

# 'Platforms Of Opportunity' Traces Whale

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Recently, unknown to the people of Davenport, a dramatic experiment was taking place in the sky overhead. A specially equipped NASA aircraft and a second aircraft were sweeping the coast and keeping in radio contact with a ground observer in Davenport.

It was all part of a worldwide program called "Platforms of Opportunity". The subject of all the attention that day was the California grey whale, which was being photographed and counted.

"Platforms of Opportunity" is a Northern California based government organization that is currently gathering oceanographic information from all over the world. The name means exactly what it says: it is a program that plans to take advantage of information from every possible source or platform. This can mean oil rigs, aircraft, space satellites, private boats and any scientific or non-scientific volunteer who is in a position to report information.

Already non-scientific volunteers have contributed enormous quantities of otherwise unavailable data.

The man in charge of coordinating this mass of information is Paul Sund—and it is a job that keeps him moving around the world. Recently he was in Santa Cruz and was asked about the experiment over Davenport.

It turned out the aircraft were developing and testing equipment to aid in the counting of marine mammals. It will be one of Sund's responsibilities to evaluate those tests and decide what equipment should be used by his organization.

But Sund's main job is to gather information from all over the world and have it fed into his base at Tiburon for distribution to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) scientists. And that means that he is constantly traveling and searching out sources of information.

Sund carries so much data in his head now that it is difficult to pry out of him that information which would be of special interest to residents of Northern California. But every once in a while he would drop a real eyebrow-raiser.

Like about the blue whales in Monterey Bay. The blue whale is the largest and most spectacular animal that ever lived—greater in size than the greatest dinosaur. They reach a length of 100 feet and weigh up to 150 tons. Not many people have ever seen a blue whale—some think it is already extinct. Famed oceanographer Jacques Cousteau has sailed the seas for 40 years and never seen one. Cousteau should have spent more time in the Monterey Bay. Recently three blue whales were spotted here.

Residents of Northern California are more familiar with the grey whale. This animal's regular migrations past Davenport have made that community Whaletown USA.

Sund tells of exciting new experiments with the California grey. Greys heading for their calving grounds in Baja are being captured by scientists working under a special permit. These whales are small, recently born animals, which are then fitted with a "girdle" with a radio transmitter. The girdle resembles a sweater with arm holes (or in this case, finholes)

which is pulled over the whale's head and the fins drawn through. This prevents the garment from slipping off as the whale swims.

The whale is then released to become Radio K-Whale, a moving, broadcasting station. The program that the whale broadcasts tells the scientists where the whale travels, how deep and frequently he dives and other bits of information.

Pleasure boats are sometimes seen chasing these whales in the waters off Santa Cruz. "That's against the law," said Sund. "It's illegal to harass a whale, and the boater could receive a ticket for doing so." Sund went on to explain that even though the grey whale is very good natured, it is possible for one to get irritated and turn on a boat.

A subject of controversy in the Santa Cruz area is the International Whaling Commission. During this 25th anniversary of the commission, commemorative whale buttons are being sold in Davenport to support the work of the commission. But conservationists here have accused the commission of promoting the slaughter of whales.

"The Whaling Commission does a lot of good in regulating the killing of whales," said Sund, "but, of course, the conservationists want no whales at all killed. Still, given a choice of the Whaling Commission or nothing, I'm sure the conservationist would want the commission around. If it weren't for the commission, there might be no grey whales today. They placed a ban on the harvesting of grey whales years ago."

Learning the whaling population of the world is just one tiny part of the "Platforms"

program. Another project is to produce an all-season data bank on marine temperature and salinity occurring at various depths. To do this, privately owned ships are being equipped with probes which are lowered into the ocean at points all over the world.

Mates and engine room personnel aboard these ships have been taking readings every four hours day and night on a no-pay basis.

As the probe descends to the ocean bottom on a wire reel, it signals its temperature and depth messages to a readout machine and a paper tape recorder in a nearby cabin. The readout equipment will show the data, time, longitude, latitude and quadrant at each

data-collecting location.

This scientific program produces data for detailed analyses of the ocean's climate over vast areas from Alaska to Mexico and from California to Australia in the Pacific. In the Atlantic, coverage extends all along the eastern seaboard into the Gulf of Mexico, to the Panama Canal, into the Caribbean, and along the coast of South America.

The "Platforms of Opportunity" program is just starting. In the next few years, enormous amounts of information will be coming in. It would be more information than even computers could handle if Sund didn't qualify it. And out of this information may come the deepest secrets of the sea.



Equipped with two powerful walkie-talkies, this man can serve as a ground observer at Davenport for NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. A "Platforms of Opportunity" program is being conducted to trace the travel patterns of the California Grey Whale.

## Santa Cruz County Pageant Theme: 'Pick Yourself Up'

A 1936 song, "Pick Yourself Up," will be the theme of the 25th anniversary of the Santa Cruz County Pageant at the civic auditorium. The retiring crown holder, Pam Scott, said the most

A nostalgic look will be reflected in the pageant's musical numbers, costumes, and pageant. Tickets are available at Richard Amei's



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