

CIRCUMSCRIBING VANCOUVER ISLAND¹

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VANCOUVER'S ISLAND

The Nootka Crisis, which had brought Britain and Spain close to war, prompted the British Cabinet to seek more precise information about the Northwest Coast, and George Vancouver was Britain's emissary to the region. He was instructed to negotiate with Spain's official at Nootka Sound, Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, but the main aim of his voyage was to conduct an exhaustive cartographic survey of the coast up to latitude 60° north and end speculation about the existence of a Northwest Passage. His diplomatic mission achieved little, but he conducted a meticulous survey in the 330-ton ship *Discovery* and the 131-ton brig *Chatham*. Vancouver circumnavigated the island that bears his name in the summer of 1792 and left the coast after two more arduous survey seasons, having in his mind "set aside every opinion of a *north-west passage* ... existing between the North Pacific, and the interior of the American continent, within the limits of our researches."² Upon the conclusion of his reconnaissance in October 1794, Vancouver's botanist and surgeon, Archibald Menzies, reported to his sponsor, Sir Joseph Banks, that "no task was ever executed with more assiduity & perservering zeal, than the intricate examination of this coast."³

¹ This article is drawn from the author's forthcoming book, *Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island* (Vancouver: UBC Press). The article focuses on the production of cartographic space and on its imperial connotations. The imperial and colonial legacies of Vancouver's survey are dealt with in other sections of the book, which also contain extended discussions of Cook and of the maritime fur trade.

² W. Kaye Lamb, ed., *The Voyage of George Vancouver, 1791-1795*. 4 vols. (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1984), p. 1,390 (emphasis in original).

³ Joseph Banks, Dawson Turner copies of the correspondence of Sir Joseph Banks. British Museum (Natural History). Menzies to Banks, 1 October 1794, vol. IX, 108.

This notion that Vancouver and his party truly sorted out the geography of the Northwest Coast was reiterated by nineteenth-century commentators and has been upheld by a host of scholars. After visiting the region in the mid-1820s, the Scottish botanist John Scouler noted that he had nothing to add to Vancouver's map and that "the admirable surveys of that navigator have rendered the numerous islands and complicated inlets of the N.W. coast of America familiar to the geographers of Europe."⁴ Berthold Seeman, who commanded a British Admiralty survey of the Pacific in the mid-1840s, noted that "no accurate information [of the North west coast] ... begins previous to Vancouver, who ... examined the whole with scientific accuracy. His work is still referred to for its agreeable truthfulness."⁵ Vancouver's work was not bettered until the late 1850s, when G.H. Richards led a six-year survey for the British Admiralty.⁶ This century, J.C. Beaglehole maintained that "Vancouver's systematic and painstaking survey ranks with the most distinguished work of the kind ever done" – a remark cited approvingly by W. Kaye Lamb, who re-edited Vancouver's journals for the Hakluyt Society of London.⁷

Vancouver's achievement, so these remarks suggest, was that he separated geographical fact from fiction – that he discovered a good portion of the spatial reality of the coast and forged a more accurate and thorough cartographic relation with it than did his contemporaries. Glyndwr Williams writes: "This exact, meticulous explorer found his satisfaction in producing charts of such accuracy that they were used for more than a century after his death."⁸ And in their introduction to a recent collection of essays, *From Maps to Metaphors: The*

⁴ John Scouler, "Observations on the Indigenous Tribes of the N.W. Coast of America," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 11 (1841): 215-40 (quotation is from p. 215).

⁵ Berthold Seeman, *Narrative of the Voyage of H.M.S. Herald during the Years 1845-1851...*, 2 vols. (London: Reeve and Co., 1853), I, 99.

⁶ The results of Richards's labours are represented on numerous hydrographic charts and in his *The Vancouver Island Pilot* (London: Hydrographic Office, 1864).

⁷ Quoted in Lamb, *Voyage of George Vancouver*, I, 208. Lamb charts much of the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century historiographical appreciation of Vancouver. The principal biographies of Vancouver are: Bern Anderson, *The Life and Voyages of Captain George Vancouver, Surveyor of the Sea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960); and George Godwin, *Vancouver: A Life, 1757-1798* (New York: Appleton, 1931). Lamb's introduction to the Hakluyt Society edition of Vancouver's voyage is the most exhaustive account of Vancouver's survey. On Vancouver's dealings with Native peoples, see Robin Fisher, *Vancouver's Voyage: Charting the Northwest Coast, 1791-1795* (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1992).

⁸ Glyndwr Williams, "Myth and Reality: The Theoretical Geography of Northwest America from Cook to Vancouver," in *From Maps to Metaphors: The Pacific World of George Vancouver*, ed. Robin Fisher and Hugh Johnson, 35-50 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993) (quotation is from 50).

