

OBSERVATION OF MARINE TURTLES ON HUON ISLAND (NEW CALEDONIA)
by the Navy Ship "La Dunkerquoise" (February 1980)

ENGLISH
VERSION

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF HUON ISLAND

1.1 PHYSICAL FEATURES:

- Location: Huon is the northernmost islet of the Entrecasteaux Reefs situated at 18.01° S and 162°57' E (see attached map).
- Length of islet: approximately 3 km, with sand banks extending north and south.
- Width of islet: approximately 200 metres in the central part.
- Height above sea level: approximately 8 metres in the raised central part covered with vegetation.
- Total surface area: estimated at 40 hectares, of which only about 12 are covered with vegetation. (The tourist guide of New Caledonia indicates a land area of 13 hectares for the islet).
- Surface area used by turtles for nesting: approximately 20 hectares.

1.2 WEATHER CONDITIONS:

When "la Dunkerquoise" last moored at Huon on 11th February 1980 at approximately 4 p.m. local time, the air temperature was roughly 40° in the shade, with clear skies and little wind (5-8 knots); stormy weather was recorded during the night of the 11th.

1.3 VEGETATION:

Composed of a creeper of unidentified species. No trees. (About 15 coconut palms were planted in the highest part on 11th February).

1.4 WILDLIFE:

- A large number of birds (gannets, terns and tropic-birds) many of which were hatching. There were no nests; the birds lay their eggs on the grass of unknown species. All bird ages from egg to almost the adult stage were seen.
- There were many crabs on the beaches and two species were noted: orange coloured crabs on the ocean shore and, on the lagoon beach, long clawed crabs which shelter in holes dug into the beach.

2. OBSERVATIONS PERTAINING TO TURTLES

2.1 DAYTIME OBSERVATIONS:

- Equal distribution of turtle movement tracks on all the beaches, on both the lagoon and ocean shores, sometimes revealing complicated routes between the seashore and the nesting site. These tracks are approximately 1.40 metres wide.
Density of tracks: about 25 distinct departures every 100 metres estimated to be 24 or 48 hours old.

- Equal distribution of nesting holes. Density of nesting holes: On an area of 50m x 50m there were approximately 140 holes, with an average diameter of 1.70 metres and a depth of 50 cm, of which roughly a quarter seemed to have been dug during the previous 48 hours. (Estimation based on comparison with holes dug in our presence during the night).
On the sides of the craters dug by nesting turtles, hatchling tracks were also often observed, doubtlessly implying that another turtle had previously nested in more or less the same place: an average of 15 (\pm 5) hatching tracks were seen on the sides of a hole (suggesting that not all eggs hatch normally).
- About 15 dead and decaying adult green turtles were seen on the island, most of which were found in the middle of the sandbanks stretching north and south of the raised part of the island. Two of these dead turtles had remained stuck on the rocky reef along the ocean beach.
- A very large number of young and lively turtles of 5 to 6 cm in length appeared after 5 p.m. They followed winding routes, and not necessarily in the direction of the sea. Their presence attracts no interest from birds, but they are attacked by crabs. Some of these little turtles were placed directly into the ocean but, rather than swimming out to sea, they attempted to move back to the shore. However, a young turtle taken on board the anchored ship and thrown back into the sea swam away from the beach. (This may have been quite by chance).

2.2 NIGHT TIME OBSERVATIONS BETWEEN 10 P.M. AND 2 A.M. LOCAL TIME:

- About 50 green turtles (the only species found) came in to nest.
Size: - carapace length approximately 1.40 metres.
- carapace width approximately 0.90 metres.
- Nesting process: after removing the sand with its front flippers to a depth of 50 cm, the turtle digs a hole with vertical walls approximately 30 cm wide (width of the rear flippers used) and 50 cm deep. Each rear flipper works alternately, the incurved leg extracting the sand and the other removing it from the immediate vicinity of the hole. Approximately 60 eggs (\pm 20) are laid in clusters of 3 or 4 within thirty minutes; the shells are flexible and shiny. The hole is then filled in.
The turtle breathes noisily during the nesting. It returns to the water in short stages of 3 to 4 metres. Some turtles, aware of our presence began digging a hole, went away, turned again on reaching the water and came back to nest or went through the whole procedure all over again, several times.
- Many hatchlings attempted to reach the sea. They were also extremely attracted to our lamps. A young turtle was found alive and hardly injured in the stomach of a young shark caught about 500 yards from the shore; it survived for a few days in a bucket. (It would probably have lived had there not been bad weather subsequently causing too much water movement in its bucket).
Turtles were also found in the stomach of young sharks fished on Surprise Island.

