

GEOGRAPHICAL RECORD

A MAP OF THE WORLD*

W. GEORGE LOVELL

One's destination is never a place, but a new way of looking at things.

—Henry Miller, 1891–1980

I had barely one-quarter the time that Jules Verne allotted Phileas Fogg, but when the opportunity arose I took it: a journey around the world, not by the fictional gentleman's varied and at times unconventional means of transport but by private jet. The invitation arrived courtesy of the American Geographical Society, whose travel program forms part of its mission "to link the business, professional, and scholarly worlds." Although I had some reservations about the cultural and environmental implications of such a lavish undertaking, discussions with AGS colleagues who had previous experience of similar forays convinced me that it was too enticing a prospect to miss. Seattle-based TCS Expeditions had promoted the trip under the banner "Natural Wonders around the World," but we would encounter little that had not been shaped in some manner by human hand. As we made our way, my interests and training meant that I could emphasize the connections between culture and history over the face of the earth. The lectures I prepared for our journey, organized loosely around the impact of Europe on the non-European world, were designed to appeal to an educated but general public, not a planeload of avid specialists. A log (of sorts) follows.

DAY 1

Where better to begin than Seville? Its pivotal role in the age of European expansion made it for two centuries, in the words of Fernando de Herrera (1536–1599), "not a city but a world" (Lovell 2001). It was from Seville that the expedition led by Ferdinand Magellan set off to be the first to circumnavigate the globe. Of the five ships that departed on 10 August 1519, only the *Victoria* made it back to the banks of the Guadalquivir on 8 September 1522. Out of the original crew of 243, 18 returned.

* The trip recounted in this "traveler's tale" took place between 21 January and 13 February 2006. For her solicitation of my services as ambassador as well as lecturer on behalf of the American Geographical Society, I thank our Executive Director, Mary Lynne Bird. AGS President Jerome E. Dobson heard about my writing up the experience through William Woods and encouraged me to pursue publication in the *Geographical Review*. The evaluation process called for me to rethink key issues and how to deal with them narratively, for which I thank all concerned. For her transformation of the manuscript from handwritten scrawl to digital text, I am indebted to Kari Pries. Maureen McCallum Garvie looked at what I had to say through her critical literary lens; any infelicities that remain are my responsibility alone. The staff of the AGS Travel Program, Education Manager Lauren Cummings above all, kept track (and me straight) of myriad logistics. On several occasions during the trip I found myself thinking of the geography classes I took from two memorable teachers, Miss Marks and Mr. Dewar, whose lessons when I was a schoolboy back in Glasgow truly did open up the world.

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Magellan was not among them, for he had been killed by hostile natives in the Philippines. “Buried on a far shore in the end” is how Fernando Pessoa (1974) put it in one of his poems, a valediction that reminds us that lands “discovered” by explorers like Magellan had been home to disparate peoples for centuries if not millennia. A plaque by the river records that the historic feat was completed under the seamanship of Juan Sebastián del Cano. It is Magellan, however, who invariably receives the credit. Pessoa (1974, 27) evokes the phantom captain thus:

They dance not knowing the dead man’s
Daring soul is still in command,
At the helm a wrist with no body, to steer
The ships through the rest of the end of space:
That he can compass the entire
Earth—even absent—with his embrace.

In voyages of exploration financed by Spain and Portugal in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries lie the roots of globalization (McGillivray 2006). They were enshrined in the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, when two Iberian monarchs convened under papal blessing to partition the reaches of a world soon to be exploited, and ravaged, as never before. The Catholic faith and Crown ambitions were engaged by a mix of men, many of them motivated by naked greed. “We came here to serve God and the King,” wrote Bernal Díaz of the conquest of Mexico, “and also to get rich” (Díaz 1632, quoted in Elliot 1963, 65).

After teaching a class in Seville I fly to Fort Lauderdale, Florida. There I am to meet with staff and passengers before we board the specially rigged Boeing 757 that will carry us to ten remarkable destinations. Crossing the Atlantic I reread Eric Wolf’s magnum opus, *Europe and the People without History* (1982). I admire the breadth of his research, the directness of his prose, and the power of his ideas. How our globalized world came to be is an epic and tragic tale, as Wolf makes pertinently clear. Although by vocation he was an anthropologist, geography and geographical concerns lie at the heart of Wolf’s analysis, furnishing me not only with historical facts but also with conceptual inspiration.

DAY 2

Members of staff number seven, passengers seventy. I am briefed by expedition leader Lynne Turner, who has been conducting such trips for more than twenty years, during which time she has visited more than eighty countries. My country count so far is less than half that. Lynne is English, as are most of the flight personnel: two pilots, two engineers, two chefs, eight cabin crew, and an airport liaison officer are in charge of our safety and comfort. All but two or three of the passengers are American. They hail, I find out in the course of our travels, from diverse backgrounds and livelihoods, linked by a desire to see—and learn about—exotic locales. Of the ten stops we are scheduled to make, I have some field experience in four.

At an inaugural reception we exchange pleasantries. Over dinner I become acquainted with William Calvin, a distinguished scientist whose expertise ranges from

climate change and evolutionary biology to dissecting how we think (1991, 2004, 2008). He is an ardent believer in the need for scholars to communicate their research findings in accessible ways to lay audiences, which he himself does to great effect (1998). William speaks in measured, hushed tones, rather ironic given that his work has often been considered provocative if not audacious, challenging accepted notions of what happened in prehistory to make our species the preeminent of primates. I have to strain to hear him but gain much from our conversations in the three weeks we spend together.

