



NEWSLETTER

www.FortRoss.org

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Fall | 2019

2019 Round Up

Dear friends, over the last eight years FRC has taken on many of the roles and services historically provided by California State Parks staff. We provide all on-the-ground interpretation and tours, staff the bookshop, run all programming, throw a few big events each year that promote our park, handle all social media, and, to make all that magic, we manage a fantastic team of volunteers.

FRC and our skilled volunteers are responsible for maintaining the windmill and educating the public on this incredible structure. The Call House team is active in opening the Ranch era building to the public one weekend a month. It's all a labor of love!

FRC accomplishes this without receiving any of the park gate fees. We fund our work through grants, donations, and

membership from beloved members such as yourself. **Thank you for supporting Fort Ross and for being a member of our community!**

Our staff is working hard to grow our programming, bringing students of all ages to the park for both history-based (ELP) and marine ecology curricula. Our Marine Ecology programming is maturing at a steady pace - we served 62 programs this year which brought over 3300 students to the park for an immersive outdoor experience, which is a one-third increase over our 2018 numbers. But more important than the data is the impact it's having on students:

'As always, it was an enchanting and educational experience for my students and parent chaperones.'
- ELP teacher

In Construction News

Fort Ross has been the recipient of several much-needed projects this past year.

- In late 2018 State Parks completed the Fort Ross Cemetery Restoration project. If you haven't enjoyed the much-improved trail from Sandy Cove to the cemetery, we suggest you remedy that immediately.
- It's always a blessing to have a solid roof over one's head, and FRC staff is excited about getting a new roof in the Visitor Center, paid for in part from matching

funds associated with an FRC donation from several years ago.

- This month we are pleased to announce State Parks has installed new ADA-compliant bathrooms in the historic fort compound, and — huzzah — they flush! Those Russian American Company employees would be most impressed!
- State Parks and partners are designing the Fort Ross Cultural Trail and a crack team of programmers and storytellers are working on the interpretive stops along the way. We will share a website highlighting the project soon.

Going Digital

This November 2019 issue will be our last hardcopy newsletter. FRC publishes a robust electronic newsletter 10 times a year and we've decided to make the switch to digital-only to decrease our environmental footprint. Plus our digital newsletters tend to run longer, include more photos, and can be stored and searched for from our website, making them useful to readers over the long haul. We have a directory listing newsletters going back to the 1970s! <https://www.fortross.org/newsletter.htm> We hope this is not too inconvenient for our readers.

Thank you for being a member of Fort Ross Conservancy. We hope you enjoy these articles and the year ahead!

--Sarah Sweedler
Fort Ross Conservancy CEO



Talk About the Weather: California's First Weather Station

Talking about the weather has been a favorite pastime for people around the globe for who knows how long, an activity not only enjoyable but fundamental to how people structure their daily lives throughout the seasons. With global climate patterns changing and the environment struggling to adapt, we, perhaps more than ever, can appreciate the people who had the foresight to measure and record weather conditions daily, allowing the rest of us to better understand our local weather history and make informed decisions about protecting all who live here today.

Between 1837-1840, Igor Chernykh, an agronomist with the Russian-American Company, began taking the first formal weather records in California. One of the Company's main goals at Ross was to grow and supply food staples to their 80 settlements in Alaska. Chernykh was sent to Ross to help improve crop yields. An integral

part of his work was tracking local weather and vegetative growth patterns at the coast and inland, in order to determine best growing practices. He used a thermometer to track temperature--consistently measuring and recording each morning, afternoon, and evening. His thoughtful, detailed, and sometimes poetic records helped illustrate how profoundly wildlife is impacted by weather.

A few decades later, California's first official volunteer weather station was established at Fort Ross by notable Ranch era businessman and landowner George W. Call. Following in Chernykh's and the Russian-American Company's footsteps, Call owned and managed the Fort Ross Ranch, raising livestock and producing fruit from the orchard. As early as November 20, 1874, he began keeping daily weather records and continued this practice until his death on March 11, 1907, at which time his son, Carlos A. Call, began faithfully carrying on the daily measuring and recording until 1970. Between father and son, the Call family created a tremendously valuable dataset of local weather patterns spanning nearly 100 years. Carlos A. Call received a number of awards and letters recognizing his stellar service, including the

National Weather Service's prestigious Thomas Jefferson Award, the highest award presented to volunteers. When Carlos retired at age 90, he passed the torch on to the California Division of Beaches and Parks. However, he took the original weather station equipment with him to his home in Sebastopol so that he could continue taking weather readings every sunset.

