



Short Wave

San Juan Island National Historical Park

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THIS WEEK: AUG.29-SEPT. 3, 2011



Belle Vue Sheep Farm was a thriving establishment when this photo was taken by an unknown photographer in October 1859. The cabin at far right was the home/office of the farm's first agent, Charles John Griffin. The men at far right in the photo are (from left) British Magistrate John de Courcy and U.S. Magistrate Henry Crosby. This was also the home of the defunct pig!

Belle Vue Sheep Farm established for politics and cold cash

Belle Vue Sheep Farm was a thriving concern when U.S. Navy Ensign James Madison Alden painted the site during the height of the Pig War crisis in October 1859. The watercolor (middle column) shows the five cabins and three visible out buildings that composed the "Home Establishment" overlooking the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the Olympic Mountains.

For years this was the only image of Belle Vue Sheep Farm as an active facility until a photograph dated September 1859 was discovered in recent years in a scrapbook housed in the collections of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. The image, looking north from Grandma's Cove, shows the same number of buildings, but reveals tidy houses rather than the

rough cabins described in some written accounts of the period.

The farm was established Dec. 15, 1853 on San Juan island by order of James Douglas, chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company and governor of the crown colony of Vancouver Island. His primary purpose was to solidify Great Britain's claim to the island, which had been in dispute



with the United States since the

1846 Treaty of Oregon.

But the station prospered and by September 1859 boasted not only 4,500 head of sheep (up from precisely 1,369 in 1853), but three outlying stations on the island. These included the current site of Friday Harbor, the alpaca ranch just south of English Camp and San Juan Valley, which Griffin and his herds-men called Oak Prairie.

All that is left of the complex today is a crumbling piece of masonry at American Camp, by a flagpole.

But thanks to the photograph, we've learned the Belle Vue Farm sheep pens were girded by massive log fences, while white picket fences defined the cabin areas.

San Francisco's Daily Alta California reported that on October 29, 1859 a naval officer aboard HMS *Satellite* possessed a camera kit and took several images of the camp while the reporter was present. This possibly was Royal Navy Lt. Richard Roche, RN, well known as an amateur photographer. It is likely, though not certain, that he took the Belle Vue photo, besides those that have been positively identified as his work. We're fortunate someone had the foresight to consider the camera as well as the sketchpad as a way of documenting a scene for future reference.

English Camp to remain open through Labor Day, visitor center operations then on winter schedule

San Juan island National Historical Park's Interpretation division will revert to winter schedule beginning September 6.

That means the visitor contact station in English Camp's Royal Marine barracks will close for winter. The exception will be the annual Holiday Social, scheduled noon to 3 p.m. in the barracks. The English Camp grounds will remain open

from 8 a.m. to dusk.

The American Camp visitor center will remain open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Grounds are open from dawn until 11 p.m.

To schedule a ranger guided walk in the park or a presentation for groups or in the classroom, contact the visitor center at 360-378-2240, extension 2233.

English Camp Visitor Center
3905 West Valley Road
(360) 378-4409, Open 9-5 Daily

For dates and times of weekly programs go to www.nps.gov/sajh or visit us on Facebook or Twitter.

American Camp Visitor Center
4668 Cattle Point Road
(360) 378-2240, ext. 2233, Open 9-5 daily