

This article was downloaded by:[Louisiana State University]  
On: 1 May 2008  
Access Details: [subscription number 790629466]  
Publisher: Routledge  
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954  
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Scottish Geographical Journal

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:  
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t759156372>

### A comparison of pilot Whale drives in Newfoundland and the Faroe Islands

Russell Fielding <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Geography and Anthropology, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Online Publication Date: 01 September 2007

To cite this Article: Fielding, Russell (2007) 'A comparison of pilot Whale drives in Newfoundland and the Faroe Islands', *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 123:3, 160 — 172

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/14702540701854694  
URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14702540701854694>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article maybe used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# A Comparison of Pilot Whale Drives in Newfoundland and the Faroe Islands

RUSSELL FIELDING

Louisiana State University, Geography and Anthropology, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

**ABSTRACT** *The long-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala melas*) is a common cetacean species in the North Atlantic Ocean and has been hunted by humans for food and oil for many centuries. A common hunting method used by pilot whalers has been to initiate a 'drive' in which the whales are surrounded by boats and driven onto the shore or into the shallow water, then killed. This method uses the natural herding instinct of the pilot whales to the whalers' advantage and entire pods are often taken at once. These pilot whale drives have historically occurred throughout the inhabited regions of both sides of the North Atlantic but by the mid-twentieth century were only occurring in two locations: the Faroe Islands and Newfoundland. Canada's 1972 ban on commercial whaling put an end to the Newfoundland pilot whale drive, leaving the Faroes as the North Atlantic's lone whale-driving society. After discussing both pilot whale drives, this paper compares the Faroese and Newfoundland whaling communities and examines reasons why the whale drive has continued in the Faroes but has been ended in Newfoundland.*

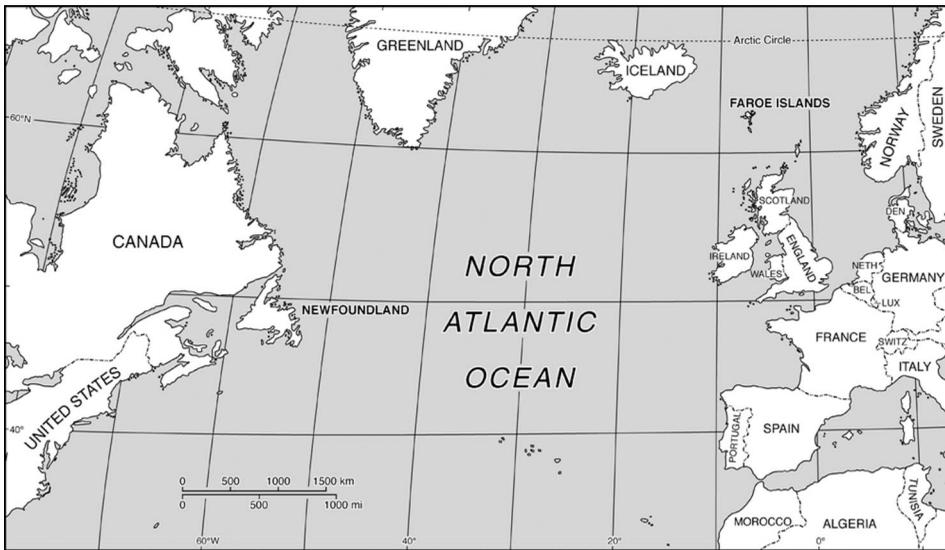
**KEY WORDS:** Faroe Islands, fisheries, Newfoundland, whales, whaling

## Introduction

The long-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala melas*) is a common cetacean species in the North Atlantic Ocean and has been hunted by humans for food and oil for many centuries (Sanderson, 1992, p. 24; High North Alliance, 1997, p. 27). Individual pilot whales can reach lengths of up to 6 m and can weigh up to 3 tonnes. They often travel in groups known as *pods* comprised of 100 to 500 individuals. The hunting method most often employed by North Atlantic pilot whalers has been to initiate a *drive* in which the whales are surrounded by boats and driven onto the shore or into the shallow water and then killed. This method uses the natural herding instinct of the pilot whales to the whalers' advantage. The entire pod is usually taken together (Sanderson, 1992, p. 7; Bloch, 2005). These pilot whale drives have historically occurred throughout the inhabited regions of the North Atlantic (Figure 1) including Ireland, mainland Scotland, the Orkneys, the Shetlands, the Faroes, Norway, Iceland, Greenland, Newfoundland and New England (Sanderson, 1992, pp. 24–25).

