
The Last Logbook of the *Orca II*

The building blocks of archaeology are the artifacts made or modified by humans. Seldom, however, do such artifacts of past behavior arrive in the present unaffected by time and the host of changes time carries with it. This is as true—and in many cases much more so—for an artifact created just forty years ago as it is for a stone tool fashioned millions of years ago. The actual artifacts from a Hollywood movie seldom survive as long as the celluloid movie in which the artifacts appear.

Major artifacts and support vessels from the filming of the 1975 Hollywood blockbuster film *Jaws* were purchased after the production by a local boat captain and taken to a remote stretch of shoreline opposite the small fishing village of Menemsha on the island of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. Key among these items used in the movie was the fiberglass copy of the fishing boat *Orca*. This copy, called *Orca II*, remained on the shoreline for decades, becoming the object of increasingly brazen predation by rabid fans of the movie, who eventually stripped the site to near non-existence. The local captain and his wife who originally purchased the movie remnants tried for decades to preserve the artifacts but in 2005 eventually removed the remaining visible segments of the hull of *Orca II* to be recycled as small souvenirs of the movie. What survives *in situ* from the original movie production is almost completely covered by sand or shallow water, as recorded during a survey in May 2017.

These represent the final stages in the archaeological transformation of a Hollywood icon. *Note: citations from Internet fan sites are direct, uncorrected quotes and contain offensive language.*

The motion picture *Jaws*, filmed largely on the island of Martha's Vineyard in the summer of 1974 and released to an almost unprecedented media frenzy in the summer of 1975, still exerts an outsized influence on American popular culture nearly half a century later. That significance was not immediately apparent. Peter Benchley, author of the best-selling novel that became the basis for the film, wrote in 2001 that none of those involved in the film project "knew that we were involved in the birth of a phenomenon that would retain a strange resonance in the culture for a *quarter of a century* . . . and in the worldwide debut of a director [Steven Spielberg] who would go on to influence the film industry like no other."¹ Carl Gottlieb, who both co-wrote the screenplay and acted in the film, subsequently wrote a best-selling account of the making of the movie and noted that "Jaws made film history as the highest-grossing movie of all time, and established a business model and release pattern for large-scale summer movies that persists to this day."²

The decision by director Spielberg to film the movie's central conflict—between an obsessed shark hunter named Quint, played by English actor Robert Shaw, and a great white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*)—with a mechanical shark in actual waters required both specific location attributes and a diverse fleet of watercraft. The location attributes required an island in the northeastern United States surrounded by sheltered, shallow waters and a sandy bottom that was in close proximity to support areas for a large film unit and cast, one that included an array of shore locations to serve as stand-ins for the towns and beaches of a fictional island called Amity. The variety of watercraft included an actual fishing vessel that would be converted for on-screen work as Quint's shark-hunting fishing boat called *Orca*, as well as a small fleet of waterside support vessels to enable the filming and to operate and maintain what became several versions of a mechanical shark.

The film's producers eventually found their location on the island of Martha's Vineyard off the coast of Cape Cod. A temporary mock-up of a Hollywood version of Quint's fisherman's shanty was erected at the head of the small and picturesque fishing village of Menemsha on the southwestern corner of the island, and local waterman Captain Lynn Murphy and his wife Susan were hired to drive the various support vessels throughout the production.

The key vessels required for filming, as Carl Gottlieb writes, were "a submersible platform with a track, on which rode a crane-like attachment with a bucket-pivot on top [to hold and operate the mechanical shark; and] a model of a fishing boat with flotation barrels supporting a realistic superstructure."³ In addition the production required an actual fishing boat, enhanced to appear even more "nautical" for a general movie audience, that would serve as the original to a copy used for stunts. Various other shuttle and support boats included a large tugboat out of Vineyard Haven called *Whitefoot*; a fleet of small boats to be used in a scene depicting an armada of local fishermen out to hunt the shark and including a small fishing boat skippered by a character named Ben Gardner (played by a local and legendary islander by the name of Craig Kingsbury; and perhaps most critically, additional support barges for the mechanical shark, half a dozen inflatable runabouts, and a large floating camera and miniature studio barge eventually dubbed the *SS Garage Sale*.

The actual fishing boat was found in a shipyard near Marblehead, Massachusetts. According to Gottlieb, this was "a forty-two-foot Nova Scotia lobster boat named *Warlock*."⁴ This all-white vessel, a type derived from the Cape Islander lobster boats designed on Cape Sable Island off the southern coast of Nova Scotia since the beginning of the twentieth century, was driven to Martha's Vineyard. Once the vessel arrived, movie production designer Joe Alves transformed it into the dark and menacing *Orca* through the application of "gallons of burgundy and black marine paint."⁵ Oversized windows all around the cabin enhanced the sensation of being at or even below the surface of the sea and therefore directly within the realm of the shark. The effect was heightened through the addition of an oversized bowsprit more typical of a swordfishing boat, a rack for similarly oversized yellow



Actors Richard Dreyfuss and Roy Scheider at the transom and Robert Shaw on the flybridge try to hang onto the operational *Orca* as it heels from the actions of a monster shark in the 1975 blockbuster movie *Jaws*. The need for an *Orca II*—a non-functioning copy of the *Orca* that could repeatedly sink and heel—became evident, as Susan Murphy relates, when the tug *Whitefoot* almost pulled the working *Orca* apart in the course of filming these stunts. Courtesy of Universal Studios Licensing LLC.

kegs for use in harpooning sharks, and most notably, an almost absurdly oversized mast. The overall effect was to make the *Orca* a sort of Disney version of a maritime hunting vessel, or what an audience of landlubbers might believe a fully laden shark-fishing vessel should look like.

An identical but non-operational, motorless copy of this wooden vessel was created (the “model of a fishing boat with flotation barrels or drums supporting a realistic superstructure”) out of fiberglass and then fitted with a metal framework beneath the hull that could be manipulated by the addition or subtraction of air to the barrels to simulate heeling or even sinking. Painted exactly as was the working *Orca*, this stunt boat was named the *Orca II*.