

Centuries of Whaling

When Vikings roamed the Atlantic Ocean long ago, one of the greatest prizes they sought was whales. Way back in the 1100s, the struggle between whale and sailor was a fairly even one, but over time, whaling methods grew more and more advanced. By the mid-1800s, whaling had become a big business.

Norwegian whalers, the modern relatives of the Vikings, were among the leaders in whaling technology. In 1863, a Norwegian sea captain created a new type of whaling ship. The 82-foot-long boat was sleek and swift, fast enough to catch up with even the fastest swimming whale. It also had bomb harpoons. These harpoons were tipped with bombs that would explode inside the whale. Suddenly, the seas were even more dangerous than ever for whales.

By the late 1800s, many whale species were endangered. Because right and bowhead whales were slower than the new boats, they were easy to kill. Sadly, millions of whales were slaughtered before a ban on whaling was agreed upon in 1982. Since then, whaling has been prohibited and successfully suppressed.

But whales still suffer because of the extensive whaling in the past. Some whales, like the gray whale, have recovered quite nicely. Others, like the northern right whale, continue to be in danger of extinction. At the present time, fewer than 400 northern right whales exist in the whole world. Only time will tell if whales can survive the effects of centuries of whaling.

1. What is the passage mostly about?
2. What finally stopped widespread whaling?