

**REPORT ON A TRIP TO SOLOMON ISLANDS**  
**(Shortest version – without photographs)**  
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This booklet is dedicated to Reg Webb. Reg, “*I can no other answer make but thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks*”. You know why.

## REPORT ON A TRIP TO SOLOMON ISLANDS 19.08 – 14.09.2008



Among comments placed beneath a text on the Internet site of the Nautilus Foundation (<http://www.nautilus.org.pl>, unfortunately only in Polish) announcing our trip to Solomon Islands, there appeared some concerns on whether this research task would turn into a mere exotic holiday thousands of miles away from home. Therefore let me begin by clarifying all doubts: the expenses pertaining to our stay in and trip to that country have been covered out of our own pocket. This WAS, after all, a holiday for us and we were not expecting ANY sponsorship and participation in costs, especially given that the costs are substantial. So, yes, this was our holiday and therefore my research work in Solomon Islands was solely a result of my good will and affinity I feel with Nautilus. Hence it was at our discretion to spend our time the way we chose to. However, our selection of Solomon Islands as a holiday destination was not random. The attached articles by Marius Boirayon explain – hopefully – why we have also decided to represent the Nautilus Foundation and to attempt finding out (however cursorily) whether phenomena and beings depicted by the Australian could be real, or whether they solely belong in the realm of Solomon myths and legends (so-called *kastom stor*). I believe that what follows in this report will explain what I did manage to ascertain and why it is ABSOLUTELY VITAL that a proper expedition needs to be organised into the region, or – as I will try to demonstrate – a number of expeditions, actually. It will also facilitate, I hope, understanding why the majority of Solomon mysteries remain uncovered.

*The attached articles penned by an Australian researcher Marius Boirayon describe the existence of strange lights called “Dragon Snakes” as well as mysterious creatures called giants. Moreover, from other sources (both on the Internet and locally) we have learned about “small people”. Initially, then, the assumed goal of the trip was to check the following pieces of information:*

- *“Dragon Snakes”, i.e. strange lights (UFOs?), observed on the islands of Guadalcanal and Malaita: What are they? Where exactly are they seen? What do they look like? What is the purpose of their activities and appearance in precisely defined places at precisely determined times of the night?*
- *Giants (or rather, as it turned out later, “proper” giants and beings called “moo-moo” and “chowa-chowa” as well as others, including*

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*those that to a certain extent bring to mind... Sumerian gods such as Ea, Enki or Enlil, half-human, half-fish), seen on the islands of Guadalcanal and Malaita: What are these creatures? Are they real? What do legends (kastom stori) say about them? Where do they dwell?*

- *“Small people” – so-called “kakamora” – living on the islands of Makira and Guadalcanal: Who or what are those strange, diminutive people that the locals talk about?*

*It is a very ambitious task, yet I knew, after all, that I would not be able to realise and execute all of the above points as one would need far greater resources and far more people to achieve this. However, if I could confirm or verify even a tiny part of the above data – this in itself would already constitute a big success and a contribution towards further study of the archipelago’s super-fascinating mysteries.*

*There was one more reason for going to Solomon Islands (apart from regular and well-deserved rest), namely an attempt to confirm some specific information stated by Boirayon, concerning people who might know something about “Dragon Snakes”, giants or “small people” or who have seen them; moreover Boirayon makes a mention about news in the “Solomon Star” newspaper and on one of SIBC radio-station’s shows – such claims should also be verified. In particular, the main goal was to reach the author of the publication himself as contact with him via the Internet was impossible.*

*Below is our report from the trip.*

\* \* \*

Solomon Islands are not the easiest country to travel, both due to its remoteness and due to the fact that tourism here is not yet as developed as, for instance, in the (overseas) neighbours of the country, such as Fiji or Vanuatu, while infrastructure and organisation are at best mediocre, at worst – appalling. Moreover, Solomon Islanders have this specific kind of mentality which accounts for so many promises not being kept, while local *kastom* (customs) and *tambu* (taboo) make access to some places possible only with the consent of the whole community (frequently after a *kastom* fee is paid) or else downright forbidden.

However, we did not expect the islands to put a curse of sorts on us, even before we put our feet for good on the Solomon ground.

Our expected itinerary was to be as follows: a flight on 14 August 2008 from Warsaw to London, a flight on the same day by Emirates from London to Brisbane via Dubai, and on 16 August (taking into account the change of date while moving in the easterly direction) a flight from Brisbane to Honiara, the capital city of Solomon Islands.

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The flight from Warsaw to London was exceptionally good and pleasant and at 7:05 pm sharp – exactly as the timetable indicated – we landed at Gatwick from where we expected to take a further flight.

To our great surprise and disappointment, as well as despair and rage, it turned out however that Emirates – airlines considered to be the best in the region – had overbooked seats on our plane, so despite the fact that we had booked the tickets already in April – we did not make it on board of the plane. We attempted to explain that we had a connecting flight to Solomon Islands, we also asked whether any of the passengers flying to Dubai or Brisbane could release a seat for us. Unfortunately our attempts to convince the ground personnel that it was absolutely vital for us to take that flight came to nothing. I wonder whether we could have made it if we had not waited for our checked luggage for so long...

I must admit that Emirates employees did their best to make up for the loss we incurred: they offered a free taxi ride from Gatwick to Heathrow, free accommodation in a reasonable-quality hotel near Heathrow and a free replacement ticket for the London-Hong Kong-Melbourne-Brisbane route (as well as in excess of GBP 400 per head in cash). The problem was, it meant a later departure: not only did we have to spend an additional unplanned day (or rather night) in London, but also we risked not making it on time for the flight to Honiara – we only had an hour and a half now between arrival in and departure from Brisbane.

The following day we took a bus (luckily also free) from the hotel to the airport and without any further hassle we went through immigration and check-in procedures for our flight to Australia by Qantas. The flight was smooth and without major disruptions, although long hours spent on planes (first from London to Hong Kong, then from Hong Kong to Melbourne) dragged mercilessly and felt like days.

In Melbourne we had to change flights and take a domestic one to Brisbane. That meant collecting our checked luggage and waiting at the baggage belt.

Imagine our horror and frustration when it turned out that... our luggage disappeared! It did not make it to Melbourne, perhaps even to Hong Kong. Without warm clothes (winter in Australia can really be cool, and temperature at night did not exceed some 5-7 degrees Celsius), without washing utensils, without medicines and other more or less useful items, we were left to our own devices, although we were provided with some basics, such as soap, shampoo and toothpaste.

Ania became particularly frustrated, especially given that it was for the first time in her life that she had an adventure like that. As for me, I kept my cool and calm and was convinced that we would find our rucksacks in Brisbane.

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Thanks to our lack of checked luggage we have moved quickly and easily through the check in and luggage procedures. The only problem was that our transit visas to Australia which were to be needed for our stay in Brisbane on our way back to Poland were now used up and made invalid. Hence one of the first things that we had to do in Honiara was arranging for new visas at the Australian consulate.

Chilled to the bone, tired, without much sleep and irritated (especially Ania) we waited for hours in Melbourne for our next flight to Brisbane.

Once we arrived there we immediately made our way to the international airport, firstly to check on the status of our luggage, and secondly – as it turned out it still had not been found – to try and rebook our flight to Honiara to the next available date, i.e. Tuesday. By the way we also found out that the flight to Solomon Islands had been... moved from Saturday to Sunday! Obviously nobody cared to inform us.

Fortunately enough a very friendly employee of Solomon Airlines made an appropriate amendment with no ado or additional fees.

Hence we faced a two-day stay in Brisbane and – naturally – this also meant a two-day (or rather three-day) delay in the arrival to our final destination. Solomon Islands' curse?

Brisbane turned out to be cool, but not as cool as Melbourne. We managed to find an inexpensive hotel (for Australian standards, at least) near the airport and waited for some information concerning our luggage. To our great relief it was found eventually, but... all our supply of freeze-dry food (that we had brought from Poland in anticipation of our jungle outings) was missing. It had been, we found out, requisitioned by the Australian Quarantine. Sanitary regulations of Brisbane and Queensland are the strictest not just in Australia but in the entire world. Since our food – despite being hermetically sealed – contained beef from Germany (the Australians have almost paranoid fear of mad cows disease and of all sorts of germs) – it had been confiscated. Fortunately we managed to get it all back just before our departure, although inevitably we had to pay a certain fee.

On the second day of our stay in Brisbane we met with our friends from Hospitality Club (<http://www.hospitalityclub.org>), with whom we were supposed to stay for one day on our way back to Poland. Liz and John and their three sons live in a spacious house in the suburbs. They welcomed us cordially and treated us to excellent food. Unfortunately there was not too much time left for sightseeing, although the city does not offer an awful lot in terms of prominent attractions.

On 19 August we eventually took a flight to longed-for and long-awaited Solomon Islands which welcomed us with oppressive, sticky heat.

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After almost hassle-free passport control (except further questions about our freeze-dry food) we took a taxi to a hostel run by so-called *tasiu*, i.e. lay Anglican missionaries congregated in the Melanesian Brotherhood. During ethnic unrest and riots in the years 1998-2003 they played a significant role in introducing peace and order in the country and some of them gave their lives for this cause. On the other hand however due to their intensive, and even aggressive, missionary and evangelical activities they contribute towards an irreparable disappearance of traditional customs, beliefs and values.

On the first day of our visit in this tropical, excessively verdant country we were too tired for anything, so having purchased something to eat and drink we took to sweet laziness on the hostel's veranda with a view over the port and the ocean.

Apart from the need to handle our transit visa to Australia it seemed appropriate to begin the following day with an attempt to verify data contained in the texts of Marius Boirayon, and above all with an attempt to contact him personally. But where to start the search? Perhaps with checking whether the majority of Honiara and Guadalcanal inhabitants have heard about "Dragon Snakes" and giants? A short "investigation" on the subject seems to have confirmed that a large part of the locals have at least heard stories on giants and strange lights, including some people who know traditional tales about giants (some of such tales – read in a library or heard from the locals – are included in Appendix III to this report). At least this part of the Australian's statements seemed to be true. But how to contact the author himself? How to verify the remainder of his assertions?

In his articles Boirayon on several occasions mentions the name of his acquaintance – or even friend – the former premier of Guadalcanal and Solomon Islands, Ezekiel Alebua. It was therefore necessary to contact him directly or to get in touch with his younger brother Dominic who is a tourist guide.

Nevertheless I began my research from a visit to the National Museum which both collects artefacts and huts representing styles and cultures of individual islands of the archipelago and possesses a sizeable collection of volumes in its library. I did not manage to find out anything on that day. However, thanks to my visit I gained some foothold.

Next we directed our steps to the Parliament building situated on a hill overlooking the city. A simple and very short climb (perhaps 5 minutes) squeezed the last drop of sweat from us – the humid heat engulfed us entirely with its unbearable stickiness.

The Parliament was the place where I hoped to find out some information about Ezekiel Alebua and possibly to establish some contact with him. Indeed. I was told that the former premier of the province and of the country... served his time in prison!

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Perhaps in the case of Solomon Islands it is not as shocking as it may seem, as due to ubiquitous corruption, coterie and lies governments here change every several months or so. To me, however, this news came as a blow as it meant that contact with one of few people who personally knew Boirayon – and one of a few who had seen the “Dragon Snakes” and had encounters with giants – was now made much more difficult or downright impossible.

Yet there existed one more way to reach Boirayon – through Ezekiel’s younger brother, Dominic. Earlier, while still in Poland, I had found out that it might be possible to get in touch with him at the local provincial government’s office, provided he was based in Honiara and not on the other side of Guadalcanal, on the Weathercoast, in a place called Avu Avu.

Having reached the seat of the Guadalcanal provincial government, we managed to find a taxi driver who agreed to take us to Alebua’s house. The increasingly winding road ran through thick vegetation and palm tree forests, reminiscent to an extent of the jungles in the interior.

Obviously the Solomon curse continued: at that moment in time Dominic Alebua was based in Avu Avu.

Thus the trail ended abruptly and I still did not have any information about Boirayon.

The following day I decided to continue my search. Ania was just beginning to experience jet lag effects, so I left her to rest and first went to the offices of “Solomon Star”, the national newspaper. According to information contained in Boirayon’s text, in 1996, in that very paper, there appeared on the first page a photograph showing a mysterious creature captured by the locals, called “Cho-Cho” or “Chowa-Chowa”.

A very friendly and obliging lady came to my aid and she made available to me the whole year’s issue for 1996. Unfortunately, despite the fact that I had a look through all the pictures in all the papers bound together in two fat volumes – I was not able to find the said picture. Hence there are three possibilities: 1) the picture appeared in another year, 2) the picture appeared in 1996 (or in another year) in another newspaper (there are at least two more national titles), or 3) such picture never existed.

After my visit at the newspaper’s office I made my way to the SIBC (Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation) radio station. As per Boirayon’s article, at a certain point in time (approximately around the year 2000) the station broadcast news about an apparent meeting of a certain Anglican missionary with a representative of the giants, a “Luti Mikode”. On another occasion another SIBC news was on everyone’s lips, namely concerning a meeting between representatives of the Tangarare tribe with a group of giants. I wished to confirm these pieces of information directly at the

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source. Unfortunately nobody was able to ascertain whether and when such news had ever been broadcast (this despite the fact that I met with the managing director of the station himself). I was instead referred to the station's librarian who promised to contact me with an aged folk stories (*kastom stori*) teller named Luk Susuta who hosted regular shows on the air. The man knew a lot of tales (including ones about giants) from various parts of the country and he had knowledge about the whereabouts of the tales' sources and about who would be able to help me further in my quest. Mr Susuta is however not an easy person to find. Despite a number of attempts I did not manage to make an appointment with him. In the light of later events it ceased to matter so much.

The next task was to verify another assertion of the Australian author, concerning the existence in the Cultural Centre of a 15-page long booklet, containing 14 images of alleged aliens (the "Greys"), officially called "mythological creatures" from Solomon Islands. It turned out that the Cultural Centre had been closed and the whole collection of this institution had been moved to the National Museum's library. In effect I had to go to the Museum once again to see with my own eyes and hear with my own ears what the librarians have to say (and show). Despite detailed descriptions they were not able to find any such booklet. Does it exist? If so, where is it? Does it indeed represent beings popularly known as the "Greys"? These are questions calling for a prompt response and a proper research. But where to begin such a research – is a riddle not easy to solve.

On the same day I decided to do one more thing, namely to visit... the Honiara prison to at least try and speak to Ezekiel Alebua. It did not prove to be completely unfeasible, however it required writing a special explanatory letter to the management explaining the purpose of the visit. For a while I played with an idea of writing such a letter, yet later events made conversation with Ezekiel Alebua an issue of a lesser urgency.

The following morning we met in our hostel with Ann, a Swedish lady with a PhD degree from the University of Lund who married a Solomon Islander from the Kwaio people in Malaita and who had lived for the past two years in Guadalcanal in conditions that most Europeans might consider to be primitive and that were in fact simply modest and with which Ann seems to be quite happy. Ann and Robert shared with us a number of useful pieces of information of which the most important was the one stating that in the village of Aruliho situated some 20-30 kilometres away from Honiara there lived a certain John Maeli who was hosting – as he does every year – Chris Blackwell.

Who is Chris Blackwell? This approximately 60-year-old Australian who graduated from an engineering department and has been a pilot for many years, currently runs a holiday retreat in his own country, and moreover deals with the production of jewellery in Indonesia, later to be sold in Australia. Jack of many trades.

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But of greatest importance was the fact that Chris was also a researcher of strange and inexplicable events and phenomena and that he arrived in Solomon Islands – as he does every year – to study the issue of giants and strange lights. One certainly could not afford to overlook such an opportunity. We had to go to Aruliho.

A taxi driver that Robert knew took us to the village for 300 Solomon dollars – Solomon Islands, as we were to find more than once, are not the cheapest country, contrary to what one might expect.

We had to walk the last few kilometres – the state of the roads, especially in Guadalcanal's interior, leaves a lot to wish for, and that is putting it mildly. Since it rained the previous night (rain made our lives difficult many times more during our stay, thwarting our plans), thick cakes of mud stick to our sandals. A passenger car would not have much chance here.

Eventually the settlement of Aruliho comes into view. A number of houses, pretty much alike, based for better wind circulation on tall poles, with wooden walls and with roofs made of palm leaves or corrugated iron.

We reach John Maeli's house. Together with Chris and several other men he is busy building a general-purpose washhouse (for washing the body, dishes and clothes). It is an idea (and – to a large extent – execution) of Chris who – in exchange for help from the local inhabitants in his research – repays them by helping in some concrete, specific way. Chris confirmed stories about giants and showed us one of the mountains visible from afar as the one which is called the Dragon Mountain and behind which (or around which) strange lights are visible almost every night called locally "Dragon Snakes". The official name of the mountain – as I finally found out – was Gallego or Gallago (according to different spellings). I am obviously vitally interested in both the lights (and the giants), and climbing the mountain or one of the nearby hills. Chris and John say it is possible. We agree that after Chris comes back to Australia (which is going to happen in a few days' time) we will come to John's village to attempt some exploration.

Chris also shared some information with me, extremely vital from the point of view of my quest. As it happened, Marius Boirayon, from whose texts about giants and strange lights everything started, used to be Chris's close associate in his own research. According to what Chris claims, after Boirayon had published his articles, Australian secret service became "interested" in him, and he ended up as a mentally unstable and neurotic wreck of a man and came back to his country.

