

Find Whales At Frolic in Alaska Area

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William L. Finley, Oregon naturalist, has sent word in a letter to Mrs. Finley, at their home at Jennings Lodge, that the American Nature association expedition, cruising on Campbell Church's yacht Westward in Southeastern Alaska, is meeting with thrilling adventures. The expedition is headed by Arthur N. Pack of Princeton, N. J., and Finley, who are studying and photographing the various kinds of whales in the region and the Alaska brown or Kodiak bear.

Finley writes:

"Warm, sunny days loosen the frosty bands of winter, bring the bears out of their dark dens and their long sleep, and limber the huge, uncouth whales into sporting antics. So the scientific party found the show in full swing when the Westward cruised into Glacier bay. The yacht nosed her way through miles of floating icebergs and found a spot of open water not far from the lofty ice wall of Muir glacier. It was mid-afternoon as the yacht hung waiting, for something might happen.

ICE CRAG CRASHES

"And it did. A perpendicular crag of ice was seen to lean outward from the glistening, blue mass and plunge crashing into the deep water below. Hardly had it disappeared, spreading a mountainous tidal wave outward, when it rebounded and sent a spray of water a hundred feet high. Another great splinter shattered off and fell like broken glass, to pop up again with a whitening spray.

"Camera men on deck jumped to action and turned cranks busily. It was not often luck brought the chance of picturing a glacier in the process of changing its face. For that was what was happening. Of a sudden a deep crack began to widen in the ice wall and thousands of tons began to topple. As the mass fell into the sea with a roar, the upward heave of the white water seemed to cover the whole center of the glacier.

BOMBARDMENT LIKE THUNDER

"Bombardment within the narrow walls of the canyon was thundrous. The little yacht hung tremulous when suddenly from somewhere below a big berg came shooting up a short 50 feet from her bow. Just a little closer and she would have been lifted on the icy snout and sent head over heels.

"From this evidence ice still remains down in the bed of the great salt inlet, John Muir, who discovered this glacier, said that the ice wall was about 300 feet high above the surface and 700 feet under water down to the bed-rock, a part of the ice buried in the moraine deposit of the past. This glacier is receding at the rate of a mile every two years, but the lower ice does not disappear so rapidly, which accounts for occasional icebergs that come shooting to the surface.

"The Westward, tossed like a toothpick on the tidal waves, and fearful of another submarine iceberg, turned tail and sought shelter around a nearby island. Later she picked her way out of the cluttered canyon into wide, peaceful waters where whales might be rolling liesurely in the evening.

Finley Getting Alaska Photographs



At Left—William L. Finley, famed Portland naturalist, shown grinding away at his movie camera on his present Alaska cruise with Arthur N. Pack on Campbell Church's yacht Westward. At right, above—Campbell Church Jr. rowing a rubber boat up a mountain stream. Right, below—Harpoon gun poised to grab a whale.

WHALES AT PLAY

"The next few days were spent scouting for signs of these big mammals. On the third day a watchful fieldglass on deck spied a big splash on the water off to the east. The usual sign of a whale is a feathery jet of white breath spouting from the surface. But this should be investigated anyway. It proved to be a pair of playful whales. They were shooting up clear of the water, twisting in mid-air and landing partly on their sides, then rolling and lob-tailing along leisurely for the next dive. The throttle was opened wide till the yacht was within 200 yards, then slower to 100 yards. Easing into the auxiliary engine, she slid still closer. I had ascended to the mast-head with the cameras and was turning the crank on the oblivious whales.

They sounded, turned flukes, and then reappeared as if shot out of the water. To see monsters 40 to 50 feet long sporting boisterously was a rare sight.

MOVING PICTURES TAKEN

"Whales play much as other mammals do, but they are seldom caught at it. At times they came rearing up and, turning, landed on their backs with white bellies gleaming on the surface."

Pictures of whales are rare, and moving pictures of them playing like children in a swimming pool have perhaps never before been taken.

Finley said the party planned to go ashore soon and meet the "big brown bear in his own woods haunts."

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Mr. and Mrs. William L. Finley have had as their house guests during the week Mrs. George Beggs and son, George Jr., of Princeton, N. J., and T. H. Wilson of New York and Tucson, Ariz. George Beggs Sr. is one of the consulting engineers for the San Francisco-Oakland bridge, and is now working on the preliminary model for the structure which is being designed to carry eight lines of traffic across San Francisco bay. All three of the visitors have recently returned from a six weeks' cruise with Mr. Finley in Alaska on the yacht Westward.