Mosquitoes and Memories

Typical roads, PNG – 1965

Typical villages, PNG – 1965

Meeting hut, PNG – 1965

Hut and stockade, PNG – 1965

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CRICOS No. 00213J
Woman feeding cassowary. Sheet of roofing iron leads to water drum.
Wabo Village, Purari River, PNG – 1978

Loading dugout with Marks’ workgear, Wabo Village, Purari River, PNG – 1978
Front steps into house, Wabo Village

Pawaia woman after giving blood, Uraru

Arrival at Uraru by river truck. C. Morse and T. Petr in boat.
Purari River, PNG – 1978
George Nurse taking blood at Uraru, Purari River, PNG – 1978

Along branch of Purari River, Kapuna to Mapaio, PNG – 1978
Mapaio Village, Purari River, PNG – 1978

Making a dugout canoe, Mapaio Village, Purari River, PNG – 1978

Mapaio Village, Purari River, PNG – 1978

Making a dugout canoe, Mapaio Village, Purari River, PNG – 1978
Peg and Lin Gressitt, Wau Field Station, PNG – 1978

Wau Ecology Unit, PNG – 1978
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AYERS ROCK 1958

In September 1958 Mrs Mackerras and I attended a science conference in Adelaide. Following this, along with Kathleen Walker, we had booked an organised trip to Alice Springs and Ayers Rock (now Uluru).

We travelled on the Ghan train from Adelaide to Alice Springs and then by bus to Ayers Rock. We camped in tents, which the bus company supplied, as this was before there was any hotel accommodation at Ayers Rock or nearby.

All three of us climbed Ayers Rock right to the top. At that time there were not any safety measures such as pegs or chains along the route of the climb. This was a pleasure trip but collecting mosquitoes was always part of my pleasure so I collected mosquitoes when the opportunity presented itself. It was not a funded expedition.

One day a trip was organised to the Olgas and we collected out of the pools of water among the rocks. I collected three or four specimens of larvae and reared one of them. It turned out that the larvae I had collected were of a new mosquito, which I named *Aedes explorator*. I reared a female. As far as I know I am the only person who has ever found it and I do not think the male has been found. I am not sure of this, as I have not studied the latest literature. I really enjoyed the trip to Ayers Rock and the Olgas, as it was a fascinating place. Unfortunately I have not managed to get back there since that time.

We also went out to the West MacDonnell Ranges from Alice Springs. I remember going to Standley Chasm and also to Palm Valley. There were a lot of women on this trip and one nice old man, I suppose in his seventies. We were going for a swim in the Finke River at Palm Valley. This man did not have his togs with him so he said he would go swimming in his underpants, which he did. However his underpants were nylon and they became completely transparent when they got wet! Nobody liked to tell him. We got a lot of amusement looking at the other ladies who were older than us and who could have been quite shocked but took it in their stride! We flew home from Alice Springs.
I visited Mitchell River Mission in 1960 and 1961. This Aboriginal community was different to the Torres Strait Island communities which were autonomous, while Mitchell River was an Anglican Mission Station at that time. In February 1964, almost three years after my second visit, the village was struck by cyclone “Dora”. A lot of the cottages were damaged or destroyed as they had grass walls and were grass or palm thatched. State Government funds were needed to rebuild the village and in 1967 the Anglican Church handed control over to the then Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs. The thatched buildings were replaced by European-style housing and Mitchell River Mission became known as Kowanyama from then on.

The Aboriginal people were different in nature and less outgoing than the Torres Strait Islanders were but there was no difference in the way we were treated. We dealt mainly with the mission people who were European. Our party consisted of Mrs Mackerras who was taking bloods, Ralph Doherty who was an expert in arbovirus research, Miss Trevethan who was Ralph’s assistant and myself. Mrs Mackerras and Ralph Doherty were the leaders of the expedition and dealt with the local people. My job was the scientific work.

We flew from Cairns to Normanton and then to Mitchell River. We had at least a week there doing the same sort of things as we did in the Murray Valley. We were looking for arbovirus and did mass collecting when we could. This was different to our collecting in other places such as Torres Strait where we were looking for malaria.