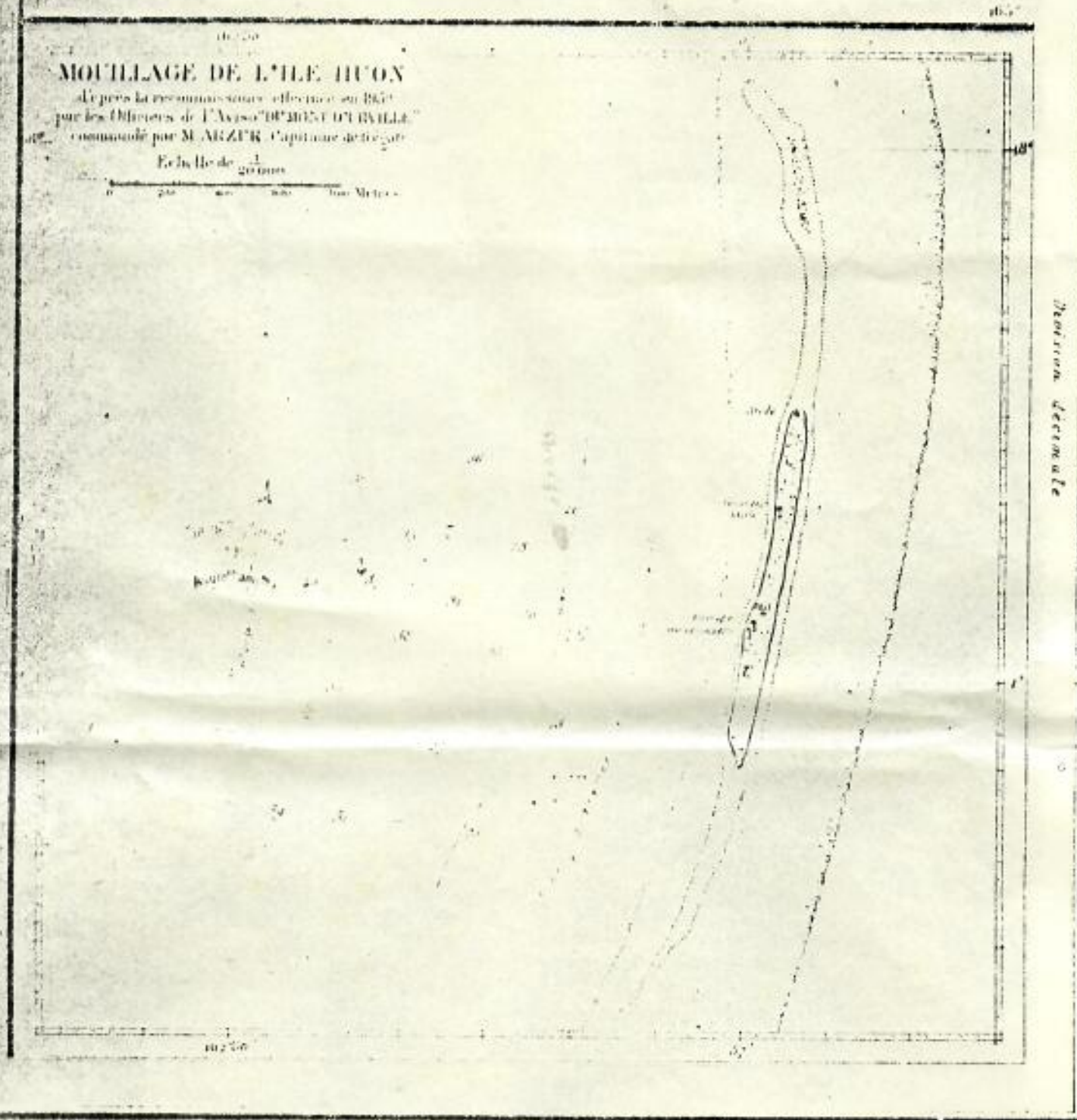
MOUILLAGE DE L'ILE HUON

Le plan a été communiqué officiellement au B.M.
par les Officiers de l'Aviso "DUMONT D'URVILLE"
commandé par M. ALZIER, Capitaine de Vaisseau

Echelle de $\frac{1}{20000}$

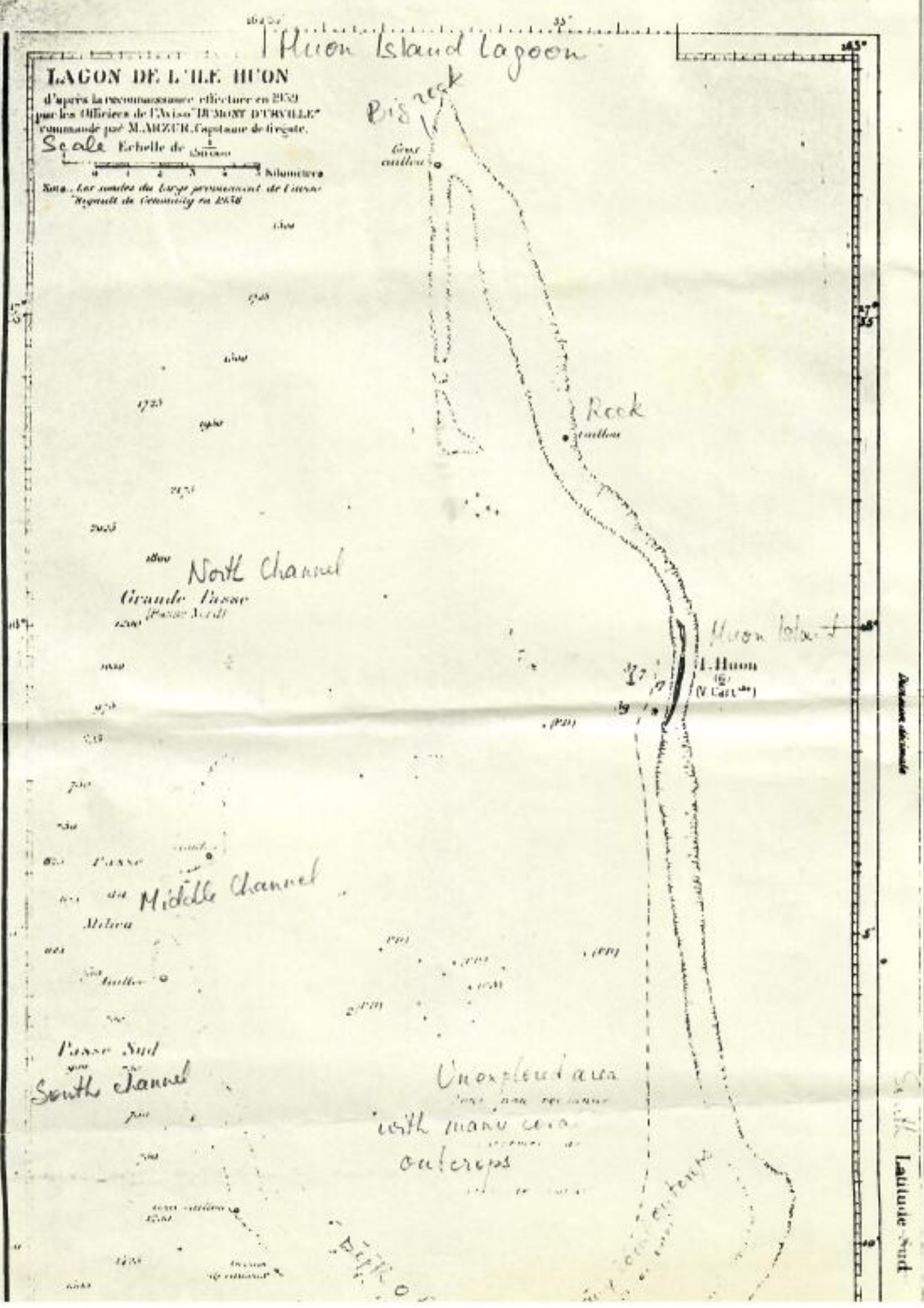
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Division Decimale



