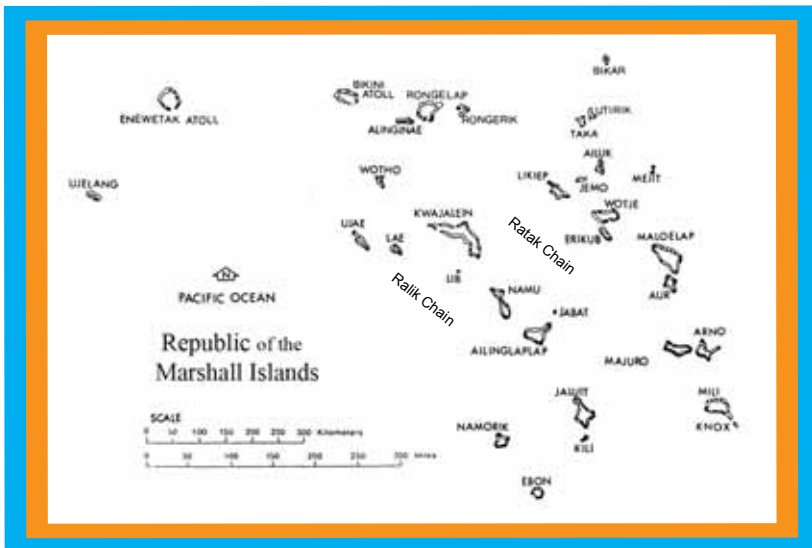
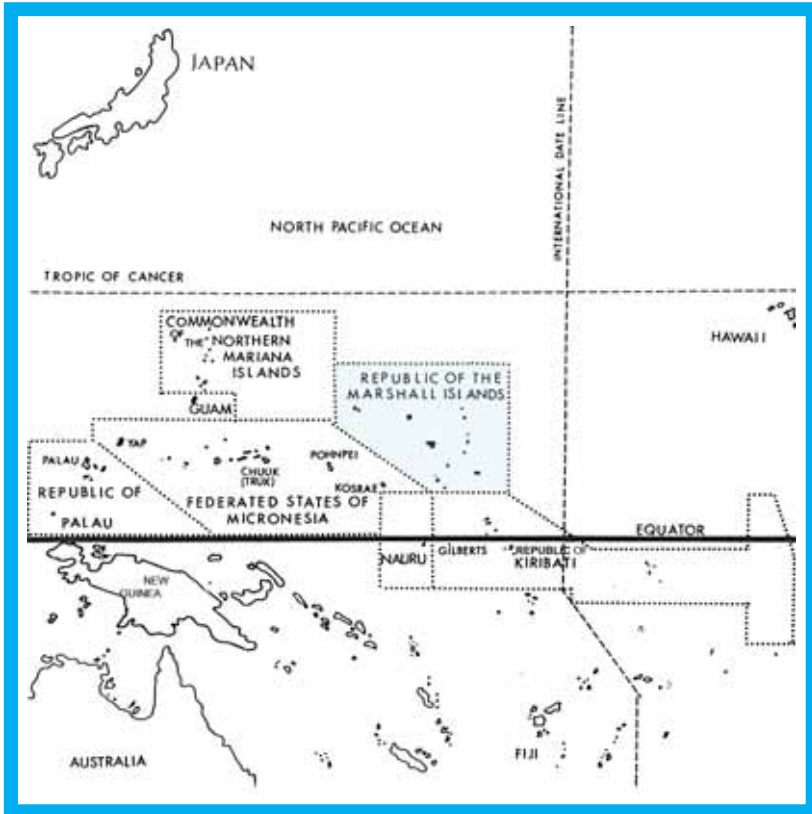


HANDICRAFTS
of the
MARSHALL
ISLANDS

JUDY MULFORD



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Written, photographed, and
illustrated by
JUDY MULFORD

MAJURO
2006

With special thanks and appreciation to Dan Mulford, Rebecca Lorennij, Mandy Ritok, Eonbit Rakinmento, Catherine Overman, Melissa Brown Bidermann, Carol Curtis, and the Handicraft Artists of the Marshall Islands.

KOMMOL TATA

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Front Cover: Assorted Marshallese Handicrafts
Back Cover: Mattang Navigational Stick Chart

MESSAGE from the MINISTER of
RESOURCES & DEVELOPMENT

Marshallese handicrafts are very unique and considered to be the finest and most beautiful in the Pacific, and are produced by some of the finest weavers in the Pacific. Handicrafts are an important part of the economy of the Marshall Islands. Marshallese made handicrafts could be found not only around the Pacific Islands but also internationally. Some can be found on desks and hanging on walls in private homes, and in government and corporate offices in the United States, Japan, New Zealand, Taiwan and several other countries.

This is the first Marshallese Handicraft Catalogue produced and funded jointly by the Ministry of Resources & Development and the United Nations Development Programs (UNDP). The main purpose of the catalog is to bring together information on Marshallese handicrafts and to promote their exportation internationally. It is also hoped that the catalog will also be used as a tool within and outside the classroom in educating our children and the general public to better appreciate the talents and weaving skills of our people.

I wish to thank the Government of the Marshall Islands and the UNDP for funding the production of this catalog. I also wish to thank Mrs. Judy Mulford, the Marshall Islands Handicraft Association and the Marshallese Handicraft Weavers for their assistance in developing this catalogue. I hope you enjoy the color pictures representing the many types of handicrafts produced in the Marshall Islands. Suggestions and comments regarding this catalogue are most welcomed.

Kommol tata,

John M. Silk
Minister of Resources and Development
Republic of the Marshall Islands



INTRODUCTION

The tropical Marshall Islands are located in the Western Pacific Ocean just north of the equator and about 2,400 miles southwest of Hawaii. 1,225 tiny islands form 29 atolls and five single low islands that are arranged in two chains 150 miles apart and 800 miles long. The northwestern, or “sunrise” atolls are called RATAK, and the southwestern, or “sunset”, atolls are called RALIK.

The Marshallese belong to a larger group of island people called Micronesians who inhabit the Gilbert, Caroline, Marianas, and Marshall Islands.

Micronesians entered the Pacific over 3,000 years ago from southeast Asia and gradually settled eastward to the Marshall Islands. The first foreign sightings of the Marshall Islands were by the Spanish explorers in the 1500's, but they did not colonize. The islands were named after English sea captain John Marshall of the HMS *Scarborough* who charted the area in 1788.

The first ethnographic observations of the islands were recorded in the early 1800's by Russian explorer Otto von Kotzebue. In 1857 American missionaries began arriving from Honolulu and by 1909 had established churches on the inhabited atolls.

During the 1850's Germans also began arriving and in 1885 the Marshalls were declared a German Protectorate. For 29 years coconut plantations and copra facilities flourished. But, in 1914, the Japanese took control, colonized, and fortified military bases in the area.

After World War II, in 1947, the Marshall Islands, under the auspices of the United Nations, became part of the Trust Territory of the United States. The Republic of the Marshall Islands was formed in 1979 and in 1986 a Compact of Free Association was signed with the United States.