

# The Jalan Raya: Uncovering the secrets of Papua's trade on-foot

Final Report

Royal Geographical Society: Neville Shulman Challenge Award 2009

Expedition dates 13<sup>th</sup> Aug 09 – 26<sup>th</sup> Nov 09

West Papua (formerly Irian Jaya), Indonesia



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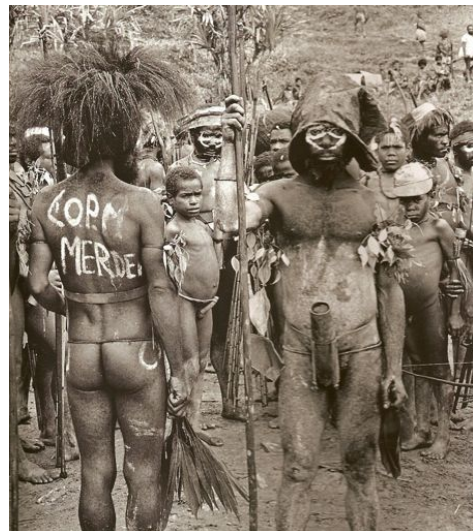
## Terms and Translations

**Jalan Raya** – The ‘Great Road’: A 400 km track stretching the length of the highlands of West Papua and the ancient site of inter-tribal on-foot trade between highland tribes. I adopted the term *Jalan Raya* from Tim Flannery, an Australian zoologist who operated in the Papuan region between 1981 and 1996. However, it is worth noting that there is no singular, sweeping name for the route within Papua, for this is a somewhat amorphous trade network. For the sake of simplicity, in this report, I shall refer to the network as the *Jalan Raya* or Great Road.

**West Papua** – The Eastern most province of Indonesia, Western half of the island of New Guinea, and location of this expedition. Formerly Irian Jaya, West Papua (also commonly referenced as Papua or Indonesian Papua) has been part of Indonesia since 1963. It is often confused with its independent neighbour PNG (Papua New Guinea) that forms the Eastern half of New Guinea (see map 1).

**RGS** – Royal Geographical Society <http://www.rgs.org/HomePage.htm>

**OPM** – Organasi Merdeka Papua: The indigenous ‘Free West Papua’ Movement. An unpredictable, largely unorganised militia that fights for West Papuan independence from Indonesia. Formed in the wake of the Indonesian takeover of the province from the Dutch via the United Nations in 1963, the OPM have been responsible for a number of attacks on Indonesian military posts and settlements. They can be encountered in groups into the hundreds, often armed with a mix of traditional bows and arrows and modern automatic weapons, and have been known to take Western hostages in the past<sup>1</sup>. Generally though, they hold Westerners in high regard due to a mix of positively received Western influences: action films, football, missionary work and Dutch colonialism coupled with the belief that the West generally supports their cause. My encounters with the OPM have varied from aggressive, mindless gangs operating extortion rackets in remote areas, to highly driven, politicised groups focused solely on independence. In all cases treat with respect, caution and common sense. Political conversations are best avoided. Military operations against the OPM vary in their location and intensity throughout the highlands. If you are attempting to access an area where they are active you are highly unlikely to receive a surat jalan (see below) and advice from previous expeditions, appropriate local contacts, and NGOs familiar with the area, is best sought before travel (see 4.1 Planning and Expedition Log 4.3.1 for a detailed break down of how I gained access and intelligence on this project).



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<sup>1</sup> See Daniel Start *The Open Cage* (1997: Harper Collins)

**Morning Star Flag** The 'Morning Star', the proposed National Flag of West Papua prior to the disputed unification with Indonesia, has become a symbol of resistance for members of the OPM. The ceremonious raising of the flag is illegal in West Papua and can result in a prison term. Its use for ceremonial purposes is allowed, but only in exceptional circumstances with expressed permission.



**Surat Jalan** a travel permit and permission issued initially from the central police station at your entry point to West Papua. Essentially the surat jalan is a piece of type-written paper containing your passport photograph, personal details and a list of areas you are allowed to visit in the region. Your surat jalan must be produced at every village or town you visit in any restricted area that contains a police and army post. Here you will receive a local stamp granting you permission to continue (or not). If you are going to conduct your project legally then you have to comply with this regulation. You must also visit both the army and the police posts in the town or village, or you could be followed, arrested and returned to the post you neglected to visit, as we were on one occasion on this project.

**Freeport Mine** is the largest gold mine and the third largest copper mine in the world. The American based corporation has been accused of environmental neglect and exploitation of its local labour force. However, the corporation's greatest criticism arises from allegations that locals were forcibly removed from their land and have never been adequately compensated. The mine is the largest foreign taxpayer in Indonesia, having contributed \$9.3 billion in tax between 1992 and 2009<sup>2</sup>, but many Papuan's argue they are yet to experience any equivalent rise in their living standards. The mine site and nearby town of Timika remain a major flashpoint of unrest.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/07/12/papuan-strike-halts-worlds-biggest-gold-mine.html>

## Abstract

This project investigated traditional inter-tribal trade in West Papua. My team retraced the course of an ancient foot-only trade route known locally as the 'Jalan Raya' or the 'Great Road' that stretches the length of the Papuan highlands – a distance over 400km, from the highland town of Wamena in the West to the Wissel Lakes region of Enarotali in the East.

We collected GPS data of the existing route, which in fact existed as a network of tracks linking the major tribal populations, and recorded on film the remaining evidence of long distance (multi-day) on-foot trade in natural salt. We also collected hair samples from domestic animals to provide raw materials for a joint Aberdeen and Durham University DNA and human migration study.<sup>3</sup>

The expedition's 'challenge' aim was to make the first unbroken, unaided crossing of West Papua's length. However, porter abandonment and political instability, resulting from the ongoing conflict between the Indonesian military and the OPM<sup>4</sup>, forced us to revise this ambition. We did fully explore the Jalan Raya of the Eastern and Western highland provinces of Jayawijaya and Paniai, and part of the central highland region, but I returned solo to make a limited survey of the route in the central province of Puncak Jaya (the site of the most intense fighting) to at least partially fulfill the expedition's challenge aim.

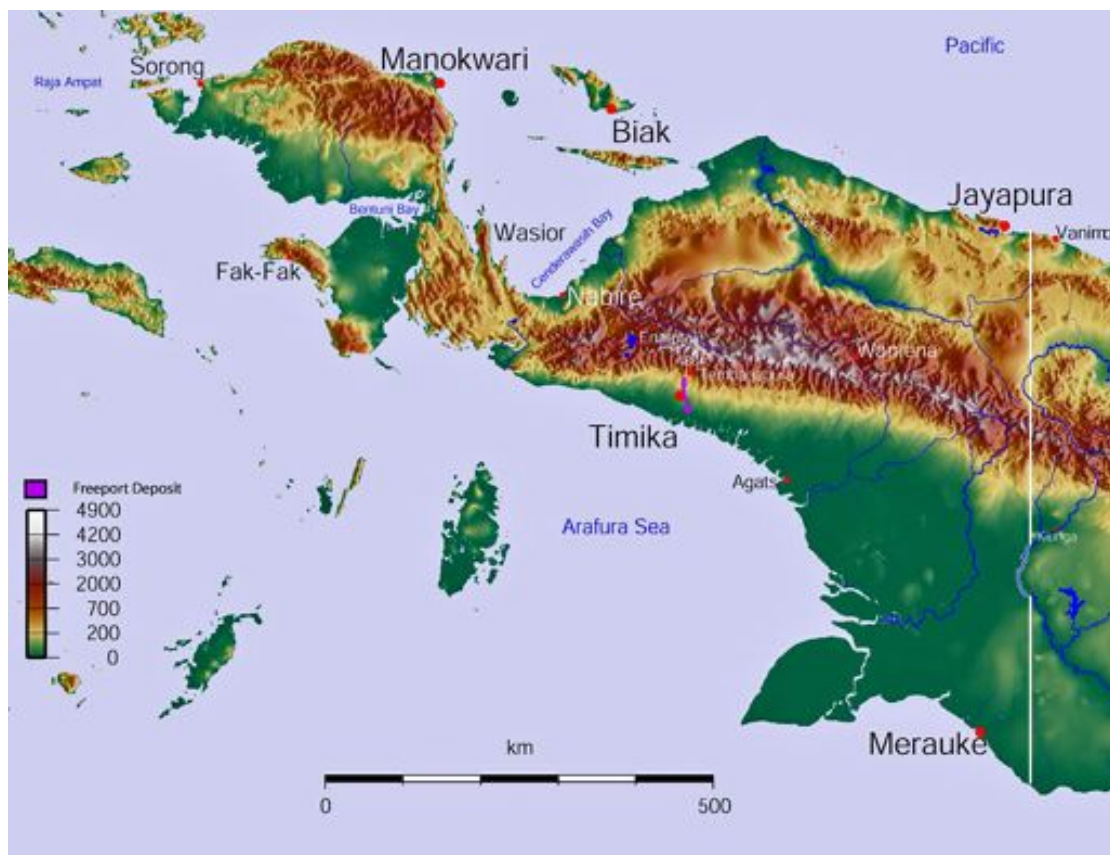


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<sup>3</sup> Web link for article online at 'PhysOrg.com' <http://www.physorg.com/news190898948.html>

<sup>4</sup> see 'Terms and Translations'

## 1.0 Background: Earlier studies and pilot expeditions of 2007 - 08



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 ultimately separated the island from Australia between 8,000 and 6,500 BC.

Flora and fauna are Australian in character. It has no predatory cats, monkeys or apes, common to the opposing side of the Wallace Line<sup>5</sup>, in neighbouring Southeast Asia.

New Guinea represents the perfect natural fortress. With the exception of Australia and Greenland, New Guinea is the largest island in the world, with the largest mountain range between the Himalaya and the Andes running the length of its backbone and huge swathes of intact rainforest and mangrove flanking either side –it is perhaps little surprise that its many unique wildlife species and tribal peoples remained



<sup>5</sup> 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 Russell Wallace, who noticed this clear dividing line during his travels through the East Indies in the 19th century.

largely unknown to the outside world till the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The island covers just 1% of the world's land area but harbours at least 5% of its animal and plant species, two-thirds of which are unique to New Guinea.



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. Its rugged terrain ensured certain groups would remain as isolated and unknown to each other as people living on different continents, causing a staggering number of languages to develop on the island – estimated to be up to 1,000 distinct languages, comprising one-sixth of the worlds total.

### 1.1 The Jalan Raya

I first came across a reference to the 'Jalan Raya' 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, that ultimately led to the expedition in 2009.

Historically the Jalan Raya 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 during the 1950s, first noticed the route:

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: organising the exchange of local goods for the first iron axes, dogs and machetes from the Asian merchants trading on the coastlines.



The Jalan Raya 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 used the route in an attempt to evangelise Dani warriors in the Baliem valley prior to the establishment of an airstrip in Wamena.<sup>6</sup>

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 undertake ritualized warfare. In addition, if Tim Flannery's supposition is correct, the Jalan Raya would indeed take its place among the world's longest running on-foot trade routes. Of course, the lack of a written history and modernisation within Papua in recent decades will make it extremely difficult for anyone to accurately record the precise length of time this route has been active, however there is evidence to suggest that Sri Lankan Princes were adorning themselves with crowns made from New Guinea's birds of paradise in the sixteenth century, and even before that it seems likely that the Chinese were consuming New Guinean nutmeg.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Russell T. Hitt *Cannibal Valley* p. 73 (1962: Lowe and Brydone)

<sup>7</sup> Tim Flannery *Throwim Way Leg* p.3 (1998: Weidenfeld and Nicolson)



**Map 2 - West Papuan Highlands – Jalan Raya and Major Tribal Groups**

## **1.2 Pilot expeditions and research 2007 – 08**

I remained in West Papua for one year through 2007 and into 2008. During this time I developed language and practical skills relevant to a larger project and conducted a number of pilot expeditions throughout the region. It was only by fully committing to life in West Papua during this time that I was able to create a platform for the resultant successes of 2009: Immersing myself in the local tribal cultures gave me the fundamental knowledge I required to negotiate the complex cultural sensibilities of the highlands, and afforded me access to the local contacts I would need to ensure safe passage in later projects. Although I appreciate it is not possible for most people intending to conduct expeditions in Papua to stay for a year prior to their start date, I would strongly recommend a thorough recce ahead of any project that takes the time to foster local relationships and trust in the area you intend to work.

