



HMS BEAVER

Charts

THE SEAS

1863 — 1870

PACIFIC NAVAL
SURVEYS

THE VERSATILE BEAVER

HER MAJESTY'S SHIP BEAVER CHARTS THE SEAS 1863-1870

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Much has been written about the exploits of the pioneer steamship BEAVER and rightly so. Was she not the first steamship to operate in the waters of the North Pacific? Did she not enjoy an unusually long life from her launching in England in 1835 to her sad end in 1888 near what is now the Lion's Gate Bridge entrance to Vancouver harbour? A hundred years ago this Hudson's Bay Company ship was the most famous if not the most useful vessel on the coast of British Columbia when the latter was but a mere fur-trading post. In this period of B.C.'s centennial celebrations it is well to remember too that it was the good ship BEAVER which helped to carry the gold hungry miners from Victoria to the Fraser river in 1858. Not content with having been on hand in Victoria harbour in 1843 when she disembarked the Hudson's Bay Company staff who finally established a fort on the site of B.C.'s capital city, the BEAVER contributed to the transportation system of 1958 which culminated in the establishment of the colony of B.C. and the selection of a Hudson's Bay Company factor as the colony's first governor at Langley. Certainly with a career of 53 years to her credit, the builders of the BEAVER had neither envisaged the versatility of their craft nor her long longevity.

It was therefore only fitting that the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada erected a cairn at Prospect Point in Stanley Park, Vancouver, commemorating this astonishing vessel. Part of the inscription contained upon this cairn has this to say: "The story of the BEAVER is the story of the early development of the west coast of Canada". This statement has a wealth of meaning. As a

trader, explorer, freighter or even in her humble career as a tow-boat, the BEAVER'S history is that of the growth of Canada's Pacific coast covering a period of half a century. Develop the coast she certainly did in the trading sphere but what is more, she spent an eventful seven years surveying the seas off the B.C. coast and thus helped to make the seas safe for the vast amount of shipping which has developed with the industrial empire of B. C.

The story of Her Majesty's Ship BEAVER - or Her Majesty's Hired Surveying Vessel BEAVER as she was called in Admiralty documents - flying the White Ensign is not well known probably because of her association with the traditionally Silent Service during this period. Nevertheless, a search of Admiralty documents in the Public Record Office and in the Archives of the Hydrographic Branch in London, as well as other naval correspondence in the Provincial Archives of B. C. has revealed an interesting story of the BEAVER'S achievements in the hydrographic field and indicates that the BEAVER followed in the proud footsteps - or should it be waterways?- of Vancouver's DISCOVERY and CHATHAM.

Little need be said about the close relationship between the Royal Navy and the Hudson's Bay Company in the early history of the North West Coast of America. Suffice to say that their history in this region was that of British exploration and trade protection in what was termed "this North Pacific gem". After Trafalgar in 1805 the Navy was used as a weapon of national policy. Without a rival on the high seas the Royal Navy became the British policeman in all corners of the globe and the North Pacific was no exception. During this nineteenth century period, often called PAX BRITANNICA, many naval vessels were employed charting the seas and it was due to their efforts that charts of B.C. waters,

the Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence and Atlantic seaboard appeared on the market. By 1862 the Pacific coast surveys were largely completed as a result of the endeavours of Captain G. H. Richards who was ably assisted by other naval officers in HMS PLUMPER and HECATE, famous vessels whose names still adorn waterways and straits on B.C.'s coast. Captain Richards was recalled to become Hydrographer of the Navy (1863 - 1874) and in this capacity he never forgot the survey needs of the Pacific Coast.

