"We need more stories, and of a different kind," I can hear him say to the other mourners, who rise to declaim their part one by one.

NOTES

1. Waigani 1 ends when political independence was granted to Papua New Guinea in September 1975. The Bulmers left UPNG at the end of 1973, the year when I was away. Without binding them to my memory of events, I would like to thank Ann Chowning, Jim Griffin and Amirah and Ken Inglis for editorial advice and comments.

2. The Beiers, Ulli and Georgina – publisher of poets, encourager of artists – were at UPNG from 1967 to 1971, Ulli as senior lecturer in Literature, Georgina at the university’s Cultural Centre.

REFERENCES


WHAT IS THIS MAN UP TO? A KALAM VIEW OF RALPH BULMER

Ian Saem Majnep
Kaironk, Papua New Guinea

INTRODUCTION

I’m going to talk about Ralph Bulmer’s 28 years of working with the Kalam.1 I’ll talk of the things he investigated when studying our way of life. How people hunt and eat game mammals, how they shoot and eat birds, how they obtain wives, how they make war, their gardening and economy. These were the kinds of things he was interested in, every aspect of our culture. He was concerned with trade and exchange of game mammal furs, bird of paradise plumes, green snail and white cowry shells, and the places people traded with, between Kaironk and the Asai Valleys, Kaironk and Simbai, Kaironk and Maring. He went and observed these activities and when he understood Kalam ways, he recorded them in various books and papers which went to many countries. Now people overseas have heard of my place and I want to tell something about how Bulmer did his research, and about what we Kalam thought of him.

A lot of anthropologists, linguists, geographers, biologists, archaeologists and other scholars go to remote parts of Papua New Guinea to do research. These people are very single-minded, very determined. When they go to the field they leave their wives or husbands and children behind; they put them out of their minds. And they don’t worry about the risks of working with uncivilised people, they don’t think “Will they come and kill me?” They just get on with their work, studying things, observing things first hand. That is how Ralph went to my country.

In the 18 provinces of our country there are about 750 separate languages. Even in my subprovince, Simbai, several languages are spoken, each in a different area. The main divisions are between Kopon (Kobon) in the southwest, Harway (Haruai) or Wyapk and Alamo in the northwest, Gaj (Gainj) and Malrj (Maring) in the east, besides Kalam.

There are really two Kalam languages, two families of dialects. One, *Etp Mnm* is spoken in the Simbai Valley, from Simbai to beyond Kumbruf, around Waym in the Kaiment Valley, and in the Upper Kaironk. The other, which I speak, is *Ty Mnm*. Variants of this dialect are spoken in the Asai Valley and adjacent areas and by the Womk and Gobnem groups in the Kaironk. In *Ty Mnm*, if you want to ask “What are you about to do here?” you say “Awl ty gng geban? (Here what going-to-do you-are-doing?)”. In *Etp Mnm* you say “Eby etp gng gspan?”2
RALPH COMES TO THE KAIRONK VALLEY

Ralph's first trip to the Kalam area was in 1960, when he went with Bruce Biggs (a linguist from the University of Auckland). They stayed with the Kaytog (Kaironk) local group in the Upper Kaironk Valley. At that time no one in the Kaironk Valley spoke any Pidgin, so they employed a man from the Asai Valley, Jogbtwd, now the Kandum Councillor, who spoke some Pidgin.

When the Kalam first saw Ralph they were astonished. They whistled and shook their wrists in amazement. "Look at this man! Wa-a-y!" they exclaimed to one another, "Look how big he is! What did he eat that made him so big? Y-o-y!" And they took lengths of cord and measured the circumference of his legs, arms and waist. Later on, when people saw that his meals were quite modest in size, they were puzzled. "How come we eat more than he does, yet he is so big and we are so small?" They also noticed that Ralph washed his eating utensils carefully, washing them after every meal. "Ah," they said, "We don't wash carefully, our hands are still dirty when we eat. Maybe that's why we don't grow very big."

