Malibu 90265

Chapter 1: Ancestors and Predecessors

by Taylor Coffman

THE EARLIEST EUROPEAN VOYAGE along this coastline is steeped in obscurity. After all, it was nearly half a millennium ago. There's still some question about that exploration's commander, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, who died before the voyage ended. Was he Portuguese or was he in fact Spanish? Nowadays, after extensive research by Harry Kelsey, the leading Cabrillo specialist in recent years, Spanish is the preferred identity for that ancient mariner.

Cabrillo's record of events in 1542-1543 vanished years ago. Summaries are all that exist in the musty archives, some in Mexico City, others in Spain or elsewhere. The best-known of the accounts includes this description for October 10, 1542: "They anchored before a large valley opening out on the coast; here there came to the ships many very good canoes, large enough for twelve or thirteen Indians."

Dr. Kelsey, for his part, published his findings in 1986. (He went on to study another sailor of yore, the more-renowned English privateer who became Sir Francis Drake and who landed on the California coast, probably just north of San Francisco, some forty years after Cabrillo.) Among the surprises in Kelsey's *Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo*, published by The Huntington Library in San Marino: three ships made the journey of exploration that began in 1542, not two ships, as had customarily been thought. Nonetheless, Kelsey said nothing specific about the Malibu area.

Another specialist, Ronald Rindge of Malibu's most historical family, is convinced that Malibu Lagoon in the "Malibu, Malibu"

heartland is the place where Cabrillo anchored on that October day of long ago. Rindge's book *The Rediscovery of the Pueblo de las Canoas* appeared in 1985 through the local Historical Society, right before Harry Kelsey's debut. Both of these researchers knew that Mugu Lagoon, near the Oxnard Plain, has long been identified as the "large valley opening out on the coast," despite its uninviting, often dreary climate. That claim (mainly made by the emphatic Henry R. Wagner) and many other details regarding Cabrillo's voyage may never be resolved. A much earlier historian erred badly in identifying Pueblo de las Canoas with Santa Barbara; to that assertion (dated 1853), little credence has ever been given. The same man absurdly misidentified San Simeon Bay as the place of "Sardines"—to the merriment of Hubert Howe Bancroft in his multi-volume *History of California*, the old *Sardinas* actually being closer to today's Goleta.

The Indians described by Cabrillo in all the surviving accounts, Bancroft's among them, are unmistakably Chumash. Their *tomols* (canoes) were hallmarks of their seafaring lives. Recent ethnographic studies have modified the old wisdom about those people. They were once thought to range up the coast to Cayucos in San Luis Obispo County; yet now the lower Big Sur area, near Salmon Creek in Monterey County, seems to have been their farthest reach in that northerly direction. Malibu (derived from the name *Humaliwo:* "where the surf sounds loudly") has long been considered the southernmost Chumash toehold, with the Gabrielino people holding sway to the southeast beyond Topanga Canyon. As researchers like Sally McLendon and John Johnson learn more, though, the Chumash-Gabrielino boundary may shift farther down the coast, perhaps to the lower boundary of Pacific Palisades in Santa Monica Canyon. If so, this revision will be on par with the extending in the 1980s of the Chumash boundary up the coast toward Big Sur, as proposed by

Robert O. Gibson of Paso Robles, California, a renowned "ethnogeographer."

Of the Chumash towns from west to east along the greater Malibu shoreline, Muwu is easily identifiable with Point Mugu. Wixatset and Simomo were fairly close by. Lisichi was near the mouth of Arroyo Sequit. Lojostogni was near Lechuza Canyon (in the Broad Beach area). And Sumo (obviously akin to Zuma) was close to Point Dume. From there eastward, the next Indian town of consequence was evidently Humaliwo at Malibu Lagoon.

Another Spanish voyager can be cited here, Sebastian Vizcaino. He sailed past the Malibu area late in 1602, beating northwest when "head winds were constant," as he put it, toward his discovery of Monterey Bay. He bestowed several names along the California coast, such as Santa Catalina for one of the offshore islands. But his only name for any feature in greater Malibu has long been overlooked: Point Conversion—Vizcaino having recently "attempted to instruct the Indians in the Christian form of worship" at San Pedro. As for the place called "Conbersion" (in old Spanish), we know it as Point Mugu. This detail comes from *Vizcaino and Spanish Expansion in the Pacific Ocean, 1580-1630,* the work of W. Michael Mathes for the California Historical Society, San Francisco, in 1968.