---

*Correspondence Address:* Russell Fielding, Louisiana State University, Geography and Anthropology, 227 Howe-Russell Geoscience Complex, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 70803 USA. Email: rfield2@lsu.edu



**Figure 1.** The North Atlantic region. Note the Island of Newfoundland in eastern Canada and the Faroe Islands between Iceland and Norway. *Source:* Map produced by Clifford Duplechin, LSU Department of Geography and Anthropology

While pilot whaling came to an end in most places during the nineteenth century or before, Newfoundland continued to support a drive-style pilot whaling industry until 1972 (Dickinson & Sanger, 2005, p. 136) and the pilot whale drive, or *grindadráp* as it is known locally, still occurs today in the Faroe Islands. After discussing both pilot whale drives, this paper compares the Faroese and Newfoundland whaling communities and examines reasons why the whale drive has continued in the Faroes but has ceased in Newfoundland.

### Methodology

The Faroese pilot whale drive is an ongoing but obscure event which supports a limited English-language literature (see for example, Wylie, 1981; Bloch, 1990; Gaffin, 1996; Kruse, 2002; Kalland & Sejersen, 2005). Outside of the Faroes, the *grindadráp* is not very well known except by those who are involved in protests against it. Similarly, the existence of a pilot whale drive in Newfoundland as recently as 1972 is a relatively unknown event even in Atlantic Canada. While a fair amount of academic literature does exist on the subject of the Faroese *grindadráp*, not much has been written in recent years, especially since certain changes in the practice have been instituted. Much of the existing literature is based in Scandinavia and is not readily available in major North American or British journals, or it tends to be either strongly pro- or anti-whaling in its focus and therefore more polemical than impartial in its outlook. Very little literature exists at all on the subject of the Newfoundland pilot whale drive beyond catch statistics in whaling literature and a few references in locally published regional histories.

The Faroese whalers are gregarious people and, because of the negative publicity, seek the opportunity to have their side of the story told. Similarly, the men who participated in the Newfoundland pilot whale drive are now getting old and are eager to have their stories recorded. For these reasons, it became clear that the best methodology for this project was to go directly to the source and interview both groups of whalers, themselves. To this end, the author spent time in both the Faroe Islands and Newfoundland, with the whalers, listening to them relate their experiences first-hand. Follow-up questions and one primary interview were conducted via email. Qualitative data gathered from interviews was supplemented by data such as catch statistics, laws and regulations, and medical information from veterinarians and biologists.

### **Grindadráp: The Faroese Pilot Whale Drive**

According to written records, it can be shown that the inhabitants of the Faroe Islands have been practicing the grindadráp for at least 400 years, but in all likelihood it has occurred there since the islands were first settled in the ninth century (Joensen, 1990, p. 179; Sanderson, 1992, p. 27; Faroe Islands Department of Fisheries, 1993; High North Alliance, 1995; Shoemaker, 2005, par. 13). Authorities have kept precise records of all Faroese whaling activity and catch statistics can be found dating to the late sixteenth century (High North Alliance, 1995). During the five centuries of recorded pilot whaling in the Faroe Islands, the long-term average number of whales landed annually is about 1000 (Bloch, 2005).

In all the time that the grindadráp has occurred, very little has changed in practice. When a pod of whales is sighted, usually by a fisherman, a traditional word-of-mouth alert—called a *grindaboð*—is sent. Traditionally, the grindaboð was initiated when a piece of clothing or even a small child was raised up the mast of the boat that had first sighted the pod (Sjúrðarberg, 2005). Today, modern means such as cellular telephones and marine radios are used. As soon as the signal is received, men on the shore hurry to the harbour and a semicircle of boats is formed behind the whale pod. Boat crews hurry to make the grindaboð because the man who first sighted the pod is entitled to keep the largest whale landed. The whales are driven toward the nearest approved whaling bay. Bays are approved for their gentle slopes, which impede the whales' sense of echolocation, causing them to not turn back to open water. Once stranded, the whales are dragged onto the beach and killed (Sjúrðarberg, 2005). During this process, the water of the harbour is stained red by the blood of the slaughtered whales. Images of the blood-stained harbours and freshly-slaughtered whales are often used by environmental and wildlife conservation groups in protest of the grindadráp.

