

## A VISIT TO NOOTKA SOUND

By H. S. SWARTH

WITH FOUR PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

SOMEWHAT over a hundred years ago, in the latter part of the eighteenth, and early in the nineteenth century, there were many visitors to this port who recorded their observations in print, it being at that time the objective point of the fur traders, while to government expeditions it was the one, almost the only, well known locality that could serve as a base of operations in the exploration of the dangerous and almost unknown northwest coast. Beginning with Captain Cook's "Voyages", there followed in rapid succession the narratives of Meares, Vancouver, Quadra, La Perouse, Cleveland, and others—English, Spanish, French and American, private adventurers and government officials, nearly all of whom gave more or less elaborate descriptive accounts of Nootka Sound, its inhabitants and resources.

With the decline of the fur trade, and the settlement of various international disputes centering about the place, as well as the discovery and exploitation of vast-

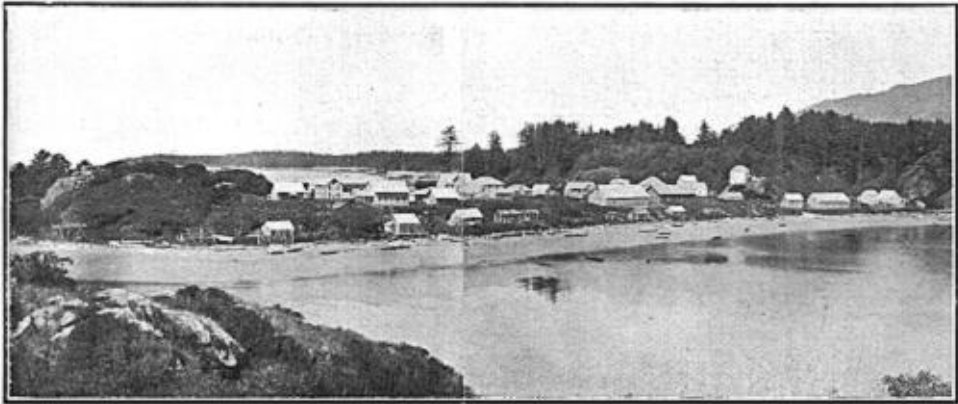


Fig. 8. THE VILLAGE OF FRIENDLY COVE, NOOTKA SOUND; AUGUST 6, 1910

ly more promising regions elsewhere on the Pacific, Nootka lost its place in public interest, and, out of the track of civilization, it has for many years been little more than a name, of interest to the historian, but otherwise almost forgotten.

The writer had occasion to visit the place in the summer of 1910, in pursuance of the work of zoological exploration being conducted upon Vancouver Island by the University of California Museum of Vertebrate Zoology. Our party was at this time reduced to two, Mr. E. Despard and myself, and it was with rather mixed feelings that we prepared for this trip, for many were the pessimistic tales we had heard as to physical conditions on the west coast, the drawbacks of canoe travel, and the impossibility of travel by land. Hence, though eagerly anticipating the opportunity of visiting this historic spot, we had some misgivings as to the probable success of the trip, measured by numbers of specimens secured.

A coasting steamer, the *Tees*, making monthly trips from Victoria up the west side of Vancouver Island, was boarded by us at Port Alberni, July 22. In an

air line the two points, Port Alberni and Friendly Cove, are not more than one hundred miles distant, but there are narrow, tortuous channels to be traversed between, and interminable stops at canneries, missions, and mines, so that it was the evening of the second day before we reached our destination, and steamed into Nootka Sound. The Sound is enclosed between Nootka Island and the mainland of Vancouver Island, and to our left, on Nootka Island, lay the little village of Friendly Cove. There is no wharf, and as soon as we had come to anchor a huge canoe put off from the shore, and approached the steamer. This, the property of the store-keeper and capable of holding a score of men, was a war canoe of former days, now reduced to the lowly task of transporting groceries and supplies! We made the acquaintance of Mr. H. L. W. Smith, the store-keeper and the only white inhabitant of the town, who gave us a cordial greeting, assisted us ashore, and did everything possible to make us comfortable.

Three large arms or inlets open from Nootka Sound, the Muchalat Arm extending eastward, Tlupana Arm to the northeast, and the Tahsis Canal, stretching due north. Upon our first arrival at Friendly Cove we remained only one night, and then, taking advantage of the temporary presence in the harbor of a small gasoline launch, had ourselves and outfit transported to the head of the Tahsis Canal, some twenty-five miles distant.

