APPENDIX 3

The Use of Kites for Fishing

1 Introduction

Regular readers will know my view that kites originated somewhere in, or near Indonesia when a leaf being used in a wind to blow the tackle out to the fish got tangled and turned into a kite. So it is no surprise to me that the greatest number of descriptions of 'kite fishing' are from that area (expanded to include Western Pacific islands). But kite fishing is practised in South Africa, the USA and New Zealand. There is even a history of kite fishing in the UK, but none that I know of in the last 25 years. Does anyone have a recent example?

Pierre Fabre [1] mentions that kite fishing was brought back to Europe in the 17th century — but I don't know of any evidence. The earliest American reference was given by Ron Moulton [2] of paper barndoors being used in 1909.

2 Why kite fishing

Obviously fishermen use kites as available technology to improve their catch. Asian kite fishing typically uses the kite to take the bait away from the boat (shore fishing is unusual), which is an advantage with fish wary of boats and shadows. Depending on how high the kite is above the water, it is sometimes claimed that predator fish see the kite and are attracted by what they see as a bird hovering before attacking small fish. The kite may also be used to skip the lure along the surface of the water — which attracts fish. Before western lines were available local lines floated which made them more likely to scare fish and gave an extra reason for using a kite to drop the bait into the water. Those Indonesian and Pacific societies had technical problems in making small hooks; much fishing today is by net or fish trap.

It will probably soon be clear to anyone who knows much about fishing that I don't; the previous paragraph is looking at south east Asian kite fishing. I've used the terms bait and lure interchangeably — in the home of kite fishing hooks and bait are not used in the most famous form of fishing, which is for garfish (or needlefish). These are elusive predators which come to the surface from quite deep (100m.) water. In 'Europe' according to Fabre their bones are bright blue; British specimens have green bones and used to be called mackerel runners in my youth.

Eastern types are prized to eat, all are long and narrow with lines of backward facing teeth in long mouths.

In Micronesia the lure was a mass of spider's webs in which the fish's jaws got tangled (this is still done in the Solomon Islands). In Indonesia there is another method where the lure is a loop with a small fish attached. When the fish takes the bait the strike pulls the loop around those jaws.

Western kite fishing also uses the kite's ability to get the bait away from a boat's shadow. Kite fishing is also used in beach-casting where bait can be deposited beyond the breakers and the range of a casting rod. Kites can be used to hold a surface bait in position against a current, move a bait through the water or simply be positioned above a weighted bait.

Using kite fishing to avoid the rocks when fishing from a lighthouse is a British technique — no longer used as all our lights are now automatic.

3 Types of kite

Given our major interest, what sort of kites are used? Clearly kites should be inexpensive –professional fishermen are often poor– and anyway the kite has to be expendable compared to the fish. Most kites used nowadays in Asia have plastic covers — even where 20 years ago leaf kites prevailed. In 10 years time no doubt all will be made in China.

The most basic form of leaf kite is shown in Illustration 1. Very often the leaf, which will be pressed as it dries, will have a cross spar and perhaps even a spine of something like split bamboo simply threaded through. Even this simple kite can have its bridle adjusted for wind speed and to allow it to fly 'off' the wind direction. But leaf kites can be much more complicated although fishing kites are small. Tal Streeter [3] reports a leaf kite rather like Illustration 2 but 2m. tall with a hummer — for ceremonial purposes. Illustrations 3 and 4 (thanks to Michael Alvares for his collection) show the very different fishing kites used in the east of our area. The use of whole leaves, palm fronds, grasses etc are a reminder that quite complex kites (Illustration 5) are known — though this example would be for ceremonial/ religious purposes.

