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Report of a Reconnaissance Through the Country Around Cape

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LOST AND FOUND

In January, 1857 Thomas J. Henley, Superintendent of Indian Affairs in California, engaged James Tobin, a local merchant and sometime Indian agent, to explore the coast north of the recently established Mendocino Reservation and report on the number and condition of Indian groups in the region. Tobin's short report, which was originally printed as part of the Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1857, provides an interesting (though perhaps occasionally exaggerated) glimpse of a relatively pristine area of the state on the brink of significant change. It is accompanied here by a map (NARA RG 75, Treasure File, Map #194) that Tobin prepared sometime after writing his report, and which was embellished by wash drawings created by artist Alexander Edouart. Tobin also served as the guide for the 1857 "Mendocino Hunting Party" that was later painted by Edouart (Rogers 1968) and documented by Edward Vischer (1858); Vischer's account contains a valuable contemporary description of life on the Mendocino Reservation. Three years later, Tobin provided key testimony (1860) to the legislative committee investigating the causes of the so-called "Mendocino War."

The map, which is printed here in sections for purposes of legibility, was published in its original colors but in a reduced format by Rogers (1968). It is reproduced here courtesy of the NARA, College Branch, Maryland, Cartographic Research Branch.

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Report of a Reconnaissance Through the Country Around Cape Mendocino