On his first visit Ralph stayed for only five or six weeks. He wanted to find a good place to build a house, to use as a base for his research on later trips.

On his second visit in 1963, he went with Andy Pawley, another linguist from Auckland, who stayed with the Kaytog local group. Ralph came to Wayak-mlwk (a ridge in the territory of the Gobnem (Gombenem) local group, where Wpc, the Big-man of Gobnem, had his house), and asked my cousin Wkeng if he could stay there. Wkeng went to Wpc and Wkeng's brother Asing to seek their agreement. They said, "All right, we'll give him some land there to build a house."

So they built a house for him at Gobnem, which became his main base. On that visit he worked mostly with Wpc and with Smy Mwlep, Wkeng Apespyn, Simon Peter Gi and John Kiyas, with Mokyang from Kumbruf, and with Ykway from Maring. At that time I was still at school and I saw him only a few times when I paid visits to his house.

He stayed amongst us and studied our ways. How people paid bridewealth, how people exchanged shell valuables when obtaining a wife, how they butchered pigs, hunted game mammals and shared out the meat. What are the good seasons for hunting? When can a man go and kill a lot of kapuls or birds? What are the dry and the rainy months? How people made war, all their customs and practices. When he asked people about their lives and customs they told him "This is how we do this, this is how we do that." They related legends of how things were in the beginning, which he recorded on tape.

A Kalam Homestead: Yk's House at Gwlkwm  (Ralph Bulmer's photograph)
He said “I’d like people to bring me specimens of all kinds of birds and animals.” We listened carefully to his requests and tried to bring whatever kinds he asked for. To people who were helpful he gave gifts, such as cloth, axes, bushknives, and when he gave such gifts people talked about it. He made friends with those people who were quick to bring him specimens and took them on hunting trips.

If he was at home working and children came to watch him and kept making a lot of noise beside his house, he sometimes scolded them, (rushing outside and shouting) “Ha-a! Hey!” When he did this they ran away frightened.

When he went walking about with some companions he’d be out all day usually returning late in the afternoon. He’d go to some quite distant places. Some day he’d go up Walblep Ridge to the forest at the top, other times he’d walk up Gwnpogep Ridge. Some days he’d say “Alright. Today I’ll go via Knem to Gwlkm Saddle and on up to Colm Mountain.” Then his party would go with him. Sometimes he’d say “Today I’d like to look at the kangaroo grasslands down at Tumbumkamp (Ben’s Bluff).” He’d go and walk about there, observing things. One time he said, “Let’s go down to the Jimi Valley plains,” and he and his party went and camped down there for several days.

On these walks he used to rest at various places, giving smokes to his companions while he sat down, jotting down notes. While we were moving about in the bush, some of the men would climb trees looking for game mammals, or they’d go and shoot birds. Ralph would watch how these things are done and think “Yes! This is how they hunt, these are their methods.” Wherever he went he’d work like this, observing everything first hand. He observed closely the hunting techniques of men who were skilled at getting birds and kapuls. Ralph was less agile than us and sometimes would fall on slippery ground. When we walked about with him we took care to place strong pieces of wood for him to step on when we were crossing ditches or climbing over fences. “Take care that he doesn’t fall or break a leg,” his companions would say. “Such a big man, how would we ever carry him!”

Sometimes he went and watched people making their gardens, the men turning the ground over with digging sticks, women planting seedlings, all the stages of planting and harvesting. When he took photographs of our gardens with crops growing in them, the people were worried. “He-e-e! Now, maybe our crops won’t grow well,” they said. They thought this because he was making a permanent image of the crops and carrying it away with him.

While he was studying us, we were studying him. “What is this man up to?” we wondered. The real reasons behind his actions weren’t obvious. “When he walks around, why does he always write things on paper? What is he going to do with all these animals he’s collected?” Now, they can see the point of it all and they say “Ah, so this is what he has done with things he took and the information he recorded.”

**HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH THE BIG-MAN, WPC**

His closest friend among us, his real brother, was Wpc (roughly ‘Oovich’, in English popular spelling). He was our **bwrb**, our big-man. He looked after us and he looked after Ralph. Wpc accompanied Ralph on all his excursions (during Ralph’s first visits). As I mentioned, Wpc gave Ralph some land for a house, and he also used to bring him fruit and vegetables. He’d cut a bunch of bananas and ripen them in a pit covered with leaves and bring them to Ralph. Or he’d prepare other foods – he’d cook and skin sweet potato and taro and take them to Ralph. Pipit (**Saccharum edule**) too. In return Ralph would give gifts. Our Melanesian custom is like this – when someone gives you something you give something in return. When it’s a big gift, you give a big gift in return.

When we saw what a good man Ralph was, we decided to be generous in sharing our feast foods with him, giving him big portions of pork, sweet potato, and so on. It was mainly Wpc who did this, but sometimes other families used to bring him food. The people saw his generosity and they responded in the same way. While he was with us (at Gobnem) we were his family. He lived with us and we did the things that parents, brothers and sisters, fathers’ brothers and fathers’ cousins should do, looking after him.

People used to come from other places, like Pwgoy (Fungoi), Womk (Womuk), Simbai and Pwdwm (Fundum) to ask Wpc about Ralph. “How do you get on with this fellow? Is it true that he gives you lots of things, like a brother or a father’s cousin does?” Wpc replied that it was true. “He’s like an elder brother to me,” “You’ve got a good man there,” they said appreciatively. “You and he are living together in the right way,” and they felt pleased.

The people used (privately) to call him Maj-twd, after Wpc’s father. They thought he was the ghost of Wpc’s father returned from the dead. The people there would come out and greet Ralph, shaking his hand and saying loudly: “Oy! Brother! You’ve come! My elder brother, ey!” They they would talk about him in private, and someone would ask, “This friend of Wpc’s, is he one of Wpc’s relatives who’s died and now has come back to live with Wpc? What do you think?” Another would answer “Yes, I think you’re right.” Now we tell this story and laugh about our reactions.
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Ralph was an Englishman and he used to go back to England from time to time and visit his true kinsmen, his parents, uncles, aunts and cousins, and stay with friends that he hadn’t seen for many years.

Besides those I’ve mentioned above, he brought other people to work in the Kaironk Valley. Graham Jackson, a social anthropologist from Auckland, went to work at Yhal with the Kopon people. Inge Riebe, a social anthropologist from Sydney, worked with us. Then there was Jim Menzies, a zoologist from the University of Papua New Guinea, and Sue Bulmer, an archaeologist and (others, including) some students from the University of Papua New Guinea. People who specialised in various kinds of work, he gathered information from them all.

WORKING TOGETHER IN THE FIELD

I’d like to talk a bit about our work together. I started helping Ralph in 1963. He’d asked people to bring birds and animals, so I decided to collect the ones he asked for. I started to bring birds that he particularly wanted. One day I shot a bleb (ground dove, Gallicumba beccari) and brought it to him. Another day I brought him a knopl (East Indian woodcock, Scolopax saturata) that I’d shot over at Gwlkm.

He often went to the bush with his party – including mature men and some boys – to look at things like game mammals, birds and the blossoms of trees. When he asked them questions they often had difficulty giving him the information he wanted. Whereas when he asked me I could give him ready answers, and I think when he noticed this he started to work regularly with me.

Bulmer wasn’t like some men, who come to a place and start firing off all sorts of questions at random. After walking about observing things, he’d go to a place and sit down, and think really hard about everything, and then, only after thinking everything through, he’d start asking questions. Whenever one of his companions brought a specimen he’d ask me “Where did he get that from?” I’d obtain the information and tell him. That’s how we carried on our investigations.

During the early days of our collaboration, when I saw how serious and intense Ralph was, I was a bit afraid of him. But as time went on, I saw we were achieving good results and I was learning a lot. You learn a great deal from working with a man like that, someone who thinks very deeply and seriously about everything and who is a perfectionist. You won’t learn as much from an easy-going man, someone who likes to joke and laugh with his companions but doesn’t think too deeply or take too much care to get things exactly right.
He liked to collect specimens of all kinds of plants. I worked with him gathering and preserving specimens, cutting them, putting them between leaves of paper and then drying them in the rafters of the house above the fireplace.

