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FEATURED

Traveling from Papua New Guinea to show children the world at Camporee

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A group of women from Papua New Guinea cook dinner at their campsite in the International Village inside Morningside Park of Cam-plex during the fourth day of International Pathfinder Camporee in Gillette.

News Record Photo/Luke Johnson

About 60,000 people traveled to the International Pathfinder Camporee in Gillette, each with their own story of how they got here.

Journeys are complicated but travel is linear. Regardless of how far one goes, the telling of how they went from start to finish amounts to a straight line.

Much more interesting is the question of why each person left home in the first place, especially to brace the elements in Gillette for a week. In that case, the farther the journey, the more pressing the reason for it.

Few traveled as far as the 165 people who arrived in Gillette this week from Papua New Guinea after traveling more than 7,000 miles across the Pacific Ocean and western United States. Their reasons vary for the international trip, at no small expense to their own pockets. At their core, their reasons are simple: for their children to see the world.

“It’s educational for them, to see what’s out there in the world that we don’t have back home,” said Linda Sombuki, who’s with a group of 14 from Waigani Seventh-day Adventist Church in Papua New Guinea.

“It gives them a different perspective,” she added. “What they want to pursue in the future can change by observing and being part of it all.”



Pathfinders from Papua New Guinea play between their tents in the International Village inside Morningside Park at Cam-plex during the fourth day of International Pathfinder Camporee in Gillette.

News Record Photo/Luke Johnson

Through sunshine, rain and cold, the parents guide and tag along with their young ones, church Pathfinders, who like scout troops, earn their “honors” in the form of skills they hone and knowledge they display through activities.

Participating in Camporee also gives them a chance to see the world, a trip that for many who, whether they travel alone or as a family, experience a journey they may take only once in their lives.

“It’s like a once in a lifetime trip to bring my husband and my child to the U.S.A.,” said Esther Haurom.

“It’s only once that they’re a Pathfinder, so we’d like to give them that experience, which is why we’re here,” Sombuki added.



A group of women from Papua New Guinea cook dinner at their campsite in the International Village inside Morningside park at Cam-plex during the fourth day of International Pathfinder Camporee in Gillette.

News Record Photo/Luke Johnson

It’s obvious that getting from the large Oceanic island north of Australia to anywhere in Middle America presents logistical challenges. The sacrifice required is more difficult to see.

From A to B

The entire group from Papua New Guinea traveled to Gillette in several groups, which on their own were still quite large, Sombuki said. She traveled in a small group of three. The rest of her church traveled ahead of time, flying from Papua New Guinea to Sydney, Australia, before crossing the Pacific Ocean and landing in Los Angeles.

From there, they flew direct to Chicago and spent time in nearby Berrien Springs, Michigan, home of Andrews University, an Adventist school. That group then took a bus to Gillette, taking about a week in all to reach Camporee.

There's a practical element of bringing young Pathfinders to the world stage to learn from their peers and learn skills they otherwise wouldn't have access to back home. In the process, there's hope that the experiences open their eyes to the possibilities and an understanding of the world beyond their home.

"They see the things on TV then they come to see reality, and how these things are put together," said Owen Korawali.

But with religion at the center of the gathering, it's also about faith and worship.

"The worship comes together with the camping," Haurom said. "We have to do the honors but we must also be involved in the worship as well. We must bring them all together here. I think for Papua New Guinea, we consider worship as part of the Camporee."

That ties into the event's nightly activity, a showing in front of tens of thousands of attendees at Cam-plex Park, which Haurom said was "one of the main reasons" she and many from her group committed to the trip.

Papua New Guinea is a far distance from the United States, and perhaps equally different in certain other respects.

"It's between developed and underdeveloped, in a sense," Sombuki said.

They estimated that attending Camporee cost each person in their group in the neighborhood of 6,000 Australian dollars (\$4,000). Understanding that their country's currency, a kina, is worth about 25 cents, puts that cost into greater perspective.

Wages in the country vary depending on the industry and profession, but minimum wage equates to about \$1 dollar an hour.

"Pretty much our country is developing but at a slow pace," Sombuki added.

But there are some advantages to shopping stateside, particularly when it comes to certain fruits, like strawberries and grapes, and certain sweets.

"We like chocolate," said Nancy Samuel with a smile. "Back in our country it's very expensive."

Making it in Gillette

The thunderstorm that swept through Gillette and rained down on Cam-plex on Tuesday affected campers from Papua New Guinea in the International Village, which is found on the race track of Morningside Park.

But by Thursday, the group had mostly recovered from the storm, and layered up for the abnormally chilly August weather. Joe and Wendy Urbin came from Spokane, Washington, and have settled in with the group from Papua New Guinea.

Wendy's from the island, but the one woman she knew and planned to connect with at Camporee had a last-minute change of plans after a death in the family, she said. Still, she and her husband helped those from her homeland settle into camp.

“We’re here pretty much for everybody, everybody who needs it,” Joe said.

They cooked the first meals when the group first arrived and have driven carloads to Walmart throughout the week, including to buy a couple of tents and a few sleeping bags after the storm.

When the storm approached, an announcement was made instructing people to take shelter inside, which frightened some of the kids, Haurom said. They drew on stories of Moses and said prayers, which calmed them down while it ran its course.



A Pathfinder from Papua New Guinea grabs a drink from his tent at Cam-plex during the fourth day of International Pathfinder Camporee in Gillette.

News Record Photo/Luke Johnson

Once the skies cleared, a double rainbow spread across the sky, emerging where the clouds just were. People cheered the moment, finding meaning and symbolism while stepping out from barns and buildings around Cam-plex. In some cases, they also found their homes from the week had been wiped out.

The kids from Papua New Guinea were among the ones celebrating the moment, and also the ones who found their campsites in puddles.

That weather was unlike the weather in Papua New Guinea, but so were many things about this week for those who sacrificed to gather across the world. The parents and adults knew some of the headaches and complications that may arise when not just traveling, and not just camping, but doing so with 60,000 people in northeast Wyoming.

All the way from the other side of the world, they bore the brunt of those challenges, so their kids could have moments like that, outlasting a storm and in awe of a rainbow, making memories they won't soon forget and learning what a world there is to see.

Jake Goodrick