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The blame for my going to Indonesia and Papua New Guinea in July rest with the street scheme of San Angelo. As you know, ranchers starve who stay away from cattle auctions, and the only route to the Angelo market from the west goes right by the biggest geriatric hospital in town.

Every time I pass a retirement center, I start planning on hiding out. To my way of thinking, ending up docked in a rocking chair in an old folks' home makes the riptides and whirlpools of the Indian Ocean and the wild men and sand crocodiles from Borneo seem like a Fourth of July picnic on spring creek.

One of my friends took care of major details of putting the trip together. Distances and destinations ran like this: couple of days stopover on Kauai Island in Hawaii. Tranverse of two-thirds of the 3500 mile long archipelago of Indonesia from Bali to Borneo, including four days sailing on a schooner in the Sumbawa Sea. Return flights back over Indonesia to emigrate into the sovereignty of Papua New Guinea. After visiting key locations in the highlands and coastal jungles of PNG, a series of flights to pass back into Indonesia for a flight to Los Angeles.

As soon as the trip was announced, folks began to warn me to be careful. Travel books devote more space to security in New Guinea than they do to riding the subways after dark on Manhattan Island. Roadblocks on the few roads and trails in PNG don't mean road repair. Warnings mean a couple of tribes are mediating century-old grudges with arrows, spears and dart guns.

However, I began to notice after being warned about the perils that no one was trying to talk me out of making the trip. The sessions signed off kind of vague-like. "Monte, I guess you know not to snorkel in the crocodile-infested river of Borneo and to stay out of reach of the tiger leaches on the banks." And, "Dad, I suppose you'll remember to be careful putting on layers of sunscreen and insect repellent after you've purified a day's worth of drinking water to starve off the dangers of dehydration on the Equator." Or, "you don't reckon one of them reformed head hunters might relapse, do you, Noelke?"

I began to drive by the turnoff at the ranch and spend the hot June evenings sitting alone in the front yard. Miss Abigail Van Buren claims tomcats moved from one house to another can be relocated by putting butter between their toes. She says once a tom licks off his feet he become comfortable with the smells of his new surroundings.

About every similar possession was at the ranch. Nothing transplanted in having your saddle hang in the place where the first saddle you ever owned hung over 60 years ago, or having a boot jack under your bed that goes back to your grandpa's time. Butter smells didn't seem strong enough to contain a wanderlust that powerful.

Packing and repacking for the several-phase trip took my mind off the danger. Gear had to be planned to take on the schooner, and charter aircraft into the jungles of New Guinea limits baggage weight to 20 pounds of soft luggage.

My big bag had to be stored three times in different locations. Carry-out stuff had to be adequate to provide toiletries and medications for the whole trip; sun screens and repellants and film had to be purchased beforehand.

I solved the problems by using one day pack of clothes for hot weather and another day pack to take to the high country. The packs and a heavy plastic sack of intermediary sailing gear were stuffed down in an old army duffel in between the snorkel fins. At two

stops, open air laundry service washed enough extra clothes to switch packs without worrying about dirty things

But back in my mind, I kept looking for signs of trouble. Visas came through and airline reservations worked as promised. Hotels confirmed reservations where modern communications reaches, and a travel note said cannibalism in New Guinea has been forbidden by law since 1975.

Travel, nevertheless, revives superstitions. You know how old sailors fretted about hexes and spooky signs. The simplest things, however, are good omens. At the first stop, not 50 miles from the ranch the waitress came over and plopped down at the table and told me what to order.

I knew then things were off to a normal start. I tossed a few grains of salt over my shoulder going out the front door and forgot about licking butter off my fingers