We spent a week at this camp (July 24 to August 2), with but moderate success. Our only object in going such a distance from Friendly Cove was the chance of securing specimens of the larger mammals, naturally driven back from the vicinity of the town, but, whatever the reason, we found big game decidedly more scarce here than at some other points nearer civilization. Wolves and panthers are numerous, though difficult to obtain in summer, and they had apparently driven out the deer, for in a week's time we hardly saw a fresh track of the latter.

On August 2 we returned to Friendly Cove. We secured the services of a trapper whom we found encamped on the Tahsis, and Mr. Smith also came to assist us in the moving. With some difficulty we stowed ourselves and outfit in the two small canoes, Smith and Despard in one, and Leiner (the trapper) and myself in the other. We started early, about 3 A. M., to avoid the wind which blew up the canal every day—thereby encountering swarms of tiny gnats also taking advantage of the calm weather—and alternately paddling and sailing, as occasional light puffs of wind came to our assistance, spent most of the day reaching our destination. Mr. Smith established us in a cabin about a mile from the village, where we found ourselves much more advantageously placed for collecting, and where we remained until our departure from the Sound, August 11.

On the whole Pacific northwest there is no place of greater historical interest than this former center of the fur trade, Nootka Sound, the name of which figured so conspicuously in the accounts of all the early explorations that it came to typify the entire region; but there is little about the place now to suggest its claims of former glory—that the first ship to be built on the Pacific northwest was launched here, and that at this point English and Spanish statesmen met to settle the differences of their respective nations, as to the claims of each upon the countries of the north Pacific. On one of the islands in the bay there is a monument commemorative of the "Nootka Treaty"—a compromise by which both nations withdrew from the port for the time being. From that day to this there has been no white settlement at Friendly Cove.

The earliest detailed description of the Sound is given by Captain Cook, in the history of his third voyage, though the Spaniards had probably been there some years before. Cook was there in March and April, 1778, and it was visited by

Meares, Vancouver, Dixon, and others, whose travels were published in the years immediately following. A later account of the place, and a very full one, is that contained in John Jewitt's Narrative. Jewitt was armourer on the *Boston*, an American ship trading on the northwest coast, which was seized by the Indians while lying in Nootka Sound, and the entire crew massacred, with the exception of Jewitt and one other man. This was in March, 1803, and the two were held as slaves from that time until they escaped in July, 1805. Jewitt kept a journal during his captivity, which was published later, in narrative form, a fascinating tale and a valuable account of the region. There is but little zoology contained in it, except as relating to such animals as the Indians depended on for food or clothing, the sea otter, seals, whales, bear, etc., but the description of the natives and their customs is intensely interesting, while the account of the geography and appearance of the sound, both in general and in detail, is such as to strongly impress a later visitor with the credibility of the narrative. A late edition (1896) of this book has been published, with an introduction and copious notes by Robert Brown. Dr.



Fig. 9. WATER FRONT AT FRIENDLY COVE, NOOTKA SOUND

Brown explored many parts of Vancouver Island in the sixties (among numerous contributions to the zoology, ethnology and geography of the region he published a list of the birds of Vancouver Island, in the *Ibis*, 1868), and he tells here of a visit to Friendly Cove in 1863.

With Captain Cook's account of the discovery and exploration of the bay in 1778, Jewitt's narrative of twenty-five years later, and Dr. Brown's careful exposition of conditions sixty years from that time, we have graphic pictures of this interesting spot at widely separated intervals. It is perhaps excusable for a later visitor to tell something of the place as it exists today, for it is remote from the usual track of the "tourist" or "tripper", and such, even should they stray so far, would doubtless see very little to interest them, for the greatest charm of the place, of course, lies in its memories and associations.

The Indian village of Friendly Cove has been where it is since before the coming of the white man, and the advantages of the site are so obvious that it had probably been occupied for ages previous to that time. The town is at the southeastern extremity of Nootka Island on a projecting spit, which is some half mile in length, perhaps a quarter of a mile across, from bay to ocean, quite level, barren

of timber, and covered with grass. At the extremity of the peninsula a string of rocky islets extends at right angles into the sound, giving the shelter that forms the cove, a placid, unruffled bay in almost any weather.

