

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

RESULTS OF A GRAVITY SURVEY
OF
McCARTHY'S MARSH,
SEWARD PENINSULA, ALASKA

by

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ABSTRACT

A gravity survey of McCarthy's Marsh (sometimes referred to as the Fish River Flats) was completed during August 1977 and included 80 measurements. The resulting contoured data indicate a small sedimentary basin localized in the northeastern corner of the topographic depression which forms the marsh. Faults probably border both the northern and eastern edges of the structural basin, which was probably filled by sediments eroded from the adjacent mountains. These mountains include plutons rich in radioactive minerals, which may have been locally concentrated in the sedimentary rocks within the basin; and a potentially commercial uranium deposit has now been discovered in another valley on the opposite side of the Darby Mountains. Geophysical modeling suggests a minimal sedimentary thickness of about 1 km and possibly up to 2 or even 3 km depending on the density of the sediments filling the basin. Geomorphic evidence indicates recent or active faulting at one basin boundary and might thus suggest a young age, low sediment density, and small total thickness. However, coal specimens collected near the edge of the basin may be Tertiary in age and thus suggest an older basin age, probably higher sediment density, and higher total thickness.

INTRODUCTION

McCarthy's Marsh is a tundra and lake covered topographic depression bounded by the Bendeleben Mountains on the north, the Darby Mountains on the east, and a chain of hills dominated by Mt. Wick (450 m elevation) on the southwest. The topographic relief within the depression is small and ranges from about 100 m at the northwest corner to less than 30 m. The depression is drained to the southwest by the Fish River. The abundant lakes and marshlands geomorphically suggest a continuing process of gradual subsidence combined with sedimentation from the surrounding mountain ranges. Geomorphic studies of the Bendeleben fault (Hopkins, 1963) along the northern edge of the topographic basin suggest recent or active subsidence of the lowland. In a 1967 and 1968 gravity reconnaissance of the Seward Peninsula (Barnes, 1971), a single measurement near the north-central part of the McCarthy's Marsh showed a Bouguer anomaly more than 30 mGal lower than the anomalies measured in the adjacent hills and mountains. The anomaly was interpreted as a small structural basin filled with Cenozoic sediments or sedimentary rocks. In the initial contouring and in later contouring for the reconnaissance gravity map of Alaska (Barnes, 1977), the structural basin was assumed to have the approximate area and shape of the present topographic basin, although variation of the gravity and probable basin depth within the area was recognized. The basin was considered too small to produce significant petroleum resources, and thus received little study.

Recently, Miller and Bunker (1976) studied the uranium and thorium contents of some of the plutons in the nearby mountains and found concentrations that ranged up to 58.6 ppm in the Darby pluton. The probability that some of the sediments underlying McCarthy's Marsh had been derived from the weathering of these plutons, and the possibility of local concentration of radioactive minerals suggested the desirability of drilling some exploratory holes. A gravity survey was thus planned as an initial step towards determining the configuration of the basin and locating a drilling site. Most of this report was prepared as a Technical Letter in 1977 as preparation for the proposed drilling.

Following the gravity survey, a potentially commercial uranium deposit of at least 1 million pounds U_3O_8 (Dickinson and others, 1987) was found south of Death Valley on the opposite, or eastern side, of the Darby Mountains. This deposit occurs in early Tertiary sedimentary rocks, in which coal or other carbonaceous material produced a reducing environment for uranium-bearing ground water moving downslope from the mountains. The coal contains anomalously high amounts of tungsten (Stricker and others, in press, 1988) and the Tertiary rocks are also rich in siderite (Dickinson, 1988). Coal has also been found on the flanks of McCarthy's Marsh (T.M. Miller, oral communication, 1977) where its presence suggests both a Tertiary age and possible reducing environment for some of the rocks underlying that marsh.

GRAVITY MEASUREMENTS

More than 80 gravity measurements (including two outside the mapped area) were obtained during August 1977 using a LaCoste and Romberg geodetic gravimeter. A large jet helicopter provided transportation from the operating base established at the settlement of Council a few miles west of the mapped area. The gravity base station at Council was located on the ground approximately 1 m northwest of the northwest corner of the Trading Post, where

the established gravity is 982,272.49 mGal on the U.S. Geological Survey Alaskan gravity base network (Barnes, 1968) converted to the International Gravity Standardization net 1971, IGSN-71 (Morelli and others, 1974). The data were reduced using the ellipsoid of the 1967 Geodetic Reference System (International Association of Geodesy, 1971) and include the second order terms in the free-air correction. Gravity anomalies released on the original reconnaissance map of the Seward Peninsula (Barnes, 1971) were calculated with the older datum and 1931 ellipsoid, but the more recent Seward Peninsula map (Barnes and Hudson, 1977) used the newer datum and included the data in this report.

