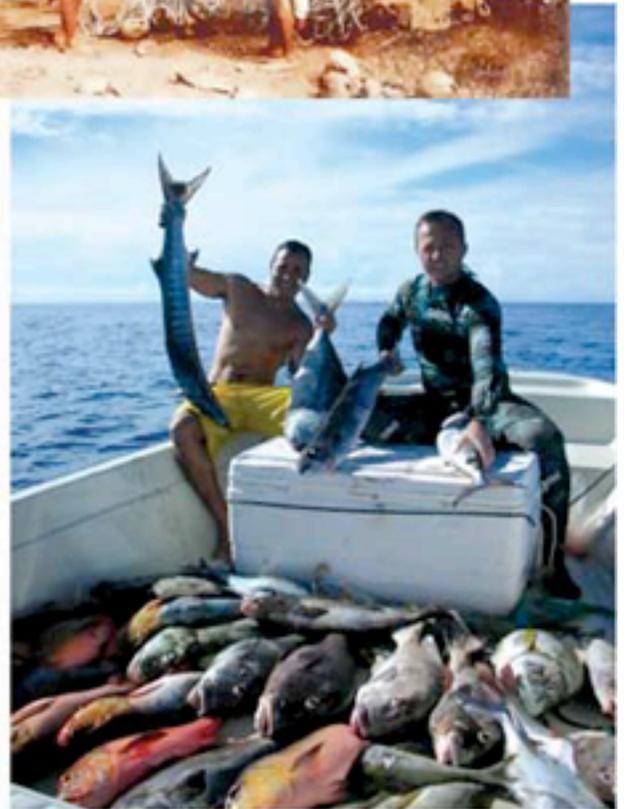


# Journal of Micronesian Fishing

The Ghost of Fishing Christmases Past  
Trolling - Hatohobei Style  
Commercial Fishing In Your EEZ  
Talaya - Fishing with a Throw Net

SPRING  
2009





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Cover Photo: Kirino Olpet seen  
with his daytime speargun on Pohnpei.

Photos from the TTPI Archives at  
University of Hawaii; bottom right  
photo courtesy of KB Vitarelli.

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# Editors' Perspectives- Introducing the Journal of Micronesian Fishing

Fishing is an activity that permeates life throughout Micronesia. We all like to share photos of the ones we caught, talk about the ones that got away, and compare the way we eat our sashimi, soup, or barbeque. It's as much a part of fishing as putting squid on the hook, sharpening your spear, or remembering to add the oil when fueling up. We created the Journal of Micronesian Fishing to share some of our stories with you, and we hope, in return, you will share with us. We aim to cover all aspects of fishing throughout the region -- documenting catches, sharing techniques, exploring culture, reporting on current events, and discussing trends.



This journal represents an open forum for dialog between you, the readers, the fishermen, the communities, the resource managers, and the policy makers alike. One of the big stories that we all should be sharing is how fishing has changed over the years – unfortunately generally a change for the worse– and how you or I can help improve things. We'll probably not see fishing like it was in the 50's and 60's in our lifetime, but perhaps the next generation will if together we get the word out and start making some serious choices about how, when and where we fish. What is the "right" choice? What is the "best" choice? The answer often depends upon the person, but we'd like to think that together we can learn from what others have tried in the region, figure out what worked, and learn from what didn't -- **its time to talk story.**

Beyond being a place to share opinions and discuss issues, we also want to celebrate the tradition of fishing in Micronesia. Through stories and photographs, we offer you the chance to impress our readers with spectacular catches, and we aim to teach the younger generation how it was...and how it is now, so we can all decide how it will be in the future. We sincerely hope you enjoy our journal and hope you will contribute your words and images to help make it a success. Find us online at ([www.micronesianfishing.com](http://www.micronesianfishing.com)) or write to us at PMB 1156, PO Box 10003, Saipan, MP 96950. We look forward to hearing from you. Fish on!

