

## The Biage of Papua New Guinea



The Biage people live on the eastern slopes of the Owen Stanley mountains in the Kokoda sub-district of Oro province. Many of the villages are located on or near the famous Kokoda Trail; tourism is having a big impact on those villages and is an important source of income for many people.

The Biage people live in villages and hamlets of between 10 and 160 people, which range in elevation from around 400m to over 1400m. The villages higher up on the steep mountain slopes are smaller than the villages in the foothills. The villages at lower elevation are situated among oil palm plantations and old rubber plantations, but as you leave the valley, this is quickly replaced by rainforest. At the higher elevations it can become quite cold at night.

The Biage people grow their own food: taro, sweet potato, green vegetables and a variety of fruits.

The Seventh Day Adventist Church and Anglican Church have been working in the Biage area for about forty years, and other churches have started more recently. Although some villages had a revival in the 1980s, where many people turned away from using magic, in other villages magic is commonly used and many people live in fear of displeasing the spirits. Two Biage men are trying to translate Scripture and church materials into Biage, but lack training and support.

**Primary Religion:**

Christianity/Traditional

**Disciples (Matt 28:19):**

Less than 15%

**Churches:**

10

**Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):**

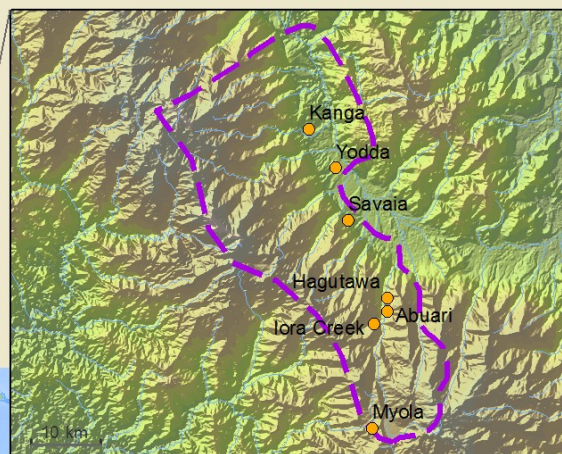
None

**Population (date):**

998 (2000)



### BIAGE HOMELAND



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### Have They Heard The Gospel?

Call Themselves Christian	90%
Believe In Jesus As God And Only Savior	Probably less than 15%
Believe In Their Local Traditional Religion	Probably more than 30%
Have Not Heard Who Jesus is	0%
Is The Word Of God Translated?	There is no Scripture available in the Biage language. Biage was previously thought to be a dialect of Mountain Koiali, which has a New Testament, but Biage speakers do not understand Mountain Koiali.
Hindrances to Scripture Distribution	Lack of Biage Scriptures.
Are Cross-Cultural Missionaries Needed?	Bible translation and good Bible teaching is needed among the Biage.

# The Biage of Papua New Guinea

## Group Description

### Geography & Environment

Biage speakers live in steep mountains near the Kokoda trail and also in the valley bottom. The mountainsides are covered with rainforest, while oil palm plantations dominate the valley bottom.

### Language/Linguistics

Percent Monolingual. 0%

### Literacy

Literacy Attitude Very receptive

Adult Literacy 45%

Percent Literate for Men 53%

Percent Literate for Women 35%

Active Literacy Program Yes

Comment There are 4 elementary schools which use the vernacular as the language of instruction. There used to be an adult literacy program in Felai but the teacher was too busy to continue teaching the classes. He is considering restarting it.

### Economics

Subsistence Type Pastoralist

Comment People grow fruit and vegetables to feed their families and to sell. Some people keep chickens or cows.

Average Income The national average is \$2700. The average in Biage is probably lower than this.

Occupation Subsistence farming

Income Sources Tourism (running guest houses, working as guides and porters for trekkers), cash crops (coffee, cocoa, vanilla, oil palm), selling garden produce. In one village, some people find gold.

Modernization/Utilities Many villages are equipped with solar-powered 2-way radios. The radios were donated by the Australian Army in appreciation of the help given to them during the battle for Kokoda in the second world war.

### Community Development

Health Care Poor

Comment There is a hospital at Kokoda Station. There is one other aid post, but it often does not have medicine.

Diet Good

Comment People grow a range of fruits and vegetables.

