

History of Surveying in Alaska and the Arctic

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ABSTRACT

This is a brief discussion of the history of land surveying conducted under the various authorities in Alaska and the significant events and projects that drove those surveys. Authorities include Russian Government, International boundary Commission, United States General Land Office/Bureau of Land Management, NOAA/Coast and Geodetic Survey, Alaska Road Commission/Department of Transportation, Department of Natural Resources, local platting authorities and private surveyors registered under Alaska law.

Much exploration of Alaska and the arctic was driven by the search for a northwest passage with expeditions originating from both the Russian and European sides. From Bering's first expedition in 1728, Russia conducted eleven voyages mapping Alaska so effectively that the Tebenkov Atlas of 1852 was used for many years. Bering's navigation equipment in 1741 included the compass, quadrant and telescope.

Between 1945 and 1953, the Coast and Geodetic Survey mapped the arctic coast between Demarcation Point and Cape Beaufort, extending control along the entire arctic coast of Alaska. Precise mapping of the arctic coast in the 1970's and 1980's was driven by the need to determine ownership of oil reserves.

Projects and events which perpetuated the survey and development of Alaska include the Gold Rush, the Alaska Railroad, roads and aviation, the Alaska Canadian boundary dispute, World War II, the Trans Alaska Pipeline and state and federal land disposal programs.

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