

Topic Page: [Northeast Passage](#)

Definition: **Northeast Passage** from *Collins English Dictionary*

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1 a shipping route along the Arctic coasts of Europe and Asia, between the Atlantic and Pacific: first navigated by Nordenskjöld (1878–79)

Summary Article: **Northeast Passage**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

water route along the northern coast of Europe and Asia, between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Beginning in the 15th cent., efforts were made to find a new all-water route to India and China. Most of these attempts were directed at seeking a Northwest Passage. However, English, Dutch, and Russian navigators did try to seek a northeast route by sailing along the northern coast of Russia and far into the arctic seas.

In the 1550s, English ships made the first attempt to find the passage. Willem Barentz, the Dutch navigator, made several futile voyages in the 1590s, as did Henry Hudson in the early 17th cent. The decline of Dutch shipping in the 1700s left the exploration mainly to the Russians; among the men sent out was Vitus Bering, who explored the eastern part of the passage. The Russian Great Northern Expedition (1733–43) explored most of the coast of N Siberia. The Northeast Passage was not, however, traversed by anyone until Nils A. E. Nordenskjöld of Sweden accomplished the feat in 1878–79. In the early 1900s, icebreakers sailed through the passage, and in the 1930s the Northern Sea Route, a shipping lane, was established by the USSR.

Since World War II the Soviet Union and now Russia has maintained a regular summer-to-autumn highway for shipping along this passage through the development of new ports and the exploitation of resources in the interior. A fleet of Russian icebreakers, aided by aerial reconnaissance and by radio weather stations, keeps the route navigable until the expansion of the ice in winter prevents shipping. The decrease in ocean ice in the Arctic due to global warming has led to an increase of shipping through the Arctic and to the creation of shipping lanes further from the Russian coast; the routes cut the distance between N Eurasian Atlantic and Pacific ports by several thousand miles.

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Northeast passage. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/northeast_passage



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