Kau Lä’au and Ma’ama’a: Traditional Hawaiian Ulua Fishing, 28 minutes, DVD, color, 2005. Writer, editor, and director: Kate Sample; executive producer: Charles M Langlas; distributor: Pili Productions <http://www .pacificworlds.com/piliprod.cfm>, Social Sciences Division, University of Hawai‘i at Hilo. US$9.00 (including US domestic postage); US$11.00 (including international postage).


I viewed a video version of this documentary, produced for teachers in Hawai‘i’s schools, but now being made available to the public in DVD format. This video documents the two traditional Hawaiian shore-fishing techniques used to catch the large predatory fish known among Hawaiians as ulua (Caranx spp, English Giant Trevally or Jack Crevalle). The documentary features three generations of traditional Hawaiian fishermen from Kalapana in the Puna District, east of Hawai‘i Volcanoes National Park on the southeast corner of the Big Island (Hawai‘i), who demonstrate the making of materials for and application of the kau lā‘au and ma‘ama‘a ulua fishing techniques. While these traditional Hawaiian fishing techniques date back to before European contact and have continued to the present day, they exhibit little change and are still being passed from generation to generation in a few Hawaiian families. The video also successfully addresses social aspects and ecological values associated with these traditional Hawaiian fishing techniques as discussed by the narrator and described by the fishermen themselves.

Kau lā‘au, which is locally referred to as “hang-baiting,” involves the use of a stout pole of ‘ōhi‘a wood (Metro-sideros spp), which is wedged into the crack at a shoreline cliff overlooking the nearshore ocean surge. At one end of the pole is a line that runs up along the wood and through a Υ configuration at the tip of the pole; it then hangs down just above the crests of the waves below. To bait the hook, the tail of an eel (Hawaiian puhi) is used, while the head is pounded into a mash that is thrown in the water as chum to attract the ulua (Viewer’s Guide, 2). The other technique, known as ma‘ama‘a, or locally called “cowboy style,” is a hand-lining technique that is often used from the shore and away from the cliffs, especially when placement of the pole for the kau lā‘au is not feasible. For the ma‘ama‘a technique, a hook is baited with a sewn eel tail and tied to a hand line. This line is twirled overhead, cast to the ocean, and pulled in to attract the ulua. Both fishing techniques were still commonly used by Hawaiians well into the first half of the twentieth century, though since the 1920s many Hawaiians and other locals began fishing for ulua by slide-baiting. This technique requires the use of long stiff rods with reels and terminal tackle adapted for the ulua. Slide-baiting has caused a decline in the availability of ulua as well as changes in the fish’s behavior. These factors have made it difficult to catch the ulua using the traditional Hawaiian techniques
(Viewers' Guide, 12). All these techniques are described in more detail in the accompanying Viewers' Guide, which also serves as an excellent educational tool to facilitate classroom discussion.

Charles M. Langlas, the executive producer, who teaches anthropology at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, notes that filming for this project began in 1995 (Viewers' Guide, 3). Filming took place at seven different locations, for a total of seventeen days, and over a five-year time span. The video focuses on the fishermen of the Hauanio family, spanning three generations in the Kalapana area: Ben Hauanio was born in 1928 and is originally from Kalapana village. Aku Hauanio, the son of Ben's older brother John Hauanio, was born in 1951, has lived in Kalapana all his life, and works today at the Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. Kainoa Hauanio, Aku's son, was born in 1980 and also grew up in Kalapana. We learn that these three men are among the few remaining people who learned to use traditional fishing gear from parents. For example, Ben recalls learning to throw nets by following and watching his father perform this activity. Aku learned the technique in similar fashion from his father.

Part of the local knowledge that is handed down concerns the collection and preparation of materials for the making of fishing implements employed in kau lāʻau and maʻamaʻa. To illustrate, the long wooden pole used in kau lāʻau is carefully cut from the ʻōhiʻa tree and then peeled and properly seasoned. The line made for the maʻamaʻa technique was originally derived from a shrub (Touchardia latifolia) and the dye from the bark of the kukui nut tree (Aleurites moluccana).

The method used for filming was to allow the fishermen to speak for themselves as much as possible about kau lāʻau and maʻamaʻa as well as related aspects of Hawaiian culture. Their descriptions and viewpoints are interspersed and introduced or elaborated on through the voice-over narration by Jacqueline Pualani Johnson, who introduces concepts and summarizes important points during the interviews with the fishermen. The traditional Hawaiian music presented throughout the 28-minute production nicely complements the Hawaiian spirit of aloha that these fishermen graciously exhibit in sharing their traditional heritage and cultural values.

Writer-director and editor Kate Sample, together with Langlas and consulting marine anthropologist Craig Severance, address several important issues pertaining to Hawaiian values and conservation. The issues are skillfully brought out in this excellent documentary. First is the relationship between Hawaiian fishing and other aspects of Hawaiian culture, such as beliefs about good and bad luck, and ideas on the importance of sharing fish with other members of the community. On one occasion, Aku says: “You don’t point at the fish. As the fish come, a lot of people start pointing, that’s the worst, the worst thing.” (According to Hawaiian custom, pointing to the fish may scare them away or cause them not to bite the bait.) Next is the significance of Hawaiian attitudes about conservation of marine resources. Another
issue is the critical aspect of cultural loss and perpetuation of Hawaiian culture and tradition, as exemplified by how much traditional Hawaiian fishing knowledge has been lost and how much remains to be transmitted to the next generations. Finally, the issue of identity is brought out as we listen to Ben’s and Aku’s narratives about what fishing means to them and their wish for their children to one day carry on the traditions with their own families (see also Viewer’s Guide, 4).

This video should be of great value for classroom teaching as well as for educating the public about traditional Hawaiian subsistence fishing, resource management, and Hawaiian culture in general. The script not only is well written and informative but also reveals great sensitivity for the people of Kalapana. (A general map of the Big Island showing the Kalapana area in the Puna District would have been helpful to those viewers unfamiliar with the geography and place names of Hawai‘i.) Short black-and-white clips of the early days of the Hauanio fishers throwing nets are nicely woven into the footage and act as an engaging contrast to the contemporary “ethnographic moment.” Finally, the outstanding photography by five camerapersons skillfully features the Hauanio men fishing on the breathtaking cliffs overlooking the Kalapana shore. In addition, there are some vivid underwater shots of elusive ulua themselves and the eels that are used for bait and chum. In summary, the generous sharing of Hawaiian fishing culture by members of the Hauanio family coupled with the conscientious documentation by a talented production crew have made for a video that may well be the best short documentary yet produced about an important aspect of traditional Hawaiian culture.

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Delegations from twenty-seven Pacific nations gathered in Palau from 22–31 July 2004 for the Festival of Pacific Arts, a magnificent celebration of Pacific cultures that takes place every four years. Launched in 1972 in an effort to safeguard Pacific art and performance traditions, this Islander-organized and Islander-oriented festival remains the foremost arts event in the region.

For participants, selection as a delegate offers a marvelous opportunity to travel to a different part of the Pacific, to learn about the practices of other Pacific islands, and to proudly represent the home culture through carefully prepared presentations or cultural displays. Many report an increased pride in their own heritage and greater awareness of its importance as they reflect on the similarities and differences that mark Pacific cultures. For the observers who come from around the world, the event presents continuous performances and exhibitions that run from morning until late at night, providing an unparalleled concentration of outstanding music and dance as well as access to an incredible array of Pacific