Pacific World of George Vancouver, which stemmed from a conference that was held in 1992 to mark the bicentenary of Vancouver's arrival on the coast, Robin Fisher and Hugh Johnston suggest that "Vancouver could be said to have discovered the northwest coast of North America, for it was he who established that it was a continuous line, unbroken by any passage to the Atlantic."⁹

Such images mimic Vancouver's own sense of his survey. He wrote in his published account of the voyage (1798): "Although the ardour of the present age, to discover and delineate the true geography of the earth, had been rewarded with uncommon and unexpected success, particularly by the persevering exertions of this great man [Captain Cook] ... all was not completed."¹⁰ Vancouver sailed on Cook's second and third voyages, and he knew that the illustrious navigator had not explored much of the Northwest Coast.¹¹ Vancouver noted that the "very detached and broken region that lies before so large a portion of this coast, rendered a minute examination altogether unavoidable," and he figured that his team had conducted "an accurate survey" and "dispassionate investigation of the truth."¹² "It was with infinite satisfaction," he concluded, "that I saw, amongst the officers and young gentlemen of the quarter-deck, some who, with little instruction, would soon be enabled to construct charts, take plans of bays and harbours, draw landscapes, and make faithful representations of the several headlands, coasts, and countries, which we might discover."¹³

This rhetoric of accuracy, exactitude, and faithful geographical representation, invoked by Vancouver and recycled by scholars, is underwritten by the idea that Vancouver's team charted in a more or less truthful way a geography that was waiting to be discovered – that they made a closer copy of reality than had any previous surveyor. Scholars of Vancouver's voyage have not considered the recent critical literature on the history of cartography, which posits a set of links between maps, knowledge, and power. "Whether a map is produced under the banner of cartographic science – as most official maps have been [and Vancouver's were] – or whether it is an overt propaganda exercise," Brian Harley argued in 1988, "it cannot escape involvement in the process by which power is deployed." Maps often "desocialise' the territory they represent," he continues, to the degree that "decisions

⁹ Fisher and Johnston, *From Maps to Metaphors*, introduction, p. 14

¹⁰ Lamb, *Voyage of George Vancouver*, I, 275-6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 276.

¹² *Ibid.*, IV, 1,390; I, 275.

¹³ *Ibid.*, I, 281.

about the exercise of power are removed from the realm of immediate face-to-face contacts.”¹⁴

This, roughly, I suggest, is what Vancouver’s cartography encouraged. He was not simply engaged in a veridical search for an anticipated geographical reality. Nor did he simply unfurl the geographical truth about the Northwest Coast in a progressive fashion – starting at the Strait of Juan de Fuca (which some European pundits thought led to the Northwest Passage) and finishing his survey at “Point Conclusion” on Baranof Island – as the recent literature on his survey suggests. As accurately, Vancouver created a geography, and his geography had imperial connotations.¹⁵ His cartography facilitated geopolitical processes of appropriation that worked at a distance from Native peoples. He papered over the intersubjective spaces of interaction created by the maritime fur trade and reinvented the island that bears his name. His cartography became connected to Western formulae of sovereignty that worked around Native geopolitical dynamics. In my view, Vancouver’s achievements should be assessed in the light of the concepts and methods that he brought to bear on the Northwest Coast and in relation to the imperial and colonial legacies of his survey.

¹⁴ J.B. Harley, “Maps, Knowledge, and Power,” in *The Iconography of Landscape*, ed. D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels, 277–312 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) (quotations are from 279 and 303).

¹⁵ I will focus on the ideas, concepts, and practices that infuse Vancouver’s cartography. I avoid discussion of deeper epistemological questions of truth and reality in cartography but want to make one brief point about them. Arguments about the accuracy of Vancouver’s survey re-endorse what Graham Huggan calls the “mimetic fallacy” at the heart of the scientific culture of imperialism: the idea that “an approximate, subjectively reconstituted and historically contingent model of the ‘real’ world” can be faithfully “passed off as an accurate, objectively presented and universally applicable copy.” Vancouver’s movements and dealings with Native peoples have been tracked in great detail, but his assumptions about truth and reality have barely been discussed. His survey had its own contingencies, but Vancouver passed it off as a reliable reconstruction of a geography that was *indubitably there all along*. Huggan claims that mimesis endorses a particular view or kind of reality: that of the West. The “imitative operations of mimesis can be seen to have stabilized (or attempted to stabilize) a falsely essentialist view of the world which negates or suppresses alternative views which might endanger the privileged position of its Western perceiver.” Principally, Vancouver’s cartography was falsely essentialist (incomplete) in that it erased most signs of Native territorial arrangements. Scholars such as Fisher, Johnston, and Williams do not comment on such issues, but they adopt a particular position on them: they collapse the distinction between what Huggan calls the “approximate function” of the map as a form of representation and its “authoritative status” as a form of knowledge that can induce effects of power. Vancouver’s aim, they imply, was also his achievement: it was the plausibility (or accuracy) of his cartography that made his survey authoritative, not the Western views of the Northwest Coast that it licensed. See Graham Huggan, “Decolonizing the Map: Post-colonialism, post-structuralism and the Cartographic Connection,” *Ariel* 20, 4 (October 1989): 115–31 (quotations are from 116–8).