During 2007/08 I discovered that although the Jalan Raya was largely disused in the well-contacted areas around Wamena and Enarotali, two towns placed at the extremities of the mountain range, many believed is still functioned in the remoter central regions. It became clear that the new generation of Papuan highlanders, particularly those born in the second generation since the Indonesian take over, were largely ignorant to both the route and long distance on-foot trading. However, tribal elders still spoke fondly of the days they walked their pigs from the notorious pig specialist Dani regions of the East to the far West and beyond.

Conducting pilot expeditions in late 2007 and early 2008 in both the far East and West of the highland range confirmed the existence of a linking path of sorts, but it was unclear whether the Jalan Raya still functioned as a trading path in the remote central highland regions.

The work of American anthropologist Leopold Pospisil, mentioned above, went a long way to filling in gaps in my historical knowledge. His work, conducted before the wide-sweeping shift from tradition in the years just before Indonesian and missionary involvement, allowed me a glimpse into the various economic functions of the distinctly different Tribal societies. This, combined with the anecdotal and primary evidence from the tribal elders, justified a larger project to attempt to rediscover the Jalan Raya and record any remaining evidence of long distance on foot trade.

### **1.3 Aims in 2009**

With the ancient function of the Jalan Raya clearly defined the 2009 expedition aims took shape. I decided to pursue the three following objectives:

- GPS map the remaining route of the Jalan Raya
- Record using camera and film any surviving evidence of intertribal long distance trade on-foot
- Make the first unbroken crossing of West Papua's highlands

### **1.4 Predictable obstacles**

I knew from my 2007-08 experiences that we would face several obstacles to achieving the aims above:

- 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 – leaving the Jalan Raya redundant and potentially very difficult to locate.
- Porter abandonment and local misunderstanding: Despite walking with trusted Papuan friends, abandonment had become a staple of all my expeditions in 2007-08. It was understandably difficult to convince local people that a Western man would choose to walk when he could easily afford a truck or plane. This led to suspicion and inevitable demands for outrageous sums of money, and in extreme cases I was a target of theft and even abandonment.
- Access, was and remains to be, a major issue. The conflict between the Indonesian military and the OPM has resulted in a number of accusations of Human Rights abuses, the closure of the majority of the highlands to outsiders, a total ban on all foreign journalists and severe restrictions on travel to the region. Just obtaining accurate maps can be a major headache, let alone negotiating permits, known locally as a 'surat jalan' to enter the remotest regions.
- Major natural obstacles: vast uninhabited areas, river crossings, mountain passes, a multitude of climates (it can be both hot/humid and chilly in the highlands, rains are also quite unpredictable) and some 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.

I shall describe in much greater detail in section 4.0 how we reduced some of the risks outlined above and indeed, how we adapted to some of the unforeseen obstacles during the expedition itself.

## **2.0 Sponsorship**

Gaining sponsorship for this expedition seemed particularly difficult at first. 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. We required sponsors that were both understanding of this fact and shared our interest in the aims of the project.

We were very fortunate to find sponsorship through the award of the RGS *Neville Shulman Challenge Award*. Not only did the award cover our expedition costs but it provided access to the wealth of resources at the RGS itself and greatly boosted our chances of gaining further equipment sponsorship. Simply, without the Award, the expedition would not have been possible.

Further sponsorship of expedition equipment was found through independent documentary production company Indus films ([www.indusfilms.com](http://www.indusfilms.com)) who kindly donated cameras, film and necessary chargers, and outdoor clothing company Craghoppers ([www.craghoppers.com](http://www.craghoppers.com)) who provided all the clothing for our team members.

The project was also affiliated with a joint Durham and Aberdeen University study to determine the pattern of ancient human migration in New Guinea through the study of the DNA of domestic animals.<sup>2</sup> Although we took part in this entirely voluntarily, a happy, unforeseen, side effect of collecting animal hair samples for the project was the clearly non-political legitimacy it afforded the project. There were times when it was difficult to convince officials and locals of our simple aim to uncover the Jalan Raya, as a result we were sometimes treated with suspicion. The collection of animal hair gave us a simple and very convenient side-aim to fall back on – and a great visual ‘show and tell’ whenever I struggled to make conversation!<sup>8</sup>

## **3.0 Team Members**

A small lightweight expedition was key to our success. Originally I had intended to have three core team members: Will Millard (Expedition Leader), Callum Fester (Medic and Logistics) and Heron (Local linguistics and Guiding). However, illness to Heron in the week prior to our start date made it impossible for him to join us.

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<sup>8</sup> Although on one occasion in a village hit particularly badly by a virus transmitted in pigs we were unable to take samples as locals believed their animals had been infected deliberately by outsiders and refused to allow us access to their animals.

I intended to form our own chain of intertribal portering and guiding: travelling for a maximum of one week with people local to the area to minimise navigational error and misunderstanding, but also to ensure that tribal groups from across the highlands would benefit financially from our project.

#### **4.0 The Jalan Raya: Introduction to the 2009 Expedition Report**

The full report of the 2009 expedition will be comprised of three parts: the preliminary preparations we 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.

#### **4.1 Planning**

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. 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. 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 specializing in helicopter rescue.<sup>9</sup> 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 jeopardize their local highland contacts should we have problems with the authorities.

Emergency Evacuation: 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

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 2 for full GPS points of airstrips

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 naive 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 organization (Helimission) has access to a helicopter, all others will require that you make it at least to an airstrip.

Local and International Non-governmental Organisations: An invaluable source of information and logistical contacts prior to undertaking the expedition, the handful of NGOs working in West Papua were fundamental to the success of our project.

At the time of writing unicef, Medecins Du Monde and The Clinton Foundation were all active in the state. Again, I was fortunate to have good contacts in these organisations from time spent in the state through 2007/8, but the high turnover of staff in these positions means that any contacts in the aid sector will become redundant fast. However, they are a great source of local, on the ground, non-biased information. Medecins Du Monde helped us find transportation and provided some really useful emergency contacts, unicef helped me with security information and gave us access to some excellent medical intelligence regarding outbreaks of cholera and diarrhea in the highlands and Ham Papua were a valuable source of local highland Papuan contacts and community leaders. 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 good will 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. Before setting off I estimated we would need roughly £3800, equating to 53 million Indonesian rupiah in cash for on-route expenses.<sup>10</sup> As it was highly unlikely that the local guides and porters we intended to employ would be carrying change of any description I knew we would have to get all of this cash in small denominations, ultimately equating for about two shoe boxes full of rupiah.

Having crossed the obvious hurdle of withdrawing this amount of money from the local banks<sup>11</sup> we endeavored to break the money up into 1 million rupiah portions and split it between myself and Callum. 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.

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<sup>10</sup> See 'Appendices' for full breakdown of expenses.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

Specialist Kit: In addition to standard expedition essentials we found the following were useful additions to our equipment:

- Solar panels – vital for charging cameras and our GPS – access to electricity in the highlands is highly unlikely outside of the populous areas. Small, durable solar panels are widely available online with a range of adaptors.
- 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.
- Rolling tobacco and pencils – both well worth considering as highly appreciated gifts.
- Flip-flops – great relief from heavy, wet walking boots and extremely lightweight.
- 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 cheaper and hardier than cards and don't necessitate a laptop to upload. I also carried a lightweight tripod and a monopod (which doubled as a walking stick).
- River crossing kit – a rope of 20 meters in length (or as long as you can manage), waterproof dry bags serviceable as floats and a good quality carabineer are essential for the numerous river crossings in Papua.
- Sweet potatoes – be prepared to carry raw sweet potatoes. Dry expedition rations are very unpopular among most local porters/guides.
- 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.
- Vitamin tablets – our diet was limited almost exclusively to sweet potatoes and noodles,<sup>13</sup> so having a lightweight multi-vitamin supplement is something I would highly recommend.

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 should we be deserted at any stage of the trip. 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 become totally self-sufficient.

Language: My experience in Papua prior to this expedition 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 with 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. I chose to

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<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> We did also have some emergency ration packs but found them too heavy to carry as a staple food source.

enhance my language skills further by taking a language course prior to my departure at SOAS (School of Oriental and Asian Studies) in London.

## 4.2 The Pig

In homage to the route's trading past we decided to take a small pig with us. This may sound ridiculous, and indeed I would not go so far as to recommend this addition to a team visiting Papua, however, we felt that it would help significantly reduce misunderstandings experienced in the past (see 1.4) by affording us a simple explanation for our presence on the Jalan Raya.

Pigs are a huge status symbol in Papua. A man with a lot of pigs will have a lot of wives and land and will probably be a chief or a headman, or at least very high in the social hierarchy. We felt the pig would help legitimise us in the eyes of the locals.

We chose a small pig from the market at Wamena that was both domesticated and happy on solids. It adapted very quickly to expedition life, and having been reared in a noken sack since birth it was happy to be carried.



## 4.3 The Expedition Diary

The following is a chronological account of the expedition, broken down into three sections:

- 13<sup>th</sup> August till 24<sup>th</sup> September 2009 – the build-up in-country and the first leg of the expedition between Wamena and Tiom, within the state of Jayawijaya.
- 25<sup>th</sup> September till 1<sup>st</sup> October 2009 – The second leg of the expedition between Tiom and Ilu, entering the state of Puncak Jaya.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> October till 18<sup>th</sup> October 2009 – The third leg of the expedition between Enarotali and Wandai, within the state of Paniai, and 14<sup>th</sup> till 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2009 – in Mulia, Puncak Jaya and returning again to Wamena, Jayawijaya.

Compiled from my diaries and video records of the expedition I hope this provides an insight into our project and acts as something of a guide to future studies in the region. I shall try and stick as closely to the exact experiential account as possible, but at points, where we were 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.

#### **4.3.1 First Leg – 13<sup>th</sup> August till 25<sup>th</sup> September 2009**

##### 13<sup>th</sup> August: Arrival in Indonesia

Expedition leader Will Millard arrived in Indonesia on the 13<sup>th</sup> August for one month of reconnaissance and to reestablish the local and NGO contacts outlined in section 4.1.

Initial entry was made at Jakarta International Airport where British Nationals are among the nations granted a 30-day visa on arrival, for a fee. It is worth noting that proof of onward travel out of Indonesia, within the 30-day period, is required to apply for the visa.

My plan was to spend 30 days setting up the expedition within Papua itself, then cross the border by land to Papua New Guinea where I could renew my visa for a further 60 days at the Indonesian embassy located in Vanimo. It was understandably difficult to 'prove' this itinerary to the visa official at the airport in Jakarta as the Vanimo crossing is made on-foot, therefore I did not have any documentary evidence of my onward journey and it took some time to explain my situation. Should you wish to avoid this complication I would recommend the purchase of a cheap ticket from Jakarta to Singapore with a low cost airline like 'Air Asia' (usually less than £20), so you have some 'proof' of an onward journey even if this is not your intended itinerary.

In Jakarta, I spent a few days purchasing expedition essentials and arranging my onward travel. It is, in general, cheaper to purchase internal flights to West Papua from within Indonesia.

