

Context:

Gabriola 19th-century charts

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# A Russian map of Gabriola—1849

by Nick Doe

Shortly after the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) started mining coal at Nanaimo in August 1852, the then governor of Vancouver Island, James Douglas (later Sir James), came up from Fort Victoria to inspect the newly opened mines. An account of his trip was presented to the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) in London, England, early the following year.<sup>1</sup>

The second paragraph of Governor Douglas's report to the RGS makes an interesting comment on the cartography of the Nanaimo area at the time:

"In our passage through the Canal de Arro [Trincomali Channel], we were struck with the extreme incorrectness of the maps of Vancouver Island. The line of the coast is well delineated, and could be traced upon our maps, as far as the promontory named Cowichin Head [Cowichan Head; about half way up the Saanich Peninsula]; but from that point [on], all resemblances to the coast ceases: the multitude of islands forming the Arro Archipelago [Gulf Islands], which extends as far as, and terminates at Cala Descanso [Gabriola Island] being laid down as an integral portion of Vancouver Island; whereas its true line of coast runs from 15 to 20 miles W[est] of its position as laid down on our maps; the intermediate space being occupied by islands, and channels of various breadths, generally navigable, but probably inconvenient for sailing vessels on account of the strong currents and frequent calms which occur in these narrow waters."

To fully understand Douglas's complaint about his maps,<sup>2</sup> we have to go back to the Spanish naval expedition of 1791. This was the first European expedition to conduct any sort of survey of the Strait of Georgia. Understandably, given the size of the strait and the survey's limited eight-day duration, lots of detail of the coastline went unrecorded. In particular, the Spanish thought that the outer coasts of the Gulf Islands were the east coast of Vancouver Island (see Map 1). This misunderstanding on the part of the Spanish was officially perpetuated on maps of BC for over fifty years. For example, if you look at Map 2, British Admiralty Chart #1917, first published in 1849, you will see that it continues to show Gabriola and the other Gulf Islands as forming an integral part of Vancouver Island. It was this chart that Douglas was using on his expedition to Nanaimo.

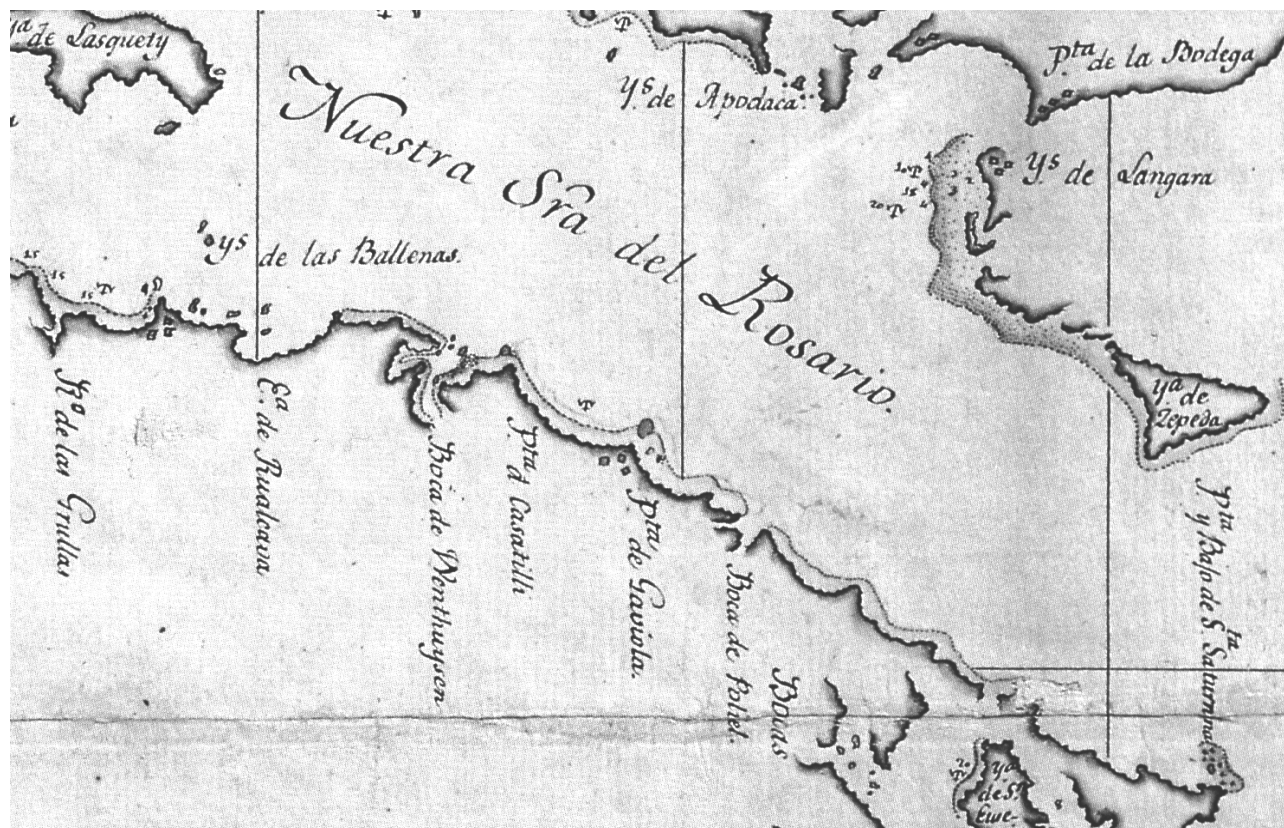
Now Douglas made quite a to-do about the inaccurate maps. Along with his report to the RGS, he published a sketch of the southern part of Vancouver Island, (see Map 3). This sketch, which was engraved by John Arrowsmith in London, England, is usually cited as being the first map ever published to show Gabriola, Valdes, and Galiano as islands.