DAY 3

Spotting the jet on the tarmac at Fort Lauderdale gives me a thrill of anticipation; boarding it intensifies the sensation. An interior that usually accommodates 233 people has been customized to fit 88. It includes room for a power-point lecturing site and even a nook to accommodate reading material related to the places we will visit. Soon after takeoff I catch glimpses of Cuba and Jamaica. I deliver my first lecture, "Geography and Empire: Spain, Portugal, and the Division of the World," as we fly over Colombia heading toward Iquitos, Peru, our first port of call.

Lying alongside the upper waters of the Amazon River, Iquitos flourished during the rubber boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an era vividly reconstructed by Bradford Barham and Oliver Coomes (1996). The promise of prosperity, Barham and Coomes contend, brought only distorted and short-lived economic development, the lessons of which have yet to be learned, at least judging by how Peru's oil and lumber reserves are currently exploited in the Iquitos area. Established as a Jesuit mission in the mid-eighteenth century, Iquitos is now a sprawling hub of a half-million inhabitants. It is the largest city in the world accessible only by air or river transport. Iquitos itself has roads and vehicular traffic, but none can actually get you there. A boat takes us downstream to Ceiba Tops Lodge, where the pleasant river breeze is replaced by a sticky cloak of heat. The thick tropical night, buzzing with sounds, swallows us up.

DAY 4

I complemented my lecture on the plane yesterday with a screening of a documentary film, David Sington's *The Secret of El Dorado* (2002). In it the agricultural base that sustained human life in Amazonia in pre-Columbian times is attributed in large measure to the existence of anthropogenic black-earth soils. These were created not by indiscriminate slash-and-burn but by careful slash-and-char techniques, whereby forest nutrients are retained by the deposition of ash and organic material, thus maximizing soil fertility generation after generation.

In *The Secret of Eldorado* the Spanish Conquistador Francisco de Orellana reports having seen populous Indian communities along the banks of the Amazon when he traversed it—from the Andes to the Atlantic—in 1541–1542, the first European to do so. Orellana's testimony, previously dismissed as exaggerated and with no archaeological evidence to support it, has increasingly been deemed more cred-

ible since the discovery of soil-enhancement strategies on the part of native peoples, which bolstered their hunting, gathering, and fishing activities. We now have evidence that points to pre-Columbian Amazonia having been more assiduously farmed, and thus more densely settled, than hitherto believed.

As we descend the Amazon and go up one of its tributaries, the Napo, I discern no sizable clusters of settlement, only the cleared edges of rather desultory looking villages. We disembark and tramp through dripping forest to a hut where two Indian shamans tell us about native botanical knowledge, explaining the medicinal benefits of a handful of several hundred varieties of plants and herbs. Their exposition would surely have been to the liking of the ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes, whose Amazonian exploits his student Wade Davis recounts with great affection in *One River: Explorations and Discoveries in the Amazon Rain Forest* (1996). Rain falls in intermittent showers, not thunderous cloudbursts. We climb 40 meters to a canopy walkway, looking over (and into) a vast extent of trees, rewarded by sightings of parrots, toucans, and white-necked puff birds. Bromeliads flower and insects teem, but I see very few people.

“Tomorrow,” our guide Percy responds when I ask him about the native population. “We’ll visit some Indians tomorrow.”

DAY 5

The research of William Denevan (2003) and William Woods (2003) has done much to establish a revisionist image of Amazonia before European penetration, one that has little to do with simple societies practicing shifting agriculture. Instead, assert Denevan, Woods, and a growing number of scholars, native communities in many parts of the Amazon were large, cultivation prolific, social organization advanced, and human impacts on the environment significant (Newson 1996). A new, more complex model is emerging, one that Charles Mann’s *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus* (2005) has done much to communicate to a wider readership, along with increased awareness of myriad other more subtle contact scenarios (Lovell and others 2006). Yet how do we explain that explorers who followed in the wake of Orellana found nothing at all like the mythical El Dorado that fired the European imagination?

Disease. In the decades and centuries after Orellana’s expedition, Old World diseases unknown to New World populations—smallpox, measles, and typhus were the most virulent killers, alone or in lethal combination—emptied or diminished swaths of occupied land and well-tended territory in Amazonia and elsewhere (Cook and Lovell [1992] 2001; Lovell 1992). In Peru’s case, to the depredations caused by colonial epidemics were added heavy-handed treatment of Indians as virtual slave labor between 1890 and 1914, when rubber tapping in the rain forest around Iquitos reached its coercive zenith. Protestant missionaries who sought to improve the situation by proselytizing among native communities later in the twentieth century only exacerbated it. As our launch approaches the village of Indiana, therefore, I am somewhat wary of what to expect, and not just because of its emblematic name.

An elder greets us at the river's edge. We are led along a trail and shown into a communal meeting house, where a welcoming ceremony is enacted. Children peek at us through the slats that frame the circular, thatched-roof construction, some 50 paces in circumference. A girl of perhaps nine or ten beckons to me. I slip outside and see her run to her mother, who smiles at me and points to woven bags and animal carvings laid out on a wooden table, along with bracelets, necklaces, earrings, and slingshots. Another dozen or so women vendors display similar wares. Like their offspring who huddle around them, they are naked from the waist up, with painted arms and faces. Apart from a handful of men, women and children predominate in this Indian scene.

