



MARINE SAFETY INFORMATION BULLETIN 01-16

June 14, 2016

Voyage Planning Notice for Vessels Transiting the Bering Strait

This bulletin is an informational release to mariners planning to transit through the Bering Strait. The U.S. Coast Guard is conducting a Port Access Route Study to determine if ship routing measures are warranted in this region. While this study is still in progress, a number of issues potentially affecting safe navigation and the environment have been identified, including the quality of hydrographic survey information, dense concentrations of threatened or endangered species and marine mammals, and evolving communications protocols in the region. Mariners planning to navigate these remote and ecologically sensitive waters are encouraged to be diligent in voyage planning to avoid problems during the transit.

Hydrographic Survey Information:

Mariners are urged to be mindful of the quality and age of hydrographic survey data on which nautical charts are based and choose their route appropriately. Both paper and electronic charts provide information in their source diagrams about the hydrographic surveys the chart is based upon. Hydrographic survey data for much of the Bering and Chukchi Seas is in excess of 50 years old and may have been obtained with survey techniques that are not as reliable as today's multi-beam sonar. In 2015, a vessel operating in western Alaska struck an uncharted object and sustained significant damage. The accident investigation revealed the location to be approximately 20% shallower than charted depths. Mariners should choose transit routes well clear of shoal water to allow for sufficient under keel clearance, especially if operating in areas where chart source diagrams indicate the chart is not based on a recent hydrographic survey. For additional information on nautical charts and a detailed description of chart source diagrams, refer to the general information section of United States Coast Pilot 9.

The Coast Guard and NOAA have recently surveyed a four nautical mile wide navigation corridor that begins at the Northern terminus of the Unimak Pass Safety Fairway and extends Northward through the Bering Strait. The at-sea survey work was completed in 2015 and preliminary analysis of the hydrographic data has found no dangers to navigation or areas with depths of less than 10 fathoms. The new hydrographic surveys did reveal a number of areas where depths were inconsistent with the charted depths, but none at depths of 10 fathoms or less.

Nautical charts will not reflect these updated survey results until this data has been processed for publication, which may occur as soon as 2017. In the interim, the Coast Guard is making this newly surveyed potential navigation corridor known to the maritime community for their awareness and consideration in voyage planning. Coordinates of the area that has been recently surveyed are provided in enclosure (1).

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Vessel Traffic Recommendations For Eastern Norton Sound From 1 August Through 31 October:

Spectacled eiders (*Somateria fischeri*), a threatened species of seabird, undergo flightless molt periods in several locations. The most imperiled population (the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta breeding population) molts exclusively in eastern Norton Sound. Vessels should remain outside the following area from 1 August through 31 October to avoid disturbing large flocks of these birds (Coordinates provided in Decimal Degrees):

Northwest corner -- 64.296N/-162.112W

Southwest corner -- 64.053N/-162.045W

Northeast corner -- 64.319N/-161.654W

Southeast corner -- 64.076N/-161.591W

During the molting period, spectacled eiders are flightless and use their energy stores to stay warm and grow new feathers. Disturbance from vessel traffic during this energetically demanding time could result in harm to the spectacled eiders. The outlined area in enclosure (2) comprises the core molting area for spectacled eiders, although mariners may also observe them outside this core area. Questions/concerns should be directed to Ellen Lance at (907) 271-1467 or by email to Ellen_lance@fws.gov.

Chukchi Sea and Bering Strait – Communication Centers:

In past years with high levels of outer continental shelf exploratory drilling activity, Commercial North Slope Communications Center facilities were established in support of 2015 Chukchi Sea and Bering Strait offshore vessel traffic in Alaska. The primary objective of the Communication Center Program was to prevent open water conflicts with subsistence hunters in the Chukchi Sea and Bering Strait. It is not anticipated that the Communications Centers that covered the Bering Strait and Chukchi Sea in Kotzebue, Nome, Wales, Savoonga, Deering, Kivalina, Point Hope, Point Lay, Wainwright, and Barrow will be in operation during the 2016 Navigation Season. Any additional developments in this program will be published through the Seventeenth District's Local Notice to Mariners.