Sincerely,

*John Starmer  
Peter Houk  
Scott Russell*



*Photo: Kids enjoying their ocean out on Sotaron Atoll, Chuuk State.*

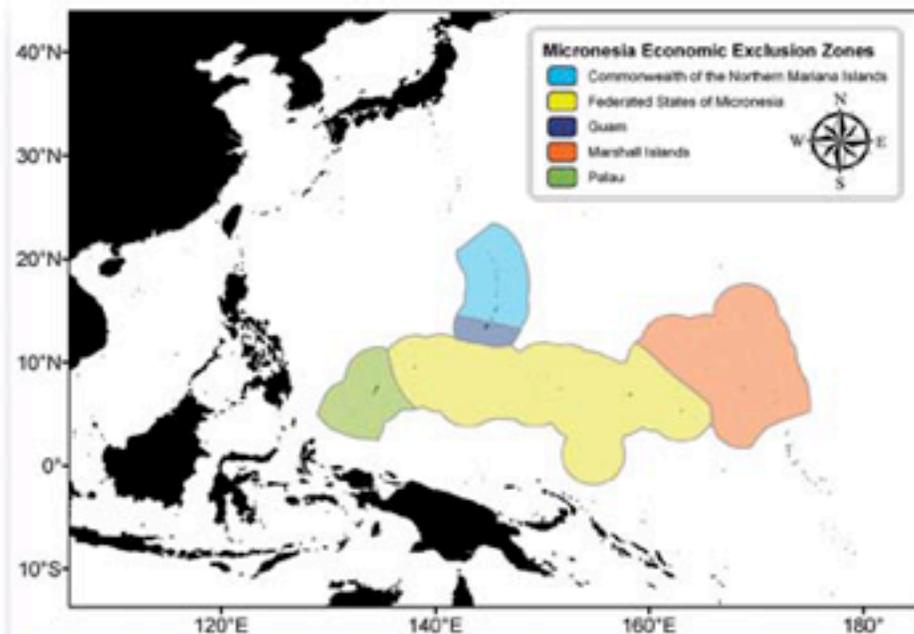
# Commerical Fishing in your EEZ



EEZ's or "economic exlusive zones" have long been a hot topic throughout Micronesia's legislative sessions, coffee shops, restaurants, and bars. EEZ's are spatially defined as the oceanic waters that extend from a conutries shoreline out to 200 nautical miles, and are prized for their high-value fishery resources. If two countries reside closer than 200 miles to each other then the EEZ becomes the half-way point between the countries. For decades fisheries operations have taken place throughout Micronesian waters; however the story behind why most countries lease permits to foreign vessels rather than fish themselves always seemed a mystery to me. Japanese, Korean, and Chinese fleets that are aimed at providing fresh fish for the expensive Japanese markets dominate Micronesia's EEZ today. In fact, one NOAA national marine fisheries program estimated nearly 10,000 tons of fresh fish per year have been provided to Japan via Guam from 1990 to 2007, translating to nearly 100 million dollars... and there are other commonly used ports throughout Micronesia as well. Reportedly, the bulk of this fishing was to have taken place between 2 - 5° N and 140 - 160° E, following the productive North Equatorial Counter Current that runs from Asia to the Americas, including a nice chunk of Micronesia's waters.

How important is the FSM? In 1999 permits for foreign fishing vessels accounted for \$16.7 million or 22% of the total government revenue according to an April 2001 article in Pacific Magazine by Robert Gillett. So, why don't the Micronesians fish their own stocks anymore? It seems that government-based fishing operations started up throughout Micronesia when the compact funding was flowing, but never really made a profit. Somewhere between keeping up with the rapidly improving technology, paying for shipping, offloading, butchering, marketing, and of course fuel, seem to have made smaller government-based operations fail in comparison to giant, Asian counterparts. In fact, an article I found that cited the FSM statistical yearbook claimed that the situation was so bad in the 1990's that approximately \$77 million was lost, equating to \$120 dollars per FSM citizen. Thus, permitting seems to be the way of the future, but as with any significant source of independent country income...tracking the numbers can be elusive... where does the money go? Opinions? Insight?