Two of Percy's associates, Celso and Pablo, inform me that in all the area of Iquitos perhaps only 40,000 Indians remain, less than one in ten of the local population, made up primarily of mestizos.

"Most of the Indians you see here today will be gone in a few years time," Percy remarks more matter-of-factly than wistfully. "Would you want to live the way they do?"

On the boat back to Iquitos I give an impromptu talk about cycles of conquest in the Amazon, illustrating my points with reference to films, not books. "For the first cycle of conquest, conquest by imperial Spain and Portugal," I tell the passengers as they eat lunch and contemplate the landscape, "Roland Joffé's *The Mission* (1986) is in a class of its own. For the second cycle of conquest, conquest by local and international capitalism, get hold of Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* (1982). And for the third cycle of conquest, conquest by American evangelism, Hector Babenco's *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* (1991) will give you plenty to think about."

I notice one of the passengers nod approvingly. He comes up to me afterwards and introduces himself. His name is John Logan, Hollywood scriptwriter, a kindred spirit for whom the silver screen is a window on the world.

We fly from Iquitos over the headwaters of the Amazon, across the Andes, and out into the Pacific. Our next destination is the Galápagos Islands. We settle down to watch *The Mission*, the plot of which is based on events and circumstances surrounding the battle of Caybaté in the interior of South America in 1764 (Hemming 1978; Saeger 1995). Toward the end of the film, one protagonist seeks to justify the forced removal, enslavement, and slaughter of thousands of Guaraní Indians after the spatial arrangements of the Treaty of Tordesillas were replaced by those of the Treaty of Madrid.

"The world is thus," he shrugs.

"No," responds another. "Thus have we *made* the world."

DAYS 6 AND 7

Two of Charles Darwin's famous finches perch on a tree outside the customs and immigration building at Baltra Airport. One of the other two lecturers, the naturalist Gerard "Ged" Caddick, can hardly believe his eyes. "Wow!" He gestures to us excitedly, "Everyone—come look!"

Ged is a big fan of Alfred Russel Wallace, pioneer of the theory of natural selection. As Magellan trumps del Cano in the circumnavigation stakes, so Darwin trumps Wallace on the natural selection front, even though Wallace hit on many of the same ideas about evolution before Darwin did. Despite Ged's advocacy of Wallace, the very first creatures he spots on his initial visit to the Galápagos, minutes after landing, are birds intimately associated with Darwin. Wallace hardly receives a mention in Galápagos tourist hype, mostly because his scientific fieldwork focused on the Amazon and Malaya. It is Darwin's face that is emblazoned on T-shirts and his name that is given to the research station on Santa Cruz Island, where tortoises, once preyed on by pirates and whalers, are now bred successfully and reintroduced to islands on which they had become extinct.

Although Darwin spent only five weeks here in 1835—the H.M.S. *Beagle*, captained by the implacable Robert Fitzroy, anchored on 15 September and sailed off on 20 October—the raw material that the Galápagos furnished him with over the next quarter-century resulted in his (r)evolutionary theory, articulated in *The Origin of Species* (1859). Of his time in the Galápagos, Darwin wrote ([1839] 1962, 379–379), “The natural history of these islands is eminently curious, and well deserves attention. . . . The archipelago is a little world within itself. . . . Considering the small size of these islands, we feel the more astonished at the number of their aboriginal beings, and at their confined range. . . . Hence, both in space and time, we seem to be brought somewhat near to that great fact—that mystery of mysteries—the first appearance of new beings on this earth.” The great scientist visited four islands in the Galápagos archipelago: San Cristóbal, Santiago, Floreana, and Isabela. Aboard the *Galápagos Explorer II*, our sleeping quarters for three nights, we make landfall on another three—Española, Santa Cruz, and Genovesa. A brochure in my cabin has a Galápagos “checklist” with information on eighty-five mammals, seabirds, land birds, coastal birds and migrants, and reptiles. I lose track of the sightings I should be crossing off, but William Calvin, as big a fan of Darwin as Ged is of Wallace, assures me that we have encountered considerably more of interest in two days than he did during a more prolonged visit to the islands the year before. William's appraisal is shared by our guide Francisco, who is so struck by how close he can get, one rainy morning on Genovesa, to a short-eared owl that he asks me to take a photograph of him kneeling next to it.

“My colleagues will be amazed,” he grins.

DAYS 8 AND 9

It takes us about five hours to fly south from the Galápagos to Easter Island, which has the distinction of being the most remote inhabited location in the world: Chile lies 3,700 kilometers to the east, the Pitcairn Islands 2,100 kilometers to the west. How long it took the first Polynesian settlers to reach the volcanic outpost they called “Rapa Nui” is a matter of conjecture, perhaps seventeen days in optimal seafaring conditions. It is now generally accepted that Easter Island was settled by intrepid migrants who came eastward across the ocean in well-stocked, sail-

propelled canoes. Thor Heyerdahl's "Kon-Tiki" theory of passage westward in rafts from mainland South America has gone out of fashion ([1948] 1950). The date of initial arrival, however, is still contested, with some investigators proposing as early as A.D. 300–400, others as late as A.D. 1200. Most scholars contend that Polynesian colonization of Easter Island, long before Europeans ever visited it, unleashed catastrophic environmental destruction. The fate of Easter Island as a metaphor for our present global predicament was addressed by Ronald Wright in one of his sobering Massey Lectures, *A Short History of Progress* (2004). It also figures as a case study in Jared Diamond's *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (2005). Some of the passengers with whom I discuss the issues at hand are familiar with the latter but not the former.

