

Can We Get There From Here?

One of the things that we were looking forward to when we allocated in Tambapmining is the road that goes right to the village. We thought if we get a decent vehicle, the travel problems would be solved. Well, not so fast. There is a road but, it has deteriorated until it is only usable for about 4 months out of the year. On our first trip we were able to drive right up to the house. It was obvious, though, that once the rainy season starts (around December) the road will be impassible until it dries up again in July or August.

So we were in a bit of a quandary. It would be difficult to have a successful program in an area that was reliably accessible only 4 months out of the year. We could always use a helicopter to get in. That, however, is so incredibly expensive that it is not really an option. It looked like the best possibility was to purchase a good boat and use that to make the trip out to the village. The trip would be about 120 miles north up the coast to the Ramu river, then a few miles south up river to the village.

We had no idea if the kind of boat we needed was available in Madang or even in all of Papua New Guinea. It was a real surprise then to find that a local company in town actually manufactures boats that are exactly the type we are looking for. There was a model available that is 30ft long, with a 225 hp outboard motor. It has an enclosed cargo bay and room at the front to install a cabin where we can sleep when we are visiting other villages (like having a small houseboat). It is fast and can carry up to 1.5 tons of cargo or 20 people. Finally it has foam throughout, making it almost impossible to sink (Kathy especially likes that).

This particular boat had been built for one of the auto dealers here in Madang and they were eager to find a buyer. They offered to let us have it for \$22,000. While that was a bit more than we had hoped to go, the manufacturer told us that if he were to build another like it for sale today the cost would be in the mid 30's.

We took it.

Without even putting out a general appeal \$8500 has already come in towards the purchase. Kathy and I had some money left from the sale of our house and have loaned that to the project. Another supporter has promised to loan us the remainder. We are proceeding with the purchase and hope to raise enough to pay back the money that was borrowed. If you would like to contribute to this project, please send a check made out to Pioneer Bible Translators, PO Box 203, Moline IL 61266 and indicate that it is for the boat project.

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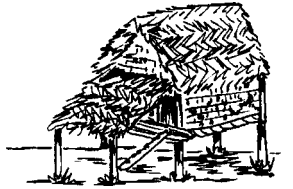
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Ramu Ramblings

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*Serving the people of the Lower Ramu river valley
of Papua New Guinea*



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Changes in Latitudes



Finally, after a year of preparation we step off the plane in Madang.

It has been almost seven years since we left PNG so one of the first things people asked us is about how things have changed. In an attempt to answer that, let us offer a few observations.

First, it is definitely hotter now. The whole global warming thing must be true as is evidenced by the fact that it is at least 20 degrees hotter now than we remember it. We have been trying to figure out how to run an air-conditioning system off solar panels and a battery. I know that we will get used to it again, soon I hope.

Shopping has definitely changed in Madang. Several new shops have opened including a Nike store, two or three furniture stores, a new hardware store, and a couple of new supermarkets. There is little that we can't find here. The food items are limited to Australian brands for the most part but with the exception of cake mixes, they do most things fairly well.

And speaking of shopping, our currency is not what it used to be. When we left, the Kina was nearly equal to the Dollar in value. Now it is worth about 25 cents. It was a shocking experience to walk into a store and see a block of

cheese for 15 kina. After doing the math, that comes out to about \$4.25, not too bad after all. The decline in the kina has made some things a real bargain. The best steak in the best resort in town can now be purchased for about \$8 US. Needless to say, we can afford a night out occasionally.

Security is now a big issue. Law and order has suffered a serious breakdown since 1995. Security companies are everywhere. After our missionaries suffered some attacks and robberies in Madang, every PBT property is now guarded from 6 PM to 6 AM by a security guard with a big scary dog. That is in addition to the security fences and barbed wire. It is unfortunate that we have been forced into a fortress mentality but it is a necessity now.

In a way, all of the above are superficial. In the important ways things are much the same as we remember them. The Papua New Guinea people are wonderful, working with them is the greatest privilege one could hope for, and God is good. We are so blessed to be here and to have the opportunity to bring people the good news about Jesus in their own language.



PBT's office (Ground Floor) and our temporary home (above).

Getting Settled in Tambapmining ...

Shortly after returning to PNG we, together with Jim Davis and Dave and Chris Robinson, took a four wheel drive pickup truck to the village of Tambapmining. This was where Dave and Alice Parrish had worked before and we were hoping to use this village as our base of operations for our ministry to the five language groups of the Ottilien family. But of course, that required the permission of the village leaders. The purpose of this trip was to ask for that permission and to survey the condition of the Parrishes house.

The road out to Tambapmining is paved for the first 100 miles or so. We made great time for that part of the trip. Things changed rapidly after we left the pavement behind. Soon we had to shift to four-wheel drive as the road got worse and worse. While we were able to drive the whole way to the village, it was obvious that once the rainy season starts that will no longer be possible. We would have to use a boat and travel by sea.

