

OF WHALES WITHIN 12 HOURS

A Rare Sight: Eskimo boys playing on a bowhead whale



Rock's cook tent as a symbol
Women are cooking in the tent.



RARE PLAYTHING—Three Point Hope boys will probably never forget this moment when they happily played on the huge carcass of Allen Rock's bowhead whale he harpooned on April 23. One of the two whales caught that day, Rock's weighed about 35 tons. The boys are perched at the back end

of the whale's lip and temple. Just beneath the boy lying prone is the eye. A moment later, the boys were shooed off the huge mammal when the men got ready to cut up the whale. The boy at far right is Rexie, Allen and Frances Rock's adopted boy.



posing with Bernard Nash, his
seen floating with the help of a
is Rexie Rock.

90 Tons of Whales Caught at Point Hope . . .

(Continued from page 1)

were, indeed, some marked changes from the old days in the manner in which a whale catch was announced. Attached to the sled load of flukes was a modern snow vehicle with which my nephew had speeded to the village carrying the great news.

In the old days, a whaling captain sent a runner on foot to carry the news. Now a snow vehicle was being used but along with it, a convincing proof of the whale's flukes in the sled—the parts of the whale that are traditionally cut off the whale the first thing once the animal has been killed.

A crowd began to gather outside the lodge, most of them women in their colorful parkas. They congratulated Frances and hugged her happily. Some of the women were in tears. They were happy for the future. There would be food for a long time to come.

Allen's whale was last of the three whales caught last week, his and John Oktolik's were caught within one hour. Joe Frankson had caught his two days earlier.

Three bowhead whales, all rather small ones but their combined weight came to about 90 tons—a lot of meat and muktuk for the village of Point Hope with a population of 375.

Other villages and towns will also benefit. Kotzebue

will get great many pounds of it as will Nome and Barrow. The villages up and down the Arctic coast are happy because they, too, will get some of the whales.

TO WHALING CAMPS

The two great animals caught on April 23 brought the population of the village to the whaling camps on the ice. They converged to the area by dogteams and by snow machines. Some of them walked as the camps were close to the shore—an ideal whale hunting condition for the village.

John Oktolik's whale was the first for the cutting operation. It was about a 30 foot whale or about 30 tons. The whole animal was easily pulled out of the water by block and tackle.

Allen Rock's whale was next a scant 100 feet down from Oktolik's. Rock's catch was larger or about 35 tons. It was also pulled whole on the ice but not before it began to buckle the sea ice under it threatening to break through.

The men simply pulled it farther up from the edge of the ice until the ice supported it firmly and out of danger of breaking through.

The two whales brought out of the water bodily was the most imposing sight to see and the operation of cutting them up was even more so.

Old men, old whalers

themselves, were very much evident at the cutting operation. They gave their valuable knowledge of how the whale was cut to the younger whalers and the operation was done precisely and swiftly.

As a result, about 65 tons of whales were cut up within 12 hours and put safely away in underground meat caches where they will stay frozen even through the summer.

This manner of operation was a lesson learned the hard way great many generations ago. Arctic ice has always been treacherous. It does not condone tarrying. The ice could break between the whale cutting operation and the shore and valuable food could be lost to the village.

The fastest way possible in cutting up whales was the result and this manner of operation has been passed on well to the present day. The old whalers last week at Point Hope had their hour and they did it with dignity. Their precise knowledge was unmistakable.

The Eskimos of Point Hope have also been quick to take advantage of a modern convenience and that is the snow machine. This vehicle's maneuverability and pulling capacity was quickly made use of which expedited the hauling of the muktuk and meat into the village caches.

Along with the above operation came man-killing work by both men, women and youths. The time of day does not mean a thing when whales are caught at Point Hope and other whaling communities.

When large whales up to 80 tons are caught, the people have gone without sleep up to two or more days. The huge ones cannot be pulled on the ice and much of the operation has had to be done in the water working off the umiaks cutting with long-handled large knives and hocks.

The three whales caught so far at Point Hope are considered rather rare because they were taken so early in the season which starts from about the middle of April to about the last week in May.

This good fortune has given the whalers confidence that they have a good chance to catch more before the season is over. The whalers are also confident that good whaling conditions will prevail which had been rare during the last few years.

WHALING CELEBRATION
Whether any more whales are caught or not, Point Hope already has three important reasons to celebrate its traditional yearly whaling activity.

This will occur around June 9. Women of the village will be designing new clothes and mukluks for their

families and plans will be made for the great feast all according to tradition.

When the excitement died down a bit last week in the village, people remarked: "Why all three of the men are Qaqmaqtuqs."

Qaqmaqtuq is the northern faction of the whaling societies while Ungasaqsikaaq is the southern faction. The societies are friendly whaling rivals. Each has its ancient celebration grounds about a quarter of mile distant from north to west.

The villagers were not the only ones caught by the tide of excitement. ASCAP board members and others made a rush to the whaling camps when the whales were caught disrupting the start of the board meeting.

"We don't have a quorum," this remark was heard more than once.

The board members and Dr. Victor Fischer of the Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research of the University of Alaska, did not wish to miss the rare occasion of seeing the whaling event.

At noon lunch on April 24 at Rock's Lodge, they were treated to whale steaks.

"Why this is not bad at all," some remarked and ordered seconds. When they went home, a few of the visitors took pieces of whale meat with them.