THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COOK'S THIRD VOYAGE TO RUSSIAN TENURE IN THE NORTH PACIFIC

by James R. Gibson

Captain James Cook's voyages to the Pacific between 1768 and 1780, thanks to his own great abilities and to strong private and state support, accomplished the monumental feat of accurately surveying, mapping, and publicizing the basic geography of the worlds largest ocean. His first and second voyages clarified the outlines of the South Pacific, especially the configuration of the South Sea Islands, New Zealand in particular, and the nonexistence of *Terra Australis Incognita*, the mythical southern continent. His third voyage probed the North Pacific as well, discovering the Hawaiian Islands and delineating the western coast of North America but finding no waterway into the interior and no Northwest or Northeast Passage. Here in the far North Pacific, however, Cook did find fellow European imperialists from Russia who had entered the Pacific from the north and by land. This encounter with the eastbound Russians had several consequences of little importance for the geography but of much significance to the history of the region. These consequences relate to the priority, basis, and stability of Russian tenure between Asia and America and the fate of Russian eastward expansion.

At the end of April 1778, the decrepit *Resolution* and the small *Discovery*, following a month's layover, left King George's or Nootka Sound and sailed northwestward up the coast in accordance with Cook's instructions, which directed him to proceed as far north as 65°. He did not dally, as his expedition was already a year behind schedule. The ships quickly encountered cloudy, rainy weather but occasionally the Northwest Coast was visible--"An uneven mountainous Country; the Hills covered with Snow. The Lower parts Woody . . . many deep Bays," in the eyes of James Burney, first lieutenant on the *Discovery*.[1] Along the fiorded coast the two ships saw no sign of the fifteen Russian crewmen who were reputed to have been lost by Chirikov in 1741, when he and Bering sighted the American mainland, and whose fate was to intrigue and distract navigators for nearly a century.[2] The vessels

[1]James Burney, "Journal of the proceedings of his Majys. Sloop, the *Discovery* . . . ," University of British Columbia Library, typescript, II, p. 42.

[2]See Ya. M. Svet and S. G. Fyodorova, "Istoriya pyatnadtsati" ["A History of the Fifteen"], pp. 48-64 of V. Stetsenko, comp., *brigantina* (Moscow, 1971).

approached the Alexander Archipelago off the Alaska Panhandle, where Cook named the volcanic cone of Mount Edgecumbe. Then the Gulf of Alaska was reached, and Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet on either side of the Kenai Peninsula were entered. In Cook Inlet the expedition was ". . . in hopes of finding a passage into the northern seas, without going any farther to the westward."[3] But rather than opening up and leading to the North Atlantic, both channels soon closed in to dead ends, and the ships turned back. So Cook Inlet, which began as the "Gulf of Good Hope," ended as the "Seduction River."

By now Cook was looking closely for traces of Russian occupancy, for London wanted to know how far east its imperial Muscovite rivals had advanced from Asia. The first signs were found in Cook Inlet at the end of May. There the natives had iron knives and spears and glass beads, probably of Russian origin. But as Cook concluded:

> It is probable they may get them from some of their Neighbours with whome the Russians may have a trade, for I will be bold to say that the Russians were never amongst these people, nor carry on any commerce with them, for if they did they would hardly be cloathed in such valuable skins as those of the Sea beaver; the Russians would find some means or other to get them all from them.[4]

The expedition returned to the gulf proper and rounded Kodiak Island, which has commonly been regarded as the site of the first permanent Russian settlement in North America. Its founding did not occur until six years later, however, so Cook saw no Russian residents. Bearing southwestward along the Alaska Peninsula, he became more and more convinced that, in his own words, ". . . the Continent extended farther to the west than from the Modem Charts we had reason to expect and made a passage into Baffin or Hudson bays far less probable, or at least made it of greater extent."[5] So the outlook was bleak for the expedition's principal objective--the discovery of an Arctic passage.

Nearing the tip of the Alaska Peninsula, Cook came across--in an unusual fashion--evidence of more direct Russian influence upon the na-

[3]William Ellis, *An Authentic Narrative of a Voyage Performed by Captain Cook*, 2 vols. (London: Robinson and Sewell, 1782), I, 255-256.

[4]J. C. Beaglehole, ed., *The Journals of Captain James Cook on His Voyages of Discovery*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: The Hakluyt Society, 1955-1967), III, 371.

[5]Beaglehole, III, 368.

tives. Off the Shumagin Islands on June 19th some Aleuts in three or four kayaks hailed the *Discovery* and handed the crew a note. Written in Russian (which, surprisingly, no member of the expedition could read), it turned out to be a receipt for fur tribute paid by the Aleuts. Apparently the Aleuts had taken the Englishmen for Russian tribute collectors and had wanted them to know that they had already rendered their due for 1778. At any rate, the receipt demonstrated Russian suzerainty as far as the Shumagins. William Bayly, astronomer on the *Discovery*, reported that "This seems to be the farthest East that the Russians trade along the Coast of America."[6]

A week later the ships sighted Unalaska Island (Fig. l), which was christened Providence Island following the lucky escape of the two vessels from rocks and reefs in a thick fog on June 26th. They put in to Samganuda Harbor, which was subsequently renamed English Bay in honor of Cook's visit. Here the Aleut natives displayed much evidence of direct Russian contact. For example, they showed little surprise or curiosity upon seeing Europeans, they bowed politely in the European manner, they were friendly and obsequious, they had very few sea otter pelts, they had been deprived of most weapons, they uttered some Russian words, they wore some European clothes, and they used tobacco. No Russians were to be seen, however. After taking on fresh water, shooting some grouse, and gathering wild peas, water cress, and scurvy grass (arctic cress), the expedition quit its providential haven and headed north for the legendary Strait of Anian and the elusive Northwest and Northeast passages.

The rest of the summer was spent in the Bering Sea and the Arctic Ocean. The season notwithstanding, the ships were eventually turned back by pack ice. As Cook himself put it:

> The season was now so very far advanced and the time when the frost is expected to set in so near at hand, that I did not think it consistant with prudence to make any farther attempts to find a passage this year in any direction so little was the prospect of succeeding. My attention was now directed towards finding out some place where we could Wood and Water, and in the considering how I should spend the Winter, so as to make some improvement to Geography and Navigation and at the same time be in a condition to return to the North in further search of a Passage the ensuing summer.[7]

[6]Beaglehole, III, 384n.

[7]Beaglehole, III, 427.

