

To Explore the STRANGE ISLAND of SAN NICOLAS

An Expedition from the University of California Will Visit the Ghoulish Land that is Spread Over with Skulls and Thighbones of a Lost Race.



SAN NICOLAS ISLAND, LOOKING N.E.

LOS ANGELES, Cal., Oct. 15.—An air of mystery pervades each of the little islands in the scant archipelago off the coast of California. San Clemente Island is strewn with enormous prehistoric mortars and pestles, and here and there are numerous evidences that a giant race lived there before the Portuguese navigator, Cabrillo, sailed for conquest up the coast of Alta California in 1542. Santa Catalina is indented by many strange caves, weird grottoes, where one may see remains of a race of fishers and artisans with shells. San Miguel Island has been the scene of titanic eruptions of ice, water and sand. The grotesque pillars that lift themselves above the island level, the winding caves that twist from the shores into the heart of the island, and the roaring gulches and canyons denote a spot rich in possibilities for both scientist and dreamer. Santa Cruz Island is used as a pasture for thousands of sheep, and it, too, is full of absorbing interest regarding extinct races of aborigines. The Smithsonian Institution scientists have gathered tons of stone, shell and bone utensils and personal ornaments from Santa Cruz.

Most Mysterious of All.

But San Nicolas Island has by far the most abundant evidences of a tribe of unusually tall and strong people who must have vanished almost in a night. Of all the California archipelago this is the most mysterious.

Notwithstanding that the islands known on the Pacific Coast as the Channel Islands are but from 2 to 35 miles out in the blue of the ocean, they seldom are visited. Every few years an exploring expedition goes to them for a season of scientific study, but with the exception of Santa Catalina—a famous summer resort for California pleasure-seekers and anglers—a half-dozen visitors do not land at any of them once a year. Today the islands remain as lonely and desolate as they were long before the first whiteface sailed up the coast—300 years ago. The

islands which occupied them are as much of a mystery as ever, and so far science is baffled in the effort to determine what sort of folk these aboriginal settlers were, how they lived, what they believed, and especially how they so suddenly and completely disappeared from the face of the earth.

The University of California, at Berkeley, is now about to begin the most thorough exploration ever made of San Nicolas Island, which lies 60 miles off the coast of Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties.

Reminders of a Lost Race.

As far back as the memory of any person in Southern California runs, hundreds of white skeletons have dotted the valleys and hillsides of San Nicolas. Strange utensils of serpentine, sandstone and slate are found there among the human bones, and the island and its inhabitants have a history so curious that it is difficult of comprehension.

In 1535 the Franciscan padre in the Santa Barbara Mission, learning that there were but 15 of the strange and almost extinct Indian race then living there, determined to rescue them from the island. They went over in a sloop and succeeded, as they thought, in getting all on board. At the last moment an Indian woman returned for her child, and one of the frequent storms of the Channel Islands springing up, the sloop was driven away without her. The sloop went on the rocks of Point Conception and all on board were lost.

Sixteen years later Captain George Nidever and two men went from the coast on a sloop to hunt sea otter off San Nicolas. On landing, they were, like Crusoe, astonished to find human footprints in the sand. They saw no one, however, and a storm compelled them to put to sea.

The Sole Inhabitant.

It was two years thereafter that the adventurous captain, revolving in his mind the sight of the footprints in the uncanny island, determined to go and discover and bring over the lonely woman of whom he had vaguely heard. Men accompanied him, and at length they saw on the surf-beaten shore a woman, with long, tawny hair, dressed in a queer garb of colored bird skins, and carrying with a bone knife the blubber from a seal.

They surrounded and approached her stealthily, and although suddenly confronted, she did not appear in the least afraid, but smiled, and then falling on her knees, prayed to the sun. She offered no objection when, by signs, she was made to understand that she was to go with them in the boat.

They reached Santa Barbara across the rough sea, and the first thing the Indian woman saw was Dr. S. L. Shaw, now 90 years old, and yet living there, riding a horse. She had never seen or heard of any object like it, and thinking the man and horse were one, she knelt on the shore and offered her devotions to it. Two weeks afterward the last inhabitant of rock-ribbed, tempest-tossed San Nicolas died from eating food to which she was unaccustomed, and which had been furnished by her rescuers, and the curtain fell on her race forever.

In speaking of that death at a meeting

of the Southern California Medical Society the other day, Dr. Walter Lindsey said that, if the woman could have been spared a few years of life, a story of one of the strangest races that ever lived in the Southwest, and that had had no contamination with the whites, might have been learned. The woman, known as the "Lone Woman of San Nicolas," has been the subject of a score of romances and poems and food for a lot of philosophy on the Pacific Coast for years.

