

Plenty Favorite Tidbits of Sea Otter on Amchitka

A recent diving survey by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries (BCF) has provided reassuring information on the abundance of sea urchins, a favorite food of the sea otters of Alaska's Amchitka Bay.

Charles H. Meacham, Commissioner of Fish and Wildlife, said a special team of divers from the BCF Biological Laboratory at Auke Bay and the University of Washington spent 7 days surveying the area around Amchitka Island, 2,000 miles east of Juneau.

What was expected to be a routine diving assignment turned out to be an extremely productive underwater venture. It was believed that Amchitka sea otters had become so numerous that they had reduced their main food supply of sea urchins to a low point.

Instead, the diver-scientists found that in depths of 30 to 70 feet, sea urchins literally carpeted

the floor of the sea.

Concentrations of urchins averaged 100 per square yard in the zones investigated, suggesting that a plentiful food supply exists for the sea otters. Additional dives later this year will verify

whether the sea urchins are abundant around the entire Island.

The study group concentrated on subtidal areas, gathering information on the kinds and abundance of marine plants and animals to help the Atomic Energy

Commission measure environmental effects of an underground

atomic test to be conducted at Amchitka.