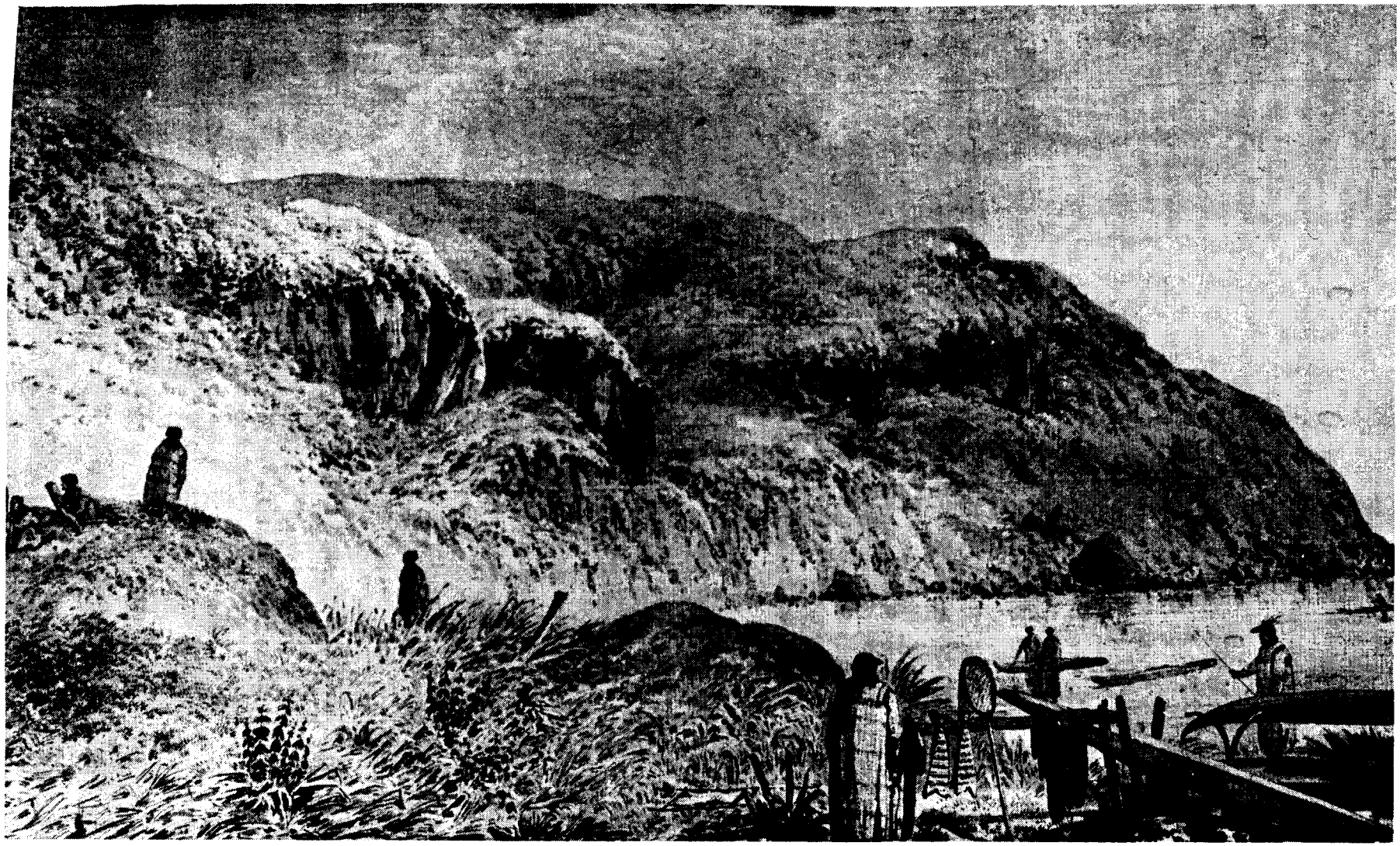

Fig. 1—A view of Unalaska, from a drawing by John Webber (courtesy Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Bushnell Collection, 41-72/507).

Cook decided to winter in the Sandwich Islands, where he had already sojourned the previous winter. En route his two ships stopped again at Unalaska to plug leaks, caulk seams, mend sails, and overhaul rigging. These repairs were particularly pressing after the storms and ice of the waters to the north. In addition, water and ballast were obtained, fish were caught, blubber was melted, berries were picked, livestock were pastured, astronomical observations were made, and a spare anchor was fashioned into various articles to trade for provisions in Hawaii. Cook noted, prophetically, that Unalaska Island was a good site for a settlement in view of the "great plenty of good Water," the "great quantity of berries," and the "plenty of fish."[8]

Now the Russians finally made contact. On October 8 a young Aleut chief named Yarmusk or Perpheela presented to Captains Cook and Clerke fish pasties made from salmon and rye flour and seasoned with salt and pepper. Perpheela indicated that the pies came from some Europeans who lived on the island and who, like the Englishmen, had white skin and owned a ship. The American John Ledyard, a corporal in the marines, volunteered to accompany Perpheela back to the Russian encampment and to take some liquor in return for the pasties. He was given two weeks by Cook to make contact and return. Following an arduous two-day journey of twelve to twenty miles by foot and kayak, Ledyard reached the Russian factory of Egoochshac (Illiuliuk), which the Russians came to call Good Harmony or Captain's Harbor and which is now called Dutch Harbor. His warm reception by the Russians prompted him to pen one of his most widely quoted lines: "Hospitality is a virtue peculiar to man, and the obligation is as great to receive as confer."[9] Equally cogent and memorable was Ledyard's remark on another Russian proclivity. He wrote: ". . . they were very fond of the rum, which they drank without any mixture or measure."[10]

The young Yankee corporal passed two nights at Egoochshac. The settlement 'comprised one dwelling for the Russians, some thirty native huts, three storehouses containing furs, anchors, and cables, a bathhouse, and a boathouse, plus a small sloop of about thirty tons burthen.[11] The

[8]Beaglehole, III, 393, 448.

[9]James Kenneth Munford, ed., *John Ledyard's Journal of Captain Cook's Last Voyage* (Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon State University Press, 1963), p. 94.

[10]Munford, p. 95.

[11]Several members of the expedition, however, reported that the sloop was fifty to sixty tons. See Beaglehole, III, 1139, 1334, 1355; and Ellis, II, 35. The captain of the sloop, Peter Natrubin, claimed to have sailed as a boy with Bering in 1741; in fact, he was a henchman of the infamous *Solovyov* (see below page 000).

settlement was described by Thomas Edgar, sailing master on the *Discovery,* who visited Egoochshac a few days after Ledyard in the company of John Webber, the expedition's principal artist:

> The ground where the factory is built is a low leave1 spot about 2 or 3 miles in an Oval form, a very fine fresh water river running close by the house. The harbour is small & only fit for small vessels, well sheltred from wind or Sea, being surrounded by high hills on all sides. The dwelling house is about 70 or 75 feet long & about 20 or 24 feet broad & about 18 feet high in the middle, being built in an Arch'd form with American timber & well thatch'd with straw and dry'd grass. . . ; the ends are flat boarded up; the House stands East and West, the door on the south side near the west end & a Centinal allways standing at the door with a drawn sword or loaded musquet. The principal people live at the East end of the house; having a window at that end made of tulk [talc] gives a tolerable good light, with a sky light over head & cover'd with the intestines of some of the large sea animals, gives very good light also. The next appartment to this lives some russians & the better sort of Kamscadales, the lower sort of russians & Kamscadales spreading their skins on dry'd grass & sleeping on the ground. They cook all their provisions in large copper kettles in the middle of this house, which makes it very disagreeable sleeping after day break, the house being full of smoake occasiond by their burning dry'd grass & turf, there being no Wood on the Island but what is brought from the continent. . . . here is three large store houses a little distance from this where they keep their dry'd fish, skins, provisions &c in. . . . Here is several Indian houses with familys living amongst them, . . . & they have two crosses opposite each other, painted white, about 10 or 12 feet high bearing east & west dist from each other about a quarter of a mile. The Sloop is hauld up within 10 or 12 yards of the house laying in 2 feet water, she is Lighter built, appears very strong & clumsy. . . . On the shore stands several canoes & one large open skin boat.[12]

The Russian inhabitants were preoccupied with the maritime fur trade. In the words of Captain Clerke, commander of the *Discovery*, "the

[12]Beaglehole, III, 1354-1355.

business of the Russians here is to collect Skins of the Natives about the different Isles, particularly those of the Sea Beaver. . . ."[13] They did not farm, but they subsisted on fish, blubber, berries, and sarana (the root of the Kamchatka lily). James King, second lieutenant on the *Resolution*, remarked that ". . . their diet must be poor, which indeed was sufficiently evident from their sallow Complections & wan looks."[14] The settlement numbered from thirty to sixty Russians, from twenty to seventy Kamchadals, and 300 Aleuts[15] under Gerasim Izmailov,[16] who was the chief spokesman for the Russians and the main informant for the Englishmen. To the southwest on nearby Umnak Island there was another settlement of ninety-seven Russians and a sloop under Yakov Sapozhnikov.[17] Altogether there were from sixty to seventy Russians and as many or more Kamchadals, plus 300 Aleuts, on Unalaska Island and reportedly from 400 to 500 Russians and a "great many" Kamchadals on the entire Aleutian chain.[18]

A couple of days after Ledyard's visit, Izmailov called on Cook aboard the *Resolution*. Izmailov related that his men had avoided the Englishmen during their first stopover in June, taking them for Chinese or Japanese, and that initially the Russians did not make an appearance during this their second stopover in the belief they were French or Spanish. Now, however, the Russians were eager to get rum and brandy from their visitors, and the Aleuts tobacco for sniffing and chewing. And the Englishmen were keen to learn the condition of the Bering Sea and the availability of assistance in Kamchatka the following summer for the expedition's next attempt to find the Arctic passage. Cook also wanted to know the nature and extent of Russian discoveries and settlement between Asia and America. He was shown a crude map and told that the Russians had tried several times to establish a settlement on the adjacent continental mainland--the "great land"--but had been thwarted by native resistance. Evidently the Russian traders had settled

[13]Beaglehole, III, 1338.

