

HOME GROWN

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DRIVER: I've got an extra jacket behind the seat, if you want to put it on.

BOBBY: No, it's okay.

DRIVER: Suit yourself. But I'll tell you, where we're headed is gonna get colder'n hell.

—*Five Easy Pieces* (1970)

After well cleansing the bear from the dirt and blood with which it is generally covered when killed, it is brought in and seated opposite the king in an upright posture, with a chief's bonnet, wrought in figures, on its head, and its fur powdered over with the white down. A tray of provision is then set before it, and it is invited by words and gestures to eat.

—John R. Jewitt¹

In 1790, Spanish sailors manning their country's outpost at Yuquot on Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island were faced with a moral dilemma. Northwest Coast Natives, whose land the Spanish were on, offered them a handful of children in trade for copper, abalone shells, and muskets.² The Spanish debated whether to agree to this barter—buying the children respite from imagined abuse—or refuse to sanction a practice they found barbarous, and put the children at further risk of neglect. Fortified by rumours Mowachaht Chief Maquinna was having boys fattened up for eating, the Spanish started negotiating, in one case purchasing an eight-year-old girl from Chief Wickanninish for a copper frying pan and a pot. For the Nuu-chah-nulth, the zeal the Spanish expressed for the children was mystifying but nonetheless profitable. The few they had first offered the sailors had been captured in raids on other tribes or were considered too ugly to be desirable. Presented with an immediately popular commodity, Maquinna's warriors stepped up their raids on their neighbours to provide for the Spanish appetite.

British Columbia's economy has always been export-driven. Otter pelts, lumber, fish, and minerals—now hydroponic pot, tourism, and film production—are staples of an economy that banks on foreign investment. Yet while colonial exploit has been a determining feature of the trade in Northwest Coast commodities, it can, even today, feel as if there's something

endemic to the landscape that supports a particular type of exchange. Things in B.C. could, for instance, have gone drastically differently. Vancouver Island in particular might have been a nexus rather than a backwater outpost had the entrance to the Northwest Passage been where Europeans hoped. For exactly three centuries, exploration of the Americas was partly driven by fantasy of a short cut across the continent that had a western gate somewhere on the B.C. coast. This was part of what motivated the Spanish occupation of Nootka, and was a contributing factor to tensions between Britain and Spain that nearly erupted in an international war, when in 1789 Spanish Captain Estéban José Martínez boarded English ships in the sound. But by the time the temperate cross-continental canal imagined on every global European map drawn since Columbus had finally been confirmed as an icy and largely impassable Arctic maze, the existence of a Northwest Passage had been rendered moot. By 1792, a succession of Spanish, Russian and English explorers had proven there was no western entryway to the continent, and no Strait of Anian that would lead ships north along the Pacific coast and into a latitudinal waterway.

Not coincidentally the signing of the Nootka Convention in 1790 terminating claims by both British and Spanish empires to exclusive rights on the Pacific coastal trade probably would not have been concluded had either country still suspected the existence of a western door to the Atlantic. On March 27 1795, Brigadier-General José Manuel Alava for Spain and Lieutenant Thomas Pierce for Britain stood on the shores of Nootka Sound, read their declaration and counter-declaration, raised and lowered their respective flags and together set sail for the San Blas naval base on the Mexican coast.³ With the European occupation over, Maquinna's people were for the first time in years able to erect their winter encampment at Yuquot without worry for the violence their close proximity to the Spanish sailors had inevitably brought.

Today, the principal population on the western side of Vancouver Island is between Tofino and Ucluelet. The two towns bracket Pacific Rim National Park and lie just south of Clayoquot and Nootka Sounds. Loggers and fishers, the town's principal early settlers, have since been met with an influx of hippies followed by a succession of eco-friendly tourists, retirees and a small but growing population of surfers. The latter, principally, have made Tofino a summer party destination. Ironically instigating this was the arrival of over 12,000, mostly youthful, environmentalists in the summer of 1993 to protest logging in Clayoquot Sound by forest company MacMillan Bloedel. That event did the most to advertise the recreational potentials of the West Coast beaches. In comparison with the boarding cultures in Hawaii, California, and Australia, surfing on the Island had a relatively late

start. Mostly this is to do with the quality of surf, which suffers from the Island's proximity to the Northern Pacific storms that generate the waves hitting Pacific Coast beaches. As waves travel south they organize themselves into "sets", and by California have an established rhythm, which is easier to anticipate and, furthermore, critical to the waves becoming stronger and bigger (think Tacoma Bridge). On Vancouver Island, the surf is still asymmetric, erratic and choppy, and makes it difficult to gauge and ride. Little surprise the Island's best beach near Ucluelet is, according to one local, rated only "seventeenth best in the world." Pride here is measured.

