

Day sixty-five

The water route to Port Townsend, hastily recreated after a lapse since steamship days now that the Hood Canal bridge lies tumbled beneath three hundred feet of riptide. That void atop the waves has made Port Townsend more queerly isolated and central than ever: without the bridge, the drive to Port Townsend and the Olympic Peninsula beyond is so long, south all the way around Hood Canal, that the state ferry system has installed this nautical shortcut.

The big green and white ferry Kaleetan spins north out of the Edmonds ferry slip as if having decided to make a break for Alaska, and the newness of direction sends itself up from the deck plates through my body, a vibrant return to the time when passenger <sup>skimmed</sup> craft ~~went~~ up and down the Sound and Strait in purposeful day long voyages instead of flat across the channels in quick commuters' hops. The fresh sense of surging out onto the water world is not illusion; the Kaleetan, at 18 knots, will take an hour and a half to reach Port Townsend.

The day is dark enough that the first of the lighthouses to slide past the ferry, Point No Point, still has its light winking. Behind it, the shoreline of the Peninsula juts blackly along the gray canyon of water and sky, Whidbey Island its mate-shore to the east. I have brought along Swan in scholarly tatters, notes and photocopies and snippings, but the wide water and its dikes of forest keep my eyes. Time enough for Swan's future at the two coffered of it waiting for me in Port Townsend.

Some dozens of minutes and Foulweather Bluff, named by Captain Vancouver as the North Pacific rain ran into his ears. Strangely, Puget Sound and now Admiralty Inlet seem broader, out here as the ferry goes along the center of their joined water like a zipper up a jumpsuit, than when I look across from either shore; the wave-ruffled distance in both directions somehow adds up extra.

More mid-channel minutes, until the Kaleetan sprints north past Fort Flagler, opposite Port Townsend, as if still determined on Alaska, then at last yields slightly west with a graceful dip and begins to wheel direct onto the hillside town.

Seen here from the water, Port Townsend stands forth as a surprising new place. It regains itself as the handsome port site of its beginnings, the great water-facing houses <sup>appear</sup> ~~look~~ correct and captainly on their bluff, the main street is set broadside along the shore as it ought to be in a proper working wharftown. Instead of the dodgy glimpses along its downtown through too many cars and powerlines, this Port Townsend looks you level in the eye and asks where you've sailed in from.

Docking this ferry is also from maritime days of the last century. Kaleetan is far too massive for the tiny ferry slip, like an ocean liner coming <sup>in</sup> ~~up~~ to moor to a balcony, and the crew must show seamanship. One ferryman fishes out with a boathook, snags a large hawser off pilings at the port bow. With that our vessel is snubbed while a tugboat hustles in and butts the stern around until, slotted just so,

the ferry can make a final careful surge to the little dock ramp.

The elephant has landed.

Many of us who step off as foot passengers could be our great-grandparents ~~coming~~<sup>traipsing</sup> ashore at Ellis Island, Montreal, Boston: beards, duffel coats, parcels, suitcases. A number of us, as I am, in watchcap and waterproof jacket, which I suppose would mark us as crew of an immigrant windship. Three ministers are prim among us, over from Seattle for the day on some missionary duty or another. Women carry children ashore, mothers greet daughters, husbands wives, huge trucks ease off the ferry, others snort aboard, turmoil of drayage and pilgrims such as the town hasn't seen in eons.

# —————  
 But a block or so from the ferry landing, within a dozing quiet from some other vector of the last century, the carved cane ~~reposes~~<sup>rests</sup> in its glass museum case. I squat and begin to inventory. The handle is ivory carved into a perfect fist the size of a child's right hand. Through the grasp of the fingers, like a held rattle, and out the circling grip of thumb pressed onto forefinger, twines a snake. The ivory reptile then writhes through air down onto the wrist. There above where the tiny pulse would hammer, the snakehead rests. Except that it is not at rest, but in mid-swallow of a frog, eternally doomed in its try to escape around the rim of wrist.

I check my notes. Swan first saw this creation in the village of Masset in the Queen Charlotte Islands on the tenth of July, 1883.

The carver, one of the Haida magicians either in wood, stone, or in gold or silver, still was at work on the cane. Swan asked the artisan's price--ten dollars--and said he would be back.

A second snake, this one of wood, drives up the cane from the bottom in three precise writhes covering most of the length, until the head poises very near to the carved struggle of snakehead and frog. After snake eat frog, the outlook seems to be snake eat snake. This deft crawler along the cane length has a broad scalloped design along the middle of its back, with cross-hatched scales along either side of the broader cuts. It also has tiny blue-green abalone eyes, a gentle everlasting glitter.

Snakes white and brown, contorting a stick of wood into struggle, legend, art. I very nearly reel back from this example of Haida blade magic.

# Over lunch in a restaurant which confusedly has tried to rig its interior as a shipdeck, I think of Swan coming upon the snake-cane six hundred miles to the north of here. Keen as he was about art of this coast, he must have felt like a prospector whose boot has kicked up a potato-sized nugget in front of him. The carved scene ripples the other way in me, from art out into life. I see back to the instant when a jay attacked into the garden outside my window, its flash of blue and black and the high excited HEEP HEEP HEEP cry and then the toss of the garter snake which had been sunning on the warm dirt. In combination of grappling and chopping, the jay

finished off the snake in an instant, then undertook to pull it apart, like a man trying to stretch an inner tube he is standing on. After a few minutes of tugging, the jay dropped the loop of corpse in disdain, bounded across the garden in three arrogant hops and flew off. When I went out to look at the snake I found it as long as the span of my hand, nine inches: gray-green with three strings of yellow down its length. In places the jay had frayed through the body, small ruptures like those a knife makes in rubberoid wiring. Even as I bent in study of the snake, not two minutes after the jay's ambush had begun, an ant clambered on like a pirate coming aboard a derelict schooner, dashed in and out of the snake's open mouth and up to a quick circle of the flat skull, then raced off in exploration of the first body-rip. How sudden it all, the same eternal suddenness of the ivory frog sinking down the ivory snake's gullet.

# —————  
 End of the Port Townsend day, the Kaleetan churning a fast white current away from the town. In the early dusk--hard to tell this day's darkness from its daylight--I can see from the afterdeck back to today's second reference point of Swan's embarkment toward the Queen Charlottes that early summer of 1883. The bespired red-brick courthouse, and in it the records of the municipal court which Swan himself presided over in some earlier years, and within those records this verdict from the twenty-sixth of May, 1883:

It is Ordered, Adjudged and Decreed that...James G. Swan is an  
Habitual Drunkard as described in Section 1674 of Code of Washington  
Territory. And it is hereby further ordered...to every Dealer  
in Intoxicating Liquor and to all other persons residing in the  
County of Jefferson...not to give or sell under any pretence any  
Intoxicating Liquor to said James G. Swan...

Day sixty-six

Unfold a map of the North Pacific, and you notice, some six hundred miles north of the British Columbia capital of Victoria and not far under the overhang of Alaska, a large stalactite-like shard which has fallen free of the continental cliff of shoreline. The illusory plummet has carried the chunk fifty miles to sea, striking its western edge into some of the trickiest weather of the entire Pacific and shattering the landmass into a hundred and twenty-five fragments from the size of rocky hummocks to big adrift peninsulas. Swan's telling of ~~the~~<sup>these</sup> geographic proportions: The extreme length of the group from North Point, North Island to Cape St James the southern extremity is 156 miles. The Islands of the main group are North, Graham, Moresby and Prevost. Graham and Moresby, are the largest and constitute nearly eighty five per cent of the whole area...

White seagoers had arrived in the late 1780's--the islands received their name from the British captain who sailed in on the trading vessel Queen Charlotte--but except for the Hudson's Bay post at Masset and a dogfish oil refinery at Skidegate, white enterprise and settlement across the next hundred years remained strangers to the Haida homeland. (This changed sharply at the end of the nineteenth century, and on into this: the Queen Charlottes now count a population of about 6,000, the majority of it non-Haida.) Here in 1883, then, the archipelago still was, as Swan so heavily had hinted a decade before in his Smithsonian article on Haida tattoo patterns, not familiar territory to whites, and

his own prime intention lay with the least known geography of all: the west coast of the Queen Charlottes, that region swept peopleless by the smallpox epidemic among the Haidas two decades earlier.

The idea wafted to Swan out of the report of the previous white expeditionary to the Charlottes. Geologist George M. Dawson in the mid-1870s had been able to sail and clamber at will among the Charlottes, except: "The time and means at my disposal did not enable me to make a survey or geological examination of the west coast of the islands, which would require to be carried on during the early summer... the least boisterous portion of the year. It is a very dangerous lee shore for sailing craft..." Swan pointed out to Baird at the Smithsonian the west shore's defeat of Dawson, nor has any one visited this Coast or examined it who has made any reliable report. Since he, Swan, would be in the Charlottes anyway...

