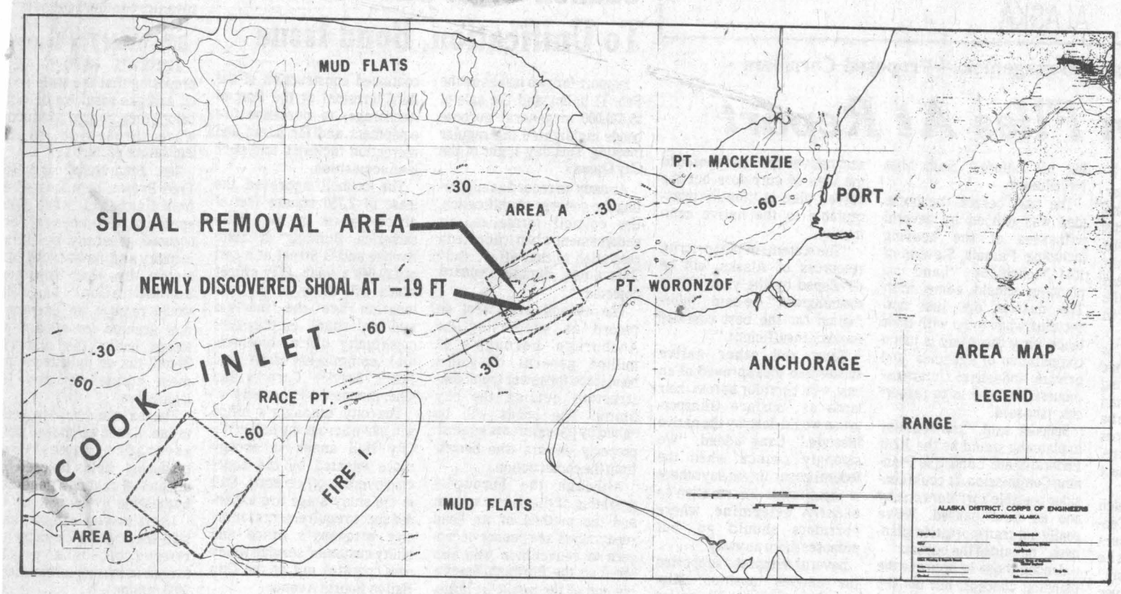
Anchorage Daily Times, Thursday, January 30, 1975

SHOALS THREATEN SHIPS



DANGER AREA LIES WEST OF PT. WORONZOF

A gravel and boulder-strewn shoal discovered in August by the vessel Rainier about two nautical miles west of Pt. Woronzof poses a new threat to large vessels using the Port of Anchorage. Anchorage shipping companies, led by Sea-Land, are trying to get Alaska's congressional delegation to get funds appropriated for the Army Corps of Engineers to remove the obstruction.

Port Users Tell Concern Over Channel Hazards

By FLIP TODD
Times Staff Writer

Use of the port of Anchorage is being threatened by shoals that have formed near Anchorage in a narrow shipping channel that leads to the port.

In August the National Oceanic and Geodetic Survey vessel Rainier discovered a new shoal in the 2,000 - foot wide channel that rises as high as 19 feet below the zero tide level.

Since most of the Sea-Land cargo ships and petroleum tankers draw in the neighborhood of 32 feet of water the obstruction is considered an extreme hazard by the companies that operate the multi-million dollar ships.

Since Anchorage has some of the highest tides in the world most of the vessels have been able to avoid the problem by waiting north of Kenai until the high tides carry them over the obstruction.

Navigational charts showing depths in the Cook Inlet have proven unreliable because the powerful tides have carved out cayons on some sections of the inlet bottom while building up boulder-strewn shoals in other areas.

During a 30-month period from May 1967 to October 1969 four ocean-going vessels using the Port of Anchorage hit the bottom of the Cook Inlet in the area near the recently discovered boulder-strewn shoal.

A meeting yesterday at the office of the Greater Anchorage Chamber of Commerce brought together some of the concerned shippers, who heard an Army Corps of Engineers civil engineer, Dick Griffith, describe the hazardous shoal as a 400-foot long ridge "with two little high points that come up to -19 feet."

The corps made a preliminary study of the shoaling problem in 1970 after shippers and insurance people became very upset with the danger of the port approach, but that study has never been acted upon.

KEITH COLLAR
'We Have To Wait'

The Coast Guard put out a notice to mariners after the Rainier discovered the shoal this summer.

"At first we thought some ice rafted a large boulder out there" Griffith told a gathering of 15 people at the meeting yesterday, "but apparently the shoal has been there all the time."

A survey in 1970 failed to detect the long ridge, he said, because the survey lines were almost parallel to it and never touched the shoal which runs across the face of the only channel left open to shippers.

Another channel farther to the north which ships formerly used has been completely closed because of shoals, said Capt. Keith, a Sea-Land pilot who pioneered the route into Anchorage for large vessels shortly after the Good Friday Earthquake in 1964.