Prior to leaving his base at Esquimalt for his return passage to England, Richards sought to organize a scheme whereby the survey of the coast of British Columbia could be continued. He knew well that much survey work remained to be done if the new colony's maritime trade was to prosper. Many sections of the northern coast, inlets and straits were as yet uncharted and neither trade nor settlement could be hoped for unless these waters could be made safe by accurate surveys and their translation into charts for mariners. The Admiralty decided to grant £3500 per annum for the continuation of the survey and Richards, aware that no HM vessel would be made available for hydrographic work alone, cast his eyes upon the Hudson's Bay Company BEAVER which was at that time at anchor in the inner harbour of Victoria. He therefore recommended to the Admiralty that this steamer should be hired as the best means of carrying on the survey work. However, financial considerations intervened as the Admiralty grant was £500 short of the required £4000 to charter the vessel for one year. Undismayed he extracted a promise from Governor Douglas that this extra amount required would be paid from the treasury of the colony. Douglas obviously knew a bargain when it came along and the

Colony's investment in this hydrographic survey produced excellent dividends in the years to follow.

It had become a practice with the Admiralty to charter local vessels for these purposes where larger naval vessels were not required or when economies were being introduced into naval estimates. Further east on the Great Lakes the Royal Navy commodore had hired a Northwest Company schooner to perform similar functions during the survey of the Lakes of Canada, as they were then called, after 1815. Naval personnel went on board these chartered vessels, carried out certain modifications such as erecting extra chart rooms for the surveyors and accommodation on the upper deck for small boats which were often detached from the parent vessel for days doing independent survey work in shallow bays and inlets. The BEAVER had such a refit for her special duties as soon as she became a government survey ship.

In December, 1862, the White Ensign replaced the Company flag and she was towed from Victoria harbour to the naval anchorage in Esquimalt by the gunboat HMS GRAPPLER. Twelve months prior to this she had been the subject of correspondence between Captain Richards and Governor Douglas. Richards in HMS HECATE had hotly criticised the presence of the BEAVER in Victoria harbour because she was being used as a floating magazine, and he was concerned lest the powder on board her might be ignited by the notoriously hot soot given off by the Nanaimo coal used aboard the early steam vessels on the Pacific coast. In the event of hostilities with the United States, not unlikely in those uneasy days, Richards feared that the town and any vessels in port would be destroyed if the BEAVER was set on fire accidentally or otherwise. Happily for the BEAVER, HECATE and the other ship present, the Hudson's Bay Company Ship LABOUCHERE, these dire predictions did not materialize. At all events, before Esquimalt would receive her, the gunpowder stored on board for many

months was removed to a safer location.

During the early months of 1863 she was completely overhauled while awaiting surveying instruments from England. During speed trials in the Straits of Juan de Fuca she achieved a speed of nine knots and her engines were rated at 70 horse power, quite a tribute to her original builders Boulton and Watt of London, the pioneer makers of steam engines. A chart room on deck was built, the old master's stateroom was converted into a wardroom for the naval officers, and the port and starboard paddle boxes were ingeniously adapted for use as cabins for the surgeon and engineer.

Appointed to command this fine recruit to Her Majesty's Service was Captain Daniel R. Pender, Royal Navy, who had been left by Richards to complete the survey of the B. C. coasts adjacent to Vancouver Island. Pender was no stranger to these waters for he had served under Richards in HMS PLUMPER and HECATE since 1857 and was now to command this hired paddle steam as Master and Commander until the naval survey party was withdrawn in 1871. To assist him in this hydrographic mission were Mr. E. R. Blunden, Second Master, Doctor Bogg, Surgeon and Naturalist, Mr. Charles Bonwick, Engineer in Charge, and a crew of twenty-nine naval seamen and one marine. Since the BEAVER'S task was not only to survey and chart the seas but also to preserve order on the coast if need be, she was armed with small arms and a single one pound swivel gun mounted in the forward section. By June, 1863, HMS BEAVER was fit in all respects for sea and her adventures as a surveyor began.

Steaming out to continue the naval survey of the northern shores of British Columbia, the BEAVER discovered that the title "surveyor" was to embrace a variety

of tasks well outside the range of her normal terms of reference. Her first task in 1863 was to check on the state of settlements on the upper sections of Vancouver Island. Pender was able to report that all was quiet on the coast. Returning to Esquimalt by way of Fort Rupert (named, of course, after the first governor of the Hudson's Bay Company) and Nanaimo, Pender took his vessel to Texada Island at the request of Colonel Richard Clement Moody, Commanding Officer of the Royal Engineers who ashore was busy complementing Pender's maritime survey work by road, town and country surveys. Moody, as the first Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works for British Columbia, had asked Pender to examine the north west end of Texada Island and to submit diagrams and tracings of the limestone formations found there. This was all part of the day's work to the BEAVER's crew who were kept active producing diagrams and charts of their work for onward transmission to the Colonial Government and the Admiralty.