Another San Francisco item is *The Voyage of Sebastian Vizcaino to the Coast of California, Together with a Map & Sebastian Vizcaino's Letter Written at Monterey, December 28, 1602.* The venerable Book Club of California did the honors in 1933 through the Grabhorn Press; the foreword was by Oscar Lewis, who later wrote about the Big Four railroad barons and also about Hearst Castle in *Fabulous San Simeon*. The letter in question was sent to the Count de Monte-Rey in Mexico City, the viceroy for whom Vizcaino named Monterey.

The Book Club map first appeared in Spain in 1802, based on Vizcaino's original charts. It shows that a "Gran Ensenada" (Santa Monica Bay) and a "Punta de la limpia Concepcion" (Point Conception) were among the other names besides Monterey that date from 1602, exactly two hundred years before the map was first published.

As for Malibu or any places right past Santa Monica, the first name on the map is "Costa aspera," as in rough or rugged terrain. Next, immediately west, comes a very eye-catching "Costa de Indios Amigos," no doubt indicating friendly natives in the area. Oddly, though, Point Mugu's "Conbersion" doesn't appear at all on the map of 1802/1933; instead, the next entry denotes what must have been the Santa Clara River, just short of Ventura ("Rio dulce" to the voyagers). Vizcaino's running narrative, written by Father Antonio de la Ascension, contains passages that, despite being vague, pertain to this part of southern California. The Spaniards encountered an "Indian king, or cacique of the country," for example, a daring man who'd been singing lustily while climbing aboard their ship. He must surely have been one of the "Indios Amigos" indicated on the old map.

"He first took two or three turns round the quarter deck, singing in the same manner as before; and then addressed himself in his own language to the governor [Vizcaino] and others." The king expressed surprise at "seeing no woman in the ship":

> But the general [Vizcaino again] answered that they never carried women, nor did they want any. At this the Indian was more urgent with the general to come ashore with his people, promising to give to every man in the ship ten women; which made all the Spaniards smile. The Indian, supposing that this was sarcastically intended as promising more than he could perform, said, that if one of the soldiers would go on shore, he would soon be convinced of the truth of what he had promised, and in the mean time, he and his son would remain as hostages, till the soldier returned: but [with] night coming on, it was

> thought proper to defer the experiment till next morning, when, if the weather would permit, the ship should go in.

Should go in? In or into . . . what? Into a lagoon like the one Ron Rindge studied meticulously in his *Pueblo de las Canoas* book? Perhaps; if not there, then into somewhere else close by along that east-west stretch of coastline (the imposing but often quixotic Wagner insisted that *Canoas* was Mugu Lagoon). This Vizcaino-Ascension passage isn't to be found, at any rate, in standard accounts of early coastal history. Its publication here in 2013 marks one of the only times it's appeared outside the most obscure annals—or apart from a rare book held by very few libraries, a mere 240 copies of *The Voyage* having been printed in a year as grim as 1933. It was four years prior, in 1929, that the authoritative Wagner proclaimed Mugu and, while he was at it, offered a much different translation of the "ten women" passage quoted above. He did so for the California Historical Society in *Spanish Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America in the Sixteenth Century*, yet another San Francisco publication.

Much later than either Cabrillo or Vizcaino, starting in the late 1700s, the Spanish conquerors' herding of the Indians to mission compounds depopulated large areas of the California coast, as far north as the Bay Area. Most of the Chumash around Malibu fell under Mission San Buenaventura's proselytizing sway; however, Humaliwo itself was eventually more subject to Mission San Fernando's aims. The Portola expedition of 1769 is what launched the missionization process at key locations between San Diego and San Francisco. Malibu wasn't among those places. Scouts for the expedition, looking westward from future Santa Monica, past Pacific Palisades and out toward the high and rugged terrain near Saddle Peak, reported back on its inaccessibility, saying there was "no way past the range falling steep to the sea." It was "costa aspera" for sure, as Vizcaino had noted long before. Portola backtracked and forged ahead through bramble-

choked Sepulveda Pass instead, alongside today's Interstate 405, crossing the San Fernando Valley and finally reaching the coast near Ventura via the Santa Clara River.