##### 14<sup>th</sup> August till 17<sup>th</sup> September: Establishing contacts, Gaining permissions

Mid-August meetings with local Papuan contacts reveal an unstable security situation in the build up to the Anniversary of the date that was formally proposed by the United Nations for Papuan independence. Allegedly the Morning Star Flag<sup>14</sup> was raised by students in Abepura (a town local to Jayapura) on the date of my arrival in West Papua. This led to shootings by the military that saw the "rebels" disperse in nearby forests without any killings. A heavy military presence remains and I delay my travel to the highlands till the date has passed without incident.

Informal meetings with International NGOs in Jayapura go very well, providing valuable logistical, security and terrain advice regarding the Puncak Jaya region surrounding the highland village of Mulia in the central highlands. All express their concerns about formally associating themselves with expedition projects that could easily be misinterpreted by the Indonesian military. One officer mentions they were

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<sup>14</sup> see 'Terms and Translations'

recently hassled by the military in Mulia. The military believed a documentary was about to emerge on Western networks discrediting the Indonesians and believed their organisation were hiding journalists. The Clinton Foundation have just been forced out of West Papua entirely with very little warning, despite quadrupling the number of HIV/AIDS screenings in the highland town of Wamena, for their alleged associations with separatist activity.

Meetings at Polres (the Central Jayapuran Police Station), to gain all the locations I require on my surat jalan, are met with mixed success. I am initially warned to only avoid the flashpoint site of Timika and any part of the state that is in close proximity with the Freeport mine<sup>15</sup>. However, two weeks later on the 11<sup>th</sup> September, this is retracted, and I am informed that the entire central state of Puncak Jaya is also potentially off. Military action against OPM separatist activity is given as the reason for the change in access privileges; however, I am recommended to try negotiating with local police and military posts on a case-by-case basis. As with previous projects, it is increasingly clear that communications between police and army posts in opposite districts is very limited and the scale and ferocity of military operations are constantly fluctuating. I decide to give ourselves the best possible chance of completing the project we must proceed with the plan to leave from Wamena, where we have permission, and head towards Tiom, on the border of Puncak Jaya, where I can re-consult the military and hopefully gain local permission on the day - A risky endeavor but still within the law as long as we do not stray into Puncak Jaya without permission. At this stage we only had formal permission to conduct the project within Jayawijaya and Paniai provinces only, roughly the first and final thirds of the project area.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> August I flew to Wamena in the highlands to establish both local and Missionary contacts. I was hoping to form an evacuation plan and to take advantage of the Missionaries superior knowledge of highland airstrips along the route. Helimission and MAF, respectively Dutch and American run organisations, were extremely reluctant to provide any sort of aid or form any association, formal or informal, with the project. Eventually, after a couple of trust building meetings I was able to gain vital GPS co-ordinates for air-strips the route<sup>16</sup>. But both MAF and Helimission were reluctant to have any further association with the project (see section 4.1 'emergency evacuation'). The GPS co-ordinates were vital to our route finding as the air-strips fell in the centre of the major tribal communities we intended to visit. It was clear though, that if we encountered any health problems we were probably on our own.

Arranging local Porters and Guides was always going to be a major problem. My Dani guide from 2007/08 had an infection on his arm that required at least a one-month course of antibiotics. His suggestions as replacements were all friends of his - locals with no experience of distance walking or knowledge of the connecting routes to the Jalan Raya – they all agreed to join us on the expedition but it later became clear that they were actually agreeing as they did not want to say 'no' and not because

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<sup>15</sup> see 'Terms and Translations'

<sup>16</sup> see Appendices 2

they had any intention of coming<sup>17</sup>. It was not till the night before we were due to leave that we found two suitable guides through a recommendation via internet café cum hiking hub: 'Papua.com', located in the centre of Wamena. The Dani pair, Ronnie and Les, claimed to know the route we planned to take. However, as I would later discover this was not the case and I was forced to employ one further guide at the start of the second day of the expedition.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> September I was finally issued a visa for Papua New Guinea (PNG). I was getting towards the end of my initial 30-day tourist visa and needed to cross the international border to have a 60-day visa issued from the Indonesian consulate in Vanimo. I have made this crossing several times; it is a far cheaper option than flying to Singapore, however, it has never been straightforward. The official at the PNG embassy in Jayapura realises that many people are going to PNG on Indonesian embassy visa runs and tries to charge foreigners for the more expensive 'Business' visas. To obtain a tourist visa you must prove you are visiting PNG as a tourist – Vanimo has excellent surfing and birdwatching opportunities – it is worth putting this in writing, in Indonesian, on application for the tourist visa. Hopefully things have changed since the time of writing, but you should be aware of this corrupt practice if you intend to renew visas in PNG. On the border of PNG-West Papua, I was almost sent back to the Indonesian Embassy in Jayapura as I was trying to leave the country on a 30 day 'visa on arrival' – this was apparently a 'Category B' visa and therefore ineligible for this particular border crossing. Apparently, if I had had a 60 or 30-day pre-issued visa from an Indonesian embassy in a foreign country then this 'complication' apparently would not have occurred. Luckily, the official eventually let me pass through after some persuasion and the application for the 60-day visa at Vanimo's Indonesian embassy was swift and extremely efficient.

The final problem that needed attention came shortly after members of the separatist OPM wing operating in Wamena discovered our plans. They were running something of an extortion racket in the isolated valley we intended to enter between Lake Habbema and Ilaga. We were not allowed to make contact face-to-face and communicated via a third party. They requested 10 million rupiah and insisted we take two of their own local guides to continue. This was impossible for us on the budget we were on. Again, we decided to take a calculated risk. We were to be the first foreigners into this almost uninhabited area for over 25 years, and, as we had not met the OPM delegates face-to-face, we decided to tell our third party contact that we would consider their request for a few days, but actually just left early the following morning. In our opinion, if the valley really was as remote as many believed, it seemed highly unlikely that they would leave Wamena to look for us, and in my experience, paying money for these unofficial passes perpetuates an essentially corrupt system and inevitably leads to even more payments down the line. In this instance, our strategy was correct.

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<sup>17</sup> It is worth being aware of this face-saving technique, many times I've been told one thing only for another to happen – particularly with directions. Many believe it is better to give a positive answer, whether correct or not, than to say 'no' or 'I don't know'.

17<sup>th</sup> September

We set out from Wamena, intending to walk to Lake Habbema and relocate a small path that ran behind the Lake into a large valley that ran out towards Ilaga. I believed this was the historic location of the Jalan Raya and hoped to find signs of its contemporary use as an on-foot trade route.



Map 3 - The project area for the first and second leg. Wamena and the Dani Baliem valley is in blue, the brown line denotes the pathway we took, the broken brown line denotes possible alternative routes on the Jalan Raya.

Wamena is located in the centre of the Baliem valley (marked in blue lines on Maps 2 and 3). The whole valley is flat, densely populated and cultivated, with sharp almost vertical rock faces and mountains surrounding the area on all sides. American millionaire Richard Archbold first discovered the Baliem in 1938. His team pulled off a daring landing on Lake Habbema in a Catalina flying boat and then walked with 105 men and 27 tones of supplies over 21 days down to the valley. Here the team would discover a population of over 50,000 Dani tribes people – one of the largest single discovery of indigenous tribes people in history.



Wamena has since modernised faster than any other highland town in West Papua. Very much the highland tourist centre, the simple grid town has several hotels, some tour operators and a couple of banks – but outside of the steep valley walls sheltering the town, development and evidence of outside influence decreases drastically.

As we followed the path up out of the valley in the direction of Lake Habbema, Dani populations became sparse and highland forest and scrub dominated the landscape.

The route had changed considerably since my pilot expeditions in the region during 2008. Prolific logging in the montane forests around the Baliem had stripped large swathes of the forest bare. There was plenty of activity around the timber industry, both formal and informal, with Dani men and boys carrying wood from the forests for sale in the expanding Baliem. In just one year, I approximated 5 square miles had been cleared with axes and chainsaws. The path that we followed was very good, wide and well used, built to accommodate trucks and lorries in the timber industry. It steadily climbed for the entire first day, weaving between patches of forest and occasional villages.

The heat was searing in spite of the altitude, and with so little forest left there was scant shade. Having started strongly, a lack of water and overexertion brought on from my eagerness to get started caused me to suffer badly from heat exhaustion. By 2pm I was quite badly sick and felt very faint, so I decided to cut the day short.

We stayed in one of the last Dani villages en-route to Lake Habbema. A small cluster of wood huts and 'honnais': small conical huts of wood and thatched roofing, favoured by most Papuan highland tribes.



The village contained only women and children as the men were employed in casual labour positions in Wamena. The women were caring for the children, the sweet potato fields, the pigs and the chickens of the village, just as they would have in the pre-contact years, but the men's total employment in the Baliem marked a profound cultural change. 50 years ago this village would have contained both men and women. The men would have been responsible for fence building, the local political decisions and when necessary, warfare. They certainly would not have been able to freely work in the Dani Baliem, and would most probably have been killed for entering Dani valley land without permission – as expressed by the tribes people Richard Archbold met during the first exploration of the region in 1938.

After just one day on the trail it became clear that neither Ronnie nor Ness, our Wamena guides, knew where they were going. They were used to taking tourists on a well-trodden trekking loop around the Baliem and Pyramid. They wanted to return once we had made it to Lake Habbema, and rejoin the path they knew towards Pyramid, immediately taking us away from the Jalan Raya and ultimately landing us back at our starting point in Wamena. This was immensely frustrating, but as I knew little about the small path leading from the Lake towards Ilaga and Tiom I felt we had little choice but to return towards Pyramid.

## 18<sup>th</sup> September

Having been badly ripped off by the ladies of the village who demanded we pay 250,000 Rupiah for our stay, we did have a real piece of luck. As we took a break by a stream we met Les, a Lani tribesman who knew the path from Lake Habbema to Tiom. I immediately employed him as a third guide, not only benefitting from his knowledge of the route but significantly easing our collective loads, ensuring we made much better progress on the second day.

## 19<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> September

We had made it to the banks of Lake Habbema by the third day. The last of the villages connected to the Baliem were well behind us now and as we left the logging track leading to the Lake the terrain became much harsher. The track was much smaller and harder to follow. We were well away from the logging area now and as the thin path cut its way through the highland gorse and jurassic tree ferns we all suffered from inevitable cuts and scratches.



It was much cooler at the higher altitude and we walked in a relentless rain shadow, following the path along the West Baliem River at the bottom of a wide valley that ran to Ilaga in Puncak Jaya (see Map 2).

It became clear that Ronnie and Ness had never intended to walk this far from Wamena despite their original assurances, and that Les's knowledge of the route was in fact based on a conversation with his Father. Luckily we did have GPS coordinates for Tiom, so Callum and I were able to determine the rough direction.

The guide's poor knowledge of the path and the lack of human contact since entering the valley was a sure indication that long distance on-foot trade was no longer the primary source of goods for this region. In fact, we discovered deserted villages, abandoned huts, (which we slept in) and broken bridges as we followed the increasingly worsening path - suggesting a mass migration to the hub town of Wamena had also occurred in this area.

Morale among the guides dipped to an all time low. The adverse walking conditions and arguments regarding routing had caused a bad atmosphere to develop between the local guides. Ness in particular had been problematic from day one, refusing to carry his fair share of the load, not sharing food with the others and generally creating a bad atmosphere with his miserable attitude. However, the day before we eventually made it to Tiom provided an unlikely opportunity for a team building exercise: a hair-raising crossing of the swollen West Baliem River with ropes and dry bags used as flotation sacks, seemed to bring us all back together again.

We did not have enough food supplies for ourselves, or for the pig, to continue the long walk up the valley to Ilaga and having finally located the path to Tiom we decided to take the opportunity to re-supply and employ a new set of guides.

