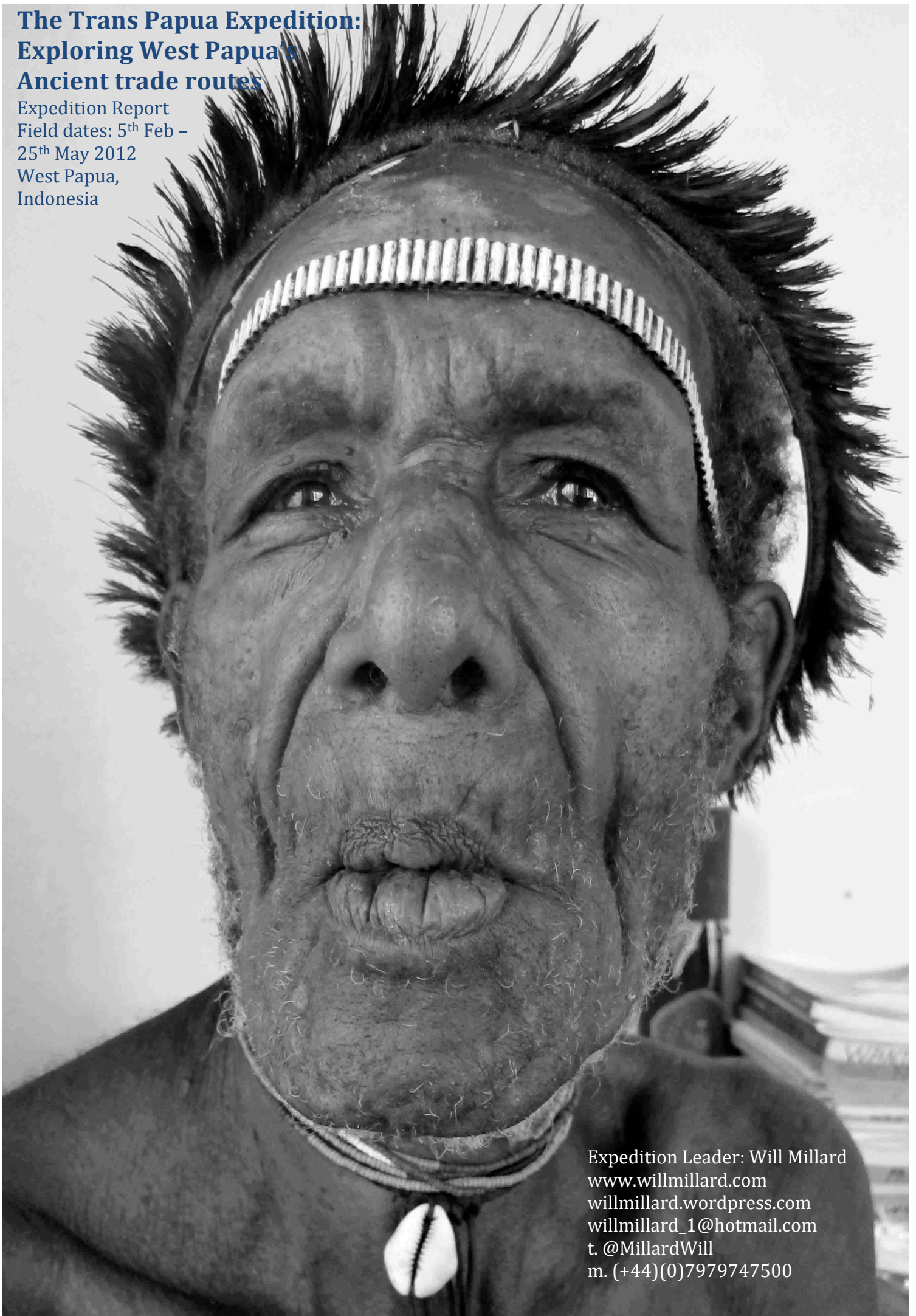


The Trans Papua Expedition: Exploring West Papua's Ancient trade routes

Expedition Report
Field dates: 5th Feb –
25th May 2012
West Papua,
Indonesia



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Abstract

This project aimed to explore the historic inter-tribal trade connection between the Papuan interior and its coastlines. By uncovering and following a series of ancient intertribal trade routes deep within uncharted New Guinea I hoped to record the last of the island's great overland traders, and make the first unbroken, unassisted crossing of West Papua's width via its remotest territories.

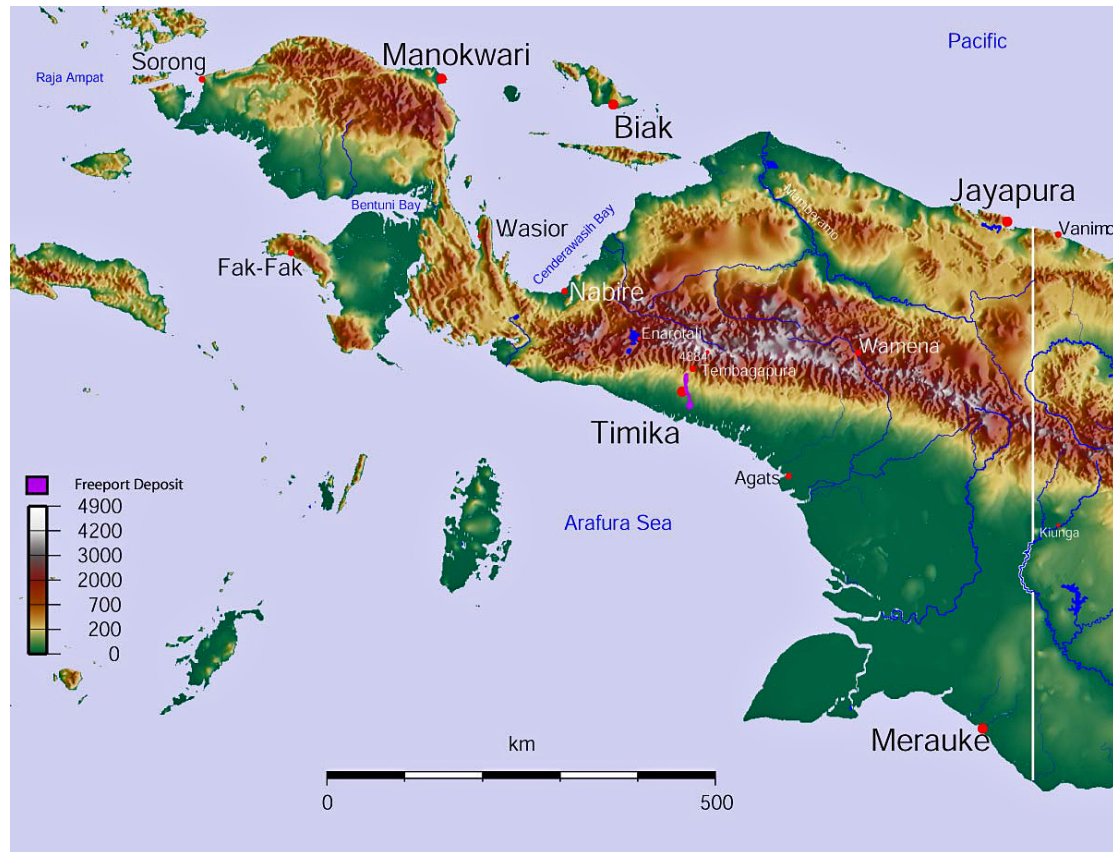
Following on from my 2009 rediscovery of on-foot traders on the 'Great Road', a foot-only trade route that runs along the length of West Papua's mountainous spine, I was hoping to make the trading connection between this central highland route and the coastlines – explaining how highland products have been transported out of the province by local people as early as the 13th century.

Originally I aimed to be entirely self-contained and self-sufficient, moving only under my own steam with packrafts and on-foot. Owing to the highly sensitive political situation in the province I felt the project's success hinged on my ability to be discreet and mobile. However, in the aftermath of an aborted attempt to trace a line northwards from the central highlands in March 2012 it became abundantly clear that if the project were to have any chance of meeting its intellectual aims I would have to be more flexible. Solo on the second leg I successfully uncovered a new 500 km route leading from the centre of West Papua south to the coasts by trekking and hitching lifts on boats.

Although I did not successfully make the first unbroken crossing of West Papua via the lines I had intended, largely because the northern line was not, and never was, a trade route, I did establish contact with an extremely remote tribe on the absolute last frontier of West Papua's original wilderness, and achieved my intellectual aims; categorically proving the existence of a genuine route running to the southern coasts from Papua's centre.



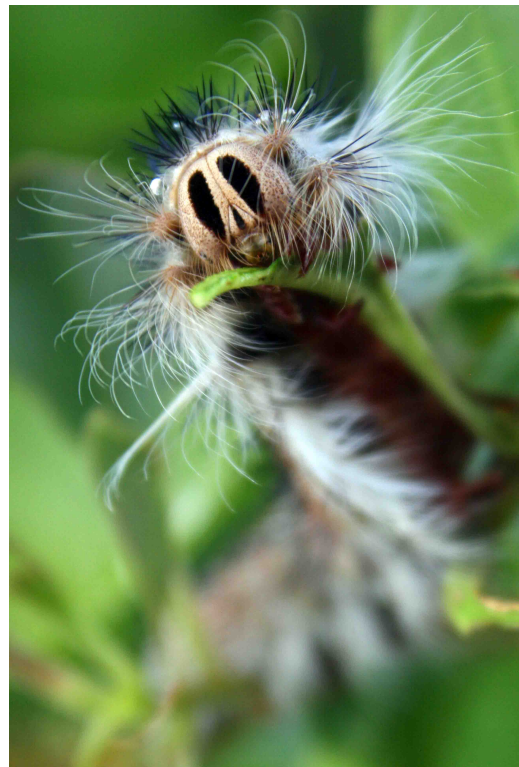
1.0 An introduction to New Guinea and West Papua



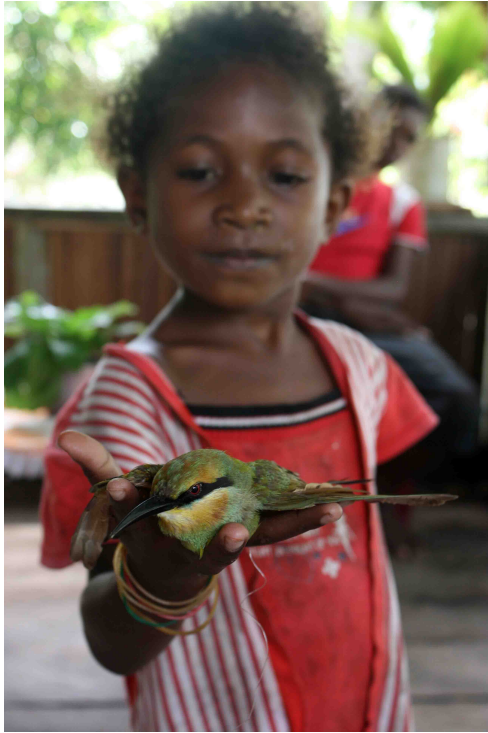
Map 1 – West Papua

West Papua forms the western half of the island of New Guinea and Indonesia's eastern most province.

New Guinea once formed part of a single, continuous landmass with Australia and Tasmania, however, rising sea levels at the conclusion of the last ice age in 10,000 BC would separate the island from Australia and afford it an opportunity to evolve its own extraordinary environment. It is the third largest island in the world after Australia and Greenland and contains the highest mountain range between the Himalaya and the Andes. Either side of its mountainous backbone is the largest swathe of intact primary rainforest left in Asia and one of the world's biggest swamplands. It is perhaps of little surprise that the many unique wildlife species and tribal peoples present on the island remained largely unknown to the outside world till the 20th century, but no one could have predicted just how many new species and cultures would be discovered in New Guinea's post contact years.



The enigmatic island accounts for less than 0.5% of the world's landmass, yet is responsible for a staggering 10% of its species, one third of which are found nowhere else. Flora and fauna are Australian in character. It has no predatory cats, monkeys or apes, common to the opposing side of the Wallace Line¹, but houses the unique birds of paradise, numerous tree kangaroo species, the planet's smallest parrot and its largest rat, freshwater sharks, fanged frogs, singing dogs and even poisonous birds. This list isn't just endless. It's incomplete. There is absolutely no doubt New Guinea, and in particular, West Papua, has more to give.



People are believed to have inhabited the region for 45,000 years. Arriving from Asia, before the separation of Australia and New Guinea, they would later diversify into the Aborigines in Australia and the Tribesmen of New Guinea. Until the arrival of aircraft and later the construction of the first roads, New Guinean tribes people could contact each other only by foot and canoe. However, in many cases, the rugged terrain ensured some groups would remain as isolated and unknown to each other as people living on different continents, causing a staggering number of distinct languages and unique tribal cultures to develop within the island's boundaries. There are over 1000 distinct languages spoken and, incredibly, Survival International estimates there are still 44 uncontacted tribes hidden within the province of West Papua.

Decades after the age of discovery and well into the 21st century, West Papua remains remarkably unknown, off-limits, socially, and politically, isolated. It has not experienced the rapid development of its independent New Guinea neighbor Papua New Guinea and the vast majority of its forests remain totally unexplored and woefully under researched.

The biggest reason for the comparative lack of development is its vastly different political experience in the decades since the breakdown of colonies worldwide. In the wake of World War Two, the island of New Guinea was effectively calved in two. The eastern half became independent Papua New Guinea, the western half ultimately became part of Indonesian Irian Jaya and latterly West Papua.

West Papua had been part of the Dutch East Indies colonies from the end of the 19th century. With very little interference, bar the establishment of a handful of port towns, the vast Papuan hinterland remained utterly unmolested right through to the 1950s. Then the first American and Dutch missionaries arrived, mass converting Papuans to Christianity and bringing an end to centuries old animist and spiritual beliefs alongside tribal warfare, head hunting and cannibalism.

¹ The Wallace Line is a boundary that separates the ecozones of Asia and Australasia. West of the line are found organisms related to Asiatic species; to the east, a mixture of species of Asian and Australian origin are present. The line is named after Alfred Russel Wallace, who noticed this clear dividing line during his travels through the East Indies in the 19th century.

When the Netherlands withdrew from the rest of the Dutch East Indies in 1949 it clung firmly to West Papua, arguing the territory was culturally distinct from the rest of newly formed Indonesia: Indonesians were mostly Muslim, Papuans were Christian, Papuans originated from Melanesia, Indonesians were Asians who had migrated from the mainland. The newly formed Indonesia under President Sukarno argued that this was yet more evidence of the Dutch trying to exert control over its former colony, who not only bank rolled their nation for years from Indonesian nutmeg and cloves, but initiated some of the most brutal programs in colonial history; massacring entire Malukan societies in the race for spice.

The Dutch prepared West Papua for independence, electing the New Guinea council in 1961 with the goal of complete independence by 1970. Sukarno was furious. With Soviet backing he prepared for a military takeover, pushing paratroopers and marines into the territory through 1962 in preparation for an invasion. It didn't go well and the majority of soldiers were either attacked by the local population or handed over to the Dutch, but that was to be of little consequence. By late summer in 1962 the Americans had decided West Papua wasn't worth risking a potentially damaging defeat of their Dutch allies from an army sponsored by the Soviets and pressurised the Government into signing the New York Agreement, which saw Papua become Indonesia's 26th province on 1st May 1963.

The one concession was that within six years Papuan people would be allowed to confirm or reject Indonesian sovereignty in a UN-supervised vote.

Things went very badly from the very beginning. By 1969, against a backdrop of Papuan revolt at the hands of the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM – the militarised wing of the Free Papua movement) and Indonesian military counter-operations that slaughtered thousands, Indonesia decided that the sovereignty vote by Papuans would involve just over '1000' selected 'representatives'. They were uniformly threatened or bribed into voting for Indonesian integration in what was officially named the 'Act of Free Choice'. Soon after Papua became a permanent fixture of the Indonesian Republic.



The Indonesian Government interest in West Papua was financially motivated. Indonesia was woefully poor in the pre-independence years of the 1960s, particularly in the rural areas of Sumatra and Sulawesi, plus it is extremely overpopulated, especially in Java, which in territorial terms is the same size as England but has well over double the population density. Papua however has no shortage of land and contains a fractionally small population, plus, as Indonesia had just realised with the signing of a 1967 contract with US based mining giant Freeport McMoRan, it was, quite literally, a goldmine. In years to come Freeport would become Indonesia's largest foreign taxpayer, contributing an astonishing 2% of the national budget. The Papuan highlands were soon to be exposed as hiding the

world's largest gold deposit and its second largest copper seam.

Since 1969 Indonesian settlers have been moving en-masse to Papua on Government sponsored transmigration programs, where they receive a year's supply of rice, housing and a cash lump sum on arrival. The Government argue it is humanitarian compassion and a chance at a fresh start for its poor, whereas Papuans see it as a thinly veiled attempt to outnumber them should the issue of self-determination ever arise again.

The last five decades have seen widespread acts of violence, torture, rape, killings and permanent disappearing acts. Accusations of gross human rights abuses have been leveled at the Indonesian military and OPM alike. In spite of Papua's mineral wealth the poverty rate remains double the national average, HIV/AIDS is reaching epidemic proportions and foreign journalists are banned, guaranteeing word of any misdeeds are either filtered through state sponsored news gatherers or very occasionally leaked out weeks after the event. The overwhelming majority of Papuans wish to be independent of Indonesia and many take part in campaigns and flag raising ceremonies of the banned 'Morning Star', the emblem of the independent nation they anticipated they would become in the wake of the Dutch withdrawal. This is treated as treason by the Indonesian authorities and punishable by sentences of up to 15 years in prison.

Generally foreigners have not been a target of unrest. There were kidnappings on just two occasions, once in 1995, where Cambridge University graduates were taken hostage for 130 days whilst researching in the Puncak Jaya, and again in 2012 where climbers from New Zealand were detained by the OPM for one night. Killings of foreigners are sporadic and usually centered around the Freeport mine, however in recent months the attempted murder of a German tourist at a beach near Jayapura has led some commentators to dispute the safety of visiting the province (see Conclusion for recent unrest to date). In general Papuans see foreigners as sympathisers with their cause and are largely very welcoming and extremely friendly, but there are very strict rules as to where foreign people are allowed to visit and work, all of which are set by the inflexible and inconsistent departments of the police and military that control security within the province. Patience and flexibility are key to success with any negotiations over access and it should really go without saying that avoiding political demonstrations is advisable.

As one of the most experienced expedition leaders to operate in the province in recent years I cannot deny that part of what makes Papua so extraordinarily mysterious comes from a direct result of this saddening political history. West Papua has largely retained its wilderness and obscurity. The challenge for the next generation of explorers, adventurers, and scientists, will be finding ways to prioritise and record the unique wildlife and cultural history within this beguiling region before it is too late.

1.1 The history of the Jalan Raya and Trans Papua

I first came across a reference to the 'Jalan Raya', the 'Great Road', an on-foot trade route that spans the length of the West Papuan highlands, in a text by Australian anthropologist Tim Flannery. He states:

The Jalan Raya is one of the world's great foot-only trade routes. Produce, such as the plumes of birds of paradise, has probably travelled along it for millennia on its journey to places as far afield as Sri Lanka and China. (T.Flannery, *Throwim Way Leg* p.241 1998: Weidenfeld and Nicolson)

I read that piece in early 2007, right before I took a rare opportunity to work as an English Language Teacher in Jayapura, the capital of West Papua. It marked the beginning of my fascination with this route and Papuan trade in general. It ultimately led to a Royal Geographical Society sponsored expedition in 2009 which evolved into the Trans Papua Expedition in 2012.

Historically the Great Road existed not as a single route. It was in fact a network of tracks and rivers running the length of the highlands, effectively linking all of the major highland groups in an unbroken chain of inter-tribal trade. Leopold Pospisil, an American anthropologist in the Kapauku and Mei territories of the western highlands during the 1950s, first researched the route, noting:

In their trading Kapauku do not limit themselves to partners of their own tribe. Indeed, the Kamu valley constitutes but a segment in a chain of intertribal trade that starts in the south at the Mimika coast of New Guinea and continues through the Kapauku territory into the interior, at least as far as the Baliem valley, or even further. The whole intertribal trade resembles a chain reaction in which traders from many regions and tribes participate by exchanging their commodities, carrying the newly acquired ones for a relatively short distance and trading them again for other goods to their neighbors on the other side of their territory.

(Leopold Pospisil *The Kapauku Papuans* p.24 (1963: Holt, Rinehart, Winston)

In this way the cowrie shell became accepted as currency throughout the highlands, red ochre, stone axes and palm wood travelled from the Northeast Lani territories and green jadeite and serpentine stone, prized for its durability and beauty, moved out of the Dani Baliem valley. From the far west Pospisil noted the demand for medicinal natural salt from the Moni salt wells and recorded the role of the Kapauku as the trading middlemen.

The Great Road became a conduit for the spread of more than objects. Throughout its history it would have acted as the catalyst for the spread of a common Papuan culture and belief system. A role it would maintain as late as 1951 when American and Dutch missionaries first used the route in an attempt to evangelise Dani warriors in the Baliem valley prior to the establishment of an airstrip in Wamena.²

The cultural importance of this historic route cannot be understated. It shaped Papuan culture throughout its history and provided evidence of a complex system of trade long before outside influence - effectively rebuffing the popular stereotype of Papuan tribes as singular units that only contacted neighbouring tribes to partake in ritualised warfare and headhunting. In addition, if Tim Flannery's supposition is correct, the Great Road would take its place among the world's longest running on-foot trade routes, and clearly, one of the most underrated.

² Russell T. Hitt *Cannibal Valley* p. 73 (1962: Lowe and Brydone)

I successfully retraced the Great Road (see map 2) through several small expeditions throughout 2007 and 2008 ahead of a larger Royal Geographical Society sponsored project in 2009.³ I discovered that the route was falling into disrepair through underuse. The overwhelming majority of highlanders were reliant on air-drops of essential supplies, or, in many cases, were close enough to a road to avoid distance walking altogether. Many of the tribal groups, that were once spread throughout the highlands, had relocated to a hub town to place themselves, and their families, at an even closer proximity to the transport networks that negated the need to walk. I found evidence of abandoned villages, broken bridges and vast areas of uninhabited wilderness where people would have once lived. In a last gasp effort to record on foot trade I headed to the most isolated part of the Great Road, in the far west of the highlands. Here, I was truly astonished to record the survival of the trade in natural salt from a very remote jungle well in the heart of Moni tribal land⁴. The products local notoriety for its medicinal value in the treatment of goiters had kept the tradition alive, and the salt in demand. Incredibly, I discovered it was even still transported on foot. A family of three were just setting off as I arrived at the well, carrying parcels of salt to the town of Enarotali, four days away.



