

# The Dangerous Sport of Shark Hunting

CATCHING THE LARGE, gray, man-eating shark — niuhi was the name of this shark in Hawaiian — was the dangerous sport of high chiefs, an ancient sport that persisted through the time of Kamehameha the Great.

Best bait was putrified human flesh. Putrified pork was a less-preferred substitute, as was the liver and flesh of common sharks.

It took preparation time and manpower to put several high chiefs at sea in a double-hulled canoe to catch the man-eater. Those chiefs who helped catch and kill one were honored. They shared the parts of the shark after it was killed and on the beach.

Teeth of the niuhi went to the chief or chiefs who finely noosed him in deep water. All preserved parts, in-

*A pastime for chiefs used human flesh, as bait.*

cluding bones and skin, were believed to confer extra bravery on their owners.

Flesh of the man-eater was cooked and eaten by high chiefs — but the flesh was kapu to women, even high chiefesses.

COMMONER MEN, and even occasionally women, were killed for shark bait.

First, the body or bodies — human, pig or common shark (but

fication process, the flesh was mixed with 'awa, the pounded root of kava (*Piper methysticum*), which causes drowsiness in humans — and apparently in sharks.

Thus, part of the technique used by Hawaiian high chiefs was to tranquilize man-eating sharks before they tried to noose them.

Now comes the hunt. Sharks can detect the presence of cooked flesh from great distances. Advance chumming of putrified cooked pig or shark meat attracted regular sharks almost immediately to the chosen area of the ocean.

The big niuhi came after three or four days of such chumming.

With niuhi present offshore, it was time for the high chiefs with their human bait mixed with 'awa.

At the chosen spot, the bundles were pierced with spears (or the liquid on the platters was poured overboard) to float a greasy fluid behind the canoe. Ever-hungry man-eaters rose to gulp it down.

THE FLUID TRAIL led the niuhi close behind the canoe. Sometimes bundles of flesh-'awa were thrown overboard for the big sharks to eat.

Man-eaters circled the canoe in a frenzy of feeding.

Finally, made drowsy or stupid from the 'awa, one would swim between the hulls close enough to touch. The trick was to try to get one swimming from bow to stern.

Ideally, the stern noose went over

the head, and the bow noose over the tail.

By this time, the chiefs canoe was well in toward shallow water. Nooses were weighted with stones to sink them properly for attachment.

Once the nooses were tightened, the high chiefs, if lucky, had a happy, contented, tranquilized captive. They tried to keep him that way, for the feeding continued all the way to shore.

There, the niuhi was killed by a spear thrust in what was one of the most dangerous sports of old Hawaii.

## Today in History

TODAY IS FRIDAY, Dec. 12, the 347th day of 1980. There are 19 days left in the year.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT in history.

On Dec. 12, 1642, New Zealand was discovered by Dutch navigator Abel Tasman.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS: Singer Frank Sinatra is 65. Singer Dionne Warwick is 40.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: A great man is always willing to be little. — Ralph Waldo Emerson. American essayist and poet, 1803-1892.

The Associated Press

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## Tales of Old Hawaii

By  
Russ and  
Peg Apple

never mixed) — were cooked in an underground oven, an imu. When the flesh could be separated from the bones, the bones were discarded. The flesh was usually wrapped in banana leaves. Sometimes the flesh was placed on wooden platters.

Bundled or on platters, the flesh was left several days to putrify.

A rock bench, several feet wide and several feet long, built into the Great Wall at Honaunau, Big Island, is believed to be one place the bundles were laid out to rot. Two platters collected in 1893 by the Bishop Museum were reputed to have been for decomposed human flesh destined to bait sharks. The platters were said to belong to high chief Alapa'i-kupalupu-maro, a contemporary of Kamehameha the Great.

SOMETIME DURING the putri-

HAWAIIAN STAR-BULLETIN



THE SUNDAY STAR-BIG ADVERTISER

# The true meaning of shark bait: horses and humans

Capt. John "Jack" Young Jr. doesn't mince words when he talks about sharks.

"I hate the damn things," he says. "They're vicious."

