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Cape Cod's Circle of Seasons

By TOM MELHAM

Photographs by JAMES P. BLAIR

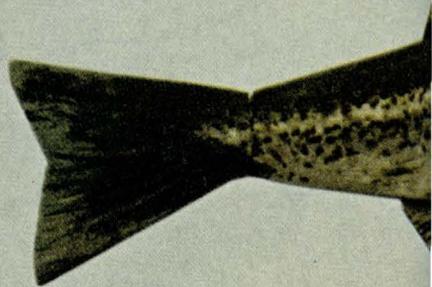
BOTH NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STAFF

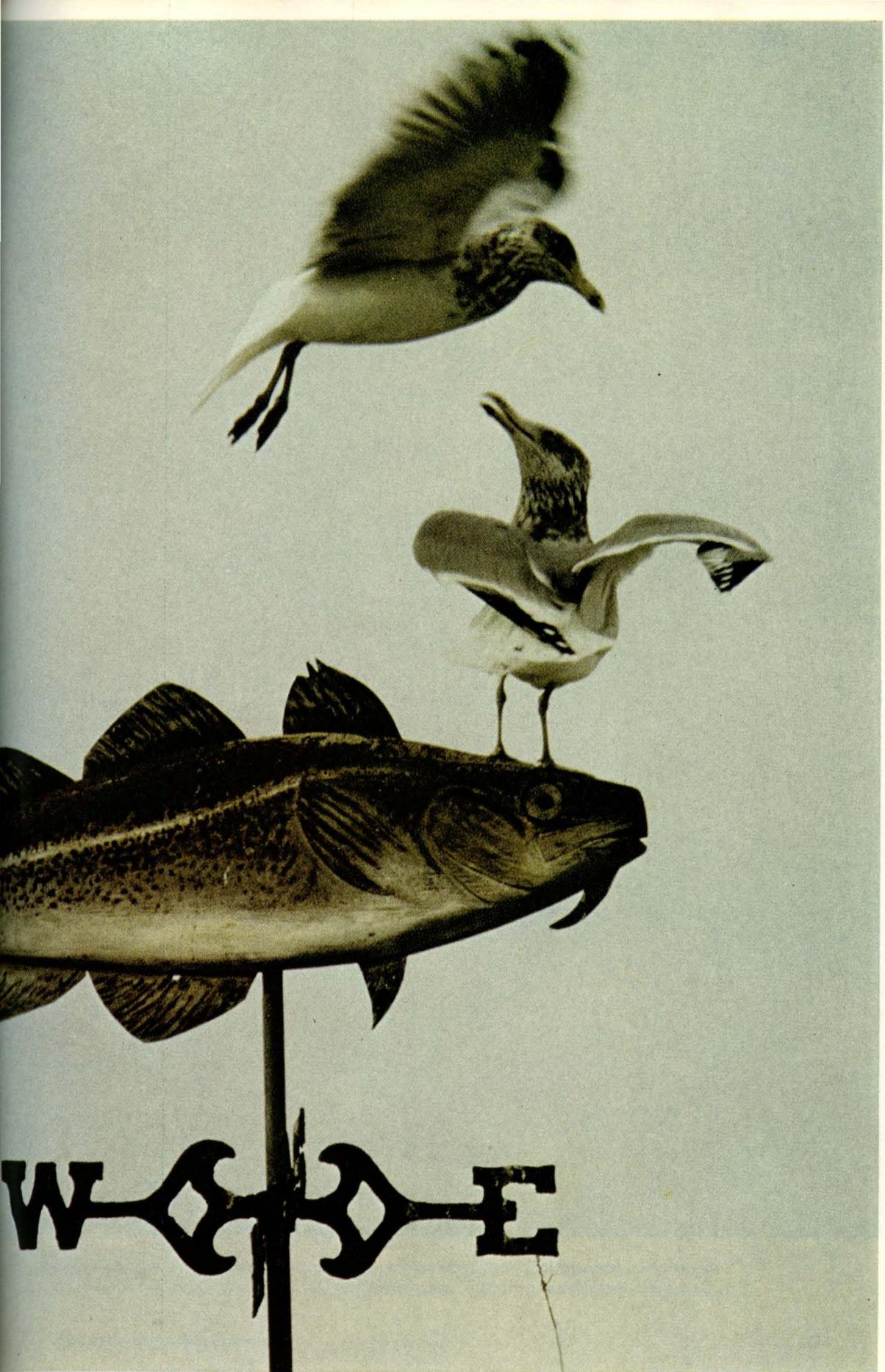
THE WINDS WERE UP EARLY, tearing at my too-light windbreaker as I paced Nauset Beach just after dawn on a chill winter day. Seaweed and chunks of salt ice littered the sand where, a few months before, I had squeezed my way through eddies and whorls of summer vacationists. Now, except for the gulls chorusing overhead, the beach was deserted. As elsewhere on Cape Cod, shops were shuttered, guesthouses empty. The summer glut of tourists and street vendors, clambakes and beach parties had melted into memory.

Heading south, I neared a "ghost town" of weathered wood shacks set like an Andrew Wyeth painting amid low, sculptured dunes fringed with sun-coppered beach grass. The sea, sand, and salt air merged in a haunting panorama of elemental beauty. This, to me, is the real Cape, the off-season Cape stripped of summer varnish.

Born of glaciers, shaped at the whim of wind and wave, on the map it seems a thorn in Neptune's side as it juts crookedly into the Atlantic from mainland Massachusetts.

Feathered fishermen joust for space atop a cod-shaped weathervane in Chatham. Whirled by wild northeasters in winter, barely nudged by summer's salt-laced breezes, the vane spins out a tapestry of seasons hardly guessed at by vacationing "summer people."



