

## Making a Splash in the Pacific: Dolphin and Whale Myths and Legends of Oceania

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 Dolphins, whales and porpoises, collectively known as cetaceans, cause excitement wherever they are seen. This excitement may stem from the impressive size of the large whales, or the playful exertions of the acrobatic dolphins, not to mention the many stories of cetaceans coming to the aid of shipwrecked sailors and stranded fishermen. Whatever the origin of their appeal, cetaceans have featured prominently in mythology from ancient times. It comes as little surprise, then, that Oceania, so dominated by the waters of the vast Pacific, is rich in cetacean legends and mythology. From Australia and New Zealand to Hawai'i and Easter Island, dolphins and whales frequently appear in Pacific Island folklore. The majority of discussions about cetaceans in the past, however, have concentrated on the dolphin's role in Greek mythology, with scant regard for the beliefs of the sea-faring peoples of the Pacific.

It is interesting to note that one of the first British ships to explore the Pacific was, in fact, called *The Dolphin*, under the command of Captain John Byron (grandfather of the famous poet) in 1765. The following year, under the command of the more inquisitive Captain Samuel Wallis, *The Dolphin* landed in Matavai Bay, Tahiti, to a friendly welcome, three years prior to Captain Cook's arrival in 1769 to observe the transit of Venus. The myths and legends recounted below, however, originate from long before the first European settlers arrived in the South Seas, and some even speak of the creation and settlement of Oceania itself.

### AUSTRALIA

The late Burnum Burnum, Australian Aboriginal writer and activist, pointed out that the four extreme points of the Australian mainland have always been significant 'Dolphin Dreaming' sites for local tribes. In the west is Monkey Mia, in the east Byron Bay, in the south is Wilson's Promontory and in the far north Bamaga, though he pointed out that the entire Australian coastline is in fact blessed with the presence of dolphins and whales. According to Burnum, the sight of a dolphin or whale always brought joy to Aboriginal tribes, particularly in times of difficulty or distress, and in his own tribe, the Wurunjeri of south-eastern Australia, the dolphin was regarded as a sacred symbol or totem. In common with other tribes, the Wurunjeri engaged in co-operative fishing with the help of the local dolphins. The tribe would also consult the dolphins for answers and insights on important tribal matters (apparently by use of telepathy), and the tribe believed that the spirits of their dead would transform into dolphin bodies and remain offshore, helping and guiding the familiar members of the human tribe on land. It was always forbidden among the Wurunjeri people to hunt or kill dolphins; to do so would invoke the wrath of the 'feather footed man,' Gornge (the Executioner).

The Wurunjeri people are one of several tribes in Australia that share a special relationship with cetaceans. As still happens in some parts of the world today (such as Brazil and Maurita-

nia), the Noonuccal tribe of Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island, Queensland) traditionally fished for mullet with the help of a local pod of dolphins. The members of this tribe believed that they shared a common ancestor with the dolphins—the cultural hero Gowonda who, along with his hunting dogs, was transformed into a dolphin and thereafter helped the local people to catch fish. According to the legend, Gowonda could be instantly recognized by his white fin, and this characteristic was passed down to his descendants, always making it easy to recognize the leader of any dolphin pod.

When fishing, the tribesmen would first sit on the sand dunes, concentrating on the ocean (many observers believed they were telepathically communicating with the dolphins, much as the Wurunjeri people did), mentally calling each individual dolphin by name. On the first sight of a dorsal fin, the men would rush down into the waves and start hitting the water's surface with their spears. It is also said that the locals communicated with the dolphins through certain sounds and whistles, which the dolphins themselves used in 'reply' to the men, and thus a 'spoken' language existed between the two species.

The dolphins would drive the fish towards the awaiting nets of the men, who would show their gratitude by offering some of the mullet to their willing helpers. Some witnesses even reported seeing the dolphins accept mullet off the end of spears, showing no signs of fear or apprehension. Moreover, some dolphins were known to have waited in the area until they received their due reward, and would patiently swim up and down the beach until they were fed with some of the men's catch! When European settlers first came to this area, they would secretly watch this co-operative fishing, and slowly learned the whistles and sounds that the tribe used to communicate with the dolphins. They then imitated the sounds, and when the dolphins approached the settlers would kill and eat them. Not surprisingly, the surviving dolphins stopped coming to the beach soon afterwards.

The tribes along Australia's south-eastern coastline tell of a great battle that occurred between the ancestors of the water, air and earth at the mouth of Logan River, New South Wales. The land creatures were led by Goanna, the air creatures by Sparrow Hawk, and the water creatures were led by Dolphin. In the midst of the battle, Sparrow Hawk swooped down and snatched Goanna's spear, driving it deep into the back of Dolphin. However, Dolphin was strong; he blew the spear out of his body in a mighty breath, and a torrent of blood and water rushed towards the shore and flooded the land. To this day, swamps and tiny islands dot the vast estuary of the Logan River—standing as a memorial to the strength and resilience of Dolphin.

The 'Dolphin Tribe' of Mornington Island, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, shares a very special bond with the dolphin to this day. The tribe has a shaman, who apparently has the ability to communicate telepathically with the local dolphins, and the

people believe that the shaman is a dolphin spirit that has chosen to reincarnate in a human body. Having the 'soul' of a dolphin, the shaman always understands the clicks and whistles of the dolphins, and will always begin communicating with the dolphins using these sounds until, having built up to a crescendo of dolphin chatter, both he and the dolphins suddenly fall silent. According to the shaman, it is at this point that the conversation becomes telepathic.

Also in Northern Australia, the native people of Groote Eylandt tell a story about their origins which accounts for the special relationship they share with dolphins to this day. Millennia ago, in the early days of Dreamtime, lived the Indjbena, or dolphins. Although smaller than their present-day relatives, the dolphins still spent much of their time riding the waves and playing in the shallows. Dinginjabana was the strong, courageous leader of the dolphins, and took great delight in teasing and taunting the helpless Yakuna, the shell-fish that lived peacefully on the ocean's sandy bottom. Dinginjabana's mate, Ganadja, was unlike the other dolphins, for she shared many hours with the Yakuna, learning from their profound wisdom and knowledge of the ocean. Although a bold and fearless leader, Dinginjabana was a jealous mate, quickly roused to fits of envy by seeing Ganadja's loving devotion towards the Yakuna shells. The more time she spent with her bottom-dwelling friends, the more Dinginjabana taunted the shells. Eventually, the leader of the shells, Baringgwa, warned his kind to be vigilant, explaining that the dolphins were increasingly discourteous and provocative. Dinginjabana was incensed when he heard of the Yakuna shells' criticism of the dolphins, and angrily charged Baringgwa, tossing him high above the waves with his powerful tail flukes.

