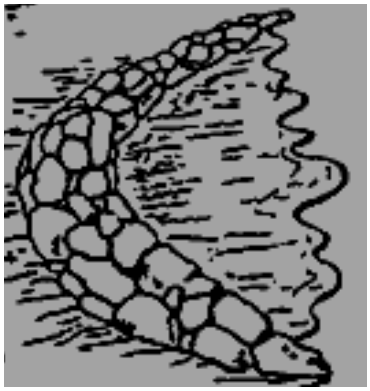
A Long-Term Survival Guide – How To Make Tidal Fish Traps:

Knowing how to make tidal fish traps is important information for anyone who lives close to the ocean. There are seven kinds of tidal fish trap; Arc, Tidal Pool, Arrowhead, Heart-Shaped Funnel, Fence Trap, Fence Weir, and Trap Weir. They can all be made from natural materials, and will provide you with food in a long-term survival situation.



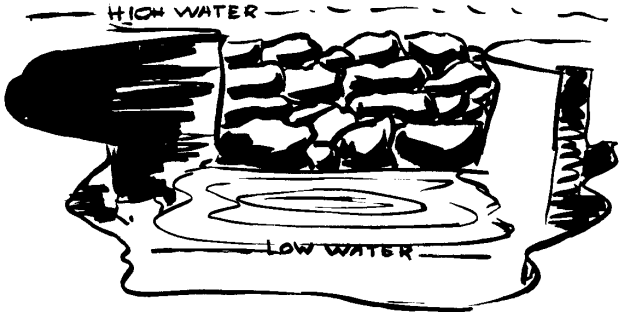
Arc Trap: A crude arc of stones works well as a tidal fish trap, as you can see from the captured fish.

Tidal Traps are a very efficient food-gathering method for survival use, as once the traps are constructed, you need only gather up the trapped fish at each low tide. All of these traps can be baited with crushed sea snails or crabs, or fish heads and entrails from previous catches.

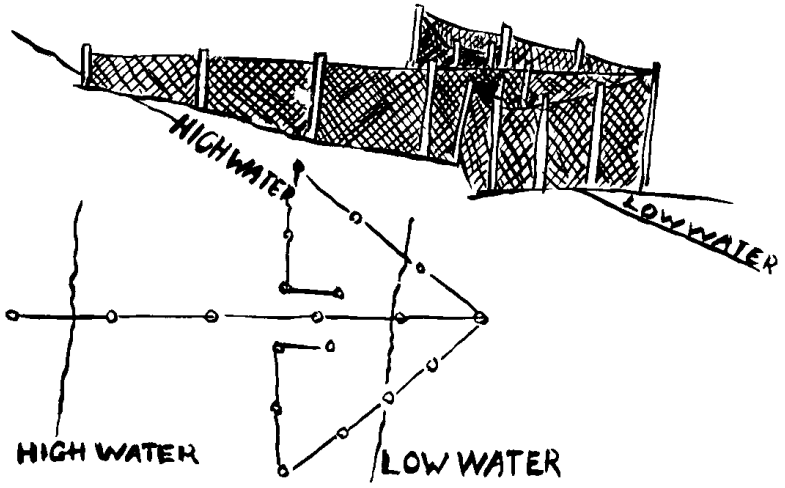
Arc Trap: The simplest tidal trap is the arc trap. Arc-style tidal fish traps can be made from locally available stones on tide flats, or off to one side of the mouth of any stream or river, where they will be covered by the high tide. They are easily made by piling rocks to form broad arcs, which trap fish behind them as the tide recedes. Build your arc trap so that the curved rock wall is just under water at high tide, so that fish can swim over the wall, or around the ends of the arc. The arc should be curved enough so that as the tide recedes, the ends of the arc are exposed first, so that fish are trapped in the arc. If the arc still has water in it at low tide, you can spear the fish, or scoop them up in an improvised dip net.

A Natural Tide Pool Trap: Most tidal pools are not this ideally shaped.

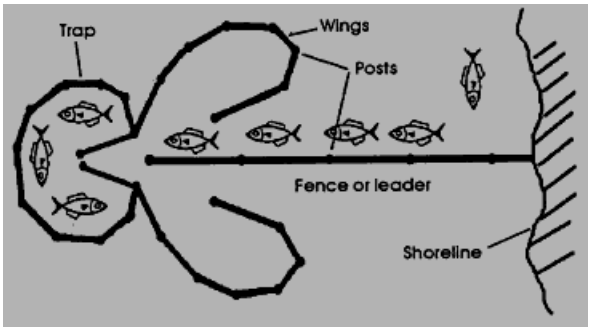
Tide Pool Trap: Some tidal pools are natural fish traps, but most should be improved, by building an arc of stones across any gaps which would let fish escape, while keeping the wall low enough to be covered at high tide. Be careful to use rocks that are light enough to move easily; the last thing you need in a survival situation is a back injury. You can also make arcs from wooden sticks, but stone arcs last almost forever. Some hundred year old arc traps are still used, on the west coast.



