Form 504
U. S. COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

DESCRIPTIVE REPORT

Type of Survey: Topographic
Field No.: Office No.: 2553

LOCALITY
State: Alaska
General locality: Savannah
Locality: Islands

1961
CHIEF OF PARTY
F. Westdal

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C. H. F. Stuttman, Superintendent.

State: Alaska

DESCRIPTIVE REPORT.

Topographic Sheet No. 2553

LOCALITY:

Sarnak Islands

1901.

CHIEF OF PARTY:

J. Westdahl
Descriptive Report

to accompany topographic chart entitled

Treasury Department
W. J. East and Geodetic Survey
C. H. Kittsman Superintendent
Samnak Islands
Alaska

Surveyed in August and September, 1901, by the party in
Steamer "McArthur"

Ferdinand Westahl, Assistant, Commanding

Scale 40,000

There are two original field sheets for this work; the first, covering the main island nearly and the majority of the outlying islands, was begun and finished, without computed triangulation points, by Mr. O. M. Leland, Adt; the other, embracing the vicinity of Peteson Bay and the whole of Caton Island, after the triangulation had been completed, by Assistant C. R. Fess. Like the preceding sheet of Katak Peninsula, both of these were executed in wet weather, between showers of mist and rain, often in the midst of a shower when it was necessary to secure the station occupied, and it was therefore impracticable to put projections on the field sheets on account of uneven shrinkage. All the field work was transferred to and adjusted upon, a new sheet and projection by Mr. O. M. Leland, and is the sheet to which this
Sannak Mountain, from near Pankof Δ.

Sannak Δ
Granite Δ
Description Report refers. The original field sheets have also been forwarded to the Office. The contours are drawn for every hundred feet difference of elevation above ordinary high water mark and are sketched mainly, the tops of mountains, hills, and bluffs only being determined by vertical angles.

The Sannak group has an extreme length between its outermost visible rocks and breaks of twenty and a half nautical miles East and West (map) nearly, and a breadth of ten and a half miles. The nearest point of the mainland is Cape Panket to the Northwest, with a clear passage shallow miles in width between rocks, and to the Northeastward, at a distance of eight miles, lies Midway Rock which may be considered to be the farthest outlying point of the Sandmann reefs and rocks. The Sannak group consists of two main islands, Sannak and Caton Islands, on the same ridge, with a great number of smaller islands and rocks disposed in almost parallel ridges to the Southward of the former. Near the northeastern extremity of the main island lies Sannak Mountain, about three miles in length by one in width, and rising to seventeen hundred feet above the sea. Four and a half miles to the Eastward from its highest point this ridge again rises to two hundred feet and more above the sea at Middle Delta, but all the remainder of the group consists of low ridges and irregular lumps rising to little more than one hundred feet in places on the main ridges at the north side.
of the islands, and gradually sinking to less than forty feet along the ridges forming the islands and rocks on the south side. This low, lumpy area is covered with a luxuriant tundra vegetation, mosses, grasses, berries, and flowers in the short summer season; and in the innumerable depressions between the ridges and lumps are lakes and rivulets. The rocky foundation under this carpet of vegetation, as seen along the cliffs of the shores, is of a dark slate color and, where most exposed to the action of air and water, of a cleavage resembling slate. The layers are divided by transverse cracks, sometimes filled with quartz but mostly with a stain resembling cement. The cliffs above the action of the waves are covered with bright colored limon. Some of the sharp projecting points on the beach bear a curious resemblance to petrified trunks or trees. Among the angular debris along the shore, apparently fallen from the cliffs above, are numerous smooth and light-colored granite boulders from the size of a cobble stone to about one foot in diameter. The sand formed by the disintegration of these rocky ledges is coarse and angular, and, when wet, black in color. The beaches on the north sides of the islands are generally shingly mixed with a little sand; on the south sides a bright colored sand prevails.