Peter Houk

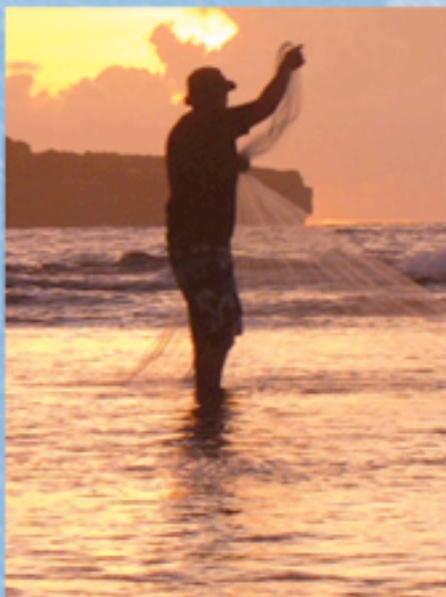


# TALAYA

## FISHING WITH A THROW NET

Humans have been fishing for thousands of years. Greeks, Romans, and countless other civilizations have made references to the construction of their tools for fishing and the practice of their techniques. We, as islanders, are no exception to this ancient legacy; but we must understand that with our changing world, our practices must adapt.

Fishing has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. Growing up on Saipan I was exposed to every type of fishing—except for dynamite and bleaching. I got the absolute most exposure to *talaya*. *Talaya*, or cast-net fishing, a practice that has been passed down through the ages. An ancient *talaya* would have been constructed of copra with stone weights distributed around the bottom of the net. The design of a modern day cast-net is not much different from its ancient counterpart; the key difference being that modern day cast-nets are composed of nylon, string, and lead weights instead of stones. In addition, contemporary *talayas* have a radius that ranges from four to sixteen feet. The larger the net, the more strength is needed to carry and cast it. Casting the net takes time and practice and is much better learned by viewing rather than reading instructions. Youtube has several instructional videos for throwing cast-nets, none that I have ever used but they might work for you. Check 'em out.



Although I was lucky enough to learn how to *talaya* it is apparent that the practice is very much slowing down. As a child I thought that it was a normal thing to wake up before the sun came up and head to the beach to fish. Or to come home after school, wait for my dad, and then hit it before it got too dark. I thought that every kid spent most of their time following their dad to go *talaya*. It wasn't until I was older when I realized that I was one of a few in my age group who actually knew how to *talaya*. I was proud that I knew something that seemed so outdated to most of my peers.

It wasn't easy though. It took a long time for me to get better at seeing the fish in the water at greater distances. Personally, I would say that learning how to throw a *talaya* is easier than trying to see fish in the water. Some might disagree but hey, that's just me. After years of practice and not having a job these past six months, I can finally say that I have become a proficient *talayeru*.

***But what makes a master talayeru?***

***... patience.***

But what makes a master *talayeru*? Is it based on the amount of fish one catches or the size? I remember once asking my dad what he thought was the most important trait that a person had to have to become an expert *talayeru*. His answer was patience. At the time I thought that he was merely talking about being patient so as to not scare the fish away. But now, being patient has a much greater meaning. To me, a master *talayeru* has patience; patience in actually taking time to learn how to *talaya*, because it isn't just as easy as buying a net and throwing it into the water. Patience, in waiting for the fish to come close enough to throw the net without scaring them all away. But as *talayeru*s I believe that we should be patient for another thing, the fish. We should not harvest fish that are too small, you know, let 'em grow. The bigger they are the more meat they'll have.

A perfect example is the *mañahak* or immature rabbitfish. We locals like to go *talaya* for the *mañahak* because it's good for *kélaguen*. But what isn't usually considered is that those one hundred pieces of *mañahak* you just caught won't get a chance to grow up into *sesyon* and *hiteng*. Now there's a problem. In my lifetime I've seen the population of *sesyon* and *hiteng* plummet to the point where it's rare that you are able to catch a large school.

