

*Vancouver's Voyage: Charting the Northwest Coast, 1791-1795*, by Robin Fisher. Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1992. xii, 131 pp. Maps, illus. \$35.00 cloth.

This book was published in conjunction with the conference held at Simon Fraser University to observe the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the Vancouver expedition on the Northwest Coast. But it must not be dismissed as merely a curtain-raiser for that notable conference: it is a concise, perceptive, and superbly illustrated account of Vancouver's accomplishment that will appeal to a wide variety of readers.

The shadow that has fallen over the Columbus celebrations has reached as far as the Pacific Coast. "This book," Dr. Fisher remarks in his preface, "appears at a time when 'exploration' and 'discovery' have become dirty words." But there is very little in the record of relations between the Vancouver expedition and Native peoples that calls for any apology. Vancouver had been specifically instructed "to use every possible care to avoid disputes with the Natives of any parts where you may touch, and to be particularly attentive to endeavour . . . to conciliate their friendship and confidence." Good relations, indeed, were essential. It quickly became apparent that the maze of islands and inlets that characterize the Northwest Coast could only be explored in small boats. These were highly vulnerable, and the trade goods that they carried for purposes of barter made them a rich prize in the eyes of the Indians. Nevertheless, although warning shots were fired occasionally, two years passed before a clash with the Tlingit in the Behm Canal resulted in bloodshed. And even then, Vancouver held himself partially to blame. He had been caught off guard: "having been so long accustomed to tranquil intercourse with the several tribes of Indians we met with, our apprehensions of any molestation from them were totally done away." But Vancouver sensed that a change was coming, due primarily to traders who gave the Indians firearms. Indeed, he doubted if it would have been possible to carry out the survey, dependent as it was on small boats, at any later date.

The survey itself was a daunting enterprise, involving as it did the detailed examination of the thousands of miles of coastline between Lower California and Cook Inlet, in Alaska. Vancouver's plan of attack, as Admiral Bern Anderson, one of his biographers, has remarked, was "rendered infallible by its simplicity": he set out to examine every foot of the continental shore, which would entail exploring every opening or inlet along the way. It has been estimated that the ships' boats covered a total of 10,000 miles in the course of the three survey seasons. Bad weather fre-

quently made rowing the boats acutely uncomfortable as well as laborious, but Vancouver and his officers time and again praised the way in which the seamen performed their tasks. Nor did they find any consolation in the scenery that tourists now flock to see. They preferred their landscapes neat and tidy and found the coast for the most part desolate and dreary. Vancouver named his first important anchorage north of Burrard Inlet Desolation Sound.

The illustrations are outstanding and supplement the text in a striking way. Thanks to a generous benefactor, Gary Fiegehen was able to roam the coast (at times presumably by helicopter) and photograph in colour some thirty of the features that figure in Vancouver's own narrative. Neither a man nor a man-made object appears in them, and they make apparent, in a highly dramatic way, the ruggedness of the coast that the expedition explored. The wonder is not that *Discovery* and *Chatham* grounded and bumped occasionally; sailing in waters that were at best charted only in a rudimentary way or not at all, it is a wonder that they survived the survey. Ironically, their most dangerous moment seems to have come when the great survey had been completed and they were leaving the anchorage Vancouver had named Port Conclusion, bound for Nootka Sound and thence for England. They had progressed only a few miles when the wind dropped and they nearly came to grief on the rocks near Cape Ommaney: at the last minute a gentle breeze sprang up and blew them offshore. So narrowly did Vancouver and his shipmates — and his charts — escape destruction.

The photographs are supplemented by a selection of the engravings that appeared in the folio volume that accompanied the first edition of Vancouver's *Voyage*, and by sketches by midshipmen-artists, many of which have not been published before. Supplementing these again are reproductions of sections of Vancouver's charts, all placed near the portions of the text to which they relate. Throughout, the quality of the reproductions is outstanding.

*Vancouver*

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*The Northwest Coast: British Navigation, Trade, and Discoveries to 1812*, by Barry M. Gough. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992. xiv, 266 pp. Maps, illus. \$39.95 cloth.

Traditionally, histories of the early Pacific coast of North America centred upon Spanish exploration and colonization, with some attention to