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18th-century history, west coast of Canada

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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 It may therefore be out-of-date in some respects.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 8 of a series of 10 articles and is the final version, previously posted as Draft 1.2.

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There is no substitute for going to look for yourself. *Polly Ester*, our 12-foot Porta-Bote fitted with a 4HP engine and a pair of oars, along with a toothbrush, a few beers, and some granola is all one really needs.

Ironically, where the trips started from (by car at least) is the site of an old Indian village with a barricade. It also has a Spanish name (*El Verano on Gabriola*). Look no further! The upturned boat in the lower picture is *Polly* in her winter quarters.



The barricade along the beach front is about 20-years old, and of the original 15 panels only four are still intact, the others having succumbed to a combination of inadequate footings in the rocky ground, rot, and winter storms. In contrast, the ones shown by Cardero are pristine. I guess maintenance standards were different back then.

Flea Village — field trip #2, September 2005

by Nick Doe

[...continued from [File FV-567](#)]

***Polly Ester* expedition of 2005**

In September 2005, not much progress having been made in the meantime, I set out for Desolation Sound again. This time I travelled alone and the trip was more purposeful. None of this just enjoying yourself. There had to be an answer to this riddle. Flea Village was somewhere just

north of, but not in, Prideaux Haven. A village of 300 people can't disappear. Even a mere Muggle should be able to find it.

Back over the same route—sounds like a chore, but of course it wasn't. The crossing of the open water between Zephine Head

and Bold Head in sunshine and a lively breeze was exhilarating.¹

Made camp on Roffey Island, and thanks to a very early morning start had time to work on the task at hand in the afternoon. This time I resolved to cruise the coast using oars instead of the engine, and to go ashore and bushwhack as much as time would permit. I also decided that I would start at the northernmost of the suggested locations and work my way north until at least Price Point.² This would leave the contentious areas adjacent to Roffey Island and at the northern fringes of Prideaux Haven until last.

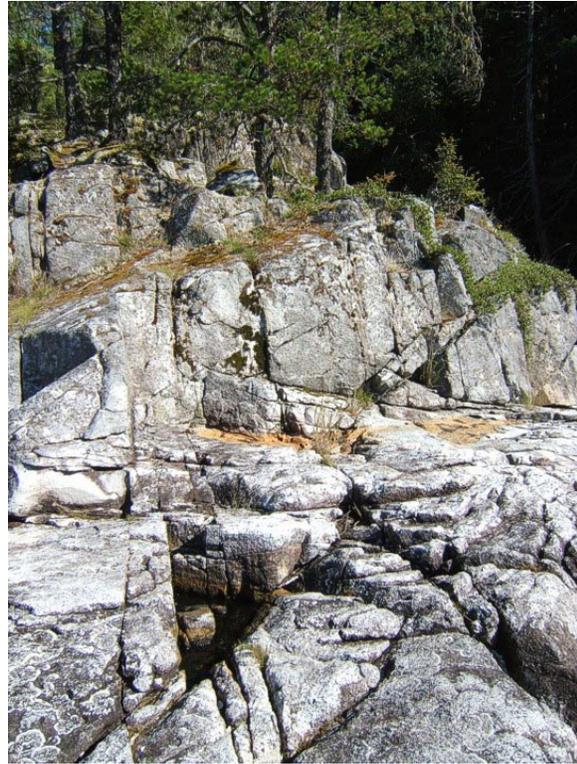
The requirements were simple. There had to be water, even at this time of year when it hadn't rained for some time. There had to be a beach. And there had to be some reasonably level ground for the houses. Everything else was up in the air. Amazingly, I found all three, in that order.

I took the boat around to the bay north of the Roffey Peninsula and managed to moor it, rather uncomfortably, among the rocks in the northeast corner of the bay. From there, I climbed the hill in a dry seasonal creek bed, and then traversed along through the woods, more or less parallel with the coast. Keeping really close to the shoreline wasn't practical as the hillside was uncomfortably steep lower down.