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<sup>1</sup> James Douglas, *Report of a Canoe Expedition along the East Coast of Vancouver Island*, February 28, 1853. Published in *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 24, pp.245–249, 1854.

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<sup>2</sup> Because 19th-century writers did not carefully distinguish between a map and a chart, I won't either.



Courtesy Museo Naval, Madrid

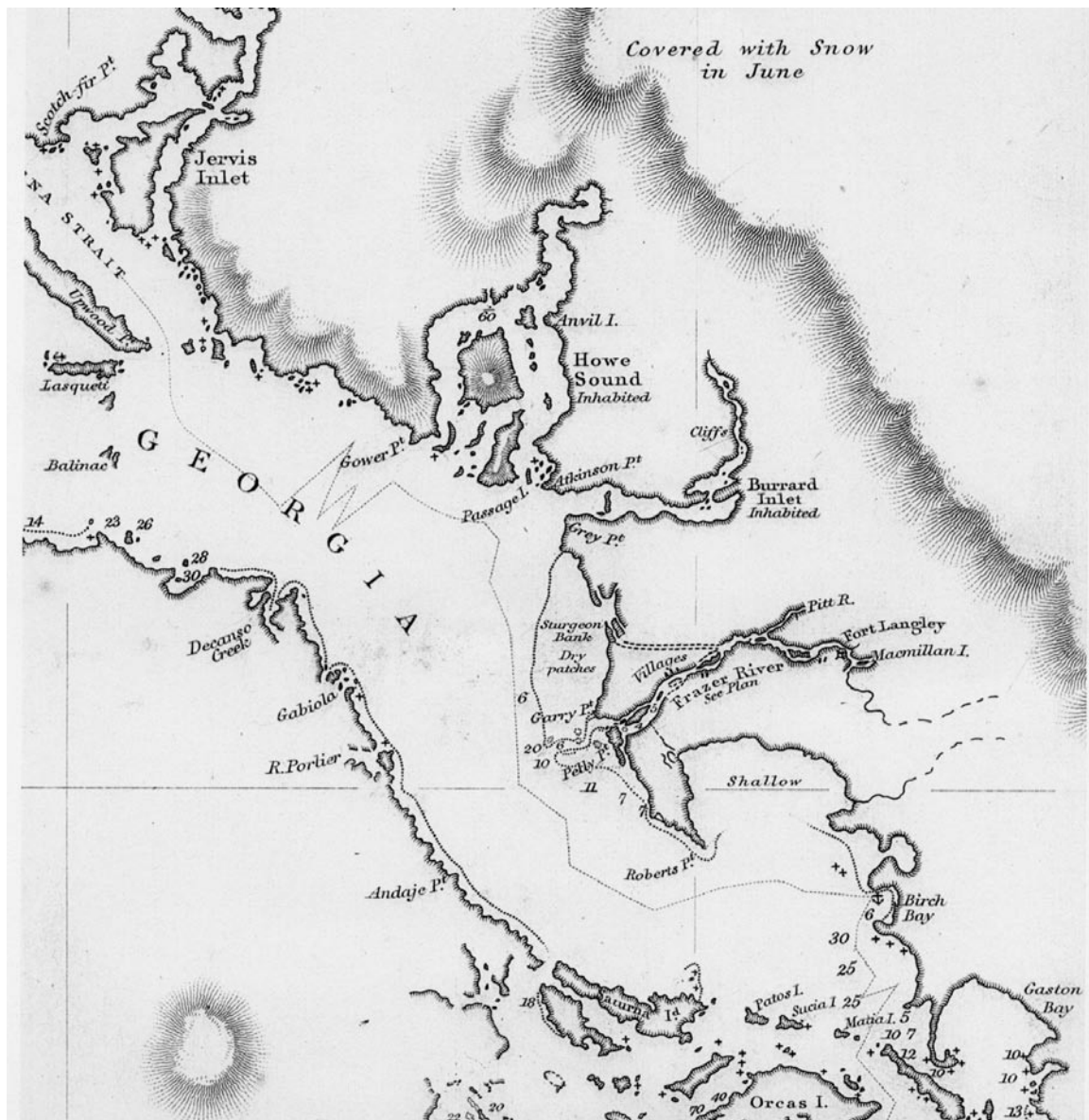
Map 1: Part of *Carta que comprehende...* based on the surveys of the Spanish navy of the west coast of Vancouver Island, Juan de Fuca Strait, and Strait of Georgia, 1789–91. Several copies exist, but the best of these, shown here, was drafted by Juan Carrasco in late 1791 at the Spanish naval station at San Blas in what is now Mexico. This portion, which shows the east coast of Vancouver Island and the outer coasts of the Gulf Islands, is based on the survey of José María Narváez in the *Santa Saturnina* in the summer of 1791.