Map 2 – West Papuan highlands, the Jalan Raya and major highland populations

By the end of 2009 I still felt my research was incomplete. Nothing I had seen or read had adequately explained just how certain products, traded in the highlands on the Great Road, had made their way to the highlands from the coasts. Decades before any major expeditionary party had penetrated the interior, products such as the birds of paradise feathers were turning up on the heads of Sri Lankan Princes, who wore them as crowns as early as the 16th century, and before that it seems likely that the Chinese were consuming New Guinean nutmeg.⁵ The sweet potato, a South American vegetable used throughout the highlands, has been present since the 7th

³ The Neville Shulman Challenge Award 2009

<http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Grants/Expedition+fieldwork+and+independent+travel+grants/Neville+Shulman+Challenge+Award.htm>

⁴ The Moni Salt Wells film clip <https://vimeo.com/11290883>

⁵ Tim Flannery *Throwim Way Leg* p.3 (1998: Weidenfeld and Nicolson)

century⁶, and the cowrie shell has been an acceptable form of currency for as long as any Dani elder can remember. In a land synonymous with savagery and formidable natural obstacles it may seem like an impossible idea, but clearly a highly organised system of trade had branched off the highlands and reached the coasts, establishing a regular route of even greater importance than the 'Great Road' - one that brought every major cultural change to Papuan society, hundreds, if not thousands, of years before aviation and outsiders arrived in the province. My concern was whether they would still be active and if there was anyone still alive that could remember where they were.

I knew from studying anthropological notes and missionary diaries from the 1950s and 60s that there were two major lowland populations that regularly traded with each other: the Kombai and Korowai clans of the Asmat, located in the vast swamplands of the south, and the Mamberamo clans, based around the massive Idenberg and Mamberamo rivers that swept through the northern lowland jungles. It seemed likely then that these trading clans would provide the middleman link between the highland tribes and the coasts. They were already established inter tribal traders and, at the extreme ends of their tribal influence, they were scraping at the central mountain spine that contained the Great Road (see Map 3 below). According to satellite imagery it looked possible that they could have been contacted through natural corridors in the environment: the Mamberamo clans via a gap in the mountain range leading north to the head of a river network that flows on to the Mamberamo, and the Korowai and Kombai clans via another gap in the mountains affording access to the heads of another southern network of rivers, named as the Noordoost and Lorentz, that flowed on to the heart of the Asmat.



Map 3 – West Papuan highlands, the upper extent of Asmat and Mamberamo clans and possible corridor trade routes

I spoke to contacts within the Dani Baliem valley. Everyone was confident of the route heading south to the Asmat. Although it hadn't been walked in years, owing to the establishment of a regular flight to the riverhead in lowland Dekai, it sounded as if there was once a clear tribal network stretching to the south coast.

I also read about a successful southern crossing by George Monbiot⁷ in 1989, heading south from the Dani Baliem via a series of remote lowland rivers, and an

⁶ According to soil analysis in the 1980s - George Monbiot *Poisoned Arrows* p. 61 (1989: Abacus)

⁷ Currently an Environment correspondent with the Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/georgemonbiot>

aborted attempt by adventurer Bruce Parry in 2002 to head north from the southern coastline to the Baliem, but both had chosen, perhaps deliberately, very isolated routes where the chances of meeting firmly established traders were remote. Equally, I studied the 1959 French expedition led by Pierre Dominique Gaisseau, immortalised in the Oscar award winning expedition film 'the sky above, mud below', that crossed the province, and the subsequent retracing of the route in 1989 by another two Frenchmen, Arnoult Seveau and Luc-Henri Fage, both finishing in coastal capital Jayapura. Both used motorised transportation and also spent many weeks in isolation in the forest, deviating significantly from the Mamberamo route in the north to force an overland route to the provincial capital Jayapura. I felt heartened by all of their successes, but equally I knew I didn't have their resources and, as my interest was in the people and historic trade network, I wasn't willing to deviate from the major rivers in search of 'first contacts' or a more direct, but uninhabited, route to the coasts. I needed to find my own chain of villages and populations otherwise my theory would collapse.

The most useful sources came from *New Guinea: The Last Unknown*, a comprehensive history of New Guinea's exploration written by Australian journalist Gavin Souter in 1963. Here I learnt of two previous expeditions that had gone some distance to making the connection on precisely the routes I wished to trace. In 1909 legendary Dutch explorer Hendrikus Albertus Lorentz, having already tried, and failed, to push into the highlands on precisely the Asmat river I had identified on the satellite maps, was motivated into action again following a declaration of intention from The British Ornithologist's Union to celebrate their 50th anniversary by sending "a party of six explorers to New Guinea's snowtops". This was a race to become the first nation to sink crampons into New Guinea's equatorial snow. Lorentz was incensed at the Brit's cheek: "I shall be first on the snow...it would not be right for the English to take advantage of earlier Dutch work. They must not be allowed to plough the land with someone else's oxen." Starting up the Noordoost with eighty-two Bornean porters and sixty-one troops they reached the snowfields on the 8th November, two months after making the first ascent of the river. Encounters with "natives" are documented fleetingly. They note tracks and traps in the hill tops, but meet no people, but interestingly they detail meetings with "small men with phallic gourds" around the Noordoost's lower reaches – clearly the first established contact with the tribal groups we now know as the Kombai and Korowai of the Asmat. This all seemed to fit with what I already knew: the lower reaches of the Asmat rivers were inhabited with traders, but the trade routes did not follow the river's course throughout its length. The river's source, high in the mountainous centre of West Papua, was desolate and barren; I knew this to my cost following two fairly horrendous expeditions I had taken there in 2008 and 2009. The trade route, according to my local contacts, curled away on a southeast line away from the major mountains and the river's headwaters before returning to the rivers lower down. This seemed to make sense. The upper reaches of both these rivers were clearly unnavigable by dug-out canoe, you were better off on foot, and if you were better of walking, you would never pick the highest part of the mountain range to lay your regular route and carry your goods.

The route north still seemed pretty unclear. Which should have hinted that it was a fairly spurious undertaking from the outset. In 1921 I read of another Dutch expedition led by J.H.G Kremer that successfully ascended the Mamberamo from its northern mouth right to the foothills of the central mountains and beyond, almost to the point Lorentz had summated 12 years previously. He took 800 men and six

months and seemed to force the route forward using siege tactics. Surely, if there were an obvious trade route through a natural gateway between the headwaters of the Mamberamo and the hills he would have mentioned it? I approached an old contact and authority on all recent expeditions in the highlands based in Wamena⁸. Scrutinising our maps he confirmed that there was a possible route north on the line I had chosen, but there was no guarantee it was a trade route or that it was inhabited. He also, rather ominously, pointed out that the last person to attempt this route had never returned.

I still felt that the route north was worth exploring. It seemed likely that there would be more than one route connecting the highlands and the coasts, and as the Mamberamo clans were such prolific traders, and seemed comparatively close to the Great Road, I guessed this would be the most likely access point. The route south was clearly genuine. I would simply be making the connection between what had gone before me, armed with the knowledge of where previous expeditions had deviated from the trade route.

2.0 Aims in 2012

- Search for evidence of the prolonged existence of intertribal trade between highland and lowland tribal groups.
- Record accurately the current condition of the trade route and the level of change already experienced by the modern day indigenous groups, including the level of interaction with the tradition of long distance trading.
- Compile accurate GPS records of the rivers and trade routes.
- Make a complete crossing of the state and the first packraft expedition of the Mamberamo headwaters and Asmat waterways.
- On return, continue to raise awareness of the need for pragmatic conservation in West Papua to preserve the cultural history and environment through the publication and broadcast of the expedition's results and narrative.

2.1 Predictable obstacles

- Modernisation and prolonged exposure to influences from outside the state (planes, cars, mining, missionary work, the sale of Indonesian, Asian and Western goods and materials) had caused a retreat from traditional cultural values. This had left the Great Road and distance walking, largely redundant and very difficult to record in 2009. I feared it would be even worse on the Trans Papua as the route was even more remote and I knew from experience that I would have to deal with a lot of misinformation due to the cultural face-saver of always giving the answer you think people want to hear, regardless of accuracy.
- Porter abandonment and local misunderstanding. Despite walking with trusted Papuan friends, abandonment had become a staple of all my expeditions in 2007-08 and 2009. It was understandably difficult to convince local people that a western man would choose to walk when he could afford a truck or plane. This led to suspicion and inevitable demands for outrageous sums of money. In extreme cases I was a target of theft and even abandonment. The parts of West Papua I intended to visit had very few

⁸ I can't give exact details or a name here as this person would never give consent for his contacts to appear in the public domain, but please do contact me directly on any of my given details on this cover sheet if you wish to know more.

interactions with outsiders. It was imperative I planned for inevitable misunderstandings as a result of my presence and did not become over reliant on the participation of any one tribal group or peoples. This was not to say I would enter the expedition with mistrust, but it was important to understand that a warm welcome and offers of help were a privilege very much at the discretion of the people we met and should never be presumed prior to entering a new tribal district.

- Access, was and remains to be, a major issue (see the introduction above for the background on West Papua's volatile political history). Just obtaining accurate maps can be a major headache, let alone negotiating the required permits, known locally as the 'surat jalan' (see 3.1 Preparation "Access" and footnote 16). Without question, the overwhelming majority of my plans would land in the 'off limits' territory. The paranoia abounding around the province also meant getting all my equipment into the state was going to be a massive hurdle to cross.
- Major natural obstacles: vast uninhabited areas, river crossings, white water, mountain passes, a multitude of climates (it can be both hot/humid and chilly in the highlands, rains are also quite unpredictable) and dangerous animals (cassowary, taipan, vipers, etc.) made the choice of what gear and food to take on a proposed lightweight and discreet expedition very difficult. The risk of infection is extremely high as is the chance of illness – malaria, typhoid and a host of diseases communicable through stinging insects.
- Access to high quality healthcare and medical evacuation are major issues. The quality of medical facilities are very poor outside of the major towns, medical evacuation is largely unavailable and due to the aforementioned access restrictions it would be highly unlikely that anyone would know our movements prior to the start of the project.

I shall address how we went about reducing the risks outlined above in much greater detail in section 3.1 Preparation.

2.2 Sponsorship and Support

This expedition would not have been possible were it not for generous support from a number of charities and equipment partners that shared my passion for this project. The nature of conducting expeditions in any restricted zone requires absolute discretion. Commercial sponsorship that would require extensive publicity and advertising prior to our departure date could have jeopardised the entire expedition. I required sponsors that were both understanding of this fact and shared my interest in the aims of the project. I remain extremely grateful to the following organisations and companies:

Winston Churchill Memorial Trust (WCMT) <http://www.wcmt.org.uk/>

Support from the WCMT was absolutely invaluable throughout the expedition. They were the first organisation to provide backing to the project and provided vital support at the mid-way stage. I am in no doubt that their outstanding reputation went a very long way to legitimise my expedition in the eyes of other supporters who would join at a later date.

The Transglobe Expedition Trust (TET) <http://www.transglobe-expedition.org/page/the-trust>

A charity established in 1993 to perpetuate the memory of the Transglobe Expedition by supporting humanitarian, scientific or educational projects which follow in the expedition's tradition of adventure and perseverance. I was honoured to be associated with them and their work.

The Jeremy Willson Charitable Trust <http://www.jwct.org.uk/>

A charity set up in tribute to and memory of Jeremy Willson. The charity helps people and projects that reflect Jeremy's passions in life: athletics, geology, adventure and the environment. Their kindness and the story of Jeremy's action packed life and can do attitude was a source of inspiration on the expedition.

The Frederick Soddy Trust <http://www.soddy.org/>

The Frederick Soddy Trust was established in 1957 under the terms set out in the will of the chemist and Nobel Laureate, Professor Frederick Soddy FRS. The Trust offers support for expeditions that include the study of the whole life of an area with an emphasis on human geography.

The Berghaus Adventure Challenge Award <http://www.berghaus.com/en/adventure-challenge/>

The project was shortlisted by Berghaus and subsequently won the popular vote online to receive a donation and Berghaus equipment.

Mike Jones Award

I was honored to receive the Mike Jones Award for the project through Mike's sister Chris Baillie and the WCMT. He was without doubt among the finest adventure canoeists in British history having completed numerous first descents including the Dudh Kosi and the Blue Nile. Mike's life was a source of great inspiration for my team.

Alpacka raft <http://www.alpackaraft.com/>

Loaned the project two highly durable packrafts that were integral to the projects success. Packing down to the size of a two-man tent and weighing just two kilos, they gave us unprecedented access to West Papua's remotest jungle streams and rivers. I remain in debt to the kindness of Nancy Halls.

Indus Films <http://www.indusfilms.com/>

This BAFTA award winning adventure film production company loaned the project technical equipment to facilitate the project's film. Long-term supporters of my expeditions, an extremely generous independent film company with environmental values at its core.

Dryad Bushcraft <http://www.dryadbushcraft.co.uk/>

Andrew Price of Dryad Bushcraft very kindly gave Callum and I a full days wilderness and bushcraft training tailored specifically to tropical environments. His hints and tips came in extremely useful and saved the expedition a small fortune on survival essentials.

Craghoppers <http://www.craghoppers.com/>

Donated clothing from their Nosilife brand to clothe the expedition.

Aquapac <http://store.aquapac.net/>

Donated waterproof pouches and housings to protect technical equipment and the expedition film's tapes.

BCB International <http://www.bcb.in.com/>

Donated a range of outdoor essentials from their "Bushcraft" brand including repellents, tape, waterproof bags, karabiners, micro lights and tarps. I owe a huge debt of thanks to Philippe Minchin.

Expedition Foods <http://www.expeditionfoods.com/>

Gave a generous discount on their high-calorie rations range.

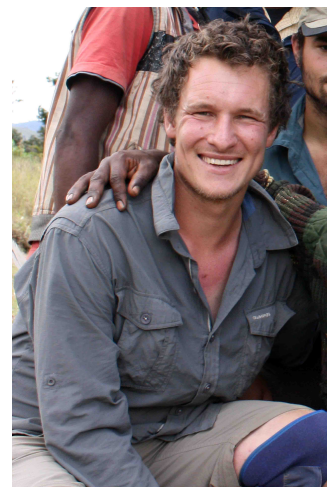
DD Hammocks <http://www.ddhammocks.com/>

Gave a generous discount on their sleeping systems and snake skins.

2.3 Team Members

Will Millard – Expedition Leader

Will has been leading expeditions in West Papua since 2007. In 2009 he was awarded the Royal Geographical Society's Neville Shulman Prize for 'furthering our understanding of the planet and its cultures' and in 2012 he was awarded the Berghaus Adventure Travel Award and Mike Jones Award for the Trans-Papua project.



Will is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) and the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and has written and submitted images on Papua's tribes and wildlife for numerous magazines and websites including BBC Wildlife, Outdoor Fitness, Geographical, WWF and Wanderlust. He has spoken about his experiences at the RGS, National Geographic Store, Adventure Travel Live and on the Wilderness Lectures tour and broadcasted on the BBC World Service and Radio New Zealand.

He is a graduate of the University of Leeds and the National University of Singapore, having majored in Sociology and Southeast Asian studies, and works as an Assistant Producer for Indus Films in Cardiff, who make the Bruce Parry series *Tribe*, *Amazon* and *Arctic* for the BBC.

Callum Fester – Expedition Medic for the first leg

Callum has been working with Will on Papuan projects since 2009. Callum is a Geography graduate and has been a fully qualified paramedic since 2011 with three years experience working in Ambulances around North London. He has previously worked as an outdoor instructor at youth summer camps and has served a term in Afghanistan with the British Army as a Combat Engineer.



Callum has spoken about his experiences in Papua at the annual RGS Explore event and is currently training to become a Primary School Teacher.

3.0 The Trans Papua Expedition: Introduction

The full report of the 2012 expedition will be comprised of three parts: the preliminary preparations I made prior to starting the expedition, a chronological selection of key parts of the diary log detailing the successes, problems and recommendations, alongside the expedition narrative itself, and finally, the results and conclusions. This is not intended to be an exhaustive dissection of every element of the expedition but is a guide to those wishing to pursue their own projects in the region. Should you require further clarification or detail on any element of this report please contact me using the details given on the cover page.

3.1 Preparation

Mapping and GPS: Acquiring maps is a real problem in West Papua due to Government restrictions on the dissemination of cartographic data and the prevalence of unmapped areas. In 2009 I used three maps, each with faults: one was an Indonesian map, which was excellent for place names, yet wildly inaccurate, one was an American satellite map, which had useful topographic information, but lacked local names and details, and one was from an American cartographic company (<http://www.cartographic.com/>) which was very accurate for the far West of the highlands, but lacked sufficient detail for the rest of the state. All were on a scale too large to be sufficiently useful for day-to-day trekking but by using a combination of all three, we found they provided a serviceable guideline for rough positioning.

The problems outlined above meant that we relied heavily on GPS navigation in 2009. We were provided with the GPS data for a clutch of airstrips located in some of the major highland towns we hoped to encounter on our expedition. The data was hard won from an understandably suspicious missionary aviation organisation specialising in helicopter rescue; Heli Vida.⁹ Although they did ultimately give us the coordinates we required, they made it clear that we should take care not to associate them with any aspect of our expedition - fearing it could jeopardise their local highland contacts should we have problems with the authorities or turn out to be journalists operating illegally in the province.

In 2012 I again acquired the critically important co-ordinates for villages with airstrips¹⁰ from Heli Vida, and bolstered our navigational accuracy significantly with the acquisition of satellite mapping data from the Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM)¹¹ and HydroSHEDS¹² from Dr. James Kitson. Pre-loading these content dense maps and co-ordinates onto my GPS gave us the most accurate positioning we could possibly hope for.

Prior to departure both Callum and I reviewed our route multiple times, familiarising ourselves with the topography of the area we were supposed to cross and carefully measuring distances between natural obstacles to give us a surprisingly accurate picture of what we could expect to experience on the trail. In large part though I navigated as the locals did, measuring distances in walking days not kilometres,

⁹ Heli Vida, formerly Heli mission <http://www.helimission.org/english/countries-of-operation/papua/>

¹⁰ See Appendices for GPS co-ordinates

¹¹ <http://www2.jpl.nasa.gov/srtm/>

¹² <http://hydrosheds.cr.usgs.gov/>

ticking off prominent natural landmarks and memorising the order of the villages along the way. As you will see throughout this report this system manifested itself in the use of a lot of hand-drawn maps and scribbled directions gleaned from locals. I have tried to include these where appropriate.

Emergency Evacuation and Healthcare: The lack of medical evacuation options in West Papua can give a sense of foreboding ahead of any expedition. There are a number of Christian missionary organisations that are all worth approaching in advance of any expedition, but do not expect to gain preferential treatment. They have few aircraft and follow strict schedules, servicing not just their own missionaries but providing a critical transport link for highland Papuans requiring medical treatment. International organisations working in Papua are under constant scrutiny from the Indonesian authorities and often have a slender hold on their permits to remain in the state. They will not jeopardise their position and work by associating themselves with unknown outsiders who could turn out to be OPM sympathisers or illegal journalists. However, if an approach is made well in advance, with the production of appropriate credentials, then some missionary aviation services might agree to transport you and your equipment for a fee - but they are keen to stress that they do not act as commercial transportation for tourists in any capacity.

In the event of an emergency, the official line from most missionary aviation services is that, although evacuation is not part of their remit, they will attempt to come to your aid, but, at the time of writing, only one organisation has access to a helicopter, all others will require that you make it at least to an airstrip.

In the case of the Trans Papua I knew we would be heading well into the Papuan hinterland. There was nowhere a helicopter or a plane could realistically land. Callum and I accepted that as part of the risk of undertaking such an ambitious project we would be solely responsible for ourselves and our health throughout the project. As any chance of rescue in the event of an emergency was basically zero we knew we would have to rely heavily on our own First Aid skills and abilities. Obviously it wasn't something we entered into lightly. With such high stakes we chose our First Aid kit with real care, consulting specialists in tropical medicine as well as scrutinising choices made in other expeditions of a similar nature. I have included a complete list of antibiotic choices in the 'specialist kit' section below.

Local and International Non-governmental Organisations: An invaluable source of information and logistical contacts prior to undertaking the expedition. At the time of writing Unicef and Medecins Du Monde were active in the state. Again, I was fortunate to have good contacts in these organisations from time spent in the state through 2007/8 and 2009, but the high turnover of staff in these positions means that any contacts in the aid sector will become redundant fast. However, they remain a great source of local, on the ground, non-biased information. Medecins Du Monde helped me find transportation and provided some useful emergency contacts and unicef helped with medical intelligence regarding outbreaks of cholera and diarrhea in the highlands. As with the Missionaries, any advice and help they give you is purely at their discretion.

Money: Despite what is written and broadcast about the highlands of Papua the days of bartering with anything but bank notes are long gone. Gifts of pencils, pictures, food, tobacco etc. are appreciated as a gesture of goodwill but should not

realistically be considered a substitute for cash currency. I knew we would have to pay for all services we required on the expedition, be it occasional portering or for stays in local villages. Papua is not cheap by Indonesian standards. Budget guest houses are normally around £20 per night, all non-local food is imported into the province and fuel costs are double. I have generally found myself paying far more for daily portering in Papua than anywhere else in Indonesia. As a rule of thumb guides will expect upwards of £20 per day, porters around the £10 mark and for stays in a local village I expect to pay around £5 per night. In more remote areas I have paid less, in more contacted regions, such as Wamena, I have paid more for these services than I ever received as a local Teacher in 2007/8. Sometimes prices quoted can be outrageously high. There is a common misconception that Westerners have enormous amounts of money, but you may find it very difficult to bargain or negotiate as many see this as a loss of face, or, actually just don't believe that you can't afford to pay. That said there were many occasions on this trip, and in the past, where I felt that payment was not expected at all and indeed was, on occasion, refused. Without question being able to speak some of the local language has helped me immeasurably when it comes to money matters. If you have the time it is well worth employing a guide for a couple of days as a trial before committing to something more long term.

As it was highly unlikely that the local guides and porters we intended to employ would be carrying small change of any description I knew we would have to get all of the cash in small denominations, ultimately equating for about two shoe boxes full of Indonesian rupiah. Having crossed the obvious hurdle of withdrawing and changing this amount of money from the local banks¹³ we broke the money up into 1 million rupiah portions and split it between myself and Callum. I would have an emergency pouch hidden on my person and a daily expenses pouch in my pocket; the rest was hidden within our sleeping sacks. This was not so much because we feared theft, but more that pulling out the equivalent of three years wages to pay someone for a few days guiding would have been both embarrassing and alienating. Please see the Appendices for a full break down of costs and expenses.

Specialist Kit: The Trans Papua expedition was going to take in a whole range of environments from cold, mountain passes, to hot and humid lowland rainforest. I was also going to be mixing disciplines: long days trekking in the highlands followed by self-propelled travel along remote lowland rivers. I knew there was a good chance my team could face up to one month in total isolation if one of the routes did not provide access to tribal communities, so we were going to have to try and carry enough rations to compensate, plus I was hoping to film and photograph the project. The kit I selected needed to be durable, ideally waterproof, and above all, lightweight. At my absolute peak I knew Callum and I could manage 45 kilos of equipment each, but anything heavier was going to cause far more problems than any extra gear could possibly solve.