Illustration 1

Illustration 2

Illustration 3

Illustration 4

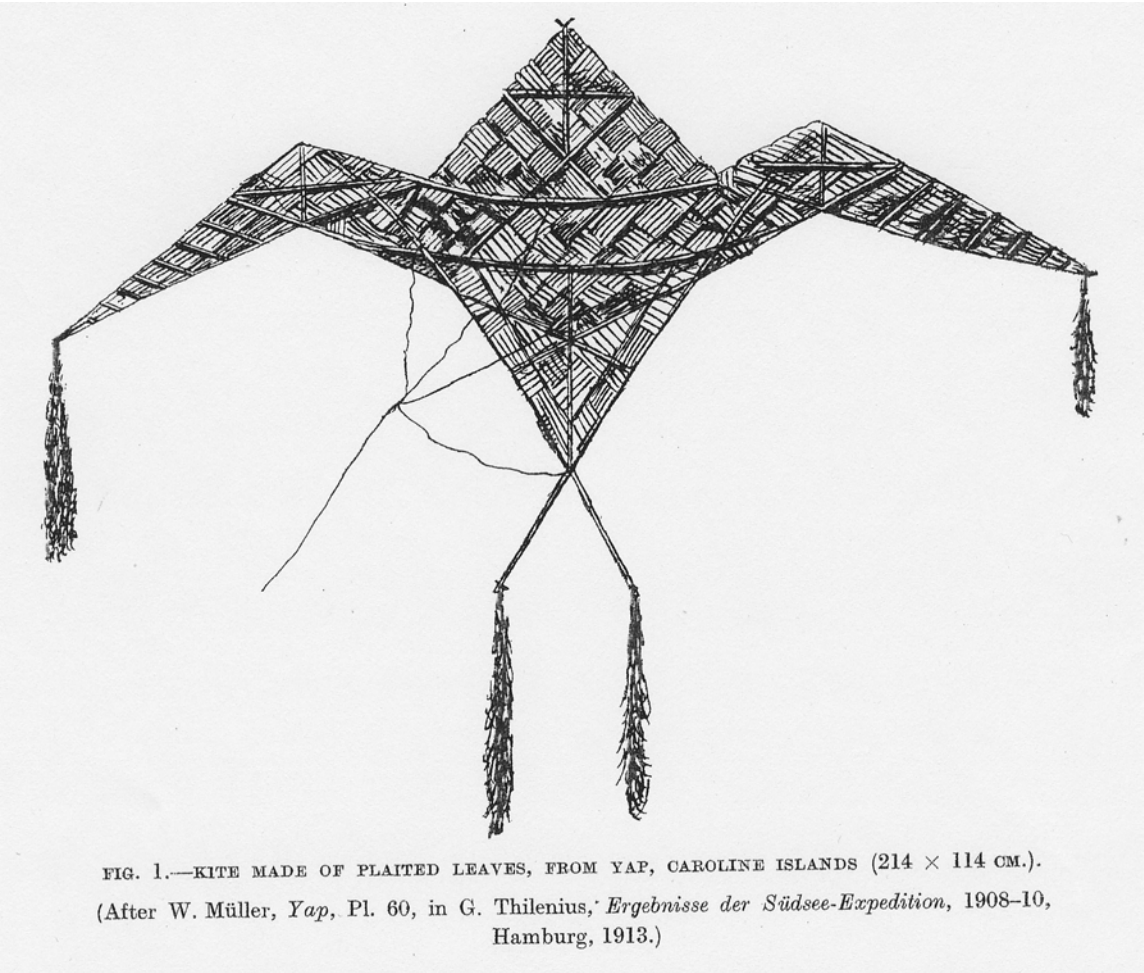


FIG. 1.—KITE MADE OF PLAITED LEAVES, FROM YAP, CAROLINE ISLANDS (214 × 114 CM.).
(After W. Müller, *Yap*, Pl. 60, in G. Thilenius, *Ergebnisse der Südsee-Expedition*, 1908–10, Hamburg, 1913.)

Illustration 5

Various types of kite are used in the West. Stormy Weathers [4] advocated a 'Bigmouth Sled'; basically the two stick design with the spars tapering from 50 cm. apart to 35 cm. on a 1m. kite. In South Africa Turton [5] used della portas with 1m. diagonals and long tails. The bridle was three point, same length from each top corner and the centre intersection. It was easy to adjust such a kite to fly 'off' the wind. Similar kites are made by the Mountjoys for fishermen south of Durban.

