

Context:

18th-century history, west coast of Canada

Citation:

Doe, N.A., Flea Village—4. Historical accounts
SILT 17-4, 2016. <www.nickdoe.ca/pdfs/Webp564.pdf>. Accessed 2016 Nov. 06.

NOTE: *Adjust the accessed date as needed.*

Most of this paper was completed in April 2007 with the intention of publishing it in the journal *SHALE*. It was however never published at that time, and further research was done in September 2007, but practically none after that. It was prepared for publication here in November 2016, with very little added to the old manuscripts. It may therefore be out-of-date in some respects

It is 4 of a series of 10 articles and is the final version, previously posted as Draft 1.2.

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Date posted:

November 9, 2016.

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Flea Village — historical accounts

by Nick Doe

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It's there, you just can't see it

At this point in the story, you're going to be wondering, so what is the problem? A large and unusual village, definitely located in the historical records in a relatively small area—it can't be hard to find. The footnote in Lamb's edition of Captain Vancouver's book certainly inspires confidence in this regard. It says: “[Charles F.] Newcombe, who knew the locality well, places this village [Flea Village] in Prideaux Haven, Homfray Channel”.

So, no problem, let's leave it at that...except...except that Bill Wolferstan in his popular cruising guide to British Columbia says the following:¹

“Many yachtsmen have searched diligently throughout Prideaux Haven for Menzies ‘Flea Village’ but have failed to find it. It is there, *almost exactly as described* by Menzies [Bills’ italics]. The large Maple Tree has been replaced by several smaller ones. The steps, skeletons of Houses and scaffolds, stench and Fleas, have disappeared being replaced by myriads of no-see-ums, rusty tins and ancient bottles and a thicket of small pines—the legacy of logging activity possibly 50 years ago.”

It's there, but “many yachtsmen” can't find it? An Archaeological Impact Assessment in 1998 adds this, just in case you have little faith in “yachtsmen”:

“EaSd-3 is recorded as a fortification site over 120m long with midden and canoe runs. This site could not be located in the field. ...Site location was determined from a

¹ Volume 2: *Desolation Sound and the Discovery Islands*, 1987 edition, p.96. Immediately below the quote there is a picture of Laura Cove.

photocopy of a 1:50 000 scale map of site locations and database information summarized from the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN). Both sources are inaccurate.”²

Although I'm jumping ahead a bit here, I'll also add a small extract of Beth Hill's account of Flea Village:

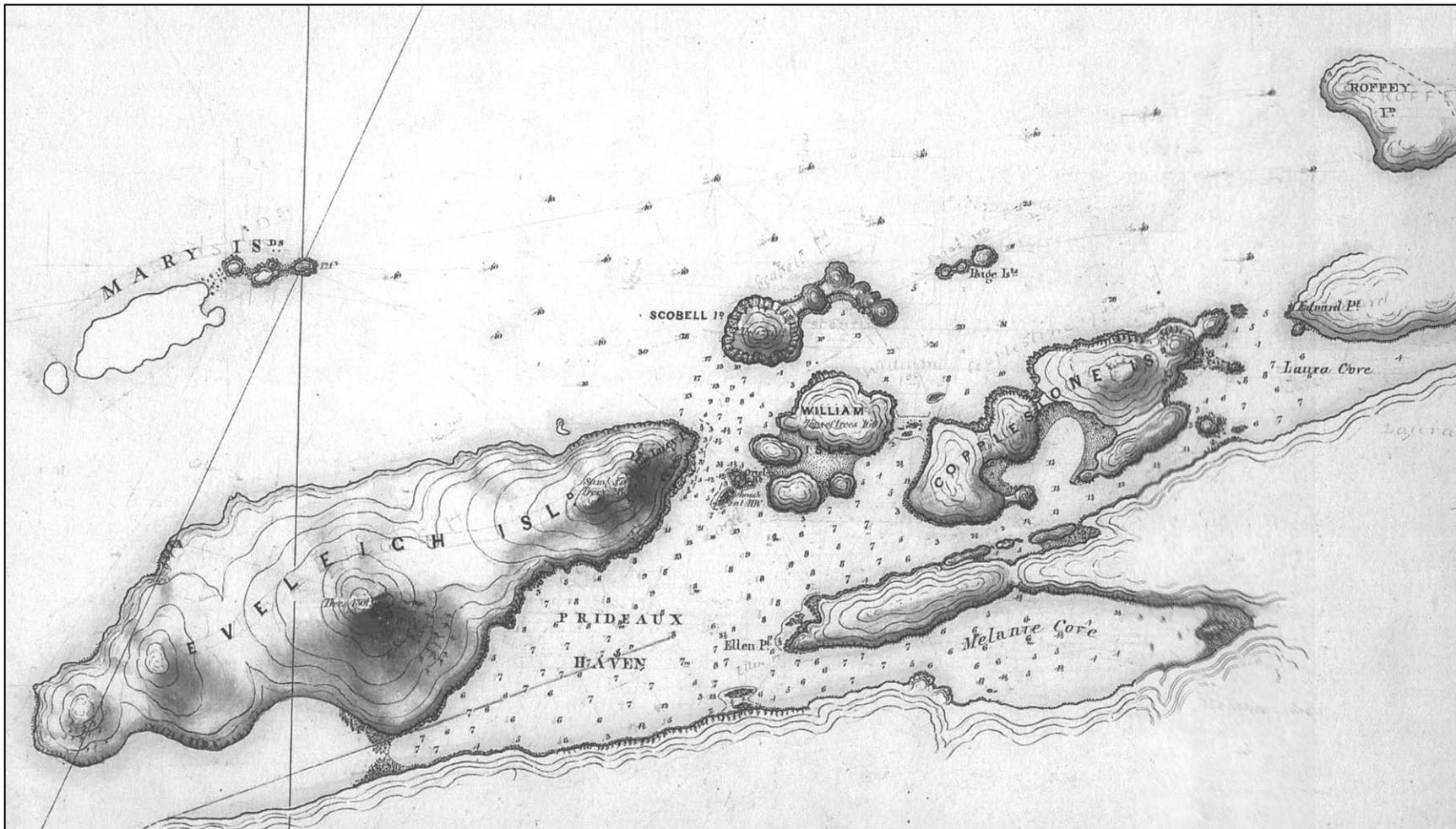
“So we four went carefully around the point in a small boat...and there it was, *plain as the proboscis it resembled on the chart!* [my italics]”

There you go. Not only is it there, it's on the charts—and still the yachtsmen can't find it.

Pender's chart

At this point, the thought occurred to me that while the village might not be marked on modern charts, perhaps it had been on earlier versions. On a visit to the UK Hydrographic Office, I obtained with the help of Andrew David a copy of a manuscript chart of Prideaux Haven by Daniel Pender, an officer in the Royal Navy, made in 1864. This beautiful piece of work is annotated lightly in pencil and red ink; yet, strangely, there is no mention anywhere of a deserted Indian village, something that would surely have interested Pender, even if his note wouldn't have made it on to the published version of the chart.

² Millennia Research Ltd., *Desolation Sound and Copeland Islands Provincial Marine Parks: Archaeological Inventory and Impact Assessment*, p.10, Report Prepared Under Permit 1998-52 for BC Parks etc.; Sliammon Native Council; Klahoose Indian Band; Holmalco Indian Band; and the Archaeological Branch.



Manuscript chart of Prideaux Haven by Daniel Pender, *Beaver*, 1864. There are several lightly pencilled annotations, scarcely visible even on the original, but none make mention of a “deserted Indian Village”.

Courtesy UK Hydrographic Office, Taunton, D8239

Historical sources

I have to confess that by this time, I was getting very wary of documented sources of information and I paid increasingly less attention to them, perhaps less than some deserve. However, for the record, here they are.

