THE MAMMALIAN FAUNA OF BOUGAINVILLE ISLAND, SOLOMONS GROUP.

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Although Bougainville Island is essentially a zoo-geographical part of the Solomons, annexation by Germany and subsequent transfer under mandate to Australia has rather inaptly linked it politically as well as postally with the more distant Bismarck Archipelago, so that it is sometimes regarded as being an intermediate or buffer island between those groups. Actually, more than one hundred miles of open ocean separate Bougainville from New Ireland, whereas to the south only the twenty-six odd miles of Bougainville Strait, obstructed by numerous islands, separates it from the large island of Choiseul, a distance also scarcely exceeded between any of the larger islands of the group.

Considerable faunistic interest therefore attaches to Bougainville as a base of deployment for the mammals found within the Solomons—a fact which, coupled with ts size and rugged nature, accounts for the relatively rich variety of mammals secured there recently for the Australian Museum by the Reverend J. B. Poncelet, S.M., of the Catholic Mission at Buin, South Bougainville. Largest of the group, discovered by Mendana in 1567, the island is about one hundred and ten miles long and from twenty to thirty-five miles wide, with a volcano erupting at intervals from a 6,000-ft. peak of the mountain range, which extends throughout its length and attains in Mount Balbi the astonishing altitude of 10,171 feet.

Owing to the great elevation, and rugged and mainly shelving coastline, which formed a natural barrier in overcoming the ferocity of the inhabitants, Bougainville was until recently the least known of the group. It is less than fifty years since missionaries began their civilizing work at Buin, the southern point facing the remainder of the group, and then only after great difficulty in getting hold of a few sickly natives and proving their friendly intentions by kindly treatment and cures was it possible to venture forth without firearms.

At present there are inland parts where the natives have not yet made contact with whites, and in May, 1935, a newspaper reported the experience of a missionary who penetrated the mountains in search of an unknown community. Armed only with a walking stick and accompanied by nine mission boys, he eventually located the settlement, where the natives were so amazed at the colour of the first European seen that they actually rubbed his skin to make certain the colour was not painted on. Discussing his fate, the natives apparently concluded that a man of peace was not worth killing, to the relief of the priest, who said he was naturally terrified, as the natives, though not cannibals in the sense of killing to eat, have been known to kill and feast upon intruders.

Although government stations and plantations are now well established and a palm-shaded road runs along the coast, and the known natives are nearly all friendly towards strangers, in spite of submitting to civilized taxation, past difficulties and dangers evidently kept the large island a close preserve from explorer-naturalists and