



# MANX SEA FISHING

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## LONGLINES AND SHORELINES



### LONGLINE OR BAULK FISHING

**L**ONGLINE fishing for cod from boats called 'bault yawls' (a 'bault' was another name for a longline) was a centuries-old practice of Manx fishermen. This type of fishing was carried on from creeks and beaches as well as from harbours.

The original bault yawls were small versions of the ancient herring boats called 'scoutes', but with the mast set further forward. (See

Card 1 for details of the 'scoutes'). There were four benches for the rowers and the mast was attached to the second bench. There was no standing rigging. The square sail hung from a yard on the mast with one lower corner attached to a hook in the bow and the other corner made fast on the second bench next to the side. The old bault yawls were 'double ended', but from about 1850 they were changed and built with transom sterns. The open bault yawls were replaced by half decked ones about 1880–90, and in the later longline boats there was a cabin. When there

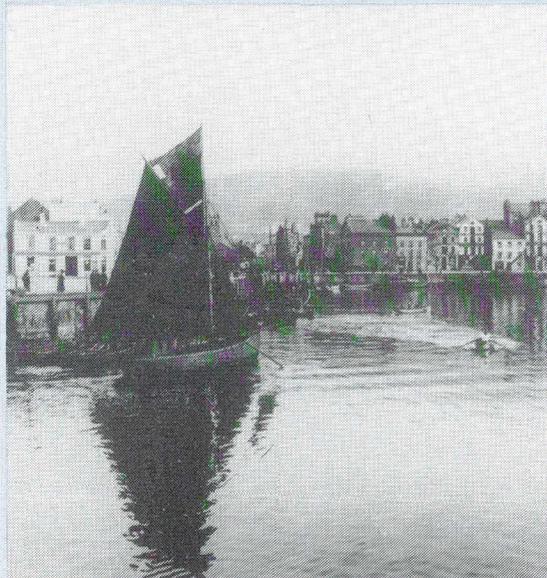
was not enough wind to use the sail the fishermen had to row miles to and from the fishing grounds.



Making a Buckie Pot.

### FISHING LINES

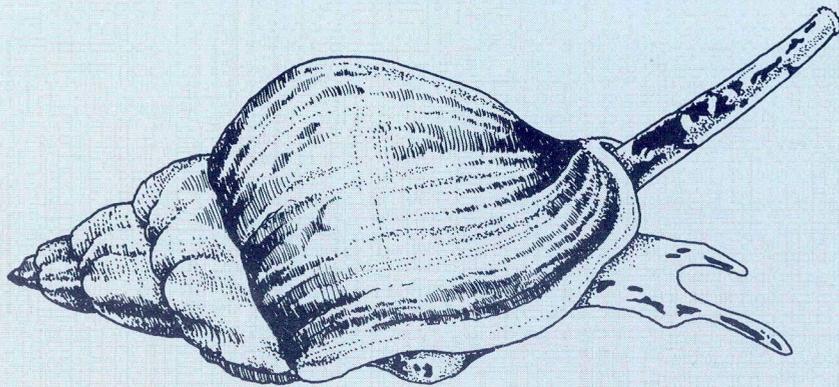
Longline fishing for cod was carried on from October to April. The cod lines got their name from their length – up to one mile. Men brought their own lines in the same way that pieces of net were brought by crew members for the herring fishing in earlier times. Hundreds of hooks were attached to the main line at intervals of about four metres by means of shorter pieces of line known as ‘snoods’ which were knotted to the main line by a clove hitch. In early times the ‘snoods’ were made of horsehair, in later times, of tarred linen thread. The length of the snoods was about a metre, or from the ear to finger tips with the arm extended. The ‘snoods’ were thinner than the main line. The lines were sunk by means of big ballast stones. In later times two anchors of the size used in rowing boats came to be used instead of stones and this reduced the amount of heaving the fishermen had to do when hauling in the lines.



An Undecked Boat Being Rowed into Ramsey.

### BAIT

The bait used was usually whelks, or ‘buckies’ as they were known locally. It was possible to use other bait such as sand eels, lugworms, scallops or queenies, but whelks were found to be the most practical. The whelks had first to be trapped using special cages of willow. Fishermen travelled long distances to places where willows grew and selected the right time of year when the twigs would be pliable. Fishermen from the north of the Island got their supply of willow from the Curraghs. In other parts of the Island there were special ‘osier gardens’ where willows were grown for the purpose. The cages were made on a special stand, standing on three legs with cup-hooks attached. The finished whelk cage had a curved shape rather like an old-fashioned ink well so that the whelks could not escape once they entered. The buckie pots were tarred before use. Crab-meat or a piece of dogfish was dropped in the pot to attract the whelks and a piece of iron-stone or lead used to sink it. The buckie pots were marked by a rope with a cork on and usually collected on the way home from fishing. Longline fishermen had a special routine for breaking the whelk shells with a mallet and baiting the hooks. Lines had to be untangled, cleared and baited every day, and also re-coiled in a special way after baiting. The container for the baited lines was usually a wooden tray, but Ramsey longliners used a tarred potato basket.



A Buckie.

