



## Roteps Wet Mill

## Western Highlands, Mt Hagen, PNG

**Partner since:** 2019

**Traceable to:** Single Wet Mill,  
Smallholders

**Altitude:** 1650 - 1900 MASL

**Varietals:** Boubon, Typica and  
Arusha

**Processing:** Cherries are collected by trucks/agents sent by Paul within a 10-20 mile radius from his wet mill in Kuli. Cherries are delivered fresh to the mill, pulped, fermented for 2-3 days, then dried on long tarps for 7-10 days. Parchment is then trucked to Goroka in Eastern Highlands for final milling and export before delivery to the port in Lae.



Roteps Wet Mill is a large scale wet mill, common for the PNG Western Highlands context. Very few wet mills operate high in the mountains where you find the homes and farms of the majority of smallholder coffee producers. The owner of Roteps, Paul, sends out a strong team of cherry collection agents and their trucks on a daily basis to collect from known smallholders and small estates

within a 20 mile radius of the wet mill, which is located in Kuli, along the Highlands Highway east of the city of Mt. Hagen. As is common in PNG, a large, expansive drying field holds long tarps for drying, and the dry parchment is stored at a warehouse on site. The coffee is then sent for final milling into the town of Goroka before export out of the port of Lae. Premiums are paid to both agents and smallholders for premium ripe cherry, to reduce the number of lower grade lots he needs to dry separately. To keep ripe cherry from fermenting in the back the truck before milling, most trucks can only complete one or two routes up a single valley and back. Paul's wet mill, founded in 2013, is 100% pre-financed by our export partner in PNG, meaning we have a much higher level of control over cherry collection and we can pick the best lots coming out of this operation.



Papua New Guinea coffees most commonly hail from the Highlands – the high-altitude areas of the “mainland” and split up between Western (Hagen), Central and Eastern (Goroka) Highlands regions. Smaller regions are beginning to pop up (e.g. the smaller islands like New Britain). The country offers a diverse set of options not in processing (rare to see

anything but fully washed), but in producer format. Suppliers range from small cooperatives to well financed estates, to massive washing stations that can each produce dozens of containers per year. Crop to Cup's focus is generally on the smallholder coffees of PNG (as opposed to its estate coffees). While each smallholder farm is small in land size and yields are drastically low, the sheer volume of smallholder farmers allows the country to produce massive volumes most years.

Many smallholders pulp by hand and wash in bags on their own farms, then sell parchment to local collectors who then re-sell to larger middlemen who buy from the side of the road and sell to exporters in larger towns like Goroka and Hagen. Those are generally low-quality coffees, but they account for most of the volume produced by the country (usually sold as Y-Grade). Most specialty lots come from washing stations who send trucks far and wide to collect cherry from thousands of smallholders. Tarp drying is most common, and the daily or weekly lots that come out of these washing stations can be impressive, for many of them are well managed with strict red cherry collection, clean water and careful attention to drying. The other sources of PNG specialty lots are the new generation of coops and small, traceable producer groups. Coops and other organized farmer groups are now producing impressive qualities, but their numbers are still low. Much of this difficulty in building

membership is due to cultural and geopolitical issues between villages. Hundreds of disconnected languages are spoken across the Highlands, and historically there was not a lot of cooperation between villages. The support that agriculture provided was generally limited to each village, and each village is usually comprised of just one or a few families/clans. Further, the countless disparate areas of the Highlands only became connected upon the completion of the Highlands Highway (from the port in Lae to Hagen in the West) in the early 1950s (and “first” contact between Highlands and the coastal areas was not even until 1930!). To this day, access to the secondary valleys off the Highlands Highway is still difficult, and a lot of coffee is still transported by small prop plane from tiny airstrips in the middle of dense forest.

But when you do see coops, they are impressive. The examples of farmer organization we’ve seen in PNG often trump that of many other established producer countries. Coop farmers are often paid by cashless card swipe, and detailed home and family income growth plans are the norm. Traceability has improved as well, and we can now access lots as small as 10-20 bags produced by only one or two families. This has greatly improved our ability to weed out defective lots (which will always be common in such a smallholder context), and, over recent years, cup scores and

consistency have followed suit.