sunning on the warm dirt. In a combination of grappling and chopping, 
the jay finished off the snake in an instant, then 
tried 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 
corpse in disinterest, bounded around the garden, and flew off. 

When I went out to look at the snake, I found that it was as long as 
the span of my hand, nine inches; gray-green, with three lengthwise 
strings of yellow down its body. In three places the jay had frayed 
through that body, the small ruptures like those in an electrical 

Even as I studied the snake, not three 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 arrested suddenness of the 

ivory frog going 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 I can see from the afterdeck back to today's second reference point of Swan's embarkment toward the Queen Charlottes early that summer of 1883. The bespured red-brick courthouse, and in it the records of the probate court which Swan himself had presided over in 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-eight

Two dawns for the price of one this morning. I clamber from bed early for the cosmic bargain.

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. 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 west-west-west 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 halflight to swoop away.

Swan cherished the sorcery of foretelling—of harkening to 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.
There was a most infernal din, and to help it out Jones and myself got
out the swivel and fired it off. . . .

And finally, when totally obscured, they were in great excitement and fear.

As the moon became more and more obscure, they increased their clamor.

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

Swan, eyeing the flagpole:

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

Swan was rubbernecking interestedly up at the vanishing moon when the
By 8:15, the sparrows nearest our parapet are scratching 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 flares struck against the dimness. The clouds go a deeper, steelier gray. At 8:16, a.m., totality, it is deep evening.

Swan with his camera gone chased the eclipse from the Makahs' 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 are in a quickening dawn. The birds begin their day again. At 8:30, on the stroke, the sensor lamps blink out around us.
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-
deedee chorus, watch 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 sat and tried to nest himself. Now
he sat casually and eyed a number of items he evidently had never
noticed before; his own tail, a bug in the grass, every nearby tree.

Sneezes, and he was astonished about it. I have decided there is no
worry about him marauding the birds. More likely

the birds will mistake him for a fluffy boulder, perch and drown
him in droppings.

Now to Swan. I find him saying that...
The next village site, Chathl, proved a disappointment: a few toppled memorial columns and the bones of seals, otters and fish, showing that it was the inhabitants of the water and not of the sands that constituted their food. Except for a few seasonal hunters of fur seals, Chathl was long abandoned, another ghost town, as if the tribes one morning heard the canoeing orders from Raven and in a single fleet followed him up the rays of a red sunset. Here again, the village's afternoon was struck with the shale and conglomerate coastline, which in the most fantastic forms imaginable seemed more alive than the villages. They canoed past a height of sandstone thrown up in the form of a natural fortification, a last ditch stronghold where the tribal people had held off enemies.

Sunday, the twelfth of August, Swan arose at five intending an early start, but felt a southeast wind on his face and looked out to a brilliant and perfect rainbow, a double one, which indicated rain.

Aug 12, pocket diary

I am disappointed as there is nothing to prevent our going, but the rain, and I am anxious to be moving. Instead, Swan cleared out the brush from an abandoned lodge, everyone moved in with the provisions to a dry corner, Edinso built a big fire and the old house assumed a cheerful appearance.
Their interior weather improved further with the halibut caught by Johnny Kit Elsewa and a couple of crew members. Swan dined heartily of it, and of boiled halibut paunch...a delicate kind of tripe tender.
and of a crane shot by Johnny which was stuffed and roasted, and of
boiled halibut paunch...a delicate kind of tripe tender and delicious.

After that repast—a very nice Sunday dinner Swan writes, as blandly
as if he were dabbing away the last traces of baked beans and pot
roast—the weather cleared enough for Swan and Deans to be guided by
one of the canoemen
to yet another burial cave, in a high ridge near the headland called
Cape Knox. Edinso gave the cave a billing in the legend time a
fifteen-foot-long lamprey eel had inhabited the darkness...It could
go on the land like a snake and would attack men and dogs. A celebrated
hunter of ancient times who had a large pack of hounds, attacked this
Lamprey in a small lake before the entrance to the cave, but the creature
cut them with its sharp teeth and drove them off and then dived down
into the lake and was seen no more.

The abode of a demon like the Dragon which St George slew, Swan
mused, and plunged in under the daggering stalactites. The cave was
one more stone womb of the Haida past, beyond the
recolleotions of the present or former generation, littered now with
fragments of boxes and bones torn from their resting place by some
wild animal. None of these burial deposits had escaped the marauder
whoever it was.... Back at camp, Edinso as usual told them they were
the first white to have seen the place, which Swan eagerly accepted
as no white men have been here to whom he has shown it, and no one
could find it except by accident which it not likely...as the geological formation of the ridge presents no attraction to either gold or coal seekers.

Monday, third of August, a most disagreeable day, misty rain and 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 remained a bother. Yesterday he put some hot sand in a sack and...sweated the part; now evidently had taken cold. This makes it disagreeable to us as well as painful to him. The ailing chief passed the day by having letterbk. Aug. 13, Edinso ordering up halibut Edinso had several messes of boiled halibut served up till Mr Deans and I were surfeited, and one of the paddlers forged a lot of square staples to mend our canoe which had got split along the bottom.

The rain quit the next morning, and on the ebb tide they set out but as again, Swan still uneasy about the cracked canoe bottom, 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 would put away in the diary.

