



Exploration Guide to the Exhibits

Welcome to The Whale Museum! We hope you enjoy your visit today. To use this guide, look for the numbered icons in the exhibits. Refer to this guide for more information about each exhibit.

To begin, please turn left while exiting the Gift Shop into the Downstairs Exhibit Gallery.



Downstairs Exhibit Gallery



Recent Sightings

This map depicts the area surrounding the islands, collectively known as the Salish Sea. We use it to mark recent sightings of marine mammals. Notice the dotted blue line in the center - that is the border between the U.S and Canada, a big barrier for humans, but not for the animals! This makes a partnership between our two countries very important for the health of the ecosystem.



Sooke (L-112)

Meet Sooke, a three-year-old orca from L Pod. Orcas' life cycles are similar to ours, and females can live well into their 80s and 90s. Sooke would have been just out of her infancy when she died. The Whale Museum was honored to receive her skeleton for this exhibit. She is a reminder that all of nature is interrelated in complicated ways and we should do a better job of anticipating and mitigating our impacts.



Stewardship Wall

One of the museum's goals is to promote the recovery of the Southern Residents, an endangered population of orcas. Orcas live all over the world, but they are divided into ecotypes, or separate groups, which do not have the same diet or interbreed, even if they live in the same area. "Resident" refers to the type of orca that eats fish. Speaking of orcas, did you know The Whale Museum was involved in the efforts to rescue Springer, a Northern Resident Orca? Stop here to watch a short (5min) video about Springer's inspiring story.



Gray Whales and Baleen

The skull below you is from a one-year-old male gray whale fondly nicknamed "Stinky Bill." He is the star of a popular program in which students articulate his bones and discover his cause of death. Gray whales are baleen whales. Although baleen is all made from the same material, keratin, and has similar functions, it can vary wildly in appearance from species to species. Look closely at the baleen on exhibit. What purpose might the differences between them serve?



Fabric of the Salish Sea

Whales are one part of a much larger ecosystem that is interconnected and woven together. Each part behaves a little differently, but depends on all the other parts. Whales are especially susceptible to changes because they are at the top of the food chain and rely on precise balances and relationships for them to have enough to eat. On which parts of the environment do we rely as humans?



Marine Debris and Pollution

This trash is a reminder to us that the Salish Sea is not as pristine as it may appear on the surface and that everything we do affects the marine environment. Do you know where your trash goes? Make a goal to find out when you get home.



Watching Whales in the Wild

Whale watching is an incredible experience, and we encourage you to try to see whales. Be Whale Wise by making informed and responsible choices. Please do your part to help them recover and thrive.



When you're ready to continue the tour, go through the doorway, turn right, and head up the stairs to the Exhibit Hall. Please be sure to maintain Social Distancing on the stairs and check to see if they are clear before proceeding.

Upstairs Exhibit Hall



Welcome to the Salish Sea

The Salish Sea is the official name encompassing all of the inland waters of Washington and British Columbia. It was named to honor the Coast Salish, a group of linguistically related native peoples who were the original inhabitants of the area.



What is a Whale?

Often we use the word “whale” interchangeably with “cetacean,” which is a suborder of animals that includes whales, dolphins, and porpoises. These three groups of animals are closely related and share a history of going from land mammal to fully aquatic.



Teeth and Baleen

The biggest difference between baleen and toothed whales is how they eat. Scientists think that originally all whales had teeth and that baleen slowly developed to take advantage of the swarms of plankton filling the ocean. Developing baleen whales initially form tooth buds which disappear and baleen grows instead.



Intelligence

How do you measure intelligence, especially when it developed separately from your own and is therefore fundamentally different? Scientists have been wrestling with that question for years. Some methods they use include the relative size of the brain and the presence of certain structures and functions.



Skeletal Similarities

Whales are mammals, just like us, and our bodies have a lot in common. What might our shared characteristics say about how we live our lives?



Gray Whales

This exhibit is made entirely of recycled furniture. Creativity is needed for us to better care for the environment, and it also provides ways for laypeople to assist scientists in the protection of the planet, like the poem featured in this exhibit.



Lime Kiln Point State Park

Located on the west side of San Juan Island, about a 20 minute drive from Friday Harbor, Lime Kiln Point State Park is one of the best places in the world to see whales from shore. The replica of the lighthouse at the park, to your right, is the next stop on your tour.



