



Carte Des Nouvelles Decouvertes Au Nord de la Mer de Sud, Tant a l'Est de la Sibirie et du Kamtchateka, Qu'a l'Ouest de la Nouvelle France, Dressée sur les Memoires . . . 1750

Cartographer: Joseph Nicholas De L'Isle & Philippe Buache

Date: 1750

Size: 37 x 63 cm

A landmark map in the history of cartography and perhaps the single most influential map of the region in the middle of the 18th century. This map was a cartographic landmark, representing the most important advances in the mapping of this region prior to Captain James Cook. The map reported the discoveries of numerous Russian explorers, including Tchirkow and Vitus Bering and several overland expeditions, as well as the routes of Frondat, Spanberg, and other Europeans. The Manila Galleon route is also shown. While the treatment of the northwest coast of America is largely conjectured with the information largely derived from Russian sources.

Extending to Korea in the west and showing the whole of North America, it marks out the supposed discoveries of Admiral de Fonte, including a vast inland sea, the *Mer de L'Ouest*, to the north of California, a waterway from the Pacific almost to Baffin's Bay, and a large landmass in the middle of the Pacific. The mythical *Bay of the West* is shown along with a large Lake titled *Lac De Valasco* in what is now Alaska. The figure in the upper left is a native of Kamtchatka and in the upper right is a figure of a native of Louisiana.

While the map integrates the latest Russian explorations, it also re-invigorates the mythical *Sea of the West*, which had first appeared on charts published by Johann

Baptiste Nolin in circa 1700, but which had quickly disappeared and had not been integrated into modern maps until Philippe Buache began to add the information again in the middle of the 18th Century. Shown here are the mythical discoveries of Admirals De Font and Martin Aguilar, which would reshape the northwest coast of America for the next 30 years, until the discoveries in this region by Captain James Cook began to reshape the area between Alaska and Puget Sound.

Joseph Nicholas De L'Isle spent much of his career in Russia, producing the *Atlas Russicus* (the first Russian atlas) with Ivan Kyrilov and founding Russia's Royal Academy of Sciences at St Petersburg. He returned to Paris in 1747 with a large map collection, including the manuscript of this map of the North Pacific. In 1750 he presented the map to a public assembly of the French Academy of Sciences.

When Vitus Bering returned to St. Petersburg in 1730 after his first voyage to the strait that bears his name, there was disagreement in some circles as to the certainty of his discovery. The naval and scientific communities agreed to advance a second Kamchatka exploration proposed by Bering. The targets of this venture, known popularly as the *Great Northern Expedition*, were to confirm Bering's maritime division between Asia and America, explore east of Kamchatka, report on unknown lands, and investigate the northwest coast of America.

With increased interest on the part of the Russian government, the second program was conceived on a grander scale than the first; it was planned as an elaborate scientific exploration of the territories and seas of the northern Pacific. In addition to Bering as captain-commander and his two lieutenants, Captains Martin Spanberg and Aleksei Il'ich Chirikov, members of the Academy of Sciences who specialized in natural history were also included. After interminably frustrating logistical delays, they were finally under way in 1733. Saint Petersburg attempted to ease Bering's burden by detaching from his command a north-coast party that was to sail from Archangel along the Arctic Coast to Kamchatka to reconfirm that the two continents were separate. This was unsuccessful, although several small parties sailed sectors of the route without reaching the Pacific.

Despite its outstanding discoveries, the long and tragic saga of the *Great Northern Expedition* was fraught with difficulties from the beginning. After 1731, when an officer was sent east to supervise the shipbuilding for the voyage, it was two years before Bering and his party set out for Siberia, not arriving at the east coast until 1737, where they were greeted by no advance party and no ships. By July 1738 Spanberg was sent in command of three small, hastily built ships to sail south and untangle the geography of the Kuril Islands and Hokkaido, Japan. During three voyages Spanberg and Walton, his lieutenant, successfully mapped the Kurils and sailed coastal Japan. Their maps were not published at once but edited and incorporated into a work by Gerhard Friedrich Muller, a well-known German traveler and historian in Russian service.