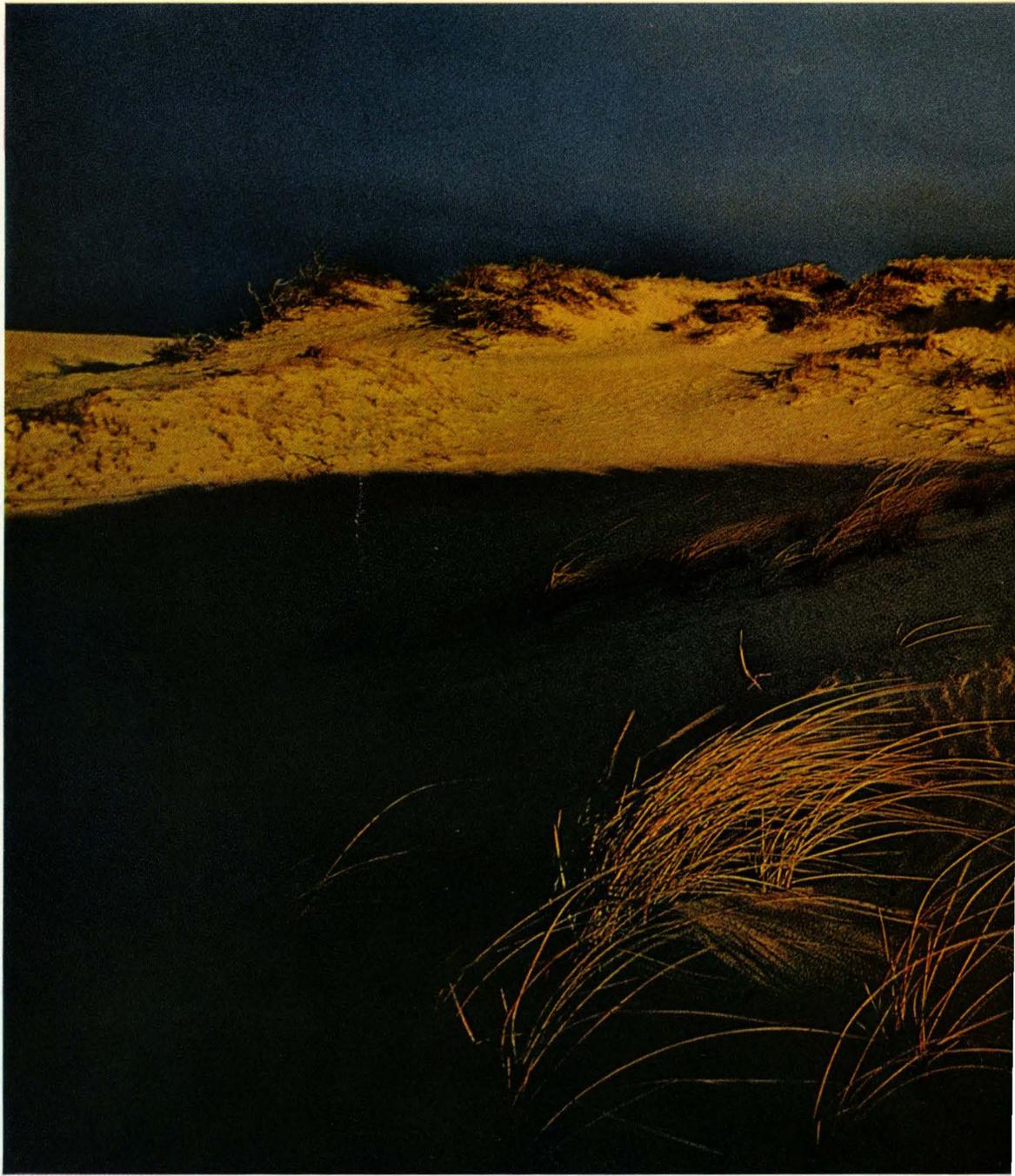




Tide's out, fun's in for youngsters carrying specimen nets on a nature-study walk along Cape Cod Bay near Brewster. A tame herring gull, raised at the Cape Cod Museum of



Natural History, paces the group. Hikeways braiding the peninsula's sandy 70-mile length guide other off-the-beaten-paths to moor and marsh, cliff and dune, beach and tidal flat.



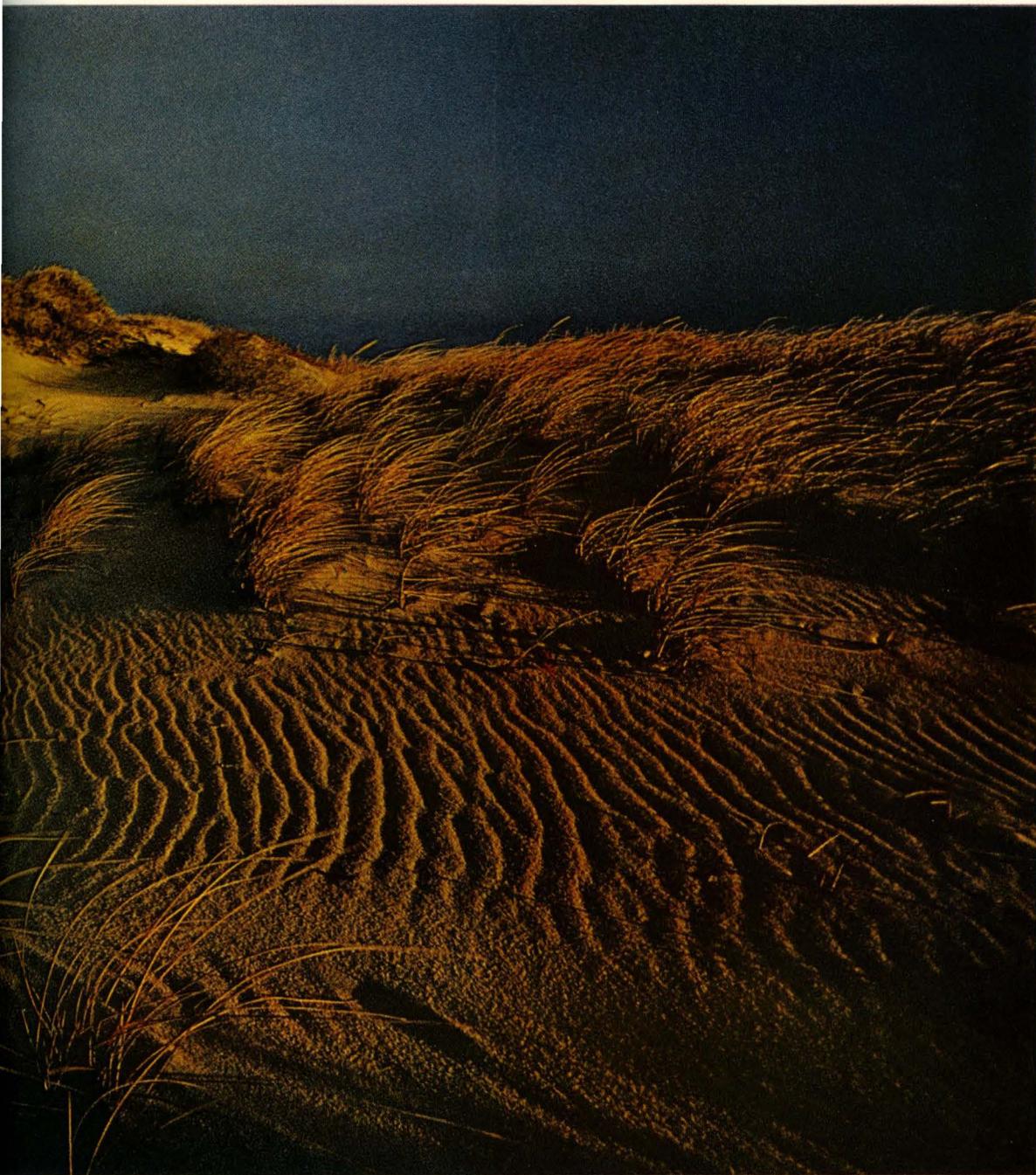
Etched by the sea wind, bronzed by the late November sun, a lonely stretch

Its first segment—the upper Cape—runs eastward 35 miles from the Cape Cod Canal to Chatham (map, page 51, and **“Close-Up: U.S.A.”—Western New England**, a supplement to this issue). It is a hilly, pond-pocked realm of harbors, cranberry bogs, and sea captains’ houses. Here, too, is the world-renowned scientific community of Woods Hole, and the resort of Hyannis Port, where

the Kennedy clan has summered since 1926.

At Chatham the land swerves abruptly north and runs 35 miles more, before ending in Provincetown’s shifting shoals. This lower Cape is a sandspit world of beaches, sea cliffs, and dunes clothed in bayberry and heath.

Nowhere on the Cape is the sea more than six miles away, continually exerting its power and making this land one of exceptional



of dune and grass along Nauset Beach awaits the blast of an Atlantic storm.

natural beauty. Cape Cod is also a place of unusual personal freedom and privacy.

"I find I can live just the way I want," says Monica Dickens, a spirited Cape resident, author, and great-granddaughter of novelist Charles Dickens. "The Cape is ideal for a writer—you're left alone, not caught up in some social whirl. That's why so many creative people live here."