Ganadja was heartbroken when she saw her fellow dolphins treat the Yakuna shells so badly, and knew it would only be a matter of time until the Yakunas called upon Mana, the tiger sharks, to come and attack the dolphins. Sure enough, the next time the dolphins chose to taunt the Yakunas, the shells beckoned the assistance of Mana, the sharks. The dolphins were helpless against the sharp teeth and killer instinct of the sharks, and one by one, they fell victim to the sharks' merciless attacks. Ganadja, meanwhile, had sought shelter with the help of the Yakunas, who covered her body on the ocean floor, completely hiding her from the sharks. The souls of all the dolphins killed by the sharks rose from the ocean floor onto the land, and transformed into human bodies. Meanwhile, Ganadja, the sole survivor of the massacre, remained alone in the ocean until one day she gave birth to a son, whom she named Dinginjabana, in memory of his father. Her new-born son grew to be larger than any dolphin had ever been before, and was the first of the dolphin clan that we see in our oceans today, stronger than their ancestors, respectful but fearless of sharks.

After her son had grown, Ganadja again found herself feeling lonely in the ocean, and it was with great delight that she saw the human form of her mate, Dinginjabana, in the shallow waters one day. As Dinginjabana recognized his Ganadja, the joy in his face was so apparent that Ganadja became elated, and she transformed into a human body to be reunited with her mate. As time passed, this human couple had many children, who became the 'Dolphin Tribe' of Groote Island. These people have never forgotten their connection with their ancestors in the

ocean, just as the dolphins remember to this day the special affinity they share with their human cousins.

As well as the dolphin, the whale is also a revered ancestor of many Aboriginal tribes in Australia, particularly those living near the ocean. The sacred 'Rainbow Serpent', associated with all the life-giving elements of the earth (including the sun, water, fire and wind), was often symbolized as a whale and was said to originate in the very center of the galaxy—the cloudy stellar nebulae we now call the Milky Way. On his voyage to earth, many other creatures accompanied the Whale/Rainbow Serpent, and his influence thus spread beyond the waters onto the parched landscape of the Australian continent. Indeed, the rock formations where the ocean meets the land (cliffs, caves and blowholes) are believed by some tribes to be the work of the sacred Whale ancestor, and in these places his energy is said to be felt most strongly. Indeed, as the whale ancestor moved from site to site, it is believed that he left a trail of energy that can still be 'tapped into', often through the medium of song, by those tribe members who have been initiated. These serpent-like 'song lines' can even be used to navigate from point to point across the whole landmass of Australia. The most sacred sites of the Mirning and Kondoledjeri ('Whale People') of South Australia correspond remarkably closely to the preferred coastal locations for the Southern Right Whales to breed, play and give birth.

To both of these tribes, the whales (especially any rare, all-white whales) are sacred, and the Elders still relate stories about Numbadda (the Rainbow Serpent), which they symbolize as a whale. These people have long possessed the ability to 'call' the whales close to shore to watch them cavorting in the waves. Small groups of tribal Elders would go to Numbadda's sacred sites at midday, where they would be sprayed with the mist of the ocean as the waves crashed against the rocks and up through small openings. This spray created a rainbow as it refracted the sunlight, reminding the members of the tribe of their connection with the Rainbow Serpent. The Elders then went to a special site on the top of a nearby cliff, where they would sing to the whales. They beckoned the mighty leviathans to come close to shore, which the whales invariably did, and the Elders would pay respect to their totemic guardians in the sea below. The Kondoledjeri people also speak of a particular Whale Dreaming site which is the home of all 'whale souls' and to which the spirits of all whales travel when the physical body dies.

The Mirning people of the Nullarbor region of South Australia tell the legend of a sacred cove called Coolani. This was the scene of a great ceremony hosted by Jiddea, the Rainbow Serpent in its Whale-form, and attended by all the animals of land and sea, including the Dolphins, Wombats, Emus, Kangaroos, Koalas and Dingos. All those invited were seated around a great stone table, which can still be seen to this day. It is also still possible to see some of the animal guests, who were transformed into stone as testament to the gathering.

The Mirning people also tell of Jiddea's attendance during Creation times at a ceremony which he was actually not entitled to attend, being uninitiated at that time. His illicit attendance provoked the wrath of Yugarilya (the Seven Sisters of the Pleiades constellation). They chased Jiddea away, and in his haste the mighty whale shaped the southern coast of the land, carving

out blowholes and caves the length of the shore, and he even created the high cliffs of the Great Australian Bight with a mighty heave of his body. Along these cliffs ran a black and a white dingo, his two friends, who accompanied him on his journey to the west to be initiated, as Yugarilya had decreed. When he reached the west he was instructed in special tribal law at a sacred location, and he then carried on swimming further west to mate with his wives and begin the line from which the whales of today are descended.

Another Mirning story tells of the arrival of animals in Australia. In the distant, inhabited lands of the East, all the animals had heard from the flocks of migratory birds about a beautiful, empty land, far across the ocean. Vexed as to how they could reach this land, the animals asked Whale if they could make use of his large canoe—the only vessel large enough to carry them all. When Whale refused, they enlisted the help of Whale's close friend and ally, Starfish, who agreed to distract his friend Whale while the animals secretly borrowed the canoe and sailed to the distant land across the sea.

All was going well for the escaping animals as Starfish distracted his friend by picking the whale-lice off his skin, lulling him into a deep and relaxed sleep. When Whale awoke and discovered his canoe had been taken, he was furious, and angrily tossed Starfish around with his mighty tail. To this day, Starfish's ancestors hide quietly in small pools and dark caves, far away from the wrath of Whale, and bear the scars on their skin inflicted by the mighty leviathan of the Sea. By way of retaliating, though, Starfish was able to gouge a hole in Whale's back, which all of Whale's ancestors to this day carry, and through which they must breathe.

Whale chased his canoe, filled with all the animals, for many days and nights across the vast ocean. Had it not been for Koala, with his strong arms to paddle, Whale would have caught them. As it happened, the animals made it to shore, where they jumped out of the boat, then jumped on the wooden frame and cast it out to sea, where it was turned into an island of rock, which stands to this day. The animals adapted to the new land quickly, and flourished there, while Whale swam along the coast for several months, very close to land, before departing. To this day, Whale's descendants return each year, and swim along the coast, just as their ancestor did all that time ago.

