

May 2007

The Whaling Station við Áir



**Provisional report on the conservation of
the whaling station as a maritime museum**



MENTAMÁLARÁÐIÐ

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the whaling station as a maritime museum

Mentamálaráðið
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For the attention of the Minister of Culture,

In the autumn of 2006 the Minister of Culture, Jógvan á Lakjuni, appointed a committee to consider the conservation of the Whaling Station við Áir. It was charged with submitting a report to the Minister in spring 2007.

The committee concludes that the Whaling Station við Áir should be preserved as an example of the industrial society, which developed in the Faroes in the late 19th century. Whaling was of great social importance at the time and stations were set up throughout the world, seven were located in the Faroes. Today virtually all whaling has ceased, hence most of these stations have disappeared. Preserving the Whaling Station við Áir is therefore also important from a global perspective.

The buildings við Áir have survived by chance, but it is thanks to visionaries in Sundalagið, the local area, and Føroya Fornminnisavni (Faroese National Museum) that much of the whaling equipment still exists. It will therefore be possible to restore the Whaling Station nearly to its original condition, not for industrial purposes, but in order to create a maritime museum and cultural activity centre við Áir. Time has clearly taken its toll on the buildings, however, and if the Station is to be conserved, immediate efforts to safeguard both the buildings and equipment are required.

The Committee also concludes that in order to submit a comprehensive proposal on the conservation of the Whaling Station við Áir, studies are needed to determine the present condition of its buildings and equipment. Any comprehensive recommendation should also include a cost assessment for the entire project. Such studies and assessments are expensive and the Committee has not had the financial resources to carry them out.

For the reasons set out above, the Committee has decided to draw up this provisional report as a basis for continuing work, provided the necessary support can be secured.

The Committee for the conservation of the Whaling Station við Áir

Andras Mortensen, Director
Faroese National Museum

Dorete Bloch, Director
Faroese Museum of Natural History

Jógvan Mørkøre, Councillor
Sund Municipality

Ole Jensen, Architect
Faroese Office of Public Works,
advisor to the committee

Armgarð Weihe, Senior Principal
Ministry of Culture,
Committee Chairperson

Conclusion

Considering its importance as an element of Faroese and even international 20th century industrial and maritime history, the Whaling Station við Áir should be conserved. Furthermore its place in cultural history certainly also justifies its conservation.

The Committee recommends:

- making a decision of principle to conserve the Whaling Station við Áir as a museum.
- transforming the area við Áir into a tourist hub offering visitors historical activities with a maritime focus.
- coordinating all activities between national and local authorities as well as private business.
- entrusting a board, appointed by the minister of culture and Sund Municipality, with carrying out the preparatory work.
- allocating a 990,000 DKK government grant for 2008 under Section 7 of the Faroese Finance Act to the Whaling Station við Áir for urgent restoration and technical preparatory work.
- charging said board with studying the possibilities of external funding for restoring the Whaling Station and establishing a maritime museum.

Historical Overview

Towards the late 19th century whale stocks along the coasts of Northern Norway and Finnmark dwindled, hence Norwegian whaling companies had to search for new hunting grounds. They first set their sights on Iceland, where whaling conditions were good. However they soon realized that the stocks in the seas around Iceland also inhabited the seas surrounding the Faroes, and therefore concluded that whaling from the Faroes was also likely to be profitable.

In the summer of 1894 Albert Grøn, a whaler from Sandefjord, pioneered commercial whaling in the Faroes. He had previously whaled from Finnmark and now sailed the whaling vessel *Urd* to the Faroes where he built a whaling station at Gjánoyri in 1893. Albert Grøn had obtained a hunting licence from the Danish prefect for the Faroes and was, on the whole, well-received by the authorities. His vessel was allowed to sail under the Norwegian flag and he was exempted from levies during the first year. His assessment that the Faroes ought to be a decent area for hunting proved correct.



The whaling and freight ship Chr. Rebeiro anchored við Áir.

The Whaling Station við Áir

Between 1893 and 1905 seven whaling stations were established in the Faroes. The seventh and last was the whaling station við Áir, which the Scottish businessman Christian Salvesen in Leith founded with the company Dansk Hvalfangst og Fiskeri A/S. The other six were located at Gjánoyri, Norðdepul, Funningsfjørður, Selvík, Lopra and Signabøður. The Norwegian whale hunt in the Faroes ended in 1930, by then only two whaling stations were left, those in Lopra and við Áir.

The Faroese carried on where the Norwegians left off, with varying results. The Whaling Station við Áir as it stands today is from 1936, when it was largely reconstructed. But parts of it date further back. The most recent expansions were made in the 1950's. The Station was constructed in the same way as older whale oil and guano factories, which no longer exist, and it still conveys a sense of the bustling activity that took place there.



