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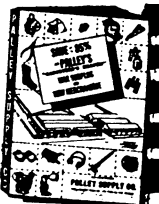
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OCEANOGRAPHY

Ice Island Formation

► THE FLOATING ice islands of the Arctic may form from the bottom up, rather than from the top down, as is now thought.

This upside down phenomenon, which represents something entirely new to glaciology, is discussed in *Geographical Review* (Oct.) by Dr. Frank Debenham, emeritus professor of geography at Cambridge University, England.

Dr. Debenham suggests that ice islands are really unusual forms of sea ice, produced

by salt water freezing onto a thin layer of coastal ice anchored in a fiord.

Ice islands, the first of which was discovered by the U. S. Air Force in 1946, are very large and durable. The Air Force has used them as floating experimental and weather stations. Recent reports have indicated that the Russians are doing likewise.

A characteristic of the ice island that plays an important part in its identification is the fact that its surface is corrugated.

The origin of the islands has been found to be a 200-mile stretch of the polar coast of Ellesmere Island, which is due west of Greenland. It is here that the only ribbed ice of its kind in the polar region is found.

Dr. Debenham claims that this region, which is known as a "polar desert," has so little snowfall and so much thaw that it would be virtually impossible for enough ice to freeze and remain frozen onto the coastal ice.

He believes that coastal ice, moored in narrow fiords, are laminated over a period of centuries by the freezing of the salt water underneath.

The English Arctic expert theorizes that the characteristic corrugations are caused by the slight, but regular pressure of the tides, as it acts upon the ice anchored in the fiord.

Research by the Air Force has shown that at regular intervals in the thickness of the ice there appear veins of sand, mud and stone. Dr. Debenham credits these as having been picked up by the freezing sea water from the fiord bottom and cemented to the bottom of the island.

A microscopic examination of these "distinct layers of dirt" may show whether the material is of land or marine origin.

The islands tend to break away when they are subjected to a catastrophic weather change.

Science News Letter, November 20, 1954

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