

Ndeku is the Saramaccan word for a tree used to drug a creek or river to catch fish.

Upon my return to Gunzi, after a two and a half hour up-river motorized canoe trip from Zemoise, I noticed that there was some kind of congregation behind my house. The local motorcycle crew and some men and children were standing around in a circle distributing bags filled with sticks and logs that I had never seen before. After inquiring into the nature of this odd behavior, I was informed the congregation of people would be carrying the 50 pound bags of ndeku sticks and logs out into the jungle where we would drug a creek to catch fish for a village funeral which would occur two days from now. After retrieving my machete and rubber boots from my house, I put the 50 pound sack of ndeku tree sticks on top of my head and walked three miles out into the jungle until I met the others at the big creek that runs under the bridge.

Seventeen people, carrying the sacks mostly on their head with a few carrying the sacks by motorcycle or wheelbarrow, brought 20 sacks out to the creek. After an hour's walk, we put down the sacks and with our machetes began to craft wooden clubs out of the trees with strong wood by the creek. We put these clubs to use by mashing the softer ndeku tree sticks to expose the ndeku's white wood underneath the bark. After spending nearly three hours clubbing the ndeku tree remnants, we brought the mashed ndeku to the river where we set it on two big stones on the bank of the creek. Before beginning the process of drugging the creek, Maku, our spiritual leader, begged the great god of the forest for a plentiful and safe hunt.

After Maku's prayer, two of the men began to dampen and then further pound the ndeku on the stones in the creek. As the ndeku was pounded into the water, the white wood beneath the bark began to create a milky substance that began to move down stream. Within minutes, drunken fish began to float to the top of the water. The first fish we saw was a sting ray which put everyone on guard and quickly reminded us of the potential dangers associated with creek drugging. As the first small edible fish began to float to the top of the water, the kids waiting down stream with their colanders began to scoop up the fish and throw them in their sacks.

After observing for a few minutes, I jumped into the water with my machete in hand and began walking down the creek, following the milky substance on top of the water, looking for lame fish. The men jumped in after me and they showed me how to maim the longer, squirmy fishes with my machete and how to cup the jumpy, smaller fish with my hands. A few minutes into the expedition and waist deep in water, I had maimed one fish with my machete and was routinely scooping up the smaller fishes with my hands and flipping them into my friend's sack like a shortstop in baseball fielding a groundball and making an underhand toss to his second baseman.

Feeling more confident, I began to venture further down the creek with the men most skilled at fishing and hunting. With the water up to my knees, I was alert

and ready to knock any passing fish with my machete when I was taken by surprise. Something passed between my legs and shook my boots! After letting out a cry of surprise, Mambele, the most skilled hunter in the group, began to shout in Saramaccan, "Where is it? Where is it?" I pointed at my feet and he began to swing his machete into the murky water near my feet. I quickly jumped out of the water onto the shore. Mambele continued to pursue the fish down the stream and finally caught him 20 yards up the stream where he pulled out a fish locally called Aiyumau, a 30 pound monster of a fish with sharp teeth that would probably feed most of my village two nights from now.

After wading through the water for over a mile, in some instances actually swimming, Mambele had pulled three Aiyumau out of the water. I caught about 30 fish and the group of seven men whom I travelled with down the creek had collectively caught over 500 fish. Upon our return into the village, we were greeted by the joyous women who cleaned and cooked the fish.