The climb out of the valley to Tiom was extremely difficult: we were met with thick forest and a series of precipitous cliff traverses leading to adjoining crags that ultimately descended to the Lani town. Fatigue only served to heighten the dangers and it took fairly intense concentration to ensure safe passage.

### 24<sup>th</sup> September

Tiom was a relatively modern highland town spreading out from a central square with a cluster of shops, police and army posts and a direct linking road to Wamena.



We were able to allow Ronnie, Les and Ness to travel back to Wamena and found able replacements with two local boys, one of whom was the son of the local politician we were staying with at the time. They were extremely enthusiastic at the time, claiming they knew the route all the way to Enarotali – however experience taught us that this was very unlikely to be the case.

We had learnt some valuable lessons during the first week on the trail: heat exhaustion was a major issue, even at this altitude we would have to ensure that in future we drank plenty and took regular breaks, and our diet, comprising mostly of noodles, had become quite unpalatable, so we would try to supplement it with meals of rice, fruit and any meat or fish whenever we were in any populated area.

The Indonesian army and police were very welcoming in Tiom. It seemed to be devoid of the paranoia and mistrust that prevails in many other parts of Papua. I was concerned we might be turned back at this point due to the concerns expressed in Jayapuran Polres prior to our departure but instead we received the blessing to carry on into Puncak Jaya from the local chief of Police.

### **4.3.2 Second Leg – 25<sup>th</sup> September till 1<sup>st</sup> October 2009**

#### 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> September

The section of the Jalan Raya between Tiom and Ilu (see Map 3) proved to be the most testing of the entire expedition.

Before we had even managed to leave the populations of the Tiom valley, a walk of less than 24 hours with a night in a local hut, we had lost five sets of guides. It had been easy walking along the well-trodden paths linking the Lani populations around

Tiom and there was no indication anyone was struggling in the conditions. It was, in many ways, easy money for our guides. But it seemed that no one in this area, who was available to help guide, had any experience of walking any distance at all. Each new guide seemed eager at first, and then immediately gave up after a few hours walking. It was extremely frustrating. We were discovering that, due to our time constraints, we were unable to sufficiently trial new guides and that the majority of people who were available to help us without any notice were, unsurprisingly, largely inexperienced and unemployed.

At the very edge of Tiom territory we managed to persuade two woodsmen to help us carry our bags. Both were extremely muscular and very capable, climbing at real pace into the thickly forested slopes leading away from Tiom and towards Ilu.

Having camped the night in our tents in a small clearing in the thick forest one of our new guides approached to ask for more money – 400,000 rupiah (£28) each to guide us for, what they believed was, just a two day walk to Ilu. This placed us in a difficult position. We were already paying 300,000 rupiah, three times over the going-rate of 100,000 rupiah per day, which they had gleefully accepted the previous afternoon. I felt that paying even more now could result in a situation where the requests for more money could be never-ending. The exchange I had with the guide was polite and respectful but there was no doubt it created instant tension in the team. They did little to help break down our camp or find water for the morning's walk.

We set off, climbing a mud track again in thick forest and entered one of the most remote mountain passes in the highlands. Our two guides strode ahead that morning and after an hour their voices were extremely faint. We both suspected the worst and when we eventually arrived in a small forest clearing towards the summit of the hill it was clear we had been abandoned.

It was mid-day on the 27<sup>th</sup> September. The two guides had taken our food, the food for the pig (raw sweet potatoes and sugar cane) and some of our clothing. They had left the bags they had been carrying, staked the pig in its bag high off the ground and carved an unintelligible message into the floor.

I climbed alone to the top of the hill where the trees were sparse and tried to gauge our location. It was immediately clear that Ilu was not a two-day walk away. As you can see from the picture to the right, we were at the top of a hill in the centre of a large forest.



We had two realistic options at this stage. Return three days to Tiom, or continue in the direction of Ilu, marked on our GPS as a little over 10 miles away. The 10 mile reading was an 'as the crow flies' line from where we were stood – taking in neither the terrain, the winding nature of the path, nor the undulation of the land. We had so far been travelling at a pace that



reliable knocked 3 miles a day off our GPS. If we continued at that speed we could estimate arrival in Ilu a little over three days from where we stood. It seemed worth continuing, neither of us wished to return to Tiom, which would also take three days and result in a severe delay to the progress of the expedition. Also, prior to the abandonment, the guides had inferred there was a small village a day's walk away. The path was small but clear, we were feeling strong and we knew there were plenty of natural water sources in the forest.

We were forced to make some very difficult decisions over our kit. The guides had actually stolen very little, but we knew it was not possible to continue without ditching some of the gear – we were, after all, equipped for a four-man team. We filled the two spare rucksacks with our stoves and fuel (warm food was a necessity we could manage without), all the tobacco we had intended to give as gifts to local people (they had created tension and jealousy), our spare tent (we were now effectively a two man team) and quite a bit of our extensive medical kit (probably the most difficult to leave behind, but as Callum pointed out, if we were to find ourselves in a situation where we required all three heavy duty dressings it was unlikely we would make it out of the forest anyway.)

Despite these measures our individual rucksacks still contained 30kg of kit each, ensuring progress would be slow, but safe.

After so many days of problems with local guides, it was bizarrely something of a relief to be heading out alone, no longer fearing abandonment.

### 28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> September

Abandonment forced us to really sharpen up. We began noting every possible, water source, river crossing, camping spot, and possible deviation in the path that could signal a return to civilisation.

It ultimately took us four days of walking alone and three nights of forest camping to find the start of the Yani/Yalli land heading to the hub-town of Ilu.

There were some very difficult moments. At one stage we really struggled to find clean water high above the tree line on a mountain pass, and as the days dragged on it became increasingly clear that we were slowing down (on the second day we managed to knock only 2.15 miles off our target to Ilu). We started to save our energy where possible, conscious of our lack of nutrition, and spoke only when necessary, choosing instead to concentrate our efforts on the track. But I still made one bad navigation error, losing the path entirely on day three just after we had crossed a wide river: instead of walking both up and downstream to check for the emerging route on the far bank, I became convinced that it was downstream, losing us a precious hour.

We were both very concerned throughout this time that one of us would fall sick or get injured. Now, with no extra people, our safety net was gone and anyone

incapable of walking on would have to be left alone whilst the other went on for help.

We met no one on the trail throughout the days we walked. It was yet another sign that the Jalan Raya was a dying route servicing an extinct tradition of long distance on-foot trade. The only trading walkers we had met so far on the project were a group of women, back near Tiom, who had walked for just two days to the market hub. After just two weeks of walking it had become clear that people were not really leaving the populated valleys that surrounded the hubs of Wamena, Tiom and Ilu. Simply put, there was not the need. Enhanced transport links with airstrips and the occasional roads had negated the need to trade on-foot with tribes from other territories. Instead, products from across Indonesia were flown or driven almost to the doorstep of the villages and traded by Indonesians from shops established in the traditional highland market towns.

By the fourth day of walking solo we were weak, especially the pig, which I had been carrying in the noken sack since our abandonment. When I gave it its daily bath, it was clearly very malnourished and dehydrated – gleaning both its nutrition and fluids from the raw vegetables stolen by our previous guides. We moved as quickly as we possibly could for the remainder of the day and eventually burst into a village at the top of Ilu valley in the late afternoon. Sadly, the pig died in my arms the moment we found a field of sweet potatoes.

It was a devastating blow to the expedition. Although we both knew that had the pig's food not been stolen it would have lived, I still knew I was ultimately responsible for its inclusion on the expedition (see section 4.2) and therefore the blame for its death from dehydration and starvation rested with me.

Having not seen people for several days we were suddenly surrounded by the members of the village. I negotiated guides to carry our bags and lead us down to Ilu in exchange for the pig.

### 30<sup>th</sup> September

We arrived in Ilu, in the state of Puncak Jaya, weak and very fatigued. We had almost sprinted the remaining five miles to Ilu to keep pace with our new guides as they led us along a wide freshly laid gravel road intending to link up Ilu with the other major towns in Puncak Jaya. The valley was well-populated and, as with Tiom and the Baliem, intensely cultivated by local women tending to their crops of sweet potato and taro.

The town of Ilu was slightly larger than Tiom but had characteristics similar to all highland hubs: an air-strip, a central market with a Papuan and Indonesian market, a police post, school and military post.

After we had devoured our first proper meal for days we were ushered into the local military post, where we immediately realised we were deeply unwelcome.

We were interrogated by the chief of police, chief of the Military police, chief of Army Intelligence and the Territorial Commander, for several hours, during which time we were accused of being illegal journalists and OPM sympathisers.

In spite of the passes we had received from the military in Tiom, stating our clear permission to continue to Ilu, we were being charged with entering the state of Puncak Jaya illegally. The military and the police informed us that since December they had, in fact, been engaging with the OPM on an almost weekly basis. They blamed Dutch journalists for stirring up trouble the previous year, after they had entered illegally to make a film about the OPM and allegedly promised them weapons, food, and sensationally, 'freedom', in exchange for permission to film.

Eventually we were let off with a caution, but only because of their own embarrassment at the break down of communication that had clearly occurred with the military post in Tiom. However, we could not continue on to Mulia and were warned off entering Puncak Jaya again. We were told in no uncertain terms that we would be leaving on the very first truck to Wamena the following morning and were even subjected to a midnight raid of the hut we were sleeping in, just to check we had not run off in the night.

The project was in disarray. We had recorded no long distance traders and lost our pig alongside half of our equipment.

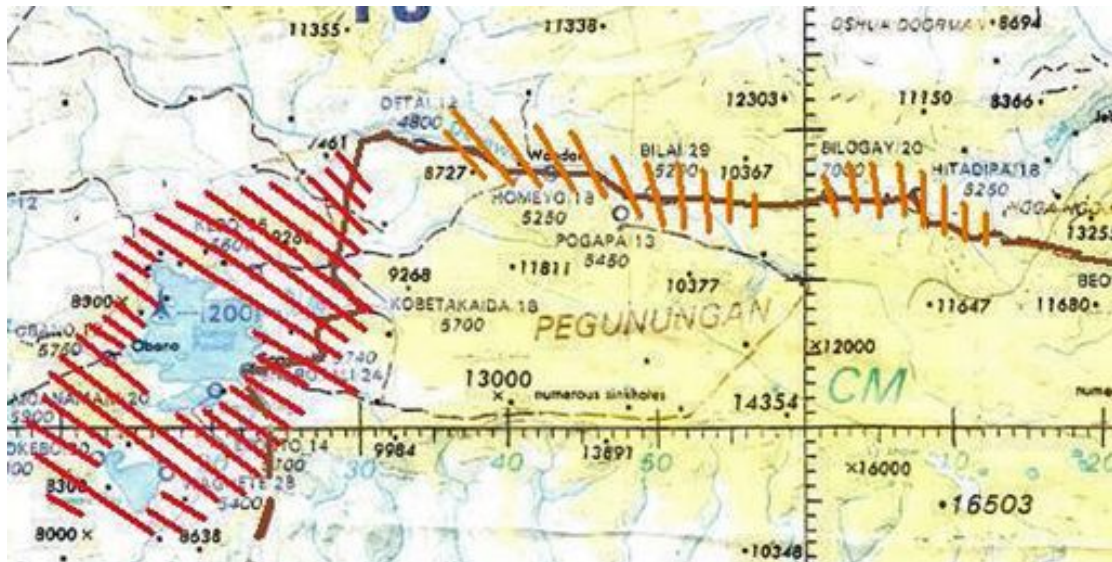
However, we had found sections of the Jalan Raya, all be it abandoned, and we had a fair portion of our expedition finances left.

I decided on the 1<sup>st</sup> October that we could start the project again from the far side of Papua. We would start, instead of finish, in Enarotali, and walk out East from there, back in the direction of Wamena, searching for any remaining examples of long distance on foot trade.

