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Senri Ethnological Studies

Maritime Institutions in the Western Pacific

**Edited by
Kenneth Ruddle
and
Tomoya Akimichi**



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of Ethnology**

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Senri Ethnological Studies

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The blackberries this particular autumn were nearly over and in any case the bushes that grew within a mile of the village—which was called Bottom, perhaps because it lay at the foot of the red rocks—had been stripped bone-bare. When the gang had gathered at the rendezvous Pete made a revolutionary proposal—that they should enter a new territory in search of fruit.

Number One said disapprovingly, 'We've never done that before.' He was in all ways a conservative child. He had small deep-sunk eyes like holes in stone made by the dropping of water, and there was practically no hair on his head and that gave him the air of a shrivelled old man.

'We'll get into trouble,' Liz said, 'if we do.'

'Nobody need know,' Pete said, 'so long as we take the oath.'

The village by long custom claimed that the land belonging to it extended in a semi-circle three miles deep from the last cottage—even though the last cottage was a ruin of which only the foundations remained. Of the sea too they reckoned to own the water for a larger, more ill-defined area that extended some twelve miles out to sea. This claim, on the occasion when they encountered the boats from beyond the headland, nearly caused a conflict. It was Pete's father who made peace by pointing towards the clouds which had begun to mass over the horizon, one cloud in particular of enormous black menace, so that both parties turned in agreement towards the land, and the fishermen from the village beyond the headland never sailed again so far from their home. (Fishing was always done in grey overcast weather or in fine blue clear weather, or even during moonless nights, when the stars were sufficiently obscured; it was only when the shape of the clouds could be discerned that by general consent fishing stopped.)

'But suppose we meet someone?' Number Two asked.

'How could we?' Pete said.

Graham Greene, "A Discovery in the Woods,"
A Sense of Reality.
Penguin Books (1981: 95).

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Stephen DAVIS is an anthropologist and the head of *Landsearch*, a consulting organization that specializes in Aboriginal land and sea problems. He has lived for three years with the Yolngu people of the Northern Territory and is closely involved in documenting their traditional claims to sea areas, to assist in government legislation.

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