A DAY WITH THE ADMIRAL

Calling Wellington Radio . . . Calling Wellington Radio . . . Launch Admiral going out due south of the Heads to Cape Palliser area . . . Calling Wellington Radio . . .

LISTENING to the skipper of the Admiral reciting this litany we looked at the sea hissing past at a respectable nine and a half knots and tried to work out the time required to get 25 miles out in the Strait and back again before the northerly promised by the Weather Office arrived—a northerly that even now banked up dark over the Tararuas while over the harbour a brisk breeze blew. Still, the sun was glinting on Massey's memorial and the sky was blue, and though not quite up to a rollicking chanty we still had great hopes of this trip.

We had been invited by Professor L. R. Richardson of Victoria University College Zoology Department to come and see for ourselves how deep sea research was done, we had been waiting for the weather to settle for a week now, and unless this trip served us well the charter period would be over with nothing to show for it.

Coming up with Barrett's Reef the already quick dip and sway of the launch increased in tempo, and although fortified with pills and an as yet unfaltering belief in our capacity to take punishment, we went aft to the wheelhouse for reassurance.

"Ay, she's a very good sea boat," the Tynesider skipper assured us. "She'll go through weather when others have to turn back. I've had her up to Wanganui and down to Lyttelton, and she takes everything in her stride."

Most of the deck space on the Admiral was taken up by chains and ropes, drums of cable and drums of diesel fuel, boxes of glass floats and various kinds of nets. Going around this gear and checking the lashings were two members of the zoologist crew—a very necessary job, they explained, for when things got rough ill-tied lashings were apt to come adrift.

On one earlier trip with a southerly beam-on they had been chased all over the ship by gear that had come adrift, and were forced to jettison one particularly mobile drum that contained forty-four gallons of Cook Strait destined for the Oceanographic Institute. Specimen eels slopping from their containing tanks on to the deck added to the confusion of that particular trip.

It was noticeable from the start that students and lecturers adapted themselves easily to the practical side of their deep sea work. Hands used to fine instruments and to the intricate and laborious dissection of specimens, were turned equally well to lashing down gear, to winch and snarled cable, shackle and sextant; to the mending of nets, splicing, and other aspects of seamanship on a fishing boat.

Out to starboard as we cleared the Heads, the peaks of Tapuaenuku and Kaiterau came into view, looming white with late snow out of the blue Kaikoura coast. The farther out we moved the more land became visible, until we could see right through the Strait between Terawhiti and the South, and against the dark rocks of the coast to port gulls flickered like flies in the sunshine. The scientists were enthusiastic about such clear weather, as some of them in all their trips out had never seen through the Strait.

After Turakirae Head it took an age to come up with Cape Palliser, just south of which we were to begin operations. Shortly after midday, however, the sun was shot for position, then the motor was shut off and the Admiral moved slowly in an arc, rolling through the troughs to the sound of a march on the ship's radio.

All hands then laid to the beam trawl, a wedge-shaped affair of angle-iron, pipe, and net, which was going to be used to trawl across a ridge about 400 fathoms down and over it into deeper water of up to 800 or 900 fathoms. Once the trawl was down the idea was to move forward with the current under slow speed, this movement keeping in shape the net behind its tear-shaped jaws of iron—a net kept open in front by the jaws and over the rest of its length by glass balls tied to the top surface.

The trawl was now lowered over the side, the trim of the net examined, then the brake was released on the winch and the trawl started to sink as the ship moved slowly forwards. From the winch the trawl cable fed through one block in in the centre of the deck, through another block on the aft starboard gallows, then into the sea off the beam where it bisected the sunlit green down to the edge of darkness where the eye could only see the elusive flash of a trapped bubble on the cable surface.

As one drum of cable finished another was shackled on and so on; every now and then a shackle would catch on a block and halt the trawl's descent but was soon kicked free. First 500 fathoms of light cable disappeared overside, then 500 of ¼ inch, lastly 500 of heavy 3/16 cable that had to take the strain of all the rest. Then the Admiral began her tow, and lunch was announced.

A little later when we were all lying in the sun (except the skipper, who was superintending the tow), a sudden change in the movement of the ship made us look aft down a markedly increased slope to where the sea foamed up almost over the stern counter. This sternward tilt persisted even after the Admiral's motors were cut, for the launch was effectively anchored by the trawl, caught somewhere on the bottom 3000 feet down and 9000 feet odd astern.

The winch was started dead slow and the blocks cracked and screamed as the cable started coming slowly inboard under terrific tension. One expected at any moment for everything to give and vanish overside, and got the impression that if everything did the Admiral—released from the strain—would bound from the sea like a porpoise.

After most of the 500 fathoms of heaviest cable had been brought in there was a sudden easing of tension, and a corresponding relaxation for everyone on board who concluded that the trawl was free. There was time then to look around and what could be seen was not all cheering. The South Island and most of the North had disappeared in yellow murk, the sky lowered and the sea was rising with the increasing wind.

Along with the weather change came the anti-climax to the day—the realisation that the winch must be hauling nothing but slack cable; finally up came the cable end itself, a noncommital stub of wire that told nothing of 1500 feet of cable and a beam trawl vanished.

During the four-hour trip back against the nor'wester, in our all too few lucid moments—hanging over the rail or drenched by spray (the deckhouse where everyone else sheltered seemed insufficiently airy for our taste) we discovered that even on such a completely blank day we had learned something.

The legend of the unpractical scientist is just a legend in the Strait. These laboratory workers are fast becoming expert fishermen and seamen, and their patience and willingness to face up to tedious work, to discomforts and disappointments in exchange for slow results would be a model for any so-called "practical" man. As one honours student on board the Admiral put it, "Field work such as this makes our studies real and directed. Out here we can see the animals that otherwise we would know only through books and papers. Sometimes there are disappointments—as on this trip. But we'll be back."

PREPARING to send down the beam trawl: Scientists at work aboard the Admiral

(continued from previous page)

duced to the life around him. The Swedes themselves went to great pains to show him their country, its faults as well as its virtues, and he has been able to make a record of Sweden today that is not only a "personal assessment" but also an authoritative introduction to Swedish life.

New Zealand, he considers, has much in common with Sweden, including a love of the out-door life in a beautiful and sparsely-populated country. The Swedish Welfare State is far more highly developed than ours, with much of the social security legislation aimed at increasing their small (and at present rapidly ageing) population. Their education is in a formal pattern, and this tends to restrict personal expression, although the individual and his rights have an accepted value. But the outstanding aspect of the Swedish people is the tolerance and good sense that they show on any matter at all, and their willingness to accept what is best for the future and work towards that. Some countries may dream of raising their low living standard by working shorter hours—the Swedish people were offered the choice of shorter hours or a higher standard of living, and they chose the standard of living, now one of the highest in the world.

Parking Metres

NATURE NOTES

IN the struggle for life's bare existence
Mere size isn't nearly enough.
You will often find in the farmyard
The bantam's the one that is tough.
Now look at the whale for instance,
The sissiest fish afloat—
He eats nothing bigger than plankton
So he won't get the bones in his throat.

—R.G.P.