

GEOGRAPHY

Ice Islands as Bases

Floating masses of ice 20 miles across and 200 feet thick would be suitable for Arctic weather stations, air fields and research laboratories, conference is told.

➤ **HUGE** floating islands of ice in the Arctic Ocean are being eyed by scientists as potential bases for weather stations, air fields and research laboratories near the North Pole.

Weather experts and military research specialists at the Alaskan Science Conference in Washington listened intently as monster ice islands 20 miles across and 200 feet thick were described by Lt. Col. Joseph O. Fletcher, commanding officer of the Air Force's 375th Reconnaissance Squadron based in Alaska.

Col. Fletcher showed a photograph of a four-engined Russian plane which landed on Arctic ice 13 years ago. The inference was clear: Russia began long before the United States to study conditions along the short air route over the Polar cap.

The islands floating in the Arctic Ocean are much thicker than ordinary field ice. Scientists at the conference said they are probably chunks of glaciers millions of years old—so called fossil ice which has

never melted. There are believed to be many of them moving sluggishly through the thinner ice and open waters of the Arctic, perhaps as much as two miles a day.

No research stations now exist on these floating ice islands, Dr. A. F. Spilhaus, dean of the Institute of Technology at the University of Minnesota, said, but scientists are intrigued by their possibilities.

The polar regions are the only great gaps remaining in the world's weather network, he said. Little is known of temperature and wind conditions at sea level in the Arctic, although many airplanes have now flown over the region. Geophysicists want to know more about the atmosphere, radio conditions and the earth's magnetism at the top of the world.

The islands might be very useful for landing strips, Dr. Spilhaus said. Low level reconnaissance has shown there are level areas on the islands of ice suitable for landings.

Polar engineering is a new and startling field, he said. Solid ice may be used as a construction material like steel or wood. Alloys of ice mixed with sawdust are being studied.

From materials such as this, the meteorologist predicted, whole towns may some day be built in the Arctic on floating bases which nature has already provided in a frozen world.

Science News Letter, November 25, 1950

GEOPHYSICS

Consider Possibility of Second Magnetic Pole

➤ **THE** possibility that there may be a second magnetic north pole somewhere in the Arctic is being taken seriously by scientists.

It was brought up again in a paper by two geophysicists of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, David G. Knapp and Capt. Elliott B. Roberts. The paper was presented to the Alaskan Science Conference sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences and the National Research Council.

Alaska occupies a strategic area in the attack on this "perennial riddle of Arctic magnetism," the scientists reported. From Alaska, they said, magnetic observations in the heart of the Arctic Ocean may break the mystery.

The question lies in the magnetic north pole found by James C. Ross on the Boothia Peninsula in 1831. This imaginary

point on the earth's surface has moved somewhat since it was found, but it is still not in the center of the overall magnetic field of the Arctic.

The possibility that a second magnetic pole may be pulling the field askew has been suggested before by scientists. Despite tremendous difficulties in taking magnetic observations in the Arctic Ocean, the job of tracking down the answer is being accelerated.

Science News Letter, November 25, 1950

RADIO-ASTRONOMY

Better Communications From Study of Aurora

➤ **BETTER** communications in the Arctic, vital if all-out war comes, should result from studies of the aurora borealis and the upper atmosphere now being made in Alaska.

Dr. A. G. McNish of the National Bureau of Standards told the first Alaskan Science Conference, sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences, that the effect of the "northern lights" on radio communications was "not altogether deleterious." Normally brilliant aurora displays mean interference with radio reception, and often blackouts. New information is giving a possibility for careful choice of frequency that will allow radio communications otherwise impossible.

Science News Letter, November 25, 1950

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