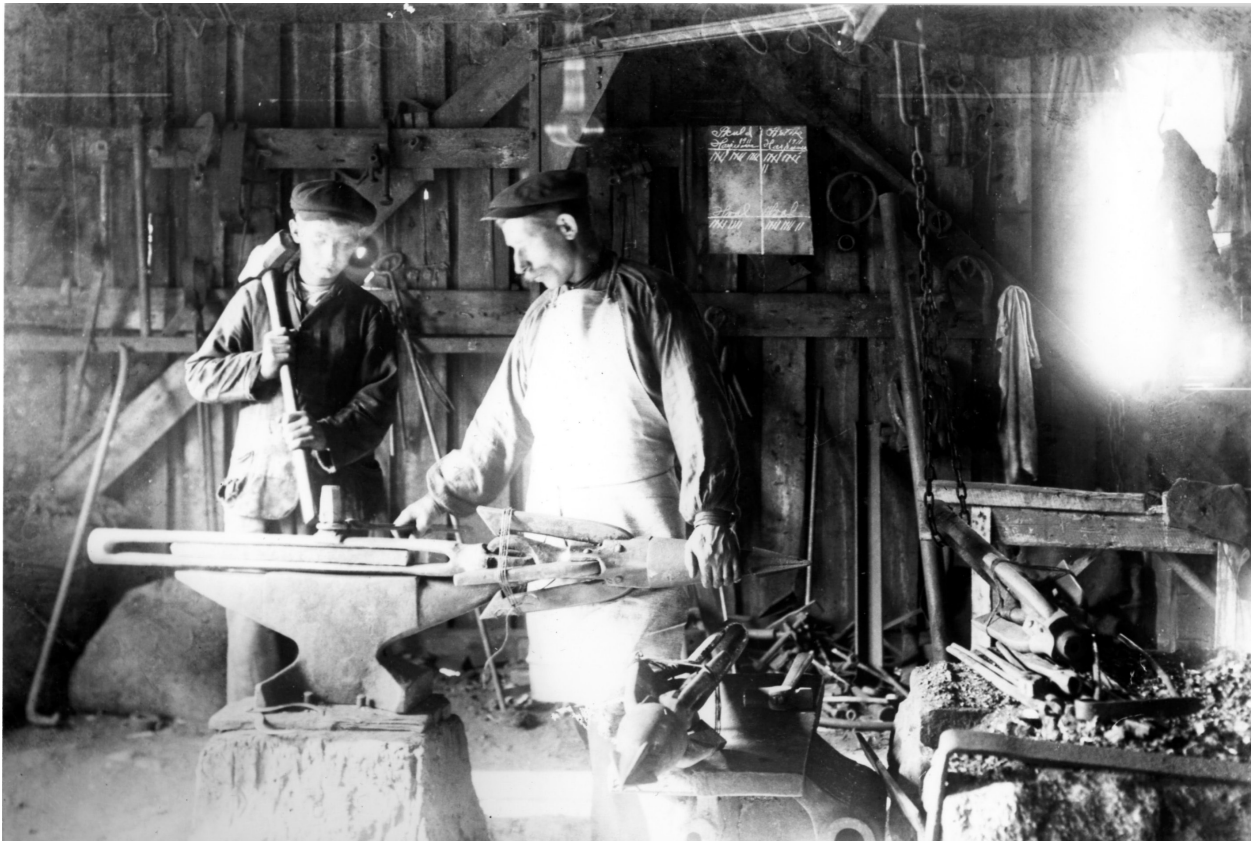
Map from the book *Av hvalfangstens historie* (Of the history of whaling), by Sigurd Risting. The Whaling Station við Áir, indicated in red, is the most recent whaling station in the Faroes and was not included on the map.



The slope where the whales were dragged on shore on a beautiful day

The Whaling Station við Áir represents a very important part of Faroese industrial history. It exemplifies the factory environment on shore at a time when Faroese society was taking its first steps into the industrial era. Whaling stations were also vital for living conditions on the islands as they coincided with a demographic boom, which made it more difficult for each individual to make a living.

Although whale meat was primarily intended for industrial production, it could be bought cheaply and it was an enormous help for many poor households, which a source from Norðurstreymur explains in the Faroese newspaper *Føroyingatiðindi* in 1897. Whaling was also of great economic importance, particularly in Sundalagið where three whaling stations were located.



Straightening a harpoon at the smithy

Whale hunting also took Faroese people to foreign shores. Volume 365 of the Faroese Fishermen's Association's periodical, FF Blaðið, dated April 20, 2006, features an interesting article about Thomas Jacobsen born in Skipanes in 1876, who in 1913 travels to South Georgia to work at a whaling station there. It was Christian Salvesen in Leith who arranged this.

The travelogue describes how they anchored in Africa on their way, and also how they worked at the whaling station in Grytviken. For example, Thomas repaired a cogwheel on Endurance, the vessel belonging to famous arctic explorer Ernest Shackleton. The article offers insight into the living and working conditions of the Faroese in the early 20th century

Norwegian Whaling Globally

A total of 214 whaling stations were scattered along the world's coasts. Virtually all were Norwegian-built and owned and they were all set up following the same model. They differed in size, but the station lay-out never changed. Out of these 214 whaling stations, the Station við Áir is the only one left standing in the Northern hemisphere. In Albany in south-western Australia and in Grytviken in South Georgia museums have been established to illustrate the history of whaling at those sites.

The original buildings are still standing við Áir, therefore the Whaling Station could become a museum displaying whaling as an industry, which was once of global significance. The museum is therefore important, not just for the Faroes, but for the whole world.

It should be noted that the whaling station Þyrl in Hvalfjörður, Iceland, which remains active, was constructed completely differently. It was built in 1948 as a floating boiling plant. At Norwegian stations whales were quartered directly on the ramp, and then drawworks dragged each cut up to the grinders above the boiler plant, which is located to the right of the ramp. At Þyrl whales are quartered one floor higher up than at Norwegian stations, and all processing, including fine cutting and freezing the flensed whale takes place under the ramp where it is quartered.



