

Context:

Gabriola, family history

Citations:

Poulton, Lynda, Capt. B.A. Wake and his family, *SHALE* 5, pp.3–13, December 2002.

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Reference:

Date posted:

May 20, 2015.

Capt. B.A. Wake and his family

by Lynda Poulton

Introduction



Baldwin Arden Wake was born January 1813, in Northamptonshire, England. His parents lived all their lives in England, as probably did their parents before them. His father, Baldwin Wake, was a physician, but we know

little else of his ancestry other than that his grandfather was Drury Wake from Courteenhall, Northants.¹

When Baldwin A. was thirteen years old, he joined the Royal Navy as a first-class volunteer, aboard HMS *Espoir*. For many years, he was employed at the Cape of Good Hope. There, he attended the christening of a child named Adelaide, who, years later, was to become his wife. On his promotion to lieutenant in 1837, he joined HMS *Melville*, bearing the flag of Admiral Sir Peter Halkett, the Commander-in-Chief of the American and West India Station.² He was promoted to the rank of commander in 1849, and became a captain on the retired list in 1866.³

¹ According to family legend, the family descended from Hereward the Wake, England's famous outlaw, who led a revolt in the Fens against Duke William of Normandy who had usurped the English throne after the Battle of Hastings, 1066.

² Other ships on which Captain Wake are known to have served are HMS *Falcon*, HMS *Forester*, HMS *San Josef*, and HMS *Racehorse*.

³ These details are taken from an obituary published in *The London Times* of April 7, 1880. The article goes on to say that "...this gallant officer was several

times instrumental in saving life at sea, and his heroic conduct on those occasions was acknowledged by the Royal Humane Society and the Royal Shipwreck Institution".

On his retirement from the navy, Captain Wake and his family found their way to Esquimalt; however, the census records of that time do not include the Wake family, so it is possible that they spent extended periods elsewhere.⁴

In March, and again in July 1876, Captain Wake pre-empted land on the north end of Valdes Island, and, in September of that same year, he took an additional military officer's grant of more land directly to the south of the first claim. His total land claims were then 760 acres of unsurveyed land—one fifth of the island.⁵ The Wake family built their homestead at the northern tip in a bay within Gabriola Passage. There, they grew vegetables and raised sheep and cattle.

As the only white settlers on the island, it was inevitable that the family would become involved in the affairs of both the settlers of Gabriola Island to their north, and the Aboriginal people of the area.

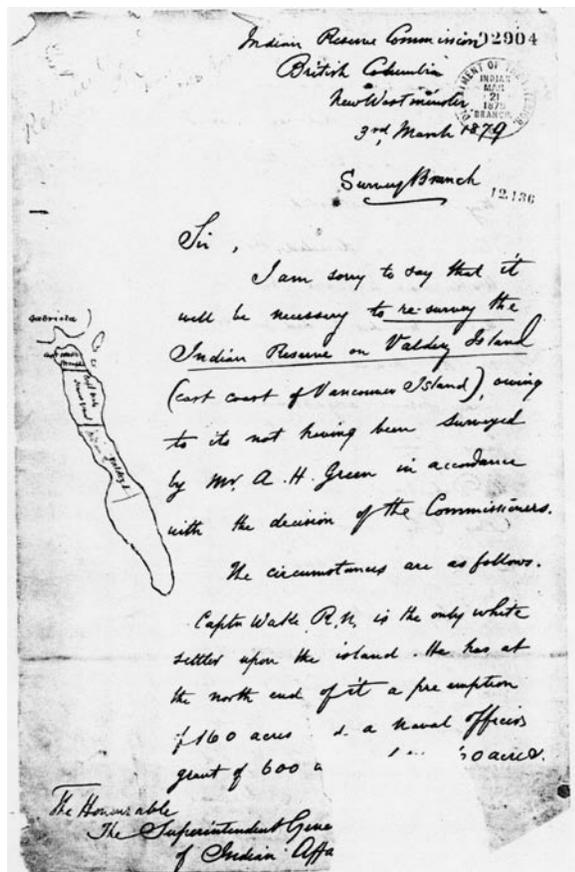
Valdes Island

Valdes Island is located in the Strait of Georgia, about six miles south of Nanaimo,

times instrumental in saving life at sea, and his heroic conduct on those occasions was acknowledged by the Royal Humane Society and the Royal Shipwreck Institution".