# ——— Running a little late in life as usual, Swan at six and a half decades intends an expedition which I, twenty-five years younger and with the advantages of modern equipment, can never hope to duplicate. The point is moot this winter, since this season is not the necessary "least boisterous portion" of the weather year, but precisely its most. The still-unpopulated western coastline of the Queen Charlottes remains one of the remotest loose ends of North America, and winter flogs it with surf, gust, downpour.

Telephoning to the Queen Charlotte communities to ask about hire of a fishing boat or airplane or ~~even~~ helicopter to glimpse some of that shore, I am roundly advised to forget even that notion,



wait for a summer. Which, remembering the one near-drowning this North Pacific coast warned me with a few years ago, I decide I had better accept as gospel. Even in summer, as Swan is aiming for, I cannot have the means he did. The advice had been held out by

Dawson to whomever adventured in next: the Queen Charlottes' west shore "would, I believe, be most easily dealt with in one of the canoes of the country manned by a good Indian crew." To Swan, rider of canoes throughout the frontier half of his life, those words chimed exactly right. To me, footsoldier of a considerably tamer west, they can only be rue, and useful comparison of some of Swan's capabilities and my own.

# ———


As to why Swan decided to dare the Charlottes' western shore, when the Haida population and the material he sought to collect for the Smithsonian were peppered along the eastern coastline, the answer does not show itself in his diaries or the letters to Baird. My hunch is that whatever he told himself in his justifying Boston way, he wanted to do it for the edge of challenge, as the Makahs canoeing downcoast along Cape Flattery could not resist darting themselves through the tide rip tunnels in the searocks. Swan held no small estimation of himself as a coastman, a true coastie, in the Dungeness lighthouse keeper's sudden fine phrase to Carol and me, and here lay one of the last unknown rims of western shore. An extra west, one more over-the-horizon territory for the curiosity that worked in him like a second heart. For certain, this is greatly the broadest leap I have been close enough to see Swan take--his 1849 decision to cast himself west to California being lost to time--and I settle in with anticipation to watch how he will manage it.

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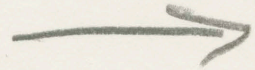
From under that Port Townsend civic cloud of decreed drunkenness, which at least was newly lined with the Smithsonian's silver, Swan sets off for the Queen Charlotte Islands in mid-June of 1883. He voyages in rare style, out of Victoria aboard the Otter, a Hudson's Bay Company supply steamer. In effect, he is traveling to the Queen Charlottes as the invited guest of British Columbia's Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Dr. Israel Wood Powell. Of their time, Powell and Swan are perhaps the two white men of the Pacific Northwest most ardent and informed about the coastal native cultures, and long have known each other through Swan's visits across the Strait to Victoria. Powell's cachet, particularly in vouching for Swan to the Hudson's Bay Company whose ships and trading posts were the supply line into the North Pacific, was ideal, and with it came the suggestion that Swan be accompanied by one of Powell's field agents, James Deans. The one hitch in this supremely hospitable arrangement is that Deans missed the boat.

Swan shrugs--watched for Mr. Deans till the Steamer was under way but he did not appear, the diary reports, and lets it go at that--and settles back to savor the cruise of the Otter. Not much of event has happened to him in the almost two years since leaving Neah Bay. Wait, there is this: Henry Webster's death, which Swan inscribed and then drew triple lines around, crosshatching them darkly at the corners and center until the result looked eerily

like the sketch of a coffin. But otherwise, except for a dab of added enterprise when a Haida bracelet maker named Ellswarsh worked for awhile out of the back room of Swan's office, Swan's Port Townsend routine consisted of the minor paperwork chores of old, and the bald patches in the diary which led up to the citation for chronic drunkenness. An overdue change, this shipboard life which Swan is more than veteran at. Since his jaunty voyage to Britain four decades earlier, I count more than a year of his life spent on vessels breasting off to somewhere or other. The Otter's seven-day slalom of supply calls along the North Pacific coast, to Metlakatla and Fort Simpson in British Columbia and Fort Wrangell in Alaska, promise a particularly cozy round of visits for Swan, who by now seems to know every living soul, Indian and white, from Shoalwater Bay to Sitka.



Swan, it ought to be reported, is writing now in triplicate, or rather, in three versions which add up to triplicate and then some. During each day he pencils into a pocket diary, and in it flash his touches of mood, occasional grumbles (the Metlakatla stop-over: ...the hour was too early for these settlers who had but just got up. I notice this listlessness, and desire to lie in bed mornings to prevail in Victoria and every where I have been in British Columbia and Alaska. Sit up late at night and get up late in the morning. Worse at Fort Wrangell: Arrived...at 8 AM and found the whole town asleep.), or frets or chuckles amid the



his touches of mood, occasional grumbles or frets or chuckles amid the doings of the day. At first chance he transcribes, in that brown ink, into a small squarish hardbound composition book. This version is narrative at fuller flow, expansion of the pocketed days. Next exists the fifty-page report he later drew up for the Smithsonian, typed--shakily--and with historical background of the Queen Charlottes periodically swatched in. I have had no small amount of decipherment to do on James Gilchrist Swan the past two months, but never before triangulation.

What is happening is this: in a sense, just as Swan is being whetted against a new edge of the continent now, so are the diaries. As I have begun to go through the simultaneous three, it occurs to me that with their blend of detail and elucidation and reprise they are truly taking their place with those supreme westering pages, Lewis and Clark's and young Patience Loader's. To tell his Queen Charlottes journey in any higher style, Swan would have to hymn it. And after the ledgerly reports of contentment from his 1878-1881 stint at Neah Bay and the unreported discontents of his Port Townsend life of 1882 and early 1883, these diaries' frank completeness is unexpected and welcome, like having a trout begin to <sup>warble</sup> ~~sing~~ to you up through its pond. These next days I am going to stand back a bit and give the busy pages vocal space.

# ———  
Then, at the end of the afternoon of June twenty-fifth, a shore  
which appeared low and quite level, but as it was very rainy we did  
not get a good sight.

The dim landfall is Graham, largest island of the Charlottes.

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Arrived at Massett at 5 PM....Delivered my letters of Introduction  
...took account of my freight as it was landed--wisely: 2 sacks flour  
short in my count & notified Purser Sinclair--and then went to a very  
comfortable cottage in the enclosure of the HB Co...

Off the Otter's gangplank with Swan steps the one expeditionary companion he has hired, described in a letter to Baird as a very intelligent young Haida man, a worker in jewelry, a painter and a tattooer who has been with me about 3 months... Johnny Kit Elswa is the keg-chested fellow beside Swan in the second Victoria studio portrait, and his jacket-and-trousers attire does not hide that he is a new example, perhaps in his mid-twenties, of the outdoor artists in which the Haidas had been so rich. Johnny (Swan calls him so in the diary, and I will follow that) has become the latest in Swan's line of Indian confidantes--Swell, Captain John, the Port Townsend Clallam chieftain Duke of York, Jimmy Claplanhoo--and promises to be especially valuable to Swan as hired helper on this expedition. The most faithful intelligent and reliable Indian I have seen, as Swan touts him to Baird, Johnny is from the village of Cumshewa on an eastern midpoint of the Queen Charlottes shoreline, and can show me things of Indian manufacture that the foreign collectors never have seen.

He at once proves to have less exotic talents as well: This forenoon the roof of the house I am occupying, took fire from old stove pipe falling down. Johnny & another Indian put it out with buckets and Mr McKenzie furnished new pipe which Johnny fixed all right.

# —————  
 Swan is advised at Masset that the <sup>canoeman</sup>~~man~~ he needs is the chief who, before smallpox emptied the area, ruled on the absolute northwesternmost

fragment of the Charlottes, then called simply North Island, now on the maps as Langara Island. With that chief and his canoe crew North Island could serve as the piton for the journey along the western shore: relatively <sup>calm</sup> ~~clear~~ waters from Masset to North, assured shelter there on the chief's home isle, then the headland to headland descent by canoe seventy-five miles down the coast to Skidegate Channel, the passageway between Graham and Moresby Islands, and through to the settlement at Skidegate at the southeastern corner of Graham Island.

The one omission in the smooth plan echoes the absence of Deans back at the Victoria dock. At the moment, the chief is away somewhere on another canoe errand.

# ———

On wait at Masset, Swan begins to entertain himself typically, with his pen. Goes out and counts the Haida community: sixty-five houses old and new nearly all of them with a carved column or pillar in front, covered with heraldic devices...of the family residing within, and representing some legend...Does whatever collecting is possible: Johnson brought me a fine model of an ancient war canoe with mat sails, paddles and every thing complete. The Haidahs were formerly a warlike people and a terror to all the Coast tribes...but they have become peaceful lately and no war parties are now sent out, and the ancient canoes have all decayed and gone...Johnny was of great assistance in trading and purchased everything much lower than I could. The Indians remonstrated with him and asked him why he liked the white man better



than his own people? Because, was the reply, "the white man pays me, you pay me and I work for you." This logic did not suit them but they let Johnny alone and I succeeded in obtaining some very interesting specimens. Visits companionably with Masset's handful of white residents, Alexander McKenzie trader, Charles W.D. Clifford of the Indian Service who was there on a visit and Reverend Charles Harrison the Episcopal Missionary and his wife all of whom were most courteous...