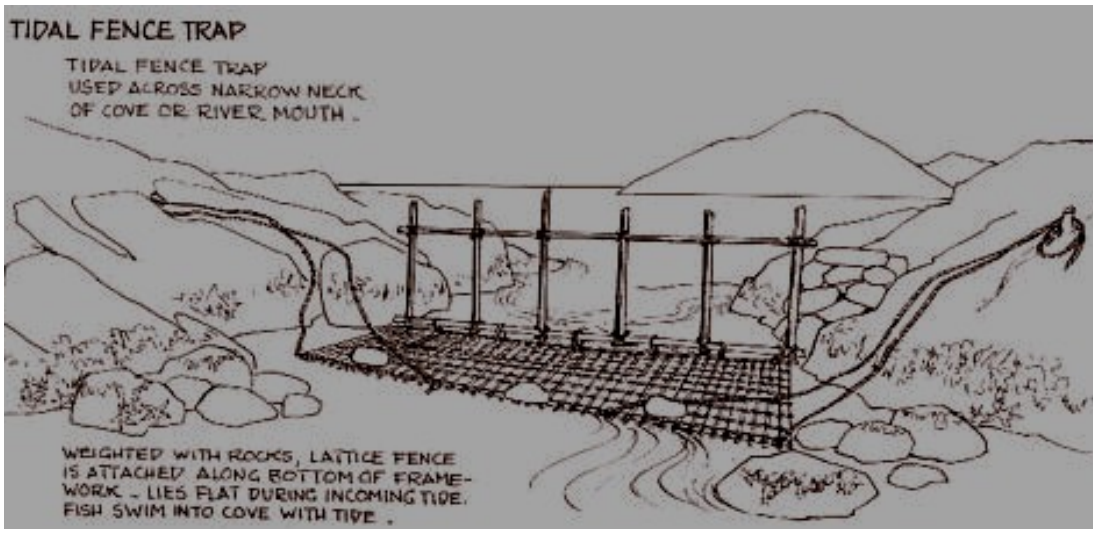
Tide Pool Trap: Most tidal pools should have rocks added to the gaps, to make a better trap.



Arrowhead Tidal Trap: This trap can be made from nets, or stone walls.



Heart-Shaped Funnel Trap: On the left is a heart-shaped funnel trap, seen from the back wall of the second holding pool. This trap is placed so that fish swimming in through a gap in the reef in the background are funneled into the trap. The trap on the right is placed close to shore, with the center fence running to shore, to catch fish swimming along the shoreline. These traps are actually made with two funnel-shaped entrances. Fish swim into the first funnel, and wind up in a holding pool. The second funnel leads from this first holding pool, to a second one. These traps are also made by piling rocks into rough walls. Fish are speared or scooped up with an improvised dip net at low tide, when the holding pools are smallest.



Fence trap, in a narrow tidal entrance. The weighted fence is left down, until high tide.

The fence is raised at high tide, then trapped fish are harvested at low tide.

Fence traps are made of wooden sticks, and placed across narrow tidal inlets, like in these illustrations. The fence is made so that it is higher than the water level will be, at high tide.

Gaps in the fence must be small enough to keep fish from escaping.

The fence is weighted with rocks, so that it will lay flat underwater, and left down until high tide.

The fence is raised at high tide and tied in place, trapping any fish which have entered the inlet.

Trapped fish are harvested at low tide, when the water level is at its lowest, when they are easier to spear, or scoop up in improvised dip nets.

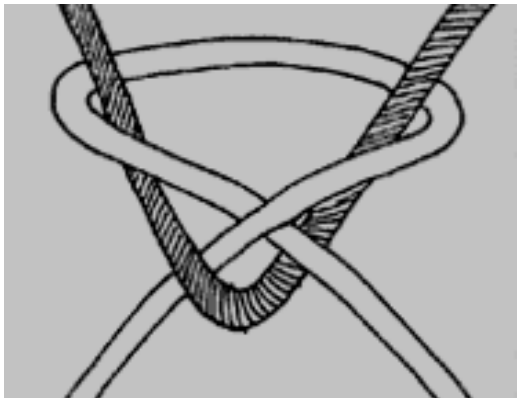
If the inlet is much wider than the one illustrated, you can build a regular fence across most of the width of the inlet, and leave a gap at the lowest point, which is where you place the moveable fence section.

These traps catch fish, but someone has to be at the trap during high tide, to close the fence.

Fence Weir: The fence weir is a fence built across a stream, to block fish moving upstream. Fish milling along the fence line are either speared, or collected in dip nets, from platforms.

Trap Weir: The trap weir is made with a fence across a stream, to stop fish from swimming upstream, and a funnel-shaped trap in front of the fence, to help concentrate the fish, so that they are easier to collect with spears or dip nets. These last two traps qualify as tidal traps mainly because fish try to swim upstream at high tide, looking for food while seawater is backed up into the stream. Fish are harvested from these two traps at high tide, when the most fish are congregating in front of the fences.

Dip Net: An improvised dip net, like this one, is one way to collect fish from tidal traps.



Dip nets, and other nets, can be made with just two basic knots, as shown here. The knot at left is used to tie cordage that will be used to make nets, to a border rope or spreader hoop; the knot at right is a netting mesh knot, used to form the actual squares of netting. To make a net, tie a series of small U shapes of cord around the edge of the spreader hoop, using the first knot, then make the second row, by using the second knot in the bottoms of the first row of U shapes, while leaving enough slack in the cord to make more U shapes. Don't worry if your first few nets are irregular and rough-looking; if they catch fish, they are good enough.

Due to fish and game laws, use tidal fish traps for survival situations only.