Some of the Cape's numerous artistic souls live in Sandwich, a leafy town of white steeples and rambling country roads. Here Nina Sutton handcrafts jewelry from colorful fragments of Sandwich glass, left by the famous 19th-century glass factory. Nearby, wood-carver Douglas Amidon sculpts human figures and rough-textured signs with a distinct turn-of-the-century flavor.

Sandwich resident Al White—gun engraver, silversmith, and artisan in almost any medium—escaped to the Cape 15 years ago when his former home, Attleboro, Massachusetts, grew too fast and too big for him. “It’s not so hectic here,” he says. “I need the mental and physical freedom of the place. I can’t create when I’m crowded in.”

Judging from his output, Al hasn’t been crowded for a long time. Painstakingly engraved scrimshaw and other carvings grace his home. On his workbench a brooch fuses gold, tourmalines, and diamonds into a life-like cicada poised on a currant leaf. A bronze timber wolf, one leg held fast in a trap, snarls savagely in a powerful portrayal of nature at odds with man.

Nature plays strongly in Al’s work, as it does throughout Cape Cod. Call it “rural seaside charm” or “getting away from it all,” it is what entices most people. Few steady jobs await newcomers, for the Cape lacks factories and industry.

Woods Hole Ships Explore the Seas

One noted employer is the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, where researchers delve into a wide range of fields, from aquiculture to the study of currents, from life in a salt marsh to maps of the sea bottom.

Five research vessels set out regularly from Woods Hole to roam the world, collecting scientific data. One of the most unusual and effective vessels is *Alvin*, a three-man deep-sea submersible. I asked Dr. Robert D. Ballard, one of the men who conducts research in *Alvin*, if I might try a dive.

“It’ll cost you about \$10,000,” came the wry reply. “*Alvin* is expensive, but for our work, it’s indispensable.”

Bob’s research concerns the ocean bottom, in particular the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, a tortuous scar running down the center of the Atlantic Ocean floor.* Through *Alvin*’s view ports he has also studied the floor of the Gulf of Maine, where—unlike most of coastal America—the earth’s granite crust lies exposed. He looks forward to years of research in the Atlantic. But like any other Cape Coddler, he also looks forward to a quiet garden and an orchard.

“I enjoy the idea of working daily at a great oceanographic institution and then going home to a farm,” the tall blond scientist said.

The Cape’s rural spirit is evident even along busy roads like 6A, the Cranberry High-

way that parallels Cape Cod Bay as it picks up small towns like beads on a string. Winding over and around gentle slopes, this woodland-bordered thoroughfare passes shingled homes, salt marshes, country stores, and inns steeped in New England heritage. Its side roads harbor some old Cape traditions as well.

Herring Hunt: a Rite of Spring

One April day I ventured off 6A to West Brewster and Lower Mill Pond, a pine-girt pool that turns a gristmill as it feeds Stony Brook. But on that day cars clogged the usually serene roadside. Dozens of Tom Sawyers and Becky Thatchers frolicked in shoeless abandon, pants rolled to the knees, dip nets thrashing Stony Brook for fish. Spring, I learned, is the time when millions of instinct-driven alewives, a kind of herring, leave the sea to struggle upstream and spawn in the freshwater ponds where they began life.

“I got one! I got one!” screamed a freckled and utterly delighted 6-year-old as he snared a herring with bare hands.

Slipping down the bank, another young fisherman fell headlong into the creek, emerged unhurt, and found two writhing fish in his net! Parents shucked their shoes and joined in. Two gray-haired dowagers approached the brook and recaptured a bit of their youth as they witnessed again—doubtless as they had for decades—Cape Cod’s watery rite of spring.

The herring, salted and dried, once provided a windfall food source to economically depressed Cape Codders. Even in this century, children on 6A hawked “sticks” of a dozen fish for a dime. Today town law still grants each Brewster citizen the right to harvest a bushel of alewives a week, but few take advantage of that privilege.

“They’re trash fish,” one old-timer told me with disgust. “So full of bones I’d as soon eat a whiskbroom.”

No matter. The Cape has plenty of tasty alternatives within easy reach: oysters, bay scallops, lobsters, and clams. Offshore, toward the vast submarine shelf of Georges Bank, lurk schools of herring, haddock, and the cod from which the Cape takes its name. For nearly four centuries these fish have filled the holds of vessels from many nations. But now the great catches dwindle; locals lay the blame

*A two-part article describing Project FAMOUS, by Dr. James R. Heirtzler and Dr. Robert D. Ballard, appeared in the May 1975 GEOGRAPHIC.

on the foreign ships, especially the Soviets'.

"Cape Codders use hooks or large-mesh nets," Chatham fisherman Fred Horton told me. "Using hook and line never hurts the fish population; a small fish won't go for a big hook. But the Russian trawlers net everything, big and small. They come in for herring—that's our bait, what the cod feed on. If we don't have herring, our way of life dies."

I met Fred in the Chatham Squire, favorite pub of the boisterous younger fishermen. Walk in on these shaggy-maned, burly men and it's easy to assume they appreciate only beer and roughhousing. But in truth they—like Chatham's more conservative fishermen—harbor a huge, unabashed love for the sea.

"The ocean's the most powerful thing in the world," one of them told me. "It changes every day. It's primeval; it's the great mother. Man, there's *nothing* other than fishing!"

Out to Sea on a Line Trawler

Fishing is one of the Cape's few industries and one of its oldest, dating from its earlier inhabitants, the peaceable Wampanoag Indians. Eager to try my hand, I arranged to go out after cod on a commercial fishing boat.

I tugged my body out of bed long before dawn, then staggered into the blustery darkness mantling the Chatham Fish Pier. Small-craft warnings were flying high, but a few dogged seamen made ready anyway—including 33-year-old Bob Ryder, skipper of the 40-foot fishing boat *Destiny*. As its throbbing diesel took us past the channel lights, I asked Bob, a hulking six-footer, why he went out day after day, good weather or bad.

"For the money," he replied with a grin. "And freedom—it's better than being stuck behind a desk."

One of forty-odd boats in Chatham's fleet, *Destiny* is a line trawler. Thousands of hooks, on short lines spaced about six feet apart, hang from the main ground line, which is fed overboard and anchored along the seafloor. A chunk of herring on each hook lures the bottom-feeding cod, haddock, and halibut.

With Bob at the helm, mate Steve Fitz swiftly baited up, coiling the line like so much spaghetti in several wooden tubs. Ten miles from shore, the heavy seas promised to get worse, and Bob decided to fish here rather than go the usual 20 miles out. At his signal, Steve cast over a buoy and ground-line anchor. As the boat eased forward, each hook flipped out singly, the "spaghetti" unwinding

without a snag and disappearing below.

Astern, Chatham's lights seemed to bob and wink as *Destiny* rose and fell on the black, oily waves. Off our bow the sun began to emerge from the ocean, piercing the gray horizon with a pink keyhole. As the last of the line payed out, Steve paused to admire the new day—and open a beer.

Close to the ocean all his life, 24-year-old Steve tried college but "just didn't feel good inside. I felt wasted; I thirsted to go out in a boat. Why fishing? Maybe for this—" he said, pointing to the streaky dawn sky. "And it's clean, natural work. You feel like you've done something at the end of the day."