The actual method of killing the whales is one of the few major changes to the grindadráp that has happened since the sixteenth century. Formerly, the whales would be killed with spears thrust from the boats, but today they are killed by the 'grindaknívur'—a knife made specifically for the task of killing pilot whales (Figure 2). The whales are dragged onto the beach by a rope with a large hook attached. On the beach, lying still under their own body weight, the whales are killed by having their carotid arteries cut and their spinal cords broken. These processes are accomplished by use of the grindaknívur. The killing process is said to take as little as



**Figure 2.** A grindaknívur and its sheath

4 seconds and always under 1 minute (Holm, 2005; Kalsø, 2005). New regulations that are currently being put into effect will move the minimum time from 60 seconds to 15 (Kalsø, 2005). This is not just an average time, but a regulation enforced by the Ministry of Fisheries. In other words, it is Faroese law that pilot whales must die within 15 seconds of first being cut with the grindaknívur. Whalers who do not ensure a quick and humane death for their catch can be fined or even sentenced to jail.

After the whales have been killed, the local *sýðslumaður*—a type of sheriff—records the size and weight of the whales using medieval units of measurement, skins and ells, and presides over the distribution of the meat and blubber throughout the community. According to a traditional system that has been in practice for at least 400 years, the meat and blubber are divided among the whalers and other members of the community, free of charge. The Faroese government is adamant that it will never allow the distribution of whale meat to become a commercial venture (Ibid.). Some of the meat is eaten fresh and the remainder is preserved by salting, drying or freezing. The blubber is almost always preserved by salting. Pilot whale meat is a favourite food in many Faroese households and the recent decline in its consumption is due only to the elevated levels of mercury that it has been found to contain (Faroe Islands Department of Fisheries, 1993; Garðalíð, 2005; Simmonds *et al.*, nd). While the potential negative effects of this mercury are currently being examined in the international literature (Shearer 1997, 2002), the Faroese government accepts that the consumption of whalemeat and blubber must be limited and the population almost universally complies. The decline in consumption notwithstanding, pilot whale meat still constitutes about 30% of the meat consumed locally in the Faroe Islands (Løgmansskrivstovan, 2002, p. 13).

Politically, the Faroe Islands are recognised as a “self-governing territory under the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Denmark” (Løgmansskrivstovan, 2002, p. 5). However, there is a strong popular desire in the Faroes for full independence and sovereignty. Since the nineteenth century, the grindadráp has been used as symbol of Faroese national identity and images of the whale hunt can be found on postcards and posters that were available for sale to foreign visitors. However, incidence of these representations is declining due to the protests organised against the grindadráp (Sanderson, 1992, p. 1).

To the people of the Faroe Islands, the grindadráp is central to their culture and identity (Sanderson, 1992, p. 98; Garðalíð, 2005; Sjúrdarberg, 2005). Traditionally, the whalers and other members of the community would celebrate a successful grindadráp

with a dance known as the ‘grindadansur’, or whale dance. Here, songs would be sung that were specifically written about the grindadráp. Foremost among these songs was *Grindavísan*, the Ballad of the Whales (Sanderson, 1992, p. 86). Other examples of the cultural significance of the grindadráp include the prized ornamental *grindaknívar* (plural of grindaknívir) displayed on many Faroese mantels and the prevalence of the pilot whale motif throughout the Faroes, used in such varied contexts as bank logos, boat decorations, and the promotional materials for a jazz festival.

### Pothead Drives: The Newfoundland Pilot Whaling Industry

In Newfoundland, pilot whales—known locally as *potheads*—were driven ashore occasionally since before living memory. Newspaper archives from the mid-1800s show that these occasional pilot whale drives were an important source of supplemental income for local residents who earned a share of the proceeds from producing and selling whale oil (Cranford & Hillier, 1995, p. 9). Detailed records have been kept since the coming of the modern pilot whale fishery, which began in 1946 or 1947 at Dildo, Trinity Bay (Pinhorn, 1976, 49; Dickinson & Sanger, 2005, p. 132). For the first four or five years of the commercial pilot whale fishery’s existence, pilot whales were harpooned from boats one at a time, as other whale species were. The first modern commercial pilot whale drive occurred in Newfoundland in 1951 when 3100 whales were driven ashore during several separate drives that year. Precise records were kept of all whaling activity in Newfoundland and show that landings increased to a peak of 9794 in 1956 (Pinhorn, 1976, p. 49). In the two decades that pilot whale drives were occurring in Newfoundland, approximately 55 000 whales were landed (Dickinson & Sanger, 2005, p. 136).