Altimetry was used for the elevation control, and the 100-ft elevation of the Council base was established by an average of ties to spot elevations in the survey area. There has been no leveling and minimal vertical angle-control within the survey area, but the base elevation is consistent with elevations estimated by the Federal Aviation Agency for the Council airstrip. Estimates of altimetry accuracy for similar surveys have been close to ± 5 meters, and this limitation suggests that the Bouguer anomalies have an accuracy of about ± 1 mGal. River gradients were also used as supplementary elevation control. The reduction density is a standard 2.67 g/cm^3 , which is fairly typical of the Paleozoic metamorphic rocks and younger plutons that crop out in the adjacent mountains. Tabulated data for the gravity measurements are given in the appendix, the format and source codes of which were discussed by Barnes (1972). The data were not corrected for effects of nearby terrain, which except on the margin of the basin are small in comparison with the possible errors caused by altimetry.

Results

The gravity data are summarized in the contour map of plate 1, which shows a triangular shaped low in the northeast corner of the topographic basin. This low probably represents the deepest part of the structural basin. The closely-spaced linear contours on the north and east sides of the gravity low are interpreted to be caused by high-angle faults. The gradient on the north side is approximately centered on the scarp trace of the Bendeleben fault. Geologic mapping (Miller and others, 1972, and Till and others, 1986) south of the gravity survey suggested another fault on trend with the belt of parallel contours on the east side of the basin, although the fault trace was not actually located.

Plate 2 shows aeromagnetic contours from the same area which are taken from surveys at 1000 ft elevation and with 1 mile flight line separation flown by Lockwood, Kessler, and Bartlett, Incorporated for the Department of Natural Resources, Alaska Division of Geological Survey (1971). Closely spaced magnetic contours on the edge of the gravity low are interpreted as resulting from volcanic flows within the sedimentary section. Such flows crop out on the south side of the Bendeleben fault. The remaining magnetic contours are consistent with a thick sedimentary section.

The calculated depth of the basin depends on the density of the material within it, which is probably controlled in part by the sedimentary history of the structure. Figure 1 is a computer plot of profile AB (located on plate 1), and of one possible basin cross section calculated by a simple two-dimensional iterative computer program using the method of Bott (1960) on a

profile from which a regional gradient of 15 mGal in 40 km has been subtracted. The vertical scale is enlarged eight times, exaggerating the V-like result of the calculation, which is only a preliminary approximation for a profile so close to the corner of the basin. The sediment density used in the model was 1.67 g/cm^3 (a density contrast of 1.00 g/cm^3), which is close to a minimum for uncompacted water-saturated sediments, so the calculated depth of more than 1 km might be considered a minimum depth. However, if the basin was formed and filled primarily in Quaternary time by clay and silt sediments the thickness of permafrost and ice lenses could be large, and the depth might be much smaller. However, the presence of volcanics within the section tends to diminish the possibility of a thick ice section. Figure 2 is another model of the same profile using a sediment density of 2.17 g/cc (density contrast 0.50 g/cc). Such a density would be more typical of mid-Tertiary sedimentary rocks, and the depth (2.5 km) might be considered more reasonable for a structure this large. Allowance for the inaccuracy of the two-dimensional model would also tend to increase the calculated depth.

Figure 5 is another profile which is located closer to the center of the basin, but which is supported by fewer gravity measurements. Along this line the two-dimensional gravity model is probably more valid, and the 2.00 g/cc (0.67 g/cc density contrast) sediment density of the model may be a more probable average. This profile suggests that the most probable depth is slightly less than 1.4 km, which would be increased if older sediments were assumed or if allowance were made for inaccuracies in the modeling technique.

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USGS GRAVITY DATA FROM SEWARD PEN ALASKA; TRAVERSE: FISH-RIV-1 PROJ CHIEF: BARNES DATUM: BARNES 1975 DATA SET: AY61
 DATE: 08/04/77; METERS: 6192; OBSERVERS: MONTI * MAIN BASE: COUN. VALUE: 982272.47, DRIFT: 0.10, OTHER BASES: BL31, NOMF

