

Interpretive Special Event Training

Fort Ross State Historic Park

California State Parks
Interpretation and Education Division
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Area Map	3
Map of Fort Ross State Historic Park	5
Cultural History	7
Timeline—major historical events	7
History of the area	12
Overview	12
Native People	12
Excerpts from historical documents	15
“Outpost of an empire”	15
From Russians to ranchers – 1840s - 1870s	29
Fort Ross as a shipping center – Call Ranch 1873 - 1920	30
Surrounding communities – Jenner to Sea Ranch	32
History of Fort Ross in the 20th century	32
Insights from key historical figures	34
Ivan Kuskov	34
Ivan Veniaminov	37
Fr. Mariano Payeras	37
Ethnographical and Natural Science Studies	41
Natural History	44
Coastal terrace	44
Wooded slopes	45
Marine environment	46
San Andreas Fault	48
Sea otters	49
History of Sea Otter Hunting	49
Natural History of the Sea Otter	51

Facilities	52
Overview	52
Blockhouses	53
Chapel	54
Kuskov House	56
Magazin	57
Rotchev House	57
Officials' Quarters	58
Old Russian cemetery	58
Explanation of Russian Orthodox Cross	59
Stockade walls	59
Other structures	60
Partnerships	62
Special Events	65
Interpretation/Visitor contact	66
Roving Interpretation at a Special Event	66
Tips for Conducting Surveys	68
Frequently Asked Questions	69
Appendices	74
A. Russian Glossary	76
B. Common Animals and Plants	78
C. Going Easy in the Intertidal Zone	84

Area Map

Courtesy of RussianRiverTravel.com



Map of Fort Ross State Historic Park



Cultural History

Timeline—major historical events

(excerpted from the California State Parks Environmental Living Program Manual [ELPM])

Pre-Colombian—Kashaya Pomo and Coast Miwok inhabit the lands that later will be chosen for Settlement Ross.

- 1542** Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo sails throughout the North Pacific. He does not land in California.
- 1579** Sir Francis Drake sails on the Golden Hind, following the Pacific coast south from what is now Oregon – 42° latitude. The ship lands at Point Reyes, now called Drake’s Bay, on June 17. Drake names the coast “New Albion” and lays claim to the west coast of America for England.
- 1602** Sebastian Vizcaino-Aguilar explores the west coast and names the “Rio de Sebastian” (Russian River). He is in search of good harbors along the Alta (upper) California coast and goes as far north as Cape Mendocino.
- 1728** Vitus Bering, in his first voyage, explores the waters east of Russia, hoping to find a northern passage. The trip is unsuccessful.
- 1741** Aleksei Ilich Chirikov assists Bering in the Great Northern Expedition. His report to the Admiralty is the first description of the Northwest Coast of North America and of the Aleuts.
- 1741** Vitus Bering sets out again in the North Pacific waters. He discovers the Aleutian Islands, and is shipwrecked on what are now called the Commander Islands. Bering dies of exposure; some of his crew members survive by eating sea mammals (including the sea otter) and using their fur for warmth. Crewmembers return to Russia with 900 sea otter pelts. The official “Fur Rush” begins.
- 1750s** The first known sale of sea otter pelts (in Canton, China) brings incredible profits. Major fur-trade companies scramble to take hold of Pacific territories for further involvement in the sea otter trade.
- 1769** Gaspar de Portolá discovers San Francisco Bay during an overland exploration from the south.
- 1775** Ensign Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra enters and names Bodega Bay and Tomales Bay. He explores the coastline to the 58th parallel.
- 1784** The first permanent Russian base is established in Alaska on Kodiak Island by merchant Grigory Shelikhov. This becomes the headquarters of Russian business until 1804.
- 1785** The English and American sea otter trade in China becomes constant.

- 1790** Merchant and business owner Grigory Shelikhov expresses an interest in occupying California, an outrageous thought for those back in St. Petersburg.
- 1799** The Russian-American Company (RAC) receives its first charter from the Russian Government. The company was granted imperial approval under Tsar Paul I for a 20-year period. The Russian-American Company then had a monopoly on hunting and trading rights in all of Alaska. Other small Russian companies are forced to join the RAC. Alexander Baranov is appointed Governor of Alaska.
- 1803** The RAC and American sea captain Joseph O’Cain join forces under a contract in an effort to catch sea otters along the California coast. The RAC supplies the labor of Alaskan hunters, while O’Cain supplies the ship. Profits are to be split.
- 1804** The RAC moves its headquarters from Kodiak to Sitka.
- 1806** The RAC, with Count Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov as representative, establishes trade relations with Spanish California in San Francisco. They arrive on the ship *Juno*. Rezanov courts and becomes engaged to Doña Concepción Argüello, the daughter of the commandant of el Presidio Real de San Francisco. The trip is a success, despite Spain’s prohibition of trade with foreigners. Grain becomes available for starving RAC employees in Alaska, while the Spanish Californians will receive trade goods they badly need. Rezanov develops plans for a Russian establishment in New Albion to encourage permanent trade relations, to hunt the sea otter, and to establish an agricultural base.
- 1807** Rezanov returns to Russia but dies of pneumonia near Irkutsk, en route to St. Petersburg to deliver his plans for California and to ask for permission to marry Doña Concepcion.
- 1808** A marker of the Russian presence and claim is placed at Trinidad Bay.
- 1809** In August, a marker is placed along Little Bodega Bay by Ivan Kuskov, company manager. Friendly contact is made with local Coast Miwok people.
- 1811** A marker is placed on the northwest shore of San Pablo Bay. On March 4, Kuskov reaches Bodega Bay in the ship *Chirikov* to establish a settlement. Kuskov names the area Port Rumiantsev in honor of the Russian Foreign Minister. He also establishes a base on the Farallon Islands. In late March, Kuskov chooses the site for the Ross settlement. The available timber, soil, water and open space, as well as the protective hillside behind the site, are noted as reasons for the location choice.
- 1812** Kuskov sets up port facilities in Bodega Bay. He begins to establish living quarters in the Russian Gulch area. He explores the Russian River, which

- he calls the “Slavianka River.” The Ross settlement is established with the labor of approximately 25 Russians and 85 Alaskans. Construction of the fort begins in April. Kuskov, a gardener, explorer and company man, dedicates “Ross” in August. He remains manager of Ross until 1821.
- 1812** Spanish officer Gabriel Moraga visits the Ross Settlement. A revolution in the Americas against the Spanish, coupled with Spain’s perennial lack of gunpowder and cannon supplies, prevents Spanish authorities from actively removing the Russians.
- 1813** Officer Moraga arrives again at Ross, with an interest in trade relations. The trade relations between RAC and Spanish California become constant until 1822, when California comes under Mexican rule.
- 1814** The Treaty of Ghent, between Great Britain and America, ends the war of 1812.
- 1816** Work begins on the first ship to be built at Ross. This will also be noted in history as the first ship built in California.
- 1816** Two well-known scientists visit Fort Ross. Johann Friedrich Eschscholtz and Ludovik de Chamisso came to Ross on the ship *Rurik*. Chamisso names our state wildflower, the Golden Poppy, after Eschscholtz. Its Latin name is *Californica Eschscholtzia*.
- 1817** The official treaty between the Kashaya Pomo and the RAC is signed. This is known to be the only treaty in California between a European power and California Native Americans that was upheld.
- 1821** Kuskov retires from the Ross settlement. Karl J. Schmidt replaces him as manager. Schmidt is Finnish.
- 1821** The Transcontinental Treaty agreement, negotiated in Washington in 1819 by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams and Luis de Onis, the Spanish minister to the United States, determines the boundary between the United States and Spain’s North American possessions. It thereby gives the United States a firm claim to the region between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. As part of the treaty, Spain sells Florida to the United States for \$5 million.
- 1822** Mexico declares its independence from Spain. Hereafter, trade relations with the new Mexican government are competitive and costly for the RAC.
- 1823** Mission San Francisco Solano at Sonoma is established.
- 1826** Paul I. Shelikhov replaces Karl Schmidt as manager of Ross.
- 1829** Peter S. Kostromitinov replaces Paul Shelikhov as manager of Ross.

- 1832** The Hudson's Bay Company hunting brigade, led by Michael La Framboise and John Work, visit the area of Ross. Several visits were recorded for this and the previous year.
- 1833** Kostromitinov Ranch is established on the Russian River, a few miles inland from the River Mouth. Baron Ferdinand von Wrangell visits Russian California.
- 1834** Khlebnikov Ranch is established near what is now the town of Bodega.
- 1836** Father Ioann Veniaminov visits Ross and several missions in Mexican California.
- 1836** Alexander G. Rotchev replaces Kostromitinov as manager of Ross.
- 1839** Cyrille-Pierre-Theodore LaPlace visits Ross on his voyage around the world.
- 1840** The sale of the Ross colonies becomes an official plan for the company. Alexander Rotchev and Kostromitinov are actively looking for buyers. General Vallejo, the Mexican government, and John Sutter are possible buyers. General Vallejo cannot come up with the money, and the Mexican officers in California remind the RAC that this is already Mexican land. John Sutter agrees to purchase the improvements on credit.
- 1841** Manager Rotchev, Scientist Voznesenskii and Agronomist Chernykh climb Mt. St. Helena on their way to Sutter's Fort. John Sutter agrees to buy the fort and all outbuildings for a price of \$30,000, to be paid in installments. Included in the sale are a few cannons, the shipyard, livestock and all grain in the ground. The Russian-American Company leaves Fort Ross in December 1841.
- 1842** Robert Ridley becomes the first caretaker for Sutter at Ross. Robert Livermore leads a drive of 2,000 head of cattle from Fort Ross and the ranches to the Sutter farm in Marysville.
- 1843** Samuel Smith replaces Ridley as caretaker. The same year, William Benitz replaces Smith as caretaker and eventually signs a lease with Sutter for Fort Ross and surrounding property. He and his growing family stay at Ross until 1867.
- 1845** Mexican Governor Pío Pico granted 17,660 acres, including the former Fort Ross Property, to Manuel Torres. The grant is named the Muniz Rancho. Benitz and his partner Rufus continue ranching there under an arrangement with Torres.
- 1846** The Bear Flag revolt and uprising takes place at Sonoma Plaza on June 14th.

- 1849** The Gold Rush begins. RAC involves itself in California commerce by importing ice from Alaska.
- 1850** California becomes a part of the United States.
- 1851** Benitz arranges to buy the Muniz Rancho from Manuel Torres for \$5,000.
- 1859** Title for the Muniz Rancho is officially granted to Benitz.
- 1867** Alaska is sold to the U.S. for \$7.2 million; \$200,000 goes to the RAC. They liquidate all assets and return to Irkutsk, Russia.
- 1867** James W. Dixon purchases Fort Ross and 6,000 acres from Benitz. A wooden chute is built for his lumber operations. The same year Charles Fairfax purchases 7,000 acres from Benitz.
- 1873** George Washington Call purchases Fort Ross and surrounding property of more than 7,000 acres. The Call family lives in the Rotchev house until 1878, when their large white two-story home is completed.
- 1878** Rotchev House is turned into the Fort Ross Hotel. In 1885 the Fort Ross School opens. The Call family grows, with 14 children born between 1869 and 1900.
- 1874** The first weather station on the west coast was set up by George W. Call. The Fort Ross Post Office was established with Call as postmaster in 1877. A Western Union telegraph station opens but closes again in 1902.
- 1903** The California Historical Landmarks Committee acquires Fort Ross and its surrounding 2½ acres.
- 1906** The Fort is deeded to the State of California. A month later, a major earthquake hits and severely damages several remaining buildings.
- 1917** Fort Ross Chapel undergoes its first restoration.
- 1962** The State acquires 352 acres that are added to Fort Ross State Park.
- 1970** Fire destroys the restored chapel. It is rebuilt in 1972. Today, several different Russian Orthodox groups use the chapel for services.
- 1976** The State acquires 239 additional acres that are added to the park, including the old Russian orchard and the Call orchard.
- 1990** State Parks, in conjunction with Save the Redwoods League, purchases 2,157 acres of forest and coastline.

History of the area

Overview

Fort Ross was a thriving Russian-American Company settlement from 1812 to 1841. This commercial company, chartered by Russia's imperial government, controlled all Russian exploration, trade and settlement in the North Pacific from established permanent settlements in Alaska and California. Fort Ross was the southernmost settlement in the Russian colonization of the North American continent; it was established as an agricultural base to supply Alaska. It was the site of California's first windmills and shipbuilding, and Russian scientists were among the first to record California's cultural and natural history. Fort Ross was a successfully functioning multicultural settlement for some thirty years. Settlers included Russians, Native Alaskans and Californians, and Creoles (individuals of mixed Russian and Native ancestry).

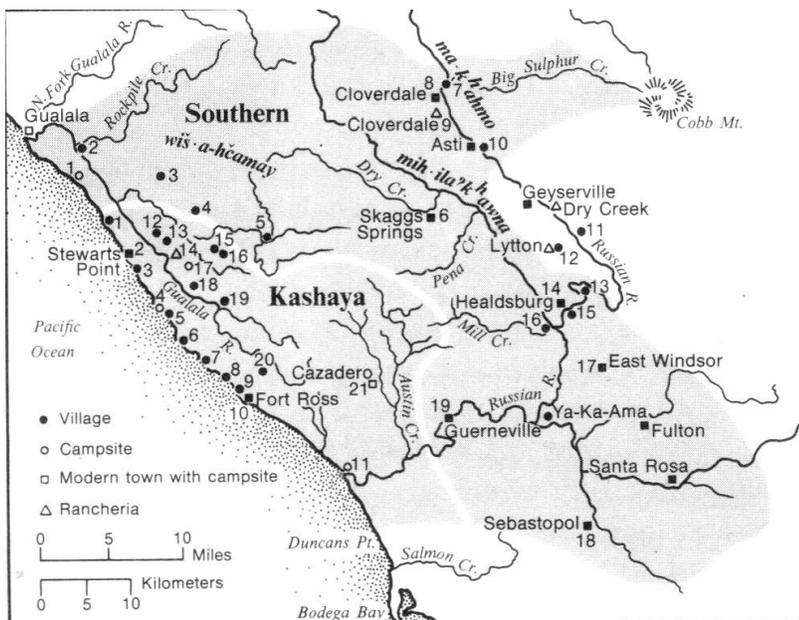
Along with the chapel, the structure of most historical interest at Fort Ross is the Rotchev house, an existing building renovated in about 1836 for Alexander Rotchev, the last manager of Ross. It is the only surviving building and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Several other structures have been reconstructed: the first Russian Orthodox chapel south of Alaska, the stockade, and four other buildings—the Kuskov House, the Officials' Barracks, and two corner blockhouses. Fort Ross is a National Historic Landmark.

Native people

(excerpted from the Environmental Living Day Program Manual Update for 2006-2007)

Native Americans, including the Kashaya Pomo, have lived in this beautiful spot for as long as 10,000 years. They are among the oldest cultures in California.

The Kashaya had a rich life. The place that we call Fort Ross was called Metini by the Kashaya. The people lived at Metini and in villages and camps on the warmer, sunnier ridges above. The villages and camps were in places where the people could easily gather and prepare different food items. From the sea, the



Kashaya could gather nutritious food such as abalone, mussels, sea urchins, fish, and seaweed. On the land there were many different animals to hunt, such as deer, elk, foxes, and bears. Many plants could be eaten: berries, seeds, roots, herbs and the main staple of the Kashaya people's diet, acorns.

The Kashaya had almost everything they needed to live in this area. The local

trees provided wood for shelter and tools. The local animals provided food and fur for warmth. Tools were made from wood, bone, and stones like chert. Beautiful baskets could be made from local grasses and plants. The Kashaya traded with other Indian tribes for items that they couldn't find on their own lands. One neighboring group that they traded with was the Coast Miwok, who lived in the Bodega region. The Coast Miwok were also in contact with people at the Ross Colony.

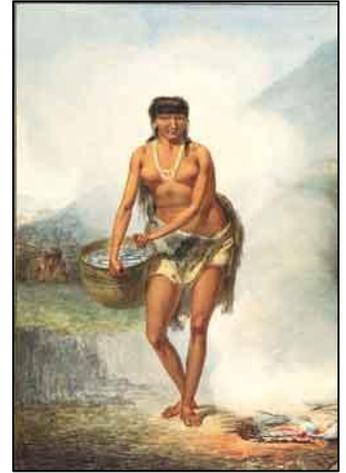
When the Russians first sailed into the cove at Metini in 1812, life had already changed for many California Indian tribes. The establishment of the Spanish missions had a major impact on the native people. The first mission was established in 1769 near San Diego. More missions were eventually constructed along the coast as far north as San Francisco Bay. After the Russians' arrival, missions were established even farther north.

The Kashaya knew about the missions. They knew that they did not want a mission on their land. When the “undersea people” (the Kashaya name for the Russians) arrived, they told the Kashaya that they would protect them from the Spanish as well as other Indians in the area. In addition, the Kashaya could work for the Russians in exchange for things like beads, iron pots, tools and cloth. The Russians may have paid them for the land known as Metini with three blankets, three pairs of britches, two axes, three hoes and some beads. Eventually, the Russians wrote and signed a treaty with the Kashaya. (A copy of the treaty is on page 9.)

Eventually, Native Californians from several different tribes lived and worked at Settlement Ross: Kashaya Pomo from the lands surrounding Fort Ross; Coast Miwok from the area around Bodega Bay; Central Pomo from the lands to the north near Point Arena; and Southern Pomo from the Russian River Valley.

When Golovnin, Captain of the ship *Kamchatka*, arrived at Settlement Ross in the summer of 1818, he wrote: “The chief of the peoples living next to Port Rumiantsev came to see me when my sloop was anchored there. He brought gifts consisting of various parts of regalia, arrow, and household items, and asked to be taken under Russian protection. An Aleut who had lived over a year among these people acted as an interpreter. This chief, called Valentila, definitely wanted more Russians to settle among them in order to protect them from Spanish oppression. He begged me for a Russian flag, explaining that he wanted to raise it as a sign of friendship and peace whenever Russian ships should appear near the shore. . . .”

Malcolm Margolin, a professor from Sonoma State University, wrote in *The Way We Lived*, “. . . unlike the Spaniards who forced the Indians into missions or the Anglo who stole the land and treated the native residents as trespassers, the Russians came merely to hunt sea otter and grow grain for their Alaskan colony. Their behavior toward the Indians was relatively indifferent, even benign”



Coast Miwok woman, *Inhabitant of Rumiantsev Bay*, by Mikhail Tikhonovich Tikhonov 1818. (Original painting in the Scientific Research Museum, Russian Academy of Fine Arts.)

A "TREATY" between the Russian-American Company and the Kashaya Pomo Native Californians, ceding land for Settlement Ross:

On September 22, 1817, the Indian chiefs, Chu-gu-an, Amat-tan, Gem-le-le and others, appeared at Fort Ross by invitation. Their greeting, as translated, extended their thanks for the invitation.

Captain Lieutenant Hagemeister expressed gratitude to them in the name of the Russian-American Company for ceding to the Company land for a fort, buildings and enterprises, in regions belonging to Chu-gu-an, [land] which the inhabitants call Med-eny-ny. [Hagemeister] said he hoped they would not have reason to regret having the Russians as neighbors.

