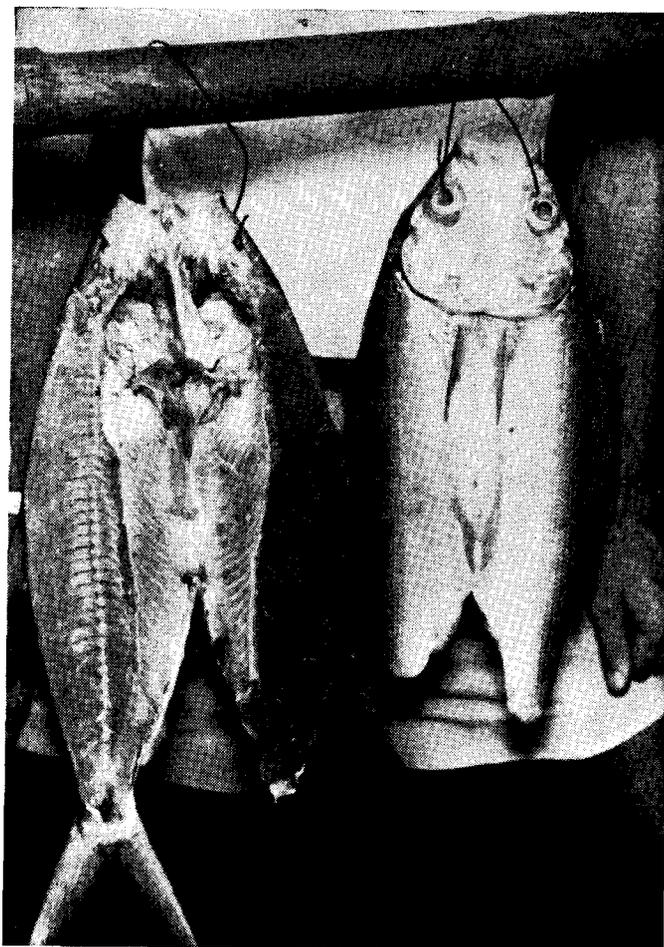




Inspection of fish being prepared for smoking. Each fish is cleaned, backbone removed, and then washed.



After soaking in brine, the fish are hung up until tacky to touch. Note wires hooked through eye sockets.

IT is essential for the production of a good quality smoked product that the fish be fresh, carefully cleaned and bled, brined in fresh brine made with good quality salt, and then smoked after a preliminary drying and heating to form a firm pellicle which prevents the absorption of moisture and bacteria.

The procedure described below will give a product with a limited keeping time. By increasing the period of drying and smoking, a product having a moisture content of less than 20% will be obtained, and this will keep in a satisfactory manner in the tropics for a period of from four to six months.

Cleaning, Curing, And Smoking Procedures

CLEANING: Fish is cleaned, backbone removed and all blood washed away. Bruised and badly-cut fish should be rejected. A certain skill is required to make the cut along the backbone so that the surface of the flesh remains smooth; a long, single, slow stroke with a suitable knife is most effective.

Curing Fish By Smoking

The method outlined below for the smoke-curing of fish, and the smoke-house appearing in the illustrations, were developed by the Department of Agriculture, Stock and Fisheries in the territory of Papua and New Guinea.

CURING: The cleaned fish — large pieces as fillets and smaller fish simply opened from the back — are put into brine and allowed to soak for 1 hour. Very large fish may require 1½ hours, but for average sized mullet, 1 hour is sufficient. They are then taken out, rinsed in a 3% brine to remove the surface salt, hung on sticks and placed on the draining racks in the shade, preferably in a breeze. After approximately 2 hours draining they become "tacky" to the touch and are placed in the smoke-house.

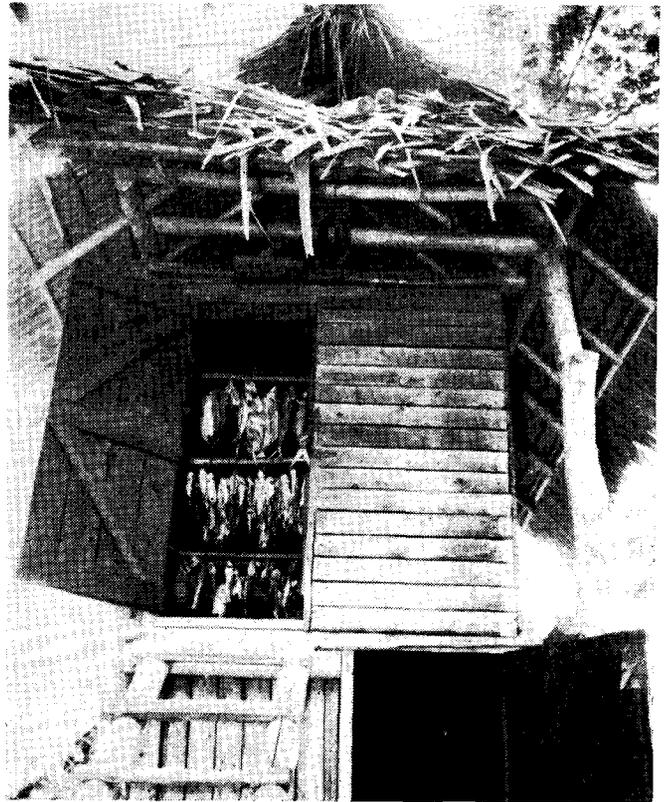
BRINE: Eight gallons of water, 12 pounds of salt, and 1 ounce of saltpetre

is sufficient to take about 50 fish or 100 pounds weight. Increase the amount proportionately if more fish are to be cured.

SMOKING: Open draught in ceiling to the fullest extent. Make wood fire and subject fish to an average heat. Should fish commence to quiver on the hooks, then the fire is too hot. After 2 hours draw the fire leaving all red coals in a heap in the centre. Then close draught in the ceiling to 1/4 open, make a ring round the coals with 1 bag of sawdust (approximately 150 lb. flour bag). After sawdust is ignited close draught on bottom of fire-room door. One bag of sawdust will smoulder for



This smoke-house is 6' square and 18' high (9' to arc mesh floor, which may be of bamboo). The smoke-house was built from packing cases, the lower section being lined with old galvanized iron. Roof and framework are of local materials. Coconut husks are being placed on the fire to make smoke.



Above right: View showing fish hung from racks inside the smoke-house.

Close-up of fish after one night of smoke-drying. Note shrivelled appearance.

approximately 10 hours. The fish should be medium-smoked after this period. Open all doors and draughters and allow it to come to normal temperature before removing from smoke-house.

HANDLING OF FISH: Fish should be brought in not later than 12 noon. This allows cleaning and curing to be finished by 3 p.m. From 3 to 5 p.m. the fish are drying. At approximately 5 p.m. they are ready for smoking. Then after 2 hours of heat at 7 p.m. sawdust may be put on and the smoke-house left for the night. It is better to have the draining of the fish finished before the damp night air sets in; if draining is incomplete, the fish will have not the tight "tackiness," and will tend to be spongy when smoked. Mullet of an average weight of 2 lb. smoke the best. Larger fish must be allowed to remain longer in the brine and also have a longer period under heat.