STAT. NOS.	LOC.	HT- FEET	ELEV TYPE	ELEV TYPE	UBSY LINE	DBSY MILLIGALS	GRAY TYPE	FAA MGALS	SRA ANOM	SBA Z-67	STAT	OTHER ELEV	SBA ELEV
BL31	0 10.54	149	58.87	A	0	8	8	-93.2	-95.0	6	BL31	0	0
NOMF	04 30.55	165	26.12	A	0	0	0	7.0	7.4	6	NOMF	0	0
NOMF	04 30.55	165	26.12	A	0	0	0	7.0	7.1	6	NOMF	0	0
NOMF	04 30.55	165	26.12	A	0	0	0	7.0	7.1	6	NOMF	0	0
COUN	04 53.60	163	39.92	A	0	0	0	1.2	-1.6	7	COUN	100	-2.2
COUN	04 53.60	163	39.92	A	0	0	0	1.2	-1.7	7	COUN	100	-2.3
MM01	04 56.04	163	28.25	A	0	0	0	46.0	3.0	7	MM01	0	-9.0
MM02	04 59.02	163	26.80	A	0	0	0	26.5	0.1	7	MM02	0	-6.9
MM03	05 3.70	163	29.15	A	0	0	0	-0.1	-13.4	7	MM03	0	-17.4
MM04	05 5.98	163	28.85	A	0	0	0	-17.1	-26.5	7	MM04	0	-39.0
MM05	05 6.75	163	20.52	A	0	0	0	-21.6	-31.3	7	MM05	0	-36.9
MM06	05 8.21	163	15.62	A	0	0	0	-11.1	-47.6	7	MM06	0	-48.7
MM07	05 13.01	163	11.62	A	0	0	0	-17.2	-29.7	7	MM07	0	-30.9
MM08	05 10.52	163	7.72	A	0	0	0	-17.4	-27.5	7	MM08	0	-32.2
MM09	05 7.68	163	6.15	A	0	1	182	-51.3	-56.4	7	MM09	0	-58.0
MM10	05 9.30	162	56.62	A	0	20	380	-30.3	-41.0	7	MM10	0	-46.8
MM11	05 10.28	162	43.00	A	0	-3	1192	0.5	-25.0	7	MM11	0	-33.4
MM12	05 7.60	162	48.60	A	0	0	210	-27.8	-33.7	7	MM12	0	-35.4
MM13	05 4.82	162	53.65	A	0	2	110	-51.6	-54.7	7	MM13	0	-55.6
MM14	05 3.08	162	58.15	A	0	1	88	-55.0	-57.5	7	MM14	0	-58.3
MM15	05 3.25	163	5.95	A	0	8	106	-41.9	-44.9	7	MM15	0	-45.3
MM16	04 54.50	163	5.92	A	0	0	71	-13.1	-15.1	7	MM16	0	-1.1
MM17	04 56.08	163	9.25	A	0	0	56	-5.2	-6.0	7	MM17	0	-7.8
MM18	04 53.90	163	13.65	A	0	0	42	-3.9	-5.1	7	MM18	0	-5.6
COUN	04 53.60	163	39.92	A	0	0	100	1.2	-1.6	6	COUN	0	-2.2

DATA SUMMARY

RANGES OF	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	LONGITUDE	ELEVATION	DBSY GRAY	FAA	SBA-Z-67
MINIMUM	61 10.54	149 58.87	16	16	981986.77	-93.2	-96.2
MAXIMUM	65 13.01	163 26.12	1501	1501	982273.13	66.8	7.3