The method of pilot whaling in Newfoundland was similar to that of the Faroe Islands in the days of the spears, but with some significant differences. Pods of pilot whales would be sighted at the mouth of a bay and driven inward by a pair of small whaling ships or several mid-sized motorboats. The men on these vessels would initiate the drive by firing shots from rifles at the whales, without actually hitting them (George, 2006). The report from these shots served the dual purpose of frightening the whales into swimming forward and alerting men on the shore. During this time, the impending drive would be announced throughout the village. Men would then stop whatever work they were doing and would hurry to the boats in at the harbour. When the pod was driven close enough to the designated bay, the men in the rowboats would take over the responsibility of driving them. By shouting and rattling stones in tin cans they would drive the whales toward the shore. Sometimes a long net would be stretched behind the pod to prevent the whales from swimming back to the sea. To kill the whales in the shallow water, men would thrust lances into their bodies, aiming for the heart or lungs but often missing the whales’ vital organs completely. These lances consisted of long wooden poles with iron blades fastened to the tips with rope, leather, or bands of metal (Figure 3). Whales then died in the water and were hauled ashore—in early days by hand and later by winches attached to trucks. If a pod was driven during the late evening, the whales would almost always be contained behind the net and killed the next day. Often, whalers would not work on Sundays so if the pod was driven on a Saturday night the whales would not be killed until Monday (Power, 2006).



**Figure 3.** Lances used for pilot whaling in Newfoundland

There were two very different types of whale processing that took place in Newfoundland. Before 1954 the only processing that was done was the removal and rendering of the blubber. This was the only part of the whale that was used; the rest—including meat, bones and organs—was dumped back into the bay or left to decompose on the beach (Cranford & Hillier, 1995, p. 11). The blubber then was boiled down to oil, which was barrelled and shipped to St John's for international export (Power 1994, p. 31).

By the mid-1950s, central Canada's mink-farming industry was in need of a new source of meat-based mink feed because the province's wild horse stocks had been depleted. In 1954, Canada's centre of mink farming was moved from Saskatchewan to Newfoundland and Labrador (Power, 1994, p. 32). The Fur Farmers Feed Cooperative was also established this year at Dildo Cove, Newfoundland, to provide whale meat as mink feed (Power, 1994, p. 32). From this time until 1972, pilot whales were hunted more for their meat than for their blubber, as worldwide demand for whale oil decreased. They were also hunted with greater frequency, with drives occurring as often as every other day (Power, 2006; Williams, 2006).

By the mid-1960s, the pilot whale stocks had started to decline. In 1972, the Government of Canada enacted a moratorium on whaling and the pilot whale fisheries were closed. Whether or not the pilot whale fishery was the direct cause of the decline in pilot whale numbers is a debated topic even today in Atlantic Canada. Some former whalers contend that it was not, that over-fishing of the pilot whales' primary food—squid—is the cause for their decline (Cranford & Hillier, 1995, p. 13). Others theorise that there are no more pilot whales because the whale drivers have killed them all; over-exploitation cannot be ignored in the decline of the pilot whale (Dickinson & Sanger, 2005, p. 136). What is certain is that pilot whales are not often sighted in the areas in which they were once driven.

### **Direct Comparisons**

Why has the pilot whale drive continued in the Faroes while it ceased in Newfoundland? Four key differences exist between the two variations on this practice that might suggest reasons for this geographical discrepancy. The first difference that will be discussed here is the fact that pilot whale meat was rarely consumed by humans in Newfoundland but is considered a delicacy in the Faroes.

Second, it will be noted that the Faroese have dedicated some of their best biologists and veterinarians to the work of ensuring that the grindadráp is conducted in a sustainable manner that is as humane as possible. In Newfoundland, little concern was ever paid to the manner of killing or the number of whales killed per year. Another key difference that will be discussed is the cultural significance that the grindadráp plays in contemporary and historical Faroese society, versus the lack of significance of the pilot whale drive in Newfoundland culture. Finally, this paper will examine the feelings of the participants themselves toward the Faroese grindadráp and the Newfoundland pothead drive. It will be made clear that the Faroese whalers take more pride in the grindadráp and that, conversely, the former Newfoundland whalers sometimes feel a sense of shame for having participated in the pilot whale drive as it was practised.

