



A whale of a tail

BY EVELYN MEADER; ILLUSTRATION BY SUSAN STEPHENSON

Both beachcombers and beach strollers find plenty to enjoy on the shores of P.E.I. In November or 1987 the biggest natural find of all time appeared on the beach at Norway, near Tignish - a huge blue whale body, all 78 feet, 80 tons of it (now that is really a case of being "all washed up"). the rare creature, largest of all mammals, twice the size of the biggest dinosaur, attracted school bus loads of students, carloads of the curious, including Barb Currie and me, and vans of scientists.

The big blue mammal, upside down, unrecognizable tongue draped across waters like shapeless drapery lining, uneven black baleen sticking up from the overturned jaw like old water-stained dock piles, was because of its very size and known rarity worthy of awe. The might beast had drifted ashore like any other litter of the sea, but even dead with mouth ajar it was impressive.

Its beaching stirred much interest. Students came from the Institute of the Environment in Bar Harbour, Maine. Businesses in Tignish experienced a "whale boom". The powers that be had to arrange for its burial - nobody wanted a big stink. Luckily cool November weather provided some natural refrigeration.

On the cold windy shore we noticed long strips of very thin, dark skin that looked like pieces of plastic garbage bag. the students had peeled off the skin to better check the blubber layer. The blubber right under the paper thin skin was a dusky blue, the same colour as our great blue heron. The whale's length can be divided, one-third jaw, one-third body and one-third tail, the end fins of which are called a fluke.

It is indeed "flukey" that this larges of the monsters of the deep uses its huge jaw, spreading tongue and straining baleen to survive on the sea's TINIEST creatures, krill and other plankton.

I learned the whale can stay submerged for over an hour, sometimes two. It surfaces and "blows" to expel water, then takes in air. The nostrils, on top of the head, form to blow hole. A baby blue measures 20 feet, weighs 2 tons and drinks 200 lb. of rich whale milk daily. They