Swan also passes his tests, Haida and white, as a guest.

One item I noticed especially in Swan's consignments of supplies taken aboard the Otter in Victoria was a copper tank for specimens of fish he is to obtain from the waters surrounding the Queen Charlottes. A Baird idea, of course. Besides his duties at the Smithsonian<sup>n,</sup> where he had become Secretary after the death of Joseph Henry several years before, Baird in his spare time had assumed charge of the U.S. Fish Commission. He had tapped Swan into the Fish Commission payroll for occasional collecting of fish in the Cape Flattery region, and now Baird wanted samples from the North Pacific. Swan, nobody's amateur when it comes to packing for a journey, filled the fish tank with oranges bought in Victoria, opens the lid and bestows <sup>the fruit</sup> ~~oranges~~ on the Hudson's Baymen and the local Haidas.

Next, the first of July, An Indian sold me 2 halibut heads for 2 pieces of tobacco and I made a real old fashioned down east chowder which we had for breakfast. Mr McKenzie and Mr Clifford pronounced it delicious...Then I showed Johnny how to make a plum pudding which was

done by 5 PM & served with baked salmon...This being "Dominion day," which is celebrated by the Canadians & provincials they considered that my cooking was done in compliment to the day, which however I knew nothing about till this evening.

Clifford, the Canadian Indian agent, walks Swan to the burial ground near the entrance to Masset Inlet that afternoon. Beyond the gravestones--the christianized Haidas now were importing them from Victoria--they see the platforms which elevate the remains of a trio of tribal skagas, medicine men. The skeletons show through the rotting plank coffins, rather as if the skagas are getting restless about eternity. Together with their sacred bones, Swan knows, will be the carved instruments of magic, medicine sticks and implements of office...But we did not care to examine too closely at this time for fear of giving offence, so we turned our attention to examining the surrounding scenery.

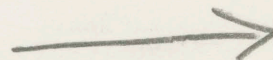
# —————  
 Ceremonies of Canadian-American amity aside, Swan paces the Masset shoreline day upon day, because still there is no sign of his canoemen. The site at least has its beguilements. Wild strawberries, fat little pellets of flavor, virtually carpet areas of the island. Elsewhere, for miles as far as the eye could reach were acres of wild roses in full bloom. McKenzie told Swan he had been visited the previous summer by a Russian traveler who marveled: "This is Bulgaria, the land of roses!"

Swan's own comparison is less exotic but as emphatic:

The whole region about Masset reminds me of the appearance of the land of Neah Bay...covered with the same kind of forest and shrubbery. It is an Indians paradise, plenty of fish and berries in summer, wild geese and ducks in myriads in the fall and all winter, and with but little physical exertion their every want is supplied.

The pause; the propositional line which is as close as Swan ever comes to disclosing calculation:

If there was a regular communication between this place and Victoria by steam so that one could come and go at least twice a month, I would as soon reside here as at any place I know.



# Two weeks and a day after Swan's arrival at Masset, paragraphs of promise. The ninth of July: The old chief for whom I had been waiting returned home today. His name is Edinso or, as the whites pronounce it, Edin shaw.

By letter to Baird the next day: The Chief of North Island, who has been absent, will be starting shortly to go with me to that interesting place and till he is ready I shall busy myself collecting specimens of fish, and dredging for molluscs. The familiar financial sign-off--My Indian, Johnny Kit Elswa has proved of great service in purchasing articles at far less prices than I could, as tourists and collectors have advanced prices greatly. Mr. McKenzie tells me that my purchases are actually lower than he has paid Indians for the same kind of articles--and Swan is away to begin dickering with the canoe chief.

# Edinso. There is a story of him terrible as any mythic lightning flung down from Olympus. When smallpox erupted in Victoria in 1862 a group of Haidas led by Edinso was there. Whether to clear the Haidas from the disease's ravages or simply to get the obstreperous Edinso out of town--the Victoria Daily British Colonist once called him "a perfect fiend" when he had a few drinks in him--it is not clear, but the governor of British Columbia ordered in a gunboat to tow the Indians home. Not far north along the coastline of Vancouver Island, Edinso pulled out an axe and hacked free his canoes. He put to shore with his followers, they made camp, defiantly returned to Victoria, and

smallpox swept them. When Edinso eventually led home to the Queen Charlottes those who had survived, the epidemic went with them.

Which of course is only to say that horror came to the Haidas on one wind rather than the next. Yet that wind was Edinso's, as if fate couldn't leave him alone.

Edinso likely was in his early seventies when Swan met him and started to talk canoe charter, and for decades had been a name in the North Pacific for the sumptuous potlatches he had ~~thrown~~<sup>staged</sup>; for whirling a Tsimshian chief into the path of a gunshot intended for him during a tribal fracas; for traveling about the Queen Charlottes in his glory days in a canoe "twelve fathoms in length, elaborately carved and painted at both ends, manned by a large number of slaves and dependents." By now, however, he also was a fading figure, an aging sea-soldier who was merely one of a dozen chiefs basing themselves at Masset since their villages had died or dwindled and trying to accommodate to the tribe's narrowed future. In the mid-1870's a missionary had arrived at Masset and impressed some of the Haida leaders with christianity's magic of inoculations and other medical care. Within a few years a number of the chiefs and even some of the shamans who had most desperately resisted the missionaries came into the new fold. Edinso, with whatever level of enthusiasm, was one of these Haida leaders to decide that the gospel bearers were a milder plague than the horrific invisible diseases. He made his peace as well with the officialdom in Victoria, even erecting a carved column topped with the figure of the governor of British Columbia in frock coat and silk hat.

But political accommodations with the white world were one matter, canoe charter was another. Swan would just have to wait longer, Edinso serenely told him, until he completed a trading trip to Fort Simpson on the British Columbia mainland. Meanwhile, wouldn't Swan care to look over a lot of ancient things he had for sale?

#

The tenth of July, in probably not the best of moods, Swan shops through Edinso's items. As he asked too much I did not purchase, the diary says shortly. What did seize Swan's interest was the project of the chief's nephew, Charley Edinso, a carver at work on a pair of caneheads made from the ivory teeth of a walrus. Two beautiful canes nearly finished, Swan records, each representing a serpent twined around the stick which was a crab apple sapling...on top of one was a clenched fist: yes. The writhing Port Townsend museum piece in gestation.

The depiction, Charley Edinso enlightens Swan, is the hand of Apollo's priest Laocoon, vainly grappling the serpent as it crushes him to death for trying to warn his fellow citizens against the Trojan horse. The Haida carver did not have an advanced knowledge of Greek mythology, although I would not put it past the best of Haida artists to tune in from the very air whatever lore they wanted for the day. Simply a picture from a London illustrated newspaper which had found its way across the planet to Masset.

As for the other canehead, Swan squints close to find that this one is merely the head of an elephant. Newsprint provided these astounding

details--thrust of tusks, bend of trunk--too: a picture of Barnum's Jumbo, representing the hoisting on board a steamer when bound to New York.

Veteran shopper of Indian art that he is, Swan is dazzled. Beautifully carved, the diary says again, then the cautious prod to Charley Edinso about price. He asks \$10 each. Swan may even manage to keep a straight face as he says he'll think on it.

# \_\_\_\_\_  
Edinso pushes off across Dixon Entrance and Hecate Strait toward Fort Simpson, Swan strolls down to watch a Haida canoe maker at work. As a canoe connoisseur, Swan is closely interested in the process of molding a hollowed log into a craft of honed grace. The builder first softened the wood by filling...with water which he made to boil by putting red hot stones in it. The canoe was then partially spread and allowed to remain for a day...The next morning after heating the water again with hot stones he built a slow fire of rotten wood and bark on the ground along the sides of the canoe to render the wood perfectly soft, or as he said, "to cook it," and then stretched the sides apart as far as was safe and kept them in position by means of stretchers or thwarts. I measured this canoe before he commenced to widen it and found that amidship, the opening was two feet eight inches wide, after he had finished the canoe I again measured it at the same place and found it was four feet nine inches...

Days peel this way from Swan's Queen Charlotte summer with practically no effort at all. On the twenty-first of July, a canoe

at last glides up Masset Inlet. Not Edinso; out steps the tardy James Deans, by way of a supply steamer which brought him as far as Skidegate. Swan shows no measurable enthusiasm about the arrival.