James Tobin

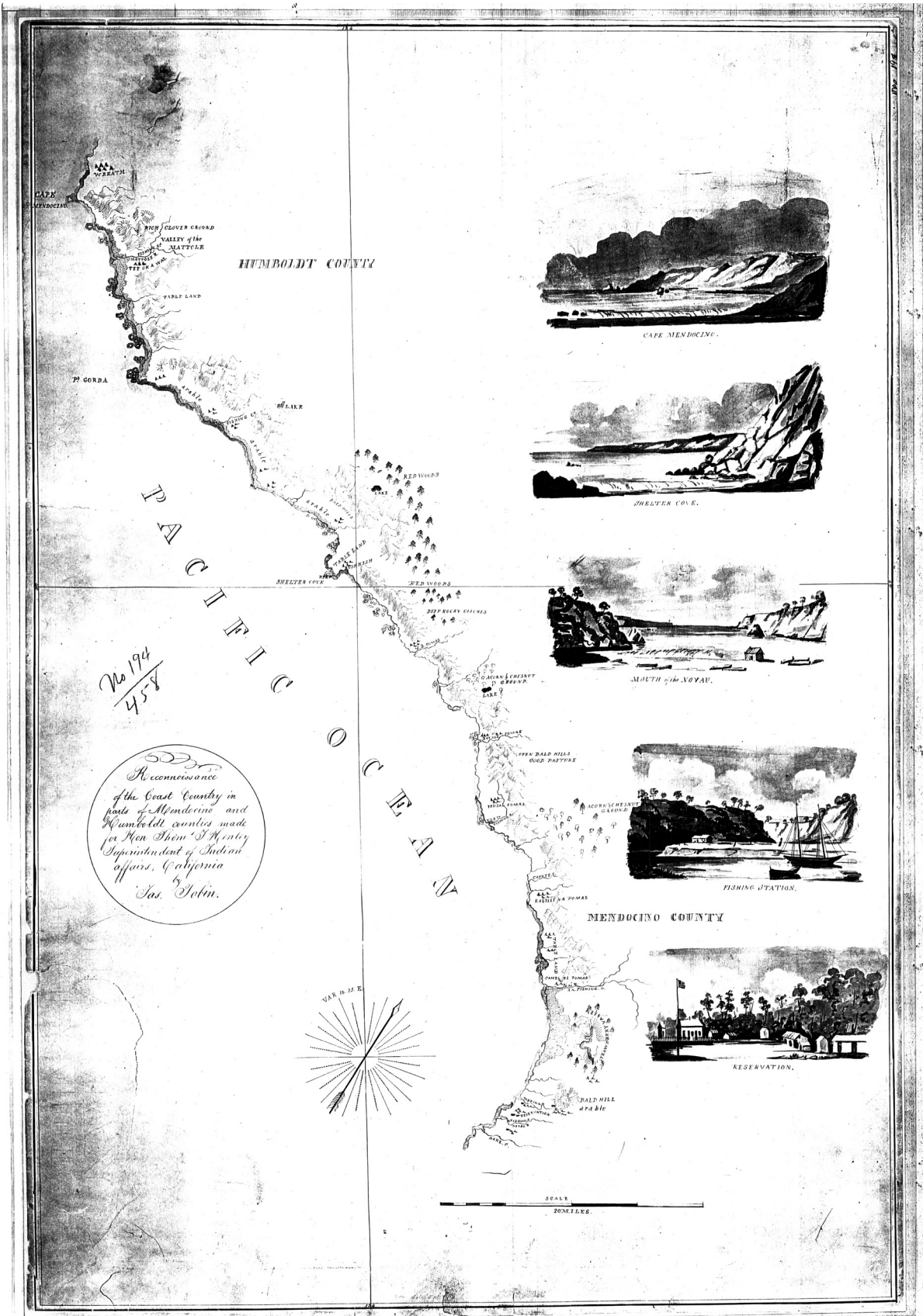
San Francisco, April 29, 1857

Sir: In accordance with the proposition made by me upon the 8th of January, I proceeded to the Indian reservation of Mendocino, and made an exploration and reconnaissance of the coast country as far north as Cape Mendocino. The accompanying sketches can be relied upon as correct in every particular. I have had the opportunity of seeing this country in its worst aspect and most inclement season, viz: the months of January, February, and March, and of ascertaining much of its capabilities.

From the next tribe above the reservation, the "Camel-el-poma," I took an Indian who understood and spoke the Chiabel-na-poma, a language with which I was myself somewhat familiar. He obtained two or three from the next tribe to the north to accompany us, and they, again, others from the succeeding tribe. In this manner we proceeded to the cape, where, through the medium of five or six interpreters, I was able to hold intelligent communication with the Indians of that locality. Our interpreters were subsequently rewarded with a few beads and some shirts, which they received with great demonstrations of pleasure.

We met with very little opposition to our progress. Although ordered back by almost every new tribe we encountered, we soon disarmed opposition by an exhibition of our skill as riflemen among the game of the forest, while the stories told of our prowess by the Indians who accompanied us, so won their regard that they treated us with great consideration, and usually escorted us to the limit of their territory, beyond which they would not venture.

They had never seen a white man or a gun, and generally fell to the earth trembling on hearing the first discharge. On witnessing its effect upon the deer, elk, bear, and seal, of which we shot great numbers, their astonishment and admiration knew no bounds.



TREASURE FILE
FIG 735 SERIES C.M.F.
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It was then they seemed to understand what had before perplexed their feeble comprehension, how our little band of six men could travel through their country so fearlessly and independently.

I planted wheat, oats, peach stones, and seeds of various kinds, at every camp; and, lest their curiosity might frustrate the design, I planted duplicates at night, unobserved by them. I also distributed a few beads, jewsharps, and other trifles among them, and told them “the great white captain,” who had charge of all the Indians, would come and see them at some future time, at which they appeared greatly pleased.

We kept them well supplied, during our stay, with venison and bear meat, and gave them the skins. In short, we made such a favorable impression upon them that they were very sorry to have us go away. Captain Ford, the very able and efficient officer in charge of the reservation, sent with me one of his hunters to look for good hunting grounds, convenient to a landing, in order to save packing. This he succeeded in finding at a point about thirty miles to the north of the reservation.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
JAS. TOBIN

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

The crops on the reservation look well, and a large yield may be expected.

