

**SL1 Lumley Fishing (extract from journal)Sierra Leone: A Village Album**

1 A FISH STORY

2 I strolled to Lumley Beach this morning. The air was fresh by the ocean. I inhaled deeply, stepped  
3 lightly, and drifted with thoughts that ride on the breezes. A coastline reminds me of a commencement  
4 speech—a pause at a particular edge where a sea of achievement halts, and new challenges begin. I  
5 walked along a demarcation between earth, water and sky; between life in Africa and the unknown  
6 ahead when I would fly home in a few days.

7 A canoe caught my attention. It was paddled along the shoreline, just outside the line of breakers.  
8 The long, ocean-going dugout looked awkward and heavy. A line of paddlers struggled to keep the  
9 unsteady boat upright, and parallel to the swells. They halted and hung there on the water for several  
10 minutes until three men on shore suddenly shouted and waved a signal over the frothing surf.  
11 Immediately the paddlers turned the canoe perpendicular to the waves and rode in on their surges. The  
12 paddlers flipped into the knee-deep water and held the canoe tightly in the shallows as more waves lifted  
13 it farther up the beach, then threatened to sweep the vessel back into deeper water.

14 I squinted in the bright sunlight and watched as several men grabbed at a rope on the stern.  
15 One yanked it loose, and others began to haul it in. There was a shout and a pull, a shout and pull.  
16 Onlookers ran to help. I impulsively grabbed on with them. The rope scratched my hands, and seawater  
17 squished out between my fingers as I leaned into the work. A relay formed. Some people behind me  
18 waded into the surf, but I stayed on the beach. Each pull was heavy and fast. A man would lift the  
19 sopping net over his shoulder, space himself a dozen steps behind the next, and pull. Our feet gouged  
20 deep footprints—workers’ footprints—into the sand. Sweat and seawater glistened off their muscular  
21 bodies. The first in line dropped his load high on the beach, and ran back to the waterside to join the  
22 line again.

23 A short haul was enough for me. I moved out of their way, and strolled higher on the beach  
24 where market women waited expectantly to negotiate a deal for fish. As my heart rate slowed, and I  
25 brushed the damp sand off my hands, I felt keenly aware of the daily work of all these breadwinners.

26 I watched the process closely. Farther along the shore another group mirrored our activities,  
27 except they pulled the net's other end toward us. It looked hundreds of feet long, and swept an arc  
28 through the water. As the gap narrowed, birds followed and dove into the dense cluster of fish. The two  
29 ends drew together into a giant sling--almost a sack. The teams soon mingled to sweep the glittering gift  
30 from the sea onto shore.

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31           The catch surprised me. There were some adult fishes, but the dominant load flashed with  
32 thousands of tiny, silver swordfish. Fried and salted, these trophies would make delicious finger food.  
33 Stewed they would enrich many sauces later that day.

34           In memory I feel the rope, the water and sand; my muscles tighten as I recall the effort. I see  
35 and hear the echoes still—the cadence of waves, the shouts, and the gleaming, men, fish, white sand, and  
36 sea. What would be nourishment for many dwellers, clapped the sand with beating fins—an insistent  
37 vibration, like Lilliputian thunder, only rattling my thoughts instead of the rafters.