

## **Cannon Wreck - Banana Islands, Sierra Leone (Diemermeer)**

The Cannon Wreck - Banana Islands, Sierra Leone is located off the southwestern tip of Mes-Meheux Island the southern most of the three islands comprising the Banana Islands group. The remains of the shipwreck are at coordinates 08° 05' 31.84" East and 013° 14' 38.24" North and lie from 5 to 20 meters (16 to 65 feet) from the shore at a depth of 4 to 10 meters (13 to 33 feet) on a rocky bottom. The Banana Islands shipwreck has been known for a long time, and materials from it have been on display at the Sierra Leone National Museum since the 1960's. However, a formal preliminary excavation of the wrecksite was not conducted until the period of 9 November to 23 November 2012 by a Polish diving team expedition sponsored by the prestigious Explorers Club of New York and under the direction of Peter Wytykowski.

In addition to ceramic shards, 28 cannon were also discovered along with 5 anchors. The many small fragments of porcelain found at the wrecksite, as well as on the shore between rocks, suggest that porcelain may have been a significant part of the cargo on board the vessel. There were no complete items recovered only fragments consisting primarily of blue and white wares, but including a very limited number of Batavia ware shards from tea bowls and saucers. Most of the approximately 300 fragments (estimate is based on published photos) recovered are well preserved and the decorative motifs readily discernable. The majority of the fragments are from cup and saucer tea sets, with other saucers, plates and bowls also represented. None of the fragments contained a base mark. The fragments recovered included those from shallow saucers decorated

on the interior with underglaze blue motifs of peonies and bamboo comparable to those found on the Nanking Cargo (Geldermalsen) shipwreck in Indonesia dated to 1751 of the Qianlong period (1735 to 1796). Also found were fragments of tea bowls with scalloped rim and panel décor containing butterflies and flowers similar to recoveries from the Ca Mau shipwreck in Vietnam dated to circa 1725 of the Yong Zheng period (1723 to 1735).

During the second expedition to Sierra Leone (14 February to 7 March 2014) a number of nearly intact porcelains were recovered by using a deep water dredge. As of the date of this writing further details have not yet been published or made available concerning these findings.



The wreck was originally tentatively dated to the first half of the 18th century. However, as a result of subsequent archival research in the Netherlands, Sri Lanka and Australia the shipwreck has been conclusively identified as that of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) ship the Diemermeer, which sank in August 1747. The original navigational chart for the final voyage of the Diemermeer, drawn by Isaak de Graaff, was found in the National Library of Australia and confirmed the identity of the wreck. This dating, subsequent to the date of the Ca Mau wreck and prior to that of the Nanking Cargo

(Geldermalsen), is fully consistent with the characteristics of the porcelains recovered.

### **References**

Christie's Amsterdam, 1986. *The Nanking Cargo: Chinese Export Porcelain and Gold, European Glass and Stoneware, Auction Catalogue*, 28 April - 2 May 1986. Amsterdam: Christie's.

*Diver Magazine*, 2014. "Mystery of the Vanishing Dutchman," October 2014. Teddington, United Kingdom.

*Diver Magazine*, 2015. "The Final Circle," February 2015. Teddington, United Kingdom.

Nguyen Dinh Chien, 2002. *Tau Co Ca Mau (The Ca Mau Shipwreck)*. Hanoi: The National Museum of Vietnamese History.

Sheaf, Colin and Kilburn Richard, 1988. *The Hatcher Porcelain Cargoes, The Complete Record*. Oxford: Phaidon and Christie's Limited.

*Sierra Leone News*, 2014. "Shipwreck Reveals 29 Cannons at Banana Island," 4 March 2014.

Sotheby's, 29-31 January 2007. *Catalogue for Made in Imperial China – 76,000 Pieces of Chinese Export Porcelain from the Ca Mau Shipwreck, circa 1725*. Amsterdam: Sotheby's.

Wytykowski, Peter, 2012. *Report of Flag 160 of the Diving Expedition - Sierra Leone 2012*.

[www.sierra2014.com](http://www.sierra2014.com) - The second expedition to Sierra Leone just ended, Sierra 2014 Vanishing Dutchman Expedition, 16 March 2014.

[www.vocsite.nl/schepen/detail](http://www.vocsite.nl/schepen/detail) - Diemermeer 1736.



Wytykowski, 2012 - page 21.