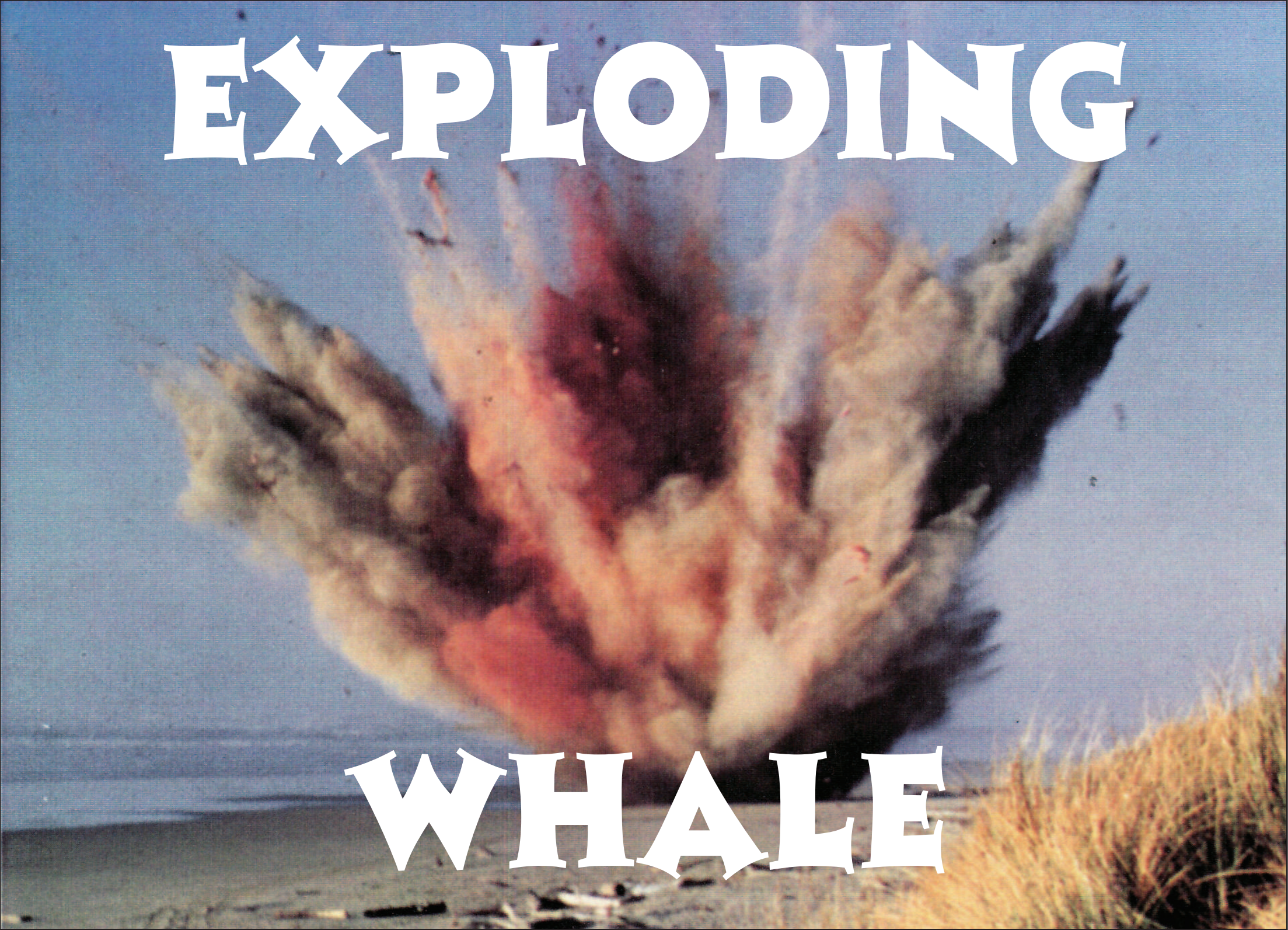


45TH ANNIVERSARY OF FLORENCE’S FAMOUS



Nov. 12, 1970, was W-Day, or Whale Day, when the Oregon State Highway Department decided to clear the remains of a dead whale from South Jetty Beach near Florence.

Florence’s Moby Dick brings fame, smell and headaches

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Down through history, whales have made people and places famous.

First there was Jonah and his large-mouthed nemesis. Next came Moby Dick and tales galore of whaling and Northeastern American whaling towns.

Now Florence has joined the list of places made famous by association with the mammoth mammals, along with Walter F. Umenhofer of Springfield — both victims of “The Great Whale Explosion of 1970.”

The newest epic in whale tale circles started Monday, Nov. 9, when a dead 45-foot blue sperm whale washed ashore about 1/2 mile south of the Siuslaw River Jetty.

