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STATION: AITAPE

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Papua New Guinea Patrol Reports

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TERRITORY OF PAPUA AND NEW GUINEA

PATROL REPORT

District of Melik Report No. 1 of 34/35

Patrol Conducted by E. D. Robinson

Area Patrolled OVER LAND

Patrol Accompanied by Europeans.....

Natives.....

Duration—From 7/1/34 to 31/7/34

Number of Days.....

Did Medical Assistant Accompany?.....

Last Patrol to Area by—District Services...../...../19.....

Medical /...../19.....

Map Reference.....

Objects of Patrol.....

DIRECTOR OF DISTRICT SERVICES
AND NATIVE AFFAIRS,
PORT MORESBY.

Forwarded, please.

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District Commissioner

Amount Paid for War Damage Compensation ... £.....

Amount Paid from D.N.E. Trust Fund £.....

Amount Paid from P.E.D.P. Trust Fund £.....

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Territory of New Guinea.

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Sub-District Office,
Wewak, Sepik District,
2nd August, 1934.

Memorandum for:-
The District Officer,
Sepik District.

Special Patrol Report No.S.D. 1/1934-35.

Area Patrolled:- Overland from Aitape through Wapi Area to Head-Waters of Yellow River, and down Yellow River to Sepik River. Thence per N.L. Osprey down Sepik River to Tumbungu. Thence overland from Tumbungu to Wewak.

Objects of Patrol:- To inspect reported Gold Find on Wini Creek. To explore Wini Creek to the South with the object of proving it to be the head waters of either the Yellow or the Sand River.

Personnel:- E.D. Robinson, Assistant District Officer, Mr. E. Gallet of "Gallet Exploration Company of New Guinea". 2 N.C.O's and 7 Native Constables. 1 Medical Orderly and 34 Carriers.

Names of Native Constabulary:- Corporal Wankra, Lance Corporal Pasangon, Constables Atimo, Merakain, Muriki, Kisi, Sengi, Yaska, and Watarai. Also Medical Orderly Aure.

Duration of Patrol:- 7th July to 31st July 1934.

Results:- See under separate report on reported Gold Find.

Proved Wini Creek to be the headwaters of the Yellow River. Made friendly contact with many natives hitherto unvisited by the "White Man".

Diary.

7th July. Patrol left Aitape per road and made camp in the afternoon at Sinauti. Distance 10 miles approx.

8th July. Left early lunched at Ningia, went on and made camp at Walwali. 16 miles approx.

9th July. Left in light rain arrived Koiniri and made camp. 6 miles approx.

10th July. Left early on a fairly mountainous road arriving at Wantibi 11 a.m. in very heavy rain, lunched and left, crossed river with heavy flood running and proceeded up mountain to Wugubli where camp was made. Distance 11 miles approximately.

11th July. Left and arrived Malwettem and lunched, then on to Karsitem, and on to Pai where camp was made. Pai is on top of the dividing range and from here both the Aitape and Sepik shed may be seen. 10 miles approx.

12th July. Walked about 3 miles along the Wini Creek and arrived at Mr. Gough's camp. Worked ground in readiness to put in a box. Made camp 3 miles approx.

13th July. Mr. Gough's boys were working on the box all day, box taken out 4 p.m. See separate report.

14th July. Left early and followed Wini Creek down for about 16 miles to Mr. Gallet's base camp and camped. This camp is on the right bank just below the village of Kakoi, and opposite village Timeni.

16 miles approx.

15th July. Left Early following the creek and made camp early in afternoon on the left bank. River shows more mudstone and the country looks slightly lower. 10 miles approx.

16th July. Left 7.15a.m. following creek, 8 am large tributary coming in from right bank, 10-15 am. large tributary coming in on right bank. Made camp on left bank late in afternoon, no natives seen all day, numbers of crocodiles on banks and in the water. 12 miles approx.

