

Context:

Gabriola Island placenames.

Citation:

Doe, N.A., Malaspina Galleries—what's in a name, *SHALE* 8, pp.12–15, June 2004.

Copyright restrictions:

Copyright © 2004: Gabriola Historical & Museum Society.

For for-profit reproduction permission e-mail: nickdoe@island.net

Errors and omissions:

Date posted:

August 22, 2011.

Malaspina Galleries—what’s in a name?

by Nick Doe



Capitán Alejandro Malaspina

MUSEO NAVAL

You might suspect that anything called the **Galiano Gallery** on **Gabriola** would be confusing. And, of course, you’d be right. Just try asking Google to search the Internet for it, and see how meagre are the returns, apart that is, from this article.

People who live on Gabriola¹ all know this topographic feature, not by its official name, the Galiano Gallery, but as the **Malaspina Galleries**. This is in spite of the edict of the Geographic Board of Canada in 1906 that it is Dionisio Alcalá Galiano, not Alejandro Malaspina, who should be so honoured.²

¹ In a laudable effort to reduce confusion, Canada Post drops the word “Island” from our name, so *we* are just “Gabriola”, but *they* are “Galiano Island”.

² See *endnotes* 1 and 2 for biographies. For what it’s worth, given that Galiano has a well-known Gulf Island, while Malaspina has only a small strait and an inlet, and given that a Snunéymux^w name appears not to be forthcoming, I think Gabriolans are quite right to award the galleries to Malaspina.

Needless to say, neither gentleman had a hand in the creation of the galleries; they’re all entirely the work of nature. Which of course, is another source of confusion—how many visitors I wonder have headed off to the “galleries” expecting to find further opportunities to buy things to hang on their walls? A favourite Gabriolan retort to the question “when are the galleries open?” is “whenever the tide is low”.

Although the gallery (or galleries) have been known to officialdom since the early 1900s, there was still lingering doubt in 1965 as to whether to call it (or them) a “gallery” or a “cliff”.³

Even members of the Spanish Royal Navy, who visited the galleries certainly once and possibly twice in the late-18th century, were confused. A well-known sketch by the young Spanish cartographer and artist, José Cardero, made in 1792, was mixed up with a lot of other drawings when it got back to Madrid. After being reworked by someone who had never been to the northwest coast, it was labelled “...*view of a natural feature in Port Mulgrave*”. All very well and good, except that Port Mulgrave is in Alaska, about four hundred nautical miles north of anywhere on Gabriola.

³ Letter from J.K. Fraser, executive secretary of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, to W.R. Young, chief of the Geographic Division, Department of Lands and Forests, Victoria, November 26, 1965. In his reply dated December 1, 1965, Mr. Young recorded that the province was “quite agreeable” to “it” being called a cliff. It is currently known as a “cliff type 2” (a steep rock face projecting nearly vertically from the surrounding land) as opposed to a “cliff type 1” (a steep rock face projecting nearly vertically from a body of water).

Eventually this did get sorted out. The galleries, it was said in 1885, are near **Port Descanso** in the Juan de Fuca Strait. ...Ah yes ...Port Descanso. Not even the Geographic Board of Canada was entirely sure where that was. Hence the board's misnaming of—what used to be called **Yacht Harbour**, before it was called **Rocky Bay**, before it was called **Knight Bay**—**Descanso Bay**.⁴ As *SHALE* readers all know, but some tour guides don't, *Cala del Descanso* (cove of rest) was actually the Spanish name for what we now know as **Pilot Bay**.⁵

Until the mid-1970s, the galleries were marked on Canadian topographical maps (92 G/4) as being on the south side of **Taylor Bay**, which of course they aren't. The galleries are at the end of Malaspina Drive on the south side of **Malaspina Point**...which used to be called **Arbutus Point** before it was called **Schooner Point**, before it was called **Miles Point**.⁶ But enough, enough!...no wonder some people on Gabriola call them “the caves” and leave it at that.⁷

Gabriolans have always known the feature as a “set of galleries” (plural) rather than a gallery (singular) for the very good reason there is more than one of them. To see the complete set however you need to go to the end of McConvey Road on the opposite (southwest) side of the small bay,⁸ which,

⁴ See *endnote 3* for further details.