Instead, now that he has been beached at Masset for a solid three weeks, Swan's thoughts turn inward. Stomachward.

Not that his menu thus far hasn't been fertile as usual. Johnny cooked a nice breakfast, runs one diary report, a stew of Potatoes and onions, Griddle cakes or "Slap Jacks" as Johnny calls them, and nice coffee--Another:..Made some clam fritters for breakfast which were very fine. And again: Today I made a pudding of the roots of the brown lily... first boiled the root, then mashed and mixed with eggs, milk, sugar and spice and baked...I think it is the first pudding ever made of this kind of root. But if his own palate is faring splendidly, the victuals of the Hudson's Bay colony horrifies him. Prior to my advent, the H.B. Company people were content to live on Indian dried salmon cured without salt, canned meats, beans, peas and salted fish... In other words, like a colony of Martians bivouacked in an orange grove and eating galactic K rations. So I thought to give them a treat.

The diary pages now whoosh with Swan's marine gathering and garnishing...some clams which I put in a tub of water for two days to get rid of the sand...large crabs nicely boiled in salt water. Some fresh trout and fresh salmon...A soda-biscuit stuffing prepared for the trout, enhanced with dried herbs...fat bacon chopped fine...three cloves of garlic bruised, pepper and salt and water, the whole rubbed into a uniform mass with a potato masher.



Swan chefs on to crabs, clams, salmon. When all was ready, I called the gentlemen to the repast which may be enumerated as follows, clam chowder, baked trout, roasted salmon and deviled crab, with a dessert of wild strawberries and strawberry short cake, coffee and tea; a banquet of natural products which elicited encomiums of praise from the guests.

Even the glazed encomiums are not his final word. Where food is concerned, there seems never to be one with Swan. Two days later he is busy preparing an octopus salad and serving it up to his Hudson Bay converts with chutney sauce and another of his culinary perorations:... when one knows how to render such food palatable it will be found that many a relishing and nutritious meal can be had from articles which previously excited disgust.

Day sixty-seven

Swan's sunny idyll of strawberries and roses begins to be over.

The final Thursday in July at Masset:

Mr. McKenzie succeeded in harvesting his crop of hay this afternoon...

The Indian children...Minnie and Charlotte were full of fun and frolic  
this PM I told Mr. Deans it was a sure sign of rain, as children and  
little pigs and kittens always were unusually frolicsome at approaching  
changes of the weather...

#

Friday: Rain...commenced at 9:30 PM. It being a dull day I  
remained in the house drawing sketch of Johnsons fish trap.

#

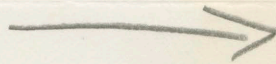
Saturday: Weather showery. Swarms of gnats were very troublesome  
all night. This morning I killed quantities on the window with the  
fumes of burning matches...

#

Sunday: No prospect of Edinso getting here so long as this gale  
lasts...must be windbound somewhere between here and Fort Simpson...  
I think if he does not get back by Tuesday that I will get Weeah to  
take me to North Island. Swan <sup>tries to take</sup> takes his mind off Edinso with the  
youngsters of Masset. After church some children came to look at some  
pictures of the Zuni Indians in the Century Magazine of December 1882,  
when they looked at the dancing scene and masquerade performances in  
the February number they chatted like magpies...

# ———  
On Tuesday, the last day of July, the details pause as Swan notes a favorable wind and hopes as I am very anxious to be starting off that it will waft in old Edinso.

# ———  
It does not, and the next day Swan sits back and listens to McKenzie and Johnny Kit Elswa discuss a Haida method of fixing guilt. When a person is taken sick and foul play is suspected two men, not doctors but relatives, drink salt water for four successive days. In this water a frog dried and pulverized is stirred and mixed. This causes purging and vomiting. This cleansing of the system enables them to see clearly both mentally and physically...A wood mouse having been caught is put in a little cage, and set up on a box or table. Its first impulse is to retire to a corner and setting on its hind legs it remains immovable for a short time. While it is quiet the men question it to learn who made their relative sick. They name the persons suspected... The person whose name causes the mouse to nod its head is considered the guilty one, and unless he or she pays a number of blankets or give a present of equal value they will have the same sickness and die.



# ———  
 By now, Swan has been encamped at Masset long enough for hair to grow down to meet his collar, so Johnny Kit Elswa trims him as well as any barber and better than most... The young Haida shines steadily in the triple diarying. I like particularly his imaginative moment early in the Masset sojourn: Johnny...procured a bottle of Lime juice and a bottle of Raspberry syrup at the store and made a drink which he said was to celebrate the fourth of July... A good interpreter, a good cook and good valet, Swan praises him to the diaries, and a splendid hand about a camp and managing a canoe, young active and strong, and faithful in looking after my interests.

It might be added, no slouch in other interests, either. Before their time in the Queen Charlottes is ended, Swan will act as scribe for his helper: Wrote to Rev Charles Harrison Massett that Johnny wants to marry Charlotte...

# ———  
 Friday, August fourth, no Edinso. Wrote letters and packed specimens today.

# ———  
 On Saturday, Swan buys the pair of Charley Edinso's extraordinary canes. They are beautifully carved and when varnished will look finely.

# ———  
 "In Northwest coast art, perhaps more than in any other art, there's an impulse to push things as far as possible."

"Haida artists worked mostly within a rigid, formal system, but occasionally burst out and did crazy, wild things which out-crazied the other people of the Coast."

"They weren't bound by the silly feeling that it's impossible for two figures to occupy the same space at the same time."

As accompaniment to Swan's notes on Haida art I have been reading

Indian Art of the Northwest Coast: A Dialogue on Craftsmanship and Aesthetics, by Bill Holm and Bill Reid. In my kingdom, the pair of them will be the highest priests. Holm of the University of Washington's Burke Museum and Reid himself a Haida artist, they sat to discuss item by item one of the great exhibitions of Northwest Indian art--the Haidas, Kwakiutls, Tlingits, Tsimshians, Bella Bellas and Bella Coolas created so much there has come to be a kind of academic sub-industry based on numerous museum holdings--and the talk of Holm and Reid as they pass back and forth incredibly carved pipes and dagger hilts and ceremonial masks is as exuberant and nuanced as their topic. The quotes are from Reid, who ~~himself~~ <sup>surely</sup> has done a carving <sup>as</sup> great as any of those of his ancestors: a depiction of Raven, as the Haida legend vows, discovering mankind in a clamshell; the clever bird poised atop, wings cupped out in shelter--or is it advantage?--while tiny mankind squirms to escape the birth-shell, pop forth from the sea-gut of the planet. Reid's insights make me wish for more rumination from Swan while ensconced at Masset, with those <sup>dozens of</sup> carved poles looming as skyline around him. What ~~he~~ <sup>Swan</sup> does say of that most massive of Haida art is this:

These carved columns are pictographs, and the grouping of animals illustrate Indian mythological legends...They are all made of the cedar (Arbor Vitae), which abounds on the Islands and attains a great size. In order to relieve the great weight of these massive timbers they are hollowed out on one side and the carving is done on the other or front side, so that what appears as a solid pillar

is in reality but a mere shell of about a foot in thickness,  
thickly covered with carvings from base to summit....These columns  
are generally mentioned as "totem poles" without regard to their  
size some of which are six feet in diameter at the base and ninety  
feet high, and to call such great monuments poles is as inapplicable  
as to apply the term to Pompeys pillar or Cleopatras needle or  
Bunker Hill monument.

Day sixty-eight

Two dawns for the price of one this morning, and Swan will have to fend without me at Masset. <sup>#</sup> I have clambered from bed early for the cosmic bargain.

*mod* At first daybreak, I am atop the eastern rim of our valley, scouting the viewpoints at Carol's campus, and in minutes am shivering like a sentry who has had to walk the high ground all night. The eclipse, a total one, the rare magical blot of moon precisely across sun, will occur above the southeast horizon. People are reported flocking to the Columbia River and the high passes of Idaho and Montana to watch from amid the swath of totality.

Among the college's terraces of walkways, I finally find and settle to the most direct parapet.

The sky is an impassive gray. I like it that the veil of cloud will add second mystery to the eclipse, the kiss of sun and moon will take place beyond our range and yet somehow invisibly pull light up out of our eyes. Like owls, we will be made to go more dim-sighted as the day rises.

A hundred and seventeen winters ago, Swan stepped into a December night at Cape Flattery to spectate the reverse of this, an eclipse of the moon. There was a large party gathered that evening at the house of a chief who was giving a feast. I had informed some of the Indians during the day that there would be an eclipse that evening, but they paid no regard to what I said, and kept on with their feasting and dancing till nearly ten o'clock, at which time the eclipse had commenced.

So far this morning, only the birds have commenced, the weet-weet of sparrows blithely insistent in tree and bush. Yet the day in some way does seem stalled, slipping cogs. At 7:18, an exact hour before the eclipse and some twenty minutes after sunrise, the morning remains wan enough that the breast of a seagull atop a light pole shines out white as a pearl on mud.