From “Ten Mile river” towards the north, the country of the Camel-el-pomas, there is a tract of very fertile land, ten miles in extent, having a flat or gently rolling portion from half a mile to two miles wide, stretching from the coast to the foot of Bald Hills, where the finest pasture can be had at all seasons. There is but one big gulch on it. In the next ten miles, still proceeding northward, there are fine fishing streams, where salmon and other fish can be caught in great quantities. This tract is rather hilly, and vast portions of it are covered with acorns and chestnuts to such an extent that our horses would occasionally walk on them for several minutes without touching the ground. This is the country of the Yon-sal-pomas and the Bay-ma-pomas.

We found a very good summer harbor here, and were much astonished at the quantity of sharks. As far as the eye could reach, on either side, the shore was lined with them, for a distance varying from one hundred

yards to a quarter of a mile. They were of enormous dimensions, being at least twice the size of the largest I ever saw in the West Indies.

I went down on the beach to examine them more closely, and came to the conclusion that they were fishing, as the shore was strewn thickly with the heads of large-sized codfish, upon which the crows, gulls, and coyotes were feasting. We came to the conclusion that a vast codfishery could be established here. We named the place Shark Bay. In this last stretch there is much fine arable land.

The country for the next ten miles is rough, with occasional fine valleys and fishing streams, bald hills with good pasture, and also acorn and chestnut ground.

We now come into the Shelter Cove country, where the Kush-Kish Indians live—a country of surpassing richness, where vegetation is at least six weeks earlier than in the section south of it.

Vast fields, extending thousands of acres, were covered with a most luxuriant growth of clover, reaching to our knees, in the early part of February. In fact, there is a marked change in the climate, it being much milder from this point up to Cape Mendocino. This may, perhaps, be accounted for, from the fact that the prevalent winds are from the northeast, from which the lofty cape and Cape mountains shelter all in the immediate vicinity to the south.

Here is a place where thousands could be subsisted, and where a white man never before crossed. There are also here a good summer harbor and landing. Proceeding to the north, we crossed many fine fishing streams, and vast tracts of arable land, bald hills without end, and pasture of the finest kind.

The deer were in herds from twenty to two hundred, and we would often shoot as many as we wanted from one band—so tame were they from never having been hunted before.

The elk are numerous, and we saw as many as three bears at one time. Of the latter we shot several large ones, much to the delight and astonishment of the Indians, the Yee-ok-a-wall tribe. The redwoods here run out, and are replaced by a kind of yellow fir, while the flats are studded with cottonwood.

The country back of Point Gorda is of the same character as that last described.

Next comes the Matole river and the valley of the Matole, extending back about twenty-five miles. It consists of rich bottom and rolling land, capable of