In the event I managed to keep just within the weight limit and have picked out the following items from my kit as either essential or certainly highly recommended for

¹³ This was no mean feat. There are restrictions on the amount of cash you can bring into Indonesia and the officers that work at Jayapura and Wamena Airport would guarantee that if you were caught attempting to bring a sum of money this large into the highlands you would be heavily 'fined' and would certainly have to answer some awkward questions. However, at the time of writing at least three, well-staffed, major Indonesian Banks were in operation in Wamena. If you are starting out from the highlands factor in a few days withdrawing your expedition budget as part of your planning - I spread my budget across several current accounts, ensuring I withdrew to my limit each day from several cards meant it took no more than a couple of days to get to my total.

anyone attempting a lightweight long distance self-contained projects in remote environments:

- Solar panels – vital for charging cameras and our GPS. Small, durable solar panels are widely available online with a range of adaptors. The only problems are finding the time to charge in daylight hours, when you want to be moving on, and finding adequate sunlight to justify getting out the panel, not so much of an issue when following rivers, but a real nightmare when you are under a thick canopy. I learnt to keep the whole kit handy and charge when any opportunity arose, taking short breaks when I found puddles of light in the forest.
- Alpacka Packrafts, repair kit and two-piece carbon paddles - Essential for this project where I knew we would need to carry some sort of boat to transport ourselves and our kit to the riverine communities of the lowlands. The 'unrigged explorer' models were lightweight (2 kilos) and large enough to take one person and all their kit. The paddles I purchased could have been smaller. I would recommend getting three-piece paddles over two as we experienced a lot of problems with the paddle tops catching on the brush in the forest during walking.
- DD Travel hammocks, tarpaulin and snakeskins – I chose hammocks over tents as we felt we should need to be elevated from the forest floor for safety and comfort. The snakeskins could be pulled across our hammock and mosquito net, easing and speeding up erection, and the tarps doubled as a useful water catcher during rainstorms.
- Goretex bivvy bag – all you really need for sleeping. It did get very cold at points in the highlands but not dangerously so, and the weight and space saved in not taking a sleeping bag was well worth the sacrifice.
- Expedition foods high calorie range – On this project Callum and I were looking to get the maximum calories for the bare minimum of weight whilst still having a fairly nutritious and varied diet. Having scrutinised most of the market leaders we settled on Expedition foods high calorie range, which easily topped the calorie/weight scale with roughly 150 grams per portion for over 800 calories. Many have asked why I didn't supplement our rations with bush food given that we experienced serious malnutrition problems on the first leg. The truth was we found that the effort and time required to set traps, fish, and then prepare the food, was eating into our rest and work periods to such an extent that it negated the nutritional benefits of wild caught food. We decided the extra time spent walking or rafting and actually progressing to communities where food was relatively plentiful in the quickest time possible was of greater long-term benefit.
- Emergency whistle and mini-led necklace – we both wore these items around our necks. Along with our compasses they were probably the items we used the most.
- Laminated picture books with images of animals, family members and culture from the UK – an indispensable source of communication and fascination where there is no common language.
- Camera equipment – An extremely robust Sony A1 camera and back-up in a waterproof bag. I decided to go with tapes over cards as they are hardier and don't necessitate a laptop to upload. I also carried a lightweight tripod and a waterproof Go Pro mini camera, all of which could be charged off the solar panel.

- Paracord, karabiners, bright electrical tape – indispensable for hanging tarps, towing our packrafts and as spare bootlaces. I used tape constantly to patch things up in an emergency, but also as a bright signaler on everyday items that could easily be lost, such as on the handles of knives.
- Garmin etrex 30 with two Garmin etrexH – I mapped constantly on the trip and the preloaded maps on the etrex30 were genuine lifesavers (see mapping and GPS above). All of these models took AA batteries that could easily be charged off the solar panels but in the event I can only remember changing the batteries a handful of times.
- Water purification tablets – carrying enough of these tiny tablets that require just one to purify a litre of water in 45 minutes has proven a far better alternative to time-consuming boiling.¹⁴ I would also recommend carrying sachets of rehydration salts – not only for rehydration purposes, they make a pleasant change from days of drinking water and many are a good source of vitamin C – if you are in Indonesia definitely think about taking some Pocari Sweat sachets.
- Medical and repellent – We opted to carry 100% Deet only. Many do not recommend spraying this directly onto your skin but we didn't experience any problems and found that the biting insects were so incredibly persistent that we wouldn't have wanted anything less and didn't want to waste weight. A First Aid kit is obviously essential. Alongside the standard bandages, tapes, plasters, paracetamol and ibuprofen I also carried a range of anti-biotics and anti-malarials (as well as being up to date with all my rabies, Japanese encephalitis, typhoid and hepatitis boosters prior to travel). These included a full course of Doxycycline as an everyday anti-malarial and a full course of Malarone as an emergency Malaria treatment in lieu of hospital care. Amoxiclav was our anti-biotic for skin and wound infection, of which I had several courses. I had Ciprofloxacin for urinary infection and Metronidazole for stomach disorders, Co-codomyl and Tramadol for severe pain and antihistamine tablets and cream for bites and stings. I did not carry anti-venom for snake bites as I felt it was unlikely that I would be able to positively identify the snake species in question, and, in a country where there are so many deadly snakes, I felt I would inevitably be carrying vast quantities of anti-venom for the unlikely event that one of us were bitten by the correct snake species. I had numerous snake encounters on the project and found that in every case the reptile in question was not aggressive and in most cases would take every opportunity given to get out of your way, however deadly¹⁵, simple precautions such as loose fitting trousers, boots, leading with a stick and keeping a vigilant eye on the track kept us safe. I would like to explicitly express that my advice is based on my own personal experience and is absolutely no substitute for doing your own research into the environment you intend to travel in or consulting medical professionals. You need to feel comfortable with your own kit. I was forced to accept that I could not cover all emergency eventualities and still pick up my bag. If you are not faced with this reality then you should look to carry more medical kit

¹⁴ Finding clean water sources in the Papuan highlands is generally not a problem as there is an abundance of rivers and small ponds from the prolific rainfall, but there were times that a basic filter would have proven useful such as in the immediate aftermath of heavy rains which placed a lot of suspension in our water sources. However, an intelligently placed tarpaulin can be used to catch a days water in the rains (which almost always came at night) negating this concern.

¹⁵ The exception was the “ular pisang” the banana snake, a local pit viper that relies on its exceptional camouflage to ambush rodents. This is deadly and would not move no matter how close you unintentionally got to its coiled form (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGW6ErnAMAY&feature=relmfu>). However, it also seemed very unwilling to strike out, both Callum and I twice came within centimeters of stepping on this snake. Keep a close eye on the leaf litter on any trails, particularly ones that could be frequented by rodents, try to lead with a stick, wear boots and loose fitting trousers.

if possible but don't overlook the benefits of taking simple precautionary and preventive measures in avoiding illness: ensuring you are suitably hydrated, using drywash gel, drying your feet, using repellents, taking vitamin tablets, using sun cream and sharing your medical problems with your expedition partner if you can.

- Mora frost knives – There is a bewildering array of specialist bushcraft knives on the market, many of which are overpriced and pretty unnecessary. These Swedish blades, recommended by bushcraft specialist Andrew Price, were inexpensive, came in plastic safety sheaths with belt clips, and were unbelievably sharp.
- Dry bags – obvious really, but I have included them here to mention their dual purpose as flotation devices and also to highlight that I carried a range of dry bags; from the standard dry sacks for clothes, to snap seal transparent plastic bags for medical equipment and waterproof marine pouches for things that absolutely could not get wet such as camera tapes and the essential electronics. I also used handfuls of silica gel to remove moisture.

A lightweight, discreet approach was fundamental to the success of this project. Before we set off we also considered what kit could conceivably be abandoned in an emergency. Although a far from ideal situation it pays to prepare for the worst and think about what essential kit you would proceed with should you be required to abandon the project, what kit you must have spares for, and what kit you would need to keep an injured or sick expedition partner alive in the event that you had to split up to find help. I always tried to keep enough survival essentials on my person so I knew that even if I lost my entire rucksack I would be able to keep mobile for a significant period of time.

Training I knew from painful experience that although it pays to start these projects with supreme fitness and endurance, going into the forest with zero body fat is an enormous mistake. I trained by walking with weight, running, and generally working on my core, nothing too spectacular, but I did start out about a stone overweight. As you will read in the diary section this was a prudent decision as by the end of March Callum and I had lost over two stone each.

I also took sessions in white water training and self-rescue at my local white water centre and joined Andrew Price of Dryad Bushcraft in the Welsh Gower for a day's one-on-one survival training and a bushcraft course.

Access: Getting access to West Papua to conduct this expedition was always going to be tricky (as outlined in '2.1 Predictable Obstacles' and the political history in the Introduction). I have had a lot of experience in jumping through the various bureaucratic hoops and felt that even though this was a big step up from my previous projects that there was no reason to believe things would be any different. West Papua had experienced a period of relative stability in the lead up to my start date, sadly something which cannot be said of the events that followed in the immediate aftermath of my project (see Conclusion for further details) and despite numerous meetings with the OPM and the various factions of the Indonesian military and the police over the years I had very rarely ran into any real trouble.

I applied for two sets of 60-day tourist visas with a break in between. You can get a 30-day visa on arrival if you hold a British passport and enter via Jakarta or Bali, or apply for longer visas as a researcher but as my project was in a restricted area I

knew it would be best to apply as a tourist than enter into the red tape mine field of applying for an unnecessary research visa that was almost certain to be refused.

Getting 90 kilos of equipment into the region would have been extremely expensive had I been unable to get an extra weight allowance with British Airways as part of my Fellowship with the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. From Kuala Lumpur I did have to pay a lot of excess to get the gear into West Papua, but I was able to then leave the vast majority of the kit in the province when I returned home at the midway point in April, before being reunited with it all when I came back for the second leg at the end of the month.

Traditionally, getting my surat jalan¹⁶ approved has been a major headache. First you have to present yourself, photocopies of your passport and your visa, at the Police station in Jayapura where they will either approve or refuse your plans, then, even if you have approval, you must present your surat jalan again at every police and military post you encounter on the entire trip. I have had approval change from one post to another for no discernable reason, requests for massive bribes, and accusations that I had forged the entire document. As this was such an ambitious project, into regions that I knew were restricted, I thought I would struggle to get official permission and then probably get turned away from a military post at a later date.

In the event, my access problems did not come from within West Papua. On arrival in the airport in Jakarta we were subjected to a search of all our kit and I was accused of bringing in the high calorie ration packs to sell within Indonesia. Eventually, as it became clear the customs officers were soliciting a bribe from me, I was led into an area just behind the exit where there were no CCTV cameras. With our gear loaded on two trolleys I was asked for £200. I explained I didn't have any sterling on me, or dollars, or Indonesian rupiah, having just arrived from Malaysia. Luckily, the customs officer didn't know his exchange rates and asked for 200 Malaysian ringgits (approximately £40) and as he dived into my wallet to extract the notes Callum wheeled half of our expedition supplies out into the public hallway, effectively halving the corrupt officials bargaining position in an instant.

In West Papua I happened to meet an old friend called Pak Ponnyman who is responsible for initially approving surat jalans from Jayapura. I was completely open about the places I was planning to visit and happily, I don't think he realised at any stage that I was intending to effectively cross Papua overland, his biggest concern being that I would be eaten by a crocodile. There was no doubt that a recent easing of tensions in the region had helped my cause significantly, that, and the fact that I could speak to Pak Ponnyman in his own language and we knew each other well enough to have built up some sort of trust over the past five years.

¹⁶ The surat jalan is the state pass held by all foreign visitors which includes a list of the towns and provinces you are planning to visit and must be presented to all members of the military or police you meet. The Indonesian authorities are very paranoid about allowing foreigners to have free reign to wander around restricted areas where operations against the OPM are ongoing, particularly in the central state of Puncak Jaya and anywhere around the Freeport mine. Officially their concern is that foreigners could be kidnapped or killed by the OPM, but it seems more likely that they are more concerned with foreigners meddling with mining and logging operations or spreading news about the indigenous separatist movement. Video evidence of military members torturing suspected members of the OPM was released by the BBC and Survival International in 2011 which led to some very red faces amongst the Indonesian Government who are feted world wide for their relatively liberal values. The suspicion, among the authorities at least, is that the images and video were released by foreign journalists colluding with the separatists. Practically speaking, the authorities and the surat jalan system, offers absolutely nothing in the way of actual security to foreign visitors. You are responsible for yourself, but a common sense approach and the avoidance of obvious protests should go a long way to ensuring your safety.

Insurance finding insurance coverage for the project was something that was not resolved until about a week before I was due to leave. Although West Papua was not subject to Foreign office warnings the nature of the expedition caused me to be rejected from a string of Insurers. In the end, having realised that the inclusion of search and rescue coverage were redundant for us anyway (see Emergency Evacuation above), I found Voyager Travel Insurance would cover us for our medical expenses if we could get ourselves to a hospital.

Language, communication and reducing misunderstanding: My previous years of experience in Papua afforded me enough basic Indonesian skills to communicate fluently on this project. This was vital. Indonesian is swiftly becoming the lingua franca of the highlands, uniting tribal people that speak a variety of local dialects within a common umbrella language. Undertaking projects in West Papua without Indonesian, or a good English-Indonesian translator, would be exceptionally difficult as very few people speak English in Papua.

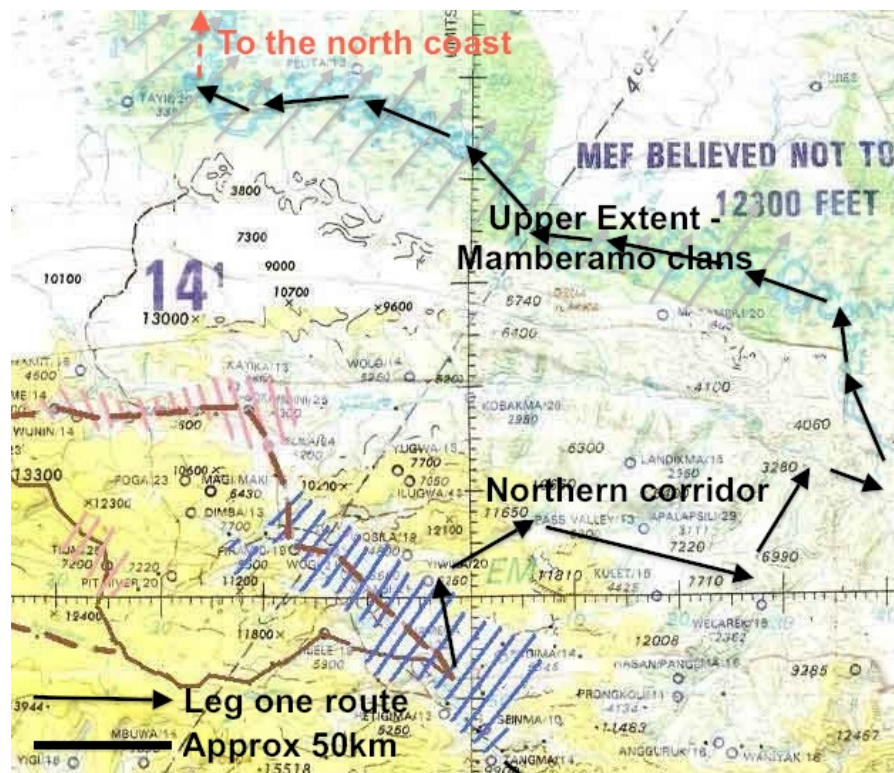
3.2 The Expedition

The expedition was comprised of two legs. The first took place with Callum between Wamena in the central highlands and the Mamberamo river in Papua's north (see map 4) from the 5th February till the 20th March 2012. The second, I soloed, between Wamena and the Asmat region to the south (see Map 3) from the 28th April till the 23rd May. What follows is a chronological account of both legs compiled from my diaries (quoted in the report in italics), my blogs (<http://willmillard.wordpress.com/>) and my video records. I hope this provides an insight into my project and acts as something of a guide to future studies. I shall try and stick as closely to the exact experiential account as possible, but at points, where I was unable to film or write, I will summarise events to the best of my knowledge.

I would like to reiterate that the following account should not be considered a substitute for a thorough plan and reconnaissance. I am in no doubt that many of the places we visited in this project have already changed drastically, just as many of the people mentioned will have moved on.

3.2.1 The first leg

As the crow flies I was looking at approximately 1000km of trekking and packrafting to make a complete crossing. However, a flying crow does not take into account the enormous amount of undulation between a mountain range that tops out at over 16,000 feet and a coastline that frames an impenetrable natural fortress of swamps and meandering rivers. In effect, before we had even taken our first step on the first day, I knew we were looking at over 1000km of overland travel on the first leg alone. On our first day of walking, the 5th February 2012, we had a little over seven weeks of our visas left to complete the crossing. We knew, if we made it to the Mamberamo communities under our own steam, that there were options of hiring local boats from the villages of Dabra and Discali, and, if we really were running out of time there was even a fairly regular flight from Dabra to the state capital Jayapura. However, they were several hundred kilometres away, our sole focus for the trip was linking the Dani communities with those of the river (see map four) and we knew that no matter what transport niceties awaited us downstream we were still going to have to find a way down to the head of the Mamberamo on our own.



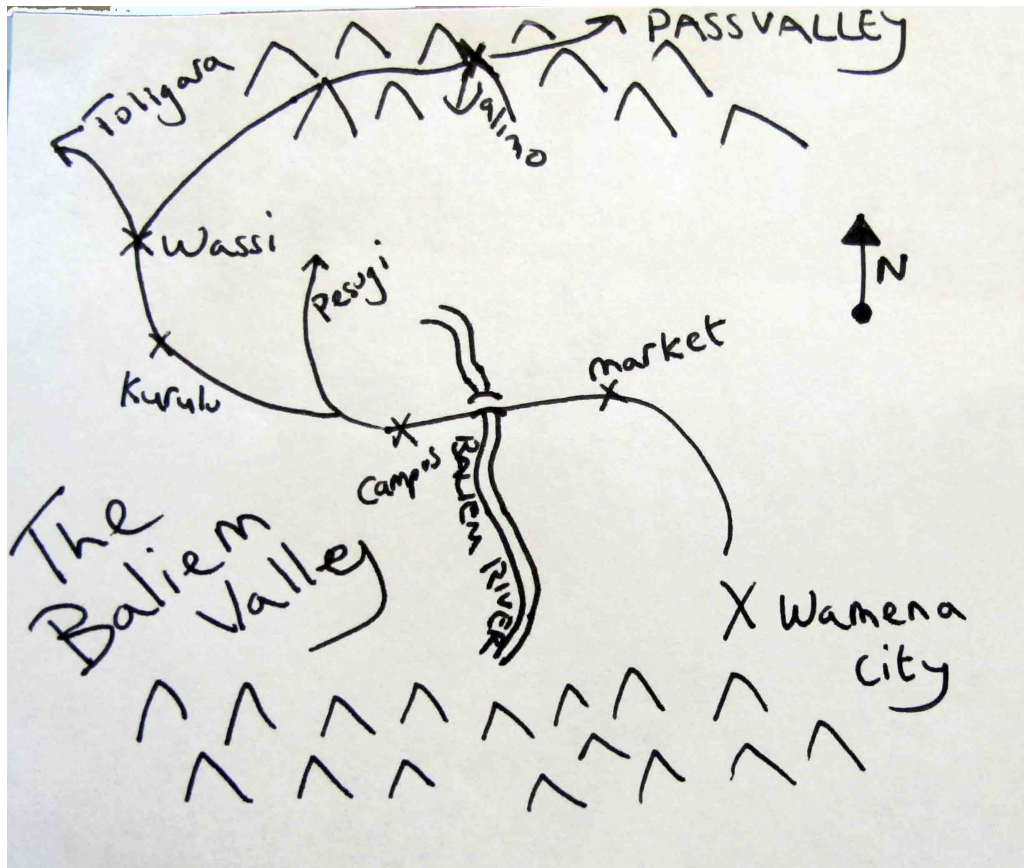
Map 4 - leg one

The northern highlands
5th February

Things had gotten off to a good start.

Having flown in from Jayapura to Wamena, and paid off a huge excess bill, we had quickly completed the last of our preparations: GPS co-ordinates from Heli Vida, the last cash exchanges, and approval from the local military police to enjoy a few days walking around the Baliem valley. I knew there was only one military police post between Wamena and the town of Pass valley, approximately two weeks walk away, it was in a place called Kurulu and I had been asked for a big bribe from officers based there in the past. I was confident we could avoid it. This isn't the sort of place where any of the military bother with patrols.

For the next few days our objectives were clear. Follow the paved road out of Wamena town towards the University campus at Pasugi, walk on past Kurulu, head through the hills to the road junction at Wassi and bear due northeast towards Pass valley. Noone was sure of the exact distance, mostly because people took the daily truck that took a day to make the journey, but I sketched a rough map in the back of my diary that most seemed to agree was accurate enough (map 5).



Map 5 – Hand drawn directions - The road out of the Dani Baliem Valley and into the Yali highlands

I calculated we were looking at anything up to about two weeks walking on covered roads. We were carrying hefty loads but having a clear path to follow was the perfect way to break us in before the hard work begun in the jungle proper later in the month.

5:57am A purple sunrise gives way to a grey dawn. We shoulder 45 kilos each and shuffle out under the cover of the semi-light, trying to get out of Wamena town before it wakes up properly.

Remember Will, your bags will never be this heavy again, and we will never be this unfit.

Our path stretches on ahead for eternity.

Following a long tarmac road along the southern edge of the Baliem valley, we're locked in on all sides by towering slabs of granite. The Baliem housed one of Papua's greatest secrets, hidden from the wider world right through till 1938, the largest highland tribal population in history lived and died right here.



Yet, of all the highland communities, the Dani have experienced the clearest and most profound changes to their lifestyle and culture. Wamena, its major town, is probably the most advanced in the entire mountain range. Laid out on a grid its streets

are lined with Indonesian shops and restaurants, it has at least three banks, some

comparatively modern schools, two Internet cafes, and a hospital. An absolute metropolis compared to other highland towns.

Outside of town, honnais, the traditional conical huts of wood and straw, are still the housing of choice, but within their walls life has changed irrevocably. Gone are the penis gourds, grass skirts and all-too-frequent clan wars with the neighbouring Yali. Walking of any distance to trade has been replaced by the numerous 4 x 4s and trucks that ply the road networks throughout the valley floor.

Our on-foot efforts were being met with wide-eyed incredulity.