Another myth that accounts for the presence of the whale's blowhole comes from the Aboriginal people of what is now Encounter Bay, Southern Australia. They tell of a mighty tribesman, Kondole, a tall, strong but mean-spirited man who was the only member of the tribe to possess the stick of fire, the only means of illumination in the dark Australian night. One evening, Kondole refused to reveal to the others in the tribe where he had hidden the stick of fire, thus preventing them all from dancing into the night. In his rage, one of the tribesmen crept up behind Kondole and drove a spear through the back of his head. At that instant, the members of the tribe were transformed into different creatures, including kangaroos and possums, dolphins and fish. Kondole, meanwhile, was transformed into the largest and strongest creature of all—the whale—and to this day still bears the hole in the back of his head from the sharp spear that penetrated it.

One of the most famous places in present-day Australia to

encounter wild dolphins is Monkey Mia, Western Australia. In this remote spot, nearly 1000 km north of Perth, it is possible to wade in knee-deep water surrounded by a pod of friendly, wild dolphins that have been coming into the Bay of their own accord since the mid-1960s. The visitors of today, however, may not be the first to encounter the dolphins in this region. The word 'Mia' originally meant 'home' or 'camping place' to the Aboriginal people of Australia's west coast, and the ready supply of firewood, fresh water and fish that are found in the vicinity of Shark Bay would have undoubtedly made this a very attractive site for the people to have based themselves. Indeed, archaeological evidence indicates that people were living in the area thousands of years ago. Excavated bones of the creatures that these people ate include crab, turtle and wallaby. Significantly, not a single dolphin (or whale) remnant has ever been found among the excavated bones. This suggests that Aboriginal people of this area held the dolphins in sufficiently high regard to refrain from eating them, and perhaps even revered them in the same manner as the tribes of Australia's northern, southern and eastern coasts.

#### NEW ZEALAND

The Maori of New Zealand have traditionally enjoyed a long and sacred relationship with dolphins and whales. They believed that dolphins provided assistance in finding the answers and solutions to tribal problems, regarding cetaceans as 'the human beings of the sea'. Dolphins were generally known as *tepuhi*, a name thought to originate from the sound that the dolphin makes as it breathes air out through its blowhole. Some Maori tribes learned to recognize certain aspects of cetacean body language, such as the manner in which dolphins and whales would leap out of the water, as an indicator of future events, and as such they regarded cetaceans as messengers of the gods. It was possible to know in advance, for example, if a sick member of a tribe would live or die by observing the behavior of whales and dolphins close to shore.

One of the world's smallest dolphins is the Hector's Dolphin, measuring only about 1 meter when fully grown. It is an agile, sprightly dolphin, and is found only in the coastal waters of New Zealand. It was known by the Maori as *Tutumairekurai*, meaning 'special ocean dweller.' Some Maori tribes, particularly those in the South Island around the Banks Peninsula (where the Hector's Dolphin is most commonly seen) believed that the spirits of the dead would become *tutumairekurai*. Another name for the dolphin in common usage was *Tupoupou*, which means 'to rise up vertically.' This presumably originated from observing the dolphins 'spy-hopping', so that the head (with both eyes) is above the water's surface, the tail balancing them from below so that they appear to 'hover' in one location to have a good look around!

A number of Maori myths incorporate cetaceans, often with dolphins helping people in trouble at sea, a theme which is common in Greek myths (such as the popular story of *Arion and the Dolphin*). One story tells of a young Maori woman who had to choose between two men that loved her. The one she rejected, Ruru, was so incensed with anger at not being chosen that he threw her over a cliff in a fit of rage, killing her instantly. Of course, the man whom the girl had chosen was enraged by this, and fought with Ruru, eventually throwing him

over the same cliff. As Ruru fell, his anger roused him to utter a Maori curse to kill the man who had defeated him. However, this powerful curse, normally used only by the head of the tribe, actually fell on a dolphin in the water below, immediately killing it. Ruru himself was injured, but did not die from his fall; instead, he landed next to the dolphin that he had killed, now washed up on the shore. Feeling guilt for killing this innocent dolphin, Ruru approached the medicine man of the tribe, the dead dolphin in his arms, and explained what had happened. The wise elder was so angry that Ruru had used the curse inappropriately, and without the right to do so, that he transferred the spirit of Ruru into the dolphin, and instructed him to watch safely over all passing boats for eternity.

Another tale comes from the North Island of New Zealand, where the Ngapuhi Tribe lived. In this tribe a young and an old chief were feuding, and in a fit of anger one day, during a canoe expedition, the younger chief ordered the older chief's small son, Te Whare, to be thrown overboard. The older chief silently asked the dolphins to save his son, and one dolphin duly appeared on the scene as the canoe journeyed on. At first the dolphin played with the boy to win his confidence, and eventually Te Whare grew brave enough to touch and hold onto the dorsal fin of the helpful dolphin. The dolphin then swam the boy to the nearest beach, near the village of Maungakiekie, where members of another tribe found him. Unfortunately he was not treated well by the members of this tribe, but after many years of hardship, he returned to his own people, where he was regarded as a hero and eventually became Chief.

Another Maori story comes from Motutapu Island. One day, a woman was found on the beach covered in seaweed, barely alive. The tribe who found her realized that she must have been floating aimlessly in the ocean for many days, and they kindly took her in and looked after her. Eventually, she married the chief of the tribe, Tinirau, and they had a son together, Tuhuruhuru. As Tuhuruhuru approached manhood, his father gave him a pet dolphin, which he called Tutunui. When the time came for the boy to be formally initiated into manhood, his father called for the tribal medicine man named Kae to preside over the ceremony. After the ceremonies were over, and Tuhuruhuru had been initiated into manhood, Kae asked that he be taken back to his home on the back of the dolphin, whom he secretly intended to steal from the boy.

When Tutunui arrived at the shore near to Kae's home, he gave the signal for Kae to climb off his back, but the medicine man did not, instead chanting incantations which trapped the dolphin in the shallow water. Tutunui found it more and more difficult to breathe with all the sand-filled water washing over his blowhole. Eventually the dolphin died, and was promptly butchered and eaten. As the dolphin's flesh was cooked, the smell drifted across to Tinirau and his fellow warriors, who then attacked and killed Kae to avenge the death of the innocent dolphin.

In the eastern part of New Zealand's North Island lived the Ngatiawa tribe. Legend tells us that they lived well off the fertile land, heated by thermal waters, until one year a tremendous flood destroyed their crops. Looking for a scapegoat, some tribe members blamed a young man, Te Tahī, for dabbling in magic and bringing on the floods. It was decided that Te Tahī should be taken to a small, inhospitable volcanic island, Wha-

kaari, and left to fend for himself. Alone on the island, Te Tahī called on the dolphins to help, and they soon appeared in the shallow waters. They swam Te Tahī back to his home village on the Whakatane River, overtaking the canoes full of the tribe members who had callously marooned him. When the village people arrived back to see him there, they fell into a respectful, fearful silence and bothered him no further. Indeed, Te Tahī lived into old age. When he died, the dolphins came to the village to carry his body away into the sea, where he was transformed into a dolphin himself, and became a protective guardian at sea for all those in his family. Sure enough, as the years passed, none of Te Tahī's descendants ever fell victim to the ocean or suffered accidents at sea.