The recording continued from the Russian era through the Ranch era, with new equipment replacing old. Today California State Park staff continue adding to the Call family legacy, dutifully taking daily readings at the weather station located in the field northwest of the fort compound. Daily maximum and minimum temperatures and precipitation readings are submitted to NOAA, an agency that understands the key role weather plays in the health of all living things. Thanks to the hardworking individuals who saw the importance of maintaining a weather record, scientists have a powerful dataset they can use to talk intelligently about the weather in order to monitor environmental changes, and work to protect the bountiful wildlife that calls Fort Ross home.

--Charon Vilnai
Programs Instructor, Sea Lion Survey
Project Lead, & Call House Museum
Lead



The Port Before the Fort: Russian Port Rumiantsev

For thousands of years, a freshwater spring surrounded on three sides by ocean faithfully supplied drinking water to the local Coast Miwok inhabitants and many others at "Tiwut-huya" (now known as Campbell Cove), below "Nai-utci" (Bodega Head). This spring and surrounding protected harbor would later provide a tremendous maritime resource for ships in the 17th-19th centuries and up to the present day.

Some speculate that Sir Francis Drake may have been the first European to encounter Bodega Bay in 1579, and that it may in fact have been his Nova Albion landing location on the California coast. The bay was later charted in 1775 by the Spanish Peruvian naval explorer Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, though the bay that was originally named for him was not present day Bodega, but Tomales Bay further to the south.

Russian and Alaskan Native sea otter hunters first came to California on board American otter-hunting ships as early as 1803, and probably first entered Bodega Bay in 1807 aboard the American ship *Peacock*, which transported 1,231 otter skins. On board the *Peacock* was Vasili Tarakhanov, Russian supervisor for the Aleut otter hunters, who saw the potential of Bodega Bay as a port and reported back to his superiors in Sitka/ New Archangel, Alaska.

The food shortage at New Archangel in the winter of 1805-1806 forced the Russian American Company to look for more temperate climates to grow food, plus the lucrative fur trade fueled further expansion of the sea otter hunt. The search for food and fur took the Russians and the highly skilled Alaska Native indentured hunters down the Pacific Coast, to California, looking for suitable harbors, hunting grounds and locations to start an agricultural settlement.

The Russians called Bodega Bay Port Rumiantsev (founded in 1809), named in honor of a major sponsor of the Russian American Company, Count Nikolai Petrovich Rumiantsev, who was very influential with Tsar Alexander I and served Russia as both Minister of Commerce and later as Minister of Foreign Affairs. When Fort Ross was later founded to the north in March 1812, its sandy beach bay was called "Little Rumiantsev Bay."

In 1841, when the Russians sold to John Sutter prior to their departure, the Port Rumiantsev inventory of sale included a warehouse, three houses (one with a stove and one with livestock pen), a banya (Russian bathhouse), a large livestock pen,



large baidara (kayak), other large seal-skin baidaras, a four-oar canoe, and a long 20-ton covered boat (for travel along the ocean coast).

--Hank Birnbaum
Bilingual Guide, Historical Specialist &
ELP Instructor

"...Rumiantsev Bay began and remained the primary Russian port in California. Even though it was some thirty kilometers distant, products from Ross destined to Sitka were transported from the fort by mule trains or longboats for embarkation. Distant from the presidio of San Francisco, Rumiantsev also was frequently visited by United States ships that participated in the fur trade. It was recognized as having an excellent freshwater spring."

– *So Far From Home*, Glenn J. Farris

The Blob in our Ocean is Much Scarier than a B-Grade Horror Flick

The whir and buzz of electronic machinery fills the October air as Snowbird, a drone, takes off into the cloudless blue sky. She soars out over a calm, clear Fort Ross Cove, on the lookout for Bull kelp. Piloted by the KELPRR team (a partnership between The Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, The Farallones Association, and The Nature Conservancy), the drone is helping these scientists to survey huge areas of the Sonoma and Mendocino coasts, recording the locations where kelp still actively grows. As of 2016, these two counties lost over 93% of their Bull kelp canopies due to a complicated string of events, stemming from global climate change. The most extreme example of climate change

to date was an event now known as the Blob. In a nutshell, the Blob was a mass of warm water and disruptive weather patterns that together halted the normal flow of both warm and cool air and water currents essential to the health of the ocean and its inhabitants that occurred from 2013 through 2016.