The most profound changes came to this valley in the 1950s with the arrival of American missionaries with their miracle cures for yaws¹⁷ and airplanes. They persuaded the Dani to burn their idols, reject their animist beliefs and convert wholesale to Christianity. This was followed by the Indonesian takeover in the late 60s and early 70s, which brought yet more infrastructure, roads, buildings, Indonesian businesses and the deeply unpopular: 'Operation penis-gourd', aimed squarely at 'civilising' the local populace: clothing the Dani, rehousing them, and forcing them to attend Indonesian schools. Since then, the local Dani elders told me, there has been a widespread retreat from tradition amongst the majority of Baliem Papuans: "In the past the men here would build fences, hunt birds and keep watch for war parties from the Yali lands outside of the valley, but since the Indonesian's moved here that has stopped in a lot of places. Many of the men have stopped working and the sweet potato fields go untended by the women, people have learnt to rely of government hand-outs...we have become lazy as a people."

Some very positive changes have come with the development of the Baliem Dani. Education standards are better and there is an excellent Dutch missionary run University training Papuan English, Mathematics and I.T Teachers. The development of Wamena town has seen an improvement in the standard and accessibility of healthcare. Heli Vida, a swiss-dutch run missionary organisation has aided the delivery of emergency treatment in some of the regions most isolated spots and unicef's anti-malaria programmes have seen a massive drop in the rate of infection, which stood at 1 in 5 just a decade ago. Most Papuan Dani will agree that they enjoy the far greater access to goods and services, and a much better diet, in the post-contact years, with the introduction of Asian cooking oil, tinned fish, tea, coffee, salt and sugar, but Hernius, a Dani teacher, on the outskirts of the Baliem highlighted a notion that would resonate with most indigenous groups I met during the trip: "Clearly my life is better now. But things would have changed for us without the Indonesians. I remember when the Dutch and the missionaries arrived. Things were already changing for the good, but they had much more respect for us and we respected them too...under the Indonesians our environment is disappearing from under our feet and our silence has been bought today with things we would never have relied on when I was a child."

¹⁷ Yaws is a chronic bacterial infection that mainly affects the skin, bones and joints. It was rife throughout West Papua in the decades before the arrival of Western medicine. Manifesting itself as large sores and red pustules on the skin of the infected, it was believed by Papuans to be part of a curse placed on one sufferer to another, ironically, this reading of the infection wasn't too far off the mark, as the infection is spread through direct contact with the skin sores of the infected. As little as a single dose of penicillin can treat the condition. The arriving missionaries, with their tales of biblical miracles, were seen as nothing short of miracle healers themselves.



In spite of the improvements and a vast wealth of natural resources, West Papua still has the lowest literacy and healthcare rate in all of Indonesia. According to UNICEF the rate of HIV/AIDS in West Papua is now higher than anywhere else in Indonesia. In the five years I have been visiting Wamena I have also witnessed the number of homeless children grow from 50 to over 250, all of which are addicted to solvents and, according to a recent mission-funding screening, half have HIV/AIDS. These are modern problems, brought to a community that was rushed into contemporary society by a developing Government that was only just finding its feet at a time of enormous economic and political unrest. As we headed out of the Baliem I wondered what we might find

further north in the less-contacted areas. Would we encounter a return to tradition or a vast, recently deserted wilderness where former tribes people had relocated to the towns?

The first few days of walking were spent fielding questions such as: Why aren't you taking the car? You do know how far it actually is to Pass Valley don't you? You do know it'll take you a week to walk? You do know one week is seven days, don't you?

We were both struggling with the weight as it was. I was just thankful the local people didn't know the full extent of my plans at that early stage.

Eventually, after a night sleeping in a small classroom, we double back on ourselves, slide through a fault in the wall, and begin a long two-week descent from the highlands due directly northeast.

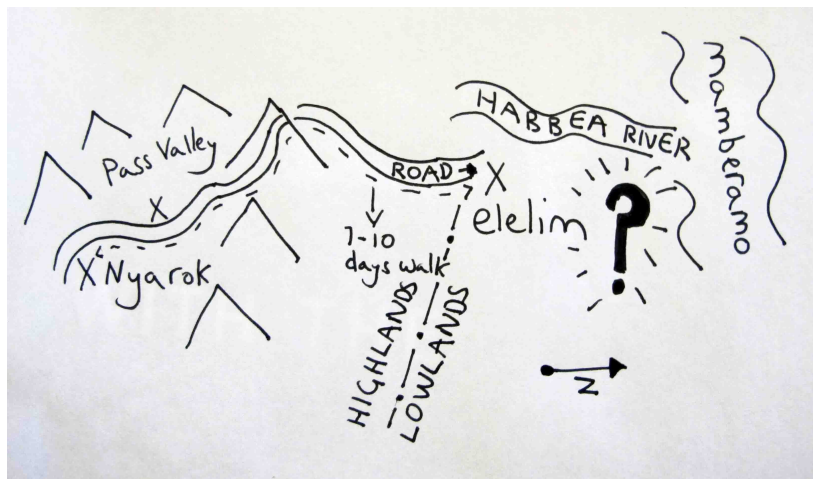


6th -14th February

We grind out the days until they start to merge together. Word of the two white men walking the road has spread up the valley like wild fire and we are totally overwhelmed by the kindness of strangers. People pour from their homes with food they can barely afford to give and heartfelt messages of support I can only just understand. The elder men cannot believe it. They flick their penis gourds in delight and whoop as we pass.



We stay with a very old man named Nyarok who lives in a roadside honnai with his daughter, pig, and twelve piglets. That night in the men's hut he traces a finger in the dirt. There is a newly constructed town beyond Pass Valley, behind a large mountain called 'the cow'. It is called 'Elelim' and is the gateway to the lowland forest and the end of the covered road, it has a military post, but it also has a river, the Habbea, which flows to the Mamberamo clans. It could be the route I'm looking for.



Map 6 – Hand drawn - Nyarok's directions to Elelim - Still no idea how to make the riverine connections to the Mamberamo.

15th February

The landscape is changing each day we descend.

We lose the misty, sharp-cold order of the montane trees as we enter the beginnings of the lowlands. A denser, humid, fog envelopes the roadside, typified by a tangle of strangler vines, creepers and buttress-rooted hardwoods, alive with insects.

We have a far greater connection with the elder men and women here. Those individuals that can still remember the days before the road appear to work far harder than any of the younger generation. We meet old men, easily in their sixties but rippling with muscle, out chopping and carrying wood. Their lack of Indonesian makes communication almost impossible, but their message is simple: “walking is good.”

Ironically, it is the older Papuans who are engaging with the modern changes on a far greater level than the youth. Most are still involved in traditional trade on some level: informal logging and the sale of vegetables, chickens and pigs, but they also utilise the new roads to great effect.

Transporting their goods to the central market “Pasir Jibama”, on the outskirts of Wamena, they



have realised that using vehicles may cost more but they can carry far more products and ultimately get a much better return at the end of the day. The floor market is still dominated by the regions tribal groups who have commandeered Indonesian run vehicles to streamline their businesses, but as many lament, it seems unlikely that the youth will continue the tradition and there are almost no Papuan drivers.

Aside from a few encouraging signs of local industry in the mid-way points between the towns of Wamena and Pass valley, the prevailing feeling was traditional trade



was in demise, owing in part to an influx of products from outside the province, but mostly due to an attitudinal shift amongst the current generation that were unwilling, and in some cases, embarrassed, to work in the fields and forests around the valley. The concern among the elders is that the next generation are neither connected to their past or particularly part of the provinces future:

written off from projects aimed at extracting natural resources, unable to own their own businesses, and largely without access to the standard of education required to effectively assume positions of influence.

As we approached the second week of the first leg we found clear signs of local government investment in housing, roads and schooling, but it was abundantly clear that cash was spent on facilities and buildings and not on establishing qualified and well-trained professionals within the province. On two occasions we stayed in

immaculate and vast school buildings with electricity, books and even computers, but rarely anything like enough qualified staff. I met many 'English Teachers' on the first leg of the trip, but, outside of Wamena, not one person who could actually speak English. English is obviously not an educational priority, but it was astonishing to meet people who claimed a regular wage as a Teacher in a subject of which they had almost no understanding. I spent some time in between legs with an Indonesian schools inspector who happily admitted that claiming financial subsidies for buildings was an excellent way of making money for local politicians in the region. Personally, he claimed an exorbitant wage to inspect schools and hold educational conferences in parts of Papua where school attendance was almost zero, then, he said, he simply falsified a report at a later date. Here, it seemed, when it came to measuring development, physical buildings were a sign of progress, what was actually happening in them was irrelevant.

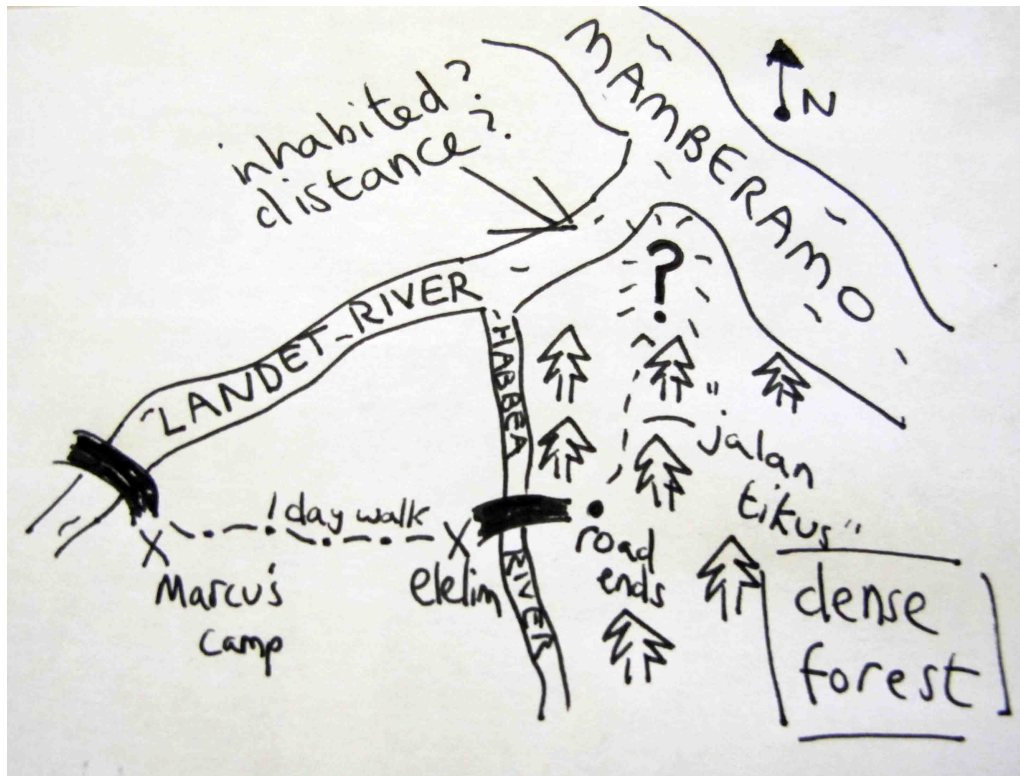
Another snapshot of the prevailing problem was provided on the tenth day of walking along the road. We approached a workers camp staffed almost entirely by men from Sulawesi. They were building a bridge and had erected a large temporary shelter by the riverside to house the 40 or so workers who were living there and



working on the construction site. The vast majority of workers were unskilled manual labourers who had answered a job advert in their hometown of Manado.

We spent a couple of days with the men as we wanted to thoroughly assess the Landet river. It was one of several large rivers that straddled the gap between the high and lowlands and a few chats with

locals revealed it ultimately flowed on to the Mamberamo. However, after a couple of attempts at launching the packrafts it became abundantly clear that the river was unnavigable. 80 metres across at its widest, and churning with white water, the chances of getting our packrafts, let alone a traditional dug out filled with trade items, downstream and in one piece were precisely zero. This was not the river trade highway I was looking for. We were watched by a trio of local Papuan boys with a mixture of fascination and amusement, which quickly turned to bewilderment and then horror as it dawned on them that we were actually planning on heading downstream once we had built up our confidence on the side streams. "Stop!" called one, with a look of genuine concern in his eyes, "don't try and go down the river in that! It is too fast and there are many, many big stones. Your raft will sink. You will die". He introduced himself as Marcus. He took us back up to the worker's camp, revealing he was the only Papuan employee in the camp. As he was from the area and a skilled hunter he offered to take a look at our forward plans. Marcus admitted to being unsure of whether people walked or boated from here to the Mamberamo but was certain no one took on the rivers in their upper reaches and directed us to Elelim and a "jalan tikus", literally a "mouse path", Papuan for a "tiny track", that he thought run north of Elelim and into the forest. It sounded positive, and certainly a much safer option than this river that offered nothing. I sketched a fresh map. (See map 7)



Map 7 – Marcus’ Directions – the first mention of a lowland forest path, ‘the jalan tikus’ but still no clue as to whether the forest is inhabited or any distances beyond Elelim.

We got to know the camp men very well.¹⁸ Their hospitality offered a welcome break from the rigours of the road, we were exceptionally well fed and spent a couple of night’s sleeping side by side with the men on the floorboards. In between a drawn out interrogation over British construction wages, marriage and football I learnt the majority of these men had pursued temporary construction contracts all over the Papuan province and had been subjected to a fair bit of abuse and, in some cases, attacks, from a very disgruntled local population. The Papuans felt the unskilled work was something they could do, providing training, money and work experience, but the fact Indonesians from other provinces were favoured was a clear example of an anti-Papuan bias within the industry. Confirming this prevailing thought was the sentiments from the Indonesian Forman of the project who simply responded that: “we have tried to employ locals where possible but we have had a lot of theft and laziness and disruption from jealous villagers who didn’t get jobs with their friends. In the end it was too much hassle...besides, it isn’t my fault the Government gives these contracts to firms based outside of the province. We’re just trying to survive. We’re poor too, I also have a family, you know.”

We stayed in a couple more workers camps and saw this problem, the racial divide and mutual mistrust, reflected in every case we encountered. It was a very sad indication of where the divisive policies of the Indonesian Government of the 70s and 80s had led the region. It was hard not to feel empathy for both parties. On the one hand the Papuan people could have easily learnt the ropes in the industry, and were clearly not getting the opportunity because they were assumed to be ignorant, but in their place was an extremely hard working and very poor core of workers from outside of the province who hardly saw their families all year. It was people who would never visit the sites that made the ultimate decision over who works on these contracts, leaving their employees to deal with any fallout, safe in the knowledge there is a huge Indonesian working class population ready to step into their shoes

¹⁸ <http://willmillard.wordpress.com/2012/04/09/everything-i-do/>

should they fail to meet expectations. "It doesn't matter if I am scared of being attacked by angry Papuans or if the pay and conditions are bad, if I don't do this job or if I complain I'll never work in this industry again and I'll have to go back to fishing which is even more dangerous and pays nothing. There is always someone to take your place, we don't allow ourselves to forget that" confides Henry, an 18-year-old labourer, the day before we leave.

Entering the northern jungle

18th February

We passed through Elelim without incident. The military police weren't surprised to see us, word of the two white walkers had long since spread up the road to Elelim and they we're very helpful, in fact they were probably the most relaxed and pragmatic group I have met in five years of coming to this province. This was due in large part to the Papuan chief of police. He was actually from Biak, an outlying island that has experienced a much greater level of contact, and conversely access to development, than anywhere else in the province, but he was a Papuan face of authority¹⁹ nonetheless, and as a result the town suffered far less from the social problems encountered elsewhere in the province.

Elelim was not a friendly place.

We had been getting used to almost universal, and at times, overwhelming, hospitality and kindness so far on this trip, but our experience in Elelim was different. In truth, I hate coming to these towns. A new build town on a loose grid, the houses were all Government built and the people were bussed in from highland communities across the province to take advantage of the free accommodation. It had no real reason for being there beyond the Indonesian government strategy to extend their influence as far into the hinterland as possible. The whole place was devoid of local character and felt forced. Despite buying all the food for the family we stayed with, and giving gifts of tobacco and candles, and paying almost double the average rate for a stay in a local home, I was asked for an exorbitant sum of money by the father of the house. I declined and we left Elelim under a cloud.

Elelim marked the end of the road.

We pushed up away from town along a logging track and down to a big river, the junction between the Habbea and the Landet.

Things are starting to look bleak.

Time is no longer on our side and progress is slow.

A big man approaches me on the riverbank. He explains there is a forward path heading north. A tiny foot-track through thick forest to a village called Wara. The village, he says, is the last outpost of the Yali tribe; it lies beside a great river.

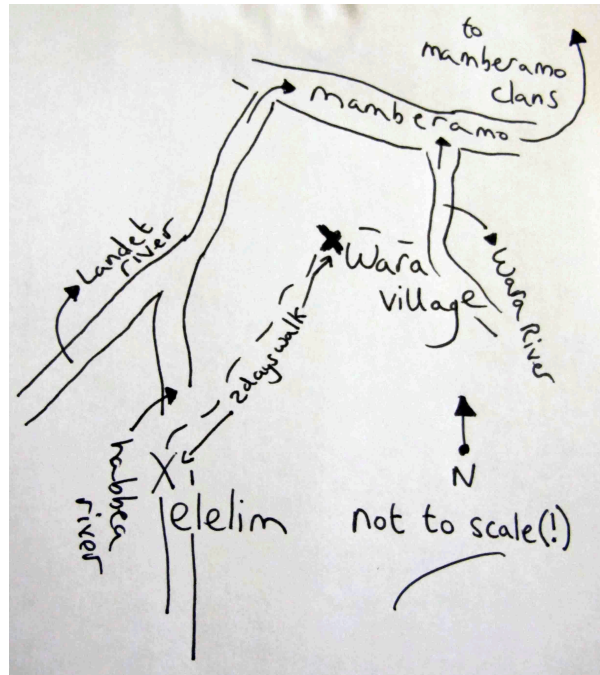
My heart leaps.

¹⁹ A prevailing misconception among Papuan people living away from the main towns (particularly those who are connected to, or form part of, the OPM) is that there are no Papuans in any positions of military authority. In their eyes their struggle is an exclusively Papuans versus Indonesians fight, a romantic stereotype of 'noble savage versus neo-colonial invader' that is a theme in most news stories about the region. In fact there are several Papuans serving in the Army and military police, although it is fair to say the overwhelming majority are from coastal areas and outlying islands and they are still well in the minority, especially in terms of rank.

This must be the path mentioned by Marcus at the men's camp last week. Maybe this is the lifeline we need to get to Papua's swampy north. Could this be the ancient trade route I've been hoping to find?

I hastily draw a rough map in the back of my notebook and confer with the man. He nods demurely. Running his finger along the biro-ink ridges on the page, he fixes my eye, "it will take you two days to Wara. May you walk with Jesus."

I turn to leave but he grips my bicep and leans in close to my face, "but you listen to me, you be aware of the snakes. You understand?"



Map 8 – the path to Wara village

We spent our first night in the forest as an electrical storm moved in from mountain foothills. At first light we broke camp and begun the long journey north to the village of Wara.

23rd February

We emerged into a forest clearing and into Wara village on day nineteen of the project. It took us a week of camping in the bush and walking long days, following a tiny track.



The village was just a cluster of conical wooden huts and a simple church with a wide river. The village was located on the top of a small valley, the river Wara flowed at its base, ever northwards. The people were extremely kind, warm and understanding. Most spoke their own language, a Yali dialect, but a couple could speak Indonesian so I was able to get just enough information regarding a forward route. I learnt

that Wara village was indeed the last of the Yali villages before the lowlands, but it was not the head of a great connecting northern trade route. In fact, no one had ever descended from their position before.²⁰ When the people of Wara needed to trade they simply headed back up through the forest to the town of Elelim. Wara was a dead end. An isolated spoke off the great trade routes of the highlands and not the start to an independent route connecting the lowlands that I had hoped it might be.

²⁰ I did learn that there had in fact been an attempt to force a paved road through the forest south of Wara village. This was the Trans Papua Highway, an Indonesian Government project to connect the highlands to the state capital on the coast. It was an enormously costly project, mired in corruption and allegedly subject to OPM attacks and ultimately fell hundreds of kilometres short of its target. The following week we found the rusting hulk of a JCB on the banks of the river. Consumed by the forest, it was a truly bizarre marker of their lack of progress an ominous sign of just how impenetrable this environment still is.

We had reached an impasse. The project could have finished right there but I felt there was a good chance we could still find a way to the Mamberamo alone. Our satellite map showed the river Wara met a much larger river, known as the Bogor, that would eventually flow into the Mamberamo and out to the coasts. Going forward was undoubtedly a risk but we had the supplies and packrafts to pull off the descent if the river conditions remained good. The river Wara was hard but not impassable, and there was always a chance we might find a population of people between Wara village and the headwaters of the Mamberamo that were still using the river route to trade, but were hitherto unknown.

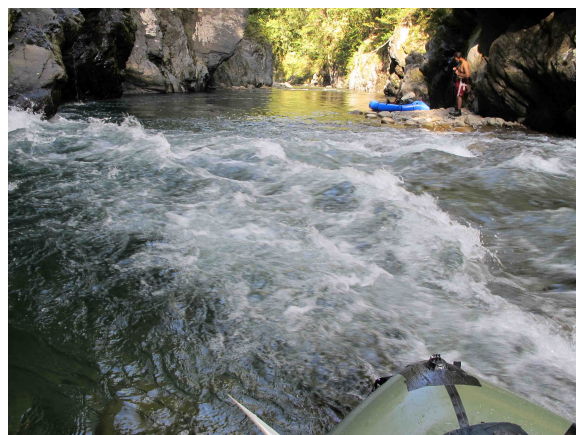
It just felt right to continue.



First descent of the Wara

The village ladies led us through the forest to their fishing hole on a wide curve on the river. We inflated the packrafts and headed downstream, falling into a regime of guiding the rafts on foot past the worst cataracts and waterfalls, camping out on the banks, fishing and sleeping in the rafts.

For the first three days it was idyllic. Allowing our rafts to take the loads was a massive relief after the first few weeks of heavy hauling and the river was hemmed in by some of the most spectacular forest I had ever encountered. The canopy heaved with sulphur-crested cockatoos, hornbills and a host of brightly colored birds and fish eating predators the likes of which I had never seen.



Then we encountered our first storm, doubling the volume of water in the river and ramping up the speed. We found ourselves trapped within in a narrowing gully and on white water far beyond my level of experience. We couldn't go back up the river as the flow was too strong and the sides were just too steep to climb out. We had no option but to keep moving downstream.

I didn't know it at the time but that moment marked the beginning of a month of the toughest expedition conditions we had ever endured. Four weeks later the adventurous aims of the Trans-Papua would be out of reach, and Callum, my long term expedition partner, friend and medic would leave the project for good.

3rd March

The river was bending right, but the rest of the scene just didn't seem plausible. I back paddled a little, slowing my progress right down to get a better look. On the bend I could see a ridge of towering water. It was protruding implausibly directly skyward from the centre of the flow. It looked like a giant white step.

