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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 It may therefore be out-of-date in some respects.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 7 of a series of 10 articles, previously posted as Draft 1.3.

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Flea Village — field trip #1, September 2003

by Nick Doe

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***Polly Ester* expedition of 2003**

Preparations

A year passed, with little new information, but I did come across a photograph by Gary Fiegehen in Robin Fisher's, *Vancouver's Voyage*.¹ The accompanying caption is a little coy, not actually claiming this is Flea Village, but implying that it is...

FACING PAGE: The party...discovered an extensive deserted village, computed to have been the residence of nearly three hundred persons. It was built on a rock, where perpendicular cliffs were nearly inaccessible on every side, and connected with the main, by a low narrow neck of land.

The photograph as Jenni and I were subsequently to discover is of the west end of Coplestone Island in Prideaux Haven, a location that failed to qualify as the site of Flea Village on every test we could apply.

So it was on September 3, 2003, we set out in our 12-foot boat *Polly Ester* to resolve this mystery once and for all. I have to admit that by now, I was rather less interested in finding a site as described by Menzies and co. as I was in finding the site of José Cardero's drawing.

Part of the reason for choosing this date was the tides. The tidal range in Prideaux Haven is very high, 18.2 feet (5.6m) on

large tides, and so the shoreline and appearance of the islands can vary quite a bit. On June 26, 1792, the tides were neap tides and so at noon the water would have been at around 7.7 ft. By my reckoning, on September 5, 2003, at noon, it was around 9.0 ft; close enough. In sharp contrast, when Galiano was there, on July 4, 1792, the tide in the late afternoon was exceptionally high.²

Prideaux Haven

We loaded the car, drove up to Comox, took the ferry across to Powell River, and then early the next morning, assembled our folding boat and put in near the Government Wharf on the Okeover Inlet. Down the inlet; round Zephine Head into Desolation Sound; up passed Mink Island; through the narrow passage on the east side of Otter Island; marvelled at a huge cloud of tiny jellyfish; and motored on up to the head of Melanie Cove where we made camp near Mike's old place.³

The moment we got there, we were able to cross my *numero uno* possibility off the list. The islet at the head of Melanie Cove [Menzies's "small Cove in the bottom of

² June 26, 1792: 0603 9.1; 0827 9.3; 1449 6.5; 2244 15.9. Sept. 5, 2003: 0809 4.7; 1639 14.9; 2224 12.8. July 4, 1792: 0006 11.9; 0421 14.8; 1203 -0.7; 1923 18.6. New moon: June 19, 1792 & Aug. 27, 2003. Full moon: July 4, 1792 & Sept. 10, 2003.

³ Now vanished except for a few fruit trees, with no fruit other than small apples, and a derelict wood dam for collecting water from a small creek. "Mike" was Andrew Shuttler; his interesting story is told in M. Wylie Blanchet, *The Curve of Time*, pp.38-43, Whitecap Books, 1968.

¹ Douglas & McIntyre, p.79, 1992.

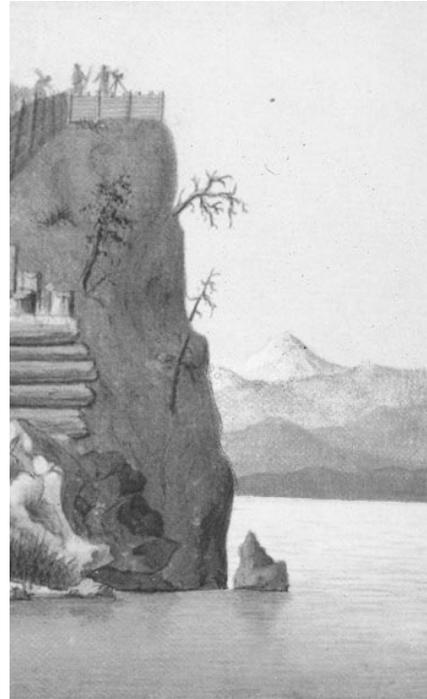


The west end of Coplestone Island in Prideaux Haven (*above left*) looks a promising candidate for Flea Village to many. By catching the right tide, you can even make the distant islets on the right of the island look as if they comprise an isthmus, (Vancouver's "...connection to the main by a low narrow neck of land). What everyone misses too is that, if the trees were not quite so high, or if you move just a little to the right, you can see from here a tall mountain in the background (*above right*), exactly as required by Cardero's drawing.

Unfortunately, the terrain on the island is rough—boulders everywhere—there are convenient beaches for marauders (*left*), gentle slopes on the east side, no visible archaeological features or cultural material, there is no fresh water, and the island is an island, no matter what the state of the tide. There are a few canoe runs, but that's all. Good effort, but an F nevertheless.



photograph



detail from the Cardero-Brambila drawing

Left photograph of Otter Island with Mount Denman in the background (it's been flipped horizontally, but there are similar views that don't call for that). The island has no beaches, no signs of an Indian village, certainly no barricades, and it's impossible to imagine anyone in their right mind scaling its cliffs carrying a tripod as they have done in the Cardero-Brambila drawing *right*. Despite the resemblance, there is no evidence this is what Cardero drew, though he almost certainly saw it. Scobell Island in Prrideaux Haven also has cliffs.

Finding elements of Cardero's drawing in scenes of Desolation Sound is so easy that having been there you can't doubt that was where the drawing was made. But getting all the elements together is much more of a challenge.

which...?"] turns out to be an ideal camping spot for two, but easy to clamber up to, and barely big enough to hold a decent dinner party, yet alone be home for three hundred people. There were midges and mosquitoes, but no fleas.

The rest of that day and the following we spent visiting all the islands—Cobblestone particularly, Scobell, the Williams, Roffey, and Eveleigh. We made a perfunctory inspection of the coast up to Price Point and we walked the trail from Melanie to Laura

Cove, once the home of Phil Lavigne.⁴ And on the way home, just in case, we visited Tenedos Bay and Grace Harbour.

Nowhere fitted. Now Jenni and I have kayaked the coast for more than twenty years, and we've seen a few Indian village sites, and after a while you get to know they're there almost by instinct. They're

⁴ *The Curve of Time* (ibid), pp.109–11; Beth Hill, *Upcoast Summers* (diaries of Francis & Amy Barrows), 9th page of photo's following p.38 & pp.48–51, Horsdal & Schubart, 1985; Beth Hill, *Seven-Knot Summers*, pp.150–3, Horsdal & Schubart, 1994.

always beautifully situated; are commanding and accessible at the same time; have reasonably flat dry ground, usually a meadow; have sources of water and firewood, and a good place to beach canoes or kayaks, no matter what the state of the tide or wind. Nowhere in Prideaux Haven fitted. Jenni especially was scornful of the idea that 300 people, at least half presumably women and kids, could have lived on the rocky, dry islands we saw.

But we had a good time anyway.

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