



The Western Flyer: Steinbeck's Boat, the Sea of Cortez, and the Saga of Pacific Fisheries

Kevin M. Bailey

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In January 2010, the *Gemini* was moored in the Swinomish Slough on a Native American reservation near Anacortes, Washington. Unbeknownst to almost everyone, the rusted and dilapidated boat was in fact the most famous fishing vessel ever to have sailed: the original *Western Flyer*, immortalized in John Steinbeck's nonfiction classic *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*.

In this book, Kevin M. Bailey resurrects this forgotten witness to the changing tides of Pacific fisheries. He draws on the Steinbeck archives, interviews with family members of crew, and more than three decades of working in Pacific Northwest fisheries to trace the depletion of marine life through the voyages of a single ship. After Steinbeck and his friend Ed Ricketts—a pioneer in the study of the West Coast's diverse sea life and the inspiration behind "Doc" in *Cannery Row*—chartered the boat for their now-famous 1940 expedition, the *Western Flyer* returned to its life as a sardine seiner in California. But when the sardine fishery in Monterey collapsed, the boat moved on: fishing for Pacific ocean perch off Washington, king crab in the Bering Sea off Alaska, and finally wild Pacific salmon—all industries that would also face collapse.

As the *Western Flyer* herself faces an uncertain future—a businessman has bought her, intending to bring the boat to Salinas, California, and turn it into a restaurant feature just blocks from Steinbeck's grave—debates about the status of the California sardine, and of West Coast fisheries generally, have resurfaced. A compelling and timely tale of a boat and the people it carried, of fisheries exploited, and of fortunes won and lost, *The Western Flyer* is environmental history at its best: a journey through time and across the sea, charting the ebb and flow of the cobalt waters of the Pacific coast.

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