For a second I was utterly mesmerized.

It would take us a week before we eventually descended the Wara River into the Bogor. A week of swimming, hauling and rafting on just 800 calories a day in atrocious river conditions. By the end I had experienced staggering weight loss and we had both sustained injuries. Every single one of our dry bags had flooded,



damaging our technical and medical kit, and sweeping away some items altogether. We were engaged in running repairs to the packrafts and utterly isolated. The weather was shocking. The river conditions deadly.

It was the twenty-eighth day of the expedition as I guided our rafts out of the gully and onto a true Papuan giant: the Bogor river. Perhaps 60 metres across at its widest extent and after consecutive days of heavy rain and storms the water was really shifting. Hundreds of rivers emptied into its length. It swept east along the foot of the mountain range before curling into the Idenberg that formed the upper reaches of the Mamberamo. This was undoubtedly our river and

the key to the Mamberamo clans, but as we swung into the mainflow I knew beyond doubt that this could never have carried people downstream in regular trade. We were faced with an obscene set of rapids. Six-foot waves of white water barreling over car-sized boulders and a whirlpool large enough to swallow a ferry.

I stared out over the forward scene. The evening light had cast a red-hue over the river, the forested mountains leaned in on all sides, just daring me to continue.

Thirty metres after the right hand bend the river doubled back left, right into a set of rapids of equal severity. If we had faced this on the Wara we would have walked the rafts over this rocky beach, put in, and crossed directly to the inside of the next bend, just before the rapids, and portaged again. Here, with about sixty metres of

ground to cover to the other bank and the rapids just thirty metres away, we would get about half way across before we would hit the bend head on.

The consequences would be disastrous.

I sat down on a sun-baked boulder, removed my hat and cupped my face in my hands. It had been my decision to follow the Wara downstream. Now we were trapped.

I felt Callum's hand on my shoulder. "What do you want to do now Will?" He spoke quietly, knowing what our predicament really meant.

We had two options.

The first was to try and cut a path directly north from our position.

It would take in a 3000 metre high ridgeline before descending down to the Idenberg and the headwaters of the Mamberamo. It would keep the expedition alive but it was dubious if it would do the same for us. It would take weeks to cut that path. If we made it down the other side, and that is a big 'if', we would have to make contact with a village immediately, as our supplies would be gone and we would definitely have overstayed our visas. We don't know for sure there is a regular water supply up there and if there were no people to meet us at the Idenberg then it really would be game over.

The other option isn't exactly great either. A retreat. Straight back to the nearest population, the Wara village, a week's kayak upstream.

We can't kayak back up the white water.

We have to find a different line. A new line. Set a bearing for southwest and cut through every single inch of forest that stand between us and safety.



My body didn't feel like my own anymore. I could feel all my ribs for the first time. I was starving. We had never intended to spend so much time away from people. This project was supposed to be a study of intertribal trade.

I looked at Callum. Just as strung out. Just as determined. Loyal to a fault. I knew he would carry on if I asked him too. I owed it to him, our friends and our families not to do this anymore. I owed it to myself.

I stared at the whirlpool at the bend. The frothing wave tops. The vast ridges. The world's greatest natural fortress.

These are the reasons there are so many different languages and unique tribal cultures in West Papua. This is why they developed separately for thousands of years. No one lives here. No one travels through here.

“How long do you think it will take us Will?”

“half a mile a day cutting back from here if we’re lucky, we’re looking at two more weeks I reckon”

With that we got our heads down for last night sleeping in the rafts by a river. The sunsets and darkness shrouds our camp beside the roaring Bogor.

The retreat



Over the next two weeks we cut our way back to the Wara village. We really had no choice. The nature of the expedition had left me in the middle ground between two very different disciplines: trekking and rafting. We had struggled on the Wara, which really represented the upper limit of what we could achieve with the kit we had managed to carry, but the rapids on the Bogor necessitated at the very least large rafts or kayaks better suited for whitewater and certainly safety equipment such as helmets and life jackets. As it was we didn't have any of this, and could scarcely manage to carry any more equipment. As it had become increasingly obvious that this line was not a trade route in disguise continuing forward would have been a potentially fatal error of judgment.

The retreat was one of the hardest parts of the project. We had absolutely no idea what sort of terrain lay between us and the village. The Wara river was a huge obstacle. As mentioned, the river sat in a high-sided valley and the village was on the opposite bank, at some stage we would have to cross. We were extremely low on rations by this point and had just one machete between us. We stuck to a strict regime that ensured the machete was always working on cutting us a path back. I would cut for twenty minutes whilst Callum rested, then he would take over and repeat the process. I am in absolutely no doubt that the first week of cutting was spent entirely in forest never before seen by an outsider. It was so thick you could see no more than a couple of feet in front of your face, and, to make matters worse,

it was full of biting insects and deadly vipers, we had to be on full alert as our bodies continued to deteriorate. There was no chance of rescue if anything went wrong and our satellite phone had died and was no longer taking charge.

Progress was painfully slow. Most days we would gain less than 500 metres on the GPS towards Wara village, despite having cut through a much greater distance, such as the demoralising nature of the relentless, undulating terrain.

Day 29 – 723 metres straight up and over the first ridge.

I have never seen jungle this thick and hostile. We catch the end of a storm around midnight.

It feels like every tree in the forest is ready to fall down.



Day 30 – Trench foot. Chunks of skin peel off round Callum's toes exposing red raw flesh.

We are both anxious.

If one small thing goes wrong we will be in deep, deep trouble.

Day 31 – Morning - Lost my knife. Down to the spare and one machete now.

I'm trying not to think about distance and time. All that really matters is that we make it out of here alive.

We've only cut 483 metres in ten hours.

This is my greatest test. Keep the discipline and we can do this...

Day 31 – Midday

Instant and unbelievable pain. Hundreds of poker hot stings to the face within a second. Swarming under hats, hair, clothes –everywhere and impossible to crush.

Tough, black, outer-casings.

I could feel them tremble as they forced their sting deeper under my skin.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qfn-FRhjW7q>

Day 31 – 15:30 “mate, shall we recce it?” called Cal nervously. “Yeah I’ll take a look,” I shouted back, ditching my bag at the top of the cliff. I inched to the lip. It was a sheer rock face but it was only twelve foot high and there was a small ledge at the midway point. I knew I could get down. Then Callum could just pass me the bags.

Five minutes later I was lying spread-eagled at the base of the drop covered in mud and surrounded by the shattered remnants of the ledge. I looked down my body. I had just one boot still on my feet and blood was spilling liberally out of the knuckles on my right hand.

“We are in this for the long haul Will.” Callum paused as he covered my knuckles with zinc-oxide tape, moments after he had scrambled down safely, “we can’t afford to get injured mate”.

He was right. We had gone less than 500 metres today. Again.

Day 33 – 21: 00 We have only come 720 metres in the last two days.

At this rate it'll take three weeks to get out of this.

I stare at our little blob on the GPS, just a small pink dot in a vast smear of unbroken green. It was Christmas when Anna's boyfriend finally figured out how to get this dense satellite map loaded on the internal hard drive of this lifesaving device.

I scan the dimly lit screen, scrolling through the scales, why, oh why did I ever think it would be funny to get him to label the map 'The Funtacular 3000' ?

We found an easier slope down to the banks of the Wara and made it across late in the afternoon. An enormous tarantula emerged from my backpack just as I pushed my raft and load out into the flow.

It is a relief to be on the right bank.



Day 34 – 19:00

Callum: "after this I don't think I'll bother with the jungle anymore. I feel I've seen the best and worst of it now."

We had encountered seven-foot bracken and a perilous cliff climb and now we are camped on some seriously unstable ground. There has been a massive mudslide right through here that has carved a patch of bare ground the size of a football pitch, but there

are no other options.

Trees tumble down around us in the night.

Day 35 – Got blindsided by a giant forest pig this afternoon and Callum came within an inch of stepping on a pit viper (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGW6ErnAMAY&feature=plcp>)



I swear I can smell toast.

Day 36

09:40 There are strangler vines everywhere. Every time we make any progress I have to double back with the small knife to cut my ankles free, plus, no rain for three days has left us short on water.

11:08 This isn't getting any better. Two dry riverbeds and we're down to 300 millilitres of water between us. We usually get through at least five litres each a day.

This is our worst start to the day of all time.

13:16 *We tried to follow one of the dry riverbeds hoping it would lead us eventually to some water, but it just took us down the wrong side of a dry 10-metre waterfall.*

Down to desperate tactics now. We've started emptying pitcher plants and bamboo strands in the hope of finding some fluid. We have one inch of grey water, it's full of part digested wing cases and excrement.

14:30 *Still trying to cut down the valley.*

Desperate to find the river Wara now. Ironic, considering last week I would have given anything to escape that river.

One mouthful of water each. Callum notices there are little translucent larvae wriggling in the water.

16:00 *"Look Cal, we've got two hours of light left. We're not going to make it down to the Wara with our kit in that time."*

I couldn't believe what I was about to suggest.

"I could leave you up here with the bags to set up camp and quickly go down alone."

Callum was really torn. It was an awful situation. It would be the first time we had ever separated, but we were desperate. "Blow your whistle if you get in trouble" he called as I left.

Shouldering our empty bottles in my daypack I headed down the ravine. I had left both the small knife and machete with Callum so he could cut a space for camp. A huge mistake in hindsight. I should have taken one or the other, but to leave with neither was lunacy. Ray Mears would have me shot, or stabbed, but he always carries a knife.

I came to a cove presiding over a ten-metre drop. I tried to use a small tree to lower myself part of the way down but it snapped in half and I plummeted, tearing the arse of my trousers wide open.

I kept going down. More loose rock. Another heavy fall. More indecent exposure.

I found a small gully. Good sign, but it was clogged thick with brambles and stranglers. I cursed my stupidity at leaving both knives behind. I tried to break them with my hands and got nowhere. Eventually I found a good stick that I could use to beat back the worst of the brambles and I had to bite my way through the stranglers. This was getting really mad.

I dropped down five more water-free platforms. The gully narrowed and steepened. I was so thirsty my throat was burning. But I could hear the Wara was close. Another huge drop and I found a massive stone blocking my way.

Heartbreak.

I looked around desperately.

The light was fading fast but I thought I could hear a trickle somewhere. Maybe I really was going mad. But there, just in the base of the stone, a pencil-width dribble

of water was flowing out from under a thicket. I pushed my fingertips into the cool flow.

It was real.



Day 37 - 06:00 *My right hand is like a claw. Puss streams from the knuckles. This is getting really grim.*

Day 38 – *A huge storm and an uncomfortable fitful night's sleep. I wring out my clothes. There are puddles in my bag. I flick a grape-sized forest cockroach from the food section then try to get some sun on my soaking sleeping bag and hammock. There's clearly something*

wrong with my tarp, or with me. I give up trying to dry stuff after a few minutes. Sit down. Eat your rehydrated Chicken Korma. Get up and go again.

Day 39 – 10:30 *Down a gully and up the other side. Slip-sliding on the mud I place my hand down to try and steady myself and feel the most ferocious blinding pain on my thumb. A large ant, 2cm long, black with a pinkish abdomen, has its enormous incisors right in my knuckle. For a second I am utterly stupefied. The pain is glorious.*

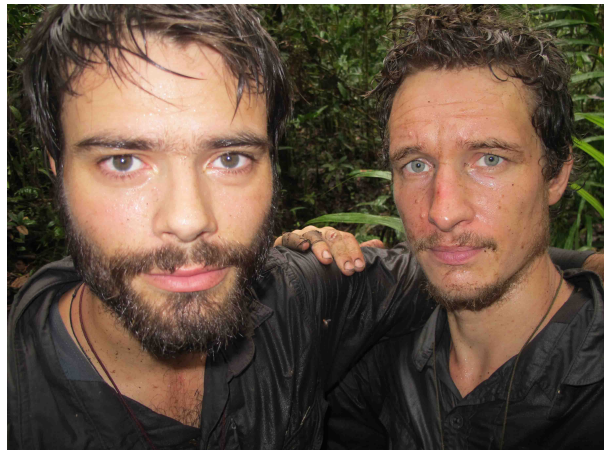
I flick it off.

My thumb swells to twice the size and becomes immobile for hours.

21:00 *Callum and I wait to go to sleep. Our dreams have totally normalised for the first time in our lives.*

I dream about being in the office in Cardiff, drinking pints with my friends, watching television at my parents and playing ping-pong in Steve's basement.

Then I wake up and discover I am actually cutting my way through a sea of forest in unknown West Papua.



Every single day is almost identical now. The only barometer of change is our rapidly deteriorating bodies.

First Contact?

Day 40 15th March 2012

"A PIG!"

Callum's shout extracted my mind violently from a daydream.

"Where?!"

We both stopped dead in our tracks.

We were slowly making our way down the left hand side of a shallow gully. There was some serious canopy overhead, throttling the light out of the forest floor, stifling the plant life and allowing us a very rare opportunity to walk almost unabated. This meant we had a clear view for about 30 metres and there, right at the base of the gully, next to a tree, staring straight back at us, was not a pig.

"DOG!" Callum and I were both shouting now. "It's a hunting dog!"

Less than 25 metres away was a small-white faced dog with chocolate brown legs. I started down towards it. My heart was thumping hard.

This was huge. There was no way a domestic hunting dog would be this far into the forest without its human owner. This was our first solid contact with people for over three weeks.

We got to within 20 metres of the dog, then it just turned round and idly trotted off down the gully.

I kept shouting greetings. No Papuan is ever far from their dog. No reply.

We traced the pugmarks of the dog. They went into a stream so I ditched the bags and started searching and shouting frantically. People, without doubt, were near.

We needed help. We were in a bad way. It was obvious the last few days, despite our mental resilience, had taken a massive physical toll. We were thinner than ever before and were taking serious antibiotics and painkillers constantly to get the worst of our pain and infection under control. We both knew deep down we were getting close to the end of our thresholds, if we could just make contact with someone now then maybe we could get help to the village of Wara. Maybe this ordeal would be over.

I followed the stream right down only to find it disappeared into dense brambles, I scanned the banks, looking for more prints, but found nothing.

As I started back towards where I had left Cal I felt the hair on the back of my neck stand up. I stopped just feet away from him. We stood in silence. We could both feel it. We were being watched.

"If" I whispered, "that was the people of Wara on a hunt, they would have come over. People's hearing here is too good to have missed our shouts...unless..."

Callum grinned and finished my sentence "...we just crossed paths with a totally different tribe."

That was it.

Why I do what I do. Why I take the risks I take. Why I return to West Papua time and time again. For that very real chance that I could one day turn the corner and see

something truly remarkable.

The people of Wara were absolutely adamant no one lived or traded north of their position. I had naively ignored their warnings three weeks ago when I pressed on downstream in the forlorn hope they could be wrong. Now, I realise, we probably both were. Whoever it was we encountered that day had zero interest in meeting us, and certainly weren't engaging in any downstream trading activity with the people of the Mamberamo. That much I do know.

But I can't tell you anything else, as I literally haven't got a clue.

A few hours later I found those dogs prints again. They were leading from a side stream that ran through the southern line we were cutting back to the village. They turned onto a freshly cut path swinging back north and were joined, almost step for step, by another absolutely tiny set of human prints.

I like the idea there are people still living on this planet that can express their choice to not make contact with the rest of us. Making first contact with indigenous people should always be a two way choice. We certainly weren't out there to 'make first contact' or force ourselves on anyone who didn't want to meet us. As it was, we just quietly crossed paths in the middle of the forest, and that was fine with all of us.

We were however, getting closer to Wara village, and we were starting to court hope.

Survival International estimates there are still 44 uncontacted tribes hidden within the province.²¹



²¹ <http://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/papuan>

The end of the first leg

17th March

Wara Village

We sat and for a moment just listened.

Ahead we could see the wooden fencing sweeping round the village, the orderly sweet potato gardens, banana plantain, fruits and the network of paths we had followed to the river with the ladies of Wara all that time ago. I could hear the lullaby-like chatter of the Yali language within the fence, I could hear the children screaming in play, I could even hear the dogs and the village pigs. They were sounds I hadn't heard in weeks and it felt truly wonderful, and even a touch overwhelming, to hear them all again.

We had made it.

"This whole thing feels so unreal" I look to Callum, my friend. His face was thin and pale, his clothes hung off, soaked through with sweat, and his muscles were utterly wasted. He cracked out a toothy grin from behind his thick dark beard, "soon" he pointed towards the village, "we will eat like kings!"

We had just cut through every inch of almost 10,000 feet of unrelenting forest together, sharing everything, totally dependent on each other, and we had survived. But I knew, from the moment we both walked back into Wara village, our onward paths would part irretrievably.

This was to be our last, and greatest, adventure together.

Callum crudely scribbles 'Callum and Will 18/3/12' into a flat stone and we stagger to a heroes welcome.

Two days after Callum and I had crawled from the forest and back into the village of Wara we walked out of the jungle entirely. Covering a distance in a day and a half that had taken us a week to walk one month previously, we made it back out onto the road by Elelim. There was now no question we would be taking a car back to Wamena and early the next morning we were rushing past all the villages and roadside camps we had stayed-in over those first two weeks of walking and hauling.



It was hard not to feel a real sense of pride at what we had managed to pull-off over the last six and a half weeks. We had given the project absolutely everything and covered an incredible amount of ground without support.

I knew though I had failed. This expedition was not to be the first unbroken crossing and without Callum it wasn't possible for me to continue unsupported. We fell hundreds of kilometres short of the entry point to the Mamberamo River and the lowland population it supports. Ironic, that after everyone's concerns that we would end up being eaten by crocodiles we didn't even come close, but managed instead to almost step-on every other deadly reptile on the island.

The linking path I had chosen as a plausible trade route between Wamena and the Mamberamo was just an arbitrary line on my satellite map. Nothing more than a natural anomaly in an otherwise impenetrable landscape. It never was and never will be used by highland Papuan people to trade with the coasts unless the fabled trans-papua highway comes to fruition. The village of Wara, the last outpost before all those kilometres of seemingly uninhabited forest, was indeed just an isolated spoke off the 'Great Road' and not the start of an independent northern trade route that I had desperately hoped it might be.

The route we attempted, from the highland rivers north to the coasts, is clearly within the realms of possibility for a well-equipped kayaking expedition. With appropriate safety equipment, white water kayaks and hard barrels for the gear, I am absolutely convinced that the descent of the Bogor to the Mamberamo is possible. It is a moot point though. Expeditions in this deeply paranoid state necessitate the sort of self-contained discretion within which we were operating. The logistical and bureaucratic nightmare of trying to get all the kayaking equipment realistically required to attempt a full descent into the country would take a leap of faith on the part of the governing authorities that they are just not yet ready to take.²²

Callum and I decided he shouldn't continue on the second leg. Expeditions, despite their totally committing nature, give you a lot of time to reflect on your life back home and sometimes you find that actually you're not all that happy. Callum hadn't been enjoying his job as a Paramedic for quite some time. It was time for a change. He wanted to try to get into primary school teaching and I knew that if he stayed on with me he would miss his opportunity to gain the requisite essential work experience in the final term of the year.

There is no way Callum would have voiced any intention to leave this project if I hadn't said it first, but I would be a pretty awful friend if I hadn't tried to persuade him to leave. The truth was, as much as I wanted him to stay, I knew there was no way I could live with the guilt of knowing my selfishness had delayed his chance to do what made him happy, plus we both knew we were coming to the natural end of our partnership. We had had one hell of a run over the last three years but there was no getting away from the fact that recently we had taken a big and uncomfortable step-up. For the first time our ambitions and expectations had started to pull in different directions.

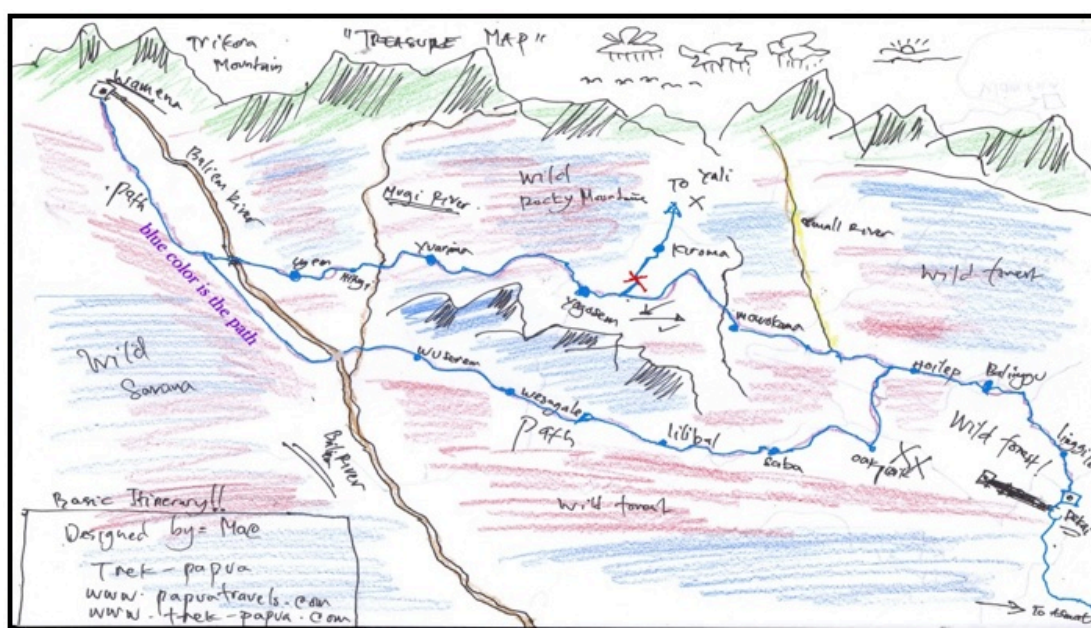
²² The most recent professional West Papuan kayaking expedition to my knowledge was attempted in October 2011 by guide Chris Eastabrook on the remote Derewo river. It sadly ended before it really began with all their equipment being confiscated by the police and numerous portering problems. There is some detail on this thread: <http://www.ukriversguidebook.co.uk/forum/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=81495>

3.2.2 The second leg

At the conclusion of the first leg I spoke with a pair of highly regarded professional Papuan guides about my plans to trace a route leading south from Wamena directly into the vast Asmat swamps and down to the coastline. With their help I was able to significantly build on my knowledge of the southern route mentioned in section: 1.1 The history of the Jalan Raya and Trans Papua.

Unlike the Wara route north they not only confirmed there was a path, but also that there is past recent form in local people making a successful crossing. They reeled off a long list of villages and territories I would pass on the way – Dani, Yali, down to the Momuna then along the rivers to the tree-house dwelling Kombai, Korowai and out to the sea. One of the guides, Mac from trek-Papua, drew me a map with rough distances and village names (see Map 9) it seemed to roughly correspond with the southern corridor I had spotted on my satellite map at the planning stages (see map 3 above).

