

CONTENTS

Maps ... xii

Author's Note ... xiii

INTRODUCTION

An Overlooked Explorer ... 1



PART I

Spain Strives to Control the Pacific Northwest Coast

CHAPTER 1: A Young Mariner's Journey from
Cadiz to New Spain ... 11

CHAPTER 2: Investigating the Russian
Threat, 1788 ... 28

CHAPTER 3: Conflict at Nootka Sound,
1789–1790 ... 43



PART II

The Key Expedition

CHAPTER 4: In Quest of the Northwest
Passage, 1791 ... 63

CHAPTER 5: Surveying “Puerto Narváez,”
May 1791 ... 71

- CHAPTER 6: Charting “Entrada de Nitinat,”
June 1791 ... 82
- CHAPTER 7: Reconnaissance of an Unknown
Archipelago, May–June 1791 ... 94
- CHAPTER 8: Exploration of the Gran Canal’s
East Shore, July 1791 ... 119
- CHAPTER 9: Exploration of the Gran Canal’s
West Shore, July 1791 ... 146
- CHAPTER 10: The Super-Explorers
Arrive ... 165



PART III
New Spain Changes Course

- CHAPTER 11: Spanish Influence Wanes ... 189
- CHAPTER 12: The Revolt of 1810 in New
Spain ... 206
- CHAPTER 13: Narváez Adapts to Political
Change in Mexico ... 215



- APPENDIX A: The Local Geographic Legacy
of Narváez’s Expedition of
1791 ... 232
- APPENDIX B: Narváez’s Missing Journal
of 1790–1791 ... 236

APPENDIX C: The Three Identities of
an Historic Schooner
(1788–1796) ... 240

APPENDIX D: Dimensions of the
Santa Saturnina ... 244

APPENDIX E: Manifest of the *Santa*
Saturnina ... 246

APPENDIX F: A Brief History of the *San*
Carlos One and Two ... 248

APPENDIX G: Lineage of José María
Narváez ... 251

Endnotes ... 258

Bibliography ... 288

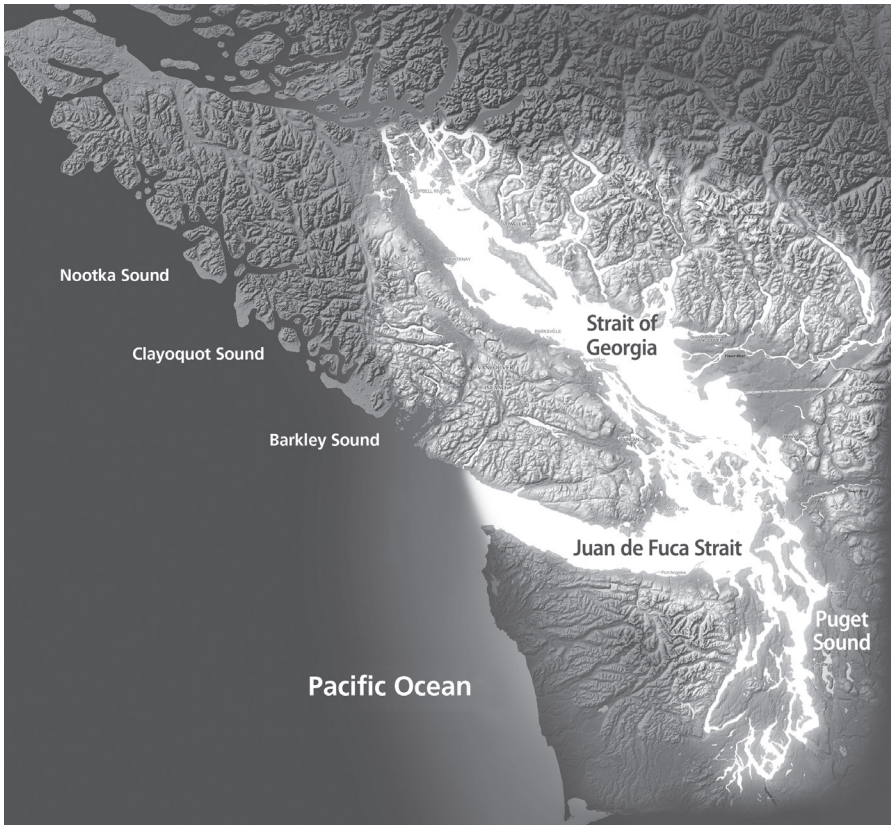
About the Author ... 305

Index ... 307

INTRODUCTION

An Overlooked Explorer

THE VOYAGES OF EARLY European mariners in wooden sailing vessels, their quests for new trade routes, and their encounters with strangers in unknown lands remain a touchstone of identity for North Americans. Even in our complex era of high technology, global markets, and multicultural interaction, the exploits of these voyagers still capture our imagination. This book is about one of those men — José María Narváez y Gervete, a Spanish-Mexican seafarer. Most of José Narváez's maritime career involved serving as a non-commissioned *piloto* in the Spanish Navy. Nevertheless, he navigated and/or skippered numerous vessels; made several significant discoveries during the age of European exploration on what is now Canada's Pacific Northwest Coast; participated in many of the most important events that occurred there between 1788 and 1795; sailed to other places in the Pacific Ocean and engaged directly in the political upheaval that transformed New Spain into Mexico between 1796 and his death in 1840.