17th July. Left early after heavy rain all night, river very high so had to take to the bank cutting a track through lightly timbered country. 10-10 am heard talking and rounded a bend in time to see a woman and child running away, we called out and a man came from a small house on left bank, he was timid but quite friendly. I called a number of names of villages which I knew at the mouth of the Yellow River, he replied by pointing downstream which was very encouraging to us although we could not yet say for certainty if we were on the Yellow or the Sand river. After giving the old man some small presents we left and about half an hour afterwards 7 men called to us, these were men of Tetumbrum and Talu two villages inland off the bank of the creek and below Kakoi and Timeni, they remained with us until we made camp on right bank late in the afternoon and then they left telling us by signs that they would return in the morning with natives of Kelnom which they said was inland and downstream. 12 miles approximately.

18th July. Left early and passed one house on the left bank, and just below 25 natives of Kelnom accompanied by 7 of the Talu people (who were with us yesterday) awaited us, we traded matches rings and razor blades

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for foodstuff, all the natives were quite friendly but very timid. We then proceeded with all these people, some guiding and some following us. At 11-15 we sat down to lunch and the carriers and Police cooked rice some of which they gave to the visiting natives who did not care for it. Later as we proceeded, the natives pointed out the road to their village Kelnom, which was on the left bank. At 1 pm they left us telling us that they were afraid to go further down as the village of Maurel was there on the left bank, and they had been shot up by Malays some years ago. Amongst these Kelnom men was one who could speak Malay quite well, Corporal Wankra also speaks Malay and through that we got some very useful information. He told us that we were definitely on the Yellow River and pointed out the direction the Sand river was running. Also he told us that about 5 months ago two Malays and a party of natives were in the vicinity shooting birds of paradise, he was with them for two days and left them before they got to Maurel village as he was afraid of the Maurel people. At 3-30p.m. we crossed the river breast high and made camp on the left bank. 8 miles approx.

19th July. Left early morning and crossed over to the right bank then spent some hours cutting through dense pit-pit, saw large village on left bank and some distance inland, judged this to be Maurel. Made camp on right bank. 8 miles approx.

20th July. Left 6 am, 10-10 am came to large house with fish baskets spears and bows and arrows, inside a large garden and a fire was still burning but no other sign of natives. A short distance away was a large kunai plain, from here we could see Kojabu mountain on the Sepik river and just situated at the mouth of the Yellow river, this greatly heartened the Police and carriers who were doubtful as to our success in finding the Sepik river; when I explained to them that in 1932 I had made my camp at the foot of this mountain when awaiting the arrival of Mr. Oakley and Mr. Eve on their overland patrol from Aitape. they were delighted. Went on and made camp on right bank in afternoon. 9 miles approx.

21st July. Left early and cut a track through light bush until 11 am when we heard bush being cut on the opposite side of the river, after cutting a track through dense pit-pit to get to the actual bank of the river we saw some large houses on the opposite bank which was fairly high a very large number of men and women who had already heard us were standing on this bank, we called to them and after very little hesitation

two of the men came down into the water and swam across to us, I noted that they were exceptionally powerful swimmers. When they landed they were of course a little bit timid but after making signs of friendship to them they overcame their timidity and called to others who also came across. They explained that the village was Eiderwok and also that it extended for miles, as we left 4 men of Eiderwok accompanied us as self appointed guides until 4 pm when we made camp on the right bank. 16 miles approx.

22nd July. Natives of Eiderwok arrived at daylight and showed by signs that they wished to accompany us, we then left the actual bank of the river but kept it in sight all the time, crossed three very large plains of swamp grass or buck oats, from here we could see the Kojabu mountain on the Sepik river quite plainly. 10 am came to a large circle of 6 large houses, these also belong to the Eiderwok people, of whom there were about 50 men and women who were all quite friendly, we lunched here. Leaving at 12 midday we passed Wei-ari village on our right and then Pabel village on a small hill on our right, these villages are both on the right bank of the Yellow River and I had met many of the natives some years ago when I went up to Mirijami on a patrol from Ambunti. Going due south we arrived at Mirajami at 4 p.m., here many of the natives remembered me from before and were very excited, patting me on the back and saying Kiap Kiap. They then told us by signs that the Sepik Kiap was down below. We crossed the Yellow River in their flimsy canoes which they still make with stone axes, and made camp on the left bank opposite the village. 20 miles approx.

