

# White man meet Indian whalers

The chief of Canada's Mowachaht tribe pays tribute to Malaspina

R. IVATTS, **Madrid**

Canada's Mowachaht-Muchalaht Indians are now keen to teach the youngest members of their tribe that it was the Spaniards who first explored their waters — not the English, as had previously been thought. With this objective in mind, Mike Macquinna, the chief of the tribe — which lives in Nootka Sound, Vancouver Island — has this week been participating in a two-day event, hosted by the Italian Institute of Culture in Madrid.

When the scientist, Alejandro Malaspina, accompanied by the botanist Tadeo Haenke, visited the Mowachaht Indians in August 1791, this was the tribe's first contact with a white man. Now, Mike Macquinna — descended from the chiefs who traded with the Spanish between 1774 and 1796 — claims “he does not want to change history,” but simply re-



**Alejandro Malaspina (1754-1810).**

cover the legacy which Malaspina's visit bestowed on his tribe: “the opportunity for contact with another culture and the chance to start trading with other nations.”

Macquinna explains that “the stories handed down orally by the oldest members of our tribe say that the Spaniards' arrival provoked fear at first, as no one had ever seen ships with such large sails, but bonds of friendship were later established. They weren't looking for conquest or conflict. Their journeys were made out of curiosity.”

Not only have the Mowachaht-Muchalaht Indians had to adapt to new laws and trade their whale-hunting traditions for tourism, they have also lost *Tsuxiit* — the whale they believed assumed the spirit of Macquinna's father — when the propeller blades of a boat, sheltering from a storm, injured and killed the tribe's beloved creature.

Today, however, the tribe is turning to a new spirit for hope: that of Malaspina's scientific journeys to Nootka Sound.