#### *Feeding Men or Mink?*

Pilot whale meat is a favourite meal in the Faroe Islands. It can be boiled, grilled or baked, but is most commonly eaten dried with salted blubber and potatoes. The flavour is similar to beef, with a hint of the sea, rather like a lean beefsteak that has been marinated in a fish-sauce. The flavour of blubber is more fishy and its texture a bit tougher than beef fat. Blubber is also quite oily, reminding the eater of the valuable commodity that whale oil has been throughout previous centuries. Both meat and blubber are distributed communally immediately following a grindadráp and are rarely, if ever, sold. Until recently, pilot whale meat was one of the major sources of protein in the Faroes but has been used less since it was discovered to contain high levels of mercury and other heavy metals (Faroe Islands Department of Fisheries, 1993; Garðalið, 2005; Simmonds *et al.*, nd). The Faroese whalers point out that there is no industry in the Faroe Islands that produces mercury as a byproduct, therefore the pollution must be coming from abroad. This is a source of contention between the Faroese and the rest of Europe, as the Faroese feel that their favourite food is being taken away from them (Sjúrðarberg, 2005).

By contrast, pilot whale meat was very rarely eaten in Newfoundland even at a time when other whale species were being killed for human consumption. Of the 13 participants interviewed in Newfoundland for this paper, several had eaten pilot whale meat but only one said that he had eaten it regularly. The rest had only tried it and did not like it. The pilot whale drive was begun to harvest blubber, which would be rendered into oil. It was later used as a food source for the mink ranches that had been brought to Newfoundland but its intention was never to provide food for humans.

#### *Doing it Right or Just Doing it?*

Much of our scientific knowledge of the grindadráp is due to the work of Dorete Bloch, the biologist known throughout the Faroes for her expertise on pilot whales. During the past few years, Bloch and her staff have placed many satellite tracking tags on the dorsal fins of certain pilot whales that were then released. They sometimes take blood or tissue samples from the whales for further analysis at the laboratory (Bloch, 2005). Conducting an accurate count of the pilot whale population has been an ongoing project for the Faroese biologists. According to Bloch, there are

approximately 778 000 pilot whales in the eastern North Atlantic stock. The Faroese take about 1000 whales per year, meaning that the grindadráp accounts for less than 0.1% annually. The International Whaling Commission states that a sustainable hunt is 2% (Bloch, 2005). The number of pilot whales killed annually is regulated by the Faroese Ministry of Fisheries. The minister's office can forbid future grindadráp if it is known that enough whales have already been killed in a given year (Kalsø, 2005).

In addition to ensuring the grindadráp's sustainability, Faroese scientists are also working to make it as humane a process as possible. In general, and in Western thought, a quick death is seen as a humane death. The first task, after driving the whales into the shallow water, is to get them out of the water and onto the beach where they will lie still under their own body weight. Men from the shore wade out to the whales and insert blunt hooks into their blowholes. Formerly, flesh-piercing hooks were inserted into the blubber but the new blowhole hooks have been found by Faroese veterinarians to cause the whales less pain (Holm, 2005; Kalsø, 2005; Sjørðarberg, 2005). However, certain anti-whaling groups dispute this finding. The founder of one such group, Sea Shepherd, comments:

I don't think that getting struck with blunt hook is more humane than a sharp hook. That's like choosing between getting slugged over the head with a baseball bat or an axe. (Watson, 2005)

Still, the hooks are inserted and made secure in the blowholes. With ropes attached to the hooks, the men haul the whales ashore. Because pilot whales can grow up to 6 m long and weigh up to 3 tonnes, it often takes the efforts of five to 10 men to pull one whale onto the shore. With the whales on the beach, the process of killing them begins. Two lateral slices are made with the grindaknivur—the first through blubber, the next through muscle—to expose the spinal cord. The whaler then makes one downward thrust to break the cord and the whale is dead. The process can take as little as four seconds. A new grindaknivur is currently being tested that will pierce the skin, blubber, muscle and spinal cord in one motion and can kill a pilot whale almost instantly. Initial reviews by pilot whalers of this new knife are quite favourable (Olsen, 2006). The Faroese Ministry of Fisheries can, in cooperation with the Faroese Pilot Whalers Association, make recommendations for a more humane hunt. These recommendations often become law, such as the case of the killing method changing from spears to knives. It is now illegal to kill pilot whales with spears in the Faroe Islands (Bloch, 2005; Kalsø, 2005).

In Newfoundland, by the former whalers' own estimation, the pilot whale drive was an "awful cruelty" (Williams, 2006). Rather than being hauled ashore while alive, the whales would be killed in the water, with lances thrust from the boats. Ideally, the whale's heart or lungs would be pierced by one of the first lance strikes. However, the reality as represented in archival films and photographs shows whalers thrusting their lances toward any part of the whale that was within reach (National Film Board of Canada, 1957). Many whales would swim injured for several minutes or even hours before dying of blood loss.

