



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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INTERIOR ANNOUNCES COLOR FILM ON NATURAL SPONGE INDUSTRY

Old world methods and old world culture add color and zest to Sponge--
Treasure from the Sea, a 14-minute, 16 mm. sound-color film produced by the Fish and Wildlife Service, to be available shortly, the Department of the Interior announced today.

The film tells the story of the natural sponge industry in the United States. The center of this industry is Tarpon Springs on the west coast of Florida. Sponsor of the film is the Sponge and Chamois Institute, and the producer and distributor of the film is the Fish and Wildlife Service's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries.

The premiere of the film will be in Tarpon Springs, Florida, December 10, at the annual meeting of the Sponge and Chamois Institute. Prints will be available from the Bureau's cooperating film libraries throughout the country on a free loan basis and at the Visual Education Unit, Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, U. S. Department of the Interior, Post Office Box 128, College Park, Maryland.

There are two locales for the picture--Tarpon Springs and the Miami Seaquarium. The Seaquarium was used to film the underwater sequence of the picture.

One of the high spots of the picture shows the two methods of harvesting sponges, hooking and "hard hat" diving; another, the sponge auction where silence and gesture replace the usual chant of the auctioneer and the shouts of the bidders; a third, the "Blessing of the Waters" on Epiphany Day with its ancient custom of diving for the Golden Cross. Old world music and old world dancing are included at appropriate places.

Sponge harvesting is a Greek art with centuries of tradition as a background. It was brought to this country more than a hundred years ago by Greek sponge fishermen and it has been maintained by their progeny throughout the decades.

Sponge harvesting has defied skin diving techniques. Any harvesting which cannot be done by hooking from the surface must be done by men in the full diving suit with the hardshell headpiece, breathing hose and leaded feet, belt and breast weights. Some sponges are deep, and the surrounding waters--surface temperatures not withstanding--are cold. At times there are tides and currents which make the heavy suit and haul lines necessary. Then there is the length of time the diver is on the bottom.

The demand for natural sponges continues because man may imitate but has never duplicated the natural sponge which--besides having a multitude of uses in the home--is indispensable in lithography, ceramics and other industries.

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