The Makahs assured Swan that he would be the first white man to see Lake Ozette. That may have been native blarney, but the known history of the Alava coast until then vouches for it as probable truth. In the journals of the sea-going explorers, there is no record of longboats aiming ashore along this unnerving stretch of shore. In July of 1775 at the mouth of the Hoh River, twenty-five miles south of here, the Spaniard Bodega sent in a boat crew of seven from his schooner to fill water casks. The waiting Indians killed five, and two drowned in terror in the surf. With that bloody exception, explorers cruised respectfully shy of the Olympic Peninsula coast in their scans while watching for some major channel which would prove to be the Northwest Passage through the top of America, and they had a tricky enough time even with that. (Recall Captain Cook, that tremendous discoverer, offshore somewhere in heavy weather in February of 1778: "It is in this very latitude where we now were that geographers have placed the pretended Strait of Juan de Fuca. But we saw nothing like it, nor is there any possibility that any such thing ever existed.") Nor were shipwrecked crews likely to have set off overland and come onto Lake Ozette; the Olympic Peninsula was known to be a firred jungle vaguely the size of all of England.
Indeed, there is a strange and welcome slowing-down of exploration where the Olympic Peninsula is concerned. Not until 1889 did an expedition of six men and four dogs traipse entirely across the Olympic Mountains; their exploit was sponsored by a Seattle newspaper and left some of the loveliest peaks of America with the curious legacy of being named for editors. Even for a few more years after that the Lake Ozette corner of the Peninsula remained undisturbed, until settlers came to its shores—inland from Alava, along the trail Swan walked thirty years earlier—in the 1890's. Their homesteads never really burgeoned, and the lake even now remains remote, lightly peopled. Carol and I once hiked in toward the southern end by a lesser trail, to camp overnight. The solitude was entire except for hummingbirds buzzing my red-and-black shirt.

Now, with a last look toward the beach and the Makah canoe-way, to Ozette.

Swan's exploration on that day in 1864 we duplicate with eerie exactness. The trail commenced a short distance south of the village and runs up to the top of the hill or bluff which is rather steep and about sixty feet high. So the
route still goes. From the summit we proceeded in an easterly direction through a very thick forest half a mile and reached an open prairie which is dry and covered with fern, dwarf sallal and some red top grass, with open timber around the sides. The very grass seems the same. From the prairie we pass through another belt of timber to another prairie lying in the same general direction as the first but somewhat lower and having the appearance of being wet and boggy. This was covered in its drier portions with water grass and thick moss which yielded moisture on the pressure of the feet. Step from the broadwalk, and drops of moisture from James Swan's pen are on our boots.

By now, this second of the twin prairies has a name, and some winsome history. Maps show the eyelet in the forest as Ahlstrom's Prairie—where, for fifty-six years, Lars Ahlstrom lived a solitary life as one more outermost particle of the American impulse to head for sunset. Through nearly all the decades of his bachelor household here, Ahlstrom's was the westernmost homestead in the continental United States.

Originally—which is to say within the first few dozen days after his arrival in 1902—Ahlstrom built himself a two-room cabin close beside the Ozette-to-Alava trail. That dwelling burned in 1916, and he lived from then on in the four-room cabin which still stands, thriftily but sturdily built with big tree stumps as support posts for its northwest and northeast
corners, a few hundred yards from the trail. Even now as Carol and I battle the brush to this cabin, all signs are that Ahlstrom kept a trim, tidy homestead life. In his small barn on the route in, the window sills above a workbench are fashioned nicely into small box-shelves. At the cabin itself, the beam ends facing west are carefully masked with squares of tarpaper to prevent weathering. Inside, when Ahlstrom papered the cabin walls with newspapers, he carefully wrapped around the pole roof-beams as well, a fussy touch that I particularly like. Summers in Montana when I worked as a ranch hand, I spent time in bunkhouses papered this way, and neatness made a difference. Always there were interesting events looming out at you—BANKS CLOSE; JAPS BOMB GUNBOAT—or some frilly matron confiding the value of liver pills, and the effect was lost if the newsprint had been slapped on upside down or sideways.

