

Table 3—History of Fox Farming on Amchitka

Year*	Number introduced	Number trapped	Value
1921	7		
1922–1924		No report	
1925		144	\$ 7,200
1926		172	7,200
1927		No report	
1928		516	35,000
1929		564	35,000
1930		Not trapped	
1931		965	37,000
1932		660	18,150
1933		Not trapped	
1934		555	23,310
1935		Not trapped	
1936		500	20,000
1937		Unknown	
1938		Unknown	
1939		Unknown	
1940		Unknown	
1941		Unknown	
1942		Unknown	
1943		Not trapped	
1944		Not trapped	
1945		Not trapped	
1946		Unknown	
1947		441	?

*Sources: 1921–1936: Murie (1937).

1943–1945: Inferred from the evacuation of the Aleuts.

1947: Bergsland (1959, pp. 127-128).

the trappers returned. In April we all returned to the village from there. We passed four days on Adak and then went to Atka. We had killed 441 foxes altogether. (Paraphrased from a word-for-word translation by Bergsland, 1959, pp. 127-128.)

Trapping was a time-consuming business, and transportation between islands was thoroughly unreliable. Some sort of shelter had to be built on any island used for fox farming. In 1924, 11 barabaras (half-buried sod huts) were built as hunting camps on Amchitka and in 1925 3 more. The Site 20 mentioned by McCartney in Chap. 5, this volume, is the remains of one of these. In addition, a small village, consisting of five cabins, a boathouse, and a church, was built at the head of Constantine Harbor. The village was destroyed in the Aleutian campaign of World War II. All that now remains is a number of pits and a graveyard (Fig. 1), in which the only still legible headstone is for Anna Zaochney, 1884–1930. This is the Site 21 referred to by McCartney.

The story of fox farming deserves a monograph of its own. It is another case of a dream that started magnificently and then petered out with changes of fashion and oversupply of product.

From annual reports of the Alaska Game Commission* come the data given in Table 4 on the growth and decay of the Alaskan blue fox fur industry. In 1923, the first date they report, furs sold for over \$100 apiece. The price reached nearly this level again in 1929, but during the depression years the price dropped to \$30 and after the war fell further to nearly \$10 a skin. Production stayed high during the 1930s, but it was a moribund industry, and the war killed it off.

During the 1930s the Biological Survey developed the pattern of an annual summer trip into the Aleutians on the motor ship *Brown Bear*. On most of the islands the state of the bird population was the principal business, but on Amchitka the emphasis was on sea otters because that was where one of the principal remaining groups of them was to be found. Their existence was kept an unofficial secret; the service did not wish to advertise their presence since poaching was already going on.

It also became evident during this period that something was happening to the bird life of the islands. O. J. Murie led two expeditions to the Aleutians in 1936 and 1937, his purpose being “to investigate the faunal relationships on these islands with a view to obtaining necessary data on which to base satisfactory administration.” In his trip report Murie says (Murie et al., 1937, p. 70): “There seems to have grown a general vague feeling that a fox island is ‘good for only so long.’ Probably in many cases this coincides with the length of time the bird supply lasts.” At the end of his report he made recommendations as to which islands should be left fox islands and which should be returned to the status of bird islands. As to

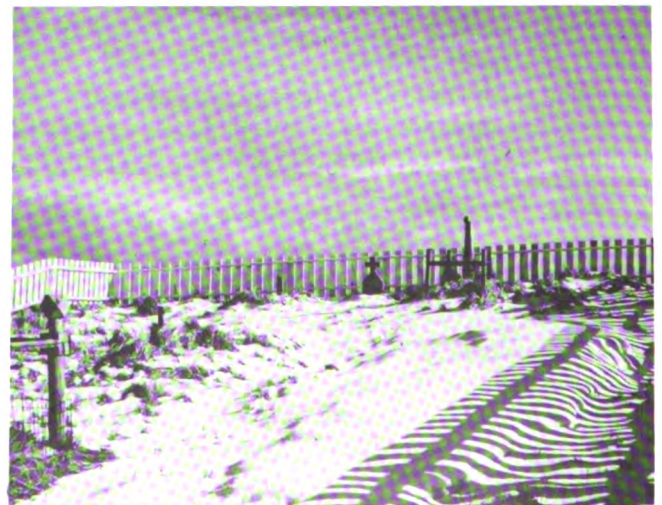


Fig. 1—Aleut graveyard remaining from 1930s village (fence erected in 1968).

*Established Apr. 14, 1925.