[14]Beaglehole, III, 1453.

[15]Burney, III, 31; F. W. Howay, ed., *Zimmerman's Captain Cook* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1930), p. 82; Munford, p. 98; John Rickman, *Journal of Captain Cook's Last Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (London: E. Newberry, 1781), p. 298.

[16]Izmailov claimed to have been a member of Lieutenant Sindt's voyage of 1764 to the Bering Sea.

[17]Beaglehole, III, 1449.

[18]Beaglehole, III, 1141, 1338, 1449; Burney, III, 31; Ellis, II, 35-36; Munford, p. 98.

no farther east than Unalaska. As Cook reported, "It appeared by the Chart as well as by the testimony of Ismyloff and the others that this is as far as the Russians have discovered and extended themselves sence Behring's time. . . ."[19] "They all affirmed," he added, "that no persons of that nation had settled themselves so far to the eastward, as the place where the natives gave the note to Captain Clerke. . . ."[20] So Kodiak Island had not yet been settled. Moreover, the Unalaska settlement was clearly a permanent one. Although, as Cook admitted, "We neglected to inquire how long they have had a settlement upon Oonalashka . . . ,"[21] several members of the expedition noted that the Russians had already resided on the island for a year or two and would stay for another couple of years. Cook himself, for example, stated that "All these Furriers are releived from time to time by others, those we met with came here from *Okhotsk* in 1776 and are to return in 1781, so that there stay at the island will be four years at least."[22] Edgar asserted that "These people came here in 1777 & are to return to Kamscatka in 1780, at which time are to be releiv'd by others."[23] Some of the Russians told Clerke and William Ellis, surgeon's mate on the *Discovery,* that they would return to Okhotsk in 1780,[24] and King recorded that ". . . these people stay out five or eight years. . . ."[25] King also mentioned that Izmailov had said that he had left Okhotsk in 1776 and would return in 1781.[26] Finally, Ledyard reported that the Russians and Kamchadals had come to Unalaska from Kamchatka in the small sloop ". . . in order to establish a pelt and fur factory."[27] They had been there, he added, about five years, and every year the sloop delivered furs to Kamchatka (a two-month voyage, according to second lieutenant John

[19]Beaglehole, III, 455.

[20]Captain James Cook and Captain James King, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean,* 4 vols. (London: John Stockdale, 1784), III, 100. One member of the expedition, however--James Burney--asserted that "They have one settlement to the east of the island Oonalaska, near the high mountains." See Burney, IV, 19. He apparently obtained this information in Kamchatka.

[21]Cook and King, p. 104.

[22]Beaglehole, III, 458.

[23]Beaglehole, III, 1355.

[24]Beaglehole, III, 1339; Ellis, II, 35.

[25]Beaglehole, III, 1447.

[26]Beaglehole, III, 1449.

[27]Munford, p. 100.

Rickman of the *Discovery)* and returned with supplies.[28] Thus Egoochshac had been founded as a permanent base on the site of the Aleut village of Illiuliuk in the early 1770s. According to the Russian Orthodox missionary Ivan Veniaminov in his classic account of the Unalaska district, "It is said that this settlement was founded by Solovyov."[29] Ivan Solovyov[30] captained the vessel *St. Paul* during its five-year trading voyage of 1770-1775 to the Aleutians. He reached Captain's Harbor[31] in the summer of 1772 and remained until the spring of 1775. Here he established a camp of huts, dugouts, forge, and the like, which were "preserved," i.e., not abandoned, at his departure.[32] Only forty-one of Solvyov's original crew of seventy-one returned to Okhotsk with him.[33] Many of the rest had been killed by natives, but some may have stayed behind to man the new post; if not, the base was reoccupied in 1776, again by the *St. Paul,* now under the command of Izmailov, who returned to Okhotsk in 1781,[34] just as Cook and King stated.[35] The Umnak settlement was probably founded a year or two after Egoochshac by Sapozhnikov, who skippered the *St. Euplus* during its voyage of 1773-1779 to the Aleutians.

[28]A decade later Ledyard, an eager traveller, tried to travel from Siberia to Alaska with the aim of crossing the North American continent from west to east, but at the instigation of Grigory Shelikhov, a leading fur trader, he was stopped at Yakutsk and deported westwards by imperial order in the belief that he was a British agent intent on spying on Russian activity in the far North Pacific. See Stephen D. Watrous, ed., *John Ledyard's Journey Through Russia and Siberia, 1781-1788* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

[29]Ivan Veniaminov, *Zapiski ob ostrovakh Unalashkinskavo otdela [Notes on the Islands of the Unalaska District] (St. Petersburg: Rossiisko-Amerikanskaya Kompaniya, 1840), pt. 2, p. 173.*

[30]This was the same Solovyov who became notorious for killing Aleuts on a genocidal scale in the middle 1760s during his first voyage to the Aleutians.

[31]Named after Captain Mikhail Levashov who wintered there in 1769.

[32]N. N. Ogloblin, "Puteviya zapiski morekhoda I. M. Solovyova 1770-1775 gg." ["The Travel Notes of the Seafarer I. M. Solovyova, 1770-1775"], *Russkaya starina,* 76 (1892), 213.

[33]Solovyov returned with seven Aleuts and 4,886 fox and 1,900 sea otter pelts worth 150,000 rubles at Okhotsk.

[34]Vasilii Nikolaevich Berkh, *A Chronological History of the Discovery of the Aleutian Islands,* trans. Dimitri Krenov and ed. Richard A. Pierce (Kingston, Ontario: Limestone Press, 1974), p. 56.

[35]He may have been relieved by the *St. Alexander Nevsky,* which was sent from Okhotsk in 1781 by the "luckiest of all the Siberian Argonauts," the merchants Lapin, Orekhov, and Shilov, who also owned the *St. Paul.* See Berkh, pp. 56, 60.