There were 214 Norwegian whaling stations

Norwegian Whaling Stations

Location	No. of stations	Location	No. of stations
Labrador	1	South Georgia	9
Newfoundland	18	Falkland Islands	1
Iceland (Þyril is different)	12	New Zealand	4
Finmark and Svalbard	22	Australia	6
Norway	8	Seychelles and Indian Ocean	2
Faroes	7	Japan	20
Shetlands	3	Islands around Japan	2
Hebrides	1	Pacific Ocean	2
Ireland	2	Mongolia	1
Span	3	Korea	1
Azores	15	Caribbean	8
Madeira	2	Brazil	3
Morokko	2	South American West Coast	14
West Africa	3	US West coast	14
Southwest Africa	11	Canadian West Coast	9
Southeast Africa	8	Total	214

The Norwegians started their global industrial whaling in the North Seas. They were initially based in Northern Norway, then, when whale stocks diminished there, they hunted from stations in the Faroes, Iceland, Shetlands, Orkney Islands and Ireland and subsequently from the Americas, Japan, Africa and the South Seas. When stations ceased to turn a profit they were simply dismantled and transferred to other locations near whaling areas.



Existing Norwegian whaling stations við Áir, Grytviken on South Georgia and Albany in Australia.

Museums and Tourism

Although this maritime industry only emerged around a century ago, little is known about it. It should therefore be made the subject of research. The fact that we no longer know much about this activity ought to make us consider to what extent we are passing on to future generations the historical values shaping our time. So far we have done little to showcase the pillar of modern Faroese society, namely fisheries, which developed alongside Norwegian industrial whaling in the Faroes.

A few smacks have been conserved along with a few motorboats, but not as part of public museums. We must secure future generations' insight into this world while there is still time. Faroese museums still focus on the peasant society – the era preceding the development of fisheries on the Faroes. Virtually no museum work has been done on the modernization driven by the exploitation of the sea's resources. The time has come to focus on fish, ships, fish factories, those who spent their lives in this industry and other elements of Faroese industrial history.

The Whaling Station við Áir and its surroundings are ideally suited to offer precisely such activities, which can foster the imagination and awareness of those growing up in the Faroes today. We no longer live in an agricultural society, but in a diverse modern society, and the question is whether we adequately demonstrate how much we value and pride ourselves on this.

What shall we do with the fish filleting lines, today's factories, when they are no longer in use? and what about the filleting factory trawlers and other factory vessels?

We propose that the area surrounding the Whaling Station við Áir be set aside for developing a maritime museum. The area is well-suited and allows for completing the museum in stages. Now is the time to think like visionaries. It is a matter of creating a good basis for growth – not of bringing all our visions to life at the same time, as we are not likely to have the necessary funding. We must set long-term targets.

However we must first and foremost reach the following goal: we must conclude that this is how we want to use the Whaling Station við Áir in the future.

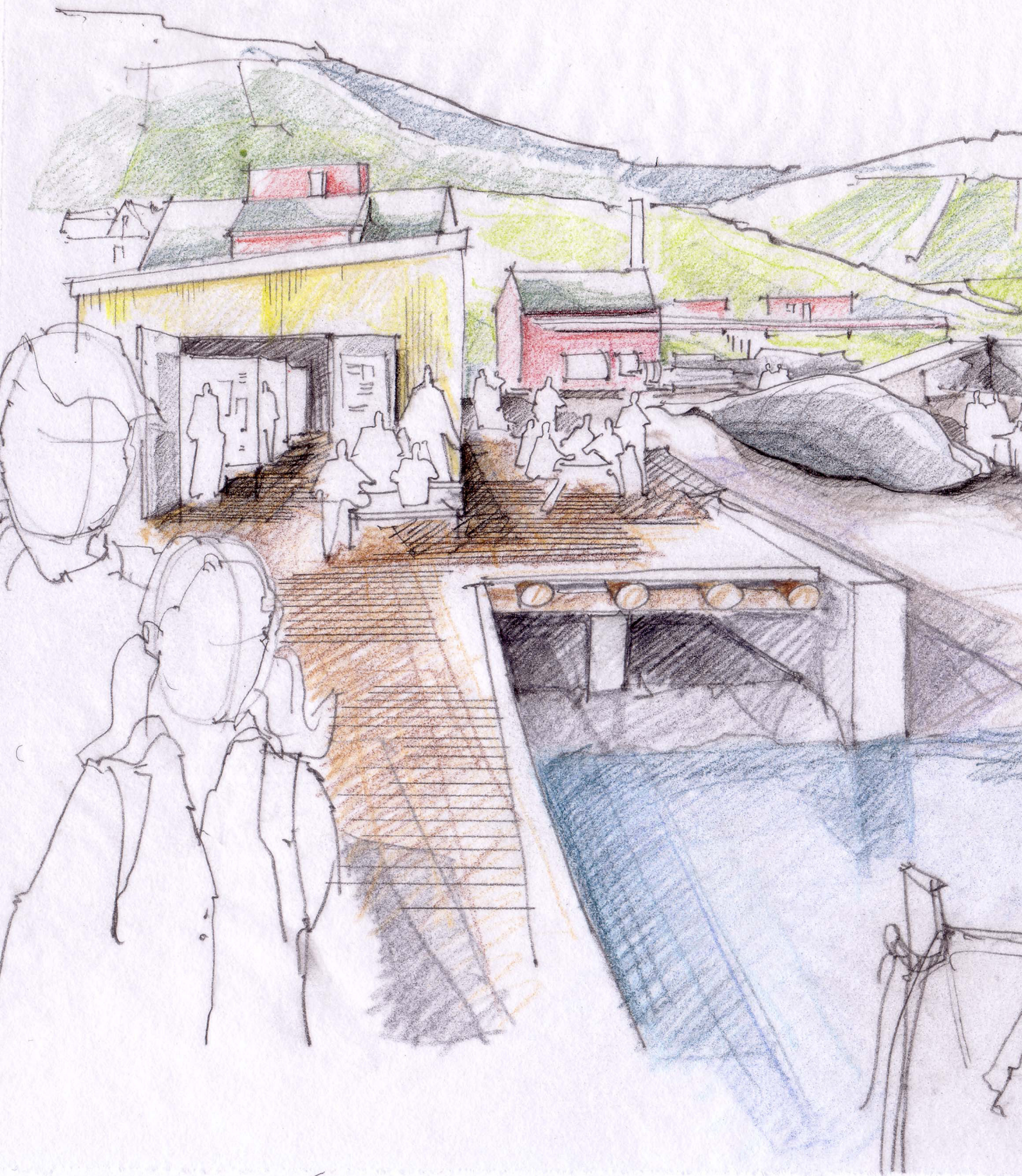
As they stand these buildings constitute a resource we must not waste, as do the surroundings, which are ideal for building a museum focusing on the period in Faroese history of industry and civilization to which the Station belongs.