On the sheltered side is a beach a few hundred yards long, extending nearly the length of the town, an ideal landing for canoes, and in sunny weather a delightful place in which to loaf, bathe, and do laundry work, as we observed. This beach, however, is not of hard sand, but of a yielding, coarse gravel, in which one sinks ankle deep at every step, but on this rocky, precipitous coast one is not apt to be critical of such minor details. Above the beach is a short, steep rise of a few yards to the level ground beyond. On the seaward side of the peninsula is another fine stretch of beach, about two miles in length, and of the same general character, though with here and there short stretches affording firm, sandy footing. At the northern end of this beach, where the coast becomes more rocky and broken, is a large lagoon, opening into the sea and flooded by the tides, surrounded by grassy meadows, and with several streams flowing into its upper end. Above the outer beach, as elsewhere in the region except for the limited village site, the forest extends nearly to the high tide mark, impassably dense, dark and forbidding. About half a mile from the village, and only a stone's throw from the beach, is a small, shallow, freshwater lake, several acres in extent. This pond figures several times in Jewitt's narrative, but though he describes it as at that time surrounded by open woods, free from underbrush, we found the forest hereabouts, as elsewhere, choked with undergrowth, while, except in occasional spots, the shores of the lake were overhung and hidden with drooping willows and alders.

The town itself and its inhabitants, we found quite as interesting as the animal life we were there to study. Probably in many respects the straggling rows of cabins present an appearance not greatly unlike the village first seen by Captain Cook, for even in those days the northwestern coast Indians built rather elaborate wooden domiciles. True, many of the houses are now embellished with glass windows, and a few have more or less elaborate bay windows or even front porches, but these details cannot be seen at any distance, and at a close view most of the houses are quite satisfyingly old and weatherbeaten in appearance; while some even of the most pretentious, if approached from the rear, are seen to be there of ancient design and workmanship, contrasting strangely with the more modern and garish "front". It is doubtful if the village is as large as it was when Cook saw it, for he estimated the population at two thousand, and from the number of houses, it appears to be far below that at the present day. I had no other way of forming an estimate, for during the summer most of the able-bodied inhabitants are absent, fishing or working at the canneries, and the village had a very deserted aspect at the time of our visit.

Some distance behind the town, at the edge of the beach, and nearly hidden in the woods, is the Indian burying-ground, the graves embellished with the most extraordinary decorations. The ancient custom of these people to bury with the departed, or to adorn his tomb with his most cherished possessions, leads now-a-days to most incongruous combinations. Above the various graves were to be seen among other things, a phonograph with several broken records, a sewing machine, an iron bedstead, and a carefully constructed, miniature full-rigged ship, all very much the worse for the weather they had been through.

The Indian tribes of the northwest coast, and the Moochahts, or so called "Nootka Indians", in particular, as one of the most powerful and warlike, have never been considered very trustworthy. The early history of the settlement of the region, aside from the almost incessant warfare carried on between the various

tribes, contains numerous accounts of the murders of traders and other visitors, with here and there some more conspicuous atrocity, such as the capture of the *Boston* or the destruction of the *Tonquin*. Even in recent years there have been occasions when cruelty and injustice, inflicted by reckless white men upon the despised "Siwash", have been followed by prompt and bloody retribution; and today the visitor to some of the more remote villages will be conscious of the black looks and surly demeanor of a portion of the population. It is interesting to note, however, an amiable weakness of these warlike savages, one noted by Jewitt and by Dr. Brown, and even at this late date corroborated by myself. Jewitt remarks on the Indians' fondness for biscuit and molasses, "which they prefer to any kind of food that we can offer them"; and the later writer, commenting upon this, speaks of a prospective Indian uprising being immediately allayed by the opening of a keg of treacle and a box of biscuit. During our stay at Friendly Cove two "potlatches" took place. The first was given by a hunter, who had fortunately secured four seals. These were cut up and boiled in a huge kettle on the beach, around which the village gathered, while the host served the dainties. The second feast made

