

Cook's spoils have a new berth in Sydney



The Banks map, printed in 1772, showed for the first time the east coast of Australia. Only two of the 100 original copies survive. Photo: Peter Rae

Steve Meacham

A UNIQUE map, described as the Holy Grail for collectors of Captain Cook memorabilia, has been acquired by the State Library of NSW for a record \$418,000.

The map – engraved in March 1772 on the instructions of Sir Joseph Banks, the wealthy naturalist on the Endeavour – showed for the first time what discoveries Cook had made in his first great voyage.

As such, it is the first known printed depiction of the east coast of Australia – and the first map to outline Australia as a distinct continent, incorporating the coastlines previously mapped by navigators.

Only one other copy of the Banks map exists – a version printed on inferior paper in the British Library.

Richard Neville, the State Library's manager of original materials, calls the new acquisition "the missing piece" in its world-class collection of Cook and Banks memorabilia.

"This map is the beginning of the definition of what we now know as Australia," he said. "The first time the east coast of Australia is described on a map is hugely significant. It laid the framework for the whole colonisation of Australia."

The library, which has never paid as much for a single map, already owned the original invoice for the engraving. It also owns a simple, hand-drawn map by Cook which may have been used as a reference.

Mr Neville believes Banks probably commissioned his map not just to show what Cook had discovered, but also to lay the



Captain Cook's discoveries of the South Pacific are shown in the map.

grounds for a second voyage. Despite circumnavigating New Zealand and charting Australia's unknown coast, both men knew they had not answered one of the great conundrums of the 18th century: was there a great, undiscovered Southern Land?

"To me, this is the map Banks and Cook came up with to promote their second voyage," Mr Neville said. "It showed a great hole in world cartography that they hoped to fill in."

At that stage Banks was planning to accompany Cook on the Resolution. But, said Mr Neville, "he threw a hissy fit" and Cook went without him to establish finally that the Great Southern Land was a myth.

The Banks map will be on public display at the library from June 13 to July 31.

Meanwhile, a rare handwritten letter by Cook – being sold by the same wealthy American through the Sydney bookseller Hordern House – has been purchased by a private Australian collector for another six-figure sum.