This early detour in 1769 left all of Malibu unseen, unexplored, virtually unknown. The Spanish stuck to their inland roads and were years in catching up to this remote coastal backwater, sealed off by mountains and still requiring the "reduction" (by cruel removal at gunpoint) of its native population. Besides, the missions came along piecemeal. San Buenaventura was founded in 1782, more than a decade after the Portola trek. San Fernando wasn't founded for another fifteen years, not until 1797. The latter was among the filler missions established in that decade to strengthen the chain of Spanish outposts that, for Alta California, had begun in San Diego.

Between those mission dates of 1782 and 1797—namely, in November 1793—a very different kind of voyager sailed eastward past Malibu. He was an Englishman, as Francis Drake had been. This later explorer is more widely known than Cabrillo of 1542 or, of almost equal obscurity, Vizcaino of 1602 (both of whom sailed west in the Malibu area). The new adventurfser was George Vancouver, who'd apprenticed under Captain James Cook in the North Pacific and who, late in 1793, was heading down to Baja California. No privateer like Drake, Vancouver was a seaborne surveyor under King George III of American Revolution fame; he'd left England on his voyage in 1791 and wouldn't be returning home until 1795, by then having logged an astounding 65,000 nautical miles. In the meantime he'd journeyed back and forth between Alaska, Puget Sound, the Hawaiian Islands, and Oregon and California, preparing detailed charts in many areas and keeping his eye peeled for the mythical Northwest Passage.

Equipped with Spanish charts, including copies of Vizcaino's work, the documents held by Vancouver were replete with gaps; thus did he assign place names for the first time wherever he saw the need.

The Englishman coined more than three hundred of them all told, mostly much farther up the Pacific Coast. But in 1793, Point Sal and Point Arguello in Santa Barbara County, along with Point Vicente and Point Fermin in Los Angeles County, were all southerly names he applied, each of them befitting the region (with each saluting a Spanish Californian of current renown). There was another Spanish name invoked by Vancouver in the same year, a name that's caused lasting mystery and debate: Point Dume, oddly shortened by that English voyager to honor Father Francisco Dumetz of Mission San Buenaventura. *Dume* was simply a linguistic "corruption," as Lawrence Clark Powell said in *The Malibu*, the classic book he wrote with W. W. Robinson in 1958, in many ways never surpassed to this day.

Captain Vancouver had met Dumetz a week earlier in 1793 while tarrying along the coast in the Ventura and Santa Barbara areas. *Dume* evidently rhymes with *plume* in the captain's rendering of the name. Its pronunciation is contested still. And yet there's no accent mark in the Vancouver journal as first published in London in 1798 (and as later reprinted), little reason for saying *Doo-MAY,* as some currently believe. Nor was a period used, as if *Dumetz* were being abbreviated. Imagine if Vancouver had bestowed this name the way he had most of his others, like Point Sal or Point Vicente. Everyone would be saying Point Dumetz without giving it a second thought. The only argument would be over saying *Dumaitz* (phonetically) in deference to good Spanish form.

Francisco Dumetz, in any event, would seem to deserve better. So would Vancouver himself, whose stature in the Malibu area has too often been measured by this unexplained quirk in what he recorded, his oversized journal normally consisting of rich details and careful observation.

As was once observed, "For most practical purposes [the] modern history of the Pacific Coast of North American begins with the four-year voyage of Captain George Vancouver." That bigger picture is one that everyone in these parts should keep in focus, proudly so. His name belongs on a landmark somewhere in greater Malibu, not just buried in old books that few have ever read—or probably ever will read. Across the Santa Monicas, there's a street near the Woodland Hills Country Club called Dumetz Road. Malibu has yet to doff its cap with similar flair. Historically, better late than never could well be the rallying cry.