Meanwhile, I become actively committed with helping the men build the washhouse. I mix and pour wet concrete, having earlier shovelled from a dry riverbed two crates full of fine, loose gravel which – mixed with water and cement – produces

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strong, hard concrete. To collect the gravel, Chris drives his hired 4WD truck into a narrow pass between thickets which almost scratch the body of the vehicle.

I become involved in the work so much that we decide to stay at John's place for a little longer. We say goodbye to Ann and Robert and discuss the possibility for our next meeting.

Before we eventually leave Aruliho (Chris will take us back to town) we make an appointment for the following day to visit the so-called Giant's Cave. Apparently that is where one of these mythical – or perhaps completely real – creatures once lived. After seeing the cave we are to go to a nearby beach to enjoy swimming and sunbathing.

The next day we are picked up by a certain Tunga, commonly known as Mister T. In his friend's taxi he takes us into the forest. Then, after 5-10 minutes' light walk we spot a barbed-wire fence with a padlocked wooden gate. We squeeze beneath the wires and soon reach the cave. Its walls are all covered with very strange signs, inscriptions, drawings. Apparently this is the giants' writing. Orthodox mainstream scientists claim that these are traces of the earliest settlements in Solomon Islands. Irrespective of who inhabited the cave in the past, the fact remains that nobody so far has managed to decipher those engravings.

We take a whole series of pictures. It is only after we blow them up on the camera's display that we notice how some of the drawings remind... faces of the so-called "Greys". Is it only our inspired imagination? Is there or was there any connection between the giants and the "Dragon Snakes"? Who are – if they do really exist – those weird creatures? Responses to such questions are not possible without in-depth research and a proper expedition. In any case the idea that the cave – even if only in myths or legends – may have served as the dwelling place of the giants does not seem to be so alien to me.

In the second half of the day we go to Bonegi beach. We stay for two hours and Mister T takes care of our belongings. We swim in the warm ocean, throwing ourselves right onto foamy waves which flood us up to our ears. Merely several hundred metres away from us, sticking out of the water, is a rotten, rusty skeleton of *Kinugawa Maru*, a Japanese transport ship, also known as *Bonegi II* (not far, merely 800 metres away, there rests under the sea the wreck of a similar ship, *Hirokawa Maru*, also called *Bonegi I*). In November 1942 the ship carried to Guadalcanal a supply of guns, munitions, food and vehicles. It was spotted by American patrol boats and sunk down. The wreck now sticks out vertically, while 26 metres of the ship is down below the sea level. This is not a result of American bombs and torpedoes, but rather of the tsunami and hurricanes. As earlier photographs indicate, the original position of the ship was quite different. In any case it is not important. There are lots of such wrecked ships in the surrounding waters, both Japanese and American ones. Usually though they rest –

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and rust – at a much deeper level, from several to several dozen metres. They are all remains of fierce sea battles during WWII, collectively known as “the Battle of Guadalcanal”. Very many people lost their lives on both sides as a result of the exhaustive fighting.

After the swim we stroll along the beach in the blasting heat of sunrays shooting from the sky. The plums of palm trees rustle soothingly right at the shoreline. The sun, the wind, the waves... Splendid. And everything would be so fine if it was not for the fact that in my enchantment and delight over the impressive passing day (and in fact in my forgetfulness and silliness) I did not wear any cap or hat, nor did I put any sunscreen on my body. The result – after a mere couple of hours – is deplorable. The skin of my back, arms and legs burns and stings, assuming a deep-purple hue. I feel I am in fever. When in the evening Ania sprays a special soothing cream over my body – I shiver all over and shudder with cold. I swallow anti-flu tablets and aspirin, but the following morning the aching of my skin is only a small fraction duller, while I develop sore throat so I need to take special lozenges on top of the other medicines.

The next day – due to our general condition, especially mine – we do not do much. We only pay Ann and Robert a visit in their village. As I said before, they live in modest conditions in a wooden hut on poles and yet they still wallow in luxury compared to many other villagers, because they have power (from solar batteries), a TV set, a DVD, an electric cooker and some other amenities. Several weeks later, while viewing Ann’s profile on Google, we are all the more admiring her for her complete change in lifestyle as compared to what she had and knew in Sweden.

Before we reached Ann and Robert’s house, we had to... cross to the other side of the Mataniko river. There is an outstretched piece of rope attached to wooden pegs on both shores. The crossing consists in stepping on a wobbling float that reminds old battered door, and then in pulling on the rope. One moment of upset balance, a momentary loss of concentration – and one can end up in the dirty waters of the river which in this section (quite close to the estuary) is some 150-200 cm deep. Once on the other side, one has to scramble up the slippery and quite steep shore.

Ann and Robert offered us a warm welcome, treating us to delicious coconut juice, a cake, coffee and pineapples. A stark naked little boy called Tome keeps running all over the farmyard, oblivion to the rain, clay, rocks and trash. Our visit slowly draws to an end. One more river crossing and we are coming back to the hostel.

Yellowish blisters form on my burnt skin.

The following morning I feel a bit better – perhaps the medicines worked and I “sweated out” the disease – although the blistery skin on my back is still in pain. Ania and I decide to see the Mataniko waterfall, situated in the upper course of the river on whose shores (in its lower section) Ann and Robert live.

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We take a taxi to the village of Lelei, the place from where treks to the waterfall begins. We soon find out that here, too, we face some river-crossing – this time fording the water as its level is up to one’s knees at best. Well, what do the two “*waetman*” do? They remove their trekking boots, take off their socks, roll up their trousers and carefully, delicately, so as not to hurt sensitive feet against rocks and pebbles on the bottom, ford the river. Next, they rub their feet thoroughly with a towel, put the socks and boots back on, lace up the boots and roll their trousers down. The whole operation of crossing a 20-metre wide stream took us some 15 minutes. Obviously the locals, making little of sharp stones, cross the river barefoot in a matter of fifteen seconds or so.

The chief of the village was awaiting us on the other side. He was the one who collected fees for the trek. Before we set out, he showed us his collection of helmets, jerry-cans, arms, bottles, belts and other rusty remnants of WWII. It was exactly at this spot where fierce battles between the Americans and the Japanese took place – on the hills called the Galloping Horse because of their overall shape – depicted in the book and the movie “The Thin Red Line”.

Eventually our guide Tony, Ania and I begin our climb on the hills marked by the Americans during the war as 50, 51, 52 and 53. Initially the trail is very steep and leads through hills covered with grass. Then we climb and descend many times, in the burning sun, amongst tall grasses.

We stop on a tall ridge. Suddenly a forest wall materialises before us. We are swallowed by the moist, stuffy heat of the jungle, and the dark canopy of trees cuts off the sunlight. We look down. We are about to begin an extremely steep descent on a slippery track, no wider than 40 centimetres, covered with sticking, mossy rocks and roots. We teeter unsteadily, making our first steps. Although we put on our hiking boots with well-treaded soles, every now and then feet slip off the wet surface. We both experience minor falls. Quite by accident Ania bends her trekking stick. All this time our guide has no difficulty in walking calmly barefoot.

The path becomes now even steeper. At a certain point the gradient increases to 80% and in order not to fall down, we need to hold on to a vine or a liana that Tony cut and tied to a tree.

At times the track is so overgrown that Tony needs to use a bush knife to clear the way.

When finally, after a murderous descent (much more exhausting than the climb), we reach the waterfall, I am so emaciated and worn-out that I almost faint. During all this time I only drank juice from one coconut. Therefore I am dehydrated but also weakened by the cold. That is why when, on my last legs, I reach the waterfall, I drink

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some two litres of crystal clear water, soak my legs in the stream, pour the liquid over the nape of my neck and over my head. Some 15 minutes later I begin to feel much better.

We spend approximately one hour at the waterfall. In fact, it is a series of waterfalls, streaming cascades of water descending from gradually lower levels or terraces. Everywhere we look we are surrounded by the thick, tropical jungle, overgrowing the steep slopes, and in some places there are caves which – provided one has time and willingness to do so – can be partially penetrated. We swim, take a bath in a waterfall pond. Finally it is time to come back. None of us has a slightest desire to climb the steep, jungle track that led us here. We take a decision to... float down the Mataniko river. We wrap our backpacks in plastic rainproof coats that Ania has providently taken from Poland.

Then, just as we stand, in our hiking boots, trousers, T-shirts and headgear we jump into the rapid current. First we have to step on an inclined boulder, washed by rushing water. Then we need to lower ourselves into the chasm of steep rocks with gushing streams. There is a vine or a liana attached to the rocks. Ania goes down first. She manages to make a big step and jump straight into water, almost two metres deep. Then it is my turn. I hold on to the natural rope which... snaps under my weight. I fall down right onto river stones and rocks. Fortunately enough, it all ended up in a mildly bruised elbow and some skin abrasion on my back. A swim in the cool current of the Mataniko river is quite pleasant, even though – despite her great skills in the water – Ania almost drowns on two occasions as heavy, soaked boots draw her to the bottom.

The level of water in the river varies: sometimes it is arm-deep, on other occasions – only ankle-deep. Throughout most of its course it runs down a mysterious, dark gorge, covered on both sides with a tropical jungle. Water gets into soaked boots all the time, but the T-shirt and trousers begin to dry. We no longer ford the water along its course, but rather cross it, zigzagging from one side to the other. Small sharp pebbles get into my boots, making the walk all the more so inconvenient. What is worse, wet boots begin to rub against my legs as water-heavy socks slid down somewhere.

Eventually we reach back the Lelei village where – all soaked through and exhausted and yet very happy – we wait for a taxi. It has been a very intensive and eventful day.

After the Mataniko swim the burned skin does not hurt so much any more and blisters slowly dry.

Unfortunately the following day I begin losing my voice hour by hour. The throat infection I have had so far has now attacked my vocal cords. It is therefore small

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wonder that we are not going to do anything or to walk anywhere, especially given that we have been waiting for half a day for John Maeli with whom we made an appointment for the morning and who only arrived in the afternoon. We are supposed to live in Aruliho for a while in order to climb a hill adjacent to the “Dragon Mountain” and to observe strange lights.

We fix a fee for – as John termed it – the “programme”: the price for staying in the village, climbing the nearby mountain which will make observing “Dragon Snakes” possible, and for transport, a guide and porters has been agreed to be 2500 Solomon dollars. Back then we did not know just what a huge mistake we were making.

Next day, after being late – naturally – several hours, John arrives in the company of Mister T who is going to take us to Aruliho in his ramshackle truck which hardly sticks together.

Before we depart to John’s village we do something which then seemed to us to be a good and noble move (since – following Chris’s example – we, too, wanted to contribute to the wellbeing of these people), and which later turned out to be another big mistake. We buy for him and his family 20 kilos of rice, 10 kilos of flour and sugar, a new kettle (which was intended for John but was supposed to be earlier used during our stay in the jungle), a bush knife (the latter also for Mister T), soap, tinned fish etc. We spend in excess of 1000 Solomon dollars for all these items.

We reach Aruliho and quarter in John’s house. The wooden structure is equipped with “rooms” made of torn pieces of plywood and rags. Windows – if they can be called such – obviously have no panes in them, only pieces of fabric, hanging gloomily on a piece of string. Naturally one can forget about electric power, but luckily the settlement has running stream water, flowing out of a rubber hose; it is at least possible to take a shower or rather – as the washhouse has no walls whatsoever – to rinse oneself a bit.

My vocal cords still refuse to co-operate. Now I speak in low, sensual bass, now I lose voice completely. Besides I still have a little fever. However the skin on the back and arms begins to peel off.

To make matters worse, Ania also starts feeling unwell. This means a whole day’s waiting, doing practically nothing. At night, in turn, we experience a downpour of rain so torrential that I cannot hear my own thoughts. Raindrops bounce off the corrugated-iron roof. The roof is not entirely leak-proof, so every now and then a trickle of water falls right on me.

The rainstorm prevents us from doing anything the following day, either. The good side of such forced laziness is that it enables us to recover, to rest, sleep well, gather strength. We take our pills, moreover John treats me to (and with) a traditional

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“water medicine” drink (i.e. something that I prefer not to know of dissolved in a bottle of water) as well as lime juice. All that “mass attack” on my ailments brings positive results – I begin to feel better and I regain my voice.

However Ania is still feeling sick and downcast and so she decides not to climb the hill with us to observe “Dragon Snakes”.

Initially John made a positive impression on us. He went out of his way to make our stay in his modest homestead the best he could. He treated us to fruits from his garden (that Chris has termed “a living supermarket”) – juicy papayas, mangoes, guavas, rock-melons and watermelons as well as delicious star-fruits – he shared his food with us. Especially for Ania he also built a separate latrine (the existing one, to put it mildly, did not represent a particularly clean sight, and “excursions” to it after dark – i.e. already after 6:30 pm – were not particularly pleasant) etc. It is only later that we found out he did not treat us quite honestly.

Eventually the longed-for and long-awaited moment has arrived. In the afternoon me and a group of porters are climbing the nearby hill from which we should have a view on the “Dragon Mountain” and a valley further down and away. It is the place where – according to eyewitness accounts (and Marius Boirayon’s article) “Dragon Snakes” appear nearly every night.

John remains in the village. Together with Patrick, Eric and two more men we leave Aruliho. Initially the road is almost flat and leads through thin vegetation on the border between fields and the jungle. Then the inclination increases a bit.

We reach a village. In order to be able to climb higher, we need the elders’ permission as all this area belongs to them. Unfortunately the women from the village oppose and disagree with our crossing of their land (a side remark here – in Solomon Islands the locals in many respects follow the rule of matriarchy, therefore women, especially older ones, have a lot to say, however in matters relating to the whole village or community all the elders make a joint decision). Clearly they are afraid that we can be gold prospectors or geologists wanting to reap profits from their land. Moreover, as they say, there are no men in the village now and they cannot take a decision by themselves.

Both Eric and Patrick, and I make unsuccessful attempts at convincing these people that we are not going to harm them or their property in any way. I notice that the awareness of the importance of those strange lights that fly almost over their heads is surprisingly low and that it might be worthwhile organising a meeting with the whole community to explain to them why observing the lights is so vital. Eventually we have to clear out of the village with our tails between our legs. Bitter pills have been swallowed.

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We descend back, towards the fields. We notice that there is a temporary shelter in one of the fields, belonging to the crops' owner. Patrick has an idea and says that we could make a camp here. The fields' owner is Patrick's *wantok* – member of the same community. Indeed, he agrees for us to set a camp in exchange for scaring away wild pigs that sometimes like to sneak in here. There is a magnificent view to the mountains, including the "Dragon Mountain". Unfortunately this vantage point is quite remote from the subject of our observation, so "Dragon Snakes" (provided they do really exist and will show up tonight) will be visible much less clearly than if we made observations from a nearby hill.

According to my guides' words, the mysterious lights are only visible after midnight. Once we set up our camp, we indulge in recounting tales of usual, and sometimes completely unusual nature under the canopy of the sky speckled with thousands upon thousands of Milky Way stars – I have never seen before so many of them.

One person particularly keen on talking on any subject is Patrick. This approximately sixty-year old man (as per my rough estimates) has an outward appearance of a poor peasant or even a beggar. Bare feet, dirty, ragged clothes. As he later admitted himself, he only finished primary education. He had, however, surprisingly wide knowledge and erudition which he owed to, as he said, almost obsessive reading of books. Before he recounted his strange stories to me, he said he was currently involved in the protection of an endangered species of turtle (leather or leatherback turtle), afforesting and the protection of the cultural legacy through collecting and describing traditional herbs. His open mind and pleasant disposition won my instant affinity, and when he later explained to his fellows – in pidgin (the local *lingua franca* of Solomon Islands which I do not know particularly well but which is easy to understand as it constitutes a simplified and impoverished version of English) – something on antigravity, I felt genuine admiration.

I explained to my guides just what was commonly understood under the term Unidentified Flying Objects. I also said that – at least according to witnesses' accounts – in some cases there were occurrences of so-called abductions on board of strange crafts and quite frequently one of the first related and not comprehended symptoms of such an abduction was observation by the "victim" of a strange, small light under the ceiling. The light later hypnotised the observer. At this stage Patrick recounted his unusual dream whose interpretation (as well as decision as to whether it was just a dream) I leave up to the Readers.

**Patrick's first story.** *It happened when I was still young. I had been elected the chief of the community. I strived to perform my duties the best I could, however the community was not satisfied with me. They criticised my decisions and disagreed with them.*

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*One day I returned home and began to pray to former gods. “Help me find the way, show me which road to take and what to do so that the others are satisfied with me and so that I could like what I do.”*

*Then I went to bed. At night I noticed a strange light under the ceiling, slowly approaching my forehead. I didn’t know what was going on with me, but I found myself in a brightly lit room in which some bright-haired being told me not to be afraid. I felt we rose above the ground. I saw my house. And then I saw a long house full of people who were reciting some texts and talking loudly. Something was drawing me to that place. I wanted to find myself in that room immediately. I felt I was walking away from the craft but nonetheless some force grabbed hold of me, as if someone put their hand on my arm. “Not now, wait some more”, the being said..*

*Then I woke up and the light above my forehead disappeared.*

*Several days later I found an ad saying that candidates were wanted for a cultural centre. I applied and went for an appointment. I saw exactly that same building which had appeared in my dream! There were plenty of people inside who were reciting something and talking loudly. I asked if they would have a place for me and they agreed. That is how I began doing what I really liked although with time my interests changed and now I enjoy protecting cultural heritage and nature.*

Later on we started talking about local stories and legends concerning beings apparently living in the deep jungle interior of Solomon Islands. Patrick once again confirmed that many inhabitants of Guadalcanal, as well as Makira and Malaita, had heard about giants and that some of them even had direct contacts with them. Obviously I took this opportunity and asked about a possibility of meeting those people, the more so that some of them claim they own giants’ hair or teeth. If any of this is true, then do not such artefact beg for a proper examination and research?

