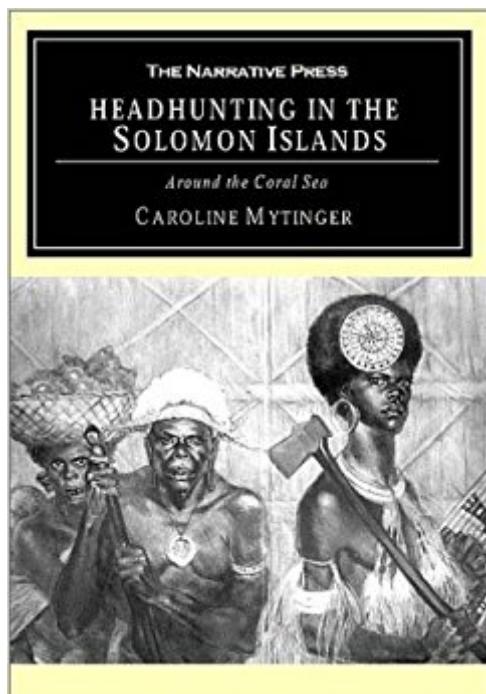


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# Headhunting In The Solomon Islands: Around The Coral Sea



## Synopsis

Carolyn Mytinger, an artist and amateur anthropologist, set off in the late 1930s with her friend to paint indigenous people in the Solomon Islands.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Mytinger is an artist and amateur anthropologist. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Caroline Mytinger, an artist and amateur anthropologist, set off in the late 1930's with her friend Margaret Warner on an expedition to paint indigenous people in the Solomon Islands. She wanted to record the different types of people before the "civilizing" process and intermarriage made it impossible to distinguish pure island races. While Mytinger's language does occasionally reveal the prejudices of her time, she respected native people and was very cynical about "civilization" and the pompous attitude of the white people in the Solomon Islands. However, Mytinger is rarely serious, and her book is most notably funny and honest. She never shirks the truth, no matter how shocking or just plain gross it might have seemed to her contemporaries. She seems to relish description of the hideous infections and other maladies that plague the artistic Expedition, as well as the constant presence of insects: "It was the invisible hordes of mosquitoes in the dark under the table, and those working down our thinly clad backs that absorbed our attention. I was sitting on a cane chair and, so help me, they were stabbing up from below. To make the situation acute our hosts had set a very formal key - we were Miss This and they Mr. That - not an atmosphere sympathetic to easing

things as a cow does on a tree." Headhunting in the Solomon Islands is an incredibly rich sensory experience; you can practically feel the tropical sweat dripping off these pages; smells and tastes and colors spring out of Mytinger's prose: "All up and down the lagoon...was a labyrinth of little coral-made islands and waterways that had a varying depth and a snow-white coral sea-bottom. That made the blues of the water every shade from deep purplish ultramarine to peacock and robin's-egg blue. And there were streaks of tender green and yellow where the coral castles reached near the surface. The blue of this water was the first distinct palette color we had seen in this blinding dark and light world." Most of the island experience is not this idyllic, however, and each new location brings a host of fresh obstacles: days of stifling uninterrupted heat, fevers, terrible faux pas with the natives (like entering the 'men's garden' where no women are allowed), foolish mistakes (like giving one of her models a piece of melted gum, which ends up strung all over the woman and her baby), constant skin infections, and of course the ever-present mosquitoes. Not exactly the best circumstances for painting portraits, but the two friends meet it all with good humor and energy. Mytinger and Warner went chasing adventure in the name of science - something rarely done by women at the time, and they did it in the face of universal disapproval and even terror on the part of their families, who didn't expect them to come back alive. Not only that, but they had virtually no money and no scientific support. But live they did, and they brought back beautiful paintings and the captivating stories contained in this fine book.

To experience the trip taken by these two women to Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands was outstanding. The time era this was undertaken had no frills and comforts as we know as modern day travelers. The legacy of these trips is that the world, through Caroline Mytinger's paintings, can see what the people were like and in color! It brings all the old photos in black and white, to an added dimension, and back again to re appreciate the beauty of the photo subjects. Both books are gutsy and potent reminders that much is achieved outside of one's comfort zone. These two books have enriched my time spent at the destinations in the book where I had lived for extended periods of my life. Rae SmartNoosaAustralia

This was a book my parents had in their library which over the years somehow got lost. Finding it again, in good condition, was wonderful. What a great service you provide.

