

Visions of the Maritime *camino*

The first peoples to reach the western shores of North America did so via a maritime pathway that had been traversed and inhabited by other living creatures for millennia. This pristine “kelp highway” paralleled the continental coasts enclosing the waters of the northern Pacific Ocean. Before these first human migrants learned to harvest its bountiful resources and to explore its reaches with increasingly sophisticated watercraft, this “proto-*camino*” was home to an extraordinary abundance of aquatic plants and animals – among them sea otters, turtles, seals, whales, tuna, and kelp.

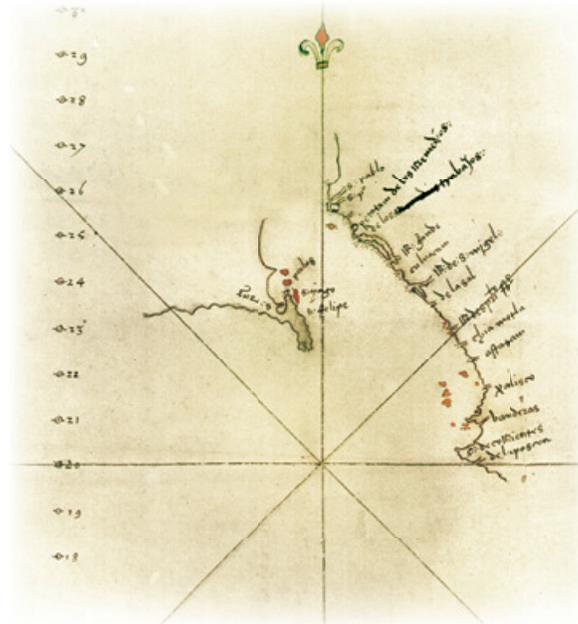
To travel the maritime *camino* is to encounter and explore an environment rich in biodiversity. Along with the desire to explore and discover, is the perennial human quest for meaning, leading inevitably to the representation of what is new, curious, and fascinating. In the late eighteenth century, the Europeans who sailed north along the coast of the Californias in search of a new frontier, sought not only to establish the familiar cultural institutions that would secure their tenure of this new land, but also to catalog and understand what they sought to dominate. The application of contemporary science in the form of surveys, measurements, collection, sampling, preserving, recording and illustration not only served imperial goals; it also sought to inform a broader project, that of the European Enlightenment.

The “enlightened” voyages of explorers such as La Pérouse (1786), Malaspina and Bustamante (1791), and Vancouver (1792) exemplify this spirit of observation and inquiry. The tangible product of their visits to the newly founded ports of Alta California are found in the charts, rutters, astronomical observations, sketches and natural history illustrations that sought to record the landscapes, plants and animals of the Pacific coast. The role of artists

and illustrators on these voyages was crucial in accurately portraying that which was new or exotic to European eyes. Today their drawings are not only notable for their artistry, but also portray vistas that have been radically transformed by the impact of increasing populations, urbanization, agriculture and industry, as well as the irrevocable depletion of natural resources and the decimation of native species.

Today the *camino* recorded by these artists of Spain’s Pacific frontier remains a subject of fascination for many fellow voyagers. Doc White is one such artist and traveler. His journey along the coast of the Californias revisits and re-records their ecological treasures. And at a time when this *camino* is under increasing pressure that threatens to compromise its rich and unique biodiversity, Doc’s images are all the more compelling.

Doc’s photographic record is both contemporary and timeless. His lens captures a fleeting moment – yet also etches in our memory something that is unchanging: the rugged vistas of the coastline of Baja California and its formidable interior. His images reveal an ocean still rich in natural resources, a limpid counterpoint to the desiccated land it washes against. But these same images also remind us that respect and care for this *camino* will ensure that what they continue to represent a living pathway rather than a nostalgic reminiscence of what has been forever lost.



Above: This map was produced in the wake of the first Spanish expeditions by sea to the northwest of New Spain organized by Hernán Cortés. It shows the coast of Nayarit and the southern tip of Baja California. While the coastal features were relatively well known and named, Spanish knowledge of the interior was fragmentary. The sea would remain the principal pathway for exploring California for centuries. Courtesy Archivo General de Indias.

