

Northwest Passage



Introduction

- Many early Europeans believed in the existence of a strait, called the ‘Strait of Anian’, lying somewhere on the Northwest coast of America. But there was just one problem with finding the fabled entrance: no-one could survive long enough to get there.
- This story tells the tale of the search for the Strait of Anian and a Northwest Passage, charting the long period of speculation about the strait, inter-imperial rivalry, wishful thinking, and of course, mutiny!



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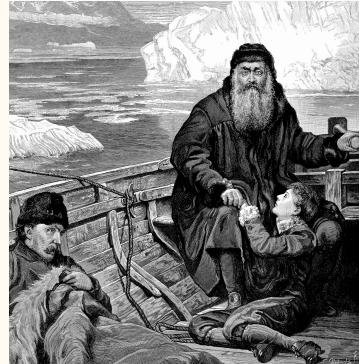
No Californian strait

1

Attempting the Northeast



- Finding a passage to cross the northern part of the continental United States had been a long-term goal for European explorers.
- Many attempts were made to find such a passage from the Northeast side, as it was easier for European explorers to attempt to find this passage coming from the Atlantic.
- Henry Hudson was among the most famous of these explorers - however, the attempt to find this passage was so gruelling that his crew mutinied, casting him, his son, and six others off the ship, never to be seen again.



2

Naming the Strait of Anian



1569, Magini

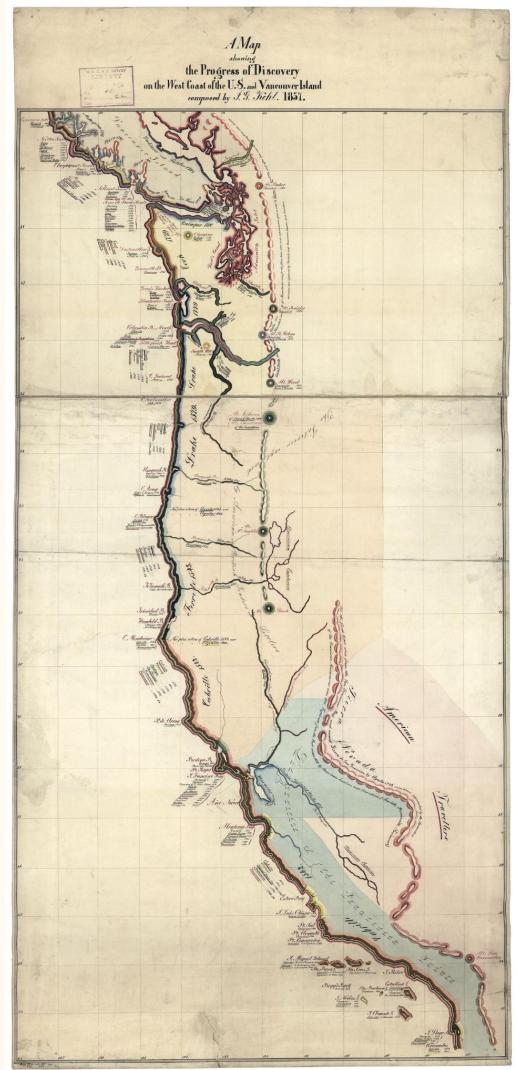
- The 14th-century writings of Marco Polo had passed down the story of an entrance to a Northwest Passage from the Pacific side. The “Strait of Anian,” was likely named for Marco Polo’s descriptions of the Anian Region of China
 - Sixteenth-century Spanish explorers were the first to attempt to find the Strait of Anian, from Spanish settlements in Mexico.
 - But even from the relatively close ports of the Mexican coast, expeditions to the Pacific northwest still took sailors on long journeys through uncharted territory into perilous storms, fogs, winds, and currents.

3

Not so 'strait' forward

- In 1542 Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo sailed from New Spain and explored as far north as Mendocino in northern California.
- After Cabrillo died on the journey, his pilot and navigator, Bartolome Ferrelo continued to search for the Strait of Anian as far north as what is now southern Oregon, before turning back because of storms and a shortage of provisions.

Kohl, 1857



Drake's 'Uncharted' Journey



- In 1579 English explorer and privateer Francis Drake voyaged to the Pacific Northwest after raiding Spanish settlements along the coast of South America. Drake explored the west coast in search of a Northwest Passage to take him back to England and claimed the area for the English as New Albion.

- Reports of Drake's journey and concerns about English land claims spurred the Spanish to re-explore the Pacific Northwest for a Northwest Passage.

Viscaíno

In 1602 and 1603 an expedition led by Sebastián Viscaíno reached Cape Mendocino, and his pilot Martín de Aguilar sailed as far north as southern Oregon in a companion vessel. Again, the explorers had to turn back because of heavy seas, thick fog, and the length and hardship of the voyage. Viscaíno wrote in his journal:

“the state of our health was so bad . . . there was neither assistance nor medicines nor food to give [the crew] except rotten jerked beef, gruel, biscuits, and beans and chickpeas spoiled by weevils. The mouths of all were sore, and their gums were swollen larger than their teeth, so that they could hardly drink water. Affairs were in such a condition that anyone who had ever in his life been at the helm steered, climbed to the main topsail, and did the other tasks” (Polk, 256).

