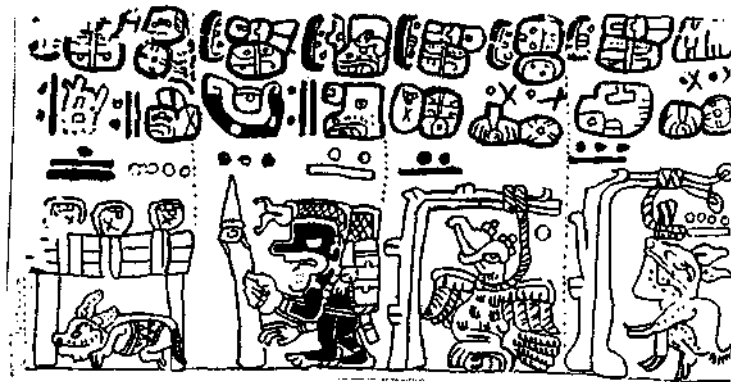


Small-game trapping in a yucatec maya community

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The Socio-Cultural Significance of Small-Game Trapping Among the Modern Maya

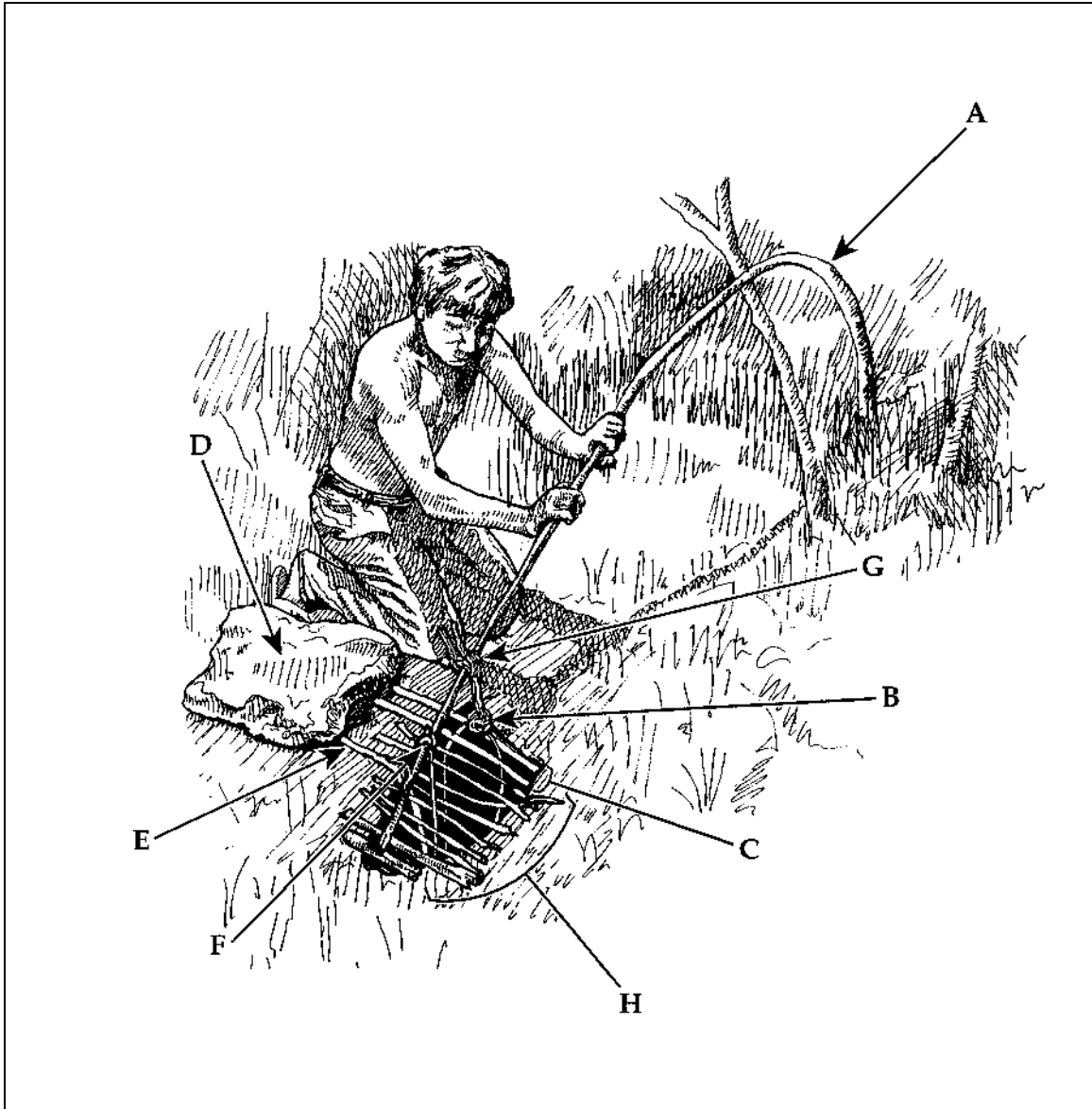
Trapping small-game, particularly pocket gophers (*Orthogeomys hispidus*; 'ba' in Maya) is an activity reserved almost exclusively for young boys. These boys are typically not old enough to assist their fathers in the milpa and are therefore encouraged by their parents to make themselves useful through a number of activities including the trapping of small game.

