



EAST-WEST CENTER MAGAZINE

03
SPRING 1973



RESEARCH INFORMATION SERVICES
EAST-WEST CENTER
1601 EAST-WEST ROAD
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96848-1601

Spring 1973

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East-West Center Magazine

Published by
Office of Publications and Public Affairs
East-West Center
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822

Robert B. Hewett, *Director*

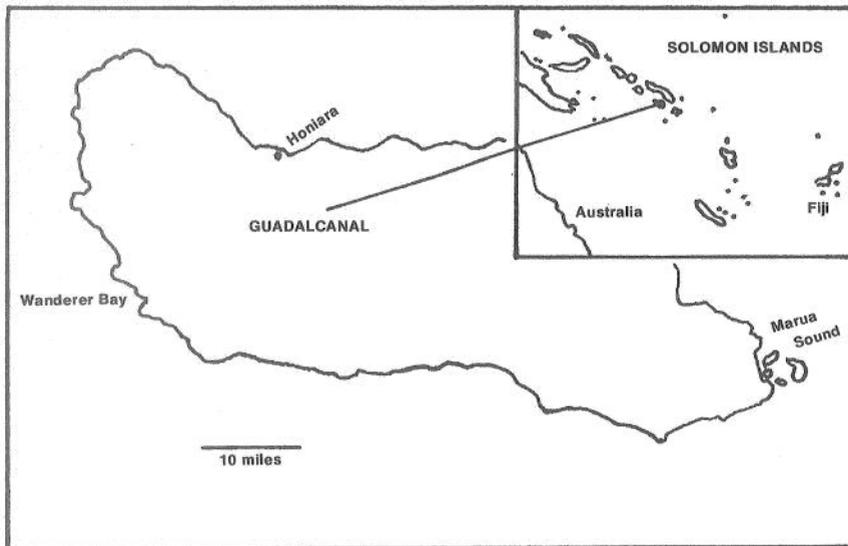
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ABOUT THE COVER

Photographer Allan Miller put together this stylization by superimposing a silhouette over a greatly exaggerated shot of egg packing flats to graphically symbolize a new addition to the East-West Center — the student-operated radio station KEWC. Vic Gillespie, an Open Grants student from California, is the man at the microphone. The egg flats are used throughout the KEWC studio to absorb reverberating sounds. For more on KEWC, see page 4.



Whether the Weather Coast?

By Murray Chapman* and Peter Pirie

Few people have ever heard of the Weather Coast. But to nine East-West Center researchers in the Guadalcanal Weather Coast Project, it was home for nearly six months. Now, the team of graduate students and staff members is back at the East-West Center preparing a report to be submitted to the administration of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate.

Their work on the Weather (south) Coast of Guadalcanal was part of a co-operative effort to study the population-resources systems of the area, and to assess the extent to which the isolated village societies are functional and susceptible to change. The project was initiated at the suggestion of the government of the Protectorate, which expressed concern over reports of population outstripping food supplies and other resources. The area of investigation extended from Wanderer Bay in the west to Marua Sound in the east, a coastal distance of some 90 miles, populated by about 8,000 people.

Directed by Drs. Murray Chapman and Peter Pirie of the East-West Population Institute staff, the co-operative effort employed Solomon Islanders in several phases, in addition to the seven East-West Center grantees. During the course of the project, about 60 people from the Weather Coast participated as interpreters, research assistants and census enumerators.

Equally co-operative in design was the make-up of the East-West Center team. It marked the first time in the history of the Center that a co-operative field education project was devised to involve scholarship holders from more than one institute and trained in more than one graduate discipline. All collaborated in an isolated situation and under close supervision of the directors.

Student participants from the Population Institute included Robert Freeman and David McLure, both pursuing master's degrees in economics; and Jane Tanner and Thomas Foye, who are completing master's degrees in public health. Judith Bennett and Elizabeth Muhr of the Culture Learning Institute, MA candidates in oral history and political science, and

*Murray Chapman and Peter Pirie are researchers at the East-West Population Institute, and co-directors of the Weather Coast Project.

Eric Witt, Food Institute grantee working on an MS in agricultural economics, rounded out the team.

The project, which represents a three-semester commitment for each student, began in summer 1972 with a pre-field training seminar and continued during the fall with the actual field work on the Weather Coast. A post-field seminar, devoted to the processing, analysis and write-up of the data and results, will continue throughout the spring semester.

The Weather Coast Project was made possible by combining the field-education resources of the Center with the degree granting capacity of the University of Hawaii. Graduate credit for each of the three semesters enabled team members to fulfill university and departmental degree requirements while also gaining invaluable experience in field research. The project would not have been possible without combining the special strengths of both the Center and the University, and hopefully will not be the last of such closely collaborative efforts in graduate training and field education.

Both students and directors

Following three weeks of orientation, training and finalization of field plans in Honiara, the main town of the Solomons, the team left in two ships on September 26 for some isolated living on the Weather Coast. Both students and directors lived in leaf houses in their respective village communities, ranging in size from 30 persons to more than 270. In addition to supervising a comprehensive census, all participants collected site information on fertility behavior, population movement, economic activities, health, child nutrition, education and communications.