Some local placenames are *Boca de Wenthuyzen* [Northumberland Channel, between Gabriola and Vancouver Island]; *Punta de Casatilli* [Berry Point, Gabriola]; and *Punta de Gaviola* [Law Point and the Flat Top Islands, Gabriola]. Note the T-shaped anchor symbol shown off the Whalebone Beach area of Gabriola. It is quite possible the expedition went ashore here. Three Indian village symbols (small squares) are also shown on Gabriola, above and to the left of the annotation *Punta de Gaviola*.

Some other names on the chart are *Gran Canal de Nuestra Señora del Rosario* [Strait of Georgia]; on the far left *Río de las Grullas* (River of Cranes) [Englishman River]; *Islas de las Ballenas* (Whale Islands) [Ballenas Islands]; *Ensenada de Rualcava* [Nanaimo Harbour]; *Boca de Poliel* (Porlier was meant) [Porlier Pass]; *Islas de Apodaca* [Bowen & nearby islands]; *Islas de Lángara* [Point Grey & nearby islands]; and *Isla de Zepeda* [Point Roberts, then thought to be an island]. The identity of *Punta de la Bodega* (top right) is controversial. Many think that it is Point Atkinson, but I think it more likely that it is a rendering of Stanley Park by someone who hadn't noticed First Narrows.

The detail of Nanaimo Harbour suggests that Narváez sailed into it in 1791, not just across its entrance. Although Galiano also visited Nanaimo harbour in 1792 and made sketches there, his work was not added to this part of the published charts.

BCA CM/A438



Courtesy UBC Special Collections

Map 2: This was the chart Governor James Douglas had with him on his expedition in 1852. Admiralty Chart # 1917 (first edition), published in 1849, *Vancouver Island and the Gulf of Georgia from the surveys of Vancouver 1793, Galiano and Valdés 1792, and Kellett 1847*.

In fact, none of the gentlemen named in the title deserve the credit for the east coast of Vancouver Island which can only be the work of Narváez shown in Map 1.

Some local placenames on this chart are *Decanso Creek* [mistranslation and misspelling of Galiano's "Cala del Descanso" (Cove of Rest) on Gabriola Island (Pilot Bay) but shown here on Vancouver Island]; *Gabiola* [Gabriola Passage]; *River Porlier* [mistranslation of "Boca de Porlier" (Porlier Entrance)]; *Andaje Point* [misspelling of Galiano's "Punta del Anclage" (anchorage point), east coast of Galiano Island north of Active Pass].

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Douglas's report to the RGS urged that the British navy be sent out ASAP to do a proper survey of the east coast:

"There is every reason to believe, from the appearance of the country and its geological phenomena, that Vancouver Island, about Wentuhuysen Inlet [Nanaimo Harbour], is *one vast coal-field*; and, if that conjecture be correct, the progress of the colony will be rapid and prosperous, notwithstanding the many adverse circumstances which have hitherto retarded the development of its resources. ...It is therefore of the very greatest importance to the trade of this colony that the Canal de Arro [Trincomali Channel] should be explored and a correct survey prepared as soon as possible...and I beg most earnestly to recommend that measure to your consideration."

I would guess that one of the "many adverse circumstances" Douglas is referring to here is the signing of the Oregon Treaty of 1846, which fixed the US border in the west as the 49th parallel. Many pro-British North Americans, including Douglas himself, were bitterly disappointed that the treaty had left the HBC's District of Columbia, including Fort Vancouver, in "foreign" territory.<sup>3</sup>

Douglas's plea for a survey ship to be sent out got no immediate response from London. The general-service naval ship HMS *Virago* did arrive in 1853 and some surveying was done in the Queen Charlotte Islands and Port Simpson areas in 1854, but it was not until 1857, when Captain George H. Richards arrived in HMS *Plumper*, that an intensive survey of the Strait of Georgia was begun in earnest. The impetus even then, was not so much to respond to Douglas's appeal, but the need to define the disputed

US / British border through (or around) the San Juan Islands. This was a detail that the Oregon Treaty had left open to dispute.

A revision of Admiralty Chart #1917 published in 1858, (see Map 4), is the first British chart to show Gabriola as an island. It is interestingly also, so far as I know, the first chart of any nationality to show "Gabriola" spelled with an "r"—the original "Punta de Gaviola" having evolved by this time to "Gabriola Point".

