

## COASTAL NOTES

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The most famous iceberg ever had to be the one that sank that Titanic in 1912. Icebergs have been described as rocks that happen to be made of ice; their ice has been formed under pressure just like the metamorphic rocks around Stonehaven, so they last like a rock and fracture along fault lines like a rock. Most of the world's icebergs come from either the glaciers of western Greenland or the ice sheets of Antarctica. Roughly 10 – 15,000 icebergs are calved each year from the Greenland glaciers.

A lump of floating ice only qualifies to be called an iceberg if it's at least 17 feet high and 50 feet long. Anything smaller than that is a growler or bergy bits. Bergy bits are too small to be considered a hazard to shipping. The largest iceberg recorded in northern waters stood 550 feet high, but that is dwarfed by one huge tabular Antarctic iceberg in 1987 that was reported to be 100 miles long, 25 miles wide, and 750 feet thick.

Icebergs have definite shapes depending where they come from. Antarctic ones are calved from ice sheets so are generally flat or tabular, while those from Greenland originate in mountain glaciers and tend to be high and narrow, resembling towers and turrets, hence known as castle bergs. Although just made of water, experienced sailors reckon that they can smell icebergs at night or in fog – some claim they smell of cucumber.

They are usually coloured white, light blue or aqua-green. The blue colour is from highly compressed gas within the iceberg scattering the light in much the same way as a blue sky. Old icebergs that have rolled over will show green from the algae that have grown on their undersides during their time at sea.

Following the Titanic disaster, the American Navy set up patrols to track icebergs and warn other shipping of their presence – the new fangled radio made this possible. In 1913 the very first International Conference on the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) was held in London. One of the outcomes of the conference was to set up an International Ice Patrol, to be funded by the 13 main maritime nations affected and managed by the US in the light of their previous experience. This service continues to this day, now under the auspices of the US Coast Guard.

UP until WW2, the Ice Patrol operated with 3 ships patrolling the ice prone areas. After the war, the greater range and endurance of aircraft meant that they were better equipped to carry out the role. Today, the aircraft are based in Newfoundland during the ice season.

It's quite impossible to estimate how many lives and ships have been saved by the International Ice Patrol. In the early days, it must have been a fearsome task to deliberately steam into areas known to be prone to icebergs and fogs with no radar, sonar or any of the modern electronic devices to assist the sailor, just keen eyes and perhaps a good sense of smell.

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