Patrick also told me that apart from “proper” giants of Guadalcanal and Malaita and “small people” of Makira Solomon Islands were moreover inhabited by beings called “moo-moo” and “chowa-chowa” (or “cho-cho”). The latter can be linked to a story explaining the name of the archipelago. When the Spanish sailor Alvaro de Mendaña centuries ago discovered the islands and embarked on land, he planted a cross in the ground and began praying. When the locals noticed that he was praying to a wooden cross they regarded him as someone exceptional and gave him – as they claimed – an egg of their god called “Chowa”. It turned out to be big nugget of gold. Mendaña thought that he had just discovered the land where King Solomon hid his legendary wealth. That is how the country gained its name. However, this does not explain in any way what or who were – or are – those strange creatures that live somewhere on the border between legends and reality, facts and dreams.

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Intrigued by Patrick's tales I showed him a 10-cent coin. On the reverse side there is an impression of an unusual "monster", not quite a human and not quite a fish. This incredible creature seems to have some common features with (although not a direct resemblance to) gods described in Sumerian and Babylonian eposes who apparently gave rise to civilisation on Earth: Ea (Oannes), Enki or Enlil. They, too, were depicted on Sumerian cylindrical seals as half-human, half-fish. Sheer coincidence? Perhaps. But is it likely that those creatures are the real thing and that the reverse of the coin does not merely represent an image of one of those water gods, as the official science has it?

**Patrick's second story.** *Some years ago on the island of Makira an acquaintance of mine went hunting deep into the forest. At a certain point in time he heard a rustle of the thickets. When he turned over, he saw a creature from this coin!! It began chasing him. It had red eyes and it wanted to do my acquaintance some harm. It was one of those jungle demons. Fortunately my acquaintance managed to escape.*

When, several days later in Lime Lounge restaurant – where most of the clients are white tourists and employees of local companies from Australia – I asked one of the waitresses about the image on the reverse side of the 10-cent coin, she answered politely and calmly, as if she was taking an order from me: "oh, yes, these are devils from Makira, they live in the jungle"...

Midnight approaches. We all move to our vantage point from where we have excellent – albeit remote – view of the mountains, including the "Dragon Mountain". We are lucky: the sky is practically cloudless, while myriads of stars flicker continuously, winking at us.

Initially the eyesight needs to get used to darkness. With difficulty I discern outlines of Gallego and the surrounding hills. For a while nothing unusual happens. Suddenly the valley on the other side of the mountain lights up with a glow. First the glow is extremely weak, it brightens up and then dims again, at first it is difficult to differentiate it from the glow of the stars. Suddenly, though, the glare becomes much stronger and assumes the shape of a beam, extending behind a ball or point of light which moves along the slope. The Gallego mountain – just as the remaining peaks – is covered with dense jungle, yet it is not a solid wall of vegetation without any gaps. I see a light stealing by behind trees and bushes. Then, again, the glow dims for a while. It appears and disappears higher up or lower down.

At one point the valley and the surrounding hills are lightened up with a glow so strong that the outline of the "Dragon Mountain" can clearly be discerned. If the light is so bright from such a distance, how strong must it be over the valley! According to the stories told by the locals – especially those who were apparently being chased by "Dragon Snakes" – the light can be compared to a welding arch multiplied several

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dozen times in intensity. The powerful beam runs aslant across the sky like some huge lamp hanging under the night sky. Moments later everything dims back to darkness.

Some 40 minutes later to the right of the slope I notice a single light. From a distance it looks like the light of a hand-held torchlight with a kryptonite bulb, yet through binoculars it looks like the face of the moon (although of a much more bluish hue), and moreover it is situated some several kilometres away from our vantage point. The light performs a strange dance in the sky, up and down, left and right. Then it goes down and goes out. Today we are not going to see any “Dragon Snakes” any more.

I had a unique opportunity to find out that “Dragon Snakes” are a real thing. It does not matter what they are – they do exist. However the very question about their nature remains unanswered. Were they stars? Certainly not. They move in a completely different way. Could it be some atmospheric or natural phenomenon? Obviously one cannot preclude such an explanation. Could “Dragon Snakes” be explained away by some human activities? It is not unlikely. Yet, because of the way these lights were moving, I suppose we may have to do here with a much greater mystery. What kind of mystery exactly? An answer to this question could only be possible if a carefully organised expedition is mounted to the area, having at its disposal proper equipment, consisting of an appropriate number of people, and – first of all – having enough financial resources. I am ready to admit that participating in such an expedition is one of the things I would be very willing and keen to do. I need to stress that I will try to find sponsors in Poland and abroad but it is not going to be an easy task and it may as well be dashed to the ground. It is nevertheless worth trying as this seems to be one of the greatest mysteries of Solomon Islands and indeed of the whole humanity. Regardless of what these strange lights are or what causes them, this question just begs for a response. Even if we are dealing here with a “regular” human activity. After all, even then we do not know what these “Dragon Snakes” are there for, why exactly there, what exactly they are, why they appear so regularly etc. It is the task and mission of science to search for the truth and discovering the reality around us. Meanwhile, science (and with it also all sorts of “sceptics”, “pragmatics” and “rationalists”) distances itself from that kind of phenomena, instead branding their study as being pathetic, childish or as hearsay unworthy of proper attention. Such a superior, contemptuous and patronising stance contributes towards to further fossilization of already rigid way of thinking of most scientists who boast of the openness of their minds. Matters such as “Dragon Snakes” should be studied unconditionally and exactly with an open mind. Perhaps it is an immaterial event. Perhaps – a complete breakthrough. Every person whose interest is not limited to consumerism and whose view on the world is not that of cynical rationalism should ask basic questions: Who? Where from? Why? How? Questions that apparently science is supposed to ask as well. If so, then “Dragon Snakes” should have been subject to examination of mainstream science for a long time. This is not the case. Why? Perhaps this is yet another mystery to be solved. Personally I sometimes think that when most people around me consider me (and likewise thinking individuals) to be

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childish or infantile, or harmless maniacs, or, last but not least, insufficiently clear-headed – only because of quite atypical cognitive purposes and passions – then the saying that the majority is always right does not necessarily have to be true. It may as well be exactly the majority that is in some kind of lethargy from which only some shocking and crucial discovery could perhaps wake them up. I am far from supposing in a megalomaniac fashion that it is me who would or should make such a discovery (although I am not denying that it would be an extremely pleasant and gratifying experience); I only suggest that one of the ways of finding answers to various unsolved matters – perhaps the only one – would be to go to such places and visually, with one's own eyes, find out about the real state of affairs. Is it such an unfeasible task for scientists of – apparently – open minds?

There is one more story connected with “Dragon Snakes” which – if there is any grain of truth in it – confirms that the whole phenomenon can be something much more serious than human or natural activity.

During WWII the Japanese sent to Guadalcanal forces some several dozen thousand strong. If one adds up – even approximately – the number of the Japanese killed by the Americans, the number of the Japanese killed by the locals, the number of the Japanese who died of other causes and the number of the Japanese taken captive – it will turn out that the overall result is much smaller than the original number of enemy troops. Whatever happened to the remaining Japanese? They disappeared into thin air.

What is more, some time after the war a monument was erected in memory of the Japanese soldiers killed (Japanese War Memorial). In its original design the memorial contained a sculpture of an unusual being, similar to a human but covered with scales, equipped with a tail, holding some device in one hand and pointing with the index finger of the other hand... exactly towards the “Dragon Mountain”! It is not certain what exactly happened to the sculpture. Our excursion to Mount Austin (where the monument is erected) revealed that the memorial had been completely vandalised and devoid of all the metal parts and plaques. I managed to reach the president of the Solomon-Japanese Association who explained to me that a certain time ago a group of unemployed people had taken all the metal parts to sell them for scrap. Apparently the association managed to recover some of them and they are soon to come back to their place. Is the weird sculpture one of those metal parts? Nobody knows. According to another theory the sculpture had been secretly taken back to Japan and an entirely different statue had been put in place – and it is the latter which was apparently sold for scrap.

In any case, the question of what exactly “Dragon Snakes” are is a minor issue. What is most important is the fact that so far nobody has taken any trouble to check what exactly happens on the “Dragon Mountain” and why. Or, if anyone like that appeared, the search results are either mediocre or for some reason they have never

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been made available to the public. Common human curiosity, willingness to find out that which has not yet been found out, to arrive at some solutions to mysteries – should be a sufficient stimulus to organise a professional expedition to the area.

Incidentally, in 1999 the Japanese sent troops 2000 men strong towards the “Dragon Mountain”. For what purpose? We shall never find out, as the operation was aborted due to escalation of ethnic tensions in Solomon Islands, notably those between Guadalcanal inhabitants and Malaita inhabitants. Of significance is also the fact that the military forces of RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands) keep their eye on the mountain and have sent their helicopters to that area on several occasions. There is too much circumstantial evidence, too many coincidences, strange behaviour patterns and weird stories to put “Dragon Snakes” away on a shelf labelled “fairy tales”.

I am fascinated with the night observation and satisfied, yet not as much as I could be if we climbed the nearby hill from which the view of the mysterious lights would be much better (and closer) making it possible to take pictures or a video recording. Definitely someone was to blame here, and certain things have not been settled and agreed upon. Taking into account the fact that Ania – because of her indisposition – did not even leave Aruliho and that I did not watch the lights from the previously established vantage point – we were expecting a return of at least part of the money we had paid. Nothing like that happened. On the contrary. As it turned out later, we were expected to pay even more money. That undermined our initial trust in John and Mister T. We were inclined to aid them financially, but it was us who wanted to decide just when we would provide our help and in what form. Meanwhile, 2500 Solomon dollars for taking just one person up to a very small altitude quite close to the village (even taking into account transportation costs) is definitely much too exorbitant. As we were to find out, this was not the end of John and T’s dishonesty.

On the following day Ania felt worse. I was trying to convince her, however, to see another place where “Dragon Snakes” apparently show up, this time over the sea, close to a village called Vila, some 10-15 kilometres away from Aruliho. Eventually Ania agrees, so we were going to spend the following night in Vila, right at the seaside.

We arrive in Vila late in the afternoon. As it turns out, our home for tonight will be a hut, even smaller than the one belonging to John, with a palm-leaf roof, and with a vestibule and corridor so low that not just me, but also the local inhabitants – much shorter than I am – have to stoop. For beds tonight we will have mattresses lying directly on the floor (as was the case at John’s place), with the only difference being that the layer of dirt must be four times as thick. Moreover Vila – and certainly this particular house – is lacking in running water, so unless we take a bath in the sea (and because of our health problems and the coming darkness we can’t and won’t) – we will have to spend this night without washing. Even a latrine is missing, so all the natural needs have to be taken care of in a “bush toilet”. I am not saying I like such conditions

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– far from it – but I take things as they come and assume that it will do no harm to spend this night (after all, just one) without washing and other amenities.

However, such conditions are definitely not to Ania's liking, especially given that she still feels bad, both physically and mentally. Eventually I manage to convince her to stay.

Patrick – who arrived with us and with whom I feel the greatest affinity of all the locals – tells me that the “water” lights are visible around 8:00 pm. We take a walk along the main road to a place on a nearby beach where we have a clear, unobstructed view to the sea.

Lying on the beach at night in wait for a possible “show” of lights appealed even to Ania, despite a strong seaward wind.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, there appears John and informs us that he has just heard on the radio how there is a raging tornado over the neighbouring island of Malaita and that it is not safe to stay at the beach and we should definitely come back to the hut. Although we are not entirely convinced whether he is telling the truth, reluctantly we come back to the village. John catches up with us a while later. The problem is, he clearly smells of alcohol. Earlier that same day he managed to coax us into giving him even more money – for, as he claims, “the truck, the night programme, and a pig” that we asked for to have for dinner. As I am writing these words some three weeks later, we can still make do with his promise rather than the actual pig.

Patrick says that not everything is yet lost as it happens sometimes that these “water lights” can be observed around 2:00-3:00 am at night. I am obviously interested and say that I would very much like to see them. I must have been misunderstood, because I slept soundly until around 9:00 in the morning – I am only woken up by Ania who complains of something flying around her face. It was only a moth, but the fact is we really did not want to go into details as to what kind of bugs live in the hut.

The evening and the night spent in Vila without basic amenities, with a feeling of being taken advantage of and cheated by John, still feeling unwell (especially in Ania's case) – have tipped the scales. Upon Ania's strong insistence we come back to Aruliho, pack our rucksacks and then come back to Honiara. On the way from Vila to Aruliho Mister T's truck has a flat tyre, so the whole wheel needs to be changed. Of course once we get back to the capital, Mister T remembered to ask me for some money “for the tyre” (which I flatly refused).

We are not sure whether to put any trust in John. Actually we are convinced that he does not deserve this. It is an undeniable fact that he took advantage of us financially and that he did not deliver the services he had promised as part of his

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“programme”. On the other hand, I do not know anyone else who could show me places and people connected with the giants and take me there.

Eventually we decide to come back to Honiara on the same day and to spend several days there. John is supposed to visit us and then we have a good mind of having a serious word with him. For the time being, for Ania's sake, we come back to civilisation. For several days we do not do anything special, although during our stay two interesting events happen.

Since we have a view of the harbour from our hostel's veranda, we can observe boats and ships that make the port or put out to the sea. Usually these are quite small units, carrying passengers (and sometimes goods) to the neighbouring islands, such as Makira, Malaita, Savo, Florida etc. We notice, however, that a huge ship has made the port, made of steel, several storeys tall, equipped with powerful cranes – as it turned out later, it was a container ship whose owner was a company from Liberia.

In the evening we go to eat something and to drink the cheapest beer in town at the local Yacht Club, a meeting place of many white people, mostly locally employed Australians, sometimes also tourists, sailing around Solomon Islands in their yachts. All foreign visitors enjoy a free entry but they need to write their names in a special book. When we open the book to put down our names, as many times before, we rub our eyes with disbelief and astonishment. There we see three Polish names. So is it possible to meet fellow countrymen even in such remote places?

Initially we are not particularly happy with this news: all other reasons for our trip to such a remote and exotic place aside, one of the reasons has been also to bury ourselves for a while far away from the Poles, Poland and her problems, forgetting about everything, and to be able to speak about every subject imaginable in our own language without being understood by anyone. And yet when the three newcomers found out from an extremely friendly barman (who always had a chat with us) that we were their compatriots and when they invited us to join them at their table – the ice broke. It turned out that Włodek, Janek and Maciek were... seamen from the huge ship that we have seen at the roadstead (by the way, we have found out from our new Polish acquaintances that the ship was actually quite a small unit, and bigger ones would not even fit in the port). They were no less surprised seeing us on the other end of the world than we were when we saw their names in the book. They flooded us with questions about events in Poland (we did not know as we did not watch TV or listen to the radio, and besides there is extremely little information concerning Europe, let alone Poland, in Solomon media), what we were doing so far away from Poland, where we were from, etc. In return, they told us about their life at sea. Apart from the three guys from Poland, the crew consisted of two Germans and about a dozen Philipinos. The ship sailed under the Singapore banner and carried all sorts of goods in containers to Papua-New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu etc. Our three seamen from Poland are going to spend their time at sea until November. The

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youngest one, Maciek, was the captain, Włodek was the main mechanic, and Janek – the main electrician. Maciek and Janek were from Tricity (Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot), and Włodek – from Szczecin. After a long and interesting conversation and having drunk several litres of beer it was time to say our goodbyes. The sailors had to come back to the ship, and we felt a bit sleepy and tired and had to go to bed. Our meeting with the three Poles was a very pleasant and obviously completely unexpected event.

The following day we decided to thank Ann and Robert for their invitation at the beginning of our stay, therefore this time it was our turn to invite them to the Yacht Club to dinner. At the agreed time we met with Ann – Robert was with his friends and was to join us later. Naturally Ann, as a foreigner, had no problems entering the Yacht Club. But when Robert arrived, it transpired that without a membership card he had no right to use the bar and the restaurant. In spite of my intervention and confirmation that Ann and Robert were married, both the guards and the club's management stubbornly refused to let Robert in. We were prepared to leave, but we had already ordered our dinner and paid for it, so we wanted to have it our own way. Eventually, when the whole hassle subsided, and only three people from the Yacht Club remained – we agreed that nobody knew about anything, and that Robert could get in quietly, that we would quickly eat and drink and would leave soon after.

To our disadvantage, Robert had already had several glasses of beer and did not behave exactly quietly. Eventually though we all managed to have our dinner.

During the meal Robert told me one very interesting thing from the point of view of my research. The fact that he was under some influence of alcohol may obviously undermine the credibility of his story, yet on the other hand it may also be that it is exactly thanks to his state that he decided not to keep his mouth shut about it anymore and to say what he had kept for himself. In a nutshell, he admitted having had another wife before marrying Ann who came from the island of Makira, several dozen kilometres south-east from Guadalcanal (he himself comes from the tribe of Kwaio living on the island of Malaita, north-east of Guadalcanal). Because of this he had lived for a while in Makira. He claimed that while in the jungle at night on several occasions he had heard strange, almost child-like voices and seen small footprints. Obviously one cannot rule out the possibility that what he had seen and heard were just children (although it is difficult to imagine what children, even the local ones, would do in the thick jungle at night), yet when we consider omnipresent stories, very deeply rooted in Makira, about “kakamora” or “small people”, living in local caves of the tropical interior, one can then ask what Robert really experienced. Just as with “Dragon Snakes” I am far from a stubborn claim that we have to do with some otherworldly civilisation from some remote planet or a different dimension. Perhaps the explanation for the mystery of “small people” is far more prosaic and concerns, for example, a new, hitherto unknown to science kind, race or species of human. According to descriptions, “kakamora” are even shorter than West African Pygmies and are only some 100-120 cm tall. Just as with strange lights on Guadalcanal the question of who

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or what exactly “small people” are is secondary. What is most important is to perform appropriate studies which could ascertain whether behind stories, full of mysticism and local beliefs, there may lay hidden some unknown reality. And just as is the case with the Guadalcanal lights, the only way of finding out would be an organised, proper expedition to the areas traditionally believed by the locals to be inhabited by those tiny beings.