The climate and terrain of the eastern half of the island is so distinctly different it's hard to imagine only 80 kilometers separates its shoreline from the Pacific. Protected by a small mountain range running down the Island's spine, the dryer leeward side enjoys Canada's most temperate climate. Winters are mild and there's not too much rain in the summer, so it's neither cold nor really wet, and thus feels neither Canadian nor coastal. This eastern edge borders the Strait of Georgia, which runs the length of the southern half of Vancouver Island and spans a scant 50 kilometers at its widest point to the Mainland. Bounded to the south by the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the perimeter of the Strait of Georgia forms a large natural basin that is one of the most naturally productive regions of the world. Prior to first contact the area supported a Salish Nation that had one of the densest populations on the continent.

According to a recent theory, contact between Natives and Europeans may have occurred much earlier than imagined, when Sir Francis Drake's *Golden Hinde* sailed into the Strait of Georgia in the late summer of 1579.⁴ To date, Richard Haykluyt's account of Drake's voyage has been taken on faith, and the northern point of the pirate's plundering journey up the Americas has been assumed to be off the coast of Oregon, with landfall possibly no further than California. No one considered that Elizabethan records might be carefully contrived forgeries intended to fool Spanish spies. By reconstructing inconsistencies in his logs, and retracing maps made after his return, local historian Samuel Bawlf speculates that Drake made it as far as Alaska, which would place Europeans in the waters of present day B.C. centuries before the accepted first sighting in 1774 (off the islands of Haida Gwaii) by Spaniard Juan Pérez. As late as 1920 Nanaimo Indian elders were only too keen to relay stories about Europeans predating Pérez and James Cook by hundreds of years, but few historians paid much attention.

The secrecy around Drake's journey may, symptomatically, have been driven by his belief that he had discovered the fabled entrance to the Northwest Passage. On his return to England he told Elizabeth of "a very short way" home. Bawlf speculates Drake saw the entrance to Chatham Strait on the

Alaska Panhandle and thought he had sighted the southern entrance to the Strait of Anian. Turning south because of the cold, Drake decided on a fort and shipyard located on Vancouver Island, north of Nanaimo near present-day Comox. Here, on the beach of a small natural harbour, surrounded by trees big and plentiful enough to build fleets of ships, Drake would claim “New Albion” for the Queen. Most crucially, this nascent coastal metropolis would serve to guard the entrance to one of the most priceless bits of colonial real estate ever discovered. True or not, whatever became of Drake’s plans and discoveries disappeared with his logbooks, which were secreted and never again found. It wasn’t until Captain Cook’s midshipman George Vancouver, charting the coast in 1792 under almost exactly the same orders given to Drake (to find the entrance to the Passage and stake a claim to the coast supported by a fortified settlement—albeit this time at Nootka Sound), would the Strait of Georgia be rediscovered, and Vancouver Island circumnavigated.

Entering the Strait leads sailors around the southern tip of Vancouver Island, past the present location of B.C.’s provincial capital Victoria (often described as a city more English than England) and north toward Nanaimo halfway up the Island’s eastern edge. Nanaimo is the Island’s second largest city, distinctly characterized by a history as a working-class resource town. Friends of mine live just south in the small town of South Wellington. The name’s imperial air speaks of the area’s early British immigrants and a large population in the late-nineteenth century of expatriate Scottish miners. At the time South Wellington was the centre of a short-lived, booming coal industry, but the coal was so depleted and gaseous that by the beginning of the twentieth century the miles of veins snaking under the streets and along the coast—even under the ocean—were abandoned, and the miners moved out. Today the only reminders of this industrial past are some overgrown coal tips, which lend picturesque accents to a landscape of unobtrusive rural charm. The area, in fact, looks remarkably like the British countryside, with small hedge-rowed acreages excised from dense blocks of Douglas fir and blood-barked arbutus trees.

The look of these farms dates back to the era of the miners, who helped pay for their horticultural pursuits by hiring Chinese labourers to help them with the digging underground. The Europeans paid the Asians out of their own pocket, keeping back a percentage. Long after the miners’ departure, the area still basks in a tranquil aura at odds with the resource industries that, to this day, form the backbone of the Vancouver Island and B.C. economy, the proximity of which are often right over the next hill.