⁴ According to family legend, the Wakes lived for a time in Germany, and then moved to Virginia, USA. Only after a few years did they move to Canada with their four children.

⁵ 760 acres = 3.1 square kilometres. A ten-acre farmer's field is about 200 × 200 metres.



Public Archives, Canada

A letter from the Joint Indian Reserve Commission, established in 1876, to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs in Ottawa complaining about the quality of the surveys on Valdes Island. The small sketch in the margin shows the Wake land claims.

between Gabriola and Galiano Islands.⁶ On the eastern shore, facing the strait, drifts of pink foxglove make a showy appearance on the sloping banks each spring. Tall, strangely eroded sandstone cliffs, facing the Pylades Channel, dominate the western shore, and offer a home for pigeon guillemots, cormorants, and other sea birds.

⁶ The island was named by Captain Richards, of HMS *Plumper*, in 1859, after the Spanish explorer, Cayetano Valdés y Flores who, along with Dionisio Alcalá Galiano, explored the waters around Vancouver Island in the summer of 1792.

The north side of Valdes Island is separated from Gabriola Island by the Gabriola Passage, which is scarcely more than a hundred metres wide at its narrowest point. At times, tidal streams in the pass flow at eight knots making it impossible to navigate without power; however, occasionally, a bear or cougar will make the crossing to Gabriola, usually to the great consternation of the sheep farmers on that island.

Valdes Island is the traditional territory of the Lyackson⁷ who have three reserves on the island covering about half the island. There are no permanent residents among the 200 to 300 band members, most of whom live in the Nanaimo area. The remainder of the island is currently owned by a forestry company and is uninhabited.

The Lyackson have always objected to the alienation of any of their traditional land, and this dispute with the provincial government, which began with Captain Wake's pre-emptions and his naval officer's grant, continues to this day.⁸

Captain Wake the teacher

Although it is not known how much time Adelaide Wake and the four adult children spent on Valdes Island after the pre-emptions of 1876, Captain Wake certainly

⁷ The Lyackson First Nation (FN) are members of the Hul'qumi'num group, which also includes the Chemainus FN, Cowichan FN, Cowichan Lake FN, Halalt FN, and Penelakut FN. The Lyackson have many family connections with the Snunéymux^w (Nanaimo) and speak the same language.

⁸ In July 2002, Wake Cove, Valdes Island, was declared a BC marine park. Directly across from Drumbeg Park, this quiet spot on Valdes Island offers an opportunity to spend time in this historically interesting area. The Lyackson however have said that the park was created by the BC government without their consent. *Raven's Eye—the Aboriginal newspaper of BC and Yukon*, August 19, 2002.

was there a lot. In 1876, he offered to become the teacher at the Gabriola School. Although he had no teaching experience, the school had lost the existing teacher to a posting in Nanaimo, and so the captain's offer was accepted.

Every school day, Wake rowed a small boat through Gabriola Pass to the Maples, the small bay near the Gabriola South School which was located on the site where the Community Hall is now.

All did not go particularly well for Wake as the acting schoolteacher. According to the *Nanaimo Free Press*, "Wake exercised good moral influence, and was painstakingly conscientious, but although he offered a good influence to the scholars, there was growing dissatisfaction with his teaching methods, and in June of 1878, Captain Wake was removed from his teaching position."

Through correspondence with Gabriola Islanders, school trustees, and the superintendent of the school board, we know that there was a lively exchange of opinions between the captain and Gabriolans.⁹ Many people had something to say about the situation at the school.

The next several years, no doubt, found the captain working around his homestead on Valdes, but he also found time to regularly correspond with the superintendent of the Vancouver Island school district about the problems at the Gabriola School.

⁹ There is more on the captain's views on the museum's website. The captain was evidently unhappy with the secularization of the education system, didn't believe in spending time on the "bright intellects" at the expense of "the great mass of the dull and stupid", advocated the formation of "good habits", and held that "education was not the first object that God placed before women's eyes".

