

Report from the Ferry «Firewater» from 08.18.2010

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(Reduced Version)

I would like to recognize family Engstrom for their supportive efforts of the expedition, and also I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to everybody for assistance and help in our participation at the conference "Russian America" in Sitka.

By request of Professor Svetlana Fedorova I send her regards to the nice city of Sitka and its residents, and also to everyone who has gathered these days in Sitka for the conference about Russian America.

1. Voyages of "St. Peter" and "St. Paul" and Discovery of Russian America, Alaska

In July of 1741 Russian navigators Vitus Bering and Alexei Chirikov were the first Europeans to come to the northwest coast of America, Alaska, and put it on a map.

(Figure # 1) Packet Boats

There was a tragic circumstance that overtook the navigation of the Packet Boat of Alexei Chirikov. These events were documented by the captain of "St. Paul" in the Log Book.

On July 18th "with Morsel's winds (up to 17 km/sec., or 34 miles/hour) with squalls. The weather was cloudy with fog and rain ..." the boat with 11 armed men was sent to the coast. That evening and the next following days the boat with people has never returned. During the day of July 23rd (after 5 days) there was a smoke visible on the beach and the "fire was burning on the shore of the bay." On the 24th they decided to send the second small boat with 4 men to help Dementyev. They also did not return. At noon on July, 25th two Indian canoes were coming from the bay approaching the ship, from where Indians shouted twice "Agai, agai". Then the canoes turned around and went back into the bay. After waiting another 24 hours for their comrades the Officers' Council made decision to continue their journey and go back to Kamchatka: "... for the lack of long boats on the Packet Boats, on which it would be possible to explore the American shores, ... and to replenish supplies of fresh water."

In the Log Book Chirikov documented coordinates of the bay and the spot, to where from the Packet Boat the long boats have gone. "... there is a sharp mountain, behind which another wide snow-covered mountain NO $\frac{3}{4}$ O (NE $\frac{3}{4}$ E) and the bay..., where the boat was sent, NNO $\frac{3}{4}$ O (NNE $\frac{3}{4}$ E) in 5 minutes, another mountain with a sharp summit deviated to the right ..."

The Captain of the 2nd Rankⁱ Shumeiko, G.K. noted in the "Navigating analysis of the voyage of 1741" that "descriptions in the Log Book were so detailed, that it would be nearly impossible to make a mistake in identification of geographical locations of any places."

(Figure # 2) Photo from the Boat

(Figure # 3) Map and Northern Cape

Mystery of Alaska

The fate of Chirikov team has concerned Lomonosov and Shelikhov. The team also was remembered by such seafarers as James Cook and George Vancouver, who came 40 years later to the shores of Alaska. Captain Laperuz wrote: "Looking at this Bay I always thought: most likely, the boat and the crew were killed by the furious sea, rather than by the wild Indians."

The Board of Directors of the Russian American Company gave orders to look for the lost fellow Russians "that had been lost from the crew of captain Chirikov on the wild shores of America." However, no specific data about purposeful search of the lost Chirikov's men was gained.

In myths of the local native population of the southeastern coast of Alaska there are some stories about first white people. Whether they could be directly tied to the lost Chirikov's men also had not been established.

American historian F. Golder pessimistically came to the conclusion: "the loss of the Chirikov's men will forever remain a mystery of the North".

Following the Footsteps of Alaska Explorers

In the summer of 2005 to the Lisiansky Strait located at the 57° 50' went the participants of the Russian-American search expedition "Following the footsteps of great seafarers. Discovery of Russian America." The purpose of the expedition was to find the spot where 15 sailors, Chirikov's men, had disappeared. In the Log Book of the ship "St. Paul" Captain A.I. Chirikov gave description of the location and he used mountains as the landmarks with specification of latitudes. However, the data on location of the bay and the inlet, where Chirikov's men had gone to, did not match up in latitude: from 57°46' to 57°51'. In the final report presented to the Admiralty Board in 1742 Chirikov specified 58°00' of latitude. Participants of our expedition decided to compare the description of the coast and the landmarks within the distance of 14° or 14 nautical miles.

