

## AN EVALUATION OF FAO/KIRIBATI CANOES IN TOKELAU

by

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### Introduction

In January 1988, two FAO/Kiribati canoes, one made of fibreglass and the other of plywood, were shipped to Fakaofu, Tokelau on board the *MV Wairua*. At that time, I was spending my holiday at home (Fakaofu). From the experience I gained while I was in Suva working together with Robert Gillett in the same type of canoe as those in Tokelau, I was asked by the Director of Agriculture and Fisheries, Foua Toloa, to look after the canoes, and to pass on the techniques of operating the canoes, such as reefing, general sailing and safety, to the local people. Because the local people have sailing skills from using their traditional canoes, which in some aspects are similar to the FAO/Kiribati canoes, and also because of their willingness to work and learn, the job was an enjoyable one.

### Use of the canoes

After negotiations with the elders of the village, it was agreed that the canoes could be used by any individuals or family in the village for any purpose, provided that:

- (a) There must be someone from each family going with me to learn from me;
- (b) Because the canoes were powered by a four horse-power outboard motor (Yamaha), each individual would provide his own fuel (petrol) in case of calm weather; otherwise the sails were to be used in favourable winds.

During the time of this operation, the sails were always used. In some cases, the individuals who used the canoes got tired of waiting in unfavourable winds and wanted to use the outboard motor, but because of my encouragement the sails were used all the way. In favourable winds, the individuals were happy not only with the fact that they saved their petrol for other purposes but also with the fun they had when sailing.

It was up to the individuals to choose which canoe they preferred. In most cases, the fibreglass canoe was used. When I asked people why they preferred the fibreglass canoe, the answer was that it was faster, and easier to handle than the plywood canoe.

As the canoes were not allowed to be taken out in the open ocean (because of hazards crossing the reef), the major use of the canoes by individuals was to provide transport between the main village and the plantations on the outer islets. Sometime the fibreglass canoe was used for fishing, without the sails or the engine being used, but with the help of paddles to go to the fishing grounds which are not very far from the main village. Tables 1 and 2 show the different types of use for each canoe.

**Table 1: Use of the fibreglass canoe**

User's name	Hrs used	Sailing	Motoring	Stand-by
Pio Tuia	6	1h15		4h45
Mataalofa Neemia	1	1		
Agriculture Dept.	7	1h30		5h30
Fisheries Dept.	2	2		
Agriculture Dept.	6	1		5
Tofi Tagata	3	2		1
Feleti Tulafono	7	2		5
Luka Alefaio	7	2		5
Agriculture Dept.	6	2		4
Peau Lui	5	2		3
Agriculture Dept.	6	1	1	4
Katieli Paleti	4	1		3
Moses Pelasio	6	2		4
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>20h45</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>44h15</b>

**Table 2: Use of the plywood canoe**

User's name	Hrs used	Sailing	Motoring	Stand-by
Fisheries Dept.	2	2		
Fisheries Dept.	2	2		
Leo Niko	5	1	1	3
Eli Lapana	5	1	1	3
Medical Team (NZ)	5	1	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>

On most afternoons, the canoes were used to provide training for the youth or whoever was interested in learning how to handle the canoe, in the lagoon in front of the main village. These afternoon sessions were very useful to those who did not have other opportunities to use the canoes because of work commitments.

#### **Advantages of one canoe over the other**

The people of my village considered that both types of canoes have advantages and disadvantages, including the following:

##### *Plywood canoe*

- Quite big and has a good height to prevent water from splashing on to the boat and getting people wet;
- Has more space than the fibreglass canoe;
- Position of the outboard motor is more favourable than on the fibreglass canoe; it causes less sea water to splash into the canoe.

### *Fibreglass canoe*

- Fast and makes less leeway than the plywood canoe;
- Easy to paddle;
- Outrigger can take more weight than the plywood canoe outrigger;
- The self bailer is very helpful;
- Regarding the sails, both the gaff and the boom have jaws, while the plywood canoe has no jaws on the boom and the gaff.

