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‘The Legend’. *True or False?*

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Edmund’s Almanac, 2007 Edition (The Origins of English Phrases): “Who knows what time it is”. Originally from the call response phrase play of Shakespeare’s ‘The Tempest’: “Only the Captain knows what time it is”.

This Caribbean treasure legend lives, to this day, on the disputed territory of the Mystery Caye. Captain Morgan, the ‘Pirate’s Pirate’, died on the full moon of October 2nd, 1777, battling, standing on the Great Barrier Reef itself, amidst the tempest ‘Prospero’. He was hatched to death, along with his trusted liger, Henry the VIII, by the infamous marauder - a giant, named only as ‘John the Conk’, a conk shell diver and fisherman from Guatemala.



Captain Morgan’s death, however, remains a mystery to this very day, as Guatemala’s, US supported, ‘Sand Fly Islands Claim’ continues in the international courts, as the longest standing territorial dispute between these two nations. In a bizarre series of circumstances, and events, the very existence of modern day Belize, as the most recent country member of the ‘League of Caribbean Nation’s’, a free trading zone, stems from this extraordinary story.

At sunset, amidst a raging, flaming tempest, on that fateful evening, in early October, the Captain finally succumbed to the fatal hatchet blow by 'John the Conk'. All the 'Seven Sundials' of his island bay hideaway and the supposed 'Minted' dreadnought treasure, burned and lost forever. It ended the life of perhaps the most original of all the pirates of the Caribbean in his 'Bond'esque' hide-away port, created from an extraordinary confluence of unique conditions in the great Caribbean ocean. The British named, 'Sand Fly Range' are sited by the very edge of the Great Barrier Reef, the second largest Coral reef in the world, and actually kiss the reef itself at Hatchet Caye, site of the murder. Because of this unique geological confluence, the great Caribbean Ocean is tamed for a moment before the quieter waters of the protected coastline of Belize. At the center of this island caye grouping is a 'still' harbor, Belize's only natural swimming cove, surrounded by a group of seven, uniquely configured, mangrove cayes. There, the Captain created his secret harbor from the storms and from other villains of the 'high seas'.

The Captain dredged and carved out the center of one of the mangrove islands, now named 'Mystery Caye', where he removed the masts of his small armada of craft, to house the infamous dreadnought, the 'TRINIDAD EAGLE', the gigantic British 'Man of War' galleon, planned for the transference of 'minted' coinage from the Colonies back to The Royal Mint, sited, at the time, on the banks of the River Thames, in London's City, directly opposite to Shakespeare's 'Globe Theatre'.

*The galleon was over two hundred feet in length and was commissioned as a 'super side-wheeler' for Lord Admiral Nelson himself. It was the prototype for a new, human powered, class of galleon-battleship. However, the ship was constructed secretly, under the Spanish flag, **on the Barbary Coast at a cove on Angel Island**, near the small Spanish garrison of San Francisco, in 1776, for King Phillip of Spain. This plot was enabled by the then British Governor of Bermuda, Captain Henry Morgan, who organized an elaborate scheme to conceal the project's ultimate goal from the Spanish King. The design of the 'Man of War' was unique and highly controversial, as it was the first man powered galleon, and it incorporated the single largest main mast of its day, with a height of over three hundred feet, crafted from a single redwood from the forests of the region. Its second unique feature were the side-wheels themselves, which were to be used only in the absence of wind, so as to avoid the 'giant' being a 'sitting duck'.*

The side-wheels were to be powered by the crew pushing a revolving bar connected to them by means of an axle. The design, by the rogue naval architect, Sir Winton Thomas, was inspired by drawings created originally by Leonardo De Vinci.

On the morning of October 5th, 1776, the 'giant' arrived under it's own power, in the small Spanish garrison fishing village of San Francisco. For the next several days, munitions and supplies were loaded aboard from an armada of smaller vessels, including a gift of an exotic animal, a liger, a cross between a lion and a tiger, from Captain Morgan himself, for the King, who thought the Captain to be a double agent working for him, in conjunction with Lord Admiral Nelson's favorite naval architect of the day.

As night fell, on October 8th, the crew rested and waited for wind to embark on their long journey back to Spain. The Captain hosted a small celebration on deck with the assembled crew. Unbeknownst to them a secret sleeping agent was poured into their barrels of rum, along with Peyote from the Indians working in conjunction with him. One by one the Spaniards fell into a deep slumber, as the Captain and his cohorts disarmed them and chained them to the ship's main mast. He then chained the seventeen hundred pound liger, named Henry the VIII, to the ship's revolving bar. Upon the Captain's signal the anchor was weighed as Henry began to push the giant bar around, whilst being whipped from the central axle console by the Indian crew. The side-wheels began to turn and the galleon began to slowly move, as she headed out through the Golden Gate. Where, were there to have been the bridge there at that time, the galleon would have been too tall to pass beneath it.

