

“The reef proper extends parallel to the main range of Keys, for a few miles south or south-west of it, following the same curve and never receding many miles from it. The distance between the reef and the main range of Keys varies usually from six to two or three miles, the widest separation being south of Key West, and east of the Ragged Keys, where the space is about seven miles. Between this reef, upon which a few small Keys rise at distant intervals, and the main range of Keys already described, there is a broad navigable channel, extending the whole range of the reef from the Marquesas to Cape Florida, varying in depth from three to six fathoms; and except Love Key, where the passage is not more than fourteen feet deep at low water, averaging from three to four fathoms.

“Further east the average depth is again the same as at Love Key, but it becomes gradually more and more shoal toward the east, measuring usually about two fathoms or even less to the east of Long Key and Key Largo, but deepening again somewhat toward Cape Florida, where the reef converges toward the main Keys and mainland. Protected by the outer reef, this channel affords a very safe navigation to vessels of medium size, and would allow a secure anchorage almost everywhere throughout the whole length of the reef, were the numerous deep channels which intersect the outer reef well known to navigators, and marked by a regular system of signals. As it is, however, the reef seems to present an unbroken range of most dangerous shoal grounds, upon which thousands of vessels, as well as millions of property, have already been wrecked. These facts have a stronger claim upon the attention of the Government, since there are, as already remarked, numerous passages across the reef, which might enable even the largest vessels to find shelter and safe anchorage behind this threatening shallow barrier. . . .

“The reef proper, as we have remarked above, runs almost parallel to the main range of Keys from Cape Florida to the western extremity of the Marquesas, where it is lost in the deep. It follows, in its whole extent, the same curve as the