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Errors and omissions:

The place where the expedition gathered freshwater is said here to be near Barnacle Road. I am now more inclined to believe it was further along the coast at Lavender Bay, see *SHALE* 10, pp.37–44 for details and pictures of what were possibly Galiano's *lagrimaderos*.

Reference:

Date posted:

May 10, 2010.

Alcalá Galiano's sketchmaps of Gabriola

by Nick Doe

In 1792, the inhabitants of Gabriola Island were visited by the crew of the sailing ships *Sutil* and *Mexicana* under the command of the Spanish naval officers Dionisio Alcalá Galiano and Cayetano Valdés. It was not the first time the Spanish navy had been here; it was however, the first expedition to have left behind a substantial record of its visit. This record includes six pages of the book *Relación del Viaje...* (Narrative of the journey...) first published in Spain in 1802,¹ plus portraits by José Cardero of two Indian chiefs whom the Spanish met here.² A third drawing, also probably by José Cardero but now lost, was the basis of the well-known depiction of Gabriola's Malaspina Galleries³ by the Italian artist Ferdinando Brambilla.⁴

Galiano and Valdés came to Gabriola for a little R&R—don't we all! They called the bay where *Sutil* and *Mexicana* anchored for four days *Cala del Descanso*, which means “cove of rest”; however, as we shall see later in this paper, contrary to popular belief,

¹ *Relación del Viaje hecho por las Goletas Sutil y Mexicana en el año 1792 para reconocer el Estrecho de Juan de Fuca*, pp.55–61, Madrid, 1802.

² Shown on the front cover. Note that one of the chiefs, the *Jefe de las Bocas de Wentuisen*, is almost invariably described in the literature as being from Nanaimo, but although this is possible, I see nothing in the title to exclude the possibility that he also was from Gabriola, or from one of the other near-by islands.

³ More correctly called the “Galiano Gallery”, though no one locally uses that name.

⁴ Alejandro Malaspina's expedition stopped at Nootka for two weeks in August 1791. This was as close as Malaspina ever came to Gabriola. Brambilla joined the expedition later and never visited the Pacific northwest.

Cala del Descanso was not the present-day Descanso Bay where the ferry terminal is.

The story of the visit really begins the previous year, 1791, when an exploratory survey of the Strait of Georgia was made by José María Narváez, Juan Carrasco, and José Verdía in the small schooner *Santa Saturnina* and the long boat of the *San Carlos*. That expedition was poorly equipped, the weather for sailing was bad, and, understandably, the chart that they made contained some inaccuracies. The most intriguing error was that it suggested that the Fraser valley, seen only at a distance, might in fact be the opening to a waterway leading eastward into the heart of the North American continent. It was this possible opening that Galiano and Valdés were most anxious to explore. By a remarkable coincidence, the Spanish and British navies arrived at the same place, at the same time, for the same purpose. On the previous day, near Point Roberts, the Spanish had met the expedition of Captain George Vancouver, which had as a prime objective determining whether or not there existed a northwest passage through to the Atlantic Ocean.

Just recently, my attention was drawn to some pencil sketchmaps in a “miscellaneous” file in the archives of the Naval Museum in Madrid.⁵ These pencil sketchmaps are by Galiano. Because they are only sparsely annotated, it is not easy for someone to recognize what they represent, and they have never been published before,

⁵ Museo Naval *Ms.2456 f. 1–2*. This file box is not listed in the Higuera Rodríguez *Catálogo Crítico...*

but to my delight when I saw them, they show Gabriola Island. Not only does Gabriola have a fine existing 18th-century record, there is, as it turns out, more to add to it.

The written record

Before I go on to describe the sketchmaps, I should perhaps say a few words about the already published journal of the visit. It was by studying these shortly after I first came to Gabriola that I realized that Descanso Bay has probably been mis-identified.⁶

What is not often recognized is that the 1802 book *Relación del Viaje...* (Narrative of the journey...) is an inaccurate account of the voyage.⁷ It has been edited by people that never took part in the 1792 expedition. In the pages on Gabriola for example, there is a passage sometimes rendered:

“...Under a clear sky there was displayed to us an attractive country; the green of varying tints and shining, of some woods and meadows, and the majestic rush of the waters which fell from the heights at various points, entranced our senses, and for us was all the more pleasant because we had so recently passed through many trials and labours.”

Nice words, but unfortunately words that were lifted from some other document, or written about some other place. They are

⁶ Nick Doe, *The 18th-Century Spanish Expeditions to Gabriola*, The Gabriola Sounder, p.7, Sept. 17, 1999.