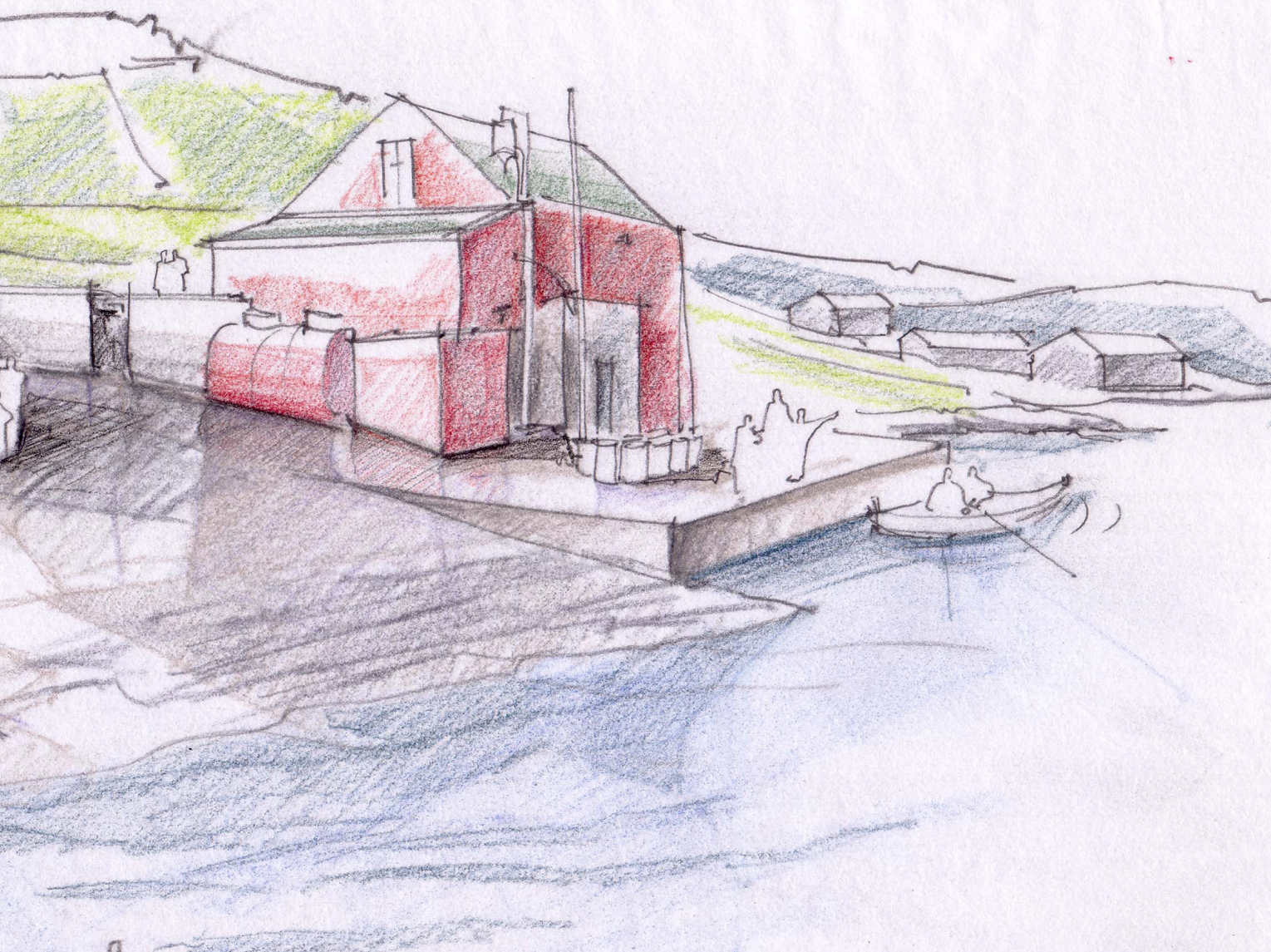
As regards tourism, the Whaling Station við Áir is a prime location. It does not take long to drive there from much of the Faroes.