Abandoning the Northwest

- Though Viscaíno never actually found a northern sailing passage, a priest on the expedition, Antonio de la Ascensión reported back to Spain that California was an island, an idea that became very popular over the next 200 years.
- The Spanish abandoned exploration of the Pacific Northwest in the early seventeenth century as a decline in Spain's power shifted attention to existing territories. There would not be another European attempt to explore the Pacific Northwest for the next 150 years (Polk, 254). The maps published in this period reflected a combination of blind faith and speculation, sometimes working to entice sponsors for future expeditions.

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Charting Uncertainty

From 1603-1769, there is no record of exploration of the Pacific Northwest at all - instead, maps are drawn solely based on speculation. This is likely due to the immense costs, both financial and personal, of explorations in the pacific Northwest for European explorers. Here are some of the maps produced at this time.



1677,
Duval



1700,
Scherer



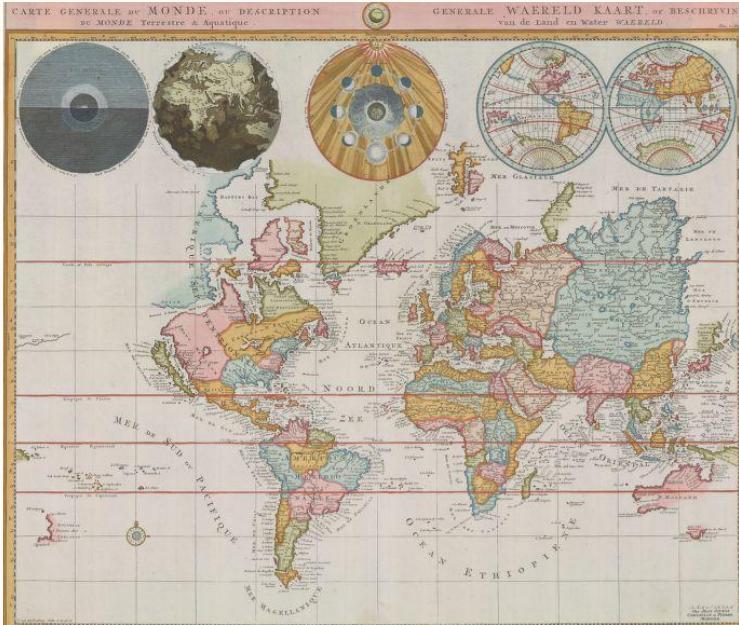
1660, Walton



1666, Pieter Goos

4

Charting Uncertainty



1700, Mortier



1719, Moll

5

Bering Strait

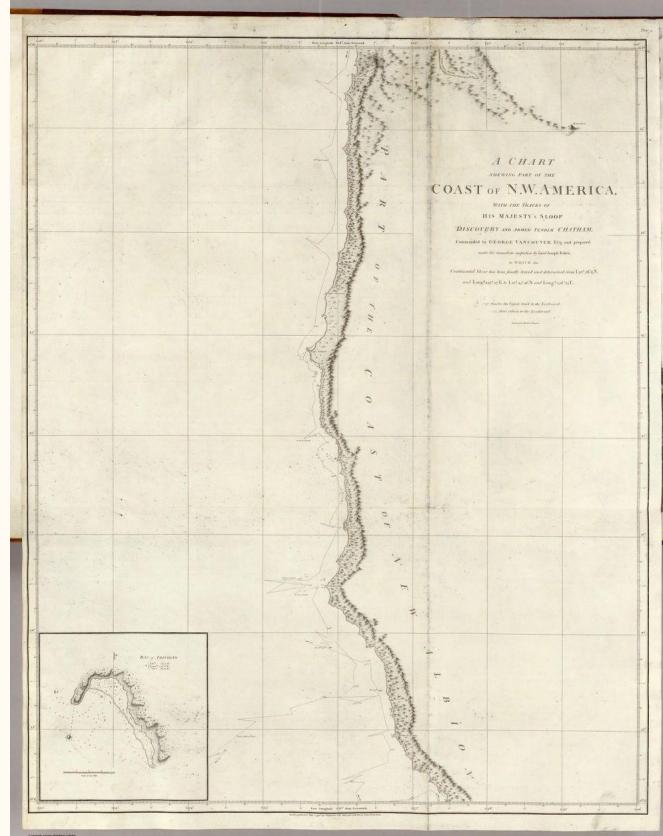
- In the early 1700s, the Russians sent Vitus Bering to explore the east coast of Russia.
- Bering sailed north from the Kamchatka Peninsula in eastern Siberia and confirmed that there was a strait separating Asia and North America (later named the Bering Strait).
- The possibility of Russian encroachment into Spanish American territory and reports of a north Pacific fur trade motivated new European attempts to explore the Pacific Northwest beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century.
- This 1775 map depicts Bering's discoveries, labeling the Bering Strait as "Straits of Anian of the Ancient Geographers."



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Vancouver's Conclusion

- British navigator Captain James Cook made three expeditions to the Pacific in the 1770s that included the search for a Northwest passage through the Bering Strait and into the Arctic. Twenty years later, the quest was still on for a Northwest Passage from the Pacific.
- In 1790 the British sent George Vancouver to map the northwest coast, secure rights to British territory, and to explore waterways for a potential Northwest Passage. He concluded that a Northwest Passage did not exist at the lower latitudes that had been previously described.



1798, Vancouver

*Let's explore the
collection!*