⁷ There is also to make matters worse a bad translation around. *A Spanish Voyage to Vancouver and the North-West Coast of America* by Cecil Jane, although an enjoyable read if you are new to the subject, does not have many admirers among “serious” historians. The recommended translation is in Henry R. Wagner’s, *Spanish Explorations in the Strait of Juan de Fuca*, pp.228–300, but unfortunately this excellent book has become very rare outside of libraries.

not specifically about Gabriola at all. Galiano and Valdés actually only managed to find good drinking water with the help of the Snunéymux^w people living in Taylor Bay.

The most reliable record of the visit is the Naval Museum’s MS 619, which has been faithfully translated by the BC historian John Kendrick.⁸ All the remainder of the quotes in this paper are from this translation.

The story so far...

We can pick up the story of the visit of the *Sutil* and *Mexicana* on June 13, 1792, when the vessels reached Boundary Bay.⁹ The forty-or-so strong expedition had left Acapulco in March, and after a trying journey, which included unfavourable winds and a broken mainmast, finally reached Nootka in the middle of May.¹⁰ Here they did what they could to repair the damage and patch up their poor-quality rigging. Early in June, they left Nootka and headed down into the Juan de Fuca Strait.

It was the expectation of Galiano and Valdés, based on the chart made in 1791, that they would be able to sail into the supposed eastward-trending straight or inlet (*Boca de Florida Blanca*), by sailing northward between Point Roberts and Crescent Beach. Point Roberts (*Isla de Zepeda*) was thought to be an island, which indeed it often appears to be when viewed

⁸ John Kendrick, *The Voyage of Sutil and Mexicana—1792*, Arthur Clark, Spokane, 1991.

⁹ A very detailed account of the Spanish explorations in the Vancouver area is in Tomás Bartoli, *Genesis of Vancouver City—Explorations of its site 1791, 1792 & 1808*, Marco Polo Books, Vancouver, 1997.

¹⁰ John Kendrick, *The Men with Wooden Feet*, NC Press, Toronto, 1986.

from the south from a small boat. Once into Mud Bay however, the deception was quickly apparent; the *Isla de Zepeda* became *Punta de Zepeda*; and Galiano ruefully marked on his chart that Boundary Bay was the *Bahía del Engaño*, the “fraudulent” bay.

It was time for Plan B. This was to try to enter the *Boca de Florida Blanca* by way of Burrard Inlet. This was not such a bad idea of course, but again the chart that they had caused some confusion. It showed Point Grey (*Isla[s] de Lángara*) as an island in the entrance of what we now know is the Fraser River. After running into shallow water off Roberts and Sturgeon Banks, and spending two sleepless nights because of the insecure anchorages, they finally called a “time out”, and in the morning of June 15, headed out across the Strait of Georgia to the Gulf islands, which is where *our* story really begins.

Porlier Pass to Descanso

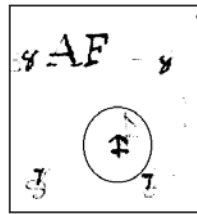
About midday, they arrived at Porlier Pass¹¹ (*Boca de Porlier*) between Galiano and Valdes Islands, which they somewhat rashly entered without first checking it out with their small boat. Once inside the pass, they decided to turn around and get out as there were no anchorages, but in the meantime both the wind and tide against them had increased.¹² After a lot of hard rowing, they finally escaped back into the Strait of Georgia. It might have been here that the unlucky Galiano ruefully annotated his sketch of the Porlier Pass *Puerto Falso* (False Port).

¹¹ Known locally ever since the Hudson's Bay Company days as the Cowichan Gap.

¹² They were not the last to run into trouble in the pass. HMS *Virago* ran aground here in 1853. Rather surprisingly, Galiano appears not to have seen the extent of the Trincomali Channel.

Sketchmap 1 (page 17) shows their route along the coast of Valdes Island to the Flat Top Islands (*Punta de Gaviola*).¹³

The expedition of the previous year had found an anchorage somewhere near the eastern end of Whalebone Drive on Gabriola, but evidently the wind for Galiano and Valdés was not conducive to their stopping there and they proceeded on toward Berry Point.¹⁴ Sketchmap 2 (page 18) shows their route along the north coast of Gabriola Island passing between Gabriola and Entrance Island, now the site of a lighthouse.



Anchorage symbol in Sketchmap 3

Doubling Berry Point, the two ships quickly found shelter from the fresh east wind (NE by the compass) and anchored close to the entrance of Pilot Bay, as shown in Sketchmap 3 (page 19). Here they remained until June 19, spending time repairing

sails, overhauling their boat and making spars for it, taking on water and wood, writing up their notes, making drawings, socializing with the inhabitants, and enjoying a little hunting and exploring.