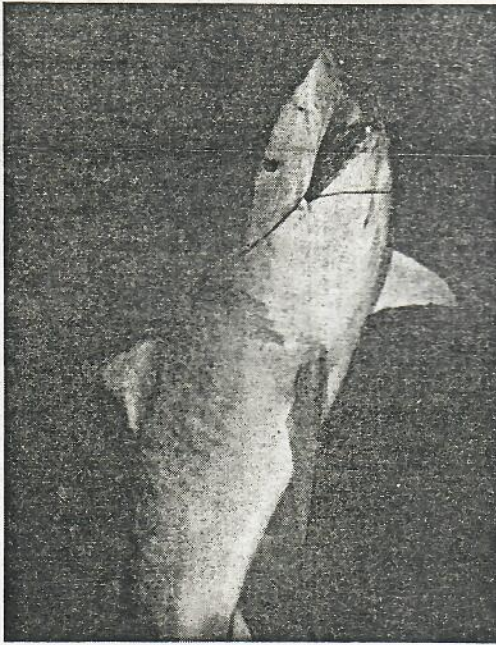
Young's father, John Sr., was a founder of the Young Brothers Barge Co. His uncle, Capt. William E. Young, was a world famous shark hunter during the 1920s, '30s and '40s.

Time and popular perceptions have changed since the days the Young brothers would take paying guests off Keeki Lagoon and harpoon large sharks for sport. Today there'd be an outcry if people were to shoot old horses on the waterfront as the Youngs did and then drag the bloody carcasses behind a boat to attract large sharks.

(The Youngs were not the only people who did this. In the Kohala region of the Big Island, sharks were killed using old horses and other livestock as bait through the 1950s.)

"In those days, they didn't think there was much value to the shark," said Young, 72. "I only went out once when I was a kid . . . They (his uncles) had thrown the harpoon at one of the sharks and as the line played out, I almost got caught in the damn thing. My father never let me go again."

Lowell Dillingham, 74, chairman of Dillingham Corp., also recalled going shark hunting with the Youngs when he was a small boy. He remembers being on a tugboat pulling a "very white, very dead horse" off Ewa Beach. The carcass — from a horse on its way to the slaughterhouse — was sliced so it would bleed and then left to drift until it attracted sharks.



Waikiki, Aquarium photo

A tiger shark at bay.

The tugboat left the scene for a leisurely tour of the area, then returned when the carcass had attracted 10 or 15 sharks. Dillingham said he was too young at the time to react emotionally to what was happening and was uncertain what motivated people to go shark hunting — "whether it was hatred or some kind of sport." But he said few Hawaiians participated. Hating sharks, he said, was something by recent books and films such as

"outside their experience."  
"No, why should we do that?" asked Francis "Son" Hekekeia, Honolulu fire captain and commercial scuba diver. He said that when he was growing up his parents taught him to respect and revere sharks, not to hate or fear them.

Hekekeia said he doesn't approve of the hatred generated against sharks by recent books and films such as



from the sea  
mike markrich

"Jaws" and disapproves of killing them for sport.

"When I was growing up," Hekekeia said, "we learned to think of the shark as our *amakua* (a personal family spirit) that looked out for us . . . All of us as children were always taught that man is more dangerous than a shark."

"Our parents would say to us, 'How many people die in the ocean due to shark attacks and how many due to attacks or murders by humans?'" (According to the Waikiki Aquarium and the National Marine Fisheries Service, there have been 65 shark attacks in Hawaii recorded since 1886; 28 of them fatal.)

The shark played an important role in Hawaiian mythology. Children were taught not to venture into the ocean when the red flowers of the wilowill tree bloomed, for during that period sharks were said to be especially dangerous. People who captured sharks were thought to derive strength and bravery from their mana or spirit.

But for the most part sharks were left alone. They were an accepted part of the Hawaiian ocean environment and some were even tamed by Hawaiians as undersea pets. There are stories, however, that certain Hawaiians of high rank did fish

for the muihi or tiger shark from a canoe. Capture of the tiger sharks, which are among the most dangerous of all local sharks, was difficult and risky. According to several accounts, during the time of Kamehameha I, human beings were sometimes used to bait them — hence the modern expression, "shark bait."