The only thing of note that I saw were terraces. These were only a few metres wide, but very convenient for walking along.

¹ On the previous trip, boaters had walked passed our campsite in Melanie Cove wondering where our "real boat" was moored. We considered at one point explaining to them that it was too big to bring into a Prideaux Haven anchorage.

² The Homfray Channel beyond Price Point has a very rocky, steep "no bottom shore"—it disappears sharply into the sea at a constant angle. There are no islands and few anchorages or camping sites.



The rocks of Prideaux Haven and the east coast of the Homfray Channel are granodioritic (granodiorite, tonalite, quartz diorite) often with the darker mafic minerals (biotite and hornblende) weathered out at the surface. Extensively compression fractured.

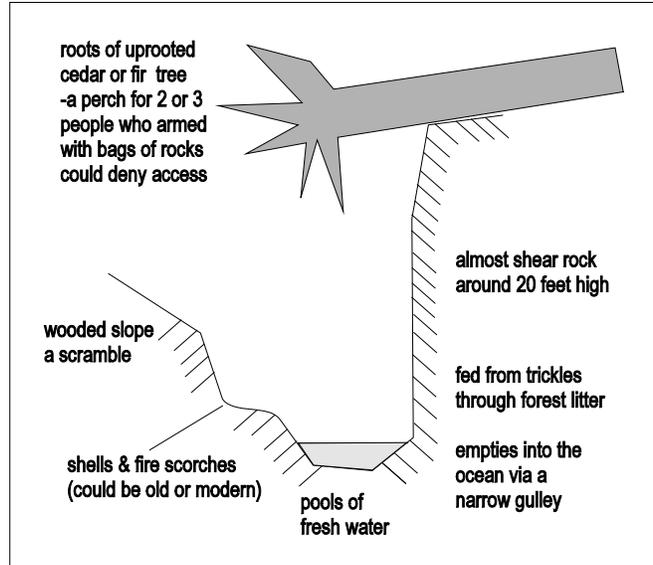
Were these natural features, old logging roads, ancient earthworks, ...? I ended the debate by peeling away some of the moss and found that they were granodioritic. Heavily weathered, it is true, but intrusive igneous rock nevertheless. That's the kind of rock the Coastal Mountains of BC are made of, and it's not the kind of rock that takes kindly to being asked to move along with a shovel. Presumably, the terraces were created by glaciers in the last ice age, but exactly how I'm not sure.

Just about when I was about to turn back, getting anxious about the boat, I heard the musical tinkle of running water underneath the leaf litter. Hah hah! Down the slope and there at the bottom was a pool of water

as clear as you'd find in any trout stream at the foot of a rock. From here, through the understory and down through a narrow gulley and a cleft in the rock, you could just glimpse the cobbles at the edge of the sea.

And the rest is pretty much history. I returned the next morning in the boat with compass, camera, notepad, and laser rangefinder. Found the creek again, landed on the nearby beach, walked into the woods, and there, as expected, was what I thought at the time was the village. I'll let the pictures tell the tale.

