

What Whalemen Hunted

Whales are not fish. They are mammals and must have air to breathe or they will die. They breathe through nostrils on the top of their heads (called blowholes) and hold their breath while they swim under water. When they come to the surface, they let their breath out, forming tall, misty columns of air. This is called a spout and was used by whale hunters to find them.

Whales are warm-blooded like animals on land. They have thick layers of blubber under their skin to protect them from the cold. Oil in the blubber was used for many years to light homes, shops and streets. It was also used to lubricate machines and curing leather.

Some whales are small, like porpoises. Others are larger than the largest dinosaur that ever lived. The largest whales, the Blue Whale can weigh up to 120 tons, or as much as six and a half dump trucks.

It took great courage for men to go out to sea after these huge creatures in small boats. At first they chased only the whales they could see from shore and boiled out the blubber on the beach. Then they built larger stronger boats with try-pots on the deck and sailed far from home, hunting whales.

They sailed around Cape Horn at the tip of South America or around the Cape of Good Hope at the tip of Africa and into the Pacific Ocean. They cruised about on the Indian Ocean, South Seas and up into the Arctic and North Atlantic. They went in search of whales. There were six species of whales they generally hunted; the sperm whale, right whale, bowhead whale, humpback whale, gray whale and blue whale.

Based on "When Nantucket Men Went Whaling" by Edith LaMonte. Meadocraft, p.20-21