

Magnetic North Pole shifting at 50km a year

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For unknown reasons the shift in the Magnetic North Pole has accelerated rapidly in the past 40 years, potentially causing problems for navigation for vessels within the Arctic Circle, just as the northern route is opening up to commercial traffic, Reuters reported at the weekend.



Compass needles point towards the north magnetic pole, which has been moving at an unpredictable rate from the coast of northern Canada a century ago to the middle of the Arctic Ocean, heading in the direction of Russia.

Ciaran Beggan, of the British Geological Survey in Edinburgh, UK, told Reuters last week that it was “moving at about 50 km (30 miles) a year. It didn’t move much between 1900 and 1980 but it’s really accelerated in the past 40 years,”

The rapid shift has forced researchers to update early a model that helps navigation by ships, planes and submarines in the Arctic. A five-year update of the World Magnetic Model was due in 2020, but the US military has requested an unprecedented early review, he said. The BGS runs the model in association with the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Beggan said that the moving pole affected navigation, particularly in the Arctic Ocean north of Canada.

As well as civilian navigation, NATO, the US and UK militaries use the magnetic model. An update will be released on January 30th, delayed from January 15th because of the current shutdown of the US government.

Beggan said the recent shifts in the north magnetic pole would be unnoticed by most people outside the Arctic. Although many smartphones have inbuilt compasses to help orientate maps or games such as Pokemon Go, in most places, the compass would point only fractionally wrong, within errors allowed in the five-year models, Beggan told Reuters.

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