Surface and Subsurface Buoys and moorings in Arctic Waters:

The locations of all subsurface and surface oceanographic moorings that have been reported to the U.S. Coast Guard are included in an enclosure to the weekly Local Notice to Mariners. The name, type, location, depth, water depth, and a Point of Contact for all data buoys, surface and subsurface, should be reported as quickly as is practical if they are placed within 200 nautical miles of the United States. Data buoys placed in the Arctic region but outside of 200 nm of the United States may also be reported and will be included in this compilation for informational purposes only. Any notifications, corrections, additions, or deletions should be submitted via e-mail to D17-PF-D17-LNM@uscg.mil.

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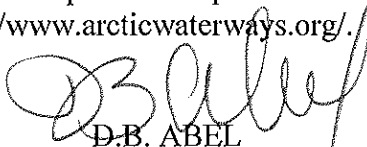
Chukchi Sea Point Lay Walrus Concentrations:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would like to notify mariners that due to low seasonal ice conditions over recent years there have been large groups of walrus hauled out on the barrier islands near the community of Point Lay once the area is ice free. In 2015 the haul-out was just north of the old village site. Large concentrations of walrus can be expected to be encountered in the near shore waters. In addition, large groups of walrus may also be encountered in the water as they move from Point Lay to the Hanna Shoal area to feed. To prevent disturbance to this large concentration of walrus, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requests that all marine vessels transiting the area remain a minimum of 5 miles offshore. Walrus usually continue to use the Point Lay haul-out through the month of September and into mid-October. Barges or other vessels servicing Point Lay are requested to maintain a one mile buffer from walrus hauled out on shore. Vessels traveling in a predictable manner appear to be less disturbing to walrus. If you observe walrus in the water, near your vessel, avoid excessive speed or sudden changes in speed or direction. Vessel operators should take every precaution to avoid harassment of walrus when a vessel is operating near these animals. Vessels should also reduce speed and maintain a minimum half mile distance from the vessel to groups of walrus encountered in the water. Also, vessels should not be operated in such a way as to separate members of a group of walrus from other members of the group. Pacific walrus are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and harassment or disturbance is illegal. Questions/concerns should be directed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Marine Mammals Management toll free at 1-800-362-514. To report instances of disturbance or harassment contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement toll free at 1-877-535-1795 or 1-800-858-7621.

Arctic Waterways Safety Committee (AWSC):