Having heard [what was] translated for him, Chu-gu-an and a second, Amattan, whose dwelling was also not far off, replied, "We are very satisfied with the occupation of this place by the Russians, because we now live in safety from other Indians, who formerly would attack us and this security began only from the time of [the Russian] settlement."

After this friendly response, gifts were presented to the Toion and the others: and to the Chief, Chu-gu-an, a silver medal was entrusted, ornamented with the Imperial Russian seal and the inscription "allies [soiuznye] of Russia" and it was stated that this [medal] entitles him to receive respect from the Russians, and for that reason he should not come to them without the medal. It also imposes on him the obligation of loyalty and assistance, in case this is needed. In response to that he and the others declared their readiness and expressed their gratitude for the reception.

After the hospitality, when [the Indians] departed from the fort, a one-gun salute was fired in honor of the chief Toion.

We, the undersigned, hereby testify that in our presence the chief Toion responded in exactly this way.

Navy Captain-Lieutenant and Cavalier Hagemeister

Staff doctor and Court Counselor Kerner

Commerce Counselor and Administrator of Fort Ross Ivan Kuskov

Assistant Navigator 14th class [Ivan M.] Kislakovskii

Company Agent Kirill Khlebnikov

Commercial Navigator Prokofii Tumanin

Excerpts from Historical Documents

“Outpost of an Empire”

Russian expansion to America, by Stephen Watrous

(Excerpted from “Fort Ross,” published by the Fort Ross Interpretive Association, 2001)

In the centuries that followed the discovery of America, European expansion into the Western Hemisphere reached a scale that changed the world. The voyages to the New World undertaken by the Atlantic powers of Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries are generally well known, as are the explorations and settlement of Europeans in North America during the 18th and 19th centuries. Less well known, however, is the penetration of America’s northwest coast by the Russians, the culmination of Russia’s age-old effort to settle and develop its eastern frontier.

Russia’s eastward expansion took on a new dimension in the 17th and 18th centuries, as a counterpart to European and American westward expansion. About the same time that English colonists first settled along the Atlantic seaboard, Russian explorers, trappers, and settlers pushed east into Siberia and in 1639 reached the Pacific Ocean. By the mid-17th century frontier *promyshlenniki*—self-employed and contract entrepreneurs—had sailed through the strait that separates Asia from North America, inadvertently discovering a sea route from the Arctic to the Pacific. But it was not until almost 75 years later, when Tsar Peter the Great became determined to define the geography of the North Pacific, that the potential value of the discoveries in this region became clear. In two arduous voyages, Vitus Bering and Alexei Chirikov, under commission of the Russian Crown, sailed through the area now called the Bering Strait in 1728, and in 1741 discovered the Aleutian Islands and the mainland of Alaska, both of which they claimed for Russia. These results aroused great interest among Russian hunters and traders; the fur trade had long been the mainspring of Russia’s eastward expansion, and now these frontier entrepreneurs were drawn to the herds of fur seal and sea otter that lived in the North Pacific. From the 1740s to the end of the century, over forty Russian merchants and companies sponsored voyages to the Aleutians and the Alaskan mainland. By the early 1800s, Russian entrepreneurs were exporting an average of 62,000 fur pelts from North America each year, worth roughly two-thirds of a million paper rubles (about \$133,200), a large sum in those days. Even though over eighty percent of the pelts were fur seal, the nearly five percent that were sea otter pelts were the most valuable.

Russian settlement in Alaska

The rapid growth of the fur trade called for permanent Russian posts in Alaska as well as bases for hunting expeditions and storing furs. A Russian presence in the Aleutians and on Unalaska Island began to appear in the 1770s, but the first known permanent settlement was founded on Kodiak Island in 1784 by the enterprising merchant Grigory Ivanovich Shelikhov. The hardy, ambitious, and resourceful Shelikhov, who was perhaps the most farsighted Siberian merchant of his day, became an early advocate of extending Russian enterprise as far south as California.

The Russian foothold in Alaska remained undisturbed by other Europeans for several decades. In the minds of Europeans and American colonists of the 18th century, Alaska was barely known—at most, it was little more than a place name



Map of the Russian Settlements in America

for a remote and forbidding land. From the late 1760s on, however, the governments of Spain and Great Britain, both with claims to the North American mainland, became concerned about Russia's presence in the North Pacific and, later, its monopoly of the fur trade. Spain advanced its territorial claims by sending naval expeditions as far north as Unalaska, and by establishing a chain of missions in Upper California between 1769 and 1776, from San Diego north to San Francisco Bay. Great Britain promoted its cause by sending Captain James Cook to search for a Northwest

Passage; the Cook expedition visited the northern Pacific coast and Unalaska, where they met the Russians in 1778. The newly formed United States established a claim to the northwest coast, in part as a result of merchant voyages from Boston to the Columbia River of Oregon in 1787-88.

Despite the growing profits of the fur trade in the North Pacific, the number of Russian trading companies in operation at the end of the 18th century declined. The diminishing animal populations in northern waters, the losses of sailing vessels in Alaska storms, and the rising costs of long voyages from the Siberian seaboard to keep the American settlements supplied all combined to reduce the number of trading companies and leave the field only to the strongest. At Grigory Shelikhov's death in 1795, his firm dominated the trade. In a move of significance for all of Russian America, Shelikhov's widow, Mme. Natalia Shelikhova, and a business partner combined with another competitor in 1797 to form the United American Company, which two years later reorganized to become the Russian-American Company, chartered by Tsar Paul I.

The Russian-American Company, like other European joint-stock companies, was given tasks to perform that went beyond the realm of trade. It was authorized to use the coastal areas of North America south to 55° north latitude (near Alaska's current southern boundary) and to explore and colonize unoccupied lands. It was also given the right to exploit surface and mineral resources in the areas settled by Russians. In effect, it became the "right arm" of the Russian government in the American hemisphere. Members of the Tsar's family, the court nobility, and high officialdom held shares in the Company, and it was understood that the Company would henceforth control all Russian exploration, trade, and settlement in North America. Shelikhov's dream of turning the North Pacific into an "inland sea" of the Russian Empire was now under way.



Flag of the Russian American Company

Russian advance to California

In 1791 Shelikhov sent Alexander Andreyevich Baranov to Alaska as his trusted assistant to manage his trading company's affairs. Baranov's success earned him the role of first manager-in-chief of the Russian-American Company at its founding in 1799, a post he filled until a few months before his death in 1818. From his headquarters at Novo-Arkhangel'sk, Baranov, with the help of his able assistant, Ivan Alexandrovich Kuskov, supervised the Company's growing enterprises in Alaska and those as far afield as California and even Hawaii. A man of enormous talent, courage, and stamina—who was both admired and feared by Russians, natives, and foreigners alike—Baranov was the main architect of Russia's southward expansion.

Worried by the dwindling otter catch in Alaskan waters, Baranov dispatched an exploratory hunting expedition to California in 1803 in a joint venture with an American sea captain, Joseph O'Cain. Sailing as far south as San Diego and Baja California, the voyagers found the otter to be plentiful, which ensured that the sea otter would remain the Company's most profitable trade item, even if the quality of the fur was not as high as that of the Alaskan otter.

The other nagging problem that drove the Russians south was the persistent difficulty in keeping the new settlements in the North Pacific supplied with adequate provisions to feed their colonists. The harsh physical environment of Alaska and the lack of familiarity with crop- and stock-raising among the Kodiak and Aleutian Islanders, on whom the Russians relied for labor, worked against their meager attempts at agriculture. Even the efforts of Russian settlers to grow garden produce and to obtain seed were disappointing. The winter of 1805-06 was climactic. The weather was unusually severe, and no supply ships arrived from Siberia for many months. The few staples on hand at Sitka were rationed but soon gave out, and the lean, ill-nourishing diet the settlers had to live on led to malnutrition, scurvy, and death.

Upon this dismal scene arrived a high-ranking company official from St. Petersburg to inspect the colony. Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov, imperial chamberlain and son-in-law of Grigory Shelikhov, was appalled at what he saw and reported the colonial territories to be in a "disastrous situation."

So moved was Rezanov by the misery of the colonists that he purchased a vessel from Americans in Alaska and sailed to San Francisco Bay early in 1806 to purchase grain and, if possible, to establish trade relations with the Spanish in Upper California on a continuing basis. On his arrival, Rezanov boldly ignored the fact that all California ports were officially closed to trade with foreigners. During the next few weeks, the persuasive Rezanov successfully carried out his goal of trading Russian-made utensils and tools for wheat. With the return of Commandant Argüello to the Presidio, Rezanov was able to gain support for permission to trade with Spanish California, which was referred to Madrid for approval. Rezanov's cause was further promoted by his romance with the commandant's daughter, Doña Concepción Argüello, which led to a marriage proposal and its acceptance, on the eve of his departure.

Returning to Sitka with provisions and news of a possible trade agreement with Spanish California, Rezanov urged Baranov to make use of "the one unoccupied stretch" of California coastline as an agricultural and hunting base for the settlements in Russian Alaska. Then he set out on his return trip to St. Petersburg, traveling via Kamchatka and Siberia, to report to the Tsar and the Company's home office. On the way, weakened by fever, Rezanov fell from his horse and died of injuries a few days later, on March 1, 1807. It was a year or two before Doña Concepción knew of his fate. But, in Alaska, Baranov and Russian-American Company officials hurried to act on Rezanov's advice.

Establishment of the California Settlement

In 1803, 1806 and 1808, Baranov had appointed Timofei Tarakanov to lead large Native Alaskan hunting parties to California. Between 1808 and 1811, Baranov sent his deputy Kuskov on a series of expeditions to reconnoiter possible settlement sites in "New Albion," a name used by the Russians after Sir Francis Drake's designation of California. At Bodega Bay, called Rumiantsev Bay by the Russians, on the Sonoma Coast north of San Francisco Bay, Kuskov established a temporary base and set about exploring the surrounding territory. He examined



several sites, and in 1811 selected a cove and promontory up the coast from Bodega Bay as the best location for the colony. Although it lacked the deep-water anchorage the Russians enjoyed in Bodega's outer bay, the proposed site had overall advantages in soil, timber, water supply, and

Ross Colony

pasturage. In addition, its relative inaccessibility from Spanish-occupied territory gave it an advantage in terms of defense. Kuskov submitted his recommendations to Baranov, and preparations began for founding a settlement.

In March 1812, with orders to build and administer the settlement, Kuskov returned to the Sonoma Coast. With him came twenty-five Russians, many of them craftsmen, and eighty Aleuts. These Native Alaskans brought forty



Baidarkas

baidarkas, the swift, maneuverable skin kayaks used for hunting and a few larger skin boats, *baidaras*, for transport.

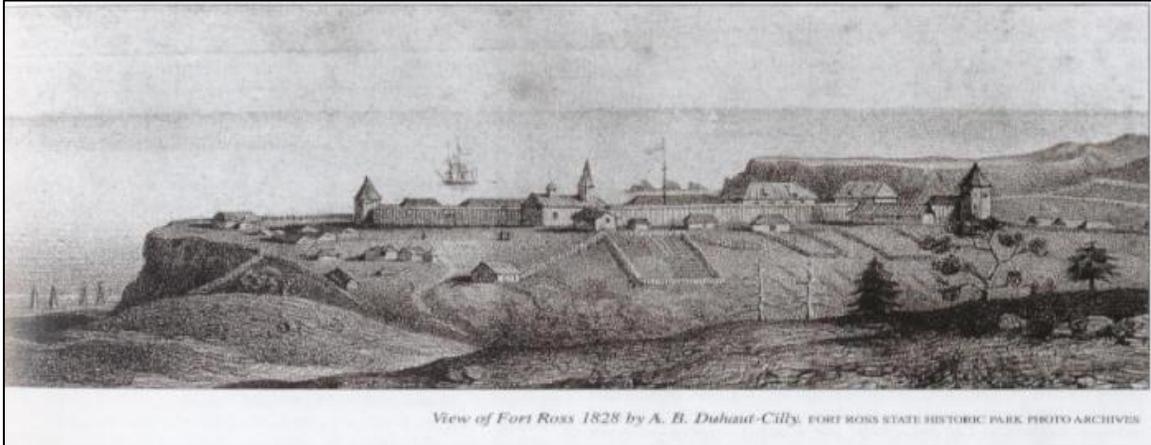
Kuskov's assignment was not an unfamiliar one. He had previously administered settlements in Alaska and had built Novo-Arkhangel'sk on Sitka

Island after local Indians destroyed the Company fortress in 1802. Construction at the California site began at once. The structures which rose on the bluff of the new colony took on lines similar to those of Novo-Arkhangel'sk, as the workmen followed models of the traditional stockade, blockhouses, and log buildings found in Siberia and on Sitka.

On August 30, 1812 (in the old style Russian calendar), the name-day of Tsar Alexander I, the Russians held a special religious service at the colony, marking the completion of the stockade. The stockade was built of redwood, much in the same configuration as seen today. Two blockhouses with cannon ports were constructed at the northwest and southeast corners of the stockade. The northwest blockhouse had seven sides and the southeast one had eight, each structure being two stories high. Between twelve and forty cannons were placed within the stockade and blockhouses, the number varying in the different accounts of the site written over the years. Sentries bearing flintlock muskets stood guard in each blockhouse, but although it was fortified, the settlement served as a commercial, not a military outpost. Flagstaves were first erected in the center of the stockade and outside it on the bluff, each bearing the flag of the Russian-American Company, with the imperial double-headed eagle as its insignia. The settlement was given the name "Ross" most likely to highlight poetically its connection with Imperial Russia (*Rossija*). Ross had other early names as well: the Russians often described the outpost as "Ross Colony," "Ross Settlement," and "Ross Fortress," and Company officials called it the "Ross Office." Its current name, "Fort Ross," has been used by Americans since the mid-19th century.

By 1820 the stockade interior contained the house of the manager (now called the Kuskov House), the quarters of other officials, barracks for the Russian employees, and various storehouses and lesser structures. Some buildings had two stories. The manager's house had glass windows and was comfortably furnished. The chapel was added about 1825, replacing a small bell tower on the same site. A well inside the stockade provided the colonists with fresh water in case of emergency.

Outside the stockade, a windmill, cattle yard, bakery, threshing floor, and cemetery, along with farm buildings and bath houses, appeared within five years. There were vegetable gardens and an orchard. In later years, there were two windmills, two threshing floors, several bathhouses and assorted other structures described in the 1841 Russian Inventory for Sutter. Along the cove, at the mouth of the stream below the stockade, were located a shipyard, forge, tannery, boathouse and storage shed for *baidaras* and *baidarkas*.



View of Fort Ross 1828 by A. B. Duhaut-Cilly. FORT ROSS STATE HISTORIC PARK PHOTO ARCHIVES

After 1820, many Russians chose to live outside the stockade. There were also the dwellings of the local Kashaya Indians, on whose ancestral land the outpost was built, and who worked for the Russians. The Native Alaskans who had come with Kuskov, generally designated by the Russians as Aleuts, lived outside the fort as well. Auguste Bernard Duhaut-Cilly, visiting from France in 1828, noted a population of about sixty Russians, eighty "Kodiaks," and about eighty Indians, all living in relative harmony.

Fort Ross: The Russian Colony in California

Records show that after 1812, there were from twenty-five to one hundred Russians and from fifty to one hundred twenty-five Native Alaskans at the settlement at any given time. The number of the Kashaya, who came to work as day laborers, varied with the seasons. Records indicate the presence of only a few Russian women in the colony (the most prominent of whom was the wife of the last manager); "Creole" and Alaskan women were somewhat more numerous. However, during the life of the colony, a number of Russians and Alaskan natives married California Indian women—Kashaya, Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo—with the consent of tribal and Company authorities. The children at the settlement, who made up about a third of the residents by the mid-1830s, were almost all considered as "Creoles," born of these ethnically mixed unions.

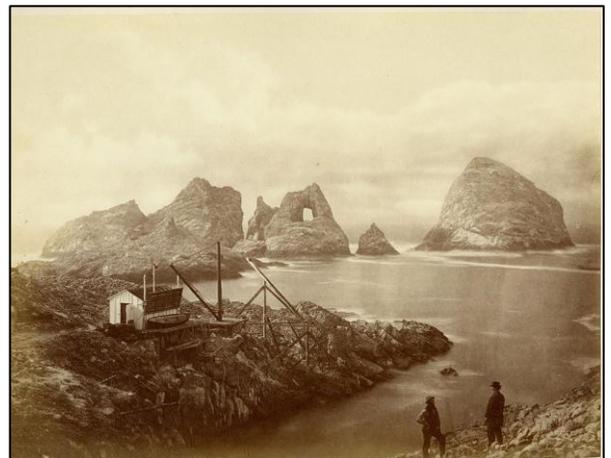


Creole at Fort Ross

Everyone in the vicinity of Fort Ross labored for the Russian-American Company. The organization and operation of the colony followed the same general pattern as in the Company's Alaskan settlements. The Ross colony, as in Alaska, was headed by a manager. He was paid a salary and given living quarters, and, although he also had servants, he worked as hard as any of the colonists—even finding time to tend a garden to add to the food supply. Kuskov, the first manager, was a particularly avid gardener, growing cabbage and beets for pickling, with enough produce harvested for shipments to be sent to Sitka for distribution in Alaska. The Ross settlement had five managers during its existence—Kuskov served from 1812 to 1821, Karl Ivanovich Schmidt from 1821 to 1824, Pavel [Paul] Ivanovich Shelikhov from 1825 to 1830, Peter Stepanovich Kostromitinov from 1830 to 1838, and Alexander Gavrilovich Rotchev from 1838 to 1841.

The rest of the Russian colonists were drawn from various parts of the Russian Empire. Besides *prikashchiki*, who were the administrative assistants and work supervisors, some of the colonists were artisans—carpenters, blacksmiths, coopers, and those skilled in a trade. Many of the Russians were *promyshlenniki* (Kuskov used the term *promyshlennye* in his census of 1821): handymen, laborers, hunters, and occasional seamen in the Company service. Before 1820, such workers were hired to work on a share-of-the-catch basis; after that time they were paid a salary, signing on for a seven-year term and agreeing to serve their manager, to resist trading with the natives or foreigners for personal gain, and to avoid vice, particularly drunkenness. Their salary was paid in Company scrip, and out of this they had to buy their clothes and food; a portion of meat and flour was allotted to them on a regular basis. In 1832, the 72 salaried employees at Fort Ross averaged an annual income of 360 rubles apiece, not a subsistence wage. The Aleuts, with their "passion" for hunting sea otter, were paid according to the number of otters they caught. They were furnished waterproof parkas and boots for the hunt and sea lion skins with which to repair their *baidarkas*, which could stand the battering of the sea for only about three months before needing to be mended.

Much of the wear and tear on the *baidarkas* took place in the waters off the Farallon Islands, some 30 miles west of San Francisco, where the Russians, until about 1830, maintained their chief hunting base. Here, in their hunting group, or *artel*, up to ten Aleuts and Indians under a Russian foreman lived in crude earthen huts on the rocky slopes and regularly embarked upon harpooning forays on shore and sea. They processed their catch at this base camp for periodic shipment to the mainland—bundles of seal and sea otter pelts, bird meat, eggs and feathers, resilient sea lion skin and sinew, salted and dried sea lion meat, and blubber stored in small kegs, used both for food and as lamp oil. Members of the *artel*



Farallon Islands

and their families were rotated between Fort Ross and the Farallones, depending on the size of the sea mammal herds during the hunting season.

