



Barclay Sound Coast and Hinterland

By E. Mackay Young

ALMOST as indented as the rugged west coast of Scotland, the coast of Vancouver Island from Cape Beale to Cape Scott, its farthest point, presents a series of sounds and inlets. Quite the largest of these, and not the least important, is Barclay Sound, which extends inland and narrows into that delectable fiord known as Alberni Canal. This fiord runs through entrancing scenery to within twelve miles of the east coast of the island, and is joined in various parts by Stamp River, Somas River and other streams and creeks.

On many maps the sound is named Barklay, but the correct spelling is Barclay, so-called after the British captain of that name. Captain Barclay, the accredited discoverer of the sound, commanded the "Imperial Eagle," and sailed from Ostend in November, 1786, arriving at Nootka in June, 1787. It was about this time that the Northwest American fur trade began to attract adventurers from all quarters of the world, especially from Great Britain, Russia, Spain and the United States. Barclay was one of those intrepid British navigators who managed to combine exploration and trading to the advantage of geographical knowledge and the personal gain of the fortunate seeker after the lucrative fur-bearing denizens of sea and land. Sometimes the quest of the elusive sea otter proved barren or disappointing to the high

hopes then cherished of rapid wealth. It is certain that quick and big fortunes were often made in those early days of the fur trade, the precious skins being in great demand, especially in Russia and China.

On this particular voyage in 1787 Barclay appears to have had great success in bartering his old iron for new fur with the natives of historic Nootka. On his richly laden ship he sails southward in the golden month of July and discovers the sound with which his name will always be associated. Of his further voyage homewards little need here be told. One tragic happening, however, marked the beginning of a series, many doubtless unrecorded, of deadly encounters between white men and natives along the North American coast during the next two decades. Pursuing his course past Cape Flattery, Barclay sent a boat to enter the river variously named Destruction River and the Ohahlat, and the crew of five men were massacred by the natives.

The most southerly point of Barclay's recorded observations appears to have been that part of the coast past Cape Flattery named by him Cape Fear. He was not so painstaking or accurate an observer as Captain Cook, but he was the first after that great navigator to survey the coast below Cape Flattery.

Barclay Sound was next visited by Captain Gray and Captain Meares in 1788.