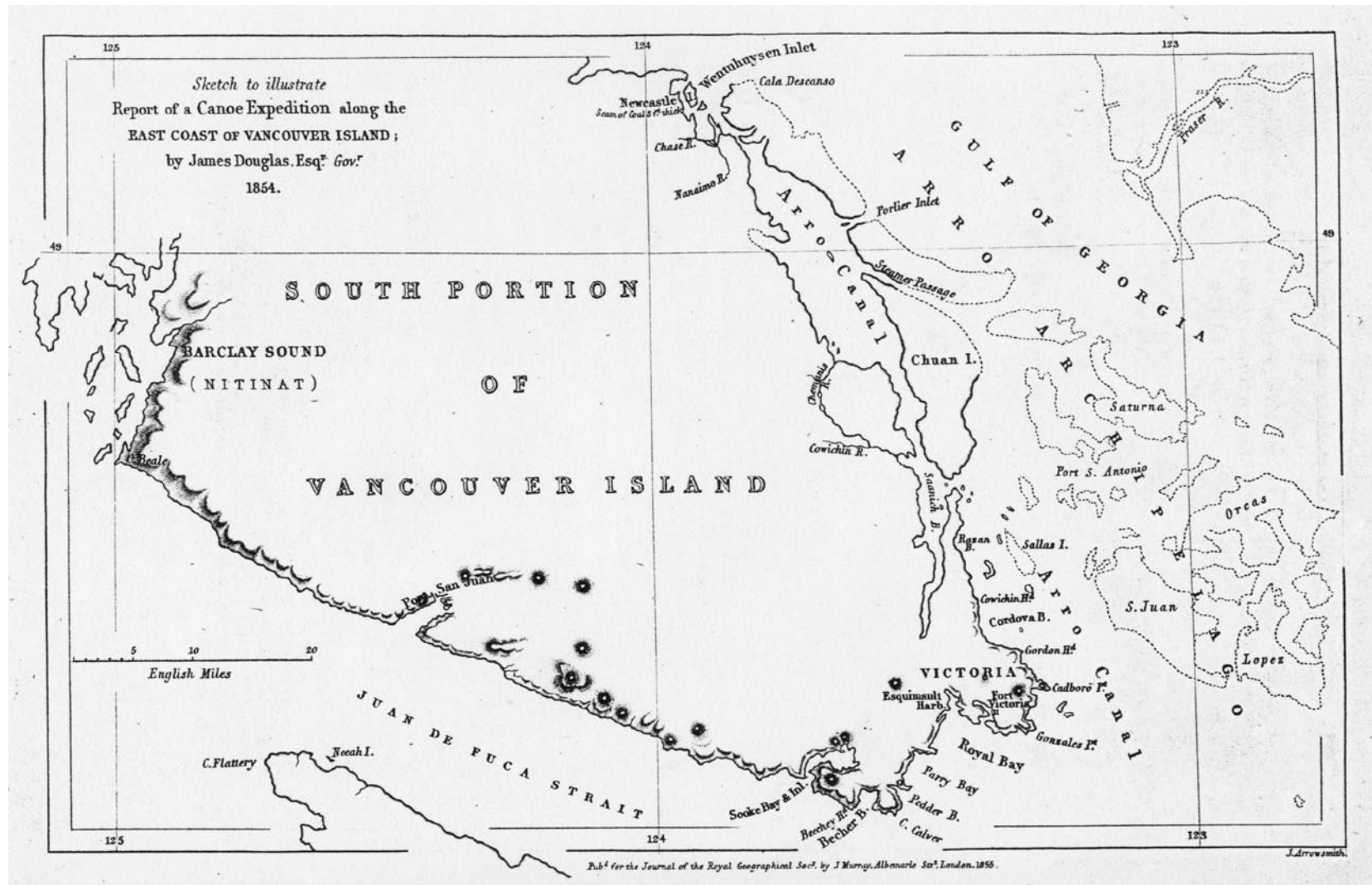
The 1858 edition is too early to have incorporated any of Richards' work—publication usually took a couple of years—so the information about the Gulf Islands that it contains must have come from non-Admiralty sources, without doubt the HBC. A further revision of Admiralty Chart #1917 published in 1862, (see Map 5), does include Richards' work, and here we see for the first time on a naval chart the name "Gabriola Island" (1859 survey) and the cartography takes on an all-together modern look.<sup>4</sup>

So far so good. A simple enough story. It was therefore with some surprise a couple of years ago, on leafing through Derek Hayes's then newly-published historical atlas of BC, that I came across a Russian map dated 1849 (see Map 6).<sup>5</sup> A little research and consultation with experts soon revealed that there is little possibility that

<sup>3</sup> "...Sound a brief lament for our lost kingdom—soaring mountains and winding waterways, pleasant valleys and high plateaus—a goodly, goodly land. Now forever lost." G.P.V. & Helen B. Akrigg.

