

UPPER SEPIK – CENTRAL NEW GUINEA PROJECT

PROGRESS REPORT December 2004

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The Upper Sepik – Central New Guinea Project, funded for three years under the ARC-Linkage program, commenced 16 August 2004. Andrew Fyfe, the APAI post-graduate student, arrived in Adelaide that day to commence work with the project; he was allocated space in my office at the South Australian Museum. He had already completed enrolment procedures as a PhD student in the Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences at the University of Adelaide. Professor Graeme Hugo and I have been appointed as his supervisors.

The project aims to examine up to 10,000 artefacts originating from specific places within two regions in New Guinea – the upper Sepik and central New Guinea – with the objective to explore relationships between the characteristics of those artefacts on the one hand and language, propinquity, population, subsistence and environment on the other.

A two-day workshop took place 9 and 10 September to enable all participants in the project to become familiar with the timing and objectives of the project, the nature of the data to be collected, and the region and peoples from whom the data originates. In addition to myself and Andrew Fyfe, the participants in the workshop included:

- Professor Graeme Hugo, Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Adelaide
- Justin Nottage and Chris Medlin, both of the National Centre for Social Applications of GIS at the University of Adelaide
- Dr Ari Verbyla, Director of BiometricSA, University of Adelaide
- Doug Marmion, representing also Professor Andrew Pawley, of the Department of Linguistics in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University
- Dr Bryant Allen, Department of Human Geography, RSPAS, ANU
- Sai Perchard, Year 10, International Baccalaureate student at Glenunga International High School (for website design and management).

The roles of the various participants in the project were clarified, resources identified and subsequently made available, and issues requiring attention were explored.

Meanwhile Andrew Fyfe used my field reports, lists of ethnographic collections relevant to the project, and publications by myself and other researchers to further familiarise himself with the material to be examined and the region from which it originated. We purchased a laptop computer, digital camera, scanner and colour printer from project funds, and the South Australian Museum upgraded my computer and printer. Andrew familiarised himself with the equipment and developed a framework for recording data about each of the artefacts to be included in the study. A volunteer, Alexia Binmore-Wilkinson, commenced on the project 28 September, providing significant assistance for around 15 hours per week.

During 5 – 8 and 11 – 12 October, the procedures for examining artefacts and recording data were tested and refined using ethnographic material from the project regions presently in the collections of the South Australian Museum. 210 objects from the upper Sepik (most of them collected by J.S. Womersley in 1949 and by M.J. Lewis in 1962-63) and 32 from central New Guinea were recorded.

On 18 October, Andrew flew to Sydney and commenced a seven-week stint at the Australian Museum to record data on some 1250 objects from the study area. I followed him on 15 November for three weeks, costs paid for by the Australian Museum's Leo Fleischmann Research Fellowship.

Although practical requirements restricted access to the collections to about four hours per day on average, a total of 1668 objects were recorded – 1069 from the upper Sepik and 599 from central New Guinea. The upper Sepik material was collected by H.D. Eve in 1930-37, by myself in 1968 and 1969, and by M. Mackenzie in 1982; the central New Guinea material was collected by S. Campbell in 1936, by myself in 1964, and by M. Mackenzie in 1984.

Andrew explored archival sources in relation to Campbell and Eve (Mackenzie's material is extremely well documented and published) and although little was discovered relevant to the Eve collection other than the village identifications provided in the Register, diaries and drafts of an unpublished manuscript by Campbell were discovered in the Mitchell Library. Copies of these papers have been requested to assist in providing further information about the Campbell collection.

One disappointment was that some 550 upper Sepik objects collected by Douglas Miles in 1964 on behalf of the Australian Museum are lacking village identification in the Register, and the field notebooks in which this information was recorded are missing. Also missing are the majority of colour transparency photographs and all but one set of monochrome negatives and there is no sign of the recorded sound tapes mentioned in Miles' brief report of the expedition. Efforts were made to locate the missing material but without success. However, I remain optimistic that the material will be found and that the objects can subsequently be included in the project. The Anthropology Department of the Australian Museum, and its collections and archives, have been through several major relocations over the past 40 years and this is no doubt why this material has been mislaid.

On 30 November and 3 December, Andrew and I gave illustrated presentations on the Project to staff of the Australian Museum and on 13 December I gave the same presentation to staff of the South Australian Museum. We are looking forward to the design of the Project's website by Sai Perchard early in 1995 and to the posting of the outcomes of our research activities on that site.

Opportunities to browse in the Library of the Australian Museum led to the discovery of several publications relevant to the project of which we were previously unaware and to the fact that a central New Guinea collection of around 100 objects made by David Hyndman among the Wopkeimin exists in the Anthropology Museum of the University of Queensland in Brisbane, with a corresponding collection in the PNG National Museum.

Andrew and I plan to travel to Port Moresby around the end of January to commence a three month stint at the PNG National Museum to record some 3500 artefacts in the collections

there. I will return after three weeks but Andrew will continue until he has completed the task. Then I will return to Moresby to take Andrew into the field to walk through the areas from which the objects have come and to take the opportunity to fill gaps in our field-based information.

Thanks are due to Alexia Binmore-Wilkinson for the quality of her volunteer assistance in Adelaide to date; to Jude Philp, Collection Manager at the Australian Museum for practical day-to-day assistance in the storerooms; to Phil Gordon (Head of Anthropology), Jan Brazier (Archives), Karl Bento (Photography), Yvonne Carillo (Secretary) and other staff and volunteers for making it possible to achieve so much in Sydney within the allotted time; and to the Australian Museum for the award of the Leo Fleischmann Research Fellowship that enabled me to travel to Sydney and assist Andrew in working with the collections in the Australian Museum.

Table 1. Collections recorded in the South Australian Museum

	Upper Sepik	Central New Guinea	Total
Wills, K.A.	18	-	18
Womersley, J.	99	-	99
Lewis, M.J.	93	-	93
Black, J.	-	16	16
Downes, C.K.	-	8	8
Others	-	8	8
TOTAL	210	32	242

Table 2. Collections recorded in the Australian Museum

	Upper Sepik	Central New Guinea	Total
Eve, H.D.	338	-	338
Campbell, S.	-	225	225
Craig, B.	710	353	1063
MacKenzie, M.	36	111	147
Others	-	8	8
Total registered	1084	697	1781
Not found	15	98	113
Total found	1069	599	1668