Waiting for John we make an excursion to Mount Austin, a hill not far from Honiara, which the Americans assigned number 35 during the war. In its direct environment, on a slightly smaller hill, there is the Japanese War Memorial. According to what Marius Boirayon says, it “would have to be the only one of its type in the world. Most war memorials I’ve come across have something to do with soldiers, guns, dead people and stuff. Not this one! It’s about 30 x 10 metres in area. On the western end there are four large blank vertical marble walls that should have writing on them, and to the north a row of cherry-blossoms that are having difficulty surviving in the tropical environment. The only writing to be found, which is about the famous Japanese sculptor, is at the base of the bronze statue of a half-human man with scales who is holding a ray-gun looking thing attached to the end of his long tail. This very futuristic ‘Star Trek’ warrior-type reptilian half-human man has a very determined look upon his face whilst holding his tail-attached ultra-modern ray-gun in his right hand and pointing to the west with his left. Surprisingly enough, when I line up to where he is pointing, for some reason he is pointing straight at the ‘Mt Dragon’ of northwest Guadalcanal.”

Small wonder that after such a description a climb up Mount Austin becomes almost obligatory. It is hard to pass up such an occasion – despite the fact that to the best of my knowledge every trace of this weird sculpture has long disappeared.

A wide tarmac road turns out to lead to the very top. Overcome with holiday laziness and taking into account the heat that beats down from the sky, we decide to take a taxi. As we approach the monument, we immediately spot the soaring, white marble walls. They are erected in such a way that in vertical projection they form a cross of equal limbs. There is also a white plinth in front of the structure. Some distance away, in the south-eastern corner, there is yet another plinth. Unfortunately, the whole monument makes a depressing impression: all the traces of not just the sculpture but also of the plaques and other metal elements are long gone. The plinths and the marble walls are speckled with graffiti. The memorial looks extremely deplorable. It haunts me: how could it happen? Where are the inscriptions and the plaques? And most importantly: what happened to the statue?

We walk back down the slope. While Ania returns to the hotel, I visit the Tourist Information Office to seek any information about the fate of the monument. They direct me to the nearby Mendana Hotel which also serves as the seat of the Salomon-Japanese Association, headed by Mr Francis Deve. We manage to have a quick word

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with each other: he is actually in a hurry for some meeting. He receives me very courteously and informs that some months back a group of the unemployed locals, in an attempt to earn some money, dismantled all the metal parts to try and sell them as scrap. Apparently the Association managed to salvage at least some part of the elements and they are going to be placed back on the stone plinths. What is the fate of the sculpture is unfortunately unknown. Intrigued, I ask Mr Deve for information (and possibly photographs) once the ceremony of restoring the plaques (and the sculpture?) takes place. However, I have a strange feeling that he does not know much about the apparent first sculpture on the hill, the one described by Boirayon. Later, upon my return to Poland, I search the Internet and find information which confirms the fact that the statue apparently stolen by the unemployed and the statue described by the Australian are two different objects. A picture of the statue from before the theft (from the year 2000) which I have managed to find on the page [http://www.pacificwrecks.com/provinces/solomons\\_guadalcanal\\_hill35.html](http://www.pacificwrecks.com/provinces/solomons_guadalcanal_hill35.html), shows a sculpture of a fisherman with both hands hanging down and without any "tail". Hence either Boirayon is not telling the truth or we have to do here with yet another unsolved mystery and the whole matter is much more serious than it may seem. I entered into correspondence (although with little success) with John Innes, an Englishman who has lived in Guadalcanal since the war and who specialises in the war and post-war history of the island and in the protection of ship and plane wrecks and memorials. Perhaps he has some news on the fate of the sculpture. I also intend to contact Chris about it and to present to him the results of my investigations. What is extremely interesting is the fact that a newspaper called "The Sydney Morning Herald" of 28 January 2008 informed in its article about a wave of thefts of metal objects (including "unexploded bombs and ammunition"!) for sale as scrap. The article reports a theft of a statue that the thieves have dumped half way through as it was too heavy; the statue, the article says, was "of a man with scales holding a gun". Are they referring to the same statue that Boirayon mentions in his text? Why, then, the photograph placed on the Internet site above depicts something entirely different?

While in Honiara we also decided to visit the local botanical gardens. Upon arrival there we find out that it is practically speaking part of the Solomon jungle situated close to the city and adapted for tourists by cutting out walking paths or tracks of three levels of difficulty. The whole walk around the gardens takes approximately an hour and leads through enormously lush and verdant area covered with trees, bushes and grasses whose names in most cases we can only guess at or whose names we do not know at all. They have a special "orchid house" here – Solomon Islands can boast several dozen kinds of the flower – but due to damages caused by tornadoes and the tsunami they are only grown again from seeds.

It is in the botanical gardens where we first got soaked wet with rain. Up until now we have been lucky and each time it rained we were under some sort of shelter.

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The remaining time spent in Honiara passed on purchasing gifts and souvenirs. We take almost all of them to the local Agricultural Quarantine office – for 80 Solomon dollars they will issue a certificate for us and they will spray some of the goods with a special insecticide. The issued certificate will later prove to be completely useless in Australia, anyway...

Living up to his promises, John Maeli finally appears (although obviously late) – accompanied by Mister T whom Ania has serious reasons to greatly dislike.

He suggests another “programme”. This time we are to hire a boat to the eastern tip of Guadalcanal, to Marau Sound, where Ania would enjoy long-awaited beach and sea, while I would go still further, to the southern coast of the island called the Weathercoast, and from there I would climb the hills in the tropical jungle to meet people who apparently had close contacts with giants, have their hair or teeth, or have seen their footprints. Moreover, story has it that somewhere up there is a mouth of a tunnel that “Dragon Snakes” use to travel beneath the mountains.

But when the conversation goes on to the question of finances, he is not so self-confident anymore. First I ask him to present to us a detailed breakdown of fees that would show just exactly how he spent the money that we had given him. At first he sounds convincing, but later on he begins to falter increasingly and mix everything up. It is apparent that he cannot explain in detail the alleged expenses, he counts some of the costs twice, trying to persuade us that we still owe him (or rather Mister T) some money.

Secondly it transpires that a trip to Marau is an extremely large expense: in all it exceeded 10 thousand Solomon dollars (approx. 1500 USD). Large part of the costs is the fuel (and this is one thing that John did not cheat about as prices of the fuel in Solomon Islands are really very high) and a boat hire. Moreover it turns out that the only decent hotel in Marau is one of the most exclusive – and therefore most expensive – places; for one night they charge 1200 Solomon dollars (approx. 200 USD) per person! The first thing to do is therefore to consider whether we can afford such a trip at all.

Ania is clearly dissatisfied, and this is despite prospects of the longed-for swimming and beach. When the conversation switches to finances, she cannot stand it any longer and leaves. I convince John that on that afternoon we are not going to accomplish or decide anything anyway and ask him to come back the following day.

During this time Ania and I both come to a conclusion that if we are, after all, to ever co-operate with John again, then it needs to be on our terms. To begin with, the money needs to go directly to the people from whom we are going to hire a boat or buy petrol. Secondly we agree that we are not going to pay even one single penny over the originally established fee. Thirdly, we pay half of the money immediately and half –

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after the successful “programme”. If John agrees to such conditions – we are willing to give it a try and go with him.

The following morning, however, John does not show up. Well, perhaps he did show up but did not find us, and seeing we were not at the hostel – left without a word. It is actually very strange, because previously we used to stumble upon him, Mister T or one of the neighbours or family members on a regular basis. Suddenly now he has vanished into thin air without ever returning money that he had previously “borrowed” from me (fortunately enough it was not a big amount).

Disappointed and furious we decide to ignore John, Mister T and their “buddies” and to make our own “programme”. We do not intend to spend our last 11 days in Honiara. Since the prospects of studying and carrying out research on strange and unexplained mysteries of Solomon Islands dim so suddenly, it is better to devote this time for relaxation and rest than to run around in circles and stay in the uninteresting capital.

Early next morning we hire a boat to take us to the nearby island of Savo – a favourite place for weekend getaways for both tourists and the local inhabitants – and later we purchase airline tickets for the remoter island of Gizo, situated hundreds of kilometres away in Western Province, the one which was almost wiped away by the tsunami in 2007 and which was then – and still is – one of the most popular tourist destinations in the whole archipelago. We only hope that the situation will not repeat and that we will manage to make it back to Honiara before our departing flight home.

At first, however, we direct our steps to the Tourist Information Office from where we take a ride to the already familiar village of Vila. There we change to a fibreglass boat which should get us safely within some 25 minutes to Sunset Lodge on Savo. Indeed, everything went smoothly, although obviously with some delay (i.e. according to the Solomon time). What we did not expect, however, was that the sea – at least on the Guadalcanal side – would be so rough. Every now and then the boat, propelled by a small but powerful engine, despite being stuffed to the full with all sorts of goods (and our quite heavy rucksacks), jumps on the waves as if it is made of paper, and with it jump the two of us, falling onto the hardness of a wooden plank which serves as a bench. And even though closer to Savo the sea clearly became calmer, reminding even the surface of a quiet lake, the results of this short trip can be quite painfully felt up to this day.

We reach the shore and step out of the boat. We receive a warm welcome from the staff and management of Sunset Lodge, including being treated to a couple of sizeable coconuts decorated with colourful flowers. We sip the cool coconut nectar through a straw and life again makes perfect sense. We order our dinner and then, carefree, loll about in hammocks.

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The following day we set out to observe megapods. These strange Pacific birds, of which there are many kinds and species, are unique in that they bury their eggs deep in the sand, compost or the ground near thermal waters, and after the young hatch they do not express any interest in them – the nestlings need to depend solely on themselves practically from day one and within a day or two they learn how to run and fly.

The area where the megapods feed and lay their eggs is divided into two sectors. In one of them the wild birds behave in their characteristic way, digging deep pits in the sand in which they lay their eggs, almost twice the size of a hen's egg. The other sector, separated from the first one with a palm-leaf fence, is an arena for human activity. The locals do the opposite work to the one the birds are doing: crouching down low or lying they dig the eggs out of the pits and later sell them (for 6 Solomon dollars apiece) or use for their own consumption. Obviously we made it clear that we also want to try this delicacy. They turned out to be very similar in taste to ordinary eggs with the only difference being that inside a thin layer of the white there is a huge yolk.

The second part of the day is spent on swimming in quiet, steely-blue waters of the ocean. The sea here is so calm that without any fear we swim several hundred metres from the shore. I also discover the charms of snorkelling (swimming with a mask and a snorkel) except that since I do not have proper equipment, my glasses put down low on the tip of my nose serve as a mask and instead of using a snorkel I simply hold my breath and lie motionless on the surface of the salty water which makes me float freely. At the nearby bottom I see multi-coloured corals, and swimming among them I discern fish of all shapes, hues and sizes: covered with yellow-navy-black stripes, entirely blue, grey-black... I do not know their names but it does not bother me as I contemplate the sea bottom.

For the rest of the day we laze away, swimming a bit, and then lying in a hammock. The weather is beautiful, the sun beats down and we are in no hurry...

On the second day of our stay in Savo we first take a boat to a "dolphin school", a place where these pleasant sea mammals gather together in larger groups. It only takes a short while before we see their steely gray backs, whizzing past our boats right under the surface, and then they jump out of the water merrily only to submerge again a second later. We circle around the dolphins for some 15-20 minutes to gather them into a larger group. Then we approach the shore on the other side of the island. We reach the place from which we will begin our climb to the volcano that created Savo. According to our guide, the last eruption happened around 1860.

At first the route is extremely easy and it can hardly be called a climb. The inclination is minimal and the track runs along a dried-up riverbed whose bottom is hardly damp as a small, narrow trickle runs down, never reaching the sea. As our

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guide assures us, however, in the rainy season this innocent area turns into a rapid river.

After several hundred metres I put my hand into the brook: the water is clearly warm, but pleasant. Greenish blooms on nearby stones indicate high concentration of sulphur.

The ravine, sculpted by the lava and the water, begins to narrow, and the lazily flowing small brook almost imperceptibly changes into a stream of increasingly rapid water. Again, I put my hand into it. Although still bearable, the temperature is noticeably higher.

The track branches off to the right from the dry riverbed that we have followed so far; it will now lead right to the volcano's summit. Here the first obstacles begin, literally and metaphorically. The easy walk now becomes an increasingly demanding climb (we take out our walking sticks) over stones and boulders. We weave our way between the rocks, crossing from one side of the stream to the other. An increase in temperature is already noticeable: my clothes are all wet. At one point, having climbed quite high already, we observe cascades of steaming water. Sunrays shoot through the steam, creating an eerie curtain of haze and light. Yet this is not the end of our hike.

The increasing temperature of water, the sun beating down almost vertically and the steamy stuffiness of the surrounding jungle all take their toll on me and my shorts which look now as if they were removed from a washing machine a moment ago – they are dripping with water, or rather with perspiration. The same with my shirt. And although Solomon Islands – even during or after the rain – are warm or even hot, yet I have never before felt so intensely a mass attack of high temperatures and humidity. Fortunately enough, this time we took with us enough water not to dehydrate.

The trail runs along increasingly larger and steeper boulders and in several places – just as it was with Mataniko – we need to hold on to specially attached lianas not to fall down. Remembering my previous experience I worry whether the vine will bear my weight. Luckily it did – both ways.

The boulders and stones become now so steep, and the current of the almost boiling stream so rapid that it is hard to climb without holding on to the rocks. At this height it is however impossible, as they are all heated to a very high temperature. As the guide explains to us, sometimes the locals come here (indeed we have met a few) to cook some food by burying it in the soft volcanic tuff or putting it in the boiling water. After a few steps we indeed see some rocky cracks and “pockets” where water gurgles every now and then. If hell exists, perhaps that is what it looks like: perpetual wandering in unbearable heat, humidity and stuffiness.

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From the volcanic hell it is time to come back to the small paradise of Sunset Lodge that awaits us. I dream of a cold beer and of rinsing my feet at least once in the blue waters of the sea. I feel a relief when we descend to a smaller altitude. The temperature of the water drops down, 80 degrees, 60 degrees, 40 degrees Celsius, eventually it is again possible to put one's hand in the disappearing trickle, vanishing before our eyes. Step after weary step we gradually move towards the coast. Finally I see again the blue of the ocean. My heart jumps with joy, and I can again paddle in the sea which wets my already wet shorts. After some 15 minutes a boat arrives and takes us back to the hotel, where within a dozen seconds or so I manage to drink a can of cold SolBrew. Oh, what a paradise! One had to go through hell to appreciate it!

When we had a rest and a good meal, we again indulge in sweet hammock laziness or in swimming in the calm ocean.

And so, before we realised it, it was time to come back to Guadalcanal, especially given that the following day, very early in the morning, we were taking a plane to Gizo. For a two-day accommodation at Sunset Lodge, guides, transportation to and from the island, food, beer and cold drinks for two people we paid under 2700 Solomon dollars – how much less than John's suggested "programmes". So it can be done after all.

The following morning a very early wake up at 4:30 am. We take a shower, put our clothes on, eat some dry biscuits and hurry out to take a pre-arranged taxi (which arrived – in keeping with the Solomon time – some fifteen minutes later) to the domestic airport from where our flight is supposed depart at 7:30. However, we need to be there already by 6:30.

When we arrive it is several minutes past 6:00 am. A building comes into our view which reminds us of some run-down train stations in some smaller Polish towns. Actually it is a large barrack with fans which have not been used for ages and are speckled with dusty, old spider webs. Next to two check-in counters there are two sets of obsolete scales. The barrack is padlocked and chained but soon afterwards someone swings the door open.

There is nobody inside but us. There are also some local people around but they do not enter the building. Soon afterwards we are joined by a Swiss couple. We start talking to them but it turns out that their flight is not at 7:30 am, but rather at 7:00 and that they are not flying to Gizo but rather to Munda. Alarmed, I ask the ground crew what the problem is, to which they reply that our flight is postponed and that the check-in procedure for Gizo will start... at 9:20! So, after all, we could have slept three more hours! Obviously we are not particularly happy hearing the news, but fortunately we have plenty of time and are not in a hurry. It could have been worse: they could have cancelled the flight altogether, and apparently this happens quite a lot. As it is, we have only experienced once again some of the Solomon time...

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Eventually the check-in indeed starts at approximately 9:30. First they weigh our check-in luggage on old mechanical scales, and then... each passenger needs to step on one of these devices, holding all of their hand luggage. Perhaps they do it to evenly spread the weight on the plane, or perhaps those passengers who arrive too late will not be let on board as they would be too much of a load with their bulky bags...

When we finally embark on board, we begin to understand why each decagram needs to be weighed. We will face an hour-and-a-half flight by an old, thirty-year old, well-worn De Havilland Twin Otter which can only accept 19 passengers...

