

Journal of navigator Potap Zaikov, on ship "St. Alexander Nevskii"

July 27-October 22m 1783.¹ Near the American Coast.

On July 27th., at 4 o'clock, we were towed into a small bay. We anchored one cable length from shore at a depth of 10 sazhen, protected by land from the wind. There is a little creek with fresh water there and old shelters of American natives, with many berries, black and red currants and blueberries. The woods are mostly fir and alders. There are also plants unknown to me, only about 3 feet high, and 1-1/2 inches thick, but with very large leaves, about 1-1/2 feet long, with sharp needles on the edges. We saw no sea or land animals.

At 5 o'clock, we saw two Americans [i.e., natives] travelling past in a baidarka, or skin boat. We sent interpreters in two baidarkas to invite them but when they saw us, they landed and ran ashore, leaving their baidarka, which in shape and workmanship resembles the Kad'iak boats. We found in it fir pitch mixed with seal blubber, dried salmon resembling Kamchatka, and one iron needle. At 6 o'clock we sent two baidarkas to the northwest bay to explore the shore and look for the inhabitants. Some of our men went ashore with firearms.

On July 28th, at 8 o'clock... the interpreters came in baidarkas with letters from our scouts which stated that seeing a camp fire yesterday they approached it and saw American natives with two big baidaras. When the natives saw them they ran into the woods leaving the boats and all their property. A baidara was sent at once with orders that if the Americans wanted to establish relations, they should be given presents and invited to visit the ships. If they would not come, the Russians should leave their baidaras and other property unmolested and return to the ships.

On the 30th, at 4 o'clock, the baidaras returned safely, with one girl and a young boy. The men explained that all the rest of the natives who had been sleeping in two big baidaras ran away in the woods and did not return. They are called the Shugach people. They inhabit this coast and go out to sea to hunt sea animals. The interpreter did not see their dwellings, shelters or tents. The shore is covered by fir woods. There are sandy stretches and a big bay. The clothes left by the Shugach were made of deer, bear and squirrel skins. Pieces of broken European bottles made of green glass were seen. No weapons were left in the baidaras. The paddles were made of light fir wood. Our men left everything as it was and returned to the ship.

On August 17th, at 11 o'clock foreman Nagaev arrived safely with the baidarkas and brought two young Americans. The others, he said, had left during the night. He was with them on the beach and they gave him these two young people as hostages. By giving them, they wanted to show their friendly intentions, and to establish trade relations. Nagaev got about 28 beaver skins in trade for beads and needles. The Americans on the shore called themselves Shugach. They came to make a supply of food. It takes them two days of rowing to reach their homes. The Shugach call the place where our ships are anchored Kaiak.

On August 18th, Nagaev told us he and his comrades had found the shore unsuitable for the approach of ships. The water is shallow with many banks and sandbanks stretching into the sea. The shore is low, covered in many places by water during high tides. The woods are fir and willows; there are berries of the same kind as on the islands. He

entered a creek, the mouth of which is shallow, and went upstream about five versts. The banks of this creek are covered by fir and willows. The current is not swift, and the creek is 10 to 15 sazhen wide. There are plenty of fish in it, of the kind called kizhuch [silver salmon] in Kamchatka. They saw an American summer camp but when the people saw them they fled into the woods. They saw dried fish, stretched seal skins and small dogs in the camp. On his way back, Nagaev saw black and silver foxes on the seashore. He met more Americans by accident, two men in a baidarka going past his camp: they were invited to stop and were given presents. They said that near Nagaev's camp there was a big baidara of their tribe with lots of people. Our people went over and met them by the sea. Seeing the Russians, they started to howl songs, and one of them danced according to their custom in the baidara, raising some clothes on a pole. All their faces were painted in many colors. They had women with them. Choosing a place on the beach, Nagaev and they stopped. They kept their baidara about 100 sazhen from our boats and did some trading. They took beads, big and small, giving beaver [sea otter] skins in exchange, and also treating our men to some meat and dried fish. In the evening they had a dance and the chief declared that his village was located by a bay to the west, that all the people related to him were called Shugach, and that their bay is convenient for ships. We therefore held a council and decided to move west to the Shugach Bay and to send forty men in baidaras. They were to explore the shore, to find out more about the inhabitants and then join us in Shugach Bay.

On August 19th, we gave the Americans clothes and footwear and appointed one to stay with the ships and the other to go with the baidaras. They said that ships had visited the Shugach bay before, so we decided that the English Captain Cook had visited this bay.

The Americans are of medium height, with black eyes and hair. Their clothes are made mostly out of goose, deer and bear skins. They cut their hair just above the eyes in front and some have it tied behind, and some wear it short. Their faces are copper-colored, and they have slits in their lower lips, and in their noses.