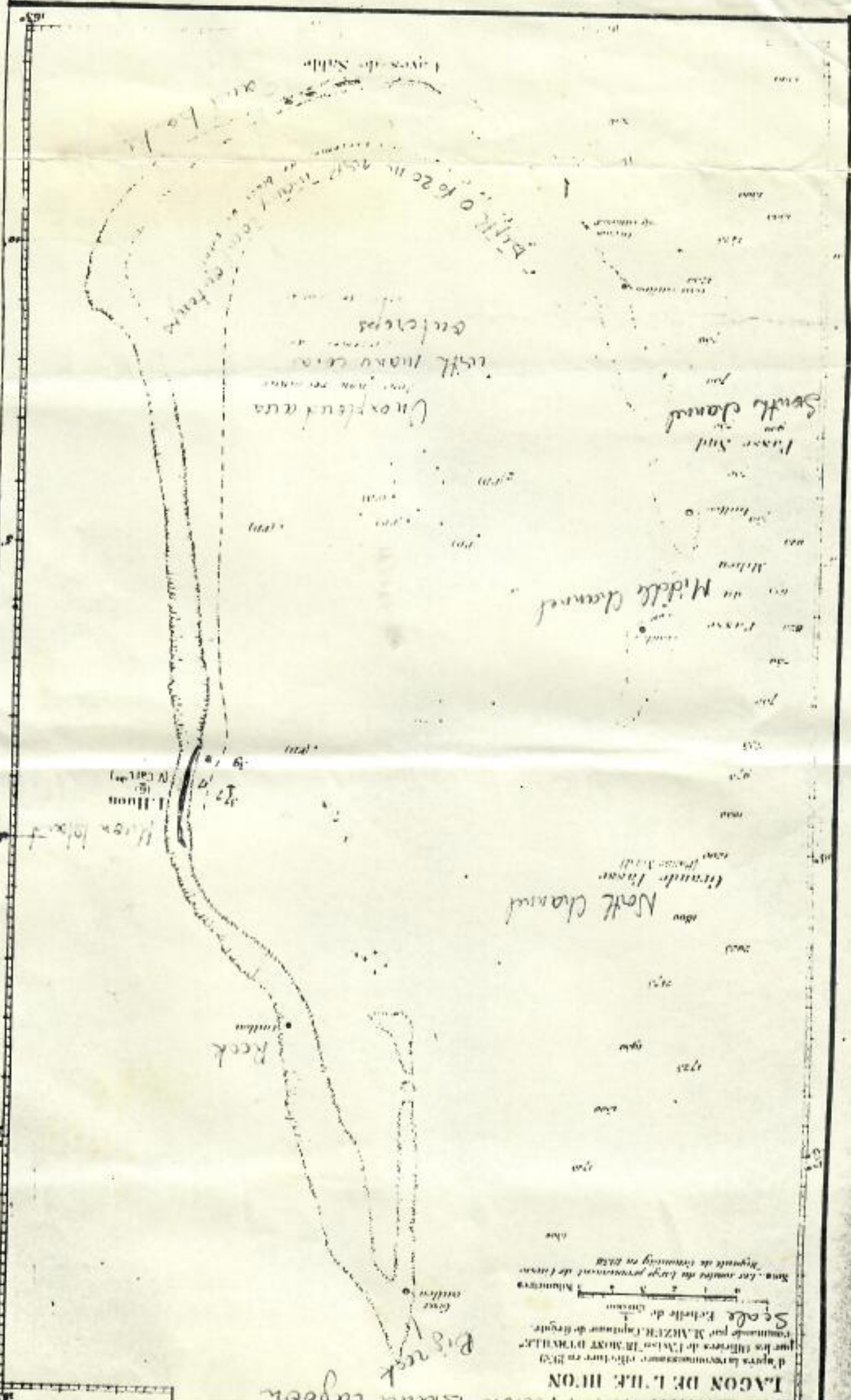
Utiliser cette carte
avec circonspection

Les longitudes sont rapportées au méridien international.
Les sondes sont exprimées en mètres et réduites au niveau des plus basses mers.



South Latitude Nord

Distance métrique



LAGON DE L'ÎLE DE HON
 d'après la reconnaissance effectuée en 1870
 par les Officiers de l'Escadre du Nord de l'Inde
 Commande par M. ARZÈRE, Capitaine de Vaisseau
 Seule Echelle de 1/10000
 Mètres
 Sont les routes de large par lesquelles on passe