Indeed you do. A day of codfishing can last 16 hours or longer, from baiting and setting lines to hauling, gaffing, and cleaning scores of fish, some of which may weigh 60 pounds or more. All this while the sea pitches you about; it's enough to wear down anyone's stamina. These men earn every nickel they get, even when an exceptional catch brings them a thousand dollars.

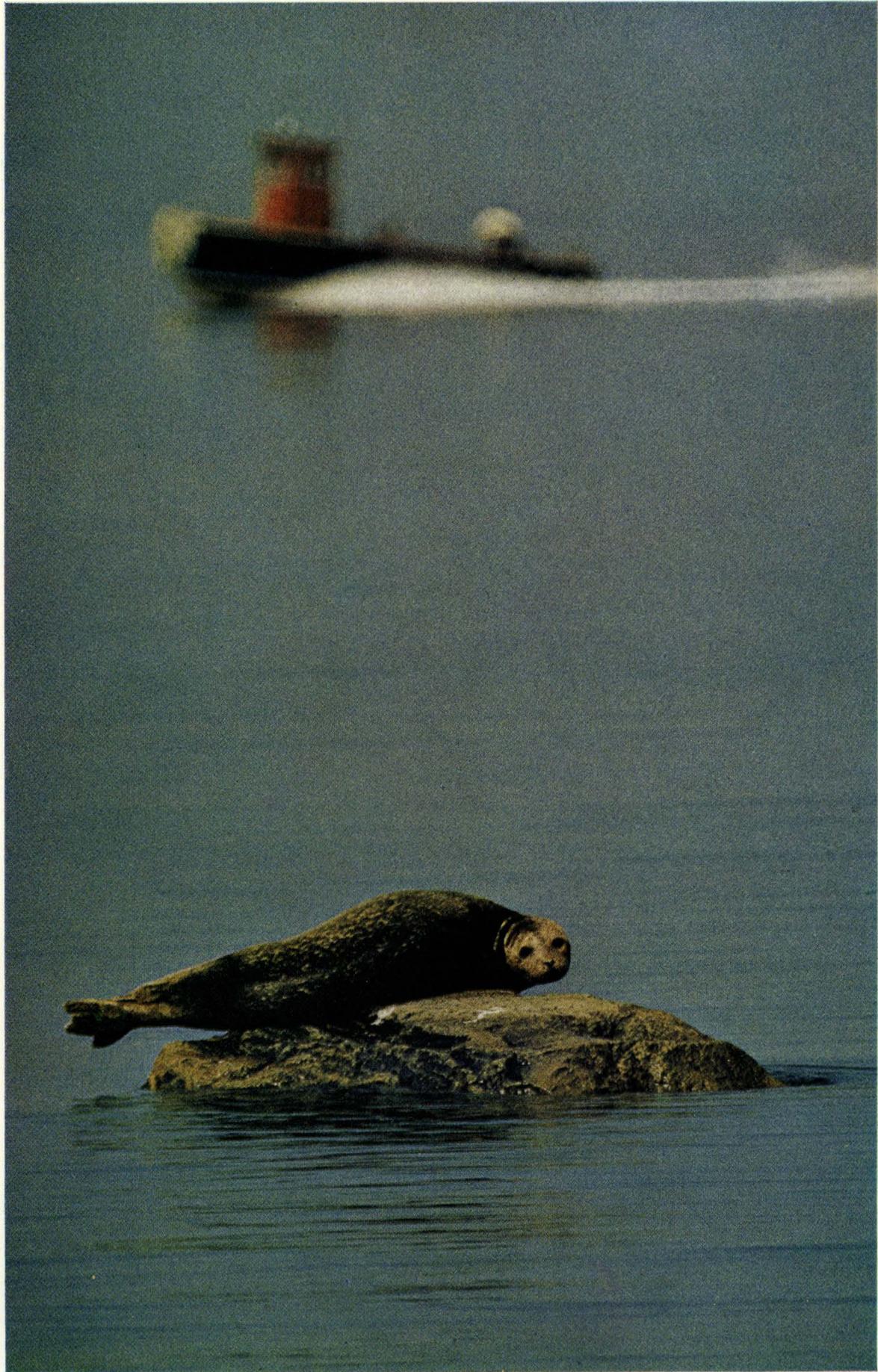
"It sure doesn't average out that way," Bob roared over the engine's hammering rhythm. Bottom snags, he explained, can cost a fisherman his whole trawl. Worse, he risks his boat—and life—each time he goes out. The seaward edge of the Cape from Monomoy Island north to Provincetown, the treacherous "backside," is the graveyard of more than 2,000 ships and countless men.

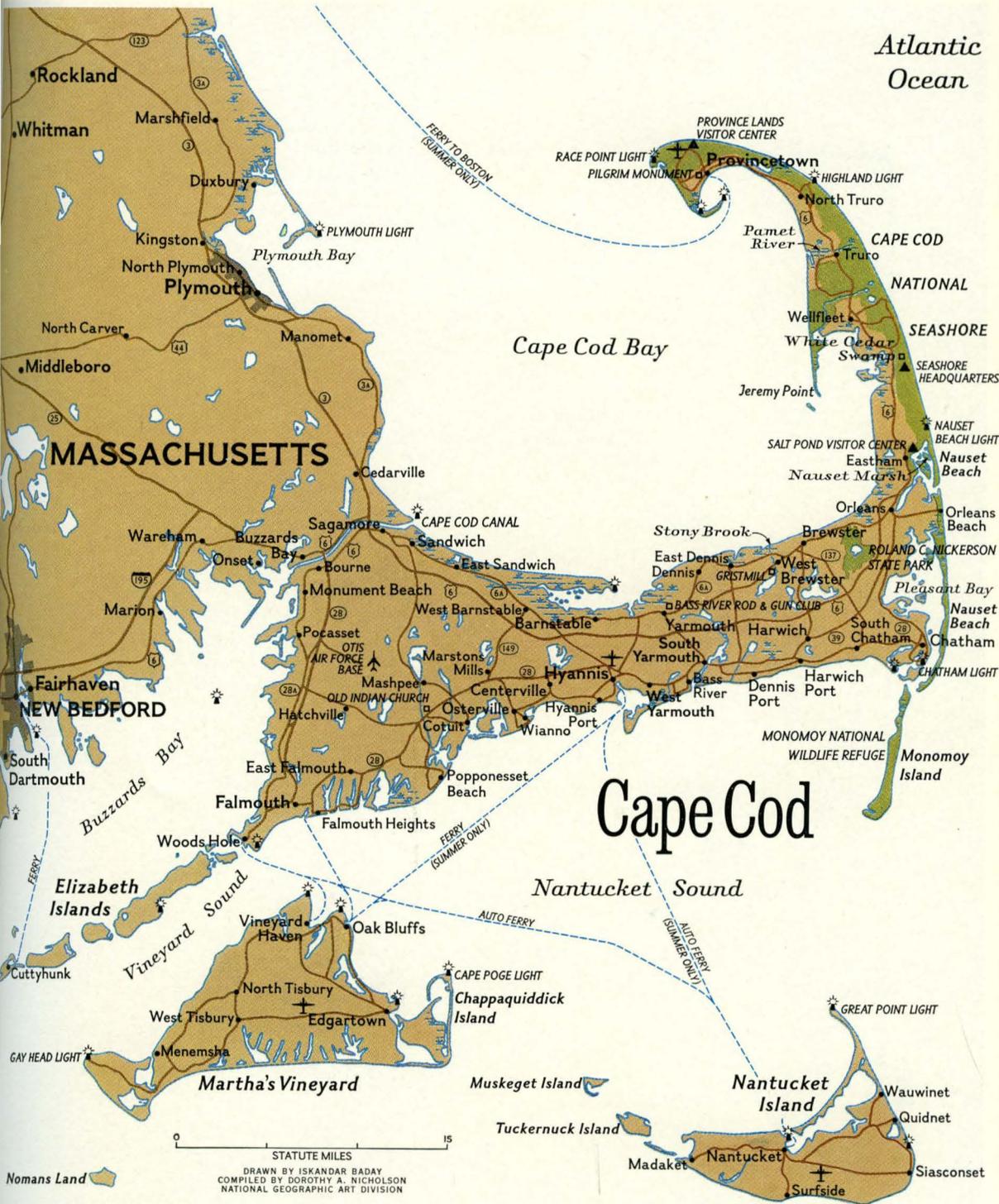
By now Bob was hauling in the line as Steve coiled it into the tubs. It was a bad day for cod. Hook after empty hook emerged from the dark waters. Then our luck turned even worse—dogfish and skates, worthless weeds to a fisherman, showed up. Bob knocked them off the hooks.

