

ENDING THE SEARCH FOR THE MYTHICAL PASSAGE OF ADMIRAL FONTE:

*The 1792 Voyage of Jacinto Caamaño*¹

FREEMAN M. TOVELL

The existence of a navigable passage across North America had long been conjectured by cartographers and geographers. The oldest theory was that there existed a Strait of Anian, which was believed to traverse the top of the continent. In time, accounts of other navigable routes attracted the attention of geographers and mariners alike, and all were of particular interest to Spain, as their Pacific openings lay in waters Spain historically considered belonged to it. These were the Strait of Juan de Fuca in latitude 48°N, the passage of Admiral Bartholomew Fonte in latitude 53°N (the Dixon Entrance), and the Strait of Lorenzo Ferrer Maldonado in latitude 59°N (just south of Prince William Sound).²

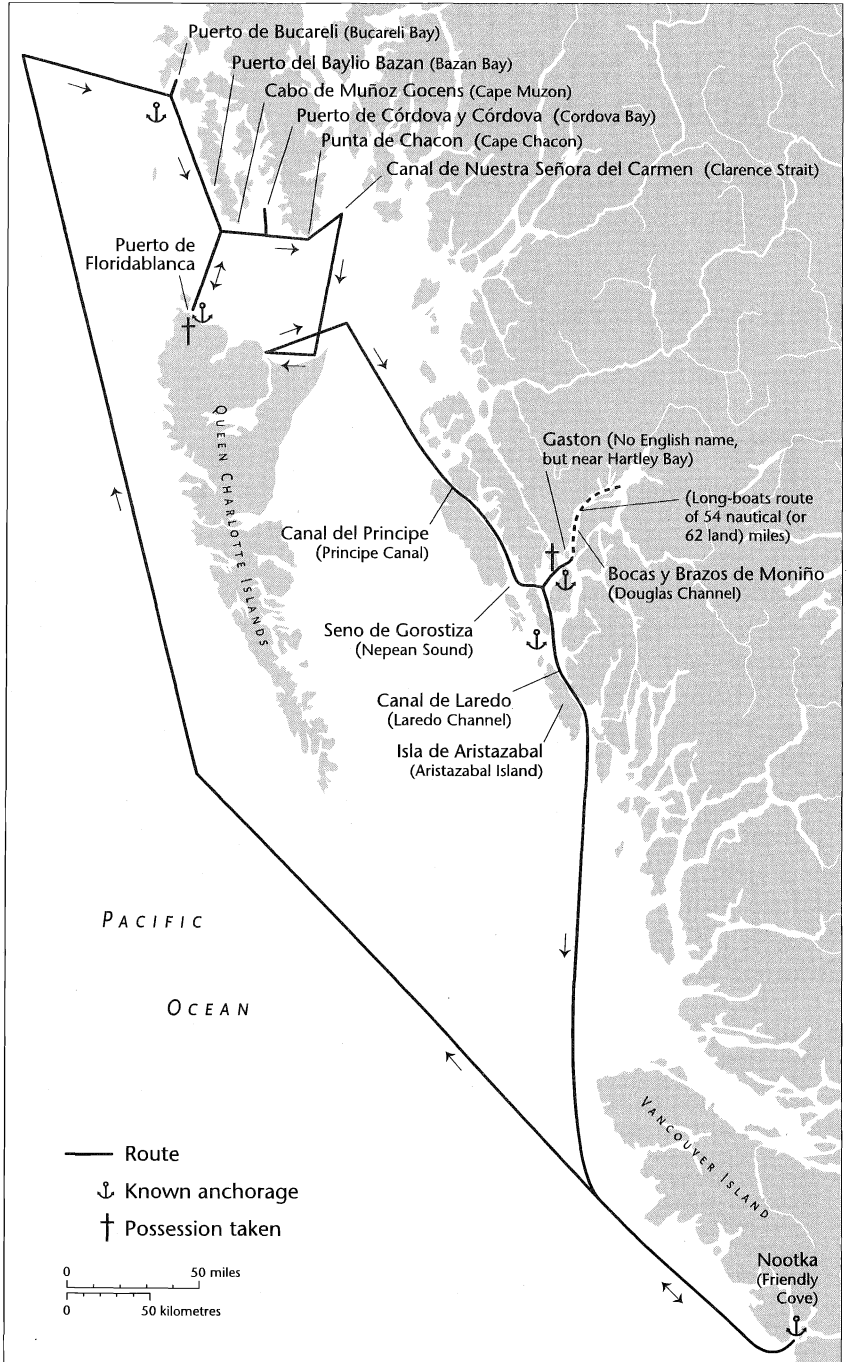
Recent scholarship on the Spanish contribution to the search for these apocryphal passages has focused almost exclusively on the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the Passage of Lorenzo Ferrer Maldonado,³ whereas Jacinto Caamaño's destruction of the myth of the Strait of Admiral Fonte has been virtually ignored.⁴ This essay evaluates

¹ A revision of a paper read at the annual meeting of the Society for the History of Discoveries, Arlington, Texas, November 1995. Research has been assisted by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada, which is gratefully acknowledged. I should also like to thank Dr Christon I. Archer and Dr W. Michael Mathes for their careful readings of versions of the manuscript.

² There is an extensive body of work on these mythical passages. See especially Henry R. Wagner, *Apocryphal Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America*, Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, no. 41, 1931 (hereafter cited as Wagner, *Apocryphal Voyages*).

³ For example, Donald C. Cutter, *Malaspina and Galiano: Spanish Voyages to the Northwest Coast, 1791 and 1792* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991) (hereafter cited as Cutter, *Malaspina and Galiano*); John Kendrick, *The Voyage of the Sutil and Mexicana: The Last Spanish Exploration of the Northwest Coast of America* (Spokane, WA: Arthur H. Clark, 1991) (hereafter cited as Kendrick, *Sutil and Mexicana*); and Freeman M. Tovell, "Manuel Quimper and the Exploration of the Strait of Juan de Fuca," *Resolution* 14 (May 1990): 14-21.

⁴ The only detailed study of Caamaño's voyage was made over sixty years ago by Henry R. Wagner and W.A. Newcombe, who edited a translation of Caamaño's journal by Captain



Map 1: Caamaño's explorations from Nootka, 13 June – 7 September 1992.

Caamaño's voyage, places it in its political and strategic context, and examines its consequences for Spanish policy in the Pacific Northwest.

The question of a passage across North America actively interested the Spanish almost immediately after Cortes's conquest of Mexico in 1521, but early tentative efforts to sail north up the Pacific coast were brought to a halt when further exploration was first discouraged and then prohibited on the grounds that it would be impossible to keep knowledge of any find from Spain's rivals, especially England.⁵

Reports from the Spanish minister in Saint Petersburg of Russian activity in Alaskan waters prompted a renewal of exploration north of Mexico and the then-viceroy was ordered to investigate. The Pérez expedition of 1774 and the Hezeta-Bodega y Quadra expedition the following year, though important, were inconclusive in their results. However, the news that in 1776 James Cook would be setting out in search of the Northwest Passage and, if successful, stood to win the £20,000 prize offered by the British Parliament, acted as a wake-up call, alerting the Spanish to the danger their California settlements would face should Cook succeed.