When we reached the village we went right to the house to check it out. Structurally it is in good shape. We will have to replace a few of the support posts and some steps on the porch. Also the fly wire has to be completely stripped off and replaced. There is some plumbing and guttering work to do as well. The big thing is just all the cleaning work that needs done. The house has been sitting empty for several years now and it has collected a fair bit of grunge.

After checking out the house we went to meet with the village leaders. We outlined our vision for developing translation and literacy programs among all the language groups in that area and told them that we needed their cooperation and help to bring that about. We asked them if they would be willing to assist in that and if we could use the house for our base of operations. After a bit of discussion they enthusiastically agreed that we could come and work there and that they would assist us.

Now all that was left to do was to get our boat, purchase supplies for the first stay, and head for the

village. We set a goal of having everything ready to go by the first week of December.

...Almost

The time to travel on the ocean here in PNG is early in the morning. At dawn the sea is often like glass and a boat can skim along at a good clip. As the day proceeds, the winds kick up and by afternoon the seas are often rather vigorous. With that in mind on December 7 we got up at 5AM to get the last of the supplies loaded on the boat to begin our trip to the village. I was thinking that if we could average 25 mph we could make the 125 mile trip in around 5 hours.

Well, as usual, everything takes longer than expected. By the time we were done loading the boat, topping off the fuel tanks, getting everything organized, tied down, covered, etc. it was 9:30 a.m. We should have been over half-way up the coast by that time. The ocean looked fairly quiet so we shoved off.

The first hour we followed the coast due North. The waves were small and we were making excellent time. I checked the GPS and it said that our speed was 25.1 mph. Perfect. After traveling about 25 miles North, we rounded a cape and started West. Jan Messersmith, one of our PBT members who was very knowledgeable about things nautical, had cautioned us that things were generally rougher on the other side of the cape and to be careful. We were to find out exactly what he meant.

At first things were going well. The seas on the other side of the cape were definitely higher but nothing to be concerned about. The farther we went though, the worse it got. By 11:30 I was standing at the steering wheel and looking way up at the tops of the waves coming at us. The boat would go up and over and crash down on the other side, rattling bones and nerves. We decreased speed but it didn't seem to make any difference. Kathy had the worst of it.

She was sitting on a stack of cushions on the big square fuel tank and occasionally she would become airborne and then slam down on the tank when we hit the bottom of the trough.

And to add to the fun, I was getting sea sick.

At 12:30 I checked the GPS and it showed that we had reached the half-way point. We were feeling battered and bruised. I was so sick that I was having trouble focusing on the oncoming ocean. And at our reduced speed we still had several hours ahead of us.



Back in Madang, we will be making a few modifications to our boat before setting out again..

There is a point in an airplane takeoff beyond which you are committed and there is no aborting. We felt like we had reached that point. We could turn around now and since we would be going with the waves, we could probably be back in Madang in a couple hours. Or we could continue pushing ahead. If we pushed ahead we were committed.

Reading this it may seem like it was an easy decision. It wasn't. We had worked so hard to get everything ready and we were so eager to get to the village and start our ministry, that in spite of the difficulty of the trip and our battered bodies, there was a part of us that just wanted to keep going. But neither the condition of the seas nor the condition of my stomach was getting any better. We refueled and turned around.

Going with the waves was better in the sense there

were no more bone jarring impacts. But it was still not easy. With a following sea, there is a tendency of the waves to sneak up behind you, grab the back of the boat, and try to turn it around. So the driver has to be constantly aware of what is happening - a real feat when the driver in question is slumped over the wheel trying to calm his stomach. And there is a better chance of broaching. That is when the bow buries itself in a wave and a few hundred gallons of water decide to join you in the boat. Jan had told us about those things so we were somewhat prepared when they happened.

You have probably figured out by now that if we are writing this, we made it OK. Once we got back around the cape, things settled down a little and we increased speed. I got on the marine radio and called ahead to ask for some help getting unloaded. When we pulled up to the dock two PBT men and some Papua New Guineans were waiting. That is one of the wonderful things about working as part of a team. In short order we had all the equipment unloaded and I took the boat back to the mooring.

We learned a lot through all this. Kathy and I have about a page of things to do differently. First on that list is to be on the boat and leaving the harbor at first light. We also need to build some cargo racks to keep things dry, figure out a way to stow our gear better, make a windshield. And so on and so on.

One thing that encouraged us is how well the boat actually did. At no time were we really fearful that it might sink, or break up, or anything like that. It is large enough and well enough powered to handle the seas. It is obvious that we made a good choice of vessel.

God is so good. That we made it through this with only a few bruises and scrapes is evidence of his faithfulness and constant watch care.

*Merry Christmas and
Happy New Year*