At last a few cod appeared, and Bob deftly gaffed them into the stern. But he was still turning up more trash fish than keepers. Then a whine of the pulley and taut line told him something big was on a lower hook. "You just never know what (Continued on page 53)

Shipping a bit of the briny, racing sloops vie on a summer Sunday off Harwich Port (following pages), echoing the age of sail when Cape Codders manned the helm of many a California-bound clipper. Beyond the shelter of Monomoy Island lies danger; shoal-fanged seaward Cape waters have swallowed more than 2,000 ships.







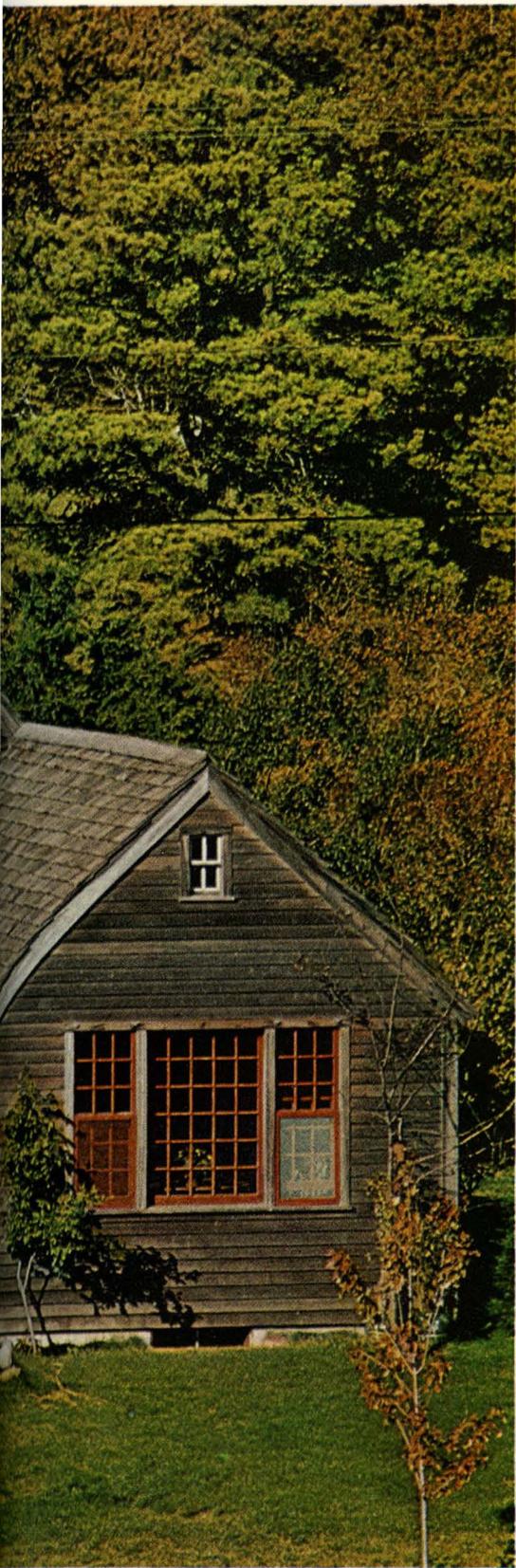
“STRONG RIGHT ARM of Massachusetts,” Cape Cod elbows into the Atlantic from the Cape Cod Canal, which saves ships a hazardous passage around outlying shoals. Those same shoals in 1620 drove back a Virginia-bound vessel named *Mayflower*, which made its first New World landfall near present-day Provincetown. After signing the *Mayflower* Compact—first

written agreement on self-government in America—the Pilgrims crossed the bay to found Plimoth Plantation.

Today millions of latter-day pilgrims make vacation landfalls on the Cape’s spacious beaches, vying with 124,000 year-rounders for parking spaces and elbow room. Bemused by it all, a stray seal (left) parks on an offshore rock in Cape Cod Bay.



House that tradition built: Styled as a Cape Cod home of the 1600's, a modern "salt-box" in East Dennis turns a long, sloping back roof to winter's northeasters. In bygone



NICHOLAS DEVORE III

days, additions like these were often tacked on as the family—or its fortune—grew.

you're going to pull up—*anything* can be down there,” Bob murmured. What was it? Tuna? A shark? “Halibut!” Bob’s happy yell filled the air. “Forty-five pounds, easy. At a dollar-ten a pound, I’ll take all I can get!”

Accustomed to prepackaged halibut steaks, I could only gape in awe as that 45-pounder flopped and bashed its head on the bottom of the boat. But Bob has caught much bigger ones, as large as 200 pounds dressed out.

“Halibut’s a slow-growing fish, and there aren’t many left here,” he said. “This one’s probably 10 years old. At the going price, it’ll pay my expenses; the cod’ll be all profit.”

Then reaching to untangle a line, Bob inadvertently ripped his oilskins with a gaff hook. “There go the expenses,” he muttered.

And so the day went, a mix of good luck and bad, as two Chatham fishermen reaped a living from the sea. By early afternoon the boat’s wallow and diesel fumes had filled me with green waves of nausea. Worsening winds persuaded Bob to call it a day. As we churned back to Chatham, Steve cleaned the catch, lopping off the heads and tossing the entrails to the flock of following gulls.

Back in the harbor the fish were unloaded, crated in ice, and trucked to Boston and New York City’s Fulton Street, where “fresh Chatham cod and haddock” would draw retailers and housewives the next morning.

Heavy Seas Mold the Cape’s Coastline

Leaving Chatham, I headed north along the Cape’s backside. Violent northeasters relentlessly buffet this unprotected coastline, eating away its midsection while they feed shoals at Provincetown and Monomoy Island, a wildlife refuge south of Chatham. The shore near North Truro takes the worst battering, where Highland Light stares out to sea less than a hundred feet from the edge of an ever-retreating bluff.

“We just lost a piece 40 feet long and about 70 feet wide,” lightkeeper Thomas Branco said as we stood on the landslide-prone cliff. Below us waves lapped at gigantic hunks of clay that only weeks before had been part of his lawn. A few miles south, the ocean intrudes toward the headwaters of the Pamet River, almost severing the lower Cape.

“I don’t think I’ll ever see it, but someday Provincetown might be an island,” Branco said, smiling wanly. “And there’s nothing you can do about it. You can’t stop the ocean.”