Pisces
 Rock

North Channel
 Grande Lagon

Middle Channel

South Channel
 Bassin Sud

Chopland area

Barrage de Sable

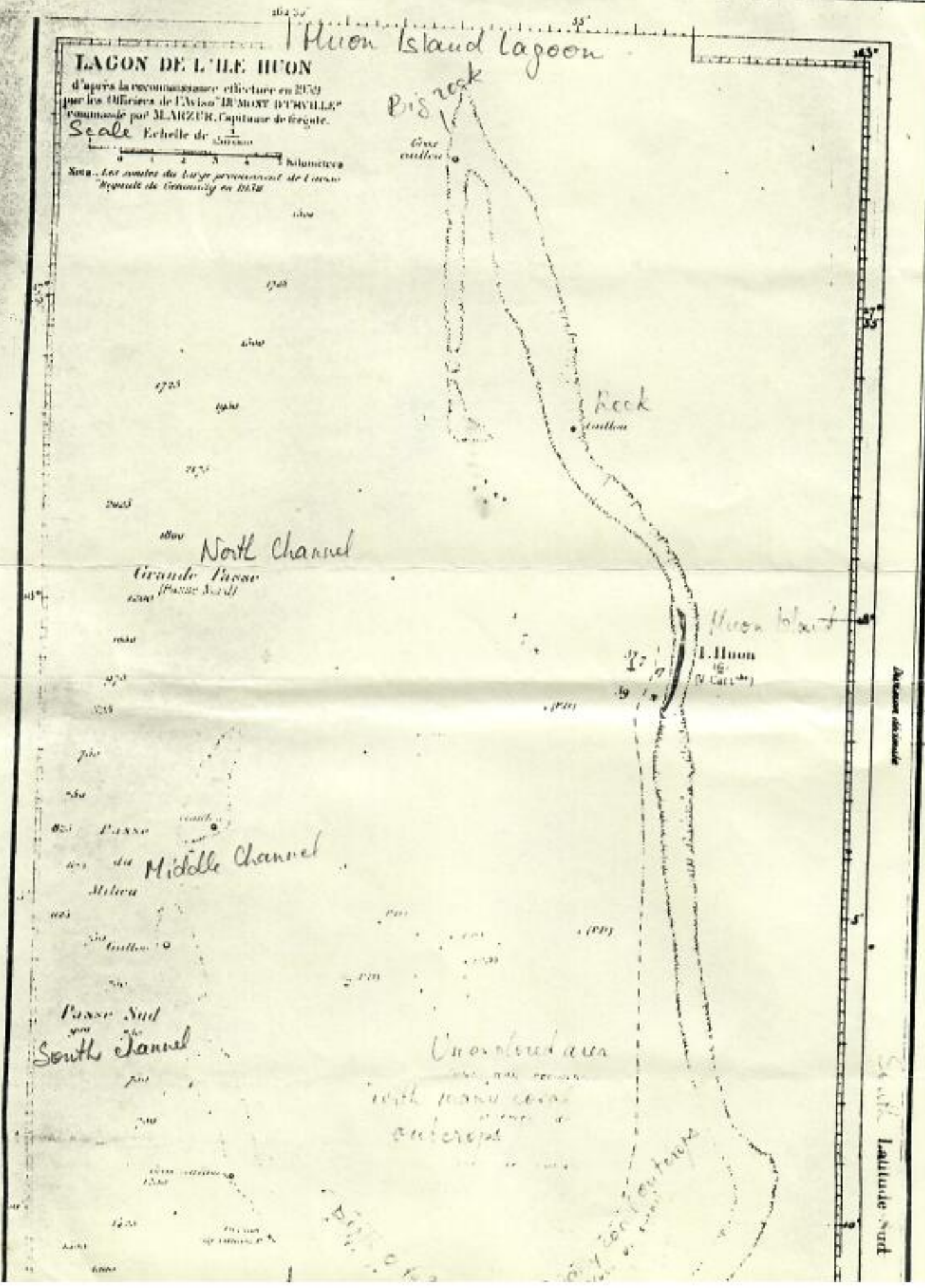
Barrage de Bois

Rock

Île de Hon

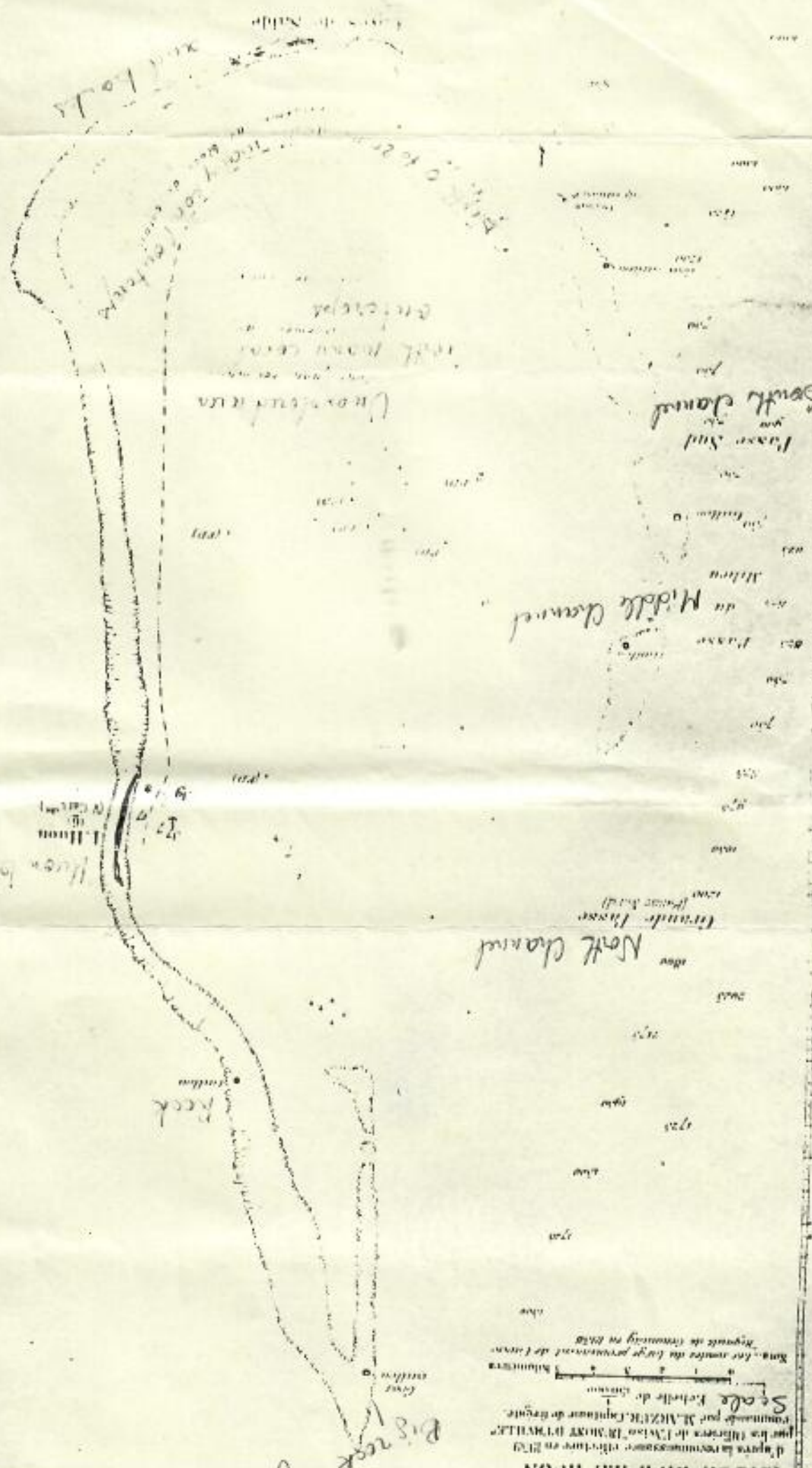
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Latitude Nord

Longitude Ouest



LAGON DE L'ÎLE DE HON
 d'après la reconnaissance effectuée en 1873
 par les Officiers de l'Armée de l'Air et de la Marine
 commandés par M. AIZET, Capitaine de Vaisseau
 et M. LAFITE, Lieutenant de Vaisseau.
 Echelle de 1:50,000
 1000 Mètres
 Nota: Les courbes de fond sont indiquées en mètres.
 Révisé et corrigé en 1878.

Pis rock
 Caves
 Lagon

OBSERVATION OF MARINE TURTLES ON HUON ISLAND (NEW CALEDONIA)
by the Navy Ship "La Dunkerquoise" (February 1980)

by Dr. Chavanat (medical doctor)

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 Density of tracks: about 25 distinct departures every 100 metres estimated to be 24 or 48 hours old.

$$3\text{km} + 3\text{km} = 6000\text{m} \div 100\text{m} = 60 \times 25 \text{ departure tracks} = 1500$$

(24 or 48 hours \therefore 750 - 1500 turtles emerging per night -
 assume 50% success rate - then 375 - 750 turtles actually nesting per night.

- Equal distribution of nesting holes. Density of nesting holes: On an area of 50m x 50m there were approximately 140 holes, with an average diameter of 1.70 metres and a depth of 50 cm, of which roughly a quarter seemed to have been dug during the previous 48 hours. (Estimation based on comparison with holes dug in our presence during the night).
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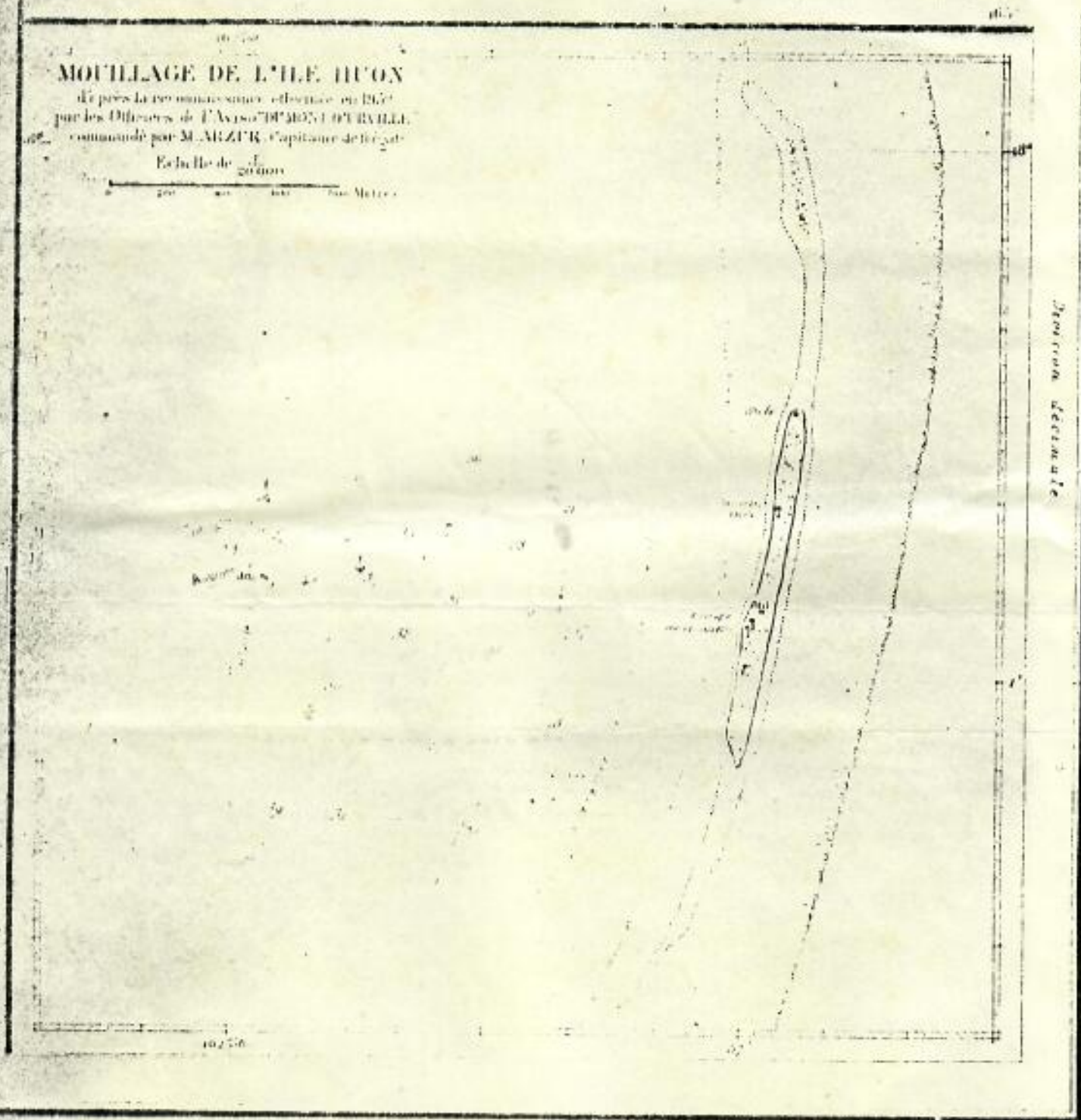
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MOUILLAGE DE L'ILE HUON