There is a lot of evidence, quite apart from Sketchmap 3, that the present-day Descanso Bay is not where the Spanish ships anchored. The Spanish records describe the expedition's approach thus:

“...they arrived at the east point of the *Bocas de Winthuysen* [“entrances” to Nanaimo Harbour including Departure Bay and the Fairway and Northumberland Channels] and passed between the point and the islet.”

¹³ These small wooded islands look as if they are a single point when seen from a distance.

¹⁴ Berry Point is officially known as Orlebar Point though few Gabriolans use that name.



A map of the area, before development of Duke Point in the 1980s.

Descanso Bay is a lot further than one nautical mile from Berry Point. The six fathoms are interesting. An 18th-century Spanish fathom was a bit less than an English one, so we are talking about 33 feet here, and to relate this to a modern chart, we must not forget the tide. In the late afternoon and evening of June 15, 1792, my calculations show that the tide was fairly high, about 12 feet, so the anchorage would show on a modern chart as about 21 feet, or 3.5 fathoms. The only place in Descanso Bay that is this shallow and sandy is the beach along Easthom

The usual interpretation of this, following the suggestion of the renowned historian Henry R. Wagner, is that the east point was Tinson or Malaspina Point, and that the islet was Snake Island. The objection to this is that the Fairway Channel is a mile wide, and it is difficult to see why the narrator would have bothered mentioning the islet, given that there was plenty of sea room—there are after all countless numbers of islets all along the coast of BC. The correct interpretation is that the east point was *Punta de Casa Tilli* (Berry Point) and the islet was Entrance Island.

The narrative continues:

“We followed the coast, still with the objective of looking for an anchorage, and discovered one at a distance of a [nautical] mile from the point...let go the anchor in 6 fathoms sand, stopping between two points.”

Road at the southern tip of the bay.¹⁵ It might fit I suppose, but both Taylor Bay and Pilot Bay are sandier and shallower, and are exactly as the Spanish described.

Later in the records, it says (paraphrasing):

“...we went to visit the interior of the entry of Winthuysen and saw coves that had been previously seen from the land, the second of which is more sheltered than Descanso, but [the bottom] not as clear, nor with as good holding ground.... We passed a channel trending eastwards [Northumberland Channel] and from its direction should have led to the archipelago [Flat Top Islands] we had seen from the point [Law Point, *Punta de Gaviola*] preceding the east point of the harbour [Berry Point, *Punta de Casa Tilli*].”

¹⁵ Descanso Bay was formerly known as Rocky Bay. Its present name was acquired in 1904.

Now if the Spanish had been anchored in Descanso Bay, where was this second cove? As soon as you round the western point of Descanso you are into the Northumberland Channel, which is lined with cliffs. The text only makes sense if the ships were anchored in Taylor or Pilot Bay, making the second cove the present-day Descanso Bay.

Two more clues. On the beach, they asked the local people that they had met about the *Boca de Florida Blanca*. How could they do that, given that they had no language in common, other than by pointing in the general direction of Howe Sound (*Canales de Carmelo*) and the Burrard Inlet? That is not easy to do from the present-day Descanso Bay, as you cannot see in that direction, but you can from the entrance to

Pilot Bay. Finally, and I must thank Loraine Littlefield for this one, five men and a boy were observed to have carried a canoe from the beach at the head of the cove. Where would they be coming from at Easthom beach? At Twin Beaches, the answer is easy. They had portaged from one beach (Taylor Bay) to the other (Pilot Bay).

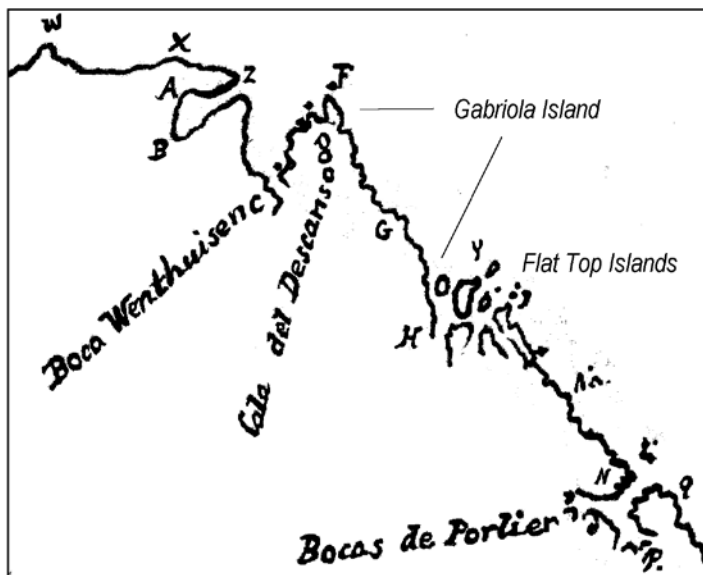
On Gabriola Island

In this section I will describe some, but not all, of the events of the expedition's stay, concentrating mainly on how the sketchmaps will change ideas about what went on.

