

White Harbor Whaling District by CashBanks



Update 18/11

- Rearranged cove wharf
- Cut some houses from the northern end of district
- Added yards to houses in the south, reclassified some as fishing huts.
- Moved the Inn further north to the cross-roads
- Added terraforming plan

"The Castle Stair, a stepped street in their city, is lighted with marble mermaids cradling bowls of burning whale oil."

Thanks to this stray reference in Dance with Dragons, we know that the good folk of White Harbor manufactured whale oil. So hurray we should probably give them a place to do it!

DISCLAIMER: I hate whaling, I hate that it's still happening. None of what I write is intended to encourage or glorify it, I'm just trying to be historically accurate.

Inspiration

The Basques!

The pioneers of early European whaling were those of the Basque region of France/Spain. The Basques were among the first to catch whales commercially from at least the 11th century, and dominated the trade for five centuries, spreading to the far corners of the North Atlantic and even reaching the South Atlantic.

Whaling 101

Whaling - WHY?!

Whale meat and fat were some of the most valuable commodities in the middle ages and well into the 20th century. The main product of whaling was oil, rendered from whale blubber. Whale oil was highly prized and used primarily for lighting and lubrication, but industries also used the oil in tanning, for finishing broadcloth and as an ingredient in soap.

As a secondary product of the hunt, the Basques also collected the baleen from the mouths of the whales, which filter krill and other small marine creatures. Baleen consists of hard but flexible, and somewhat curved, plates (up to a metre or two in length) and could be used the way we might use fibreglass-reinforced plastic: for archer's bows, buckles, helmets and so on.

How'd they hunt?!

The Basques developed two methods of whaling, one locally based where they would hunt the whales that swam close to port. The other where they would make long journeys to more profitable hunting grounds across the sea, process the oil while they were there and bring it back in barrels stored in the ship's hull.

For the sake of making an interesting build, let's say that whales frequent the Bite and swim not too far from White Harbor which give the whalers a chance to employ both methods.

When hunting locally, the whales were spotted by full-time look-outs from stone watchtowers situated on headlands or high up on mountains overlooking the harbor, which limited the hunting area to several miles around the port.

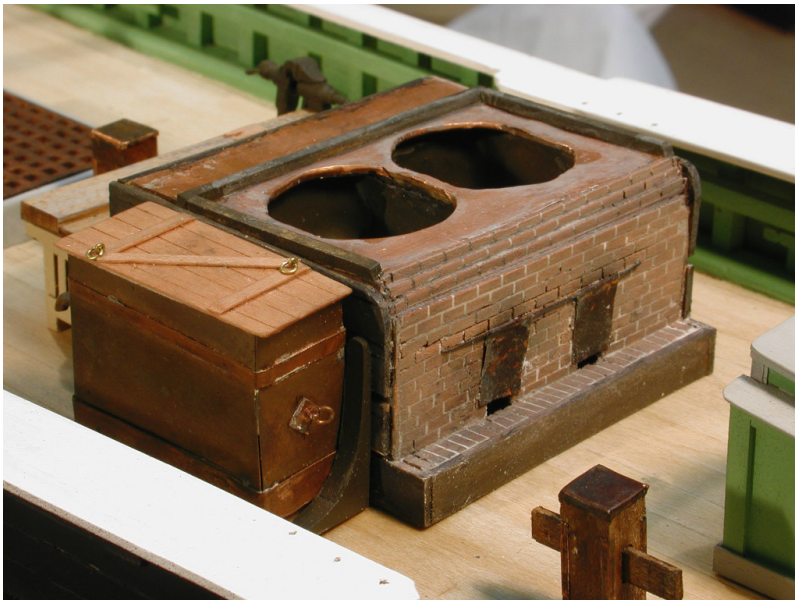
When the spout of a whale was sighted, the watchman alerted the men by burning some straw, beating a drum, ringing a bell or waving a flag. Once alerted, men launched small rowing boats from the beach, or, if the shoreline was steep, the boats were held by a capstan and launched by releasing the rope attached to the boats. The whale was struck with a two-flued harpoon (as shown in the seal of Hondarribia, dated 1297), lanced, and killed. A larger boat manned by ten men towed the carcass ashore, waiting for high tide to beach the whale, where it was flensed.

"Flensing" was the processing of removing the valuable parts from the whale. Once ashore men with flensing knives would not only cut up the blubber into long strips, but also cut up the viscera, baleen and other bones for processing. The meat would be cut up for sale to local butchers.

Once they'd removed all the useful parts, they'd generally leave the rest of the carcass to polar bears and sea birds.

How'd they make the oil?!

