

500 years of Sierra Club outings

Most people do not realize it, but the Sierra Club is 500 years old. Yes, I know you will say that we are celebrating the centennial in 1992, not the quincentennial. You are correct that in 1892 John Muir founded what he called the Sierra Club in California, but as historical research has shown, he was merely continuing in America an organization that had begun in Spain 400 years earlier. The name is a giveaway: it's Spanish. Muir didn't speak Spanish, but he wanted to continue a centuries-old tradition of outdoor adventure.

Research conducted by the Delta Sierran, on the centennial of Muir's work and the quincentennial of Columbus's first voyage has uncovered some remarkable facts. Old documents in Madrid, Seville, and Genoa reveal that the first voyage of Columbus was a Sierra Club outing.

The November/December 1491 edition of Sierra magazine (published in those days by the Ferdy-Isabel chapter) lists among its Spring and Summer trips the following:

ATLANTIC OCEAN AND THE SPICE ISLANDS

This trip is for the experienced ocean adventurer. We will leave from the west coast port of Palos on August 3rd and sail across the Ocean Blue to India, China, and the Spice Islands, taking a unique westward track to arrive at the same sites that Marco Polo reached by hiking overland to the east. We will first stop in the picturesque Canary Islands to replenish water and supplies. This trip is based on the assumed (but unproved) spherical shape of the world. There is an outside chance that we may sail off the edge of the earth, but the possibility is quite remote.

Trip participants nevertheless will be asked to sign a waiver releasing the Sierra Club from liability should a ship sail off the edge. The ships for this trip are the caravels Nina and Pinta and the nao Santa Maria (Spanish registry). Leader: Christopher Columbus. Chris is an experienced navigator and ocean explorer, occasionally referred to as "Admiral of the Ocean Seas." Send your deposit of 5 ducats to Chris at 101 Via Salami, Genoa.

Deeper research into Columbus's secret logbook (he kept two logs, a fake one to show the crew and one that was accurate but hidden) uncovered even more astounding findings. The first landfall was made on October 12 because, on October 11, Columbus had retrieved a floating bottle that contained a brochure and a map with the caption "It's Better In The Bahamas!" Columbus immediately changed course to take advantage of the off-season rates.

The secret log also describes the explorers' meeting with the inhabitants. A rough translation: "A group of the inhabitants of the islands greeted us and identified themselves as an Association of Indigenous Persons with the curious name of "Pee-Cee." They insisted that they were not a "tribe" and were offended when we referred to them as "Redskins." The Pee-Cee have names reflecting their identity with the natural world. Their "facilitator" (she refused the title of "chief" as too authoritarian) was "Spotted Owl," and other members of the group were "Dances-with-Excluded Turtles," "Endangered-Species-Who-Moans," and "Gay Beaver."

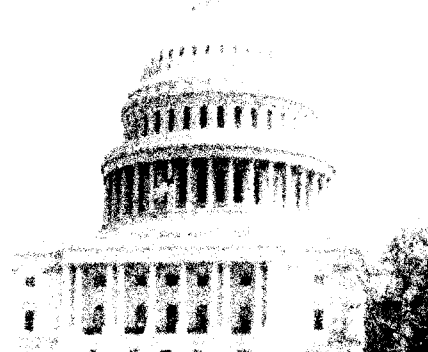
Columbus's log also discussed the bags of trash on the beach, stacked in neat piles ready for disposal. He learned from his new friends, the Pee-Cee, that around the time of the autumnal equinox there is a great gathering and celebration on the beaches, during which there is singing and dancing and eating after the beach has been cleared of trash.

The Pee-Cee explained to Columbus that scheduling a beach sweep during the hurricane season usually results in nature clearing the beach first, leaving more time for the party. Columbus apparently recommended this pagan, but fun, celebration to Sierra Club headquarters because the tradition continues today.

When the Delta Sierran researchers uncover more mysteries of Columbus's voyages, you will read about them here first. △

-Earl Higgins

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