One popular Maori story tells of mighty whales that did not enjoy a life playing in the waters or helping troubled seafarers. In the village of Kereheretau there lived a very powerful, though ill-tempered, medicine man who had seven huge whales in his care. He would send the whales out each day to gain news about the world and happenings far away. The first whale, Tahutoria, gathered information from other whales about distant tribes and other lands. The second whale, Takitaki, spoke with the dolphins, and heard of their ocean adventures and the canoes they encountered on their journeys. The third whale, Korito, communicated with sharks, who spoke of distant battles and bloodshed. The fourth whale, Onepoto, conversed with the swordfish and flying fish about the magic of the clear blue ocean realms, while the fifth whale, Witea, learned of the depths of the dark ocean from the groper fish. The sixth whale, Tuhara, heard of strange, exotic creatures in distant seas from the snapper, while Hikunui, the youngest and smallest of the seven whales, stayed close to shore, chatting with the stingrays. Each day, after sunset, the seven whales told the medicine man the stories that they had learned that day, after which they slept soundly. Hikunui, having not exerted himself in his search for news, rarely slept well, and one evening, after many restless hours, he managed to fall asleep just before the sun began to rise. When morning came soon after, he remained asleep. The other whales in his pod, having set out on their daily voyage to gather news from the sea, turned back to waken their young companion. Unfortunately for the six whales, the medicine man was watching them. When he saw them all swimming in the wrong direction, shirking their duties, he grew very angry. In a fit of rage, he transformed the six whales into hills, dotted along the coast next to the sea. To this day, the six hills can be clearly seen in Kereheretau. Meanwhile, Hikunui, the seventh whale, remains sleeping peacefully, free from the curse suffered by the other members of his pod.

#### KIRIBATI

Kiribati (pronounced "Kir-ee-bas"), in the Central Pacific, is a tiny atoll Republic (albeit a huge country if ocean area is taken into account) relatively untouched by the outside world. On most of its atolls there is no electricity, running water or sewerage system. The country has no television or daily newspaper, the main transportation is by sailing canoe (as it has been for centuries) and outsiders are still regarded with a mixture of wonder and respect (even fear) on the outer islands. Cetaceans in Kiribati are known as Kua, literally meaning 'tired', because the whale's deep and full breaths traditionally reminded the lo-

cal people of a person sighing, or breathing heavily (as if asleep). Dolphins, meanwhile, were sometimes specifically called Kua Keve, or 'dolphin deceivers,' as some locals believed that the dolphins would mischievously lead whales (and other dolphins) to shallow waters, where the whales would become beached and die. The dolphins were known to help boatsmen navigate through difficult stretches of water, however. Indeed, between Tarawa and Maiana Islands, boatsmen frequently encountered dolphins in pairs, whose heads always pointed them in the direction of the narrow passage at Bairiki into the Tarawa lagoon, and to safety.

Dolphins and whales are common figures of speech in the I-Kiribati language, in both poetry and magic, to denote great rulers or powers. Indeed, uttering the word Kua in a magical ceremony was believed to invoke the formidable strength of cetaceans. On the island of Makin, boys were often required to spend long periods of time sitting on whale bones (a single vertebra being large enough to serve as a stool), invoking the magical powers of Te Kua to build strength, both physically and magically. The dolphin was even recognized in the night sky, with the constellation of Te Kua figuring prominently in the native's celestial observations.

A connection that occurs quite frequently in Micronesian mythology links the taro plant, a nutritious green-leafed vegetable, with cetaceans. According to the locals of Arorae Island, Kiribati, a giant named Te Toa mai Matang angrily hurled his spear at what he believed to be a large, dark cloud that was obscuring the warmth of the sun. This 'cloud' was, in fact, the tall leaves of four babai (taro) plants—two male, two female—growing on neighboring Tarawa Island (the main island in Kiribati). Badly damaged from the giant's attack, the taro plants fell down from the sky. One of them landed on the ground in Tarawa, where it remained and re-grew, but the other three plants fell to the ocean, where they were transformed into dolphins. The dolphins swam south, fleeing all attempts of capture by opportunist fishermen en route, until they arrived in the shallow waters of Arorae Lagoon. There, a giant named Ten Takoto waited for them – having been told in a dream of their arrival – and captured all three. He planted them in the ground, and thus introduced taro plants to the island, where they still flourish.

Another common story throughout Micronesia is of cetaceans that emerge from the sea in the form of humans to watch village celebrations and activities in secret. One such story comes from Onotoa Island, in the southern part of Kiribati. Here a group of dolphins were once attracted to the beach by the intoxicating perfume of a young man's hair oil. When the dolphins were spotted, all but one of them were slaughtered for their meat. One female dolphin, however, begged for mercy, and pleaded for her life with the sweet-smelling youth who was about to kill her. Reluctantly, he agreed to spare her by hiding her away from the other village people—in direct contravention of the rule stating that all dolphins must be taken to the village center to feast on. Once in her hiding place, the dolphin transformed into a beautiful young woman, and in time her feelings grew for the man who had spared her. The man was reluctant to marry this stranger, however, for to do so would have been to defy village custom. The man and his secret love began to argue, not realizing that the man's Mother could overhear their voices. After she had listened to the discussion, the Mother de-

cidated to take both her son and his 'Dolphin love' to the village Elders to arbitrate on the matter. Shaking with fear, the young woman pleaded to the Elders, explaining that all dolphins are human in origin, many having been transformed into dolphins from the souls of drowning people. The Elders accepted this explanation, and the two were finally allowed to marry. Since that time it has been taboo on the Island of Onotoa for anyone to kill or eat dolphins.