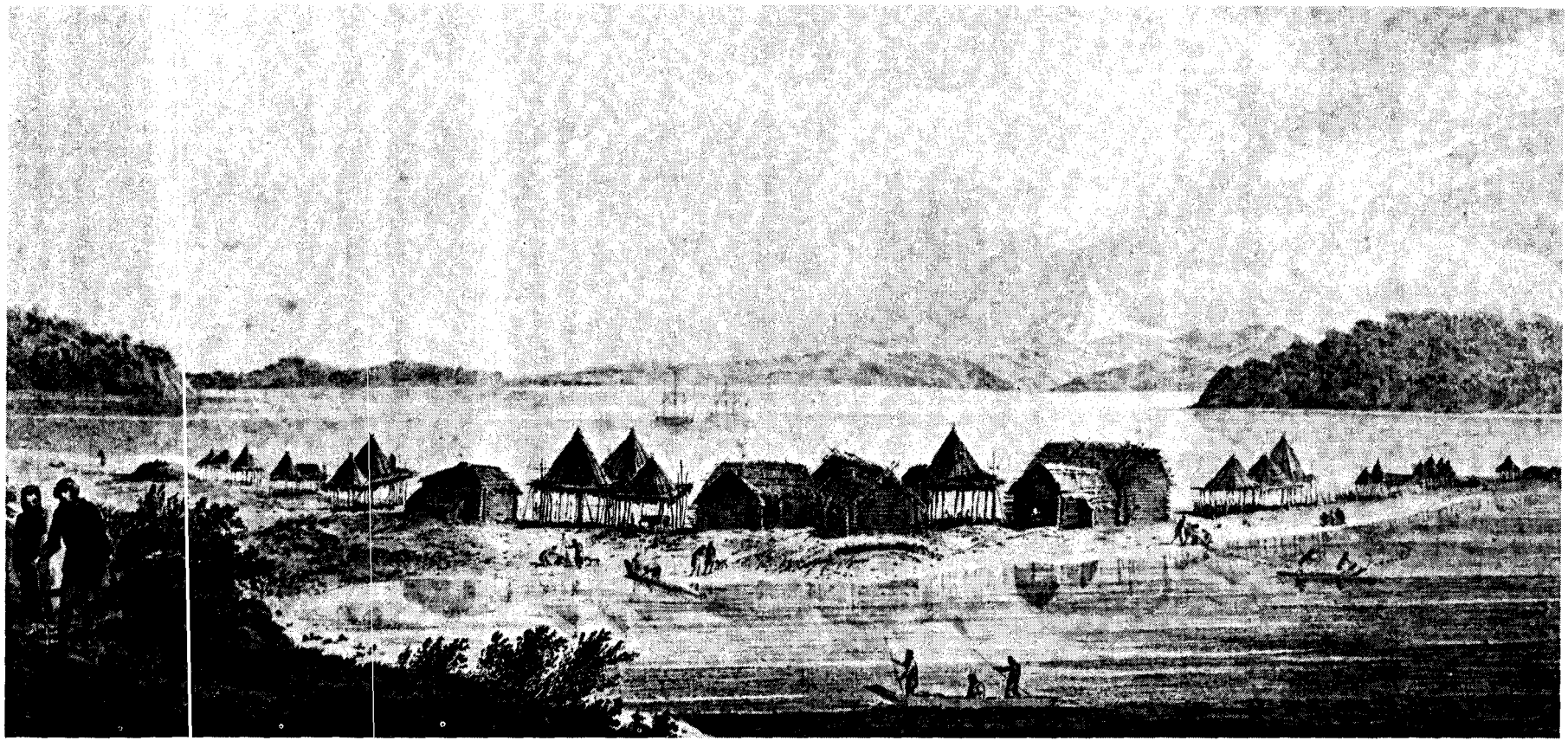

Fig. 2—A view of Petropavlovsk, from a watercolor painting by John Webber (courtesy State Library of New South Wales, Mitchell Library, ML ZDL PXX2 f41).

Thus, as the Soviet ethnographer Fyodorova has hypothesized,[36] on the basis of the several journals kept by members of Cook's last voyage (some of them published only recently) it can be concluded that in all likelihood the first permanent Russian settlement in North America was founded at Illiuliuk in 1772 or 1773. This predates by more than a decade the establishment by Grigory Shelikhov in 1784 on Kodiak Island of Three Saints Harbor, which has heretofore commonly been considered the first permanent Russian settlement in America. A year-round base entailed less voyaging from Siberia's ports and more trading on the Aleutians, so that profits were increased and control was tightened. Russian tenure, then, was probably stabilized during the third rather than the fourth quarter of the eighteenth century.

On October 26, having received letters of introduction from Izmailov to the authorities of Kamchatka, Cook's expedition quit Unalaska and stood for the Hawaiian Islands to winter. There, of course, the deified but ailing Cook was killed at Kealakekua Bay in mid-February of 1779 by aggrieved islanders. A month later, after considerable killing, burning, and looting, the Englishmen, now commanded by the consumptive Clerke, left for Kamchatka. This "wretched Country," as it was termed by one of the squadron's members, was to be used as a springboard for a final try at the Northwest or Northeast Passage. Cook himself had had "so bad an opinion" of the peninsula that "he was sure nothing could be got," according to King.[37] But it would have to suffice, as there was no other accessible and suitable base within striking distance of Bering Strait.

Kamchatka was reached at the beginning of May. The *Resolution* and *Discovery* anchored in Avacha Bay, which was acknowledged by the crews as a superb natural harbor, although it was still half-covered with ice and the snowbound vicinity had a dreary aspect. The expedition spent six weeks here wooding and watering, victualing and visiting before sailing north.[38] The two ships got as far as 69°N. before being halted by ice, and the *Discovery* was badly damaged. Neither a Northwest nor a Northeast Passage was discovered. As Burney put it,

[36]Svetlana G. Fyodorova, "Pervoye postoyannoye poselenie russkikh v Amerike i Dzh. Kuk" ["The First Permanent Russian Settlement in America and J. Cook"], pp. 228-236 of Kim V. Malakhovsky, ed., *Novoye v izuchenii Avstralii i Okeanii* (Moscow: Hayka, 1972.)

[37]Beaglehole, III, 650.

[38]The *Resolution* alone took on fifty-five tons of fresh water. See Cook and King, IV, 6.

". . .finding our run to the northward as well as our approaches to either continent obstructed by the sea being so full of ice, it was judged fruitless to make any more attempts."[39] They returned to Kamchatka for repairs,[40] supplies, and ballast in late August, just after Clerke had died and Gore had succeeded to the command. Another six weeks were passed in Avacha Bay; this time the peninsula was much more attractive in its verdant phase. Clerke was buried ashore, and in early October the expedition headed home via the Cape.

When the *Resolution* and *Discovery* called at Petropavlovsk for the first time in the spring, their crews were surprised and perplexed by the apprehension and suspicion displayed by the Russians. King and Webber were received ashore by "15 Russians under Arms" who were "much alarmed."[41]In a few days two envoys arrived from the governor, Major Behm, who resided at Bolsheretsk on the western side of the peninsula.[42] King noted that "They shew'd great surprise & even fear on our [*sic*: their] first coming on board, not expecting to see two ships so much larger than their own Sloops in this part of the World." ". . . they were frightn'd," he added, "& desired two of the boats crew to be left on shore as hostages for their safety."[43] The envoys also admitted that on the previous day during a visit by King to Sergeant Surgutsky, commandant of Petropavlovsk, they had been concealed in Surgutsky's kitchen to overhear the conversation and verify King's English nationality! Finally, they said that when Governor Behm at Bolsheretsk heard of the expedition's arrival, "It requir'd . . . the Majors authority to keep the inhabitants from leaving the Town."[44] Before the envoys had left Bolsheretsk a council of war had decided not to forcibly oppose the visitors but only because soldiers and guns were insufficient.[45]

[39]Burney, IV, 30.

[40]According to the quartermaster of the *Discovery,* Alexander Home, the *Resolution* ". . .was in so Rottin and crazy a condition that there was great reason to fear she would never go Home." Alexander Home, "An Account of Kamschatska," National Library of Australia, MS 690, p. 30.

[41]Beaglehole, III, 646, 1239.

[42]Until 1785, Bolsheretsk was the administrative center of Kamchatka.

[43]Beaglehole, III, 653.

[44]Beaglehole, III, 654.

[45][S. N. Sch.], "The English in Kamchatka, 1779," trans. Eleanor Lieven, *Geographical Journal,* 84 (1934), 417.

This reaction was motivated by more than just plain surprise[46] or traditional Russian xenophobia. In advancing across Siberia from the late 1500s, Muscovy had met little resistance, either internally or externally. Siberia's natives were not numerous or united, and they lacked firearms. And no foreign powers challenged the Russian conquest. The two that could have done so--China and Japan--refrained because of isolationist policies imposed by regimes that came to power just as Russia was penetrating Siberia--the Manchu (Ching) Dynasty in 1644 and the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1603. So Russia had a free hand east of the Urals, and her eastward advance was not seriously challenged until the beginning of the nineteenth century on the Northwest Coast. Consequently, Russia's forces in Siberia did not have to be large, and the appearance of any foreign force was both a rarity and a threat. Particularly was this the case with Kamchatka, whose peripheral location, maritime disposition, and outward thrust rendered it more exposed than most other parts of Siberia. Being more remote from European Russia, the peninsula was more difficult to man and supply and hence to defend. According to various members of the expedition, there were only from 400 to 500 soldiers and Cossacks in Kamchatka, including from thirty to forty at Petropavlovsk, and most of them were "transports" (exiles).[47] Petropavlovsk, Russia's second most important port on the Pacific after Okhotsk, had been described by Unalaska's Izmailov as a large town with forty guns, but it turned out to be ". . . a poor forlorn hamlet, containing only twenty-one wooden buildings . . . and . . . two guns . . . ," according to Ellis (Fig. 2).[48] This military presence was not only undermanned and underequipped but also undertrained, underpaid, and underfed, as Governor Shamlev, Behm's successor, informed the governor of Irkutsk Province (which included Kamchatka):

> Though I am ordered, in case of an arrival of foreigners in Kamchatka, not to allow more than ten people to land and this only for most urgent reasons, I see no possibility of executing this command, because all the guns of the Cossacks are in disorder. Only those are sent to Kamchatka from Jakutsk and Ochotsk which are not suitable for use there. There is neither a good artillery nor gunners. All the guns we have here will

[46]For example, Home noted that ". . . the Russians were greatly alarmed and it was no wonder for such an Event was as little lookt for as that of the Moons falling to Earth." See Home, p. 30.