On August 24th at 7 o'clock a Shugach in a one-hatch baidarka came from shore, and told us through an interpreter that the chief was not at home and that he would go and see him. We gave him beads for presents, and told him that we were his friends. He went back ashore, and brought us some berries and dried fish. We invited him on board, but he would not come and returned to shore.

At 9 o'clock we could see from ships that the Shugach had a women's dance ashore. It continued for an hour. At about 12 o'clock we heard the Shugach howl and they started to perform shamanist rites. At 5 o'clock they came to the ship. Their faces were painted in several colors. Some of them came on board, received gifts of beads and began to show beaver skins and to trade them for beads. Among these Americans were those we had met at Kaiak Island and on the mainland. We told them through an interpreter to go ashore, and to come for trading in one boat at a time. Their clothes were of goose, deer and woodchuck skins.

At 8 o'clock a few of them came in two baidaras and began to trade beaver skins for beads. We got about forty when one of the Americans

jumped from the ship into the baidara. Both baidaras left the ship in a hurry and leaving their baidaras on the beach the natives ran into the woods. We went ashore in two baidaras to talk to them but the Shugach armed themselves with bows, put on armor, and remained in the woods. We asked them to show us a good harbor for ships, and offered them friendship and a chance to trade but they said there were harbors on another island and refused to trade. So we returned to the ship empty handed.

On August 25th, at 6 o'clock, two Americans in a two-man baidara came to the ship and asked us to give them back the baidaras that were taken when the Americans jumped from the ship. They had left them on the shore and they were carried off by the waves. We asked them to give us a young man to show us the harbor and promised for that all kinds of beads and whatever else they liked. But they refused. They just showed us the island off Khtaaluk, and kept saying that there was good anchorage there. We tried to capture one of them, but they were careful and kept on paddling around the ship. We gave them one baidara and when another boat came we told them that they must first show us a good place for our ship and we would then give them the other baidara. At 12 o'clock we heard howling and shamanist rites on shore where their shelters were. At 4 o'clock in the morning we saw two of them going west close to shore in a baidara using poles to push it. We held a council on board the ship and decided to sail to the Khtaaluk island to search for a harbor and our Company ship and also to find Nagaev and his party.

During our stay ashore, we saw Shugach weapons. Their bows are not very long, about four feet, and made of wood. The arrows are two feet

long and have points made of red copper, slate or big shells. Their armor is made of wood and wound with sinews. Also they have spears with points about two feet long made of red copper and spears with points made of bear bones. The shafts are slender, about two inches thick, and 2 sazhen long. Seeing the armor we concluded that the Shugach have enemies.

There is ample timber, mostly fir, not far from the shore. Some old trees are so big it would take five or six men to encircle them. There are also berries, red and black currants, raspberries and blueberries.

In the natives' shelters we saw a kind of pancake, made of strawberries which reminded us of candy. These are dried over the fire on a piece of fir bark. We saw their way of living on the shore. They had supplies of food, such as smoked fish called humpback [gorbushka] which was split open and the bones removed. The fish eggs, which are thrown away in Kamchatka, were put in boxes of fir bark. There was a good supply of fir sap mixed with seal blubber in the same kind of boxes, also sea cabbage and dried berries. Apparently their shelters are built for summertime use only. They are six feet high and square, the walls are made out of thin and wide fir planks placed upright, with roofs of fir bark with an opening for smoke. They make the fire directly below that opening, on the earth floor of the hut. Against the wall each family has a storage space made of boards with small windows on each side. The boards they use are about a yard wide and an inch thick and have a fine smooth finish, and are placed very tightly together. To protect them

from the rain, they are covered with fir bark. Their axes are either of stone or copper, and remind one of our axes used in making grooves. Their hats are made of tree roots and are like our round hats. During our stay on shore, on the 25th, we found a wooden box close to one of the huts in which were women's clothes, double parkas made of squirrel skins and a rug made of white wool that looks like sheep wool with ornaments made of the same wool and dyed yellow and brown. We took the rug and put large blue beads and needles in the box as pay.

At 6 o'clock a baidara arrived from the interior of the inlet and the men told us there was a bay farther on, on the left side of what looked like a narrow strait, with a place convenient for anchorage. The council decided to enter this bay, anchor in a safe place, and then look around in baidaras for the other Company ship, and for Nagaev's party. So we raised anchor and were towed into the bay at the northeast.

On the 6th, the foreman Shishev started with three baidaras and firearms for precaution, first for Khtaaluk Island and from there to the mainland looking for Nagaev's party. At 5 o'clock in the afternoon the foreman Shishev and Nagaev arrived with six baidara and the Russian workers. They had met them on Khtaaluk Island.