We have identified at least three major socio-cultural functions of small-game trapping:

- 1) Through the search for suitable trapping locations, the boys learn how to navigate in the forest. Such navigation skills are crucial since men are routinely required to venture into the forest to hunt, collect building materials, and establish new milpas.
- 2) As the boys select natural materials for trap construction, they learn to identify numerous plants as well as acquire a detailed knowledge of the physical properties of plants and their seasonal cycles.
- 3) The boys form social bonds through teamwork. Such relationships continue into adulthood and play an important social, political, economic role in daily community life.

Trapping, therefore, functions as a process by which Maya boys unwittingly acquire invaluable skills, which will eventually be expected of them as men. The complex and far-reaching function of small-game trapping in Maya society thereby mitigates the relatively small amount of meat produced by such a time-consuming and labor intensive process.

GOPHER SNARE TRAP



ANATOMY OF A GOPHER SNARE TRAP

- (A) Spring sapling.
- (B) Bark strip attached to the wire snare.
- (C) Two parallel shafts, which are embedded into the sidewall of the trap. These shafts flank the snare. When the trap is tripped, the gopher is pulled up by the snare and pinned against the shafts.
- (D) Large stone used to both anchor the parallel shafts and the distal end of the shaft that anchors the bait vine to the floor of the gopher burrow.
- (E) The shaft that anchors the bait vine to the floor of the gopher burrow.
- (F) The bait vine attached to the spring sapling.
- (G) The bark strip attached to the spring sapling.
- (H) The roof supports.

This is a view of the trap before the covering of leaves and soil is applied. From this perspective, the gopher will approach the trap from the upper right-hand corner of the illustration.

PLANTS USED IN GOPHER TRAPPING AND PREPARATION

<u>TRAP COMPONENT</u>	<u>SCIENTIFIC NAME</u>	<u>MAYA NAME</u>
Spring, Bark Strip, and Shafts	<i>Xylosma anisophyllum</i> (Stanley)	puuts' mukuy
Bait Vines	<i>Turbina corymbosa</i> (L.) Raf. <i>Cydista aff. potosina</i> [K.Schum & Loes]	x-tabentun ek'kix
Trap Roof Supports	<i>Cecropia pelata</i> L.	k'o'och
Trap Roof Cover	<i>Guettarda combsii</i> Urban	taas ta'abil
Pit Oven Cover	<i>Guazuma aff. ulmifolia</i> Lam.	piixoy

