

Chart of the passage to the East of Banka laid down from Observations in the Ship Vansittart, by Cap. Lestock Wilson (locating famous ship wrecks in the Gaspar Strait!)

Stock#:	31903
Map Maker:	Ross
Date:	1815 circa
Place:	n.p.
Color:	Uncolored
Condition:	VG
Size:	25.5 x 22.5 inches
Price:	SOLD



Description:

Extremely rare chart of the strait on the east side of Banka (between Banka and Gaspar Island), site of a number of British, Chinese, Portugese and American Shipwrecks, as laid out by Captain Daniel Ross, following his survey of the Gaspar Strait, including the infamous Discovery Rocks, in 1815.

While exceedingly dangerous, in the late 18th and early 19th Century, this strait was a great lure for trading ships seeking to be the first to reach the trading ports of China and Southeast Asia. The strait was first traversed by an English Captain named Hurle in 1702, but was named for a Spanish captain from Manila, who made the passage in 1724. The present chart was almost certainly being utilized and annotated in the months preceding the shipwreck of a British ship carrying Lord Amehert named the *Alceste* on Po. Liat or Middle Island (Pulau Liat), following Lord Amherst's unsuccessful Embassy to China in 1816 or early 1817.

The chart shows the strait between Banka and Billton Island, including a number of manuscript additions, several of which refer to contemporary ship wrecks, including the *Fingal* (an American ship owned by the



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Astor Family, which sunk on February 7, 1816), the Portugese ship *Amelia* (January 1816) and the *Vansittart* (sunk October 9, 1789). There is no mention of two other wrecks in the same area, the wreck of the *Alceste* (February 1817) and later the scene of Captain Pearl's rescue of the survivors of the Tek Sing wreck in February 1822 (near Belvedere Shoals). Several points on the map are labeled Rocks in the water by D. Ross. The map is centered on Po. Liat or Middle Island (Pulau Liat).

The extensive contemporary notes and annotations suggest that this chart was in use in the Gaspar Strait sometime between February 1816 and February 1817. We reach this conclusion based upon the chart's location of the wreck of the *Amelia* (January 1816) and the *Fingal* (February 1816), but not the *Alceste* (February 18, 1817) and the *Tek Sing* (1822). As noted in the *New Monthly Magazine*, Volume 12, p94 (August 1, 1819), in its description of the recently surveyed wreckage of the *Alceste*, "the *Alceste's* keel is lying about ten yards from that of the Portuguese ship *Amelia*, which was wrecked here in 1816."

It seems inconcievable that such a detailed chart woud have missed the location of the wreckage of the *Alceste*, which first sailed to China in February 1816, commanded by Captain Maxwell and with Lord Amherst aboard (on an Embassy to China), and was engaged in voyages of exploration for the British Admiralty at the time of its demise.

The chart is based upon Alexander's Dalrymple's *Chart of the Passage to the East of Banka Laid down from Observations in Ship Van Sittart'. By Captain Lestock Wilson, 1789. Published by A Dalrymple, 17 March 1792*. Dalrymple's chart, published on 2 sheets, appeared in his *East India Pilot*. Following the demise of Captain Lestock Wilson's ship, William Bligh of *Mutiny on the Bounty* fame wrote the following entry in *Voyage to the South Sea*, on October 9, 1789, regarding the discovery of the survivors of the Vansittart:

This day anchored in the road the General Elliot, an English ship commanded by Captain Lloyd. In the Straits of Banca he had met with some boats belonging to the East India Company's ship Vansittart that was lost in the straits of Billaton by having struck on a rock that went through her bottom. Captain Wilson, who commanded the Vansittart, I was informed had just finished a survey of those Straits and was hoisting his boat in when the ship struck. Immediately on receiving the intelligence Captain Lloyd, in the General Elliot and another ship in company called the Nonsuch, sailed for the wreck. They found the ship had been burnt down to the water's edge by the Malays. They however saved 40 chests of treasure out of 55 which were said to have been on board. Most of the ship's company were saved: one man only was lost in the ship, and five others in a small boat were missing who were supposed to have taken some of the treasure.

Ross updates the information provided by Captain Wilson, including a memorandum identifying the safest way to make Gaspar Island, in order to avoid certain hazards described in his note and laid out in the



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chart.

The American ship *Fingal*, under the command of Captain Vibbert, sank on February 7, 1816 when sailing back from Canton to New York with a cargo of Chinese porcelain cargo consigned to the Astor family. The ship owned by John Jacob Astor, the founder of the famous Astor fortune and dynasty, was a 383 tons copper sheathed vessel that struck a rock in the Gaspar Strait.

Captain Daniel Ross was regarded as "the Father of the Indian Surveys." Ross founded the Bombay Geographical Society and led the survey of the coasts of China (1807), Paracels with part of the coast of Cochin China and coast of Palawan (1810), Straits of Malacca (1819) coast of Tenasserim, Mergui Archipelago, Saya de Malha Bank and Rangoon (1825). His charts form the foundation of the General Charts of Captain Horsburgh.

In 1825, Ross was appointed the Marine Surveyor General for the East India Company, and remained in his command until November 1833.

In discussing the importance of the contributions of the Indian Navy in the charting of the region, Captain Jervis of the Bengal Engineers stated at a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (August 26, 1838):

The maritime surveys which have been made by the East India Company's naval officers are honourable to the spirit of the great public body whose desire they were instituted. A series of charts of the entire coast of China, by my friend Captain Daniel Ross, Indian Royal Navy, and others, illustrating the ports, rivers and coasts, from Cochin China and throughout the Malayan Archipelago to the confines of India, by Captains Crawford, Robinson and Ross, are highly useful to the navigators who frequent those seas. . .

A fascinating artifact of the early 19th Century.

Detailed Condition:

Printed and manuscript chart on linen, with green silk edges. Some soiling.