The number of pilot whales driven ashore in Newfoundland was regulated not by any government agency but by the companies that bought the meat for mink farms. In the years when the pilot whale drives were done only for oil, there was no limit to the number of whales landed, only as many as could be. When the mink farms

moved to Newfoundland, the feed companies set the limits, but often would buy as much pilot whale meat as the whalers could supply. No former whaler interviewed could remember a veterinarian or scientist every being present at a pilot whale drive, although one remembered someone “maybe from the university” coming out to “measure the whales” (George, 2006).

### *Cultural Significance*

When asked what the Faroe Islands would lose if the grindadráp were to cease, most Faroese responded that they would lose a unique part of their culture and heritage. The president of the Pilot Whalers Association responded that, “We would lose a big part of our culture and our cultural history. We would also lose this popular meat and blubber” (Sjúrðarberg, 2005). One whaler from the island of Suðuroy—the southernmost of the Faroe Islands and a place known for the independent attitude of its inhabitants and their close adherence to tradition—commented that if the grindadráp was ever outlawed that he and many others would continue to take pilot whales, reverting to the old method of killing them with spears from boats and would process the meat and blubber while at sea. While clearly a violation of Faroese law, this demonstrates how hesitant grindadráp participants would be to give up the practice.

Until 1985, when the first organised protest against the grindadráp was begun, the Faroese actively promoted it as their foremost national pastime (Sanderson, 1992, p. 1; Watson, 2005). The reference to the grindadráp as ‘sport’ has been used by those opposed to it and the Faroese now try to distance themselves from that description. However, the existence of the Grindavísan, grindadansur and other grindadráp-related cultural traditions as well as the famous *Grindadráp* paintings by Sámal Joensen-Mikines (Figure 4) point to a creative time when whaling was a major influence to Faroese artists.



**Figure 4.** Sámal Joensen-Mikines, *Grindadráp*, 1942, oil on canvas, 78 × 110 cm. *Source:* Courtesy of Listasavn Føroya, Tórshavn, Faroe Islands, and Kári J. Mikines, son of the artist

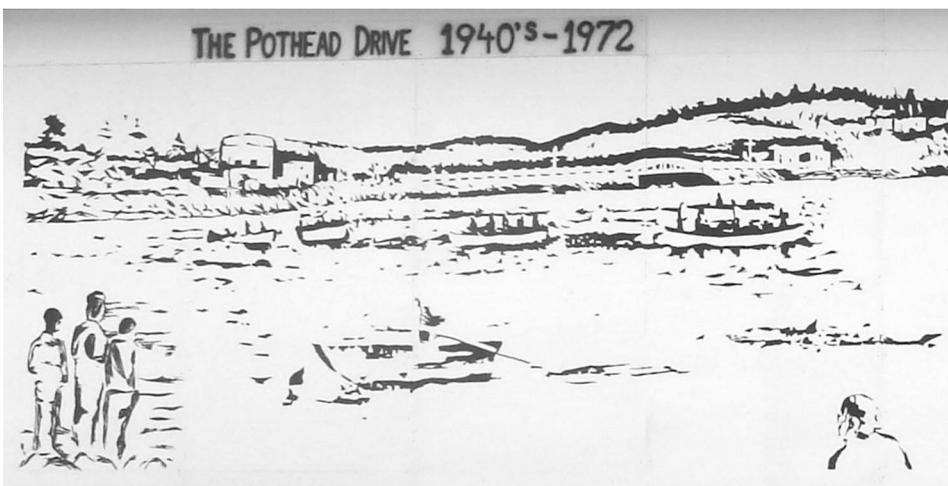
By contrast, the pilot whale drive had very little lasting significance in Newfoundland culture. Most of the former whalers interviewed made reference to the fact that the pilot whale drive was done only for economic reasons. All made a point to explain how much money they had been paid for various jobs involved in the drive. For example:

... it was just whatever you would make in a day's pay. Of course nobody made a lot then. They probably made 10 dollars or something. That would be quick money. Get a bit of cash then. (Smith, 2006)

and

You'd probably make 25 or 30 dollars if you're lucky for a drive. The carcasses, they were cleaned over there on the cliff, then you towed the carcass out to the whaler [boat] and you got 50 cents for towing it out to the boat. (Williams, 2006)

