



The PEARL and the Giant Squid

PEARL (schooner)

Maldives Isl. # 2540c (2001) 5r

In June 1874, reports started to appear in the Indian newspapers about an incident in the Bay of Bengal in which a 150-ton schooner had been attacked and dragged under by a giant squid in full view of a passing ship. Then, a few weeks later on July 4, an account was published in the (trustworthy) *London Times*, with excerpts from the Indian newspapers:

The first part of the account was by a passenger who had been on board the steamer *Strathowen*. He reported: "We had left Colombo, had rounded Galle, and were well in the Bay (of Bengal), with our course laid for Madras, steaming over a calm and tranquil sea. About an hour before sunset on the 10th of May we saw on our starboard beam and about two miles off a small schooner lying becalmed. There was nothing in her appearance or position to excite remark, but as we came up with her I lazily examined her with my binocular, and then noticed between us, but nearer her, a long, low swelling on the sea, which, from its colour and shape, I took to be a bank of seaweed.

"As I watched, the mass was set in motion. It struck the schooner, which visibly reeled, and then righted. Immediately afterwards, the masts swayed sideways, and I could clearly discern the enormous mass and the hull of the schooner coalescing - I can think of no other term. Almost immediately after the collision and coalescence the schooner's masts swayed towards us, lower and lower; the vessel was on her beam-ends, lay there for a few seconds, and disappeared, the masts righting as she sank, and the main exhibiting a reversed ensign struggling

towards its peak."

The second part of the *Times* report consisted of the account of the captain of the schooner, James Floyd. He stated that the **PEARL**- "a tight little craft as ever sailed the seas" - had left the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius bound for Rangoon with a crew of six and its hold full of ballast. She was due to return to Mauritius with a cargo of rice. On the outbound leg of the journey, the **PEARL** had put into the port of Galle for water.

According to Captain Floyd, the **PEARL** left Galle on May 7 and sailed along the south coast of Ceylon. She would have passed the Great Basses lighthouse, and then headed northeast into the Bay of Bengal towards Rangoon. Three days out of Galle, on May 10, the schooner was becalmed at latitude 8 degree 50 minutes North, longitude 85 degree 05 minutes East. This position is about 170 miles due east of Vandeloo Bay.

Around 5 p.m. on that fateful day, Captain Floyd sighted the **STRATHOWEN** a few miles off. A short time later, as the **PEARL** lay becalmed, "a great mass rose slowly out of the sea about half-a-mile off on our starboard side, and remained spread out, as it were, and stationary; it looked like the back of a huge whale, but it sloped less, and was of a brownish color; even at that distance it looked longer than our craft, and it seemed to be basking in the sun. (Continued on page 2)

