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Department of Commerce and Labor
COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY

O. J. S. Mann
Superintendent.

State: *Alaska*

DESCRIPTIVE REPORT.

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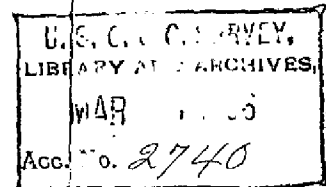
LOCALITY:

Martin Islands
and Kotalla Bay

1903

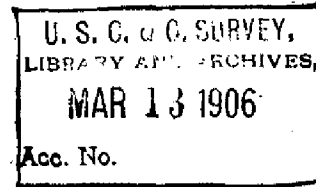
CHIEF OF PARTY:

W. C. Hodgkins



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Descriptive Report
on the Topographic Sheet of Martin Islands
and vicinity, Alaska, 1905.
By W. C. Hodgkins, Assistant.



The topography shown on this sheet was surveyed in connection with the hydrographic examination of the approaches to the Martin Islands and to Controller Bay and is necessarily only fragmentary, the bad weather which prevailed in the latter part of October, when the survey was in progress, preventing the giving of very much time to the topography.

The general character of the country back from the shore line is hilly, but the immediate vicinity of the shore is comparatively low, decidedly so east of Katalla, and to the westward also as far as Palm Point, beyond which the shore rises for a time into rocky bluffs fifty or sixty feet in height.

The Martin Islands lie off this more elevated part of the coast, with which they appear to have been connected at some former time, perhaps not very remote. They are two in number, besides a number of outlying rocks and ledges, are nearly flat on top and are bordered by steep rocky cliffs which in some places reach a height of sixty to eighty feet.

The water is bold around the Martin Islands, except near the northern part of the more northern island, from which a flat extends to the main land. At low water a considerable extent of this flat is dry and I have been told that a dry spit sometimes connects the inner island with the main land.

East of Katalla, the sand beach is comparatively steep and in ordinary weather boats can land without difficulty. A dense forest closely borders this part of the shore and the upper part of the beach is covered with numerous fallen trees. Between Katalla and Palm Point, the trees are a little farther from the shore and there are several settlers' cabins, but the beach is flatter and the approach is quite foul, there being numerous scattered rocks off shore.

There are no records of ship wrecks in this locality, but it may be stated as certain that a ship stranding on the outer coast of the Martin Islands in a heavy gale would soon go to pieces or founder in the deep water close to the cliffs, while on the sandy shore east of Katalla or on Kanak Island a well built ship should endure a considerable sea and should be driven close up to the beach before going to pieces.

There are no traveling dunes within the area delineated on this sheet, nor were any shingle levees noticed.

The cliffs in the vicinity of Cape Martin seem to be receding rather rapidly, though very probably somewhat irregularly. The triangulation station "Stump", established in 1903 by Assistant Pratt, was found in 1905 to have been destroyed by an extensive caving away of the cliffs, estimated at about fifty metres in a direction normal to the coast. The sandy shores of the inlets east and west of Kanak Island (not shown on this sheet) seem to have suffered considerable changes since 1903, but there is no definite evidence of a general recession of the coast.

The forest growth on the main land is composed of spruce, as usual in Alaska. On the Martin Islands there is no forest growth, but there are a few stunted spruces and in places a dense growth of the troublesome "devil's club", besides a luxuriant growth of grass in the open ground.

The only settlement is the small hamlet called Katalla (written Catella by the inhabitants), which was established at the time of an excitement over the local oil fields in 1902 and 1903. There are very few inhabitants and the trade of the place is very small. A few prospectors go into the interior from this point, where there is a postoffice. The mail and supplies are brought by launch from Kayak landing, on Wingham Island, which is a regular port of call for the coasting steamers, though few of them actually go in as far as Kayak itself. The general custom is to anchor two or three miles out and land passengers and freight by lighter.

There are no roads in this section, though there seems to be a trail up the valley of the small river which flows into the sea at Katalla, passable for energetic travelers on foot ("mushers" in Alaskan parlance).

This region is said to be rich in coal and oil and it has been proposed to establish a railway terminus and shipping point upon the inner of the Martin Islands. However well situated this point may appear with reference to its accessibility from the coal fields, its exposure to the sea would seem to preclude its utilization as a port unless the projectors were in readiness to expend large sums for harbor works of a protective nature.

W. C. Hodgkins

March 13, 1906.