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An Outline of Sea Ice Conditions in the Vicinity of Iceland

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ABSTRACT

Sea ice records from Iceland are very old, some mentioning of sea ice is made in the earliest historical accounts of settlement in the country. Reference is made to summaries of these accounts, one by Thoroddsen (1916–1917) and the other by Koch (1945).

In a discussion of the historical data, evidence is presented to the effect that at least until 1600 only major occurrences can be expected to have found their way into the record, but a mere chance may dictate whether moderate occurrences were reported or not. Occurrences of light ice are not reported until after 1800. A table is given which presents these circumstances in detail.

The pictorial summaries of Koch are continued through 1971.

The shaded portions on the monthly charts indicate areas where ice was reported the whole or a part of that month, based on available data. A chart marked with an asterisk indicates that no reports of ice were received during that month, but that the reports were too scanty to exclude presence of ice within the chart area.

Historical accounts of the sea ice near Iceland exist from the time of settlement by Norsemen on the island, in the seventh or eighth decade of the 9th century, although they were not written until two to three centuries later. At first these tales were not written in order to become a source of the climatological and economical history of the nation, but only to explain and amplify details of stories pertaining to individuals or certain localities.

Chronicle writing began several centuries after the settlement, but in the beginning it was far from continuous, notably in the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries, from which time one can hardly find accounts of sea ice or other natural events such as volcanic eruptions, which did happen at that time however, according to other evidence. In the seventeenth century the accounts of sea ice became more numerous, and since then most of the severe ice years are probably recorded, although some may be missing. But in spite of some omissions it may most likely be claimed that written records of sea ice do not extend farther back in any other region than in Ice-