To this day, there seems to be a combination of feelings towards cetaceans in Kiribati. These sentiments range from respect for these 'people of the sea' to contempt for the foolishness at being 'enticed to their death' by following the leader of the pod into water that is too shallow. The locals also view cetaceans with intrigue, noting the combination of human traits (such as their dance-like movements in the water and their obvious love of play) as well as the evident fish-like traits that they possess. Further, the people of Kiribati feel a certain amount of fear at the threat that they perceive cetaceans pose to people at sea, no doubt connected with a legend that tells of the ancestor Bue (literally 'Fire,' and the son of the Sun). The story goes that the Sun gave a staff called Kaini Kamate ('the staff to kill') to Bue as a gift, together with a complete set of incantations for killing dolphins (Te Tiri Kua, or 'the Vanquishing of Cetaceans') in case he encountered any trouble from cetaceans at sea. Far from encountering hostility from the dolphins, however, the descendants of Bue seem to have encountered nothing but kindness and co-operation from cetaceans. In one story, a dolphin even gave Bue's grandson, Mataroa, a ride on his back to seek his estranged wife, Nei Ngangao. The stigma still remained, however, and until recent times mariners in Kiribati would often use Te Tiri Kua magic to protect themselves from cetaceans. A wooden wand, Te Kainonoki, would be pointed towards any passing dolphins or whales, and the following charm would be uttered:

You are pleased!  
 You come in friendship, Sir Dolphin,  
 From your land – the keel of the sea!  
 May you have all you wish for –  
 The glories of Heaven, Sun, and Moon!  
 You are pleased! You come in friendship!

This politeness to the cetaceans seems to reflect the sailor's desire to be left in peace. At first this ritual seems surprising, given the co-operative and harmonious relationship that many other native people share with dolphins and whales throughout Oceania. The origin of this fearful respect is most likely based on an old story about a cruel shaman, Kaionobi, who turned himself into a dolphin and swam between the waters of Abiang and Tarawa Islands. His intention was to attack and kill unsuspecting sailors, but was eventually killed by the magic of his two sisters. His body floated to the surface of the water, and was carried by the ocean current near to the northern tip of Butaritari Island, where it broke into two parts. His head became the small islet of Kaionosi-ieta ('Upper Kaionobi') and the tail became the adjacent tiny islet of Kaionosi-inano ('Lower Kaionobi'), both located close to the shore.

It is here on Butaritari Island, at the northern end of the Tungaru archipelago, that two families have for centuries practiced their magical art of 'calling' dolphins and small whales to

the beach at Kuma, situated at the northern end of the atoll. To call the cetaceans, the head of the family would lie down and enter a trance, sometimes for as long as three days, during which his or her feet always faced westwards. During this time, the Caller would go in spirit towards the islet of Bikaati, then dive into the ocean, travelling down to Mona (the underworld beneath the ocean) and greet an assembled group of dolphin spirits, all in human form, that were feasting and dancing. The leader of the dolphins was known as Nei Teweinei ('Lady Shooting Star'). It was believed that the youths in this crowd were the spirits of dolphins, while the older ones represented the spirits of whales. The Caller would be welcomed by the 'dolphin-people' as one of their own utu (clan), and would invite the 'dolphin-people' to a party in his or her village. A number of the dolphin-people invariably accepted, quite voluntarily, fully aware of what was to come. The Caller would then stand and watch all the 'guests' shed their clothes and enter the ocean, transforming into their true physical forms of dolphins and whales as they did so. When the Caller had witnessed the last cetacean jump into the ocean and embark on the journey to the beach at Kuma, he or she would wake from the trance and announce: "*E tau, a roko raomi, nakoni katauru te maie!*" which translates 'Alright, our friends from the west are coming, go and get ready for the dance!'

The exact time of the cetaceans' arrival later that day, or the next, was predicted with great accuracy by the Caller, and the village people busily prepared themselves for the arrival of their 'guests'. Exotic garlands of flowers were strung together, mats were woven, fine perfumes and the most beautiful traditional costumes were prepared. During all the festivities, it was taboo to wear anything red (as it resembled blood) or to talk of killing, and menstruating women were forbidden from joining in the festivities. When the cetaceans appeared (invariably right on cue) the villagers would each choose an individual animal to befriend and spend the next few hours stroking, playing and even flirting with this 'guest.' On a given signal by the Caller, who instructed the village people to 'entreat our brothers to dance on the shore', the people led the cetaceans up onto E Tou Te Kua ('the shallows of the beach'). At all times the animals were given the chance to turn around and swim back out into the lagoon, though it is said that the only time they actually did so was when defending the village people from sharks, after which they invariably returned to the beach. Once all the cetaceans were out of the water, the Caller would signal for all them to be 'marked' or 'lined', a euphemism for ceremoniously slaughtering the creatures with sharp knives, after which they would be feasted upon for days.

After the dolphins had all been killed (apparently never showing any resistance or attempt to escape), the Caller would cleanse him or herself by bathing in the blood-red seawater, taking a 'magic wash'. Despite orchestrating the whole event, neither the Caller nor any member of the Caller's clan was ever permitted to eat the cetaceans. To the Caller's family, consuming their totemic animal was as taboo as incest or cannibalism; it would have been to 'eat the flesh of the clan,' suggesting that the Callers of Kuma are the descendants of the ancestor Bue, discussed above. Moreover, when members of these clans died, they were always buried at sea.

The main motivation for the Callers to summon the ceta-

ceans, apparently, was to demonstrate their prowess as powerful magicians. There were actually two families in Kuma who practiced the art of calling the dolphins: the Maerua and Ababou clans (as well as the Tekokona clan on Beru island, an offshoot of the Ababou clan). These two families were often in competition, and it was not unusual to find one clan calling the cetaceans, while the other would be entering a trance to send them away. This 'reverse magic' was performed by holding the tip of a palm leaf and standing on the beach prior to the cetacean's projected arrival. The Caller made a circular motion with his or her hands, and the animals would be told to 'go home' in the Caller's chant. Sometimes the dolphins and whales would even be spotted in the distance, but would never approach the beach when this 'reverse magic' was being employed. This situation could carry on for weeks or months, both clans competing for social prestige and the chance to demonstrate whose magic was stronger by calling or sending away the cetaceans.

Barbaric as the whole ritual might sound, the Callers believed that the cetaceans who came to the beach (and there could be as many as five hundred in one Calling, enough to feed all the islanders for weeks) did so voluntarily. The dolphins and whales arrived in the knowledge that their physical bodies, for which they had no further need, would be put to good use in the nutrition of land-based humans. The tradition has all but disappeared over recent years, though the local people recall interesting stories connected to the dolphin Calling.

One story that the present inhabitants of the village recall concerned a village girl named Beneata who, at the end of the last century, tried to call the dolphins, having been taught the basic steps by her grandmother, Tekaraneitei. She was young and inexperienced, however, and having entered the trance and inviting the cetaceans to the 'feast' in her own village of Kuma, she was caught by a sudden panic. She became too afraid to jump into the water to follow the dolphin and whale spirits back to her village, and therefore became trapped in her own trance. She remained comatose for days, and was eventually saved by the magic of another village member, Nei Tituabine, who consciously entered Beneata's vision, and pushed her into the water on the shoreline of Mona, thus awakening her from the trance. Later in life, Beneata grew into an accomplished Caller, and never again experienced any fear while in trance.