⁵ Nick Doe, *Alcalá Galiano's sketchmaps of Gabriola*, *SHALE* 1, pp.12–21, November 2000.

⁶ See *endnote 4* for further details.

⁷ June Lewis-Harrison, *The People of Gabriola*, pp.265–266, Frieson & Sons BC, 1982.

⁸ There is public access to the beach here, but at the time of writing, it is a scramble. Notice that there appears to be a second set of galleries above the present ones and below the residences. “Stacked”

just in case you were wondering, used to be called **Foster's Bay** before it was called...ah! never mind. Good luck in finding them (or it)! Ask a young person if you get lost. It's a favourite summer-evening hangout place.

A good source of Gabriola placename information by the way is Aula Bell and Neil Aitken's, *Gabriola Island Place Names*, Reflections Books, Gabriola, 1992.

ENDNOTES

[1]. **Alejandro Malaspina**⁹ (1754–1810) was an Italian navigator, who, in the service of Spain, made one of the great voyages of discovery of the 18th century.^{10, 11} His voyage (1789–94) was inspired, in part, by those of Britain's James Cook (1728–79), and that of France's Jean François de Galaup, Comte de la Pérouse (1741–c.88).¹²

galleries like this also appear on the cliffs on Valdes Island. These are part of the evidence that such galleries are not carved by the “wind and the waves” but are due to erosion by salt left on their backwalls by evaporating salty groundwater. See *SHALE* 7 and forthcoming *SHALE* 9 for details.

⁹ “Alejandro” is the Spanish spelling of the Italian “Alessandro”. Officers who are in command of a naval vessel are customarily addressed as “captain” irrespective of their commissioned rank. At the start of the great voyage, Malaspina's rank was *capitán de fragata* (ship's captain or commander). During the voyage he was promoted to *capitán de navío* (post captain). At the conclusion, before his political troubles began, he was promoted to *brigadier de real armada* (commodore), just one level below *jefe de escuadra* (rear admiral).

¹⁰ John Kendrick, *Alejandro Malaspina—Portrait of a Visionary*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999.

¹¹ Andrew David, *The Voyage of Alejandro Malaspina to the Pacific, 1789–1794*, The 1999 Hakluyt Society Annual Lecture, Hakluyt, 2000.

¹² Gabriola's expert on la Pérouse is André Lemieux. See <<http://www.gabriola.org/alaska2001/>>.

Malaspina however, put less emphasis on geographical discovery than his predecessors. He chose instead to add to various scientific and hydrographic tasks, an investigation of the political state of Spanish possessions in the Americas and Pacific Ocean.

The Spanish at the time were very mindful of their appalling reputation as colonisers earned in previous centuries, and were eager to put this behind them and fully enter into the spirit of Europe's "age of enlightenment". Two specially designed corvettes, the *Descubierta* commanded by Malaspina, and the *Atrevida* commanded by José Bustamente, were used for the voyage.

The five-year long expedition returned triumphantly to Cadiz in 1794, bringing with it 300 journals; 450 notebooks of astronomical and hydrographic observations; 1500 hydrographic surveys; 183 charts; 361 coastal views; and more than 800 drawings of places, persons, and exotic animals and plants.

While Malaspina had been away however, the political climate in Europe had taken a turn for the worse. His entirely reasonable proposal that the king dismiss all his ministers and replace them with individuals who shared his vision of Spain as a modern enlightened state was judged to be seditious, and Malaspina was sentenced to ten years imprisonment. Practically all the records of the great voyage were put into storage, there to remain in obscurity for almost a century.¹³

¹³ Malaspina's account of the voyage, *Diario del viaje*, was actually first published in Russian in 1824–7, but attracted little attention. The first Spanish edition was edited by Pedro de Novo y Colson and published in Madrid in 1885 with the title *Viaje político científico alrededor del mundo por las corbetas Descubierta y Atrevida...*. An English edition is being prepared by the Hakluyt Society and Volume

Even today, many of these records remain untranslated and thus relatively unknown in the English-speaking world.