From my seat I have an excellent view on the cockpit which is not separated in any way from the passenger compartment. For the first time I have a chance of watching the pilots during start, flight and landing. However truly interesting sights spread down below us. At first we see the familiar road that we have travelled many times already: from Honiara to the west of Guadalcanal. Then we can admire the whole of Savo. Later on we were busy observing a cockroach which, as if nothing has happened, strolled along the length of the plane until it climbed a sailor's hat of some Solomon Islander and remained there. Yet when the first tiny, uninhabited islands emerged below us, the first turquoise lagoons and coral reefs, the first waves, breaking frothily against the reefs – we already knew that Gizo must be somewhere near. And indeed, some 20-30 minutes later we were landing on an airstrip located on some island whose name we never found out. The airport building is even smaller than the one in Honiara, but we hardly notice it anyway. We take our rucksacks (which the ground crew takes out from the plane and puts directly on the grass) and we go to the pier to find some boat that could take us to the main island, to Gizo town. Luckily a friendly Australian who had been waiting with us in Honiara for hours and who works in the civilian section of RAMSI as a co-ordinator for modernisation of the prison service in the country, took us to the other side in a boat he had hired.

With heavy rucksacks we are looking for a hostel called Rekona. Finally we succeed to find it. We take a rest for the remainder of the day.

The next morning we take a taxi to the other end of the island, to Seraghi beach. It is a belt of golden-white sand which cuts deep into the sea. Palm trees rustle over us in the wind, and tiny hermit crabs scurry off in all directions, hiding in their tiny shells which they shed from time to time as they grow, only to find a new, bigger one. We are in paradise. The only thing we do not know is how we are supposed to change into our swimming gear, as we are immediately surrounded by swarms of neighbourhood kids who watch our every move with utmost attention. After all, it is not every day that they can see someone from so far away. Finally the kids get bored of us and disperse in all directions, and we can finally enjoy a wonderful swim in the turquoise-blue-steel water of the ocean.

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On our way both to and from the beach we have an opportunity of observing the remains of the damages that last year's tsunami has made: the whole expanse of trees struck down to the ground, crumbled houses. But while on the way to the beach (and while on the beach) we were accompanied by heat and rays of golden sunshine, on the way back – very soon after we jump into the taxi – the whole beach and forest is flooded with rain so torrential that all life comes to a halt and the car's windscreen wipers have to work full-time. As an aside, the driver, stress-free, sips beer from a can, first one, then another...

We go to bed early. Tomorrow is an extremely important day for Ania. For the first time in her life she will be able to realise her dream: she will take her first ever diving lesson. If she is going to like it, then maybe she will continue learning.

To hold the lesson, we go to a diving centre in the western part of the town, run by Danny Kennedy.

Danny is a very interesting and colourful person. This American arrived in Solomon Islands 25 years ago as a backpacker. He fell in love with the country so much that he decided to stay and he opened his water sports centre (diving, snorkelling, swimming, fishing, water-skiing, hiking etc.) which he runs with his Australian wife (<http://www.divegizo.com>). He co-operated with the famous marine researcher employed by National Geographic, Dr Robert Ballard when the latter was looking for the remains of the petrol boat PT-109 sunken in Solomon Islands in August 1943, on which the future US president, the young John F. Kennedy, was a lieutenant. At that time the Japanese destroyer Amagiri ran into Kennedy's boat, crushing it to smithereens. Some fragments of the boat kept drifting southwards and eventually sank too. Part of the survived crew (including JFK who saved many of his comrades) started swimming to the south until they reached the shores of a tiny island, called by the locals Plum Pudding Island, but known henceforth more commonly as Kennedy Island. For six days the survivors fed on coconuts until finally two local inhabitants, serving as coastwatchers – Biuku Gasa and Eroni (Aaron) Kumana – found the castaways and took a message scratched by Kennedy on coconut shell to the nearest allied forces headquarters, risking their lives but initiating a rescue operation.

Danny is involved in the preservation of the beaches and coral reefs of Solomon Islands and is co-organising a clean-up operation. It is with him that Ania will have the pleasure of familiarising herself with the first secrets of diving. Since I am myself definitely a "land animal", and moreover some physical conditions make it impossible or more difficult for me to dive, I am going to remain on board with the helmsman and make a photographic documentation of Ania's progress.

First Ania needs to go through a short theoretical part, concerning underwater breathing, signals used by divers, etc. Then we take the necessary equipment and go out to the sea. Initially we stop in shallow waters so that Ania can get used to the

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scuba container, oxygen, foam jacket, breathing etc. Ania turns out to be quite a diligent student and although – as Danny later told me – initially she was quite slow, after some time she grasped what diving was about and quite quickly began breathing and moving properly. Since she was a good student, Danny took her 13 metres down which seems to be very deep considering the fact that it was Ania's first dive ever! As Ania later claimed, the sights are incomparable. Colourful reefs, fish of all sizes, hues and shapes, huge sea turtles... In a way I envy her, but I do realise that diving is not my sort of activity after all. I would much rather sweat out all the water in my body climbing steep and slippery tracks in the jungle than go even two metres down below the surface of the sea...

Happy and satisfied, Ania finally re-surfaces. She already knows that she would like to continue the lessons, both in terms of theory and in terms of practical diving. We spend the rest of the day on our room's veranda.

The following day of our stay in Gizo we take a boat to Kennedy Island. We want to see the place near which the boat of the future US president sank. The island turns out to be so small that one can walk around it within 5-10 minutes! We also discover that we will have problems swimming here as the deep water is separated from the island by a strip of shoal dotted with hard and sharp corals so we need to be extra careful to avoid bruises and scratches, not to mention a potential damage to the corals themselves. Instead of swimming we paddle in knee deep water, observing the marine life. A curious striped fish circle around our legs not showing any fear. The white sand of the beach, rustling trees with an eagle squealing somewhere under the blue sky, coral reefs, the humming wind and sea... Would it not be wonderful to be able to move here for a while and to escape from the omnipresent tumult, haste and dealing with things that at the core have in fact no greater meaning? Unfortunately, dreaming is beautiful but the grim reality brutally penetrates our awareness. Tomorrow we are flying back to Honiara, and the day after tomorrow it is time to come back home...

In Honiara we take care of last things, buy last souvenirs, pack our rucksacks. On Saturday – the penultimate day of our stay in Solomon Islands – we idle away on the hostel's veranda for most of the day. Ania starts feeling unwell again and is in high fever. Perhaps this is a side effect of diving, or perhaps a weekly dosage of anti-malaria drug has left its stamp on her health. Whatever the cause, she goes to bed and sleeps like a baby for the rest of the day and the whole night. Fortunately the next day she feels much better.

At 5:00 pm we take a taxi to Henderson International Airport and check in our luggage. During the procedure they find my first name misspelled in my transit visa to Australia. It takes the officials almost half an hour to clear the mistake, including a phone call to Canberra. Eventually they let us go through and at 8:00 pm we depart to Brisbane. Goodbye, Chester House, goodbye Honiara, goodbye, Solomon Islands. I know I will be back one day. I have to.

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In Brisbane we have to go through the quarantine again – all our neatly packed gifts and souvenirs must be opened, every speckle of dust is placed on a special piece of paper and put to a careful scrutiny... It takes ages but finally they do not pick on us and let us go; we can leave the airport. As at the beginning of our trip, this time too we go Liz and John's house. We arrive after midnight so we quickly take a shower and go to sleep. The following morning we only meet with Liz – John wakes up very early for work. We tell Liz about our experiences in Solomon Islands, we talk a bit, she treats us to some delicious food. Unfortunately we need to rush to the airport. Ania wants to buy some souvenirs from Australia and first of all – mindful of our adventure with Emirates on our way to Solomon Islands – we prefer to be at the airport much earlier. And rightly so, because this time they pick on our luggage. On every flight so far we had no problem with this. Suddenly now they claim we have 6 kilograms of excess luggage. In itself it is not a big issue, but what surprises us completely is that for the 6 kilos we have to pay... almost 300 Australian dollars! We are lucky to have some remaining US dollars left, otherwise we could be in serious trouble.

We manage somehow to get on board of the plane and even to keep part of our gifts and souvenirs as hand luggage. Unfortunately the other part has to travel as check-in luggage and that results in our bulkiest souvenir being seriously damaged.

A very long flight awaits us, some thirty hour almost non-stop as stopovers in Singapore and Dubai are too short to rest and stretch the bones. At least we fly by the latest purchase of Emirates, Boeing 777, equipped with powerful engines and luxuries of all sorts, including the fact that with lights switched off in the passenger cabin the ceiling lights up with tiny star-like lights... On the Dubai-London route we are served by a very friendly flight attendant from Poland thus ensuring that we have those extra servings of cookies and light drinks and receive small gifts usually reserved for business class passengers.

After many hours' waiting at Gatwick we finally begin our last leg of the journey, from London to Warsaw. Tired and sleepy, but also sad that our Solomon adventures have come to an end (although glad to have come back to our families and homes) we land in Poland around 11:00 pm and take a taxi home. Tomorrow is the last day of our holidays, and then it is back to reality which is anything but easy...

\* \* \*

Was it worth travelling many thousand kilometres and find ourselves in this strange country, where hell meets paradise, myths mix with reality, where the three elements – the mountains, the tropical jungle and the sea – coexist to guard the land against nosey and inquisitive explorers, making legends alive or perhaps turning reality into a myth?

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Let me answer in an indirect, tricky and perhaps slightly ambiguous way. Do not come to Solomon Islands. Do not dive in turquoise waters around Gizo. Do not climb hills among trick tropical jungle. Do not spend days and nights in local traditional villages. Do not take a trip in a dug out canoe with the locals, looking out for a crocodile or for a shark circling around you. Do not repay the locals for their hospitality with money, food or even some interesting story. Last but not least, do not describe your adventures and experiences – whatever they are and whatever they concern – in the press or on the Internet.

Because then there will be other visitors coming after you. And after them – still others. And soon the turquoise lagoons in Gizo will be surrounded with five-star giants. The forest will be cut out or there will be a safe road marked out right through its middle, through the hatching or breeding grounds of birds, reptiles or mammals. Traditional wooden huts will disappear from villages, replaced instead with concrete bungalows. The crocodiles will go away, the rivers will dry or become polluted. The locals will become greedy, avaricious, or else they will be unable to find themselves a place outside the tourism industry. Obviously, it is not going to happen tomorrow or in a year's time. But if – paradoxically – we leave Solomon Islands to the unimaginable wealth of nature which makes the country so hardly accessible, at the same time protecting its natural and cultural heritage – there is a chance that those (fortunately few) tourists who will make it there are going to enjoy the beauty of the country and the kindness of the locals for many decades and centuries to come.

The Solomons have merely lifted part of the veil covering their wealth and heritage and their unusual mysteries. Perhaps if we – as most of white people we met – came here solely for tourist purposes, we could have seen more. This, however, would have required much more time as not everything in Solomon Islands is as it seems at a first glance.

It is also evident that I have not realised and executed all of my research goals, plans and assumptions. Yet, even if I succeeded I don't think I would be able to tell whether all these beings and phenomena that the locals talk about are but part of the local folklore or something entirely real. My own observation of "Dragon Snakes" seems to confirm that behind tales old people tell there hides REALITY far different from the one life experience and the innate – for us, Westerners – pragmatism in thinking has accustomed us to.

And yet even the observation of the strange lights does not bring an answer to the question of what they are, why they are there and why just there.

Many factors – both objective in nature (such as illness or malaise, some people not keeping their promises etc.) and of more personal kind (the need for a detailed study and verification of Boirayon's words which required a prolonged stay in

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Guadalcanal) – resulted in us being unable to make it at all to two remaining mysterious islands, i.e. Makira and Malaita.

And yet we are dealing with a similar issue here: the fact alone of visiting those islands, meeting with people who apparently had some encounters with lights, giants or “small people” or at least with people who seem to have observed such beings or phenomena, would most likely not result in drawing any definitive conclusions as to the nature or origin of these strange experiences. Even some direct contact with a giant or a “small man” – “kakamora” – could (and even this would already be a great breakthrough!) only prove the reality of their existence, but would not explain their nature, the reason for their living in Solomon Islands or their origin.

There is obviously only one sure and unchallenged statement: either those beings and phenomena exist or they do not exist. Or perhaps I should phrase it differently: either they exist in the material, tangible world that requires hard evidence, or they do not. In the tales of the local inhabitants they will however lead a very long life for a very long time to come, and their reality will to those people be as obvious and impossible to undermine as obvious the existence of the electric current or radio waves is to us, despite the fact that we cannot see them with the naked eye.

It is up to serious, interdisciplinary expeditions, consisting of both mainstream scientists and alternative knowledge researchers, to discover the truth about this lost and forgotten world. The only way of finding out whether the described mysteries are real (or not) is not just listening to old tales, but also, and foremost, to go to the places where – according to what the locals say – there appear and live “Dragon Snakes”, giants, “small people”. The author of this report has seen with his own eyes that behind stories of “Dragon Snakes” there lies hidden something more than just a myth, a legend, tradition. It will be squandering a huge opportunity if the men of science and researchers do not become interested in the subject now that we know that “Dragon Snakes” do really appear and – what is most important – where. What if it is only some human or natural activity? It could just as well be, for we would explain and describe one more phenomenon on this planet, thus expanding our knowledge. But what if it isn't? What if behind “Dragon Snakes” there is a mystery so large that we are not even able to imagine it? And how frequently do we get a chance of observing the same objects and/or beings in the same place at the same place?

If someone accuses me of letting my imagination run wild in the above argument, then I will only say that until and unless absolutely and irrefutably convincing proof is presented for or against the reality (or unreality) of the strange phenomena and beings in Solomon Islands, everyone has a right to such an interpretation of those phenomena and beings as they think appropriate. And I cannot stress strongly enough, and will keep repeating it over and over again: that country just begs for an expedition. It is abundant with weird tales and it seems hard to believe that nobody seems to verify – positively or negatively – information and transmission contained therein. Only an

## REPORT ON A TRIP TO SOLOMON ISLANDS

organised expedition could not just observe “Dragon Snakes” using specialist equipment (night vision devices, lunettes and other equipment enabling night observation from a greater distance and taking more details into account) but also actually get to the spot where “Dragon Snakes” are most active.

And yet, although I did not have at my disposal sufficient financial resources or sufficient amount of time to think of organising a serious expedition, in the final analysis I have not suffered a complete failure. Most importantly, I have managed to observe strange lights in the sky. Moreover I have been successful in verifying – in a positive or negative way – at least some of the statements contained in Marius Boirayon’s article. Finally, I have learned why contacting him (and some of his friends and acquaintances who have witnessed something unusual) is difficult or downright impossible. I have met Chris Blackwell, Robert from the village of Mataniko (an indigenous Malaitan and an ex-husband of a woman from Makira) and – whatever can be said of him – John Maeli. These are useful and valuable contacts, people who may in the future lead me to other individuals who will be able to pass some important information or assist a potential expedition with their knowledge and experience.

From the point of view of a tourist – and taking into account my research work – we have managed, I think, to do an absolute minimum, i.e. to go to those places that tourists coming to Solomon Islands visit most frequently. We have seen most places in and around Honiara, made an unforgettable excursion to Mataniko Falls (with a return trip even more remarkable), we have been to a popular weekend getaway destination – Savo Island – where we shared our time between more or less exhausting attractions and sweet laziness, and finally we have reached an island most commonly crowded by tourists – Gizo – where we have even tried (or rather where Ania has tried) the most popular sport and recreational activity of the area, i.e. scuba-diving.