Captain Wake and the Lyackson

Captain Wake spoke of difficulties he faced with the Indians over land boundaries while visiting the Nanaimo Indian camp, in early 1876. He said that the land he had pre-empted had separated the Indians from their cultivated land. Wake offered to pay for this land. Although the Indians had nothing unkind to say to him, they expressed the desire to have no white settlers on Valdes Island.

The difficulties that existed between Captain Wake and the Lyackson are described in correspondence from December 1876 and January 1877, between The Honourable A.C. Elliott, Provincial Secretary, and Gilbert M. Sproat, Joint Commissioner.¹⁰ The Lyackson protests at any non-Aboriginal settlement on the island are noted. When the commissioner visited the Lyackson in 1877, he estimated that there were 18 adult men in the band, and 1800 acres of land assigned; an average of 100 acres for each man.

Mr. Sproat managed to develop agreements with the band Chief and with Captain Wake. Land boundaries were drawn, taking into consideration the needs of both parties. These agreements allowed the Aboriginal people the right to continue farming their existing crop areas, and maintain access to running stream water. Difficulties such as allowing roving dogs to chase the white settler's cattle were discouraged through agreements with the Lyackson. Much time was spent in communication. The commission noted however that the

¹⁰ The Joint Indian Reserve Commission (JIRC) was set up after BC joined Canada in 1876. It travelled around the province to allot reserve lands. Members of the JIRC were appointed by both provincial and federal governments. See also page 24.

Lyackson were satisfied, as was Captain Wake, with the talks and the results.

The captain's demise

On Monday, January 5, 1880, Baldwin A. departed from Valdes Island to spend a few days in Nanaimo. His younger son, Baldwin Hough, remained at the Valdes homestead. While in Nanaimo, Captain Wake collected some family effects, just arrived from England. These comprised six boxes of household goods, valuable family plate, clothing, and books. On Saturday morning, January 10, he left Nanaimo Harbour, bound for Wakes Cove on Valdes Island.¹¹

The weather was cold and snowy with a strong wind—winters were much harsher then than they are now. At Jack Point, an Indian noticed the boom of the sloop swinging around, gybing, as if hit by a strong gust of wind. It is not clear whether Captain Wake at this point was still in control of his boat, nor whether he was intending to sail through Dodd or False Narrows.

Nearly a week later, on the evening of Friday, January 16, young Baldwin arrived in Nanaimo searching for his father, with no success. It was learned shortly afterwards that Mr. Curran, a resident of Thetis Island,¹² had found the captain's sloop adrift near North Bay on Thetis Island on the

¹¹ See the two appendixes for more details of subsequent events.

¹² Mr. W.H. Curran, an Irishman pre-empted many lots on Thetis until he owned a large part of the island which he logged with oxen. He sent his logs to the Chemainus Mill. He apparently prospered. He was married on the island in the early 1880s, had a large family, and built at least three log houses in different parts of the island. *Memories of the Chemainus Valley*, p.12, Chemainus Valley Historical Society, 1978.

evening of Sunday, January 11. The sloop was a wreck; it had been de-masted and the boom and sail were a tangled mess dragging in the water alongside the hull. The sloop's superstructure—a small cabin—had been swept away, although, remarkably, the stove and stovepipe that had been inside remained intact. Nothing was found of the boxes or their contents in the sloop, but the younger son later found a quantity of the silver plate buried on the beach. The plate had been buried just above the high water mark, by covering it with soil and large rocks.

On January 20, George Wake, Captain Wake's older son, offered a fifty-dollar reward for return of his father's body. The advertisement ran for several weeks in the Nanaimo newspaper, but there was, as far as we know, no response.

Several years later, in 1882, a settler found human bones on Thetis Island. A coroner from Nanaimo investigated the situation and determined that the bones were not those of Captain Wake, but those of an Indian family that had "...been landed there from canoes, sick, [and that they had] died eight or ten years ago [when] a much contagious disease was among the Indians". It was, the coroner added, "...not necessary to hold any inquest [or] incur any further unnecessary expense".

Later family history

After Captain Wake's mysterious disappearance, his younger son, Baldwin, remained at Valdes, where he lived for the rest of his life.¹³ In the 1881 census, he is listed as living alone. The first telegraph station in the area was begun on Valdes Island the same year, with Baldwin as the

¹³ The *Nanaimo Free Press*, June 21, 1889 reported that a jubilant Mr. B.H. Wake had found a seam of coal on his property on Valdes. The report however also mentions that the seam was "a thin one".