Our accommodation was in a grass hut. It had a grass roof and walls with a wooden floor and was quite comfortable.

One day our party was invited to go fishing on the river. Mrs Mackerras and Ralph Doherty decided they would not go, as they had to do other things but the rest of us set off. The Europeans on the trip were the superintendent, the carpenter, the schoolteacher Miss Card who was I suppose in her fifties and originally came from Sydney, Miss Trevethan and myself. We set out for the river in a big blitz buggy and on the way stopped and picked up a very big Aboriginal man named Frank George. A whole party joined us including Frank’s wife, other women and children.

We went about eight or ten miles away from the mission station down to the bank of the Mitchell River where the boat was anchored. When we got there someone said, “Oh! We’ve forgotten to bring the oars!” They HAD brought the outboard motor so they said, “We’ll go anyway – with just the outboard!” So, on this remote river full of crocodiles, away we went with the outboard motor and no oars. We did not have life jackets or any of the safety gear one would have on such an expedition these days. Frank stood up in the bows with his woomera and spears and either the carpenter or superintendent operated the outboard.

We went along and nosed in among the mangroves at the side of the river. When Frank saw the waving tail of a big barramundi under the water they brought the boat around again and Frank threw a spear with his woomera. Sometimes he got the fish and sometimes he missed! Two or three that he hit swam away and you could see the spear going down the river. They said, “We’ll get that when we come back.”
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We went on down the river and while we were crossing a shallow place the propeller grounded and a pin in the outboard broke so it was longer useable. As we had no oars they looked around and said, “Oh well, what can we use as oars? It’s not very far to the place where we were going to have a picnic. We’ll go there, take the outboard off and see what we can do but we’ve got to get there first!” So to propel the boat the carpenter used the butt of his rifle, Frank used his woomera and the superintendent looked around and saw my lovely big cooking spoon, which I always had with me in case I wanted to do any collecting. It was much the best thing for a paddle, this long spoon! So away we went and paddled I suppose about a quarter of a mile down the river until we came to the place for our picnic.

We got out of the boat there and had our picnic while the repairs to the motor were being carried out. They took the handle off the petrol drum, heated it up in the fire, straightened it out and made another pin for the outboard! So did we stop then and return home with our temporarily repaired motor? Not a bit of it – we went on!

We got into a very shallow place where there were little cross channels between one channel of the river and another. As we were pursuing a fish and I was wondering what we would do if the motor was damaged again, Miss Card who was sitting next to me asked, “Would you like to see these photographs I took in Sydney the last time I was there?” I said, “I would rather wait until we get back!”

In fact we had no more trouble with the motor and we got about half-a-dozen barramundi including a very large one, and a big sawfish. The ones that had been speared earlier were floating as we returned along the river and we picked them up. The fishing trip was a great experience and too exciting to think about taking many photographs – or looking at them!

One of the community activities was basket making. The women used reeds, which they rubbed on their thighs to make the fronds that they then wove. When I returned home Aunt Audrey, mummy’s younger sister and Barbara Clarke her daughter, who both belonged to the Country Women’s Association, were going to give a demonstration of basket making while sitting in the window of the Courier-Mail building in Queen Street. I suggested they rub the cane on their thighs the way I had seen the women at Mitchell River doing. They did not take at all kindly to my suggestion!
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Normanton from the air – first trip March 1960

The Courthouse and Shire Council buildings, Normanton – second trip April 1961
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Main street and town well, Normanton – second trip April 1961

Herd of goats, Normanton – second trip April 1961
Mitchell River Village – first trip April 1960

From left. M. J. Mackerras, P. Marks, P. Trevethan outside their hut, Mitchell River – first trip April 1960

Cessna with load of mosquitoes, Mitchell River – first trip April 1960
From left. E. N. Marks, R. Doherty, M. J. Mackerras, W. Cunningham
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Frank George with woomera and fish spear, Mitchell River – second trip April 1961

Boat repairs and lunch. Fishing Trip, Mitchell River – second trip April 1961