The Spanish government responded promptly with an order to Viceroy Bucareli to despatch the Arteaga-Bodega y Quadra expedition of 1779, but, delayed by chronic lack of shipping in the Pacific, it did not leave San Blas until almost the day Cook was killed in Hawaii. Unaware that they were following a good part of Cook's route of the year before, the expedition's two ships skirted the entrance to Prince William Sound and proceeded along the Alaskan coast as far as Afognak Island, just north of Kodiak Island. As the coast was trending

Harold Grenfell, RN, published in the *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 2 (1938): 189-222, 265-301 (hereafter cited as Wagner, *Introduction*). It should be noted, however, that Wagner was mainly interested in the cartographical results of the voyage and that Newcombe's footnotes related almost exclusively to Caamaño's ethnographic observations. The original of the journal is in the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico (hereafter cited as AGN), Historia 71, ff303-92. The AGN; the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and the Museo Naval, Madrid, possess extensive extracts catalogued as Provincias Internas 134, MS 10 and MS 2193, respectively. The latter was published in 1975 by the Instituto Histórico de la Marina, Madrid, as number 7 in its series, *Colección de Diarios y Relaciones de los Viajes y Descubrimientos*, edited by Roberto Barreiro-Meiro. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are taken from the Grenfell translation.

⁵ The eminent Spanish maritime historian, Martín Fernández de Navarrete, stated that the purpose of his lengthy introduction to the 1802 publication of the Alcalá Galiano-Valdés expedition, summarizing all the Spanish voyages up the Pacific coast from 1532 to 1792, was "to inform on the expeditions previously carried out in the search for the Northwest Passage." For these early voyages, see Henry R. Wagner, *Spanish Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America in the Sixteenth Century* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1929). See also Warren L. Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

southwest and the northern horizon showed nothing but a solid range of snow-capped mountains, Arteaga, the expedition's commander, concluded that there could be no passage to the north or northeast in those waters.

Spain's involvement in the war against England, in support of the American colonies, precluded any further voyages north. However, exploration was resumed in 1788 when, in response to more insistent reports of Russian penetration into Alaska, Esteban José Martínez and López de Haro, in a remarkable voyage, sailed north to encounter fur traders at Three Saints Bay on Kodiak Island. They understood from the Russian factor at today's Dutch Harbour on Unalaska Island that the Russians intended to occupy Nootka Sound the following year.

Unaware that English and American fur traders had already been active in the area and had even established a temporary post in Friendly Cove, and without waiting for approval from the home government, Viceroy Manuel Antonio Flores immediately ordered Martínez to occupy Nootka. The inevitable clash occurred the following year, 1789, when Martínez seized three fur-trading vessels belonging to the fur-trading syndicate of John Meares. War was averted at the last moment, with the signing in October 1790 of the Nootka Convention.

As a diplomatic document, the Nootka Convention was seriously flawed. It had been negotiated on the basis of inaccurate and incomplete information and under threat of war, and the ambiguous wording of the key articles reflected the need to satisfy both Spanish pride and Prime Minister Pitt's eagerness to establish an English foothold on the north Pacific coast and to break Spain's long-outdated claim to a monopoly of the trans-Pacific trade routes. Of particular concern to Spain were the ambiguities of the articles that granted England the right to establish trading posts on unsettled portions of the American coast.

The Nootka Convention represented a major shift in the strategic balance of power in the Pacific. Spain's virtually undefended missions and presidios of Alta California, the modern State of California, could no longer remain secure in their isolation. Realization of this harsh truth provided the impetus to search aggressively for a navigable passage across the continent, not so much to find one as to make certain none existed. It was important to Spain that the California missions and presidios not be easily approached from the north.

In 1787, English fur trader Charles William Barkley sighted the entrance of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and, the following year, another English fur trader, John Meares, explored its mouth. It was not until 1792 that Britain, in the person of Captain George Vancouver, made any effort to follow up their discovery and to determine how far the strait reached. On the other hand, on assuming office in 1789, the able viceroy of New Spain, Revillagigedo,⁶ was quick to do so.

Revillagigedo was no expansionist and had no wish to add to his manifold difficulties governing a viceroyalty that stretched from today's Guatemala to the Gulf of Alaska. Nevertheless, immediately upon assuming office, he sought and obtained approval to organize an ambitious campaign of exploration for 1790, 1791, and 1792. His purpose was, in part, to strengthen Spain's claims in the Pacific Northwest, especially along the segment of the coast north of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, which had become the scene of intensive Russian, English, and American activity in the sea otter fur trade. More urgent was the need to establish clearly the geography of the region in anticipation of the negotiation between Spain's commissioner, Capitán de Navío (Captain) Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, commandant of the Naval Department of San Blas, and his English opposite number, Captain George Vancouver.⁷ Their mission was to settle, on the ground, various matters that the Nootka Convention had left unresolved. From the Spanish perspective, one of these was the need to agree on a boundary between English and Spanish interests in the region.⁸

It is highly unlikely Revillagigedo believed in the existence of any of the apocryphal passages. In a letter to Bodega y Quadra written shortly after taking office, he referred to Martínez's report that in 1789 one of his officers, José María Narváez, had sighted what he, Martínez, was certain was the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca as being

in the same area of dreams [as the] apocryphal voyages and discoveries of the Spanish Admiral Fonte ... The English and the French have not been able to find [the Strait of Juan de Fuca] in

⁶ Juan Vicente de Güemes Pacheco de Padilla Horcasitas y Aguayo, second Conde de Revillagigedo, was viceroy from 1789 to 1794. Spanish and Mexican historians normally spell his name as one word, but on occasion he himself spelled it "Revilla Ggedo."

⁷ See Revillagigedo's detailed 8 December 1789 instructions to Bodega y Quadra, AGN, Historia 68. These were approved by Antonio Valdés y Bazán, the Minister of Marine and the Indies, by Royal Order, 18 April 1790.

⁸ See Freeman M. Tovell, "The Other Side of the Coin: The Viceroy, Bodega y Quadra, Vancouver, and the Nootka Crisis," *BC Studies* 93 (Spring 1992): 3-29.

spite of their many efforts to discover it and the differences in its location now 48°, now 55°, and now 59°.⁹

Nevertheless, the implications of the Nootka Convention could not be avoided. As a first step, the viceroy instructed Bodega y Quadra to ensure that, upon re-establishing the post at Nootka, Francisco de Eliza investigate “whether it be the Strait of Juan de Fuca or some other that may interest our curiosity.”¹⁰ Bodega y Quadra expanded Revillagigedo’s directive by instructing Eliza to examine “the entrance don Juan Pérez saw in 1774, between 54° and 55° of latitude, as well as the Rio de Martín de Aguilar, which Sebastián Vizcaíno located in 43°.”¹¹

The first expedition undertaken from Nootka was that of Manuel Quimper who, in 1790, explored the Strait of Juan de Fuca as far as the San Juan Islands, thus establishing its extent.¹² In the same year, Salvador Fidalgo explored Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet and found them closed.¹³ In 1791, the great scientific expedition of Alejandro Malaspina established the nullity of the Strait of Ferrer Maldonado when the waters around Prince William Sound and Yakutat Bay in latitude 59°80’N were found to give no access to the hinterland.¹⁴ Francisco de Eliza, setting out the same year from Nootka with José María Narváez, completed Quimper’s work by exploring Haro Strait and Georgia Strait. Narváez entered the outer waters of Vancouver harbour, the first European to do so.¹⁵ In 1792, detached from Malaspina’s expedition, Dionisio Alcalá Galiano and Cayetano Valdés, in the schooners *Sutil* and *Mexicana*, would establish the insularity of Vancouver Island, thus destroying the Juan de Fuca fable by demonstrating that the strait did not give access to the

⁹ The approximate latitudes of the passages of Juan de Fuca and Admiral Fonte and the Strait of Anián. Revillagigedo to Bodega y Quadra, 8 December 1789, AGN, Historia 68, Author’s Translation (AT).