Chief among these industries is MacMillan Bloedel, thanks to whose neighbouring Harmac Pulp Mill South Wellington enjoys the occasional



South Wellington survey photograph, A.J. Campbell, 1943, Courtesy of B.C. Archives I-64274

sulfurous odor wafting in from the northeast. Mac Blo's dominance over the B.C. economy has been waning, though, in small part due to the environmental protests already mentioned, but as well because of a recent spate of protectionist duties slapped on our softwood exports by the United States. Both these hurdles however, may in the long term be minor compared with a larger issue. Lumber extraction in B.C. was built on a formula of unencumbered access to ancient timber, and the escalating production costs of harvesting the little remaining, unprotected and increasingly remote trees of any sizeable girth impairs the industry's viability more than anything else.

The question, then, isn't whether but when lumber will be eclipsed by pot as a provincial cash crop. Marijuana's economic ascendancy is reflected in the staggering number of hydroponic grow-ops proliferating across the province (and the increasing expertise of local cultivators), but is also due to savvy marketing handled by Vietnamese gangs and Hell's Angels—increasingly to the U.S. in exchange for cocaine. Hard numbers are impossible, but speculation over the number of dollars the marijuana harvest is pumping into the province ranges anywhere between four and ten billion annually. "It's a bit of a puzzle," says one economist, stumped by the number of service sector jobs springing up, especially for salespeople in stereo and audio equipment. In an economy where most industries are in decline, including historically stalwart resources like fishery and mining, along with high-tech and tourism after 9/11, the job numbers are, he adds, "a mystery."⁵

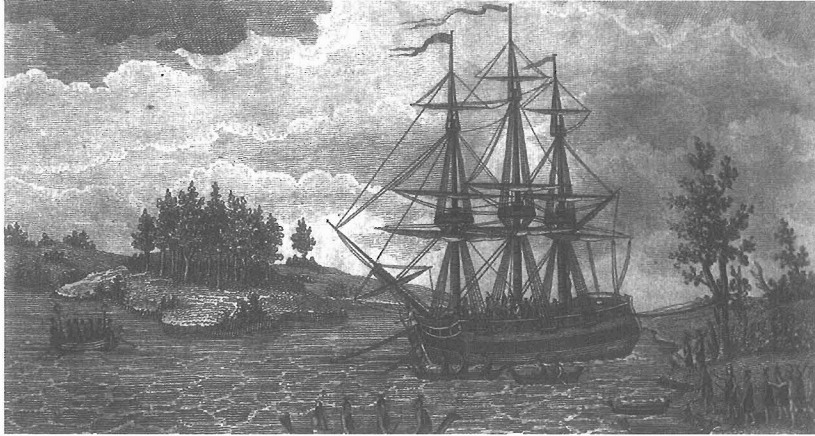
This is reason to celebrate for the Hell's Angels, though, whose B.C.

chapter is quite possibly the richest in North America. Every year they throw a party near my friend's house on the island. Held in late summer, Angels come to it from all over Canada and the U.S., filling the brimstone tang of South Wellington's air with the low, hiccupping sounds of their Harley Davidsons. They're on their way to Angel Acres, the bike gang's resort camp, and South Wellington's current claim to fame.

South of South Wellington, there's a small restaurant on Highway One. It's an unremarkable café set alongside a gas station, a place I would continue to ignore had not my resident friend Pete pointed out its use as the set in the climactic scene of the film *Five Easy Pieces* (1970). Outside this café, whose fictional location is in the U.S. state of Washington, Jack Nicholson's character Bobby Dupea abandons his car, clothes, and money to run away from his pregnant girlfriend, played by (real) Canadian actress Karen Black, hitching a ride on a (fictional) Canadian-bound logging truck.

Dupea's misanthropic escape and flight into the unknown is set in an alienated rural sideway in the middle of backwoods America. The scene is shot by an American film crew on a Canadian location that's substituting for America with characters in dialogue about traveling to a place they are at that moment standing in. Los Angeles artist Cindy Bernard photographed this café and gas bar in 1991 as part of the project of twenty-one photographs entitled "Ask the Dust". Bernard was recreating landscape shots from American films made between 1954 and 1974, including such classics as *The Searchers* by John Ford, *Vertigo* and *North by Northwest* by Alfred Hitchcock, as well as B-movies like *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* by Russ Meyer. She used information provided by the film's directors and production managers and reconstructed the shot—without the actors—using the same aspect ratio. Bernard's titling is informational and brief, in this case: *Ask the Dust: Five Easy Pieces 1970/1991*. She is vague about the location of her locations, assuming either their unmistakability, as with the mesas of Utah or the Golden Gate Bridge, or their interchangeability, such as in this Van Isle gas station.