VANCOUVER'S "COMBINATORY CALCULUS"

Vancouver's surveying instructions, which were prepared for the Home Office by Major James Rennell (who had a great hand in the mapping of India), Sir Joseph Banks, and William Bligh, were far more detailed than any Cook had been given, and they reveal the great emphasis that the British Government placed on the cartographic aspects of his mission.

It is judged necessary, in order that future Surveyors may profit to the fullest Extent, by your Discoveries & Operations; & that they may be able to Appreciate the Authorities on which the Geography of the several Portions of the Coast rest; that those Authorities should not only be pointedly marked in your Chart but that a Register should also be kept in the Nature of a *Log Survey Book* ... so that, in Cases where you have not been able, either from Weather or Accidents to compleat the Trigonometrical or Observational Process, others may be enabled to compleat what you have begun, without the Delay of going through the whole Process anew.¹⁶

With regard to charting, Vancouver was told that

every principal object whose position is either wholly or even thro' Accident only partially and incompletely determined shall have that position marked by a dot (.) & the mode by which it was so determined shall be described by adding as many of the following Marks as may serve to express it.

- a Position determined by Celestial Observation...
- ◌ Longitude of Time Keeper
- 0 Latitude by Observation
- Lat. by Account
- By Intersection of Bearings, with 2 or more broken lines...
- ∅ Surveying Stations of the Day, Month & Year to be added...
- = Measured bases...¹⁷

And with regard to illustrating the charts:

It is suggested that significant and Characteristic Names should be given, on the spot of the several Objects that form the Sound Marks; in which case, if named with Judgment the Name would

¹⁶ "General instruction for surveying," in the hand of Sir Joseph Banks, 21 February, 1791 PRO HO 42/18, fol. 170.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, fols. 171-2.

convey some portion of information to succeeding Navigators and Surveyors.¹⁸

Vancouver had another set of instructions from the Admiralty, which outlined his diplomatic objectives but also impressed on him that his principal goal was to acquire “a more complete knowledge” of the coast.¹⁹ This was a different mission than that of Cook’s third voyage. Vancouver, like other British explorers sponsored by the Admiralty during this period, was told to observe people and nature, and to avoid collisions with Native peoples. But it was Archibald Menzies who was chiefly responsible for describing “the present state & comparative degree of Civilization of the [Native] Inhabitants” and collecting botanical specimens.²⁰ Menzies was counselled by Joseph Banks. Vancouver and his officers were meant to focus on surveying.²¹

At the heart of Vancouver’s surveying instructions, and his introduction to his account of his transactions, was the idea that he should produce a conclusive, and hence authoritative, geography. The British government hoped that he would render the geography of the coast “compleat” and instructed him to chart the “authorities” on which his geography rested – his own discoveries and those of others. “The benefit that Government will derive from this mode of surveying is that the Employment of conjecture [especially about the Northwest Passage] will be rendered impossible,” Banks wrote to Grenville.²² Vancouver added that because the region was so “detached and broken,”

I have considered it essential to the illustration of our survey, to state very exactly not only the track of the vessels when navigating these regions, but likewise those of the boats when so employed ... The perusal of these parts of our voyage to persons not particularly interested, I am conscious will afford but little entertainment; yet I have been induced to give a detailed account, instead of an abstract, of our proceedings, for the purpose of illustrating the charts accompanying this journal: of shewing the manner in which our time day by day had been employed; and, for the additional purpose,

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 177.

¹⁹ Lamb, *Voyage of George Vancouver*, I, 283.

²⁰ “Instructions to Menzies from Jos. Banks,” Soho Square, 22 February 1791, BM Add. MS. 33,979, fol. 75. Banks sponsored Menzies and many other late eighteenth-century travellers.

²¹ A full list of the instruments and nautical and surveying texts used on Vancouver’s voyage, prepared by Andrew David of the Hydrographic Office in Taunton, U.K., is published in Fisher and Johnston, *From Maps to Metaphors*, 291–3.

²² Banks to Grenville, 20 February 1791, PRO HO 42/18[33], fol. 168.

of making the history of our transactions on the north-west coast of America, *as conclusive as possible*.²³

Vancouver sought a finite space – a calculable geography – and was determined to show how he had mapped it. He discussed the techniques and physical toils involved in his work and the ways in which he arrived at a conclusion. His charts and log survey book were meant to describe his physical, cognitive, and optical route through spaces that were at once real and technical, geographical and analogical. Headlands, inlets, bays, tides, beaches, and horizons were simultaneously spotted and measured, discovered and brought into spatial existence by a cartographic method.

