

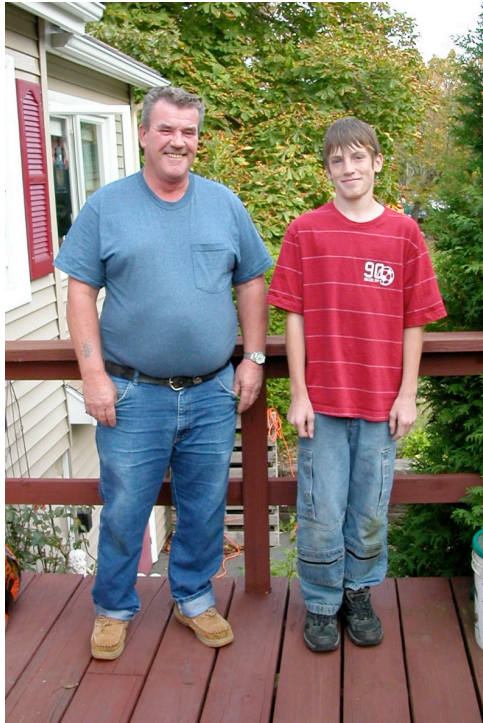
HENRY THOMPSON, SR.

Interviewer: Caleb

Date: October 10, 2003

Place: Henry Thompson's home

Transcriber: Caleb and Sally Merrick



Henry Thompson was born on October 7, 1947, and has lived in Friendship all of his life. His family has lived here for three generations. He has two children and eight grandchildren. Henry was a lobster buyer for 30 years and has been lobstering for 10 years. His hobby is metal detecting.

Q: How long have you been lobstering?

A: About ten years this time. I went lobstering once before back in the 60's, and then I was a buyer for about 30 years. And then I went lobstering again.

Q: When did you start lobstering?

A: It was in about 1990.

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Q: How old are you?

A: I'm 56 years old.

Q: What other family members lobster?

A: I have a brother that lobsters out of Spruce Head, and I have a son that lobsters, and I have a nephew that lobsters, and I guess that's about all.

Q: How often do you go out a week?

A: I go about five days a week. And my morning starts around 4:00. And we are usually done around 1:30-2:00. It depends what the weather is.

Q: What months do you lobster?

A: I usually fish from June to December.

Q: Do you have a license? And how did you get one?

A: Yeah, I have a license. I was lucky; I got in just on the borderline before they put the freeze on them, and that's how I got mine. But nowadays you've got to go through quite a lot more to get one.

Q: Where do you fish?

A: I fish around Penobscot Bay, out around the islands, over by Morse's Channel, Long Island, Otter Island, Long Ledge, and down through there.

Q: How far out is that, and how deep is it?

A: Well, it's not very deep; it's only, oh, there are some spots that's 20-fathom deep, but most of mine are 15 to 12 fathoms.

Q: How do you know where you can set your traps?

A: Well, if you get in the wrong place, they'll let you know awful quick that you're not supposed to be there.

Q: What is your job on the boat? Describe it.

A: I'm the captain of the boat. I do all the driving of the boat and hauling of the traps. The sternman, he just baits them and gets them ready to go back overboard.

Q: Describe how you set a trap. How much line do you attach to it?

A: I have about 15 fathom of rope on it. There's 6 feet to a fathom, and what you do is you throw the buoy overboard first, and once the line's off, then you bait your trap, tie it up, and push it overboard.

Q: What color is your pot buoy?

A: My buoys are blue and orange.

Q: What do you use for bait, and where do you get it?

A: I use herring and pogies, and I get it at the wharf where I sell.

Q: How many traps do you set, and how many do you pick up in a day?

A: I set around 650 traps, and we haul approximately 150 to 170 a day.

Q: What is a normal catch for a day, and what is the biggest lobster you've ever caught?

A: Well, what matters on the catch is, some days it will vary certain times of the year. And on the average in the summertime I'm going to say between 250 and 300. That's what I will catch. The biggest lobster I ever caught was 2 inches over the big size, and it would probably be between 8 and 10 pounds, and I had to cut the stay lines off of my back head to get him out of the trap.

Q: Describe how you haul a trap, how deep the trap is, and how much it weighs.

A: Hauling a trap, you have a hydraulic hauler, and you just put the rope through your block into the hauler, and it brings the trap off from the bottom. And the weight of the trap--with the rope and the buoy and the toggle--would run probably 60 to 70 pounds.

Q: How do you keep from being pinched by lobster claws?

A: You have to be quicker than they are!

Q: What size lobster are you allowed to keep, and how do you measure them?

A: To measure a lobster, you have to put the measure in the eye socket and go parallel with the back, and if it gets down over the edge of the back, you throw it back. If it stays up on top, you can keep it.

Q: Why do some lobsters have a v-notch in the tails, and what do you do with
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them?

