

## Chapter 5

## SCIENCE &amp; SOCIETY

## • Views of Earth

## Northwest Passage Controversy

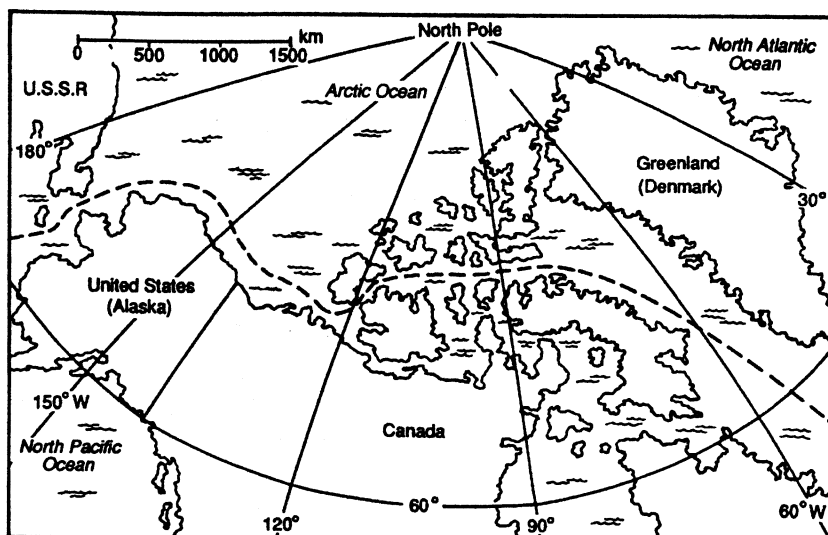
Five hundred years ago, Columbus thought he would reach Asia by sailing westward and circling Earth. Of course, he did not know about the two continents that lie west of Europe—North and South America.

Soon after Europeans understood that Columbus had found land previously unknown to them, other explorers began to search for a way around it. The search began for a northwest passage across North America. Nearly four hundred years passed before a route was charted. Between 1903 and 1906, Ronald Amundsen, a Norwegian, led a crew of six through the Northwest Passage from east to west. In 1942, Henry Larsen and crew sailed from west to east and, two years later, from east to west. It had become clear that the bitter winters and year-round freezing of the waterway made such a route impractical.

Traditionally, the area has been of interest only to the Inuit, who live, hunt, and fish there. Today, however, interest in the area is growing. Hundreds of oil wells have been sunk. Pipelines for oil and natural gas, oil rig platforms, weather stations, and military bases have been built throughout this remote region. Specially built ships called icebreakers lead convoys carrying supplies to workers.

The advanced technology that makes possible these trips into the far north has been accompa-

nied by controversy. The United States says that this region is an international waterway, that any country has a right to sail through it or fly over it. Canada claims that the waters are part of its international waterway between its islands. Therefore, it has authority over the air space above it and over use of the waterways. It also has rights to the minerals, including gas and oil. Canada also would have to approve use of the region for United States' defense stations.



Canada and the United States have had a friendly relationship for almost two hundred years. In this current dispute, the United States has agreed to ask Canada's permission to use the waterways. Canada has always granted it. But neither nation really thinks the other has the right to the region.

## You Decide

1. How might a Mercator projection map lend support to the idea that the Northwest Passage is in international waters?
2. How might the Inuit be affected by increased traffic in the Northwest Passage?
3. How might the United States being in the Northwest Territory benefit Canadians?
4. Should international waterways be decided on a nation's already being in an area or by the distance between the landforms? Explain your answer.