A third of an hour more and Carol joins me, having sent her class out to write about the double-yolked dawn. We sip coffee out of styrofoam and wait for the day's half~~light~~ to swoop away.

Swan cherished the sorcery of foretelling--of harkening to <sup>an</sup> ~~the tiny~~ almanac calendar ~~in the front of his 1862 diary~~ while the Makahs preferred to use the logic of the moment for their divinations. The moon they believe is composed of a jelly-like substance, such as fishes eat...They think that eclipses are occasioned by a fish like the "cultus" cod, or Toosh-kow, which attempts to eat the sun or moon, and which they strive to drive away by shouting, firing guns, and pounding with sticks upon the tops of their houses.

A few minutes before eight, a helicopter buzzes across the southeast, a blacker bug now than in its pass a half hour ago.

Swan was rubbernecking interestedly up at the vanishing moon when the fact of eclipse began to terrify the Makahs. Some of them coming out of the lodge at the time, observed it



and set up a howl, which soon called out all the rest...They told me that the toosh-kow were eating the moon, and if we did not drive them away they would eat it all up, and we should have no more....

Minutes past eight, a breeze restlessly tosses the dim colors atop the campus flagpole. The loophole beneath the clouds to a few bottom slopes of the Cascades is losing light. Students begin to shoal in front of all the campus buildings. One calls across to another, "Why do you wanna watch it get dark? It does it every day."

Swan eyeing the Makahs: As the moon became more and more obscure, they increased their clamor, and finally, when totally obscured, they were in great excitement and fear....There was a most infernal din, and to help it out Jones and myself got out the swivel and fired it off...

By 8:14, the sparrows nearest our parapet are scrunching as far back into the middle of a tree as they can get, and muttering an apprehensive t-t-t-t.

In the next minute, a flight of them whirls high overhead, flinging themselves over the forested fringe of the campus and evidently back to their night's refuge.

A minute again, and the college's automatic lights flick on, like blue-white flares struck against the dimness. The clouds go a deeper, more glowering gray.

At 8:18 a.m., totality, it is deepest evening.

Swan with his gunfire chased the eclipse from the Makah's moon.

The noise, which was so much louder than any they could make,  
seemed to appease them, and as we shortly saw the silvery edge  
of the moon make its appearance after its obscuration, they  
were convinced that the swivel had driven off the toosh-kow  
before they had swallowed the last mouthful.

Within three minutes, we stand in a quickening dawn. The birds pick up their day again. At 8:30, on the stroke, the campus's sensor lamps dowse out around us.

Day sixty-nine

Monday, the eighth of August, 1883, 8:30 that morning, a plash of canoe paddles at last. Swan, Johnny Kit Elswa and Deans push off from Masset, in company with Edinso and his squaw, three men and two boys. I am to pay Edinso \$1.00 per day. His wife and the three men 75¢ each and the two boys 50¢ each and canoe 50¢ per day...which makes a total of \$5.50 per day, plus rations.

# —————  
 The expedition's start had not been promisingly smooth. Edinso did not give instructions about stowing the things and when I got in I found myself perched up on some boxes with Mr. Deans. Old Edinso asked in a curt manner why I sat so high up. I told him...if he wanted me to stow his canoe I could do so. I then ordered several packages placed properly and made myself comfortable and we proceeded on...

After that bit of bramble, the canoe rides before a fair but light wind west past Wiah Point, its passengers let out fishing lines with spoon bait and trawled them astern and soon caught three large salmon. Edinso's squaw had about two gallons of strawberries and a lot of red huckleberries and she gave us as many as we could eat.

The floating picnic crosses Virago Sound by mid-afternoon and a stop then called to cook a meal for the canoe crew. Mr. Deans and I lunched on strawberries, sardines, bread and cold coffee.

They go on to make their first-night camp at a village called Yatze; little to recommend it even to Indians, Swan thinks. The Haida villagers

of Yatze are gone somewhere, a few wan potato patches and one lonely carved monument the only signs of life. Human life, that is. Mosquitoes and gnats were plentiful and...quite lively.

As if not wanting another clear look at the place, the canoers paddle out of Yatze the next morning before dawn. Edinso complains of having sprained his back while launching the canoe and, Swan notes perhaps a bit apprehensively, is quite cross, but the expedition progresses west several miles to the Jalun River before breakfasting.

The queer beach there impresses Swan as a singular exhibit of volcanic action in which the lava had burst up through the upper strata of rocks as though the region had boiled up like a pot. The lava...of a brick red color and a pale sulphur yellow in places, filled with boulders and pebbles of stone blackened outside with the heat and looking like a gigantic plum pudding. This is the first instance I have seen of such an evident volcanic action on the direct sea beach.

In early afternoon, Pillar <sup>Rock</sup>~~Point~~ is passed, and Swan hurriedly pencils a sketch which shows it as a ninety-foot-high spike of stone driven into the offshore shoals.

A few hours later the canoe eases ashore at Edinso's own village, Kioosta, deserted except for many carved columns the handsomest of which are in front of Edinso's house.

# \_\_\_\_\_ Swan is in his tent after supper this second night out from Masset, possibly congratulating himself on the expedition's unruffled progress, when Edinso drops by to inform him of new terms of canoe hire: he and the crew desire hot biscuits and coffee to be served them every night.

I knew the old fellow put on considerable style with strangers and I determined to settle our status at once. I told him I did not wish him to dictate to me what I should do, and he knew that since we left Masset we had no time for any cooking but the most simple kind, and it was no use to talk to me about hot biscuits till we got to camp where we would have leisure.

Edinso huffs from the tent, and Swan falls asleep to the mutters of the crewmen debating the biscuit issue.

In the morning the dietary ~~ruckus~~<sup>squabble</sup> wakes with them. Had a good blow up with old Edinso, Swan's pocket diary begins forthrightly. This time, the chief tries Swan on the angle that the canoe crew wants to eat with him and they want flour and potatoes and pancakes, and want Johnny to be their cook.

They might as well have wanted Swan to pare their toenails during supper every night, too. If there is one matter in the cosmos that Swan has a clear doctrine about, it is the sanctity of his meals. He fires back to Edinso and the other Haidas the ultimatum--bluff, more likely--that if I heard any more complaints I would return to Masset and get another crew...When they found I was determined they gave up and all became good natured.

# ———  
Good-natured or not, Edinso defers on biscuits and hotcakes and begins showing Swan and Deans the long-awaited shores of his North Island, today's Langara.

He takes them first to a site called Tadense, a deserted village rapidly expiring back into the forest. Even the more recent houses built fifty years ago are fast decaying: the humidity of the climate causes a growth of moss which, freezing in winter and seldom or never dry in summer, rots the soft cedar and rapidly reduces it to a pulpy mould. Then from the oozing-away village, along the waterline to a burial cave. A dry cavern some 60 feet in length, as Swan jots it, the entrance to which is 25 feet above high water mark and approached by a rough path over conglomerate boulders. Edinso, who is proving to have a rhetorical formula for every occasion, assures them that no white eyes ever have seen the hallowed spot before this instant.

They clamber in among some 28 or 30 burial boxes of various sizes... In one of the boxes of skeletons which had been opened by age, a puffin or sea parrot had made its nest...Some of the burial boxes were ornamented with the crests of the occupants carved and painted in colors, others were merely rough boxes. Some of the bodies were rolled in Hudson Bay blankets, and some of the heads were mummified like AZTEC mummies...That of a Chief or doctor, was well preserved the hair tied in a knot on the top of the skull, and the dried ears still holding the abalone shell ornaments...

Yet one more stop in this funereal day: Cloak Bay, sheltered on its north side by a small island which thrust up a conglomerate cusp of cliff astoundingly like a round medieval tower, everything but the want of windows made this appearance complete. Sharp rocks fanged around the island. One pinnacle displayed a hole bored through by the ocean's action. Edinso at once advertises the cavity as the work of an immense

fish gnawing a doorway to its house. That reminds him that he hasn't adequately explained the castellated island, and he relates to Swan and Deans that here lived an Indian slaver named Teegwin, and for his misdeeds he was turned into this big stone, and his sister coming to see him was also turned to stone.

After this recital we hoisted sail and returned to camp.

#

Two days after that, on the tenth of August, Swan makes a find which is among the oddest in his thirty years of nosing along the Pacific shoreline. Edinso and crew had steered Deans and him to the deserted village of Yakh, there to see the burial place of a medicine man named Koontz. Inside his plank box, Koontz in a shirt of caribou skin reclines in full dignified length, not doubled up as is the practice. Bodies of doctors alone being allowed to remain in the position in which they die. Deans potters around the corpse a bit, but Swan is less interested in Koontz's posture than a pair of items among the skaga's burial trove. Two large curved teeth which he thinks resemble those of a beaver, but which seem too long, too...odd. The baffling incisors, he subsequently learned were tusks of the African wild hog...probably procured from the wreck of a Japanese or Siamese junk which was lost on Queen Charlotte Islands in 1833.

