

KiteLines

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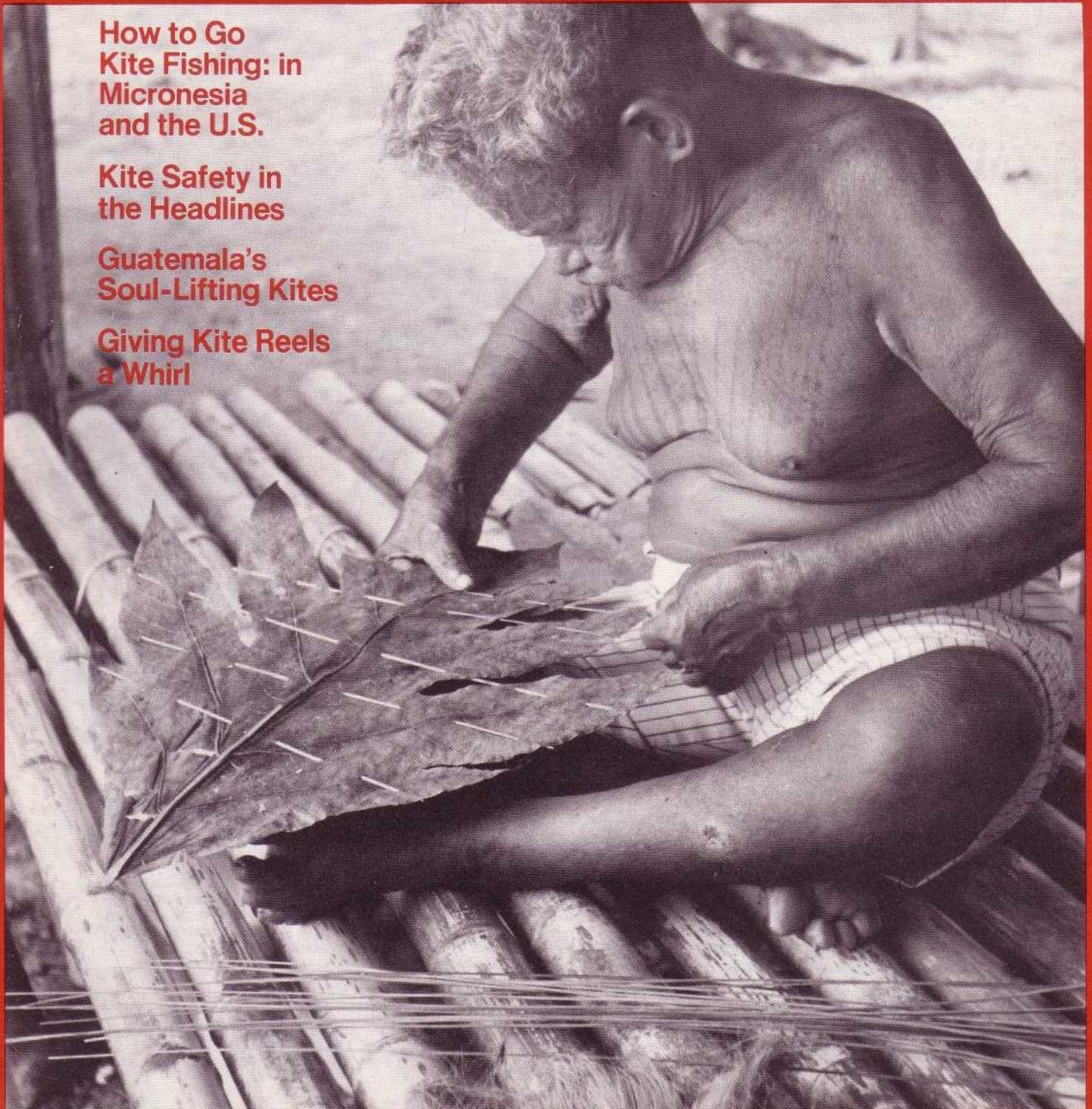
quarterly journal of the American Kitefliers Association

**How to Go
Kite Fishing: in
Micronesia
and the U.S.**

**Kite Safety in
the Headlines**

**Guatemala's
Soul-Lifting Kites**

**Giving Kite Reels
a Whirl**



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Contributions are invited from kite enthusiasts. Articles, captioned photographs (preferably black-and-white, 5"x7" or larger), reports, clippings (see *Classifieds*), letters and other material relevant to kite interests should be sent to AKA at the address of the publisher. Contributions used become the property of *Kite Lines*. Return of unsolicited material cannot be guaranteed unless accompanied by ample stamps and envelope, self-addressed. Accuracy of contents of *Kite Lines* is the responsibility of individual contributors. Diverse views presented in *Kite Lines* are not necessarily those of the editor or of the American Kitefliers Association.