The village at Taylor Bay

Soon after making sure the ships were secure, the crew went ashore at the head of the cove (the Pilot Bay beach at Twin Beaches, part of the Gabriola Sands Provincial Park). Here they followed a path into the woods (toward the beach at Taylor Bay), but were soon met by some alarmed Natives whose village they appeared to be approaching.

...(continued on page 20)

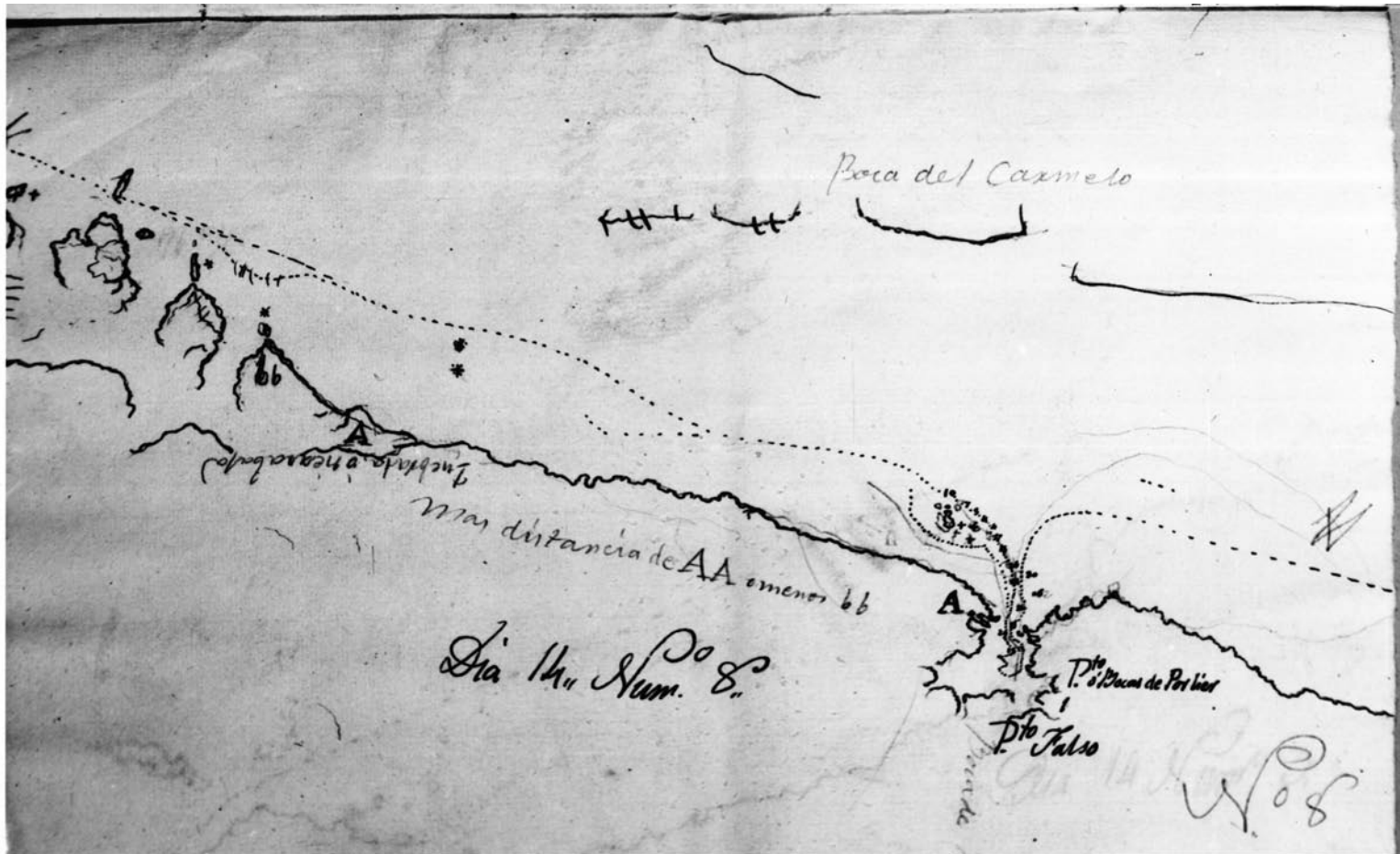


Carta Esferica... 1792 PRO FO 925 1650 (13)

Part of a much larger chart of the Strait of Georgia by Galiano showing the Northumberland Channel (*Boca Wenthuisen*), Pilot Bay (*Cala del Descanso*), and Porlier Pass (*Bocas de Porlier*). Newcastle and Protection Islands are shown attached to Vancouver Island.