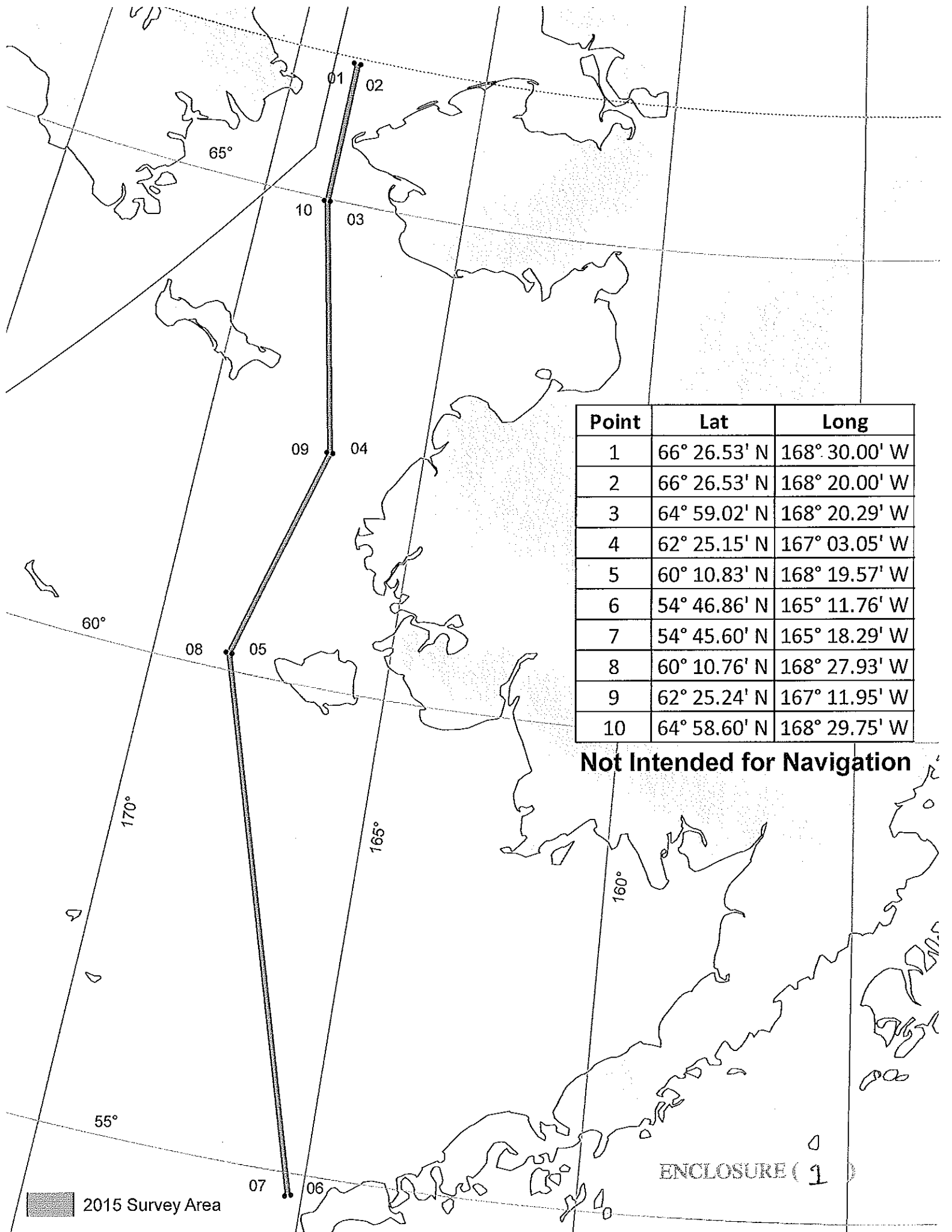
The Arctic Waterway Safety Committee was established in October 2014 as a self-governing multi-stakeholder group focused on creating and documenting best practices to ensure a safe, efficient, and predictable operating environment for all arctic waterway users. The committee is composed of a wide array of arctic maritime users and stakeholders that fall under three broad categories: Subsistence Hunters, Industry, and Other representatives. Each category has five seats, each with a vote in decisions made by the Committee.

The AWSC is currently developing an Arctic Waterways Safety Plan which is intended to be a compilation of best practices for vessel operations. The USCG encourages vessel operators with experience working in the Arctic to be a part of this process. Additional information can be found on the AWSC website, <http://www.arcticwaterways.org/>.



D.B. ABEL
Rear Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard
Commander, Seventeenth Coast Guard District

- Encl: (1) Hydrographic Survey Coordinates.
(2) Map of Spectacled Eider Core Molting Area in Norton Sound.

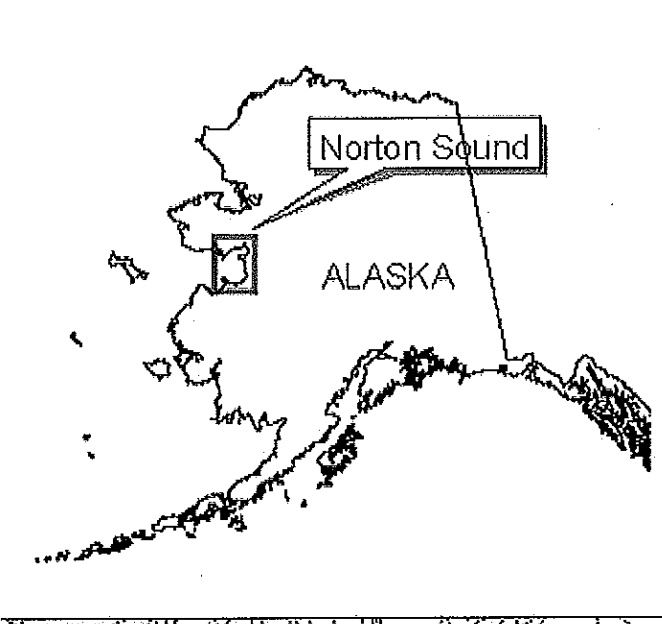


Point	Lat	Long
1	66° 26.53' N	168° 30.00' W
2	66° 26.53' N	168° 20.00' W
3	64° 59.02' N	168° 20.29' W
4	62° 25.15' N	167° 03.05' W
5	60° 10.83' N	168° 19.57' W
6	54° 46.86' N	165° 11.76' W
7	54° 45.60' N	165° 18.29' W
8	60° 10.76' N	168° 27.93' W
9	62° 25.24' N	167° 11.95' W
10	64° 58.60' N	168° 29.75' W

