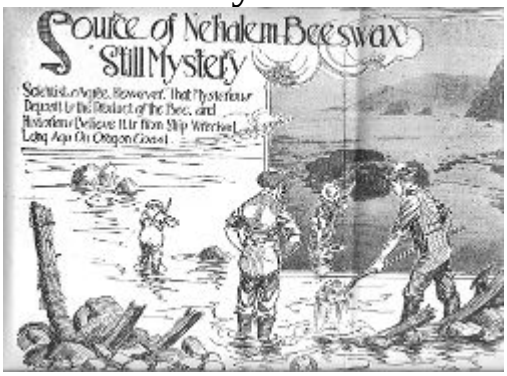
The Beeswax Wreck of Nehalem, Oregon

What is the Beeswax Wreck?

One of the more popular mysteries of the Oregon Coast has been the identification of the "Beeswax Wreck" near Nehalem. Identified, over time by various experts, as Chinese, Japanese and Spanish, most researchers now agree that the vessel was of Spanish origin. The site has been buried for the last 100 years. However, blocks of beeswax are



occasionally found by beachcombers in the sand dunes adjacent to the site. Artifacts in various Museums include a number of pieces and blocks of Beeswax, as well as some tapers and cylinders made into candles, some small porcelain sherds a few pieces of wood and one silver container. Diagnosis of the artifacts has been conducted by various individuals over the years. So far they have failed to come to any consensus, as to the date of

origin.

History of the site;

1805 Captain William Clark observed a 25 year old male among the Clatsop Tribe, who was light skinned, freckled and appeared to be half white.

1811 Gabriel Franchere of the ship Tonquin met an old native named Soto who stated that he was the son of a Spaniard wrecked many years ago near the mouth of the Columbia River.

1813 Alexander Henry reports meeting a 30 year old male who was supposed to be the offspring of a member of the crew of a ship that was wrecked a few miles south of Astoria. Henry also described great quantities of beeswax dug out of the sand spit.

1833 Sir Edward Belcham tells of the beeswax wreck.

1844 Daniel Lee and Joseph H. Frost in "Ten Years in Oregon" report "The remains of a vessel sunk in the sands 30 or 40 miles to the south (of the Columbia River)…probably from Asia….contains beeswax."

1847 It has been written that six tons of beeswax was shipped to Hawaii. (No document has yet been located to substantiate that report)

1870 S.A. Clark tells of the "bones of wrecks" of "two vessels" near the mouth of the Nehalem. Turn of the 20th century Publications such as the Oregon

Native Son, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Nehalem Valley Historical Society, and others ran numerous articles about the mysterious shipwreck.

1929 E.M Cherry proposed raising the remains for commercial profit. Alas, the stock market soon crashed causing the loss of his financing.

1930s Ben Lane, mayor of Manzanita, built a small table from the wood from the shipwreck. It is in the collection of the Columbia River Museum.

1956 E.W. Giesecke began interviewing the elder residents of Manzanita and Nehalem and gathering their opinions as to the precise location of the remains of the shipwreck in question. His research has continued to this time and has become the basis for this proposal.

1984 Don Marshall published Oregon Shipwrecks which summarized much of what had by then come to print.

1989 Yvonne Hajada published a paper titled Ethnohistory of the Nehalem Shipwreck. This paper summarized the native American oral traditions of the area that may have had some connection to the site.

1991 Wayne Jensen published a pamphlet titled "Tales of the Neahkahnie Treasure".

2003 Gary Gitzen published "Real Treasure Discovered on Neahkahnie Mountain, the secret voyage of Sir Francis Drake to the North Oregon Coast". These two publications did little to endear

the site to serious historians.

2005 Alison Stenger published an article in the Oregon Archaeological Society Newsletter titled Physical evidence of shipwrecks on the Oregon coast in prehistory.

Some Assumptions about the Beeswax Wreck;

While suggestions or origin for the Beeswax Wreck have ranged from Chinese or Japanese, British or Dutch privateers, to Spanish coastal vessels missing from Peru, or New Spain (Mexico), the artifacts in various collections seem to be consistent with a late 17th or early 18th century Manila Galleon.

These vessels traveled across the North Pacific from Manila in the Philippines, to Acapulco, New Spain between 1565 and 1815. While many were lost to shipwreck, a few to combat, only five can be listed as missing.