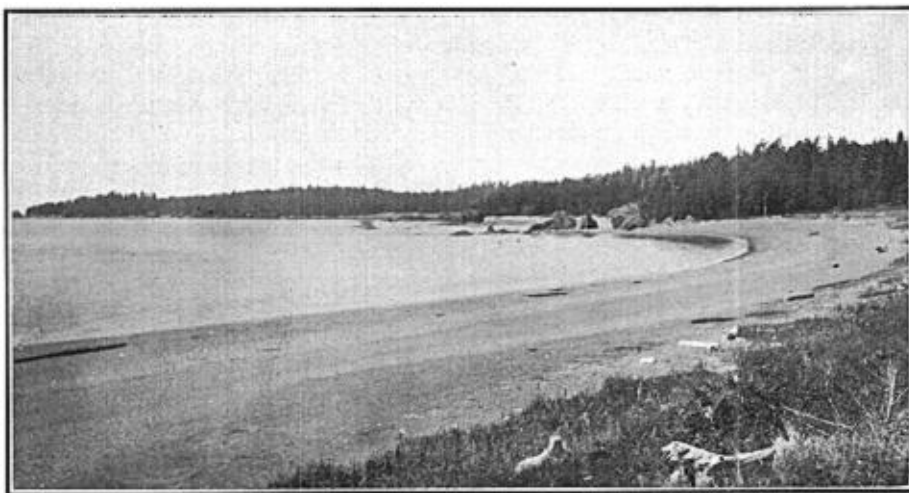


Fig. 10. OUTER BEACH AT FRIENDLY COVE, NOOTKA SOUND

more of a stir, the generosity of some visiting timber cruisers one evening supplying the whole population with pilot bread and store jam, in return for certain dances, which were most cheerfully executed.

Another curious, and to me unexpected discovery, was that to this day Americans are known to the west coast Indians as "Boston men", Englishmen as "King George men". Changing circumstances have made the Briton's appellation appropriate once more, but it is doubtful whether a Californian or a Texan would recognize the suitability of the above classification!

The permanent white population of Friendly Cove, as indicated above, is limited to Mr. Smith, the store keeper. The whole of the peninsula has been set aside as a reservation, for the use of the Indians, and the store is held by lease. There is a Catholic mission here, a neat little church in carefully kept grounds, and a priest is resident during the winter months, but was away at the time of our visit.

The stay we made at the head of the Tahsis Canal enabled us to see a good deal of the Sound besides the immediate environs of Friendly Cove. The shores of the

canal, like most of the west coast, are rocky and abrupt; at only a few spots along its length are there limited areas of level and fairly open land, in every case occupied by Indian cabins, which were securely closed at this season, for their owners use them but a small portion of the year. "Tashees" is described by Jewitt as the winter home of the Indians, occupied from September until February. Our camp was quite at the head of the canal, in a cabin at an abandoned marble quarry. Three fairly large streams empty here, and there are rather extensive areas of meadow land. These meadows, though fair to the view, are very deceptive, and anything but easy to traverse, the grass waist high, or even shoulder high, and concealing innumerable logs, stumps, and masses of windfall, while the ground is everywhere intersected by a network of little ditches, also concealed. Some Indian cabins placed here are nearly hidden by the surrounding mass of nettles, elder, and salmonberry bushes.

The forests of the west coast must be seen to be appreciated. I had seen, as I supposed, densely forested regions in the eastern and central portions of Vancouver Island, and had also heard tales of west coast conditions, but these had not prepared me altogether for the jungle we entered. Everywhere, over hill and valley, is the dense impenetrable forest, Douglas fir and spruce, mostly, a tree wherever there is a possible foothold for one, and underneath a matted tangle quite impenetrable except along the water courses. Devils' club and salmonberry bushes reach out long thorny branches in all directions, while everywhere is the bush we heard so abundantly vilified by woodsmen and hunters—the ubiquitous salal. On the east side of the island the latter occurs mainly as a small, rather innocuous shrub, easily trodden under foot, but it thrives on the west coast, forming thickets higher than a man's head, and as absolute a barrier as a stone wall. Altogether the forests appeared to me to be somewhat more tangled and impassable than the worst I had seen in southeastern Alaska—more uniformly dense and without the welcome relief of the open "park" country so characteristic of some of the Alaska islands.

At one time there was a trail from the head of the Tahsis Canal across the island to Alert Bay, on the east coast, but we were unable to find any trace of it. The trapper we found encamped here was unaware of its existence, though he had blazed a trail for some miles over what was probably the same route, following up one of the streams.

The naturalist's interest in Nootka Sound is due to the fact that the earliest explorers secured here numerous specimens of animals and plants new to the scientists of the period, and hence serving as types of the several species. The birds known to have been first described from this spot are the Rufous Hummingbird, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Blue-fronted Jay, and Varied Thrush, and it was partly the search for "topotypes", always interesting but frequently elusive and exasperating, that brought me to Nootka.

