Context:
Gabriola, history

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Doe, Nick, Malcolm Lowry's stars, *SHALE* 22, pp.36–37, January 2010.

Errors and omissions:

Reference:

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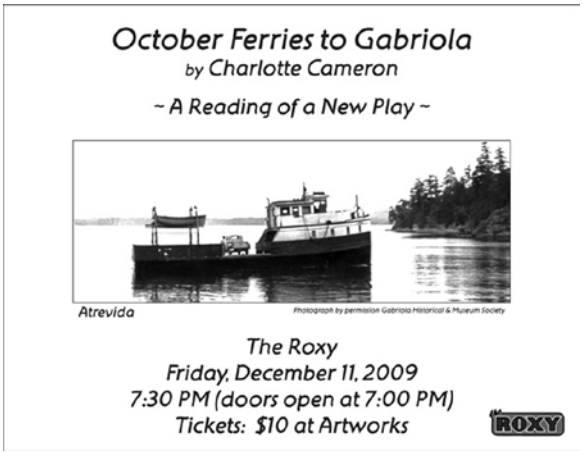


Malcolm Lowry's stars—*by Nick Doe*

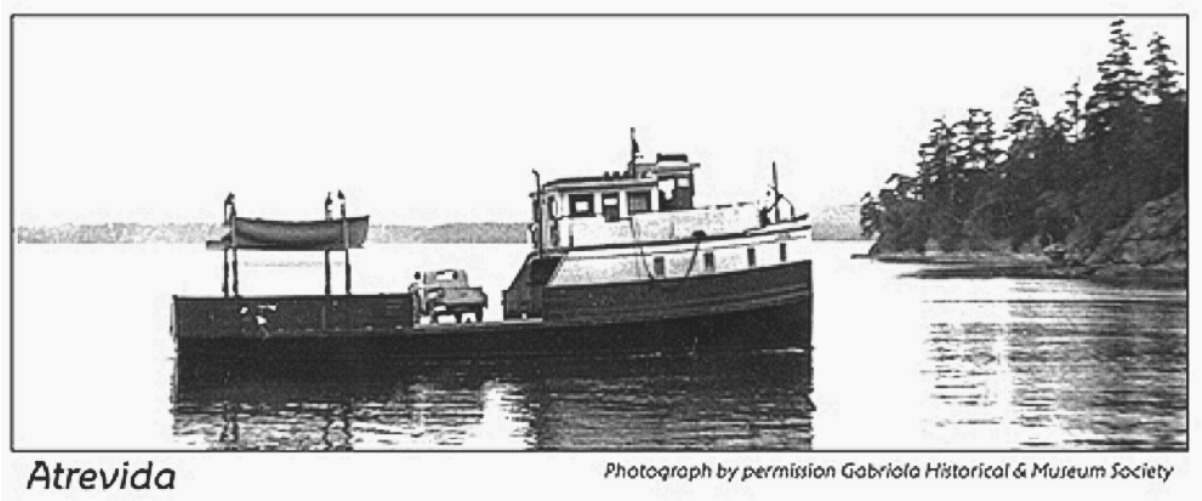
> "…It was the ferry, blasting on its siren with a deep, protracted chord of mournful triumph. In the sky some stars came out. Capella, Fomalhaut, in the south, low over the sea, then Algol and Mira. …"

This is Malcolm Lowry describing the arrival of his fictional characters, Ethan and Jacqueline, at the Gabriola ferry terminal. His and Margerie's actual arrival was on October 7, 1946. The question is inevitable. Could you in fact have seen those stars at that time and place?

The first to ask was Phyllis Reeve, and then came Charlotte Cameron. The answer is …no. So if you've never even heard of all those stars, don't bother looking.

There was a full moon on October 10, 1946, and it would have been 90% full on the evening of October 7. Sunset was at a quarter to six. All bright stars not hidden by the moon would have been visible by a quarter after six by which time the moon was 10 degrees above the horizon in the southeast. The rising, near-full moon would surely have attracted most attention.