Vancouver and his team used a set of methods and instruments to draw together space and depict it on a uniform plane – a scale map. They worked with what William Boelhower calls “a combinatory calculus.”²⁴ Boelhower discusses the mapping of the eastern seaboard of North America up to the nineteenth century, but his arguments about scale maps have a more general purchase. Vancouver’s survey work, I take Boelhower to suggest, revolved around his “physical and cognitive mobility across an open series of heterogeneous spaces,” and his charts were attempts “to weave such infinite variety into a unified discourse.”²⁵ Vancouver used different techniques and types of equipment to connect up the dots on his charts: chronometers and lunar observations for establishing longitude at sea; gunther chains for measuring bases in areas with long stretches of beach; triangulation stations on shore for determining the angle of a bay or headland in relation to the sun; sextants, compasses, long lines, and the turning points of a long boat when determining the size of an inlet; and compass bearings taken from “ship stations” to judge the distance between prominent coastal features. The combination of methods and tools used at specific points was influenced by the weather and the physical terrain.²⁶ Vancouver judged that his team had “completely explored every turning” of Puget Sound. This survey was successful because there was much flat land in the area and triangulation bases could be established at regular intervals.²⁷ And he noted that there were “a sufficient number of stopping places” in Johnstone Strait “to answer all our [surveying] purposes.”²⁸ But Vancouver could not obtain an

²³ Lamb, *Voyage of George Vancouver*, IV, 1,391 (Vancouver’s emphasis).

²⁴ William Boelhower, “Inventing America: A Model of Cartographic Semiosis,” *Word and Image* 4, 2 (April-June 1988): 475-97 (quotation is from 479).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ For a more rigorous discussion, see Andrew David, “Vancouver’s Survey Methods and Surveys,” in Fisher and Johnston, *From Maps to Metaphors*, 51-69.

accurate latitude for the head of Jarvis Inlet and other locations because of low cloud.²⁹ Vancouver's Island was produced from Vancouver's intricate and heterogeneous passage between his survey log book, journal, and charts.³⁰ "At the centre of the map is not geography *in se*," Boelhower declares, "but the eye of the cartographer."³¹

Vancouver's eyes, of course, were not just fixed on distances and angles. He looked for *safe* anchorages, *deep* harbours, and *fertile* tracts of land as well as that elusive water passage into the interior. And he was instructed to bestow appropriate names. Vancouver was meant to characterize the region's potential and make it characteristically British. One the one hand, he was a representative of George the Third and was meant to stamp his geography "British" and describe its main features. Like many other explorers on state-sponsored voyages, he named many of his findings after royal, aristocratic, military, and political figures: "The Gulf of Georgia" after the king; "Point Chatham" after William Pitt (Lord Chatham); and "Grenville Channel" after the home secretary. And he bestowed the name "Possession Sound" at the opening of Puget Sound to signify where he claimed formal possession of the Gulf of Georgia region for Britain. Vancouver then described the landscapes to which such names had been fixed. For instance, he considered the area around Possession Sound to be of "a rich fertile mould" and, from an agricultural point of view, "capable of high improvement" – a "most lovely country" with commodious harbours.³² As he moved north during the summer, however, he discovered that the "country presented a very different aspect from that which we have been accustomed to behold further south" – steep, rugged rocks with small bays and "herbage of a dull colour."³³

However, like Cook, Vancouver also sought to capture his experience of exploration in his journal and on his charts. On the other hand, then, he bestowed names that signified the physical and technological aspects of surveying as well as the particular circumstances of his voyage at different points in time. He named "Puget's Sound" and "Johnstone's Strait" after two of his most hard-working officers. He bestowed names such as "Desolation Sound" because he considered it

²⁷ Lamb, *Voyage of George Vancouver*, II, 558.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 628.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 589.

³⁰ Elaboration of this idea is hampered by the fact that Vancouver's log survey books are lost. I consider his instructions in relation to his maps and journal.

³¹ Boelhower, "Inventing America," 479.

³² Lamb, *Voyage of George Vancouver*, II, 533 and 535.

³³ *Ibid.*, 573.

a “gloomy place” that “afforded not a single prospect that was pleasing to the eye,” and “Observatory Inlet” (on the Nass River) because he reckoned that the time his party spent there in July 1793 was “essential for correcting our former survey.”³⁴ His writing about landscape was also tempered by the purpose and duration of his work. He noted that Johnstone Strait was “infinitely more grateful” than Desolation Sound; but he also found it grateful, no doubt, because it was the passage that led him to the discovery that Vancouver Island is an island.³⁵ And as his exhausting survey dragged on, Vancouver became less enthusiastic about the coast. He wrote to the Admiralty Board in December 1793: “The country we have passed through in general this summer appears incapable of being appropriated to any other use than the abode of the few uncouth inhabitants it at present contains.”³⁶ By the end of the third survey season he was desperate to quit “these remote and uncouth parts”.³⁷

In short, Vancouver tried to intersperse the physical, technical, and official nature of his voyage both in his journal and on his charts. One can follow his path around Vancouver Island from “Port Discovery” (which he bestowed to mark the arrival of his aptly named ship in uncharted waters), to “Admiralty Inlet” (bestowed, in part, to signify its commodious harbours), to “Port Townsend” (after the marquis of that name, who became commander of British forces in Quebec after General Wolfe’s death). Or one can follow him from “Jervis Inlet” (named after an admiral), to “Upwood Point” (named “in remembrance of an early friendship”), and on through parts of the Strait of Georgia where Spanish explorers had bestowed names.³⁸ His charts represent the spatial relations of exploration. His journal describes the circumstances under which he had *made* his discoveries: the weather, the instruments used, his mood, and his expectations and disappointments. Vancouver produced a unified geographical discourse that was at once personal and national, corporeal and imperial. Overall, he framed the Northwest Coast as a distinctively British and scientific domain.