He went often to Gwlkm (an extensive clearing in the primary forest around the confluence of the Aunjang and Gwlkm streams in the Schraders, about four hours' walk from Gobnem). Whenever he visited Papua New Guinea he never failed to walk to Gwlkm. My point is that it was the best place for us people of the Upper Kaironk Valley to go hunting. Because the forest grows all around Gwlkm, people could camp there within easy reach of their hunting grounds, where they went after birds or game mammals. There Ralph saw with his own eyes most of the details which I put down in the Birds book and the Animals book; these are based on our experiences at Gwlkm.

"This is what I want to see," he'd say, and I'd guide him to various places in the forest. "OK, now where will we go next?" he'd ask. As we went along he'd pause, asking questions and making notes. "What about this plant?" he'd say, pointing to the gd fern. I'd explain that this plant grows in such and such a place, that such and such a group of plants can be found there.

I'd explain that a certain group of people own this area of land, that they planted cordylines to make an enclosure for use as a camping place while they were in the forest hunting or gathering the fruits of the mountain pandanus. He'd go to another place, rest there and ask more questions about things he'd observed and again I'd explain "The boundaries of this group of people are in such and such a place."

When we went to camp somewhere I'd tell the lads that were with us to go ahead and build a shelter and I'd explain where to go to get water for us all. I'd explain to them about the foods Ralph liked to eat, and about his habits and ways. Sometimes he'd say "Today I feel like eating such and such." He liked to eat three kinds of stews when we were at Gwlkm. His favourite was made with malg, the mountain pigeon (Gymnophaps...
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albertisi), together with bep (Rungia klossi, a spinach-like green). Second was tinned fish or meat with a mix of aromatic greens giving a strong flavour. Number three, he’d boil potatoes, dice them and eat them with tinned fish or meat. Also he was very partial to potatoes baked in their jackets.

OUR BOOKS

In 1968 Ralph went to the new university which the Papua New Guinea Government had built at Port Moresby. He asked me to come and work there with him. He stayed at the University for about five years. After he left I stayed on alone, working at the UPNG.

When he went back to New Zealand Ralph invited me to visit and that’s how it came about that, in 1974, we started work on our first book, *Birds of My Kalam Country*. We began work in Auckland the very next morning after I arrived from Port Moresby. Early in the morning, we came to the Department (of Anthropology) and he opened his office and we sat down. He said “I asked you to come here for a good reason. Now I’ll explain what it is.” And he told me his idea of a book about birds and asked if I would be his co-author.

I listened quietly while he started to explain his plan, feeling anxious. “I don’t have any experience of that sort of work,” I said. “I’m a Standard Two dropout. What would I have to do?”

Ralph said “I haven’t written a book like this before either. I’ve only written short articles. But let’s try.” So I agreed that we should have a go. For two months we worked very hard, and we made fast progress. Sometimes the work was straightforward, sometimes not. When our minds were on the same wave length we surged ahead.

The main reason this book was easy to write was because Ralph already knew a great deal about birds. He’d learnt a lot about ornithology when he was in England, beginning with childhood walks with his father. Bird-watching was his hobby. In New Guinea he was always studying birds, it was the subject he asked most questions about when we were in the bush, and because he already knew so much he could easily digest and assess the information we gave him. If a person is unfamiliar with a subject he’ll believe anything his
informants tell him. But someone who knows a lot about a subject will be critical; he’ll have a good idea which information is accurate and which isn’t. In these things Ralph acted just as we would.

Ralph was pleased with the way the book went and when we’d finished he said to me “Let’s do another one.” He asked me to choose the subject and I said it should be about kmn – about the kapuls or game mammals3 of our region and how we hunt them. He was taken aback by this suggestion. “I’ve already written a lot on this subject. Jim Menzies and I have done a long paper about marsupials and rodents and I’ve written a few things about Kalam hunting. What else can we do?” But I had very strong convictions on this point. “There is really a lot to be said about kmn. You know, compared to game mammals, birds are only small things, not nearly as important to us either for food or for ceremonies.”