¹⁰ Revillagigedo to Bodega y Quadra, 12 December 1789, AGN, Historia 68, AT.

¹¹ Bodega y Quadra to Eliza, AGN, Historia 69, AT. Pérez had reached Langara Island off the northern tip of the Queen Charlotte Islands. The Río de Martín de Aguilar, today believed to be the Rogue River, just north of the California-Oregon border, was supposed to give access to the “Great Sea of the West.” It was never the object of a studied search.

¹² Quimper’s journal is in AGN, Historia 68. There is a partial translation in Wagner, *Spanish Explorations in the Strait of Juan de Fuca* (Santa Ana, California: 1933), 82-134 (hereafter cited as Wagner, *Spanish Explorations*).

¹³ See Elizabeth Nelson Patrick, “The Salvador Fidalgo Expedition, 1790: The Last Spanish Exploration of the Far North Pacific Ocean” (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 1981).

¹⁴ The Malaspina expedition did not operate under the authority of the viceroy but of Minister Valdés. See Cutter, *Malaspina and Galiano*.

¹⁵ The only extant Spanish documents of this expedition are in the Museo Naval, Madrid, and the AGN, Historia 44 and 69. They may be found in translation in Wagner, *Spanish Explorations*, 137-200.

interior of the continent.¹⁶ This left only the need to verify whether Fonte's passage, believed to lie in latitude 53°N in the waters between the Queen Charlotte Islands and the southern portion of the Alaska Panhandle, existed or was also apocryphal. It would fall to Jacinto Caamaño to confirm or disprove this.

Viceroy Revillagigedo had an additional reason to challenge the reality of the Fonte myth. Francisco de Eliza, the commandant at Nootka, had, as a mark of his appreciation, forwarded a chart given him by the English fur trader, James Colnett. Colnett gave Eliza his chart, which documented his exploration of the region in 1781, as a mark of his appreciation for the assistance given him in the repair of his ship, the *Argonaut* (which had suffered extensive damage returning to Nootka from San Blas). His chart not only gave the impression he might have discovered Fonte's passage – though Colnett made no such claim in his journal – but made the Spanish realize they had not examined carefully the coast between Nootka and 55°, the latitude of Bucareli Bay.

The Fonte hoax, for such it was, was first launched in 1708 in an anonymous letter published in an obscure and short-lived London publication, the *Monthly Miscellany or Memoirs for the Curious*. Written by its editor, James Petiver, for reasons that are not clear the letter began by recalling that in 1639 the Spanish government had been disturbed by reports that "some Industrious Navigators from Boston" had been attempting "to find out if there was any North West Passage from the Atlantick [sic] Ocean into the South Tartinian Sea."¹⁷ The Spanish authorities had commanded Bartholemew de Fonte, an "Admiral of New Spain and Peru and Prince of Chili," to search for such a passage with four ships. He sailed from Callao, the port of Lima, in April 1640, and at a point in latitude 53°N (roughly the southern portion of the Alaska Panhandle) reached a river he called

¹⁶ The first account of this expedition was published in Spain in 1802. It was an extensive revision of the original manuscript, even including new passages not in it. These changes were made for political reasons as, upon his return to Spain, Malaspina had fallen from grace. See Kendrick, *Sutil and Mexicana*, a meticulous attempt to reconstruct the original manuscript.

¹⁷ The original English text is found in Wagner, *Apocryphal Voyages* and, slightly abbreviated, in Appendix 2 of Glyndwr Williams's scholarly *The British Search for the Northwest Passage in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Royal Commonwealth Society, 1962) (hereafter cited as Williams, *The British Search*). The Spanish text as it appeared as an appendix to Padre Andrés Marcos Burriel's edition of Venegas's *Noticia de la California*, published in 1757, has been reprinted in facsimile in *Obras Californianas del Padre Miguel Venegas, S.J.*, edited by W. Michael Mathes, Vivian C. Fisher, and E. Moisés Coronado (La Paz, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur, 1979).

Río de los Reyes (River of the Kings) in an archipelago he called Saint Lazarus. One of his ships, under Captain Barnarda,¹⁸ was ordered to follow a river flowing in an east-north-east direction as high as 71°N. Fonte himself followed the Río de los Reyes to the northeast to reach a lake he called Belle, and then, via other rivers and lakes (one of which he named after himself), he reached one close to Hudson Bay and named it the Estrecho de Ronquillo. There he met a Captain Shapley from Boston and, after a cordial exchange of courtesies, purchased with his diamond ring and “1000 Pieces of Eight” Shapley’s “fine Charts and Journals.” The admiral concluded that, as he had met a maritime traveller from Boston coming the other way, there was obviously a passage across the continent. He then returned to Peru by the same route he had come and arrived back in Callao the following September. Thus ended the account in the anonymous letter.

Possibly because England was heavily involved in the War of the Spanish Succession with France when the letter appeared, it created no stir whatsoever. However, in 1744 one Arthur Dobbs, a wealthy member of the Irish Parliament and a severe critic of the Hudson’s Bay Company, revived the letter as part of his campaign to promote British interest in the search for a Northwest Passage. Dobbs’s book brought the story to the attention of, among others, two of France’s highly respected geographers, Joseph Nicholas de l’Isle and Phillipe Buache. Their writings and maps appeared to give some substance to the Fonte story – at this time, France dominated the science of cartography – and aroused the interest of other equally respected geographers.¹⁹ The debate involved even the illustrious Benjamin Franklin, who believed the letter to be genuine. He mistakenly thought it an “abridgment and a translation, and bad in both respects; if a fiction it is plainly not an English one, but it has none of the features of fiction.”²⁰

Of particular importance was the involvement in the debate of the Spanish Jesuit, Padre Andrés Marcos Burriel, director of the Spanish

¹⁸ Thus in the original English, but “Bernardo” in Father Burriel’s Spanish version.

¹⁹ There is an extensive literature on the controversy the Fonte letter generated. Particular mention should be made of Wagner, *Apocryphal Voyages*; G. Williams, *The British Search*; T.A. Rickard, “The Strait of Anián,” *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 5 (1941): 161-83; W. Michael Mathes, “The Province of Anián and its Strait: Myth, Reality, and Exploration of the Pacific Northwest, 1542-1792,” paper delivered at the Vancouver Conference on Exploration and Discovery, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, 1991 (hereafter cited as Mathes, “The Province of Anián”).

