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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Perilous Trek To Big Sealer

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I HAD an interesting chat this week with Elmore MacKay, federal fisheries officer here, who shared an unusual experience a few days ago with Conway's Lowell Matthews.

The pair had been set down on a ice flow in the morning, in the middle of a seal herd, 35 miles off North Rustico by Robert McElwaine, Tryon who was flying pelts back to base through the day. They were in trouble though, when the weather closed in, and the plane could not come back for them.

McElwaine has the plane owned formerly by Clinton's "Flying Farmer" Elton Woodside. He flies the mail from New Glasgow to Pictou Island along with other flying jobs he picks up.

Their first thought was to stay in the area. The second was to head for the East Star, a sealing ship they had seen some five miles away before the weather closed in. After waiting until 5 o'clock they decided that the plane definitely would not return that day.

I'LL LET Mr MacKay talk for himself and Matthews:

"Before the weather closed in we could see the sailing vessel "The East Star ", approximately five miles away, in a Northeasterly direction from us. During the day the wind was north.

"Taking the wind direction for our bearing - we had no compass - we set out on foot for the sealer", Mr. MacKay reported.

The two men had plenty of problems.

"We had covered approximately one and one-half miles before darkness set in. After that we had difficulty avoiding the open water cracks and holes in the ice."

The ice piles, 20 feet high in spots, added to their problems but Elmore brightens considerably as he adds, " about 7p.m. the weather cleared somewhat and we were pleased to see the lights of the East Star". It seemed about one mile away, but the distance was deceiving and they still had a long way to go before they reached her.

Many Perils Are Encountered

THEIR DIRECTION was perfect, but they could have been miles off their course, and the cracks and holes were always dangerous. A four-foot piece of rope was all they had to hold them together, as they made their perilous way.

The presence of countless seals and pups added to the difficulty. It was easy to stumble over the white pups, as they were almost invisible against the ice. One of our news stories said there were 200,000 seals in the herd, but to Mr. MacKay and his partner it looked as if there were "millions of them".

The fisheries inspector had warm praise for the treatment they received from Captain Chapman, the ship's master, and Captain Olsen who was in charge of the operations on the ice.

"THE SHIP was in an area of open water" as they approached it and "the mate brought his ship over to the ice and took us aboard", Mr. MacKay told me. They returned to Rustico the next day by plane.

The ship uses a 4,000-foot cable with hooks on it, to haul the pelts from the ice. Operated on an hydraulic winch, it can handle 135 pelts at once. The ship had 8,000 pelts aboard at the time, and hoped to have its full load of 40,000 by the latter part of this week.

The Harp seals are not dangerous. Adults run 200 to 300 pounds. The young pups are white, but they turn pure black at five weeks or so and those "Beaters" are the most valuable, bringing around \$10 each. They're active, hard to catch and often have to be shot, Captain Olsen explained.

Females melt small holes in the ice before giving birth to the pups. They usually have one pup, twins are rare. The pups are born on the ice in the area. "Contrary to a widely held opinion", Elmore told me, they are not "born in the North and drift down on the ice."

Seal's Milk Is Richer Than Cream

I THOUGHT this bit particularly interesting: Mr. MacKay took a sample of milk from the stomach of a pup that had sucked its mother just before it was killed. A City dairy tested it and found 50.5 percent fat.

Henry MacDonald, provincial dairy superintendent, tells me that blend cream contains eight to 10 percent butterfat, table cream 18 percent and whipping cream 28 percent. Yet this milk is more than half fat.

No wonder the pups grow at the rate of four pounds per day, as Capt. Olsen told his out-of-the-night visitors.

School To Train Fish Technicians

THERE'S KEEN interest among top fisheries people here, in the Fisheries Federation idea of an Atlantic Technical Institute to train technicians, who could translate the latest findings of research scientists into terms the fisherman can understand.

Our Fisheries Minister, Leo Rossiter, is keenly interested. There are indications other provinces are interested although discussions thus far have been at the civil service, or departmental level.

Deputy Minister Eugene Gorman tells me "we have at our Atlantic coast doorstep the biggest fishing resources in the world, and we're handicapped by antiquated boats, equipment and a lack of up-to-date knowledge.

"We've no stern trawlers in the Maritimes", he said. Although they're building two 78-foot ones in Bathurst this winter. The Fisherman's Loan board built two here in

1952, but had to dispose of them elsewhere, because fishermen tied too closely to tradition wouldn't use them. "We were 10 years ahead of our time," he observes.

THE SIDE-TOWING and hauling arrangement draggers use now, is as inefficient as it would be to harness a horse to a wagon, and only attach one trace, he suggests. In this mechanized age, you might compare it to a bulldozer, or tractor, with the draw bar attached to the middle of one side, instead of the rear, where Mr. Gorman suggests the dragger should haul its net.

"If we had some of the technically trained men the suggested school could turn out, we might find it much easier to get some of those ideas across", he suggests.

Provincial and federal agricultural representatives carry the findings of the country's best agricultural scientists to the people at the production level. There's no reason why the same thing should not be done in fisheries it's suggested.

Halifax Is Suggested As Site

A GRADUATE school in B.C. gives masters and Doctors degrees in subjects allied to fisheries, the Superior School of Fisheries, St Anne de la Pocatiere, Quebec gives degrees to students who come in at the senior matriculation level, and a school at Grande Riviere, Quebec trains apprentices from junior high school age.

The thought here is to take boys from Grade 10 or 11 who will have at least some basic knowledge of chemistry, and possibly physics. It's hard to build a knowledge of oceanography, where the whole life environment is in solution, without some foundation on which to build, it was explained.

Halifax is suggested as an ideal site for a school that would give diplomas after a two or three-year course. There are several reasons. The city has recognized universities like Dalhousie or St. Mary's to which the school could be attached. The Atlantic fisheries technological station and the Atlantic oceanographic surveys headquarters are there.

The City has the headquarters of the world's largest fishing operations, that operate 12 months a year, using every size and type of fishing boat, that run out as far as 400 miles to the Grand Banks of Newfoundland.

Ocean fleets like the big 2500-ton Russian factory trawlers, the biggest and best in the Atlantic fisheries, with up to 280 crewmen, come in at times for major repairs and service, it was noted.

Newfoundland people are very receptive to the idea, I'm told. New Brunswick is also interested and there's evidence of some interest in N.S. as well. It begins to look like a probable future development.