



A few Anchovies

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One fall in the late '60s, I was in Baja California with some friends for a long weekend, camping south of San Felipe - Fall is not generally best choice down there, as the wind often blows in your face all day, stirs the water up and spoils the fishing. But we were all involved in high intensity jobs at the Lab, and Baja was a great place to get away from the weekend phone calls. In those days, there were no phones, and only a couple of telegraph offices between Ensenada and La Paz.

We were camped on the beach, maybe 30 feet from the water, 180 degree view of the Sea of Cortez, perfect except for the wind. I like to fish with artificial baits because I love to cast, probably as much as I like catching, but I wasn't enjoying the prospect of the wind opposing every cast, so we were kind of lazing around talking about going fishing, but not really doing anything.

A local fisherman came walking up the beach from the south, and periodically he was wading hip-deep into the water and dipping something. As he slowly came closer, we could see he had a tiny dip-net in his hand, and was following a ball of anchovies 15 feet from shore. The school was maybe 3 feet across, and a foot below the surface, looking like black cloud in the water.

I figured he was trying to catch some bait, and started a conversation. I mentioned anchovies, and his eyes lit up, "si, si".

Me: "tenemos una tiraya" - we have a casting net

He: "se puede?" - is it possible?

Me: "si, momento"



A Modest Catch
From the Baja 100

The tiraya is a circular net six or seven feet in diameter, with several cords from the inside edge, coming out a grommet in the center. To these cords is attached a small nylon rope, about 25 feet long.

Around the edge of the net are small lead weights, an ounce or two each. It is thrown with a sort of “discus” maneuver, with the edge of the net starting in the mouth, each hand holding a point on the edge with arms spread, and the body twisted almost completely facing back. Then the thrower spins back toward the front with as much motion as he can toward the target at the same time.

The idea is that if you can develop enough rotation, the net will open all the way because of the weights on the edge, and if there is enough forward impetus, the net will drop on the target like an umbrella. Pulling the net in by the rope will close it like a drawstring, trapping the fish inside.

I have made a few casts that worked out exactly like that, but I usually overthink the physics and end up destroying the coordination needed. The net needs to be released from the mouth and hands at the right time, or the net will fold or crumple or just land at your feet.



A proper cast Near Cabo San
Lucas-
Photo by R. Wetzel

This particular day, the net shot out, opened into a beautiful umbrella and dropped right on the anchovies. It was heavy coming in, and I figure it amounted to what the saltwater fishermen in Southern California would call a “scoop”- several pounds, in any event.

The fisherman's son was sent to get an old picnic cooler to carry the anchovies in, and after we loaded it, I asked:

“*vayan a pescar?*” **Are you going to fish?**
“*No, nos vamos a cenar!*” **no, we are going to have dinner!**