Kob Kaeb / Coconut-shell Shoes

Site of Documentation
Tai Yuan in Oui Sorn Larn Group, Mae Wang district, Chiangmai Province, Thailand

Description
*Kob Kaeb* is a game played by Tai Yuan children living in the Mae Wang district, Chiangmai, Thailand. The game utilizes *Kob Kaeb*, a traditional toy that is made from a pair of coconut shells. The aim of the game is for players to compete to see who can move fastest, while standing on the *Kob Kaeb*.

Who Plays
This game requires a minimum of one player. It can be played alone, in pairs or teams. Both boys and girls can play aged 8 to 14 years old.

Accessories/Equipment
To play the game, players need to have a traditional Lanna toy called *Kob Kaeb*. The toy is made from the shell of a coconut, which is cut in half, drilled with holes and threaded with string. In the past, *Kob Kaeb* would have been hand made by children’s parents, although nowadays it can be purchased from local craftsmen, such as those found in the Oui Sorn Larn community.

Local craftsmen over time have refined how they construct the toy. Rather than sanding the shell down with a lathe, they cut the top of the coconut off and leave the peel on, creating a broader surface for the children’s feet and making the *Kob Kaeb* easier to walk on.
Time and Place

*Kob Kaeb* can be played whenever children have free time, as long as the weather is cool and dry. Often they prefer to play during their lunch break at school or at home on the weekend. Players should be careful when playing after rain, when the ground is wet, as it is easy to slip and fall over. Ideally players need to have a large, flat game area that is free from obstructions and measures around 5 x 10 metres in size.

Skill, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

This is a game that tests the player’s coordination, strength and balance. The best players are those that have strong legs and arms, and excellent coordination, so they can control the movement of the coconut shells while they run.

Popularity

This once popular traditional game is nowadays not often played by children. As the structure of Thai society has changed with time, so have the types of toys and games played by children. Families have increasingly become fragmented, with more aunts, uncles and grandparents no longer living close to their relatives. Parents also tend to work longer hours, putting additional pressures on time and making convenience key. Elders no longer have the time or know how to craft a toy by hand, and often it’s easier to purchase mass produced items from local shops.

There are still a small number of communities in rural areas (such as the Oui Sorn Larn in Chiang Mai or Kon Tao Kon Kea group from the Mae Sroi district in Chiang Rai) that endeavor to preserve these traditional toys, by producing them for local children to play with. In local Oui Sorn Larn schools particularly, they actively encourage their children to learn and play these types of games.

Nowadays, children often call this game, *Len Kala or Len Ka Long Ba Prao* (which means playing with coconut shells).
Preparation

1. First, the players need to cut a coconut shell into half. On the centre of each half, a small hole needs to be drilled.
2. Next, they need to pass a long string (approximately twice the height of the player) through the holes of both coconut halves.

3. A big knot needs to be tied in both ends of the string, on the inside of the coconut shell, so it’s secure and can’t slip through the hole.
How is the Game Played?

**Step 1.** Players can play the game alone for fun or race with a group of players. The aim is to be able to walk quickly and easily on the coconut shells with bare feet.
**Step 2.** Each player needs to place one foot on the top of each shell. The string must be pinched between their big toe and the toe next to it and the string held tightly with both hands. The player must now try to keep their balance, by pulling the string taut enough to keep the coconut underfoot, while walking around.

![Image of a person stepping on coconuts with a string](image1.jpg)

**Step 3.** If racing, the players have to draw a start line and a finish line on the ground. They can drag a line in the sand using a stick, or use makers such as bags or shoes to determine the track. All the players have to line up at the start line, and when the starter shouts, “Go” they have to race towards the finish line.

![Image of children jumping in traditional clothing](image2.jpg)
Step 4. The first player to cross the finish line wins the game.

Rules

1. Any player who falls off their Kob Kaeb is eliminated from the race.