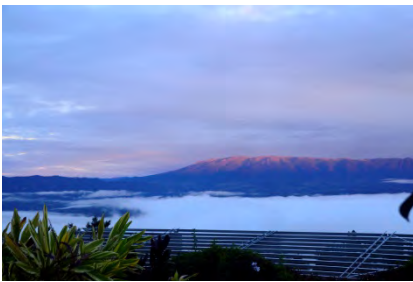


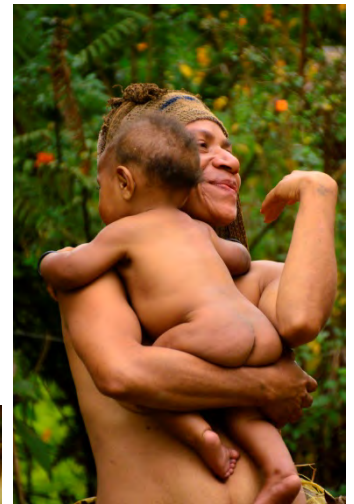
Day 8 Sunday Oct 19

Once again we were treated to a beautiful sunrise, The skies were so clear as it rained all night long, with the rain hammering down on our aluminum roof.

Since it is Sunday morning, on our drive to our next set of villages, we saw everyone dressed up to go to church. One woman was carrying a huge bouquet of about 30 Calla lilies, and another had a multicolored bouquet, all to take to church. Many of the women were wearing colorful dresses although a portion wore black skirts with white shirts. The children wore dressier clothes then we had seen during the week.



Our first stop was to the village just down the road from our lodge, called Kogie. Here we were to be shown a funeral and how the Melba mourn their dead. The “actors” seemed to be a family with quite a few small children. The mother was nursing her baby and other young children were running around playing. Some things are truly universal.



When someone dies, a smoke signal is sent up from a special location to let everyone in the vicinity know that there had been a death. The family dances around the fire and then the body is brought in, carried on a bed of leaves. Relatives from near and far come and bring pigs as offerings. The family sits around the body crying for seven days. The body is then placed into the ground, covered with dirt and a tree is planted. Dust to dust. The men then go into their huts and eat sweet potato as their festive meal. The mourning continues for another seven days as they hold their funeral festival. The unusual thing at this demonstration is it actually had a little boy who they placed in the hole; they put bamboo sticks over the top of this little grave and then covered it with dirt. We kept asking if he was okay and they assured us he was. He either snuck out the other end or I guess they unburied him after we left. It made us all very uncomfortable.



We also saw a real funeral festival on the side of the road here in Mt. Hagen, with a big Welcome Home sign (meaning welcoming the person to heaven). It was packed with people and music. Since this lasts for seven days, we passed it every day.

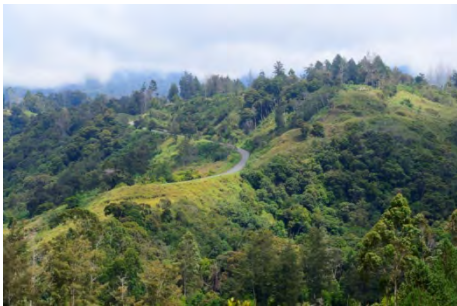
When a person is near death or has died suddenly, mediums are called in to discover the causes and the identity of the sorcerer or witch who may have been involved. Appropriate rituals and sacrifices are performed to prevent death or free the deceased's spirit. Once death has occurred, relatives gather to express their sorrow, wailing. Burial is now common, but in the past a corpse might be cremated, thrown in a river or buried at sea, or left in a tree to rot. The dry bones might be buried under a house floor to provide protection to the living with the jawbone worn around the neck of a relative or leader. Rituals believed to help the deceased accommodate to their new state occur at the funeral and at later mortuary ceremonies. Spirits may be encouraged to stay near the living. Some are sent off to a "place of spirits" not far from the living, on mountaintops or in the forest. Funerals and mortuary ceremonies are times to pay off the deceased's debts, recognize his or her accomplishments, and restore friendly relations among the living by exchanging wealth (ie., pigs).