The earliest “modern” historical reference to Flea Village I know of is in the Barrows journals so ably rescued by Beth Hill and her husband. The Barrows travelled the coast in the 1930s.

On July 11, 1934, their journal says:³

“Prideaux Haven. Anchored [*Toketie*] under Flea Village. We went ashore and saw Sautler and his chum Frank who were in the boat house at work on their 30-foot boat. They have arrived at the planking stage of construction. Phil Lavigne from the next bay [Laura Cove] arrived with some tobacco for Sautler—he had been to Refuge Cove [on West Redonda Island].”

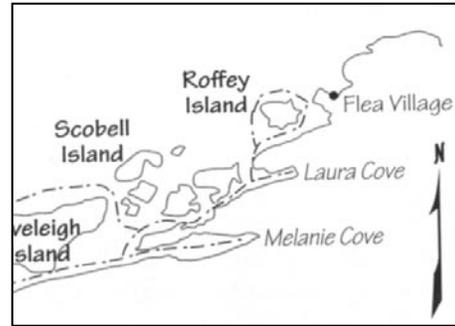
So we’re definitely north of Copplestone Point, assuming that the Barrows knew where the village was.

Muriel Wylie Blanchet in 1968 adds this fragment (from a good story that I won’t quote in full here):⁴

“He [Phil Lavigne {Lavine}] had a small mountain to climb before he could get help from anyone. It was only a rambling goat-trail, and it was dark when he finally stumbled into the Sa[u]lter place.”

So we’re also not on an island.

Next we have Beth Hill, who says:⁵



The north side of Roffey Peninsula is said by Heather Harbord to be the “real” Flea Village site.

“So we four went carefully around the point in a small boat, watchful for the submerged islets that cluster in the corner behind Roffey Island...and there it was, plain as the proboscis it resembled on the chart! There was the stream to provide water for the village. The almost-island [?] was high and steep-sided, just as Menzies described it in 1792, but it had a flat top, where lay the remains of an old iron stove, perhaps Sautler’s. The top of the peninsula was accessible from the saddle (which was covered by a deep midden deposit). There was ample room where the little peninsula joined the mainland for the large Indian house which once stood there, and later, for Sautler’s big pea patch. Such joyful shouts as we recognized it, the long-lost village of fleas!”

Finally, there’s Heather Harbord’s account. Heather actually talked with a Native guide, something historians don’t seem to do very often.⁶

“Roffey Island hides the most famous place of all—Vancouver’s flea village. Concealed from Haida slavers, the Sliammon people had a small, fortified village on the rocky peninsula behind the island.

³ Beth Hill, *Upcoast Summers* (diaries of Francis & Amy Barrows), p.48, Horsdal & Schubart, 1985. There’s a photograph of Sautler and Frank on the 9th page of photo’s following p.38.

⁴ M. Wylie Blanchet, *The Curve of Time*, p.110, Whitecap Books, 1968.

⁵ Beth Hill, *Seven-Knot Summers*, pp.152–3, Horsdal & Schubart, 1994.

⁶ Heather Harbord, *Sea Kayak Desolation Sound and the Sunshine Coast*, pp.48–51, map p.48, Rocky Mountain Books, 2005.

... ‘My grandfather said our people had the original mobile homes,’ said Murray Mitchell, who runs Ayjoomixw Tours in a traditional canoe. ‘Planks were lashed to posts and taken with them when they moved.’ Vancouver’s men saw the posts but didn’t realize that the people had taken the planks for use elsewhere. The men also noticed that a cantilevered deck in front of the houses made scaling the cliff impossible. Mitchell said that when the villagers were in residence they would have piled rocks and heavy branches on the deck ready to hurl down on invaders. The small village at Lund had similar fortifications.

“As Vancouver’s men poked about...they were attacked by a multitude of fleas. ... ‘The people hadn’t fled,’ says Mitchell. ‘They had just been transformed into fleas which Vancouver’s men found there.’ The village was called Mah-choh-sah-yee, meaning flea village. It was not used for long.”

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