This was the total opposite of my Wara experience on the first leg. Here was a viable route and, with the appearance of fairly regular villages, a relative safety net. I soon learnt there were also air-strips, boats and opportunities to re-supply. It sounded every bit the ancient trade route I'd been looking for. A vast network connecting five major tribal populations in an unbroken chain of inter tribal trade stretching from the Dani to the sea.



Map 9 – Mac's directions south

The end of March brought problems to the project beyond simply the loss of Callum Fester. I was getting very close to running completely out of funds. West Papua had become even more expensive during my time away between projects, a hike in fuel tax had significantly raised the price of internal flights, we were also getting stung for huge excess luggage bills at every turn and the fall in tourist numbers had caused guides and homestays to effectively double their charges. My visa was about to expire, requiring an expensive trip out of the country to either PNG or Southeast Asia and a lot of the equipment, particularly the clothes, medical supplies and daily tools, needed replacing.

I picked up a horrendous bout of food poisoning that left me incapacitated in Jayapura for three days in the immediate aftermath of the first leg. Having already been in a weakened state I knew that any chance of a quick turnaround necessitated a complete recovery and a significant amount of weight gain within four weeks. The illness served to compound the injuries and malnutrition I had already suffered and made the likelihood of carrying on after such a short period of rest extremely distant. I also learnt that things were far from okay at home. A close family member had become very sick whilst I was in the forest and out of communication. It was obvious that me being away had heaped further stress on the situation.

I decided that in spite of my extremely tight budget it was best that I returned home to the UK for the month of April. This would give me ample time to recover in safe surroundings as well as put me in the best possible place to promote the project and find extra funding. I found return flights via the Middle East and left the vast majority of my equipment in West Papua to avoid paying anymore excess on my return in one month's time. I had been initially eager to press on at all costs, pressurising myself into starting the second leg before I was really ready, probably because at this stage I was unable to see the first leg as anything but a failure and wanted to salvage the project as quickly as possible. As soon as my flights home were booked I knew I had made the right choice. I needed to regroup.

Back home, April 2012

After just a couple of weeks my fitness began to return. I was able to reflect on the first leg; my mistakes, the things I needed to change, what I had learnt and what we had achieved. I gained extra, and absolutely vital, financial support from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust (WCMT). I had already decided I was returning at the end of the month but there was no getting away from the fact that I had almost completely run out of money and that, without help, the second leg was going to put me deeply in debt. Their support and trust helped me to see what we had achieved in the first leg, and gave me a big confidence boost going forward solo.

My family member recovered and I was able to explain face-to-face everything that happened on the first leg and set out a much clearer explanation of why I wanted to continue with the project. I don't think my close family and friends were ever really happy to see me go back, but I do think that month together helped ease a lot of fears they had been harbouring over the past few months.

I promoted the project harder than ever before. Released from the concerns that any publicity could hamper my chances of entry to the province by the confidence of my relatively easy entrance in February, I wrote about the first leg and published online <http://willmillard.wordpress.com/> and, much to my surprise, saw the number of hits pass 5000 within a couple of weeks and then approach 10,000 just a couple of months later. I was asked to record a piece for Radio 4's "From Our Own Correspondent" on my return and secured a multi-page feature article in Australian Adventure sports magazine "Outer Edge". Helen Aherne at the WCMT worked tirelessly to secure me slots in every single local paper in both my home bases of the Yorkshire Dales and the Norfolk fens, which helped bring further publicity to the first leg and a whole new audience to the blogs, and Berghaus very kindly replaced my jackets whilst Craghoppers provided an entirely new set of clothes from their NoSiLife range. I repaired where I could and tried to cut back on my pack weight.

Without Callum I knew I would no longer be able to move unsupported. Safety concerns aside, I knew I had reached my load limit at 45 kilos and couldn't imagine carrying more into the forest. Packrafting solo in remote, uninhabited regions for weeks on end would take more food than I could manage to carry alone and would mean I had no support in the event of an emergency. I decided not to take my raft, significantly decreasing the weight I had to carry in a stroke, getting rid of the extremely cumbersome oars strapped to the side of my bag and affording me far greater pace over the terrain. I had already failed in my bid to make an unsupported crossing, my priority now had to be the intellectual aims, uncovering and recording the overland connection between the highlands and the coasts to the south, and if I had to take motorised transportation to achieve this then I felt it was worth it, rather than notching up another, identical, wilderness failure.

My revised aims for the second leg were:

- Uncover, record and accurately log the ancient trade route running south to the Asmat.
- Attempt to record any evidence of the prolonged existence of on-foot trade or trade by canoe on any surviving section of the route and record contemporary threats to the route.
- Cover as much of the route by overland travel as possible.

Back in West Papua – preparations for the second leg

2nd May 2012

The first week back in West Papua was used making absolutely sure I had the best possible intelligence on the forward path south. I knew I would be looking at a couple of weeks walking before I entered the lowland stretch and wanted to maximise the knowledge of the route I had already gained from Mac's map and advice. I had been reliably informed that this would be by far my most expensive expedition to date, especially once I made it to the southern lowlands. Fuel prices were well over double those of coastal Papua, and in the headwaters up to three times as much, with very few boats capable of navigating the rivers for extended periods of time. 8 million rupiah (£520) per day for boat charters seemed crazy, but it was made clear to me that only cargo, and the occasional very wealthy tourist or television production company, made those sort of long distance trips these days. If I was to truly travel overland in the lowlands then those were the sorts of prices I could expect to pay. The only issue was I didn't have anything like that money. I set off anyway.

The first signs that something ominous was a foot was the large anti-Indonesia protest taking place in Jayapura the day I arrived. I wasn't used to seeing Papuans out in such force on the street. In the year I had lived in this city I could count the signs of dissent on one hand, all were swiftly rebuffed by the military and none were on this scale. Roadblocks barricaded the main roads into town, manned by children asking for money to fuel the demonstration, and hundreds of protestors sat at a rally in the city centre. It was a sign of things to come and by the end of June the province was reeling from unlawful killings across the state. A Papuan protestor was shot dead by the military police that night and a shopkeeper from Makassar was murdered with an arrow in retribution. The cycle of violence was starting up again.

My plans were approved again by Pak Ponnyman. This time he appeared half way through the process, relieving the young Javanese officer who was stumbling over my forms and gladly pocketing his “administration fee”. Back in the highlands I could feel the tension in Wamena. A local election had turned bloody in the nearby Toligara regency and the recent murders in Jayapura had clearly had an effect. It was obvious more violence was just around the corner. I decided to leave at the earliest opportunity and quickly made my final arrangements, replanning the minutiae of my route with Mac, getting a second opinion from my trusted sources, organising a car to the first village on the way, and gathering all the GPS data I needed for airstrips. On the morning of the 10th May I set out full of nerves and with a bag weighing a little over 40 kilos.

A couple of weeks’ later two soldiers ran over a child in Wamena in an apparent accident. The boy was killed and the soldiers were dragged from their vehicle by dozens of enraged Papuans. One was beaten to death, the other was critically injured. The local soldiers retaliated in typically brutish fashion, the Jakarta Post reported: “soldiers ran amok, committing arson, vandalizing houses, throwing stones and shooting”.²³

Setting out

10th May

In the beginning was The Hole.

Out of The Hole came the Dani men. They settled in the fertile lands around The Hole.

Then came pigs. The Dani took the pigs and domesticated them.

Next came women, and the Dani took the women.



Then from The Hole came other men-Portugese, Spaniards, Dutchmen, Englishmen, Japanese, Americans. There was no room for them around The Hole, so they spread out over the face of the earth in search of land as good as Dani land.

But they never found it and now they are coming back again.

- Dani legend.

Things had gotten off to a bad start. The rain has been going steady for a full thirteen hours, obliterating the rope bridge that I was supposed to cross far south of Kurima and swamping the path ahead with water. Losing the rope bridge has forced me onto a lesser route, a foot wide ribbon of trampled gorse hanging high above a precipitous valley side.

Keeping my head down I start to advance away from the Dani and into the land of the Yali. To the untrained eye the Yali might seem a little amorphous. The arrival of missionaries and foreigners to the region in the 1950s have had a homogenising

²³ Jakarta Post 7th June 2012 <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/06/07/soldiers-run-amok-after-comrade-killed.html>

effect on their tribal identity, like the Dani they became Christian and torched many of their religious idols, they started wearing clothes and moved away from their traditional territories in the remote highlands and into the numerous tin-roof towns that started to emerge all around the Baliem valley. You would be forgiven for lumping them in with the Dani, along with the Lani and Yani, but this would be a mighty disservice to all. The Yali are a fiercely independent and proud tribal group. 'Yali', I have come to realise, is really an umbrella term for a whole series of tribal people identified and divided by their geographical location (west Yali, east Yali etc) with quite distinct dialects and traditional religious beliefs. The Dani and Yali were enemies in the decades prior to foreign intervention and will be quick to put you right should you accidentally confuse the groups.

As darkness falls I enter the first of a string of Yali villages. A full days walk from any meaningful road I was surprised at just how well trod the footpaths are in this region. In my previous experiences villages tended to get fewer and farther between the greater the distance they are from the paved roads connecting the major hub towns, but not so here, the paths are abuzz with people trading in pigs and vegetables, in fact, this is one of the best examples I've ever seen of the surviving culture of on-foot trade. I reassure myself that I must be on the right track.



That first night I stay in the village of Wasangma, just outside Warima, and befriend a local Yali man named Nathaniel who agrees to help me along the road to Soba for a fee. I am pleased for the company and doubly pleased to break up some of the weight. Nathaniel takes 15 kilos and we head off from his honnai the next morning.

The Yali villages come thick and fast. "Look, look at this" enthuses Nathaniel, clearly enjoying his new role as tour guide, "runner beans, sweet potatoes, cauliflower..." he sweeps his hands over a vegetable patch with visible pride in his locality. He has been buzzing since we left his house, Nathaniel is clearly very popular, we can barely go 20 yards without meeting a cousin, uncle, great grand father or sister, and he is extremely keen to parade the fact that he has been employed as a guide to virtually everyone we meet. As people learn of our long distance travel plans he also adopts the role of local postman dropping off messages as we head up his valley: local elections dates, school closures, and relationship gossip spread up the valley on our heels and Nathaniel elicits gasps from his audience as he recounts stories



of infidelity with unparalleled glee.

The villages are blossoming with local industry. The lack of a nearby road has kept on-foot trade alive and necessary. Wamena's closest market is a day's walk away and people need things to trade, as such the gardens are full of vegetables and activity.

The path swings from southeast to south and it quickly becomes clear that we are going to have to climb up and out of Nathalius' valley.

"That looks steep Nathalius..."

There is a slab of rock in front of me that, had I not just seen a barefoot man three times my age skipping up the face of, I wouldn't consider ascending in anything less than a helicopter.

"This is the way Will" said Nathalius grimly. He didn't look very happy anymore. This was going to be the first time he'd ever left his stamping ground. We start to ascend. It is even steeper than I thought. A man of roughly 60 years old stops chopping wood to stare at us as we pass. He is naked bar a penis gourd, his feet are straddling an enormous log, he is stunned at our lack of progress.

After five hours of climbing straight up we enter a forest boarded in by moss and montane trees. At the summit we were over taken by a group of female Yali traders. Their athleticism is astonishing. Kilos of oil, cigarettes, vegetables and rice. I'm in awe. All this time I've spent looking for this walking culture in remotest Papua, and here it is, strong as ever, just two days walk from Wamena.



We emerged from thick mist the other side of the mountain at nightfall and startled two bare-breasted women who were washing sweet potatoes in a small stream. One led us to a house with wood walls and a solar panel with nothing to power. A group of men are gathered round a small fire boiling a chicken which they kindly offer out to us.

Nathalius worked hard today. I've had to pay him a little more as the path deteriorated but he is staying positive and is carrying his share well. "From now on I'll take the big bag for the uphill, you take it for the down and flat", he whispers across to me in the dark, "and be careful here" he leans in, with a conspirative edge to his voice, "all the people in this area are drunks and glue sniffers."

In fact, I later learn, they are Protestant, unlike Nathalius, who is Catholic, and the steep climb is clearly a natural divide between these neighbouring tribes, allowing them to develop with a degree of separation. Here, the dialect is slightly different and Nathalius is suspicious. You can strip away tribal dress and traditional religion, but you can't eradicate mutual mistrust of the boys the other side of the hill.

12th May

A very rough night. In an effort to cut right back on weight I chucked out my sleeping bag before I set out and, as a result, last night, I shook throughout the night.

Nathalius and I sit in silence round the early morning fire. A dozen family members sit chatting and baking plantane in the embers. I look over to Nathalius, he squeezes out a smile, but I can see he is just as depressed as me.

We head away from Pukam village, the path cuts its way across a small tabletop sized plateau at the crest of a ridge and the sense of exposure is immense. An imposing crown of mountains hems us in on all sides, the path twists through gorges and climbs the valley sides, people join us on the plateau, shouting greetings, offering encouragement, then I meet a man dressed, surprisingly, in a brilliant white trilby.

“I am the headman of the valley,” says the man by way of introduction, resplendent in his hat and neat polo shirt, he offers me his hand and we sit together in the grass. I tell him my plans to walk down to the Asmat, his eyes widen. “You do know it is a very long way?” I was used to this response by now, but, before I could counter with: “yes” Nethalius weighed into an exhaustive warts-and-all description of every one of my long distance walking failures of the last five years. The headman looked on with a glazed expression that suggested he wasn’t listening to a word, then turned back to me. “Trust me, it’ll take you two months to get to Dekai, if the path isn’t flooded which it is” he leaves that bombshell hanging, then adds “I know, I’ve walked it.”

I get up to leave and five minutes later fall headfirst into a 30 foot gully, the only thing that saves me from reconstructive facial surgery is, ironically, my massive pack, which gets caught on a clump of bracken as my body dangles over the precipice.

Later that afternoon Nethalius begins to complain. He asks for a day off (paid) in Lilibal, our destination for the night, and demands to be flown back to Wamena when we do eventually reach Soba (apparently they have a small missionary run airstrip), then, on a huge hill climb, he gives up his 15 kilo pack to a passing trader. Quite a departure from his “I’ll carry your pack on the uphill” statement the previous night.

Nathalius disappears from sight at the crest of another grueling ridge climb just as a young boy materialises in front of me. “I’ll carry your bag”. He is about ten years old and holding a bow and arrow. His ankle is clearly broken.

Eventually we pop out of the mist on to a small plateau. There is a cluster of honnais and a wooden school building. A game of volleyball comes to an abrupt halt as we stagger forward. I make our introductions to the headman and local Teacher and we are immediately led into the men’s hut.



Lilibal Village – The last of the great on-foot traders

This is truly the land that time forgot.

I lie back on the straw of the men's hut and stare up at the ceiling.

Dark faces huddle round a candle. There are two fires burning at either end of the spacious hut. The wood-walls are pitch black with a good half inch of tar-like soot lacquered across the ceiling from years of wood-smoke. A pig oinks in the dark; a sack of sweet potatoes hangs from the wall.

This scene hasn't changed in centuries.

"We have almost everything we need in this village and the surrounding forest; cauliflowers, forest-nuts, sweet potatoes, bananas," begins the Teacher, a bright-eyed Yali tribesman named Marcus who speaks from behind a bushy mustache, "but for all the extras: oil, soap, sugar, salt, tea and coffee, we must walk to the town of Wamena."

I am introduced to a 9-year-old boy, who looks about six, who regularly walks to the central highland hub town in a day. I am staggered. It had just taken me three, grueling, days. "He sets off at 6am and is there before dark," explains Marcus, "he carries five kilos, barefoot". It may seem cruel, but out here it is a necessary way of life, not just for trading goods but also for carrying vital messages and maintaining and reaffirming tribal boundaries. "What foreign people don't realise is that we weren't always hunting heads and eating our neighbours" Marcus continues "we used to walk our pigs and potatoes for days to trade peacefully with the other tribes, long before any outsiders started to interfere in our ways." It was this intertribal cooperation that saw a South American vegetable, the sweet potato, established as a staple crop, the use of cowrie shells as a currency, and the highlands first pigs, dogs, steel machetes and iron axes spread out across the hinterland.



Marcus reiterates that the establishment of airstrips and roads in the late 1950s was the beginning of the end. As a preoccupation with West Papua's rich resources swept the region and communications improved, the great history of distance walking appeared to be disappearing without a trace, but as I was discovering, Papua has an uncanny knack of holding onto its dearest secrets in its remotest corners.

The boy's name is Semina and he is very much the future of long distance walking here. These are by far the most competent walkers I've ever met and, unsurprisingly, it is a source of great local pride.

Nathaniel lets out a groan, and asks for medicine. I agree to give him some ibuprofen and immediately a disorderly queue for treatment appears in front of me. The range of ailments is quite extraordinary – broken ankles, a shattered clavicle, septicemia, shingles, even elephantitis – none of which are remotely treatable with over the counter ibuprofen, all of which would be treatable, or at least manageable, if they had access to decent healthcare.

For the majority of people living in and around the remote eastern highlands the hospital at Wamena is considered to be an option to be taken in only the very worst of circumstances. Disturbingly, in this village at least, they remain convinced that the Government run hospital is part of a wider conspiracy to kill them off altogether, instead they prefer to defer to the spiritual intuition of their headman.

Soon, I'm out of Ibuprofen. I tell the headman about my own aches and pains and he starts rubbing me down with something that resembles a dock leaf but, ironically, stings like a nettle. It is pure kindness on his part so I don't complain as my eyes begin to stream. He probes my scars and scrapes with his creased fingers before pausing on my trench-foot, manifested in an intensely itchy ulcer-like infection spread out across my toes. "Ah, yes" he says under his breath, nodding sagely and reaching for yet more leaves, "this is AIDS..."

Soba – Village. The end of the road.

My team presses on up the hillside just before daybreak.

I've picked up two more local lads to share the load and Marcus the teacher, bedecked in an impressively white t-shirt, has joined the team as well. He marches on at the front of the group imperiously, naming mountain peaks and streams, occasionally turning to squeeze my hand when he really has a point to make – "100 people died here last year Will" he says gleefully, pointing at a landslide that appears to have calved an entire mountain in half.

The atmosphere borders on the carnival. I feel like I'm on a school trip. I relax enough to even experience a slight twinge of guilt that I have now spread my load across four people, having previously walked with Callum carrying everything ourselves. But, that was a different time and place, a totally different expedition. In as much as that one was on an ancient on-foot trade route that existed entirely in my head, whereas now, two months later, I was on a genuine trade route with luxuries such as people, pathways and a heart-warming lack of white water/deadly vipers/wild pigs/bees etc.

We pop out the top of a spectacular crown of mountains just after sunrise. I can see the lowlands start to spread out at my toes, a disorderly sea of swamps stretching all the way to the horizon. The beginning of the end. Beyond that horizon is the south pacific and home. I have a great team, everyone is happy, even miserable Nathalius squeaked out a smile today. I just have to forget what the headman said about floods last week and concentrate on the matter in hand.



"Will" Marcus was staring at me earnestly. I reckoned he could read my mind. "We must turn back now" he looked to the two others who looked at their toes.

Of course he must. He's the local teacher. This was only ever a day trip.

"It's okay Marcus" I replied "thank you for your help". I meant it. We had been given an incredible welcome by their village and they hadn't asked for a penny in return.

"Please be careful. You already know the route forward is impassable."

Nethaniel looked desperate.

He watched Marcus and the boys all the way to the crest of the hill and let out a heavy sigh as they disappeared.

"Never mind Nethaniel, just you and me again now, the dream team!"

He didn't respond.

At lunch we sat on a rock together and drank from a small stream. We had started to swing south now and we were a long way from his village, family, and friends. The last hill we had crossed had just been another big climb for me, but for Nethaniel it marked something far more significant. It was a tribal boundary on the great road. The Yali here really didn't speak his language, they didn't share his cultural outlook, history or family heritage, and as we had long since exhausted the limit of mine and his knowledge of Indonesian, he had grown lonely and tired.

"Do you want to go home Nethalius?" I asked, trying to sound as sympathetic as possible, knowing it was a big deal for such a proud Papuan man to admit he was struggling.

"Yes" he replied flatly, much to my surprise, following up with "these people say there is a flight back to Wamena tomorrow morning from Soba, you must pay for me to fly home with that plane."

He had said this once before on the second day, but repeating it again now represented a sea change in our relationship. All his initial enthusiasm had vanished as the grueling reality of multi-day walking had sunk in. He had become desperately moody. Whinging at every obstacle, complaining constantly about the weight of his pack and the ignorance of locals he had yet to meet. Worse still he recently started demanding even more money and threatening to take vital pieces of expedition equipment.

I could have replaced him at the last village with some of the stronger walkers, but for some reason I felt an unrequited sense of loyalty. Now I was stuck, I needed him more than ever.

This was by no means the first time I'd faced these sorts of issues. In 2009 I'd lost five guides in 24 hours to problems such as: "I am lazy", "I have a sore back", "I have school tomorrow" and "I just remembered my sister died". I would have laughed it all off had the entire debacle not climaxed with me, Callum and our pig for trade, abandoned and alone without food for four days in the middle of a forest. The hardworking walking talent of West Papua has nearly always been frustratingly out of my reach, either because they weren't present in the village I was looking in, or because they were always, understandably, gainfully employed, but mostly, to be brutally honest, because they were female. Without question the women are the masters of the tradition, carrying loads way in excess of what I could manage, even

after five months in the field, without a whimper. The few times I had walked with the ladies I had been stunned at their cadence. A rhythmic approach to walking, their bare feet moulding to the track with unbelievable stability, no matter the slope, weather or load. But the fact was the men of the village would only ever let me walk with the ladies, who travelled along these routes daily, as an absolute last resort. "Men are stronger," they always said, before invariably giving up a day later.

By the time we could see Soba in the distance I was beyond caring anyway. Nathalius was going home. Whatever the cost.

Even from where I was stood I could see Soba was little more than a cluster of large wooden huts, tin-roofed with a bit of flaky black paint on the walls. There was a small sloping airstrip, flattened along its length on a tongue of grass, and that was about it.

It was an easy downhill stroll from where we were standing so I don't know why I fell. But what I do remember was the sickening feeling that I was going for the big drop this time. I fell about 18 foot, directly over the side of a ravine, stopping myself from smashing my face in on the rocks below by catching my ankles on a small tree trunk but opening up both knees on the way down. I was left hanging upside down, blood pouring from the wounds on my knees and up my thighs staring down at a dry riverbed another ten metres down.



That night I sat round a fire with a group of men, clutching my knees, the blood dried and flaking like the paint on the walls. A longwinded political conversation begins regarding the Indonesian occupation. I tried not to listen.