Part of the WAKE family tree

Drury Wake (?)

Baldwin Wake (?)

Baldwin Arden Wake (1813–80) + **Adelaide** Maria ? (1830–1894)**George F. Wake** (?)**Baldwin Hough Wake** (?–1904) + Amelia Morris (1859–1946)**Amy Rosamond Wake** (?–1938) + Gervais Wake (?)

Rosamond Adelaide Alice Wake (1882–?)

Hereward Eyre Wake (1883–1913)

Gladys Maude Mary Wake (1884–1914)

Florence Myrna Wake (?) + Henry Colborn Maunoir Ridley (?)

William Henry Ridley (1887–?)

George Arden Ridley (1888–?)

daughter, Rosamond Adelaide Norbury of England, survived her.

In June 1886, the younger daughter of Captain and Mrs. Wake, Florence Myrna, married Henry Colborn Ridley, at St. Paul's Church, Esquimalt, as recorded in *The Daily Colonist*, June 1. The couple moved to Mr. Ridley's home at Kamloops, BC,

telegrapher. In 1884, he travelled to England, returning with a bride, from Yorkshire, named Amelia. They lived together at the Valdes homestead until Baldwin's accidental death in 1904.

After this, Amelia remained on Valdes, farming and working as the telegrapher, until 1946, when she died after a brief illness, at Nanaimo Hospital. When Amelia died, ownership of the property on Valdes passed out of the hands of the Wake family.

After the disappearance of her husband, Mrs. Adelaide Wake lived in Esquimalt. Mrs. Crease, of Pendrelew, wife of Justice Henry Crease, and Mrs. Pooley, of Fernhill, were ladies with whom she spent happy times. In June 1881, she had the pleasure of seeing her older daughter, Amy Rosamond, marry first cousin, Gervais Wake, at St. Paul's Church, Esquimalt. The *Daily Colonist* carried an account of the wedding. Mrs. Wake died in Esquimalt in 1894.

In 1914, Rosamond and Gervais, and their daughter, Gladys Maude, moved to Crompton Hill, Herefordshire, England. In the *Colonist* of January 5, 1939, an obituary notice, written by Miss F.R. Crease, of Victoria, writes that Amy Rosamond died suddenly at Malvern, England, on December 29, 1938. Her husband, Gervais, and one

where they had two children. No further record has been located of their lives, or of the lives of their descendants.

Of George F. Wake, the older son of Captain Wake, very little is known, although he did write two interesting poems about dogs which found their way to the BC Archives. One reads:

Though some would malign him and say
He is sly, and meaner than sin,
And call him false,—cunning,—a thief,
Chock full of deceit to the skin,—
Small wonder if part of it's true!
Of man would it read out of place?
Dogs' virtues are all of their own,
Their vices are those of our race!
'Tis granted that often on trail,
Behaviour would make a saint swear,
And earned is all language they get,
(E'en parsons admit that is fair!)
Still—unless more lucky than most
In land of "queer eggs" and of "hog",
Most trustworthy chum you will make
Is much abused Malamute Dog!

Hereward Eyre Wake, grandson of Captain Wake, and son of Rosamond and Gervais, was a long-time Esquimalt resident, and rail worker. He died in a tragic train accident near Nanaimo, in 1913. He is buried in the Ross Bay Cemetery, Victoria.

Gladys Maude, younger daughter of Rosamond and Gervais, graduated from the Royal Jubilee Hospital, in Victoria, in 1912. When her parents moved to England, in 1914, Gladys joined them. When the Great War began, she volunteered to nurse abroad. While working in a hospital in France, in 1914, she suffered severe injuries during a German bombing raid and died shortly after. In 1998, her memory was honoured by the BC government, by naming a mountain for her. The mountain, Mount Wake, is located northeast of the junction of Meager Creek and the Lillooet River.

At the old world St. Paul's Anglican Church, in Esquimalt, at the historic naval base, mural tablets remain to the memory of Captain Wake; his wife Adelaide; their granddaughter, Gladys Maude; and their grandson, Hereward Eyre.