Yet as scholars such as Boelhower argue, cartographic systems of representation are not as stable or uniform as they appear. We can

³⁴ Ibid., II, 616 and 609; III, 1,026.

³⁵ Ibid., II, 617.

³⁶ Vancouver to Stephens, 6 December 1793, in *ibid.*, IV, 1,588.

³⁷ Vancouver to a friend, 2 October 1794, quoted in Barry M. Gough, *The Northwest Coast: British Navigation, Trade and Discoveries to 1812* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 168.

³⁸ Lamb, *Voyage of George Vancouver*, II, 589–96 (quotation is from 591).

reveal the arbitrariness of their claims to universality and completeness by searching for their “blind spots,” or erasures and closures.³⁹ Maps can be “deconstructed” in a number of ways. In Vancouver’s case, I think, it is the differences between his journal, published in 1798 in three quarto volumes, and some of the engraved charts in the folio atlas that accompanied this text, that reveal such blind spots.⁴⁰

Consider Figure 1: the southern portion of Vancouver’s *Chart Shewing Part of the Coast of N.W. America*, which was produced by four renowned engravers who were employed by the Admiralty and whose work was supervised by Vancouver and the Admiralty’s hydrographer, Alexander Dalrymple. The engravers worked with draft summary charts prepared by two of Vancouver’s officers, Joseph Baker and Edward Roberts, and these drafts had been prepared from more detailed manuscript charts. This *Chart*, and a smaller one depicting the coast from 28 to 63 degrees latitude and 205 to 245 degrees longitude, rationalizes Vancouver’s reconnaissance of 1792 in particular ways.⁴¹ There was not the space on the published charts to include all of the information that Vancouver’s team had generated. Only aspects of Vancouver’s cartography were emphasized, and, as far as it is possible to know, the engravers highlighted those aspects that Vancouver deemed important and that the Admiralty approved of.⁴²

On this chart, Vancouver Island’s intricate shoreline is circumscribed by the jagged track of Vancouver’s vessels. There is a double message in Vancouver’s statement that the purpose of representing the tracks of his vessels on his charts was to make the history of his

³⁹ See also José Rabasa, “Allegories of the *Atlas*,” in *Europe and Its Others*, 2 vols., ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen, and Diana Loxley, vol. 2, 1–16 (Colchester: University of Essex, 1985). Rabasa argues that “the allegorization of the four continents [in Mercator’s *Atlas*, 1595–1636] suppresses the colonialist machinery and fabricates an omnipotent European who can dominate the world from the cabinet, but it also produces a blind spot that dissolves history as a privileged modality of European culture” (12).

⁴⁰ George Vancouver, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and Round the World... Performed in the Years 1790, 1791, 1792, 1793, 1794, and 1795, in the Discovery Sloop of War, and the Armed Tender Chatham, under the Command of Captain George Vancouver* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson and J. Edwards, 1798). This was a revised version of Vancouver’s journal. Vancouver noted that he drew on the journals, logs, charts, and drawings of his officers. This 1798 text was translated into French, German, Danish, and Swedish. In 1801, Vancouver’s brother, John, published a revised English edition in six octavo volumes. See Lamb, *Voyage*, introduction, 226. Lamb’s 1984 edition is a reprint of the revised 1801 text, with appendices added but without the full collection of engraved charts.

⁴¹ I have worked with facsimiles from the 1798 edition.

⁴² It does not appear that the Admiralty gave Vancouver any specific instructions about what to include or highlight on the engravings. Correspondence over the engravings mainly concerns financial matters. see PRO ADM.1/2630 (1798), photostats in the W. Kaye Lamb Collection, box 10-3, UBCL-sc.