This homestead of Ahlstrom's never quite worked out. Regularly he went off into the Olympic Mountains on logging jobs and other hire to earn a living. On the other hand, it went on never quite working out for five and a half decades, until Ahlstrom, at eighty-six, suffered a foot infection and had to move to Port Angeles for the last year or two of his life.

I think of Swan and Ahlstrom, who missed each other by forty years on this mossy prairie between Alava and Ozette,
and judge that if time could be rewoven to bring them together, they would be quite taken with one another. Swan promptly diaries down the facts of the life of Mr. Ahlstrom. . . arrived to America from Sweden at the age of 20 years. . . he and a neighbor have laboured to build a pony trail to the lake by laying down a quantity of small cedar puncheons. . . the rain here does not allow his fruit trees to thrive but his garden looks finely. . . Ahlstrom, with his reputation for conviviality with travelers, takes note of Swan's reputation as a cook and proffers the chance for him to chef a meal for the two of them--maybe halibut cheeks or some other of Swan's coastal favorites.

The trail again, ours and Swan's. After crossing the second prairie we again enter the forest and after rising a gentle eminence descend into a ravine through which runs a small brook. Exactly so. The little stream that dives under the boardwalk runs very loud, and sudsy from lapping across downed trees. Where the water can be seen out from under its head of foam, it is dark brown, the color of strong ale.

And then the lake, obscure and moody Ozette. Here we found an old hut made in the rudest manner with a few old splits of cedar and showing evidence of having been used as a frequent camping ground by the Hosett hunters. An old canoe split in two was lying in front and bones and horns of elk were strewed about. Now the premises which come into sight are National Park display centers, and rangers' quarters.

At last at the lakeside, Swan had a curiously threatening experience.
It was nearly sundown when we arrived and I had barely time to make a hasty sketch of the lake before it was dark. We had walked out very rapidly and I was in a great heat on my arrival and my clothes literally saturated with perspiration. I imprudently drank pretty freely of the lake water which had the effect of producing a severe cramp in both of my legs which took me some time to overcome, which I did however by walking about and rubbing the cramped part briskly. I said nothing to the Indians as I did not wish them to know anything ailed me, but at times I thought I should have to ask their assistance.

So he saved face, and evidently something more. What was it that struck at him with those moments of dismay in his legs, the uncertainty of how the Makahs might react to an ailment, that habit of burying first and regretting later? The remoteness of Ozette itself, like a vast watery crater in the forest?

The next morning, the twenty-third of July, 1864, Swan intended to go out with Peter and sketch his way along the Ozette shoreline, but awoke to heavy fog. He and the Makahs prepared instead to hike back to Alava. I had accomplished two things. I had proved the existence of a lake and had made a sketch of a portion and as I was the first white man who had ever seen this sheet of water I concluded I would take some other opportunity when I might have white companions.
with me and make a more thorough survey.

Swan never did achieve that more thorough survey. But today, at least, he had the companions to Ozette.
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In continental outline, the United States rides the map as a rudely-carpentered galleon: bowsprit ascending at northernmost Maine, line of keel along the Gulf shores and the southwest borders, the long clean amidship straightness of the 49th parallel across the upper Midwest and West. This ship of states is, by chance, proving eastward. Or as I prefer to think of it, the figurehead and bow are awash in the Atlantic while potent Pacific tides gather beneath our aft portion of the craft.

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tiny communities exist on logging and seasonal salmon fishing, and there seems to be enough vacant time to cause edginess. The man next to me at the cafe counter this morning at Sekiu was working his way through hash browns, sunny-side eggs, toast, sausage, coffee, and vehemence.

"That kid," he grumped across the room to the waitress, "that kid never did make much of a showing for himself around here. Glad to see him gone."

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and the sight would stir up a righteousness in him. How different our position from theirs. They came to conquer. We are here to render benefit.

The Makahs might care to argue that point of benefit, after a hundred and twenty years as a Reservation people under the U.S. governance. Neah Bay meets the visitor as a splatter of weather-whipped houses, despite its age a tentative town seemingly pinned into place by the heavy government buildings at its corners: the Bureau of Indian Affairs offices, the Coast Guard enclave, the Air Force base on the opposite neck of the peninsula. One building stands out in grace, the museum being built by the tribal council to display from the finds of an archeological dig southward along the coast at Cape Alava. Despite its brave thrust and the bulky federal presence, the dark forested hills which crowd the bay seem simply to be waiting until the right moonless night to take back the townsite.

