

JAMES PATRICK SINCLAIR

CITATION FOR AN HONORARY DEGREE

Mr Chancellor, it is my privilege to present James Patrick Sinclair for a degree of The Australian National University.

Mr Sinclair was born at Dubbo, NSW, on 18 April 1928. In 1948, after a five and half months course at the Australian School of Pacific Administration in Sydney, Mr Sinclair went north as a cadet patrol officer in the Australian Administration of Papua and New Guinea. He was just twenty. It was characteristic of Australian Government in Papua New Guinea to give responsibility for transforming the lives of peoples to officers who were so young and so briefly trained. It is characteristic of Mr Sinclair that he discharged those responsibilities with respect and sensitivity for the peoples and institutions he encountered. He was conscious that his work was a privilege. He later wrote of those years:

I think that most men who have patrolled in the uncontrolled ... areas will agree that the years so spent are in many ways the finest and most rewarding of the patrol officer's life, filled with the satisfaction of country covered, new people seen and new mountains climbed.

An outstanding postwar patrol officer, in 1954 and '55 Mr Sinclair was selected to lead patrols into one of Papua New Guinea's last extensive unexplored areas, in the Southern Highlands. In 1957 he led the famous patrol from which Maslyn Williams made the acclaimed *New Guinea Patrol* for the Commonwealth Film Unit. During the period 1968 to 1975, as acting District Commissioner and then District Commissioner, Mr Sinclair encouraged the replacement of Australian by Papua New Guinean officers - a process called 'localisation'. His empathy with Papua New Guineans meant that he was one of the last DCs to be localised. In 1993 Papua New Guinea awarded him an Order of the British Empire for services to the state and to literature.

Mr Sinclair's most singular achievement is his 25 books on Papua New Guinea, in particular its history. Most were commissioned, most had print-runs of 5,000 plus, embracing a great variety of subjects, without which knowledge of Papua New Guinea both there and in Australia would be much less. Mr Sinclair could never devote more than two or three years to a book; nonetheless many are cited by academics, several of them frequently. At least eight would each merit a master of arts in any Australian university, five more could each earn a doctorate, and one based on his field experience, *Behind the Ranges: Patrolling in New Guinea*, is a rare and invaluable original contribution to Papua New Guinea and Australian history. Others comprise or include Mr Sinclair's superb photographs of Highlanders during early contact, well captioned - the best single record in existence of those vanished days. Mr Sinclair has a talent for identifying subjects which encapsulate the Australian experience in Papua New Guinea, and for conveying what that was like.

Since its foundation, the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies has been the leading centre in the world for research on Papua New Guinea. Scholars of The Australian National University in the field have drawn often on the knowledge and practical assistance of 'outside' men such as Mr Sinclair. It is therefore most appropriate that this University honour Mr Sinclair for work as an officer who discharged a national responsibility with efficiency and compassion, and who has done so much to increase popular and scholarly understanding of the two countries.

The sum of Mr Sinclair's work in the field and in writing represents an exceptional contribution to both Australia and Papua New Guinea. Mr Sinclair is one to whom Australia can point to demonstrate the high calibre of its work in Papua New Guinea.

Mr Chancellor, it is with great pleasure that I present James Patrick Sinclair, that you may confer on him the Degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, on the ground of his distinguished creative achievement as a scholar in the field of the study of the people and history of Australia and Papua New Guinea.

Professor J J Fox
Director
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University

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