Although the main expedition made only a two-week stop at the Spanish naval establishment at Nootka on the west coast of Vancouver Island in August 1791, Malaspina subsequently put two of his senior lieutenants (*tenientes de navío*), Dionisio Alcalá Galiano from the *Atrevida*, and Cayetano Valdés y Flores from the *Descubierta*, in charge of making a subsidiary exploration of the Juan de Fuca Strait and the Strait of Georgia.¹⁴ Because of Malaspina's political troubles, the Galiano-Valdés expedition of 1792 was later portrayed as an independent voyage of discovery, and Malaspina's role in it was suppressed.¹⁵ The reality, however, is that at the time, the 1792 voyage was deservedly regarded as an integral part of the Malaspina expedition.

[2]. **Dionisio Alcalá Galiano** (1760–1805) was born in Cabra, Córdoba, Spain, and became a skilled, and highly respected, officer and hydrographer in the Spanish navy. He was assigned by Malaspina, along with fellow-officer Valdés, to investigate the Juan de Fuca Strait and follow wherever it might lead. At the time, Europeans did not know that Vancouver Island was an island.

1, *Cadiz to Panama*, was published in 2001, and Volume 2, *Panama to The Philippines*, in 2003.

¹⁴ Their portraits appear on the front cover of *SHALE* 1, November 2000. Contrary to the note on the inside front cover (printings 1–5), Galiano commanded the brig *Sutil*, and Valdés, the brigantine *Mexicana*.

¹⁵ An account of the voyage, *Relación del viaje hecho por las goletas Sutil y Mexicana...* was first published in Madrid in 1802. The first English edition wasn't published until 1930 (Cecil Jane's translation entitled, *A Spanish voyage to Vancouver and the North-West coast of America*).

The Spanish 1792 expedition took place at the same time as that of Captain George Vancouver, whom Galiano met during their respective voyages. The Galiano-Valdés expedition set out from Acapulco on March 8, 1792, and arrived on Gabriola Island on the afternoon of June 15. They left to explore Burrard Inlet on the morning of June 19, and subsequently went on to circumnavigate Vancouver Island arriving back at Nootka on August 31.

After his visit to the northwest coast, Galiano returned to Napoleon's Europe where he worked on a new map of Spain for a few years before becoming involved in several naval operations against the British. He was killed at the battle of Trafalgar on October 21, 1805, and was buried at sea.

[3]. The present-day **Descanso Bay** appears as **Yacht Harbour** on a sketch of Nanaimo Harbour, 1852, although this quickly gave way in the 1860s to **Rocky Bay**, a name still remembered by some of the old-timers on Gabriola. Because Rocky Bay is not a suitable name for British Admiralty Charts (there are too many rocky bays in the world), Commander John Franklin Parry of the survey ship HMS *Egeria* renamed it **Knight Bay** in 1904 in honour of one of the ship's six lieutenants, John Harry Knight. This was hastily changed by the Geographic Board of Canada in 1906 to **Descanso Bay**; however, in the meantime, British and US charts and sailing directions had been published with the name Knight Bay, and so, to the exasperation of the board, that name persisted for many years.

[4]. The present-day **Malaspina Point** was aptly called **Arbutus Point** in the 1850s, but within a few years this had become **Schooner Point**. Commander Parry renamed it **Miles Point** in 1904 after another of his lieutenants, Irving Brock Miles. For some unknown reason, Parry shortly

afterwards changed his mind and altered the name to Malaspina Point on his manuscript chart dated 1905 (UK HO B9838). It was this name that became widely used (if it wasn't already), particularly in US Hydrographic Office publications (see for example, HO 175, *British Columbia Pilot*, vol. 1, first edition, 1916, p.234). The Geographic Board of Canada nevertheless endorsed the name Miles Point in 1906. Perhaps becoming tired of being asked who "Miles" was, the board relented in October 1945 and allowed that the point could be called Malaspina Point after all. This probably made sense to those living on Malaspina Drive; however, that same year, the board changed **Berry Point** (or to some, **Lighthouse Point**) to **Orlebar Point**. Gabriolans haven't caught up with this one yet, especially those who live on Berry Point Road, but watch out for further developments.

Parry also marked the galleries on his manuscript chart in 1904 as "Malaspina's Gallery", a proposal that was destined to be unacceptable because fiddly punctuation like apostrophes is usually disallowed in geographical names. ◇