



Sea Ice at Shikotan Japan and Russia

Ostrov Shikotan is a volcanic island at the southern end of the Kuril chain. At about 43 degrees north—more than halfway to the Equator—Shikotan lies along the extreme southern edge of winter sea ice in the Northern Hemisphere. The Earth Observing-1 satellite captured this image of swirling blue-gray sea ice around Shikotan in February 2011.

The ice here tends to move with currents and eddies, which has shaped it into rough circles. The eddies may result from opposing winds from the north and southwest.

Uneven snow cover exaggerates the island's rugged appearance. Multiple forces have shaped Shikotan over millions of years. It has been battered by tsunamis—although wind, rain, and tectonic forces likely play a greater role in shaping the surface.