²⁰ Quoted by Glyndwr Williams, “An Eighteenth-Century Spanish Investigation into the Apocryphal Voyage of Admiral Fonte,” *Pacific Historical Review* 30 (1961): 319-27.

royal archives and libraries. Burriel had been given a copy of the French version by Jorge Juan,²¹ who had obtained it in Paris. In 1757, he translated the letter into Spanish and included it as an appendix to his publication of the important Venegas manuscript, *Noticia de la California*. In it, he made a detailed critique of the letter, demonstrating its absurdities and concluding, correctly, that the whole thing was a hoax.

The English translation of Burriel's work did not include the all-important appendix, nor did its French, German, and Dutch translations. As a consequence the debate among European geographers and cartographers took no account of Burriel's exposure of the hoax, and no mention was made of the fact that Burriel had carefully searched the naval archives in Madrid, Seville, and Cádiz without finding anything about Fonte or his voyage. Given the great secrecy with which the Spanish government cloaked its geographical discoveries and overseas ventures, the apparent absence of any contribution to the debate by a Spanish scholar was taken as proof of the letter's authenticity. Contrariwise, anyone who might have seen Burriel's refutation might have been suspicious that it was a ruse to cover an actual discovery.²²

Jacinto Caamaño Moraleja was born in Madrid on 8 September 1759 of a Galician family. He entered the navy in June 1777 not as a midshipman in the Real Colegio de Guardias Marinas, but as an *aventurero*, or aspirant, to commissioned rank, receiving neither pay nor uniform. After serving on various warships, he attained the rank of *Alférez de Navío* (senior sub-lieutenant). As a *Teniente de Fragata* (junior lieutenant), he came to New Spain late in 1789 together with the new viceroy, Revillagigedo, as well as Bodega y Quadra and five other naval officers, one of whom (Francisco de Eliza) was his brother-in-law.²³ Shortly after arriving in San Blas, he was promoted to *Teniente de Navío* (senior lieutenant) and given command of the frigate *Princesa*, one of the ships under Eliza voyaging north in 1790 to re-

²¹ Juan was one of the major figures in the extensive reforms of the Spanish navy undertaken in the 1750s. He also served as director of the Real Colegio de Guardias Marinas (Naval Academy) in Cádiz.

²² Mathes, "The Province of Anián," 20. Charles Pierre Claret Fleurieu, in his introduction to Marchand's *Voyage autour du Monde, pendant les Années 1790, 1791 et 1792* (Paris, 1789-1800), xxxviii-xliii, made a similar criticism of Francisco Mourelle's unsupported assertion (in his journal of his voyage with Bodega y Quadra in 1775) that "no such strait [as Fonte's] exists." Mourelle's conclusion, he wrote, was "an ingenious manner of diverting other nations from the project of attempting discoveries in these parts." AT.

²³ See Caamaño's service file in the Archivo Museo don Alvaro de Bazán, El Viso. See also Barreiro-Meiro's introduction to Caamaño's journal. Eliza was married to Caamaño's sister.

open the Nootka establishment after its temporary abandonment. He spent the winter there and, upon returning to San Blas, was given command of the *Nuestra Señora de Aránzazu*.²⁴

This veteran frigate was no prize. Drawing fourteen and one-half feet, it was a 205-ton vessel built in Cavite in the Philippines. It had served out of San Blas since 1781, almost exclusively on resupply missions to the Alta California settlements and, in this role, proved to be a dependable workhorse. Even so, the *Nuestra Señora de Aránzazu* was described unflatteringly by Alférez de Navío (Ensign) Félix de Cepeda, Bodega y Quadra's adjutant as commander of the Limits Expedition, as "a defective vessel in every respect, too large for the task [given Caamaño], and possessing no good qualities. In short, she is a monstrous cargo ship."²⁵ But she would have to do. No other ship was available for a mission Revillagigedo considered as urgent as that of Alcalá Galiano and Valdés.

At the time Caamaño set out, it is almost certain the Spanish authorities and Revillagigedo himself had strong doubts that there was a Northwest Passage. The voyages of Quimper, Eliza and Narvaez, Arteaga and Bodega y Quadra, Fidalgo, Martínez, and Malaspina seemed to have proven that pretty conclusively.²⁶ Alcalá Galiano and Valdés would soon add their evidence. Nevertheless, though the viceroy might not have expected that Caamaño would find the Estrecho del Almirante Fonte, the possibility that it was not apocryphal – however slight – had to be proven.

Caamaño sailed from San Blas on 20 March 1792 and reached Nootka on May 14. En route, the *Aránzazu* suffered extensive storm damage and on arrival had to be careened. The month taken to repair his ship meant the loss of precious summer weather, causing him to

²⁴ When Caamaño returned to San Blas from Nootka, he learned that the viceroy had appointed him to command the schooner being specially built to explore the Strait of Juan de Fuca. So excited was he at the prospect that, despite the heavy seasonal rains, he set out immediately on his horse from Tepic (in the hills behind San Blas, where officers resided) for the port, some seventy miles away. En route, his horse stumbled and fell, pinning the rider under it. When the viceroy heard the news, he appointed Antonio Mourelle in his stead. Caamaño offered to go anyway as an extra officer, but, as the expedition was delayed, Revillagigedo offered him either the command of the *Sutil*, a second schooner being built for the expedition, or the opportunity to take the frigate *Aránzazu* to search for the Estrecho del Almirante Fonte. Caamaño chose the latter and, on 8 February 1792, Bodega y Quadra, as commandant of the Naval Department of San Blas, formally appointed him to command the frigate.

²⁵ Unpublished MS entitled "Memoria de los Viages Europeas a la Costa Norueste de America Septentrional," Part 1, f75, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, catalogue 81/67 cp. AT (hereafter cited as Cepeda, "Memoria").

²⁶ They had also studied the official account of Cook's third voyage, which appeared in 1784.

regret that some channels he wanted to inspect carefully could be given little more than superficial attention.

Shortly after arriving at Nootka, Caamaño received his instructions from Bodega y Quadra, at the time awaiting Vancouver's arrival.²⁷ As Caamaño summarized them in his journal, he was

to prepare for sea with all despatch so as to be ready to sail to Bucareli Bay²⁸ for the purpose of exploring its various arms, and surveying the coast lying between it and Nootka. I was to use every effort to discover and chart the principal channels, gulfs, and harbours, as far as they were unknown. I was also instructed to determine the actual position of the *Estrecho del Almirante Fonte*, considered by recent opinion as doubtful, or even imaginary.²⁹

Departing Nootka on 13 June, Caamaño arrived in Bucareli Bay (latitude 55°N) on 24 June and anchored near the entrance of Port San Antonio on Baker Island. Two boats were immediately sent out. The pinnace was commanded by Primer Piloto Juan Pantoja, who had accompanied Francisco Mourelle on his survey of the bay on the Arteaga-Bodega y Quadra expedition of 1779. Segundo Piloto Juan Martínez y Zayas commanded the cutter.³⁰ These able and experienced pilots were "to survey the channels not previously examined by our expedition in the year 1779, but with directions not to spend more than fifteen days in this work unless something presented itself to justify a more thorough examination."³¹ As Caamaño does not give any indication of the route taken by the survey party, it is not possible to determine whether any of the "channels not previously examined" by Mourelle were, in fact, surveyed. He says only that

²⁷ In contrast to the direct hand he assumed in planning the Alcalá Galiano-Valdés expedition, Revillagigedo was content to leave the formal instructions to Bodega y Quadra, an indication of the viceroy's confidence.

