

WEST COAST SHANTIES AND SEA SONGS

DESCRIPTIONS AND LYRICS

1. **Bring Em Down**

Travis leads this hauling shanty. A.L. Lloyd commented that it was brought to Liverpool from the West Indies. Among the vessels that adopted the tune as a shanty for heavy hauling, were those running up the coast of Chile. Oldtime sailors, who had a high regard for Valparaiso women, pronounced the name of the country to rhyme with “versatile”.

In Liverpool I was born,
Bring 'em down,
London is me home from home,
Bring 'em down.

Those Rotherhithe girls are mighty fine
They're never a day behind the time

Around Cape horn we all must go
around Old Stiff in the frost and snow

Then up the coast to Valipo
northward to Callio

Those Callio girls I do adore
they'll take it all and ask for more

Those Valipo girls with their long black hair
they'll rob you blind and strip you bare

Then back home to Liverpool
spend your pay like a bloody fool

Those Liverpool girls I do admire
they'll set your riggin all afire

I'm Liverpool born and bred
thick in the arm and thick in the head

So rock and roll me over boys
Get the damn job over boys

2. Whaling Johnny

Dick leads this Halyard Shanty he learned at Mystic from Stan Hugill. It mentions the Zulu Sea, but since Hilo is mentioned, it probably should have been the Sulu Sea on the South West of the Philippines, where Sperm Whales and Dugongs exist. Stan told Jim Mageean that he learned it aboard ship during the 1976 Tall Ships Race From Bermuda to Newport, R.I.

When Whaling Johnnie went to sea,

Whaling Johnnie Hilo

Oh a randy dandy lad was he.

All bound away to Hilo

His girl had found another flame,
And he treated her just the same.

She'd gone and married a sailor bold,
So Johnnie' ran hot and cold.

Of rum he drank a steaming dram.
He says he'll go and fish for sperm.

So he went and joined a whaling bark.
He says he'll have a damned fine lark.

He went into the Zulu sea.
To fishe for sperm and manatee.

When whaling Johnnie he came home,
He'd shellfish growing down his back

3. Cheerily Man

Aaron leads this most mentioned sea song in Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*. Aaron uses the version of this shanty sung on *Short Sharp Shanties* by Barbara Brown, rather than the more raw Stan Hugill versions. Cheerily was used both in naval and merchant vessels to call for "pulling with increased effort".

Oh, hauley, aye yeo, ***Cheerily man!***

Walk him up Oh, Cheerily man!

Hauley, aye yeo, Hauley, aye yeo, ***Cheerily man!***

Oh, to the cathead, aye yeo, ***Cheerily man!***

Oh, ship for dead, Cheerily man!

Heavy as lead, heavy as lead, ***Cheerily man!***

Oh, forty cocks, Cheerly man!

Oh, split her blocks, Cheerly man!

Oh, on the rocks, Oh, on the rocks, ***Cheerily man!***

Oh, rouse her and shake her, ***Cheerily man!***

Oh, shake and wake her, ***Cheerily man!***

Oh, we will make her, Oh, we will make her, ***Cheerily man!***

4. Coast of Peru

Travis sings this song about the early days of whaling off the coast of Peru. In *Songs the Whalemens Sang*, Gale Huntington includes a copy of this song written in the log of the *Bengal* in 1832. This descriptive foc'sle song is thought to be dated back to the last quarter of the eighteenth century and remains one of the most popular whaling songs today.

Come all ye young whalemens that's rounded Cape Horn,
Come all ye bold sailors that follow the sperm;
Our captain he has told us and we all believe it's true,
There's plenty of sperm-whales on the Coast of Peru.
'Twas early one morning just as the sun rose,
The man in our mainmast sings out, "Thar she blows!"
"Where away,!" says our skipper, "And where do she lay?!"
"Three points to yer eastward, not a mile away!"
Our whale-boats went in me boys, and we made a good start,
"Lay on!" says the harpooner, "For I'm hell with the long dart!"
The harpoon it struck and the whale sped away,
But one thing he done, my boys, he showed us fair play.
We had him turned over and laid alongside,
Then over with our blubber hooks to rob him of his hide,
We began cutting in boys and then trying out,
And the mate in our main-chains, how loud he did shout.