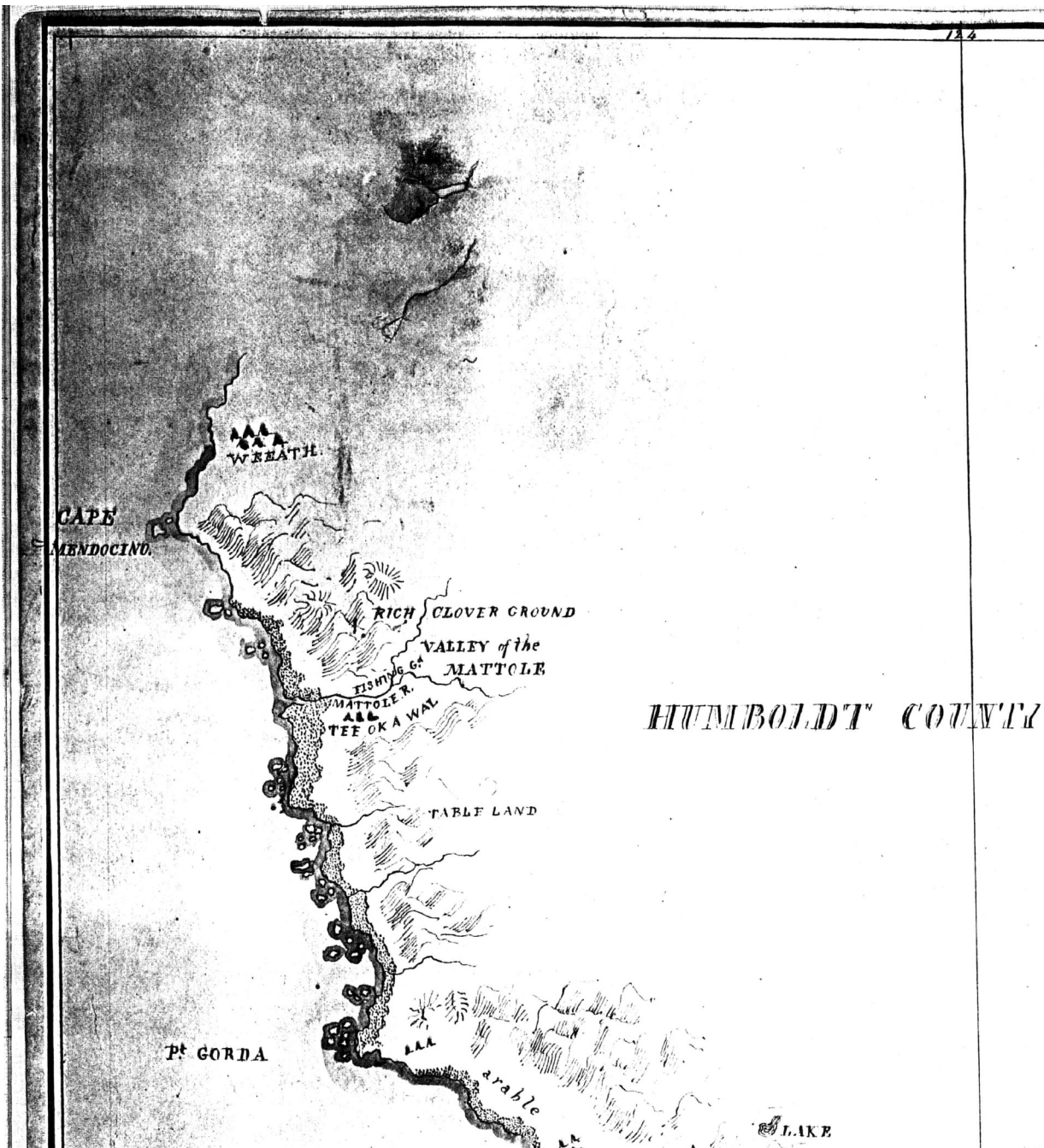
producing any kind of grain, as well as Indian corn, melons, &c. This fact I learned from an old acquaintance, whom I met back in the valley of the Matole. He had been living there alone for a year, and stated that no frost comes until after the first rain. The Matole river is, perhaps, the best fishing station on the coast, and the Indians catch a great many fish in baskets and nets.

Cape Mendocino, the country of the Yeeath Indians. — Instead of finding it a rocky, bleak, barren, and brushy

mountain, we were agreeably surprised to discover it was the very opposite, being a beautiful, bald hill, covered with fine clover and other grasses, and decked with most gorgeous flowers.

We here planted our flag on the extreme western point of the United States, and gave three cheers for Uncle Sam.

Throughout this entire route there is a line of snowy hills, varying from ten to fifty miles from the coast.



Wherever we went we found the rocks along the shore covered with mussels.

The natives, generally speaking, appear to be fat, living comfortably on the products of the forests, the soil, and the water.

Whenever I planted seed, I explained fully to them their use, at which they seemed much pleased.

Within the stretch between the coast and the line of snow hills I have before mentioned, there are many rich

and extensive valleys, having room sufficient for a large number of Indians. Should you desire, at some future period, any information concerning them, I shall be most happy to make the exploration and report.