Eté 1867
par les Officiers de l'Aviso "D'ARVILLE"
commandé par M. ARZIR, Capitaine de Frégate

Echelle de $\frac{1}{20000}$

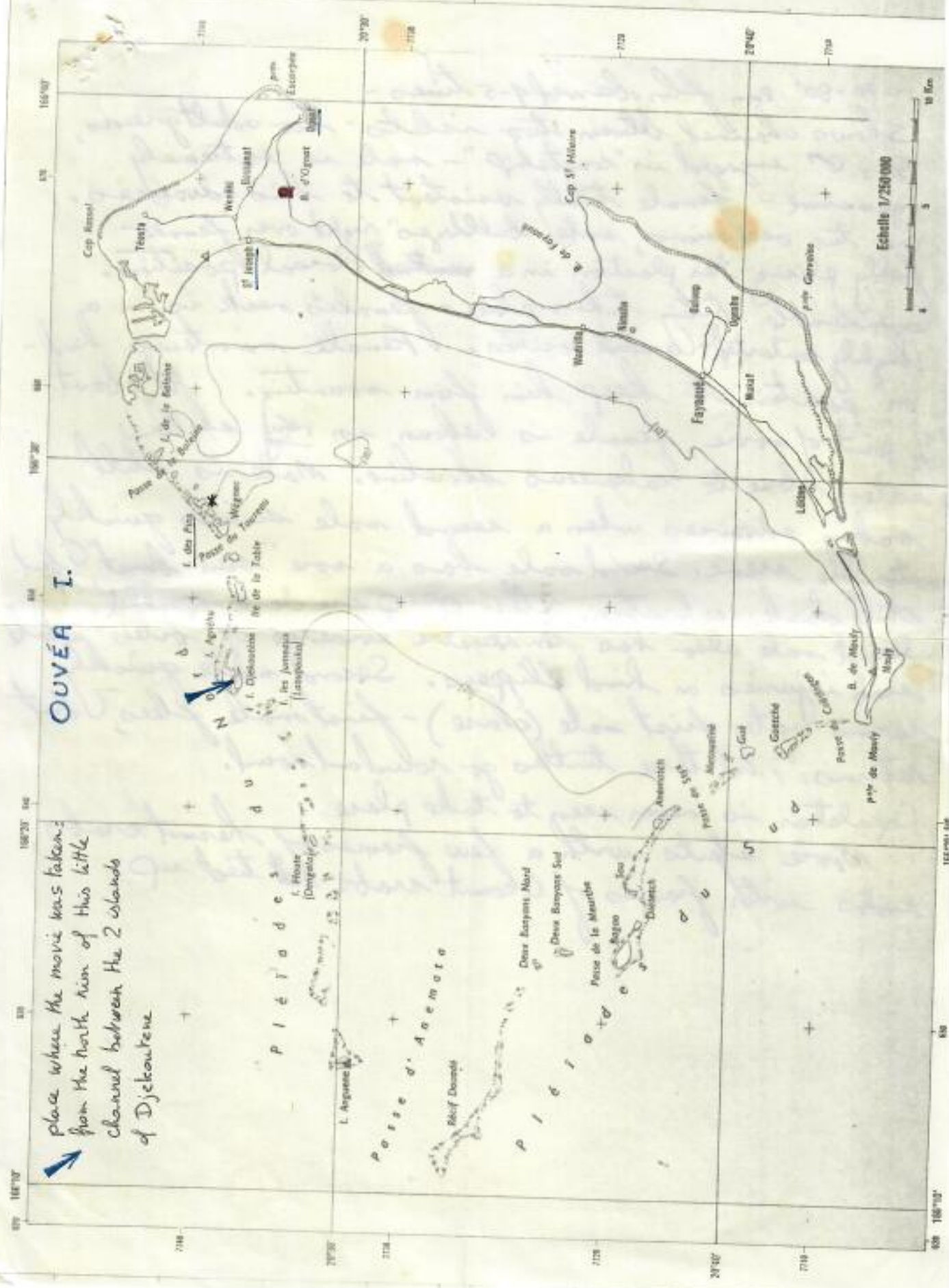
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Détour de l'île

place where the movie was taken:
 from the north rim of this little
 channel between the 2 islands
 of Djekoutene

OUVÉA I.



Echelle 1/250,000

~70-80' 8mm film, observed 4-5 times -
Shows channel between two islets - two adult greens,
♀, ♂ engaged in "courtship" - male is extremely
aggressive - female totally resistant to his advances.
one two occasions, male "bulldozes" right over female -
fully placing her plastron in a ~~ventral~~ dorsal position.
Considerable biting takes place - female's neck is in a
highly contorted-arched position. Female maintains head-
on position to keep him from mounting. At about
1/2 point of movie, female is shown in very shallow
water close to calcareous shoreline. Male is still
making advances when a second male swims quickly
into the scene. Second male has a more "sun-burst" but
still dark, coloration. Other ♂-♀ are dark speckled.
Second male also has considerable evidence of bites - white
scab injuries on hind flippers. Second male quickly
swims after first male (chase) - first male flees, but
returns. The three turtles go round and round.

Copulation is never seen to take place.

Movie starts with a few frames of hermit crabs,
ends with frames of coconut crabs ~~bed~~ tied up.

H. GIGAROFF

REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

OFFICE DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE
ET TECHNIQUE OUTRE-MER

CENTRE DE NOUMEA

Boite Postale A5 NOUMEA-CEDEX

NOUVELLE-CALÉDONIE

Téléphone : 624-55-626-77-610-00

NOUMEA, le

Film - Tortues Marines
d'Ouvéa 11/79-

H. GIGAROFF

REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

OFFICE DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE
ET TECHNIQUE OUTRE-MER

CENTRE DE NOUMEA

Boite Postale AS NOUMEA-CEDEX

NOUVELLE-CALÉDONIE

Téléphone : 624-55-626-77-610-00

NOUMEA, le 5/03/80

Mr. G.H. Balazs

Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology
P.O.B. 1346 - Coconut Island
KANEHOE
HAWAII 96744

Dear Mr. Balazs

Please find here added
the movie about sea-turtle's breeding. It
was taken around the 15th of October 1979 in
the "Pleiades du Nord", islets west of Ouvéa
(the Northern Loyalty Island), - see the map -
Several very fresh tracks of sea-turtles going
for hatching were seen ^{branches of} on this islet and of
"île des Pins" islet (*). Some of these ~~two~~ tracks
had been already "visited" by fishermen from
St Joseph. And I can add that some
friends of the ORSTOM spent the New Year week-end
in Ognat tube, near St Joseph, and could
observe the eclosion of turtle eggs brought
back from Pleiades islets by the natives, ^{some} weeks before.

