There are no Tide Tables for Banks Strait

I first went through Banks Strait in a yacht when I was 18 years old in 1958, and actually had several trips through there delivering yachts to Melbourne from Hobart. Always keen on sailing, in later years I bought volume 2 of the Australia Pilot.

In 1982 I crossed Banks Strait in a kayak (twice) and since then have probably crossed Banks Strait in a kayak at least 30 times, sometimes at night. In 1984 we left Little Musselroe Bay at 10.30 one Friday night with the intention of paddling to Preservation Island. This was well before the days of GPS's, which I don't use anyway and have no intention of ever using. That night was a pitch black night and you couldn't see your hand in front of your face when we arrived at Preservation Island spot on in the early hours of Saturday morning. I used a map and a compass and a bit of general knowledge about tides

In 2002 Elli and I left Preservation Island at 6pm to paddle to Little Musselroe Bay, where we arrived at 10.40pm, again spot on.

I feel that I know Banks Strait pretty well. Back in 1982 there were very few "Standard Ports", and only one in Bass Strait. That was the Mersey River (Devonport). If you wanted to know the tides for say Rabbit Island just off the east of Wilsons Prom you looked at the Mersey Tide Tables and added 15 minutes to them. If you wanted Preservation Island you subtracted 40 minutes from the Mersey tides. Stack Island along the western end of Bass Strait you added one hour…… and so on for places in Bass Strait. But if you wanted the tides for Swan Island they were taken off the Standard Port of Hobart – you added 43 minutes to the Hobart tide table. It would seem that there are now a lot more Standard Ports and now you can use the tides for Low Head and subtract 2 hours and 4 minutes to get the tides for Swan Island.

So let us look at HW for Swan Island for Thursday 8th March 2016

HW at Low Head is 1051 so subtract 2Hr4min we get 0847 for HW at Swan Is.

HW at Hobart is 0745, so adding 43 minutes we get 0828 for HW at Swan Is.

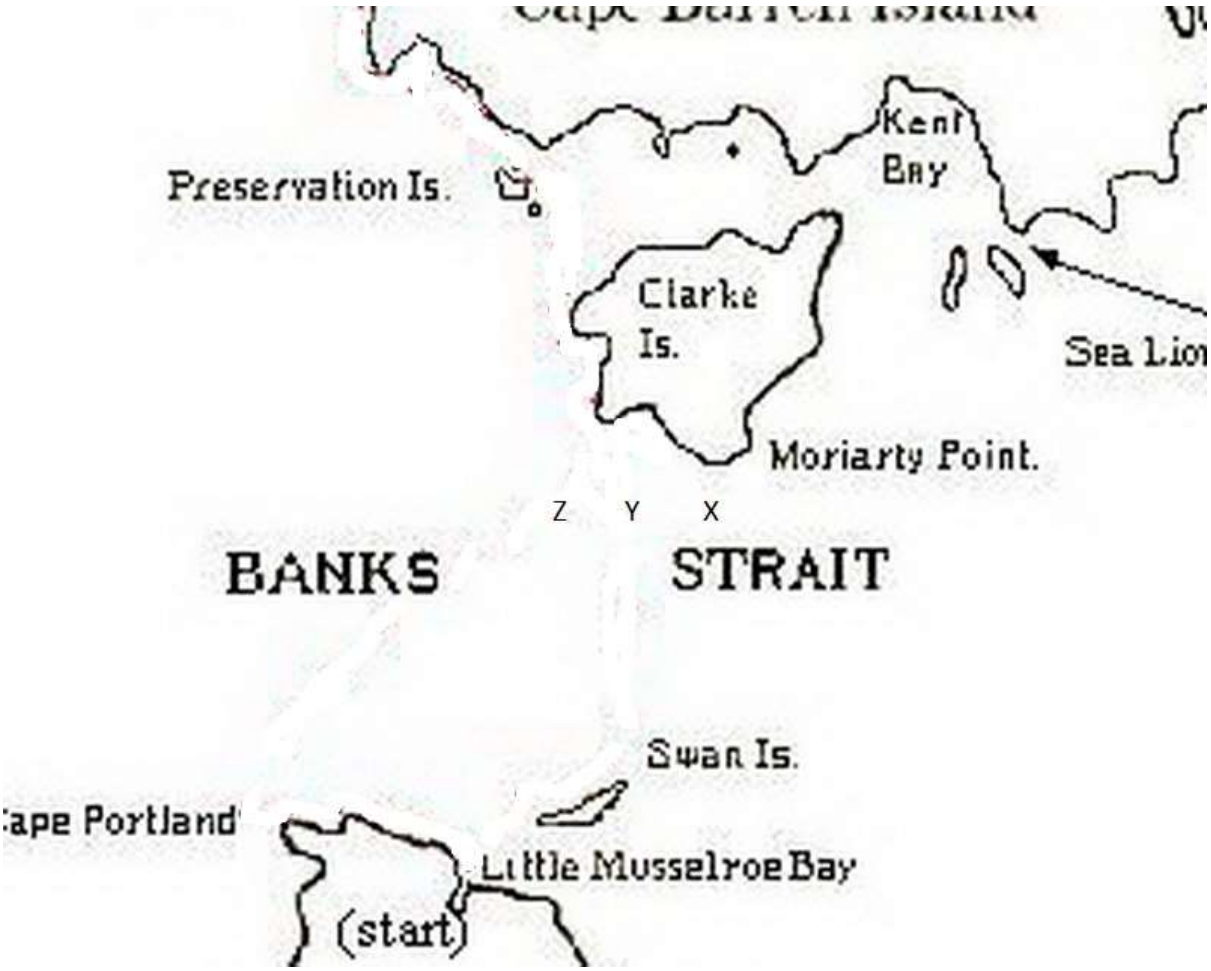
A bit of difference.