<sup>4</sup> I don't know whether it was Richards, Pemberton, or someone else that first used the name "Gabriola" for the whole island. The earliest published use I have seen of "Gabriola Island" is on a map of Vancouver Island and the Gulf of Georgia by Joseph Pemberton, published in London in 1860 (Canadian National Map Collection 0005936). Pemberton was surveyor general for the colony of Vancouver Island, 1851–64.

<sup>5</sup> Derek Hayes, *Historical Atlas of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest*, Map 244, Cavendish Books, Vancouver, 1999.



Courtesy National Library of Canada

Map 3: *Sketch to illustrate Report of a Canoe Expedition along the East Coast of Vancouver Island, by James Douglas Esq. Gov. 1854.*

Douglas's 1852 map. Local placenames are *Wenthuysen Inlet* [Nanaimo Harbour]; *Cala Descanso* [Gabriola Island]; *Arro Canal* [Trincomali Channel, from the 1790 Spanish "Canal de López de Haro"]; *Steamer Passage* [between Saltspring & Galiano]; *Chuan Island* [Saltspring Island].

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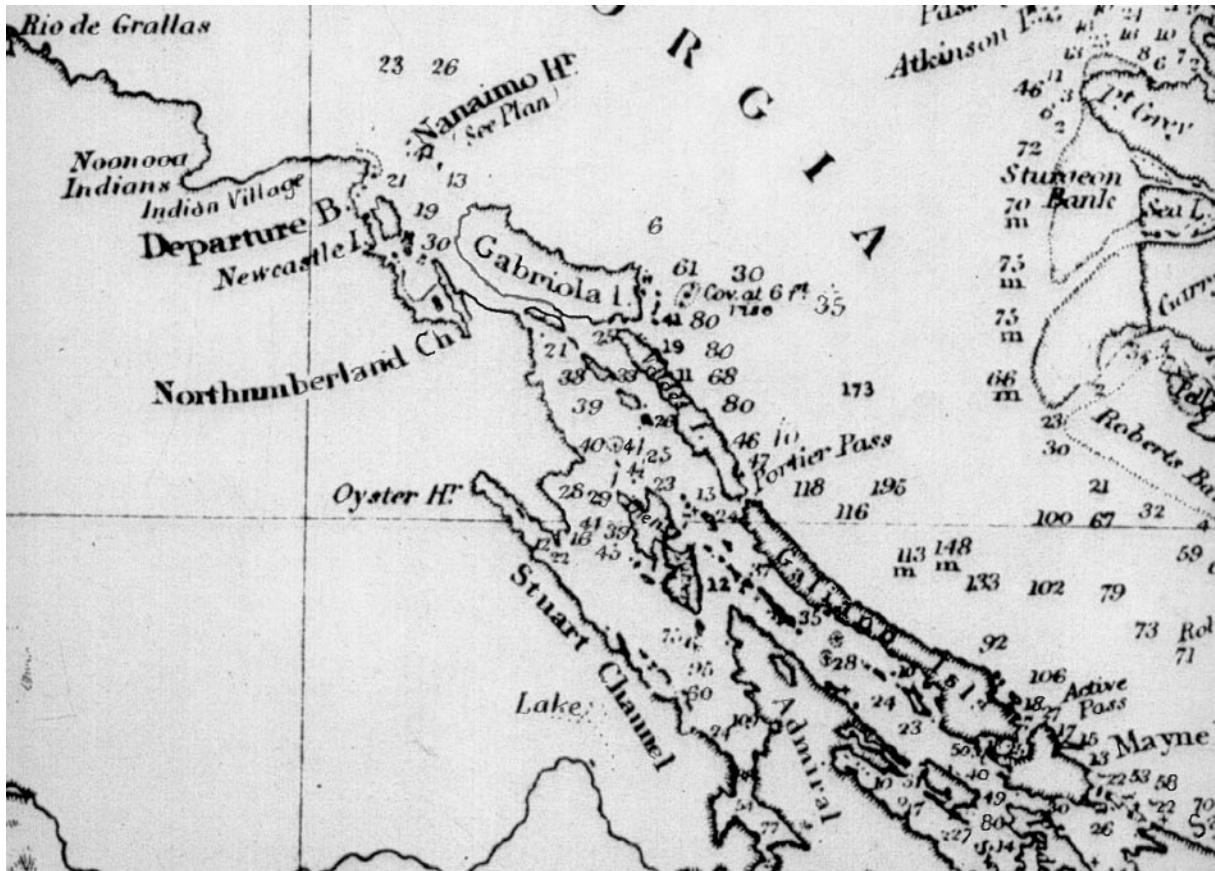


Courtesy BC Archives

Map 4: Admiralty Chart # 1917 (2nd edition), published in 1858. The first British chart to show Gabriola as an island. Same title as Map 2 with the addition ...*Rosario and Haro Straits from the United States Coast Survey in 1854*. This part of the chart is a poor copy of the 1854 US chart (No. 51), which in turn appears to be a copy—a good one—of an 1853 HBC sketch (Map 7) without most of the placenames. The 1854 US chart gives credit to Captains Kellet RN and Wilkes USN; however, no chart of either gentleman showing this amount of detail of the Gulf Islands is known.