#### **4.3.3 Third Leg – 2<sup>nd</sup> October till 18<sup>th</sup> October 2009/14<sup>th</sup> till 17<sup>th</sup> November 2009**

##### 2<sup>nd</sup> October till 6<sup>th</sup> October

It took almost four days to cover the distance between Wamena and Enarotali. Having been forced to return to Wamena by truck we then took the next available flight to Jayapura with Aviastar. From here we flew to the island of Biak then took a small Susi Air flight to Nabire on the coast of Western Papua. Finally, we arrived in Enarotali on a small single prop plane from Nabire.



**Map 4** - The project area for the third leg, within the region of Paniai. The red lines denote the Mei tribal area, the orange the Moni tribal area, the brown line was our route along the Jalan Raya.

6<sup>th</sup> October

Enarotali is the state capital of Paniai. A large highland town nestled next to the 'Great Lake' Paniai, Enarotali is comprised of several parallel streets of Indonesian run shops selling groceries and tools, a police, military-police and army post, and a semi-paved road running West to Nabire and the coast, and South, to the other two of the three 'Great Lakes' (aka the Wissel Lakes): Tigi and Tage.



Enarotali is relatively stable. In 2007 it joined Wamena as one of the only places within the Papuan highlands that foreigners can regularly access without special permission

(although you will still need it on your surat jalan). It is populated by members of the Mei or Kapauku tribe and is well served by road and air. It has relatively modern breezeblock and wooden housing and several schools and churches, but it is still a far cry from 'modern' Wamena. Responses to foreigners, from both the authorities and locals, are mostly very friendly, but can sometimes feel edgy and even slightly hostile due to previous experiences with mining corporations.

Our plan was to attempt to pick up the Jalan Raya Northeast of Lake Paniai and then walk as far east as possible. We had only till the 18<sup>th</sup> October before Callum would have to leave Papua, so time was very tight. We were hoping to be able to fly back from one of the airstrips deep in Paniai province, but there was no guarantee we would be picked up by any of the missionary flights servicing the region.

We attempted to negotiate ourselves onto a boat to drop us on the far Northeastern shore of Lake Paniai at a village called Komopa, avoiding a long days walk round the

shore from Enarotali on rough, swampy terrain. Unfortunately, the driver refused to take us in his public boat with all the other Komopa bound Papuan passengers and insisted we pay him 2 million rupiah for a private rental. The discrimination was extremely frustrating, and forced us into the long day walk around the shore.

We took the decision to avoid the police and military authorities on arrival in Enarotali. We had already been granted permission to travel within Paniai, it had been stamped on our surat jalan back in Jayapura and yet we were still questioned informally on arrival in Enarotali by a member of Military Intelligence and later hassled by an undercover officer at our guesthouse. I was keen to avoid any further delay or unnecessary harassment in an area we knew to be relatively stable. This decision, as I was to discover the following evening, was a mistake.

### 7<sup>th</sup> October

We walked out of Enarotali at sunrise and made good progress around the shore along a dirt track that led through a grassy marshland, over Lake Paniai's floodplain, to the small traditional honnais that clustered the Lake's northern shore. The terrain here was very flat, but extremely muddy after the previous night's rainfall, slowing our progress significantly. Women, the primary workers here (and across highland Papua) were catching fish in large circular nets and carrying loads of vegetables to sell in the markets of Enarotali. Vital protein from the tiny carp, crayfish, ducks, chickens and very occasionally, pig, provided the cornerstone to most diets and made these items particularly sought after.

We eventually made it to Komopa at 5pm when I noticed a tall, muscular Indonesian man was following us. In general, it is very rare to meet any Indonesians away from the main highland commercial hubs, so immediately alarm bells were ringing.

All too soon members of Military intelligence surrounded us on all sides confiscating our surat jalans and passports. We were then placed on a boat and driven all the way back to the station at Enarotali.

As we hadn't checked in with them at their post in Enarotali, they had decided we were probably OPM sympathisers, entering the highlands illegally to report on the unrest caused by Freeport's recent attempts to extend their mining business into Paniai.

### 8<sup>th</sup> October

Surprisingly the Military Intelligence in Paniai accepted our reason for being in the highlands almost without question. They were not only very friendly, they were also extremely apologetic, understanding and helpful.

We were taken to the District Chief of Police, where I was able to explain the misunderstanding, and our passports and surat jalans were subsequently returned without question. We received a stamp to continue into the highlands around Paniai and were not asked to pay any 'fine', administration fee or bribe.

It was fair to say that I was stunned we were able to continue and I felt suitably embarrassed for my lack of faith on our arrival in Enarotali.

Unfortunately though it was not all plain sailing that day. Having acquired a very friendly and intelligent Papuan guide to take us on towards Moni land (highlighted in orange on Map 4) we were accosted by a large mob of local Mei Papuans outside our guesthouse in Enarotali, and effectively were told that if we continued on our expedition then “bad things would happen to us.”

It was difficult to follow exactly what we had done wrong, but essentially it seemed we were accused of being gold thieves. It transpired that Freeport had been conducting surveys in the area, which had stirred up local resentment towards outsiders, as they believed we were complicit in an alleged massive theft of gold resources. This group felt they had not been sufficiently reimbursed for Freeport’s speculative survey and we were guilty by association for being Western.

We were sat on the porch of the guesthouse with a large group gathered around the outer fence. I tried to explain to the group’s spokesperson, an elderly Me man, that our intentions were entirely exploratory, but the atmosphere suddenly became very aggressive. The owner of our guesthouse implored us to come inside, which we duly did, but unfortunately the trouble outside only escalated further with shouting and threatening behavior.

Our mistake, if any, had been to attempt to explain our position in broken Indonesian to a man that barely spoke any Indonesian and had already made up his mind about us. Looking for any way to bolster his argument that we were thieves he had seized on the Indonesian word for ‘expedition’ (ekspedisi) as the final piece of evidence that we were conducting an exploratory survey of remote Papua for Freeport mining. Our disappearance into the guesthouse had effectively closed the case and confirmed their suspicions.

I decided to take a risk at this point. As it was obvious the situation was only getting worse, I came out of the guesthouse and walked up to the largest, most vocal and aggressive member of the group and calmly apologised, offering my hand, smiling. This seemed to catch everyone off guard and thankfully things calmed down immediately. A few more handshakes and apologies all round, and eventually everyone left. Obviously going outside was a very risky tactic, but I knew from past conversations with Papuan friends that one of the major causes of upset is the feeling that outsiders, especially Westerners and Indonesians, believe they are aloof and superior – I felt that by hiding inside this was exactly the impression we were giving. Despite knowing we had done nothing wrong, there is no getting away from the fact that many Papuans are justifiably aggrieved at the way their natural resources and the resultant profits have been unfairly distributed in the last fifty years. Thankfully though, aggressive and intimidating scenes directed at foreigners are very rare. I have never encountered anything like this before or since.

Unsurprisingly, our new guide did not turn up for work the following morning.

## 9<sup>th</sup> October

Yesterday's dramas unsettled us, especially as we were advised to abandon our plans by two separate Indonesian families that morning, but we decided to continue, writing it off as a misunderstanding.

Our experience returning with the Indonesian military via boat from Komopa had allowed us to gain the knowledge and contacts we needed to get on an affordable public boat across the lake – turning an 8 hour trek into a 2 hour boat ride.

Unfortunately though, as soon as the locals had piled off the boat at earlier stops, leaving us alone with the driver, he refused to carry on, promptly shutting off his engine and demanded more money. He asked for a further 50,000 Rupiah each to continue, effectively doubling the price of the journey for just another 5 minutes in the boat. The price hike was, as ever, totally non-negotiable. We decided to walk without paying the extra.

We arrived in Komopa and were taken to meet the district military commander of Paniai, an exceptionally welcoming Javanese man named Agus Hermawan. Agus had been part of the team who had found the British hostages from *Lorentz 95*<sup>1</sup> and had peacekeeping experience in Lebanon and the Congo. After the drama of the last couple of days his rational straightforward advice was very welcome. Agus assured us we were safe to continue and arranged for a set of young Mei men to guide us through the rest of their tribal territory.

We stayed in the military post that night as an extremely heavy rainstorm set in.

## 10<sup>th</sup> October

The heavy rain finally abated at 10am. We left Komopa with a procession of Mei boys via a dirt road, under construction to eventually link the Mei and Moni tribal territories with Enarotali within a couple of years.

Komopa, and the surrounding area, appeared to be wealthier than the communities we had encountered in the first and second legs of the expedition in Jayawijaya and Puncak Jaya. Komopa had electricity, powered, albeit intermittently, from



a hydroelectric generator set at the headwater of a mountain river. The surrounding villages had small shops, run by Indonesians, and smart wood fences and huts.

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The road ended abruptly and for the next six hours we plunged waist deep through floodwaters – the pressure from the previous night’s storm had caused the river to burst its banks.

The terrain was terrible, but the atmosphere within our party was the best we had had since the start of the project – we had many genuine laughs with the local people as Callum and I lost our footing time and again in the high water.

We were forced to attempt to feel the way with our feet over submerged logs, advancing slowly, in fear of slipping off into the deep floodwaters. Insects, including palm-sized huntsmen spiders, crawled all over us in a bid to avoid drowning and by the late afternoon it was raining again and it became clear conditions were set to worsen. When we reached an island of higher ground and a dry hut, I decided we should all stop for the evening.

Further signs of an elevated standard of living were clear, even at this outpost at the outskirts of Mei territory. Not only were the houses built with superior materials, but education levels were higher, with some children even able to speak a few words of English.

### 11<sup>th</sup> October

The rain stopped again at midnight. It had not fallen anything like as hard as the previous night and as a result the floodwater had largely retreated. We were able to make quick progress, and reached the edge of Mei land by mid-morning.

The older, more confident, leader of our guiding group explained that the path ahead led to Moni land. They were nervous of continuing without permission, the Moni were traditional enemies of the Mei and they had a formidable reputation.

We knew we would be heading off alone again at some point in this leg. Our previous experiences of abandonment had allowed us to streamline our equipment and bolstered our confidence in our own abilities to continue without local guides, but it was a shame to lose such capable and proficient men.



We returned to the familiar jungle corridor between tribal territories – dense forest, a tiny foot track, no other people.

In late afternoon we came across a sign that we were entering Moni territory – a steel axe driven into the top of an eye level tree branch, thick cowrie shell necklaces



and two tubular, bark wrapped parcels hanging below – with no local guide to explain the meaning, or message, we continued along the path.

At the conclusion of the day we had walked barely one mile of the direct GPS distance to Homeyo and the rain came on strongly once more.

I noticed my feet were suffering from the constant emersion in water. I was still avoiding the dreaded emersion/trench foot, but I was on the way with large welts on the backs of both ankles.

### 12<sup>th</sup> October

The forest became denser and the path began to badly deteriorate, unaided by relentless rain and an endless string of river crossings. We kept our boots on for the crossings, choosing to save time and make up ground, as we encountered our first leeches.

By 10am we had risen a grueling 2,000 feet from our camping spot, an hour later and a recent landslide of over 100 meters in length had obliterated the path, slowing us right down as we searched for the route.

We were both starting to tire fast. With little sign of people and no long distance traders in the five weeks we had been on the trail the project was beginning to feel like a war of attrition against the increasingly difficult conditions.

### 13<sup>th</sup> October

The morning started in much the same way as all the others: a damp break up of the night's jungle camp and quick preparations to begin the morning's walking. We were both feeling quite low. We were not making much progress intellectually or geographically and had had to fight really hard just to keep the project on course. Our strength as a team had been remarkable throughout the expedition, but we both knew we were a long way off meeting any of the aims I had set at the start. In the absence of a positive focus we had both begun to think about when the end of the project would come and how we were going to get out of the forest once we had run out of time.