From the shore the Spanish soldiers waved and cheered enthusiastically at the departing galleon, completely unawares of the kidnapping, firing their muskets into the evening skies in celebration. Reaching a small beach West of the Golden Gate, the Captain dropped anchor. The Spanish crew and Captain were loaded into boats containing the awaiting British crew of an abandoned galleon, scuppered just beyond the Gate, and were deposited on shore, still in deepest slumber.

Onboard the galleon was a treasure of gold that had been collected from the indigenous Indian tribes of the region, a pre-cursor of the Gold Rush to follow, some seventy-five years later. The cache was considerable, as

was the embarrassment at the Spanish court when the news reached the King in Madrid.

The galleon, originally named the 'Santisima Trinidad', sailed for many months before arriving in the port of Dangriga, in British Honduras, for a 'retro-fit', where she was also to collect taxes from a slew of plantation owners from the region.

Work commenced on the sandbanks of the Dangriga River estuary, to include a pair of gigantic mahogany, stern, wings to further stabilize the 'giant'. Along with its tall main mast and side-wheels a third feature was to be added... the largest cannon ever to roam the seas, forged in Sheffield, England. The cannon was mounted on the stern of the ship, between the wings and was said to have had a range of over eleven miles. She was re-named the 'EAGLE', with her wings painted in the smelted gold Indian treasure, and was to return, triumphant, to London's Royal Mint, on the banks of the River Thames the following year, in time for Queen Elizabeth's birthday celebrations.

Shortly before sunset, on June 4th, of 1777, the resplendent HMS 'EAGLE' began her maiden voyage home, where she was slated to become Lord Admiral Nelson's flagship, under the Captaincy of Jack Straw. As she headed back, past the mangrove islands, leaving the port of Dangriga for the only gap in the great reef, Captain Morgan struck with his concealed armada, quickly surrounding the dreadnought, forcing her into the shallow protected waters of the island's natural harbor and onto a gigantic steel anchor placed at the shallow entry, rupturing the dreadnought's enormous hull.

He next released dozens of 'Spider' and 'Howler' monkeys onto the side-wheels, where they sprung onto the decks and immediately up into the rigging, causing massive fear and confusion for the crew, as shots rang randomly into the darkening skies. With precision the Captain then scaled the side-wheels himself, traveling quickly to the giant eagle's wing. From there he overcame the guards and began, with the aid of his men, to crank and load the giant cannon, turning it inward and firing it towards the stern mast, immediately re-loading it to shoot down the main mast, and finally the remaining mast, thus rendering the ship unseen from the mainland. Amidst the fray and confusion, he and his men then dove back down into the waters below and swam underwater, with the use of bamboo snorkels to the safety of mangrove caye.

For the next several days the ship lay helpless in the lagoon as she battled the pirate and his men, positioned strategically on the surrounding cayes. The white flag was raised on June 7th, of 1777 with the Captain and Henry VIII having swum inside the damaged hull of the wounded

dreadnought under a school of giant rays. From there he pursued Captain Jack Straw, along with Henry's support, to the infamous 'Crow's Nest Surrender'.

The ship was then consumed by the pirates, as they quickly removed the remaining masts, whilst dragging the giant galleon over a series of mahogany logs into the center of the waiting mangrove caye, sealing and concealing its entry with mangrove and rocks. Inside, the 'EAGLE' was ravaged of all its weaponry, ingots, coinage and treasures. The Captain then used the hull as the private quarters for the pirates and their captives, vanished from plain sight.

The British Royal Admiralty sent numerous galleons to the region, and to the very lagoon itself, in search of infamous dreadnought and its lost 'Mint', in the end abandoning its efforts in the hurricane season of 1777. With the news of the dreadnought's loss, the London stock market experienced the great 'Cold, Christmas Crash of 77'. The treasure was never quantified by the British Government but it is believed that it rivals only the sinking of the USS Central America, off the Carolina's in 1857, in weight of 'Minted' Government coins and stamped ingots.

Throughout the whole period Captain Morgan, the pirates, the captured British Naval officers and Sailors, camped out under the very noses of the searching Admiralty, who used the actual Captain's harbor as base for their search operation.

On each of the seven island cayes the Captain built a unique sundial on the decks of his captured, concealed armada. The sundials sat atop of a ship's compass, surrounded by an off-center calibration of an armillary sphere. The tracking sun was reflected by a series of mirrors placed in the mangrove surrounding the sunken vessels to each of the sundials, which, when calibrated by the Captain, and the Captain only, revealed the time of day, as a pin point of light from the mirrors of the sundials roamed the harbor and cayes, from dawn to dusk, at one point revealing the actual location of the treasure he had buried.