NUMBER OF STATIONS: 25

STAT. NOS.	LONGITUDE	LATITUDE	HT- MFE	ELEV FEI	CLEV TYPE	UHSV TIME	UHSV TIME	GRAV TYPE	GRAV TYPE	FAA MGALS	SRA 2.20	ANOM ACC.	SMA 2.67	STAT NUMH	OTHER ELEV	SRA ELEV	
MM19	163 53.60	64 53.60	0	100	K	0	0	0	0	1.2	-1.6	6	-2.2	0	MM19	180	R
MM20	163 54.76	64 53.76	0	53	T	0	0	0	0	-3.7	-5.2	7	-5.5	0	MM19	42	J
MM21	163 56.72	64 56.72	0	67	T	0	0	0	0	-5.7	-7.4	7	-7.8	0	MM20	48	J
MM22	163 58.08	64 58.08	0	71	T	0	0	0	0	-6.9	-8.9	7	-9.3	0	MM21	52	J
MM23	163 59.03	64 59.03	0	131	T	0	0	0	0	-10.3	-14.0	7	-14.8	0	MM22	130	M
MM24	162 57.80	64 57.80	0	120	T	0	0	0	0	-16.6	-20.0	7	-20.7	0	MM23	126	M
MM25	162 57.17	64 57.17	0	254	T	0	0	0	0	-18.4	-23.2	7	-24.3	0	MM24	155	M
MM26	162 57.53	64 57.53	0	254	T	0	0	0	0	-3.8	-11.0	7	-12.5	0	MM25	235	M
MM27	162 58.60	64 58.60	0	313	T	0	0	0	0	-1.9	-16.6	7	-19.8	0	MM26	500	M
MM28	162 39.40	64 39.40	0	578	T	0	0	0	0	-29.4	-38.2	7	-40.0	0	MM27	295	M
MM29	162 41.20	64 41.20	0	494	T	0	0	0	0	0.8	-15.5	7	-18.9	0	MM28	550	M
MM30	162 40.30	64 40.30	0	154	T	0	0	0	0	-4.2	-18.2	7	-21.1	0	MM29	520	M
MM31	162 50.25	64 50.25	0	98	T	0	0	0	0	-47.3	-51.6	7	-52.5	0	MM30	185	M
MM32	163 1.75	64 1.75	0	85	T	0	0	0	0	-34.5	-34.9	7	-37.4	0	MM31	80	J
MM33	163 3.55	64 3.55	0	96	T	0	0	0	0	-40.4	-43.1	7	-43.7	0	MM32	72	J
MM34	163 9.05	64 9.05	0	125	T	0	0	0	0	-38.7	-42.2	7	-43.7	0	MM33	99	J
MM35	163 10.70	64 10.70	0	156	T	0	0	0	0	-42.9	-47.3	7	-48.2	0	MM34	125	J
MM36	163 6.65	64 6.65	0	263	T	0	0	0	0	-58.8	-57.7	7	-59.1	0	MM35	156	J
MM37	163 11.60	64 11.60	0	194	T	0	0	0	0	-51.8	-57.3	7	-58.5	0	MM36	235	M
MM38	163 19.88	64 19.88	0	271	T	0	0	0	0	-26.3	-33.0	7	-35.5	0	MM37	198	J
MM39	163 24.80	64 24.80	0	297	T	0	0	0	0	-17.5	-25.9	7	-27.7	0	MM38	270	M
MM40	163 38.92	64 38.92	0	100	R	0	0	0	0	1.2	-1.6	6	-2.2	0	MM39	266	J
MM41	163 39.92	64 39.92	0	100	R	0	0	0	0	1.2	-1.6	6	-2.2	0	MM40	100	R
MM42	163 10.95	64 10.95	0	52	T	0	0	0	0	-4.6	-1.6	6	-2.2	0	MM41	101	R
MM43	163 7.22	64 7.22	0	61	T	0	0	0	0	-6.5	-6.1	7	-8.6	0	MM42	108	R
MM44	162 57.50	64 57.50	0	166	T	0	0	0	0	-9.5	-9.7	7	-10.5	0	MM43	44	J
MM45	162 53.20	64 53.20	0	152	T	0	0	0	0	-19.9	-24.2	7	-25.1	0	MM44	54	J
MM46	162 51.35	64 51.35	0	183	T	0	0	0	0	-16.1	-21.3	7	-22.4	0	MM45	147	M
MM47	162 49.75	64 49.75	0	215	T	0	0	0	0	-7.3	-13.4	7	-14.7	0	MM46	145	M
MM48	162 54.98	64 54.98	0	129	T	0	0	0	0	-17.4	-21.1	7	-21.8	0	MM47	208	M
MM49	162 56.52	64 56.52	0	119	T	0	0	0	0	-15.9	-19.3	7	-20.8	0	MM48	137	M
MM50	163 0.35	64 0.35	0	94	T	0	0	0	0	-19.3	-22.0	7	-22.6	0	MM49	138	M
MM51	163 2.00	64 2.00	0	80	T	0	0	0	0	-27.0	-30.2	7	-30.7	0	MM50	108	M
MM52	163 1.10	64 1.10	0	87	T	0	0	0	0	-36.4	-38.9	7	-39.4	0	MM51	68	J
MM53	163 0.20	64 0.20	0	86	T	0	0	0	0	-44.2	-46.6	7	-47.2	0	MM52	73	J
MM54	162 50.95	64 50.95	0	142	T	0	0	0	0	-45.1	-49.1	7	-49.9	0	MM53	76	J
MM55	162 48.35	64 48.35	0	280	T	0	0	0	0	-26.2	-34.0	7	-35.7	0	MM54	123	J
MM56	162 46.90	64 46.90	0	354	T	0	0	0	0	-17.3	-27.3	7	-29.4	0	MM55	279	J
MM57	162 59.88	64 59.88	0	176	T	0	0	0	0	-47.9	-52.9	7	-53.9	0	MM56	360	J
MM58	163 2.10	64 2.10	0	218	T	0	0	0	0	-52.7	-58.8	7	-60.1	0	MM57	185	M
MM59	163 1.10	64 1.10	0	107	T	0	0	0	0	-57.4	-60.4	7	-61.1	0	MM58	202	M
MM60	163 11.55	64 11.55	0	168	T	0	0	0	0	-47.5	-52.3	7	-53.3	0	MM59	98	J
MM61	163 2.70	64 2.70	0	204	T	0	0	0	0	-48.1	-53.8	7	-55.1	0	MM60	170	J
MM62	163 13.75	64 13.75	0	114	T	0	0	0	0	-39.2	-43.4	7	-44.4	0	MM61	209	J
MM63	163 5.58	64 5.58	0	67	T	0	0	0	0	-5.1	-6.4	7	-6.4	0	MM62	133	J
MM64	163 34.92	64 34.92	0	100	R	0	0	0	0	-9.5	-11.4	7	-11.8	0	MM63	54	J
MM65	163 34.92	64 34.92	0	100	R	0	0	0	0	1.2	-1.6	6	-2.2	0	MM64	100	R