So we started the second book, Animals the Ancestors Hunted.

The Animals book was much more difficult to write than the Birds book. There were many reasons for this. It was partly because Ralph did not know as much about kapuls as he knew about birds and about studying the lives of humans. It’s easy to learn the observable aspects of people’s lives, how they work, how they sleep, what foods they eat, and the like. You can even ask people questions about their inner lives and their secret knowledge. But in the case of wild animals, only people who know them well, who have a lot of experience hunting them, can tell what they eat, where they sleep, and how they think.

But the Animals book was also harder because we went about the job in a different way. In preparing the Birds book we first worked out the divisions or chapters together, then discussed the birds of each chapter mainly in Pidgin, before Ralph put my observations into English and added his comments. When we came to do the Animals book, we followed a different system. This time Ralph asked me to write the chapters on my own, first taping them in Kalam, then transcribing the tapes, before we worked together translating them into English.

The first stage, taping-recording the chapters about the most important animals, was not too difficult, because the knowledge of the trees and animals of the forest is there in my own head. But I also had to go around and interview other people who had specialised knowledge that I didn’t have, for example, about animals of the middle altitudes or the hot lowland plains. Ralph also asked me to record myths about animals, and I had to choose those that were suitable for the book and record them myself or get others to tell them. One of these myths we put into my Introduction.

Transcribing the tapes, putting the words down on paper, was hard going. I had never done this kind of work before, writing my own language. Translating the Kalam text into English, which was Ralph’s job, was often excruciatingly difficult. Part of the difficulty was that many Kalam words I used were not yet in the Kalam Dictionary and there are no Pidgin words to translate them, and indeed there are no English words to translate some of them. So that when Ralph asked me what these words meant, I had to stop and think, and sometimes I got really worried and began to sweat with embarrassment and ask myself what could have possessed me to take this work on! Ralph sometimes had to wait as long as five or six minutes, and I felt very ashamed. But eventually I would come up with something.

There is some important information we had to leave out of the books. In my region there are certain things that people keep secret, which they don’t want outsiders to know about. For example, if people know magic which will make their taro and sweet potato crops grow well, or which will make their pigs multiply, they won’t give out this magic to outsiders. The only ones they let know are their close relatives. Among the Kobon and Kalam peoples, if a group have magic which enables them to obtain a lot of greensnail shells or a lot of pigs, they keep quiet about their knowledge, so other groups don’t get hold of it and turn it to their own advantage. I’m only giving general examples here. I’m not going to tell you any details of secret magic and rituals etc.

It’s the same with Europeans - manufacturers and rich people. A rich European with 10 or 12 million in the bank doesn’t publicise his wealth, it might be dangerous if others know how much he’s got in the bank. Someone who has a new invention, say a new formula for a drink, or a car design, that he could make a lot of money from, doesn’t tell the secret to others. If people ask about these things he tells them lies.

I explained all these secret things to Ralph because, after all, they are a part of Kalam culture that is still alive. He would think “Aha! This is something important and top-secret.” He kept this private information in his head or in his notebooks. He didn’t publish these secrets. We couldn’t publish it in a book, because the new generation of Kalam people might be able to read it and spread the information about, dangerous information, which might result in witchcraft done against certain people. Publishing such information might land me in court, so I told him certain information only in strictest confidence. He didn’t write this information down, but kept it in his head, or if he did write it down, he kept the information in his private notes and archives.

When we were well advanced with the Animals book he said to me “You know, our next project should be plants – wild plants and cultivated plants. I’ve been collecting plant specimens for many years but I haven’t
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done a book or article about them. While I’m finishing the Animals book you ought to start writing one on plants.” So I did. Then Ralph fell ill.

