

Hills, William H.

Journals on H.M.S. Portland and H.M.S. Virago, 1852-1853

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May 21, 1853

We had brought with us from Fort Simpson as a pilot, an influential and most intelligent Chief named Edénsaw, against whom strong suspicion was expressed by some as to his share in the "Susan Sturges" affair, he had volunteered his services to us, and had fully explained to him that if anything happened to the ship he would be made responsible for it. When he knew we must be approaching the coast, he became very uneasy, and shewed a great deal of anxiety. At 2 P.M. the weather cleared a little and shewed us the coast, which Edénsaw instantly recognized as the land to the west of Masset harbour, and shewed at once that he knew where he was, by his activity and vigilance in piloting. Running along the shore about 8 miles we came to a deep Bay where we anchored in safety for the night. At the bottom of this bay is an opening which Edénsaw informed us spread out into a deep and spacious harbour, called by him Nadun; he is at present building himself a house in this harbour intending to remove his tribe here, from their present village to the Westward of this, where the harbour is not so good. He was highly delighted in having anchored the ship safely here as he is anxious to have his new port known. However he would not risk his responsibility further than this:- we had anchored in 7 fms water, and the Captain asked him if he would take the ship into the inner harbour. His cunning answer was "Me speak, stop here. You captain, plenty good water in my harbour spose you like". Meaning that he was content to remain where we were, but if the captain chose to go inside on his own responsibility there was plenty of water for him to do so.

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May 22, 1853

...A boat during the day explored and partially sounded the inner harbour and bay. The former was found to open out into an extensive sound well adapted for a harbour for a large number of shipping. A sketch of the whole was made and the name "Virago Sound" given to it: the native name Nadun being applied to Edénsaw's new village. According to his account there is a considerable river emptying itself into the head of the sound, abounding in salmon, running from two large lakes inland and having a large waterfall in it; all this he sketched on paper with a pencil, and where we have had a chance of examining his reports, we have found them to be relied on.

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May 23, 1853

...At the North West corner of Q. Charlotte's Ids. is a small group called North Ids., which at a distance appear continuous with the coast. There is however a channel between them and the main coast; into which we entered under the guidance of Edénsaw who assured us it was "halibut water" meaning deep water; the halibut abounding only at considerable depths. A mile from the East entrance of the channel, on the South shore of North Island, we anchored in a deep cove, to wait a more favorable appearance in the weather. This anchorage Edénsaw informed us was formerly a good deal used by the North West trading vessels who bought sea-otter skins from his father, who went by the name of Captain Douglas; whalers have also been here trading potatoes and fish, but none very recently. ...Immediately opposite this, in a bay on the main coast line is Edénsaw's village, which he is about removing to Virago Sound; the bay is very rocky and open to the North East winds, so that vessels cannot anchor there. The distance however across to our anchorage is not more than two miles. The name of the village and cove is Henslung. The great depth of water, and

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the strong tide running through the channel sweeping into the cove at times in eddies does not make it a desirable harbour for sailing vessels; which is Edénsaws reason for abandoning the place....

May 24, 1853

241 ...This morning we parted with Edénsaw, whom we left at his own place Henslung. He is decidedly an interesting character, and an example of what splendid abilities are only waiting culture among these Indians. He would make a Peter the Great, or Napoleon, with their opportunities. He has great good sense and judgment, very quick, and as subtle and cunning as the serpent. Unfortunately like all his countrymen he has no perception of right and wrong, but what self-interest dictates: he is ambitious and leaves no stone unturned to increase his power and property. He is now about thirty five years old; his father dying while he was young left him poor, at the head of a weak tribe, only safe from the attacks of their neighbours on account of their poverty, which made them not worth attacking: to better this he contrived to marry a woman nearly 50 years of age, who is a high chief of the Kigarny tribe, inhabiting the coast opposite the North coast of Q. Charlottes, one of the strongest of the North west tribes of Indians. Backed by such influence he is able to remove his people to Nadun, close to the powerful Masset tribe, where with the advantage of a good harbour and making his people cultivate the ground he hopes to attract vessels. He also talks of trading with the other tribes for furs in the same way as the Hudson's Bay Company, and then selling them to them or to the highest bidder; should he carry out this idea he will prove an awkward customer for the H.B.C. to deal with. He talks very intelligible English; and is a very sharp hand at driving a bargain. 241 As a pilot he is the only Indian we met with that seemed to have made a distinction in his own mind between a passage fit for canoes, and one where a large vessel can pass. As long as their canoes will float the Indians in general do not seem to notice whether the water be shoal or deep, and consequently though acquainted with all the inlets they can give no information as to their capabilities. Edensaw seems to have let his foresight carry him under water as well as above;- where he reported "good water" we found it deep;- where he pointed out "small water" it proved shoal;- and at any spot where he said "plenty stone stop" there sure enough it was rocky. In personal appearance, he stands about 5 feet 7 ins, with a shade of yellow in his complexion, hazel eyes rather small, and broad features. Square and high shoulders and a wiry form. Wears his hair in European style, and whenever we saw him was always dressed neatly; quite different from the usual Indian style that rejoices in gaudy colours: his dress consisted in a blue cloth travelling cap, white shirt. and black silk handkerchief, blue cloth monkey jacket, white waistcoat, blue cloth trousers and boots; and every article fitted as if made for him.

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