DATA SURVEYS RANGES, HT, LATITUDE, LONGITUDE, ELEVATION, OBSV GRAV, FAA, SRA-2.20, SRA-2.67

NUMBER OF STATISTICS	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	FAA	SRA-2.20	SRA-2.67
40	64 53.60	162 39.40	-57.4	-61.1	-61.1
40	65 9.08	163 34.92	1.2	-2.7	-2.7

USGS GRAVITY DATA FROM SEARIS PEN ALASKA (MAV) BASED ON ISM-MIV-J PROJ CHIEF HANNES DATUM HANNES 1975 DATA SET 1463
 DATE: 04/11/77. REFERENCE POINT: UNDETERMINED MAIN BASED ON VALUE 98272.47, DRIFT 0.07, OTHER BASED ON NOMF,

STAT. MUS. #	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	LUC.	HT-REF	ELEV	ELEV TYPE	GRV	GRV TYPE	FAA	SRA	ANOM	SBA	STAT	OTHER		
MAIN	AVG	AVG		REF	FEET	TYPE	GRAV	GRAV TYPE	MGALS	2428	ACG	2467	MUMB	ELEV. TYPE		
COUN	64	53.60	163	39.42	A	0	100	M	0	1.2	6	-2.2	COUN	100	R	-2.2
MM63	64	58.60	163	36.75	A	0	172	F	0	0.6	7	-5.3	MM63	185	M	-4.8
MM64	65	6.68	163	33.42	A	0	341	T	0	-16.4	7	-28.0	MM64	352	J	-27.6
MM65	65	7.38	163	26.12	A	0	431	T	0	-22.7	7	-37.4	MM65	425	M	-37.8
MM66	65	12.18	163	28.48	A	0	646	T	0	-9.0	7	-31.1	MM66	650	M	-30.9
MM67	65	11.28	163	26.75	A	0	554	T	0	-11.0	7	-29.9	MM67	560	M	-29.5
MM68	65	10.65	163	26.30	A	0	504	T	0	-12.0	7	-29.2	MM68	490	M	-38.1
MM69	65	9.34	163	24.57	A	0	372	T	0	-16.4	7	-29.1	MM69	358	M	-38.8
MM70	65	8.72	163	22.91	A	0	307	T	0	-27.1	7	-37.5	MM70	315	M	-37.1
MM71	65	8.72	163	20.68	A	0	242	T	0	-33.2	7	-41.4	MM71	258	M	-40.5
MM72	65	8.13	163	18.85	A	0	221	T	0	-37.0	7	-44.6	MM72	235	M	-43.8
MM73	65	4.55	163	16.55	A	5	242	T	0	-30.2	7	-38.5	MM73	253	M	-37.8
MM74	65	1.88	163	19.08	A	0	148	T	0	-5.2	7	-19.1	MM74	158	J	-9.8
MM75	65	1.45	163	13.48	B	8	131	T	0	-14.6	7	-19.1	MM75	160	P	-17.4
MM76	65	1.82	163	7.60	A	0	122	T	0	-27.1	7	-31.3	MM76	141	M	-30.2
MM77	64	59.25	163	4.02	A	0	60	T	0	-16.2	7	-18.3	MM77	75	M	-17.5
MM78	65	0.35	163	3.15	A	0	62	T	0	-25.7	7	-27.8	MM78	66	J	-27.6
MM79	65	1.20	162	54.68	A	0	125	T	0	-46.6	7	-50.9	MM79	108	P	-50.8
MM80	65	3.82	162	56.92	A	5	86	T	0	-57.8	7	-60.6	MM80	120	M	-58.6
MM81	65	4.50	162	55.60	A	0	85	T	0	-57.3	7	-60.2	MM81	120	M	-58.1
MM82	65	5.49	163	5.70	A	0	139	T	0	-56.0	7	-60.8	MM82	150	M	-61.2
COUN	64	53.60	163	38.92	A	0	100	M	0	1.2	6	-2.2	COUN	100	R	-2.2
COUN	64	53.60	163	34.92	A	0	104	M	0	1.2	6	-2.2	COUN	100	R	-2.2
NOMF	64	30.55	165	26.12	A	0	16	A	0	7.5	6	7.0	NOMF	100	R	-2.2
NOMF	64	38.55	165	26.12	A	0	16	A	0	7.6	6	7.0	NOMF	100	R	-2.2