5. Davy Lowston

Dick leads a song of an Australian crew getting seal pelts off the coast of New Zealand in 1809. Perhaps not completely true, but a Sydney newspaper did report in 1813: "the *Governor Bligh*, has returned from New Zealand, carrying a joyful gang of 10 men, who had survived nearly four years." This story may not be true, but many similar stories were reported. My name is Davy Lowston, We did seal, we did seal,
My name is Davy Lowston, ***We did seal.***
Tho my men and I were lost,

Though our very lives it cost
We did seal, we did seal, we did seal.
We were set down in Open Bay, were set down.
We were set down in Open Bay, we were set down.
We were left, us gallant men,
Nevermore to sail again,
Nevermore, nevermore, nevermore.

Our captain John McGraw, he set sail, he set sail,
Oh yes, for old Port Stanley **,he set sail.**
"I'll return, men, without fail!"
But she foundered in the gale
And went down, and went down, and went down.

We cured ten thousand skins, for the fur, for the fur,
We cured ten thousand skins **for the fur.**
Brackish water, putrid seal,
And we all of us fell ill,
For to die, for to die, for to die.

Come all you men who sail upon the sea, on the sea,
Come all you men **who sail upon the sea,**
Though the schooner "Governor Bligh"
Took up some who did not die,
Never seal, never seal, never seal.

And come all you men who venture far from home, far from home,
Come all you men **who venture far from home,**
Where the icebergs tower high,
That's a pitiful place to die, **Never seal, never Seal, never seal.**

6. Bold Northwestmen

Aaron sings a 1791 broadside ballad, about some effects of China's growing desire for sea-otter pelts from British Columbia called Queen Charlotte's Island which is now called by its indigenous name of Haida Gwaii.. Phil Thomas writes that because of the trader's arrogance and their ignorance of cultural factors, a state verging on warfare often developed between native people and ship's crews.

Come all ye bold Northwestmen who plough the raging main,

Come listen to my story, while I relate the same;

'Twas of the Lady Washington, decoyed as she lay,

At Queen Charlotte's Island, in North America.

On the sixteenth day of June, boys, in the year Ninety-One,
The natives in great numbers on board our ship did come
,
Then for to buy their furs of them, our captain did begin,
But mark what they attempted before long time had been.

Abaft upon our quarter deck two arm chests did stand,
And in them there was left the keys by the gunner's careless hand;
When quickly they procuring of them did make a prize,
Thinking we had no other arms for to defend our lives.

Our captain, he then speaking unto them did say,
"If you'll return me back those keys, I for the same will pay";
No sooner had he spoke those words than they drew forth their knives,
saying, "This vessel now is ours sir, and we will have your lives."

Our captain then perceiving the ship was in their power,
He spoke unto his people, likewise his officers,
Go down into the cabin and there some arms prepare,
See that they are well loaded, be sure they don't misfire

Then down into the cabin straightway we did repair,
And to our sad misfortune, few guns could we find there;
We only found six pistols, a gun and two small swords,
And in short time we did agree "blow her up" was the word.

Our powder we got ready and gun room open lay,
Our souls we did commit to God prepar'd for a watery grave!
We then informed our captain, saying ready now are we,
He says a signal I will give, it shall be "follow me."

All this time upon the quarter deck one poor man was forc'd to stand,
With twelve of those curst savages with knives all in their hands;
Till one of those blood-thirsty hounds he made a spring below,
Our captain then said "follow me!" and felled him with a blow.