The villagers fondly tell another story originating from the late 1890s. One of the village girls who went down to the beach to flirt with the cetaceans after they had been called was, so the story goes, actually carried off to sea on the back of a dolphin, and was taken around the island of Butaritari. The Caller was confident that both woman and dolphin would return, although the other villagers were less certain. As the Caller predicted, the girl did indeed return several hours later, apparently having had a wonderful journey.

In another story from the late 1940's, a Caller named Kureiti, and her niece, Mere, set about jointly calling the cetaceans. Kureiti became distracted by a woman who was watching the proceedings, and missed a word from the ritualized chant needed to enter the trance. When she finished the chant, she knew she would die soon – for this was the fate that always befell any Caller who forgot even a single word of the ritual. Only a few days later, a woman named Tearinang, who came from the neighboring village, visited Mere with a 'gift' of breadfruit.

What Mere did not realize was that two small knives were wrapped in the leaves of the breadfruit. Tearinang intended to kill Mere, believing her to be having an affair with her husband, though this was not actually the case. As Mere washed the dishes after sharing a meal with Tearinang, her guest lunged towards her with the two knives she had secretly brought, cutting Mere badly. Mere's Aunt, Kureiti, instantly jumped up to defend Mere, and was badly cut in the ensuing bloody fight. Kureiti was taken to the American hospital (a vestige of the American presence in the Islands during the Second World War), and died a few days later from the severe cuts, just as she herself had anticipated as a result of forgetting a word in the Calling ritual. As for Tearinang, she was sent to jail in Tarawa, where she spent the rest of her days.

The story of the Calling of cetaceans in Kuma becomes even more remarkable when one learns that the lagoon where the dolphins and whales came to was a place where they were never normally seen. Indeed, even on the ocean side of the atoll cetaceans were never known to beach themselves. Word quickly spread whenever a Calling took place, and any people on the Islands of Butaritari or Makin who had relatives in the village of Kuma would make their way to the village and always asked 'May we have a bite?' (the words 'eating' or 'meat' were never used). In more recent times, news of the Calling would actually be announced on the radio, and at village meetings in the Maneaba (large, straw-roofed gathering places). It is said that pregnant women were especially partial to the taste of cetacean meat, and it was believed that eating the flesh of whales or dolphins would add strength and wisdom to the unborn baby. Families (particularly young girls) who wanted to maintain healthy teeth, however, were encouraged to refrain from eating the cetacean meat, as they were told it would rot the gums. This 'rule' seemed to apply only when the meat was scarce, however; when it was plentiful, everyone feasted to satiety.

The people of Butaritari sometimes wore necklaces of dolphin teeth, though these were purely decorative, and carried no monetary or magic value. No dolphins would be deliberately slaughtered just for their teeth; rather, teeth would be taken from the dolphins that had been called for their meat – this decoration was seen as little more than a by-product. Similarly, dolphin and whalebones would be carved into ornaments and artifacts, including stools, tables and toys.

There could sometimes be a steady stream of cetaceans that arrived at Kuma's beach after a Calling – even lasting several days on occasion. When such large numbers appeared the dolphins and whales would be led onto the beach in small groups, then slaughtered and cut into pieces, to make way for the next group. The longest recorded instance of whales and dolphins arriving at the beach was, according to the locals, one month – with over 100 cetaceans arriving each day (resulting in a grand total of more than 3000 from that one Calling).

Perhaps the most unusual story to come out of the village is one that the present-day village people remember clearly from the mid-1980s. A canoe from the neighboring small island of Makin was carrying many people across to Butaritari, and suddenly found itself caught in rough seas. All the people were swept off the canoe, and many – young and old alike – drowned. After a few hours, only a young man and an elderly woman re-

mained alive by clinging onto a wooden sail-pole to stay afloat. The story goes that a large silhouette suddenly appeared in the water below the woman – it was a large whale. The whale lifted her onto its back, and gently carried her to an area of shallow water where she was able to stand up and walk to safety (the young man later drifted to shore by the current, and survived). Interestingly, the old lady who was saved had never eaten whale meat in her life, always refusing it when offered. The locals believed that this was central to the whale's decision to help the woman, and this may have been an influential factor in the apparent cessation of cetacean Calling around that time. Indeed, the Calling had traditionally happened about twice a year, and a variety of reasons may account for its decline. First, boat traffic and foreign aid to the islands have increased since the mid-1980s, and the villagers now have a full and relatively healthy diet without the need for cetacean meat. Secondly, the Callers seem less willing these days to sacrifice their lives to carry out this ritual. As the story of Mere and Kureiti indicated, it was widely held that if the Caller missed even a single word from the highly ritualized chant (which was kept secret within the clan, and passed down orally) they would certainly die. Moreover, the Callers were known to die at relatively young ages, as if sacrificing their own lives in return for the cetaceans' lives. Thirdly, though perhaps least plausible, is the theory that the Callers no longer feel the need to 'show off' what some call 'unnecessary skills', preferring to direct their magical powers to pursuits that earn social prestige and serve life-sustaining roles in the life of the village.

A short distance from the beach in Kuma, in the shallow lagoon waters, is a large stone, Nan Teeu, which the village people believe possesses supernatural properties. It is said that magic oil is held inside the stone, and if the oil were to be released (by small leaks) then the dolphins or whales would automatically be attracted to the beach. However, nobody in the village has ever possessed the knowledge or ability to release this magic oil, and so they have always relied on the Caller's magical chant to attract the cetaceans. In fact, it is said that the Caller's chant (together with the details of the ritual) was actually written down in a book at one time, but that this book mysteriously disappeared. Some accounts state that missionaries burned the book, while others say it was stolen by a visiting teacher. It is possible, therefore, that the knowledge is recorded on paper and still exists somewhere.

## HAWAI'I

The ancient Hawaiian chant about the Earth's creation, Kumulipo, tells of all life originating from coral. Twenty-nine pairs of fish appeared, each with a corresponding plant on land to act as a guardian, and the largest of the fish was actually Kohola (the whale), whose guardian on land was 'ili-ahi (the sandalwood tree). Both were worshipped and revered from ancient days; the powerful aroma of the trees and the haunting songs of the humpback could be detected by the ancient Hawaiians over vast distances. Ironically, both have been 'harvested' almost to the point of extinction – the humpback whale and the sandalwood tree are listed as endangered species in modern day Hawai'i.

