

TRADING WESTWARDS

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Buzi, Thoez and Bera are three small Papuan villages close to Boigu. Boigu people have traded with the people who live there for a very long time, especially in the early northwest monsoon season when garden food is scarce.

These villages have not always been where they are today. They used to be further inland, where the people could be safe from the Thuger. In our father's day, the troubles with the Thuger were almost finished. Also, by that time, some store goods were coming to Boigu, so it was time for their trading friends to move back to the coast closer to Boigu. They said to the people of Buzi:

Move down. Move down. Put your village on the coast where we can see you. In time a government will build a store on our island. If you live closer to Boigu it will be easier for you to come to the store and buy things for you and your families. If you live inside, it will be hard for you. A better way is to move down.

So the people from the three villages started to live on the coast closer to Boigu.

At that time Boigu people were buying store goods from the Papuan Industries Limited (PIL) store at Badu. Three or four sailing canoes would go together to Badu to buy things such as flour, rice, sugar and cloth. These were paid for out of the Boigu Island Fund. At Boigu the goods were rationed out to the people.

When Boigu got its own company boat, store goods were brought to Boigu in it.

By 1933 a store was built at Saibai and the Boigu boat went there to buy goods too. At the 1937 Torres Strait Islanders Councillors' Conference, a young Boigu Island Councillor, Jacob Matthew, asked that a small store be built at Boigu. After that conference, a small store was set up on the verandah of the government teacher's house. The Boigu store was finally built in 1954. In 1983 a new Island Industries Board supermarket was opened.

Back in our father's day—the 1920s—there were two young Boigu men named Gaurie and Peter. They were good friends. A Malayan crocodile shooter offered them a job at Merauke. They agreed to go with him. They were probably the first Boigu people ever to go to that area.

When the job was finished, they were given a whaleboat to come back to Boigu in. On the way they saw smoke rising from the mainland. At that time Boigu people had no knowledge of any villages in that area. Gaurie and Peter began to think that the Thuger were once again on the move. They were worried about that and took great care for the rest of the journey. They travelled only at night and during the day anchored their boat out at sea. Gaurie and Peter were glad when they reached Boigu.

The people listened to the story of their trip back to Merauke. The older people remembered the times when Boigu people sometimes lived in fear of the Thuger. They wondered whether those times were about to return. Because of this worry, they went to their friends at Buzi, Thoez and Bera to ask if they knew something about this. They said:

We know about these people. They are not Thuger. They live far back in the country. They have big gardens near their villages. We were all once frightened of the Thuger, now we know those times are finished. But these people are still frightened and that's why they live inside.

The headman agreed that it would be good for everyone if these people moved to the coast and started trading. Store goods could be traded for garden food. A party of men—Banu, Auda, Anau and Pinu—went to talk to these people. They carried a gun for protection.

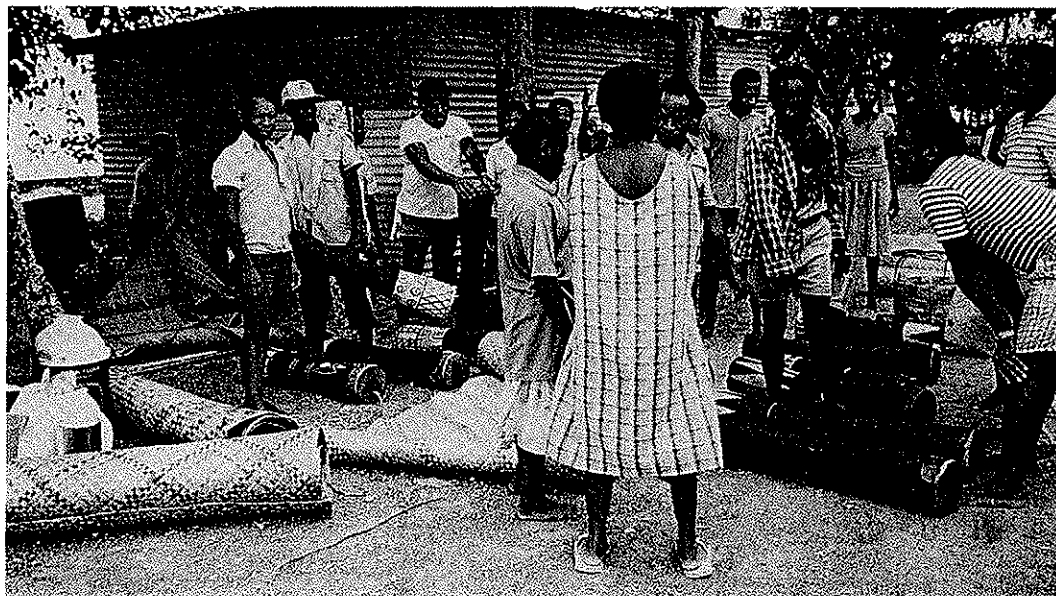
First they went to Pab. The people there wore no clothes. The four Boigu men told them not to be frightened of the Thuger anymore and showed them the store goods. The Pab people had never seen such things before. They agreed to move their village to good garden ground on the coast. Next the Boigu men went to Mari. The village was situated opposite Deliverance Island (Warul Kawa) about a three or four day walk inland. The Mari people also agreed to

move down to the coast. That's how trading started with the people from Pab and Mari.

At that time the government in Port Moresby did not allow Torres Strait Islanders to go to Papua unless they first got a pass from Daru. The penalty for not having a pass was a three month gaol term on Daru. The Boigu people usually did not get a pass to go to the three close villages or those to the west. If they saw a government boat at that time, they hid themselves and their canoes out of sight.

Trading store goods for mats and drums from Papua New Guinea. Photograph by Monica Wardle.

Today we still go to Papua to trade and the Papuan people come to Boigu to trade. When we go over there to trade, we get a pass from the



408 BOIGU: OUR HISTORY AND CULTURE

Chairperson of the Island Community Council. There are quarantine laws too now. The idea is to stop any diseases coming into Australia from Papua New Guinea. Birds and other animals cannot be brought from Papua New Guinea into the Torres Strait. The Quarantine Officers at Thursday Island inspect mats and drums that come from across the water.