I have brought with me the copied portions of Swan's diaries which relate the political position of Cape Flattery in the tribal geography of the North Pacific. Remoteness and the empty expanses of
Strait and ocean would seem to dominate such a site, but that was not the case at all when Swan lived with the Neah Bay villagers in the early 1860's. He found them carrying on a complicated war of nerves, and occasionally muscles, which would do credit to any adventurous modern nation; south, north and east, the Makahs looked from their pinnacle of land to a tribal neighbor they were at issue with.

The calmest of these rivalries extended southward, about a day's canoe journey down the coast to where the Quillayute tribe lived. The Makahs suspected the Quillayutes of having killed one of their whaling crews which had been blown
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Makahs now scored a move:

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who was here on a visit. The squaw was part Elwha and Peter took
her as a hostage to enforce pay from the Elwhas for robbing and killing
Swell a year and a half ago. (p. 258) The ransom fell through, the
woman was allowed to escape. Peter came to me today with a very
heavy heart in consequence of the squaw having absconded. The

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Next, however, intelligence reached the Makahs—and of course Swan's pen—that the Arhosetts were having their own problems of pride. This forenoon Frank told me that he had just received news from his father, old Cedakanim of Clyquot. It appears that the Arhosett Indians have been trying to induce the Clyquots to join them in an attack on the Makahs...They offered 100 blankets and 20 Makah women as slaves provided they could catch them. Cedakanim and the other Clyquot chief rejected this offer and demanded a steamboat, a sawmill and a barrel of gold. This difference of opinion came near resulting in a fight but at length old Cedakanim told them he would not fight the Makahs nor did he want any pay from the Arhosetts as he was much richer than they and to prove this he ordered 100 pieces of blugber to be given them...This, said Frank, made the Arhosetts so ashamed that the sweat ran out of their faces...
Perhaps deciding that it was easier to negotiate with enemies than allies of Cedakanim's sort, the Arhosetts held back to see what might be forthcoming from Neah Bay. Agent Webster suggested to the Makahs that they offer the Arhosetts a peace settlement of, say, twenty blankets; the U.S. government would provide ten of the blankets. Given the prospect of getting out of a prospect of war at the cost of only ten blankets of their own, the Makahs made a show of reluctant
nominating Swan as plenipotentiary:

diplomacy...the Indians wish me to go over to the Arhosetts and find out if they are willing to settle the affair by a payment to them of blankets, and if so the Arhosetts were to be invited to come over and get them, but we were not to carry anything at first to them but merely to find out the state of their feelings.

As it turned out, the Arhosetts did not even have the satisfaction of receiving an envoy from the Makahs. Swan sent word to them through Cedakanim, the Clyoquot chief who had faced them down with blubber, and eventually two Arhosetts arrived at Neah Bay to say they would settle the matter for blankets.

Peace ensued for two weeks, until the Elwhas protested that a cousin of Peter had stabbed the brother of Swell's killer, Charlie.
Peter responded that he was sorry—sorry that Charlie's brother had only been wounded instead of killed, for he would do it himself if he could get a chance.

Peter being Peter, a chance did come. There is this ultimate entry by Swan:

Tried to get Indians to go to Pt. Angeles for Mr. Webster but all are afraid as Peter on his trip down killed an Indian at Crescent Bay. The Indian was an Elwha and some years ago killed Dukwitsa's father. Peter obtained a bottle and a half of whiskey from a white man at Crescent Bay and while under its influence was intigated by Dukwitsa to kill the Elwha which he did by stabbing him. Peter told me that after he had stabbed the man several times he broke the blade of the knife off in the man's body.
As might be expected, that stabbing invited battle. As might not be expected, the battle lines shaped themselves not between the Makahs and the Elwhas, but the Makahs and the United States. Swan's narrative of move, counter-move, and counter-counter-move:

Mr. Webster arrested Peter this evening and took him on board the sch. A.J. Westen to be taken to Steilacoom, the territorial army headquarters. A cance with a party of Inians followed the schooner and this evening it was reported that they had rescued Peter and conveyed him to Kiddekkubbut. I think this report doubtful. I afterward ascertained it was true....Old Capt. John and 16 others came this forenoon to make me a prisoner and keep me as long as Mr. Webster keeps Peter but when they found that Peter had escaped they came to tell me not to be afraid. I said I was not afraid of any of them and gave them a long lecture.