For two days, the eight-ton visitor was an object of idle curiosity.

Then it started to smell.

Local officials pondered the best way to rid the area of the whale. A search of records failed to produce a similar incident, and it have been such a long time since a whale had washed ashore in the area that residents and officials couldn’t remember the correct steps to take.

Rendering plants were offered the carcass to use for making fertilizer, if only they would remove it. All offers were politely, but firmly, declined.

Then George Thornton, assistant district highway engineer, announced that his department would blow up the whale.

Thursday, Nov. 12, was set as W-Day (whale day.)

Word spread far and wide.

Reporters, television cameramen and spectators found Florence on the map and headed to the city post haste.

Thursday afternoon, Thornton’s



Two Volkswagen Beetles, parked end-to-end, show the massive size of the 45-foot blue sperm whale.

crew began placing dynamite under the whale.

The engineer explained that he planned to place the explosives so the force of the blast would throw most of th whale toward the ocean. Then, when the tide washed back in, highway crews would haul away or bury what the seagulls didn’t eat.

At 3:30 p.m., police began moving spectators back to safety. Sand dunes offering a view of the whale were dotted with spectators and cameramen.

Finally, at 3:45 p.m., Thornton gave the signal to push the plunger.

A 100-foot high column of sand and whale erupted skyward.

Chunks of whale flew in every

direction.

Spectators dove for cover as screaming pieces of flesh flew through the air.

Finally, fog of atomized whale fall-out descended on the area, coating everything with a smelly covering.

Spectators moved back toward their cars, looking for shelter from the fall-out and escape from the nauseating smell that enveloped them.

“My insurance company will never believe it,” spectator Umenhofer cried as he arrived back at the parking lot.

Before him stood his automobile, its top crushed by a 3-foot square hunk of blubber — the only casualty caused by the flying pieces of whale.

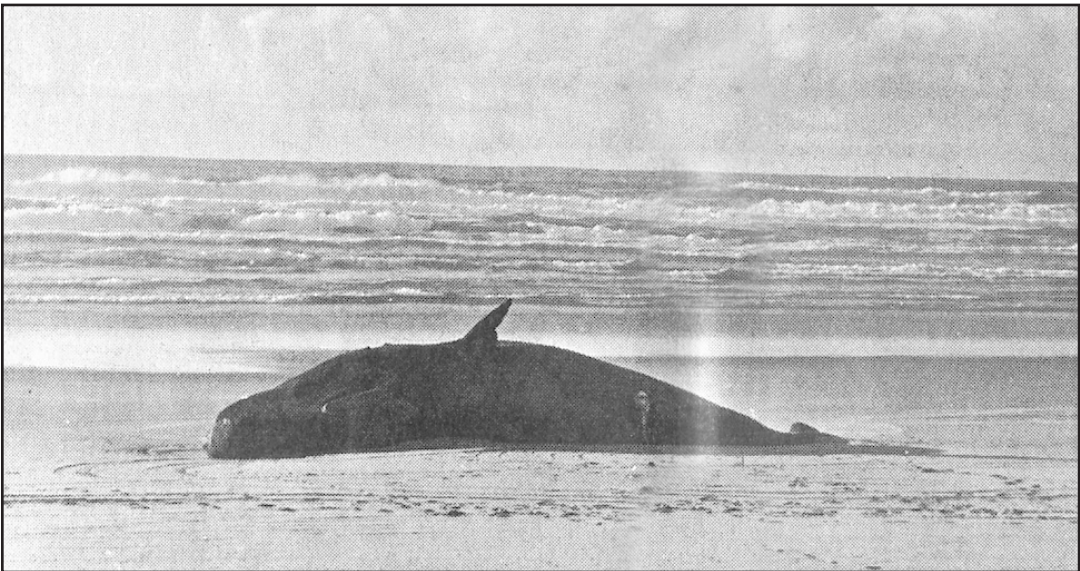
On the beach, highway crews were busy burying the only large piece of whale left after the explosion: the tail.

Nowhere in sight were the seagulls, despite the abundance of bits of whale spread along the beach.

Jokes about the Florence whale started making rounds Monday; one songwriter was reported looking for a group to record his latest ballad, “Blow Whale Blow;” residents visiting the South Jetty were seen carrying gas masks; and sea gulls continued to avoid the area.

Florence seemed assured of its true place in history — thanks to an eight-ton whale.

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Remains of this Pacific gray whale, (later identified as a blue sperm whale) were scheduled to be blown up by the State Highway Department Wednesday, according to a department spokesman. The whale, estimated to be 48 feet long and weigh over eight tons, washed onto the beach near the South Jetty sometime Monday.