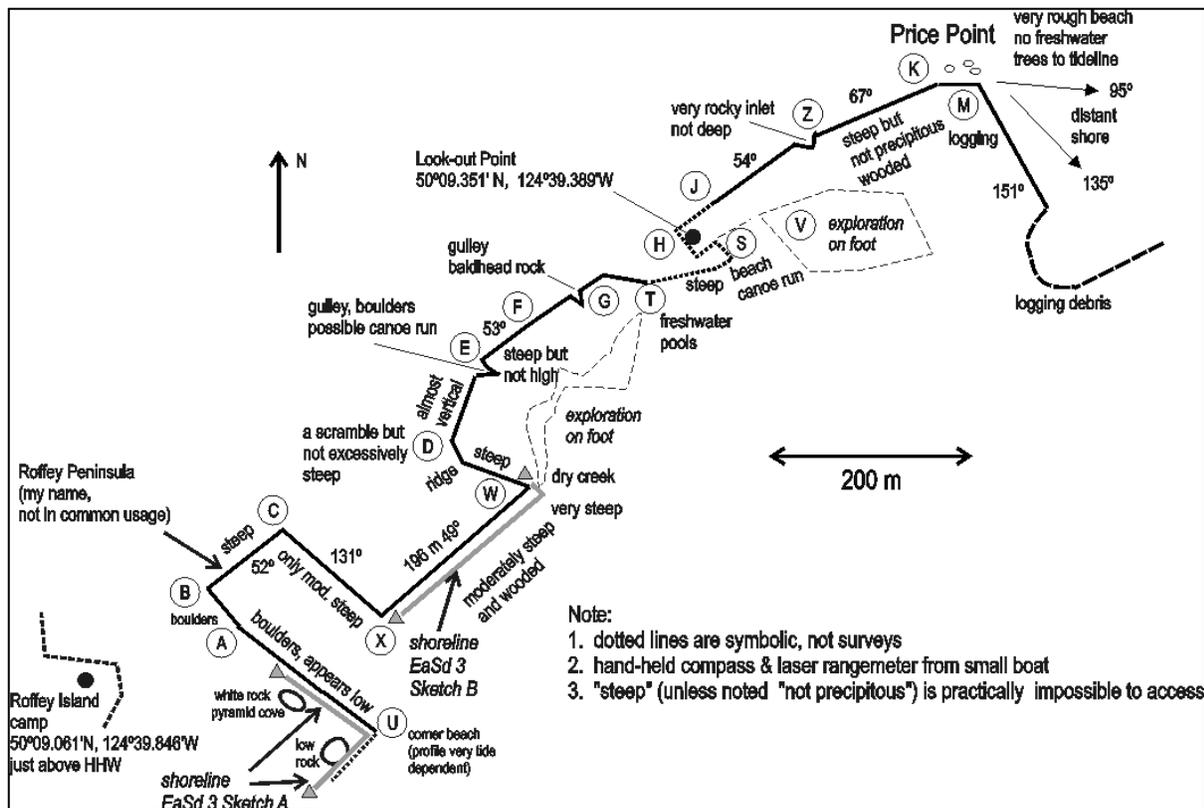
Because the weather was threatening to turn bad, I left soon after. As I steered out of the white-capped open water round Zephine Head into the Malaspina Inlet, I paid little heed to the boils, swirls, and tidal rip. They had become as the growls of a known-to-be-friendly dog. I knew now one of the secrets of this land; the water could tug me whichever way it willed, but the flood tide was in my



The water site. I don't suggest that anything I saw here is "archaeological"—it very likely isn't, but the topography and "feel" of the place does fit the notion of a reliable, adequate, defensible, and accessible source of water for a village of 300. Not readily visible from the sea. (photo below).

favour. This was, as the song goes, this was now my country.