Then with what few fire arms we had we rush'd on deck amain,
And by our being resolute, our quarter deck we gain'd;
Soon as we gain'd our arm chest such slaughter then made we,
That in less than ten minutes our' ship of them was free.

Then we threw overboard the dead that on our deck there lay;
And found we had nobody hurt, to work we went straightway;
The number kill'd upon our deck that day was sixty good,
And full as many wounded as soon we understood.

'Twas early the next morning at the hour of break of day,
We sail'd along abreast the town which we came to straightway;
We call'd on hands to quarters and at the town did play,
We made them to return what things they'd stolen that day.

And now unto old China we're fastly rolling on,
Where we shall drink good punch for which we've suffered long;
And when the sixteenth day of June around does yearly come,
We'll drink in commemoration what on that day was done.

7. **Santa Ana**

Travis sings the lead on this shanty about the 1846-1848 US Mexican-American War. Joanna Colcord wrote: the last whaler to return to New Bedford hauled into dock to this shanty". The treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed eight days after gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill in California.

We're sailing down the river from Liverpool

Heave away Santy Ana

Around Cape Horn to Frisco Bay

Way out in California,

So heave her up and away we go,

Heave away Santy Ana

Heave her up and away we'll go

All on the plains of Mexico

She's a fast clipper ship and a bully good crew,
A down east Yankee for her captain too.

There's plenty of gold so I've been told,
There's plenty of gold so I've been told,

Back in the days of forty-nine,
Those were the days of the good old times.

General Scott and Taylor too,
Made poor Santy meet his Waterloo.

When I leave this ship I'll settle down,
And marry a girl named Sally Brown

8. Saltpeter Shanty

Dick leads this shanty that he learned from Ron Angel. Prussian explorer, Alexander von Humboldt discovered in 1802 the fertilizer value of cormorant droppings called guano. The Chincha Islands had huge mounds of Guano, some over 200 feet high. Soon the shipping trade attracted dance halls and crimps at all the main ports of Chile and Peru.

To old Callao were bound to go ***Oh roll!***

To old Callao were bound to go ***Oh roll!***

From Liverpool bay were bound far away

Them putahs of Chile they'll grab all our pay

Oh roll! rock yer Bars. Heave her high and rock & roll!

Them Putahs of Chile they're hard for to beat Oh Roll!

Repeat
They'll meet us and greet us and treat us to wine
The bastards are robbing us all of the time
Ch

Pedro the crimp boys we know him of old Oh Roll!
Repeat
He's priming his vino and doping his beer.
To the Chinchies he'll ship us if we don't get clear.
Ch

When it comes time/ to sailaway home **Oh Roll!**
Repeat
From some old sea port on the west coast of hell
We'll say adios and they'll wish us all wel

9. De Hoffnung

Aaron leads this shanty from the German-Chilean guano trade, in low German (Plattdeutsch). In 1813 Humphry Davy, the Cornish Chemist, wrote in *Elements of Agriculture* how the special effects of Peruvian guano make the "sterile plains of Peru fruitful." The end of this playful tale involves tying the Devil's tail to the anchor so he was sent to the bottom when the anchor was set.

The Hoffnung was, a hundred, days under way,
To me way hay ho, da
She sailed from Hamburg to Valpariso
Its a long time ago!

And as the Old Man swore and cursed,

The Devil came climbing over the rail.

"If you bring me to the Channel in ten days' time,

As sure as you stink, you will get my soul."

The old hulk at last went nineteen knots,

The Devil had the skys'ls all set.

And when she came to the Channel to anchor,

Then said the Devil, "Give me your soul."

Then said the Old Man, "Take your time,

We have to anchor by Cape St. Patrick."

The Devil now was more than overjoyed,

He ran up the fo'c'sle-head to let go the anchor.

The old carpenter was greatly pleased,

He had spliced the Devil's backside to the anchor.

And as the anchor went down to the ground,

The Devil went with it — the dirty big hound!

