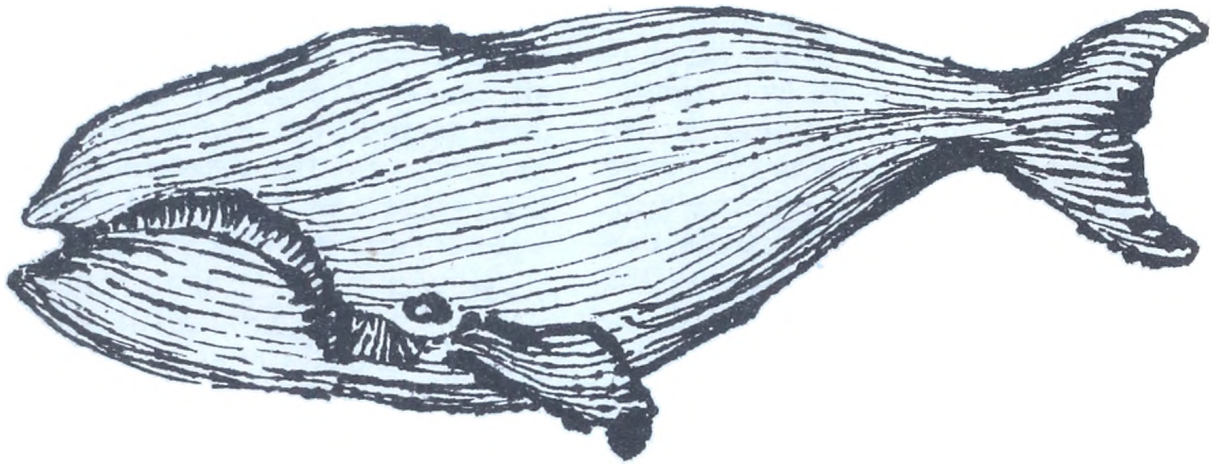
*No matter how you look at it . . .*

# *It's a WHALE of an Industry*



By JOHN DAVIDSON

AS FAR BACK as 1842, whaling was a flourishing industry in Western Australia, and, in addition, many farms along the coast depended for their existence on supplying fresh vegetables to the whalers. The industry was then controlled by Norwegian companies. However, the companies concerned in the post-war revival of the trade in Western Australia are Australian-owned, and between them they produce whale oil which is worth more than £A1 million annually.

One of these companies is the Cheynes Beach Whaling Company, which began operations in 1952 at Frenchman's Bay in the Albany district. This concern operates two whale-catchers, or 'chasers, as they are sometimes called (except by the skipper, who assures you that he **catches** whales and doesn't just **chase** them). The vessels, **Cheynes** and **Kos VII,** both of about 250 tons, with

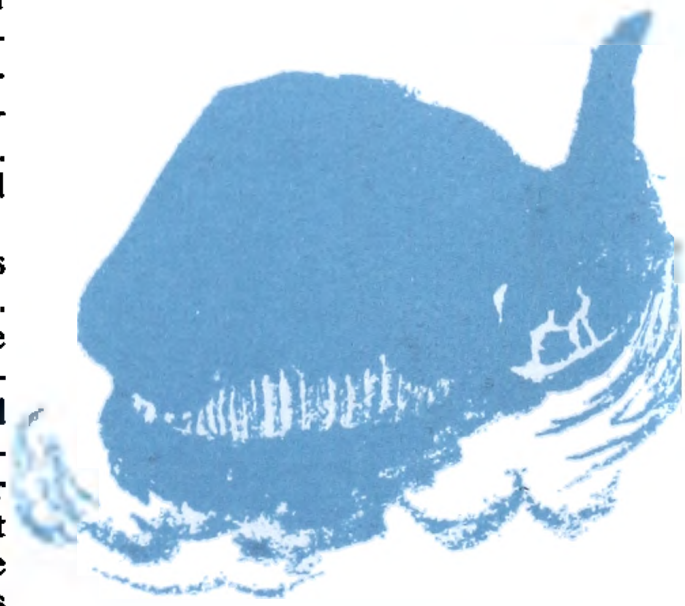
a maximum speed of 12½ knots, are steam-operated with oil-fired burners, each consuming about six-and-a-half tons of oil a day.

Mounted on the bow of each ship is a harpoon gun, which fires a harpoon weighing 170 lb., to which is attached 80 fathoms of rope. The explosive warhead of the harpoon explodes inside the whale, usually causing instantaneous death. When dead, the whale is inflated for buoyancy and is towed by a launch to the shore processing station at Frenchman's Bay, about 14 miles from the town of Albany.