Since the Blob, much of the California coast marine ecosystem has been drastically altered and may never return to its earlier balance. With the threat of the second Blob on the horizon, it is more important than ever that we learn from the patterns observed during the first Blob. We are entering a second extreme marine heatwave and with it we may forever lose an ecosystem

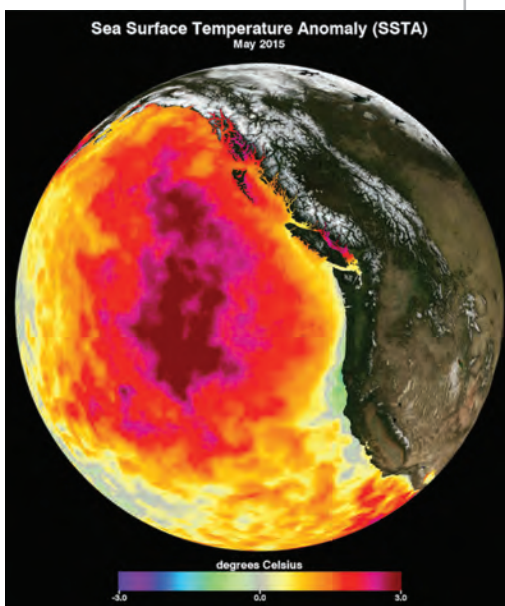
not only wondrous to behold, but absolutely essential to the health of the oceans and consequently, the welfare of humankind.

Scientists first observed a mass of warm water starting in the Gulf of Alaska that quickly expanded to cover the entire west coast of North America which at its worst reached 100 meters deep. In "Revenge of the Blob," author James Thomson explains how much of the water along the west coast of North America was approximately 3 °C above average for over two

years. The speed at which the ocean warmed was unlike anything scientists had seen before. According to NASA's Laura Naranjo, "In September 2014, NOAA scientists noted that a buoy off the coast of Newport, Oregon, recorded a seven-degree Celsius (thirteen-degree Fahrenheit) rise in temperature over the course of only one hour."

Algal blooms are common seasonal occurrences. However, with the warmer waters, long term and widespread algal blooms happen more frequently and persist because the warm waters disrupt upwelling. During the time of the Blob, the normal strong seasonal shifts that bring the much needed cold winters and strong spring winds never happened. Losing the upwelling is catastrophic because it brings nutrient-rich cold waters from the deep ocean that form the basis of the marine food web and when it's disrupted, so is the entire marine food supply.

The warm waters stayed and the effects of the algal blooms worsened, affecting much of the ocean's fish, birds and marine mammals. Species began dying in unprecedented numbers. Marine mammals suffered from the immediate effects of the intense algal blooms in the form of domoic acid poisoning. Domoic acid poisoning also closed the crab fisheries in the 2015-2016 season for months



which may have cost the state's crab industry anywhere from \$48 million to \$117 million.

Unable to find ample food sources near shore, sea lion, fur seal, and elephant seal mothers would have to swim great distances, sometimes forcing them to abandon their pups in search of food. The number of sea lion pup strandings grew to hundreds.

While many of these circumstances have reversed course to some extent, one area that has not improved and, in fact, is getting worse, is the intertidal zone. The continuous warm water allowed a densovirus, known as the sea star wasting disease, to decimate the subtidal and intertidal sea star

species, which had been keeping the population of the Purple Sea Urchin in balance. With no remaining predators (other than humans), the massive urchin population transformed the sea floor into what are called urchin barrens. These fields of urchins have consumed all of the Bull kelp, which provides a sanctuary and food source for a wide diversity of mammals, fish, and invertebrates. Kelp forests do more than provide marine habitat; the amount of carbon sequestered by kelp forests is 20 times greater per acre than the amount of carbon sequestered by other terrestrial forests.

With such drastic changes occurring in our climate, scientists are needed

now more than ever to record these changes, allowing us to further understand what's happening and what we can do to lessen the impact of future occurrences. It is up to each and every one of us to educate ourselves as the effects of global climate change become more frequent. As Ken Lafferty so eloquently says, "What you pay attention to is predicated by what you know." At this time, getting personally involved may create the most noticeable and impactful change. Together, we can make a difference.

--Song Hunter
Director of Programs

In Memoriam



Fort Ross Conservancy board and staff express our deepest sympathy for the untimely departure of our beloved Kedry family member Tomas Pacha. Tomas was a great artist with a generous spirit whose photos of Kedry at Settlement Ross shine with brightness and love. He was always kind and always happy to be with us. We send our deepest condolences to Tomas' wife and son, and to the many in our community who are affected. We will miss you, Tomas.