Postscript

In July 2002, the Wake family website was posted on the museum's website. Just by chance, Captain Wake's great-great granddaughter and her son discovered the site. Excited correspondence commenced between the museum's history committee and the Wake descendants. A lunch and intriguing stories were shared. Baldwin H. had salvaged silver from the captain's abandoned sloop in 1880, and it now graces the table of his great-great grand daughter. A family member reports that two of the recovered silver forks have been made into a lovely silver bracelet.

No one in the descended family has any information about the fate of the captain. The names of Mount Wake, Wake Cove, Wake Bay, and Wake Cove Marine Park remind us of the influence and times of Captain Wake and his Valdes settler family, but one hundred and twenty-two years later,

the mystery of the disappearance of Captain Wake remains.

Sources and more information

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James Nesbitt, BCA vertical files, "Old homes and Families". *Daily Colonist*, May 21, 1950.

Wake family descendant information, as told to researcher, Lynda G. Poulton.

Lynda Poulton is a resident of Gabriola, and a director of the Gabriola Historical and Museum Society. Readers who have enjoyed this story, and who would like further information, are encouraged to visit the Gabriola Historical & Museum Society's Wake family webpages at:

http://www.island.net/~gm_chin/wake/default.html

The pages contain images of various official 19th-century documents and newspaper reports pertaining to Captain Wake. Lynda would like to thank the Wake descendants for their contributions to this story, and also Barrie Humphrey for his ongoing assistance and encouragement with the research. EDITOR

Appendix A: The story as told in the newspapers

The fate of Captain Wake in January 1880 attracted a fair amount of attention in the local press. Reports also appeared in the Victoria newspaper, and in newspapers in the United Kingdom. The following is how the story unfolded to newspaper readers.

[Actual clipping shown on the right]

Nanaimo Free Press

Saturday, January 17, 1880

Captain Wake Missing

Capt. B.A.Wake, formerly a post-captain in the British Navy, but lately a settler on Valdez [Valdes] Island, a short distance below Dodd's Narrows, arrived in this city [Nanaimo] a week ago last Monday [Jan. 5] in his sloop. He stayed around town a few days, and about last Saturday [Jan. 10] [started] on his return hom[e], which he has not reached. His son arrived in town last night [Jan. 16] to learn what had become of his father, and brings the unfortunate news of his non-arrival. It is feared that he has met with some mishap or has been blown out in the Gulf. We are inclined to think that the old gentleman, who was possessed of indomitable courage and perseverance, has ventured to[o] far this time. [] It is just possible that he may have been blown on to some of the Islands in the Gulf.

Later—News was received in town last night [Jan. 16] that the sloop had gone ashore on Thetis Island with the mast broke off close to the deck, and the sail and mast dragging in the water. This seals the old gentleman's fate.

Nanaimo Free Press

Wednesday, January 21, 1880

Captain B.A. Wake

A week ago last Friday morning [Jan. 9, probably Jan. 10 was meant], Capt. Wake left this harbor in his sloop bound for his house on

Capt Wake Missing

Capt. B. A. Wake formerly a post-captain in the British Navy, but lately a settler on Valdez Island, a short distance below Dodd's Narrows, arrived in this city a week ago last Monday in his sloop. He stayed around town a few days, and about last Saturday on his return home, which he has not reached. His son arrived in town last night to learn what had become of his father, and brings the unfortunate news of his non-arrival. It is feared that he has met with some mishap or has been blown out in the Gulf. We are inclined to think that the old gentleman who was possessed of indomitable courage and perseverance has ventured to far this time. It is just possible that he may have been blown on to some of the Islands in the Gulf.

Later—News was received in town last night that the sloop had gone ashore on Thetis Island, with the mast broke off close to the deck, and the sail and mast were dragging in the water. This seals the old gentleman's fate.