John said I had a skookum tumtum; a brave heart.

...The steamer Cyrus Walker with a detachment of 33 soldiers under Lieut. Kestler arrived at Neah Bay about midnight of Tuesday...Early The steamer with Mr. Webster on board proceeded to Kiddekkubbut and succeeded in arresting 14 Indians, Peter and thirteen others.
Peter now vanishes from the Neah Bay chronicle, to Swan's considerable relief. I have tried for the past three years to make Mr. Webster believe what a bad fellow Peter is, the diary splutters in farewell. The next, and last, installment.

A fairly fiery record, these few years of bravado and occasional bloodshed by the Makais. Yet it might be remembered that while this sequence of bluff and bravado and occasional bloodshed was occurring, Swan's own kin, the United States of America, and its cousin tribe, the Confederated States of America, were inventing modern mass war at Antietam and Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. If it is a question as to which civilization in those years was more casual with life, don't truly compete with the Civil War's creeks of blood, the Makahs were not the automatic choice.
Day twelve

The new year. On Sunday, January 1, 1960, his first New Year's Day on the coast of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Swan opened a pocket diary barely larger than a deck of cards and inscribed:

May it be not only the commencement of the week, the month and the new year, but the commencement of a new era in my life, and may good resolve result in good action.
Day fifteen

I have not said enough about the startling weather. In usual winter I can simply accept rain and cloud as our regional cloak, the season's garment of interesting texture and of patterned pleasant sound as well. "Rain again," a friend will growl. "Right," I will smile absently. But as rainless day after rainless day has gone past, it dawns on me that this winter is different: drier, colder. Until yesterday morning, the temperature had been below freezing for four days and nights in a row, the longest spell of its kind I can remember here. I bury our kitchen vegetable scraps directly into the garden patch for compost, and the shovel has been bringing up six-inch clods of frozen soil, like lowest-grade coal.

What brings the weather to mind is the renewed presence of birds. This morning kindled into bright sun and already, just to be out in the fresh warmth, I have walked up to the rim of the valley. The view west from there is bannered in five blues today: the water of Puget Sound in two shades, azure nearest me, a more delicately inked hue farther out; the foreshore of the Olympic Peninsula in its heavy forested tint; the Olympic Mountains behind their blue dust of distance; the clear cornflower sky.
As will happen this time of year, clouds are lined across the southern reach of the mountains while clear weather holds the northern end, the Strait country. Such mornings shrug away time. Vessels on the Sound—freighter, tug, barge, second freighter, the White Edmonds-to-Kingston ferry—seemed pinned in place, and I had to watch intently before my eyes could begin to catch the simultaneous motion of them all, inching on the water. Then as I turned home, the flurry. Robins in fluster at the mouth of the valley, abruptly dotting suburban fir trees and frost-stiff lawns. Motion double-quick, headlong. Airful of flying bodies, a vigor in orbit around fixed beauty of Sound and mountains.

These past iced days, I have tried to picture the birds, up in the innermost branches, fluffed with dismay and wondering why the hell they didn't wing south with their saner cousins. It occurs to me also that the dozeey tan cat, as well as the cold, may be keeping them from sight; it occurs to me that it is time I invited the cat to be elsewhere for a while. That the birds one way or another can be conjured back, I dare not doubt. A birdless world is unthinkable to me. To be without birds would be to suffer a kind of color-blindness, a glaucoma blurring colorizing one of the planet's special brightnesses.
on the thin ends of birch branches like monks riding bell-ropes.

A fretful nest-building robin—we always have one or two in the trees at either end of the house—must gather and gather dry spears of grass until the beakful sticks out like cat's whiskers. The flickers, towhees, chickadees, the juncos, the occasional flashing hummingbird; the seasonal grosbeaks who arrive in the driveway and, masked like society burglars, munch amid on seeds among the gravel, besides Carol and the pulse of words across paper everyday necessities there are few in my life, but birds are among them.

