoo-shrike	<u><i>Coracina lineata</i></u>	2	6		20
170	Cicadabird	<u><i>Coracina tenuirostris</i></u>		6	14	
170	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	<u><i>Coracina papuensis</i></u>	2	6	8	16
170	Solomon Is Cuckoo-shrike	<u><i>Coracina holopolia</i></u>				22
174	Brown-winged Starling	<u><i>Aplonis grandis</i></u>				18
176	Shining Starling	<u><i>Aplonis metallica</i></u>	3	6	13	16
176	Singing Starling	<u><i>Aplonis cantoroides</i></u>	2	6	8	17
178	Common Myna	<u><i>Acridotheres tristis</i></u>				16
178	Long-tailed Myna	<u><i>Mino kreffti</i></u>	2	6	9	
180	Pacific Swallow	<u><i>Hirundo tahitica</i></u>	1		9	16
184	Solomon Islands White-eye	<u><i>Zosterops kulambangrae</i></u>		6	9	
196x	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<u><i>Passer montanus</i></u>				16
198	Midget Flowerpecker	<u><i>Dicaeum aeneum</i></u>				16
198	Olive-backed Sunbird	<u><i>Cinnyris juquularis</i></u>	1	6	8	16