Bering and Chirikov's object was to locate the "continents" called *Gama Land* and *Compagnies Land* (see *The Evolution of Japan in Early Maps*). Earlier reports by Portuguese, Dutch, and Jesuit navigators and mapmakers had produced accounts that were so vague they merely implied that continent-size masses existed north and northeast of Japan. It was not known whether these were attached to Asia or America, whose North Pacific coast configurations were unknown, or whether they were giant islands or new continents. It was 1740 before Bering and Chirikov could build and provision two small ships, the St. Peter and the St. Paul, and embark on their voyage. Their plan was to sail in tandem with elaborate precautions and procedures should they become separated.

Nevertheless, after searching for the reputed location of the fictitious landmasses, they lost sight of each other in the open ocean. Both Bering's St. Peter and Chirikov's St. Paul continued on to the Alaskan coast independently. Neither crew sighted the other again and both suffered terribly from lack of food, water, and the early mariner's nemesis, scurvy.

Among the academics on the expedition were Louis Delisle de la Croyere and Muller, Delisle de la Croyere, an astronomer, was a brother of the famous Parisian mapmaker Guillaume Delisle and of Joseph-Nicolas Delisle, astronomer and cartographer of map. Joseph and Louis had taken service with the czar in 1726, Joseph being responsible for the growth of the Imperial Academy of Science. Louis served as official astronomer on the *Great Northern Expedition*, but he developed scurvy aboard Chirikov's St. Paul and did not survive the voyage. Captain-Commander Bering suffered the same fate-even though he was within a relatively short sail of the food and warmth he desperately needed-dying as the ship put in for water at the island that now bears his name. Unfortunately, the crew was unable to muster enough able-bodied men to sail the ship onward, and it was smashed against the shore. After a cold and miserable winter, they built a small boat from the wreckage and sailed to Kamchatka, bearing the sad news of their leader's death.

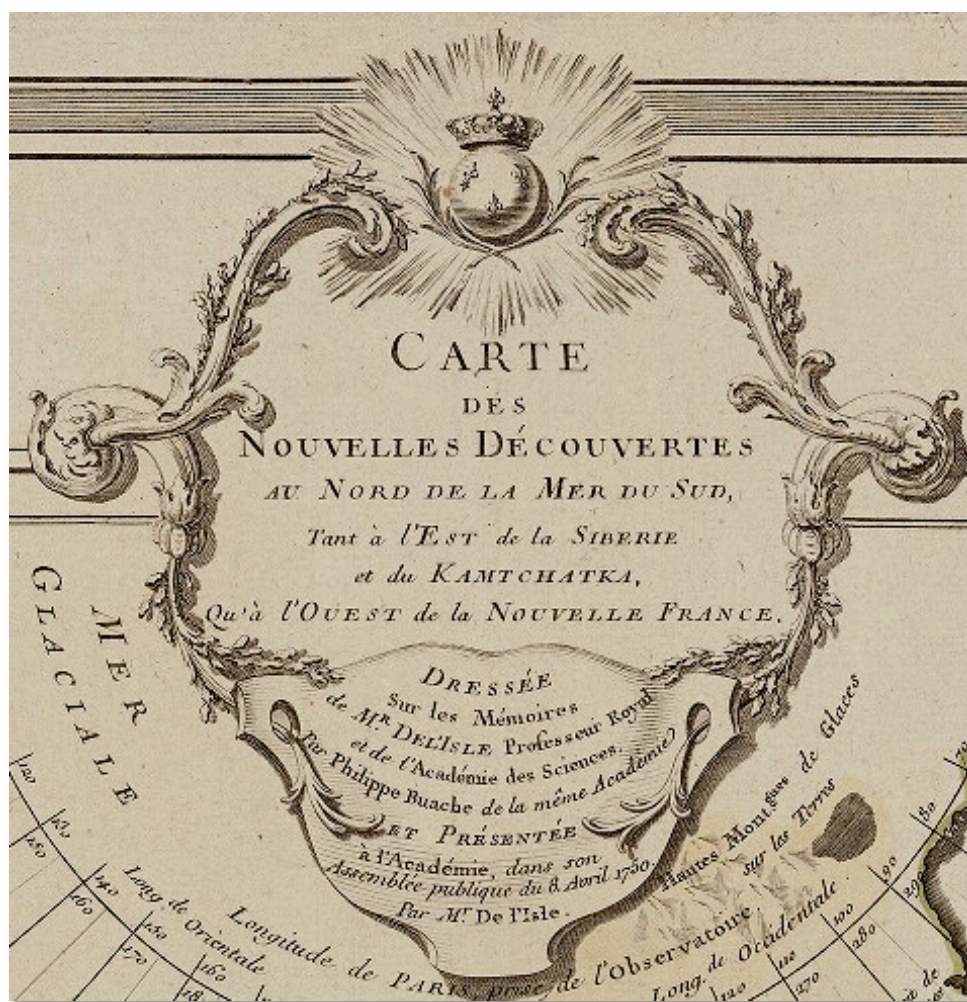
By the 1740s Russians became suspicious that Westerners brought in at the time of Peter the Great were exploiting their positions, and Russian attitudes toward them began to change. The highly respected Joseph-Nicolas Delisle, feeling out of favor in Saint Petersburg, returned to Paris in 1747 after an absence of two decades. He addressed the Royal Academy of Science with his report of the Russian expedition accompanied by this map. His data was inaccurate, possibly because he had been placed beyond the clique of insiders receiving information at Saint Petersburg. Delisle reported incorrectly that Bering had died on the outward leg of the voyage, on the island now named for him, rather than at the end of the cruise, after his discoveries. Bering had sailed along the Alaskan panhandle and named Mount Saint Elias before coasting the Aleutian Islands. This map Delisle produced in 1750/52 with Philippe Buache, First Geographer to the King of France, did little to clear up the confusion regarding the mythic great islands between eastern Asia and Alaska. They contributed further to the misunderstanding of American northwest coast cartography by relating the pretense of discoveries attributed to a legendary Spaniard, Admiral Bartholome de Fonte, in 1640 and the apocryphal voyage in 1592 of Juan de la Fuca, a Greek-born navigator in Spanish service. Delisle revealed to the credulous, a purported passage discovered by de Fonte north of the Strait of Juan de Fuca through which one could sail to Baffin Bay and on to the Atlantic (center right). He showed de la Fuca's strait leading to an enormous (and imaginary) *Sea of the West*. Delisle and Buache's map is adorned with a vignette on each side picturing a native warrior of Kamchatka and "*Northwest Louisiana*," respectively.

