

The village of Ako in Dyke Ackland Bay looked "picture postcard perfect" when we arrived on Sunday morning.



A KIAP Returns

Don Silcock

Our arrival at Ako on one of Tufi's dive boats created quite a stir with the village kids.



I have to be honest and start this short article by admitting that I had absolutely no idea what a Kiap actually was until I met Doug Robbins & his family, over a drink on the verandah of the main lodge, at the Tufi Dive Resort.

I was at Tufi on my second trip in as many years as part of a book project I am working on with the resort to document the special nature of the area, both underwater in the fiords & the offshore reefs and above water in the villages in & around the fiords.

What I think is quite unique about the area is the spell it seems to cast on anybody who goes there and I have yet to meet anybody who says anything negative about the place, infact the general description you will almost always hear people say is "beautiful Tufi"

Yet there is very little written down anywhere about the area & it's

Doug Robbins is led through the village to meet the chiefs.



Doug & his family are greeted by the village chiefs.





Doug introduces himself to the village chiefs.

"...they went to work in the field under what can only be described as a steep learning curve..."

history and I was struggling to find any good information until Linda Honey, one of the owners of the resort, introduced me to Doug.

Doug had been a Kiap in Papua New Guinea for 4 years from 1969 to 1973 during the Australian colonial rule, and two of those years had seen him & his wife Annette stationed at Tufi. So not only was Doug a great source of information about the area in the days before independence, he was able to explain how Oro Province was

administered back then.

Tufi had obviously cast it's spell on Doug & Annette as they were fulfilling an ambition to return to the area, 36 years after they had left and together with their three grown-up children, now that Doug had retired from his solicitor's business in Brisbane.

Joining them on this trip back in time was Fif & Sue Favetta, who had also been stationed at Tufi prior to PNG independence in 1975.

Like many Australians, I had no

concept of the role the country played as the colonial administration of Papua New Guinea so it was interesting to learn about those days from people who had actually been there. I spent many hours chatting with Doug & Fif about what Tufi and the Oro Province region had been like back then.

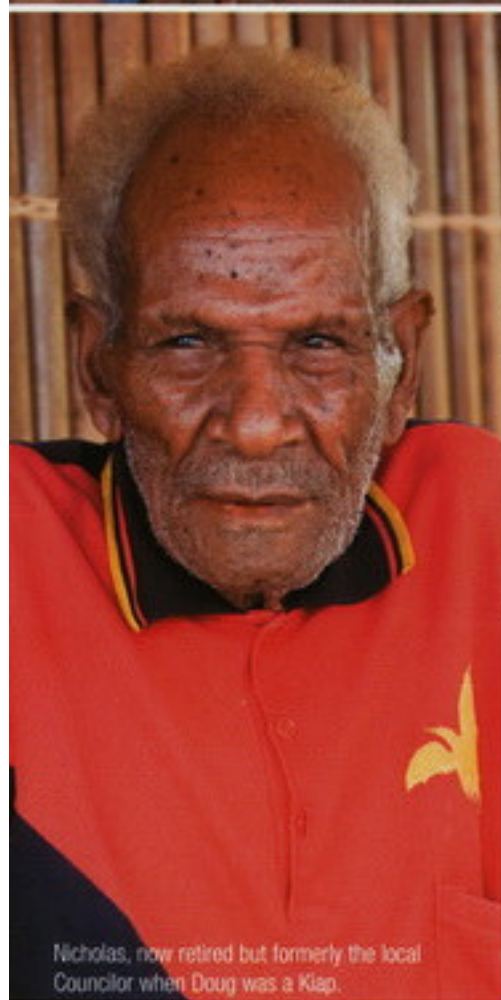
Frankly, I was expecting both of them to have somewhat of a "colonial attitude" and talk condescendingly about Tufi, but it was quite the opposite and I was pleasantly surprised to hear the way the



One of the many pigs raised for subsistence.



Doug shows Nicholas & some of the village chiefs his old photographs from his time as a Kiap.



Nicholas, now retired but formerly the local Councillor when Doug was a Kiap.



The village kids are very excited by our visit!

talked about area & the people with real affection.

The Kiap's Role

Kiaps were officers of the Australian colonial administration stationed in remote locations to provide the overall management of that area. They were very much multi-functional and required to cover a wide range of tasks, from basic law & order through to census surveys and collection of customs duties.

At the top of the Kiap hierarchy was the District Officer, or DO, who was basically the governor of the area he was assigned and therefore responsible for all law & order and government administration. This effectively meant that he was the area magistrate, chief of police, head gaoler, licensing authority, collector of customs, inspector of labor, land purchaser & local treasurer all rolled into one.



Doug & the village chiefs.



The village chiefs look at Doug's old photographs.

A major part of the DO's role was to manage the overall relationship between the local population & the foreigners in the area and provide the locals with a way to raise any incidents of ill treatment. This obviously required considerable skill to understand & arbitrate fairly on all manner of issues, so that the district functioned smoothly and did not descent into turmoil because of perceived bias or unfairness in either direction.

An Assistant District Officer supported the DO and then there were the Patrol Officers, who did most of the fieldwork assisted by Cadets under training.

Both Doug & Fif were hired as Patrol Officers and after a 4-month intensive training course in Sydney, followed by 5-week familiarization course in Port Moresby they went to work in the field

under what can only be described as a steep learning curve.... The major part of a Patrol Officer's responsibilities was conducting field patrols of the district, which meant extended treks from village to village for weeks on end, and it was common for 30% of an officer's time to be spent on patrol.

The purpose of the patrols was to establish a visible presence of law & order in the villages, settle major disputes ranging from the amount of compensation for the damage done field to a garden by a neighbor's pig, to negotiating a peace treaty between warring villages, while also quantifying the village populations & demographics.

Reading copies of Doug & Fif's original trip reports was quite fascinating as they described in detail their treks



A villager watches on....

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from village to village, the conditions they faced on a daily basis, where they camped, what they eat and the many issues they were called upon to arbitrate & resolve.

"Multi-tasking" does not do justice to the range of skills a good Patrol Officer was required to possess....

Return to Tufi

While they were back in Tufi I saw Doug & Annette meet with many locals, who remembered them from all that time ago, and I could see that there was real respect for them in the eyes of the villagers. So I was very honored

when Doug asked me if I would like to accompany him & his family on a trip up the coast to the picturesque village of Ako.

They had both visited & stayed at the village many times back in the 70's, and were keen to see it again, plus it was the home of some Doug's old colleagues which he hoped to meet up with again.

The trip up the coast from Tufi and around Cape Nelson into Dyke Ackland Bay to Ako, not far from the mouth of the mighty Musa River, went without a hitch and the scenery was quite spectacular. Our arrival on a quiet Sunday

morning caused quite a stir and we got a truly warm welcome with the village chief surrounded by what appeared to be every child in the village waiting for us on the beach.

Doug had brought along prints of his old photographs and once the initial formalities were over, he used them to explain the purpose of the visit. Great excitement followed when it was realized that Nicholas, who had been a local Councilor when Doug was a Kiap, was still alive and living in the village.

It was quite touching to see the former colleagues reunited after over 35 years and the sparkle in Nicholas' eye as he looked at the old photos told a story in itself.

We spent a couple of hours wandering around the village and being shown the locations where Doug & Annette had lived when they stayed here, plus other places of interest.

It was very clear that the villagers appreciated the visit as much as Doug, Annette & their family did and I felt very privileged to have been included. ▲

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The village kids get even more excited as we prepare to leave.



Ako villages wave us goodbye!