The Salish Sea, comprising the Strait of Georgia, Juan de Fuca Strait, and Puget Sound.

In Pacific Northwest Coast history, Narváez deserves special recognition for three particularly significant explorations. In 1788, the young navigator was the first Spaniard to contact and investigate a functioning Russian fur-trading outpost west of the Gulf of Alaska. The following year, Narváez became the first European to reconnoitre the interior of Juan de Fuca Strait — the long, wide throat of what is now known as the Salish Sea. Extending that exploration in 1791, he became the first European to sail across the large inland gulf that forms the northern part of today's Salish Sea, map the waterway extensively, sight its numerous islands, make brief contact with the people of a few First Nations, and discover the site of what is now western Canada's largest city — Vancouver, British Columbia.

The Salish Sea

In 2009 and 2010, the Province of British Columbia Geographic Names Office, the Geographical Names Board of Canada, the Washington State Board on Geographic Names, and the U.S. Board on Geographic Names each approved the name “Salish Sea” as an official designation for the inland marine waters of southern British Columbia, Canada, and northern Washington, USA. The Salish Sea extends from the north end of the Strait of Georgia and Desolation Sound to the south end of Puget Sound and west to the mouth of Juan de Fuca Strait where it meets the Pacific Ocean. These separately named, interconnected bodies of water form a single estuarine ecosystem, which covers approximately 18,000 square kilometres of inland marine waters.¹ It constitutes one of the world’s great inland seas.

Prior to formal governmental adoption of this geographical designation, “Salish Sea” had been used commonly as a name for these waterways by citizens on both sides of the border for years, including Coast Salish people who lived around its shores and spoke one of the dialects of the ancient Salishan language. The Salish Sea is connected to the Pacific Ocean primarily via Juan de Fuca Strait (with comparatively slight tidal influence from the north around Vancouver Island at Point Chatham where Discovery Passage meets Johnstone Strait), and it is bordered by continental shores in the east, Vancouver Island in the northwest, and the Olympic Peninsula in the southwest. The saltwater area of this inland sea contains numerous channels in the North Gulf Islands, the South Gulf Islands, and the San Juan Islands; the large lower Fraser River Delta; the Puget Sound lowlands, Hood Canal, Tacoma Narrows, and Deception Pass.

Until my earlier book, *José Narváez: The Forgotten Explorer*, was published in 1998, other mariners tended to receive credit for these three achievements. In the first instance, most historians had recognized the controversial Captain Esteban José Martínez as having made New Spain’s first contact with the Russians when he led the expedition to Alaskan waters in 1788. But Narváez’s journal of that voyage, which the author translated into English for the first time,² showed they were incorrect. Although Martínez was in charge of the espionage mission, it was Narváez who went ashore first and accomplished a face-to-face encounter.

Regarding Juan de Fuca Strait — thought to be the long-sought western entrance to a legendary Northwest Passage trade route that would supposedly link the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans — it is surprising that it went unexplored by Europeans for as long as it did. Fascination with that hiatus has inspired some imaginative writers to generate fantastic, yet temptingly believable theories which disintegrate when common sense is applied. To place Narváez's actual exploration of Juan de Fuca Strait and one of its extensions in perspective, two of these legends require mention.



One incredible, hypothetical theory was advanced in 2003 by a British Columbia bureaucrat-turned-historian who alleged that it was the colourful English navigator Sir Francis Drake who first sailed *unarmed* through most of the Salish Sea, travelling from *north to south* in 1579 during a *secret* voyage of exploration that somehow was kept hidden from the public for more than four hundred years. The author of this implausible tale also asserted that Drake, continuing south along the Pacific Northwest Coast, probably careened his rotting *Golden Hind* on a small beach inside the miniscule bay now known as Whale Cove, Oregon. No archeological evidence has been found to support this supposition. Furthermore, Whale Cove is a treacherous little recess in the steep rocky shore along an extremely dangerous section of the Oregon coast. Even the skipper of a modern powerboat would hesitate to enter these choppy, churning, unprotected waters. Today, boaters are advised to remain 500 to 600 metres offshore for a distance of 1.6 kilometres north to 1.6 kilometres south of the cove. This author's notion was inspired in part by a crude chart of a tiny cove named Portus Novae Albionis — allegedly drawn by an ancient Greek mariner — which resembles the shape of the vastly larger Drake's Bay north of San Francisco. It is not surprising that this incongruous conjecture has failed to gain any serious support among responsible historians.³ In reality, sailing *north* along the Pacific Northwest Coast in 1579, Drake failed to sight Juan de Fuca Strait and concluded that “either there is no passage at all through these