This isn't solely based on a certain kind of fish. It should be understood that if a fish is small, don't harvest it. In past years, fish populations may have been able to cope with people taking immature fish, but with the human population in our islands growing, it puts even more stress on the fish populations to keep their numbers up. Patience is the key. We *talayeru*s and all other fisherman need to realize that although we exploit this natural resource, we also have an obligation to conserve it, so that both we and our children may have a chance to continue to benefit from it. We must adapt our practices to be viable in the changing world that we live in today.



WORDS- DAVID BENAVENTE  
IMAGES CHINNELLE CAMACHO

*Chamorro word glossary*

*Talaya* – cast net

*Talayeru* – cast net fisherman

*Kélaguen* – fish pickled with  
vinegar and spices

*Hiteng* – adult rabbit fish

*Sesyon* – adult rabbit fish

# Boy Scout Beach: The *Ghost* of

by Scott Russell

**December 25, 2008 dawned cool and breezy on Saipan.** The sky was a pastel blue and nearly cloudless but much of the island's coastline was being pounded by giant waves generated by a winter cold front. If I was to continue my 35-year tradition of spear fishing on Christmas day, I would have to find a spot protected from these heavy seas. After considering the options, I decided to give Boy Scout Beach a try.

Boy Scout Beach is located on the leeward side of Nautan Peninsula at the extreme southeastern tip of the island. Due to its location, this stretch of coastline and adjacent off-shore waters are normally protected from the prevailing trade winds and swell. I was hoping that it would be calm enough to fish even with a hazardous surf warning in effect.

Being Christmas, I knew that my fishing partners would be busy with their families and friends. The prospect of fishing alone, however, didn't dampen my enthusiasm. I have fished by myself for many years and, to be honest, I actually enjoy the solitude. I know this violates one of free diving's cardinal rules and I certainly don't recommend that others follow my bad example. But being just shy of 60, I'm too set in my ways to change.

I arrived at Obyan Beach in the early afternoon with kayak and dive gear loaded aboard my rusty pickup truck. A quick scan of the southern horizon revealed calm waters off Boy Scout. Fishing was on! After loading my gear in the kayak, I paddled out the channel cut and cruised south in the direction of Nautan Point.

Boy Scout Beach is actually two discrete pockets of sand separated by a short stretch of rocky coastline about a kilometer south of the main beach at Obyan. The area got its name in the 1980s when it briefly served as a camp site for a troop of Saipan Boy Scouts. During World War II, Boy Scout had been a popular recreation beach for off-duty American airmen who flew B-29 bombing missions against Japan. The concrete slabs of their living quarters still dot the landscape just inland from the beach.



# Fishing Christmases Past

Being in no particular hurry, I took some time to enjoy the clear turquoise waters and rugged, jungle-fringed shoreline. The presence of several green sea turtles cruising serenely on the surface of the water added to my enjoyment.

This rich tapestry of visual treats reminded me why Boy Scout had long been one of my favorite spots on the island. I accidentally stumbled upon the beach in the summer of 1974 while on a hiking trip to Naufan Point. What a spot! With a narrow ribbon of pristine sand, a beautiful fringing reef and small surf, Boy Scout Beach had it all.

I quickly shared the news of this discovery with a couple of my fishing buddies who, like me, were inexperienced but eager for adventure. Within a couple of weeks we had cut a trail through the jungle to link the beach to the old World War II-era military road that runs parallel to the coast. With easy access established, we were ready to give the new spot a try.

Fishing in the 1970s was considerably different than today. First off, our equipment was pretty limited. A mask, snorkel, and a cheap pair of fins made up our basic diving gear. Our guns, crafted by an enterprising prisoner at the Susupe jail, were less than a meter in length and powered by a thin piece of rubber tubing. This homemade "pachinko"<sup>1</sup> fired a rusty shaft which sometimes had a small blob of braising rod welded on the tip to serve as a barb. We also used a floating fish box called an "M-boat"<sup>2</sup> to keep our catch safe from sharks. Usually it was pulled by the least skilled fisherman in the group who we jokingly called *chule guagua*<sup>3</sup>.