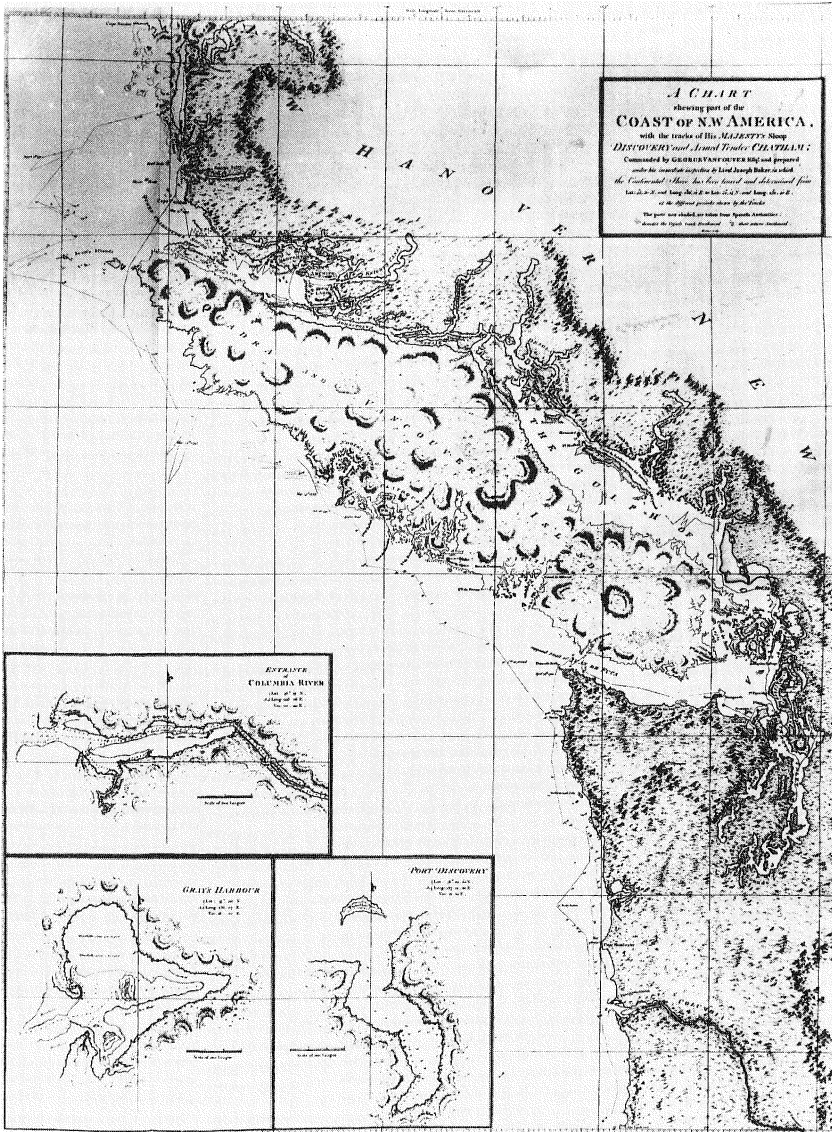


Figure 1: John Warner, "A chart showing part of the coast of N.W. America with the tracks of His Majesty's sloop Discovery and the armed tender Chatham commanded by George Vancouver ..." in George Vancouver, *A voyage of discovery to the north Pacific Ocean and round the world ...* (London: G.G. and J. Robinson and J. Edwards, 1798), plate 5.

transactions “as conclusive as possible.” The island is named “Quadra and Vancouver’s Island,” but the fact that Vancouver circumnavigated it stands out. The polynomalism of the Nootka Convention, and Vancouver’s meeting with Quadra, is acknowledged but circumvented. By 1825, Hudson’s Bay Company fur traders and British politicians were referring to the island simply as “Vancouver’s Island.” In 1792, Vancouver despatched two of his officers to Britain with manuscript maps of the coast that included much information from Spanish charts, and the engraved chart states that those parts of the coastline “not shaded” had been derived from Spanish authorities. Vancouver noted that he drew on the important survey work done in the region by the Spanish explorers Quimper, Fidalgo, and Eliza in 1790 and 1791, that he received assistance from Galiano and Valdés in 1792, and that he felt obliged to mention Spanish names.⁴³ But the engraved chart retains only sixteen of the numerous names bestowed on the island by Spanish explorers.⁴⁴

Nor does this chart give much indication of maritime fur traders’ cartographic endeavours, or of the contact process, or of a Native presence. Vancouver discussed his dealings with traders and Natives in his journal, and he noted that he valued the charts produced by a number of British traders. But he dismissed most fur traders as “adventurers” who “had neither the means, nor the leisure ... for amassing any certain geographical information,” and he declared that he did not trust Native testimony about the geography of the region.⁴⁵ As significant, Figure 1 does not fully represent the fact that Vancouver spotted many Native villages and came into contact with many Native peoples. It

⁴³ See Lamb, *Voyage of George Vancouver*, II, 591-2, 663.

⁴⁴ On Spanish cartography, see Henry R. Wagner, *Spanish Explorations in the Straits of Juan de Fuca* (Santa Ana, CA: Fine Arts Press, 1933); John Kendrick, trans., *The Voyage of the Sutil and Mexicana, 1792: The Last Spanish Exploration of the Northwest Coast of America* (Spokane, WA: Clark, 1991); and H.P. Krauss et al., *The American West Coast and Alaska: Original Drawings and Maps from the Expedition to Nootka Sound of Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, 1792* (New York: Krauss, catalogue no. 144, 1976).

