

## AFRICAN FISHING CUSTOMS

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A Negro of the Ovimbundu tribe of Portuguese West Africa has a great advantage over the modern fisherman in highly civilized countries. If the fish are not biting well, the latter tries another kind of expensive fly, makes another cast, but without much hope.

The Negro approaches his problem with all the optimism that magic can give. His primitive equipment consists only of a line of thin bark at the end of which is a sharp stalk of grass on which a fat grub is impaled. But with this meager outfit he never doubts success, for he softly sings his spell: "O fish, come and take your good thing. Do not send the little fish to spoil the good bait. Better you come and take the good thing with all your strength." Among the Ovimbundu, fishing with the line is practiced only by men. Women push baskets against the stream, or use poison which is scattered on the surface of the water.

In order to make fish-poison, the tuberous roots of a wild plant are soaked in water until scum rises to the top. The solid part of the poison is not given, because it would sink and the fish which had eaten it would remain at the bottom of the river. Therefore, only the scum of this poisonous infusion is thrown in the water. The stupefied and gasping fish remain at the surface, whereupon they are seized by women who transfer them to gourds or baskets worn around their necks. Usually poison is used only in the dry season when the rivers are shallow.

Sometimes there is fishing by means of a weir which has an opening in the middle. A basket or trap is placed opposite this gap in the weir in order to catch the fish as they come through the aperture. Spearing of fish, shooting them with bow and arrow, and fishing by torchlight to attract the fish to the surface, are all methods known among African Negroes. The method varies according to the tribe, the season, and the sex of the angler. In Hall D, Case 6, is a model of a bark canoe such as is used by fishermen of the Vachokwe tribe in eastern Angola.

## RUBBER TECHNIQUE DEVELOPED FOR BRAIN CASTS

Getting inside the skull of a fossil animal dead some millions of years to find out what kind of a brain it had is a difficult problem.

Occasionally, weathering of the surface bones of a skull may expose a natural cast of the brain, formed by sand or silt sifting into the cranial cavity and hardening there. Such casts reproduce with fidelity the shape of the brain cavity as it existed in the living animal. These are rare finds, however, and often difficult of identification. Various methods, therefore, of producing artificial casts have been tried.

Perhaps the most successful of these is the liquid rubber technique, recently developed by Assistant Curator Bryan Patterson and Assistant James Quinn of Field Museum's Division of Paleontology. The liquid rubber is poured into the cavity, rolled about and drained. After the first coat has dried, another is added, and then a third or fourth application. When thoroughly dry, the flexibility of the rubber permits it to be pulled from the cavity intact with very little risk of damage to the skull. This cast is then filled with plaster to retain its shape while a mold is being made as a preliminary to the permanent plaster casts. These molds give very accurate casts with minute detail, sometimes even showing details of the cranial circulation.

The casts obtained are used in the research work that is carried on in the Museum's laboratories. They are of the greatest importance as an aid in determining the relationships of many puzzling types of extinct mammals.

## Hemp Comes from a Species of Banana

Manila fiber, usually known as manila hemp, and used in rope-making, is derived from a species of banana plant, not of the edible species, but another of the same genus, *Musa textilis*, of the Philippine Islands. The fiber is obtained from the stalk and leaf bases, by heating, tearing, boiling, and combing the material. The innermost part of the flower stalk is employed for fine fabrics, shawls, and the beautiful "drawn work" of the Filipinos.

## THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN GOAT—A PICTURESQUE AMERICAN MAMMAL

Mountain goats are found on the higher, almost inaccessible slopes of the mountains of northwestern North America, but they are most numerous in British Columbia. They are remarkably sure-footed and fearless in traversing high precipitous slopes above timberline, where they feed on brush grass, lichens, moss, and stunted vegetation.

Despite their goat-like appearance, they are not true goats, but are somewhat related in structure to the antelopes. Between the males and females there is no prominent difference. Although keen-sighted and difficult to approach, they are somewhat stupid animals. Living in high, nearly inaccessible places that can be reached only by the most intrepid sportsman, they are thus so well protected by Nature that they are not rapidly decreasing in number like some other animals.

## THE OLDEST HANDLE

BY HENRY FIELD  
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A Crô-Magnon craftsman who lived in southwestern France some thirty thousand years ago invented what is thought to be the first handled tool.

From the Middle Aurignacian levels at Tarté, in the Haute-Garonne district of France, Mr. Jean Cazedessus, well-known French archaeologist of that region, excavated a small horn handle in which a flint blade had apparently been inserted. This object, the oldest horn handle in the world, is on exhibition in Case 4 in the Hall of the Stone Age of the Old World (Hall C).

No doubt Crô-Magnon artisans had tried wooden handles, only to find that they split after being exposed to water, ice, and snow. We can even imagine their going through the childish experiment of tying handles to their flint blades, with fibers or leather thongs. But the puny instrument created by such efforts would have been no match for the tough skin of the reindeer or the great cave bear, and yet those skins were an important protection against an icy Aurignacian winter. So necessity mothered one of her earliest inventions. The strong horn of a reindeer's antler was made into a handle which has borne the test of centuries. Ask any backwoodsman today to show you his hunting knife. It will almost certainly have a horn handle.

The oldest handle exhibited in Hall C is much shorter than that of a modern knife, but it also carried a stubbier blade—a blade of chipped flint instead of tempered steel.



Sure-footed Climbers

Rocky Mountain goats—a habitat group in Hall 16. They are not true goats, being somewhat related to the antelopes in structural characteristics.

scene represented is typical of the beautiful Kootenay District in British Columbia.





Hambly, Wilfrid D. 1939. "African Fishing Customs." *Field Museum news* 10(8), 7-7.

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