There exist very few artistic representations of the pilot whale drive in contemporary Newfoundland culture. The few known examples include the large mural painted on a shed in New Harbour, though it was painted in 2005, long after the pothead drives had ended (Figure 5) and a painting entitled 'Whaling at Dildo', an impressionistic piece that was done during the height of the commercial pilot whale fishery (Figure 6). Aside from these and a few other scattered examples, only large-scale commercial whaling is represented in the folk art of the areas where the pilot whale drive formerly occurred. Examples of this folk art include whalebone archways in front of houses and various crafts made from



**Figure 5.** Detail from a barnside mural in New Harbour, Newfoundland, depicting the pothead drive



**Figure 6.** Reginald Shepherd, *Whaling at Dildo*, 1965, oil on Masonite, 39 × 59.5 cm. *Source:* Courtesy of The Rooms Provincial Art Gallery, Memorial University Collection, St John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

whale vertebrae, teeth and other bones. Rarely are pilot whale relics used in such way.

Newfoundland has a rich musical tradition and many of the folk songs are based on fishing or sailing themes. If the pilot whale drive had been a deeply ingrained part of the culture, one would expect to find many songs related to the topic. In fact a few songs about the pilot whale drive do exist and their lyrics are recorded in some locally published books about the region's history, though none of the former whalers interviewed knew these songs.

#### *Pride or Shame?*

The final comparison that this paper will make between the Faroese and Newfoundland pilot whale drives is the self-reflective views of the whalers themselves. Faroese whalers take great pride in the grindadráp. They are proud of the speed at which an entire pod can be killed. With everyone working together, the entire pod—often over 200 whales—can be killed in as little as 15 minutes. While several whalers interviewed mentioned that they dislike the actual act of killing a whale, all were proud to be able to supply food to their communities free of charge, the result of a hard day of work. This feeling of satisfaction is reflected in the lyrics of grindadráp-based songs. English translations of the original Faroese and Danish lyrics will be presented here (Sanderson, 1992, pp. 91–94). One song emphasises the whaler's ability to provide for the poor as well as for himself:

And I hope they die; it is an enormous flock,  
And the poor can have my boat share;  
I'll get plenty myself anyway.

Another stresses the difficulty of the grindadráp and courage of the young whalers:

The struggle was hard and cost blood;  
Here one could learn that Faroe boys with the courage of men  
Dare go into the battle and fight.

The most oft-quoted line of the Grindavísan emphasises the bravery of the whalers and their desire for a grindadráp:

Brave boys, to kill *grind* [or, pilot whales]—  
That is our desire.

By contrast, the former whalers in Newfoundland often expressed regret over having participated in pilot whale drives. One well-respected participant, who asked to be quoted anonymously, wondered aloud what he would tell his grandchildren when they began asking about the pilot whale drive and his involvement in it. “I feel shame for what I did”, he said. Similarly, the former Newfoundland whalers were almost unanimous in their assessment that there is no place for the pilot whale drive in Newfoundland today, nor any chance of its revival. “If you do that today, if you drive those potheads today, then I’d say every man would be hung”, was one former whaler’s comment (Woodman, 2006). Another whaler agrees: “It would be illegal to drive them now. Oh yes. What would happen to you? Oh, you’d be hung” (George, 2006). It would appear then, that to preserve the necks of the former whalers, the pilot whale drive in Newfoundland is over for good.

## Conclusions

Two island cultures, both in the North Atlantic, both peripherally situated with respect to their political and cultural mainlands, conducted a similar hunting practice with some key differences. Only one of those cultures continues the practice today.

The Faroese drive pilot whales to provide food for their people. They use all of the whales’ meat and blubber, distribute it communally and free of charge, and take great efforts to conduct the drive in a humane and sustainable way. The cultural significance of the grindadráp is represented in their folk art and music, and the whalers take great pride in the feeling of accomplishment that a successful grindadráp gives them.

By contrast, the Newfoundland pilot whale drive was conducted as a profit-making activity to supplement the income of fishermen or commercial whalers and sealers. The people used only the parts of the whale that were profitable at a given time and the drive was not regulated by biologists or government agencies but was apparently conducted at unsustainable levels and in relatively inhumane ways. The pilot whale drive did not appear often in the local folk art or song traditions, and produced a feeling of shame rather than pride in its participants.

It is no wonder then that the grindadráp still continues today in the Faroe Islands while the pilot whale drive has ceased in Newfoundland. Practices that are deeply ingrained in a culture, provide food for the people, and are flexible enough to adapt to science-backed suggestions of change are not soon forsaken. Practices that are

conducted only for economic reasons are quickly abandoned when they become unprofitable.