Although our gear was not up to modern standards in the '70s, the marine life was fantastic. Back then, out of the way places like Boy Scout Beach were infrequently visited and the fish were plentiful and usually pretty tame even in very shallow water. In those days, Boy Scout's coral reef was healthy and its many caves and overhangs provided excellent habitat for a wide range of reef fishes and other marine creatures.

Our first attempts to fish Boy Scout were nighttime adventures in shallow water just outside the fringing reef. Although the sleeping fish were easy targets, getting them into the M-boat proved to be nearly impossible. Within moments of taking our first shot, we invariably would be surrounded by a half dozen or more Grey Reef sharks. These dangerous and



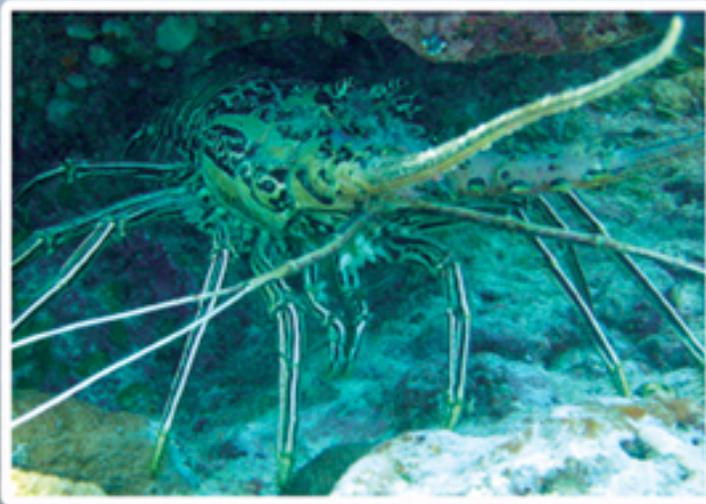
unpredictable predators made quick work of any fish we managed to spear and usually chased us out of the water within a few minutes.

My buddies were not crazy about the sharks and soon gave up fishing for other less risky activities. After that, I had Boy Scout Beach all to myself. Under the circumstances, I decided to give daytime fishing a try and found it much more to my liking. Unlike the drab shadows of nighttime, the ocean and coral reef reflected a rich pallet of colors in the sunlight. The schooling fish were abundant and the Grey Reef sharks obligingly spent most of the daylight hours in deep water leaving me alone to fish the shallows in peace. Best of all, I discovered that the dim recesses of the reef were loaded with lobsters. On a typical outing, I would return to shore with a dozen or so fish and three or four good-sized *muhougang*<sup>4</sup> all caught in water less than three meters deep. Not bad for a novice *peskadot*<sup>5</sup>.

On Christmas Day 1974, I brought my boss and his wife to Boy Scout Beach for a holiday picnic. Although I assured them that I would catch fresh fish for the grill, they insisted on bringing along a bowl of marinated chicken and ribs just in case. My memories of that day have faded with time, but I still recall proudly returning from the water with a giant lobster that I speared in one of my secret holes. My friends were duly impressed and the lobster was soon sizzling on the grill. Its sweet meat washed down with icy cold beer was the perfect ending to my inaugural Christmas day fishing trip on Saipan.

I continued to fish Boy Scout regularly for the next several years and used it as a venue for a few more Christmas day outings. In 1983, however, I bought a boat and subsequently abandoned Boy Scout Beach in favor of more distant fishing spots on Saipan, Tinian and Goat Island.

I returned to Boy Scout a few times in the 1990s and was shocked at what I saw. Years of unregulated fishing by teams of commercial divers using compressed air had taken its toll on the reef's once impressive fish population. The few fish that were around quickly fled when approached and the reef sharks which once had aggressively patrolled these waters in substantial numbers were nowhere to be seen. Even the reef had changed. The caves and overhangs that I once entered to hunt lobsters were no longer there. I knew where the fish had gone, but what had caused the reef to change so drastically since the days of my youth?