[47]Beaglehole, III, 1258; Burney, IV, 13; Cook and King, IV, 152; Ellis, II, 241.

[48]Ellis, II, 205.

> sooner damage our gunners than the enemy, and the artillerymen do not know their business at all, so that the salutes on solemn days are often accompanied by disasters. At the departure of the English from Bolsherezh the gunner who was loading the cannon was killed.
>
> In the whole of Kamchatka . . . there are . . . in all garrisons 398 men. Every spring very many of these sicken, in consequence of catching the scurvy; only one part of the so-called healthy people possess ammunition; the greater part is dressed in dogs' and stags' skins in the local manner, and therefore have not even the appearance of a soldier. As no uniforms are delivered to them, they are not punished for their unsoldierly appearance. Their pay is 4 roubles 28 kopecks a quarter; in the form of provision however they get 32½ pounds of flour and groats monthly. On that account the fixed pay is extremely small not only for a livelihood, but also for buying food; therefore they are allowed, in order to save them from exhaustion by hunger, to catch fish in summer and to salt them for the winter. Thus, if they would be taken away from that work to build fortifications and make preparations for defense from inimical and foreign people, as well in Bolsherezh as in the har bour of Petropavlovsk, they would die of starvation.[49]

Hence Captain King's comment that "From these circumstances, it is pretty apparent that the Russian commanders in Siberia, had, from our visiting this place, been induced to attend to the defenceless situation of it; and the honest Serjeant [Surgutsky] shrewdly observed, that, as we had found the way thither, others might do the same, who might not be so welcome as ourselves."[50]

Furthermore, as Shmalev indicated, many of the Russians were disabled by scurvy. The English seamen, by contrast, were healthy and fit, thanks to Cook's radical insistence upon fresh food and water, clean and airy quarters, clean and warm bedding and clothing, scrupulous personal hygiene, regular exercise, and ample rest. Indeed, not once did scurvy appear on either ship throughout the voyage,[51] although venereal disease was prevalent. Among the Russians on Kamchatka scurvy was endemic. Ellis observed that "Most of the Russians were most terribly

[49][Sch.], "English in Kamchatka," p. 418.

[50]Cook and King, IV, 80.

[51]Howay, p. 101.

afflicted with the scurvy; and one man had been ill near four years. . . . "[52] ". . . Many of the Russian souldiers die of it," asserted David Samwell, surgeon on the *Discovery*.[53] His counterpart on the Resolution, John Law, visited Petropavlovsk daily to treat the scorbutic residents. The Englishmen regularly collected nettles, wild celery, wild garlic, and even birch sap as antiscorbutics, but the Russians, according to Home, ". . . were too lazy to gather the green stuff with which the country abounded."[54] He added disdainfully:

> When they saw us Taping the Birch Trees they told us that the Juice of the Birch was exceeding good. But they never offered to do it themselves, and at the same time their Hospital was full of scorbutic people . . . and scarcely a Russian, soldier or sailor But what was more or less aflicted with it. They expressed great surprize at our eating of nettles, and it was plain it was a thought that never had struck them. It was our custom whilst here to strew out soup . . . thick with nettles and cellary, and besides this to eat great quantitys of Boiled nettles . . . and along with our Meal to drink the Juice of the Birch . . . and Leeks was always eatt raw . . . and also Boiled amongst the Broth. But they did not think fit to be Taught by us in such matters. . . .[55]

No wonder that King remarked that ". . . the difference in the appearance of our people & the Russian Soldiers is very striking."[56] This sentiment was echoed by Governor Behm. Samwell wrote:

> The Major often expressed his Surprize that all our people should look so well after having been out near three Years, and said that from our Appearance he should have supposed that we had but just left England, nor was he less astonished to hear that we had lost but such a small Number of Men by sickness, telling us that the Russians send their small Sloops with about 60 Men in them on a Summer's Cruise to the Coast of America and the adjacent Isles & that it often happens that not more than 20 or 30 of them return home alive, the rest dying of the

[52]Ellis, II, 216.

[53]Beaglehole, III, 1242.

[54]Beaglehole, III, 659n.

[55]Home, p. 17.

[56]Beaglehole, III, 670.

> Scurvy & other Disorders; & he was somewhat amazed to find that we carried only 112 Men in the Resolution & but 70 in the Discovery, for the Russian Sloops of one Mast and ab[t] 70 ton Burden generally carried sixty Hands.[57]

Another concern also made the Russians anxious. Between Kamchatka and Alaska they had opened the lucrative sea otter trade, which they jealously guarded. This enterprise had been successfully monopolized by the Russians ever since it had been serendipitously initiated in the early 1740s by Bering's second expedition. The pelts brought high prices in China, and the Russians did not want to see these prices lowered and their catches reduced by competition from Englishmen or anyone else, especially if the competitors were to gain access to the ports of South China. These ports were closed to Russian traders, who had to bear the heavier expense of getting their furs to Kyakhta on the Mongolian frontier, where they were permitted to make transactions. A prime sea otter skin was worth thirty to forty-five rubles (six to nine pounds sterling) in Kamchatka but brought twice as much at Kyakhta and thrice as much at Peking.[58] "Such is the jealousy the Russians entertain of the trade to the north, which they now look upon as we did formerly upon the trade to America, as of right belonging to them;--founding their claim on their priority of discovery . . . ," commented Rickman.[59]

Finally, Izmailov in his letters of introduction, one of which was delivered to Governor Behm, had, in Samwell's words, ". . . represented us as Traders and Hollanders or for what he knew Pirates, and advised his Countrymen at Kamtschatka to be upon their Guard against us . . . ."[60] He also misrepresented the English ships as packet boats. This apparent paranoia on Izmailov's part stemmed from a more specific circumstance that had made the peninsula's Russian inhabitants inordinately wary. Only eight years earlier a Hungarian exile named Baron Benyowsky had fomented an insurrection at Bolsheretsk. Several Russians, including the governor, were duped and killed. Several others, including Izmailov, were taken hostage by Benyowsky and forced to sail him to Canton, whence they returned to Europe on French ships.[61] This incident under-

[57]Beaglehole, III, 1247.

[58]Burney, IV, 19; Cook and King, IV, 156; Ellis, II, 215; Home, p. 26.

[59]Rickman, p. 343.

[60]Beaglehole, III, 1242.

[61]See Captain Pasfield Oliver, ed., *The Memoirs and Travels of Mauritius Augustus Count de Benyowsky* (London: Adventure Series, 1893).

lined the weakness of Russian forces in Kamchatka and unnerved the Russian residents. It was still fresh in their memories at the time of the arrival of Cook's expedition, which some locals took to be a punitive force under Benyowsky.

Despite this weakness and fear, the peninsula's authorities, particularly Governor Behm, outdid themselves in accommodating their English visitors. Notwithstanding the peninsula's meagre resources,[62] Behm and his successor, Captain Shmalev, combed the countryside to meet the expedition's needs. Altogether thirty-nine head of cattle,[63] nearly 30,000 pounds of rye flour, 400 pounds of tobacco,[64] 100 pounds of sugar, and 20 pounds of tea, plus milk, butter, eggs, honey, ducks, venison, turnips, tar, rope, and canvas were provided.[65] Behm also privately presented gifts worth at least £200.[66] In addition, the Kamchadals supplied more fish than the two ships could use. The fresh beef and fresh bread were especially welcome, for the crews had not received any fresh beef or a full ration of bread (one pound per man per day) for two-and-a-half years.[67] Although these supplies were very expensive at the local prices of eight to ten rubles per pood (thirty-six pounds) of flour and 100 rubles per head of cattle[68]--twice as expensive as Sapozhnikov on Unalaska had said they would be--Behm would accept no payment for them.[69] The Englishmen were as overwhelmed by this gen-

[62]For example, Home observed that "It is but seldom things can be got so that every where there is great poverty . . ." Home, p. 16, and Burney noted that ". . . Russians of St. Peter and Paul were as much in need of assistance as able to supply our wants . . ." Burney, IV, 14.

