

FISHING IN POUCH COVE

*From an article written by Andrew H. Brown
published in National Geographic Magazine, June, 1949*

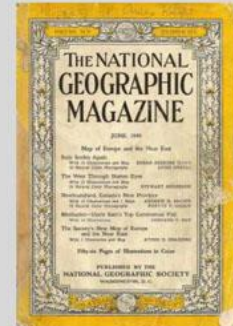
One day I met Harry Nosworthy, who had been fisherman and schoolteacher. Now he was an assistant magistrate.

"Go to Pouch Cove," he advised, "It's only 15 miles from St. John's. Stay with my mother and father." With proper pride he added, "I was born there. It's the best fishing village in the country."

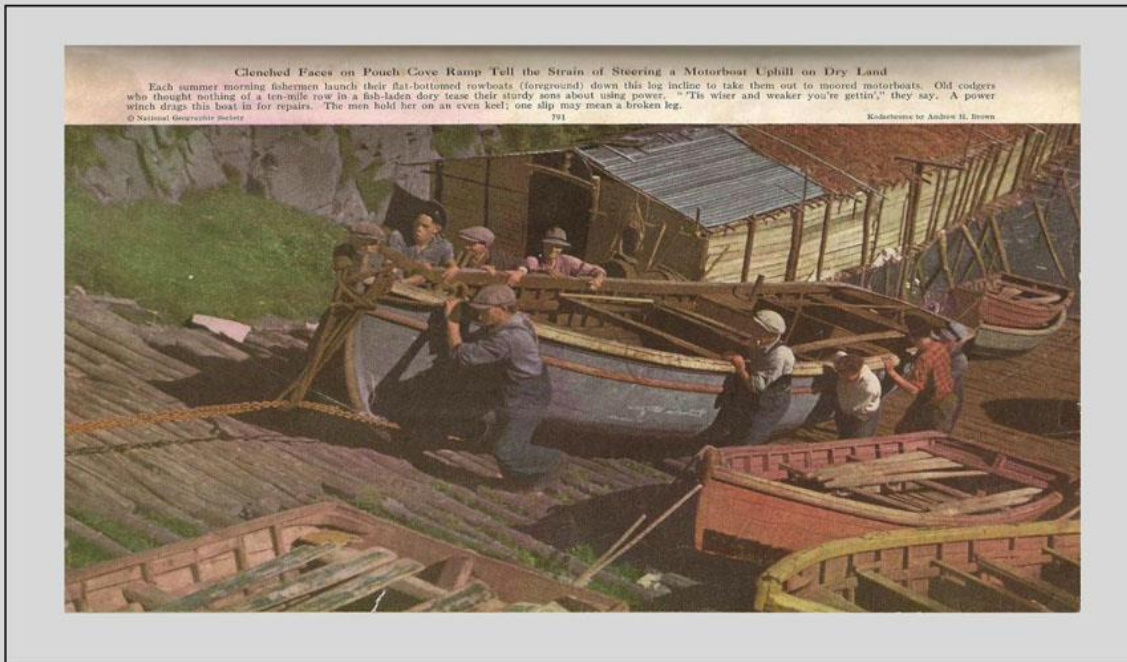
When I got to Pouch Cove, John and Emma Nosworthy took me warmly into the family. Sturdy, jolly Emma arranged a dawn fishing trip with cousin Billie Nosworthy. For me she hauled out Harry's fishing suit and boots, his wool cap, hand line and shoulder bag.

Up long before the sun next day, I gobbled the breakfast Emma had left out – sandwiches, sweet "excursion biscuit" and raspberry preserves. I picked up my gear and trotted across the street to Billie Nosworthy's.

Beside Billie, our crew included his brother Joe and a young boy, Matt. We went slapping out to sea as the rising sun flushed scattered clouds.



National Geographic courtesy of Garry Knight.



At a certain spot Billie cut the engine and dropped anchor. He threaded my hook with squid to show me how. We heaved over our lines. Bottom was in thirty fathoms. We pulled the hooks just off it.