During the first study in 1970 the corps took samples from the bottom of the inlet in the narrow shipping channel.

Griffith said the result of that study led him to believe the newly discovered ridge is composed of glacial moraine material "composed of fairly tight gravels and sand and paved with cobbles" with the leaving the port.

Five oil companies that sell petroleum products in Alaska are also frequent users of the port.

Sea-Land, which sails on a schedule three times a week, has claimed in a letter that the delays brought about waiting for high water every time it wants to pass through the narrow channel will result in the loss of 17 sailings this year or approximately 6,500 container loads amounting to 95,000 tons of freight.

The shippers, spearheaded by Sea-Land, are now in the process of launching a major campaign to try to get the corps to remove the shoal.

Collar estimates that if the newly discovered shoal can be lowered by six feet to the -25 foot level it it could save him as much as 2½ hours each way or five hours per sailing in waiting time to get across it. The shipping company's own regulations require that there be a 10-foot clearance above the highest known obstacle in the channel.

So far the corps is unconvinced of the economic justification of removing the obstacle.

The corps is maintaining its position that there is not an emergency in the inlet because the ships can wait until high tide to cross the obstruction.

Annual maintenance on the project would require the corps to dredge the port area, which costs close to a half million dollars every year.

In addition the corps feels it couldn't take on the project until the summer of 1976 at the earliest, because of funding and the necessity to write an environmental impact statement.

"What does it cost and what does it gain you?" is the question the corps wants answered before it can undertake a major project, it says.

Next Wednesday the shippers are going to try to convince the corps that the cost to the Anchorage economy as a result of the delays in shipping and the congestion at the port that will result from having limited entry to the port will in fact well justify the expense to remove the shoal.

So far the shipping firms that use the Port of Anchorage have been trying to avoid the shoals by waiting north of Kenai until the tides are almost at their peak. This sometimes involves a wait of up to nine or 10 hours and Sea-Land, the most frequent user of the port with three sailings a week, is beginning to show its concern with the problem because of the costly delays.

"We have to wait until within about 2½ hours of high water to come across the shoal," observes Collar, and the same thing holds true when the ships are

Anchorage Daily Times, Saturday, March 15, 1975

Shoal Plan Needs Okay

Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, has advised Mayor George Sullivan that it will take congressional action to have the newly found shoal in Cook Inlet removed by the Army Corps of Engineers.

The shoal is directly in the channel that ships coming into the Port of Anchorage must traverse. Local groups from the city administration to the Greater Anchorage Chamber of Commerce have been asking for corps assistance in the shoal's removal.

Stevens told Sullivan that after inquiries to the head of the corps, he had learned that congressional authorization will be required before the corps can remove the shoal.

"In this regard we are making every effort to obtain emergency congressional authorization in the most expeditious manner available to us," Stevens said.

The estimate of removing the shoal has ranged from $500,000 to $1 million, depending on the type of material which composes the new formation and whether the dredge presently in the inlet is capable of removing it. Sullivan said if a larger dredge must be brought in from elsewhere, the removal cost may well reach $1 million.

Tuesday, February 18, 1975, Anchorage Daily Times 3

Shoal Removal Could Come By Mid-Summer

Authority for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to remove a recently discovered shoal in the channel leading to the Port of Anchorage could come as early as mid-summer, the corps district engineer said yesterday.

Speaking before the Greater Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, Col. Charles E. Debelius said, "Optimistically the authority might be granted in four or five months." But he made it clear that would only be the case if no environmental impact statement were required and the entire project were expedited at every level.

If the corps were required to file an environmental impact statement, that step alone would take about a year, he said.

The National Ocean Survey vessel Rainier in August discovered a 4,000 foot cobblestone and boulder-strewn shoal about 60 feet across between Fire Island and Point Woronzof. The Corps of Engineers later confirmed the existence of the shoal and a notice to mariners was issued by the Coast Guard.

Col. Debelius said that under the corps' special continuing authority it can recommend a rapid study of the problem as long as the cost remains less than $1 million.

"But the hooker is that the benefits must be greater than the cost itself," he said. The corps must apply a cost benefit formula to the situation and determine that the project is justified by its cost. A corps economist now is working with members of a special Chamber of Commerce committee to determine the financial benefits that will be derived by removing part or all of the new shoal. The new shoal has two points which rise as high as 19 feet below the mean low water or zero tide level.

A few years ago the corps initiated a study on other shoaling problems in the inlet.

"We did complete the work on the Cook Inlet shoal study more than a year ago," Debelius said. "But our report would have been negative," based on the economic information, he said.

Rather than submit a negative report, after some discussion with the state's (congressional) leaders, "We decided to put it in limbo," Debelius said.

Sea-Land vessels and oil tankers, which are the most frequent users of the port, normally draw about 32 feet of water. Currently those vessels pass over the obstacle just 19 feet below the zero tide water line by waiting for daily high tides that may reach more than 30 feet over the zero tide level.