#

Swan has on his mind even another mystery of Africa-in-the-North-Pacific. Back at Kioosta he noticed among the carved column figures a creature with a rolled-up snout. Except for the lack of tusks, it looked for all the world like the head of an elephant. Beginning to wonder about

about the pachydermic enthusiasms of the Haidas, Swan at last questions Edinso and is enlightened when the chief points toward a flutter on a nearby bush. The carved creature was a colossal butterfly, the snout its proboscis.

Swan of course asks for the legend, Edinso of course has it ready: that when the Hooyeh or raven was a man, he lived in a country beyond California, that he got angry with his uncle and lit down on his head and split it open. Then fearing his relatives he changed to a bird and flew to Queen Charlotte Islands where he was told good land could be found. The butterfly, a creature as big as a house accompanied him and would fly up in the air and when he saw any good land he would unfold his proboscis and point with it.

Just the way, Edinso drives the point home <sup>to his white questioner</sup> with a tap of mockery, Johnny was going with me showing me places.



Day seventy

Recited in turn by each of Swan's three sets of <sup>diary</sup> pages during their early weeks in the Queen Charlottes, a legend, a belief, and a lore:

# ———  
 Towats was a great Haida hunter, and once while hunting he found the house of the king of the bears. The king bear was not there but his wife was, and Towats made love to her. Arriving home to a much disordered house, the king bear charged his wife with unfaithfulness. She denied all. But the king bear noticed that at a certain hour each day she went out to fetch wood and water and was gone long. One day he tied a thread to her dress. By following the thread through the forest, he came upon his wife in the arms of Towats. The king of bears slew the hunter Towats by tearing out his heart.

# ———  
Called on Kive-ges-lines this PM to see her twins which were born on the 10th. They were pretty babies but the Indians are sure to kill one. Next day: One of the twins died during the night as I predicted. The Indian who told me said..."It died from want of breath" which I think very probable. These Haidas like the Makahs have a superstition that twins bring ill luck...

# ———  
Old Stingess...came to my house and...I asked her to tell me about tattooing and when the Haidahs first commenced tattooing. She

said it was always practiced...as long ago as the most ancient legends  
make any mention. Formerly the Indians procured the wool of the  
mountain sheep which was spun into fine threads which were stained  
with some black pigment either pulverized charcoal and water, or with  
lignite ground in water on a stone, as at present, then with needles  
made of copper procured from the Sitka Indians, these fine threads  
were drawn under the skin producing indelible marks. When white men  
came they learned the art of tattooing with steel needles from sailors  
on board the vessels, and have adopted that plan since...here the old  
woman became tired and went home.

# —————

How elliptical, literally, the past becomes. Stingess culls from what may have been an evening long legend an answer for Swan. Who chooses as much of it as he thinks worth cramming into his diary pages. At <sup>my</sup> hundred years' remove, I select lines from his and frame them in trios of editing dots. From her Haida tradition to Swan's white tribe to my even paler version. The logical end of the process signaled by my ellipses, I suppose, might be for the lore of Haida tattooing to compress down to something like a single magical speck of print, perhaps the period after the news that Stingess has got tired of all the chitchat and <sup>hobbled</sup> gone home. But I've heard it offered that a period is simply the shorthand for the dots of an ellipsis. That a story never does end, only can pause. So that would not complete it either, the elliptical transit from Stingess to Swan to me to whomever abbreviates the past next.

March    The Cracked Canoe

Day seventy-one

I flip the month on the photo calendar above my desk, and the room fills with lumberjacks. The calendar came as a gift, a dozen scenes from the glass plates of a photographer who roved the Olympic Peninsula lumber camps in the first years of this century, and I've paid no particular attention to the scenery atop the days: January a stand of age-silvered trees, February a few dodgy sawyers off in the middle distance from the camera. But March's four loggers, spanned across the cut they are making in a cedar tree as big in diameter as this room, hover in as if estimating the board footage my desktop would yield.

The chunky logger at the left stands on a springboard, his axe held extended, straight out and waist high, in his left hand and the blade resting almost tenderly against the gash in the cedar. He is like a man fishing off a bridge beam, but absent-mindedly having picked up the camp axe instead of the ~~bamboo~~ <sup>trout</sup> rod.

The next man is seated in the cut, legs casually dangling and crossed at the ankles, ~~A~~ small shark's grin of spikes ~~is~~ made by the bottoms of his caulked boots. His arms are folded easily across his middle; he has trimly rolled his pant legs and sleeves; ~~is~~ handsome and dark-browed <sup>with</sup> a lady <sup>with</sup> killing lock of hair down the right side of his forehead.

The woodman beside him is similarly seated, arms also crossed, but is flap eared, broad-hipped, mustached. Surely he is the Swede of the crew, whatever his origins.

The final logger, on the right edge of the photo, is a long-faced giant. As he stands atop a log with his right foot propped on the cut, broad left hand hooked into a suspender strap where it meets his pants, there is unnatural length to his huge stretched body. The others must call him Highpockets, or Percival, if that is what he prefers. His shirt is work-soiled, his eyes pouchy but hard. Unlike his at-ease mate across the tree, he clenches his axe a third of the way up the handle, as if having tomahawked it into the tree just over the left jug-ear of the Swede.

Down the middle of the picture, between the seated sawyers, stands their glinting crosscut saw. If the giant is six and a half feet tall as he looks to be, the saw is ten; the elongated great-granddaddy of the crosscut in Trudy and Howard's cabin. Under its bright ladder of teeth are strewn the chips from the cut. The foursome has not much more than started on the great cedar, and already the woodpile is considerable.

Twenty days until spring in the company of these timber topplers, and by-god forceful company they promise to be. I want all at once to see the Peninsula woods that drew whackers like these, if only to reassure myself that they're not out there now leveling daylight into whatever green is left. Late tomorrow, Carol will be finished teaching her week's classes. We will head for the Hoh rain forest.

# —————  
Swan at Kioosta, his forty-eighth day in the Queen Charlotte islands

and his fourth on the venture along the western shore: Very disagreeable morning, thick with misty rain.

He decides to sit tight and do such diary matters as ruminating on the blessed total absence of fleas and other annoying insects so common and universal in Indian camps and villages...Edinso says that formerly fleas were very numerous, and at Masset they were so plentiful as the sand on the beach and they remained as long as the Indians dressed in otter skins and bark robes, but when the white men came with other kind of clothing and bought all the old fur dresses, the fleas began to disappear. At last the Indians all went to Victoria, and on their return they found that the fleas had entirely left...Edinso said perhaps the world turned over and all the fleas hopped off.

Day seventy-two

Sunshine, bright as ripe grain. Just before lunch as I looked out wishing for birds, a cloud of bushtits and chickadees imploded into the backyard firs. I stepped into the yard to listen to their dee dee dee chorus, watched them become fast flecks among the branches.

No sooner had I come inside than the lion colored cat, pausing for a slow slitted look in the direction of the sun, lazed up the hillside into the long grass.

Three times in four minutes he tried to nest himself. Then sat casually and eyed a number of items he evidently had never noticed before, such as his own tail, a bug in the grass, every nearby tree. Sneezed, and was astonished about it. I have decided there is no worry about him marauding the birds. More prospect the birds will mistake him for a fluffy boulder, perch atop him and drown him in droppings.

#

Now to Swan. He is saying, in the <sup>busy</sup> three-handed style he has chosen for the Queen Charlottes, that their next site, Chathl, has proved a disappointment. Bones of seals, otters and fish, showing that it was the inhabitants of the water and not of the sands that constituted their food, and a few toppled memorial columns: that was all. Except for a few seasonal hunters of fur seals, Chathl was one more of the west-shore ghost villages of the Haidas, as if the tribal undoubtedly Raven-- people one afternoon heard canoeing orders from some forest spirit--

and in a single fleet followed him up the rays of a red sunset. Here again, Swan is struck with the wild shale and conglomerate coastline, which in the most fantastic forms imaginable seems more alive than the dead-quiet villages ever could have been.

# — Sunday, the twelfth of August, back at Edinso's own village of Kioosta, Swan arises at five intending an early start downcoast from North Island, the cornering turn which will take the expedition at last along the Queen Charlottes' west shore. Arises and feels a southeast wind on his face and peers seaward to a brilliant and perfect rainbow, a double one, which indicated rain. Within half an hour the downpour has begun.

I am disappointed as there is nothing to prevent our going but the rain, and I am anxious to be moving.