When Kuskov selected the settlement site for Ross on Kashaya territory in 1811, he was uncertain about relations with the Indians. Such concerns proved groundless. Unlike relations between the Indians and other foreigners in California, those between the Russians and the Kashaya were remarkably free of tension and strife. On the whole, the Russians appear to have treated the Kashaya fairly. The Indians employed at the settlement were paid in flour, meat, and clothing (either daily or monthly); lodging was provided, and their labor was at first voluntary, although relations deteriorated later. The coastal Indians regarded the Russians as far more desirable neighbors than the Spaniards, and they viewed the Russian presence as a safeguard against the Spanish (or Mexicans) and against other Indians entering their territory.

The Kashaya called the foreigners associated with the Russian colony the "Undersea People," whereas they referred to themselves as the "People from the Top of the Land." Originally, the land made available to the Russians by the Indians was accompanied by an exchange of gifts, mainly tools and trinkets, and professions of friendship. As the settlement grew, the Russians, who were amply aware of Spanish claims to all territory north of San Francisco, prudently decided to formalize their title. Consequently, Chief Manager Baranov sent Captain Leontii Andreianovich Hagemeister to the Sonoma Coast to document the transfer. A deed "releasing land to the Company" was drawn up and agreed upon in 1817 by the local Indian chiefs (Chu-gu-an, Amat-tan, and Gem-le-le), but it was signed only by the Russians present—Hagemeister and six other officials. It stated that "the chiefs are very satisfied with the occupation of this place by the Russians" and that "they now live in security from other Indians who used to attack them." A copy of the agreement, the only one known to have been executed between Indians and Europeans in California, was dispatched to Russia. Chief Chu-gu-an was presented a silver medal inscribed with the words "Allies of Russia."

The three-way culture of Native Californians, Native Alaskans, and Russians at Fort Ross was chiefly one of genuine cooperation, which some attribute to the religious values that had been instilled earlier in the Russians and Aleuts, by clergymen in Alaskan Russian America. At Fort Ross, many of the Kashaya acquired a good understanding of the Russian language, and a number of Russian words found their way into the Kashaya vocabulary. Some Kashaya wives and children accompanied their *promyshlennik* husbands and fathers north to Alaska and even to Russia after the sale of the colony in 1841.

Although no one left a detailed account of daily life in the colony, the observations of both residents and visitors point to a busy if simple existence. In addition to hunting sea mammals and birds, parties fished for salmon, sea perch, and sea bass, and harvested local shellfish for the settlement's larder. Sturgeon were caught in the Russian River. Farming



Fort Ross 1828

and ranching consumed many hours of the colonists' time, with even some of the Aleuts and Indians joining in to handle planting, cultivating, herding, logging and construction chores. At the sheds along the cove, artisans got to work making furniture, barrels, plows, and other hardware, and later even ships and boats. The blacksmith's anvil rang with the hammering of metal, as countless articles needed for trade and for operating the colony were fashioned by the skilled workers. Not all was hard work for the employees, however, for at Ross, as in Alaska and in the motherland, various holidays were observed. These occasions were cause for celebrations, which sometimes featured gun and rifle practice, followed by a feast of fresh meat obtained by slaughtering a bull from the settlement's herd of cattle. All in all, everyday life was active and peaceful.

Not once was the settlement threatened by outside attack. The climate was mild yet invigorating, and the beauty of the surroundings imparted a sense of well-being recorded by many who were there. Manager Rotchev was to look back nostalgically at the time spent in this "enchanted land" as the "best years" of his life.

Closely bound to the lives of the colonists was their religion. The Russians brought with them their Eastern Orthodox Christianity, as they had to Siberia and Alaska. In the early 1820s, as reported by the Company's chief manager, "The Russian, Creole, and Aleut employees at Ross settlement expressed their intention to build at their own expense a chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas." The goal was helped along in 1823-24 when the officers and crews of three Russian Navy ships, on visit to San Francisco Bay, donated a "rather considerable sum" to the proposed chapel, and, soon thereafter, the Company's home office ordered four icons to be sent from Russia for placement in the building.

Presumably, Paul Shelikhov, the settlement manager at that time, deserves credit for supervising the chapel's construction, for the first known reference to the "newly built" chapel—the first Orthodox structure established in the New World south of Alaska—came in 1828 from a French visitor, Duhaut-Cilly. The chapel, however, was never consecrated as a church because of the colony's tenuous legality and the fact that no clergyman was ever permanently assigned. Nevertheless, the colonists conducted prayer meetings in the chapel and designated a sexton for its upkeep. In later years, they hosted at least two priests who visited Ross and its chapel.

In the summer of 1836, Father Ioann Veniaminov spent about five weeks at the settlement. While there he preached, instructed, and conducted weddings, confessions, communion services, baptisms, burials, and prayer services. He also held services for the Aleuts (in translation), consecrated the waters of Fort Ross Creek, and led a festive procession around the stockade exterior.

Farming and Ranching at Fort Ross

As early as 1816, the sea otter catch showed signs of decline, and, by 1820 or so, attention was increasingly given to agriculture and stock raising. But the initial intention of Company officials that the Ross settlement would become an important food base for Alaska as well as for the Siberian seaboard (Kamchatka and Okhotsk) was not to be fulfilled. The reasons were many. The arable land around the settlement was limited and relatively infertile. Coastal fogs and encroaching wild oats often caused poor wheat harvest. Gophers, mice, and blackbirds damaged the tilled fields and adversely affected harvests. Despite some attempts at mechanization and scientific farming, introduced by Moscow-trained agronomist Yegor Leontievich Chernykh, the colonists had inadequate knowledge of crop rotation, fertilization, and other farming techniques, and for the most part were unable to reap even marginal yields of grain. Better results were often gleaned from the small-scale plots of wheat and barley under private, individual cultivation. Harvests from private holdings actually surpassed those from the Company's fields during the tenure of Kuskov's successor, Karl Schmidt, in the early 1820s. Most long-lasting of the first horticultural efforts at Ross were the Russian experiments with fruit trees. The first peach tree, brought from San Francisco, was planted in 1814, and in 1817-18, Captain Hagemeister introduced grape stock brought from Peru and more peach trees from Monterey. Eventually the Russian orchard, located on the hillside less than a mile from Ross, included apples, peaches, grapes, cherries, and several types of pear. This orchard, which is still maintained today, contains several fruit-bearing trees



Fort Ross Orchard

that were possibly planted over a century and a half ago.

Agriculture at Fort Ross peaked in the early 1830s, but it fell far short of expectations. This disappointment gradually led Company officials to experiment with agriculture inland and to the south. They reasoned that establishing farms in more sheltered areas might not only raise the colony's overall productivity but would serve as a buffer between the Russian coastal holdings and the

Mexican and American settlers advancing from the south. Between 1833 and 1841, the Russians maintained three such ranches. The farthest ranch from

Ross was that founded by the agronomist Yegor Chernykh. Chernykh had been sent by the Company to California to improve crop production on the Sonoma Coast and, soon after his arrival in 1836, he recommended extending the colony's farming activities farther inland. Chernykh also developed a large vineyard, introducing what has since become a major crop in the area, grapes.

Although the Russians never made it their major enterprise, stock raising was more consistently successful than growing crops, and in time it became an integral part of the economy. Breeding stock, first obtained from the Spanish, produced several thousand head of cattle, horses, mules, and sheep, and enabled substantial shipments of wool, tallow, hides, salt beef, and butter to be sent to Alaska, as well as other destinations, for marketing. Moreover, sheep and cattle provided raw materials for clothing and a variety of household goods, much of which was used in trading. In the early 1820s, about 1,800 pounds of wool were produced annually, more than enough to cover the needs of the colony and to export to the California missions and elsewhere. Although wool blankets and saddle-cloths were woven at Fort Ross, efforts to expand woolen manufacturing proved unsuccessful because of the lack of skilled workers. From tallow the Russians made candles, with wicks of flax or rush, and they also used animal fat combined with oakwood ashes, seashell lime and water to make soap. Lanterns, combs, and powder horns were fashioned from the horns of oxen. Shoe soles and boot uppers were made from hides. In the last years of the colony 1,700 head of cattle, 940 horses and mules, and 900 sheep were in Russian hands, and were described by the French observer, Eugène Duflot de Mofras, as "in prime condition and unquestionably the finest in California."

Manufacturing and trade

The forests surrounding the Russian settlement supplied the raw materials for housing, shipbuilding, and other timber products. The colonists made barrels from redwood at the cooperage, and navigational equipment from the harder wood of bay trees. They boiled pitch from fir and pine trees, and processed tannic acid from the bark of the tan oak tree. They sawed redwood beams, 21 feet long and in various widths, and even prefabricated sections of housing, all of which sold well on the California market.

Because of the abundance of timber, company officials held high hope for the development of shipbuilding at Ross, primarily as a means of improving trans-Pacific trade and communication.

In eight years' time, three brigs and a schooner were built at the cove, ranging in size from 160 to 200 tons, and in cost from 20,000 to 60,000 rubles each (\$4,000 to \$12,000). In the end, however, shipbuilding was abandoned, as Company Agent Kiril Timofeyevich Khlebnikov reported, because the oak used



Schooners at Fort Ross cove

in construction was " . . . freshly cut and the wood used while still unseasoned, and by the time the ship was launched the rot had set in. After three or four years the changes in climate caused the rot to increase in all the main parts of the ship, and there was no way to repair it." As a consequence, the larger vessels could only be used for coastal trade from Monterey to Alaska, and occasionally for a voyage to Hawaii or Okhotsk. Nevertheless, the shipyard at Ross was the first of any size to operate in California, and many of the smaller boats constructed there found a ready market among the Californios, as the Spanish-Mexican settlers were called, of the San Francisco Bay area.

Other commercial activities were more consistently successful, particularly tanning, milling, brickmaking, blacksmithing and foundry work. At the tannery at the mouth of Fort Ross Creek, working with six redwood vats, an Aleut master tanner dressed, tanned, and fashioned hides and skins into shoes, boots, and other leather goods. By the late 1820s, between 70 and 90 tanned hides were



Mill stone

shipped to Sitka each year. In 1814, the first known wind-powered flour mill in California was built on a knoll north of the stockade; another windmill, added some time later, was able to grind over 30 bushels of grain a day. A third mill was hand- and animal-powered. After the flour was ground, it was stored, exported, or used for baking in one of the fort's kitchens. Two mill-driven machines were used to crush tan-oak bark for the tannery. A good-quality clay was found nearby, which led to the manufacture of bricks; their production and storage were moved to Bodega in 1832.

Much has been written about the enmity and suspicion that existed between the Russian and the Spanish-Mexican authorities in California, but their disagreements have been overstated. The Spanish government officially forbade its subjects from trading with foreigners. Commercial exchanges, however, did take place between the Spanish and the Russians beginning with Rezanov's visit, and, in the early days of Ross, the Californios supplied the Russians with their first wheat, fruit trees, cattle, and horses. Because the Californios undertook almost no manufacturing of their own, they had considerable demand for farm implements and household wares. As the Russian colony grew, it was soon able to fulfill some of this demand. There was hardly a useful item of wood, metal, or leather that the *promyshlenniki* and artisans did not produce, and soon the Russians sold ploughs, axes, nails, wheels, metal cookware and longboats to their neighbors in exchange for grain, salt, and other raw materials.

After Mexico won her independence from Spain in 1821, foreign trade was no longer against the law. Trade between the Californios and the Russians continued, but now there was more competition from the Americans and British. Competition lowered the price of Russian goods and increased the price of California produce. Trade relations were further hampered by the Mexican imposition of new anchorage fees on all foreign vessels entering California ports.

One compensation for the Russians, however, was their control of Bodega Bay, their main shipping port. Here they had established storage and supply facilities as well as landing rights, all made available to foreign vessels. Here some supplies were warehoused and others taken to Fort Ross by *baidara* and *baidarka* or by horseback. The journey between the port facilities at Bodega Bay and Fort Ross usually took five hours, whether by land or by sea. With this port of entry and with their variety of goods for sale, the Russians were able to continue trading with the Californios, as evidenced, for example, by the records of the sale of gunpowder and uniforms, procured or produced by the Russians, to General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, on the nearby Mexican frontier.

Last years of the Russian Colony

By 1839, for all the diversity of activity at Fort Ross, officials of the Russian-American Company had decided to abandon the colony. The California sea otter population had been largely depleted by the mid-1830s, and the Russian shift of emphasis from hunting to farming and stock raising, to produce large quantities of grain, beef, and dairy products, did not match expectations. Moreover, the experiment in shipbuilding, while impressive in the short run, proved defective over time, while trade in manufactured goods did not return enough profit to offset deficits.

At the same time, the Mexican government's active encouragement of new settlers into the area, as well as a growing influx of Americans, posed a looming challenge to Russian claims over territory, which neither the Imperial government in distant St. Petersburg nor the Russian-American Company was able to meet. A last effort to avert a Russian withdrawal came in 1836 when Baron von Wrangell journeyed from Sitka to Mexico City to seek an improvement in relations with the new Mexican Republic. He also sought Mexico's formal recognition of the legality of Russia's claim to Fort Ross, previously denied by both Spain and Mexico. The Mexicans were willing to yield on this issue, but only in return for Russia's diplomatic recognition of their own national independence as a republic. However, Tsar Nicholas I, an unwavering defender of absolute monarchy and a foe of revolutionary change, rejected the condition, and so ended any chance of a favorable resolution of the contested issue of the "legitimacy" of the Russian colony. In April 1839, the Tsar approved of the Company's plan to liquidate the settlement, and shortly thereafter the Company offered all of its California holdings for sale.

The man charged with selling the colony and its assets was Alexander Rotchev, who had arrived at Fort Ross in mid-1836, on a temporary assignment. Joining him later were his wife, Helena—the Princess Gagarina—and their three children. A prominent writer and literary translator conversant in several languages, the energetic and talented Rotchev, together with his attractive wife, soon lent a new tone to life in the frontier community, giving it vigor, intensity, and sophistication in its last few years. Named to succeed Kostromitinov as manager of the colony in late 1838, Rotchev was quick to grasp the problems facing the distant colonial outpost and proved himself to be a resourceful administrator and diplomat. Although he personally opposed the decision to sell the colony, he

faithfully carried out his orders, ably conducting the intricate negotiations that led to the sale of the Company's assets in California.

Rotchev first approached the Hudson's Bay Company regarding the purchase, but the British turned down the offer in 1840. He then made overtures to France through the French military attaché in Mexico City, Eugène Duflot de Mofras. Duflot made an extensive visit to Ross to investigate the area first-hand, but he, too, declined to put forth a bid, on the grounds that he lacked authority in such matters. The Russian-American Company then ordered Rotchev to offer the outpost to Mexico. Both the Mexican Government and General Vallejo of Sonoma rejected the Russian terms, partly because Mexico already considered Fort Ross as legally its own, and possibly because they hoped that the Russians would simply abandon the outpost.

Rotchev then approached Captain John Sutter at his ranch in the Sacramento Valley, and in late 1841 Sutter agreed to buy the Russian-American Company's assets. This included all the buildings, livestock, and implements, but not the land itself, which was still claimed by Mexico. The contract stipulated that Sutter pay the Company the equivalent of \$30,000 in installments, in both cash and produce. However, a separate, unofficial deed, signed by Rotchev one day earlier than the day on which Sutter, a Mexican citizen, signed the official contract, transferred to the new owner a stretch of land extending from Cape Mendocino to Point Reyes and inland for 12 miles. (This deed did not surface publicly until 1857, and then it caused considerable legal controversy.)

On January 1, 1842, Rotchev and about one hundred colonists sailed from Bodega Bay on the last Russian ship bound for Sitka. After 30 years, the flag of the Russian-American Company was lowered at Fort Ross, and the Russian epoch in the history of California came to a close.

The abandonment of Fort Ross was a harbinger of Russia's withdrawal from North America altogether. The Russian-American Company's profits continued to decline, and, when the Company's charter expired in 1862, it was extended thereafter only provisionally. Meanwhile, Russia's preoccupation with developing its newly acquired Pacific territories north of China was increasing, and the prospective costs of continuing to maintain the outposts in America, especially in the face of a growing British presence, led Russia to sell its Alaskan holdings to the United States Government in 1867, thus terminating a century-long territorial presence in America. In retrospect, the withdrawal from Fort Ross, Russia's easternmost outpost, signaled a turning point in the expansion of the Russian Empire. As the world's largest contiguous empire, Imperial Russia chose to redirect its energies and consolidate itself on only two continents instead of three.

From Russians to ranchers – 1840s - 1870s

(excerpted from the Fort Ross Conservancy website)

In September of 1841, John Augustus Sutter signed an agreement with the Russian-American Company to purchase the assets of Fort Ross. Sutter made the purchase on credit and proceeded to move everything that could be moved to his land near current-day Sacramento. Sutter never lived at Fort Ross, but hired



John Sutter

a succession of managers to oversee its dismantling. One such manager was John Bidwell: “Sutter bought them out – cattle and horses; a little vessel of about twenty-five tons burden, called a launch; and other property, including forty odd pieces of old rusty cannon and one or two small brass pieces . . . This ordnance Sutter conveyed up the Sacramento River on the launch to his colony.” The Mexican authorities officially rejected Sutter’s claim of land ownership, instead dividing it into two holdings: the Bodega Rancho, between Bodega Bay and the Russian River, granted to Captain Stephen Smith, and the Muniz Rancho, between the Russian River and Timber Cove, awarded to Manuel Torres, whose sister was married to Captain Smith.

The last manager under Sutter was William Benitz, who eventually leased the land from Sutter. Benitz later purchased the Muniz Rancho, including Fort Ross. He successfully planted a broad range of crops, and raised cattle, sheep, and horses, creating a self-contained agricultural empire which brought stability to the coast.

William Benitz married seventeen-year-old Josephine Kolmer shortly after she arrived with her family in Sonoma in 1845 as part of the John Grigsby/William B. Ide wagon train. Benitz gave the Kolmer family land at Timber Cove, which their descendants kept for 100 years; Kolmer Gulch is named for them. Josephine bore ten children while living at Fort Ross; seven survived to adulthood. In early 1846 Josephine and William moved into the Rotchev House. As the family grew, Benitz expanded the Rotchev House and built the two-story addition, which stood until 1926.

The Russians planted an orchard on the hillside north of the fort, and by 1841, there were 260 fruit trees—apples, peaches, pears, quince, cherries. Benitz expanded the orchard by planting another 1,700 trees.



Fort Ross circa 1866 as Benitz Family Ranch
(Courtesy of Benitz Family)

Benitz constructed a stone wharf from which to ship out his goods. Coastal schooners such as Benitz's traded up and down the coast, loading and unloading lumber, piling, and building stone quarried from the Salt Point area. Benitz and his neighbors sold potatoes, grain, deer hides, eggs, butter, apples, live ducks, and pigeons—all desirable commodities in Sonoma and San Francisco. According to the tax collector, Benitz was rated the fourth richest man in Sonoma County in 1858.



