

Savoonga takes two whales to start hunt

by Bill Hess

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Savoonga started this year's whaling season off right last Thursday and early Monday when crews captained by Chester Noongwook and Raymond Toolie landed the first two bowheads of the season.

The first whale was harpooned at about 9 p.m. Thursday by Noongwook's 20-year-old son, Parson. "They got the whale about 60 to 70 miles South of here," said Thor Noongwook, Parson's older brother.

"It was the first whale Parson ever harpooned," Thor added. "We do it by hand,"

he explained how the St. Lawrence Island whalers thrust the bomb-laden harpoon into the animals flesh. It took about one hour to kill the whale, during which time the rope attached to the harpoon became snarled on the boats mast and nearly capsized it.

Two young, inexperienced whalers were reported on the boat, and Captain Noongwook had to untangle the rope.

After the kill, made on the calm, 15 degree day, Noongwook and his crew were joined by the 12 other whaling boats from Savoonga, which helped out with the three-hour task of towing the bowhead in.

"The whale was 52 feet long," said Thor Noongwook. "We butchered it already." Thor had been out working as a member of another crew.

News of Toolie's whale came in as this issue was going to press. Other than the fact that the other whalers had joined with Toolie in the job of bringing the whale in, no other information was available.

After a frustrating delay of many days when they were held in by a solid pack of ice, whaling crews from Gambell, Savoonga's neighbor on St. Lawrence Island, finally made it out to sea early this week.

Norma Silook said her husband Roger had gone out for the first time on Sunday, but had had to come back in when the ice closed up again. He was going out again Monday.

"My husband was going to the south side," Mrs. Silook said. "I hope they catch one today. I'm excited! I think everybody is excited. Its nice and sunshine now."

Ernie Frankson, a whaling captain from Point Hope, said there was not much in the way of good leads formed near that community yet, but a couple of boats had went into the water. Frankson

intended to join them before the week was over.

Marie Adams, the spokesperson for the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, said that although there were small areas of open water in Barrow, no real leads had yet opened up. Whale counters had officially spotted only one bowhead.

"The weather is gorgeous," Adams said. "It's sunshiney and it doesn't seem all that cold. The leads could open up any time now." Temperatures in Barrow lately have been running between about -10 degrees F to -25.