I have a New Zealand 2m. delta sold for fishing — here the kite flies 'off' by attaching a plastic bag on a short line from one of the fittings where the spreader joins with the leading edge spar.

In the USA at least one kite was patented for kite fishing — by Richard Gerstein in 1991. Illustrations 6 and 7 show the sled kite and the fishing arrangement. The claimed advantage of the design was its ability to fly stably in gusty winds and also over a wide wind range. Note that 38 and 40 are spars in addition to the two tapered tubes (26 and 28), which are sub divided by 34 and 36. Has anybody seen one? They are very close to a Powersled.

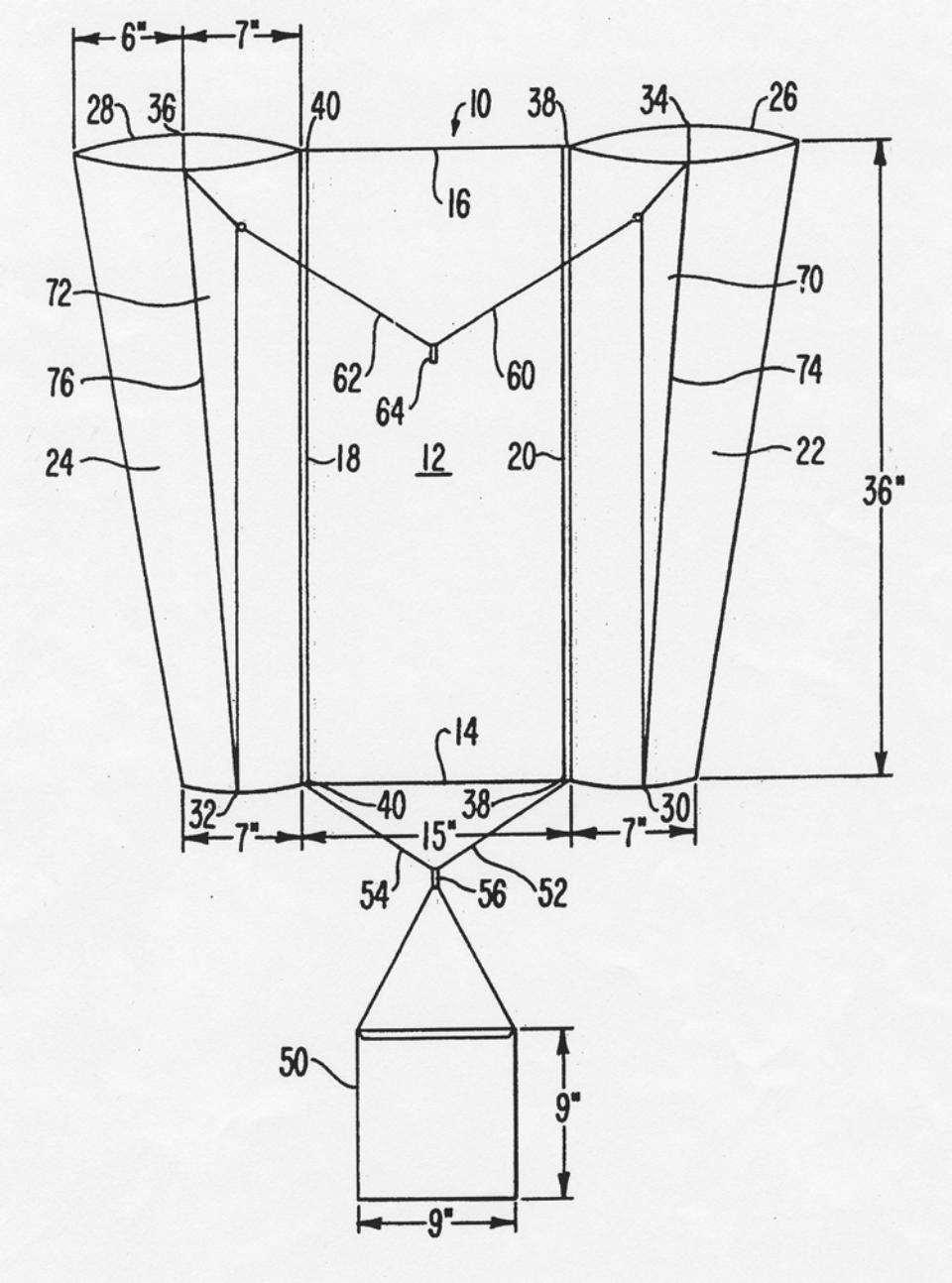


Illustration 6

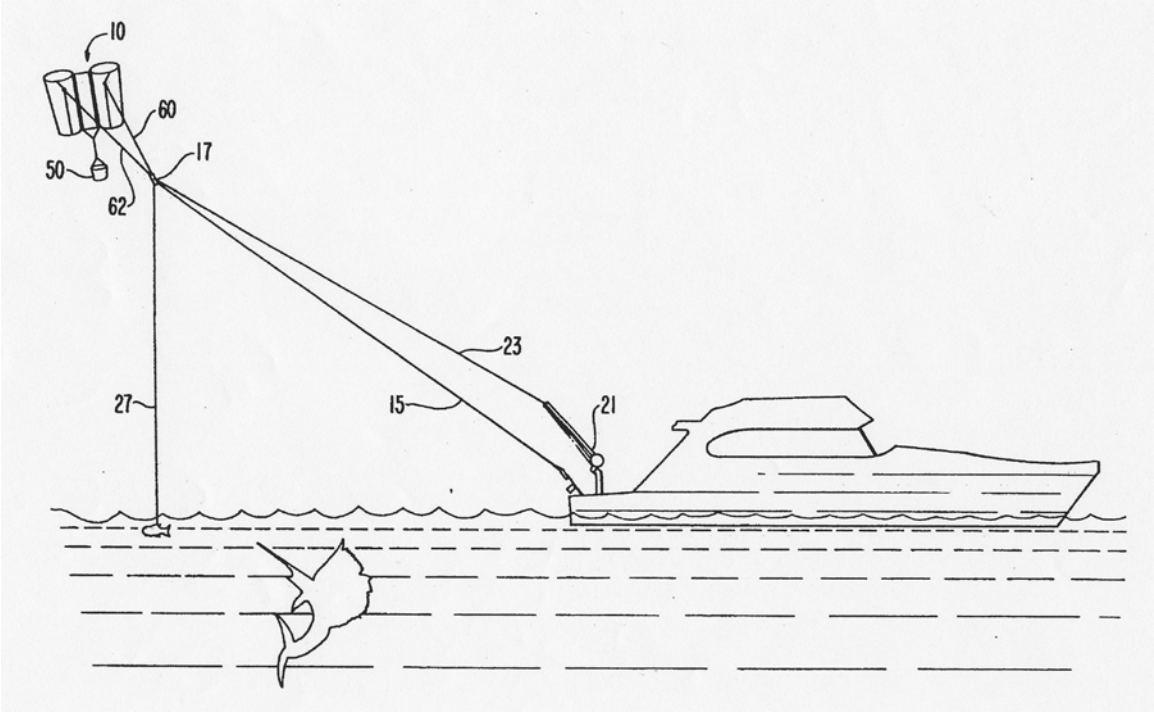


Illustration 7

4 Line arrangements

There are, I think, three main methods:

4.1 Single line

The kite line becomes the bridle, which then passes down the kite to be the tail at the end of which is the bait/lure in the water. This is used in Indonesia, often with a 'rod' in the form of a pole with a ring at the tip through which the line passes. The rod helps to get the kite up into the wind and keeps it out of the water when pulling in. This rig is designed to dance the lure on the surface. The kite is a plastic Malay of about 20cm. x 20cm. — see Streeter [3]. The lowest third of the cover may be cut away for strong wind use.

4.2 Single line with a fishing line fixed to it

This is well described by Turton [5]. A low angle is best and bottom, fly or trolling is possible. Stormy Weathers [4] used a plastic container part filled with water as a float, which would also stop the bait being lifted. Turton's system allows the line to be retrieved using reel/rod but the kite line has to be detached, often at the critical point of landing the fish.