Our guides are three Chileans who, among them, have invested decades of archaeological and historical inquiry into the island's past: Edmundo Edwards and husband-and-wife team Claudio Cristino and Patricia Vargas. They too know about the work of Diamond but have yet to get hold of Wright's more cogently argued volume, which I promise to send them. Edwards and Cristino are not at all positive in their assessment of Diamond, whom they consider (as do other colleagues, including William Calvin) too much an environmental determinist. I listen to Edwards rail about how Diamond, in his opinion, availed himself of research findings on Easter Island to gain the popular recognition, and teeming book sales, that most specialists can only dream of. His words articulate a tension I have heard voiced elsewhere, one that is difficult if not impossible to reconcile (Dobson 2006; Mann 2006).

In the capable hands of our Chilean guides we are treated not only to morning and afternoon field reconnaissance but also to animated evening discussions, when fine Chilean wine helps trigger debate among them about nuance and detail in the Easter Island experience. My fellow travelers are captivated by the liveliness of the exchange.

How can one not marvel at the majesty of the *moai* of Rapa Nui? These massive statues, whose heads and torsos were quarried from the volcanic tuff of Rano Raruku crater, were reerected by Cristino and his collaborators after their precipitous fall from grace at the hands of those who had toiled so hard to carve, transport, and raise them. When life on Easter Island flourished, a dozen or so clans venerated deities in the form of *moai* installed on elaborate platforms. The *moai* were toppled by desperate Easter Islanders who, having gutted their home of its forest cover, fought each other for ever-diminishing resources and then turned on the stone gods they believed had deserted them. Although popular lore has the *moai* staring out to sea, the majority actually faced inland, which is how they have been restored (Figure 1). In their mute survey of the desolate interior, I imagine them asking of their erstwhile followers, "Why such wanton disregard for your own welfare? Could you not foresee the harm you would do to yourselves in our name?"

Edwards reckons that the island's pre-European numbers peaked at some 14,000 people, taxing its restricted extent of 116.6 square kilometers. Whatever its maximum size, the population had decreased considerably because of ecological crisis



FIG. 1—Formerly toppled *moai* restored to upright authority, facing inland, by Claudio Cristino and his associates. (Photograph by the author, Easter Island, January 2006)

and internecine warfare by the time the Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen sighted the island on Easter Day 1722, thus bestowing on Rapa Nui its European name. In 1774 Captain James Cook described native inhabitants as “small, lean, timid, and miserable,” pitiful survivors who had resorted to cannibalism. No tall stands of timber meant no outrigger canoes for fishing, and allowed relentless winds to dry out already fragile soils, making farming precarious. Missionaries who arrived in 1864 counted only 2,000 souls. This inventory, however, was undertaken after three documented outbreaks of European-introduced smallpox and after slave raiders, a year or so before, had carried off 1,500 people to dig guano fertilizer on islands off the coast of Peru.

Chile laid claim to Easter Island in 1888, after its defeat of Peru (and Bolivia) in the War of the Pacific. Today almost 4,000 people live on the island, three-quarters of them of Polynesian ethnicity. Friction abounds between these native descendants and newcomer immigrants of Chilean stock.

DAY 10

Born and raised in Scotland, I grew up on the stories of Robert Louis Stevenson. His novels of historical adventure, *Treasure Island* (1883) and *Kidnapped* (1886), enthralled me as a boy. At high school and university, his novels about the nature of

human character, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889), made me realize that life, no matter where it is lived, has its enduring dark side. Stevenson fled Scotland, ostensibly for reasons of health, and wandered the world in search of more clement lands and more benign ways of being, traveling eventually to Samoa. He died there in 1894 at age forty-four, as far from his place of birth, Edinburgh, as distance on earth permits.

The natives warmed to the man they called “Tusitala” (Teller of Tales) during the five years he spent among them, writing at his prime. Far less positive was the reception of Stevenson’s reading public to his South Sea stories such as “The Beach of Falesá” (1892). First published in the *Illustrated London News*, this tale and others were insightful critiques of the ills of imperialism, preempting Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) by a decade. Stevenson was “postcolonial” in his sensibilities a century before the term was coined, which helps explain why he was so loved by the local population. At Vailima, his mountain estate in Samoa, he wrestled to the end with the demons that stalked him all his life, reworking the tensions of his own relationship with his father in his unfinished masterpiece, *Weir of Hermiston* (1896).

Our time in Samoa is brief, an overnight stay to refuel the jet after the nine-hour flight from Easter Island. From the airport at Apia we are taken directly to Vailima. The traffic on the potholed road idles along, in stark contrast to the clip of lines that drive Stevenson’s “From a Railway Carriage,” which I remember well from *A Child’s Garden of Verses* (1885):

And charging along like troops in a battle
All through the meadows the horses and cattle:
All of the sights of the hill and the plain
Fly as thick as driving rain.

Many houses, I notice, are still laid out in traditional Samoan style, with roofed but open-sided structures used to receive and entertain guests built adjacent to, or in front of, dwelling units where families live. This is how Vailima was constructed and has since been maintained, with tattooed men and garlanded women awaiting us with a *kawa*, in which greetings are extended and refreshments served.