And Swan, with his feathered name: birds perpetually aviate across his horizons. Time upon time I have marked incidents in his pages. This forenoon, the tenth of July of 1865, I saw a kingfisher fluttering in the brook and supposed he had a trout which he could not swallow. On going to him I found he had driven his bill into an old rotten stick with such force as to bury it clear up to his eyes. We had hard and fast. I took him with the stick to the house and called Jones and Phillips to see the curiosity. It was with difficulty that his bill was pulled out again.
S to Baird, Jul 6 '62:

Two years previous, in the same week of July:

I discovered a dead Albatross on the beach yesterday which

had a large dogfish which it had swallowed partially but it was too

large, and while the fish's head rested in the bird's stomach, its
tail was out of its mouth. Consequently the bird was soon suffocated....

I never met with a similar instance of voracity.

Birds routinely conjure instances which have nothing whatsoever

to do with human ken. I think of my bafflement about last spring's

haunting robin. I had been standing

[Handwritten note: I thought I had been standing]
of my face, veer off just before a collision, then repeat the foray
two more times.

The bird's window fixation grew. A few days later, on my way back
into the house from the mailbox, I happened to step inside the workshop
just as the robin arrived outside the glass. Unmoving in the
semi-dark of the workshop, I stayed and counted, unbelieving, as the robin
flung itself from the woodpile onto the window thirty-five consecutive
times.

Over and over again, the small creature would fly up so hard its
breast would flatten full onto the glass, feet scraping a quick
graping eek on the pane, and drop back. A second or two of wait,
then repeat.

Flurries erupted two or three times, a particularly frenzied one
at the last when the robin flung itself to the window several times in
a row as rapidly as it could launch-collide-rebound-launch again.

Once, it turned away and sidled off along the woodpile, then whirled
as if to catch the window by surprise and whapped the glass cliff again.

Once, too, the robin paused long enough to open its bill very wide,
as if swallowing—or making a silent anguished protest.
That effort of hurling one's body thirty-five times at near-full force, against a solid barrier left me dumbstruck. What would be equivalent for a human body thirty-five rapid-fire fullback plunges into a stadium wall? It also unnerved me. I try to stay clear of the birds' affairs, but neither do I have to put up with hara-kiri which employs my own windowpane. In front of the target window I high as stacked cardboard boxes until they loomed behind the spattered pattern of attack, hoping the robin would be nonplussed and go nest in a tree somewhere. Whether it did take itself to a tree, I cannot know. I do know that its haunting madness left my vicinity.

Swan, the twelfth of February of 1863: Quite a number of crows have been washed ashore dead. They have a rookery at Waadah Island and probably the stormy wind that has prevailed for several days with the thick snow blinded them and they fell into the water... There is catastrophe of the sort here as well, although not in bunches. This house I live in sits as a glass crag in the birds' midst. Badgerlike, I hunch in here at the typing desk and watch helplessly as the building imposes its thrusts athwart the birds' paths and all too often kills them. Grosbeaks have been the most frequent victims of headlong smash against a window. During one of their
Day nineteen

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100 blankets and 20 Makah women as slaves provided they could catch them.

Cedakanim and the other Clyoquot chief rejected this offer and demanded

a steamboat, a sawmill and a barrell of gold. This difference of opinion

came near resulting in a fight but at length old Cedakanim told them he

would not fight the Makahs nor did he want any pay from the Arhosetts as

he was much richer than they and to prove this he ordered 100 pieces of

blubber to be given them...This, said Frank, made the Arhosetts so ashamed

that the sweat ran out of their faces...
Perhaps deciding that it was easier to negotiate with enemies than allies of Cedakanim's sort, the Arhosetts held back to see what might be forthcoming from Neah Bay. Agent Webster suggested to the Makahs that they offer the Arhosetts a peace settlement of, say, twenty blankets; the U.S. government would provide ten of the blankets.

Given the prospect of getting out of a prospect of war at the cost of only ten blankets of their own, the Makahs made a show of reluctant \underline{\textit{possible}} nominating Swan as plenipotentiary: \underline{\textit{diplomacy}}...the Indians wish me to go over to the Arhosetts and find out if they are willing to settle the affair by a payment to them of blankets, and if so the Arhosetts were to be invited \underline{\textit{some}} to come over and get them, but we were not to carry anything at first to them but merely to find out the state of their feelings.

