

'For me, personally, Southeast Asia has been my life':

Doug Johnston, one of the first two Kiwi volunteers in Sarawak

When Doug Johnston and John Baird went as volunteers to Sarawak in 1962, it was such an exotic adventure that they took with them a letter of introduction from then Prime Minister, Keith Holyoake. Illustrated with some of his newspaper clippings from the time, here Doug outlines his pioneering adventure and its lifelong impact.

In 1962 John Baird and I were the first two secondary school leavers to go to Sarawak. This happened through the initiative of Reg Hornsby (Christ's College) and Charles Caldwell (Christchurch Boys' High School), headmasters of two boys secondary schools in Christchurch. John served at a community development scheme at Lemanak whereas I taught at a Government Secondary School at Kanowit on the Rejang River.

Our introduction to Southeast Asia was greatly facilitated by Peter Joe Chia, a Singapore school teacher, who met us off the plane and put us up in his home for several days until we made the final hop to Sarawak.

The following year three more boys from Christchurch schools also went to Sarawak. These were Peter England (Christchurch Boys' High School), Hugh Wilson (St Andrew's College) and John Davis (Christ's College).



These first New Zealand volunteers went to East Malaysia under the auspices of the VSO scheme.

During 1963 New Zealand's own volunteer scheme was established

(VSA) and still operates but now mainly in the Pacific.

I was also the first New Zealand volunteer to return for a second volunteer assignment. In 1969 through VSA my wife Margaret and I taught at the government secondary school in Keningau, Sabah. This school drew pupils from as far afield as Pensiangan near the Indonesian border and Sipitang on the coast. This was a fascinating experience as both staff and students came from a wide range of ethnicities and backgrounds. The trip to Keningau in those days involved a wood-burning train journey followed by a landrover ride on rough rural roads.

There was no doubt as to the long term benefits for me of our experiences in Sarawak and the value of the support we had from VSO. For me personally Southeast Asia has been my life - I gained a PhD after field research in Malaysia, and became a lecturer on Southeast Asian geography at the University of Canterbury spending my sabbaticals in South East Asia and presenting at conferences. I also spent two years on the staff of United Nations ESCAP (Bangkok) specialising in transport conditions in rural areas.

Following our experience in Asia, Margaret became involved in teaching ESOL to refugee and new migrant students in Christchurch secondary schools, in particular at Hagley College. She taught there for 10 years in the specialist intensive secondary preparation programme for refugee and new migrant teenagers. Later she became a schools advisor for a large area of the South Island. This role involved visiting schools with newly arrived refugee or new migrant students and providing teacher professional development in supporting these students in mainstream classes.

P.M. MEETS YOUTH GOING TO SARAWAK

WHEN 18-year-old John Baird, head prefect of Christ's College, leaves on January 11 for Sarawak, he will carry in his pocket a letter from the Prime Minister (Mr Holyoake).

"I would like to help you in some way," Mr Holyoake told John yesterday, "and perhaps a letter of introduction may assist you some time."

When the Prime Minister knew he was coming to Christchurch yesterday, he expressed the wish to meet both John and Douglas Johnston of Boys' High School, who have been chosen as the first New Zealand boys to travel under

the auspices of the English organisation, Voluntary Service Overseas.

Unfortunately, Douglas was away on holiday, but John spent half an hour with Mr Holyoake in his hotel, where he was also presented to Mrs Holyoake.

The Prime Minister commended him on his decision to give up a year of his time to undertake voluntary work, but John told him he felt he was gaining more than he was giving.

Easier Now

He and Douglas would be attached to the Government in Sarawak for almost a year, during which time they expected to assist

with teaching in one of the country's few secondary schools.

"I would like to give this year of service," John said, "and I think it is easier to do it now than after I have gained my university degrees. I also think our country is going to be bound more closely with South-east Asia and that it is good to know more about the area."

His head master (Mr H. R. Hornsby) had known of the scheme and had written to see if it would be possible for New Zealand boys to be included. John told Mr Holyoake.

The organisation had replied that it would have been sending sixteen boys to Sarawak, but it would be happy if two of them could come from the Dominion. Mr Hornsby had been asked to select two suitable people.

"Probably if the idea continues, future selection will be on a competitive basis."

● Picture below shows Mr Holyoake taking a note of John Baird's address so that he can send him a letter of introduction to take to Sarawak.

TO TEACH IN SARAWAK

Christchurch B.H.S. Pupil

A 17-year-old pupil at Christchurch Boys' High School, D. C. Johnston, will spend next year in Sarawak where he will teach at a Dyak boarding school.

The headmaster (Mr C. F. S. Caldwell) made the announcement at assembly yesterday.

A fifth-year boy, Johnston has been a school monitor for two years. He is captain of the First XV, is a good athlete and plays cricket and tennis. On his return from Sarawak he will be going to Canterbury University to study for a degree preparatory to becoming a post-primary school teacher.

He and J. S. Baird, head prefect at Christ's College, are going to Sarawak under the auspices of Voluntary Service Overseas, an English organisation, and will leave here about January 10. The organisation has been sending boys to different parts of the Commonwealth for a number of years. The boys help underdeveloped countries by teaching, by working on community services and similar undertakings. They are not paid but get their keep and pocket money. Shipping companies assist with their transport.

The boys will return to New Zealand shortly before Christmas next year.

Two Schoolboys For Sarawak

The head prefect at Christ's College, J. S. Baird, and a pupil of the Christchurch Boys' High School would spend next year in Sarawak, said the headmaster (Mr H. R. Hornsby), at the college's prize-giving ceremony last evening.

Mr Hornsby said that Baird would be in Sarawak under the auspices of an English organisation, Voluntary Service Overseas, which for some years had been sending to all parts of the Commonwealth English boys of 18 and 19 who had time to spend after leaving school before they could enter an English university.

"This year, 1961-62, the organisation has sent 168 volunteers to 34 countries, but Baird and a Christchurch Boys' High School boy will be the first New Zealanders, as far as I

know, to be sent," said Mr Hornsby. "As well as being a year of service to the peoples of the Commonwealth, it will certainly add to the two boys' knowledge of the people of South-east Asia, and indeed they will, in their turn, make the people they come in contact with know a little more of this country and its inhabitants."

"Baird will, I believe, be employed with Dyaks in a secondary school in Sarawak, as a start, but there is obviously a chance for high adventure, and I am glad that two boys from Christchurch will be the pioneers from this country in this scheme."

The headmaster of the Christchurch Boys' High School (Mr C. F. S. Caldwell) said last evening that the name of his school's pupil to go to Sarawak would be announced at assembly today.