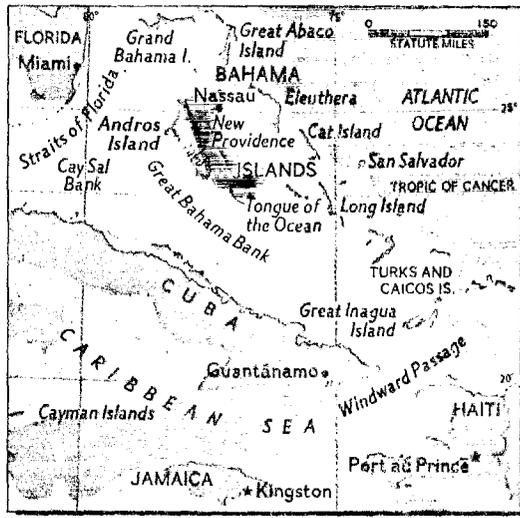


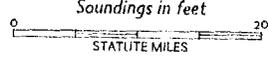
GREAT BAHAMA BANK
 — limestone more than 14,000 feet thick — stood above the sea after the Ice Age locked water in mammoth glaciers. Rain gnawed holes in the porous rock. Then came the great thaw, when the ocean rose and flooded the shafts, turning them into blue gems dotting the bank.

SODDEN WITH SWAMPS and severed by wide "bights," low-lying Andros, largest of the Bahama Islands, sprawls for a hundred miles beside a deep Atlantic channel that widens into the Tongue of the Ocean (pages 356-7). A sharp beak on the island's soggy western side broadens the lump of land to forty miles; 7,500 islanders live along the drier eastern edge. Reefs near the channel hold most of the blue holes, whose unusually strong currents set them apart from similar formations around the globe.

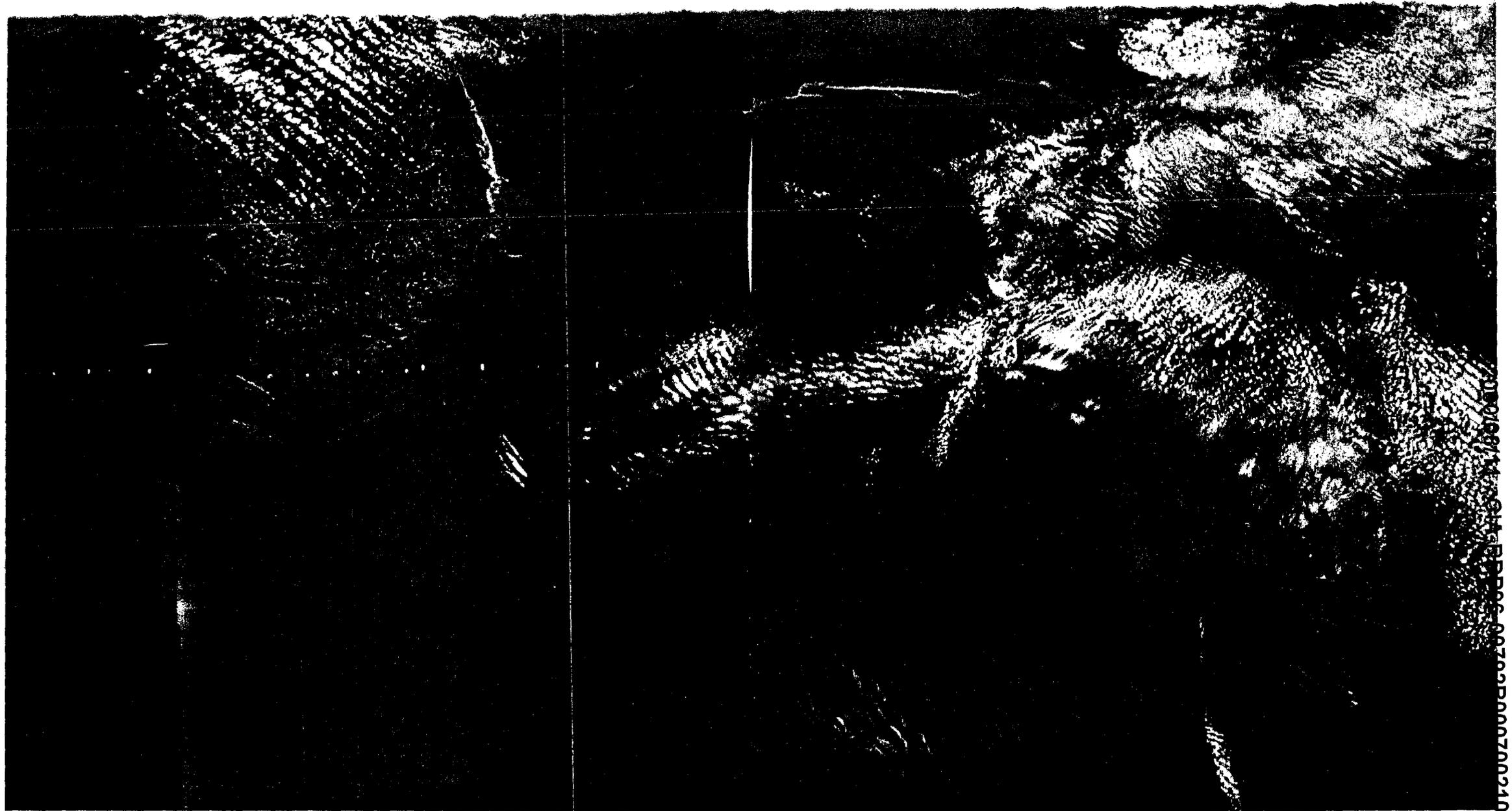


Andros Island

• Blue-hole areas pinpointed by author



DRAWN BY ALFRED ZEBARTH
 COMPILED BY LEO J. BOBERSCHMIDT
 GEOGRAPHIC ART DIVISION
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The Tongue of the Ocean

DEEP-BLUE BRANCH of the Atlantic basin cuts into the azure Bahama Bank, photographed from 105 miles above by Apollo 9 astronauts orbiting the earth. Near southern Andros at left, the Tongue of the Ocean, partly obscured by clouds,

curves into an oval tip 40 miles across. Scientists believe that turbulence on the ocean floor formed the Tongue by keeping it clean of the limestone particles that built the surrounding bank. Tidal currents receding from the shallows furrow the

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rim. Seventy miles north, the Wall slopes steeply 6,000 feet to the channel floor (next page). Openings along the Wall may admit sea water later disgorged from blue holes, which could explain why the output of the holes appears to exceed intake.

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