Soon Billie, Joe, and Matt were yanking fish aboard every few moments. There was a knack to the business. It was a quarter of an hour before I took my first brown-backed, yellow-eyed prize.

The fishing seemed good to me, but the men said it was slow. Yet the storage bins steadily filled with flopping cod.

At noon Billie told Matt to start the fish stew. ("Chowder" is a word I never heard in Newfoundland.) The boy diced pork, scrubbed and cubed potatoes and cut up onions. Joe cleaned a plump three-pound fish.

Billie produced a flat piece of cast iron with up-curved edges and set it firmly across the top of the middle fish bin. With a jackknife he shaved a birch chunk into splinter and overlaid this kindling with heavier wood. He splashed a cupful of gasoline over all, tossed in a match and - poof! - there was a blazing fire.

The black, broad-bottomed tea "kettle" was set to boil. The iron stew pot joined it on the flames, at first with just the pork cubes set to sizzle to make crisp, brown "crunchin's" for the stew. When the fat back was ready, Billie tumbled fish, potatoes and onions together into the pot. He tossed tea into the steaming kettle - and everyone fished listlessly, eyes on the cooking food.

Billie had to right the heeling pot and kettle whenever a big wave struck, but no coals fell from the fire.

When the stew was ready, Joe cut birchwood forks. The pot was lifted from the flames, and everyone reached in for morsels. I took two bites. The first was delicious, the second flat and savorless. I could hardly force it down. Then, with a body blow, nausea struck. I had felt queasy earlier, but this was all-out seasickness.

Until we turned the point into the cove, I took no more interest in anything.

"It's too bad she was so lippy," said Billie sympathetically. "If it had only been civil, you'd have more fish and a better time."

At rugged Pouch Cove shores are so steep and high that the fish must be tossed from the boats to a shelf-like platform just overhead. From that level the men throw them up one, two, or even three more "steps" to the stages, shacks where they are prepared for "making."

Spidery stages, built of spruce poles and slats are tough enough to withstand roaring gales and crashing surf.



From Open Boat to Cleaning Shed, Cod Climb Pouch Cove Cliffs, Platform by Platform
When the vessel is in, fishermen stand on cliffs above, like miners on open benches or ladders in a backfill, and pitched the heavy cod from step to step. Though the structure looks flimsy, its steel girders, main beam and cap run after rear. Rode down through the clear water. Business stand on the feet of their ramp (page 181).



E. Fred Miller

"It's Grand to Come Home in the Evenin' with a Boatful of Fine Fat Fish!"
 These men pitch their catch ashore with single-tined forks which they call "pews." Pronging cod is good exercise for the back, they say, when urging reluctant sons to stop play and get to work.

Billie tied his boat to the foot of the first step. With a single-pronged fork called a "pew" he flipped the cod up to the lower platform. Matt pitched them on up to the stage.

Joe sent for his wife and another woman. At a table in the stage one of the women split the fish open from gills to vent and cut around the heads. Her companion took the cod, ripped out the entrails, and dropped the precious livers into a tub. Against the table edge she snapped off the heads. Joe removed the spines with two deft cuts.

In wheelless two-man barrows they carried the fish to a shed. There Joe's wife laid them away, spreading salt thickly between layers. As weather and curing space allowed, they would wash the fish, take them to the drying flakes (racks of board or boughs) and spread them out in the sun and breeze to "make."

Back at Emma Nosworthy's I washed the fish slime from my hands and the caked sea salt from my face. It had been a good day.

At Joe's house we had tea to celebrate my baptism on the fishing grounds. Legs crossed and rough hands folded on knees, the men yarned between gulps of the strong brew.



E. Fred Miller

Cod Are Seldom Out of Sight or Scent Alongshore; These Drying Fish "Thatch" a Roof
 In the stage below, the cod have been cleaned, split, beheaded, and salted down. Now they are spread on flakes (boughs of spruce or wood racks) to cure. Ordinarily the entire family joins in this operation. They turn the fish twice a day for about a week and rush them to cover if it rains.