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Gravity profile AB and cross section computed with a density contrast of 1.00 gm/cm^3 representing a porous-sediment density of 1.67 gm/cm^3 . Horizontal and vertical scale units in kilometers (vertical exaggeration: 8X). Small circles represent observed Bouguer gravity values in milligals; small crosses represent data calculated by the iterative program of Bott (1960).

Figure 2. Gravity profile AB and cross section computed with a density contrast of 0.50 gm/cm^3 representing a sedimentary rock density of 2.17 gm/cm^3 and basement rock density of 2.67 gm/cm^3 . Horizontal and vertical scale units in kilometers (vertical exaggeration: 8X). Small circles represent observed Bouguer gravity values in milligals; small crosses represent data calculated by the iterative program of Bott (1960).

Figure 3. Gravity profile CD and cross section computed with a density contrast of 0.67 gm/cm^3 representing primarily a sedimentary density of 2.00 and basement rock density of 2.67 gm/cm^3 . Horizontal and vertical scale units in kilometers (vertical exaggeration: 8X). Small circles represent observed Bouguer gravity values in milligals; small crosses represent data calculated by the iterative program of Bott (1960).

MCCARTHY'S MARSH - PROFILE AB - DENSITY CONTRAST = 1.00 G/CC

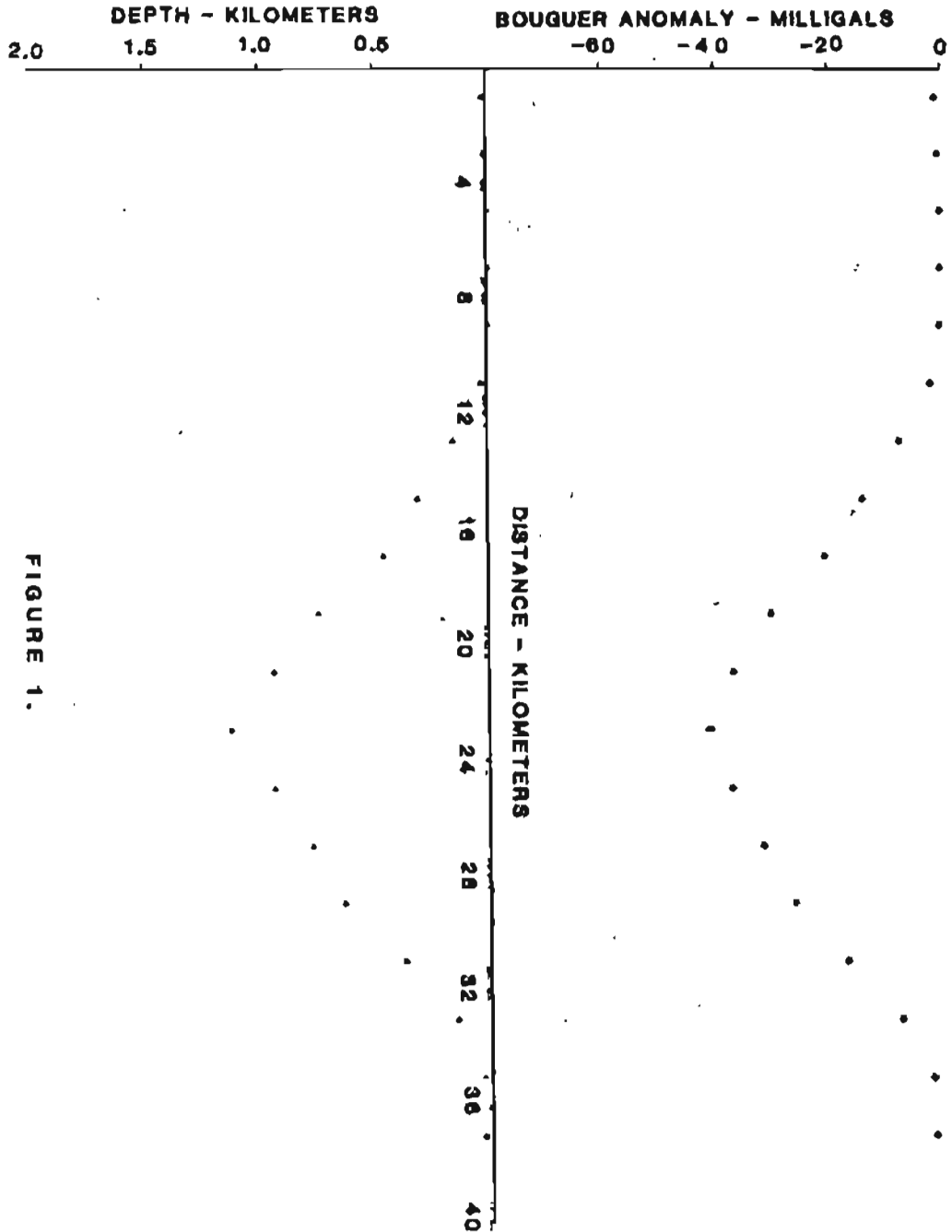


FIGURE 1.