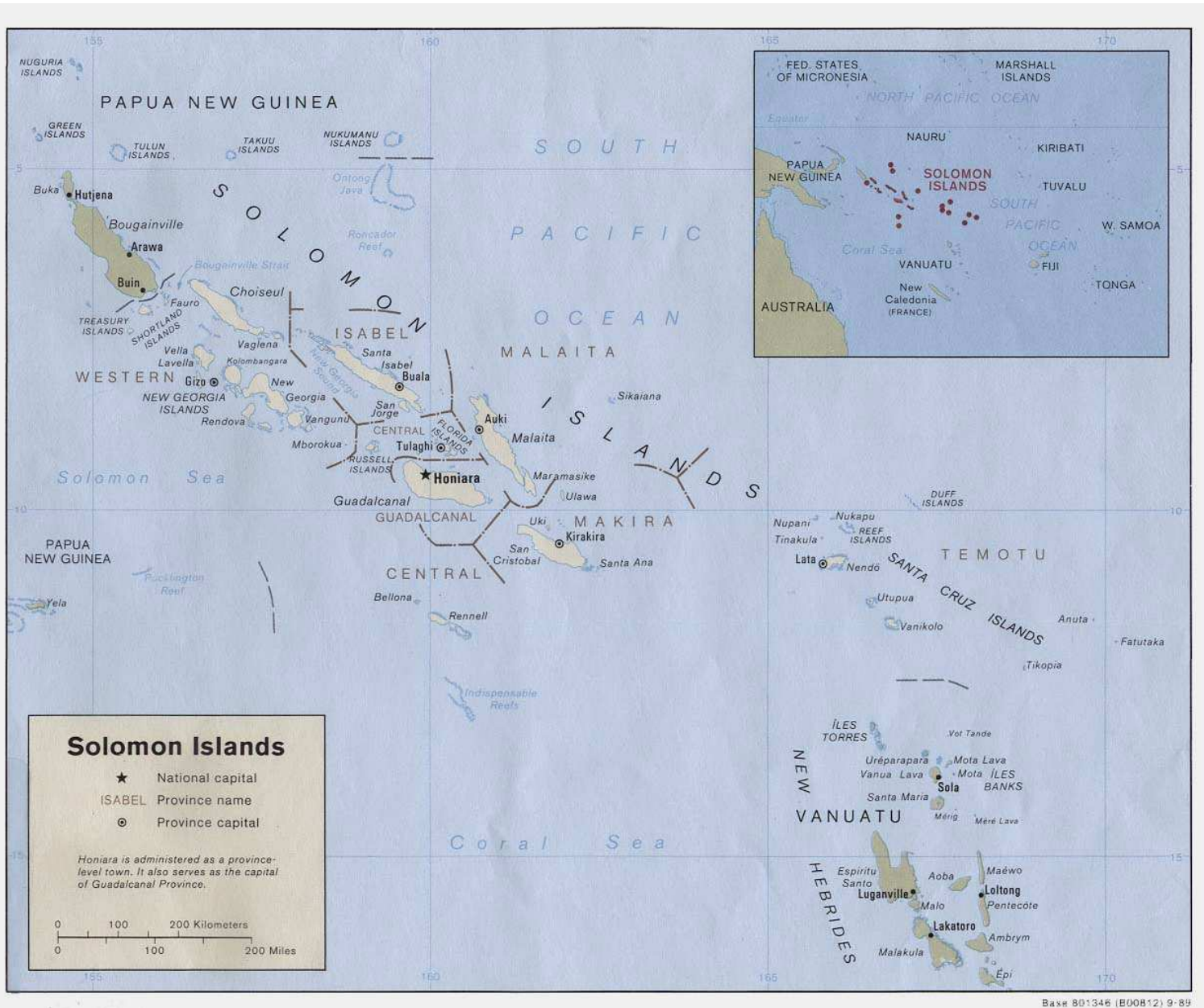
Could we have seen more? Probably so. True, we have not observed multi-coloured starfish, small or quite large sharks, salt- and freshwater crocodiles, we have not been shaking off spiders, scorpions and centipedes deep in the heart of the jungle interior. We have not experienced many adventures, we have not seen many places. Yet there can always be the next time some time in the future. We do not regret what we have not seen, we marvel at and celebrate what we have experienced. One thing is certain. We both want to come back to Solomon Islands. Ania – to improve her diving skills and to swim in the clear waters of the sea and the rivers, and me – to continue my research, alone or as an expedition member.

And we do sincerely hope that one day our plans and dreams will come true.

# BASIC FACT SHEET

## APPENDIX I

### SOLOMON ISLANDS: BASIC FACT SHET



1 COUNTRY NAME:

Solomon Islands (English), Solomon Aelan (Pidgin), Wyspy Salomona (Polish)

2 LOCATION:

Solomon Islands are located in a likewise-called archipelago consisting of almost 1000 islands. The largest of them, Guadalcanal, has an area of over 5000 sq. kilometres, and the smallest ones – uninhabited – are only some several hundred metres in area.

Larger islands' interior is dominated by lush tropical jungle, covering hills from several dozen to several thousand metres tall (the tallest peak, Mount Makarakomburu,

## BASIC FACT SHEET

reaches almost 2500 metres above sea level). Smaller islands in the west as well as the east of the country are, in turn, mostly coral lagoons and are less hilly (although there are exceptions from the rule).

Despite the small size of even the largest islands, the country stretches from Papua-New Guinea in the north-west up to its south-eastern neighbour, Vanuatu, along the distance of 1450 kilometres, and the overall area of the country including the territorial waters is as much as 725,197 sq. kilometres (of which the total land mass is merely 27,540 sq. kilometres). Solomon Islands are situated between (approximately) 5 and 12 degrees south and between (approximately) 155 and 170 degrees east.

### 3 PROVINCES AND ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION:

The country's capital is Honiara (approximately 54,600 inhabitants). Together with the surrounding suburbs and nearby villages it also constitutes a separate administrative unit, the capital territory. Moreover Solomon Islands are divided into 9 provinces as follows (according to the total land mass):

<b>Province name</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Capital</b>	<b>Most important islands</b>
Western	5475 km <sup>2</sup>	Gizo	Fisi, Fauro, Gizo, Ghoi, Kavachi, Kennedy, Kiambe, Kingguru, Kohinggo, Kolombangara, Liapari, Logha, Lola, Marovo, Matikuri, Mbava, Mborokua, Mbulo, Mondomondo, Mono, Nakaza, New Georgia, Nggatokae, Nusatupe, Ranongga, Rendova, Shortland, Simbo, Stirling, Telina, Tetepare, Vella Lavella, Uepi, Vangunu, Vonavona
Guadalcanal	5336 km <sup>2</sup>	Honiara	Guadalcanal
Malaita	4225 km <sup>2</sup>	Auki	Malaita (Big Malaita), South Malaita (Small Malaita), Sikaiana, Onlong Java
Isabel	4136 km <sup>2</sup>	Buala	Santa Isabel
Choiseul	3837 km <sup>2</sup>	Taro	Choiseul, Taro, Vaghana, Rob Roy
Makira-Ulawa	3188 km <sup>2</sup>	Kirakira	Makira (San Cristobal), Ulawa, Uki Ni Masi, Owaraha (Santa Ana), Owariki (Santa Catalina)
Temotu	895 km <sup>2</sup>	Lata	Anuta, Fatutaka, Duff (Taumako), Santa Cruz (including Nendo, Vanikoro and Utupua), Reef, Tikopia, Tinakula
Rennell & Bellona	671 km <sup>2</sup>	Tigoa	Rennell, Bellona, Indispensable Reef
Central	615 km <sup>2</sup>	Tulagi	Aeaun, Mbanika, Nggela, Russell, Savo, Tulagi
Source: Wikipedia			

## BASIC FACT SHEET

### 4 POPULATION:

Solomon Islands are part of Melanesia. Therefore the vast majority of the country's population (94.5%) are the Melanesians. Moreover the country is inhabited by the Polynesians (3%), the Micronesians (1.3%) and other nations, including some Chinese as well as some Europeans and Australians. The overall number of Solomon Island population (data from July 2008) is approximately 581,000 people, of which the largest island – Guadalcanal – has approximately 100,000 inhabitants, including the capital (Honiara) with approximately 54,600 inhabitants.

### 5 RELIGIONS AND DENOMINATIONS:

The predominant religion in Solomon Islands is Christianity. Only a small fraction of the population (below 5%) profess the belief of (and in) their ancestors. There is also a negligibly small percentage of Muslims. Among the Christian denominations the most popular is the Church of Melanesia (Anglican), with 32.8% believers, followed by the Roman Catholic Church (19%), the South Seas Evangelical Church (17%), Seventh Day Adventists (11.2%), Methodists (10.3%) and the Christian Fellowship Church (2.4%).

### 6 LANGUAGES:

English is the official and standard language of Solomon Islands, however only approximately 5% of the population do use it, and it is mostly in use in cities and towns and in tourist areas. The most commonly used language, the lingua franca of Solomon Islands, is the Solomon version of Pidgin called pijin. It is a greatly simplified version of English, adapted to the local pronunciation and mixed with some local or Spanish words. Pijin makes communication possible between people from different provinces or islands, and sometimes even between people from different districts or communities and villages, since there are 85 different languages in existence.

Examples of phrases in pijin:

*Nem blong mi Ana.* (My name is Anna.)

*Mi kam from Polan.* (I come/came from Poland.)

*Hao mas fo go long datwan hotel?* (How much [is it] to go to that hotel?)

*Mitufala save staka kastom stori.* (We [two] know a lot of custom stories.)

*Mi no garem eni pikinini iet.* (I do not have any children yet.)

*Mi save pijin lelebet.* (I know pidgin a little bit.)

A lot more useful phrases and sentences can be found in the Lonely Planet "Phrasebook" series.

## BASIC FACT SHEET

### 7 MONEY:

The currency of Solomon Islands is the Solomon dollar. One Solomon dollar (SBD) is equal to approximately 0.14 US dollar. There are the following notes in use:

1. 100 SBD
2. 50 SBD
3. 20 SBD
4. 10 SBD
5. 5 SBD
6. 2 SBD

[pictures of specimen notes can be found on the following pages:  
<http://www.banknotes.com/sb23.htm>, <http://www.banknotes.com/sb19.htm>,  
<http://www.banknotes.com/sb20.htm>, <http://www.banknotes.com/SB21.JPG>,  
<http://www.banknotes.com/SB21R.JPG>].

There are also the following coins in use:

1. 1 SBD
2. 0.50 SBD (50 cents)
3. 0.20 SBD (20 cents)
4. 0.10 SBD (10 cents)
5. 0.05 SBD (5 cents)

Because of inflation and galloping prices coins with a value lower than 50 cents cease to have any practical meaning, although change is frequently given in such small denominations.

SBD is not changeable worldwide but in Solomon Islands it is possible to exchange it in banks for American or Australian dollars, Swiss francs, British pounds or euro. Naturally it works the other way too, while exchanging foreign currency into SBD.

### 8 HISTORY:

Not much is known about early prehistory of Solomon Islands. Artefacts recovered by archaeologists on the islands of Santa Ana, Guadalcanal and Gawa indicate that there were hunter-gatherers living on larger islands as early as 1000 BC. Some of the modern inhabitants of Solomon Islands are descendants of Neolithic Austronesian peoples who came from south-eastern Asia.

The European discoverer of the Salomons was a Spanish explorer, Alvaro de Mendaña Y Neyra, who set out from Peru in 1567 in search of the legendary Isles of

## BASIC FACT SHEET

King Solomon, In 1767 a British sailor, Philip Carteret, entered the Solomon waters. In the ensuing years explorers and researchers were increasingly frequent.

The middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked an advent of missionaries. Initially they did not make much progress because of the procedure called “Blackbirding” – frequently brutal recruitment of labour to work on sugar plantations of Queensland and Fiji – which led to a number of bloody revenges and massacres. The gloomy fame of trading in humans persuaded the United Kingdom to create a protectorate over the western part of Solomon Islands. In the years 1898 and 1899 some outer islands were added to the protectorate, and in 1900 the remaining part of the archipelago, previously under the German mandate, was handed over to the British. After the creation of the protectorate missionaries came back and settled down, converting most of the population into Christianity.

In the early 1900s a number of British and Australian companies established huge coconut palm plantations. However, the economic growth was slow, and the indigenous people did not benefit too much from the new order. When WWII broke out, most of the plantation owners and traders were evacuated to Australia, and most of the businesses fell into decline.

From May 1942, when the Coral Sea Battle started, until December 1943 Solomon Islands were a constant battleground. Although the American forces which landed on Guadalcanal in August 1942 initially did not meet with any resistance, soon they fought a bloody battle over an airstrip that the US Army called Henderson Field. One of the fiercest battles was fought near Savo, in the vicinity of Guadalcanal, also in August 1942. By the time the Japanese forces withdrew from Guadalcanal for good in February 1943, more than 7000 Americans and 21000 Japanese had been killed. Until December 1943 the Allied held control over the whole archipelago. The presence of the American forces on such a large scale, eclipsing anything that had ever been witnessed there, has sown the seeds of many peace movements and resulted in many long-lasting friendships.

After the war the British colonial government returned. The capital was moved from Tulagi to Honiara to make use of the existing infrastructure left behind by the American army. The local movement, the so-called Marching Rule, opposed the government’s power. There began a period of unrest until some leaders were put in jail in 1948. Throughout the 1950s and the 1960s there appeared and disappeared local dissident groups but none managed to dominate the others.

In 1960 the advisory assembly of Solomon Islands was displaced by the legislative assembly, while the executive assembly was created to carry out the protectorate’s policy. With time, the assembly was gaining an increasing amount of power.

## BASIC FACT SHEET

In 1974 a new constitution was accepted which stipulated that the country was now a parliamentary democracy with a ministerial system of government. In the middle of 1975 the official old name – The British Protectorate of Solomon Islands – was replaced by a new one, namely simply Solomon Islands. On 2 January 1976 Solomon Islands took over the power and on 7 July 1978 they became an independent country. At certain periods in their modern history, the Solomons were the scene of some ethnic tensions. The worst of such conflicts, during which many thousand people lost their lives, took place in the years 1998-2003.

APPENDIX II

**TIME, PEOPLE AND MONEY IN SOLOMON ISLANDS – SOME REMARKS  
AND NOTES**

**TIME**

Can tomorrow be any different from the present day? Can one make plans more than an hour ahead? Won't the sun rise and set down tomorrow again, marking the limits of yet another day, yet another night? Then why hurry, especially given that since the early morning the incapacitating heat grabs hold of us with its sticky and salty tentacles? Let us not bother about punctuality and constant haste – it is really unhealthy.

That is approximately the course of reasoning behind the phenomenon commonly termed the Solomon time (as opposed to the “white man time”). It stems not in the least from the ill will of Solomon Islanders. It is just the way it is.

Thus if we set up a meeting or make an appointment for a specific time, do not rather count on everyone coming at the agreed hour. We can easily manage to have our coffee or tea in a nearby café, unhurriedly prepared and served as if in a movie played at half the speed.

Solomon time is applicable not just in social occasions but can be transferred into the public domain as well.

First of all, banks and shops (and even some part of bars, restaurants and cafes) close already at 3:00, 4:00 or – at the latest – 5:00 pm. What is more, if we are in a hurry at 12:00 noon we will not be able to achieve anything as all the offices, agencies and shops are having a lunch break then. And – as is widely known – tradition and habit cannot be easily changed, so who will dare to work during lunch-break? The exception to the rule are of course places where it is possible to have a meal.

After 5:00 the city almost comes to a standstill. The only open shops and restaurants are those that belong to the Chinese who settled here a long time ago or to white people.

Secondly, if you need to take a boat or a ship to another island in the archipelago, do not count on any fixed itinerary or schedule. If they tell you the boat will set out in three days – it is vaguely likely that you will leave in a week. After all, an appropriate number of passengers need to show up (otherwise it is not worth the trouble), it is necessary to collect the money for the fuel, repair some damages. All of it takes time, doesn't it? That is why if you are determined to reach other parts of Solomon Islands

from Honiara or other major towns, I suggest you pitch your tent at the harbour. It will make the whole experience cheaper and much less stressful. Obviously the above does not apply to all the vessels and to all the situations. For example, apparently there is “something” going to Malaita almost every day, although it is not known whether the “something” is a comfortable, big ship or a small fibreglass boat with an outboard motor, or else – a rusty vessel that should not really have any right to keep on the surface.

But if you are really pressed for time and have a bit more money to spend, you can, after all, travel by plane. A relatively extended network of connections will take you to the major towns in particular islands, although only two airports have a tarmac surface, while the rest are grassy airstrips.

However, come prepared with sizeable reserves of patience, drink and food. Punctual departures of small (19 passengers) aircraft is a rarity here. At best your flight will be delayed several hours, in a worse case – several days, and in the worst scenario it will be cancelled altogether... It is always necessary to bear in mind the Solomon time, whatever the circumstances. And to get used to a completely different pace of living which by the way appeals much more to me and my senses than the mad and vacant speed, hustle and bustle of the western world.

### **PEOPLE**

Obliging, hospitable, smiling, friendly... Who would think that as little back as a century ago many of their ancestors were cannibals and head-hunters... But the word that I will always associate with Solomon Islanders is – BETEL. The chewing of this substance is interwoven and inbred into the country’s tradition (as well as many other countries of Oceania and south-east Asia) so strongly that I am doubtful whether this custom will ever be rooted out or abandoned. After all, even missionaries failed in this respect...

It is a common belief that the locals chew „betel nuts”. In fact such a collocation has its sources in a specific ignorance of the former colonizers. While from the purely grammatical point of view the phrase does exist in English, semantically it is a mistake: the green fruit (nuts) that are so passionately, at every step, every half an hour, bought and chewed by men, but also by women, and even by older children, are nuts from areka katechu palm trees (although even here they are most commonly known in English as “betel palm”), and the term “betel nut” stems from the custom of chewing areka together with betel LEAVES (and other ingredients).

In Solomon Islands the main ingredients are: the nut, betel leaves rolled into a stick and lime made of ground shells. The role of lime is to keep the basic elements of the chewed concoction in an alkaline form which allows for their absorption directly

from under the tongue. Moreover, substances in the nut itself cause increased salivation.

It is not difficult to imagine what kind of sights are in our minds most frequently associated with the inhabitants of the „Happy Isles”: vampiric apparitions with mouthfuls of fresh blood, living dummies with crimson lipstick on... and red splashes on the pavements and sometimes even on the walls... What is more, because of the addition of lime in the mixture and as a result of prolonged and frequent use, the teeth of most Solomon Islanders assume a brownish-red hue, and in the case of exceptional addicts they look like blunt stumps. The addiction is known to have caused gum cancer.

It does not mean, obviously, that betel-chewing and the sight of those who chew is the only impression we had from dealing with the locals.

Apart from the omnipresent conformity to the Solomon time (see above) which makes every move of each local inhabitant twice as slow, I had – despite unpleasant situations described in the report – the best impressions in my dealings with the Solomon Islanders. They are warm and open-minded (as well as open-hearted) people who treat the visitor on a tour in their country with kindness and understanding. It is also the land far safer than many other tropical countries: one is not nagged and accosted by the locals on every step of the way, and even night or evening strolls around the city can – at worst – end up in being asked for some “financial support” in exchange for some service.

It is this openness of the Solomon Islanders, in connection with their sensitivity which makes stay with most of them so enjoyable and instils a need for broadening their horizons while at the same time broadening ours.

