

# Definitions starting with S

## Sponging

Catching sponges for export was a major industry in the Bahamas until the 1930's. Many varieties of these marine animals were found on the shallow banks of THE MUD west of Andros. The most valuable for export was the VELVET SPONGE; in descending order of value, other varieties of sponge included the WOOL (or CHECKERBOARD), YELLOW, REEF, GLOVE, HARD-HEAD and GRASS SPONGE. These were gathered from a small dinghy or BATEAU operated from a larger SLOOP. There were two men on each dinghy: the BOWMAN (or HOOKER), who would watch the sea floor for sponges through a GLASS, and the TENDER, who propelled the boat with a SCULLING OARS. On spotting a suitable sponge, the hooker would HOOK it with a long GRAINS to detach it from the sea floor, unless it was already a loose ROLLER. The sponges were left on the deck of the mother ship to die, and then were placed in a CRAWL on the BAY. After the sponges had soaked there for several days, men would go in with BRUISERS to beat the black GURRY out of them. Their soft skeletons were left to dry in the sun, and then they were trimmed and ready for sale. Despite the folk song Sponger Money Never Done, most of the profits went to the Nassau merchants who bought the sponges and resold them for export. This ended abruptly in 1938, when disease killed over 90% of Bahamian sponges within a few months. Although some varieties of sponge are growing again, the valuable VELVET SPONGE is believed to be extinct. Moreover, the modern preference for synthetic substitutes makes the resurgence of a profitable sponging industry unlikely. See Albury 1975:188 ff.

Unique solution ID: #5671

Author: n/a

Last update: 2011-10-26 17:45