Just as we were about to shoulder our packs, voices broke out clearly on the path ahead. In a moment of indescribable excitement, a Moni family appeared out of the forest in front of us.

We were as startled to see them as they were us. Four members of the same family: a mother,



father and young son, carrying a toddler in a noken sack, observed us with marked surprise. After a brief exchange in broken Indonesian, it became clear they had already walked from deep within Moni land and were on their way to Enarotali. I asked what was in their sacks. "Garam Asli" the Father replied, "natural salt."



My own relief at hearing those words was palpable. In that moment the decision to enter the forest had been entirely justified. These were our first genuine long distance traders walking a traditional product to trade in the market centre of an opposing tribe. Here, in spite of all of the cultural and social changes in post-contact Papua, was an example of a group crossing tribal boundaries, using the Jalan Raya

to trade in much the same way as their ancestors had for centuries.

Now we just needed to find the salt mine.

#### 14<sup>th</sup> October

By mid-day the following day we had made it out of the forest to the village of Wandai. A bright Moni village with several churches, two schools and fields full of vegetables. Perched high on the slopes of a valley, it was placed towards the centre of Moni land (marked in orange on Map 4 and 2) and appeared to be doing very well. The villagers were busy. Both men and women seemed to be employed in the fields, or as members of the clergy or teachers – in fact, it was by far the most industrious area we visited on the expedition. We were made to feel very welcome and were invited to stay with a local Moni man who acted as both Teacher and Pastor to the community.

The natural salt well, where the family had collected the salt for the on-foot transportation to Enarotali, was located at the base of the valley – an hour's walk straight down a steep pathway.

I had first read about the Moni salt wells of this region in Russell T. Hitt's *Cannibal Valley*:

Homeyo, on the main trail between the Wissel Lakes and the Baliem Valley, was known throughout the mountains of New Guinea because of its salt wells. The Moni prepare salt by dropping porous vines down into the briny water of the wells. Then the salt laden vines are pulled up, dried, and burned. The salty ashes next are tamped into molds that are made by digging slender cylindrical holes in the ground and lining them with leaves. Then the molds of salt are removed along with their covering of leaves. These salt molds are dried over the fire to become one of the most important trading items in interior New Guinea.

Russell T.Hitt *Cannibal Valley* (1962: Lowe and Brydone) p. 139

This description had been my major motivation for persevering into the Moni territory a week ago. Back then I was holding out for evidence that the salt wells were still in place, despite a 47-year gap since writing. In fact, the wells were not only still in place, they were thriving.

At the base of the valley a large hut with a corrugated iron roof, wood plank walls and a chimney stood right next to a large 20 metre wide pool of brine. There were at least 50 workers in and around the hut and pool: women, children and men, in the first example of non-gender specific employment I had seen among highland Papuans.

The pool of brine was carved into the valley wall, blocked with a small metre high wall acting as a dam along one side, with a single bamboo tap protruding from one end. Here the Moni could pour the brine into buckets before carrying it to the hut, where the brine was boiled over flames in barrels, reducing the brine to solid, dry, salt.

The conditions in the hut were excruciating. The low roof intensified the heat and the acrid smoke billowing from the barrels of boiling brine was exceptionally dry and thick. Despite this, up to 50 workers were crammed into the floor space of little more than 20 square meters.

Outside, in keeping with tradition, the salt was placed in leaf molds and shaped into tubular packages for sale across the highlands.



The workers, who had been extremely welcoming considering my intrusion, were justifiably proud of their industry. The elders lamented the lack of traditional Papuan industries, commenting that the natural salt trade had largely become the only product that was regularly walked over long distances for an exclusively Papuan market. Here I found, for the first time since starting the project back in 2007, a total acceptance of my aim to walk long distances in Papua, and discovered to my delight that Papuan people still used the inter-tribal chain of the Jalan Raya to trade in Moni natural salt all the way to the Baliem valley.

Film from the salt wells, and from the expedition in general, can be seen at: [http://www.willmillard.com/?page\\_id=61](http://www.willmillard.com/?page_id=61).

It seemed that there were three main reasons why the Moni salt had survived, where other traditional trade items had failed:

- It is still considered useful. Other traditional products had been replaced by modern imitations of far greater efficiency: steel over stone, cosmetic dyes over natural ones, modern medicines over traditional cures, synthetic fabrics and clothing over penis gourds and grass skirts, rupiah cash over cowrie shells – but Papuans believed natural salt was still superior to the Indonesian imports. It was not only cheaper, it retained its value as an effective traditional treatment for goiter, an inflammation of the thyroid gland caused by iodine deficiency, a perennial problem in highland communities where salt is still hard to come by.
- It is lucrative. Where other traditional industries have become increasingly less profitable as foreign counterparts edge them out, the demand for natural salt has allowed it to retain its value. Today, as an expression of Papuan identity, it is probably worth more than ever. At the time of writing, a single one-kilo tube of natural salt was selling at the market for 50,000 rupiah (approximately £3.50). An average Papuan highlander can carry approximately 20 tubers. If you consider it takes a day to manufacture the salt from brine, a further three to transport it on foot to market, a day to sell and two days to return, then that equates to 1 million rupiah for a week's work (£70). This is a huge sum for any Papuan; indeed it is well above average for any local worker in West Papua.
- Production methods have modernised. The replacement of the briny vines described in *Cannibal Valley* with an open well, steel buckets, and a covered production facility, have served only to streamline the production line. Greater efficiency has increased output, keeping the product at the forefront of Papuan minds across the region.

We slept in a house owned by the local Moni Teacher and Pastor that night. Wandai had been an inspiring experience. We had been warmly welcomed by an entire community that was clearly doing very well without any influence from outside. The value of the salt offered more than financial recompense; it had allowed the region to hold onto its traditional identity. The benefits of the wells spilled over into other aspects of the lives of the Moni, we found a healthy traditional trade in cowrie shells and a high level of employment throughout Wandai and its surrounding villages.

### 15<sup>th</sup> October

With our October 18<sup>th</sup> deadline looming large we needed to leave the area as soon as possible. It was clear from the daily air traffic that MAF, AMA and Suzi Air were all operating in the area, and yet we spent hours calling to confirm where the nearest flight was landing, only to be told that no one was flying. The locals assured us that flights landed daily at the airstrip nearby so we knew this could not be true.

It was not clear why we were being so universally rejected. I could only assume at this point that it was simply that these organisations did not want to associate themselves with people whose intentions they could not be 100% sure.

We decided to make our way to the airstrip and to our total surprise, in the late afternoon, an AMA plane did in fact land on top of a hill near a village called

Bugalow. Following a scramble to the summit, I was able to persuade the pilot, who had spare space, to take both myself and Callum back to Nabire.

It was extremely emotional for us as we left the Moni land, we both knew we had been fortunate to see the salt wells, and felt thoroughly humbled by the hospitality of the people of Wandai. Sadly though, I could not help but feel that we had witnessed something of a 'last stand' for the Jalan Raya.

### 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> October

We spent two days in the coastal town of Nabire - resting, eating, nursing sores and making our onward travel preparations to Jakarta.

We were both proud of what we had achieved together. We might not have completed the crossing of West Papua via the length of the ancient Jalan Raya, but we had stuck to our task as best as we possibly could under some testing circumstances. We both knew the abandonment and our arrest in Puncak Jaya had cost us badly, but equally it would have been very easy to give up at that point too; the fact we didn't, and then subsequently achieved one of our most important original aims: the recording of long distance on-foot traders, was a testament to our determination as a team.

### 19<sup>th</sup> October – 13<sup>th</sup> November

I decided to return to Papua alone after a break. Both Callum and myself were slightly underweight after several weeks of intense physical work without adequate nourishment and I had deep sores on both ankles that were struggling to heal; time away to return to peak physical fitness was critical.

Despite the threats from the military police following our interrogation on the 30<sup>th</sup> September, I wanted to return to Puncak Jaya if I could. I knew I had left a large gap in our geographical and intellectual knowledge of the Jalan Raya in the central part of the highland range by failing to properly access it from both the East and West, and that should I not take the opportunity now it was highly unlikely any trace of long distance trading would be left in years to come.

As Callum headed back to England, I flew on to Singapore on a low-cost Air Asia flight, renewing my Indonesian visa and subsequently returning to Indonesia on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November.

I was not as lucky with flights as I had been previously, and a tricky set of connections quickly spiraled into a logistical nightmare. I was delayed in Jakarta, Jayapura, and again in Biak as I attempted to head back to Nabire where AMA (the airline that returned us to Nabire from Wandai on the 15<sup>th</sup> October) had previously promised to help me return to Puncak Jaya on a passenger fare. Unsurprisingly, I failed to gain any formal permission on my surat jalan for a return to Puncak Jaya, learning that OPM leader Kelly Kwalik's presence across the Iraga region was the

cause of a major military operation closing Sinak, Ilaga and Beoga to all foreigners. This, combined with time and financial constraints, limited my options significantly.

Frustratingly, when I did eventually make it back to Nabire on the 11<sup>th</sup> November, I discovered the AMA plane was grounded for repairs, the MAF pilot was away on holiday and the only other plane was flying to Timika on the South coast. I was told that other flights were full or not flying due to inclement weather. For three days I hounded every flight carrier in Nabire for any news of any flight flying to Puncak Jaya, all to no avail.

#### 14<sup>th</sup> November

Without warning I woke early to a phone call from commercial carrier Merpati. The news was a flight was due to leave for Mulia, a town in the centre of Puncak Jaya, in 45 minutes. I sprinted to the airport and went to purchase a ticket.

On entry to the ticket office I discovered police intelligence were waiting for me. They took my passes and my passport, questioned my intentions and allowed me to travel on the condition that I absolutely do not leave Mulia under any circumstances. In many ways a convenient agreement considering I had barely any serviceable equipment and it hardly seemed sensible to head back into the wilderness solo.

Not for the first time on this trip, having our collection of domestic hair samples for an Aberdeen and Durham University study was extremely helpful. In this case it instantly lifted the atmosphere, offering a harmless, non-threatening (yet in there eyes, slightly ludicrous) ulterior reason for entering Mulia.

I arrived in Mulia on a tarmac airstrip, that, had it not been on a fairly severe decline, would have been among the best I had landed on so far in Papua. The Merpati plane was full of cargo – oil, parcels of tobacco, tyres, brushes, rice and countless other domestic groceries and items. It was an excellent example of the importance of these daily flights to local trade, and a clear sign of an almost total departure from traditional on-foot trade in the Mulia region.

Mulia was much larger than I expected, spread out over a square mile, it is walled in on every side by steep shrub covered valley sides with thick, forested tops. Almost all of the houses here were tin-roofed with satellite dishes, and a large, active Indonesian population was firmly established around the central market place. There was also a freshly laid road running up the valley. I was told it ultimately ran to Wamena, effectively paving over the ancient Jalan Raya. It did, however, deteriorate in quality in the central regions, especially where it ran through the areas experiencing the most intense fighting at that time.

I checked in with the local police as instructed, and it became very clear that my movements were to be subject to intense scrutiny for the duration of my time in Mulia. I was warned not to leave Mulia under any circumstances, particularly by the road that headed East of the town across the mountains: the chief of police pulled his thumbnail across his throat as he pointed up the road, a mime that was solemnly

repeated by the other officers surrounding him. They then produced images from their recent battles with the OPM, mutilated corpses and torture victims, both Indonesian and Papuan alike, that they insisted were innocent victims of OPM brutality.

I ended up staying on the floor of the police station for the duration of my time in Mulia, not through force, but really because the only room available in the town was prohibitively expensive.