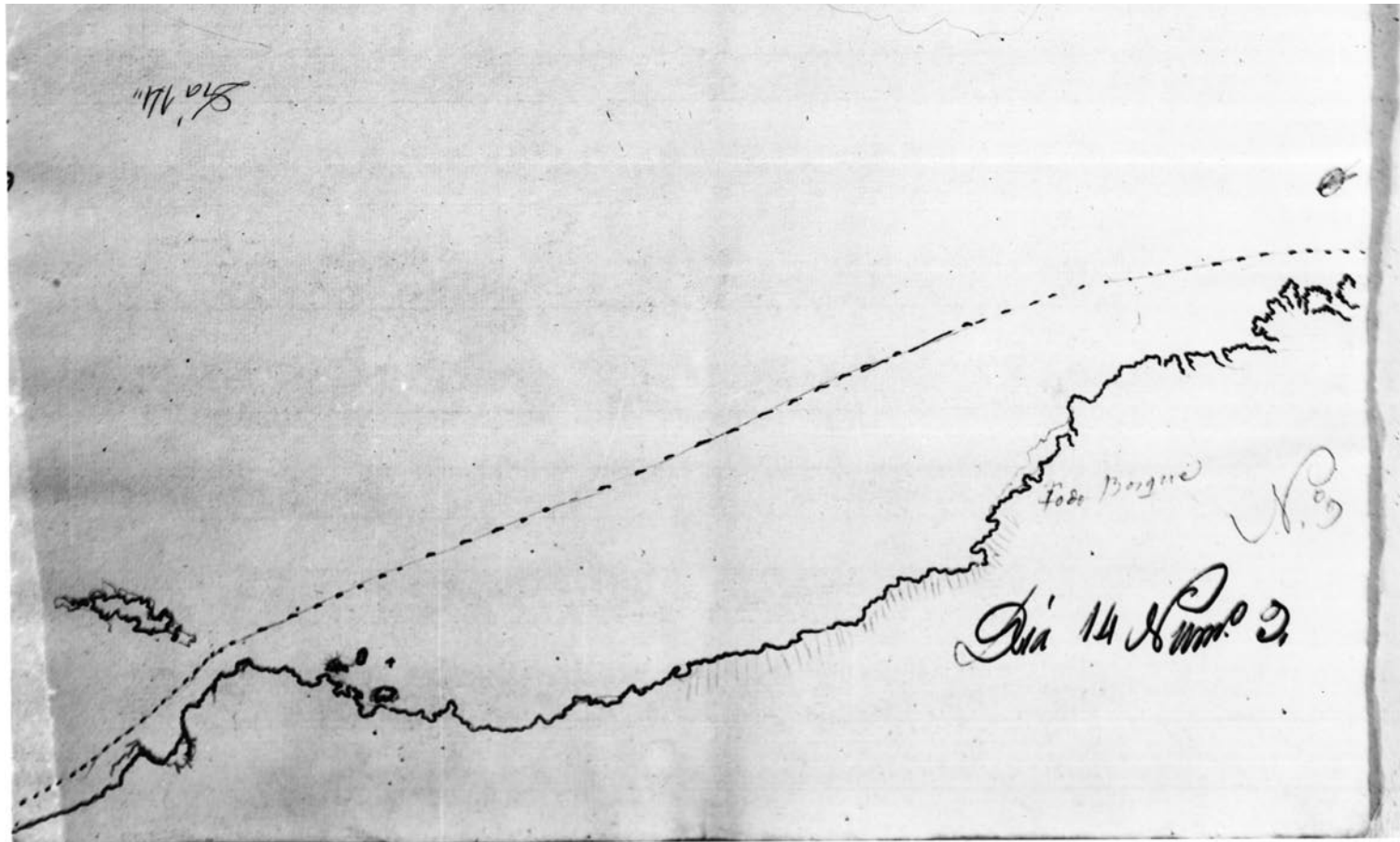
The numbers and letters marking geographic features are a sure indication that this was an early draft of the chart. The letter D, which looks like an 8, near *Cala del Descanso* gives a better indication of its location than the name, which was probably added later. A and B mark Departure Bay, C the Northumberland Channel, F Entrance Island, G the Whalebone Beach area, H Gabriola Passage, and Y the Flat Top Islands.