²⁸ Bucareli Bay lies on the west side of Prince of Wales Island in the Alaska Panhandle. It was discovered by Bodega y Quadra in 1775 and explored during the Arteaga-Bodega y Quadra expedition of 1779. None of the documents relating to Caamaño's voyage give any reason why Bucareli Bay had to be surveyed a second time after Mourelle's meticulous survey in 1779. Wagner suggests that the known desire of English fur traders to form a settlement somewhere along the coast, and rumours that the Russians were enlarging their Alaskan establishments, may have influenced the viceroy. See Wagner, *Introduction*, 192.

²⁹ Bodega y Quadra's written instructions contained some further points. Caamaño was to take with him an additional piloto (master), a naturalist-taxidermist (disecador), thirteen men of the Company of Catalanian Volunteers stationed at Nootka, and stores for two months. The ship's boats were to be equipped for survey work. Recalling that, after exploring the Strait of Juan de Fuca in 1790, Quimper had returned directly to San Blas rather than to Nootka, Caamaño was told that "under no pretext are you to fail to call at Nootka upon your return." Bodega y Quadra to Caamaño, 9 June 1792, AGN, Historia 70, cuaderno 20, ff9-11, AT.

³⁰ Sometimes called Zayas to distinguish him from Estéban José Martínez.

³¹ AT.

“during the ten days of their absence [the boats] had carried out this duty to my satisfaction.”³² As Pantoja accomplished his task in eleven days, compared to Mourelle’s twenty-six days, one suspects he took some shortcuts or, with the exception of one or two points, was prepared to accept Mourelle’s determinations. Nevertheless, some corrections and adjustments were made to Mourelle’s chart.³³

Satisfied that Fonte’s passage could not be reached from Bucareli Bay, Caamaño sailed south to search the waters of latitude 53°N. He sailed down the west coast of Dall Island to reach Port Bazan, which was charted.³⁴ Continuing south, he arrived at Cape Muzon³⁵ at the southernmost tip of Dall Island and crossed the Dixon Entrance³⁶ to anchor in Parry Passage between the south shore of Langara Island and Graham Island in the Queen Charlotte Islands in a bay he called Puerto de Floridablanca after the Spanish minister of state. This was the area where Fonte’s Río de los Reyes and the Archipelago of Saint Lazarus were supposed to be. Caamaño found nothing to fit their description in the Fonte letter, but he performed the possession ceremony and charted the bay.³⁷

He decided to sail back across Dixon Entrance to Cape Muzon and then discovered, to the northeast, a “large bay as capacious as that of Bucareli.”³⁸ This was Cordova Bay.³⁹ Pressed for time, he could not explore it. Instead, he crossed its entrance to Cape Chacon⁴⁰ on

³² Caamaño journal: 208.

³³ A copy of this chart (chart 4), complete with fathom marks, was included in the volume of drawings and plans forming part of Bodega y Quadra’s report on the Expedition of the Limits: “Viage a la Costa N.O. de la America Septentrional por Dn. Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, del Ordn. de Santiago, Capitán de Navío de la Real Armada. y Comandte. del Departamto. de San Blas en las Fragatas de su Mando *Sta. Gertrudis, Aránzazu, Princesa, y Goleta Activa*. Año de 1792, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Madrid, MSS 145 and 146 (hereafter cited as Bodega, “Viage”). The charts and drawings that accompanied the copies of the journal now in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, MS HM 141, and the Library of Congress, Washington, MS 19519, have, unfortunately, become dispersed.

³⁴ “Puerto del Baylío Bazán,” after the Minister of Marine, Antonio Valdés y Bazán. His chart is listed in Wagner’s *Cartography of the Northwest Coast of America to the Year 1800* (Berkeley, 1937) (hereafter cited as Wagner, *Cartography*, chart 802). A copy was included in the folio volume of Bodega y Quadra’s *Viage*, chart 21.

³⁵ “Cabo de Muñoz Gocens,” named for a fellow Spanish naval officer. Vancouver changed it to its present name when charting in the area the following year.

³⁶ This waterway, which lies on the Canada-United States border, was not named by the English fur trader, George Dixon, though he explored it, but by Sir Joseph Banks, the President of the Royal Society. See F.H. Howay, *The Dixon-Mearns Controversy* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1929), 68.

³⁷ The spot where the cross was raised is clearly marked in his chart, listed in Wagner’s *Cartography*, chart 806. A copy was included in the folio volume of Bodega y Quadra’s “Viage,” chart 5.

³⁸ Caamaño journal: 265.

³⁹ Caamaño named it “Puerto de Córdoba y Córdoba” after the commander in chief in the Spanish navy. Vancouver shortened it to “Cordova.”

⁴⁰ “Punta de Chacon,” after Antonio Chacon.

the southeasternmost point of Prince of Wales Island and sighted the broad expanse of Clarence Strait,⁴¹ running north and south, which he named the Canal de Nuestra Señora del Carmen. He sailed up it some distance and, though at first the weather was clear, fog quickly set in, followed by rain, squalls, and contrary winds, forcing him to retreat.

Caamaño decided to return to the Queen Charlottes where his earlier examination of the waters off the north shore of Graham Island had been hampered by fog. Still finding nothing, he crossed Hecate Strait, sailing to the southeast in search of the narrow Principe Channel⁴² between Banks Island and Pitt Island, which “according to the account of the Englishman, Captain Colnett, leads into the *Estrecho de Fonte*.”⁴³ Caamaño decided to enter it, even though its narrowness made such a venture highly risky in a ship as cumbersome as the *Aránzazu*, with her deep draft. After waiting for daylight, the feat of slipping through the channel was accomplished during the afternoon and evening. “It is so narrow in places,” he noted, “that the farther shore was often less than a mile from us.”⁴⁴

It is evident that Caamaño had with him a copy of Colnett’s chart, for he now began to follow it. He soon emerged into Colnett’s Nepean Sound and then sighted the wide entrance to Douglas Channel. He now “felt confident that we would soon sight the *Estrecho de Fonte*.”⁴⁵ He entered a large harbour near the southern tip of Pitt Island at the entrance to Grenville Channel, which he called Gastón after a fellow naval officer.⁴⁶ He charted it and, for the second time, formally took possession of the region.⁴⁷ Again taking his cue from Colnett’s chart, Caamaño sent Second Pilot Martínez y Zayas in the longboat to explore up Douglas Channel, which ran north and then northeast as far as today’s Kitimat. Refusing to be deterred by tales recited by the Natives of “huge sea animals that thrust their whole bodies out of the water, attack and overturn the natives’ canoes and devour their victims,”⁴⁸ Zayas proceeded and reported to Caamaño that

⁴¹ So named by Vancouver.