In the archives of Yakutsk, the provincial capital of eastern Siberia, there is an account of the long-forgotten 1648 voyage of three Russian vessels from the Arctic coast, around the northeastern peninsula of the continent, and south to Kamchatka. Led by Fedor Alexeev and Semen Dezhnev in three small ships, the ninety-man party rounded Asia's East Cape, becoming the first Europeans to pass through and discover what became known as Bering Strait. Soon after reaching the Pacific the ships separated. Alexeev's fate remains unknown, while Dezhnev and his crew sailed through the Diomed Islands and landed on the Pacific Coast near the Anadyr River. He made a

report of the voyage, but it never went farther than the provincial archives in Yakutsk.

Russians did not begin traveling to Kamchatka until 1690, and the fate of the men who made the early expedition remains a mystery, although the saga was passed down orally in the region. It is clear that both Peter the Great and Virus Bering were unaware of the Alexeev-Dezhnev voyage.





The Remondini-Santini edition of Joseph De L'Isle's map of the northern Pacific Ocean, North America and Asia.





L'Amérique Septentrionale divisée en ses principaux États...1762 [Sea of the West]

Cartographer: Jean Janvier

Date: 1762

Size: 17.5 x 12

Decorative example of Janvier's fascinating map of North America, featuring the *Sea of the West* myth, Russian discoveries in northwest America and a host of other interesting details. The map is known in a number of transitional states, of which this state is perhaps the most interesting. The Tchirikow/De L'Isle coastline reminiscent of the Alaskan Archipelago remains shown above the words *Mer Du Sud*, but the connection to the mainland has been replaced with open sea.

The *Bay of the West* appears in its usual configuration, which is present in at least three states of this map, as are the configurations of the Straits of Juan De Fuca and Martin Aguilar. The *Archipel St Lazare* appears in a region which was previously land locked. The mythical river system crossing Canada is still in evidence. *Lac Michinipi ou des Assinibouels* is shown. The sources of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers are shown, albeit speculatively so. A few early French forts still appear in the Transappalachian West.





References:

- McGuirk, D., *The Great Cartographic Myth: Mer del'Ouest*
 Tooley, R.V. (Amer) p.35, #105;
 Wagner, H. (NW) 566;
 Schwartz & Ehrenberg p.161;
 Nebenzahl, K. (Silk Road) #5.5A, pp. 156-158.