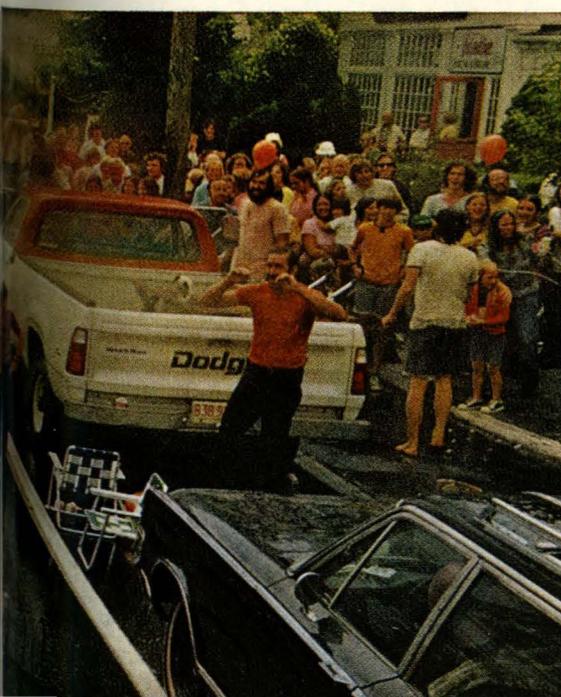
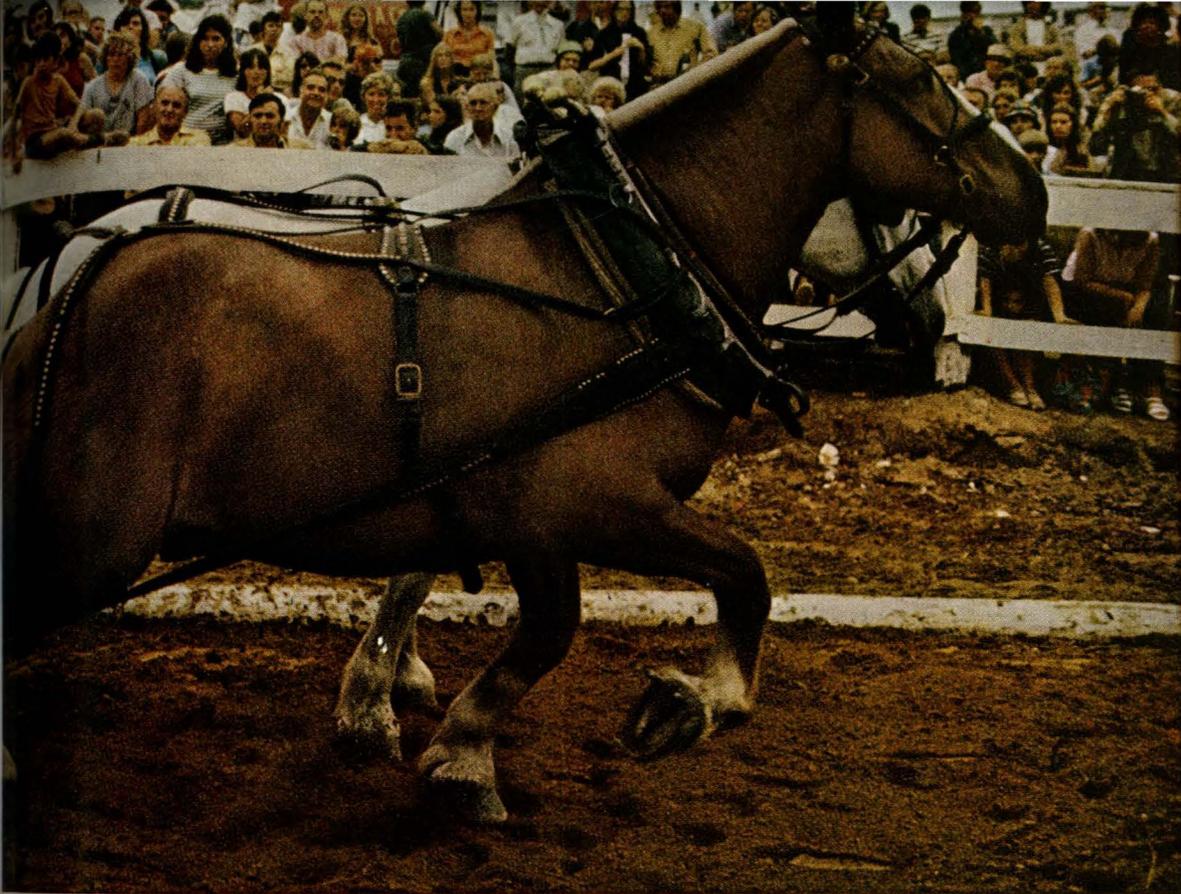
Unable to tame *(Continued on page 58)*



Tart-'n'-saucy rubies are whisked by conveyor belt to waiting trucks of the A. D. Makepeace Company, world's largest grower of cranberries. Bogs like this one near



Marstons Mills are flooded at harvest so the buoyant berries can be easily gathered by wooden booms. Much of Massachusetts' million-barrel-a-year crop comes from the Cape.



Summer horseplay: During the Barnstable County Fair in July (above), harness-straining teams of Belgian and Percheron workhorses haul sleds weighted with 10,000 pounds and more—urged on by teamsters' cries of "Hut! Hut!" and tourists' squeals of "Hi-ho, Silver, away-y-y!"

Horsing around without steeds, merry-makers at Chatham's annual Fourth of July parade (left) douse passersby and onlookers with bucketsful of seawater scooped from a fisherman's dory. Following the silly with the serious, a home-made banner urges the extension of coastal fishing control from 12 miles to 200 for foreign vessels, which are blamed for dwindling local catches.

From Sandwich to Provincetown, summer's mood continues unabated for three hectic months. Native Cape Codders may grouse about the onslaught of summer people, but many still hang out a room-for-rent shingle.

nature's fury, man is challenged by another threat to the Cape—growth. A boom in both summer and year-round homes made Cape Cod's Barnstable County the fastest growing county in Massachusetts. Its population rose 37.5 percent between 1960 and 1970. Today the Cape's permanent inhabitants number more than 124,000.

In Hyannis—named for an Indian sachem—older residents recall when the modest streets were paved with oystershell. But today a generation that courts tourism has made the Cape's largest village a circus of shopping centers, motels, and billboards—part resort, part suburban sprawl. Falmouth is close behind, with large motel complexes. Chatham retains its countrified isolation, but it, too, has begun to subdivide and build. Provincetown, swelled by summer boarders, must buy water from neighboring Truro.

Even in rural Sandwich, a housewife complains: "When we came here, you could see cows out back. Now it's a parking lot. So many people come here they destroy what they came to see. They cut down the trees and spread asphalt over the grass."

Most residents dislike the changes wrought by developers and newcomers. But Cape Codders traditionally respect the rights of the individual, and many are loathe to set rules for land they don't own.

Norman Cook, former head of the Cape Cod Planning and Economic Development Commission, argues for a construction slowdown and for cluster zoning that would set aside village greens for each subdivision.

"Today the Cape has about 100,000 acres of open land left," he says. "It will be full in ten years if things go along as they have. We don't have the water or land to support many more people, but they just won't believe our resources are finite."