### **Problems encountered**

Several problems arose, but they were not serious and were fixed before the next trip was made. Most of the problems were on the plywood canoe. When it came to Tokelau, it did not have any lines or rope for the main or jib halyard, or the main sheet, while the fibreglass canoe did.

When the plywood canoe platform arrived in Tokelau, one wood piece was broken, and after some days of use, somebody broke two pieces of wood just by walking on it. I found that the wood on the plywood canoe was much thinner than that of the fibreglass version.

We had some difficulties when the plywood canoe was used because neither the boom nor the gaff had any jaws on them, and that caused the mast to shake, which could be very dangerous in times of strong winds.

Despite the above problems, there were no major difficulties.

### **Concluding remarks**

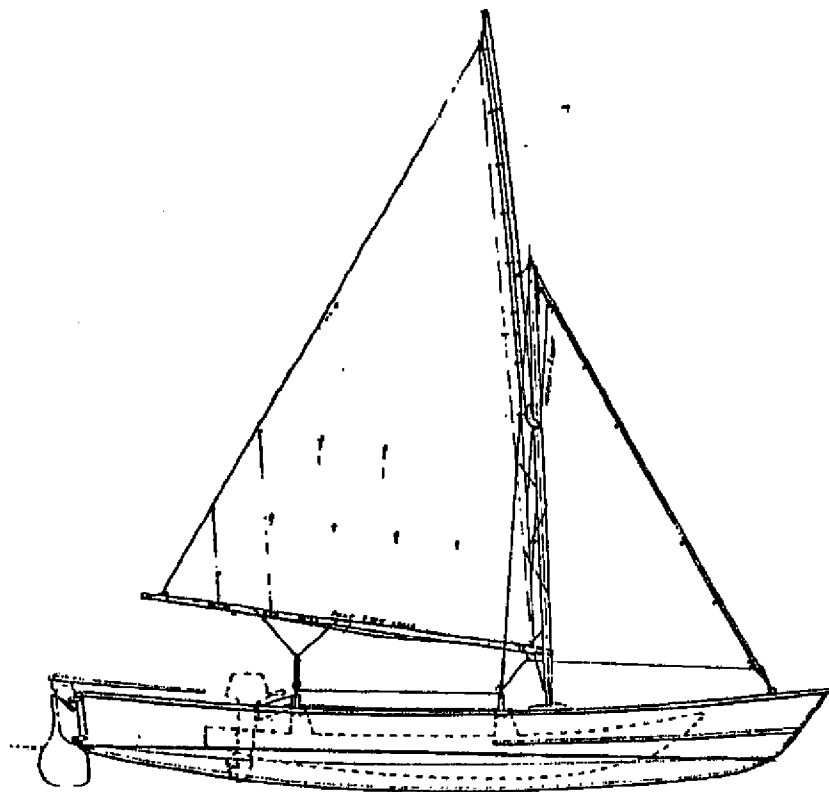
I believe that everybody who went out with me on the canoes enjoyed themselves, and learned techniques such as reefing, safety, and general sailing. I believe that they can now handle or operate the boat themselves. In terms of economy, the canoes proved better than dinghies with outboard motors.

I learned that several people wanted to buy the fibreglass canoe for themselves. They said the canoe would be really nice to use in the open ocean for fishing. I agreed with their thoughts, but we were not able to prove our hypothesis because the canoes were not allowed to cross the reef to enter the open ocean.

I am not aware of the exact financial arrangements for the canoes, but several people mentioned to me that the government should consider making canoes (especially the fibreglass type) available for use or lease by people who cannot afford a dinghy. There would be additional savings when the wind was favourable.

The fibreglass canoe, using the 4 horse-power outboard motor, can do two trips from the main village to the plantations (outer islets) using 5 litres of petrol, compared to a dinghy which needs more than 5 litres of petrol for just one trip.

I think everybody who used the canoes was happy with the results, just as I was very happy with my job.



**The FAO/Kiribati canoe**