In 1790 Don Pedro Alberni sailed into Nootka Sound, charged by Captain Bodega Y Quadra with consolidating Spanish authority in the region. He promptly set about adding to the Spanish fort, including within its garrison a bakery and an elaborate garden (from which a record still stands in B.C. for the largest head of lettuce ever grown). Quadra and Alberni made friends with Maquinna, which was no small feat considering Maquinna's brother Ke-le-cum had recently been shot by a Spanish sailor at the order of Martínez (who was then ordered back to Mexico). Their ambassadorial talent reputedly lay in their gracious hospitality. Alberni began learning to speak Nuuchahnulth, and the two Spaniards became famous for hosting



Sketch of the *Boston*, Courtesy of B.C. Archives A-07638

large, elaborate dinners to which Maquinna, other ranking chiefs, and any other visitors to the region would be invited. Captain Vancouver, for one, expressed admiration for the "superfluity of the best provisions, served with great elegance."⁶

The generosity and warmth in this anomalous tale stand in stark relief to the historical tack of the West Coast. When Alberni was transferred back to Mexico in advance of the Spanish departure (he would later assume the Governorship of California), he was replaced by a succession of less generous company-men, and the air of suspicion and mistrust between the Europeans and Natives immediately returned. Spanish sailors are reported to have repeatedly raped Nuu-chah-nulth women,⁷ and English, Spanish, and American captains continued to find pretexts and excuses for retribution and violence (dating back to 1785 when English Captain James Hanna killed over twenty people with a fusillade from his cannon because a carpenter's chisel had gone missing). In 1803, Maquinna's tolerance for the Europeans and Americans came to an end. An American vessel named the *Boston* stopped at Friendly Cove to trade and its captain, John Salter, insulted Maquinna, calling him a liar after Maquinna returned a faulty musket the American had given him as a present. Salter presumed Maquinna had broken the musket on purpose. In response Maquinna slaughtered the crew, arranging the heads of 25 sailors in a line on the ship's quarterdeck. He spared two others, John Jewitt and John Thompson, whom he subjugated as slaves.

In a personal account of his two years in captivity, Jewitt recounted a story about Maquinna's brother-in-law Tootoosch. During the massacre on the *Boston*, Tootoosch had killed two sailors named John Hall and Samuel Wood. Months after, he succumbed to some form of mental illness, perhaps as a result of the killings. Jewitt wrote how Tootoosch believed the ghosts of the two men were following him, and that he refused to eat anything that wasn't forced on him, because the sailors "wouldn't allow it." Mental disorders were uncommon among Nuu-Chah-Nulth, and Maquinna asked Jewitt if he knew what might be a cause. Jewitt replied by pointing to his own head and explaining that Tootoosch's brain was injured, and that he didn't see things "as formerly."⁸

Jewitt continued by describing how:

Maquinna [had] asked me what was done in my country in similar cases. I told him that such persons were closely confined and sometimes tied up and whipped in order to make them better. After pondering for some time, he said that he should be glad to do anything to relieve him and that he should be whipped, and immediately gave orders to some of his men to go to Tootoosch's house, bind him, and bring him to his in order to undergo the operation.

Thompson was the person selected to administer this remedy, which he undertook very readily, and for that purpose provided himself with a good number of spruce branches with which he whipped him most severely, laying it on with the best will imaginable, while Tootoosch displayed the greatest rage, kicking, spitting and attempting to bite all who came near him. This was too much for Maquinna who, at length, unable to endure it longer, ordered Thompson to desist and Tootoosch to be carried back, saying that if there was no other way of curing him but by whipping, he must remain mad.⁹

Notes

- 1 John R. Jewitt, *White Slaves of Maquinna* (Surrey: Heritage House Publishing, 2000), page 111.
- 2 Christon I. Archer, "Seduction before Sovereignty: Spanish Efforts to Manipulate the Natives in their Claims to the Northwest Coast," *The Vancouver Conference on Exploration and Discovery*, April 23-26, 1992. Programme published by Simon Fraser University,
- 3 Archer, page 50.
- 4 Samuel Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage of Sir Francis Drake 1577-1580* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2003).
- 5 Matthew Debock, "16,000 New Jobs for B.C. Economy: Robust Retail, Construction Sector Fuel the Growth," *The Vancouver Sun*, August 10, 2002, page A1.
- 6 Quoted in Stephen Hume, "A Spanish Garden on the Edge of our World," *The Vancouver Sun*, March 7, 2002, page A11.
- 7 Stan Douglas, "Nu•tka• 1996," *Stan Douglas* (London: Phaidon, 1998), page 135.
- 8 Jewitt, page 122.
- 9 Jewitt, pages 122-123.