The chart is shown in full as Map 127 in Derek Hayes's, *Historical Atlas of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest*, Cavendish Books, Vancouver, 1999.



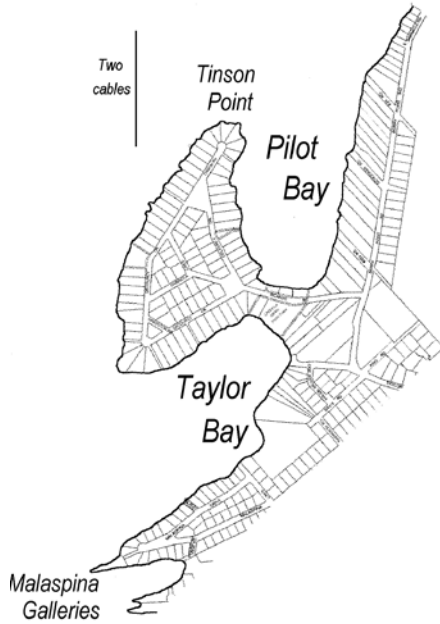
Sketchmap 1: Galiano's Day 14, No. 8 (*Día 14, Num.º 8*). This sketch shows the north coast of Galiano Island; Porlier Pass (*Puerto y Bocas de Porlier* and *Pto Falso*); and Valdes Island along to Breakwater Island and the Flat Top Islands on the left. The smaller islands around Gabriola Passage are not readily identifiable. The upside down annotation near the islands is *inebrada o tierra baja*—flooded or low-lying land. The faint pencil mark *Boca del Carmelo* near the top refers to Howe Sound and possibly indicates Bowen Island.

Courtesy MUSEO NAVAL



Sketchmap 2: Galiano's Day 14, No. 9 (*Día 14, Num^o 9*). This sketch shows the north coast of Gabriola Island starting from the Flat Top Islands on the right and finishing west of Berry (Orlebar) Point on the left. The importance of the sketch is that it shows that the Spanish vessels *Sutil* and *Mexicana* passed between Gabriola Island and Entrance Island (the islet, lower left). This is a good clue that Descanso Bay has been mis-identified. Henry R. Wagner, the authoritative Pacific Northwest historian, mistakenly assumed that the "islet" referred to in the journal of the voyage was Snake Island. The only annotation on the sketch is *todo bosque*—"it's all forest".