In hoping these 2 movies would be
of some interest for you (maybe you would find
it common?), I send you my best

Amitiés

DIRECTION GENERALE - 24, RUE BAYARD 75008 PARIS - TELEPHONE 225.31.52
ADRESSE TELEG. ORSTOM-PARIS

CABLE ADDRESS :

ADRESSE TELEGRAPHIQUE :

" SOUTH PACOM " NOUMEA

" SOUTH PACOM " NOUMEA

TELEPHONE : 26.20.00

TELEPHONE : 26.20.00

TELEX : SOPACOM 139 NM

TELEX : SOPACOM 139 NM

Best personal regards.

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

POST BOX D 5
NOUMEA CEDEX
NEW CALEDONIA

COMMISSION DU PACIFIQUE SUD

BOITE POSTALE D 5
NOUMEA CEDEX
NOUVELLE-CALÉDONIE

In reply, please quote PRO 7/14

PLEASE ADDRESS REPLY TO

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

7 March 1980

R. Grandperrin

Fisheries Advisor

cc: Mr George Balazs,
Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology,
Coconut Island,
P.O. Box 1346, ~~Marine Center~~
KANEOHE, Hawaii. 96744
~~Honolulu, Hawaii. 96812~~

Dear George,

Many thanks for your letter dated 25 February. I have contacted Mr Gigaroff who told me that he forwarded the film to you about one week ago. You should have received it by now.

2. Concerning J.K. McElroy's request for moral or financial support I thank you very much for your advice which will of course be kept confidential. Anyhow as clearly stated by myself during the Workshop, the SPC will not put a penny into this sort of exercise. Furthermore, I think that there is so much to do on turtles in other fields at a regional level prior to undertaking this sort of action. As Mr McElroy seems to think that the populations you are working on could prove to be ideal I would like to know whether you have in mind to write to him. Please let me know.

3. The navy ship "La Dunkerguaise" is now back from her trip to the north of New Caledonia. They took pictures during the day and during the night. You will have all of them as soon as they are duplicated. The beach in Huon Island was still pouring with green turtles (only greens) tracks. Six crew members spent about four hours on the beach from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. They saw approximately 50 turtles. Some of them were digging old nests out and as a consequence, hatchlings came out. They caught a reef shark. It had a live hatchling in its stomach. They could keep it for three days. The navy will produce a report on this survey a copy of which will be sent to me. I will have it translated for you. As soon as I get the report the navy will be duly acknowledged by the Secretary-General. At this stage it is not possible to say whether the navy could help in case a tagging programme is carried out in the coming years but I can tell you now that they enjoyed the trip.

4. Mark Gentle's address is C/- Fisheries Division, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, P.O. Box 358, Suva, Fiji.

NOUMEA, le 8 NOV 1982

CENTRE DE NOUMEA
Boite Postale A 5 NOUMEA-CEDEX
NOUVELLE-CALÉDONIE
Téléphone : 26-24-55 - 26-26-77 - 26-10-00

Michel PETIT

to

Réf/MP/md/5906

Georges H. BALAZS
Deputy Chairman
IUCN/SSC Marine Turtle Group
University of Hawaii At Manoa
P.O. Box 1346
Coconut Island
KANEŌBE HAWAII 96744
HAWAII - U.S.A.

Dear Georges,

I think you will be very happy to learn that, during our last tuna aerial survey in New Caledonia (27th Sept-1st Oct.), we have seen about 100 or more Turtles, scattered between NEPOUI (West coast) and Grand-Passage. They were outside the reef (around 10nm) and, for a lot of them, they were in copulation attitude. The sea was very calm, the sky without cloud, so the water very clear. The SST was include between 23°C and 23.8°C. T

The next aerial survey will be probably between 21st November and 15th December and I'll tell you our turtles sightings on Sandy island when they will be laying.

Best regards.

Michel PETIT.

CABLE ADDRESS :
" SOUTH PACOM " NOUMEA
TELEPHONE : 26.20.00
TELEX : SOPACOM 139 NM

ADRESSE TELEGRAPHIQUE :
" SOUTH PACOM " NOUMEA
TELEPHONE : 26.20.00
TELEX : SOPACOM 139 NM

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION
POST BOX D 5
NOUMEA CEDEX
NEW CALEDONIA

COMMISSION DU PACIFIQUE SUD
BOITE POSTALE D 5
NOUMEA CEDEX
NOUVELLE-CALÉDONIE

In reply, please quote PRO 7/14

PLEASE ADDRESS REPLY TO
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

17 February 1982

Mr George Balazs
National Marine Fisheries Service
Box 3830
HONOLULU
Hawaii 96812
U.S.A.

Dear George,

Thanks for your letter of 8 February.


The island with the enclosed lagoon stocked with turtles is indeed Vuanggava (Vuaqava) which lies close to Kambara (Kabara) Island and is situated at approximately 179°5' E, 18°50' S. It's English name is in fact Turtle Island. I've never been there although I've seen it in the distance. The story of turtles "basking" probably came originally from Bill Travis. According to Travis the turtles get into the lagoon through a narrow channel running through the mangroves which surround the lagoon. Uday Raj once put up a project proposal to the National Trust in Fiji to set up a turtle farm on the island and in this he claimed that the lagoon has no surface connections with the sea. He intended constructing an artificial beach. (Nothing came of this proposal).

The other island I'm less sure of - could be Yadua Taba, the sister island of Yadua off north Vanua Levu. This is the island where John Gibbons found the new species of iguana. You could try writing to him c/o School of Natural Resources, USP. (Mick Guinea is also still at USP, studying sea snakes).

As to Huon and Surprise Islands, legally they are French Government land but are a traditional fishing area of the people of Belep Island. If you wanted to visit there you would be well advised to ask permission of the chiefs of Belep.

Hope this is helpful.

Cheers,


Mark Gentle
Assistant Fisheries Officer

MG/gr

Cablegram

Dr. René Grandperrin

Cable Address: SOUTH PACCOM NOUMEA

Mailing Address: South Pacific Commission
Post Box D 5
Noumea Cedex
New Caledonia

Message

BALAZS REQUESTS INFORMATION ON TURTLE OCCURRENCE AT ISLANDS VISITED,
NUMBER SEEN BY SPECIES, NESTING ACTIVITY, NUMBER OF TRACKS SEEN PER
HUNDRED METER OF BEACH, AND FRESHNESS OF TRACKS (STOP) PLEASE ^{TAKE} NUMEROUS
PHOTOS OF TURTLES SEEN, TRACKS ON BEACH, AND NESTING AREA (STOP)
SLIDES OF HUON TO FOLLOW (STOP)

SHOMURA

RCA
537-2521

Sent by RCA
11:40 1/21/80

88C SH100

copy w/ Meylan
G. Green

CABLE ADDRESS :

" SOUTHPACOM " NOUMEA
TELEPHONE : 26.20.00
TELEX : SOPACOM 139 NM

ADRESSE TELEGRAPHIQUE :

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In reply, please quote PRO 7/14

25 January 1980

PLEASE ADDRESS REPLY TO
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Mr. George Balazs
HIMB
P.O. Box 1346
Coconut Island
KANEODHE, Hawaii 96744
U.S.A.