Dates for the vessels missing on the eastbound voyage, which could have inadvertently placed one of them on the Oregon Coast are 1576, 1578, 1586, 1693 and 1705.

While some dating analysis have come up with dates around the mid 17th century, the historical data points to either the 1693 or 1705 date of arrival for the Beeswax Wreck.

One of our researchers, Captain Richard Rogers,

notes that the earthquake and tsunami of January 27, 1700, would have dispersed the remains of any lately arrived vessel for some distance inland at Nehalem. It would have presumably reduced any sand dune accumulation to a low sand beach. A vessel arriving five years later would have impacted near the present coastline, but might have broken up and been cast into low lying areas, now inland, by the first few winter storms. Thus, it is most probable that the Beeswax Wreck came ashore in late 1705 as the San Francisco Xavier.

It appears that there were survivors who integrated into the local native population.

History of the *San Francisco Xavier*

The San Francisco Xavier first sailed from the Philippines in 1697, then from Acapulco in 1698.

She made a second round trip in 1699-1700, another in 1701-1702.

She sailed on her final, fateful voyage in 1705, commanded by Santiago Zabalburu.

She was known to have been carrying at least 500 cakes (75 tons) of beeswax amongst her cargo.

Proposed Methodology for the Beeswax Wreck

Project;

(1) Statement of intent; This is a proposal to establish the location and identity of the "Beeswax Wreck" on the Nehalem Spit. It is intended that the proposed expedition conduct archaeological research on the site in compliance with all applicable rules and laws of the State of Oregon and adhere to standards set forth by the Society for Historical Archaeology. (2) Archival data recovery; While much has been published concerning the Beeswax Wreck, no document has confirmed either the location or the identification of the vessel in question. Some excavation permit reports may be found at the Oregon Historic Preservation Office. Some analytical reports done on certain artifacts over the years are archived at various universities and museums and need to be copied and reviewed. (3) Artifact catalog; Artifacts known to have come from the Beeswax Wreck Site are housed in various museums, universities and private collections. As much as possible, they need to be cataloged and if possible, be made available for study by the team being assembled for this project. Ed Von der Porten is leading the team for porcelain documentation. Jack Hunter will oversee the data recovery of ship's hull remains. (4) Remote sensing; Historical research, conducted by E.W. Giesecke, has narrowed the search area to a very few acres. Some of the search area is within the boundaries of the Nehalem Beach State Park. Land owners permission must be granted to proceed with any further phase of this project. Sheldon Breiner has

volunteered his services to conduct a magnetometer survey over the area of interest. A Geometrics, man carried, Cesium Magnetometer will be used to walk a grid pattern over the area. Data will be integrated with a portable GPS system and processed through computers to identify the magnetic signature of the search area. While large iron objects, such as cannon and anchors would give off the strongest anomalies, less subtle magnetic anomalies can be recognized from anything that has altered the local magnetic field. Ground penetrating radar has been discussed by the researchers. Technological limitations are presented by the presumed salt content in the ground water, and the need to clear the brush in order to run a tight grid pattern over the site. An Accumeter, Super Pro VI underground Geo/Surveyor is designed to detect areas of dense material within and adjacent to a defined survey area. The method used is to place four pins in the ground. They are wired together and tied to a instrument console which emits an electrical pulse. The pulse is interpreted on a display panel that indicates the area of density concentration. This may prove useful in determining an area of concentrated wax or hard wood, buried in sand. (5) Core samples can be taken after or in conjunction with the remote sensing portion of the project. The water table is presumed to be about twenty feet below the current ground level and the shipwreck remains were reported to below the water level 100 years ago. Therefore cores of some thirty feet may be required to penetrate through any shipwreck remains. Carefully patterned core samples may help define the extent of the site area and provide