Courtesy MUSEO NAVAL

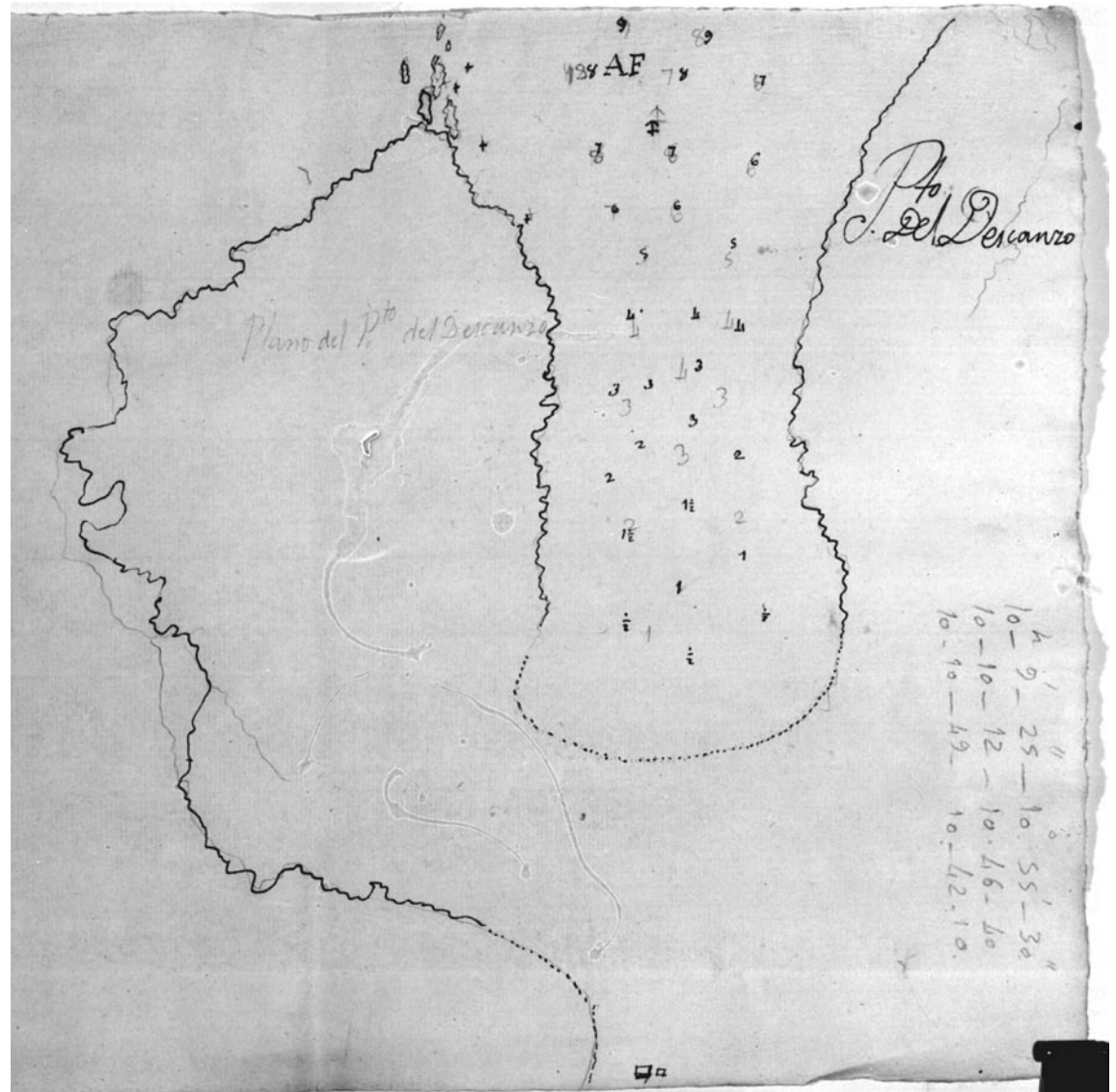


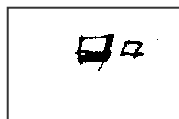
Adapted from RDN 92G.011.4.3 /4

Sketchmap 3: Pilot Bay (*Puerto del Descanzo*). The anchorage is indicated by an anchor symbol below the letters AF and slightly to the right, more or less level with Tinson Point. Note the village in Taylor Bay. This is marked by the two small squares (the usual symbol), one larger than the other, at the very bottom of the sketch.

The three (vertical) observations on the right are measurements of the angular distance of the moon from the sun. Lunar distance measurements were used for determining longitude. Calculations show that these observations were made at 8 a.m. June 18, 1792

Courtesy MUSEO NAVAL





Village symbol

(from page 16)... Galiano shows the village in Sketchmap 3. It was apparently at, or close to, the end of Taylor Bay Road.

The present-day Snunéymux^w elders recall visiting this area as children, and it is known to them as *X^wc'umí:l'ucun*, or “close-together place”.¹⁶

From comments later in the narrative, it would seem the village was at that time quite small. The people were in the process of removing the planking from the frames of the houses in preparation for their salmon-seasonal migration to their village on the bank of the Fraser River at Yorkson Creek across from Port Hammond.¹⁷

On June 17, the junior officer Secundino Salamanca went on a not-too-successful three-hour hunting trip, but apparently did not see anything remarkable.

The water problem

One of the most important tasks of the Spanish crew while they were here was replenishing their supply of freshwater. As everyone on Gabriola knows, in June, the surface water runoff begins to dry up with the fine weather, but the subsurface aquifers are still very full. The inhabitants, despite their uncertainty about the strangers' intentions, guided the crew to:

¹⁶ Loraine Littlefield (private communication). The site is an archaeological site (DhRx 18) and local people tell me that many anchor stones (stones with holes) have been found there in the past. See also June Lewis-Harrison, *The People of Gabriola*, p.102, Friesen & Sons BC; 1982.

¹⁷ Taking the siding and roof planks of houses with them, leaving just the framework in place when unoccupied, was a common practice among the Coast Salish.

“...two trickles of water, in one of which [there] were three huge reservoirs in large basins paved with round stones. ...These trickles were on the east shore of the harbour, about two cables beyond (*dos cables mas afuera*) the location of the *goletas* [ships]”.¹⁸

For some while, I was uncertain as to how to interpret “beyond”. Did they mean further into Pilot Bay, or did they mean out beyond the entrance to the bay. I now suspect it was the latter for two reasons. One: the Spanish word *afuera* carries with it the notion of “outside”; and two: the words were recorded from the perspective of someone standing on the beach at the head of the bay, not someone outside the bay looking in. We can conclude therefore that the water supply that the Snunéymux^w generously shared was somewhere in the vicinity of Barnacle Road.¹⁹ From the two “trickles”, the Spanish managed to load “thirty medium barrels” a day.

