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HOW OLD IS THE SCIENCE OF OCEANOGRAPHY?

Mankind has been interested in the oceans since before the time of Aristotle who wrote a treatise on marine biology in the fourth century B.C. The early studies of the ocean were concerned with problems of commerce; information about tides, currents, and distances between ports was needed.

While he was Postmaster General, Benjamin Franklin prepared temperature tables by means of which navigators could determine whether or not they were in the Gulf Stream. This resulted in faster mail service to Europe.

The beginning of modern oceanography is usually considered to be December 30, 1872, when HMS CHALLENGER made her first oceanographic station on a 3-year round-the-world cruise. This was the first purely deep-sea oceanographic expedition ever attempted. Analysis of sea water samples collected on this expedition proved for the first time that the various constituents of salts in sea water are virtually in the same proportion everywhere (Dittmar's principle).

Even before the CHALLENGER expedition, Lt. Matthew Fontaine Maury of the U.S. Navy was analyzing log books of sailing vessels to determine the most favorable routes. He did much to stimulate international cooperation in oceanography and marine meteorology. The present U.S. Naval Oceanographic Office is an outgrowth of his efforts. ("Questions About The Oceans," U.S. Naval Oceanographic Office