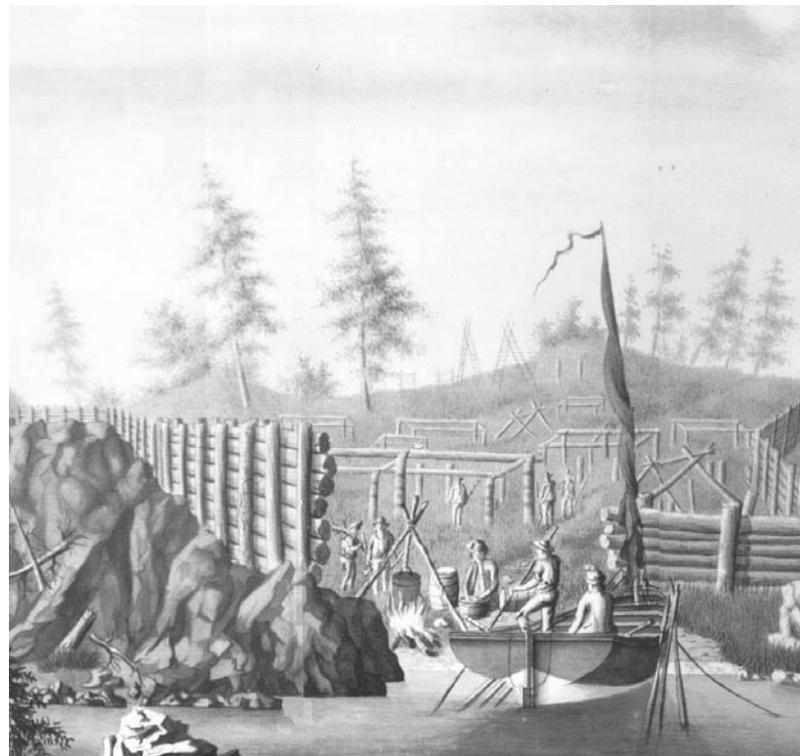


A sketch of the survey made in 2005 (trip #2). From the north end of Prideaux Haven (Roffey Island) bottom left to Price Point top right.

Sketch A is FV-565 page 2. Sketch B is FV-565 page 1.

Scale may not be that accurate, also GPS positions were observed at a time when the accuracy was not super-high.

The cove and beach in the following pictures is S and the CMT area is V. The creek is T. The rocks that may have been in Cardreo's drawing are H. The "white rock" bottom left is P in FV-565 page 2, and the "low rock" is Q in FV-565 page 2.



I can't claim that the photograph on the left taken in Desolation Sound in 2005 proves anything (S on the sketch map). But the fact is that if you follow the trail from this landing place a very short way into the trees at the top of the beach you come to what could have been the site of a large village (V on the sketch map). Culturally modified trees (CMTs) abound.

The site is in the Homfray Channel not far from where the British said they came across Flea Village and there is no other site large enough to have been the home to 300 people that I knew of at the time anywhere along this stretch of coast.



What Cardero's drawing of the shelving beach fails to convey is that the landing area is flanked on both sides by hard-to-climb bluffs, the tops of which afford excellent positions from which to hurl missiles at raiders attempting to land, no matter what the height of the tide. Militarily, it is a perfectly protected, concealed landing spot.

The precipitous cliff with barricade extending to the top on the far right of Cardero's drawing? As shown, doesn't exist at this location.

The gulley in the bluff on the far shore (above and slightly to the left of the boat) is where running water was available, even at the end of the dry season. Puget mentions landing in a small bay close to the "building" to collect water.

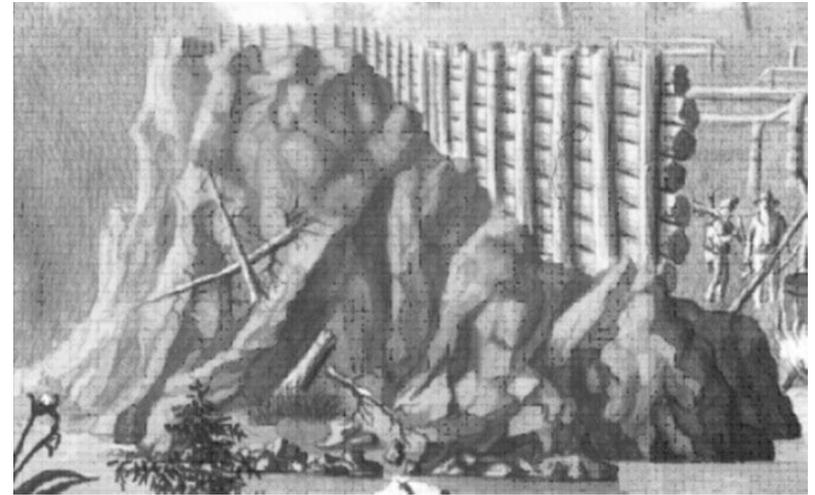


There is a narrow, but adequate, canoe-run up the beach, but unfortunately such runs are hard to date.

In the morning of September 17, 2005 (*above & far left*), the tide was low (3 ft).

In the evening—supper time—on July 4, 1792 (*near left*), the tide was high (17 ft.).

