

# Basic Detail Report

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**00050198**

**Title**

Untitled [Illustration from The Whalers]

**Date**

1989

**Primary Maker**

Bronwyn Maree Bancroft

**Medium**

Acrylic on paper

**Dimensions**

Image: 500 x 700 mm

**Name**

Painting

**History**

First published in 'The Nearest the White Man Gets' published by Hale & Iremonger in 1989, this story comes directly from an oral storytelling tradition and tells of the life and times of Percy Mumbulla's seafaring uncle Brierly. It is a story of the orca, the largest of the dolphin family. Known as killer whales, the orcas' relationship with the Indigenous whalers of Twofold Bay on the New South Wales south coast has become legendary. In the early years of Eden whaling in the 1840s, there were reportedly around 50 killer whales spread through three main pods. All three pods cooperated together - one pod stationed far out to sea would drive whales in towards the coast, another pod would attack the whale and the third would be stationed ahead of the whale in case it broke loose. Each year for more than a century on Australia's far south-east coast, the killer whales would return to Eden from their Antarctic summer and lie in wait. Their prey were the baleen whales journeying to and from their breeding grounds hundreds of kilometres up the coast. Three generations of the Davidson family worked with the killer whales, which often led the whalers out to sea to join in the hunts. A few members of the pod of orcas would swim right into the mouth of the Kiah River where the Davidsons had their two isolated houses on the opposite side of the bay from the township of Eden. They would then breach or thrash their tails on the water surface until the whalers emerged and rowed their boats out to meet them. The Davidsons called this behaviour 'flop-tailing'. No other Eden whalers were ever visited in this manner. On cloudy moonless nights, the Davidson crews would follow the glowing bioluminescent trails of the orcas which would light up the sea. When the whale was dead, the Davidsons would simply row home after tying an anchor and small buoy to it, leaving first spoils to the killers. Just like orcas elsewhere in the world, the Eden killers only ate the tongue and lips and discarded the rest. After a few days the whale would float to the surface and the Eden whalers would

row out and tow the remains for trying out at their tiny whaling station on the banks of the Kiah River in Twofold bay. The whalers called this arrangement 'the law of the tongue' and as a result, far less of the whale was wasted than if the orcas had hunted alone. The skeleton of Old Tom, the last of the Eden killer whales is preserved to this day in the Eden Killer Whale Museum and bears testament to the extraordinary tales told about him. Tom's death in 1930 brought the 100 year period of whaling in Eden to a close. Bancroft's illustrations vividly bring the story to life. The book was Short-Listed by the Children's Book Council of Australia.