Our collecting ground at Friendly Cove was of about as varied a nature as could be found in a similar area anywhere in the region. The trail between our cabin and the village passed the whole distance through the woods, while from the rear of the store another trail, a short cut through the forest, led to the outer beach, which could also be reached in a more roundabout way by passing through the village. The outer beach, the lake already referred to, and occasionally the more distant lagoon, were abundant ground to cover in a morning, and were about the best places for birds. We secured three of the four especial desiderata. The sapsucker we did not see, though here and there I ran across the handiwork of the species on the trees. Hummingbirds were not common, though some were seen every day; the adult males had already departed for the south, but specimens of

females and immatures were secured. The jays were exasperatingly scarce, considering that in the vicinity of former camps in other parts of Vancouver Island they were frequently the most abundant species of bird. However, by following up every one seen or heard, we finally secured eight specimens. Of the Varied Thrushes we obtained about as many.

Following is a list of the birds seen at Nootka Sound, both at the Tahsis Canal camp and at Friendly Cove, during the time we were there, July 23 to August 11.

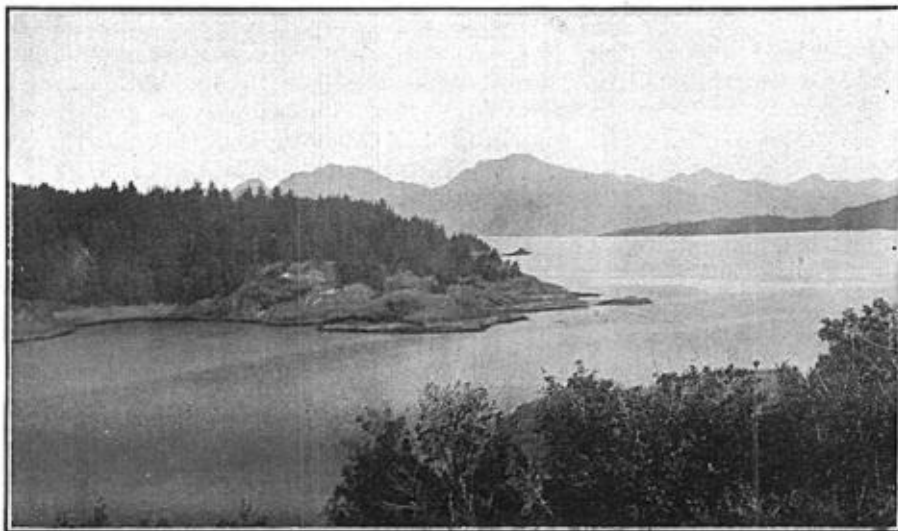


Fig. 11. LOOKING UP THE TAHISIS CANAL, NOOTKA SOUND, FROM AN ISLET  
IN THE BAY AT FRIENDLY COVE

Besides these, numbers of gulls, scoters, and phalaropes were seen, but under circumstances not permitting of absolute specific identification.

<i>Gavia immer</i>	<i>Empidonax hammondi</i>
<i>Brachyramphus marmoratus</i>	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>
<i>Cepphus columba</i>	<i>Corvus corax principalis</i>
<i>Mergus americanus</i>	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos caurinus</i>
<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>	<i>Melospiza melodia rufina</i>
<i>Ardea herodias fannini</i>	<i>Passerella iliaca fuliginosa</i>
<i>Pisobia minutilla</i>	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>
<i>Ereunetes mauri</i>	<i>Vermivora celata lutescens</i>
<i>Actitis macularius</i>	<i>Dendroica aestiva rubiginosa</i>
<i>Ægialitis semipalmata</i>	<i>Dendroica townsendi</i>
<i>Bonasa umbellus sabini</i>	<i>Oporornis tolmiei</i>
<i>Columba fasciata</i>	<i>Wilsonia pusilla pileolata</i>
<i>Accipiter velox</i>	<i>Cinclus mexicanus unicolor</i>
<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus alascanus</i>	<i>Nannus hiemalis pacificus</i>
<i>Pandion haliaetus carolinensis</i>	<i>Certhia familiaris occidentalis</i>
<i>Ceryle alcyon caurina</i>	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>
<i>Dryobates villosus harrisi</i>	<i>Penhstes rufescens</i>
<i>Colaptes cafer saturator</i>	<i>Regulus satrapa olivaceus</i>
<i>Cypseloides niger borealis</i>	<i>Hylocichla ustulata</i>
<i>Selasphorus rufus</i>	<i>Hylocichla guttata nanus</i>
<i>Nuttallornis borealis</i>	<i>Planesticus migratorius caurinus</i>
<i>Empidonax difficilis</i>	<i>Ixoreus naevius</i>
<i>Empidonax traillii</i>	