A: A v-notched tail is a breeding lobster, and you throw them back so that in the future years you'll still have lobsters on the bottom for the younger generation to get when they start going.

Q: What happens if you get caught with a short lobster or a v-notched one?

A: If you get caught with short lobsters or v-notched lobsters, it's according to how many you have, but you'll get a fine. The fine usually if you've got a v-notch would be around \$250.00, and if you've got short lobsters--anything over five short lobsters--is \$25.00 a lobster.

Q: What other kind of fish get caught in your traps?

A: There's all kinds of fish that get caught in the trap. There's some codfish, there's hake, there's catfish, there's sculpins, there's mackerel.

Q: What is your favorite one?

A: The codfish would be the best one.

Q: What is your least favorite one?

A: The sculpins.

Q: What other kinds of sea life do you encounter while you're fishing?

A: You have conkles, crabs, periwinkles--well, about anything can go in and out a trap when it's on the bottom.

Q: Where do you sell your lobsters?

A: I sell my lobsters into the wharf that I go from.

Q: Describe your lobster boat. How long is your boat, what kind is it, and what color is it?

A: My boat is 34-feet, and she is white. She's a wooden boat that has been epoxied.

Q: What is its name?

A: The name of my boat is the *Ashbri*.

Q: Why is it named this?

A: It is named after my two granddaughters--the first three letters of each granddaughter.

Q: Do you use a propeller cage? What is it for?

A: A propeller cage is to keep the ropes from getting in your wheel so much, and other things that would be in the water. The cage will shear it off, but you will still get wound up once in awhile.

Q: What do you do for a bathroom on the boat?

A: Usually a bathroom on the boat is just a bucket with a cover on it.

Q: What do you wear when you go lobstering?

A: When I go lobstering, I have boots on and what they call oil clothes; it's a rubber pair of pants and a rain jacket.

Q: Describe the parts of a lobster trap.

A: A lobster trap has two front heads, a middle head, and a back head. The trap is 21 inches wide, about 18 inches high, and 4 feet long. It has three bricks in it--some have more than three bricks--and two runners on the bottom.

Q: Do you ever use toggles? Explain what a toggle is.

A: Yes, I use toggles. Toggles are small floats which will keep the rope up off the bottom so that it doesn't get hung up around a rock.

Q: What do you keep the lobsters in once they're caught?

A: I have a watertight box; the engine has a pump on it that will pump saltwater into the box, and it will keep the lobsters just like they're in the ocean.

Q: How do you know where to go in the fog, and what electronics do you have?

A: In the fog you use your compass and radar and plotters and fathometer.

Q: Have you ever fallen overboard? Explain what happened.

A: No, I have not fallen overboard since I've been lobstering.

Q: Have you ever gotten seasick? Describe the circumstances.

A: Yes, I do get seasick. As long as I'm at the wheel, I do pretty good, but if something happens and I'm not at the wheel, I do get seasick.

Q: Have you ever broken down at sea? Describe what happened.

A: Yes, I've broken down at sea. I've got rope in the wheel and not been able to move and had to call on the radio for someone to come get me. I've run out of fuel before because I forgot to fill up the boat and had to call somebody to tow me in.

Q: Have you ever gotten hung up on something or run aground? What happened?

A: Yes, I've run ashore before. I don't think there's a fisherman on the coast that hasn't. I've been fortunate; I've been able to get her right off, but some people have to wait for the tide to come back in to refloat the boat.

Q: Have you ever lost a trap while hauling or lost bait bags? Explain what happened.

A: Yes, I've lost traps that way before. The rope might get weak and part on you, or it might be hung up on the bottom, and you'll part it with the hauler. And bait bags, I have lost hundreds of them. The seals will go down and rip them off your traps.

Q: What is the scariest thing that has ever happened to you?

A: Back years ago when I had my other boat, we had a big northeast snowstorm, and the boat was on the mooring. She was a 26-foot boat, and she broke her mooring and was going ashore, and I went through snow up to my waist to get over where she was, and when I got aboard of her, she had already gone into the rocks. And I was trying to start her, and I couldn't get her started because she had water in her. And my brother, he came in with the *Seasmoke* and towed me off, and we put her ashore down by the wharf. And then I hauled her out the next day and repaired her.

Q: What do you like most about lobstering?

A: What I like most about lobstering is you're your own boss out there, and it's self-employed. And you have the freedom of doing what you want to do out there. You can haul your traps, or you can move traps. It's a lot of fun.

Q: What do you like least about it?

A: Well, the least I like about it is when you have to take all the traps up in the fall of the

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year. There's a lot of work in it.

Q: Do you like to eat lobster? How often do you eat it, and how do you like it cooked?

A: Yeah, I like lobster, but I don't eat it very often. If I was cooking them, usually we cook them 20 minutes, boil them in water. My wife, she like them awful well, so I bring them home to her, and she has them.