Valdez Island. The wind was blowing light from the northwest. He had on board [the] sloop six boxes or cases of family effects, such as plate, clothing, books, etc., which had just arrived from England. On rounding Jack's Point, the sloop was seen in a "gibe", as though struck by a sudden squall of wind. Nothing further was heard till on Friday last [Jan. 16], Mr. Wake, son of capt. Wake arrived in town and stated that his father had not arrived at home. On Saturday [Jan. 17], Constable Stewart went to Thetis Island in the Steamer *Nellie Taylor* and there found the sloop. Mr. Curran, a settler on that island, stated that he found the sloop adrift on Sunday night [Jan. 11]. It was found that the mast had been broken short of [f] close to [the] deck, and the small house of the sloop had been carried away. The sail was trailing in the water at the side of the sloop and was fastened to the boom as though a reef had been taken in the sail. Nothing was found of the boxes or their contents, although the stove and

stovepipe remained intact. In a small bay, a short distance from where the sloop was found, some of the broken boxes were found upon the beach, but none of their valuable contents. The covers of some books were found, and strange to say, the glass of a looking glass was found intact, although the frame could not be found anywhere in the vicinity. It is quite evident that a robbery has been committed, but whether the robbers found the sloop abandoned or put the gentleman out of the way is at present a mystery. We incline to the opinion that the captain either met his death at the hands of the elements, for it came on rough and cold that night, or the "jibing" of his sail. The robbery was committed after the sloop was found adrift. No trace has been found of the body of Captain Wake.

Daily Colonist

Saturday morning, January 24, 1880

The Disappearance of Capt. Wake—A mystery to be Unravelled.

The body of Capt. B.A. Wake has not been found, and the family of the missing gentleman offer a reward of \$50 for its recovery. From the remarks of the *Free Press*, we gather that there is a suspicion of foul play; at any rate, it is now known that the sloop was robbed of its contents after Capt. Wake's death by drowning or violence. [...repeat of the earlier *Nanaimo Free Press* reports omitted...]

It is to be hoped that the government will supplement the reward offered by the family, and that the police will be directed to institute strict inquiries into all the circumstances.

Nanaimo Free Press

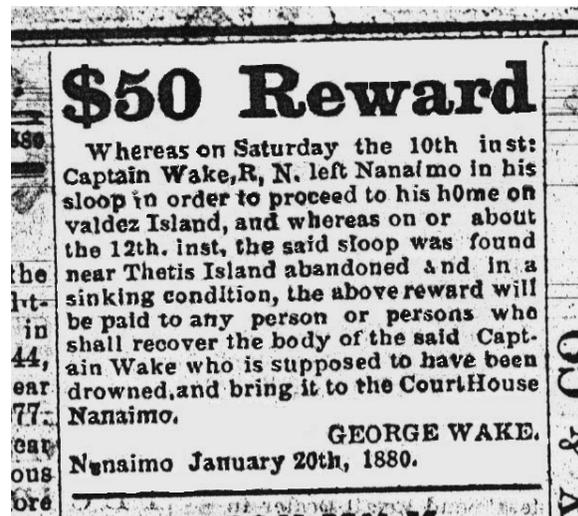
Saturday, January 31, 1880

The late Captain B.A. Wake

From Mr. B.[H.] Wake, son of Capt. B.A. Wake who so unfortunately lost his life while making the trip from this city [Nanaimo] to his home on Valdez Island, we learn that he has been partially successful in his patient cruise among

the islands below the rapids. In a bay on the north end of Thetis Island, Mr. Wake found a quantity of the silver plate buried on the beach. The plate had been buried just above the high water mark, by covering it with soil and then placing large rocks thereon. A short distance from the plate he found a large East Indian shawl and still further on two dresses. Tracks were seen in the snow, which appeared to go in the direction to cross the island. No trace was found of the other articles or of the body of the old gentleman. Mr. Wake is now of the opinion that the fatal mishap occurred after passing through the "rapids", and that after the sloop was dismantled, she drifted with the northwest wind prevailing that afternoon on to the northern point of Thetis Island. It is now plainly apparent that a robbery of the goods has taken place, otherwise, why should they be so carefully "cached". The mystery still remains unsolved as to whether Capt. Wake lost his life in defending his property from the ravages of "pirates", or whether he succumbed to the intensity of the cold or the fury of the elements, and thus left the goods an easy spoil for any persons feloniously disposed. Mr. Wake will again renew the search, and it is to be hoped that the guilty parties will not remain long unshackled.

Notice in the *Nanaimo Free Press*, January 21, 1880 and for several weeks after.



Appendix B: The Wake Day experiment—by Lynda Poulton and Nick Doe

It is not often that one gets the chance to do a practical experiment to attempt to solve a historical problem, but four Gabriolans did on Sunday, January 14, 2001—a day known to the participants as “Wake Day”.