CAROLINE ISLANDS (FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA)

As stated, a common story in Micronesian mythology is that of cetaceans who adopt human form to observe village events, a theme also prevalent in Amazonian Indian myths concerning the pink boto dolphin of the River Amazon. The Ulithi people of the western Caroline Islands (in what is now The Federated States of Micronesia), tell a story of two 'dolphin women' who emerged from the sea to watch the local village men dance. They did this for several nights in succession. One evening, however, the marks that the dolphin women left behind on the sand were noticed by one of the village men, and he became suspicious. He lay in wait the following night, and after the women had emerged from their dolphin bodies he hid the tail that belonged to one of them. This dolphin woman was therefore not able to return to the sea, and stayed in the village to become the man's wife, and the mother of his two children. One day, by chance, she found her tail, which her husband had been secretly storing in the roof of their home. She put the tail back on and made her way down to the beach. Before returning to her oceanic home, she implored her children never to eat dolphin meat, and thus it became taboo for any member of the village to ever harm or eat dolphins.

The connection between the taro plant and cetaceans that appeared in Kiribati legends also features in stories from western Micronesia. On the island of Woleai in the Caroline Islands, intricate eight-day ceremonies were sometimes held when cetaceans were 'called'. When the animals beached themselves, they were killed and eaten. The feast always featured taro leaves, which were seen as a land-based 'equivalent' or partner of the sea-based cetaceans. The theme of this tradition bears a strong resemblance to the traditional Hawaiian belief, discussed above, of partnerships existing between creatures of the sea and 'guardian' plants on the land.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Dolphins and whales have traditionally not fared well at the hands of the Solomon Island people. While sharks have tended to earn the respect of many powerful island magicians, cetaceans have typically been seen more as a food resource rather than symbols of friendship or divine messengers. On the island of Malaita, for example, dolphin hunts were commonplace in the past, and dolphin teeth are still used as a form of traditional currency in the area.

The situation is a little different in Tikopia, a small Polynesian-populated island actually located in the Melanesian Solomon Islands. Here the locals identify sea creatures that are thought to be harmless, and therefore good for food, such as Ika (fish). Other marine creatures, such as Maranga (cetaceans), are actually considered dangerous, and for this reason are not hunted or eaten. Occasionally, a Tafora (large whale) may be stranded or washed ashore. This is regarded with some wariness by the locals, who feel the whale is out of its element on land, and therefore signifies some imminent spiritual danger or threat due to its 'invasion' of the human realm. The whale is actually believed to embody a deity, and only special rituals can appease this deity. First, armed men approach the beached whale, whether it is still alive or has already died, and offer it food (including breadfruit and the

leaves of the taro plant), after which the whale is buried with the taro leaves. As in Kiribati and the Caroline Islands, a connection between cetaceans and the taro plant appears to exist in Tikopia.

RAPA NUI

Although dolphins and whales are rarely found close to the shore of Easter Island today, it is almost certain that the local people, whatever their origins, encountered many cetaceans on their voyage to Rapa Nui. Indeed, there are some impressive petroglyphs, unique in Polynesia, which depict marine mammals (including seals) very clearly, indicating that the locals were familiar with cetaceans. All the petroglyphs that are presented here were sketched by Dr Georgia Lee (1992) during her years of extensive fieldwork on Easter Island.

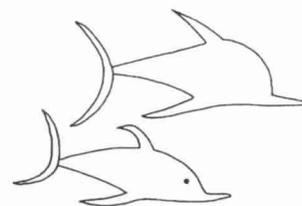


Figure A

The two forms depicted in Figure A were found on vertical panels hanging over the cliff edge at Vai Atare, and were originally thought to be swordfish. It seems much more likely that these are, in fact, dolphins. The rounded head and curved dorsal fin resemble a dolphin more closely than a fish, and the smooth continuation of the body into a rounded beak is more of a dolphin than a fish trait, particularly if these images depict bottlenose dolphins (which are very common throughout Polynesian waters). The only anatomically incorrect features of the petroglyphs are the tails, indeed resembling those of fish (which move from side to side) rather than the 'flat' tails that dolphins and whales have, all of which move up and down in the water.

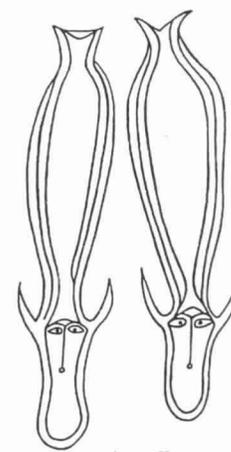


Figure B

The creatures depicted in Figure B closely resemble squid, possibly even the giant squid which normally lives at great depths (and forms a major part of the diet of the sperm whale), though they are known locally as 'Dos Caras'. The islanders believe that these creatures are in fact Varua, or spirits from the mythical homeland, Hiva. Their names were Kuha and Rati and their parents taught them how to transform into other creatures through the use of magical powers. When they were fully-grown, Kuha suggested they fly to find another island in order to find a husband. They both changed themselves into marine creatures and went to an island in Tahiti, only to find that there were no men there. Therefore, they transformed into spirits and flew like birds, then changed into fish once again and traveled in the sea until they came to Easter Island. They assumed human form and then met a handsome man with whom they both lived. Many children were born and, when the children were grown, Kuha and Rati decided to return to their homeland. Their husband carved their portrait on the rocks to remember

them (Lee 1990). Figure C is almost certainly a depiction of the sperm whale. This is revealed by the square shape of the head, the relatively short pectoral fin and the absence of a dorsal fin, all primary characteristics of the mighty sperm whale, a toothed cetacean that is relatively widespread in South Pacific waters. The location of the semi-circle towards the lower part of the head also corresponds with the anatomical location of the sperm whale's small eye.

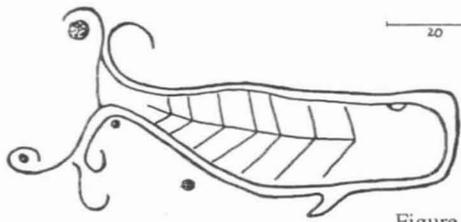


Figure C

The petroglyph shown in Figure D depicts a creature that has many dolphin qualities associated with it. The eye is located in the anatomically correct location relative to the mouth, and the shape of the beak is a perfect 'bottlenose' example. The extension beneath the body most likely represents two pectoral flippers, shown in relief (one on the right side of the body, the other towards the left). The tail is very typical of a dolphin or whale tail, although the depiction of growths on the body in the hind-tail region is not easy to interpret. Most puzzling, however, is the presence of two dorsal fins. No dolphin possesses (or has ever possessed) two fins on the back, although it is possible that the second fin might belong to another dolphin (maybe a baby) which is behind the one we see. The second dorsal fin may even be a symbolic representation of a pregnant female. Figure E also shows two dorsal fins, though this time the clear relief of the pectoral fins below the body, and the unblemished, streamlined tail musculature make it almost certain that this petroglyph represents a dolphin.

