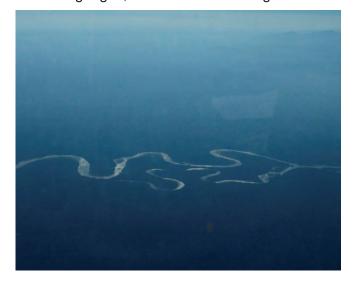
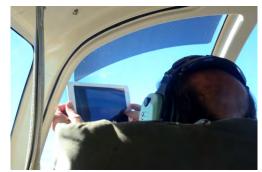
Day 6b, Oct 17, Friday

We boarded our little charter plane, took off on the grass runway and in 45 minutes were in Mt. Hagen, our next stop. The views of the Karawari River and the mountains were again beautiful with clouds playing hide and seek with the mountain tops. The wide range of mountains is so densely forested and forbidding which explains in part why different groups migrated to different areas and each developed their own tribal culture and languages, never communicating with other – or even aware of each other.







As we flew over, I was trying to take pictures of all the beauty. And if you think I take a lot of pictures, the pilot was using his iPad to take pictures throughout the flight (in all fairness, he was leaving and going back to Australia in the next week).

Mt. Hagen is one of the larger cities in PNG and is the capital of the Western Highlands province. It is named after an extinct volcano which is said to have taken its name from the German colonial officer Kurt von Hagens. The Germans colonized this area from 1884 to 1914 at which point it was taken often over by Australia. The surrounding area is made up of the Melpa tribe. This is the same tribe and area that Michael Leahy discovered in 1930.



Mt Hagen is the business center of the Papua New Guinea highlands, supplying a number of important industries, such as sweet potatoes, potatoes, tea, coffee and mining. It is a city where stone meets steel and where tradition and history is juxtaposed against modern ways. We drove through the city which was teeming with people – crowds everywhere. There is a large store called Best Buy (not the same chain we know). They are building a new government building which is about 5 stories high. The modern world is creeping in here and not necessarily in a good way. Along with the "welcome to Mt. Hagen" billboard, there is a

second billboard begging to keep Mt. Hagen clean. Yet there is garbage everywhere (see my picture), something the white man brought. It is supposed to be picked up but does not look at this every actually happens.







There is a large bus station as Mt Hagen is central, and it was also packed with people. The buses, which are mini-buses, are each privately owned (that is, each bus is privately owned). There is a driver and someone to call out the stops and you pay by the distance you are traveling.

We made our way up to 7000 feet to the Rondon Ridge lodge. The area of Ronden Ridge is covered with lush tropical rain forest and rugged limestone bluffs with small valleys dotted with subsistence farming. Crops here include sweet potato, coffee, tea, and vegetables. So along the way we passed gardens of all these vegetables, a woman washing her clothes and her baby

in a water sewer (and waving and waving at us), people hiking along the road, and wonderful views.













The lodge is on the mountain and all 11 rooms have magnificent views of the Hagen Range, Mount Giluwe, the Sepik Divide, the Baiyer Gap and the Wahgi Valley.







The main lodge is quite modern and had rock'n'roll playing. Except for the huge carvings and masks around the room, it was hard to remember where in the world we were as the architecture was very generic and not at all reminiscent of PNG. We got settled into our beautiful room which has a bedroom and a lower sitting area leading to a private garden. Unfortunately they are building more rooms right below the current two buildings so that spoils the view a bit. Nevertheless, we looked out over the valley and could see the buildings of the town of Mt Hagen in the distance. Each room has a large carving in it, and so we visited each other's rooms to see the art. The lodge itself is also filled with amazing art (most for sale), including a mother statue (remember the story from the spirit house...).



























There was also a photography exhibit in the lobby with pictures of PNG of the past. One photo particularly grabbed our attention. The caption read, "A Chimbu woman in the Eastern Highlands simultaneously breast feeds a piglet and her own child, 1939.." and goes on to explain how pigs were such valuable commodities as they are used as currency and a sign of a man's wealth (as I described earlier), so pigs were kept alive at all costs with orphaned piglets or ones that couldn't compete with their siblings routinely being breast fed by nursing mothers.