4.3 Two lines, one fishing, one kite (see Illustration 7).

The fishing line may be attached to the kite line by a clothes peg (Stormy Weathers) or a purpose-made fitting. Illustration 8 shows the package bought this year at Kittyhawk, Illustration 9 shows the clip and Illustration 10 a typical catch and the kite.

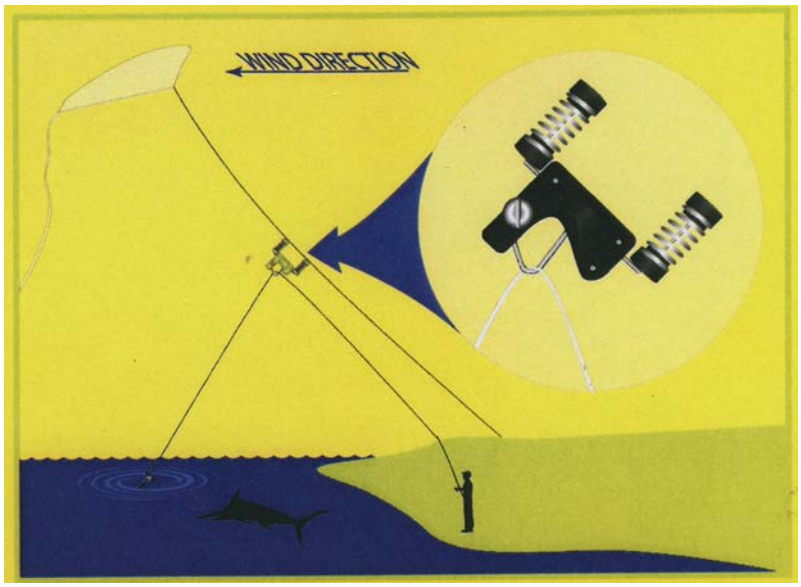


Illustration 8

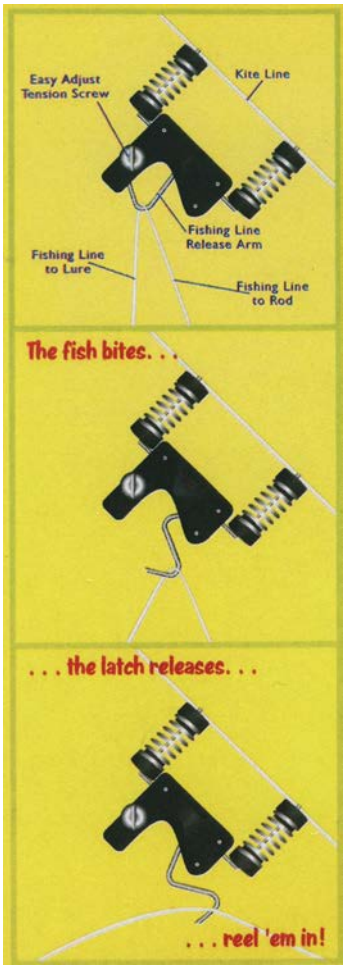


Illustration 9

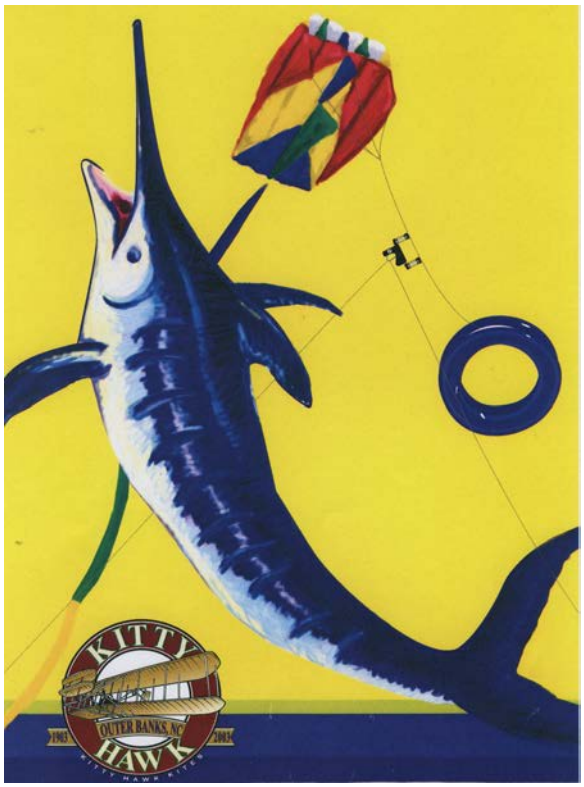
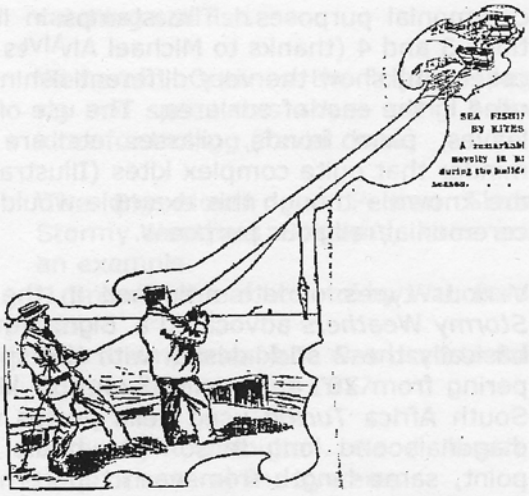


Illustration 10



SEA FISHING BY KITES.

The Remarkable Invention of an Enthusiastic Angler.

The kite has generally been considered an admirable means of pleasure, but an enthusiastic sea-angler during his recent vaca-

tion devised a method of turning it to more profitable account in connection with his sport.

To the wire controlling the kite, which is of the ordinary box type, is attached a number of fishing-lines. They pass over small pulleys or through small eye-holes fixed to the kite wire. The kite is flown in the usual manner, and in ascending carries the fishing-lines out to sea. The angler allows the lines to run out to the requisite length. The wire controlling the kite runs off a reel fixed to the ground, and can be checked whenever required.