Furthermore the area is also well-suited for camping, boat rental, restaurants and other tourist amenities.

Local tourism is also gaining momentum and the Whaling Station við Áir with its surroundings could become an activity centre offering families and visitors unforgettable experiences both on shore and at sea.

An Activity Centre við Áir





The Whaling Station is functioning as a maritime museum. The old equipment has been restored and galleries display objects and images from times gone by. A glass fibre whale on the ramp illustrates the work that was once done here.

The bridge has been rebuilt and visitors are enjoying themselves, having some tea, while children and adults have fun in little boats rented on site.

There are camping sites and dining facilities in the area.

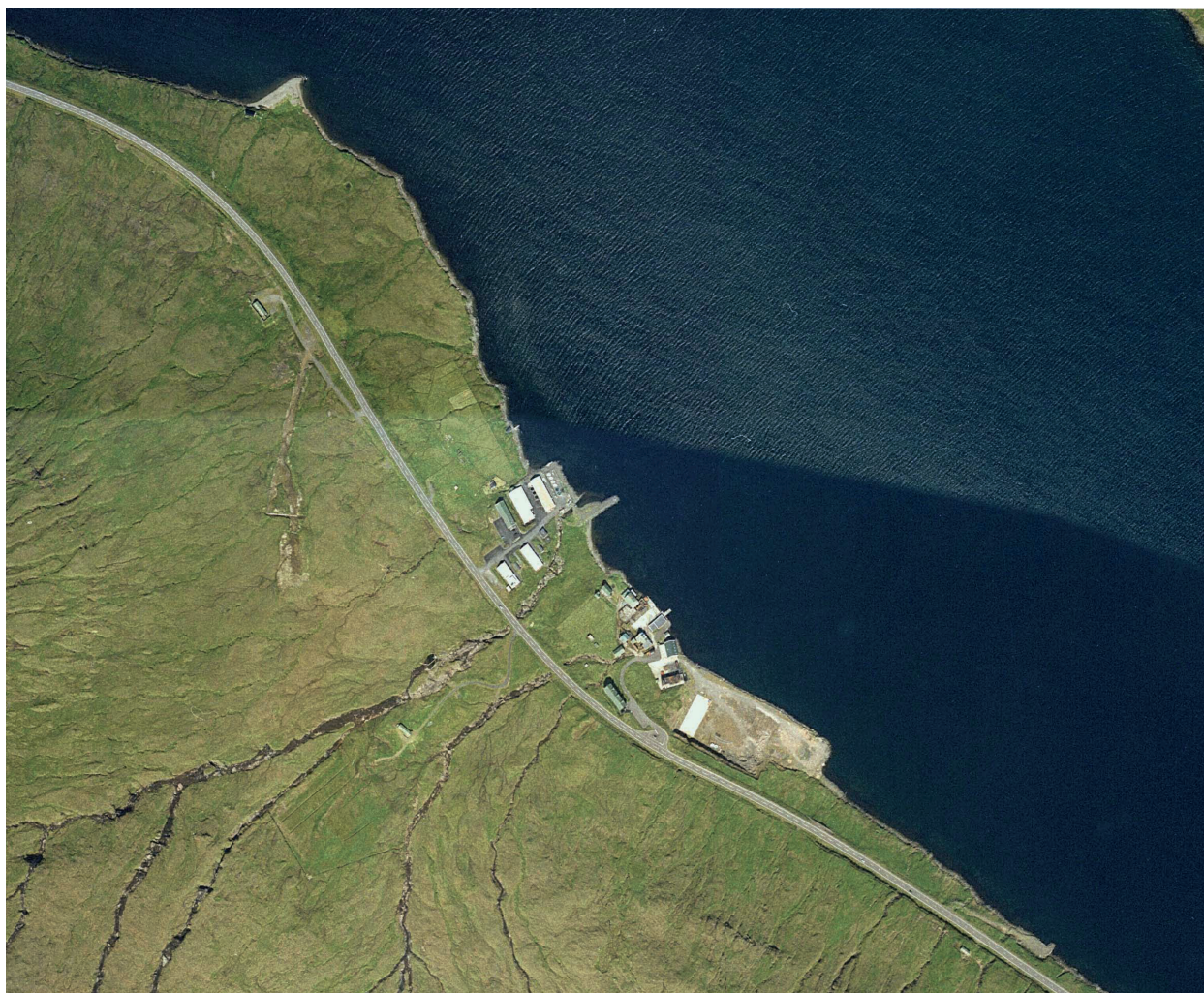
The State of Conservation of the Whaling Station við Áir

In 1982, 25 years ago, Føroya Fornminnissavn reported that objects of historical value were located at the Whaling Station við Áir, and that these should be conserved. It therefore requested permission from the Faroese Government to collect loose objects in the area and place them indoors. This was done in 1982 and 1983. A survey of the area and buildings was also carried out at that time.

Føroya Fornminnissavn highlighted once again in 1989 that the Station was of historical importance and that it should be looked after. That same year the Government decided that the Whaling Station should be conserved.

Ever since the Landsverkfrøðingurin, which subsequently became Landsverk, (the Faroese Office of Public Works) has paid a supervisor to carry out emergency maintenance. In 1997 an assessment was made, it was based on inspections and measurements of the area and buildings and the buildings' state of repair was gauged. The architectural firm Kári Thomsen carried it out on behalf of Landsarkitekturin (Faroese Chief Public Architect).