MCCARTHY'S MARSH - PROFILE AB - DENSITY CONTRAST = 0.50 G/CC

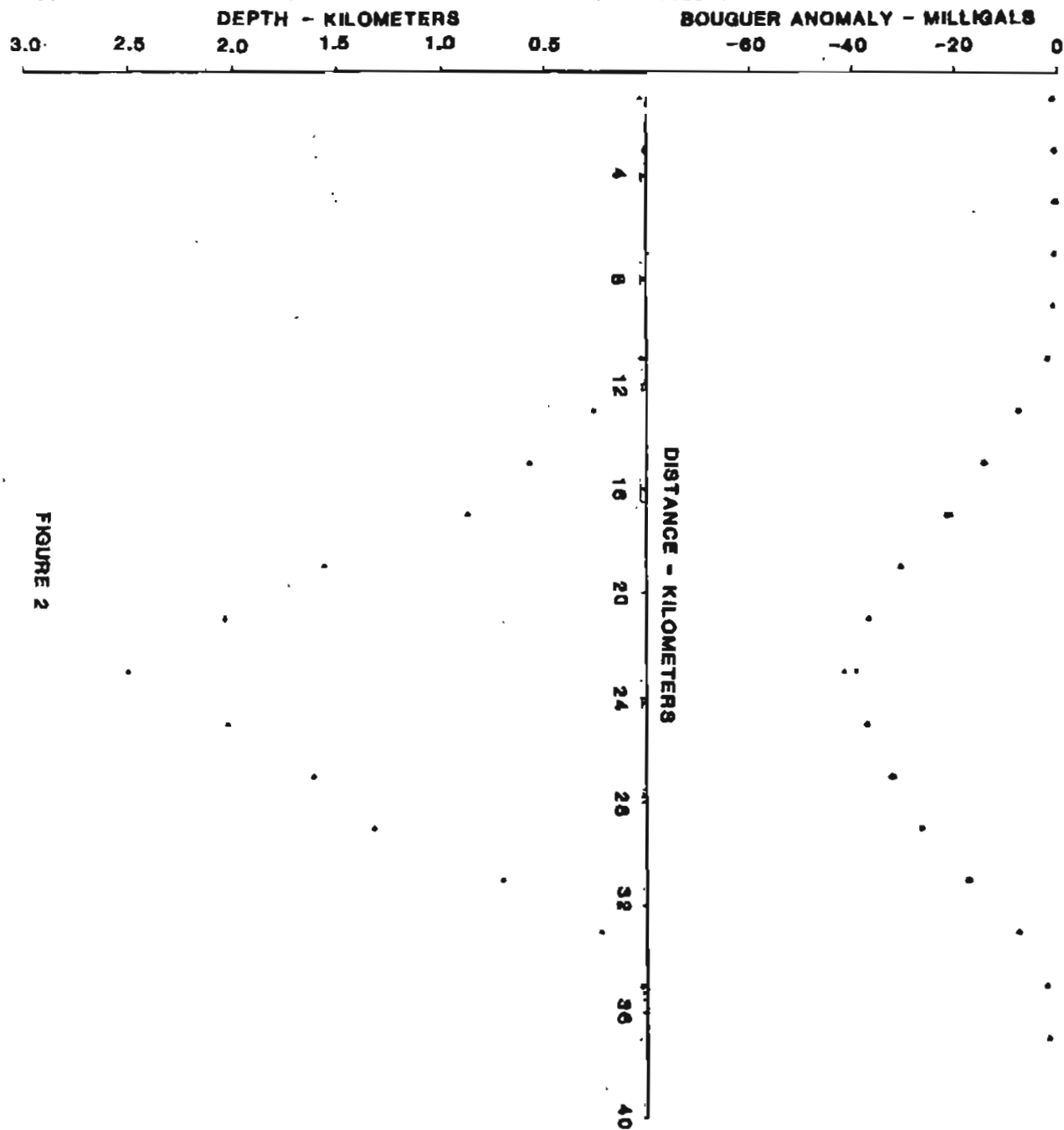


FIGURE 2

