

great numbers every Summer while in pursuit of the smaller fish they feed on. Inevitably they run foul of the weirs.

Naturally, a 500 or 1000-pound fish is not a fit companion for a crew of five men in a 50-foot boat. Hence, every tuna caught in a trap must first be slain. And, the killing technique is a thoroughly gory business. An axe with a stout handle is used. The axe-swing-er aims a lusty blow to the lump that is on the tuna head. One such blow usually kills the fish instantly. But, the business of maneuvering the giant fish in position for the execution is fraught with excitement.

Some Summer visitors once went along to partake of the adventure of trapping. They wore fancy sports togs, and one lady was dressed entirely in white. They ignored an old skipper who suggested they wear slickers on the trip. And, when they returned to shore, every member of the adventure-seeking party was covered from head to foot with tuna blood. There happened to be six of the larger sized tuna in the trap they visited.

SOMETIMES old leviathan himself stumbles into a weir. He's usually of the finback

family; valueless and a thorough nuisance. His great, threshing flukes threaten death. The trap has to be partially dismantled, so the crew can shoo him out from a safe distance. And then there's a whole day's work of repairing the damage he has done.

The trappers are gamblers at heart. "Fishing," according to one old veteran of their ranks, "is largely a game of anticipation." Most of the traps are owned by the freezer interests. The crews toil two weeks or more at the chore of driving the traps (all the gear is taken up as soon as the Winter gales start howling and stored away until Spring). They receive nothing for this labor. It is only when they start the actual business of fishing when their gamble be-

gins. Sometimes they draw the nets daily for a period of two weeks and don't make a dollar. Then there may come a flush week when every man of a crew will clear \$150.

"Back in the good old days, from 1916 to 1922, we never made short of \$2000 in a sea-

son. Now, if a trapper gets \$1200 or \$1300 he figures he has done darn well," said a veteran of the fleet.

The traps seem crude and makeshift when viewed from the shore. In reality they are ingenious and workmanlike units, very intricate in their structure. They are staked out at regular locations, a town permit being required for each trap, and a percentage of the revenue derived from the season's catch goes into the coffers of the town of Provincetown.

POLES of the toughest hickory are shipped in from Connecticut. Seventy of these poles are needed to hold the nets of a single trap. First, in the structure of a trap is the "leader": a 900-foot subterranean fence. This fence begins in shoal water and extends out to the trap proper. Fish that swim into this fence do not turn toward shore, but invariably follow the fence and swim offshore. Their course brings them into the mouth of the trap. The "heart" net is the first stage of their captivity and then, finally, they swim into the "bowl." Once inside the bowl they rarely escape, but swim round and round in the great net until the trap-boat pays its morning visit and the net is pursed for the bailers to go into action.

Captain Souza says the biggest haul of fish taken from one trap in a single day, so far

as he recollects, totalled 700 or 800 barrels of mackerel. That was in 1916, off the South Truro shore. He says his own biggest catch last Summer amounted to 210 barrels of fish.

This skipper also discloses that the skeleton of the much advertised Provincetown "sea serpent," that was in all the papers a few months ago, was nothing more than the remains of a 45-foot "basking shark" that was taken from his trap last Summer. It was dead at the time of discovery, so the crew dumped it overboard. Captain Souza estimates that the maligned shark weighed in the neighborhood of four tons.

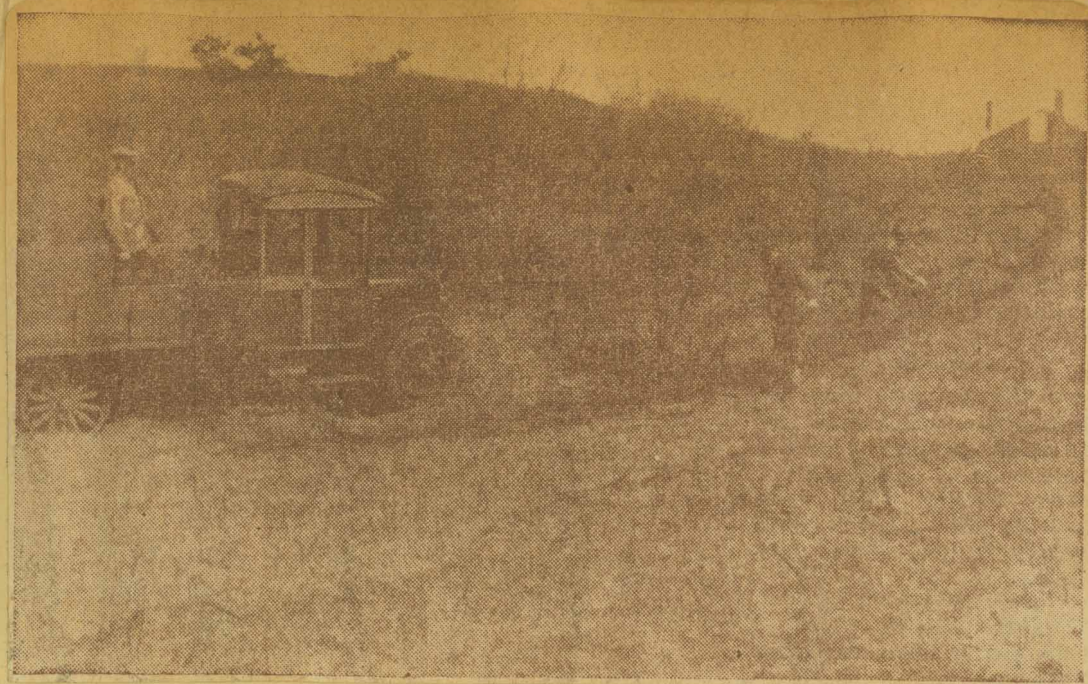
But, the buckos of the Provincetown trapping fleet are never surprised by anything found in their nets. Every so often they get mammoth sea turtles, weighing as much as 100 pounds, or porpoises, or sturgeon, or blackfish, or strange species that drift up here from far-away native waters in the South. Everything with a tail, that swims in the ocean, eventually steers a course into the Provincetown traps. Sometimes it isn't even bounty of the sea.

During the prohibition era a trapping crew found 11 barrels of concentrated Scotch malt in their nets. The malt was quickly sold to New Bedford bootleggers at \$200 a barrel. For several days thereafter, this crew did no fishing. Nor were they concerned with any worldly cares.

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There are but fourteen vessels now out from Provincetown engaged in the whale fishery, against forty-two last year, one having been lost, and twenty-eight withdrawn for other business, in consequence of the small catch and low price of oil.

Right, Here's a fine catch of Spring herring being unloaded at a Provincetown wharf. One of the biggest hauls taken from a single Provincetown weir amounted to 700 barrels!



Above, Every Spring the weir nets are freshly tarred and spread out in the fields back of Provincetown to dry. Then they are replaced at established locations in Provincetown waters.