Nevertheless the time was not yet ripe to start restoring the Station. Although emergency maintenance has been carried out, the Station's current state is not known and a new assessment will be required as a basis for major restorations and plans for future use.



Aerial photo of the við Áir area

Provisional Recommendations

The Committee proposes:

- conserving the Whaling Station við Áir for the purpose of making it a museum.
- transforming the area við Áir into a tourist hub offering visitors historical activities with a maritime focus.
- coordinating all activities between national and local authorities as well as private business.

The Whaling Station is the main attraction of the activity centre and it shall be conserved as a historical asset and a dynamic museum centred on Faroese fisheries and maritime industry in modern times, specifically post 1856. Furthermore a local historical museum will be established for the Municipality of Sund.

Facilities such as a conference venue, accommodation, eateries, harbour facilities for recreational sailors, camping areas as well as boat and cottage rental should be linked to the activity centre.

If we are to harness this project's full potential, it is of utmost importance that national and local authorities as well as the business community all participate.

The Committee proposes that:

- the national authorities shall shoulder the administrative and financial responsibility for the conservation of the historical assets: the buildings and any maritime collections.
- the local authority shall be responsible for the local history museum in cooperation with the national authorities, pursuant to the law passed by the Løgting (Faroese Parliament) on village museums.
- to the extent possible, the activity centre shall run on general business conditions, however, national authorities shall foot the expenses of ensuring that all activities are based on sound professional and technical criteria.
- the Municipality shall be responsible for infrastructure, meaning enabling access to the site and preparing areas for camping and harbour facilities. The local authority and business community shall cooperate on the use of infrastructure.
- there shall be an agreement between the Municipality and business community governing camping and harbour facility investments and management.
- any buildings considered part of the infrastructure and which are publicly owned, shall be leased to private businesses, which run activities in the area.

The Whaling Station shall be restored in accordance with conservation standards and guidelines and converted into a maritime museum. The Station's global historical significance shall be promoted; it is one of the world's very few remaining stations and the only one in the northern hemisphere. The Government shall list the Station as a protected site. Any equipment found at the Station shall be restored for display and interactive exploration. Once fully restored, the whaling station shall offer visitors a vivid experience of this global industry of the past. The Faroese Government shall secure funding for the restoration in cooperation with foreign funds.

Conservation and restoration activities shall be supervised by the Landsantikvarur (Keeper of National Antiquities) and the museum may have historical objects, which are public property, in its custody. The museum may, in addition, display biological museum items linked to Faroese industrial whaling and fisheries.

A hall shall be purpose-built in the area for displaying boats, ships and other objects from modern maritime history.

The outdoors area shall also be used for exhibitions, both on shore and at sea. There shall be a landing quay for historical vessels not licensed to sail.

Investments in the maritime museum shall be made with public funds in cooperation with foreign funds, and its running costs shall be paid out of public funds and own revenues.

The local museum shall be a museum for the Municipality of Sund. It shall be set up and run pursuant to the act passed by the Løgting (Faroese Parliament) on village museums.

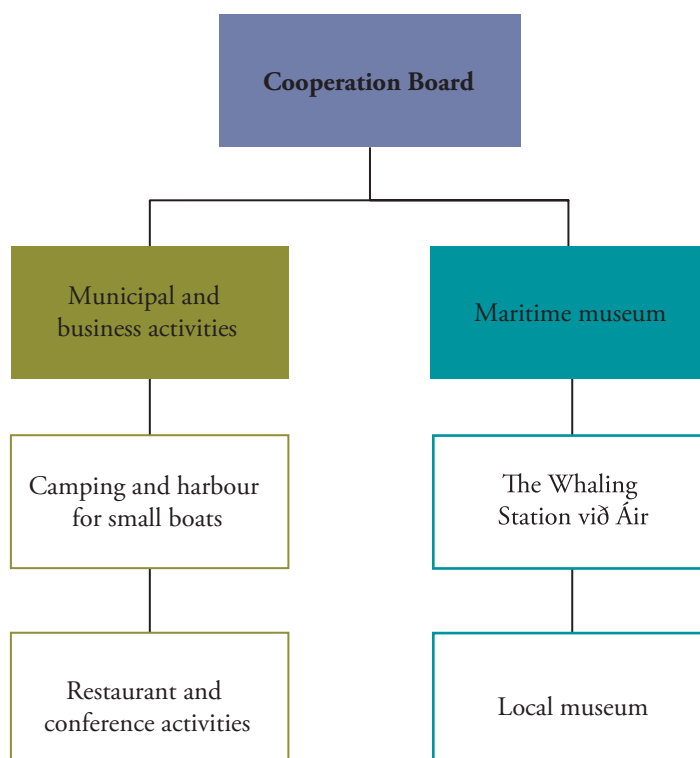
Part of the hall used for the maritime museum shall be allocated to the local museum.

The local museum shall showcase the cultural history of the villages in the municipality, but also illustrate the importance of industrial whaling for the Faroes and particularly the local area, Sundalagið, which boasted three out of the Faroe Islands' seven whaling stations.

The local municipality shall cooperate with the Faroese National Museum on matters of administration and expertise, and together they shall cooperate with the tourist industry to ensure that they offer exciting and dynamic activities showcasing cultural and natural history.

Municipal and business activities are linked to the centre, including a camping area, boat rental and dining facilities.

Organization and Management



The Whaling Station við Áir shall be managed as a maritime museum and the local museum shall be run in close cooperation with the former, for example as regards staff. Municipal and business activities include, for example, services for visitors. Centre activities shall be coordinated by a cooperation board.