200 years ago...

“Please send good rum or brandy...”

Excerpted from *RUSSIAN CALIFORNIA, 1806–1860 A History in Documents VOLUME I*
Compiled and edited by JAMES R. GIBSON and ALEXEI A. ISTOMIN

54. A Letter from Manager Kuskov to Manager Khlebnikov of New Archangel Counter about Various Matters at Ross.4 [no number]. Ross. 27 February 1819.

Dear Sir, Kiril Timofeyevich:

I had the honour to receive your friendly messages from New Archangel on the ship *Kutuzov* last year and on the *Il'mena* this year, and I humbly thank you for them; pardon me, dear sir, that I did not write to you via the *Kutuzov*, but, although the affairs of Ross are uninteresting, everything requires that paper be kept and spent on the fulfilment of orders. Upon my arrival in Port Rummyantsev Leonty Andreyanovich [Hagemeister] still had two days at his disposal, but it happened that scarcely had I succeeded in arriving by ship with the latest documents than he was awaiting the return of the *Kutuzov* from Monterey, although in vain.

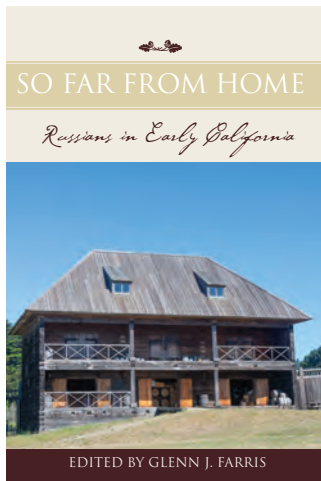
You will learn everything about affairs here from the documents bound to New Archangel Counter on the *Rummyantsev* and from my reports to [Governor] Semyon Ivanovich [Yanovsky], and so I am not writing. You are fairly well acquainted with Prokopy Savel'yevich [Tumanin, commander of the *Rummyantsev*], who saw everything here that is agreeable and disagreeable, and he will tell you at the first opportunity. When I have a chance to have a pleasant meeting with you, I will be glad of it and perhaps we will talk about this and that. The requirement of materials, etc. is in the list enclosed with the report to Semyon Ivanovich [Yanovsky].¹ I remembered to add a kamley of sea lion gut for the Konyagas, and perhaps it will be sent with the rest, and send a few now for consumption – at least 100 – on my account, and if possible please send with the transport – but not urgently – some good rum or brandy, if only anisette, and as much wine, if there is plenty. Do me a favour and send up to four arshins of fine or ordinary white cloth, if there is any in the storehouse, and 4 dozen gold-plated buttons of a large sort. Of local garden vegetables, I am sending to you on the *Rummyantsev* a keg of beets and ten pumpkins, which have been taken from the bed, and a cheese from the holy father [mission friar] that was sent to me and that I ask you humbly to accept, and I ask you humbly to pardon the fact that at present there happens to be nothing better to send.

Paying you my sincere respects, I remain always, dear sir, your humble servant, Ivan Kuskov.

PS Prokopy Savel'yevich will tell you about his case, and thank God that there have been no more such cases. If you send copper rudder hinges, etc. for the *Buldakov*, the first should measure 11 inches on the sternpost.

Kuskov.

Received 24 March 1819 on the *Rummyantsev*.



So Far From Home by Glenn J. Farris

The story of Russian presence in early California is often hidden from view by the fog of history. This selection of letters, journal entries, and reports about the Russian colony Fort Ross and surrounding areas from 1803 to 1841 by Russian as well as Spanish and foreign visitors at last brings this world to life. Historical archaeologist Glenn J. Farris weaves these first-hand accounts into a deft chronicle of intrigue, endurance, and adventure.

It can be yours for \$100 donation! If you want a copy please donate at <https://www.fortross.org/donate.htm> ***and*** email sarjanh@fortross.org your mailing address.

CALENDAR

December 14
Community Potluck: 12pm - 3pm
Fort Ross Visitor Center

2020

January 1
First Day Hike

April 18
Annual Members' Meeting

July 25
Fort Ross Festival

October 10
Harvest Festival

December 12
Community Potluck

Our website is updated daily.
 For details go to:

www.fortross.org/events.htm

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Highlights of Upcoming Events:

SAVE THE DATE!!

April 18
Annual Members' Meeting

July 25
Fort Ross Festival

October 10
Harvest Festival

**Please see the entire list of
Events at**
www.fortross.org/events.htm