[63]There were no more than thirty cattle at the peninsular capital of Bolsheretsk. Cook and King, III, 338.

[64]This amount was enough for three pounds for each user in the expedition. Burney, IV, 15.

[65]Beaglehole, III, 657-659, 668, 674n, 675-676, 707, 1260, 1280; Cook and King, III, 338, IV, 4, 6-7, 70, 80-81; Ellis, II, 221, 231, 298-299, 302; Howay, pp. 105, 107; Munford, p. 167; Rickman, pp. 345-347.

[66]Cook and King, III, 399.

[67]Bumey, IV, 16; Cook and King, IV, 4, 6.

[68]Beaglehole, III, 647. Manufactures cost three times as much as in England. Cook and King, IV, 155.

[69]Altogether the Russians provided supplies worth 2,257 rubles at state prices but probably more than 8,000 rubles at market prices. See J. C. Beaglehole, ed., *Cook and the Russians* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1973), pp. 6-8, 7n. Also see Ya. M. Svet, trans., *Tret'e plavanie kapitana Dzhemsa Kuka* [The Third Voyage of Captain James Cook] (Moscow: Izdatelstvo "Mysl," 1971), pp. 574-575.

erosity as the Russians were by the expedition's exploits. "Nothing can exceed the attention and friendship of this Worthy Governor," wrote Clerke. He added: "Our wants were no sooner hinted than a supply was order'd with every expedition that could be thought of, in short it appear'd their warmest wish and utmost ambition to contribute to our convenience and satisfaction."[70] Henry Roberts, master's mate on the Resolution, acknowledged Behm's "extraordinary civillity's & unbounded generosity."[71]King was more eloquent in his gratitude:

> In this wretched extremity of the earth, beyond conception barbarous and inhospitable, out of the reach of civilization, bound and barricadoed with ice, and covered with summer snow, we experienced the tenderest feelings of humanity, joined to a nobleness of mind, and elevation of sentiment, which would have done honour to any clime or nation.[72]

The guests expressed their appreciation by giving Behm 100 gallons of brandy--no mean present in the eyes of the bibulous seamen--some curiosities, guns, and a gold watch.[73] The brandy must have been particularly appreciated, for the reason established earlier by Ledyard and now corroborated by Home: "Brandy is lookt upon as the very Elixir of Life. When a Bottle is produced they cannot conceal their Joy, and when once they have got a little . . . they will give any price for more."[74] Some of the expedition's papers were also entrusted to Behm for delivery to the English ambassador in St. Petersburg upon the governor's imminent return to European Russia.

The question arises--at the risk of cynicism--as to why the Russians were so generous with scarce and costly supplies. It is true that Governor Behm had received orders from his empress to assist the Englishmen, but he need not have been so liberal. Probably traditional Russian hospitality was partially responsible, as was a genuine desire to help fellow European Christians in their scientific endeavors. But the Russians may also have been motivated by a desire to impress their visitors into believing that Kamchatka (and by implication all of the Russian

[70]Beaglehole, III, 658.

[71]Beaglehole, III, 673n.

[72]Cook and King, III, 353-354.

[73]Rickman, p. 347.

[74]Home, p. 25.

Far East) was more bountiful and hence more formidable than it actually was. In other words, the magnanimity may have been in part at least a deliberate deceit designed to conceal the region's vulnerability from potential rivals, particularly those who might find a convenient passage from the North Atlantic to the North Pacific.[75] Be that as it may, in an attempt to lessen this vulnerability a Russian galiot, the *St. George,* arrived at Petropavlovsk from Okhotsk a month before the expedition's departure with supplies and soldiers, including an officer and fifty men ". . . to reinforce this & some of the Neighbouring places"[76] and "2 great Guns for the Garrison."[77] At the end of the year St. Petersburg acknowledged Kamchatka's "deficiencies" and ordered the governor of Irkutsk Province ". . . to provide, according to need and possibility, security from powerful hostile action . . ." against the peninsula.[78] So in 1780, together with a new governor, four cannoneers, fifty rifles "fit for use," 1,800 pounds of lead, and 180 pounds of gunpowder were sent to Kamchatka.[79] In 1784, Grigory Shelikhov, with much state assistance, founded Three Saints Harbor on Kodiak Island, thereby giving Russia a commanding position in the Gulf of Alaska. A year later the elaborate North Eastern Expedition under Joseph Billings was launched to, among other things, show the flag in the very far North Pacific waters so recently tracked by Cook. In 1787 Jean De Lesseps, the only survivor of Lapérouse's voyage (1785-1788), learned at Petropavlovsk of a plan to strengthen its garrison and fortifications.[80] In the same year Catherine II ordered the dispatch of four warships from Cronstadt to the North Pacific to protect Russian interests there. Although these vessels were not sent, owing to the outbreak of war with Turkey and Swe-

[75]If such were the case, the ruse did not work. Seven years later, in 1786, Captain Peters of the British East India Company arrived at Petropavlovsk with a proposal to trade supplies for furs. Britain did not try to take advantage of Russia's military weakness in the region until the Crimean War, when an Anglo-French squadron attacked Petropavlovsk (and was ignominiously repulsed). See John J. Stephan, "The Crimean War in the Far East," *Modern Asian Studies* III, Pt. 3 (July 1969), 257-277.

[76]Beaglehole, III, 705.

[77]The *St. George* took thirty-five days to sail the 1,000 miles from Okhotsk. Cook and King, IV, 79-80. Beaglehole, III, 705.

[78]Beaglehole, *Cook and the Russians,* p. 9.

[79][Sch.], "English in Kamchatka," p. 419.

[80]Jean B. de Lesseps, *Travels in Kamtschatka* (New York: Arno Press, 1970), I, 8-9, 13-14. Ironically, Cook's expedition also served to strengthen Russia's presence in northeastern Asia, for his landing on the Chukchi Peninsula in the summer of 1778 prompted some recalcitrant Chukchi to voluntarily submit to Russian tribute.

den, the Siberian Flotilla, based at Okhotsk, was bolstered--from five vessels in 1786 to ten in 1804.[81] Similarly, the populations of Okhotsk and Petropavlovsk more or less doubled by the end of the century.[82] Finally, in 1798 the Kamchatka Regiment of 300 men under Major Somov was stationed on Kamchatka and along the Okhotsk Seaboard.[83] Russia's far eastern flank was thereby considerably strengthened.

On 10 October 1779 the *Resolution* and *Discovery* set sail from Kamchatka and stood south. The consensus of opinion among the officers was that a course ". . . going to the Eastward of Japan and touching for refreshments at Macao in China would be the most eligible Plan for us to pursue in making our Passage home."[84] At the end of November the two vessels dropped anchor for six weeks in Macao Roads at the mouth of the Canton River. Here, in the words of George Gilbert, midshipman on the *Discovery*, "The Chinese suppl[i]ed us very plentifully with provisions of all kinds but at a very dear rate. . . ."[85] Also obtained was news of the outbreak of war between England and France and of the progress of the American Revolution. More importantly, the Englishmen sold the remainder of their furs for fabulous prices, particularly the sea otter pelts. Only now did the ships' companies realize that they had been outbargained in Kamchatka, where "most" of their furs had been sold to Russian merchants for what had then been considered a "great price," or, in King's words, a "larger Price . . . than was ecpect'd."[86] The merchant Vasily Feodosich had paid four to six pounds sterling (twenty to thirty rubles) for good sea otter skins and £60 for the best pelt.[87] But this was only half as much as the Chinese paid.[88] Twenty pelts which belonged to the commanders were sold at Canton for $800, or $40 each.[89] Gilbert was ecstatic; ". . . the Chinese being

[81]James R. Gibson, *Feeding the Russian Fur Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 103.

[82]Gibson, pp. 19-21.

[83]Gibson, p. 90n.

[83]Beaglehole, III, 1281.

[85]Beaglehole, III, 713.

[86]Beaglehole, III, 660.

[87]Beaglehole, III, 1243.

[88]Moreover, at Petropavlovsk some of the English sailors had sold their sea otter skins for rubles, but as there was little to be bought with them, they were kicked about the deck in frustration.