The guides were then going to take us back to Moki to see how the tribes fight, but we told them we had already seen that. Not great planning on their part. So they took us to the PNG tour office to figure out what else we could do. We asked to see more face painting and maybe a Sing Sing but it was a little late to organize that. But they told us they arranged to have two women paint their faces for us in the afternoon.

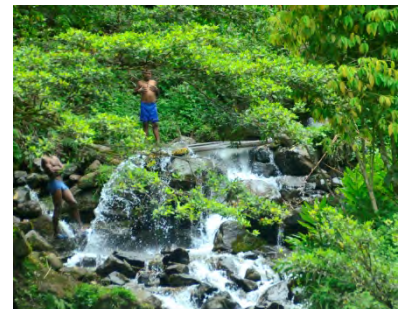
We drove back through the town of Mt. Hagen and passed the “local shoe maker.”



Then we traveled west through the countryside which was absolutely spectacular. The green mountains, the fields of cabbage and sweet potato, went on for miles and miles, as far as the eye could see. There were rivers and villages and loads of natural beauty.



We passed a waterfall where buses and cars were being washed next to a sign saying “car wash.” Little boys were swimming in the waterfall and having a fun day off from school.



While the gas stations in the villages near Tari were just plastic cans on the side of the road, here they had an actual gas station.

We arrived at our next village, Paia. There were a group of children standing as if they were waiting for us. We started hiking through the sweet potato fields with the children following us as if we were the Pied Piper. And such giggles the entire time. There were other children peaking behind bushes to catch a glimpse of us. Some were brave enough to pose for a picture with us.



The significance of visiting this village is that they have set up several museum-style huts (I use that loosely) to teach the children about

their culture. The first museum was a hut filled with all the ceremonial objects, the gold trim and Kina Shell, more shields, stone axes, jugs for pig fat, drums and body decorations.



The second hut showed how justice is done. It was very dark and there were stone carvings of spirits, which look a little like people. If someone is accused of adultery or killing or stealing, the village surrounds the stone and if the stone starts shaking in front of you, that means you are guilty and you better confess. They were also stone bowls to collect the blood of the pigs as a sacrifice to the spirits.





We saw a big hole in the ground where pigs and vegetables are roasted. But the most interesting, and surprising, was the hut filled with human skulls. No these are not cannibals. They were two layers of skulls. The top layer was of all the elders of the village which would bring knowledge to the people. The bottom layer were skulls of people who had been killed and still needed to be revenged. Only after they are revenged, would the skull be buried with the body. That is the way of justice here. If someone is hurt or killed, the tribe then kills someone in the other tribe.



Next we met the Chief's wife and daughter-in-law in their native wear. The chief was at church so we didn't get to see him (although we did pass him on our way out). The women were dressed in grass skirts and layers and layers of shell necklaces. On their arms they wore shell bracelets. They happily (?) posed for us. Or so it seemed. I think they still don't know what to make of these white people who come with their cameras to take their pictures, but it helps support

the village.

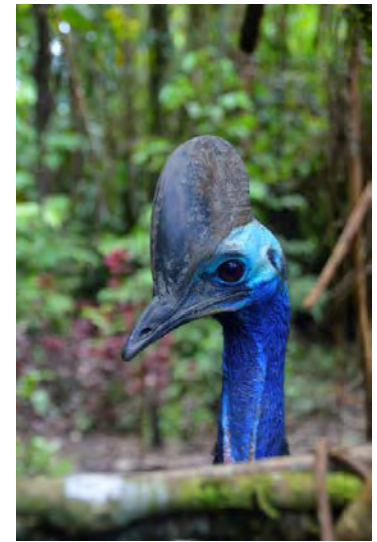
The children in the meantime continued to follow us around and at the end sat at blankets covered with necklaces which they hoped we would buy. We then walked back through the fields, in the mud, to our bus and headed back down the road again passing the beautiful scenery and waterfalls on our way to our picnic lunch.



We passed an area where there was a note written in blue shells thanking the US Air Force. When the Air Force had been here, they had set up schools for the children and the locals were very grateful.