10. Blow ye Winds in the Morning

Travis leads this popular whaling capstan shanty. This version is completely about the whaling trade because it is void of all references to slave trade that some collectors claim is its origins. It describes a whaling voyage like the similar longer version in *Songs the Whalemen Sang* from the log of the *Elizabeth Swift*, 1859.

Tis advertised in Boston, New York, and Buffalo:
Five hundred brave Americans a-whalin' for to go.

Chorus:

Singing Blow ye winds in the morning

Blow ye winds, high-ho!

Hual away your runnin' gear

And blow, boys, blow!

They send you to New Bedford, that famous whaling port,
And give you to some land sharks to board and fit you out.

They tell you of the clipper ships a-runnin' in and out,
And say you'll take five hundred sperm before you're six months out.

And now we're out to sea, my boys, the wind comes on to blow;
One-half the watch is sick on deck, the other half below,

The skipper's on the quarterdeck a-squintin' at the sails,
When up aloft the lookout spots a mighty school of whales.

So lower down the boats, my boys, and after him we'll travel,
But if you get too near his flukes, he'll kick you to the Devil.

And now we've got him over boys, we'll tow 'im alongside,
Then over with our blubber-hooks to rob him of his hide

Home at last our ship made fast, done with all our our sailin,
A warmming glass around we'll pass, and damn this blubber whalin.

11. The Whaleman's Lament

Dick sings this sad story about the fate of whalemen,. It is from *Songs the Whalemen Sang*.

Gail Huntington also obtained these words from the log of the *Elizabeth Swift*, 1859.

Huntington points out that some whalers were happy ships and others just plain were not. It depended entirely on the afterguard and usually on the Captain.

'Twas on the briny ocean
On a whaleship I did go
Oft times I thought of distant friends
Oft times I thought of home
Remembering of my youthful days
It grieved my heart full sore
And fain I would return again
To my own native shore

Through dreary storms and tempest
And through some heavy gales
Around Cape Horn we sped our way
To look out for sperm whales
They will rob you they will use you
Worse than any slave
Before you go a-whaling boys
You had best be in your graves

They'll flog you for the least offense
And that is frequent too
And the best that you will get from them
Is plenty more work to do
So do it now or damn your eyes
I'll flog you till you're blue
My boys I wouldn't say it all
But it is all too true

But if ever I return again
A solemn vow I'll take
That I'll never go a-whaling
My liberty to stake
I will stay at home
And I will roam no more

For the pleasures are but few me boys
Far from our native shore

12. John Kanaka

Aaron leads this fine halyard shanty that salutes the value of sailors from Hawaii on sailing ships. In Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, the prowess of Hawaiian sailors is often mentioned. Stan Hugill taught us all to not sing tu-rye-aye; instead to use the Polynesian Tu-li-aye pronunciation.

I thought I heard the old man say.
John Kanaka naka To Li Ay
There's work tomorrow but no work today.
John Kanaka naka To Li Ay
Oh To Li Ay, Oh To Li Ay,
John Kanaka naka To Li Ay

We're bound away to Frisco Bay,
We're bound away at the break of day.

It's just one thing that grieves my mind.
To leave my wife and child behind.

They'll wave farewell down on the quay.
To wait and fear and weep for me.

Were bound away around Cape Horn,
Where you wish to Christ youd'e never been born.

The boson said "Before I'm through,
You'll curse yer mother for having you".

It's rotten wheat and weevily bread,
And its pump or drown the old man said.

13. Rolling Down To Old Maui

Travis leads this popular shanty that is frequently used as the final song at sea festivals by artists like Stan Hugill. Stan ultimately published "Rolling Down to Old Maui" in *Songs of the Sea* in 1977. The publication of this version ended the controversy over what melody to use for this popular song.