23rd July. Left 6.50 am proceeding along the left bank of the yellow River and arrived at the foot of the Kojabu mountain after crossing the Sepik in Mirijami canoes, at 12-30 p.m. and made camp. Here the natives told us by signs that the Kiap of the Sepik had gone up the Sepik River and would be back in 4 days.

24th July. Inspected all the Police equipment and rifles, brought three canoes from the Mirijami natives and made a raft as the party would be too large for the "Osprey." Went to the top of Kojabu Mtn. (1000 feet), from here one gets a remarkably good view of the Sepik valley and on a clear day one may see the foothills of the Aitape range, this is the mountain where I made the fires to guide the Patrol of Mr. Oakley and Mr. Eve in 1932. Mr. Keogh returned from upstream on the M.V. "Osprey"

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at 3-30 p.m. and we proceeded downstream at 7-35 p.m. by bright moonlight, kept running all night.

25th July. Steamed all day and arrived at Ambunti at 9 pm.

26th July. Left Ambunti 2-30 p.m., arrived Japandei at dusk and made camp.

27th July. Left early, steamed all day and arrived Tumbungu at dusk and made camp, the "Osprey" went direct downstream.

28th July. Left per canoes up the Tumbungu creek for about 2 miles and then walked through a long grass plain to Shuambo, on to Chimbien, and arrived at Worligum about 2 pm after walking through the same type of country all the time. Here we made camp.

29th July. Left 6-25, walked through grass plains all day and arrived at Wamba late and made camp.

30th July. Left 5-30 am and arrived Yamungu 8-30 am, Japarakwa 2 pm, Beliwana 3-45 and Fassan 4-30 p.m. where camp was made. The grass plains lasted all the way until Japarakwa and then changed to bush.

31st July. Left early after heavy rain which made the going very bad, arrived at the Government Station at 3-30 p.m.

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General Remarks:-

A. Yellow River. Previously Unexplored Area.

The route taken by the patrol after leaving the site of Mr. Gallets dredging claims, passes through Territory previously unvisited. Mr. Behrman shortly before the war years travelled up the Sand River plotting its course, but he did not penetrate up the Yellow, and the line shown on his surveys as being the presumptive direction and source of the Yellow is now shown to be incorrect. Whereas he shows the Yellow to rise between Tomboron and Seinum, this patrol definitely proves that its real source is the Wini which rises further to the North, and that its whole downward course is further to the west than was previously believed.

The patrol travelled in the bed of the river practically all the way, the average depth would be from about three to six feet, and the average width between twenty and thirty yards. As one gets downstream the country becomes much flatter and the banks of the river are lined with dense wild sugar cane (pit-pit).

The country is only lightly timbered and is very damp.

The river cannot be considered navigable in any part, the snags and shallows making it impossible for water transport. There are no canoes on the river above the village of Miriyani which is approximately 10 miles from the mouth.

Natives - Villages

All the natives seen on our way down the Yellow River were particularly friendly, there was no suggestion of trouble during the whole patrol. When one first came in contact with them they were naturally timid, but in every case their curiosity overcame their timidity.

All the villages until one arrives about 30 miles from the mouth are built a mile or so inland from the banks. The houses large and bow shaped are built off the ground on piles from six to eight feet high, usually a circle of about ten or these with a large space in the centre is built. All clearing is done with stone axes.

Weapons.

All male natives carry Bow and a number of Arrows and usually a bone of the cassowary shaped into a dagger is worn in an armband on the upper arm.

No spears or shields were noted.

Clothing.

The Men wear a gourd of various shapes and sizes on the penis, this is tied around the waist with a string.

The Women wear either a small grass skirt or remain naked.