More detailed and more consistent information on each of these topics was acquired from several field sites by dividing the team into distinct working groups that better reflected personal interests and graduate specialties. The working group on agricultural and economic activities (Freeman, McLure, Muhr and Witt) took inventories of household possessions, mapped food gardens, investigated the nature and effectiveness of agriculture extension ser-

vices, and, most difficult of all, collected daily production and consumption figures for several households in and around their villages during different weekly periods.

Tanner and Foye were responsible for two fertility surveys—one, of the largest language area on Guadalcanal, the Birao, and the other, of a small tightly enclosed valley whose inhabitants are staunch supporters of a socio-political movement. In these two surveys, 140 married persons were asked about their own children, their attitudes toward having larger or smaller families, and their knowledge of customary and introduced means of spacing or limiting children. For the Birao survey, Foye collaborated with Mr. Martin Avasi, a Weather Coast man with 16 years' experience as a medical assistant. In both areas surveyed, the interview schedules were pre-tested several times in the local dialect. (A model international questionnaire was almost jettisoned in the process.)

Bennett, who was responsible for relocation and population movement, walked the entire length of the Weather Coast to identify older people who might recall past distributions of the population. All her

interviews were taped, and the techniques of oral history were used to reconstruct changes in population patterns since 1890 and the relocation throughout this century of settlements from the ridgelines to valley floors and coastlands.

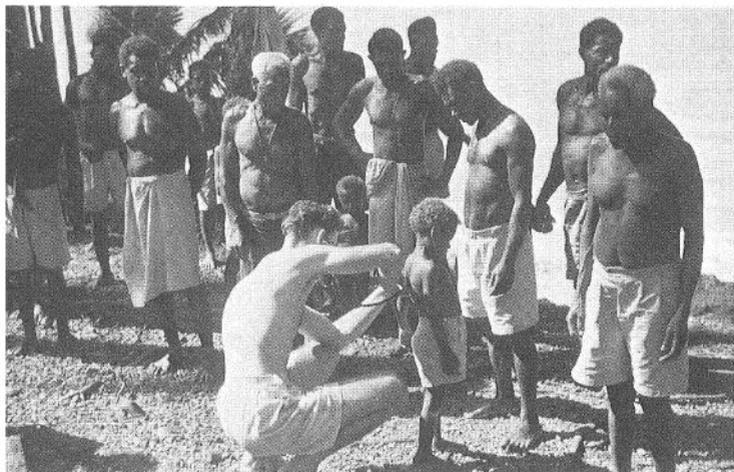
Four wives who accompanied the team also contributed to field data collection. Kerry Freeman, a graduate student in education at the University of Hawaii, focused her attention on education from the standpoint of the village, interviewing parents, teachers and pupils in elementary schools. She also tested classroom materials being developed by the curriculum unit of the Protectorate's Department of Education. Wanda McLure and Judy Foye, respectively physiotherapist and trained nurse, investigated the relationship between customary and introduced medical systems, while Linley Chapman, who had lived on the Weather Coast for 13 months during 1965-67, did extensive questioning on fertility behavior, child rearing and nutrition.

Eight different languages

Provisional results from the Weather Coast census taken on Monday, November 27, gave a population of 7,943 present at midnight (that is, the *de facto* population) and a total of 8,291 who felt they belonged to the Weather Coast (that is, the *de jure* population). The 1972 *de facto* figure compares with another of 7,281 recorded in February 1970, and together these suggest a population increase of more than 9 per cent over a period of two years and nine months. Hand tallies suggest that during this period (1970-72) the average size of households rose from 4.1 to 5.1 persons; not surprisingly, married couples with several children and the ability to have more form the most important component of the population on the Weather Coast.

At the other end of the scale a number of *cheka*, former slaves either bought by a "big man" or captured during an attack by a party of warriors, still survive in several localities. Census questions were asked in eight different local languages by 41 enumerators who were trained and supervised by team members.

All the information collected, in addition to being summarized for the Solomons administration, will be utilized by participants for masters' theses and research papers. Witt, for instance, has begun an M.S. thesis on the relationship between agricultural productivity and systems of land control at the eastern end of the Weather Coast. Similarly, Bennett is considering the extent to which the large-scale shift of village communities from inland to coastal areas was influenced by laborers who returned from the Queensland canefields about the turn of this century. Because of its wide scope, the Guadalcanal Weather Coast Project is actively co-operating with regional organizations like the South Pacific Commission (New Caledonia) and the WHO nutrition team (Fiji), and with such field survey programs as the Land Resource Team, Directorate of Overseas Surveys (United Kingdom), and the Victoria University of Wellington Solomons Project (New Zealand). □



Above, village men watch intently as a visiting doctor trained in tropical medicine examines a small boy during a week's tour of the Coast. Below, villagers, many of them school children home for the Christmas holidays, listen to a "big man" talk about the use of education. About half the Coast population is under 15 years of age.

