

## SPERM WHALE ASHORE

### Reached South of Mandurah.

While hunting kangaroos last week along the coastal hills 30 miles south of Mandurah, Mr. Reg. Dawes happened to look out to sea and about a mile from the beach, saw a large black object which he took to be an upturned boat. A big sea was running but around the object a flat calm denoted possibly engine room oil. He hastened to his home some 10 miles away and turned on the wireless. No craft was reported missing, so, his curiosity thoroughly aroused, he set out early next morning to investigate. Several miles further along the coast he saw waves breaking over the great bulk of a dead whale. He returned home and wrote to the Curator of the Museum. The letter reached Mr. Glauert late on Friday, a sketch with it revealing that the cast-away was a sperm whale—a rare visitant to West Australian waters.

At daybreak yesterday Mr. C. F. H. Jenkins, of the Museum staff, and a Pressman left Perth and met Mr. Dawes at Mandurah an hour and a half later. However, they found the discoverer of the whale apog for information concerning the price of oil and the possibility of ambergris, but decidedly uninterested in transporting two visitors over 20 miles of wretched road, rowing them across Lake Clifton, and then tramping miles to the beach. So the requirements of science and news were made as fully as possible on the spot. Mr. Dawes told the following story:

### Bulk Like a Ship.

"With Mr. E. Moffatt and four of my brothers, I was kangarooing along the undulating sand hills about half a mile from the beach. The party had split up and, happening to look out to sea, I saw what I took to be an upturned boat, surrounded by engine room oil. I hurried home and,



Mr. REG DAWES.

as the wireless reported no boat as missing, I returned to the spot next morning. Three miles further along I found the whale, although then I was by no means certain what it was. Big waves were breaking all over it, and apart from the giant half moon shaped tail it looked like nothing I had ever read or heard about. The other end looked like an enormous battering ram. There was a little hole—I suppose it was the blow-hole—on top but there seemed to be no eyes or mouth. Almost half-way down the body a long sword-like fleshy thing was jutting into the air. It was studded with polished horns about 4in. long and 2in. across. The whale was about 60ft. long and over 12ft. through. I have read that a whale weighs about a ton per foot, so you can imagine its weight. The waves made it hard to get a proper look at the creature. I plunged my sheath knife into its side and oil began to trickle out. It was very cloudy and didn't look worth taking.

"We reckoned that we could not do any more until it had washed higher on the beach, so we went home and returned next day. Fox marks were all over the beach. They are thick in the district now. The whale was practically high and dry on the beach. Great lumps were out of the whale's tail where sharks had snatched a banquet. Big white lumps of oil like soft candle-grease were everywhere, and the water was just about black with a huge mob of herring. The belly was pure white and a dark scum was peeling off the back. When we had first seen the big saw sticking out we thought that it might have been a sword-fish barb, which had killed the monster, but we discovered that it was its lower jaw, though it was the funniest place that I have ever seen a mouth.

### Oil Tried Out.

"The side looked soft, but cutting it was like cutting rubber. There seemed to be about a foot of blubber and then red meat, but every inch was tough. After no end of trouble we filled a kerosene bucket with blubber. It weighed like iron, but we got it home and started to boil it down. As fast as it melted we poured it off to prevent burning. The whole lot melted clean away, save for a few lumps and we got about two gallons of beautiful oil. Now we intend to get as much as we can. There looks to be about 50 truck loads. We ought to transport about a cwt. a day, but it is mine



to us about 30 truck loads. We ought to transport about a cwt. a day, but it is going to be heavy going. It would be easy if we could bring the truck to the beach. The rock and sand hills will prevent that, so the stuff will have to be man-handled to Lake Clifton and then trucked to our home on the Harvey estuary. If there is money to be made we will be only too pleased to make it. Actually we are fish cannery, but now there are too few fish in the estuary to keep the factory going."

Questioned as to whether the Perth Museum wanted the skeleton of the whale, Mr. Glauert said that its transportation would be too big a job. "Our 50ft. Blue whale is enough," he said. "It cost us a pretty penny to bring that skeleton from Busselton 25 years ago. We may get the skull later to add to the Sperm whale's lower jaw already at the Museum. The Sperm whale or Cachalot roams all the seas save those of the Arctic region. As far as West Australian waters are concerned, they are practically confined to the deep water off the south coast. A few years before the Great War, Norwegian whalers used Albany as the base for a profitable enterprise. The huge, oddly shaped cushion above the skull prevents the Sperm whale from getting a 'headache' while bumping along the rocky sea bottom for the giant cuttlefish upon which it feeds. Sperm whales have been known to grow to 50ft. in length, but the one washed up south of Mandurah would appear to be about the average size."

An idea of the value of the oil was gained from the Inspector of Fisheries (Mr. Aldrich), who said that the value of last year's blue whale catch was about £15 a ton. Sperm oil, he thought, was valued a little higher. The spermaceti, which came from the cushion above the skull was very heavy, almost solid, and was not always in demand. Ambergris, he said, was actually an abdominal growth found perhaps in one Sperm whale in a thousand.

Mr. David Butchart, a very old colonist, who knew Fremantle in its hey-day as a whaling base, recently said that the whale boats owned by John Bateman and Joshua Harwood had made many captures between Rottnest and the coast in the 'sixties, but the only instance he remembered of a Sperm whale, most valued of all because it yielded about 20 tons of oil, coming into Fremantle waters was when American whalers, chasing it down the coast, came into conflict with Harwood's boats. A law suit followed, which resulted in the ordering of the Americans from that part of the coast.