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ISSUE : [Issue 16](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1977/6/1

The Whales in Cape Breton's Waters By far the most common whale in Cape Breton's waters is the Pilot Whale, known also as blackfish and pothead (and, incorrectly, grampus). It is actually classed as a dolphin. Peter Beamish, Research Scientist at Bedford Institute, told us that there is a well-known herd the fishermen see every year in St. George's Bay. Fred Lawrence, a fisherman from Meat Cove, told us about standing at a height of about 400 feet, watching an enormous pod of pilot whales coming out of the Northumberland Strait, heading north toward somewhere between Anticosti and St. Paul's. It was a long, long movement of whales • the path of them spaced out in the water running from within 100 yards of the shore out as far as places known by local fishermen as 9 Mile Shoal and Spanish River Shoal. He watched them pass for over an hour and a half • literally thousands of whales. It was September 1, 1974 • a calm day with the only white on the water where the whales broke. And he said the first 6 whales left the group and seemed to station themselves very much like road guards just off of Meat Cove. They went around in their own circle just off that source of danger to whales for the hour and a half it took the pod to pass • and then they fell in behind and joined them. Fred said it is common when out fishing to see a large pod of pilot whales. He once threw a stick in and his dog went after it • and just that fast those whales disappeared. A whale is a creature that was at one time an amphibian which millions of years ago left the land and evolved into a pelagic mammal. It can now return to land only to die. Whales are part of the Order Cetacea, made up of whales, dolphins and porpoises • representatives of each of these frequenting the waters around Cape Breton. The Order is then divided into the two Sub-orders • the Whalebone (or Baleen) and the Toothed Whales. The Whalebone Whales are filter feeders • they have long, horny slats emerging from the upper gums, through which sea water is expressed, plankton and fish catching in the mustache-like outer edges of these slats. A whale washed ashore recently at Black Point. Its baleens were about 8 inches wide as they came from the gums and curved down and in to a point at the free end • and from the side they looked very much like a tusk. But on edge, the side that faces the ocean as these slats are lined up close to each other right across the whale's mouth • they were about an 1/8th of an inch thick. The baleen was about 3 feet long and the exposed edge ended in filaments which got progressively longer toward the bottom. The Baleen Whale eats by scooping up huge quantities of sea water and then expressing it by driving the tongue up against the baleen plates • the food catching in the filaments. Some of the smallest creatures on earth • those that make up the planktonic hordes • are the food of the largest creatures that ever lived • the Baleen Whales. The food is swallowed whole. Even the Toothed Whales (the Sub-order Odontoceti) do not chew their food. The teeth are for grasping and tearing but the work of chewing is carried out in the whales' stomachs, which number from four to nine. The whale is a mammal, and as a mammal it shares certain basic characteristics with man: it is warm-blooded; that is, it maintains its own internal heat and is thus less confined by water temperature to cer?



tain territories than cold-blooded creatures. It has a four-chambered heart. Its young are torn alive out of the womb and they breathe air into their lungs. And they suckle their young. Some whales re- i ' .tf'.* .* 'L* >'* .-i*.* - • • ? .*?'? ast Droaram offers a l' / Cape Breton's Bed & Breakfast program offers a unique and interesting experience in overnight accommodations. Every season those in the program, displaying the above sign, open their doors to greet visitors with courtesy and warmth. WATCH FOR THE BED & BREAKFAST SIGN -OR- contact the Cape Breton Tourist Association for a list of Bed & Breakfast participants re CO-OP Building Supplies and Harbour Homes • your best Cape Breton Source of PRE-ASSEMBLED HOMES and COHAGES • Complete stocks of lumber, building supplies. Plumbing, Heating and Electrical materials. W? cafmr to th? building public CO-OD COOP BUILDING SUPPLIES " " " " 1 Kings Road, Sydney 539