diagnostic cultural material. (6) Excavation permits will be sought if remote sensing and core sampling determine that there may be a substantial amount of cultural material to be excavated. A back hoe will be used to remove the approximate 20' of overburden. Standard archaeological procedures will be followed to recover cultural material. Metal detectors will be used during this phase. (7) Data recovery and artifact preservation will be done in cooperation with the University of Oregon. (8) Public outreach and education will be a continuing theme. (0) Artifact display will be done in cooperation of interested museums. (10) Publication of the outcome of the project will take place through various professional, public and private publications. (11) Funding will be sought through the NAGA Research group and various other sources. History of the San Francisco Xavier The ship in question is the third Manila Galleon (plus a few smaller ships) to use that saint's name. She was built in the Philippines. 1697 First outbound voyage arrived at Acapulco in December. 1698 Returned to Manila. (Levesque, Rodrigues Bibliography of Micronesia Volume 20 List of ships cumulative index. P754.) 1699 (Dahlgren P107): The galleon "San Francisco Xavier", General Miguel Martinez, sailed in this year from Cavite; but the log-book kept by Piloto Mayor Miguel de Lorrenga, does not begin until 7 December, when the senas came in site, in 35 deg. 30'N lat. And 88 deg 39' long. E. from Cape esperitu Santo. On the 23rd of the same month Cape San Lucas was sighted; and on 15 January 1700 they arrived at Acapulco. Nineteen persons

died on board between 17 July and 8 January. As regards the return-journey begun in 1700 we have no record. 1701 (D-p108) : The galleon "San Francisco Xavier", General Don Bernardo de Endaia, Piloto Mayor Miguel de Lorreaga, sailed from Cavite on 5 July and passed out oof the Embocadero on 2 August. On 18 September they were off Volcan de San Agustin (the southernmost island in the Volcanoe Archipelago).On 28 October they reckoned they were in 31 deg 53' lat, and 35 deg. 41' long., and on 31 October in 31 deg. 25' lat. And 39 deg 16' long.:on the former day Rico de Ora was noted in the margin of the dairy, and on the later day Rico de Plata - which, of course, does not mean that land was sighted, but only that they were in the neighborhood where the charts placed these imaginary Islands. The senas were encountered on 16 December in 33 deg. 31' lat. And 97 deg 36' long., and on 8 January 1702 they arrived at Acapulco….Seventeen of the crew had died on the outward voyage. 1702 (D-p108) : The return-journey from there was begun on 31 March; on 15 June they passed the Mariannes; on 2 July Boronga was sighted; and on 9 July they put in at Palapa. 1704 She was refitted to carry 60 guns. Four of them came from the 1638 shipwreck of the Concepcion. (LVC) 1705 (D-p111) : The galleon "San Francisco Xavier", General Don Santiago Zabalburu, sailed from Cavite in August. "Nothing is known of its fate; not a franment, no object whatever, large or small, has ever been found to serve as evidence or support for even a conjecture as to its fate, whether it was shattered on some unknown rock or was swallowed by the waves,

crew and all - commander, seamen, and passengers, among whom were whole families of high rank. The ocean has kept the secret of this terrible tragety." (Cesareo Fernandez Duro, Armada Espanola, VI, p.96. Cf. Bl & Rob. XLIV, p. 142.) She was known to have been carrying at least 500 cakes (75 tons) of beeswax amongst her cargo. (Ref??)

Beeswax Wreck Project Team Scott Williams is our primary Investigator. He presently serves as the Area Cultural Resources Specialist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Olympia Washington. He will be overseeing the project from the permitting process, through each stage of the project. Please feel free to contact Scott at 360-704-7787 or scott.williams@wa.usda.gov , or 1835 Black Lake Blvd. SW, Olympia, WA., 98512-5623. Let him know what areas of interest you might have in this project. Eb Gieseike has been the historian most focused on the Beeswax wreck at Nehalem Oregon. He has been investigating the site since the mid 1950s. It is his research that is driving this project. Richard W. Rogers is the prime instigator. He has been the one coordinating the efforts of the variety of specialists involved in the project. You can contact him at 808-622-2947 or plialoha@hula.net. Ed Von der Porten has been involved in a number of early Spanish shipwreck projects along the west coast. He will be leading the study of the porcelain and other Asian artifacts that

come to light. Jack Hunter is a veteran maritime archaeologist from California with experience in Manila Galleon shipwrecks. Sheldon Breiner is considered the "Magnetometer Guru". We are honored to have him leading the remote sensing phase of the Project. Trisha Drennan is the senior maritime archaeologist at Scientific Consultants Services Inc. in Honolulu as well as a research associate with the NAGA Group. Dave Wellman of Wellman Survey out of Eugene, Oregon has contributed his services in aerial photography and other survey techniques. You can get involved as well!! At this, pre-permit, phase of the "Beeswax Wreck Project", the one thing that we would like to ask of you is to mail Scott a letter of support on your most impressive letterhead. Let him or Richard Rogers know if you would like to become more involved.