When the Gannak Islands are approached from a distance, nothing is seen except Gannak Mountain which in its outline resembles the engraved outlines of the mainland and other
islands in the vicinity. When approaching still nearer, especially from the southeast, where the low land extends out farthest, the sudden rising above the horizon of this extensive and, in the present imperfect state of our published charts, unlooked for low land, with its far outlying rocks and islets, gives a nervous shock to the most daring navigators and has caused the locality to be most carefully avoided by them. The southern and western approaches, certainly are dangerous, especially so in the season of fogs and thick weather; but on the north and east sides it is not so, the only hidden dangers, so far discovered, being the Bedrock rocks. No others have been reported, and in former years at least, when the sea otter was more abundant, the horizon was almost constantly scanned from the highest elevations by the native hunters.

The low islands and reefs of the Sannack group, and the similar ones in the Sandmann's group to the northward, with the comparatively shallow water surrounding them, have been, and still are, the favorite haunts of the sea otter, which feeds its food at the bottom of these waters, and roving places on the low lying rocks and islands within instant reach of the sea. Marvelous are the tales told of how some lucky hunters would discover the sleeping places of these wary animals, approach them cautiously at night in their noiseless kayaks, land, and club them to death by the hundred. Not so, however, during the supremacy of the Russian American Fur
Company, which allowed the natives to kill only a limited
number each year, and was so careful not to disturb them
otherwise, that no native nor white man was permitted to
live on the islands at all, except at one place at its northwestern extremity. I am informed that this regulation was impli-
citly obeyed by this docile people and has given the name,
Achekto, to the harbor, Achekto or Achak being the Russian
for "place of fire". Since Alaska was ceded to the United
States while traders established themselves at the various
harbors in the group, and the natives, spurred on by the rich
rewards offered by the traders for the pelts which was probably
not more than one third of the price obtained for them finally in the
London fur market, killed the sea otters indiscriminately.

Before the Government of the United States finally adopted
and enforced restrictive legislation these traders fitted out
small schooners and, taking on board a dozen or more native
hunters with their dogs for the purpose, pursued the otter
at its feeding grounds among the farthest outlying ledges so
that now the valuable animal is all but exterminated. During
the winter season cruising in this vicinity we saw but two
sea otters, and that was while searching for the Leonard Rock
rocks in a space of some hundred miles and half a mile apart over the
reported locality. A sleeping otter was twice seen in a space
between two adjacent rocks, and it might have been the same
otter both times as I would not permit any shooting at it.
View of Acherk, or Company, Harbor, from Acherk Hill
Harbors and Anchorage. Acheron or Company Harbor, at the northwestern extremity of Narraganset Island, is a very contracted anchorage with barely room enough to round to. It is open to winds from northwest to east, but offers good protection in southerly and westerly winds. When it is blowing strong from the westward there is an unpleasant surry rolling in around the point, and in strong winds from north to northeast a vessel must leave the harbor. The land on the west side of the harbor rises to one hundred feet at its highest point and is an island at high water. Almost under this highest point lies the wreck of a schooner blown ashore here in a sudden northeast gale, when laden with codfish and ready to sail, with both anchors down and ninety fathoms of chain on each. Vessels drawing more than ten feet should not run in farther than abreast this schooner wreck. The houses of the settlement do not show until well inside the points forming the harbor. There are further rocks off these points on both sides of the entrance but they are marked by kelp and can be readily avoided. If bounds in, bring the northwestern end of Long Island over the low point of land at the southern end of the harbor, on about S. 1/2 W. steering, and run in on it, keeping midway between the points, until the prakes of Narraganset Mountains are in line and the bow of hours on the east side of the harbor directly under them. Anchor here in about five to six fathoms over sand and broken shells. The water is sometimes so clear that...
the bottom can be seen here. Care should be taken in approaching from the westward to avoid the reef, lying one mile to the westward of the West point, and a sunken rock, lying one mile further to the westward, or two miles from the West point. The area to the southward of this is a reef and sunken rock is very foul and should be avoided. In approaching from the northward and eastward, the only known danger is the Country Rock, which lies two and one-tenth miles K.D. by W. 5/8 W. from the East point of the harbor, two and three-tenths miles K.D. 1/8 W. from the extreme West point, and a little more than one and a half miles off the nearest point of land to the eastward of Acheek Harbor. This rock has several small pinnacles very close together. The least water found upon it is about twelve feet, but there may be less, and from nine to fifteen fathoms immediately around it. The safest way to approach from the eastward is to keep within three-quarters of a mile of the north shore of Sannak Island from abreast of Northeast Point. Acheek Harbor has been sounded and the hydrography of it is plotted on a separate sheet.