Fort Ross Cove circa 1875

In 1848, 162 Kashaya still lived outside the fort. The Kashaya were employed by Benitz and his partner, taking on the farming and ranching chores inherent in such a large agricultural empire. As decreed by the federal government, Kashaya workers received board, lodging, and an \$8 a month salary. Dixon did not need a labor force for agriculture and instructed the Kashaya to leave Fort Ross. In the early 1870s,

many Kashaya moved permanently up to their traditional winter home in the oak grasslands northeast of Fort Ross. Charles Haupt, a rancher who had married a Kashaya woman named Molly, invited her people to live again at their old village, which was now on his ranch.

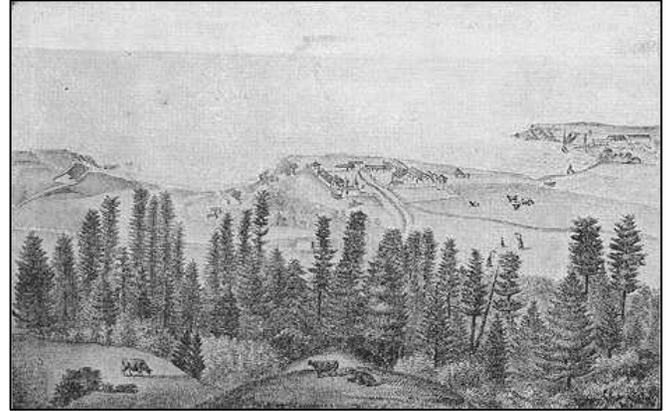
Benitz left Fort Ross in 1867, selling off his land in two large parcels. The northern half, including the fort, was sold to James Dixon, a sawmill operator in Marin County. The southern portion went to Charles Snowden Fairfax. Neither Dixon nor Fairfax intended to live on the land. They purchased the property intent on recouping their investment through lumber sales, and held the parcels only long enough to harvest the most accessible timber.

Fort Ross as a Shipping Center – Call Ranch 1873 - 1920

By his mid-thirties, George W. Call had accumulated substantial wealth and had traveled widely. He returned to California keen on finding land where he might ranch and raise his family. In 1873 Call purchased 2,500 acres of Dixon's northern parcel, including Fort Ross and its loading chute, for \$35,000. He also paid \$10,000 for livestock. Call settled at Fort Ross with his Chilean wife Mercedes Leiva Call and three young children; over the years, nine Call children would be raised at the fort. Call continued to purchase land until he owned approximately 8,000 acres. He built barns, wagon sheds, and a smithy. Within a decade, Call transformed Fort Ross into one of the most active small shipping, communications, and business centers along the northern California coast.

Fort Ross also became a tourist destination. Some would come to explore the former Russian colony, while others were drawn to the dramatic shoreline and inland forests. Until the 1920s when automobiles became popular, the sea was

the primary access to Fort Ross. Call expanded upon the transport of goods by sea begun by all the previous owners. He constructed a wharf and warehouse near the Dixon lumber chute, to export not only Fort Ross produce and timber but also that of neighboring farms and ranches. In 1897, Call put his own gasoline schooner, *La Chilena*, into weekly service to San Francisco. The weekly Schooner Day was a festive and busy occasion in the neighborhood, and the Call family was renowned for its hospitality. The Call era brought stability to a large stretch of the coast that would last for one hundred years.



Old Fort Ross as Seen from the Hill" as pictured in *Thompson and West's Atlas of Sonoma County, 1877.*

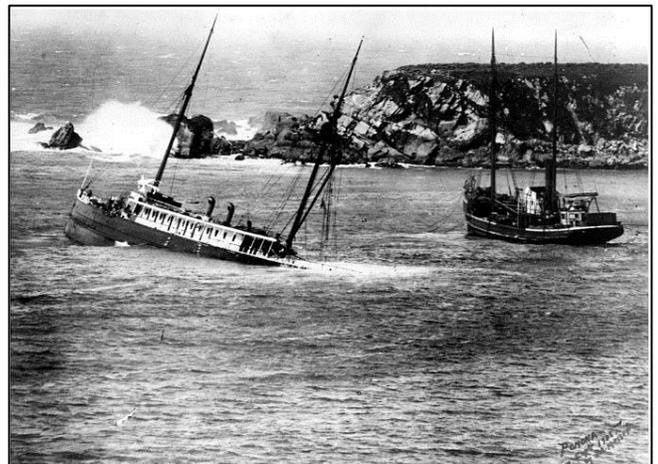
When his family outgrew the Rotchev house, Call began work on a new residence outside the fort compound facing the northwest cove. It was the Call family home for a century. After the Calls built their family home outside the fort walls, Call leased out the Rotchev House as a hotel. The former Russian buildings housed a dance hall and a saloon as well; eventually there was a store, a post office, and a telegraph station. Fort Ross became a social center for residents of the area.



The Fort Ross port and landing chute in the northwest cove (pictured here before 1900) was used extensively by ranchers from the surrounding community. Neighboring farms and ranches hauled wood products as well as butter, hogs, apples, and hides to Fort Ross by four- and six-horse wagon teams over the narrow, winding, and precipitous dirt roads.

The *Pomona*, a coastal steamer that regularly traveled from San Francisco to Eureka, struck a submerged rock about two miles south of Fort Ross cove and was wrecked at Fort Ross in 1908. When the *Pomona* wrecked just offshore of Fort Ross, Mercedes Call fed and cared for a great many of the passengers in the aftermath.

G. W. Call hired fourteen Chinese laborers and an Irish foreman to build a new road



Pomona shipwreck

south along the cliffs from Fort Ross to Meyers Grade, and to widen the road north of the fort to Kolmer Gulch. The road was closed by landslides a decade later, and did not reopen until the early 1920s, when the mode of transportation began to change, even in this remote area.

After G. W. Call died in 1907, his sons Carlos and George H. managed the ranch. Mercedes Leiva lived in the house for another twenty years, and Carlos and his sister Emma lived there into their nineties. Now part of the State Park, the Call House has undergone restoration and is open for visitors.

Surrounding communities – Jenner to Sea Ranch

Fort Ross was the first European settlement along the Sonoma North Coast, but by the middle of the nineteenth century, the old Russian colony had many neighbors. In the 1880s the Sonoma coast could be described as having a sawmill in every gulch and a chute at every marginally hospitable coastal indentation.

Over time many of these sites developed into small towns, providing amenities such as general stores, hotels, possibly a stage stop. From the Gualala River to the mouth of the Russian River, the coast is populated by small unincorporated towns where locals once felled timber, stripped tanbark, quarried sandstone, or grazed cattle and sheep. Although logging and quarrying enterprises no longer dominate the landscape, some of the towns remain, often bearing the names of the men who first established commerce along this rugged coastline. By the early 1900s the lumber industry and coastal shipping were in decline, the land was overgrazed, and people moved away from the area. During Prohibition, locals turned to smuggling liquor via the sea. Black Point and Del Mar Landing in the old German Rancho known as Rancho Del Mar—The Sea Ranch—became well-known spots for this enterprise.

In the 1920s the road along the coast between Jenner and Gualala was built, and coastal shipping was replaced by automobiles and trucks. Slowly, tourism became important, as the coast attracted urban visitors who came to fish, hunt, and enjoy the beaches in this wild and pristine environment.

History of Fort Ross in the 20th century

In 1903, the stockade and about 3 acres (12,000 m²) of land were purchased from the Call family by the California Historical Landmarks Commission. Three years later, the compound was turned over to the State of California for preservation and restoration as a state historic monument; since then, the State has acquired more of the surrounding land for preservation purposes. The California Department of Parks and Recreation, as well as many volunteers, put extensive efforts into restoration and reconstruction work in the fort.

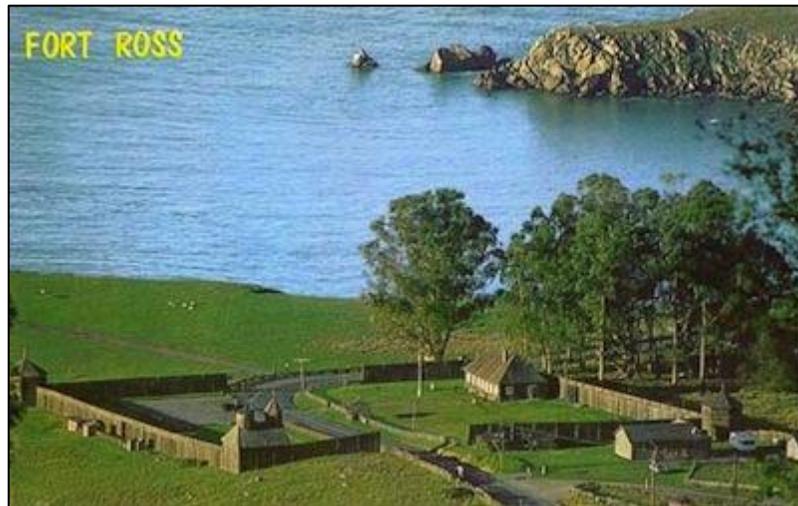


Chapel after 1906 earthquake

In 1967, the Rotchev House, listed as the “Commander’s House,” was recorded on the National Register of Historic Places.

The chapel was knocked down in the 1906 earthquake, but its restoration was not begun until 1916. In 1925 the State appropriated \$2,500 to rebuild the stockade and blockhouse and repair the Rotchev House. The first caretaker/ranger, William Turk, was hired in 1930, although funds for preservation were very limited from the 1920s until after World War II. Beginning in 1948, Curator John McKenzie initiated the restoration of the Rotchev house and the seven-sided blockhouse. In October 1970, an intense accidental fire destroyed the chapel. Later a fire burned the roof of the Rotchev house. These calamities spurred the state to action, and the era of reconstruction began which produced the restorations seen today.

Highway 1 once bisected Fort Ross. It entered from the northeast where the Kuskov House once stood, and exited through the main gate to the southwest. The road was eventually diverted, and the parts of the fort that had been demolished for the road were rebuilt. The old roadway can still be seen going from the main gate to the northwest; the rest (within the fort and extending northeast) has been removed. Most of the existing buildings on the site are reconstructions. The only original structure remaining is the Rotchev House.



Insights from Key Historical Figures

Ivan Kuskov

(The following text is based on "Who Was Ivan Kuskov," by Breck Parkman, Senior State Archaeologist, California State Parks.)



Ivan Aleksandrovich Kuskov

Ivan Aleksandrovich Kuskov was unique in the relationships he forged with the Native Americans, which shaped the history of Fort Ross. Kuskov was able to create the settlement and hold on to it for all those years without the use of violence.

Kuskov was born in 1765, in the town of Totma, 400 miles northeast of Moscow, a few years after Catherine the Great had begun her rule. In 1787, Kuskov traveled to eastern Siberia, where, in Irkutsk, he met Alexander Baranov and then later traveled with Baranov to Alaska via an arduous route on the long overland trail linking the city of Irkutsk with the coastal town of Okhotsk, in the Russian Far East.

The "trail" involved a horseback trip of more than 160 miles from Irkutsk to the Lena River, sailing down the Lena River for 1,200 miles, and then traveling by foot or on horseback the very strenuous 450 miles east to Okhotsk. The trip to Alaska continued by sailing ship, crossing the temperamental Sea of Okhotsk and the North Pacific Ocean, before making landfall in Alaska. Even today, this is a long and difficult journey. In 1790, it separated the hardy and adventurous from all those too timid to try.

Once in Alaska, Kuskov set to work for Baranov. Kuskov served as manager of the redoubt on Prince William Sound, and commanded long-distance sea otter hunting parties that traveled as far south as the Northwest Coast and California. Prior to 1804, Kuskov served as manager of the main establishment on Kodiak Island whenever Baranov was away. After 1804, he became the second in command at the newly created Russian settlement at Sitka. Between 1808 and 1811, Kuskov made several voyages to California seeking a location for a new colony. In 1812, he sailed back to California aboard the *Chirikov*, with orders to create Colony Ross.

As Kuskov's men set about building their new settlement in California, Napoleon Bonaparte led his 500,000-strong French army across the border in an ill-fated invasion of Russia, and a young United States declared war on a more powerful Great Britain, thus initiating the War of 1812. Closer to home, members of the local Coast Miwok nations were lured, coerced, or forced into servitude in the Spanish missions that had been constructed by the Franciscans in San Francisco and San Jose.

In June, 1802, Kuskov led a large party of Alaskan hunters on an excursion from Kodiak to southeastern Alaska. While he was hunting, the Russian settlement at Sitka was attacked by the local Tlingit Indians. The Tlingit succeeded in taking the settlement, killing the twenty Russian men and 130 Aleuts, capturing the

women and children, and torching the various wooden structures. Further north near Yakutat, Kuskov's party was attacked as well and had to fight for their lives. Two years later, Baranov led a large contingent of Russians and Native Alaskans in the retaking of Sitka and was badly wounded in the process. Kuskov accompanied Baranov and from that time on was his second in command at Sitka. In 1805, some of the Tlingit, including some who were the servants of the Russians, rose up once again, this time destroying the settlement at Yakutat and massacring forty of the Russians—men, women, and children—in the process. Kuskov had spent time at Yakutat and knew many of the dead. The Tlingit uprisings undoubtedly affected him. Kuskov understood the importance of treating the local indigenous people fairly and showing them the respect they deserved, and he knew that it was important to reconcile any differences and grievances before they could explode into violence. Now Kuskov realized the dire consequences of any failure to do so.

Prior to having founded Fort Ross, Kuskov entered into a common-law marriage with the daughter of an Indian chief from southeast Alaska. This was probably in 1810. The woman's name was Ekaterina Prokhorovna, suggesting that she had been baptized prior to her marriage to Kuskov, and that her godfather's name was Prokhor. What is most interesting is that Ekaterina was Tlingit, the very tribe that had only recently risen up in resistance to the Russian presence in southeastern Alaska. When Kuskov sailed to California in 1812, Ekaterina went along with him and she lived at Fort Ross for the ten years he was there. They built their house within the stockade walls, and furnished it with the trappings of their position, including a piano.

In 1812, as Kuskov supervised the construction of Fort Ross, the Tlingit uprisings were undoubtedly on his mind. As a defense, Kuskov had his men construct a mighty fortress of hand-hewn redwood and arm it with their many powerful cannon. Furthermore, the men armed themselves with musket and saber, and conducted regular militia drills, determined not to be caught unprepared.

By treating the local people with respect and dignity, Kuskov mitigated most of the discomfort they might have felt with his settlement's presence. Furthermore, Kuskov punished any of his men who were caught abusing local Indian women. This was appreciated by the local tribes. Many of the men, both Russian and Alaskan, took wives among the local Kashaya Pomo and Bodega Miwok. In most cases, the marriages were successful, created a sense of community at Ross, and provided the colony with a multitude of children. In many instances, the men took their wives and children back to Alaska and Russia, when their service at Colony Ross ended.

Although Kuskov and other company officials had arranged with the local Pomo and Miwok for the use of their lands, not all of the tribesmen agreed with the Russian presence. In the census that Kuskov prepared for Ross Colony in 1820-1821, a number of Indian men are listed as serving time at Fort Ross or at the hunting *artel* on South Farallon Island. Their crimes, such as killing the "best" horses and burning the wheat fields, suggest some level of active resistance was

underway within the Russian colony. This resistance became much more common in the 1830s, long after Kuskov had departed Fort Ross.

Although Kuskov pursued agriculture more and more while he was at Fort Ross, especially after 1817, he never once forced the local tribal people to assist in this or any other endeavor. However, by the 1830s, the Russians were so desperate for farm workers that they took to impressing large groups of native people, and forcing them to work for months at a time. One account, from the mid-1830s, notes a slaving raid made on the inhabitants of an area near present-day Healdsburg, in which more than 150 men, women, and children were herded to the Kostrimitinov Ranch on Willow Creek and forced to harvest the crops. Naturally, such desperate actions intensified native resistance, and the understandable resolve to rid their land of all foreigners, Spanish, Californio, and Russian. The fact that Mariano Vallejo was already engaged in a military struggle against the Southern Pomo and Wappo at this time only made the Fort Ross situation more tenuous.

It is telling to contrast Kuskov's treatment of the native people around Fort Ross to that of the Spanish around San Francisco Bay. Whereas the local Pomo and Miwok were afforded protection by the company managers following Kuskov, that was not always the case with the tribes people living further inland. However, during Kuskov's tenure, Russians could freely roam far inland from Fort Ross and never worry about being molested by the local native people. That was certainly not true for the Spanish residents around San Francisco Bay, nor was it true of Russians in the years after Kuskov's departure. Eventually, the souring relationship with some of the local tribes may have indirectly undermined the stability and efficiency of the colony and thus added to its final demise in 1841.

Although the Spanish authorities objected to the presence of Fort Ross, relations between the people of San Francisco and Fort Ross were remarkably warm and supportive. A considerable amount of commerce and exchange was carried on between the two communities. At the time of the founding of Fort Ross, Alta California was under the charge of Governor José Joaquín de Arrillaga. Although Governor Arrillaga was officially opposed to the Russian presence, he did not press the issue and thus unofficially allowed for the mutually beneficial exchange between the Spanish and Russian communities. When Governor Arrillaga died two years later, he was replaced with a very different personality, José de Argüello, a man who pressed home the Spanish case for the abandonment of Colony Ross. For the remainder of Kuskov's time at Ross, the Spanish authorities worked diligently against his success. The creation of Mission San Rafael in 1817, near the southern border of Colony Ross, was one way they attempted to thwart the feared expansion of the Russian colony. In 1823, the Mexican authorities approved the creation of Mission San Francisco Solano in what is now the town of Sonoma, for that very same reason.

Throughout his career with the Russian-American Company, Kuskov showed great resolve and intellect, and it was in these innate abilities that he found success. Kuskov was not a very educated man, and he spoke no languages but his own, unlike the other managers that followed him at Fort Ross. He had a

wooden leg and walked with the aid of a crutch. He had a temper, but also the patience and good sense to moderate it. He genuinely cared about people and this allowed him to become a leader that others would follow. Indeed, when Kuskov passed through Kodiak on his way home to Totma, in 1822, the local Russian manager was warned to be wary of Kuskov, for he still held the respect of the old-timers and his influence might prove a distraction in a Russian-American Company no longer guided by Kuskov's old friend, Alexander Baranov.

In his later years, Kuskov was recommended for the prestigious Cross of St. Vladimir, a medal that he did not live to see. Kuskov died a relatively poor man, leaving an estate of just over 70,000 rubles. Since Kuskov had no children, the estate went to his wife, Ekaterina. We remember Ivan Kuskov, not because of his wealth, but because of his ideas, his ideals, and his deeds. We are reminded of him today, on this 200th anniversary of his return to Bodega Bay (Port Rumiantsev), and we will be reminded of him for many years to come. Ivan Kuskov built a bridge that linked Russia and America, and we all travel it still. For this, we owe him our eternal gratitude.