San Nicolas is 10 miles long and four miles wide at the widest point. Its topography shows a nearly level plateau, with an elevation of 800 to 1000 feet. Two-thirds of the surface is covered with drifting sand, and the remainder grows a species of nutritious grass and moss, on which a thousand sheep find pasture. Several springs have been discovered, but their water is slightly brackish. Of late years the island is rarely visited, except by sheep-sheepers and shell-gatherers, who make annual trips in schooners, fishing smacks and Chinese junks.

The only safe landing ground at San Nicolas is at Coral Harbor, a pretty cove formed by two sandstone arms thrust out from the main barrier of the shore. The entrance is but six or seven yards across, and the water within is placid as a lake, and sufficiently deep to float a vessel of 20 tons burden.

On the bleak, silvery strip of beach immense white pelicans are to be seen at almost any season of the year, promading with stately dignity. On the approach of a boat they spread their heavy, pointed wings and vanish over the rocks. Further up the shore of the beach there is a dilapidated shearing shed and a weather-worn shanty belonging to Chinese shell-gatherers, who haunt these lonely cliffs during the summer and fall.

Nothing more desolate than the general appearance of the island can be imagined. As far as the eye can trace there are innumerable circular depressions, showing where primitive dwellings once stood. Not a vestige remains of the materials used in the construction of these rancherias. Hundreds of shell mounds are scattered about, and they are found to consist of astonishing numbers of shells of mollusks, the bones of every species of fish found in the channel, skeletons of seals, sea elephants, whales, sea otter, the island fox and various aquatic birds. Without question these animals were used for food by the tribes that once thronged these boundaries. There are also numerous canine skeletons, several of which indicate a species of bull terrier. Judging from the immense quantities of dead land mollusks everywhere, there must have been a time when the island supported luxuriant vegetation. Of all this naught exists today save a few stunted thorn bushes and here and there a cactus forlornly reaching its grotesque arms out of interminable sweeps of sand.

An examination of some of the mounds discloses all sorts of curious utensils, stone cooking pots, water dials, mortars, pestles, drills, bone needles and fishhooks, shell beads, charm stones, pipes, cups and a few arrow heads, spear points and swords made of bone. The absence of any weapons proves the peaceful attributes of the islanders. Small imitations of boats and fish, carved from crystallized stone and serpentine, also show a rudimentary knowledge of the art of sculpture.

In many places conical piles of small black pebbles stretch oddly with the white land. In some instances these are closely packed in abalone shells. No trace is seen of the "brush pens," in which the lone woman of San Nicolas for years

found her only shelter from cutting wind and sand. Nature, ever unkind of the individual, long since merged the superhuman efforts of this courageous life into the universal fate of an entire race. Indeed, every foot of this strange island is eloquent of the extinction of an almost unheard-of people.

A trip along the west coast of San Nicolas Island over a vast extent of shell mounds sets one to wondering how it was possible for a limited population to consume such prodigious numbers of mollusks. In fact, the infinite variety of mollusca on San Nicolas is said by biologists not to be exceeded by any other known region of equal area. The shore line is of course sandstone, burrowed by the pounding surf into fantastic alcoves, bridges, columns and caves.

Nature's Handwork.

Sometimes these savage cuts form rude effigies bearing a surprising likeness to living creatures. One of the most conspicuous is the exact counterpart of the neck, breast and body of a bird, with an alert, hooded head. This piece of nature's sculpturing must be 40 feet long, and, beheld from a distance, it looks quite as perfect as if fashioned by man. There are hundreds of photographs of this freak of nature sold all over California.

Going westward from this gnarled, fluted wall, the ground makes a gentle descent to a wide mesa, terminating in a steep escarpment. The atmosphere from this elevation is so deliciously clear that the eye can readily distinguish the peak tops of all the Channel Islands, several of them being 40 miles away. Immediately at one's feet there stretches away a dreary desert of stupendous barrenness.

A singular characteristic of the place is heaps of the bones of whales, their arrangement and packing so systematic, as to be correct as to have withstood a century's sweep of winds over this exposed point. But one human skeleton has ever been found in this part of the island, and its bleached, dismembered aspect was in keeping with the driven desolateness of

the spot. The merciless blast had piled the sand dunes all about, but spread no kindly drift over this "rough sketch of man."

All around are the casts of roots of trees in the shifting sand, ranging from coarse fiber to several inches in diameter. These semi-perforations are all intact, the wind having swept them clean of the loose earth. They yield a metallic ring when tapped with a rock or shell.

A still more remarkable feature of this desert is a sparse stone forest, the broken columns or trunks of trees composed of indurated sand.

At the extreme west end of the island there is a colossal precipice 100 feet in height, its channeled and tilted face softened by a luxuriant growth of emerald moss and lichens.