Nagaev reported that from the time they separated from the ships on August 20th, they followed the American shore up to the Shugach Inlet. The shore line runs west and in some places southwest. The shore is low. From Kadiak Island up to Khtaaluk Island, there are banks about 1-1/2 miles off shore. The sea covers them at high tide, so that ships cannot come close to shore. He and his party in baidaras went between the banks and the shore in shallow water. Half way between Khtaalik Island and Kaiak,

8

they crossed a good-sized river flowing into the sea and having several shallow mouths. Nagaev estimated the distance to be twenty versts. In the Shugach language, the river is called "Iullit." The Shugach travel up the river in baidaras and in twenty days reach numerous people living on the shores of this river. The river is quite big. The current is not swift. On these trips they trade with the people living up the river from whom they receive virgin copper and themselves find pieces of it in the mountains. The shores of this river are thickly covered with willows. The river flows from north and northeast and marks a divide between the mountains. The Shugach trade beaver skins, seal skins and rugs with the Iulit natives. East of the river not far from seashore, Nagaev saw many lakes on which geese and swans molt. He saw piles of these birds killed by the Shugach for clothing. He did not see any Shugach dwellings on the shore, but saw a small deserted village on the island. The Shugach native with them ran away just like the other one who was kept on board the ship. It took this party a long time to reach the bay on account of severe rains and storms. The American we kept on board the ship told us that the Shugach have wars and that they also trade with five tribes of Americans, the Kaniags or natives of Kad'iak Island, the Iulit who live on the shores of the above-mentioned big river, with Lakhamit whose land is from Kaiak Island to the east on the American shore, and with the Koliush their neighbors living farther west. They visit these people at different times in bid baidaras.

In the afternoon of September 15th, the workers of Panov's group came to us in the harbor in baidaras. One of twenty-eight, fourteen had

been wounded by the Shugach in a night flight. They said they were sent from their ship on August 16th to find the harbor in Shugach Inlet, for Lazarev did not know where it was. They had looked everywhere but could not find it. During this search, while they were on the mainland, the Shugach attacked them at night, killing the sentries by stealth. They killed nine men and wounded fourteen, using bows and spears. Even with firearms they had trouble repulsing the attack. Many were so severely wounded that they could not search for the ships. Hearing that from Lazarev, we sent a letter to Nagaev and his party instructing him to be very careful or to return to the ships with all the party.

On October 6th, in the afternoon, the interpreters that we sent to the ship belonging to Panov's company returned and four men with them with letters. They wrote that the natives attacked them repeatedly and they found out from one they had caught that the Shugach were planning to concentrate in one place and attack the ships. They had heard nothing from Nagaev and his party.

On the 10th the snow fell and it became colder.

On the 22nd, with a cloudy sky, weather gloomy and a little snow on the ground, foreman Nagaev's party returned. They reported that after exploring the inlet to the northwest they could find no good hunting grounds either on the mainland or on the islands. They found only one small Shugach village. Seeing the Russians coming, the men ran away, leaving women, children and food. Women and some provisions were taken in the baidaras. This village is on a small island. On the night of the 19th these Shugach in great numbers attacked the Russians, killed three men and the woman interpreter from Unalashka, and wounded nine Russians.

Finally they were repulsed by firearms. During this attack the women taken for hostages ran away. Only four women and two small boys were left, and they were brought to the harbor.

NOTES

1. From Tikhmenev, II, Appendix, 1-8.
2. This extract is printed as a curious testimony of the first visit of Russian promyshlennik vessels to the shores of northwestern America and of several attempts by Zaikov to explore Chugach Bay and to investigate the way of life of the natives there, especially since in Berkh's Chronological History of the Discovery of the Aleutian Islands, (p. 108), it is said that little is known of the voyage of the vessel Alexander Nevskii. Until his visit to the American coast navigator Zaikov gathered furs in the Commander Islands from October 1781 until June 1782, and in Kapitanskaia Bay on Unalashka Island from October 15, 1782 until July 1, 1783. (Zaikov's Journal). In a voyage on the vessel Vladimir, between 1772 and 1778, Zaikov reached the Aliaska peninsula and wintered in 1775 in Issanakh strait in a harbor on Unimak Island. As Berkh says (p.90), Zaikov's map of the Aleutian Islands was the first to show the Siberian navigators the true position of the islands of this chain. /See maps by Zaikov in Atlas Geograficheskikh otkrytii v Sibiri i v Severo-zapadnoi Amerike XVII-XVIII vv. (Atlas of geographical discoveries in Siberia and Northwestern America, XVII-XVIII centuries). A.V. Efimov, editor (Moscow, 1964): Map 160, illustrating voyages between 1772 and 1779; Map 161, of the Aleutian Islands, 1779; and Map 158, published in 1782.