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Cover

Patricio Tahemaremacho makes kites in preparation for kite fishing on the small Pacific island of Palau. It is here recently that an environmental controversy has centered. A giant oil supertanker port has been proposed for this remote isle in the Micronesia chain. The proposal has accelerated the desires of the natives for independence from U.S. trust protection, and has created a classic confrontation between conservation and development. Wayne Baldwin, President of the Hawaii chapter of AKA, was in the right place at the right time to see Patricio working in the traditional manner of his ancestors. Except for the striped shorts, the picture could have been taken generations ago. "It was like striking gold to me," Wayne confessed. Photograph by Wayne J. Baldwin.

(Story on page 32.)

**1 BREADFRUIT LEAF
 +6 OR MORE SPIDER WEBS
 +FRONDS OF ONE COCONUT PALM
 +DRIED FIBERS OF COCONUT HUSKS
 +PACIFIC ISLAND NATIVE SKILL
 =20 OR 30 SIX-FOOT NEEDLEFISH
 WITHIN SEVERAL HOURS**



Story and Photographs
 By Wayne J. Baldwin

Patricio Tahemaremacho's fingers deftly interlaced the dry slender ribs of a coconut frond through the flattened breadfruit leaf. I felt as if I were visiting Tobi Island before the days Europeans navigated this exotic and unknown part of the tropical Pacific Ocean.

Patricio was making a breadfruit leaf fishing kite of the type used for centuries to catch needlefish from a canoe along the shores of this small, remote island several hundred miles north of New Guinea.

No one really seems to know exactly how long ago Patricio's ancestors patiently worked on similar kites. There is good reason to believe this unique kite, similar to the one shown in the photographs, was made here for centuries from the natural materials at hand: carefully prepared breadfruit leaves, slender ribs removed from the

fronds of a coconut palm, and strong sennet line made by twisting together the tough individual fibers from dried coconut husks. The fibers were used to tie the slender ribs together where they crisscross to give added strength.



It's an exciting feeling to view with your own eyes an ancient type of fishing kite being constructed by an island craftsman approaching eighty years of age. Patricio was instructed in the art of making these kites and catching needlefish by his father and

grandfather when he was a young boy. He continues to make these kites as he was taught, even though younger fishermen now use plastic materials or purchase commercially made kites.

As interesting as the kite is the peculiar lure used to capture needlefish, a tasty fish that sometimes reaches a length of six feet or more when fully grown. This unusual lure is made from the web of a species of spider found on Tobi Island. Usually six or more spider webs are carefully collected on a slender Y shaped stick, then tied together in several places. The finished lure, resembling a frayed, elongated noose two to three inches in length, is slipped off the Y shaped collecting stick and tied onto the end of the sennet fishing line.

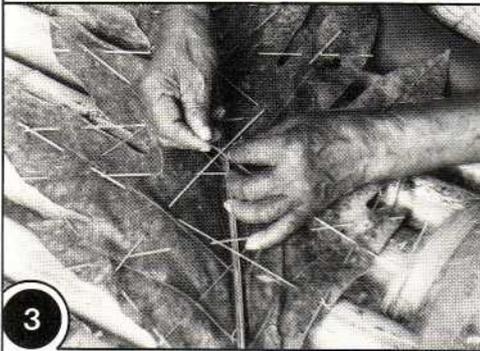
One can close one's eyes and imagine the joy that some long-forgotten Tobi islander felt upon returning to his village with a successful catch of fish captured using his new discovery—a discovery that was to help feed generations of islanders in future years. The spider web lure is particularly effective for catching needlefish, since they have long jaws with large, recurved teeth that easily become firmly entangled in the fine silken strands.

I first met Patricio Tahemaremacho in Koror, Palau, while there on business in late 1976, and through a mutual friend made arrangements to purchase two breadfruit leaf fishing kites. I also hoped to take a series of photographs of their construction. Luckily, I was able to accomplish both, while observing every detail of construction.

The two finished kites were a real bargain; they cost me a new pocket-knife and \$10. Although Patricio did not not speak English, his son Patris, who is equally adept at making these kites, acted as translator and explained exactly how the breadfruit leaf, obtained from Tobi Island, was dried and pressed between two woven mats, the slender ribs were removed from the coconut frond, and the coconut husk fibers were prepared. I watched in admiration as Patricio began making the kite totally by eye, without the aid of a ruler or layout. It took two hours to finish one kite, but this did not include the time required beforehand in preparation of the breadfruit leaf, removing and trimming by hand the slender ribs from coconut fronds, patiently twisting together the sennet fishing line, and making the spider web lure.

