

ICE AND ICE MOVEMENTS

IN

BERING SEA AND THE ARCTIC BASIN.

Report of the ice as found in Bering sea and the Arctic basin in the vicinity of Bering straits, and its movements under the influence of the prevailing currents and winds.

General description of the ice in different localities.—The "Arctic pack" which never melts, consists of hard, blue ice, made up of fields of comparatively level ice, as much as 1 miles in diameter, which are surrounded and interspersed with hummocks, from 20 to 40 feet high. Along the edge of the pack "leads" are found running into it for short distances in different directions; when the pack moves it goes in a body, and these leads are continually changing, opening and closing, so as to make it impossible for a vessel, once caught in the pack, to proceed at will. A vessel so caught is unmanageable, even should she escape being crushed, and all the whaling captains agree that, if it is found impossible to get out before young ice makes, nothing can be done except to abandon her.

In the spring, with the prevailing southerly winds and northerly currents, the pack breaks off from the shore ice and moves north, the northern limit of its southern edge varying in latitude, as will be shown further on, and is held north until the fall, when it again moves south. During these summer months ice melts, evaporates and disappears, so that, when the pack returns south, the old ice probably does not come below the latitude of Icy cape in a body, unless it does so well off shore.

I can find no record of the old pack being seen from the shore in the fall below Icy cape, such portions of the old ice that are found below that latitude being composed of detached and much broken floes.