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### Whale carcass docks in Seward

Necropsy scheduled to determine whether collision killed animal

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A work crew pulls away from a 25- to 30-foot whale impaled on the bow of the Carnival Cruise Lines ship Summit after helping attach a tow line to the carcass Aug. 19, 2006 in Seward. Officials did not know whether a collision with the ship killed the whale or if it was already dead when the ship snagged it. The crew felt nothing.

Photos courtesy of CAROL GRISWOLD

By TOM KIZZIA  
Anchorage Daily News

A cruise ship pulled into port Saturday in Seward with a dead whale pinned to its bow. Federal officials are investigating but say it does not appear the ship's operators did anything wrong.

The crew of the towering 2,000-passenger ship Summit said they were surprised to discover they had snagged a whale somewhere after leaving Disenchantment Bay near Yakutat. They felt no bump during their voyage, a company spokesman said.

The whale, estimated to be 25 to 30 feet long, was spotted by longshoremen after the vessel was tied up at the Seward dock, according to federal investigators.

The whale was tentatively identified as a humpback. It was towed by a tugboat Saturday afternoon to a beach in nearby Thumb Cove. A necropsy has been scheduled for today to help determine whether the whale was struck by the Summit or was already dead and floating when it was scooped up by the ship.

The whale was dangling on the bulbous bow that protrudes from the ship's hull below the waterline, said Scott Adams, a Seward-based enforcement officer with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"We have no knowledge if it struck this vessel or another vessel or just died of some genetic issue," Adams said. "It doesn't look like the result of any predatory attack."

Humpback whales are an endangered species protected under several federal laws, said Barbara Mahoney, an Alaska marine mammal specialist with the National Marine Fisheries Service.

At least two have been struck and killed by tour boats in Glacier Bay National Park in the past decade, she said. But a boat crew that is not pursuing or harassing whales, and that reports any accident, is not likely to suffer repercussions, federal officials said.

"These boats are big enough that they don't even feel a bump," Mahoney said.

The Summit is a 91,000-ton ship the length of three football fields -- with several end zones thrown in. It is owned by Celebrity Cruises, which advertises that passengers on its Alaska voyages will encounter "untamed wildlife" and "unspoiled ports of call."

Celebrity spokesman Michael Sheehan said the company notified federal and state agencies and the Seward police after discovering the whale at the dock. He called the chance of striking a healthy whale and then perfectly balancing the carcass on the ship's bow "exceedingly unlikely."

The timing of the incident is potentially awkward, with a statewide vote in Tuesday's primary on a measure that would impose taxes and new regulations on the cruise industry. The industry has mounted an expensive campaign to oppose the measure.

Gershon Cohen, a sponsor of the proposal, said the measure wouldn't necessarily have prevented a collision between ship and whale -- though an observer that ships would be required to carry might be a help, he said.

He cited a related marine mammal concern -- a precipitous drop in the seal population in Yakutat's Disenchantment Bay, where the Summit stopped to see the calving Hubbard Glacier before heading to Seward. The fast-moving glacier has drawn many ships to a seal-pupping area in recent years, he said.

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