[89]Cook and King, IV, 236-238.

very Eager to purchase . . . gave us from 50 to 70 dollars a skin; that is from 11£5s to 15£15s for what we bought with only a hatchet or a Saw."[90] The rest of the men were equally excited, being convinced that their fortunes could easily be made in the maritime fur trade. King described the situation:

> During the absence of our party from Macao, a brisk traffic had been carrying on with the Chinese for our sea-otter skins, the value of which had augmented every day. One of our sailors disposed of his stock, alone, for eight hundred dollars; and a few of the best skins, which were clean, and had been carefully preserved, produced a hundred and twenty dollars each. The total amount of the value, in goods and cash, that was obtained for the furs of both our vessels, we are confident was not less than two thousands pounds sterling; and it was the general opinion, that at least two-thirds of the quantity we had originally procured from the Americans, were by this time spoiled and worn out, or had been bestowed as presents, and otherwise disposed of, in Kamtschatka. If, in addition to these facts, we consider, that we at first collected the furs without having just ideas of their real value; that most of them had been worn by the savages from whom we purchased them; that little regard was afterwards shewn to their preservation; that they were frequently made use of as bed-clothes, and likewise for other purposes, during our cruize to the northward; and that, in all probability, we never realized the full value for them in China; the benefits that might accrue from a voyage to that part of the American coast where we obtained them, undertaken with commercial views, will certainly appear of sufficient importance to claim the public attention.
>
> So great was the rage with which our seamen were possessed to return to Cook's River [Inlet], and there procure another cargo of skins, by which they might be enabled to make their fortunes, that, at one time, they were almost on the point of proceeding to a mutiny.[91]

King suggested that the British East India Company send two ships from Canton with iron, woolen cloth, glass and copper trinkets, and knives to the Northwest Coast in the early spring to trade until the

[90]Beaglehole, III, 714.

[91]Cook and King, IV, 245-246.

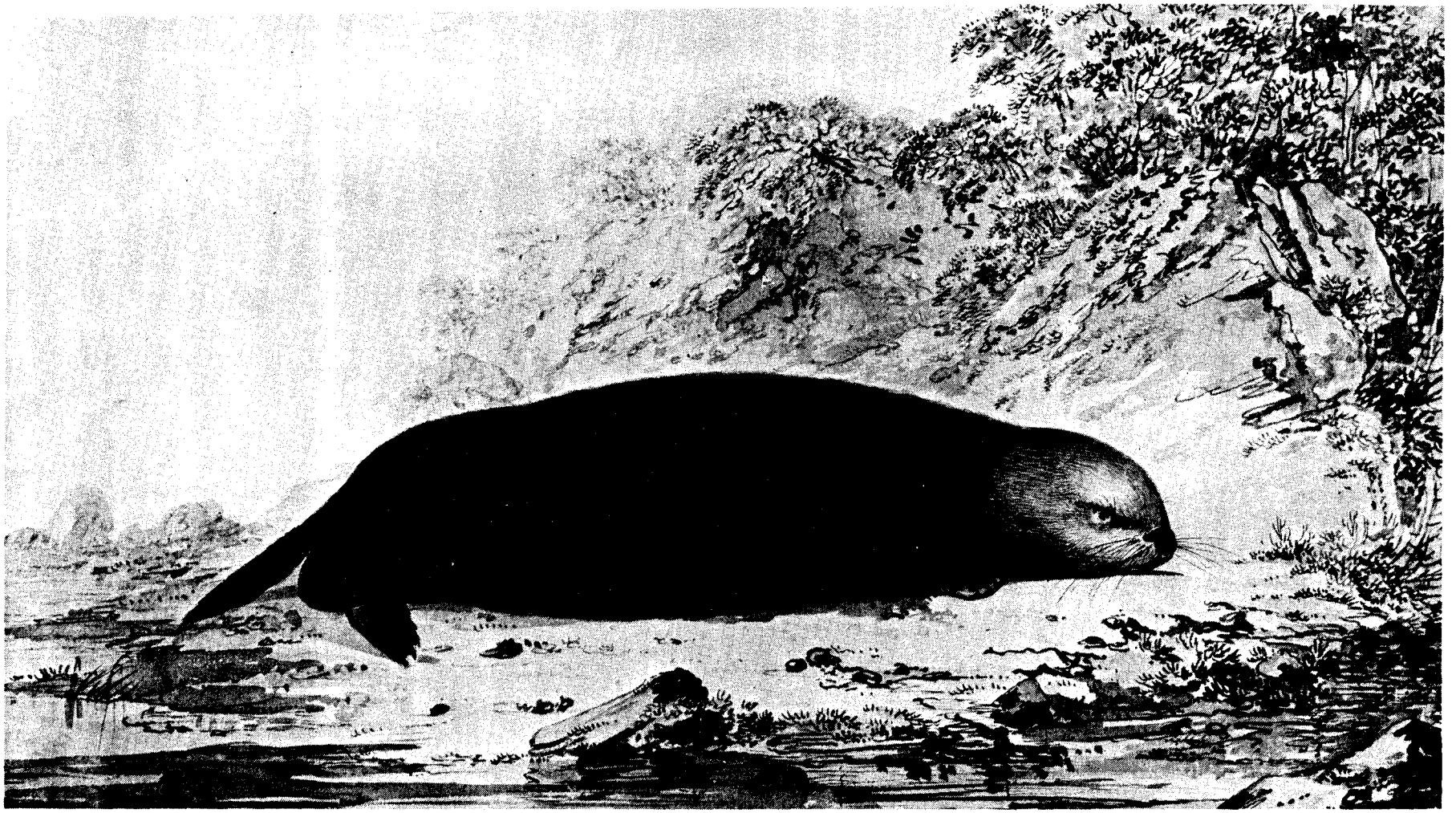

Fig. 3—A freshly killed young sea otter of Nootka Sound, from a watercolor painting by John Webber (courtesy National Library of Australia, Rex Van Kivell Collection, NK 52A).

early fall; they would, he asserted, return with 250 sea otter pelts worth $100 each or a total of $25,000, as against a cost of $6,000.[92]

The object of this excitement was a playful marine mammal with a lustrous coat--the sea otter or "sea beaver" (Fig. 3). Its pelt was first encountered by Cook at Nootka Sound. His two ships stopped there at the end of March 1778 for "watering" and "wooding," i.e., to get fresh water and make new masts.[93] No sooner had they anchored than they were surrounded by the canoes of Indians who were eager to trade.[94] Around the sound there were five Indian villages, each containing 500 to 2,000 inhabitants,[95] and additional Indians came from distant points to trade. At times, as many as 500 natives in more than 100 canoes hovered around the two ships.[96] The Nootkas proved to be astute entrepreneurs. They preventd neighboring tribes from trading with the Englishmen in order to safeguard their profitable role as commercial middlemen, and, in Cook's own words, they ". . . possessed such strict notions of their having an exclusive property in the produce of their country . . ." that "They even wanted our people to pay for the wood and water that were carried on board," as well as the grass.[97] According to Burney, ". . . Iron, Brass and Copper were the articles on which the Indians set the greatest Value."[98] Cook described the scene:

> A great many Canoes filled with the Natives were about the Ships all day, and a trade commenced betwixt us and them, which was carried on with the Strictest honisty on boath sides. Their articles were the Skins of various animals, such as Bears, Wolfs, Foxes, Dear, Rackoons, Polecats, Martins and in particular the Sea Beaver, the same as is found on the coast of

[92]Cook and King, IV, 246-250.

[93]In addition, the sound was reconnoitered, astronomical observerations were made, natural specimens were collected, bearings were taken, livestock were pastured, grass was cut, fish were caught, animals were hunted, and spruce beer was made (by boiling coniferous boughs in water and adding malt liquor and sugar).

[94]No wonder that Nootka Sound subsequently became a major rendezvous for ships engaged in the maritime fur trade. Apart from a spacious and sheltered harbor and trading natives, Ledyard noted that ". . . as it afforded excellent timber we furnished ourselves with a new mizen-mast, spare yards and other spars, besides wood. It also afforded us excellent water, a variety of good fish and the shores with some excellent plants. . ." Munford, p. 69.

[95]Burney, II, 39.

[96]Cook and King, II, 212.

[97]Cook and King, II, 226.

[98]Burney, II, 39.