As it turned out, the Arhosetts did not even have the satisfaction of receiving an envoy from the Makahs. Swan sent word to them through his wealth of Cedakanim, the Clyquot chief who had faced them down with \underline{\textit{blubber}}

and eventually two Arhosetts arrived at Neah Bay to say they would settle \underline{\textit{for blankets}}.

Peace ensued for two weeks, until the Elwhas protested that a cousin of Peter had stabbed the brother of Swell's killer, Charlie.
Peter responded that he was sorry—sorry that Charlie's brother had only been wounded instead of killed, for he would do it himself if he could get a chance.

Peter being Peter, a chance did come. There is this ultimate entry by Swan:

**Tried to get Indians to go to Pt. Angeles for Mr. Webster** but all are afraid as Peter on his trip down killed an Indian at Crescent Bay. The Indian was an Elwha and some years ago killed Dukwitsa's father. Peter obtained a bottle and a half of whiskey from a white man at Crescent Bay and while under its influence was instigated by Dukwitsa to kill the Elwha which he did by stabbing him. Peter told me that after he had stabbed the man several times he broke the blade of the knife off in the man's body.
As might be expected, that stabbing invited battle. As might not be expected, the battle lines shaped themselves not between the Makahs and the Elwhas, but the Makahs and the United States. These years passing with remarkable tranquility at Cape Flattery had been remarkable between the natives and the white newcomers, as Swan was aware: I have been reading this evening the report of the Comm. of Indian Affairs and it seems singular to be able to sit here in peace and quiet on this, the most remote frontier of the United States, and read of the hostilities among the tribes between this Territory and the eastern settlements. Peter's knife punctured that state of affairs. Swan's narrative begins to show move, counter-move, counter-counter-move:

Mr. Webster arrested Peter this evening and took him on board the sch. A.J. Westen to be taken to Steilacoom, the territorial army headquarters. A canoe with a party of Indians followed the schooner and this evening it was reported that they had rescued Peter and conveyed him to Kiddekskubut. I think this report doubtful. I afterward ascertained it was true... Old Capt. John and 16 others came this forenoon to make me a prisoner and keep me as long as Mr. Webster keeps Peter but when they found that Peter had escaped they came to tell me not to be afraid. I said I was not afraid of any of them and gave them a long lecture.
John said I had a skookum tumtum, a brave heart.

...The steamer Cyrus Walker with a detachment of 33 soldiers under

Lieut. Kestler arrived at Neah Bay about midnight of Tuesday... Early. The
steamer with Mr. Webster on board proceeded to Kiddekubbut and succeeded
in arresting 14 Indians: Peter and thirteen others.

Peter now vanishes from the Neah Bay chronicle, to Swan's
considerable relief. I have tried for the past three years to make
Mr. Webster believe what a bad fellow Peter is, the diary splutters
in farewell. The next and last installment.

A fairly fiery record, these few years of bravado and occasional
bloodshed by the Makahs. Yet it might be remembered that while this
sequence of bluff and bravado and occasional bloodshed was occurring
at Cape Flattery, Swan's own kin, the United States of America, and its cousin tribe,
the Confederated States of America, were inventing modern mass war
at Antietam and Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. If it is a question
as to which civilization in those years was more casual with life,
don't truly compete with the Civil War's creeks of blood.
the Makahs were not the automatic choice.
A few hours in Neah Bay, fitting its geography onto Swan's era—a breakwater has been built from the west headland of the bay to Waadah Island; the Bureau of Indian Affairs buildings top the eastern point where Webster's trading post stood—and I had for the ocean. Cape Flattery is, as I have said, the farthest west you can go on the mainland forty-eight states of America, but there are thrusts of cliff actually out into the ocean; points of landscape as if a compass heading had been devised here, west-of-west.

From a logging road I climb a trail down the forest trail to the tip of the Cape's longest finger of headland. At the trailhead the Makah Tribal Council has nailed up alarming signs...Rugged High Cliffs...Extremely Dangerous Area...enter at your own risk. The final brink of the trail lives up to them by simply snapping off into mid-air.

There, some eighty or hundred feet above the Pacific, rides an oceanlookers' perch, an oval of white hardpack clay about twenty feet wide and thirty-five long. A clawmail hardness for this last talon of cliff. Behind, on all sides, the continent shears away. The Cape forest flows determinedly out onto the cliff edges. Some trees have their roots actually above the ocean water.