We moved and paddled along, noting everything of interest in this, I might add, that much of the character had been and manners were to me, most interesting region.

Rounding Cape Knox, a long promontory which on the map looks ominously like an overturned Hudson canoe, Swan and crew met a headwind which forced them to land on a rocky point and scramble for a camping site. From the rain, which was quite copious, they found a place sheltered by spruce trees and high grass. With tents up and a fire going, Swan decided to lift the party's spirits.

(p. 113) The weather soured. This is a pretty rough time, with wind and rain, so to mark the event I had a ham cut and fried some slices for supper. The ham, a good campsite, warmed Swan's sense of humor. This same place had been occupied as a camp last summer by Count Luboff, a Russian who was looking out 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 Luboff's fire.
There was, however, a rumor of copper, and the next afternoon Swan and Deans walked about three miles by a circuitous route to see a rock formation where the Indians said they once had plucked out pure copper. Again, the volcanic action had molded incredible shapes. One great bluff looked like a gigantic roly pudding cut in two. Others reminded me of sheets of dough in a cracker bakery with a layer of flour between the sheets to represent the calcareous spar or quartz which is between each layer of this metamorphic rock. Then lift this mass of dough and throw it into a heap, would give a good idea of the violent and terrible turmoil when this upheaval took place. The visitors saw no copper.

The rain kept on--Our situation is more romantic than pleasant--and the expedition hunkered in for another day. Swan passed it by sketching Swan sketched 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 had made a salve of spruce gum and deer tallow for Edinso's ailing back. The chief was assured if not cured. He presented Swan a pair of shark teeth ear ornaments in return.
passed the time by foraging for Swan

The crewmen foraged for him—fossil shells, a smidgin of coal dug from among the reefs, a weed-like plant called Tl'kunite which the Indians ate with candlefish grease but which Swan thought tastes earthy like moss.

At 2 P.M. a schooner on the offered bound south with all sails set. It was a pleasant sight as there is nothing between us at this camp, and Japan, nothing but a dreary stretch of wild and monotonous ocean and the swiftly moving vessel gave a feeling of life....I am quite tired of this place and long to leave it.
Late dusk. Beyond Lake Quinault, northward along the Pacific edge of the Olympic 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, with her better attention to the dark drives this last blackening stretch of distance.

Mapping in my mind as the road inches the forest, I realize that the coast here, off through the timber to the west of us, is the single piece of Washington 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 pellet of metal have, on some tideline wander or another. Since I have been everywhere else along this shore, on the Washington coast that Swan was, this means I have out-miled him.

Not surpassed, never that just out-miled. I grin out past the push.
I think over the fact of having set foot anywhere along this continental rim where the wandering Swan didn't, and of sleeping tonight beside a fine Peninsula river he somehow never saw, and it whirls me out of the rushing dark that I am becoming something of a winter brother myself.
Day seventy-four

A night that was several nights long. Our aged tent, which has been
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 started 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 the balloon, and Carol and I
muttered inconclusively about the situation. It crossed my mind, and without
doubt
am same hers, that this might be a repeat of the big windstorm. Somehow
it got decided that if this was so, the weather would define itself by
swatting the tent down onto our heads, and at that point we would face
the issue of sitting up in the car the rest of the night. More velocity
did not arrive, we finished the night damp but stubbornly prone, then
began the drive home through coastal rain moving almost solidly through
the air, as if walls of water were dissolving down over the car.
Swan's own overweathered site, the rainy perch atop Cape Knox, he
concluded to leave on the morning of the seventeenth of August, even if it meant
abandoning the journey
instead of continuing down the western shore. 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. They went on.

11:30 a.m... we passed Salsthlung point and passed Natson 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, they came out in a quiet little harbor as

smooth as a mill pond...After appeasing our appetites, we started out

prospecting. What the rocks yielded here was a black pitch, a species

of Trachite, which Swan found mystifying, a most singular formation.

...This fossil pitch is forced up in a manner similar to quartz veins....

I took some...and chewed it....It burns freely in the fire....a most

singular formation.

This bayside site also was notable for being almost empty of Birds--
a solitary

raven, two or three sparrows and a few sea gulls. Swan sedately jotted

that this would 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 returned the next day. Heavy surf, strong wind. Swan spent the time packing his alcoholic specimens of fish and mollusks in one large tin tank and a wooden box. He noticed chunks of California redwood among the tide wrack on the beach and felt gratified.

...It shows the Northerly current which sets inshore all along the coast from California to Alaska.... Some writers assert that the Southerly current—the Kuro Shiwo or Japanese current, he interjected in explanation—sweeps along the entire Coast, which is incorrect, as my observations...
The rain that night turned tremendous—fearful, Swan wrote—and the morning promised 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...letterbk, Aug. 19, insert after "all our provisions": will get exhausted and...

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

Swan wrote finish to the exploration of the western shore of the Queen Charlottes: ...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 inside or eastern shore.

...by the east side of the island.

A final word of—anguish? disgust?—in Swan's pages.

Pocket diary, Aug 20

I can't understand this weather with the Barometer so well up.

His own Edinso announced the baleful theory. Our present ill luck is occasioned by Mr. Deans stirring up the remains of the old skaga or doctor back at 00 nine days before.