And working out HW for Preservation Island the same day

HW at Mersey is 1049, minus 40 minutes we get 1009 for HW at Preservation.

This is a good hour and a half later than Swan Island, but we expect this because Banks Strait constricts the flood water flowing from east to west and slows it down.

If we consider this rough map of Banks Strait I have marked three spots, X, Y, Z.



Because there is a progressive slowing of tides through Banks Strait, HW at point Y will be later than at point X. Point Z will be later again. But how much later? There are no tide tables for any of these points.

So if you are out in Banks Strait and make this statement: ***The predicted tide change was for 7am but as became the norm for the area the change was an hour and a half late*** I would have to say "where the hell did you get this 7am figure from for the exact location you were in?"

You can look at the Bureau of Meteorology website and get tide tables for Swan Island on this page: http://www.bom.gov.au/australia/tides/#!/tas-swan-i

BUT PLEASE NOTE WHAT THEY SAY

Caution: ***Tidal predictions for this location are based on limited observations and therefore expected to be less accurate. Users should exercise caution when using these predictions.***

Less accurate????? Do they mean this is just a bit of guess work?

So I ask you again, where did you get this figure of 7am for the tide change?

Nobody in the world can give you an accurate time of when the tide will change at point X or Y or Z. And even if you had an accurate tide table for point Y it would not apply to point Z because we know that will be later. By the time you work your way across towards Preservation Island they are going to be at least an hour and a half later.

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO WAY THAT ANYONE IN A KAYAK IN BANKS STRAIT CAN SAY THE TIDE DID NOT CHANGE DIRECTION WHEN IT SHOULD HAVE BECAUSE NOBODY KNOWS WHEN IT SHOULD CHANGE AT THAT PARTICULAR POINT ANYWAY

Right at the start I mentioned the Australia Pilot. This is from that volume:

sand over rock, the holding ground is bad. It is not advisable to anchor off Swan island if westerly gales are expected, as on the termination of a westerly gale the wind in the vicinity of Banks strait sometimes shifts to south-eastward. This wind seldom blows home with much strength, but with the swell which rolls in simultaneously, necessitates leaving those anchorages which are open south-eastward. All anchorages in Banks strait which are exposed south-eastward require great caution in their use, owing to the uncertain nature of the winds.

Tidal streams.—The flood stream is the west-going stream, and the ebb stream the east-going, and they are each of 6¼ hours duration at springs; but during neaps, the flood stream runs 7 hours and the ebb stream 5½ hours. The interval of slack water never exceeds a quarter of an hour; the west-going stream begins about 6 hours before high water at springs, and 5½ hours before it at neaps; the east-going stream begins 40 minutes after high water at springs, and 10 minutes before it at neaps.

In the narrowest part of the strait, which is 8½ miles wide between Swan island and Clarke island, the tidal streams run at a rate of 3 knots at springs. Westerly winds accelerate the east-going stream, which has been found to last 2 hours into the flood after strong westerly winds; at such times it occasionally attains a rate of 5 or 6 knots.

At springs, in the middle of Banks strait, the east-going is the stronger of the tidal streams; at these times either stream, when opposed to the wind, causes a high topping sea, which can be dangerous for small craft.

In the channel between Swan island and the shore westward, the flood stream sets north-westward and the ebb stream south-eastward, at a rate of 3 knots at springs, but they are, however, influenced by the wind.

Directions.—A vessel passing through Banks strait from south-eastward can close the southern shore when Mount Pearson is seen over Cape Naturaliste bearing 177°, as she will then be westward of Mussel rock, Black reef, and the other dangers that lie in the strait eastward

You will notice that the tide changes at all sorts of various times depending on whether it is a Spring Tide or a Neap Tide – and if you are in-between those two then how much will you allow? A strong westerly wind can make the ebb tide 2 hours longer than normal, so I suppose a weaker westerly wind may make the ebb tide run say 27 minutes longer.

I repeat again:

THERE ARE NO TIDE TABLES FOR BANKS STRAIT

If you come to my place and put your finger on a point on a map of Banks Strait and say ***"we were out there last Tuesday and the tide did not change when it should have"*** I am going to look at you and sadly shake my head and quietly say to myself ***"absolutely balmy thinking they had any idea of when the tide should have changed at that particular point."***