The most ghoulish of all the sights on this strange island is to be seen on the broad plateau, on the south side of the Chinese Camp, at Coral Harbor. Here acres of the naked sand are littered with hundreds of disjointed skeletons, and present the most reckless illustration of the "ground plan" of humanity that imagination can picture. Measurements have been made by several scientists of the thigh, leg and arm bones, and literally bushels of skulls and other parts of the human frame have been brought to Los Angeles from San Nicolas for investigation.

The general opinion is that the physique of the Indian race that swarmed once over the island was much larger than that of any civilized race of the present, and that some of the aborigines must have been 7 feet 3 inches tall. The skulls of the extinct tribe often measure several inches more around than the large skulls of today. Many skulls found lying about on the island show that their possessors must have suffered death from a club or blunt battle ax. No one has ever yet found a skull on San Nicolas that shows marks of a bullet.

There are many collar bones and shoulder blades broken and crushed, which would make it appear that their owners were slain with some such weapon as a war club or bowlder. Scientists say that the favorite weapon of the Aleutian savage tribes a century or more ago was a club or bludgeon, and this fact fits with the stray tradition that the Aleut came down and completely destroyed the original inhabitants on the Channel Islands about the year 1570.

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LOOTING OF CHINESE IMPERIAL SUMMER PALACE IN 1860.

WASHINGTON, Oct. 7.—The just-published annual report of the Smithsonian Institution contains an unusually large number of articles of popular interest, perhaps the most remarkable of which, in some ways, is a vivid account of the looting of the Summer Palace, so called, of the Chinese Emperor, near Peking, on the occasion of the expedition undertaken against China by France and England in 1860. The writer, Count D'Herisson, acted as secretary and interpreter to the French commander, General Montauban, and, in view of what he occurred within the last year, his narrative offers abundant confirmation of the time-worn saying that history repeats itself. Curiously enough, however, no note has apparently been previously been taken in this country of the fact that such a record existed.

The Summer Palace had been abandoned by the Emperor, Hien-Pong, on the approach of the allies, and measures were taken by General Montauban and his English colleague, General Grant, to guard it against pillage. To Count D'Herisson, as a Frenchman, it recalled in many respects the palace at Versailles, built by Louis XIV—a resemblance which he explains by the influence of the Jesuits, who had maintained an almost semi-sovereign state at Peking until the suppression of their order in 1764.

For the splendor which he found within, the enthusiasm of Count D'Herisson can hardly find adequate words. "There," he says, speaking of one of the outer

precious stones and fine fabrics presented by tributary Princes, and all that the Kings and Emperors of Europe had sent to Hien-Pong and his predecessors, all the bric-a-brac and curiosities, as well as all the goods which the simple-minded merchant, wishing to obtain rights in the land, had brought to the emperor to propitiate the sovereign. Everything was preserved with care and equally honored, from a cloth of gold ornamented with pearls, which had come, perhaps, from the Sublime Porte, up to a doll that cried "papa" and "mamma" which a Marcelline captain had taken from his little daughter at Christmas and carried to China to "grease the palm" of the chief Mandarin. This multitude of treasures had overflowed the private apartments of the sovereign and his wives and spread itself into these immense cathedral halls. The spectacle was at once extraordinary and dazzling—dazzling from the richness of the articles, extraordinary from their number and variety.

But this magnificence was as nothing compared with the splendors of the throne-room itself. In a small oratory to the left of the throne, for example, the walls, the ceilings, the dressing tables, the chairs, the footstools, were all in gold, studded with gems. Rows of small gods in massive gold were carved with such wonderful skill that their artistic value was far beyond their intrinsic worth.

On supports of jade were two pagodas of enameled gold, "as large as cornucopias," with seven superposed roofs, from each of which pear-shaped pearls hung like so many bells. In another oratory, resembling the interior of a monstrance, were gathered all the articles for the Emperor's daily use when occupying the throne-room—his tea service, his cups, his

pipes, the bowls of which were gold or silver, and the long tubes enriched with coral, jade, rubies, sapphires, and little tufts of many-colored silk; his ceremonial chaplets of rows of pearls as large as nuts. Here also were his speaking trumpets of silver gilt, which he used at times the better to impress his audience.

"I shall not attempt to portray," says Count D'Herisson, "the wonder and admiration of the 'barbarians' who penetrated into these precincts. Involuntarily we spoke in low tones, and began to walk on tiptoe, on seeing before us such a profusion of riches, for the possession of which mortals fight and die, and which their conquerors had abandoned in their flight as indifferently as a citizen closes the door of his house, leaving his mahogany bureau exposed to all the chances of war. All was so natural, so familiar, so commonplace to him, that he did not even try to save these treasures."

