

NEW CALEDONIA -- BITS AND PIECES

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CELEBRATION OF FRENCH FESTIVALS AT NOUMEA

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New Caledonia celebrates two important festivals during the year -- one on July 14 and the other on September 24. The former is the Day of the Republic and the other the anniversary of France's annexation of the island in 1853.

The eve of these occasions is marked by a torchlight procession led by the military band through the streets of Noumea, the starting point being the barracks. The next day comes a review and children's games in the Place Courbet. Government House is the scene of gaiety in the evening where Noumea society gathers. The women, it is said, are noted for their frocking in the latest parisienne styles.

While the dance proceeds at Government House, the natives perform the pilou pilou in Coconut Square. To the beats of wooden drums, manou rolled round hips, adorned with feathers and coconut leaves with bust and face striped hideously with red, blue and white paint and brandishing tomahawks, the natives hark back to the days not long ago when this dance preceeded the satisfaction of cannibal habits.

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Ile Nou is the New Caledonian headquarters of Pan-American Airways. The first trial flight from San Francisco to Noumea was brought the Clipper down on the waters of Noumea harbour on August 28, 1939. It was considered a step of great importance in the commercial life of the islands. The old penitentiary buildings on Ile Nou were pulled down to make way for Pan-American's administrative offices and workshops. The regular service which included calls at Honolulu, Canton, Pago Pago, and later Suva in late 1941, was commenced in the middle of 1940.

New Caledonia has a counterpart of the New Zealand kiwi. It is the cagou, a bird which cannot fly and is found in the forests in the south of the island. It barks like a small pup and hides its head in the ground when pursued.

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The greatest contribution to New Caledonia's domestic economy is derived from the chromite and nickel mining industries. The principal mining centres are along the coasts at Thio, Voh, Tiebaghi and Nehou. Cattle breeding is next in importance, more important than husbandry as breeders do not have to contend, as have agriculturists, with Australian supplies.

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The native tree of New Zealand the Kauri is found prolifically in the forests in the south of New Caledonia. Timber companies have realised its possibilities and are now engaged in exploiting it as a major commercial enterprise.

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A race meeting was part of any large festival celebrated in Noumea. The course is at Magenta and well laid out. Australian jockeys were attracted by the events held, while the majority of the horses were bred in the Commonwealth and imported specifically for racing. Among the most prominent local bred horses was one named Flaneur from Michael Daly's stable. The horse was from a strain commencing at the outset of the island's colonisation. Another less successful than Flaneur, but nevertheless a strong contender at the meetings was Let Him Go, a descendant of Prince Rupert, a prominent winner, of O'Donoghue-Cheval's stable.

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An essence manufactured from the leaves of the niaouli, known commercially as Gomenol, is used as a preventative against lung troubles.