A TRADITIONAL FRESHWATER EEL TRAP

By *Daniel R. Opeari, Provincial Fisheries Officer
Division of Primary Industry, Kundiawa, Simbu Province

INTRODUCTION

In Papua New Guinea, people use many types of traditionally manufactured traps to capture live animals and fish to eat.

This article describes a kind of trap which the people of Bomai in the Karimui District of the Simbu Province make. It is used to catch freshwater eels, especially Catfish eels. These eels are common in the rivers and streams of the area.

MATERIALS

The materials needed to make this trap are listed below.

1. The whole bark of a particular species of tree is stripped off carefully. The tree is known as 'Rambi' in some parts of Simbu Province. Its bark is often used for rope work.

   Care must be taken not to make holes in the bark as this encourages splitting when it is left in the sunlight. The bark is cut into 1-2 m lengths about 70 cm wide. The length depends on the type of eel to be trapped.

2. Three strong sticks are needed. One should be about 2 m long and flexible at one end. The other two are shorter and should be about the same length as the bark.

3. Canes are used for the rope work of the trap.

4. A flat piece of wood about 1.5 cm thick as the door of the trap.

CONSTRUCTING THE TRAP

1. Make 2 circles of about 20 cm diameter using canes. Tie one of these to each end of the length of bark to form a cylinder. Cane ropes are tied to the outside of the cylinder at intervals. These help the cylinder to keep its shape.

2. Close one end of the cylinder with canes woven together to form an open mesh. The bait is inserted through the holes in the mesh.

3. The other end of the cylinder is closed with the flat piece of wood cut to fit easily inside the cylinder. It is attached to the cane at the end by a cane-rope hinge, so that it opens inwards.

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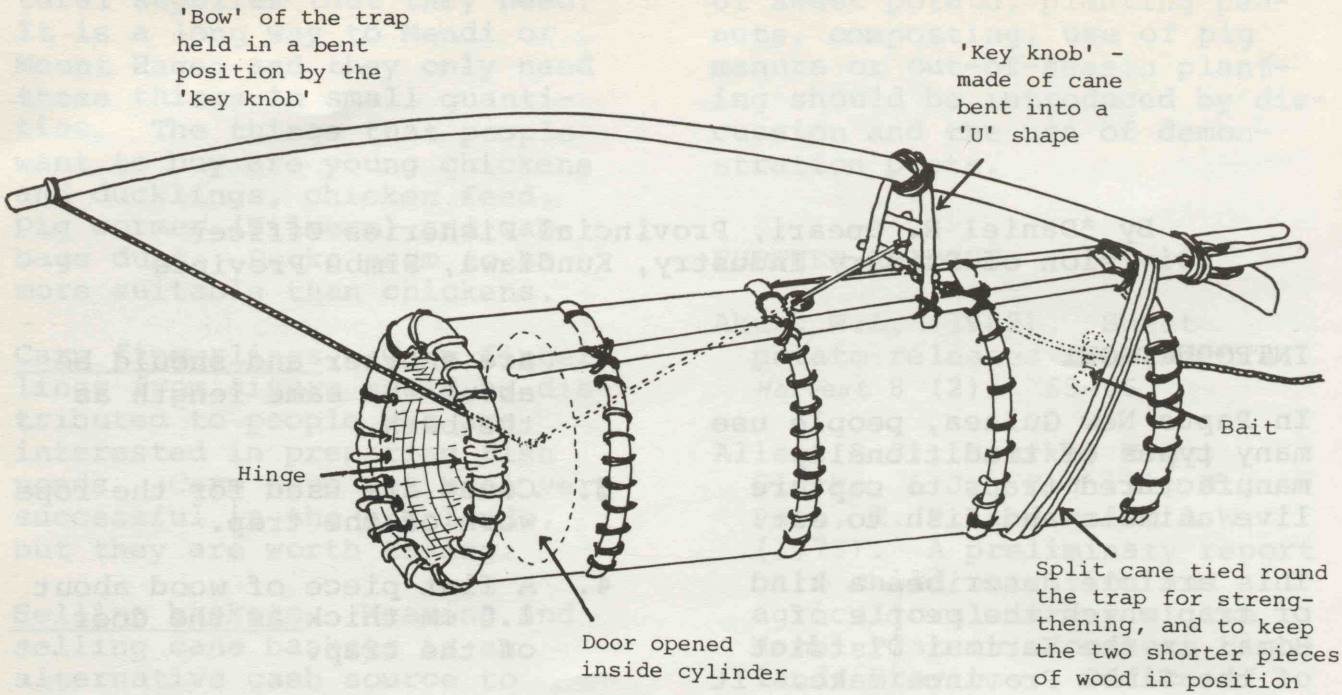
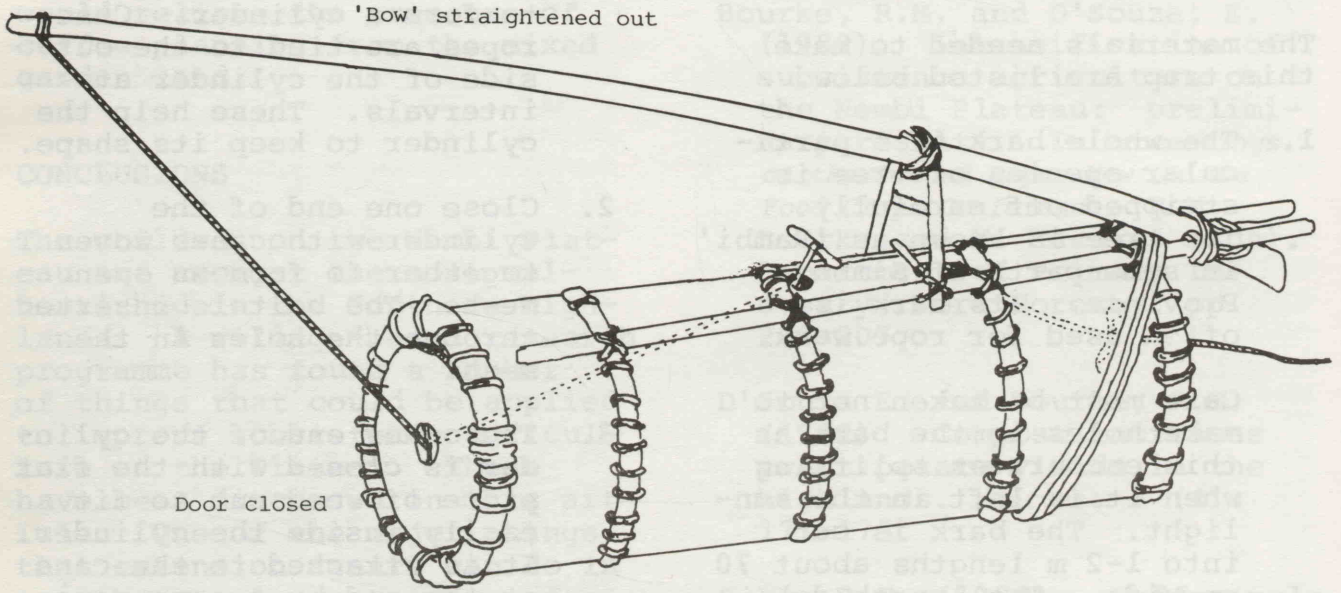
* *Present address: P.N.G. University of Technology, P.O. Box 793, Lae.*

