

Greenland Whale Fisheries

(1. modern folk version)

Words & Music:
Traditional Sea Shanty

This is a traditional sea shanty; however, unlike most of them (which can trace their roots to the 1830s-1850s), this shanty was first published as a ballad before 1725. There are many variations and covers and David Hodge has an arrangement of it in the March 2007 issue of Acoustic Guitar.

G C G Am D
'Twas eighteen hundred and fifty-three and on June the thirteenth day,
G Am C D
That our gallant ship, her anchor weighed,
G Am D G C D7 G
And for Greenland bore away, brave boys, and for Greenland bore a--way.
[alt: And from England bore away...]
E B7 E
And for Greenland bore a-way.

Our captain stood on the quarterdeck
With a spyglass in his hand,
"It's a whale, and a whale, and a whalefish," cried he,
Where she blows at every span, brave boys,
Where she blows at every span.

Then the boats were launched and the men on board
With the whalefish well in view,
And well-prepared were all our jolly shipmates
For to strike where the whalefish blew, brave boys,
For to strike where the whalefish blew.

Then the whale was struck and the line played out,
But he gave such a flourish with his tail,
He capsized our boat, and we lost five men,
And we never did catch that whale, brave boys,
And we never did catch that whale.

Well, then, the loss of that whalefish,
It grieved our hearts full sore,
But oh! The loss of our five shipmates,
That grieved us ten times more, brave boys,
That grieved us ten times more.
"Up anchor, up anchor," our captain cried,

"Let us leave this cold country,
Where the storm and the snow and the whalefish do blow,
And the daylight's seldom seen, brave boys,
And the daylight's seldom seen."

(2. 1833 Bengal Journal version, per Bob Pfeiffer)

Words & Music:
Traditional Sea Shanty

This lyric version came from The Mudcat Café. Your source for all things DigiTrad!

D A7 D D A7
'Twas in 17 hundred and 84 and of March the seventeenth day
D G D A7 D A7
That we weighed our anchors to our bow and for Greenland bore away, brave boys!
D A7 D
And for Greenland bore away.

Bold Stevens was our captain's name & our ship the "Lion" so bold
And we, poor souls, our anchors weighed
To face the storms and cold, brave boys, to face the storms and cold.

And when we arriv-ed in that cold countree
Our goodly ship to moor
We wished ourselves safe back again
With those pretty girls on shore, brave boys, ith those pretty girls on shore.

Our boatswain in the maintop stood
With a spyglass in his hand
"A whale, a whale my lads," he cried
And she spouts at every span, brave boys, and she spouts at every span.

Our captain walked the quarter-deck
And a fine little man was he
"Overhaul, overhaul, let your davit tackles fall
And launch your boats for sea, brave boys, and launch your boats for sea."

We struck that whale, and down she went
But she gave a flourish with her tail
And the boat capsized, and four gallant men were drown'd
And we never caught that whale, brave boys, and we never caught that whale.

Well, the losin' of those gallant men
It grieves my heart full sore
But the losin' of a hundred-barrel whale
Well it grieves me ten times more, brave boys, well, it grieves me ten times more.

The winter star doth now appear
So boys, we'll anchors weigh
It's time to leave this cold countree
And homeward bear away, brave boys, and homeward bear away.

Oh, Greenland is a dreadful place
A land that's never green
Where there's ice and there's snow and the whale-fishes blow
And daylight's seldom seen, brave boys, and daylight's seldom seen.

(3. "Greenland Whale Fishery" version)

Words & Music:
Traditional Sea Shanty

Per The Mudcat Café, this was printed in Patrick Shuldham-Shaw and Emily B. Lyle, The Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection, vol 1., version A.

No longer we will stay on shore since we are so deep in debt
And a voyage to Greenland we will go
Some money for to make, brave boys, some money for to make.

It was the year of eighteen five and March the twentieth day
When our gallant ship from her anchor swayed
To the seas she bore away, brave boys, to the seas she bore away.

It's Bollard was our captain's name and our ship the Lion bold
We're away to some far north cold country
Where the snow forever lies, brave boys, where the snow forever lies

When we did arrive in this far country where the snow for ever lies
Where the hail, wind and snow, and the big whales blow
And the daylight never dies, brave boys, and the daylight never dies

Our mate was up in the crow's nest high with a spy glass in his hand
"Oh a whale, oh a whale, oh a whale fish," he cried
"And he blows at every span, brave boys, and he blows at every span"

Our captain on the deck did run and a clever little man was he
"Overhaul, overhaul, from the davits let them fall
And lower your boats to the sea, brave boys, and lower your boats to the sea"

The boats being launched and the lines paid out and every boat her crew
There have orders been given to all steersmen
To steer where the whale fish blew, brave boys, to steer where the whale fish
blew.

Oh we steered east and we steered west and it's all to catch the whale
But he capsized our boats and we lost five men
Nor did we catch the whale, brave boys, nor did we catch the whale

When this sad news to our captain came, he called up his old ship's crew
For the losing of his five 'prentice boys
He down his colors drew, brave boys, he down his colors drew.

Alas, alas, don't be dismayed for the losing of five men
For Providence will have its own way
Let a man do all that he can, brave boys, let a man do all that he can.

(4. "Greenland Fisheries" version)

Words & Music:
Traditional Sea Shanty

1. 'Twas in eighteen hundred and fifty-three
And of June the thirteenth day,
That our gallant ship her anchor weighed,
And for greenland bore away, brave boys,
And for greenland bore away.
2. The lookout in the crosstrees stood
With spyglass in his hand;
There's a whale, there's a whale, there's whalefish he cried
And she blows at every span, brave boys
She blows at every span.
3. The captain stood on the quarter deck,
And a fine little man was he;
"Overhaul, overhaul! Let your davit tackles fall,
And launch your boats for sea, brave boys
And launch your boats for sea.
4. Now the boats were launched and the men aboard,
And the whale was full in view.
Resolv-ed was each seaman bold
To steer where the whalefish blew, brave boys
To steer where the whalefish blew.
5. We stuck the whale the line paid out,
But she gave a flourish with her tail,
The boat capsized and four men were drowned,
And we never caught that whale, brave boys,
And we never caught that whale.
6. "To lose the whale," our captain said,
It grieves my heart full sore,
But oh! to lose (those) four gallant men
It grieves me ten times more brave boys
It grieves me ten times more.
7. The winter star doth now appear,
So, boys we'll anchor weight;
It's time to leave this cold country
And homeward bear away, brave boys
And homeward bear away.
8. Oh Greenland is a dreadful place
A land that's never green
Where there's ice and snow, and the whalefishes blow
(and the) daylight's seldom seen brave boys
But the daylight's seldom seen.