In the Rezanov's documents of the 1805 Census of the native population, published by the historian Andrei Grinev, was written: "On the southern side of the Island of Yakobi there is a village by the name of Apolosovo... and there is about 100 residents."

In some written sources of the end of 18th century, in particular in several letters by Alexander Baranov to the Siberian Governor Nagel, and also in the written orders to Kuskov, who was on his way to Sitka, there was also mentioning of the Apolosovo Village on the Yakobi Island.

From the letter to his assistant Ivan Kuskov in April of 1801, who was on his way to Sitka, Baranov wrote: "... in Lituya Bay and nearby do not spend too much time there, but make your way to the icy straight to Yakobi Island and after reaching the Apolosovo Cape think about it ... Then on the way back (route of Kuskov) go by the way of open sea, come past Apolosovo, as you were told about the entering route ..."

In the Report to Golikov and Mrs. Shelikhova from June 7th, 1798, Baranov wrote: "... last summer, of the 797th yearⁱⁱ ... the plate № 3ⁱⁱⁱ was placed ... behind the Lituya Bay near the big Chilkhat Bay, on the island with inhabitants, named by the locals Takhanas Island, and in 795th year while visiting it I named it the Yakobi Island... "

To the Lisyansky Straight

Research was complicated by the weather conditions: clouds were covering tops of the mountains; storm reached the research boat in Takhanas Bay. We were able to observe southern coast of Yakobi, bay in the mouth of the Lisyansky Straight from Cape Theodor of the Yakobi Island (57°50 '), Greentop Bay (57°51 '), Squid Bay and Takhanas Bay up north from the Lisyansky Straight. However, we were unable to identify any mountains similar to the Chirikov's description given as landmarks.

In 2006 our expedition was joined by Chris Howard, who knows this area very well. In the late 1990's Mr. Howard came upon a group of petroglyphs in one of the bays of Yakobi, and among them were some petroglyphs resembling Aleutian kayak and a sailboat.

(Figure # 4) Petroglyphs of "The Ship".

Petroglyphs in the Surge Bay and its close location to the big lake, fresh water source of the rocky island, with abundance of fish, confirmed the idea of probable Indian settlement location in the area, which was possibly named by Rezanov as the Apolosovo Village.

During the navigation we noticed that the landscape of Surge Bay matched the descriptions of the landscape and mountains landmarks given in the Ship Log. Latitude 58° practically dissects the bay, which coincides with the official report of Chirikov.

(Figure # 5) Map of Surge Bay with Beams-Degrees

When tracing-paper with beams 53° and 70° bearings was applied to the navigation chart of the Surge Bay and covered similar per Chirikov's description of the mountains landmarks,

then the line of 31° had shown the direction of boats movement of the lost Chirikov's men. That is how the bay and the shoreline where the boats of the lost Chirikov's men were identified.

(Figure # 6) Map № 1703 with tracing-paper

Conclusion: both of the boats with Chirikov's men within 6 days proceeded to the northern cape of the bay in a direction of 31°, which logically coincides with the movement of the sail boat (up north) and both boats that were visible from the ship before their disappearance from sight.

(Figure # 7)

In a point of crossing of these measuring beams was Packet Boat "St. Paul". The depth was taken and it matched Chirikov's measurements: 65 sazhen^{iv} (35 meters), that coincided with the data in Ship Log dated July, 18th at 4pm.

(Figure # 8) Nagaev Map (Cape Cross)

In 2008 an American expedition went out to this area, including 2 experts from Hoonah-Angoon and Allan Engstrom. This group found in the northeastern side of the Surge Bay nearby a small stream with fresh water remnants of old native dwelling. Age of this site was not established.

(Figure # 9) Map of Surge Bay with a stream

In reference to the fire which was visible from the ship in the afternoon apparently was not hidden deep in the bay, but most likely close enough to the ship, on the nearby shore that we were able to identify. The boats went towards northern cape and came into an open space between the island and the coast.

(Figure # 10) Map of Surge Bay

Big wave

What could have happened with Chirikov's men when they were lost from site?

The name of a bay, Surge, has a meaning "Big wave". Maybe there was an old native name of this bay just as eloquently depicting character of this bay.