When a fish has been hooked the line is wound upon the winch until it has been raised somewhat, and the kite is simultaneously wound in.

The operation is very simple and can be performed expeditiously if an assistant is employed to wind in the kite at the same time.

The most salient characteristic of the device is that any number of fishing-lines may be attached to the kite wire. To ascertain if his bait is still intact on the hook, the angler simply winds in the winch connected to that particular fishing-line until it is above the water. If the bait is still there, the winch has only to be released and the hook falls back into the sea.

Of course, the kite can only be requisitioned when the wind is blowing in the suitable direction. Also it cannot be employed for fresh-water angling, as the movements of the kite in the air would disturb the floats and frighten the fish.

The new method of fishing will particularly recommend itself to those who prefer to remain comfortably situated on dry land. At places where there are no piers, kite fishing might easily be made popular.

Illustration 11

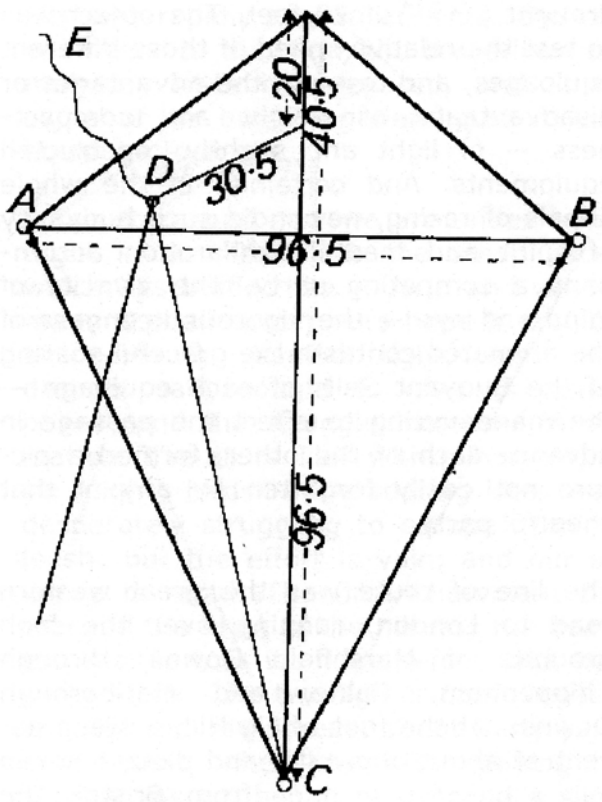


Illustration 12

5 British kite fishing

I know of two examples:

Illustration 11 is an extract from the Daily Mail of Saturday September 2nd 1901. Three things strike me:

- the use of a short train of what looks like 'Blue Hill' Hargrave boxes which must have been cutting edge kiting at that time
- flying with wire
- the system was straightforward 'killing fish' i.e. get a bite, pull it up, haul it in.

Illustration 12 is of the kite used by Bill Trebilcock, Principal Keeper of the Eddystone Light, to catch fish in 1978 [6].

He wrote that kite fishing had been practised for 'coming on 150 years', having developed from using pig's bladders as balloons. Made from light canvas, canes and 5mm. line, the kite shown was used in up to force 6 when it was capable of ferrying a parcel and rig weighing 10 kg. from a boat, 40m. to the top of the tower.

The 'stray line' marked E was attached to A or B depending on which side of the tower the kite was required to fly. With the length of E adjusted to give the kite the required buoyancy (i.e. flying level) the kite could be flown 5-10m. above the sea, 50-100m. out. This was done by attaching weights to the 30m. tail which ended with the baited hook.

Striking after a bite caused the kite, and fish, to rise. The main problem was the fish banging on the tower on its way up but (to quote) "about 7 out of 10 stay for supper". The article has a photo of Bill and a fish.

I've recently (2011) been told of kites used in beach casting at Cromer in Norfolk (UK) — details awaited.

6 Bibliography in date order

1913 Balfour [7].

Everyone seems to refer to this. It includes a reference to the 1901 article — Illustration 11. It is available on John Dobson's website www.johndobson.info.

1967 Hart [8].

Chapter 3 – has some drawings of kites

1971 Brummitt [9].

Mentions $50 kits sold in Florida for catching sail fish

1976 Pelham [10].

Outlines the 'clothes peg' rig and speculates about using two line kites for trolling (?ever done)

1977 Stormy Weathers [4]

Systems, kites and an example.

Baldwin [11]

How a simple leaf kite was used to fish

1978 Moulton [2]

Good illustrations of several line systems

Trebilcock [6].

1983 Turton [5]

Dramatic account of a night's fishing with lightsticks hanging below the kites. Much know-how. Kite fishing with a national association produced e.g. a 791 kg. great white shark and a 42kg. marlin

1996 Ohashi [12].

Brief but good kite illustrations

1998 Fabre [1].

Probably the best 'general' article

2002 Streeter [3].

Wonderful description of leaf kites and of a group of kitefliers travelling to try kite fishing.

[1] Fabre, P. "Fish 'n' Kites" *Kite Passion,* Feb. 1998.

[2] Moulton, R. (1978) *Kites.*

[3] Streeter, T. (2002) *The Philosopher's Kite.*

[4] Weathers, S. "The Big Mouth and Pelican Sleds" *Kitelines,* Fall 1977.

[5] Turton, A. R. "Heavyweight Kite Fishing South African Style" *Kitelines,* Summer/Fall 1983.
[6] Trebilcock, B. "A Fisherman's Tale" *European Kiteflier,* Spring 1978.
[7] Balfour, H. (1913) *Kite Fishing.* In *Essays and Studies Presented to William Ridgway.*
[8] Hart, C. (1982) *Kites: an Historical Survey.*
[9] Brummitt, W. (1971) *Kites.*
[10] Pelham, D. (1976) *Kites.*
[11] Baldwin, W. J. "1 Breadfruit Leaf etc. etc." *Kitelines,* Fall 1977.
[12] Ohashi, E. "Kite Fishing Indonesian Style" *Kitelines,* Summer 1996.