⁴² “Canal del Príncipe.” Wagner believed it was probably named for the Príncipe de la Asturias, the heir to the throne, but notes that it appears on the copy of Colnett’s chart in the Museo Naval, Madrid, as “Príncipe Real.”

⁴³ Caamaño journal: 269.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁴⁶ It is near Hartley Bay, at the southern end of the Grenville Canal.

⁴⁷ His chart is listed in Wagner’s *Cartography*, chart 807. Bodega y Quadra included a copy in the folio volume of his “Viage,” chart 6.

⁴⁸ Possibly some variety of whales common in these waters. AT.

the northeast arm [of Douglas Channel], up which he had penetrated for a distance of 18 leagues,⁴⁹ had a breadth varying from one to one and a half miles, and seemed to run for a considerable way. Although the water is very deep, [this arm] as well as others, is subject to a regular but extremely slow tidal ebb and flow of six hours and twelve minutes. Therefore, in his opinion, [the channel is] of little importance.⁵⁰

If, as seems to be the case, Caamaño assumed Colnett's chart was credible, it would have struck him that Douglas Channel might be the river up which Fonte had sent Captain Barnarda, running as it did in the same direction: northeast. However, Zayas's report of the channel's sluggish tide did not correspond with the description in the Fonte letter, nor did he encounter tides of twenty-two and twenty-four feet. For this reason, Zayas's report "led me to deprive this region of its name of the *Estrecho de Fonte* and replace it by that of Bocas y Brazos de Moñino."⁵¹

It was now getting late in the season and the weather was worsening steadily. The frequent rains, squally weather, and intermittent fogs were impeding the survey work and making navigation in these unexplored waters highly dangerous. Though he understood from the Natives that there was a passage that would take him from "Gastón" to the Queen Charlotte Islands, he doggedly continued to search the area for some other passage that might be Fonte's. He sailed through Squally Channel into the narrow Laredo Canal,⁵² between Princess Royal Island and Aristazabal Island,⁵³ which eventually led him into the open waters of Hecate Strait. He then headed directly south to Vancouver Island, arriving back in Nootka Sound on September 7 after an absence of eighty-six days.⁵⁴

Jacinto Camaaño had conducted a successful expedition under difficult circumstances. He was able to use his boats for exploring the shallower bays and passages, but the deep draft of a ship not configured for maritime exploration prevented the examination of some promising channels. Moreover, the *Aránzazu's* poor sailing

⁴⁹ Fifty-four nautical miles.

⁵⁰ AT.

⁵¹ Caamaño journal: 269. Moñino was the family name of Floridablanca, the Minister of State, before he was ennobled. AT.

⁵² Possibly named for Laredo in Spain.

⁵³ Named for a fellow naval officer.

⁵⁴ The original of Caamaño's general chart is in AGN, *Mapas y Planos*, and is listed in Wagner, *Cartography*, chart 801. It shows his route and was reproduced (not very clearly) as part of the Wagner-Newcombe edition of Caamaño's journal. A copy of the chart, without the route, was included in the folio volume of Bodega y Quadra's "Viage," chart 3.

qualities demanded constant attention, and the generally poor weather made it difficult to cope with the tricky currents and constantly changing winds. The widest passages encountered were the Dixon Entrance at 53°N, and Clarence Strait and Hecate Strait lying between the Queen Charlotte Islands and the mainland. None bore any resemblance to any waterway on Fonte's supposed route, and the broad Entrada de Juan Pérez harboured no Río de los Reyes or the Archipelago of Saint Lazarus. Nor did Camaña encounter any of the geographic features mentioned in the Fonte letter, such as cataracts twenty feet high, rivers and lakes flowing into Hudson Bay, and highly civilized Natives inhabiting large cities.⁵⁵ A glance at today's map will show that Caamaña missed no opening that could have been Fonte's.

Caamaña had effectively removed the danger that any threat to Nootka from the north lay between the latitudes he had examined. He correctly concluded, first, that "the coast from Bucareli Bay to Nootka is all one archipelago, formed of a vast number of large and small islands," and, second, that the mainland lay much further to the east than had been thought.⁵⁶

Caamaña appended to his journal a discourse entitled "Opinion concerning the *Estrecho del Almirante Fonte*." In it, he stated firmly that no such passage exists, at least where it was supposed to be in the waters around 53°N. He believed that the

expedition said to have sailed from Callao on April 3, 1640 ... never took place. For, to me, it seems to have no foundation other than the ravings and ignorance of someone who, devoid of all knowledge of either navigation or geography, and, wishing to stimulate the search for a passage leading to the North Atlantic Ocean, invented (I venture to say) this story of channels, great rivers, cataracts twenty feet high over which he sailed his ship, ... fertile islands, large towns inhabited by very civilized people, and a passage extending even so far as 80°N wherein he met a vessel from Boston, and other absurdities.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Caamaña's journal is particularly valuable for the extensive amount of information he recorded concerning the Tlingit, Tsimshian, and Haida at the time of contact. He wrote about their physical appearance, clothing, and ornaments as well as about their way of life, economy, language, arms and warfare, government, marriage customs, and what little he was able to learn of their religion. Caamaña also included extensive descriptions of the geography of the different parts of the region through which he passed — the trees, the climate, and the lack of space for agriculture. Josef Maldonado, the botanist who accompanied him, compiled a lengthy list of land and water animals, birds, fish, plants, and fruits.

⁵⁶ Caamaña journal: 298.

⁵⁷ AT.

He thought that “should the idea of a passage to the North [Atlantic] not prove, as I fear, an illusion, then there can be no hope of finding it in the archipelago between the parallels of 51° and $54^{\circ}46'$ of latitude.”⁵⁸

Caamaño restored the name *Entrada de D. Juan Pérez* to the Dixon Entrance, replacing *Estrecho del Almirante Fonte*, which had appeared on some Spanish charts, including Bodega y Quadra’s general chart of 1791. But then, curiously, he gave Fonte’s name to Hecate Strait, not because he thought it might have been the route Fonte had taken, but because of “the veneration with which I regard the fame of the early Spanish explorers.” For this, he was roundly chastised by Cepeda for “preserving the imaginary memory of this Admiral ... His name should be removed [from all charts]. Any idea that can lead to error or cause the least confusion should be committed to oblivion.”⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Bodega y Quadra accepted Caamaño’s appellation and, on his second general chart of 1792, which he included in the folio volume of his “Viage,” Hecate Strait appears as the *Estrecho del Almirante Fonte*.⁶⁰

Bodega y Quadra praised Caamaño for his work. He recorded in his journal that he

was pleased to see [the *Aránzazu*] enter [Nootka] and also to see the charts her commander ... handed me of the mouth of Bucarely [sic] [Bay], the *Estrecho de Fonte* [sic],⁶¹ the new *Canal del Carmen*,⁶² the northern head of *Isla Carlota*,⁶³ part of the coast, and various useful ports. His reconnaissance warranted the greatest appreciation from me and from Vancouver as well, to whom I gave a set in return for what he gave me.⁶⁴

And in his account of his voyage, Vancouver mentions that, before returning to San Blas, Caamaño dined with him on board the *Discovery*. We may be certain that they went over these charts together very carefully. Exploring some of these same waters the following year, Vancouver made some minor corrections, which he could do with his better instruments, and retained or modified most of

⁵⁸ That is, roughly between the tip of Vancouver Island and the Dixon Entrance. The latter parallel in the Grenfell translation is printed incorrectly as $51^{\circ}46'N$, AT.