A fine drizzle, almost a mist, descends from Mount Vaea, where Stevenson is buried. He took pains to write his own “Requiem” (1887):

Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you grave for me:
Here he lies where he longed to be.
Home is the sailor, home from sea.
And the hunter home from the hill.

Magellan would have loved to return to his point of departure. Not so with Tusitala.

DAYS 11, 12, AND 13

Both a country and a continent, Australia sits in the southwestern corner of the Pacific a law, at times a harsh one, unto itself. The fleet that brought the first convicts to build their own prison here left Portsmouth on 13 May 1787, arriving in Botany Bay, after a passage of 25,440 kilometers around the Cape of Good Hope and across the Indian Ocean, on 20 January 1788. That initial cargo of English refuse, Robert Hughes documents in *The Fatal Shore* (1986), swelled to 160,000 by the time the penal experiment ended in 1868.

Anyone who saw the fleet anchor and disgorge its contents—300,000 Aborigines are thought to have inhabited Australia on the eve of English penetration—must have found the captives who waded ashore an odd sight. They were ill prepared, at least at the outset, to live, let alone live well, from the resources of the land. While the castaways teetered on the edge of starvation, the Aborigines enjoyed what must have seemed a bounty. In short order, however, this state of affairs was reversed. Today the fruits of Australia belong to the 92 percent of its population who are of European ancestry. A mere 1 percent of the national population of 20 million is Aboriginal, with a plethora of statistics attesting to its socioeconomic marginalization. Although Aborigines, since 1998, have had legal access but not title to 42 percent of national territory they regard as ancestral land, the government—unlike that of Canada with respect to its First Nations—has been loath to issue any cross-generational “apology” for the treatment that Aborigines endured in the making of modern Australia. Relations are uneasy if not perpetually strained.

As we approach Cairns after a six-hour flight from Apia, the Great Barrier Reef gleams in turquoise ripples. A lecture that evening by a local marine biologist, however, informs us how global warming is damaging the health of the reef in the form of coral bleaching. Indeed, when we snorkel next day Dr. Jamie Seymour’s alarming details are much in evidence. Driving up the Queensland coast to Port Douglas we see beaches that rival those of the Caribbean for scenic beauty. But we are warned not to swim in their alluring azure waters: killer jellyfish, not sharks, are the declared danger. The sole presence, early one morning, on a seemingly pristine strand, I cannot resist the temptation.

DAYS 14, 15, AND 16

Australia’s past is predominantly defined in relation to Europe, England above all. Its future, however, is destined to be struck in association with Asia, currently the continent of origin of 7 percent of the Australian population. As memories of Japan and World War II recede, the Asian country that looms largest on the horizon, its capitalist ambitions drawing it ever closer to Australia’s abundant resources, is China. Trainload after trainload of coal, I learn, is carried to Australian ports for shipment to China. There the coal is consumed by a voracious economy in blatant disregard for the planet’s welfare, to say nothing of the health of 1.2 billion Chinese. Granted, the emissions generated by the aircraft I am on only exacerbate the problem, but

what, I wonder, would Mao Tse-tung have thought of the juggernaut path and pace of development China's recent leaders have chosen?

Australian coal is one target of Chinese business in the Asia-Pacific region. The lush forests of Papua New Guinea, tuning in one night to the BBC World Service reveals, are another, with illegal logging fulfilling the demand. Jetting from Cairns across the Coral Sea to Port Moresby, and from there into the heart of Papua New Guinea, one would hardly think there is any cause for concern. Only in a Twin Otter moving low and slow over the interior between Mount Hagen and Karawari do I notice the cut and thrust of such activities, officially sanctioned or otherwise.

We land in a cleared field next to a tributary of the Sepik River, transfer from plane to boat, and make our way downstream to Karawari Lodge. A journey along the Sepik is a journey back in time, for we encounter village after village, Ambonwari and Konwei two among hundreds, where people are still hunters, gatherers, and fishers. I have been off the beaten track in several parts of the world, but no place I have ventured rivals the Sepik in terms of witnessing an age and stage of development that most cultures left behind centuries if not millennia ago. The experience is mesmerizing.

A Swiss friend, the linguist Kathrin Cooper, tells me several of her colleagues have come to the Sepik to study its myriad languages. Yet what exists here is a mere smattering of the 715 tongues that have been recorded for Papua New Guinea to date, the island's rugged, isolating topography and fierce tribal rivalries the principal reasons behind such remarkable linguistic diversity. Just as this heady indigenous mix proved too unwieldy for the colonial aspirations of, in turn, Great Britain, Germany, and Australia, so also does it constitute a major challenge for the government of Papua New Guinea, independent since 1975, to administer and provide for.

At dawn one morning, relishing the cool air of the river, we spot hornbills and birds of paradise. Later we visit a community where scores of children, barefoot and naked, swarm me when they realize I can show them what they look like on the screen of my digital camera (Figure 2). A wiry imp of a boy won't let me go, running off to get one friend of his after another to be photographed. They howl with joy when they see images of themselves. As our boat departs I notice the boy bolt into the trees. Suddenly it dawns on me what he is up to. As we negotiate a bend in the river there he is, waiting at the other end of the meander, already in the water leaping and hollering, arms flailing in recognition, eyes shining. He waves at me, and I wave back, until another bend in the river separates us forever.