# — That double rainbow, signal to Northwest rain, indeed must have been an "anxious" omen to Swan. Dampness is a price humankind hates to pay. ("Eleven days rain, and the most disagreeable time I have experienced," wrote <sup>an edgy</sup> ~~shocked~~ Captain William Clark on November 17, 1805, and that was at the very start of the Lewis and Clark expedition's <sup>sodden</sup> ~~four~~ months in winter camp near the mouth of the Columbia.) Perhaps it is because rain tugs all that is human in us too far back to our un-dry origins. If it has taken this long to encase us, set us upright and mobile on frames of bone, and all that evolving ~~it all~~ can be pattered back to sheer existence by drops of water, we are not safe. No, I think the private red streams in us do not at all like that call of commonality, and the unease of it now must be in Swan.



# ———

Monday, thirteenth of August, a most disagreeable day, misty and rain ~~an~~ alternate showers. I remained in my tent most of the time, writing and drawing, but the rain prevented out of door sketching. Edinso's sprained back <sup>also</sup> ~~remains~~ a bother. Yesterday he put some hot sand in a sack and...sweated the part; now evidently has taken cold. This makes it disagreeable to us as well as painful to him. The ailing chief passes the day by having several messes of boiled halibut served up till Mr. Deans and I were surfeited.

Meanwhile, Swan adds, one of the paddlers is busy at the fire forging a lot of square staples to mend our canoe which had got split along the bottom.

# ———

The cracked canoe creates a new fret, and Swan's most serious yet. Cedar canoes such as those of the Haidas were so finely honed, so extreme an alchemy of tree-into-vessel-of-grace (recall the Masset canoe maker Swan watched stretching an amidship portion to double its natural width) that their beautiful tension of design became a kind of fragility. ~~delicacy.~~ For all their length and capacity they were thin, thin craft, leanest of wood. Think of this: you are in a twin-engined aircraft and one propellor begins to stutter, semaphores an erratic pattern in from the wing to your solid stare. <sup>There</sup> ~~That~~ is something like the jagged message Swan must read now <sup>from</sup> ~~in~~ the canoe bottom.

To me, Swan exactly here is tested as a true explorer, for this is the first deep nip of predicament. Predicament somehow shadows an expeditionary in strange forms that cannot be imagined until the pounce happens. ~~it strikes.~~ The Antarctic explorer Mawson, the bottoms of his feet dropping off like insoles, forcing him to bare his body for periods so the polar sun might bathe germs from it. Meriwether Lewis, on his way home down the Missouri after the two-year expedition to the Pacific, wounded in a buttock when one of his hunters mistook him for an elk. Swan's confrontation with predicament is not yet so dire, but as odd: the canoe which he has chosen as the single capable implement to carry him along the west shore now becomes threat to the journey.

no 4 And dependent for safety on Edinso's canoe, which like its owner has lived considerably past spryness, are Swan, Johnny Kit Elswa, Deans, the chief's wife, the five <sup>ten</sup> ~~the five~~ crew members: ~~nine~~ persons, plus full supplies, plus Swan's hefty tanks of fish specimens.

It can be imagined that Swan watches carefully, hawk-intent, as the copper staples are tacked into place along the fissure through which the Pacific could come in, and the entire expedition dribble out. Then that he puffed ~~long~~ <sup>5</sup> a long moment on his white meerschaum before saying aloud that in the morning they ~~would~~ <sup>will</sup> push on.

# The rain has gone by the next morning, and on the ebb tide they set out again, Swan uneasy about the canoe bottom but as I know Edinso is careful I don't think he will take any chances although I expect we will get some of our things wet, and we may have to lighten the canoe by throwing some part of our cargo overboard.

That put away in the diary, we moved and paddled along, noting everything of interest in this, to me, most interesting region.

Rounding Cape Knox, a long promontory which on the map looks ominously like a canoe flipped on its back, Swan and crew meet a headwind which forces them to land on a rocky point and scramble for a camping site. They find a place sheltered from the rain by spruce trees and high grass. With tents up and a fire going, Swan decides to lift the party's spirits. This is a pretty rough time, with wind and rain, so to mark the event I had a ham cut and some slices fried for supper.

The ham and a good campsite warm Swan's sense of whimsey. This same place had been occupied as a camp last summer by Count Luboff, a Russian who was looking at lands for parties in Victoria. He had put up a notice on a board, that the place was taken as a coal claim. Some of the Indians not knowing what the board meant, split it up for fire wood, which was the best use that the board could be dedicated to, as there is no coal or any indications of coal at this place except the charred remains of Count Luboffs fire.

# ——— I have said Swan's trio of diaries tell very nearly as much as possible about this expedition, but there is an omission <sup>noticeable by now.</sup> The phantom of these pages is Deans. Johnny Kit Elswa and Edinso receive their share from Swan's pen, but Deans is mentioned only when he goes prospecting or accompanies Swan into a burial cave. The notations are unfailingly polite: too polite, as though the diarist does not want any commotion if wrong eyes find the pages.

Swan, I am beginning to think, may wish that Deans still was on the dock back at Victoria.

# ———

The rain keeps on--Our situation is more romantic than pleasant--  
and the expedition hunkers in for another day.

# Swan passes it by sketching the stone doctor...a sandstone reef washed by the surf into a form that certainly does not require much imagination to make one think as the Indians do that it is a giant doctor of ancient times petrified and fossilized...

Perhaps inspired by the offshore medicine man, Swan now concocts a salve of spruce gum and deer tallow for Edinso's ailing back. If not cured, the chief at least is assuaged. He bestows a pair of shark teeth ear ornaments on Swan in return.

# The weathered-in site atop Cape Knox begins to pall on Swan. This delay, and Edinso's sickness makes me feel pretty blue... as I must pay for every day these people are with me...

At 2 P.M. a schooner on the offing bound south with all sails set...A pleasant sight as there is nothing between us at this camp, and Japan, nothing but a dreary stretch of wild and monotonous ocean... the swiftly moving vessel gave a feeling of life....I am quite tired of this place and long to leave it.

# The last of dusk on the Olympic Peninsula. Beyond Lake Quinault, northward along the Pacific edge of the Peninsula, we are passing through miles of tunnel of high firs. The line of sky is so narrow between the margins of our deep road-canyon that it looks like a blue path somehow hung along the treetops. I am sagging from the day of deciphering Swan's travel, readying for our own; Carol with her better attention to the dark drives this last blackening stretch of distance.

Mapping in my mind as the road slits the forest, I realize that the coast here, off through the timber to the west of us, is the single piece of ~~Washington's~~ <sup>Washington's ocean</sup> shoreline never visited by Swan. He came as far north as the mouth of the Quinault River in 1854, on that jesting report from the Shoalwater Indians that a British steamship was carrying on a smuggling trade with the Quinaults, and he once canoed down from Neah Bay to the Quillayute tribe at La Push. Between, the stretch of shore where the Hoh River flows into the Pacific, Swan somehow did not attain. But the two of us in this ~~fat~~ <sup>fat</sup> pellet of metal have, on some tideline wander or another. I think over the fact of having set foot anywhere along this continental rim where the wandersome Swan didn't, and of sleeping tonight beside a fine Peninsula river he somehow never saw, and the surprise of it whirls to me out of the rushing dark.

Day seventy-three

The Hoh park ranger, stocky and red-mustached, recites for us new numerals of the February windstorm that unbuilt the Hood Canal bridge. Here in his domain those hours, ninety trees were blown down across the first nine miles of the trail Carol and I are about to hike. Twenty-two more barricaded the road we have just come in on from the coastal highway. When the wind hit its wildest, the ranger heard seven trees topple within a total of five seconds.

I try to imagine the blizzard of wood, tons of cudgel falling at every eyeblink, and ask the ranger what he did during it, hole up somewhere and try pull the hole in after him?

"Wasn't anything to do, just drink a little wine and listen to them fall."

#

If the Alava trail is a miniature Roman road and Dungeness Spit a storybook isthmus between saltwater and glacier ice, these Olympic Peninsula rainforests, the Hoh the most northerly of four, are Atlantises of nature. Communities of myriads of life which thrive while enwrapped in more than twelve feet of rain per year. Their valleys are fat troughs to the Pacific. In from the ocean the rainclouds float, are elevated by the terrain beginning its climb to the Olympic summits, and let down their <sup>water</sup> ~~rain~~. The moisture produces a whopping north woods jungle, a kind of Everglades grown to the height of fifteen-story buildings. Here in the Hoh, for instance, Sitka spruce are the dominant giant trees, and they

measure big around as winery vats and more than two hundred feet up.