⁵⁹ Cepeda, “Memoria,” f75, AT.

⁶⁰ Chart 18 in the folio volume. Wagner does not list this important chart in his *Cartography*.

⁶¹ Hecate Strait.

⁶² Clarence Strait.

⁶³ At the time, the Queen Charlotte Islands were thought to be a single island.

⁶⁴ Bodega, “Viage,” AT. He is referring to the charts Vancouver had given him of his explorations up to the time he reached Nootka.

Caamaño's appellations – a fact that undoubtedly explains why so many have survived to appear on today's charts.

Bodega y Quadra repeated his appreciation when forwarding the documents to Revillagigedo, but the viceroy acknowledged their receipt without comment.⁶⁵ At a later time, he remarked that Caamaño's "journal adds nothing of particular importance to the explorations carried out in 1779; and, although certain points are corrected on his chart, he does not satisfy whether or not there is a passage between the Pacific and the Atlantic."⁶⁶ This was a strange comment from one who studied carefully the journals of his maritime explorers. Had he not read Caamaño's discourse, or was he not convinced by it?

Although Bodega y Quadra declared himself pleased with Caamaño's effort, he was well aware that much of the Alaska archipelago remained to be examined. In his report to the viceroy on the Limits Expedition, he wrote:

Even apart from other considerations, it is necessary to undertake an expedition with the frigate *Concepción*, the schooner *Activa* and the sloop *Orcacitas*,⁶⁷ which, from different points, should survey the continent from 50° to 60°.⁶⁸ Its direction is unknown and it is probable that all the land discovered that up to now is considered to be firm coast may be an archipelago.⁶⁹

It could be concluded from this that Bodega y Quadra might also have harboured lingering doubts that, after all, Fonte might not be apocryphal. What would be the purpose of such a major expedition except to make certain that the Estrecho del Almirante Fonte, or some other passage, did not lie somewhere beyond that mass of islands, or elsewhere, on that yet far from fully charted coast?

Bodega y Quadra was a serious student of geography. We know he was familiar with the map Father Burriel included in his publication of the Venegas manuscript, as he mentions it in the journal of his 1775 voyage. He also made use of it when planning the route of the Arteaga-Bodega y Quadra expedition of 1779. He may even have been familiar with Burriel's exposure of the Fonte fiction. Nowhere have I

⁶⁵ Unnumbered letter to Bodega, 11 November 1792, AGN, Historia 72, cuaderno 26.

⁶⁶ Revillagigedo to Alcudia, letter 162 of 12 April 1793, par. 179, AGN, Correspondencia de Virreyes (hereafter cited as CV), 173, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Estado 21, AT.

⁶⁷ The former *Adventure* built by the American fur trader Robert Gray in Clayoquot Sound and purchased from him by Bodega y Quadra at Neah Bay on his way home from Nootka to San Blas.

⁶⁸ The coast between Nootka Sound and Prince William Sound.

⁶⁹ Bodega, "Viage," AT.

come across a statement that he did not believe in the existence of Fonte's passage, but it is highly probable that this was the case. I also believe he proposed this "final" expedition for quite unrelated reasons. Because we have only his official papers on which to base a judgement, and because on paper he was a man of few words, it is necessary to fall back on circumstantial evidence.

First, as a cadet at the Real Colegio de Guardias Marinas in Cádiz, Bodega y Quadra had received a solid grounding in cartography from the great hydrographer, Vicente Tofiño, who gave special training in the advanced navigational methods and procedures then coming into use to officers, like Bodega y Quadra, who had been selected for maritime exploration. Tofiño instilled in his students the importance of accurate charts and the need to make them as complete as possible. When serving out of San Blas and later as commandant of the Naval Department of San Blas, Bodega y Quadra placed particular emphasis on such charts and himself produced a number of them.

Second, Bodega y Quadra was familiar with Tofiño's project to make an accurate atlas of Spain's overseas possessions as a companion to his atlas of the Spanish coast. When back in Spain between 1784 and 1789, he proposed a scientific expedition to Antonio Valdés, the Minister of Marine and the Indies, to be carried out in two specially built frigates staffed with highly trained navigators. Its mission would be to chart the entire Pacific coast from Tierra del Fuego to Prince William Sound, with particular attention being given to the coast north of California.⁷⁰

Minister Valdés rejected his proposal, but Bodega y Quadra never lost an opportunity to urge Revillagigedo to authorize expeditions to chart the Pacific coast of New Spain. We have, for example, his *Carta Reducida*, or general chart, of the coast from Acapulco to Unalaska, the purpose of which was to show the viceroy that four segments remained to be examined.⁷¹ These were: (1) a small segment

⁷⁰ Bodega y Quadra to Valdés, 23 January 1787, in his service file in the Archivo Museo Alvaro de Bazán, El Viso. A translation will be found in *Bodega y Quadra Returns to the Americas*, a pamphlet I wrote for the Vancouver Conference on Exploration and Discovery, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, 1990.

⁷¹ "Carta Reducida de la Costa Septentrional de América de California desde el Puerto de Acapulco hasta la Isla de Unalaska. Está construido al Meridiano de San Blas, con arreglo a las mejores Observaciones, noticias, y Repitidos Viages para manifestar lo que resta que examinarse, y deve executar de Orden del Exmo. Conde de Revilla Gigedo [sic], en la Expedición de Limites, el Capitán de Navío Comandante de ella [y] del Departamento Dn. Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra. Año de 1792." Reproduced as plate 39 in Wagner, *Cartography*, and noted as chart 800. The chart is not dated but Wagner believes it was drawn in Monterey in November or December 1792, when Bodega was returning to San Blas from Nootka. However, the phrasing of the title suggests that it might have formed

of the Alaskan coast between Kodiak Island and the mainland;⁷² (2) the coast between Kruzof Island and Bering's Bay;⁷³ (3) the intricate coast of the Panhandle from Bucareli Bay south through Hecate Strait to Cape Cook on Vancouver Island; and (4) the Washington-Oregon-California coast from Cape Flattery to San Francisco. The latter three coastal segments comprised almost the entire northern portion of his proposal to Minister Valdés.

The viceroy had now to make a choice: (1) to fill all these gaps; (2) to continue the search for Fonte's passage; (3) to support the "final" expedition Bodega y Quadra proposed in his report (part of coastal segment 2 and coastal segment 3); or (4), to order a final attempt to make an accurate chart of the Washington-Oregon-California coast (coastal segment 4). Despite repeated orders to voyagers returning from the north, this latter task had never been accomplished to his satisfaction.⁷⁴

At an earlier time, Revillagigedo would have favoured more exploration. When drafting Bodega y Quadra's instructions for the Limits Expedition, he remarked that the survey of the coast from latitude 56°N southwards down the Alaskan archipelago was "exceedingly more important" than the survey of the coast south from the Strait of Juan de Fuca,⁷⁵ but the deadlock of the Bodega-Vancouver negotiation caused him to change his mind. An accurate charting of the California coast had clearly become an urgent necessity.⁷⁶ Where on that wild coast might hostile trading posts or settlements be located? Were there bays and rivers that could serve as havens for pirates and smugglers?