Fishing is usually done by a single

fisherman from a canoe, but it can also be accomplished while wading along the edge of the coral reefs if the prevailing winds are suitable. According to Patris, a good fisherman can often catch up to twenty or thirty needlefish within several hours.



During fishing the breadfruit leaf kite is flown at different heights depending upon the strength of the wind. In light winds they are flown as low as sixty feet above the water but in strong winds they may be flown as high as three hundred feet. Both light-wind and strong-wind kites are made that have a short adjustable bridle for setting the angle of attack. They can also be made to fly to the left or to the right by trimming or altering the kite on one side. These techniques are quite simple but very effective.

In launching the kite from a canoe, the fishing line, which also acts as the



kite's tail, is let out first, followed by letting out the sennet kite line to keep the kite aloft while closely observing its behavior. Since the breadfruit leaf

will in time become worn or damaged, frequent bridle adjustments are necessary. After letting out the flying line it is either tied onto the canoe or held between the fisherman's teeth, thus allowing him to handle his canoe and line at the same time. The canoe slowly follows the kite while the spider web lure is made to skip and dance along the surface of the water. Apparently the lure resembles a small fish jumping or frantically trying to elude some pursuing predator. This action entices the fast-swimming needlefish to strike the lure. When it does, its large, numerous teeth become securely entangled in the strong spider web filaments. Then the kite with the needlefish firmly "hooked" by the lure is pulled in and the fish removed. The kite is launched again within several minutes to catch another fish.



There is considerable speculation regarding why this method is so successful for capturing these large, timid predators. Modern rod and reel methods are often used with success but their effectiveness does not approach that of the ancient breadfruit leaf kite and spider web lure. Some observers believe that fishing with a kite allowed the fishermen to maneuver the lure close to their timid prey without startling it. Some are convinced that it's strictly the motion of the lure playing upon the surface of the water. Others believe that the fishing kites tended to attract needlefish to the lure because the moving kite looked like some seabird feeding upon small fishes.

Unfortunately, lack of free time prevented me from going fishing with Patricio in his canoe. The centuries-old techniques he used were described to me in considerable detail by Patris, and they closely agree with observations made by other individuals and with reports printed in scientific journals. However, good fortune

placed several clear 35mm color slides in my hands that showed Patricio actually fishing with one of his kites in the Western Caroline Islands. These excellent photographs were kindly made available to me by Dr. Bob Johannes, an associate also interested in kite fishing and fishing lore of the Pacific islanders.

Since these rare and valuable fishing kites may become quite brittle with age or damaged from frequent handling, I donated both, along with the photographs, to the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu, HI, so that in the years to come others may enjoy and perhaps study them. ♦

FIGURE 1 Patricio Tahemaremacho of Tobi Island, approaching 80 years, wears hat and shirt in the strong tropical sun while he kite fishes from his canoe. His ancient methods are slowly being replaced by modern kites and plastic materials.

FIGURE 2 A breadfruit tree with the large dark green leaves from which the Tobi Island fishing kite is made. The breadfruit itself is a large oval which resembles bread when cooked, and was the quest of Capt. William Bligh of the H.M.S. Bounty during the voyage that ended in mutiny in 1789.

FIGURE 3 The fishing kite nearing completion, the intricate framework of coconut frond ribs is being tied together with coconut husk fibers. The central spine is made of three ribs that extend beyond the breadfruit leaf to act as part of the tail and also secure the sennet fishing line. A short fore-and-aft bridle will be attached at center. The fishing and flying line are one continuous line that is secured to the bridle in such a manner that it can be quickly adjusted for changing wind conditions.

FIGURE 4 Now ready, the breadfruit leaf fishing kite is shown rigged for fishing. Notice the spider web lure (bottom, attached to the end of the fishing line). The flying line can be seen at the top. The sennet line is of a particular type made by Tobi Islanders and judged to be of the highest quality in the Pacific.

FIGURE 5 A close-up view of the spider web lure. About 2½ inches in length, it resembles an elongated noose of tough silken threads and feels much like wool. The lure is made to play on the surface of the water to entice a hungry needlefish to strike. Once the fish strikes the lure, its large recurved teeth become firmly entangled by the web. The kite and fish are pulled in, the fish untangled from the tough filaments, then the kite is again launched to catch and hold another victim.