Ivan Veniaminov



Ivan Veniaminov (E-van' Ven-ya-meen'ov) (Saint Innocent or Innokentii)—A Russian priest, Archbishop, Metropolitan and now a saint. He was born in 1797 near Irkutsk on the Angara River. He grew up with an uncle who was a clergyman with the Russian Orthodox Church, and he learned many crafts. After several years as a married priest, he was sent to Unalaska to continue teaching and working. Much is known about this person. He was respected by all. He wrote the alphabet for the Aleuts and other Alaskan peoples. He kept daily weather records, taught people crafts, and taught them about the church. In 1836 he sailed on the Company sloop *Sitka*. He arrived at Bodega Bay on July 15th and carried on to Fort

Ross by horseback. He also visited San Rafael Mission, the small town of San Francisco, the San José Mission, and the Santa Clara Mission. He returned to Sitka that same year. He is one of only two priests who ever visited Fort Ross. He continued his work with the church and eventually became Archbishop and then Metropolitan. He died March 31, 1879.

Diary of Fr. Mariano Payeras

(Bancroft Manuscript Collection MS C-C18 pages 411-428)

One league before we arrived, a horse was dispatched for Don Luis, our captain, and a servant announced the departure of our followers. This was done that we might conduct business with the Imperial Governor. Later they returned with the announcement that we might continue and that we would be received with hospitality.

Upon seeing us at a distance at the foot of the hill, Commander Carlos Schmidt left the square in the fort, and a young servant of 23 years erected a white flag of peace some 200 paces west of the fort in a visible place. In front of the commander, he raised the green and blue flag of Russian commerce.

We were received at the foot of the hill by a four cannon salute and with the utmost graciousness possible from the commander, his aides and all the people. After more salutes and compliments, we left his three-story house of 8 rooms (which were very well distributed), accompanied by other men who live there. The fort is situated atop a mesa, which is surrounded by ravines that abut the sea. It is constructed of redwood planks (there is no other wood used in any of the structures) and forms a palisade. It is 4 varas high, uniformly, and is surmounted by a beam set with pointed stakes intended to dissuade any assault. It has three gates; one to the northeast, one to the west, and one to the southeast. Within the square are: the commander's house; two warehouses for cloth, furniture, household goods, and the like; another warehouse filled with provisions for the fort; a barracks and three officials' houses; two bastions, one in the northern corner of the square mounting five cannons on two floors, and another bastion in the southern corner mounting four cannons. In the other two corners are two sentry boxes from which the sentinels chime bells each hour. Also within the square are four small cannons (*violentos*) mounted on carriages. Outside the fort a stream runs within a deep ravine just south of the fort. In this ravine are located a blacksmithy and a shop where they store and work wood used to construct the ships they launch. Three brigantines have already been built, and there is enough wood for another. In the bank of the stream they have a forge and a bathhouse. These are made of wood also. Here nothing is built of stone, adobe, or cement (lime). When I mention the bathhouse, be aware that I believe they are like those used by our Indians. Inside the bathhouse, they have built a rectangular stove of stone, like those in which they bake bread. Above are two high rooms which have iron gates. On these are set stones like those the Indians use to cook their acorn gruel. These stones are heated until they become red hot. In this state, they sprinkle them with water until the steam rises through the upper openings of the two mentioned rooms. They enter naked and soon begin to sweat oceans. Those that are situated on tiered benches to the side of the oven, amuse themselves with colorful stories. While at Bodega, I wanted to see one in operation. The order was transmitted to stir the fire and sprinkle on the water. My head became so light that I had to soon open a window.

In this same area, along the stream, and in all other places nearby, they have their kitchen gardens; there they grow very fine vegetables. Nearby are their wheat fields. These produce little, and that is of poor quality due to the extraordinary cold and constant fog. To the northeast, at a cannon shot's range, they have their cemetery, which is without an enclosure.

In the graves are some distinguished persons. For the three honored founders, they placed a marker made of three graduated tiers, larger to smaller. Atop this pyramid is a globe surmounted by a cross. The cross is painted white and black, and this is located on the side of the hill visible from the fort; the attention of the

viewer is immediately called to it. Above other Christians, they build a box. Above the Kodiaks, they place only a cross. We saw many patriarchal crosses—these appear with a small crossbar above, below that a larger crossbar, and below that a diagonal beam which we believe was like our INRI. To the north of the fort, at a distance or two cannon shots, they operate a fine windmill, of which the foundation is wood. To the north-northwest is located a beautifully constructed long granary. In it we saw all their gathered wheat, still on the stalk. As the climate is so moist, they have built a drying chamber with a stove. The wheat is thoroughly dried before flailing. Directly north is a cairn of natural (rough) marble pieces, and in this they propped the flag previously mentioned. Finally, to the west, at about rifle shot's distance there is a long structure of two parts, similar to our houses which we call dobles. This has two openings which look upon the square. In the middle of each part is a door, in front of which is a beautifully built corral enclosed by a stake palisade. To the northwest is another for the sheep, and to the south one for the cattle. I have heard that they have 100 to 200 cattle and 2,000 sheep. When it rains or is cold, they go inside, when it is good weather, they go outside. Although worthless, they save the excrement of the animals. It is also said that they make fine cheeses, and their meat appears to be savory and palatable.

To the south of these corrals are the houses of the Russians, their servants, the Kodiaks, and of the Christian Indians, proportionate to their income. All the houses as well as the mill are built of squared beams set upon one another. The roofs are made of planks joined by fillets. Each roof has a gutter to prevent rain from leaking inside.

As the redwood is so common and accessible, matures quickly, is pliable (soft) and as it is a wood they regard with affection, and is delightful to the sight, it is found all over their establishment. Their houses are almost all extremely comfortable because of the good glass used in their windows.

In the commander's living room, there was a tryptich. In this were pictures of Saint Peter, Saint Paul, and Saint Nicholas. At the base was written "Templum non Visi in Ea." When in the chapel, we noticed there were no priests. Who administers the sacraments? Now I will tell a story concerning the delaying of the marriage of a Russian-Indian Creole because of some doubt surrounding his baptism, and for other related spiritual points. An officer second class, Theodor Svinin, related that all who live in Russian territory are legitimately baptized, as well as confirmed. To assure this, the Creole was placed before me. How commendable for the bishop that he has assistance over Kodiak baptisms in this establishment. While we were there a priest came and took care of that which remained. At other times, these needs are ministered by the commander (Don Carlos confirmed one) and the governor at Sitka.

The treatment given to us by the commander, to the most minor of the many, while we were there was unsurpassable given the nature of the area. The attention, courtesy, respect, attention, and graciousness were of a superior degree.

The first night that we remained there, we were entertained with fireworks and a full orchestra played in the Russian manner which amused us more for its foreignness than for its agreeableness.

Don Carlos made a generous offer to take us to Bodega in his 15-oared launch. The only problem was to travel in the boat, which was made of many seal skins after the fashion of Kodiak kayaks. Don Carlos assured us repeatedly of its safety and that in 3 hours we would be in Bodega, a distance of 30 miles by sea. We were eager to view the coast from the sea and also the port (of Bodega). On the 24th at about 8:30 in the morning, we embarked from the south commissary at the foot of the hill near the blacksmithy, near where the mouth of the creek emptied. With ultimate civility our officers took leave of the Russians who saluted us with a four cannon salvo, and waving their hats, they cheered us three times; "Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!" This was our farewell!

The sea was calm and as there was no wind, we moved along with only oars. Because of the motion of the sea off Bodega, I threw up three times. During that time my pilot remained calm and navigated with extra care. The skin covering of the launch became translucent in the water, despite its coat of grease and oil. Upon arriving off Bodega, we attempted to enter at a point northeast, but the pilot made us pass this point so that we finally arrived at 3:00 in the afternoon. In a short while we noticed an official and retinue with horses at the opposite point of the port. Later they told us that only small boats may anchor inside the bay. We all ate together in the houses there.

Ethnographical and natural science studies

Excerpted from <http://www.militarymuseum.org/FtRoss.html>

A number of explorers, scientists, artists, and men of letters from Imperial Russia used Ross as a base of operation while pursuing their investigations and recording their findings. Others used Russian ships in San Francisco Bay as springboards for exploration, travel, and scientific research. Some of these men were on expeditions sponsored by the Russian government or by private initiative; others were Company employees with a penchant for observation, who recorded what they saw around them. Altogether, their pioneering work in the geography, botany, zoology, entomology, geology, meteorology, and ethnology of the region contributed information and insight valuable to the present day.

The first of these observers, the physician and biologist Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff, accompanied Nikolai Rezanov to California in 1806. Langsdorff was a correspondent member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, and the memoirs of his stay present a classic account of early Spanish California. His sketches of California Indians and their artifacts are among the earliest portraits of native life to have survived.



Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff

In 1816, Captain Otto von Kotzebue headed a voyage around the world. Privately chartered by Count Rumiantsev, the ship brought the



California poppy

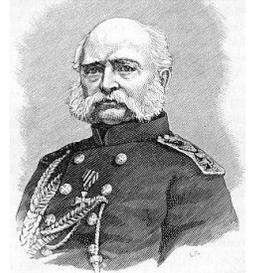
naturalist Adelbert von Chamisso, the artist Louis Andreyevich Choris, and the entomologist-zoologist Johann Friedrich Eschscholtz to California. During their stay in the San Francisco area, Chamisso collected the California poppy and gave it the botanical name *Eschscholzia californica*, after his friend and the land that they were investigating. (Today this flower is better known for being California's state flower.) On a return trip to California with Kotzebue in 1824, Eschscholtz made a large insect collection, recorded the geology of the area, and carefully described such

mammals as bears, skunks, deer, and "mountain goats," with "long hair hanging from their legs, and short, rather straight horns." Kotzebue left detailed memoirs of his California travels on both occasions; he provides, for example, the first mention of the geysers of Sonoma County, confusing them with the smoke of Indian campfires.

In 1818, Captain Vasily Nikolaevich Golovnin, of the Russian Navy, visited northern California and included stops at Fort Ross and Bodega Bay. His memoirs describe the warm welcome given him by the Miwok chiefs at Bodega Bay, as well as many observations of Indian life and customs, including the autumn grass fires intentionally set to encourage the growth of seeds and grains. Golovnin made a useful navigator's map of the Bodega Bay area, with precise water depths and topographical features included. On board his ship was the young artist Mikhail Tikhonovich Tikhanov, who made a series of five color sketches of California Indians while ashore at Bodega Bay. In the mid-1820s, another Russian naval officer, Lieutenant Dmitry Irinarkhovich Zavalishin, visited San Francisco Bay. In an extensive literary portrait of the Spanish population and

local geography he wrote that he traveled overland to Fort Ross, Santa Cruz, and east to the Calaveras-Mariposa area.

During the early 1830s, Baron Ferdinand Petrovich von Wrangell, while manager-in-chief of the Russian-American Company, strongly encouraged the scientific study of the wildlife and geography of North America. In 1833 on a journey to evaluate the possibilities of extending the Russian settlement farther inland, he personally conducted the first anthropological study of the Indian population of the Russian River area and the Santa Rosa plain. Along with his own written observations on the natural habitat and Indian customs, Wrangell arranged to have the Imperial Academy of Sciences publish a comprehensive anthropological account of California Indians written by Manager Peter Kostromitinov. Also invaluable today are the first systematic weather records kept in California, compiled by Yegor Chernykh between 1837 and 1840. These documented temperature, sky cover, air pressure, precipitation and wind conditions at Ross and at his ranch ten miles inland.



Baron Ferdinand Petrovich von Wrangell

Among the later visitors to Ross was the naturalist and artist, Ilya Gavrilovich Voznesenskii. A trained scientist and competent graphic artist, Voznesenskii was sent by the Imperial Academy of Sciences to explore and investigate Russian-America. Many important sketches of the Ross Settlement and its surrounding area come from Voznesenskii's hand, the result of a year-long visit to Northern California. His avid interest in California's flora and fauna, as well as Indian life, took him far afield by foot, boat, and horseback.



Settlement Ross, 1841, by Russian naturalist and artist Ilya Gavrilovich Voznesenskii

In May 1841, Chernykh and Voznesenskii joined forces to map and name the tributaries of the Russian River as far north as the Healdsburg area. Shortly afterward they made the first recorded ascent of Mt. St. Helena, and left a copper plate on the summit inscribed with the date of their visit. The plate also bore the name of Princess Helena de Gagarin, wife of Count Alexander G. Rotchev, the commanding officer of Fort Ross. Voznesenskii also traveled up the Sacramento River to visit the Swiss émigré, Captain Johann (John) Augustus Sutter, at his

ranch and fort, New Helvetia. He rode up California's central valley to explore the volcanic Sutter Buttes with his host, who would soon play a major role in the fate of Fort Ross.

On these and other expeditions, Voznesenskii was able to gather an ethnographically invaluable collection of California Indian artifacts. These include ornaments, weapons, garments, and baskets that can be seen today at the Museum of Ethnography, St. Petersburg, Russia. Many of these objects are the sole surviving items of their kind. Voznesenskii's travel notes tell of his many local excursions, from the islands of San Francisco Bay to the forests of the Mendocino Coast. They contain observations of the lives of Californians, from the children at Fort Ross to the foreign merchants at Yerba Buena (San Francisco).

Natural History

Information derived from the Fort Ross website <http://www.fortrossstatepark.org/>

Coastal terrace

The Sonoma coast does not have much level ground for farming, and Kuskov was no doubt attracted to the terrace for its agricultural possibilities. The Fort Ross terrace is the youngest (somewhat over 80,000 years old) of a series of ancient wave-cut structures lifted up from the ocean floor. In 1812, just as it is now, the terrace was probably covered with grasses over the yellow clay soil. These grasslands have been modified many times as different human groups have inhabited them. For several thousand years, Native Americans harvested seeds here for food, and burned the fields in the fall to keep them open and to encourage their food plants. In the ranch era, the grazing of sheep and some periodic field burning also helped keep these ancient grassy plains open.



Bush lupine



Poison oak

Today, shrubs and small trees also inhabit the young terrace; coyote bush, bush lupine, bracken fern, and wax myrtle dominate. The low-lying Pt. Reyes ceanothus, with its dark blue flowers, is found on the terrace. Foot-tangling vines of the small native blackberry and the introduced Himalaya blackberry thrive, as does poison oak; both are savored

by deer. The Russians and other settlers of the nineteenth century tilled these same fields and planted wheat, barley, and potatoes. They also introduced foreign annual grasses with their agriculture, which largely crowded out the native bunch grasses. Later the terrace was grazed, sometimes too heavily. Without grazing, the grasses could soon grow to be as “high as a horse’s chest,” said one man early in this century.

The state flower, the poppy *Eschscholzia californica*, is one of the most obvious wildflowers. It was named by Adelbert von Chamisso after his colleague Johann Friedrich Eschscholtz. Both scientists visited California in 1816 on a Russian round-the-world scientific exploring expedition. Lupine, orange monkeyflower and Coastal Indian paintbrush prefer the cliffs and road cuts. Purple Douglas iris forms extensive mats on the hills and fields. It is beautiful to observe, but crowds out the pasture grasses, spoiling fields for cattle grazing.

The terrace soils are sandy and easily worked, but need heavy fertilizing for agriculture. The topsoil is shallow and underlain with impermeable clay. Small resident birds and mammals are numerous—blackbirds, rabbits, gophers, moles, mice, and deer. The Russian-American Company found to its dismay that these creatures can destroy crops very quickly. The grassy terrace is inhabited by other



Brush rabbit

animals which also enjoy man's crops and livestock. Raccoons feast in orchards, as well as on any scraps left in a campground or on a back porch. The gray fox is becoming more common again; many dens of pups can be found in the area. Local foxes and skunks, both striped and spotted, have been known to raid chicken houses. The skunks also dig out ground-nesting wasps. Ringtails, small mammals once trapped along with foxes, raccoons, and skunks, are also now more common. They are splendid climbers and predators of birds. Small groups of feral pigs, a legacy of the Russians and later ranchers, roam the foothills. Fort Ross has its own herd that plows up the grasslands and eats apples from the old Russian orchard. The small coastal black-tailed deer are numerous and destroy gardens not heavily fenced. Their fawns are preyed upon by bobcats, which are often seen in daylight hours in the foothills. A few mountain lions are rare sightings. There are even signs of black bear, which heavily hunted in the early ranching days, have been rare until recently. Coyotes are common inland, but are seen here only occasionally.



White-crowned
sparrow

Many songbirds are found on the terrace—the house finch, blackbird, Steller's jay, and several kinds of sparrow predominate. In the summer, American goldfinches feast on thistle heads. Towhees, nuthatches, and valley quail raise families in the brush. At least five kinds of swallows come in the spring to nest, often raising two or three families. In the winter, robins and juncos are common.

White-tailed kites, kestrels, and red-tailed hawks hunt overhead. Other large hawks are also found—harriers, red-shouldered hawks, and an occasional golden eagle. There are also several species of owls living in the area. The common raven is a predator and, like the turkey vulture, a scavenger. Both are year-round residents. Like most areas of our world, Fort Ross has lost some of its bird species. The California condor lived here well into the last century. Native Americans valued its feathers, and William Benitz once reported having shot one.

Small amphibians and reptiles also like the grassy terrace. Several kinds of lizards can often be seen basking in sunny spots. Rattlesnakes prefer the higher, warmer elevations. Garter snakes are common; rubber boas and gopher snakes occur more rarely. Frogs and toads are becoming rare, with the exception of the small, noisy tree frog, *Hyla*.

There are a few species of ticks and Lyme disease does occur, but more rarely than on the Atlantic Coast. Pill bugs and earwigs are very prevalent. Also thriving are the yellow-faced bumblebees *Bombus vozneseuskii*, named for Russian scientist I. G. Voznesenskii, who visited Fort Ross. Numerous flies are found on the mounds of decaying seaweed on the beach.



Western black-
legged tick

Wooded slopes

The Bishop pine grows close to the ocean and is often shaped by its winds. It is a quick-growing opportunist, spurned as food by deer. It populates open fields after fires, or when lands are no longer grazed or farmed and have become quite dominant. Alder and willow flourish along the local streams, and redwoods



Australian eucalyptus

venture quite close to the shore on the damper, protected slopes. Monterey cypress and Australia's eucalyptus, introduced during the ranch era, have become very numerous. Although invaluable as windbreaks, they are not native to the area and were not present during the Russian occupation.

Going higher in altitude, leafy trees and shrubs take over, and are soon mixed with evergreens. Manzanita, buckeye, maple, madrone, California bay, salal, and

huckleberry are found; salmonberry and thimbleberries grow in the forest understory. Columbine, not eaten by deer, likes open sunny areas. The tan oak, valuable to the Kashaya for its acorns and to the ranchers for its bark and wood, occurs from the lower slopes to the ridge tops. The silk tassel tree, *Garrya*, can also be seen in this community.



Tan oak

The magnificent coastal redwood played an important role in the history of Fort Ross. The Russians built the entire compound with this wood, which they laboriously cut and hauled, at first without help from draft animals. In



Coastal redwoods

spite of heavy timber harvesting by the Russians for three decades, and by Dixon and Call later in the century, they have sprouted anew from their old stumps. Several fern species, wood sorrel (*Oxalis*), trillium, and adder's tongue are found beneath the redwoods. Calypso orchids live under Douglas-firs and coastal redwoods. The heavy duff and moist atmosphere create an ideal situation for mushrooms and other fungus. Wild rhododendrons seek out spots of light in the heavy tree cover.