Both sexes wear strings of seeds resembling beads, these are coloured either red, black, or white and are worn around the neck, or in a tight band around the forehead. Strings of small bones of animals or birds are also worn around the waist. Now and again one sees the plumes of a bird of paradise or gouria pigeon worn in the hair.

Health.

These people are of medium build and are light skinned, they seem to be a particularly healthy crowd, very few cases of ulcer or framboesia were noted, tinea imbricata is prevalent.

Agriculture.

The main diet of these people is Sago, small gardens are made, in which are planted, sugar cane of fair quality, taro, yam, sweet potatoes, bananas, and pau-paus. Very few coconuts were seen and all were small and of poor quality.

Fish are caught in woven baskets which are put in the small streams early in the morning and collected at dusk.

Transport.

These people have no means of transport except walking, when they wish to cross the river they swim, some quite good swimmers were seen.

The Miriyami people use small flimsy canoes but these are only used when they wish to cross the river or go downstream.

Government Influence.

These people could be very quickly brought under Control, they are prepared to be friendly, quick to pick up signs and seem eager to help. In every case where we met natives I would call out names of villages which I knew on the lower Yellow from my previous visits, also I would call the name of an influential man of Miriyami "Ibio" as we got down these would be picked up and they would repeat and point downstream, this helped us quite a lot as it was a definite sign that we were on either the Sand or Yellow River. It was not until the day before we arrived at Miriyami village that we were certain that we were on the Yellow or the Sand river, the natives would call out the name of a village which

I knew to be on the Yellow River and would point downstream, but as the two rivers run parallel it was hard to be certain.

On our arrival in Miriyami I was given quite an enthusiastic welcome as many of the natives remembered me from my last visit in 1932.

B. Sepik River.

The patrol arrived on the Sepik River on 23rd July and made camp at the foot of the Kojabu mountain in the same place as I made it in 1932. On the morning of the 24th July I went up the mountain (1000 feet), from the summit of this one gets a splendid view of the country over which we had been. On a clear day the foothills of the Aitape range can be plainly seen. Also looking down the main Sepik one gets a clear view of the Wogamas mountains which are approximately 60 miles above Ambunti. The M.L. Osprey arrived in the afternoon and we proceeded downstream calling at Ambunti, Japandai, and leaving the vessel at Tumbungu. It was low water on the river and the mosquito's were not so prevalent as they usually are.

C. Tumbungu to Wewak.

The walk overland from Tumbungu to Wewak was made in three and a half days. The whole area of country is one vast grass plain, the grass is a kind of swamp grass or buck oats and should be splendid feed for cattle. The villages are mostly poor and more or less neglected. Houses are built on the ground and are of a very poor type. The natives are of medium build and appear to be healthy although many cases of ulcers and framboesia were noted. This route would make a splendid road for quick communication with the Sepik River, a runner could easily make Tumbungu in two and a half days, and from Tumbungu to Ambunti can be made by canoe in about 12 hours, or Tumbungu to Angoram in about 8 hours. Horses can be used as far as Chuemo and then with a little bridging as far as Tumbungu.

(Sgd.)...E.D. Robinson
Asst. District Officer.

TERRITORY OF PAPUA & NEW GUINEA.

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RC/RD.

REF. WKA.14

Sub-District Office,
Angoram,
Sepik District,

23rd September, 1949.

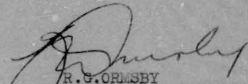
District Officer,
WAKAK.

OLD REPORTS

Forwarded herewith is a copy of a pre-war Patrol Report by Mr. E.D. Robinson covering an over-land trip to the mouth of the Yellow River and down the Sepik.

I understand that a similar patrol from Lumi to the Yellow River is contemplated in the fairly near future and his report should be of great assistance to Mr. Gilbert.

I have obtained permission from Mr. Robinson to make copies of a number of Pre-war reports and I will forward them to you as opportunity occurs. I suggest that you send a copy of the enclosed report to the Director and find out his views. I imagine he also would be glad to receive any such documents.


R.G. ORMSBY
Assistant District Officer.

Encl.

