

A Sea of Peaks – Jeff Wielki, Calgary, AB, Canada

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On James Cook's third voyage around the globe he visited New Zealand, which he had previously mapped in great detail, dropped off a Tahitian who had been living in London, then carried on up the West Coast of North America in search of the Northwest-Passage. Cook's map of New Zealand captures imaginations. It portrays a sense of what it might be like to discover the unknown, to be a part of his adventure.

As a cartographer, all of those qualities in Cook's map are captivating. I wanted to emulate them and discover something new. In the mountains on certain special days, the summits and ridges can look like a chain of islands rising above the valley clouds. What if James Cook could sail on those clouds and map those islands? I took this fantasy to Mt. Logan, Canada's highest peak located in the Yukon. This meant mapping the entire St Elias Range, which are impressive mountains that blissfully ignore the Alaska-Yukon border. The intent of this project was to use a real historical figure, in a real place with a twist on that reality.

On May 4th, 1778 Admiral James Cook and his crew sighted Mount St. Elias, on the northwest coast. This is where my fictional cartography fits in. My story is that Cook and his crew would be the first recorded Europeans to circumnavigate and map the St. Elias Isles. Those islands resulted from the digital elevation model (DEM) which I "flooded" up to 2000 metres on my computer, then proceeded to map by hand, much like Cook would have done over two hundred years ago. In this "cloud as ocean" world he certainly would have found the Northwest-Passage.

There were elements I wanted to capture from Cook's New Zealand. His charts document the ship's path as a dashed track. He portrays an incomplete coastline indicating land that was out of view as they sailed past. The hatched coastline indicates a complete survey. The vegetation style needed modification to make the trees look more like pointy conifers, which better fits the feel of the Yukon wilderness. Finally, the most obvious feature was the terrain. The oblique hills are a series of lines, more like hachures following the spine of a ridge.

Named features on the map took some translation due to the shift in the landscape. Actual names remain the same, but the type of feature may have shifted. For example a glacier may become a bay; a peak may become its own island, a ridge could be a point or a cape, but big mountains remained big mountains.

The Resolution in 1778 was the name of James Cook's ship. My resolution here is that mapping should be a fun journey. This was fun. It was, like the names of Cook's other ships, a discovery and an adventure.