Douglas-fir and grand fir are the major components of the mixed evergreen forest that continues up onto the coastal ridge. In the lower canyon of Fort Ross Creek can be found a few samples of the less common California nutmeg, named for its nutmeg-like cone; it is actually related to the yew.

Marine environment

The Pacific Ocean is the dominant agent in the climate and topography of the coast. It can be a ferocious force, with long, strong swells, high winds, and wide tidal fluctuations. The water temperature varies only slightly all year, typically ranging from 50-53 F. From November through February, storms coming in off the ocean bring almost forty inches of rain, often in heavy downpours brought by gale-force winds. Occasionally, strong local hurricane-like storms occur. At least twice roofs have been torn off coastal dwellings, including that of the Call house. These storms cause streams to erode their banks, trees to be uprooted, and cliffs

to crumble. The rocky shores are battered and their marine residents often dislodged and thrown onto the beaches with mounds of kelp, driftwood, and flotsam.



California sea lion

There are a few offshore rocks near the fort. One large group of islets is a seasonal home to two kinds of sea lions, the large Steller's and sleek, dark California sea lion. Smaller rocks host the nests of seabirds—chiefly gulls, murre, oystercatchers, and cormorants. Some low-lying rocks serve as hauling out spots for harbor seals, especially in summer.

A sizable colony inhabits the sandy mouth of the Russian River ten miles down the coast and male northern elephant seal are occasionally seen on the beaches. The sea otter, the mammal which brought the Russians to Fort Ross in the first place, is no longer resident here with the exception of a rare sighting. The Monterey Bay is the closest place to see significant numbers.

Whales are also found in the area. Gray whales migrate south from the Bering Sea to Baja California from December to March and can be seen from shore. After calving, when they make the return journey, they are closer to shore and thus more easily seen. The males return first, beginning around April, followed by the females and young.

Occasionally a solitary gray will linger along the coast during the summer, feeding in the shallow water. Lately, a group of blue whales has been seen every fall at varying distances from shore; they winter off Mexico and Costa Rica.

Humpback whales make occasional appearances, as do fin, and minke whales and occasionally orca. Shy harbor porpoises can sometimes be seen quietly rolling in the water, their backs breaking the surface.



Orca

For over a century, salmon, lingcod, and many varieties of rockfish have been avidly sought by people fishing off the rocks or from small boats. Though still a rich area, the waters here have been greatly depleted. Quantities of marine bones and shells were found in the archaeological excavations of the North Pacific and Native Kashaya sites outside the stockade.

Marine plant colonies are especially productive on this part of the coast. Mats of bull kelp, *Nereocystis luetkeana*, named for Russian sea captain Fedor Lütke, form each spring and summer just offshore, to be broken up by winter storms and piled on the beaches. The palm tree-like *Postelsia* was discovered by and named for a Russian scientist in Alaska, Aleksandr Filippovich Postels. It covers many lower rocks where there is especially strong wave action. The feather boa kelp, *Egregia*, is also very common. Low tides reveal quantities of bright green sea grasses. Tide pool rocks are encrusted with colorful pink coralline algae. Many types of seaweed were included in Kashaya culinary tradition.

The Northern California rocky intertidal zone is famous for its diversity of plant and animal life. Most of the edible intertidal invertebrates and plants which the

local Kashaya gathered—abalone, mussels and limpets—can still be found. Sea stars and chitons, being less edible by humans, survive in great numbers. Large, offshore sea urchins are rarer and smaller than in the past as they are currently being heavily harvested; intertidal urchins are still plentiful. Young fishes also make their homes in the tide pools.

The Pacific waters off Fort Ross are rich in bird life. Immature brown pelicans fly north each spring, feeding as they go, and head south again in the fall. Migrating flocks of geese, brant, and many shorebirds are to be found. Great blue herons hunt from rafts of kelp, and are permanent residents along the shore, as are varieties of gulls and other nesting birds. Loons are temporary visitors. The powerful osprey fish just off shore, and can be seen in spring and summer carrying their catch (or nest material) to their nests high in snags in the forest. Most of them fly south for the winter, but occasionally one will winter here.

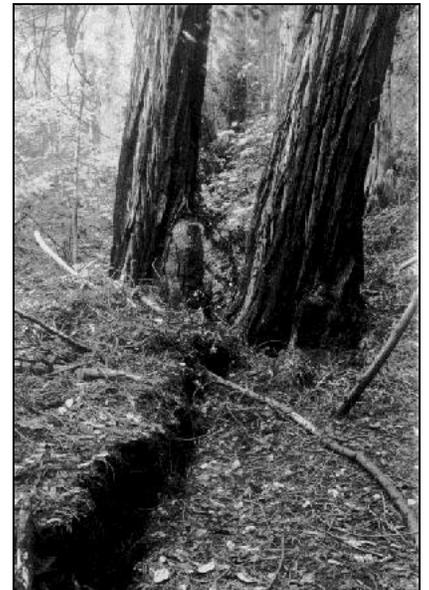


Immature brown pelican

San Andreas Fault

California's major earthquake rift zone passes through San Francisco and comes ashore two miles south of Fort Ross, then runs north and through the Fort Ross orchard located on the east side of Highway One. The fault is the result of the boundaries of the Pacific and North American plates passing by each other. On this portion of the fault, the movement tends to be in sudden large events, and it is thought that this section of the San Andreas Fault moves significantly only every few hundred years. California's 1906 earthquake was the sudden result of such motion.

Fort Ross lies on marine sediments to the seaward side of the fault. These sediments were deposited underwater on the Pacific plate forty to sixty million years ago, and have moved from the south about three hundred miles up the California coast. In 1906 the land at Fort Ross shifted 12.6 feet along a narrow well-defined area above the plate movement. The resulting surface features can still be seen today. Offset creeks, sag ponds (depressions along the fault which often become filled with water in winter), escarpments, shifted fences, and damaged trees are lasting evidence of the quake. Across the road from the orchard on the trail beginning at the Stanley Spyra Memorial Grove, there are many visible remnants of the 1906 earthquake. Especially noticeable are the damaged giant redwoods and surface features such as sag ponds and escarpments. The ancient giant bay and redwood trees in this area are hundreds of years old.



Sea otters

History of sea otter hunting

Content submitted by Robin Joy, State Park Interpreter I at Fort Ross State Historic Park



Vitus Jonassen
Bering

In 1741, Czar Peter the Great sent a Danish sea captain, Vitus Jonassen Bering, to explore the North Pacific Ocean and discover whether or not the Asian Continent was connected to the North American Continent. This ambitious undertaking would also establish a Russian presence in the international world. Bering was shipwrecked on the Commander Islands, and the crew survived by hunting the numerous sea mammals. For warmth the men discovered the beautiful thick pelt of the sea otter. Vitus Bering died, but this voyage is well remembered as a pivotal moment for the North Pacific. In addition to establishing the Russians in the North Pacific and Alaska, it won the Russians acclaim in the international trade circles as the discoverers of the most valuable fur pelt in the world.

Unlike some marine mammals which use body fat or blubber to keep warm, the otter has very little body fat. Their bodies are covered with dense fur which provides insulation from the cold Pacific waters. As many as one million hairs might sprout from one square inch of a sea otter's hide, about ten times the amount on a similar patch of human scalp. In fact, the sea otter has perhaps the densest fur in the world.

Many of the 900 sea otter pelts which Bering's crew took back to Russia went to the Chinese trade markets where they quickly became the most valuable and sought after pelt. The Mandarins wore the fur as belts, capes, and trim on their silk robes, as a sign of wealth and status. It was called "soft gold," not an overstatement as each pelt brought between 80 and 100 rubles, even more costly than the famous sable pelts of Russia. One fur could be worth as much as a year's pay!

When the 'soft gold' rush began in the 1760s, the way of life of the Native Alaskans of the North Pacific was drastically changed. Survival in the cold, cold north was difficult for the Native Alaskans of the North Pacific who depended on the ocean's creatures for food, materials for building homes and tools, as well as clothing. They respected all animals, they believed them to have spirits, and some Native Alaskans knew the sea otter as "the brother." In some tribes only chiefs and experts were allowed to hunt and wear sea otter. In a bitter irony, the success of the Russian-American Company was solely due to the skills of the Native Alaskans who expertly hunted on the Pacific under company instructions.

Coastal Native Californians were also familiar with the sea otter which they used for clothing, bed coverings, ceremonial garments, and, occasionally, food. It was also a valuable trade item with inland tribes. Though the Californians were skilled hunters, they could not rival the skills of the Alaskans and weren't used by the Russian-American Company.

A government-owned company, the Russian-American Company was funded in part by shareholders whose profits depended on sea otter pelts and the fur trade. In the early years of the Company, the merchant ships of the north Pacific supplied the ships, and the company supplied the labor force of mostly Native Alaskans. In 1809 three such joint ventures resulted in the highest known catch of otter: 1809–9,356 pelts. From 1803 to 1805, more than 17,000 sea otter pelts were taken in California waters. The Company hunted the entire length of California from Trinidad Bay in Humboldt County to Baja California. Ivan Kuskov, the first Manager at Fort Ross, reported that over 2,000 fur pelts were taken in the first years here. In the 35 years that the Russian-American Company was in California, over 100,000 pelts were taken. By the 1820s, the California sea otter had almost completely disappeared.



In 1911 the Northern Fur Seal Treaty signed by Japan, Russia, Great Britain, and the United States ended the indiscriminate hunting of marine mammals, including otters and fur seals. This protection was strengthened in California in 1913 and, finally, in 1941 a sea otter refuge was established.

Today the sea otter population in California waters is around 2,000, most of which are found near Monterey. The Alaskan and Kuril sea otters have come back faster than the California otters. Today, there are about 168,000 otters in the waters off the Russian and Alaskan coastlines.

Natural history of the sea otter

(excerpted from the National Geographic Website-
<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/sea-otter>)

This aquatic member of the weasel family is found along the coasts of the Pacific Ocean in North America and Asia. The sea otter spends most of its time in the water but, in some locations, comes ashore to sleep or rest. Sea otters have webbed feet, water-repellent fur to keep them dry and warm, and nostrils and ears that close in the water.



Sea otters often float at the water's surface, lying on their backs in a posture of serene repose. They sleep this way, often gathered in groups. Otters sometimes float in forests of kelp, or giant seaweed, in which they entangle themselves to provide anchorage in the swirling sea.

These aquatic otters do more than sleep while floating on their backs. They are often seen with a clam or mussel and a rock that has been deftly snared from the ocean floor. Otters will place the rock on their chests, and repeatedly smash the shellfish against it until it breaks open to reveal the tasty meal inside. They also dine on such aquatic creatures as sea urchins, crabs, squid, octopuses, and fish.

Sea otters are the only otters to give birth in the water. Mothers nurture their young while floating on their backs. They hold infants on their chests to nurse them, and quickly teach them to swim and hunt.

Sea otters are meticulously clean. After eating, they wash themselves in the ocean, cleaning their coats with their teeth and paws. They have good reason to



Sea otter with pup

take care of their coats—it helps them to remain waterproof and insulated against the cold. Sea otters have thick under fur that traps air to form an insulating layer against the chilly waters (they have no insulating fat). This coat is invaluable to otters, but it has worth to some humans as well.

Sea otters were hunted for their fur to the point of near extinction. Early in the 20th century, only 1,000 to 2,000 animals remained. Today, 100,000 to 150,000 sea otters are protected by law.

For more information on the sea otter and other marine mammals go to The Marine Mammal Center at www.tmmc.org



Facilities

Overview

"The fort is situated atop a mesa, which is surrounded by ravines, which abut the sea. It is constructed of redwood planks (there is no other wood used in any of the structures) and forms a palisade. It is four varas high, uniformly, and is surmounted by a beam set with pointed stakes intended to dissuade any assault. It has three gates: one to the northeast, one to the west and one to the southeast..." -Diary of Fr. Mariano Payeras, 1822.

"It was called Ross by its commander and founder Kuskov," writes Father Payeras, whose diary contains some of the earliest descriptions by an outsider after the fort's completion, September 10, 1812 (modern calendar).

A report by Lieutenant Mariano Vallejo to Governor Figueroa in 1833 says its "walls form a quadrangle of exactly 100 varas [1] square." The fort's formidable appearance was enhanced by two well-gunned blockhouses, and sentries on the two corners without blockhouses, "from which the sentinels chime bells each hour." In spite of these defenses, erected against the natives and Spanish, the cannon were never fired in defense. Inside the stockade were "the commander's house, two warehouses...another warehouse filled with provisions for the fort; a barracks and three officials' houses..." A "draw-well" was dug inside the stockade, in case of siege.

The chapel was added a few years later (circa 1825); the set of three suites for clerks (officials) described by Payeras is believed to have been remodeled around 1836 for Manager Rotchev. Two buildings were added between 1836 and 1840: the "new kitchen" and "new warehouse." Only six buildings may be seen in the fort today—the original Russian-built Rotchev house and five reconstructions.

The compound is aligned on the compass slightly east of magnetic north. Outside the stockade were a bake house, bath houses, threshing floors, two windmills with grindstones, a tannery and a brickworks (until 1832, when it was moved to Bodega Bay). There were large barns and corrals, the houses and gardens of the Russian artisans and *promyshlenniki*, and the low, possibly semi-subterranean dwellings of the Aleuts. In 1833 Mariano Vallejo reported as residences "59 large buildings more or less . . . arranged without order or symmetry." Near the sandy beach were a smithy, boathouse and shipways. All of this has disappeared.

The elements are harsh on the California coast. A Bostonian visiting in 1832 described the structures as "weather-beaten." Baron von Wrangell, governor of Russian America, wrote in his official report of 1834 that all the fort buildings "are neatly and orderly maintained and look comfortable, even handsome. However, almost all the buildings, as well as the stockade wall and watch-towers, are so old and dilapidated that either they need repairing or else they should be replaced by new structures." Some were indeed repaired, but most had to wait a century, until they became part of a California state park! The State acquired the fort just before the earthquake of April, 1906. At this time seven Russian buildings and some of the stockade were still standing: two blockhouses (not in very good shape), the chapel, the Rotchev house, the officials' quarters, and two warehouses (the "old" and "new" warehouses mentioned in the 1841 inventory had been combined into what was known as the "Dance Hall"). The chapel was knocked down in the earthquake, but its reconstruction was not begun until 1916. In 1925 the State appropriated \$2,500 to rebuild the stockade and blockhouse and repair the Rotchev house. The first caretaker/ranger, William Turk, was hired in 1930, although funds for preservation were very limited from the 1920s until after World War II. Beginning in 1948 Curator John McKenzie initiated the restoration of the Rotchev house and the seven-sided blockhouse. In October 1970, an intense accidental fire destroyed the chapel. A few months later an arson fire burned the roof of the Rotchev house. These calamities spurred the state to action, and the era of reconstruction began that produced the restorations seen today.

[1] A vara (Spanish) is almost a yard: 33 inches.

Blockhouses

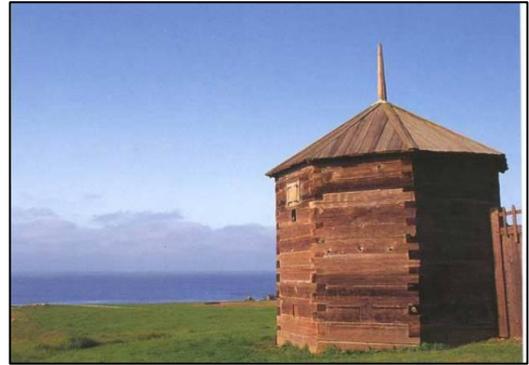
Two bastions, one in the northern corner of the square mounting five cannons on two floors, and another bastion in the southern corner mounting four cannons. -Diary of Fr. Mariano Payeras, 1822.

In the two corners opposite each other, one overlooking the mountains and the other overlooking the sea, are mounted 12 pieces of artillery up in two towers or lookout platforms. Each piece is of eight caliber and six are located in each tower. Report by Mariano G. Vallejo, 1833.



The two blockhouses were noticed by priest and soldier alike, but apparently no visitor observed that one is seven-sided (the northwest) and one eight-sided (the southeast). Both towers stood, quite decayed, for many years.

Twenty-seven days after Fort Ross officially became a historic site of the State of California, the massive earthquake of April 18, 1906 struck. Due to the fort's proximity to the San Andreas fault, all of the historic buildings suffered structural damage. The Russian blockhouses and the chapel, which had successfully withstood the wind and rain for nearly a century, were now in a state of collapse. The southeast blockhouse was not renovated until 1930. Original floor boards from the officials' quarters were set in this eight-sided blockhouse floor; they are still in place. In 1948, ruins of the northwest blockhouse were removed, and it was reconstructed in 1950-51 using Russian joinery techniques. In 1956-57, the southeast blockhouse was again repaired.



Southeast Blockhouse- photo by Dan Murley

Chapel

The most notable structure at the fort, the chapel, is unusual for North America and often photographed. With its landmark "small belfry" a familiar sight along Highway One, the chapel is a mecca to visiting Russians. The greatest efforts made over the years in maintenance and preservation at Fort Ross have been for the chapel. It was constructed by the resident Russians about 1825 with their own funds, and funds donated by visiting Russian officers and crew of the *Kreiser*. The chapel was never consecrated and there was no permanent priest; but one Company official, Fedor Svin'in, appeared to act as a lay deacon, according to Father Payeras. It was used and revered during the Russian tenure,



Fort Ross Chapel after 1906 earthquake

as it is today. "The chapel with a cupola," as it appears in the Russians' inventory for Mr. Sutter in 1841, is not anywhere extensively described by early visitors to the fort. The earliest photographs of the original Russian chapel are from the 1880s.

In the 1906 earthquake, the chapel's old walls completely caved in and the floors and foundation were reduced to rubble. The roof and the turrets came to rest over the foundation virtually intact. In the spring of 1916, the State

Legislature appropriated \$3,000 toward its reconstruction. George W. Call's son Carlos, a strong advocate of the proposal, was appointed supervisor of the rebuilding. The chapel's reconstruction mainly involved giving the building a new foundation and walls and bringing the original roof into position. Carlos Call and

his local carpenters solved the practical problems of increasing the building's structural integrity, but the chapel's original appearance was changed.

To replace the building's broken supports, original Russian-cut timbers and planks were taken from the officials' quarters and part of the old warehouse. Since the upright wallboards from the officials' quarters were over a foot too short for the chapel walls, the floor was raised to make the chapel roof the correct height. It was then necessary to add a small porch and step to the front of the chapel to make it easier to enter. From historic measurements and observations of similar chapels in Russia, such an addition was reasonable, and in fact there once may have been an extended shed-roofed porch or *kryltso*, typical in similar Russian chapels. Due to the damage sustained by the ceiling joists and roof beams, an extra side wall stud was added for stronger support. This increased the number of panels on the south wall, and thus the number of windows, from three to four. Later it was found that in this 1916-18 reconstruction the north and east walls of the chapel were not aligned with the original stockade; this was subsequently corrected.

A serious error with theological implications occurred when the roof of the cupola was restored in a different style and a Roman, rather than Russian Orthodox, cross was erected on the bell tower. In 1939, a Russian Orthodox cross replaced the Roman cross; however, it was put on the bell tower upside-down due to a carpenter's misinterpretation of a pattern given to him by a visiting Russian Orthodox bishop. A letter to the governor of California signed by several hundred people noting the mistake was forwarded to the carpenter, and in 1941 the Russian Orthodox cross was put up correctly.

