

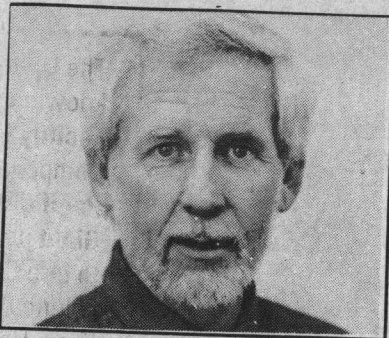
Spouts of success: the comeback of the coastal whales

I STOPPED in one of those high-way turn-outs north of Davenport the other day to see if I might spy a whale. My wintertime calendar does not begin until I see a spout from a whale headed south — what the Azorean whalers used to call a “down” whale.

In these days of ethnic cleansing, downsizing and craziness everywhere, I find reassurance and comfort in knowing that out there, beyond the growl and grumble of talk radio, the natural rhythms continue. The Arctic seas have closed for the winter, and the whales are heading south for their own version of a Mexican vacation.

A brisk, north wind is driving a chop ahead of it and the air is crisp and clear. Occasional wind gusts buffet and shake the car. A wind this strong will flatten and scatter a whale spout, so I concentrate my gaze close in. As usually happens, I catch a movement out of the corner of my eye, and I turn just in

Hindsight



Sandy Lydon

time to see a puff of spray dissolve in the wind. And then there's another. And another. The spouts move steadily to the left as if they, too, are being driven by the cold wind.

Spying for whales

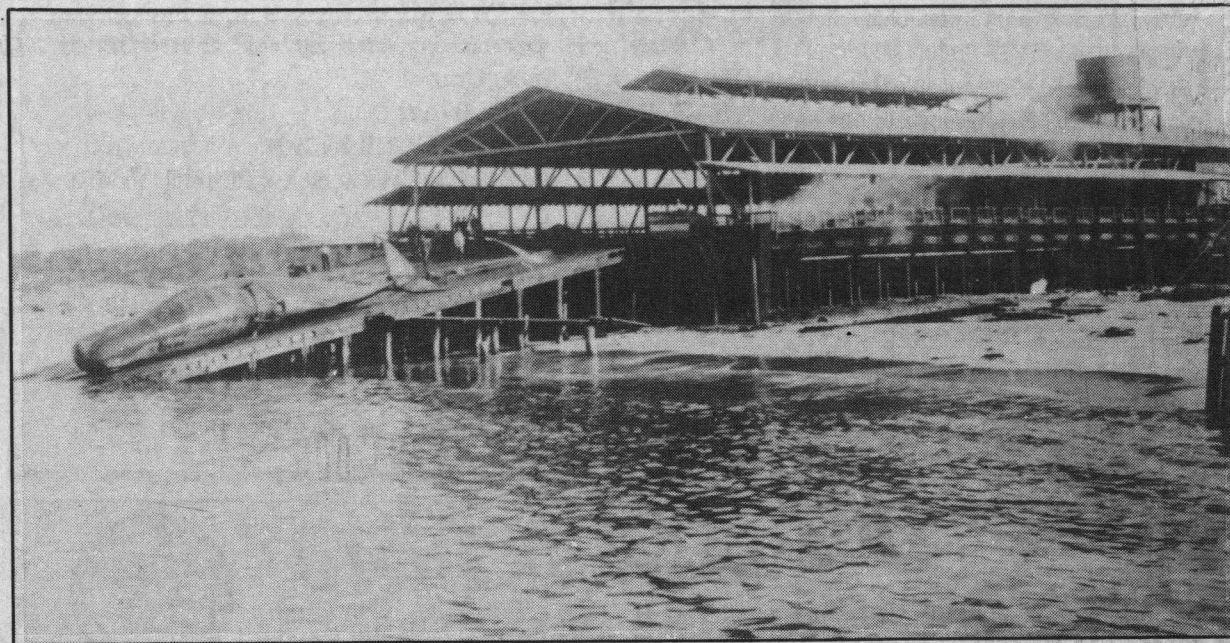
I spent a lot of time out here on

the east as a kid while visiting my grandmother at her home in the Buta Canyon up behind Pescadero. I don't ever remember spying whales. The really wondrous thing about seeing whale spouts in the 1990s is that we human beings can claim some responsibility for their return. There weren't any whales for me to spy in the 1940s and 1950s because there weren't any whales out there. Now there are and we did it. Pretty nifty, huh?

The evolution of our coastal whales from prey to protected is a story worth reviewing, and what follows is a brief summary of how it happened.

The earliest inhabitants of the Monterey Bay Region — the Ohlone — did not venture out onto the ocean to hunt whales. They celebrated the arrival of a dead whale on the beach, but had to compete with the grizzlies for the carcass.

Please see LYDON — D2



The Flanginon Collection

A whale awaits processing at the Moss Landing Whaling Station in 1919.