

Pig to Pork

In the remote islands of Micronesia, the most common and plentiful source of animal protein comes from the sea. There are chickens running semi wild that provide eggs and meat for special occasions. Plus, on the occasion of the arrival of the field trip ship every 4 to 6 weeks it is possible to climb down into the hold and purchase canned delights: Spam, tuna, salmon, etc.

Fish may be taken with nets or spears. But some are caught using a fish trap built of stones on the reef near the edge of the island. As the tide rises and falls, it induces currents that trap food and draw fish that are seeking the food.



Fish trap on the reef

But as you walk around the island, you will see the occasional pig. It will probably be tied to a tree with a long rope and will be tended to and well fed. It will be used to provide pork for some very special occasion or celebration. I remember, as an aside, we were at a festive celebration and were offered a prized cut of pork. It was a 3 inch cube of fat! Not exactly what I would have chosen as the most desirable piece of pork. But what can you say when they are being generous and polite to respected teachers?



Heading to Ta (neighboring island) for a pig

The school did not keep pigs, so for a special occasion, they had to purchase a pig and often it would be on a neighboring island. So a crew would take the school boat and outboard motors and head to Ta, the closest island to Satawan.



Getting the pig

Some of the photos and descriptions may be distasteful to some readers, but this is how preparing a pig was done.

The boys would get the pig from its owner and coax it out to the boat for the ride back to Satawan. Soon after arrival back, the pig would be killed. I have photos of some of the rest of the preparation process.



Securing the pig on the boat for the return ride

A first step is to singe the hair from the pig and expose the bare skin. Then the skin would be scrapped to remove any lingering hair. The next step is to rub down the entire surface with halves of papaya fruits. My understanding is that there is an enzyme in the juice of the papaya that works as a tenderizer for the pork.

Then, if the pig was female they might have to squeeze out any milk that remained in its udders.

At the school, this would all be done by the students, mostly the boys. If this is a community event, it would be a collective effort by the men in the community



Singing the hair from the pig



Scraping the skin



Squeezing the milk from the pig



Rubbing down with papaya fruit halves



After all this preparation, it is time to cut the pig open and continue to cut it into the more familiar cuts of meat in preparation for roasting for the big meal.

Cutting the pig open

I wasn't around for any of the final cutting or cooking of the pork. For a school event, the cooking would be done by the school cook with some students recruited to help. Cooking in the village was done mostly by women with help from the school girls.

But we were invited to a few of the celebrations and festivals during our time on Satawan. The meals were delightful.