DAY 17

New Guinea is second only to Greenland as the largest island in the world, with Papua constituting the eastern half of the island, the Indonesian state of Irian Jaya the western half. Next on our itinerary is the third-largest island in the world, Borneo, another haven for illegal logging. Its colonial heritage pertains mostly to the British and the Dutch. Today the northern third of Borneo belongs to Malay-

sia, save for the oil-rich Sultanate of Brunei, a morsel of territory compared with Sarawak to its south and west and with Sabah to its east. The southern two-thirds of Borneo constitute the Indonesian state of Kalimantan. We are headed for Sandakan, in Sabah.

Unlike Kuching in Sarawak, which I visited some years ago and whose crumbling charm, evocative of the stories of Somerset Maugham, still conjures up the colonial past, Sandakan has a very different feel to it. The views of the port looking down from the hill where a Buddhist temple has been built are eye-catching, but the city itself suffers from utilitarian postwar reconstruction. Sandakan was notoriously occupied by Japan in January 1942. Rather than relinquish control of it in the face of Allied advances, the Japanese military opted to endure aerial bombardment before razing, prior to surrender, the little of Sandakan that remained standing. Only at the waterfront market do I stumble across the local spark and color I found so intoxicating in Kuching.

What makes up for Sandakan's prosaic demeanor is an afternoon at nearby Sepilok Orangutan Sanctuary. Here, in a protected patch of rain forest only 25 kilometers west of the city, feeding stations have been established to care for orangutans (the name in Malay means "men of the forest") either liberated from captivity as pets or orphaned from their natural homes by logging operations. William Calvin is in his element, photographing the high-flying antics with evident glee. He later shows me a private edition of his most prized images, which he aptly titles *Almost Us: Portraits of the Apes* (2005). Large, mainly solitary, tailless, and cloaked with long red hair, these arboreal acrobats have 98 percent of the genetic composition of our species. The achievements made possible by 2 percent of separation are allegedly what make us *Homo sapiens* (wise man), a label much of our behavior in every corner of the globe does little to warrant.

DAYS 18, 19, AND 20

Having visited the world's second- and third-largest islands, we now travel to the fourth largest, Madagascar. Getting there proves to be a long haul, twelve hours plus from Sandakan to Antananarivo, with a refueling stop—and another opportunity for passengers to shop—at midpoint in Male, on the Maldives. During the first leg across the Indian Ocean, Peter Bobrowsky of the Geological Survey of Canada presents a lecture on "Giant Earthquakes and Killer Waves," in which the impact of the tsunami of December 2004 figures prominently. On the two-hour flight from Antananarivo, the centrally located capital of Madagascar, to Fort Daughin on the island's southeastern shores, I notice a ship washed up on a stretch of beach. Our pilot tells me the damage was wrought by the tidal wave that struck Fort Daughin, which lies at the far end of the ocean from the seismic epicenter off the coast of Aceh Province in Indonesia, as a part of the tsunami's massive destruction.

Although it is early evening, the heat is oppressive, in the low 40s centigrade and humid. We split into groups of three or four for the 80-kilometer ride to Berenty. I convince David, the driver of the vehicle to which I am assigned with companions

Woody and Laura, that a cold beer would be a good idea. David looks at his watch, worried about the time. Not an issue, asserts the body language of both Woody and Laura. David makes several stops before he locates a store with an ancient refrigerator and coolish bottles of Three Horse Beer. It slakes our thirst for several bone-

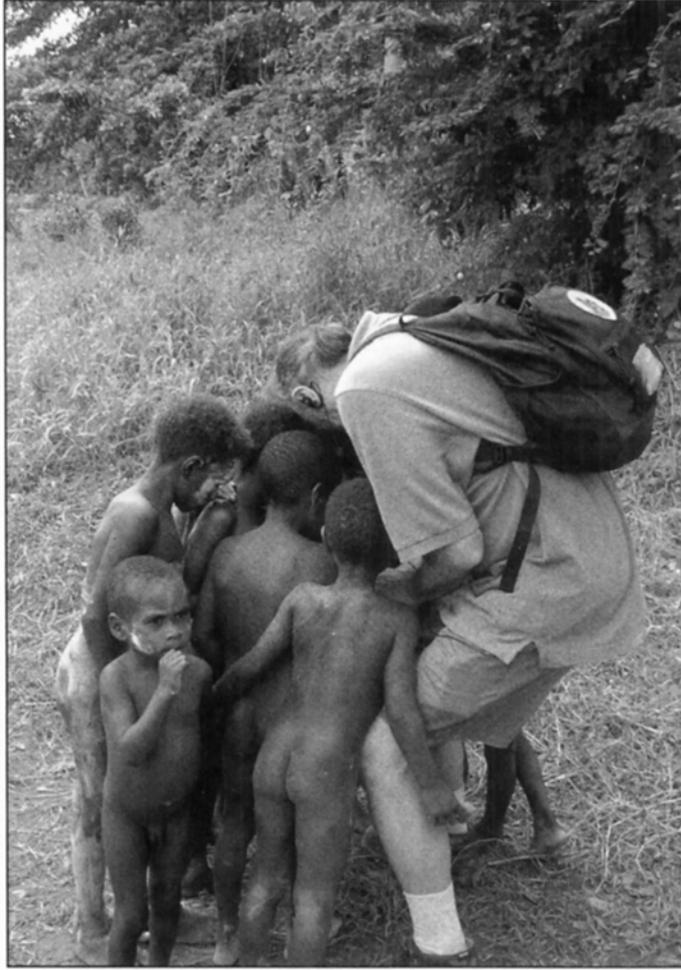


FIG. 2—Innocence and experience on the banks of the Sepik River. The author shows a group of children what they look like in a digital camera. (Photograph by Alanna Hynes, Papua New Guinea, February 2006; reproduced courtesy of the photographer)

rattling hours as we bump our way into a magnificent sunset beyond Ankananemo. The palms and rice paddies of the coastal plains give way to spiny forest and sisal plantations before we reach Amboasary and cross the Mandrare River, after which Berenty—and bed—beckon enticingly.

