



# Breaking Ice for Arctic Oil: The Epic Voyage of the SS Manhattan through the Northwest Passage

*Ross Coen*

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In 1969, an icebreaking tanker, the SS *Manhattan*, was commissioned by Humble Oil to transit the Northwest Passage in order to test the logistical and economic feasibility of an all-marine transportation system for Alaska North Slope crude oil. Proposed as an alternative to the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, the *Manhattan* made two voyages to the North American Arctic and collected volumes of scientific data on ice conditions and the behavior of ships in ice. Although the *Manhattan* successfully navigated the Northwest Passage—closing a five-hundred-year chapter of Arctic exploration by becoming the first commercial vessel to do so—the expedition ultimately demonstrated the impracticality of moving crude oil using icebreaking ships.

*Breaking Ice for Arctic Oil* details this historic voyage, establishing its significant impact on the future of marine traffic and resource development in the Arctic and setting the stage for the current oil crisis.

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