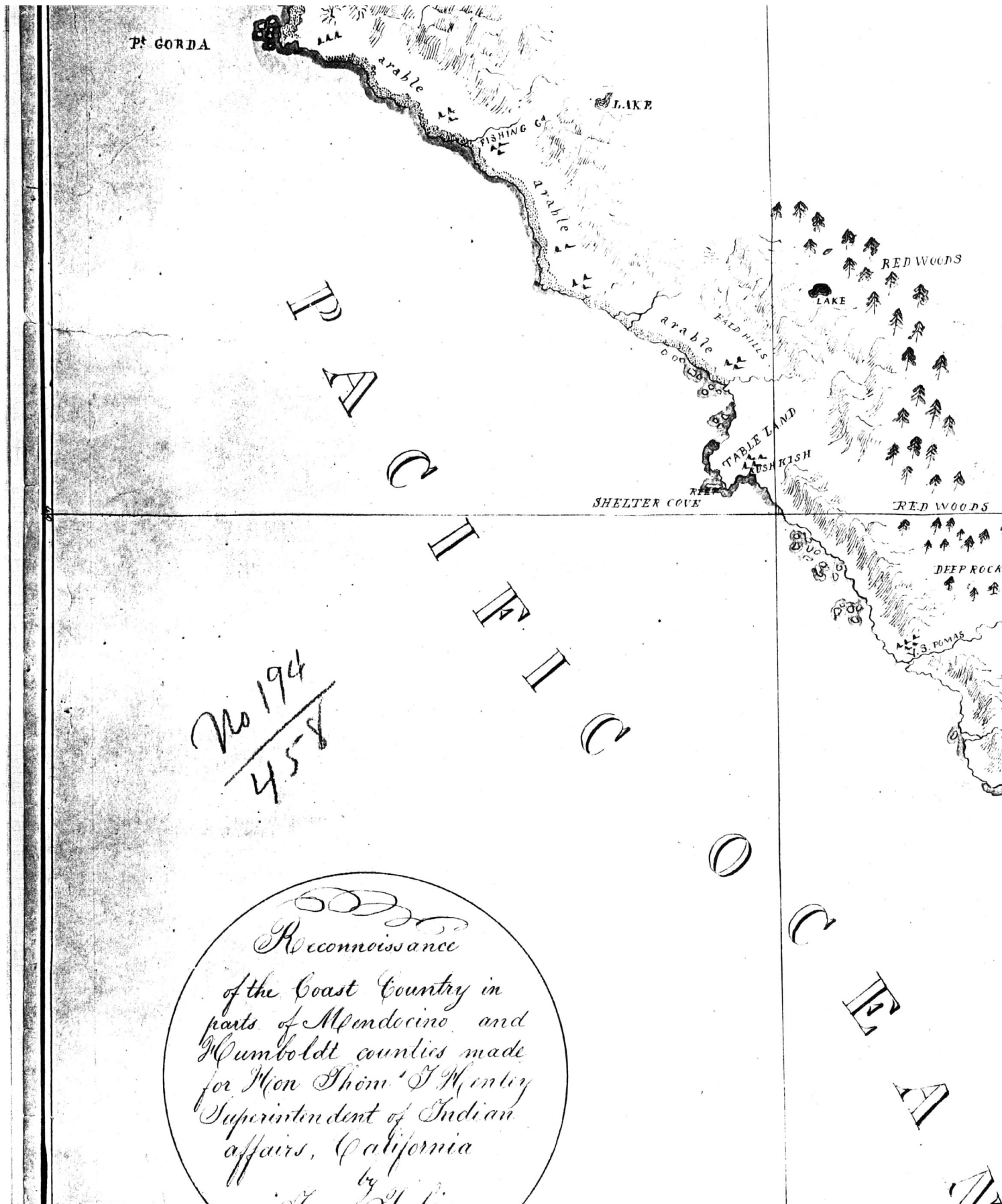
Respectfully, JAS. TOBIN



CAPE MENDOCINO.