R. Shelton White grew up exploring the Outer Banks of his native North Carolina. His love of the sea has remained a life-long passion. In 1969, Doc was given command of a Swift Boat (PCF) in Vietnam. During the conflict he was wounded three times, awarded two Bronze Stars, the Purple Heart, the Cross of Gallantry, and the Navy Commendation Medal for Valor. In 1972, he became a US Navy pilot. After the Vietnam War, Doc settled in San Diego and started a charter-dive operation. Since then he has travelled extensively, recording through his photography, the oceans' story. He is a member of the Explorers Club and the Royal Geographical Society. With his wife Ceci, Doc continues to explore the world's rivers, seas and oceans, and advocate for their preservation for future generations.



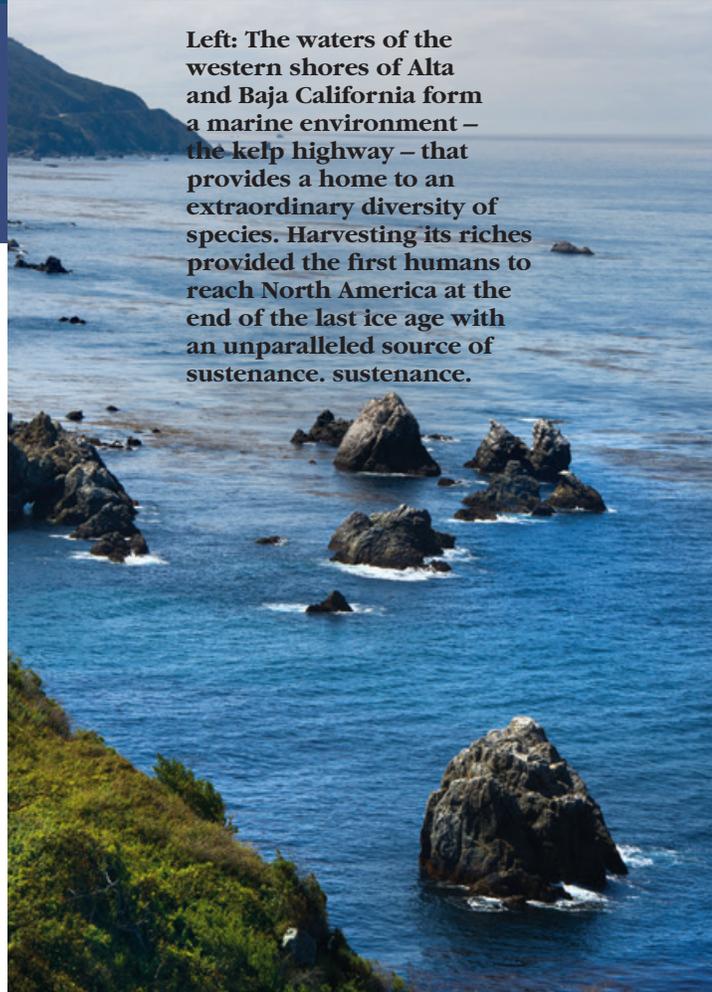
“The coast of the mainland runs from north-northwest to south-southeast, and it is clean coast. Inland it is of fine appearance, flat, and there are good valleys and here and there a grove of trees. The rest is bare.” *Account of the voyage of Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo*, August 19, 1542.

Left: The waters of the western shores of Alta and Baja California form a marine environment – the kelp highway – that provides a home to an extraordinary diversity of species. Harvesting its riches provided the first humans to reach North America at the end of the last ice age with an unparalleled source of sustenance. sustenance.



There is much seaweed on the surface, which grows on the bottom and is fastened to it.” *Account of the voyage of Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo*, August 2, 1542.

Left: The waters of the western shores of Alta and Baja California form a marine environment – the kelp highway – that provides a home to an extraordinary diversity of species. Harvesting its riches provided the first humans to reach North America at the end of the last ice age with an unparalleled source of sustenance.





“...a great quantity of fish of many species and different forms, all very good, wholesome, and of good taste, was caught each day....sardines, *chernas*, red-snapper, perch, *cornudos*, dog-fish, sharks, devil-fish, skate, salmon, tunny, *esmeregales* [pilchards], oysters, ray-fish, chuchos, mackerel, roncodoros, mutton-fish, bonitos, *puercos*, sole, *sirgueros* [linnets], newts, a great quantity of pearl oysters, and many whales....The country is of good climate, fertile and healthful....Of trees and shrubs there are: plums, which in place of gum exude a great quantity of very fine fragrant incense, *pitabayas* [cactuses], heather, mastic, live-oaks, and cedars and pines in the mountains...There is much game in the mountains and on the wing: lions, tigers, deer, stags, rabbits, hares, and many coyotes. Of birds there are doves, wild pigeons, quail, and many different kinds of ducks.” Antonio de la Ascensión, OCD, *Account of the Voyage of Sebastián Vizcaíno*, Port of San Bernabé, Cabo de San Lucas, June 11-19, 1602.