The four of us were Keith Poulton (captain), Jenni Gehlbach, and ourselves, the authors of this note. For the venture, we used the Poulton’s *Shearwater*—a 22-ft. sloop. We took with us two global positioning systems (GPSs) to record our positions at sea.

The experiment went in two stages. First, Nick set up on his computer a model of the wind and tide conditions on the day of Captain Wake’s last voyage (see Nick’s box for details). At the time of the experiment, we believed this to have been Friday, January 16, 1880. On Wake Day, the tides were very similar to those back in 1880.

The computer simulation results were interesting in that they predicted that starting off at Dodd Narrows with an ebb tide underway, with no sails or wind, Wake’s boat would have drifted south down the Stuart Channel until the tide turned in the afternoon. It would then have drifted all the way back to the narrows. His boat would never have reached Thetis Island.

When the wind was taken into account, it seemed even more unlikely that the boat would have drifted that far. According to the Journal of Entrance Island, kept by Robert Gray,¹⁴ the weather report for January 16, 1880 was as follows:

“First part increasing breeze from SE with thick, drizzling rain.

Middle part a brisk breeze from E and fair.

¹⁴ Nanaimo Community Archives.



Captain Keith Poulton at the helm of *Shearwater* on Wake Day.

Latter part more moderate and less wind.
Wind from SE to S. Latterly thick and cloudy.”

Absolutely no sign here of a northwest wind to drive him south toward Thetis Island.

The second stage of the experiment began early in the morning on Wake Day. We assumed Wake’s boat must have gone somehow or other through Dodd Narrows. So, four Gabriolans set out to sea aboard the *Shearwater* to ponder the fate of the captain.

We worked our way up the Stuart Channel to Dodd Narrows against a strong ebb current. On arrival at the narrows, we shut down the engine. The sloop spun around, quickly travelling south, back the way we had come. Cliffs and rocky bluffs rushed by. Turbulence seemed alarming.

After passing Round Island, *Shearwater* began to drift more and more slowly as Stuart Channel widened. The air seemed colder, the sea and sky were grey. While eating stew, and sipping hot tea, thoughts and conversation were about Captain Wake. We felt very conspicuous out there, drifting along with no motor and no sail, yet,

surprisingly, nobody came our way to investigate. After six hours in Stuart Channel, and while nearing Ruxton Passage, the tide turned. Just as Nick's computer had predicted we were a long way from Thetis Island, still six nautical miles to our south.

And there the mystery remained for some months until it came time to write this report. Going over the newspaper reports of the time again, we discovered that we had made a crucial mistake. We had read a *Daily Colonist* report dated January 24 that Wake's sloop was found on Thetis "...on Sunday night" as meaning Sunday the 18th. However, on tracing this report back to the reports in the *Nanaimo Free Press*, it became clear to all that it was Sunday the 11th that was meant, and that Wake's last voyage had actually taken place on Saturday, January 10, 1880.

Back to the computer. And now everything looked very different. On January 10, 1880, there was a spring tide (a new moon on the 11th), but not an ordinary spring tide, a *perigean* spring tide (the moon was closest to the earth in its monthly orbit on the 9th). The fairly infrequent co-incidence of the moon being aligned with the sun at the very same time the moon is closest to the earth in its elliptical orbit leads to exceptionally high tides (16 feet or more in this area).

Even better, the weather report from Entrance Island for January 10, 1880 reads as follows:

"All through the 24 hours a Strong breeze from SW to west, and NW attended with snow and freezing at the same time."¹⁵

¹⁵ The veer of the wind from SW to NW (clockwise rotation) probably indicates the passage of a low-pressure system moving rapidly eastward across the northern end of Vancouver Island. The snow would have marked the passage of the associated cold front. Such fronts are commonly accompanied by squalls.