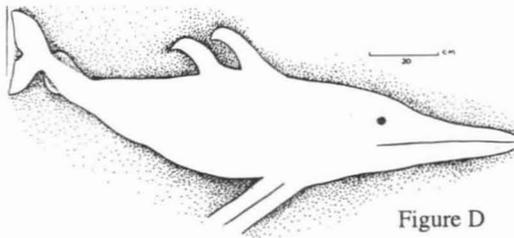


Figure D



Figure E

It is worth noting that none of the petroglyphs of what appear to be dolphins have the common 'fish hook' motif next to them, as many of the other petroglyphs depicting sharks and fishes do. This suggests that dolphins may not have been a source of food for the locals, and no reports of hunting dolphins are known of. That said, Skjoldsvold's excavations at Anakena have unearthed dolphin bones (of at least 13 dolphins), identified by vertebrae and teeth, together with a harpoon of the kind used prehistorically in the Marquesas.

Whether the dolphins were hunted, held in any particular regard, or even worshipped as in many other parts of Oceania, is not clear—though the locals were obviously motivated, for whatever reason, to invest time and effort in creating these striking images of cetaceans. In doing so, the inhabitants of Rapa Nui joined a very select number of cultures (alongside the

Norse people, Celts and some Australian tribes) who portrayed dolphins and whales in their petroglyphic artwork.

#### FRENCH POLYNESIA

As tales from other islands have shown, not all contact with cetaceans in Oceania has rested on mutual friendship and respect, and there are parts of French Polynesia where cetaceans have been traditionally treated with great brutality. The people of Va-Pan Island in the Marquesas come from a long heritage of cannibalism, and many dolphins over the years met the same fate as the early unsuspecting missionaries. When the people plan a feast, over a dozen canoes set off in search of dolphins. As soon as the dorsal fins of dolphins are spotted, some of the men bang rocks together beneath the water's surface to confuse and scare the dolphins, who instinctively move away from the noise—into the nets of the waiting fishermen who have sailed on ahead. The noise continues, getting ever louder, and the dolphins eventually become unconscious from the noise, as their hearing is so sensitive, and blood begins to pour out of their tiny ears into the surrounding waters. When all the dolphins have been herded into one area, where they lie unconscious, they are mercilessly slaughtered before being taken back to the village for everyone to feast on.

#### OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDS

The God of the Whales in Polynesian mythology was known as Rongo-Mai (literally translated as 'water food') who was always depicted as a huge whale. Interestingly, this same deity was also the god of Comets. The god of the Ocean, Tangaroa, was also sometimes depicted as a whale—possibly as the whale was a sufficiently grand Ata (physical incarnation) of this mighty god. According to the people of the Cook Islands, Tangaroa's father was Vatea, who was looked upon as a creature endowed with reason, with a body like that of a marine creature. Indeed, Rev. W W Gill, in his *Myths and Songs from the South Pacific*, describes Vatea's body as half-human, half Taairangi (cetacean). On one side of the body was a human arm, and on the other side was a fin. At the end of the body was a tail with a human foot on one side, and half of a cetacean tail-fluke on the other.

A mammal that shares its oceanic home with the dolphin, and is often confused with some porpoises in appearance, is the friendly yet shy dugong (or 'sea cow'), whose trusting nature is believed to be the origin of the Mermaid legend. To this day, a friendly dugong lives in the warm waters of Port Resolution Bay, on the island of Tanna in Vanuatu, and he allows both locals and tourists to swim and frolic in the water with him. One story goes that a group of women ran out of supplies of fresh water to cook food in, and had to resort to using seawater. One of the village women, Amela, went to collect the water using coconut shells, and as she entered the clear lagoon she noticed a large shape in the water near to her legs. She called her husband, Kasaro, who ran to her aid, and was about to kill the beast when the dugong poked his head above the water and implored the man not to kill him, explaining that the two of them shared the same name—Kasaro. On hearing this, the husband lowered his spear, sparing the dugong's life, and so Kasaro remains in the bay to this day, much in the same way as lone 'ambassador' dolphins choose to frequent certain bays and

river estuaries around the world, where they often attract great attention from people.

Whether lone 'ambassadors' or 'super-pods' of several hundred individuals, dolphins and whales are becoming increasingly prominent in eco-tourism ventures, and Oceania is no exception to this. Apart from the many companies offering dolphin-swim and whale-watch excursions in Australia, New Zealand and Hawai'i, other islands in the Pacific are beginning to understand the huge tourism potential of offering trips for visitors to see and swim with the cetaceans around their coasts. Indeed, a successful dolphin-swim program runs in Moorea, French Polynesia, and other programs are fast gaining popularity in Fiji (Momi Bay), New Caledonia (Nouméa) and the tiny island of Niue. In addition, Maroe Bay (which cuts into the middle of Huahine, French Polynesia) and Vava'u, Tonga, are becoming increasingly popular destinations to see humpback whales close-up.

The local people of Vava'u are, in fact, still rather bemused by the ever-increasing stream of tourists who come to see the whales. Only a few decades ago the whale was regarded as little more than a valuable source of meat and materials both to the locals and European whalers who frequented this area. Two modern-day tales exhibit the utilitarian role that the whales seem to have played in the lives of the Tongan people. In the narrow passage between Toula and Pangimotu Islands, where the water is very shallow, humpbacks commonly come to rest—it seems they enjoy being in the quiet, calm waters. In 1958, so the story goes, a local village man was riding on his horse and saw a whale, apparently asleep, on a nearby sand-bank. He tied his horse to the tail-flukes of the sleeping whale, and then ran to the village to get help retrieving this mighty 'catch' from the sea. When he returned an hour or so later, a large group of men in tow, neither horse nor whale were to be seen!

Another tale comes from the nearby island of Hunga. In 1966, the local fishermen (and would-be whalers) decided to try catching whales by attaching some dynamite to a harpoon. However, the first (and only) time they tried this method of whaling, they hit the whale with the harpoon, but the dynamite did not detonate. The whale then submerged, and surfaced again directly beside the boat. When the dynamite hit the boat, it exploded, and the boat was blown to pieces (as too was the unfortunate whale). The men were rescued by onlookers from the beach, but never attempted this again!

There is little doubt that the view of cetaceans held by many native peoples throughout Oceania is changing. As tourist dollars fuel an ever-increasing number of excursions to see and swim with cetaceans, many traditional beliefs are disappearing. It is to be hoped that one common theme from ancient times persists, even flourishes, amidst this tourist wave of dolphin and whale devotees—that cetaceans should be afforded great respect, and regarded with a sense of humility and awe. As the majority of island peoples throughout the Pacific have known for aeons, to be in the presence of cetaceans is to experience something powerful; it is an immense privilege and, for some, it is a chance to touch the divine.

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