It was an extraordinary place to stay. The last outpost, armed to the teeth with M16s, in the centre of a brutal conflict that has remained largely unknown to the wider world. The atmosphere was tense as night fell. Periodically torches were shone into the dark, guns cocked, radios checked and then rechecked. Surrounded by weapons and police you could argue it was the safest place to be, but in all seriousness, if there were to be any attack this is precisely where it would happen.

### 15<sup>th</sup> November

I conducted a survey of plane traffic in the area and met with Erwin, the English speaking co-ordinator for a local airline. Erwin explained the prolific rise in demand for goods to be flown into the highland market centre: “as Papua enters a new era of modernity it is unreasonable to expect Papuan people to be satisfied with the potato and pork staple diet of the past. Equally, with a new flourishing Indonesian trans-migrant population firmly established demand is high for Indonesian and Asian products. All of these new goods have to be flown in, for now, air-freight is a booming industry in the highlands.”

Later that afternoon I meet with Olis, a local Papuan journalist working for a highland Radio Station. Olis is the grandson of one of the great tribal warriors of the region and had an almost encyclopedic knowledge of Mulia’s development. Olis argues that in spite of the relatively recent introduction of modern products – largely alongside the widespread establishment of electricity in Mulia, the most drastic period of cultural change came in the mid-1950s with the Christian missionaries, and not with the Indonesian takeover: “It was the missionaries that saw an end to widely held animist beliefs and creation myths and, crucially, it was they who brought the concept of a wider world with a higher standard of living and material goods that



were unavailable in the highlands prior to their arrival.” The religious messages were clearly a lot easier to digest when the people presenting them had apparently “god-like” abilities with their superior technology and medicine.

That night any tension in the police station towards me dissipated. After an icebreaking conversation that covered all the major topics of

interest beyond why I was actually in Mulia: dating in Britain, the British Royal Family and the Premiership, the military police opened up, explaining their genuine terror at the situation they found themselves in. Ineffective weapons and equipment meant their role could only ever be to hold their position. Many in the service believed it was a deliberate ploy on behalf of the Government to prolong the conflict – by ensuring the levels of danger within the highlands were always high, they believed the Government were able to grant mining and logging licenses indiscriminately, without fear of scrutiny, collecting huge taxes and charging a small fortune for protection services in the process. Here in Mulia, the conflict was not a black and white freedom fight between the OPM and Indonesian military – Papuan people were firmly established in the military and the police, indeed, in this post alone over half of the staff were Papuan – increasingly it seemed, the conflict was becoming defined by political ambition and a power struggle for the more lucrative pieces of the highlands. It is no great coincidence that the areas of most conflict are the sites of the state's most valuable natural resources.

A police sergeant from the Papuan island of Numfor leant over whilst the rest of the officers watched football on their communal television: “this is the richest part of Indonesia and yet we are unable to progress, how can we improve this area when people won't invest, tourists won't come and our own Government won't give us what we need to improve our lives?”

Ironically, it seemed, the military police and the OPM on the frontline of the conflict shared the same dissatisfaction with the National Government. But Papuan highlanders take pride in their hatred of the authorities. In the absence of centuries old traditions and customs it alone has emerged as an intractable part of highland identity.

### 16<sup>th</sup> November

A warm farewell from the military police was followed by a single-prop flight from Mulia to Wamena with Trigana airlines. I was the only passenger, wedged in amongst chickens and boxes of Indonesian products bound for the highland market. Planes are no longer the mysterious giant, silver birds of Papuan past, they are the established drivers of highland trade and commerce, turning week-long walks into fifteen minute flights – but soon, they too will compete with roads, as the Jalan Raya is inevitably paved over.

### 17<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> November

Back in Wamena, I took time to catch up with my friends: Papuan highland students at the Okonimous University Campus, a Dutch missionary initiative aiming to train local Teachers primarily from within the Papuan highland community.

It was a worthwhile break. Staying with friends at the University was, as always, a thoroughly positive experience. Despite their total lack of education in their youth, these Papuans have learnt to speak fluent english and are emerging as capable, patient teachers in the new schools that are starting to dot the highlands. They



firmly believe that it is only through education and the establishment of Teachers willing to remain in highland communities that effective change can be fostered. For now, they argue, Papuan people are all too easy to fob off as “too uneducated” to make decisions over the commercial development of their land – worthy only of a cash lump sum, or similar material bribe to keep them quiet in the short term. With education, they hope a new generation of non-violent Papuans will emerge that can legitimately take positions of power within the Government and corporations controlling the distribution of natural resource profits.

Sadly though, they fear that there is an inherent lack of will within many of the highland populations to commit to formal education; a tradition that they hope to change, as the first group of indigenous teacher trainers in history take to their posts in the highlands.

“Whether we like it or not, the outside world is upon Papua and its resources, it is up to us whether we play a role in the future developments of the state, but for sure, if we don’t act fast, that decision will be made for us too.” Emi, 23, Teacher Trainer.

Finally, in early December, I made it back to the UK.

### **5.1 Conclusion**

In spite of the enormous success we felt with the recording of the Moni salt trade, there is no escaping the fact that West Papua stands on the brink of enormous social and cultural change. Unfortunately, just as not every tribal group can maintain a traditional identity through a profitable salt well, not every group is in a position to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the lucrative trade in natural resources within their land. This, as I shall explain, is largely due to the development of a commercial system that distinctly favors International corporations and the Indonesian government.

Our expedition had followed a clear pattern: several days to a week of walking in the densely populated valleys of the major highland tribal populations, with a larger hub town in the centre, before anything up to a week of thickly forested, mountain walking where we saw and met barely anyone till we emerged in the next valley.



**Map 5** The highlands and major populations. The black lines indicate the existing road networks, the black Xs the air-strips that are regularly serviced.

Map 5 demonstrates clearly the abundance of airstrips covering the highlands where our project was undertaken. Simply put, there is no need for the Papuan highlanders to walk to trade. Every one of the major tribal populations marked on this map has at least an air-strip, originating from the missionary planes in the 60's, and the Mei and Dani lands at the extreme ends of the range are developing roads that will eventually unite the entire range in a Trans-Papuan highway. Indeed, at the time of writing, road-laying activities in the central Puncak Jaya region had started with earnest, leading many highlanders to believe that the linking road will be complete within the next decade.

The ease of obtaining products from outside Papua has seen an influx of Indonesian products that have effectively replaced local specialties: why would you get a stone axe from Yalli when you could get a steel one, on your doorstep, from Java?

This has seen the death of long distance walking and many traditional industries. It helps explain, in part, the reluctance of local guides and porters to leave their territory, and the relative lack of on foot traders on the sections of the Jalan Raya that fall between the major tribal territories.

The growth of airstrips has had a homogenizing effect on what was once a varied set of tribal cultures. They are, of course, the major sources of all outside influences: they brought the missionaries with a unifying Christian faith, and the Indonesians, who brought uniform products and static markets to the highland hub towns, and language; Indonesian is slowly becoming the lingua franca across the highlands.

Idols and beliefs unique to the cultures are gradually being eroded, alongside traditions such as long distance trading. It is rare to see penis gourds and grass skirts in these central regions today. Many modern Papuans want to move on from this aspect of their past: "it is not just because it is seen as embarrassing, since most of us wear clothes now, but it is also the most obvious way that you can be judged by outsiders as still being primitive and backward" Demianus, 36, Wamena.

It is all too easy to bemoan modernity in Papua in favour of protecting our heavily romanticised image of a 'pure' tribal existence. There is no doubt that some aspects of highland Papuan contact with the world outside its borders has been highly beneficial: missionary conversion to Christianity helped bring an end to intertribal warfare and killings, Indonesian occupation provided a lingua franca for tribal groups to communicate, and the development of education and health infrastructure has improved the highland quality of life immeasurably, significantly lifting the average life expectancy.

However, commercial development within the region has distinctly favoured outsiders. The perceived illegality of the Indonesian take-over among Papuans, the subsequent human rights abuse allegations, and the damaging environmental and political effects of International commercial mining and logging



corporations has served only to heighten mistrust and paranoia in the region. 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. Through all the villages and hub towns we encountered during this expedition we only once met a Papuan women selling her goods from within a store or business, the rest were entirely Indonesian owned and operated. Likewise, I am yet to meet a Papuan behind the wheel of a taxi, motorcycle or plane, and they are still underrepresented within local Government positions, the police and the military.

Papuan people have seen the outside world enter their life like a landslide since the late 1950s, leaving many neither connected to their past nor part of the future. Opinion was divided among the Papuans we met as to why they felt they had been left behind. Many believed it was all part of an Indonesian conspiracy to eradicate them from the land, whilst some felt they had become lazy as a people: too eager to accept financial handouts to allow commercial development on their land, resulting in a lack of motivation to work or study.

Tribal elders claim nothing has ever really been adequately explained to the highlanders living in this area, as such misunderstanding, paranoia and confusion has led to mistrust and resentment of outsiders. Two hours walk from the flourishing, confident, yet steadfastly traditional, Moni villagers and salt wells of Wandai, we found a remote community of Moni in crisis. We learnt from the elders that Freeport had recently landed their helicopter, on a strip the locals claimed they had been instructed to build, and conducted a mineral survey in the mountains. The local leaders called me round to first explain that this was their land, that they didn't want any outsiders coming in and that the Gold was theirs alone. One hour later, I was called back again, to be told that it was ours for a price, before finally they began

begging me to employ them in the prospective mine for the 250,000 rupiah (18 pounds) per day they had been promised by Freeport. This tribe had no idea whether they wanted a mine, or really what a mine was. It was not clear precisely how much time had passed since the helicopter had landed, but the Moni men were definitely holding out for their new jobs, whether they were perceived or promised.

An aged Papuan pastor from the Western highlands tried to explain it to me: “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.”

The mining and logging companies and the Indonesian government have paid some money to highlanders for their land and welfare, but sadly this has contributed only further to the erosion of tradition. Many highlanders have simply given up working the potato fields in expectation of a hand-out. Papuan Students living in Pyramid in the Baliem Valley told me that since 2005 more than half of the community have stopped working in the gardens following a government cash transfer programme for poorer families – this, they claim, resulted in a famine in 2008, killing 1 in 10 people in the region.

Unfortunately, the lack of formal statistics makes it difficult to formally substantiate the observations of locals. However, at the time of writing, education and healthcare standards were the lowest in Indonesia and HIV/AIDS continues to rise, leaving Papua with the highest rate outside of Southern Africa. Drug misuse and alcohol are also prevalent. When I was working in Jayapura in 2007 13 Papuans died in one week from drinking hospital ethanol mixed with milk, and Wamena, the largest and most established of the hub towns, has an increasing level of homelessness, something that would have been unheard of twenty years ago.



The lack of a formal Child Protection policy in the highlands and the apparent breakdown of the traditional family unit has left a number of children homeless - particularly those who have disabled or deceased parents. Wamena, in particular, bears the brunt of this most recent problem. In 2007 I worked briefly with a group of 50 homeless children from across the highlands, they were

all addicted to a glue called ‘Aibon’ and adopted the brand name as their own unique tribal identity. They lived on the absolute fringe of society, begging, stealing, washing cars and prostituting themselves. On my return in 2009 the number of homeless ‘Aibon’ had quadrupled, a recent survey found half of them were infected with HIV.

Papuans were expected to adapt, without support, in a single generation, to practices developed, learned and refined by outsiders over the course of hundreds

of years. Their perceived failure to 'keep up' fuels the popular perception of an 'ignorant' Papuan that abounds among many of the Indonesians we met. It was just one step away from the classic stereotype of the Papuan as a 'savage primitive' – a prolific misconception, even in our own Western media channels, that chooses to promote an image of a 'backward' or 'stone age' mindset, usually alongside a baseless suggestion that there are still cannibals resident in the highlands. They are hard labels to shake off and are always in total ignorance to the many intelligent progressive systems, such as the Jalan Raya, that existed for centuries within Papua, long before the intrusion of outsiders. I believe this culture of stereotyping Papuans has contributed largely to the lack of Papuan voice in the development of the state, and provided a convenient excuse for insensitive commercial development of the land.