Clockwise from top left: A seal basks on the rocky shore of Baja California; Bottlenose Dolphin; Humpback whale breaching; Gray whale, Scammon’s Lagoon; Great White Shark; Common Dolphins.

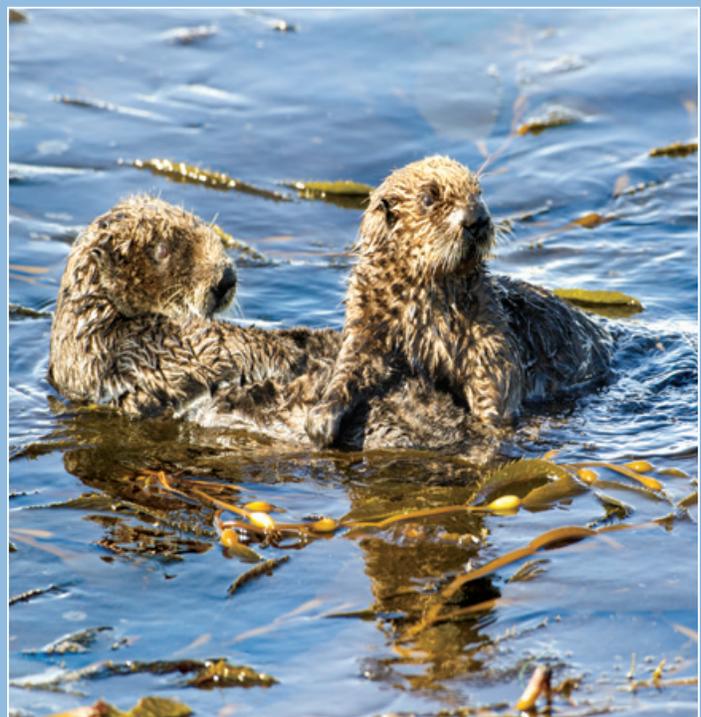
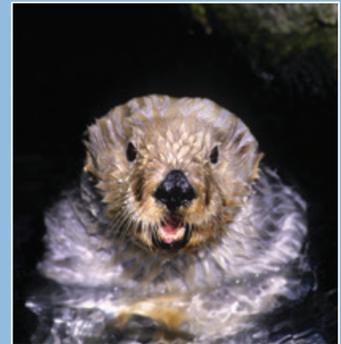


“The most remarkable fishes of both seas are the whales, which gave reasons to the ancient cosmographers to call California Punta de Ballenas, and which even today give their name to one channel in the Gulf and one bay in the Pacific Ocean.... Sailors usually call them ballenatos (little whales) perhaps because, although very large, they are not as big as those that are said to exist in other seas. Sharks, dolphins, or toninas are seen very frequently in the Gulf.” Miguel del Barco, SJ, *Historia natural y crónica de la Antigua California*, mid-eighteenth century.



A combination of fact and fantasy, Flemish cartographer Cornelis de Jode's depiction of the Pacific Northwest dwells upon the likely presence of a waterway – the Strait of Anian – linking the northern Atlantic with the Pacific. The map also indicates the location of the mythical kingdom of Quivira, as well as coastal scenes populated by sea monsters and intrepid mariners. A mixture of the factual and the imagined, this was the mysterious shore that awaited the eastern bound Manila Galleon in the late sixteenth century. Cornelis de Jode, *Quivirae Regnu*, 1593.

Right and below: Sea Otters. At the time of the beginning of Spanish settlement of Alta California in 1769, sea otters inhabited the length of the maritime camino, from the tip of Baja California to the Pacific Northwest and beyond to the coasts of Japan. Hunted for their pelts almost to the point of extinction, they are now considered a threatened species.