But people are not just the local inhabitants. They are also tourists. The number of tourists we met during our stay indicates that – as a sign of good, or perhaps bad fortune – Solomon Islands is still not a particularly popular travel destination and that (which is hardly surprising) Australian travellers are most numerous. On the other hand the geographical dispersion of the countries from which those visitors arrive is wide enough to mean that perhaps trips to that region are gradually becoming popular in Europe. During our four-week stay in the country we met (apart from many Australians and a group of English girls on training in a local hospital) a Slovenian, a Norwegian couple, a number of Swiss and British tourists.

And one more thing: quite a few of Solomon Islanders that we spoke to who asked us where we were from either knew where Poland was (in one instance even mentioning Warsaw as the capital) or at least were aware of Poland’s existence. Yet when we were telling our families, friends, acquaintances or colleagues that we were going to Solomon Islands, in the vast majority of cases we were met with a complete

lack of knowledge as to that country's geographical location, and sometimes even as to the very fact of its existence. I am not sure whether it proves such a high level of basic schooling system in Solomon Islands or such a low level of knowledge in Poland... Obviously I do realise that in our media there are virtually no news about that country, not to mention the whole of Oceania and the Pacific region. On the other hand, however, information about Europe, and about Poland in particular, is also extremely scarce in the Solomon press, or in TV or radio news. With one notable exception: while packing our souvenirs we accidentally stumbled upon a newspaper article which stated, quoting AFP, that a couple of Polish famous stars had won a Eurovision dance contest...

### **MONEY**

Planning our trip to Solomon Islands we expected that – as was the case with other exotic and remote countries which we had visited – it was going to be an inexpensive place and that the bulk of our expenditure would be our flight from Warsaw to Honiara. Indeed, there is no doubt that we paid the most for our plane tickets. Yet with each passing day in Solomon Islands we encountered more unpleasant surprises when it came to spending the money. Because of the unstable economy and frequently changing governments the inflation rate is quite high and the prices have increased up to 200% compared to an identical period two years ago when – as Ann said – everything was much cheaper.

As an example, a basic breakfast consisting of one sandwich and tea or coffee costs in the region of 40-50 SBD, i.e. approximately some 5.5 to 7 USD. For a proper, bigger breakfast, the cost will increase to twice or three times that amount.

Everybody kept complaining about increasing prices of fuel (which may reflect an overall global trend). A gallon of fuel cost around 45 SBD.

A bottle of water is from several to about a dozen SBD. For a taxi ride from the airport to the centre (or the other way round) drivers charged 70 SBD, i.e. approx. 10 USD, not much less than a ride on a similar route in Warsaw (especially outside of the peak hours).

The list could go on and on. A proof of just how expensive it can get in Solomon Islands is the fact that a group of medicine students that we met from Great Britain (a country undoubtedly more expensive than Poland) and a couple from Norway (one of the most expensive countries in Europe) all complained about some of the prices being comparable to those in their own homelands!

Perhaps it is this omnipresent high cost of living that has certain influence upon at least some part of Solomon Islanders being so unscrupulous in reaching out for

## TIME, PEOPLE AND MONEY IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

somebody else's money, especially the money of tourists. I am convinced that every island, district, village and town has its Mister T.

And yet, despite an increase in prices and – following it – a drop in the standard of living, most of the indigenous people seem to cope somehow, and during our stay we have only stumbled upon one beggar, while in many African countries there are lots of them.

## APPENDIX III

### *KASTOM STORI*

#### **GIANT STORIES FOUND IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM'S LIBRARY as well as HEARD FROM THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

##### *KASTOM STORI 1:*

##### THE GIANT AND THE TWINS

Once there lived in the bush of Malaita a giant which was feared by the village people. This giant had long hair and long nails on his fingers and toes.

Every night he would go through the villages killing men, women and children. He went from one village to another, killing people as he went along. There lived in a certain village a man and his wife. They had no children, and they did their daily work sadly. Time went on and the woman got pregnant. It was the eighth month of her pregnancy when her husband died. She was very sad and lonely. She left the village and went to live in a cave.

It was in this cave that her sons were born. They were twins and their names were James and John. Their mother told them about the giant that lived on the other side of the island. Every day their mother told them not to wander deep in to the forest in case they might come face to face with the giant.

One day the mother gave each of them a bow and an arrow. This was when they were twelve years old.

They asked their mother where the giant lived. Their mother told them that his home was in an alabalolo tree. It has big roots and a big trunk.

They said goodbye to their mother and set out with no other weapons but the bows and arrows.

James led the way and John followed behind him. They went stealthily in the forest without making a sound. Silently they entered that part of the forest where the giant's home was, but it was still a long way off.

The tree was big and thick with very thick branches. There were creepers hanging from the tree, and they climbed the tree by holding on to them. At last they came to the top and what a surprise they had. There sleeping on one of the branches was the giant. He was in a deep sleep and was snoring very loudly.

## APPENDIX III: STORIES ABOUT GIANTS

The twins took the locks of his hair and tied them to the branches. Then they took their bows and arrows and shot him. He felt the shots, but he thought it was only the mosquitoes biting him and kept on sleeping. While he slept, the twins cut off his head and he died.

They took his head back to their mother and she was very happy indeed to see them return safely.

They went and told all the people in the village and a big feast was held that night. Everyone was very happy and they danced and feasted until dawn. And now the people would not be frightened of giants again.

To this day there is no giant living in any part of Malaita.

\* \* \*

### *KASTOM STORI2:*

#### THE GIANT AND THE CHILD

Long ago there lived a very big giant. He had twelve sons and no daughters..

They lived in big caves in the depths of the forests on the weather coast of Guadalcanal.

They were cannibals, they lived on human flesh.

Day after day the people were killed and eaten by this terrible giant and his twelve sons. The Chief of the village tried his very best to save his people from the rerrible giants. Even his own sons and daughters were eaten by the giants. He was indeed very sad at heart. Fortunately an idea suddenly came to his mind. The idea was that the people were to sail to another island to avoid the giants eating them, The people all agreed to the plan and they set out. They sailed and sailed and finally settled themselves on an island.

Among the crowds was a very old woman, the people refused to take her in their canoes and she was left behind all alone. It was indeed very sad time for her. There were no human beings around her with the exception of the terrible giants. She left her house to live in a cave. She went out every night to search for food.

By saome miracle she had a baby boy. It was given to her by the kind spirits who live in the sea. The boy grew up. The little boy told his mother to make a spear for him. He practiced shooting with spears and finally made up his mind to kill the giants.

### APPENDIX III: STORIES ABOUT GIANTS

One day he told his mother that if he did not return, she must not worry. The boy disappeared into the woods and heard a peculiar noise among the trees.

He looked up and saw a pretty little bird. The kindly little bird told him that if he wanted to kill the giants, he must eat the fruit of a tree near the river bank. The boy went and did exactly what he was told. He then went to the giants' house and started to fight fiercely with them, until he had beaten them all.

He thanked the little bird, and carrying the goods that the giants had stolen, went back to his mother. When his mother heard of his bravery she was indeed pleased with him. She started signals by fire to the people who had run away without her. They sent some strong men to find out what the signal was about, they discovered that it was from the woman they had left behind. The people returned to their homes and lived happily once more.

The woman hid her son, praising herself, and said that she was the one who had killed the giants.

At last they discovered that it was her son. They gave their daughters to him. He had twelve wives altogether and he became their Chief and lived happily ever afterwards.

\* \* \*

*KASTOM STORI*3 (told by Titus, John Maeli's cousin):

A GIANT AND A WOMAN (sound recording)

Please find the whole recording there:

[http://rafiki\\_yako.republika.pl/Story%20about%20giants.mp3](http://rafiki_yako.republika.pl/Story%20about%20giants.mp3)

## APPENDIX IV

### GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION CONCERNING STUDIES AND RESEARCH



Is this the way the giants of Solomon Islands can look like? According to apparent eyewitnesses, people who had encounters with the giants or who are said to possess their hair or teeth – this is exactly how these half-mythical, and possibly half-real creatures are described: long hair all over the whole body, long, claw-like finger- and toenails, human or animal bones for tools. Apparently they also emit a strong, characteristic, unpleasant odour; what is interesting is that the same feature is mentioned in tales of giants from other parts of the world, such as Yeti (Himalaya), Yowie (Australia), Almaz (the Asian part of Russia) or Sasquatch (Canada).

According to descriptions of people claiming to have had some contact with the giants (observations or direct encounters) those beings are some 2.5 to 3 metres (approximately 8 to 10 feet) tall and they have their own language.

There are people in Solomon Islands, and in particular in Guadalcanal and Malaita, who say they are in possession of the giants' hair and/or teeth which are treated as amulets and give them vital powers. It would be extremely interesting to be able to subject such samples to some DNA testing to confirm – or rule out – the possibility that the hair or teeth are (or are not) of animal origin.

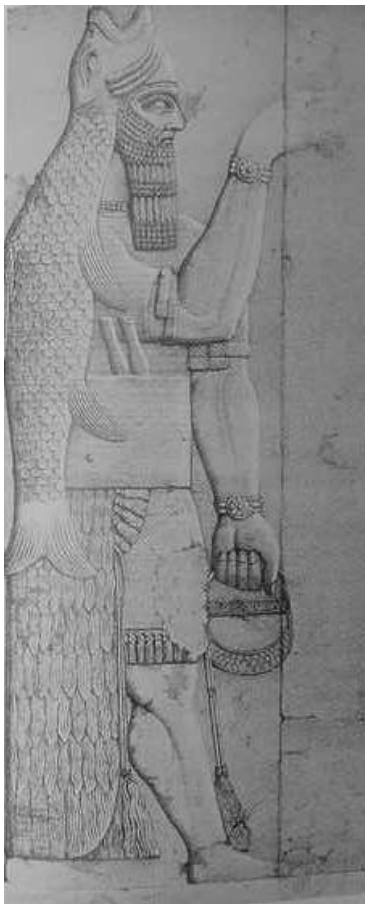
The reverse side of a 10-cent coin described in the report. It depicts an image of a weird being, neither fully a human nor fully a fish, or perhaps some creature with some resemblance to a basilisk or a cockatrice. According to an official interpretation it is an image of a sea-god, symbolised by fish and strange fins. At least twice,

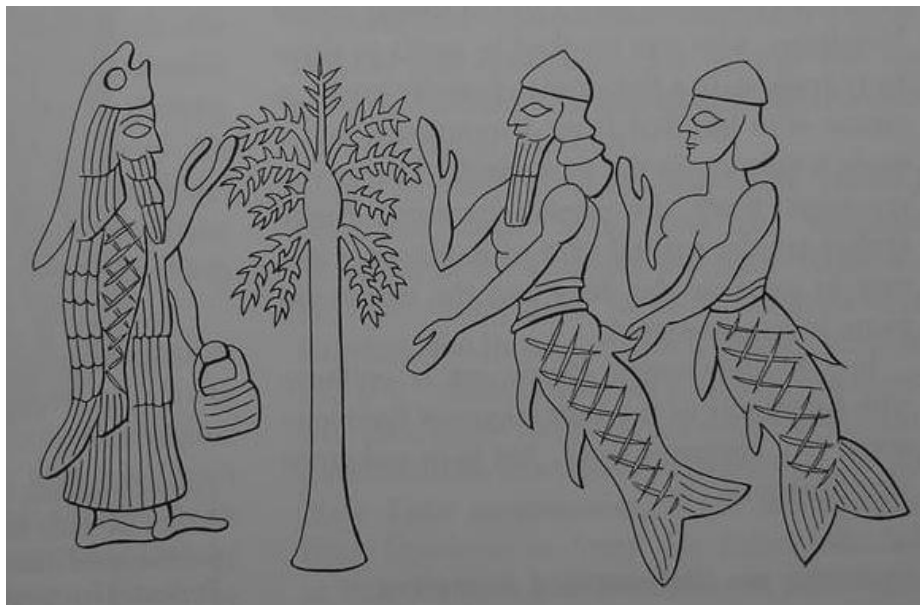
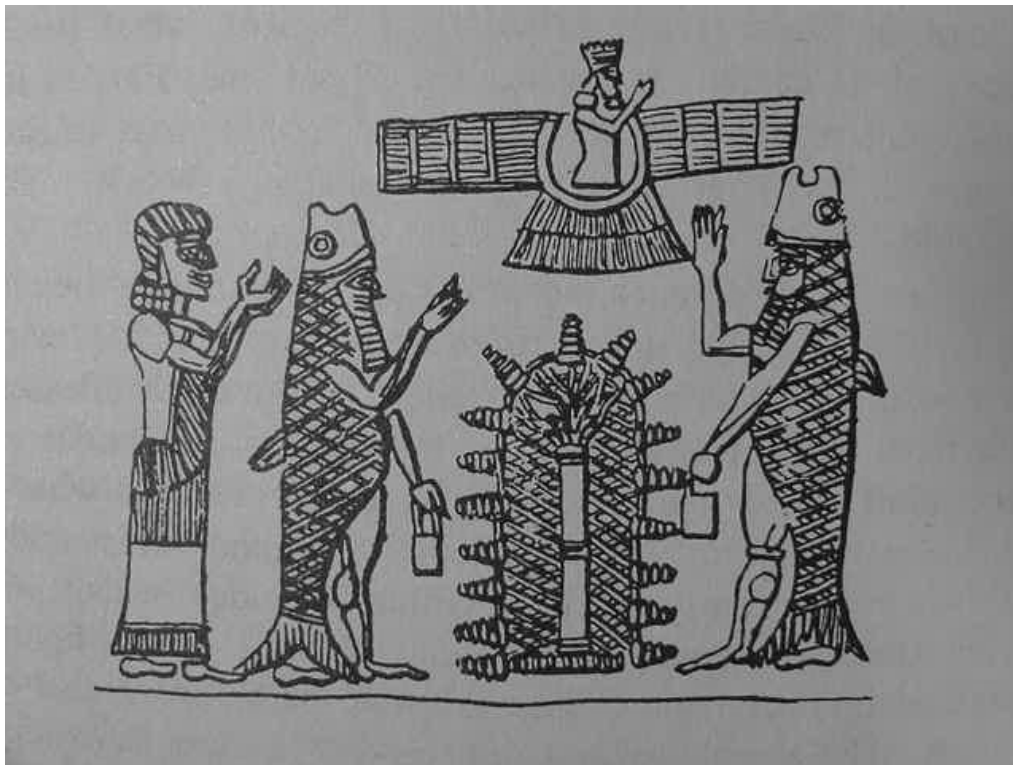


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however, I have come across a different explanation (from Patrick and from a waitress at Lime Lounge café), namely that the strange creature from the coin actually lived indeed in the deep jungle interior and was a jungle demon, called *adaro* or *ataro*. Apparently it even once attacked Patrick's friend! It is quite difficult to verify such pronouncements because of the layout of the land and natural conditions (thick, tropical forests, mountainous terrain, sticky, debilitating heat, swamps, crocodiles, etc, etc) and also because those "demons" – provided they do exist at all – are not easy to track down. It is however possible to gather a larger number of stories about these beings, possibly from as many people (not knowing one another or in any way related to one another) as possible.

What is also interesting about the being depicted on the coin is that because of the imagery itself (partly a human form, partly fish) and the original sea or water environment (their home is the sea from which they emerged) the god or demon reminds to a degree (although it is not delusively similar to) the first gods of Sumer, engraved on clay tablets or cylindrical seals, namely Ea (Oannes), Enki or Enlil, and to other Sumerian or Mesopotamian deities. They also came out from the water and were also shown as half-humans, half-fish (see the Picture below).





The “Dragon Mountain”, the real name – Mount Gallego. It is on this hill, or rather around it, where “Dragon Snakes” are observed, i.e. strange balls of light dragging behind them a light-beam or rather browsing through the ground with a beam of light as if they were looking for something. Although I do not in the least feel entitled to speculate about what “Dragon Snakes” can be or are (or what they cannot be and are not), there is no doubt that I have seen such lights in the sky, and the only definitive

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answer could be supplied by an expedition into the region. Below are data concerning the location of the “Dragon Mountain” and our camp as well as graphical maps indicating the situation of the “Dragon Mountain” and the observation camp. As stems from the attached illustrations, there is a valley on the other side of Mount Gallego. The valley leads right down to the shore and perhaps this is the way to reach the mountain.