It's a damn tough life full of toil and strife we whalemens undergo,
And we don't give a damn when the gale is done how hard the winds does blow.
We're homeward bound, 'tis a grand ol' sound with a good ship taunt and free,
We don't give a damn when we drink our rum with the girls of old Maui.

Rolling down to old Maui, me boys
Rolling down to old Maui
We're homeward bound from the Arctic ground
Rolling down to old Maui

Once more we sail with a Northerly gale through the ice, and wind, and rain,
And them coconut fronds and them tropical lands we soon shall see again.
Six hellish months have passed away in the cold Kamchatka sea
But now we're bound from the Arctic ground rolling down to old Maui.

Once more we sail with the Northerly gale towards our Island home,
Our mainmast sprung and our whaling done and we ain't got far to roam.
Our stans'l booms is carried away, what care we for that sound,
A living gale is after us, thank God we're homeward bound

How soft the breeze from the island trees now the ice is far astern,
And them native maids and them island glades is awaiting our return.
Even now their big, black eyes look out hoping some fine day to see,
Our baggy sails running 'fore the gales rolling down to old Maui.

14. **Blood Red Roses**

Dick leads this halyard shanty thought by some to originally be about sailors' criticism of redcoat soldiers used to raise the sails on troop carriers. The words in this version were often used on voyages crossing Cape Horn and well into the twentieth century.

Me bonny bunch of roses oh
Go Down You Blood Red Roses, Go Down
It'll soon be time to roll and go
Go Down You Blood Red Roses, GoDown
OH you pinks and poses
Go down yer blood red roses, Go Down

We're bound away for Iqueique bay
We're bound away at the break of day

Around Cape Horn we must go,
Around Cape Horn through the Ice and snow.

Oh rock and roll her is the cry,

The bleeding top mast sheave is dry.

Just one more pull and that'll do
We are the boys to pull her through

15. **Liverpool Judies**

Aaron leads this favorite capstan shanty from Liverpool about crossing Cape Horn. Aaron learned it from Barry Finn, who said it refers to the winds that pull sailors & their ships home. Yes, "Those Liverpool Judies have got us in tow." Stan Hugill says it is of Irish origin from the 1840s and was popular in the western ocean packets.

From Liverpool To Frisco a Roving I went
For stay in that country it was my intent
But girls and strong whisky Like other damn fools
I soon was transported back to Liverpool

***Singing roll, roll bullies roll,
them Liverpool Judies, have got us in Tow.***

I shipped on the Alaska line out in the bay
Waiting for a fair wind to get underway
The Sailors all drunk and their backs are all sore
The Whisky's all gone and you can't get no more

Along comes the mate with his jacket of blue
A looking for work for us sailors to do
It's jib topsail halyards he loudly does roar
Saying "lay aloft Paddy you son of a whore."

One night off Cape Horn I won't soon forget
It gives me the horrors to think of it yet
She was diving bows under the sailors all wet
She was doing twelve knots with her main Skys'l set.

Here's a health to our Captain where e'ere he may be
He's a friend to the sailor on land or on sea
But as for our first mate that dirty old brute
I hope when he dies straight to he he'll sky-hoot

And now we'll arrive at the Bramblymore docks
The fair maids and lassies around us will flock
Me whisky's all gone and me six quid advance
And I think it's high time for to get up and dance.

16. **Away to Hilo**

Travis leads the version of this song as sung by Allan Macleod, which tells an all-too-often sailor's story. It is version two of Hugill's "Tom's Gone to Hilo" which he says came from Bill Dowling of Bootle. Bootle is still considered one of the roughest parts of Liverpool. It is not clear if this is about Ilo, Peru or Hilo, Hawaii.

Oh Tommy's gone on a whaling ship,

Away to Hilo

Oh Tommy's gone on a dam long trip.

Toms gone to Hilo

He never kissed his girl good-bye,
He'd had enough and he told her why.

She robbed him blind and left him broke,
He'd had enough gave her the poke.

His half pay went it went like chaff,
She hung around for the other half.