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Water	Good
Comment	There are numerous clear, fast flowing mountain streams.
Shelter Description	Houses are built a few feet off the ground. The floors are made from black palm, walls from local timber or woven bamboo and roofs from sago palm leaves in the valley, kunai grass on the mountain, and sometimes corrugated metal.
Electricity	A few families own generators.
Energy/Fuel	Most people cook on wood fires.
Clothing	Western; secondhand
Transportation	Walking
Infant Mortality Rate	5%
Life Expectancy	65 years.
Comment	Infant mortality and life expectancy are the national average. The figures in Biage are probably higher and lower respectively.
<b><u>Society and Culture</u></b>	
Family Structure	Patrilineal society. People live in a nuclear family but belong to an extended family in the village.
Authority Rule	Each clan has a leader, called the 'big man' or 'lawyer'. He leads his clan and resolves conflicts. There is also a chief who leads all the clans and sub-clans and resolves conflicts between people of different clans.
Social Habit/Groupings	People are members of a clan. People live in villages and hamlets of 10 to 160 people.
Recreation	Story-telling
Attitude to Outsiders	Indifferent
Comment	Villages on the Kokoda Trail have many tourists passing through and are indifferent to visitors. Villages away from the trail are welcoming to outsiders.
<b><u>Youth</u></b>	
Labor/Task	Fetching water and firewood, helping in the garden, looking after younger siblings
<b><u>Education</u></b>	
Primary Schools	6
Comment	4 elementary schools (grades Prep - 2) and 2 community schools (grades 1-6). Some Biage children attend Primary School (grades 3-8) at Kokoda Station.
Language of Instruction Early Years	Biage, Tok Pisin [tpi], English [eng]

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Language of Textbook

Biage, English [eng]

Comment on Instruction

In elementary schools, Biage is the language of instruction. In community schools teachers may use English, Tok Pisin and/or Biage, depending on what they are comfortable speaking.

Comment on Textbooks

Elementary school teachers create their own books in Biage. Apart from this, textbooks are in English.

Number of Schools Greater than  
90% Homogenous

5

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### Status of Christianity

#### Response To The Gospel

How Have They Responded  
to the Gospel?

One church reported that they had had a revival in the 1980s, following which many people had destroyed their traditional magic items. However, in general there are many nominal Christians.

Attitude to Christianity

Somewhat receptive

#### Church Growth

Total Baptized

750 (estimate)

Comment

Many nominal Christians

Number Of Pastors

7 (estimate)

Number Of Churches

10

Comment

6 SDA churches, also Anglican, Covenant Ministries International, New Apostolic and Renewal.

Number of Communities

17

History of Christianity, Year Began

1960

Comment

Seventh Day Adventist church along Kokoda trail. Anglican Church in Kanga village at a similar time.

#### Religion Population

Religion 1

Doubly professing

Comment

Many people profess Christianity but probably also believe traditional religion

Religion 2

Ethnic religions

Comment

Probably some people practice traditional religion; in some villages people are very afraid of spirits. Traditional practices are not talked about much.

Religion 3

Other/Small

Comment

There are some Jehovah's Witness members in at least one village.

#### Scripture Use

Comment

Majority of the churches.

Most people cannot adequately understand Scripture in their second language. Biage is the only language that everyone understands well.

## The Biage of Papua New Guinea

### Missions and Church

Organization #1	Seventh Day Adventist
Main Ministry	Other/Church
Year Started	1960s
Number of Adherents	Estimate of 400
Number of Congregations	6. At least 3 congregations do not have a pastor. There is also an SDA church at Kokoda Station.
Number of Local Workers	3
Language Used	Biage, Tok Pisin [tpi], English [eng], Hiri Motu [hmo]
Organization #2	Anglican Church
Country of Origin	The first missionaries to PNG came from the UK and Australia. The PNG church is now independent.
Main Ministry	Other/Church
Year Started	1969s
Number of Adherents	300
Number of Congregations	1
Language Used	Lay workers use Biage, Tok Pisin and English. When the Priest visits he uses Tok Pisin and English.
Organization #3	Covenant Ministries International
Main Ministry	Other/Church
Year Started	1978
Number of Adherents	140
Comment	Probably everyone in the village where the church is located has been a member of the church and might claim affiliation with it. Fewer than 20 people regularly attend church.
Number of Congregations	1
Comment	There is another CMI congregation at Kokoda Station.
Number of Local Workers	2
Number Using Local Language	2
Language Used	Biage, Tok Pisin
Organization #4	New Apostolic Church
Main Ministry	Other/Church
Year Started	1980
Number of Adherents	100 (estimate)
Number of Congregations	1
Organization #5	Renewal Church
Country of Origin	PNG
Main Ministry	Other/Church
Year Started	1990s
Number of Adherents	20
Number of Congregations	1

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Organization #6	Every Home for Christ
Main Ministry	Evangelism
Comment	Visiting home-to-home explaining the gospel. The group is based in the neighboring Hunjara-Kaina Ke language group, but also visit in the Biage area.
Year Started	1996
Number of National Workers	an SDA church at Kokoda Station. 11