Not Intended for Navigation

ENCLOSURE (1)

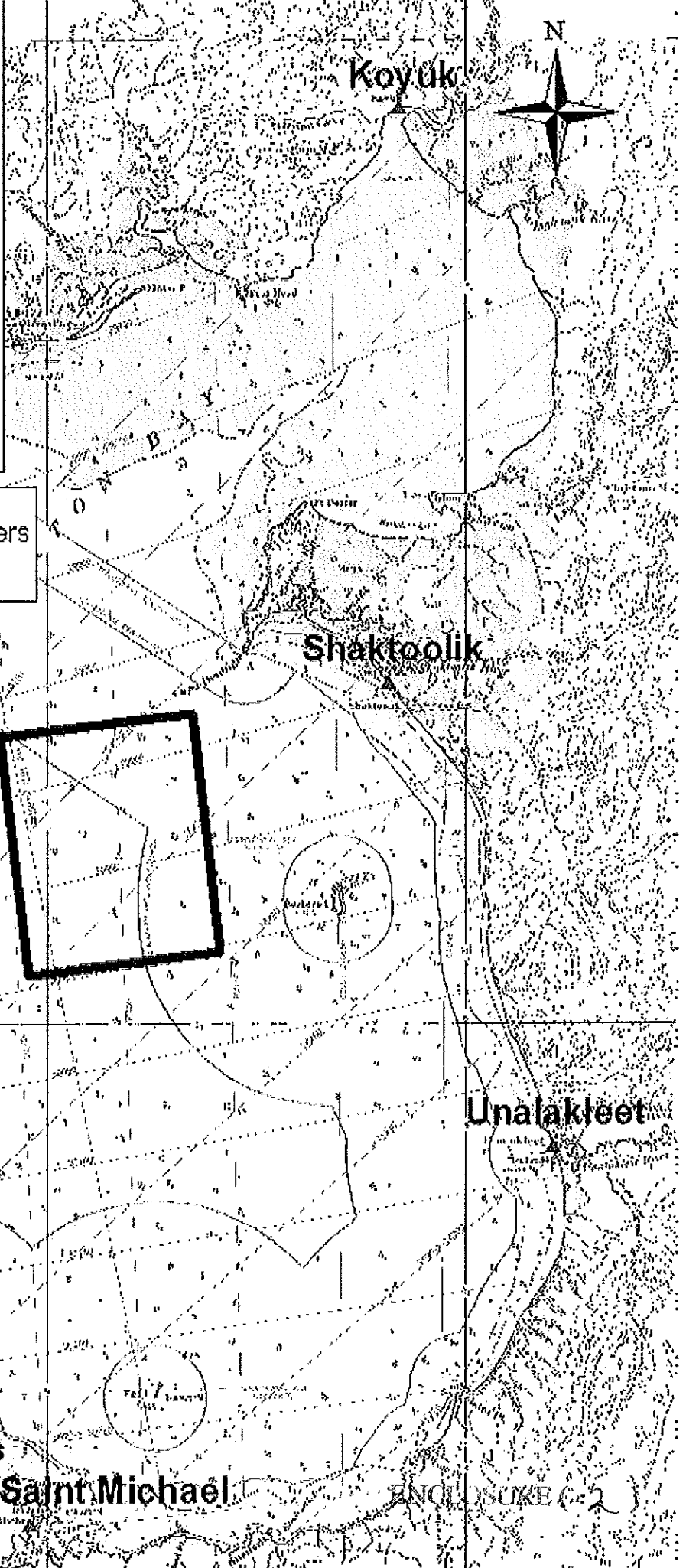
2015 Survey Area



Norton Sound

ALASKA

20 0 20 Kilometers



Koyuk



Shaktoolik

Unalakleet

Stebbins

Saint Michael

ENCLOSURE (2)