I am awakened by the thud-thud-thud of one creature after another alighting on the roof of the bungalow where I have been sleeping fitfully. I light a candle and



FIG. 3—Memorials to the dead on the approach to Fort Daughin from Berenty. (Photograph by the author, Madagascar, February 2006)

peer through the screened bathroom window at the forest edge a few meters away. What I identify from my guidebook as ring-tailed lemurs, twenty or more, are leaping about in aimless frenzy. I shower, dress minimally, and join our guides Benoit and Didi for a walk through the forest before the sun comes up. The dawn chorus includes crested couas, paradise flycatchers, hook-billed vangas, and other exotic birds. We end up by the river, its crimson waters absorbing light rather than reflecting it. After breakfast we look for brown lemurs, introduced to Berenty from western parts of the island, and creamy white/black-faced sifakas, which perform a bouncy, hip-hop dance routine. At night we spot nocturnal lemurs, the tiny gray mouse variety among them. Two men play haunting music on primitive string instruments as we emerge from the forest into the moonlight.

One afternoon we visit a school where pupils take turns attending class because the wooden house that accommodates them is so small and ill equipped. After we make a donation of educational materials, the teachers ask the children to sing, which they do, raucously. Women at the market eye us with curiosity at least the equal of my own. I see one young girl with butter beans for sale and remember, decades ago, stocking the dry-goods shelf of my father's grocery store in Glasgow with packages of them marked "Produce of Madagascar." Here they are, I marvel, and so am I. Everyone is poor, some desperately so, but Berenty and its people have a dignity I find less disquieting than I usually do when confronted with abject poverty and gross inequality.



FIG. 4—Although global warming has melted them considerably, the snows of Kilimanjaro still cap, at least in part, Africa's loftiest peak. (Photograph by the author, Tanzania, February 2006)

The drive back to Fort Daughin is as spectacular by day as it was at twilight. Zebu cattle wander alongside the road or across it. Teams of oxen pull plows in irrigated fields. The sun beats down. Mountains shimmer. People go about their daily routine, memorials to their dead ancestors erected not where their remains are but close to where they toiled when alive (Figure 3). In the near distance I see staples growing that come from three different continents—corn from North America, manioc from South America, rice from Asia. In our urbanized, industrialized, technology-ruled world, four out of five of Malagasy's 18 million people are still rudimentary subsistence farmers. When we fly back to Antananarivo, however, I am alarmed at the erosion that garishly scars a landscape whose vegetation cover has been depleted by 95 percent.

As we leave Fort Daughin, I am on the lookout not for the French foundation that, since 1643, lends the town its name but the Portuguese site that dates back to 1504, when some 80 shipwrecked sailors tried to colonize Madagascar before the locals wiped them out. The French, too, abandoned the island in 1674, returning to impose their presence again in the late nineteenth century. They suppressed an insurrection after World War II at the cost of 80,000 Malagasy lives. Independence was finally brokered in 1960.

Contemplating the eastern seaboard before our plane turns inland, I am struck by how few settlements are strung along the coast. Despite having been peopled, some two millennia ago, not from Africa 400 kilometers to the west but from In-



FIG. 5—A drought on the Serengeti Plain led to greater concentrations of animals than usual at strategic watering holes. Photograph by the author, Tanzania, February 2006)

onesia and Malaysia thousands of kilometers to the east, Madagascar has concentrated its search for sustenance almost exclusively on the land, turning its back—like the moai of Easter Island—on the sea that gave it birth. Here the plow, not the paddle, is what people pick up to help feed themselves.

DAYS 20 AND 21

Madagascar lies to the east of Africa, of which it once—130 million years ago, geologists reckon—formed part. It split off and drifted to its present location 60 million years ago. Life on the island evolved in such marked isolation as to make Madagascar quite distinct from Africa, or from any other continent for that matter: more than 80 percent of its plants and animals, so Daniel Gade records (1996), are endemic, found no place else on earth. Biological distinction of this magnitude is quite exceptional—indeed, difficult to grasp—as we zoom across the Mozambique Channel and jet toward Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. We land in a state of elation, having circled the snow-capped and glacier-fringed volcano that is Africa's highest mountain, its majesty unclouded and serene (Figure 4).

Light aircraft carry us over Olduvai Gorge, where the archaeologists Louis and Mary Leakey worked for decades to champion Tanzania as the cradle of humanity (Leakey and Lewin 1978). The vast Serengeti Plain stretches beyond. Its wild beasts

are much in evidence at strategic watering holes because of the widespread drought (Figure 5). The array of animals we observe in safari excursions by Land Rover in two days, our guides point out, normally would entail ranging across the Serengeti for weeks at a time. The dry spell, in short, though to sightseeing advantage, comes at a huge cost, and not only in terms of animal survival. Tanzania, a nation whose 37 million inhabitants enjoy stable and responsible government by African standards, seldom appeals to the international community for assistance, but it did so during our brief stay. No rainfall in several areas of the country had resulted in crop failure and the desiccation of pastureland, which in turn meant that some people were hungry, others starving, sadly a common occurrence elsewhere in East Africa but rare in Tanzania.