Now we have a northwest wind in the afternoon.¹⁶ The computer simulation showed that Wake's boat, aided by wind and an exceptional tide, easily could have reached Thetis Island on its own. What was more, this result was not at all sensitive to estimates of the strength of the wind or current. So, although the Wake Day experiment had not tested the actual conditions that Wake must have experienced, it enabled Nick to fine-tune his computer program, and gave us confidence that we had learned at least part of the answer to the mystery of Captain Wake's demise. Our conclusions are as follows:

Captain Wake left Nanaimo on Saturday morning aiming to be through Dodd Narrows comfortably before 9:30 a.m. to avoid being caught by the start of the flood tide, which flows northward through the narrows. Sunrise that day was about 8:00 a.m., so it was probably about then that he left Nanaimo harbour.

Captain Wake would have preferred Dodd to False Narrows for two reasons. First, there was a low tide coming up at 10:30 a.m., and low tide is not a good time to be in False Narrows; and second, going through Dodd gets you out of the tidal stream quicker. Once through Dodd Narrows, he would have headed down to Ruxton Passage. He would have wanted to be in Gabriola Passage no later than 1:35 p.m. because that's when the tide in the passage would have turned against him (westward) that day. He had plenty of time, so his plan was good.

The captain's boat made it to Dodd Narrows as planned, though at some point between Jack Point and the entrance to the narrows,

¹⁶ Northwest winds funnel into Trincomali Channel producing winds much stronger than in the Strait of Georgia. Environment Canada *Marine Weather Hazards Manual—West Coast*, p. 83, 1992 edition.

something incapacitated the captain, possibly a blow to the head as the boom swung across in an uncontrolled gybe. His boat passed through the narrows, and driven by strong winds from the northwest and a strong tidal current, drifted down toward Thetis, arriving there around 8:00 p.m. on Saturday night. This was well after dark, sunset being at 4:37 p.m. that day.

During the night, the grounded boat lost its mast and cabin as it rolled in the heavy surf on the rapidly rising perigeon spring tide. The wreck was looted on Sunday morning

before being found by Mr. Curran, late that same day.

Wake Day was fun, but, as you can see, there's still plenty of mystery left. Exactly how and where did the captain die? What happened to his body? (no fifty-dollar reward for us), and who was it that looted the wreck on Thetis Island? His doom, and the misadventure that befell his sloop, seem destined to remain undetermined; and the robbers of his precious cargo remembered only by sand and sea. ◇

Nick's computer model

A computer model of Wake's last voyage may sound very grand, but it was actually fairly simple to construct. I used a spreadsheet (MS Excel) with seven main columns:

- In the first column I put the elapsed time since Captain Wake lost control of his boat. This was done in adjustable fixed increments, but twelve minutes turned out to be a good choice. [Elapsed times could be converted to actual times by addition of a simple constant corresponding to the surmised actual time he lost control.]
- The second column was reserved for the calculated location of the boat, at the time in column one, in a north/south direction relative to Dodd Narrows.
- The third column was the same as column two, but for the east/west direction. [It turned out that this column didn't add much and was complicated to maintain.]
- The fourth column contained the estimated speed of the wrecked boat solely due to the wind, at the time in column one, in a north/south direction relative to Dodd Narrows. I assumed for simplicity that the wind strength was independent of the location of the boat, but I could simulate variations of speed with time by varying the values as I went down the column. For a boat the size of Captain Wake's, and no sail, I reckoned the drift speed of the boat as about 5% of wind speed.
- The fifth column was the same as column four, but for the east/west direction.
- The sixth column was reserved for the estimated speed of the wrecked boat solely due to the tide, at the time in column one, and at the location in columns two and three, in a north/south direction relative to Dodd Narrows. This was the most complicated calculation and required construction of a look-up table, which I will come to shortly.
- The seventh column was the same as column six, but for the east/west direction.

The procedure then was to work down the rows using the values in columns four and six to update column two, and correspondingly, the values in columns five and seven to update column three.

The look-up table used for columns six and seven was constructed this way:

The table was entered with (1) the time (column one plus constant), (2) the location north/south relative to Dodd Narrows (column two), and (3) the location east/west relative to Dodd Narrows (column three).

First I used the date and the time (1) to calculate the strength of the tidal current in Dodd Narrows using a tidal program I developed years ago for doing just this sort of thing. I then applied various simple rules to modify the value of the current according to location—if the boat is more than this far south, but less than this far south, and so on, then diminish or increase the Dodd Narrows current by this factor and by this amount...that sort of thing. The results of these reckonings were the return values of the look-up table.