The village here is quite an old settlement, mostly but elegantly testified to by the numerous memorial crosses in the two cemeteries on the hillside back of the dwellings of the living. The largest and most conspicuous buildings are the Greek Church, two stores, and two warehouse, now used as salting houses for codfish. Our
of their has a short landing wharf for boats in front of it to which our tide-gauge was fastened. The dwelling houses number about twelve to fourteen, all small but neat looking and are principally occupied by white fishermen married to native women. Since the extermination of the sea-otters the importance of the settlement has departed. The stores are empty and the only profitable industry carried on at present is codfishing. We saw about twelve to fifteen head of cattle grazing in the luxuriant grass covering the entire land. Cattle were imported here many years ago, but the experiment of raising them has not proved an unqualified success owing to the scarcity for housing them in winter and the difficulty of curing grass sufficient for feeding them at such times during the short and wet summers.

Murphy's Rock. On the north shore of the island, a little more than a mile from Acherk Harbor, is an indentation in the shoreline to which the above euphonyous name is locally applied. It is protected by a reef in the offing and is a good harbor for boats. A fishing station with a crew of about twelve men is located here. It is much more and handier to the codfishing grounds in the deep water bordering the north side of Dannek Island than Acherk Harbor, and nearly all the fishermen living in the latter place now fish for and from this station. Larger houses were being built here this season.
Paulof Harbor, named for, and first occupied by Paul W. Paulof, the pilot employed on the ship during the season, as an outer hunting station, is a small and well protected bay about one mile eastward from the eastern base of Sannak Mountain. It is reported to be a good harbor for small craft but intricate to enter on account of the protecting reefs. Vessels drawing more than seven or eight feet cannot use it. The most important fishing station in the group is now located here, and the only store on the island where supplies may be purchased.

Animak Bay, one mile to the eastward of Paulof Harbor, is small and of no importance; it derives its name from a schooner of that name which capsized off the island and the wreck drifted ashore here.

Johnson's Bay, the next indentation about one mile further to the eastward, is at the base of the highest hill on the islands outside of Sannak Mountain and upon which Middle is located. It has an inner harbor for boats and small craft, and large vessels may anchor in the outer eight fathoms deep close to the east shore in about nine fathoms protected from southerly and westerly winds. There are a few rocks lying close in off the west point which should be given a reasonable berth in entering. A fishing station is located around the point in the inner part of the bay.
Northeast Harbor is an open and readily accessible bay, well protected in northerly and westerly winds but exposed to southerly and easterly. The point forming the north side of the harbor is about one hundred feet high, narrow and projects about three-quarters of a mile to the eastward, beyond the general direction of the shore and forming a cove about three-quarters of a mile in length and breadth to the southward of it. The whole of this area is, however, not available for anchorage. In the middle, or slightly nearer the southern shore, lies Eagle Rock, an islet about fifty feet above the sea at high tide, seemingly consisting of two almost inaccessible black rocks close together and with some grass on top, but at low tide seen to be surrounded by an extensive area of flat, rocky ledges.

The north side of it is bold to, but from the west end, in the direction of Sammak Mountain, runs a sunken reef and joining another running from the back in the inner end of the cove. To the southward of Eagle Rock, the cove is foul and more exposed, but to the northward of it is good anchorage in from two to five fathoms over sandy bottom. To retire, give the north point a brisk of about one-quarter of a mile and run around and past it until Channabara Island is just open from it. Anchor in ten fathoms between the north shore and Eagle Rock, but slightly nearer the former. When sitting nearer from the outlet of a lake in the western extremity of the cove I anchored in five fathoms abreast and to the northward of the west end of Eagle Rock, only temporarily however.
View of Lida Island, from the anchorage.
as this truth is very contracted and when the wind blew hard from the northward over the point the ship's stern swung too uncomfortably close to Eagle Rock. There is a considerable amount of drift wood in this cove, and some all along the north shore of the island. Northeast Harbor has been partially rounded out and the hydrography of it is plotted on a separate sheet.