Some local placenames are *Gabriola Point* [a misspelling of "Punta de Gabiola", Law Point, Gabriola Island]; *Rio de Grallas* [a misspelt survivor from Map 1, Englishman River]; *Portier Inlet* [a misspelling of "Boca de Porlier", Porlier Pass]. *Saltspring Island* has its modern name, though this was soon changed to *Admiral Island*, only reverting to "Saltspring" in 1906. Note that *Wentuhuysen Inlet* has become "Nanaimo Harbour", a name adopted by Company-Colonial Surveyor Pemberton in 1852.

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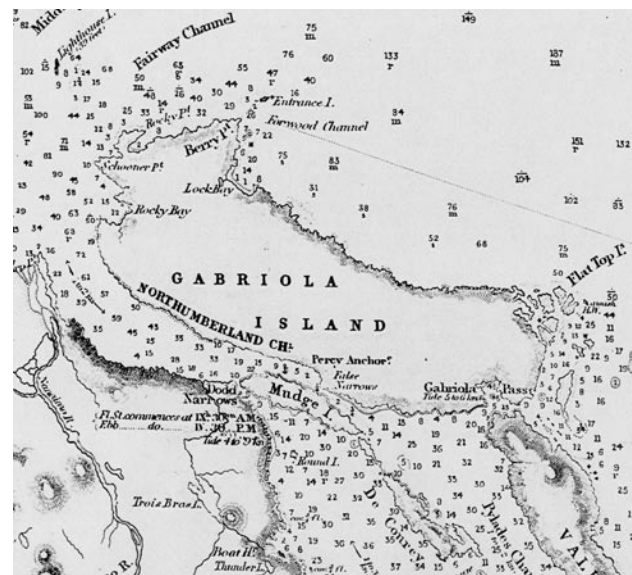
Courtesy UBC Special Collections

Map 5: Admiralty Chart # 1917 (3rd edition), published in 1862. Same title as Map 2 with the addition "...Captain Richards R.N. 1859–61".

The first admiralty chart with a distinctly modern look. Richard's survey was much more detailed than this large-scale map suggests (see right).

Most other placenames are also the same as modern ones, although the misspelt *Rio de Grallas* [Englishman River, from the Spanish 1791 chart] and *Portier Pass* [Porlier Pass, still known locally by its HBC name, Cowichan Gap] hang in there. *Admiral Island* [Saltspring Island]. The name *Active Pass* (after USS *Active*, the first deep-ocean vessel to go through) was Richards' choice, but *Plumper Pass* (after Richards' vessel HMS *Plumper*) was used by pro-British Islanders for many years.

BCA CM/B227



Richards 1859...part of Admiralty Chart # 579, first published 1863



the date of this map is wrong;<sup>6</sup> yet, here we have a map, apparently surveyed three years before Douglas's canoe trip, that clearly shows that all the Gulf Islands are quite distinct from the east coast of Vancouver Island. Both Gabriola and Mudge are shown, perhaps even Entrance Island, and although Gabriola and Valdes seem to overlap—a sign maybe that the cartographer was unsure about the Gabriola Passage—the two islands manage nevertheless to look quite distinct. The map also shows a ship's track going through Dodd Narrows and on up the coast, not stopping at Nanaimo, which is significant, because it adds to the evidence that the map was drawn before 1852. Another interesting feature is the Cowichan River (*p. Ковычын*). The river is both named and mapped, a clue that the cartographer was more familiar with the land than was your average passing sailor.

Two questions spring to mind. First, where did the Russians get their information? and how come the Russians appear to have got it three years before the governor of Vancouver Island and a chief factor of the HBC seems to have done?<sup>7</sup> The answer to the first question, I think, is easy—the Russians got their information from somebody in the HBC. It's the only possible source given that there is no record of any Russians surveying this area, nor any historical reason to suppose they ever did. And the answer to the second question? Well, let's leave that until the end.

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<sup>6</sup> The map shows the 1846 US / Canada border, but does not show Fort Rupert at the north end of Vancouver Island founded in the summer of 1849.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas, who succeeded Richard Blanshard as governor in 1851, was not obliged to resolve his conflict of interest by being both governor and a chief factor of the HBC until 1858.

The story of the Russian-HBC connection goes as follows. Shortly after the HBC arrived on the coast in 1821, they found they had two commercial rivals to contend with. The first were the Americans (the Boston men), who were visiting the outer BC coast every year to trade in sea-otter pelts; and the second were the Russians, who, as a result of an agreement with the British in 1825, occupied the coast as far south as 54°40'.