DAY 22

On our return to Kilimanjaro Airport, a sign catches my eye. "If Hollywood can make a fortune on African wildlife, why can't Africa?" The question burns in my head as we sweep across the continent, flying over foretold as much as untold human tragedy.

Our original plan was to head west across the middle of Africa (Zaire, Congo, Cameroon) and refuel along the Gulf of Guinea, then cut north and west over the Sahel and the Sahara before landing at Funchal on Madeira Island. A change in routing instead takes us north over the Great Rift Valley, Sudan's troubled Darfur region, and the Libyan Desert before we touch down, momentarily, at Monastir in Tunisia. From there we skirt the coast of Algeria and cross the Mediterranean into Spain.

The lights of Almería flicker on, a glimmer in the Andalusian twilight compared with the glow of the setting sun, which burns itself out over the snowy ranges of the Sierra Nevada. Night falls on the last stage of a long journey. A full moon rises and beams down on a statue of Christ on a hill. His arms are outstretched, as if in rapture not at the heavens above but the river below. We descend, after a passage of 55,000 kilometers, to my favorite city in the world.

DAY 23

Where better to end than Lisbon? Here it was that Vasco da Gama sailed from in 1497, returning two years later after rounding the Cape of Good Hope, bringing back to Europe new seafaring knowledge not only of Africa but also of Asia, India in particular. Lisbon, too, was where Columbus first returned in 1493 with word of his discoveries, though to his dying day he believed, against firm evidence to the contrary, that he had been in Japan and other parts of the Old World, not initiating exploration of a New World beyond European ken. The Admiral of the Ocean Sea had to be careful: by docking in Portugal before Spain—the *Niña* was sore in need of repair, and its men of respite—Columbus ran the risk of offending his Spanish backers while being perceived as rebuking his former Portuguese patrons, who had opted not to finance the voyage west to reach the East. I gaze, west of Lisbon at Belem, across the Tagus and its Atlantic estuary. Lines by Fernando Pessoa (1974, 28) waft ashore:

Salt-laden sea, how much of your salt
 Is tears of Portugal?
 For us to cross you, how many sons have kept
 Vigil in vain, and mothers wept?
 Lived as old maids how many brides to be
 Till death, that you might be ours?

The lapping waves leave Pessoa's questions unanswered. Not so the great poet's response (1974, 98) to the figure of Christ on the opposite bank of the river, known in Lisbon as "the Sea of Straw":

Hate you, Christ, I do not, or seek. I believe
 In you as in the other gods, your elders.
 I count you as neither more nor less
 Than they are, merely newer.

I do hate, yes, and calmly abhor people
 Who seek you above the other gods, your equals.
 I seek you where you are, not higher
 Than them, not lower, yourself merely.

Sad god, needed perhaps because there was
 None like you: one more in the Pantheon, nothing
 More, not purer: because the whole
 Was complete with gods, except you.

Take care, exclusive idolater of Christ: life
 Is multiple, all days different from each other,
 And only as multiple shall we
 Be with reality and alone.

I walk down the Avenida da Liberdade, starting at the monument honoring the Marquis de Pombal. Portugal's Enlightenment reformer is the statesman who in 1750 negotiated the Treaty of Madrid with Spain, thereby legalizing Portuguese colonization in South America far to the west of the line of demarcation established two and a half centuries earlier by the Treaty of Tordesillas. I think back to the Amazon rain forest and of the dire situation of its Indian peoples. Pombal is best known in Lisbon for his remodeling of the city after much of it was destroyed by earthquake and fire in 1755, not his aggrandizement of Brazil five years earlier, at grievous native expense.

At Pombal's showpiece square, the Praça do Comercio, I board one of Lisbon's old streetcars. It rattles through neighborhoods of decaying urban splendor, up through Mouraria, down past Alfama, along to Estrela. Some of the streets are so narrow I can reach out from the streetcar and stroke a cat sunning on a window sill. Or feel whether a shirt on a clothesline is dry. The music of *Madredeus* (1995) on my iPod resounds in my ears. If, according to Bruce Chatwin (1987), Aborigines sing place into being in Outback Australia, so too do the voice of Teresa Salgueiro and the lyrics of Pedro Ayres Magalhães bring Lisbon palpably to life:

When Lisbon awakens from its ancient sleep
 I will be the one to sing.
 The message I have is mine alone.



FIG. 8—West of Lisbon at Belem, the Monumento das Descobertas commemorates voyages of discovery made by Portuguese navigators in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. (Photograph by the author, February 2006)

Dawn.
 Show me the river that I cross so often
 For no good reason.
 Its enchantment holds me by a thread
 And is witness to what I know I have to say.
 And the city?
 They call it Lisbon,
 But it is only the river that is true.
 Tagus, my sweet Tagus, you flow as you are.
 You have flowed, without regret, for millennia.
 You are the home of water.

Our world is 71 percent water, 29 percent land. Having gone around it by air, I yearn now to traverse it by sea.



The trip lingers in the memory. It surfaces again and again, long after my departure from Lisbon. Henry Miller would have approved of where I am bound. I find myself arriving at a new way of looking at things, at least looking at things differently from before. The world, and what happened in history to make it what it is, I view

less as a pattern of cause and effect than a process of reverberation and entanglement, one that reminds me, in episodic flashes, of who we are and how we came to be.

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