The estimated basic running costs are 2,076,000 DKK per annum.

Running Costs

1 museum director	Maritime Museum	530.000 DKK
1 museum curator	Local Museum	360.000 DKK
1 museum technician	Maritime Museum	350.000 DKK
1 administrative staff	Maritime/Local Museum	250.000 DKK
Guard	Sjóvinnusavn/økissavn	240.000 DKK
Total (1)		1.730.000 DKK
Other running costs		346.000 DKK
Total (2)		2.076.000 DKK

Funding

The Committee considers it feasible to obtain resources from foreign funds for restoring the Whaling Station and constructing the facilities for the proposed museum. In this regard, it is vital that the Faroese authorities clearly demonstrate that they are willing to carry out this project.

Drafting a Preliminary Report and Urgent Restoration

The Committee puts forth this initial recommendation as it recognizes that preparing an adequate cost assessment of the proposal requires an appropriation on the Faroese Finance Act. Funding is needed for drafting a preliminary report on restoring the Whaling Station and the location for the maritime museum, local museum and private business ventures.

Moreover urgent action is required in 2008 in order to guarantee the conservation of the Whaling Station. Tidying the surroundings and making urgent repairs are needed to guarantee that visitors are not exposed to any hazards, and that potential investors may see the Station at its best.

An estimated 990,000DKK are needed in 2008

Funding required in 2008

Consultancy services: recording state of conservation, buildings	100.000 DKK
Consultancy services: recording state of conservation, equipment	100.000 DKK
Urgent restoration (supervisor)	140.000 DKK
Urgent restoration (assistant/craftsman)	140.000 DKK
Materials	100.000 DKK
Drawing up a restoration proposal	120.000 DKK
Travel and representation in connection with the board's research	70.000 DKK
Draft design (Maritime Museum, tourist area, etc.)	220.000 DKK
Total funding required for 2008	990.000 DKK

Cultural Capital

The Whaling Station has value as cultural capital and the cost of making it a museum must be seen in light of the value added to its cultural capital by converting it into a maritime museum.

Continued Work

The working group recommends:

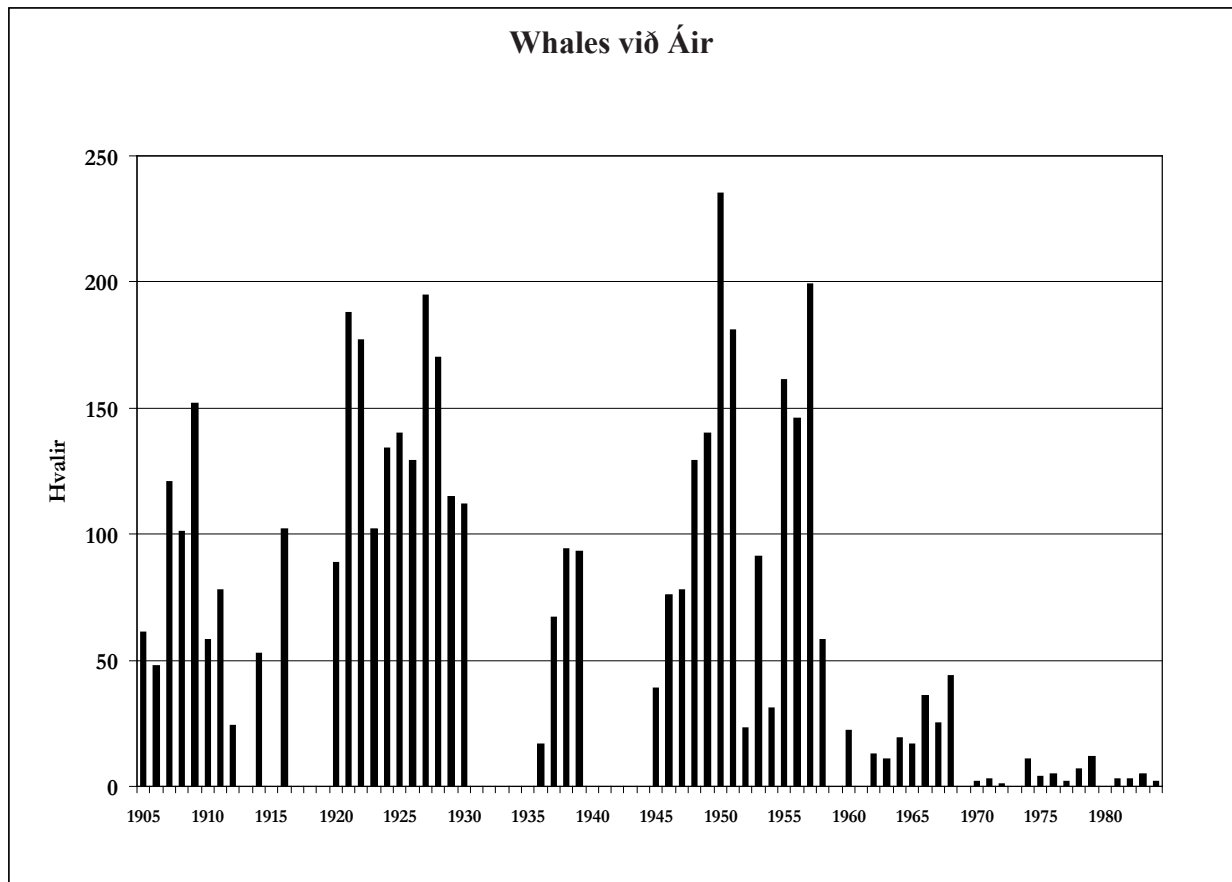
- continuing work on the preparations.
- allocating a 990,000 DKK government grant to the Ministry of Culture under the 2008 Faroese Finance Act, this shall be earmarked for urgent maintenance and technical preparatory work at the Whaling Station við Áir.
- appointing a board to be in charge of the preparatory work.
- that the appointed board study the possibilities of external funding for restoring the Whaling Station við Áir and for developing a maritime museum við Áir.
- that the board submit a final proposal on a museum and activity centre við Áir by May 1, 2008.

