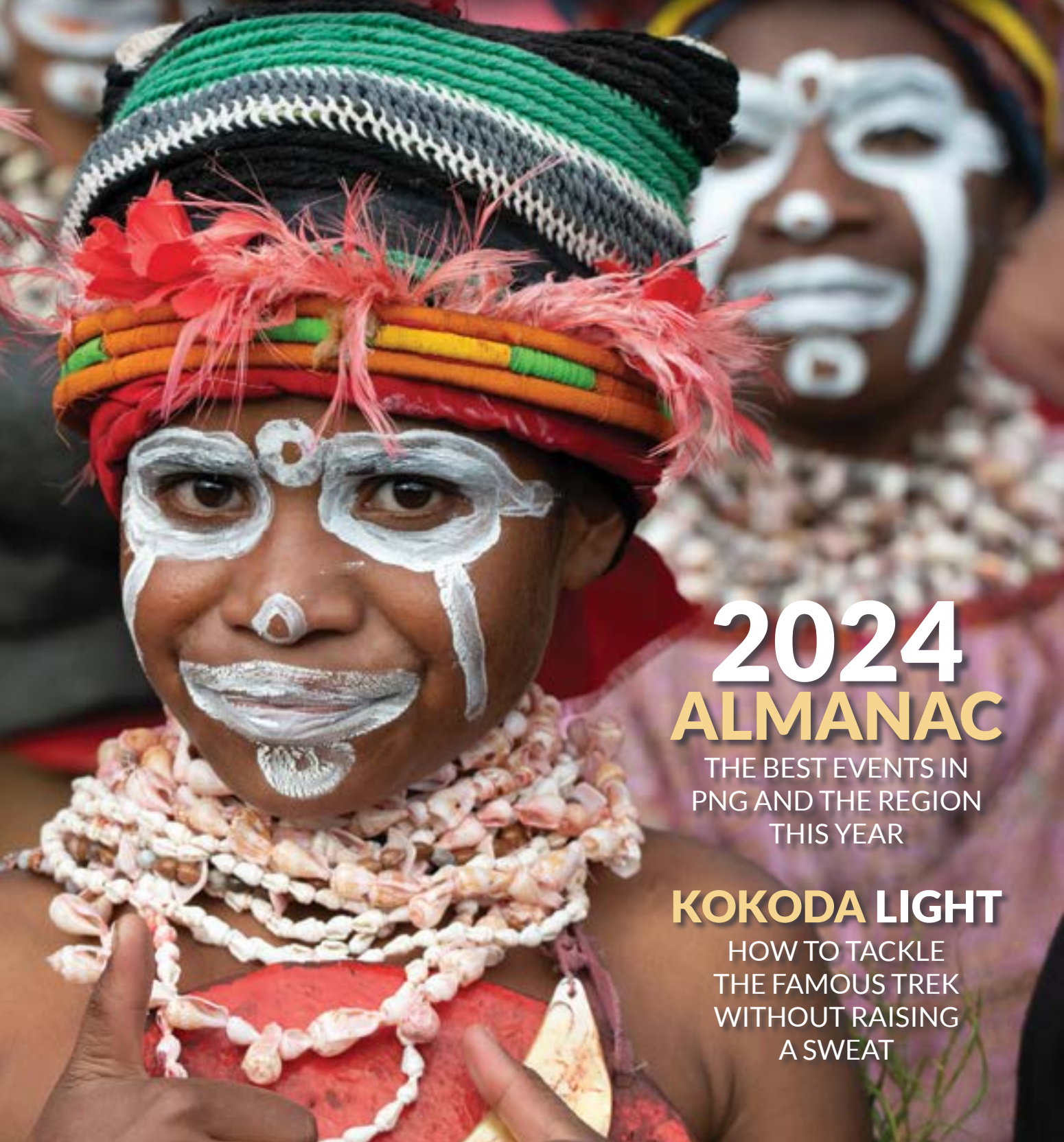


THE IN-FLIGHT MAGAZINE OF AIR NIUGINI VOLUME 1 JANUARY - MARCH 2024



# PARADISE



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# ARE WE ALONE?

A meteorite that crashed off Manus Island may hold clues to alien life in outer space. *Richard Andrews* reports.

A meteor that landed off Manus Island in 2014 may be the first sign of civilisation beyond our solar system, according to a leading astrophysicist.

US Space Command and further research involving the PNG University of Technology have confirmed that the 500-kilogram fireball was the first recognised interstellar meteor.

A Harvard University research team, led by Professor Avi Loeb, is analysing meteor debris retrieved last year from the ocean floor north of Manus. An expedition collected hundreds of tiny molten droplets, or spherules, from the debris, which are being analysed and dated.

"We're trying to confirm whether the spherules are like an alloy that is not made by nature, but originate from a technological civilisation," says Loeb.