The time and the location was only known to the Captain, hence the saying; "Only the Captain knows what time it is". The Captain was also the only man on the islands allowed to swim between the seven cayes, under the concealment of the rays, directly beneath the camped out British Admiralty Galleons. He was a strong swimmer who risked his life to tend his created menagerie of birds and the ligers, who lived and had colonized these protected islands, with their staple diet of large tuna, trapped in the tidal coral pools created by the reef. Just the sight of these ligers, the largest cats on earth, stopped any of the mangrove islands from being further

investigated beyond their very perimeter, by the Navy, with the disappearance of two sailors who swam in the lagoon, spooking the visiting British sailors.

Ligers were, and still are thought to be a mythology, as they have only managed to be bred in captivity since, with seven of the world's remaining ligers currently residing in Belize's Zoo.

This region had both lions and tigers, all originally brought to the area by ancient sea faring merchants, and these powerful ligers were able to swim the nine nautical miles to the islands, having the love of waters from their tiger mothers and their lack of a 'recessive' gene enabled these giants, and their mothers, to access the floundering tuna on the reef itself at Hatchet Caye. 'Henry the Eighth', the Captain's only 'Captain', was said to have weighed over seventeen hundred pounds, often consuming over one hundred pounds of tuna in a single session, dwarfing his parents collective weight by seven hundred pounds.

In the ancient Mayan temple of 'Altuna Ha', deep in the jungle by the Dangriga River, a single carving of a supposed liger stands atop of the infamous façade, its lined forehead distinctive. In Arthur Mellancamp's book, 'Tigers of Belmopan', he accounts for the probabilities of this colony, as at the estuary of the river were a permanent pride of lions from the Northern Territories. During the mating season the tigresses from the inland Belmopan region migrated to the coastline, with some crossing the estuary to mate with the lions, fearful of the waters separating them. The tigresses were abandoned by their males and chased to the sea and the distant reef islands, where they lived the remainder of their natural lives with their gigantic young offspring, who flourished. In 1957 a single giant liger's shoulder bone was supposedly discovered during a British sponsored dredging of Mystery Caye's harbor, in a final attempt to resolve the mystery of the lost 'Minted' treasure. The then outgoing High Commissioner of British Honduras, Dr. Adam Dreyfuss Schmidt, declared of the damaged find; "It was that of a 'pack' donkey – no liger - not today; so we hung it on a mangrove to let the sand flies have their way!" In an attempt to demote further interest in both the islands and it's legend, Dr. Schmidt and the British Government had the islands re-named 'The Sand Fly Range', with the support of the island's owner's, the homesteader's, distant family descendants of 'John the Conk'.

The United States, allies of the British in the Region, supported Guatemala's claim to the range however, upon Britain's withdrawal from the colony in 1974, stating that the matter be resolved in the British Petty Courts for the homesteader's claims of the Guatemalan family. To this day the court's jurisdiction overrides the existing Belize court system.

In the interim the islands surrounding Mystery Caye, with the exception of the Captain's 'Bird Island', a 'Hitchcock'esque' icon of the region, a whirlwind helix of Osprey in flight, have been developed, including the infamous 'Hatchet' Caye. Mystery Caye stands alone, to this day, enmeshed in a dispute over its ownership. It is a mangrove caye surrounded by dredged white coral sand, where only the adventurers roam its beaches, covered with garbage from prospectors with metal detectors, still seeking the buried treasure. Successive governments have wrestled with this claim for three centuries but finally the British Petty Court of North Lambeth, in London's, Camberwell Grove, on July 10th, 2005, awarded full 'Homestead' rights to the Guatemalan Conk family, commencing in 2012, with the island to remain as a Belize territory. However the legal fees for defense of the family claim have far outstripped the raw potential market value of the island. In a deal struck at the inaugural hosting of the 'Caribbean League of Nations' summit in Belmopan (Belize's Capital city, with its 7,100 residents being the smallest capital city in the world), the Prime Minister; Dr. Peter Drummond, upon receiving the vote to become the first Central American mainland nation adopted into the League, announced that an agreement had been reached with the Conk family to give ownership of Mystery Caye to the city of Dangriga, in exchange for some of the Northern Territories adjacent to the river at the estuary. The 'Sand Fly Range', including Mystery Caye, will be sold at auction by Christie's, of London, ending the last and longest outstanding Caribbean treasure territory dispute. However, in a legal loophole... the 'Homesteader's Right's' have been available for sale, for use in the interim before the island's transference to the city of Dangriga on the infamous date of April 1st, 2012.

In the three months that the British Navy based its search for the 'EAGLE', from Mystery Caye, in 1777, nothing is known of the Captain, the Giant and the concealed colony until the burning mangrove islands were seen ablaze from the coastal town of Dangriga on the evening of October 2^d, 1777, for the posted hurricane 'Prospero'. In all, one hundred thirty eight bodies were accounted for, including the Captain and 'John the Conk'; Henry's remains were never found. The exact location of the supposed 'Royal Mint Treasure' will perhaps always remain a mystery, as the Captain, and only the Captain "knew what time (and where) it is".

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