The Committee for the Conservation of the Whaling Station við Áir

Annex 1 Overview of whaling stations, names and owners

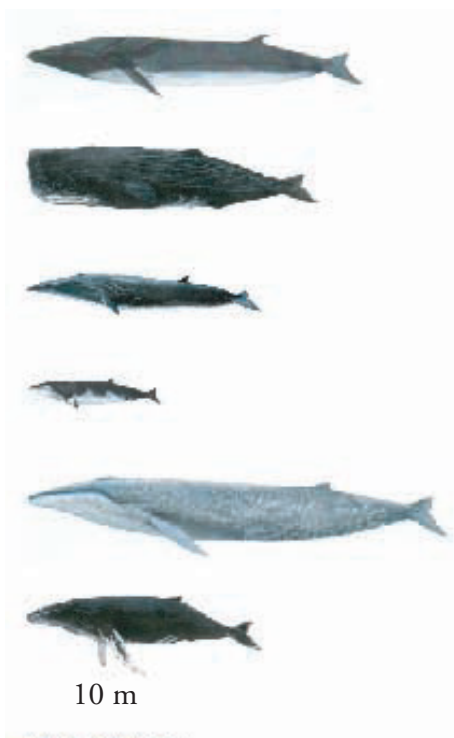
Staður	Ár	Navn	Eigarar
Gjánoyri	1894-1911	Urd	Albert Grøn, Sandefjord
	1904	Urd & Skuld	A. Grøn; A.F. Klaneness; T. Grøn
	1914	Urd+Emma	A. Grøn, Sandefjord
	1920	Urd	Haldor Virik & O. Wegger
	1925	Urd	Færøernes Hvalfanger-Selskab
Norðdepli	1898	Norddeple	Andorsen & Neumann
	1899-1912	Norddeple	P. Michelsen, Sandefjord
	1913-1920	Norddeple	A/S Sudurø
	1920	Emma	E. Abrahamsen
Funningsfjørður	1901-1904	A/S Emma	C. Evesen
	1906-1913	A/S Emma	Alf Momsen, Tønsberg
	1915	A/S Emma	A. Grøn, Sandefjord
	1920	A/S Emma	H. Virik & Wegger
	1925	A/S Emma	Færøernes Hvalfanger-Selskab
Selvík	1902-1912	Norddeple	Michelsen, Norway
Lopra	1901-1916	A/S Suderø	P.O. Bogen, H.G. Thomsem; P. M.
	1923-1925	A/S Suderø	P.O.B.,H.G.T., P. Mortensen:C.M.
	1926	A/S Suderø	Johann Mortensen
	1928-1930	Det Færøske Hvalfangerselskab	Einar Mikkelsen
	1933-1939	N.J. Mortensen A/S	N.J. Mortensen A/S
	1946-1947	P/F Lopra	Gudmund Mortensen A/S
	1948-1951	P/F Lopra	P/F Lopra
	1953	P/F Lopra	P/F Lopra
Signabø	1902-1912	A/S Verdande	O. Finsen; A. Benzon; F. Børgesen
Thorsvig	1905-1912	Dansk Hvalfangst- og Fiskeri A/S	Chr.Salvesen;A.A.Dehli; E.With;
	1914	Dansk Hvalfangst- og Fiskeri A/S	C. S.; A.A. D.; E. W.; M. Wattræ
	1916	Hekla & Talkna Hvalfangerselskab	H.M. Wrangel & Co.
við Áir	1920-1930	Hekla & Talkna Hvalfangerselskab	H.M. Wrangel & Co.
	1936-1939	P/F Sperm	H.J. Joensen (Eiðis Hansjakku)
	1945-1951	P/F Sperm	H.J. Joensen (Eiðis Hansjakku)
	1952-1954	P/F Heykur	Sjóvinnubankin
	1955-1958	P/F Hvalarakstur	Kjølbro, Klaksvík
	1962-1966	P/F Treyst	H.J. Joensen (Eiðis Hansjakku)
	1967-1969	P/F Ægir	P. Dahl
	1968	P/F Treyst	H.J.Joensen; E. Fugloy; H. Hansen
	1974-1976	P/F Ægir	P. Dahl
	1977-1984	P/F Hvítiklettur	Faroese Government

Annex 2 Overview of whaling and whale species at við Áir



A total of 4,454 whales were received við Áir between 1906 and 1984. Of these 4,044 have been identified

3,155 fin whales



524 sperm whales

509 sei whales

124 minke whales

62 blue whales

30 humpback whales

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Images: Føroya Fornminnissavn (The Faroese National Museum)

Tables: Føroya Náttúrugripasavn (The Faroese Museum of Natural History)

Illustration: Heidi H. Poulsen



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