As the supply of marine mammals dwindled due to over-hunting, the Americans began to show an interest in trading for land-based furs. The HBC strategy to put them out of business was simple and effective. By forming year-round associations with the Native hunters and trappers, the HBC could easily arrange to buy up all the supplies of furs shortly before the American ships appeared off the coast each spring. The price of furs went up, the market was temporarily flooded with manufactured goods, and the American ships were unable to do much trade—so they went away.<sup>8</sup>

The second commercial rival to the HBC was the Russian-American Company, which had operated since 1799 in what is now Alaska on a similar basis as the HBC did further south. Here the strategy to deal with competition was co-operation. Although the Russian-American Company had furs, and could trade them at the border with China, their supply routes across the vast hinterland of Russia were hideously long and impractical. The Russians had established a supply colony in California at Fort Ross, a hundred kilometres north of San Francisco, in 1812, but it was a failure. So, in the 1840s, as a result of agreements between the HBC and the Russian-American Company,

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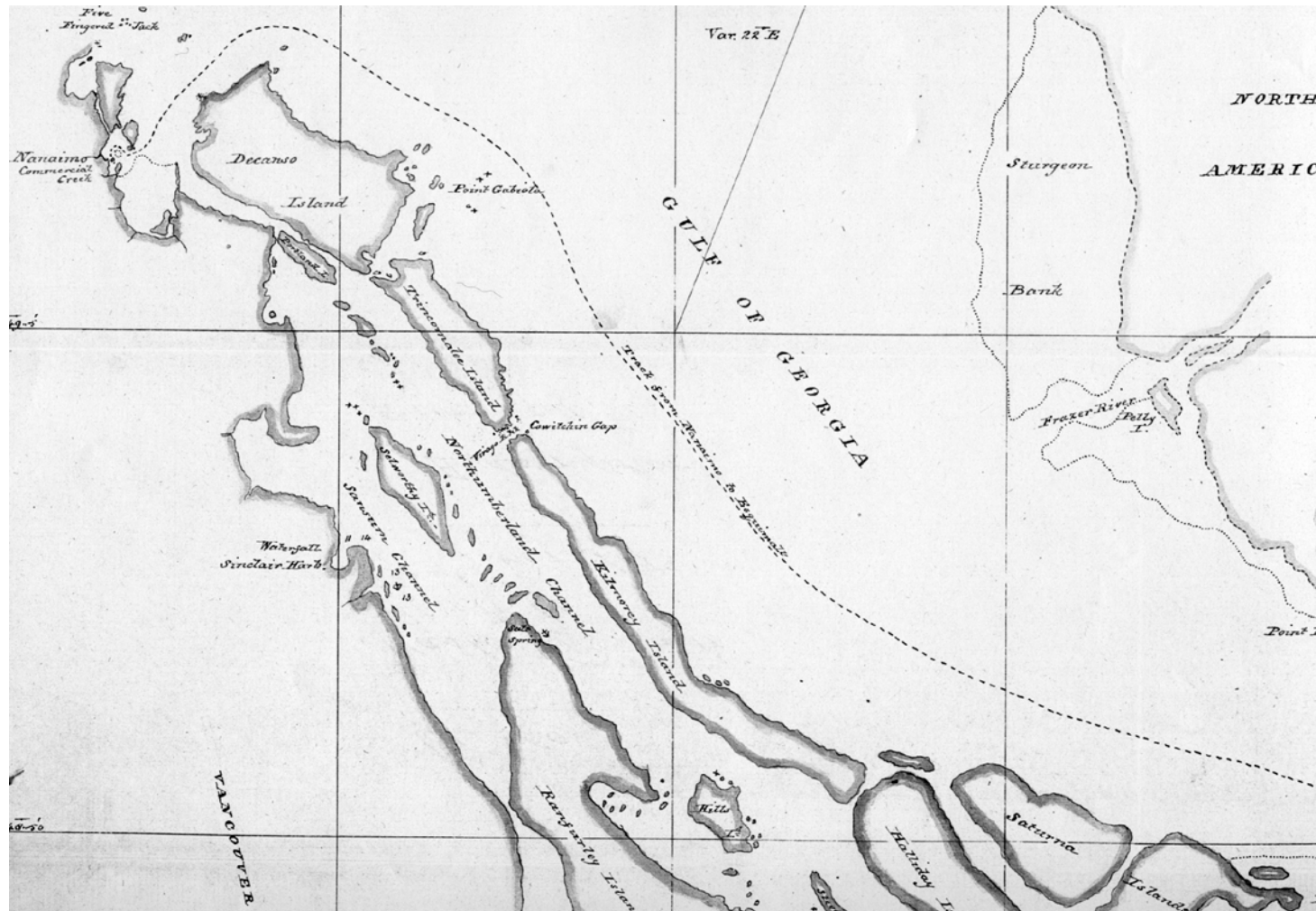
<sup>8</sup> Well...not completely of course. New Englanders later returned to the Pacific in search of whales, ice, fish, and coal, with well-known consequences for both Alaska and Hawaii.



