

Subsection 3.—Coastal Waters*

The coastline of Canada, one of the longest of any country in the world, comprises the following estimated milages:—

Mainland—

Atlantic, 6,110; Pacific, 1,580; Hudson Strait, 1,245; Hudson Bay, 3,155; Arctic, 5,770; total, 17,860 miles.

Islands—

Atlantic, 8,680; Pacific, 3,980; Hudson Strait, 60; Hudson Bay, 2,305; Arctic, 26,785; total, 41,810 miles.

A comprehensive description of the coastal waters of Canada would require information from sciences such as oceanography, marine biology and meteorology. However, the basic factor in any study of the oceanic-continental margin is the physical relief of the sea floor, and the scope of the information presented here is therefore restricted to this and a few salient features of the Atlantic, Arctic and Pacific marginal seas surrounding Canada.

Atlantic.—Along this coastal area, the sea has inundated valleys and lower parts of the Appalachian Mountains as well as those of the Canadian Shield. The submerged continental shelf, protruding seaward from the shore, effects the transition from continental to oceanic conditions. This shelf is distinguished by great width and diversity of relief. From the coast of Nova Scotia its width varies from 60 to 100 miles, from Newfoundland 120 to 50 miles (at the entrance of Hudson Strait), and northward it merges with that of the Arctic Ocean. The outer edge of the shelf, known as the continental shoulder, is of varying depths of from 100 to 200 fathoms before the shelf suddenly gives way to the steep declivity leading to abyssal depths. The over-all gradient of the Atlantic continental shelf is slight but the whole area is studded with shoals, plateaux, banks, ridges and islands and the coasts of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland are rugged and fringed with islets and shoals. Off Nova Scotia the 40-fathom line lies at an average of 12 miles from the shore and constitutes the danger line for coastal shipping. The whole floor of the marginal sea appears to be traversed by channels and gullies cutting well into the shelf.

The main topographical features of the Atlantic marginal sea floor are attributed to glacial origin but land erosion is an important factor. Eroded materials are carried seaward by rivers, ice and wind, and wave action against cliffs and shore banks washes away enormous masses that are deposited over the surrounding sea floor. The topography of the continental sea floor is therefore constantly changing and navigation charts of Canada's eastern seaboard must be continuously revised.

Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait bite deeply into the Continent. Hudson Bay is an inland sea 250,000 sq. miles in area having an average depth of about 70 fathoms; the greatest charted depth in the centre of the Bay is 141 fathoms.

Hudson Strait separates Baffin Island from the continental coast and connects Hudson Bay with the Atlantic Ocean. It is 430 miles long and from 37 to 120 miles wide and its greatest charted depth of 481 fathoms is close inside the Atlantic entrance. Great irregularities of the sea floor are indicated but, except in inshore waters, few navigation hazards have been located.

Arctic.—The submerged plateau extending from the northern coast of North America is a major part of the great continental shelf, surrounding the Arctic Ocean, on which lie all the Arctic islands of Canada, Greenland, and most of the Arctic islands of Europe and Asia. This shelf is most uniformly developed north of Siberia, where it is about 500 miles wide; north of North America it surrounds the western islands of the Archipelago and extends 50 to 300 miles seaward from the outermost islands.

The topography of the floor of the submerged part of this continental margin is only partly explored but sufficient has been charted to indicate, in common with continental shelves throughout the world, an abrupt break at the oceanward edge to the relatively steep

* The Federal Government's oceanographic research program is outlined in Chapter XI on Mines and Minerals, Section 2, Subsection 1.