The low rumbling of an outboard engine interrupted my ruminations and I looked up to see a boat loaded with Japanese SCUBA divers passing by on its way back to the dock at Garapan. They had just finished a dive at a popular spot immediately south of Boy Scout Beach which features a vertical wall that starts at about 15 meters. Knowing that the waters immediately adjacent to Boy Scout Beach hold few fish, I decided to tie off on the dive boat buoy and work the wall south to Naufan Point.

In spite of the hazardous surf, there was no current and I was able to dive deep with little effort. I spent the next couple of hours leisurely pursuing fish and by the time I made it back to my kayak, I had a decent stringer which included a couple of nice parrots. I could only wonder what my stringer would have looked like if I had fished this same stretch back in the 70s. For those who tout the health of Saipan's reefs and fish stocks, I can only assume that they never saw Boy Scout Beach back in the day. If they had, they'd know what a really healthy reef looks like.

I slipped aboard my kayak, hauled up the anchor and headed for home. All in all, it had been a very pleasant and productive outing. I had a chance to reflect on fishing Christmases past, dive a beautiful spot, and bring home some goodies for the family. I look forward to keeping this holiday tradition alive for years to come.



**“For those who tout the health of Saipan’s reefs and fish stocks, I can only assume that they never saw Boy Scout Beach back in the day.”**

#### Notes

1. Pachinko is the local term for spear gun. It derives from a Japanese game similar to pinball that was popular on Saipan in the 1960s.
2. The origin of this term is obscure. It may derive from the World War II term “Mike Boat” used by the Americans to denote small Japanese patrol boats. In the 1970s, M-boats were made from plywood and tin. They are now commonly fashioned from Styrofoam.
3. *Chule guagua* is a Chamorro term that means “bring the fishing basket.” It refers to young and/or unskilled people assigned to assist a fisherman by carrying a basket, bag, or by pulling an M-boat.
4. *Mahongang* is the Chamorro term for spiny lobster.
5. *Peskadol* is the Chamorro term for fisherman.

# Trolling-Hatohobei Style

Imagine the smell of fresh tuna fish and the burning sensation of the trolling line running in your hands with the sailing canoe moving through the wind and surfing the ocean swell gracefully in the early morning hours. This is what all tuna trollers enjoy on a typical fishing day on the island of Tobi, a small island in southwest region of Palau. Fishing almost as much a ritual as going to early morning Sunday church, except, tuna trolling is a daily ritual necessitated by the lack of modern amenities such as freezers or chillers to hold fresh yesterday's catch for today's consumption.

I am the oldest in a family of eight; seven boys and one girl. Though our father is blind and relies on me to assist him with everything that he needs to do, he is still a masterful fisherman. In the evening before the trolling day, my father describes to me the sizes and the different colors he wants for his trolling lures. I then go to work. I make up to 6 or 8 different lures, some big and some small. Chicken feathers are used for tuna lures, and we grow roosters with different feather colors to provide the needed materials. Red and blue cloth might also be used to dress up (skirt) the lures. Once the lures are done, I proceed to the canoe house to make sure all paddles, water bailers, and the canoe's sail are ready for the next day. I also inspect the canoe hull and outrigger parts and ties just to make sure all is secure. Before going to bed, we pray for good weather and good sailing wind.

The next morning, we rise early at 4:30 and push out the canoe from shore. Once we clear the reef line, we poke the sail up and drop our trolling line. My father asks me to scan the skies and the horizon for feeding seabirds and frigate birds-- indicators that tuna are present. As we troll, my dad constantly checks the swell directions, wind directions and where the birds are feeding. This information gives him the ability to tack or change sail directions once he feels the need. Frequency of tuna biting the bait and the sizes of tuna we start to catch dictate the size of the lures to use. Our distance from the island and the time of day also play a part on which color and what size of lures we will pull. Typically, the farther out from the island and the higher the sun is above the horizon, the bigger the lure we use.