Looks right to me.



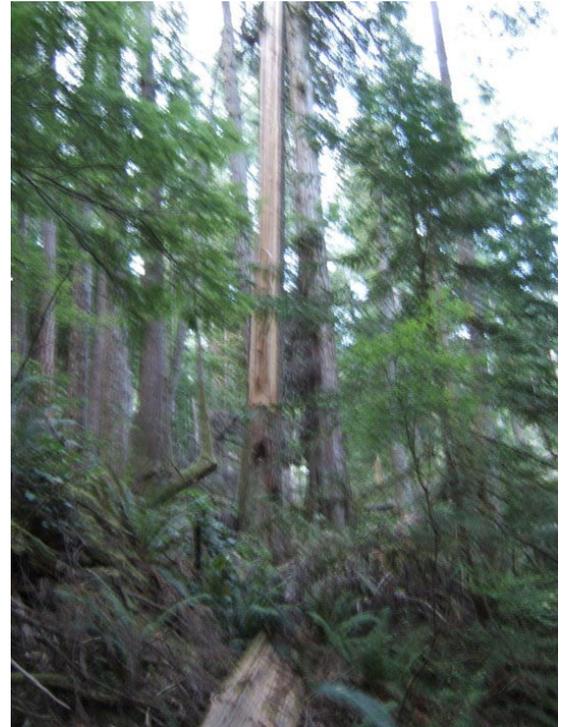
One of the several details of Cardero's drawing that has struck me as odd is the pair of dead trees on the cliff (H on the sketch map). This doesn't look like a place where they would lodge in this way for any length of time. That the artist intended them to be trees is revealed by the clearly drawn roots on one of them.

Curiously, if you look at the rocks at this position at the landing place in real life you see a conjugate pair of compression fractures with their classical X shape. This shape is not at all unlike that of the shape of the two trees in the drawing. Co-incidence?



What is very different about the entrance to the cove and Cardero's drawing is that in real life there is open sea to the left, not trees. However, there are numerous examples of Brambila adding trees on the left when there were none in the original.

The "potted plants" beneath the trees are also undoubtedly inventions of Brambila. See FV-566, p.11, and FV-570 for examples.



The terrain inland from the beach was steep (top) but reached a plateau about 60 m above the sea (bottom left). Culturally-modified-trees (bottom right) were numerous everywhere, but the only shell deposits and remains of a fire pit I saw were down below close to the water supply. In retrospect, I should have been more worried by the lack of archaeological evidence than I was at the time.

This concludes my notes of the 2005 trip, written at the time. My exuberance at having found what I thought was both Flea Village and the site of the *Fortificación* drawing was in retrospect, premature as the notes on the 2007 trip will show.

At the time, I called the cove I had found “Sunset Cove” for two reasons. One, the obvious one, that it made a pleasant camp site with a point ideal for observing the sunset at the end of a busy day; and two, because I thought at the time it was the end of the project.

I am sure that the Spanish camped here, giving Cardero an opportunity to work on his drawings and I suspect that Puget’s remark that “...We came too early...and the tents pitched in a fine romantic situation among the trees” is evidence that the British did too, but we can’t be sure of that as Menzies’ account differs. Small-boat camp sites such as these are extremely scarce in the Homfray Channel.

The cove is 828 metres NE of Roffey Island. By Google Earth in 2016 (not the old handheld GPS in 2005) it is at 50°09.33’N, 124°39.35’W.

[...continued in [File FV-569](#)]

Articles:

[FV-561 Introduction](#)
[FV-562 Vancouver expedition accounts](#)
[FV-563 Spanish expedition accounts](#)
[FV-564 Historical accounts](#)
[FV-565 Archaeological reports](#)
[FV-566 Initial remarks on Cardero's drawing](#)
[FV-567 Field trip #1, September 2003](#)
[FV-568 Field trip #2, September 2005](#)
[FV-569 Field trip #3, September 2007](#)
[FV-570 A second look at Cardero's drawing](#) .