In the following spring she proceeded over to the mainland to survey the northern portions of the colony. Nekwiltá Inlet, never previously surveyed, was done before a gale forced her to seek shelter in Captain Vancouver's Safety Cove, Fitzhugh Sound. Queen Charlotte's Sound was surveyed before she returned to Victoria harbour to have her boilers repaired. Governor Seymour was keen to have the mouth of the Fraser River re-examined so off went the busy BEAVER to this area where today fishing fleets reap the rich salmon harvest. Pender was able to find a few changes in the depth of water since the survey of 1859 but to facilitate navigation he recommended the placing of permanent buoys and beacons to clearly distinguish the channel for shipping.

Soon more warlike tasks awaited HMS BEAVER. She was rushed to the mouth of the Fraser bearing dispatches from the Admiral to Captain Gilford in HMS TRIBUNE with orders to

send up one of the naval gunboats to Bentinck Arm to investigate some Indian trouble there. This was the occasion when the long arm of the Royal Navy quelled the possible joint revolt of the Chilcotin and Bella Coola Indians in Burke Channel by the timely arrival of HMS SUTLEJ with Governor Seymour from Victoria on board. The ship fired a salute on the occasion of the anniversary of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne and the sound of guns in the narrow inlet acted as an adequate deterrent to any future insurrection. The BEAVER was employed in these circumstances as a supply vessel, taking two months' provisions for the gunboat HMS GRAPPLER on patrol in the troubled waters of Bute Inlet. This exciting year of 1864 was brought to a successful conclusion by a survey expedition to Devastation Sound.

New waters were discovered during the next year's survey which saw Knight's Inlet surveyed, with the channels leading into it from Queen Charlotte Sound, Broughton and Johnstone Straits. The new inlet at the northern end of Vancouver Island was suitably named Seymour Inlet in honour of the Governor of the Colony. Acting as policeman of the North Pacific, the BEAVER brought the body of the murderer Antoine and the latter's boat to Nanaimo and once again the shore authorities were grateful for the BEAVER'S services.

1866 proved to be year of great survey activity. Leaving for the north west coast numerous channels between the northern end of Vancouver Island and the northern boundary of British possessions in latitude 54 degrees 40 minutes north were explored. The harbour at the eastern entrance of Skidegate Channel (a name adopted by Pender in 1866) in the Queen Charlotte Islands was surveyed, much of this good work being done by small boats without the aid of modern echo sounding gear which today provides an easy method of tracing the sea bed in confined anchorages. As a diversion from such

lonely pursuits, the BEAVER was employed as the examining vessel for local pilots. Pender was authorized by the local Colonial Secretary to examine masters of government and other vessels who were seeking credentials to act as pilots for such harbours as Esquimalt, Victoria, Nanaimo and Comox.

Uncharted rocks reported to the local authorities were all investigated by Pender who added them to his growing folio of navigational charts and in many cases graciously named such hidden menaces after their discoverors. Thus Clarke Rock in the inner channel leading to Nanaimo was named after William Clarke of the Government Vessel SIR JAMES DOUGLAS who had reported its absence on charts then in use. The year closed with another examination of the bar at the entrance to the Fraser River where it was found that the course of the channel was constantly changing, and a visit to Bella Bella which brought the good news that all was quiet in that district.