Although the park staff was aware of the changes in design and recommended their correction, the alterations produced by the 1916 reconstruction remained for nearly forty years. Only as public interest in Fort Ross grew, and the study of its building construction became more intensive, was the state persuaded to appropriate new funds to bring the building into closer conformity with the original. Finally, in 1955, a second restoration was funded. The walls of the chapel were rebuilt with three windows and the building was correctly aligned with the adjoining stockade as indicated by archaeological excavation, but the elevation of the floor was still high. In 1960, the cupola was replaced with a more authentic Russian roof style, and a small cross was added. This cross was later replaced by a tall Russian Orthodox cross.



On October 5, 1970, the restored Russian chapel was entirely destroyed in an accidental fire that swept through the building, leaving nothing but a few charred timbers. Once again supporters of Fort Ross quickly organized to promote a third rebuilding of the chapel. Funds were obtained from a variety of sources; local

residents, Russian American groups, and government agencies all contributed. The Department of Parks and Recreation conducted a comprehensive study of the building site based on new archaeological techniques, and developed updated historical data and additional detail on floor alignment, configuration, and use of building materials. The chapel that emerged in 1973 is what is seen today in the compound.

When the Russians left Fort Ross in 1841, they apparently took all the icons with them. They left one large bell, a candelabrum, a candle stand and a lectern, which were destroyed when the chapel burned in 1970. All have been replaced with replicas. The bell that hangs today outside the rebuilt chapel was recast, using the original bell's materials and a rubbing which had been made from the original. It bears the inscription: "Cast in the St. Petersburg Foundry of Master Craftsman Mikhail Makharovich Stukolkin." The bell's deep, resonant chime can easily be heard across the stockade, and twice a year it announces to the public the Orthodox services held in the chapel.

Kuskov House

The old house for the commandant, two stories, built of beams, 8 toises [sazhens¹] long by 6 wide, covered with double planking. There are 6 rooms and a kitchen. -Inventory for Mr. Sutter, 1841.



This building served as headquarters for the first manager, Ivan Kuskov, and as a storeroom for arms and other valuables. It must have been one of the first of the Russian buildings to be lost; there are no pictures or reports of it from the following ranching years. Archaeological investigations found a line of postholes to aid its reconstruction. The substantial building was carefully designed based on the 1817 stockade layout, visitors' descriptions, and on other Russian American buildings of similar use. It stands in its original location, built by 20th century craftsmen using old joinery techniques.

"In one corner of the commandant's living room there was on a canvas two feet high a painting of St. Peter and St. Paul and another very small one below it of St. Nicholas." -Writings of Mariano Payeras, 1822.

"The first room we entered was the armory, containing many muskets, ranged in neat order; hence we passed into the chief room of the house, which is used as a dining room and in which all business is transacted. It was comfortably, though not elegantly furnished, and the walls were adorned with engravings of Nicholas I, Duke Constantine," -An anonymous Bostonian's description, 1832.

The replica Kuskov House was completed in 1983. It has a furnished armory and storerooms on the ground floor, and a trade room and attached living quarters upstairs. From the second floor "dining room," one can see the sea, and any approaching ships, through the old-style hand-made glass. It is now the most spacious room in the fort, and worth a climb up the stairs, over which heavy doors were installed in the reconstruction.

Also upstairs is a small room on the northeast corner designed as a scientific study. The Russian naturalist Ilya G. Voznesenskii spent part of 1841 at the fort, collecting and sketching; the lab is arranged as he might have used it. Several local plants and animals are named for Voznesenskii, and his watercolor of Fort Ross is one of the most accurate and valuable visual representations of the settlement.

Magazin

The Magazin, or fur warehouse, is the latest building to be reconstructed within the fort walls; it held a critical place in the Russian American Company's operations. Valuable fur pelts were stored and baled for shipment to Russia for trade all over the world. The upper floors may have served as a barracks for company employees.



The new exhibits represent three of the original warehouses within the fort's walls. These warehouses served many functions. One stored valuable goods and served as a place for employees to purchase goods. Another housed tools and materials for the industrial trades at the fort. The third was for storing and processing fur.

Rotchev House

Originally built in 1812, the Rotchev House is almost 200 years old and is the only surviving original structure of the Fort Ross Settlement.

Along with the chapel, the structure of most historical interest at Fort Ross is the Rotchev house, an existing building renovated about 1836 for Alexander Rotchev, the last manager of Ross. It is the only surviving structure which contains construction techniques dating back to the Russian era. This structure was known as the "Commandant's House" from the 1940s through the 1970s. It was titled the "new commandant's house" in the 1841 inventory to differentiate it from the Kuskov or "old commandant's house."

The Rotchevs apparently lived in comfort--or with as much style as they could manage in the wilderness of the California coast. One visitor commented on their "choice library, French wines, a piano, and a score of Mozart" (Dufлот de Mofras, 1841). All these refinements disappeared with the Russian inhabitants in that year; the house as it exists now is stripped to its bare walls.



About two years after the Russians departed, William Benitz took up residence in the building. When he married, he enlarged the house by building a two story addition to accommodate his growing family.

The Benitz family sold the ranch in 1867. The house was also used as a dwelling by James Dixon for a short time after his purchase of the fort in 1867, and by Ada Fairfax, her mother, and her entourage, after her husband's death in 1869. The Russian Rotchev house was the George Call family's dwelling from their purchase in 1873 until early 1878, when they built their own house. It then became a hotel, and was so operated into the early 1900s. It was later occupied by a caretaker family. The house is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Officials' Quarters (barracks)

Probably the first building constructed after the fort walls were erected, the long, sturdy officials' quarters parallels the sea just inside the stockade. Its reconstruction was completed in 1981. The building now contains a dining room with an adjacent Russian stove for warmth and bread baking. There are a storeroom, a wood shop, a metal shop, a "jail room," and several individual sleeping rooms. Exhibits in this building do not necessarily reflect the activities that took place in the "officials' quarters."



Old Russian cemetery

"To the northeast at a cannon shot's distance they have their cemetery, although unfenced. In it there is a noteworthy distinction... [a] mausoleum atop a sepulcher of three square steps, from larger to smaller. Above these was a pyramid two yards high, and over it a ball topped off by a cross, all painted white and black, which is what most attracts one's attention when you descend from the mountain. Over another burial of an individual de razón they placed only something like a box, and over the Kodiaks a cross . . . All of the crosses we saw are patriarchal; a small cross above and a larger cross nearby like arms, and below, a diagonally placed stick" - Payeras, 1822.

The only outlying facility to survive in some visible form is the old Russian cemetery. It is situated across the ravine on a bluff east of the fort. The several



monuments seen in the early photographs no longer exist. A cemetery restoration project conducted in the early 1990s by the University of Wisconsin and the California Department of Parks and Recreation discovered over 150 individual burials in the old Russian cemetery.

Across the gulch to the east, one-quarter mile above the cove, a large Russian Orthodox cross marks the site

of the settlement's cemetery. During the Russian American Company's thirty-year settlement here, 131 people were buried in the cemetery.

In 1990 the University of Wisconsin conducted excavations intended to locate and identify the individual Orthodox burials at the Cemetery. The names of individuals associated with specific burials are not known, although researchers have identified a lengthy list of people who died at Fort Ross and were most likely buried here. The Ross settlement was a mercantile village with many families, and there are a large number of women and children buried in the cemetery. Remains have been re-interred and given last rites by priests of the Russian Orthodox Church. Artifacts, such as beads, buttons, cloth fragments, crosses and religious medallions were found in the cemetery during the restoration project.

Explanation of the Russian Orthodox Cross

The Top Bar

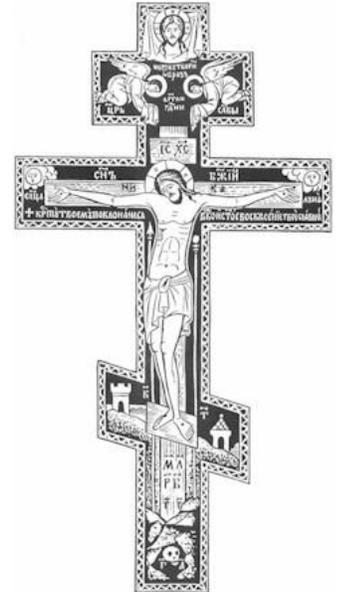
The top bar is the title-board which Pilate ordered to be hung in mockery over Christ's head on the Cross. On this board was inscribed: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin (abbreviated to the Greek initials 'INBI' or the Latin initials 'INRI' in the Western tradition).

The Middle Bar

The middle bar is that on which the Lord's hands were nailed.

The Bottom Bar

The slanted bottom bar is the foot-rest. The Cross of Christ stood for a scale of justice between the two thieves: for one of them sank in to hell, (the lower end of the bar), and the other, the wise thief, ascended into heaven, because of his repentance, (the upper end).



Stockade walls

The fort is in a constant state of deterioration.... The walls and buildings are constructed of weak timbers insufficient to withstand any attack except by the natives who have no heavy arms, only bows and arrows. The walls could not withstand a cannon ball of any caliber.



-Report by Mariano G. Vallejo, 1833. Set upon a hill with a sharp descent to the sea, and upon a smooth, clayish terrain, the wooden stockade is shaped in a rather large square, which forms four right angles. In two corners, diagonally opposed to each other and connected to the stockade walls, two watch towers have been erected with guns that protect all sides of this so-called fort. Nevertheless, it appears quite strong, and perhaps even unconquerable, in the eyes of the Indians and the Spanish here.

-Baron Ferdinand von Wrangell's Report, 1834.

A square fort, surrounded by a row of posts 172 sazhen long by 2 sazhen¹ high. There are turrets in two of the corners. -Inventory for Mr. Sutter, 1841.

So the formidable facade did not fool the Spanish or Mexicans (who had few "heavy arms"² themselves!) And from the beginning, the heavy redwood posts, hewn, carried and set in 1812 by the Russian and North Pacific workers without "beasts of burden," must have rotted at an alarming rate. In 1830 a 75-foot section was blown over during a heavy wind. Baron von Wrangell was concerned about the fort's stability in 1833. Photographs from the ranch era, from about 1865 on, show very little of the original stockade standing.

After the fort became a state park, the stockade walls were restored a portion at a time. In 1929, the east, south, and part of the west walls were rebuilt. Archaeological excavations were undertaken in 1953, and a year later the west and east walls were completed. In 1972, Highway One was rerouted to bypass the fort; in 1974 the stockade was completely enclosed, as it had been during the Russian occupation.

Visitors from the 1940s to the 1970s who remember the eastern sally port gate, always open, will find it now often shut. The southern gate is the major opening, and gives access to the cliffs and coves below. Based on archival and archaeological evidence of its original location, the sally port gate in the west stockade wall was moved about ten feet to the north, and now opens to a trail leading to the Visitor Center. The walls have been rebuilt with foundations of structural steel and concrete—not as historically accurate, perhaps, but expected to be more permanent than redwood posts stuck into damp ground. In 1989 a portion of the east stockade wall was also rebuilt, after archaeological investigations found that the spacing of stockade posts should be corrected to comply with the Russian gauge. The north stockade wall was rebuilt in 1996-97.

Other structures

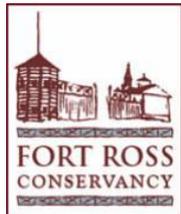
Early visitors counted up to nine structures inside the stockade. They are all on the Inventory of 1841. The seven buildings seen today, the two blockhouses, the magazin, the Kuskov house, chapel, Rotchev house and officials' quarters, along with the well, represent only a sample of the once rich and vibrant life around the fort, when up to 300 men, women and children and thousands of domestic animals lived here.

The variety and complexity of the community is strikingly revealed in the inventory given to Sutter in 1841. However, only one building not seen today long survived the Russian occupation: the original fur warehouse was described in the 1841 Inventory as "The old warehouse, two stories, built of beams, 8 sazhen long by 4 wide. It is surrounded by an open gallery with pillars." Also mentioned by Father Payeras in 1822, it was located between the Rotchev house and the northwest blockhouse. This barn was used well into the twentieth century as a popular place for community dances; at this time the adjoining new warehouse had been combined with it by vertical board siding.

Other structures inside the stockade lost after Sutter's 1841 inventory, some of whose locations are uncertain include: "The granary, built of planks, 7 sazhen long by 4 wide" (this building is also called the new warehouse in the Spanish version of the inventory prepared by Vallejo in 1833); "A kitchen, 4 sazhen long by 3 1/2 wide;" "A storehouse for provisions, planked, 6 sazhen long by 4 wide," (this last was probably one of the three storehouses mentioned by Father Payeras). This building between the southeast blockhouse and the south gate had an "attached jailhouse." In addition there were a barracks with 8 rooms and 2 vestibules, 11 sazhen long by 4 wide, and a well 2 ½ sazhen deep.
-Inventory for Mr. Sutter, 1841

The report by Vallejo of 1833 was particularly impressed with the "two fine grist-mills, one powered by wind and the other by water . . . [from] the box canyon." They were still there in 1841, with their grindstones; the wind-powered mill had a capacity of "20 *fanegas/day*" (A Spanish *fanega* is about 1½ bushels). Associated with these were a "planked floor for winnowing wheat, a wooden threshing floor and a storehouse for cleaning wheat." Another threshing floor and shed were some 500 sazhen (about 1,166 yards) away. Scattered around the fort was a haphazard collection of domestic buildings and gardens, arranged in "a confusing and disorienting perspective," said Vallejo in 1833, who counted almost sixty dwellings. The 1841 inventory lists twenty-four planked dwellings with glazed windows, a floor and a ceiling; each had a garden. There were eight sheds, eight bath houses and ten kitchens. All have disappeared. Probably their valuables were taken to Sitka by the Russians, their timbers and fences used by Benitz or burned by the Kashaya, following their tradition of burning the grasslands to renew the seed plants.

Partnerships*



Fort Ross Conservancy (formerly Fort Ross Interpretive Association)

Mission Statement

The mission of the Fort Ross Conservancy, Incorporated, is to promote for the benefit of the public the interpretive and educational activities of the Russian River Sector of California State Parks at Fort Ross State Historic Park and Salt Point State Park.



Renova Fort Ross Foundation

The **Renova Fort Ross Foundation, funded by The Renova Group**, was created to serve as a key organization in raising private and public funding for **Fort Ross State Historic Park**.

The Renova Fort Ross Foundation has contributed significant funds to the preservation of Fort Ross State Historic Park. The Foundation has also contributed funds to related efforts including providing most of the funding for the 2012 Interpretive Special Event Training to provide knowledgeable interpretive staff “hosts” to assist with the 200-year Commemoration.



California State Parks

Our Mission

To provide for the health, inspiration, and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



Presidio Trust in San Francisco

The Presidio Trust is a distinctive federal agency created to save an historic American place and transform it to serve a new national purpose. They have hosted and sponsored a special Fort Ross Series of events and evenings celebrating cultures.



California Historical Society

California Historical Society offered outreach for the events by sending out information about the events and activities to those in their database.



Sonoma County Museum

The Sonoma County Museum celebrates and interprets the region's rich history, art, and culture by exhibiting and collecting relevant objects and artworks, by serving as a vital community gathering place, and by inspiring visitors with dynamic experiences designed to engage, educate, and enlighten.



Gualala Arts Center

Hosted commemorative events throughout the bicentennial year



Timber Cove Inn

Timber Cove Inn

Provided funding for the Fort Ross Conference with the Society of Living Traditions.



Bodega Bay Historical Society

Sponsored a presentation regarding the Russian-American Company.



Congress of Russian Americans

Organization for preservation of Russian heritage and encouragement of active participation of Russian-Americans in the public life of the United States.



Sonoma Historical Society

Sponsored their annual 25-mile hike to Fort Ross and highlighted some historic places along the way, ending at Fort Ross for a barbecue and presentation by park staff.

*Some of the partnerships are specific to the 200-year anniversary in 2012.

Annual Special Events at Fort Ross State Historic Park

Annual Winter Festival—January or February, dates vary

Annual Spring Festival—dates vary

Russian Orthodox Church Services—Memorial Day and July 4th

Cultural Heritage Day—Last Saturday in July

Harvest Festival—Third Saturday of October

Interpretation/Visitor Contact

Roving Interpretation at a Special Event

Submitted by Elizabeth Hammack, State Park Interpreter III
Guidelines adapted from Sam Ham's "Environmental Interpretation"

Special events are opportune venues for interpreters to conduct roving interpretation. This informal exchange with visitors is a personalized, face-to-face communication, where interpreters move around the event available to answer questions and look for people to meet and chat with. If the interpreter can weave an interpretive message into the conversation, that is great, but unlike a formal tour, this may not be the case; you do not want to force a conversation into something that the visitor is not interested in learning about.

The two main groups of interpreters assisting will be living history docents and host interpreters (in uniform). Living history demonstrations are excellent methods of sparking an interest from visitors and catapulting an exchange. Carrying props and dressing in historic clothing can also assist interpreters in their roving endeavors. Host interpreters play a valuable role in providing an overview of information about the park while engaging visitors and attending to visitor comfort. The following are guidelines to assist you as a roving interpreter at Fort Ross:

1. Be observant when approaching the visitor; some people just want to enjoy the experience without well-meaning distractions. You don't want to disrupt the solitude of the moment or the group camaraderie they are enjoying. Generally, the situation will be obvious.
2. Be approachable. Smile and use a friendly greeting. Use the Russian phrases you have learned.
3. Establish rapport immediately. Personalize each encounter by asking the group questions. Where are they from? Have they visited Fort Ross before? What brought them here today?
4. If the opportunity arises, incorporate your planned messages (themes) into the discussion. You can do this by still allowing the conversation to take its own course and meet the needs of the individuals you are talking to.
5. Use costumed interpretation and props. As mentioned earlier, you can utilize your historic dress (if applicable) and/or any replicas/artifacts/props to convey your messages and share with your audiences. If you are in uniform, you can introduce visitors to interpreters in period dress.
6. Try to answer every question as if it were the first time you'd answered it. Even though you may find yourself giving the same information or answering the same questions, each visitor deserves the respect of all your attention and interest. Try to learn about each individual and

group you are talking to and make a relevant connection with what you are saying to their lives and what you already know about them.

7. Speaking of commonly asked questions: You can anticipate these more commonly asked questions and be prepared to answer them through thematic interpretation. Develop examples, analogies and comparisons that will help them understand the information.
8. Since many of you are interpreting at Fort Ross for the first time, it's okay to carry a fact sheet with you to refer to so that you can feel "armed and ready" if you need to look at this sheet occasionally. Do not read from it verbatim. Just use it as an information resource.
9. Take care not to dominate the conversation. Let the visitors participate fully in the discussion, asking questions, making observations, etc. They may have a lot to say and ask. Be a good listener.
10. In guideline #1, we discussed being sensitive to whether or not visitors want to talk to you. Also, be aware that they may want to talk to you and ask questions initially, but perhaps not for too long. Also, if your time is limited, invite them to talk to you later or to join a formal tour (if available).
11. When appropriate, you can lead a small group on a "mini-guided walk."



