

BOOK REVIEW-

THE PAPUA NEW GUINEA ATLAS

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PAPUA NEW GUINEA ATLAS - A NATION IN TRANSITION, edited by David King and Stephen Ranck was published in early 1982 by Robert Brown Associates (Australia) Pty Ltd, together with the University of Papua New Guinea. It costs K9.95.

This new atlas is designed to replace an earlier atlas edited by Ward and Lea, and published in 1970. Both books are set out in the same way - that is, very small scale maps with notes about each map, including suggestions for further reading. This allows us to compare the two atlases. Changes in human geography in Papua New Guinea over the last 10 years can be easily seen.

The use of coloured photographs and sometimes coloured maps has certainly made the new atlas more attractive. However, the choice of which maps have been coloured is hard to understand. Complex maps such as geology, vegetation, soil and landforms are in black and white, while the very simple livestock map is coloured.

The wide range of maps included is very impressive, especially in human, commercial and historical geography. Amongst others likely to be of special interest to readers of HARVEST are the maps on settlement patterns, farming systems, cash crops, livestock and fishing.

The biggest weakness of the PAPUA NEW GUINEA ATLAS is that in following the lay-out of the Ward and Lea atlas, the maps have been made much too small. The scale chosen is suitable for a sketch map in a simple text book on the geography of Papua New Guinea. It is not suitable for an atlas.

For example, in the relief map (showing altitude), there is no room to name even one mountain range. Only four contours (lines joining points at the same altitude above sea level) are used. The landforms map shows that the 200 m a.s.l. altitude is very significant in the topography (shape of the land - mountains, plains, etc.) of Papua New Guinea. However, the first contour in the relief map is at 300 m. This might have resulted because of the choice of scale.

In some cases, the problems of using too small a scale become impossible to overcome. These are cases, such as land use potential which depend on the physical environment (such as altitude, rainfall, etc.). C.S.I.R.O. found it a difficult job to produce an agricultural land use potential map at a much bigger scale. Therefore, it is even more difficult to reduce the information on this large map, to the small size used in the PAPUA NEW GUINEA ATLAS.

We would advise serious workers on the physical environment of Papua New Guinea who need an atlas, to use the much older JACANDRA ATLAS. This contains maps of a much more useful size.

In spite of the criticisms above, the PAPUA NEW GUINEA ATLAS contains much valuable information on the human, commercial and historical geography of Papua New Guinea. The information is neatly, pleasingly and concisely presented.

We hope that the many users of the atlas will realise that the small scale maps have only limited use. If people are aware of this, they will be less likely to draw incorrect conclusions from the maps.

Copies of the PAPUA NEW GUINEA ATLAS can be obtained from most good bookshops, or you can order it from:

Gordon and Gotch (P.N.G.) Ltd
P.O. Box 3395
PORT MORESBY