MCCARTHY'S MARSH - PROFILE CD - DENSITY CONTRAST = 0.67 G/CC

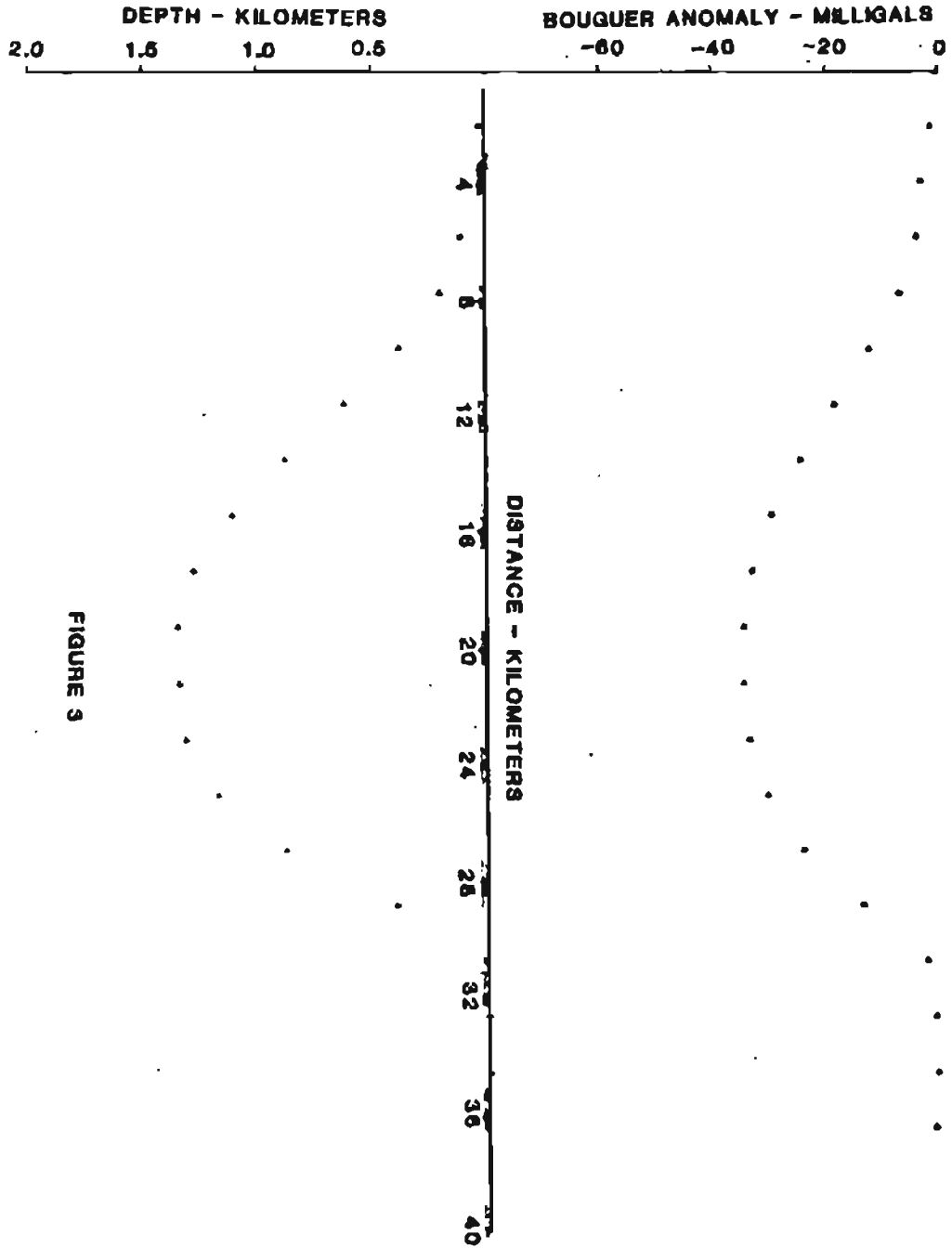


FIGURE 3