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, 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 presiding 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 ostracized 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 of the highlands.

The Jalan Raya exists as an example of a highly complex system of trade within a much misunderstood and under-studied region. I believe it is highly plausible that it was once one of the greatest on-foot routes in human history. Its astonishing survival into the 21<sup>st</sup> century stands as a testament to the intelligence and endurance of these people and their cultural traditions.

West Papua is a region not without problems, 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. In spite of sweeping changes, Papua and its people remain special, worth protecting, understanding and appreciating, before it is too late.

## **5.2 Personal Development since the Project**

I owe a great debt of thanks to the people of West Papua and my sponsors for my personal and professional development at the conclusion of the project. There is no doubt that this expedition has furthered my career, allowing me to work on the subjects of adventure and anthropology that interest me most, and helping validate my skills as a serious, competent Expedition Leader.

In the year and a half since returning home at the end of 2009 I have been able to publish articles and images from the expedition in *Geographical Magazine* and *Wanderlust* (see Appendices 3), provide interviews for *Radio New Zealand International* and conduct a series of talks at the *RGS*, the *National Geographic Store*, the *Wilderness lectures* in Bristol and at *Adventure Travel Live*. I have also written a simplified report from the expedition for the educational website *Education through Expeditions*, allowing school children to take advantage of my results and findings in West Papua, whilst also encouraging a future generation of adventurers.

I am currently working full time as a Researcher within the Factual documentary company that originally sponsored the cameras for this project: Indus Films, and have been awarded Fellowship to both the *RGS* and the Winston Churchill Foundation for my endeavors in West Papua.

In January 2012, I shall be returning to West Papua to attempt the first crossing of the state's width from the South to North coast. In a project of greater physical ambition than the 2009 Jalan Raya, I'll be following the Noordoost and Mamberamo Rivers deep into territory barely visited by outsiders. I'm hoping to investigate the historic connection between the Jalan Raya and the coasts and make the first, and probably last, recordings of the region's environment ahead of the highly destructive hydroelectric and palm oil projects planned for the region. I've had my expenses sponsored by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and Transglobe Expedition trust – grants I would never have received were it not for the initial faith the *RGS* placed in me back in early 2009.

### **5.3 The state of West Papua in 2011**

West Papuan issues are still largely absent from mainstream news. In December 2009 Kelly Kwalik, the leader of the OPM, was killed by the Indonesian military in Timika. The state is still firmly off limits to journalists and, at the time of writing, incidents of serious violence had escalated. Access to the entire state of Puncak Jaya is currently fully withdrawn and in October 2010 a film was leaked worldwide via Survival International that clearly depicted the torture of suspected members of the OPM by the Indonesian military. Freeport mine continues to be a major flashpoint for unrest. In January and April 2011 employees of the mine were injured, in July 2009 an Australian worker was shot dead and in July 2011 approximately 7,000 local workers paralyzed the mine in a strike for higher wages. At the end of July a clash over the electoral register in Puncak Jaya saw 21 highland Papuans dead, just a few days later on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, thousands of Papuans took to the streets to protest for a referendum for Papuan independence – timed to coincide with a meeting of the ‘International Lawyers for Papuan Independence’ in Oxford.

At the end of 2009 a team of scientists from Britain, the United States and Papua New Guinea found more than 40 previously unidentified species when they climbed into the crater of an isolated volcano. In a remarkably rich haul, from just five weeks of exploration, the biologists discovered 16 frogs which have never before been recorded by science, at least three new fish, a new bat and a giant rat, which may turn out to be the biggest in the world.

In spite of forest destruction at a rate of 3.5% per year, West Papua and New Guinea continue to retain some of their secrets.

### **6.1 Acknowledgements**

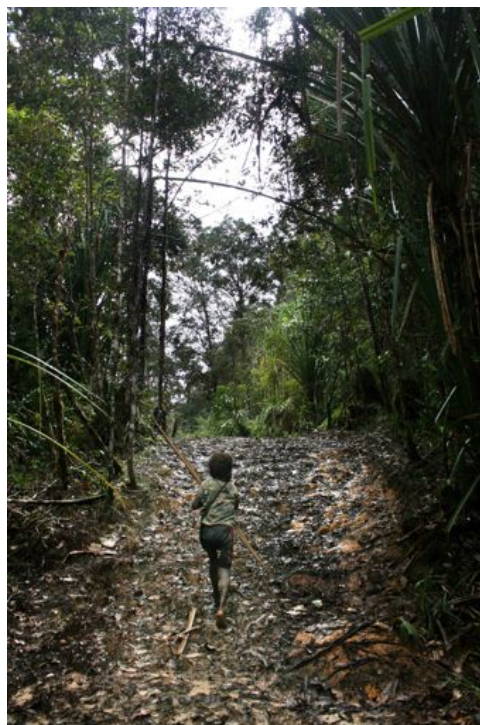
Without the financial support of Neville Shulman through the *RGS Neville Shulman Challenge Award* this project would not have been possible. I am extremely grateful to Neville Shulman and the members of the RGS panel that not only chose our expedition from a set of very strong projects, but also fully backed our core values on what was always going to be an extremely ambitious venture.

The RGS were extremely supportive throughout, offering us a vital support network and full access to their resources whenever we needed it. I am particularly indebted to Shane Winser and Catherine Souch at the RGS for their unwavering patience and confidence boosting support throughout the project.

Gwenllian Hughes, Sally-Lisk Lewis and Steve Robinson of Indus Films took a great leap of faith in loaning me camera equipment to document this expedition in 2009. It is a testament to Indus’s genuine commitment to grass-roots adventure that they chose to help my low-key, high-risk, unprofitable project. Being able to show actual footage of the project, in my talks and online, has undoubtedly helped me reach a much wider audience and provided some real insights into contemporary Papuan culture.

Additional thanks to Simon Brown of Craghoppers and Emma Robertson at the BBC Safety Stores for all their equipment, clothing and advice; being able to save on some of the basics allowed us to invest in pieces of specialist equipment that we could never have afforded in the budget were it not for their initial generosity.

My friends in Papua – Agus and the boys down at Komopa, Dedi, Rosa, Ester, Heron, Louise, Akhy, Javier and my friends at UNICEF, Remco, Agathe and Tomas at Medecin du Monde, Charlotte at the Clinton foundation, the guys at English First, especially Nate, Alvie, Evan, Ant, Michael, Ed, Hannah, Agung the CC ladies, and all of Louise’s inspiring students. Your support, advice and good humour were essential to the success of the project, as were the many many occasions you found space for me to sleep!



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, that took huge personal risks to ensure our safety for the sake of an adventure.

Finally I would like to thank my close friends and family for their unending support. Especially my Mum and Dad, my girlfriend Sarah, and of course, my expedition partner Callum Fester.

### 7.1 Appendices 1 – Expenditure

Expenditure	Cost	Total
<b>Flights and Insurance</b>		
<b>International Flights</b>		
Etihad Airlines – two return fares to Jakarta	£389.20 x 2	
One single – Jakarta to London (Qatar air)	£344	
Jakarta to Singapore (return)	£100	
<b>Insurance</b>		
Harrison Beaumont	Will £321.52 + £120 extension	
	Callum £160	



<p><b>Single Internal flights</b></p> <p>Jakarta to Jayapura x2</p> <p>Jayapura to Wamena (trigana air) x3</p> <p>Wamena to Jayapura (trigana air) x 4</p> <p>Jayapura to Biak x 3</p> <p>Biak to Nabire x 3</p> <p>Nabire to Enarotali x 2</p> <p>Nabire to Mulia x 1</p> <p>Mulia to Wamena x1</p> <p>Nabire to Jakarta x 2</p> <p>Jayapura to Jakarta x 1</p> <p>Wandai to Nabire x 2</p> <p>Excess luggage charges</p> <p>Unforeseeable short haul internal flights due to political unrest pushed our predicted costs up and lengthened my intended stay in Papua.</p>	<p>£380</p> <p>£100</p> <p>£200</p> <p>£120</p> <p>£80</p> <p>£60</p> <p>£40</p> <p>£35</p> <p>£400</p> <p>£165</p> <p>£60</p> <p>£120</p>	<p><b>£3583.62</b></p>
<p><b>Misc. en route Equipment</b></p> <p>Arcteryx 70 l Rucksacks</p> <p>Titanium pots</p> <p>All Food (dry rations, emergency rations + misc snacks for 80 days for 4 pax)</p> <p>Drybags</p> <p>Boots</p> <p>GPS</p> <p>Leatherman</p> <p>X 2 Vaude expedition tents</p> <p>Head Torches</p> <p>Socks</p> <p>Gaters x 2</p> <p>Satellite phone credit</p> <p>Sleeping bags x 2</p> <p>Bivvy bags x 2</p> <p>Sleeping mats x 2</p> <p>Flasks x 4</p> <p>X2 machetes</p> <p>Stove and fuel</p> <p>Water purification</p> <p>Rain covers</p> <p>Rope</p>	<p>£360</p> <p>£25</p> <p>£450</p> <p>£100</p> <p>£300</p> <p>£50</p> <p>£80</p> <p>£400</p> <p>£70</p> <p>£40</p> <p>£40</p> <p>£100</p> <p>£70</p> <p>£80</p> <p>£16</p> <p>£20</p> <p>£32</p> <p>£46</p> <p>£55</p> <p>£25</p> <p>£20</p>	

X 2 Carribiner	£30	
Batteries	£23	
Solar Panels	£288.22	
Maps	£60.20	
<b>(Clothing kindly donated by Craghoppers)</b>		<b>£2780.42</b>
<b>Off route expenses</b>		
Hotels in Papua: Jayapura/Sentani/Wamena/Nabire during 3 week set-up + 10 day transit	£520	
Off route food x 2 persons	£500	
Ojek/local taxis	£40	
Indonesian language Course	£250	
Jakarta transit (hotels, food costs x 7 days)	£120	
Singapore visa run (hotels, food costs, x 5 days)	£140	
PNG visa run x 2 days (transport, hotel)	£100	
		<b>£1670</b>
<b>Medical</b>		
Inoculations	£300	
Anti-malarials	£40	
First Aid kit	£30	
Repellents	£90	
<b>(additional medical donated)</b>		<b>£460</b>
<b>Technical</b>		
HD mini-dv stock	£90	
Tripod	£30	
Monopod	£30	
Headphones	£65	
<b>(additional technical equip. donated by Indus Films)</b>		<b>£205</b>
<b>Visas and Good Will</b>		
Surat Jalans	£20	
Indonesian Visas (x1 30 day, x 3 60 day)	£130	
Misc gifts (pencils, pork, veg)	£135	
Accommodation/good will donations on route	£280	
PNG Visa	£40	
		<b>£605</b>



ENAROTALI: S – 03: 55: 57  
E – 136: 22: 66

NB. These are for guidance only. I strongly recommend you make contact with one of the many missionary aviation organisations prior to your project for the most accurate co-ordinates.

### **7.3 Appendices 3 – Articles**

Articles authored by Will Millard as a result of the expedition:

*Geographical Magazine* 'In Search of the traders of the Great Road' by Will Millard (Aug 2010) [http://www.geographical.co.uk/Magazine/New\\_Guinea\\_-\\_Aug\\_10.html](http://www.geographical.co.uk/Magazine/New_Guinea_-_Aug_10.html)

*Wanderlust Magazine* 'From the Road' by Will Millard (Jan/Feb 2011)  
<http://www.willmillard.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/WILL-ARTICLE.jpg>

### **8.0 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)