

- Yap State. Program on Environment, East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, 121 p.
- Merlin, M. and J. Juvik. 1996. *Irá me Neenier nón Chuuk*: Plants and their environments in Chuuk. Program on Environment, East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, 121 p.
- Merlin, M., R. Taulung and J. Juvik. 1993. *Sahk Kap Ac Kain In Acn Kosrae*: Plants and environments of Kosrae. Program on Environment, East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, 113 p.
- Merlin, M., D. Jano, W. Raynor, T. Keene, J. Juvik and B. Sebastian. 1992. *Tuhke en Pohnpei*: Plants of Pohnpei. Environment and Policy Institute, East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, 94 p.
- Merlin, M. and T. Keene. 1990. *Dellomel er a Belau*: Plants of Belau. Environment and Policy Institute, East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, 50 p.
- Moul, E.T. 1957. Preliminary report on the flora of Onotoa Atoll, Gilbert Islands. Atoll Research Bulletin No. 57.
- Roberts, N. 1998. The Holocene: An environmental history. Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd ed.
- Thaman, R.R. 1987. Plants of Kiribati: A listing and analysis of vernacular names. Atoll Research Bulletin No. 296.
- Thaman, R.R. 1990. Kiribati agroforestry: Trees, people, and the atoll environment. Atoll Research Bulletin No. 333.

Maka feke – Octopus fishing Tongan style

Dr Mecki Kronen, SPC Community Fisheries Scientist, Reef Fisheries Observatory

Traditional Tongan fishing techniques are partly based on myths, legends and beliefs. Bataille-Benguigui (1988) concluded that Tongan fishing techniques have a religious basis, are associated with rites or taboos, or are non-ritual but still concerned with the art of fishing.

Increased urbanisation and westernisation of Tongan society and life have resulted in a relaxation of traditions as well as a replacement of old fishing techniques and customs with more modern ones. However, remnants of traditional fishing practices and techniques are still alive.

In Tonga, octopus is caught for consumption, bait, for sale in the local market, and to give as a gift. Octopus, or *feke*, is caught by women, men and children. Common techniques include the use of iron bars (*a'a feke*) by reef gleaners of all ages and by both genders, free-dive spearing (mainly by male fishers), and *maka feke*. *Maka feke* is done by both men and women of all age groups while they are reef gleaning, or is done by men from (motorised or non-motorised) boats.

This article focuses on *maka feke*, the 'stone for the octopus catching', which is a traditional Tongan method for catching octopus. Sources indicate that the legend of *maka feke*, as well as the technique, is widely spread across Polynesia (www.webcentral.co.uk/ilegends.htm; Bataille-Benguigui 1988; www.ocean-park.go.jp/kaiyo_e/d/d401000.html).

According to legend, there was once a rat on a canoe. This canoe got hurled around in a storm and eventually started to break up. Afraid and shivering, the rat looked for help or something to cling to. When the rat noticed an octopus swimming nearby he asked it to take him to land. The rat also promised a generous payment for this rescue service.

The octopus agreed and allowed the rat to sit on his head while he carefully swam towards land. Once they reached the beach, the rat jumped off and quickly ran up onto dry land. When the octopus demanded his reward, the rat mischievously replied 'feel the top of your head'. Another ending to the tale is that the rat made fun of the octopus' naivety.



Completed 'maka feke' lure.



Two maka feke lures ready for use.

'Maka feke' lure showing how the 'rat's feet and tail' are tied to the cone-shaped stone coated with a cowrie shell.



Whatever the 'true' ending of this tale may be, the fact that the rat insulted the octopus is considered the reason that ever since then, the octopus seeks revenge against the rat for its betrayal. As a result, the Tongan *maka feke* lure resembles the shape of a rat.

The *maka feke* lure is expertly crafted. A carefully selected cone-shaped stone of enough weight to avoid floating, constitutes its main part. Half of this stone is covered with a cowrie shell to mimic the rat's fur. The rat's 'feet' are made from palm tree leaves, which are also used for the long 'tail'. Palm tree root material is used to fix all components together. A line is tied to the lure with which it is lowered into the water. On one trip with fishermen from Manuka village on Tongatapu, the lure was used on a shallow coral reef. Here, the line was lowered into the water and rhythmically shaken up and down, about one metre above the bottom. After about an hour, a medium-sized octopus darted towards the lure and grabbed it. In the same moment, the fisherman jiggling the lure quickly caught the octopus with his free hand.



The lure is lowered into the shallow water above coral ground and rhythmically shaken up and down to attract octopus.



An octopus attracted by the lure, darts towards it and grabs it.

The octopus is killed and cut into small pieces to be used as bait for handline fishing.



The octopus was killed and cut into small pieces for use as bait for handline fishing. The fishing party preceded to a known fishing ground, where five handlines, each equipped with a sole hook with octopus bait, were lowered into the water. Within 2.5 hours, 20.4 kg of reef fish were caught using the medium-sized (1.2 kg) octopus caught with the *maka feke* lure.

References

Bataille-Benguigui. 1988. The fish of Tonga: Prey or social partners? *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 2:185–198.

www.ocean-park.go.jp/kaiyo_e/d/d401000.html, 20.08.2002: Oceanic Culture Museum Data File, Polynesia (9, Dependence on the Ocean for Livelihood). 3 p.

www.webcentral.co.ck/ilegends.htm, 20.08.2002: Legends Cook Islands, Webcentral Cook Islands 1998–9. 2 p.

Tongkah – Unique gear for catching octopus

By P. Balan, Penang Inshore Fishermen Welfare Association

Changkat is a small village in Seberang Perai Selatan (Malaysia) where Malays, Chinese and Indians live within their individual communities, yet side-by-side with each other. The village is not very remote but there is no public transport to it.

The Changkat jetty is quite a distance from the village and it is a 10-minute motorcycle ride to reach it. The jetty at Tengah River, which is also the river that marks the boundary of Batu Kawan island from this side, is home to almost 20 boats. Like Changkat village, and unlike most small jetties in Penang, the fishermen are multi ethnic: Malays, Chinese and Indians.

The jetty by the river is about 400 metres to the sea and flanked on every side by beautiful, lush mangrove forest. The fishermen here prefer to fish at night rather than during the day, which is the norm in other areas. It is here that the practice of using 'tongkah' to catch small octopus is found. Tongkah is unique to Penang State and to the whole of Malaysia.

A tongkah is 7 1/2 feet in length and 15 inches wide, and looks somewhat like a surfboard. It has a 'hand stand' for the arm to rest. A rope is set at the front for the user to manipulate the tongkah on the mudflat. A sack is tied to the armrest where the catch is thrown into as the tongkah moves.