Two women travel about the Coral Sea painting portraits of natives and visiting plantations there in the late '30's. To us, the names of these then and now peaceful tropical places are loaded with

horror and regret: Guadalcanar, Rabaul, Bougainville. Prophetically Mytinger details an incident on a British copra plantation in a world vanished away like smoke: the missus kicks a bush boy for using cocoanut husks on the fire, which burn too brightly. "Can every English clergyman's daughter kick like a kangaroo?" asks Caroline. Later the copra shed burns down mysteriously, ruining the missus. Her husband had died some time before and her thumb was infected. "It was the fact that she did not throw her head on the table and sob like any woman that undid me. I went for a walk down on the beach and did it for her."

When I first found this book (1st edition at a yard sale!) I was a college student in my early twenties. I had lived a fairly adventurous life and done things most females haven't done; nevertheless, I was entertained by this easy-to-read, tongue-in-cheek TRUE tale of the two young women living in the 1930's and doing something far outside the norm. Although some of the language is dated, it helps give the story a sense of era, and it makes me think about all the old classic films of that period, when women wore gloves and hats and (gasp) high heels and stockings. So when I read about these two young ladies traveling with their gloves and hats and stockings, and being invited to dinner and having to dress up (in the tropics!) and sweat and still remain prim and proper, I have nothing but the highest regard for them. Because then, the next day, these same two women are out in the hot sun, lugging their equipment and luggage and working out all those details of travel by themselves, with no guides, no internet, no cell phones, no assistance...and through it all, they still remain so balanced and optimistic and lively. About 10 years ago I re-read this book and enjoyed it just as much as the first time. Now, at almost age 50, I am buying (Christmas gift) it for my teen daughter, a "girly-girl" herself who has traversed the Andes mountains, delved into the , ridden elephants through Asian jungles, hiked volcanos, and trekked across deserts and glaciers alike with a great deal of earnest enthusiasm and little complaint. It is a book she will truly appreciate.

This book tells the story of two young American women who set off on an independent "Exposition" to the South Seas in the 1930s. They had the lofty goal of painting "the portrait of a race of primitive negroids living in the Southwest Pacific." Of the two young women, Mytinger was the painter, and her friend Margaret was her faithful companion and assistant. They started off from San Francisco with four hundred dollars in their pockets and a cigarette tin containing supplies for doing charcoal drawings. The idea was to supplement their meager cash and support themselves along the journey by drawing portraits of people they met. Despite the odds, which spared them no end of adventures, from capsizing, to fistfights, to malaria, they survived the journey and made it back home with a

story to tell. The book is somewhat of a period piece, in that the author comes across as living her life through whimsy in a feminine sort of way-but at the same time, she is also a feminist, proud of the fact that she is traveling together with her friend in wild places that many men from back home would deem too dangerous to visit. Mytinger writes from a time before the word "politically correct" was invented, and much of the terminology that she uses to describe the local people that she meets would not be considered acceptable today. However, the manner of her descriptions are not at all out of line with the standards of her time. Modern readers interested in living conditions in the South Seas, especially in the Solomon Islands and New Guinea during the time just before the Second World War will find this a treasure trove of information. Mytinger tells us about life on the plantations, and life in native villages. She tells us who was getting along with whom, the Americans, the British, the Germans, Japanese, and of course, members of all the various local tribes. During the two years of their Exposition, Mytinger did indeed find many heads to paint. But the conditions of the journey were not conducive to assembling a large collection of portraits. All of her painting supplies were destroyed in the first watery landing on the islands. She was eventually able to get enough paints together from various sources to be able to cob a paint kit together and get some heads on canvas. Unfortunately, most of the collection was lost and never made it back home. Nevertheless, apparently, she had copies of a few of the portraits, which appear reproduced in black-and-white in several places throughout the book.

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