Captain Keith Collar, a ship's pilot who guides Sea-Land vessels from Kenai north through the shoal-laden waters of the Upper Cook Inlet to Anchorage, described the newly-discovered navigational hazard as being located 6.2 miles southwest of the city port.

Collar, who usually boards the ships arriving from Seattle by helicopter, was aboard the first Sea-Land vessel to arrive at the port in April 1964. He has made more than 1,500 sailings through the Upper Cook Inlet.

"In 1964 we had a controlling depth of 31 feet (below the zero tide level) in the south channel leading to the port, he said.

Beginning in 1968, the ship's pilot, who specializes in bringing vessels into the port, began using a north channel at the recommendation of the commander of a Coast Guard cutter who had used the north channel extensively.

But in April 1969, the SS Anchorage, a Sea-Land container vessel he was piloting, ran aground in 20 feet of water where navigational charts indicated there were 35 feet of water at zero tide. The vessel sustained no serious damage, but after the grounding he returned to the south channel whenever he piloted vessels in and out of the port area.

In October 1969, Sea-Land's SS New Orleans ran aground in the south channel in an area the charts said had 31 feet of water.

"But we found 25 feet," Collar said. This time the vessel sustained serious damage when it "sliced through the rocks and was sliced open like a can opener," he recalled.

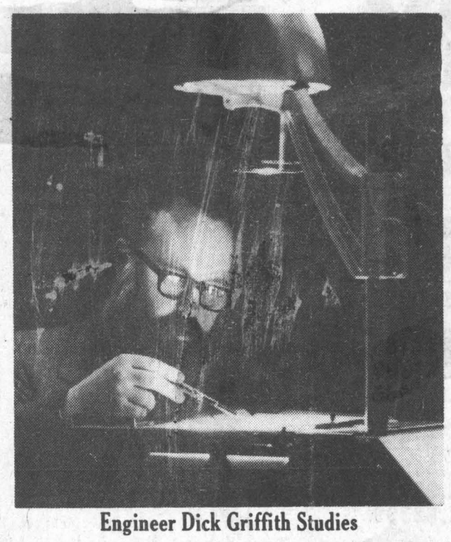
Four days later when the vessel was in drydock in Seattle, "it looked as if a giant can opener had opened three-quarters of the ship's length," Collar said.

The damages cost more than $2 million to repair and the vessel was out of service for six weeks, he said.

From that point, Sea-Land and its insurers agreed that the vessels should not navigate the Cook Inlet unless navigational charts indicated that there was at least a 10-foot clearance below the ship.

"If the present rate of shoaling is allowed to continue," Collar said, "it is possible the port will be closed between 1980 and 1985."

"In 1964 we had a controlling depth of 31 feet; in 1969 it was reduced to 25 feet and as of August this year it is down to 19 feet," he said.



Engineer Dick Griffith Studies

Russ Painter, George Sullivan Listen

Anchorage Daily News, Monday, May 5, 1975—13

Daily News photo by Michael McDermott

Pulling into Anchorage

This Shell Oil Co. tanker, the Felania, is carried into the Port of Anchorage recently by the tug, shown at right. With the ice gone and summer coming on, the port is busy with activity these days.

—Anchorage Daily News, Wednesday, February 12, 1975

Corps failed to complete shoal survey

By SALLY W. JONES
Daily News Staff Writer

A Chamber of Commerce investigation into a recently discovered Cook Inlet navigation hazard has revealed the Army Corps of Engineers was authorized to conduct an inlet shoal survey in 1969 and never completed the work.

A rocky ridge lying 19 feet below average low tide was discovered by a National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration inlet survey last summer. The corps confirmed the shoal's location in another survey in October.

THE CHAMBER investigation also revealed the corps does not consider the shoal hazard critical enough to justify emergency removal.

Anchorage Port Director E. Erwin Davis outlined the Chamber findings to the City Council late Tuesday.

He said Sea-Land Freight Services, Inc., has estimated it must cut shipment of 94,350 tons of cargo into the port this year because of shoal-caused delays. Davis said other shippers using deep-draft vessels — such as oil tankers — also may be forced to cut sailings here.

Because of the obstruction in the shipping channel, deep draft vessels must wait further out in the inlet until a navigable high tide over the shoal occurs. A Sea-Land vessel captain told the council the obstruction has resulted in an average of only five and one half hours of adequate water levels for shipping daily.

DAVIS SAID THE Chamber was informed by the corps recently that the funds appropriated by Congress for the inlet study in 1969 have been exhausted and the incomplete study lies "on the shelf."

The corps is the sole agency nationwide with authority for maintaining navigable waterways and keeping them open.

Apparently, Davis said, the $26-million Port of Anchorage does not meet corps cost-benefit ratio criteria to justify further shoal study.