

Rare blue whale found dead on New Zealand beach

May 28 2009

(AP) -- The carcass of a rare blue whale washed ashore in southern New Zealand after it apparently died of old age, a marine expert said Thursday.

The body - with bite wounds and its tail chewed off - already had been attacked by scavengers ahead of the rare stranding on New Zealand's South Island, Te Papa National Museum expert Anton van Helden told National Radio.

"It's ... probably the biggest recorded to have come ashore on the New Zealand coast," he said.

Fewer than 2,000 blue whales - the largest mammals known to have lived - remain from a population of 200,000 in 1900.

A local fisherman found the massive 88-foot (27 meter) carcass south of Cape Farewell.

"It's the biggest one (whale) I have seen," Abalone fisherman Philip Walker said. "It was huge."

He said most of the tail had been chewed off, and the body had bites that Department of Conservation staff said were likely from great white sharks.

The department will take tissue samples for a whale database at

Auckland University, van Helden said.

But he said the carcass will be left to rot, as it washed up in a place too inaccessible for its removal.

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