<b>Location of the observation camp and Mount Gallego (the “Dragon Mountain”)</b>			
<b>Grid</b>	<b>hddd.ddddd°</b>	<b>hddd°mm’ss.s”</b>	<b>UTM</b>
<b>Approximate location of the observation camp</b> (accuracy of GPS indications up to 45 metres; the real observation point was some 200-300 metres south-west of the camp.). Approximate altitude above sea level 121 metres (with accuracy up to several dozen metres).	S9.31508 E159.76577	S9 18 54.3 E159 45 56.8	57 L 584097 8970223
<b>Approximate location of Mount Gallego</b> (“Dragon Mountain”) around which and behind which lights (“Dragon Snakes”) are seen. Approximate altitude above sea level 1064 metres.	S9.35695 E159.73334	S9 21 25.0 E159 44 00.00	57 L 580526 8965600
<b>*Frame of reference: WGS84</b>			

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Location of Mount Gallego and observation camp on a simplified map of the MapSource system – the scale = 3 kilometres:



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Location of Mount Gallego and observation camp on a simplified map of the MapSource system – the scale = 10 kilometres::



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## GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION CONCERNING STUDIES AND RESEARCH

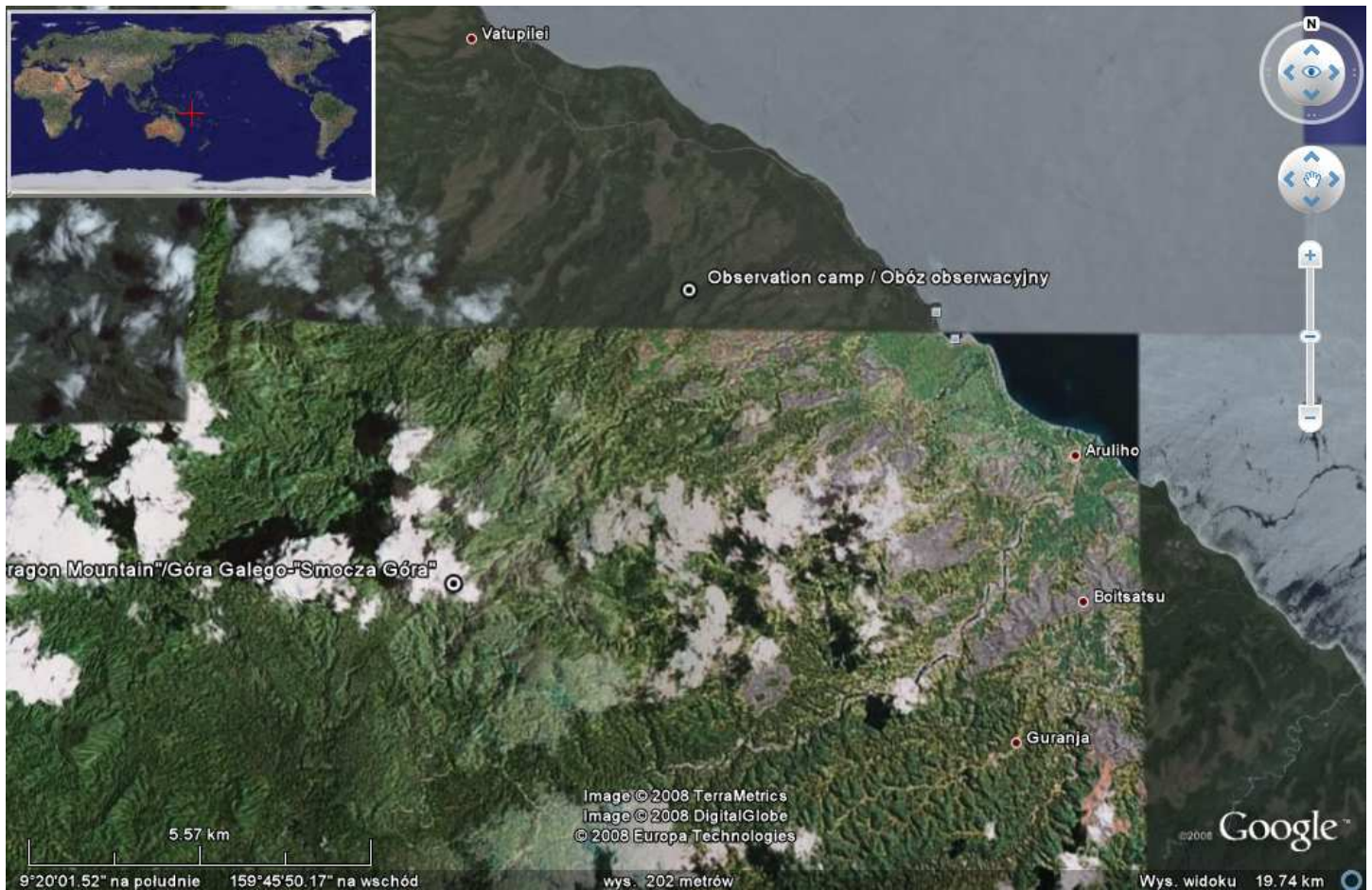
Location of Mount Gallego and observation camp on a simplified map of the MapSource system – the scale = 20 kilometres::



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## GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION CONCERNING STUDIES AND RESEARCH

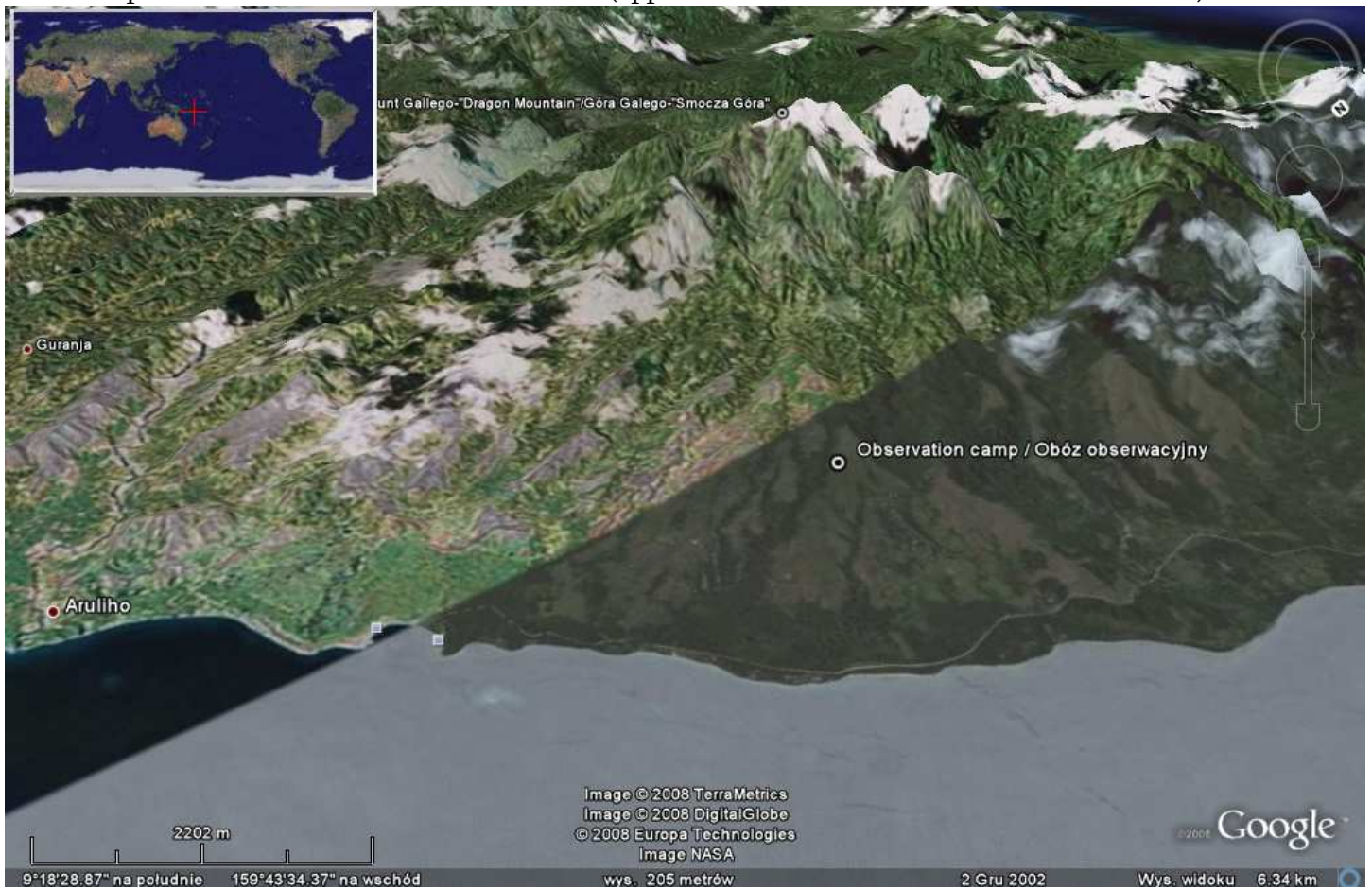
Location of Mount Gallego and the observation camp on a Google Earth map –aerial view from 19.74 kilometres.:



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## GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION CONCERNING STUDIES AND RESEARCH

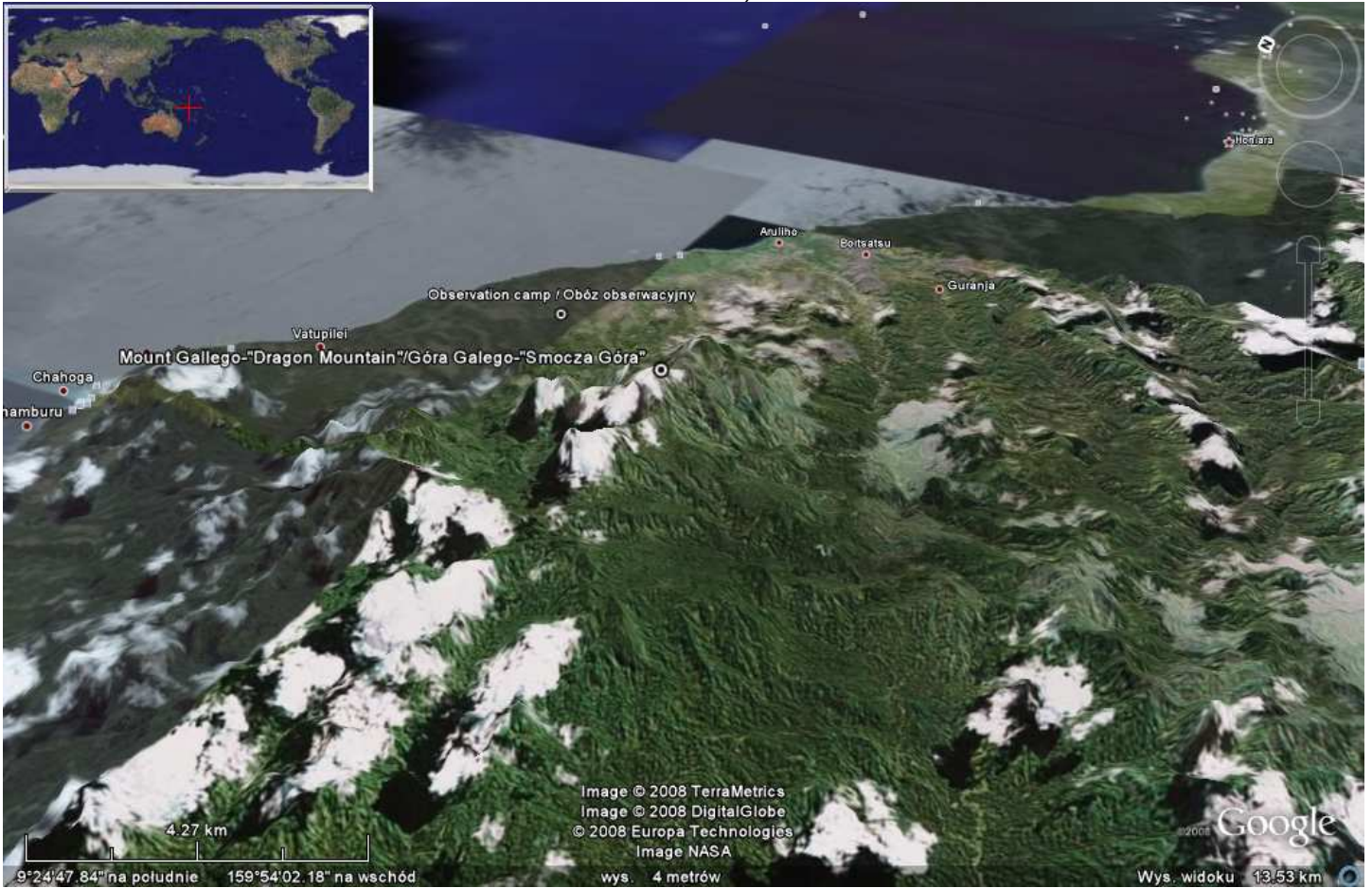
Location of Mount Gallego and the observation camp on a Google Earth map –aerial panoramic view from 6.34 kilometres (approximate location of Aruliho is also visible):



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Location of Mount Gallego and the observation camp on a Google Earth map –aerial panoramic view from 13.53 kilometres (a valley on the other side of the mountain is also visible):



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## GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION CONCERNING STUDIES AND RESEARCH

Location of Mount Gallego and the observation camp on a Google Earth map –aerial panoramic view from 14.61 kilometres (a valley on the other side of the mountain is also visible):



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## GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION CONCERNING STUDIES AND RESEARCH

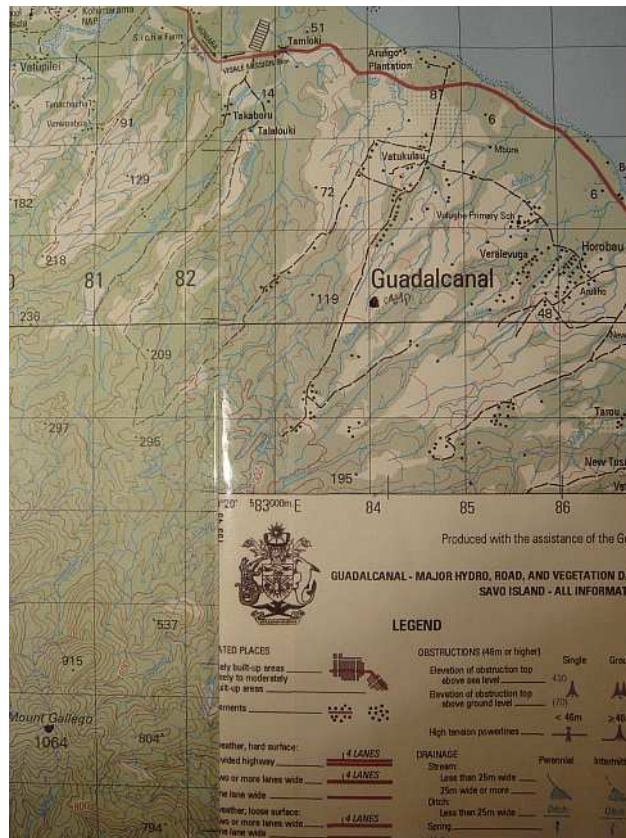
The Gallego Mountain on a map. The position of the contour lines indicates that it is steep from all sides:



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Photograph showing two topographic maps stuck together with a sellotape indicating the location of the observation camp (a dot and the word “CAMP” beneath the Word GUADALCANAL) and the Gallego Mountain (a dot in the lower left-hand corner):



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Graphical simulation: a computer reconstruction of the beam of light seen on the other side of the “Dragon Mountain”. Before this particular observation, another beam of light, of much lesser intensity, had a “head” in the form of a brighter ball of light, hence probably an association of such emanations with dragons and snakes. On one occasion the beam of light, slanting at an angle towards the sky, was much brighter and flooding the whole valley with light, but did not have any “head”.



After that manifestation the light dimmed and disappeared. For a longer while nothing particular happened, and only some 40 minutes later another manifestation took place: this time on the western side/slope of the mountain (to the right of the observer facing the “Dragon Mountain”) there appeared a single light whose brightness was comparable with that of the brightest stars or with the light of a crypton torchlight from very far. However, it could not have been a star because the light continuously moved up and down and to the sides. The swinging movement of the object was too clear to ascribe it to optical aberration or other optical illusions, frequently accompanying the observation of stars with the naked eye. Moreover, it could not have been a torchlight either as the light point appeared to the side of the mountain, in the air, at a great distance (several kilometers) from the observers. For the light source to be a torchlight the following conditions must have been met: (a) the torchlight would have to be equipped with an enormously powerful battery and bulb, making it possible to see it from several kilometers, (b) someone would have had to hang in the air and swing the torchlight to and fro. The approximate location of the ball of light is shown

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in the picture below (on the illustration the size of the light-ball has been increased on purpose for better clarity), however one needs to remember also about the “dance” the light performed in the sky, the fact the picture does not obviously reflect:



“Last moment” news:

While browsing through some Internet pages, I have come across the following article, originally printed in the “Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland”, vol. 45 (Jul-Dec 1915). The article discusses the beliefs of the local people of San Cristobal (the other name of Makira) and is called “Beliefs and tales of San Cristoval”. One of the chapters contains information concerning “kakamora” – the “small people” of Makira. While in itself it does not constitute an irrevocable proof of their existence in this plane of reality, detailed descriptions pertaining to their physical characteristics and their behaviour seem to confirm that we are not dealing with purely mythical entities.

*THE kakamora are not figona or abaro; but neither are they quite human.*

*The following is the natives’ description of them:–*

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*They vary considerably in height, from six inches to three or four feet, but in San Cristoval there are non larger than that: six inches is the ordinary height. They also vary in colour from very dark to quite fair. Most of them are considered to be quite harmless, but sometimes they have been known to attack men. When they do so they use their fingers, which are furnished with long sharp nails with which they stab. They have no weapons of any sort, build no houses, plant no gardens, and have no arts. They wander about the forest eating nuts, ripe fruit, and opossums: the last they are fond of. Sometimes men have come across two of them, one at the top of a tree throwing a dead opossum to his mate. They are exceedingly strong; one is said to be as strong as three or four men. They live in holes and caves, and sometimes in banyan trees. They are exceedingly fond of dancing, and many of their dancing grounds are pointed out. They dance by moonlight and in heavy rain, and sing as they dance. They have a language, but not like Melanesian languages. They have long straight hair coming down to their knees. They have a king – in Mwala it is a queen. They know nothing about fire or cooking, but they like to snatch brands from native fires, and play with them, presently throwing them carelessly aside. Some of them are fond of deluding men. One plan is to beat another kakamora; men suppose it is a child crying, follow it, get lost in the bush, and are mocked by the kakamora from tre tops. They are naked, have bvery small teeth, and are afraid of anything white. [...]*

For anyone interested, the article was found on the <http://www.jstor.org/pss/2843476> site.