Galiano has fortunately quite possibly given a good further clue to the location of his water supply. On the top righthand corner of his sketch of *Puerto del Descanzo* there are some very faint pencil marks that appear to mark out the course of a creek. One line runs between the “s” and the “c” in his “...*Descanzo*”. The marks are faint but real, and when I went into the trees on the southeast side of Berry Point Road this summer to check it out, there indeed was a

¹⁸ A cable is one tenth of a nautical mile, 185 metres. The term *goleta* meant both a schooner, which in those days commonly carried square topsails, and more generally, any two-masted sailing vessel. *Sutil* mostly operated as what we now call a brig (square sails) and its sister ship *Mexicana* as a brigantine (square foresail, fore-and-aft mainsail). In the 18th century, the English would have called *Sutil* a brig or brigantine, the terms meant the same thing, and *Mexicana* a schooner in spite of its square foresail.

¹⁹ The nearest archaeological site is the small midden (DhRx 35).

north-easterly-trending line of slough sedge (*Carex obnupta*) marking what must be a watercourse, just as Galiano's sketchmap shows. There was even a small pond there, closely patrolled by a host of dragonflies.

Local people say the "swamp" has always been there, though the pond was dug out or enlarged in the 20th-century.²⁰ A small creek, just east of Barnacle Road, connects the pond to the beach. In winter, the creek flows in torrents, but dries up in summer. All year round, a tiny trickle of water from the pond still manages to seep through to the sandstone shore, travelling underground.

As I sat by the edge of the tranquil water of the pond in the sun, a small racoon climbed a dead tree opposite, a red-legged frog near my feet eyed me inquiringly, and one of the island's black-tailed deer, a buck, moved cautiously but unafraid out of the forest for a drink. I wondered if *they* remembered the time when people came from the beach, excitedly speaking Spanish and *Hul'qumi'num* together? Do *they* know where the round stones that once lined three reservoirs now lie, hidden from human eyes, somewhere quite close-by, beneath all the muck and mud and more than two-hundred-years' worth of forest and logging litter? Well perhaps—but, sad to say, they weren't ready to tell their tale to me.

Acknowledgements

I should like to thank the following for their invaluable help. John Crosse of Vancouver who first drew my attention to the sketchmaps; Dr. Eric Beerman who lives in Madrid; Dolores Higuera, Directora Técnica at the Museo Naval in Madrid; Bruce Ward of the BC Map Society; Derek Hayes; John Kendrick; and John Black at the Malaspina Research Centre, Malaspina University-College in Nanaimo. ◇

²⁰ The late 1950s / early 1960s perhaps.

The brief Spanish presence

As far as we know, the first non-native explorers of the Pacific Northwest were the Russians. Although the Spanish had sent expeditions northward from Mexico in the 16th and early-17th centuries, they had not succeeded in sailing beyond Baja (lower) California. Successive viceroys were content to leave the map blank, saving themselves the expense of voyages, and avoiding the uncontrollable attention of "foreigners" that discovery of a northwest passage would bring. For 120 years, there were no official expeditions to the north.

All this changed in 1741 when Vitus Bering reached America in the ships *Sviatoi Petr* and *Sviatoi Pavel*. Apart from their geographic discoveries, the Russians found there was a fortune to be made in furs. By 1760, Russian fur traders had established themselves in what is now Alaska.

From 1774 onward, the Spanish, alarmed by the Russian "threat", sent ships northward from their naval base at San Blas in Mexico to find out what the Russians were up to. But for them, there was more trouble on the horizon. In 1778, the British Captain Cook arrived at Nootka. The British were intensely interested in a northwest passage, and although Cook did not find one, he did find, just as the Russians had, that there was money to be made by trading furs. British and American fur traders began arriving on the coast in increasing numbers in the period 1785–1790.

The Spanish established a base at Nootka in 1789, but by 1796, their power had waned, the "foreign" presence had become too strong, and they withdrew. American fur traders from Boston were active in the period 1788–1821, but in the 1820s, they were driven out of business by dwindling sea-otter populations and by the arrival of Hudson's Bay Company traders from the east.

Tomás Bartoli, *Brief Presence—Spain's activity on America's Northwest Coast (1774–1796)*.