According to the classic 1915 work by former University of Hawaii zoologist William Alanson Bryan, "The Natural History of the Hawaiian Islands," slaves were killed two or three days in advance of a fishing expedition and the flesh of the victims placed in a special container and allowed to decompose.

(It is important to view this in historical perspective. During the same period it was not uncommon for lower-class Europeans to be hanged or burned alive at a stake for minor infractions such as stealing a loaf of bread.)

The human bait would then be loaded onto an outrigger in a way that left a trail of blood in the water. The canoe would be paddled toward an area known to have sharks and the fishing, with special large hooks, would begin.

In more recent times, the organized killing of sharks has fallen into disfavor, says National Marine Fisheries Service biologist John Naughton.

Naughton, who participated in a two-year UH shark control program, said modern research indicates that killing sharks without purpose can be counterproductive. He said they are the top carnivores in the Hawaii ocean and are important in keeping a natural balance in the ocean ecosystem.



Island Edition



Pierre Bowman of Big Isle practices with harpoon — but there was no target by the end of the day. Advertiser photo by Hugh Clark.

### Festive event in Kohala

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# 2,000 at shark hunt, but star fails to show

By HUGH CLARK

Advertiser Big Island Bureau

UPOLU POINT, Hawaii—Man declared war on the sharks again at another of North Kohala's hunts during the weekend. This time, the sharks didn't bother to come.

But up to 2,000 persons came to line the Upolu Point cliffs to watch a headless cow carcass in the water as a would-be lure to the feared foes from the sea.

A crew of shark experts occasionally poured another can of slaughterhouse blood into the swirling waters to augment the carcass lure, which had been floating in the water for two days after the cow's death by cancer. But even 25 gallons of blood failed to produce a single pass of a shark.

**HAD A SHARK COME BY**, veteran hunter Pierre Bowman of Union Mill and his crew of spearmen and riflemen would have shot at and harpooned the creature to the apparent thrill of the crowd.

The local phrase here for the grisly activity is called euphemistically, "shark charming." Bowman, a one-time Oregon State football star who recently retired from a career in the sugar industry, has been hunting sharks for 30 years.

Every two or three years, he explained, he stages a spectacular like this as a fund-raiser. Once it was for the prep basketball team; this year, it was for Steve McPeck, who recently was elected statewide president of the Future Farmers of America and needs some travel funds to go to the Mainland.

**ON SUNDAY**, the young farmers took donations at a roped entrance to the area of the hunt. They also sold soda, hot dogs, hamburgers and shaved ice. A booth loaded with vegetables and plants grown by the young farmers did a brisk business.

The Kohala High School stage band played swing numbers from 1930's — rather incongruous music to watch for sharks while the now bloated cow bobbed in the sea.

The crowd was not particularly boisterous or excited — but certainly curious.

Viewers were drawn from all parts of the Island, including large numbers from Hilo and Puna 80 to 100 miles away.

Persons had different reasons for attending.

"Never seen anything like this before," was the most common reason offered.

"Doesn't bother me. If it (the shark) will kill man, we shouldn't worry about what happens to it," was another explanation.

"I don't bother with why — let's just say it's a pre-Christian event," is the way another wrote off the experience.

**A QUESTION** was raised: Why do police and prosecutors arrest, charge and try cockfighters for cruelty to animals and not even patrol this shark hunt?

A member of the vice squad who asked not to be identified responded with a large shrug: "Gee, don't ask me. Go higher up. You do seem to have a point, though."

County Prosecutor Paul M. de Silva said the criminal-justice system must choose which activities to stop and which to permit.

"This must be determined against a backdrop of acceptability," he said.

If the 1972 cruelty-to-animal statute were applied evenly, police and prosecutors might be forced to press against weekend paniolos for calf roping or Kona fishermen for their bouts with billfish, De Silva reasoned.

Trying to show the absurdity of concerns for baited sharks, he said: "We would have to prosecute a person for using an aerosol can on mosquitos."



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Herb Kane is one of the many artists who contributed to the 1987 Progress Edition. By Herb Kane