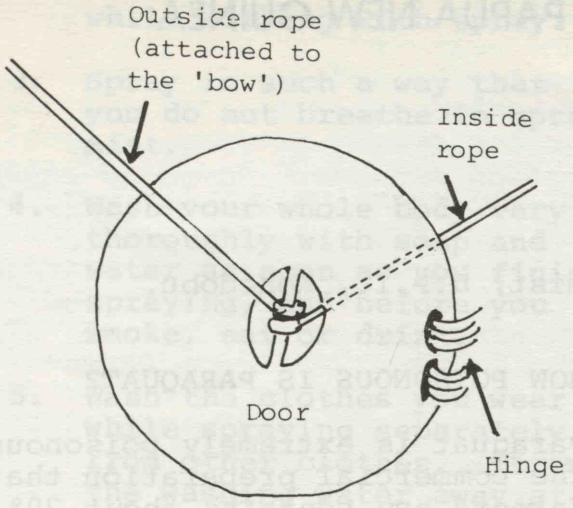
THE EEL TRAP IN THE 'SET' POSITION



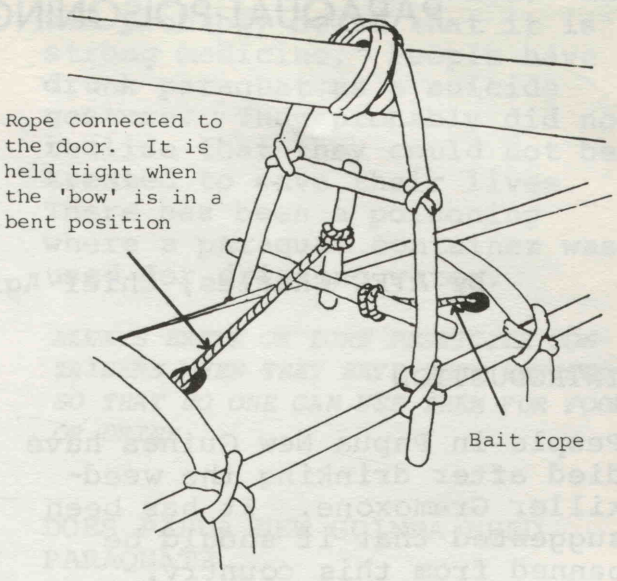
THE EEL TRAP 'RELEASED'



The construction and operation of the eel trap. In the top diagram, the door of the trap is held open by ropes which connect the door to the 'key knob' and to the 'bow'. In the lower diagram, the bait has been pulled down. This loosens the horizontal bar (A), and so releases the vertical bar (B) in the 'key knob' This then allows the 'bow' to spring back to a straight position. At the same time the door is pulled closed.



Detail of the door of the trap, to show how the ropes are attached



Detail of the 'key knob' of the trap, in the 'set' position. See explanation below.

4. Fasten the two shorter sticks to the top of the cylinder, with about 20 cm sticking out from the back of the cylinder. They should be tied in a V-shape as shown in the diagram.

5. The longer stick is tied in the middle of the V-shape, as shown. A cane rope attaches the flexible end to the hinged door of, the cylinder. This long flexible stick is the 'bow' of the trap.

6. Make the key knob of the trap as shown in the enlarged diagram.

The diagrams above and opposite show how the trap is made and how it works.

HOW THE TRAP WORKS

The bait is tied to a cane rope and inserted though a hole in the mesh at the back of the trap. The other end of the bait is tied to the horizontal piece of wood (A) in the key knob. The vertical piece of wood (B) has a rope going from it to the hinged door.

The two pieces of wood, A and B, are arranged in a 'T' shape so that if the bait is pulled, the horizontal piece (A) slips down, releasing the vertical piece (B). The bow of the trap is then able to spring up and so shuts the door of the trap.

The baits used in these trap are the larvae of tree beetles, which are very easy to see in water.

The trap is suspended in a stream or river. The door to the trap is left ajar. Any eels passing will be attracted by the larvae. Eventually the eel finds its way into the trap through the door. As soon as the eel pulls the bait, it causes the door to close. So the eel is trapped.