

PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND SOLOMON ISLANDS EXPEDITION

Headhunt Revisited: Charting Cultural Change in Melanesia

Inspired by an adventurous woman explorer of the 1920s, photographers Michele Westmorland and Karen Huntt carried Wings WorldQuest Flag #1 on a trip that retraced the route through Melanesia taken by artist/writer Caroline Mytinger nearly 80 years ago.

After reading Mytinger's books *Headhunting in the Solomon Islands* and *New Guinea Headhunt*, Michele and Karen decided to pursue their own expedition to document existing cultural practices in these areas today and to bring Caroline's story to light once again.



Michele Westmorland and Karen Huntt, holding Wings WorldQuest Flag #1, visit one of the mysterious calcite caves filled with skulls near Hiliwao village, along the southeast coast of Papua New Guinea.

After five years spent planning a film and book about this experience, hoping they could find descendants of the natives depicted in Caroline's original paintings, and eager to learn if any of the older cultural practices still remained, the modern explorers set sail on April 27, 2005. For the next eight weeks, they would take a film crew, anthropologist, and historian on a 2,000-mile journey through the South Pacific.

REDISCOVERING CAROLINE MYTINGER'S PORTRAITS

Nearly 80 years ago, two intrepid women set out by freighter from San Francisco with little more than \$400 and a tin of paints. Their objective was to paint portraits of the tribal peoples of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands before the encroachment of modern, European-style culture changed their lives forever. Caroline, a portrait artist, and her friend, Margaret Warner, spent 1926 to 1930 traveling through Melanesia.

Caroline returned in 1930, and, under the guidance of famed anthropologist Margaret Mead, exhibited 25 oil paintings at the American Museum of Natural History. Afterward, the paintings disappeared from view. After two years of searching, Michele and Karen

ISLANDS EXPEDITION



Michele and Karen share information with John Wayne and Dr. Andrew Moutu at Marovo Lagoon, Solomon Islands.

discovered 23 paintings stored in the Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, and they located Caroline's sketches and scrapbooks stored in the Monterey Museum of Art.

Michele and Karen's plan was to take reproductions of the paintings to show to chiefs, elders, and villagers – a technique that proved to be successful in opening doors, hearts, and memories for the 2005 explorers.



A 2,000-Mile Sea Route – New Georgia to Port Moresby
The 2005 expedition traveled to coastal and island areas in the M.V. FeBrina, a 72-foot vessel, starting in the New Georgia Group. The route: the Florida Islands and Guadalcanal (Solomon Islands); New Britain, Louisiade Archipelago, Conflict and DeBoyne Groups, Milne Bay Province, Southeast coast, Oro Province, and Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea).

WHO
Michele Westmorland and Karen Huntt

WHAT
Duplicate the 1920s journey of artist/writer Caroline Mytinger

WHERE
Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands Melanesia, South Pacific

WHY
Chronicle changes since Mytinger's expedition and raise awareness of cultures

GOAL: TO LIVE THE CULTURE AND FIND LINKS WITH THE PAST

The expedition was planned to find which cultural traditions were still in existence from Caroline's time, which no longer exist, and where old and new might intersect. Karen and Michele wanted to raise awareness of this virtually unknown area and to erase misconceptions about its dangers and the violence of its people.

Their goal was to participate in cultural practices, learn about cultural traditions, and possibly find one or more living descendants of people depicted in Caroline's 1920s portraits.

Take the Trip on the Web:

Read Michele and Karen's daily journal, meet the villagers, and listen to the sounds of Melanesia at www.headhuntrerevisited.org

THE EXPEDITION EXPERIENCE

The team took a skiff ashore daily, but sometimes relied upon Dick Doyle, their interpreter, and Dr. Andrew Moutu, a Papua New Guinea-born anthropologist, to go ashore first, talk to the residents in pidgin, and introduce them to the project. Often, when villagers saw the portraits in Caroline's artwork, they immediately understood the team's mission, relaxed, and opened up.



Michele photographs while riding in an outrigger.

At nearly every stop, the team was welcomed warmly by residents, who willingly and enthusiastically shared their daily lives, talked about the past, and demonstrated local crafts, such as pottery making, carving war canoes, or building outrigger canoes.

Day after day, Michele and Karen recorded extraordinary experiences to include in their future film, book, and expedition exhibition – the beauty of village orchid collections, the solemnity of ancient head-hunting shrines, the thrilling speed when riding in war canoes and outriggers, the sight of elderly women in now-rare grass skirts and full-body tattoos, the taste of betel nuts and paw paws, the transforming power of applied face paint and headdresses, and the sensation of being tattooed by palm thorn and charcoal with neither antiseptics nor anesthetics.

EXPEDITION RESULTS

The expedition was a great success. Michele and Karen covered over 2,000 miles by water, visited dozens of locations where Caroline Mytinger lived, and met the descendants of four of the people she painted.

Although some practices are in decline as cultures adapt to life in the modern world, the team documented many of the traditional practices that Mytinger saw and painted. Michele and Karen aim to increase awareness of Melanesian culture through their book, documentary film, and expedition exhibition.

TIPS FOR MAKING DOCUMENTARIES AND FRIENDS ON REMOTE ISLANDS

- Be passionate about your project. Do your homework about the places you will be visiting. Do lots of research and know your subject well.
- Develop a team of people who are experts in their fields, but who are not egotistical.
- Have team members who are conversant in the local language.
- Allow interviewees the time to respond in a relaxed manner. Know when to stand back and when to push forward with questions.
- Know what you want to accomplish, but be open to unexpected experiences.
- Funding is vital. Don't quit your day job, unless you make fundraising a key part of your efforts.

ABOUT MICHELE WESTMORLAND AND KAREN HUNTT

Michele Westmorland, a full-time freelance photographer based in Seattle, has been traveling to Papua New Guinea since 1991. Michele's photographic stock is represented by Corbis, Getty, AGE Fotostock, Animals/Animals, and Danita Delimont.

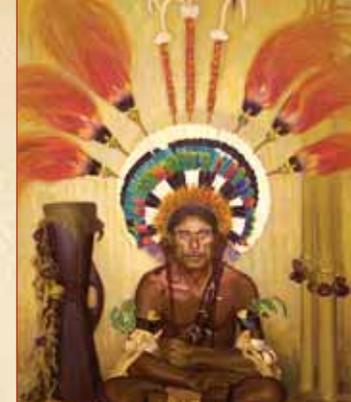
Karen Huntt, also from Seattle, is a freelance photographer and photo editor who has traveled throughout North America, Europe, and Morocco. She was a managing photo editor at Corbis, and she ran the stills photo department at National Geographic's TV Division. Karen's photographic stock is represented by Corbis, Getty, and Alamy.



EXPEDITION SPONSORS

Support for the Mytinger Project LLC – Grants, donations, self-funding: Marcia and John Friede, Explorers Club grant, Canon USA, Hitachi Global Storage, Reef and Rainforest, Air Niugini, Stratos, Isis for Women, Lowepro.

Grace, the local pastor's wife, discusses the project with Karen at AloAlo on the southeast coast of Papua New Guinea.



Caroline Mytinger's painting titled "Heera," which means "body decoration"