Whale Research

For a long time the only way whales were studied was by performing necropsies after they died. Scientists only started studying their behavior relatively recently. Studying live whale behavior is challenging and requires new methods and technologies, but without it many defining characteristics about whales would be unknown, like the social nature of many cetaceans.



Pinnipeds

“Pinniped” is the name for the group of animals that includes seals, sea lions, and walruses. The Salish Sea has healthy populations of seals and sea lions. One way to tell the difference between seals and sea lions is that seals move like caterpillars on land, but sea lions can rotate their back flippers forward and walk.



Minkes and Humpbacks

Minkes and humpbacks are examples of small and mid-sized baleen whales, respectively. The skeleton and model on display are only calves!



Harbor and Dall's Porpoises

Fully grown, these frequently-seen animals are still only about the size of an orca calf. Since they are both common and near the top of the food chain, their health can tell us a lot about the health of the region.



Dolphins vs. Porpoises

Dolphins and porpoises look very similar, which may raise questions about how scientists put animals into different groups. Scientists use physical characteristics, like the shape of teeth, to separate animal groups, but they also use ancestry. Some characteristics may develop independently and animals end up looking similar even though they are not closely related.



Orcas or Killer Whales

This is the skeleton of Moclips (L-8), an adult male from the Southern Resident Community of orcas. Compare his size to the gray whale yearling hanging next to him. This is a good illustration of the dramatic size difference between baleen and toothed whales.



Taku (K-1)

Thanks to researchers learning to individually identify orcas on sight, tracking methods like those used in the story of Taku are no longer necessary. Researchers use saddle patches and fin markings to identify specific killer whales. The saddle patch is the light marking just behind the dorsal fin, and it is unique on both sides of every whale, like a fingerprint.



Genealogy

This board is constantly updated as whales are born and die. This family tree not only shows relationships between whales, but also the different patterns in which the whales travel, since Resident orcas stay with their mothers their whole lives. We know a whale has died if we do not see it with its family anymore.



After finishing at the Genealogy Board you'll see two doors to your left - the far door leads to Exhibit #23, the other to our Kid's Room. Both will lead you to Exhibit #24.

Kid's Room - Here in the Kid's Room you'll find some great short videos that are just the right length and content for our younger visitors. We Also have some take-home coloring/ activity sheets so you can bring some San Juan Island marine life home with you!



Human Relationship

Whales evoke a variety of emotions in people and have done so for centuries. How humans feel about whales often informs how we treat them, but we don't know how whales feel about us. What do you think whales would say to us if they had the chance?



Salmon

Did you know that even trees need salmon? Many animals throughout the food chain, including fish, mammals, and birds, all rely on salmon as part of their diet, and trees are made stronger by the nutrients from their decomposing bodies. A healthy salmon population is essential for a healthy ecosystem.



Sonic Sea

Sonic Sea is an awarding winning documentary about the dangers of man-made ocean noise on the health of our planet's marine life. This 20-min short cut of the film will introduce you to some of the factors that affect the creatures not only here in the Salish Sea, but oceans the world over.



Endangered Orcas

Orcas are at the top of the food chain. This means that they are a good indicator of the health of the region, since they rely on the proper functioning of many creatures lower than them. By this indicator, our region is struggling. Any extinction of a species is an enormous loss to our planet.



**When you're all done upstairs, please head back down to the Entrance/Gift Shop
Please be sure to maintain Social Distancing on the stairs and check to see if they are clear before proceeding.**

We are glad you chose to visit The Whale Museum!
Please feel free to explore as long as you like and ask us questions.
We hope you enjoyed your visit today and that you will be stewards for the Salish Sea ecosystem.

There are many things you can do to help the Southern Resident orcas as well as the other fascinating animals found here:

- Reduce, reuse, recycle
- Clean up a beach
- Limit use of water and electricity
- Use biodegradable cleaning products
- Support sustainable fisheries
- Spread the word!

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask our staff.
Thank you so much for visiting.

Visit us online at www.whalemuseum.org
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Follow us on Twitter@TheWhaleMuseum

Adopt an Orca
Get to know each individual in the Southern Resident Community.
Be a part of helping to save these whales for future generations.
Museum membership included.