Courtesy Limestone Press

Map 6: Part of *Map of the Island of Quadra and Vancouver*. Dated 1849 and published in an atlas in St. Petersburg in 1852. It is the earliest known map of any nationality to show Gabriola as an island. The atlas was compiled by Mikhail D. Teben'kov, chief manager of the Russian-America Company. Some local placenames on this map are *р. Ковычин* [Cowichan River]; *М. Стюарт* [Point Stewart, an HBC name for East Point on Saturna]; *Кан Арро* [Arro Canal, now Haro Strait]; *М. Грей* [Point Grey]; *М. Робертс* [Point Roberts]; and *О. Прохода* [?, probably Passage Island].

BCA CM/B2020-2



Courtesy UK Hydrographic Office

Map 7: Part of *Sketch of the SE end of Vancouver Island and Haro Strait* by Captain Stuart of the HBC, 1853. This unpublished sketch has a fascinating list of HBC placenames, only some of which have survived. Examples are *De[s]canso Island* [Gabriola Island]; *Point Gabiola* [Law Point & the Flat Top Islands]; *Portland Island* [Mudge Island]; *Trincomalee Island* [Valdes Island]; *Selworthy Island* [Thetis & Kuper Islands]; *Kilmorey Island* [Galiano Island]; *Halliday Island* [Mayne Island]; *Ranfurley Island* [Saltspring Island]; and *Sansum Channel* [Stuart Channel].

three HBC vessels—*Columbia*, *Vancouver*, and *Cowlitz*—were sailing continually between Fort Victoria, Fort Vancouver, England, and Alaska, with cargoes of British manufactured goods, grain, beef, and other agricultural produce bound for Sitka.<sup>9</sup>

The opportunities for the Russians to acquire information from the HBC were ample, and they took advantage of it. Mikhail D. Teben'kov who compiled the 1852 atlas was a naval officer and hydrographer who spent twenty-five years in Alaska and the North Pacific until he reached the highest position in the Russian-American colonies, that of chief manager, or governor.<sup>10</sup> Teben'kov gathered data during his own voyages, and instructed subordinates to seek specific information while on theirs, to compile information buried in earlier logs and reports in the company archives, and to quiz the captains of ships visiting Alaska.

The remarks in the hydrographic notes accompanying Teben'kov's map of Quadra and Vancouver's Island, as it was originally known, are both terse and telling.<sup>11</sup> The only thing he has to say is "...Cape Flattery and many points of the Strait of Juan de Fuca were reckoned very well by officials of the Hudson's Bay Company". There is one small clue in the Russian map itself that its source was the HBC. East Point on Saturna Island is called Point Stewart (*M. Cmюapm*), a name only used by the HBC.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Lillard, *Seven Shillings a Year—The History of Vancouver Island*, p.76, Horsdal & Schubart, 1986. Sitka is the Tlingit name for the site of Ново Архангельск [New Archangel].

<sup>10</sup> R.A. Pierce (trans. and ed.), *Atlas of the Northwest Coasts of America...compiled by Captain 1st Rank M.D. Teben'kov and Published in 1852 with Hydrographic Notes*. Alaska History Series No. 21, Limestone Press, Ontario, 1981.

<sup>11</sup> R.A. Pierce (trans. and ed.), *Atlas...* p. 32.

An interesting ending to the story of Chief Manager Teben'kov's Gabriolan scoop is an HBC sketch I found in the papers of HMS *Virago* (Map 7). We can date this sketch to no later than April 1853, which was when it was given to the captain of the *Virago* by the HBC employee Charles Stuart.

This map is not the same as that published by the Russians, but it has many names for places in the Gulf Islands, most of them unfamiliar to us, as they were never adopted by the British navy. This map clearly shows that either HBC surveyors were extraordinarily busy in the winter of 1852/3, or, more likely, that the HBC knew rather more about the geography of the Gulf Islands than Governor Douglas's report to the RGS in February, 1853, would have the casual reader believe. Why the reluctance to tell all? Well, for what it's worth, I think it was provincial politics off to an early start. The newly-established government was lobbying hard to have the British navy made responsible for coastal surveys, and evidently somebody felt that this was not the right time for the HBC to be revealing how fully capable it was of doing the job itself.

## Acknowledgements

*Thanks to Michael Bakst of Sechelt BC for help reading 19th-century Russian handwriting, Derek Hayes of Cavendish Books, Bruce Ward of the BC Map Society, and librarians and archivists in Vancouver; Victoria; Ottawa; and Taunton UK, for much appreciated help in locating and copying maps and charts.*

## Additional notes on the maps

BCA = British Columbia Archives. Although BCA call numbers are given, copies were not obtained from there unless otherwise stated.

Douglas's map, Map 3, is becoming increasingly rare in BC libraries. It should face page 248 of *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 24, 1854, but in many instances it has gone missing. ♦