National Seashore Buffers Growth

Whether or not the Cape restricts its growth, part of it will always remain—the 28,000 acres along the lower Cape that comprise Cape Cod National Seashore, administered by the National Park Service.

"Preservation and use—that's the Park Service in a nutshell," Seashore Superintendent Leslie Arnberger told me. Created in 1961, the seashore was "about 300 years too late for wilderness, but happily we've been able to save some open space."

Much of the open space is beach, although

numerous trails lace other natural areas, such as the White Cedar Swamp, Salt Pond, and Nauset Marsh, affording glimpses of ecological evolution, from marsh to swamp to forest.

Several million people visited the seashore last year, and the numbers are swelling, Mr. Arnberger said. "Traffic's the main problem. Once they get on the beaches, there's room enough." He added that the Park Service plans to expand its bicycle trails from Provincetown to Eastham, through the dunes of the lower Cape.

Sailors Doomed by Witch's Spells

One summer dusk I crossed those brooding dunes while winds whispered through the stubble of poverty grass. No wonder 18th-century Cape Codders feared this desolate stretch as the home of witch Goody Hallett!

I tried to picture the legendary "little old woman of Nauset Sea" dancing the nights away in scarlet shoes, wailing like the wind as she heaped ill fortune on wayfarers who dared intrude into her barren domain.

For nearly a century, according to the tales, Goody reigned over Eastham and the Cape's deadly shoals. She whipped up hurricanes and lured ships to disaster with a lantern hung from a whale's tail. Stoked with hot rum, the witch frolicked in the leviathan's stomach, dicing with the Devil for souls of doomed sailors.

Legend says the Devil eventually strangled his wicked consort, and years later, a pair of red shoes found in a dead whale's belly confirmed Goody's demise. But if Goody Hallett were alive today, I know just where she'd live—Provincetown.

"P'town," as some call it, is summertime haven for the occult, the gay, and the artistic, the serious and the sham. Many Cape Codders, Provincetowners included, label the town a "summer sideshow." Its central attraction is Commercial Street, crammed with wall-to-wall souvenir and craft shops, portrait studios, hot-dog stands, and waterfront apartments.

Sidewalks and doorways overflow with the varied profile of tourist America—shaggy youths, sprightly old folks, and camera-toting families dressed in Cape Cod T-shirts. People, people everywhere! They come to watch fudge being made, to poke at lobsters in tanks, to sit for sidewalk caricaturists. Awash in this summer flood, it's easy to overlook Provincetown's other faces.

A few yards from Commercial Street's crush stretches peaceful Cape Cod Bay, where sandpipers scatter before cartwheeling children, and yoga enthusiasts pretzel themselves in early-morning exercises. Here, more than 350 years ago, the Pilgrims made their first landfall in the New World before founding Plimoth Plantation, drafted the Mayflower Compact, and lay at anchor more than a month. A 252-foot-tall tower, the Pilgrim Monument, commemorates the events.

Here, too, whalers once berthed, as did playwright Eugene O'Neill, novelist John Dos Passos, and a number of modern artists. Today Provincetown is part art colony, part fishing village, part mecca for youth.

"It's very free here," explains Nancy Francke, an engaging young motel manager who left comfortable but routine New York suburbs for the charms of Provincetown.

"You don't have to be someone you're not . . . you can paint, sculpt, write, or just look at the water. Some may call that a cop-out, but when it makes you happy and life's so short, why not?"

Free-living to the hilt, P'town may delight or offend, but it cannot be ignored. It grasps at all who come here, asserting gaudiness and serenity, creative independence and a passion for the inane.

Stepping down from Commercial Street, I entered the Rainbow Shop to find myself walking on clouds (they're painted on the sky-blue floor). Rainbow colors filled the store.

"The rainbow is a big, wonderful symbol of hope and the unity of man," Thom Klika beamed as he painted a wall-size rainbow streaming from a cottony cloud. A tiny rainbow decal sparkled on one of his front teeth.

Rainbows are Thom's main motif, taking shape in watercolors, pillows, even jigsaw puzzles and stained glass. Rainbow greeting cards brighten dark days with such messages as "The soul would have no rainbows had the eyes no tears."

"Have a rainbow," Thom offered, handing me a colorful miniature, one of some 350,000 calling cards for happiness he has made and sent to people as far away as Europe and Japan. "Even if I wanted to stop making them, I couldn't—kids keep writing to me, asking for them. If I don't follow through, they'll think there's no Rainbow Man."

Leaving Thom to his joy-breeding work, I explored Provincetown's more relaxed west end, where a slim, gray-haired man

labored in his terraced herb and flower garden.

"It *was* something of a challenge to build it out of sand," he allowed modestly. Better known for verse than vegetables, this casually dressed gardener is Stanley Kunitz, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet who spends his summers in Provincetown.

"Why Provincetown?" I asked.

"It's one of the best working places I've ever encountered," he replied, pointing out the isolation of Provincetown's east and west ends from its cotton-candy center. "In the west end, you have few distractions. People respect the artist's privacy here."

In the similarly artistic east end lives Robert Motherwell, creator of bold, exciting collages and oils. Both he and Kunitz help support the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, a "congregation of talents." Here 20 young artists and writers spend October to May in work, discussion, and informal criticism. Talented resident poets and artists advise, with the help of guests such as writer John Cheever and poet Robert Lowell.

"It's a unique situation," Motherwell says. "Here the teachers pay the students." Young artists and writers get about \$150 a month.

Needy or otherwise, artists continue to seek out Provincetown. Motherwell explains: "It has the most beautiful light in America; the sea reflects all around. And it's always been a Bohemian place. I've summered in France, Italy, other places, but I always come back here in the end."

Fall Brings the Cranberry Harvest

As Provincetown's summer laughter faded into the solitude of autumn, I returned to Brewster to sample the Cape's major fall event—the cranberry harvest. Massachusetts raises nearly a million hundred-pound barrels of berries each year, and much of that crop comes from the Cape's sandy bogs.

One sparkling October day I accompanied a harvesting crew from the A. D. Makepeace Company, world's largest cranberry grower. Workers had already flooded the bog with about a foot of water, first step in harvesting.

Submerged, the deep-red berries shone among the leafy vines like millions of sunken rubies on green plush. Men waded ahead of me, pushing motorized harvesters that threshed the vines. The fruit bobbed to the surface in a vast red wake.