IN NEW ZEALAND

When in 1974 I made the first of my four visits to New Zealand, Ralph took me to many places, just as I guided him around when he was in Kalam territory. He repaid the hospitality I’d shown to him.

In New Zealand, weekends and Christmas holidays were our main times for bushwalking or travelling. Ralph used to take me to the forests and mountain ranges. We went to the Waitakere Ranges and up north, to Northland. On my second visit, Sue took me to Taranaki. The Bulmer family took me all around the North Island, pointing out those animals and plants that are native to New Zealand and those that are introduced.

When we were bushwalking Ralph would explain “Now this tree is found in this type of country, it grows in this way.” He’d say, “Now I’ll take you up this ridge and show you something else.” When we sat down to rest I’d ask him questions about the environment. If I saw a plant that resembled one from my country, or a tree that was similar except for having a different kind of leaf, we’d stop and he’d explain, describing the distribution of the tree and so on.

“This bird which you see here, the fantail,” he’d say, “it likes this kind of habitat and it lays its eggs here.” “That bird you see there, the Tui, it’s related to the Honeyeater (Melidectes belfordi) of New Guinea.”

LOOKING BACK

Looking back on our partnership, it reminds me of a Kalam legend that goes like this.

There was a wild man who lived at Mgemd Mountain. This man didn’t know anything about cultivated foods, such as taro, yams and sweet potato, or about the use of stone tools, or about how to go about cutting dry wood and using it for firewood. His firewood was game mammals. And game mammals were also his main food, he killed lots of them and after eating them (without removing the fur or guts) he slept, with the pieces of the carcasses scattered around him in small piles (like firewood). This is how he lived.

Then two women from Wlyag Alyag, who were hosting a dance festival there, came to gather leaves at the head of the Acb stream, which rises on that mountain. They saw the wild man there, hunting game mammals, using them as firewood, breaking the carcasses in half and piling the pieces up in various places. Then the man went off to look for some tobacco. The two women came close and saw the scattered piles. They gathered all the carcasses together, gutted them and singed off the fur. When the hunter came back they said to him “Why do you use these animals for firewood? You sit down there and watch what we do. You take an axe and you chop wood this way,” they said and they showed him how to select wood and cut it up. They brought taro and sweet potatoes to him. “These are the real foods,” they said, and they showed him how to cook and eat such foods.

I was like the Mgemd man, a wild hunter who lived alone in the bush. I knew how to kill and eat the animals and birds of the forest. This was the kind of knowledge I could transmit to Ralph, because it was stored in my brain. Ralph was like the two women from Wlyag Alyag. He came from a society of people who know a lot, who share their knowledge with each other by talking and in books. Such people sleep in good houses, which gives them freedom from worry about surviving the elements. They know a lot. Ralph came and explained to me how to do many things. His kind of knowledge and my kind of knowledge we put them together in our books.

Now in some parts of the world people have heard about our work. The reviewers of the Birds book and other friends have written that they liked what we did. Ralph’s parents and my parents could never have imagined that their children would come together in such a partnership.

That’s all I have to say.

NOTES

1. Translated from the Kalam by Andrew Pawley. Saem Majnep tape-recorded the Kalam text in Auckland in November 1988, a few days before returning to Papua New Guinea. AP transcribed it and with ISM’s permission reordered certain sections. A portion of the original Kalam text appears in Pawley’s paper in Part IV of this volume. Here and there explanatory material has been inserted in the text, in parentheses.

2. The Kalam seize on the different words for ‘what?’ (etp in Etp Mnm, ty in Ty Mnm) to name the two dialects. In overall vocabulary and morphology the two dialects are about as different as Spanish and Italian.

3. Kalam kmn refers to those wild marsupials and rodents that are most prized as game, in contrast to as (small marsupials and rodents other than rats found near homesteads), dogs, pigs and other animals. In the 1960s and ’70s Bulmer translated kmn as ‘game mammal’. In Animals the Ancestors Hunted he prefers to borrow the Tok Pisin term kapul, which is a near equivalent, covering both large and small marsupials and rodents.