Surf pounds underfoot with surprisingly little noise, but wind makes up for it. I crouch carefully, not to be puffed off the continent, and look out the half-mile or so to Tatoosh, the lighthouse islands here at the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. While at Tatoosche, pioneer James C. Swan entered in his diary on July 18, 1864, I counted 18 vessels in sight.
Now machines instead of humans operate the Tatoosh light, visitors are none, and the tiny white cluster of lighthouse, residential quarters, water tower, and a collapsing shed are visual echoes of emptiness. Tatoosh simply rests out there like a fat stepping-stone off the end of the continent, and the next foothold beyond it is Asia.

In the 1860's, the Makah tribesmen told Swan that below these cliffs, in hours of calm water, they sometimes hunted seals. Caves are said to drill back in very far at the base of the cliffs, and so a Makah would approach by canoe, swim or wade in with a lighted torch and a knife, and stalk back along the tunneled floor of the cave until he came onto drowsing seals. The blaze of the torch confused the animals, and the hunter took the chance of their confusion to stab them.

There was risk, Swan noted. Occasionally the torch will go out, and leave the cavern in profoundest darkness.

Profoundest darkness, and naked knife-bearing men who would face it. I stand atop this last rough end of the continent and think of what men could do before they found other, easier routes. Where the Makahs of Swan's time on Cape Flattery are concerned, I think of their often
Day twenty

Cape Flattery must have sent the hair creeping on the back of Swan’s neck a few times, too. This morning I find that in the Smithsonian article he wrote about the Makahs, he lists the tribal superstitions in firm schoolteacherly style, then this uncommonly uneasy language burst from him:

The grandeur of the scenery about Cape Flattery, and the strange contortions and fantastic shapes into which its cliffs have been thrown by some former convulsion of nature, or worn and abraded by the ceaseless surge of the waves; the wild and varied sounds which fill the air, from the dash of water into the caverns and fissures of the rocks, mingled with the living cries of innumerable fowl...all combined, present an accumulation of sights and sounds sufficient to fill a less superstitious beholder than the Indian with mysterious awe.

Yesterday’s weather faded and faded, had gone into gray by sundown.

This morning brought sleet, blanking the coastline down to a few hundred yards of into merging earth and water. A worker from a construction crew stepped from the motel room next to mine and looked into the icy mush. He declared: "I need this like I need another armpit."
(Nov. 10, 1861)

The attendance at school has been very meagre the past week and this afternoon I sent for Youaitl (Old Doctor) and had a long talk with him on the matter. I told him that the Government at Washington had been at great expense to have the school house built and now I wanted the children to come and be taught and wanted him to let his second son Kachim come and board with me and be one of a class with Jimmy that his board and schooling would cost nothing, that I proposed to teach Jimmy's class by themselves and then teach the smaller children who could come as day scholars. That if a few of the boys took an interest to learn others would be induced to come, and finally all the children could be taught. I also told him that the old men were dying off and these boys would shortly take their places and if they would come and learn now they could be useful when they grew up and could better adapt themselves to the white men's customs than the old men who were so prejudiced against the whites.

Old Doctor said my talk was all good, all good and he would send the boy and talk to the other Indians...
Day twenty-two

This morning, later, at the motel and nagged by a murmur of memory, I finally found the entry, Swan's diary words of this exact date, one hundred thirty-nine years ago. January eleventh, 1860. Cloudy and calm. This is my birthday, 42 years old. I trust that the remainder of my life may be passed more profitably than it has so far. Self investigation is good for birthdays.

Tonight, after another coastal day back and forth between Swan's words and the actuality of Cape Flattery:

"Some men and women are never part of the time they were born into,"

Carol's voice read to me as I hunched in the phone booth at Clallam Bay,

"and walk the streets or highways of their generations as strangers...."

Mr. Doig's story reinforces our diminishing conviction that there is something special in American earth, in American experience and in the harrowing terms of American survival. Where there is no longer a house earlier of sky..." The earliest words bounce back and forth between my ears: never part of time they were born into...walk their generations as strangers...

A train of language I might have written of Swan, but it has been written of me, in the pages of the New York Times Book Review.