## References

- Bloch, D. (1990) *North Atlantic Studies*, 2(1–2), pp. 36–44.
- Bloch, D. (2005) Interview with the author, Tórshavn, Faroe Islands, 30 August.
- Cranford, G. & Hillier, R. (1995) *Potheads and Drumhoops: A Folk History of New Harbour, Trinity Bay* (St John's, Newfoundland: Flanker Press).
- Dickinson, A. B. & Sanger, C. W. (2005) *Twentieth-Century Shore-Station Whaling in Newfoundland and Labrador* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press).
- Faroe Islands Department of Fisheries (1993) *Whales and Whaling in the Faroe Islands*, Tórshavn, Faroe Islands. Available at <http://www.whaling.fo/> (accessed 22 April 2006).
- Gaffin, D. (1996) *In Place: Spatial and Social Order in a Faroe Island Community* (Illinois: Waveland Press).
- Garðalið, M. (2005) Interview with the author, Húsar, Faroe Islands, 22 August.
- George, V. (2006) Interview with the author, South Dildo, Newfoundland, 30 May.
- High North Alliance (1995) *Pilot Whaling in the Faroe Islands*. Available at [http://www.highnorth.no/Library/Hunts/Faroe\\_Islands/pi-wh-in.htm](http://www.highnorth.no/Library/Hunts/Faroe_Islands/pi-wh-in.htm) (accessed 23 April 2006).
- High North Alliance (1997) *Marine Hunters: Whaling and Sealing in the North Atlantic* (Reine, Norway: High North Alliance).
- Holm, D. (2005) Interview with the author, Vágur, Faroe Islands, 24 August.
- Joensen, J. P. (1990) Faroese pilot whaling in the light of social and cultural history, *North Atlantic Studies*, 2(1–2), pp. 179–184.
- Kalland, A. & Sejersen, F. (2005) *Marine Mammals and Northern Cultures* (Edmonton, Alberta: CCI Press).
- Kalsø, B. (2005) Interview with the author, Tórshavn, Faroe Islands, 30 August.
- Kruse, B. (Ed.) (2002) *Hunters of the North* (Tórshavn: Sprotin).
- Løgmannskrivstovan (Faroese Prime Minister's Office) (2002) *The Faroe Islands—A North Atlantic Perspective on Sustainable Development* (Tórshavn, Faroe Islands: Løgmannskrivstovan).
- National Film Board of Canada (1957) *Encounter at Trinity* [video recording] (Montreal: Allan Wargon, dir.).
- Olsen, J. (2006) Interview with the author, Tórshavn, Faroe Islands, 7 October.
- Pinhorn, A. T. (1976) Living marine resources of Newfoundland-Labrador: status and potential, *Bulletin of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada*, 194, p. 49.
- Power, B. (1994) *Chapel Arm: Past and Present 1838–1994* (no publisher information: Chapel Arm, Newfoundland).
- Power, B. (2006) Interview with the author, Chapel Arm, Newfoundland, 24 May.
- Sanderson, K. (1992) Grindadráp: a textual history of whaling traditions in the Faroes to 1900. Unpublished MPh Thesis, University of Sydney.
- Shearer, R. (Ed.) (1997) *Canadian Arctic Contaminants Assessment Report* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development).
- Shearer, R. (2002) Canadian Arctic contaminants assessment report II—5 years of research, in: *The Second Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme International Symposium on Environmental Pollution of the Arctic: Extended Abstracts. Rovaniemi, Finland, October 1–4, 2002* (Oslo: AMAP).
- Shoemaker, N. (2005) Whale meat in American history, *Environmental History*, 10.2. Available at <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/eh/10.2/shoemaker.html> (accessed 23 April 2006).
- Simmonds, M. P., Johnston, P. A., French, M. C., Reeve, R., & Hutchinson, J. D. (nd) Organochlorines and mercury in pilot whale blubber consumed by Faroe Islanders, *Science of the Total Environment*, 149(1–2), pp. 97–111.
- Sjørðarberg, Ó. (2005) Interview with the author, Tórshavn, Faroe Islands, 16 August.
- Smith, G. (2006) Interview with the author, Dildo, Newfoundland, 25 May.
- Watson, P. (2005) Interview with the author, via email, 25 October.
- Williams, C. (2006) Interview with the author, New Harbour, Newfoundland, 2 June.
- Woodman, H. (2006) Interview with the author, New Harbour, Newfoundland, 2 June.
- Wylie, J. (1981) Grindadráp, in: J. Wylie & D. Margolis (Eds) *The Ring of Dancers: Images of Faroese Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).