Lida Island Anchorage. To the southward of Lida Island and northwestern of the west end of Eaton Island is a plateau of sandy bottom with about six to eight fathoms of water over it where vessels may anchor in safety during southerly and southwesterly winds. I anchored here on two occasions and remained one night in calm weather. However, there are two entrances to this anchorage, on either side of Lida Island. If approached from the eastward, run in close to the visible rocks off the east end of Lida Island where depths of eleven fathoms will be found until well in past the point when it decreases to eight and seven and a half. The danger lies in the partially covered reef projecting north-northwestward from Eaton island. If approached from the westward look out for the rock ashore which lies three-quarters of a mile northeastward from Finnerty Island and one mile west-southwest from Lida Island; but do not approach the west end of Lida Island closer than half a mile as foul bottom reaches out from it. There are some rocks marked by keep close under Eaton Island but otherwise this anchorage seems to be free from danger. Care should be taken not to
approach too close to the south side of this anchorage, where extensive areas of foul ground exist, except as directed under the head of Coton Harbor. There is an abandoned fishing station on Lida Island. Search was made for fresh water on this island but none was found.

_Caton Harbor_. Between Lannak, Coton, and Saranna Islands is a large area of shoal water over sandy bottom where small vessels may anchor in from two to three fathoms and protected from all swell. This is known as Coton Harbor. The apparently wide opening to the northward, between Coton Island and the small islands off Lannak, from which direction come the bravest gales, is almost filled by reefs showing above water in many places and which completely break the swells. There is a narrow entrance close to the rocks projecting from the west end of Coton Island, through which I entered with the "McArthur" on account of storms of weather, and another still narrower and crooked between Lannak and Saranna Islands of which I know nothing except that the approaches to it from the southward are full of rocks and reefs. I am informed that schooners of considerable size have ventured in Coton Harbor, which speaks well for its safety and good holding bottom.

To enter this harbor from the northward proceed as directed to enter Lida Island Anchorage from the westward.

When we past the rock awash lying three-quarters of a mile
northeastward from Finney Island, and the visible rocks between it and Manda Island, being the extremity of Northeast Point run to show tangent to the south, or inside, of the rock awash and from and on that range until close to Eaton Island; then keep the visible rocks and help projecting from the west end of this island close aboard on your port hand. Do not approach the help on your starboard hand. When past the rocks on your port hand turn to the southwest for half a mile until Princess Rock is in range with Sannack Mountain and anchor in about three fathoms, about half a mile from the nearest flat reef to the westward. At high water this reef shows only a large, flat rock, but at low tide a larger area is uncovered all around it. In the narrowest part of this passage I found nothing less than four and a half fathoms; I kept leads going (on both sides and inward at low water very slowly). Immediately inside the water shoals to three and a half and their fathoms and the bottom is plainly firm everywhere. I am informed there is an equally good anchorage, and probably better sheltered in southeast gales, off the sand beach on Eaton Island immediately inside the narrow entrance in about the same depth of water. I had no opportunity to sound out Eaton Harbor. Princess Rock, referred to above, is a high rock with some soil and grass on top and surrounded by an extensive area of flat, rocky reefs which are covered at high tide. It shows conspicuously because of its shape and height in the opening between
Sannak and Gatun Islands from the northeast, and between Sannak and Saranna Islands from the southeast. Its name is derived from a romantic story current among the natives that upon its summit is buried the body of a chief's favorite daughter who, before her early death, expressed to her father the fear that her body would be mutilated by the innumerable field mice which infest these islands and the mainland. The old chief promised her immunity from this apprehension, and after her death, buried her body on the summit of this rock.

It is also related that the natives used to resort to this grave as to a shrine to supplicate the intercession of her spirit for success in the chase; if her prayers were effective, they would return and place some of the pelts as votive offerings on her grave. A story is current among the few remaining natives that a white man, upon being told this tale, recently robbed the grave of the valuable deposit.

Petersen Bay, on the south side of Sannak Island, is well protected from all winds, except southeast, especially for small vessels which may anchor well inside and abreast the village. Vessels drawing twelve feet or more must anchor just inside the narrow entrance where they will be exposed to southeast gales. The holding bottom is good, however, and the most common pots are at a gate from that quarter with both anchors down and worked to forty-five and thirty fathoms of chain on each respectively. As southerly gales the approaches do not look
View of range for running into Peterson Bay, north point of bay under saddle of Sannak Mountain, NW by W + W (mag.)