Northerne coasts, which is most likely, or if there be, that [it] is unnavigable.”⁴

A much more fascinating legend suggests that it was the late sixteenth-century Greek seafarer — commonly known as Apóstolos Valerianos by Euro-American historians and as Ioannis Phokas (or Focus) by Hellenic historians⁵ — who claimed to have led an expedition into the Salish Sea as early as 1592, while he was serving as a *piloto* for New Spain, using the name Juan de Fuca. According to Valerianos’ tall tale, he supposedly was ordered by Luis de Velasco II, the eighth viceroy, to find the fabled Strait of Anian, an alleged northern waterway that connected the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. On the Pacific Northwest Coast, Valerianos ostensibly discovered a broad strait between 47° and 48° north latitude and sailed through it between lands that were “rich in gold, silver and pearls” and inhabited by people clad in furs. According to Valerianos’s story, he reached the Atlantic Ocean after a voyage of more than twenty days.⁶ Although this myth inspired numerous European explorers to search for the Northwest Passage for centuries, it eventually became common knowledge that no such transcontinental waterway existed at this latitude. Furthermore, researchers have never been able to find a single record in the Spanish colonial archives about any part of the fanciful voyage.



Turning from fable to fact, one finds that the historical record documents three aspects of European exploration of Juan de Fuca Strait: the first sighting, probes of its mouth, and penetration of its throat. The renowned Captain James Cook, who investigated so much of the Pacific Ocean for England, sailed right past the fog-shrouded strait in 1778. The first recorded sighting was made in 1787 by a woman: Mrs. Charles William Barkley (Frances Hornby Trevor), wife of the English fur trader who captained the *Imperial Eagle*.⁷ Subsequently, three other merchant mariners examined the strait’s mouth, but exploration of its interior was left to Narváez. In 1789, he became the first European to chart what is now the Salish Sea’s throat.

Narváez's most noteworthy accomplishment, however, was his exploration of a large interior arm of the Salish Sea — unknown to European mariners of the era — which reached northward a great distance. In the summer of 1791, the uncelebrated, twenty-three-year-old Spanish *piloto* became the first European to sail this broad inland sea in command of a small schooner and longboat. Nevertheless, the mariner who is commonly given credit for exploring this waterway and locating the site of the city that now bears his name is Britain's ace surveyor, Captain George Vancouver, who arrived one year later aboard the large square-rigged HMS *Discovery*.

Today, Narváez's remarkable achievements are almost unknown, barely recognized, or generally overlooked, and his biography remains unfamiliar to most North Americans. The fame attained by the British captains Cook and Vancouver for their explorations of the Pacific Northwest Coast in the late 1700s has overshadowed the accomplishments of Spanish mariners during the same period. And few of them have been disregarded more than Narváez. England trumpeted the extremely important voyages of its two famous explorers. Yet the Spanish seafarers and their largely Mexican crews, who did far more work, won little recognition outside Madrid. Spain had no interest in supplying the world with information about the distant area her explorers had found and exploited. The Spanish throne was more intent on trying to retain the entire Pacific coast of North America as its exclusive territory and possibly becoming the first to find the fabled Northwest Passage.

This book is not intended to minimize Captain Vancouver's meticulous hydrographic work in 1792 along the Pacific Northwest Coast, including the Salish Sea. However, he was not the first European to explore most of those waters, to anchor along those shores, to view the majestic mountains, to trade with the Indigenous peoples, nor to name many of the landmarks. The Spaniards preceded him and their stories deserve equal attention. One of them was Narváez, a particularly noteworthy mariner from New Spain and then Mexico. This book recounts the roles he played during four critical periods of Spanish-Mexican maritime history: Spain's eighteenth-century efforts to regain its position as a naval power, compete for control of trade in the Pacific Ocean,

and continue geopolitical expansion in New Spain; the escalation in European voyages of exploration in the Pacific during the late eighteenth century; the Mexican revolt from 1810 to 1820; and the controversial administration of Agustín de Iturbide, who ruled the new nation of Mexico for a short time in the early 1820s.