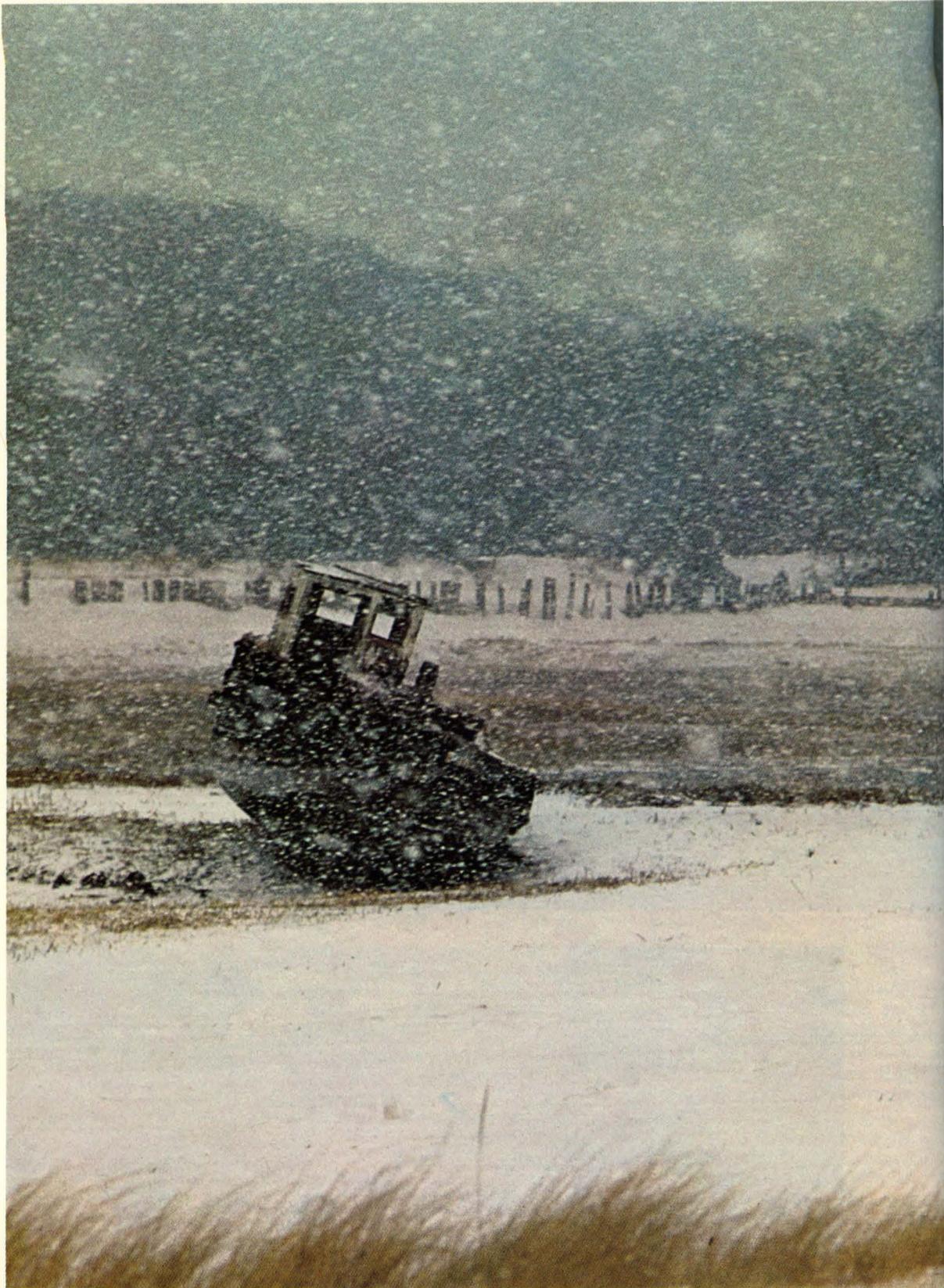
Other workers corralled the buoyant berries within a hinged (*Continued on page 64*)



Thumping “oompah” strains toot from Chatham’s gazebo (above) during Friday evening band concerts through July and August. Before an enthusiastic lawn-chair-and-blanket audience that often exceeds 5,000, the band reels out a repertoire of Sousa marches, Strauss waltzes, and beer-garden schmaltz—often punctuated by the rhythmic popping of children’s helium-filled balloons.

Aromatic steam makes the air itself mouth-watering at the annual August clam-bake of Yarmouth’s Bass River Rod and Gun Club (right). Fresh from the bake pit, blushing red lobsters and clams have been steamed to perfection with sausages, ears of corn, onions, and potatoes over hot rocks and seaweed. The abundant Cape Cod delicacies are swiftly annihilated by hundreds of salt-air-whetted appetites.





Beached for eternity, ghost ships ride out a snowstorm in a marsh at Wellfleet. The shades of many a long-dead seaman still haunt these windswept shores. And many a



spine has shuddered at tales of ghostly Goody Hallet, a Cape Cod witch who, local legend avers, liked to lure ships to perdition with a lantern hung from the tail of a whale.



Savoring the serenity of Cape Cod in autumn, a lone boatman cuts a

wooden boom (pages 54-55). A conveyor belt loaded the harvest into a waiting truck. As one truck filled, another—summoned by radio—took its place.

"The cranberries deteriorate fast after they're knocked off the vine," Lewis Flint, a harvester for 48 years, told me. "So we want to process them within 24 hours." That means long, hectic working days throughout September, October, and often into November. But like Chatham fishermen, cranberry pickers reap the scenic benefits of outdoor work, and harvest a sense of accomplishment.

"Today you can see what the whole year was for," said Chris Makepeace, the 26-year-old assistant foreman, as he raked in more berries. Chris may be the boss's son, but during harvest he still works in the bogs 14 hours a day, seven days a week. Lewis explained:

"It's like working on a farm. You've got to start at the bottom to learn. If Chris hadn't done that, no one would listen to him."

That seemed like a hint, so I slipped on a

pair of waders and joined those raking in the crop. It would have been monotonous work were it not for the camaraderie of the crew. All day long they shrugged off fatigue with jokes and songs, and laughed at the frogs that hopped like self-propelled checkers across the dense cranberry sea.

Autumn Glows With Quiet Beauty

Happily, I was not indentured to the harvesters' seven-day workweek, and could explore the whole sweep of autumn on the Cape, considered the best season by many residents. Here fall colors rarely blaze with fire, and the land lacks the craggy magnificence of, say, California's Big Sur. What emerges instead is a quiet, subtle beauty, often as desolate as it is fragile.

You can find it in Mashpee, where the Old Indian Church rises square and solid atop hand-hewn timbers, tawny and seamed as an old Indian's face. The autumn sun barely warms the aging shingles silvered by the



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solitary wake along mirror-smooth Pleasant Bay near the peninsula's "elbow."

briny air. Nearby, tired gravestones lean beneath the weight of many years. To me, one tablet's message memorialized the passing of summer as well as of human life:

THE ONCE-LOVED FORM, NOW COLD AND DEAD
EACH MOURNFUL THOUGHT EMPLOYS:
AND NATURE WEEPS HER COMFORTS FLED,
AND WITHERED ALL HER JOYS

Down the Cape from Mashpee, Hyannis Port lures lovers and beachcombers to its surf-flecked shores. They come to savor the salt air, to walk amid dunes rippling with beach grass, to share in the nostalgia of autumn on Cape Cod. They also come for a glimpse of three white-shingled, dark-shuttered homes overlooking Nantucket Sound—the "Kennedy compound."

For nearly fifty summers the Kennedys have romped and rested here, leaving their indelible mark on the Cape. Residents of nearby Hyannis recall seeing Rose Kennedy's young children, barefoot and dungareed,

lining up for double dips of homemade ice cream after the downtown movies. July Fourth always meant a boisterous weekend of parties and softball on the broad Kennedy lawn; touch football games used to pit Jack against Bobby as opposing quarterbacks. All just memories now.

As I dawdled down the autumn beach I recalled my early-morning walk on Nauset Beach the previous winter and all the year-round delights I'd seen, from Woods Hole to Provincetown. During my off-season odyssey, I'd discovered the Cape's deceptive beauty—simple yet profound, delicate but eternal.

I'd met some of its creative, independent, solitude-loving people, a people bound to the Cape by the lure of the land and the relaxed way of life. Best of all, I had glimpsed a bit of the Cape Cod magic that was here long before today's tourists or yesterday's Pilgrims. I left, hoping that progress and time's ever-rolling wheel would not rut too deeply the Cape I had come to know. □