

with Sifton and the Yukon. Perhaps the evidence simply does not exist, but one is left with the impression that there is much more to Sifton's involvement than is presented here. There is little comment on the minister's activities in the granting of timber berths, despite continued questioning in the House. T. A. Burrows, Sifton's brother-in-law, seldom failed to be successful in his bids. It is not that the author is overcautious; when he has the evidence, he does not hesitate.

These lacunae should not detract from a very impressive piece of research; and one hopes for the second volume soon. Sifton was not a likeable man, but he has been fairly served by Professor Hall. It is also pleasant to conclude by remarking that the early high standards of U.B.C. Press are being well maintained.

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J. E. REA

*Distant Dominion: Britain and the Northwest Coast of North America, 1579-1809*, by Barry Gough. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1981.

This is a book which one does not hesitate to recommend, especially to British Columbians.

The period it spans is determined by the facts that 1579 is the year in which Francis Drake started on the first voyage an Englishman made to America's west coast and that 1810 is the opening date of another of Mr. Gough's books, *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast of North America, 1810-1914*.

A chapter to which I would very particularly call readers' attention is Mr. Gough's first — on the "Tyranny of Distance." This is something it takes an effort to understand in these days when we can arrive at Heathrow a mere dozen hours after taking off from Vancouver airport. Before the coming of the steamboat (in its infancy in 1809) the speed of travel at sea was determined by the natural forces of winds and currents; and it was low. Captain Bligh's *Bounty* averaged 108 miles per day over the 27,086 miles he sailed between England and Tahiti. Better speeds might indeed be made on short voyages favoured by good winds, or worse against headwinds, but 100 miles a day was a good average for a long voyage. Add that wooden ships were frail as well as slow. The eighteenth century was three-quarters gone before men learned the value of copper

sheathing to protect their hulls against shipworm and barnacles. Their oak timbers were subject to dry-rot; wear and tear took its toll of their pine masts and spars, their hempen rigging and canvas sails; and explorers particularly might spend years at sea before they saw their home ports again. Salt meats and lack of green vegetables invited scurvy, for which no really practical preventative was found until the great siege of Gibraltar (1779-83), when General Elliott's experiments showed how orange juice could be preserved by mixing it with brandy. Perhaps the best asset of the ships was that they were small enough to be careened on a sheltered beach when their hulls needed repair. The pioneers who sailed them, of course, did so with no charts to aid them in locating reefs and shoals, for sheer lack of predecessors to make the charts!

These were the conditions under which the men, whose work Mr. Gough describes, sailed the northwest coasts of America. The greatest of them are easily James Cook and George Vancouver; "dedicated scientists" one must call them for the meticulous care they took in charting, for the benefit of others, the unknown seas through which they sailed. Cook also discovered a new source of wealth, which led lesser men to follow him. This was the famous sea otter, whose wonderful pelt was worth a fortune in Canton; and that accounts for the importance which the now obscure anchorage of Nootka Sound on the west side of Vancouver Island (you cannot reach it by car today) enjoyed in Mr. Gough's period. It was the centre of the sea otter trade where John Meares built the fort which brought Britain and Spain to the brink of war in 1790 after the Spaniards had seized it; and what Canada now possesses on the west coast she owes to the stiffness with which the younger Pitt's government prepared for a war from which the Spanish flinched. There were also, of course, the Russians as well as the Spaniards to consider; but more important than either were the Chinese.

I liked the way Mr. Gough discussed the China trade. It is well known that there was a war over it in 1840-41, and "holier-than thou" westerners have built up the legend that it was "an opium war" forced on the innocent Chinese by greedy merchants seeking profit in the drug traffic. That legend is born of ignorance which Mr. Gough does much to correct. The fact is that the Chinese, who would accept opium, wanted almost nothing else from traders whom they despised as "foreign devils" and treated abominably. While the sea otters lasted, the fur trade to Canton was indeed profitable, but the result was the near extinction of the unfortunate otters. Here Mr. Gough gives figures that will interest

naturalists; in 1817 the Nor-Westerners sold 98,240 sea otter pelts at Canton, but in 1820 only 21,826. One had not realized how soon and how seriously the decline started.

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*Russia in Pacific Waters: A Survey of the Origins of Russia's Naval Presence in the North and South Pacific*, by Glynn Barratt. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1981.

Mr. Barratt's purpose in this book is to describe Russia's naval ventures in northeast Asia and western America. His starting date is 1715, when a Russian party launched their first vessel — an open boat named *Okhota*, at Okhotsk — and he ends with the collapse of hopes for Russian naval hegemony in the North Pacific Ocean in 1824-25. He covers the early explorations of Bering, fur-trading, contact with Spaniards, British and Americans, and the difficulties the Russians faced.

He is to be congratulated on having done his research very thoroughly and has much information to offer. Unfortunately, however, his material too often deserves better presentation than it gets. For example, on page 237 he writes that in 1810 Simon McGillivray "failed totally to rouse Lord Wellesley to action" over "Gray's River." Here he does indeed identify McGillivray as a "Nor-Wester"; but how many will recognize "Gray's River" as the Columbia? And who was Wellesley? Plenty will recognize the family name of the Duke of Wellington — and may be misled as a result; but one questions how many students of northwestern history will recall that in 1809-12 Wellington's eldest brother, Richard, Lord Wellesley, was Britain's foreign minister; or that not the least of his problems in that position was keeping peace, as long as he could, with his country's principal rival on the Columbia — the U.S.A. — at a time when every nation in Europe outside Sicily and the Spanish peninsula was at war against Britain. Here one should add that no reader can afford to overlook Mr. Barratt's collection of "Preliminary Notes," for these explain Russian words and spellings that may otherwise baffle him (they occur on p. xvi, not p. xiv, as the table of contents states).

Of Russia's interests in Pacific waters one must say, first, that they were not managed well; second, that in general they were far from easy to manage at all; but third, in some ways at least they could surely have been managed much better.