She drank and boozed his pay away,
With her other eye on his next payday.

Tommy's gone and he left her flat,
Oh Tommy's gone and he won't be back.

Tommy's gone to Hilo Town,
Them Liverpool girls they let him down.

17 **Whisky Johnny**

Dick leads this shanghaiing version of "Whisky Johnny" from Hugill. San Francisco crimps like Shanghai Brown and Larry Marr were in great demand during California's gold rush. It was mostly impossible to compete with the gold rush to get crew members. Hundreds of ships were left stranded in San Francisco Bay.

Now if ever you go to Frisco Town,

Whisky Johnny

Mind you steer clear of Shanghai Brown,

Whisky for me Johnny oh

He'll dope your whisky night and morn,
And then shanghai you round Cape Horn.

Two months wages they are dead,
And a donkey's breakfast for your bed.

Oh Shanghai Brown and Larry Marr,
Their names are known both near and far.

Oh Larry Marr and Shanghai Brown,
They robbed me up and they robbed me down.

They fit you out with dumboat gear,
That'll have to last you half a year.

Carpet slippers made out of felt,
And a nice clean yarn rope for yer belt.

A suite of oil skins made out of cotton,
And an old sea chest with bricks on the bottom.

Oh the Barbary coast is no place for me,
Keep an eye on your drink when you come from sea.

Or you'll wake up on a cold frosty morn,
On a three skysail yarder bound round the horn.

On a three skysail yarder bound round the horn,
You'll wish to Christ you'd never been born.

Oh I thought I heard the old man say,
Just one more drink and then belay.

18. Paddy Lay Back

Aaron ends this voyage with a popular capstan shanty everyone enjoys joining in on and recording. The words probably came from a popular Irish folk song. It likely likely dates back to the 1870s and became widely known on British packet ships during the late 19th century. It tells of the trials of sailors in those late days of the tall ships.

'Twas on a cold and drafty morning in December (**December**)

And all of me money it was spent (**spent, spent**)

And where the hell it went, I can't remember (*remember*)

So down to the shipping office I went (*went went*)

CHORUS

Paddy lay back, (*Paddy lay back*)

Take in the slack, (*take in the slack*)

Take a turn around the capstan heave a pawl.

About ship, stations, boys, be handy (be handy!)

We're bound for Valparaiso 'round the horn

That day there was a great demand for sailors (*for sailors*)

For the colonies, and for Frisco and for France (*France, France*)

So, I joined the limey barque they called the Hotspur (*the Hotspur*)

And I got paralytic drunk on my advance (*'vance 'vance*)

It was on the quarter deck where first I saw them (*saw them*)

Such an ugly bunch I'd never seen before (*'fore 'fore*)

For the captain had shipped a Shanghai'd crew of Dutchmen (*Dutchmen*)

And it made me poor old heart feel sick and sore (*sore, sore*)

Well, I asked the mate which watch was mine-o (*mine-o*)

He said he'd soon see which watch was which (*which which*)

And he blew me down and he kicked me in the stern-o (*stern-o*)

Calling me a dirty lousy son-of-a-bitch (*bitch bitch*)

It was then I made me mind up that I'd leave her (*leave her*)

Get a job and live me life ashore (*'shore 'shore*)

So I jumped overboard and swam ashore boys (*'shore boys*)

And in the English bar I found a whore (*whore whore*)

But Jimmy the Crimp, he knew a thing or two, sir (*two sir*)

And quickly I was outward bound again (*'gain 'gain*)

On a limey to the Chinchas for Gu-ano (*gu-ano*)

And here I am singin' the old refrain (*'frain 'frain*)

Now here we are once again at sea, boys (**sea, boys**)
The same old garbage all over again (**'gain 'gain**)
So won't you stamp the capstan 'round and make some noise, boys (**noise boys**)
And join with me in singin' the old refrain (**'frain 'frain**)
