

Selkirk had dispatched to his colony. Subsequently McDonald became involved in the fur trade, and he served with George Simpson (later Sir George) in the Athabasca District just before his arrival in the Columbia District. McDonald favourably impressed Simpson, and this helped his career immediately afterward when Simpson assumed the governorship of the company. In addition to her biographical introduction, Cole opens each of the book's four parts with a succinct history that aims to put the group of letters that follow in their proper context. In footnotes throughout the work, she also provides essential biographical information about the people who are mentioned in McDonald's correspondence.

While Cole's adherence to editorial conventions is a strength of the collection, it also is one of its weaknesses.

She does not provide the reader with any information about the First Nations, who owned the territory where the company built its posts. This omission is most glaring on the map of the Columbia District (2), which shows only rivers and trading posts. It conveys the no longer acceptable impression that the land was vacant apart from the European establishments. Also, by failing to refer readers to the appropriate anthropological literature, those who are unfamiliar with the cultures of Pacific Slope First Nations are not provided with the background information they need to evaluate McDonald's descriptions and assessments of local Native customs. These shortcomings notwithstanding, Cole is to be congratulated for pulling together an extremely valuable collection.

*A Tour of Duty in the Pacific Northwest:  
E.A. Porcher and H.M.S. Sparrowhawk, 1865-1868*

Dwight L. Smith, editor

Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2000.  
172 pp. Illus., maps. US\$85 cloth

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**I**N THE MIDDLE YEARS of the nineteenth century the colony of British Columbia was a major producer of gold, and we tend to think of it in those terms. British Columbia played a second important role to which this book calls our attention. Thanks to its sources of coal and its secure harbour at Esquimalt, the colony served

as a nodal point in the web of steamship routes that bound the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans into a single strategic and commercial system. This role is brought to life by the private journal and water colours of Commander Edmund A. Porcher, captain of the gunboat *HMS Sparrowhawk* during a three-year turn of duty.

Leaving Portsmouth early in March 1865, the *Sparrowhawk* spent almost seven months on its way to British Columbia. It called at Madeira, Rio de Janeiro, the land Islands, the Straits of Magellan, Valaparaíso, Callao, and Honolulu. HMS *Sparrowhawk* used its engines only when sail did not serve. The slowness of the voyage and the frequent stops to take on coal show the inefficiency of early steamships. Since Porcher used the coaling stops to visit and paint local sites, this inefficiency is posterity's gain.

The heart of the journal focuses upon HMS *Sparrowhawk's* time in British Columbia, from October 1866 to August 1868. As British gunboats were meant to do, the ship enforced the colonial order, visited settlements, investigated wrecked ships and rescued survivors, maintained communications, and carried mail. The *Sparrowhawk* was constantly on the move through dangerous waters not well charted. It made visits to San Francisco (once for repairs to its keel), the ports of Puget Sound, and Sitka (at the very end of Russian rule). A recurring theme is interaction with Aboriginal peoples along the Coast – peoples who displayed far more autonomy and initiative than Porcher expected or desired. He praised William Duncan and the Metlakatla settlement precisely because they resulted in Aboriginal peoples making “progress ... in the arts of civilized life” (135) – in other words, becoming deferential to British authority. Another theme involves providing transportation for the governor of the united colonies, often between Victoria and New Westminster. In 1867 Porcher accompanied Frederick Seymour on two inland trips, the first to Boston Bar and the second all the way to the Cariboo. After this last visit the journal's text offers more summary and

less information, in part because Porcher's life brought him few new experiences. The final pages record the return journey to England via Panama and St. Thomas.

Porcher possessed good powers of observation, and, precisely because his views were conventional, his account of what he saw and did is particularly useful. There are excellent descriptions of the military encampment on San Juan Island (which was to protect England's interests in the still unresolved dispute with the United States), the sawmill located at the future Vancouver felling spars, a price war between the Nanaimo Coal Company and a competitor at Bellingham Bay, and the way in which Frederick Dally operated to get the photographs that provided the principal visual record of these years. Ship desertions, common during these years, acquire a personal face. Porcher knew all of his men and, even while pursuing departees, could almost sympathize with their reasons for wanting to try life ashore. He even included the note of a fleeing lieutenant, who explained: “I am not leaving this Ship through any discontent ... but there are such temptations here for a young man that I cannot resist them any longer” (47).

The utility of the journal's text owes a good deal to the editing of Dwight L. Smith, professor emeritus of Miami (Ohio) University. Porcher's accounts of two voyages to the northern coasts have, for example, been supplemented by the inclusion, in brackets, of passages from two anonymous articles (probably by Porcher) that appeared in Victoria's *Daily Colonist* newspaper. On the other hand, the footnotes could be more thorough in identifying individuals and places, such as “Mr. Skinner” at Cowichan (41) and “Blenkinsop” (142) at Fort Rupert. A lack of familiarity

with the history of British Columbia is the likely cause, although the editor did consult archival and cartographic authorities in the province.

Interesting as is the text, the work's glory and its true value lies in the water colours that Porcher produced during his travels. The University of Alaska Press deserves all praise for reproducing fifty-four of these sketches at a very high standard. Porcher's paintings are notable for their fine

sense of colour. They convey the atmosphere and mood of the places they depict. By including human beings and animals in movement, Porcher gave a dramatic, personal touch to the scenes he painted. Particularly fine and historically significant are the paintings of New Westminster (facing, 64), Fort Simpson and Clinton (facing, 104), and "Nahritti" village on Hope Island (facing, 140). Porcher's water colours deserve wide circulation.

*Geography of British Columbia:  
People and Landscapes in Transition*

Brett McGillivray

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000.  
235 pp. Illus., maps. \$39.95 paper

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THE *Geography of British Columbia: People and Landscapes in Transition* is intended as a textbook describing the geography of this "vertical landscape" in a comprehensive manner. It supersedes an earlier, similar book, *British Columbia: Its Resources and People*, edited by Charles N. Forward (Western Geographical Series, vol. 22). Brett McGillivray borrows from the format of the earlier compilation but, as the single author of this text, has created a more pleasing and more easily read treatment of British Columbia's geography. Well written in one voice, it doesn't suffer from the somewhat disjointed assembly of Forward's book. Still, McGillivray is aware of the necessity of omitting some topics and only touching on others.

Both Forward and McGillivray's books take a similar approach, beginning with a chapter providing regional profiles, although some of the regions have been redefined. This is one of the idiosyncrasies of regional geography: there are different and changing views. Unfortunately, the transitory regional names and boundaries don't lend themselves to spatial comparisons, although a full-page version of Figure 1.2 – showing the eight regions – could have been combined with census subdivisions, thus allowing for such analysis.

McGillivray's book begins with a general overview and introduction to regional geography. Chapter 2 deals with physical processes and, for the non-geographer, explains the basic tectonic and volcanic processes that