## FISHING MARKS

Fishing marks were a means of fixing the position of what was found to be a good fishing spot so that it could be found again in the future. Fishermen could do this fairly accurately by lining up two objects on land in one direction and two objects in another direction. The spot was therefore where two lines intersected. They might use a prominent object like Corrins Tower on Peel Hill, the Round Tower in Peel Castle, a church steeple or the summit of a hill. A prominent farmhouse might be seen to be in line with a particular feature on a hill behind in one direction and a certain farm lane in line with, say, the outside top of Cronk ny Arrey Laa.

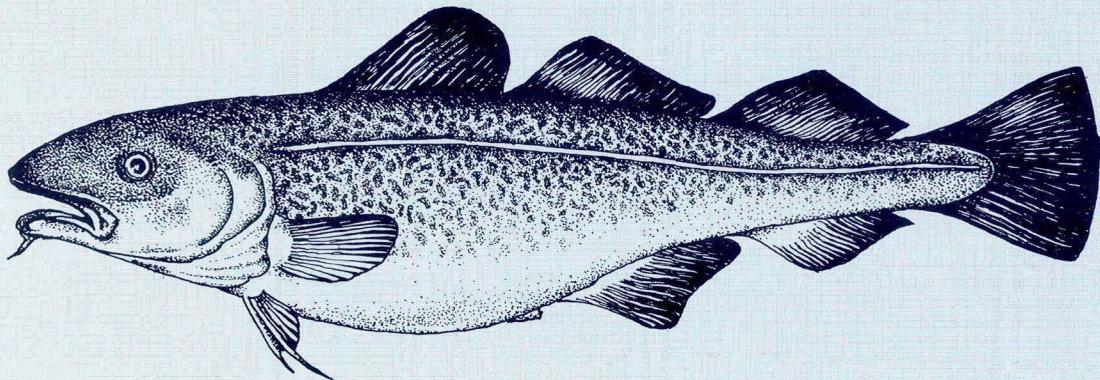
Longline and other fishermen who fished by day would have lists of fishing marks, each mark having its own name and set of reference points. Some old notebooks kept by the fishermen with sets of fishing marks still exist. More often the information was just memorised.

In earlier times the longlines would be left lying all night, but as the number of trawlers fishing around the Island increased and lines were destroyed, day fishing only became the rule.

## THE SEASONS

There were two parts to the cod fishing season (i) 'Low sea' fishing from September to December, when the baulk yawls fished 4 to 5 miles offshore. A baulk yawl would have a crew of 4 or 5, each man supplied a line with about 300 hooks on (2) the 'Banks fishing' or 'Deep Sea Fishing' followed, ending in May. In the colder months the cod would be in deeper water and it was also during the spring months that the cod moved out to their spawning ground. Ramsey longliners had to go halfway to Whitehaven or further at this time of year. Larger boats became the rule for this fishing, operating at least 10 to 15 miles offshore. These larger boats used seven or eight lines, each having up to 500 hooks. The finest cod were caught in February and March.

Cod fishing was more important in the past than in recent times. A Manx newspaper article of February 1846 describes the spring catch as follows: "The cod fishing off the S.E. coast of the Island has been very successful this week. Yesterday the market place [at Douglas] and quays were covered with fish which appeared of excellent quality".



A Cod.

## HARDSHIPS

The lives of longline fishermen were very hard. They had to dress for handling wet lines and wet fish. Oilskins were worn with plenty of clothes underneath to try and keep out the winter cold. The oilskins had to be well greased and oiled to keep them waterproof. We even hear of the fishermen coating their own bodies in goose grease to counteract the winter cold. Fishermen's lives were ruled by weather and tides. Longliners would go out as early as 3 a.m. according to the tide. The tides had also to be watched for coming in, and it was important to have a favourable wind behind the loaded boat. Sudden storms and snow showers were common in the winter months. A prolonged period of stormy weather meant that the boats could not leave harbour and there were no earnings (see document H) Baiting the hooks was a long and tedious job and bait more than two days old was useless for attracting fish. More than a century ago the lives of longline fishermen were being described as a form of slavery, yet sons continued to follow their fathers on the baulk yawls. Long line fishing ceased at Peel about 1930, but survived until later at Ramsey.

Longline fishermen might go herring fishing in summer, or go to the Ramsey mackerel fishing. Skate fishing was an alternative in the autumn. Herring, especially rotten ones,

were used as bait for skate. The skate fishing was carried on towards Solway and Whitehaven and men might be away from home for three or four weeks.

## SHORELINES

Shorter versions of the longlines were used from the shore, and these shore lines were generally made from horsehair. Horsehair lines when properly made lasted for generations, being passed from father to son. An old law of 1629 laid down the punishment for "whosoever shall be found or detected to pull Horse Tayles" and would be directed at those who removed horse hair from others' colts to make fishing lines. Shorelines were used especially on the sandy beaches of the northern parishes and were known there as "gorsh-tags". Peel fishermen spoke of "laying a greie" when they meant laying a shoreline. The shoreline would be laid as the tide was coming in and left until it had gone out. A boy was often left in charge of the line to scare off gulls when they tried to take the bait. The line would be stretched between two stakes or two rocks.

Lugworms were often used for bait on shorelines because it was possible to dig enough of these to bait the shorter lines. There would be about 120 hooks on the shore line. Sheep's bladders were often attached as markers.



At Work on a Longline Boat – Breaking Whelk Shells, Baiting Hooks and Coiling the Lines.  
At the stern are two 'Mollags' and a Buckie Pot.