⁴⁵ Lamb, *Voyage of George Vancouver*, I, 274, 592. On Vancouver’s use of George Dixon’s and Charles Duncan’s charts, see *ibid.*, II, 592; III, 1,069, 1,071; IV, 1,322-6. Some of these traders, of course, had come out of the navy and had been trained by Cook. The importance of Duncan’s discoveries were related to the Home Office in 1790, probably by Alexander Dalrymple, who had a copy of his journal and published two of his charts. See PRO HO 42/18[57]; Alexander Dalrymple, *Memoir of a Map*, iv. Vancouver was more disparaging about the British sea otter trader John Meares, who reported to the British Government that an American trader, Robert Gray, had sailed around (what became) Vancouver Island. When Vancouver met Gray at the mouth of the Strait of Juan de Fuca in April 1792, the American denied having ventured more than fifty miles into the Strait of Georgia. Meares exaggerated the American’s achievements for his own ends. See C.F. Newcombe, *The First Circumnavigation of Vancouver Island*, Archives of British Columbia, Memoir 1 (Victoria: Cullin, 1914), 29-38.

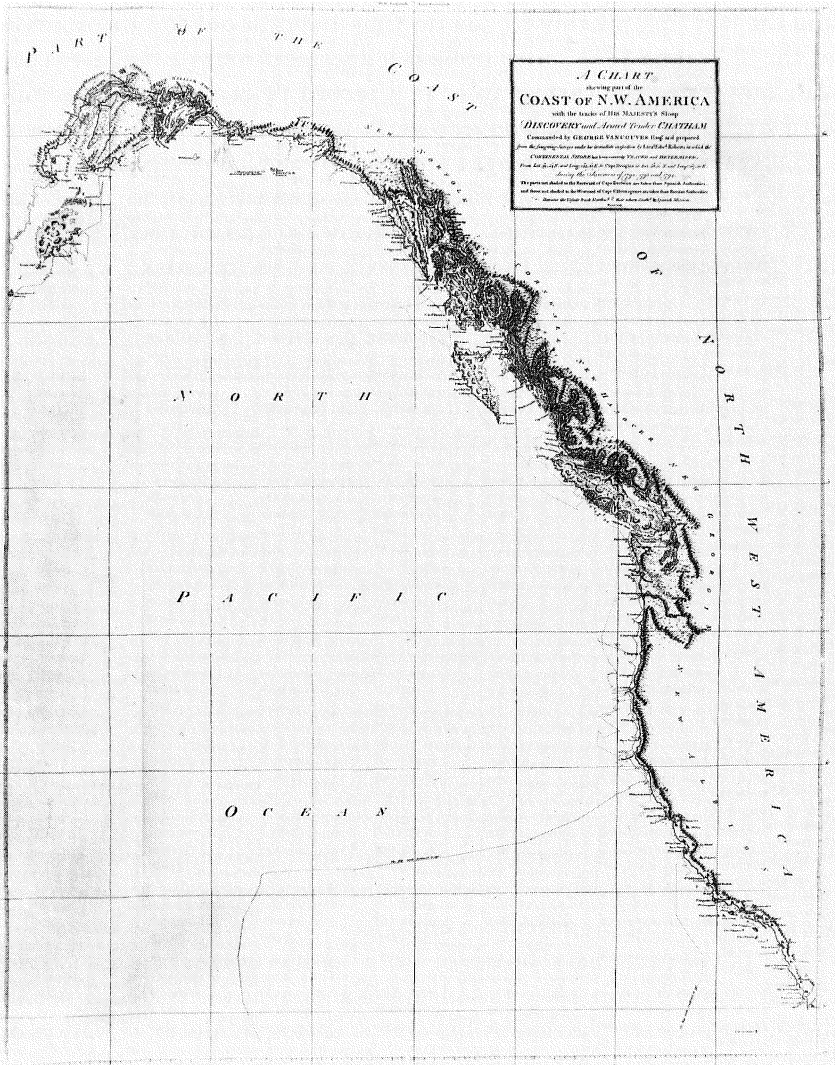


Figure 2: S.I. Neale, "A chart showing part of the coast of N.W. America with the tracks of His Majesty's sloop Discovery and the armed tender Chatham commanded by George Vancouver ..." from charts by G. Vancouver and J. Baker, in George Vancouver, *A voyage of discovery to the north Pacific Ocean ...* New edition, with corrections (London: G.G. and J. Robinson and J. Edwards, 1801), plate 5.

depicts only a handful of Native place names, and all but one of these – Cheslakees – was recorded by other explorers.

The absence of point symbols for land topography on this chart, and the fact that the tiny crosses dotting it appear only on the sea side of the shoreline (depicting sunken ledges and rocks), suggests that Vancouver saw his cartography as a record of maritime surveying. Dalrymple also saw Vancouver's work in this way. Little is known about Dalrymple's involvement in this particular project, but Andrew Cook has shown that he devised a set of conventions for engraving sea charts. Cook thinks that the engravers' decoration used to fill the interior of the island and the coastal fringe of the mainland was there to help the viewer distinguish sea from land on a coast where Vancouver had to chart intricate passages and fjords.⁴⁶

The Admiralty's engravers produced a chart that displays the technical skill of the British Admiralty but hardly anything of the contact process. In effect, this chart suppresses the idea that the Spanish had mapped the region, that Vancouver had traversed Native space, and that Native peoples and traders were in close proximity to each other's ways. It occludes the vibrancy of contact and the complex Native territorial and political arrangements that were described, in part, by fur traders. Vancouver's cartography subverts the commercial and corporeal connections between place and space that gave the early contact period its colour, and it re-presents the coast as a lifeless, unified, objective spatial environment dotted with names that refer mainly to the power of science and the geographical reach of the British Admiralty. An abridged version of this chart, Figure 2, which appeared with the 1801 (corrected) octavo edition of Vancouver's voyage, retains even fewer signs of a Spanish, Native, or Western commercial presence but highlights Vancouver's route around the island and a handful of Vancouver's more significant names.

