

I should like to tell you of an interesting journey I took a few days ago into the interior of British Guiana. This journey was planned about two months ago during a visit made to Bartica-Potaro when Dr. Nicholson and I looked into health problems in that district. At that time we went to Mahdia, Tumatumari, 72 miles Potaro and Issano, following the route of the District Dispenser. At Issano, we reached the end of the Government Road and saw the point at which pork-knockers embark on their long trip in the Mazaruni River in search of diamonds.

I had never seen this area and was keen on learning how people beyond Issano live and to see what facilities are offered to them by the Government. It was then that plans were made for me to join the quarterly visit by the District Commissioner, in order to save officers' time and to conserve on the use of transport.

I landed by B.G. Airways plane at Tumereng and was met by the District Commissioner who had just concluded court in the district. Tumereng consists of a few shops, about two dozen small houses and two dance halls which the pork-knockers use to tie their hammocks at night. Sanitary conditions are very bad and there is a need for improvements there. The B.G. Airways now runs a thrice weekly service to Tumereng, carrying in pork-knockers, goods, mails and now and then, carrying emergency medical cases to Georgetown. This service has been increased as the traffic to the area has grown.

Tumereng is about a mile from Enachu, which is the Government Compound consisting of Post Office, Dispensary, Police Station, <sup>Sub-</sup>Warden's Office, Rest House and quarters for these Officers. At Enachu there are three contacts with the Coast - telegraph, radio phone and a radio contact with Atkinson Field for reporting meteorological conditions - weather, cloud formations, etc. In between Tumereng and Enachu is a settlement known as Castries - named no doubt because of the fairly large number of West Indian Islanders in the district, many of whom

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come from St. Lucia. Castries consists of a Church, houses and shops.

4 But all of this I did not see on the Saturday I landed at Tumereng. After the airplane landed smoothly in the Mazaruni River, efficiently handled by one of the expert pilots of B.G. Airways, we left almost immediately by boat for Kurupung, in order to reach before dark. We travelled in the sub-Warden's launch, captained by an Amerindian. The party I travelled with included the District Commissioner, the Police Inspector from Bartica, Mr. Crevally and the Clerk of Court from Suddie, Mr. Murray. My first meal in the Mazaruni was one well worth remembering - stewed deer meat, shot by the Police Inspector on his way up to Issano.

We arrived at Kurupung before dusk, and deposited our things at the only Government building in the area - the Police Station which has a small Rest House attached. We then walked around Kurupung and saw all the houses and shops and met a number of the miners and shopkeepers, who make up the population of the area. The number of miners in Kurupung has been growing steadily due to the lure of diamonds in the mountains nearby. There have been some fairly successful diamond finds in the Kurupung, thus the influx of miners to the area. However, of late, there has been a decline or perhaps all the worthwhile spots are already claimed. A new form of diamond mining has been introduced - what is popularly called water dogging. The miners work the rivers and creeks, bringing up sand and gravel to be inspected for the precious gems. This method does not require that the miner be submerged under the water, which is a skill that requires training and expensive equipment, which many of the miners do not possess.

On the Sunday we went up the mountain near Kurupung to Kumarau Falls, which, incidentally I could not find on any of the three maps of B.G., which I examined. If you do have a map handy you will see the Kurupung River which is a branch of the Mazaruni River. Kurupung is in the Kurupung River and behind

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are the Merume Mountains, an extensive mountain range of magnificent flat topped mountains, some of which look like man made fortresses jutting out of the bush. The trail we followed up the mountain is the one used by the miners to reach their claims. The Government helps maintain this trail and had recently done work there. The climb is strenuous and as I saw dozens of men going aback and coming down, loaded with heavy packs, I had to admire their great strength and endurance. Pork-knocking may sound glamorous to some people on the Coast, but it is hard going, rough living and requires great determination and strength of character to persevere. When I held a meeting later in the day at Kurupung one of the pork-knockers who had met me on the trail asked me how I liked it. I said "It was a wonderful trip, but I ~~was~~<sup>was</sup> quite tired." His snappy remark was "Yes, I saw." "You were going at the rate of about four feet per hour." My progress was certainly slow in comparison to the speed at which the miners move in some of the steepest parts of the mountain.

The Kumarau Falls are a sight worth seeing - utterly magnificent waterfalls set in a splendid background. The Kumarau Falls have three drops the last being a sharp drop many hundreds of feet, very much like our famed Kaieteur Falls. It is a site that will some day be developed as a tourist centre, I predict.

