# Amchitka

**Amchitka** (pronounced /æmˈtʃɪtkə/; Amchixtax̂[1] in Aleut) is a volcanic, tectonically unstable island in the Rat Islands group of the Aleutian Islands in southwest Alaska. It is about 68 kilometers (42 mi) long, and varies from 3 to 6 km (2–3.75 mi) in width.[2] It has a maritime climate, with many storms, and mostly overcast skies.

*The island was populated for more than 2,500 years by the Aleut people, but has had no permanent population SINCE 1832. It was included in the Alaska Purchase of 1867, and has since been part of the United States. During World War II, it was used as an airfield by US forces in the Aleutian Islands Campaign.*

Amchitka was selected by the United States Atomic Energy Commission to be the site for underground detonations of nuclear weapons. Three such tests were carried out: Long Shot, an 80 kiloton blast in 1965; Milrow, a 1 megaton blast in 1969; and *Cannikin* in 1971 – at "under 5 megatons", the largest underground test ever conducted by the United States. The tests were highly controversial, with environmental groups fearing that the Cannikin explosion, in particular, would cause severe earthquakes and tsunamis. Amchitka is no longer used for nuclear testing, although it is monitored for the leakage of radioactive materials.

## Geography

Amchitka is the southernmost of the Rat Islands group in the Aleutian Chain,[2] located between 51°21′N 178°37′E﻿ / ﻿51.35°N 178.617°E﻿ / 51.35; 178.617 and 51°39′N 179°29′E﻿ / ﻿51.65°N 179.483°E﻿ / 51.65; 179.483.[3] It is bounded by the Bering Sea to the north and east, and the Pacific Ocean to the south and west.[3]

The eastern part of the island is a lowland plateau, with isolated ponds[4] and gently rolling hills.[3] There is low but abundant vegetation,[3] consisting of mosses, lichens, liverworts, ferns, grasses, sedges, and crowberry.[4] The centre of the island is mountainous, and the western end is barren and vegetation is sparse.[3]

Amchitka has a maritime climate, often foggy and windswept, with cloud cover 98 percent of the time.[3] While temperatures are moderated by the ocean, storms are frequent.[5] Geologically, the island is volcanic, being a part of a small crustal block on the Aleutian Volcanic Arc that is being torn apart by oblique subduction. It is "one of the least stable tectonic environments in the United States."[6]

## Early history

The [human](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human) history[[1]](#footnote-2) of Amchitka dates back at least 2,500 years, with the Aleut people.[5][7] Human remains, thought to be of an Aleut dating from about 1000 AD, were discovered in 1980.[8]

Amchitka is said to have been seen and named St. Makarius by Bering in 1741, was sighted by Billings in 1790, and visited by Shishmaref in 1820.[9]

Islanders received necessities and supplies such as tobacco, ironware, horse- and ox-skins, and cotton in return for hunting otters or seals.

Russian trappers and traders established settlements on the islands, exploiting the indigenous people,[10] whose population on the island quickly fell.[8] From 1832, the island was never permanently inhabited,[8] and by the time of World War II, an abandoned Russian fishing village was all that remained.[11] The islands were surveyed by the North Pacific Exploring Expedition in 1855,[9] and were included in the Alaska Purchase of 1867.[10] In 1913, President William Taft set aside the Aleutian chain, including Amchitka, as a wildlife preserve.[11] The Native residents of Atka leased the island for fox hunting in 1920, and continued to use the island until the Japanese invasion of the western Aleutians in 1942.[8]

## World War II

For more details on this topic, see Aleutian Islands ~~Campaign~~.

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n June 1942, the Japanese **occupied** *some* of the western ***Aleutian*** islands, and hoped to occupy Amchitka.[12] Eager to remove the Japanese, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to move quickly to regain the territory. American planners decided to build a series of airfields to the west of Umnak, from which bombers could attack the invading forces.[13]

The U.S. Army established bases at Adak and 13 other locations.[13] At the War Department's suggestion, an initial reconnaissance of Amchitka was carried out in September 1942, which found that it would be difficult to build an airstrip on the island.[12] Nevertheless, planners decided on December 13 that the airfield "had to be built" to prevent the Japanese from doing the same.[12] A further reconnaissance mission visited Amchitka from 17 to 19 December, and reported that a fighter strip could be built in two to three weeks, and a main airfield in three to four months.[12] The plan was ***approved*** and began in 1942.[12]

American forces made an unopposed landing on Amchitka on January 12, 1943, although the destroyer Worden (DD-352) grounded and sank with the loss of 14 lives. Despite facing difficult weather conditions and bombing from the Japanese, the airfield was usable by February 16.[12] The Alaska Command was now 80 km (50 mi) away from their target, Kiska.[13] The military eventually built numerous buildings, roads, and a total of three airstrips on the island,[11] some of which would later be renovated and used by the Atomic Energy Commission.[14] At its peak, the occupancy of Amchitka reached 15,000 troops.[11]

The Aleutian Islands campaign was successfully completed on August 24, 1943.[13] In that month, a strategic intercept station was established on the island, which remained until February 1945.[15] The Army abandoned the site in August 1950.[16] The site later hosted an Air Force weather station in the 1950s, a White Alice telecommunication system in 1959 to 1961, and a temporary relay station in the 1960s and 1970s.[11]

## Nuclear tests at Amchitka

1. Long Shot 21:00, October 29, 1965 51°26′12″N 179°10′47″E﻿ / ﻿51.43655°N 179.17976°E﻿ / 51.43655; 179.17976﻿ (Long Shot Nuclear Test) 80 kt 2,343 ft (714 m) shaft
2. Milrow 22:06, October 2, 1969 51°24′56″N 179°10′48″E﻿ / ﻿51.41559°N 179.17992°E﻿ / 51.41559; 179.17992﻿ (Milrow Nuclear Test) ~ 1 Mt 4,002 ft (1,220 m) shaft
3. Cannikin 22:00, November 6, 1971 51°28′11″N 179°06′12″E﻿ / ﻿51.46961°N 179.10335°E﻿ / 51.46961; 179.10335﻿ (Cannikin Nuclear Test) < 5 Mt 6,104 ft (1,860 m) shaft

Стр.:

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1. History of amchitka [↑](#footnote-ref-2)