

# All in a Day's Work

## John Ball – Fisherman

### PROFILE

John Ball is a fisherman and fishes out of Turk Head near Skibbereen in West Cork.



Photographs courtesy of John Ball

### A Day in the Life of John Ball

#### What do you fish for?

I fish for shrimp, crab, lobster, pollock and mackerel – mostly with pots and fishing lures.

#### When is your busiest time of year?

My busiest time of the year is during the shrimp season, which is from August until late December. January to April are very quiet so there is very little fishing.

#### Do you work alone or as part of a team?

I fish on my own with a 21ft fibreglass boat and most of the time I fish around the islands – Sherkin, Cape Clear, the Skeams, as well as south of Baltimore Harbour. It depends on where the fish are.

#### Have you always wanted to be a fisherman?

I have always been interested in fishing and the sea and could never see myself being far away from it. Before going out on my own I fished on trawlers and other fishing boats for a good few years. This gave me a lot of experience.

#### What is a typical day like?

An average day's fishing during the shrimp season could start at 5.30am and end at 5.30pm. Some times the day can be shorter or longer depending how things go (weather etc.). Every day is different. Fishing for shrimp involves hauling, baiting and re-shooting 20 pot trains of gear. These trains, or lines, have a buoy attached and are anchored at each end so as to keep them from moving and tangling. After hauling and re-shooting each train, the catch is sorted and the small and undersized go back into the sea alive. The shrimp that are big enough to keep go into tank pots until the end of the day, after which time they are collected alive by a refrigerated truck and sold to market.

#### Is your catch collected for market each day?

Shrimp are collected mostly every day, depending on the quantity. Crab are collected once or twice a week and are

usually loaded onto trucks with big tanks of sea water to keep them alive for market in France or Spain.

#### Do you always fish in the same area?

Shrimp pots and crab pots are shot back in the same area if the fishing is good, but at times you have to find a different area. This often takes up a good part of the day. Wind, weather and tides have a big effect on all fish and where they move to on the fishing grounds.

#### What's the worst thing about your job?

The worst thing about my job must be the bad weather. It can make it very difficult to fish, so I can lose a lot of fishing time during the winter months. Gales and stormy weather can often cause a lot of damage to the pots and can badly tangle them up.

#### What is the best thing about your job?

The best about my job is that it changes every day. I like all the seasons and the different fish that come along with these changing seasons. I am fascinated by the creatures and sights that I see. Some of the unusual fish I have come across have been sunfish, trigger fish and flying fish. Most of all, I enjoy being my own boss!



**Top left:** A small mechanical pulley hauling in the train of pots.

**Right:** Lobsters and crabs waiting to be sold to market.

**Bottom:** A stack of pots in the boat, waiting to be shot into the sea.



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