"What made this object special was that it was the first to be recognised coming from outside the solar system, containing material stronger than the toughest iron space rocks," he says.

"This meteor was moving at a speed of 60 kilometres per second outside the solar system – faster than 95 per cent of all stars. So that suggests potentially that it could have been a spacecraft from another civilisation."

Dubbed 'The Alien Hunter' by British media, Loeb holds numerous awards and senior positions in physics, science and astronautics. In 2012, *Time* magazine selected the Boston professor as one of the 25 most influential people in space research.

Data from the 2014 meteor, recorded by US government sensors, went unnoticed for five years until Loeb and a Harvard



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The spherules (debris from the meteor) may originate from an advanced technological civilisation outside the solar system.

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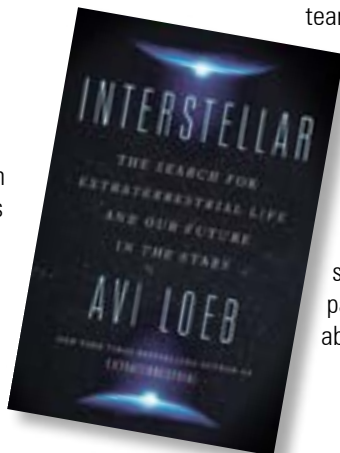


associate discovered it in 2019 and published their findings.

That led to a two-week US\$1.5 million (PGK5.5 million) expedition last June, funded by entrepreneur–philanthropist Charles Hoskinson. The 25 team members boarded the Australian research vessel *Silver Star* on Manus and set out for the meteorite site about 100 kilometres offshore.

Connected to the vessel by a five-kilometre cable, a purpose-built magnetic sled was deployed to retrieve iron particles by skimming across the seabed.

“Most of the material we found was volcanic ash, black powder,” says Loeb.



“It wasn’t until we used a fine mesh sieve to filter the volcanic ash that we found the tiny metallic spherules, created when asteroids collide with the Earth.

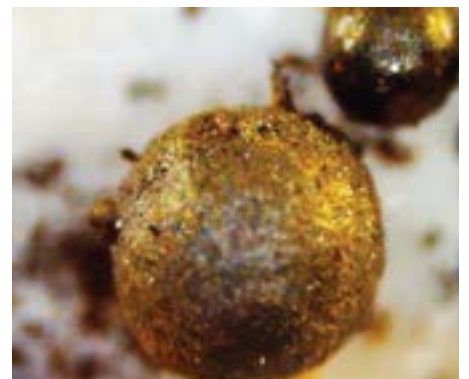
“That was a thrilling moment. I hugged the people around me.”

In collaboration with scientists and laboratories from around the world, Loeb’s team includes a research

partnership with the PNG University of Technology. Dr Jim Lem from the Mining Engineering Department travelled to Harvard University to take part in the analysis.

Early findings show that some spherules from the meteor path contain “extremely high abundances” of a previously

**Imagery of a meteor tearing through space (opposite page); scientists on the research vessel *Silver Star* off Manus Island (above left); Professor Avi Loeb (above); debris from the meteor that crashed into the ocean near Manus Island (below); Professor Loeb’s recent book (left).**



PICTURES: SUPPLIED BY PROFESSOR AVI LOEB

unknown combination of heavy elements that don't match terrestrial alloys natural to Earth, fallout from nuclear explosions or other natural meteors in the solar system.

This gives rise to the controversial theory that the spherules may originate from an advanced technological civilisation outside the solar system.

Loeb's latest book, *Interstellar*, discusses the implications of the Manus expedition and says that "humanity must reset its cultural understanding and expectation of what it means to have contact with interstellar extraterrestrial civilisations."

Loeb argues that for too long humanity's default on this subject has been to speak about it in the "hushed tones of conspiracy" and that scientific success should be shared, not secret.

He refers to a July hearing in the US House of Representatives about unidentified aerial phenomena – the government's name for



**Professor Avi Loeb with Papua New Guinean academic Dr Jim Lem who travelled to Harvard University in the US.**

UFOs. One whistleblower witness, David Grush, claimed the government secretly possesses materials from alien spacecraft and is reverse-engineering them.

As a result, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Shumer and a bipartisan group of five other senators have proposed extraordinary

legislation that would declassify as many records as possible regarding "the Pentagon's experience with unidentified foreign objects."

"I'm completely agnostic about the claim," says Loeb. "We have to wait until they go down this rabbit hole to see if it's real or not. But it's the first time I've seen politicians going down this path with the goal of figuring out what government has in its possession."

At the same time, Loeb writes "I am convinced that we are tantalisingly close not only to learning that terrestrial life is not the only life in the solar system, but that human civilisation is not the only civilisation to exist or have existed."

To back up this conviction, Loeb and his team hope to return to the meteor site to collect more material.

"Now we know where to look," he says. "Because these spherules are just like romantic rose petals that lead you to your partner." ■

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