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Bottoms Up at Petty Harbour Means the God Have Gone and Winter Is Coming. Fishing craft have been overturned by gales, and the boats are being used as rafts. The owner, having secured the raft, goes to work with hammer and saw to stop a leak in the rotting hull.

Most Newfoundland fishing boats are powered with single two-cylinder gasoline engines built in the home island. Knowledge of boatbuilding comes from father to son; many fishermen fabricate their own. Thirty-seven warrenting ships were completed in Newfoundland in 1944.

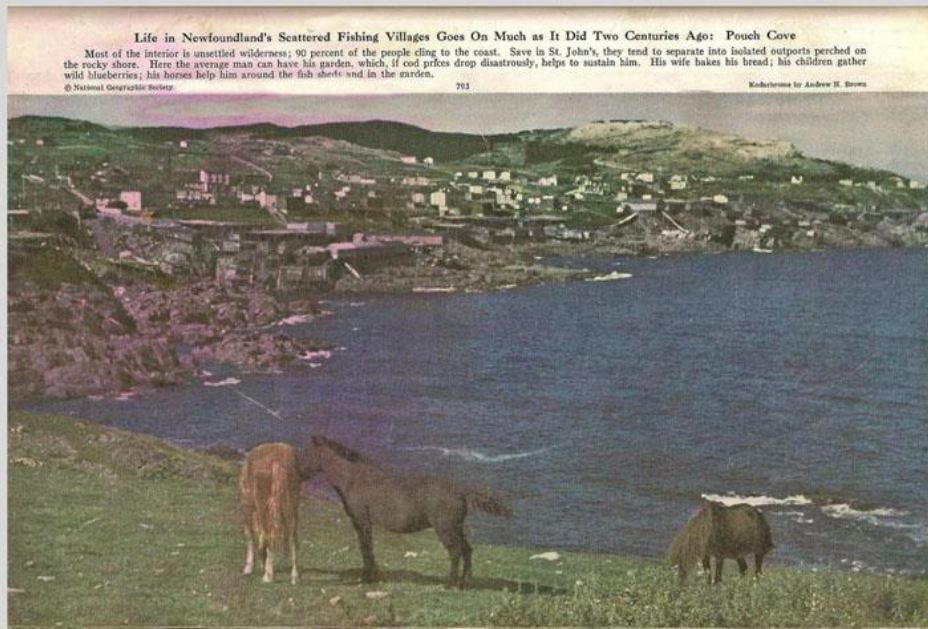
A Wooden Archer Appears as Impossible as a London Flint, but It Works. A close glimpse reveals a hidden cap in hand. Most craftsmen dig into the bottom and hold a small lead even in rough seas. Newfoundlanders call this homemade anchor a "killa."

The rough and rugged ship arrives at extended use of such primitive makeshift equipment declines. The ship's supply merchant, who carries the kilt, never all leaves the craft. The fishermen pay all the cost of fish. When the value of his lot exceeds the cost of outfit, he puts ash in his pocket.



Newfoundlanders dearly love a story. They spin tales in language as full of flavor as their smoked salmon.

They speak of "bilin' the kittle" over a fire of "blasty boughs." Both phrases ring as familiar to the island folk as "double play" to a Yankee. Blasty boughs are dried branches of fir or spruce trees. If the needles have crisped to a bright red-brown, they burn with a gay snapping, like the explosions of tiny firecrackers.



Life in Newfoundland's Scattered Fishing Villages Goes On Much as It Did Two Centuries Ago: Pouch Cove. Most of the interior is unsettled wilderness; 90 percent of the people cling to the coast. Save in St. John's, they tend to separate into isolated outposts perched on the rocky shore. Here the average man can have his garden, which, if cod prices drop disastrously, helps to sustain him. His wife bakes his bread; his children gather wild blueberries; his horses help him around the fish sheds and in the garden.

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