Two of the principal scholars of Vancouver's voyage, Andrew David and W. Kaye Lamb, have noted that Vancouver distrusted Spanish maps, but they are puzzled by his drastic cartographic abbreviation of Spanish exploration on the west coast of Vancouver Island.⁴⁷ Vancouver did not explain his motives. And these scholars have not discussed the representation of Native geographies in the engraved chart of

⁴⁶ Andrew Cook, personal communication. See also his "Alexander Dalrymple (1737-1808), Hydrographer to the East India Company and to the Admiralty, as Publisher" (PhD diss., University of St Andrews, 1992), 3 vols., especially vol. 1, 219-25.

⁴⁷ See Lamb, *Voyage of George Vancouver*, I, introduction, 241; David, "Vancouver's Survey Methods."

Vancouver Island. Such puzzles and abbreviations add to the metonymic effect of Vancouver's cartography. The Admiralty's engravers inserted Vancouver Island into what Boelhower calls a system of "global circulation" characterized by the "combinatory passion of the scale map." It was with the rise of scale cartography, he argues, that maps "truly" became icons of nation-building and imperial expansion because they instituted a series of distinctions between the global and the local, line and image, place and passage. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Boelhower claims, the scale map became an icon of America's "sheer passage" across the continent:

Global circulation over the continental territory was ... the categorical imperative of nation-building. But if the global-route-line becomes the dominant factor of the cartographic text, then the local-place-image becomes mere context. At the global level – that is, on the abstract surface of the scale map – context disappears, place is no longer important.⁴⁸

This was a passage purportedly without obstacles; a passage premised on what Rabasa calls a "systematic forgetfulness" of prior inscriptions on the land.⁴⁹

Boelhower's distinctions are probably too acute. Vancouver was not making context disappear. Rather, he produced a cartographic text and context. He fashioned a cartographic space with a selection of old and new lines, names and passages, and emphasized his – and Britain's – presence. Yet Boelhower is right to emphasise the global combinatory calculus of scientific cartography. For Vancouver worked towards the order of discourse that informed the Nootka Crisis. In fixing Vancouver Island on a grid of latitude and longitude, imposing British names, and representing his own achievements, he was rendering the island stable and combinable. David Turnbull argues that the "power of maps lies not merely in their accuracy or their correspondence with reality. It lies in their having incorporated a set of conventions that make them combinable in one central place, enabling the accumulation of both power and knowledge at that centre."⁵⁰ Maps are simultaneously practical tools, ways of ordering and disciplining space, and discourses through which people come to take particular conceptions of space for granted. Navigators found

⁴⁸ Boelhower, "Inventing America," 484.

⁴⁹ Rabasa, "Allegories of the *Atlas*," 3.

⁵⁰ David Turnbull, *Maps Are Territories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 26.

Vancouver's charts useful, and politicians could use them to locate the activities of British traders and size up the potential of the coast. Map-makers such as Arrowsmith had new cartographic details to work with on their maps of the Pacific and North America. In fashioning Vancouver Island as a cartographic shell – representing it in intricate but faint outline – Vancouver contributed to an imaginative geography that recontextualized the Northwest Coast from imperial vantage points. He shaped what Harley has called an “anticipatory geography” of colonialism.⁵¹

I have been suggesting that Vancouver's achievements should be assessed in the light of his surveying practices, which unified space, his naming practices, which personified Vancouver Island as British, and the categorical connections he made with the coast. He achieved both an intimacy with and detachment from the coast that reflected a broader confidence in his ability to know the world as a geometric totality and represent it accurately. He distinguished his work from the “fallacious speculations” of theoretical geographers and corrected the work of others who had been on the coast.

This, roughly, is what went into the production of this cartographic space. Vancouver started to desocialize the coast by opening up a conceptual gap between contact and cartography. In time, his cartography provided an objective link between exploration and empire. British politicians, speculators, and colonists invoked his survey as a basic link between British interest in the Northwest Coast and British power over it. They embellished and redefined the space of appropriation that Vancouver had fashioned. Vancouver Island was incorporated into imperial space and primed for colonial intervention before British emigrants started to settle there in the 1850s and the Hudson's Bay Company took on the role of colonial proprietors. Vancouver's survey facilitated and augmented processes of geopolitical abstraction that wrested territory from Native people in advance of colonial settlement.

⁵¹ See, especially, Harley, “Rereading the Maps of the Columbian Encounter,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 83, 2 (1992): 522–42.