Dear George,

Many thanks for all you sent me during the past weeks :
copies of your letters to Messrs Petit, Sihaze, Konku, Shomura, Rancurel
and Gaudriller; slides and photo; articles on Turtles conservation, the
Philippines and on "the song of the sea turtles", and finally this
beautiful book on Hawaii which is a fascinating document on the archipel-
ago.

I do not know whether you have been sent the films taken by
the volunteer presently working at ORSTOM. If you have not, please let
me know so I could refresh his memory.

The most interesting event is no doubt the planned survey by
this French navy ship to Huon. The Captain told me there are good chances
that the ship will go there. I have drafted for the Secretary General's
signature an official letter describing in detail what type of information
should be collected as you instructed me by cable through Richard Shomura.
The Captain was keen to do something. Furthermore, I know him personally.

The last point I would like to raise in this letter deals with
the draft of the Sea turtles conservation strategy elaborated during the
World conference on turtles. As soon as the final is available, do you
think that it could be included as an article for the SPC Fisheries
Newsletter? Please advise accordingly.

George, that's about all I have to say. As I understand you
were not in Honolulu when I sent you the cable dealing with the trip to
Huon. Does this mean that you have taken some days off? If this is the
case, I hope your leave was good.

Personal regards,

Yours sincerely,

R. Grandperrin
Fisheries Advisor

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NOUVELLE-CALÉDONIE

In reply, please quote CONF 2/9/9/1
PLEASE ADDRESS REPLY TO
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

22 August 1979

Dr George Balazs
Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology
P.O. Box 1346
KANEHOE, Coconut Island
HAWAII 96744, U.S.A.

Dear George,

I hope that your wife forgave me for not being able to join the party Thursday 2 August as I was leaving that night. Sorry for the misunderstanding; I think I was too busy trying to order my favorite Chinese dish!

As I told you already I was most impressed by this workshop on marine turtles and hope that the Noumea one will have this level although discussion will be slightly slowed down by the necessity for interpretation.

You will find enclosed a copy of an article by Uday Raj which appeared in 1974 in the No.12 issue of the South Pacific Commission Fisheries Newsletter. I had in mind to table it during the meeting but I am not sure that the identification features are all reported, especially for the logger head for which emphasis should be put on the number of lateral plates. You may have some idea on that or may be there is something already available which could be easily reprinted here in the SPC. Please keep in mind that we do not have any drawing facilities and that it will have to be translated by SPC.

By now you should have received (i) the formal invitation to attend as a consultant signed by the Secretary-General of the South Pacific Commission, (ii) copy of my letter to Ms Silverstein in Washington D.C., (iii) copy of my letter to Dick James in the Solomon Islands, (iv) copy of the letter from French Polynesia.

I am still expecting the document produced by Peter Pritchard on Papua New Guinea and I hope that we will be allowed to table it.

./...

As I told you the ORSTOM scientists in Noumea are carrying out aerial surveys for tuna around New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna and the New Hebrides. They told me they can see the turtles swimming at the surface and the tracks on the beach. They are now going to record everything. It is a start as nothing has been done so far on this matter.

One of our Master Fisherman has just come back from a three-week duty fishing in Ile des Pins, South of the mainland of New Caledonia. He told me that whilst he was there the local people caught an average of two greens a day in the small Nokauhui atoll, South of Ile des Pins. He says that this exercise is going on all the year around. Does this mean that the population is important around this place? There is an urgent need to undertake some sort of action here in New Caledonia and I am expecting a lot from this workshop.

As you know the spawning season occurs here from November to February-March. The workshop will be right in the middle. Something might be arranged for you to visit Nokauhui or other places. Weather permitting, it is 5 miles from Ile des Pins and there are two flights a day from Noumea. Please let me know well in advance. As I understand Peter Pritchard was also interested in going somewhere before or after the meeting.

Thanks for the copy of your letter to the Cook Islands. Congratulations, it was perfect.

George, I was delighted to meet you at last. Many thanks again for your hospitality and for the time devoted to me whilst I was in Honolulu.

Best personal regards,

Yours sincerely,



R. Grandperrin
Fisheries Adviser

Encl.

cc : Mr R. Shomura
Director
South-West Fisheries Center
Honolulu Laboratory
P.O. Box 3830
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RG/wp

Les patrouilleurs de la Marine aux Chesterfield et à Matthew

TOUTES les 3 heures, les services de la météorologie à Nouméa captent les émissions radio de stations automatiques implantées sur les îlots les plus éloignés de la Grande Terre. Les données climatologiques recueillies et transmises sans intervention humaine par ces stations jouent un rôle important dans l'élaboration des prévisions que nous communiquons chaque jour la météo.

Au cours des dernières semaines, les patrouilleurs de la Marine Nationale, profitant de missions de surveillance en zone économique qui devaient les conduire aux abords des Chesterfield, de Matthew et de Surprise, ont contribué à l'entretien des stations installées dans ces îles en y transportant les techniciens de la météorologie.

«La Dieppoise» aux Chesterfield

Embarquant à bord de «La Dieppoise» le 11 janvier 1980, MM. Clavier et Viale, techniciens de la météorologie, étaient chargés de réparer la station des Chesterfield endommagée par de violentes dépressions successives.

L'archipel des Chesterfield, parsemé de récifs peu connus, est situé à quelque 300 milles à l'Ouest de la Grande Terre. En «atterrissant» plein Est, «La Dieppoise» en profitait pour reconnaître un trajet peu fréquenté. Bientôt apparut

station changées et les antennes débarrassées de leur couche de guano.

Au matin du deuxième jour, les marins du youyou arrivant sur l'île Loop ont assisté à l'éclosion de dizaines de bébés tortues, rampant le plus vite possible vers la mer pour échapper aux redoutables oiseaux prédateurs les attaquant en paque. Un certain nombre de nouveaux-nés ne dut son salut qu'à l'intervention humaine. Mais une fois à la mer, d'autres dangers les attendaient encore...

Pendant ce temps, les travaux de réparation de la station s'achevaient. Les essais s'effectuant normalement, l'équipe de «La Diep-



— L'îlot Surprise vu du ciel. —

Seul témoin du passage de la civilisation dans ces terres désertes, la station météorologique continue sur son petit morceau d'île corallienne appartenant aux oiseaux, aux crabes et aux tortues marines, de transmettre pour notre plus grand profit et la sécurité de tous, ses importantes informations.

«La Dunkerquoise» à Matthew...