"They don't belong here" says one man. "We are Christian, they are Muslim, we are Australasian they are Asian". I had heard it all many times

before. The hot Indonesian tea and cocoa gets handed out with spoons full of Indonesian sugar, as we sit in a hut built by Indonesians with Government money. I try to sympathise with their situation. What happened fifty years ago was a travesty. But the problem today goes deeper than just a simple separatist dispute between two culturally polarised groups. "Indonesians are ignorant," another man chirps in, jabbing his index finger at the roof, "they can't work in this environment, one day's walk here they would die, they are selfish, they don't even eat together, they don't share." Everyone nods in agreement, "yes! Yes!" "we must fight them, clear them all out!" The atmosphere darkens.

"That isn't true" everyone falls silent. I had spoken without thinking really.

"I'm sorry it isn't". All eyes were on me now. "I have friends who are Indonesian, they share and they are strong, and just like you, they are poor too, they came here looking for a better life because the government told them too. This isn't their fault."

I couldn't find the language to explain what I really thought. That the vast majority of Papuan men who got any political leverage here squandered it for more money and control, that many of the Papuans that had settled in social housing now relied on government donations of rice and didn't work their sweet potato fields anymore. That the Indonesians who have come here from overpopulated parts of Indonesia aren't the major problem, the exploitation of natural resources, the disenfranchisement of Papuans in the control of their land, which is sold from under their feet, and the lack of money filtering down into education and healthcare in this province is killing these people. This is the richest state in Indonesia, and among the richest in the world, yet its people are being kept deliberately dumb. I always encountered the strongest anti-Indonesian sentiments in these sorts of towns, where people didn't need to work or walk and had gained the most from the occupation.

"We have become lazy as a people" an elderly man splits the silence with a croak, "The central Government, the Indonesians, have made us lazy as a people, we must fight to preserve our traditions, we must work hard again". No one speaks. The elder had the final say. It was obvious he was right. If there is any freedom or control to be won, it isn't going to come from sitting round a fire complaining.

I could hear the water boiling. A black pot full of sweet potato dangles from a spring-loaded hook over the fire. It starts to rattle as the vegetables strike the pot's sides.

Nethalius tells the men all about me. "He is crazy!" He points over his shoulder with his thumb, the elderly man starts to giggle. "He walked to Puncak Jaya with a pig and got arrested, then he walked across Paniai to Moni and got arrested again. He crossed to PNG with the Marind in the south and he crossed Yapan just to see a bird! Now he tries to walk to Mamberamo nearly dies and then comes here and walks to the Asmat. He has been coming back for five years now!"

"Why doesn't he like his own home?" asks one of the men.

"He is from Ingeriss! They only have rain and snow there!"

Everyone laughs.

That night I felt overwhelmed with fatigue. Five years coming back here. Maybe Nathalius is right, am I crazy? What was I doing carrying on?

I roll in my sleeping sack, wincing at the pain in my knees. That was it. I was done. I've got nothing left to prove. This is the route I was looking for. It exists. I don't need to continue and cover every inch when everyone is warning me it is already under several feet of water.

Tomorrow I'll fly back to Wamena and then make connections on to Dekai, bridging the 65km between this village and the headwaters and then find a way to continue the route downstream.

I didn't want a repeat of the first leg on my own. I was fast running out of stamina and as everyone was advising me to avoid carrying on the onward path it seemed prudent to listen. Unlike the vast majority of people we met living on or around the road on the first leg these people were expert walkers. If it was impassable for them it was definitely impassable for me.

The next morning, surprisingly, the flight arrived almost on time. It dropped off a weeks supply of rice, noodles and drums of cooking oil, and after a brief conversation between the man in charge of the radio, who also doubles as the teacher and local pastor, turned, and took off again.

A horrible silence descended on Soba.

The news filtered back to me that the headman has chartered the plane for the next week and that it will not be taking passengers.

I donate the vast majority of my ration packs to the village, significantly lightening my load, and begin the long walk back to Wamena.



Dekai – The Asmat and river trade.

By May 20th I had made it to Dekai. The walk back to Wamena was excruciating. I had to effectively double Nethaniel's wages to stop him constantly moaning and trying to take items of equipment, and was forced to employ another person to help with our load as Nethaniel was all but refusing to carry anything but the smallest possible pack. I had to keep him onside, he would barely speak to me in Indonesian anymore and as I could no longer understand what he was saying about me to the people we met on the track it didn't seem worth forcing him to leave.

In spite of the frustrations it had been a critically important part of the West Papuan on-foot trading puzzle. Without doubt I had been walking on an ancient route that had quite clear evidence of the culture of distance walking today. I had been truly stunned by some of the athleticism of the people, particularly the women, and was now very keen to see how the route all fitted together in the lowlands.

Dekai would be make or break. Had I just been walking on an extension of the Great road I uncovered in 2009 or was this indeed the highland half of a much larger trans-Papuan route leading to the south coasts? All the elders and experienced walkers I had met on the route assured me that



their portion of the path finished in Dekai and then headed on to the Asmat via the rivers. If I could just find more evidence downstream then this surely was the route I had been looking for.

19th May

I drop out of the cloud base smothering the hills. Behind me are the highlands and below me is the small square of forest I failed to cover. We sink abruptly and I wipe my window with my sleeve – I can see a series of huge coffee brown rivers with wide shingle beaches, soon, we're so close I can even make out a woman drying her washing, spreading out brightly coloured blankets all along boulder strewn banks.

The Asmat.

20,000 square kilometres of swamp that had remained virtually unexplored until the mid 1900s. New Guinea's grizzly reputation for head-hunting, cannibalism and man-eating crocodiles comes from right here. This place has literally hundreds of years experience in repelling western explorers. The plane touches tarmac.

Dekai feels unfinished. When I arrived I asked a motorcycle taxi driver to point me towards the town centre. He looked confused. I now know why. The town is built on a massive grid that shows huge ambition but very little in the way of actual shops, structure or people. There is no discernable centre but there are a series of sporadic, expensive looking but ultimately empty buildings, a ludicrously wide immaculately tarmacced road, but no vehicles, and inexplicably large spaces between houses.

It is a place waiting for something to happen. But it doesn't seem to know what.

The military post wasn't hard to find. They had usefully painted their entire building in camouflage colours. I know what you are thinking: "but Will, surely that would make it impossible to find as it would just 'blend in' with the swamp?" It doesn't. It didn't. Plus they had painted an enormous eagle on the front door. It had red eyes and a distinctly Papuan looking man trapped within the talons. Above it was a hand drawn slogan that read: "death from above".

I had my journey signed off by the head of intel after lots of cross-questioning, but little idea of how I was going to execute it. Since I no longer had the packrafts I was now entirely reliant on boats and if this wasn't going to cost me everything I had left I was going to need help.



Surprisingly, after a particularly hostile half-hour in the military post backroom the head of intel produced a number for a man named Sam: "He is mister boat, it is very expensive here, if he can't help, no one can."

I was stood on wooden decking in front of a good-looking Indonesian man in his forties. He was wearing a string vest and bouncing a small child on his knee.

"I am Sam", he said, in a whisper, barely making eye contact.

Sam had been plying his craft into the heart of the Asmat for most of his life. Having moved to Dekai with the first wave of transmigrants in the 60s, he settled, bought a small boat and figured his way in and out of the mêlée that is the Asmat waterways. It can't have been easy, setting yourself up as a middleman between the fickle Indonesian traders and the understandably standoffish local people, as well as negotiating your way through all the corruption and crocodiles. But in this land of water the boatman is god. Sam is proof that in the Asmat your boat handling ability can get through even the most entrenched racial obstacles. A group of Papuans gathered round the decking to listen in as Sam held court. It was clear. After 30 years hard graft in the area, he was "the man".

Dekai was indeed the head of a vast river transport network flowing south. According to Sam I was situated at the very northern limit that boats could penetrate from the coasts, some 250 km inland. Historically, I learned, trade in this region worked similarly to the on-foot model in the highlands: a chain reaction of short journeys to the limits of tribal territories that slowly spanned the entire Asmat and all the tribal groups within the limits of this New Jersey sized swampland. Journeys were undertaken by dug out canoe and were often fraught with risk, not least because of the crocodiles, inclement weather and dangerous tides in the lower reaches, but also because of the inherent dangers of trading with neighbors who may be planning a head hunting raid or be seeking retribution for a previous raid on their village. It seemed the cycle of vengeance inflicted on neighbors for a successful raid had almost no timescale. Revenge on a family group could be inflicted years, even decades after an act, and a seemingly peaceful trade network offered the ultimate surprise ambush for a tribal group seeking retribution. '*Tuwi asonai makaerin*' "Fattened by friendship",²⁴ the literal translation of an ancient Asmat Sawi phrase for the deliberate deceit of a neighboring tribal group ahead of a raid. In the case of the route to the coast this would involve the gradual process of welcoming a neighbour within your tribal territory with gifts, such as pig meat, which eventually would gravitate towards a wholesale system of trade across borders, duping your partner into the belief that old scores were settled before enacting violent revenge. For decades items of trade were fairly regular: vegetables, pigs, crocodile meat, shell currency, but as Asian and European traders made contact with the New Guinea coasts the goods being traded would have offered an enormous advantage to any tribal group that successfully monopolised the system. The first steel axes and machetes in the 1950s offered the ability to cut down a tree in a couple of blows, a huge step up from the tiresome stone model, and the first medicines were a huge step away from the traditional beliefs in spirits and karma as the harbinger of illness. This, alongside Christianity, did more to change the traditional belief systems of the people of the Asmat than anything else before or since. The system of *Tuwi asonai makaerin* would have taken a major hit. To risk jeopardising downriver trade to settle a feud could lead to your entire tribe being cut off from the enormously advantageous items being traded at the time. The Christian missionaries to the region believed it was the word of God that brought peace to the Asmat, it is far more likely though that it was the pragmatic attitude of local tribal leaders who quickly realised that the prolonging of wars would sever their access to the miracle goods arriving en masse throughout their waterways.

²⁴ p. 50 *Peace Child* Don Richardson (1935: Regal)

Travelling through the Asmat today it is hard to imagine what it was like just 60 years ago, such are the wholesale changes that have been enacted in the region with the growth of motorboat transportation, planes and the establishment of numerous new towns to ensure Indonesian control extends along the main rivers. But there are still signs of a historic unity of purpose and culture that could not have been maintained if this trade system had been constantly embroiled in conflict prior to contact from outside. As with the highlands I noticed many similarities in the ways different villages had constructed their longhouse buildings, carved their totems and maintained their creation myths. Even today I met people who believed their departed loved ones were reincarnated as hornbills and many elders spoke of their ability to assume animal forms at will. It was clear the woodcarvings of crocodiles and totem poles of people still held a grave significance to every group I met, but I didn't have the language skills to pull all these elements together into one complete story at the time. On return to the UK I researched the animist religious beliefs of the region and came across the following in George Monbiot's *Poisoned Arrows* (1989: Abacus) which frames the idols and beliefs of the Asmat cultures within a widely held story of tribal creation in the region:

Before there were people in the Asmat, Fumerpitch – or Windman – strode about the swamp forests, seeing the animals that abounded in them and the fruitful sago. He found that all was ready for human life to begin. He built a longhouse beside the river, and in it he put the figures of people he had carved from wood. Then he made a drum and sang and danced for a long time, and slowly the wooden figures came to life. When they had got used to living their numbers multiplied, so he built new longhouses for them. But a giant crocodile came up the river and started destroying the longhouses with its tail, trying to get at the people inside. Fumerpitch caught it and tore it into pieces, and hurled the foul flesh of the beast as far as he could, over the sea and away from the Asmat. There it grew up and became the people of the foreign lands. Since then the Asmat have lived on the riverbanks, and hunted the fierce crocodile, and its offspring. When someone dies in the village his soul flies off to join the hornbills, or the giant black fruitbats. After that he returns to the village, where he roams around distracted, causing trouble. What he lacks is a body, so, in the way of Windman, he has one made for him, carved out of wood, that he can occupy...Every so often the burden of the dead becomes too great, and they have to be persuaded to leave.

George goes on to detail the creation of a giant ancestor pole: "made of the interlocked figures of all who have died in the last few years" adding "navels are the centre of everything and around them are designs based on the intestines of beetles, vaginas of crocodiles, mantids in human form, cuscus tails and hornbills' heads. The master carver uses stone axes traded from far upriver with people who swapped them with the Dani" and even notes "for five hundred years the Asmat had been using nails from the distant wrecks of ships whose sailors didn't even know their land existed" having previously drifted inland on tidal currents. Even without this last, and most important, mention of the trade with the Dani, via the Lani, along the path I had already walked in previous weeks, it is clear that the shared belief system throughout the Asmat is no coincidence. You could argue that many of the aspects of the Asmat way of life (living on stilts, the dugouts, the methods for hunting crocodiles) are a product of the environment in which they live and something that would have evolved naturally without influence from neighbouring tribes, but the specificities of their religious beliefs: those ancestor poles, the reincarnation, the

emphasis on animism, could only have developed through centuries of shared experience along this great unifying route stretching across Papua. The prevalence of the ancient ancestor poles in long houses along the river today is testament to this.



Sam helped me make some plans. I clearly didn't have the money to hire him but this wasn't going to stop him giving me an enormous helping hand.

"Have you paid for another night in your hotel tonight?" he asked flatly.

"No" but it was also passed 4pm and my innate sense of fairness and decency dictated that I was committed already to staying another night. Or so I thought.

"Good" he snapped my book shut "you'll be staying with my aunt down at the port tonight, Uncle Hendra will take you now"

Pelabuhan – The Port

20th May

Hendra's truck emerges from the forest after two hours of bouncing along a brown ribbon of pot-holed road. The port is nothing more than two small shops and Sam's Aunty's guest house – a small tin-roofed stilt affair with lino floorings and single beds.

A smooth, wide, bend of brown river and half a dozen Papuans lounge around out front. They are taller and more slender limbed than the highlanders and have sharp oval faces and pronounced cheekbones. Many have bright plastic rings through their ear lobes and septums. I'm immediately offered half a day on a boat for £300. It is far too much. I try to negotiate and the group walks off laughing. Ominous. A large pig dozes. A pet cockatoo tears chunks out of a motorcycle's rubber handlebar grips.

Things feel unfriendly. This port feels static.

No. It feels stagnant.

I feel a slight twang of panic.

This is a watery purgatory.

A naked boy plays with a tyre in a puddle. A man burns rubbish. Two large boats are moored up. One is emptying bathroom tiles from its bowels. Who, I wonder, has ordered a delivery of bathroom tiles, to this place?



I visit the military post. They sneer at me. "You'll never get a boat out of here".

Sam's Aunt has the kindest eyes. The skin around her ankles is dark and scaly from infection. I help her apply some anti-histamine cream and she tells me about her family. They are all from Sulawesi. Poor and optionless in an overpopulated rural community they signed up for the transmigration program at the first opportunity and shipped out to West Papua. The men carved a niche for themselves hunting down Gaharu, a dark, sweet smelling, resinous heartwood in high demand in the Middle East, and they haven't looked back, or left, since.

Gaharu, or Argarwood, was by far the most important local trade commodity in the area. Pound for pound, at its highest quality it is worth more than gold in the Middle East and parts of South Asia where it is prized for its use in perfumes and incense. The resin forms within the large evergreens typical of the Asmat due to a specific mold infection. The men in this area penetrate deep into the forest in search of the darkest infections, in some cases deliberately scraping away a tree's bark to encourage the growth of the mold, before removing the Agarwood from the hulk of the tree entirely. As I headed downstream I must have seen at least half a dozen of these temporary camps dotted along the riverbanks every day. As demand outstrips supply the pursuit of Gaharu has become yet another contributing factor to Indonesia's record-breaking levels of forest clearance.²⁵

I ask Aunty for help and she holds her palms out defensively: "I want to Will, but I can't, you will have to fix your price with the Papuan boatmen, it is the only way".

I go to my room having forced down some chicken and rice. I don't feel well. After half an hour I start to feel stomach cramps. I get very sick in the night.

21st May

I am so weak this morning. Aunty brings me fried bananas and I try to force them down. A sense of grim obligation forces me back to the dockside. Ridiculous. I should be going to hospital, not carrying on. A small boy fires a plastic gun at the pet

²⁵ http://wwf.panda.org/who_we_are/wwf_offices/indonesia/?uProjectID=ID0196

cockatoo. He tells me his Dad hunts wood and snakes in the forest so I show him a picture of a snake from my book. He jumps backwards in fright. I ask him if he knows anything about boats and we go to the docks together. The bathroom tile boat hasn't left yet. I shout out to the Captain.

Three days later Captain Baroh was gently mocking me about this very moment, steering the huge boat through the swamps with his feet, chain smoking whilst



attempting a British accent: "ooooh, please let me on your boat", he laughs at his own joke, "YOU, looked like a crazy person – a white fatty holding hands with a little boy and his plastic gun! Gonna hold me up were you Will! HA!" he gurumped, smoke spewing from both nostrils, "You are lucky I am a very sick man too my friend!" He gave me a smile and an affectionate dead-leg.

I think they just let me on their boat. I'm never ever going to get permission from the military to leave on a commercial tug-boat though...Aunty approaches me in a delicate lime-green sarong: "I'm happy you finally spoke to the Captain of that boat, this way is better, now you can hide...get your bags, go to the boat, they will leave before dawn. I've spoken to the police, you are now on a petrol run to the coastal town of Timika, you understand don't you Will". She squeezed my hand and fixed me with her eyes. "We are from different countries but we are the same. I want to help you". She produced my falsified paperwork. I couldn't believe her kindness.

I was stowing away.

The journey to the coast



The crew were all from Makassar, a large city in the south of the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. They had sailed around the coast from the south Papuan town of Timika and then come straight up the network of rivers spanning the 250km between the

coasts and Dekai. They were trading in cooking oil, noodles, tobacco, rice, crackers and piles of bathroom tiles on what was considered by them to be the new frontier for Indonesian trade.

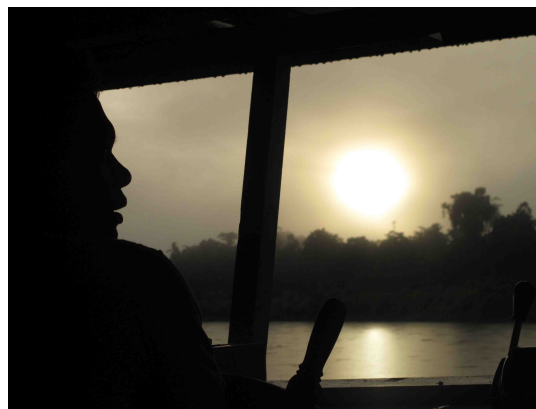
“Dekai is still very new” explains Captain Baroh, a 26 year old Father of three who has been working the boats for the last decade, “there are plenty of opportunities to trade here. The Government is spending a lot of money to establish an Indonesian community here, there is wealth in the forest and coal, it is flush with cash and people want good imported food and nice building materials. Carrying goods upriver is still cheaper than flying them in.”

The boat was large and shaped like a tug. It had a spacious hull, a small sleeping deck with a DVD player, a few bunks, a tiny kitchen with a gas ring out the back and a diesel engine in the bowels. “This is the boat of food!” declared the ship’s cook, a fresh faced 17 year old, and we tucked in to an evening meal of noodles and rice as the DVD player thumped out Indonesian dance tunes.

22nd May

Just after 5am the boys hauled in the rope and we cast off downstream. Instantly we plunge into thick forest, the captain and his large wooden steering wheel silhouetted against the mist and jungle backdrop. Kingfishers, rails, swift-like birds and fish eagles abound on the banksides, as the sun gets fuller in the sky I begin to notice Asmat villages, stilt houses, long houses with reed roofs and people out fishing in dug outs.

“We have to kill the speed whenever we see a canoe” says the Captain, pulling down the throttle to a putter as we pass a Papuan man, stood up in his dugout, bow drawn and taught, eyes focused on the water. “If we roll a canoe on our bow wave it’ll cost us 15 million rupiah (£980)...they’ll chase us down in their motor boat and if we don’t pay we have to fight”, he rubs a long scar on his arm, “you don’t want to get in a fight here.” It all felt a bit over dramatic, but then when your profit margins and wages are so low an avoidable mistake like that could cost you your whole trip.



We pass a number of Gaharu camps; tarpaulin tents, a string with a row of coloured t-shirts drying, the men deep in the forest. The Asmat feels wild but this is by far the most populated tract of lowland jungle I have ever visited. The local villages have been long established and signs of local industry are everywhere – informal logging camps, fishing and the buzzing of dugouts with motor engines up and down the river we are sharing. It doesn’t take much of a leap of faith to imagine that this has been a vital watercourse for trade for centuries.

The biggest fears of these modern traders aren’t crocodiles. All the lads were in agreement that, in no particular order, their causes for concern were: getting into trouble with local Papuan people, being struck by a submerged tree and capsizing, and ‘Satan’, who apparently lives in the trees behind the banks. “It is no joke Will”

implores first mate Agung with the Captain nodding sagely behind, “stick to the rivers.”

We continued on the long journey downstream occasionally passing several entirely abandoned villages, the stilts of the houses choked by reeds and lianas, the thatch



rotting clean through on the bank sides. I had read about an expedition that passed through near here in the late 1980s and reported similar sights. That expedition argued they were just temporary hunting camps of the semi-nomadic Asmat people, but I was witnessing fully formed villages. I spoke to Rosemary Faran, a Papuan Human Rights worker originally from the Marind territories around the Merauke

section of the Asmat, she explained: “the truth is many of the villagers here have turned away from their ancient grounds. It is an unbelievably difficult way to live and with populations rising it is getting harder and harder to provide for large families as we did traditionally. Also, Indonesian Government policies provided tin roofs and rice in their new build towns. Many think it is a way of controlling the local people here, watching over them, but really it is just a pragmatic choice.” Later, at probably the most established of all the towns on the river, Agats, I meet a former Kombai warrior, now rehoused within the Government social housing scheme, he reiterates the sentiments of Rosemary, adding: “of course life is easier for us living here, we have access to clean water, a proper roof, access to food. Things are getting harder and harder in the forest, food is more difficult to find, we have to go further and further to survive. I am fearful for the youth though. I don’t have an education but at least I have knowledge and skills from the forest. My son has a poor education and no knowledge or skills. What will happen to us? How will we ever be free?”

I have never met a Papuan who feels they were better off in the past, but equally, I am yet to meet a Papuan who is truly satisfied today. Across the board, the people I met wanted independence from Indonesia and greater, more modern, opportunities.

I had encountered numerous other abandoned villages during the Great Road expedition in 2009. Unlike the Great Road though, which was largely disappearing as air transportation replaced walking, these river networks were experiencing much larger traffic, bigger boats and larger scale commercial activity, but, again, it was largely transmigrant Indonesians who were driving these enterprises as traditional Papuan practices withered alongside.