> Kamtchatka. Cloathing made of these skins and a nother sort made, either of the bark of a tree or some plant like hemp; Weapons, such as Bows and Arrows, Spears &c[a] Fish hooks and Instruments of various kinds, pieces of carved work and even human sculs and hands, and a variety of little articles too tedious to mention. For these things they took in exchange, Knives, chissels, pieces of iron & Tin, Nails, Buttons, or any kind of meta1.[99]

The Nootkas also swapped fish, whale oil, venison, and even wild garlic. But the Englishmen preferred furs. Midshipman Edward Riou of the *Discovery* wrote: "The Natives continue their Visits bringing with them apparently every thing they are in possession of, but nothing is so well received by us as skins, particularly those of the sea beaver or Otter, the fur of which is very soft and delicate."[100] The Indians also liked sea otter pelts. Their clothes were made of cedar bark, elk hide, and fur, especially sea otter fur, which was used for trimming as well as whole garments. As Clerke noted, "Of the Skin of the Sea Beaver is formed a great, & by them the most esteem'd part of their dress. . . ."[101] The Englishmen literally bought the Nootkas' clothing off their backs! Ledyard summarized the trading:

> We purchased while here about 1500 beaver,[102] beside other skins, but took none but the best, having no thoughts at that time of using them to any other advantage than converting them to the purposes of cloathing, but it afterwards happened that skins which did not cost the purchaser sixpence sterling sold in China for 100 dollars. Neither did we purchase a quarter part of the beaver and other furrskins we might have done, and most certainly should have done had we known of meeting the opportunity of disposing of them to such an astonishing profit.[103]

Midshipman James Trevenen of the Resolution was equally sanguine about the commercial prospects. He reported that William Bligh, master on the *Resolution* (and the future notorious captain of the *Bounty*), had traded at Tahiti a shilling hatchet for thirty green beads, for twelve

[99]Beaglehole, III, 296-297.

[100]Beaglehole, III, 296n.

[101]Beaglehole, III, 1325.

[102]Including more than 300 on the *Discovery*. Rickman, p. 246.

[103]Munford, p. 70.

of which he then exchanged on the Northwest Coast for six sea otter skins, which could have fetched an average of £15 each at Canton--making a return of £90 from 1 shilling.[104] On another occasion Trevenen himself traded a broken buckle at Nootka Sound for a "very fine" sea otter pelt that he sold at Canton for $300.[105] Upon leaving Nootka Sound, Cook was importuned to return by the Indians, who promised to stock furs in that event.

In the Gulf of Alaska the expedition again met natives with furs to trade. In Prince William Sound iron and beads were exchanged for sea otter skins; half a dozen blue beads fetched a skin worth $90 to $l00,[106] and in Cook Inlet pelts, salmon, and cranberries were acquired for "trifles." By now Cook felt that fur trading along the Northwest Coast would be profitable. He wrote that "The fur of these creatures [sea otters] is certainly finer than that of any other animal we know of; consequently the discovery of this part of North America, where so valuable an article of commerce is to be procured, ought certainly to be considered as a matter of some consequence."[107] "There is no doubt," he added, "but a very benificial fur trade might be carried on with the inhabitants of this vast coast . . . ."[108]

As Cook's ships neared the Aleutian Islands, the natives became more unwilling to trade. Unknown to the Englishmen, the Aleuts had been forbidden by their Russian overlords to truck with anyone else. And if Cook still had any doubts about the prospects of the maritime fur trade, they were dispelled by the Russians. At Unalaska he found that "their great object is the sea beaver or otter," and he "never heard them inquire after any other animal. . . ,"[109] He also learned that the Russian enterprise had originated with the second expedition of Bering, to whom the Russians paid great respect. The business was, Cook concluded, "very beneficial," being ". . . of much private advantage to individuals, and of public utility to the Russian nation."[110] King, too, ob-

[104]Christopher Lloyd and R. C. Anderson, eds., *A Memoir of James Trevenen* (Greenwich: Navy Records Society, 1959), pp. 21-22.

[105]Lloyd and Anderson, p. 28.

[106]Ellis, I, 243.

[107]Cook and King, II, 235-236.

[108]Beaglehole, III, 371.

[109]Captain James Cook [and Captain James King], *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (London: G. Nicol and T. Cadell, 1784), II, 509.

[110]Captain James Cook, 497.

served that "The principal object of the Russian colonies amongst these Islands is the procuring of the Sea otter, which they sell to the Chinese at an exorbitant profit; where those Skins are not to be procur'd they have no settlements."[111] The Russians were found to be as "immoderately fond' of sea otters as they were of grog and tobacco. About fourteen Russian ships plied the maritime fur trade out of Okhotsk and Petropavlovsk,[112] and Unalaska alone cleared 100,000 rubles (20,000 pounds) annually from this traffic.[113]

Thus, Russia's lucrative sea otter trade was exposed by 1781, when the first accounts of Cook's last voyage by Rickman and Zimmerman were published. These and subsequent accounts, such as Ledyard's of 1783 and Cook's and King's of 1784, told readers that there were "great numbers" of sea otters along the Northwest Coast, that the natives were "quite keen" to trade sea otter pelts, taking bagatelles in exchange, and that the pelts had a "great value" in China. Among the first to utilize this information were two members of Cook's own expedition--Captain Dixon in the *Queen Charlotte* and Captain Portlock in the *King George,* who were on the coast in 1786. The first, however, was Captain Hanna in 1785 in, appropriately, the brig *Sea Otter.* In the late 1780s American vessels, mostly out of Boston, also entered the "Northwest trade," and by the end of the century they were outcompeting the British.

Although their monopoly was now broken, the Russian traders still enjoyed several advantages, quite apart from their half-century head start. For one thing, they controlled the sources of those varieties of sea otter with the best pelts--Kurilian, Kamchatkan, and Aleutian. The Northwest Coast, New Albionian, and Californian varieties, which were accessible to the Yankee traders, were poorer in terms of color, texture, and thickness. The Russians also controlled the principal fur seal rookery--the Pribilof Islands. In addition, the Russians possessed the world's best hunters of sea otters in the Aleuts. These "marine Cossacks," with their maneuverable kayaks and unerring harpoons, were virtually enslaved by the Russians, who themselves really neither hunted nor traded but simply exacted. The Americans, on the other hand, had to be content with riskier and costlier shipside or shipboard trading with the Northwest Coast Indians, who occasionally attacked and even captured unwary trading vessels. Furthermore, the Russians had permanent bases

[111]Beaglehole, III, 1446.

[112]Cook and King, IV, 157.

[113]Rickman, p. 289.

amid the sea otter grounds, while the Americans had to voyage from New England around the Horn and make the best of one or two trading seasons on the coast. Finally, the Russians had the vested interest and hence strong support of their tsar--at least from 1799, when the Russian-American Company was chartered under the aegis of the Russian Government to monopolize the exploitation and administration of Alaska.

Despite these advantages, the Russians failed to oust their American competitors. Thanks to Russia's entrepreneurial and technological backwardness--and American acumen in the same respects--the Yankee "coasters" had better ships, better sailors, and better trade goods. Also, the Americans were more imaginative and more ruthless traders. They were not loath, for example, to barter spirits and guns to the Tlingits and even to incite them against the neighboring Russians. Moreover, the Americans had access to Canton, which remained closed to the Russians, who had to market their furs via a more lengthy and more difficult route overland to Kyakhta. Then, too, the American shipmasters spread their commercial risk through diversification--sandalwooding from the South Sea Islands, smuggling and poaching along the western coast of New Spain, whaling in both halves of the Pacific, trafficking in hides and tallow from California, and even provisioning Russian Alaska. Only the financial power of the Hudson's Bay Company and managerial genius of George Simpson prevented the Americans from completely dominating the Northwest Coast,

Thus, thanks to Cook's third voyage, Russia was made aware that the Pacific was as much as "Western Sea" as it was an "Eastern Ocean." Cook himself, of course, did not live to see this happen, but it was the bold curiosity of this master mariner that documented Russia's first permanent settlement in America, underscored Russia's weakness in Kamchatka, and exposed Russia's monopoly on the sea otter trade. As a result, British and American rivals soon appeared in the far North Pacific and eventually halted Russian eastward expansion. That, however, is another story.

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