Revillagigedo did not dismiss Bodega y Quadra's proposal out of hand. Indeed, he told him he would consider it for a later time. He was certain the passage of Juan de Fuca did not lead into the interior and, in all likelihood, was now quite satisfied that the passages of

part of the documentation Bodega y Quadra prepared for the Limits Expedition. Moreover, unlike his general chart referred to in footnote 54, it does not show the 1792 discoveries of Alcalá Galiano, Valdés, and Vancouver, nor does it show the latter's Puget Sound.

⁷² The Canal de Flores.

⁷³ The Puerto de los Remedios, named by Bodega y Quadra in 1775, and the Bahía de Bering, or Dixon's Port Mulgrave, explored by Malaspina in 1791.

⁷⁴ "Our crews, exhausted by their voyages to the higher latitudes, were beset with sickness and short of provisions, and anxious to reach port to rest." Revillagigedo to Alcudia, letter 162, para. 187, AT.

⁷⁵ Revillagigedo to Bodega y Quadra, 29 October 1791, AGN, Historia 67, Archivo Histórico Nacional (hereafter referred to as AHN), Madrid, Estado Legajo 4287.

⁷⁶ See Revillagigedo's letter 120 of 30 November 1792, to Aranda, AGN, CV, series 2, vol. 23, and letter 154 of 18 February 1793, to Alcudia, AHN, Estado Legajo 4290.

Fonte and Ferrer Maldonado did not exist. But the viceroy was prudent when it came to spending money on a venture he considered unlikely to justify heavy expense. Perhaps for this reason, but also to seek confirmation of his doubts as to the correct course to follow, he decided to consult the officers of the *Sutil* and *Mexicana*, who had just returned from their circumnavigation of Vancouver Island. Was, he asked them, any further exploration northward necessary? Alcalá Galiano and Juan Vernacci both responded in the affirmative. They recognized that such a passage so far north would be of little value, but they wanted to settle the question of a transcontinental passage once and for all. Juan Vernacci added he would regret it if Vancouver rather than Spain received the glory of discovering such a passage. Valdés and Segundina de Salamanca thought that, as Vancouver would be exploring the area that year (1793), his maps would be published and available to all nations.⁷⁷ In this, they proved correct, for the maps, when published, showed that Vancouver's 1793 campaign, though more detailed, effectively substantiated Caamaño's conclusions.⁷⁸

His judgment confirmed, Revillagigedo wrote Alcudia, the Minister of State, saying, "until now, neither we nor the English have found the communication which links the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. But we are close to removing all doubts." He then added:

If it is not accomplished this year [1793] by either one or the other, I shall assign in 1794 a frigate of the Department of San Blas, the bergantine *Activo*⁷⁹ and some smaller ships to sail to the highest latitude, should His Majesty approve this new expedition and send me some officers of the Royal Navy, well versed in astronomy, with whom we can put an end to disappointments and a full stop to our costly expeditions.⁸⁰

In other words, he would support Bodega y Quadra's proposal should Vancouver fail, but it is doubtful he was serious in saying this.

⁷⁷ The viceroy's letter and the replies to it are in AGN, Historia 71, cuaderno 31.

⁷⁸ On Fonte, Vancouver was more cautious. In the Notes and Miscellaneous Observations, appended to his account of his voyage, he said he believed his survey "had afforded ... the most satisfactory proof that no navigable communication exists between the North Pacific and North Atlantic Oceans." But, after giving a detailed analysis of the Fonte story, he said he did not "mean positively to deny the discoveries of De Fonta [sic], I only wish ... to ascertain the truth; and I am content with having used my endeavours to prove their improbability." *The Voyage of George Vancouver, 1791-1795*, edited by W. Kaye Lamb (London: Hakluyt Society, 1984), 1552-56.

⁷⁹ Possibly the *Activa* was intended.

⁸⁰ Letter 162, para. 196, AT.

Even if not totally convinced that Caamaño had disproved Fonte, Revillagigedo proceeded as if the former had joined Arteaga, Bodega y Quadra, Quimper, Fidalgo, Malaspina, Eliza, Alcalá Galiano, and Valdés in demonstrating that, in Spanish eyes at least, Alta California could not be reached by sea across North America between latitudes 60°N and 48°N.

It is highly probable that, even before seeking the opinion of the officers of the Alcalá Galiano-Valdés expedition, Revillagigedo had already made up his mind not to urge the home government to approve Bodega y Quadra's recommendation. He could feel even more secure in his long-held belief, formed when he assumed office in 1789, that Spain should withdraw from Nootka and the entire Pacific Northwest.⁸¹ That remote establishment no longer had any strategic value, and the enormous resources required to maintain it could not be justified by whatever lingering symbolic value it might still have. This was even truer in the post-Nootka Convention situation. By their silence, the Spanish authorities, by then deeply preoccupied with European affairs, appeared to agree. The Pacific Northwest had become even more marginal to Spain's essential interests. Three years later, in 1795, England and Spain would conclude the Third Nootka Convention, providing for the Mutual Abandonment of Nootka.

Withdrawal from the northwest, however, did not mean there was no need to protect the coast north of San Francisco. Here Revillagigedo was determined to maintain Spanish rights. In the first place, consistent with his policy to see the California missions and presidios strengthened, he was certain a final attempt should be made to make a detailed survey of the coast from San Francisco north to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The task was assigned to Francisco de Eliza in the *Activa* and Juan Martínez y Zayas in the *Mexicana*. The latter successfully accomplished this survey in 1793.⁸²

Second, the viceroy did not hesitate to support Bodega y Quadra's plans to strengthen the defences of San Francisco, Monterey, Santa Barbara, and San Diego. He also agreed with Bodega y Quadra's recommendation to provide a buffer to defend San Francisco with a small settlement in Bodega Bay. The expedition sent out to establish it had to abandon the attempt when it discovered the shallowness of the water, the tidal bores of adjoining Tomales Bay, and the lack of

⁸¹ See, for example, Revillagigedo's letter 44 to Floridablanca of 1 September 1791, AGN, CV, vol. 164.

⁸² See Henry R. Wagner, "The Last Spanish Exploration of the Northwest Coast and the Attempt to Colonize Bodega Bay," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 9 (1931): 321-33.

wood for construction. Similarly, to eliminate the possibility that the Columbia River, the last unexplored possible route across the continent, might lead inland to the Mississippi, Revillagigedo ordered it carefully examined. When Martínez y Zayas, in the schooner *Mexicana*, ran onto a sandbank only fourteen miles from its mouth, he was satisfied that the great river could not be navigated by an ocean-going vessel.

After Jacinto Caamaño, no one entered the lists to demonstrate once and for all that the Estrecho del Almirante Fonte was a hoax. Not only had he driven the final nail into the apocryphal admiral's coffin, but he had effectively ended the need for any further Spanish exploration north of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.