While the rest of British North America was preparing for Confederation celebrations, the BEAVER was due for a refit and was towed by her naval colleague the gunboat HMS FORWARD from Esquimalt to Victoria to undergo repairs and to await the arrival of a new boiler from England. In July, 1867, a thorough examination of her timbers revealed that they were as sound as they were when she was launched thirty-two years before. Her sturdy British oak timbers had even survived the mishap of running aground on the notorious Race Rocks lying one mile off the south east corner of Vancouver Island. Such navigational hazards apparently paid no respect to hydrographic vessels for on this occasion a rock weighing ten pounds saw fit to embed itself in the BEAVER's timbers and it was not discovered until later when she was docked for repairs. After her refit she suffered the humiliation of coming down the repair ways in a most unseamanlike manner and finished up on her side in the soft mud flats. Pulled off by her friend FORWARD she was taken to

the Hudson's Bay Company wharf to recover before setting off for Fort Simpson to resume her surveying duties near the northern boundary of British North West America.

By 1868 the BEAVER's crew had examined and charted over nine hundred miles of coast as far north as the southern tip of Alaska. New anchorages were discovered; Portland Inlet was found to extend eleven miles farther north than was shown on the old charts; and the Fraser River surveys were continued to locate new shoals to safeguard the interests of the ever increasing shipping in those waters. The following year saw her investigating the best positions for placing beacons on Captain Vancouver's famous Spanish and Sturgeon Banks off the entrance to Burrard Inlet, an enterprise undertaken at the direction of the local government who in turn was seeking to help the saw mill interests at Burrard Inlet. A few years later, after the Hudson's Bay Company sold her to private interests, the BEAVER was to use such navigational aids during her humble career as a tow to lumber carriers to and from Burrard Inlet. One wonders if Pender and his surveyors foresaw the establishment of British Columbia's largest city with a population of over 658,000 souls as he and his devoted pioneers sounded and charted the then quiet waters of Burrard Inlet in their small vessel.

Although the Admiralty had intended to withdraw the survey party at the close of 1869, the BEAVER was still completing her work in 1870 but her days as a naval vessel were now numbered. Resurveys on a large scale of Becher and Pedder Bays at the east end of the Straits of Juan de Fuca, bays now used as naval anchorages by the ships of the Pacific Command of the Royal Canadian Navy, were the last survey assignments before it was announced that HMS BEAVER would go out of commission and be handed over to the Hudson's Bay Company.

On 21 December, 1870, the traditional naval paying-off ceremony took place as the vessel lay at anchor in James Bay, near the present site of Victoria's famed Empress Hotel. Commander Pender and Lieutenant Coghlan, representing the naval authorities, handed the vessel over to Chief Factor James A. Grahame and Captain Herbert Lewis, representing the Hudson's Bay Company. The pennant and the White Ensign were lowered, and the Hudson's Bay Company flag was run up. HMS BEAVER no longer adorned the Admiralty's List of Ships. No doubt she would have been purchased by the Hydrographer of the Navy, her original proposer and seconder as a suitable survey vessel, now Rear-Admiral George Henry Richards, had he known that four years later she would have been auctioned by the Company and sold for \$7,500.00. However, it was not to be and this willing workhorse of the B.C. coast survey found other employment.

HMS BEAVER's work was not forgotten and it is still serving those ships who do their business in the great waters of British Columbia. Pender returned to England armed with sufficient chart data to complete seventeen Admiralty charts of various sections of the B. C. coast. In his new office as Assistant Hydrographer Pender was able to translate the surveys carried out in the BEAVER during the period 1863-70. Charts of Hecate Strait, the Queen Charlotte Islands, Port Simpson, and innumerable harbours, were but a few of the Admiralty charts based upon the BEAVER's surveys which were soon produced and printed for the Royal Navy, merchant shipping and the general public.

Today if we look at a large scale map of British Columbia's long and indented coast we are constantly reminded that the BEAVER and her naval surveyors intended that their quiet labours should be remembered. Beaver Harbour, Cove, Rock, Ledge and Creek are all named after the Hudson's Bay Company paddle steamer; Coghlan Rock and Anchorage, Pender, Bonwick

and Blunden Islands recall those who, with surveying instruments and cartographic skills at hand, made hydrographic history on Canada's Pacific coast. Thus did the versatile BEAVER join that distinguished company of ships which even now charts the seas and makes them safe for all.

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