(Figure # 11) Big wave overturns boats and ships. Ancient drawing.

In American Coast Pilot the width of the bay is defined as 4.1 miles. Coast Pilot warns small vessels of danger in the bay as the bay abounds with underwater rocks, reefs and the fast tidal currents forming frequent breakers and whirlpools.

Chirikov wrote: "... near the coast a lot of external and underwater rocks, where breaker plays"

(Figure # 12) View of Surge Bay from the shore. Reefs.

We also remember about the tragic ending of French seafarer Laperuz when his boats were entering the mouth of the Lituya Bay (coincidentally, he was born in 1741). In the breakers formed by tidal current, two of his boats capsized, taking 21 lives of his seamen.

Therefore, it is possible that the Chirikov's boats also lost control and were unable to win struggle with the waves, currents, turbulent winds, and breakers. Long seaweeds also hindered movement of the boats by clinging to the oars. The presenter had personally experienced navigational difficulties in the Surge Bay while taking a trip on an inflatable oar boat even in a good clear weather.

Conclusion: Boats possibly crashed on breakers, or were capsized by waves.

Nathaniel Portlock

The answer about the faith of the second boat was found by researcher Allan Engstrom in the diary of English seafarer of the end of 18th century N. Portlock. Portlock described meeting near the Lisiansky Strait with local Indians in 1787. Indians arrived for fur exchange and shared a story that happened in this area sometime ago, how there was a boat crash with white people in it. Portlock described rather strange outfit of the Indian Chief: faded European uniform coat of red color.

Conclusion: Red uniform coat could have belonged to the gunner of the Packet Boat "St. Paul" Grigory Zubov who has left the ship in the first boat.

(Figure # 13) Gunner

In 2009 participants of our expedition surveyed the north cape of the Surge Bay. Here are the pictures.

(Figure #14)

Conclusion

It is necessary to continue search of evidence in the area: weapons, anchors and other objects that belonged to the 15 lost seamen. It is possible that there are still sites in the shallow area of the bay that contain some of the objects, remnants, evidence of the footsteps of Russian seamen, explorers of Alaska. For the final stage of research we need special equipment which could be attached to the bottom of a boat: depth finder and lateral viewer. It is our common duty in the memory of explorers of this part of the world, to the participants of first contacts between Europeans and Native Alaskans.

July 15th became an important date in history of the Russian Fleet and it is forever entered by Russians in the calendar of great geographical discoveries.

Some historical information

The follower of Vitus Bering and explorer of Alaska, Alexei Chirikov, began his navigation training in Moscow in well known Sukharev Tower^v where the Navigation School was located. By the initiative of the Moscow Historical Educational Society "Russian America" effective July, 15th, 2009, this date was marked as the celebration day of Explorers of Russian America, Alaska. On this day there are special public prayer performed and ringing of all church bells is conducted, connecting the Russian Capital with Alaska and with the home-town of A.I. Chirikov, the village of Averkievskoe-Luzhnoe of the Tula Region. Reviving remarkable dates of history, fleet and science, we salute to the glorious past, we honor memories of our remarkable ancestors, we pass our knowledge to young generations, and we connect our neighboring countries.

Participants of the Russian-American expedition "Discovery of Russian America. Following the Footsteps of Alaska Explorers": Allan Engstrom, Chris Howard, Vladimir Kolychev, Richard Dauenhauer, Nora Dauenhauer, Vladimir Latyntsev, Olga Kolycheva

Advisers: Elton Engstrom and members of the Russian Geographical Society, Vyacheslav Kudryavtsev and Valery Bogdanov.

ⁱ Captain of the 2nd rank = US equivalent: Lieutenant-Commander [translator's note]

ⁱⁱ In this quote 797 means 1797 [translator's note]

ⁱⁱⁱ Russian possession plate [translator's note]

^{iv} Sazhen = Russ. fathom = 7 ft. [translator's note]

^v The Sukharev Tower (Сухарева башня) was one of the best known landmarks and symbols of Moscow until its destruction by the Soviet authorities in 1934 [translator's note]