The power and loft of the Sitkas, however, are merely the might above the rampant details of the rain forest, like crags over delicate valleys. Nature here tries a little of everything green. Variety and variety of moss and lichen, sprays of fern. The fascination of the rain forest is that all flows into and out of all else; here I can sense how the Haidas, whom Swan went among in their own clouds of forest, could produce art in which creatures swim in and out of each other, the designs tumble, notch together, uncouple, compress, surge. This forest's version is that an embankment with a garden of fir seedlings and ferns sprouting from it will turn out to be not soil, but a downed giant tree, its rot giving the nurture to new generation. Moss-like epiphytes scamper up tree trunks, and from ~~the epiphyte mat~~ <sup>amid the fuzzy</sup> spurts licorice fern, daintily leafing into the air sixty feet above the ground. Alders and broad-leaf elm are adorned with club-moss, their limbs in wild gesticulation draped with the flowing stuff. So laced and lush is this ecosystem that we walk our several miles through it today without making a footfall, only scuffs.

Carol tells me that these Olympic rain forests, and the rough coast to their west, provide her the greatest calm of any place she has been. That she can walk in this rain forest and only be walking in this rain forest, moving in simple existence. Surprising, that, because neither of us thinks we are ~~particularly~~ <sup>at all</sup> mystic. Perhaps, efficient dwellers we try to be, we simply admire the deft fit of

life systems in the rain forest, the flow of growth out of growth,  
out of death...

I do not quite ease off into beingness as she can. Memories and ideas leap to mind. I remember that Callenbach's young foresters of Ecotopia would stop in the forest to hug a fir and murmur into its bark, brother tree... This Hoh forest is not a gathering of patches of fog snagged in the tree tops above, brothers to humankind, but of elders. The dampness in the air, tells me another story out of memory, of having read of a visitor who rode through the California redwood forest in the first years of this century. He noted to his guide that the sun was dissipating the chilly fog from around them. No, said the guide looking to canyon walls of wood like these, no, "The trees is drinkin' it. That's what they live on mostly. When they git done breakfast you'll git warm enough."

# ———

For a time, the river seduces me from the forest. This season, before the glacier melt begins to pour from the Olympic peaks, the water of the Hoh is a painfully lovely slate blue, a moving blade of delicate gloss. The boulder-stropped, the fog-polished Hoh. Question: why must rivers have names? Tentative answer: for the same reason gods do. These Peninsula rivers, their names a tumbled poem of several tongues--Quinault, Quillayute, Hoh, Bogashiel, Soleduck, Elwha, Dungeness, Gray Wolf--are as holy to me as anything I know.

# ———



Forest again. For comparison's sake, I veer from the trail to take a look at the largest Sitka spruce along this valley bottom. The Park Service has honored it with a sign, giving the tree's dimensions as sixteen feet four inches in diameter, one hundred eighty feet in height, but now the sign is propped against the prone body of the giant. Toppled, it lies like a huge extracted tunnel bore. Clambering onto its upper surface, I find that the Sitka has burls, warts on the wood, bigger around than my body. For all that, I calculate that it is barely larger, if any, than the standard nineteenth-century target that Highpockets and his calendar crew are offhandedly devastating in my writing room.

# —————  
Evening, and west to Kalaloch through portals of sawed-through windfalls, to the campground next to the ocean. In fewer than fifty miles, mountain and ocean, arteried by this pulsing valley.

Day seventy-four

A night that sagged several nights long. Our aged tent, which has traveled as far as Nova Scotia and up and down the mountain west in all manner of weather, never was soggier, droopier. Rain hit the canvas all night in buckshot bursts. Seepage sprung in one corner and then around the doorway flap until by morning we were scrunched in our sleeping bag into the exact center of the tent, islanded away from the sopping edges like a pair of frogs on a lily pad.

Vehement as it was, the rain made the night's lesser threat. When the wind arrived off the ocean, the tent walloped and bellied, tried to lift us off into the fir trees somewhere. All in all, as restful as trying to sleep inside the bag of a leaky balloon, and every hour or so Carol and I muttered inconclusively about the situation. It crossed my mind, and without doubt hers, that this might be a repeat of the big windstorm. Somehow it got decided that if this was so, the weather would first define itself by swatting the tent down onto our heads, and at that point we would face the issue.

More velocity did not arrive, we finished the night damp but stubbornly prone, and then began the drive home in coastal rain moving almost solidly through the air, as if walls of water were dissolving down over us as the car nudged them.

# \_\_\_\_\_  
 Swan's own overweathered site, the rainy perch atop Cape Knox, he concludes to leave on the morning of the seventeenth of August, even if it means abandoning the journey down the western coastline.

I told Edinso if he did not feel better I would return to Masset.  
He said if he went back it would be as bad as if he goes on and he thought my spruce salve had done his back good.

On they go.

# \_\_\_\_\_  
11:30 a.m...we passed Salsthlung point and passed Natzun Bay into which three small streams empty, but there are no Indian settlements ancient or modern. Saw a school of whales rolling and blowing.

# \_\_\_\_\_  
2:20 p.m....we reached Kle-ta-koon point, near which there is a snug harbor inside the reef. On the shore is the summer residence of the otter hunters, a cluster of houses forming a little village called Tledso but at present unoccupied: a narrow rift...not over twenty feet wide, formed the dangerous and only passage for canoes and boats.

Bouncing through the reef-cut--you can all but hear Swan praying to the cobbled bottom of the canoe to hold together--they came out in a quiet little harbor as smooth as a mill pond. A placid bayside site also notable for being almost empty of birds: a solitary raven, two or three sparrows and a few sea gulls. Swan, old combatant of crows, edgily jots that the quiet can only be too good to last. As soon as a camp of Indian otter hunters comes here for a few weeks, the place will be alive with crows and other birds which seem to follow the abode of man, like nettles, sorrel and other noxious weeds.

# \_\_\_\_\_

Storm returns the next day, heavy surf, strong wind.

Swan spends the time packing his alcoholic specimens of fish-- they have been adding up steadily in the diaries, cuttlefish, sticklebacks, rock cod, buffalo sculpine, viviparous perch, young octopus--in one large tin tank in a wooden box.

# \_\_\_\_\_

The rain that night turns tremendous. Fearful, Swan records.

The morning, the nineteenth of August, promises no better.

# \_\_\_\_\_

We are now 13 days from Masset and have advanced but fifty miles and at this rate we cannot reach Skidegate in three months and all our provisions will get exhausted.

The weather, the wild broth of the North Pacific, is proving too much.

Beside the campfire at Kle-ta-koon, Swan must weigh risks one last time. Chance more of the whistling weather, more canoe peril, or cancel this bravura journey and any further exploration of the west shore of the Queen Charlottes.

He is a man who knows that life is no walk-through: that just now is his single try at this last frontier edge. But he knows too (veteran of all those tumbles by alcohol and that so-frequent slippage of his finances) that defeat will happen when it wants to.

Catch the moment with me, juggle its mood down through the typewriter to waiting paper, say with surety what you-as-Swan decide this rainswept night. Slippery item, surety.

# \_\_\_\_\_

Swan unpockets a diary and writes retreat.

P. 312 A follows →

REVISED

312A

Edinso's canoe is an old one and unsafe to proceed with so much weight in her, and prudence dictates a return as soon as the wind abates...On consulting with Mr. Deans have decided to return to Massett where I can leave some of my heavy articles and proceed to Skidegate... by the east side of the island.

Day seventy-five

A warm rainy morning, a borrowing from April-to-come. The rain makes fine, fine streaks, scarcely larger than spider's web, against the evergreens. As I began today's brief squat to the typewriter and diary pages, the day till now spent thinking of Swan at his point of decision, of how it is when a dream at last denies itself to you, a jay went past the window like a blue spear.

#

One last spurt of--anguish? disgust?--in Swan's Queen Charlottes pages. I can't understand this weather with the Barometer so well up.

Edinso announces his own baleful theory. Our present ill luck is occasioned by Mr Deans stirring up the remains of the old skaga or doctor back at Yakh nine days before.

Day seventy-six

Monday, the twentieth of August, 1883. As Swan packed his tin bins of fish for the retreat to Masset, I heard the report of a gun, and...an Indian named Kanow arrived...He has come to hunt sea otter and will return to Masset as soon as he kills any.

Double luck has just blown in.

Swan looks from his heavy fish tanks to the canoe of the arrivee. If... Amiably, Kanow agrees; he will cargo Swan's load of specimens back to Masset with him.

Next the sky, which this morning has been gradually less malevolent.

# Swan waits, waits. # With one last northwest gust the wind and rain whirl away.

# \_\_\_\_\_  
Swan sits under sunshine for the first time in a couple of hundred hours and begins to write the reversal of the Queen Charlottes' defeat of him.

This unexpected arrival and the relieving of our canoe of the weight of the case of specimens which weighs as much as a barrel of beef--nearly three hundred pounds, he noted elsewhere--will make our canoe much lighter and as the Indians have been at work repairing her today, I hope we can make a start tomorrow early if the wind is fair. I have told Johnny to cook enough this evening so that we shall not have to go ashore tomorrow until we camp for the night.

# \_\_\_\_\_