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RED WOODS

LAKE

arable
FISHING
arable
arable
TABLE LAND
SHELTER COVE

RED WOODS

DEEP ROCK

Mt. S. FOMAS

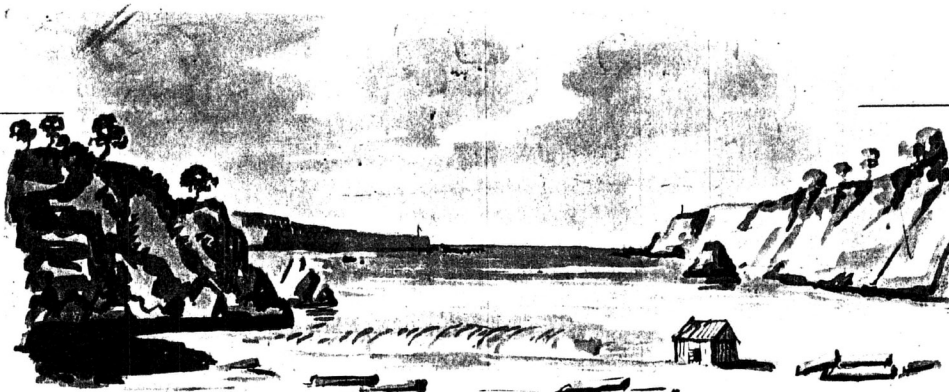
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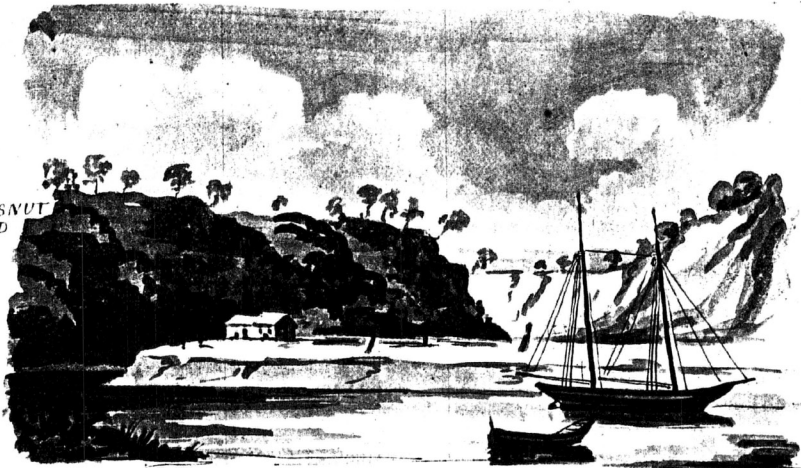
Reconnaissance
 of the Coast Country in
 parts of Mendocino and
 Humboldt counties made
 for Hon. Thom. S. Montez
 Superintendent of Indian
 affairs, California
 by J. P.



SHELTER COVE.