A son tour, «La Dunkerquoise» débarquait à l'îlot Matthew, le 23 janvier, M. Graume chef des services techniques de la météo et l'un de ses collaborateurs M. Quinquès. Matthew, îlot volcanique surgit de l'océan en 1948 est situé à 250 milles environ au S.E. de la

avec 48 heures de préavis un temps des plus éléments sur les récifs d'Entrecasteaux. Chose promise, chose due : un soleil de plomb et une faible brise attendaient le patrouilleur à Surprise. Seul, M. Legal n'a pas vraiment apprécié ces excellentes conditions climatiques : après une journée de travail dans le four solaire que constituait la cabine de la station, il a regagné le bord justement épuisé. L'équipage de «La Dunkerquoise», qui n'a pas peur des mauvais jeux de mois, affirme maintenant que les techniciens de la météo sont aussi des «durs à cuire».

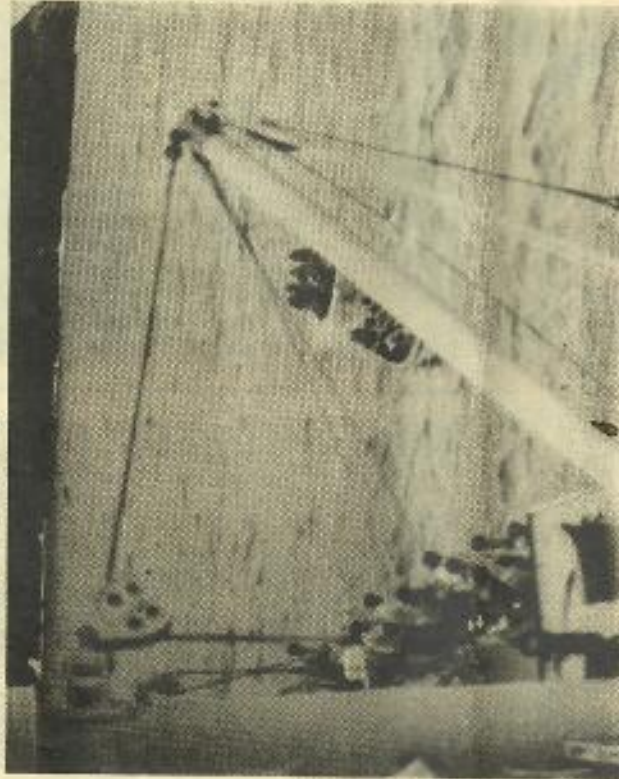
M. Legal devait encore passer quelques jours à bord de «La Dunkerquoise» qui ne faisait qu'entamer son périple dans le grand Nord de la Nouvelle-Calédonie. Outre sa mission de surveillance des pêches, conduite en coopération avec le «Neptune» de l'Aéronavale, elle devait reconnaître l'environnement des récifs d'Entrecasteaux. Le Directeur de la Mission Océanographique du Pacifique avait d'ailleurs pris passage à bord afin d'étudier les conditions dans lesquelles l'hydrographie de ces parages mal connus pourrait être entreprise prochainement.



prontait pour reconnaître un trajet peu fréquent. Bientôt apparut l'archipel sauvage, au-dessus duquel planaient des centaines d'oiseaux. Peu farouches, ils ont ponctué de leurs cris perçants tous les travaux de réparation. Un nouvel abri météo fut installé, les piles de la

vaient. Les essais s'effectuaient normalement, l'équipe de «La Dépêche» commençait alors à réembarquer le matériel lourd, emporté spécialement pour la mission.

Il fallut bientôt abandonner ces îles lointaines et enchantées.



Le départ et le retour des équipes de travail sur Matthew.



matériel, une volucelle surgit de l'océan en 1948 est situé à 250 milles environ au S.E. de la Grande Terre. Il est d'un accès difficile et la station météo, installée en décembre dernier, n'aurait pu y être implantée sans les possibilités exceptionnelles qu'offrait le TCD «Ouragan» de passage dans nos eaux : personnels et matériels avaient été mis à terre par les hélicoptères Puma de l'Armée de l'Air, embarqués pour la circonstance à bord du TCD.

La mission du patrouilleur, un mois plus tard, n'avait certes pas la même ampleur, il s'agissait simplement de débarquer sur l'îlot les deux spécialistes de la météo afin qu'ils remédient à un léger défaut de jeunesse de la station. Malgré les difficultés résultant des effets conjugués d'une forte mer et des abords abrupts de l'îlot, l'opération s'est déroulée sans incident, mais les deux techniciens conserveront sans aucun doute un souvenir ému des trajets mouvementés entre le patrouilleur et l'îlot. Ces deux «terriens» ne se sont cependant pas moins bien comportés que les quartiers-maîtres et il fut démontré ce jour-là que de brillants électroniciens peuvent aussi avoir le pied marin, l'équipage de «La Dunkerquoise» en témoigne !

...Et à Surprise

Le 9 février, «La Dunkerquoise» intervenait une nouvelle fois au profit de la météorologie. Le technicien passager

«La Dunkerquoise» était cette fois, M. Legal, sympathique Caldoche, vieil habitué des îlots déserts et riche pour la plus grande satisfaction de l'équipage, en anecdotes pittoresques relatives à ses séjours en ces terres oubliées.

C'est la station de l'Île Surprise qu'il convenait cette fois de réparer.

Surprise, située à 80 milles au Nord des Belep est l'îlot le plus Sud des récifs d'Entrecasteaux. Sable corailien d'une blancheur éclatante, faux tabacs et cocotiers, offrent en arrivant du large un aspect paradisiaque; vision trompeuse car la



Sur l'îlot Huon, cette tortue creuse le trou où elle va déposer ses œufs.



Très peu de tortues dépassent le stade juvénile.

temps et à la végétation envahissante.

Ces lieux présentent deux inconvénients :

- une cartographie sommaire impose de ne s'y rendre qu'avec de bonnes conditions de visibilité et d'éclairage et l'absence de mouillage abrité et de bonne tenue interdit à un patrouilleur d'y rester par gros temps.

Il était donc nécessaire, avant de faire route vers Surprise en cette période de l'année où les dépressions sévissent, de prendre quelque assurance auprès des prévisionnistes de la météo. Ceux-ci ont fait un effort tout particulier pour «La Dunkerquoise» en lui promettant

Le patrouilleur devait également passer 24 heures à Huon, îlot le plus Nord de tout l'archipel calédonien, afin de recueillir à la demande de la CPS quelques informations relatives à la ponte des tortues marines en ce lieu. L'équipage en a profité pour planter quelques cocotiers espérant ainsi restituer à cet îlot dépourvu de toute végétation arborescente, l'aspect que les navigateurs ont décrit au siècle dernier.

Toutes missions plaisantes qui ont permis à l'équipage du patrouilleur en revivant pendant quelques jours l'époque des découvreurs, de joindre l'agréable à l'utile.

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Le départ et le retour des équipes de travail sur Matthew.



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...Et à Surprise

Le 9 février, «La Dankerquoise» intervenait une nouvelle fois au profit de la météorologie. Le technicien passager de «La Dankerquoise» était cette fois, M. Legat, sympathique Caldoche, vieil habitué des îlots déserts et riche pour la plus grande satisfaction de l'équipage, en anecdotes pittoresques relatives à ses séjours en ces terres oubliées. C'est la station de l'île Surprise qu'il convenait cette fois de réparer. Surprise, située à 80 milles au Nord des Belep est l'île la plus Sud des récifs d'Entrecasteaux. Sable corallien d'une blancheur éclatante, faux tabacs et cocotiers, offrent en arrivant du large un aspect paradisiaque ; vision trompeuse car la



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