

A Whale of a Project at Davenport

By MARGARET KOCH
Sentinel Staff Writer

Whale watching is in again...

Davenport residents have their ocean-going eyes sharpened for the sight of the great mammals. The goliaths of the deep are surging along through the coastal waters, diving to the kelp beds with mighty flips of their giant tails, then surfacing to send up white jets of steamy breath.

The whale parade passes Davenport each winter and spring as the whales head south to Baja California, then back north for the summer.

Right now they are moving north, stopping to rest and browse in the Davenport kelp pastures on their long journey.

In Baja the gray whales congregate at Scammon's Lagoon where the females give birth to their young and they all enjoy warmer winter waters.

Not only are the Davenportites whale watching these days, they are all sporting "whale badges" commemorating the 25th anniversary of the International Whaling Commission. The buttons are decorated with four small gray whales, they also say "Davenport, Calif. Jan.-May 1973 Whale Migration." They cost \$1.

The buttons may be purchased at Gregory's Country Store in Davenport, right across the road from one of the best whale-watching points.

The buttons have gone all over the world — including one that was sent with special letter of thanks to the President of Mexico, Luis Echeverria Alvarez.

The letter thanked President Alvarez for designating Scammon's Lagoon as a whale sanctuary last year. It is off-limits to chechakos with trigger fingers and juvenile ideas about what is fun.

In 1971 the Point Richmond Whaling Station also was closed down. It was the last one

operating in the U.S. The whale meat was turned into dog food, chicken food and fertilizer at the station.

Whalers cruised along the coast, shooting harpoons into the great beasts, until December 1971 when the United States ended commercial whaling. The gray whales that migrate along the California coast were particularly desirable because they were easier to catch and kill, according to old accounts.

Davenport's very name comes from Captain John P. Davenport, one of the area's earliest settlers and an ardent whaling man. How his eyes must have lit up when he spotted the pods of whales cruising past Davenport. The area is situated on a "seaward thrust" of the coast which makes it one of the few points in California that extends close to the whales' migratory route.

Captain Davenport devised a method whereby bell alarms were rung by watchers when whales were spotted near shore. He went out in small boat to harpoon the whales, towed them back to the beach where their carcasses were cut up and the oil was boiled out in huge black iron kettles. In 1862 the Captain's whaling company processed 1700 barrels of whale oil, according to Mrs. Elio Orlando who has done much research on whaling in the Davenport area.

In the days when Captain Davenport lived at Davenport Landing (one mile north of the town) in a frame house on the west side of the arroyo, overlooking the coastal waters, the gray whales were plentiful. Whaling was good in Monterey Bay. But heavy slaughter during the last 100 years brought the gray whale close to extinction.

They recovered sufficiently to be harvested commercially by foreign factory ships in the 1920s and 1930s. Since 1938 the gray whale has been given

complete protection by international agreement. But the Russian and Japanese whalers keep trying to get the ban on them lifted, according to Dr. Roger S. Payne, research biologist and whale expert with Rockefeller University.

When the whales appear off Davenport they are most likely to be spotted first by several devoted whale watchers — Postmaster Myrtle Garaventa at Davenport and the McCrary brothers, Lud and Bud, a few miles north of Davenport.

The McCrarys have watched with binoculars as whales appeared to be "in the coves, scraping along the rocks, as if trying to get rid of barnacles or something."

The gray whale feeds in summer in the Bering Sea above the Aleutian Islands, according to Burney J. LeBoeuf of UCSC Crown College.

The migration south begins in December-January to Scammon's Lagoon, Black Warrior Lagoon and even down around the tip of Baja California into the Gulf of California. It is believed the whales bear their calves in the Baja lagoons because of the warmer waters and the abundance of food there.

The mature gray whale ranges from 40 to 60 feet in length and an average whale may weigh a ton and a half per lineal foot.

Conservation of whales is not new. In 1946 the International Whaling Commission was formed to regulate the harvesting of whales and to put certain species on the endangered list and limit the catches of member countries.

However, more than 20,000 other kinds of whales are killed each year by Japan and Russia, representing 80 per cent of the world's catch.

Recently (March 11, 1973) 637 whales were slaughtered in a few hours in the traditional whale killing by Faeroe Island-

ers of Denmark. They were pilot whales — driven into shallow waters by hunters in small boats, then killed as they thrashed around helplessly. The people celebrated the event with a big dance that evening.

Another jolt — or it should be — is Farley Mowat's story "A Whale for the Killing" based on the fate of a whale stranded in a salt water pond in Newfoundland and used for target practice by local people. It appeared in Reader's Digest.

What really is needed, according to whale conservationists, is a 10-year moratorium on all whaling to permit a complete evaluation of the entire whale population. If this is not done, they fear the whale may go the way of the Dodo bird and the

Carrier Pigeon and the California Grizzly and a list of other unfortunate beasts that got in man's way.

The whales don't even get in anyone's way. But they have mountains of flesh that can be turned into dog food, fertilizer and oil...

Anyone interested in preserving these mammals — the earth's largest — may write to Professor John Laurence McHugh, president of the International commission and a staff member at State University of New York, Syracuse, N.Y.

Another thing you can do — buy a whale badge for \$1. The money goes to research — on whales, of course.

It's a whale of a project.



Whales
And
People

Alvin Gregory presents a "whale badge" to Rose Domenichelli, who has worked for the past 19 years at Gregory's Country Store in Davenport — and who has whale-watched each year, along with most of the Davenport residents.

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