The process of making whale oil consisted of heating minced blubber in open copper cauldrons over a slow fire. These boilers were called "tryworks". The workers used copper ladles to skim fritters (fenks) from the oil and recycle them as fuel for the tryworks. Each oven consisted of roughly rectangular stone walls, about 50 cm thick, surrounding a circular firebox about 1.2 to 1.5 m in diameter. The ovens were often arranged in rows of four or more, like row houses sharing walls between adjacent units.



Damage to the stone oven walls, from accidents or from regular use, led to deterioration, and crews often had to rebuild their ovens. A wooden working platform surrounded the stone ovens, and a timber structure roofed with distinctive red clay tiles possibly imported from the Basque Country protected the whole tryworks.

After hunting, flensing and trying, the storage and shipment of whale oil was the fourth, and final, step in the production process. The Basques used a standard shipping container called a barrica, a wooden staved barrel with a capacity of about 200 to 230 litres, about the same as a modern oil drum.

The Plan

I've plotted out a district that includes facilities to accommodate all the steps in the whale oil production process.



Whale spotting tower - tall, made of stone, used to spot the whales in the area.

Whaling skiffs - some beached, one or two docked, used to row out to the spotted whales, harpoon them then tow them back to shore.

Oil Processing facilities

Office - I'm not 100% sure if they had these purely administrative buildings in medieval times, but somewhere for them to plan voyages, meet investors/customers, store valuables etc.

Blubber boiling vats - where the blubber was boiled, I've marked out half a dozen clusters of them. They would also mince the blubber close by (marked in the areas with grey squares).

These might also be put inside facilities once I test their size and if we can't think of anything else to put in them.

Warehouse - used for the storage of supplies/provisions needed for the long hunting voyages.

Whale Oil warehouse - used for storing the recently oil recently barrelled

Old Whale Oil Processing Facility - the first facility built to process oil. Basically looks old.

New Whale Oil Processing Facility - As demand for oil grew they needed extra space and facilities to make it, this new area was built with more vats.

Baleen processing facility - where whale bones/baleen would be cleaned and fashioned into parts sought after for purchase.

Cooper - coopers played an important role in the whaling industry by fashioning the barrels needed for storing the oil.

Whale Bones - the remains of whales harvested previously.

Anchored Whaling Ships - Ships that have returned from their seasonal hunts and anchored in harbor while their next voyage is organised.

An Inn - for sailors either about to leave on voyages, or who've just returned from one. Also popular among the local facility workers. **Taking suggestions on names.**

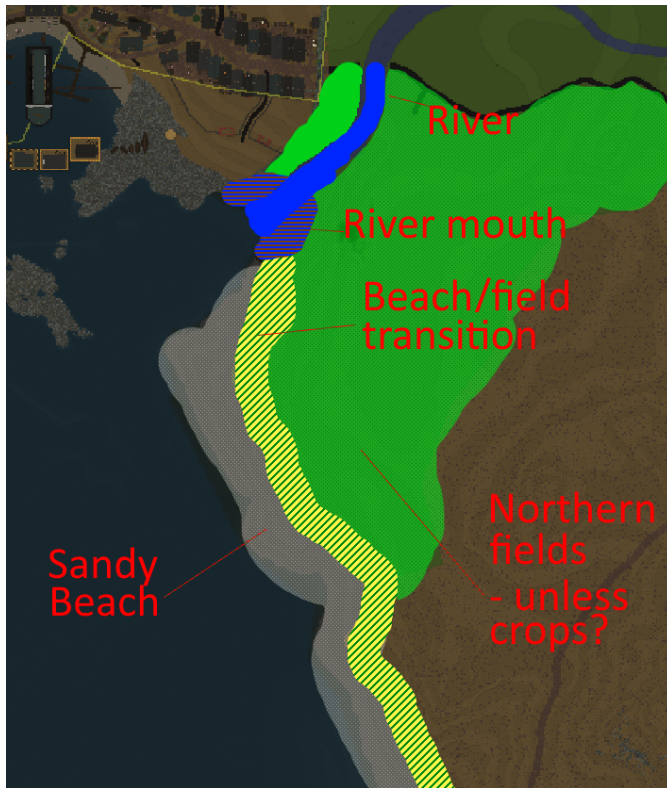
Houses - for the local facility workers. Low class in the WH Sprawl style. **I'm just guessing about the yards to the south, will these be fields?**

Fishermen houses - the blue wood kind used in the sprawl.



Terraforming

Shouldn't be difficult, I'm just not sure what the plan is for the southern fields, will they be sub-divided into crops?



Inspiration: the Skagen coast of Sweden.