Tips for Conducting Surveys

These tips apply when conducting surveys in person:

- Remember, people's time is valuable. Try to stay focused on the questions. Visitors may want to engage in a discussion or may want to relay a story that is triggered by one of the question. Let them know politely that you will be glad to discuss that when you have completed the survey. Jot down any topics that the visitor seemed interested in discussing further so you can remember to return to that topic afterwards.
- Practice conducting the survey with someone else—at least twice. If possible, give the survey to someone who does not know anything about the topic; there is always a difference between verbalizing it and reading it. Time yourself.
- Make sure you speak slowly and articulate your words carefully.
- If they give an answer that is not one of the multiple choice answers, then repeat the multiple choice answers again to try to get them to pick one of the standard answers. For example, if they say "Kind of helpful," then you can say, "Did you mean 'somewhat helpful' or 'not very helpful'?"

Frequently asked questions:

What hours is the park is open?

Gates are open Friday, Saturday Sunday and holidays from 10:00 am to 4:30 pm. Park grounds are open daily from sunrise to sunset.

Where can we buy food?

There is no food to purchase at the park. There is a store/deli about 2 miles north called Fort Ross Store and about 12 miles south of the park entrance at Jenner.

Where is the nearest gas station?

There is gas north of the park entrance about 2 miles at Fort Ross Store and south of the park entrance at Jenner about 12 miles.

Are dogs allowed in the fort?

No; dogs are not allowed on the trails or in the fort compound. They are allowed in the upper parking area only. Dogs must be on a leash at all times.

Where is the pay phone?

There is no pay phone at Fort Ross. If you have an emergency or need roadside assistance, contact staff at the Visitor Center or the fort compound. They will help you locate a state park ranger or staff person to assist you.

Is there water available to drink?

There are drinking fountains at the Visitor Center and in the fort compound.

Where is the bathroom?

There are two in the fort compound and several in the visitor center.

Where is access to the beach?

You can walk to Sandy Cove or North Cove. You may drive down to Sandy Cove to unload dive or picnic gear, but must park back in the upper lot.

Where are the trails?

They are across from the orchard, or from the fort to the cemetery, or to the Reef Campground.

Where do we park?

You must park in the upper parking area unless you have a Handicapped parking tag, or have limited mobility. You may never park in front of the fort compound or at the beach area of Sandy Cove.

What year did Highway 1 change from the old route through the Fort?

1972.

What is the best way to get back to Hwy. 101?

Go back to Jenner and take 116 to Guerneville, which turns into River Road. Follow that to 101 or go to Bodega Bay and follow the road to Petaluma.

When do the whales go by?

They may be seen from November to April.

Where can I get a bird, animal or plant list?

In the visitor center or on the web: www.fortrossstatepark.org

Where are the picnic areas?

Fort Compound, upper parking area, Call Picnic area, the beach.

Can I have a fire on the beach?

No.

How far is it to...?

Jenner is 12 miles; The Sea Ranch is 18 to 20 miles north. Gualala is about 25 miles north.

Where can I stay for the night?

There are local places going either south or north. Please contact the local Chamber of Commerce of Russian River or Redwood Coast Chamber; or visit our web site for more information.

What does FRC stand for and what do they do? (Formerly the Fort Ross Interpretive Association or FRIA)

Fort Ross Conservancy. They support ongoing research, archives and the library, and they fund various programs.

When do you offer presentations on the history of Fort Ross?

Presentation times vary according to the season, the time of day, and the visitation needs. Please contact the fort interpreter's office at 707-847-4777.

Do you offer group presentations for schools and/or other groups?

Yes, please contact the interpreters' office at 707-847-4777.

Do the interpreters always fire the cannon?

No, the firing of the cannon takes place for various groups who have made prior arrangements and/or if the fort is crowded with enthusiastic visitors. It is always best to ask, as it is not a given.

Where does the name Fort Ross come from?

The settlement of Ross, the name derived from the word for Russia (*Rossia*), was established by the Russian-American Company, a commercial hunting and trading company chartered by the tsarist government.

Are any of these buildings original?

The Rotchev house, an existing building renovated in about 1836 for Alexander Rotchev, the last manager of Ross, is over 70% original. It is the only surviving structure that contains construction techniques dating back to the Russian era. This building was known as the "Commandant's House" from the 1940s through the 1970s. It was titled the "new commandant's house" in the 1841 inventory to differentiate it from the Kuskov or "old commandant's house."

What was the time frame of the original settlement?

Settlement Ross was originally constructed in 1812, and was occupied by the RAC until 1841.

Where did the ships anchor?

In Bodega Bay, which they called Port Rumantsiev.

How many people lived at this Settlement?

Up to 250 or so in its heyday, but generally around 150 to 200.

Are the cannon original and do they fire?

The 4 cannons in the compound are not original. They are exact replicas of British Howitzers; the two located nearest to the wall are made to fire.



Who lived in that white house down the road?

The Call Family lived there from about 1876 to 1976.

What are the sand boxes for that we see in the chapel?

For candles

What kind of wood was used to construct the buildings?

Mostly redwood

When are your special event days?

We list them on the web at www.fortrossstatepark.org or contact us by calling 707-847-3286.

When are the Russian Orthodox Church services?

Services are held every year on Memorial Day and July 4th. On occasion, a church may hold a service on short notice.

How do I get to the cemetery?

From the fort compound, walk to the beach landing and look for the bridge crossing the creek. Or drive south from the entrance about 1 mile and look for a pull-over. The cemetery crosses have no names because we do not know which site belongs to whom, but the cemetery is a true cemetery.

How many buildings were at this site?

Over 60 structures were accounted for. Nine buildings were inside the fort compound.

What did the company do to make money?

They hunted and traded sea otter pelts among other various skills, which included brick making and shipbuilding.

Who traded for the sea mammal pelts?

The Chinese paid the highest prices, but other merchants also purchased the pelts.

What did they get in trade for the sea otter pelts?

Goods from China and from other merchants.

Are those real guns in the armory?

They are exact replicas of Brown Bess and a French weapon, 1812 Charleville.

Whom do I talk to about becoming a volunteer?

For the Fort?

If you would like to volunteer in the fort, contact the park interpreters at 707-847-4777.

For the Call House?

If you would like to volunteer at the Call House, phone 707-847-3286 or call FRC at 707-847-3437.



View of Sandy Cove from the southeast blockhouse

Appendices

- A. Russian Glossary**
- B. Common Plant and Animal List**
- C. Going Easy in the Intertidal Zone**

Appendix A

RUSSIAN GLOSSARY

Hello *	Zdrahvst *vyui—tyeh*
Hi	Priv- yet !
Welcome	Do'bro po-zhal'o-vat'
Thank you	Spa- see 'ba
Goodbye	Dos vee dan ya
How can I help you?	Kak ya mo- gu ' vam po- moch '?
My name is . . .	Meen- ya ' za- voot '...
What is your name?	Kak vas za- vut '?
Where are you from?	Ot ku 'da vy?
Where are the Restrooms?	Gu- dyeh ' u vas tua- let 'i?
Over there	Tam
Is this your first visit to Fort Ross?	Vi zdes per 'viy raz ?
Yes	Da
No	Nyet
Please / You're welcome	Pa-zhal'ooys-ta
Sea Otter	Mor skaya vui 'drah

* Best to use the more respectful “hello, vs. “hi,” even though it’s a mouthful! (Ask a Russian neighbor, friend or the Internet, so that you can HEAR the correct pronunciation!)

Examples of the words/phrases in Russian:

Здравствуй
(Hello)

Appendix B

Common animals and plants

(Excerpted from the website <http://www.fortrossstatepark.org/>)

Mammals

Black bear	<i>Ursus americanus</i>
Black-tailed jackrabbit	<i>Lepus californicus</i>
Bobcat	<i>Lynx rufus americanus</i>
Brush rabbit	<i>Sylvilagus bachmani</i>
Coastal black-tailed deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>
Coyote	<i>Canis latrans</i>
Feral pig, from wild boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
Field mouse (vole)	<i>Microtus californicus</i>
Gray fox	<i>Urocyon cinereoargenteus</i>
Mole	<i>Scapanus orarius</i>
Mountain lion (puma)	<i>Felis concolor</i>
Pocket gopher	<i>Thomomys bottae</i>
Raccoon	<i>Procyon lotor</i>
Ring-tailed cat	<i>Bassariscus astutus</i>
Striped skunk,	<i>Mephitis mephitis</i>
Spotted skunk	<i>Spilogale putorius</i>



Brush rabbit



Gray fox

Birds

Great (common) egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
White-tailed kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
Brewer's blackbird	<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>
California towhee	<i>Pipilo fuscus</i>
California quail	<i>Callipepla californica</i>
Common raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
American gold finch	<i>Carduelis tristis</i>
Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
Great blue heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>
House finch	<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>
Allen's hummingbird	<i>Selasphorus sasin</i>
Anna's hummingbird	<i>Calypte anna</i>
Dark-eyed junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i> var. Oregon Junco



California Quail



Dark-eyed junco

Kestrel (sparrow hawk)	<i>Falco sparverius</i>
Northern harrier (marsh hawk)	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
Great horned owl	<i>Bubo virginianus</i>
Pigmy nuthatch	<i>Sitta pygmaea</i>
Red-shouldered hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>
Red-tailed hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>
American robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>
White-crowned sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i> & others
Steller's jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>
Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i> , & others
Turkey vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>



Steller's jay

Sea birds

Black oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>
Brant	<i>Branta bernicla</i>
Brown pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>
Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>
Common murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>
Double-crested cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>
Western gulls	<i>Larus occidentalis</i> & others
Loon	<i>Gavia</i> sp.
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Pigeon guillemot	<i>Cepphus columba</i>
Scoter	<i>Melanitta</i> sp.
Surfbird	<i>Aphriza vergata</i>



Common murre

Reptiles and amphibians

Alligator lizard	<i>Gerrhonotus multicarinatus</i>
Fence lizard	<i>Sceloporus occidentalis</i> & others
Garter snake	<i>Thamnophis sirtalis</i>
Gopher snake	<i>Pituophis melanoleucus</i>
Rubber boa	<i>Charina bottae</i>
Tree frog	<i>Hyla</i> sp.



Fence lizard

Insects and arthropods

Beach fly
Yellow-faced bumblebee
European earwig
Ground-nesting wasp
Monarch butterfly
Pill-bug (sowbug)
Western black-legged tick

Canacidae sp.
Bombus vosnesenskii
Forficula auricularia
Vespula sp.
Danaus plexippus
Armadillidium vulgare & others
Ixodes pacificus & others



Monarch butterfly

Marine mammals

Blue whale
Fin whale
California sea lion
Elephant seal
Gray whale
Harbor seal
Humpback whale
Minke whale
Orca (killer whale)
Harbor porpoise
Dall's porpoise
Steller sea lion

Balaenoptera musculus
B. physalus
Zalophus californianus
Mirounga angustirostris
Eschrichtus robustus
Phoca vitulina
Megaptera novaeangliae
Balaenoptera acutorostrata
Orcinus orca
Phocoena phocoena
Phocoenoides dalli
Eumotopias jubatus



Harbor seal

Fish

Cabezon
Kelp greenling
Lingcod
Rainbow surfperch
Rockfish
Chinook salmon
Coho salmon

Scorpaenichthys marmoratus
Hexagrammos decagrammus
Ophiodon elongatus
Hypsurus caryi
Sebastes sp.
Oncorhynchus tshawytscha
Oncorhynchus kisutch



Chinook salmon

Marine Invertebrates

Anemone (giant green)
California mussel
Gum boot chiton
Limpets
Red abalone
Sea stars
Purple sea urchin
Red sea urchin

Anthopleura xanthogrammica
Mytilus californianus
Cryptochiton stelleri
Collisella sp. & others
Haliotis rufescens
Pisaster ochraceus & others
Strongylocentrotus purpuratus
S. franciscanus



Limpets

Former Inhabitants (fauna)

California condor
Sea otter

Gymnogyps californianus
Enhydra lutris

Marine plants

Bull kelp
Feather boa kelp
Iridescent seaweed
Pink coralline alga
Sea palm

Nereocystis lutkeana
Egregia menziesii
Iridaea acordata
Lithothamnium pacificum
Postelsia palmaeformis



Kelp washed up on beach

Flowers and shrubs

California fetid adder's tongue
Western azalea
Bracken fern
California poppy
California blackberry
Pt. Reyes ceanothus
Western columbine
Coyote bush
Douglas iris
Hairy manzanita
Himalaya blackberry
Blue huckleberry

Scoliopus bigelovii
Rhododendron occidentale
Pteridium aquilinum var. *pubescens*
Eschscholzia californica
Rubus ursinus
Ceanothus gloriosus & others
Aquilegia Formosa
Baccharis pilularis
Iris douglasiana
Arcostaphylos columbiana
Rubus discolor
Vaccinium ovatum



California blackberry

Red huckleberry
 Seaside paintbrush
 Bush lupine
 Coastal lupine
 Orange monkey flower
 Calypso orchid
 Poison oak
 Redwood sorrel
 Salal
 Salmonberry
 Thimbleberry
 Trillium
 Wax myrtle

V. parvifolium
Castilleja wightii
Lupinus arboreus
L. littoralis
Mimulus aurantiacus
Calypso bulbosa
Taxicodendron diversilolum
Oxalis oregana
Gaultheria shallon
Rubus spectabilis
Rubus parviflorus
Trillium ovata
Myrica californica



Seaside paintbrush



Bush lupine

Domestic species of flowers

A Few Named Garden Plants

Butterfly bush
 Calla lily
 Red angel trumpet
 White datura
 Flannel bush
 Fuchsia
 Mexican sage
 Naked lady
 Pride of Madeira
 Princess flower
 Autumn damask rose

Buddleia sp.
Zantedeschia aethiopica
Brugmansia sanguinea
B. candida
Sterculiaceae fremontia
Fuchsia sp.
Salvia Leucantha
Amaryllis belladonna
Echium fastuosum
Tibouchina urvilleana
Rosa damascena bifera



Red angel trumpet

Trees

Bishop pine
 Bigleaf maple
 California buckeye
 California nutmeg
 California bay

Pinus muricata
Acer macrophyllum
Aesculus californica
Torreya californica
Umbellaria californica



California buckeye

Coastal redwood

Douglas-fir

Grand fir

Interior live oak

Canyon live oak

Pacific madrone

Red alder

Silk tassel tree

Tan oak

Willow

Sequoia sempervirens

Pseudotsuga menziesii

Abies grandis

Quercus wislizenii

Q. chrysolepis

Arbutus menziesii

Alnus rubra

Garrya elliptica

Lithocarpus densiflorus

Salix sp.



Douglas-fir cone

Common trees found on the grounds

Blue gum eucalyptus

Monterey cypress

Eucalyptus globulus

Cupressus macrocarpa



Blue gum eucalyptus

Mushrooms

Boletus edulis, *Amanita muscaria* & many others

Appendix C

Going Easy in the Intertidal Zone: Exploration Without Devastation

Monterey Bay Aquarium, 1999

Here are a few major impacts we humans have on tide pools and beaches and how we can explore with lesser impacts on the resources:

1. **Where to walk:** the entire intertidal zone, beaches and rocky shores alike, is teeming with life. Virtually everywhere you step there will be plants and animals underfoot, some very fragile, others more rugged. In addition, you need to watch your footing to avoid slips and falls. Try this:
 - Keep on boardwalks, posted trails or other established paths.
 - Avoid stepping on fragile dune plants going to and from shore.
 - On the rocky shore, try to step on solid, bare rocks. Stepping on seaweed is not only a slippery way to travel, but many creatures take cover under the seaweed during low tide. Stepping on loose stones is unstable, and you may damage animals living underneath the stones.
 - Walk in a line, placing your feet where others have stepped. If you spread out in the intertidal, you also spread out the trampling effect.
2. **Examining animals:** many intertidal animals have exacting requirements for where they live, right down to a particular hole or depression in the rock that only they fit into. Many of these animals may be handled briefly to examine them, but should be treated with the following courtesies:
 - Always keep your hands wet when touching these animals, and keep these animals wet as well.
 - It is always best to look at a plant or animal *in situ*; try bending over to get a closer look in a tide pool or rocky crevice rather than bring the plant/animal out of the water up to your level.
 - If you must remove an animal from the water, place it in a small, clear plastic container with fresh seawater briefly to allow everyone to see it. Be sure to replace the animal *exactly* where you found it.
 - If you must roll a stone or driftwood over to look underneath it, try not to crush animals in the process. Always replace the stone or wood gently in its original position. Remember, a loose stone or wood turns into a wrecking ball with the next high tide and can do a lot of damage to those intertidal animals.

- Similarly, if you lift up algae to look for creatures hiding underneath, replace it when you are done. The algae form a vital “wet blanket” over the rocks to keep animals cool and moist, as well as hiding them from gulls and other predators.
 - Do not remove limpets, snails, abalone, chitons, mussels, sponges, tunicates (sea squirts) and attached animals or plants from the rocks. Most algae, mussels, tunicates (sea squirts) and sponges will not be able to re-attach themselves before the next high tide and will be tossed up on the beach to fall victim to the sun or a predator. Many gastropods (limpets, abalone, snails) easily succumb to internal bleeding if damaged while forcefully removing them from the rocks. (Their internal cavity walls are easily torn, and these animals lack clotting compounds in their blue-green blood to repair their damage).
 - Some limpets and sea urchins have a shell or test that precisely fits a hole or depression in their “home rock.” If you remove them and don’t put them back in the same location, they just don’t “fit” anywhere else and are easy prey for tidal surges and predators.
 - Each tide pool is an established community of sorts, with each resident having established its territory, food source, shelter and interrelationships with the other residents. Each time we add or subtract or move animals, or disturb the physical conditions (by moving stones, algae, littering, etc.) the entire community may be affected.
3. **Collecting:** nearly everyone who visits the beach or tide pools is fascinated by what they see and desires to bring some souvenir or an object of beauty or curiosity back home with them. However, we should consider nature’s viewpoint when tempted to collect.
- Living marine plants and animals have complex requirements for food and general living conditions that can’t be matched in most aquariums at home or at school. Removing live specimens from their intertidal homes is a certain death sentence for them.
 - Dried specimens of certain algae or invertebrates may be attractive when properly prepared. However, preparation may be complicated (and perhaps a smelly) process you may not want to undertake.
 - Collecting shells has been a popular hobby for many people. However, each shell is often a complex microcosm of creatures, many of which live on long after the “original owner” is dead. If you look closely at a shell you are very apt to see tiny white *spirobis tube worm* shells attached to the inside or outside, or perhaps some *boring sponge* or even a small *boring clam* living in tiny holes in the shell. There may be barnacles, colonies of bryozoans or

beautiful coralline algae encrusting the shell, and that shell may be just the right size for a naked hermit crab looking for a new house. In short, just about every shell is an important home for a multitude of organisms; when you take the shell home, you add to the housing shortage in the intertidal.

- For all of these reasons and many others, the State and many local governments have enacted strict regulations prohibiting collecting of plants, animals, shells and even rocks from beaches and tide pools.

The single most important way we can minimize human impacts on intertidal areas is to educate everyone about better ways to treat these fragile resources. Please pass these tips along to others using beaches and tide pools. When you're in the intertidal zone, please model the best behavior possible for others; we all learn best by observing others.