Because my father teaches at the only elementary school on the island and there are no freezers and chillers to store more than what we need for the day, we return to the island with our catch around 7am. All the canoes that went out sail close to the channel where we launched and start reeling in their trolling lines. The mood is up and after an unspoken signal, the morning's trollers decide to race for the channel. This is the most exciting part of the trolling trips as we get to feel the sailing canoe surf the ocean swells while outriggers are pulled out of the water to make the canoe go faster. Once back on the beach, and the canoes are put away, we enjoy the results of our morning's efforts before going on with the rest of the day with the next day's trolling to look forward to

*Justin Andrew*



*Your food, your choice.*



*Help support informed  
resource management.*

## **J**ournal of Micronesian Fishing

**Submissions:** Contributions can be as simple as photos of your catch or as detailed as a transcribed interviews. Mainly we are looking for stories (600-1200 words long) about fishing, cultural importance of fishing, management, community efforts, history, why Uncle Semo is the best fisherman ever, and related topics. JMF has an editorial staff that can help ensure that your message comes across clearly. We also are looking for smaller pieces too (up to 600 words) in **any** language, including yours!

**Format:** Electronic submissions are preferred and may be emailed to [info@pacmares.com](mailto:info@pacmares.com). Text submissions should be sent as .doc, .rtf or .txt files. Images may be sent as .jpg or .tiff files. English language submissions: 600 and 1200 words. Local language submissions up to 600 words.

**Advertisement & Sponsorships:** JMF is distributed as hardcopies throughout Micronesia on a quarterly basis and issues are archived on at [www.micronesianfishing.com](http://www.micronesianfishing.com). Advertising space is limited, so please email inquiries to [info@pacmares.com](mailto:info@pacmares.com).

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# Past & Present

Each issue we aim to provide stories and photos that depict fishing as it was in the past, 20 or more years ago, and the present. Today's fishing generation may not always realize just how different catches, fishing methods, fish sales, and cultural importance of fishing might be. Certainly the varying islands throughout Micronesia differ in the type and magnitude of change, however, we'd like to hear, see, and talk about any experiences you may have. In this issue I will do my best to get things started by sharing some stories, interviews, and experiences that I've had over the past 13 years while living and travelling throughout Micronesia.

One of the most distinguishable and amazing fish I have ever seen, heard, and tasted is the bumphead parrotfish. Schools of these fish travel around nearshore reefs and lagoons, crunching away at an estimated 5 tons of carbonate reef material per fish, per year. I'll never forget when Clarence (Obak) Kitalong from Palau described the excitement of his childhood days when he used to throw spears in the shallow waters of Ngetkib and Ngeruluobel Villages, hoping to land a critical blow to a large individual, slowing it enough for a prize catch.

Over a decade later, upon my first visit to Palau in 1994, I was amazed as several fishermen from Ngaraard-- Skeras, Elechang, Arkasaus and others-- patiently awaited the setting sun while chewing betel nut, isolating upon a school of large fish that was invisible to me. Upon nightfall, they entered the water and quietly speared 6 individuals for a village gathering until my glowing excitement awoke the remaining school, and they dispersed into the dark waters. Luckily, I was forgiven.

Over the past 10 years I've heard about and seen market coolers loaded with bumpheads for sale, especially at the right time of year and moon phase. Now, it is against Palau's law to harvest these fish until a better assessment of the existing stock, and its trends are known. While several methods of harvest exist, the fishermen I talk to lead me to believe the introduction of the underwater flashlight began a trend of unsustainable harvest, eventually leading to today's ban. Now I wonder to myself, is the story of the bumphead parrotfish in Palau mirrored through other prized fisheries resources on other islands?



*Palau has closed fishing for Bumphead Parrotfish due to concerns of overfishing.*

*Peter Houk*



*Palau, 1970's UH TTPI Archives*



*Pohnpei, today*

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*Sunrise trolling in Yap*

*Drying salted fish on Losap Atoll, Chuuk*



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