
Preface

Papua New Guinean communities living on islands in the Coral Sea, near creeks feeding the major rivers of the mainland, and in villages crowded along ridge-tops in the interior, gardened and hunted over land containing gold. Most of the men who came hungry for the gold were from Australia. They carried with them the skills to obtain it and the beliefs then common among Australian working men about foreigners and blacks. Most of the diggers believed that their guns and their brains made them superior to any 'coloured' men. Some also thought that they were physically superior, although that was harder to believe after 1902 when the first black American won a world boxing title. They did not doubt that they had a right to take the gold, and many thought that it was only a matter of time before Australians possessed the land.

Papua New Guineans had a variety of attitudes towards outsiders. Different communities put different values on skills in war, crafts, growing crops, trade, and the ability to control the non-material world. But the variety of their responses to miners was more than just a reflection of the fact that Papua New Guineans had worked out different methods of exploiting their environment and different sets of rules about how men should treat each other; communities were also separated by their experiences with foreigners. Some of the peoples living alongside alluvial land had for many years been meeting foreigners who came to fish for pearls, recruit men to work on boats and plantations, save souls and govern. Their beliefs and behaviour had been changed by those meetings. Others had only heard talk of foreigners when the miners and labourers came with their stores and began to dig and sluice.

So relationships between miners and villagers varied from one area to another. Some villagers retreated and the miners rarely saw them, some fought the miners and were shot in large numbers, some joined the police, some induced the foreigners to use their guns against enemy clans, some worked for the miners, some learnt to work gold for themselves (and still do), some extended their gardens and supplied the

miners with tons of food, some village women decided to sleep with miners, and some were raped. The miners were gone from some fields within a few months; they stayed on others for forty years. On a few isolated fields the miners could not prospect or work unless they could buy food from the villages; on fields close to a port or navigable river the miners could be independent of local communities.

This book is about encounters between Papua New Guineans and miners from the first 'rush' in 1878 until 1930, four years after the alluvial miners finally found 'the big one'. It begins in 1888 with the north Queensland miners crowding to Sudest Island, New Guinea's first goldfield. It then turns back to look at the way of life and beliefs of the villagers and miners who met on Sudest. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 trace the relationships between foreigners and villagers as mining developed on Sudest, Misima and Woodlark Islands. Chapter 5 shifts to the mainland and the rush inland from Port Moresby in 1878 when no gold was found. Later chapters follow the defining of the alluvial areas along the northern rivers, near Milne Bay, in the Keveri Valley and on the upper Lakekamu River, and describe the meetings between peoples in those places. The last chapter is about the finding of rich alluvial and reef gold on Koranga and Edie Creeks and along the Bulolo Valley of the Morobe District. This book also attempts to tell some of the history of the miners and Papua New Guinea communities independent of their meetings. It is imperial history; not the history of colonial policy but of the behaviour of men on the frontier of empire.

Gold was the main export of British New Guinea and Papua until 1916 and it was again the most valuable export in 1938–39. In the Mandated Territory of New Guinea gold quickly replaced copra as the main export until by 1940 gold made up more than 80 per cent of the Territory's exports. Many writers have described the development of the Morobe Goldfield after 1926; here it is mentioned briefly. The history of some communities on other goldfields has been taken beyond 1930.

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Gold-sluicing on Sharkeye Park's claim, Koranga Creek,
Morobe Goldfield, late 1920s
PHOTOGRAPH. H L. DOWNING

The information for this book has been obtained by reading, talking and travelling. Most of the reading was done in the National Archives of Papua New Guinea and in the library of the University of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby; and in the Australian Archives, the National Library of Australia and the Menzies Library of the Australian National University, Canberra. Although most of the book is about miners who wrote infrequently, and villagers, labourers and policemen, nearly all of whom were illiterate, the written records are rich. The main defect in the written material is that so much of it is about people and not by them. This problem has been partly overcome by obtaining information from many sources about the communities described by outsiders. The writings of anthropologists, missionaries and linguists helped, and so did travelling and asking questions. This book has benefited from 'informed tourism' rather than 'field work'. In the Northern District and along the Waria River alone, communities from at least twenty language groups met the miners. Each community would provide valuable material for the student who earns the confidence of the people and has the skills to communicate with them. This book may assist those who attempt more detailed studies.

Fully-footnoted copies of the manuscript of this book showing sources of information and making additional comments will be placed in the library of the University of Papua New Guinea, the Menzies Library of the Australian National University, and the National Library of Australia, Canberra.

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