The sun sinks and an electric storm plays out on the horizon. The boys unreel a long extension cable to get a large lamp off the prow to signal to other boats and keep watch for driftwood. We pull into a bankside, thick with seven-foot high reed beds, and drop anchor. "Mister, if we are hit by a big piece of wood in the night this boat will sink. You, me and the boys, will all have to swim downstream to the last village." I couldn't tell whether the Captain was joking or not and didn't really understand why we hadn't just moored at the village anyway. Soon I found answers to both questions. A dug out pulled up out of the dark and a big argument broke out between our boat and the local boatman who was demanding £500 off the Captain for our nights stay in the wilderness. It rained hard in the night as the storm passed overhead. Tree roots and detritus scraped at the side of the boat as they flowed downstream. At daybreak the next morning we pass a single mast protruding from the middle of the river. A threatening marker of just how dangerous this job is.

Having spent almost two years out of the last five on projects here in West Papua I have learnt to appreciate just why the people that live and work here have such strong fatalistic and animist beliefs. We are utterly at the mercy of this environment. I can understand why you wouldn't want to anger anyone, physical or spiritual, real or imagined. It is easy to develop superstitions when your very presence feels like an affront on this isolated natural space.

23rd May

Today at some stage, I will reach the river mouth town of Agats and the end of this expedition.

It feels quite unreal. This isn't how I imagined it of course. I thought I'd be bursting into sunlight after some survival epic on my packraft with Callum close behind, embracing the exhaustion and celebrating our achievement after numerous close shaves. Instead I am motoring down to diesel fumes and dance music having just covered a distance that would have taken weeks in the rafts in just two days. By the

end of today we will have travelled 250km. When I think back to Callum and I cutting our way through the forest and making just 500 metres a day I can't help but have a new found appreciation for motorised transportation. It is all too easy to over-romanticise the tribal groups 'simple' life. If I was a member of the Kombai, Korowai, Dani, Yali, Monuma or any of the other groups living on these trade routes I too would want to take maximum advantage of transportation advances and the higher quality of living that being in a town dominated with government social housing offers.

I do still feel some disappointment but overwhelmingly I am relieved. I remind myself that forward progress at all is a big achievement in a place like this. Papua, I have learnt, never delivers quite what you expect. On this leg I have achieved what I set out to do and am travelling downriver on the absolute epitome of modern day Papuan river trade.

The river is vast now. 300 metres across at least. We are approaching the mouth. The boys have signal on their mobile phones and start texting their various love interests. I can see Agats on the horizon, the South Pacific is ahead of me, and directly behind is the vast interior of New Guinea. The sun is setting. It feels perfect.

"Yo Mister Will!" I turn to see the Captain has placed the ships hosepipe between his legs and is pretending to urinate over the side.

Again. Papua never does quite deliver what you expect.



Postscript

Although the town of Agats was my finish line I still had to find my way back to the north coast capital Jayapura from this remote outpost on the opposite side of the island.

I was apprehended by an officious intel officer on arrival in Agats and informed that I was not to return to the boat on any circumstances and could do nothing more in town except wait at the port for the midnight ferry to Timika under his supervision. As luck would have it, for the first time in five years, an intel officer was forcing me to do precisely what I wanted. Three days later I made it back to Jayapura after an hour-long flight right across the width of the province and started the long journey home.



Map 10 – The key waypoints of the Trans Papua Expedition

4.0 Conclusion

For the last five years I have either been in Papua or at home planning the next expedition. It has largely been an intense mix of engaging in difficult projects or juggling meager funds with my full time work, and very little of anything else, particularly anything approaching proper reflection on all I have seen and experienced in this beguiling province.

The Trans-Papua Expedition feels like a watershed moment for me as an expedition leader and for West Papua. There were times on this expedition that, if I am honest, I would have happily given up and come home, drawing a line under my time in Papua firmly, forever. I felt lonely, isolated and



overwhelmed by what I was attempting at a time when no one else seemed to be getting any access at all. A lot has changed since I have been home. I've had the time to really go through what happened, watch my footage back and reread my diaries. Largely, I can't believe we survived the Wara, but I have also discovered a great deal of personal pride in our achievement. I am proud that Callum and I didn't give up, and that I continued even after he had left, but, more than ever, I feel immensely privileged to have had this opportunity and my respect for the people of Papua, and, in particular, what they achieved historically on this trade route has only grown.

I now know that there are at least three major routes in the state. The first, the Great Road, connects the Papuan highland tribes living within the central mountains, the other two connect these groups with the coasts, one at the extreme end of the range to the port of Nabire and the other is that magnificent route south that I spent time mapping throughout May and June this year.

I believe it is highly plausible that these were once among the greatest tribal trade routes in human history. Their astonishing survival into the 21st century, against overwhelming odds, stands as a testament to the intelligence and endurance of these people and their cultural traditions. The first Papuans to walk and canoe these routes have left almost no record of their endeavors, yet I can vouch from my own experiences, with almost all modern wilderness accessories at my disposal, their courage and resolve easily places their efforts among the truly great feats of human fortitude. Sadly, in the West our prevailing preoccupation with the tribal cultures of West Papua tends to fall into two camps: those that focus on the past history of barbarism, or those that fetishise the stereotype of finding the 'simple' or 'pure' tribal existence, an impossibly naïve search for an Adam and Eve-esque lifestyle that never existed in the province. Neither takes into consideration the logistical challenge of maintaining a trade route in such a vast environment, not just getting from a to b, but valuing goods in a trade system based entirely on bartering with people from a vast range of linguistic backgrounds. It didn't last for centuries because Papuan people were incapable of thinking of a better system. It lasted because it worked.

Today, overwhelmingly, it is clear the feats and rich history of the routes is on the verge of disappearing without trace, alongside one of the most varied set of tribal cultures this planet has ever maintained.

The Trans-Papua Expedition was always much more than just a test of my endurance in this environment of extremes. Crossing a multitude of tribal territories afforded me unique contemporary access to the modern day indigenous Papuans that lived and worked alongside these great trade routes. Nearly everyone I met was dissatisfied with their level of interaction with the brave new world that had first entered their consciousness 60 years ago. Those living in the new towns and the Indonesian social housing schemes either felt life was easier in the new builds but feared a loss of cultural tradition and continued to work hard to improve their living standards, or they were part of a new group that had turned their back entirely on tradition, had all but stopped working, but were immensely frustrated at their communities lack of progress and laid the blame squarely at the feet of the Indonesian Government. It was the latter group that was prevailing as I left the province. Outside of the towns, and in the more isolated areas, I met a curious mix of groups either wanting to enter and exploit the benefits of living in a new build town as soon as possible, or those that seemed quite content to continue to farm

traditionally and trade using the trade routes, but with the benefits of modern means, such as cars and motorised boats.

It is all too easy to bemoan this introduced modernity in Papua in favour of protecting our heavily romanticised image of tribal existence. The more Papuans I met the clearer it became that no one, bar perhaps the near miss we had deep in the forest, wanted to return or fully maintain their traditional roots. But the rapid commercial development with the region has created enormous levels of mistrust and resentment. The fact remains that Papuans are neither the drivers nor the benefactors of the development of their region. Health and education standards among Papuans remain among the lowest in Indonesia. The motorbikes belong to the Indonesian migrants who now make up to 50% of the 3.6m population. Migrants own the shops, restaurants and building firms, and overwhelmingly man the police and army. An aged Papuan pastor from the Western highlands tried to explain their feelings: "In the past we knew what we wanted and how to get it, but then people came from outside, they brought new things and change, we wanted to change and we left a lot of our traditions behind, but still we are so far behind the outsiders we can only believe we are being tricked and fooled and they are keeping things for themselves, from our land that are rightfully ours. We are deeply mistrustful." This mistrust is often reflected back at Papuans by the many Indonesian migrants and members of the military that now live and work in the province, manifesting itself in some truly disgusting instances of human rights abuses and quite clear examples of racial prejudice by both groups. Instances of violence still remain infrequent but, at the conclusion of my expedition, West Papua found itself in the news, yet again, for all the wrong reasons.

At least 17 people have been killed since I came home. On May 29th a German tourist was shot on the beach at Jayapura. I saw the man on the day, and remember clearly thinking it was strange to see another westerner. I too, almost went to the beach that day. Incredibly, he survived. Activists link the shooting to hearings that month at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva, where Indonesia was discussed. The suspicion is that parts of Indonesia's security forces want to show that Papua remains dangerous, blaming the OPM, whilst orchestrating the shooting by paying for a gunman. It felt far-fetched, but incidents of shootings on Westerners are so rare and almost always confined to the Freeport mine. It was the first apparently random shooting I had ever heard of. Others told me the man was a suspected OPM sympathiser, but this wasn't how the local Indonesian authorities responded to the attack in the aftermath. Security forces in Jayapura on June 14th shot dead Mako Tabuni, a leading advocate of a referendum on Papuan independence. The police claimed he was carrying the gun used to shoot the German tourist. Eyewitnesses, however, have said he was unarmed and doing nothing more aggressive than buying betel nut when he was killed. Unsurprisingly more violent protests erupted across the province in the wake of this with dozens more arrests and shootings.

These are isolated incidents that serve to exaggerate the dangers within the province, feeding, very conveniently, the idea that Papua is a violent and dangerous place and Papuan people are still mindless savages. In truth, London has more cases of homicide in a year than West Papua, yet here, the occasional act of violence from the spectacularly misguided OPM or a military over reaction to any act of protest, leads to further, catastrophic, restrictions on the province. The upshot is Papuan people are restricted in their access to development, become disenfranchised and

even more disinterested in aiding what they see as an Indonesian-centric model of development. Unsurprisingly, the incidents of unrest only grow.

West Papua remains a treasure trove. Already it houses the world's largest goldmine and third largest copper mine, owned by American-run Freeport McMoRan, it is still the largest single taxpayer to the Indonesian government. The Government, you could argue, have a vested interest in keeping the region unstable and off limits. There is clear evidence of far more untapped natural resources within the state, not to mention the enormous timber and palm oil potential, all of which could be lost should the issue of Papuan independence ever rise again, and would certainly be curbed should any critical foreign journalist or environmental NGO be allowed unrestricted access to the province. Indonesia's current president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), is being feted internationally for his democratic moderation in his governance over Indonesia, the world's largest Islamic nation. Just as the United States supported Suharto's rise to Presidency in 1967, overlooking his rampant corruption due to his popular anti-communist stance, SBY seems able to ignore a generation of Papuans without impunity as he has ascended to power at a time when the majority of the Western world is deeply paranoid about the threat of terrorism from within potentially extremist Islamic communities. It is this financially and politically motivated model that activists argue is among the biggest barriers to development and social change within the province. Either way, Indonesia is going nowhere and Papuan development remains badly stilted.

It could be argued that with so few opportunities available to highland Papuans in such a discriminatory environment that a 'lack of motivation' is understandable, but that would be to take away from the efforts of the few who have made remarkable progress in spite of some of the cultural and physical barriers – Papuan Teachers, members of the clergy, the police, and increasingly within the army, civil service and charitable sector. All of which are of enormous importance in the building of a positive Papuan future, particularly as role models for an emerging Papuan community. Sadly though, the prevailing opinion among highland society is that both education and formalised employment is a waste of time. The few that have broken the mould report feeling ostracised from their village, their progressive intentions misinterpreted as a self-serving desire to conform to a system that their peers believe is only designed to oppress Papuans.

The majority of highland Papuans we met were preoccupied with the injustice of Indonesian occupation and the need to take arms in their fight for freedom; a fight that has raged on for over 50 years, cost many lives, attracted minimal international interest and made very little actual progress. Meanwhile, Indonesian influence has permeated almost every major town and village across the state and an entirely new generation of Papuans and Papuan born Indonesians have grown up together in Indonesian-run West Papua. As the distraction of the conflict continues Papuan highlanders fall only further behind. For many, the pursuit of freedom at all costs has replaced achievable long-term community goals. This, combined with a lack of compromise and effective communication on both sides of the conflict, leaves a depressing lack of resolution to the problems throughout the province.

Clearly West Papua is a region not without issues, but it is without doubt one of the world's most fascinating and enthralling places to travel. I hope that this report, and my project, could in some small way inspire others to visit and conduct vital contemporary research in the highlands. I have not lost hope for an amicable

solution in the future to the multitude of problems within the state. In spite of sweeping changes, Papua and its people remain special, worth protecting, understanding and appreciating, before it is too late.

5.0 Acknowledgements

This expedition would not have been possible without support from the following people and organisations.

Jamie, Helen and Julia and their colleagues at the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust who were outstanding in their support for the project throughout its course. The WCMT is an excellent institution that supports a wide variety of grassroots projects, I can't recommend it enough to anyone with a good idea or a passion in almost any subject.

Anton and all the fellows at the Transglobe Expedition Trust, who really got behind the project in the vital early stages and showed tremendous support for my aims and certainly living up to their reputation for backing the: "mad but marvellous".

Nick and his family at the Jeremy Willson Charitable Trust for their very generous donation. This organisation is absolutely unique in its motivation and the projects it supports, a real inspiration.

David and the fellows at the Frederick Soddy Trust for their very generous support for the study of the human geography of the region. I was honoured that despite not being affiliated with a University the Trust decided to offer vital funding.

Chris and Megan at Berghaus for organising the delivery of the Adventure Challenge Award and all of the people who voted online for the Trans Papua Expedition to win the award.

Chris for choosing the Trans Papua Expedition to receive the Mike Jones Award. I have said it already in this report but it is worth repeating, I felt humbled to be associated with Mike and his adventurous life.

Nancy at Alpaca for eventually succumbing to my begging emails and phone calls and loaning us two superb packrafts without which the first leg would have been even more impossible.

Steve, Gwen, Leona, Jamie, Will, James, Luke, Em, Kate, Melly, Gwyn, Rick, Nath from Zipline and all my mates at Indus Films and Gorilla. It is a real indication of the sort of company Indus is that they have loaned me equipment and editing space time and time again safe in the knowledge that they'll get zero return for their investment and that I'll probably break their cameras. Please don't fire me.

Andrew Price at dryad Bushcraft who showed real kindness in giving up a day of his time to try and teach Callum and I some of his survival gems. Showed outstanding patience in the face of astonishing incompetence as I tried to make a wooden peg with his mora frost knife.

Kirstin at Craghoppers for twice(!) replacing all my expedition clothing.

Tim at Aquapac for his waterproof housings, without which there would be no expedition film. I can confirm Aquapac housings can stand-up to a week of hammering on an ungraded white water rapid and come out intact the other side.

Philippe at BCB for providing an enormous amount of gear from their Bushcraft range and for inviting me down to play with all their toys at their survival cave in Cardiff.

Erin for her very generous discount at Expedition Foods and Nick for his generous discount at dd Hammocks.

A huge thank you to Papua and its people for all the wonderful memories and acts of kindness; the strangers that have put a roof over my head and passed the sweet potatoes and especially to all those people, who I simply can't name here, that took huge personal risks to ensure our safety for the sake of an adventure.

Finally I would like to thank my friends and family for their unending support. Especially my Mum and Dad, my brother and sister, and my close friends who were always right behind me every step of the way on this project. Lastly, I would like to thank Callum. What a journey mate.

6.0 Appendices

6.1 Expenditure

Expenditure	Cost	Total
<u>Transport</u>		
<u>Flights:</u>		
Will Millard – British Airways (Singapore return) booked Diversity 16/05/11	£723.53	
Callum Fester – British Airways (Singapore return) booked Diversity 07/09/11	£915.93	
Flight date adjustment charges, British Airways	£75	
Lion Air, Kuala Lumpur to Jayapura 02/12 2 pax	£412.71	
Trigana, Jayapura to Wamena 02/12 2 pax	£160	
Trigana, Wamena to Jayapura 04/12 2 pax	£160	
Garuda, Jayapura to Jakarta 04/12 1 pax	£185	

Lion Air, Jayapura to Jakarta 04/12 1 pax	£190	
Qatar Air, Jakarta to London, 04/12 return 1pax	£670	
Batavia Air, Jakarta to Jayapura, 04/12 1 pax	£185	
Trigana, Jayapura to Wamena 04/12 1 pax	£80	
Trigana, Wamena to Jayapura 05/12 1 pax	£80	
Merpati, Jayapura to Dekai 05/12 1 pax	£110	
Merpati, Timika to Jayapura 06/12 1 pax	£120	
Garuda, Jayapura to Makkasar 06/12 1 pax	£110	
Jetstar, Jakarta to Singapore 06/12 1 pax	£33	£4,210.17
<u>Excess charges:</u> Lion Air, Kuala Lumpur to Jayapura 02/12 (Incl. customs bribe)	£320	
Trigana, Jayapura/ Wamena, 02/12, 03/12, 04/12	£240	
Trigana, Jayapura to Wamena 04/12 1 pax	£75	
Trigana, Wamena to Jayapura 05/12 1 pax	£55	£690
<u>Shipping charges</u> Removing excess kit at expeditions conclusion to Singapore 06/12 (sadly had to be flown due to thefts stopping all shipping)	£240	£240
<u>Boats</u> Ferry – Agats to Timika	£55	

05/12 1 pax		
Tug boat – Dekai to Agats 05/12 (crew donation, no fee requested)	£250	£305
<u>Vehicles</u> 4 X 4 – Elelim to Wamena, 2 pax, with gear 04/12	£50	
4 x 4 – Wamena to Kurulu, 1 pax, 04/12	£20	
Local transport – chartered taxis to/from airports in Jayapura/Jakarta, local busses around Wamena	£140.55	£210.55
<u>Insurance</u> Photoguard	£348	
Voyager (2 pax)	£385.10	
Extensions and excess on claims (GoPro, Canon G12, Sony A1 damaged in Wara descent)	£87	£820.10
<u>Equipment Essentials</u> Alpacka Rafts - Import Tax Plus return postage to US	£110.83	£110.83
Kayak Paddles Ferg's Kayaks wellington	£219	£219
Expedition Foods -250 dry rations and postage	£1213.00	
Energy bars/sweets/salts	£280	
Vitamins	£45	£1538
Blacks - 2 x Aluminium bottles 5 x Drywash 4 x hiking socks	£51.71	£51.71
Technical- Gorilla Pod (Jacobs) Tripod (Jacobs) 4 x sandisk for Go Pro Sennheisser headphones GPS Sony - A1 Camera	£29.97 £69.99 £139.96 £34.99 £199.98 £800	

Mini dv tapes	£110	£1384.89
Dixons Travel – Canon G12 External Hard Drive Compact flash 8gb Sd cards 16gb Spare G12 Batteries	£628.39	£628.39
Basics- 2 x Whistles Snares Puritabs x 350 Alpkit Mats Mora Frost knives DD Hammocks and s/s Titanium pot Fishing tackle Rope Machete Head torch - Petzl	£5.40 £8.50 £50.76 £80 £27.99 £85.50 £35 £20 £8 £20 £40	£381.15
Communications – Sattelite phone Byru credit Mobile phone credit Spare batteries/charging adapter	£120 £40 £80	£240
<u>Replacements - second leg:</u> Go Pro 2 housing Batteries Anti-biotics (amoxiclav, ciprofloxacin) Painkillers (tramadol, co- codamol) Laxatives/Antihistamine Fungal Powder Electric and Gaffa tape Rehydration salts Zinc oxide tape and plasters Tape Stock Tripod head Lens cleaning kit/protection Laces/insoles Byru Satellite top up Food and salts	£27 £45 £65 £60 £12 £12 £13 £20 £8 £95 £14 £15 £22 £85 £65	£558
<u>Off route expenses</u> Hotels in Papua/Indo, before and after expedition: First leg – 8 nights		

Second leg – 9 nights	£340	
Off route food:	£275	
Kuala Lumpur – Visa Run 2 pax, final kit purchases 01/12	£320	
London – Visa run 04/12	£60	
Jakarta transit – 05/12	£65	
Jayapura – Singapore home transit 06/12	£84	
State passes/surat jalans/local access charges	£130	
		£1274
<u>Medical</u>		
Superdrug Travel: Innoculations and boosters	£288.08	
General first Aid replacements (bandages, dressings, plasters)	£35	
Painkillers/Antibiotics – full courses	£165	
		£488.08
<u>Enroute Expenses</u>		
Leg one:		
Village accommodation	£112	
Food	£140	
Good will	£75	
Leg two:		
Village Accommodation	£145	
Food	£165	
Good will	£78	
Gifts	£23	
Guides/Porters:		
Nethaniel 5 full days	£95	
2 pax, 2 half days	£20	
1 pax, 1 full day	£20	
Mac – advice and half day	£25	
		£898
<u>Wales bushcraft and Wilderness training</u>		
Callum return ticket		
London to Cardiff	£64	
Enterprise Car rental	£26	
Andrew Price – Dryad	£50 (for expenses)	

Bushcraft Fuel	£25	£165
		£14,412.87

6.2 Financial Support

Organisation	Donation	Total
Winston Churchill Memorial Trust	£6000	
	£3000 (04/12)	
Transglobe Expedition Trust	£2000	
Jeremy Willson Charitable Trust	£1000	
Berghaus	£1000	
Frederick Soddy Trust	£700	£13,700

6.3 GPS Points (in descending order)

Wamena S 04:05.568' E 138:56.783'

Leg One:

Pass Valley S 03:51.530' E 139:06.000'

Elelim S 03:46.207' E 139:22.876'

Wara Village S 03:49.441' E 139:29.512'

Advance position on Bogor River S 03:45.129' E 139:31.860'

Dabera S 03: 16.190' E 138:36.820'

Mamberamo River mouth S 01: 27. 798' E 137:53.889'

Leg Two:

Kurima S 04:13.071' E 139:02.236'

Wasangma S 04:14.628' E 139:04.075'

Lilibal S 04:21.507' E 139:08.708'

Soba S 04:20.800' E 139:10.740'

Oakpisik S 04:21.250 E 139:12.260'

Dekai S 04:52.000' E 139:27.000'

Agats S 05:32.300' E 138:08.020'

6.4 Recommended Reading

Anstice, Mark *First Contact* (Eye Books: 2004)

Flannery, Tim *Throwin Way Leg* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson: 1998)

Harrer, Heinrich *I come from the Stone Age* (EP Dutton: 1965)

Hitt, Russell *Cannibal Valley* (Lowe and Brydone: 1963)

Matthiessen, Peter *Under the Mountain Wall* (The Viking Press: 1962)

Meiselas, Susan *Encounters with the Dani* (Steidl: 2003)

Monbiot, George *Poisoned Arrows* (Green Books: 2003)

Muller, Kal *Indonesian New Guinea* (Periplus: 2001)

McCarthy, J.K *New Guinea: Our Nearest Neighbour* (Cheshire: 1971)

Pospisil, Leopold *The Kapauku Papuans* (Holt, Rinehart, Winston: 1963)

Shulman, Neville *Zen Explorations in Remotest New Guinea* (Tuttle: 1998)

Souther, Gavin, *New Guinea: The Last Unknown* (Angus and Robertson: 1965)

Start, Daniel *The Open Cage* (Harper Collins Publishers: 1997)