The chaser, the shore station and the towing launch are in two-way radio contact, and time is saved by constant reports on sightings and positions. An aircraft, flown by Mr. John Downie, spots, locates and often assists in catching the whales. Mr. Downie also sees that buoyed whales do not come adrift.

Sighting whales is an expert's job, especially in rough weather. Often, it is the blowing of the whale which betrays its position. Incidentally, the vertical spout of water so much associated with whales is not water pumped up by the whale, but condensation from the large volume of air forced from its lungs. An interesting sidelight on hunting sperm whales, which can lie submerged for up to 50 minutes, is the use by the modern whale 'chaser of a radar device which keeps track of the whale at depth, in somewhat the same way that Asdic detects submerged submarines.

THERE ARE numerous types of whales, but, in recent years, the humpback and sperm whales have been the species hunted in Western Australian waters. The humpback caught off the Australian coast spends part of the year in its feeding grounds in the Antartic, and then travels up through warmer waters surrounding Australia,



South Africa and South America, where breeding takes place. While migrating, the whales do not feed, but rely on their body fats to sustain them.

Humpbacks grow to 50 feet in length and weigh about a ton for each foot in length. Unlike the sperm whale, the humpback has no teeth, just a series of bony plates in the upper jaw. The sperm whale, which has about 48 teeth in the lower jaw, inhabits the deep waters off the continental shelf and feeds on large octopus and squid.

There are restrictions on the number of humpback whales that can be caught. The quotas, which are voluntary and designed to ensure that the species will not become extinct, are set by the Commonwealth Fisheries Department in conjunction with the International Whaling Statistics in Norway. Other restrictions do not permit the killing of whales under 35 feet in length or of a lactating cow whale with calf.

How can you recognize a lactating cow whale?

"That's easy," 'chaser skipper Frank Hughes, of Cheynes Beach Whaling, told me. "A whale with a calf will take it on her back or under a flipper, for protection, when pursued."

Cheynes Beach Whaling Company is allowed a quota of only 120 humpback whales a season, and these are obtained between June and late July (some larger companies are allowed 1,000 humpbacks). When the towing launch brings the whale alongside the shore station, a Fisheries Department inspector is waiting to check whether or not it is regulation length.

Then the flensing (or cutting-up) operation begins. This is a slippery and bloody business to watch — let alone perform. However, it is most interesting to see skilled operators at work with their long razor-sharp flensing knives. Finally, the whole whale, including blubber and bones, is cut up to a suitable size to despatch down a circular opening to the Kwana-type cooker, which is similar in principle to the domestic pressure cooker, except that in addition it contains a large, revolving, perforated cylinder through which the whole contents pass as cooking reduces the size of the particles. The whale is cooked for five or six hours, heat being supplied by steam generated from burners fired by fuel oil at a consumption rate of 50 tons a week.

After cooking, the complete contents of the cooker are blown over to settling tanks. The oil is tapped to containers and the residue, called grax, a mixture of offal and oil, is passed through super decanters, from which further oil is extracted. The grax settles and

is fed into a drier, where moisture is extracted, the result being a meal of high protein content, used either as stock or poultry feed or as fertilizer.

The humpback yields edible oil, sold in Britain and Europe mainly for the manufacture of margarine. The oil is valued at about £85 sterling a ton. The average whale weighs nine tons, but one humpback, recently caught by Cheynes Beach Whaling, yielded 15 tons of oil. Sperm oil is inedible and used mainly for such industrial purposes as tanning, steel tempering, and as a blend with mineral oils for machinery lubrication.

Britain is the chief buyer of this oil, which is valued at about £90 sterling a ton, the average oil per whale being eight tons. Oil is stored at the whaling station in tanks, which have a total capacity of 2,000 tons, until it is transferred into bulk tanks in cargo vessels to be shipped overseas. In 1956, when only one 'chaser was employed, Cheynes Beach Whaling exported oil to the value of £100,000.

A small organization such as Cheynes Beach, with a quota of only 120 humpback whales, would use about 700 tons of fuel oil a year, including that used by one 'chaser, as was the case in 1956. In addition, four tons of diesel fuel is needed each week by diesel engines at the shore station. About 1,000 gallons of lubricants is needed annually, plus 10,000 gallons of motor spirit and a similar amount of distillate.

The company is expanding, and now, with two 'chasers employed, can hunt a greater quantity of non-quota sperm whales in addition to their quota of humpbacks, so the figures given should be considerably increased, and we will find Western Australia's economy enhanced of yet another valuable industry.

* * *

## Wolf Scent

BECKLINGHAUSEN, *West Germany. — A chemical which smells like wolves is keeping rabbits and stray dogs from spoiling the beauties of a city park at Herten near here.*

*It is spread on all lawns and flower beds and when animals get wind of the artificial wolf-scent they give the park a wide berth.*

*