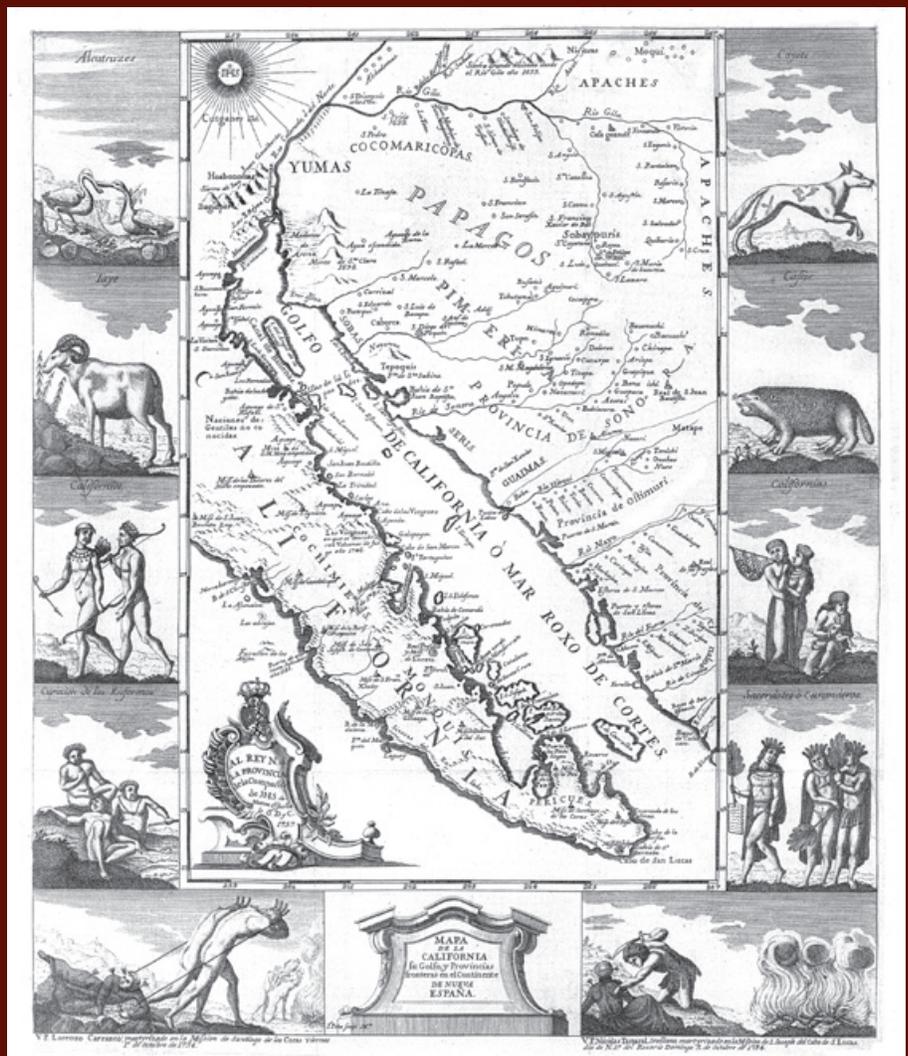




California seal and Sealions.



Cueva las flechas, Canyon San Pablo, Sierra de San Francisco. There is no consensus on the meaning of the larger-than-life images of humans and animals represented on the walls of these caves, nor of their dating. Some have suggested they may be as old as 7,500 years. "The most common animals [in California] are bears, coyotes, foxes, deer, skunks, raccoons, squirrels, vipers, and other kinds of snakes, rabbits, berrendos [pronghorn antelope], etc. Among the birds the one that is almost a plague in the grain fields is the quail, and recently the thrush (*Oriolus*) has taken to attacking grain. [Other birds are] doves, crows, hawks, several kinds of woodpeckers, vultures, geese, albatrosses, pelicans, seagulls, etc." José Longinos Martínez, *Diario de las expediciones a las Californias 1792*.