Capella was eight degrees above the horizon, NNE. It would have been very low in the sky and not visible at the terminal itself. Fomalhaut was five degrees below the horizon, SE, very close to the near-full moon. Definitely not visible. Algol was fourteen degrees above the horizon, NE. Probably visible, but only just. Mira was fifteen degrees below the horizon. There's not a chance that Mira was visible.



The *Atrevida*, was Gabriola's first regular ferry and operated as such from 1931 to 1955. After decommissioning in 1969, she was dry-docked for eight years before being bought and refurbished. *Atrevida* (Daring) is named after one of Malaspina's corvettes, the other being *Descubierta* (Discovery). The boat is moored and operated out of Maple Bay by Lee and Judith Griffin, the third of three (so far) private ownerships.

Bellviews, pp.18–21, Bellvue Sail and Power Squadron Magazine, June 2008.

Just out of interest, I tried another time and another place. The Lowrys visited Mexico. They went to Acapulco, Cuernavaca, Oaxaca, and Mexico City. They were there in January. In Mexico (I used a generic 18°N, 99°W, Time Zone +5), on January 10, 1947—an arbitrary moonless date in winter—the sun set at about seven in the evening.

All the stars Lowry mentions were clearly visible by eight o'clock. Capella, 38 degrees high NE; Fomalhaut, 27 degrees high SW (low in the south is right); Algol, 61 degrees high NNE; and Mira 70 degrees high SSE. The order of brightness is also exactly as Lowry gives them: Capella (+0.1), Fomalhaut (+1.2), Algol (+2.1), and Mira (+3.0).[4]

The moral? Everyone needs a good editor, especially one who can do arithmetic!

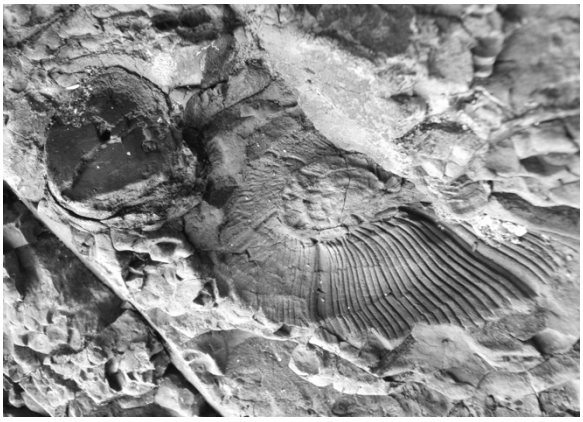
What Mr. Lowry should have written—let's assume no moon—is:

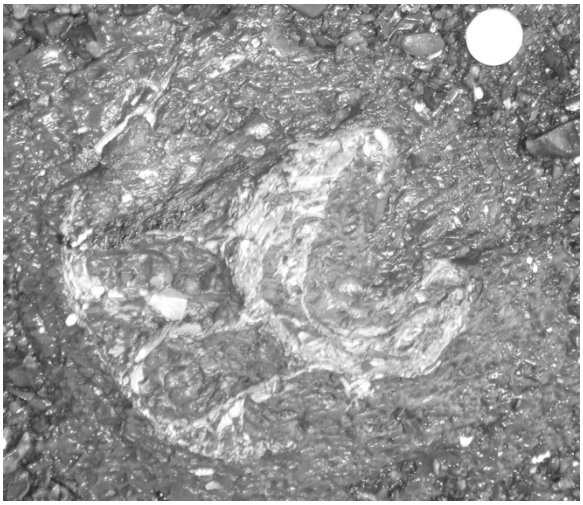
> In the sky some stars came out. Vega, Capella, in the northeast, low over the dark silhouette of the island, then Altair and Deneb. …"

But then again, *October Ferry*…was a work of fiction. ◊

More Gabriola ammonite fossils—*by Nick Doe*

A perfectly-preserved ammonite from Gabriola remains elusive, but here are some recent failed candidates. Top and bottom, *Pachydiscus suciaenis*? middle, *Gaudryceras denmanense*? Not shown is *Nostroceras hornbyense*? ◊





[4] The more positive the magnitude, the dimmer the star; not the other way round. Bright stars have a magnitude of +1.5 or less, but stars with magnitudes down to +4 are easy to see with the naked eye even with some city (or Harmac) light pollution.