In the rooms of the Empress, the walls of the closets of the secretaries were furnished from top to bottom with pigeon-holes, in which, one above another, like files of lawyers' briefs were red boxes of old lacquer of Peking, wonderfully engraved in intaglio, containing ornaments, necklaces and bracelets in pearls, in jade, in precious stones, tiny rings for feminine fingers, and huge ones of jade for men when they drew the strings of their bows. Other boxes were crowded with artistic objects, with materials to be transformed into jewels, with unique specimens of transparent jade, of rock crystal, of milky jade, of moss agates, of uncut diamonds, of precious stones still in their natural state.

"On opening any one of these boxes," says Count D'Herisson, "it appeared to send out sparks and sheaves of light. Beyond, great wardrobes of old lacquer

set into the walls contained the garments of the Empress, both those for daily use and for ceremonious occasions—enough to dress from head to foot 10,000 Princesses from the Arabian Nights. Everything was silk, satin, damask, fur, with embroideries sometimes as delicate as spider's webs, sometimes as heavy as those on bishop's copes."

But it is necessary to pass to the Count's story of the loot itself. It began, it appears, according to the most approved psychological formulae. The Generals had given orders to remove the articles of value systematically, and the work had been begun. The troops—French, English, Arabs, Sikhs, Chinese coolies, cavalry, infantry, and artillery—thus had an opportunity to estimate the value of the treasure which the palace contained. And there was some natural grumbling. Suddenly it was learned that a mob of Chinese pillagers had scaled a wall on the other side, and must be turned out. There was an alarm of fire, causing the obvious thought, "These Chinese will cabbage everything," or "The rascals are going to burn everything."

The action followed the thought—a mad, indiscriminate scramble in which every man endeavored to seize what he could. "What could the general or his officers do?" asks Count D'Herisson. "Absolutely nothing. If they had tried to stem the torrent, they would have been swept away by the rush; they would have compromised their influence and reputation, and with it the future of the expedition. With us, as with the English, the Generals had only one thing to do, to shut their eyes."

"It was one of those psychological moments in military life when, as Count von Bismarck said later, the artificial regulations as well as armies disappear, leaving primitive human nature in all its credulity and absolute surrender to its free instincts. Such moments occur at two points in the history of armies—in overruling defeat and in supreme victory, and at such times there are no longer regulations or authority."

From the very first moment, it is amusing to note, the French soldiers went on the theory of each man for himself, while the English systematized the pillage, arriving in squads, like gangs of workmen, with men carrying large sacks and commanded by non-commissioned officers, who even brought with them jeweler's touchstones, with which to test the quality of their booty.

"I was simply an onlooker," says Count D'Herisson, "a disinterested, but curious spectator—and I enjoyed this strange, unforgettable vision. There was this anti-rep of men of every color, of every race, this entanglement of individuals from every nation on the earth, swarming on the mound of riches, hurrying in all the languages of the globe, hurrying, struggling, stumbling, falling, picking themselves up, swearing, cursing, exclaiming, while each carried off something. I say it looked like an ant-heap, crushed under one's foot, where the terrified workers fly in every direction, one with a grain of wheat, another with a bag, another with an egg."

"There were troopers, their heads buried in the boxes of red lacquer belonging to the Empress; others, half smothered in the folds of brocade and of pieces of silk; still others, who had placed rubies, sapphires, pearls, and rock crystals in their pockets, in their hats, in their cloaks and who hung around their necks strings of great pearls. Others carried off clocks and dials in their arms."

"The sappers of the engineers had brought their axes and broke up the

furniture to secure the precious stones with which they were encrusted. There was one smashing a lovely Louis XV clock to secure the face, on which the hours were marked with crystal figures, which even brought with them jeweler's touchstones, with which to test the quality of their booty."

When the Count returned to camp, after an agreeable adventure in rescuing 27 ladies of the Emperor's harem, night was falling. The men came back loaded with booty, bearing the most heterogeneous collection of articles from silver saucers to astronomical telescopes and sextants—a prodigious mass of material which it would have been impossible to carry away.

Count D'Herisson noted one curious fact. "Nothing," he says, "temporarily, but the clock struck continuously. In every tone, at all hours, now and then accompanied by the sad snap of a spring broken by inexperienced hands. Multitudes of rabbits playing on their tambourines formed a base, accompanied by the cymbals of monkeys playing four thousand waltzes and quadrilles, together with as many music boxes, which dominated the cuckoo clocks, sweet notes of the flute, the nasal notes of the clarinet, the screeching of the cocks, the notes of horns and cornets, as well as the hearty bursts of laughter coming from the easily amused crowd. It was a nightmare."

The pillage lasted two days, when, by the exercise of a little tact, it was stopped. A few days later the Summer Palace was burned, by order of the Generals, "as an act of public and authorized vengeance for the murder and torture of members of the allied forces."

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