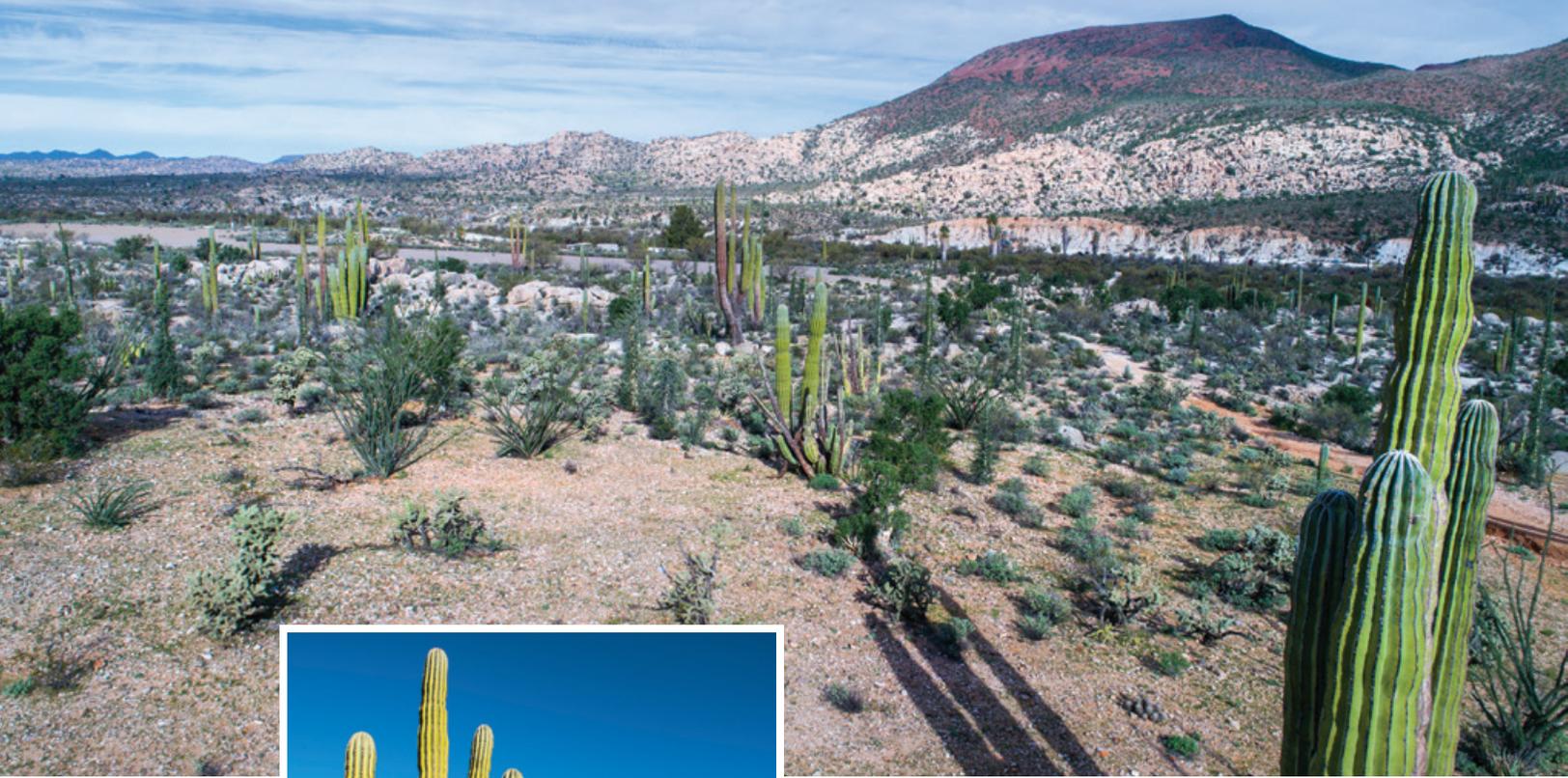
Miguel Venegas. *Mapa de la California su Golfo, y Provincias fronterizas en el Continente de Nueva España*, Madrid 1757. This map shows not only the coast of Baja California and the Sea of Cortés, but also a series of natural history and ethnographic illustrations, as well as incidents from the martyrology of the Society of Jesus. As such it occupies a unique place in the cartographic history of the Americas, combining elements of Enlightenment science and Catholic theology.



"We continued on our journey. We left the river and headed toward the mountains that would take us to the opposite coast. According to my calculations we traveled four and one-half hours today. We spent more than half the time going up and down a rocky and difficult road. The rest of time was spent traveling through some flat plains....Seeing that there was no water, we dug a hole in the ground and the animals drank from it." Junípero Serra, Diary..., May 23, 1769.







Contemporary photographs of the rugged terrain in Baja California show the timeless quality of the land when compared with historic images of the camino real used by muleteers and their pack mules. Photographer: Doc White.

