

## FROM THE ARCHIVES by Robin Rudderow

### Admiral Edward Belcher & his maps of Bodega Bay

*The map is particularly interesting for several reasons, including the detail of the interior of the bay before Captain Stephen Smith turned it into a hub of commercial activity, the comments on the map about the bay "this lagoon nearly dry at low water," and the indication of the Russian buildings at Campbell Cove.*



European explorers were reaching the far ends of the Earth by the late 1700's, including James Cook to the Pacific Islands, George Vancouver to British Columbia, and our own Juan Francisco Bodega y Quadra along the Pacific coast. The 1800's saw the floodgates of curiosity flung wide open as England and other world powers set out to see and chart the world.

Edward Belcher was one such explorer. Born in 1799 in Nova Scotia, then a province of England, and now Canada, Edward joined the British Royal Navy at age 13, when England was at war with France. After the war, he was assigned to ships that explored the Mediterranean and Pacific coastlines and several South Pacific Islands.

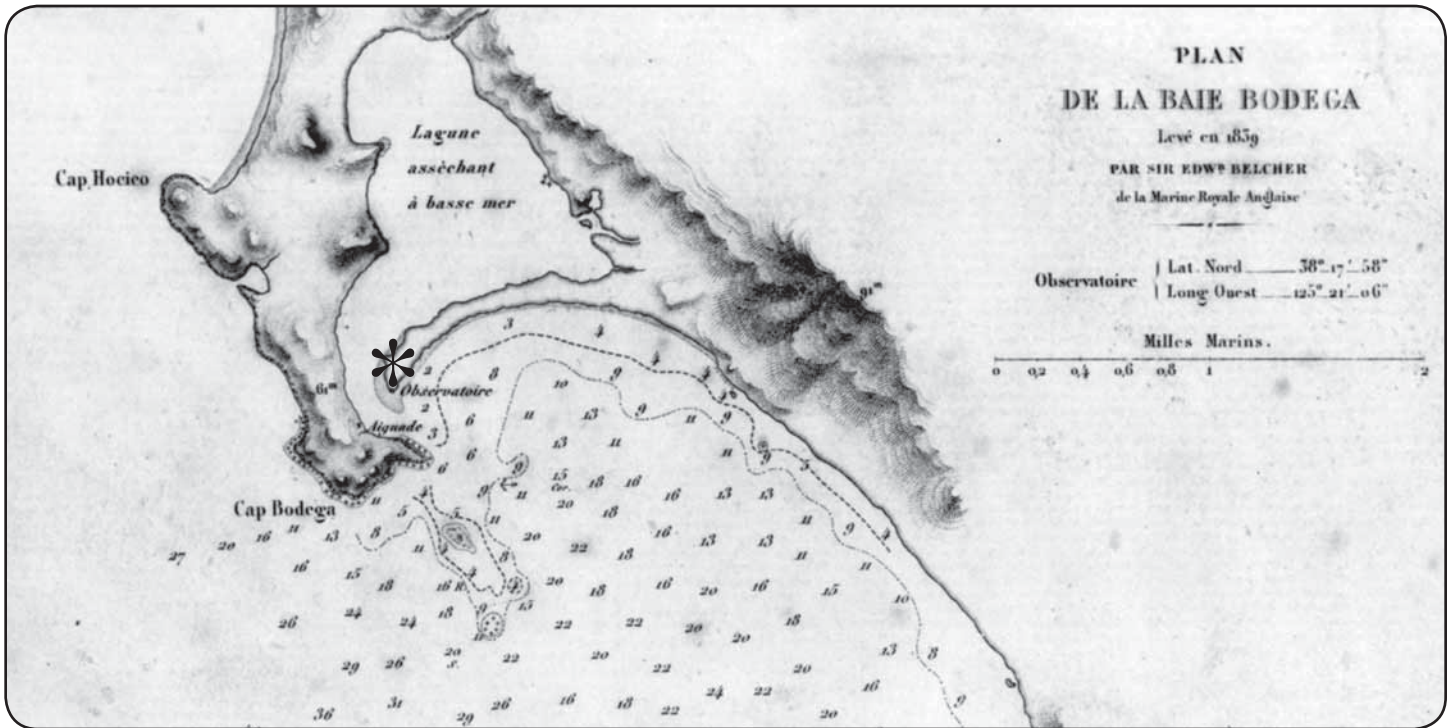
At the age of 37, Edward was appointed commander of the *H.M.S. Sulphur*, which weighed 380 tons and had a crew of 109 men. Together with the *H.M.S. Starling*, Edward embarked on a voyage around the world, the pace of which was breakneck. For example, after visiting Hawaii in the summer of 1839 he sailed up the Pacific coast of North America reaching Kodiak, Alaska in July and then sailed for Sitka.

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After visiting Sitka, he sailed back down the coast to the Columbia River for a visit to Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Vancouver (near present-day Portland Oregon), then down the California coast making frequent stops including Bodega Bay in late September 1839, where his crew surveyed the area. He reached San Diego California in October, just a month later.

Edward's surveying voyages involved the collection of geological, astronomical, meteorological, zoological, and botanical data. His naturalists brought back thousands of samples of plant and marine animals. His surveyors created detailed maps, showing both the topography of the location and the depth soundings of the accompanying water ways.

The French published a copy of the Belcher map which is useful because it specifically identifies point "A" on the map as being the "observatoire" (observatory) where Belcher's survey crew determined latitude and longitude and mapped the bay.



*Belcher's 1839 map of Bodega Bay was shared with us by Glenn Ferris of Fort Ross, who found it at the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office in Taunton, Somerset, England during a visit in June 2016.*



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In 1852 Edward was given the command of five ships to explore the Arctic. In 1854, his ships hemmed in by ice he abandoned four of them and with his crew returned to England. Court martial was automatic for any captain who had lost a ship. Edward was exonerated though he never again received an active command. He was however, made a Knight Commander of the Bath (K.C.B.) on March 13, 1867, and was promoted to the rank of Admiral in 1872. He died in London, England on March 18, 1877, at the age of seventy-eight, but his legacy lives on ...

One of the ships that Edward left behind in the Arctic, the *Resolute*, broke free of the ice and drifted 1200 miles to Davis Strait (near Greenland), where it was picked up by the American whaler the *George Henry*. [Yes, *Rancho Bodega* fans, the *George Henry* is the ship that brought Captain Stephen Smith and his steam sawmill from Dartmouth, Massachusetts to Bodega Bay in 1843!]

The American government returned the *Resolute* to the United Kingdom. In 1880 when the ship was broken up its timbers were used to make a desk that was a gift from Queen Victoria to President Rutherford B. Hayes. The "*Resolute Desk*" is still use.

*H.M.S. Resolute*



*The Resolute Desk*