Lunch was in a garden which was also a guesthouse for backpackers. The flowers here were spectacular, some of which I've never seen before. They also had a cassowary, luckily behind a gate as they are beautiful but mean birds.



After a picnic lunch we sat around waiting for the two women who were to paint their faces for us. This turned out to be quite a farce. It seemed like two of the local girls had been

coerced to do this. They were barely painted, they had a few feathers in their hair, and they were so incredibly uncomfortable and self-conscious that we just thanked them and left. The sad part to me was that these girls did not appreciate their culture but rather were embarrassed by it. Or perhaps they were just embarrassed by us.



From there we headed back to the lodge. On the way we got to again observe daily life here. Since it is Sunday, the main market was closed but people still need to buy their daily food – and betel nuts - so all the women had their blankets on the ground outside the market building still selling their vegetables and betel nuts. They had their colorful umbrellas to protect them from the sun. This is the way it used to be done before the roof was built over the market.

A bit more about betel nuts. Chewing betel nuts is a local past time here and everywhere you look there are men and women selling betel nuts on the street. They first chew the nuts' fleshy part to a pulp. Sometimes they will then dip it into a bowl of lime which is a white powder made from crushed seashell that has been baked and they carefully add that to their mouthful of pulp. Mixing it with the lime produces a bright red liquid that they repeatedly spit out. It also turns their teeth red and gives them a high.



Another sign of "civilization" is the billboards everywhere. There was a big Coca-Cola sign that said, "Welcome to Mt. Hagen, Our city Our drink!" Really?

There was another billboard with pictures of people in their traditional headdresses and the caption "Your traditions shared with Digicel" which is the local Internet and cell phone company.





We passed in a set of buildings surrounded by barb wire and on the wall was written "Beautiful Mt. Hagen, keep it clean." This was rather ironic since there's garbage everywhere.

We passed groups of people playing volleyball or darts and the usual group of men playing cards. We had seen card playing everywhere but the

volleyball and darts seem to be specific to Mt. Hagen. And everytime they saw us, they held up their babies for pictures. So different from other parts of the world.

And then it was back to Ronden Ridge to relax, pack, and get ready to leave.

Today is our last day in Papua New Guinea. While we are ready to go home, it also seems sad to leave such an interesting primitive exotic place.

Last few thoughts:

If you plan to visit the Sepik River Basin, download the ecotourism guide "[Sepik River: Nature and Community Tourism](#)" and see "[Ethics for Visiting Sacred Places](#)" for more guidance.

Read more: <http://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Papua-New-Guinea.html#ixzz3JrU3xolp>

Guide to artifacts: <http://www.art-pacific.com/artifacts/guidetoc.htm>

The national flag is a rectangle divided diagonally from the top left corner to the bottom right. The upper triangle is red with a yellow bird of paradise; the lower triangle is black with five white stars representing the Southern Cross. Black, red, and yellow are traditional colors in many Papua New Guinean societies. Items of traditional exchange (*kina* shells, pigs) are prominent on the currency. The Southern Cross symbolizes the country's close relations with other South Pacific nations.

"Aramay" means thank you in Huli.

Shoes are worn in the cities but not in the villages.

Business men always have police with them while working in PNG.

There is lots of corruption in PNG. Politicians buy the vote in villages by buying them things they need.

If you buy artifacts, and you will because the masks etc are so beautiful and so inexpensive, know that you will likely need to have it shipped back which the lodge takes care of. But beware as they can't (won't) tell you price until after you get home. They send an email asking for approval to ship and at that point you are stuck. And then it can take up to a few months to receive your package(s). And the price to ship was over 4x the price of the goods. Still a bargain, but definitely leaves a bad feeling. All the items will be labeled with your name. Nevertheless some of my items were sent to my friend Roberta. Be sure to photograph all your items.

BUT - raw beauty and isolation makes this an amazing place to visit. The rural new Guineans in the villages have a friendly innocence that will not last much longer. There is breathtaking scenery and such unique culture. I am so glad we got to visit before it becomes too commercial.