Peterson Bay and Village
from the anchorage
inviting but at such times all the reefs show breakers and may therefore be avoided. The channel is comparatively
straight and, if the directions are closely followed, perfectly safe.
The north point of the entrance is higher and bolder than the
more projecting south point, and therefore can be more easily
distinguished. To enter bring the left tangent of the north
point under the slight paddle between the highest peak
of Sannal Mountain and the eastern peak of the same
and run in on this range, the magnetic course of which
is K.W. by W. ½ N. When nearly up to the south point so
that it is seen in line with the south shore of Sannal
Island swing to the northward a little so as to bring the
same left tangent of the south point on with the extreme
left tangent of Sannal Mountain and run in on this latter
range until the rocks on the north side of the entrance are
close aboard, then steer for the middle of the entrance and
select an anchorage according to draught. These directions
are closely followed will pass the reefs and breakers off Peterson
Island on the starboard hand at a distance of about one mile, and the nearest breaker on the port hand, off
Peterson Island, one mile. The north point of the bay is bold
to, but the south point has sunken rocks and reefs off it
both in the entrance and inside the bay. Peterson Bay has
been sounded and the hydrography of it is shown on a prepa-
rate chart.
There is a small settlement of natives and some white men on the north shore of the bay itself. The houses are not seen when running in according to above directions until just before the anchorage for deeper draught vessels is reached. They are situated on a platform of grass and moss-covered shingle about twenty feet above the sea and near the brackish water. I am informed by the inhabitants here that during the prevalence of heavy northwest gales in winter a tremendous surf enters this harbor and almost reaches their houses. It seems well-nigh impossible to believe this, owing to the situation of the bay to leeward of the islands in such gales, but it is vouched for by all the inhabitants the party talked with and partially confirmed by the wave erosion at the edge of the shingle platform above the brackish water. I have been told many marvellous tales about the fierceness of the northwest winter gales in this region but this forms to cap them all.

On Appleget's sketch-map of Nanak Islands an anchorage is marked in the cove formed by Mary and Peterson Islands on the north side of them. I have been informed it is easy of access by following the directions for entering Peterson Bay until these islands are nearly abreast and then head up for the anchorage. On the north side of Peterson Island, about two miles eastward from Lida Island, is a cove from the points of which reefs project nearly half a mile in north-northwest directions, the same authority also locates an anchorage.
I have had no opportunity to examine either of these anchorages. I have passed close to the reefs outside the latter and have seen nothing there to endanger a vessel in westerly and southerly winds. In view of the general accuracy of the information on Applebee’s map I should not hesitate to anchor in either of these places and recommend that they be shown as anchorages on the published charts. I may add that I used Applebee’s map for entering Peterson Bay, Lila Island Anchorage, and finally Eaton Harbor, the latter contrary to the advice of the pilot who warned me to await high water.

The line of rocky islets projecting to the southeastward from Long Island, and all the islets off the south side of Savannah Island, seem to be the remains of a low table-land, now washed out in its softer parts. When seen broad off they all appear of the same height, flat-topped and grass covered, and with almost perpendicular sides like a piece of gigantic long-piled blocks placed in a row with openings between them. With perhaps the exception of Peterson Bay the entire south side of Savannah Island is dangerous for a stranger to approach. This is especially true of the southwest end where the Kennings and the Onida sunken rocks lie three and a half and five miles respectively from the nearest visible rocks, with many more sunken rocks within the thin kelp field between them. On the east end also, off the entire round of Eaton Island are reefs and breakers more than one mile off shore.
In the names used for this sheet I have been guided by those obtained by Messrs. Fari's and Leland, while surveying and camping on shore, from the natives and white men living here, rather than from Applegarth's sketch map. In the descriptive report to accompany the sheet on scale of 1:150,000, which includes the entire season's work, I intend to present some account and discussion of names used in general on all the sheets.

Respectfully Submitted

Ferdinand Wettstaedt
Assistant