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Children of Maraone Village, Bauro Highlands, Makira Island. The Bauro Highlands support some of the last forest dependent communities in the Solomon Islands. The Makira Community Conservation Foundation is working with communities here to protect these last forests from loggers.

The Bauro Highlands on the island of Makira is an area of high conservation value in Solomon Islands. The forests here support many forest dependent communities. Recently logging companies have swath through many of these last remaining forests. However efforts are being made by communities of Bauro Highlands, and local and international conservation NGO's to save these last forests. Large - scale logging has removed almost all of the lowland forests of the Solomon Islands. Logging companies are said to have influenced much of the political and economic climate in this country.

ON THE TRAIL

The Melanesian bush, wildlife and stunning landscape has much to offer the eco-tourist, avid bush walker, trekker, mountain climber, or outdoor photographer. There are walks which can last for only a few hours to hikes which take several days. In this section PATRICK PIKACHA samples some of the most accessible walking trails around the Solomon Islands.

Mt Rano Trail Kolombangara Island

Probably the most accessible trail in the Solomon Islands, the Mt Rano trail begins at Iriri Village on North Kolombangara Island. A boat transfer from Gizo town to Iriri takes about an hour. Boat transfers can be arranged with Gizo hotel staff or one can hitch a ride on the many boat ferries that travel from Gizo to Kolombangara.

The beginning of trail has been recently damaged by a logging road, however the upper reaches of the trail is still very much intact. The trail winds through old growth tropical rainforests, cyanthea forests, palm forests. One is able to see different species of orchids along the trail as well as many birds. At night frogs are abundant in the forest.

The trail to the campsite, Professor camp, is about 13km's. The camp is situated at 1050m overlooking North Kolombangara, Gizo, Nusatupe, Vella Lavella, Ranongga and Simbo Island.

The next day one is able to trek to high elevation forests. Upon reaching an elevation of 1700m, the mossy effect is evident. Endemic frogs, birds, and many species of plants, especially orchids may be spotted here.

A water tight bag, container, or pelican case is necessary to keep camera contents dry.

Contact: Iriri Village Tourism Committee, North Kolombangara Island or Gizo Hotel, Gizo.

Mt Mariu Trail, Gatokae Island

The Mt Mariu trail begins at either Peava or Biche Village on Gatokae Island. It is accessible through arrangements with local villagers or staff of Wilderness Lodge (thewildernesslodge.org). A campsite is erected on the upper reaches of the Kavalavata River, amidst large stands of old growth trees.

The following day a 5 hour hike to the summit of Mt Mariu takes place. The hike takes in spectacular views of the Marovo Lagoon. Birds are abundant near the summit. Orchids including the montane ground orchid *calanthe ventilabrum* are common here.

Contact: Wilderness lodge (www.thewildernesslodge.org), Peava Village, Gatokae Island.

Bauro Highlands Trail, Makira Island

The Bauro Highlands trail has been long established. It is perhaps one of the longer accessible trails in the country passing through mountain villages on Makira Island.

Makira Island is high in bird endemism, and you will not be disappointed on this trail. A good binoculars, notebook and field guide is useful to carry.

Mountain villages and family hamlets are scattered along the trail ending at Maraone Village in the hinterland (See pictures on page 6).

The walk can generally take 2 to 3 days. There are a few village stays along the way, and many camping sites beside the Rawo River.

Villagers are able to put on a cultural show for visiting tourists, however it is best to notify the locals first before beginning your trek.

Upon returning, bags and equipment may be loaded onto a canoe with a guide at Nara Village, and one can tackle the rapids down the Rawo River.

Contact: Makira Community Conservation Foundation. Phone +677-50057.

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A note to travellers/guides/porters: Please do not harvest wild orchids from these forests.

Maraone village, nestled in the Bauro Highlands of Makira Island, Solomon Islands.

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Montane forests, Mt Rano trail, Kolombangara Island.

Montane forests, Mt Rano trail, Kolombangara Island.

Mt Rano trail, Kolombangara Island.

New Georgia monarch, Mt Mariu trail, Gatokae Island.

Solomon Islands Drongo *(Dicrurus solomenensis)*, Bauro Highlands, Makira Island