CONSTRUCTING A GOPHER SNARE TRAP

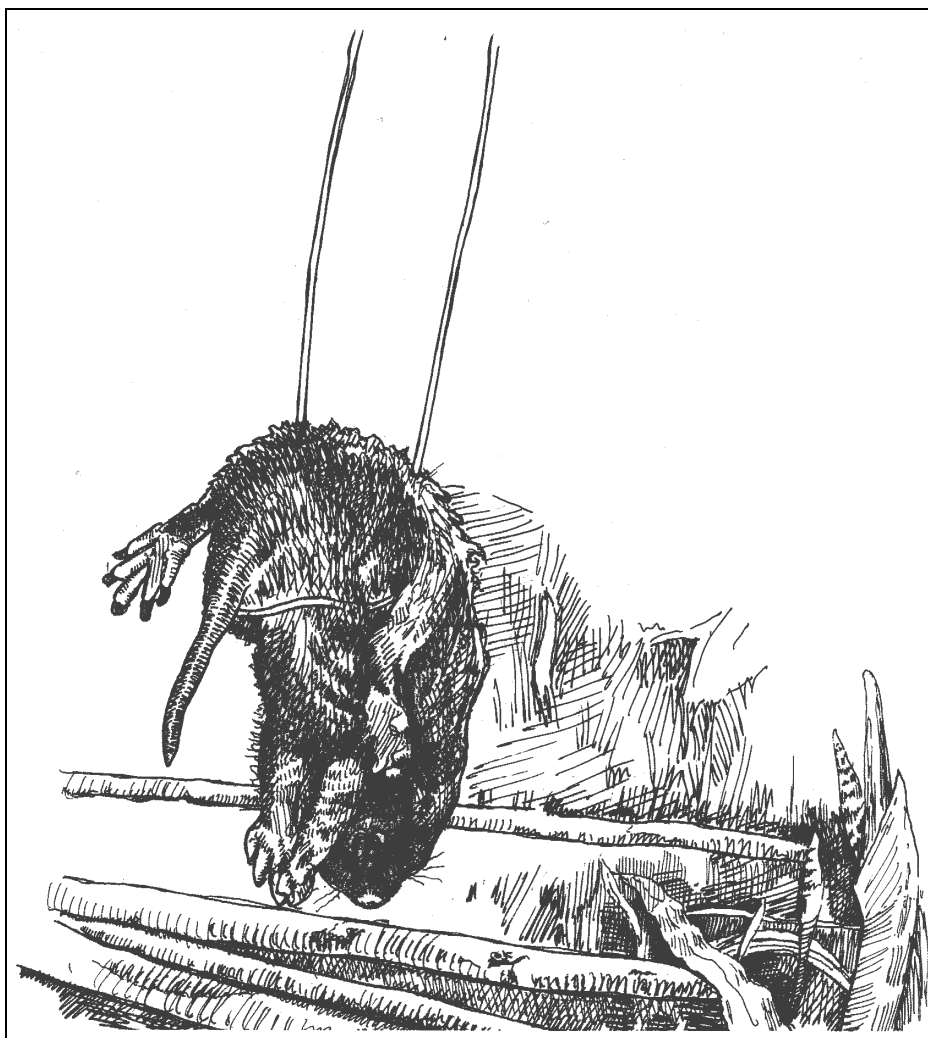


The trappers attach the bait vine to the spring sapling.



The trap roof is then covered with *taas ta'abil* leaves and soil.

GOPHER REMOVED FROM SNARE TRAP



PREPARING A GOPHER IN A *PIIB* (PIT OVEN)



The fur is burned-off as the fire is reduced to coals



The *piib* is covered with *piixoy* leaves and soil. After the gopher has been cooked underground for about twenty minutes, it is removed and consumed whole

“HEN-COOP” TRAP

Used for trapping small birds, they are typically referred to as *tsutsuy* (dove) traps.



The trap is set: note trip-line and trigger.

BASKET TRAP

Like the hen-coop trap, it is used to trap small birds and is set in essentially the same fashion