Monday and Tuesday were Court days and the District Commissioner <sup>Mr. Leonard</sup> then assumed one of his many duties, that of Magistrate. Some fifty cases were dealt with and the team I travelled with, the Magistrate, the Police Inspector, who was Police Prosecutor and the Clerk were kept very busy. I had the opportunity of seeing the Dispenser working at first hand and observed some of the problems he encounters. The Dispenser pays a weekly visit to Kurupung and spends about three days. He has to deal with a variety of diseases and accidents. Those which are serious and which require services beyond those of a dispenser are sent either to the Bartica Hospital or to Public Hospital,

Georgetown. One of the serious problems of the area is the need for a separate Dispensary building for Kurupung. The Dispenser was carrying on gallantly in the face of serious inconveniences. During the time I was at Kurupung he did his work from a guard room in the Police Station which was not at all satisfactory. We are now seeing about solving this problem and hope that it will not be too long before we set up a Dispensary building at Kurupung. This and other problems of the area were told to me when I met a large number of the miners at a meeting on the Sunday afternoon. I was greeted before the meeting by a petition signed by a number of the residents - "We the ladies and gentlemen of this remote part of our Colony Kurupung, hereby welcome you in our midst, as one of Her Majesty's Ministers in this Colony, to visit us and to see for yourself what is our needs so as to better our position in life. We wish you in your brief stay that you will enjoy the atmosphere of the entire surroundings and on your departure you will have a safe passage back home. We wish you God's blessings and the best of health." Surely such a genuine welcome made me feel very happy that I had come to Kurupung. I discussed a number of the problems with the people of Kurupung and am now in the midst <sup>of</sup> examining the possibility of finding solutions to as many as possible.

From Kurupung we travelled back to Enachu. There I examined the Dispensary and small hospital which can take up to seven patients. It is a neat and well kept compound and offers a very good medical service to this remote part of B.C. The work is in the hands of a capable and experienced Dispenser who is well beloved in the area. The Post Office does a brisk business and I was happy on looking over the activity of the Department to see that a fair amount of money is deposited in the Post Office Savings Bank and a good amount is sent out in money orders. This shows that the earnings of the **poor**-knockers are being well-channelled.

In the evening I met the miners of the area at Castries and had a long chat with them. I discussed with them the

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constitutional developments now taking place and explained what the Five Year Development Plan was all about. We talked over their problems and had a lively discussion. We left early the next morning for Oranapia, where a meeting was held with the miners. I received the following welcome address -

**"Officials of our Government, Ladies & Gentlemen,**

We the pioneers of Oranapai are very pleased to welcome to Oranapai Mrs. Jagan who is at the moment our Minister of Labour, Health and Housing. And we are very lucky to have her personally with us here today. We have also realised that you have taken our interest at heart which causes you to be here with us. So we humbly pray that you may grant us an attentive hearing to our three most deserving needs in our district. Our present population is just a little over half an hundred working between landing and twenty miles Puruni. First we ask that you may use your good office in granting us the privilege to be visited at least once a month by the Dispenser in the Mazaruni - it is over 18 past months since our district has not been visited by a Dispenser. Secondly, we ask to bring to your knowledge the deplorable and disgraceful condition of the only road that takes us from landing to aback which has been upkept by the Government. It is nothing but a perfect death trap that endangers our lives and limbs each day as we pass by. Third, and last we ask to enlighten you how inconvenient and expensive we usually find ourselves to attend Court at Enachu whenever we happen to fall in the hands of the law. As there is no other transportation but the weekly mail boat we generally have to lose nearly a fortnight to Enachu and back. So we respectfully pray that you may forward our grievances to the head authorities of our Majesty's Court and that the Lord may speak within their learned hearts to grant us a court hearing in our district whenever we are in the hands of the law. And may God's richest blessings be always with you to continue fighting for our country's future development and may your Government return head of the polls at the next election."

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We are already in the process of solving two of their problems - that of the monthly visit by the Dispenser and the cleaning of the trail both of which should begin next month.

After Oranapai we travelled all day on the boat up to Issano stopping off for a few minutes at Kamakusi<sup>a</sup>, which at one time was an important centre of activity in the area. I am told that a prison was once there and the remains of a brick oven are still to be seen. There is an impressive grave of a young policeman who died by drowning some years ago. Now, all of importance that remains is a rest house and the now vacated sub-warden's house. I understand that this may be used later as a youth camp. It is certainly a beautiful spot for young people to spend a holiday and I would like to see progress made in that direction. Swimming, fishing, camping and games would keep young people fully occupied.

We arrived at Issano before dusk, in time to meet a large delegation of miners who had a number of problems to discuss with me. Chief problem was that of overcrowding in travelling on the P.W.D. lorries from Bartica to Issano and the insufficiency of loggie space for tying their hammocks at Issano. A very interesting suggestion was made during our talks and that was that Government should periodically publish the world prices of raw diamonds. The pork-knockers felt that this would be a good guide for them when they sell their diamonds. Some complained that the prices offered are not always the best. The Ministry of Trade and Industry is looking into this suggestion now.

In the morning I visited the three loggies built by the Government for use by pork-knockers and could see the need for improvements. Issano, like Tumereng and Kurupung, has very poor sanitation. Drains are blocked, garbage is not controlled, latrines are too few and far between and houses are built in a disorderly fashion. There is much room for improvements in this direction.

In the morning we left the last point in the Mazaruni River and proceeded by jeep back to Bartica, stopping off first at 72 Miles Potaro, the site of P.W.D. Headquarters. I paid a visit to the Government Midwife there and saw the first baby born in the little building which we converted, from my last

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visit, into a clinic for League work and a place for mothers to have their babies in comfort. Baby and mother were doing fine, thanks to the efficiency of our midwife, who incidentally, was a graduate of the first group of women trained under our accelerated midwifery training programme. We arrived in Bartica that afternoon, thus ending what was for me a journey well worth taking.

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