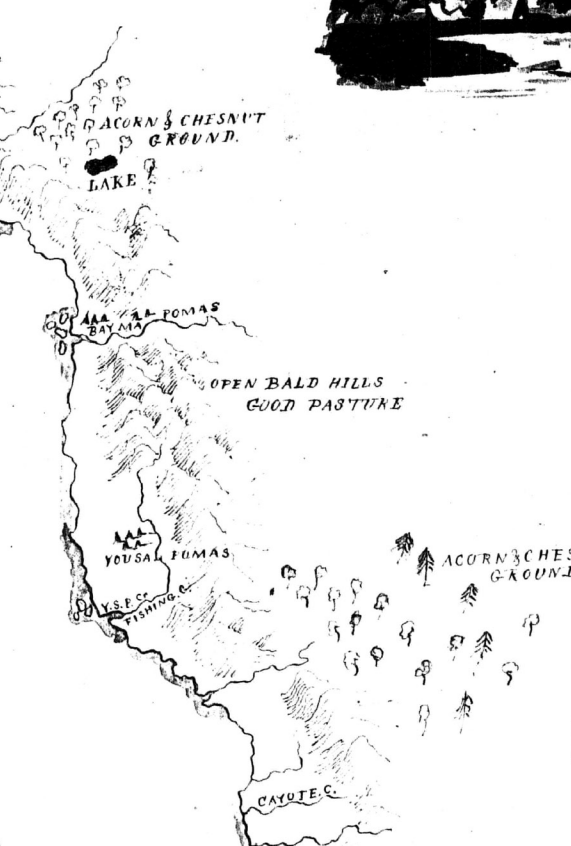


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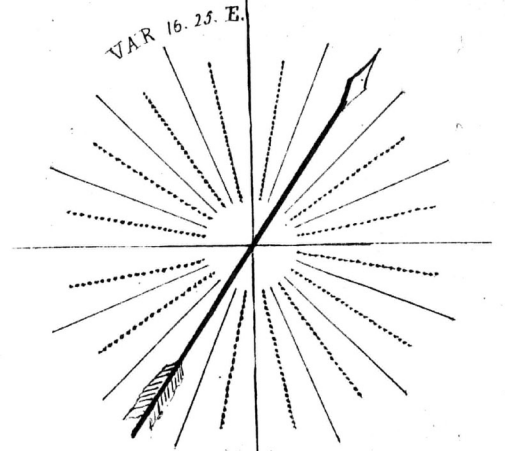


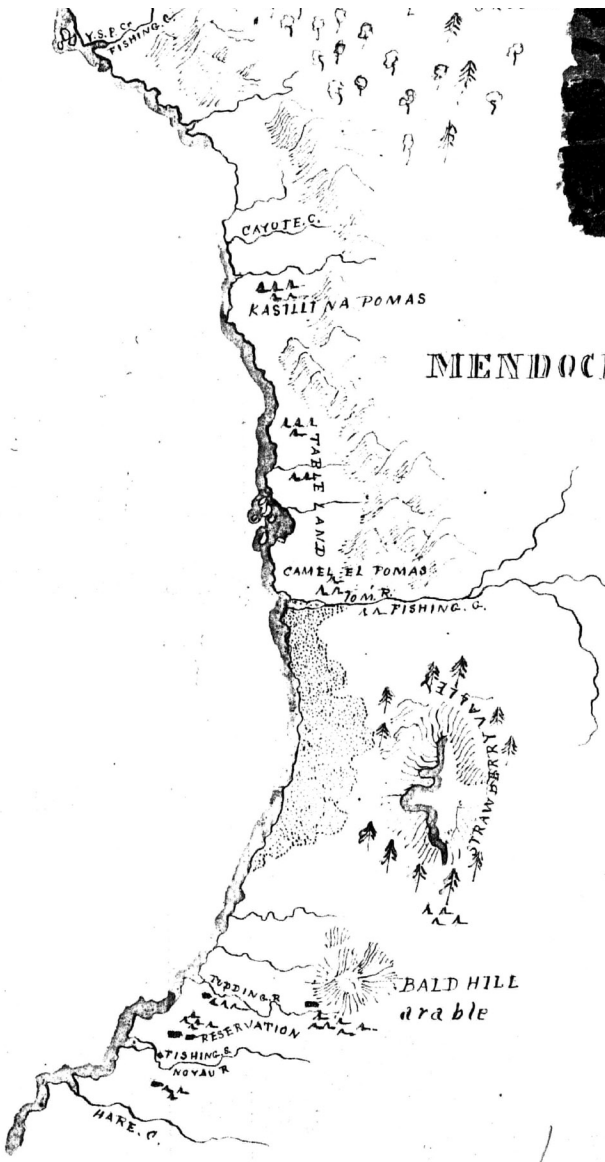
FISHING STATION.

Y GULCHES



plans of ~~the~~ Humboldt counties made
for Hon Thom^s Hentley
Superintendent of Indian
affairs, California
by
Jas. Tobin.





FISHING STATION.



RESERVATION.

SCALE

20 MILES.