

Sir english
gentleman, who was
tried and executed



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Sir Francis DrakeBy Mussie SahleLate in 1577, Francis Drake left England with five ships, ostensibly on a trading expedition to the Nile. On reaching Africa, the true destination was revealed to be the Pacific Ocean via the Strait of Magellan, to the dismay of some of the accompanying gentlemen and sailors.

Still in the eastern Atlantic, a Portuguese merchant ship and its pilot - who was to stay with Drake for 15 months - was captured, and the fleet crossed the Atlantic, via the Cape Verde Islands, to a Brazilian landfall. Running down the Atlantic South American coast, storms, separations, dissension, and a fatal skirmish with natives marred the journey. Before leaving the Atlantic, Drake lightened the expedition by disposing of two unfit ships and one English gentleman, who was tried and executed for mutiny. After rallying his men and unifying his command with a remarkable speech, Drake renamed his flagship, previously the Pelican, the Golden Hind. In September of 1578, the fleet, now three ships, sailed through the deadly Strait of Magellan with speed and ease, only to emerge into terrific Pacific storms. For two months the ships were in mortal danger, unable to sail clear of the weather or to stay clear of the coast. The ships were scattered, and the smallest, the Marigold, went down with all hands. The Elizabeth found herself back in the strait and turned tail for England, where she arrived safely but in disgrace.

Meanwhile, the Golden Hind had been blown far to the south, where Drake discovered - perhaps - that there was open water below the South American continent. The storms abated, and the Golden Hind was finally able to sail north along the Pacific South American coast, into the previously undisturbed private waters of King Philip of Spain. The first stop, for food and water, was

at the (now) Chilean Island of Mocha, where the rebellious residents laid a nearly disastrous ambush, having mistaken the English for their Spanish oppressors. After this bad beginning in the Pacific the tide turned, and for the next five and a half months Drake raided Spanish settlements at will, among them Valpariso, Lima and Arica, and easily took Spanish ships, including the rich treasure ship "Cacafuego," leaving panic, chaos, and a confused pursuit in his wake. During this time, he captured and released a number of Europeans, whose subsequent testimony survives. The plundering was remarkable for its restraint; neither the Spanish nor the natives were intentionally harmed, there was very little violence, and there were very few casualties.

Drake's crew in the Pacific was of unknown number, with estimates ranging from around sixty to one hundred men. After stopping to make repairs at an island, Cano, off the coast of Southern Mexico and after a final raid, on the nearby (now vanished) town of Guatulco, the Golden Hind, awash with booty, including perhaps twenty-six tons of silver, sailed out of Spanish waters in April of 1579. As she left the sight of all Spanish observers, and of the captured Portuguese pilot who had been set ashore, she was accompanied by a small captured ship, crewed by Drake's men, which was kept for an unknown time. Sailing first westerly and then northerly, well off the shore of North America, the leaking Golden Hind reached a northernmost position variously reported as between 48 degrees and 42 degrees north latitude, a range which includes most of Washington, all of Oregon, and a sliver of California.

There, somewhere in the region he named Nova Albion, in the strangely cold and windy June of 1579, Drake found a harbor - reportedly at 48, 44, 38 1/2, or 38 degrees. He stayed in this now lost harbor for over five weeks, repairing the Golden Hind and enjoying extensive and peaceful contact with the Indians. Before he left he set up a monument, in the form of an engraved metal plate, which has never been found.

After stopping briefly at some nearby islands to fill out his larder, Drake turned his back to America and sailed into the vast Pacific. The crossing was uneventful, and landfall was made in sixty eight days, at a location which, like the Lost Harbor, remains elusive. The next months were spent puttering about in the Indonesian archipelago, making promising commercial contacts, local political alliances and trading for spices - and again entering the sight of witnesses.

Difficulty in finding a route through the thousands of islands nearly ended the journey in January of 1580, when the Golden Hind ran hard onto a reef in apparent open water; but after several desperate days a change of wind brought salvation. Continuing westward, the Golden Hind crossed the Indian Ocean without incident, rounded the Cape of Good Hope into the Atlantic, sailed up the coast of Africa, and arrived triumphantly in England in the fall of 1580, nearly three years and some 36, 000 miles having passed beneath her keel.